

**GALATASARAY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**TOWARDS NEW NARRATIVES and SIGNIFIERS
AGAINST “GLOBAL ENDS”: CHILE’S GREAT REFUSAL**

PH.D. THESIS

Emre ÖNKİBAR

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Feride Selcan SERDAROĞLU POLATAY

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This dissertation represents the culmination of a long journey. The intellectual quest that led to this work traversed significant distances, both geographically –from Turkey to Chile, what is often termed the “end of the world”– and conceptually. And also, as someone who was historically influenced by the East-West dialectic, it was surely a concrete and instructive journey to shift to the South-North dialectic.

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Last but not least, luckily enough, the impetus for examining the clash between utopian struggles and dystopian realities was already there, beginning with Roger Waters from Pink Floyd. When I arrived in Chile, it was his concert in Santiago, the capital, that reignited a symbolic thread, reminding me that this is one of the few places on earth still echoing the ultimate message embedded in *The Wall* album: *Together We Stand, Divided We Fall* – at the same time, what was chanted in the stadium, all together, was equal to “*El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido*.” It was not only a moment of cultural resonance but also a strange, creeping sense of despair – as if the end of the world were near, and only a scattered few still listened to rock and roll as a form of resistance. This haunting contrast between enduring hope and cultural decline mirrored the broader contradictions of our time. Nevertheless, the emerging paradigm remains elusive, and reaching the real amid spectacle, fragmentation, and ideological confusion proves to be an ongoing and uphill struggle.

TABLE OF CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENT	iv
ABBREVIATIONS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
RÉSUMÉ.....	x
ABSTRACT	xvi
ÖZET.....	xxi
1. INTRODUCTION: PROTEST AT THE END OF HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY.....	1
<i>1.1. Orientation of the Study</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1.2. Placing Chile in Contemporary Struggles</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.3 Why Chile: Is It a Peripheral Signifier or One of The Protagonists in The Plot of Neoliberalism?</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>1.4 Literature Review</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>1.5 Theoretical Framework.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>1.6 Research Questions</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>1.7 Research Design.....</i>	<i>30</i>
2. INTELLECTUAL TRAJECTORY AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE ACT OF GREAT REFUSAL	35
<i>2.1. Understanding the Psychoanalytic Space of the Political-Philosophies of Marcuse and Žižek.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>2.2. Centrality and Fundamental Elements of Hegel's Philosophy.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>2.3. Hegel in Marcuse and Žižek.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>2.4. Opening the Way of Psychoanalysis for Conceptual Foundations: Freud and Lacan.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>2.5. Marcuse's "Great Refusal" and Žižek's "Act"</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>2.5.1. Framing the contrast.....</i>	<i>95</i>
3. ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK OF THE ACT OF GREAT REFUSAL: PSYCHOANALYSIS, IDEOLOGY AND NARRATIVE.....	101

3.1. <i>Narrative and Ideology in Protests</i>	104
3.1.2. <i>The Rationality and Logistics of Contention: Opportunities, Mobilization, Politics and Cognitive Liberation</i>	109
3.1.3. <i>From Class to Identity and Populist Turn</i>	112
3.1.4. <i>Framing, Narrative, and Ideology</i>	115
3.1.5. <i>Refusal of the big Other and its Affective Categories</i>	119
4. GLOBAL ENDS' and CHILE'S HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY: RETROACTIVE HISTORICISM in the ACT of GREAT REFUSAL	133
4.1. <i>New Narratives of the Old</i>	139
4.1.1. <i>Master-Hegemonic Narratives</i>	142
4.1.1.1. <i>End of Ideology</i>	148
4.1.1.2. <i>End of History</i>	153
4.1.2. <i>Short Prelude for Bridging Narratives</i>	164
4.1.3. <i>Master-Hegemonic National Narratives</i>	174
4.1.3.1. <i>End of Democracy</i>	178
4.1.3.2. <i>End of Dictatorship</i>	189
4.1.3.3. <i>End of Transition</i>	194
4.1.3.4. <i>Towards to End of Neoliberalism?</i>	198
4.2. <i>Post-1968 Latin American Cycles: Hegemony and Its Discontents in Latin America</i>	205
4.2.1. <i>The Rise of Social Movements and Their International Dimensions</i>	209
5. METHODOLOGY: FROM END-NARRATIVES TO EVIDENCE	215
6. NARRATIVE AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY IN THE CHILEAN GREAT REFUSAL	235
6.1. <i>Moment I – Negation: Changing the Desire</i>	251
6.2. <i>Moment II – Rupture: Repetition of Violence & Democracy</i>	263
6.3. <i>Moment III – Containment: Institutional Leap</i>	273
6.4. <i>Moment IV – Refoundation as Negation of Negation</i>	281
6.5. <i>From Negation to Utopian Legacy</i>	288
6.6. <i>End of Analysis</i>	313
BIBLIOGRAPHY	326
APPENDIX 1: SLOGAN CORPUS CODEBOOK AND PICTURES THAT WERE TAKEN FROM FIELD RESEARCH AND FROM THE MEDIA	367
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW-CORPUS NARRATIVE - SIGNIFIER MATRIX	372
APPENDIX 3: QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK	380
APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE USED IN ALL INTERVIEWS	388
APPENDIX 5: CHRONOLOGY OF THE ESTALLIDO SOCIAL	389

ABBREVIATIONS

18-O / O-18	: October 18th (the start date of the social outbreak)
AFP	: Administradoras de Fondos de Pensiones
APEC	: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
CCP	: Communist Party of China
CEP	: Centro de Estudios Públicos
COP25	: 25th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties
CSIS	: Center for Strategic & International Studies
CSN/COSENA	: Consejo de Seguridad Nacional
CPNI	: Critical-Psychoanalytic Narrative Interview
CTC	: Confederación de Trabajadores del Cobre
DINA	: Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional
EZLN	: Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FONASA	: Fondo Nacional de Salud
HRW	: Human Rights Watch
ICA	: International Cooperation Administration (US government)
IMF	: International Monetary Fund
INDH	: Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos
INE	: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas Chile
IR	: International Relations
ISAPRES	: Institutos de Salud Previsional
ISI	: Import Substitution Industrialization
LOCE	: Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza
MEMCH'83	: Movimiento Pro-Emancipación de las Mujeres de Chile
MIR	: Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria
MST	: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra
NSM	: New Social Movement
OECD	: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODM	: One-Dimensional Man
OHCHR	: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PCCh	: Partido Comunista de Chile
PDC	: Partido Demócrata Cristiano
PPM	: Political Process Model
PPT	: Psychoanalytic Political Theory
PS	: Partido Socialista de Chile
PUC	: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
RMT	: Resource Mobilization Theory
RSI	: Réel, Symbolique, Imaginaire (Real, Symbolic, Imaginary)
SDS	: Socialist German Students' Union
SMO	: Social Movement Organization
SMS	: Social Movement Studies
TINA	: There Is No Alternative

UN	: United Nations
UP	: Unidad Popular (Popular Unity)
USA/US	: United States of America
USSR	: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	: World Bank
WEF	: World Economic Forum
WSF	: World Social Forum
WTO	: World Trade Organization



LIST OF FIGURES

	Page Number
Figure 3.1: The possibility of the Act and Great Refusal.....	130
Figure 4.1: Historical National Narrative Line of Chile	174
Figure 5.1: The five discourses of Lacan.....	226
Figure 6.1: Intensity Landscape of Post-Neoliberal Desire	237
Figure 6.2: Ideology × Narrative Match Matrix (0-5).....	241
Figure 6.3: Conceptual Dendrogram (Interviews)	247
Figure 6.4: Frequency of coded slogan categories (n = 558)	248

LIST OF TABLES

	Page Number
Table 2.1 Comparative Analysis Table: Mapping the Main Concepts of Marcuse and Žižek.....	77
Table 5.1 Summary of the field research for both the interviews and academic events	224
Table 6.1 Mapping Intellectual Outcomes onto Core Cognitive-Political Narratives	244

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse de doctorat est une recherche qui examine la “cartographie cognitive” dans un monde désespérément fragmenté. L’étude aborde le soulèvement populaire chilien de 2019, nommé *estallido social* (explosion sociale), comme un tournant paradigmatique et historique né du mécontentement envers l’ordre capitaliste mondial et les cadres politiques, culturels et économiques qui l’accompagnent, à notre époque de luttes post-politiques en mutation. Cette insurrection est considérée non seulement comme un moment de rupture dans l’histoire nationale du Chili, mais aussi comme faisant partie d’un moment mondial où les promesses et les limites de la mondialisation néolibérale sont remises en question. S’appuyant sur la théorie critique, la psychanalyse et l’espace politico-philosophique, ce travail propose une interrogation sur un sujet fréquemment débattu par les universitaires du champ de la critique-narrative systémique : la possibilité d’une reproduction contre-hégémonique à la périphérie et d’une transformation sociale et politique radicale. La problématique fondamentale de la thèse est de savoir comment la subjectivité politique peut être reconstituée et sous quelles formes l’objection radicale au système peut émerger à une époque (la post-politique) où les grands récits, tels que la “fin de l’histoire” de Francis Fukuyama et la “fin des idéologies” de Daniel Bell, se sont effondrés. Dans ce contexte, en suivant la littérature de la théorie critique qui se développe autour de l’axe “primauté du sujet ou primauté de l’acte ?”, l’analyse se concentre sur les récits “cognitifs” et de la “fin”. Cette focalisation vise à démontrer que les manifestations n’étaient pas simplement une réaction aux politiques actuelles, mais aussi une intervention fondamentale dans l’horizon de temps et de sens imposé par l’hégémonie.

Les profondes contradictions structurelles de la structure capitaliste mondiale ont déclenché les protestations, préparant le terrain au Chili pour une explosion violente contre la logique répandue et obscène du “néolibéralisme avancé” – ou de la “complétude du néolibéralisme” – qui englobe non seulement une domination économique, mais aussi des dimensions culturelles et subjectives. Le Chili, en tant que “laboratoire” où les politiques néolibérales ont été appliquées dans leur forme la plus précoce et la plus pure, montre que ce modèle n’est pas seulement un programme économique, mais aussi un projet symptomatique qui façonne profondément les relations sociales, les codes culturels et les subjectivités individuelles. Dans ce contexte, il est essentiel d’interroger le positionnement subjectif et idéologique des récits construits sous le néolibéralisme avancé pour saisir les conditions dans lesquelles une telle complexité s’est formée. Au-delà d’une réaction aux difficultés économiques, les manifestations constituent une réponse critique à l’aliénation profonde subie par le sujet néolibéral, dépourvu de liens significatifs à travers des

contre-récits. Cette aliénation doit être comprise comme la perte de la capacité des individus à donner un sens à leur position dans leur propre réalité sociale et à se situer dans un horizon d'action collective. Dans le cadre du concept de "cartographie cognitive" de Fredric Jameson (ou du *Weltgeist* de Hegel), en identifiant l'absence de relations permettant aux sujets aliénés de former des alliances significatives, l'étude a recours à la théorie critique et à la psychanalyse pour produire de nouveaux récits et signifiants capables d'intervenir dans les récits hégémoniques nationaux et mondiaux. L'*estallido* peut être lu précisément comme un effort pour combler ce vide de la carte cognitive, pour unifier des expériences fragmentées dans un cadre de sens commun et pour créer un nouveau sujet collectif.

La thèse conceptualise les manifestations chiliennes comme un "Acte du Grand Refus" (*Act of Great Refus*), en se basant sur la pensée de Marcuse et Žižek. Il est ainsi avancé que les protestations sont un rejet profond de la logique du "néolibéralisme avancé", incluant non seulement les difficultés économiques mais aussi les dimensions culturelles et subjectives. Le concept de "Grand Refus" d'Herbert Marcuse repose sur la thèse que la société industrielle moderne (le capitalisme avancé) réprime son potentiel libérateur en emprisonnant l'opposition dans de faux besoins et une existence unidimensionnelle. Ce refus implique une recherche d'existence authentique et l'imagination d'une société qualitativement différente en rejetant les fausses satisfactions offertes par le système. Le concept d'"Acte" de Žižek, dérivé de la psychanalyse lacanienne, désigne un moment de rupture imprévisible, traumatique et impossible qui modifie radicalement les coordonnées de l'ordre symbolique existant. L'Acte n'est pas une simple "action", mais un moment de contact avec le "Réel" au-delà de l'ordre symbolique, par lequel le sujet se reconstitue lui-même ainsi que la réalité. Le cadre théorique proposé vise à intégrer l'analyse de Žižek sur l'idéologie et la rupture radicale (l'"Acte") avec la critique de Marcuse sur l'unidimensionnalité et la société post-industrielle, et son concept de "Grand Refus" comme projet de sortie. Cette synthèse offre la possibilité d'analyser l'*estallido* à la fois comme une résistance immanente et continue au système et comme un moment de rupture radicale qui en ébranle les fondements.

Cet argument est développé au sein d'une structure composée de six chapitres principaux. L'introduction définit le problème et présente le contexte théorique et historique. Le deuxième chapitre examine en détail les trajectoires intellectuelles et les concepts fondamentaux de Marcuse et Žižek, qui constituent la base théorique de la thèse. Le troisième chapitre construit le cadre analytique en établissant la relation entre la psychanalyse, l'idéologie et le récit, et passe au crible critique les approches traditionnelles de la théorie des mouvements sociaux. Le quatrième chapitre déchiffre le rôle des récits de la "fin" dans la trajectoire historique du Chili à travers la conception hégélienne d'une histoire holistique ouverte et le concept de "l'historien matérialiste" de Benjamin, et situe le phénomène dans le contexte latino-américain. Le cinquième chapitre détaille la méthodologie, tandis que le sixième applique ce cadre

au cas chilien, analysant les dynamiques narratives et contre-hégémoniques de l'*estallido* comme un point-limite des récits de la “fin”.

La méthodologie qualitative-interprétative, basée sur une recherche de terrain menée entre novembre 2023 et novembre 2024, combine des entretiens semi-structurés, l'analyse des récits de protestation, une approche analytique d'”historicisme rétrospectif” (*retroactive historicism*) du refus chilien, avec des sources secondaires telles que les graffitis et les slogans, ainsi que des notes de terrain. L'originalité méthodologique de l'étude réside dans son traitement de la manifestation non seulement comme un phénomène sociologique et politique, mais aussi comme un espace psychanalytique du champ philosophique et politique. Les entretiens semi-structurés ont été utilisés comme principale source de données pour examiner la transformation de l'ordre symbolique. L'enquête narrative et l'approche psychanalytique du “noyau traumatique” conceptualisent ces transformations comme le reflet de changements dans le “désir du Maître”. Cette formulation lacanienne souligne que les changements sociaux sont façonnés non seulement par des demandes rationnelles, mais aussi par les dynamiques inconscientes du désir, de la jouissance et du trauma. L'analyse suppose que le langage et le discours ne se contentent pas de refléter la réalité, mais la constituent. Ainsi, l'analyse révèle un processus qui, plutôt que de rejeter définitivement l'ordre existant (la pensée, la société et l'homme unidimensionnels comme forme de l'impossible), permet d'apparier les signifiants et les récits au sein de cadres idéologiques. Elle examine comment les protestations, parallèlement au rejet de l'ordre néolibéral inhérent au capitalisme avancé, contiennent également une quête de nouveaux sens, de nouveaux symboles et d'une nouvelle identité collective. Ce processus montre que l'idéologie n'est pas seulement une “fausse conscience”, mais aussi un mécanisme qui structure la relation fantasmatique que les sujets entretiennent avec le réel.

Conformément au concept lacanien de “sujet supposé savoir”, l'étude, qui transforme l'interrogation elle-même en récit, examine comment les intellectuels et les universitaires ayant écrit sur l'*estallido* construisent des récits cognitifs et expriment leurs sentiments subjectifs sur les manifestations ; elle révèle ainsi comment ces récits s'articulent à une mission idéologique ou s'en écartent. Ces sujets intellectuels sont considérés à la fois comme des acteurs produisant le sens de la protestation et comme des narrateurs porteurs des symptômes de leur propre position idéologique. Leurs récits ne sont pas de simples rapports factuels, mais aussi l'expression de leurs propres désirs, peurs et fantasmes. La thèse, qui aborde l'historiographie rétrospective – un sujet insuffisamment exploré dans la littérature critique – comme une manifestation des angoisses actuelles et de la nature traumatique du refus chilien, analyse des signifiants symboliques tels que “le peuple” (*el pueblo*), “la dignité” (*dignidad*) et “la violence” (*violencia*) au sein du noyau traumatique et de l'économie libidinale de la protestation. Ces signifiants expriment non seulement des revendications politiques, mais aussi les couches profondes de la psyché collective. Les concepts de nostalgie tournée vers le passé, de mélancolie située dans le présent et de fantasme projeté vers

l'avenir sont mobilisés pour interpréter les dimensions temporelles complexes de la résistance politique. Ainsi, les fonctions de ces signifiants dans la production d'une force collective et dans la négation de l'ordre social unidimensionnel (ou du capitalisme tardif) guidé par la logique néolibérale, comme on le voit dans l'exemple chilien, sont démontrées. La nostalgie représente un désir d'unité et de solidarité perdues ; la mélancolie, une identification pathologique à un trauma et une perte insurmontables ; et le fantasme, une projection radicale du désir vers l'avenir face à ces impossibilités.

La thèse positionne le cas chilien (a) comme un "Acte du Grand Refus" dans la lignée de Marcuse-Žižek ; (b) comme une intervention dans les récits de la "fin" tels que la démocratie, la dictature, la transition et le néolibéralisme ; et (c) simultanément comme la reproduction d'antagonismes et de nouvelles formes de contradiction. L'*estallido*, en re-signifiant rétroactivement les récits de la "fin" qui ont façonné l'histoire moderne du Chili, établit également les possibilités de transformation qu'il a ouvertes pour la société et la politique chiliennes à travers des efforts de construction de récits contre-hégémoniques. De cette manière, la thèse éclaire la nature singulière du refus des manifestations chiliennes de 2019 en examinant de près les récits politico-cognitifs et les symboles des protestations à l'ère post-politique néolibérale, où les récits maître-hégémoniques sur la "fin de l'histoire" et la "fin de l'idéologie" se sont effondrés. Ce faisant, elle positionne les concepts de "fantasme de la fin", "mélancolie de l'échec" et "nostalgie du passé" comme des formes de contre-récit dans un ordre capitaliste mondial multipolaire, les situant dans le contexte de la lutte post-néolibérale. Ces concepts psychanalytico-politiques montrent que l'insurrection n'était pas seulement un acte rationnel, mais aussi une expression complexe du désir collectif, du trauma et de l'espoir.

Ainsi, sur le terrain de la continuité des récits de la "fin" et de la réversibilité, de l'accumulation et de la répétition historiques au sens hégélien-benjaminien, la thèse avance que le cas chilien symbolise l'émergence d'un puissant "désir post-néolibéral" né des contradictions internes de l'expérience néolibérale en cours. Ce désir contient plus qu'une simple privation matérielle ; il inclut le désir de réimaginer un avenir collectif. L'imaginaire politique et le noyau traumatique de l'insurrection populaire chilienne de 2019 sont lus comme l'événement critique où l'expression de ce désir est recherchée avec l'objectif de "réinventer l'histoire". Les manifestations n'ont pas seulement commémoré les traumatismes du passé (en particulier la dictature de Pinochet), mais ont également mis en pratique la conception de l'histoire de Walter Benjamin en re-signifiant ce passé au sein de la lutte du présent. Le concept de "l'à-présent" (*Jetztzeit*) de Benjamin désigne un "saut de tigre" où un moment spécifique du passé est chargé d'un potentiel révolutionnaire dans le présent. L'*estallido* a fait précisément cela, unifiant la dictature et la période post-dictatoriale en un seul récit d'oppression avec le slogan "Ce n'est pas 30 pesos, c'est 30 ans", convoquant ainsi les fantômes du passé dans la lutte d'aujourd'hui.

De ce fait, l'étude parvient à la conclusion que le Chili, en tant que partie du Sud Global, existe dans un "temps futur néolibéral" et que les signaux qui en émanent reflètent l'une des dernières phases du sujet post-néolibéral. Malgré toute sa complexité, ce refus de la mobilisation sociale a rendu visibles les fissures dans l'ordre symbolique du discours capitaliste mondial. Cet acte de refus, en accord avec l'idée de "réinventer l'histoire", se révèle comme une action politique fonctionnant sur l'axe nostalgie-mélancolie-fantasme à travers des liens symptomatiques qui croisent des récits établis, comme les récits de la fin propres au Chili, et donc à travers les moments de transformation du désir, du président, du système, de la société. De tels moments sont apparus à l'intersection de deux forces apparemment contradictoires : la pulsion de mort du sujet, supposée libératrice mais semblant disparaître au milieu des crises mondiales (ou des fins mondiales perçues), et la renaissance d'Éros, qui permet la réémergence de cette pulsion. Par conséquent, cet acte de refus n'est pas seulement une stratégie politique, mais aussi un processus de restructuration psychique collective. Partant de ce processus, la tension entre la pulsion de mort (Thanatos) du sujet, orientée vers l'impossible et le possible dans une perspective de libération, et le retour d'Éros a ébranlé la position singulière du Chili dans les récits néolibéraux durant une période définie par des crises multiples, faisant émerger un nouveau champ de lutte idéologique. Avec cette dynamique, il est conclu que le Chili est passé d'un "laboratoire néolibéral" à un "laboratoire de résistance" ou "laboratoire anti-néolibéral" qui produit activement des possibilités imaginaires pour l'avenir.

La thèse comble une lacune dans la littérature en analysant les manifestations chiliennes à la fois comme une résistance continue à l'ordre établi et comme un moment de rupture radicale, en se concentrant sur les récits "cognitifs" et de la "fin", l'historiographie rétrospective et le noyau traumatique du refus chilien. La contribution théorique de la thèse réside dans sa capacité à réunir la théorie critique et la psychanalyse dans le contexte des mouvements sociaux, et à le faire non seulement en relation avec le Nord Global, mais aussi dans le contexte du Sud Global. Les concepts de "rupture radicale" et de "cartographie cognitive", souvent débattus dans la littérature à travers des exemples centrés sur l'Europe ou l'Amérique du Nord, sont concrétisés dans ce travail avec le cas chilien, montrant comment le contexte historique local peut s'articuler aux débats mondiaux. À cet égard, la thèse offre une base à la fois théorique et méthodologique pour de futures recherches. La question de savoir si la fin n'a pas réellement pris fin et si des vagues de protestation similaires remplissent une fonction de comblement de vides cognitifs similaires est proposée comme un domaine de recherche fertile pour de futures études comparatives.

En conclusion, ce travail affirme que le cas chilien recèle des indices importants sur le début de la fin de l'ère post-politique et offre un terrain critique pour comprendre les possibilités et les impasses (apories) d'une re-politisation à l'échelle mondiale. L'*estallido* est un tournant critique non seulement dans l'histoire du Chili, mais aussi dans l'histoire mondiale du néolibéralisme. Secondairement, la thèse avance que l'*estallido* est un "échec de l'échec" (*failure of failure*) : bien qu'il n'ait peut-être pas

atteint ses objectifs institutionnels, il a remporté un succès historique en brisant de manière permanente l'hégémonie idéologique du consensus néolibéral et en ouvrant un nouvel espace pour le désir et la subjectivité politiques. Cette thèse s'efforce, en fin de compte, de montrer comment un acte de refus peut, d'une manière qui transcende les échecs et s'empare de l'impossible, créer l'espace symbolique et narratif nécessaire à un nouveau départ. Le refus du Chili, en ce sens, offre une puissante leçon théorique et politique (praxis) sur la façon dont l'espoir peut naître de la mélancolie, et le fantasme de l'avenir du trauma du passé.



ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis is an inquiry into “cognitive mapping” in a world that is desperately fragmented. The study treats the 2019 Chilean popular uprising, known as the *estallido social* (social explosion or outbreak), as a paradigmatic and historical turning point, born from the discontent with the global capitalist order and its accompanying political, cultural, and economic frameworks in today's changing era of post-political struggles. This rebellion is considered not only a moment of rupture in Chile's national history but also as part of a global moment where the promises and limits of neoliberal globalization are being questioned. Drawing upon critical theory, psychoanalysis, and the politico-philosophical space, this work offers an investigation into a subject frequently discussed by scholars in the field of systemic critical-narrative – the possibility of counter-hegemonic reproduction on the periphery and radical social and political transformation. The principal problematic of the thesis is how political subjectivity can be reconstituted and what forms radical objection to the system can take in an era (the post-political) where grand narratives such as Francis Fukuyama's “end of history” and Daniel Bell's “end of ideology” have collapsed. In this context, following the critical theory literature that develops along the “primacy of the subject or primacy of the act?” axis, the analysis focuses on “cognitive” and “end” narratives. This focus aims to reveal that the protests were not merely a reaction to existing policies, but also a profound intervention into the horizon of time and meaning imposed by hegemony.

Deep structural contradictions in the global capitalist structure triggered the protests, preparing the ground in Chile for a violent explosion against the pervasive and obscene logic of “advanced neoliberalism” – or the “completeness of neoliberalism” – which encompasses not only economic domination but also cultural and subjective dimensions. Chile, as a “laboratory” where neoliberal policies were implemented in their earliest and purest form, demonstrates that this model is not just an economic program but also a symptomatic project that profoundly shapes social relations, cultural codes, and individual subjectivities. In this context, to comprehend the conditions under which such complexity has formed, it is essential to question the subjective and ideological positioning of the narratives constructed under advanced neoliberalism. The protests, beyond being a reaction to economic hardships, are also a critical response to the deep alienation experienced by the neoliberal subject, who is devoid of meaningful connections through counter-narratives. This alienation should be understood as the loss of individuals' ability to make sense of their position within their own social reality and to place themselves within a horizon of collective action. Within the scope of Fredric Jameson's concept of “cognitive mapping” (or Hegel's *Weltgeist*), by identifying the absence of relationships that would allow alienated subjects to form meaningful alliances, the study resorts to critical theory and psychoanalysis to produce new narratives and signifiers that can intervene in hegemonic national and global narratives. The *estallido* can be read precisely as an

effort to fill this cognitive map void, to unite fragmented experiences within a common framework of meaning, and to create a new collective subject.

The thesis conceptualizes the Chilean protests as an “Act of Great Refusal,” drawing on the thought of Marcuse and Žižek. Thus, it is argued that the protests are a profound rejection of the logic of “advanced neoliberalism,” which includes not only economic grievances but also cultural and subjective dimensions. Herbert Marcuse's concept of the “Great Refusal” is based on the thesis that modern industrial society (advanced capitalism) suppresses its liberating potential by trapping opposition within false needs and a one-dimensional existence. This refusal entails a search for an authentic existence and the imagination of a qualitatively different society by rejecting the false satisfactions offered by the system. Žižek's concept of the “Act,” derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, signifies an unpredictable, traumatic, and impossible moment of rupture that radically alters the coordinates of the existing symbolic order. The Act is not a simple “acting out” but a moment of contact with the “Real” beyond the symbolic order, through which the subject reconstitutes both itself and reality. The proposed theoretical framework aims to integrate Žižek's analysis of ideology and radical rupture (the “Act”) with Marcuse's critique of one-dimensionality and post-industrial society, as well as his concept of the “Great Refusal” as a project of egress from this condition. This synthesis provides the possibility of analyzing the *estallido* as both an immanent, continuous resistance to the system and a moment of radical rupture that shakes the system to its foundations.

This argument is developed within a structure consisting of six main chapters. The introductory chapter defines the problem and presents the theoretical and historical context. The second chapter examines in detail the intellectual trajectories and fundamental concepts of Marcuse and Žižek, who form the theoretical basis of the thesis. The third chapter constructs the analytical framework of the thesis by establishing the relationship between psychoanalysis, ideology, and narrative, and critically filters the traditional approaches of social movement theory. The fourth chapter elucidates the role of “end” narratives in Chile's historical trajectory through Hegel's open-ended, holistic understanding of history and Benjamin's concept of the “materialist historian,” situating the phenomenon within the Latin American context. The fifth chapter details the methodology, while the sixth chapter applies this framework to the Chilean case, analyzing the narrative and counter-hegemonic dynamics of the *estallido* as a limit-juncture of “end” narratives.

The qualitative-interpretive methodology, based on field research conducted between November 2023 and November 2024, combines semi-structured interviews, analysis of protest narratives, a “retroactive historicism” analytical approach to the Chilean refusal, and secondary sources, including graffiti and slogans, as well as field notes. The methodological originality of the study lies in its treatment of the protest not only as a sociological and political phenomenon but also as a psychoanalytic space of philosophical and political significance. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main dataset to examine the transformation of the symbolic order. The narrative inquiry and the psychoanalytic “traumatic kernel” approach conceptualize these transformations as reflections of changes in the “Master's desire.” This Lacanian formulation emphasizes that social changes are shaped not only by rational demands but also by the unconscious dynamics of desire, enjoyment (*jouissance*), and trauma. The analysis assumes that language and discourse do not merely reflect reality but

actively constitute it. Thus, the analysis reveals a process that, rather than definitively rejecting the existing order (one-dimensional thought, society, and man as a form of the impossible), allows for the matching of signifiers and narratives within ideological frameworks. It examines how the protests, along with the rejection of the neoliberal order inherent to advanced capitalism, also entail a search for new meanings, new symbols, and a new collective identity. This process shows that ideology is not merely “false consciousness” but also a mechanism that structures the fantasmatic relationship subjects have with reality.

In accordance with Lacan's concept of the “subject supposed to know,” the study, which transforms the inquiry itself into a narrative, examines how intellectuals and academics who have written about the *estallido* construct cognitive narratives and articulate their subjective feelings about the protests; it thereby reveals how these narratives are articulated into an ideological mission or how they deviate from it. These intellectual subjects are treated both as actors who produce the meaning of the protest and as narrators who bear the symptoms of their own ideological positions. Their narratives are not just factual reporting but also an expression of their own desires, fears, and fantasies. The thesis, which considers retroactive historiography – a topic insufficiently explored in the critical literature – as a manifestation of contemporary anxieties and the traumatic nature of the Chilean refusal, analyzes symbolic signifiers such as “the people” (*el pueblo*), “dignity” (*dignidad*), and “violence” (*violencia*) within the traumatic kernel and libidinal economy of the protest. These signifiers express not only political demands but also the deep layers of the collective psyche. The concepts of nostalgia for the past, melancholy situated in the present, and fantasy extending into the future are deployed to interpret the complex temporal dimensions of political resistance. Thus, the functions of these signifiers in producing collective power and negating the one-dimensional social order (or late capitalism) guided by the neoliberal logic seen in the Chilean case are demonstrated. Nostalgia represents a desire for a lost totality and solidarity; melancholy, a pathological identification with an insurmountable trauma and loss; and fantasy, a radical projection of desire towards the future in the face of these impossibilities.

The thesis positions the Chilean case (a) as an “Act of Great Refusal” in the Marcuse-Žižek lineage; (b) as an intervention into “end” narratives such as democracy, dictatorship, transition, and neoliberalism; and (c) simultaneously as the reproduction of antagonisms and new forms of contradiction. The *estallido*, by retroactively re-signifying the “end” narratives that have shaped Chile's modern history, also establishes the possibilities of transformation it has opened for Chilean society and politics through efforts to construct counter-hegemonic narratives. In this way, the thesis sheds light on the unique character of the 2019 Chilean protest's refusal by focusing on the political-cognitive narratives and symbols of protests in the post-political neoliberal era, where master-hegemonic narratives about the “end of history” and “end of ideology” have collapsed. In doing so, it positions the concepts of “the fantasy of the end,” “the melancholy of failure,” and “nostalgia for the past” as forms of counter-narrative within a multipolar global capitalist order, locating them in the context of post-neoliberal struggle. These psychoanalytic-political concepts show that the rebellion was not merely a rational action but also a complex expression of collective desire, trauma, and hope.

Thus, on the grounds of the continuity of “end” narratives and historical retroactivity, accumulation, and repetition in a Hegelian-Benjaminian sense, the thesis argues that the Chilean case symbolizes the emergence of a powerful “post-neoliberal desire” born from the internal contradictions of the ongoing neoliberal experiment. This desire involves more than material deprivation; it encompasses the desire to re-imagine a collective future. The political imaginary and traumatic kernel of the 2019 Chilean popular uprising are read as the critical event in which the expression of this desire is sought with the aim of “reinventing history.” The protests not only commemorated the traumas of the past (especially those under the Pinochet dictatorship) but also put Walter Benjamin's understanding of history into practice by re-signifying that past within the context of the present struggle. Benjamin's concept of “now-time” (*Jetztzeit*) refers to a “tiger's leap” in which a specific moment of the past is charged with revolutionary potential in the present. The *estallido* did precisely this, uniting the dictatorship and the subsequent period into a single narrative of oppression with the slogan “It's not about 30 pesos, it's about 30 years,” thereby summoning the ghosts of the past into the struggle of the present.

Consequently, the study concludes that Chile, as part of the Global South, exists in a “neoliberal future time” and that the signals emanating from it reflect one of the final stages of the post-neoliberal subject. This refusal by social mobilization, despite all its complexity, has made visible the cracks in the symbolic order of the global capitalist discourse. This act of refusal, consistent with the idea of “reinventing history,” reveals itself as a political act operating on the nostalgia-melancholy-fantasy axis through symptomatic links that intersect with established narratives, such as Chile's own unique “end” narratives, and thus through the junctures of changing desire, the president, the system, and society. Such junctures have emerged at the intersection of two seemingly contradictory forces: the death drive of the subject, supposedly liberating but appearing to vanish amidst global crises (or perceived global ends), and the resurgence of Eros, which allows for the re-emergence of this drive. Therefore, the act of this refusal is not only a political strategy but also a process of collective psychic restructuring. Based on this process, the tension between the subject's liberating orientation toward the impossible and the possible – its death drive (Thanatos) – and the return of Eros has shaken Chile's unique position in neoliberal narratives in a period defined by multiple crises, giving rise to a new field of ideological struggle. With this dynamic, it is concluded that Chile has transformed from a “neoliberal laboratory” into a “laboratory of resistance” or an “anti-neoliberal laboratory,” actively producing imaginary possibilities for the future.

The thesis fills a gap in the literature by analyzing the Chilean protests as both a continuous resistance against the established order and a moment of radical rupture, focusing on “cognitive” and “end” narratives, retroactive historiography, and the traumatic kernel of the Chilean refusal. The theoretical contribution of the thesis lies in its synthesis of critical theory and psychoanalysis within the context of social movements and its application not only to the Global North but also to the Global South. The concepts of “radical rupture” and “cognitive mapping,” often discussed in the literature through examples centered on Europe or North America, are substantiated in this study with the Chilean case, showing how a local historical context can be articulated into global debates. In this respect, the thesis offers both a theoretical and methodological foundation for future research. Whether the end has not actually ended and whether similar waves of protest serve the function of filling

similar cognitive mapping voids are proposed as a fertile research area for future comparative studies.

In conclusion, this study claims that the Chilean case carries important insights into the beginning of the end of the post-political era and offers a critical foundation for understanding the possibilities and impasses (aporias) of a global re-politicization. The *estallido* is a critical turning point not only in Chile's history but also in the global history of neoliberalism. Secondly, the thesis posits that the *estallido* represents a "failure of failure": although it may not have achieved its institutional goals, it has achieved a historical success by permanently shattering the ideological hegemony of the neoliberal consensus and opening up a new space for political desire and subjectivity. This thesis ultimately seeks to demonstrate how an act of refusal can, in a way that transcends failures and seizes the impossible, create the symbolic and narrative space necessary for a new beginning. Chile's refusal, in this sense, offers a powerful theoretical and political (praxis) lesson that hope can be born from melancholy and the fantasy of the future from the trauma of the past.



ÖZET

Bu doktora tezi, umutsuzca parçalanmış bir dünyada “bilişsel haritalama”yı inceleyen bir araştırmadır. Çalışma, günümüzün değişmekte olan siyaset-ötesi mücadeleler çağında küresel kapitalist düzene ve ona eşlik eden politik, kültürel ve ekonomik çerçevelere duyulan hoşnutsuzluktan doğan 2019 Şili halk isyanını, *estallido social* (sosyal patlama veya infilak) olarak adlandırılan olayı, paradigmatic ve tarihsel bir dönüm noktası olarak ele alır. Bu isyan, yalnızca Şili’nin ulusal tarihinde bir kırılma anı değil, aynı zamanda neoliberal küreselleşmenin vaatlerinin ve sınırlarının sorgulandığı küresel bir momentin parçası olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Eleştirel kuram, psikanaliz ve politik-felsefi uzamdan yararlanan bu çalışma, sistemik eleştiri-anlatı alanıyla ilgilenen akademisyenlerce sıkça tartışılan bir konuya – çeperdeki karşı-hegemonik yeniden üretim ile radikal toplumsal ve siyasal dönüşümün olasılığına – dair bir sorgulama sunar. Tezin temel sorunsalı, Francis Fukuyama’nın “tarihin sonu” ve Daniel Bell’in “ideolojilerin sonu” gibi büyük anlatıların çöktüğü bir çağda (siyaset-ötesi), siyasal öznelliğin nasıl yeniden kurulabileceği ve sisteme yönelik radikal itirazın hangi biçimlerde ortaya çıkabileceğidir. Bu bağlamda, “Önce özne mi, önce eylem mi?” ekseninde gelişen eleştirel kuram literatürünü izleyerek, analiz “bilişsel” ve “son” anlatılara odaklanır. Bu odaklanma, protestoların sadece mevcut politikalara bir tepki olmadığını, aynı zamanda hegemonyanın dayattığı zaman ve anlam ufkuna yönelik köklü bir müdahale olduğunu ortaya koymayı amaçlar.

Küresel kapitalist yapıdaki derin yapısal çelişkiler protestoları tetikleyerek, Şili’de yalnızca ekonomik bir hâkimiyeti değil, kültürel ve özne boyutları da kapsayan “ileri neoliberalizm”in – ya da “neoliberalizmin tamlığı”nın – yaygın ve müstehcen mantığına karşı şiddetli bir patlamaya zemin hazırlamıştır. Şili, neoliberal politikaların ilk ve en saf haliyle uygulandığı bir “laboratuvar” olarak, bu modelin sadece ekonomik bir program değil, aynı zamanda toplumsal ilişkileri, kültürel kodları ve bireysel öznellikleri derinden şekillendiren semptomatik bir proje olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, böylesi karmaşıklığın oluştuğu koşulları kavrayabilmek için ileri neoliberalizm altında inşa edilen anlatıların özne ve ideolojik konumlanışını sorgulamak elzemdir. Protestolar, ekonomik sıkıntılara tepki olmanın ötesinde, karşı-anlatılarla anlamlı bağlardan yoksun neoliberal öznenin maruz kaldığı derin yabancılaşmaya da eleştirel bir karşılık niteliğindedir. Bu yabancılaşma, bireylerin kendi toplumsal gerçeklikleri içindeki konumlarını anlamlandırma ve kolektif bir eylem ufkuna kendilerini yerleştirme yeteneklerinin kaybı olarak anlaşılmalıdır. Fredric Jameson’ın “bilişsel haritalama” (ya da Hegel’in *Weltgeist*’i) kavramı kapsamında, yabancılaşmış özneler anlamlı ittifaklar kurduran ilişkilerin yokluğu saptanarak, çalışmada hegemonik ulusal ve küresel anlatılara müdahale edecek yeni anlatı ve göstergeler üretmek üzere eleştirel kuram ve psikanalize başvurulmaktadır. *Estallido*, tam da bu bilişsel harita boşluğunu doldurma, parçalanmış deneyimleri ortak bir anlam çerçevesinde birleştirme ve yeni bir kolektif özne yaratma çabası olarak okunabilir.

Tez, Şili protestolarını Marcuse ve Žižek'in düşüncelerine dayanarak "Büyük Ret Eylemi" (*Act of Great Refusal*) olarak kavramsallaştırır. Böylece protestoların, yalnızca ekonomik sıkıntıların değil, kültürel ve öznel boyutları da içeren "ileri neoliberalizm" mantığının derin bir reddi olduğu ileri sürülür. Herbert Marcuse'ün "Büyük Ret" kavramı, modern endüstriyel toplumun (ileri kapitalizmin) muhalefeti sahte ihtiyaçlar ve tek boyutlu bir varoluş içine hapsederek özgürleştirici potansiyelini baskıladığı tezine dayanır. Bu ret, sistemin sunduğu sahte tatminleri reddederek otantik bir varoluş arayışını ve niteliksel olarak farklı bir toplum tahayyülünü içerir. Žižek'in Lacancı psikanalizden türettiği "Eylem" (*Act*) kavramı ise, mevcut sembolik düzenin koordinatlarını kökten değiştiren, öngörülemez, travmatik ve imkansız bir kopuş anını ifade eder. Eylem, basit bir "harekete geçme" değil, öznenin kendisini ve gerçekliği yeniden kurduğu, sembolik düzenin ötesindeki "Gerçek" ile bir temas anıdır. Önerilen teorik çerçeve, Žižek'in ideoloji ve radikal kopuş ("Eylem") çözümlemesini Marcuse'ün tek-boyutluk ve endüstri sonrası toplum eleştirisiyle ve bu düşünceden çıkış projesi olarak onun "Büyük Ret" kavramıyla bütünleştirmeyi hedefler. Bu sentez, *estallido*'yu hem sisteme içkin, sürekli bir direniş hem de sistemi temelinden sarsan radikal bir kırılma anı olarak analiz etme imkânı sunar.

Bu argüman, altı ana bölümden oluşan bir yapı içinde geliştirilmektedir. Giriş bölümü, problemin tanımını yaparak teorik ve tarihsel bağlamı sunar. İkinci bölüm, tezin teorik temelini oluşturan Marcuse ve Žižek'in entelektüel yörüngelerini ve temel kavramlarını ayrıntılı bir şekilde inceler. Üçüncü bölüm, psikanaliz, ideoloji ve anlatı arasındaki ilişkiyi kurarak tezin analitik çerçevesini inşa eder ve toplumsal hareketler teorisinin geleneksel yaklaşımlarını eleştirel bir süzgeçten geçirir. Dördüncü bölüm, "son" anlatılarının Şili'nin tarihsel yörüngesindeki rolünü Hegel'in ucu açık bütüncül tarih anlayışı ve Benjamin'in "materyalist tarihçi" kavramı aracılığıyla deşifre eder ve olguyu Latin Amerika bağlamına oturtur. Beşinci bölüm, metodolojiyi detaylandırırken, altıncı bölüm ise bu çerçeveyi Şili vakasına uygulayarak *estallido*'nun anlatısal ve karşı-hegemonik dinamiklerini son anlatılarının sınır uğrağı olarak analiz eder.

Kasım 2023-Kasım 2024 döneminde yürütülen alan araştırmasına dayanan nitel-yorumlayıcı metodoloji; yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakatlar, protesto anlatılarının çözümlemesi, Şili'nin reddine ilişkin "geriye dönük tarihselci" (*retroactive historicism*) analitik yaklaşım ile duvar yazıları, sloganlar gibi ikincil kaynakları ve alan notlarını birleştirir. Çalışmanın metodolojik özgünlüğü, protestoyu sadece sosyolojik ve politik bir olgu olarak değil, aynı zamanda felsefi ve politik alanın psikanalitik bir uzamı olarak ele almasıdır. Yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, simgesel düzenin dönüşümünü incelemek için ana veri seti olarak kullanılmıştır. Anlatı sorgulaması ve psikanalitik "travmatik öz" yaklaşımı, bu dönüşümleri "efendinin arzusu"ndaki değişimlerin yansıması olarak kavramsallaştırır. Bu Lacancı formülasyon, toplumsal değişimlerin sadece rasyonel taleplerle değil, aynı zamanda arzu, keyif (*jouissance*) ve travmanın bilinçdışı dinamikleriyle şekillendiğini vurgular. Analiz, dilin ve söylemin sadece gerçekliği yansıtmadığını, aynı zamanda onu kurduğunu varsayar. Böylece analiz, mevcut düzeni (imkansızın bir biçimi olarak tek boyutlu düşünce, toplum ve insan) kesin olarak reddetmekten ziyade, gösterenleri ve anlatıları ideolojik çerçeveler içinde eşleştirmeye olanak tanıyan bir süreci açığa çıkarır. Protestoların, ileri kapitalizme içkin neoliberal düzenin reddiyle birlikte, aynı zamanda yeni anlamlar, yeni semboller ve yeni bir kolektif kimlik arayışını da nasıl içerdiği incelenir. Bu süreç, ideolojinin sadece "yanlış bilinç" olmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda

öznelerin gerçeklikle kurdukları fantazmatik ilişkiyi yapılandıran bir mekanizma olduğunu gösterir.

Lacan'ın "bildiği varsayılan özne" (*subject supposed to know*) kavramına uygun biçimde sorgulamayı bizzat anlatıya dönüştüren çalışma, *estallido* üzerine yazmış aydınların ve akademisyenlerin bilişsel anlatıları nasıl kurduklarını ve protestolara dair öznel duygularını nasıl dile getirdiklerini inceler; böylece bu anlatıların ideolojik misyona nasıl eklemlendiğini ya da ondan nasıl saptığını ortaya koyar. Bu entelektüel özneler hem protestonun anlamını üreten aktörler hem de kendi ideolojik konumlarının semptomlarını taşıyan anlatıcılar olarak ele alınır. Onların anlatıları, sadece olgusal bir raporlama değil, aynı zamanda kendi arzularının, korkularının ve fantazilerinin bir ifadesidir. Eleştirel literatürde yeterince irdelenmeyen geriye dönük tarih-yazımını güncel kaygıların ve Şili reddinin travmatik doğasının bir dışavurumu olarak ele alan tez, "halk" (*el pueblo*), "haysiyet" (*dignidad*) ve "şiddet" (*violencia*) gibi simgesel göstergeleri; protestonun travmatik özü ve libidinal ekonomisi içinde çözümler. Bu göstergeler, sadece politik talepleri değil, aynı zamanda kolektif ruhun derin katmanlarını da ifade eder. Geçmişe yönelen nostalji, şimdide konumlanan melankoli ve geleceğe uzanan fantezi kavramları, siyasal direnişin karmaşık zamansal boyutlarını yorumlamak için devreye sokulur. Böylece bu göstergelerin kolektif güç üretme ve Şili örneğinde görülen neoliberal mantığın yön verdiği tek-boyutlu toplumsal düzeni (ya da geç kapitalizm) olumsuzlama işlevleri gösterilir. Nostalji, kayıp bir bütünlük ve dayanışma arzusunu; melankoli, aşılamayan bir travma ve kayıpla patolojik bir özdeşleşmeyi; fantezi ise, bu imkânsızlıklar karşısında geleceğe yönelik radikal bir arzu projeksiyonunu temsil eder.

Tez, Şili örneğini (a) Marcuse-Žižek çizgisinde "Büyük Ret Eylemi" olarak; (b) demokrasi, diktatörlük, geçiş süreci ve neoliberalizm gibi "son" anlatılarına bir müdahale olarak; ve (c) aynı anda antagonizmaların ve yeni çelişki biçimlerinin yeniden üretimi olarak konumlar. *Estallido*, Şili'nin modern tarihini şekillendiren "son" anlatılarını geriye dönük (retroaktif) olarak yeniden anlamlandırarak, Şili toplumuna ve siyasetine açtığı dönüşüm imkânlarını karşı-hegemonik anlatı kurma çabaları üzerinden de kurmuş olur. Bu sayede tez, "tarihin" ve "ideolojinin" sonuna dair efendi-hegemonik anlatıların çöktüğü post-politik neoliberal çağda protestoların siyasal-bilişsel anlatıları ile simgelerini mercek altına alarak 2019 Şili protestoları reddinin özgün niteliğine ışık tutar. Bunu yaparken "sonun fantezisi," "başarısızlığın melankolisi," ve "geçmişe duyulan nostalji" kavramlarını çok kutuplu bir küresel kapitalist düzende karşıt-anlatı biçiminde kurarak post-neoliberal mücadele bağlamında konumlandırır. Bu psikanalitik-politik kavramlar, isyanın sadece rasyonel bir eylem olmadığını, aynı zamanda kolektif arzunun, travmanın ve umudun karmaşık bir ifadesi olduğunu gösterir.

Böylece, "son" anlatıların devamlılığı ve Hegelci-Benjaminici anlamda tarihsel geri dönüşlülük, birikim ve tekrar zemininde tez, Şili örneğinin, süregiden neoliberal deneyimin iç çelişkilerinden doğan güçlü bir "post-neoliberal arzu"nun ortaya çıkışını simgelediğini ileri sürer. Bu arzu, maddi yoksunluktan daha fazlasını, kolektif bir geleceği yeniden hayal etme arzusunu içerir. 2019 Şili halk isyanının politik imgeseli ve travmatik özü, "tarihi yeniden icat etme" hedefiyle bu arzusunun ifadesini aradığı kritik olay olarak okunur. Protestolar, geçmişin travmalarını (özellikle Pinochet diktatörlüğünü) sadece anmakla kalmamış, aynı zamanda o geçmişi bugünün mücadelesi içinde yeniden anlamlandırarak Walter Benjamin'in tarih anlayışını

pratiğe dökmüştür. Benjamin'in "şimdi-zaman" (*Jetztzeit*) kavramı, geçmişin belirli bir anının şimdiki zamanda devrimci bir potansiyelle yüklendiği bir "kaplan sıçrayışı"nı ifade eder. *Estallido* da tam olarak bunu yapmış, "30 yıl" sloganıyla diktatörlük ve sonrası dönemi tek bir baskı anlatısında birleştirerek geçmişin hayaletlerini bugünün mücadelesine çağırmıştır.

Böylelikle çalışma, küresel Güney'in bir parçası olarak Şili'nin "neoliberal gelecek zaman"da var olduğu ve buradan gelen sinyallerin post-neoliberal öznenin son safhalarından birini yansıttığı kanısına varır. Tüm karmaşıklığına rağmen, toplumsal seferberliğin bu reddi, küresel kapitalist söylemin simgesel düzenindeki çatlakları görünür kılmıştır. "Tarihi yeniden icat etmek" fikriyle uyumlu bu ret eylemi, Şili'nin kendine özgü son anlatıları gibi yerleşik anlatılarla kesişen semptomatik bağları ve böylece arzuyu, başkanı, sistemi, toplumu değiştirme uğrakları üzerinden nostalji-melankoli-fantezi ekseninde işleyen bir politik eylem olarak açığa çıkarır. Bu tür uğraklar, görünüşte çelişkili iki gücün kesişiminde ortaya çıkmıştır: özgürleştirici olduğu varsayılan ancak küresel krizler (veya algılanan küresel sonlar) ortasında yok olur gibi görünen öznenin ölüm dürtüsü ve bu dürtünün yeniden ortaya çıkmasına olanak tanıyan Eros'un yeniden canlanması. Dolayısıyla bu reddedişin eylemi, sadece politik bir strateji değil, aynı zamanda kolektif bir psişik yeniden yapılanma sürecidir. Bu süreçten hareketle, öznenin imkânsızlık ve mümkünlğe yönelik özgürleşme yönelimli ölüm dürtüsü (Thanatos) ile Eros'un geri dönüşü arasındaki gerilim, çoklu krizlerle tanımlı dönemde Şili'nin neoliberal anlatılardaki özgün konumunu sarsarak ortaya yeni bir ideolojik mücadele alanı çıkarmıştır. Bu dinamikle birlikte Şili'nin "neoliberal bir laboratuvar"dan, geleceğe yönelik hayali olasılıkları aktif biçimde üreten bir "direniş laboratuvarı" ya da "anti-neoliberal laboratuvar"a dönüştüğü sonucuna varılmıştır.

Tez, Şili protestolarını hem yerleşik düzene karşı süregelen bir direniş hem de radikal bir kopuş ânı olarak analiz ederek, "bilişsel" ve "son" anlatı, geriye dönük tarih-yazımı ve Şili reddinin travmatik özüne odaklanmak suretiyle literatürdeki boşluğu doldurmaktadır. Tezin teorik katkısı, eleştirel kuram ile psikanalizi toplumsal hareketler bağlamında bir araya getirmesi ve bunu, yalnızca Küresel Kuzey ile değil, Küresel Güney bağlamında da işleridir. Literatürde sıklıkla Avrupa veya Kuzey Amerika merkezli örnekler üzerinden tartışılan "radikal kopuş" ve "bilişsel haritalama" kavramları, bu çalışmada Şili örneğiyle somutlanmış, yerel tarihsel bağlamın küresel tartışmalara nasıl eklenilebileceği gösterilmiştir. Bu yönüyle tez, gelecekteki araştırmalar için hem teorik hem de metodolojik bir temel sunar. Sonun aslında son bul(a)madığı ve benzer protesto dalgalarının benzer bilişsel haritalama boşluklarını doldurma işlevi görüp görmediği, ileride yapılacak karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar için verimli bir araştırma alanı olarak önerilmektedir.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, Şili vakasının, post-politik çağın sonunun başlangıcına dair önemli ipuçları taşıdığını ve küresel ölçekte yeniden politikleşmenin imkânlarını ve açmazlarını (*aporialarını*) anlamak için kritik bir zemin sunduğunu iddia etmektedir. *Estallido*, yalnızca Şili'nin değil, neoliberalizmin küresel tarihinin de kritik bir dönemeç noktasıdır. İkincil olarak tez, *estallido*'nun "başarısızlığın başarısızlığı" (*failure of failure*) olduğunu öne sürer: Kurumsal hedeflerine ulaşamamış olsa da neoliberal konsensüsün ideolojik hegemonyasını kalıcı olarak yıkarak ve yeni bir politik arzu ve öznellik alanı açarak tarihsel bir başarıya imza atmıştır. Bu tez, nihai olarak, bir reddediş eyleminin nasıl olup da başarısızlıkları aşan

ve imkansızlığı ele geçiren bir şekilde, yeni bir başlangıç için gerekli olan sembolik ve anlatısal alanı yaratabileceğini göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Şili'nin reddedişi, bu anlamda, umudun melankoliden ve geleceğin fantazisinin geçmişin travmasından doğabileceğine dair güçlü bir teorik ve politik (praksis) ders sunmaktadır.



1. INTRODUCTION: PROTEST AT THE END OF HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY

“The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity all unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him-or which are not present. This night, the interior of nature, that exists here-pure self-in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, in 'which here shoots a bloody head-there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night 'when one looks human beings in the eye-into a night that becomes awful.’”

– G.W.F. HEGEL

1.1. Orientation of the Study

The human condition, in its inherent complexity and depth, often finds reflection in the collective actions that form part of human social activity, as individuals attempt to navigate, contest, or transcend prevailing political, cultural, and economic systems. Throughout history, specific moments have punctuated the continuity of everyday life, revealing underlying societal tensions and opening unforeseen possibilities. For Alain Badiou (2012; 2022), a French philosopher, the historical events that mark the development of human societies are “events” (*événements*), exceptional breaks with the status quo or political consensus, which are rare and transformative occurrences that generate new opportunities for social and political change. An event is not merely a significant occurrence but a “real change” that subverts the established “logic of a world,” distinguishing itself from a mere “modification” which simply unfolds according to that world's existing rules (Badiou, 2009, p. 303). Citing examples such as the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, the October Revolution, or the May 1968 demonstrations, Badiou (2012, pp. 14, 22; Johnston, 2009, p. xiii) highlights how these events break with pre-existing conditions and open new avenues for societal transformation. He asserts that these historical moments are milestones in societal development, often arising from or attached to widespread discontent with contemporary global capitalism and its political and economic consequences.

Contemporary events suggest the potential approach of another major rupture

stemming from this persistent discontent with global capitalism. This also signals that, as Badiou, Žižek, and others (2010) observed during the 2008 economic turmoil and afterwards prevailing social movements, “*the long night of the left is drawing to a close. The defeat, denunciations and despair of the 1980s and 1990s, the triumphalist ‘end of history’, and the unipolar world of American hegemony – all are fast becoming old news*” (p. vii). This anticipation of rupture, potentially indicating the decline of the triumphalist 'end of history' narrative, confronts the pervasive sense of ideological closure diagnosed by critical thinkers who have observed the historical trajectory from the 20th century into the present moment.

In fact, the historian Eric Hobsbawm (1994) famously called the 20th century the “*Age of Extremes*,” a time when Herbert Marcuse (2007) observed “*the closure of political discourse*” and the seeming reduction of acceptable alternatives. This diagnosis, which has found support in the analyses of scholars such as Fredric Jameson (2003), Mark Fisher (2009), and Slavoj Žižek (2010), has had a significant impact on understandings of the twenty-first century. The fact that they all agree that “*it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism*” highlights a time of uncertainty in which the political imaginary – the very ability to imagine systemic alternatives – seems to be suppressed and limited by the seemingly totalizing logic of the capitalist paradigm and its corresponding culture. However, even in this, there is a phenomenon called “*the return of the repressed*” (Freud, 1915). This phenomenon falls under the category of a “socio-historical world,” revealing the mysteries of such narratives (Marcuse, 1966, p. 12).

Even other socio-historical endings, such as the claimed “end of tyranny,” “end of oligarchy,” “end of monarchy,” “end of colonialism,” “end of imperialism,” “end of fascism,” or “end of war,” appear to lose their definitive nature within this conceptual framework, as they are constantly delayed in favor of the ultimate, but possibly unimaginable, “end of the world” or ultimately of the *end of capitalism* itself. It is as if, because they are subjected to a kind of *postification* – the tendency to prefix everything with “post” – truth itself constantly creates a dissonance between subject and object that is in accord with the nature of capitalism. Hegel's idea of the “*Night of*

the World”¹ bears an obvious parallel to this condition of ideological blockage and the difficulty of expressing significant change outside of the prevailing narrative. The current situation, in fact, resembles this Hegelian condition for social movements seeking agency and navigating the ambiguous phase of global political transition. As Blunden (2019, pp. 176–179) cites Hegel, it conjures up the scene in which “*the owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering.*” Blunden further claims that Hegel is the philosopher of social change activists and social movements, who can help with the “practical critique” of social change (2019, p. 6).

This represents a time of darkness and confusion, similar to the state that precedes the full development of self-awareness or rational understanding, in which long-held beliefs disintegrate, and new, coherent visions are unable to emerge amid the “*phantasmagorous representations*” (Benjamin, 1969) of the present crisis. Immanuel Wallerstein (1999), for instance, pointed to this horizon and predicted that the coming decades would see “*the end of the world as we know it,*” or not just the end of global capitalism but the breakdown of the existing symbolic order². This highlights even more the deep sense of stagnation and the challenge of defining significant change outside of the given contemporary macro-evidence that the “*marriage*” of democracy and capitalism is faltering – the “*slipperiness*” (Wolf, 2023).

Drawing on Mascareño’s (2020, pp. 252-254) distinction between *crisis* as a “*negative self-description*” and the deeper *critical transition* that is triggered when rigid routines lock a subsystem into a tipping point, four structurally persistent crisis zones are identified: capitalism, totalitarian residues, democratic legitimacy, and the Earth’s climate. Mascareño (2024, pp. 9-13) later shows how these structural tensions are increasingly narrated through an “apocalyptic script” centered on climate breakdown and runaway artificial intelligence; the script motivates present action by portraying the future as both unavoidable and still open to avoidance. These insights

¹ The “Night of the World” (*Nacht der Welt*) is a complex metaphor in Hegel (1974), often associated with his early Jena lectures. While the opening quote captures its raw phenomenological feel, the concept is generally interpreted as representing the pure negative power of the self or understanding – an empty subjectivity (‘nothing’) that dissolves fixed forms and representations (‘phantasmagorical representations’). One could consider this as a state of potentiality before specific self-consciousness or logical will. Applied metaphorically to the socio-political sphere, it can imply a period of great uncertainty and the disintegration of established orders (‘darkness and confusion’) before new forms of collective understanding or political organization can develop. It presents the possibility of radical creation (“unending wealth”) as well as the horror of groundlessness – that “awful” element.

² This symbol refers to Lacan’s concepts of Symbolic, Imaginary, and the Real. They will be further extended in Chapters 2 and 3.

explain why recent shocks, such as the global pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and large migratory waves, so quickly amplify discontent across multiple political and social fields.

In *Living in the End Times* (2010) and *Heaven in Disorder* (2021), Žižek reframes this landscape as relentless chaos³ by defining a “six-crisis problem” that is categorized as inevitable ends: ecological, economic, military, migratory, technological (AI), and societal, all propelled by capitalism’s own dynamics. Complementing this, Mascareño (2020) further gives some of the current repercussions; “*psychic problems, rising delinquency in large urban settlements, domestic violence, unemployment, and global inflationary trends*” (p. 253), while Žižek exposes the libidinal and ideological layers that keep the turbulence circulating, marked by outrageous inequality, climate breakdown, desperate refugees, a simmering new cold war, and a surge of popular protests and social antagonisms. Together, these diagnoses reveal how crises both delegitimize existing arrangements and open cracks through which emancipatory energies can emerge.

Žižek’s view can also be linked with Antonio Gramsci’s term “*interregnum*” in *Prison Notebooks* (2007), which suggests that the old world is dying, but the new one is struggling to be born. And Gramsci goes on to say, often forgotten, that our time, now, is the “*time of monsters*.” During this crisis period, Gramsci (2007, p. 276) describes the emergence of several “*morbid symptoms*” similar to the six crises Žižek defines. These crises, which are considered to report an inevitable decline, are the most suitable conditions for forming and developing social movements.

These very crises, however, create fertile ground for social movements and the potential emergence of transformative events. In the face of this latter perception, considered by some as an existential threat, it becomes evident that either passivity

³ The empirical reading of what Žižek treats here as “*end times*” certainly encompasses the positivist-progressive symbolic order in a linear concept of finite time and, therefore, involves the empirical sample space. At this stage, the system-generated crises result from specific conjunctural crises. Because contemporary capitalism has the capacity to revolutionize these crises to its own benefit, it also produces the capacity for us to accept that capitalist finality is not identical to the end of time itself. However, the retroactive, contingent, and temporal nature that Žižek usually employs in his “transcendental-materialist perspective” enables us to treat his concept of “end times” as a Benjaminian messianic pre-apocalyptic time: point zero. Thus, Žižek appeals to the necessity of a revolutionary intervention—one that must occur before apocalyptic destruction, and which is expected to deliver us all. In this vein, what Žižek identifies above should be interpreted as crises of the global capitalist order, crises he believes are leading us towards destruction within this framework.

(inertia) or direct action will play a pivotal role in shaping our world's evolutionary trajectory. This is where praxis, which derives from the combination of practice and theory, plays a crucial role. It underlines not only the cognitive aspect of the world but also the practical aspect; the given world has to be changed. Thus, the praxis of '*the end of the world*' implies a perspective of simultaneity of the crises engraved in practice through a subject's implied responsibility. It means finding ways to live more sustainably, reducing our consumption, supporting social movements, and advocating for policies that protect the planet and its inhabitants, which means something must change in the current phase. Since global capitalism remains the primary antagonist, the struggle against this antagonism, which can be seen as the "end of capitalism," can also be juxtaposed with the above narrative. Simply put, the main struggle is strictly related to the desire for change, or, as Mark Fisher (2021) further developed in his work, "post-capitalist desire."

1.2. Placing Chile in Contemporary Struggles

We have witnessed uprisings and movements that, at their heart, echo themes of refusal and rupture around the world in the past decades, especially retroactively in line with post-1968 world narratives. This dynamic often produces events that defy conventional political analysis, rupturing the seemingly stable continuum of history. These uprisings represent moments where the impossible suddenly enters the realm of the actual, as seen in protest cycles, transnational movements, or counter-hegemonic genealogies. This condition set the stage for what would be institutionalized as the "*strategy of post-politics*" (Žižek, 2008b),⁴ a hegemonic project that seeks to replace fundamental ideological conflict with technocratic management, characterized by post-ideological and post-industrial politics of world capitalism (Bell, 1988). The historical victory of this project can be located precisely in the period following 1989. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union were not just geopolitical events; they were narrativized as the final act in the great ideological drama of the 20th century, cementing the "End of History" (Fukuyama,

⁴ Post-politics refers to a depoliticised, consensus-driven era where fundamental ideological conflicts (like Marxism vs. capitalism) are sidelined in favor of technocratic management. In this framework, "*there is no alternative*" becomes the governing logic, as democratic choices are narrowed to expert-approved options. Jameson's (1991) diagnosis of late capitalism, centered on the crisis of historicity and the rise of pastiche, explains why imagining systemic alternatives becomes nearly impossible, reinforcing the political closure of post-politics. That's why he promotes the very famous chant: "always historicize!" (Jameson, 1983).

1989, 1992) as the master-hegemonic narrative of the era. The wave of “*transitions to democracy*” that swept across the former Eastern Bloc and parts of the Global South was thus integrated into this triumphalist story, presented as the universalization of a single, victorious model of liberal democracy and market capitalism. This created a powerful, depoliticized consensus, an order in which the only remaining politics was the administration of this new global reality.

It was precisely against the institutional architects of this new, depoliticized global order that the first wave of the new social movements aimed at global capitalism. The first central turning point of global *anti-end-of-history* movements was against international institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Economic Forum (WEF), which began with the protests in Seattle, Quebec City, and Genoa shortly after the Zapatista movement in Mexico declared “*the end of the end of history*”⁵ (Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Martin, 2008, pp. 174-175). The Zapatista and Seattle, Quebec City, and Genoa alliance (or, to put it in a more precise way, the alliance between Global South and North), which has gained an essential place in the literature of anti-globalist and anti-capitalist movements, later manifested itself in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, where the experience of horizontal democracy – the transition from the Davos “*order*” to the Porto Alegre “*order*” – was foreseen. Therefore, this epoch claimed that upcoming protests and revolts in the coming decades will have a kind of “*ending*” acquisition. But has this been the case?

It has been reported that the number of anti-government protests increased globally by an average of 11.5 percent annually between 2009 and 2019 across all regions (Brannen et. al, 2020, p. 1). This is so significant that some, such as Ortiz et

⁵ Key commentators and participants in these movements found resonance in the declaration of “the end of history” and explicitly stated it. Naomi Klein, for instance, encapsulated this paradigm shift in her reflection on the World Social Forum's significance: “*What I felt was something more intangible: the end of The End of History [...] After a year and a half of global protests [...] the World Social Forum was billed as an opportunity for an emerging movement to stop screaming about what it is against and start articulating what it is for*” (Klein, 2002, p. 1). This view had previously been put into practice in the 1994 by Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), emphasizing the wider significance of the Zapatista uprising in resolving this belief: “*Don't give too much weight to the EZLN [...] Years from now [...] there is going to be protest and social ferment in many places. I know this because when we rose up against the government, we began to receive displays of solidarity and sympathy not only from Mexicans, but from people in Chile, Argentina, Canada, the United States, and Central America. They told us that the uprising represents something that they wanted to say, and now they have found the words to say it, each in his or her respective country. I believe the fallacious notion of the end of history has finally been destroyed*” (Notes from Nowhere, 2003, p. 24).

al. (2022) and Bevins (2023), emphasize 21st-century protests as part of a single, interconnected protest cycle, rather than categorizing them as isolated events. Bevins (2023) identifies the 2010s as a period marked by a global wave of contention, beginning with the Arab Spring of 2011 and continuing to the Occupy Wall Street protests, anti-austerity riots in Europe, Turkish Gezi Park public space protests, the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements, the Climate Strike youth protests, and the wave of unrest in 2019 that swept countries as diverse as Chile, Lebanon, France (Yellow Vests), Hong Kong's Umbrella protests, farmer protests in India, pandemic-related protests in Brazil, national strikes in Colombia, and popular votes in the UK and beyond. He argues that the sheer number and intensity of these uprisings constitute the largest cycle of mass protests in history, with a significant focus on challenging neoliberal policies and diagnosing their underlying causes. Similarly, Ortiz et al. (2022) analyze nearly 3,000 protests between 2006 and 2020 across 101 countries, identifying common demands such as calls for real democracy, jobs, public services, social protection, civil rights, and actions against austerity and corruption. This escalating global trend, as seen as “a constellation of anti-neoliberal movements” (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 6), is historically unprecedented in its frequency, scope, and size, surpassing previous eras of mass protest. Analysis of underlying causes suggests that this trend will continue and likely intensify. In this totality, the year 2019 seemed exceptional, as Foreign Policy declared it “*A Year of Global Protest*” with “*leaderless*” movements (Johnson, 2019).

In the context of being “*leaderless*”, regarding their structure, contemporary movements further share a distinct political grammar that separates them from traditional parties or social movement organizations. Many begin with a “trigger” – a small spark that ignites a broad sense of alienation, such as a fruit-seller’s despair in Tunisia, a renovation of a small park in the center of Istanbul, or a new law in Hong Kong. The sociologist Geoffrey Pleyers (2025, p. 69) provides a profound framework for understanding this new political form, detailing a set of recurring features that define this “*global decade*” of protests: they operate on multiple scales, from the local square to the national debate; they organize through “*reticular and adhocratic*” networks rather than hierarchical structures; their claims are frequently formulated around universal values like “*dignity, social justice, and democratisation*”; and they cultivate strong subjective and artistic dimensions in “*spaces of encounters*” that foster

intersectional alliances. This complex articulation of leaderless organization, moral claims, and affective subjectivation indicates a political desire for an “uncertain” and “precarious” future, aimed at a deeper refusal of the prevailing order’s legitimacy, and demonstrates a persistent struggle against the global capitalist structure.

It is precisely this global context that provides the essential backdrop for understanding the specific case of Chile. Pleyers’s argument that one must overcome the “*false dichotomy between the 'national' and the 'global'*” (2025, p. 69) is central to this dissertation’s claim that the Chilean *estallido social*⁶ must be understood as a crucial node within this larger, transnational wave of resistance. Hence, I argue that Chile’s protests are part of a global wave of resistance movements that challenge neoliberalism across diverse contexts, from the ongoing 1968 movements paradigm to the present moment.

According to data from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s *Global Protest Tracker* (2025), Chile has experienced one of the largest and longest social protests in the history of the Global South. Although the peak size has been reported as exceeding 1,000,000 and remains uncertain in the platform dataset, data recorded by the Chilean police department (Carabineros) indicate that the total participation reached 3,700,000 (Cooperativa, 2019).

