Fantasies of critique : a study of the unconscious economy of the Chilean estallido

FANTASIES OF CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS ECONOMY OF THE CHILEAN *ESTALLIDO*

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I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and contributions from other persons are cited and referenced accordingly.

ABSTRACT

This is an investigation of the desire for change. Adopting a Lacanian perspective, I study this topic due to the strange straightforwardness such a desire has acquired within contemporary progressive academia. On the one hand, the influence of affective theory suggests that emancipation is a matter of breaking with our symbolic ties to unleash the potency of bodies. Here, the desire for change coincides with itself. On the other hand, Lacanian scholarship seems theoretically aware of the ambivalence of desire, but focuses primarily on its mobilisation in oppressive settings. Here, the desire for change is underexplored. To counter this situation, I argue that the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy is crucial to understanding the complexities of the desire for social transformation. I substantiate my argument through the empirical study of an emancipatory event: the 2019 Chile revolt known as *estallido*. Based on a fieldwork conducted between March and June 2022, I enquire about the identification of local critical scholars with this event. My investigation strategically focuses on these actors since they can be conceptualised as subjects who shape themselves according to the good of social change. Accordingly, it would be reasonable to expect from these critical subjects an unproblematic identification with the revolt. However, the interpretation of my material demonstrates that this is not the case. Their desire for change must travel through winding unconscious paths that attest to the ambivalence of subjective identification with social change. My interpretation of the fantasies of critique provides evidence that the *estallido* succeeded in the transformation of neoliberal meanings but, to a large extent, kept its libidinal economy in place. This evinces the benefits of an imaginary approach to the desire for change, providing a more nuanced picture of its unconscious dynamics than the one offered by contemporary perspectives.

To Lucila, Noelia, and Juana.
This is the proof that all those
afternoons playing cards and
dominoes paid off.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My mum only attended school for about four years in rural Chile in the 50s. My dad did not even bother. Only one of my brothers went to university and he did not finish his BA. If I am writing these lines, it means that I brought a doctoral thesis to completion in a foreign language. It is hard to get your head around something like that. For years, my academic passion has been propelled not just by an intellectual inquisitiveness, but also by an indelible sense of injustice. This factual state of affairs—that my family has historically been precluded from the opportunities now conceded to me—paved the way for a guilt circuit that has long accompanied me in the form of a question: why me? Why am I the one who can have this? And swerving guilt when you grew up in a catholic environment, believe me, is not an easy thing to do. But London, as it happens, surreptitiously taught me that I can shake hands with it.

As unpreventable as it is to distance yourself from your parents' trajectories, and even your siblings', at least part of it can be experienced as a joy. Otherwise, by remaining anchored to injustice and nothing but injustice, I shall have to brush aside other beautiful feelings, such as pride. Assuming that my research says something valuable about the passionate attachments of academics (as I think it does), it gave me in return something invaluable—the possibility to envisage a different attachment to my own work. What I do is undoubtedly driven by my family's poverty and exploitation, but it is not just that. It is also, and above all, the way I have found to express my deepest gratitude for an improbable generosity in the face of adversity. So, instead of trying to redeem my family through my work—since, like Annie Ernaux, I also thought that I should write to avenge my people—being proud of these pages is the best homage I can

pay to them. The journey of this research made me realise that I am smaller than I believed I was, and that turned pride into something beautiful.

Throughout these last four years, people up here in this kingdom and down there in Chile have been fundamental to endure the hard times and celebrate the merry ones. Summarising what they mean to me here is an atrocious reductionism, yet not naming them is simply inexcusable. They belong to this page because, somehow, none of them looked the other way when I carried on digging holes around myself, irrespective of how profound they were. They all discovered ways to love me and keep loving me when even I sometimes came to believe it was easier not to. The mechanics of this remain inscrutable to me, but I learned the hard way just to embrace it. So here it goes.

Up here: Karla Bray, for keeping my head above water this whole time. No one in this country did more than you to accomplish such a vexing task; Lizaveta van Munsteren, my dearest comrade, for giving me the gift of companionship I supposed beyond my reach; Stacey Clapperton, for being my strictest pedagogue of the important things in life without ever (well, almost ever) losing a pinch of tenderness (and for reading almost every word I wrote); Vincent Harting, for showing me that there was more room for love within me than I wanted to believe; Bruno Lloret, for the painful joy of working through similar national wounds by your side; Daniel Leyton, for embracing me no matter how different our positions sometimes are; and Francisca Jalil, for teaching me that breaking the rules is just as important as complying with them.

Down there: Pancho, for the unfathomable fluke of having crossed paths and keeping doing it; Andrea Caorsi, for all those healing cups of tea while breaking down the mysteries of that thing we call family; Julia Valenzuela, for teaching me a different pace to face the day (and for introducing me to Toy Story); Coté, for your excruciating capacity

for saying exactly what the situation requires but I do not want to hear (you get to places water cannot); María Luisa Figueroa, for nurturing a rather unthinkable bond in spite of all my inconsistencies; and Irina Karamanos, for knowing that, after all this time, everything we have shared is still there, intact.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the importance of my supervisors in this bumpy, meandering journey of mine. Margarita Palacios, for the stoic patience you showed during the painstaking process of softening the rigid positions with which I arrived here; and Stephen Frosh, for always encouraging me to keep going, especially when it was clear I had no idea where I was heading to. My appreciation for the part you both played in making me the researcher I am now is immense.

I'm not sure if it's my soul exactly, perhaps it's my Unconscious, because it was my Unconscious that brought me here. Hold on, said the Lame Lottery-Ticket Seller, the Unconscious, what does that mean?, the Unconscious is something found in the Viennese bourgeoisie at the turn of the century, we're in Portugal here and you yourself are Italian, we belong to the South, to the Greco-Roman civilization, we have nothing to do with Central Europe, no, *we* have soul. That's true, I said, I do have a soul, you're right, but I have an Unconscious too, I mean, *now* I do, you see, the Unconscious is something you catch, it's like a disease, I just happened to catch the virus of the Unconscious […].

Today is the last Sunday in July, said the Lame Lottery-Ticket Seller, the city is deserted, it must be forty degrees in the shade, I should think it's the best day there is for meeting people who only exist in memories, your soul, I mean, your Unconscious is going to be kept very busy on a day like today, I wish you a good afternoon and good luck.

Antonio Tabucchi, *Requiem: A Hallucination*

CHAPTER 1
PLACING MY STUDY

Introduction

This is an enquiry on a deceptively straightforward matter—how critical academics engage with radical social transformation. Such an ostensibly simple question customarily receives a direct reply: critical academics want radical social change, that is what they strive for. And this is the case since, as Kristin Ross (2023: 101, emphasis added) concisely puts it, 'to critique is to *wish for* and *work toward* change'. Taking this insight as a starting point, my research focuses on the winding unconscious paths that the subjective commitment to emancipatory social outcomes can take. As is evident, this way of framing my study presupposes a divide between conscious wishing and unconscious desire. Such a premise is at the centre of psychoanalytic theory. However, academic literature has a deep-seated tendency to treat socially progressive identifications and desires as if they were immune to this division.

This tendency is an effect produced by the mutual reinforcement of two current trends. On the one hand, the increasing attention to the affective underpinnings of social life is largely predicated on a rejection of psychoanalysis (Kornbluh, 2019; Ruti, 2018; Stavrakakis, 2014). The idea that bodies harbour a potency hindered by discourse formations turns desire into a sort of vitalism that coincides with itself. Insofar as desire is both unproblematic and fully positive, the goal of this influential approach is to unleash this bodily potency by means of a rupture with symbolic constraints. On the other hand, psychoanalytically informed research strengthens the perception that the desire for change is unproblematic, yet in an indirect fashion. By

focusing scholarly attention almost exclusively on the unconscious dynamics of conservative or oppressive identifications, progressive subjective attachments appear impervious to the derailments of the unconscious. Evidence of how socially oppressive relationships are sustained through desiring narratives is abundant (Bloom, 2016; Hoedemaekers, 2019; Hook, 2020; McMillan, 2017; Palacios, 2011; Sánchez et al., 2024; Siltaoja et al., 2019; Vadolas, 2012; Wilson & Bayón, 2017). This is certainly a good thing in the face of increasingly subtle forms of domination. Yet somehow this emphasis makes it seem unnecessary to be equally attentive to progressive identifications.

The main goal of my research is to challenge the obviousness of the desire for change to arrive at a more nuanced account of the attachments to social transformation. To achieve this, my argument is that we cannot dispense with psychoanalysis. In order to demonstrate the benefits of my alternative approach, I strategically focus on a group of people among whom this desire seems obvious: critical scholars. Like no other occupation, within the humanities and social sciences individuals can turn their intellectual commitment to a different society into a way of making ends meet. To a certain extent, critical academics are professionals of social change. Furthermore, I seek to suspend the obviousness of this subjective relationship with social change in the context of an ongoing transformative event. During October 2019, a series of seemingly delimited student protests against the increase in tube fares led to what is considered by many as the largest popular uprising in recent Chile (Castillo, 2019; Landaeta & Herrero, 2021; Martuccelli, 2019; Ruiz, 2020). This unparalleled revolt has been christened *estallido social* [social outburst]. As I will show in different parts of my research, many local scholars wished for and worked towards this state of affairs. It is reasonable, thus, to presume that in the midst of the *estallido* they experienced something akin to self-recognition—what they want and do suddenly coincides with the world.

I resort to a Lacanian vocabulary to empirically demonstrate that this coincidence between a subjective critical disposition and social transformation is much less univocal than is often assumed. Specifically, I deploy the notion of fantasy to show the ambivalence of Chilean scholars when facing their desires for social change while social change is happening. Later in this introductory chapter I will flesh out the theoretical relationship between fantasy and desire. Meanwhile, it could be said that fantasy is the way in which unconscious desire—which, it is worth stressing, is not synonymous with conscious wanting—is framed. Consequently, the unconscious desire for radical change becomes legible through fantasmatic frameworks. Drawing on individual interviews and classroom observations conducted in 2022, I reconstruct five of these frameworks allowing Chilean academics to psychically navigate the revolt. The research question guiding my study can thus be expressed as follows: *How do Chilean critical scholars sustain the desire for critique in the aftermath of the* estallido*?* Or interchangeably, *what are the fantasies elicited by the* estallido *among Chilean critical scholars?* From the perspective adopted in this research, the economy of desire can only be sustained through fantasmatic narratives.

Based on the above, the reader will find in these pages neither authoritative answers to the multiple questions posited by the *estallido*, nor a normative prescription on how to be a critical scholar, at least not directly. In my attempt to account for the unconscious economy of social transformation, I treat the Chilean revolt as a privileged context to explore the alleged internal harmony of the desire for change, while finding in critical academics the subjects who best and more patently embody the latter. I take the affinity between the *estallido* and critical scholars as an opportunity to enquire about the fantasies that organise the desire for social transformation. Such an organisation obviously responds to a particular national configuration; they are ways of organising this desire in Chile. Without denying their

idiosyncratic texture, they are also the unconscious effect of a collective challenge to neoliberalism, an extended feature of the last decade worldwide (Bevins, 2023). My study is designed to contribute to the understanding of the 'time of riots' we seem to find ourselves in according to Alain Badiou (2012: 5). As a result, I provide—or I hope to provide—insightful takes on the *estallido* and critical academia, but this is the result of my overriding goal of empirically exploring the unconscious economy of the desire for change.

To accomplish my exploration, certain things need to be in place and other commonplaces must be avoided. I will start with the latter. Exploring the unconscious economy of social identifications is by default an elusive task. Unconscious manifestations are ephemeral and apparently accidental; the residue of meaningful discourse. Research designs are not particularly receptive to this kind of material. Academic research tends to be conceived to explain things and, as is the norm, explaining is synonymous with providing the causes or discovering the origins behind those things. A study on the 2019 Chile revolt like the one I embark on here should, then, partake of those explanatory mechanisms. The vast majority of available literature on the matter adopts this position. Yet, mine does not. As stated, my academic curiosity is organised by the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan and a recurring advice he delivered to his audience was to shy away from the question of origins. He went as far as to assert that 'the great secret of psychoanalysis is that there is no psychogenesis' (Lacan, 1997a: 7). From this angle, establishing the origins of a phenomenon is to no avail; causes cede epistemic primacy to effects. Or, if we prefer, a study about processes of identification is, above all, a matter of location and not origins.

When it comes to epoch-defining events such as the *estallido*, suspending this interrogation is easier said than done. There are at least two reasons for that. On the one hand, due to the prominence of

sociology within Chilean academia—an aspect my study touches on—a particularly strong temptation to establish the causes of social phenomena is discernible. The idea according to which the popular uprising of 2019 was the pinnacle of the mobilisation cycle that began in 2006 (Aguilera & Espinoza, 2022; Pleyers, 2022; Ruiz, 2020; Thielemann, 2020) or the direct result of the Chilean neoliberal system (Karmy, 2019; Villalobos-Ruminott, 2020), are examples of this penchant for discovering the causes of social events. On the other hand, although closely related to the previous point, determining the causes of something has a soothing, conciliatory effect. Since causes reduce the complexity of the subject under scrutiny, they dispense an intellectual strategy to deal with the contingency of events such as the *estallido*. In other words, once we claim to know why the revolt took place, we can master it. Therefore, asserting to have discovered the origins of the *estallido* is a way of taming its contingent and unforeseeable nature to make it fit into certain scholarly devices.

In the following subsections, I delineate my procedure for exploring the *estallido* while showing allegiance to its radical contingency. That is to say, I present the justification to proceed unconcerned about what its origins are, while focusing my attention on the fact that it simply has a place. Another admonition imparted by Lacan serves as a blueprint. In a conference delivered in 1967 in Lyon, he said to the attendees that what we find at the beginning of something is not the origin, as we might spontaneously assume, but the place. This place is inscribed in what he refers to as our 'common fate' (Lacan, 2008). Human beings, he carried on, occupy places where an act pushes them, a push that forces subjects to grab hold of the threads it presents to them. Drawing on Lacan's caveat, in what follows I contend that the *estallido* is the common fate of Chileans and I concentrate on its interpellative 'push' within local academia. Regardless of what originated it, the revolt was the place from which a call was launched

to Chileans that forced them to find their own place amid the country's transformation.

Avoiding a 'proper' explanation of the revolt, and conceptualising it rather as the place from which an emancipatory interpellation emanates, allows me to study critique as a particular kind of subjective commitment. Following Simon Critchley (2008: 10), 'A subject is the name for the way in which a self binds itself to some conception of the good and shapes its subjectivity in relation to that good'. I will unravel this ethical definition of the subject below, but I can already sketch a preliminary definition of a critical scholar as the academic self that attaches itself to progressive social transformation and shapes itself accordingly. What my research captures is this process of self-shaping when a) the conception of the good that critical scholars attach themselves to is taking place on the streets, and b) we accept the theoretical premise that the subject never fully coincides with itself. If we can hypothesise that for a critical subject the *estallido* was as close to an experience of self-recognition as it gets, then a psychoanalytic approach demands to assess this against the backdrop of structural misrecognition.

In the rest of this chapter, I present a conceptualisation of the key notions informing my research. First, I draw on the concept of contingency to understand the emergence of the *estallido*. Subsequently, I expand on why the subjectivity of critical scholars gravitates towards change, while explaining why this feature makes them relevant to my research. Finally, I flesh out the logic of signification from a psychoanalytic perspective to explain the role of fantasies in the organisation of unconscious desire. These three notions undergird my account of the revolt as an emancipatory event. What I propound is that to capture the desire for change, the *estallido* should be treated not as an omen of a post-neoliberal society, that is, as a way of imagining a new social configuration, but rather as the actual

organisation of such a society. This organisation is sustained on an unconscious economy that is the focus of my study.

THE PLACE OF THE REVOLT

'Place' is an important notion in my research. Lacan (2008) was particularly strict when differentiating a 'topological' place from one's place in the world. The former is concerned with tackling down origins which, for him, was a recipe for making a fool of oneself, since only the latter is an addressable question. In this section, I will expand on the significance of this second notion of the place to conceptualise the *estallido*. Furthermore, this is not just theoretically precise but also a felicitous formulation since it is linked to the fact that this defining event for our Chileanness surprised me far from my country; it found me *displaced*. Two weeks after I landed in London to pursue my PhD the revolt took off. Not only was I forced to navigate through the coordinates and codes of an unknown culture, but almost from the outset the dissolution of what I regarded as my own coordinates and codes became a fellow traveller of such a process. A harrowing fellow traveller, I must add. I was 'here' still feeling part of 'there' yet 'there' was not *in place* anymore. Here and there lost their meanings abruptly.

Naturally, others joined me in the same experience. Another Chilean PhD researcher based in the United States recounts how she had to juggle a suspended daily life and the exigencies of academia. At some point in her text, she rhetorically asks the reader 'where do you begin to explain to a foreigner the grotesque constellation summoned up by the revolt?' (Flem, 2020: 86). No doubt that was, and still is, a piercing question. Like many other Chileans outside the country, I have been repeatedly asked for the reasons behind what happened; that is to say, for the topological place of the revolt. Soon I realised, however, that all the sociologically grounded explanations I could

furnish my enquirers with were aimed at saying something about the origins—inequality, precariousness, and a variety of other social malaises—but I was forgetting the other place. Because, where do you begin to explain the revolt to yourself? Ultimately, if we are to believe in psychoanalysis, the first step is to accept that we are foreigners to ourselves.

On 18 October 2019, an unprecedented popular uprising shook Chile to its core. After thirty years of a democratic reshaping of institutions and social logics that buttressed the neoliberal infrastructure erected by the dictatorship, the Chilean people seemed surfeited. At the end of a decade that saw a series of massive social movements, the initially confined student protests over a $30 (30p) tube fare hike gained momentum, marking the beginning of the *estallido*. For many authors (Castillo, 2019; Landaeta & Herrero, 2021; Martuccelli, 2019), what commenced in mid-October was a revolution. The revolutionary character of the revolt is, however, an ongoing debate. But if one thing is certain it is that, unlike previous demonstrations, this time the tenor was completely different: instead of demanding the transformation or improvement of a circumscribed dimension of the social, the revolt appeared more like a visceral rejection of the prevailing organisation of life, acquiring an existential condition (Villalobos-Ruminott, 2020). As a consequence, particularly during the culminating months of 2019, Chile became a different, almost unrecognisable place shaped by a collective desire for transformation.

That Chile was unrecognisable must be taken literally. The patterns that hitherto made everyday life legible were blown into pieces. After multitudinous protests and the suspension of several tube stations, the night of 18 October ended with the image of a seventeen-stories building in downtown Santiago set ablaze. The country woke up the next morning to a state of emergency, a constitutional yet anti-

democratic law that allows the president to severely restrict citizens' freedom of movement and their right to assembly to ensure public order. For the first time since the dictatorship, soldiers were brought to the streets to placate a political uprising. Despite the ominous reverberations of such a deterrence manoeuvre, the outpouring of thousands and even millions of people into the streets did not stop. On 25 October, in Santiago alone over a million people took part in what is regarded as the biggest demonstration in Chilean history (Landaeta & Herrero, 2021). The philosopher Aïcha Messina, in the preface of her book that was delayed due to the *estallido*, defines this period of the country in terms of suspension. Her point is not that people were inactive but that there was a 'void of signification': 'We cannot give a name to what happens not because it is obscure, but because what happens is the very suspension of meaning, of its production' (Messina, 2020: 9).

Several academic interpretations have been rehearsed to understand how something like this transpired. By way of example, some authors have understood the revolt as an insurgence in defiance of the uninterrupted privatisation of the means for the reproduction of everyday life (Ruiz, 2020). Against the backdrop of a precarious social security system, the cleavage between humanness and commodification became unbearable, leading to the emergence of a highly unspecific demand for dignity in opposition to the abuses of capitalism. In a similar vein, it has been said that the *estallido* was a response to the disproportionate character of Chilean modernisation (Araujo, 2019). The general yet profoundly unequal improvement of the living standards from 1990 onwards, i.e., in the post-dictatorship period, implied an increasing feeling of subjective exhaustion due to the excessive exigencies to manage daily life. Precariousness, low-income jobs, and socioeconomic inequality grew intolerable in the face of an extended demand for more equal social interactions. And even from more phlegmatic positions (Peña, 2021), it has been acknowledged

that the revolt expressed a growing dissociation between subjective expectations and structural opportunities, paving the way for a desire for the reorganisation of life.

Others have interpreted the *estallido* as the highest point in the mobilisation cycle of the last decade in Chile. For the historian Luis Thielemann (2020), it is clear that the revolt represents the culmination of a cycle that began in 2011. In his view, that year young students from popular and middle classes formed an alliance based on the criticism of the neoliberal order and the unkept promises of social mobility. Such an alliance marked the expansion, both quantitative and qualitive, of a popular challenge of neoliberalism in the country, subsequently expressed through mobilisations against the pension scheme and the recent feminist wave (Asún et al., 2020). Along the same line, Pierre Dardot (2023) interprets the *estallido* as the result of a series of social movements that produced various 'collective subjectivations' in opposition to what he calls 'the experience of neoliberalism' in Chile. For him, to adequately understand the revolt we must consider how different actors and rallying cries have helped to configure political commitments against concrete, everyday neoliberal expressions. Alongside the students' demands, the historical struggle for social, political, and cultural recognition of the *mapuche* people, as well as the renewed prominence of the feminist movement from the mid-2010s onwards, are key aspects of the *estallido*'s genealogy.

This overview shows how the *estallido* has been both portrayed and experienced as a singular response to local neoliberal contradictions. As Danilo Martuccelli (2021: 6) has pointed out: 'In spite of the diversity of interpretations the *estallido* has given rise to, neoliberalism is always, in one way or another, the overall framework of analysis'. Interestingly, the Chilean revolt can be seen as the popular uprising that closes a decade of anti-neoliberal rebellions worldwide. Vincent Bevins (2023), for instance, suggests that the 2010s

were defined by a global wave of contention beginning in Tunisia in 2010 including—among many others—Egypt in 2011, Brazil and Turkey in 2013, and Lebanon, Hong Kong, and Chile in 2019. For him, the combination of the number and intensity of these revolts makes them the largest cycle of mass protests in history. Such a fervent and extended impetus to achieve social transformation was characterised by some structural similarities: these uprisings were usually leaderless, digitally coordinated, horizontally organised, uncoupled from political parties, and based in main squares. Also, and crucially, they were directed against neoliberalism: 'many protests around the world over the past few decades self-consciously took aim at "neoliberal" policies' (Bevins, 2023: 30). In Bevin's terms, this decade of mass protest was a distinctively anti-neoliberal decade.

The anti-neoliberal tenor of the *estallido* is almost indisputable. As it has done all around the world, neoliberalism has eroded the basis for a minimally harmonious and tolerable social existence for the vast majority of Chileans. Rampant socioeconomic inequality, relentless precarisation of labour relations, and a largely inoperant political sphere are just a few upshots of three decades of a formally democratic neoliberal modernisation in the country. The depth of the neoliberal debacle is certainly a powerful enough reason to rebel against the configuration of social life. The now iconic phrase scrawled across a wall in Santiago attests to this impulse: 'neoliberalism was born and will die in Chile'. According to Dardot (2023: 226), this anonymous augur encapsulated a collective exercise of political imagination in terms of 'the necessity to situate oneself in relation to a desired place in the future'. However, even if we accept that Chile has become one of the crudest examples of the neoliberalisation of life in the world,[1] this

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[1] The tacit acceptance of this fact has recently been disputed. According to Ismael Puga (2020), more than a deep cultural transformation expressed in entrepreneurial mindsets and lifestyles, neoliberalism has produced rational or practical adaptations to material situations. In this sense, the very belief that neoliberalism has radically

is insufficient to explain the emergence of the revolt. Regardless of how detailed the list of neoliberal-induced social issues can be at play, this line of argument seems invariably to fall short. As Bevins (2023: 274) perspicaciously points out:

> After a mass protest event, social scientists and journalists begin to look for structural explanations. That country has a lot of inequality, they may say. Unemployment was high; the price of food has risen; democratic reforms are needed. All of that is hugely helpful and part of the story. But I think that after taking an extremely wide view of the decade, looking at these events in comparison to one another makes it clear that this isn't quite enough. Employing just those methods, you can't really explain why Chile's uprising happened in 2019 instead of 2015, or why Brazil had one at all.

Despite their accuracy, the presence of some of the most socially and individually harmful neoliberal outcomes in Chile fails to account for the revolt's existence. Otherwise stated, if the *estallido* can indeed be conceived as an anti-neoliberal revolt, neoliberalism in itself cannot satisfactorily explain the *estallido*. The radical contingency at the heart of the Chilean revolt—the simple fact that it might as well not have occurred—is the tiny yet vexing pebble in the shoe of any attempt to find the causes behind it. None of the undeniable social and individual problems springing from our local version of neoliberalism can ultimately explain why the Chilean people decided to burn down buildings and tube stations, loot shops, and engage in a physical confrontation with the police for months. Why in October 2019 and not the year before, the next decade, or ever at all? In the last instance, to suggest that the *estallido* can be understood by resorting to the

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altered Chilean subjectivity ends up granting it the appearance of solidity; both the strength and prevalence of neoliberalism have been overestimated. So, Puga (2020: 229) concludes: 'Chileans, like social scientists, perceive a fantasy neoliberal consensus'.

multiple expressions of suffering provoked by the neoliberal system is to fall prey to the illusion that, as Louis Althusser (2020) would have put it, by accounting for the aqueducts you can explain a pint of water.[2] When neoliberalism is summoned to make sense of the origins of the revolt, something seems to be *out of place*.

The notion of contingency developed by Ernesto Laclau allows me to theorise this peculiarity of the *estallido*. His theory presents the social field as an impossible paradoxical site. The objectivity of the world we inhabit, the experience of the social, is the result of a political articulation graspable in terms of hegemony. Through the latter, Laclau conceptualises the way in which particular meanings impose on concrete individuals—i.e., become universal—against the backdrop of the lack of foundations of the social. His theory seeks to understand how we can have a coherent experience of the social when there is no 'society' capable of fully exhausting such experience. The social, hence, is politically instituted and meanings inherently unstable. This approach, however, has been accused of merely replacing the foundationalism underpinning traditional Marxist analyses with an equally strong anti-foundationalism. To face this, Laclau will insist that it would be wrong to assume that necessity and contingency are two different moments or modalities of the experience of the social; contingency is necessity's internal impurity, an element that hinders its full constitution from within. Objectivity, then, is always partially constituted and partially threatened since it has 'a merely relational identity with its conditions of existence' (Laclau, 1990: 22). As a consequence, these conditions can only be found at the level of what Laclau calls 'factual history', and they are the result of the interplay (and mutual subversion) between objectivity and contingency.

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[2] 'For no more than we can explain the water in this glass with reference to all the waterways in the world can we explain a historical fact (in the sense of an immediate historical fact) by the succession, however long and multifaceted it may be, of all the historical facts in the world' (Althusser, 2020: 42).

My take is that the *estallido* is radically contingent insofar as it has a merely relational (and not necessary) identity with its conditions of existence, namely, neoliberalism. From this angle, it is warranted to claim that the revolt sprung from neoliberal discontent, but its objectivity cannot be reduced to such an experience. Adopting this approach implies focusing on the factual history of the *estallido*, that is, on the fact that without being inscribed in any necessity it nonetheless *did happen*. A small vignette from my fieldwork can serve as an illustration of this. It was the beginning of June 2022 and I was observing a lesson from the module 'Actualisation in Critical Theory' convened by Ramón, a local philosopher interested in the intersection between social work and ethics. At one point of the lesson, while he was discussing a highly theoretical topic, the revolt was suddenly invoked: '[...] because everything that is happening today, wouldn't be happening without the *estallido*'. I took note at full speed to retain the exact terms he used to convey his thought process. Immediately after the quoted line was uttered, he hastily added that such a claim certainly does not mean we are living in the best of worlds, just that ours 'doesn't exist without the *estallido*'. The students, and even myself, nodded along. The revolt is that radically contingent event outside of which our current Chileanness simply cannot be understood.

Going back to Lacan, the *estallido*, this justifiable yet utterly contingent manifestation of social unrest, is Chile's common fate. The revolt is that place exerting a push over the Chilean people independently of their will. Irrespective of our personal positions or inner contemplations, no matter how much or less we could care about what happened during those concluding months of 2019, the revolt's push operates regardless of our conscious volition. This is why Ramón's phrase is so to the point: what happened and is still happening in the country only exists because of the *estallido*. The Chilean philosopher Humberto Giannini (1987: 21) defined the quotidian as 'what happens when nothing happens'. The pull of the revolt, thus, comes from its

'unquotidian' nature, namely, from the fact that something *did* happen and indifference is not an option. The *estallido* is an event that opened up a truly event-ful period in contemporary Chile, reactivating the sedimented elements of everyday life.

In the face of the irreducibility of the *estallido* to the social problems it sought to rebel against, my study desists from any attempt to provide a compelling account for its causes. Instead of that, I embrace the revolt's untraceable character—its radical contingency— by focusing my attention on some of its effects. If the revolt is our Chilean common fate, how has its push felt? I believe this is a significant question since *the place* of the revolt, the fact that this event has framed our Chileanness for the past years, has received little attention in comparison to the interest in its origins. Unsurprisingly, the centrality of the causes in most analyses entertained an overoptimistic vision of where the revolt was supposed to lead us. So, if neoliberalism was the cause, the result should be a post-neoliberal social arrangement. Something along those lines existed, but it was rather short-lived. However, the subjective push of the *estallido* can still be experienced, even when a post-neoliberal Chile seems utterly fanciful today. In the following section, I will delineate a notion of the subject compatible with the exploration of the revolt's push.

THE PLACE OF CRITIQUE

As I mentioned, my study focuses on the responses to the revolt's push among a circumscribed group of people: critical scholars. That this is the case can be seen as my own reaction to the push. I came to London with a proposal stating that I would be exploring Chilean academia, specifically the (problematic) relationships between the production of critical knowledge and its liaisons with neoliberalism. I was not completely sure how to adequately formulate this problem, but I sensed there was one. During the first year of my PhD, I rehearsed

different entry points to explore the interrelation of the compulsory character of critique and the naturalisation of neoliberalism within Chilean academia. A significant portion of the latter seems to explain almost any phenomenon by claiming it is the result of neoliberalism, and they happen to know that because they are critical scholars. This is another expression of the 'fantasy neoliberal consensus' identified by Puga (2020), and it certainly is a very comfortable circularity to inhabit. It took me a while to realise that the *estallido*, perhaps for the first time, broke such self-referentiality. Unlike previous demonstrations, the revolt did not represent an opportunity to counter the neoliberalisation of a certain social domain—such as education or the pension scheme—but to experience a post-neoliberal life. Critique, as it happens, had an opportunity to materialise itself.

The problems with critique have been one of the favourite topics of critical enquiry. This is another way of saying that academic critique matters, first and foremost, to other academics. Almost forty years ago, Terry Eagleton diagnosed this situation as the reason why critique's importance has diminished so dramatically. He went as far as to claim that the critical practice lacks all substantive social function these days, and that this could be due to 'a matter wholly internal to the academies' (Eagleton, 2005: 7). To prove his point, he embarked on a historical reconstruction of the public sphere from the eighteenth century to the rise of deconstruction, for which he has particularly caustic remarks. His work is admirable in many ways, yet in its pages there is no reference to the subjective dimension of this process. Whatever the problems with critique might be, they have two possible roots: they are either political or epistemological. But they are never libidinal, which means that there is nothing potentially problematic with the desire for critique. Tom Boland (2019: 43) summarises this position perfectly:

Yet, the question remains — what is the desire of critique? Clearly, the critic desires to reveal the truth to those who deny or conceal it. They desire the social honour of recognition for being a truth-teller, a critic, yet their unmasking of others ensures that the contest for recognition will be interminable. More metaphorically, they desire to gain the truth through critically debunking lies, to possess a perfect vision of reality.

Clearly, Boland presupposes a direct and unproblematic correlation between the critic's intentions and the social recognition of those intentions. The latter might be naïve, since not many these days would aspire to a perfect vision of reality, or contemptible, inasmuch as those intentions could derive from a vain aspiration for recognition. But the critic *clearly* recognises itself in its practice; the experience of critique is transparent to the subject while desire is assumed as the straightforward fulfilment of social mandates. The fact that I engage in an exploration of the desire for social change implies that such transparency is regarded here as, to play with Puga's formulation, another fantasy consensus.

In order to study this subjective dimension of critique, I need to operationalise what the subject is. Critchley's ethical notion of subjectivity stands as the most compelling candidate. His starting point is that the fundamental political experience is disappointment. This is the case since the realisation that we live in a violently unjust world is the first political discernment; it is what prompts engagements with different conceptions of justice. In his view, what is needed is a notion of ethics that can operate as a motivational force to face contemporary forms of disappointment. As part of this project, Critchley (2008: 10) provides the definition quoted earlier: 'A subject is the name for the way in which a self binds itself to some conception of the good and shapes its subjectivity in relation to that good'. The nature of such good is certainly not predefined, meaning that it varies

from subject to subject, but it invariably has a paradoxical effect. If the condition of possibility for a subject is this self-binding relation to a good, the latter is expressed through an incommensurate demand that overflows the subject. Or, the ethical demand the subject attaches itself to is both its condition of possibility and impossibility.

Based on the above, the subject is not a pre-given existence but something one becomes by attaching oneself to an impossible, hyperbolic demand for justice. For Critchley, then, the subject is internally divided, something that is in excess with itself. Consequently, even if a decision is at the heart of subject formation, self-transparency can never be attained. This is due to the circularity of ethical experience: 'The point is that the demand is not somehow objectively given in the state of affairs. Rather, the demand is only felt *as* a demand for the self who approves of it' (Critchley, 2008: 18). We can perceive how Critchley conceptualises a notion of the subject aligned with the radical contingency of the *estallido*: the same way that the revolt is an anti-neoliberal event that cannot be explained by neoliberalism, subject formation cannot be explained by the approval of a particular demand since these moments are one and the same thing; demand and approval emerge in unison. The demand for the good that stands as the principle of the subject's articulation *is deducible from, but not reducible to, the situation*. When a subject feels motivated to act in a certain way, i.e., in conformity with a good, it means that fidelity to a sort of forced choice is at play. The demand is experienced as transparent, as the only way forward, and this creates an opacity within the subject.

There are multiple advantages to my study in working with this notion of the subject. First, as mentioned, this ethical definition of the subject is fully compatible with my operationalisation of the *estallido*. To resort to a more technical term, the radical moment of undecidability at stake in the revolt is also operative in the subject.

Second, it allows me to problematise the alleged self-recognition of critical scholars in their practice. Inasmuch as the demand around which the subject is articulated is excessive, transparent agency is an unachievable outcome. As a result, desire and identification cannot be understood as the straightforward fulfilment of social mandates, an aspect I will develop further in the next section. Third, Critchley's notion is predicated on the possibility of counteracting political disappointment, which is precisely what defines the *estallido*. A popular uprising comes across as one of the most salient situations of political injustice. Crucially, the fact that the demand emerging from a situation of political injustice is irreducible to the situation not only means that it is ultimately unfulfillable, but also that it is 'a situated demand that is addressed, in principle, to everyone and hence universal' (Critchley, 2008: 42). Using a slightly different language, we all have to face the *estallido*'s push, the common fate of Chileans.

To understand what good critical subjects bind themselves to, I will draw on a traditional definition of critique from Max Horkheimer, one of the frontmen of critical theory. When he defines the notion of practice, he denounces the taken for granted distinction between thinking and doing as spurious: 'The practical aspect lies in the notion of difference; *the world has to become different*. It is not as if we should do something other than thinking, but rather that we should think differently and act differently' (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2019: 53, emphasis added). At the core of the academic practice of critique, then, we find the premise—and the promise—that the transformation of the world is an unqualified imperative. Pairing this definition with the ethical notion of the subject, my study operationalises the critical scholar as *a self who binds itself to progressive social change and shapes its subjectivity in relation to this good*.[3] The simultaneity of the

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[3] This is an attribute that surely could be used to define other subjectivities. I neither claim that scholars are the only 'critical' subjects, nor that they are more critical than

demand and its approval is patent here. We are not dealing with a constituted self that once confronted with the injustice of the world decides to produce transformative academic knowledge. Perceiving that the world *has* to become different implies that there is no critical subject prior to the approval of the demand for social transformation. This is why for Critchley the demand is both a curvature of intersubjective space and what organises the inner space of subjectivity. Ultimately, we might say that the desire for critique predates the critical subject and not the other way around.

Accepting that critical scholars organise (and curve) their intersubjective and psychic spaces according to their fidelity to social change, my study dwells on them to explore what happens with this organisation when social change *takes place*. Put differently, if the articulating demand is that the world has to become different, it seems warranted to hypothesise that disarticulation and subsequent rearticulation occur when the world is becoming different. This is precisely what the *estallido* brought about. The revolt has been defined (by critical scholars) as 'a utopian overflow of wanting to change everything' (Richard, 2021: 57), an 'uprising to demand another type of life and another kind of society' (Ferretti & Dragnic, 2020: 126), 'the desire to change everything' (Castillo, 2019: 23), a moment where 'the nation and its discursive formations [were] in a transformational moment' (Gordon-Zolov & Zolov, 2022: 2). The fact that with the revolt 'nothing seems impossible to be transformed' (Cortés, 2019: 81) is grudgingly acknowledged even by some of its most unenthusiastic commentators: the revolt entails 'the desire to socially reconfigure the meaning of life' (Peña, 2021: 32).

In the midst of all this transformation, somehow the critical subject managed to remain impervious. Or at least that's what we can infer

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others. I strategically focus on them due to the fact that their 'criticality' is both socially recognized and self-recognised.

from scholarly debates. Most of them revolved around a peculiar divide: those who purportedly saw the revolt coming and those who did not. To say it unadorned, a large number of local academics engaged in a fruitless exercise of finger-pointing. Despite the fact that such a debate might be easily dismissed on the grounds of the contingent nature of the *estallido* formulated here, in chapter 5 I show the psychic importance of this penchant for academic foretelling. Others saw an opportunity to update critical theory. Danilo Martuccelli, for instance, asserts that the revolt should recalibrate the scope of critique so as to account for experiences of existential suffering hitherto overlooked. In his view, critical thought should move from the social disquiet provoked by neoliberalism 'to the structural and historical question about the fights against processes of suffocation […], moving critique towards a very different understanding of inequalities, injustices, and abuses' (Martuccelli, 2019: 428). In a more general fashion, Alexis Cortés (2019) suggests that the revolt laid bare the difficulties of the social sciences in exercising their public critical role. From his point of view, sociology and other related disciplines should recover a tradition of social influence eroded by the hyper-productivity that characterises the current trends in knowledge production. Despite their differences, these takes are in solidarity with the supposed transparency of the desire for critique.

As necessary and commendable as some of these evaluative endeavours are, they ultimately treat critique as a purely intellectual activity. These and other similar approaches tend to assume that the challenge to academia posed by the revolt can be satisfactorily addressed either by broadening the scope of critique or by refining some of its procedures. The desire for critique linked to the articulation of the critical subject that I have outlined here goes completely unnoticed. This might be the confirmation of its endemic lack of attention: academics can quarrel over their alleged capacity to see what has not even taken place, but turn a blind eye to their own

critical subjectivity. Following the appreciation of most local academics, the revolt might have shown some limitations of the critical performance in Chile, but it seems to have little to say about the ways in which academics forge their own attachments to critique.

The appropriateness of the theoretical categories and procedures at our disposal is certainly an important matter, even more so in the course of events unfolded by the revolt. However, I strongly believe this is not the most important conclusion we should draw. Underlying this position, we find the assumption that the *estallido* is in solidarity with critique and vice versa. On the contrary, I maintain that the revolt destabilises critical subjectivities by exposing the desire for critique. In an embellished way, we might say that the popular uprising curved the curvature of the demand for social transformation articulating the critical subject in Chile. More prosaically, the *estallido* materialises the good the critical self binds to, altering the manner in which its subjectivity is shaped. The subjective push of the revolt is something Chileans cannot respond to by means of the existent symbolic resources, as simple as that. By virtue of this, critical academic subjects are a privileged locus to explore the vicissitudes of the desire for social transformation (that they have kept unattended). What remains to be clarified is how the responses to the revolt's push, the way in which a critical self shapes its subjectivity after the uprising, can be accounted for. The following section provides an alternative based on the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy.

THE PLACE OF DESIRE

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, from the perspective I adopt in this research, a Lacanian one, understanding desire requires accepting a counterintuitive assertion: desiring and wanting something are not equivalent. This is true even at a literal level—if they were to refer to the same phenomena, then two terms seem redundant. Desire,

as a corollary, must grasp a process the notion of wanting does not. To understand this, which is basically the difference between conscious and unconscious intention, I must refer to the logic of signification and the mechanisms through which meaningful action is possible. The goal of this section is to introduce the notions involved in this process—the Other, desire, and fantasy—and the role they play in my research. This could be a slippery slope. Lacan's convoluted jargon is a well-established fact, so the risk of merely rehearsing another overcomplicated take is certainly present. I will proceed, then, by referencing another excerpt around the notion of place that, at first glance, seems to convey nothing special:

> "Place" can have a very different meaning [than the topological one]. It simply means the place I have come to, and which puts me in a position to teach, given that there is such a thing as teaching […].

> There are the places I talked about first: topological places, places that have to do with essence, and then there is your place in the world. You usually get to that place by pushing and shoving. In short, it leaves you some hope. No matter how many of you there are, you will always end up in a certain place (Lacan, 2008: 5).

Lacan is here not simply teaching, but a place has put him in a position to teach. This immediately breaks with the spontaneous idea that the intersubjective space involves two agents (teacher and students). Otherwise, he would not invoke the place. If there is such a thing as teaching, it is because a third agent sets the symbolic coordinates allowing individuals to have a position in such a setting. The technical name of this third agent, what Lacan refers to as the place, is the Other. When we speak or produce any meaningful action, the Other is always mediating our interactions in order to make them intelligible. As Slavoj Žižek (2007: 9) has put it, 'our speech activity is grounded on our accepting and relying on a complex network of rules and other

kinds of presuppositions'. Some of these rules are quite straightforward. By way of example, we could not produce intelligible utterances if we have not previously learnt and successfully incorporated grammatical rules. Beyond this basic level, we also need to participate in the same life-world enabling me and my interlocutor to sustain a meaningful exchange. These are instances in which the Other silently operates as the guarantor of symbolic interactions.

In the second part of the quotation, however, Lacan adds something that muddies the waters: you get to a place by pushing and shoving. It is clear, then, that the Other's mediation is far less straightforward than it seemed. The reason is that this third impersonal agent has no concrete existence. In what appears to be a game of presuppositions at the centre of our everyday life, the symbolic coherence of individuals depends on the Other that, in turn, depends on its continuous summoning by individuals. This is what leads Žižek (2007) to define the Other as a virtual entity. Despite appearances, meanings are fragile constructions, since there are no foundational grounding social interactions other than their constant repetition. The point of departure for psychoanalysis, then, is the fact that human speech requires sanctioning from an impersonal entity (the Other) in order to attain social circulation, yet the provenance of this Other is always unclear.[4] So, if human beings occupy places where something pushes them (the call of the Other), they are nonetheless never comfortable and, quite literally, have to push back.

The pushing and shoving resulting from the virtuality of the Other is what psychoanalysis conceptualises as desire. In one of his famously intricate formulations, Lacan (2008: 38) asserts that 'desire is always what is inscribed as a repercussion of the articulation of language at

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[4] Lacan (1997a: 51) famously maintained that the Other is recognised but remains unknown: 'In true speech the Other is that before which you make yourself recognized. But you can make yourself recognized by it only because it is recognized first. It has to be recognized for you to be able to make yourself recognized'.

the level of the Other'. This is another way of saying that every time we try to convey meaning we resort to this authoritative entity and what we receive is not a confirmation but a profound sense of doubt, hence the pushing back. We can perceive this more clearly through the notion of interpellation. The latter is commonly assumed as a moment of ideological recognition, the situation in which we (literally or metaphorically) turn around because we sense someone is calling us. What this standard definition misses is that, as Alenka Zupančič insists, the subject is not simply the neutral substratum upon which ideology works (Hamza & Ruda, 2019; see also Ruti, 2017). We do not just turn around and say 'Yes, that is me' (a teacher, critical scholar, PhD researcher, and so on). From a psychoanalytic point of view, interpellation is never the mere internalisation of ideological calls since this process 'by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, […] there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it' (Žižek, 2008: 43). In yet another ironic twist, the subject's acquiescence to the ideological call depends on this interpellative backfire. This is the paradoxical nature of desire.

In this research, desire is without exception related to the dialectic between recognition and misrecognition at the basis of the relationship linking critical scholars with the Other. Or, more evocatively, the subjective pushing and shoving resulting from the Other's push. This means that every time a subject identifies as a critical scholar—i.e., self-binds to the good of social transformation—it borrows symbolic evidence from an incomplete Other, so identification is a process that does not work as smoothly as we would like. Since the Other cannot fully saturate the symbolic nature of our social fabric, its interpellative call is pierced by gaps and inconsistencies that make the Other's recognition a moment of doubt and anxiety rather than of plenitude and sameness. Lacan's cryptic definition quoted above contains a very precise term: repercussion. I would suggest taking it quite literally. When the Other organises a portion of the social handing out social

positions, language actually hits twice; it provokes a re-percussion. The subject receives from the Other the warrant of its identity (the percussion), but the incompleteness of this process causes the recoil of something after the impact (the re-percussion). Desire is the name of this recoil. At the level of the subject, the repercussion takes the form of an enigma experienced through the question 'why are you telling me this?' (Lacan, 1998: 214). So, no matter how much symbolic assurance we can muster, the Other is invariably desiring; in order to achieve subjective consistency, we must mitigate its structural inconsistency first.

