



‘Chile woke up’ (and I can fall asleep no more): The fantasmatic organisation of the desire for change

Gustavo Sánchez¹ 

© The Author(s) 2024

Abstract In this article, I adopt the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy to challenge mainstream conceptualisations of the desire for social change. Recent anti-neoliberal uprisings across the world have been interpreted as expressions of the vitalist force of bodies beyond symbolic mediation. This obfuscates the ambivalent unconscious dynamics in the identification with emancipatory events. To counter this, I develop a psychoanalytic conceptualisation of the desire for change. I show the benefits of my approach through an empirical interpretation of the fantasmatic organisation of this desire in the context of the 2019 Chile revolt. By questioning the alleged straightforwardness of the desire for change, my study contributes to a more nuanced approach to emancipatory events.

Keywords fantasy · *estallido social* · desire · revolt · emancipation

Introduction

In the early 2010s, Alain Badiou (2012) warned us about a worldwide capitalist offensive through the seemingly unobjectionable label of ‘modernisation.’ Such an advance, however, would encounter the first stirrings of a global uprising against this manoeuvre. For Badiou (2012, p. 5), this collision marked ‘a *time of riots* wherein a rebirth of History ... is signalled and takes shape.’ By and large, his thesis was corroborated. Vincent Bevins (2023) 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

✉ Gustavo Sánchez
g.sanchezmunoz@aston.ac.uk

¹ College of Business & Social Sciences, Aston University, 295 Aston Express Way, Birmingham B4 7UP, United Kingdom



Chile in 2019. For Bevins, 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 largely directed against neoliberalism: ‘many protests around the world over the past few decades self-consciously took aim at “neoliberal” policies’ (Bevins, 2023, p. 30). This decade of mass protest was a distinctively anti-neoliberal decade.

Regrettably, the magnitude of the contention did not translate into an equivalent social change. ‘Looking at the years 2010 to 2020,’ Bevins (2023, pp. 5 and 3) concludes, ‘it’s clear that there was a huge amount of desire for changes to the structures that comprise our global system,’ yet the outcomes ‘were very different from the goals of the movements.’ Various responses have been rehearsed to ascertain the causes of this ‘missed revolution.’ In this article, I contribute to the ongoing discussion about social transformation by focusing on the complexities of the desire for change. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, my goal is to challenge the way in which this desire is commonly conceived when interpreting these kinds of events, namely, as a force that somehow coincides with itself. I demonstrate the benefits of a psychoanalytic approach through an empirical analysis of the 2019 Chile revolt. The latter, known as *estallido social* [social outburst], has largely been treated as a destituent force whose emancipatory potential derives from the disorganisation of the neoliberal mode of life (Castillo, 2019; Galende, 2020; Karmy, 2019). In contrast, I maintain that the rich symbolic life of the *estallido* was from the outset an emancipatory organisation of the social that nonetheless comprised significant subjective challenges worthy of attention.

To explore these overlooked subjective challenges, I conducted an empirical study strategically focused on critical academics who experienced the *estallido*. The rationale behind this strategy is that the subjective positioning of critical academics provides us with a privileged entry point to grasp the ambivalence of the desire for change. Simon Critchley (2008, p. 10) maintains that ‘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.’ Bearing in mind that ‘to critique is to wish for and work toward change’ (Ross, 2023, p. 101), critical scholars can be defined as subjects who self-bind to progressive social transformation and shape themselves accordingly. Thereby, it would be reasonable to expect from these subjects an unproblematic identification with the revolt, adding credence to the thesis of the straightforwardness of the desire for change. Far from that, my research shows that in the midst of this popular uprising, the self-shaping of critical scholars was predicated upon ambivalent unconscious dynamics. I argue that this is an index of how the desire for change entails a contradictory dialectic between recognition and misrecognition that deserves scrutiny.

My argument is structured as follows. To begin, I present what I call the immediatist take on the *estallido* while advancing an alternative interpretation: the *estallido* was not about the possibility of envisioning a post-neoliberal society but rather its symbolic organisation. I focus on the main motto of the revolt, ‘Chile woke up,’ to support my claim. Building from this, I introduce the notions of the Other, interpellation, desire and fantasy to conceptualise the dynamics at play in this symbolic approach to the *estallido*. Then, I flesh out the methodology of my study,



explaining the rationale behind my analytic procedures. From this, I offer a detailed interpretation of the fantasy through which one participant of my study sustained his identification with the emancipatory call of the revolt. The reconstruction of his imaginary edifice empirically demonstrates the subjective struggles to attain recognition as a subject who has awakened from the neoliberal dormancy. Lastly, in light of the insights from my empirical analysis, I derive epistemological and political conclusions for conceptualising and interpreting the desire for change.