The wave of protests that began in Chile in 2019 and quickly spread across the country was initially sparked by a minor trigger: a hike in metro fares. The protests

⁶ The term *estallido social*, literally 'social outburst' or 'social explosion' in Spanish, is used throughout this thesis to refer to the period of intense social mobilization and protest beginning in Chile in October 2019. While the events have been described and interpreted in various ways – including as a 'rupture', 'riot', 'popular revolt', 'rebellion', 'revolution', 'social unrest', a 'generational crisis', or a 'crisis of capitalist modernization'/'neoliberalism' – the decision to retain the Spanish term *estallido* (sometimes used interchangeably with *estallido social*) is deliberate. This approach highlights the importance of naming and self-identification in shaping collective subjectivity within social movements. Using the term prevalent within the context aims to better reflect the movement's own framing and inclusive nature. The naming of the protest was also a common theme during the interviews and respective academic gatherings. There are two main sides: one emphasizes the word “revolt” to heighten its political tone, while the other follows the popular name, *estallido*. There is also another dimension of the discussion, which is the mainstream media’s role of naming the protests (according to some, basically taking the political out of the event), or the right wing’s choice of using the *estallido* as well. This is essentially the primary reason some choose to revolt to save the politics and restore historicism, largely stemming from struggles throughout history. I think that the name of *estallido* is a very unique and novel way to understand the popular revolts in the contemporary world. Hence, the already given name itself must be static and be turned into a dynamic one along with the construct of historicism (in this sense, what has been given to the revolt-based meaning of it). Additionally, it refers to a psychic explosion in a way and strengthens the psychoanalytic space. Apart from this discussion, the term 'O-18' (referencing the pivotal date of October 18, 2019) may be used occasionally throughout the thesis, reflecting another common designation for the events.

were triggered by high school students in Santiago on October 7, 2019, who all began protesting increased metro fares with mass evasions by jumping over turnstiles for a seemingly unimportant 30 \$ (Chilean pesos) increase (approximately four cents USD) in the price of the metro fare (Chechilnitzky, 2019). However, everyday life was affected by technical rationality, exemplified by the procedure followed by the “*technocratic commission of questioned experts*” (Otárola, 2020, p. 9), deciding the metro ticket price; it represented such a technical bureaucracy and neoliberal rationality at the same time, that it excluded any social value of transportation. These “*evade*” acts soon became a powerful symbol of the pent-up rage of people forced to endure decades of neoliberal policies.

But what if there’s more to this (hi)story? How can we understand this revolt as more than a reaction to a metro fare hike? What if hidden within the folds of history lies a global capitalist ontology – a narrative that transcends borders and challenges our assumptions about the very fabric of our fundamental struggle? Shortly and directly, what was it? A revolt, revolution, or rebellion?⁷

Obviously, the spark led to the eruption of much deeper structural problems – inequality, the corrosive effects of the neoliberal system, social injustice, and lack of political representation. The protests brought millions to the streets and opened the door to the writing of a new constitution, reorientation, or re-ideologization of the political battleground for the future of the country, which was somehow unexpected for many, particularly in the post-politics era of Chilean “exceptionalism” within the miraculous development stage of Latin American narratives. Naturally, it suddenly

⁷ Octavio Paz is the inspiration behind these distinctions of the words revolt, rebellion, and revolution. Revolt (*revuelta* in Spanish), according to Paz, is the spontaneous uprising of the population “*lives in the subsoil of the language*,” rebellion (*rebelión* in Spanish), on the other hand, takes the precise place of the uprising against authority; it is the space of disobedience; it is a solitary act, which does not pretend anything else but it recognizes authority at the precise moment when it demands something from him, which is why he never pretends to take his place, revolution (*revolución* in Spanish), on the contrary, is an “*intellectual word and refers more to the uprisings of entire peoples and the law of history rather than to the deeds of a rebellious hero*.” It is the pretension of a rapid and (therefore) violent change of institutions; hence, it turns around totality itself and changes the frameworks of the possible (Paz, 1990, pp. 139-144). In Paz’s categorization of mobilization, only rebellion and revolution can be considered mass mobilizations. The first type, revolt, is also the subject of our analysis in this dissertation, and Paz describes it as a movement of the multitude. In his view, this mobilization is more of an aggregation than an organization, distinguishing it from large-scale and well-coordinated rebellions or revolutions. Revolt, unlike revolution, is “ineffective” because its goal is not to establish a “work” or a “new order.” On the contrary, it seeks or allows us to access our “original contingency.” So, simply, in this multitude, without leadership and affective bonding, there is no hegemonic moment; there is no contingent universal that mediates particular aspirations.

became a case of its unique situation, a “*dictatorship monad*” (Vejar, 2014), a refusal of something that had already been imposed on the Chileans a while ago: the authoritarian neoliberal legacy. All the contradictions can easily be gathered together in this atom-monad⁸: democracy and authoritarianism, reform and repression, revolution and technocracy, life and death, as if all that emerged from liberal values in the authoritarian face. Such transfiguration processes in the historical political processes, then, “*create a universe closed on itself; no matter how realistic, naturalistic, it remains the other of reality and nature*” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 86). As such, vital monad was embodied in the words of Salvador Allende’s final broadcast from *La Moneda* before the military attacked the presidential palace: “*sooner rather than later, the great avenues will open again where free men will walk to build a better society*” (Allende, 2018). In that sense, what began as evasion became expression, and what was dismissed as chaos revealed itself as a historic act of negation and refusal.

To interpret the *estallido* through the lens of Allende’s famous call that “*las grandes alamedas*” will one day be opened for the “*free men of Chile*,” it is necessary to confront the linear, “triumphant” narratives that dominate the political legacy surrounding Chilean protests. These affective dimensions reveal a process in which the nation was reimagined, subjectivities were rewritten, and established narratives were challenged and re-narrated, all while interrogating global endings and ultimately becoming part of history. That’s why, if the core of this ambiguous character is understood as an *a priori* category for grasping the daily erosion of political imagination, then its source lies in the turns and twists of time, in the repetition and accumulation of historical experience. By looking through the “*here-and-now-time*” to the past, this thesis explores how the Chilean protests of October 2019 became a turning point in the struggle against global capitalism, or its code name in Chile,

⁸ The atom-monad line of historicity refers to a concept explored by Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher and cultural critic. It connects the ancient philosophical concept of the monad, a fundamental, indivisible unit of being, with the modern scientific understanding of the atom as the basic building block of matter, as inspired by Leibniz. Benjamin uses this line of historicity to examine the relationship between the past and the present. He suggests that historical events and figures can be seen as “monads,” each containing a miniature representation of the entire historical universe. These monads are not isolated but connected through a network of relationships, much like atoms within a molecule. By understanding these connections, we can gain a deeper understanding of the forces that have shaped our present reality. Benjamin’s exploration of the atom-monad line of historicity is particularly relevant in his discussions of historical materialism and his concept of the “dialectical image.” This concept suggests that historical events and objects are not simply static remnants of the past but can be activated in the present to reveal hidden truths and potentialities. See (Benjamin, 1969).

“neoliberalism”. Thereby, it aims to address the transference of the present-day case by taking a politico-psychoanalytical look at the traumatic elements of the past through the lens of atom-monad historicism, or what Terry Eagleton (1994, p. 50) calls “Zen-like smack,” and fighting for the oppressed past in post-1968 narratives in general.

To put this analysis in context, it is essential to examine the specific factors that distinguished the Chilean protests and the historical and social-political conditions that made them a global focal point, thereby connecting Chile to the broader global cycle. In this case, we need to first explain why Chile has become such an important case study, especially since the scale and intensity of the protests seem to exceed their causes.

1.3 Why Chile: Is It a Peripheral Signifier or One of The Protagonists in The Plot of Neoliberalism?

There are several interrelated reasons why Chile is a crucial case study, further underscored by several key presuppositions that guide this inquiry. These are not merely background assumptions but critical lenses that structure the inquiry, establishing why Chile serves as a paradigmatic case study within a peripheral site where the contradictions of the core are most brutally exposed, and a protagonist in the *narrative* of neoliberalism's rise and potential fall.

Firstly, Chile occupies a unique place in global history as the first country to adopt a radical form of neoliberalism, directly following its experimentation with the Chilean road to socialism (*La vía chilena al socialismo*) under Salvador Allende’s Popular Unity (*Unidad Popular*) (Hobsbawm, 2017; Morra et al., 2023). As the first democratically elected socialist president in the Western Hemisphere, Allende advanced a constitutional socialist transformation that became a global reference point. Consequently, and in direct reaction, the Pinochet dictatorship implemented a neoliberal program associated with the Chicago Boys,⁹ institutionalising market rule

⁹ The key characteristics of Chilean neoliberalism, implemented with the guidance of a group of Chilean economists (or a group of technocrats) trained at the University of Chicago and popularly known as the “Chicago Boys,” included sweeping privatization of public enterprises and social services. The theoretical underpinnings, heavily influenced by economists like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman (who visited Chile and met with Augusto Pinochet), rested on the belief in the market as a natural, self-regulating phenomenon and humans as autonomous, rational economic actors. See, for example, its specific place within both the “domestic component of the neoliberal turn” and the global neoliberal turn (Alexander, 1978; Harvey, 2007) for further inquiry. This will be expanded in Chapter 4.

through authoritarian means (Edwards, 2023). Importantly, Chile remains the only Latin American state still governed by a constitution drafted under a military dictatorship, which underscores both the coercive nature of neoliberal imposition and its entrenchment in the national political order (Atria et al., 2020). Therefore, this historical sequence provides a crucial foundation for examining how neoliberalism was not merely a set of policies but a deep structural transformation of governance, legality, and subjectivity.

Secondly, Chile has consistently been framed as a global prototype of neoliberalism. Indeed, it has been described as a neoliberal “*Miracle of Chile*” (“*Milton Friedman - Pinochet and Chile*”, 2013), the first “*experiment with neoliberal state formation*” (Harvey, 2007, p. 7), and an exemplary empirical case of completeness of neoliberalism (Araujo, 2022). Furthermore, it was promoted as “*the only possible alternative*” for Latin America (Buono & Lara, 2006, p. 2) and closely tied to the United States of America’s (USA) geopolitical influence. As Naomi Klein (2007) has demonstrated, Chile became the prototypical laboratory for neoliberal *shock therapy*, making its trajectory anything but peripheral. Consequently, its long-term social, political, and subjective effects – particularly in rupture moments like the *estallido social*– remain central to understanding how neoliberal models operate and endure.

Thirdly, the militarised imposition of neoliberalism during the 1970s and 1980s etched market rationality so deeply into Chile’s institutions and social fabric that it shaped both collective and individual subjectivity. From a critical perspective, this “advanced neoliberalism” permeates everyday life, fostering a persistent sense of alienation and narrowing the horizons of political imagination (Marcuse, 2007, p. 9). Hence, Chile becomes an exemplary case for exploring what can be termed “*post-neoliberal desire*”: the emergence of new signifiers and counter-narratives that challenge neoliberalism’s supposed completeness and permanence.

Fourthly, the *estallido* must be understood as a local articulation of global contradictions. Although triggered by specific events, the 2019 uprising addressed systemic crises in global capitalism, revealing the limits of a model long celebrated as a success story. In this sense, Chile illustrates how global capitalist contradictions are refracted through peripheral contexts, and thus how mass mobilisation can simultaneously reflect local grievances and global structural tensions, just as the

“authoritarian neoliberal” setup of 1973 and onwards led to a global modification, especially from the early 1980s onwards (Harvey, 2007, p. 9). Consequently, the Chilean case allows for an in-depth examination of how neoliberal legacies are contested in local contexts, even as they remain connected to global systemic dynamics.

Fifthly, Chile’s political history is uniquely structured by a succession of proclaimed “end” narratives: the violent end of democratic socialism in 1973; the formal end of dictatorship in 1988–90; the prolonged and often frustrating end of the transition period (1990–2010); and, most recently, the contested attempt to end neoliberalism itself (2019 onwards). Thus, it offers the opportunity to witness a long struggle and a historical past marked by repetitions and accumulations. The *estallido* engaged with these layers not only politically but also affectively, mobilising nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy to reimagine the nation and re-narrate alternative futures. Thus, Chile provides a rare opportunity to examine the temporality and affective dynamics of refusal in a historically sequenced form.

Sixthly, and in contrast to many recent global protest waves that have fuelled right-wing populism, Chile’s *estallido* retained a distinctly leftist character (Žižek & Barria-Asenjo, 2020). Empirical research (Hechler et al., 2024) demonstrates that the movement was driven by a broad, leaderless “*pro-change group consciousness*” unified by the goal of a new constitution. This consciousness, which mediated the effects of perceived inequality and left-wing ideology, allowed a diverse and leaderless movement to act collectively, highlighting how unique national factors contribute to and are illuminated by global patterns of protest. This left-leaning dynamic persists, even though the country sees itself, as do many outside observers, as a peripheral, “small” nation-state that has more often been acted upon by world powers than been an active historical protagonist. Consequently, the Chilean mobilisation stands apart from global patterns of right-populist backlash, positioning itself instead within a renewed New Left trajectory in the Global South.

Seventhly, the *estallido* cannot be fully understood without acknowledging Chile’s unresolved collective trauma – above all, the 1973 coup and the ensuing dictatorship. This trauma operates as a form of retroactive historicism, resurfacing in the present to contest both neoliberal governance and the broader “end of ideology”

thesis (Bell, 1960). In this sense, historical wounds are neither static nor inert; rather, they are re-narrated and mobilised as central forces in contemporary political upheavals.

Eighthly, the Chilean case must also be situated within the broader master-hegemonic narrative of the post-Cold War era. As Perry Anderson (1992, pp. 282-283) argues, the “end of history” thesis functioned as an ideological summation of Western liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism, marking the final horizon of political development. Within this framework, Chile’s “miracle” or “oasis” (real or imaginary) was presented not as an anomaly but as the paradigm of a future that had already arrived. Therefore, the *estallido* represents an insurrection not only against local policies but against the symbolic order of the neoliberal international system itself.

In synthesis, the seminal contribution of choosing Chile, as illuminated by these presuppositions, lies in its unique capacity to allow the dissertation to analyze a concrete instance where the internal contradictions of a “complete,” “advanced,” and “radical” local neoliberal model intersect with, and trigger, a broader systemic crisis and reaction within global capitalism. This unique trajectory makes Chile a crucial site for investigating a central paradox of late capitalism (Mandel, 1975): how a social order predicated on the total administration of life, and the foreclosure of political alternatives, paradoxically generates the conditions for its own violent, affective undoing. It is a psycho-political resistance laboratory where the repressed historical trauma of a forcibly imposed neoliberalism returns in the form of a collective, symptomatic outburst. This requires situating the Chilean refusal not just against neoliberalism as a set of policies, but against the wider symbolic order within which it became hegemonic: the neoliberal international order. In this regard, to further unravel the Chilean experience, it is necessary to situate it within the broader master-hegemonic narratives of the end of ideology (Bell, 1960) and end of history (Fukuyama, 1989; Fukuyama, 1992) which framed much of the late 20th century's ideological discourse and still echo in the 21st century, in other words, post-politics.

1.4 Literature Review

The 2019 Chilean *estallido* has generated a wide and contested body of scholarship. Most studies focus on its causes, organisational forms, and political effects, but they approach these issues from different, sometimes overlapping,

perspectives. These lines of inquiry help to situate the specific contribution of this study.

A first group of studies examines the deep roots of the *estallido* in Chile's neoliberal model, implemented under the Pinochet dictatorship and maintained through the democratic transition. These works identify long-standing inequalities as a central cause of discontent (for Spanish, *malestar*) (Araujo, 2019; Peña & Silva, 2022; Gunturiz et al., 2023). Other authors complicate this picture, pointing to deficits in political representation, systemic abuse, and a political system unable to process demands through its traditional channels (Navarrete & Tricot, 2021). For example, Mayol (2019) focuses on the erosion of public trust in the neoliberal order.

Many studies apply established social movement frameworks, including political process theory, resource mobilization, and framing theory (Benford & Snow, 2000; Zirakzadeh, 2006; Della Porta, 2015). In the Chilean case, scholars emphasise that the *estallido* was part of a longer protest cycle stretching back to the early 2000s (Joignant & Somma, 2024). This period saw the increasing “autonomisation” of movements from parties and institutions, expressed in *cabildos* (self-organised assemblies) and horizontal, anti-authoritarian practices (Ganter et al., 2022; Woods, 2022).

Another focus is on culture and symbolism. Research documents the role of art, music, and performance in shaping collective identity and reclaiming public space (Pfaller Schmid, 2022; Gordon-Zolov, 2023). Slogans or symbols like “¡Chile despertó!” (*Chile awakened!*) and the renaming of Plaza Italia to Plaza de la Dignidad are linked to the legacy of the Allende era and the trauma of the dictatorship (Frens-String et al., 2021; Thygesen, 2024). These works demonstrate how protest gives rise to a shared political language grounded in historical memory.

Although not covering the event of *estallido*, some scholars provide crucial understanding for the genealogy of neoliberalism, political process, subjectivity, and ideological coordinates of Chile. One of them addresses Chile's post-dictatorship political consensus. Camargo's *The New Critique of Ideology* (2013) directly challenges the “end of ideology” thesis. He shows how the *Concertación* governments deliberately excluded class struggle from public discourse, replacing it with a “discourse of success” and a “naturalisation” of inequality (pp. 173–182, 204–205,

226–229). This post-political order managed deep social antagonisms through depoliticised consensus. In the context of this thesis, Camargo’s work helps define the specific ideological formation that the *estallido* refused.

Other work focuses on critique from below. Rodríguez (2020) describes a “critique in movement,” where social actors create “cognitive maps” linking local grievances, such as housing or education policies, to the wider structure of neoliberal capitalism. This approach highlights the desire to understand the social totality as a basis for political orientation and collective organisation. It situates the dictatorship’s trauma as a continuing backdrop but leaves open the question of how these structural antagonisms translate into political subjectivity.

Finally, a nascent but growing body of work has begun to apply a psychoanalytic perspective to the *estallido*. Moving beyond conscious grievances and symbolic expression, this approach investigates the affective undercurrents of the movement. For instance, Sánchez’s (2024) work on the “fantasies of critique” explicitly examines the “unconscious economy of the Chilean *estallido*,” analyzing how the uprising was fueled by shared fantasies that structured the collective desire for a rupture with the neoliberal order. This perspective posits that the desire for change is never straightforward but is organized through fantasmatic narratives that subjects construct to navigate the inconsistencies of the emancipatory call itself. Delving deeper into this psychoanalytic framework, Águila and Maureira (2022) interpret the *estallido* as a political symptom. From this viewpoint, their central argument is that the Chilean *estallido* can be understood as a symptom in a psychoanalytic sense. This symptom represents the emergence of repressed, systematically unsatisfied desires within a society profoundly shaped by “radical-advanced” neoliberalism.

And perhaps the most interesting and profound work comes from Mario Uribe’s book (2021), an important intellectual and psychoanalyst in Chile, titled “(18-O) Psicoanálisis de un Malestar, la Dignidad del sujeto” (*Psychoanalysis of a Discontent: The Dignity of the Subject*). Uribe was the first psychoanalyst to publish a comprehensive essay on cultural discontent, analyzing neoliberal capitalism. Uribe’s book aligns with Lacanian tradition linked to critical theory, tracing a lineage from the May 1968 protests in France to the Chilean social uprising from the Sorbonne to the Plaza de la Dignidad (Uribe, 2021, pp. 41-42, 58-59). In this book, Uribe follows more

than 40 artworks on the walls of Santiago, and his attempt is very interesting in terms of the absence of the political subject; he tracks these wall arts as a narrator and detects the political subjectivity within the dignified way of acting and the acute symptomatology of cultural discontent under capitalism. Hence, he represents a “*great awakening*” of Chile against the dehumanising effects of savage neoliberalism, which prioritises market logic over human dignity and well-being.

The last stop on the literature tour, which was one of the main inspirations for this thesis, is from International critical theorists and the Lacanian network, including Slavoj Žižek himself, who also took note of Chile’s uprising. Žižek et. al (2021) identify “*dignity*” or “*justice*” as the *Master Signifier* crystallizing the movement. They argued that by rallying around abstract values like *dignity* and *justice*, Chileans were effectively *naming* the trauma of neoliberalism and beginning to fill the ideological void left by the collapse of the Pinochet-era consensus. In practical terms, the protests led to a constitutional convention to replace the 1980 Pinochet constitution – a process seen by many as a cathartic *Act* refounding Chile’s social contract. Complementing this, Barria-Asenjo et al. (2024) adopt a mainly Lacanian-Zižekian psycho-discursive approach to explore the affective-discursive dimension of the protests, highlighting how the shared feelings of indignation and rage are actively constructed and articulated through specific narratives.

Psychoanalytic commentators likened the mass demonstrations to a kind of *group therapy* for a society long told to remain “one-dimensional.” In sum, recent academic work views the *estallido social* not as a mere reaction to a fare hike, but as a profound rupture: an explosion of *critical consciousness*, *popular will*, and *utopian aspiration* after decades of latent discontent. Through the lenses of critical theory and psychoanalysis, the Chilean uprising is analyzed as a dramatic case of society attempting to re-map itself, rejecting a failed model and envisioning new possibilities for collective life.

Turning to the question of *what is missing*, three main gaps stand out. Even though some studies have mentioned the feelings of collective consciousness Chileans may have experienced the discontent whether in the form of anomic frustration, cognitive replacement of neoliberal subjectivity, or problems in the signifying chain (Rodriguez, 2020; Peña, 2020; Barria Asenjo et al., 2021; Henriquez & Pleyers, 2023),

this aspect has rarely been explored in the literature on psychoanalytic category of political theory and social movements in its totality, which of that its historicity (traumatic essence) as well.

Furthermore, while the literature is mostly concerned with the school of social movement studies (mostly micro-empirical cases about events) and its production within national perspective by contentious politics to protest cycles of new social movements organizations such as students, women, indigenous, workers and their participant to social mobilisation and electoral participations (Donoso & Bülow, 2017; Joignant et al., 2020; Mendel et al., 2023); few situate the *estallido* within the “*global decade of social movements*” (Pleyers, 2023). This global resonance complicates the methodological nationalism typical of traditional protest analyses. Thus, positioning the Chilean case within this transnational horizon not only affirms its specificity but also allows a richer conceptual articulation of refusal as both singular and structurally resonant. What we claim, then, is that *estallido* is the historical event that produces new narratives and signifiers that disrupt the master-hegemonic narratives from the Chilean context. With these two coming together, if one considers international global understanding as an antagonist element, then the world’s singular cases can be situated as a unique and novel approach by pointing out what is to come through the cognitive mapping attempt.

Another crucial observation about the literature is that the optimism and proximity to protests observed in studies conducted around October 2019 have significantly decreased in more recent studies. Focusing on the narrative dimension of productive social sciences – particularly the part concerned with generating knowledge about the Other – requires an engagement with historicity. This means not only reading these narratives intellectually but also positioning ourselves as both observers and participants within them. Such an approach enables us to identify and address the negative elements embedded in today’s social structure and production relations. It also provides a means to formulate counterarguments to capitalism’s absorptive tendencies within the discipline of social science. Ultimately, reclaiming the narrative depends on this method of critical reengagement. And for this reason, while these distinct streams – structural, political, cultural, and the emerging psychoanalytic – each provide crucial insights, they often remain siloed. Due to the extensive academic and professional production surrounding this process, a divergence in analysis and

interpretation is evident within the academic, political, and social worlds.

What often remains undertheorized is the precise way in which objective structural conditions are translated into subjective, affective, and collective action. There is a need for a framework that can analyze the “*psychosocial phenomenon*” without losing sight of its political and economic roots. This is where the present study intervenes. As the *estallido* is an undeniably complex phenomenon, this thesis posits that to truly grasp this complexity, one must undertake a dialectical analytical movement. It argues that one must first situate the local event within the broader global-level phenomena that constitute its backdrop – in this case, the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism and its accompanying “end of history” narratives. From this global vantage point, the analysis must then turn back to the complexity of the case itself, examining the specific, unique ways these global forces are refracted, contested, and re-signified within the particular historical and cultural context of Chile. Finally, this enriched understanding of the local allows the analysis – for those who wish to see it – to return to the global, offering new insights into the nature of contemporary capitalism and the possibilities for its refusal.

This approach prevents a simplistic reading of the *estallido* as either a purely endogenous event or a mere generic instance of anti-neoliberal protest. By employing a theoretical apparatus synthesized from the critical theories of Marcuse and Žižek, this thesis analyzes the *estallido* not just as a protest, but as an *Act of Great Refusal*¹⁰. This framework enables an investigation into the unconscious economy of the protest – the interplay of desire, fantasy, and trauma that animates the collective. The Chilean situation emerges here as the most revealing and theoretically productive – not because it is exceptional in itself, but because it offers a sharply legible condensation of the contradictions this thesis seeks to explore between refusal and institutionalisation, between fantasy and structure, and between the desublimated subject and the possibility of the Act.

¹⁰ The uniform expression “Act of Great Refusal” is employed in this thesis as a conceptual synthesis and thus appears capitalized when referring to the thesis’s own theoretical-analytical construction. At times, the text uses lower-case forms (e.g., “act of refusal,” “refusal of act”) in order to indicate the more general or descriptive register in which these phrases circulate within the literatures of Marcuse and Žižek. On other occasions, the text refers simply to “Refusal” or “Act.” These instances should not be read as belonging to a single philosopher, but as part of the thesis’s holistic and pragmatic usage, treating both as living theories whose mutual resonance is most prominent and logical for the course of the argument. These distinctions are not arbitrary; they reflect different emphases in praxis and discourse, and their conceptual depth will be elaborated in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Therefore, this dissertation builds upon the existing literature on structural causes, political contention, cultural expression, and nascent psychoanalytic interpretations by adding a crucial layer of politico-philosophical analysis. It seeks to understand how macro-level “global ends” are experienced, resisted, and refused at the level of political subjectivity. By analyzing the “new narratives and signifiers” that emerged from the Chilean case, this study provides a deeper understanding of how a people can challenge not only a set of policies but the very ideological coordinates of their reality. It is in this synthesis of the retroactive, the symbolic, and the psychoanalytic that the unique contribution of this thesis lies.

Thus, this thesis adopts an epistemological stance centered on the narratives that produce political subjectivity and meaning-making in their entirety, rather than focusing solely on structural mechanisms such as formal institutionalization, strategic planning, or resource accumulation. Like the separation of use and exchange values, this approach necessitates a departure from traditional modes of perceiving and interpreting occurrences. By revising traditional modes of perception, this study seeks to uncover the symptomatic elements that underpin the gains and lacks of the *estallido*. In this way, it is possible to revisit and identify the symptomatic elements within both the previous and the new social arrangements: the gains (*Eros*) and the lacks (*Thanatos*) resulting from the *estallido*. We carry out this side of the analysis from critical theory¹¹, with respect to Hegel and Benjamin's thesis of history, and its re-reading by Frederic Jameson (1972) and Terry Eagleton (1994), with the idea of generating an approach of *temporality* and *contingency*, from nostalgia, melancholy to fantasy, to the field and symbolic place in dispute in the construction of Chilean refusal and its narrative. After six years, the initial enthusiasm had decreased, and it became imperative to reassess the situation in light of the need for a retroactive analysis. It is possible to develop a balanced and sustainable course of action for the research effort

¹¹ *Critical theory* encompasses a wide range of approaches, including Marxism, post-structuralism, feminism, ideology critique, psychoanalysis and postcolonialism. It emerged in Anglophone academia in the mid-1960s, drawing from the Frankfurt School's (*Institute für Sozialforschung*) Critical Theory and various “*French*” and other intellectual traditions. This broader understanding of critical theory challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries within the humanities and social sciences. In this thesis, “*critical theory*” (with or without capital “C” and “T”) will be used in a broader sense, recognizing its diverse origins and its potential to offer new perspectives on complex social phenomena. This approach is particularly relevant for this study, as it allows for an interdisciplinary examination of *estallido social* through the lens of power relations, social structures, and cultural representations. Thus, critical theory, in this context, refers to the overarching body of theoretical traditions and their internal debates, which provide frameworks for understanding social critique at a systemic level.

when one looks back at previous studies and forward to possible future (imaginary). The interplay of nostalgia, fantasy, and melancholy in the collective psyche will undoubtedly influence the direction taken, recognizing that ideologies, although potentially false needs or beliefs, are also expressions of a desire.

Master-hegemonic narratives use the “progress”¹² rationale against these *endings* to build social beliefs and assumptions and create a space for reconciliation that props up conformist, poseur radicalism in recognition, and instead of redistribution (Fraser, 2019). This means that hegemonic narratives are allowed to define social assumptions and beliefs, thereby consolidating the conformist, pseudo-radical one-dimensionality. Thus, the focus on this actual political event and the ensuing political struggle is vital in the context of history and the future. The moment(s) are required to interrupt the repetitive process of master-hegemonic narratives that constantly reinforce the present by rewriting history for their purposes. This dissertation theorizes that the aforementioned logic reflects a society's collective effect, manifesting as symptomatic expressions of unconscious, retroactive behavior against the daily revealed inequalities, injustices, cruelties, and general destructiveness inherent within the societal structure.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Within the study of social movements, there is an ongoing dispute over what is referred to as “*grand theories of social movements*” (Jasper, 2010), as it appears that the main paradigm is lost in historical transaction. In this dispute, two major paradigms exist: the American school (Olson, 1965; McCarthy & Zalt, 1977; Tilly, 1978) and the European school (Touraine, 1981, 1985; Melucci, 1980; Castells, 1983). Within them, analytical approaches range from empirically oriented models to critical-dialectical perspectives. In the discipline that progresses under the determination of the paradigm shift from class to identity, most specifically, clear lines seem to be drawn between “history or society”, “deduction or induction”, “structure or individual”, and so on. In the USA, considerable scholarship has developed in response to broad structural explanations, resulting in the political-process model, which integrates resource

¹² This idea that the misleading myth of “*history is synonymous with progress*” or the mostly known phrase “*enlightenment is totalitarian*” has been put and consistently verified in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1972).

mobilization, political opportunity, and cultural framing to explain collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000; Douglas et al., 2001; Tilly & Tarrow, 2005). Comparative researchers, such as Della Porta (2015), have engaged with these frameworks in European contexts, adapting and extending them to study transnational and crisis-driven mobilizations, often introducing a stronger focus on democratic theory and protest in times of systemic crisis.

In contrast, the critical-dialectical tradition foregrounds history, contradiction, and power, thereby restoring the question of systemic ends; however, it can at times under-specify the concrete mechanisms linking structure and action. This tradition, rooted in Marxist sociology and its renewals within social movement studies (Barker et al., 2013; Caouette & Kapoor, 2015; Piva & Santella, 2022; Linera, 2024), explicitly seeks to connect collective action to the broader dynamics of capitalism, imperialism, and global power relations.

Drawing on this critical-dialectical lineage, the present study situates protests within a historical and dynamic framework, one that is attentive to the transformation of abstract possibilities into concrete needs – what Lenin referred to as “the concrete analysis of the concrete situation” (Lenin, 2002). This framework addresses themes such as, globalization, populism, authoritarianism, radical democracy, multitude, and neoliberalism (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Hardt & Negri, 2016), but does so with an explicit attention to how these macro-structures are lived or whereas as Žižek (Butler et al., 2000, p. 108) called “*the totality of Capital are not opposed*,” and contested at the level of postmodern political subjectivity.

An adequate framework must connect these levels and, crucially, reintegrate the subjective register largely absent from each. The interplay between empirical analyses of protest strategies and critical theoretical explorations of systemic structures can provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary social movements. Yet, this dual approach often struggles to capture the subjective dimensions, the motivations, desires, and unconscious dynamics that animate collective action and shape its transformative potential: “*Acta non verba*”¹³ (deeds, not words) of the

¹³ This Latin phrase is very much related to retroactive historicism, which refers mainly to the times of the theory-practice relationship.

instrument of radical theory and practice.

Declarations of “change” within restrictive, one-dimensional “end” narratives mirror liberal democracy’s capacity for self-reproduction under capitalism (Žižek et al., 2012; Marcuse, 2007). In today’s context of heightened contradictions, the need for holism becomes unavoidable. Therefore, in any given “realistic and complex” issue, the social action theories must give a sense to the “totality” of “negation” through which they emphasize human emancipation for all (Blunden, 2019).

In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and the persistence of neoliberal capitalism have renewed interest in Marcuse’s *Great Refusal* as a lens for positioning social movements, not simply as a reaction to worsening material conditions such as suppressed wages, underemployment, unemployment, rising living costs, and pervasive debt but as a critical stance that rejects the totality of a one-dimensional order (Cremin, 2016; Kellner & Pierce, 2011, pp. 47–48). Scholars note that substituting *students* for *occupiers* in Marcuse’s (1970) Berlin lectures requires little revision (Claussen, 2004; Kellner & Pierce, 2014), and parallels with the Occupy movement reaffirm the *Great Refusal*’s value while highlighting its difficulty in moving from negation to durable change (Lamas et al., 2017). Chile’s 2019 *estallido social* sought to bridge this gap by linking street-level refusal to the concrete demand for a new constitution, confronting the *Real* of post-politics, symbolic order of neoliberal capitalism (Barrio-Asenjo et al., 2020).

Movements today often lack a central subject; instead, they generate *collective* or *individual Acts* within events (Žižek, 2014). This raises the question: *Who is the subject of the Act or the Event?* Responses range from the “multitude” (Hardt & Negri) to the networked individual (Castells), the excluded part (Rancière), the precarious body (Butler), the faithful militant (Badiou), and the communicative actor (Habermas). In our framework, *the Act of Great Refusal* can emerge as a temporary collective “we” (Lolas, 2019), crystallized in protest and animated by shared fantasies, such as a song by Quilapayún “el pueblo unido jamás será vencido” (e.g., *the people united will never be defeated*; anti-imperialist and class-based unity to conquest happiness – “*a conquistar nuestra felicidad*”) and “el baile de los que sobran” (e.g., *the dance of those who are left behind*; desperate precarious future within “democratic unfreedom” and “nobody cares” about us, we are those who are not invited to the party) by Los

Prisioneros¹⁴. This means that only the utopian political imaginary aspect of reinventing history and re-narration —that is, only the return of the gratified or traumatized repressed — can be a “class.”

Psychoanalysis offers one of the few strategic frameworks for analysing this phenomenon. Moving from “*clinical to political*” (Zupančič, 2008), it reveals the unconscious structures, fantasies, and desires underpinning collective action. This tradition – initiated by the Frankfurt School and transformed by the Lacanian turn – bridges empirical analysis and critical theory, showing how capitalism reproduces itself by neutralizing struggles through a “post-political consensus” (Stavrakakis, 2003; Stavrakakis, 2016). The Lacanian emphasis on the *Symbolic* highlights how language, law, and social structures shape experience, while Marcuse’s vision of a “*new sensibility*” stresses liberation from repressive apparatuses (Marcuse, 1955; Marcuse, 1964; Marcuse, 1969).

Psychoanalysis thus reinforces the Hegelian notion of recognition, crucial for forging alliances in a fragmented global political landscape (Jameson, 2009, pp. 341-342; Barria-Asenjo et al., 2023; Barria-Asenjo et al., 2024). Capitalism’s denial of cognitive mapping makes imagining alternatives difficult, sustaining “master-hegemonic narratives” of inevitability (Jameson, 2009, p. 341).

In Chile, the *estallido*’s centrifugal outburst (Muñoz, 2022) mirrors the psychoanalytic process of narrativizing trauma, integrating disruption into a broader historical flow. Indeed, Muñoz (2022) identifies this very characteristic as key to Chilean historical significance. According to Muñoz, the event’s defining characteristic was its explosive and dispersive nature, which gave rise to its designation: an *outburst*. Muñoz states, “[w]hen something bursts or explodes, the movement of its particles is eccentric, dispersive, centrifugal” (Muñoz, 2022, p. 95). This centrifugal movement mirrors the psychoanalytic phase, in which a traumatized subject can finally articulate a coherent narrative. The outburst, initially disruptive and

¹⁴ Los Prisioneros is a Chilean rock/new-wave band formed in the early 1980s under Pinochet’s dictatorship; their songs circulated despite censorship pressures and became a generational voice against the regime’s market reforms and social stratification. “El baile de los que sobran” (1986), from *Pateando piedras*, condemns the broken promise of education-led mobility – naming a cohort “left over” by neoliberal restructuring and youth precarity. The track re-emerged as a street anthem in 2019, sung by massive crowds alongside the Nueva Canción repertoire – Víctor Jara’s “El derecho de vivir en paz” and Quilapayún’s “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido,” as reflected in my field notes, interviews, and materials documented in the memorial sites and so on.

fragmented, becomes a narrativized traumatic event capable of integration into the broader, ongoing flow of the Chilean experience.

Refusal, in this sense, resists mere problem-solving repetition of the status quo and engages the ontology of the negative, demanding a move beyond negation toward the creation of new categories of thought and action. This is the terrain where Marcuse's *Great Refusal* and Žižek's *Act* converge: both challenge neoliberal hegemony by rejecting its ideological coordinates and opening space for new signifiers through their respective political imaginaries and, henceforth, thought of strategies. This thesis applies their radical, historically contextualized theories to contemporary protests, contributing to the literature by demonstrating how such an integrated approach can confront global change under even the harshest conditions.

This is partially due to the narrative perpetuating the idea that late capitalism, along with democracy and neoliberalism, is the only possible economic and social system, making it hard to imagine how things could change. The “*ideological-political*” dynamics in this psychic setting are based on the realization and actualization of events from a historical perspective. It is unchanging yet destructive, surplus-valued in its entirety, but filled with pain that fits the symbolic-narrative sphere. Faced with this “*impasse*,” in other words, this means questioning, based on a sense of alienation and catastrophe, the physical and political ways of interacting, along with the “master-hegemonic narratives” and global capitalism that have shaped modern life so far.

Therefore, this research defends that using psychoanalysis and criticism to analyze social movements, utilizing Marcuse's “Great Refusal” and Žižek's conceptions of “the Act,” is exceedingly suitable and significant for contemporary understanding of demystifying the ideology of narratives. That's because Marcuse and Žižek are two of the most important names in the literature that analyze how neoliberalism (and *neoimperialism* for Marcuse) as an ideology compatible with capitalism establishes its hegemony by undermining freedom, progress, and tolerance. According to one of the claims of this thesis, these two philosophers, who stand as counter-narrative authors/philosophers of the two hegemonic narratives of the “end of ideology” and the “end of history”, are the prominent representatives of the central paradoxes in the understanding of today's back and forth historical events: The utopian

project or as Ernst Bloch's seminal concept "*Utopian impulse*" of the 1960s as a realist alternative of opposition to the system, and the dystopian character of today's psychic-setting, which is far from concrete demands and often lacks a political program. *The Act of Great Refusal* conceptualizes this full gesture.

This term will represent the theoretical unity shared in the holistic works of Marcuse and Žižek. Leveraging the lens of Marcuse and Žižek, a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of new signifiers in the master-hegemonic narrative of contemporary capitalism is feasible. Another contribution to the literature from this study is the application of a historically contextualized and rejuvenated critical theory, influenced by the radical theories of Marcuse and Žižek, to examine contemporary protests within the current resistance cycle. These trends will demonstrate that adopting an open and flexible approach enables us to confront the challenges of global change, even under the harshest conditions, and how it pertains to our relationship with it. Such an attitude allows us to adapt and respond to these changes more quickly and resiliently.

Returning to this constellational name of both concepts, it will be employed to describe the theoretical unity that both Marcuse and Žižek reveal in their holistic (cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, psychoanalytic, cultural theory, ideology critique, philosophy as a radical political act, etc.) body of work, and by enacting its relevance to the field of social movements. Hereby bringing a critical theory, provided by the radical theories of both, historically contextualized and re-enacted to examine present-day social movements in the current cycle of resistance, is a contribution to the knowledge of the existing body of literature.

1.6 Research Questions

The primary motivation for the study's problem is historicity and narrative, as, unlike Marcuse's epoch, there is no global symbolic order or "big Other" (Žižek, 2015, p. 129) that dictates our actions in contemporary times. In this case, I will look at Chile as the *Act of Great Refusal* that took place on the scene of the demonstrations and narratives (the former is the analysand and the latter is the analyst). The aim is to associate the political level at the forefront with the problems of our time through a detailed assessment. Unlike the theoretical currents that hand over the power and potential of the protest to the network of contradictions and cause it to *silicate*, the

ways that this study follows have the power to identify the source of the problems. Building on these assumptions, the thesis aims to answer the following problem:

The loss of political subjectivity in the so-called post-industrial and post-political era, as articulated within discourses and narratives proclaiming the end of ideology and the end of history, affects the potential for radical change within contemporary society as capitalism becomes increasingly entrenched in a non-alternative dimension.

This problem will be addressed in the main continued articulation as follows the question: “What is the gain (the moments of great refusal during the event itself) and what is the lack (the eventual act, e.g., the “*estallido social*” as a historical event breaking down the symbolic order) in the contemporary struggle against these global “ends” (the “end of history” ideology and its symbolic articulation: post-politics) that seek to define and delimit our own horizons of possibility?”

This main research question is explored through the lens of the Chilean *estallido*. Those familiar with this event will recall the intensity of the protests and how they shattered the carefully constructed image of Chile as a beacon of neoliberal success and stability. Here was a nation seemingly at the “end of history,” suddenly engulfed in a period of profound contestation, with its people demanding accountability for latent inequalities and unfulfilled promises.

This articulation of the main problem is interlinked with the research questions, particularly when tracing the trajectory of movements in Chile – from their roots to their march towards power, their influence on constitutional processes, and their current-day implications. This quest will be problematized with the following sub-questions:

a) What happens when a society’s underlying antagonisms erupt, breaking a long-standing image of consensus and challenging the very narratives that defined its path?

b) How do the theories of Marcuse and Žižek provide frameworks to understand the motivations and ideological dynamics of the Chilean refusal, those moments of “Great Refusal” that could also constitute “Political Acts” intended to interrupt the narratives of the “ends”?

c) Is Chilean *estallido* embodied with the Great Refusal, exposing the Real of

neoliberal symbolic setting, therefore acting and challenging the hegemonic narratives like the “end of history” and “end of ideology” by revealing new signifiers?

d) What are the implications of the end of history and end of ideology narratives for the rise of new social movements in Chile, the ongoing constitutional process, and the current political landscape?

e) Can the Chilean protests (or Chilean people – *el pueblo de Chile*) be considered a “master signifier,” reflecting the growing global antagonisms, contradictions, and ideological struggles of our time, where the “end of capitalism” is once again a possibility worth fighting for?

This thesis is based on the main assumption that the cognitive resurrection of the “end of ideology” and the “end of history” are misleading discourses that distort the contemporary dynamics of international relations, and the state of capitalism in the present provides a valuable opportunity to study social movements and their possibility to contribute to the formation of a current emancipatory project. In an attempt to answer these questions, which are part of a broader research agenda, one must examine the most contentious areas of society, as well as the sources that provide the greatest signals of conflict and change. Chile is one such site with its *Estallido Social*. The protests, rooted in social and economic discontent, provide a suitable context for analyzing the relationships of power, discourse, and struggle.

While this study does not employ a traditional hypothesis-testing model, it formulates theoretically grounded propositions that emerge from and are tested against empirical materials. These are not deductive hypotheses, but interpretive claims derived from the conceptual lenses of Marcuse’s Great Refusal and Žižek’s Act. The analysis explores how these theoretical constructs illuminate the Chilean *estallido* as a site of ideological rupture and re-symbolization, thus following a critical interpretive methodology rather than grounded theory or positivist analysis. This examination will be based on the following analytical claims (AC) articulated as testable interpretive categories:

AC (Main Claim): The 2019 Chilean *estallido* constitutes a hegemonic rupture that transformed Chile’s symbolic position in the global narrative from a “neoliberal laboratory” into a “laboratory of resistance.” In other words, Chile transitioned from

being an exemplar of neoliberal success to an exemplar of popular refusal, thereby marking a break in the global narrative of history's end.

From this main claim, several sub-claims follow:

AC1: The Chilean *estallido* functions as a practical and symbolic refutation of the “end of history” and “end of ideology” narratives. It demonstrates the re-emergence of intense ideological antagonism and utopian desire within what was supposed to be a post-ideological society. In doing so, it reopens space for imagining alternatives, contradicting the notion that no fundamental change is possible.

AC2: The rise and popular embrace of new Master Signifiers – notably *Dignidad* (Dignity), *el Pueblo* (the People), and *Violencia* (Violence) – were central to the *estallido*'s ability to unite disparate grievances into a collective subject. These signifiers helped forge a shared *post-neoliberal desire*: a vision of a society beyond the neoliberal order, rooted in reclaiming dignity, people-power, and a contentious understanding of violence (structural vs. direct).

AC3: The Chilean *estallido* is best conceptualized as an “Act of Great Refusal.” This means it had a dual character: on one hand, a qualitative, life-affirming rejection (*Eros*-driven) of the entire repressive social order (in Marcuse's sense of Great Refusal); on the other, a radical, death-drive-inflected rupture that broke the existing symbolic coordinates (in Žižek's sense of the Act). In plainer terms, it combined the creative energy to say “we want a new world” with the destructive energy to say “we will destroy the old myths.”

AC4: The collective energy of the *estallido* was fueled by a specific affective temporality. In it, *nostalgia* for past solidarities (the *past* dimension) and *melancholy* over present failures (the *present* dimension) converged to produce a *fantasy* of a different future (the *future* dimension). This entwinement of past, present, and future feelings created a utopian impulse that was crucial for sustaining the movement. We suspect that this mix of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy is a hallmark of such movements in “post-utopian” times – a way that people subconsciously negotiate the loss of grand narratives by cobbling together pieces of memory and hope.

1.7 Research Design

To unravel the complex web of narratives and signifiers surrounding the Chilean *estallido*, the fieldwork for this study spanned one year in Chile (November 2023 - November 2024), encompassing three key fronts. After cataloguing articles from the humanities and social sciences related to the outburst, the respected historicity of Chilean social movements, and explicitly focused on the production of knowledge about protests, 28 Chilean intellectuals and academics (8 female and 20 male) residing inside Chile: Santiago, Valparaíso, Temuco, Valdivia, and outside Chile: United States, United Kingdom, were interviewed.

Through her model of *crítica cultural*, Nelly Richard positions the intellectual as a *social storyteller*: one who narrates – not merely reflects – the power configurations that shape society. Her texts lift the reader’s suspicion against supposedly neutral or consensual narratives, revealing antagonisms and margins where alternative stories emerge (Richard, 2004). As Jameson observes, “*narrative is the hermeneutic question [...] deeply involved in our present inquiry as we were when the objection was raised*” (1983, p. 46), and the individual narrative often functions “*as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction*” (Jameson, 1983, p. 62). Meanwhile, in the post-ideology of the end of history, Eagleton reminds us that “*is the very form of the ideological; and since the ideological will not disappear with the dismantling of class-society, neither will narrative*” (1979, p. 78).

Intellectuals (academics, public commentators, artists) are key producers and mediators of the discourse surrounding social events like the *estallido*. They can be seen as Lacanian ‘*subjects supposed to know*’ (for French, *sujet supposé savoir*) (Lacan, 2014, p. 59), whose interpretations reveal both conscious analysis and, potentially, unconscious assumptions and fantasies. Interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives, narratives, and reflections.

This sample encompassed various fields: history, political science, anthropology, sociology, law, literature, philosophy, psychology, and the arts. The interviews, conducted in English and Spanish, lasted between 34 and 108 minutes, were digitally recorded, and transcribed using flexible verbatim intelligent transcription. Flexible verbatim intelligent transcription involves accurately transcribing the core verbal content, while potentially omitting superfluous filler

words. This process excluded filler words (e.g., 'uhh,' 'umm'), corrected grammatical errors, standardized the format, and lightly edited for clarity. Pauses, emotional tone, and non-verbal cues recorded during the interview are added as supplementary annotations. This approach strikes a balance between the accuracy required for narrative/discourse analysis and efficiency, while preserving potential cues for a psychoanalytic reading.

Additionally, informal observations were conducted at nine academic events focused on the Chilean *estallido*, critical theory, critical thought in Latin America, and the sociology of radical change, totaling 28 hours of documented observation.

The qualitative methodology employed in this study encompasses several key components. These include: semi-structured interviews, the analysis of protest narratives, and a retroactive examination of fieldwork concerning Chile's refusal. The focus is on “cognitive narratives” to comprehend the understandings, desires, and anxieties underpinning collective action. The analysis is conducted at three levels: master-hegemonic narratives, national political narratives, and cognitive narratives.

Transference sources (documents, artifacts, symbols, metaphors, narratives) that record the past are shaped by the perspectives and biases of the present. This creates a cycle where the past is interpreted and presented in a way that supports the present narrative. The past becomes secondary to the present, like an appendix to a book. The alignment between historical records and master-hegemonic narrative(s) allows us to examine the past in a way that explains and justifies the present reality of popular or “people” movements, or, to put it in a more terminological way, social movements highlighted as a retroactive representation of the moment. To articulate the terms of the Chilean protest’s argument and its implications, this dissemination turns to another narrative depicting the identity and politics at the end of history.

As briefly mentioned, social movements are not isolated events; they are deeply connected to master narratives and signify shifts in hegemonic ideological battles, along with the imaginary possibilities towards “something coming to an end.” This is due to an imaginary problem where subjectivity has lost its transformative form and is trapped in the notion that revolutions, radical changes are no longer possible, as discussed in narratives of the “end of ideology” (Bell, 1960) and the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992). These movements, therefore, represent class struggle and a need

for change, which means reconsidering master narratives and social priorities. Currently, there appears to be no widespread consensus in social science production across the Global North and South, including Chile, that a “coherent narrative structure” is essential for understanding the complex relationship between social movements, hegemonic narratives, and the pursuit of anti-neoliberal signifiers.

The flexible approach to data collection is justified by the need to differentiate between narrative and signifier, acknowledging their divergent trajectories. Cognitive narrative is discerned solely through the dynamics of transference, facilitated by a semi-structured interview format. While seemingly simple, speech reveals complex libidinal currents and their corresponding symbolic configurations. Thus, the more academics and researchers elaborated on their experience of the outburst – a topic in which their expertise was presumed, given their published work on the subject – the more certain signifiers emerged.

Therefore, the study seeks to explore the pairing between signifier and ideology in the post-neoliberal subject, considering the process of mystification through the Lacanian concept of the “subject supposed to know.” It explores nostalgia (past), melancholy (present), and fantasy (future) as new aspects of political struggle. The research explains how these signifiers and imaginaries create collective power and the negation of one-dimensional societies, such as Chile, a supposed success story of the neoliberal bloc that, nevertheless, surprised the world with its outburst.

This thesis is structured as follows. In the second and third chapters, which are of a conceptual nature, the thesis outlines the main approaches to the theoretical framing of the research. In Chapter 2, the philosophical relationship and intellectual development, with respect to their conceptual frameworks, of Marcuse with Žižek will be explored, highlighting their shared concerns, alignments, and divergences. This chapter will demonstrate how their concepts of “Great Refusal” and “the Act” within critical theory and psychoanalysis can be combined into a core analytical instrument for this research: *the Act of Great Refusal*. This attempt will help establish the psychoanalytic space for the political-philosophical dimension in analyzing narratives of protest and social change, before elaborating on the key concepts, terms, and traditions that will collectively inform the theoretical orientation of the study in the following chapter. Building on the theoretical toolkit, Chapter 3 examines how

psychoanalytic concepts and ideology critique inform the study of contemporary social movements. This chapter transitions from pure theory into a more applied theoretical discussion. It examines how unconscious factors and the *narrative framing* of grievances interact to shape movements. Key here is the idea that beyond material causes, movements are driven by how people *make sense* of their world (cognitive mapping, narrative construction) and how they *feel* about it (affect, desire, drive).

Chapter 4 shifts to a more concrete analysis, situating the Chilean *estallido* in both global and national contexts. It addresses how master-hegemonic narratives (the end of ideology, the end of history) have impacted contemporary movements broadly, and then explores the national narratives specific to the Chilean narrative landscape. It will analyze historical precedents, taking the post-1968 world events related to Chile as a symbolic order and their influence on contemporary protests. The chapter will also examine the unique characteristics of certain tides and cycles of social movements in the “peripheral” context of Latin America. Essentially, this chapter provides an interpretive historical account, showing how Chile 2019 can be seen as the outcome of both global structural pressures and a local history of unresolved tensions.

Chapter 5 will detail the methodological approach used in this research. It will explain the selection of interviewees, data collection procedures (including interviews and document analysis), and methods of analysis (narrative analysis and thematic coding). For this study, data analysis and interpretation will involve using the research methods to analyze the data collected during field research. The analysis will be guided by the conceptual framework and research question, aiming to determine the sociopolitical and psychological dimensions of the protests. Inductive codes will be introduced for analyzing field notes for historical processes, events, and mentioned narratives. Additionally, ontological links with global neoliberalism will be developed through codes generated by a deductive code list for signifiers accessed by narratives. Moreover, this process will lead us to paths where the narrative is constantly produced and used as a specific source for today's political actions.

In Chapter 6, the findings from the interviews and analysis of 3-level narratives will be presented. The implications of these findings for understanding social movements, ideology, and the potential for transformative change will be discussed. The conclusion will summarize the key findings and their contributions to the field. It

will also reflect on the limitations of the research and suggest avenues for future inquiry, offering final thoughts on the potential for social movements to achieve meaningful change despite the prevailing narratives of “end of ideology” and “end of history.” The results of this study seek not only to contribute to scientific knowledge on psychoanalytic political theory, critical theory and social movement studies, in particular the protests of the contemporary periphery context, but also to provide evidence and interpretations to deepen our understanding of the Chilean situation in a period of turbulent social and political changes with few precedents in the country.

Having established the contemporary crisis of “global ends,” positioned the Chilean *estallido* as a paradigmatic case of refusal, and outlined the central research problem concerning political subjectivity, it is now necessary to build the specific theoretical apparatus for the investigation.

2. INTELLECTUAL TRAJECTORY AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE ACT OF GREAT REFUSAL

Wood is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden. They are called Holzwege. Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so. Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a Holzweg."

– MARTIN HEIDEGGER

As established in the introduction, understanding the contemporary landscape of post-political social movements, exemplified by the Chilean *estallido*, as a phenomenon demanding novel theoretical instruments is essential. These new and spontaneous movements, often marked by widespread popular mobilization and an open denial of established models and conventional political opportunities, express the disapproval of the existing global order and can help us to grasp the internal and external conflict and subjective dimensions of domination and illuminate what a true act of refusal by means of new subjectivities and acts in our current era (Lamas et. al., 2017; Stavrikakis, 2021). This occurs especially in a time when the relationship between the present and the past is disrupted, as the future seems increasingly uncertain or even canceled out.

From Marx's (1844 [1974]) initial critique of alienated labor to the Frankfurt School's critical social inquiry of the human emancipation project (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972) and extending to modern critical theory (Jameson, 1991; Fisher, 2009; Fraser, 2022), theorists have sought to comprehend how contemporary capitalism adapts to and incorporates dissent through divide ways but mainly through holistic understanding of “*uncompleted reality*” principle of ontology (Sbriglia & Žižek, 2020) in which make it possible to say the paradoxical but inevitable quote suggests that Marxism remains the most relevant philosophy until scarcity is overcome –i.e., until capitalism ends. This challenge, fundamental to critical theory since its inception, entails confronting perpetually evolving manifestations of social

dominance. Understanding the mechanisms of control and identifying pathways to emancipation is pertinent and essential in contemporary society, where capitalism influences not only the economy but also culture and individual subjectivity. Yet, dichotomous distinctions persist at the core of the debate on this issue, especially concerning historical “ends” within the critical position of emancipatory projects. It often seems as if the nature of change swings back and forth endlessly, an infinite pendulum, alternating between opposites: *optimism* and *pessimism*, *hope* and *despair*, *utopia* and *dystopia*, *positivity* and *negativity*, *gain* and *loss* – constitutes the core of the analysis. This sentiment closely resembles concerns expressed at other historical moments, notably Trotsky's (1901) remark at the onset of the 20th century: “*It seems as if the new century, this gigantic newcomer, were bent at the very moment of its appearance to drive the optimist into absolute pessimism and civic nirvana.*”

Within the scholarly pursuit of critical philosophy, particularly as it informs analyses of societal dynamics and emancipatory projects, along with their political extension – a tradition deeply concerned with societal critique and human liberation – it is imperative to recognize that this intellectual enterprise is not *monolithic*. Rather, it is characterised by persistent meta-theoretical discussions concerning its fundamental nature, methodological approaches, perceived successes and failures, and its orientation towards practical engagement. These internal debates profoundly shape the diagnostic and prognostic character of critical thought, influencing how critical theorists understand social reality and the possibilities for transformative change.

This relates to the fact that if one reads foundational texts of critical theory, such as Max Horkheimer's (1937) programmatic essay, *Traditional and Critical Theory*, a key insight emerges: “*Critical theory does not have one doctrinal content today and another tomorrow*” (p. 234). Its transformations align with the transformations of the era itself, rather than dictating sharp turns toward new insights independently. This raises an interesting question posed by Horkheimer: How does critical theory change with the historical era while maintaining a continuity that defines it as an intellectual tradition and heritage?

In the trajectory of contemporary critical theory, particularly as it pertains to the analysis of some kind of qualitative leap or withdrawn to process in the historical

development, or basically a refusal, the critique of ideology, and resistance against the pervasive forces of late capitalism and neoliberalism (neoliberal capitalism), the philosophical contributions of Herbert Marcuse and Slavoj Žižek present distinct, yet often convergent, insights. Consequently, the chapter has a twofold aim: first, to trace the distinct intellectual paths – the *Holzwege*, to borrow Heidegger's metaphor¹⁵ – taken by Marcuse and Žižek regarding radical critique and transformation, and second, to introduce a synthesized concept capable of illuminating the dynamics of contemporary resistance: the *Act of Great Refusal*.

The intellectual and then analytical path that this chapter will follow, from Marcuse to Žižek, is based on a certain methodological principle that Žižek himself has pointed out. Žižek (1991) begins his seminal book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, by stating that there is a “*fundamental homology*” between how Marx and Freud interpret things. The most important thing for both of them to do when looking at commodities and dreams is to avoid the fetishistic urge to look for a hidden “content” behind the form. The “secret” that analysis reveals is not the hidden meaning, but the secret of the form itself (Žižek, 1991, p. 11).

In this respect, at the outset of this chapter, it is useful to apply what Fredric Jameson (1975, p. 221) calls a *structural homology*¹⁶ for his cognitive mapping: two

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger (2002) is known for using the word “*Holzwege*,” which means “wood paths” or “logging trails,” as the title of a book of essays that was published in 1950. In a figurative sense, it denotes the limits of reasoning that diverge from the conventional path, often leading into difficult or uncharted domains, and potentially lacking a clear resolution, yet representing genuine inquiry. Žižek and Marcuse both had a lot of contact with Heidegger's philosophy, but they did not always agree with it and often criticized it. This makes the choice of metaphor especially relevant in this case. Marcuse was a student of Heidegger in Freiburg during the late 1920s. Marcuse eventually ended his relationship with Heidegger, mostly because of political differences, as Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933. However, Heidegger's *Being and Time* had a big impact on Marcuse's early work. Some commentators argue that certain Heideggerian concepts, such as “being-in-the-world” and “authenticity,” subtly persisted in his interpretations of Marx and Hegel. Žižek primarily interprets his ideas through the lenses of Lacan and Hegel; however, he has demonstrated a persistent and essential interest in Heidegger. His inaugural book critically analyzed Heideggerian concepts of language, establishing the foundation for much of his subsequent theoretical work. Marcuse and Žižek frequently engage with, reinterpret, and critique Heideggerian concepts concerning ontology, technology, Dasein, and existence in their writings. For more information about Marcuse and his work and relationship with Heidegger, see Feenberg (2004) or Wolin and Abromeit (2005); for more information about Žižek and his work and relationship with Heidegger, see Sorenson (2021).

¹⁶ Originally a term of comparative anatomy, *structural homology* designates those bodily parts whose similarity rests on common evolutionary origin rather than on current function -e.g., the pentadactyl limb shared by human arms, a bat's wing, and a whale's flipper (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.; Hall et. al., 1994). Structural homology designates a correspondence of relations, not of surface concepts: two theories can be “built” on different vocabularies yet share an isomorphic inner layout.

theoretical architectures can share the same inner layout even when their vocabularies diverge. This chapter, therefore, extends this structural homology to the relationship between Marcuse and Žižek. The inquiry that follows will not attempt to unearth a shared “content” in their thought, a task that would inevitably founder on their obvious divergences – one a Freudo-Marxist, the other a Lacano-Hegelian; one a theorist of libidinal liberation, the other of the death drive. Instead, the homology this chapter seeks is a formal one. The argument is that Marcuse's critical theory of the “one-dimensional society” and Žižek's (2008b) critique of the “post-ideological” and “post-political” order, despite their different vocabularies and historical contexts, are structured by a formally parallel logic. In this regard, the convergence of their theoretical and conceptual bases is reflected in contemporary thought.

In his analysis, Jameson (1991) employs the concept of “cognitive mapping” to describe the weakening of an individual's ability to mentally map their own position within the vast and abstract network of late capitalism as an aesthetic and political necessity. According to him, cognitive mapping serves as a counter-strategy to the disorienting effects of a spatialized society, aiming to enable individuals to reconquer a “sense of place” and reconstruct an “articulated ensemble” of social reality that can be mentally retained and remapped (Jameson, 1991, p. 96). For Jameson, the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles is the most potent spatial metaphor for this failure. With its disorienting interiors, reflective exterior that isolates it from the surrounding city, and elusive structure, the hotel physically embodies the sense of alienation, confusion, and systemic incomprehensibility inherent in the postmodern condition. Thus, the Bonaventure Hotel becomes a concrete example of the decline in an individual's ability to construct a coherent mental map of their social reality (Jameson,

Transposed into social and ideological analysis, structural homology alerts us to deep formal correspondences between seemingly unlike thinkers, institutions, or discourses: beneath their distinct vocabularies, they may reproduce parallel logics, impulses, or contradictions. In the Marxist-critical tradition, it refers to the way social, economic, cultural, or psychic structures echo one another without ever being identical. For Marx and Engels (1848), the clash of classes is reflected in political ideology; Gramsci (1971) demonstrates how the “organic” relationship between civil and political society reproduces ruling-class hegemony; Jameson's concept of “cognitive mapping” uncovers homologies between cultural texts and the spatial logic of late capitalism. Following Jameson's (1990, pp. 45-54; 1991, pp. 186-187) use of homology, structure, and lived experience in cognitive mapping, the term denotes how a pattern at one theoretical level can be matched, point for point, with a formally parallel pattern in another. Recognising this isomorphism allows us to compare their “similar-but-distinct” critiques without collapsing one into the other, and provides the theoretical bridge that structures the remainder of this chapter: it preserves the thinkers' distinct emphases while enabling us to read their critiques of late-capitalist paralysis as operating on the same structural chassis.

1991, pp. 39-44). This bridging move also answers Jameson's (1991) call for "[c]ognitive mapping was in reality nothing but a code word for class consciousness" (pp. 417-418), particularly in the era of late capitalism¹⁷. In this respect, Marcuse and Žižek stand as relatively cognitive mappers of the post-ideological and political era. This is mostly because, just like Bailes articulates, "*cognitive mapping is useful in imagining change, as it provides alternative, systemic narratives and connects apparently disparate social elements*" (Bailes, 2022, p. 114).

These elements often strain the limits of established theoretical vocabularies within Political Science, International Relations (IR) – even though the systemic narratives are quite an obsession within IR – and the broader social sciences. This is particularly true when dealing with phenomena that navigate the complex terrain between structural economic determinations and culturally articulated subjectivities. Such challenges are compounded because research into inquiries like the psychoanalytic space of the political-philosophical dimension has largely been replaced by more positivist approaches. However, there are hybrid variations in such cases. One of them is called *Psychoanalytic Political Theory* (PPT), which has emerged as a distinct and rapidly evolving field within political studies, aiming to enrich and reorient political theory by employing psychoanalytic concepts, theoretical strategies, and analytical methods to map, account for, and interpret sociopolitical phenomena (Stavrakakis, 2021).

I believe that the hybrid terrain of theorization that exists between psychoanalysis, political theory, and philosophy can help build the interpretive application of psychoanalytic critical theory to contemporary protest subjectivity, using narrative-symbolic material to explore the act of refusal and rupture in contemporary cases. So that this represents the culmination of a long process initiated by Freud's invention of psychoanalysis over a century ago; therefore, still relevant,

¹⁷ Following Ernst Mandel's (1971) periodisation (as taken up by Fredric Jameson), I use *late capitalism* to denote the post-monopoly/imperial phase of capitalism that Jameson treats as a global totality with a "postmodern" cultural logic – one that weakens historicity, spatialises social life, and absorbs other cultural codes. In this chapter, the term 'functions' heuristically names the systemic horizon against which cognitive mapping is posed, rather than as a comprehensive economic periodization. A comprehensive reconstruction of Mandel's schema and the debates surrounding it (including its intersections with neoliberalization) would require a separate inquiry; the thesis, therefore, brackets that literature to maintain focus on how this horizon conditions subjectivity and political narration in the Chilean *estallido*.

especially within the analysis of social movements that can “*extend into the challenges of new materialist, biopolitical theories and neoliberal, environmental, post-political, and posthuman realities*” (Stavrakakis, 2021, p. 13).

The phenomenon under scrutiny extends beyond mere physical action to encompass the intersection of physical and intellectual patterns, particularly in arenas that demand radical social change. Given that the primary audience engages with the established vocabulary mentioned above, this chapter adopts a pedagogical approach with the help of the PPT toolkit to “*determine a certain balance between them*” (Stavrakakis, 2021, p. 10). This given position of the approaches assumes no prior familiarity with Marcuse's Frankfurt School critical theory or Žižek's Lacanian-Hegelian psychoanalytic philosophy across these multiple disciplines. In order to define and explain the key ideas from their work that are necessary for the analysis that follows, the main goal here is not to get into complex theoretical arguments *between* these thinkers. While Marcuse and Žižek share roots in Hegelian, Marxist, and Freudian traditions, they diverge historically, methodologically, and politically. Thus, the task is not to suggest convergence through direct engagement, but rather by revealing structural homologies – shared theoretical problematics that emerge within the same lineage of critical theory, albeit in different historical and material conditions.

Building upon this understanding, this chapter is driven by two foundational premises and presuppositions. Firstly, it explicitly identifies a fragmented or underdeveloped theoretical connection between Marcuse and Žižek as a central thesis premise, highlighting the *comparative scarcity*¹⁸ of existing literature and attempts to address this gap. Secondly, and equally crucial, is the premise of extending psychoanalytic insights from *the clinic to politics*¹⁹ (Zupancic, 2008, pp. 1-3), using

¹⁸ The term “comparative scarcity” as it has been used here refers to a relative lack of scholarly literature or developed theoretical connections regarding a specific topic, in this case, between Marcuse and Žižek, as seemingly noted or exemplified by scholars. It's important to understand that “comparative scarcity” isn't typically a formal, standalone concept or theory with its own dedicated body of “seminal references” in the way concepts like “hegemony” or “performativity” might have. Instead, it's a descriptive phrase indicating a gap, paucity, or underdevelopment in existing research.

¹⁹ “From clinic to politic” approach is a hallmark of both traditions, though they draw on different psychoanalytic lineages (Freud and Lacan, respectively). The Frankfurt School's engagement with psychoanalysis was crucial for developing a critical theory of society that could understand the psychological dimensions of domination, ideology, and societal discontent. The Slovenian School, most notably Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupančič, and Mladen Dolar, has reinvigorated the “clinic to politic” move by applying Lacanian psychoanalysis to contemporary ideology, politics, and popular culture.

this framework as a basis for analyzing their shared intellectual community and its broader societal implications. It is precisely this framework that enables a shift from the clinic to the political, examining the subjective and unconscious dimensions of power, ideology, and social antagonism. In this context, informed by these core premises, the goal is to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for a dual reading of the current historical transition.

Following Horkheimer's insight that critical theory evolves with its historical context, I examine how Marcuse's concepts, forged in the post-war era of affluence society and Cold War tensions with the advance of post-industrial “end of ideology” narrative, resonate with and are re-articulated by Žižek's work, which confronts the challenges of post-socialism, neoliberalism, post-politics and the proclaimed “end of history.” This chapter will define the key conceptual tools – *Ideology, Alienation, Desire, Drive, Subjectivity, and Negativity* – as understood through the lenses of Marcuse and Žižek, culminating in the operational definition of the *Act of Great Refusal* used throughout this thesis.

One important point to note before proceeding is that the broader biographical context is set aside, and only the psychoanalytic theoretical potential of the developing relationship between Marcuse and Žižek's political philosophical orientations is examined. The chapter concludes by summarizing how each conceptual toolkit arises from distinct readings of the same ancestors, preparing it for application in the analytical chapter that follows.

2.1. Understanding the Psychoanalytic Space of the Political-Philosophies of Marcuse and Žižek

This section offers Marcuse and Žižek, detailing their intellectual trajectories, the socio-political environments that influenced their theories, and prepares the philosophical context for the fundamental concepts utilized in their examinations of refusal and radical change. Against the prevailing “*economic, deterministic, full-bloodedly scientific*” Marxism of the Second International (Eagleton, 2003, p. 72),

the Frankfurt School²⁰ and subsequent critical theory built upon German idealism, Marxism, and psychoanalytic theory. Another theme about the Frankfurt School is that it has been a source of inspiration for critical political thought of our time – an example of radical philosophy. These foundations help us identify the aptitudes and conditions for social transformation within the framework of reasoning and thinking as a political project that reconfigures the debate raised by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1947 [1972]) in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, regarding the contradictions of modernity, reason, and progress.