Based on these conceptualisations of both the Other and desire, one aspect of my definition of the critical subject needs further clarification. The critical subject was defined as a self that binds itself to progressive social change and shapes its subjectivity in relation to this good. Once we accept the dialectic of recognition and misrecognition informing the logic of desire, this subjective self-shaping becomes a complex matter. Fantasy is the notion whereby we can grasp some of these dynamics. For psychoanalysis, fantasies are narratives or frameworks that allow the readability of desire; they artificially make misrecognition 'digestible'. This is why they operate in a different register; while the Other (and its recognition-cum-misrecognition) is embedded in the symbolic dimension of human life, fantasies pertain to the imaginary dimension.[5] This implies that our symbolic world is not directly meaningful but it becomes so through the production of desiring, imaginary narratives (Glynos, 2021; Žižek, 1997). These are libidinally-charged narratives aiming at filling the gaps of interpellation—and keeping the desire of the Other at bay. For Lacan (2019: 4) 'libido, a notion that lies at the heart of psychoanalytic theory, is nothing but the psychical energy of desire'. Consequently, for our world to be

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[5] Of course, these registers can only be separated for interpretive purposes.

meaningful, the enigma of the desire of the Other is 'solved' by unconsciously energising parts of our symbolic milieu.

We can understand fantasies as imaginary scenarios whose main purpose is to square a fundamental symbolic antagonism with the subject's conscious life. To produce this effect, fantasies rearrange the terms of a destabilising situation in order to make it psychically bearable for the subject. The defensive nature of these imaginary formations is thus evident: they obturate the rifts of discourses by means of the elevation of some of its symbolic components to a different status, solidifying meanings and identities. Inasmuch as the experience of desire 'is first apprehended as being experience of the Other's desire, and it is within this experience that the subject has to situate his own desire' (Lacan, 2019: 17), there is no desire outside a protective, imaginary construction. Herein lies the obduracy of fantasies: they are narratives that grant coherence to the subject. Fantasies, then, are highly idealised scenarios that allow the subject to situate its desire (i.e., to sustain the interpellation) by means of libidinal investments upon certain signifiers with which the subject forges attachments beyond reasonableness.

Critical subjects consciously shape their subjectivity according to the good of social transformation in multiple ways. My interest lies, nonetheless, in the unconscious dimension of this process. More specifically, I enquire what are the fantasies allowing critical subjects to navigate the interplay between recognition and misrecognition amid the *estallido*. This is an exploration of the psychic or libidinal economy of the revolt. As Anna Kornbluh (2014: 137) has insightfully shown, this is the term 'for substantifying the workings of desire, […] designating the foundational structure of psychosocial life'. However, according to her, we would only be faithful to the psychoanalytic project if we take 'economy' as a figurative language. This means that we must refrain from imagining there is one particular economy

regulating our unconscious life. Rather than an immanent order of the psyche, the latter works *like* an economy. Kornbluh's near-forensic approach demonstrates that Freud rarely referred to 'economy' in his writings, an effect produced by his translators. He preferred domestic tropes, evoking the idea that our psyche resembles 'an everyday, everywhere, ongoing process of organizing, putting something to use in a certain way' (Kornbluh, 2014: 144). Therefore, the term 'economy' is a makeshift at best; a notion that illuminates something that cannot be expressed directly. Our psyche is akin to a resourceful household and the question is how its material is organised, knowing that this is a necessity but there is no necessary organisation.

At this point, everything is in place to articulate the main assumption around which my study revolves. Against the grain of the vast majority of analyses of the revolt, I do not treat it as a radical disruption of neoliberalism in Chile. It certainly was that, yet reducing it exclusively to this dislocatory moment implies overlooking the fact that the *estallido* organised social life for a considerable period of time. My claim is that if the popular uprising was truly an emancipatory event, it was not because it opened up the space for imagining new social bonds, but because it organised them. The *estallido*, consequently, should be interpreted as the Other of Chilean society and not so much as its dislocation. In my opinion, the clearest sign of this is the capacity that certain mottoes emerging from the uprising had to make life meaningful. 'Chile woke up' is without a doubt the most salient of these slogans, to the extent that it seemed as though 'Chile as a whole was beginning to awaken' (Landaeta & Herrero, 2021: 61). Such a motto is much more than a rallying cry: 'Therein lies, perhaps, what has been called awakening. A demand that, in short, pushes us to go beyond what we thought we were capable of enduring' (Adriasola, 2021: 246). The language here is precise—waking up was one of the ways in which the revolt's push was felt, a call coming from the Other

(of the revolt). As I empirically demonstrate in chapter 4, this particular push was an intense one.

The *estallido* did not herald a post-neoliberal society yet to be organised, it was its embodiment. As Jacques Rancière (2010: 11) expressed it in the Spanish translation of *Proletarian Nights*: 'Emancipation is a way of living inequality according to the logic of equality'. It is, therefore, an internally split organisation of the social bond. This is precisely how the emancipatory dimension of the Chilean revolt should be interpreted. Rather than a moment of vacuum or disarray waiting to be hegemonised (like Messina's (2020) 'void of signification'), a rich and overdetermined symbolic life emerged almost simultaneously with the revolt. Even if temporarily, the *estallido* was the point of reference for meaning-making in Chile, organising and sanctioning social legibility. By means of a series of mottoes, chants, performances, artistic practices, and other symbolic bonds, the revolt operated as an engine for emancipatory identifications. Agreeing to this, however, implies accepting as a corollary that the Other of the revolt is also a desiring Other, meaning that it is within the discursive incompleteness of the *estallido* that subjects ought to situate their own desire. Regardless of how progressive the Other's touch of recognition might have been, this process was not without a kick of misrecognition. As Rodrigo, the director of a PhD programme in Valparaíso, told me during our interview: 'We were somehow expecting an event like the *estallido*'. The flipside of this is that as soon as the revolt became the Other, *the estallido expected something from them in turn*, something for which there never seems to be a satisfactory answer: 'I wanted the revolt, but what does the revolt want from me?', that is the enigma of the *estallido*.

When the revolt is treated not as a dislocation but as the place from which meaning is sanctioned and interpellations are released, the desire for change is open for exploration. In this chapter, I have

conceptualised the different steps involved in such an enterprise. The relevance of adopting this perspective is twofold. Theoretically, there is no reason to confine our scholarly inquisitiveness to oppressive desires. As Adam Phillips (2021: 5) points out: 'We are the only animals for whom radical change can be an object of desire. And we are traditionally at our most ambivalent about objects of desire'. The desire for social transformation is in no way less ambivalent than, let us say, the desire for self-realisation infused by neoliberalism. Politically, the conclusion of Bevin's detailed study of recent revolts is categorical: the last decade was defined by 'a huge amount of desire to see change in the structures that comprise our global system. And as we have shown, that desire was not enough, and neither was being right' (Bevin, 2023: 281). The Chilean uprising was not the exception. The revolt made the country unrecognisable, but only a couple of years later what became unrecognisable was the revolt itself. Among the many reasons for this outcome, the ambivalent nature of desire cannot be ruled out. At least not before rigorous study.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have introduced and theorised the key notions comprising my research on the fantasies of critique amid the *estallido*. To substantiate my claim that the revolt can be understood as the symbolic organisation of life rather than a moment of disruption, I presented the concept of contingency and subsequently of the Other. The *estallido*, from this angle, becomes the emancipatory place that distributes and allocates symbolic recognition, a process I have referred to in terms of push or interpellation. In order to grasp this process, I introduced a particular notion of the subject as the result of a self-binding to a good, and defined the critical subject as the self who binds to social change and shapes its subjectivity accordingly. This implies that the effects of the revolt's push are particularly intense among

these subjects. Finally, I articulated a notion of desire in relation to the Other's lack of foundations, making it the upshot of structural symbolic alienation. From the interplay between recognition and misrecognition, the notion of fantasy emerges as a way of imaginarily framing unconscious desire and sustaining the subject's identifications.

Based on the above, in my exploration of the desire for change the *estallido* is the where, critical scholars, the who, and fantasies, the how. Accordingly, this desire is studied in terms of the fantasies helping critical subjects—who self-bind to social transformation—to unconsciously navigate the misrecognition they get back from the transformative interpellation springing from the Other of the revolt. The theorisation presented in this chapter allows me to set a conceptual scaffolding to challenge the alleged transparency of the desire for social change—the fact that is seems to be the only desire that is not governed by the unconscious economy of desire. If it is true that, as Critchley (2008: 67) maintains, psychoanalysis provides 'a vocabulary of desire, affection and the passions', we must also bear in mind that this vocabulary is contingent upon the 'full acknowledgment of alienation as a process, which is constitutive of the subject and does not necessarily carry only negative connotations' (Tomšič, 2019: 28). The desire for change is thus a desire in which the subject finds itself as much as it loses itself.

The following chapters are organised as follows. Chapter 2 provides a historical reconstruction of the humanities and social sciences in Chile, emphasising the succession of modes of understanding social change. This overview shows how 'anti-neoliberalism' became the present good that critical subjects self-bind to. Against this backdrop, I maintain, the *estallido* forces new imaginary stabilisations of the desire for change among these subjects. In the second part, I engage in a discussion with competing perspectives for the exploration of critical

attachments. Particularly, I contrast my symbolic approach with the immediatist tendencies of postcritical theory. Chapter 3 lays out the methodological principles and procedures I followed to empirically reconstruct the fantasies of critique. At the same time, by explaining how my interpretation transpired, I justify why these fantasies are structured around seeing and writing. Chapters 4 and 5 present a detailed account of these fantasies; the former reconstructs some of the fantasies organising the libidinal economy of the visual field of the revolt, while the latter the ones organising academic writing. In Chapter 6, I draw the main conclusions of my study. On the one hand, I delve into the commonalities of the fantasies I identified, arguing that they did not break with the libidinal economy of neoliberalism. On the other hand, I use these insights to discuss the possibility of emancipatory fantasies. In Chapter 7, and final, I compare my approach to the *estallido* with other influential takes produced in Chile. The emphasis on the role played by imagination in these accounts allows me to stress the relevance of the imaginary dimension of the desire for change.

THE HISTORICAL CONFIGURATION OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN CHILE AND THE END OF NEOLIBERALISM

INTRODUCTION

Following my definition of the critical subject as the self who binds to social change and shapes its subjectivity accordingly, this chapter is devoted to a historical reconstruction of the forms that the good of social change has adopted in Chilean academia. The social sciences in Latin America were consolidated as a field relatively recently—around the 1950s—yet despite their newness they have been subjected to profound transformations, both in terms of their theoretical orientations and institutionally. One of the tenets of this field is that, from the outset, it has been organised around a conceptualisation of social change (De Sierra *et al.*, 2007; Lechner, 2015; Garretón, 2015). In a way, the social sciences in the region have permanently been critical since they have assumed throughout their trajectory that the world has to become a different place (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2019). *How* different is an issue that has varied historically. However, the fact that academics have shaped their subjectivity according to robust notions of social change has been a permanent feature.

Understanding the concrete ways in which social transformation has been conceived by local scholars is crucial to grasping the paradoxical emancipatory place of the *estallido* outlined in the previous chapter. I review the historical sequence of the good of social change in the first two sections. In line with Manuel Antonio Garretón (2015: 164), this trajectory can be grasped according to the succession of 'limit concepts' that define 'a desired horizon' towards which societies must advance. The social sciences in Latin America have historically been

endowed with a 'utopic horizon', making knowledge production and social change two inseparable dimensions of academics' self-shaping. My main goal in this chapter is to establish that the emergence during the 1990s of what has been called 'the new Chilean critical discourse' (Richard, 2004: 48) has effects that extend beyond the epistemological plane. I develop this in the third section. The new critical discourse certainly entailed a diversification of the theoretical landscape whilst enthroning neoliberalism as its limit concept. In so doing, however, it turned a post-neoliberal society into its desired horizon and made neoliberalism the master signifier organising the experience of critical subjects. Against this backdrop, the fact that the *estallido* was 'the experience of the end of neoliberalism' (Castillo, 2019: 42), or the 'end of the Chilean way to neoliberalism' (Cortés, 2022: 90), simultaneously implies the self-fulfilment of critique and the reorganisation of the experience of the critical subject.

This paradoxical upshot of the Chilean uprising can be perceived when the symbolic dimension of the *estallido* is brought to the fore. Rather than in terms of a new mode of production or set of policies, the temporary achievement of a post-neoliberal society was primarily a symbolic experience—the fact that, as the motto goes, 'Chile woke up'. In this context, the critical subject committed to the good of social change must find recognition amid a new symbolic organisation of its experience—the Other of the revolt—which in turn prompts a new imaginary economy. Such a perspective, however, goes against the grain of influential interpretations of the *estallido*. For many (Castillo, 2019; Galende, 2020; Karmy, 2019; Villalobos-Ruminott, 2020), the revolt was a suspension of symbolic representation that freed the anarchic potency of bodies impounded by neoliberalism. To substantiate my position, in the final section I contrast my approach with the theoretical trend that silently informs these interpretations—the postcritical project. The latter assumes that the main task for radical researchers is to overcome the subjective attachments to

critique precisely by jettisoning representation in favour of affective connections. My review highlights the main shortcomings of this perspective, and at the same time underscores the importance of symbolic mediation to grasp the desire for social change.

THE GOOD OF SOCIAL CHANGE BEFORE THE COUP: DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIALISM

In 1990, just as the country was entering the post-dictatorship era, Chilean social sciences also seemed to be opening up to a new period. That year, Martín Hopenhayn (1990) averred that an embryonic sensibility was emerging within this field—what he called 'critical humanism'. According to him, a heterogeneous community of researchers began to develop against the grain of the historical trends of the national social sciences. If the latter traditionally found their justification in the production of comprehensive theories of social change in the context of modernisation, critical humanism embraces cultural transformations largely regarded as incidental by functionalist and Marxist approaches. Operating predominantly outside the university and deploying a vast array of theories—particularly post-structuralism—critical humanism lay stress on the deployment of new identities, modes of citizenship, resistances, local practices, and the like, aiming at the emancipation of multiple forms of alienation.[6] In order to materialise this, critical humanism seeks 'the dissemination, by all available means, of a critical consciousness that, depending on

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[6] This trend identified by Hopenhayn correlates with the global mapping of the 'new critical theories' carried out by Razmig Keucheyan (2013). According to him, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a new breed of critical theories began to take shape. Characterised by the loss of the gravitational pull exerted by Marxism, increasingly tenuous ties to working-class organisations, and a greater opening to figures from peripheral countries, the critical field was globally renovated. A crucial feature of these new critical theories is that the academic milieu is their natural environment. 'Wholly integrated into the university system', Keucheyan (2013: 22) succinctly puts it, 'contemporary critical thinkers in no way form an intellectual "counter-society"'. As this chapter shows, one of the few differences is that, in the case of Chile, this integration took longer.

the type of receiver, privileges one or another critical tool' (Hopenhayn, 1990: 18-9). By debunking and unmasking the power relations underpinning social discourses, this new sensibility, according to Hopenhayn, heralded a new approach to knowledge production for the social sciences in Chile. To fully grasp the emergence of this new critical discourse, which is nowadays hegemonic, a larger picture of the humanities and social sciences is required.

The institutionalisation of the social sciences in Latin America is relatively recent. At the end of the nineteenth and the dawn of the twentieth century, the first modules dedicated to sociology and social theory made the scene within philosophy and law faculties in countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. However, it was not until 1940, when the Institute of Sociology was founded at the University of Buenos Aires, that the social sciences started to set their boundaries as a field in its own right in the region (De Sierra *et al.*, 2007). From the 1950s to 1973, the different disciplines consolidated themselves against the backdrop of national-popular projects, import substitution industrialisation, and the Cuban Revolution (Balan, 2003; Sosa, 1994). Such a flourishment was dramatically brought to a halt with the series of authoritarian regimes that took over the continent.[7] Despite the fact that dictatorships provoked a convulsion in the entire region, there are good reasons to claim that the Chilean experience acquires particular relevance in this context. Due to the positioning of the University of Chile in the regional scene, the number of exiled academics in the country from other latitudes of the continent, and the centrality obtained by Santiago as the headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the transformation of higher education carried out as a result of the

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[7] During the second half of the 20th century, practically no country in the region escaped authoritarian experiences. A chronological albeit incomplete list of the coups goes as follows: Venezuela (1948), Guatemala and Paraguay (1954), Brazil (1964), Peru (1968), Bolivia (1971), Chile and Uruguay (1973), Argentina (1976), El Salvador (1979), Panamá (1989).

coup in 1973 implied a dramatic shift for the social sciences in Latin America (Bagú, 1989; Garretón, 2007; Sosa, 1994).

In Chile, the stage of development of the social sciences prior to the coup is customarily subdivided into two periods (Courard & Frohmann, 1999; Garretón, 2007). From the 1950s until the late 60s, the first centres devoted expressly to sociology and anthropology were created against the background of, and motivated by, the increasing economic and sociopolitical diversification of Chilean society. With a significant influence of Western epistemologies (Balan, 2003), a new breed of specialists was trained in an environment where functionalism and structuralism reigned as the main approaches for the interpretation of diverse phenomena, gathered together around notions such as 'development' and 'modernisation'. The ECLAC played a substantial role in spreading this approach to social transformation. The division between developed and underdeveloped countries was a capitalist way of conveying 'the preoccupations of the transformation of Latin American society' (Solari *et al.*, 1976: 70). The focus was on the socioeconomic conditions and cultural patterns allowing countries to follow the road taken by the first world in order to remedy the regional backwardness. With all its ethnocentric premises (Escobar, 1995), development was the main notion for the nascent social sciences to convey their commitments to social change.

A brief but important 'critical phase' goes from the mid-1960s to 1973, when Marxism elbowed its way into defiance of functionalist orientations. Inspired by both the political climate in the region and the theoretical influence of authors like Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, a more engaged relationship between the social sciences and sociopolitical changes was proclaimed in this phase. As a result, class struggle, ideology, and the transition towards socialism came to the fore as subjects of knowledge production. The unkept promises of development in tandem with the influence of the Cuban revolution

translated in Chile into non-capitalist approaches to development and the Chilean road to socialism (Garretón, 2014). This second phase was characterised by a fierce attack on functionalism and theories of modernisation, which were perceived as working in cahoots with imperialist goals (Solari *et al.*, 1976). In 1973, Aníbal Quijano (1973: 50) set the tone for the reorganisation of the social sciences in the region based on two interdependent movements:

> Firstly, the decline of the prestige of the currents that today we call developmentalist in Latin American social thought; and, secondly, the beginning of radical criticism of the orientation that today, with all justice, I think we can call the imperialist orientation of the social sciences.

In the context of this new phase of critique, critical subjects attained recognition through a very different type of agency: 'Properly speaking, you cannot call a social scientist anyone who is trying to conduct research like a good academic from outside the substantive practice of the transformation of society' (Quijano, 1973: 57). We can perceive how the notions guiding critical knowledge production were not merely theoretical or epistemological tools; they were symbolic anchors for the subjective self-shaping of subjects committed to the good of social change. In other words, they were the reference to respond to the question of what it is to be a critical subject.

As Garretón (2015) has documented it, before the coup in Chile, this era was defined by a clear notion of social transformation. Regardless of the theoretical orientation, the diagnosis was unambiguous: Latin America is either an underdeveloped or a dependent capitalist society. From this starting point, theories of change were framed in terms of the stages to achieve development or the conditions to stage the revolution. Development and socialism were the competing goods orienting the self-shaping of academics during this period. For the embryonic field of the social sciences, the challenge

was not so much theoretical—after all, this was a particularly fruitful and innovative period spearheaded by dependency theory (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979)—but professional. The clarity regarding the desired horizon towards which society should advance lacked nonetheless a professionalised community of researchers as its counterpart, bearing in mind that the social sciences were still in the making. According to Garretón (2015: 160), who was part of this process, 'it was clear what world we were facing and how we wanted to change it, but we did not know what we were as social scientists'.

At the precise moment when the more radical critical currents were gaining institutional space, Pinochet's dictatorship made its entrance. The 1973 coup implied a twofold movement: a rupture followed by a refoundation of the humanities and social sciences. The new regime undertook an ideological cleansing in its early years that led to the redundancy of over a thousand academics expelled from the University of Chile and the Catholic University, while simultaneously research centres were shut down or downsized to a minimum (Garretón, 2007). In parallel to these political decisions, from the outset, the authoritarian regime suffused higher education with managerial principles, such as efficiency and competition, in order to make profitability the main criterion for resource allocation, in a new context marked by the self-financing of universities. The humanities and social sciences were the hardest hit by these new guidelines. They underwent a thorough 'reinvention' (Garretón, 2015) that altered the good of social change in relation to which scholars shaped their subjectivities.

THE GOOD OF SOCIAL CHANGE DURING AND AFTER THE COUP: DEMOCRACY AND NEOLIBERALISM

Under the circumstances imposed by the dictatorship, the humanities and social sciences found in independent academic centres—chiefly sustained by foreign aid—a site to resist (Courard & Frohmann, 1999;

Garretón, 2007). Said centres, especially the FLACSO (Latin American Social Sciences Faculty), were able to employ dismissed academics, maintain a degree of research quality, and, in some measure, preserve a critical spirit (Ramos, 2005). By and large, the result of this period is not only the privatisation of higher education but also an internal and external reengineering of the humanities and social sciences. On the one hand, the visibility of sociology as a domain linked to a critical and transformative perspective of society was perceived by the authoritarian regime as a subversive threat, hence its severity towards the discipline of the social sciences (Garretón, 2007). But on the other hand, there was a gradual adaptation by the vast majority of social scientists to non-critical theories and frameworks, even when such perspectives were no longer deemed as a threat by the regime. So, if the topic-driven nature of most of these independent academic centres entailed a diversification of research areas and an increasing openness towards new perspectives for the social sciences (Lechner, 1988), this coerced shift also solidified a mainstream research agenda around democracy. As Lechner (2015: 25) has put it:

> Relegated to an extra-university ghetto, the social sciences in Chile managed to keep alive a critical thinking that crystallises in two debates that have Latin American projection: on the one hand, the socialist renewal that—anticipating recent processes in the USSR and Central Europe—rethinks the meaning of democratic socialism and promotes the formation of a new left. On the other hand, the critical reception of neoliberalism, both in terms of its theoretical body and its "social model".

Among many other transformations, the authoritarian experience entailed a rearticulation of the limit concepts of the social sciences. The post-dictatorship period saw the reformulation of the desired horizon of social change from development and revolution towards democracy and, incipiently, (anti-)neoliberalism. Even though Lechner refers to

the latter, his take is that democratisation is the national objective to which the social sciences should contribute. Through the 'remodelling' and 'renewal' of the way in which we interpret our world, they partake in the endeavours 'to reconcile political democracy with social justice and economic growth' (Lechner, 2015: 25). This remodelling and renewal points precisely to a reconfiguration of the good according to which critical researchers shape their subjectivity: change is no longer conceived in terms of development or revolution, but rather modernisation in order to cement this new democratic era.

Such a turn was certainly not without risks. Lechner (2015) and others (Garretón, 2015) envisaged the possibility of social sciences adopting an instrumental or technocratic character. This is indeed how many authors have defined the shift towards democratisation in Chile. Nelly Richard (2001: 195), regarded by many as one of the most prominent critics in the Chilean landscape from the 1980s onwards, set forth the situation of the social sciences at the beginning of the new millennium as follows:

> The "strong" sciences devoted to the study of culture in Latin America for international centres and organisations, accustomed as they are to the numeric and statistic languages, have professionally developed a type of techno-operative knowledge that *almost entirely* dominates the academic field (emphasis added).

These 'strong' sciences were—and still are—primarily sociology and political science. By that period, these sciences were defined by 'an endemic theory of modernisation' that, according to Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, kept them prisoner within the boundaries of historicist analyses, which explains the loss of the 'critical potency' of such sciences (Villalobos-Ruminott & Thayer, 2010: 120). Coincidentally, in the same years that these theories of modernisation were being developed, outside the academic domain, specifically in the artistic scene, a particular strand of critical practice was taking shape

(Richard, 2004), one that will prove to be extremely influential for future academia and its limit concept.

What Hopenhayn (1990) labelled as the 'critical sensibility', or the 'new Chilean critical discourse' in Richard's (2004) parlance, was largely the result of the reception and interpretation of the artworks produced by the *Nueva Escena* [new scene] during the authoritarian years through poststructuralist and deconstructive lenses. The procedure that this peripheric group of researchers found in said artworks was the possibility of using the practice of citation not so much for the sake of erecting a solid, robust, and totalising body of knowledge, but precisely to erode such pretensions. Citing, then, was a way of introducing interruption and discontinuity into the linear and coherent discourse of the 'strong' social sciences. According to Richard (2009), the strong social sciences operationalise technical demonstration schemas predicated on methodological control and expert rationality. The new critical discourse, conversely, was conceived as an 'interpretive getaway' searching for the dissemination of meanings. In the context of both the severe attrition of the institutional space of the social sciences and the hegemony of sociology of modernisation, poststructuralist themes such as difference, meaning, and subjectivity (Belsey, 2002) found their place in the world outside the university.

The backwardness of the Chilean social sciences when it comes to the reception and production of critical knowledge during the 1990s is an extended perception. Different studies on the *Revista de Crítica Cultural* [Journal of Cultural Critique], the most important vehicle, and one of the few, for critical voices in this period attest to that. César Zamorano (2014) has stressed that the contributors of this Journal— edited by Nelly Richard—concur in perceiving sociology and political science as spaces for theoretical creation incapable of articulating critical interventions in the face of the totalising mechanisms of the

ongoing neoliberal revolution. For Tomás Peters (2018), in turn, the depletion of critical densities discussed in the Journal's pages was the result of the triumph of a technical view of social sciences gathered together under the derogatory umbrella of 'transitology', that is, the technocratic or functionalist concern about the transition towards democracy. From this gaze, the vast majority of the social sciences underwent a successful adaptation process to the post-dictatorial coordinates within which alternative critical takes were largely obliterated.

The dominance exerted by this 'strong' version of the social sciences over the whole field is also acknowledged by some of the salient representatives of this former current. In his exhaustive study on the construction of the Chilean sociological field, Claudio Ramos (2019) points at the ARCIS University as likely the only academic institution that during the 90s was receptive to knowledge production beyond the confines of the theories of modernisation. Under the direction of Tomás Moulian (the only sociologist in the country who has managed to turn a critical study into a best-selling book),[8] this university counted among its ranks well-known critics. Also, from 1996 it harboured the Centre for Social Research (CIS) and created two critically inspired journals: *Infraganti* and *Investigación y Crítica* [research and critique]. The Centre was highly ambitious and it was composed of three areas: economy, critical theories and communication, and culture. In this environment, a 'Workshop of Critical Theories' was put in place from 1997 to 2001, encompassing social theory, Marxism, and contemporary continental philosophy. So, according to Ramos (2019: 454-5):

> During the 90s, in ARCIS there was an examination of the dominant ideas about the transition [towards democracy] and a

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[8] According to Alexis Cortés (2022: 31), Moulian's analyses were not just a source of inspiration for public critical sociology, but also had 'the merit of demystifying the main presuppositions of the Chilean political transition, moving the critique of neoliberalism from the margins of academia to a broader public audience'.

critique of the *Concertación* discourse. It was an alternative-left type of centre. In theoretical terms, it was a site where the ideas of Foucault, Žižek, Negri, Guattari circulated, and a whole universe *strongly contrasting with that of the other social sciences centres in the country* (emphasis added).

Apart from one institution and a handful of researchers, during the 1990s 'democratisation' and 'modernisation' solidified as the unassailable goods of social transformation. Circa the mid-2000s, however, the distribution between the 'strong' and the critical social sciences started to change. Due both to the introduction and consolidation of new theoretical perspectives that broadened the academic scope and in the sociopolitical situation of the country, critique ceased to be a niche practice. For the sake of my argument, what is more relevant than determining which came first—or which is more decisive than the other—is to identify them as triggers for said transformation.

Nelly Richard (2001, 2009) claims that during this decade, the reception of cultural studies in Chile announced a new relationship between the humanities and the social sciences. With a solid commitment to transdisciplinarity, cultural studies established new points of intersection for disciplines and sciences unaccustomed to trespassing their own limits. At the same time, they expanded the analytical possibilities by adopting a position where 'anything goes' when choosing study subjects. This 'promiscuity' of cultural studies, expressed in both the unrestricted blending of disciplines and the unlimited study prospects, demanded new forms of critical legitimacy. Consequently, not only a whole array of hitherto disregarded cultural processes and artifacts were now considered worthy of 'critical deciphering', but also the very academic procedures became the centre of critical attention. In this vein, cultural studies entailed a reorganisation of academic knowledge enabling a critical practice

characterised by a 'diagonal' intervention that runs through the interstices of different discursive formations (Richard, 2001).

The second half of this decade was also a sociopolitical watershed. The 2006 student protests known as 'the penguin revolution' marked the outset of a series of popular demonstrations that shook the prevailing conformism of the epoch. It represented the first nationwide social movement explicitly articulated around the problems of neoliberalism rather than those of democracy (Ruiz & Boccardo, 2015), forcing a reassessment of the discourse of social change. Due to the interconnectedness of the educational system and the broader neoliberal model of society, by critiquing the former the student revolts enabled a wide-ranging critique of the latter (Ruiz, 2015). A succession of massive and momentous protests have taken place since then: the student movement in 2011, the demonstrations for the abolition of the pensions scheme in 2017, the feminist movement in 2018, and, more recently, the *estallido* of October 2019 (Thielemann, 2020). Illustrative of the impact of this social criticism upon the academic domain is the emergence of new postgraduate programmes in the humanities and social sciences with an explicit critical perspective during this period.

- An MA in Contemporary Thought and a PhD in Social Sciences were created at the Diego Portales University in 2004 and 2018, respectively.
- A PhD in Sociology saw the light in 2006 at the Alberto Hurtado University.
- A PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies on Thought, Culture, and Society was established in 2015 at the University of Valparaíso.
- The PhD in Critical Theory and Current Society was inaugurated in 2016 at the Andrés Bello University.
- The Silva Henríquez Catholic University launched a PhD in Social Sciences in 2018.

- A PhD in Advanced Social Studies was created in 2023 at the Central University.

These postgraduate programmes share the characteristic of adopting an explicit critical stance, but also the fact that they are mostly established in private universities. So, the enlargement of the new critical discourse has been nurtured by fierce social criticism of multiple neoliberal expressions in Chilean society, yet it is precisely within institutions that emerged under the auspices of neoliberal policies where many of those critical positions have found shelter. In an ironic historical twist, the dissemination of this new critical discourse goes hand in hand with the expansion of the neoliberal university which, paradoxically, has been identified as the major threat to the former (Rodríguez, 2018; Santos, 2015; Thayer *et al.*, 2018). From the mid-2000s onwards, anti-neoliberalism progressively replaced democratisation as the desired horizon of the social sciences, and thus the good according to which critical scholars shape their subjectivity. Social change was conceived, largely from within the neoliberal university, in terms of emancipation from neoliberalism.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE END OF NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism is the limit concept of the current generation of critical scholars in Chile. Going back to Ross' (2023) formulation quoted in the previous chapter, a post-neoliberal society is what contemporary Chilean critical academics have both wished for and worked towards. The revolt brought this desired horizon to fruition in terms of the symbolic experience of Chileans. Within academia, one of the clearest indicators of this is the inescapability of the term 'neoliberalism' in almost any academic account of the event. The *estallido* has been identified, for example, as the epilogue to the local neoliberal consensus (Ferretti & Dragnic, 2020), a collective subtraction from neoliberal governance (Karmy, 2019), and the event that will bury

neoliberalism (Ruiz, 2020). The popular uprising can be considered the summit of the rise of the new critical discourse. Significantly, this approach permeated the analyses of some of the most unreservedly conservative commentators.

> What is clear is that the protesters who took to the streets identified so-called "neoliberalism" as the main source of the problems affecting the country. In fact, most of the mottoes the crowds were chanting on the streets and most of the banners demanded the end of the neoliberal system (Peña & Silva, 2021: 14).

The quoted excerpt was co-written by Carlos Peña, one of the champions of the 'strong' ethos of the social sciences and the chancellor of the prestigious (and private) Diego Portales University. Despite rehearsing a detachment from critical perspectives ('the so-called "neoliberalism"'), the fact that he had to make room within his analyses of the Chilean 'modernisation'—the warhorse of the strong social sciences—to address the *estallido* through the critical lens of 'neoliberalism' stands as an index of the hegemony of the new critical discourse. In spite of all the qualifications, rhetorical distancing, and self-proclaimed scholarly seriousness, Peña ultimately resorts to the language of critique to interpret the *estallido*, proving that it became its lingua franca. On the opposite side of the academic spectrum, this language is common currency. Take Alejandra Castillo, a well-known feminist philosopher, as an example. For her, the *estallido* is 'the fall of the neoliberal body', 'a revolt that brings the neoliberal machine to a halt', 'the collapse of the neoliberal body', or, in a more straightforward fashion, 'the experience of the end of neoliberalism' (Castillo, 2019: 17, 23, 39, and 42). With varying degrees of exuberance, this was the tone set by the revolt in the local academia.

From the vantage point of the present, some of the most fervent critical takes on the *estallido* seem too sanguine or even far-fetched.

However, the narratives behind the revolt lent credence to this academic excitement. Castillo, just like Peña, dwells on the mottoes and chants on the street to substantiate her analysis, claiming that the *estallido* produced 'a set of phrases impossible [to understand] for neoliberalism but full of meaning for the revolt' (Castillo, 2019: 41). This is crucial: the symbolic world emerging from the *estallido* is already post-neoliberal. For Critchley (2008: 103-4), who follows Laclau's theory of hegemony, nomination is the quintessential political procedure: 'The political task, then, is one of inventing a name around which a political subject can be aggregated from the various social struggles through which we are living'. At this symbolic level, there is a crucial difference between the *estallido* and the anti-neoliberal mobilisations that preceded it. The series of protests taking place in the last decade in Chile shared the same underlying logic of 'no more…'. The changes in higher education in 2011 were framed as 'no more profiteering'; the narrative behind the transformation of the pension scheme coalesced around the idea of 'no more AFP' (the private companies managing the founds); and the feminist movement of 2018 sought a 'non-sexist education'. In contradistinction, the main motto of the *estallido* was 'Chile woke up'.

The above not only attests to the global instead of regional scope of the revolt, an event that cannot be confined to a particular demand as it represents a wholesale reshaping of the social. It also bears witness to how this emancipatory movement sought social transformation through the most traditional critical gambit—the possibility of *seeing* how things *really* are. 'The motto "Chile woke up"', Richard (2021: 40) maintains, 'expressed the desire of the Chilean people to reappropriate a vital force that was stolen from the citizenry by the transitional pact between *redemocratisation* and *neoliberalism*'. The extended perception that the revolt 'interpellated a citizenry that has awakened from a prolonged lethargy' (Morán, 2019: 64) echoes the standard procedure of ideology critique: a discourse formation (i.e.,

neoliberalism) is masking the actual state of affairs and so impeding Chileans to perceive their oppression. The revolt exposes this distorted reality through a collective process of self-consciousness. As a result, 'this awakening not only entails a critique of both the economic model and the representative democracy, it is also an invitation to create a different bond between us and with the reproduction of life' (Fernández & Moreno, 2019: 275).

Now, if we accept that the revolt unleashed the 'demystification of neoliberalism' and, therefore, 'nothing seems impossible to be questioned and even transformed' (Cortés, 2022: 16, 21), then critique finds in this event a moment of self-fulfilment. Using the language I have been deploying in this chapter, neoliberalism ceases to be the limit concept of the social sciences and anti-neoliberalism its desired horizon; the revolt is the (temporary) materialisation of such a horizon. The *estallido*, consequently, actualises the premise and the promise of critique, namely, that the world has to become a different place (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2019). What I propound is not that neoliberalism suddenly vanished and was replaced by a fully-fledged alternative principle—let us say, socialism. Rancière's (2010: 11) definition of emancipation referenced in the previous chapter, 'a way of living inequality according to the logic of equality', can be modified to make sense of this: the revolt was a way of living neoliberalism according to the logic of post-neoliberalism. This is how 'the experience of the end of neoliberalism' (Castillo, 2019: 42), or the 'end of the Chilean way to neoliberalism' (Cortés, 2022: 90), brought about by the popular uprising should be interpreted.

The solidarity between the revolt and the new Chilean critical discourse is undeniable at an intellectual level. For the local academia, the possibility of ending neoliberalism amounts to what Laclau (1990: 3) calls the self-image of an era, 'a certain horizon, however blurred and imprecise, which somehow unifies its whole experience'.

Subjectively speaking, things are more complicated. Experiencing the end of neoliberalism somehow divides the experience of the critical subject in Chile. Once we accept that the latter self-binds to the good of social change in terms of post-neoliberalism, the revolt transforms the way in which the critical subject has hitherto shaped its subjectivity. 'Limit concepts', Garretón (2015: 165) writes, 'have been essential to organise, either latently or manifestly, both the practice of social scientists and their normative horizon'. Resorting to the categories outlined in the previous chapter, the experience of the end of neoliberalism implies that the place from which our symbolic existence is organised—the Other—has been *re-placed*, prompting new ways of self-binding to social transformation. This includes the fantasies allowing the subject to navigate the misrecognition resulting from the Other's interpellation.

Surprisingly, this reorganisation has gone largely unnoticed by local scholars. Among the few exceptions, we find the philosopher Federico Galende. He maintained that one of the results of the revolt is that critique becomes 'inaudible'. Since the critical practice 'is constitutively a distance, and this distance is founded on a suspicious relationship with the means' (Galende, 2020: 53), the *estallido* imposes a sort of immediacy that annuls the critical distance. This is why Galende suggests that, in this context, critique grows into performance:

> *Estallidos*, revolts, uprisings: What is happening today in Chile, with its crowds overflowing the squares, brings to the surface a word that is at odds with the classic concept of critique. This word [...] is *performance*. But what is a performance? It is not the assertion of a distance that reflects upon the means, but a collective bodily potency that unfolds experimentally and verifies itself in this very act of unfolding. It makes its own moment, designs its own time; is born of itself and is not subordinated to any text or script that explains it (Galende, 2020: 54).

Despite remaining at an epistemological level, Galende does not limit the effects of the revolt within academia to an assessment of how fit or unfit the critical knowledge production was in the aftermath of the *estallido*, as others have done (Cortés, 2019; Martuccelli, 2019). His interpretation of the situation is much more nuanced. First, the issue at hand is framed neither in terms of the accuracy/inaccuracy of critical analyses, nor the possibility/impossibility of critique. Rather, the latter seems to be 'at odds' with itself. Second, the expression of this internal oddness is that, when one tries to deploy critique, it does not hold up; the parameters under which it used to be effective, the epistemological distance, are not in place anymore. Consequently, critique becomes something else—a performance. Third, the kind of practice that Galende refers to as performance attests to an autarchic affective agency. Against the backdrop of the lack of parameters for critique, this self-governed vitality is a law onto itself that makes its own path experimentally.

I do not agree with Galende's conclusion. The distinction between critique and performance seems unsubstantiated and the postcritical undertones of his interpretation run against my theoretical approach (more on this in the next section). However, his analysis has the double merit of identifying the internal division of critique in the aftermath of the *estallido* and hinting at the subjective consequences of this situation. Furthermore, he perceives this internal division in the proximity that the revolt imposes on critical subjects, that is to say, in the lack of a critical 'distance'. Once again, he is alluding to the inability to exercise the epistemological detachment that characterises academic critique. Yet, from a slightly different angle, this is also the source of the psychic struggle with the desire for critique. The fantasmatic organisation of the subject's experience concurrently depends upon an inner distancing:

Fantasy is the form through which we organize our enjoyment. It does so by constructing a narrative that envisions a relationship to a seemingly enjoyable object. Enjoyment doesn't come from obtaining the object but from sustaining a relationship to it *from a distance*, which is what fantasy erects. I contend that fantasy narrates a tortured path through a variety of obstacles that allows one to relate to an object of desire (McGowan, 2022a: 178, emphasis added).

From within academia, what is often assumed is that the revolt imposed an inescapable sense of immediacy when it comes to critique. As follows from Galende's view, there is no script to interpret the *estallido*—we are reduced (or elevated, depending on the theoretical propensity) to a collective bodily potency. The same is applicable to Castillo (2019: 64), for whom the uprising entailed a process of acceleration that turned any analysis into a chronicle, a mode of writing that plays out 'more in our day-to-day than in its theoretical pretensions'. Events are too close to take the necessary step back to interpret them. Ironically, claims like these prove exactly the opposite point from those they attempt to make. Adducing that the *estallido* transforms critique to such an extent that it has been dispossessed from its theoretical pretensions *is* a theoretical claim. Furthermore, such a statement is silently predicated on a theoretical tradition that extols bodily matter over discursive formations (Stavrakakis, 2014). What this situation seems to show is the subjective, rather than epistemological, struggle with the displacement of neoliberalism as the organiser of the critical experience in Chile and its replacement by the revolt. The latter recalibrated the imaginary or fantasmatic distance from which critical subjects shape themselves according to the good of social change, but it certainly did not make it disappear.

From my perspective, the emancipatory character of the *estallido* is first and foremost symbolic: if Chile woke up, it did so to a new

discursive milieu in which neoliberalism can be lived according to the logic of post-neoliberalism. Amid this context, critical subjects—those who shape themselves in consonance with social change—are interpellated from a new place, namely, the Other of the revolt. The fact that the revolt produced 'a set of phrases impossible [to understand] for neoliberalism but full of meaning for the revolt' (Castillo, 2019: 41) means that the latter organises our symbolic life—and understanding those phrases is contingent on imaginary recognition. The experience of the end of neoliberalism implies that the critical subject has to find readability in this new Other where phrases—i.e., symbolic life—are imbued with meaning. In this context, the critical subject has to navigate a new fantasmatic distance, not immediacy, regarding its desire. This is why the revolt *qua* the experience of the end of neoliberalism reorganises the desire for change—it elicits a new imaginary economy of critique. The emancipatory interpellation launched by the Other of the revolt, that is, the call to identify oneself as a subject living according to the logic of post-neoliberalism (the awakened subject), transforms what is experienceable. Yet, as I showed in the previous chapter, this interpellation is nonetheless subjected to the dialectic between recognition and misrecognition.

Through the notion of limit concept, I have tried to evince that neoliberalism is not simply an intellectual artifact nor a mere set of policies, but crucially the symbolic guarantor of the experience of critical subjects in contemporary Chile. Neoliberalism provided a more or less clear sense of what the good of social change is and thus how critical subjects should self-shape themselves, both consciously and unconsciously. As Garretón (2015: 161) puts it, neoliberalism became 'the single dominant principle of totality in [Chilean] society, […] the sole explanation of all evils'. This dominant principle allowed the organisation of a fantasmatic distance to frame the desire for critique—an unconscious response to what the Other wants from a

critical subject. From the standpoint I adopted in this study, the *estallido* can be conceptualised as a reorganisation of this fantasmatic distance. Once the revolt is set in motion, the experience of the end of neoliberalism propels a new imaginary economy of critique, that is to say, unconscious responses to the enigma of the desire of the Other of the revolt. *What does the Other want from me now that we have awakened?* When neoliberalism is lived according to the logic of post-neoliberalism, the imaginary economy of critique undergoes a transformation.

The primacy of analyses based on the notion of immediacy, however, has occluded this dimension of the *estallido*, strengthening the idea that the desire for change coincides with itself. Due to his interpretation of the *estallido* in terms of an 'affective potency', Rodrigo Karmy (2019: 56) illustrates in exemplary fashion this anti-discursive tendency:

> Faced with the neoliberal body confiscated by the entrepreneurial form [...], the revolt restored the body as potency. The fascination experienced by the participants in a political process like this is entirely linked to the surprise that comes to conscience—that bad advisor—what a body can do; what bodies can do. Because the revolt throws us into this: a hand-to-hand fight.

The revolt throws us into a pre-discursive experience, one in which we encounter the potency of bodies. From this angle, the Chilean uprising was emancipatory insofar as it marked a break from symbolisation *tout court*. The *estallido* is then properly 'aneconomic'; an event that does not follow a pattern nor is regulated by any organisation since it is the suspension of representation. Such a suspension has no additive effect; it brings with it 'a radical, unconditional loss' that nonetheless 'opens up a beginning in which we can reimagine another historical era' (Karmy, 2019: 57). Towards the end of my study, I will engage in a detailed discussion of Karmy's theory of revolts in the light of my

empirical analysis. Meanwhile, it suffices to notice that my approach is opposed to his view. What scholars aligned with the supposed immediacy and anarchic affectivity of the revolt lose sight of is the fact that, as Anna Kornbluh (2022: 35-6) highlights, 'The symbolic is the medium of sociality, and without its material support, the eruptive, evanescent real of revolutionary fervor cannot be sustained'. The operationalisation of both the *estallido* and the critical subject I have offered thus far corroborate the importance of the symbolic dimension of the revolt. And since that is the case, rather than an aneconomic event the *estallido* elicits a whole imaginary economy that calls for an empirical exploration.

Before moving to the methodological chapter in which I flesh out the steps I followed in such an exploration, it seems necessary to discuss the commonalities and discrepancies my approach has with the influential postcritical turn in the humanities and social sciences. There are at least two reasons for this. First, this theoretical current has advanced crucial insights for the exploration of the affective side of critique. The postcritical project coalesces around the steadfast challenge of the privileged place that critique occupies within academia, both epistemic and political. This challenge is conducted by underscoring the subjective attachments sustaining critical identifications. My own approach appears to fall within the postcritical research agenda. Second, most researchers aligned with this agenda understand that, once the hegemony of critique has been defied, the goal is to unleash a sort of unbridled affectivity hindered by the representational procedures of critique. Their efforts, then, correlate with the penchant for the immediacy of affects I identify in predominant takes on the *estallido* (Bulo, 2021; Galende, 2020; Karmy, 2019; Márquez, 2020; Villalobos-Ruminott, 2020). Here is where I depart from postcritique. Therefore, contrasting my study against the postcritical project allows me to locate my enquiry in a path where the

subjective attachments to critique, and thus the desire for change, have been under scrutiny.