The Chilean *estallido*: Between Destituent Potency and Symbolic Organisation

In 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 the emergence of a panoply of massive social movements, the initially confined student protests over a CLP\$30 (£0.30) tube fare hike gained momentum, marking the beginning of the *estallido*. For many authors (Castillo, 2019; Gordon-Zolov & Zolov, 2022; Landaeta & Herrero, 2021; Martuccelli, 2019), what happened on 18 October was a revolution. 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). Accordingly, the *estallido* has been pinpointed as the epilogue to the local neoliberal consensus (Ferretti & Dragic, 2020), a collective subtraction from neoliberal governance (Karmy, 2019) and, in a grandiloquent fashion, the experience of the end of neoliberalism as such (Castillo, 2019; Cortés, 2019).

Among Chilean academics, the *estallido* has been welcomed as an event harbouring the possibility of collectively imagining post-neoliberal social arrangements (Castillo, 2019; Galende, 2020; Karmy, 2019; Richard, 2021). Mainly, they derive such a possibility from the perception that the revolt entailed a suspension of symbolic representation that freed the anarchic potency of bodies impounded by neoliberalism. Federico Galende (2020, p. 55), for instance, claims that the revolt brought with it an 'instant communism' in the form of 'a destituent potency,' that is, 'a heteronomous force to the order of thought.'¹ Against this backdrop, any discursive distance is annulled in favour of what he calls performance. For him, the latter is 'a collective bodily potency that unfolds experimentally and verifies itself in this very act of unfolding' (Galende, 2020, p. 54). The fact that this potency verifies itself implies that is not contingent on any symbolic organisation; it is a law onto itself. The same kind of self-governed vitality springing from the *estallido* is postulated by Rodrigo Karmy (2019, p. 56):

¹ The author has translated all direct quotes from Spanish sources.



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 threw us into a pre-discursive experience, one in which we encounter nothing but the potency of bodies. From this angle, the Chilean uprising was emancipatory inasmuch 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, p. 57).

These analyses based on immediacy follow the idea that ‘life springs forth without form and thrives in form’s absence’ (Kornbluh, 2019, p. 2), a premise that informs vast swathes of contemporary radical theory. However, such a strong sense of immediacy significantly minimises the role played by symbolic mediation in the *estallido*, a dimension acknowledged even by some representatives of the foregoing tendency. Witty phrases such as ‘it’s not 30p, it’s 30 years,’ ‘we won’t go back to normality, because normality was the problem,’ or single words like ‘evade’ or ‘dignity,’ populated the streets during the revolt, articulating new practices and social interactions. The circulation of these fortuitous and anonymous symbolic units paved the way for new discourse formations by means of ‘a set of phrases incomprehensible for neoliberalism yet full of meaning for the revolt’ (Castillo, 2019, p. 41). Undoubtedly, the most salient and compelling motto was ‘Chile woke up.’ The idea of a collective awakening was the spontaneous way in which the transformative potential of the revolt was symbolically conveyed (Landaeta & Herrero, 2021; Ruiz, 2020). This motto ‘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’ (Richard, 2021, p. 40).

The dense and rich symbolic life of the Chilean revolt should lead us to qualify its portrayal as an anarchic flow of affectivity. If mottoes such as ‘Chile woke up’ emboldened protestors on the streets it was because they acted as a sort of invitation to identify with a state of wakefulness in contradistinction to the neoliberal torpor. Rather than a rupture with neoliberal meanings by means of unbridled affectivity, it seems more justified to understand the *estallido* as the symbolic organisation of a non- or post-neoliberal experience, regardless of its fragility. This approach echoes the way in which Kristin Ross (2016) treats the Paris Commune of 1871. She pays attention to the actual words spoken and embraced by the insurgents in order to establish new political identifications. Words like *citoyene*, for example, conveyed 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, p. 16). Similarly, ‘Chile woke up’ interpellated people in an emancipatory fashion, organising life differently from the outset.



The Desire for the Revolt and the Revolt's Desire

Adopting this symbolic approach to emancipatory events muddies the waters of the desire for change. Unlike analyses based on the immediacy of bodily potencies, the idea that the *estallido* invited Chileans to identify themselves as subjects who have awakened from the neoliberal slumber locates desire in the intricacies of the logic of signification. From a Lacanian outlook, the intersubjective space cannot be reduced to two or more human bodies partaking in an interaction. For actions and statements to be meaningful, a third party must be introduced to establish the symbolic coordinates within which individuals and their speeches acquire legibility. The technical name of this third agent is the Other. The latter is not a human agent but an entity whose existence is often unwittingly summoned in everyday life to ascertain who we are. Lacan (1981/1997, p. 51) famously maintained that the Other is recognised but remains unknown: '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.' Accordingly, signification is conditional on the implied acknowledgment that the Other is the entity that makes self-recognition possible.