Following this remark, Marcuse and Žižek's intellectual trajectories are founded on substantial interactions with the same line mentioned above. Hegel, Marx, and Freud are the three key partners in their works, although they draw on different psychoanalytic traditions (Freud for Marcuse, Lacan for Žižek). While Marcuse's trajectory moved from Heideggerian existentialism to Hegelian Marxism and then to a Freudian synthesis (Kellner, 1984; Feenberg, 2023), always seeking to bridge theory and radical practice, Žižek typically begins with Hegel and Lacan, re-reading Marxism through their critical and speculative insights on oscillating between philosophical, political and psychoanalytical approaches (Dean, 2006; Hamza, 2015). Tracing that triple trajectory clarifies why their key concepts resemble one another structurally but function divergently within the realms of political theory and praxis. In this regard, this thesis situates itself within the limited but generative body of comparative literature due to its “*bridging*” role, one that also draws upon the broader dialectical tradition. Notably, Eagleton, Jameson, and Fisher all employ a “dialectical imagination” (Jay, 1996) most proximate to the Marcusean–Žižekian lineage, Eagleton's (2015) insistence that contradiction is the very structure of political hope, Jameson's (2009; 2013) theorization of the antinomies and contradictions that saturate late capitalism and foreclose totality, and Fisher's (2021) evocation of post-capitalist desire and “remembering” the communal experiences of 1960s with *Acid Communism*

²⁰ Founded a decade before the National Socialists came to power in Germany, the Frankfurt School's psychological studies on authoritarianism and anti-Semitism during Fascist rule placed them on a Marxist and psychoanalytical line in which Fascism was based on libidinal repression as one of the final stages in capitalist domination. While Adorno was the first to utilize the Freudian category to analyze mass culture, the leading psychoanalyst theorists of the school were Erich Fromm, emphasizing “*culture above biology*,” and Marcuse, focusing on “*revolutionary ends*.” See (Jay, 2008).

as speculative negations of capitalist realism all enact a critical method that not only sustains but intensifies the refusal – act continuum elaborated in this section.

It is possible to discern different approaches to Žižek's connection with critical theory. While some scholars place him in the Frankfurt School's critical theory (Sharpe, 2004; Sharpe & Boucher, 2010), others assess his distinctive work regarding post-structuralism, left leaning of Lacanian line and analytic philosophy (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Stavrakakis, 1999), to some it is mostly the intersections with more broad line of philosophic (German Idealism)-psychoanalytic (Lacanian) ontology (Boucher, 2008; Johnston, 2008) and some to do so for post-Marxist paradigm (e.g., Kay, 2003; Butler, 2005). However, if one traces the trajectory, it is possible to claim that critical theory is an umbrella term for a variety of different and even incompatible approaches. Therefore, in most general terms, I would argue that Žižek belongs to the critical theory lineage.

This critical encounter is not without precedent. As Sharpe (2004, pp. 8-13) has pointed out, there exists a compelling historical and theoretical continuity between Žižek's project and that of the first-generation Frankfurt School thinkers, including Marcuse. Against the reductive view that sees critical theory merely as something that "starts with Marx and ends with Baudrillard on the Gulf War," Žižek's oeuvre must be seen as a continuation – and a radical transformation – of the Frankfurt School's logic of negation (Sharpe, 2004, p. 8; Boucher, 2008). In this sense, Žižek's repeated "returns" to Hegel, Freud, Marx and Lenin are not nostalgic but strategic; they are attempts to reinscribe the dialectical and psychoanalytic legacy of Western Marxism through a Lacanian lens (Žižek, 1989; Stavrakakis, 1999). His intervention thus inherits Marcuse's emphasis on totality and negation while recoding it through the topologies of drive, repetition, and the *Real*.

As critical theory ascends to *intellectual intuition*²¹ and approaches Hegel or Marx, the discussion itself also concerns the a priori Marxist elements as it approaches Freud and Lacan. This implies that the a priori precedence found within all traditions

²¹Intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*) is a central concept within German Idealism, particularly in the philosophies of Schelling and Hegel. It refers to the capacity of the mind to grasp the unity of subject and object, or thought and being, in a non-discursive, immediate way—thus standing in contrast to empirical or mediated knowledge. For Hegel, however, this notion is dialectically integrated rather than posited as a mystical faculty. See (Hegel, 1977).

and disciplines is also present in figures such as Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Lacan. Herein, what is suggested in this chapter is that the complementary projections are provided by Marcuse and Žižek.

Before beginning a debate on their relevance for the contradictions proposed by late capitalism and turning to the Hegelian architecture that undergirds both authors, it is useful to flag a decisive fork already latent in the psychoanalytic problematic: whether political negativity presupposes a subject who bears it a priori or whether, conversely, the breach itself engenders the subject retroactively. The next sections will show how this fork re-emerges in Hegel's concept of negativity and is radicalised differently by Marcuse and Žižek.

The *intellectual intuition* and, consequently, the real dialectic of events, stand inevitably and enlighteningly within the theoretical framework. In the introduction to their collection *Subject Matters: Hegel, Lacan, and the Future of Materialism*, Sbriglia and Žižek (2020) attempt to outline a reflectivist ontology to prevent the subject from being under erasure. Their significant posture against the historicity of subject between Cartesian and Newtonian traditions, cultural turn and realist turn, and or subject-oriented ontology and object-oriented ontology according to which “there is only one type of being: objects” (Sbriglia & Žižek, 2020, p. 6) likewise depends on a bypassing of modern philosophy as such, and for similar reasons. This new orientation brings the issue of decentralized subject forward: “subject was already decentered long ago, first, by German Idealism, and then by psychoanalysis” (2020, p. 7). Interplay between them, therefore, is a plaything of one's liberating cognitive thought, or as Sbriglia and Žižek have put it: “the idea” (2020, p. 8). The “two deaths of the subject” metaphor is the subject of the current discussion, from which a contextual understanding arises, and therefore sets the stage for comparison-related concepts and theories, which will be unfolded in the following sections. Avoiding the generalization trap, I believe that Marcuse has already escaped from two deadly traps where the subject has been caught, but only through the radical philosophical combination of Hegelian reason and negation, Marxist sociological doctrine, and Freudian psychoanalysis, directed towards insights into the psychological and socio-economic infrastructure of historical transformation in post-industrial capitalism.

As Freud reminds us, the task of psychoanalytic theory is not always to uncover something new, but to follow a path to its logical consequences:

“We shall see that this is not so, that it is merely a matter of coming to closer quarters with a conclusion to which we long ago committed ourselves and following analytic theory out to its logical consequences.” (Freud, 1930/2002, p. 45)

This statement also offers a guiding inspiration for radical philosophy. The aim is not to propose an entirely new framework, but to explore the psychoanalytic insights already latent in critical theory, particularly in Marcuse and Žižek, and to develop their implications for understanding political subjectivity, rupture, and refusal.

In essence, radical philosophy is the endeavor to develop and implement revolutions, representing the progressive stance of social movements and the underlying disturbances that fuel them. It draws inspiration from the interpretive world order of German idealism, based on Hegel's (1952) concept of reason in history. Therefore, the first point of engagement for the Hegelian position underpinning all the ideas put forth by both Marcuse and Žižek was in reason's motion. For this reason, it is necessary to explore the roots of their thought regarding the handling of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality (unity) to look at the seeds of their critique of contemporary capitalism: Hegelian philosophy.

2.2. Centrality and Fundamental Elements of Hegel's Philosophy

Both Žižek and Marcuse are cited within a list of prominent radical philosophers²² who are identified as being “*Hegelians of one type or another*” (Blunden, 2018, p.8). Blunden observes that this collection of philosophers is extremely diverse and would likely find limited points of agreement among themselves, with their individual readings of Hegel reflecting this diversity. Nevertheless, both Marcuse and Žižek employ Hegelian dialectics (Anderson, 1993; Marcuse, 2023; Žižek, 1991; Žižek, 2012). This shared, albeit diversely interpreted,

²² This list is notable for its diversity, including figures from existentialism, post-structuralism, and various Marxist and anarchist traditions, suggesting that affiliation with Hegelianism does not predetermine specific stances on social or political criticism. It includes figures such as Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, along with various Marxists and anarchists like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin (Blunden, 2018, p. 8).

Hegelian foundation is the crucial common ground that allows for a meaningful synthesis of their ideas, despite their different psychoanalytic allegiances (Freud vs. Lacan) and Marxist concepts such as totality, alienation, subjectivity, negativity, and so on, in order to draw a framework for understanding collective subjectivity and historical movement.

One of the prominent members of German Idealist philosophy, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's system is an encompassing intellectual undertaking, articulated across various domains such as *Logic*, *Philosophy of Nature*, *Philosophy of Mind* (also translated as *Spirit*), *Philosophy of Right*, and *Philosophy of History* (Marcuse, 2023, pp. 23-24, 54). Central to Hegel's system is the concept of "Spirit" (or "Mind," *Geist*), which is not an abstract world-spirit but simultaneously subjective such as individual mental activity and objective –the "constellations" of artefacts, actions, and social practices of a community, including economic, social, political, and artistic activities (Blunden, 2018, pp. 41-42). Spirit is understood as both 'substance' and 'subject', inherently constructing its social environment through physical artefacts and by construing meaning in the social world (Blunden, 2018, pp. 139-140). Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* divides *Spirit* into *Subjective*, *Objective*, and *Absolute Spirit*, each with a definite directionality. The objective realm, particularly as expounded in *The Philosophy of Right*, deals with the ordered world of institutions, usages, and prescriptions, reflecting the "ethical idea" and the necessary connections among persons as expressions of fundamental spiritual freedom (Findlay, 1976, p. 309).

At the core of *Spirit* lies the concept of *Reason*, which Hegel posited as presupposing nothing beyond itself, as the very substance of history, and as the ultimate realization of the state. This Hegelian conception of *Reason* is not merely an abstract metaphysical construct; rather, it retains the material aspirations for a free and rational social order, emphasizing freedom, the subject, mind, and the notion (*Begriff*) as its foundational elements (Marcuse, 2023, p. 5).

A crucial distinction in Hegelian dialectics is that between the Understanding (*Verstand*) and Reason (*Vernunft*). This dialectical reason, which overcomes the abstract and classificatory divisions of the understanding, represents the triumph of unity over division. Understanding operates by fixed, isolated distinctions,

categorizing the world into determinate, finite entities (Findlay, 1976, pp. 60-63). Reason, conversely, dissolves these rigid determinations, recognizing the fluid, dynamic, and contradictory nature of reality, allowing for the comprehension of its inherent movement, therefore “*reveals the other fundamental aspects of Being as such and of everything that is real*” (Kojève, 1980, p. 198). This means that contradiction is not just a mistake in thinking; it is also the basis of *Spirit* and the essence of being.

In Hegel's philosophical framework, the development of *Spirit* culminates in the “Absolute Idea” or “Absolute Knowledge,” representing a total unity in which consciousness recognizes itself within its object, and thought attains harmony with reality. This “end” is not a static cessation but a dynamic process of self-realization, wherein the inherent potentiality of being is actualized through a dialectical progression (Findlay, 1976, p. 252). However, before going further into Hegel's philosophy, it is crucial to establish the interpretive lens of the thesis of the “end”, one that resists the traditional narrative of Hegel as the philosopher of historical closure. As Eric Michael Dale (2014) argues, the popular “end of history” thesis rests on a fundamental misinterpretation that mistakes Hegel’s concept of *culmination* – a moment of profound self-consciousness for Spirit within the present – for a foreclosure of the future. This study adopts this critical posture, reading Hegel not as the prophet of a final end, but as the thinker of an open, contingent, and ongoing dialectical process.

As the case of the *End* (temporality, repetition, accumulation, etc.) has been unfolded, it is necessary to acknowledge the historical and political context in which Hegel’s intellectual thought emerged. The dominant continental narrative situates Hegel firmly within the European revolutionary tradition, responding to the upheavals of the French Revolution and the challenge it posed to reorganize state and society on a rational basis, incorporating ideals of individual freedom and reason.

However, an alternative narrative, put forth by Buck-Morss (2009), suggests that Hegel deliberately elaborated his *master-slave dialectic* within the contemporary context of a successful slave revolt, seeing it as the realization of freedom in world history, thereby rescuing the concept from an exclusively Eurocentric lineage. According to Buck-Morss (2009, p. 59), the revolutionary struggle of enslaved people in Saint-Domingue (1791-1804), culminating in Haiti's independence in 1804,

provided a crucial contemporary context for his development of the master-slave dialectic. This is supported by evidence that Hegel was a regular reader of newspapers and journals, such as *Minerva*, which extensively covered these world-historical events (Buck-Morss, 2009, p. 42). On this reading, the revolt of the enslaved in Saint-Domingue furnished the living instance of an absolute negation in which those consigned to the position of “non-Spirit” proved themselves the bearers of freedom (Buck-Morss, 2009, pp. 54-55). Conceptually, the episode reminds us that recognition is never a purely intra-European affair: the very universality of Reason is forced to show its hand only when confronted by the demand for equality issued from the colonial periphery. This historical philosophical project, then, lasts through historical phases such as “*the Prussian War of Liberation, the Holy Alliance against Napoleon, the battles of Leipzig and Waterloo, and the victorious entry of the Allies into Paris*” (Marcuse, 2023, p. 143).

Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, as a vital component of this system, charts the temporal manifestation of Spirit’s journey through various cultural and political formations (Findlay, 1976, pp. 329-333). Suffice to say that this movement traces a dialectical transition from immediacy, embodied in sensory immediacy or traditional forms of authority, towards increasingly rational and free social arrangements. For Hegel, history is not a chronological sequence of contingent events, but rather a teleological development guided by an immanent rationality whose aim is the realization of universal freedom through the rational state (Findlay, 1976, pp. 329-330). This “world-spirit” develops through history, acting as a check on the hegemony of states.

The “Cunning of Reason” (*List der Vernunft*) is a key concept that facilitates this process. It refers to historical agents (World-Historical individuals, nations, events) who, in trying to achieve their own goals and interests, often end up serving a higher, universal purpose, which can lead to unexpected and even contradictory outcomes (Findlay, 1976, p. 330). So, individuals and nations, in their efforts to improve themselves, become unwitting tools for the *Spirit* to bring rationality and freedom to life in the world. This means that even losses and bad times help the *Idea* win in the end, even if we do not see it that way at first. This Hegelian “reconciliation,” however, is not a naive harmonious fusion, but rather an acceptance of antagonism and alienation

as constitutive elements, reflecting that the “truth” often emerges through the self-destruction of immediate forms and the “negation of the negation” (Žižek, 2012, p. 321; Marcuse, 2023, pp. 22-23).

*Rupture within continuity*²³ is a shorthand for the dialectical insight – originating in Hegel as his *absolute knowledge*, which undermines the concept of totality – that every genuine break with an existing order simultaneously preserves (and re-codes) elements of what it negates. In both trajectories we witness what Louis Althusser (2005, pp. 13-14) once called an well-known “epistemological break” (or rupture) but only within continuity, the decisive breaks by which Thales inaugurated mathematical rationality (Platonic philosophy), Galileo founded modern physics (Cartesian philosophy), and Marx cut himself off from classical political economy (Marxist philosophy or dialectical materialism) – a Hegelian insight that genuine transformation negates by preserving. Therefore, Althusser’s thesis of “epistemological break” (*La coupure épistémologique*) in Marx’s development is explicitly framed as a break that nevertheless preserves elements of what it negates, thereby offering a programmatic reflection on continuity-in-rupture that has become seminal for later dialectical debates.

For Hegel, the history of thought is a history of changing conceptual structures. Blunden (2018, p. 6) explains that every concept eventually falls into contradiction with itself and “*gives way to a new concept which arises from the ruins of that contradiction,*” which eventually ends up what he calls “*practical critique.*” This indicates a break from the old form, a rupture, even as the new form is born from the old. Similarly, social movements go through crises that may lead to transformation or collapse, signifying a rupture from their previous state (Blunden, 2018, p. 48). Therefore, *rupture within continuity* or *continuity in rupture* is the most accurate metaphor and form for praxis (standing as the *Act* and *Great Refusal* for Žižek and

²³ Across modern philosophy, historiography, and critical theory, the phrase “rupture within continuity” designates a dialectical moment in which a break (negation) simultaneously preserves decisive elements of what it negates. The formula appears explicitly in Louis Althusser’s account of Marx’s epistemological break, Michel Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge, and Walter Benjamin’s “weak Messianic power.” It is also known in International Relations as a *paradigm shift* – a fundamental change in ideas and practices within a scientific discipline – following Thomas Kuhn’s (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. For the historicity of thought and discussions on the subject of “rupture within continuity” and as a dialectical, political, and cultural motif, see (Althusser, 2005; Foucault, 2002; Benjamin, 1969).

Marcuse, respectively), which can also be read as an epistemological understanding of the repetition and circulation of historical developments regarding any given reality concept, event, or (act)ivity.

What seems as rupture within continuity in the first place can be paralleled with the fundamental concept in Hegel's philosophy: *Aufhebung* or *Aufheben* (can be translated as overcoming, preservation or sublation) means that overcoming is also their perpetual preservation, that is to say, *preserving* what was necessary in the former relation while *terminating* that which is no longer tenable (Findlay, 1976, p. 67; Blunden, 2018, p. 132). Blunden explicitly discusses it as the basic organizing principle of the Logic.

As Hegel gave the formula of his *Idea*, and in this sense, totality of reason explicitly from the individual's perspective to the external, including the problems of totality, subjectivity, negativity, and alienation:

"Single products of my particular physical and mental skill and of my power to act I can alienate to someone else and I can give him the use of my abilities for a restricted period, because, on the strength of this restriction, my abilities acquire an external relation to the totality and universality of my being. By alienating the whole of my time, as crystallized in my work, and everything I produced, I would be making into another's property the substance of my being, my universal activity and actuality, my personality." (Hegel, 1952, p. 29)

An essential element of Hegel's thought, particularly pertinent for critical theory, is the assertion that *"everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject"* (Hegel, 1977, p. 10). And for Hegel, objectification is dialectical: the subject also transforms itself through externalization. The process of objectification, central to Hegel and Marx, also informs this psychoanalytic space.²⁴ This is where *Aufhebung* connects to the process of objectification, particularly in the development of subjectivity, and is first linked to the Marxist understanding of value, and then to psychoanalytic theory (as mentioned

²⁴ This "psychoanalytic space" is basically a setup where psychoanalytic ideas—Freudian for Marcuse, Lacanian for Žižek—aren't just tacked onto political philosophy. Instead, they truly dig in and become the core of the critique. In this space I use psychoanalytic insights about things like the unconscious, repression, desire, drive, fantasy, and the symbolic order. This helps us reveal the often-hidden psychological forces behind political matters, including power, ideology, subjectivity, and what helps or hinders liberation. This goes beyond just talking about "psychoanalysis and politics." It's more about "psychoanalysis *in* politics," highlighting how psychic dynamics actually construct and maintain the political world.

above, following alienation, subjectivity, and negativity). In this process, “the subject enters into a relation with all the other concepts (the object) in the formation in the course of which both subject and object are changed” (Blunden, 2018, p. 132).

This is akin to Marx's process of concentration and reproduction of the concrete through thought, where abstract determinations lead to the reproduction of the concrete. As for Marx's understanding, under capitalism, the inherently human process of objectification turns into a negative experience of alienation as workers are systematically separated from the product they create, the process of their labor (the production process), their own creative essence or “species-being” (i.e., his human essence), and from each other, transforming their life's work into an external and hostile power that controls them (Marx, 1974, p. 68). The “subject” is thus constituted by, and struggles within, these dynamics of objectification and alienation. Blunden further notes that Marx appropriated this idea, albeit with a materialist inversion of it. For Marx, as Blunden (2018) notes, “*the realization of an idea is a matter of struggle*” (p. 27), implying a constant process of negating existing conditions while preserving and transforming elements to create a new social order.

Therefore, the theoretical apparatus this dissertation constructs, drawing on Marcuse and Žižek, is grounded in the tradition of Hegelian thought, with its emphasis on the primacy of the subject and its motivations as the engine of historical change. Marcuse and Žižek, in their broader methodological leanings, are closer to a Hegelian understanding of continuity through rupture, analyzing how even radical breaks are responses to, and transformations of, existing conditions and historical legacies. Here, a recurring theme is the inherent negativity and contradiction within societal structures and subjective experience, which they perceive not as flaws but as fundamental drivers of reality and potential for change. Yet the dialectic of negativity leaves unanswered whether the ‘agent of reversal’ precedes the act or is its retroactive effect – that is, whether the subject exists before the act or emerges through it – an inquiry that will persist throughout the following sections.

2.3. Hegel in Marcuse and Žižek

The Frankfurt School, and Marcuse in particular, found in Hegel's dialectic an insightful tool for social critique. Marcuse's (2023 [1941]) intellectual journey is deeply rooted in Hegelian Marxism, as evident in his seminal work, *Reason and Revolution*, which demonstrates his long-standing commitment to dialectical thought. According to Anderson (1993, p. 244), this book holds the important distinction of being the first Hegelian-Marxist text to appear in English (Anglo-Saxon continent)²⁵, introducing the dialectical methods of Hegel and Marx. For Kellner et al. (2011), this book also stands for “*to introduce to a U.S. audience an alternative form of social analysis that did not rely on the fetishization of method and empirical observation of facts for rendering truth claims about reality*” (p. 89).

Marcuse composed *Reason and Revolution* amidst the rise of fascism, observing that prevailing positivist social sciences were ill-suited to engage with the rise of Fascism across Europe. His engagement with Hegel aims to portray the philosopher as a foundation for a critical and dialectical theory of society, defending Hegel in the Anglo-American world against accusations of being that he was a philosophical precursor to German fascism and authoritarian statism (Findlay, 1976, p. 26; Bortanek, 2018, p. 96), which stressed society's “*fallenness*” (a Heideggerian term) and the radical need for overcoming it to achieve freedom and reason (Castro, 2016, p. 85). In this context, Marcuse asserts that “Hegel the rationalist and progressive” stood in stark contrast to the irrationalism of Nazism. This is because Hegel's mature political philosophy, particularly *Philosophy of Right*, is a “*betrayal of his highest philosophical ideas.*” In this later phase, Hegel seemingly glorified the Prussian constitutional monarchy²⁶ and endorsed private property, despite his earlier critical

²⁵ In addition to Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, the Hegelian legacy in the modern (post-war) Anglo-Saxon and continental philosophy world was also shaped by influential interpreters such as J. N. Findlay and Alexandre Kojève. Findlay's 1958 *Hegel: A Re-examination* (plus his late 1960s Gifford Lectures, republished as *The Transcendence of the Cave*) reintroduced systematic Hegelian idealism and even rational mysticism into analytic philosophy, challenging the prevailing anti-idealism of figures like Moore, Russell, and early Wittgenstein. Meanwhile, Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (delivered in Paris from 1933 to 1939, published in 1947) had a profound impact on French existentialism and structuralism, shaping the work of Sartre, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, and others.

²⁶ The Prussian monarchy, restored and consolidated after the Congress of Vienna (1815), represented to Hegel the institutional realization of rational freedom. In foreign affairs, Hegel, like Hobbes, viewed sovereign states as existing in a permanent “state of nature,” beyond binding international law. Both thinkers upheld the primacy of sovereignty and force in an anarchic international system, rejecting supranational constraints as threats to state autonomy.

insights into societal fallenness (Marcuse, 2023, p. 146). However, Marcuse distinguishes Hegel's statism from fascist ideology, arguing that Hegel championed the individual as a bearer of reason and freedom, whereas fascism sought to annihilate the individual. Carl Schmitt's declaration that “*Hegel, so to speak, died*” (as cited in Marcuse, 2023, p. 352) on Hitler's ascent to power serves as evidence of this fundamental incompatibility for Marcuse. Marcuse's enduring Hegelian vision posits that each historical stage invariably obstructs the realization of a better future. This perspective offered a validation for dissent, transforming individual protests into actions that belonged to “*History with a capital H*” (Feenberg, 2023, p. 2).

Marcuse's extended discussion of Hegel underscores the philosopher's insistence that the sovereign state is the sole guarantor of unity and order – its authority vital even in foreign affairs, reinforcing its immunity from higher law. Writing in *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel likened international relations among sovereign states to a condition of nature – a ‘law of the jungle’ where no international contract binds sovereign actors, echoing Hobbes's description of interstate anarchy in *Leviathan*. Both thinkers converge on the necessity of a strong sovereign to prevent chaos: Hobbes in domestic society, Hegel both within and among states, privileging authority over abstract moral law. While Hegel's standpoint develops through the Romantics and German Idealists in the early 19th century, Hobbes's earlier 17th-century materialist social contract provides the foundational template for anarchy and sovereignty. Hegel imbues that model with dialectical and ethical rationality, while Marcuse highlights its appropriation within bourgeois-state structures (Marcuse, 2023, pp. 146-168).

As Martin Jay (1996, p. 60) has noted, of all the Frankfurt School thinkers, Marcuse was perhaps the most drawn to the classical notion of *Reason*, retaining its emancipatory thrust against the prevailing trends of positivism and instrumental rationality within both philosophy and social theory. For Marcuse, this notion critically exposes the contradictions between “what is” and “what ought to be,” pointing towards alternatives (Lamas et. al., 2017, p. 137). Furthermore, Marcuse (2023) underscores Hegel's fundamental insight that “*all things are contradictory in themselves*,” and that this “*contradiction is the root of all movement and life*” (p. 124). One of the central objectives of Marcuse's is to demonstrate the breadth and depth of

the negativity inherent in Hegel's thought and to preserve and defend *negativity* – the inherent power of thought and action to reject and transform any given *positive* reality (Anderson, 1993, p. 247; Bourtek, 2018, p. 100). This is because Marcuse's entire project inherits Hegel's radical opposition to any fragmentary interpretation of reality, instead championing a dialectical method that necessarily involves the concept of totality and recognizes that every particular reality can only be understood in its opposition to, and as a moment of, the whole. Returning to Hegel's related reading of understanding and reason, Marcuse will later argue that Hegel betrays this very insight by arresting the dialectic in a final and absolute synthesis, forcing critical thought to push beyond the Hegelian system itself (Marcuse, 2023, p. 49).

At the core of Marcuse's philosophy is called *negative thinking*. He redefines Critical Theory's tribunal on Hegel's concept of reason and most efficiently from Adorno's (1972) *negative thinking* or "*determinate negation*," which describes how "*the irrationality of the current society*" and its societal contradictions can serve as catalysts for transformative change toward a negative possibility of a truly rational alternative (Jay, p. 61; Marcuse, 2023, p. 260). Marcuse's emphasis on "negativity" was profoundly influenced by Marx's "*Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic*" in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, a text Marcuse read immediately after its German publication in 1932, confirming Marcuse's view of a shared humanistic and radical ontological orientation (Castro, 2016, p. 244; Kellner, 1984, pp. 77-78). The publication of Marx's book was a pivotal event, with Marcuse publishing one of the first comprehensive interpretations of it. He is credited these manuscripts of Marx with "*liberating*" him from Heidegger – although it is claimed that "*a phenomenological shadow*" (Feenberg, 2023, pp. 27-32) follows him – and turning him closer to Marx, as they disclosed the "*original meaning of Marx's fundamental categories*" derived from Hegel, such as labour, objectification, sensuousness and alienation (Jay, 1996, p. 75; Kellner & Pierce, 2014, p. 24; Feenberg, 2023, pp. 42-46). In his reading of Marcuse, Jay (1973, p. 75) argues that Marcuse diverges from many of his Frankfurt School colleagues by affirming Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and the concept of species-being (or, for German origin, *Gattungswesen*), which Horkheimer and Adorno rarely cited. For Marcuse, alienated labor under capitalism was not merely an economic condition but a catastrophic estrangement of human essence, one that foreclosed the possibility of cooperative, emancipated social activity.

Unalienated labor, in contrast, implied not only reconciliation with one's own productive capacities but also the actualization of the subject's species-being through collective praxis. The dehumanizing structure of capitalism, by blocking this potentiality, demanded not incremental reform but a "*total revolution*" of social relations – a categorical negation that anticipates his formulation of the *Great Refusal*.

Deriving from the Frankfurt School's most definitive motive, the power of the negative for Marcuse, from reason to negation is consistently an active choice –an exercise of critical consciousness– rather than a passive occurrence of historical inevitability (Anderson, 1993, p. 251). While the Hegelian dialectic, as interpreted by Marcuse, also posits that "[t]he [t]rue is the whole" (Hegel, 1977, p. 11), it understands this whole as a "negative totality" (Marcuse, 2023, p. 261). This is a historical and social totality, rooted in the antagonisms and class relations of society (Marcuse, 2023, p. 262). In this sense, Marcuse critiques Hegel for his identification of reality with reason and for closing off the totality in a final and absolute synthesis. Marcuse argues that Hegel's "unity-result" betrays dialectical reason. Marcuse posits the need for a new concept of totality and synthesis that is dynamic, temporal/historical, differentiated, and concrete, forming the basis for his critical social theory. Because he highlights Hegel's dialectical logic for its capacity to link "*the form of thought with its content*," asserting that the "*absolute idea*" inherently possesses the "*dynamic which drives it into its opposite, and, through the negation of this opposite, to its return upon itself*" (Marcuse, 2023, pp. 138-139). The concept of "negation of the negation" is crucial, signifying a transformation that is not merely a return to the original, but a qualitative leap. The "*negation of negation*" is not a simple linear progression but a complex process where a "failure" retroactively transforms into a "success," or a "deadlock" reveals itself as its own "positive form" (Žižek, 2006, p. 9; Žižek, 2012, p. 285). This process is described as a "*magical turn*," an "*unpredictable reversal of chaos into Order*," particularly evident in the analysis of past events, such as revolutions (Žižek, 2012, p. 285). Even though the direct synthesis with Heideggerian phenomenology was later superseded, the underlying commitment to concrete analysis, the unity of theory and practice, and the power of dialectical negation remained central to Marcuse's evolving critical theory, profoundly shaping his later engagements with Marx, Freud, and the societal challenges of the 20th century.

Indeed, Jameson posits that Marcuse's enduring significance lies in his rigorous commitment to retrieving the “negative” – a principle extinguished in an abundant consumer society – and in valorising memory (or, for Attic Greek origin, *anamnesis*) as the Utopian impulse for concrete social liberation, thereby challenging the pervasive manipulation of post-industrial life (1974, pp. 111-112). This approach critically reasserts the subject's capacity for genuine human existence, which, for Marcuse, can only be achieved through such processes of negation. Such that, Marcuse declares:

“Man’s social practice embodies the negativity as well as its overcoming. The negativity of capitalist society lies in its alienation of labor; the negation of this negativity will come with the abolition of alienated labor.” (2023, p. 238)

Žižek, in turn, posits Hegel as one of “three [...] key philosophers in the history of Western metaphysics,” alongside Plato and Descartes, each marking a “clear break with the past” (2014, p. 77). Following this same line, his philosophy is primarily grounded in the history of German idealism at a prominent level. Žižek's work is characterized by a “heterodox” and “unconventional” appropriation of Hegel, often attempting a “(re)assertion of dialectical materialism” to Hegel or to “repeat Hegel” (2012, pp. 18, 393-394). In this way, his primary aim is to articulate a new reading of Hegel that transcends traditional assumptions about his idealist pan-logicism or the abolition of differences in ultimate rational mediation. In this regard, McGowan (2013, p. 32) also recognises that once the Marcusean attempt to “*politicized*” Hegel, it now appears “*in a new way*” with Žižek.

Žižek provocatively argues that Hegel is, in fact, a materialist thinker of history, even predating Marx's celebrated materialist reversal. Žižek contends that Hegel's philosophy, when read authentically, already contains these radical elements of negativity, contingency, and an unfinished, self-contradictory totality, as seen in his seminal book, *Less Than Nothing* (2012). He posits a concept of Hegel's elemental materialism, which he traces to the *Science of Logic* – *an anti-atomist dialectic of elements that dissolve* into relational material processes. In this schema, Žižek claims that Marx, in *Capital*, demonstrates a Hegelian self-generating *concrete universality* – where commodity, money, and capital unfold via Hegelian dialectical logic (Žižek, 2012, p. 857). Žižek (2022, p. 32) tackles the paradox that “the mystical formulae of

Hegelian 'logic' find their rational scientific application in Marx's critique of capitalism, indicating thus that Hegel's logic is, in fact, the logic of capital itself.

An important principle of Žižek's Hegelianism, similar to Marcuse's, is the emphasis on "negativity" as the "*perpetual motor of thought and life*," which he views as driving the crucial aspects of Marx and Lacan's work. Žižek explicitly insists that "negativity" drives what is most important in Marx and Lacan, and critiques those who reduce Hegelian dialectics to synthesis or developmental narratives (Parker, 2013, pp. 22-23). Hegel, for Žižek, is the "*thinker of contradiction*," asserting that contradiction exists not merely in thought but inherently "in being itself" and absolute knowing is not a final resolution but a profound recognition of closure that renders antagonism inescapable (Finkelde & McGowan, 2023, p. 8). This interpretation hinges on the idea that the absolute is not a resolution of antagonism, but a recognition of its constitutive nature. As McGowan summarizes: "*the absolute [...] doesn't succumb to contradiction because it adopts contradiction as its defining principle*" (2013, p. 33), with Žižek affirming that the scission itself is already reconciliation. Absolute knowledge, then, does not signal escape, but rather the confrontation with the impossibility of total identity or closure.

Žižek consistently elevates Hegel's famous dictum: "*not only as Substance, but equally as Subject*" (Hegel, 1977, p. 10). For him, the term "subject" in this formulation signifies a "*crack in the edifice of Being*" (Žižek, 1991, p. 44). He leverages this Hegelian concept to bridge philosophy with psychoanalysis, particularly Lacan, aiming to bring psychoanalysis from the clinic to the streets (politics) by recognizing a *Weltgeist* already engaged in its own analysis.

Žižek embraces Hegel's assertion that "*philosophy always comes too late*" to prescribe societal arrangements, interpreting this as evidence of Hegel's inherent materialism, where "*material history drives theoretical speculation, not vice versa*" (Finkelde & McGowan, 2023, p. 24). According to Žižek, the Hegelian dialectic is characterized by the "*coincidence of opposites*," where extremes immediately pass into each other, revealing "unreason (contradiction, the mad dance of opposites which unsettles any rational order) in the heart of reason" (Žižek, 2012, p. 484). This is where the contradiction is not merely a flaw in our thought, but is inherent in being itself, animating it, and making thought possible. He frequently explores the implications of

Hegel's philosophy for understanding the “*Event*” (and its complement, the *Act* –will be expended in the following sections) as an “*night of the world*” of the Absolute, an abyss must be understood as “*nothing but [...] the space of being*” (Žižek, 2012, pp. 821-822).

This dynamic involves a sophisticated understanding of how necessity and contingency interrelate. Žižek posits that necessity is not an eternal, pre-existing force but is itself the result of a contingent process (2012, p. 467). He inverts the traditional notion that contingency is encompassed by necessity, arguing that “the very elevation of a necessity into the structuring principle of the contingent field of multiplicity is a contingent act” (2012, p. 638). The “*truth*” of this interplay, particularly in socio-political events, is understood retroactively (or for German origin, *Nachträglichkeit*), where the “*contingency which gave the ‘spin’ to his life is ‘repressed’; that is, the hero constructs his life story as a narrative leading to its final result [...] with a deep necessity*” (2012, p. 569). The subject's very spontaneity emerges as a “*disturbing cut into substantial reality,*” an “*ungrounded subjective decision*” that imposes a new Necessity, “*a highest gesture of contingency*” through a thoroughly contingent act (2012, p. 106).

In these contingent situations, Žižek consistently invokes the concept of “parallax” as a fundamental feature of Hegelian-Lacanian thought, signaling non-identity or non-all (“*spirit is bone*”), negativity, and ontological incompleteness (2006, pp. 17-18). It denotes an “*insurmountable parallax gap,*” a “*confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible,*” where “*the truth of the Hegelian dialectic itself*” (Harman, 2021, p. 32). This means that the reason is encountered “*only in [or] through the ‘contradictions’ [...] of our notions of the real,*” with the contradiction being the Real itself (Žižek, 2016b, pp. 101-102).

After all, Žižek, though offering a “*heterodox Hegel,*” delineates a Hegelian view of historical temporalities that foreshadows radical breaks by “*a circular structure in which the eventual effect retroactively determines its causes or reasons*” (Žižek, 2014, p. 2). In this regard, both Žižek and Marcuse see history as advancing through decisive ruptures that nonetheless “remember” or preserve inherited forms at

a higher level under the fundamental causality effect within “concrete universality” in Hegel’s philosophy.

2.4. Opening the Way of Psychoanalysis for Conceptual Foundations: Freud and Lacan

The preceding analysis of the Hegelian-Marxist core shared by both Marcuse and Žižek provides the critical tools for a critique of objective social reality. Yet, this framework alone cannot fully account for the subjective dimension of either domination or refusal. It uncovers the logic of the system but leaves unanswered the crucial question that haunted the Frankfurt School and continues to animate Žižek’s work: why do subjects so often appear to invest libidinally in their own unfreedom, and what is the psychic source of an authentic act of refusal? To address this question, both thinkers turn to psychoanalysis, which provides the indispensable concepts for theorizing the interplay of desire, repression, enjoyment, and fantasy within the political field. It is precisely this framework that enables a shift from the clinic to the political, examining the subjective and unconscious dimensions of power, ideology, and social antagonism.

The Frankfurt School’s early engagement with psychoanalysis, specifically the libidinal structures underlying political submission, such as anti-Semitism and aggression projection, as captured by the F-scale analysis of the “authoritarian personality” (Adorno et al., 1950), aimed to understand the libidinal structures underpinning political submission and societal pathologies. While this early psychoanalytic turn faced critiques, particularly regarding the biologicistic tendencies of figures like Wilhelm Reich or Erich Fromm’s departure from Freudian metapsychology, Marcuse’s critical dialectic, inherited from Hegel, finds its necessary complement in a deep engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis (Jay, 1996, pp. 107-112). In *Eros and Civilization* (1955, [1966]), Marcuse offers a sophisticated and nuanced synthesis of Freud and Marx to theorize the possibility of liberation. Positioned within the Critical Theory tradition, his work is often regarded as a “*post-dialectic of Enlightenment*” – a distinct response within the broader continuum of interpretations and reactions to the Dialectic of Enlightenment by Horkheimer and Adorno (Whitebook, 1996, p. 3).

Psychoanalytic theory surges the unconscious and offers insights into observable behaviors underlying systemic influences and the often-hidden motivations and desires that drive individual and collective action. From a macro-social science perspective to the meso and micro levels of political-psychological analysis, the “desire to change” in emancipatory events has been analyzed by many (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Glynnos & Stavrakakis, 2008; Bloom, 2016; Stavrakakis, 2021; Ronderos, 2021; Sanchez, 2024). This literature, known as a “*Left*” reading influenced by Lacan, primarily deals with capitalism’s revolutionary capacity to reproduce itself and, consequently, its ability to neutralize struggles, resulting in a so-called “*post-political consensus*.” This consensus “*attempts to de-politicise the democratic process*” in an era of cynical apathy and pessimism (Stavrakakis, 2003, p. 118; Stavrakakis, 2016, p. 2). From influencing both the conscious and unconscious aspects, through the Symbolic, individuals refer to the realm of language, laws, and social structures that shape human experience. They are integrated into society, the system, the nation, the family, or the “order” we understand as external and internal worlds. After all, they seek the “*renewal of the subject*” in non-subjective political acts.

Distinctly, the Frankfurt School’s psychoanalytic line emphasizes less the Symbolic structuring and more the repression of fundamental human drives and the potential for liberation through the development of a qualitatively different “*new sensibility*,” envisioning a more radical break with existing subjectivity forged in opposition to capitalist administration and its repressive apparatus (Marcuse, 1955; 1964; 1969). However, Marcuse further develops this line as outlining “*the uncontrolled Eros is just as fatal as his deadly counterpart, the death instinct*” (Marcuse, 1955, p. 11).

Bearing in mind that radical philosophical inquiry is a prerequisite for psychoanalytic space, Marcuse’s main post-war work addresses the “crisis of Marxism”²⁷ in an “*era of expansion described by phrases like the 'affluent society'*”

²⁷ The “crisis of Marxism” emerged after WWII as revolutionary prospects collapsed: the Soviet model bureaucratized rather than emancipated, the working class was absorbed into welfare-capitalist structures, and Western leftist movements faltered – struggling with ideological stagnation and political setbacks (Kellner, 1981; Therborn, 2008, pp. 23-26). Such disappointments – manifest in the failure of labor parties to enact radical change, the absorption of socialist demands into the liberal center, and the

(*Galbraith*), the 'end of ideology' (Bell), 'the great American celebration' (Mills), and 'the consumer society' (Kellner, 1984, p. 156) which also meant "the end of utopian-revolutionary projects" (Kellner et al., 2011, p. 49). This period, as Jameson (1972) observes, is characterized by a paradoxical development: the technological capacity to "eliminat[e] poverty and hunger definitively" coexists with the "technical possibility of unparalleled control and total organization" (pp. 126-127). In the political and social realm, although the affluent society was promoting welfare in most of the world, it was "in the depths of radical despair during an era dominated by McCarthyism and Stalinism" and "the absence of any big revolutionary upsurge after 1920" (Anderson, 1989, pp. 42-43; Kellner, 2020, p. 83). As Žižek (2014, p. 83) further points out in this aspect, the 20th century was a time of both great progress in freedom and welfare, as well as terrible violence and oppression, as evidenced in events like the Holocaust and the Gulag, capturing the dialectical tension at the heart of this historical moment. In the mid-20th century, the absence of revolution, the bureaucratisation of Soviet experiences, and the apparent integration of the working class into capitalism necessitated a return "to the crises of revolutionary possibility in the depths of the cold war period" (Kellner, 1984, p. 155) by restoring Marx's dialectic and focusing on subjective factors for social change was inevitable (Lamas et. al., 2017, p. 8). And these events were efficient enough for Marcuse; his return to Freud was mainly a repetition of history.

In this aspect, when "pessimistic cultural philosophies were widespread in intellectual circles" (Kellner et al., 2011, p. 49), Marcuse argues that while capitalism had historically resolved economic crises, it did so through *technological rationality* that produced "compliant consumers" (Hines, 2023, p. 253). Therein, as detailed below, he analyzes how capitalism, through its *performance principle* (Marcuse, 1966), fosters consumerism, which then becomes a form of social control in the *post-industrial* global capitalism, in which "existing capitalism is reaching the level of its

defeat of uprisings like '68 movements – highlighted the need to reassess both Marx's dialectical method and the role of consciousness in revolutionary theory (Soly, 2020; Kellner, 1981). The mid-century "crisis of Marxism" was marked by multiple setbacks: Stalin's bureaucratic centralization and purges; the violent suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which shattered illusions of socialist emancipation; leftist failures in 1968 and beyond; and the absorption of labor into Western Keynesian welfare capitalism. Analysts like Immanuel Wallerstein later noted these crises as evidence of Marxism's degeneration into state-centric and reformist variants, requiring a renewed critical-dialectical approach.

notion” (Žižek, 2001, p. 90). Furthermore, he critiques the *diseconomics* of capitalism, bearing in mind that the *performance principle* corresponds, in Marxist terms, to extracting surplus-value from labor, highlighting its waste, inequality, and undemocratic monopolization of power through production for profit rather than use value (Marx, 1990).

Marcuse's evolving analysis thus tracks how societal mechanisms, whether through overt repression or subtle integration, suppress or co-opt the potential for social transformation. His search for a non-repressive “liberated” civilization (less alienating work, more play) is conceivable if not for capitalist requirements. He essentially uses psychoanalysis to strengthen the argument that what we think is “human nature” (aggression, hierarchy) might actually be a result of a specific society’s structure – changing the structure changes what is natural. This cross-pollination generates the basis of the *Great Refusal* (will be the main case of the next section), unfolding concepts like the *new sensibility*, *false/true needs*, *repressive tolerance*, and *repressive desublimation*, which one would not have without blending Freud’s insight about the sublimation of instincts with Marx’s insight about economic performance. Cremin highlights Marcuse as “*the first to develop a detailed theoretical synthesis of Marx and Freud*” (2015, p. 5). This synthesis envisions using productive forces to liberate the world from want and necessity by desublimation or externalisation from the psyche of the repressive apparatus of the *reality principle*.

However, before that, it is helpful to take a glance at Sigmund Freud’s fundamental concepts, particularly those based on the foundation of civilization in instinctual suppression, to understand his metapsychology mentioned earlier, along with the defining concepts of Marcuse’s works. His project of *Eros and Civilization*, where he re-reads Freud to imagine the possibility of a non-repressive civilization, can only be properly understood against the backdrop of the theses set out in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930 [2002]).

In this work, Freud outlines an archaeology of civilization where a cryptic eternal connection between the drive (*Trieb*) for life (*Eros*) and the drive for death (*Thanatos*) is central (Freud, 2002, pp. 55-56) and Marcuse’s Freudian synthesis centers on the struggle between *Eros* and *Thanatos* (Greek words for love and death, respectively). In this way, Marcuse first discovers the contradiction in Freud's theory

of civilization and the drive. This covers “*the inner connection between civilization and barbarism, progress and suffering, freedom and unhappiness*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 17). However, Marcuse’s main thesis is that the conflict between them is historical, not biological. Therefore, a key innovation of the Frankfurt School, particularly in Marcuse’s work, was the historicization of Freudian categories. The psychic structures Freud described were not seen as eternal but as products of a specific bourgeois, patriarchal society. As Jameson (1972) summarizes this insight, the fundamental development that forces a rethinking of Freud is the “*collapse of the family, the disappearance of the authoritarian father*” (p. 128), which means that systemic domination over the individual and the sufferings associated with it have changed through this paternal figure. On this account, he remains to correct the Freudian conceptions.

According to Freud, civilization demands a symmetry between the process of civilizational complexification and the psychic development of the subject (Freud, 2002, p. 58) –leading to the conclusion that civilizational development is necessarily connected with drive neurosis-inducing repression (*Verdrängung*) and the increase of dissatisfaction in the subject and the very structure of being (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 107-109). This dualism implies a perpetual conflict between these forces, with the potential for Eros to dominate under altered human behaviour and global power relations (Castro, 2016, p. 265).

The *performance principle* is conceptualized as the organism’s inherent drive for unlimited unfolding of the life instinct, aiming for immediate, intensive, and perpetual pleasure, the release of tension, and the avoidance of pain (Marcuse, 1970, p. 33). This is where Marcuse most extensively develops his reflections on *Eros*, focusing on pleasure, love, and creativity. *Eros* – toward new desire, imagination, and fantasy – distinguished from mere sexuality, is a broad libidinal energy that affects the organism as a whole, striving for intensification, gratification, and the unification of life. Its natural expression is “*polymorphous-perverse*,” seeking pleasure beyond singular functions, and intrinsically drives towards peace and calm, representing an “unconscious flight from pain and want” (Marcuse, 1970, pp. 11-19; Doody, 2023, pp. 98-99).

On the contrary, the *reality principle* signifies the totality of modifications imposed upon these instincts, dictating that the ego mediates the primal desires of the id with the constraints of the external world, often entailing the postponement or modification of pleasure for the sake of societal functioning. It represents “reason” as reality itself, functioning as the principle of productive renunciation. Marcuse begins *Eros and Civilization* with what Freud posited that “*civilization is based on the permanent subjugation of the human instincts*”, framing repression as both “*inevitable and irreversible*” for cultural existence (Marcuse, 1966, p. 3). In the preface to the first edition of *Eros and Civilization*, he asserts that “*psychological categories have become political categories*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. xxvii). Because “*the uncontrolled Eros is just as fatal as his deadly counterpart, the death instinct,*” and “*integral satisfaction of needs*” must be renounced (Marcuse, 1966, p. 11). Therefore, according to the latter, civilization demands not only the repression of sexuality but also a systematic renunciation of integral needs – primarily governed by the *Pleasure Principle* – to meet the requirements of labor, collective security, and social order. For civilization to emerge and sustain itself, the *performance principle* must be replaced by a historical manifestation of Freud's *reality principle*, which regulates social life according to competitive economic performance. However, domination, not civilization itself, requires repressive transformation (Marcuse, 1966, p. 36). As Freud wrote:

“*The work of civilization [...] setting them increasingly difficult tasks and obliging them to sublimate their drives [...] Whatever energy he expends on cultural aims is largely denied to the opposite sex.*” (Freud, 2002, p. 39)

This renunciation necessarily transforms natural drives into “unpleasurable work”– labor that is neither self-evidently gratifying nor intrinsically meaningful, yet indispensable for meeting the material and institutional needs of society. Freud emphasizes:

“*Sublimation of the instincts [...] is greatest when a man knows how to heighten sufficiently his capacity for obtaining pleasure from mental and intellectual work.*” (Freud, 2002, p. 14)

Marcuse interprets these drives as fundamental aspects of reality, not merely psychological dispositions, especially within the context of historicity. Because “[t]he return of the repressed makes up the tabooed and subterranean history of civilization”

(Marcuse, 1966, p. 16). According to him, the performance principle is “*the prevailing historical form of the reality principle*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 35) in post-industrial civilization. This transformation enables the human exercise of reason, work, and productivity; hence, under this principle, repression is primarily linked to the requirements of work and the procurement or augmentation of life's necessities. The human ego, the “*great reality tester*,” develops from the *id* to prevent self-destruction from unchecked desire, displacing the *performance principle* in favor of internalizing the *reality principle* and adapting to its demands. Furthermore, as contemporary critical theory emphasizes, the reality principle itself is often ideologically mediated, presenting as empirical, biological, or economic necessity, thereby concealing its constructed nature and inhibiting the imagination of alternatives (Fisher, 2009, pp. 17-18). In the postulates that Freud observed, repression and destructiveness are not inevitable but correspond to “*specific historical organization[s] of human existence*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 38) that can be transcended through a shattering world anti-capitalist revolution.

Marcuse further highlights the distinguishing line (or the Lack) between Freud's *Pleasure Principle* and *Reality Principle*, specifically the historically specific layer of repression that exceeds basic social coordination, introducing the concept of *surplus-repression*: “*the restrictions necessitated by social domination*” (1966, p. 35). He argues that under the reign of the performance principle and surplus repression, *Eros* is severely curtailed and desexualized, while aggressive energies are often channeled outwards in socially sanctioned forms (e.g., economic competition, militarism) or turned inwards, contributing to guilt and neurosis. Marcuse argues that this surplus is not universally necessary for civilization, but rather a historically specific imposition generated by capitalist exploitation. By the same token, surplus repression refers to the excessive restraint of drives under capitalist patriarchy, beyond what civilization requires in itself (Marcuse, 1966, p. 98). This refers to the extra and historically contingent repression beyond the natural minimum – the burdens that contemporary capitalism adds on top of basic self-control. Therefore, while basic repression is required for civilization, *surplus repression* entrenches inequality and alienates *Eros*. However, Marcuse posits that if surplus repression were abolished, a “non-repressive civilization” could emerge, characterized by a liberation of *Eros*, a re-sexualization of the body and social relations, and the transformation of labor into gratifying play

(1966, p. 201). In short, if Eros were liberated (through drastic social transformation), the destructive drive could be defused or redirected. In this context, what Freud saw as fixed human nature – constant psychosexual conflict – Marcuse sees as *historically mutable*. According to Whitebook (1996), the distinction between basic and surplus repression provides a quasi-quantitative concept “*for measuring the degree of historically unnecessary renunciation that operates in a given society*” (p. 27).

Hence, to capture the essence of his work, it is crucial to understand alienated labor. Cremin extends Marcuse's analysis to explain how capitalism, through “*alienated labor*,” actively “*leeches the lifeblood of the worker*” and transforms it into exchange value (2015, p. 4). This is because Marxian fusion, as he puts “*the irreconcilable conflict is not between work (reality principle) and Eros (pleasure principle), but between alienated labor (performance principle) and Eros*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 47). Marcuse further notes:

“*In a repressive civilization, death itself becomes an instrument of repression [...] the education for consent to death introduces an element of surrender into life from the beginning—surrender and submission.*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 236)

Going back to the psychoanalytic anthropology, Marcuse refers to how Freud's *primal horde* and *primal father* establish “the great traumatic event,” after the first rebellion of the sons also famously known as Oedipal struggle (complex), who continuously rule on behalf of the father (after they killed him), and how submission is reproduced (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 15-16; Freud, 2004). However, in the post-industrial era, the collapse of the family unit and the decline of the authoritarian father figure lead to a weakening of the Oedipus complex and the superego. This liberalisation, paradoxically, denies the individual the traditional path to genuine psychic individuality once offered by revolt against paternal authority. The modern ego is observed to have “shrunk,” leading to a congealing of the id-ego-superego dynamic into automatic reactions, with consciousness increasingly reduced to regulating individual coordination with the societal whole. Furthermore, societal repression has shifted from overt external restraints to “repressive desublimation,” where encouraged, specialised sexual activity serves to diffuse conscious unhappiness or dissatisfaction with the system, compensating for an “*impoverishment of the environment from an emotional or libidinal point of view*” (Jameson, 1972, p. 129). Subsequently, it is this submission process in technological advancement in capitalism (which distributes the

scarcity), work and necessity (reality principle) that Marcuse (2007 [1964]) further develops the idea of *repressive tolerance* and *repressive desublimation* in the post-industrial era (in his “*negative totality*” understanding called as one-dimensionality).

All in all, he presents Eros as the *counter-organisation* of “life instinct,” which for him to “*fight for life, fight for Eros*” against Thanatos, and against a civilization which strives to shorten the “*detour to death*” (1966, p. xxv). This fight is a “*biological necessity*,” and must be understood as a “*political fight*.” However, I must clarify that, according to Marcuse, drive is not a simple biological urge, but a psychic force influenced by society: for instance, sexual drive is harnessed and distorted by social norms (e.g., channeled into compulsive work or consumerism). Marcuse's psychoanalysis, within the context of historical positioning, also offers a prediction of the political forms of organization and “political fight” necessary for social transformation. Indeed, according to Marcuse, “*it is the failure of Eros, lack of fulfillment in life, which enhances the instinctual value of death*” (1966, p. 109). Our interpretation is that this requires a psychological and libidinal reorganization of one's stance as a precautionary measure before adopting a new strategy. This leads Marcuse to propose a vision of liberation based on abolishing surplus repression, not by dissolving all structure, but by modulating it so that *Eros* can suffuse life without civilizational collapse. This involves reconfiguring or liberating desire and libido in a transformed, perfected society. He articulates more of these ideas during the intellectual and political scenery of the *long sixties* and comes up with the term he calls the *Great Refusal*, which will be extended in the next section as the culmination of his thought.

But before that, the dramatic turns in the psychoanalytic lineage must be discussed and extended. To begin with, it is most necessary to take a look at Jacques Lacan's seminal contribution to psychoanalysis, which is often recalled as “Return to Freud” (Lacan, 1988; 1991). Even though the distinct differences and non-alignments were mentioned in the majority of the literature, as Johnston (2024, pp 96-97) notes, recent work has shown that many of Lacan's core objections to ego psychology and American psychoanalysis converge with earlier Freudo-Marxist critiques by figures like Marcuse. Johnston argues that, despite Lacan's own dismissal of earlier Freudo-Marxist projects, his theories, especially when read through the Slovenian School,

offer a missed but viable bridge to the tradition of Frankfurt School psychoanalysis and its critique of ideological adaptation. In this vein, the task for a contemporary Freudo-Lacano-Marxism, he suggests, is precisely to fill in the blanks left by this historical separation and synthesize these critical traditions (Johnston, 2024, p. 97).

Even though he does not read his work as a vitalist enterprise, Samo Tomšič's (2015; 2019) lens from Marx to Lacan is important in terms of providing projections of key concepts for further inquiry, especially to understand the logic of the energy, libido, from biology to language, or as Lacan's term *Symbolic*, before getting to Žižek's.

Tomšič's work represents a Lacanian turn to Marx, complementing Jameson's (1983) seminal work, *The Political Unconsciousness*, which is thus reinterpreted as *The Capitalist Unconsciousness*. He begins with Marx's critique of political economy, particularly *Capital*, which is explicitly presented as a "condensed Marxian equivalent to *The Science of Logic*" (2015, p. 4). This signifies a direct methodological homology, where Marx *actualises* Hegel's abstract logical categories in the concrete analysis of capitalist society. In here, the commodity functions as the "germ-cell" (Blunden, 2018, p. 270) from which the entire system is unfolded, mirroring Hegel's logical progression.

Marx begins *Capital* with the commodity because its dual form (use value vs. exchange value) already embeds the entire logic of capital. The commodity's inherent duality – fundamental meta-formulas of Marx, between *use-value* (qualitative, addressing needs) and *exchange-value* (quantitative, its relation to other commodities) – is the starting-point for revealing the "autonomy of exchange" and the "autonomy of the signifier" within economic relations (Tomšič, 2015, pp. 27-36).

Marx's analysis moves beyond empirical appearances to discern a rigorous logic, a "structural real," operating within the seemingly chaotic market. Thus, "*commodity, value and capital determine thoughts and actions beyond consciousness, intentionality and 'private' interest; they order all life around compulsive symbolic machinery*" (Tomšič, 2019, p. 173). Freud's psychoanalysis enters this lineage by extending the critical outlook of Marx and Hegel to the realm of the psychic. Freud's discovery of the unconscious is seen as a "*radical decentralisation of thinking*" (Tomšič, 2019, p.

103), challenging the primacy of consciousness, much as Copernicus decentered the universe and Darwin decentered life. He further shows, Freud's *dream-work* (*Traumarbeit*), *joke work* (*Witzarbeit*), and *working-through* (*Durcharbeiten*) function as a "labour theory of the unconscious," formally homologous to Marx's labour theory of value (Tomšič, 2019, p. 145). The concept of *Durcharbeiten* is key, framed as abolishing (Freud uses the Hegelian verb *aufheben*) repression, directly linking to Hegel's sublation and the labour of the negative. Tomšič further establishes a direct homology between Marx's "labour-power" and "surplus-value" and Freud's "labour theory of the unconscious," as key figures of negativity in the social link, becoming the "subject of the signifier" and *objet petit a* for Lacan (Tomšič, 2019, pp. 173-182). Here, according to Tomšič, the drive is not a biological *instinct*²⁸ but a symbolic force whose insistence on *surplus enjoyment* structurally *repetites* the economic insistence on *surplus value*. Freud's seminal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, is presented as "logic and not as a hermeneutic of the unconscious," focusing on "formal mechanisms" of satisfaction rather than mere meaning (Tomšič, 2019, pp. 145-146), indicating a deep structural congruence between libidinal and social economies.

A significant point of discussion in the Freudo-Marxist tradition, relevant here, is the critique of "vitalism." Tomšič criticizes early Freudo-Marxists – mentioning Reich and Marcuse – for sliding into a vitalist trap, positing sexuality (Eros) as the privileged site of liberation and emancipation, and fantasizing a society "without negativity" (Tomšič, 2015, pp. 7-8). According to Tomšič, then, Freudo-Marxists, including Marcuse, cannot reach the Marxist predicament of the "negativity" of meta-capitalism; on the contrary, "the class conflict becomes an external form of psychic conflict" (Tomšič, 2015, p. 8), in where he concludes "a materialist theory of the subject [...] is the logical response to the capitalist rejection of negativity" (Tomšič, 2015, p. 234).

Yet, this verdict is too hasty, as seen earlier in the previous sections, particularly in light of the work of philosophy and Marcuse's attachment to psychoanalysis. Marcuse was not a clinical therapist; rather, he was a philosopher of social sciences. Since it is also a crucial point, as it was discussed at the beginning of the chapter,

²⁸ This distinction is critical, as the English translation of Freud's *Trieb* and *Instinkt* both as "drive" has obscured a crucial difference.

whether psychoanalysis can be considered as philosophy, Marcuse indicates that the “logic of domination” did not triumph unchallenged within philosophy, which also retained the image of reconciliation between subject and object (Marcuse, 1966, p. 112). Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1977), Marcuse explains, articulates reason as a structure of domination, developing through the ego's self-assertion against “otherness” in a “life-and-death struggle” (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 113-114).

Marcuse concludes the philosophical interlude by asserting that Freud's metapsychology, in defining the essence of being as Eros, converges with this philosophical countertrend, challenging the traditional *Logos* of domination. He posits that the erotic impulse is the “*instinctual source of civilization*,” and the “*struggle for existence*” was originally a “struggle for pleasure” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 125). However, this erotic basis of culture was transformed by its organization in the interest of domination, leading to the repression of these insights. So, for him, understanding this historical process is crucial for envisioning a future beyond the *Reality Principle*.

When we read Marcuse not only alongside Hegel but also alongside Henri Bergson's (1944) philosophy of creative evolution, it becomes more obvious that Tomšič is missing the philosophical aspect of Marcuse's work. While Hegel's concept of the “negation of the negation” oscillates between the positive and negative, Bergson's concept of the vital principle²⁹ (for French, *élan vital*) –which also resembles such concepts of *Utopian play* (Schiller), *utopian consciousness* (Mannheim), *principle of hope* (Bloch), or *utopian impulse* (Jameson), insists that life is an open-ended creation, irreducible to static substance. Therefore, Marcuse's *Eros* is best seen not as raw libido but as a historically mediated potential for a non-repressive, creative existence – a “rupture within continuity” that forces those aiming to sublimate instrumental reason to recognize it as such a creative vector within history, rather than regressing to a pre-rational state. And eventually, as Marcuse (1966) wrote,

²⁹ *Élan vital* is a creative, evolutionary life force rather than a simple biological instinct. In Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, the terms “vital principle” and “germ-cell” (or related concepts like “germinal cells” or “sexual elements”) appear in various sections of the book. Bergson discusses it in the context of vitalistic theories and their limitations in explaining the complexities of life. Bergson argues that vitalism's position is difficult because, in nature, there is neither purely internal finality nor absolutely distinct individuality. If every individual organism or even its organized elements (like cells) claimed its own “vital principle,” it would lead to an unmanageable multiplicity of such principles.

“Freud’s psychology reaches into a dimension of the mental apparatus where the individual is still the genus, the present still the past” (p. 106).

Jameson (1972; 1974) illustrates how Marcuse’s utopian impulse, drawing from Schiller’s aesthetic education and the Surrealists’ impulse of fantasy, redefines the function of art into a “hermeneutics of freedom” that actively negates existing reality and cultivates a new sensibility through the memory of past gratification. And in this context, going back to the “germ-cell” metaphor by Bergson and Blunden, it is obvious that the back-and-forth movement of the dialectic is matter, which can be well put in the optimism-pessimism or utopian and dystopian as a “negation of negation” version of negative and positive critique axiom as if the continuity of genetic energy and *“life is like a current passing from germ to germ through the medium of a developed organism”* (Bergson, 1952, p. 32). This metaphor already captures the dialectic’s recursive motion, which is clearly formulated by Hegel when he wrote *“what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational”* (Hegel, 1952, p. 6). As Marcuse deepens this impulse when it confronts *“bad facticity with its better potentialities”* (Marcuse, 1969, p. 143).

Marcuse’s work, as Douglas Kellner (2020) outlines, epitomizes the Freudian Left’s attempt to synthesize a Marxian critique of exploitation with a Freudian critique of libidinal repression. Its focus is on the historical dialectic of *Eros* and civilization, the generation of “surplus-repression” by the performance principle, and the potential for a “new sensibility” to ground a *Great Refusal* of the established order (Kellner, 2020, pp. 83–89). Countercultural and liberation movements, viewed through the lens of liberated *Eros*, play, happy consciousness, and a “new sensibility,” thereby embody Marcuse’s (2007) project of articulating the dialectic between forces of domination and liberation.

Since Marcuse built on Freudo-Marxist theory and Hegelian philosophy, the next generation of critical theorists draws on a later development: Lacanian psychoanalysis. Moving from the *Freudian Left*, as it was seen, Tomsic’s assumptions and criticisms remain in the *Lacanian* trajectory. This trajectory begins in 1964, when Louis Althusser turned to the work of Lacan, specifically his essay “Freud and Lacan,” to better understand how ideology hails individuals and produces compliant subjects. Here, he recognized the profound utility of Lacanian psychoanalytic ideas for

understanding politics, ideology, and subjectivity, effectively rehabilitating psychoanalysis for Marxist theory. This marks the rise of what is often called the *Lacanian Left*, according to Stavrakakis, a current of intellectuals, including Althusser, Žižek, Jameson, Laclau, Mouffe, and Badiou, who sought to reformulate Marxist critique through psychoanalysis and propose “*a new theorico-political horizon*” (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 3).

However, the so-called *Lacanian Left* should be distinguished from what is often referred to as the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis (or the Slovenian Lacanian School). The latter, centered in Ljubljana and represented by Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič, Samo Tomšič, Renata Salecl, and Rastko Močnik, along with Žižek, constitutes a more philosophically rigorous lineage that combines Lacan with German Idealism and Hegelian dialectics. In fact, in the preface to the original edition of Žižek’s seminal work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Laclau gives his remarks to the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis, whose sophisticated stance is derived from Hegel (Žižek, 1991, p. xi). Unlike other strands of the Lacanian Left (notably in France, Argentina, or Britain), the Ljubljana School explicitly positions itself as a theoretical psychoanalytic movement, distinct from clinical practice, and deeply aligned with post-war Marxist antihumanism and idealist philosophy. This school’s critical theory was developed in a historical landscape markedly different from Marcuse’s. The pivotal events shaping its context were the peripheral understanding of Western capitalism, domination, and a certain amount of freedom (a “semi-liberal environment”) in Yugoslavian socialism, the collapse of Soviet-style socialism in 1989, and the subsequent dissolution of the Eastern Bloc (Parker, 2013, p. 18; Irwin & Motosh, 2014, p. 35). This effectively removed the primary global alternative to Western capitalism, ending the Cold War’s bipolar ideological structure and ushering in a new era: post-political arrangements of liberal domination.

Žižek (2001) adapts this narrative right here: “*In order to deploy the inherent, notional structure of a social formation, one must start with its most developed form*” (p. 190). His work is posited as a particularly effective response to global capitalism in the 21st century. He navigates a world shaped by post-structuralist thinking and the shortcomings of older Marxist models, although he still recognizes the influence of the Frankfurt School, also known as Western Marxism (Boyle, 2008, pp. 1–2).

In these political developments, Žižek turns to Lacan, who reinterpreted Freud through a structuralist and linguistic lens (driven by Saussure), emphasizing language, symbols, and the inherent fragmentation of the subject (it is symbolized as \$ by Lacan). Lacan's famous dictum, "*the unconscious is structured like a language*," (Lacan, 1998, p. 20) and so forth "*the unconscious is the discourse of the other*" (Lacan, 1988, p. 85) signals a shift: where Freud spoke of the unconscious in terms of buried content (ideas, drives, memories), he spoke of it as a kind of *speech* or network of signifiers that exceeds the conscious ego. Eventually, Lacan meticulously posits Freud's insights into desire and drive, but reformulates them in the fundamental Hegelian theme (*master and slave dialectic*)³⁰ – desire, for Lacan, "*the desire of the Other*" (1988, p. 146), meaning it's mediated by the symbols and wishes of those around us, a desire to be desired by the symbolic realm of the *Other*, encompassing the struggle for recognition forever circling an unattainable object. The subject's being is constituted by being subjected to the field of the *Other*, and the desire it experiences is inscribed in and belongs to this *other* (Lacan, 1998, p. 188). Here, the other (with small 'o') refers to identification, competition, and desire. And thus we come to what others (society, our parents, peers) suggest is desirable; we chase an *objet petit a* (object-cause of desire) where is explicitly thematized as the cause of desire, rather than the object of desire itself, that is fundamentally a void, a placeholder for what's missing or a lack (Lacan, 1998, p. 268). And it is this lack or impossibility which produces the foundation for the desire for liberation or desire for it came into being, that is to say, the conditions can only be objectified if the extensive demand for the impossibility of the desire emerges (Žižek, 1991, p. 160). In this interpretation, the possibility is referred to the value formula of Marx, to repeat.

As discussed in this section, drive, in Lacanian theory, is not a straightforward biological urge but a repetitive loop around a void of unfulfilling satisfaction. According to Lacan, the drive paradoxically enjoys the very failure to reach a final

³⁰ As Hegel narrates in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, two self-consciousnesses struggle for recognition. The master attains dominance but remains dependent on the slave's recognition; the slave, through labor and fear-conditioned submission, acquires self-consciousness and independence. This forms the dialectical foundation for Lacan's understanding of desire as recognition through dependency. Here, another concept joins. Hegel distinguishes *Being-in-itself*—the unreflective "thingness" of an object—and *Being-for-itself*—the self-conscious subject aware of itself as the negation of Being-in-itself. This relation illuminates the Lacanian subject's formation: it becomes aware only through the Other who structures its being. For further inquiry, see (Findlay, 1976; Žižek, 2012).

fulfilment, producing *jouissance*, a painful pleasure or enjoyment beyond the *pleasure principle* (Žižek, 1992, p. 48; Lacan, 1998, pp. 183-184; Tomšič, 2019, p. 23). The central problematic becomes not the repression of desire, but the organization of *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, reflects libido in Lacan, is a “paradoxical satisfaction” that is often experienced as displeasure or pain; it is a “*pleasure in pain*,” “*painful pleasure*” or “*pleasure that cannot be felt as such*” (Žižek, 1992, p. 48; Stavrikakis, 2007, pp. 77-78), Lacan then coins the term surplus-jouissance (*plus-de-jouir*) as a part of enjoyment that the subject of the unconscious can claim only as a loss because it belongs to the *big Other* – master of the domain (Hoens, 2016, pp. 104-105). This concept signifies that after symbolic castration has drained *jouissance* from the body, a certain “remainder” is left over, which gets trapped in erotogenic zones or symptoms (Lacan, 1998, p. 21). In social science, castration, therefore, is the lack of the fetishized “*positive network of social relations*” and around “*the symbolic network*” (Žižek, 1991, p. 49).