LIVING NEOLIBERALISM ACCORDING TO THE LOGIC OF POST-NEOLIBERALISM: AFFECTIVE POTENCY VERSUS SYMBOLIC ORGANISATION

The interpretations of how the *estallido* toppled neoliberalism reviewed above are heavily indebted to the postcritical sensibility in contemporary theory. As can be inferred from its name, postcritique is an intellectual umbrella gathering scholars looking for engagements with radical knowledge outside the confines of critique (Anker & Felski, 2017; Best & Marcus, 2009; Castronovo & Glimp, 2013; Di Leo, 2014; De Sutter, 2020). The latter, following the influential works of Bruno Latour (2004) and Eve Sedgwick (2003), is regarded as an ungenerous and negative way of reading the social that has become all too hegemonic in contemporary academia. This hegemony, notably embodied by symptomatic reading, is expressed in the prevalence among radical scholars of a suspicious attitude towards signs (the critical distance Galende refers to above). From this angle, critical analyses assume in advance that the truth of social phenomena is invariably veiled, imposing a surface/depth dichotomy that elevates the act of unmasking to the ultimate goal of radical thought (Felski, 2015).

None of the above sits well with the postcritical project. Rita Felski (2023: 330) has recently defined the aim of postcritique as a challenge to critique's 'tenacious grip on the intellectual imagination' to diversify the ways in which politically committed scholars engage with knowledge. In this sense, one of the privileged avenues explored by postcritical researchers has been to highlight that suspicion is not merely an intellectual strategy but also an affective disposition. According to Sedgwick (2003: 138): 'it is only paranoid knowledge that has so thorough a practice of disavowing its affective motive and force

and masquerading as the very stuff of truth'. Or, again, in the words of Felski (2015: 116),

> Suspicious reading is also […] a style of interpretation that has paid scant attention to its own aesthetic and affective qualities, conceiving itself as an austere exercise in demystification. Once we acknowledge that suspicious interpretation is not only thought-driven but also pleasure-driven, not just a critique of narrative but also a type of narrative, its exceptional status is diminished.

Through the questioning of the attachments to critique, the postcritical conjuncture arises as a moment of 'experimental responses' with 'modes of knowledge production that are not based on representation and critique' (Jensen, 2014: 357). Several postcritical researchers have suggested that 'hope' can be a counter-disposition to suspicion. Sedgwick (2003), for instance, vouches for a reparative reading in which hope is among the 'energies' that can help scholars to organise the fragments they encounter in their work. Jensen (2014), in turn, draws inspiration from Hirokazu Miyazaki's 'method of hope' to come up with a response to what comes after critique, insofar as this procedure ceases to be wholly representational in favour of an imaginative practice oriented towards the future. Finally, Christopher Castiglia (2017b) echoes both the reparative potentials of hope and the ascendancy of imagination over representation in his project of 'hopeful readings'. For him, one of the main problems with suspicious critique is that it cannot account for people's engagements outside ideological formations, reducing the potentialities of the social field. He claims that the postcritical moment calls for a renewed investment in imagination as a speculative world-making practice. This is precisely how some scholars have interpreted the *estallido* in terms of 'affective potency'.

Due to the commonalities between Castiglia's postcritical approach and many takes on the Chilean revolt, it would be beneficial to contrast

my position against his proposal. Castiglia's work shares the two main features of the otherwise fairly variegated field of postcritique: first, the appreciation that critique divides the world into mendacious ideological surfaces and concealed truths; and second, that overcoming this methodology requires an extra-epistemological or affective change. Critique's *modus operandi*, the fact that 'critics treat the text's surface as an obfuscation below which they discover and reveal dangerous ideological complicities' (Castiglia, 2013: 80), must be challenged because, for Castiglia, it entails an affective curtailment of what seems possible. Borrowing the term from Jane Bennett, he maintains that hegemonic takes on critique produce 'disenchantment tales', that is to say, narratives that 'discourage "affective connections" in contexts where detachment is dangerous' (Castiglia, 2017b: 1). The caveat raised by Castiglia is that, in order to rehabilitate those affective connections thwarted by critique, replacing the surface/depth model is not enough. More importantly, we need a different orientation towards the text (i.e., the social), one that is no longer predicated on suspicion. Here is where hope makes the scene.

For Castiglia, the dispositional stance that should inform progressive academia derives from the unexpected byproducts of hope. The latter is conveyed through ideals that, by nature, are incommensurate with the existing state of affairs, so hope cannot but result in discontentment. In his view, hope is not equivalent to what we want—since this can be satisfied—but it relates to 'a perpetual openness to the as-yet-untried'. The dissatisfaction brought about by this unbridgeable openness, however, is socially productive: 'Hope is a disposition toward the imaginative value of dissatisfaction and the social value of illusion […] and all sources of world making trivialized within disciplinary regimes of the "real"' (Castiglia, 2017b: 4). Hope entails a refusal of the existing world that does not result in sheer despair insofar as it propels the imaginative capacity to envisage new worlds that are not defined by the current distribution of power

relations. Consequently, a hopeful reading, in contradistinction to a suspicious reading, is not directed to retrieve deep truths concealed by alluring surfaces, but to unleash the affective connections blocked by the current form of this world. This triumph of imagination over representation is what the *estallido* allegedly embodies: the restoration of the potency of bodies impounded by neoliberalism.

Imagination is the key gear in Castiglia's theoretical scaffolding. If hope creates dissatisfaction by means of disproportionate ideals *vis-à-vis* a given situation, 'imagination shapes ideals into worlds, giving them the look of the social in ways that keep us from abandoning our desire for material consequences, and simultaneously making the *social* into an unreal—and hence reimaginable—possibility' (Castiglia, 2017b: 3). At this stage, the parallels between Castiglia's approach and many interpretations of the revolt become more and more patent: in a context in which neoliberalism has reduced us to the entrepreneurial form, the popular uprising unleashes a (postcritical) imagination that allows us to engage in the speculative world making of a post-neoliberal society. By sustaining the 'not-yetness' of hope, the postcritical wager is to activate disappointment as 'the affective response to hope's refusal of "the existing world"' (Castiglia, 2017b: 8). Once we steer away from the suspicious disposition of critique, we find in imagination's speculative capacity for unlocking affects an alternative to this neoliberal world. Strangely, at this very point, the unrealness of hope becomes an end in itself:

> […] in its commitment to the perennial not-yetness of idealism, hope is necessarily imminent and never fully satisfied. Hope attached to a specific object—a hope *for*—becomes *want*, a surrender of the self-perpetuating drive toward betterment in favor of a rearrangement of already-existing conditions. A generalized hope, by contrast, is the itch that refuses to be soothed, an ongoing

discontent that is not reducible to the dead end of suspicion (Castiglia, 2017a: 222).

It follows from the above that when we interpret an event like the *estallido* guided by this postcritical hope, the goal is not to read the materialisation of something, but rather the sustaining of hope; we should be hopeful for hope's sake. For Castiglia, as soon as hope's dissatisfaction is used as a means to achieve, let us say, a less unjust social arrangement, we would be accused of hindering affective connections. At stake is not so much the rearrangement of already-existing conditions—i.e., neoliberalism's 'concrete manifestations and its consequences for the lives of Chileans' (Cortés, 2022: 90)—but the *preservation* of the self-perpetuating, never fully satisfied, non-scratchable itch of imagination. Somehow, the affective connectivity of a speculative unreal world is a far superior outcome than the rearrangement of the current neoliberal organisation of this world. Herein lies the explanation why, from this perspective, the *estallido* cannot be considered the staging of a post-neoliberal society but rather the possibility to imagine it: representation and symbolic mediation are invariably oppressive, the constriction of our affective potency; imagination, the realm of pure affectivity, is properly emancipatory but only insofar as it is not materialised. Therefore, this branch of progressive theory persuades us that popular uprisings like the *estallido* grant us the possibility of imagining other worlds, but the truly radical thing is to never bring them to fruition.

From the perspective I adopt in this research, the disavowal of symbolic mediation is the main shortcoming of the postcritical interpretations of the Chilean revolt. The idea according to which before or beyond our entry into the discursive realm of the social we find a truer agency in the form of an affective potency can hardly be translated into an empirical research agenda. The acceptance of the autonomy of affects (Clough, 2010; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi,

2002) implies restricting academic knowledge production to a speculative activity *regardless of the symbolic dimensions of the phenomena under scrutiny*. The premise according to which 'life springs forth without form and thrives in form's absence' (Kornbluh, 2019: 2), that informs vast swathes of affect theory, has been challenged both theoretically and empirically. In Žižek's (2012) view, conceptualising affects as pre-individual intensities effaces negativity from the social. For affects to operate as free-floating intensities, we must presuppose a field of pure immanency—an absolute horizontality—where negativity has been completely effaced. Absent from crevices, the flat ontology celebrated by most affect theorists where nothing resists inclusion within the plane of consistency, expels language's negativity and its effects upon the subject. Simultaneously, Margaret Wetherell (2012, 2015) has perceptively pointed out how the claims for non-representational, unmediated, and pre-discursive body tracks block the routes to engage in empirical work through affect. By conceiving discourse as nothing but the taming of affect, the advocates of this position thwart the possibility of deploying it as an empirical tool to explore attachment creation.

Postcritique stands as a theoretical perspective aiming at the renewal of progressive academia by questioning the subjective attachments to critique. Drawing on my definition of the critical subject in this research, this means that the desire for change should be at the centre of the postcritical agenda. Yet, ironically, the neo-empiricist tenor adopted by postcritical researchers (Lee, 2020; see also Leys, 2011), where the goal is to get closer to the body than discursive positions presumably allow, results in a strong vitalism that 'sees only what the contours prohibit' (Kornbluh, 2019: 79). In this regard, desire encounters resistance only externally—it is unproblematic in itself. Standing in opposition to form—i.e., symbolic mediation or discourse formations—is the emancipatory way to proceed. It is easy to perceive how this theoretical gambit ends up chasing its own tail: bodies are

genuinely emancipated when they are freed from the symbolic constraints that hinder their affective connections so, in order to facilitate them, we must refrain from any attempt to (symbolically) organise the social. Emancipation is synonymous with destitution while representation is a matter of oppression. Affects are ends in themselves; an inherently radical but equally anti-social force since no organisation can derive from it without annulling its radicality. In a context in which there is no desirable organisation but only the desire to get rid of organisation, imagination as speculation thus rises as the privileged faculty in this intellectual romance of the somatic.

As I showed at the end of the previous section, the Chilean popular uprising has largely been interpreted from this postcritical perspective, even if not through that moniker. The emphasis on the pre-discursive affective potency of the *estallido* and its capacity to bring down forms requires, as a precondition, the assumption that the revolt is not a way of organising the social (not even in an emancipatory fashion) but only its disorganisation. Otherwise, we would fall prey to the anticipatory tactics of critique—which, for Galende (2020), has now become performance—and their aversion to surprise. According to Felski (2015: 116), one of the innumerable problems of critique is that its gestures of demystification and exposure 'no longer tell us what we do not know; [they] singularly fail to surprise'. Surprising new things can only arrive from outside symbolic mediation. This is palpably untrue. Unconscious manifestations are precisely the surprising and unexpected result of symbolic organisation. As per Lacan (1998: 28), it is in the vacillation of the symbolic 'where the subject surprises himself in some unexpected way'. Psychoanalysis, thus, propounds a notion of necessity (in terms of the symbolic structuration of our experience) that nonetheless retains contingency and surprise.

Disentangling necessity from lack of surprise enables the exploration of the surprising ways in which social transformation is

symbolically organised in Chile. As Claudia Lapping (2008, 2013a, 2013b, 2016) has continually shown, this does not mean removing affectivity from the analysis. Her starting point is that, in contrast to the immediacy tendencies of affect theory, the organisation of signifiers *does* mediate affectivity, and the name of such organisation is fantasy. Here, the emergence of the subject depends on signifying chains composing what might be called 'reality', but this symbolic realm does not cover the entirety of the human experience. What Lacan defined as the real stands for the inaccessible part of this experience, a site of unmediated affect where the subject is no longer legible. Because the real is the destabilising force of this language-based reality, a fantasmatic or imaginary structuring of symbolic relations between signifiers is required to sustain our everyday experience. This fantasmatic frame 'reconstitutes the unsymbolisable affectivity of the Real as desire, and channels its articulation in language' (Lapping, 2016: 720).

From this Lacanian perspective, there is indeed a gap between the energetic affective force—that belongs to the register of the real—and language, just like in the approaches reviewed above. In this case, however, desire is not the expression of our inner vitalism but a gap. Not merely something beyond language but precisely the leftover produced by the intersection between the unsymbolisable energies of the real and the demands expressed through language. Therefore, even if not properly articulable via symbolic means, desire still finds somewhat oblique ways to make its appearance in the subject's speech.

> Desire, then, is a form of affect that cannot be directly named or acknowledged, but can be redirected or expressed by means of symbolic association to other representations, and thus comes to be attached to apparently unrelated experiences or ideas (Lapping, 2013a: 90).

From this angle, and in sharp contradistinction to the vitalism of mainstream affect theory, agency is less an attribute of individual humans than a capacity of the signifier. The subject is, strictly speaking, not an effect of language or discourse but its excess, a surplus of language. Then, it is because the subject is subjected to the equivocations of the signifier (Copjec, 2015), that surprising affects can be found in symbolic associations. The affective life of the *estallido*—the desire for critique—should not be searched in any sort of speculative bodily potency that finally circulates freely. Rather, it seems much more productive to enquire about the unexpected and seemingly inconsequential symbolic associations emerging from the self-shaping of critical subjects.

Finally, this symbolic approach to social transformation finds in the work of Kristin Ross a source of intellectual inspiration. Her treatment of the Paris Commune of 1871 shares several commonalities with the way I approach the *estallido*. For her, the Commune was fuelled by an 'imaginary' that long outlived the event itself—one that, like the *estallido*, was rather ephemeral. The way in which she grasps this imaginary is through the sketch of the Commune's lived historical landscape. The latter is composed of 'the *actual words spoken*, attitudes adopted, and physical actions performed by the insurgents', with an emphasis on 'what the insurrectionists did, what they thought and said about what they did, the significance they gave to their actions, *the names and words they embraced*, imported or disputed' (Ross, 2016: 1 and 2, emphasis added). In particular, Ross' analysis focuses on how certain words were resurrected from previous events, such as the French Revolution, in order to establish new political identifications beyond the perimeter of the nation-state.

Resorting to slightly different grammar, Ross treats the Commune as the Other, the site from which an emancipatory call was launched. Consequently, the language used by the insurgents to make sense of

the uprising conveyed something more than just meaning: 'because the words are an interpellation, a direct second-person address, they create that gap or division in a *now*, in the contemporary moment constituted by the speech act' (Ross, 2016: 16). Since the language of the Commune was calling upon the French people in an entirely new way, confronting them with the subjective challenges of symbolic identifications, it created a whole new temporality in the present. Among the words the Commune put into circulation, '*citoyen*' had a particularly strong grip:

> The name "citoyen," […] may well be old and originate in another moment of the political past, but its iteration in this instance creates the now of a shared political subjectivization […] it interpellates listeners to be part of that present. *Citoyen*, *citoyenne* summons, then, a subject predicated on any number of disidentifications—from the state, the Empire, the police, and the world of the so-called "honnêtes gens." The words are not addressed to the French national citizen. They conjure up an ideal of *la femme libre, l'homme libre*, a non-nationally circumscribed being, and are addressed to and responded to by such listeners accordingly (Ross, 2016: 17).

The Commune, like the *estallido*, was from the beginning an emancipatory organisation of the experience. What my work shares with Ross', then, is the emphasis on how the interrelations between the imaginary and symbolic registers are fundamental to grasp the desire for change. Even if she does not properly delve into the unconscious economy underpinning the Commune, she is nonetheless attuned to the 'affective charge' the figures and phrases mobilised by the Parisian insurrection had, an affective force that surpasses 'any precise semantic content' (Ross, 2016: 29). From this angle, social transformation is not a matter of repetition versus difference, but about different ways of repeating. Hence, the importance of symbolic organisation: 'Little bits of language that hold a movement together

encompass names, nouns, negations, slogans, demands, visions—and bits that have a suturing, accretive, convocative capacity actuated in repetition' (Kornbluh, 2022: 44). In Chile, millions wake up every day. Waking up during the concluding months of 2019 implied waking up to a country that has *awakened*. This is an interpellative call without precise semantic content. Nonetheless, for subjects who shape themselves in accordance with the good of social change, this was the place they had to make their own.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have reconstructed the historical succession of the goods of social change in relation to which critical subjects have shaped their subjectivity within Chilean academia. Despite showing an unwavering commitment to progressive transformation since their institutionalisation as a field, the local social sciences have been guided by different images of the desired society throughout their history. Resorting to the notion of limit concept (Garretón, 2015), I showed that development, socialism, democracy, and (anti-)neoliberalism have been the main ideals fuelling subjective attachments to critique. The rise and consolidation of neoliberalism as the current limit concept of the social sciences owes a significant part of its position to the renewal of popular mobilisations that shook the social acquiescence that defined the post-dictatorship years. For the 'new Chilean critical discourse' (Richard, 2004), which paradoxically has thrived in the midst of the expansion of the neoliberal university, a post-neoliberal society is the good according to which contemporary critical subjects shape themselves.

In this context, my claim is that it would be erroneous to straightforwardly assume that critical subjects recognise themselves in the *estallido*. This popular uprising brought about a post-neoliberal experience that, along with fulfilling a theoretical wish, reorganised

the desire for change at a subjective level. For critical subjects, the limit concept of neoliberalism is not exclusively an epistemic horizon but crucially the signifier organising their experience. These are related, albeit independent dynamics. I relied upon the notion of limit concept precisely to highlight the symbolic structuration of critical subjectivities, that is, the fact that placing reliance on certain powerful words is crucial to attaining legibility. When the *estallido* took place, the critical subject—the self who binds itself to the good of social change and shapes its subjectivity accordingly—shaped itself in relation to the signifier neoliberalism. Alongside conscious practices, their attachments to critique were sustained by fantasies that gravitated around neoliberalism—critical subjects learnt how to respond to the insidious desire of the Other *as critics of neoliberalism*. The experience of the end of neoliberalism, thus, forces a new fantasmatic or imaginary economy of critique.

Exploring how critical subjects respond now to the emancipatory interpellation of the Other of the revolt is a way of delving into the unconscious dynamics of the desire for change. Regrettably, this is an avenue that influential scholarly takes on the *estallido* have obstructed. The proclivity to perceive this event as nothing but the disorganisation of Chilean society, particularly by means of a destituent potency, ends up rejecting symbolic mediation as such. From this outlook, the emancipatory nature of the revolt derives from the power of immediacy, particularly the untethering of pre-discursive anarchic bodily affects. The postcritical undertones of such a position are evident. Consequently, I closed the chapter by demonstrating the main shortcomings of this perspective. On the one hand, it solidifies the extended belief that the only problems with the desire for change can come from the outside; symbolic mediation and discourses are the exclusive impediments to the otherwise free-floating energies connecting bodies. On the other hand, it restricts academic endeavours to speculative exercises. Insofar as emancipation is synonymous with

the absence of symbolic organisation, we can only contemplate potential scenarios where this state of affairs will hopefully carry on indeterminately.

I developed a symbolic approach to the revolt to challenge these pitfalls of immediacy. The historical configuration of the good of social change within academia evinces the importance of symbolic mediation for the readability of critical subjects in Chile. Rather than in unbridled affectivity, the emancipatory nature of the *estallido* can be grasped in the possibility of living neoliberalism according to the logic of post-neoliberalism. And this was possible because 'Chile woke up'— an undeniably symbolic experience. The way in which critical subjects navigated this experience unconsciously is what I will interpret in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Until further notice, empirical scholarly research is still organised along the quantitative-qualitative axis. Some of its aspects can most assuredly be expanded or challenged, however these displays of methodological creativity have not yet produced another approach to frame the enquiry of the social. At first sight, my study plainly falls within the qualitative paradigm. Most handbooks devoted to this matter rehearse different formulations of the same basic postulate: qualitative research is informed by a naturalistic approach, which means that its aim is to arrive at an understanding of the everyday practices of individuals or groups in their own environment and through their own ways of accounting for them. From this outlook, qualitative research stands as a situated activity of knowledge production premised on the idea that mundane language can grant us access to the meaning-making sustaining individual and collective phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Leavy, 2014; Schwandt, 2007). Accordingly, interpretation has been pinpointed as the standard procedure for this purpose (Beuving & de Vries, 2015; Creswell, 2007). In his *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, Thomas Schwandt (2007: 158, emphasis added) defines interpretation as 'the act of clarifying, explicating, or explaining *the meaning* of some phenomenon'. Augmenting our knowledge of the meanings of things in order to reach a thorough understanding of reality can, therefore, be a succinct definition of the goal of qualitative research.

Despite the importance awarded to everyday language and especially to the actual words expressed in human interactions, one of

the overriding principles of Lacanian epistemology applied to empirical research is to divert our attention away from meaning (Hook, 2013b; Neill, 2013; Nobus & Quinn, 2005; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2014). Furthermore, Lacan (1991: 73) himself advanced the somewhat disconcerting idea that, when it comes to interpretation, 'it is on the basis of a kind of refusal of understanding that we push open the door to analytic understanding'. Consequently, the goal of this chapter is to situate my study within the tension that Lacanian psychoanalysis introduces into the qualitative tradition of empirical research. The three sections comprising this chapter are devoted to a) delineating the research design, where I flesh out the methodological principles I follow in my study; b) detailing the production of material and participants, specifying the particular characteristics of the empirical resources I work with; and c) expounding my interpretive procedure, situating my own approach in relation to other kindred programmes within the psychosocial tradition, Lacanian Discourse Analysis and Critical Fantasy Studies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Psychosocial studies are a difficult field to pin down. Fifteen years ago, in a seminal text, Stephen Frosh and Lisa Baraitser (2008) defined working from a psychosocial perspective as a transdisciplinary practice. One of the main goals was to avoid the pitfalls of stark dichotomies, such as subject and object or inner and outer worlds, by means of 'sutures' between the social and the psychic. The authors, however, raised the caveat that the psychosocial 'remains an ill-defined entity' (2008: 350), so both the theoretical sources inspiring these sutures and the actual procedures for carrying them out are still an open debate. Seven years later, Frosh presented a collection of psychosocially oriented essays in a similar fashion. His admonition to the readers was to refrain from assuming that psychosocial studies

'constitutes a discipline as yet, or as such' (Frosh, 2015: 1). As a corollary, not only it would be unfair to compare this field of research with other related disciplines due to its newness but, moreover, it would be illegitimate since psychosocial studies do not sit comfortably with disciplinarity at all. If anything, it aspires to be an 'antidiscipline'. In (what I think it was) Frosh's most recent description of psychosocial studies, he deems the resistance of this field to establish 'a formal canon of acceptable work or laying down too strongly "correct" ways of thinking or practice' the reason for its liveliness (Frosh, 2019: 1). Although in an ironic way, he resorts to a Babelian trope: the 'language' of psychosocial studies is shared by a community of researchers who can nonetheless rehearse their own 'dialects'.

Elusiveness, therefore, is what best characterises the attempts at pinning down psychosocial studies. However, and without casting aside the slippery nature of this field, I would like to focus on two features that, in one way or another, remain constant in most attempts to define the scope of the psychosocial. First, it strongly asserts the relational character of human experience. Even if terms such as 'social' and 'psychological' hold their particularities, they are never understood as opposed or separated spheres. In contradistinction to the return of immediacy shaping a significant parcel of contemporary theory—expressed by means of a renewed vitalism that abhors discursivity (Kornbluh, 2020; Stavrakakis, 2014)—psychosocial studies are predicated on the mediations between these two planes. This is crucial for the operationalisation of unconscious dynamics in empirical research. Second, psychoanalysis is key to theorising this mediation. Either by taking distance from some of its presuppositions or by embracing its project, the field of psychosocial studies cannot be apprehended outside the challenge that the unconscious posits to the humanities and social sciences. Both the emphasis on symbolic mediation and the psychoanalytic ways of informing that bridge are

the main principles guiding my exploration of the unconscious life of critique.

In this study, I address the psychosocial 'sutures' between the social and the psychic in terms of unconscious fantasies. This immediately implies abstaining from conceiving the unconscious as the most intimate, recondite dimension of a person. Drawing inspiration from Lacan, the unconscious is not the property of an individual—as if I possess an unconscious different from someone else's and so on—but an encounter with the effects of the autonomy of language. As Alenka Zupančič (2017) indicates, the primary psychoanalytical claim is that every signifying creation comes with an unexpected, unconscious addition due to this autonomy or independence of language. Signifiers, the material with which we construct meaningful actions, do not have an organic relationship with meaning as language is a system of differences without positive elements. We come to know what something means by opposing it to what is not. Meaning is the result or product of signifying chains that impose particular arrangements of signifiers aiming at turning differences into equivalences. Consequently, in the symbolic register signifiers are always telling us 'I am not that, I am not that, nor that…'.

This negative movement of signifiers can be brought to a halt by means of an artificial organisation that creates the impression of a positive content. This is the role played by the register of the imaginary. Lacan (1997a: 54), for a change, is very clear about this: 'There's no doubt that meaning is by nature imaginary. Meaning is, like the imaginary, always in the end evanescent, for it is tightly bound to what interests you, that is, to that in which you are ensnared'. In the imaginary, signifiers are articulated so as to turn the 'I am not that' into '*I am* that'. The fact that meaning belongs to the imaginary register implies that those moments in which we attain recognition— when things look like they *are* that—are fragile and must be constantly

sustained. We can understand the imaginary as the register that counters the dispersion of the symbolic by organising signifiers in a horizontal axis. One signifier (S1) must be elevated to restrict the free-floatation of the rest (S2, S3, S4...), so meaning gets secured. The formula of meaning is: S1 → S2, S3, S4.... The fragility of this process comes from the autonomy of language referenced above: the artificial (yet necessary) layout of signifiers is permanently interrupted by parallel associations. When we stumble over the interruptions provoked by these parallel associations, we confront the unconscious.

The above substantiates the claim that the unconscious is not synonymous with the recondite, almost inaccessible, reservoir of our personhood. Insofar as it is linked to the logic of signification, a psychosocial account of the unconscious requires to conceptualise it as a *transindividual operation*. As per Lacan (2006a: 214): 'The unconscious is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject's disposal in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse'. Such a process, according to Derek Hook (2008a: 403), 'needs to be apprehended as the outcome of the structural constraints within which the social act of speaking or making discourse must occur'. This is a reformulation of the famous Lacanian *dictum* according to which the unconscious is the discourse of the Other. As I have argued in previous chapters, the Other can be understood as the presupposition that must be in place for us to experience a minimally coherent symbolic identity. A key aspect of this social network that organises the symbolic exchanges of everyday life is that it does not possess a substantial existence. Rather, as Žižek (2007) puts it, it is a virtual entity, insofar as human beings only conduct themselves 'as if' this set of rules and presuppositions were stable. This implies that the 'outcome' of signification is not equivalent to the accomplishment or fulfilment of social discourses, but highlights instead the fact that they inevitably produce *a meaningless residue*. That is the precise place where we find the subject. So, on account of this inharmoniousness of

the Other, human speech is unrelentingly besieged by the question of what the Other wants. Lacan (1998: 214) illustrates this through the incessant 'why?' that the toddler directs to the parents:

> The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, and all the child's *whys* reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things, as a testing of the adult, a *Why are you telling me this?* ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire.

If the unconscious is to be understood in this transindividual modality—i.e., as the unintended effects resulting from the subjective struggles with the lack of foundations of the Other—then one of the immediate questions becomes how human beings manage to find a sense of coherence. In other words, how the individual learns to respond to what the Other wants through its own lack. Following Hook (2008a, 2011), 'libidinal economy' comes across as a way to operationalise these propositions in social research. Bearing in mind that libido is the 'psychical energy of desire' (Lacan, 2019: 4), libidinal economy aims at grasping the inertia and repetitiveness of social discourses by means of what Hook (2011) calls the 'cycles of *jouissance*' structuring them. Undergirding this idea lies the premise that individuals can model deep and passionate attachments to certain objects, ideas, or representations that help them to create a more or less stable identity despite the fact that (or precisely because) they are sustained beyond reasonableness. These attachments are the very condition of meaning but the more we try to explain them, the more obvious their meaninglessness become. Deploying the notion of libidinal economy, then, allows us to explore the ways through which certain signifiers give 'volume' or 'intensity' to our life by means of their 'stickiness', that is to say, the unconscious investment enabling

particular patterns of repetition of social discourses. Alenka Zupančič (2011: 34-5) illustrates this as follows:

> […] a certain object, for instance, may leave a person A completely cold, whereas in person B it can incite a whole series of actions, procedures and rituals, without person B being able to do anything about it. This is because the object at stake does not play the same part in the libidinal economy of the two people.

Fantasy has been pointed out by researchers with a psychosocial sensibility as an entry point for grasping these libidinal investments (Glynos, 2021; Hook, 2008b, 2013; Proudfoot, 2019). Fantasies have the rarity of being an 'invention' simultaneously autonomous (they are the subject's unconscious response to the insidious question of what the Other wants) *and* contingent on the Other (they can only emerge from within the parameters of the Other). Fantasies are neither fully individual nor strictly social, but rather the mediation of both realms through the production of libidinally-loaded scenarios. Because of this, fantasies provide the coordinates for the subject's desire by taking the enigma of the Other's desire as their starting point. The duplication of questioning (or lacks) is what leads Hook (2008b: 294) to talk about 'fantasmatic transactions', namely, 'a response on the part of the subject in the form of a sublime object of fantasy that holds the promise of a kind of harmony or completeness'. This excessive, sublime object summoned in fantasies is the libidinal force that enables the consolidation of social discourses and the sustenance of identifications.

The in-betweenness of fantasy, its irreducibility to both the social and the psychological domains, is what makes it a privileged psychosocial concept to grasp the libidinal dimension of human actions. Adam Phillips (2006: 43) gave a beautiful and succinct illustration of this: 'Desire […] is more like being told a secret about oneself that someone else has made. It could never be a confession, because the confessor always already knows his secrets'. In consequence, as long as

we are dealing with unconscious desire, we must defend ourselves (literally our-self) from the disruptiveness of its parallel associations (the secret) and the content they convey. To achieve this, we cling onto signifiers that become an integral part of who we are but, at the same time, we are structurally unaware of the libidinal ties we forge with them. This is why, for Phillips, we cannot be fluent in our own desire—and fantasies are the means to deal with this foreignness within ourselves. Consequently, the claims that the imaginary plays an ontological role *vis-à-vis* the subject (Glynos, 2011) seem warranted. In our everyday life, fantasies 'don't just accompany interaction, but prove capable of structuring it according to unconscious principles of desire and defence' (Ffytche, 2019: 402). The libidinal dimension of human activity is therefore related to the necessity of protecting ourselves from the disruptions of our own unconscious desire.

Based on the notion of fantasy delineated above, exploring the desire for critique in the midst of the *estallido* is a complex matter. Despite the awareness of the role of fantasies in the structuration of any human interaction, scholarly attention concentrates almost exclusively on already socially undesirable scenarios. By way of example, fantasy has been widely utilised to study political violence and terror (Palacios, 2011), the apartheid ideology (Hook, 2020), neocolonial logics in higher education (Siltaoja et al., 2019), contemporary workplaces (Bloom, 2016), economic crises (Vadolas, 2012), the capitalist production of space (Wilson & Bayón, 2017), Trumpism (McMillan, 2017), and more broadly the internal contradictions of the neoliberal discourse (Hoedemaekers, 2019). Although these endeavours are extremely necessary, collectively they give the impression of a political selectivity guiding the deployment of fantasy as an interpretive device. It seems like this epistemic curtailment is related to the perception that studying unconscious dynamics amid socially desirable or progressive settings invariably means eroding their potential emancipatory outcomes. Ambiguity,

contradiction, and defensive attachments are somehow discretionally placed on the side of negative interactions while emancipatory practice is tacitly assumed as a straightforward, fantasy-less occurrence.

One of the strongest claims of my study is that we would be sidelining a crucial aspect of the Chilean revolt if we overlook its fantasmatic modulations in favour of the radical (and temporary) dislocation of the neoliberal organisation of life. In contradistinction to this view (Karmy, 2019, 2020), I maintain that the emancipatory dimension of the *estallido* resided in the temporary emergence of a different Other and a whole array of new interpellations. This is not an attempt at denying the disruptiveness of the revolt; that is an undeniable fact. What my approach explores is what happens when we focus on the productive rather than disruptive dimension of radical political events. Particularly, what are the consequences for our understanding of the desire for change. As I have shown in previous chapters, sufficient evidence justifies the exploration of this avenue. Nonetheless, let me provide a further example by focusing on one of the most patently disruptive actions during the *estallido*.

The 'first line' was a more or less spontaneous group of protestors who engaged in direct confrontation with the police in the revolt. In a context in which state repression reached new heights, the first line acted as a retaining wall so other demonstrators could manifest more freely and safely. The sacrificial facet of this action is overtly admitted (Fernández, 2021). However, it is particularly challenging to understand the first line without a reference to the Other. This is where interpretations of the revolt predicated on its disruptive potency fall short: the first line was not the expression of the unleashing of bodily potencies, but the result of an identification that makes sense only within the symbolic coordinates of the *estallido*. Opinions aside, this sacrificial practice was completely meaningful and the fact that so many people felt 'called' to partake in such an activity requires an

interpellative force behind it. Subjectively, first-liners were confronted with the question of the Other's desire and self-sacrifice was the manner through which they responded to it.

By focusing my attention on the fantasies of critique, I aspire to provide a more nuanced understanding of the desire for radical change. The *estallido* arises as an opportunity to take seriously the claim that we can only access our desire via fantasmatic organisations. Emancipatory settings like the one opened up by the revolt are not beyond this structural feature. Accordingly, if I have chosen to explore this among critical scholars it is because their straightforward identification with social change makes them privileged actors to study the fantasies sustaining this desire. For the sake of my research, they are strategically placed in a position where the dialectic between recognition and misrecognition when dealing with the call of the *estallido* is at the centre of their experience. Interpreting the latter will open the door to the libidinal economy organising the desire for change in the context of the Chilean uprising.

PRODUCTION OF MATERIAL AND PARTICIPANTS

The enterprise of exploring the fantasies of critique requires the production of a very specific kind of empirical material. It follows from my research design that sense-making is a defence from unconscious content (Hook, 2008a). Consequently, 'data' in terms of meaning would not allow me to grasp the libidinal economy I am looking for. Two Lacanian principles serve me as criteria to overcome this obstacle: (a) 'words are the only material of the unconscious' (Lacan, 1979: 187), and (b) 'discourse in an analytic session is worthwhile only insofar as it stumbles or even interrupts itself' (Lacan, 2006b: 678). Both ideas are deeply intertwined. Essentially, discourse is taken here as a particular symbolic organisation in order to create meaning yet, as I mentioned, words are not organically related to meaning. Due to this

characteristic, the latter is a fragile creation that can be disrupted by the irreducibility of words to a particular discourse formation. 'Signifier' is a term that captures this irreducibility, that is to say, the peculiar substance that simultaneously enables and disrupts the field of discursivity. The stumbling that Lacan refers to is precisely the moment when words seem to refuse to follow the distribution of a given discourse (the horizontal axis) and hint at a different chain of associations (vertical interruptions). We can grasp the turning of words into signifiers by isolating them from the stream of discourse and treating them according to their *materiality*, namely, by paying attention to their shape, sound, and composition (Lapping, 2011, 2016). Interpretation, from this angle, becomes an exercise of linking the materiality of signifiers within a discourse with other possible chains of association inscribed in the Other.

Another way of expressing the previous idea is that discourse (an imaginary completeness of meaningful statements) is the medium to reach the subject's speech (the symbolic substratum of meaning). The former is impossible without the latter and, ironically, by exposing the form of the subject's desire, the latter disrupts the apparent solidity of the former. To grasp this distinction, and following most researchers aligned with a Lacanian sensibility, my study relies primarily on semi-structured interviews (Driver, 2016; Lapping & Glynos, 2018; Müller, 2012). For the purpose of this exploration, however, I combined them with certain features of narrative interviewing. Conceived as the most open type of procedure in qualitative research, narrative interviewing seeks to shift the interviewer-interviewee relationship by moving towards a narrator-listener kind of role. As a result, instead of looking for answers, from this angle the researcher tries to elicit the constant production of the participant's story through which symbolic identity is constructed (Kartch, 2017). Accepting the impossibility of achieving a fully open interview, the goal was to produce a minimally structured setting in tandem with my attempt at embodying the role of facilitator

of further associations. Accordingly, every interview was approached by resorting to the same initial (and only) prompt: *Can you please tell me what comes to your mind when I say 'estallido social'?* My ensuing interventions were limited to emphasise the emergence of certain signifiers or reiterating phrases to help the interviewees to remain within the coordinates of their speech.

I approached my interviews according to the psychoanalytic principle of free association. Freud (2001b: 106) described this procedure as follows: 'If I ask someone to tell me what occurs to him in response to a particular element of a dream, I am asking him to surrender himself to free association *while keeping an idea in mind as a starting-point'*. Some researchers have adapted this principle to conduct social research. Jason Glynos has suggested that the aim here is to produce material that has a 'floating character', that is to say, where the attempts to impose an order to the linguistic exchange, either by the researcher or the interviewee, give way to a loose and even contradictory concatenation of symbolic chains (Glynos, 2021; Glynos, Oliveira & Burity, 2019). The relative undirectedness of the linguistic exchange aims at creating an environment where it is likely to catch the participant's ego 'off guard', tripping over its own endeavours of meaning production. In my research, the point was to keep the idea of the *estallido* in the minds of my interviewees to allow them to freely associate this event in any direction they preferred. The more associations they produced in order to substantiate their enunciation, the more they opened up lateral associations that disrupted the intended meaning. Regardless of the impossibility of attaining a pure free association (Lapping & Glynos, 2018), the point was to reduce the directionality of linguistic exchange to a minimum and to focus my interventions on the use of signifiers as they emerged.

The production of material via interviews was supplemented with classroom observations. Ethnographic work has been utilised to

explore a wide range of issues from a psychoanalytic standpoint, such as entrepreneurship (Driver, 2016), classroom interactions (Walters, 2014), retail gentrification (Ji, 2021), harm-reduction policies (Proudfoot, 2019), and the psychic life of cities (Seitz & Proudfoot, 2021). In this case, I partook in in-person lessons in three PhD modules, initially as a non-participant observer. This approach underwent a modification since my participation was recurrently requested by the convenors, so after a few sessions I sporadically intervened when asked. At first, I was reluctant to do so based on my attempt at grasping the spontaneity of symbolic interactions, but it ultimately proved to be fruitful as it made my presence less intrusive for both the students and the scholars. Indeed, I was able to capture a larger number of associations once my positionality changed within the classroom. However, it also posited a challenge as sometimes I found myself adopting a position closer to a student than a researcher, jumping from expressing tediousness or dismissiveness when the topic was not of my liking, to eagerness and approval when the opposite was the case. Despite this expected shift of my own identifications throughout the observation, my goal was constantly to write down literal exchanges where the *estallido* was summoned by the participants.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, focusing my research on critical scholars was strategic. Due to their intellectual commitment to the production of knowledge aimed at helping the world become different (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2019), critical academics can be treated as a proxy for the desire for change. This certainly does not mean that they are objectively closer to emancipation than other groups of people; claiming that is utterly unwarranted. Instead, they are relevant actors for my research since they self-recognise and are socially recognised as individuals who 'wish for and work toward change' (Ross, 2023: 101). Drawing on Critchley (2008), they can be perceived as subjects who bind themselves to the good of social change and act accordingly.

Consequently, they are in a privileged position to grasp the dialectic between recognition and misrecognition springing from the interpellation of the Other of the *estallido*.[9] This subjective commitment to change can also be expressed in terms of what Margarita Palacios (2013) calls 'criticality'. According to her definition:

> I am thinking of a notion of criticality that implies a type of distantiation (passive-action) which not only refers to the structurally incomplete process of meaning formation, but also alludes to the critical impetus which fosters further translations of symbolic horizons and their metaphors into new ones [...], as well as by granting the possibility of the emergence of new sensory landscapes which permanently displace affects by transforming our bodily predisposition into new and unknown forms of being-in-the-world. (Palacios, 2013: 153-4)

My take on the criticality suggested by Palacios is a kind of subjective commitment to the openness of the social, the permanent (infinite, she would say) rethinking of the possibilities contained in the given so as to create new and progressive symbolic horizons. From different angles, the scholars and researchers included in my sample are, on the one hand, affiliated with PhD programmes with an overt critical outlook and, on the other, their own work is aligned with the exploration of new and unknown forms of being-in-the-world. Feminism, decolonial thought, deconstruction, Marxism, affect theory, just to name a handful of perspectives, come together in a group of people whose jobs involve precisely the transformation of current meanings in a progressive way. The criticality that they embody, therefore, can be

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[9] Critical academics are assuredly not the only subjects in that position; there are other subjectivities shaped in accordance with social change. People who took part in different expressions of discontent during the *estallido*, for instance, can be reasonably perceived as individuals who worked towards change. However, academics' self-binding to the good of social change is not contingent on a particular event; it is a permanent feature. Also, due to my own trajectory in Chilean academia, accessing them was significantly less difficult than it would have been for other groups. I thus seized the opportunities that my immediate circumstances gave me.

seen as a sort of allegiance to the protean nature of social life and a desire for its emancipatory transformation. The interviews and observations that I conducted with these subjects took place between April and June 2022. They aimed to follow the movement and association of signifiers the participants deployed when talking about the *estallido* to study the libidinal economy of the desire for change in Chile.

Table 1. Interviews summary

Participants	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Institution	Background	PhD programme
Scholars	Verónica	Female	50	Public	Philosophy	American Studies
	Isabel	Female	47	Public	Education	Psychology
	Cristina	Female	47	Public	History	Interdisciplinary Studies
	Tomás	Male	38	Private	Sociology	Sociology
	Carlos	Male	44	Private	Philosophy	Critical Theory and Current Society
	Rodrigo	Male	42	Private	Literature	Literature
	Ramón	Male	44	Private	Political Phil	Critical Theory and Current Society
PhD researchers	Carmen	Female	31	Private	Sociology	Social Sciences
	María	Female	35	Public	Education	Social Sciences
	Daniela	Female	31	Public	Education	Social Sciences
	Catalina	Female	32	Public	Communications	Interdisciplinary Studies
	Lorena	Female	43	Private	Psychology	Literature
	Arturo	Male	29	Public	Literature	American Studies
	Nicolás	Male	38	Public	Arts	Interdisciplinary Studies

Table 2. Observations summary

Module	Convenor	Attendees	Institution	Lessons	Hours
Actualisation in Critical Theory	Ramón	4	Private	7	21
Affective Materialisms	Verónica	15	Public	4	12
Theory and Critical Thought in Latin America	Tomás	8	Private	4	12

The fashion in which I approached the materiality of signifiers in order to reconstruct the fantasies of critique will be detailed in the next section. I would like to finish this one by mentioning a few adjustments the production of material underwent during my fieldwork. A crucial aspect when working with symbolic material is how to justify the saturation of information (Marttila, 2015). Once again, however, these criteria are based on the idea that what the researcher looks for is a sufficient amount of meaning to make reliable affirmations about social phenomena. As I have stated, that was not my goal. The traditional notion of saturation, consequently, was not applicable to my research—rather than a yardstick to measure how many participants I should interview to accumulate enough meaning, I needed a way to assess when I had enough symbolic associations. What guided my exploration was Lacan's (1998: 33) assertion that the nature of the unconscious is ethical rather than ontological: 'The status of the unconscious, which, as I have shown, is so fragile on the ontic plane, is ethical. In his thirst for truth, Freud says, *Whatever it is, I must go there*, because, somewhere, this unconscious reveals itself'. A fundamental methodological principle derives from this, namely, that catching unconscious manifestations is not a matter of quantity (how many interviews you have gathered) nor even quality (how 'good' interviews can be), but rather of patience and diligence when it comes to listening.

Accepting that the unconscious manifests itself necessarily, however, did not furnish me with an idea of how many interviews and observations were enough. In fact, knowing that I should find the material I am looking for no matter what, was simultaneously a relief and a massive source of anxiety. And due to the latter, I produced an overabundance of empirical material. Fearing that I would not be able to grasp the richness of experiences, I went to Chile with the idea of interviewing each of my 10 participants (five scholars and five PhD researchers) three times each, as well as attending at least five different modules. Both aspirations proved to be impracticable. Not

only did even the most committed participants show reluctance to repeat the process so many times, but also I did not have the energy to achieve all that. Consequently, I reduced the number of interviews to two while slightly augmenting the number of participants up to fourteen (because of the anxiety), and decided to narrow the modules down to three. This proved to be exhausting but doable. The vast majority of the academics replied favourably, yet a few excused themselves from participating due to not being in the country or not being available. When the latter was the case, I looked for another participant with the same characteristics (gender, age, discipline, and type of institution). I requested authorisation to conduct observations in four modules and was granted access to three of them.

Every time I finished an interview, I went over my notes and sensed that I was hinting at something valuable; that the participants of my study were generously partaking of the unnerving process of free association. The case with my observations was similar. Throughout the process, I tried to remind myself that the aim was to follow the signifiers and I constantly had the impression that something important transpired during the sessions. This was the case to such an extent that I ended up using only half of my interviews and certain bits of the observations. I never even touched the second batch of interviews. I fully transcribed the first fourteen resulting in 148 pages or 92,016 words, and all of my observations are contained in two mid-size notebooks. In case this picture is not eloquent enough, such an amount of material felt like a sea without a coastline. For at least a couple of months, this sea seemed completely unmanageable, producing yet again a pang of anxiety in me. I take this recursive feeling as the price one inevitably pays when work is guided by a sort of blind insistence, that is to say, when the security of meaning is suspended in favour of associations that appear to be a law unto themselves. Fidelity to the principle of free association and concurrently to the necessary emergence of the unconscious required a

sort of methodological leap of faith that, after several stages of anxiety, finally paid off.