The Other can be understood as the presupposition that must be in place for us to experience a minimally coherent symbolic identity. As Slavoj Žižek (2007, p. 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.' This is the field of the Other. However, insofar as this presupposed entity has no concrete existence—it is, quite literally, surmised—we can only partially find recognition in it. The Other cannot fully saturate the social fabric, so its interpellative call, that is, the moment in which recognition is 'offered' to us, is pierced by gaps and inconsistencies. This makes the Other's recognition a moment of doubt and anxiety rather than of plenitude and sameness. The point of departure for psychoanalysis is precisely the fact that humans must find their place in a symbolic world sanctioned by an unsubstantial entity, turning recognition and misrecognition into inseparable features of sociality.

Following the above, approaching the *estallido* as an emancipatory organisation of the social in Chile implies granting it the status of the Other. People on the streets felt called to recognise themselves as subjects who have awakened, and this made possible, as Castillo (2019) puts it, a symbolic life incomprehensible for neoliberalism but full of meaning for the revolt. If this was the case, however, there are no reasons to assume that this Other was capable of saturating the social, regardless of how progressive it might have been. This means that the emancipatory interpellation of the *estallido* was not straightforward; it was a subjective call comprising recognition and misrecognition in unison. It is one thing to recognise oneself as someone who woke up, but this says very little about what an awakened subject should do. This leftover of the signification process is what psychoanalysis conceptualises as desire. Rather than an expression of our innermost vitality, desire is an enigma, something that 'is first apprehended as being experience of the Other's desire' (Lacan, 2013/2019, p. 17). The fact that the Other 'desires' expresses the idea that we can never be certain of its recognition: you are telling me to wake up,



but what do you *really* want from me? This, we could say, is the enigma of the desire of the Other of the *estallido*.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, desire is the problematic byproduct of the insubstantiality of the Other. As Todd McGowan (2016, p. 42) succinctly puts it: ‘The image of the desiring Other kick-starts the desire of the subject. The subject emerges out of the defiles of the desire of the Other that doesn’t exist.’ In order to achieve subjective consistency amid this symbolic inconsistency, something else is required. Fantasies are imaginary constructions that allow the subject to situate its desire (Glynos, 2021; Žižek, 1997). Since the Other cannot saturate the symbolic nature of our social fabric, meanings and identifications require an imaginary suture for their sustenance. Fantasy can be understood as an imaginary supplement of meaning, a defensive formation against the desire of the Other. To find coherence amid the vicissitudes of interpellation, the subject must forge libidinal attachments beyond reasonableness with certain signifiers. Within a fantasy, the organisation of these special signifiers allows the subject to endure the misrecognition coming from the Other. Fantasies are libidinally-charged narratives aiming at placating anxiety by filling the gaps of interpellation—and keeping the desire of the Other at bay.

Accepting that the *estallido* was an emancipatory organisation of the experience of Chileans requires us to pay due attention to the fantasies that this event elicited. This means that we must unpack the way subjects unconsciously ‘(over-)invest in certain discursive elements, which are ultimately sustained by the desire to overcome a perceived lack of *enjoyment*’ (Ronderos & Glynos, 2023, p. 620). The libidinally-charged narratives through which subjects replied to the lack of the Other of the *estallido* are imaginary scenarios that strengthen their identification by means of excessive attachments to precious signifiers. Reconstructing these imaginary scenarios is crucial to understanding the complexities of the desire for change. With this said, I will now demonstrate the fruitfulness of this approach through an empirical analysis of the great lengths that subjects went to in order to sustain the emancipatory interpellation of the *estallido*.

Case, Participants and Interpretive Strategy

The material for my interpretation comes from a project whereby the objective was to explore the fantasies elicited by the *estallido* among Chilean scholars. In order to challenge the straightforwardness of the desire for change in most interpretations of the revolt, I strategically focused on the group of people for whom this desire seems most straightforward: 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. Consequently, critical scholars recognise themselves and are socially recognised as subjects who identify with social change. Drawing on Critchley (2008), I conceptualise the critical scholar as the subject that self-binds to progressive social transformation and shapes itself accordingly. This subjective commitment to social change organises both the intersubjective and the psychic space of critical academics. Since the premise of my study is that the *estallido* reorganised the symbolic experience of Chileans in a non-



or post-neoliberal way, critical scholars are located in a privileged position to grasp the unconscious dynamics elicited by this emancipatory reorganisation of the social bond. Their experiences show the difficulties of attaining self-recognition in the midst of the revolt and the crucial role that fantasies play in navigating the gaps of the interpellation of the Other of the *estallido*.