In this aspect, Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory around the topology of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real (RSI - *Réel, Symbolique, Imaginaire*) Borromean knot, has enabled numerous authors - among them Žižek - to study the analysis of liberation projects based on political philosophy and cultural criticism of the political-event orientation of desire, drive, and *jouissance* (Žižek, 2014, pp. 119-122). The *Symbolic* order, as the realm of language, law, and social structure, operates through a fundamental act of castration that institutes a constitutive lack, thereby separating the subject from any totalizing, pre-symbolic *jouissance* and creating the very conditions for desire (Stavrikakis, 2007, p. 47, 196). Lacan refers to the symbolic as the *big Other* (it is formulated as S(A); here A stands for the French word *Autre*, meaning “Other” in English). The symbols referred to here are signifiers. This entry into linguistic representation and social norms demands the sacrifice of an original fullness of enjoyment, giving rise to the “*void of missing satisfaction*” or “*the gaze*” that the drive ceaselessly circles in its repetitive loop (Žižek, 1991, pp. 105-107; Stavrikakis, 2007, p. 260). Here, as Sean Homer (2020) details, the focus shifts from libidinal repression to the structuring role of the symbolic order, the logic of the signifier, and the function of fantasy in managing the traumatic Real of social antagonism (pp. 95-101). This shifts the focus from libidinal repression to the structuring effects of the symbolic order and the political function of *jouissance*. Therefore, in Lacanian theory,

the subject is not a unified, autonomous agent. Upon entering the Symbolic order, the subject is fundamentally “split” or “barred,” represented by the symbol “\$”. This split occurs because the subject can never find a signifier that perfectly represents their being; there is always a gap between the subject and their representation in language. The subject is an effect of this failure of representation (Žižek, 1992).

Concurrently, the *Imaginary* realm (the ego for Lacan), characterized by ego-formation, identifications, images, and mirror-like relations, attempts to positivise this constitutive lack and the inherent limits of the *Symbolic* (MacCannel, 2016, pp. 72-74). According to Žižek, our direct lived experience and the domain of how things appear to us through dreams and nightmares are the primary focus (Žižek, 2014, p. 119). Through fantasy, the *Imaginary* offers a “miraculous object” –the *objet petit a*– by embodying the lack in the Other while simultaneously promising its fulfilment (Stavrikakis, 2007, p. 75). However, the drive's inherent “unmeasured,” its “insatiable demand” (Tomsic, 2019, p. 72), and its pleasure for pleasure's sake, experienced as “pleasure in pain” (Žižek, 1992, p. 48), point directly to the *Real*.

The *Real* is defined as that which resists symbolization and representation, presenting itself as an insistent, obtrusive element – a remainder or an impossible that eludes the signifying chain and imaginary capture (Žižek, 2014, pp. 119-120). The *Real* is precisely where *jouissance* is situated. Lacan formalizes this through the *surplus-jouissance*, a dynamic essential to understanding both individual pathology and broader socio-political attachments, as “*today's politics is more and more the politics of jouissance, concerned with the ways of soliciting or controlling and regulating jouissance*” (Žižek, 2005, p. 127).

For Žižek, this psychoanalytic structure is the key to understanding ideology. Ideology functions by structuring our social reality around a collective fantasy, represented by the Lacanian formula “ $\$ \diamond a$ ” (Žižek, 1991, p. 46). Žižek uses a paradox that Lacan used to understand the impossibility of touching the Real from Zhuang Zi to illustrate this formula: “*who dreamt of being a butterfly, and after his awakening posed himself a question: How does he know that he is not now a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zi?*” (Žižek, 1991, p. 45). This “fundamental fantasy” stages a scenario in which the split subject (\$) can finally attain the lost object (*a*), thereby achieving wholeness and enjoyment. The promise of the Nation, racial purity, or the free market are all

examples of ideological fantasies that offer a path to resolving social antagonisms and achieving a harmonious society, a promise that is, by definition, impossible to fulfil and must be resolved perceive and state this retroactively, from today's perspective (Žižek, 1991, pp. 100-129; Žižek, 2014, p. 142).

As can be seen, Lacan carries desire and drive to the realm of discourse. In this context, the death drive, for Lacan, is not a striving for death in a literal sense but signifies the “*radical indifference and detachment of the unconscious demand of enjoyment*” (De Kesel, 2009, p. 99) from self-preservation. It is the drive to attain a state of minimal tension, ultimately leading to death, which serves as the ultimate answer. This “*inverted vitalism*” means life's resistance turns into the mortifying resistance of the drive, striving for “surplus-life” even on the basis of “damaged life” (Tomsic, 2019, p. 202). To a certain extent, the silence of death, or the calm core of death, becomes part of a dialectical process involving *Eros*. “Negation of the negation,” hence, gains a practical meaning in a satisfied confrontation with the Real.

Žižek utilizes the death drive to explain the “empty satisfaction of consumerism” – the insatiable urge to buy more that never extinguishes desire, thereby linking the psychoanalytic problematic of *jouissance* to the foundations of capitalism. *Jouissance* can also anchor human reality, resisting symbolization and linguistic intervention, as exemplified by its function as a *sinthome*. In a way that reminds us of Marcuse's *surplus-repression*, Lacan further claims that “*repression cannot purely and simply disappear; it can only be gone beyond, in the sense of Aufhebung*” (Lacan, 1988, p. 67). This is a crucial point because, after this, the imaginary possibilities and their symbolic representations in the Real, what is negated in order to reach them, and therefore their transition to organizational and utopian stages, differ between Žižek and Marcuse. In this case, the distinction between *Eros* and *Thanatos* as a priori categories for actuality becomes clear.

Within the evolving landscape of critical theory and psychoanalysis, the re-articulation of the Marcusean formula for political struggle in the context of late capitalism necessitates a profound conceptual inversion, transforming the engagement with *Eros* into a confrontation with *Thanatos*. This adaptation frames *Eros* not merely as a drive for pleasure, but as a compromised force in late capitalism, whereas *Thanatos* becomes the subversive engine for radical political process and a figure of

traumatic retrospect, thereby advocating an ethical pragmatic approach. It is also relevant, as Uribe (2021, pp. 34-45) emphasizes, that the dialectic of *Eros* and *Thanatos* was not only a theoretical model but a concrete tension enacted in the streets: *Eros* as the impulse to bind, collectivize, and imagine new worlds; *Thanatos* as the drive to disintegrate, to risk destruction as a passage toward renewal.

Structurally, then, Žižek replays Marcuse’s wager on negativity but shifts its centre of gravity from an *Eros*-based liberation to a Lacanian confrontation with the Imaginary, Symbolic, and the Real. Marxist “Surplus” dialectical touch shows the structural parallel between Marcuse’s framework (surplus-repression to *Eros*-based Great Refusal) and Žižek’s (surplus-enjoyment to the Act). Both insist that genuine transformation is possible only through a dialectical rupture-within-continuity; both see that rupture as already inscribed in the contradictions of the prevailing order; and both regard psychoanalysis as the privileged discourse that renders those contradictions thinkable.

Yet Žižek radicalizes the homology by treating enjoyment itself as a form of surplus value, thereby aligning the Freudian drive with Marx’s logic of capital accumulation and showing how political economy reproduces itself at the level of the unconscious. What emerges is a Lacanian-Marxist horizon in which the “negative labour” of critique must culminate in an interruptive Act that both negates and preserves the inherited terrain—exactly the pattern Hegel designated with *Aufhebung* and that Marcuse redescribes as the *Great Refusal*. In synthesising these lineages, Žižek offers a contemporary grammar of radical politics that complements Marcuse’s earlier project and completes the structural homology.

Table 2.1: Comparative Analysis Table: Mapping the Main Concepts of Marcuse and Žižek

Features	Herbert Marcuse	Slavoj Žižek	Structural Homology / Productive Tension
<i>Primary Influences</i>	Marx, Freud, Hegel	Marx, Freud, Lacan, Hegel	Shared Hegelian-Marxist-Freudian roots
<i>Historical Context</i>	Post-WWII Affluence; “End of Ideology”; Consumer Society; Cold War; Integrated Working Class	Post-Socialist Neoliberalism; “End of History”; Cynicism; Capitalist Realism	Different stages of capitalism are theorized, reflecting evolving forms of domination

<i>Psychoanalytic Framework</i>	Freudian (historically modified - Eros, Repression, Pleasure/Reality Principle), emphasis on sublimation	Lacanian (Symbolic/Imaginary/Real, Fantasy, Jouissance, \$, Objet a, Act), trauma, drive, castration-central	Psychoanalysis is the key to political theory, but via different schools
<i>Core Concept of Subjectivity</i>	Historically shaped instincts vs. Performance Principle; through non-repressive sublimation (repressive desublimation)	Split Subject (\$) constituted by Symbolic lack and the Real	Subject as a site of contradiction and possibility
<i>Concept of Resistance/Break</i>	Great Refusal (Qualitative break, New Sensibility) - as a moment—destructive (eros) drive of liberation as a performative (retroactive) act, psychoanalytic act, political act	The Act (Symbolic rupture, Traversing Fantasy) - as act before the act, refusal to act or to withdraw from the compulsion to act, normative political process (Performative – retroactive act, psychoanalytic act, political act)	Both theorize refusal/rupture as critical to emancipation
<i>Critiques (negation)/dialectic</i>	Hegelian negation toward a utopian critique of the present, historical conditions of repression, affluent society	Hegelian negation toward a pessimist critique of the present, structural logic of the Symbolic, paradoxes of Law/Enjoyment, failure as constitutive	Negation as the key site of political theorizing
<i>Freud- Lacan</i>	Eros effect – the Refusal	Death Drive - the Real (Evental Act)	Differing emphasis on core psychoanalytic drives/concepts in political action
<i>Analytic Technique</i>	Repressive tolerance – desublimation	Jouissance – big Other – objet petit a (object-cause of desire)	Focus on the mechanisms of ideological control and subjective investment
<i>Marxist context</i>	False needs – Surplus repression	Ideological enjoyment– Surplus enjoyment	Shared focus on internalized domination beyond economic exploitation
<i>Continuity vs. Rupture</i>	Continuity with Enlightenment critique	Ruptures with Enlightenment optimism	Žižek as a dialectical continuation/critique of Marcusean concerns

Source: (Marcuse 1966, 1972, 2007, 2023; Žižek 1991, 1992, 2012, 2014, 2022, 2023)

Reflecting on the data in Table 1 above, which compares the fundamental concepts of Marcuse and Žižek, it is possible to state that there are both similarities and differences between these two theorists. This table summarizes the distinct theoretical architectures Marcuse and Žižek construct, highlighting how their different

psychoanalytic starting points lead to different, though often complementary, analyses of ideology, subjectivity, and resistance within late capitalism. The next section develops this shared psychoanalytic grammar into the explicit concepts of *Great Refusal* and the *Act*, showing how each theorist operationalises negativity for political praxis.

2.5. Marcuse's "Great Refusal" and Žižek's "Act"

To grasp the intellectual trajectory of how to understand the revolutionary subject as theorized by Marcuse and Žižek –especially after introducing psychoanalytic and philosophical dimensions in the preceding sections– it becomes crucial to rearticulate two central conceptual endpoints that recur throughout their work: Marcuse's "one-dimensional thought" and the attached notion of the *Great Refusal* and Žižek's idea of the *Act*. While these terms have appeared at various points earlier in this dissertation, often in introductory or referential form in the previous sections, this section consolidates and deepens their political force. The aim here is to establish a final conceptual foundation before transitioning into the analytic construction of refusal within narrative, ideological, and psychoanalytic categories, such as melancholy, nostalgia, and fantasy (which can be referred to as the retroactive historicity of the traumatic core/essence).

This section, hence, will forge a synthesized analytical tool by tracing the dialectical movement from Marcuse's Eros-based refusal of a one-dimensional society to Žižek's Thanatos-inflected Act against a society that commands enjoyment. It is argued that Marcuse's concept, a form of Hegelian "*negation of the negation*," is itself traversed and radicalized by Žižek's Lacanian confrontation with the *Real* (Žižek, 1993), hence leading to a theoretical evolution necessary for critiquing the ideological coordinates and operating the "*totality of negation*" of late capitalism.

The connection between movements during 1960s and those happening now is mostly based on the "*long Sixties*," (this narrative will be discussed in the Chapter 4) and early 1970s a time that Marcuse thought was important for understanding social movements, encompassing both revolts and rebellions, particularly his works such as *One-Dimensional Man* (hereinafter referred as ODM, 1964 [2007]), his essay *Repressive Tolerance* (1965 [1970]), and books followed student movements of 1968

are *An Essays on Liberation* (1969 [2000]), and *Counter-Revolution and Rebellion* (1972), articulate what he saw as a new phase of civilization, marked by pervasive social control and the neutralization of authentic opposition.

As it was discussed earlier, Marcuse's intellectual trajectory was a direct response to the ideological climate of the affluent post-war society mainly emerged from a fusion of Hegelian negation, Marx's "*species-being*" and alienation, Freudian critique of repression, as well as his notion of the *Great Refusal*, acquired from Alfred North Whitehead's concept of refusing the given reality (cited in Marcuse, 1966, p. 149). Coined for the first time in *Eros and Civilization*, it further appeared on the final pages of his *magnus opus* *ODM* (2007) and elaborated in *An Essays on Liberation* (2000), this notion represents a politicisation of the psyche, advocating a total opposition to the social and material mores that integrate individuals into post-industrial capitalist society. However, the first portion of the notion's originality comes from *ODM*. And therefore, Marcuse's notion of "*absolute refusal*" cannot be understood apart from his diagnosis of the socio-political condition he termed the "*one-dimensional society*" during this period. In this work, Marcuse describes a form of advanced industrial capitalism, prevalent in the post-war West, that had achieved an unprecedented level of social control not through overt terror but through absorption and neutralization.

This society, prevalent in the post-war Era, mainly relies on technological rationality, as conceptualized by Marcuse, which signifies the dominant mode of thought in modern industrial societies and its capacity to generate *false needs* through mass culture and pervasive consumerism. Technological rationality refers to the dominant mode of thinking in modern industrial societies that prioritizes efficiency, calculability, and instrumental control over qualitative human values (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 3–20). Marcuse argues that technology, within this system, embodies and enforces rationality, serving as a tool for social control (Marcuse, 2007, p. 12). The very capability of this rationality then to create *false needs* that are needs created and imposed upon individuals by the social system (through advertising, media, etc. – remembering Frankfurt School's *culture industry*) to ensure their integration into the cycles of production and consumption, thereby stifling effective opposition and creating a deceptive sense of freedom: "*The people recognize themselves in their*

commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 11). Their satisfaction may feel pleasurable but ultimately serves to perpetuate the existing systemic repressive order and distract from the human needs and potential that underpin it (Marcuse, 2007, p. 26). Hence, one-dimensional man emerges as both a conformist and a repressed individual in society.

The dominance of technological rationality and the satisfaction of false needs lead to effectively flattened critical thought by making individuals believe they are freer than they are, providing sufficient goods to keep them pacified, encouraging identification with oppressors, and, in Marcuse’s words, “absorbs all alternatives” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 20). To put it in the most definitive term, it does so by creating a “one-dimensional universe” where genuine desires become difficult to articulate or sustain. This effectively closes the “political universe,” rendering radical social change seemingly impossible (Feenberg, 2023, pp. 142-143). The “*closing of the political universe*” establishes a social cohesion that integrates formerly antagonistic forces, making the existing system appear to encompass all possibilities for societal advancement (Marcuse, 2007, p. 22). Marcuse observes that this societal integration “*permeates the 'media' which mediate between the masters and their dependents*” and shapes “*the universe of communication in which the one-dimensional behavior expresses itself*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 88). This leads to a situation where the “*functionalized, abridged and unified language is the language of one-dimensional thought*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 98). This is where “one-dimensional thought” emerges: “*the methodological justification for the debunking of the mind by the intellectuals [as] a positivism which, in its denial of the transcending elements of Reason, forms the academic counterpart of the socially required behavior*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 16). Essentially, “one-dimensional thought” emerges as a new, more comprehensive form of social control. It contains qualitative change by primarily integrating masses through consumption, fostering a “false consciousness” that aligns individual interests with the dominant system. This “total administration” appears to render consciousness impervious to “two-dimensional thinking,” obscuring inherent contradictions and making social change seem unnecessary or dangerous (Marcuse, 2007, p. 88). This system operates by absorbing dissent and neutralizing the critical power of critique itself, particularly as a forceful response to biased storytelling in academia and

politics. It specifically targets the compulsion to only narrate the positive aspects of technological progress and consumer satisfaction, while repressing any systemic contradictions. To understand the one-dimensional man, it is accurate to view the missing dimension, which is the second dimension, as the excluded and mystified potentiality of human emancipation and projects within the capitalist system, or as the space of potentiality and radical difference.

Within this totalizing system (total administration), *dissent* is managed through what Marcuse famously called *repressive tolerance* (tolerating only non-threatening dissent) and *repressive desublimation* (superficial gratification). Repressive tolerance, Marcuse writes, takes two main forms:

“(1) the passive toleration of entrenched and established attitudes and ideas even if their damaging effect on man and nature is evident; and (2) the active, official tolerance granted to the Right as well as to the Left, to movements of aggression as well as to movements of peace, to the party of hate as well as to that of humanity” (Wolff et al., 1969, p. 85).

Genuine tolerance, Marcuse argues, can only exist in a situation of intolerance for these limits on real freedom. In this context, repressive tolerance allows for a wide range of dissenting opinions and behaviors, but only insofar as they do not pose a genuine threat to the established order. It is a tolerance that protects and preserves the prevailing system by *“neutraliz[ing] opposition and to render men immune against other and better forms of life”* (Wolff et al., 1969, pp. 110-11). The core issue, for Marcuse, is that tolerance towards that *“which is radically evil now appears as good because it serves the cohesion of the whole on the road to affluence or more affluence”* (Wolff et al., 1969, p. 83).

The companion mechanism to this is repressive desublimation in the dialectic of *surplus repression*. As Marcuse observes, the kind of *“self-actualisation”* celebrated by advanced capitalism functions as a form of *repressive desublimation*: it blunts the critical intellect – the restless, *unhappy consciousness* that refuses to settle for momentary *catharsis*. Instead of rejoicing in a brief resurgence of instinct that soon folds back into the managed rationality of the administered world, this consciousness grasps the totality of domination in its most intimate frustrations and acts on that insight. *Repressive desublimation* instead channels potentially revolutionary libidinal energies into socially sanctioned and commodified forms of gratification. The system

offers a controlled release of instinctual desires, especially sexual, which serves to diffuse conscious unhappiness and pacify discontent with the alienating conditions of life. This creates a subject who appears free but is psychically bound to the system more tightly through the satisfaction of false needs – needs for consumer goods, entertainment, and status that are imposed by social interests and perpetuate the cycle of production and consumption (Wolff et al., 1969, p. 115).

As a result, the question of who can enact radical social change is a primary concern in a society that creates a “comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 3), an order in which traditional sources of opposition have been systematically pacified. Ideology, in this context, is no longer a mere superstructure of *false consciousness* but has successfully fused with reality itself. Technological rationality, mass media, and consumer culture work in concert to present the existing system as the only rational and possible reality, thereby foreclosing the very possibility of qualitative social change. The main algorithm of his idea was that the traditional Marxist agent of revolution, the proletariat, was observed to be largely integrated into the system, its needs controlled and satisfied to maintain capitalist stability (Marcuse, 1970, p. 84; Marcuse, 2007, p. 26).

In this regard, this engineered contentment, which binds individuals psychically to the system through the satisfaction of false needs, does not, however, wholly extinguish the inherent human capacity for a qualitatively different existence. Marcuse posits that even amidst the pervasive integration of advanced industrial society, a fundamental human faculty – fantasy or imagination – retains a critical, uncompromised dimension against the established reality principle (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 140-141). It is precisely at this juncture that Jameson re-enters the discussion as a contemporary complement to Marcuse, building a bridge between the Frankfurt School’s mid-century critique and the cultural logic of late capitalism. Jameson significantly incorporates Marcuse’s insights, particularly from *Eros and Civilization*, to develop his “politicized notion of desire” (West, 1982, p. 180). Despite the spread of “repressive desublimation,” he argues, a critical capacity endures in what Marcuse names anamnesis—the “memory of gratification,” a prehistoric happiness that survives as “*the hidden driving power behind the process of thought*” (Jameson, 1972, pp. 129–31). This “*remembered plenitude*,” Jameson continues, supplies the primary energy of

revolutionary activity by enabling a *politicized notion of desire* to negate the reified present (Jameson, 1972, p. 132). Marcuse posits that our innate *utopian impulse* represents our *real and true needs* – the drive for genuine gratification, peace, and a non-repressive existence. He argues that advanced industrial society systematically thwarts these needs. However, this impulse is sustained by the power of memory and imagination, which together furnish the conceptual basis for a will to freedom. This will project a future that is qualitatively different from our current reality. Building on this, Jameson's concept of a “*hermeneutics of freedom*” provides an interpretive method for uncovering and understanding these repressed utopian aspirations within culture, thus giving a concrete analytical framework to Marcuse's notion of a collective desire for liberation (Jameson, 1972, p. 130).

Against the totalizing backdrop of systemic integration within a one-dimensional society, Marcuse posits a novel concept: the *Great Refusal*. This, he argues, is the only authentic revolutionary stance, an active position of protest and negation against the established order. According to Kellner, the *Great Refusal* is not a monolithic action but a “*highly complex and multidimensional term*” (2005, p. 10) including individual rebellion and opposition, avant-garde artistic revolt, and oppositional thought. In his own words, in the context of art as “*rationality of negation*”, Marcuse states: “*In its advanced positions, it is the Great Refusal—the protest against that which is [...] modes of refuting, breaking, and recreating their factual existence*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 66) and a negation of this need for false values and consumer culture, emerging from within the one-dimensional society by challenging the presumed givenness of reality, asserting a counter-truth to the master-hegemonic narrative. This one signifies a demand for a “new morality,” “new sensibility,” and a “transvaluation of values” which are internal, transformative processes, rather than superficial adjustments (Marcuse, 2000, p. 22, 54). By the same token, it is a principled opposition to the totality of the society's false values, repressive affluence, and administered unfreedom. It is, in essence, a radical refusal to systemic injustice and untruth, an act of breaking with the established continuum of one-dimensionality in advanced industrial capitalism, its behavior, and cultural-symbolic apparatus.

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse explicitly references Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* with a related German phrase: “Die Wunden des Geistes heilen, ohne dass Narben bleiben” (*The wounds of the spirit heal without leaving scars*) (1966, p. 115). This quotation, which emphasizes a form of healing that transcends mere suppression or forgetting by integrating the injury into the spirit, points towards a core aspect of dialectical thought: that true resolution involves an internal transformation, rather than a simple external cure, in Hegelian terms, “*being-in-and-for-itself*” (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 115-116). This aligns conceptually with the idea that the “spear” itself must be involved in the healing process as a reason or absolute knowledge, suggesting that the source of the contradiction holds the key to its overcoming. And this process can only be fulfilled at the *end of history*, a remembrance to “*the peaceful recapture of the past*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 117). As Marcuse further develops his ideas, he says, “*the wounds that heal in time are also the wounds that contain the poison*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 232).

In this context, another layer given to the *Great Refusal* is the “*protest against unnecessary repression*” and the “*struggle for the ultimate form of freedom—‘to live without anxiety’*” (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 149-150). Yet, this is the first introduction and description of the concept. The *Great Refusal*, in this sense, is the system's own inherent contradiction, its “wound,” becoming the impetus for its potential healing or fundamental change. It is fueled by Eros – the life drive that seeks non-repressive forms of pleasure, solidarity, and aesthetic experience. But this early version has transformed, as discussed in the previous section, and gains significant political meaning in the ODM and further its tactical and practical remarks in *An Essays on Liberation*, and *Counter-Revolution and Rebellion*.

A critical element of Marcuse's theory, and one that makes it profoundly relevant for analyzing contemporary movements, is its re-evaluation of the revolutionary subject. Marcuse places significant hope in “subverting forces” or “radical opposition.” He sees potential agents of refusal not in the integrated industrial proletariat (but not neglected) into consumerist consensus of the capitalist system but in the margins and unorganized forces of late-capitalist abundance: “*the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders*” (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 56-57): particularly among the exploited and persecuted racial minorities, the unemployed, rebellious youth, anti-colonial movements, and radical intellectuals who had resisted indoctrination. These

groups, existing “*outside the democratic process*,” embody a revolutionary opposition even if their consciousness is not explicitly so (Marcuse, 2007, p. 260). He sees particular hope in the student opposition of the 1960s and national liberation movements, such as those in Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria, as well as “ghetto rebellions,” which he views as “*living, human negation[s] of the system*” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 93). In this regard, Marcuse broadens the old recipe of class struggle between the traditional agent of revolution, the industrial proletariat, and capitalists (bourgeoisie); rather, he reconceives revolutionary agency as a heterogeneous bloc of refusal formed at the margins and only partly overlapping with the organized working class. What binds this bloc is not a fixed sociological position but a new sensibility that rejects administered needs and prefigures non-repressive forms of life (Marcuse, 1970). In this view, students, racialized poor, precarious workers, anti-colonial movements, Indigenous and migrant collectives, feminist and queer groups, and dissident intellectuals can converge with workers in a contingent alliance that negates the system from multiple fronts – a configuration that anticipates the coalition form of contemporary uprisings as a practical “Great Refusal” (Marcuse, 1970; 2007).

The refusal is thus at once destructive (negating false totality) and constructive (opening space for a “new sensibility” that privileges peace, play, and erotic fulfilment over performance and competition). It is this refusal or “*opposition hits the system [...] violates the rule of the game [...] reveals it as a rigged game*” (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 260-261). As Jameson (1972, p. 130) calls it, the Utopian impulse is what fuels the *Great Refusal* and hence finally Marcuse identifies as nascent forces of opposition, particularly the New Left, counter-culture, and student protest movements – “*one that can perhaps become a revolutionary force*” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 83) of the 1960s, as embodiments of the *Great Refusal*. So, in its tactical meaning, it is “*a political practice of methodical disengagement from and refusal of the Establishment [...], a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things*” (Marcuse, 2000, p. 6).

While many contemporary theorists have reframed political resistance in terms of dispersed micro-resistance or internal subversion, such as Foucault, Butler, Critchley, and Laclau, Marcuse’s idea of the Great Refusal remains distinct in its commitment to total negation – a radical break with the system rather than tactical

adjustments within it (Kellner et al., 2011, pp. 63-64). This act is not merely symbolic or performative but represents a psychoanalytic and political refusal of conformity with the performance principle and its normative repressions. As Kellner et al. (2011, pp. 71-75) argue, the *Great Refusal* in Marcuse draws its force from its untimeliness, its refusal to be reconciled with liberal pluralism, neoliberal biopolitics, or cultural accommodation. It is precisely this insistence on negation, on liberation from anxiety, on radical non-conformity that positions Marcuse as a thinker of the event and the act before such terms were formalized in Lacanian or Badiouian registers.

But I also think, Marcuse's main contribution comes from ODM, as it was mentioned above earlier, where he seeks through the impossibility of breaking away from the "*democratic unfreedom*" (Marcuse, 2007, p.3) or "*civilized barbarism*" (Marcuse, 2000, p. 87) will bring the ultimate "revolution" and only if then, he suggests, radicals of "*the Establishment within the Establishment; [...] the individual liberation (refusal) must incorporate the universal in the particular protest, and the images and values of a future free society must appear in the personal relationships within the unfree society*" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 49).

If the *Great Refusal* can be understood as a specific counter-hegemonic movement, with its unique psychoanalytic and ideological dimensions, embodied in a one-dimensional society (therefore *extimite*³¹ individual and thought), then any analysis of our contemporary neoliberal order requires a theoretical update of the concept of refusal itself. Therefore, Žižek, building upon this legacy, structures ideology through Lacanian categories that can be adapted to this moment in line with the above-mentioned context.

As Žižek (2008, pp. 196, 342–343) acknowledges, Marcuse's formula is what he calls a "*marvelous circular formula*" from the same historical retroactivity as it

³¹ Extimite or extime (from the French *extimité*, a term developed by Jacques Lacan) designates the paradoxical structure of that which is both intimate and external to the subject. It refers to the element at the core of one's identity that is nonetheless alien, intrusive, or external – what Lacan describes as the "Other within." In a political-ideological register, extimacy reveals how the subject is constituted not merely through internalized norms or repressions, but through a constitutive outside that is inseparable from their very being. In the context of late capitalism, this extimacy captures how ideology no longer simply represses desire but integrates and exploits it, making enjoyment itself a site of subjection. The extimite thus names the zone where subjectivity and social structures blur, a key dimension in understanding how refusal, thought, and individuality are both shaped by and resistant to hegemonic systems. See Žižek (1991, pp. 178-182) for a politico-ideological treatment of extimacy.

was mentioned previously in the chapter. In *Essays on Liberation*, Marcuse writes: “*freedom [...] is a precondition of freedom [liberation]*” (Marcuse, 2000, p. 91). Žižek adopts and reworks this phrase within his own theoretical register, reformulating it as: “*freedom [from ideological constraints, from the predominant mode of dreaming] is the condition of liberation*” (Žižek, 2008b, p. 196). He expands the meaning by adding that “*if we only change reality in order to realize our dreams, and do not change these dreams themselves, sooner or later we regress back to the old reality*” (Žižek, 2008b, p. 196). This reformulation underscores the psychoanalytic logic at work: liberation must also transform the very form of desire and fantasy. According to Žižek, this is a Hegelian “*positing of the presuppositions*” (1991, p. 215), where an action does not follow from an already-liberated subject but retroactively produces the conditions for its own emergence. In this way, Marcuse’s *Great Refusal* and Žižek’s *Act* – the details have been expanded below – converge around a shared imperative: true emancipation requires a break not only with the existing system, but with the very forms of dreaming and desiring that sustain it.

Žižek revisits Marcuse’s formula in his discussion of the superego and subjectivization, linking it directly to Lacan’s understanding of the subject as a traumatic void that precedes its symbolic construction (Žižek, 2008b, pp. 342–343). In this reading, Marcuse’s “*freedom is the condition of liberation*” is not simply a political slogan but an ethical paradox, and liberation depends not on the realization of existing desires but on the restructuring of the libidinal field itself (Žižek, 2008b, p. 343). For Žižek, this is where the death drive becomes central, not as a desire for literal death, but as the disruptive negativity that breaks the cycle of symbolic reproduction and ideological enjoyment. The superego, Žižek argues, is not a moral conscience but a cruel injunction to enjoy, an agency that produces guilt not through repression but through over-identification with imposed ideals (Žižek, 2008b, p. 342). Recent work in psychoanalytic political theory clarifies that this control is anchored not only in overt discipline but in the superego’s injunction to “Enjoy!”, converting drive into a self-policing quest for surplus satisfaction (McGowan, 2019). In this sense, Marcuse’s *Great Refusal* gains renewed relevance. It becomes an act not only against political repression but also against the superegoic imperative to enjoy within the system. True refusal, then, must target the internalized demand to derive

satisfaction from one's own unfreedom as a gesture that links Marcuse's utopian negation to Žižek's psychoanalytic ethics of the *Act*.

In Žižek's theoretical framework, the idea of refusal is closely tied to his idea of the *Act*, a key part of understanding rupture, negation, and subjectivation in emancipatory politics. This concept, however, presents a crucial dialectical tension that resolves into two distinct but sequential modalities: the *refusal to act* and the *act of refusal*. For Žižek, these are not contradictory but represent two vital moments within a single authentic political process. At its core, the Žižekian Act is not synonymous with any simple "action" or "active intervention." Rather, it is defined by its radical, transformative capacity to fundamentally alter the symbolic coordinates of the agent who performs it and the situation in which it occurs (Žižek, 1991, pp. 217-218; Žižek, 1992, p. 44). His books *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1991), *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (1992), and *The Ticklish Subject* (1999), as well as his later analyses of contemporary crises in *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (2014) and *Trouble in Paradise: From The End of History to the End of Capitalism* (2015), make this understanding very clear.

Žižek often uses Sophocles' Antigone³², "modern heroine [...] a rebel, a refusenik, a feminist, an anti-capitalist" (Žižek, 2016a, p. viii), as an exemplar of the "pure Act," an interpretation he draws heavily from Lacan and further develops. According to this tragedy, Antigone's unwavering insistence on burying her brother Polynices in defiance of Creon's decree, a gesture that culminates in her own death, is framed by Žižek as a quintessential cut in the Real and "makes Antigone a pure agent of death drive" (Žižek, 1992, pp. 46, 77, 92; Žižek, 2016a, p. xv). It is a persistence in the death drive: a radical, suicidal "No!" to the established state law, driven by a pure, unconditional desire that refuses any compromise with the symbolic order

³² Antigone by Sophocles (in or before 441 BCE) begins after Thebes' civil war, as the play follows Antigone, daughter of the ill-fated Oedipus, who confronts a moral crisis when her brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, kill each other in a fight for the throne. King Creon gives Eteocles a proper burial but orders that Polynices, the "traitor," must remain unburied, or else he will die. Antigone breaks this law by secretly covering her brother's body in funeral dust as a way to appeal to the unwritten divine laws of family. She agrees to Creon's sentence of being buried alive after being arrested, saying that she would rather die than give up her duty to her family and the gods. Her suicide in the cave sets off a tragic chain reaction: her fiancé, Haemon, who is also Creon's son, and Creon's wife, Eurydice, also kill themselves. This leaves Creon heartbroken and Thebes without a leader, illustrating the devastating consequences when personal conscience clashes with state power.

(Žižek, 1991, p. 117; Žižek, 1992, p. 77). Žižek posits that Antigone's acceptance of death is the only thing that cannot be co-opted or “misfire,” demonstrating that true freedom is always, at its core, negative. This freedom is an act of annihilation, a “wiping out,” where, as Žižek puts it, “*its final outcome is ultimately even insignificant, strictly secondary in relation to the NO! of the pure act*” (Žižek, 1991, p. 214; Žižek, 1992, p. 44).

This interpretation, however, is significantly deepened and refined by Alenka Zupančič's (2023) crucial re-reading in *Let Them Rot*. Zupančič shifts the focus from Antigone's act as a simple manifestation of the death drive to the radical singularity of her ethical commitment (2023, p. ix). The key, for Zupančič, is Antigone's infamous statement that she would let her own husband or child rot but insists on burying her brother Polynices because he is, after the death of their parents, literally irreplaceable (2023, pp. 51-53). This reveals, Zupančič argues, the core of Antigone's “*violence of principle*” (2023, p. viii): it is a radical refusal of the state's logic of exchangeability and a confrontation with the “*undead surplus*” of her family's traumatic lineage (*átē*) (2023, pp. 45, 53). In this reading, Antigone's Act is a gesture of sublimation that “elevates” the abject, rotting corpse, the Real of her brother's being, to the “*dignity of the Thing*,” thereby forcing the symbolic order to confront the traumatic void it is founded upon (Zupančič, 2023, p. 46). This links the pure ethical Act not just to the death drive, but to a radical ethics of the Real that challenges the very coordinates of the political.

Many scholars in Lacanian critical theory have disagreed with this reading of Antigone, especially the idea that her suicide was a perfect or pure act. Among them, notably Yannis Stavrakakis (2003), underpin the important tension in Žižek's own framework, as shown by the fact that Antigone is used as a paradigm for the Act. Stavrakakis contends that Antigone's gesture remains in contradiction within Žižek's strategy, which paradoxically oscillates between radical political action and anti-political inhuman desire; therefore, it is impossible and based on an illusion (Stavrakakis, 2003, p. 119; Stavrakakis, 2010, p. 6). Antigone's “*suicidal heroic ethics*” are a flight from the socio-symbolic field rather than an attempt to change it, motivated by a desire so pure that it can only be realized in her own death. A fundamental paradox is identified by Stavrakakis: in order for Antigone to serve as a

model for political action, Žižek must subtly “socialize” her desire, depriving it of the very inhuman purity that characterizes her act (Stavrakakis, 2003, pp. 117-120). Hence, the “lure of Antigone” lies in the fact that her gesture is sterile but absolute; it provides no alternative way to formulate the socio-political structure (Stavrakakis, 2003, p. 122). Stavrakakis, further drawing on a different reading of Lacan, argues that Žižek tends to downplay the Lacanian necessity of a subsequent symbolic re-articulation for an act to possess genuine socio-political efficacy and ethical dimension beyond a purely subjective or self-destructive gesture (Stavrakakis, 2010, pp. 1-5).

Žižek himself admits that the apparent *polymorphism* of his political prescriptions seems very different from one another, which can make them appear contradictory if they are not viewed as distinct strategic responses to different political situations. Indeed, I acknowledge that Žižek’s corpus presents an understandable situation, as he is one of the strategists of post-politics. In this sense, we must clarify the Žižekian sense of the Act to alleviate Stavrakakis’s concern. There are at least four such postures. The first is a Bartleby-like³³ refusal to act, where doing nothing is the most violent intervention (Žižek, 2006, pp. 342-343, 384-385; Žižek, 2008a, p. 217). As cited by Žižek from Badiou: “*It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent*” (2015, p. 175). This represents a radical withdrawal from the existing ideological framework, which operates by constantly demanding our participation, as seen in phrases such as “[p]articipate in democracy (by choosing between pre-approved options)!”; “Consume ethically!”; and “Share your opinion on social media!”; and most importantly, “Enjoy!” (Žižek, 2008a, pp. 22-24, 216).

The second posture is the properly revolutionary Act: a maximalist, “all-in” intervention that aims for a radical rupture with the existing order, as seen in uprisings and revolutions (Žižek, 2014; Žižek, 2015). The third involves a principled-pragmatic engagement with state power, a readiness to accept the compromises inherent in governance, following the path of figures like Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti or

³³ Bartleby is the law-office copyist in Herman Melville’s short story whose refrain – “I would prefer not to”—has come to stand for a stance of passive refusal. In Žižek’s usage, “Bartleby politics” names a refusal of pseudo-activity that suspends participation and interrupts the system’s functioning. (Bailes, 2020, p. 179)

Álvaro García Linera in Bolivia (García Linera, 2023, pp. 1-10). Finally, Žižek proposes a more speculative hypothesis concerning the necessity of a new political body capable of decisive and, if necessary, harsh implementation – a “new master” articulated through the tetrad of people, movement, party, and leader (Lenin & Žižek, 2017). These Žižekian suggestions in our understanding of him, seemingly disparate options, are not a menu from which to choose, but rather overdetermined and conjunctural responses, each with its own strategic logic and potential.

Thus, to lend conceptual precision to these modalities of rupture, it is necessary to synthesize them into Žižek’s holistic category of the *Evental Act* (Žižek, 2014, pp. 2-6; Žižek, 2015, p. 237). Adam Johnston (2009) articulates the conventional movement from act to event and from event to act. The Event stands here as the Badiou concept (Badiou, 2005). This is conceptualized by Badiou as, first, evental site within certain multiples “*on the edge of the void*” and something shocking, “*out of joint*,” that happens suddenly, interrupting the usual flow of things and appearing “*out of nowhere, suddenly and unexpectedly catalyzes processes of transformation within given sets of circumstances*” (Badiou, 2005, pp. 173-177; Johnston, 2009, p. xxviii; Žižek, 2014, p. 2). This *Event* emerges as a local rupture or unforeseeable origin that interrupts the usual flow of things, or an unpredictable irruption of radical exteriority that occurs at a specific site within a world. In this context, it is helpful to understand the modalities of political action, specifically distinguishing between a creative, Eros-driven collective horizon and a singular, often *Thanatos*-driven logic of confrontation (Badiou, 2005, pp. 406-407). Hence, it is an “*appearance without solid being as its foundation*” (Žižek, 2014, p. 2), effectively a creation ex nihilo. It is conceived as the singular moment that makes the impossible possible, thereby creating new possibilities where none existed before (Johnston, 2009). However, the Lacanian tradition, which Žižek follows, tracks a path from the singular subject’s confrontation with the death drive towards a politically cathartic but often self-destructive Act. Badiou’s trajectory, by contrast, moves from a collective, truth-bearing Event towards a new form of constitutive thought. The theoretical focus thereby shifts from the private, mortal, and destructive subject of the Lacanian Act to the universal, infinite, and constructive truth of the Badiouian Event. While the framework of this dissertation does not directly engage Badiou, this distinction is indispensable. It allows us to situate Žižek’s concept of the Act as one specific,

Thanatos-driven modality of rupture, setting it in productive tension with the more collective, Eros-driven, and transformative political horizon implied by Marcuse's Great Refusal.

And I think that the *Evental Act* is the convergence, as with Johnston, between Žižek and Marcuse. This is not simply one political choice among others, but a concept describing the very structure of transformative praxis. An authentic Act is, by definition, radical, as it constitutes a "pure risk" that suspends the established ideological field and invents new categories of thought. It is simultaneously an ethical Act, one that operates "beyond good and evil" by courageously confronting the subject's relation to their own desire, often through a "mad" decision that suspends the universal law for the sake of a singular commitment. Furthermore, any such act is inherently political, as it intervenes in the "discourse of jouissance," challenges the systemic or "objective violence" of the state, and reconfigures the collective social bond itself.

As already mentioned, Žižek's own psycho-political synthesis turns on the Lacanian claim that the subject is constituted by a constitutive lack, a "gap in the symbolic" that no positive content can fill. By reading this *ontological incompleteness* in conjunction with the Marxian primacy of antagonism, Žižek argues that contemporary ideology persists less as "false consciousness" than as a cynical fantasy framework that compels us to enjoy the system even while we recognize its exploitative nature. This is the force of his well-known diagnosis of the superego injunction whose obscene underside binds the subject to late-capitalist power precisely through surplus-enjoyment rather than repression. Such a configuration, Žižek argues, can be unsettled only by what Lacan calls *the Act*. And this moment is a punctual gesture that suspends the big Other, *traverses the fantasy*, and forces a new set of symbolic coordinates into being.

To elevate the Marcuse-Žižek synthesis from a mere theoretical contrast to a viable analytical tool, it must be deployed with one final, crucial distinction from the Lacanian-Žižekian framework: the difference between acting out, the passage to the act (*passage à l'acte*), and the Act proper. This allows us to precisely define the nature of the rupture within continuity, while simultaneously justifying the conceptual necessity of our synthesized term, the act of refusal.

According to Žižek (2010, p. 326), *acting out* is a hysterical performance for the big Other, a spectacle of dissent that, like the 2003 anti-war protests against the USA invasion of Iraq, allows participants to “save their beautiful souls” without fundamentally disturbing the symbolic coordinates of power. This is Marcuse's “repressive tolerance” in its closest form – a co-opted refusal. The *passage à l'acte*, conversely, is a pre-symbolic, violent explosion, an irrational revolt “without any program,” such as the 2005 riots in French suburbs, which destroys the social link rather than reconfiguring it (Žižek, 2010, p. 326). In this regard, Žižek suggests that the only alternative remaining is one of the tactical repertoires of the post-1968 militant student movement (as Žižek calls it, Leftist terrorist organizations): direct action (*l'action directe*). Yet Žižek's invocation of direct action is complicated by his reading of Marx's famous Thesis XI on Feuerbach: “[t]he philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” In Žižek's formulation, “the first task today is precisely [not] to succumb to the temptation to act, to directly intervene and change things [...], but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates” (Žižek, 2001). The paradox is that any *truly radical* action must first suspend the compulsion to act and must re-interpret the field so that action becomes more than a reaction.

Marcuse, writing in the wake of 1968, makes a parallel move. While calling the rebellious young intelligentsia to engage in the turmoil of their time, he warns against collapsing critique into unmediated activism:

“The famous Feuerbach-thesis never meant that now it is no longer necessary to interpret the world –we can just go about changing it. This undertaking today is even more difficult than before: the world must be interpreted again in order to be changed; and a good part of this interpretation requires critical thought, philosophical thought.” (Marcuse, 2011, p. 182)

In this light, both thinkers converge: Žižek cautions against the ideological trap of immediate intervention, while Marcuse insists that refusal without renewed interpretation risks becoming empty negation. The Act proper, therefore, is neither the co-opted spectacle of *acting out* nor the blind explosion of *passage à l'acte*. It is a rare and singular intervention that “traverses the fantasy,” undermining the hegemonic social link and forcing a new symbolic reality into being. It is a gesture that traverses

the fantasy that structures the symbolic order, thereby reconfiguring its very coordinates.

Here, Marcuse's *Great Refusal* and Žižek's Act illuminate each other. Žižek's Act, in its formal purity, risks remaining a Thanatos-driven cut without content; Marcuse's Refusal, with its utopian, Eros-driven content, risks remaining an unfulfilled aspiration. Only in synthesis – where the interpretative labour of the Refusal grounds the rupture of the Act – can the political subject move from negation toward the creation of new symbolic coordinates. As Rex Butler (2005, p. 66) notes, Žižek's examples of the Act – whether the French or Russian Revolutions, St. Paul's universalist expansion of Christianity, or even the events of September 11, 2001 – show how decisive ruptures retroactively change the coordinates of the possible, an effect that this thesis seeks to anchor in Marcuse's richer vision of liberated subjectivity. Therefore, Butler's overview underscores how Žižek's examples position the Act as an intervention that retroactively changes the coordinates of the possible, an approach that complements this thesis's emphasis on linking Marcusean refusal with Žižekian rupture.

2.5.1. Framing the Contrast

As briefly mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, to elevate the *Act of Great Refusal* to an actual event, we first need to look at the scholarly conversation that has developed around the productive tension between Marcuse and Žižek. Although Marcuse coined the concept of *the Great Refusal* in the 1960s and Žižek later theorized *the Act*, scholars rarely map them onto each other (Cho, 2006; Sharpe, 2004, 2010; Tavlin, 2015; Cremin, 2016; Rayman, 2018; Bailes, 2020; Schutzbach, 2023).

While a substantial critical literature underscores the distance that seems to separate Marcuse's Frankfurt-School utopianism from Žižek's Lacanian materialism—one rooted in Hegelian-Marxist notions of alienation and liberation, the other in a post-Althusserian theory of ideology and the drive (Marcuse 1966, 2007; Žižek, 1991; Dean, 2006; Johnston, 2008; Kellner & Pierce, 2014), critical claims of an outright incompatibility overlook the fact that both thinkers articulate negativity as the engine of emancipation. Crucially, this is not a simple opposition, but rather a theoretical articulation of how, in psychoanalytic terms, *Eros* itself is “*riddled with negativity*”

and must incorporate the logic of the death drive as a limit in order to produce new forms of life (Martínez Ruiz, 2021, p. viii).

Another point attempts to merge the Frankfurt School and the Slovenian School under the catch-all banner of “*Lacanian Marxism*,” flattening the very geopolitical asymmetries between *Western Marxism*’s theoretical core and an Eastern European periphery that shape their divergent problematics as a complementary motive (Anderson, 1989, pp. 57-58; Irwin & Motoh, 2014).

Therefore, the big difference in the way Marcuse and Žižek think about politics makes things even more complicated. Although Marcuse's critical theory is highly radical, it is primarily grounded in the Western Marxist core (Anderson, 1989, pp. 25-26). His study of the “one-dimensional society” is a criticism of how things worked in the rich, advanced industrial capitalism of the post-war era. This has led to academic criticisms that his framework makes a specific experience of domination that is mostly found in the Global North (cf. Therborn, 2008). Žižek, on the other hand, thinks about things from the outside. His whole intellectual project is based on what he learned from living in a post-socialist world, where he had to deal with the cynical ideological void left by the collapse of the “*big Other*” of “*actually existing socialism*.” His criticism is not just about how capitalism has been able to oppress people; it is also about how its global victory and the cynical failure of its only historical alternative have caused trauma. Even in this sense, the peripheral epistemology of Žižek is a notion of refusal in itself and for itself.

Following this context of convergent attempts in the literature mentioned above, the intellectual trajectory traced from Marcuse to Žižek brings into sharp relief a fundamental schism within critical theory itself. This divergence crystallizes around the relationship between the political subject and the political event, presenting two distinct theoretical paths. This split in critical theory mirrors two distinct readings of Freud. The first, closer to the tradition of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), assumes there is no mass without a leader: the *subject-before-the-act*. Here, the political subject pre-exists the act; the group is held together by shared identification and guided by a figure or ideal. And the subject is driven by a prior motivation or desire. This model has shaped much of early critical theory, where the revolutionary subject must already be formed to carry out the act. The second reading,

drawn from Freud's metapsychological texts – *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920 [1955]), *Totem and Taboo* (1913 [2004]), and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930 [2002]) – opens another path: the *act-before-the-subject*. These works explore the idea of a primal horde that devours the leader, suggesting that collectives can emerge through rupture, without pre-given unity. And a traumatic rupture retroactively founds the political agent. The subject here is not the cause but the effect of the political event. In this framework, the political event is a traumatic, leaderless eruption of negativity, and the subject is merely its secondary, retroactive effect. Motivation is not a cause to be discovered, but a narrative constructed after the fact.

It is important not to treat these two models – action with a leader and act without one – as a strict opposition. As Badiou (2012, pp. 62-70) reminds that the “*organization is the same process as the event*,” there is an act without a leader or political organisation, but it is one kind of act; and there is an act with a leader, which is another kind. These are not mutually exclusive. In practice, the two forms often converge within the same event or sequence. A political eruption may begin as a leaderless, spontaneous act – what Freud's metapsychology or Žižek would frame as a rupture without subject – but later consolidate around figures, ideas, or structures that reintroduce a kind of symbolic leadership. The key question, then, is not whether there is a leader, but how subjectivation occurs in relation to the act: before it, through it, or as its effect.

The following brief couplet is frequently cited in the literature on the Frankfurt School, which can be read in connection with Gramsci's (1971) infamous programmatic slogan during the late 1910s, “*Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will*” (p. 175) – to summarize Horkheimer's approach to social critique: We must be theoretical pessimists and practical optimists. We must fear the worst and yet try our best (*Wir müssen theoretische Pessimisten und praktische Optimisten sein. Wir müssen das Schlimmste befürchten und doch unser Bestes versuchen*) (Marx Horkheimer: Portrait & Gespräch, 1969, 33:10:00, my trans.; Žižek, 2021, p. 165). Horkheimer's vision of a “*totally technicized life*” in *Dawn and Decline* exemplifies this theoretical pessimism:

The immanent logic of social development points to a totally technicized life as its final stage. Man's domination of nature reaches such proportions that

scarcity, and thus the necessity of man's dominion over man, disappears. But at the same time, the end is total disillusionment, the extinction of mind insofar as it differs from the tool that is reason [...] [A]ll this is part of the dialectic of the Enlightenment, the change from truth into unconditioned conformity with meaninglessness, with reality generally (Horkheimer, 1978, p. 237).

This position can be observed in Marcuse's consistent temper of optimism by a penetrating pessimism, most notably articulated in ODM. In here, Marcuse remains deeply skeptical about the capacity of post-industrial societies to accommodate critique, warning that such societies increasingly paralyze opposition and become self-reproducing systems without dissent. Despite this bleak diagnosis, he affirms a commitment to negativity as an enduring political stance. As he writes, critical theory “wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 261). This gesture, while acknowledging the apparent futility of resistance, sustains a kind of fidelity to refusal beyond empirical success. The most explicit formulation of what Eagleton (2015) later calls “*hope without optimism*” appears in the final line of ODM, where Marcuse quotes Walter Benjamin: “*It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 261). This is a key idea that Anderson also proclaims, stating that pessimism is a clearly common feature in Western Marxism (1987, p. 88).

This tension between a politics of optimistic representation and one of pessimistic rupture is captured in a crucial, though often overlooked, passage in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

“Art affects us, but as a mild narcotic and can provide no more than a temporary refuge for us from the hardships of life; its influence is not strong enough to make us forget real misery.” (Freud, 1930, p. 15)

This classic “*Freudian pessimism over change*” (Frosh, 1999, p. 62), however, invites a crucial dialectical question that serves as the theoretical launching point for this dissertation: if aesthetic sublimation is merely a mild narcotic, what constitutes a strong one? It is in their respective answers to this question that the projects of Marcuse and Žižek become both distinct and complementary.

Marcuse's project can be read as a direct response to, and a radical inversion of, this Freudian verdict. He argues that while conventional art under capitalism may be a palliative, a genuinely revolutionary aesthetic – embodying a “new sensibility” – is

not a mild refuge but the most potent form of political negation. For Marcuse, the aesthetic dimension holds the utopian promise of the Great Refusal. Art, fantasy, and the memory of a liberated Eros are precisely the 'strong narcotic' of hope, capable of arming the subject with the motivational force to challenge the reality principle itself.

Žižek, in turn, pushes this critique to a second power. In his work, he employs something that both Freud (in his pessimism) and Marcuse (in his realist optimism) underestimate: the force of the strongest narcotic of all – ideology. In the contemporary post-political order, ideology does not simply help us forget our misery; its fantasmatic frame commands us to find our enjoyment in it. The neoliberal injunction to “Enjoy!” one's own precarity, debt, and alienated labor is the obscene libidinal glue of the system. Therefore, a political rupture cannot be a simple refusal fueled by utopian art. The Žižekian Act must be a gesture violent enough to traverse the fantasmatic screen of ideological jouissance and confront the traumatic Real of social antagonism that it conceals.

In this vein, structural homology is evident: both thinkers view the subject not as a pre-existing, autonomous entity, but as fundamentally constituted and constrained by social and ideological forces. Marcuse's “one-dimensional man” is a subject thoroughly interpellated into conformity by the mechanisms of advanced industrial society. Žižek's “barred subject” is interpellated by the Symbolic Order and its attendant ideological fantasies. In both cases, ideology plays a crucial role in shaping subjectivity and ensuring compliance with the dominant social order in the realm of narratives and signifiers.

In Marcuse, the analytic circuit runs from *surplus repression* through *repressive desublimation* to the possibility of an Eros-charged *Great Refusal*; in Žižek, an almost isomorphic circuit stretches from *surplus enjoyment* through *inherent transgression* to the disruptive, radical *Act* that touches *the Real*. Reading these circuits side by side does not collapse one thinker into the other; it highlights how both diagnose late-capitalist paralysis in formally parallel ways, thereby justifying a joint analytical lens. Such homology allows us to treat the contemporary revolts as an event that simultaneously activates Marcuse's register of libidinal refusal and Žižek's logic of *the Act*, furnishing a composite framework for contemporary protest analysis.

The framework for this chapter, after all, proposes the following synthesis:

1) Under the context of this study's scope, the object of refusal is the dominant neoliberal story of post-politics and the "end of history," therefore, the act of rejecting the false needs (economic, political, cultural) imposed by capitalist society and reclaiming the power of genuinely human desire.

2) The desire for liberation (Eros) is articulated through "new sensibilities" and emerges in counter-narratives that challenge the dominant story. *It is the fuel for refusal.*

3) The Act is the event that violently tears the fabric of the hegemonic narrative, exposing its ideological fantasy and making a new political narrative (retroactively) possible. *It is the form of refusal.*

Ultimately, the dialectic between Marcuse and Žižek is mediated and made analyzable through narrative. Thus, the schism between the motivated subject and the groundless act is resolved dialectically. Political subjectivity emerges in the contingent and constant struggle over narrative. The framework of the Act of Great Refusal, therefore, is a tool of critical historicism, one that analyzes protest not as a simple reaction but as a complex and ongoing battle to "reinvent history from narrative," to seize control of the stories that define political possibility.

This chapter has traced the foundations of Marcuse's "Great Refusal" and Žižek's "Act," culminating in a synthesized framework that bridges Eros-driven utopianism with a Thanatos-inflected logic of rupture. To operationalize this theoretical tool, the next phase of this thesis constructs its analytical application. Chapter 3 will therefore develop the analytic framework of the "Act of Great Refusal," detailing how the interplay of psychoanalysis, ideology, and narrative can be used to dissect contemporary protest.

3. ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK OF THE ACT OF GREAT REFUSAL: PSYCHOANALYSIS, IDEOLOGY AND NARRATIVE

To fully construct the analytical framework for the *Act of Great Refusal*, it is methodologically essential to build a bridge between the psychoanalytic-philosophical tradition of the thesis and the more empirical field of Social Movement Studies (SMS). While critical theory provides the tools to dissect the deep structure of ideology and desire, SMS offers a vocabulary for analyzing the concrete practices through which movements contest power. As Rodríguez (2020) demonstrates in his study of Chilean social movements and retroactive political subjectivity during the early 21st century, a crucial point of convergence lies in understanding social critique not as an abstract theoretical exercise but as a practical, collective activity enacted *in movement*.

In this context, this chapter addresses a central gap in the study of critical theory and its convergence with social movements. As a review of the field demonstrates, there is no comprehensive instance in the literature where psychoanalytic categories are singularly employed to meaningfully comprehend, as a coherent whole, the political subjectivity constituted at the intersection of narrative, ideology, and traumatic essence of the historicity (Yiannis, 1995; Caruth, 1996; Fage-Butler, 2021). In other words, rather than it should be seen in this comprehensive unity that the task to theorize the psychic life of refusal itself – how a protest movement's legacy, encapsulated in its “ending narratives,” reshapes the political landscape and the subjective ideological coordinates of its contingent and temporal being (Bailes, 2020). The core challenge, therefore, is one of theoretical construction. To move from observing a protest to understanding its transformative potential requires a framework that can trace the hegemonic connections linking distinct theoretical traditions to a movement’s proclaimed “ends.” More importantly, it requires a model that can analyze the counter-hegemonic potential born from this very process (Moreiras, 2001).

This is a demanding task that leans on a foundational debate in the canon of social sciences between historical structure and political agency; a persistent tension exists between macro-level theories that explain systemic conditions and micro- or meso-level theories that explain concrete political action. The challenge resonates from C. Wright Mills' (2000) foundational call to connect biography and history; through the divergent inquiry between a macro-level historical structures and the concrete political agency into world order (structural versus constructivist) by IR theorists Robert W. Cox (1981) and its more "social constructivist" tendency Alexander Wendt (1992); across the influential models of contentious politics developed by sociologists Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly (2015); and ultimately, within the critical theoretical tradition itself, from Marcuse's (2007) political-psychoanalytic radical critique of one-dimensional domination over one-dimensional man (subjectivity to achieve political subjectivity) and its political strategy *Great Refusal* to Žižek's (1991) holistic psychoanalytic inquiry into ideology and the political Act. This debate is not merely abstract, as it directly shapes the way social movements and protests are analyzed. Macro-level frameworks, such as those of Cox or Wendt, often struggle to account for the subjective and unconscious forces that animate collective action, while micro- or meso-level approaches can risk underestimating the structural conditions that constrain or enable political agency. Making this tension explicit is crucial because it ties the historical debate directly to the conceptual framework of this study.

Existing paradigms in social movement studies – whether emphasizing *culture* (including framing processes linking social psychological and structural factors, e.g., Snow et al., 1986, p. 464, and theories focused on identity, cultural codes, and post-materialist values typical of 'new social movements', e.g., Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1989; 1996), *politics* (viewing contention as an ongoing political process, e.g., Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982), and *economics* (involving calculations of rational choice, e.g., Olson, 1965; McCarthy & Zald, 1977), prominent analytical frameworks derived from these traditions—such as those focused on institutional politics (e.g., Tarrow, 2011; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015) or resource mobilization (e.g., Oberschall, 1973; Jenkins, 1983; Earl & Kimport, 2011) – struggle to register the subjective excess that erupts in refusals. Their analytic vocabularies account for organisation, strategy, and opportunity; however, they often lack the tools to comprehensively analyze the interplay between

structure, agency, and the unconscious forces animating collective action when confronted with the temporal flash of an event, the retroactive logic of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy, or the historical lateness through which the present is experienced as crisis (Benjamin, 1969). These include the subjective dimensions of refusal, the complex operations of ideology, the retroactivity of the historical dimension in the present day, and the possibility of radical, counter-hegemonic events defining such struggles, as well as the potential for profound systemic disruption inherent in these uprisings. Recent efforts in SMS to resolve this by “bringing capitalism back in” (Della Porta, 2015) are a crucial step, but they do not fully equip us to analyze the subjective dimensions of refusal and the unconscious forces animating collective action. Following Badiou, I therefore insist that contemporary uprisings cannot be read as the immediate “flip-side” of capitalist development, because the logic of the event interrupts such mirroring (Badiou, 2012, p. 10). This chapter, therefore, reads movements as sites where individual initiative (agency) is both enabled and delimited by pre-existing political, economic, and libidinal structures within the broad understanding of culture.

In this vein, the primary objective of this chapter, altogether, is to construct that very framework as a synthesized, psychoanalytic politico-philosophical instrument capable of navigating this complex terrain. To fill this, the framework developed here synthesizes three dimensions that have remained “largely disparate” in previous studies: psychoanalysis, ideology, and narrative. The argument proceeds in three stages. First, it establishes the theoretical necessity of this triad, detailing how unconscious affect (as in psychoanalysis) provides the engine for political contestation. This context will be further demonstrated in the shortcomings of relying solely on the political process model, which has been dominant since the 1980s (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 84), or the “culturalist” turn in new social movement theories. Then, it will explore the relationship between the “framing perspective” and the more robust psychoanalytic concept of ideology, revealing what is at stake in the choice between them. Fourthly, it will analyze the creative dimension of refusal: the forging of new counter-narratives and signifiers that articulate a “post-neoliberal desire.” This establishes the chapter as the methodological and theoretical core of the entire dissertation. In conclusion, it will be demonstrated that the following chapter’s groundwork will be laid for the framework at the macro-level of historicism,

illustrating how the Act of Great Refusal serves as an intervention against “end” narratives.

3.1. Narrative and Ideology in Protests

In a time of contradictions, the deadlock of impossibility and hegemonic totality³⁴, which has primarily favoured neoliberal-democratic ideology, generates an urgent quest to (re-)politicise social forces and open horizons for radical change. In the context of historicity in philosophy, the constant suppression of the authentic self of being-in-itself produces a negation of being-for-the-subject, and this movement is conceptualized as emancipatory potentials through repetition (Dale, 2014; Comay, 2015). Over time, this conceptualization has given rise to revolutionary praxis, and a discipline has emerged as social movement theory. Emerging in the 18th century, the discipline has developed from *old* to *new* (Tilly, 1978; Tilly et al., 2019), and for centuries, this “movement” functioned as the engine of historical change.

Returning to the conceptual coordinates laid out in the intellectual framework, in the wake of the so-called “capitalist revolution”³⁵ (post-industrial society) and the diffuse intellectual currents associated with “post-modernism,” the “*people*” or “*social*” have increasingly been severed from their capacity for movement and transformation. What emerges is a pervasive mystification that operates across domains, generating forms emptied of their substantive force. In sexuality, we encounter the “sexual without sex”; in politics, the “political without politics”; in collective identities and subjectivities, a “multitude without radicality”; and at the macro-historical level, we are left with “democracy without demos,” “globalization without the global,” “history without historicity,” and “freedom without agency.” As Deleuze and Guattari (2009) showed with the concept of “body without organs” that how desire and political energies are re-coded into simulations of movement without transformative potential and Badiou sharpened this diagnosis with the concept of the “worldless” (*sans-monde*), those excluded from the “count” of the world and rendered

³⁴ By hegemony, this study mainly follows Gramsci’s insight that rule is secured when the dominant bloc’s meanings become common sense, a process Laclau & Mouffe (1985) later recast in psychoanalytic terms of empty signifiers and overdetermination.

³⁵ The term “capitalist revolution” is used here to refer to the neoliberal restructuring of the global economy since the late 1970s, marked by the dismantling of welfare-state protections, financialization, and the transnationalization of production (Harvey, 2007).

invisible by the dominant logic of appearance, as much as like Marcuse's "marginalized" or "outcasts" subjects. Moreover, Badiou connects the "wordless" concept through the event to "*what makes possible the restitution of the inexistent*" (Badiou, 2012, p. 56). Indeed, Žižek calls it in a very programmatic way in the post-political age as "*although [capitalism] is global and encompasses the whole world, it sustains a stricto sensu worldless ideological constellation, depriving the large majority of people of any meaningful cognitive mapping*" (Žižek, 2015, p. 7).

This axis of erasure culminates in a "*society without opposition*" (Marcuse, 2007), where the collective subject capable of effecting change is systematically disqualified from existence. As previously discussed with Marcuse's diagnosis of "*smooth democratic unfreedom*" and Žižek's observations on the absorption of conflict into procedural formalism, it is precisely from this position of exclusion that the possibility of rupture arises. In the same vein, Badiou's *worldless* again marks the void within the situation, the very point from which an Evental Act and a Great Refusal can emerge, interrupting the emptied forms of the present and re-opening the horizon for a collective subject yet to be constituted.

In moments of crisis, liberal democracy steps into this void and presents itself as the endpoint of history. Politically, it manifests as parliamentary rule equated with the pinnacle of popular sovereignty and "*democracy within capitalism*" (Bailes, 2020, p.178); economically, as an open-market neoliberal rationality that to permit "*accumulation by dispossession*" (Harvey, 2004; Harvey, 2007, p. 160); and culturally, as a postmodern pluralist tolerance that celebrates difference while remaining tethered to market logics and ignoring history and class struggle (Jameson, 1983, p.16). This "democratic" synthesis seeks to close off the horizon of radical change. Yet collective uprisings, from the Paris Commune to today's street revolts (extra-parliamentary politics), continue to return, insisting that "the end" is never final (Barker et al., 2013).

The history of SMT is, therefore, also the history of a discipline attempting to rationalize this irrepressible return of the repressed: to impose a logic of structure and strategy onto the often-chaotic eruption of collective political will within the world-system of historical capitalism (Arrighi et al., 1989; Tilly et al., 2019). However, in this effort, the subject of the movement – the agent who protests, rebels, and refuses – has remained a persistent blind spot between the macro, meso, and micro dimensions

of analysis. This “unthought” and, as already mentioned, “dead” and “twisted” subject is directly linked to the lineage of erasure outlined above: it is the ghost in the machine of SMT, a subject rendered invisible by the same processes that mystify politics and history. To bring this subject back into view requires a shift in the analytical lens. Ideology and narrative, approached through psychoanalysis, help to unmystify this lineage by tracing how collective affectiveness (nostalgia, melancholy, fantasy), unconscious attachments, and symbolic co-ordinates shape both the apparent closure of history and the recurrent eruptions of refusal. From this perspective, the subject of protest is not merely a rational actor positioned in structural fields but an agent of negation and possible transformation (Marcuse, 1966; Marcuse, 2007; Žižek, 1991).

Recognizing this absence requires a brief return to the nineteenth-century origins of critique. In the 19th century, Marx (1845) provided a seminal critique of ideology as the ruling ideas of the epoch – the notion that the dominant class’s perspective becomes the “common sense” worldview. Marx (1845) argued that under a class society, ideology functions like a camera obscura, inverting reality in the minds of the oppressed to present an unjust social order as natural and just. This concept of “false consciousness” implied that revolutionary action required exposing the falsity of the dominant narrative and raising class consciousness. However, classical Marxism gave primacy to material economic conditions and class position in explaining social change; the role of individual psychology or subjective desire in sustaining or challenging ideology was not yet fully theorized. Revolution was seen mainly as a response to objective exploitation and crisis, rather than an act of will or desire nurtured in the psyche of the oppressed (Smelser, 1962; Blumer, 1971; Le Bon, 2001).

By the mid-20th century, two strands were emerging: one, a historical materialist view that emphasized structural narratives (class, capitalism, progress), and two, a psychoanalytic view that emphasized unconscious motivations and emotional narratives. Early perspectives set the stage for integrating these. They acknowledged that protest is as much about meaning and emotion as about material grievances. However, it was only with the upheavals of the mid-20th century and the maturation of critical theory that a more systematic analytic framework – incorporating narrative, ideology, and psychoanalysis – was articulated.

At this juncture, it is useful to recall how the concept of ideology critique has evolved in response to shifting configurations of power. Early structuralist and classical Marxist traditions (e.g., Althusser, 1971) prioritized the “mode of production” and the reproduction of class relations as the primary locus of ideological control. Ideology was understood as a relatively coherent system that naturalized the existing social order, functioning largely through state apparatuses and cultural institutions. With the rise of poststructuralism, Michel Foucault (1978) expanded the analytic field by foregrounding the diffuse, capillary nature of “power.” For Foucault, power is not centralized but dispersed, embedded in everyday discourses, norms, and practices. This shift reoriented ideology critique from the macrostructural reproduction of capitalism to the microprocesses through which subjects are constituted. Later constructivist and discourse-theoretical approaches (e.g., Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) further developed this line of inquiry by conceptualizing social reality itself as discursively constructed. These perspectives emphasized the contingency of social meaning and the political struggles over signification that shape collective identities. While these approaches enriched the understanding of how domination is reproduced, they also introduced methodological risks. Eagleton (1991, p. 8) cautions against stretching the concept of power or discourse so far that “*everything is ideological*” or “*everything is political*,” arguing that such indiscriminate usage risks “*emptying them of force*” and obscuring the specificity of social conflicts.

To navigate this tension, Jameson proposes what he calls “*the historical and dialectical reevaluation of conflicting interpretive methods*” (2002, p. 196): a method by which Marxism “*subsumes other interpretive modes*” (2002, p. 31) through radical historicization. This approach insists that not only the object of analysis but also the analytic method and the analyst must be situated within the historical totality. In this way, the object of study becomes “*less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it*” (Jameson, 2002, p. x). Jameson’s framework maintains the structural insights of classical Marxism while incorporating the discursive sensitivity of poststructuralism and constructivism, without dissolving the specificity of social conflicts.

At this point, psychoanalysis deepens the diagnosis. If Marx uncovers how dominant ideas sustain power, psychoanalytic theory helps explain why these ideas

hold such a strong grip on subjects. Examining the unconscious side of ideology is both hopeful and cautionary. If psychoanalysis shows that ideology is linked to fantasy, nostalgia, and melancholy, this helps explain why it is so powerful, but also why it is never completely stable. Fantasies and nostalgic attachments can hold people to the very ideas and systems that limit them, but they also preserve memories of gratification and hope that point beyond the present order. Melancholy, by contrast, can freeze subjects in the loss of past certainties, yet it also makes visible the contingency of the present by keeping alive the sense that things could be otherwise. These affective forces shape the temporality and fragility of narratives, pulling between past attachments, present dislocations, and future possibilities.

As Eagleton (1991, pp. 185-186) explains, the primary mechanisms of the mind – such as projection, displacement, sublimation, condensation, repression, idealization, substitution, rationalization, and disavowal – are also active in ideology. This is one of Freud's key contributions to the study of ideology, as it explains why people's agreement with existing power structures is so strong and why no system can ever fully control people's inner drives. Freud's view that the pleasure principle and the reality principle can never fully merge explains why a complete utopia is impossible. At the same time, it also means that total control or dystopia is impossible because fantasies, nostalgic desires, and even melancholic attachments always exceed what the system can manage.