INTERPRETATION

Finding a way to start the analysis of the vast repository of symbolic material I had in front of me did not occur overnight. After a painstaking transcription process, I printed all of the interviews and, for lack of a more technical term, I just read them alongside my field notes. This entailed an interesting transformation. The words I formerly heard and subsequently wrote down I was now reading. The reception of those very same words changed substantially depending on the format. My impressions during and immediately after the interviews and the observations were not equivalent to what the transcription was showing to me, and the possibility of going back to certain lines over and over again directed my attention to aspects I was completely unaware of. This exercise provided me with my first informed intuitions about how to divide the corpus in order to make it approachable. The following steps summarise the treatment of the material prior to any interpretive narrative on my behalf, a process that took me just over two months.

- The first readings were aimed exclusively at becoming thoroughly acquainted with what my informants said and, crucially, how they said it. The result of these rounds was the identification of themes around which the conversations revolved. I freely inventoried these themes on an Excel sheet using the literal terms the interviewees deployed. Interviews provided between fifteen and thirty-three themes each.
- Once all of the themes were mapped out, I proceeded to group them according to internal commonalities. By way of example, 'memes', 'Twitter', and '(Instagram) reels' were consolidated under the heading 'Social Media'. In the same Excel sheet, I

used coloured tags to identify and group them. I opted for the aggregation of themes as a strategy to zoom out and so have an idea of the general distribution of the material.

- The aggregated themes did give me a comprehensive panorama of the material, but the corpus was still unmanageable. Also, a few themes appeared in the discourses of all of my interviewees and others only in a handful of them. As a result, I had to come up with a criterion to establish which themes I would be working with. I determined five mentions as the relatively arbitrary threshold to include an aggregated theme in the final stage of interpretation. Despite the fact that an objective parameter was impossible to determine, I noticed that a recurrent feature of the aggregated themes with less than five mentions was their scattered nature, sometimes dealing only tangentially with the topic. Bearing this in mind, including the aggregated themes present in at least five interviews was the definitive criterion. The aggregated themes are: university, streets, not-knowing, dictatorship, neoliberalism, social media, eyes, time, destruction, sociology, sleeping/awakening/dreaming, fear, critique, and expectation (an example of the construction of these aggregated themes can be found in the Appendix).

My initial inclination was to conduct my interpretation by means of what I called 'fantasmatic clusters'. In a piece that never saw the light of day, I attempted to articulate aggregated themes based on their proximity. By way of example, 'university', 'critique', 'sociology', and up to a point 'neoliberalism' belong to the same vicinity, so it seemed straightforward to distil the unconscious dimensions of this cluster to subsequently move to the next one. I was not completely convinced about this procedure and the facial expression of my supervisors after reading it was the confirmation I needed. Consequently, I put that text aside and went back to the material. This insistence allowed me to perceive something that, in hindsight, seems patently obvious: the

interviewees were most of the time talking about their activities. Moving to and fro between themes and aggregated themes made me realise that despite the seeming immeasurability of the corpus, those signifiers I inventoried were mostly deployed to talk about what these academics saw and wrote (or could neither see nor write). Of course, they talked about other issues too, but seeing and writing were by far the most prominent ones. This is not strange: the visual dimension of the *estallido* was particularly prominent, and my sample was composed of people who write for a living. So, through my recursive readings I opened up the insistences in the subjects' speeches, particularly how these two activities were permanently invoked. This discovery became my new entry point, so I started all over again.

The new structure felt like a breakthrough. All of a sudden—well, to be fair, as a result of all that trial and error—interpretation turned into a much more amicable process. I was certainly aware of the challenging task I had ahead of me, but a sense of attainability was regained. Even if at first glance it might look like I wasted precious time in several rehearsals that never came to fruition, I take this as a crucial part of my interpretation. Put differently, without those 'errors' I might have never even glimpsed the importance of writing and seeing for my overall analysis. Thus, the failure of the aggregated themes in terms of their original goal (to allow me to identify interpretive clusters), was nonetheless an unexpected success. As a result, I had to find a new interpretive device to frame my analysis. This was also a retroactive creation, only discernible once the interpretation was already underway. The idea of 'fantasmatic (re)compositions' was almost imposed on me. On the one hand, fantasies are artificial arrangements, composites made of a variety of libidinised elements that grant consistency to the subject. On the other hand, my material unmistakeably showed how the informants struggled with a profound sense of inconsistency; they were trying to recompose both themselves and their world. Consequently, the notion of fantasmatic

(re)composition blends theoretical principles with the largely existential tenor of my material.

To produce the five fantasies I present in the following chapters, I went back to the interviews and field notes for the final time. In a way, the previous steps can be regarded as the preamble or preparatory phase leading to the moment of interpretation. Knowing in advance the different themes, my reading was now guided by the way in which each subject faced the quandary imposed by the reorganisation of seeing and writing brought about by the *estallido*—how they recompose the meaning of those practices. Both these activities, as my analysis shows, became extremely demanding at a psychic level. The fantasies I identify are some of the 'problematic solutions' to the dilemma of seeing and writing (during) the revolt. In order to reconstruct these solutions, I focused my interpretation on those moments where the interviewees offered me the insistence and inconsistency of their speech. The more my informants got carried away talking about something they apparently know better than anybody else (their own experience of the *estallido*), the more certain signifiers became grumes or clots in the discourse's stream. When they spoke to me, they summoned the Other (of the *estallido*) in order to offer a meaningful speech. However, the longer they did it the more patent the gaps of those discourses became, opening up adjacent symbolic associations (Kaufman, 2020). In my interviews, the inconsistency (or misrecognition) of the Other of the *estallido* was countered with the insistence on specific signifiers with which academics and researchers developed libidinal attachments so as to cope with the enigmatic desire of this Other.

Before I provide examples of my procedure, it seems important to dwell on an aspect of my material. For obvious reasons, all of the interviews I conducted and the lessons I observed transpired in Spanish. The transcriptions were not translated in their entirety, only the excerpts I used. This was the case not just because their full

translation would have taken me a significant amount of time, but also, and crucially, since what mattered to me was the precise choice of words of my interviewees. Accepting that psychoanalysis is a 'type of intervention [that] begins with the subject's relation to the Other' (McGowan, 2016: 41), implies tarrying with the actual words put into circulation, avoiding their replacement no matter how close their meanings may be. This is why most of the lines and puns I interpret do not make immediate sense in English—as well as the reason behind the abundance of brackets in the quoted fragments. Observance of the principles guiding my interpretation entailed a slight interruption in the flow of the reading.

Let me now provide two examples that will make my procedure graspable in a concrete fashion. In chapter 5, I explore the odd juxtaposition of activity and passivity amid the *estallido* through the 'fantasy of the impotent academic'. A recurrent topic of conversation was the perception that, in spite of all the activity my interviewees engaged in, they nonetheless 'did nothing'. Assessed against their own speech, this was patently incongruous. Furthermore, sometimes they even regarded as impossible something they nonetheless accomplished (such as writing). Instead of taking this as a contradiction or an attempt at fooling me about the *actual* state of affairs, I simply took it very literally—I probed what those signifiers could be telling me beyond the intended meaning.

For example, I interpreted 'doing nothing' not as the absence of activity (its conscious meaning) but as a way of doing something symbolically. I treated 'nothing' as a positive entity in the symbolic register and, consequently, something subjects can act upon. This kind of 'doing nothing' opens up a whole new libidinal dimension *vis-à-vis* the Other of the *estallido* that we would overlook by remaining anchored at the level of meaning. This is also applicable to my interpretation of 'impotence' in the same fantasmatic space. Once we

resist the temptation of taking this statement as it is intended (a mere description of how things are), we can perceive that impotence is less a factual and undesirable condition to be subjected to than an imaginary way of constructing an antagonistic divide that makes academia endurable. This approach allows a reading that goes against common sense, namely, that we can unconsciously enjoy impotence.

A second example comes from the visual dimension of the *estallido*. In chapter 4, I reconstruct the 'fantasy of sleeplessness' in relation to the main motto of the revolt, 'Chile woke up'. The most salient discourse formation springing from the popular uprising can be perceived as a subjective 'call' to identify with a collective awakening, normally assumed as a departure from the neoliberal slumber. This emancipatory interpellation, nevertheless, required an enormous psychic investment on behalf of the subjects. 'Dreaming', 'awakening', and 'sleeping' can be found in almost every interview and, if we put these terms next to the hegemonic narrative of the revolt, they fit naturally within the idea that 'Chile woke up'. When tracing the lateral associations of the signifier 'dream', however, we can appreciate a much more complex picture. What I discovered by means of these associations is how problematic and exhausting sustaining this emancipatory interpellation was. The metaphoric nature of this motto had nonetheless literal effects upon individuals. Specifically, they found themselves unable to swerve the incessant call of the revolt, which in turn made them dread the possibility of being caught in the wrong (i.e., asleep). From this angle, clinging onto signifiers such as 'dream' might be taken as an endorsement of the interpellative call of the revolt but, at a symbolic level, it can also be an unconscious manoeuvre to endure the psychic hardships this process provoked. The following image provides a graphic illustration of my interpretive procedure.

Image 1. Imaginary and symbolic chains of association, fantasy of sleeplessness
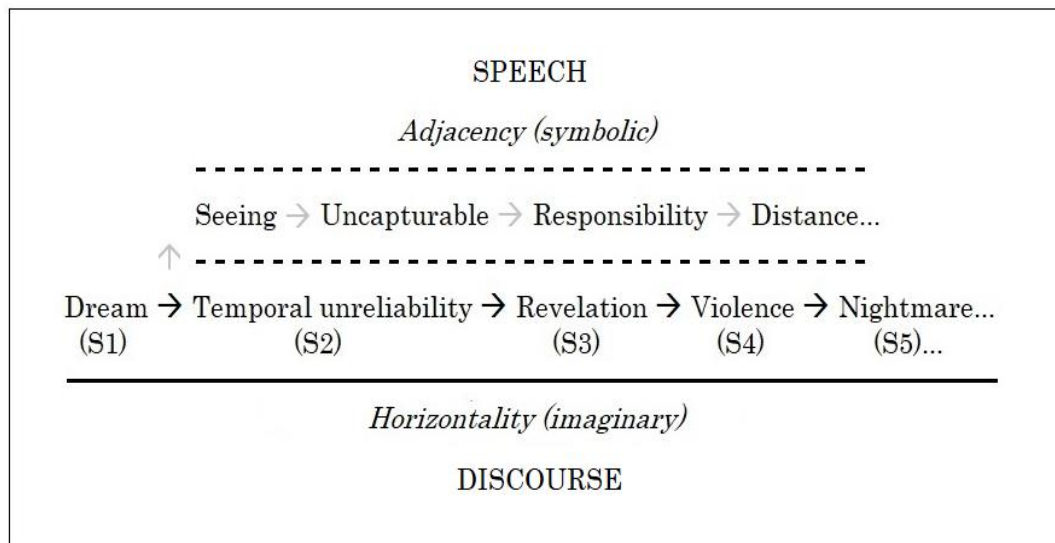
Above is represented the discourse of my interviewee on whose experience the fantasy of sleeplessness is based. Nicolás (a fictitious name) heavily relied on the term 'dream' to make sense of his experience during the revolt. Schematically, this term is located in the position of S1, the place from which meaning is triggered. He consciously linked a series of other experiences by means of their reference to the dream to sustain the linear progression of his discourse (the horizontality): the sensation of inhabiting a temporal unreliability (S2), the feeling of something akin to a revelation (S3), and so on. However, his use of the term 'dream' is marked by an interesting feature: he repeatedly claims to 'see things as a dream'. I followed this adjacent chain of associations where 'dream' escaped Nicolás' conscious attempt to convey meaning. This opened up the possibility to explore the unconscious grip of the signifier 'dream' in the face of an interpellation to waking up.

As described thus far, my interpretive procedure is in solidarity with other Lacanian-inspired approaches to conducting psychosocial research. Lacanian Discourse Analysis (LDA) is perhaps the most obvious one. Basically, all the principles I have outlined in this chapter

to grasp the unconscious dynamics of social phenomena are in accordance with LDA. One of the key aspects of this perspective is the distinction between the three registers of human experience—imaginary, symbolic, and real—and, consequently, the fictitious (yet unavoidable) structure of meaning. Due to this, researchers affiliated with LDA take as their overriding premise the fact that every symbolic exchange produces a number of parallel or subsidiary associations that undermine the intended or conscious meaning (Bucci *et al.*, 2022; Hook, 2013a, 2013b; Neill, 2013). The lateral movement of signifiers is equivalent to what I refer to here as adjacency (Kaufman, 2020), the fact that unconscious desire is never directly stated but, as Hook (2013b) insists, something to be interpreted by means of the juxtaposition of signifiers. Consequently, fidelity to the actual choice of words and not what they mean or refer to is a key tenet of LDA.

Hook's deployment of LDA shares important commonalities with my own approach. By way of example, his analysis of racialised narratives from the Apartheid Archive Project is identical to what I did in the 'fantasy of the powerless academic' (chapter 5). Hook's interest in the exploration of racist tropes leads him to lay stress on the seemingly aleatory references to animals within the material—not even the frequent animalisation of the other, but simply pets. What he discovers is how the use of the signifier 'chicken', for instance, can help the narrator to mobilise a repressed desire by metonymically replacing some content 'that cannot otherwise be admitted' (Hook, 2013b: 49). This conflictive content, namely, that the devoted carer of the narrator has nonetheless the status of a pet within the white family (purchased and loved in unison), finds a socially acceptable way of circulating via the juxtaposition of signifiers. In my interpretation, a similar logic is applicable to the fantasy of the powerless academic. As my detailed analysis shows, against the backdrop of the neoliberal university, power is customarily located in the exterior; it never belongs to scholars. For my interviewees to talk about those instances in which

they unmistakably exert power, they have recourse to other apparently contingent signifiers: 'cookies' and 'pins'. By means of these libidinally loaded signifiers, the participants of my study can express some content that cannot adopt a direct form.

As follows from the above, Hook's perspective is almost completely aligned with my own approach, considering that both procedures take as their starting point 'the properly metonymic relation between one signifier and another that we call desire' (Lacan, 1997b: 293). Most LDA researchers, however, take a different route. In analysing the same empirical material as Hook does, David Pavón-Cuéllar and Ian Parker (2013: 315) seek to make a contribution 'to the project of critical psychosocial reflection on the symbolic apparatus of racism'. In order to interpret the symbolic universe of apartheid, these scholars resort to the theory of the four discourses developed by Lacan in what is commonly regarded as the late stage of his teaching. Here, desire is displaced to a more peripheric place in favour of *jouissance*, the excessive satisfaction-within-dissatisfaction associated with the disruptions of the real. Assuming the impossibility of the social bond, the theory of discourses stands for the four historical ways in which a certain structural impossibility emerges depending on the place the signifier intervenes at (Lacan, 2007). Accordingly, Pavón-Cuéllar and Parker embark on a mapping of the different modes in which the text can analyse itself depending on the structural location of the impossibility (and excess enjoyment). As Calum Neill (2013: 347) has put it: 'In repeatedly mapping aspects of the text to the elements of discourse, in considering the various challengers to the seat of master signifier, we generate competing possible understandings. We explode the text'.

In a way, the discrepancy between my approach and usual takes on LDA can be regarded as a matter of strategy. Whereas I emphasise the relationships between desire/fantasy/imaginary, they opt instead for

those between *jouissance*/discourse/real. Strategy, nonetheless, is always contingent on a given situation—using the same strategy all the time is very unstrategic. Most LDA researchers apply this method to analyse social narratives that aspire to create a sense of unity; that is to say, to highly cohesive ideological formations. It is not a surprise, then, the widespread interest in phenomena such as apartheid. These kinds of cases justify the goal of making a text 'explode'. In my view, this cannot be the default mode of conducting empirical research. To put it bluntly, trying to make explode the already fragile attempts at regaining a sense of coherence amid the revolt seems counterproductive. That is the reason why the imaginary register comes to the fore in my study; I deliberately privileged compositions and reorganisations over explosions.

My distance from these approaches, nevertheless, goes further. Empirical studies under the umbrella of LDA suffer from at least another two deficiencies. Firstly, some of them tend to acquire an overly formalistic stance, where the goal is reduced to the identification of master signifiers in the text to subsequently 'filling the schemata' of the four discourses (Wang, 2022: 164; see also Mentinis, 2023). This makes the empirical material more illustrative than exploratory. Secondly, other investigations deploy a Lacanian grammar but end up conducting something akin to a Foucauldian analysis of subject positions. Stephanie Swales and her colleagues, for example, analyse the relationships between guilt and neoliberalism by means of interviews with food banks users (Swales *et al.*, 2020). Their take is that LDA 'can be instrumental in depicting how powerful notions of the subject are promulgated in society as well as for providing avenues for those notions to be questioned and resisted' (Swales *et al.*, 2020: 675). The problem here is that they assume a fit between discourse formations and subject positions, which is precisely what Lacanian psychoanalysis challenges. This leads the researchers to rely on the notions of ideal ego, ego ideal, and superego to conduct their analysis,

which leads them to remain anchored at the level of meaning. For example, every time an interviewee uttered 'I should', they took this as a superegoic injunction. At a symbolic level, however, this is not necessarily the case. In the 'fantasy of immediacy' (chapter 4) I proceed in a different way: when a participant manifested a similar sense of responsibility, I discovered a juxtaposition of signifiers outside her narrative (*deber* as duty and *deber* as indebtedness). Furthermore, by means of a scansion, a third and crucial adjacent association emerged: *de-ver*, to see. Based on the principles distilled in this chapter, only the second option can be considered as properly Lacanian.

My interpretation also shares important resemblances with what has been named Critical Fantasy Studies (CFS). In comparison to LDA, this is still an inchoate approach, yet its roots can be traced back to the publication of *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* by Jason Glynos and David Howarth in 2007. In this book, both authors come up with a novel programme for discourse analysis that combines Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theory of hegemony with some aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the notion of fantasy. What they call the 'fantasmatic logic' of a discourse entails the production of appealing (beatific) and repellent (horrific) narratives that account for the 'grip' of certain meanings beyond reasonableness. The fantasmatic logic, therefore, is a discursive mechanism to occult the contingency of meaning and incompleteness of any discourse formation by elevating (libidinising) some of its features. By offering a positive resolution to this structural negativity, social discourses promise a fulness-to-come that depends on the overcoming of a threat. The logic that Glynos and Howarth develop here and explore in multiple cases (Glynos, Klimecki & Willmott, 2012, 2015; Glynos & Speed, 2012; Glynos, Speed & West, 2015) is the positivisation of an inherent lack, a process that would explain the endurance of contingent norms and practices.

More recently, Glynos has come up with a research agenda that closely follows his previous collective enterprise, Critical Fantasy Studies. It could be said that, in the context of an ever-increasing attention to affects in social theory, the fantasmatic logic became such an important gear in the functioning of discourse that it deserved closer attention. He defines this agenda not in a prescriptive sense but as a 'direction of travel' regarding the empirical material, linking CFS with a psychosocial style of enquiry (Glynos, Oliveira & Burity, 2019). For Glynos, fantasy occupies a liminal place in discourses, being part of them but permanently stretching their limits, insofar as fantasies make enjoyment (an extra-discursive element) legible for the subject. The goal of CFS is to critically expand the scope of discourse analysis by exploring the unconscious modes of subjective overinvestment in ideological formations. In Glynos' own words: 'the idea of resistance to change, or its opposite, rapid transformation, are very abstract problem domains that I think the notions of fantasy and enjoyment can help shed light on, making clear their relevance to questions of ideology' (Glynos, Oliveira & Burity, 2019: 149; see also Glynos, 2021). Fantasies, therefore, account for the meaningless kernel upon which ideological meanings are sustained, a dimension of discourse that infuses an ambivalent enjoyment of the subject.

Recently, Sebastián Ronderos and Jason Glynos (2022) deployed the CFS framework to interpret the anti-populist media discourse in Brazil. In their article, the authors deliberately avoid dealing with the multiplicity of meanings around populism and proceed instead by 'following the signifier' within the pages of a mainstream right-wing outlet between 2015 and 2019. By doing so, they seek to capture the desiring scenarios constructed around villains, heroes, and ideas shaping the normative and ideological discourse of populism. What they found is not only that the signifier 'populism' is mobilised to articulate an anti-leftism, pro-free-market normative message, but furthermore that this is sustained upon an extra-ideological surplus.

According to the authors: 'The enjoyment evident in its attacks on [former president] Lula and PT were linked to an ontology of lack and its appearance as the possibility of loss — the loss of a way of life and the guarantees that support the *status quo*' (Ronderos & Glynos, 2022: 21). In other words, by following the concatenation of the signifier 'populism' with other symbolic associations, Ronderos and Glynos account for the excessive character of the anti-populist discourse, an ideological formation whose interpellative capacity resides beyond its intended meanings.

Prima facie, there is a complete correlation between the CFS and the approach I develop in this study. The analytical primacy of signifiers over meaning, the excessive nature of the subjective grip of discourses, and the narrativisation of desire by means of fantasies, are all key aspects of my own exploration. However, there is one crucial difference. CFS, as well as analyses conducted in terms of *Logics*, are almost exclusively 'top-down'. This means that the unconscious dimension of ideological interpellation is derived from the discourse itself, most of the time without the participation of the subject (who is assumed to be gripped by it). This is directly stated by Glynos when he admits that he thinks about fantasies 'at the level of policies and policy practices, or […] at the level of organizations and organizational practices, when, for example, we are concerned to understand how policies become implemented, institutionalized, or resisted' (Glynos, Oliveira & Burity, 2019: 150).

Due to this interest in policies and organisational practices, CFS privilege material from governmental documents, newspapers, public policies, organisational guidelines, and the like, while rarely engaging with interviews or ethnographic material. The opposite is the case when Glynos works outside *Logis* or CFS, as he does in his projects with Claudia Lapping (Lapping & Glynos, 2018). My approach, is in many ways aligned with the principles of CFS but adopts a 'bottom-up'

approach, so to speak. Accordingly, I seek to identify and isolate fantasies not from official sources but from the subject's speech, that is to say, from the lived experience of, in this case, the popular uprising of 2019 in Chile. Therefore, similar to my differences with LDA, this is also a matter of strategy. From my perspective, the unconscious effects of the emancipatory call of the Other of the *estallido* can best be apprehended at the level of the subject.

If I have devoted this lengthy and final subsection to the specificities of a Lacanian-inspired interpretation, it is because I wanted to decisively cast away potential misunderstandings. My approach does not dabble in any kind of 'methodless' inquiry (St. Pierre, 2013, 2021), nor follows serendipitous or whimsical patterns. Quite the opposite, I have evinced the existence of strong principles derived from Lacan's theory that can guide both the production of empirical material and its subsequent interpretation. As a result, the unconscious or libidinal life of social phenomena is not unfathomable, nor is its exploration a random or capricious activity. Moreover, I have also recognised the extent to which my approach taps into a rich tradition of empirical research at the same time that it seeks to make an original contribution to the ongoing challenge of a psychosocial research programme. The fantasmatic (re)compositions I propose here are my methodological way of approaching the dilemma of interpellation amid a politically progressive organisation of the social bond. My procedure, therefore, can be seen as *an excursion between the symbolic and the imaginary*, a permanent to and fro from these registers in order to capture the unconscious pathways followed by the desire for radical social change.

CHAPTER 4

FANTASMATIC (RE)COMPOSITIONS: SEEING

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present my interpretation of the unconscious economy of seeing during the Chilean *estallido*. This means that I treat the visual field as a domain where the complex dynamics of the desire for change can be grasped. Lacanian psychoanalysis rejects the idea that visual reality is the 'background against which and in which we desire' and assumes it rather 'as a field thoroughly colored by our desire' (McGowan, 2016: 87). Consequently, as Joan Copjec (2015: 34) puts it, there is no such thing as a 'brute vision', since a vision 'totally independent of language' cannot be found. The visual field is not given in advance; it is symbolically organised. As a result, our vision is related to the Other. The fact that visual reality is a field coloured by our desire implies that it is by means of imaginary frameworks that we came to see during the revolt. In the scopic field, subjects had to face the enigma of the desire of the Other of the *estallido* in order to see.

The visual richness of the Chilean revolt has been the focus of several studies (Cortés, 2022; De Vivanco & Johansson, 2021a; Márquez, 2020). This is the case since the *estallido* brought about a wide range of artistic expressions that saturated the scopic field. Simultaneously, however, the revolt was marked by extreme cases of police misconduct that ended with hundreds of protesters totally or partially blinded. My interpretation touches on both these extremes of the popular uprising, yet I emphasise the unconscious dynamics of the organisation of its visual field. The latter is an entry point to explore how critical academics navigate the inconsistency of the Other's call. It has been suggested that protestors populated the streets amid a

profound sense of equality; perceiving themselves as someone 'who has something to say and show, and who hopes to be recognised first by his peers and possibly later by the state' (López, 2021: 20). The fact that recognition was at stake in the visual field of the revolt means that subjects were confronted with the gaze of the Other of the *estallido*, which can only result in misrecognition.

In the rest of this chapter, I reconstruct two fantasies allowing critical academics to unconsciously endure this misrecognition by framing their desires. Particularly, both these fantasies can be understood as responses to the interpellation to identify as someone who has awakened, as derived from the motto 'Chile woke up'. This nationwide awakening—the emancipatory interpellation of the Other of the *estallido*—was sustained by a libidinal economy that I explore through the 'fantasy of sleeplessness' and the 'fantasy of immediacy'. Both fantasies are ways of regaining subjective consistency amid this new organisation of the visual field while obfuscating how desire is involved in the seemingly straightforward act of seeing. This is what Lacanian psychoanalysis refers to as the split between the eye and the gaze: inasmuch as a passage through the signifier is inescapable for us to see, desire inevitably distorts the visual field, so we need to obfuscate our participation in what we see. Therefore, the eye itself is phallic (Frosh, 2013), meaning that it is the guarantor of an arbitrary stabilisation of the visible, whereas the gaze is the imprint of our desire that is returned to us from the outside but we are unable to register it consciously. These are the dynamics I study in the context of the *estallido*.

The revolt's new eyes: Chile woke up

burst [*estallido*]

It was happening. Right then, happening. They'd been warning me for a long time, and yet. I was paralyzed, my sweaty hands clutching at the air [...]. And then a firecracker went off in my head. But no, it was no fire I was seeing, it was blood spilling out inside my eye. The most shockingly beautiful blood I have ever seen. The most outrageous. The most terrifying. The blood gushed, but only I could see it. With absolute clarity I watched as it thickened, I saw the pressure rise, I watched as I got dizzy, I saw my stomach turn, saw that I was starting to retch, and even so. I didn't straighten up or move an inch, didn't even try to breathe while I watched the show. Because that was the last thing I would see, that night, through that eye: a deep, black blood.

<div align="center">*</div>

When I saw him arrive, I knew that he had to be my priority. He came in without his eyes. Tears of blood ran down his cheeks, and he couldn't speak because of the shock. I have experience in tragedies; I was in Chañaral looking for missing people [after the floodings], I was in the eruption of the Melipeuco volcano, and I worked in the Concepción earthquake. But this was completely

out of the ordinary—I had never seen damage of
this magnitude, let alone visual damage. It was all
very shocking.

The first excerpt is how *Sangre en el Ojo*, or *Seeing Red*, by the Chilean
writer Lina Meruane (2017: 3-4), begins. The novel, published in 2012,
is a fictionalised autobiography revolving around the vicissitudes of
Lucinda, a Chilean author diagnosed with retinopathy, after suffering
an internal haemorrhage that left her almost totally blind. The second
is the testimony of José González, a nurse member of The Brigade, a
group of 45 health workers organised to assist protesters in downtown
Santiago in the wake of the *estallido*. What José describes in the
quotation is his encounter with Gustavo Gatica, a 21-year-old
demonstrator who has come to be one of the most emblematic cases of
police brutality during the revolt. He lost both eyes as a result of being
hit by 'non-lethal' shells fired by the police. Gustavo, however, was by
no means an exception, yet I shall come back to this briefly. In the
interim, I would like to emphasise how Meruane's book, in retrospect,
appears to be an eerie omen: in 2012 she was writing about another
estallido, that of her eye; however, seven years later this will become
an ignominious feature of our own social *estallido*. Seeing during the
revolt, as this chapter will show, became a sort of novelised experience.

Eyes have been at the centre of the *estallido* since the beginning.
Some were taken by police ammunition, some were irritated by tear
gas, but, on the whole, all of them (allegedly) were finally opened. At
least this is what one of the revolt's main mottoes suggests: Chile woke
up. After realising his sight was irretrievably gone, Gustavo Gatica
said to his mother: 'I gave away my eyes so that people wake up'. Now
that four years have passed since this sentence was uttered, breaking
it down seems less callous than it might have while the events were
still in the making. On the one hand, Gustavo's phrase also seems to be

extracted from a novel. Lines as inspiring as the one he delivered from his stretcher are rarely pronounced in everyday life, let alone in his condition. The aplomb and composure he exhibited in the face of a life-changing situation surely account for the emboldening effect his words had amongst protesters as he urged them to keep fighting. On the other hand, this is an excellent example of how meaning is always a retroactive and imaginary construction. Once the *estallido* was framed under the heading of 'Chile woke up', the abuse of power he was the victim of was turned into a kind of gift, an oblation to the cause of bringing the country out of its dormancy. Outside this overarching narrative, losing your eyes due to police brutality can hardly be considered an offering. But Chile, according to many, had woken up.

'Chile woke up' was everywhere and it was just about anything—a chant on the streets, an amorphous collective feeling, the headline of many news articles, a catchphrase on innumerable banners, the inspiration for a panoply of performances, the title of several academic papers and books, and even the name of an art tour around the streets of Santiago. For months, the idea that Chile was no longer sleeping was almost unquestionable and everybody had a take on what that could mean. In a way, as Gustavo Gatica embodies in all its woeful complexity, waking up was the encouraging reverse of the harrowing numbers of mutilated eyes. The unparalleled scale in which eyes got 'lost' in Chile allowed human rights watchdogs to call it an 'epidemy', whilst Lina Meruane (2021: 34) coined the idea of a 'serial eye-cide'. In Chile, as the narrative goes, hundreds of eyes were temporarily or permanently blinded so millions of other eyelids would never come to contact again. And as easy as it seems to treat this hyperbolic statement as an embellishment or a metaphor of the situation, it nevertheless holds some literality. 'Don't you ever fall asleep' was a graffiti I spotted every day whilst walking towards the house of my friend Pancho in Ñuñoa, where I spent a good part of my fieldwork in Chile. This is important to stress; if the Chilean people are to honour

the gift of Gustavo and many others, our unmutilated eyes must *never* close again. Or, as Meruane (2021: 17) wrote: 'OPEN YOUR EYES. That order written on walls and façades full of half-open windows. We abide by the persuasive urgency, we peer into the abyss of everyday life, they, we, me'. Almost three years after the revolt began, this order, according to her, has still not lost its interpellative strength.

'Don't fall asleep', graffiti on Alameda, Santiago's main street. Photo: Gustavo Sánchez.

Lorena, a PhD student at the University of Valparaíso, succinctly summarises the spirit of this nationwide awakening: 'I went outside again but I was now looking at the streets differently, as in with other eyes'. There are at least two ways to approach this. We can either immerse ourselves in the overarching discourse formation that makes these sorts of statements meaningful, namely, the idea that Chile actually woke up from something yet to be determined; or we can rehearse a suspension of this imaginary meaningfulness and remain at

a symbolic level, taking the actual words that subjects deploy to transmit the idea that Chile woke up.

From the first position, Lorena's 'other eyes' are an answer—they are straightforwardly the upshot of the revolt. From the second position, these new pair of eyes are more of a question; not so much a question of what they mean, but of what they represent in the libidinal economy of the revolt. Put differently, from a symbolic perspective what comes to the fore are the associations the 'other eyes' allow when grasping the unconscious scenarios framing the act of seeing in this waking Chile. This is even more so the case when we bear in mind that, from a Lacanian stance, the gaze is never on the side of the subject, so, in a way, we *always* look with other eyes. In consequence, 'eye, look and desire are all bound up together' (Frosh, 2013: 76). These cryptic ideas can lend us a hand to understand the vicissitudes of the Other's call amid the *estallido*.

To pin down what the Chilean people might have woken up from is not a simple task. The certainty of the awakening disproportionately outweighs the clarity around the roots of the slumber. Neoliberalism, as it tends to be, stands as the main culprit in most interviews, although this is very unilluminating by itself.[10] Ramón—part of the academic staff of a PhD in critical theory at a private university—for instance, suggests that 'neoliberalism has made us very sleepy'; so, for him, something as disruptive as the *estallido* was close to unimaginable. Isabel, a scholar at the largest public university in the country, also recurs to neoliberalism through an idiosyncratic proxy— the idea of 'the model'. In her view, the deepening of the (neoliberal) model throughout the 30 years encompassing the post-dictatorship period also had a soporific effect upon Chileans. Her take, however, is much more ambivalent than Ramón's.

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[10] Consider, by way of example, what Danilo Martuccelli (2021: 6) has said in this regard: 'In spite of the diversity of interpretations that the *estallido* has given rise to, neoliberalism is always, in one way or another, the overall framework of analysis'.

We found in our research this relentless uneasiness with the transitional pact coming out in the stories of the post-dictatorship, you know? And I was amazed, prior to the *estallido*, amazed at how calm everything was; it seemed that deep down everyone had already settled in and they had no choice but to put up with it, you know? But we all knew, I mean, when I talked to people for my *fondecyt* [research grant], everyone, well, no, everyone on the left had a critical vision, right? A critical vision of what the *Concertación* governments had been, of what the [transitional] pact had been like, and so on. So, when the *estallido* occurred, we said: "well, now the common people have woken up".

As the next chapter will present in detail, *fondecyts*—these highly competitive and prestigious state-funded research projects—play a significant libidinal role in the fantasmatic scaffolding sustaining academic writing in Chile. I will postpone that and focus here on the rest of the quotation. In a way, and despite identifying the same underlying cause, Isabel reaches the exact opposite conclusion to Ramón: when considering all the social discontent mustered during three decades, the *estallido* seems totally imaginable. Thanks to her *fondecyt*, she had first-hand knowledge about this growing disappointment concealed by a generalised appearance of calmness. She knew how things were, so, in a way, it was only a matter of time before the common people followed suit.

There are two very relevant aspects of this line of thought that I would like to highlight. On the one hand, the lethargic powers of neoliberalism are, to some extent, counterintuitive. Chileans were not drifting off because their lives were uneventful, but because they were ceaselessly producing. Neoliberalism demands from people to work 'from dawn to dusk', to permanently do more and more, and that makes them drowsy. On the other hand, sleeping is linked to knowledge, or the lack thereof to be more precise. This is accomplished

not only through the discursive summoning of *fondecyts*, but especially at colloquial points of our conversation. When Isabel went into more details about this shocking calmness, she recognised that: 'I said to myself many times, like these people are asle… they are thick [*aweonaos*], that was my expression haha, thick [*aweonaos*]'. Although very hard to translate, the slur *aweonaos* harshly refers to a stupid, gullible person; it transmits the idea of a profound lack of knowledge. As a consequence, the break of her self-censorship in this passage is very telling: 'asleep' is a much more savoury term to refer to this stupid other affiliated to a group to which she obviously does not belong and, it is likely to infer, she assumes I do not belong either. This might explain why she let her guard down, allowing herself to unbind other, more discourteous associations: being asleep = being thick.

We thus arrive at a minimal definition: to wake up is to have one's eyes open (to know). The correlation between seeing clearly—having our eyes open/not being asleep—and knowledge has deep roots in the Western tradition. Ocularcentrism is the rather flamboyant name given to this epistemological ascendancy of vision over other senses. Although this conceptual relationship between seeing and knowing is interesting to explore, I will concentrate on the spoken symbolic associations around waking up. In this regard, the experience of Nicolás, a PhD researcher in Interdisciplinary Studies and part-time lecturer based in Viña del Mar, is worthy of close attention. Alongside his academic enterprises, Nicolás is an artist who runs a local art gallery with other colleagues. On account of that, he was particularly attuned to the visual dimensions of the revolt. Furthermore, his doctoral research revolves around the links between dreaming and the *estallido*. Seeing, sleeping, and dreaming, consequently, are scattered all across his speech.

Seeing things as a dream

During our interview, the term 'dream' helped Nicolás to articulate symbolic associations that, although part of the same vicinity, are not strictly interchangeable. Technically, then, 'dream' is a highly overdetermined piece in his speech. One of these associations refers to an aspect often overlooked by some of my interviewees despite its omnipresence: the violence unleashed by the revolt. Nicolás puts in circulation the notion of a 'time of catastrophe' to describe the last months of 2019. 'That time', he acknowledges, 'I see it as a dream'. The dreamlike experience he alludes to here has to do with a sense of temporal unreliability—as normally happens when we dream, we cannot quite put our finger on the temporality we are in. For him, 'the boundaries were extremely diffuse' at the time, meaning that what he describes as days could have easily been weeks or even months. As superimposed as they are, there is a twofold relationship between dreaming and the time of catastrophe for him: under these conditions, real life resembles some features of dream life, but we also tend to dream more profoundly and richly. The dreamlike chaos of the catastrophe renews our ties with the act of dreaming, 'as if the dream begins to reveal or to manifest itself through this uncertainty one's in during the day'.

At this stage, it is already noticeable that we should refrain from taking this 'dreaming' as an activity taking place in our beds during the night. Nicolás seems to be expressing something slightly different. Given the catastrophe, he admits that 'there was a lot of tension, inside the house I mean, a tension that I now see as a dream'. He, once again, is *seeing things in the form of a dream*, yet he is not dreaming. This is an interesting use of the term. Nonetheless, the tension he mentions has material expressions. Pillaging is one of them. Back then, his home was located in one of the many hills in Valparaíso, a stone's throw from the centre of the city. Just a few streets away, there was a big

supermarket that 'got bulldozed day and night' in a plundering spree that carried on for days. Another expression was the curfew. Imposed by the chief of the National Defence almost immediately in the capital and subsequently extended to other cities, it was the first time this measure was enforced for political reasons since the dictatorship. 'The curfew', Nicolás continues, 'that shit was unthinkable; I honestly can't believe it'. For him, the idea to go out to stock up on food and other products and then come back to lock oneself in was ridiculous: 'It was surreal, you know? It was like a dream, like a nightmare'.

To summarise, up to this point the term 'dream' has been mobilised to express the idea of a temporal unreliability, a revelation, a tension, and the unthinkable (a nightmare). What they all have in common is their link to different manifestations of the *estallido*, yet not to the event in itself. This situation changes when Nicolás starts addressing his work and, crucially, the work of others. Quite suddenly, his speech acquires a bitterness unexpressed so far, which is directed at certain artists he deems to be 'political'. Some artists, he claims, took advantage of the ongoing situation in order to easily and hastily produce images that allow them to feel 'proper', as if they 'truly belong to the streets'. Here, he takes on what is perhaps the most iconic artistic expression during the revolt:

> Take the DelightLab. They projected the images on the Telefónica building and like, well, they took to it like a duck to water, you know? They're like, they're doing amazing, and they're being invited everywhere because they generated an image of the *estallido*, right? But like, like I think the *estallido* is similar to a dream, because it's uncapturable, you know? So that uncapturable, wanting to give it an image, for me is extremely irresponsible; for me, wanting to reduce it to a definition is irresponsible.

DelightLab is an art collective that has been experimenting with light and space for more than a decade in Chile. The day after the revolt

commenced, they decided to project several words and short phrases on a daily basis on the Telefónica building, a 143m high skyscraper adjacent to Dignity Square. Amongst their interventions, they illuminated the city with the phrase 'Chile woke up'. In one of the many interviews their members gave, they aligned themselves with an activist, political type of art while referring to their work as a 'luminous manifesto'. Following his own speech, what troubles Nicolás is that they 'captured' the *estallido*; they treated it like an image and not like a dream. Negatively, as opposed to the image, Nicolás hints at interesting symbolic associations through his singular way of relating to the dream. What he discursively constructs here is the antagonistic figure of an opportunistic other, a figure that moves along the axis 'image = capturable = irresponsibility' instead of 'dream = uncapturable = responsibility'. What 'dream' stands for, however, is yet to be defined.

Nicolás gives me a hint of the above when he explains in more detail why he adopts a combative position against political art. To begin with, he discloses that he is not hostile to politically-inspired art. On the contrary, what he is at odds with is 'the political art that's called "political art" because it talks about politics, and it seems that other things aren't'. From his perspective, the type of art that directly registers the political as a sort of conveyor belt of events does a disservice to the cause these events spring from. Going back to the *estallido*, to merely replicate through an image that 'Chile woke up' seems, for Nicolás, to only benefit the artists at the expense of a reduction of the political capacity of art. At this point, Nicolás begins to vociferate: 'They make it look as if the relationship with your son, with your daughter, with your partner, with your friends, that shit ain't political, right? Or what you dreamed last night ain't political, right?' The irresponsibility, then, of turning a dream into an image has to do with the closure of its political potentialities.

While still conveying his ideas in an oppositional fashion, his speech began to link the dream to more positive terms. For him, addressing the revolt should be 'like starting to associate things from a place that has no associativity whatsoever', or 'to talk about things without talking about them'. What this procedure avoids, for Nicolás, is the propensity to fall prey to 'the reduction of the image, the narrowing of a definition'. Taking advantage of his own idiom, what he wants is to 'beat around the bush endlessly'. In an important turn in his speech, he jumped into his reasons for dedicating his doctoral research to the topic of dreams:

> And why dreams? Well, because my auntie healed through distance, in the vigil; it is as though she visited you haha. Like "I'm gonna go to heal you, I'm gonna go to see you in the night". So, for me, she healed through dreams and, after talking with her—she passed away a couple of years ago—she told me "yeah, I dream, you know? I dream that I'm gonna see you", and that stuck with me.

The richness of this short excerpt is exceptional. Some background information is required first. The precise genealogy of the unconventional therapy Nicolás refers to is beyond my grasp, but it suffices to say that I myself grew up in an environment where the idea of someone visiting you in your dreams to heal you from an ailment is nothing out of the ordinary. My mother is here the most reliable source of information. She swears by a whole constellation of treatments derived from what she calls 'ancient wisdom'. Tying a red ribbon to a plant to repel the evil eye, picking bits of skin around the spine of someone who feels unwell to 'unstick' what this person feels in the stomach, or setting fire to cones made of newspaper sheets and wafting them over the body of someone who is suffering from 'trapped air', are expressions of this constellation. Dream visitations are the upper echelons of this wisdom, something that only certain women can achieve; it is customarily a knowledge passed down from generation to

generation. According to my mother, some of our neighbours were capable of that. In a different location, Nicolás' aunt was another one.[11]

Thanks to his aunt, we have arrived now at a new association: dream = healing. This curative capacity, however, is not an intrinsic property of the dream—it is contingent on a visitant. Properly speaking, the dream operates here as a vehicle; it is the conduit for healing. Perhaps unwittingly, Nicolás makes a subsequent equivalence: he first says 'my auntie heals through distance', which is followed by 'she [my auntie] heals through dreams'. Healing through dreams *is* healing through distance. The dream, therefore, is an interval or a gap, an indirect way of doing something. Interestingly, this sanative capacity of the dream does not take place while both parties are asleep, but in the vigil, that is to say, during a forced state of wakefulness. Once again, 'dreaming' has nothing to do with what happens when we are tucked in bed. A brief etymological detour seems propitious here. *Visitar*, to visit—the verb used by Nicolás when describing his auntie's technique—comes from the Latin term *visitāre*, which in turn means 'go to see'. Quite literally, then, what happens for Nicolás is that the dream *sees him* in the night and he ought to be awake if he wants to be healed.

Nicolás was one of the kindest people I had the opportunity to interview. So much so that he was generous enough to give me a book of his published in 2021 about this very topic—a book that, for obvious reasons of anonymity, I will not reference in detail. Alongside over

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[11] At this point, it seems to me a matter of intellectual integrity to acknowledge my transference with Nicolás. By this I mean that sustaining my role as a researcher interviewing a participant of my study was very challenging at times. This is, certainly, an imaginary setting that never works flawlessly, since jumping from one identification to another while the conversation takes place is totally normal. However, both the relatability of his political positions and the unexpected shared experience of a sort of pagan knowledge running in our families made my job particularly difficult. In a way, I had to remind myself that the reason I was in front of him was to follow his associations and not to get lost in them. During the interpretation of my material, however, much of this transference faded away due to a (rather reasonable) de-idealisation transpiring along this process.

forty of his drawings, the publication reflects on the act of dreaming and his singular relationship with it. There, for instance, I realised his auntie's knowledge was bestowed to her by her mother, a woman who also had a significant impact on Nicolás' approach to dreams. She passed away when he was still a child and somewhere in the book he describes how difficult it was to fall asleep afterwards: 'Night after night, I felt this calling, an abyss when the light was off; then, I recognised myself minuscule and I couldn't resist it anymore. The dream took hold of me and revealed its mysteries to me'. This passage bears a shocking resemblance to Meruane's one about the injunction to stay awake after the revolt quoted above. They both refer to a kind of interpellative capacity—the calling of the dream for him, the order of the revolt for her—while describing everyday life as an abyss. In a context in which the dream sees you, life is turned into a permanent vigil.

Sleeping with your eyes open

Sleeping implies a peculiar dynamic. Similar to being in love, sleep requires as its precondition tripping over something; we need to *fall* asleep; something—ourselves—needs not to be in place for sleep to occur. Something requires to be displaced. As Darian Leader (2019) proposes, if sleeping is undoubtedly an essential, even natural aspect of life, having to engage in a series of mental gymnastics to fall asleep is essentially a trait of human life. Otherwise stated, only speaking beings need to trick themselves in order to sleep. The reason for this, Leader suggests, can be found in the incompatibility between sleep and the self. In everyday life, we are required to rehearse several identifications to conduct our activities, and the same applies when it comes to sleep; we need to identify with the position of the sleeper. This is why a trick, a fall, must be part of the dynamic—in order to sleep, it is a necessity to become someone else.