My fieldwork was conducted over four months in Chile at the beginning of 2022. Two fronts were covered in this process. After cataloguing the PhD programmes in the humanities and social sciences explicitly aligned with the production of critical knowledge, I proceeded to contact academics and researchers based in the cities of Santiago and Valparaíso. Seven academics (three females and four males) and seven PhD researchers (five females and two males) were each interviewed twice, resulting in 28 interviews. This sample enabled me to cover the full range of fields, encompassing history, sociology, literature, education, philosophy, psychology, and the arts. In addition, I shortlisted three PhD programmes where I conducted classroom observations. The modules I accessed revolved around critical theory, critical thought in Latin America, and affective materialisms. A total of 45 hours of observation were documented.

All of the interviews were conducted following the psychoanalytic principle of free association. Freud (1916/2001, p. 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*.' Drawing inspiration from other researchers deploying this principle in social research (Glynos, 2021; Glynos et al., 2019; Lapping & Glynos, 2018), I tried to induce an undirected speech from the participants to access their loose and even contradictory symbolic associations. Accordingly, instead of a detailed script, I only used an initial prompt in all of the interviews: *Can you please tell me what comes to your mind when I say 'estallido social'?* My ensuing interventions were limited to mark the emergence of certain signifiers or asking for further development of some of them. Following the same principle, my notes from classroom observations were aimed at chasing the circulation of signifiers rather than the content of the lessons.

The looseness of the gathered material finds its justification in the necessity to distinguish between the speech and the signifier, as they move in different directions. Acknowledging that the 'discourse in an analytic session is worthwhile only insofar as it stumbles or even interrupts itself' (Lacan, 1966/2006, p. 678), these interruptions can only be perceived when the subject freely associates their speech. Talking is a simple activity that lays bare complex libidinal dynamics. So, the more academics and researchers 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 speech's stream. When the participants of my study spoke to me, they held onto certain signifiers in order to offer a meaningful speech. However, the longer they did it the more patent the gaps became. In my interviews, the inconsistency of the Other of the *estallido* was countered with the insistence on specific signifiers with which academics developed libidinal attachments so as to cope with the desire of this Other. Similar to how other researchers have interpreted fantasies through the method of 'following the



signifier’ (Ronderos & Glynos, 2023, p. 638), I traced the movement of signifiers to reconstruct some of the fantasies elicited by the *estallido* that helped critical subjects to reframe their desire for change.

In the following section, I provide a detailed interpretation of one of these fantasies. I refer to it as the ‘fantasy of sleeplessness’ and it was the result of my analysis of Nicolás’s speech, a PhD researcher in an interdisciplinary studies programme, a part-time lecturer in two universities, and also an artist (his name is fictitious). The fantasy of sleeplessness was Nicolás’s singular way to resolve the enigma of ‘waking up’ during the revolt. It is worth noting that singular and particular are not interchangeable terms here. The fact that this fantasy is ‘his’ way of emending the inconsistencies of the Other of the *estallido* does not mean that he holds the authorship of it. The singularity of his fantasy comes from the unique constellation of signifiers organising this imaginary scenario, yet both the subjective challenges and the means to deal with them were socially produced. Fantasies challenge any stark distinction between the individual and the social, and they can be better understood as ‘a composite meta-frame for social interaction that crucially cuts across notions of “internal” and “external”’ (Ffytche, 2019, p. 403). Consequently, fantasies are not generalisable but neither are they inner, fictional or private—they belong to the realm of the transindividual. My interpretation will show, then, a singular transindividual response to the collective challenge of the desire of the Other of the *estallido*.

The Fantasy of Sleeplessness

Eyes were at the centre of the *estallido* since the beginning. On the one hand, the Chilean revolt was ignominiously known for its unprecedented levels of police brutality. The unparalleled scale in which eyes got ‘lost’ in Chile allowed human rights watchdogs to call it an ‘epidemic,’ whilst the writer Lina Meruane (2021, p. 34) coined the term ‘serial eye-cide.’ On the other hand, the idea that ‘Chile woke up’ became the most widespread motto to make sense of what was happening. The revolt, as derived from this discursive formation, brought the country out of its neoliberal-induced dormancy and people were finally seeing otherwise. As a result, different metaphors emerge from the prominence of the act of seeing in the *estallido*: “waking up is opening our eyes”, “being asleep is closing them”, “we opened our eyes and they blinded us” (Johansson, 2021, p. 198). The salience of the visual field comes from the fact that, as the discourse goes, the revolt not only created the conditions of possibility for opening our eyes, but also insinuates that we should not close them again.