For this reason, social movements cannot be understood only as practical responses to problems. They also work with these affective and narrative dimensions. They mobilize fantasy and hope as resources for political engagement, reframe nostalgia and melancholy to highlight the contingency of the present, and use these elements to develop alternative narratives that challenge the dominant order.

Deceived by the positivist rationality that Marcuse directed at "*critical theory did not venture for fear of losing its scientific character*," captivates the social movements' own visions whose unreal content of utopia cannot be translated as "*no place*" anymore, but rather it is "*blocked*" by the system itself (Marcuse, 2000, pp. 3-4).

In this way, their work intersects with key concerns of social movement theory, such as resources, opportunities, and framing, while also offering a utopian critique of the present that keeps open the possibility of structural transformation. However, the present study bypasses the early crowd-psychology accounts of protest for two reasons. First, their pathologizing lens obscures the key analytical tension that will carry this chapter – the relation between agency and structure in contentious politics. Second, they predate the hegemony debates that ground the dissertation’s central problematic: how dominant narratives organise consent and how collective actors contest that organisation. Within the social-movement field, the four paradigms – Resource Mobilisation, Political Process, New Social Movements, and the Framing approach – together map the terrain of post-1968 contention that confronts these issues head-on, offering mid-range mechanisms through which structure, strategic agency, and symbolic struggle interact. Each, therefore, provides an entry point for linking psychoanalytic insights about fantasy, melancholy, and nostalgia to concrete movement dynamics. Focusing on these four paradigms also matches the scope of the thesis.

To build a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, this chapter will proceed through a cumulative analysis of the major theoretical paradigms that have defined social movement studies since 1968. These are not presented as mutually exclusive theories but as complementary lenses that, when integrated, provide a multi-layered account of how movements build cognitive responses to the contemporary condition. The analysis begins with the structural and political foundations of collective action before moving to its cognitive and cultural dimensions.

3.1.2. The Rationality and Logistics of Contention: Opportunities, Mobilization, Politics and Cognitive Liberation

The theoretical conceptualisation of social movements experienced a significant shift in the 1970s, moving away from earlier “collective behaviour” and “grievance-based” models that were largely seen as theoretically weak and empirically insufficient. The study of contentious politics in the social sciences has produced a sophisticated set of theoretical tools for explaining the emergence, dynamics, and outcomes of social movements. In its place, a series of powerful paradigms emerged that centered on the role of strategic action and structural context. Resource

Mobilization Theory (RMT), for instance, posits that grievances are constant, and what determines a movement's rise is its ability to mobilize and deploy resources – money, labor, and organizational infrastructure (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Oberschall, 1973). The Political Process Theory (PPT) expanded on this, arguing that mobilization is most successful when it coincides with shifts in the broader political structure, such as increased elite divisions or greater state receptivity, which create “political opportunities” for challengers (McAdam, 1982; Tilly, 1978). So, this created a synthetic model that brought together the main branches of American social movement studies. This school marked a significant “rationalist turn” in the field.

RMT, significantly influenced by Mancur Olson's (1965) *Logic of Collective Action*, adopted an “economic logic” and viewed participants as “rational decision-makers,” which is also known as rational choice theory. Olson (1965) argued that individuals participate in collective action because the “collective good” is either “more rewarding or less costly than inaction”. This rationalist framework was crucial in moving the field beyond psychological reductionism, which often pathologized protestors as irrational or emotionally unstable. Instead, RMT and PPT treated movements as rational, strategic actors navigating a given political and material landscape.

However, later on, RMT shifted the focus away from individual psychological states and Olson’s rational-choice-based, individualistic, and market-oriented logic of collective action towards the “organizational, strategic, and political-structural factors that enable collective action.” A core premise of RMT is that “social movements emerge as a result of changes in a group's organization, resources, and opportunities for collective action”. McCarthy & Zald (1977) further emphasized how “resource flows influence movement emergence and success”. Resources are broadly categorized into material resources, human resources, and moral resources, such as money, talent, contacts, and formal organization (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Rohlinger & Gentile, 2017, pp. 11-12; Gosh & Garada, 2024, pp.).

For RMT, political opportunity structures are critical determinants. The work of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2015) was central in developing this perspective into a comprehensive theory of contentious politics, their preferred term for the entire spectrum of conflictual collective action, from strikes and protests to revolutions. They

argued that protest is not an anomaly but a normal, if disruptive, part of politics. A key concept they introduced is the repertoire of contention: the limited set of known, culturally available ways that people have for acting together on shared interests. These repertoires (e.g., street demonstrations, barricades, petitions, social media campaigns) are learned, not invented on the spot, and they evolve slowly over time.

Furthermore, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly's (2001) work diverges from early RMT and PPT. McAdam (1982), for instance, in PPT, identified key features of political opportunity, including the state's constitutional structure, the consistency of elite alliances, the presence of elite allies, and the state's capacity for and tendency towards repression. Tilly's (1978) work also conceptualized "opportunity" in terms of how organized groups and state institutions either accept or oppose a movement's goals, thereby influencing the cost of mobilization for revolution. These structural elements are perceived as creating the potential for collective action. Furthermore, "mobilising structures," referring to pre-existing social networks, organisations, or other channels (both formal and informal), are considered essential for the organisation and survival of movements, as they provide a social base, resources, and means for coordination.

While RMT acknowledges structural conditions, it also frames individual participation as a strategic choice. Individuals are seen as active and conscious participants in the making of social movements, developing their own "discursive narrative to political power". However, RMT has faced critique for underestimating "meaning-making processes" and for not fully explaining why, when exposed to similar structural conditions, some individuals mobilise while others remain inactive. Buechler (1995), for example, notes that the construction of collective identity is often overlooked in structural theories. This is precisely where the dissertation's framework intervenes. The rationalist models can explain *how* a movement organizes, but struggle to explain *why* it erupts with such affective force at a particular moment. They can account for the logistics of refusal but not its libidinal economy. The concept of "cognitive liberation", for example, was introduced by McAdam (1982, pp. 48-51) to address this gap, referring to the psychological shift where people stop blaming themselves for their problems and begin to see the system as unjust and changeable. Yet even this concept often remains at the level of conscious belief, failing to plumb

the unconscious depths of desire, trauma, and fantasy that a psychoanalytic approach uncovers.

In the context of the agent-structure dichotomy, RMT posits agents – i.e., social movement organizations (SMOs), leaders, and participants – as rational decision-makers who weigh costs and benefits when choosing to engage in collective action. McCarthy and Zald (1977) explicitly distinguished between a “social movement” as a set of opinions and beliefs and the “social movement industry” comprising SMOs that work to achieve movement goals. This perspective highlights the active role of “protest entrepreneurs,” individuals and organizations that mobilize resources to initiate a movement. Tilly (1978) and Tarrow (2011) further conceptualize this through the notion of the “social infrastructure of mobilization,” referring to social networks and common settings that enable collective action. McAdam et al. (1996) term these “organizational infrastructures” as conditions of possibility for movements.

The rationalist-structuralist focus on resources and opportunities, while foundational, thus leaves the crucial dimension of meaning and subjectivity undertheorized. In response to this analytical gap, a “cultural turn” began to sweep through social movement studies. Scholars recognized that movements are not just strategic players in a political game; they are also producers of meaning, identity, and culture. This led to the emergence of New Social Movement (NSM) theory and, later, the discourse-focused “populist turn,” both of which attempted to correct the rationalist bias by centering the symbolic and identity-based struggles that animate contemporary contention. The next section examines these paradigms, demonstrating how they have moved the field closer to the concerns of this dissertation, yet still fall short of a fully developed psychoanalytic theory of ideology and the political subject.

3.1.3. From Class to Identity and Populist Turn

Another major paradigm in social movement studies, often contrasted with the North American process model, is the European tradition of NSM theory. The second collective action group, a defining feature of the NSM theory, emerged in industrially advanced nations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The scholars include Manuel Castells (1983), Alain Touraine (1985), Jürgen Habermas (1987), and Alberto Melucci (1989) in this field contend that these movements respond to grievances that have

emerged in post-industrial and post-materialist societies, in general, argued that conflicts in post-industrial societies had shifted from purely economic struggles to contests over culture, lifeworld, and identity.

Langman (2022) details how the post-WWII era saw the emergence of a new generation rejecting materialism for “post-materialist values” such as creativity, self-fulfillment, and empathy. This period gave rise to movements against the “colonization of the life world” by rational logic, seeking “cultural changes and identity-based changes that granted equality and dignity” (Langman, 2022, p. 138). NSM theory was developed to explain movements like feminism, environmentalism, and peace activism, which did not fit the traditional mold of the labor movement. These movements were seen as defending personal autonomy and cultural identity against the encroachments of the bureaucratic state and the capitalist market.

The prominent advocates of the NSM theory that the central conflicts of post-industrial society had shifted from the factory floor to the cultural sphere have formulated a societal theory to account for the emergence of social movements, which, in their view, did not conform to the established patterns (in terms of actions, objectives, and identity formation) of the traditional labor movement. Whether categorized as a “*programmed society*,” “*information society*,” “*technocratic society*,” “*complex society*,” or “*post-industrial society*,” these scholars have put forth an interpretation of the primary social transformations that occurred during the 1960s and trace the emergence of social movements that were less about class struggle and more about contests over information, identity, and personal autonomy against programmed, informed, technocratic, complex and post-industrial socio-politic fabrics within this framework. NSM theory provided an invaluable corrective to economistic models by highlighting the importance of culture, values, and identity. However, in its focus on post-materialist concerns, it sometimes risked under-theorizing the persistence of class and economic exploitation, particularly in the context of the Global South.

On the contrary, Žižek (2001) highlights these critics and rejects their theory of political subjectivity in his article, “*Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the Communist Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century?*”. He briefly notes that this perspective conflicts with Marx's argument that the possibility of a proletarian

revolution arises from the inherent conflicts within the capitalist mode of production. Žižek argues that new social movements, including the Zapatistas in Chiapas, often have their political power neutralized by the existing political system (Žižek, 2001, p. 198). According to him, even though the system appears to be open to hearing the demands of these movements, the very process of negotiation ultimately deprives them of their universal political impact. Therefore, NSMs often find that the existing political system appears open to hearing their demands, but this process can undermine their true political influence.

Other contemporary theorists have stressed the role of *discourse* and *empty signifiers* in protests. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) provided a post-structuralist framework for understanding this process in their seminal work, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Rejecting Marxist economic determinism, they argued that social reality is not a fixed structure but a contingent and open field of discourse. For them, political identity is not a given (based on class, for instance) but is actively constructed through articulation. This happens through two competing logics. One is the logic of the established order, which seeks to keep all social demands separate and particular. For example, it treats a demand for better pensions as a technical issue for retirees, a demand for affordable education as a problem for students, and a demand for indigenous rights as a matter for a specific community. By addressing each demand individually, the system prevents them from forming a united front that could challenge the system itself. Secondly, the logic of populist and radical politics. It works by creating a “chain of equivalence” where diverse, unfulfilled demands are discursively linked together in opposition to a common antagonistic frontier – an “enemy” or “the elite.” The differences between the demands (pensions, education, healthcare) become secondary to what they share: the fact that they are all negated by the existing power structure.

This chain is “quilted” together by an “empty signifier.” This is a term like “the people,” “freedom,” or “dignity”. Such a signifier is “empty” because it has no single, positive, fixed meaning. Instead, its very vagueness allows it to stand in for the impossible fullness and unity that the chain of demands seeks. Each group in the chain can project its own particular desire onto this signifier, allowing it to function as a universal symbol of their collective struggle.

They incorporate some Lacanian insights in noting that society is never a closed whole; there is always a *lack* or antagonism that ideologies try to cover over by naming an enemy or a utopia. Populist movements (whether left or right) often succeed by crystallizing diffuse discontent into a simple narrative – “the corrupt elite vs. the virtuous people” – and attaching people’s floating frustrations to that narrative. The “chain of equivalence” works because it is subtended by an ideological fantasy.

As Rodríguez (2020, p. 89) notes, these struggles often revolve around “the desire to ‘see it whole’ in a disorientating historical moment,” a desire that psychoanalysis identifies as the very engine of fantasy. Laclau and Mouffe’s framework is crucial for understanding how a heterogeneous movement, such as the Chilean *estallido* – comprising students, feminists, workers, and indigenous groups – can cohere around signifiers. This approach brings us closer to the dissertation’s core argument, but a full psychoanalytic account must go deeper, analyzing not just the discursive construction but the unconscious investments and traumatic kernels that give these signifiers their explosive power.

3.1.4. Framing, Narrative, and Ideology

From the late 20th century to the early 21st century, the study of social movements and protests has further integrated the importance of narrative and ideology, while drawing on refined psychological and social insights. Several notable trends define contemporary approaches: a) the cultural turn in social movement theory (with concepts like framing and collective identity), a re-evaluation of ideology in a so-called “post-ideological” age (especially after the end of the Cold War), and b) continued influence of psychoanalytic ideas through thinkers like Žižek who bridge the gap between individual psyche and societal ideology.

While this thesis analyzes the narratives and signifiers (ideology), it is important to distinguish this approach from the dominant “framing perspective” in social movement studies. In the study of social movements, framing refers to the way protesters create interpretive conceptual frameworks that help participants and bystanders understand and join a cause. Frame analysis, as developed by Goffman (1974) and applied to social movements by Snow and Benford (2000). According to Benford and Snow (2000, p. 614), framing theory examines the “active, processual

phenomenon” through which movements construct and disseminate interpretive schemata to mobilize support. And “frame” is a schema of interpretation that allows individuals to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” events and occurrences (Goofman, 1974, p. 21). The theory explains how protestors engage in “diagnostic,” “prognostic,” and “motivational” framing to identify problems, propose solutions, and inspire action (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 202; Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). Certain broad, culturally resonant paradigms, or master frames, can be adopted by multiple movements, creating a shared language of contention (Benford & Snow, 2000, pp. 618-619) .

In the broad approach, a *frame* is essentially an ideological and narrative lens (Snow & Benford, 1988; Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 622, 629): it defines a problem (“what is wrong”), identifies the culprit (“who is responsible”), and suggests a remedy or action (“what is to be done”). A “master frame,” in this context, is a broad, elastic narrative that can be adapted by many different movements. A master frame functions like a shared narrative template, “sufficiently elastic, flexible, and inclusive that other movements might employ it in their own campaigns.” For example, Snow and Benford note that the civil rights frame, with its emphasis on universal equality and rights, became a master frame in the 1960s, lending its language and moral force to the women’s movement, the student movement, and others. Likewise, environmental justice in the 1980s provided a master frame that linked disparate fights (toxic waste, indigenous land rights, and urban pollution) under a common banner of justice and rights.

While this perspective is invaluable for analyzing the cognitive dimension of protest, this thesis argues that a more robust concept is needed to capture the full ideological weight of master narratives. The distinction between the “framing perspective” and the classical concept of ideology is illustrative of what is at stake. A frame is largely a conscious, strategic construct. An ideology, in the psychoanalytic sense used here, is a deeper, fantasmatic structure that organizes our desires and enjoyment, often unconsciously.

Although the preconditioned “empirical observation” aspect of the framing approach arises from the lack of a specific political opportunity structure (Benford & Snow, 1992; 2000), engaging with the conditions of contemporary protest cycles that

experience the “end of the world” every day

Master frames are useful because they resonate with widely held values and tap into cultural narratives that many groups find relevant. In effect, a master frame is an *ideological narrative at a higher level of abstraction*. It does what Antonio Gramsci described as creating a “common sense” for a historical bloc – uniting different struggles under a general outlook. For instance, the “*human rights*” frame became a global master frame in the late 20th century, one that local movements, from Latin American dissidents to Eastern European protesters to South African anti-apartheid groups, could all use to translate their grievances into a universally legible narrative. In Chile under Pinochet, for example, opposition groups framed their struggle as one for human rights and democracy against authoritarian repression – a narrative that gained worldwide sympathy and fit the global master frame of democratic resistance.

There is a clear intersection between master frames and what psychoanalytic theory would call master signifiers. A master signifier (in Lacanian terms) is a key word or symbol that anchors meaning without having a fixed meaning itself – its very vagueness allows people to project their desires onto it. This is precisely where, as Rodríguez (2020, pp. 100-101) argues, the concept of ideology re-enters the frame, as ideologies provide the deeper “whole systems of beliefs” that give master frames their consistency and durability, a dimension often lacking in standard framing analysis.

Words like “Freedom,” “Justice,” “The People,” or “Dignity” often serve this role. In protest movements, such words become rallying cries that various constituencies can support, each investing the term with their own nuance. Master-framing often involves deploying these capacious symbols in slogans and discourse. The advantage is breadth of appeal; the challenge is that different groups might interpret the master frame differently. For example, “*democracy*” as a master frame united many movements – but to one group it might mean liberal multi-party elections, to another economic democracy and workers’ control, and to yet another, direct participatory assemblies as if one is quilting the ideology with “floating signifiers” (Žižek, 1991, pp. 87-88). The master frame’s power is in uniting these under a single narrative umbrella long enough to pose a collective challenge to the status quo.

Crucially, master frames do not float free of ideology; they *carry ideological assumptions* and emotional weight. The civil rights master frame was rooted in a moral ideology of equal personhood and carried the emotional narrative of overcoming oppression (often drawing on biblical Exodus imagery in the U.S. context). The human rights master frame carries a liberal individualist ideology that may or may not accommodate calls for economic justice. The “anti-globalization” frame that emerged around 1999 (Seattle WTO protests) carried an ideological critique of corporate capitalism and an emotional narrative of *David vs. Goliath*, the people versus the multinational giants.

In recent protest cycles – such as the Arab Spring, Occupy, anti-austerity protests in Southern Europe, Black Lives Matter, and global climate strikes – we can observe attempts to forge master frames that knit together various issues. One prominent master frame in the early 2010s was anti-neoliberalism or social justice broadly defined. Protesters in very different contexts echoed each other’s language about inequality, corruption of democracy by money, and human dignity. The “*We are the 99%*” slogan from Occupy was a simple yet powerful narrative that became a master frame for economic justice movements worldwide, highlighting the vast majority versus a tiny, privileged elite. In Spain, the indignados spoke of “Real Democracy Now,” implying that the current system was a sham, which aligns with Occupy’s critique of oligarchy – a framing of democracy versus plutocracy that resonated globally.

It’s worth noting that master frames can also exist for those defending the status quo or reacting against change. For example, authoritarian regimes often employ a master frame of “stability and security” – painting protesters as chaos agents and themselves as guardians of order. This too is a narrative strategy designed to appeal to basic human desires for safety and peace, and it often works by invoking fears (the unconscious anxiety about disorder).

From an analytic standpoint, master-framing is successful when it aligns with what social psychologists call *frame resonance* – the degree to which a narrative aligns with an audience’s values and experiences. For a master frame to resonate, it often must connect with existing cultural myths or memories.

In conclusion, master frames serve as the narrative glue in cycles of protest, shaping disparate demands into a cohesive narrative. They operate as condensed ideologies, simplifying complex analyses into rallying principles, and rely on symbolic language that engages people's imaginations and emotions. As I transition to the next subsection, we will see how all the theoretical threads discussed come together in examining real-world movements.

3.1.5. Refusal of the big Other and its Affective Categories

In the dimension of language, Jameson and Eagleton take a step forward. Building on Jameson's claim that narrative is the "socially symbolic act" through which the unrepresentable totality of late capitalism is rendered sensible (Jameson, 1983, p. 64), and Eagleton's insistence that narrative sutures private desire to "public" history (Eagleton, 1979, p. 78), we can see why leaderless movements (in other words, the discussion of lack of political spontaneity) nevertheless cohere around story. Narrative, in this Jameson–Eagleton trajectory, is both a cognitive map and an ideological form: it discloses structure even as it organizes affect. Returning to Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping, indeed, narrativization is itself a form of cognition, linking this insight directly to his concept of cognitive mapping; elsewhere, he adds that cognitive mapping "is not a mapping of physical space but a form of narrative" in its broad theoretical-analytic sense. Taken together, these formulations enable us to treat cognitive mapping as cognitive narrative – a collective storytelling practice that renders an otherwise opaque social totality intelligible.

Hence, in the absence of a charismatic leader's command, participants authorise themselves – and one another – through the shared plot they inhabit. This narrative, as transference, produces knowledge of the Other and of the self precisely when inherited visions and doctrinal paradigms have collapsed. The story told in common thus becomes the site where new political subjectivities are forged and where a sense of orientation can be rediscovered amid ideological exhaustion. Thus, cognitive narrative emerges as the subjective and collective process by which individuals and groups, confronted with the disorienting "total flow" of late capitalism (Jameson, 1991, pp. 86-87). Remembering Jameson's "cognitive mapping" was a code name for class consciousness. Similarly, the act of refusal is a code name for a radical and historical social movement (Langman, 2023, p. 138).

As already discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter, cognitive mapping (hereinafter also referred to as cognitive narrative) is presented as a representational effort to grasp the social totality of contemporary global capitalism and its various mediations, situating individual experience within this larger, often unrepresentable structure. Critical social theories and relevant productions of the social science field are considered narratives that function as cognitive maps. Social movements, in their practice, also engage in efforts at totalisation, elaborating their own cognitive maps to understand broader social and organisational structures and overcome fragmentation. The desire to grasp this social totality is fundamentally a desire for political orientation and collective organization.

Psychoanalysis, as a field, offers a crucial lens for understanding the underlying dynamics of sociopolitical phenomena. Frosh (1999, p. 317) asserts that psychoanalysis is a “*major tool for understanding subjectivity*,” revealing “*the workings of society within each individual*,” providing a means “*for directly confronting each person’s emotions and investments in identity positions*,” and supplying “*criticisms of the distortions and despair that are suffered under conditions of domination*”. It aims to enrich and reorient political theory by employing its concepts, strategies, and analytical methods to map, account for, and interpret sociopolitical events. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Freud's original works, particularly his interest in drives that construct the meanings of the refusals and the acts of group and mass formations, conceived psychoanalysis as a theoretical endeavour focusing on the social bond and its effects on subjectivity. Laclau (2004, p. 326) further posits psychoanalysis as the “*only valid road to explain the drives behind such construction*” of society. Indeed, the ontological and performative lessons of psychoanalysis, particularly the unconscious as a site of failed, limited, and the excess in our systematic meaningful constructions (Zupančič, 2016), serve to reinvigorate sociohistorical critique and *ideologiekritik*, which focuses on how power reproduces inequality, exploitation, and oppression, moves beyond the notion of “false consciousness”. At this juncture, the Freudian and Lacanian traditions converge in three decisive respects. First, both theorise social antagonism through the economy of the drive. Second, each links subjective re-organisation to political change. Third, Lacan completes a move Freud only intimated: language as the social bond of the unconscious (Stavrakakis, 2019).

Marcuse positions the concept of “utopia” within a historical framework; for him, “Utopia is a historical concept. It refers to projects for social change that are considered impossible” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 63). He distinguishes between these projects for social change that are deemed impossible due to transient socio-historical conditions (such as the absence of specific subjective and objective factors) and those that contradict scientifically established laws of nature. He argues that in the present stage of advanced industrial society, the material and intellectual forces necessary for the realisation of a free society are, in fact, technically at hand. This presence of the requisite technical capacity implies, for Marcuse, an “end of utopia” in the sense that the envisioned future society is not a contradiction of natural laws but a realisable historical possibility.

It is here that Jameson’s foundational concept of the “*political unconscious*” provides the crucial link. For Jameson (1983), ideology functions as a *narrative* – a “*socially symbolic act*” that manages and contains real social and historical contradictions by providing them with an imaginary resolution. The “end” is not merely an idea but a powerful master-narrative that structures our political reality. Consequently, the *Great Refusal* that Marcuse intuits can now be understood with more precision: it is a refusal of this hegemonic narrative. The latent utopian desire finds its political voice precisely when it begins to tell a different story, to articulate a counter-narrative of the past, present, and future. In this sense, while Marcuse and Žižek radicalize the second, they also feed off the first. Thus, Marcuse provides the historical understanding of what capitalism *must suppress*, while Žižek encapsulates the contemporary *outcome* of that suppression – a world where alternatives are seemingly unthinkable.

A persistent challenge in applying psychoanalysis to political theory has been the conceptual leap from the individual psyche to the social collective. A common but ultimately limited approach involves extrapolating clinical concepts to diagnose social phenomena, a method that either treats society as a macro-subject or fails to develop a truly social psychoanalytic theory. The objective, therefore, cannot be merely to apply psychoanalysis to politics, but to forge a theory that bridges the psyche and the social, transforming psychoanalytic terms into social concepts capable of explaining both subject formation and the dynamics of political oppression.

A crucial step in overcoming this impasse lies in the pivot from the Freudian premise that “*politics is the unconscious*” to Lacan's more radical formulation: “*the unconscious is politics*” (Tomsic, 2015, p. 20). The former implies that political life is driven by hidden forces, but the latter suggests that the political field itself – the social bond, the system of domination – is structured *like* the unconscious. This reframes psychoanalysis as a first-order theory of the political, allowing for an analysis of political phenomena and social movements not as analogous to psychic processes, but as direct manifestations of a “*political unconscious*” that speaks through the symptoms of the political world: in laws, rhetoric, and, most importantly, in acts of protest (Žižek, 1991).

This political unconscious is a turbulent engine powered by drive and affect. Freud (2002) argued that human drives hold a dominant position and shape social life in a determined and unavoidable way. Political contestation is thus irreducibly libidinal, fueled by a primal aggression – *Homo homini lupus* (Freud, 2002, p. 48) – that must be managed by any social order. The Lacanian tradition refines this by centering desire and *jouissance*. The subject of politics is constituted by a fundamental lack, propelled by a desire that is structured by the symbolic order (big Other). Ideologies are powerful because they offer subjects a fantasy framework that promises access to a lost *jouissance*, often by identifying an enemy who has stolen it. It is this libidinal economy that undergirds political contestation, and it is through the psycho-affective registers of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy that this economy finds its narrative expression. It is within this psychic landscape that the political struggle over narrative unfolds; a counter-hegemonic narrative serves as the collective work of mourning, transforming the melancholic attachment to past defeats into a revolutionary fantasy of an open future.

Within the psycho-affective triad of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy that animates the political refusal, the Marcusean conception of memory provides a crucial distinction. For Marcuse, memory is not a passive recollection of a lost past but an active political faculty, a “*hermeneutic activity*,” as Jameson (1972, p. 132) calls it, that draws on the unconscious memory of a “*prehistoric happiness*” to project a qualitatively different future, one that re-members, in the sense of re-assembling, the fragmented promises of happiness to project a qualitatively different future. Its

orientation is therefore not restorative, as in a simple romantic nostalgia for a bygone era, but fundamentally projective. It looks to the historical archive of repressed utopian impulses not to restore the past, but to equip the present with the necessary imaginative content for constructing a non-repressive future. This concept provides the theoretical lever to distinguish between a paralyzing melancholia, which remains fixated on the trauma of historical defeat, and a revolutionary fantasy, which draws on the memory of past struggles to fuel the fight for a liberated existence.

The concepts of *melancholy* and *nostalgia* are pertinent here: many contemporary movements trade on nostalgic fantasies of a lost golden age or melancholy attachment to past glory. For instance, right-wing populism in many countries has a narrative of nostalgic restoration (“Make X great again”) that is, in psychoanalytic terms, a fantasy of recovering a stolen *jouissance* (enjoyment) – the idea that “we once were whole and happy, and some Other (immigrants, globalists, etc.) took that away.” On the left, there can also be a form of melancholy, a sense of mourning for the dreams of social justice that neoliberal decades deferred.

As cultural theorist Wendy Brown (1999) noted, “*left melancholia*” is a condition in which progressives cling to symbols of an older political vision without translating them into a new strategy – a kind of attachment to the lost object of revolution that inhibits progress. Awareness of this tendency has spurred contemporary protestors to consciously move beyond melancholia by inventing fresh narratives and practices of joy and hope.

In this same vein but more from a “*political fight for Eros*” sideliners, Marcuse claims that “*the unconscious, the deepest and oldest layer of the mental personality, is the drive for integral gratification*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 18). Marcuse’s diagnosis provides the crucial categories for understanding the affective texture of the post-political landscape. In this sense, returning to Marcuse’s blending of Freud and Marx yielded several analytical categories in previous conceptual framing that remain vital. In the critical theoretical framework developed by Marcuse, psychological categories such as fantasy, nostalgia (or remembrance), and melancholy (often articulated as the “unhappy consciousness”) are not merely internal states but possess a profound symbolic dimension, serving as crucial loci for the “*transference of the moment*” towards radical social change (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 140-141; Marcuse, 2007, pp. 64-

65). Marcuse's analysis consistently posits these states as manifestations of an inherent tension between the established, one-dimensional reality and the suppressed possibilities of a liberated existence.

Marcuse assigns a crucial cognitive role to imagination (*fantasy*). He understood *fantasy* not simply as individual daydreams, but as a potential reservoir of utopian imagination – the capacity to envision life beyond the performance principle and oppressive productivity (Marcuse, 1966, p. 143). In a repressed society, fantasy is politicized: the establishment of a free, pacified society first requires people to *imagine* gratification and solidarity outside the logic of domination. He contends that fantasy is “*cognitive in so far as it preserves the truth of the Great Refusal, or, positively, in so far as it protects, against all reason, the aspirations for the integral fulfillment of man and nature which are repressed by reason*” when reason is understood within the confines of repression and so that missing second-dimension becomes rational, then “*gratification assumes a new dignity*” (Marcuse, 1969, p. 160).

Marcuse posits that fantasy, or imagination, holds a truth value that transcends and stands in opposition to the repressive reality principle. It functions as a psychological faculty that preserves “tabooed images of freedom” and the “archetypes of the genus,” linking the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness, such as art. Marcuse argues that imagination “*envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason*” (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 141-143). While the dominant reality principle relegates this harmony to the realm of utopia, Marcuse maintains that fantasy insists it “*must and can become real, that behind the illusion lies knowledge*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 143). This transformative potential is most evidently realized in art, where the “aesthetic-erotic dimension” projects the “convergence of technology and art and the convergence of work and play” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 68). Through the “emancipation of the senses,” as Marcuse describes, the creative and aesthetic faculties are developed, allowing for a qualitatively different reality to be envisioned (Marcuse, 1972, p. 64; Marcuse, 2000, p. 45; Marcuse, 2007, p. 95). However, Marcuse also acknowledges the inherent danger that a one-dimensional society, dominated by *Homo Economicus*, can absorb and neutralize even rebellious art and anti-art, rendering them harmless by integrating them into the market and mass culture.

Despite this, for Marcuse, a “rational imagination” can become the a priori for the reconstruction of the productive apparatus towards a “pacified existence” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 239).

The concept of nostalgia or remembrance (*Erinnerung*) is central to Marcuse's understanding of how the past can inform and propel future liberation. Marcuse views memory as a decisive mode of cognition, endowed with a “truth value” derived from its capacity to “*preserve promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilized individual, but which had once been fulfilled in his dim past and which are never entirely forgotten*” (Marcuse, 1966, pp. 18-19). This “*psychoanalytic liberation of memory*,” as Marcuse terms it, “*explodes the rationality of the repressed individual*” and allows “regression [to assume] a progressive function” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 19). The “rediscovered past” thus yields “*critical standards which are tabooed by the present*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 19). Marcuse explicitly links this to the “*subterranean survival of the ancient theory of recollection in Marxian theory*,” which posits a “*repressed quality in men and things*” that could lead to radical change upon recognition (Marcuse, 1972, p. 99). The pursuit of the “*temps perdu*” (lost time), as exemplified by Proust, becomes a “*vehicle of future liberation*,” emphasizing that “*the lost paradises are the only true ones*” because memory provides a duration for joy absent in the present (Marcuse, 1966, p. 233; Marcuse, 2007, p. 74). Marcuse further warns that the “*progressing rationality of advanced industrial society tends to liquidate*” memory as an “irrational rest” precisely because “*remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights*” that “*militate[] against the closing of the universe of discourse and behavior*” (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 102-103).

While melancholy is not a term Marcuse frequently indexes, its essence is captured by his concept of the unhappy consciousness (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 64-65). This state signifies a profound awareness of the contradictions inherent in the existing social reality and the repression of genuine human possibilities. Marcuse argues that this “*unhappy consciousness of the divided world, the defeated possibilities, the hopes unfulfilled, and the promises betrayed*” is “*sustained and protected*” by literature and art (Marcuse, 2007, p. 64). It represents the “*tension between the actual and the possible*” that is “*transfigured into an insoluble conflict*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 65).

Marcuse observes that pervasive unhappiness, existing as a “thin surface over fear, frustration, and disgust” beneath the “happy consciousness” of one-dimensional society, holds the potential for “political mobilization” (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 79-80). Comprehending the “*objective ambiguity*” of experienced facts “*shatters the harmonizing consciousness and its false realism,*” thereby making visible the “*irrational character of the established rationality*” (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 230-232). Thus, for Marcuse, the “unhappy consciousness” is a critical subjective state that, when not pacified or absorbed, can become an impetus for negating the existing order.

The symbolic dimension serves as the crucial medium through which these psychological states are articulated and acquire their transformative potential, facilitating the transference of the moment. Art, as discussed by Marcuse, is a primary space for this symbolic enactment. It “*opens the established reality to another dimension that of possible liberation,*” functioning as an “*illusion in which another reality shows forth*” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 87). Through the aesthetic form, words, sounds, and images are “*insulated against their familiar, ordinary use and function,*” thereby “*freed for a new dimension of existence*” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 98). This allows art to “*refuse and refute the established order*” and to “*call the facts by their name and their reign collapses*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 65). The Great Refusal manifests as this artistic protest against existing reality, recalling suppressed images of gratification that could dismantle a repressive society. The “*transference of the moment*” occurs as this symbolic power of art and imagination is activated politically. Marcuse emphasizes the need for the “*dream [to] become a force of changing rather than dreaming the human condition: it must become a political force*” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 102). This involves drawing on “utopian images” from humanity's dream history and demonstrating “*the road to realization which now, finally, has become possible*” (Nutter, 1971, as cited in Marcuse, 1972, p. 110). The emergent “new sensibility,” rooted in new instinctual needs, strives to become “practical,” a “*vehicle for radical reconstruction*” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 72). This signifies a direct shift from the symbolic, internal realm to concrete social and political practice, where the vision of a qualitatively different society, informed by remembrance and imagination, is projected onto and seeks to transform the present reality. Marcuse's exploration of the “*permanent aesthetic subversion*” inherent in art (Marcuse, 1972, p. 107) indicates that the very structure of symbolic expression, by creating a qualitatively different

universe, continually pushes against the confines of the one-dimensional reality, offering a glimpse of what could be, and thereby facilitating the continuous “transference” of utopian possibilities into the realm of political aspiration and action.

Expanding on the role of imagination, Marcuse conceptualizes memory (or recollection) as a critical function. It is not merely a recall of the past but a “*cognitive*” act of truth value that preserves “*promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilized individual*” (Marcuse, 1969, pp. 18-19). This repressed memory, once recognized, “*could drive toward a radical change in the relation between man and nature*” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 99). For Marcuse, “*history which memory preserves*” often succumbs to the totalitarian power of the “*behavioral universe,*” yet it holds the key to uncovering the “*hidden dimension of meaning*” in everyday language and experience that can shatter reified forms of thought (Marcuse, 2007, pp. 102, 185-186).

Marcuse also engaged the concept of *melancholy* in a political sense – the idea that people in advanced societies might carry an unacknowledged sadness or loss for the freedom and pleasure they have sacrificed (we can see here a precursor to what others later called “*left melancholia*” – the tendency to mourn lost utopias without being able to move forward). Additionally, Marcuse addressed *nostalgia*: he noted that even as the New Left looked to the future, there was often a romantic harkening back to nature, to lost communal bonds, or to pre-technological ways of being. While critical of empty nostalgia, Marcuse recognized that the impulse to reclaim something *human* from the past could fuel a refusal to the alienating present.

This political nostalgic melancholy, however, is not a terminal condition. A Žižekian lens provides the theoretical framework for understanding its potential overcoming. For Žižek (1991), the symptoms of historical trauma – the accumulated, “*meaningless traces*” of oppression – are not cured by discovering a hidden meaning in the past. Instead, meaning is “*constructed retroactively*” through a present-day rupture. The act of refusal, therefore, functions as a political analysis that “*produces the truth*” by creating a new signifying frame that gives past grievances their coherent, symbolic meaning. In this sense, the repressed returns not from the hidden depths of the past, but paradoxically, “*from the future*” moment of its symbolization. A new master-signifier, forged in the center of protest, does not just add to history; it

retroactively changes the meaning of all tradition, compelling us to reread the entire narrative of what came before. As Žižek further elaborates, “*we are producing the symbolic reality of past, long-forgotten traumatic events*” (1991, p. 57).

Melancholy, within a Žižekian psychoanalytic lens, operates significantly within the symbolic dimension, often as a response to loss or the inherent void of the social (Žižek, 2014, pp. 16-21). Žižek, as discussed in the general framework, posits a “*paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object*,” a symbolic pre-mourning that constructs a narrative of loss to contain a void (Žižek, 2014, p. 24). This can be observed in societal depressive conditions, where the predominant process is the “undoing of past events” (Žižek, 2014, p. 179), leading to a state of being mired in compromise and religious fundamentalism.

Such melancholy can emerge when revolutionary potential is neutralized or when a society undergoes a process of “*dis-eventalization*,” where past radical turning points are retroactively denied their substance (Žižek, 2014, p. 162). For instance, society may pay “*lip service*” to “*great modern axioms of freedom, equality, democratic rights*” while these axioms are “*de facto deprived of their substance*” (Žižek, 2014, p. 162). This creates a melancholic societal state, where the form of the Event (e.g., democratic ideals) remains, but its vibrant content is lost, akin to a self-annihilating “*negation of negation*”, where the very attachment to the lost object (the emancipatory potential) eventually disappears (Žižek, 2014, pp. 111-112). The Left's current predicament, where economic downturn and social disintegration abound, yet “*any consistent Leftist reply to these events*” or “*positive programme of social change*” is “*conspicuously absent*”, can be interpreted as a form of collective political melancholy (Žižek, 2014, p. 180). This state signifies a post-ideological era where there is no programme in outbursts of rage, indicating a profound void in the symbolic articulation of a collective vision.

Nostalgia, within the symbolic dimension, functions as a mediated longing for an idealized or inaccessible past, often engaging with a bygone era through a specific symbolic lens. This is evident in the yearning for a “*world which has passed, which is no longer ours*,” as Žižek notes with Heidegger's examples of opposing traditional farming to modern technology demonstrate a focus on a world that has departed (Žižek, 2008b, pp. 449-450). Political movements can harness nostalgia, for example,

by invoking a past “miraculous” event that has since been recuperated or “de-eventalized”.

The “undoing” of an Event can involve a retroactive denial, where a society “*fully integrated into its ethical substance the great modern axioms of freedom, equality, democratic rights,*” only for these to be “*de facto deprived of their substance*” later (Žižek, 2014, pp. 162-163). This implies a nostalgic attachment to the idea of these freedoms, rather than their concrete actualization. The postmodern ethics of compassion can also be seen as a form of nostalgic fantasy, legitimizing an endless postponement of genuine political action, thereby averting engagement with the traumatic Real. Instead of proposing “a positive programme of social change”, this “*reluctance to help signals a change in the status of public space*” where individuals remain in their “private space,” avoiding interaction or recognition of others (Žižek, 2014, p. 176). This retreat into the private, despite public proximity, can be understood as a nostalgic longing for a contained, familiar past, one that eschews the complexities of the present.

Fantasy, for Žižek, is not merely a superficial illusion but a fundamental symbolic structure that “*constitutes our desire, provides its co-ordinates – it literally teaches us how to desire*” (Žižek, 2014, p. 26). This structure serves to constitute the subject’s desire, literally “*teaching us how to desire*” and providing the coordinates for desire (Žižek, 1991, p. 118; Žižek, 2008c, pp. 7-8; Dean, 2006, pp. 11-12), particularly given Lacan’s thesis that the lack of a universal formula necessitates that every subject must invent a fantasy of their own. Operating as the ultimate support of reality, fantasy functions as a crucial symbolic frame, mediating between the symbolic structure and empirical reality. This framework is employed to mask a “void” or “fundamental impossibility” (Žižek, 1991, p. 45; Dean, 2006, p. 12), such as the traumatic kernel of the Real or constitutive social antagonism, by providing a rationale for the inherent deadlock of desire. Consequently, Žižek posits that the essential level of ideology today is not characterized by an illusion masking the actual state of affairs, but rather by an “*(unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself*” (Žižek, 1991, p. 33). This ideological fantasy is essential for sustaining reality, structuring effective social relations, and offering the subject the existing social reality as an escape from the unbearable, traumatic kernel of the Real.

Political action often operates within a fantasy frame that makes “*potentially traumatic contact with a 'real,' flesh-and-blood other*” palatable. This is evident in populism, which Žižek describes as a “*negative phenomenon, a phenomenon grounded in a refusal, even an implicit admission of impotence*” (Žižek, 2008b, pp. 268-269). Populism reduces “*the complexity of the situation, to reduce it to a clear struggle with a pseudo-concrete 'enemy' figure*”, thereby providing a “*pseudo-concretization*” of complex issues (Žižek, 2008b, p. 268). The “*new mobilizing imaginary*” proposed by the Right, deplored by the Left, exemplifies the power of fantasy to channel social discontent (Žižek, 2008b, p. 101).

In the context of what I have discussed so far, we can now finalize the complexity of the theoretical framework. Remembering Jameson’s “cognitive mapping” was a code name for class consciousness. Similarly, what I understand is that the act of refusal is a code name for a radical and historical social movement with many dimensions in post-political diversity (Langman, 2023, p. 138). So, in a way, it is the study of finding the singularity within the multitude. The figure below tries to simplify this process.

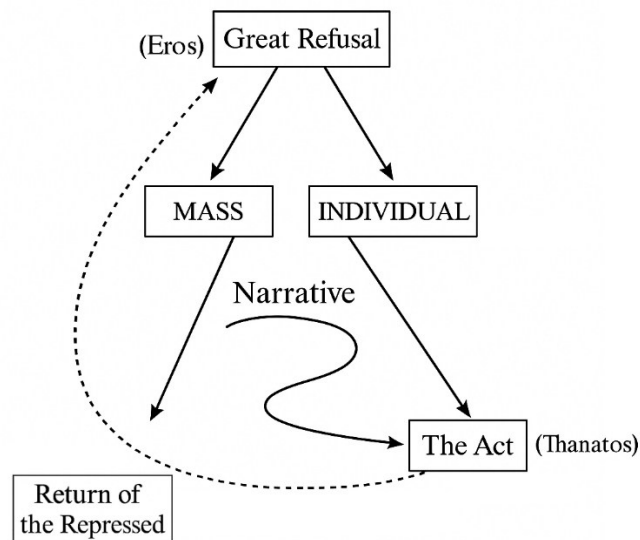


Figure 3.1: The possibility of the Act and Great Refusal

This figure provides a visual representation of the core theoretical framework. Assuming familiarity with the discussed concepts, this diagram conceptualizes the dynamic and often contradictory relationship between collective desire, individual

action, historical memory, and radical political change. It moves beyond a linear model of protest to illustrate a dialectical process involving both creation and negation, drawing from the Marcusean and Žižekian frameworks. The process originates with the Great Refusal, which is positioned as the primary, generative impulse for change. This refusal is explicitly associated with (Eros), representing the Marcusean life-affirming drive. It is the collective desire for a non-repressive existence, for dignity, and for a social order based on principles other than domination and exploitation. This initial erotic impulse is not monolithic; it splits into two distinct paths, affecting both the collective (mass) and the individual. The mass path leads to the return of the repressed. This represents the eruption of collective historical memory, shared traumas, and popular narratives (in a postmodern sense) that have been suppressed by the dominant hegemonic order. It is the re-emergence of the “class” (or in today’s setting, the expansion of the scope of the proletariat within the multitude) as a historical subject, armed with the memory of past struggles and exploitation, or those who are exploited today (Žižek, 2015, pp. 95-96). The individual path leads to the Act, which is explicitly associated with (Thanatos). This represents the Žižekian moment of radical rupture – the disruptive, negating, and singular gesture that shatters the existing symbolic order. It is the moment of decision and confrontation, often carried out by individuals or small groups, that breaks the continuity of the status quo. The wavy arrow labeled “*Narrative*” shows a connection flowing from the collective experience of the mass to the Act. As such, the appendix is contained within Jameson’s *hermeneutic intervention* and Eagleton’s narrative as ideology. This signifies that individual radical acts are not performed in a vacuum; they are informed and given meaning by the stories, symbols, and shared feelings of the collective, mainly in historical repressions or gratification of Marxist struggles, as Eagleton (1991, pp. 218-220) has put it, suddenly drop the *class-struggle* bomb into the discourse. The narrative of the mass provides the context and justification for the individual act of rupture. The most crucial element is the dashed arrow, representing the *return of the repressed* as a dynamic force. It does not originate from the box of the same name but rather starts at the *Act* and loops back to the *Great Refusal*. This visualizes the complex psycho-political insight that a successful, disruptive *Act* does not simply end the process. Instead, its consequences – the new realities it creates, the traumas it unearths, and the systemic reactions it provokes – circle back to refuel and reshape the initial *Great Refusal*. The experience of the *Act* and the confrontation it

forces with the repressed elements of history becomes new fuel for the ongoing desire for a different world.

In this regard, the repressed historical truth does not simply disappear; it resurfaces in a way that reveals it. In this critical-theoretical sense, the “*return of the repressed*” occurs when a “dialectical image” emerges in a moment, a fragment, or an event, revealing a forgotten historical possibility in the present and thereby making the contradictions of the current order clear. The unexpected and nonprogrammatic movements, which can be seen as a strong dialectical image and their explosive power, stem from the ability to make the hidden truths of neoliberal society – its built-in inequality and unresolved traumas – impossible to ignore. The strange mix of anger and happiness that people feel during these protests can be seen as the emotional charge of this sudden awakening in history, when the illusion is broken and reality comes into view. To conclude, as Ware (2024, p. 120) formulates: “*great refusal [is] protest against the existing order of things, and with this the construction of a new temporality – what we might call [...] the time of the death drive.*”

Ultimately, this synthesized framework treats the Act of Great Refusal as “*a total negation*” leading to “*the event of total rebellion*” (Kellner et al., 2011, p. 64) within a meta-political category that precedes and enables the phenomena typically studied by SMT. The forging of a “master frame,” the emergence of a “collective identity,” or the successful “mobilization of resources” are not the causes of refusal, but its effects. It is only after the traumatic, fantasmatic, and narrative work of the act of refusal has cleared a new political space that these more conventional forms of social movement activity can take root.

By integrating psychoanalytic insights with critiques of social movement theory, Chapter 3 has forged an analytic framework capable of grasping protest as a struggle over narrative, ideology, and desire. The importance of affective categories and the refusal of the “big Other” have been established. This framework will now be deployed to analyze the specific historical field that the Chilean refusal confronted. Chapter 4 will trace the historical trajectory of Chile's engagement with “global ends,” applying the lens of retroactive historicism.

4. GLOBAL ENDS' and CHILE'S HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY: RETROACTIVE HISTORICISM in the ACT of GREAT REFUSAL

This chapter employs the critical theoretical framework, termed retroactive historicism, to challenge the prevailing master-hegemonic narratives surrounding social movements in Chile, which often explain its current state as a direct and linear consequence of democracy, military dictatorship, transition, and neoliberal policies. By applying Hegelian and Benjamin's ideas (what can be called here *retroactive historicism*), its aim is to demystify the notion of a homogenous social movement and expose the taboos and rationalizing myths that justify its perceived unexpectedness, crisis, or failure. Therefore, this chapter seeks to reveal the heterogeneity, contradictions, and adaptive strategies of the social movement and to understand how the past is selectively remembered or forgotten to serve present ideological interests. In contrast to a linear march from democracy to dictatorship and back to democracy, and to neoliberal modernization, and to the eventual failure of the social movement teleology, this chapter supports further analysis of the Chilean *estallido* as a collection of irregular temporalities, the very diversity of which contributes to its transformative power.

As the Chilean case enters what some have called a terminal phase of historical meaning-making (Popa, 2022), the central issue becomes how to conceptualize historical movement itself in order to prepare for the retroactive accumulation to the present time.

Giambattista Vico (2020) was among the first to challenge linear historiography. He influenced many names, from Marx to Agamben. He proposed that history unfolds as a spiral in which progress and regression alternate. This spiral structure, which Vico termed "*corsi e ricorsi*" (cycles and recycles), implies a pattern of progress and regression, where elements of the past recur in new forms, each moment is both ahead and behind, suggesting the simultaneity of rupture and

recurrence. This non-linear temporality also finds expression outside Western historiography. In Daoist thinking, British philosopher Alan Watts (1989) uses the figure of the centipede to describe the spontaneous, unforced quality of *te* – an inner power or virtue that is lost the moment one attempts to control it through rational calculation. As Watts recounts, “The centipede was happy, quite, / Until a toad in fun / Said, ‘Pray, which leg goes after which?’ / This worked his mind to such a pitch, / He lay distracted in a ditch, / Considering how to run.” (Ch'u Ta-Kao, 1937 cited in Watts, 1989, pp. 27). The paralysis caused by over-analysis mirrors the difficulty of navigating historical time in an ideological regime that demands coherence, closure, and causality. *Te*, like resistance, operates best not through pre-formed strategies but through situated spontaneity.

But for this study's interest, regarding “*the seeds of the time*” (Jameson, 1994), its temporality, its content as narrativization with “*the present is always changing*”, in reference to all scholars interested in theory and practice (or praxis), Hegel and Benjamin have gained attention and conceptualized within critical theory and in historical philosophy in particular (Homer, 2006; Roberts, 2015). The concept of “*retroactive historicism*” is a direct adaptation of this Benjaminian-Hegelian approach to time and memory (Žižek, 1991, pp. 136-145). This approach means that one is able to “*restructure the narration of the past, making it readable in [a] new way*” (Žižek, 1991, p. 56). The role of historicity in this sense: “*They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. [...] A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations*” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 255). This approach, as conceptualized within critical theory, navigates a complex intellectual terrain, seeking to synthesize distinct yet often complementary modes of understanding history, consciousness, and social formations. This approach does not imply a simple conflation of Benjamin's and Hegel's philosophies, but rather an engagement that extracts their critical valences and reconfigures them for contemporary analysis.

Jameson says that narratives are “*imaginary resolutions of a real contradiction*” (2002, p. 62). Their goal is to tell a story that makes sense of the class, exploitation, and domination conflicts at the heart of the social order, which cannot be resolved. Walter Benjamin (2002) radicalises this insight by showing *how* those narratives work. In the *Arcades Project* and the essays on Paris, he describes modern

commodity culture as a *phantasmagoria* – a collective dreamscape whose very texture is saturated with nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy (Benjamin, 2002, pp. 21, 96, 116-117). Nostalgia surfaces in the fetish for obsolete objects; melancholy marks the felt absence of a promised fulfilment; fantasy sutures the gap by staging commodities as timeless wishes come true in Benjamin's historical project (Benjamin, 1969). These effects do not float free of politics: they are the emotional glue that secures master-hegemonic narratives, making the market's historical construction appear natural and eternal.

Benjamin provides a radical critique of what he calls "*historical materialist*" – the dominant, bourgeois view of history as a linear, causal chain of events that unfolds in "*homogeneous, empty time*". This narrative, written by the victors, presents the past as a "*triumphal procession*" and legitimizes the present order as the inevitable outcome of "*progress*". Benjamin's counter-image is the "*Angel of History*" from Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*. The Angel's face is turned toward the past, but a storm blowing from Paradise, which we call progress, propels him irresistibly into the future. Where we perceive a chain of events, the Angel sees "*one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage*" and hurls it at his feet. The Angel of History is the ultimate figure of world-historical melancholia. His gaze is fixed on the accumulated wreckage of the past; he wishes to "stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed," but he is powerless, trapped by the storm. This state perfectly mirrors the Freudian melancholic's fixation on an irretrievable loss and inability to act. The relentless "*accumulation*" of wreckage is the historical equivalent of the melancholic's ego-impoverishment. However, Benjamin's project is not merely to diagnose this paralysis but to offer a methodology for overcoming it. His concept of *Jetztzeit* ("now-time") is a call to break with the empty continuum of historicism (Benjamin, 1969, p. 261). The task of the historical materialist is to "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger". This "*now-time*" is not a point on a line but a "*blast*" out of the continuum, a "*tiger's leap into the past*" that forges a revolutionary constellation between a past moment of oppression and the present struggle (Benjamin, 1969, p. 261). This act is endowed with a "*weak Messianic power*," a chance to redeem the past by "*wrest[ing] tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it*" (Benjamin, 1969, pp. 254-255). This framework provides a methodology for a revolutionary melancholy. While the Angel of History

embodies a passive, pathological state, *Jetztzeit* offers a path to transform this condition into a political act of refusal. It is a method for weaponizing the melancholic gaze. At a “moment of danger” – a crisis where the dominant narrative of history becomes vulnerable– the revolutionary historian does not passively contemplate the wreckage. Instead, they actively intervene, seizing a specific memory of a past injustice and blasting it into the present crisis. This act “*fan[s] the spark of hope*” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 255) in the past, re-investing collective libido not in self-pity but in the political project of redeeming the oppressed.

According to Hegel, the categories of thought transformed from epoch to epoch. Incorporating a Hegelian historical perspective is crucial for social movement studies, given the field's historical neglect. By adopting Hegelian Logic, it is possible to gain a systematic understanding and expose knowledge about the changing reality of social movements. This logic provides a valuable tool for clarifying and understanding the complexities of social movements, offering a more comprehensive framework for analysis (Blunden, 2019, pp. 3-9).

Benjamin, on the other hand, offers a powerful corrective and complementary perspective, particularly in his emphasis on history as fragmented and non-linear, focusing on “constellations” rather than smooth narrative progression. Benjamin's critique of progress, especially in the “Theses on History,” challenges teleological historiography, revealing history not as an unbroken chain of events, but as a series of ruptures and interruptions. For Benjamin, even seemingly objective historical records are “documents of barbarism”. His concept of the “aura” in art, lost in mechanical reproduction, paradoxically contains a “Utopian component” accessible only in a simpler past, which then becomes a point of re-engagement for critical thought in the present. Benjamin's “messianic” temporality, as interpreted by Jameson, is not about immediate hope but arises in moments of “absolute hopelessness” where radical change seems “unthinkable,” offering a unique mode of anticipatory thought. This challenges the “Owl of Minerva” perspective, which, as discussed previously, sees reason and order only retroactively, often from the vantage point of a hegemonic narrative that declares a neat “end” to a period.

However, I actually leave the idea that Benjamin’s temporality “*can in no way be thought of approach Hegel*” (Jameson, 1992, p. 32), therefore, seeks to hold these

dynamic and often contradictory perspectives in a productive tension. Jameson aims for a “totalizing, synthesizing thinking” that contextualizes cultural texts in history, yet remains sensitive to discontinuities and rifts. This involves a “*metacommentary*,” a reflexive analysis that accounts for the historical and ideological embeddedness of theoretical categories themselves. This avoids the simplistic “*base-superstructure*” model, treating it instead as a starting point for complex interconnections.

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, for Hegel, history is not a simple accumulation of facts, but a dialectical process of *Aufhebung* (sublation), where each new stage simultaneously negates, preserves, and elevates the previous one. This means the past is never simply gone; it is constantly being re-inscribed and re-signified from the standpoint of the present.

Žižek radicalizes this Hegelian insight into a theory of retroactive causality, which resonates with Benjamin in the same vein. The meaning of a past historical event is not discovered or excavated; rather, it is *constructed retroactively*. A contingent trauma, like a failed uprising, only achieves the status of a historical “necessity” when a later event repeats it, thereby giving it a fixed place and meaning within the symbolic order. This leads to a paradoxical view of time: the past is not fixed but is “*open to retroactive reinterpretations*,” while the future is, in a sense, closed, as our actions are determined by the way we narrate the past. To change the future, one must first change the past.

This Hegelian-Žižekian logic of retroactivity is the very logic of symbolic transference. When we “transfer” a psychological category, such as melancholy, onto a historical event, we are not discovering a pre-existing psychological state in the archives. We are performing a Hegelian move: from the “dusk” of our present political crisis, we are retroactively *constituting* that past event *as* melancholic. Our contemporary sense of political loss and disillusionment enables us to revisit the “owl of Minerva” and view past failures as the origins of our own predicament. This is not a falsification of history but the very mechanism of historical consciousness itself. The methodological implication is profound: historical analysis is never a neutral description of “the way it really was”; it is always a political intervention in the present that operates by re-narrating the past.

This back-and-forth motion is not merely an epistemological challenge for

historians. It also sets the coordinates for ideological and psychoanalytic dynamics in the present. Historical remainders, what is already discussed as the *return of the repressed*, linger within political subjectivity and re-emerge in moments of rupture. The Chilean case, as it is based on a holistic dimension, must therefore be situated within this non-linear temporality: the “advance” of transition or democracy always drags with it authoritarian residues, spectral promises, and postponed traumas. In this light, the spiral temporality offers an opportunity to understand how trauma, fantasy, and disavowed repetition shape both collective memory and political resistance.

“*There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism*” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 256). Benjamin’s famous historical thesis, invoked by Kaye (2024), serves as a critical lens through which to view history, revealing the inherent violence and oppression embedded within seemingly progressive developments of civilization. This implies that any historical analysis must “brush history against the grain” to uncover its obscured barbarism. Adorno and Horkheimer (1972, p. 12) also assert that the Enlightenment’s “*principle of immanence*” acknowledges “*nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance*”. However, this “*meaningless game*” has exclusively favored Europeans, inflicting the greatest violence upon colonized peoples.

This utopian impulse, however, is given its necessary dialectical counterpoint by Benjamin’s claim that what drives the oppressed to revolt is less the image of “liberated grandchildren” and more the traumatic memory of “enslaved ancestors.” In the Benjaminian framework, political energy emanates from the insistence of historical suffering. Žižek radicalizes this traumatic pole with a precise Lacanian psychoanalytic armature. For Žižek, the core political problem is not just the historical trauma itself, but the ideological fantasy that structures our relationship to it, allowing us to maintain a safe distance from it. He would caution that both Marcusean nostalgia for a lost utopia and Benjaminian nostalgic melancholy for past suffering can become forms of ideological enjoyment (*jouissance*) – a “beautiful soul” position that allows one to savor the dream of liberation or the nobility of defeat without undertaking the terrifying risk of an actual Act.

4.1. New Narratives of the Old

Since the new has saved itself from its own fears, it must be placed in a circular movement³⁶ towards the centre (Fisher, 2009, p. 3). In this sense, it is all the more 'impossible' for us today that the sins of the new (the past) should not be struck in the face of its saving role, and that the libidinal economy of the self can be achieved by transcending this fundamental precondition - the journey of the psychic, the center of the circular movement, which can be accomplished on one way and to the *Other*. There is no one-dimensional liberating aspect to this impulse. But only the 'new' can be normalized in the form that it has been freed from the sins of the linear line and has passed through the psychoanalysis of egoism (which, in the context of this study, should be read as Old Left - New Left - Leadership - Spontaneity). In this sense, one should turn back to foundational ontological-epistemological logos, which is, according to critical theory, "*the social world is constructed and not given, and only a reflexive social science can provide an account of its own origins*" (May & Perry, 2017, p. 79).

In fact, the non-clinical, therapeutic, acquired, scientific, theoretical, and practical dimension of psychoanalysis prevails or become concrete here, because the relationship of psychoanalytic theory to other disciplines is linked to whether it remains stuck in the clinical stage or is structured within a social world historicized by human action. The events are experienced by those who are repressed. If the normalizing is both a symptomatic and a biological aspect of libido, it captures the influence of history and finds it developed through the direct transmission (narrative) of the connection with hysterical accuracy (excitement and historicity), such as the sadness, excitement, or anxiety in front of something coming to end, or in general "*end of X*" narratives. The enlightened view of critical theory must be lived here as if it were thinking about what is happening for the first time. Although the great refusals of the 18th and 19th centuries were not under the umbrella of historicism (according to '*history ends with Hegel*'), their thinkers were able to see the libidinal forms of utopian desire such as God and bread or wine, or the fetish

³⁶ It refers to the motion in which all beginnings have already begun. The historical motion that Hegel uses in the phase in which he is able to explain everything, in the spirit of phenomenology, constantly refers to this circular movement. For a further discussion, see Blunden (2019). It is also Žižek's perception of Evental Act, as discussed in Chapter 2.

(reproduction for the secularization of Christian mysteries) from within more “*theological critique of capitalism*” (Hinkelammert, 1986, pp. 217-219) and the formation of linear lines of their own time. If one can see the ontological value of philosophy in a hypernormal leap beyond its power, it is inevitable that every thought that identifies a quest and the thinker will take a backward completion to the stage where new possibilities are experienced:

“Today, any form of the concrete world, of human life, any transformation of the technical and natural environment is a possibility, and the locus of this possibility is historical. Today we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so. We also have the capacity to turn it into the opposite of hell. This would mean the end of utopia, that is, the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities. It can also be understood as the “end of history” in the very precise sense that the new possibilities for a human society and its environment can no longer be thought of as continuations of the old, nor even as existing in the same historical continuum with them. Rather, they presuppose a break with the historical continuum; they presuppose the qualitative difference between a free society and societies that are still unfree, which, according to Marx, makes all previous history only the prehistory of mankind.” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 62)

When Marcuse started his lecture, delivered at the Free University of West Berlin in 1967, with the above statement, the famous global 1968 movements had not yet started; he further claimed the “end of utopia,” which synchronizes with the “end of ideology” and later its complementary add-on with the end of history.

‘Refusal’ and the ‘Act’ mark two moments of the same dialectical gesture; the present subsection clarifies where the two converge and where they must be held apart. If Marcuse’s Great Refusal was the theoretical response to the administered affluent society of the Cold War era, Žižek’s concept of the Act is its dialectical successor, tailored for the “post-political” landscape of triumphant neoliberalism as the narrative was expanded in the latter part of the previous section. So, from the “*last judgement*” of historical narration in its own logos, this is “*of a final settling of accounts, of a point of accomplished symbolization/historicization, of the ‘end of history’, when every event will receive retroactively its definitive meaning, its final place in the total narration*” (Žižek, 1991, p. 142).

Jameson observes that the conventional interpretation of postmodernity posits the definitive demise of ideology, understanding the term largely in relation to

Marxism, which subsequently coincided with the “*end of ideology and of Utopia*” (Jameson, 1991, pp. 159-160). This pervasive anti-utopian sentiment, solidified by post-war critiques and anti-Stalinist dystopias such as *1984*, in closing the universe of discourse of Orwellian language (Marcuse, 2007, p. 92), often conflates Utopia with the imposition of totalitarian uniformity and authoritarian programs, viewing it pejoratively as a neglect of human frailty and original sin. However, Jameson stresses that the advent of the 1960s dramatically ruptured this narrative, asserting that the name of “Marcuse” became synonymous with an “*explosive renewal of Utopian thinking and imagination, and for a rebirth of the older narrative form*” (Jameson, 1991, p. 160). Marcuse (1970) taught the necessity of reinventing the Utopian vision in contemporary politics, a lesson considered part of the enduring legacy of the sixties. According to Jameson's reading of Marcuse, the traditional Marxist denunciation of Utopian thought as a diversion of revolutionary energy underwent a crucial dialectical reversal in the context of advanced post-industrial capitalism, where abundance and total control prevail (Jameson, 1974, p. 107), the very function of the utopian concept underwent a decisive reversal (Jameson, 1974, pp. 110-111). In an era where purely practical thinking represents a capitulation to the totality of the system, Marcuse argues that the Utopian idea “*keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is*” (Jameson, 1974, p. 111). This Utopian concept, identified as the “*attempt to draft a theoretical construct of culture beyond the performance principle*” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 159), thereby functions as the newest hermeneutics of freedom (Jameson, 1974, p. 111), necessary for generating political action by imagining radical difference beyond the constraints of the present mode of production (Tally Jr., 2014, pp. 46-47). Indeed, Jameson remarks that the name “Marcuse” itself became synonymous with an “*explosive renewal of Utopian thinking and imagination, and for a rebirth of the older narrative form*” (Jameson, 1991, p. 160), or as Badiou has put it, “*the rebirth of history*” (Badiou, 2012).

After all, as can be seen, the contrast between them is not merely one of emphasis but reflects a fundamental “*continuity within rupture*” in the historical conditions of late capitalism.

4.1.1. Master-Hegemonic Narratives

At this point, I will look at the narratives of the “end of ideology” and its mediated continuity, the “end of history,” in order to go to the macrostructure of the issue as it is discussed in political science and international relations literature, usually names like Perry Anderson (1992).

“*Grand narrative*” is a slippery term, with perhaps as many definitions as scholars who invoke it. Therefore, when approaching the analysis of this dissertation, it is crucial to examine the meaning of the term “*master-hegemonic narrative*,” primarily as an ideological macro discourse that influences individual and group subjectivities. This understanding is consistent with the theory of Jameson and Eagleton, which posits that the creators of grand narratives both reproduce and subvert power relations. The reasons why the term “*master-hegemonic narrative*” is preferred over such concepts as “*grand narratives*” or “*meta-narratives*” (which is connected with *Lyotard*’s postmodern thesis that declare the ending of grand narratives), which generally means second-order narratives that comment on their construction are the following: the term “*master-hegemonic narrative*” suits the subject of analysis much better and accurately points to political and cognitive master narratives that support the existing power structure around the protests. In the following sections, the term “*master-hegemonic narrative*” will refer to the integrated narratives that philosophically justify relations of power, tendentiously employing universality or history as a means of justification. The main idea is that hegemonic discourses prevail with the help of cultural apparatuses and restrictions on the possible in everyday life. Although both master narratives and hegemonic narratives are used to perpetuate the current power relations, the critical point of difference lies in the extent to which they are opposed in a particular society (Jameson, 1977, 2002; Eagleton, 1979, 1991). In this case, when we bring the expansion of the master-hegemonic narrative space to the present day, ‘master’ refers to uncertainty and a lack of master, such as the end of USA hegemony or the end of the Cold War (bipolar system). In contrast, ‘hegemonic’ refers to the ideological dimension of the capitalist mode of *reproduction* that occupies every field from the political sphere to culture.

Before analyzing how protest narratives disrupt the existing order, it is necessary to understand how that order protects itself through its own narrative

strategies. If, as this thesis claims, protest functions through a utopian act of imaginative negation, then hegemonic narratives must function through an inverse, ideological operation. We can adapt Jameson's (1975) concept of "*world-reduction*" to diagnose this process. While utopian narratives achieve world reduction by surgically excising elements of a repressive reality to imagine freedom, hegemonic narratives perform a cynical world reduction, excising elements of historical truth to naturalize repression. They present a radically simplified version of history where alternative possibilities are systematically weeded out. The narrative of the "End of History," for example, reduces the turbulent and contradictory history of the 20th century to a single, linear triumph of liberal capitalism, rendering other histories and futures not only defeated but unthinkable. This is a "reduction" that amputates the memory of class struggle, anti-colonial resistance, and failed revolutions, presenting the present not as one possibility among many, but as the only one left. This ideological world-reduction creates a closed universe just as Marcuse claimed in ODM, and it is against this carefully curated absence that any genuine political refusal must first define itself.

The narratives of the "end of ideology" (Bell, 1988) and the "end of history" (Fukuyama, 1992) are two related ideas that emerged in the aftermath of World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, these ideas have been criticized by many scholars (Badiou, 2012; Milne, 2013; Wallerstein, 1999), who argue that the world is still characterized by significant political and economic conflicts, and that these conflicts are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon.

Therefore, to move toward a more concrete study of historical-sociological intersections, an ideological tone should be included at this point. Negation is a central component of the critical approach, which is fueled by the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 2004). The negative dialectic reveals that Fukuyama is right, in a sense that of the end of "*the modern world*" (Badiou, 2012: 15). If the pathology of *denkenvenbort* (prohibition against thinking) operates in known liberal democracies, this conclusion should be modified to say that global capitalism is "*the end of history*" (Žižek, 2001: pp. 1-12 as cited in Sharpe, 2004). This has had a profound impact on social movements, which have traditionally been seen as a driving force for change and progress. In particular, critics argue that the notions of the end of ideology and the end

of history were overly optimistic and failed to account for the ongoing struggles and conflicts that continue to shape the world. Despite these criticisms, the narratives of the end of ideology and the end of history continue to shape political discourse and debate, and remain relevant in the context of contemporary global politics. By understanding these concepts and their impact on political discourse and debate, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in the world today, thereby one needs to look through deep forms of social mobilization and action.

Such that, two narratives that have emerged amidst the prevailing discourse of the post-war world, “*end of ideology*” and “*end of history*,” stand as intersecting two major historical debates on rupture and continuity of the master-hegemonic narratives³⁷. For the former, Daniel Bell’s (1960) claim that 19th-century ideologies were waning in influence due to an increasingly technocratic society, a notion later mirrored in Fukuyama’s “*end of history*” thesis (1989), was ultimately subsumed and later replaced by capitalism itself. The 1960s have been described as a decade of cultural transformation and social awakening, and this is indeed well-deserved. This was further contradicted by this decade, as it was expected that ideologies would reduce in influence and intensity in society. It is thus argued that instead of witnessing the end of ideological assumptions, the 1960s signified an upsurge of ideological struggle.

As its broadest, this is because Hegel’s notion of “end” times, which extends to his post-Napoleonic political philosophy (Hegel, 1952), manifests itself in the uncertainty of global contradictions and antagonisms. These are increasingly revealed in historical narratives and surrounding moments through a series of events accompanied by political, economic, cultural, and social crises. Under this “*coherent narrative structure*,” two main issues can be listed among the many that are caused by global capitalism and the economic aggressiveness of neoliberal globalisation.