Falling asleep, from this perspective, entails bringing some of our daytime identifications to a halt. The calling of the Other—the anonymous source of social interpellations—must remain unanswered if we are to sleep.[12] This means not only to stop being a worker, a sibling, or a scholar, but crucially to momentarily put aside the question of what the Other wants from us. This is what Nicolás finds himself unable to achieve. In all fairness, this is what anyone who received Gustavo Gatica's oblation—his bleeding, mutilated eyes—is incapable of. Because, for as noble as it is to want to transform Chilean society, embracing the idea that 'Chile woke up' dramatically altered our relationship with sleep. My point here is not simply that in a context in which being awake is an order, as Meruane puts it, we suffer from an arrest of sleep. What my interpretation suggests is slightly more nuanced: one of the outcomes of the *estallido* is that we can no longer *fall* asleep. This is what Nicolás' experience shows. 'Chile woke up' means that any attempt at weakening the interpellation from the Other is bound to fail since being duped by any trick is now overruled, yet this is crucial for humans to sleep. Finally, after a three-decade-long slumber, our eyes are wide open and only a fool would dare to close them again.

I would like to provide a succinct, yet powerful illustration of the interpellative force of the revolt in the visual field. María is a PhD researcher in social sciences at the largest public university in the country. Her work revolves around sex workers and education. The nature of her research made her very attentive to the visuality of the *estallido*; all of a sudden, as she mentions, no group of people or

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[12] Using a different language, Freud (2001b: 128) made the exact same point: 'We can only ask how it has happened that from the first we have forgotten that besides somatic stimuli there are *mental* stimuli that disturb sleep. We know, after all, that it is excitations of this kind that are chiefly responsible for disturbing the sleep of an adult by preventing him from establishing the mood required for falling asleep—the withdrawing of interest from the world. He does not want to interrupt his life but would rather continue his work on the things he is concerned with, and for that reason he does not fall asleep'.

identity was condemned to remain out of sight anymore. She also notices how this shaped the city's appearance—according to her, now 'the streets yell at you':

> In every street of Santiago one can see some slogan, some graffiti, you know? So, it is like a permanent visual reminder of the problem; I was on my way to get some bread the other day and I glanced on the wall "Bobbies are rapists" [*pacos violadores*], you know? And I thought: "yeah, Bobbies do rape". And it is a very important reminder. I don't know, I went to the supermarket and [saw on the wall] "No more SENAME" [the public institution for the protection of children and adolescents], and you are there, so you remember there are some kiddos experiencing an inhumane situation within the system […], so it helps you remember what the topics are, what the mottoes are; it helps you to, they help you to… like, unexpectedly, without you wanting to, you walk down the street and you read a slogan, you know? "Free political prisoners", and you could ask yourself, I insist, while walking the dog, "are there political prisoners?", "who are the political prisoners?" So there, visually, there are stimuli that weren't there before, right?

What I have argued in this section is how this relentless, unexpected, and especially unwanted *visual reminder* is one of the subjective expressions of the motto 'Chile woke up'. As a result of the awakening, an unquenchable interpellative force was unleashed in the form of a ceaseless self-doubt: I am walking my dog, but should I be thinking about such and such problem instead? We must witness everything; no one can ever fall asleep. Paradoxically, this way of securing identification with the revolt seems to be structurally analogous to the previous position—neoliberalism made Chileans drowsy through the demand for endless productivity and the revolt kept them awake by means of an interminable self-questioning. Even if the latter seeks to reverse the former, both of them share the same fundamental logic: an

unstoppable activity. Whilst the endless neoliberal movement had a stultifying effect on Chileans, the *estallido* set in motion an emancipatory counterattack based on an unfaltering state of inquisitive wonder. Either in the form of neoliberalism or revolt, the interpellative force of the Other cannot be counteracted.

What is, then, *seeing things as a dream*? Following the interpretation I have presented in this section, it is Nicolás' fantasmatic solution to the problem of *falling* asleep during the revolt. In other words, it is his unconscious way of *sleeping with his eyes open*. At several moments in his speech, he adopts a rather overzealous position on how people ought to treat the *estallido*. The latter should not be 'captured', 'defined', or 'put in images'; it should be treated 'responsibly'. Furthermore, by wanting to 'talk about it without talking about it' or to 'establish associations without any associativity', Nicolás assumes that the only legitimate way of approaching the revolt is by establishing a purely contemplative distance. A distance similar to the one his auntie resorted to so as to heal him—the distance of the dream, we might say.

Nicolás appears here to take the *estallido* to the letter: if he gets too close to it, he shall combust. The flames are nevertheless nearby, lurking, since they have taken the shape of a burning interpellation coming from every corner. Interestingly, Nicolás' fantasy is an attempt not to respond to the Other's call but to identify with the Other. He is aware of the fact that being duped is overruled—meaning that you must know about the rapist police officers, the inhumane conditions of minors under state 'protection', the political prisoners, and so on—and that is why he acts so carefully—he dreads the possibility of being caught in the mistake. Faced with the impossibility of responding or avoiding the interpellation that the Other of the *estallido* directs to him, he fantasises about *seeing* with the Other's eyes—the only non-duped eyes available—to get rid of its omniscient sight. His

unconscious desire is to see from a (purportedly) safe distance—the Other's sanatory distance—and, away from the incandescent call of the *estallido*, finally *fall* asleep.

The 'dream', within Nicolás' speech, organises a libidinally-charged scenario in which it is (fantasmatically) possible to deal with this demanding Other by identifying with it. Therefore, this imaginary sleepless setting is erected upon a fantasy of pure interpellation. Inasmuch as the demands of the Other of the *estallido* are unpayable—since the revolt made of the fictional, properly 'tricky' wrapping of our social interactions its main adversary—Nicolás finds some tranquillity in sublimating the dream as a site of unconscious investment. This solution is, of course, not without ambivalence. Insomniacs, Leader (2019) argues, are the ones who cannot turn the interpellation off; those for whom silencing the question of what they are for the Other proves to be unobtainable. However, he also suggests that sleeplessness can spring from something even worse: the tormenting thought that there is nothing calling us at all. This dialectic is at the heart of Nicolás' fantasy. *Seeing as a dream* is a way of imaginarily escaping from interpellation by perpetuating it—Nicolás allows himself to *fall* asleep, to switch off the call of the Other, by enthroning himself as the custodian of this interpellation. Consequently, his fantasmatic construction shows us how hard it is to cope with the burning call of the revolt but, simultaneously, that the idea of not being called by it might be even harder to endure.

One of the most famous dreams in psychoanalytic literature is 'the burning child'. An exhausted father that 'had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end' decides to go to rest in the next room leaving the door open 'so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out'. An old man stays with the mandate to look after the body in the father's absence while murmuring prayers. The father falls asleep and dreams 'that *his child*

was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" (Freud, 2001c: 509). He woke up to discover that the old watchman fell asleep as well and one of the arms of his dead child was caught by the candles' flames. The richness of this dream has captivated many commentators. Cathy Caruth' (1996) incisive reading provides important insights to make sense of Nicolás' experience.

Caruth noticed that Freud and Lacan approached this dream with different questions in mind. Whereas Freud argues that the dream keeps the father asleep since within the oneiric world he fulfils the desire of seeing his child alive, Lacan claims that, paradoxically, he wakes up precisely because he dreams. This counterintuitive take points to the fact that, for Lacan, the father is awakened not by the fall of the candle, but by the words that he could only receive in the form of a dream. As a result, while Freud's question is what does it mean to sleep?, for Lacan what is at stake is what does it mean to awaken? Caruth's interpretation is that, as per Lacan, awakening is in itself traumatic.[13] This trauma is related to the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of responding to someone's call. The father is addressed with words that reiterate the necessity and impossibility of confronting the death of his child. She maintains that,

> From this perspective, the trauma that the dream, as an awakening, reenacts is not only the missed encounter with the child's death but also the way in which that missing also constitutes the very survival of the father. His survival must no longer be understood, in other words, merely as an accidental living beyond the child, but rather as a mode of existence determined by the impossible structure of the response. (Caruth, 1996: 100)

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[13] For Caruth (1996: 91), trauma is 'the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena'.

The words in the dream reenact a missed encounter. This missed encounter is not that the father cannot see that his child is burning, but that he *fails to see it in time*. As Caruth puts it, what this interpretation demonstrates is that we can only be addressed at the wrong time. Consequently, we must rehearse a mode of existence based on the idea that a missed interpellation is the only possible interpellation. Going back to Nicolás, this is precisely what his 'dream' cannot integrate. His libidinal investment in this signifier seems to be a way of imaginarily avoiding the trauma of the revolt's call by assuming only its impossibility but not its necessity. Confronted with an impossible (yet necessary) interpellation, he identifies himself with the Other to be safe. This unconscious move, however, reenacts the missed encounter. Therefore, seeing things as a dream is Nicolás' way of sheltering himself from the real trauma of awakening.

From my interpretation it follows that the undoubtedly emancipatory motto 'Chile woke up' provoked intense subjective challenges amongst Chileans. Nicolás' speech is an attestation of this and his fantasy of sleeplessness an unconscious attempt at organising a possible solution. Torn between an exhausting interpellation and an equally distressing fear of not being the target of its call, it seems that, for him, one of the few unavoidable outcomes of the *estallido* is a subjective combustion. The revolt created the impression of an Other to whom nothing escapes its sight. In this context, the fight against the neoliberal lethargy adopts the form of endless daytime scrutiny. Nicolás identifies himself with the Other to appease this pressure, even at the cost of increasing its grip. Ironically, what this emancipatory Other shares in common with the neoliberal, oppressive Other is a façade of solidity—as though they *really* can see everything. What they both 'overlook' is the fact that, as Copjec (2015: 36) reminds us, 'when you encounter the gaze of the Other, you meet not a seeing eye but a blind one'. The Other might be the site where interpellation comes from, yet this is a call that, rather than seeing, gropes the subject.

Hence, Nicolás' experience shows that, even—or perhaps especially—amidst emancipatory settings, desire springs from the failure of the interpellative call, not from its success.

THE FANTASY OF IMMEDIACY

> We took the streets over and raised our cell phones to warn them that we were listening to them, that we were their eyewitnesses, that we will be there vigilant so that nothing, nothing, NOTHING ever again, would go unregistered or be denied. Our cameras were eyes without eyelids or eyelashes cherishing evidence. (Meruane, 2021: 52)

The previous fantasy was structured around the pervasiveness of the Other's sight. My material suggests, however, that the excessiveness of the Other of the *estallido* can have multiple visual expressions. As the mutilated eyes referred to above expose in all its cruelty, police brutality and human rights violations were the contemptible hallmark of the political response to the *estallido*. Several national and international reports helped to put into perspective the magnitude of this institutional abuse. Due to their timid, and sometimes almost non-existent, coverage of this situation, a steady and ever-growing sense of distrust towards traditional media gained traction among the population. A partisan divide between 'them' and 'us' emerged as a result. In one of the few available books in English about the revolt, the authors quote the testimony of a local architect for whom, insofar as they represent 'the state's agenda', television and newspapers can no longer be trusted. 'The agenda of the streets, the public's agenda', he clarifies, 'is written on the city's walls and on Instagram' (Gordon-Zolov

& Zolov, 2022: 9). At first sight, his punchline, 'and on Instagram', sounds intriguing. If the walls on the street were yelling at you, as María put it in the previous section, then social media seems to exert a similar interpellative call. Taking this as my starting point, in what follows I explore some of the effects that the centrality of social media and digital platforms had on the libidinal economy of the *estallido*.

Combating (mis)representation

A few days after the revolt took place, the art gallery CIMA—'summit' in English—launched a significant project that catapulted them into the limelight. Taking advantage of the gallery's location, the top of a building immediately abutting Dignity Square, they installed a camera that recorded activity in the square at all times while broadcasting the live content through their YouTube channel. The camera was christened 'CENTINELA' [sentinel], a term derived from the Italian *sentinella*, which in turn appeals to the idea of perceiving or feeling something. A sentinel is a watchman, often a soldier whose remit is to watch over the position entrusted to her or him; in short, someone to whom no action can go unseen. CENTINELA's motto was 'to observe, communicate, and persist is an act of resistance'. The logic underpinning this project is briefly described on its YouTube channel: the camera's aim is to 'show live the reality of the demonstrations' for an audience 'interested in the truth that the hegemonic press doesn't show', thus creating 'a historical archive born out of urgency, ensuring the permanence of memory within everyone's reach'. CIMA's project can be understood, then, as a manoeuvre to counter the dissemination of the state's agenda through the hegemonic media by directly and continuously broadcasting the revolt.

Settling the debate about when the *estallido* ended is presumably an infructuous endeavour. The waning of its energy at the beginning of 2020 is irrefutable and the severe limitations of social interactions

imposed by the political response to the pandemic marked for many a point of no return. Yet this is far from a consensus. Not many, however, would dare to claim that the *estallido* is currently in good health. I am writing this section at the end of January 2023, at a time when many, if not all of the political victories stemming from the revolt have been reversed and its original spirit crushed. CENTINELA, nonetheless, continues recording. The fact that no demonstrator has set foot on the square in months, possibly years, does not seem like a strong enough reason to stop. The recording has carried on uninterruptedly for 1,201 days and counting. But perhaps even more surprising is the fact the live stream still has a handful of viewers. CIMAS's project, this sort of officially unofficial broadcaster of the revolt, exhibits an unwavering commitment to its goal.

In the most intense months of the *estallido*, however, CIMA's project was the pinnacle of the attempts at counterbalancing the revolt's representation on mainstream platforms. 'There's no decent mass media in this country', is Rodrigo's opinion, the director of a PhD in Literature. His stance is a generalised one. As soon as the words came out of his mouth, he realises how moralising the statement is, so he qualifies it by adding that they simply 'aren't up to the task'. It is worth emphasising that this is not merely a disagreement on the angle from which events are presented, but the task Rodrigo is pointing out is the silence regarding human rights violations. Accompanied with a telling and apparently unintended pun, Isabel—a scholar at the largest public university in the country—gives me a description of the situation: 'Twitter exploded, I mean, Twitter was the way to find out what was happening, you know? The issue of human rights violations would have been impossible to know without Twitter because there was no other way'. The *estallido*, so to speak, detonated twice; insofar as the explosion on the streets was not being registered properly, a virtual explosion occurred on social media.

Let me look at this duality closer. Arturo is a PhD researcher in American Studies. He is interested in the unfolding of visual memory in the revolt, having already published one article on the matter. At several points during our interview, he emphasises that 'the *estallido* is mainly a visual thing; it's an extremely visual phenomenon'. For him, this feature is contingent on the current importance attributed to social media. And similar to most of my interviewees, he links this characteristic with the cleavage state/people: 'There's the official discourse, propagated by the news, the newspapers, for example, that presents an image of the *estallido*, but we have these other images that circulate on social media; the videos, the pictures, the selfies'. The frontier separating 'them' from 'us' is then a dispute over the visualisation of the revolt, the manner in which the latter is translated into images. This position can be perceived as a reversal of the logic structuring the fantasy of sleeplessness: whilst in that case the intention is to forbear from any definition of the revolt by avoiding its turning into an image, here the goal is to incessantly capture the event in order to reveal the truth obfuscated by the official discourse.

Recourses to the opposition between state/people or official/alternative as a manner to justify this impulse for registering and broadcasting the revolt can also be found in other parallel events (Bevins, 2023). The revolts of Tunisia in 2010, Egypt in 2011, and Lebanon in 2019—the latter occurring literally the day before the Chilean one—exhibit a strikingly similar pattern, despite the significant differences in terms of the oppressiveness of their governments in comparison to Chile (El-Fattah, 2021; Herrera, 2014; Kozman, 2023). In all these cases, social media have played a role in organising demonstrations, disseminating information, and denouncing police brutality and human rights violations. Arturo's speech follows this same rationale: 'That's why the use of pictures and videos was so important during the revolt: many denunciations, for example, were made thanks to pictures and videos'. This is, without a

shadow of a doubt, an accurate description of how things unfolded during the *estallido*. From day one, I myself recall dreading picking up my phone in the morning because I knew in advance what I was in for: dozens of videos displaying unmerciful and remorseless police officers in what can only be described as a carnage. Yet, as disheartening as this was, it was important to know. This is why, for Arturo, 'the use of the camera, yeah, I believe that the use of the camera in the *estallido* was very important'.

His speech, however, also allows us to glimpse other effects derived from this dynamic. Since he immediately jumped from the idea of the vision to an actual device (the camera), after the last quotation I requested him to develop that train of thought further. His answer was as follows:

> Yeah, cos, above all [*todo*] the camera on your mobile, I mean, the fact that we now have a camera on our mobile and we can register everything [*todo*] at all [*todo*] times, and all [*todos*] of us, I believe, have registers of being on the streets, or we have collected pictures, let's say, of what the demonstrations were like.

The foregoing is a seemingly uninteresting vignette. Indeed, it appears to be a rather uninspired description of what most Chileans involved in demonstrations must have done, so it does not seem worth pondering much of its content. The fashion in which this generalised activity is delivered, on the other hand, hints at significant symbolic associations. In the confined space of just two lines, Arturo's speech gets saturated by a single signifier: *todo* [all, everything], the totality. Since now we carry a camera with us 'everywhere' we go, we can register 'everything' we see, a practice that, in this day and age, 'everybody' partakes in. Even the first iteration of *todo*, meant to be a simple connector that lends emphasis to the statement, is illustrative: 'above all [*todo*] the camera on your mobile, I mean…' When taken literally, does not this resonate with CIMA's project? Just like the sentinel's lens that hovers

over 'everyone' in Dignity Square, Arturo's camera is also on top of 'everything'.

The duty of seeing everything

This unanticipated and cramped eruption of the signifier of totality is far from an exception. Carmen is a PhD researcher in social sciences. She will make an important appearance in a section of the next chapter, so I will spare some details here. The revolt found her in London starting her MA at a prestigious university and, after a moment of hesitation, she decided to study the *estallido*. When she went over that period during our interview, she mentions an abrupt mood swing. At first, prior to actively researching the event, she kept herself away from the news. 'For my own mental health', she recognises, 'my decision was to stop seeing Instagram, stop seeing Twitter, to take some distance and focus on my experience in London'. Not to see was her way of remaining mentally in one piece, a completely reasonable and, based on the similarities of our experiences in geographical terms, relatable decision. She then opted for studying the *estallido* and from there things moved quickly. Such a decision 'meant an important change because I kinda threw myself into receiving all [*toda*] the information that I had originally closed myself off to'. At this very point, a recollection comes to her mind: deciding to study the revolt coincided with her starting jogging. So she goes:

> I started jogging in London, to enlarge the cliché even more haha, and, and I jogged while listening to podcasts, podcasts, podcasts, podcasts about everything [*todo*], and all [*todo*] this to understand what the fuck was happening in this country. But also endless calls with friends, so they could tell me how was... like everything [*todo*], everything [*todo*]; I was trying to connect more with how things were lived here, and discuss all [*todo*] about politics with everyone [*todos*], in every [*todo*] possible way. It was like opening

up again and I started reading a lot, even if little had been produced, I mean, cos there was not much academic production at that point, but like all [*todas*] kinds of experiences—everything [*todo*], everything [*todo*] served me for that purpose.

After her initial refusal to see, deciding to study the revolt made her want to see everything. But not just that. When we pair Arturo's line on mobile phones ('we can register everything [*todo*] at all [*todo*] times, and all [*todos*] of us, I believe, have registers…') next to Carmen's passage on her chatting with friends ('… and discuss all [*todo*] about politics with everyone [*todos*], in every [*todo*] possible way') we can identify a staggering structural equivalence. Here, to see everything is not enough. Both of them concur in the fact that everything must be seen all the time and from every angle. Meruane's triple 'nothing' in the epigraph of this section ('nothing, nothing, NOTHING ever again, would go unregistered') finds in the experiences of Arturo and Carmen almost a direct, positive correlation—since *every* front is covered at *all* times, *everything* becomes visible.

One aspect of Carmen's excerpt seems worth further stressing. Her remembrance begins with an activity ostensibly unrelated to the rest of the narration, which is jogging. She refers to this in strictly colloquial terms; she was enjoying herself in London and, at some point, she took advantage of the city's amenities to start exercising. Significantly, her eagerness to engage in physical activity transpired precisely when she made up her mind about researching the revolt. Furthermore, from the range of possibilities available to her, she opted to run. All of this may well be a fortuitous coincidence, yet my interpretation so far suggests an alternative route. When our eyes go over all the reiterations of '*todo*' in the transcribed vignette, do not we get the impression that she is effectively running in the symbolic plane? The seemingly endless repetition of the same word line after line evokes a chasing, an uninterrupted attempt at reaching the next one as fast as she is

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capable of. For Carmen, seeing everything from every angle and at all times puts her on a sort of symbolic treadmill, permanently accelerating so as not to lose sight of anything.

As tempting as it might be to draw parallels between this insatiable appetite for seeing everything and the figure of the panopticon, there is a crucial difference. As it is well-known, Michel Foucault posited the panopticon as the linchpin of the disciplinary society. He identified in Bentham's architectural project of surveillance the dissociation of the see/being seen dyad; the inmate is seen but he does not see (that he is being seen). For Foucault, panoptic spatial arrangements are laboratories of power insofar as they allow an infinitesimal distribution of power relations. The separation of the see/being seen dyad, therefore, means that even if the surveillance is discontinuous its effects are nonetheless permanent. The reason behind this is simple: surveillance has been internalised. Accordingly, Foucault (1995: 201) claims that 'inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers'. Like the panopticon, the impetus for an uninterrupted registering of the revolt also aspires to achieve full visibility—in this case, against the partiality of the official view. Unlike the panopticon, however, this process is not sustained upon the divide of the see/being seen dyad. Quite the opposite, registering the revolt implies being seen seeing, a particular mix of exhibitionism and voyeurism. If, again, the goal is that nothing can go unregistered, this includes the subjects registering everything. I will come back to this point in the conclusion.

The final example that helps me fully delineate this dynamic comes from Daniela, a PhD researcher in social sciences based in Valparaíso. She is a historian, a leftist militant, and someone not particularly lucky, considering that the month before the revolt began she injured her knee while playing on sand dunes. As a consequence, she had to design intricate strategies in order to partake in demonstrations as she

never vacillated about being part of them. The crutches she needed to get around implied a significant obstacle not only to completing the rally's route, but even more to a quick getaway in case the situation on the street would get out of hand, which was more the rule than the exception. Despite her precautionary measures, several times she found herself in unsafe surroundings. In our interview, she devoted a good amount of time to talk about her experience and that of her friends on the streets. All this while she constantly highlighted the importance of images for such an experience. In a line tantamount to Arturo's, she mentioned that the revolt 'I think, totally, it was a visual event. And social media as well as the use of the internet and all that spread it like, booom! tremendously'. She then compares this situation with the dictatorship by referring to the 2006 documentary *The City of Photographers*, revolving around the importance of a group of lensmen for the registering of different facets of the totalitarian oppression on the streets. For her, the circumstances are dramatically different inasmuch as in 2019 everybody is a photographer, so 'now we could all do something and doing it was a duty [*deber*]'. I asked her to expand on this precise idea. For the sake of readability, my interpretation will proceed by dividing her full answer into two vignettes.

How come [a duty]?

Like to register it, you know? Like the register becomes… registering as a duty [*deber*], as if you see [*ves*] someone being beaten up you had to register it, and in many cases, for the denunciation, it was like "does anyone have photos of this or that moment?" Like the accusation that could later be made through the National Institute of Human Rights had to, for the most part, though not necessarily, but hopefully we had a register of what happened because that gave it more validity, and since everyone [*todos*] has registers of everything [*todo*], we looked out for them— "hey, in such and such corner", whatever. For example, what

happened to this guy who fell into a hole in downtown Santiago, which is terrible because one of my dear friends was running alongside him and saw when he fell, and she was running next to the guy, you know? And she was running and suddenly poof! the guy disappeared mate, and she told me that she kept on running, you know? She kept on running, and the bloke died. And she told me "fuck! If I only had had like the register of that". Like if she had been running and registering the thing, which is kinda crazy, but there are people who do it haha.

The excerpt confronts us, yet again, with the same rationale behind the act of registering discernible in the speeches of Arturo and Carmen, that is, fighting back police brutality and the official construction of the revolt's visual landscape. Moreover, Daniela reiterates the comprehensive motif—everyone registering everything—I have been stressing in my interpretation. Her reply, however, adds other crucial associations. My intervention for further clarification was triggered by the sudden entrance of the signifier 'duty', arriving at the conversation out of the blue. Subsequently, she insisted on the equivalence registering = duty, which is in solidarity with the narrative of resisting the government's oppression—when they are blinding demonstrators, you ought to do something. But when we isolate this signifier from the discourse formation providing its imaginary stabilisation, other interpretive possibilities unlock.

Daniela deploys the term '*deber*', a polysemic notion. As mentioned above, her clear intention is to convey a strong sense of duty, a collective responsibility for combating the state's repression through multimedia registers. Unlike English though, in Spanish *deber* also means 'being indebted'. A case can be made, thus, that this sort of accountability for the other in the revolt (*deber* as duty) comes with the perception of liability (*deber* as indebtedness); something is owed or due. But with a small twist, even a third association appears.

Resorting to a scansion, *deber* can be turned into *de-ver*, two words phonetically indistinguishable from the former that mean 'to see'. Taking into account these three possibilities, a significant displacement becomes noticeable. By definition, registering is necessarily a selective activity; it entails a scrupulous examination of something to find a potentially hidden element. We can then pair registering next to the figure of the witness, since the latter is someone who has been in the presence of something and can testify accordingly. When we follow Daniela's speech, nonetheless, the valence of registering undergoes a transformation—the register is stripped of the invariably occasional and discontinuous terrain of the witness to be allocated in the uninterrupted and permanent domain of seeing. 'Registering as a duty [*deber*], as if you see [*ver*]…' is the key line here: 'duty' (*deber*) and 'to see' (*de-ver*) become one and the same thing, entailing a peculiar dialectic between the duty of seeing and the seeing of duty. In the midst of the *estallido*, therefore, the vision was turned into an unfailingly moral activity.

Replying to the Other's impossible call

Let me go back to the excerpt with the above in mind. Two mutually reinforcing aspects from her examples are important for my interpretation. First, there is an overt ambiguity between the reasons provided by Daniela for registering the revolt and the actual (excessive) attachment to this activity. She exemplifies how much of a responsibility it was to register the revolt by mentioning the formal denunciations made through the National Institute of Human Rights. Nonetheless, the initial peremptory nature of this injunction is drastically qualified in the same line: visual evidence was mandatory 'for the most part, though not necessarily, but hopefully' since that would give it 'more validity'. Regardless of how accurate this appreciation may be, an internal inconsistency emerged in her speech

through her dithering, a vacillation pointing towards a dimension of this duty that extends beyond its acknowledged reasons. Second, the anecdote of her friend moves in the same direction. On 27 December, a 33-year-old construction worker who was escaping from the police's deterrence tactics fell into a power line pit covered in water and died. Daniela's friend was running next to him. It is hard to find a clearer instantiation of the excessive character of the duty of seeing: at a moment in which her friend could have imagined literally anything—imagine, for instance, him not falling into the pit—she bemoaned not having a recording of the tragedy. As it were, no matter how fast we may run, reaching something beyond the register seems literally unimaginable. Although fleetingly, Daniela snapped out of the grip of this excessiveness when, upon reflection, she realises how 'crazy' this sounds, yet she almost instantly discarded it to carry on with her original position.

Daniela's reply, as I mentioned, was a long and significant one. Another example came to her recollection as soon as she finished talking about her friend. Without a pause, she proceeded to share the experience of her partner's flatmates, who devoted time and energy to registering the revolt. Her associations are, once again, immensely rich.

And the other thing is that just at that time, I was in close contact with some guys and one of them began to record daily videos of the *estallido* in Valparaíso. I have the Instagram and everything [*todo*] if you want it later; they are remarkable. So I saw how he came home, where I stayed, my partner lived with him, then he came home and said "alright, I'm gonna start editing", and bum! and he edited and made some beautiful videos, you know?, with everything [*todo*] that had happened that day, he put it like an intro; it was like the kind of thing like when you go to an event, an event like about whatever, like ermmm, like an event like, I think, I don't

know… I'm gonna go to the CLACSO [conference, in Mexico], then you're gonna go to this thing and the first day a video will come out, like a recording, it's like a ritual recording; of course, it has a logic of registering it but it is also like a ritual you're in. But at some point, it turned weird; you've been making videos for 15 days, this guy was like, of course, "nah, I can't do it every [*todos*] day", that is, "I can't anymore, I can't go to the rallies every [*todos*] day either". Suddenly, man, I've been going for 15 days, 20 days, I'm tired, I'm gonna stay here. That was strange, like missing one day.

My attention is drawn to two aspects of this quotation: the usage of the terms 'event' and 'ritual'. Daniela received first-hand knowledge about the crafting of videos on the *estallido*. Beautiful videos containing everything [*todo*] that happened on the street. At the moment she starts describing the editing process, all of a sudden, her words seem to vanish. She refers to the revolt as an 'event' but as soon as she found that association, she evidently struggles to continue ('an event like about whatever, like ermmm, like an event like, I think, I don't know'). Something comes to her mind though. Daniela makes a symbolic bridge between this event and an academic one, the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) conference, which she would attend later that year. Established in 1967, CLACSO encompasses over 800 postgraduate and research centres in 55 countries. Amongst its explicit aims, the promotion, development, and consolidation of critical thinking are at the top. Its annual conference, the one Daniela alludes to, is the biggest hub of academic transformative knowledge in the region. And yet, all this is reduced in her speech to a visual register, a 'ritual recording'.

The revolt can indeed be described as an event, that is, as the opening up of a new and unforeseeable horizon of possibilities. However, in Daniela's speech the *estallido* is not granted such a lofty status. Quite the contrary, her use of 'event' is closer to a social event,

a programmed and anticipated gathering—much like a well-organised academic conference. This latter sense of event occurs, it is important to highlight, when the revolt is turned into a video. 'Everything' [*todo*] is meticulously edited, framed within a certain narrative, synchronised with the music; it is transformed into a spellbinding offering to the eyes. However, and apparently in the same way we do with academic conferences, it gets ritualised. Daniela draws two equivalences here: revolt = conference = event, on the one hand, and revolt = conference = ritual, on the other. The link between them is the act of registering. And at this precise point, we can appreciate a tone of disappointment in her response. She began with an animated description of the recordings only to dilute such enthusiasm in convention. A ritual is precisely that, a set of rules organising a ceremony. Rituals are solemn acts people have become accustomed to; nothing within a ritual is out of the ordinary as the rules are explicitly in place to prevent such an outcome. In an ironic twist, the *estallido*, that transformative event if ever there was one in Chile, was discursively turned into a custom for the sake of its own preservation.

The last part of the vignette can be understood as the combined subjective effect of the three *deber*: the duty, the act of seeing, and indebtedness. Daniela reaches the end of her reply sounding dejected. Something seemed off to her; after a certain number of videos, her friends can no longer keep up with 'everything' [*todo*] and tiredness arrives. 'That was strange, like missing one day' is how the quotation ends. I asked her back what she felt in that situation, and she was emphatic: 'Guilt, you feel guilty'. Here, she shifts to her experience and the feeling of being in debt protrudes: 'I've got things to do, you know? I can't be on the street every [*todo*] day; there was a point when it was like, like it was no longer possible'. Daniela's account differs very little from what someone behind in her payments could say, the only discrepancy is the nature of the fee. From the particular angle adopted in this section, the revolt's currency is the register. Based on the

experiences analysed above, the virtually interminable succession of images, videos, and selfies around the *estallido* was, among other things, a way of responding to a call of duty. Answering to this (interpellative) call of duty involved an unconscious attachment: the moral investment of seeing and a sense of indebtedness. At a subjective level, this means that seeing itself acquires a symptomatic character— seeing everything is turned into a morally binding yet unattainable activity.

My interpretation suggests that what supports this dynamic is what I will call the fantasy of immediacy. In each one of the experiences explored above the sublimation of registering as one of the most important activities during the revolt is discernible. This is portrayed as an act of resistance and it surely was. Nonetheless, the imaginary kernel of this process is that, irrespective of the veracity of the claim, a crucial aspect is selectively obfuscated: mediation. The divide they/us undergirding the rationalisations of the permanent recordings maintains that the *estallido* has been wrongly or partially represented by a media subservient to the state's agenda. In opposition, thousands of recording devices on the street tried to present (not to re-present) the revolt in itself, how things really were out there. Somehow, despite all their crafting, engineering, broadcasting, and editing, let alone their narrativisation, these registers are perceived as direct and unmediated expressions of the revolt. To the state/people and official/alternative cleavages organising the discourses around the registering of the event, we must append the imaginary mediated/unmediated frontier.

By following and isolating some of the terms used to narrate the experiences of my interviewees, we are able to access a different libidinal economy underpinning the visual reality of the revolt than that analysed above. Registering the events on the street was not just an activity but also a signifier, that is, a symbolic piece allowing these

subjects to navigate the desire of the Other of the *estallido*. They felt interpellated as subjects who have the duty [*deber*] to see [*de-ver*] everything [*todo*]. Unlike Nicolás and the fantasy of sleeplessness, Arturo, Carmen, and Daniela *did try* to respond to this interpellation that, nonetheless, was proven excessive. In other words, they could not gain recognition from the call of the Other—they could not see everything—and consequently libidinised the 'register' in order to endure this misrecognition. Within this fantasmatic realm, they squared this impasse with their conscious life yet reproducing the original impossibility. They became the bearers of something that should not be there; the representatives of something that eludes all representation, annulling themselves.

One of the consequences of the above is that mediation is always-already posited as external, an exclusive property of power structures. In a word, mediation is invariably deceitful. Since that is the case, the incessant registering of the revolt can be interpreted as an unconscious attempt to turn representation into the direct presentation of facts. This is why the uninterrupted nature of this endeavour is crucial—everything must be registered from every corner *at all times*. The ceaselessness of this activity is what ultimately keeps the illusion of wholeness. But, at the same time, it gives birth to a hoarder subject for whom accumulation (of registers) is the ultimate goal. The cases of Arturo, Carmen, and Daniela analysed here hint at a kind of rapacious disposition to have it all, an acquisitive propensity for stockpiling 'everything'. However, their own experiences indicate that this is ultimately an impossible enterprise. The sustenance of the imaginary of immediacy requires an indefatigable subject who, needless to say, does not exist.

In order to maintain the imaginary frontier of immediacy, within this libidinally-charged narrative truth is equated with the factual—although a very *ad hoc* idea of the latter. Unintendedly, the revolt

becomes a sort of pristine phenomenon that must remain untouched, immaculate. By means of this feature of the fantasy of immediacy, we can understand how the visual manufacturing of the *estallido*, under the guise of a call of duty, is subjectively 'registered' as non-mediated. Put succinctly, people's mediation is equivalent to immediacy. As ever, Lina Meruane shrewdly captures this dynamic. The idea according to which 'our cameras were eyes without eyelids or eyelashes cherishing evidence' encapsulates this rejection of any kind of mediation. It is as though, in order to resist, we should face no resistance, not even that of our eyelids or eyelashes.

In the last instance, what the fantasy of immediacy fails to recognise is the noncoincidence between factual and truth. When mediation becomes synonymous with power, as is the case here, a fetishisation of facts takes shape—protestors resolve into *de facto* empiricists. As I have shown, this is a fantasmatic scenario insofar as the only way of dodging (symbolic) mediation is, so to speak, by turning a blind eye to it. Going back to the beginning of this section, CIMA's project dismally but eloquently epitomises the fantasy of immediacy. The sentinel was the subjective prototype springing from this fantasy, yet only a machine could do the job. And, since the camera cannot feel the pang of guilt of indebtedness, that eye without eyelids or eyelashes, freed from any restriction, keeps patrolling the roundabout. CIMA's registering device is one of the few holdovers from that chaotic period. It is still seeing everything even if 'everything' is no longer there.

CONCLUSIONS

The interpretation I have offered in this chapter focuses on the fantasmatic recompositions of seeing during the revolt. By chasing the movement of signifiers in the speech of scholars and researchers, my analysis demonstrates that there is nothing straightforward about the act of seeing—no 'brute vision'—especially amid a nationwide popular

uprising. This is the case not exclusively because we are always exposed to contingent and asymmetrical distributions of the visible and the invisible, but also, and crucially, since human beings do not look with their eyes but with their desire; at least it is the latter that orients the former. The visual field, in a word, is as incomplete as the discursive field. So, in the same way we require imaginary supplements to stabilise meaning, seeing stands in need of a fantasmatic formation for its support. Both the fantasies of sleeplessness and of immediacy emerge as imaginary 'solutions' to the Other's interpellation in the visual field. In the context of the symbolic post-neoliberal organisation brought about by the *estallido*, subjects were confronted with the question: *what does the Other want me to see?*

Reconstructing the imaginary narratives allowing critical academics to answer this question is a way of exploring how the desire for change was framed. Inasmuch as their subjectivity is shaped in relation to the good of social change (Critchley, 2008), the new symbolic organisation of the social elicited novel ways of subjective self-shaping, both conscious and unconscious. My interpretation demonstrates that the latter were significantly intense for subjects. Among the peculiarities of this process, my material shows that rather than solving problems, fantasies displace them. The more scholars and researchers talked about something seemingly as simple as looking, the more certain signifiers become grumes or clots in the speech's stream. These libidinised symbolic knots reveal attachments beyond reasonableness through which critical subjects can cope with the desire of the Other of the *estallido*. Some features of these attachments allow further development.

The fantasy of sleeplessness can be read as the unconscious flipside of the revolt's motto 'Chile woke up'. The liberating impulse springing from the *estallido* coalesced symbolically around one of the most

emblematic critical procedures, namely, the capacity to see how things really are behind the veil of ideology. As a result of the revolt, so the narrative goes, Chileans were no longer under the soporific effects of the different expressions of neoliberal oppression. The *estallido*, thus, is largely regarded as a collective awakening from subjugation. However, this emancipatory 'invitation' to identify as an awakened subject was also experienced as a disproportionate demand. Although indubitably metaphoric in intention, the idea of waking up led to the mandate not to fall asleep (ever again). Being awake and not sleeping are very different in nature. So, in order to sustain the redemptive aspect of the revolt, a very literal yet unconscious refusal to *fall* asleep emerged. One of the results was a fatigued subject that has to go to great imaginary lengths to find some rest within a context in which falling asleep is equivalent to being duped.[14] I will suggest that the fantasy of sleeplessness can be more thoroughly understood as a response to a paradigmatically hallucinatory dimension of the motto 'Chile woke up'.

Commonly, hallucinations are defined as erroneous perceptions; more precisely, as perceptions without objects. For different reasons, ranging from defective cognitive monitoring to functional differences in brain activity, we are capable of seeing things that simply are not there, a feature largely attached to psychoses. The psychoanalytic tradition, however, has broken with the stubborn idea that hallucinations are an abnormal phenomenon. By way of example, Wilfred Bion distinguished between insane and sane psychotics while Donald Winnicott maintained that hallucinations are not an illness but a characteristic of the process of dream formation (Rose, 2004). Taking a step forward in this direction, Lacan uncoupled his theory of

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[14] This echoes the testimony of insomniacs. As Marie Darrieussecq (2023: 129) acknowledges: 'I don't know any lazy insomniacs. I only know exhausted insomniacs. Insomniacs stay in bed in order to sleep, and don't sleep. They are desperately in search of sleep time, time that is always lost'.

hallucinations from the premise of erroneous perception *tout court*. The inaccuracy or unreality of hallucinatory perceptions is here totally unimportant; what actually matters is their subjective effect. Hallucinations belong to the register of interpellation and allude to the Other, 'a term that is invariably present but never seen and never named except indirectly' (Lacan, 1997a: 256). Following Stijn Vanheule (2011), from a Lacanian perspective, hallucinations are an impasse with the Other in the form of an interruption in signification. Certain events, on account of their radical strangeness in relation to a given system of signification, are impossible to bring into coherence with other experiences of the subject. Hallucinations, then, point to this inconsistency in our identifications insofar as the subject does not coincide with its hallucination but instead is subjected to it.

Based on this non-pathological conceptualisation of hallucinations, the substratum of the latter is not 'reality' but words. One expression of this verbal process is the 'message phenomenon'. Since meaning is always a retroactive creation—it is the punchline that backwardly stabilises a sentence—incomplete or unfinished sentences are indicative of interruptions in the process of meaning-making. This deferred punctuation is what characterises message phenomena: 'the interrupted sentence fails to convey a message but a movement of anticipating meaning is established […], this interruption leads to a situation of enigma and suspension for the subject' (Vanheule, 2011: 97). Differently put, identifications cannot be sustained amid unfinished sentences and this precipitates a hastiness in the subject so as to recalibrate its relationship with the Other. 'Chile woke up' stands as a primary example of deferred punctuation. Even if we accept that the country was indeed brought out of its dormancy by the revolt, it is absolutely unclear what Chile woke up *to*.

In this precise and circumscribed sense, it can be said that the fantasy of sleeplessness hints at a hallucinatory dimension of the

estallido. Once the latter starts functioning as the Other, the point of reference for interpellation, some subjective challenges arise. Through the motto 'Chile woke up', the Other (of the revolt) provided the grounds for new meaning formations but put the responsibility for cushioning them upon the subject's shoulders. This is its unfinished or deferred facet. Therefore, the unconscious effects of 'Chile woke up' can be interpreted as hallucinatory insofar as the *estallido* gives rise to an unchained signifier that leaves the subject forlorn in the search for meaning. To the extent that Chile simply woke up but never woke up 'to' something in particular, the relationship between the subject and the Other was a particularly problematical one—the emancipatory invitation to recognise oneself as an awakened subject was imbued with misrecognition. Nicolás' fantasy was a way of navigating this situation.

The missing 'to', the unchained signifier in the narrative of the national awakening, further illuminates the singular relationship with the Other in the fantasy of sleeplessness. The metaphorical embellishment of the idea of 'never' falling asleep again acquires an unconscious literalness precisely at the moment when the Other of the *estallido* is not there punctuating its meaning. This uninterrupted succession of possibilities turns the revolt into an unregisterable event in the subject's experience to the extent that any identification with it has been left adrift. Hence, the fantasy of sleeplessness is not so much a way of regaining a solid identification *with* the revolt but an unconscious strategy to *avoid* this traumatic call (in Caruth's terms) as such through a direct identification with the Other. 'Seeing things as a dream' is Nicolás' singular way of dodging the shortcomings of interpellation amid the *estallido* by imaginarily adopting the position of the Other, the place from which interpellation is launched. This is why his speech reproduces the logic of deferred punctuation when he talks about the 'uncapturable' nature of the *estallido* through an 'association without associativity' or the act of 'talking without talking'.

As a response to the Other sidestepping the 'to' in the formulation 'Chile woke up', Nicolás unconsciously circumvents the impossibility of falling asleep during the *estallido* by 'seeing' things as a dream.

The idea of a traumatic call or radical unregisterability of the *estallido* is the perfect segue into the fantasy of immediacy. At a first glance, that is to say at the level of meaning, the latter is an antipode to the fantasy of sleeplessness. So much so, that instead of a sheer reluctance to capture the revolt in images, the goal here is to register it visually at all times. Literally, to never fall asleep. In this sense, CIMA's counter-hegemonic project *CENTINELA* stands as the realisation of the motto 'Chile woke up': the possibility of eyes that never go to sleep. Explicitly presented as an attempt to break from the misinformation of traditional media when it comes to human rights violations, the point was to expose the divide between the state's agenda and the people's agenda. In other terms, this can be understood as a collective endeavour to resist state surveillance by means of a generalised sousveillance. Subjectively speaking, however, this act of resistance entailed sinuous unconscious dynamics. As the experiences of Arturo, Carmen, and Daniela evince, fighting the government's power turned the act of seeing into an unabating moral duty that plunged people into a permanent state of symbolic indebtedness. The implicit understanding of 'representation' springing from this resistance during the *estallido* deserves closer inspection.

What is fundamentally at stake in the fantasy of immediacy is the relationship between visibility and knowledge. Since traditional media aligned with the state are deliberately not showing (making invisible) a significant aspect of what is happening on the streets, part of the population remains ignorant about human rights violations and police brutality. The lack of knowledge identified in this narrative is remedied not simply with visibility, but with *permanent* visibility. Now, this sort of checkmate move against institutional power is

sustained upon a problematic assumption: the representation of the revolt is so partial and biased that, ultimately, we are exposed to a misrepresentation of the situation, so the only thing left to do is to embark ourselves in the direct presentation of it. This abiding registering without an intermediary, as follows from CIMA's project, is the way to present 'the truth that the hegemonic media doesn't show'. Simply put, here truth is a) always something visible, and b) always something unmediated. As a consequence, mediation and invisibility become synonymous with (state) power strategies. The reduction of truth to recordable facts is, however, anything but obvious.

The reliance on direct and permanent recording of facts misses a crucial point, one with strenuous unconscious effects. The efforts to counter the ideological accounts of the *estallido* produced by the official media—a praiseworthy and much necessary task by the way—seem to equate all too quickly ideology with (symbolic) mediation. The logic goes as follows: since the state's media(tion) creates a partial image of the revolt, the 'people' have the duty to register the event in its entirety, without any mediation. The goal is here to avoid any opacity and that in turn means steering clear of mediation (= ideology = power). From within this narrative, this is the only way to expose the truth behind the veil of ideology. However, as the experiences interpreted above show, this attempt at gaining full mastery over the entire visual field of the revolt proved to be impracticable. Even more, the fact that this was impracticable and at the same time a call of duty was a fertile soil for the germination of both a deep sense of symbolic indebtedness and languishment. So, the more the subject tries/has to see 'everything', the further deepens the feeling of running on a treadmill that does not stop.