If Chile woke up, that was not a simple thing to do. For several months, everyday life was interrupted and people had to find ways to navigate the suspension of the quotidian. Nicolás, on whose experience I will base my interpretation, 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 has to do with a sense of temporal unreliability—as it 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. Given the catastrophe, he then admits, 'there was a lot of tension, inside the house I mean, a tension that I now see as a dream.' This unusual use of the signifier 'dream'—the fact that it is not related to dreaming but to seeing—caught my attention, so I followed its subsequent associations.

Shortly after talking about the struggles of his daily life, Nicolás began to address his work and, crucially, the work of others. Quite suddenly, his speech acquired a bitterness unexpressed so far, which was directed at certain artists he deemed to be 'political' in the wrong way. Some artists, he claimed, 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, namely, the public interventions of the art collective Delight Lab. The day after the revolt commenced, these artists decided to project several words and short phrases on a daily basis on the Telefónica building, a 143 metre high skyscraper adjacent to Dignity Square, the epicentre of the *estallido*. Amongst their interventions, they illuminated the city with the phrase 'Chile woke up.' In Nicolás's opinion, however, 'wanting to give the revolt an image is extremely irresponsible; to reduce it to a definition is irresponsible.' The reason is that he conceives the *estallido* 'similar to a dream, because it's uncapturable.'

Following his own speech, what troubles Nicolás is that they 'captured' the *estallido*; they treated it like an image and not like a dream. What he constructs is the antagonistic figure of an opportunistic other, a figure that moves along the axis 'image = capturable = irresponsibility' instead of 'dream = uncapturable = responsibility.' Negatively, as opposed to the image, Nicolás's speech hinted at interesting symbolic associations. Even when he rehearsed more positive definitions via a description of what is the responsible thing to do, they nonetheless seemed very elusive and evocative. For him, instead of the capture of the image, the idea is 'to associate things from a place that has no associativity whatsoever,' or 'to talk about things without talking about them.' This, we can infer, is acting responsibly. What this procedure avoids, for Nicolás, is the propensity to fall prey to 'the reduction of the image, the narrowing of a definition.' A crucial addition to grasping Nicolás's fantasmatic edifice comes from his own explanation of why dreams are important to him.

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 come to heal you, I'm gonna come 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, yet some background information is required. The unconventional curative practice Nicolás refers to is embedded in a sort of pagan tradition very popular in poor areas of the country, something I know from experience. Dream visitations are the upper echelons of this ancient wisdom, a



knowledge passed down from generation to generation that only certain women can manipulate. Thanks to his aunt, we have arrived now at a new association: dreaming = 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 signifier ‘dream,’ therefore, is associated with 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. Dreaming, accordingly, has nothing to do here 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.

Sleeping entails a fascinating 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. 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 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 must remain unanswered if we are to sleep. 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. His experience attests to the fact that in the midst of the reorganisation of Chilean society, the motto ‘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, 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’s experience shows. ‘Chile woke up’ means that any attempt at weakening the interpellation from the Other of the *estallido* is bound to fail since being duped by any trick is now overruled. Finally, after a three-decade-long slumber, our eyes are wide open (and only a fool would dare to close them again).

Following my interpretation, seeing things as a dream amounts to Nicolás’s fantasmatic solution to the problem of *falling* asleep after the revolt. Inversely put, it is his unconscious way of *sleeping with his eyes open*. At several moments in his



speech, he adopted 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 assumed 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 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 an incandescent interpellation coming from every corner. The singularity of Nicolás's fantasy is that, when confronted with the gaps of the emancipatory interpellation of the Other of the *estallido*, he tries to identify himself *directly* with that Other. He is aware of the fact that being duped is overruled and that is why he appears to walk over a bed of hot embers—he dreads the possibility of being caught in the mistake, i.e., dozing off. Faced with this impossibility of responding to 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. It is in this imaginary scenario where Nicolás achieves a sense of subjective coherence. 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* (Image. 1).