Nevertheless, ideology cannot be a matter of fact, since ideology is a system

³⁷ 1968 movements and collapse of Soviet Bloc (therefore emerging pro-democracy movements within ex-Soviet countries etc.).

of concepts that determines the worldview and guides actions in society (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 1–2). In the context of his discussion of capitalism, Žižek is right to point out that “*at a more general level, the history of capitalism is a long history of how the predominant ideological political framework was able to accommodate (and to soften the subversive edge of) the movements and demands that seemed to threaten its very survival*” (Žižek, 2000, p. 119). First of all, it is essential to note that this observation highlights the fact that the capitalist system, throughout history, has effectively neutralized threats to its hegemony. Secondly, this ability of the postmodern power to contain the opposition, while it appears to consolidate the political order, at the same time exposes potential vulnerabilities of the latter and the emergence of new forms of struggle that put into question the idea of the “*end of history*” where there is no more ideological struggle. And thirdly, this, as the “ontological” antagonist of the capital from history to class, is an equation that unmask the oppressors and the oppressed by the subject, of the subject, and for the subject.

Just as Marx's axiom has manifested itself in the historical course of the history of struggles for rights, so too do all these “*ends*” seem to be conditioned to express the manifestation of the master narrative of our time. Indeed, these “*ends*,” which are constructed towards the construction of the neoliberal subject or the one-dimensional man, who believes that a radical change is no longer possible, can only be understood through the narrative and ideological dimension of the constituent elements that keep postponing the “*end of capitalism*.” This move also opens up an imaginary space where not even “*the end*” can be imagined³⁸ floundering in a set of meanings devoid of political praxis or foundation. This is the space of contradiction with the established order, rebellion, dissolution, and refusal (Marcuse, pp. 3-6; 37), a space defined by negation and transference, rooted in the contradictions of the current state of global capitalism. Moreover, as Žižek (2008, p. 79) states, “*the symptom arises where the world failed, where the circuit of the symbolic communication was broken*,” indicating a clear psychic setting of the upheavals.

³⁸ This context is formulated from the famous mantra of the May 1968, “Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible” (*Be realistic, demand the impossible*).

According to Mandel (1975), late capitalism is exceptionally resilient because it incorporates opposition and turns challenges into new forms of control, making authentic rupture challenging. To position Marcuse and Žižek's toolkit, a brief survey of the long downturn in emancipatory politics that followed the crises of the 1970s – a period that sets the stage for the initial synthesis to re-emerge as diagnostic tools. The resurgence of critical theory after the mid-1990s followed nearly two decades in which the traditional Left suffered a series of strategic defeats. During these two decades, the traditional Left was pushed onto the defensive by a sweeping neoliberal “regime shift” marked by labour-market deregulation, global production offshoring, and an unprecedented wave of financialization (Harvey, 2007, pp. 9-19). At the structural level, the rise of a dollar-centred credit system reorganised world accumulation along the lines analysed by Arrighi's (1994) theory of systemic cycles of accumulation, capital and state power, while financial deregulation entrenched what Susan Strange (2016) memorably called “casino capitalism,” an increasingly volatile and speculative financial order, whose scale is captured by the fact that transnational currency trading alone grew to be sixty-one times the value of world exports by 1989, creating what Therborn (2008, p. 15) terms an “enormous global casino.”

Politically, the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in 1989-91 removed a key geopolitical counter-weight, allowing neoliberal common sense to present itself as the only viable horizon and “for the first time in two centuries, the world of the 1990s entirely lacked any international system or structure” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 559). Western commentators viewed the Soviet collapse as ratifying “*the permanent triumph of both capitalism and liberal democracy*” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 575). This led to economic liberalization and marketization reaching “*a peak of ideological complacency after the collapse of the Soviet system*” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 574). The “*root-and-branch radicalism of the pure free-market ideologists*” became “the theoretical inspiration of post-communist regimes” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 420). Thus, another dimension has emerged with China's market-led reforms, launched under Deng Xiaoping in 1978, reinforcing the sense that planned economies were converging on capitalist norms, or, in basic terms, state-managed capitalism without political liberalization (Harvey, 2007, pp. 120-121).

Within the advanced capitalist core, the defeat of organised labour under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher normalised a policy mix of privatisation, liberalisation, and welfare retrenchment; Hall's analysis captured the ideological pivot that made this shift appear commonsensical (Hall, 2017, pp. 172-186). In the North Atlantic, the memory of May 1968, once a symbol of revolutionary possibility, was recast as cultural nostalgia rather than a political challenge, fragmented under repression, co-optation, and economic crisis (Ross, 2002).

However if one follows a coherent narrative structure of late capitalism in a world of global neoliberal triumphalism (the sense that history has “ended” with no viable system beyond the status quo), the analysis of contemporary social and political phenomena, particularly under the forms of collective protest that pave the way new historical challenges against the global neoliberal-capitalist order –in the sense on the axis of “*post-industrial society*” to “*Washington consensus*” and “*post-Washington consensus*”³⁹ (Harvey, 2007, p. 93; Srinivasan, 2017), often interpreted as frameworks that ultimately facilitate the survival of capitalism, manifesting as “*the new imperialism*” and “*accumulation by dispossession*” (Harvey, 2004). This line of narrative emphasizes a crucial cornerstone in the evaluation of capitalism, which, according to Badiou (2012), is the recognition that contemporary capitalism is not a qualitatively new or postmodern entity, but rather the unbridled realization of classical capitalism's core logic. He contends that it is not some mutation, such as globalization or financialization, but fundamentally “*the one which, in a brilliant anticipation [...] Marx heralded as the full unfolding of the irrational and, in truth, monstrous potentialities of capitalism*” (Badiou, 2012, p. 12). Then, he asserts that contemporary

³⁹ The “Washington Consensus,” a set of ten economic principles, itself generally denotes a set of market-oriented economic policy recommendations (including fiscal discipline, privatization, and trade liberalization) promoted particularly from the late 1980s into the 1990s by Washington D.C.-based institutions like the IMF and World Bank, especially for developing countries (for the origin of the term Washington Consensus also in the Latin American context, e.g., Williamson, 1989; 2002; and for the structured narrative of neoliberalism see Harvey, 2007). It is crucial to note that there is no single, widely accepted definition for the term “post-Washington Consensus,” which is a topic of much discussion in and of itself. Scholars note that, while it signals a move beyond the perceived failures and rigidities of the original Washington Consensus, the extent to which it represents a fundamental departure from the underlying neoliberal tenets is contested. Due to the ongoing lack of a cohesive and widely recognized alternative framework, some critics claim that it may actually be more of a “Washington Consensus Plus” or a “Post-Washington Dissensus,” highlighting an inherent ambiguity surrounding its recommendations and long-term implications for global economic governance and development strategies. This conceptual line has gained even more momentum by 2025, as protectionism and trade wars have become the new narrative of global affairs, primarily due to Trumpism in the USA. See, for example, Fine (2003) on the lack of a new consensus.

capitalism, particularly since the collapse of state socialism around 1980, represents a return to the features of classical capitalism, fulfilling Marx's predictions about the world market, capital concentration, cyclical crises, imperial activities, wars, and the pauperization of the masses. Badiou further contends that genuine Marxism “*is [...] the organized knowledge of the political means required to undo existing society and finally realize an egalitarian, rational figure of collective organization for which the name is communism*” (Badiou, 2012, p. 9), rather than merely an economic, sociological, or philosophical descriptive enterprise.

4.1.1.1. End of Ideology

The mid-20th century saw dramatic shifts in both the world of social movements and the world of theory. After World War II, a period of apparent stability and consensus in Western democracies led some scholars to declare an “end of ideology.” According to Eagleton (1991, pp. 4-5, 265), “end of ideology” ideologists consist of three main figures: Daniel Bell, Raymond Aron, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Robert E. Lane.

The 1955 Milan conference on “*the future of freedom*,” where “*end-of-ideologist*” (Summers, 2011) intellectuals and scholars, largely liberal and anti-communist, discussed the decline of Marxism and the triumph of Western ideas (Jacoby, 1999, p. 1). Raymond Aron, already well-known intellectual especially with his work called *The Opium of Intellectuals* (1952), a key organiser of this conference, is noted for popularising the phrase “*the end of the age of ideology*” or “*the end of the ideological age*,” asserting that revolution and utopianism had concluded and it was a clear state for them: “*No one could pretend that an alternative to advanced capitalism existed*” (Jacoby, 1999, p. 2). However, the term itself has appeared earlier, with Albert Camus employing it in 1946 to critique French socialists' attempts to reconcile Marxism with ethics, suggesting his time marked the end of “*absolute Utopias which in reality destroy themselves*” (Jacoby, 1999, p. 3). H. Stuart Hughes also utilized the term in 1951, observing a “*sense of shock*” among leftist European intellectuals who found themselves preferring capitalism to communism, signalling “*[t]he end of the mystique of the Left*” (Jacoby, 1999, pp. 3-4).

Among them, in his seminal 1960 [1988] work, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, Bell articulated a “*sharpest formulation*” (Jacoby, 1999, p. 4), asserting the decline of transformative, all-encompassing political belief systems in the advanced industrial societies of the West. Bell posited that the “*older political ideas of the radical movement*” had “*become exhausted and no longer had the power to compel allegiance or passion among the intelligentsia*” (Bell, 1978, pp. 41-42) that the great ideological debates of the 19th and early 20th centuries – capitalism vs. socialism, fascism vs. liberalism– had given way to a pragmatic, technocratic management of society.

In this view, ideological passion was spent; what remained were moderate welfare states and a broadly agreed-upon narrative of progress within the capitalist framework. In reality, it was more against Marxism. For Bell, Marxism, particularly in its revolutionary iterations, served as the prime example of such a “*faith system*” whose disintegration he prognosticated (Bell, 1988, p. 412). The “end of ideology” was, above all, a profound reaction to what Bell called the “*thirty-year nightmare*” of fanaticism that had drenched Europe in blood. The context for this perceived exhaustion included a confluence of disillusioning historical events, such as the Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the grim realities of concentration camps, which, according to Bell, shattered belief in the Soviet Union as “*progressive*” and there was “*rough consensus [...] on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State; the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism*” (Bell, 1988, pp. 402-403). It was also the time when “*Stalin had died; the new First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, spoke of detente and peace*” at the 22nd Congress of the Russian Communist Party in February 1956 (Bell, 1972, pp. 18-19; Jacoby, 1999, p. 1). This was further exemplified by the burst of political independence in Poland and the Hungarian Revolution, which was suppressed by Soviet tanks and resulted in the murder of Hungarian Communist Party leader Ferenc Nagy (Bell, 1972, p. 19).

For Bell, the post-World War II environment ushered in the “end of ideology,” a diagnosis rooted in the perceived exhaustion of the radical political ideas and accompanying passions characteristic of the nineteenth-century revolutionary movements (Bell, 1988, pp. 393-394). This conclusion rested upon the observation

that developed Western societies had achieved a pragmatic consensus by embracing the welfare state, political pluralism, and a mixed economic system, thereby resolving fundamental socio-economic conflicts, including the class issue envisioned by Marx. Bell's framework posits that this stabilizing synthesis effectively rendered grand ideological struggle obsolete, necessitating a shift toward a technocratic and managerial focus. In this post-ideological era, political discourse has shifted away from fundamental philosophical clashes, focusing instead on efficient administration, economic growth, and devising sophisticated, technical solutions to complex societal challenges within the liberal democratic framework (Bell, 1988, p. 419).

While Bell acknowledged his thesis was often "*misread*" as a defence of the status quo or a call for technocratic governance, he clarified that his aim was not to deny social conflict or the emergence of new ideologies (particularly from the Third World), but rather to highlight the intellectual exhaustion of older, universalistic models and to advocate for "*piecemeal change*" within a pluralistic framework that accepted the complexities of society beyond a monolithic "capitalism" (Bell, 1988, pp. 403, 422-423). Nevertheless, subsequent critical theory has continued to interrogate the implications of such "*finalisation*" and "*victorious*" discourses, noting how notions like the "end of history" or "end of ideology" can reflect a contemporary "*capitalist realism*" where imagining alternatives to the prevailing system becomes increasingly difficult (Fisher, 2009).

However, this complacent narrative was soon to be upended by the global wave of protests and revolutions in the 1960s, as discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter. The civil rights movement, anti-colonial struggles, student rebellions, second-wave feminism, and anti-war protests all erupted, proving that history was very much alive and that new ideologies were being born on the streets. The "*end of ideology*" thesis itself turned out to be an ideological assertion – a status quo narrative challenged by the reality of mass upheaval.

From my perspective, the master-hegemonic narrative of the "end of ideology" operates by promoting a dialogue with Marcuse (2007) and Žižek (2003), which has already been identified as a "*strategy of post-politics*." This strategy operates through a search for consensus, the displacement of 'radical' signifiers, and the idea of a socio-technical pragmatism that orients political practice, as an organized ideological

support of knowledge and “repoliticization” seems a natural anti-strategy that prepares the “externalize” rupture of the “inevitable end of capitalism” as a world-historical “evental act” of refusal (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2020, pp. 287-289). In this post-political frame, deep structural conflicts are recast as technical problems to be managed, and ideology is replaced by the seemingly neutral language of expertise.

This strategy operates through a “*search for consensus*” that recasts deep structural conflicts as technical problems to be managed by the seemingly neutral language of expertise. This is precisely what Duchrow and Hinkelammert (2012) identify as the core logic of neoliberalism: a form of “instrumental rationality” that becomes totalitarian. By reducing all of reality to a “means-end calculation,” this system actively produces irrationality, as it cannot account for the “nonintentional effects” of its actions, namely, the destruction of the social and natural conditions of life (Duchrow & Hinkelammert, 2012, pp. 124, 160). The “end of ideology” is thus the end of a language capable of speaking about the subject and the common good; all that remains is the “banal” calculation of profit and loss (Duchrow & Hinkelammert, 2012, pp. 112-115). For example, Marcuse’s negative thinking (as well as Adorno’s) provides a direct counter-strategy to this logic, reintroducing the dimension of a substantive, qualitative critique.

At this point, the “*end of ideology*” narrative confuses the ruling ideology with the seemingly dominant one in the background of the contradictions of capitalist culture, creating what is called “*post-1968 dilemmas*” (Bell, 1978; Martin, 2008, p. 174). Additionally, considering the psychic context, narratives (and accompanying theories) that placed a particular emphasis on politics, with a central space that could empower social agency, had an impact on the capacity of both new and old subjects to resist global neoliberal capitalism and develop radical novelty.

The assertion that social reality has achieved the abolition, reconciliation, or repression of all contradictions, often referred to as the “*end of all ideologies*,” is itself identified within critical theory as an ideology and thus a form of false consciousness (Mandel, 1975, pp. 502-503). This pervasive notion, which surfaces in various intellectual guises such as “technological rationalism” or the political economy thesis of the “mixed economy,” functions fundamentally to mystify the antagonistic structure of contemporary life and conceal its internal contradictions (Mandel, 1975, p. 503).

The objective outcome of propagating this thesis is profoundly conservative: it serves to convince those subject to alienated labour and oppression that rebellion against the existing framework is senseless, presenting the oppressive power of given facts as an objective and rational condition. In opposition to this intellectual conformism, which views the established reality as productive enough to repel or absorb all alternatives, dialectical critique insists on the power of negative thinking, recognizing that the world is inherently unfree and marked by alienation (Marcuse, 2023, p. xxiii). The refusal to acknowledge the radical falsity of established forms of life constitutes faulty thinking, as reality itself is fundamentally self-contradictory; consequently, any purportedly consistent philosophical system, including the Hegelian totality, must incorporate its own “*symptoms, antagonisms, and inconsistencies*” (Žižek, 2012, p. 378) rather than positing a final, harmonious synthesis (Žižek, 2012, p. 523). Thus, the claim to have transcended historical antinomies – often leading to a positivist stance that equates social study with the study of nature governed by fixed, rational laws – paradoxically becomes the ideological mechanism by which the existing irrational and enslaved social order is perpetually sustained (Marcuse, 2023, p. 289).

The Marxist critique vigorously resists the assertion of an “end of ideology,” which Jameson argues, returns in postmodernity as the “*sequel, continuation, and fulfilment*” (Jameson, 1991, p. 263) of the earlier post-war episode, attaining a “*new and unexpected kind of plausibility*” because conscious ideologies and philosophical systems have “*ceased to be functional in perpetuating and reproducing the system*” (Jameson, 1991, p. 398). This transformation signals that ideology has become immanent, exemplified by Adorno's anticipation that the commodity might not be its own ideology, replacing reasoned dissent with the ubiquitous “*practice of consumption*” (Jameson, 1991, p. 398). For Jameson, the dominant ideologies of late capitalism – the market and consumerism – are not exactly ideas in the older sense, but are functionally identified with the media system itself, resulting in an “*enfeeblement of the individual concepts and messages*” (Jameson, 1991, p. 398) within an overwhelming density of information. Furthermore, Eagleton (1991) observes that this present “post-ideological” complacency, unlike its right-wing predecessor, frequently adopts radical credentials, seeking to discredit the classical concept of ideology by travestying all ideology as inherently “totalitarian” or metaphysically grounded, thereby undermining the critical project itself.

4.1.1.2. End of History

The loss of faith in radical change and utopian, revolutionary socialist projects has been a significant trend over the last 30 years. This decline of revolutionary hopes and the widespread belief in the obsolescence of radical socialist projects over the last thirty years are synthesized in the emergence of a *post-ideological* and *post-political* consensus that affirms global capitalism as the sole viable socio-economic system (Johnston, 2009, p. xxvii). This intellectual climate has been influenced by several factors, following the collapse of “*actually existing socialism*” and the exhaustion of the welfare state imaginary (including the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the rise of neoliberalism and globalization), as well as the increasing disillusionment with traditional political ideologies, which is often framed by the “end of history” narrative proclaimed by figures such as Fukuyama. Žižek (1991, p. 29) argues that the contemporary situation is characterized by a *post-ideological*, cynical reason (following Peter Sloterdijk), where subjects know too much to believe naïvely, yet continue to participate in the ideological framework, adopting an accepted lie (fetishism) that allows the system to continue functioning. This framework promotes the idea that fundamental change is impossible, making it appear easier to imagine the end of the world than a far more modest change, such as the breakdown of late capitalism, thereby regulating the historical imagination itself (Jameson, 1994, p. xii). This cynical ideological structure operates alongside *post-politics*, which is defined as the situation where all significant political agents subscribe to liberal democratic procedures and the logic of global capitalism, thereby moving past the true conflict revolving around the acceptance or rejection of capitalism (Schutzbach, 2023, pp. 46-47). In this scenario, genuine political struggle – which involves embracing antagonism and the possibility of radical rupture – is foreclosed, replaced instead by depoliticized administration and consensus around issues of identity and cultural struggles. Consequently, Žižek insists that the true Utopia today is precisely the belief that the present liberal-democratic capitalist consensus can continue indefinitely without radical change, urging instead a focus on the impossible transformation beyond the constraints of the status quo. This prevailing spirit of capitulation and lack of vision for reorganizing society remains a significant problem for the Left (Johnson, 2009, pp. 124-126).

In this regard, Francis Fukuyama's influential narrative, initially articulated in his 1989 essay "*The End of History?*" and subsequently expanded in his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*, who defended the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union - USSR), or in a sense the old movements, as the end of history, sees democratic societies, on the other hand, as encouraging the idea that all lifestyles and values are equal. According to Fukuyama, history has been moving through the historical stages towards a particular end at which liberal democracy will have prevailed throughout the world, and this, to him, is the end of history in the sense that the fundamentals of this particular phase of human evolution cannot be further advanced (Fukuyama, 1989, pp. 3-9). What Fukuyama says in his thesis is that there are no other forms of government on the waiting list other than the liberal democratic order. To some extent, Fukuyama anatomizes an era when liberal democracy was the only game in town and would likely be the only game in town because of it. Therefore, the "*end of history*" refers to the idea that the world was moving toward a state of stability, prosperity, and peace for all people and that there would no longer be significant changes or developments in the future. This, however, does not signify a cessation of empirical events or conflicts, but rather the conclusion of fundamental ideological struggle over the best sociopolitical system.

The primary historical impetus for Fukuyama's thesis was the collapse of the Soviet bloc and communism, specifically the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR by 1992. According to Anderson, this event signified for Fukuyama the discrediting of communism as a global alternative to liberal capitalism, with communism "*as a system to the capitalism it had once sought to overthrow*" (Anderson, 1992, p. 282). Fukuyama argued that communism's failure was inevitable, given the destined triumph of liberalism (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 9). Fukuyama (1989, p. 7) links the triumph of Western liberal democracy to the ascendance of the market and capitalism, seeing them as intrinsically linked. He cites the post-war transformation of Japan, the liberalization of South Korea and Taiwan, and the developing commercialization of China as evidence of this victory extending beyond Europe (Fukuyama, 1989, pp. 10-11).

This interpretation, primarily filtered through Alexandre Kojève's influential 1930s lectures, reduces Hegel's dialectic to a linear historical drama culminating in

the universal and homogeneous state (Dale, 2014). This Kojévian-Marxian framework was then repurposed by Fukuyama (1992) to proclaim the victory of liberal capitalism as the definitive endpoint of human socio-political evolution. Analysing the history of coming to an end, Kojève (1971) refers to Hegel when he puts forward the idea of the end of history. Underlying this reference, his primary concern was not the materialist struggle between ideologies or socio-economic systems, but rather the struggle to overcome the necessity for recognition and the dialectic of master and slave. Kojève, influenced by the Napoleonic Wars and the Battle of Jena in 1806, posited that Hegel believed these events marked the triumph of the principles of liberty and equality. He saw the end of history as the point where this struggle was resolved, and a universal homogenous state, along with *“knowledge which reveals the totality of Being, can be realized only at the end of History, in the last World created by Man”* (Kojève, 1971, p. 32), emerged where all were recognized as equals. And he offered Stalinist Russia and then contemporary Japan as the highest form of social order, later than that, a global superpower condominium and postwar European integration (Kojève, 1971, pp. 159-162). Fukuyama extends this, arguing that subsequent historical developments, including the challenges posed by fascism and communism, have ultimately validated Hegel's foresight, leading to the global ascendancy of liberal democracy. Kojève's later work for the *European Community* is seen as an institutional embodiment of this “end of history,” signifying the end of grand political struggles and even philosophy.

In this Hegelian inflection, primarily mediated by Kojève, is central to Fukuyama's proclamation of the “end of history,” which is situated historically following Bell's earlier diagnosis of the “end of ideology.” This terminal perspective rests upon the *“unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism”* and the perceived total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism, arguing that liberal societies are free from the internal contradictions that characterized earlier formations (Fukuyama, 1989, pp. 3-4; Anderson, 1992, p. 282). While Bell's preceding analysis concerned the exhaustion of universalistic, nineteenth-century ideologies among the radical intelligentsia in the West, finding a consensus in the mixed economy and welfare state (Bell, 1972, p. 19; Bell, 1988, p. 402), Bell himself had previously stipulated that new, parochial ideologies, such as *“Pan-Arabism, color*

and nationalism,” would arise in the developing world (Bell, 1988, p. 403). Fukuyama's thesis, however, overreaches this bounded analysis by positing that liberalism's triumph – seen as a unitary and universal historical process (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xii) – renders subsequent conflicts, such as ethnic tensions or sectarian passions, as mere “*local residues of the historical past*” (Anderson, 1992, p. 282), insisting they do not compromise the deep configuration of the time, thus universalizing what Bell had treated as contingent and bounded ideological phenomena (Bell, 1988, p. 403).

Central to Fukuyama's vision of this end-state is the triumph of the market and capitalism. He identifies two powerful forces at work in human history: the “logic of modern science” and the “struggle for recognition.” And here, another fundamental point is the philosophical mechanism of *thymos* as drive of end of history, or the innate human desire for recognition (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. 162-170). This core element, derived from Plato and mediated through the Hegelian interpretation of Kojève, is identified by Fukuyama as the “motor of human history” (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 135), asserting that the realization of mutually respected dignity in the universal and homogeneous state addresses the central driver of historical conflict. According to this framework, the historical process is characterized as the emergence, growth, and eventual decline of *megalothymia* (the desire for superiority) (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. 182-185) and henceforth the liberal democratic endpoint is understood to rest on the twin pillars of economics (satisfying desire) and recognition (satisfying thymos). The former drives humanity to fulfill an “ever-expanding horizon of desires” through rational economic processes, leading to the inevitable spread of capitalism and market economics. Consumer abundance, a unique achievement of capitalist economics, is seen by Fukuyama as consolidating the democratic values of liberal politics. The widespread diffusion of Western consumer culture, exemplified by easy access to VCRs and stereos in the economic, which he later encapsulates as “the ultimate victory of the VCR,” (and now is Internet, obviously) is presented as evidence of this universalisation (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 108).

However, critical theory views this conclusion not as an objective prediction, but as a totalizing meta-narrative and ideological formation that attempts to legitimize the present by foreclosing the possibility of systemic alternatives, representing the

intellectual crisis of “late capitalism,” according to Jameson (1991). The psychoanalytic critique, rooted in Nietzsche’s concept of the “last man” (Dale, 2014, p. 24) and the interpretations of Kojève (1980, pp. 54, 162), reveals the spiritual danger inherent in the fulfillment of *thymos*, fearing that the triumph of comfortable, liberal complacency leads to a profound loss of struggle (*megalothymia*) and the decay of humanity. By centering history on the gratification of *thymos*, critics contend that the end of history thesis displaces material analysis in favor of “social psychology,” ignoring the deepening structural contradictions of global capitalism. Ultimately, this ideological claim of an end state is viewed as an expression of the perceived “constriction of Space” and the inability to imagine alternative futures, rather than an objective temporal terminus, confirming the challenge noted by Bell (1978) that liberal society is perpetually defined by intrinsically plural and clashing values that demand ongoing procedural negotiation rather than final reconciliation.

This leads to the crucial concept of “There Is No Alternative” (TINA). TINA constitutes the central ideological claim within the discourse of the “End of History,” asserting that the collapse of communism provides irrefutable empirical proof of the irreversible global triumph and terminal ideological viability of liberal democracy and market capitalism. Rather than marking the obsolescence of alternatives, the materialist perspective – exemplified by André Gunder Frank (1990) – views the TINA claim as politically and economically insufficient. Frank (1990, p. 16) argued that the crisis of the Soviet system proved that neither a capitalist nor a socialist “system” can be independent of the world economy, demonstrating the pervasive nature of dependency or interdependence. Consequently, Frank concluded that efforts to achieve “liberation” through domestic “socialism” in Third World countries offered scarce alternatives, specifically because the infrastructure of the “socialist system” could not offer material support for the Marxist superstructural ideology of liberation within the existing world system. This critique highlights that the failure was systemic and material (adaptation to the world economy’s exigencies of capital accumulation), rather than strictly ideological. Frank (1990) notes that economic policy across the globe must adapt to the “*material exigencies of the world economy and its new crisis of capital accumulation*” (p.16), regardless of regime ideology, suggesting that the material reality governs the outcome in the long run.

Critics from the Latin American context confirm the struggle against this seemingly totalizing system. Hinkelammert (1991) explicitly frames the contemporary condition as the search for an answer to the question, “¿Capitalismo sin Alternativas?” (Capitalism without Alternatives?), suggesting that this problem is a core concern for post-Soviet political thought. This perspective indicates that the underlying problems of exploitation, poverty, and structural domination remain inherent contradictions, regardless of Fukuyama’s designation of them as mere “problems” compatible with the liberal end-state.

The critical perspective also targets the limited scope of Fukuyama’s historical analysis. Anderson (1992) suggests that if it is genuinely difficult to locate viable forces capable of fundamentally altering the world, the philosophical response should be to “change the inventory” by which the world is described. Fukuyama’s historical victory relies narrowly on the collapse of Soviet communism, rather than on the success metrics of liberal capitalism itself. Furthermore, the concept of alternatives is often corrupted within the liberal framework (Anderson, 1992, p. 351). Boyle (1995, pp. 118-119) critiques the post-1945 generalization of eccentricity as “pluralism,” arguing that it results in the desubstantialization of all values except those of the market. In this framework, purported “alternative values” such as environmentalism, feminism, or spiritual movements are relegated to the status of a “rainbow of delusions” in an “emporium of pluralism,” obscuring the market’s true, substantial hegemony.

These distinctions are vital, as the neoliberal project implemented in Chile would draw on the “pragmatic” language of Bell while being animated by the absolutist, no-alternatives spirit of Fukuyama.

This narrative, however, is philosophically untenable. As Eric Michael Dale’s (2014) critique underlines, the Kojévian-Fukuyamaist “end of history” is a myth built on a systematic misreading of Hegel’s actual texts. Dale (2014, pp. 224-227) demonstrates that Hegel consistently argues against philosophy’s ability to predict the future, emphasizes the contingency of the historical process, and explicitly identifies the Americas as a “land of the future,” thereby precluding any notion that history had culminated in 19th-century Prussia. The “End of History” is therefore not a Hegelian concept but an ideological appropriation *of* Hegel. It is a narrative

that performs a “*cynical world-reduction*,” excising contingency and openness from the historical process to naturalize the triumph of neoliberalism.

The critical theory tradition views the end of history narrative as profoundly Eurocentric, lacking the necessary cosmopolitan perspective required for genuine orientation and critique. Saramago (2024, p. 12) notes that approaches relying on stadial grand narratives, exemplified by the Kantian-Habermasian tradition, reproduce Eurocentrism by abstracting universal patterns of development derived primarily from Western societal experiences, thereby classifying alternative, non-Western paths as primitive stages. Critiques highlight that the vision of post-historical society, articulated by thinkers outside the core, often blinds itself to the material realities and fate of the majority of humanity living outside the zone of industrial privilege (Anderson, 1992, pp. 280-281). Consequently, the end of history discourse is deemed insufficient as it neglects the vast populations still mired in history (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 15). Derrida (1994) vehemently countered the notion of liberal democracy as the ultimate ideal, pointing to the immense, ongoing violence, inequality, exclusion, and hunger affecting people worldwide. Moreover, liberationists, such as Franz Hinkelammert (1993), have directly engaged with the end of history, exposing its inherent brutality, which they term “*savage capitalism*,” and arguing that the true historical contest over emancipation occurs in the periphery, far from the market’s purported satisfaction of human desires. Ultimately, the persistence of political and economic contradictions, including crises and inequality inherent in liberal democratic systems, continues to undermine the validity of these “finalisation” discourses, confirming that history, particularly from the peripheral perspective, remains an ongoing process.

Nevertheless, Fukuyama (1989; 1992) views liberal-neoliberal modernity as the final stage of human progress. He argues that liberal democracy, with its twin principles of liberty and equality, is free from the fundamental internal contradictions that led to the collapse of earlier governmental forms, such as monarchy, aristocracy, fascism, and communism. This perspective aligns with modernization theory, which posits that economic development is a precondition for democracy, thereby fostering a strong middle class that demands political participation and rights (Fukuyama, 1992, p. Xviii). He further suggests that a “general consensus” accepting liberal democracy as the most rational form of

government has emerged globally, outside the Islamic world (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 211). Despite this emphasis on the convergence toward a single, universally acceptable model, critics such as Delanty (2000) argue that Fukuyama erroneously confused democracy with Westernization, and liberalism in politics (liberal democracy) with liberalism in economics (neo-liberalism).

The concept of a post-industrial society also implicitly supports Fukuyama's narrative. As economies mature and become more knowledge-intensive, as predicted by thinkers like Bell, the traditional conflicts of industrial society are expected to wane. Fukuyama's thesis aligns with the idea that daring struggles and ideological precepts, once central to human experience, are replaced by economic calculation and technical know-how in advanced societies. However, theories of post-industrial society, initially formulated as hopeful utopias, can transform into ideologies when applied to present conditions, obscuring remaining manufacturing and practical work.

Despite his triumphalist declaration, Fukuyama himself has renounced his notion of the end of history; at the same time, his melancholic nostalgia for the past days of the post-war dream prevailed, as he has put it in a very precise way, anticipating a “very sad time”:

“The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia, in fact, will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post-historical world for some time to come. Even though I recognize its inevitability, I have the most ambivalent feelings for the civilization that has been created in Europe since 1945, with its north Atlantic and Asian offshoots. Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again.” (Fukuyama 1989, p. 18)

This “gloom,” as he acknowledges, stems from the concept of the “Last Man,” derived from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. The Last Man is depicted as a being satisfied by material plenty and physical security but lacking outlets for

“thymos,” the desire for recognition, glory, and abstract striving. This spiritual emptiness or “boredom” leads to the concern that humanity, deprived of heroic struggles, might plunge itself back into chaos, hinting at a potential for renewed conflict even within the “post-historical” world.

Despite the fact that this melancholic-infused nostalgia is not named as a factor for what might follow the end of history, Fukuyama’s conjectures about what the new state of history might entail point toward a type of archaeology of longing. Based on Fukuyama’s idea that with the decline of ideological and master-hegemonic narratives, there would also be the disappearance of the ideas and the dreams (fantasies) that propel human beings. This scenario postulates an environment of “economic rationalities” and of “technical fix response”, predicated on “refined consumer expectations” (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 18). For such a sad time, the values that the historical struggle brings to individuals are countering, such as the “excitement,” “courage,” “imagination,” and “idealism” (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 18). Thus, one could read Fukuyama’s own ‘ambivalences’ on the ending of history –liberal democracy on the one hand and the ‘search for meaning’ that historical conflict embraced on the other as this core anxiety. Thus, while not addressing the question of nostalgia as such, Fukuyama’s “The End of History?” does recognise the possibility of the emergence of a void, of the lack of meaning in people’s lives after the end of history. For all that the triumph of liberal democracy represents a potentially historic shift in human history, this may be lessened by their consequent longing for the lost grand narratives and great ideals. Arguably, this could become a significant force in shaping the future.

The master-hegemonic narrative of the “end of history,” which formed the ideological backdrop to the era of neoliberal triumph, requires a precise psychoanalytic decoding. As Alenka Zupančič (2020) argues in her crucial intervention, the thesis of a historical End, articulated by Fukuyama, marks the exact opposite of what it suggests. It does not signal that history has reached its final destination, but rather that we have entered a state defined by the impossibility of reaching an end. The “End of History” is, in fact, an “[e]nd that can go on endlessly, forever” (Zupančič, 2020, p. 833). This ideological maneuver was made possible by the collapse of “really existing socialism,” which represented a tangible “Outside” to the capitalist order. Its disappearance translated into an “open totality” where the

capitalist system became the sole horizon of the possible, an inside with no outside (Zupančič, 2020, p. 834). Given Zupancic's articulation, they also contain basic characteristics as a massive derealization of reality, an intense lack of "*realization*", a reification of certain political forces, a perplexed coordination of what one must and cannot do, and a narrative historical content that is specific to the mythos of the era in which the ideology is created or elaborated over time.

This ideological closure fundamentally restructures the collective political fantasy. If meaningful transformation can no longer emerge from antagonisms within the historical process, it can only be imagined as arriving from a great, catastrophic "Outside," such as a natural disaster or an extraterrestrial impact (Zupančič, 2020, p. 834). This fantasy, which frames change as an external and total destruction, is not a neutral observation but a potent ideological mechanism. It reinforces the existing order by presenting any internal, political rupture as unthinkable, thereby paralyzing the political imaginary. It is precisely this logic that allows the contradictions and social devastation produced by the neoliberal order to be misrecognized as external shocks, rather than as symptoms of the system itself.

Even though Fukuyama's thesis, which has been observed to generate a specific grand narrative co-opted by neoconservative rhetoric, provides an ideological rationale for the existing global order, particularly the dominance of market capitalism, Fukuyama has, however, clarified and, to some extent, revised his initial claims. Fukuyama (1995) emphasizes that he "never proclaimed anything but merely raised the question of the end of history" (p. 42), clarifying that his thesis refers to the termination of History as a singular, coherent, evolutionary ideological process, rather than the cessation of events, asserting that liberal democracy constitutes the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution. He distances himself from misinterpretations that tied his work to USA foreign policy or neoconservative movements (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 27), suggesting that the post-historical framework might align better with the European Union model, which Kojève identified as the fullest embodiment of the principles of the French Revolution in stable, abundant capitalist democracies (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 67). More recently, Fukuyama (2022) has refined his argument by distinguishing between core liberalism and its modern derivative, neoliberalism, attributing growing economic inequality and devastating

financial crises to the latter's unrestrained economic policies, while acknowledging that the crisis-producing structure of liberal democracy can generate populist political discourses and anti-foreign sentiments. Despite these acknowledgements of severe contemporary problems, he consistently maintains that liberal democracy, characterized by its lack of "fundamental internal contradictions" (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 64), remains the unsurpassed ideal and the final form of human government. However, it can be argued that the demonstrated capacity of liberal democracy and capitalism to produce crises, alongside deep-seated issues like poverty and exploitation, definitively undermines the notion that it can represent the "final" stage of human history, suggesting, according to Frank (1990), that the material world disconfirmed Fukuyama's idealist position. Addition to that, Žižek (2011, p. 33) argues that if global capitalism is indeed the end of history, it is only insofar as a "certain excess," such as violence or ecological crisis, is elevated into the very principle of social life, turning the conclusion into a potentially tragic post-historical existence.

In conclusion, the master-hegemonic narratives of the "end of ideology" and "end of history" have been central in shaping the global ideological landscape of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. They provided a philosophical justification for the worldwide expansion of neoliberal capitalism and liberal-democratic governance, casting this status quo as the fulfillment of historical destiny. By doing so, they functioned to delegitimize radical alternatives, portraying any fundamental challenge as either obsolete (a thing of the past, as in Bell's thesis) or futile (in the face of a world consensus, as in Fukuyama's thesis). These narratives simplify and "reduce" history to a single trajectory – one that just happens to validate the dominant powers and social relations. They thereby create a closed symbolic universe in which incremental adjustments are possible, but systemic rupture is unthinkable. It is against this *curated absence of alternatives* that any genuine transformative movement – any "*utopian negation*" of the present – must define itself. The following section will examine how such master narratives have been translated and contested at the national level, setting the stage for our analysis of Chile's narrative *refusal* of the purported "global ends."

4.1.2. Short Prelude for Bridging Narratives

This subsection serves a limited but necessary task. Its purpose is to sketch two complementary periodizations “to produce the concept of history” (Jameson, 1984, p. 180) that carry the discussion from Marcuse’s *Great Refusal* to Žižek’s conception of *the Act*. Periodization is essential because Marcuse’s concept of refusal operates at two temporal registers: the flash of insubordination and the *longue durée* (long duration) reorganization of global capitalism (Wallerstein, pp. 49-56). By sketching the period spanning the 1960s and 1970s till now, this period deserves brief re-examination, for it forms the hinge between Marcuse’s diagnosis of an “affluent” yet one-dimensional West, *Third World* struggle that fuels the *First World* struggle, and the neoliberal counter-revolution and era of post-politics that Žižek will later confront. A treatment of how these timelines intersected with the neoconservative USA-based hegemonic “end-of-ideology” and “end-of-history” theses has already been followed in the previous sections. This subsection, therefore, is strictly transitional, setting the conceptual groundwork for the analysis of the Chilean experience that follows.

Marcuse was an eyewitness to the events of May 1968 in Paris, and he analyzed them as a rebellion that momentarily recaptured libertarian power, demonstrating prospects for an enlarged base of opposition. This period initiates what can be termed “Long Sixties,” where new forms of opposition began to challenge the one-dimensional framework. The “Long Sixties” (1955–1974) can be understood as the cradle of Marcuse’s thesis. And not only the revolts, but also within the accumulation of history of capitalism, he was able to understand the transformation of the capitalist liberal system into a more sophisticated and manipulative system in the latter part of the 20th century.

The 1960s decade was marked by global political instability, with worker and student revolts and decolonization wars pointing to a general crisis of the social and economic order established after the Great Depression and World War. It was mentioned as one of the special years in the history of humanity, especially for those in developed countries, as it was the period of ideologies being the main motive force, with the degree of intensity that had not been seen before. It was during this period that most of the social revolutions that called for drastic change in political and social structures emerged.

Until the 1960s, it was mainly the socialist strategy and movements that pioneered such changes, with the backbone of the movement comprising trade unions and the labor movement, often through communist parties. However, this period witnessed the formation of new social movements and political ideologies, contrary to what many had predicted: that technological advancement would lead to the emergence of a one-world idea and hence the decline of ideological struggles. In line with the latter argument, the global agenda of the 1960s was characterized by protest movements that occurred during “*golden age*” of the welfare state conditions such as “*increasing standards of living, stable mixed economies and convergence among the industrialized countries around the two large states with powerful bureaucracies not tied to formal political ideologies*” (Hochuli et al., 2021, p. 29), in both poles of the world. The spirit of ideological activism was renewed under themes such as civil rights marches, anti-war protests, anti-imperialist movements, pro-democracy movements, student movements, women’s liberation campaigns, and environmental protection campaigns, which Marcuse preferred to call the “New Left” or non-one-dimensional movements. Therefore, the 1960s were not the years when the ideological commitment was over, but the years of its change and revival, with one cannot but recall the Parisians’ chants “*be realistic, demand impossible*” and “*all power to the imagination*”.

Following the argument of the previous section, the “*long sixties*” narrative should be understood as the inauguration of a qualitatively new type of social movement (Marcuse, 1970, p. 70) – one that broke from orthodox class identity and expanded the coordinates of struggle across cultural, sexual, anti-colonial, and subjective domains just as Marcuse has put it in the preface of his book “An Essays on Liberation”: “*The Great Refusal takes a variety of forms*” (2000, p. vii). This period is characterized by a wave of global uprisings and revolts, including events in the so-called *Third World* (it is known as Global South now in the social science literature), such as the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, anti-colonial struggles in Algeria, resistance in Palestine, and the Viet Cong’s armed opposition to U.S. intervention in Vietnam. In the North, the “*long sixties*” also witnessed the rise of the Civil Rights movement, student movement, Anti-war movements, second-wave feminism, and sexual liberation (*revolution*), all of which contributed to a radical questioning of traditional power structures and social norms. The year 1968 itself became an eponym

for the “long sixties,” signifying the intensity and duration of social movements. Together, these movements form what George Katsiaficas (1987) names the “*global imagination of 1968*,” or another term coming from Wallerstein (1999, pp. 42-43), which he calls “*world revolution of 1968*.”

Two parallel readings of the “*long Sixties*” help clarify how refusals appear both as a sudden spark and as a drawn-out confrontation with global power.

First, *momental reading* sees history advance through condensed flashes of refusal that crystallise a wider discontent. This monumental reading begins with a single symbolic gesture: Rosa Parks’s decision in December 1955 (an everyday refusal) to keep her seat on a Montgomery bus, forcing Jim Crow segregation itself, not merely a bus policy, onto the public stage. Langman (2023, p. 142) points to the Montgomery bus boycotts as a “mass direct action” that influenced subsequent movements. The widespread visibility of state violence against protestors via television garnered national support. Following Rosa Parks’ refusal, civil rights movements set the stage for American society, along with the murders of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and USA president J. F. Kennedy and his brother R. F. Kennedy. In January 1969, Jan Palach’s self-immolation – “Torch No. 1” – on Prague’s Wenceslas Square exposed the limits of “socialism with a human face” and galvanized student-worker solidarity against Soviet occupation (Pedziwol, 2019). His act signalled that the Prague Spring’s reforms could not be re-domesticated without residue, foreshadowing cracks that would later loosen the Soviet bloc. On 11 November 1983, Sebastián Acevedo immolated himself in Concepción’s central plaza to protest the abduction of his children by the military dictatorship’s secret police—his death immediately reverberated across Chile, fueling public outrage and opposition to the dictatorship, and today the square is also so-called as Plaza Sebastián Acevedo, unofficially, as if to remind *Plaza Dignidad* (Fieldnotes, April 28, 2024, Concepción; Márquez, 1987, pp. 47-48). Acevedo’s sacrifice anticipated the 1988 “No” plebiscite, marking the inner point at which Pinochet’s terror began to erode its own legitimacy

From this vantage point, the Chilean experience becomes doubly instructive. Pinochet’s authoritarian modernisation enacted the very neoliberal counter-revolution Marcuse anticipated (Maley, 2023, p. 16); the 1990 transition was then hailed *à la*

Fukuyama, as confirmation that ideological conflict had ended (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. xiii-xiv). Yet a string of uprisings from the 2006 “Penguin” revolt to the 2019 *estallido* refutes that verdict, demonstrating that the Great Refusal and the Žižekian Act remain potent in late-capitalist Chile (Rodríguez, 2020, pp. 164-165; Somma, 2021, pp. 23-26). To bridge the apparent gap between Palach (1969) and Acevedo (1983), one must recall Poland’s 1980 Solidarity wave, a trade-union movement towards “workers democracy” (Ost, 1989), South Korea’s 1980 Gwangju uprising, a student-led demonstrations towards democratization (Nuangjamnong, 2025), and Brazil’s 1979-84 Diretas Já movement towards direct general elections (Prange, 2014). Although each converted sectoral grievances into national challenges to authoritarian-developmental regimes, they were also punctuating the global South’s shift from military Keynesianism to debt-driven neoliberal “democracy”, each shares the narrative of return to democracy, and ending the “authoritarian” rules.

Twenty years later, the lone figure who stood before a column of tanks in Beijing – broadcast worldwide during the June 1989 Tiananmen uprising (a hegemonic crisis) – condensed an entire generational demand for democratic participation into a single defiant stance (Franklin, 2014, p. 338). The image simultaneously exposed the Communist Party of China’s (CCP) promise of harmonious modernisation as a fragile screen. On 17 December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight in Sidi Bouzid after police confiscated his produce, igniting Tunisia’s “Dignity Revolution” and the broader Arab Spring cycle (Beaumont, 2017). Bouazizi thereby flipped the neoliberal mantra of self-entrepreneurship into a lethal indictment. In the United States, the hashtag *#BlackLivesMatter* appeared, a Facebook post in July 2013 by Alicia Garza, and amplified after the 2014 Ferguson protests, turned a string of police killings into a universal indictment of racialized state violence, which reached a peak level with the murder of George Floyd by the police (Bestvater et al., 2023). Or, more recently, 15-year-old Greta Thunberg’s solo school strike outside the Swedish parliament in August 2018 – her refusal to attend class resonated far beyond Stockholm, catalyzing the global *Fridays for Future* movement that mobilized millions in climate protests within a year (Crouch, 2018). Her weekly absence re-politicised climate change by rejecting the consumer-friendly “green growth” fantasy.

Taken together, these episodic acts exemplify what Marcuse calls the *Great Refusal*: each isolates a routine point of domination and, by saying “no,” briefly suspends the normal circulation of power (Lamas et al., 2017). While these “extreme alienation” and final “*act[s] of refusal*” (Funke et. al, 2017, p. 1) differ in their strategic aims –some demanding policy changes within the system, others representing an absolute break from it– they all share the *momental* quality of interrupting the flow of ordinary obedience. And their momentary refusals transform into a monumental narrative. In a broader reading of Uribe’s Lacanian account, these are also “repeated acts” (Uribe, 2020, pp. 45-46) that each of the remembrance, repetition, and recognition creates affective charge in present time transference.

However, crucial *momental* sparks not only exist at the atomic level. Jameson reads the same arc as a single *objective situation* framed by two systemic breaks from 1957-61 de-colonial take-off to 1973-74 counter-revolution from above. As Jameson (1984, p. 182) highlights, the Cuban Revolution of January 1, 1959, also included the *Foco* theory,⁴⁰ which concretely demonstrated the attainability of revolution and heralded a period of unexpected political innovation. As Hobsbawm (2017) noted, this “*untypical but successful*” event was what “*put the guerrilla strategy on the world's front pages*” and became the central inspiration for a generation of militants across the world (p. 260).

Thereby, in this context, there are also global *monumental* sparks. Jameson locates the opening of the *long Sixties* in the worldwide decolonisation wave, specifically in British and French Africa, signalled by events such as Ghana's independence in 1957 and the diplomatic resolution of the Algerian Revolution in 1962. This process, according to Jameson, wherein “*the natives became human beings*” –encompassing also the “*inner colonized*” of the First World, such as minorities and women– marks, as Jameson interprets it, a Hegelian coming to self-consciousness, or, in Marcusean terms the emergence of new, non-class “*subjects of history*” (Jameson, 1984, pp. 180-181).

⁴⁰ Foco theory (foquismo) names the Cuban-inspired view that a small rural guerrilla ‘focus’ can trigger a wider popular uprising. In the 1960s it functioned less as a technical blueprint than as a proof of possibility – ‘it can be done’ – that nourished rebellion across the metropolises. Che Guevara condensed this horizon as a living symbol rather than a bureaucratic model. (Kellner & Pierce, 2014, p. 282)

Jameson locates a second break around 1967-68. Guerrilla setbacks in Peru and Venezuela, Che's death in Bolivia (1967), the Tupamaros' turn to urban *foco*, Israel's 1967 seizure of Gaza and the West Bank, West Germany's 1966 recession, and the implosion of Socialist German Students' Union (SDS) in 1969 all signalled strategic blockage (Jameson, 1984, pp. 193-198). For example, in this, Langman (2023, pp. 144-145) identifies the anti-war movement as one of the most widespread mobilizations of the 1960s, driven by empathy for suffering and opposition to imperialist policies. This movement against the "imperialist" and expansionist USA intervention in Vietnam and Cambodia paved the way for worldwide student movements. As Berardi (2024) further suggests, many participants in these mobilizations saw themselves as aligning with the anti-colonial struggle and the broader goal of social emancipation. The solidarity shown with the Vietcong reflected a belief that shifting the global balance of power and transforming social relations was possible, even if, in retrospect, these hopes proved to be only partially fulfilled.

This second reading, the global-structural curve, follows a much longer trajectory. During the Cold War boom, liberal capitalism still had the "free world" versus "communism" global order. That visibility made it easier for radicals to spot the system's hidden surplus and to name it, just as Marcuse warned when he dissected the "affluent society" and its managed desires. In this narrative, Vietnam cracked the *façade*: televised defeats such as the 1968 Tet Offensive (1968) spread far beyond Southeast Asia and set off a chain of student, anti-colonial, and Black-Power insurgencies from Paris to Mexico City (*the pre-Olympic massacre*) and Chicago's Street battles (Katsiaficas, 1987, pp. 3-4). Che Guevara or Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary leadership gave the struggle a communist centre of gravity; their presence confirmed, in Marcuse's terms, that the *Great Refusal* could harden into a positive project of liberation rather than remain a merely negative gesture. Until here, what Jameson's periodization does is retroactively transform postmodern "post-politic" spacelessness into a perception of space, also breaking the line between "third world" and "westernized" movements, and tries to give a sense of totality to it.

If the *momental* sparks show where power cracks, the 'global curve' shows how capital rapidly reseals those cracks and recolonises the field. This latter impetus concludes, according to Jameson, plausibly around 1972-1974, when the *Third-*

Worldism phenomenon exhausted itself especially after the Chilean coup of 1973 militarised Latin America; the Yom Kippur war unleashed the “oil weapon,” shocking advanced economies; the Vietnam draw-down and the end of the draft deflated anti-war mobilisation; Eurocommunism’s Common Programme (1972) and the Trilateral Commission’s founding signalled elite re-consolidation; and the liberation currents entered internal realignments (Jameson, 1984, pp. 203-208) and the onset of a worldwide economic crisis because it was then by the late 1970s the oil shocks and debt crises finished the old Keynesian pact and opened the door to neoliberal “reforms” in the U.S. and Europe (Jameson, 1984, pp. 183-184, 204). Notably, this can be simply put as opening the door to the *neoliberal counter-revolution* from above.

This is also exact time when Marcuse acknowledges that “*the Western world has reached a new stage of development: now, the defense of the capitalist system requires the organization of counterrevolution at home and abroad,*” and continues that “*capitalism reorganizes itself to meet the threat of a revolution which would be the most radical of all historical revolutions*” (Marcuse, 1972, pp. 1-2). He uses the term “*neoimperialism*” to refer to what would later be known as neoliberalism, *avant la lettre*, describing it as a “*global reorganization of capitalism*” (Marcuse, 1972, pp. 2-5). Indeed, as Maley argues, Marcuse presciently analyzes the beginnings of a “*neoliberal counterrevolution from above*” that would supplant the Keynesian Welfare State (Maley, 2023, p. 16). This shift initiates what is called by Wendy Brown as the “*moral project of neoliberalism,*” where the “*reorganization of repression*” was no longer just about overt discipline but about a profound restructuring of subjectivity itself (cited in Maley, 2023, p. 18).

Jameson concludes that the global economic crisis of 1973-1974 marked the point where “*all the old infrastructural bills then slowly come due once more,*” leading to a worldwide effort to “*proletarianize all those unbound social forces*” of the 1960s, thereby re-legitimising a “*traditional*” Marxist analysis of class struggle on a new, expanded world scale (Jameson, 1984, pp. 208-209).

Marcuse's understanding of the *Great Refusal* embodies this dialectical epoch directly. Taken side by side, the two narratives reinforce Marcuse’s claim that refusal must operate simultaneously at the level of singular gestures and of world-systems. In this regard, the *Great Refusal(s)* or “Marcusean social movements” (Castro, 2016, p.

376) emerge as the only authentic political and existential response to this one-dimensional universe. It is not a demand for better wages, fairer policies, or adjustments within the global system; it is a *qualitative* and *absolute* negation of the entire social order and its underlying logic of the “performance principle” that subordinates all of life to the imperatives of alienated labor and productivity, that leads one to that utopian real place (Jameson, 1974). Hence, in basic terms, for Marcuse, utopian “*is no longer that which has ‘no place’ and cannot have any place in the historical universe, but rather that which is blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies*” (2000, pp. 3-4).

Parks’s seat and Vietnam’s villages form a continuum rather than a contradiction: both expose how domination rests on routinised consent, and both suggest that consent can be withdrawn. Seen as a sequence, these moments do not merely accumulate; they relay the frame of negativity across historical blocs. Each time the “big Other” seeks to reseal its authority – Jim Crow’s legalism, late-socialist normalisation, Pinochet’s “*shock treatment*” neoliberal securitisation, Beijing’s developmental authoritarianism, Washington-consensus austerity, or green-washed consumerism – a single refusal localises the contradiction and passes it along. The pattern corresponds to what Wallerstein calls a “*world-revolutionary wave*” that travels, mutates, and returns in a new guise. Marcuse reads the early arc as a nascent liberation; Žižek re-reads the later arc as proof that the symbolic seam itself has become the battleground. Thus, momentary sparks and hegemonic curves are not two stories but alternate pulses of the same dialectic.

And, according to Žižek, the very fabric of accepted social reality, forcing a symbolic re-ordering where the 'natural' logic of segregation was exposed as a violent, arbitrary imposition because it turns the temporality to “*the abrupt reversal of 'not yet' into 'always-already'*” retroactively (Žižek, 2014, p. 146). However, there is a crucial turn in the above-mentioned *re-legitimising* analysis of class struggle. By using the bridge that Jameson constructed, a counter-revolution of “neoimperialism” or neoliberalism has dissolved the external symbolic unity instead of replacing it. Neoliberal ideology completes the evacuation of a stable standpoint against which refusal can define itself. Žižek’s shorthand is evident:

“There is no big Other, no agent of total accountability that can take into account the consequences of our own acts. [...] There is no higher historical Necessity whose instruments we are and which guarantees the final outcome of our interventions. [...] We have to renounce the very eschatological scheme which underlies our despair. There will never be a Left that magically transforms confused revolts and protests into one big consistent Project of Salvation; all we have is our activity, open to all the risks of contingent history.” (Žižek, 2015, p. 129)

Basically, what Žižek underlines is that *“there is no big Other”* – no historical necessity, invisible hand, or socialist bloc to keep the accounts of our interventions (Žižek, 1997; Bailes, 2020, p. 163). In essence, Žižek starts from the post-Cold War era, when the utopian dreams of the 1960s had given way to a more cynical and pessimistic view of the world. His work reflects the sense of disillusionment and despair that many people felt in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the failure of socialist experiments worldwide.

In general terms, this can be described as a libidinal economic super-ego domain of the post-political period, which symbolically embodied itself with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The emergence of neoliberal governance’s main logic during these years was promoting a push towards pro-democracy struggles (and respective “return to democracy” narratives) in Eastern Europe and Latin America as well. According to Harvey, this is the period in which neoliberal governance *“internalize[s] class relations”* (Harvey, 2007, p. 11); the market now functions as a super-egoic judge commanding us to extract enjoyment from every domain of life, yet forever postponing fulfilment. This is why neoliberalism, as a dominant political discourse, is more than a set of economic doctrines; it is an *“ideological fantasy that operates spontaneously in each act of the subjects before any conscious and deliberate reflection, generating repetitive”* behaviors and desires (Žižek, 2024, pp. 27-28). This *“ideological fantasy”* quilts scattered desires into a single horizon of enjoyment, masking the underlying antagonism that Marcuse sought to expose. One distinct difference is the loss of an external guarantor, which sets the scene for Žižek’s later thesis. The absence of the external guarantor, which Žižek refers to as Lacan’s concept of the *big Other* – the symbolic network of laws, norms, and shared beliefs that guarantees social meaning and against which rebellion can be clearly defined – has vanished or been denied. With no stable Other to rebel against, contemporary subjects slip into what he calls

“*cynical reason*” (1991, p. 29): as he quoted from German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk “*they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it,*” in other way, we know “*the game is rigged*”, just as it was mentioned in Marcuse, yet we go on enjoying its rituals all the same. Breaking that loop demands Žižek’s notion of *the Act* – a cut that, without prior warrant, redraws the coordinates of the possible (Žižek, 1991, pp. 215-224).

It is to this Žižekian logic, formulated in opposition to post-political managerialism and expressed in an ethically pessimistic, thanatotic register. In such a space, ironic distance becomes complicity; the system feeds on permissible transgressions. Hence, Žižek’s wager on his notion of refusal, the *Act*, an authentic act “*momentarily suspends the big Other,*” rewrites the symbolic coordinates, and is always undertaken without guarantees (Žižek, 2007, p. 144). As Dean has put it, Žižek’s *Act* matters not because of the particular seat but because it forced the segregation regime itself onto the stage of politics, letting one individual’s refusal stand in for a far wider claim to justice (Dean, 2006, pp. 125-131). Such episodic flashes provide the micro-level grammar of Marcuse’s *Great Refusal* as well.

This tension between fleeting acts of defiance and the long arcs of historical closure sets the stage for the following section’s examination of the master-hegemonic ‘global ends’ narratives, such as the proclaimed ends of ideology, history, and politics, that have framed Chile’s trajectory and against which the possibility of a *Great Refusal* must be measured. And Žižek points out this, where Marcuse was pointing out the coming one in the ruins of the 20th century’s master narratives: “the paradoxical relation between the destructive growth of capitalism and the [...] decline of the revolutionary potential” and the time when “the subjective factor is lagging behind” (1972, p. 5, 7).

This historical trajectory – from the open horizon of the Long Sixties, through the violent closure of the neoliberal counterrevolution, to the suffocating consensus of the post-political era – is the essential narrative bridge that sets the stage for analyzing Chile. The following sections will now trace how this dialectic of global narratives was translated, contested, and ultimately ruptured within the specific historical and symbolic terrain of Chile.

4.1.3. Master-Hegemonic National Narratives

Žižek's (2008a) claim that any political order is founded on a moment of illegal violence that must then be retroactively legitimized through narrative provides a powerful lens for analyzing master-hegemonic national narratives. This foundational violence remains the repressed “*the Real*” of the political order, a trauma that ideology works to conceal. To mask this, political regimes often fabricate narratives to legitimize their origins. However, as long as this foundational violence remains concealed, the regime's ideological myth persists, impacting society. Žižek's work thus encourages a “*traversing of the fantasy*” to expose this foundational violence, even in the face of contemporary skepticism towards radical political change. In contrast, Marcuse emphasizes the potential for transformative change through critical theory and the power of the imagination. Marcuse believes in the possibility of a “Great Refusal” – a rejection of the dominant ideology and a move towards a more just and equitable society. While Žižek focuses on the systemic violence of capitalism and, henceforth, the subjective impossibility, Marcuse maintains a hopeful outlook for the transformative potential of critical thought and collective action. The work of Marcuse and Žižek, in this light, is to “*traverse the fantasy*” of this narrated closure and re-engage with the open, traumatic, and ongoing process of history itself.

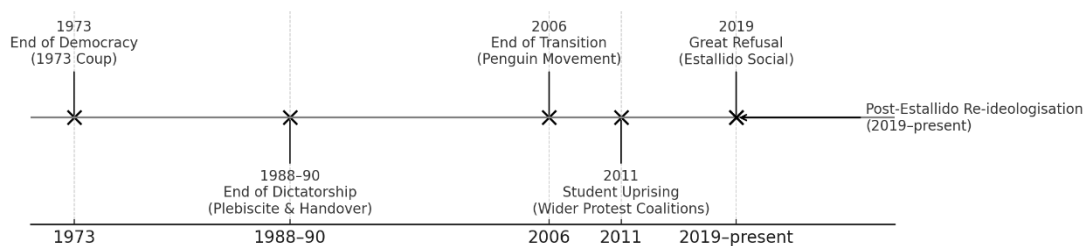


Figure 4.1: Historical National Narrative Line of Chile

Alongside the narratives of the “end of ideology” (symbolically marked by the 1968 movements during affluent capitalism and emerging post-industrial society and the shift from the welfare state to minimized state intervention via shock therapies) and the “end of history” (symbolically marked by the Soviet Union's dissolution, pro-democratic movements, and the perceived victory of liberal democracy in 1990), Chile presents an exemplary case study due to its historical context. This is primarily because

Chile represented a relatively brief experiment in democratic socialism under a democratically elected socialist president. With the termination of this experiment, what gives an exception to the Chilean case is that the *estallido* has been interpreted not only as a reaction to standardized and pacified inequalities by advanced neoliberalism but also as an expression of the widespread social trauma that has been represented by the signifier “September 11” (*el once de septiembre*) in the 1973 Coup d'état and the repressive military dictatorship (Cabrera et al., 2020).

The country essentially completed the transition to economic, political, and cultural neoliberalism alongside an authoritarian military dictatorship (lasting 17 years from 1973 onwards) that did not prioritize democratic institutionalization, through a constitutional process that began in 1980 and continued until the period referred to as the “end of history” in 1990. According to this, the Chilean *estallido* is the last critical event in the numerous popular uprisings of recent decades. A historical memory resurfaces with the persistence of the dictatorship's anti-popular (or *the people's*) ideology, which was initially perceived as a coup aimed at undermining unity and subsequently as “*coercive state violence to impose*” the neoliberal model (Hollander, 2009; Garreton, 2005). Rather than being the model of neoliberalism at the outset, it was first and foremost one of the translations of the global conflict (the Cold War) between the USA and the Soviet Union. It is not the memory of the Popular Unity (*Unidad Popular - UP*) government itself, but rather the reminders of its core demands and the collective longing for democratization, brutally silenced by the 1973 coup.

Bearing this in mind, the early implementation of radical neoliberal policies enabled by the authoritarian regime, Pinochet's act, and the subsequent paradigmatic shift from the Military Coup dictatorship to neoliberal democracy have been symptoms of a long-standing status quo that caused a short circuit in political subjectivity. As a result, the negation that can't be fully addressed in national narratives and “cognitive mapping” (Jameson, 1984; Jameson, 1990), especially concerning Chilean social movements as post-authoritarian and post-traumatic subjectivity towards the signs of an emancipatory subject, eventually collides with the post-neoliberal subject.

Following this trajectory, Chile entered a second phase marked by a stable economy and the consolidation of a liberal-democratic order, as promoted by the dominant national narrative during the period of *Concertación* (Concertación de

Partidos por la Democracia) –a coalition of center-left parties that governed post-dictatorship Chile. This narrative unfolded within the broader geopolitical transformations of the 1980s, defined by the global neoconservative turn. Ronald Reagan’s iconic call – “*Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!*” (“Berlin Wall” Speech, 2009) – shortly before the fall of the Soviet Union, became a symbolic moment signaling the triumph of Western liberalism. For regions like Eastern Europe and Latin America, this ushered in what political scientists termed “transitions to democracy,” a concept that downplayed past structural conflicts in favor of a depoliticized, post-ideological consensus. Within this context emerged influential neoconservative readings from figures such as Bell (the “end of ideology”), Fukuyama (the “end of history”), and Samuel Huntington (“clash of civilizations”) whose work helped institutionalize the idea of democratic transition as a teleological, post-ideological process aligned with Western norms and to frame this new global order as the inevitable culmination of historical development.

Reading them in conjunction with “*one-dimensional thought*” (Marcuse, 2007) or “*extreme alienation*” (Žižek, 1991, pp. 225-226) –as such the capitalist system, which prioritizes markets, competition, and profit to the exclusion of alternative socioeconomic models–, these narratives are characterized by their attempts to definitive rupture the “*de te fabula narrator*” (of you the tale is told), as outlined by Marx at the very beginning of the first volume of *Das Capital* (Marx, 1991) following the Industrial Revolution, which refers to the technique of transferring the developing capitalism in England to German workers, and its retroactive complement, “*the history of class struggles*” (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 14). As Bailes (2020, p. 187) notes, the political dimension of ideology is deeply connected to the potential for mass consciousness to transcend “*one-dimensional reasoning*”. This transcendence is predicated on recognizing the fundamental antagonisms embedded within the socio-economic structure, where existing social relations marginalize certain groups and contradict proclaimed social values. In their book, *The End of the End of History*, Hochuli et al. (2021) elaborate on this narrative sequence, dividing it into distinct periods:

“In our contemporary era, the molding of political and social history into a coherent narrative structure – one that could conceivably have a beginning, a middle, and, crucially, an end – stems back to the end of the Cold War. In 1989, an academic functionary and political scientist of the US security state, Francis

Fukuyama, claimed that Western victory in the Cold War not only brought one particular period of international history to a close but brought an end to the narrative itself.” (Hochuli et al., 2021, p. 17)

To this end, in the above-mentioned context, the analysis is based on examining Chile's unique set of “end” narratives. To fully understand the significance of the coalition and cognitive mutation between the “end” narratives and the struggle that follows, it is essential to consider the historical and political currents that have shaped Chilean society, as these founded narratives with a concrete predicament of the future are somehow already reoccupied by the past. According to this study, the historical-political national narrative considered post-1968 comprises four key periods: 1973, 1988-90, 2000-2006, and 2019. Here, its trajectory can be summarised in four important stages, drawing on various authors on narratives in Chile (Moulian, 1998; Salazar & Pinto, 1999a, 1999b; Salazar, 2012; Huneeus, 2007; Huneeus, 2014; Richard, 2019; Edwards, 2023), that are end of democracy, dictatorship, transition and finally coming to the year 2019 and re-ideologization of the struggle against neoliberalism. These narratives, deeply embedded in the national consciousness and therefore in the knowledge of the historical event(s) themselves, have profoundly influenced how Chileans understand and engage with social and political change. In these contexts, while this study is not a singular one and is not intended to conduct an in-depth study of historiography or memory, Chile has arguably gone further than any other country in the world in memory studies related to its traumatic history. Naturally, it was possible to experience the comfort of using secondary sources within the rich literature in the sections where retroactive readings were made.

This period saw no significant economic shifts (the dictatorship's accumulation pattern persisted) nor substantial changes to the party system despite many parties gaining legal status. The ideological nature stems from the transition, effectively legitimizing, in the public consciousness, the changes in accumulation patterns imposed by the 1975 neoliberal turn. This period, coinciding with the narratives of the “end of history” ideology, provided the popular mandate neoliberalism needed. The national narratives, therefore, can be seen as Chile's specific embodiment of these global narratives, solidifying the neoliberal project through democratic means.

As it is indicated that the main analysis units can be derived from the micro-level and the macro-level, it is in this vein that reflexive and retroactive approaches

can fuel the analysis from back-and-forth dynamism. Hence, what was then known as the Third World and is now referred to as the Global South is an important consideration in understanding the *big Other* in the Chilean context. Although today's realities differ, it is helpful to examine the past narrative alignment with master-hegemonic narratives, which can be subtle in this approach.

Based on this retroactive approach, rather than seeing the case as the result of "Chilean impasses" (Stern 2006, p. xxix), I will follow the literature that focuses on the process that reproduces what has happened and makes it a political event through the conjunction of the collective memory, moment and action as the most radical and influential application of these ideas occurred in Chile by "ending" narratives following the "exceptionalism," "Chilean road," "reformist tradition," "Chilean miracle" and "neoliberal laboratory" narratives respectively from socialist dream to neoliberal capitalist reality.

4.1.3.1. End of Democracy

The narrative of modern Chile begins with a primal trauma that can only be understood through the lens of its long history as a peripheral nation within the global capitalist system. Like other Latin American countries, Chile's integration into the world market since its independence was defined by its subordinate role as a provider of raw materials to the industrial core, first Great Britain and later the United States. As scholars of dependency theory, many writing from Chile in the 1960s, argued, this structural position profoundly shaped the continent's internal class structures and political possibilities, creating states that were formally sovereign but economically dependent (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

Within this shared continental reality, Chile has cultivated a reputation for exceptionalism in the Latin American context from the early 19th-century liberal reforms to the present day. In the most general definition, its main characteristics are frequently presented and mentioned as a long-standing case "model" of a stable, constitutional democracy in a region prone to coups with uninterrupted civilian rule, with regular elections and respect for law, and with efficiency of how this model functions (Petras, 1969; Huneus, 2014, pp. 17-18). This narrative was developed through multiple channels and garnered a broad consensus among foreign scholars,

local politicians, and numerous historians and social scientists. According to Salazar and Pinto (1999a, p. 13), this self-perception is a source of “national pride”, particularly for its political class. This “national pride” was rooted in a political history that, for much of the 20th century, managed to incorporate emerging social classes through a national-developmental project, diffusing class conflict while maintaining capitalist accumulation (Taylor, 2006). Hence, this enduring stability with capitalist developmentalism was often viewed as a national “achievement.” According to Garretón (1989, p. 3), three distinct elements were determined in this “phenomenon” until 1973: Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), substantive democratization, and a democratic political regime.