The fantasy of immediacy exhibits the subjective pitfalls of conflating ideology with mediation and facts with truth. Guided by the assumption that mediation is invariably an ideological manoeuvre that

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ensnares the subject in power relations, the goal of seeing everything ends up enmeshing academics in a subjective impasse. The reason for this lies in the semiotic structure of the visual field. Whereas the idea that representation is deceptive holds some accuracy, this is not the case because there is something behind the veil of ideology that can be immediately or directly presented. As Copjec (2015) reminds us, nothing stands behind representation *and yet* it always seems to hide something on account of the deceptiveness of language as such. Misrecognition is then unavoidable within the visual field and what we cannot see is how our desire deforms what we see. This is the opacity, the stain in Lacanian jargon, that the fantasy of immediacy tries to dispense with—to occult the gaze of the revolt. Ultimately, this fantasy conflates the eye and the gaze, bypassing the fact that seeing is profoundly unsatisfying since, as Lacan (1998: 103) puts it, '*you never look at me from the place from which I see you*' and, concurrently, '*what I look at is never what I wish to see*'. The feeling of being trapped on a treadmill chasing the infinite instantiations of 'everything' is an attestation of the inescapability of desire in the visual field—the stain that percolates enjoyment (a satisfaction within dissatisfaction) in the apparent direct act of seeing the revolt.

The fantasy of immediacy provides a desiring narrative that emphasises the opposite pole to that of the fantasy of sleeplessness. This becomes clear when we treat them as ways of facing what Caruth (1996) refers to as the trauma of awakening—the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of responding to someone's call. The fantasy of sleeplessness accepts this impossibility (I can never find recognition in the Other's call) but not its necessity (I nonetheless must wake up); whereas the fantasy of immediacy accepts its necessity (I must wake up) but not its impossibility (I never wake up at the right time). Within the imaginary formation of the fantasy of immediacy, the subject goes to great unconscious lengths in order to *fully recognise itself* in the call of the Other. The libidinisation of the act of registering is an attempt to

become an awakened subject 'all' of the time, with no possible misrecognition. In contradistinction, the starting point of the fantasy of sleeplessness is the acceptance that misrecognition is unavoidable, despite its necessity. Unable to appropriately respond to the interpellation of the Other of the *estallido*, the subject here unconsciously identifies with the caller and not the call. The libidinisation of the dream is a way of 'solving' the issue that answering the interpellation is not optional.

What these fantasies demonstrate are the difficulties of dealing with the fact that '*there is no right moment to awaken*' (Žižek, 2023: 1). As my interpretation evinces, despite their apparent opposition— avoiding any image, on the one hand, and permanent registering, on the other—both imaginary formations spring from the same incapacity to deal with the misrecognition of the Other. They organise libidinal economies that allow the subject to deal with this process. When we focus our attention on subjects who shape themselves in relation to the good of social change, we can perceive that the desire for change seems to be admissible exclusively in an unalloyed form. Either we reject it to the extent that we know it cannot be as pure as we want (fantasy of sleeplessness), or we accept it as long as it is unpolluted (fantasy of immediacy). And yet, these are problematic solutions since they first must accept what they reject; it is through this partial acceptance and partial rejection that these subjects manage to imaginarily frame their desire.

CHAPTER 5

FANTASMATIC (RE)COMPOSITIONS: WRITING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes a step further in my exploration of the unconscious life of the desire for change amid the *estallido*. Whilst the preceding focused on two imaginary scenes underpinning the act of seeing, the present is concerned with the fantasmatic scenarios that organise the act of writing. The prominence of this topic in the speech of my interviewees is not surprising. If 'to critique is to wish for and work toward change' (Ross, 2023: 101), this is something that critical subjects achieve primarily through their writing. The latter is a crucial aspect of the self-shaping of the critical subject. Consequently, I pay attention to how subjects take on a mixture of libidinally-charged signifiers to rearrange their academic identifications (and disidentifications) in regard to this activity.

By locating and isolating these signifiers, in the following sections I reconstruct three fantasies that can be read as subjective solutions to the challenge of writing critically in the aftermath of the revolt in Chile. In order to perform this activity, academics need to recognise themselves as critical subjects, which is not an immediate process. Once we treat the revolt as an emancipatory organisation of the social, such recognition requires new imaginary stabilisations. In this field, the subject is faced with the question: *what does the Other of the* estallido *want me to write as a critical subject?* This entails a reorganisation of the ways in which this question was unconsciously answered prior to the revolt, when the good of social change had a different meaning. As a result, the fantasies I interpret in this chapter are different modes of framing the desire for critique in relation to the

always enigmatic desire of the Other of the *estallido*. With their similarities and divergences, the fantasies of the impotent, clairvoyant, and powerless academic constitute variations of an overall attempt to recompose the imaginary scaffolding sustaining the identification of critical subjects in Chile.

The fantasies I identify and interpret in this chapter, most certainly, do not exhaust the unconscious economy of critique when it comes to academic writing during the revolt. Other configurations could be found and the isolated fashion in which I present the ones I have interpreted responds exclusively to a heuristic strategy. Quotidian life is already muddy enough to counter the pretence that in the turbulent and chaotic temporality of the revolt things would express themselves this clearly. As a consequence, there are good reasons to assume that, in real life, these fantasies might find multiple points of connection with each other and even overlap. Finally, it is worth noting that I am not suggesting the following fantasies are necessarily the sole creation of the *estallido*. Some of their components predate logically and temporarily October 2019, yet their unique combinations are unequivocally elicited by it.

THE FANTASY OF THE IMPOTENT ACADEMIC

It is 18 October 2022. I am in a café in South London writing this section exactly three years since the *estallido*. Earlier today, I listened to President Boric's address in commemoration of this anniversary. At some point of his speech, after lambasting factional takes on what happened in 2019, he unhesitatingly claimed that the *estallido* 'was an expression of the grievances and fractures in our society that politics, of which we are a part, has not been able to interpret or respond to'. The disorientation chalked up to the political domain at the end of this quotation is an attribute that can certainly be found outside these limits. As I have shown through my interpretation so far, scholars

experienced a cognate difficulty. An expression of the disorientation generated by the *estallido* is the fact that many interviewees claim not to know things. It is as though, all of a sudden, the readability of several dimensions of their lives simply went out of the window. Initially, however, it is important to distinguish between at least two kinds of not-knowing. First, most interviews ooze a profound existential or vital perplexity derived from a chaotic and unpredictable everyday life. The following excerpts express this state of affairs:

> [...] the *estallido* also intervened in my quotidian life, as in not knowing if I could go through the park or not because suddenly there were policemen on a motorcycle, you know? [...]. Ultimately, yeah, I didn't know what I'd find out there. (Catalina, researcher, PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies)

> [...] you didn't know how things could progress and reaching [the city of] Pucón was complicated, because the roads were cut off, I didn't know if I could get to Pucón [for my conference], you know? I asked myself "hey, can I get there or not?" (Verónica, scholar, PhD in American Studies)

> The morning after, well, I had a baby who had to drink a particular milk and everything was closed and we couldn't find the milk and we were running out and we had a feeling like "what the fuck?" Now, that's from like a material, everyday life point of view, and a friend of mine who lived nearby a drugstore that happened to be open bought me the milk. (Ramón, scholar, PhD in Critical Theory and Current Society)

Although the level of dramatism varies from case to case, the quoted fragments brightly illuminate perhaps the main tenet of everyday life during the revolt, namely, that people did not know how to carry on with their most prosaic pursuits. Everything that altered the straightforwardness of quotidian life happened on the street, a site where now you 'don't know what you would find'. Alongside this

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existential not-knowing, there is also what we might call a properly epistemic not-knowing. The boundary that marks where one begins and the other ends is, however, impossible to determine categorically. For the people interviewed and observed for my research, everyday life consisted not only of domestic chores, child rearing, or commuting, but it also entailed knowledge production. Knowledge production in written form, to be more precise. It is conceivable, then, that for those subjects that shape themselves according to the good of social change, epistemic 'knowing' might, to some extent at least, be experienced as a pedestrian activity as well, part of a larger routine. If epistemic knowing had any of this sense of naturalness for the participants of my study, the *estallido* wiped that off radically.

Activity as passivity

The case of Cristina, a Lecturer at the University of Valparaíso, wonderfully captures the difficulties of engaging with writing. The following is an excerpt from a moment in the interview when she began to describe her everyday life during October and November 2019:

> I didn't do anything, I didn't do anything because I considered that nothing was worthwhile, I mean, one couldn't pretend that nothing was happening, so I did nothing; I devoted myself to painting a wall in my house, which was the only thing I could do; it was unbearable, the anxiety was really unbearable, it was unbearable […]. I remember perfectly, I could even send you some pictures of the wall if you want. They were some little drawings; I used an insole for that and I painted them with a brush, with a tiny brush! I waited for it to dry a little to take the insole out so that it wouldn't get stained, I dried it up with the hairdryer and put it back on; so, it took me, I don't know, man, like five days. So, yeah, I did very little, I did very, very little. Now, all in all, I don't know how, I don't know how I've got like 5 things [academic articles];

every year I get like 5 or 8 publications and I'm like "where from?" I don't know where they came from, but even at that moment when I did nothing, something happened.

Many aspects of this fragment are worth underscoring. Cristina's interview was amongst the most challenging since the *estallido* left an indelible mark on her, a mark in the shape of helplessness. On several occasions, especially when her speech drew near to sorrowful memories, she pointed out she did not remember things very well. Her speech constantly oscillated between not recalling things or not wanting to recall things. Interestingly enough, painting a wall in her house is something she remembers 'perfectly'. Numerous factors could be at stake when interpreting the appeal of this recollection, but a case can be made that it has something to do with opposing the activeness of painting to the inactiveness of the revolt. According to her, the situation was unbearable since all she could do was wait; being active was a possibility only for those on the barricades or in political negotiations, and she did not partake in either. Cristina found herself in a situation she could not be in, an impossibility, yet instead of going out, where activity was for her, she remained indoors.

Moving from the deliberate meaning to her actual words, we can perceive a shift in where activity and passivity meet. Cristina's account of her everyday life during the revolt is consonant with the logic of symbolic satisfaction, exemplified by Lacan through the anorexic experience. In explaining the nature of symbolic satisfaction, Lacan advanced the idea that when the satisfaction of a need is replaced by a symbolic type of satisfaction it is not enough to say that the real, concrete object has been given the status of a symbol. What really matters, he insists, is that both the symbolic value and accent are in the field of activity, since it is the 'mode of apprehension' and not the object in itself that is granted a symbolic character. Such a character is the result of the eroticisation of an activity, the libidinal wrapping of

something that, through its recursiveness, provides us with a satisfaction that is not imprinted in the activity itself. Lacan's point is that, when it comes to object relations, objects are important yet not crucial—what is crucial is what we do with them.

In order to prove this, Lacan goes as far as to suggest that symbolic satisfaction can be obtained even when at stake there is no real object whatsoever. Only this can explain, for him, a symptom like anorexia. To lay stress on the object would make us lose sight of the fact that is not simply that the anorexic subject does not eat anything, but that the subject actively eats nothing. And that is possible since 'nothing' exists within the symbolic, so it can be eaten. Eating nothing is very different than the negation of an activity, and symbolic satisfaction can be derived from it: 'From this savoured absence as such, he [the anorexic] makes use of what he has in front of him, namely the mother on whom he depends. In virtue of this nothing, he makes her dependent on him' (Lacan, 2020: 177).

With this in mind, let me now go over Cristina's sequential claims at the beginning of the quotation: a) I didn't do anything, b) nothing was worthwhile, c) (one couldn't pretend that) nothing was happening, d) I did nothing. If read from a strictly symbolic perspective, where 'nothing' actually exists as a thing, the progression of her own speech hints at a content other than her intended meaning.

Moment 1: the emphasis is on the negation of an activity, namely, the fact that she did not do anything. Literally any-thing, no object, was part of her pursuits. Thereupon something changes.

Moment 2: the ensuing 'nothing was worthwhile' can be understood not merely as an assessment of the conditions surrounding her— i.e., as if any endeavour was futile—but rather as a realisation— nothing, as a symbolic existence and not as a practical negation, was worthwhile; it became valuable.

Moment 3: she then tries to make the point that you can no longer turn a blind eye to the situation on the street, yet she resorted, once again, to nothingness; the impossibility of pretending that nothing was happening also allows the interpretation that feigning got proscribed, meaning that, inasmuch as nothing is now symbolically valuable, simulation ('pretending') was out of the repertoire. Nothing, quite literally, was happening and it cannot be simulated.

Moment 4: finally, in a context in which nothingness has a positive symbolic status and it demands attention, she decided to actively partake in it; she started to *do* nothing.

From a literal reading, we can perceive that alongside the conscious, practical satisfaction derived from painting a wall there is also a symbolic satisfaction springing from an eroticised nothingness. This indicates how intertwined activity and passivity were during the revolt—unconscious activity was registered under the guise of conscious passivity. She wrote several articles, but she did nothing. It can be said that Cristina invested herself in an unconscious nothing-as-activity so as to overcome the conscious nothing-as-passivity that the *estallido* brought for her. Once seen from the logic of symbolic satisfaction, then, she unconsciously eroticised the nothingness to regain a sense of control over the situation—*nothing was happening*, an event beyond her volitional, conscious mastery, so she unconsciously decided to cease being passive by enacting the nothingness. By 'doing nothing' she engineered an unconscious way of being in a context in which many simply could not consciously afford to be. Her case also shows us that, at least psychically, it is rather difficult (not) to do nothing.

Accepting that symbolic satisfaction derives primordially from the subject's activity, however, should not make us think that the singularity of the material objects involved in this dynamic is wholly

unimportant. Of all things, Cristina decided to placate the anxiety induced by the nothingness that was happening by painting a wall in her house. Otherwise stated, painting was the conscious equivalent to 'doing nothing'. Amongst the aspects that come to the fore here is how painstaking the activity she decided to carry out was. It was not simply changing the colour of a wall or renovating a washed-out one. Cristina engaged herself in a meticulous, cumbersome activity: she painted 'small patterns' that required 'tiny brushes' and, in order to carry on, she had to wait 'a little bit' to move the insole. Everything seemed to be at scale and time-consuming because, as she declares, she wanted to kill as much time as possible.

From a slightly different angle, she was also replicating indoors what was happening outdoors. As I showed in the previous chapter, walls on the street were a privileged channel for the interpellation of the Other of the *estallido*. Cristina felt that all she could do was reproducing on her walls what the demonstrators were doing on the walls of the streets. Once again, we should take her speech literally: 'even at that moment when I did nothing, something happened'. She *did* nothing, that is, she unconsciously engaged in the *estallido* although that was consciously registered as deserting from activity. That is the reason why it is a mystery to her how she managed to maintain her publishing track by doing 'nothing'; Cristina's everyday life was interrupted, it consciously ceased to function. However, without knowing how, she found her way to remain a productive academic, at least to fulfil what is expected of one.

Doing what you can't

This unaccountable situation in which potency is somehow made to coalesce with its opposite, finds in Carlos—a scholar affiliated to a PhD in Critical Theory—an even clearer expression. His speech epitomises the strange amalgamation of activity and passivity discernible in

Cristina's. Unlike most interviews, his was organised from the beginning around academic labour. Furthermore, most of the conversation was guided by the credence he lends to the fact that 'the revolt implied evidencing and facing, for a good part of the academic world, its own impotence'. Obliquely insinuated by Cristina, now the signifier 'impotence' openly orients Carlos' speech.

> What happened was that [the revolt] revealed that from within academia not much can be done or said about the situation because we were completely overwhelmed [*desbordados*] by this, right? We were completely overwhelmed [*desbordados*] by something that we already knew that, sooner or later, it could be extended towards a future completely subtracted from our experience, that is, going far ahead, it was going to happen sooner or later, you know? Sooner or later, sooner or later.

The term he deploys in Spanish, *desbordado*, has a similar terminological richness to 'overwhelmed' in English. They both imply, simultaneously, an external overflowing of something that creates a sense of defeat and the state in which someone is taken by a sudden strong emotion. *Desbordado* was a term many interviewees drew on during my fieldwork, frequently with deep despondency. However, this is also the notion used by the prestigious cultural critic Nelly Richard (2021: 57) to define the revolt. According to her, the latter was a 'utopian overflow [*desborde*] of wanting to change everything'. Carlos, as we can see, was inhabiting this utopian overflow with a sharp sense of impotence. But that is not all. His statement is more enigmatic than it may appear at first glance.

That 'something' bound to happen that was responsible for the overwhelming tenor of the situation allows more than one interpretation. An initial take suggests that what is addressed in this sentence is the *estallido* itself; the revolt was destined to happen sooner or later. As soon as the uprising commenced, much of the local

academic debate was structured around a peculiar divide: those who purportedly saw the revolt coming and those who did not. This ignited controversies and mutual recriminations on both sides. Carlos seems to allude to this debate. The sentence is, however, just imprecise enough to authorise a slightly alternative reading; what if that 'something' was the acknowledgment of academia's impotence? This is a possible way of understanding the otherwise mysterious line about how this 'something' might be extended 'towards a future completely subtracted from our experience'. The idea that the *estallido* could be something subtracted from our (Chilean) experience seems hard to endorse; the revolt, if anything, is precisely one of those events that subjects cannot subtract themselves from. An impotent academic activity, conversely, is something that can indeed be extended indefinitely, at least the perception of said condition.

Impotence is an intriguing thing, so let me tarry with Carlos' experience for a little longer. His realisation came after the publication of an essay of his in a collective book on the *estallido*. The book was launched in early March 2020, almost five months after the revolt began. Afterwards, he briefly entertained the thought of turning the arguments presented in this piece into a full-length book of his own authorship, although that idea withered away quickly. For him, it was simply not possible to do that. 'This impossibility', Carlos points out, 'was precisely the effect of what was happening; it wasn't the time to start writing'. This perception comes with an important addition: those who wrote nonetheless.

> And, well, there were people in "academia" who, of course, jumped their gun […], they all had two books immediately written at the time, which also gave a very strange image, also very grotesque, of the scene, as it reinforced that idea of the intellectual writing from an ivory tower. Although it was not necessarily so, it generated that idea and one said: "well, what would someone who is

completely outside of this see?" [...] That's what it meant to me over time, and that's why I couldn't write in the end; it wasn't even a decision but something that simply happened that way, as though I was paralysed; there was a kind of paralysis, yeah. And what happened there, I think, was precisely the revelation, over time, quite immediately, of a kind of impotence.

There are multiple aspects that I would like to highlight from this vignette. Firstly, a sort of paralysis is attributed to the *estallido* once again. And once again, this reference is pervaded by tensions. The discursive collusion between movement and inactivity manifests in Carlos' speech in a rather blatant way; he transmitted to me a great sense of satisfaction with the piece he wrote for the collective book since it helped him to 'modulate my affective impression of what was happening and to evaluate my own incapacity as well'. So far, this incapacity could be read as the customary caveat regarding the incompleteness of any academic writing. But with the same breath he then claims, decisively, that 'it wasn't the time to start writing'. The latter differs significantly from the precaution that writing is, by definition, an incomplete endeavour. The irony of all this is that he reached the conclusion that writing in the midst of the *estallido* was impossible by writing an article on the *estallido* whilst it was happening. In other words, Carlos realised that he could not do something because he actually did it in the first place.

Enjoying impotence

The unfolding of Carlos' speech goes even further. As noted above, he constructs a transgressive other. In a first movement, he distances himself from certain academics who do not properly belong—or should not belong—to the academic realm. He accomplishes this manoeuvre by using quotation marks during our interview when mentioning 'those people in "academia"'. In a second movement, the same people are

singled out as part of a group of scholars who acted prematurely, all too hastily when it came to saying something about the *estallido*. Even though he asserts that the problem here is how much these exercises contributed to reinforce the old common perception that academics are normally detached from pedestrian events (since they write from the top of their ivory towers), there are other, more subtle elements at play as well. The notions of 'decision' and 'immediacy' appear to be saying something important, something that Carlos is not saying directly about his attachment to academic writing.

Just for the sake of the argument, let me put a pin in the fact that Carlos did write about the *estallido* during the *estallido*. When taken literally, his denunciation about what the others did echoes the Wittgensteinian adage: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'. The same odd prohibition of an impossible task seems to be at stake in Carlos' speech. Writing about the *estallido* in that period was an activity that could not be carried out and, at the same time, had to be ruled out since people could nevertheless jump their guns. This prohibition seems to be breached by the instantaneous exercise of the willpower of the others. The others 'had two books *immediately* written at the time', while the impossibility of writing for him 'wasn't even a *decision* but something that simply happened that way'. And, for him, all this manifested as 'the revelation, over time, quite *immediately*, of a kind of impotence'. There are two interesting additions here: first, Carlos felt the need, whilst making comparisons with the others, to highlight that for him it wasn't *even* a decision; it did not actually reach that threshold, whereas for the others, it seems legitimate to infer, it was totally volitional from the beginning. Second, he corrects himself in the very last line by affirming that the revelation of the impotence did not happen over time but rather 'quite immediately'. My suggestion is that these are important features to understand Carlos' fantasmatic scaffolding here.

Reaching a clear-cut verdict upon whether writing during the revolt was right or wrong is to no avail; persuasive arguments could help strengthen each side. What looks much more productive is to interpret the unconscious role that this divide plays in Carlos' discourse. Let me go over the facts for the last time: he wrote a piece only to retroactively realise that writing was no longer possible, then he condemned those who immediately decided to do what was not possible, to finally reach the conclusion that there was a sense of impotence within academia. When we remove the pin from the fact that Carlos did write a piece, much like the others did, the following question demands an answer: what differentiates these two kinds of writing? My suggestion is that what makes the whole (libidinal) difference is *the immediacy of the decision* that the others allegedly had and Carlos felt prevented from. True, Carlos did exactly what he criticises the others for, yet he clearly could not extract the same satisfaction from it. He wrote, but he could not make the *decision* of doing it *immediately*, and that is why his piece is not registered in his speech as a rule breach. If the *estallido* revealed the impotence of academia, as he claims, then Carlos *felt excluded from the enjoyment of this impotence*. Carlos seems to rely on a fantasy in which a supposed other enjoys improperly, in a way in which he would not allow himself to, *but enjoys nevertheless*. In his own fantasmatic scenario, then, Carlos was debarred from (the enjoyment of) impotence.

The interpretation I am offering is less far-fetched than it may appear. Certainly, impotence does not come across as an appealing condition to be consciously subjected to. The point is that we are not dealing here, primordially, with impotence as a kind of material or practical unfitness but rather with impotence as a libidinally-charged scenario. As Žižek (2008) maintains, the Other is not just the network of rules and presuppositions upon which our speech activity is grounded; it also entails a series of permitted transgressions to these rules and presuppositions. The Other has a more or less clandestine

face, an obscene support that, far from undermining its solidity, grants the possibility for group cohesion. Impotence, I propose, is the name that transgression adopts within Carlos' fantasy. The others, these quote-unquote academics, congregate around a corrupt enjoyment insofar as they should be well aware that 'from within academia not much can be done or said about the situation', yet they do it nevertheless. They choose to be impotent, so to speak, and that grants them access to a satisfaction-within-unsatisfaction (enjoyment) that appears unachievable to Carlos. So, in a discursive context in which nothing can be said from within academia and 'academics' have nothing to offer but their own impotence, Carlos, who could not even decide to write, cannot *even* be impotent.

The fantasmatic scenario created by Carlos, as a result, could be interpreted as an unconscious response to the disorientation scholars found themselves in at the beginning of the revolt. A disorientation that I have conceptualised in terms of the replacement of the good of social change and its subjective consequences. Put differently, by othering the supposed (im)potent academic, Carlos secured his attachment to academic writing, which allowed him to regain subjective consistency. During our interview, for example, Daniela—a PhD researcher in Social Sciences—reflected upon the impact the revolt had on academia by saying that: 'I think that [the *estallido*] tensioned the universities, you know? like "what we are doing, does it have any value?", "what does my current research contribute to?"'. Amidst this questioning about the importance of academic enquiry during the *estallido*, Carlos came up with one possible solution, i.e., to temporarily 'retreat' from writing (just like Cristina, who 'did nothing').

This seemed necessary since the revolt brought with it a new temporality, what Carlos calls 'the strange calm of the struggle', that must be respected. 'The exercise of academic writing', Carlos maintains, 'revealed itself to be counterproductive in relation to what

had to be written; as if academic writing was a kind of defensive writing with respect to writing'. What I am bringing to the fore is that this conscious decision has a flipside, namely, the fantasmatic construction of a transgressive other. To rephrase it, it seems like Carlos endures the impotence of academic writing by creating an academic other that is the imaginary receptacle of all wrongdoings. His decision to step aside from an ostensibly infertile academic writing only transpires in the imaginary and thus requires a fantasmatic supplement, one that takes the form of strong-willed other that unabashedly enjoys its impotence.

Carlos' fantasy follows the logic of fetichism. Freud (2001a) claims that the fetish is designed to preserve something from extinction. For him, the primary function of the fetish is to serve as a substitute for a belief: the mother's penis that the little boy used to believe in but does not want to give up. The reason is that, if the mother does not have a penis, then the little boy assumes that his is in danger. A substitute is needed to prevent castration henceforth. The singularity of the logic of the fetish—the disavowal—is that what is refuted is simultaneously acknowledged: 'In the conflict between the weight of the unwelcome perception and the force of his counter-wish, a compromise has been reached, as is only possible under the dominance of the unconscious laws of thought' (Freud, 2001a: 154). Following this logic, the fantasy of impotency allows Carlos to retain the belief that he is not part of the academia that writes about the *estallido* when he is an academic who wrote about the *estallido*. As his experience shows, sustaining these mutually incompatible assertions requires strong libidinal investments.

What the experiences of Cristina and Carlos clearly show is how academic writing lost its taken-for-grantedness during the revolt. This might explain the imaginary lengths they need to go to in order to safeguard their attachments to this activity and so regain subjective

consistency. Their speeches are beset with tensions, breaches, contradictions, and exceptions that speak volumes about the unconscious impact of the *estallido*. This is particularly evident in the case of Carlos. He and his colleagues did the exact same thing—they wrote about the revolt while it was still happening—and yet he feels the pressure to detach himself from that by creating a convoluted fantasy of impotency. Based on the fact that all of them *produced* pieces, it is hard to say that they were factually impotent, but none of this prevents impotence from playing a fantasmatic role. Ultimately, it all seems to be about what the participants know: Carlos knows academics are impotent, that they cannot write; he and the other academics wrote nonetheless, yet his awareness of the impotence separates his writing from the others. The others might not even suspect they are impotent, but he knows. Carlos appears to be very aware of the fact that what is impossible should be forbidden, but also of the enjoyment of transgression.

THE FANTASY OF THE CLAIRVOYANT ACADEMIC

The imaginary reassurance that the fantasy of the impotent academic provides to Carlos is just one possible way to recompose the fantasmatic framework of writing after the *estallido*. Not everyone (imaginarily) deserted from this activity as a strategy. In actual fact, the opposite seems to be the norm. As a case in point, at a very early stage of my fieldwork, after searching for a piece by one of my potential interviewees, I received an email from academia.edu letting me know that there were 1,707 papers in its database discussing 'estallido social Chile' [Chilean social outburst]. What the algorithm was telling me is that, in the almost two and a half years between the *estallido* and that notification, articles on the matter have been published at a rate of 59 per month. So, two a day. And that figure is likely not even to be the total number of articles written during that time, since those 1,707 are

only the ones scholars have diligently uploaded to their profiles. For as partial as this information might be, it decidedly shows that Chilean scholars have been writing extensively about the revolt. In this section, I will explore another fantasy—the sociological one—shaping the attachments of those who 'did-did' write.

In sociology more than sociology

Carmen is a first-year researcher in a Social Science PhD programme at a prestigious private university in Santiago. She holds a BA in Sociology from the largest public university in Chile and an MA in Social Sciences that she completed in the UK. According to her own self-description at different moments in our interview, she is very committed to her discipline, an assiduous militant of one of the political parties from the coalition currently in power in Chile, and 'clearly posh'. As I have stated previously, I conducted all of my interviews in the same fashion—I asked my interviewees if they can tell me the first thing that comes to their minds when I say *estallido social*, no matter what that might be. For Carmen, who like me lived the revolt from the UK, the first thing that came to her recollection was an anecdote transpired on British soil with other fellow compatriots.

> I remember, above all, a discussion I had with some [male Chilean] historians who told me: "how can it be that sociologists…?" Because I worked at the UNDP on [the study] *Desiguales* [Unequal] and also at the COES, you know? and they told me: "how could it be that you didn't know this? How could it be that you didn't…?" As in why I didn't almost get the exact date, "how could you not tell us that this shit was going to happen!?" Hmm, yeah, and I remember that, that, that relationship with other people who blamed us for not, and they blamed me in particular for being a militant… so it was like: "you're a militant, you worked at UNDP, you did this and

that, and you didn't know that this was going to happen!?" I don't know, I don't know if someone could have known-known; no one, no one. It surprises me today when people say things like: "but it was obvious!" I mean, yeah it was, somehow it was kinda obvious, but it wasn't; it's one of those loooong processes. Actually, I was just talking with a friend the other day who, who criticised the social sciences, she's a sociologist, and she said something like, she said exactly that: "how can it be that we didn't foresee this thing? How can it be that there are no good indicators to measure it, to anticipate these kinds of things?" And, I don't know man, I don't know, I don't know if the social sciences have that capacity, frankly.

Some background information is needed prior to starting any interpretation of this rich excerpt. In 2017, the United Nations Development Programme published an in-depth national study that provided a detailed picture of the multiple dimensions and expressions of inequality in the country. The 400-page report—whose full title is *Unequal: Origins, Changes, and Challenges of the Social Gap in Chile*—had three main researchers, one economist and two sociologists, and it was largely platformed by the local media. The study was part of a larger endeavour from the UNDP to furnish Chilean decision-makers and politicians with interpretations of local socioeconomic trends through their Human Development Reports. Starting in 1996, all these bi-yearly Reports have emphasised the unwanted results of Chile's modernisation path and its subjective impacts. According to an independent research, the Reports have 'conspicuously embodied the function of a public sociology' by adopting an interpretive standpoint that grants them a 'critical capacity' (Ramos, 2006: 126). The political scientist Norbert Lechner and the sociologist Pedro Güell are two of the most salient principal investigators of the Reports. COES, on the other hand, is the largest social sciences research centre in the country, encompassing the four biggest higher education institutions, and

harbouring more than 100 researchers. Devoted to producing knowledge on issues related to social conflict and social cohesion, it is divided into four areas with five main researchers leading them. In 2024, three of these five scholars are sociologists.

Understanding the position that sociology occupies in Chilean academia, as well as in the political and cultural domains, is crucial to grasp why it could be a site of unconscious investment. Different studies in the last decade have attempted to show the performative capacity of the social sciences in general, and of sociology in particular, in the country (Ariztía, 2012; Ramos 2012, 2018). In these accounts, the interrelations between sociology and governmentality are permanently highlighted and, to some extent, regarded as commonsensical. And even if the precise magnitude of the discipline's performative capacity is hard to establish, there are clear indicators of the influence of sociologists in the centre-left governments of the post-dictatorship era.

- Patricio Aylwin, the first democratically elected president, chose Ernesto Tironi, a renowned sociologist, as the government's head of communications.
- His successor, Eduardo Frei, appointed José Joaquín Brunner, a sociologist specialised in higher education, as a member of his cabinet.
- Ricardo Lagos, who came to power in 2000 under the heading of 'the first socialist president since Allende', established some governmental innovations. One of them was the creation of a permanent advisory team based at the presidential palace. Because of its physical location in the building, it was christened as 'the second floor'. During the Lagos' administration, this high-ranked group of professionals was led by Ernesto Ottone, a senior sociologist trained in France.

- Michelle Bachelet, also a socialist, came after Lagos as the first woman ever appointed as president in Chile, and she hired Pedro Güell, the sociologist in charge of many editions of the Human Development Report, as the head of her second floor.
- The current centre-left government of Gabriel Boric had Lucía Dammert, another sociologist whose field of expertise is international relations, as the director of his second floor.

The only time this tradition of appointing sociologists in key government positions was interrupted occurred when Sebastián Piñera, the single right-wing president of this era, was in charge of running the country. As we can see, both sociology and sociologists have been highly influential in the interpretation and conduct of Chilean affairs from 1990 onwards. Within the humanities and social sciences, this is a position only rivalled by economists.

With the abovementioned in mind, let me go back to Carmen's experience. It is already interesting that her first association took the shape, quite literally, of a confrontation with not-knowing. Unlike Carlos' internal realisation of the fruitless state of academic writing, Carmen was held accountable by other colleagues for the lack of response from sociology. Even more, the makeup of the anecdote turns it into a scene akin to a trial—anonymous representatives of one discipline conducting an interrogation in order to return a verdict on whether Carmen, as the embodiment of sociology, has failed or not to deliver according to her remit. 'How could you not know?' and 'how could you not tell us?', the questions targeted to Carmen, entail two implicit imperatives without which the request for explanations would have been impracticable: 1) you, as a sociologist, should have known; and 2) you, as a sociologist, should have let us know. None of this occurred, of course; nobody knew that the *estallido* was due to happen and the mere idea that someone should have known this information in advance impresses by its unreasonableness. And yet the questions

were formulated and Carmen, instead of acting dismissively, dwelt on them. This curious turn of events is worthy of close exploration.

The reasons enabling this demand are clearly exposed: she was not simply a sociologist but a sociologist who worked for two highly influential research centres when it comes to shaping public policies and political agendas and, on top of that, she was a leftist militant. The fact that, of all things, she was involved in the *Desiguales* study does not seem trivial. In the last decade or so, particularly since the cycle of protests initiated in 2011 began, socioeconomic inequality has been the main explanation from the social sciences to account for the social *malaise* in the country. For many academics, commentators, and the media, the UNDP report hit the nail on the head with its thorough analysis of the relationships between inequality and social unrest, particularly since this was done by an independent and extensively perceived as impartial international organisation. If the *estallido* is considered the apex of this cycle of protests, then knowledge about inequality is crucial for its understanding. The point here is that this information is public and, more importantly, something that any other informed social scientist, such as a historian, could expectedly know. When we pay attention to the fact that who is demanding a response is a professional as equally apt to provide an answer as Carmen, we can see that there is an element that does not quite fit in this scene. Why would a historian request knowledge from a sociologist about an event he is more than capable to provide a reading of and, furthermore, requesting it in that fashion? I believe that this peculiarity of the exchange points towards an imaginary relationship between sociology and knowledge in Chile.

Interestingly enough, many participants in my research expressed similar apprehensions about sociology. This was the case irrespective of the fact that only two of them are sociologists, Carmen and Tomás. Ramón, for example, qualified his speech on several occasions during

our interview with the adverb 'sociologically'. For him, there are many things about the revolt deemed 'sociologically undeniable', like the violence and the increase in the perception of street insecurity in recent years, at the same time that there are 'beautiful' aspects of the *estallido* 'beyond sociological analyses'. He also described his work in the course of one of his lessons by claiming that he 'tries to avoid certain sociological gestures to think about the social field'. María, whose background is in education, addressed during our interview the different terms in circulation to name the *estallido*. After giving some consideration to the advantages and weaknesses of a few of them, she then stressed that 'because I don't have training in sociology, I don't have like this need to consciously stand from such and such place; like to choose a word and take it as my, I don't know, my favourite word, and justify it'. When talking about academic publications on pressing, ongoing events, Verónica told me that sociologists, unlike other scholars, 'are the ones who normally come up with books on these kinds of events' and, in that register, Isabel shared with me her appreciation that 'published academic explanations [of the *estallido*] weren't spot-on, I mean, the sociological explanations they gave were a little ridiculous sometimes'. Finally, Rodrigo's very opening line of our interview was the following:

> The effects of the *estallido* were an issue that, in some way, people who study sociology, who are a bit aware of... I mean, you don't have to study sociology, because I tend to think that my reflections on the present have to do with a political interest rather than a disciplinary interest, right? So, what one thinks of the *estallido* is that we were expecting it in some way; I mean, it was not something that, it didn't catch us by surprise.

On the one hand, we have the actual symbolic associations. More than a discipline or a field of enquiry, in these vignettes sociology comes across as a warrant for veracity. To take Ramón's words, sociology

varnishes claims with a layer of undeniability. And due to this ability, it seems natural that sociologists are the ones who select and justify the terms with which we name events, as well as the ones producing and reproducing collective literature about them (even if, sometimes, they do not hit the mark). Rodrigo delivers perhaps the most suggestive equivalence in this regard: people who study sociology = people who are aware of things. Immediately after making this correspondence, he corrects himself in a singular manner. The first impression is that he realises that it is not only those who study sociology who are aware of the effects of the *estallido*, but instead of claiming, for instance, that people who study literature (his discipline) are as equally aware, he reassured me that he works *similarly* to how sociologists do. Ultimately, he makes himself part of the equivalence by 'sociologising' his work.

On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that these symbolic associations are an unshared privilege awarded to sociology. The latter is not simply another name on the list of disciplines cognisant of the *estallido*—it is the only one. Or, as Isabel unwittingly suggested, academic explanations *are* sociological explanations. At no point in any of my interviews, did a participant say something along the lines of 'historical analyses aside', 'anthropologically speaking', or 'avoiding psychological gestures' to sustain their speeches. I entertained conversations with scholars encompassing almost the whole gamut of the humanities and social sciences, and yet only sociology had that powerful capacity to make researchers immune to surprise (or at least to assert that). We can see that both what is being said about sociology and the silence about any other discipline contributes to the shaping of a passionate bond beyond reasonableness. A libidinal attachment, properly speaking. Sociology, in a way, goes beyond sociology itself and becomes a fantasmatic site that delivers certitude, the extraordinary (and utterly unrealistic) capacity of making radically contingent events a matter of expectations.

'We are the only ones who know'

In light of the above, that is, when we take sociology not as a discipline but as a fantasy that modulates a singular relationship with critical knowledge, things that first looked strange now become more understandable. Historians can interpellate a sociologist on the basis of her lack of knowledge because that erodes the imaginary prowess of academia as a whole. We could say that, for as long as the conviction that sociologists know remains in place, everything else is allowed. As a result, from within the coordinates of this fantasy, a surprised sociologist is a contradiction in terms; that simply cannot happen.

Carmen exhibits an ambivalent connection to this imaginary framework. She feels torn between the reasonable stance according to which 'no one could have known-known' that the *estallido* would occur and the idea that it was 'kinda obvious'. We can perceive in her speech a pendular movement, a sort of subjective hesitation, between recognition and misrecognition within this fantasy. The most pristine moment of misrecognition comes with the feeling of surprise about the generalised sense of obviousness permeating the people surrounding her. This is, nevertheless, a rather fleeting movement. She swiftly recoils at this feeling by suggesting that the emergence of the *estallido* was relatively obvious, in what looks like a step into recognition. Further on in our interview, while discussing the responsibility of the social sciences, Carmen articulates a moment of almost full recognition with this fantasy:

> […] we are the only ones that, I think, the only ones that do have, in some dimensions, that do have the capacity, you know? Like, last year I was working in a research centre for lawyers, on socio-legal studies, and lawyers fascinate me, I find them very interesting, because they really don't have, there are dimensions of social problems that they can't grasp, as simple as that, you know? But we [the sociologists] do have the tools, so oftentimes I feel that

those tools are there and that they are not used for convenience, because fuck! with a paper on such or such line you know that you'll surely be published in X, Y, or Z place, you know?

It seems hard to find a clearer moment of identification with the equivalence: people who study sociology = people who are aware of things. The misrecognition through surprise and the subsequent 'kinda obvious' hesitation gives way here to an air of absolute certitude about the uniqueness of sociologists—they are the only ones with the capacity (to fully know things). This conviction comes with the addition of—and it is facilitated by—the lawyers, who play the role of the other. The way she refers to them is verging on being patronising; they fascinate her, she founds them very interesting because they are not as capable as sociologists, as simple as that. However, my claim is that this is more than merely trashing former colleagues since the figure of the lawyer enables Carmen to secure her attachment to (the imaginary possibilities that make sociology more than) sociology.

Bearing in mind that a fantasy 'is the primordial form of *narrative*, which serves to occult some original deadlock' (Žižek, 1997: 11), we can perceive how the figure of the lawyer allows Carmen to entrench her attachment to sociology through a double movement. First, by means of a comparison with a lacking other, an other who cannot grasp some dimensions of social problems, sociology can retain the imaginary warrant of its purported wholeness. Second, and since much of the conversation revolved around the vexed question of how sociologists could not know about the revolt (which would turn them as lacking as lawyers), the reason for not using the tools that they do have is also externalised: nowadays, it is more advantageous not to. Due to the incentives for publishing and the ever-increasing pressure to keep doing it, sociological tools are misused. It seems like Carmen protects her attachment to sociology through the colonisation of a bad knowledge over a good knowledge: sociologists are the only ones who

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know-know stuff, but they also know how comfortable it is to get published. Sociologists have the tools but they have become too cosy within the university, so to speak, and perhaps that is why *it looks like they did not know.*

The idea that sociology has the tools but sociologists have been unable to use them properly during the *estallido* also plays an important role in Tomás' speech. He is the other sociologist in my sample and he shares both the political and professional commitments expressed by Carmen, although he comes from a working-class background. 'I felt a bit frustrated', he admits, 'because this was a moment for sociology and for what we could also contribute to it'. Frustration colours many of his associations during our interview. Similar to how for Carmen the social sciences 'maybe weren't scratching where the itch was', for Tomás frustration emerges from the fact that, in the context of the 'radical demonstrations' undergone by the country, 'it was sociology's responsibility to rise to the challenge of its society'. In his view, that did not take place. Tomás, likely the most prolific of my interviewees when it comes to writing on the revolt, deployed a well-known sociological notion to describe what was happening on the streets as well as the source of the predicaments of his discipline. For him, the *estallido* set in motion 'a process of collective sociological imagination'. This terminology derives from the work of Charles Wright Mills (2000) and it helps him to suggest that Chileans were connecting their biographies with each other while simultaneously realising both that the problems they were facing were structural in nature and that they were changing history. Tomás glimpses a paradox here:

So, the paradox I saw was that we were living in a moment where the sociological imagination of the discipline [sociology] was diminished, diminished by the extreme specialisation, by the logic of productivity that emphasises quantity over the capacity to

influence society, and a sociology that at the same time was, well, that seemed to have no explanation for what was happening. So, I said: A moment of collective sociological imagination is accompanied by a bad sociological imagination of the discipline. I mean, that's why we have to rise to the challenge, right?

Therein lies the paradox: I think that many colleagues actually did have things to contribute to explain the moment, only that sociology is experiencing a crisis in its ability to influence publicly, because the spaces are dominated mainly by a type of sociological imagination that is the economists' one, which is very limited.

Tomás and Carmen coincide in attributing the lack of sociological explanations of the *estallido* to the same external condition—academic productivity. Whereas Carmen emphasises how this dynamic favours a more or less conformist disposition from sociologists, Tomás stresses that contemporary markers of academic achievement tend to curtail sociology's social impact. They are also in agreement about sociology's ascendancy over other professions. The position that lawyers occupy in Carmen's speech is taken in Tomás' by economists. Both these groups acquire discursive value as representatives of a lack, since they are fundamentally mobilised as not-sociologists or as having un-sociological knowledge. Similarities aside, Tomás' speech is nonetheless erected upon a unique series of associations that help me to delineate the fantasy of sociology in more detail.

It would be fair to say that alongside Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Weber's *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice*, and a few others, Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* belongs to the canonical works in the field when it comes to addressing what sociologists (should) do. Pretty much every undergraduate sociology student has to deal with its reading during the first year of their training, myself included. Tomás' account, therefore, is heavily grounded on the sociological tradition. My interest,

however, is not to assess how accurate his deployment of Mills' category is, but instead to focus on the symbolic associations this notion allows. With little variation, the argument conveyed by Tomás in both the quoted excerpts was also reiterated during the lessons I observed. In the session of 24 May 2022, for instance, he said to his students that '[The Chilean] society is kinda thinking in sociological terms since the revolt brought with it an enhancement of the collective sociological imagination, but the social sciences are a bit stunned'. Based on this repetition, the following question arises: could the rather technical term of 'sociological imagination' also say something about Tomás' unconscious attachment to critical knowledge?

Imagination, in the context of the revolt, is not a word among others. Many scholars and spokespersons for civil society organisations—as much as anyone else—perceive that the *estallido* lay the groundwork for imagining Chile otherwise. It is against this backdrop that Tomás decided to take advantage of the heuristic tools provided by Mills. And one of the things that stand out is the extension the sociological imagination acquires in his speech. He indeed deployed the category to explain what, from his view, was happening as a result of the *estallido* both in several pieces and in our interview. So, first of all, and against his own conclusion, *there was* an explanation for what was happening—at least the one he provided through the sociological imagination. But when we look closely at this explanation, it seems as though the sociological imagination is used indiscriminately to name any kind of imagination. There is the collective sociological imagination, the economists' sociological imagination, the Chilean society's sociological imagination, and… the sociologists' sociological imagination. This is a curious and voracious symbolic capacity for an otherwise exclusively technical term, a feature that seems to express more than mere academic zeal.

This extension of the sociological imagination has a family resemblance with Carmen's statement that sociologists are the only ones with the capacity to fully comprehend things. This time, under Tomás' discursive command, sociology becomes the yardstick to measure imagination as such; how good imagination is should be assessed according to how sociological it is. According to this premise, then, economists' imagination is deemed limited since it is not sociological enough. Now, it seems clear that this is a reification of an academic concept. In a way, it sounds about as out of place as affirming that economists' deconstructive tools are a bit rusty. Expecting dexterity in the use of sociological categories, or philosophical for what is worth, from economists or any other academic figure apart from sociologists or philosophers is blatantly incongruous. But that is not the whole thing. Tomás is not simply suggesting that other disciplines would do good by incorporating sociological insights—which is actually a possible reading—but also, and ironically, that because others make use of the sociological imagination, sociologists cannot use it as they should. This shows that, for Tomás, the concept of 'sociological imagination' has an extra-theoretical or extra-epistemological value insofar as it helps him to build a fantasmatic scenario of wholeness.