What is the inconsistency of the Other of the *estallido* that this libidinal investment in the signifier 'dream' seeks to sort out? I will suggest that the fantasy of sleeplessness can be more thoroughly understood as a response to a paradigmatically hallucinatory dimension of 'Chile woke up.' As I have shown, this



Image 1 'Don't fall asleep', graffiti on Alameda, Santiago's main street. Photo credit: The author



emancipatory motto turned into a disproportionate interpellation. Although indubitably metaphoric in intention, the idea of waking up led to the mandate not to fall asleep (ever again). Symbolically, there is a difference between being awake and not sleeping. So, in order to sustain the redemptive aspect of the revolt, a very literal refusal to sleep emerged. The notion of hallucination helps to understand how this metaphor had nevertheless a very literal subjective grip.

Hallucinations are commonly 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). Furthermore, Lacan uncoupled his theory of 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, 1981/1997, p. 256). Following Stijn Vanheule (2011), hallucinations are an impasse with the Other in the form of an interruption in signification. Certain events, on account of their radical strangeness 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. An 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, p. 97). Differently put, identifications cannot be sustained amid unfinished sentences and this precipitates a hastiness in the subject so as to recalibrate his relationship with the Other. ‘Chile woke up’ stands as a primary example of deferred punctuation. Even if we accept that the country was 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 *estallido* provided the grounds for new meanings and identifications 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 problematical one—the emancipatory invitation to recognise oneself as an awakened subject was imbued with misrecognition. Nicolás's 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 not falling asleep (ever 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 *estallido* 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 impasse as such through a direct identification with the Other. 'Seeing things as a dream' is Nicolás's singular way of swerving the misrecognition 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 circumvents the impossibility of falling asleep during the *estallido* by 'seeing' things as a dream.

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 maintains that sleeplessness can spring from something even worse: the tormenting thought that nothing is calling us at all. This is the dialectic at the heart of Nicolás's 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 of the *estallido*, by identifying with the caller and not by answering the call. Consequently, his fantasmatic construction shows how hard it is to cope with the recognition-cum-misrecognition of the revolt's interpellation but, simultaneously, that the idea of not being called by it might be even harder to endure.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, I have interpreted the singular fantasmatic response of a critical scholar to the interpellation of the Other of the *estallido*. By following the symbolic associations of the signifier 'dream' in Nicolás's speech, I have reconstructed the imaginary underpinnings sustaining the idea of 'seeing things as a dream' in the course of the uprising. Despite the emancipatory character of the symbolic organisation introduced by the revolt, the undoubtedly progressive motto 'Chile woke up' infused a pang of anxiety among Chileans. Nicolás's speech is an



attestation of this and the 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, we can derive from his experience that one of the outcomes of the revolt was a sort of subjective combustion. In this context, Nicolás libidinalises the signifier ‘dream’ to cope with the misrecognition of the Other of the *estallido*. ‘Dream,’ then, is an excess-in-meaning aimed at counteracting the inconsistencies of the interpellative call of the revolt.

Through the motto ‘Chile woke up,’ the *estallido* gave rise to an emancipatory Other to whom nothing escaped its sight. In doing so, the fight against the neoliberal lethargy adopted the form of endless daytime scrutiny. Nicolás identifies himself with the Other of the *estallido* to appease this pressure, even at the cost of increasing its grip in practice. Paradoxically, this unconscious 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, namely, 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, then, the interpellative force of the Other seems impossible to balance out.

The symbolic approach to the Chilean uprising adopted in my research allows me to challenge mainstream takes on the desire for change in the context of our ‘time of riots.’ By empirically demonstrating the subjective struggles in dealing with the interpellation of the *estallido* amid subjects who precisely identify with social change, I have shown the difficulties of maintaining that the Chilean revolt was an event that jettisoned representation. The alleged immediacy of the *estallido* expressed in an unfathomable potency of bodies overlooks the importance of symbolic mediation. As Anna Kornbluh (2022, p. 44) puts it, these analyses brush aside the ‘little bits of language that hold a movement together encompass[ing] names, nouns, negations, slogans, demands, visions—and bits that have a suturing, accretive, convocative capacity actuated in repetition.’ Immediatist interpretations romanticise the purported radicality of the somatic and, as a result, end up taking for granted the desire for social transformation. In contrast, I have followed Adam Phillips’s (2021, p. 5) caveat that humans 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.’ As my analysis evinces, psychoanalytic theory can help us to understand the ambivalence of the desire for change.