During the 1960s, Chile also enjoyed a reputation for *exceptionalism* in Latin America – a stable democracy charting a “reformist” path. President Eduardo Frei Montalva’s Christian Democratic government (1964–1970) launched the “Revolution in Liberty” program, pursuing progressive reforms within the system: land redistribution, expanded education and housing, partial nationalization of U.S. owned copper mines (Chile’s primary export and a resource long controlled by U.S. corporations like Kennecott and Anacond), and broadened voting rights (e.g. lowering the voting age, ending literacy requirements) (Garretón, 1989; p. 65; Alexander, 1978, pp. 55-57). However, it was not only the narrative of the reformist and institutionalized character of Chile, but also social movements such as urban squatter movements, peasant land occupations, and unauthorized strikes (Petras & Morley, 1990, p. 158). Along with these combinations of driving forces, the moderate project aimed to modernize Chilean capitalism and forestall social revolution, reflecting a long Chilean tradition of gradual, democratic reform. As Miliband (1973, p. 459) notes, although the tradition of Chilean “bourgeois democratic framework” prepared the ground for peaceful transformations, it did not deter the conservative political opposition, such as the Christian Democratic Party’s (Partido Demócrata Cristiano, PDC) essential character: a conservative constitutional right. This, according to Miliband, is a typical Christian Democratic tradition, found in Germany and Italy, which exhibits a range of tendencies from radicalism to extreme conservatism. Hence, this continuity also sparked polarization. Conservative elites reacted vehemently against Frei’s modest land reforms, while left-wing groups grew increasingly radical, with the Socialist Party embracing Marxist revolution and new militant movements, such as the Revolutionary

Left Movement (MIR - Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria), emerging under the inspiration of Cuba.

In 1970, as thinkers in the developed West contemplated the exhaustion of political ideas, Chile embarked on one of the most ideologically charged political experiments of the 20th century. The election of Salvador Allende Gossens and his leftist Popular Unity (UP- *Unidad Popular*) – a coalition including left-wing organisations such as the Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Chile*, PCCh), MIR, and the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista de Chile*, PS) – represented a globally significant endeavor: the attempt to achieve a socialist transition through peaceful, democratic, and constitutional means. The “Chilean road” (for Spanish, *Vía Chilena al Socialismo*) was a concept developed during Allende's government, representing a unique attempt to transition to socialism peacefully and institutionally emerged at the height of the Cold War as a distinct “third way,” offering an alternative to both U.S.-style liberal capitalism and the authoritarian communism of the Soviet bloc, in a way conceptualized upon a problematic nature of “transitional” nature and “socialist” character (Garreton, 1989, pp. 32-33).

Obviously, this exceptionalism had a continuum that seemed uniquely positioned to test the viability of a democratically elected Marxist government when Socialist leader Allende, at the head of the UP coalition, won the 1970 election. In this event, Allende became the first Marxist in history to assume a nation's presidency through open democratic elections. Allende's accession to the Chilean presidency in 1970, with 36.3% of the vote in a multi-candidate contest, marked a pivotal moment in global political history, as he became the first Marxist to achieve the presidency through democratic means (Alexander, 1978, p. 125; Barra, 2020, p. 183). The governmental agenda sought to overcome dependence on imperialist powers and achieve profound structural change (Stern, 2004, pp.18-19), centrally involving the nationalization of strategic economic sectors like copper, acceleration of agrarian reform, and the expansion of social welfare programs (Stern, 2006, pp. 15-16). This approach facilitated an alignment between intellectuals, artists, and the revolutionary subject – the people – reflecting a symbolic alliance forged by the Latin American Left, and fostered intense political and cultural experimentalism at the grassroots level, generating what many experienced as an everyday revolution and effervescent

grassroots social struggle. Tomás Moulian (1998, pp. 158-170) interpreted this period as embodying a necessary “romance” and self-deception, characterizing the transformation as the “anatomy of a myth” in its aspiration to build a new society, while María Angélica Illanes (2019) suggests this moment marked the culmination of the democratic project as it entered its revolutionary phase, emphasizing the energy and corporeal identity of the pueblo as a historical subject. The focus on redistribution included a radical agrarian reform that politically mobilized the rural poor, a process vital to the Mapuche people, whose mobilization actively sought to “Recover the usurped land” (*Recuperar la tierra usurpada*) (Illanes, 2019, p. 141), leading to land seizures and direct action exemplified by the takeover of the fundo Rucalán. Tinsman notes the massive inclusion of rural workers, women, and youth in organizing activities, highlighting this period as a time of significant democratization and struggle.

Far from experiencing ideological exhaustion, Chile was at the zenith of ideological fervor, where the fundamental questions of social and economic organization were the central subject of passionate political debate and mobilization. Allende's victory was the culmination of a decades-long strategy by the Chilean left to channel social struggle through electoral participation, building a powerful movement rooted in the country's labor unions and working-class political parties. For many Chileans, particularly within the union movement, the UP represented the culmination of a social emancipation project, bringing “the people” to power and taking control of the State (Salazar & Pinto, 1999b, p. 122). This was not merely a change in policy; it was a fundamental challenge to the dependent model, an attempt to seize national control over the very resources that defined Chile's subordinate relationship with the global core.

However, this experiment faced immediate and severe opposition. The USA government, particularly the Richard Nixon administration, viewed Allende's government with “preoccupation,” fearing “socialist contagion” in the region and seeking to prevent his confirmation as president. The Nixon administration, viewing Allende's success as an existential threat to its Cold War hegemony in the hemisphere, immediately activated a two-track strategy to prevent his rule or ensure its failure. Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser, infamously stated, “*I don't see why*

we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people” (“*Foreign Relations of the United States*”, 1970) and instructed the CIA to “make the economy scream” (“*Foreign Relations of the United States*”, n.d.). This resulted in an “invisible blockade” (Garreton, 1989, p. 38), involving economic warfare, including intense pressure on the World Bank to refuse loans and credits to Chile, the strangulation of trade, and covert funding for opposition media and political groups. Domestic conservative forces, including the Christian Democratic Party, refused to cooperate with Allende's government and actively sought to undermine it. Miliband points out that “*the conservative forces progressively turned class struggle into class war*” (1973, p. 460). Internally, powerful economic elites and conservative political factions engaged in systematic sabotage, from capital flight to orchestrating crippling strikes against the UP government including associations of storekeepers and professionals (middle sectors), most notably the prolonged truckers' strike of 1972-73, which aimed to paralyze the country and create an atmosphere of chaos ripe for military intervention (Garreton, 1989, p. 26; Edwards, 2023, p. 67). This escalation intensified after the March 1973 legislative elections, in which UP increased its electoral percentage to 44%, making a legal coup impossible, as the two-thirds majority required for impeachment could not be reached.

From a scholarly perspective steeped in critical theory, the specific event marking the “end of democracy” narrative in Chile in 1973 is unequivocally the military coup d'état of September 11, 1973, as a “*world-changing event*” (Morley & Smith, 1977; Garreton, 1989; Klein, 2007; Edwards, 2023). This date, referred to simply as “*el once*” by Chileans for years afterward, represents the most profound political breakdown in the history of the republic, terminating one of Latin America's longest-standing democratic traditions and initiating a brutal seventeen-year dictatorship. This event is not merely a chronological marker but a foundational trauma in the Chilean collective unconscious, fundamentally altering the nation's political, economic, and social trajectory. It culminated in the violent overthrow of the democratically elected government of Allende's UP, bringing an abrupt end to what was known as the “Chilean road to socialism” (Huneeus, 2007). As a prominent social historian and intellectual of Chile, Garreton has put it, “*the main crime of our history, the founding crime of our time, which is the bombing of La Moneda, the death of the*

legitimate president, the breakdown of democratic institutions and the permanent presence of human rights violations” (Almeida, 2023).

The military coup of September 11, 1973, was the violent culmination of the three-year campaign (thousand days of Allende’s socialism) to destroy a democratic project. On the morning of September 11, the campaign reached its violent climax. The military, led by a junta composed of General Augusto Pinochet (commander-in-chief of the army), Admiral José Toribio Merino, General Gustavo Leigh (commander-in-chief of the air forces), Admiral Jose Torribio Merino, (commander-in-chief of the navy), and General César Mendoza (director general of the Carabineros), demanded Allende’s resignation (Alexander, 1978, p. 334). Inside the palace, President Allende delivered a final, defiant radio address, refusing offers of safe passage and vowing to die defending the mandate given to him by *the people*. Shortly after, the bombing began. The images of British-made Hawker Hunter jets bombing the presidential palace, La Moneda, became a global symbol of the violent death of a socialist democracy. Allende’s subsequent death, officially ruled a suicide after an autopsy report in 2011 (“Chilean president Salvador Allende”, 2011), marked the definitive and brutal “*end of democracy*” in Chile. As Mark Fisher (2021, p. 46) saw the assassination (metaphorically) of Allende as “[a] prototype for what would happen afterwards” in a way, the opening salvo of the neoliberal era.

The 1973 coup d’état cannot be understood merely as a local tragedy but as the violent termination of a unique historical experiment that captured global attention. Unlike prior European popular fronts (e.g., the French Popular Front of 1936 or the Spanish Popular Front of 1936–39) or similar ones in the Latin American regional context (e.g., the Guatemalan Revolution under Arévalo and Árbenz from 1944 to 1954, the early years of Uruguay’s Frente Amplio coalition in the early 1970s, or the Goulart government in Brazil between 1962 and 1964), the UP was dominated by revolutionary Marxists who were “*seriously attempting an alternative road to socialism*” within the confines of bourgeois legality (Hobsbawm, 2017, p. 380). It was not simply an anti-fascist alliance, but a project aimed at achieving “*the progressive construction of a new power structure*” through constitutional means (Hobsbawm, 2017, p. 367). Hobsbawm (2017, p. 365) saw Allende’s Chile as a “pretty well unique” case in modern history: a government dominated by revolutionary Marxists attempting

a constitutional and peaceful transition to socialism. He emphasized that this was “*not to be identified with bourgeois democracy*,” but rather a project to use existing legality to build a “*new society*” (Hobsbawm, 2017, p. 367). The very existence of this project—a peaceful, democratic pursuit of a socialist horizon—represents the core “*lost object*” that haunts the Chilean political imaginary, and it was the violent, spectacular, and definitive end of the Chilean project of national-popular sovereignty. The 1973 coup was therefore not just the end of a government, but the traumatic foreclosure of this possibility – an event whose unresolved psychic legacy is central to the “*nostalgia for a lost past*” that fuels contemporary Chile.

The coup d'état of 1973 was the local “translation” of the global conflict of the Cold War between the USA and the USSR, which meant the reactionary offensive of the ruling classes, in the face of the advance of the popular masses, articulated mainly by the Communist Party and the Socialist Party (Iglesias, 2015). Returning to the “*long Sixties*” cycle, particularly in the Southern Cone, was characterised by an emergent general crisis and revolutionary offensives that commenced in the mid-1960s and concluded with the coup d'état also in Argentina in 1976. As Moulián states, this event marked “*the violent termination of a unique historical experiment*” that captured global attention (“Salvador Allende was overthrown”, 2021). He also characterises the demise of Chilean democracy in 1973 as a tragic “abortion” of the “Chilean path to socialism,” a transition “from dream to nightmare” (Moulián, 1998, p. 151).

A trauma of this magnitude, an act of such profound patricidal violence against the democratic state, cannot be integrated into a new symbolic order without a powerful ideological fantasy to give it meaning and legitimacy. Hence, the magnitude of the military coup of September 11, 1973, which some contemporaries compared to a “new 1810” in terms of historical magnitude, constituted a profound historical rupture that necessitated a powerful ideological fantasy to manage the trauma and justify the ensuing violence (Salazar & Pinto, 1999, pp. 99-100; Edwards, 2023, p. 66). The Pinochet regime, from its first hours, dedicated itself to the construction of this fantasy. This fantasy was premised on the military's declared mission to save Chile from communism, thereby justifying the violence by appealing to the highest possible stakes: the defence of “*Western and Christian civilization*,” a viewpoint that, as noted by Rodrigo Baño (1992), possessed greater “*poder de fuego*” (firepower) than

dissenting opinions. The immediate, brutal repression – the rounding up of thousands of perceived leftists in the National Stadium, the summary executions, the institutionalization of torture – was the brutal *Real* of the new order. This systematic political cleansing included the dissolution of Congress, the banning of the Popular Unity parties, and the systematic execution of a “guerra sucia” (dirty war) that fractured and wounded leftist sectors (Huneus, 2007, p. 44; Sater & Collier, 2023, pp. 383-384). This violence required a narrative to justify it. In this vein, the new mission was to erase the memory of the developmentalist state and the collective subjects it had empowered. This process of institutionalized brutality resulted in thousands being imprisoned and tortured, and over 3,200 people being disappeared or executed, a horrifying toll that Pinochet's regime justified as necessary to “excise the Marxist cancer” (Huneus, 2007, pp. 46-53; Klein, 2007, p. 77; Edwards, 2023, p. 23). This wave of terror successfully silenced society, creating a political vacuum essential for the regime's subsequent aims. This wave of repression created a political vacuum, a society silenced by fear, which the regime saw as the perfect “laboratory” conditions for its second, more ambitious project: a radical, top-down revolution of the Chilean state and economy (Huneus, 2007, p. 20; Klein, 2007, p. 76).

This repression was not limited to political opponents but extended to workers, peasants, students, and shantytown residents who had mobilised to support Allende. The official narrative of the Pinochet regime, particularly in its foundational years, was significantly buttressed by the alleged discovery of “Plan Z”. As Stern (2006, pp. 41-42) explains, General Oscar Bonilla Bradanovic, then Minister of the Interior, announced on 14 September 1973 a “spectacular finding”: that the Unidad Popular (UP) had planned a massacre of military officers on September 17 and 18, utilizing 10,000 foreign extremists and Cuban arms to take control of the country. This narrative suggested an “either-or situation” in which either Marxists will destroy us, or we will destroy them (Stern, 2006, p. 42). The purported scope of Plan Z was immense, with reports blanketing the country, alleging specific assassination plans in at least seventeen sites from Arica to Valdivia. *Crónica* in Concepción notably led the way, reporting a list developed by the MIR and the Socialist Party of 600 regional families, including women, parents, and children, to be “destroyed during the chaos of a self-coup” (Stern, 2006, p. 43). The imagery of “Left cannibalism” even extended to the alleged assassination of Allende himself in one of Plan Z's later phases, with the blame

intended to fall on the ultra-Right group *Patria y Libertad*, and anti-Allende media outlets, most notably the country's largest newspaper, as reported by *El Mercurio* (Stern, 2006, p. 45).

After this, the Pinochet regime extended its repressive apparatus beyond Chile's borders, institutionalising transnational state terrorism through “Operation Condor”. As Stern (2006) details, this operation, formalized in 1975, involved “transnational South American secret police cooperation against leftist protestors”. Its aim was to track and eliminate prominent leaders in exile, demonstrating the regime's resolve to extinguish perceived enemies regardless of their location. Notable instances of Operation Condor's reach include the National Intelligence Directorate's (DINA - *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*) car bomb assassination of Army General Carlos Prats and his wife, Sofía Cuthbert, in Buenos Aires in September 1974, the shooting of Bernardo Leighton and his wife, Anita Fresno, in Rome a year later, and the car bomb explosion that killed Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt in Washington, D.C., in 1976. These events, as Stern (2006, pp. 106-107) explains, generated “enormous publicity” and required “*official effort to shape retrospective interpretation,*” often reinforcing the idea of Chile being saved from the “*stop-at-nothing lunacy of terrorists and leftists.*” The DINA, under Contreras, initiated these actions, reflecting its autonomy and power, ultimately leading to Pinochet's personal culpability.

The repressive strategy of the authoritarian regime extended beyond physical elimination to encompass sophisticated methods of informational control, notably evidenced by “Operation Colombo”. This operation, implemented by DINA in June 1975, was a calculated “disinformation campaign” designed to fabricate a narrative regarding the disappearance of 119 individuals (Huneus, 2007, p. 52). The core objective was to manipulate public perception by disseminating information, primarily through Brazilian and Argentine media, claiming that these victims had died outside of Chile, thereby absolving the regime's security services of responsibility for their murder. This practice of internal state terrorism was intertwined with continental security cooperation; sources confirm that the Pinochet regime was an “active member” of Operation Condor (or Plan Condor), a joint operation designed by South American dictatorships to coordinate killings and conceal them. Although formally established in November 1975 in Santiago, this coordinating structure facilitated the

systematic flow of information between the repressive apparatuses of Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay (Stern, 2006, pp. 106, 182; Klein, 2007, pp. 91, 102).

The Pinochet regime was not merely a reactionary dictatorship seeking to restore a prior conservative order but distinct from traditional Latin American authoritarianism, characterizing itself as a revolutionary force dedicated to violently forging a new society and citizenry. It did not seek to turn back the clock but to use the state's absolute coercive power to impose an anti-state ideology. Traditional military dictatorships in Latin America had often sought to preserve the status quo of the landed elite. The Pinochet regime, in contrast, set out to dismantle the state-led development model that had been a point of consensus across the Chilean political spectrum for decades. It used the “shock” of the coup to implement radical economic policies that would have been politically impossible to enact under democratic conditions. This was a forward-looking, ideological project aimed at constructing a new hegemony, an attempt to resolve the historical debate over economic models by force.

As Klein (2007, p. 71) posits, the implementation of this new order involved a convergence of destructive shocks. The initial military rupture was immediately compounded by economic and psychological forms of coercion. The economic transformation was driven by the Chicago Boys' implementation of neoliberal policies – the “*shock treatment*” – which Milton Friedman strongly advocated as “the only medicine” for inflation, necessitating an abrupt, decisive fiscal overhaul (Klein, 2007, p. 81; Edwards, 2023, pp. 98-102). The “Chicago Boys” – Chilean economists trained in the United States – were put in charge of the economic team *after* Allende's overthrow, with their plan, “The Brick” (*El Ladrillo*)⁴¹ serving as the economic base for the dictatorship. This deliberate contraction, which led to high unemployment and poverty, was viewed by Friedman as creating the psychological conditions necessary to “facilitate the adjustment” to unpopular reforms that could not have been possible under a democratic regime (Friedman & Friedman, 1998, as cited in Klein, 2007, p. 75).

⁴¹ A confidential economic program blueprint prepared by eleven “Chicago Boys” for the post-Allende period in Chile, proposing market-oriented reforms. It was received by Admiral Toribio Merino of the military junta in 1973.

This economic shock was intricately linked to the regime's deployment of institutionalized terror, confirming the psychoanalytic dimension of the repressive strategy. Klein (2007, p. 15) argues that physical torture functioned as a “*silent partner in the global free-market crusade*.” The terror mechanisms, codified in manuals like the *Kubark* document (which adapted the psychological experiments of Dr. Ewen Cameron), were designed to dismantle the subject’s personality, inducing “*deep disorientation and shock*” to achieve a state of “*suspended animation*” or *tabula rasa* (Klein, 2007, pp. 16, 40). This psychological manipulation – a quest for “complete depatterning” (Klein, 2007, pp. 31-32) to eradicate socialist thought – paralleled the economic agenda, as the torture aimed to “*excise collectivism from the culture*” (Klein, 2007, p. 111). Orlando Letelier, as was mentioned in Klein’s (2007, p. 99) book, explicitly asserted that the regime’s free-market fundamentalism and its system of institutionalized brutality were not separate phenomena but two sides of the same coin, with terror serving as the “*central tool of the free-market transformation*.” This transformational impulse culminated in projects like the “Seven Modernizations” (1979), which will be expanded in the following sections, explicitly aimed not merely at economic efficiency but at expanding market relations everywhere to fundamentally change Chile’s “*values and character*,” institutionalizing a far-reaching, anti-state ideological perspective by force (Edwards, 2023, p. 125). The coup, therefore, was primarily a negation of the program of President Allende’s government, aiming to dismantle the socialist experiment and crush popular power. While the Pinochet dictatorship subsequently implemented drastic neoliberal reforms, such as the privatisation of pensions, healthcare, and education, and a shift of responsibility from the state to the private sector, these were the *consequences* of the coup, not its initial driving force.

The “lost object” that continues to haunt the Chilean political imaginary is precisely this violently foreclosed possibility of a peaceful, democratic socialist society. Despite the return to democracy in 1990, the legacy of Pinochet’s dictatorship, including the 1980 Constitution and its embedded neoliberalism, largely persisted.

4.1.3.2. End of Dictatorship

The narrative of the “end of the Pinochet dictatorship” centers on the unexpected democratic opening in the late 1980s that allowed Chile to exit military rule. Although Pinochet’s seventeen-year authoritarian regime (1973–1990) was long-standing and demonstrated how Chile became a “laboratory of neoliberalism,” where free-market policies were implemented more thoroughly than anywhere else at the time, its dissolution is an important aspect that emerged during the 1980s.

The primary instrument for this managed transition was the 1980 Constitution. This constitution, largely authored by the ultraconservative jurist Jaime Guzmán, was designed to stabilize and protect the newly implemented neoliberal economic model and the unity of the state. To expand on this crucial point, Guzmán's intellectual project (known as a movement called *gremialismo*⁴² and a great sympathizer of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco) was to create a “protected democracy” (Castro, 2022), a political order inoculated against the popular sovereignty that had brought Allende to power. According to this comment, “protected democracy” meant that establishing the neoliberal order was not the main ideological motivation, but to design a “subsidiary State” so that the neoliberal market regulations could be supported by the authoritarian rule of the state (conservative corporatism). This problematic and contradictory view, in basic terms, stems from the fundamentals of wealth distribution, which favors deregulation, privatization, and the state's withdrawal from many areas of social provision (Harvey, 2007, p. 11), as well as redistributive state action for the benefit of the poorest. Therefore, this foundational motive of the neoliberal setup in Chile, so-called the protected democracy, as a precaution against the lessons from the past (Castro, 2022, p. 35), was mainly founded on the basis of “politics of anti-politics” to create an organic society without the instruments of political ideology and party (Stern, 2006, p. 57). Indeed, according to Moulian (1998, pp. 47-48), this “new regime of truth” that emerged, heavily influenced by neoliberal ideology and thinkers like

⁴²Gremialismo: from gremio – “guild,” i.e., a trade/professional corporation – was the Catholic-conservative doctrine and student movement founded by Jaime Guzmán at the Catholic University of Chile in 1967. It construed society as a network of “intermediate” associations (gremios) to be depoliticized and protected from party competition, grounding the State in the principle of subsidiarity; these premises fed directly into the 1980 order’s key notions of a “protected democracy” and a “Subsidiary State.” (Moulian, 1998, pp. 207-210; Edwards, 2023, pp. 124-129)

Hayek, posited free enterprise as the sole path to welfare and advocated for a “protected democracy” that subordinated political freedom to economic imperatives.

To further understand why this constitution is essential, Moulian argues that it stood between two periods of dictatorship: the first was the “terrorist stage” between 1973 and 1980, and the second was the “constitutional stage” between 1980 and 1988 (Moulian, 1998, p. 146). In the first phase, as it was explained in the previous section, the regime framed the early neoliberal discourse from “apocalyptic” to “empirical” along with the sweeping opposition, with brutal force and a highly violent way, and with the economic boom gave its scientific proof between 1977-1982 (Moulian, 1998, pp. 207-209). This gave the Pinochet regime a justification for an authoritarian transition to neoliberal democracy and also provided an optional use to the “State”, so-called the new State, an adaptation of democratic or authoritarian forms. Hence, the Pinochet regime enshrined neoliberalism and elite control by fundamentally reconfiguring the State and society (Moulian, 1998, p. 362). At the end, in May 1980, Pinochet held a plebiscite on a new constitution, institutionalizing his rule, and won overwhelmingly.

Indeed, as Guzmán's strategic intent illuminated, the Constitution was the architectural blueprint for this vision, or for a constrained future, installing a series of “locks” (*cerrojos*) on the system to make any substantive deviation from the neoliberal path nearly impossible (Klein, 2007, p. 204; Huneus, 2014, pp. 16-168; Edwards, 2023, p. 204). In this context, it granted the armed forces a permanent tutelary role as “guarantors” of the institutional order, formalizing this power through a National Security Council (*Consejo de Seguridad Nacional* – CSN/COSENA) where military chiefs held significant sway over civilian authorities, securing a supervisory role for the military in the broad sense of National Security (Huneus, 2007, p. 143; Edwards, 2023, p. 131; Sater & Collier, 2023, p. 437). Furthermore, the constitution already adopted provisions required a supermajority in both houses of Congress for major economic or political reforms and established a unique “binomial” electoral system that primarily benefited the top two parties or coalitions, effectively “locking in the Right’s outsized power” and limiting democratic changes (Huneus, 2014, p. 29). The binomial system required a party or coalition to defeat its rival by a two-to-one margin to win both seats in a district, a design that effectively guaranteed the right-

wing minority a veto power in Congress and made major reforms nearly impossible. This constitution was the regime's attempt to declare its own “end of history” for Chile – a permanent framework that would lock in its economic model and foreclose any return to the ideological conflicts of the past, regardless of who formally held government office. It was an attempt to create a reality where, as Margaret Thatcher would later famously declare, “there is no alternative.” Guzmán himself described these legal and institutional constraints as designed to “ensure that if reformists ever came to power, they would be forced to maintain the status quo” by reducing the margin of alternatives.

However, the military regime, having seemingly institutionalised its rule and imposed its 1980 Constitution, faced an unexpected challenge with the economic crisis of 1982-1983. Chile experienced its “*worst years of the economy*” under the Chicago Boys, starting in 1975, with unemployment soaring in Santiago (Alexandre, 1978, p. 404), from 11.1% in 1981 to 22.2% in 1982, and reaching 19.2% in 1983. This economic collapse injected new urgency into grassroots organising. As Garretón notes, the laissez-faire economic policies championed by the “Chicago boys” technocrats, combined with a global economic recession, profoundly impacted both domestic businesses and the general populace. The living standards of the middle classes plummeted, and the “popular” sectors, already precarious, faced further deterioration of their livelihoods. This economic hardship led to a significant erosion of the regime's civilian support base, intensifying its political isolation and creating fertile ground for public expressions of discontent. Petras and Morley (1990, pp. 15-16) further emphasize that the Pinochet dictatorship's IMF-monetarist-free market experiment, after an initial boom, resulted in a devastating recession, with industrial production plummeting and unemployment soaring. For instance, minimum wage earners in 1987 earned 40% less than they did in 1978-81, and nearly half the population lived below the poverty line.

A significant shift occurred with the economic crisis of 1982-1983, which profoundly impacted Chilean society and sparked widespread discontent. Under the economic conditions of the 1980s, despite severe repression by a highly authoritarian, long-standing regime, the period from 1983 to 1986 witnessed the emergence of a significant popular protest cycle against the military regime of Pinochet in Chile,

marking a critical shift from previously suppressed forms of social resistance. This period, as it is called Pinochet-style “armed neoliberalism” (Boron & Lechini, 2006, p. 28), discredited the regime's legitimising narrative of economic efficacy, leading to massive protests by a diverse range of social actors, including workers, students, *pobladores* (residents of shantytowns), and middle-income sectors. This resurgence of public opposition followed a decade of severe repression instituted after the 1973 coup d'état, which had dismantled the “*Chilean road to socialism*” and years of democratic stability. Prior to 1983, civilian opposition was largely confined to “sectoral” expressions, often under the protective umbrella of the Catholic Church, or clandestine activities by political parties and social organizations, with public demonstrations being rare and met with harsh repression.

The widespread dissatisfaction culminated in the first major “national protest” on 11 May 1983. This mobilization was initially conceived as a national strike by the Copper Workers' Confederation (CTC), Chile's most influential union, whose strategic position in the copper-dependent economy afforded it outsized political importance and a key role in the National Trade Union Coordinating Committee. However, recognizing broader discontent and internal union reluctance, the CTC strategically broadened its call to a general protest, which proved highly successful. Following May 1983, mass street protests became a near-monthly occurrence until October 1984, intensifying into a “second protest cycle” between September 1985 and July 1986.

Stern (2006, p. 264) highlights the “extreme alienation” of urban youth, compounded by high unemployment rates (30-45% for those 24 or under in poblaciones), which leads to their prominent role in street barricades and confrontations. Women, too, became a significant “social movement actor and a new symbol”, demanding “a culture of life against the culture of death” and uniting across party lines through organisations like *Mujeres por la Vida* (Women for Life) and MEMCH'83. This period also witnessed *cacerolazos* (pot banging) protests, which were resisted by the regime and repressed, and met with repression.

The Pinochet regime, initially attempting to ignore the protests, responded with force once its broad support and political threat became undeniable. Early repression included fatalities, injuries, and detentions. Subsequent national protests were called almost monthly, spreading beyond Santiago, and were met with escalating force,

including the deployment of 18,000 soldiers in Santiago in August 1983, a larger force than had been deployed during the 1973 coup.

The constitution included a provision for a 1988 plebiscite, where a “Yes” vote would extend Pinochet's rule for another eight years, and a “No” vote would trigger democratic elections. The “No” campaign, a broad coalition of opposition parties, successfully garnered 56% of the vote against Pinochet's continuation in power. This outcome, surpassing the 1988 plebiscite by a significant margin, reflected a commitment to transformative change and a rejection of traditional political elites. The victory of the “No” vote is often celebrated as a triumph of peaceful, democratic resistance. However, the sense that the 1973 coup had won “through democracy” was reinforced by a transition that preserved core institutional legacies of the dictatorship. Scholars have captured this notion with the concept of “authoritarian enclaves,” highlighting the 1980 Constitution and the binominal electoral system as mechanisms that limited democratic change while normalizing the model (Siavelis, 2016).

This outcome was a significant popular rejection of the existing system. However, this victory was immediately tempered by the nature of the transition itself, which Pinochet “*negotiated... in such a way that the armed forces kept control of the political process,*” including his own appointment as a lifelong senator. This points to the core of the ambivalence: the transition was negotiated “*en la medida de lo posible*” (to the extent possible), a phrase that, as Matus describes, came to symbolize a cautious approach, with Patricio Aylwin, the spokesperson for the “No” coalition, asking Chileans to “leave the streets and go easy on the celebrations” immediately after the victory, fearing military reprisal. Therefore, this phrase came to symbolize a political compromise that ultimately preserved the core of the dictatorship's institutional and economic legacy, including the 1980 Constitution itself. It is crucial to synthesize these complexities, reflecting the ongoing psycho-social effects of a transition that, as scholars like Vergara (2019) and Matus (2020) suggest, “fell short of addressing the lasting effects of the dictatorship”. This cautious approach signified an underlying “traumatic acceptance” of the limits of political change, along with a foundational contradiction for the new democratic era: a political victory that cemented an economic defeat.

However, the narrative of this transition is significantly more complex than a simple triumph of democracy. As Moulian (2021) argues, the subsequent “return to democracy” in 1990 only experienced “cosmetic changes” to the political and economic framework conditions. Pinochet “*negotiated his departure in such a way that the armed forces kept control of the political process,*” including his own appointment as a lifelong senator. The 1980 military constitution, although amended multiple times, “remains in place despite a number of reforms since 1989”. This enduring constitutional framework is widely regarded as illegitimate due to its undemocratic origins and its ongoing obstruction of significant political and economic reforms.

The civilian governments that followed, primarily the center-left Concertación alliance (1990-2010), chose “*not to touch the economic model of the Pinochet era*”. This was partly due to an “institutional balance” maintained through entrenched bureaucracy and market incentives, but also a pragmatic decision driven by a “traumatic acceptance” of the limits of what was possible under a democratic path to socialism, fearing military reprisal or upsetting powerful economic actors who had gained wealth and power under the dictatorship. Indeed, the first finance minister in the democratic period, Alejandro Foxley, stated in 2000 that the dictatorship’s economic policies had been “correct”.

This resulted in a “defective” or “pseudo-democracy” where “democracy never really arrived” because Chileans were “never able to reclaim what they had lost in terms of social security”. The perception that the “political system cannot respond” to the country’s needs led to a “crisis of legitimacy,” with declining electoral participation and widespread distrust of political parties and institutions.

4.1.3.3. End of Transition

Debate over when Chile’s democratic “*transition*” ended – or whether it ended at all – has been central to its post-authoritarian narrative. The “transition to democracy” refers to the period after 1990, when the country consolidated civilian rule and reformed (or circumvented) the institutions inherited from Pinochet. For much of the 1990s and early 2000s, Chilean politics were dominated by an implicit understanding that the new democracy was constrained by the past and thus in a

transitional phase, rather than fully reinforcing these authoritarian legacies through an enduring effect of *path dependence*, leaving the underlying civic and social dimensions of the transition unresolved. This process is termed *transformismo* or *gatopardismo* by Moulian (1998, p. 341), wherein the political façade is transformed into democratic vestments specifically to ensure the reproduction of the basic socio-economic structure established during the dictatorship, effectively functioning as an “iron cage” that annuls political creativity and possibilities (Moulian, 1998, pp. 53, 145).

In this debate, the core disagreement is about the criteria. One view equates the end of transition with the restoration of competitive elections and civilian rule. Another view insists that the transition can end only when the authoritarian “enclaves” embedded in the 1980 Constitution – and the veto powers they produced – are dismantled. Scholars identify these enclaves as the binomial electoral system, appointed and life senators, an empowered National Security Council, military autonomy, and a broad amnesty that shielded perpetrators. This perspective, therefore, treats the 1990s as a “restricted” or “low-intensity” democracy in which formal alternation coexisted with structural limits (Garretón, 1999).

The precise temporal demarcation of the period following Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, commonly referred to as the “*transition*,” remains a subject of considerable scholarly debate, reflecting the complex interplay between formal political shifts and the enduring legacies of an authoritarian regime. While Patricio Aylwin's presidency (1990-1994) is often cited as the initial phase of democratic restoration, a more nuanced analysis reveals arguments for extending this “transition” until at least Ricardo Lagos' constitutional reforms in 2005, or as Mesina (2024) notes, even subsequent governments like Michelle Bachelet's were “subjugated to the power of financial markets” and unable to pass significant pension reform, a system created under military rule in 1981.

Two later milestones are often proposed as potential endpoints. The 2005 constitutional reform under President Lagos removed appointed and life senators, transformed the National Security Council into a presidential advisory body, and restored the president's power to dismiss service commanders. It also opened the way to future electoral redesign. Many observers hailed these amendments as the most

significant democratic deepening since 1990, even symbolically replacing Pinochet's signature with Lagos's on the constitutional text ("World Report", 2006, pp. 173-179).

The formal onset of Chile's democratic transition is unequivocally marked by the plebiscite of 5 October 1988, in which the "No" option triumphed decisively, marking the end of Pinochet's direct rule and placing Chile among the last Latin American nations to adopt liberal democracy after a period of authoritarianism. This event is presented as a pivotal "milestone" (hito) that signalled the "closure of the authoritarian period" and, concurrently, the "beginning of a cycle of political order and economic stability." Following this plebiscite, Patricio Aylwin, a Christian Democrat and candidate for the left-of-center *Concertación por la Democracia* coalition, was elected president on December 14, 1989, assuming office on March 11, 1990. According to Estefane et al. (2019, p. 10), this moment restored a "formal" democracy, yet one that, by its very nature, "*expelled from the space of the 'new transitional politics' the reasons and forms that had dominated the explosive process of popular democratisation experienced during the long 68*". Indeed, for Edwards (2023, p. 183), the Concertación government explicitly adopted a "gradual approach" to avoid opposition from the military and business sectors, consciously maintaining a significant degree of continuity with the preceding economic paradigm

This "*consensus-oriented model of governing*" was "forced by political and economic elite networks and a technocratic political guiding principle". The Christian Democratic leaders, who played a significant role in the overthrow of Allende, supported the junta and later expressed "disquiet" only after the military had "butchered enough left-wing militants". This meant continuing the path of privatization while instituting social programs to mitigate its harshest effects, such as maintaining the market model on one hand and introducing social policies, including labour reforms and tax reforms, on the other (Ffrench-Davis, 2010). As Vergara (2019) highlights, "*the amendments further entrenched it [the neoliberal model] by granting it democratic legitimacy backed by the Chilean left*".

Yet the binomial electoral system remained in force until the 2015 electoral reform (Law 20.840), which replaced it with a moderate proportional system implemented fully in the 2017 elections. Because the binomial rules systematically inflated right-of-center representation and favored two large coalitions, their removal

is another plausible candidate for the “end” of tutelary design. Even so, research finds that malapportionment and other biases were not fully resolved by the new law, suggesting that representation problems persisted beyond the reform (Gamboa & Morales, 2016).

This political shift initiated the era of the Concertación governments (1990-2010), which, from a critical theoretical perspective, are characterised by Gaudichaud et al. (2022, p. 33) as embodying significant neoliberal features. Despite the return of constitutional rule and competitive elections, the underlying economic model largely remained consistent with the foundations laid during the dictatorship. Colburn (2002, pp. 34-36) notes that, at the turn of the century, terms such as the “*Pinochet model*,” “*democracy of low intensity*,” and “*façade of democracy*” were still in circulation among academics and media, reflecting a lingering critique of the democratic quality or in his view “*fragile democracy*” in the continent.

However, even subsequent “*progressive*” governments, such as those led by Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010 and 2014-2018), are described as continuing a “*social-liberal transformism*” rather than enacting a fundamental break from the neoliberal paradigm. Bachelet's policies, for instance, continued to rely on “*mining concessions to large private corporations*” for development, and her second term's reforms, despite “*progressive rhetoric*,” are assessed as “*minimal*” and serving to “*plug*” the fissures of Chilean neoliberalism by a political class deeply intertwined with economic elites.

Therefore, if the “*transition*” is defined solely by the establishment of formal democratic institutions and free elections, Patricio Aylwin's presidency (1990-1994) could be seen as its initiation. Indeed, if the criterion extends to a substantive shift away from the socio-economic structures established under Pinochet, or to the full realization of a more equitable, post-neoliberal society, then the transition's timeframe stretches considerably longer, and arguably remains incomplete.

Nevertheless, for many, this official narrative of reconciliation masked a reality of impunity (*impunidad*), as the 1978 amnesty law remained in place and the military retained significant power. The *Concertación's* embrace of the neoliberal economic model was seen as a betrayal of its historical principles, a process that Moulian

critically termed *transformismo* –the co-optation and absorption of the opposition into the hegemonic project of the elite.

In his seminal work, Moulian distinguishes this narrative as a “*crisis of politics*” in contemporary Chile, characterised by the “false death of ideologies” and the imposition of an “*a-ideological politics*” by hegemonic neoliberalism (Moulian, 1998, pp. 56-58). This results in the routinization of political ends, rendering politics “irrelevant” and leading to the “*petrification of the present*,” where transformation is deemed impossible (Moulian, 1998, p. 62). This is further compounded by a “culture of conformity” driven by mass consumerism and credit, which individualises social relations and de-politicises citizenship (Moulian, 1998, pp. 119-121).

This “*pending assignment*” is the historical substance of the political melancholy that this thesis analyzes psychoanalytically. It is the unresolved mourning for the lost object of a genuine democratic and social transformation, an object promised by the end of dictatorships but never delivered. The Chilean transition, with its “consensus” politics and neoliberal continuity, represents a paradigmatic case of this larger failure. The official narrative of successful transition functioned to repress the reality of this failure, thereby transforming a political problem into a psychic one.

This pervasive political melancholy was the direct result of the dominant ideological framework of the post-Pinochet era. Barria-Asenjo et al. (2020) identify this framework as the “*lógica transitológica*” (transitological logic), a specific “*reason of state*” constructed as a moralizing fable (p. 284). This narrative positioned the trauma of the Allende years and the dictatorship as a foundational “once upon a time” from which the only possible moral was to “govern within the limits of the possible.” This logic, they argue, effectively suspended the political by institutionalizing a technocratic consensus that foreclosed any possibility of a radical break with the neoliberal model.

4.1.3.4. Towards to End of Neoliberalism?

The Chilean case does not exist in isolation but resonates with a wider “critical praxis from the Americas” (Gandler, 2017), which must be understood in the context of the continent’s unique historical trajectory. Why is it that traditional European

political categories –liberal, socialist, fascist– fail to adequately describe Latin American realities? Answer to this question, Hobsbawm (2017) located the root of this exceptionalism in the fact that “national independence came to the continent more than a century before the great majority of its people entered national life” (p. 46). This foundational disjuncture between the state and the people created a political field where formal institutions and ideologies often served as a thin veneer over deeper, more archaic social structures. It produced a landscape where populist movements could arise, characterized by complex or muddled phenomena, and where the lines between revolution and stagnation, or between modernizing elites and popular masses, were chronically blurred (Hobsbawm, 2017, p. 49). This specific context, a “peculiar combination of [...] different historical epochs,” is the essential peripheral backdrop for understanding not only the hybrid nature of the Chilean refusal but also its function as a laboratory for new forms of political subjectivity (Hobsbawm, 2017, p. 51).

According to Salazar and Pinto, “*liberal contradictions*” create three critical subjective agents (neoliberal subject) in Chile: “1) *those defeated and repressed by the dictatorial installation of the free-market model*; 2) *those who have been or are being excluded or “made precarious” in the struggle to “access” market jobs*, and 3) *those who, out of simple political sensitivity or perception, criticize and mobilize against these “contradictions,” “exhaustions,” and “decreases.” The greatest “losers” by the imposition of free marketism in Chile are [...] the members of the Marxist left*” (1999a, pp. 175-177). The contradictory element of this process was already declared by the continuation under the return to democracy (Moulian, 1998, p. 147). Therefore, what is called “inclusive neoliberalism” (Edwards, 2023, p. 177) led to the “inclusiveness” of three subjective agents, resulting in a single, individualistic worker-consumer subjective identity in contemporary Chile (Moulian, 1998). To gain a deeper understanding of the base of this so-called consumer-oriented individualistic society, it will be expanded upon here that the deregulation of the neoliberal market “revolution” in the Chilean context and its eventual early opposition from social movements.

The Chilean experience in 1973 and the following years has particularly shown that “*a brutal experiment carried out in the periphery became a model for the formulation of policies in the centre*” (Harvey, 2007, p. 9). Harvey’s claim is that both

the UK and the USA saw a “*neoliberal turn*” in the 1980s, with a “less ideologically driven” model that must be implemented. While classical literature that reads neoliberalism through traditional empirical equivalences can be helpful in identifying its cyclical historical turning points, it is critical theories and cultural analyses that frame neoliberalism as an ideological construct and, further, consider its mythic dimensions as a reflection of global capitalism, revealing its deeper nature. These approaches demonstrate that neoliberalism is not merely a set of economic policies, but a hegemonic project that profoundly shapes social relations, subjectivities, and the structures of power. They focus on deciphering the processes through which neoliberalism becomes “*common sense*,” the mechanisms of consent it generates, and the discursive practices that reconfigure individuals as “*entrepreneurial subjects*.”

At the level of master-hegemonic narrative, this critical perspective is essential for understanding how neoliberalism has spread and been legitimized on a global scale. In the post-Cold War era, neoliberalism emerged as a dominant global narrative—particularly through international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) – presented as the only valid path to “development,” “modernization,” and “global integration.” This narrative, also known as the “Washington Consensus,” imposed privatization, deregulation, free trade, and fiscal discipline as universal prescriptions. Its ideological power lay in its ability to marginalize alternatives and generate a sense of inevitability, encapsulated in the slogan TINA. Although global financial crises – such as the 1997 Asian crisis and the 2008 global crisis – have shaken the mythical dimension of this narrative, particularly the claim that markets can self-regulate and automatically distribute prosperity, core values such as individual responsibility, competitiveness, and entrepreneurship continue to leave a profound imprint on global culture and subjectivities.

A particularly striking example of the ideological and mythical dimensions of neoliberalism is Chile. Often regarded as the first and purest “laboratory” for neoliberal policies, Chile underwent a radical neoliberal transformation following the military coup of 1973. Under the dictatorship of Pinochet, “*Chicago Boys*” implemented an aggressive neoliberal reform agenda (Duchrow & Hinkelammert, 2012, p. 22). This program included the comprehensive privatization of the pension

system (AFP), education, healthcare, and natural resources, the suppression of labor unions, and the liberalization of the economy.

In Chile, the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism was initially established through military repression and censorship; however, over time, it was reinforced through economic growth figures – the so-called “Chilean Miracle” – and the rise of a consumer culture. Chile was showcased as Latin America's “model student” and a neoliberal “success story.” This structured narrative emerged on two occasions: first, between 1977 and 1982, and second, during the 1990s. But this mythic narrative concealed deepening social inequalities, high levels of household debt, the inadequacy of public services, precarious labor conditions, and social fragmentation. The myth of individual success and consumerism undermined collective rights and social solidarity.

As mentioned several times before, the “Chicago Boys” were a generation of Chilean economists trained at the University of Chicago under the guidance of figures such as Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger. This partnership between the University of Chicago and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC), a bastion of Chile's conservative elite, was fostered by the USA government's International Cooperation Administration (ICA) from 1955 to 1964 as a means to combat and counteract what was perceived as a socialist way of thinking in Chile's economic education. Upon their return, these “Chicago Boys” took over the PUC School of Economics, viewing themselves as scientists dedicated to transmitting science and modernism to society. Their work, supported by business and political groups, was viewed as a counterbalance to the expansion of socialism.

Pinochet's neoliberal reform programme comprised seven interrelated components, which he termed the “*seven modernisations*” (Taylor, 2006, pp. 77-78; Edwards, 2023, pp. 125-128). This overarching vision was concretized through the strategic privatization of key social services, shifting them from state responsibility to the private sector, a process considered by Huneus (2007) to have profound political objectives beyond mere economic adjustments. The dismantling of the Chilean welfare state, which had previously ensured social provisions as “citizenship rights” (Huneus, 2007, p. 308), profoundly affected areas such as pensions, education, health, and housing (Taylor, 2006, pp. 89-97). First, extensive privatisation transferred approximately 95 per cent of state-owned enterprises to the private sector, frequently

at markedly reduced prices that favoured associates of the regime, thereby consolidating concentrated economic groups (Taylor, 2006, p. 87). A notable example was the lithium producer SQM, which came under the control of Pinochet's son-in-law, Julio Ponce (Huneus, 2014, p. 559). Between 1975 and 1989, the military government privatised 160 corporations, 16 banks, and over 3,600 mining, agro-industrial plants, and *fundos*⁴³ (Salazar & Pinto, 1999a, p. 110). Second, the pension system was restructured. The pension system underwent a radical transformation from a distributive, intergenerational solidarity model to an individual capitalisation scheme managed by private, for-profit Pension Fund Administrators (*Administradoras de Fondos de Pensiones*, AFPs) (Huneus, 2007, p. 198). This system, established by Decree Law no. 3500 in November 1980 and effective from May 1981 (Huneus, 2007, p. 327), further generated inadequate pensions for the majority of retirees, whereas the military and police retained a separate, more advantageous system. Notably, AFPs played a crucial role in acquiring shares of other privatised public companies, facilitating the transfer of public capital to private enterprises. Thirdly and fourthly, the health and education sectors were subjected to mercantilisation (Taylor, 2006, pp. 89-97). The education sector experienced significant privatisation and funding reductions. Public expenditure (state education subsidy) fell sharply from 1981 to 1990 (Taylor, 2006, p. 91); resources for state universities were curtailed, and subsidised for-profit schools proliferated, entrenching pronounced inequalities in educational quality and access. Education, especially higher education, experienced a significant push towards privatisation, with state universities weakened and the establishment of private, often for-profit, institutions permitted. The Constitutional Charter for Education (*Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza*, LOCE), promulgated on the eve of the regime's end, solidified these changes, leading to high costs for students and the adoption of "shared financing" in education in 1993 (Taylor, 2006, p. 91; Huneus, 2014, pp. 258, 484). In the health sector, the state-welfare model was replaced by a more liberal approach that introduced for-profit private health insurance providers (*Institutos de Salud Previsional* – ISAPRES) alongside a reformed public healthcare system. This system was established to compete with an increasingly underfunded public service, the *Fondo Nacional de Salud* (FONASA), which renders comprehensive care prohibitively expensive for most citizens who depend on the

⁴³ A Chilean landed estate that often includes ranching and farming.

public system (Taylor, 2006, pp. 92-95). Fifth, natural resources and infrastructure were privatised, including water rights and management, resulting in Chile's distinctive status as a jurisdiction in which water is almost entirely commodified. Sixth, labour-market reforms curtailed collective rights. Trade-union activity was severely restricted; the rights to collective bargaining and to strike were virtually eliminated. The 1980 Constitution guaranteed only the "freedom of labour," understood as the formal freedom of workers to choose employment and of firms to select employees, thereby substantially diminishing the historical influence of unions. Finally, broad economic liberalisation completed the package. Measures included significant reductions in public spending and social investment, the liberalisation of prices, lowered customs duties, and the abolition of several taxes, collectively embedding a model predicated on minimal state responsibility and extensive market governance.

While some argue that these reforms led to exceptional economic growth, transforming Chile into a "Latin jaguar" (Relea, 1998) with high GDP per capita, this growth was "*unevenly distributed*" and came at an "*enormous social and human cost.*" Income inequality in Chile has remained unchanged since the dictatorship and is among the highest in the world, with the richest 1% earning nearly a third of the national wealth. Unemployment rates remained high, particularly for lower-skilled workers. Paul W. Posner (2019) notes that under the surface, Pinochet's free-market reforms were "*ripping Chile's social fabric apart.*"

Beginning with education, the 2006 "Penguin Revolution" established a generational template for disruptive yet programmatic contention: secondary-school students exposed the contradictions of Pinochet-era governance of education (LOCE), shifting the dispute from isolated service failures to the legitimacy of market rule in a core social right (Chovanec & Benitez, 2008). That template was scaled and deepened in 2011, when the "Chilean Winter" mobilized hundreds of thousands across universities and schools, converting cost/quality complaints into a systemic indictment of profit in education and debt-driven access. Networked coordination and sustained, mass-repertoire actions (occupations, national marches, digital dissemination) rendered the education model a proxy for the broader settlement of the transition (Bellei & Cabalin, 2013; González, 2020; Veliz et al., 2022). From this angle, 2006

and 2011 appear as early indicators of a widening disalignment between official narratives and lived experiences.

In parallel with the education-centered cycles, an environmental repertoire consolidated around the *Patagonia Sin Represas* coalition against the HidroAysén megadams (2008–2014), furnishing a second front of contention against market rule. The campaign’s multi-sited organizing, litigation, and national framing culminated when Chile’s Committee of Ministers cancelled the project’s environmental permits on June 10, 2014, a decision widely interpreted as the political outcome of sustained social mobilization rather than a merely technocratic recalibration (“HidroAysén Cancelled”, 2014). This closure did not dissipate environmental contention; it normalized ecological claims and practices that would circulate into the late-2010s protest cycle.

As reform attempts stalled and “normal politics” reverted to incrementalism, a crisis of integrity crystallized the diffuse malaise. The 2015 Caval affair – an influence-trafficking scandal implicating the president’s son – punctured the self-image of probity that had anchored post-transition legitimacy and reframed contention in anti-elitist, system-wide terms. Media framing and public debate individualized responsibility yet cumulatively eroded trust in parties and institutions, reinforcing the sense that technocratic recalibrations could not resolve structural discontent (Franklin, 2015; Tagle, 2021). This integrity shock did not replace the education agenda; it widened it, supplying a moral-political register that future mobilizations could inhabit.

Against that backdrop, the period from 2016 to 2017 marked a decisive shift from sectoral protest to cross-class, life-cycle contention centered on social protection. The Coordinadora No+AFP organized nationwide days of action against the private, fully funded pension regime, connecting wage insecurity, precarious retirement, and intergenerational injustice. The scholarship highlights how the convergence between “traditional” organizing and digitally mediated, citizen-driven activism amplified scale and coherence, while policy debate re-centered redistributive alternatives to the dictatorship-era architecture (Bugueño & Maillet, 2019; Miranda, 2023). In this narrative, No+AFP functions as a bridge, translating the critique of commodified education into a more general refusal of privatized risk, thereby thickening the repertoire and diagnostic frames that will travel into 2019.

The 2018 feminist cycle then re-politized everyday life and institutional culture, bringing the boundary between the intimate and the public squarely into contention. The “Mayo Feminista” wave—university occupations, mass marches, and demands for non-sexist education and effective anti-harassment protocols – installed a new political pedagogy and a language of dignity, care, and bodily autonomy that resonated beyond campuses (Hiner & Troncoso, 2021). Crucially, this cycle did not displace prior grievances; it reframed them, demonstrating how patriarchal governance and market governance intertwine in the reproduction of inequality (Vera Gajardo et al., 2025). In this conceptual vocabulary, this is where melancholy tips into naming: new signifiers bind dispersed frustrations into communicable claims.

By the eve of October 2019, Chile had thus undergone a cumulative apprenticeship in refusal. Education cycles (2006/2011) contested commodification at the heart of social reproduction; the integrity crisis (2015) undercut elite stewardship; pension mobilizations (2016–2017) generalized the critique to the social-security settlement; and the feminist wave (2018) re-inscribed returning of the histories as a transversal measure of dignity. When fare-evasion cascades detonated the *estallido*, the society was already trained in coordinated walkouts, occupations, neighborhood assemblies, and digitally mediated public pedagogy; what changed was the scale and the condensation of frames into a broad democratic rupture (González, 2020). Read in continuity with the “*towards the end of neoliberalism*”, this sequence clarifies how a decade of protest cycles reopened the political, prepared the vocabulary of dignity, and rendered the 2019 explosion legible as the point where lived experience finally overran the official narrative.

Thus, we see how the master-hegemonic narratives of the “end of history” and “end of ideology” were translated into the specific national context of Chile, creating a post-political consensus that endured for decades.

4.2. Post-1968 Latin American Cycles: Hegemony and Its Discontents in Latin America

A comprehensive understanding of the Chilean case necessitates a regional perspective to situate it in its proper context. Scholars have noted how Latin America’s political-economic trajectory has been cyclic, with defiance articulated through

widespread societal unrest, the rise of left-leaning governments, and the re-evaluation of socio-economic models that prioritize justice and human dignity over market fundamentalism periods of neoliberal dominance and dependency-development axis followed by leftist ‘refusals’ (Petras & Morley, 1990; Boron & Lechini, 2005; Eckstein, 2001; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2011; Svampa & Slipak, 2018; Svampa, 2019), and Chile’s 2019 uprising can be seen as part of this pattern of refusal against neoliberal hegemony.

The political and economic trajectory of Latin America since the late 1960s is not a linear progression but rather a dialectical unfolding of hegemonic cycles and their symptomatic ruptures. In contemporary Latin America, the efficacy of the challenge to neoliberalism is notably pronounced (Hollander, 2009), marking a significant departure from the notion of an “end of history” or “end of ideology”. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, Latin America emerged as a pivotal geopolitical arena for the Cold War, where U.S. hegemony significantly influenced regional political trajectories through both direct intervention and indirect ideological influence. A primary line of inquiry, here, involves the enduring impact of external hegemonic powers on Latin American political and economic development. For example, Maira Aguirre (2005) sketches the historical relations between Latin America and the United States as asymmetrical, dependent, and of secondary importance for Washington's policy formulators, who consistently presume their right to impose criteria on subordinate nations. The “*policy of containment*” during the Cold War, which extended until 1989, significantly shaped the profile of U.S. policies towards the region, leading to a strong expansion of North American influence and control over Latin American economies and governments (Boron & Lechini, 2005). This historical context is crucial for understanding how economic dependence has rendered Latin American countries vulnerable to shifting dominant power concerns, influencing opportunities for local groups, their grievances, and the outcomes of their defiance (Eckstein, 2001, p. 52).

In many countries, military dictatorships supplanted elected governments, justified under the banner of “*anti-communism*” and national security. This ideological framing resonated with the end-of-ideology thesis in its most repressive form: it sought to foreclose socialist alternatives by presenting the liberal-capitalist order –

often stripped even of its democratic façade – as the only viable path. Alongside authoritarian repression, neoliberal economic reforms were imposed from the mid-1970s onward, beginning in Chile under Pinochet and spreading across the region through debt-crisis management in the 1980s. These shocks dismantled protectionist models, liberalised markets, and reoriented economies toward export-led growth, entrenching social inequality while narrowing the political spectrum. As Borón (2006) observes, this was not merely a shift in economic policy but an attempt to “naturalise” neoliberalism as a civilisational horizon, aligning domestic political orders with the strategic imperatives of global capital and U.S. geopolitical dominance. Boron (2005) analyses the possibilities and limitations of democratic capitalism in peripheral countries, linking the progressive hollowing out of Latin American democracies to the application of neoliberal policies. The “*pseudo-reformism*” of the Washington Consensus, Boron (2005, pp. 152–158) contends, resulted in a phenomenal concentration of wealth through trade liberalisation, privatisations, and financial deregulation, acting as “*counter-reforms*” that accentuated social involution and hindered economic growth, weakening the state and public faith in democracy.

The 1990s ushered in a period of formal democratic transitions across much of the region, coinciding with the global triumphalism of the “end of history” narrative. In Latin America, this took shape as a neoliberal consensus – codified through structural adjustment programs, free-trade agreements, and fiscal discipline—that was embraced by both conservative and nominally progressive governments. Electoral competition persisted, but within a narrow spectrum that excluded any challenge to market orthodoxy, consolidating what Garretón (2002) terms a “*post-authoritarian, post-political order*.” While macroeconomic indicators often improved, social inequality deepened, and the promised benefits of liberalisation failed to materialise for large sectors of the population. By the late 1990s, cracks began to appear: popular uprisings in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina signaled a mounting refusal of the neoliberal horizon, foreshadowing the Pink Tide and undermining the idea that ideological alternatives had been permanently foreclosed.

The early 2000s marked the rise of the *Pink Tide*, a wave of left-leaning governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, and elsewhere, which explicitly contested neoliberal orthodoxy and sought to reclaim state sovereignty over natural

resources, expand social programs, and deepen regional integration outside U.S. tutelage. Leaders such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa articulated projects that challenged the inevitability of the neoliberal order, reframing it as historically contingent and politically reversible. As Svampa (2019) notes, these governments did not fully transcend extractivist models; however, they did open up ideological space for imagining alternatives, often invoking narratives of historical justice and anti-imperialism. Yet by the mid-2010s, this leftward momentum faltered under economic downturns, internal contradictions, and a coordinated conservative backlash, leading to renewed austerity measures and the reassertion of neoliberal governance in key states.

As previously discussed, Chile, long considered the emblematic neoliberal success story, remained largely insulated from these regional oscillations. Its political settlement after the 1990 transition preserved the economic and institutional legacy of the Pinochet era, maintaining high growth alongside entrenched inequality. For much of the Pink Tide, Chile's elite consensus and incremental reforms reinforced its image as a stable, market-friendly democracy – precisely the kind of post-political order the “end of history” thesis envisioned. Yet this stability masked deep social discontent, which periodically surfaced in student and labour mobilizations throughout the 2000s and 2010s.

Nonetheless, desire remains a crucial mobilizing force. As Eagleton quipped, people do not sacrifice and struggle merely from cold reason; there must be passion – hope of joy or dignity – animating them. In Latin American social movements, this is often captured in concepts like “dignity” (people desire to live with basic dignity and not humiliation) or “*buen vivir*” (the indigenous concept of living well in harmony, adopted by left movements as a goal). These are essentially desired states of being that contradict the alienated reality under neoliberalism. The Chilean student protesters of 2011, for example, were alienated by a profit-driven education system that left them in debt, but they were also driven by a positive desire: for education as a social right and the experience of solidarity in mass mobilization (Rodriguez, 2020).

4.2.1. The Rise of Social Movements and Their International Dimensions

To fully grasp the historical significance of the Chilean case, it is essential to situate it within the broader context of anti-neoliberal struggles in Latin America. Kenneth M. Roberts (2017) provides a conceptual map for this task, distinguishing two historical “generations” of protest. The first generation, in the 1980s, was primarily a defensive reaction against the initial imposition of austerity and structural adjustment. The second, peaking in the late 1990s and early 2000s in countries such as Argentina and Bolivia, was a more explosive response to the crises generated by consolidated market societies, often leading to the collapse of political systems.

Most recent scholars further identify a “*third generation*” of anti-neoliberal contention that emerges after the initial defensive waves, targeting the post-boom model of neo-extractivism and the region’s “*commodities consensus*,” and recombining repertoires across feminist, indigenous-communitarian, and urban-precarious terrains (Svampa, 2019). In the Andes, work on the Water/Gas Wars demonstrates how indigenous-popular uprisings developed autonomous capacities and “*plebeian power*,” which overflowed party-system channels even when later incorporated into state projects (García Linera, 2014). Comparative syntheses argue that this backlash reconfigured the region’s political arena as movements cycled in and out of government, generating new forms of incorporation while also encountering reconstituted neoliberal logics (Rossi & Silva, 2018). From this vantage, Chile’s 2011 student cycle and the 2019 *estallido* are not anomalies but a paradigmatic leading edge of this “third generation,” where anti-privatization, anti-debt, and anti-extractivist frames converged into a broad democratic rupture (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2011).

Framed by dependency theory, Latin American social movements are best seen as historically patterned responses to a world-system position in which “underdevelopment” is produced through external articulation rather than internal deficits (Frank, 1966; Dos Santos, 1970). They stress how specific constellations of domestic classes and external linkages configure state forms and political conflict, setting the stage for cyclical waves of contention as accumulation models shift. In this light, the grievances that galvanize mobilization – debt peonage and the 1980s “*lost decade*,” structural adjustment and austerity, privatization of public goods, and elite

land enclosure – are not episodic abuses but structural effects of dependent development (Borras et al., 2012). What distinguishes Latin America from other regions is the combination of early incorporation into the capitalist world-economy, a robust tradition of mass-based popular organization, and the particular trajectory from ISI to debt crisis and IMF-backed reforms; by contrast, Northeast Asia's high-growth path hinged on "*developmental states*" that "*governed the market*" via embedded autonomy, generating a different repertoire and timing of contention, while land grabbing in Latin America has taken forms that diverge from African patterns.

Within this dependency frame, Latin American social movements, rather than being spontaneous eruptions, are understood as dynamic responses to deeply entrenched historical and structural conditions, particularly the imposition of hegemonic practices and the deleterious effects of neoliberal policies. Specific grievances that galvanise these movements are multifaceted: they include "debt peonage," "structural adjustment programs," "privatization," and outright "land grabs by powerful elites". Petras and Veltmeyer (2011, p. 16) delineate neoliberalism, globalization, and development as distinct "*modalities or forms of imperialism,*" systematically constructing an imperialist system through the "*[i]nstallation of repressive military regimes to destroy by armed force and violent repression of the class- based movements,*" and the propagation of a globalization ideology to mask economic interests.

Social movements constitute a vital area of inquiry, especially in their capacity to challenge neoliberal policies and forge transnational linkages. Harnecker (2015, pp. 158-161) underscores the importance of popular protagonism, observing whether governments mobilise workers and people, and contribute to increasing their abilities and power. Seoane et al. (2006, pp. 229-230) observe a new cycle of social protest in Latin America from the late 1990s, characterised by collective subjects with novel features, often leading to government falls and challenging neoliberal initiatives until the early 2000s. These movements, rooted in both rural and urban territories, are shaped by ethnic and cultural identities, or common living habitats, often forming around shared grievances (Seoane et al., 2006, p. 233).

Prominent among these are indigenous movements in Ecuador, Mexico, and Bolivia, alongside peasant movements like Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores

Rurais Sem Terra (MST) (Seoane et al., 2006, p. 233). Urban movements, such as Argentina's *piqueteros*, and struggles by public sector workers, teachers, and health workers, also feature prominently (Seoane et al., 2006, p. 234). A key aspect is the unprecedented regional and international articulation among these movements, including trade unions, women's groups, students, NGOs, and political parties, often spurred by initiatives like the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre. Seoane et al. (2006) highlight three characteristic elements: territorial appropriation, the revalorisation of democratic participation mechanisms, and the emergence of a “*new internationalism*”. The “*neo-liberalism of war*” is presented as the established powers' response to these challenges.

Following the argument of the previous chapter's prelude, the “long sixties” narrative should be understood as the inauguration of a qualitatively new type of social movement. The catalyst for this new cycle of contention in Latin America was undeniably the Cuban Revolution. Hobsbawm (2002) captures its singular impact, noting that after 1959, there was “*not an intellectual [of the left] in Europe or the United States who was not under the spell of Latin America, a continent apparently bubbling with the lava of social revolutions*” (p. 363). For Hobsbawm (2017), the revolution's significance was twofold: first, it demonstrated that a radical break with USA imperial domination was possible, and second, its romantic, “*heroism in the mountains*” provided an aesthetic and political model that “*could be hailed by all left revolutionaries*” (p. 262). The Cuban Revolution thus functions as the foundational event of the post-1968 Latin American narrative, the moment that opened the horizon of possibility against which all subsequent refusals.

Another seminal mostly was influenced by “philosophy of liberation in 1968” of Marcuse, Che Guevara (Cuban Revolution) and Camillo Torres (the National Liberation Army in Colombia) (Dussel, 2024), Petras and Morley (1990, p. 168) identify Liberation Theology and “movement Marxism” as having significantly contributed to “popular empowerment” and the formation of “Christian base communities,” fostering decentralized structures and class-based struggle. The fusion of popular religious beliefs with class organization provides an impetus for movements. This underscores how “ideology, values, traditions, and rituals” are

consequential to the patterning of defiance, as Eckstein argues, challenging purely mechanistic explanations.

A key characteristic highlighted by Boron and Lechini (2005), and Seoane et al. (2006), is the emergence of “new social movements” towards the end of the 1990s, exhibiting “new features” and distinguishing them from previous cycles of protest. These movements often have a “territorial base,” encompassing both rural and urban areas, and are frequently constituted in relation to ethnic and cultural identity, or in reference to a “lack of something” (e.g., “roofless,” “landless,” “paperless” movements). The Zapatista uprising in 1994, with its indigenous identity and rural origins, is cited as emblematic of this new cycle. The significant role of women in these movements, whether as “piqueteras, Zapatist and indigenous” women, is also emphasized.

The forms of action also reflect an appropriation of cultural and symbolic resources. Eckstein (2001, p. 9) illustrates how Bolivian miners, through participation in “*centuries-old rituals rooted in their agricultural past*,” reinforced a “*spirit of rebellion*” that propelled strikes and protests. Petras and Veltmeyer (2011, p. 187) note the “*Minga of Resistance*,” a Quechua term for “*collective action*,” as gaining force from its “*cultural and historical references to shared experiences of subjugation*,” highlighting the integral role of culture in political mobilization.

Modern communication technologies have also transformed mobilization strategies. Eckstein (2001, p. 358) indicates that “*modern means of communication brought messages to and from the remotest areas of the continent*,” leading to “*pan-regional movement homogenization*.” The Internet, in particular, influenced movements like the Zapatistas, allowing for the electronic dissemination of information that sparked other Latin American movements. This suggests a dialectical interplay between the local and the global in shaping protest.

Despite these co-optive tendencies, the movements demonstrate tremendous resilience and creative capacities of civil society, maintaining their vitality and limited power in opposition to the electoral political class. They have repeatedly won numerous battles and struggles, imposing limits on the scope and depth of imperial pillage and at times toppling collaborator regimes in crisis. Ultimately, these

movements are seen as producing new paradigms, new forms of production and social relations, fostering a new social consciousness that is shaped in a broad process of revolutionary change and class struggle.

The study of Latin American social movements benefits from a historical-structural approach, which, as Eckstein (2001, p. 3) explains, foregrounds the intricate patterning of defiance by structural and historical forces, acknowledging the role of “*ideology, values, traditions, and rituals*”. This perspective is preferred over individual-level psychological explanations, which Eckstein critiques for portraying rebels as “nonrational or irrational” (2001, p. 4), and over abstract structural theories that fail to capture the “historical variability” (2001, p. 6) and nuances of movements. While acknowledging the utility of “*resource-mobilization theory*” in its focus on resources, organization, and opportunities, Eckstein asserts the broader explanatory power of macro social and cultural forces in conditioning defiance. The “*dependency school of thought*,” as Eckstein (2001, p. 3). notes, challenged modernization theory by emphasizing “*global economic dynamics*” in constraining Latin American options, although it sometimes left non-economic conflicts unexplained.

A critical theoretical lens, particularly that influenced by the Freudo-Marxist tradition, offers a unique contribution to understanding these phenomena. Bosteels, in his work on Marx and Freud in Latin America, emphasizes the concept of “subjective conditions” as crucial for the “development of collective processes that tend toward a radical transformation of social reality” (2012, p. 18). This radicality, he suggests, is determined by deepening this repercussion of the so-called ‘objective’ conditions in subjectivity. Bosteels cites Rozitchner’s call to “*reactivate their silent and still untapped resources for the sake of a critique of the present*,” aiming to “*create a new meaning that would vanquish the determinism that marked us all*” (2012, p. 22). This perspective challenges purely deterministic or economistic views, arguing for the integration of “*ideology, culture, and the practices of everyday life as integral parts of the political struggle*” (Bosteels, 2012, p. 172), mainly because of the 1968 events in Latin America in general. The very political nature of the social, as Bosteels elucidates, involves displacing the “*borders of the political so as to include the everydayness*” of struggles for justice and recognizing the “*new role of morality, or ethics, in politics*” (2012, p. 163).

Furthermore, Bosteels explores how the subjective potential of political struggles becomes “*effectively visible*” when history is transformed into “*story, or perhaps even a myth*” (2012, p. 268). He references Taibo's notion that “[d]emystifying is not the only option, remythifying is the other,” especially as a means for the “screwed” to articulate their truth reference to the post-1968 narratives mainly in Mexico which echoed the whole continent in a way such as “*the student-popular movement of 1968; the Corpus Christi massacre of June 10, 1971; the re-emergence of syndicalist and armed guerrilla struggles in the 1970s; the new student movement of the CEU in 1987; the rise to power of the Revolutionary Democratic Party which and the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation*” (Bosteels, 2012, p. 268). Even the “melancholy paths” of the post-1968 Left, as Bosteels suggests, stem from a “shifting relationship of hierarchy between ethics and politics” (2012, p. 27), demonstrating a profound theoretical engagement with the psychological dimensions of political struggle.

In essence, the general characteristics of Latin American social movements and actors reveal a persistent struggle against hegemonic impositions, marked by diverse origins, pluralistic compositions, and evolving forms of collective action, which mainly lean into “class struggle”. Their complex relationships with the state, political parties, and external actors, coupled with their varied outcomes, underscore the need for a nuanced, historically grounded, and critically informed analysis that integrates the structural, cultural, and subjective dimensions of social change.