Once again in the session on 24 May, Tomás said: 'The social sciences are experiencing something akin to the Cassandra Syndrome […]. What I'm saying is a tad contradictory, since what I'm saying is that there's a lack of sociological imagination and, also, that we did see it coming'. As Greek mythology goes, Apollo bestowed upon Cassandra, one of the daughters of the king of Troy, the gift of prophecy in return for her favours. She accepted the deal but, once the supernatural gift was granted, she refused to yield to him. In retribution, Apollo turned the blessing into a curse by ensuring that, irrespective of the veracity of her prophecies, she would always be disbelieved. She, for instance, warned the Trojans against accepting the Wooden Horse, yet her words fell on deaf ears (Hard, 2020). What does this tell us about the analogy

offered by Tomás? That the sociological imagination is both an interpretive academic device *and* an imaginary position from which sociological interpretation is carried out as such. By means of different symbolic associations, Carmen and Tomás express nonetheless an equivalent libidinal attachment to transformative knowledge: inasmuch as sociologists are the only ones who know, and because they possess the good kind of imagination, they must be heard.[15]

The imaginary grounds of the sociological imagination

The *estallido*, in a way, altered the fantasmatic coordinates regulating the reproduction of sociology for Tomás. If the whole point, according to him, is to prop up 'a critical public sociology able to deliver the tools to address this kind of phenomena', then there is no real problem since, based again on his own words, the Chilean society is already thinking in sociological terms because of the revolt. In practical terms, there is no problem. Based on my interpretation, the issue at stake is that Tomás dreads the loss of his purported prophetic powers—namely, his imaginary wholeness prior to the revolt. Neither Tomás nor Carmen can retain the recognition they used to have. This is the imaginary supplement of the sociological imagination. By summoning the latter, Tomás' subjective attachment to critique appears to be exclusively epistemological, but this is secured in turn by an imaginary scenario in which, *by virtue of being a sociologist, he ought to be heard.*

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[15] This bears a strong resemblance with what Kristin Ross refers to as 'priestly sociology'. Following closely Jacques Rancière's attack on 'the Bourdieu effect', that is to say, tautological sociological analysis, Ross (2023: 49) claims that, by virtue of this priestly stance, 'the sociologist places himself in the position of denouncing a system granted the ability to hide itself forever from its agents; the social critic sees what others cannot. His authority derives from the unknowingness of his objects of study'. It is worth noting that the Chilean sociological milieu is comparable to the French one in terms of their local cultural and political influence, an aspect that could be partially explained due to the ascendancy of French sociologists in the training of Chilean scholars.

At this precise point, we can perceive how ambivalent his attachment is. Whilst talking about the role played by the media during the revolt and how exhausting it is to counterbalance the overrepresentation of conservative political pundits, all of a sudden, he sees a silver lining. He does not consider this situation too problematic since, during the *estallido*, the media 'give a microphone to anyone and that person made use of the collective sociological imagination that was happening'. Epistemologically, this is great news; the (right) tools for interpreting what is happening are at anyone's hand. Unconsciously, this is terrible news; the public is listening to *anyone* but him (who is the lawful proprietor of the right tools).

From this angle, Tomás' frustration gets a new colouration. As I mentioned earlier, he is one of the most prolific scholars on the *estallido* and yet he constantly reproached himself for not doing enough. 'Intellectually', he admits, 'I wasn't doing all [*todo*] I could do because that basically meant writing down and recording everything [*todo*], I mean, writing a field notebook every [*todos*] day'. And then he insists that he felt overwhelmed because he was not able 'to do everything [*todo*] that needs to be done, to contribute everything [*todo*] that needs to be contributed and I felt limited, I couldn't do everything [*todo*] I wanted to do'. My take here is that no matter how many more pieces he might have written, this pressure for doing everything and doing it all the time would have never been satisfied since we are not directly dealing with his work. This relentless eruption of the signifier 'everything' could be interpreted as a response to the question Carmen was confronted with: 'How could you not tell us that this shit was going to happen!?', which is another way of saying 'you are a sociologist, why aren't you telling me the future?' But, as Tomás himself admits, he now feels limited—much like Cassandra—and unsuccessful in summoning a sense of wholeness (also *todo* in Spanish).

I have been working on the basis that fantasies offer the subject a rationale for the inherent deadlock of desire. The experiences of both Tomás and Carmen show us, even more clearly than Carlos', that one of the primordial fantasmatic constructions is a scene 'in which the *jouissance* we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us' (Žižek, 2008: 43). Is not this precisely what Tomás claims to have happened to him? At the very end of our conversation, he solemnly said to me that 'the phase of satisfaction with what we have been saying is over', to subsequently close our exchange by admitting that there are 'well-equipped' people within the sociological field to make a contribution, 'but what we lack is for this to have an effect on reality, for someone to pay attention to what we are saying'.

Factually, for Tomás, the 'right' tools were successfully passed onto the public; now *anyone* is using the sociological imagination. Unconsciously, however, this is experienced as a loss; sociology does not have an effect on reality because, for him, that seems to be conditional upon a scenario in which someone pays attention to what sociologists say. Otherwise stated, now everybody is a clairvoyant, not just sociologists. Writing, in this context, does not have the same effect, no matter how many pieces can be put out there—without the imaginary grounds of the sociological imagination, it is hard to navigate the misrecognition of the Other. The concept of sociological imagination can obviously still be deployed, it can even be serviceable, yet its imaginary economy does not hold as it used to.

THE FANTASY OF THE POWERLESS ACADEMIC

Albeit spellbinding, the sociological imaginary does not saturate the full range of unconscious attachments amongst those who did consciously register their writing during the revolt. Notwithstanding the depth of the transformations the latter brought with it, not everything changed so dramatically. The requisites to secure and

maintain tenure, or at least academic employability, seem largely impervious to the *estallido*. Publishing, located at the very top of these requisites, is one of those aspects that remained chiefly unaltered within academia, meaning that, for many, to write or not to write was not even debatable. Unlike the foregoing, this third section on fantasies around writing is not predicated upon the fantasmatic, extra-epistemological capacities of a particular discipline but instead on the general requirements the university expects scholars to excel at. As a result, in what follows I shall show the imaginary avenues the university in general, and its demand for publishing in particular, can take in post-revolt Chile.

All academic roads lead to *fondecyt*

Until the sudden interruption of the revolt's momentum in March 2020 due to the pandemic, the impression that Chile was a completely different country was the overriding one. *Prima facie*, this was the case with the university as well. Most universities were closed for several months and some rearranged their regular activities in order to contribute to the ongoing situation. Isabel's experience, for instance, is that 'the university came to a standstill and everything got refocused on this, the subjects were reconfigured, and I directed all the essays to the *estallido*'. Similarly, for Ramón the transformation was so profound that 'labour relations changed, universities changed, classrooms changed, I don't know, everything turned around, everything turned around'. This was unequivocally the case, although not the full picture. Life within the university was far less monolithic and more nuanced than this wholesale reshaping suggests. Daniela's experience, for instance, has commonalities but also significant discrepancies with this vision. As a 'taxi lecturer'—the local slang for part-time scholar—she divided her time between her PhD in social sciences and her teaching positions at two higher education institutions in Santiago. The

following is the recounting of her jobs whilst the revolt was taking place:

> I was working at this very neoliberal private university at that time and, I don't know, I remember that we were in a room working with the students and the day before a lot of people lost their eyes [because of police brutality] and they [the head of department] were explicit in telling us that we couldn't say anything. I mean, you had to do your lessons, you had to carry on as if nothing was happening here. [...] But I was also working at a public university, in a research centre, and it was very interesting because we held some political meetings, something very different; like I lived both sides, it was very schizophrenic.

Daniela was torn between an institutional instruction to carry on business as usual with her private employer and a more empathic and reflective response from her public one. This is not just her experience but, all in all, also a fair depiction of the general reaction of Chilean universities. The largest public institution in the country, the University of Chile, by way of illustration, got heavily involved with the course of the events by facilitating multiple discussion forums as well as academic and non-specialised publications, but also by aligning itself, through its Vice-Chancellor, with several popular demands arising from the revolt. And although it would be unfair to claim that this was exclusively the response from public universities, based on the testimonies of my interviewees, it seems that similar endeavours from within private institutions were, to a great degree, contingent on individual rather than organisational inspiration. Consequently, and regardless of some exceptions, the *estallido* laid bare the differences between public and private institutions when it comes to addressing popular uprisings.

As I mentioned, academic publication is one of those things that, no matter what the nature of the institutions is, remained firmly in place

during and after the *estallido*. In Chile, many of the publications come from the funding granted to scholars by the National Agency for Research and Development. This public office aims at promoting and expanding scientific research by financing single and collective projects of early career academics or senior applicants, as well as by sponsoring postgraduate scholarships—like the one that allows me to write these lines. Due to its acronym, the research projects founded by this agency are known as *fondecyt*. *Fondecyts* are not just the source of money for academic research, they are at the same time the main source from which academic prestige emanates in Chile. 'Having' a *fondecyt* (in Chile we do not 'get' grants, we say that we 'have' them, much more than a mere semantic or idiosyncratic difference) is a big deal. The symbolic cachet awarded to *fondecyts*, however, does not necessarily correlate with the quality of the research; as a research assistant, I myself have been involved in well-off projects funded by the Agency that have ended, quite literally, in no results and that has not affected *fondecyt*'s reputation in the slightest. In the wake of the *estallido*, the imaginary role that these prestige designators play across the board deserves a closer look.

Perhaps the clearest sign of how interiorised the logic of *fondecyt* is amongst Chilean researchers comes from one of my classroom observations. On 4 May 2022, Verónica's module to which I got access was devoted to Charles Fourier. More precisely, the idea was to discuss Harmony, the name he gave to his utopian world. The pleasure-seeking society he proposes is established upon a thorough reorganisation of social interactions based on new laws of passionate attraction. In his utopia, passions are not to be repressed but properly channelled instead. To achieve such an outcome, he aspired at creating mathematical equations for the calculation of passions as well as a centralised information system of personal data. In accordance with these principles, Fourier exhibited a penchant for assigning numbers to everything. When the importance attributed to food in Harmony was

discussed during the lesson—Fourier, for instance, abhorred bread because it represents necessity rather than desire—Verónica mentioned that Fourier came up with a list of nine dishes for his utopian setting, which prompted the joke of one of the students that made some beam with complicity: 'That REALLY is a *fondecyt*!' This innocent banter shows, nonetheless, that even within utopian boundaries, a *fondecytless* research life seems unthinkable in Chile.

Some researchers, of course, are mindful and even vociferous about the perils of *fondecyt*. Carlos and Rodrigo, for instance, are the most adamant ones against its logic. The former considers that, by enshrining publishing in high-impact, English language journals as both the selection criteria to award the founding and the desirable outcome of funded projects, emerging topics—like the *estallido*—are normally integrated within existing research projects in an inorganic fashion. In other words, due to the prescription to multiply research products as much as possible, pressing issues tend to be assimilated rather than duly explored. Rodrigo, in turn, emphasises the flipside of Carlos' line of thought, namely, that in abiding by the *fondecyt* rules there is virtually no phenomenon beyond the academic confines; however, this makes them circulate in a neoliberal economy. Unless an exceptionally depoliticised scholar, this is a well-trodden street in Chile. However, Rima Majed's (2023: 80) caveat, that 'revolutionary moments are often imbued with contradictory features and dynamics', appears widely applicable here, since both of them held *fondecyt* projects by the time our interview occurred. And this is far from a peculiarity. Verónica also embodies a similar contradiction:

> So, the revolt exploded [*estalló*] from every front: the lessons, the research, and my labour as... because deep down it was like, like a kind of conviction to act in a revolutionary way, let's say, in whichever place one is; yeah, that was it, a disruption in the current order of things, [...] and that happened to many of us, we

talk about it a lot: "So, how do I make the revolution here, here, and here and here?"

As maintained by Verónica, her commitment to the *estallido* in terms of a revolution is unshakable. For her, the radius of the *estallido*'s explosion encompassed every aspect of academic life, which means that, following her own words, teaching and researching should also be sites in which the revolution must be made. In the course of the first and most agitated weeks of the revolt, Verónica's book on pleasure arrived from the Spanish publishing house that commissioned it. The book was part of a bigger *fondecyt* project around the political ontology of pleasure. She remembers partaking in a demonstration around Dignity Square carrying a handful of copies of her new book while asking herself "'what do I do with *The Pleasure* in the *estallido*?" I mean, research-wise, what's the point of launching a book on pleasure, for example, when everything is closed?' The question she directed to herself is a layered one. She, of course, is pointing at how counterproductive it seems to launch a scholarly book when academic life as we know it is nowhere to be found due to the revolt; universities are closed and this certainly comes across as bad timing for customary academic activities. Nevertheless, my suggestion is that we should also pay due attention to the title of her book and its conditions of possibility to arrive at a fuller understanding here.

Even without an emotional cartography of the event, it is reasonable to concede that pleasure was indeed part of the *estallido*. And no matter what that pleasure was, judging from Verónica's remembrance, what is clear is that *it was not* what she had in her hands, despite its title. My take is that 'what do I do with *The Pleasure* here?' is not just a rhetorical question to illustrate the irony of receiving your book when academic activities are suspended until further notice; it is the acknowledgment of a radical incompatibility—*The Pleasure* has nothing to do with the pleasure on the streets. In the

midst of an event demanding 'to make the revolution here, here, and here', Verónica received the finished product of an unrevolutionised or yet-to-be-revolutionised research logic. Therefore, the incompatibility seems to arise not from the content of the book but from what it represents in the context of the *estallido*. And the same *fondecyt* project *The Pleasure* sprang from allowed Verónica to write pieces on the revolt. This was the case since, according to her, the revolution 'didn't deviate my work too much', so 'I framed my text on Fourier [and the revolt] there [in my *fondecyt*], it fitted there'. Therefore, even in the middle of a revolutionary event, Verónica's account shows us the conservative capacity of *fondecyt* to keep things in their usual place.

An analogous tension glides through Isabel's speech. Even if she does not see eye to eye about the idea of revolution, she nonetheless concurs that the *estallido* transformed both the country and the university to the core. In her view, the revolt gave rise to several expressions of academic activism. People from law schools were advising and representing demonstrators in legal cases, people from medicine faculties were providing medical aid on the streets, and people from social work departments, like her, were registering police abuses and human rights violations. Like many other academics, she spent a good part of her time and energy in committees of this nature lending a hand. At the very end of our interview, she even mentioned that, in her experience, many scholars have stepped aside from the university, or have considered to, because this wave of academic activism has revealed more patently than ever the academic extractivism reigning in the institution. In spite of the awareness of all this, she openly says later on that, alongside other colleagues, 'we were in the middle of a *fondecyt* related to memory, the dictatorship, the post-dictatorship, and the transition, so what happened [with the *estallido*] fitted our research like a glove haha'. Somehow, Isabel managed to get the best of both worlds: 'Cos being out there and seeing that politicisation also helped my current *fondecyt* project, you know?'

The pieces she wrote on the *estallido* are there to attest that this was indeed the case.

A matter of pins

How to interpret the contradiction that all of the above expresses? From my perspective, it would be an oversimplification to endorse the idea that this is nothing but cynicism—even if cynicism might play a role in it. A different avenue to explore would be to interpret the fantasmatic role that *fondecyts* can perform *vis-à-vis* the perceptions of the university, the place where these projects are carried out. And this is the case since, with varying degrees of animosity, virtually all of the participants of my study entertained negative views concerning the university. 'One doesn't trust universities', is a remark that came out of Carlos' mouth but could easily have been uttered by any of my interviewees. So much so, that both he and Ramón referred to the university as 'mafias'. Ramon's speech is so rich in this respect that it is worth quoting it at length:

> I'm interested in an academic career in the sense of being able to do what I like and winning projects and having doctoral students, that's what I like. But I'd say that's my line, that is, I'm not interested in a position, I'm not interested in the deanship, I'm not interested in anything that comes from an institution like the university, because every time I get involved in a process of this type, such as accreditation and shit, I leave wanting to vomit; I mean, it seems so disgusting to me [...]. And I think this is a mafia: two peers, who are paid, come here so these guys, I don't know… then we all say that everything is super nice, and they give the university the years [of accreditation] they are going to give them. So, it's a bit of a mafia man, what mafias do, yeah, mafias do that, like Corleone man, so you're taking over more territory; it's a matter of having more pins [*chapas*] or less pins, that's it.

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The process he is describing, higher education accreditation, is a highly criticised one in Chile on the grounds of the lack of transparency and accountability of quality assurance agencies. If they resemble mafia methods, that is open to discussion. What attracts my interpretive gaze is the conspicuous contradiction arising from the fact that an academic is saying that he is not interested in anything that comes from the university. Taking into consideration that the job he chose, the identity he has forged, and the joy he gets from researching depend on the university, he must have at least some interest in an institution like the university. However, he claims not to. Where does this need to discursively detach himself from an institution he is obviously engaged with come from? A possible answer could be that it comes from the fact that, for him, the university is equivalent to a brawl for power. Somehow, he pulls off a subtle opposition: researching is put aside the 'positions' available at the university, despite the fact that all of these activities take place within the same institutional setup. Expressed differently, what he does is self-perceived as not driven by power, so he can remain a mere bystander of the emetic activities of the university.

At the end of the quote, Ramón deploys a local colloquialism to portray the power-seeking tactics transpiring at the university—the idea of accumulating or losing pins. *Chapas*, the actual word he employs, is used here as a metaphor for power by means of resembling the badges on someone's chest, such as a high-ranked military officer. The more pins you get, the more power they represent.[16] However, *chapa* is an overdetermined slang. The reason is that it could also mean alias, like an undercover agent of some kind. Keeping this amphibology in mind, the way in which Ramón refers to himself and his research—allegedly that university activity that does not belong to the university—is significant:

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[16] An English equivalent might be 'stripes'.

I think that the mafia-like university has always been like that, in the sense that loyalties are transient, so to speak, and I've been at the university for many years, I've got good friends at the university, in this one and in others, so I work based on a friendship bond. I'm not very instrumental in my work, you know? but since I've got little pins [*chapitas*], since little pins [*chapitas*] are always valuable at the university, I move, I can move, you know? So, the co-researchers of my *fondecyt* are more like friends with whom I've been working for a long time and we have degrees of loyalty, degrees of, I don't know, even human protection regarding, I mean, regardless of whether one is paid for a project, if it happens that someone works more than someone else because he has other problems, that's fine.

All of a sudden, Ramón claims to be in possession of the very same asset that has turned the university into a mafia. With a *little* twist though—he claims not to have pins but petite ones, a miniaturised symbol of power. And what is that little pin of his? His *fondecyt*. This is the asset that makes him valuable to the university as well as the enabler of his mobility. But, oddly enough, it is at the same time the feature that, if we are to be consistent with his own speech, turns him into a (discursive) malefactor. After all, no matter how little the pins may be, pins are what they are nonetheless. What seems to protrude here is (the effort to sustain) the fantasy of a powerless academic. Ramón devoted a considerable amount of energy to distance himself from the power games of the university and, to accomplish that, he portrays himself as a sort of outsider from within, someone lacking any desire for power. Despite his discursive contortions, Ramón's *fondecyt* is the place where his speech trips over itself, revealing an attachment to power that was negated at first.

My interpretation here is that *fondecyts* are a short-circuit in Chilean academia and that is what the revolt brings to the fore. They

bestow academics with a parcel of freedom—the mobility Ramón refers to—to conduct their research, a parcel of which they are the sole rightful owners—in case of changing workplace, scholars 'take' their *fondecyts* with them. *Fondecyts*, then, represent a sort of juncture or hinge linking the university and academics, although not entirely. This is why the act of researching, as we have seen, appears to have a unique, separate status from other 'positions' at the university. But this parcel of freedom is not without ambivalence. In the face of the galloping curtailment of academic freedoms that the neoliberal reorganisation of the university has accomplished, power has become almost anathema amongst academics, something permanently displaced. Let me provide just one concise example. While talking with his students about the *estallido*, in his lesson on 6 June 2022, Tomás said: 'The problem is not that academics speak, because power is not held by academics'. This encapsulates the fantasy that *fondecyt* enables *and* disrupts in unison, namely, the narrative according to which power belongs exclusively to the Other. Ironically, these products of the neoliberalisation of the university can act as an imaginary shield academics can resort to in order to discursively detach themselves from the neoliberal university. It is the *little* parcel of power that, in comparison to the behemoth the university is, *it does not consciously count as power*.

In the most traditional psychoanalytic sense, *fondecyts* can be seen as a symptom of the Chilean neoliberal university—they are a substitutive formation of something that has been prevented from external manifestation. My take is that the predatory logics of the neoliberal university have had such a deep psychic impact upon academics that some perceive themselves at the mercy of this unmitigatedly power*ful* institution. The fact that this is largely a reasonable outcome of the university's political economy nowadays, however, does not prevent a libidinal economy from running in parallel. In my interviews, what appears to follow *fondecyt* as its

shadow is the fantasy of the power*less* academic, a defensive formation made, paradoxically, of a composite similar to what most academics try to shy away from: power. *Fondecyts* furnish academics with several expressions of power: money, legitimacy, prestige, stability, and, very important, the possibility of constructing an 'extrinsic', non-neoliberalised parcel of their lives called 'my research'. Yet, since power within the university is unfailingly perceived as always-already neoliberal, it must be camouflaged. And perhaps this is why, of all things, Ramón resorted to the slang *chapa* to convey it: insofar as academic power cannot have an external manifestation, it must go around disguised under an alias.

A matter of cookies

Let me provide another manifestation of this fantasy. A structural similarity with Ramón's speech can be found in Cristina's. She landed at a university in Valparaíso after a couple of years working in the UK. As she mentioned, she felt her presence was not particularly welcomed from the beginning. One of the main reasons for that had to do, for her, with the fact that she arrived 'with the curriculum of the neoliberal generation', that is to say, 'with *fondecyt* projects, publications, experience at an international university, and speaking English'. This situation, however, did not upset her because she discerned quite soon that her disposition was different than the one exhibited by her colleagues. According to her, they all share a 'tiny, microscopic view' of what it is to have power in her faculty. In contradistinction, she holds a divergent understanding and vision of the university that 'left me out, because I wasn't part of it, I wasn't a friend of anyone here, I wasn't interested in the same stuff'. At some point in the interview, she described the situation in the following fashion:

> My stance was like are you kidding me!? I really couldn't believe
> that people were here fighting for this, cos it seems like it's a tiny

cookie [*galletita*], the power of the faculty is a tiny cookie, and they

showed a lack of vision and understanding of the university as a

whole.

University power is a tiny cookie. A cookie whose flavour, it seems fair to infer, does not take Cristina's fancy. Surprisingly, this metaphor was rehearsed over and over again in her speech; almost every time she refers to her peers, she portrays them as ravenous cookie eaters while she remains self-composed. Her decision not to fight for the tiny cookie turned her into a pariah: 'They don't pay any attention to me, they don't consider me when decisions need to be made, I'm nullified, I live on an island, you know? But, for the same reason, I can do whatever I want'. The similitudes between Ramón and Cristina are here striking: a) they align with a negative perception of the university that reduces it to ruthless power games; b) they both proclaim to have no interest whatsoever in these power dynamics; and c) they seem to enjoy and take pride from their outcast status by seeking refuge in their research projects. Ultimately, since she has her research, she is aware of the fact that 'the university doesn't end at the faculty, so I've got a whole world to grow in academic terms'. For Cristina, there seems to be a university beyond the university itself.

As a result of the *estallido*, Cristina claims, the quarrels for the tiny cookie did not stop yet they acquired a more human touch. Her perception of her colleagues remained consistent; however, she feels that the Department as a whole reached a deeper understanding of the vital trajectories of its members. Two months after the suspension of all academic activities at her university, a meeting was scheduled for the second half of November 2019. It was the first time they would gather together since the revolt began. The following is her recollection of what happened that day:

I got up and the meeting was, let's say, at nine, lessons were suspended of course, and I brought a cake [*un queque*], because I

said: "It can't be this way, it can't be that we don't do something for each other", you know? I remember that I baked the cake [*hice el queque*] and I put some chocolate chunks inside, so I baked it just before I left and then it arrived warm, the chocolate was pouring out haha.

The confectionery-based references, as we can see, permeate a good portion of Cristina's speech. Shortly after, she opposed both sweets: 'I must confess, I'm not interested in the tiny cookie, so, surely, if I would have been interested in the tiny cookie, maybe I wouldn't have brought the cake'. We know what the tiny cookie is, so the question is now what does the cake represent? In a way, it is what actually takes her fancy, which, as we have seen, academically speaking is her research. So, the first time they all reunite since the beginning of the revolt she decided, both metaphorically and literally, to put their differences on the table: she brought a bigger, more indulgent pudding to share with the tiny cookie eaters. Nonetheless, in yet another similarity with Ramón, her metaphor also backfires symbolically. In Chile, to bake a cake, *hacer un queque*, is a well-known idiom for adulation. The underlying logic is that somebody's obsequious admiration for someone else is so profound that this person is willing to go to great lengths for the recognition of the other party. Of all things, then, that day she 'baked a cake' for her power-seeking colleagues, which can be interpreted as a symbolic act of distance *and* of concealed admiration.

Resisting power

What the fantasy of the powerless academic reflects is the ambivalent status that research acquires in the neoliberal configuration of the Chilean university. It is no mystery that in the last decades the university has become, in many regards, an inhospitable place. Inhabiting the university and wanting to pursue an academic career are anything but straightforward decisions. Even if clearly inside,

academics' inclination to uncouple themselves from the logics of the contemporary university are reasonable and expected. What perhaps strikes me as unexpected is the paradoxical manner in which some of them claim to achieve such an outcome. The overdetermined symbolic constructions of the little pins and the tiny cookie, in my opinion, attest to the ambiguous (and diminished) place academic power has amid the humanities and social sciences in Chile. Owing to a neoliberally-propelled policy, *fondecyt* holders can construct a defensive narrative within which *they are not totally part* of the neoliberal university, since all they mind is their own research projects. Somehow, an activity unmistakably related and dependent on the university is discursively turned into a resistance against the university itself. Against this backdrop, power can only adopt metonymic expressions.

The interpretation I propose here is that even in a context of rampant academic disempowering—hitting particularly hard, it is worth noticing, in the humanities and social sciences—powerlessness can nonetheless play an imaginary role. In a way, this is less counterintuitive than it may sound. In Chile, neoliberalism has eroded academic positions to such an extent that, for many, it seems that all that is left is to imaginarily redouble the wager: we have no more power to be dispossessed of; it is just me and my research, the Other has all the power. However, as I said, *fondecyt* is a symptom—one of those things we cling onto no matter how much pain they provoke—inasmuch as it organises this fantasy despite being itself, comparatively speaking, a tiny symbol of power. From within this fantasy, it is as if to resist the—for the most part—oppressive power of the neoliberal university, *academics build a resistance to their own power*. And this might explain why, for those embracing this fantasy, the *estallido* did not alter the logic of *fondecyt*: when research is imaginarily constructed as invariably non-neoliberal, or at least outside its power machinations, academic writing becomes always-

already an act of resistance. But, as I have tried to highlight here, resistance is not a piece of cake.

CONCLUSIONS

The interpretation I have presented in this chapter provides three empirically-supported fantasies structuring the unconscious attachments of critical subjects to the act of writing. Setting aside their many differences, what they all show is that critical academic writing has to transit through intricate libidinal avenues to materialise itself. Critique, thus, is not simply the product of epistemological resources—appropriate theories and plausible research questions—plus material resources—institutional funding and access to a laptop; it also requires complex and oftentimes contradictory fantasmatic supports. Acknowledging that the fantasies identified above may not be the only ones at play, the detailed exploration I offer here, nonetheless, empirically reconstructs some of the 'bonds of desire' (Lacan, 2020) when it comes to critical writing in post-*estallido* Chile. This means that, through the reconstruction of the imaginary liaisons between their writing and the others, I have delineated three modalities of dealing with the desire of the Other of the *estallido*. Three ways in which critical subjects navigate the misrecognition of this Other.

The three fantasies resulting from my interpretation constitute singular ways in which the unconscious life of academic writing can be organised. From one angle, they all share the classic fetishistic premise (Freud, 2001a): I know very well (that my mum does not have a penis), and yet (I act as though she actually has one). The fantasies organising academic writing follow an analogous pattern:

- Writing, in the fantasy of the impotent academic, is an impossible task and yet the other (not me) writes anyway.

- In the fantasy of the clairvoyant academic there is a recognition that the *estallido* cannot be known in advance, and yet they think I should have known it nonetheless.

- In the fantasy of the powerless academic the university is constructed as a site defined by power struggles, yet scholars (who belong to the university) claim to hold no power.

Fantasies, therefore, organise the unconscious life of scholars and researchers by turning structural impossibilities into practical prohibitions, and each prohibition comes with its gatekeeper. Whilst this is certainly the case, seeing nothing but a fetishistic inversion in these fantasies runs the risk of missing a crucial point. The reason is that, when we put the emphasis of the fetishistic denial at the level of knowledge, everything could be read as a cynical manoeuvre. From this standpoint, Chilean academics are well aware of how things are in reality—they *can indeed* write, they *cannot know* how events will occur, they *do hold* power—and yet they mask this reality with an illusion. But, as Žižek (2008) reminds us, reconstructing fantasies is not important due to their capacity to mask the real state of things, but because the real state of things is always-already fantasmatic. This does not mean that a cynical distance cannot be adopted when writing academically; it means that such a distance is inscribed within a fantasmatic organisation of our intersubjective reality from the very beginning.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to sketch a route alternative to sheer cynicism. Lacan (2020) will refer to the unconscious as the inverted message the subject receives from the Other. This is an unknown message since it gets captured by the imaginary relationship between the ego and the other (human being), a relation that is set in motion precisely to hamper the recognition of this inverted and unwanted message containing the unconscious truth of the subject's

desire. By fixating desiring scenarios, imaginary relationships—or fantasies—act as a defence from the subject's unconscious truth. As I have mentioned on multiple occasions, these scenarios construct an other that is crucial for its maintenance, but they also create (modes of access to) objects. In their speech, the participants of my study talk about many objects and their own ways of accessing them: books, articles, *fondecyts*, universities, research centres, and so on. The singularity of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that what propels the relationship of the subject with the world is the primordial lack of the object, a lack that does not have a negative but a productive connotation. And Lacan will identify three 'terms of reference' for the lack of the object that might illuminate certain aspects of the fantasies outlined in my interpretation.

Symbolic indebtedness is the first term. In relation to castration, Lacan suggests that what is lacking is not a real, factual object. The object of (symbolic) castration is always imaginary (the phallus), that mythical guarantee of full meaning. In its absence, symbolic indebtedness is how the subject recognises the law and punishment. In the second term, imaginary detriment, the object is 'well and truly real' but the frustration, its lack, is 'wholly imaginary'. What justifies the distinction between frustration and the other terms is the fact that the subject aspires to be vindicated and feels entitled to demand the object. When frustrated, the subject feels deprived of the object by someone else but, and this is the imaginary twist, this is experienced as a withdrawal of love; what is lacking is the love bestowed by the other through the gift. In the final term of reference, privation, we encounter the lack of a symbolic object. This is premised on the corroboration that, in the world, nothing lacks in itself unless symbolised. We can only get the idea that something is not in its place after both that something and that place are coated with signifiers, otherwise it would not hold. The paradigmatic form of privation is the woman's lack of a penis. In reality, of course, the woman does not lack anything, and we

only get the idea that she does if, by the introduction of some kind of symbolic law, we establish that something should be in a certain place (Chiesa, 2007).

I argue that we could draw interesting correlations between these three terms of reference for the lack of the object and the three fantasies I have presented in this chapter. For the sake of clarity, I shall proceed schematically.

- Symbolic indebtedness comes across as a way of understanding what is at stake in the fantasy of the impotent academic. In this scenario, as we saw, Carlos is not impotent as he claims to be; he, therefore, does not lack a factual object (his missing potency). Furthermore, what he seems to desire is the Law, a Law that can effectively separate genuine academics from the other bogus academics. Ultimately, what his speech insinuates is the desire for punishment for the clandestine enjoyment of the other that he is prevented from having.

- The logic of frustration has similarities with the fantasy of the clairvoyant academic. It can be said that the lack in both the speeches of Carmen and Tomás is a real, veridical object: they, in reality, did not know about the *estallido*; neither of them could let the others know what will happen. So, irrespective of the impossibility of this task, the object is factual, yet the lack is evidently imaginary. In a peculiar dialectic, the triumph of sociology is unconsciously registered as a loss: the dissemination of the sociological imagination, the fact that now the whole Chilean society can deploy sociological tools, feels subjectively harmful. If now we introduce the logic of frustration, we can add that this could be the case since what Carmen and Tomás experience is a withdrawal of love; the revolt took place and, as a

result, they were no longer the sole recipients of the public's attention as they used to be.

- Finally, a parallel can be suggested between the privation of the object and the fantasy of the powerless academic. What Ramón and Cristina share in common is a conscious refusal of power *tout-court*, whilst the latter is invariably located within the neoliberal university. By means of the liminal nature of their *fondecyts*, they can create the fantasy of a non-neoliberalised space they can inhabit without partaking in the university (despite being fully part of it). So to speak, their speeches seem to resemble the belief that the woman actually lacks a penis: they perceive themselves—and construct their fantasmatic scenarios accordingly—assuming that academics *should forsake power* in the first place. Interestingly enough, what is perpetuated in this fantasy through the appearance of resistance is the very *symbolic* delimitation of power established by the neoliberal university, the underlying reason for their disempowerment.

As we can see, when fantasies are taken not as maskers of how things really are but as the very condition or mediation for things to be graspable in the first place, cynicism is not enough. Consequently, my intention in these concluding remarks has been to further unfurl the nuances of the fantasies organising critical academic writing in Chile. The mapping of these attempts at recomposing the libidinal bonds between academics and academia accentuates the winding path in which the desire for critique moves. Since the meaningful delimitation of what counts as critical is sanctioned by the Other that itself is a groundless entity, scholars are confronted with the impossible yet interminable task of interpreting what this enigmatic Other wants. The fantasmatic scenarios identified in my analysis are some of the painful, exhausting, contradictory, and profoundly singular ways of

dealing with the excessiveness of the Other of the *estallido*. None of them is, nor can be, a successful enterprise. By definition, fantasies are paradoxical solutions to unsolvable problems. Writing, that key aspect of the self-shaping of critical subjects, was structured according to a new Other. The ability to write again implied a new recognition as a critical subject. The three fantasies I have interpreted here are some of the unconscious ways in which this is attempted. Within these imaginary narratives, the desire for critique finds its very own problematic solutions amid the emancipatory organisation of the Other of the *estallido*.

CHAPTER 6
FANTASIES OF EMANCIPATION AND EMANCIPATORY FANTASIES

INTRODUCTION

I started my research by noticing that, for some, exploring the desire for radical social change among critical academics might be a peculiar endeavour. This is the case since there is no mystery about the link between scholarly critique and transformative sociopolitical events—in Ross' (2023) formulation, to critique is to work towards and wish for change. Accepting the irrefutability of this state of affairs, however, does not say much about the subjective form that this link can empirically adopt nor how it is sustained. As the preceding chapters demonstrate, the unconscious avenues that the desire for critique must travel in the aftermath of the Chilean revolt are significantly convoluted, more often than not demanding strenuous psychic efforts.

All of the people I interviewed and observed—around 38 scholars and researchers—publicly manifested their endorsement of the *estallido*. But that could be an understatement. Most of them were expecting an event like this to happen, even displaying their surprise that it did not take place sooner. For multiple reasons, even if the manner in which the revolt unfurled was impactful, the fact that a nationwide popular uprising occurred was simultaneously desired and foreseeable. And yet, the interpretation of my material shows that academics faced great difficulties in recognising themselves within the new symbolic coordinates in place. The emancipatory interpellation of the Other of the *estallido* entailed a dialectic between recognition and misrecognition that prompted a complex unconscious economy to frame the desire for change. As a result, we can establish that the bond

between critique and social transformation is not merely epistemological and political, but also imaginary.

My goal in this chapter is to draw the main conclusions from the interpretation of my empirical material. First, I argue that my analysis corroborates the relevance of the notion of fantasy for the study of radical events and their identifications. Fantasy enables us to pay attention to dynamics commonly overlooked in these events. From there, I delve into the commonalities of the five fantasies analysed to distil some general trends. Based on this exercise, I conclude that the emancipatory organisation of the revolt was lopsided: emancipatory meanings were largely supported by a neoliberal libidinal economy. The latter can be identified in the rejection of negativity in all of the fantasies interpreted. Finally, following the premise of my research according to which there is no desire without a fantasmatic framework, I show how my interpretation of the revolt can contribute to the conceptualisation of emancipatory fantasies.

THE DIGNITY OF FANTASY

In May 2023, just when I was reaching the concluding stages of my research, I and a handful of fellow PhD researchers had the opportunity of entertaining a generous and intimate conversation with Jacqueline Rose. In the course of this exchange, she commented on some milestones of her intellectual journey, laying stress on certain political episodes that, in her own words, she simply could not walk away from. At some point, I asked her about one of the features that have made me admire her work. Particularly, the fact that she manages to convey her politically progressive positions in tandem with the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy, which is definitely the road less travelled theoretically speaking. Her reply was that she has permanently been interested in the way people get mobilised to do things, especially how they come to perceive they are self-mobilised

amid the unavoidability of the unconscious. She subsequently added: 'So you have to fight for fantasy, because it has its dignity'. I wrote down this exact phrase in my notebook, which lately got me thinking about its reverberations with the demand for dignity springing from the *estallido*. Fantasy has its dignity and the Chilean demand for dignity has its own fantasies.

I am bringing this recollection up because resorting to psychoanalysis in order to explore the subjective effects of an event like the Chilean revolt is an unusual pick, let alone the notion of fantasy. As Roland Barthes (1985b: 275) said to Bernard-Henri Lévy in an interview, the imaginary 'is almost the poor relation of psychoanalysis […], it seems underrated, at least by the psychoanalytic vulgate'. If you want to show your critical credentials from a psychoanalytic point of view, there are other candidates better equipped for the job. The register of the real and its satellite concepts drive and *jouissance*, for instance, have for a long time been the default choice when it comes to using Lacan for interpreting social phenomena. According to him, the real is the impossible: 'Not in the name of a simple obstacle we hit our heads up against, but in the name of the logical obstacle of what, in the symbolic, declares itself to be impossible. This is where the real emerges from' (Lacan, 2007: 123). The parallels between the dislocatory effects of the *estallido* and the kind of impossibility the real accounts for are evident—the revolt was not a simple obstacle we hit our heads up against, but an actual impossibility for the reproduction of our lives as we hitherto did.

The main problem with this approach is that it ends up applying psychoanalytic theory to explain the *estallido* instead of exploring it (Uribe, 2020). In other words, it immediately domesticates an event that is ironically regarded as impossible. It is almost as if reading Lacan is all we need to understand the revolt; as though Lacanian psychoanalysis was inherently anti-neoliberal (Dureuil, 2023).

Moreover, even if the logic behind this procedure was not reductionist, its outcome can only lead us to a stalemate. The question we should posit is simple: what can be gained by adducing that the *estallido* is the 'real', unsymbolisable element of Chile's democratic history? Apart from some sort of intellectual self-reassurance, not much. As soon as a sociopolitical event is conflated with a concept, interpretations are cancelled. Ultimately, as Kornbluh (2022: 35) acutely points out, 'Overly romantic notions of the real in psychoanalytic political theory omit the dialectical character of the real's constitution by the symbolic'.

Furthermore, the decision of taking a snippet of Lacan's theory in order to explain events such as the revolt goes against Lacan himself; he persistently claimed that psychoanalysis does not provide the key to the universe. Rather, psychoanalysis 'is governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject. It poses this notion in a new way, by leading the subject back to his signifying dependence' (Lacan, 1998: 77). This was the starting point of my research. I argued that there is enough evidence to maintain that the *estallido* was a post-neoliberal way of organising social life in Chile, and that such an emancipatory organisation was symbolic. Resorting to Rancière (2010), I claimed that the revolt allowed Chileans to experience neoliberalism according to the logic of post-neoliberalism. As a result, I conceptualised the *estallido* as the Other enabling this emancipatory experience to explore the unconscious economy of the desire for change. My exploration focused strategically on critical academics, since they can be treated as subjects who shape themselves according to the good of social change (Critchley, 2008). Consequently, my research is a psychoanalytically-inspired study of the Chilean revolt not because I provide a Lacanian explanation of it, but because I focus on the symbolic nature of the *estallido* to explore its unconscious mediations and thus arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the desire for change.

Based on the above, my study closely follows Kornbluh's (2019: 164) observation that 'any analysis of social transformation must address psychic transformation'. I operationalised this psychic transformation in terms of fantasy. The 'real', dislocatory nature of the revolt is thus assumed as the background where a new field of discursivity is emerging, a process that prompts new symbolic practices and, as a corollary, new imaginary stabilisations of meaning. As I mentioned in chapter 2 and will develop at length in the next one, my procedure goes against the grain of most local approaches to the revolt, which tend to dwell on its disruptive nature. In contradistinction, my interpretation lays stress on the *estallido*'s capacity to reorganise the social bond in Chile by means of an interpellative call that 'invited' subjects to identify with new, emancipatory meanings.

My claim is that this is both a factual corroboration and a theoretical principle. On the one hand, the protests that preceded the revolt on 18 October (high school students 'jumping the turnstile' at tube stations) and the actions that unfolded immediately after did not transpire in the desert of the real. On the contrary, they offered a range of discursive elements (mottoes, rationales, narratives, and so on) that people could resort to so as to forge a counter-hegemonic identity. On the other hand, this can be understood in terms of the inescapability of the imaginary realm in our lives. As Calum Neill (2013: 339) succinctly puts it, 'there is no experience of the world which is not affected by identification'. Acknowledging that the revolt is even minimally meaningful implies the tacit acceptance of its imaginary dimension; namely, the fact that subjects sustain this new experience of the world by means of unconscious investments.

For reasons I can only conjecture about, among the community of scholars relying on the notion of fantasy for empirical research, there is a patent selectivity in the deployment of this concept. As I mentioned in different parts of my study, despite the explicit acknowledgment of

the inexorability of the imaginary realm for the structuration of meaning (Glynos, 2011; Neill, 2013), academic attention tends to 'naturally' go to politically undesirable processes of identification. Put differently, fantasy appears to only be a gear in the machinery of power and domination, a crucial component for the camouflaging of oppression. The consequence of this is twofold. First, it creates a theoretical impasse since an ontological premise (all identifications depend on a fantasmatic scaffolding) suffers an epistemological restriction (oppressive identifications enjoy closer scrutiny than others). Second, it creates a false sense of straightforwardness when it comes to politically progressive identifications. To the extent that fantasy gives the impression of being exclusively part of power dynamics, it seems that emancipatory or counter-hegemonic identifications take place in a fantasy-less environment. Otherwise, and this is the point to which I would like to draw attention, we would be forced to accept that the desire for change and its progressive identifications are just as contradictory and messy as all the others.

My research comes along as an attempt at challenging these perceptions to restore the dignity of fantasy for the study of progressive social transformation. I approached the revolt assuming that the array of new symbolic associations this event set forth required a fantasmatic 'cushioning' on the part of the subject. All I did, then, was to surmise that in the same way that there is a series of complex psychic dynamics involved in the sustenance of oppressive forms of identifications, equivalent dynamics must be in place in emancipatory settings. And to prove that the identification with counter-hegemonic discourses is anything but an uncomplicated, immediate process—as the lack of scholarly interest seems to suggest—I explore its vicissitudes among critical academics. The latter arises as the collective which is most likely to expect a direct correlation between subject positions and the desire for social transformation. For a group of people whose subjectivities gravitate towards the good of social change, radical

transformation should be an experience as close to self-recognition as one could imagine. At an unconscious level, however, the waters are much muddier than this reasonable portrayal suggests.

REJECTING NEGATIVITY

The five fantasies I reconstructed in the preceding chapters—sleeplessness and immediacy in the visual field; impotence, clairvoyance, and powerlessness in the act of writing—point precisely to the psychic difficulties involved in the identification with the *estallido*. In order not to repeat myself, I would like to highlight here some of the structural challenges that can be derived from my interpretation. To begin with, the fantasmatic recompositions of the scopic field exemplarily attest to the excessiveness of the revolt—I make use of this notion in a descriptive rather than normative fashion. Both the fantasies of sleeplessness and immediacy clearly expose the magnitude of the subjective costs people had to pay to keep up with the revolt's pace. To a large degree, this is an unintended outcome of the autonomy of the *estallido*, an undirected event that acquired a sort of anonymous yet pressing push. These fantasies appear to execute opposite manoeuvres and consequently aspire to achieve different goals. Interestingly, they end up being just separate ways of doing exactly the same, that is, coping with what they perceive the revolt wants from the subject. In both cases, the *estallido* is internalised as an injunction not to be duped. This point deserves further comments.

One of the most distinctive tenets of the discourse around the revolt is how its emergence marks a turning point in the country's self-consciousness: we used to believe that we were doing fine but now *we can see* how things are in reality. And we can see because *we are not asleep* anymore. At a symbolic level, the misperception of the lived situation, i.e., the error, is not directly due to a contingent or political obstacle, but rather linked to the vital function of resting. According to

this, the Chilean people can now see the reality of their oppression and act upon it *because* they sleep no more. As a result, we were in the presence of 'a sleeping but sovereign *demos* that woke up' to retrieve 'the founding experience of equality that feeds the secret life of every democracy' (López, 2021: 22). In such a context, the cultural manifestations on the street can be perceived as 'the denunciation of the multiple reasons why Chile should never "fall asleep" again' (De Vivanco & Johansson, 2021b: 12). For many, these could be deemed as nothing more than rhetorical vehicles to mobilise a deeper truth, symbolic ornaments produced to embellish the actual message of the revolt. Both my approach and interpretation suggest otherwise.