Fantasy is a crucial concept to delve into these complexities. The psychoanalytic notion of fantasy does not simply add some individual or psychological perspective to the broader phenomena of interpellation, but it is ‘capable of structuring it according to unconscious principles of desire and defence’ (Ffytche, 2019, p. 402). If it is true, as some researchers have claimed (Glynos, 2011), that fantasies do not play a regional but an ontological role *vis-à-vis* the subject, then we should pay due attention to the fantasmatic organisation of all kinds of identifications, including the ones with emancipatory events or ideals. In this sense, Matt Ffytche (2019) has



persuasively suggested that the resistance towards fantasy in social research seems to be more related to the ascendancy of a sociological understanding of the imaginary rather than an alleged empirical irrepresentability. I would argue that the ascendancy of an immediatist understanding of the desire for change leads us to a political selectivity in the deployment of fantasy. The latter seems appropriate to explore the endurance of undesirable identifications, yet when used to study the unconscious dynamics of emancipatory identifications it is perceived as an erosion of their potential progressive outcomes. This baseless belief only strengthens the idea that the desire for change coincides with itself, bringing us to a standstill.

My study sought to make a contribution to the current literature on the political potential of fantasy (Dean, 2012; McGowan, 2022; Ruti, 2017). Against 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, 2022, p. 177), my approach assumes the unavailability of fantasmatic narratives to navigate the Other's interpellation within emancipatory settings. Without denying the alienating dimension of fantasies, they nonetheless point to key political aspects. In this line, Todd McGowan (2022) 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 (2022, p. 180) claims, 'constrains the subject to recognize its own involvement in the enjoyment that it fantasizes about.' This is a possible interpretation of the fantasy of sleeplessness I presented in this article. Perhaps one of the political deficits of the *estallido* was that it did not allow subjects to perceive their own involvement in the fantasies it elicited. This might explain why Nicolás's unconscious solution was to identify directly with the Other and not with its call.

Finally, my study of the *estallido* through the notion of fantasy corroborates the uniqueness of the symbolic life of the Chilean revolt. This insight is particularly important considering that many other comparable events have taken place around the world during the decade of mass protests (Bevins, 2023). From a sociological angle, these events can justifiably be equated as expressions of the same emancipatory impulse to rebel against neoliberalism. At a subjective level, however, each one of them depended on an unrepeatable symbolic configuration that led to singular fantasmatic ways of organising the desire for change. Interpellating individuals as subjects who have awakened from a prolonged slumber was one of the idiosyncratic ways in which this transpired in Chile. Hence, the unconscious life of anti-neoliberal revolts is marked by the particular physiognomy of the Other and the singular way in which its desire hunts the subject.

There is a long way to go in this direction, both theoretically and empirically. In this piece, I have followed the suggestion that the study of fantasies requires 'thick qualitative description and interpretation' (Ronderos & Glynos, 2023, p. 638). Consequently, I deliberately opted for the dense description of a single experience, which can be highly illuminating but also has its limitations. It is my hope that the argument offered in this article can be seen as a contribution to the understanding of



the complex dynamics of the desire for change. Romanticising the alleged somatic potency of bodies, as immediatist approaches do, obfuscates these dynamics. This oversimplification can only do a serious disservice to the emancipatory events we seek to comprehend.

Funding This work is supported by the Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo (Becas Chile No. 72200242).

Declarations

Conflict of interest The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval No 3rd party material was used in this research.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Badiou, A. (2012). *The rebirth of history: Times of riots and uprisings* (G. Elliott, Trans.). Verso. (Original work published 2011).
- Bevins, V. (2023). *If we burn: The mass protest decade and the missing revolution*. Wildfire.
- Castillo, A. (2019). *Asamblea de los cuerpos* [Assembly of the bodies]. Sangría Editora.
- Cortés, A. (2019). La rebelión social como imaginación sociológica colectiva [The social rebellion as a collective sociological imagination]. *Cuadernos de Teoría Social* [Social Theory Notebooks], 5(10), 77–93.
- Critchley, S. (2008). *Infinitely demanding: Ethics of commitment, politics of resistance*. Verso.
- Dean, J. (2012). *The communist horizon*. Verso.
- Ferretti, P., & Dragnic, M. (2020). Chile: La revuelta en el laboratorio neoliberal [Chile: The revolt in the neoliberal laboratory]. In O. Grau, L. Follegati & S. Aguilera (Eds.), *Escrituras feministas en la revuelta* [Feminist writings in the revolt] (pp. 121–131). Lom Ediciones.
- Ffytche, M. (2019). Real fantasies: Reinserting the imaginary in the scene of social encounter. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 24(4), 394–412.
- Freud, S. (2001). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XV: Introductory lectures on psycho-analysis (Parts I and II)*. Vintage. (Original work published 1916)
- Galende, F. (2020). Pueblo, arte, sublevación [People, art, rebellion]. In F. Gaspar & G. Jarpa (Eds.), *Los futuros imaginados* [The imagined futures] (pp. 52–55). Vicerrectoría de Investigación y Desarrollo, Universidad de Chile.
- Glynos, J. (2011). On the ideological and political significance of fantasy in the organization of work. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 16(4), 373–393.
- Glynos, J. (2021). Critical fantasy studies. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 20(1), 95–111.
- Glynos, J., Oliveira, G., & Burity, J. (2019). Critical fantasy studies: Neoliberalism, education and identification. An interview with Jason Glynos. *Série-Estudos*, 24(52), 145–170.