By linking the act of awakening with the possibility of overcoming the current state of domination, falling asleep was inadvertently made equivalent to the perpetuation of the neoliberal yoke—and so we should refrain from anything that could make us drowsy. In this scenario, tiredness holds no semantic difference from being wrong. The evidence that the command to never fall asleep again is not a mere decorative supplement can be found in the problematic place that truth occupies in the two fantasies enunciated above.[17] The fantasies of sleeplessness and immediacy stage psychic solutions to the quandary elicited by an interpellative call that depends on vigilance and concentration. Amid this context, the subject must find fantasmatic ways of responding to the excessive call of the revolt that demands indefatigable attentiveness. Either through an identification with the Other in order not to succumb to somnolence, or by means of the Herculean task of registering every single act all the time, academics

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[17] As mentioned previously, my approach is analogous to Kristin Ross' analysis of the Paris Commune. When she comes across the notion of 'communal luxury' in a manifesto redacted by the Artist's Federation, she refrains from taking it as a simple ornamental statement: 'This may seem like a small, perhaps even a "decorative," demand, made by a handful of mere "decorative" artists. But what they had in mind actually entails not only a complete reconfiguration of our relation to art, but to labor, social relations, nature, and the lived environment as well' (Ross, 2023: 278). The difference lies in that she dwells on the 'decorative' in order to draw political lessons while I try to derive unconscious ones.

cling to certain signifiers so as to remain on the right side, that is to say, permanently awake. When what is visible is the truth and nothing impedes us to see it, vision is elevated to a moral duty.

The psychic *cul-de-sac* of the revolt in the field of vision shares interesting commonalities with what William Mazzarella (2017) identifies as the fantasy of perfect addressability. In his analysis of contemporary marketing and media, Mazzarella refers to the impact of neurosciences and digital algorithms on the construction of the subject they seek to produce or reach. What these technologies seem to herald is the waning of the assumption according to which underneath the layers of manipulation of mass publicity we could find a sort of autonomous subject irreducible to these strategies. The point is that nowadays, thanks to a customisation and narrowcasting unthinkable even a decade ago, we appear to be addressed as exactly who we are. Perfect addressability, then, names 'a situation in which there is no perceptible gap between the media that address me and my innermost understandings of myself' (Mazzarella, 2017: 109). I would like to suggest that an equivalent dynamic could be found in the *estallido*. To put it bluntly, once full visibility becomes mandatory and not seeing is a sign of weakness or oppression, then the only possible interpellation (or addressability in Mazzarella's terminology) is *perfect* interpellation. At a scopic level, the revolt leaves no room for interruption or intermittency, so fantasies become imaginary solutions to this demand.

Based on the above, the fantasmatic recompositions around seeing (during) the revolt are transindividually 'manufactured' scenarios helping subjects to imaginarily sustain the excessiveness of the *estallido*. When we pay attention to the symbolic structuration of the revolt's visual field, we can appreciate how its unconscious economy appears to operate a reversal of the neoliberal one; a reversal yet not a transformation. The soporific effects of neoliberalism, according to the narrative, were permanent—Chileans were uninterruptedly asleep,

incapable of seeing their subjugation. The analeptic properties of the *estallido* produce the same result, just in the opposite way: we are always awake now, able to permanently see the actual state of affairs. Discursively, the popular uprising gave rise to meanings and practices opposed to the neoliberal configuration of everyday life. At an unconscious level, however, the revolt seemed to fall back on the libidinal economy already in place. What I suggest is that the *estallido* did not lessen the psychic strains of neoliberalism in order to mobilise these new meanings; it tried to make use of the excess in a non-neoliberal fashion instead. Therefore, at least in the terrain of visibility, the revolt did not alter the unconscious circuit of neoliberalism but channelled it in a different direction. The subject, nevertheless, had to unconsciously reply to the same structural question: what does this *excessive* Other want from me? Instead of relaxing the tightness of the previous grip, the Chilean awakening forced the subject to double down on this logic.

Let us move now to the imaginary recompositions of writing. The three fantasies identified in this field—the impotent, the clairvoyant, and the powerless academic—account for what is likely to be one of the toughest processes amid radical social transformation—the subjective negotiations with our current symbolic identities in the face of the revolt. By focusing on different aspects of academic writing, these libidinised narratives lay bare the conflicts involved in adjusting oneself to (what we assume are) the symbolic exigencies of the *estallido*. For subjects who shaped themselves according to a good of social change in terms of the overcoming of neoliberalism, the post-neoliberal organisation of the revolt implied the reframing of the desire for change. My interpretation shows that no matter how much we want progressive transformation, this change can reasonably be experienced as a loss. What is perceived as a loss, and the way it is subjectively inscribed, depends on singular psychic dynamics.

Power is what academics feel deprived of. Some experience the sudden incapacity to perform the quintessential task of writing; others feel like their previous status has been unjustly eroded, so their writing is meaningless; and another group perceives itself as stripped of any institutional power, so they seek shelter in the (powerless) act of writing. All of this is veridical, first and foremost, at an imaginary level, meaning that they lose power in the fantasies allowing them to experience reality, but not necessarily outside this libidinal framework. Based on their own speeches, these subjects *do* write, *do* retain their scholarly status, and *do* exert power within the university, and yet they appear to only access their desire if they perceive themselves as dispossessed from most forms of power. Either in an oblique or explicit fashion, the neoliberal academic Other is invariably portrayed as the greedy entity accumulating all the power. The privileged place that loss occupies in the imaginary recompositions of writing explains why 'othering' certain fictitious or real groups arise as the main source of unconscious satisfaction. These others are the ones who do what the revolt forbids or makes impossible, extracting some kind of corrupt enjoyment from this transgressive behaviour. The crucial point is that, of course, the accusers partake in the very same activities they claim not to, which leads them to rehearse sometimes extreme imaginary contortions to find accommodation to this situation.

The *estallido* was the most empowering sociopolitical event that Chile experienced in its recent democratic history and perhaps its entire existence as an independent country. Never before has a spontaneous expression of popular power reached these highs. Ironically, for critical subjects, power is precisely what seems to fit nowhere except in unconscious fantasies. In the context of a revolt against the neoliberal configuration of life, academics offer different modulations of the same structural refusal to recognise themselves as power holders. Power is anathema in any capacity among scholars because it seems to be immediately equated with neoliberalism. Due to

this inescapability, subjects feel compelled to create an imaginary exterior in which the expressions of their power can be registered as their opposite.

Over thirty years ago, Ernesto Laclau (1990) identified the problems that the notion of power poses to the theorisation of emancipatory movements. The largely accepted premise that identities are forged antagonistically, namely, that the way of sustaining what something is inevitably takes the form of what that is not, may lead progressive positions to assume that the emancipatory goal is to suppress power. Due to its relevance to my argument, I will quote almost the full fragment:

> Underlying that response is the assumption that a free society is one from which power has been totally eliminated. But as we saw, if power is the prerequisite of any identity, the radical disappearance of power would amount to the disintegration of the whole social fabric. [...] it is this profound contradiction which underlies any project of *global* emancipation. By global emancipation we do not mean specific or even a broad and articulated set of emancipations, but the notion of an emancipation aimed at transforming the very 'root' of the social. A harmonious society is impossible because power is the condition for society to be possible (and at the same time, impossible [...]). Even in the most radical and democratic projects, social transformation thus means building a new power, not radically eliminating it. Destroying the hierarchies on which sexual or racial discrimination is based will, at some point, always require the construction of other exclusions for collective identities to be able to emerge. (Laclau, 1990: 33)

Recently, the same argument has been made by Vladimir Safatle (2022a). Resorting to a slightly different language, he criticises contemporary scholarly takes on the autonomy-heteronomy binomial. In his view, the ascendancy of philosophy of consciousness over the

way in which we approach subjectivity can be felt not only through the idea of a free, volitive agency but also in the belief that all external causality (heteronomy) is always-already oppression. Accordingly, 'we have been led to believe that every situation in which I am caused from the outside can only be a form of servitude' (Safatle, 2022a: 4).

This is the belief that seems to be at the centre of the libidinal economy of the *estallido*. A silent equivalence between power, neoliberalism, and externality informs the fantasies framing the desire for change. The acceptance of power in any form by academics is perceived as a neoliberal gesture, so it can only be admitted unconsciously. Regardless of whether they consciously endorse the idea that identities depend on antagonistic dynamics or not, they are unconsciously invested in the belief that power = neoliberalism = external causality = oppression. This unconscious rejection of the antagonistic nature of the social finds a subjective correlate in the fantasies that structure the visual field. The investment in fantasies that avoid the traumatic call of the Other of the *estallido*—whether by identifying with the caller or by repudiating any misrecognition—can be seen as a rejection of the antagonistic nature of the subject. The fact that the libidinal economy of the revolt is characterised by fantasies of pure interpellation and disavowal of power suggests that, for critical subjects, the desire for change is unconsciously expressed as a rejection of negativity. Neither society nor the subject is divided. This means that no limit is accepted, just as with neoliberalism.

Despite my study not covering every aspect of the libidinal economy of the revolt, my interpretation evinces the continuity of important unconscious neoliberal investments during the revolt. Certainly, these investments coexisted with other conscious and unconscious dynamics that gave the *estallido* its particular emancipatory character. Following Rancière (2010), this attests to the contradictory nature of the emancipatory experience. The irony is that

just when the Chilean people regained power, we have come to realise that consciously admitting power is near-impossible since it retains its place within a neoliberal libidinal economy. Even if partially, the rejection of the division of both the social and the subject on which this is predicated runs the risk of making the desire for change at odds with sociality. As per Laclau, suppressing power equals suppressing society. If that is part of the unconscious economy of the desire for change in the *estallido*, then we can perceive its closeness to neoliberalism even more clearly: there's no such thing as society.

EMANCIPATORY FANTASIES?

From all the above, it follows that the fantasmatic recompositions presented in this research stress a paradox: the revolt produced meanings that challenged and even temporarily replaced certain neoliberal understandings *while* retaining some of its libidinal mainstays. Furthermore, sometimes even taking advantage of them. My study evidently does not exhaust the richness of the *estallido*, but it nonetheless shows how some of its crucial transformative components are still in solidarity with neoliberalism at an unconscious level. And here is where fantasy proves its dignity. By privileging the lateral symbolic associations produced in academics' attempts to convey meaning, we can identify the imaginary economies undergirding this process. This is precisely what allows us to perceive the resilience of the neoliberal libidinal economy against the backdrop of 'phrases that are impossible [to understand] for neoliberalism, but full of meaning for the revolt' (Castillo, 2019: 41). In other words, the existence and circulation of transformative meanings do not imply necessarily the alteration of the unconscious life of the regime that has been sought to be transformed—opposite meanings can be buttressed by identical unconscious dynamics.

The foregoing could give us a hint to understand the vertiginous unfolding of events of the last three years in Chile. A quick glance at the country today will suffice to believe that the *estallido* never occurred. In a shockingly short time interval, not only the spirit of the revolt was crushed but also it would not be an exaggeration to maintain that every political triumph was reversed. One fine morning the Chilean people were burning the country down, then everything seemed possible to accomplish. We subsequently found ourselves on the brink of having the most progressive constitution in the world, one that would be promulgated by the youngest and most radical president since 1990. Three years later, the constitutional draft was rejected, a second failed process was led by a far-right coalition, the young radical president ended up being a timid reformist, and everything that seems possible is marked once again by the neoliberal aegis. How can a country that has been rocked by such a radical sociopolitical event so easily carry on business as usual after a couple of years?

Based on my interpretation, trying to find an answer at the level of meaning would be to no avail. Is not so much that the revolt's discourse was too ambitious or not radical enough to defy the prevailing one. The point appears to be that the transformation of neoliberal meanings was not accompanied by an equivalent transformation of its libidinal economy. The role played by negativity mentioned earlier is the most palpable example of this. The disproportionate rejection of limits of the neoliberal grip—a subjective 'all or nothing'—was never really counteracted but recycled, moving, for example, from permanent sleepiness to permanent wakefulness. In both cases the subject is confronted with an excessive Other, reducing the psychic costs of jumping back to a previous meaning formation. The *estallido* fought fire with fire.

The fundamental premise informing my study is that there is no unconscious desire without a fantasmatic narrative organising it,

regardless of how progressive this desire might be. Consequently, there should be a way of discriminating between conservative and progressive fantasies. Some Lacanian authors stand against this idea. Lee Edelman (2007) is one of the most salient ones. He vouches for something akin to a post-fantasmatic politics, which is literally a post-political scenario—and this is a good thing for him. He maintains that the historicity of desire finds in politics its temporalisation, namely, its translation into a teleological narrative. From his perspective, fantasy cannot be emancipatory insofar as politics grants social viability to the succession of our libidinal attachments, occluding the negativity of the social.

> Politics, that is, by externalizing and configuring in the fictive form of a narrative, allegorizes or elaborates sequentially, precisely as desire, those overdeterminations of libidinal positions and inconsistencies of psychic defenses occasioned by what disarticulates the narrativity of desire: the drives, themselves intractable, unassimilable to the logic of interpretation or the demands of meaning-production; the drives that carry the destabilizing fore of what insists outside or beyond, because foreclosed by, signification. (Edelman, 2007: 9)

For Edelman, a queer project should avoid the temptation of becoming something, that is, rejecting imaginary identifications, and directly 'embody' its impossibility (the real). As Mari Ruti (2018) shows, the sheer antisociality of this position equates destructiveness with the ethical. In this research, I have argued that such a paradigm cannot be the single yardstick for judging the desire for change. Edelman's interpretation of politics as the temporalisation of the historicity of desire is actually correct, yet his conclusions are debatable. His position is ultimately untenable in theoretical terms, since his account gives the impression that we can choose between the registers of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. Lacanian psychoanalysis

maintains that human experience cannot but transpire within these registers, not that one is preferrable to the other. We do not experience the real, then a bit of symbolisation, and subsequently a pinch of the imaginary. This misreading of psychoanalytic theory leads to one-size-fits-all accounts of social change that are of little help to understanding emancipatory events like the *estallido*.

Ruti (2012, 2017, 2018) offers a way to conceptualise the emancipatory potential of fantasies. From her perspective, Lacanian psychoanalysis allows us to understand defiant subjects in terms of what kind of desire they choose to pursue. Accepting that the mediation of the Other is unavoidable for the subject to exist, she maintains that this is not an impediment but the very condition of social change. The fact that we learn to desire through the fantasmatic narratives addressing the desire of the Other means, in turn, that the Other does not know what its desire is either. This opens up the possibility for a desire that is not directly at the service of the existing order. Lacan's (1998: 214) claim that 'the desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work' points precisely in that direction.

This approach does not negate that fantasies entail alienation. However, the crucial point is that they simultaneously allow a subjective *separation* from the Other's desire. This is the rather counterintuitive political potential of fantasies: from within alienation in socially constructed fantasies we can access our fundamental fantasies, those 'deposits of desire that are more representative of our singularity than what we inherit from the Other' (Ruti, 2012: 79). From this angle, a subject of ethical capacity does not emerge from the shattering of symbolic representation—as Edelman maintains—but from its lack of foundations. Consequently, 'the point is to peel off some of the layers of social conditioning so as to allow us to access forms of desire that might evade the demands of both conventional morality and

economic exigency' (Ruti, 2018: 108). Fantasies, thus, challenge the extended assumption that emancipation is a matter of overcoming alienation. The latter is unavoidable if we aspire to retain a minimal level of sociality, and yet we can still rebel against oppressive social arrangements not by negating the desire of the Other but by separating ourselves from it.

This way of understanding the political potential of fantasies represents an alternative to the antisocial or purely disruptive accounts of the desire for change. However, it is still predicated on socially oppressive Others, like capitalism. This raises the question: is separation also the emancipatory way forward when the Other is a progressive organisation of the social bond? Or, can fantasy itself be emancipatory? This is the challenge the *estallido* poses to a Lacanian approach to the desire for change.

Todd McGowan maintains that fantasies can indeed be emancipatory. His approach explicitly defies the extended perception that 'Emancipation appears to hit a roadblock in fantasy' and, consequently, the goal of political movements is 'to eviscerate this barrier' (McGowan, 2022a: 177). In this line, he distinguishes between emancipatory and conservative fantasies. The latter seeks to isolate enjoyment by postulating a discontinuity between fantasy and social reality. The agent who enjoys does not belong to society and becomes an external threat to it. In contradistinction, emancipatory fantasies are the ones that reject this disjunctive relationship with the social reality. 'The emancipatory project', McGowan (2022a: 180) claims, 'constrains the subject to recognize its own involvement in the enjoyment that it fantasizes about'. What separates conservative from emancipatory fantasies is the fact that the former do not allow the fantasy to intrude into social reality, sustaining an ideological distance. This makes fantasy a manoeuvre to spatialise the antagonistic character of the social and externalise it. Conversely, a fantasy can be

regarded as emancipatory insofar as the fantasy intrudes into the social, enabling the subject to see itself in the fantasy.

Thus conceived, fantasies are not problematic because they channel libidinal overinvestments in symbolic figures. The problem arises when we cannot see ourselves in this process. Such a notion of emancipatory fantasies is aligned with my study of the desire for change. The key idea is the following:

> [...] there is something emancipatory in the structure of fantasy. Because fantasy depicts an excess that goes beyond what exists in the social order, it is a site from which the subject can access what necessarily remains invisible (and impossible) within the symbolic structure. Fantasy takes the subject beyond the rules that govern possible experience and thereby envisions the impossible. (McGowan, 2022a: 193)

Based on my interpretation of the experience of critical subjects, I concluded that the revolt reorganised the social bond in Chile but, to a large extent, maintained the neoliberal libidinal economy in place. I derived this conclusion from the fact that the five fantasies I identified in my analysis coalesced around the repudiation of negativity. Following McGowan's theorisation, this can be interpreted as the failure to include the subject in the fantasising. The main shared feature of all these fantasies is that in none of them was the subject able to perceive its own involvement in the imaginary narratives. The antagonism was always externalised; through their fantasies they established an ideological distance from their fantasmatic enjoyment. At least partially, the fantasmatic dimension of the revolt was not as emancipatory as the emancipatory meanings in which the subjects were invested. Symbolically, Chile woke up, but on an imaginary level, the subjects could not see themselves awakening.

The way in which we forge unconscious attachments to emancipatory events is as important as the meanings springing from

these events. This is the dimension that my approach to the desire for change brings to the fore, which is largely taken for granted. When the libidinal economy of the desire for change is considered, emancipation appears less black and white; it becomes an internally divided process with its own dialectic between recognition and misrecognition. Fantasies are the way to navigate such a dialectic and how we are involved in them plays a key role in the outcomes of these events. I have conceptualised this approach and demonstrated its benefits empirically. In the next chapter, I will contrast it with competing takes on the revolt to provide a complete picture of its advantages.

CHAPTER 7
IMAGINATION AND THE IMAGINARY

INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I compare my approach to the *estallido* with other accounts that draw on a seemingly similar grammar: imagination. Local academics have emphasised that critique should aim to 'a desubjectivation that can rearticulate power relations; that is, a critique committed to imagining another present' (Soto, 2020a: 30). From this perspective, imagination stands as the crucial critical notion since the point is to explore the potency of imagination 'to interrupt the *continuum* that is presented as the natural order of things' (Soto, 2022: 11). The revolt has largely been understood in terms of imagination. I will discuss Rodrigo Karmy's theory of revolts which is predicated on the 'imaginal potency' of the *estallido*. My analysis shows that this approach has profound deficiencies that run the risk of turning academic analyses into consolatory fantasies. In contrast, I argue that the focus on the imaginary dimension of the revolt not only avoids these academic pitfalls, but also allows us to grasp the ambivalence of the desire for change. This provides a more nuanced account of the subjective life of social transformation.

My study on the imaginary dimension of the revolt comes at a time when the notion of 'imagination' has become a renewed focus of interest for critical approaches. As Athena Athanasiou (2020: 251) has concisely put it, these days critique is a matter of 'imagining collective life otherwise amidst a present that limits and allocates unjustly the possibility of imagining differently'. Several researchers concur with this premise. Marina Garcés (2022) claims that imagination is the faculty of limits, the capacity to perceive the frontiers of what we see, know, and think. In these limits lies what she refers to as 'the strange'

and critique allows us to situate ourselves in front of, instead of recoil from, its presence. For her, the current stage of capitalism represents a threat to critical imagination since now there seems to be a final limit, namely, the unmitigated global catastrophe. Similarly, Franco Berardi (2021) advocates the unleashing of the forces of the collective unconscious so as to move from psychoanalytic interpretation to 'schizoanalytical imagination'. Instead of repetition and repression, he takes the unconscious as a site for imaginary experimentation with desire in order to create an object that does not exist.

We can see that, from different angles, these conceptualisations attest to the fact that social transformation is today chiefly framed in terms of imagination or lack thereof. This emphasis on imagination can be strongly felt in the Chilean academic production around the revolt. Correspondingly, it has been said that the revolt was 'closely linked to a crisis of imagination' (Pinto, 2020: 29); that in the midst of the *estallido* 'imagination underwent important displacements' (Ossandón, 2020: 13); that the Chilean people experienced an accelerated politicisation in the form of a 'collective sociological imagination' (Cortés, 2019, 2020); that in the aftermath of this event critique should embrace an 'imaginative thinking' capable of 'making other flows of desire emerge eccentrically' (Soto, 2020b: 25); and also that the challenge of the revolt 'is all the greater since what it is in question is nothing less than the transit towards another imaginary' (Martuccelli, 2019: 413). Revolt and imagination seem impossible to disentangle.

No one in Chile took this relationship further than Rodrigo Karmy. While the *estallido* was still unfolding, he published a book with a series of interventions in which imagination was permanently summoned up. In those pages, he persuades us to see the Chilean revolt as an 'explosion of popular imagination' in the form of a 'redemptive violence that removes the rotten masks of power' (Karmy, 2019: 26 and 29). These inchoate propositions were delivered as a

general theory of revolts in a subsequent book (Karmy, 2020). Since Karmy not only explores the revolt from a point of view seemingly similar to mine, but also his approach encapsulates important premises informing contemporary critical approaches, I devote this last section to develop a detailed counterpoint to his theory and its political consequences.

IMAGINATION: THE PROPERLY ETHICAL FORM OF LIFE

According to Karmy (2020: 28), the political aim of the revolt is to allow us to use and, when a revolt takes place, '*to use* will immediately mean *to imagine*'. This is the formula offered by the author, so let me unpack this. If something is required for us to access the world in terms of use, it logically follows that we normally do otherwise or, to carry on with the equivalence, we are prevented from imagination. Use as imagination, therefore, has to be unlocked. This is the reason why the revolt is portrayed as an act of restitution; it is an event that restores an experience we have been dispossessed from. In this context, the violence of the revolt, an overtly accepted fact, acquires a particular status: unlike the sacrificial violence of power that deploys bodies in order to establish or preserve a sociopolitical formation, the 'martyrological' violence of the revolt creates an interruption of power, a suspension of the historical time that opens up the 'imaginal world'. This is an existential plane that 'does not succumb to the representational aegis of modernity' (Karmy, 2020: 25); it predates representation in the sense that it frees the image from a given imaginary, enabling the ungovernable stream of images in a space where the sensible and the intelligible become indistinguishable.

Crucial for Karmy's theoretical edifice is to neither confuse nor conflate the pair imaginal-imagination and 'imaginary', as they point to opposite phenomena. Moving forward in our equivalences, if the revolt grants us the possibility to use in an imaginal space, this is due

to the fact that we have actualised our potency. In the imaginal plane the existing organisation of life is suspended by means of an impersonal destituent potency, a properly anarchic realm in which life becomes fully active:

> Far from modern anthropology, that reduces the imaginal to the form of the imaginary, we denominate "imaginal" the magma through which a multiplicity of forms comes to be, and we characterise as "imagination" the singularisation of a certain form in a precise moment. (Karmy, 2020: 284)

The imaginal is the register in which forms take form but, as such, is formless. The allusion to a magmatic force, then, seems appropriate here: inasmuch as the demarcating strategies of representation are suspended, limits, identities, and all sorts of forms are dissolved, leading to what Karmy calls a 'savage cosmopolitism', an ungovernable flow of historicity. For him, this is the only way to provide a theory of revolts that counteracts capitalist catastrophe. Confronted with the destruction of our world, Karmy theorises the revolt as an instance that actualises our potency to set free from power and, by doing so, 'restores the possibility for a world to be, nothing more but nothing less' (Karmy, 2020: 283).

When an ethical component is introduced, however, Karmy's riveting account of imagination goes awry. The martyrological violence of the revolt becomes 'the properly ethical form of life capable of suspending historical time and restoring the imaginal world' (Karmy, 2020: 34). The choice of words matters here. A *form* of life that deserves to be called ethical transpires exclusively within the imaginal world, that realm in which forms are always in the making but *never fully formed*. Consequently, ethics is equated with formlessness. So, even when we spare the thorny discussion about the necessity of the martyr, the fact that representation and power are completely

interchangeable for Karmy paves the way for a radical antinormativity.

Accepting that ethics only applies to the imaginal register requires accepting as a corollary that no form can be ethical; not just certain representations but representation as such is rejected on the premise that it invariably prompts an impounding of our potency. From this angle, for instance, it is to no avail to distinguish between a state based on the principle of subsidiarity and a welfare state since both of them are *forms of power*. We thus arrive at the gist of the argument: in a world in which all forms are forms of power, the ethical life is to swerve forms altogether. The minor nuisance is that, in our very representational world, we are left with no parameters to determine the desirability of certain social formations over others, *including those that might spring from the revolt*. As soon as representation takes place—which is just about all the time—we are impotent, inactive, non-ethical.

The above is a theoretical *cul-de-sac* that finds a fantasmatic resolution. The imaginal world proposed by Karmy is not simply ethical but also primeval. Imagination is regarded in many places as an 'original' faculty, the 'degree zero' of reality, and a place located 'prior' to the emergence of consciousness (Karmy, 2020: 25, 285, 302, 303, and *passim*). Furthermore, the enabler of this process, the revolt, is described as the 'experience of the festivity of thought', the moment in which 'the people reach a fragment of eternal happiness' (Karmy, 2020: 255). This way of describing the revolt reveals its fantasmatic nature: an idealised and uncorrupted scenario (the imaginal world), the means to achieve it (the revolt), and the agent of prohibition (forms of power).

Two elements are important to underscore here. First, as we have seen, fantasies stage a path for unconscious desire yet their crucial aspect is not the object but the obstacle. The latter is the real element

of enjoyment and what turns an object desirable in the first place. As a result, 'fantasy focuses on the obstacle rather than the successful obtaining of the object, which always appears like an afterthought' (McGowan, 2022b: 14). This explains why, in Karmy's theory, it is not a problem that we so rarely have access to our active, ethical life; if anything, this makes our attachment to the over-idealised imaginal world even stronger. Second, in the guise of challenging capitalist catastrophe, Karmy's proposal ends up acknowledging its inevitability. We can no longer envisage a post-capitalist society so we must instead rebel against modernity, language, representations, or power. Suddenly, it seems easier to fight against the very conditions of meaning than against a historical formation such as capitalism. This enlargement of the problem feeds the fantasmatic kernel of the imaginal register—in the face of futureless catastrophe, we can only aspire to recover an idyllic, untainted world lost long ago.

Ultimately, what Karmy's theory shows us is how pervasive the ideal of formless life is in contemporary academia. His conceptualisation of the revolt is structurally equivalent to Christopher Castiglia's hopeful readings I reviewed in chapter 2. These projects exalt the emancipatory character of anarchic agencies in a purely horizontal plane of existence purified from the demarcations of representation. However, as per my interpretation, they also stage fantasmatic responses to our current situation. Deploying a radical vocabulary, they set forth elaborated desiring narratives that must presuppose an idealised scenario we have been deprived of as well as the culprit of this state of affairs. The ultimate proof of the imaginary tone of these theorisations is precisely their excessive attachments to the purported gatekeepers of the beatific scenario. Representation and symbolic mediation are manufactured in such a way that they—and not capitalism—become the obstacle in our path towards social change. As a result, the turn to imagination that defines a significant portion of

progressive academia is predicated upon an imaginary economy that severely curtails its transformative potential.

It follows from the above that the desire for change is mostly theorised nowadays within the boundaries of what Kornbluh (2019) calls the fantasy of anarcho-vitalism. This fantasy is defined by a visceral repudiation of form and organisation, since such notions are immediately equated with the lessening of some truer agency—the one we found in the imaginal realm. This kind of theorisation is not merely disputable on intellectual grounds but, crucially, because it relies on fantasmatic scenarios, that is to say, defensive narratives promising a fullness-to-come. Once that capitalist horizon is accepted, investment in an idealised scenario becomes a necessity. And since the obstacle is the crucial component of a fantasy, the attainability of the primordial potency or the unbounded affects becomes totally unimportant. This radical antinormativity is what grants these approaches infallibility. But it also makes them impracticable. As a result, the conviction that 'life springs forth without form and thrives in form's absence' (Kornbluh, 2019: 2) has proven to be as pervasive as it is unproductive in contemporary academia.

EMANCIPATION NOT WITHOUT ALIENATION

Psychoanalysis can help us to understand why these scholarly fantasies share a penchant for rejecting representation, mediation, and language. As Todd McGowan (2016) shrewdly shows, capitalism has a parasitic relationship with signification. The latter is guaranteed by the Other, the anonymous and ultimately virtual support of the social field. As I have insisted in my research, it is through the Other's coordinates that the subject locates itself in the world. Nevertheless, this process leads to the emergence of desire. Unlike the vitalist paradigm, for psychoanalysis desire cannot be equated to wanting; it is not a potency of the subject but the residue of signification, the

consequence of the structural reliance on an unsubstantial entity. Since the social is literally groundless, our socially-sanctioned positions are never straightforward, so we are constantly trying to answer what the Other really wants from us. Capitalism profits from this structural feature of signification. The perpetual production of commodities becomes the way of answering that question. Obviously, there is no commodity capable of achieving that, but the crucial element lies not in the object itself but in its promise of satisfaction that keeps us on our toes looking for the next one. In the last instance, capitalism prospers primarily through psychical rather than economic means, as unconscious satisfaction depends on the obstacle and not the attainment of the object (Ruti, 2017).

If the above is correct, then the efforts to get rid of representation and symbolic mediation in much of contemporary theory are warranted. There is, however, an important caveat. In its relationship with the Other, 'the subject seeks loss, not successful accumulation, which means that any attempt to link capitalism to subjectivity involves a category error' (McGowan, 2016: 41). For psychoanalysis, lack is constitutive of the subject, a feature that makes it posit, retroactively, an object of plenitude that is ceaselessly chased. Accumulation of wealth, conversely, is a completely contingent kind of repetition, inscribed in no necessity whatsoever. Capitalism is a *historical* mode of production that thrives by mimicking a *structural* feature of human existence, so despite sharing the same logic it would be erroneous to conflate both these planes. To put it differently, in a hypothetical context in which the dominant mode of production would not be based on the repetition of capitalist accumulation, we would still be repeating the dialectic of recognition-misrecognition that comes with the Other.

When contemporary theories of imagination fail to notice this difference, they perform a twofold strengthening of capitalism. They

not only bestow this historical mode of production a transcendental status, but also reproduce its fantasmatic grip. Let me go back to Karmy's theory of revolts to illustrate this. The underlying logic of removing the barriers of representation is to unleash the original potency that we reach in the imaginal world. As we saw, this is a world in which people attain a fragment of 'eternal happiness', a site where 'bodies dance beyond all established subjection, and words become entirely common'. Then, Karmy adds an important element: the revolt 'is not born or dies, rather it is always on the verge of exploding. It is eternal in this very precise sense: as the power of an irruption that has not yet occurred, it lives with us but in silence' (Karmy, 2020: 35). It is hard not to see the identity between the capitalist promise of the commodity and the promise of the revolt *à la* Karmy—at some point in the future, when the precise good will be purchased or the martyrological violence takes place, unmitigated satisfaction will be obtained. When emancipatory theories become more about restoring a stolen plenitude than about overcoming forms of oppression, we can be sure we are stepping on the fantasmatic grounds of capitalism.

As long as progressive academic thinking remains anchored in the promise of a fully satisfying future, intellectual endeavours will enact a double resignation: by resigning to the inevitability of the capitalist horizon, scholars resign from making intelligible interpretations that allow us to glimpse less oppressive social arrangements in this world. This is the fantasmatic trap of the injunction to 'imagine new worlds' of contemporary radical academia. Amid this state of affairs, the psychoanalytic lesson is that inadequacy is not a product of capitalism. We are, with or without capitalism, maladjusted animals because we cannot but rely on symbolic mediations to convey meaning, and due to that we are subjected to the derailments of the unconscious. Our existence is out of joint structurally, not accidentally. To suggest otherwise runs the risk of mystifying potentially emancipatory events taking place in this world, such as the *estallido*. As my study shows, in

the Chilean revolt actions were emancipatory because the revolt was summoned as their Other and not because of the Other's absence. And this is far from an automatic, smooth process. Subjects had to position themselves in the world according to their own interpretations of the desire of this new Other of the revolt. 'What does the *estallido* want from me?' is anything but a simple question to answer, and the extreme unconscious lengths that people went to endure it must not be underplayed.

My suggestion here is that psychoanalysis radically complexifies the picture of the desire for radical change. Above all, it reminds us that the result of pursuing a level of satisfaction hitherto denied to us can only be another modulation of the fundamental fantasy of capitalism. There will never be a plenitude to reach for the simple reason that the symbolic constitution of reality makes us strangers both to ourselves and to the world. Acknowledging this, however, is not synonymous with resignation. On the contrary, a lot can be gained simply by disentangling historical and structural forms of repetition. Or, as Ruti (2018) has advanced, by discriminating between constitutive and circumstantial forms of dissatisfaction. Progressive knowledge production should be aimed at transforming the circumstantial dissatisfaction provoked by contingent social formations *against the background* of the structural lack that defines the subject. Just because we cannot eradicate the constitutive disharmony of subjectivity it does not follow that we should not rebel against political, social, and economic forms of dissatisfaction. What can a theory that recognises this aspire to? Not satisfaction, but justice. In this sense, we find in Kornbluh (2019: 164) the best riposte to the injunction of current academia to imagine new worlds: 'There are worlds beyond capitalism, worlds of other desires, other drives, other antagonisms. They are not more satisfying, but they are more just'. Therefore, an emancipatory makeup does not have to be fantasmatically configured

for bodies to dance to the music of eternal happiness, a less exploitative and excessive symbolic reality might be radically and ethically enough.

Finally, a psychoanalytic approach to the desire for change runs against the idea that the ultimate goal of emancipation is desubjectivation. What we receive from most takes on the anarchic vitalism of imagination are the alleged 'politico-ethical benefits of subjective pulverization and radical antinormativity' (Ruti, 2018: 53). Despite some of their theoretical influences, these hyperbolic accounts of the desire for change seem to surprisingly rely on a solid idea of the subject. The latter comes first and political movements should try to dissolve it. In contrast, Lacanian psychoanalysis posits a productive negativity. As Alenka Zupančič (2015: 196) maintains,

> [...] when one speaks about desubjectivation or subjective destitution, we must not make the mistake of thinking that you start with a subject and then you have a whole movement to destitute it and then you're left with what? This is a mistake. Destitution of the subject *precedes* subjectivity. You don't start with subject and then go about its dismantling. It is not as if whatever subjectivity there is, it is there on behalf of the destitution. The notion of the subject is related to this radical negativity, but it isn't as if we have to destitute the subject, as if we are persons and then we have to destitute ourselves.

The fact that the destitution of the subject precedes subjectivity means that, regardless of how successful an emancipatory movement can be, *there is something we cannot get rid of*. Certainly, this should not make us believe that immobility is the only possibility once we accept that we cannot completely dismantle our subjectivity. What Zupančič points to is that the kind of subjective liquidation that vitalist or immediatist approaches embrace can only produce fantasmatic getaways since they try to eradicate the very possibility of emancipatory commitments: the negativity of the subject. As she

insists: 'It is not as if first we get rid of something. On the contrary, it is through this radical negativity that something appears' (Zupančič & Terada, 2015: 196). The crucial question she poses— 'and then you're left with what?'—is what vitalist theorist fill with unfathomable and intractable affective potencies that promise to unleash some truer agency. If there is any subjective transformation to be achieved, we must retain the idea that something has to remain in place.

Subjective destitution within the boundaries of anarcho-vitalism cannot be a viable political goal. Not only because it is highly debatable at a conceptual level, but also because it has severe psychic effects. This rejection of negativity is what all the fantasies I interpreted were unconsciously based on. And, in the last instance, this is what impeded the challenging of the neoliberal libidinal economy in place prior to the *estallido*. Despite all its radicality, the goal of dissolving subjectivity brings the desire for change dangerously close to the neoliberal project of eradicating every impediment to the achievement of permanent self-realisation. This is an important insight to retain in the context of a decade of mass movements against neoliberalism that, nonetheless, ended with a 'missed revolution' (Bevins, 2023). Ironically, all the criticism that Lacanian approaches customarily receive due to its alleged conservatism is predicated on a language that, under the guise of radicality, ends up in sheer immobilism. Kornbluh (2022: 43), puts it eloquently:

> The importance of a minimal signifying function for political activity has often been rejected by emancipatory theorists, including those of psychoanalytic persuasion. Demands, plans, and even slogans incite insatiable suspicion for daring to exceed the allegedly more radical ether of indeterminacy and unrepresentability. Theory's habit of reveling in the unrepresentable, the ineffable, the impossible becomes a quasi-spiritual alibi for inertia.

The approach to the desire for change I have proposed and explored in this research is certainly not infallible. It does not provide a roadmap to get us to emancipation. What it does, I believe, is to show us that the way in which we identify with social transformation is as important as the content of the wished transformation. If I embarked on this study, it is because the latter has attracted almost all of the attention, while the former is commonly taken for granted. Immediatist takes like the ones I reviewed perform and perpetuate this division. They put forward a vision of emancipation that makes it a sort of all-or-nothing situation. To imagine new worlds becomes a matter of pretending that we can do without the negativity of both the subject and the social. In contrast, psychoanalysis shows us that there is no emancipation without negativity; the signifier is indispensable for social change (Kornbluh, 2022). This is a far less edgy take on social transformation, yet the point has never been to sound radical but to achieve radical change. As my study argues, emancipation is divided because we are forced to embrace change accepting that there are things that we cannot change.

THE MOMENT TO CONCLUDE

As I described at the beginning of my study, the *estallido* was the common fate of Chileans. This means that indifference towards it was simply not an option; our lives have been marked by the revolt beyond anyone's will. And this is an event that combines everything: incredulity, fascination, fear, joy, hopefulness, and so many other sensations that make cataloguing endeavours look futile. But we can at least be certain of one thing; incredulity hits twice. The extraordinary manner in which this event erupted announcing what appeared to be unlimited political possibilities, can only be compared with the astonishing rapidity with which this process was countered and reversed. Politically, this is of course a result that can lead to many

subjective positions; sadness, resilience, perseverance, pessimism, and even nihilism seem completely warranted. Academically, however, my impression is that a humble curiosity is pretty much all we can experience. How can something like this occur? Nevertheless, genuine attempts at understanding the effects of the revolt have been mostly eclipsed by two other predominant academic tendencies: first, to individually or collectively express a thoroughgoing endorsement of the event; and, second, to elbow one's way to be the first in claiming to know the obvious reasons behind the revolt. The moment in which we currently find ourselves requires a substitute approach.

Above all things, throughout my study I have tried to stay curious. Especially since when it comes to the *estallido* certitude has outweighed inquisitiveness. The exhausting debate around seeing or not seeing the revolt coming misses, at the minimum, one element: what is overlooked. When partaking in a demonstration, I do not necessarily expect people to mull over, for example, some of the subjective implications of framing the popular uprising in terms of a collective awakening. But I do expect that from scholars, particularly if they define their work with the adjective 'critical' or 'radical'. I devoted four years to the exploration of the *estallido* and all I read from progressive academics about the fact that 'Chile woke up' were celebratory lines. What has been permanently overlooked in scholarly takes on the revolt is the desire for critique, that is, how the strangeness that defines our relationship with both ourselves and the world is inscribed in our conscious strivings to achieve social transformation. I sought to cultivate a curiosity precisely about this dimension of the event in order to contribute to the understanding of what the *estallido*, this inescapable common fate, has subjectively provoked in us.

I firmly believe that psychoanalysis can be an antidote against certitude, and my research tries to move in that direction. There is, of

course, no assurance and everything depends on how it is utilised. One of the silver linings is that I am not alone in entertaining this thought. My enquiry closely followed Jason Glynos (2019: 149), for whom a notion like fantasy has 'very interesting insights to offer around not just resistance to change and transformation, but also its opposite: the embrace of change and transformation'. Fantasy is important—it has its dignity—because what signifiers we cling to beyond reasonableness in order to sustain transformative identifications matters. The unconscious attachments to discourses, whether they are transformative or conservative, depend on complex and often contradictory imaginary economies that the notion of fantasy allows us to reconstruct. Dismissing this symbolic dimension of the *estallido* in favour of the radical scholarly jargon of immediacy—and the concomitant ethico-political privilege granted to dissolution—is the best way of missing a crucial aspect of social change.

Finally, I have deliberately refrained from saying anything about what we should have done differently or what is to be done from now on. In this regard, I militantly act in accordance with Barthes (1985a: 9), who claimed that 'writing is the art of asking questions, not of answering or resolving them'. This is the case partly as a matter of principle, since 'it isn't the place of psychoanalytic theory to talk about how the relations-to-come will be' (Safatle, 2022b: 200). Crucially, it is also my response to the fact most Chilean scholars have tried to answer or resolve the *estallido* rather than ask the right questions. For me, these right questions had to do with the desire for change and its remarkable ambivalence. In the best possible scenario, an exercise of empirical scrutiny of this nature can tell us what to avoid; yet, in my opinion, that is preferable to speculative elucubrations about what should we do with the unlimited potency of our bodies and our imagination. The libidinal economy of neoliberalism only becomes more resilient when we follow this second path. After carrying out this exploration of the desire for critique and its imaginary supports, the

only ethico-political lesson I can come up with is the reiteration of what Enrique Lihn said to Pedro Lastra (2020: 43) in 1980: 'Solo se imagina un futuro feliz retrospectivamente'.[18]

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[18] 'A happy future is only imagined retrospectively'.

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APPENDIX

Table 3. Example of the construction of aggregated themes

University	Social Media	Waking up/Sleep/Dream
[...] yeah, in regards to the university, what I did see over time was that in reality, at least in the area where I work, at the Institute of Literature, there was no one who was against what was happening [the *estallido*] (Rodrigo)	Also, what we needed was to disseminate information about human rights violations through social media, you know? Because, like the media, media was like denying it saying "no, nothing is happening here". But social media and Instagram became brimmed with slogans, slogans, slogans, slogans, slogans (Nicolás)	[...] and this idea of, this awakening, that the population begins to question everything, even with a greater radicality than I would have expected (Tomás)
Like this phrase that is criticised a lot in the university, "we didn't see it coming" and everyone says "but how could they not see it coming if we all saw it coming except them?" First there is a separation between them and us who did see it coming haha, and them who did not see it. But I also, like when I said "we didn't see something coming", I insist, it means that it was not visible, you know?, it doesn't mean that it isn't there (María)	I think it was a visual event. And social media and the use of the Internet and all that made it more popular; like tremendously. I mean, that same thing wouldn't have happened in the 80s (Daniela)	Nobody could think of it like that in terms of a revolt or an outbreak but, especially because I think that neoliberalism also makes us very drowsy; so it was kind of strange, in my view, it was kind of strange for something so, so disruptive to happen (Ramón)
I think that what the *estallido* did was like positioning academia in another place, like... I have also talked about it with other people, like the idea that before the university was more important and the social value it had was much higher than, I think, after the *estallido* (Daniela)	I believe that it is mostly a contemporary issue; it has to do, above all, with the media, the media, and social media. I believe that the *estallido* would not have been the same if it had not been for that media context that it had, above all, through social media. In other words, there is a discourse, which is the official discourse, which is presented through the news, the newspapers, for example, which presents an image of the *estallido* and we have these other images that appear on social media, videos, photos, selfies (Arturo)	And that, that feeling is incredible, incredible. When I was young, from the time of the dictatorship, I was quite an activist too, so that feeling kind of awakened in me again, a sort of military mania came to me, like, I don't know, listening to super leftist songs again. Like, like, it was a little regressive in that sense too, because, how do you say, like that was updated, that potency of demanding a kind of new beginning was actualised (Verónica)

[...] there has never been any conflict [in this university] with the students because we are like most, especially those with a master's degree, we are like more avant-garde, let's say, so we kind of welcome, we encourage these things. But of course, there comes a minute when I had to see the limit, but in that minute [during the *estallido*] the limits in general got a little out of hand haha (Verónica)

What we did, in the Department [...] there were obviously no classes, but the students wanted, well, for the university to work now, right? So, what can we do? So we put together several groups of teachers and students and I was in one about "participation" and then we were accompanying the *cabildos* [public meetings of the civil society] and, well, we did a, we reflected on it and then we made a kind of observation pattern of *cabildos* and we registered them, other people kind of registered and sent us, later we even wrote a paper with colleagues and students that was very interesting (Tomás)

I believe the distance was not a real problem, but it did mean for me, it was my option, also for my mental health, was to close it; to stop looking at Instagram, stop looking at Twitter, to move away and try to focus on what I was experiencing there, because I couldn't be with one leg there and one leg here; I mean, it was very difficult for me (Carmen)

And then you have the Cima project, they were amazing because people found out about stuff through them, because basically they recorded day and night. The thing of the lights they put up, these lights that illuminated and projected a phrase; I mean, half of Santiago saw that because, in addition, they took photos of them and it was replicated by millions. So I think that the use of WhatsApp, of all the social media, worked really well in contrast to traditional media (Isabel)

I was amazed, before the outbreak, that everything was so calm because, deep down, it's like everyone had already settled [...] but we were talking to people, for our fondecyt, and everyone, [...] everyone on the left had a critical vision, you know?, of what the Concertación had been, of what the [transitional] pact had been like. So, when the *estallido* came we said "well, now the common people woke up" (Isabel)

I see that time as a dream now, as there are many aspects of those, of those weeks that I no longer know if they are weeks, months, days; there are like super diffuse limits now that I think about them, like that time of catastrophe as having a direct relationship with the dream (Nicolás)