- Gordon-Zolov, T., & Zolov, E. (2022). *The walls of Santiago: Social revolution and political aesthetics in contemporary Chile*. Berghahn Books.
- Johansson, M. (2021). El estallido en los ojos [The burst in the eyes]. In L. de Vivanco & M. Johansson (Eds.), *Instantáneas en la marcha. Repertorio de las movilizaciones en Chile* [Snapshots on the rally. Repertoire of mobilisations in Chile] (pp. 195–201). Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado.
- Karmy, R. (2019). *El porvenir se hereda: Fragmentos de un Chile sublevado* [The future is inherited: Fragments of a rebellious Chile]. Sangría Editora.
- Kornbluh, A. (2019). *The order of forms. Realism, formalism, and social space*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Kornbluh, A. (2022). Solidarity words. *differences*, 33(2–3), 33–50.
- Lacan, J. (1997). *The psychoses, 1955–1956: The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book III* (R. Grigg, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1981)
- Lacan, J. (2006). The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious. In J. Lacan, *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (pp. 671–702) (B. Fink, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1966)
- Lacan, J. (2019). *Desire and its interpretation: The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book VI* (B. Fink, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 2013)
- Landaeta, L., & Herrero, V. (2021). *La revuelta. Las semanas de octubre que estremecieron Chile* [The revolt. The weeks of October that shook Chile]. Editorial Planeta.
- Lapping, C., & Glynos, J. (2018). Psychical contexts of subjectivity and performative practices of remuneration: Teaching assistants' narratives of work. *Journal of Education Policy*, 33(1), 23–42.
- Leader, D. (2019). *Why can't we sleep? Understanding our sleeping and sleepless minds*. Penguin.
- Martuccelli, D. (2019). El largo octubre chileno. Bitácora sociológica [The long Chilean October. Sociological log]. In K. Araujo (Ed.), *Hilos tensados. Para leer el octubre chileno* [Tight threads. To read the Chilean October] (pp. 369–476). Editorial Universidad de Santiago de Chile.
- McGowan, T. (2016). *Capitalism and desire. The psychic cost of free markets*. Columbia University Press.
- McGowan, T. (2022). Mainstreaming fantasy: Politics without reserve. *differences*, 33(2–3), 177–197.
- Meruane, L. (2021). *Zona ciega* [Blind zone]. Random House.
- Phillips, A. (2021). *On wanting to change*. Penguin.
- Richard, N. (2021). *Revuelta social y nueva constitución* [Social revolt and new constitution]. CLACSO.
- Ronderos, S., & Glynos, J. (2023). Anti-populist fantasies: interrogating *Veja's* discursive constructions, from Lula to Bolsonaro. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 20(6), 618–642.
- Rose, J. (2004). *On not being able to sleep: Psychoanalysis and the modern world*. Vintage.
- Ross, K. (2016). *Communal luxury. The political imaginary of the Paris Commune*. Verso.
- Ross, K. (2023). *The politics and poetics of everyday life*. Verso.
- Ruiz, C. (2020). *Octubre chileno. La irrupción de un nuevo pueblo* [The Chilean October. The emergence of a new people]. Taurus.
- Ruti, M. (2017). *The ethics of opting out: Queer theory's defiant subjects*. Columbia University Press.
- Vanheule, S. (2011). A Lacanian perspective on psychotic hallucinations. *Theory & Psychology*, 21(1), 86–106.
- Villalobos-Ruminott, S. (2020). Chilean revolts and the crisis of neoliberal governance. *Radical Philosophy*, 2(7), 9–16.
- Žižek, S. (1997). *The plague of fantasies*. Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2007). *How to read Lacan*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Gustavo Sánchez holds a PhD in Psychosocial Studies from Birkbeck, University of London. His work revolves around the unconscious dynamics at play in the desire for social transformation. Drawing from Lacanian psychoanalysis, he mobilises the notion of fantasy to empirically grasp the libidinal attachments enabling, but also thwarting, change. He currently works at Aston University.