Chapter 4 has applied the concept of retroactive historicism to deconstruct the master-hegemonic “end narratives” that have shaped Chilean political reality, prepared “narrative replacements” to “win the history back” for the *Estallido* within this contested history and its broader Latin American context. Having established the theoretical framework and the historical-ideological terrain, Chapter 5 will now detail the qualitative research design and methodology used to empirically investigate this phenomenon on the ground.

5. METHODOLOGY: FROM END-NARRATIVES TO EVIDENCE

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to critically examine the 2019 Chilean *estallido*. Aligned with the dissertation's aim to analyze this event as a paradigmatic historical moment *signaling* a potential turning point within contemporary post-political struggles, the methodology is designed specifically to explore the “*cognitive*” and so-called “*ending*” narratives emerging from this period. The study posits, through this analysis, the emergence of a “*post-neoliberal desire*” linked to the O-18 protests. Employing an interpretative-qualitative approach (Wiesner, 2022) grounded in critical theory and psychoanalysis, this chapter outlines the research paradigm, the specific design choices, the methods for data generation, and the analytical strategies used to interpret the complex interplay of narrative, ideology, and subjectivity within the context of Chilean “*advanced neoliberalism*”. It accommodates the necessary eclectic mix of data sources (interviews, texts, observations). A detailed explanation of the research methodology is provided in this chapter. This methodology, then, presents the qualitative design framework alongside data collection procedures that combine fieldwork and semi-structured academic interviews with “*subjects-supposed-to-know*,” as well as the analytic methods for studying narrative, signifier, ideological, and psychoanalytic components of the Chilean case.

The primary objective is to understand how Chilean intellectuals experienced and narrated this intense period of social upheaval, examining the interaction among critical thought, social critique, and unconscious processes. The research adopts a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing a case study design within a critical interpretive paradigm. This design incorporates elements of retroactive observations and relies primarily on semi-structured interviews with Chilean intellectuals, supplemented by analyses of secondary sources, national and international newspapers, reports, field notes, and protest narratives. The data analysis integrates

psychoanalytic interpretative techniques – a rationally constructed and linguistically transparent set of ideas with multi-layered narrative analysis. This methodological integration is justified due to the research’s focus on subjective meaning, lived experience, the social construction of reality, and the critique of power structures implicit in interpretations of the *estallido*. The complexity of the *estallido* and the need to explore its unconscious dimensions (Munoz, 2024), especially considering the application of psychoanalytic theory, necessitate an interpretive depth beyond positivist frameworks. Focusing on intellectuals requires methodologies sensitive to nuanced discourse and theoretical positioning.

In the realm of social science methodology, the distinction between positivist and reflexive approaches marks a fundamental epistemological and ontological cleavage, shaping how researchers conceive of knowledge, reality, and their own role in the investigative process (Morrow & Brown, 1994).

Positivist methodology, drawing its lineage from the natural sciences, posits a foundationalist epistemology, wherein truth claims are asserted to have certain, apodictic grounds, often through a “mirroring” or copying of reality by scientific concepts (Morrow & Brown, 1994, p. 65). Its ambition is the discovery of universal, invariant laws governing social phenomena (Morrow & Brown, 1994, p. 65). The positivist tradition often conceptualizes temporality in narratives through an objective, linear, and measurable lens (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, pp. 65-68). This perspective aligns with the “*logico-scientific or paradigmatic*” mode of thought (Bruner, 1986), which seeks to establish truth claims verifiable through formal logic or empirical evidence, contrasting sharply with the narrative mode, which seeks lifelikeness and verisimilitude. Within this analytic perspective, narrative is defined minimally by Prince (1982) as the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence, relying fundamentally on the temporal ordering of selected events, which must be presented with a beginning, middle, and an end, ensuring narrative closure and causality (Ewick & Silbey, 1995).

However, this adherence to a “reconstructed logic” in positivist approaches to temporality often overlooks or actively “de-narrativizes” their lived experience, abstracting instances from their specific time and space into universal categories (Ricoeur, 1980). Roth (2020, p. 6) concurs with the idea that philosophical discussions

often question the value of literary analyses of narrative, focusing instead on normative issues and the cognitive content of historical knowledge to provide demonstrably logical evaluative criteria. Such approaches tend to disregard the intentions and knowledge of actors as “epiphenomena” that distract from the discovery of correlated variables and causal laws (Morrow & Brown, 1994, pp. 56-57). This objectivist stance can lead to a “reification” and “fragmentation” of reality, as it prioritizes the technical control of data over the multi-dimensional, historical totality of social life (Morrow & Brown, 1994, p. 276). Here, we can sharpen the point by naming this as a one-dimensional narratology: it privileges a single, managerial or official way of telling and, in doing so, aligns with positivism’s aspiration to a “value-neutral” method. That aspiration subordinates freedom, reason, and equality to a universe of facts and procedures, so that lived histories are de-narrativized into technical variables (Marcuse’s (2007) critique of positivism and pragmatism, which fetishizes facts and sidelines normative criteria such as reason and liberation).

In contrast, reflexive temporality, particularly within critical theory and narrative inquiry, moves beyond this objective-subjective dualism, aiming to transcend the “subjectivist-objectivist split”. This perspective asserts that time in narrative is not merely a container for events but is actively constructed and imbued with meaning through human experience and interpretation. Ricoeur (1980), for instance, argues that we have “*an analysis of narrative will help to show in what way this “within-time-ness” already differs from linear time, even though it tends toward linearity due to its datable, public, and measurable nature and as a result of its dependence on points of reference in the world*” (p. 170) This “*human-world time*” is qualitative; its significance is derived from the meaning assigned to events, rather than abstract clock time. Mattingly’s (2007, p. 409) work on healing dramas, drawing from hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions, highlights the “*unevenness of lived time,*” where certain experiences are more “*meaningful, more significant, and more dramatic.*” This “dramatic time” is characterized by suspense, riskiness, trouble, enemies, desire, transformation, and plot, where meaning is always contingent on what unfolds in the future, implying that “*things might have been otherwise*” (Mattingly, 2007, p. 419). In this issue of reflexivity, “*critical theorists are aware that their theories are representationally incomplete models or [...] totalisations*” (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 76).

In this study, direct observation or participation in the original events of the *estallido* in 2019 was not feasible. Given the impossibility of direct participation, I adopt a retroactive approach, as described by Edwards (2005). This method involves analyzing past events through the lens of present-day memories and interpretations, recognizing that the past is always filtered through the present's perspectives. This approach aligns with the Benjaminian-Hegelian historicism, which views history as a dialectical process where the past is continually reinterpreted in light of the present.

Therefore, I employ field research data alongside textual analysis to reconstruct and understand the events. The focus is on the intellectual and everyday recollections of the 2019 events by academics, who are considered the “subject supposed to know” those presumed to know “the meaning of the analysand’s symptoms” (Žižek, 1991, p. 185) – a group strategically positioned to grasp the ambivalent unconscious dynamics of the revolt, given that, as intellectuals, their professional identities are predicated upon a “self-binding to progressive social transformation” (Critchley, 2008, p. 10, as cited in Sánchez, 2024, p. 413). Indeed, “*as soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere there is transference*” (Lacan, 1977, p. 232).

The concept of the “*subject supposed to know*” is central to this analysis. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this refers to the unconscious attribution of knowledge to an authority figure or ideology, enabling the subject to navigate the symbolic order and make sense of their experiences, even if that understanding is based on misrecognition. The key theoretical point to clarify here is the connection between the “*subject supposed to know*” and the pairing of signifier and ideology. The original phrasing could be misinterpreted as suggesting that the subject consciously completes the mystification process. However, the Lacanian concept of the “*subject supposed to know*” refers to the unconscious imputation of knowledge to another subject, often an authority figure or ideology itself. This imputation allows the subject to navigate the symbolic order and make sense of their experience, even if that understanding is based on misrecognition. It is precisely through this misrecognition that ideology operates, linking signifiers to meanings that reinforce existing power structures. The revised version, by more explicitly linking the “*subject supposed to know*” to the completion of the mystification process, clarifies this crucial point. The focus is now on how this unconscious imputation enables the connection between signifier and ideology within

the post-neoliberal subject. Moreover, the link between the concepts (nostalgia as the past, melancholy as the present, and fantasy as the future) and the refusal process, as well as actuality, needs to be expressed to understand the protest process. Thus, I attempt to articulate the concept by chronologically ordering the timeline (and the subject's psychic temporality within this process), which would enrich the concept of the 'great refusal' as a counter-hegemonic movement in post-neoliberal Chile, part of the broader global neoliberal symbolic order.

This dissertation's focus on the narratives of intellectuals is not a retreat into elitism, but rather a strategic response to the call for a new mode of engaged research. The task of the critical researcher is to get involved in the nature of social development itself. This involves collecting the experiences of prominent organizations, marking the milestones of popular struggle, and helping to organize the diverse discourses that have emerged from the development of social complexity and differentiation. By interviewing intellectuals who have themselves attempted to interpret the *estallido*, this study seeks to analyze one crucial site of this very process: the struggle over meaning and narrative within the intellectual field, a key battlefield in any counter-hegemonic project.

Above all, this study employs the critical trajectory and psychoanalytic political theories of Marcuse and Žižek to understand the sociopolitical and psychological dimensions of the 2019 Chilean protests. The critical analysis provides a framework for understanding the structural and systemic factors behind social inequality and injustice. At the same time, psychoanalysis offers insights into the unconscious and traumatic/symptomatic dimensions of the social and political processes. The methodology proposed for this study involves a complex and multilayered approach, which includes applying a psychoanalytical lens to texts and events and relating them to the origin of other thematic movements.

The analysis presented here is grounded in the theoretical and methodological framework of psychoanalysis and Benjaminian-Hegelian historicity, with a specific focus on the strategic functions of political narratives. This retroactive approach, informed by Benjaminian-Hegelian historicism, is further radicalized by a crucial insight from Lacanian psychoanalysis. A historical event, particularly a traumatic one like the *estallido*, is not an object with a fixed, inherent meaning waiting to be

discovered. According to Žižek (1991), the “*act of interpretation [...] always sets in too late [...] when the event which is to be interpreted repeats itself*” (p. 67). The first, chaotic eruption of the event is a pre-symbolic shock to the system; its meaning only emerges later, through its “repetition” in narrative, memory, and analysis. This study, therefore, was conducted five years after the initial outburst and is methodologically positioned at the precise moment of this symbolic repetition. It analyzes not the “thing-in-itself” of the 2019 protests, but the process through which their meaning is retroactively constructed, contested, and solidified within the intellectual and political field.

Along with this process of reason and mind, following one-dimensional reasoning, as Marcuse would argue, can stifle critical thinking and oppositional voices. To counteract this, I seek an *evental act*, a disruption of the hegemonic narrative through the investigation of academic knowledge itself. Inspired by Kant's concept of the “*public use of reason*” and Žižek's emphasis on the “*universality of thought*,” I aim to liberate academic discourse from its constraints. Recognizing narrative as a vehicle for ideology, I adopt a Žižekian-Lacanian approach, focusing on the “*quilting point*” or “*point de capiton*” where narratives are anchored to specific signifiers. This enables us to understand how certain events or figures become pivotal points in ideological struggles. Furthermore, rather than pursuing an identity-based inquiry, I seek to analyze the process of identification itself – how individuals and groups come to align themselves with particular narratives and how these identifications shift over time.

In retroactive literary studies focusing on “endings,” scholars have examined how narratives conclude and the implications of these conclusions for understanding history and society. For instance, Adelaida López-Mejía, in her 1999 article “*Women Who Bleed to Death: Gabriel García Márquez's 'Sense of an Ending'*,” explores the thematic elements of endings in García Márquez's works, analyzing how these endings reflect broader societal and historical contexts. Similarly, as mentioned several times previously in this chapter, Jameson, in his book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, argues that narratives are socially symbolic acts that reflect the underlying political and social structures of their time. He emphasizes the importance of historicizing narratives to understand their deeper meanings and implications. Drawing from these perspectives, this thesis aims to transcend the

examination of isolated texts. It seeks to explore the complexity of the *estallido* through an analysis of various historical moments and their narrative representations, understanding how these narratives construct and deconstruct the collective memory and identity of Chilean society. In doing so, the research will illuminate the ways in which the *estallido*, much like the fictional world of Macondo, encapsulates a confluence of historical forces, personal stories, and collective aspirations, offering a profound insight into the dynamics of social change and the power of narrative in shaping societal understanding.

A three-level design has been developed to comprehend these symbolic acts and expressions in narrative form. The ideological dimension of the neoliberal order, examined historically, has coped with the “end of ideology” and “end of history” narratives, presented as the overarching narrative. It continues with the fundamental political narratives that influence the actual political impact of the movement (the Chilean case) at the national level, as well as cognitive narratives, in order to align with political subjects at the intellectual level.

In line with the study's emphasis on analyzing narratives through a Marcusean and Žižekian lens, the data collection focus is on political and cognitive narratives that emerged throughout the *estallido*. The former is the narrative, often expressed through protest art, slogans, songs, speeches, and manifestos. They can be embodied in protest narratives through the analysis of bibliographical, documentary, newspaper, and memorial sources, as well as books related to the *estallido*, providing a rich source for understanding the symbolic and ideological dimensions of the movement within the broader historical and political landscape of Chile. However in our case the research examines how the use of political narratives and slogans or graffitis under the phrase “Chile awakened” (*Chile despertó*),” which has become a widely used slogan, and refers to a symbolic awakening where people become aware and alert to social or political realities, together with other slogans that have emerged alongside it, a presupposed significant “ending” of counter-narratives is implied: a) “*trauma of dictatorship*” (end of dictatorship): “*Ni perdón ni olvida* (Neither forgive nor forget),” b) “*neoliberal laboratory – Chilean Miracle*” (end of neoliberalism): “*El neoliberalismo nace y muere en Chile* (Neoliberalism is born and dies in Chile),” c) end of transition – “*No son 30 pesos, son 30 años* (It’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years),”

and d) “*the political process of the post-transition*” (end of democracy) “*Dignidad, hasta que sea costumbre resonante* (Dignity, until it becomes custom)” with Chile's past and present struggles for social justice, potentially challenging prevailing notions of the “*end of ideology*” and “*end of history*.”

These divergent historical-evental matches represent narratives that are reproduced through the texts and cultural products of Chilean society, including educational materials, myth, and commemorative practices. They are stories that frame the collective memory of the events, acting as it navigates the process of never-ending stories of dictatorship, neoliberalism, transition, and democracy in the midst of intractable violence that are juxtaposed between the “end of ideology” and the “*end of history*”.

Analyzing these narratives will involve exploring their traumatic/eventual resonance, symbolic power, and ideological underpinnings, providing insights into why/what they mobilize collective action, challenging hegemonic narratives, and articulating alternative visions for the future. This approach aligns with the theoretical framework of the study, which seeks to uncover the hidden meanings and unconscious desires that shape social movements through a psychoanalytic and ideological lens while also situating these narratives within the specific historical context of Chile's ongoing struggle for social justice and equality and examining their potential to disrupt and reframe dominant socio-political paradigms.

To set the narratives on track, the methodology used for development is qualitative and falls within the retroactive-interpretive paradigm. One of the most crucial stages to reach the research findings of this thesis is the field research phase. The field research phase of the inquiry involves field notes and conducting interviews. As mentioned in the interview phase, the fieldwork was conducted between November 2023 and November 2024 in Chile. It consists of participant observation and informal conversations that also took place on the retroactive grounds like museums, scientific conferences, and public spaces during the research stay in Chile. All the data was collected through fieldnotes clearly stating the date and place where the reported interaction occurred. Afterward, all the field notes were analyzed word-by-word. The analysis combined the actors' perspective with the researcher's perspective, revealing the aspects that the actors normalized (Hennink et al., 2011). This is because the

behavior and discourses within the group were considered normal and acceptable, yet appeared peculiar to an external observer.

Interviews were conducted with selected authors of scientific articles and intellectual outputs that analyze the *estallido*. The material for the interpretation comes from a project that aimed to explore the cognitive narratives elicited by the *estallido* among Chilean scholars and intellectuals. To challenge the straightforwardness of the desire for change in most interpretations of the revolt, it is strategically focused on the group of people for whom this desire seems most straightforward: “*subjects-supposed-to-know*”.

Three fronts were covered in this process. After cataloging the *estallido*-related articles in the humanities and social sciences explicitly aligned with the production of critical knowledge, it proceeds to contact academics and researchers based in the cities of Santiago, Valparaíso, Temuco, and Valdivia. In addition to face-to-face interviews, remote interviews (using online meeting platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams) were also conducted, considering the practical and logistical challenges for those involved. This sample enabled me to cover a wide range of fields, including political science, history, anthropology, sociology, law, literature, philosophy, psychology, and the arts. The interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, with durations ranging from 34 to 108 minutes. They were recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed using a flexible, verbatim, intelligent transcription that excludes fillers, corrects grammatical issues, and employs a standardized format. It is also lightly edited for clarity. In addition, it has shortlisted seven academic events where it conducts informal observations.

Observation and informal conversations were carried out mostly in 2024, after the *estallido* cycle and the two constitutional processes. This timing shaped what could be heard and seen: the afterimages of slogans on walls, the shift from mass assemblies to small routines, and the movement of expert speech from performative to reflexive registers. These notes are coded with the same scheme used for interviews and treated them as situated traces, not as tests of representativeness.

Table 5.1 summarises the field corpus underpinning this study. Using interpretive qualitative sampling, scholars were sought who have themselves produced

discourse capable of quilting Chile’s ideological field. Variation across disciplines and geography allowed me to capture multiple symbolic registers; saturation was reached at $N = 24$, when no new master signifier emerged. The qualitative corpus comprises 28 semi-structured interviews with Chilean intellectuals and participant observation across nine academic events held between Santiago and Valdivia, along with informal conversations and visiting memorial spaces such as Museo del Estallido Social, Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Plaza Italia (Plaza Dignidad), and gatherings such as 5th-anniversary protests in Santiago. Interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed in a softly edited verbatim style to preserve semantic nuance while removing non-lexical fillers (Parker, 2005). The informal corpus comprises 27 pages of handwritten field notes, 9 audio-transcribed roundtable, conference, and seminar sessions ($\approx$ approximately 42,000 words), and 2 museum, square, gathering, and café conversation logs ($\approx$ approximately 14,000 words), collected between November 2023 and November 2024. Following Marcuse’s idea of immanent critique (Bernstein, 1971) and Žižek’s approach of identifying the “symptoms” in what people say and do, the corpus is used to notice moments where official narratives break down and hidden tensions emerge. These fragments – whether in casual talks, memorial visits, or public events – are not treated as extra details, but as important signs of contradiction. Rather than anecdotal garnish, these fragments are systematically coded, triangulated, and theorised as discursive evidence of the *Great Refusal*’s everyday life.

Table 5.1: Summary of the field research for both the interviews and academic events

	Category	Details
I N T E R V I E W S	Total Participants	28 intellectuals-academics (8 female, 20 male)
	Cities	Santiago, Valparaiso, Temuco, Valdivia
	Fields Covered	History, Anthropology, Sociology, Law, Literature, Philosophy, Psychology, Arts
	Languages	English and Spanish
	Duration	34 to 118 minutes
	Recording Method	Digital audio recorders
	Transcription Method	Flexible verbatim intelligent transcription (no fillers, grammar corrected, standardized format)
	Total Events	9 events

E V E N T S	Topics Covered	Critical theory, critical thought in Latin America, change – social change, political and social history of Chile, Estallido social
	Total Hours of the Events	28 hours
	Events Type	Academic conferences, seminars, interim meetings, informal observations
	Total Data Compiled	692-page corpus (qualitative data from interviews, informal conversations, and observations)

I acknowledge that the study is conducted with the benefit (and limitation) of retrospection. While it is impossible to revisit the 2019 protests of Chile as they unfolded, their retroactive traces can be examined through field observations at key sites, including urban ethnography, main squares, murals, memorials, protest anniversaries, related congresses, memory museums, and protest museums.

Following the combined principles of narrative inquiry and psychoanalytic interview practice, the *Critical-Psychoanalytic Narrative Interview* (CPNI) format has been employed. This hybrid method draws on the “*narrative-as-inquiry*” approach (Hendry, 2009) and on psychoanalytic adaptations of the “*free association narrative interview*” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Frosh & Saville Young, 2017), while embedding these within a critical theory dialogic ethos. In keeping with Tally’s longed by carefully collecting about Jameson’s “*interpretation is a fundamentally allegorical act, by which one must translate from one code into another, along different registers and according to a particular master code*” (Tally, 2022, p. 264), the approach was designed to elicit not only participants’ explicit, consciously formulated narratives but also the latent signifiers, affective residues, and symbolic slips that emerge when recounting socio-political experience.

From a Marcusean perspective, this meant allowing space for the articulation of suppressed potentials and contradictions that leak through the cracks of one-dimensional discourse. From a Žižekian angle, it also meant attending closely to moments where the subject “stumbles” against the coordinates of the big Other. The interview guide, therefore, alternated between direct prompts (e.g., targeted questions about the estallido) and floating-attention invitations (e.g., “What is the first thing that

comes to mind when I say *estallido social* after five years?’’), enabling both structured reflection and associative, less-filtered responses.

Conscious of critical theory’s injunction to resist co-optation into dominant narratives, I monitored moments where our own theoretical vocabulary risked steering participants, and I systematically logged such instances for reflexive analysis. This CPNI format thus integrates three essential dimensions: (1) narrative structuring to capture temporal and experiential framing, (2) psychoanalytic sensitivity to unconscious processes and signifiers, and (3) critical-theoretical vigilance toward ideological reproduction. This methodological design also draws on selected elements of Lacanian discourse theory –not as a full psychoanalytic analysis, but as a conceptual lens to situate how knowledge, authority, and subjectivity interact in the interview space.

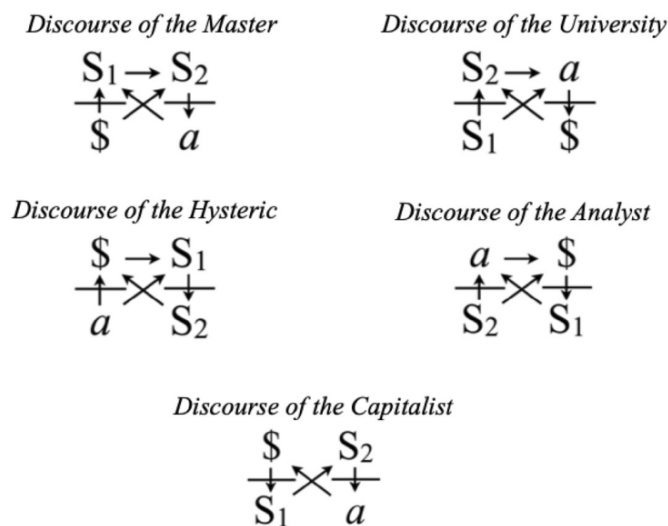


Figure 5.1: The five discourses of Lacan

Source: (Pauwels, 2019, p. 54)

Here, the figure is used as a compact map of Lacan’s discourses in a supportive setting for understanding the *subject supposed to know*. It rotates four elements – S_1 (master-signifier), S_2 (knowledge), $\$$ (split subject), and a (object-cause of desire) – through four positions (agent, other, product, truth). In the analytic discourse, a occupies the agent position and “causes” speech; this arrangement suspends the automatic production of meaning and allows a new S_1 to emerge rather than being imposed in advance (Lacan, Seminar XVII). This is precisely why the analytic and

hysteric discourses are methodologically valuable: they try to open fixed identifications generated by master/university arrangements, where S1/S2 organize administration and the subject appears as a managed “product”. In short, the diagram operationalizes when authority and knowledge are commanding the scene (master/university) and when contradiction and desire are allowed to surface (hysteric/analyst).

Within the interviewing process, the “subject supposed to know” was treated as a practical issue of transference, but not as a separate coding key. The interviews were already coded; the Lacanian discourse diagram served only as a heuristic to keep the knowledge-position open while eliciting signifiers without suggestion. In practice, SSK expectations were acknowledged and then decentered (withholding ready-made S1s, using floating-attention prompts) so that emergent signifiers could appear (e.g., “dignity”). This stance converges with the thesis’s three anchors: (i) Jameson’s cognitive mapping, which organizes fragmented narratives into a map linking lived experience to structural totality (Tally, 2022); (ii) Marcuse’s refusal and “two-dimensional” thinking, which hears negation and suppressed possibility against the pull of one-dimensional integration (Lamas et al., 2017; Marcuse, 2007); and (iii) Žižek’s account of the act, where speech marks a non-accommodatable break with prior coordinates rather than another demand (Žižek, 1991). Read this way, moments that reproduced administration or expert closure were noted as master/university effects; moments of questioning from the split subject (\$) registered the hysteric impulse; and moments where unmet enjoyment (*a*) led the sequence were taken as analytic openings. This alignment allowed the coded material to map the move from managed consensus to antagonism that underlies the *estallido*, without imposing theory onto respondents’ speech (Stavrakakis, 2019; Bailes, 2020).

To this end, the interview guide was shaped by Lacan’s idea of the “the big Other no longer exists” as well – the contemporary loss of any unquestioned symbolic authority that once defined clear limits and rules for society diminishes and therefore indicates the “*productive of new knowledge: the hysterical subject who incessantly probes the Master’s knowledge is the very model of the emergence of new knowledge*” (Žižek, 1997; Žižek, 1998). In this absence, Lacan suggests, the discourse of the university often takes its place. Here, expert knowledge replaces the traditional Master, offering technical or administrative solutions while avoiding the deeper social conflicts

it cannot resolve. This dynamic reflects the condition of today's multipolar world, where no single power holds unquestioned authority. By positioning the interviewees as "*subjects supposed to know*" in the academic sense, the research could examine how scholarly discourse itself now operates as a kind of neo-Master, guiding, legitimising, and sometimes constraining how political realities are interpreted and narrated.

A distinctive aspect of this research lies in how it treats intellectuals; writers, analysts, and academics, who reflected on the estallido social, not as external observers but as *subject-supposed-to-know* figures within the ideological field. These subjects are approached as symbolic actors whose interpretations, essays, and commentaries constitute not merely discursive products but *performative acts*. Their narratives are treated as subjective responses that both *interpret* and *reenact* the contradictions, ruptures, and traumas of the revolt itself. This methodological approach is further grounded in the Lacanian concept of the "*desire of the analyst*." An intervention becomes a true "*psychoanalytic act*" when it facilitates the analysand's progress toward the end of the analysis, which, in this research context, translates to a deeper understanding of the underlying psychic structures that shape narratives surrounding the outburst. Therefore, the semi-structured interview format provides a framework to access these unconscious dimensions and expose the complex interaction between personal experience, historical memory, and the ideological forces within the Chilean context. This approach, deeply aligned with critical theory, allows for an examination of how scholarly production actively shapes the discursive formation of a contentious event, rather than merely observing it.

This interpretive approach positions intellectual discourse as a *field performance* – where positionality, unconscious investment, and affective tensions intersect. The writings of these figures are embedded in the same ideological terrain as the protests they analyze; they are mediated through nostalgia, melancholy, fantasy, and retroactive historicism (Benjamin, 1969; Zambrana, 2018). Rather than assuming analytical detachment, this study reads these texts as symptomatic attempts to bind the trauma of the event into coherent narratives, thus performing what Jameson (2002) called "*imaginary resolutions of real contradictions*." The researcher thus treats this corpus not merely as a secondary layer of meaning, but as a *primary field of ideological-symbolic enactment*, a site where the revolt's meaning is still being contested, reframed, and negotiated.

The move also dovetails with Marcuse's diagnosis of one-dimensional thought, in which technological rationality converts the world into pure instrumentality and relegates the metaphysical –or any non-instrumental critique– to the realm of the “irrational and unscientific” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 177). By inviting interviewees to oscillate between their expert registers and personal affects, the semi-structured format exposes both the reach and the cracks of this university discourse, precisely where a new *Great Refusal* might emerge. By carefully segmenting the analysis to explore these dimensions, the following chapter demonstrates how the authors have interviewed, through their distinct methodologies, theoretical framings, and implicit or explicit reflections on their own positionality, performatively contributed to the ongoing conceptualisation, contestation, and historical inscription of the Chilean *estallido*.

By search of the narrative data within the *evental act of refusal*, this study specifically included a great variety of protest repertoires (graffiti, slogans, banners), addressing the *estallido social*. Pleyers (2023, pp. 334-335) emphasizes that occupied spaces, such as the *Plaza Dignidad*, functioned as “spaces of experience,” where the collective lived transformation occurred not merely in political discourse but in bodily, emotional, and social registers. These spaces, saturated with graffiti, poetry, music, and ritual, became what Lacanian psychoanalysis might term “*the extimité site*” (“Extimacy”, n.d.) where the Real of political subjectivation pierced the Symbolic. Uribe's (2021, p. 34) work also employed the term *Cité*⁴⁴, to attach subjectivity within a leaderless refusal. In this sense, these plazas were not only sites of protest but also of political decomposition of the subject. Along with this work, Wood's (2022) work also worth attention since it tries to follow same method except psychoanalytic leaning as Uribe did to overcome the “surprising” element of the *estallido*, therefore instead of “elite representation” Woods turns to *the people* and how they articulate the concerns in their language through “*employment of the discourse of dignity and [in] street art*” mainly through cultural aspects (Woods, 2022, pp. 50-51). These respective approaches have been fundamental to understanding *estallido*'s landscape.

⁴⁴ The term “Cité,” inherited from the ancient Greek “polis,” explains how a unified culture can exist even without a fully developed city or a single, unified government.

The rich data allowed for a differentiated examination of the official political recollection and a critical reconsideration of the *estallido social*'s present and past, as well as the often-conflicting narratives on Chilean history and some related convenient myths. To triangulate the interview material with street-level discourse, every inscription reproduced in Raúl Molina Otárola's (2019) photographic chronicle, *Hablan los muros: La rebelión social de octubre 2019*, is manually transcribed. After removing duplicates, irrelevant, and overly abstract fragments, the final corpus consisted of 558 unique slogans. Each line was entered into a spreadsheet and tagged with the project's codebook; ambiguous cases were resolved through iterative comparison with the explanatory memos developed during interview analysis. A ten-percent spot check by a second coder yielded 92 percent agreement, providing a reasonable assurance of reliability for a data set whose function is descriptive triangulation rather than statistical inference.

Once coded, the slogans were collapsed into four rupture-narratives – state repression, neoliberal antagonism, legitimacy crisis, and collective awakening – so that the profile of wall texts could be directly juxtaposed with the interview “heat-map” discussed in Chapter 6. This procedure allows the dissertation to place the reflections of intellectual interlocutors alongside a contemporaneous, anonymous counter-archive, thereby grounding the Marcusean-Žižekian reading of the *estallido* in language literally written on the city's walls. The quick-look slogan corpus codebook appears in Appendix 1.

To visualize the narrative dynamics emerging from the interviews, a series of original figures was produced and is provided later. These diagrams formalize conceptual structures derived from narrative coding and ideological alignment patterns.

The final dataset (≈ 692 pages) constitutes the empirical foundation for the three-level narrative analysis presented in Chapter 6. To translate the 692-page qualitative corpus into analytically tractable evidence, a hybrid interpretative–psychoanalytic coding strategy was employed, grounded in critical theory. The full dictionary, decision rules, and illustrative triggers are reproduced verbatim in Appendix 3.

For this, MAXQDA⁴⁵ is chosen for its transparent code-memo architecture, ease of inter-coder agreement snapshots, and export of *Code-Relations Browser* –adequate for a qualitative-interpretive doctorate without heavy statistical demands. Spanish passages bearing symptomatic slips were back-translated to preserve ambiguity. Post-interview memos noted counter-transference of the researcher’s own libidinal investment in the process. All materials were coded in *MAQUADA 24* using a retroactive-interpretive scheme that combines signifier intensity, ideology-narrative matching, and affective registers (nostalgia, melancholy, fantasy). A critical-friend PhD peer double-coded 240 segments; Krippendorff’s $\alpha = 0.82$ confirms dependable application. The matrix fed MAXQDA’s *Code Map*, whose dendrogram (Figure 6.3.) visualises how ideological “ends” cling together while *dignidad–pueblo–violencia* condense the *Real* of social antagonism.

Coded outputs were then exported to MAXQDA’s statistics module for frequency counts and co-occurrence plots; qualitative excerpts populate Chapters 6, while visualisations appear as Figures 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4. For example, the wall texts of the low-cost corpus supply the “public-visibility” metric used in Figure 6.4. and provides illustrative quotes for the Cognitive layer in Chapter 6. The entire text was OCR-extracted, lightly cleaned, and batch-coded using the existing narrative scheme; frequencies and sample quotations are provided in Annex 1, along with the photos taken by the writer of this study. For transparency and replicability, readers can consult the complete code definitions, inclusion/exclusion rules, and example quotations in Annex 3. To better understand the function of the figures in reading, I examined the details of Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 in Chapter 6.

After first-cycle coding, MAXQDA’s *Code Relations Browser* is used to calculate a simple co-occurrence table for the ten codes. I exported that matrix to the built-in Code Map tool, chose “average linkage” clustering, and let MAXQDA draw the resulting tree diagram. Line length in the map reflects the Jaccard similarity⁴⁶ that MAXQDA computes automatically (shared segments ÷ total segments). Finally, the map is saved as a high-resolution PNG and label-edited in Inkscape; this appears in

⁴⁵ The deliberate choice of a lightweight, transparent tool-chain aligns with the study’s interpretive ethos – prioritizing reflexive rigour over opaque automation.

⁴⁶ The Jaccard similarity measures the similarity between two sets. It calculates the ratio of the number of keywords in their intersection to the number of keywords in their union.

the thesis as Figure 6.3. The entire operation—from opening the Code Relations Browser to exporting the PNG – took under five minutes and required no additional scripting.

These interviews will uncover the narratives, beliefs, and motivations embedded within the academic analysis of the protests, with particular attention paid to how these narratives relate to the concept of “*act of great refusal*.” Examining this dimension is crucial for assessing whether the actions and beliefs of those directly involved align with – or directly challenge – the prevailing “end of ideology” and “end of history” narratives. Potential interview questions will probe the authors' perceived ideological landscape surrounding the protests, their interpretations of protestors' motivations, and their views on the capacity for radical change within the specific context of the *Estallido social*, with a particular focus on whether the protests themselves constitute an instance of suggested “*signifiers*.” As such, *Estallido social* makes the point that this particular use of signifiers establishes accountability and provides justification for one's (the speaker's) actions. This intellectual subject level of narratives will shed the insights gleaned from these interviews will form a vital counterpoint to the analysis of existing narratives, enabling a more complex and novel understanding of how the *Estallido social* operates within (or against) a post-ideological global context and how it can be interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Marcuse and Žižek.

Firstly, while the voices of protestors are invaluable, prioritizing interviews with authors of scientific articles offers a practical and ethically sound approach for this research. It allows for efficient access to a wide range of expert perspectives, mitigating the potential challenges and sensitivities associated with interviewing individuals directly involved in the protests. Secondly, this approach ensures a rigorous engagement with scholarly work, grounding the analysis in established research and contributing to the ongoing academic dialogue surrounding the *estallido*.

Integrating qualitative interviews with field observation offers a richer understanding of the interview data. This methodological combination allowed researchers to situate the interviews within the broader context of participants' daily lives, acknowledging that interviews are a space where relational identities are constructed. Consequently, recognizing that views expressed in interviews may differ

from those in everyday interactions provides a more nuanced perspective on the research findings.

In the case of Chile, the description of what happened, as well as the analysis of its causes and its subsequent evolution, even after almost five years, has been a complex task due to the extensive academic production produced around this process and the differences in the analyses and interpretations in the academic, political, and social world regarding this period. The field of research has changed five years after the apex of the *estallido*. Although the initial passion of the protest has waned, academic analysis has grown, allowing for a more nuanced look at the movement's potential consequences. Due to this temporal displacement, one of the primary areas of concern in this study is the narratives created by authors of scientific articles on the *estallido*. These articles offer a broader perspective on the event by integrating diverse views and information, which cannot be achieved through personal observations and emotions alone.

This research adhered to rigorous ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, ensuring they understood the research purpose, the use of data (including anonymization), and their right to withdraw. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through pseudonymization and secure data storage. Given the potentially sensitive nature of political opinions and reflections on traumatic events, care was taken during interviews to minimize potential harm and ensure participant comfort. Researcher reflexivity regarding positionality and potential biases was maintained throughout the research process. The ethical implications of applying psychoanalytic interpretations in a non-clinical research context were carefully considered, with a focus on discourse analysis rather than individual diagnosis.

In the interview corpus, most intellectuals speak in the name of the intellectual outputs they author or represent. As a result, their discourse generally converges with the public discourse visible in documents collected for this study. Yet these interviews add value precisely where they differ in mode: they supply reflexive, meta-discursive commentary on key signifiers and narrative linkages (e.g., how “ends” are retrospectively narrated; how cognitive mappings are justified or problematized), and they thematize the interviewees' own positionality in relation to those outputs. In

methodological terms, this makes the intellectual interviews a *reflexive deepening* of the documentary layer rather than a competing discourse layer; they are analyzed as sites where signifiers are named, qualified, and retroactively re-stitched to the social text, consistent with the thesis's critical-psychoanalytic orientation (Marcuse, 1966, pp. xxiv-xxv; Langman, 2017)

Several limitations inherent to the chosen approach should be acknowledged. Firstly, the primary focus on intellectual-level subjects, while justified by the research questions, means the perspectives of other participant groups are less directly represented. Secondly, the retroactive nature relies on memory and present-day interpretations, which are inherently selective. Thirdly, the interpretive framework, while providing depth, is dependent on the researcher's theoretical lens. Finally, as a qualitative case study, the findings aim for theoretical depth and insight into the specific Chilean context rather than statistical generalizability.

This chapter has outlined the interpretive-qualitative methodology guiding this dissertation, tailored specifically to the aims and theoretical framework presented in the thesis synopsis. Rooted in a critical-interpretive paradigm and drawing synergistically on critical theory, psychoanalysis, and narrative inquiry, the research design combines retroactive fieldwork, in-depth interviews with 'subjects supposed to know,' and analysis of protest/secondary texts. The analytical strategy focuses on interpreting cognitive and political narratives, key signifiers, and underlying psycho-social dynamics (nostalgia, melancholy, fantasy) to understand the Chilean *estallido social* as a complex, yet subjective, political event – an “*Act of Great Refusal*” that intervenes in historical narratives and reveals contradictions within the neoliberal order.

6. NARRATIVE AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY IN THE CHILEAN GREAT REFUSAL

The preceding chapters of this dissertation have established the theoretical, historical, and methodological foundations for a critical inquiry into the 2019 Chilean *estallido*. Having delineated the Marcusean-Žižekian framework of the “Act of Great Refusal” and outlined a qualitative methodology centered on the analysis of narrative, this chapter now moves from groundwork to the core analytical task. This chapter moves beyond description of the case to interpret its meaning, treating the uprising as an Act of Great Refusal that ruptured Chile’s political and subjective landscape. Following a dialectical logic in which values emerge from narratives, the analysis interrogates the dominant narratives that sought to rationalize or contain the event. By examining convergences and contrasts in the accounts of Chilean intellectuals – the “subjects supposed to know,” in Lacanian terms – the chapter reveals the hidden logic connecting historical trauma, collective desire, and the struggle for a new political beginning in a sense to the totality of the refusal.

The argument unfolds through four analytic “moments” that mirror the thesis’s dialectic of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy in the refusal: namely, the uprising’s traumatic fuel, the rupturing act itself, its institutional containment, and its lasting utopian legacy. Accordingly, the chapter is organized into five sections. First, I summarize the dataset and coding approach. Twenty-eight semi-structured interviews (conducted in 2024) coded across five interpretive layers supply the primary evidence, complemented by protest slogans, graffiti, and field notes gathered during fieldwork. Narrative inquiry combined with a psychoanalytic “*traumatic core*” (the Real or repression) approach allows us to track how these intellectuals remember, reframe, or resist the uprising, thereby revealing shifts in the *desire of the master-narrative* itself. Sections 6.1 through 6.4 then examine Moments I–IV in turn, each organized around: (i) a conceptual definition of the moment, (ii) its key discourse markers (master slogans

and signifiers), (iii) distilled empirical findings from the interviews, and (iv) an interpretive commentary linking the evidence to Marcuse's *Great Refusal* and Žižek's notion of the *Act*. Section 6.5 synthesizes how the four moments form a dialectical progression from negation to creative refoundation. Finally, Section 6.6 concludes the thesis that the Chilean case, in its totality, is a paradigmatic return of the repressed "trauma" towards "post-neoliberal".

Because the analytic focus of Chapter 6 is the *narrative and affective* anatomy of the *estallido*, I relocate the detailed event-by-event story to Appendix 5. That appendix provides a precise chronology (from the 4 October 2019 fare evasions through the 15 November 2019 Agreement, the October 2020 plebiscite, the May–July 2021 Convention milestones, and the 2022–2023 plebiscites), ensuring temporal clarity without fragmenting the argument. The chapter's interpretations thus remain streamlined, while readers who need the full sequence and dates can consult the appendix for reference. The sources used to define the line taken from international newspapers and Chilean national newspapers have been added to the bibliography.

A central premise emerging from the data is that the *estallido* cannot be understood solely through rational analysis of economic grievances. Beneath material triggers lies a powerful undercurrent of collective affect – a cross-temporal *dialectic of feeling* – that functioned as the true engine of the "Great Refusal." The data from the interviews reveals a powerful undercurrent of collective affect – a dialectic of feeling across time – that functioned as the true engine for the "Act of Great Refusal." As Analytical Claim 1 (AC1) of this study posits, this engine was constructed from three primary psycho-political forces: a nostalgic longing for a lost idealized past, a profound melancholy at the failures of the present, and the projection of a utopian fantasy onto the future. Together, these forces coalesced into a collective *post-neoliberal* desire potent enough to rupture the existing consensus. To fully grasp the trajectory of this desire, we can map its development onto the dialectical life-cycle of a social movement. Blunden (2019), drawing on Hegel, suggests that a new collective "formation of consciousness" follows a progression from a nebulous point-zero of untheorized discontent (mere *Being*), to a phase of naming the contradiction (posited *Essence*), and finally toward institutionalization and objective change (*Notion*). In the Chilean case, we will see a similar arc: an inchoate mass discontent coalescing into a

focused negation, which then seeks positive expression in new institutions before confronting its own limits.

To complement the interpretive reading of interviews and to illuminate the structural logic behind Chile's narrative shift, three original figures have been developed for this chapter. These visuals were generated from the coded data (using Python libraries and a MAXQDA-informed narrative model) and are designed to spatially represent key analytic dimensions. Figure 6.1 plots the *affective intensity* and *public visibility* of key narratives, illustrating the “landscape” of post-neoliberal desire at the height of the uprising. Figure 6.2 is a heat-map matrix that aligns different ideological/disciplinary lenses with core “end-narratives” (e.g., end of dictatorship, end of neoliberalism), highlighting how various knowledge domains engaged with the uprising. Finally, Figure 6.3 (a three-level concentric diagram, introduced later) depicts the hierarchy of narratives and signifiers, connecting the cognitive-emotive content of the protest to broader national and hegemonic symbolic orders. These figures operationalize the dissertation's theoretical lens – especially Marcuse's *Great Refusal* and Žižek's concept of the Act – by showing how insurgent signifiers traversed multiple layers of Chile's social imaginary, challenging the dominant neoliberal narrative at every level.

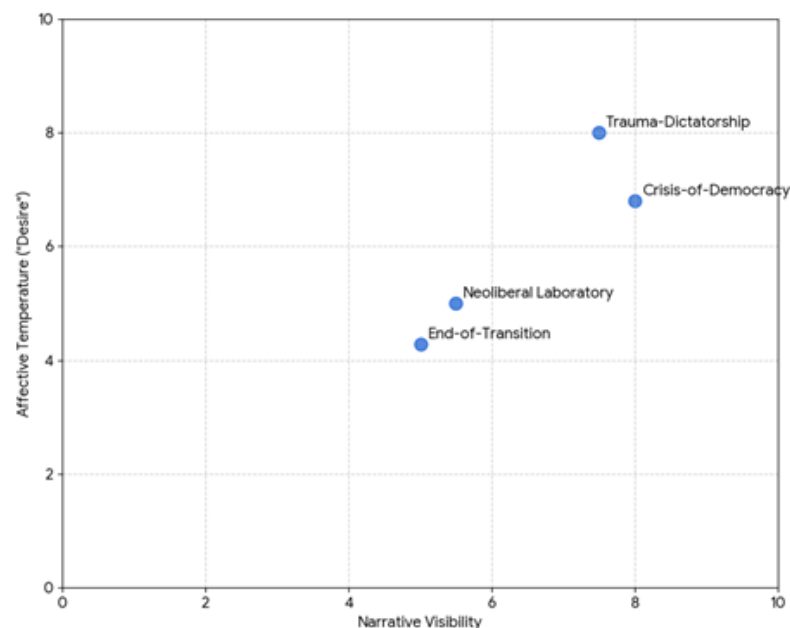


Figure 6.1: Intensity Landscape of Post-Neoliberal Desire

This scatter plot visualizes the affective and discursive power of the uprising's key narratives. It maps how frequently a narrative was mentioned ("Visibility" on the X-axis) against how passionately and centrally it was discussed ("Affective Temperature" on the Y-axis). Both scores derive from the coded interviews (see Appendix 3); I tallied how often each "end-narrative" was mentioned, and how intensely interviewees framed it (using a 0–10 scale for emotional intensity). Narratives appearing towards the upper-right of the plot were both frequently invoked *and* described with high affective charge by participants.

Four composite narrative clusters are labeled in Figure 6.1 for clarity. "Neoliberal Laboratory" unites the post-1970s boast of being the region's showcase for free-market reform with the older ideal of Chilean exceptionalism, now expressed chiefly through economic success. "End-of-Transition" groups together notions like the "Chilean Road" and the *promesa democrática* (the reformist, institution-led path out of dictatorship - Allende's ghost) – references that most interviewees now cite only to question or reject. "Trauma–Dictatorship" captures the still-raw memory of Pinochet's repression, a narrative that unsurprisingly elicits the strongest emotions in the corpus (including the slogans "¡Ni Olvido Ni Perdón!", *To Neither Forget nor Pardon!* or "¡Nunca más!", *never again*). This includes the end of dictatorship narrative as well, and the *transition to democracy* is more consistently and critically discussed as the direct and immediate context that fuelled the widespread discontent leading to the *estallido*. Finally, "Crisis-of-Democracy" extends the earlier end-of-democracy narrative that began with the 1973 overthrow of Allende: in today's interviews, it names the sense that, after decades of a formally democratic yet post-ideological and post-political order, Chile again faces a legitimacy breakdown echoing that original rupture. Together, the four labels translate a complex historical vocabulary into the visual grammar of the figure, showing how past and present meanings intersect in the current debate.

The figure clearly indicates that the *Trauma of the Dictatorship* (traumatic Real) and the *Crisis of Democracy* are the most effectively charged and visible topics, serving as the emotional core of the discontent. That these two narratives score simultaneously high on visibility and temperature confirms the double bind at the heart of the revolt: the unworked mourning for authoritarian violence persists as an open

wound, while the institutions meant to guarantee “never again” are experienced as increasingly hollow and continue to structure the political field.

Just below, the *Neoliberal Laboratory* occupies a middling altitude: frequently invoked, but with a different affective signature than the two traumas above it. This placement corroborates the interview evidence that neoliberalism remains the central analytic signifier –Chile is still narrated as the textbook case of market fundamentalism– yet by 2023, the term no longer ignites the same libidinal charge as in the uprising’s first months, mainly because of the failure of the constituent moment in 2022. The plot thus captures the *temporal cooling* that accompanies the shift from performative denunciation to reflexive stock-taking, a drift echoed later in Figure 6.2 when the critical-theory clusters lighten their engagement scores in the interview wave.

The outlier remains the *End-of-Transition* narrative, positioned in the chart’s middle band, with moderate visibility and a still-tempered affective charge. Its intermediate location confirms a discursive fatigue: nearly everyone recognises the transition thesis as exhausted, yet few invest much emotion in re-telling a story already judged inadequate. Precisely because it circulates in this matter-of-fact tone, the transition becomes the negative space –empty space between dictatorship and advance of democracy– into which the uprising can retroactively project new meaning, an opening the succeeding sections will treat as the dialectical move from negation to creative refoundation. Viewed within the longer sequence that runs from the end of democracy (1973) through the end of dictatorship (1988) to end of transition (2006–10) and toward the anticipated end of neoliberalism (2019 onwards), this weariness unmasks what Benjamin calls a “*homogeneous, empty time*,” a linear technocratic narrative that reduces politics to the management of recurring crises of representation and to an ever-widening gap between elites and “*the people*.” By exposing that hollow continuity, the *estallido* revives a Hegelian sense of historical repetition and foregrounds, in Benjamin’s terms, a “*repressed class in struggle*” –a living, open-ended subject that rejects the castrated rationality of post-political consensus and insists on rewriting history from below. So, it is noteworthy that the problematic nature of the transition and democracy period in Chilean knowledge production stands as a symptomatic nodal point of the unspoken dialogue with dictatorship, noting its lack of emotional acceptance. In this sense, it is clear that all the frontiers of the “end”

narratives met in the *estallido* and reinvented many of them from moments (acts) of refusal; in most basic terms, the act of refusal was the last end moment of all the ends. And radical rupture of the “*transitional logic*” is evident in the narratives (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2020).

To test whether this emotional pattern is consistent across analytic lenses, I next calculated a cross-ideology match. To visualise how each disciplinary lens engages the four Chilean *end-narratives* (End-of-Dictatorship, End-of-Neoliberalism, End-of-Transition, End-of-Democracy [Crisis-of-Democracy]), I first drew, for every interview transcript, a 0-to-5 alignment score recorded in the *Annex Codebook* under axial code Narrative-Alignment. *Zero* marks a passing or absent reference; *five* denotes sustained, explicit theorisation. Five denotes consensus inside this lens; however, it does not imply that neoliberalism is uncontested across society at large. Interviewees works were then grouped into seven broad research traditions (Critical-Theory / Political-Economy; Memory-History; Law / Constitutional / Rights; Sociology / Social-Movements; Cultural / Aesthetic / Literary; Gender / Labour / Intersectional; Security & State-Violence) according to the intellectual outcomes they produced. After this process, inside each row-column cell, I averaged the individual scores (inter-coder reliability = 0.82) and rendered the means as a conditional-colour heat-map in Microsoft Excel CSV sheet (dark = 5, light = 0).

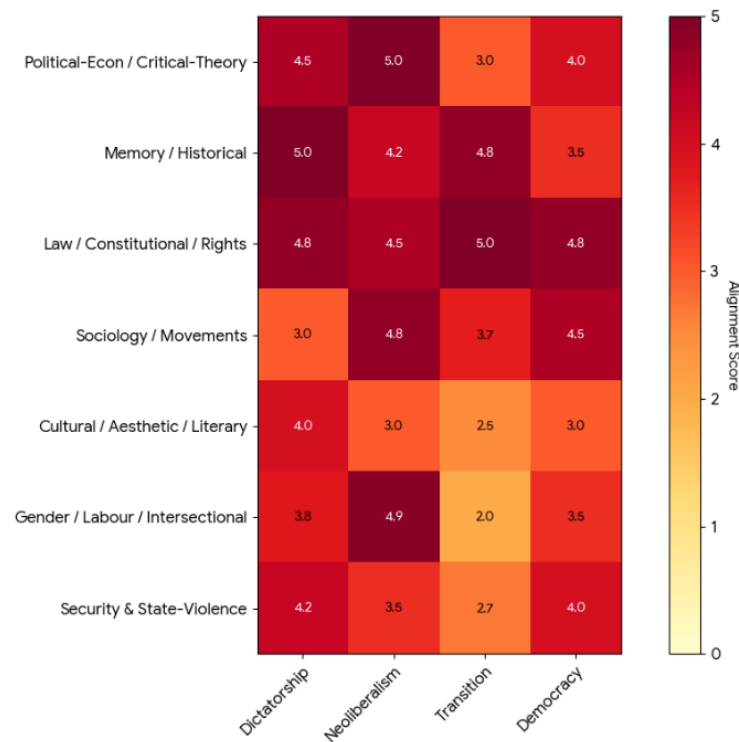


Figure 6.2: Ideology × Narrative Match Matrix (0-5)

Figure 6.2 situates the temporal split I have just theorised, performative articles (2019-23) versus reflexive interviews (2024), within a disciplinary topology of narrative engagement. Each heat-map cell averages the alignment scores of experts whose outputs fall under a given research tradition; darker shades mark stronger, more sustained theorisation of a specific “end-narrative.” Intellectual outputs are first-wave interventions written “*under the heat of the event*,” saturated with anticipatory affect and oriented toward shaping the immediate public narrative. They perform the *Great Refusal* as it is still unfolding, often projecting utopian horizons without fully confronting institutional backlash. Interviews capture second-wave reflection. Intellectuals now speak after plebiscite euphoria has waned and constitutional failure has set in. The Act is remembered, domesticated, or mourned. This distance invites self-critique, irony, or a nostalgia absent from the early texts.

This heatmap provides a powerful overview of the entire intellectual field I surveyed. It visualizes how different academic disciplines (the “lenses”) focus their attention on the core “end narratives” that define the Chilean conflict. The pattern is immediately legible: Neoliberalism emerges as the master antagonism (column mean

4.5/5, darkest hue in four of seven rows), confirming its gravitational and ideological pull across the intellectual field, but its intensity is disproportionately driven by early articles, for example, in Political Economy and Critical Theory and Sociology outlets. Political-economy and critical-theory writers treat neoliberalism and the 1973-1990 dictatorship as a tight causal pair: military violence is read as the inaugural shock that enabled market rule, while the transition narrative receives only guarded attention, an index of these scholars' scepticism toward incremental reformism. The later interviews in those same clusters score lower (3.6), reflecting what I might call a "disappointment gap" after the stalling of constitutional reform. Conversely, talk of a "crisis of democracy" deepened in the later interviews (an average increase of +0.7 in alignment scores), suggesting a retroactive realization that the revolt's radical promise ultimately collided with the resilience of Chile's institutions. In effect, as historical hindsight accumulated, the focus broadened from economic injustice to questions of political legitimacy.

Field-specific profiles add further insight. Memory and history writers, for instance, lead with dictatorship and transition narratives; for them, the unresolved trauma of state terror and the incomplete reckoning with it remain the decisive frame for decoding the present, with neoliberalism seen as just a continuation (subsumed into that longer *durée*). Thus, as in one conference about *estallido* in Valdivia, Gabriel Salazar has put it, "[w]e have had 11 attempts in our history, 11 attempts to give ourselves a political constitution. We are repeating the same issue, 11 times, and all have failed. It is not our fault. That is a repetition of history" (Field notes, 2024). Legal and constitutional analysts, by contrast, maintained a more evenly distributed engagement across all four narratives, underscoring their view that Chile's crisis is best understood as a single constitutional historical sequence: authoritarian rupture, defective transition, entrenched market law, and now a democracy in crisis. Sociologists and social movement theorists privileged neoliberalism and crisis-of-democracy themes (i.e., the decline of institutional legitimacy), focusing more on current failures of representation than on deeper historical wounds. Cultural and aesthetic critics dwelled on the symbolic after-images of dictatorship, yet were less invested in narrating the post-authoritarian *transition*, revealing that Chile's cultural field still struggles to make sense of the post-1990 decades. Feminist and labor scholarship directed its fiercest critiques at neoliberalism's assault on social

reproduction but addressed the transition in a markedly lighter key – corroborating the complaint by some interviewees that mainstream critiques “name neoliberalism without gendering it”. Finally, security and state-violence specialists drew a through-line from the dictatorship’s repressive apparatus to contemporary police tactics, treating neoliberal market reform mainly as context amplifying state violence. Intriguingly, the lighter cells in the matrix – the relative blind spots – point to where the uprising’s signifiers have yet to be fully theorized (for example, the intersectional dimensions of the revolt remain underdeveloped in analysis). Overall, the heat-map registers a dynamic tension: it shows which disciplinary conversations supplied the most affective traction for the Great Refusal (e.g. trauma-anchored memory studies and market-centered political economy indictments), and which remained tethered to hegemonic limits (e.g. hesitancy to interrogate the “stalled transition” or to foreground gender and indigenous fault-lines in the neoliberal model).

Reading the matrix diachronically sharpens its message especially through pre- vs. post-constitutional failure. The deepest neoliberal hues come from first-wave articles published between 2019 and 2022, when the uprising’s libidinal-economic critique (mostly structural grievances, inequalities, contextual factors and promises unfulfilled during the democracy period) was at its zenith. However, by 2024 interviews, those same critical-theory and sociology clusters had cooled noticeably, a disappointment gap that had opened once constitutional reform stalled and the horizon of transformation seemed to recede. Conversely, talk of a democracy in crisis intensifies in the later interviews, a retroactive admission that the revolt’s radical promise encountered, and perhaps revealed, the resilience of institutional logics. The matrix thus captures the passage from performative immediacy to reflexive self-critique: what began as an assault on the economic order broadens into a meditation on political legitimacy as historical hindsight accumulates therefore depoliticizes or reorients the current landscape.

In short, Figure 6.2 illustrates how Chile’s intellectual field both *energises* and *circumscribes* the meanings of the *estallido*, mapping the very terrain on which the *Great Refusal* continues to unfold. Disciplinary knowledge itself became a site of struggle: the interpretations of the *estallido* provided both critical fuel and inadvertent constraints for the ongoing narrative of refusal. Therefore, “*the embodiment of*

university knowledge, which falls apart in its encounter with the Real,” (Žižek, 2014, p. 20) which is the *estallido* as an event, becomes “*reversal of 'not yet' into 'always-already'*” (Žižek, 2014, p. 146). It then supplies the affective fuel for what further parts will term the *Act of Great Refusal* and which ones still orbit within hegemonic limits.

Table. 6.1: Mapping Intellectual Outcomes onto Core Cognitive-Political Narratives

Cognitive Narratives	Code-book layer (Master-Hegemonic and National-Political Narratives)	Sources/Intellectual Outputs
The “Economic Miracle”, “Oasis in the region” and “Normalcy” Myth (“Chile as Neoliberal Laboratory”), socioeconomic inequality, Aesthetic Disruption of Neoliberal Normalcy	End of Neoliberalism	(Castello, 2020; Villalobos-Ruminott 2020; Casals, 2021; Cobos, 2021; Somma et al. 2021; Alvarado Espina et al., 2023; Gordon-Zolov, 2023; Rebón & Ruiz Encina 2024)
Crisis of political and institutional legitimacy, Elite frame, Deep-Seated Discontent (or Interregnum)	Post-Politics	(Garcés, 2019; Güell, 2019; González & Le Foulon 2020; Schnbruch & Donoso, 2020; Somma et al. 2021; Julián-Vejar, 2022; Zuniga-Jara, 2022; Schild, 2023; Rebón & Ruiz Encina 2024)
Dictatorship Returns	End of Dictatorship	(Garcés, 2019; Karmy Bolton, 2019; Dragnic, 2020; Villalobos-Ruminott 2020; Casals, 2021; Charney et al. 2021, Schild, 2023)
Crisis of Representation / Hollow Democracy	End of Democracy	(Güell, 2019; Cuevas & Budrovich 2020; Garretón et al., 2020; Schnbruch & Donoso, 2020; Julián-Vejar, 2022)
Bad Promise of Transition	End of Transition	(Garcés, 2019; Castello, 2020; Dragnic, 2020; Villalobos-Ruminott 2020, Schild, 2023)
The “30 Pesos, 30 Years” Refusal and Dignity Demand and Pueblo Re-imagined (“New Pueblo”)	Signifier	(Garcés, 2019; Karmy Bolton, 2019; Ruiz Encina, 2020; Venables & Alfaro, 2022; Alvarado Espina et al., 2023)

State of emergency, Police Violence (Repression)	Signifier	(Karmy Bolton, 2019; Dammert & Sazo, 2020; Charney et al. 2021; Somma et al. 2021; Rebón & Ruiz Encina 2024)
Leaderless multi-class movement (Students, Women, Environmentalists, etc), Evade, jump, the biggest march in the history of Chile, point-of-no-return, populist and constituent moment.	Moment of Act	(González & Le Foulon 2020; Ruiz Encina, 2020; Palacios-Valladares, 2020; Villalobos-Ruminott 2020; Cobos, 2021; Julián-Vejar, 2022; Gordon-Zolov 2023)

Table 6.1 groups the twenty-four intellectual texts into five recurring storylines (Economic-Miracle Myth, Deep-Seated Discontent & Inequality, Dictatorship Trauma Returns, Crisis of Representation / Hollow Democracy, Bad Promise of Transition) and notes whether each works mainly at the level of broad political framing or at the level of the smaller, “cognitive” signifiers that give those frames emotional force. Set beside the heat-map in Figure 6.2, the table shows three things. First, it shows that critiques of deep inequality and of the dictatorship–neoliberal link come above all from political-economy and memory writers, whereas ideas about a “new pueblo” or a future beyond the market arise mainly in cultural, gender, and sociology studies. Second, it confirms that the most frequently used signifiers – dignidad, pueblo, violencia – cluster around the same narratives that Figure 6.2 marks as hottest, supporting the claim that the *Great Refusal* draws energy from the overlap of trauma, everyday distress, and utopian hope. Third, it highlights what is missing: with no clear external enemy like an old Cold-War, anti-Imperialist or anti-American master plot, and explicit talk of class struggle is rare, so the struggle became as much about internalized ideologies and desires as about external structures. In Marcuse’s terms, a one-dimensional language or thought of technocratic progress, for example inequality is debated yet the class antagonism that produces it is rarely named. The “big Other,” the post-transition consensus that said *there is no alternative*, that once organised Chilean politics—whether the party system, socialist transformation through democratic meanings or the promise of a modern economy—has lost credibility, yet nothing fully replaces it. Meanwhile intellectuals, positioned as “subjects supposed to know” try to fill that gap with new symbols, but their own writings show how fragile or asymptomatic those symbols remain and the narrative centre has become. In our inquiry, the intellectual field becomes precisely such a scene: their texts and interviews

do something to the event – they bind, stitch, and re-time it – rather than simply describe it.

This asymmetrical and complex historicism, if what this study's claim once settled in the master-hegemonic narratives of end of ideology and history can be obtained as, for example, the “end” narratives go back further than the post-Pinochet era. In the 1960s President Eduardo Frei Montalva promoted “*Revolución en Libertad*,” a Christian-democratic project that promised social reform without class war; a decade later Salvador Allende spoke of a “*Chilean road to socialism*,” a peaceful path that would avoid both Soviet authoritarianism and U.S. capitalism. Together these projects built the image of Chile as a country able to modernise by negotiation rather than rupture. So, in this sense, the frontier of each ends shows the symptomatic narratives of exceptionalism, the Chilean road, and a reformist tradition, and, under dictatorship, justifies the idea that a technocratic transition could one day restore the lost harmony.

The 2019–23 intellectual outputs revisits all of this in a sharply different key. Frei's and Allende's “paths” (although there were almost nothing in-depth examination of these historical narratives) now appear as early moments in a longer Bad Promise of Transition: each offered emancipation yet left major social questions unresolved, paving the way for the “miracle” narrative that neoliberal reformers later claimed. When today's authors dismantle the Economic-Miracle Myth they are also, implicitly, re-reading those earlier projects, showing how the promise of consensual progress has repeatedly masked enduring class divisions. In short, the new signifiers do not erase Frei's and Allende's stories; they turn them inside out, using their unfulfilled aspirations as evidence that Chile's “peaceful way” still ends in a dead end unless the underlying structure is confronted. Table 6.1 therefore prepares the ground for the close readings that follow: it marks the discursive space in which the Great Refusal seeks to break one-dimensional thought and reopen the question of collective agency. A full sheet is provided in Appendix 2 for readers who wish to see the complete works of intellectuals.

Taken together, more than a catalogue of topical preferences, intensity landscape, the heat-map and following table register the dynamic tension that drives the rest of this chapter. They show which disciplinary conversations supplied the

affective traction for the *Eros-Thanatos* politics, trauma-anchored readings of dictatorship in the memory field, or market-centred indictments in critical political economy –and which have remained tethered to hegemonic limits, hesitant to theorise the stalled transition or the gendered fault-lines of neoliberal rule and “never ending” accumulation process of history.

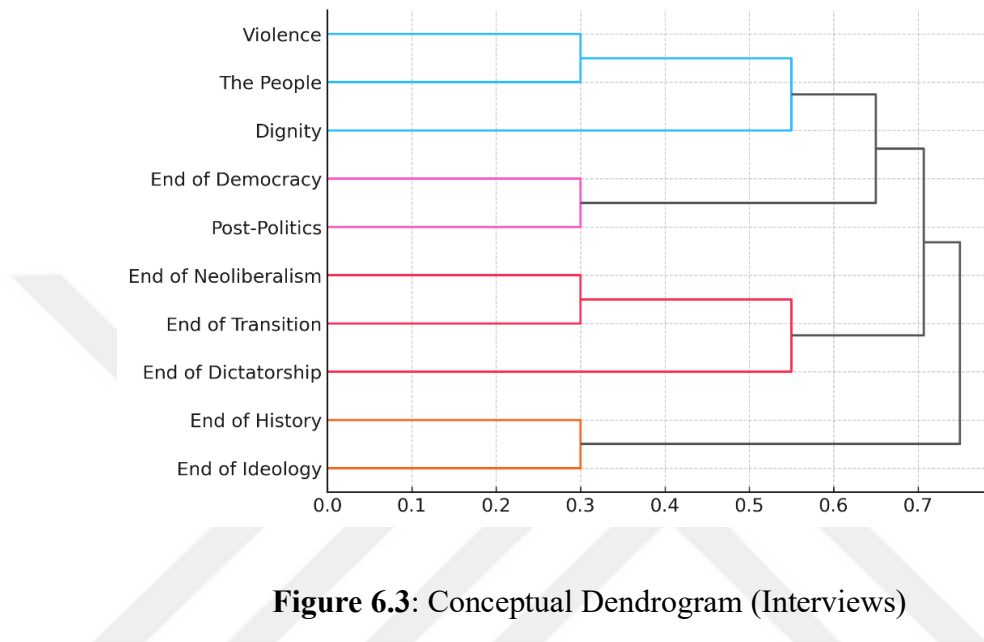


Figure 6.3: Conceptual Dendrogram (Interviews)

To further understand how I construct the matching narrative Figure 6.3 (Conceptual Dendrogram of Interviews) visualizes how the various “*end of X*” narratives clustered in our interviews. The figure shows the dendrogram style categorization as a way of taxonomy. Two principal branches organise the narrative. The historical-structural axis clusters from End-of-Dictatorship to End-of-Transition to End-of-Neoliberalism, confirming that interviewees read October 2019 as the unresolved terminus of a half-century neoliberal itinerary. A second ideological axis binds End-of-Ideology to End-of-History and folds into Post-Politics / End-of-Democracy: here, the voices diagnose a crisis of representation in which politics becomes technocratic management.

Perpendicular to these axes sits the dignity–people–violence triad, a short branch that condenses the lived affect of the *Great Refusal*: collective agency (‘pueblo’), the cry for recognition (‘dignidad’), and confrontation with neoliberal state force (‘violencia’). Their tight coupling explains why slogans and interviews alike treat dignity not as abstract ethics but as an embodied demand that surfaces precisely where

repression intensifies. Overall, the dendrogram corroborates the thesis argument that cognitive signifiers/narratives mediate between hegemonic “end” narratives and everyday antagonisms, thereby translating latent discontent into the symbolic act that ruptured Chile’s neoliberal common sense.

To complement the interview narratives and thematic coding, the analysis also draws on a systematic examination of protest inscriptions. Graffiti and banners were among the most visible and persistent forms of expression during the *estallido*, occupying walls, metro stations, and public squares across the country. They functioned both as immediate political statements and as a running record of the movement’s evolving priorities, emotions, and targets. By transcribing and coding 558 examples (Otárola, 2019), it becomes possible to trace not only the most frequent topics and enemies named in the streets, but also how different strands of the uprising’s political imagination connected with each other in concrete, everyday language. Figure 6.4 summarises the frequency of these coded categories, offering a snapshot of the *estallido*’s narrative economy.

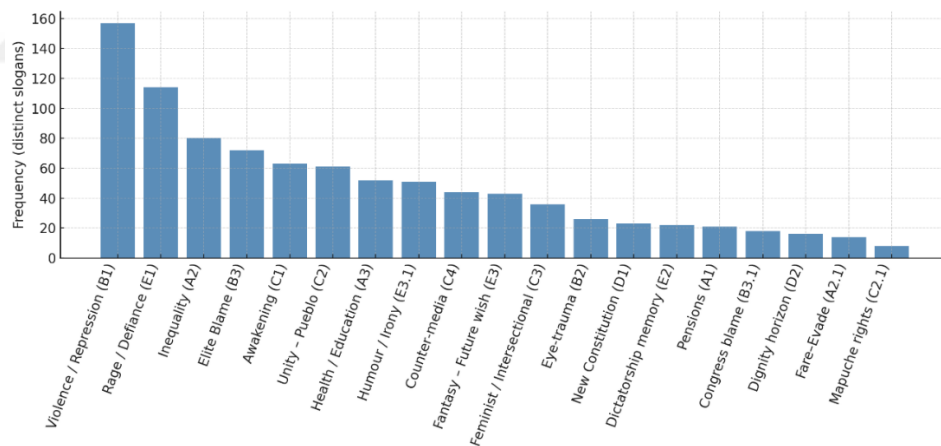


Figure 6.4: Frequency of coded graffiti and banner categories (n = 558)

The 558 manually transcribed graffiti and banner texts form a compact mirror of the *estallido*’s narrative economy. Their profile is unambiguous: references to police and military repression stand at the apex, with 157 slogans (28 per cent) invoking bullets, tear-gas, or the now-emblematic loss of eyes. Close behind, 153 graffiti and banners (27 per cent) denounce the everyday violence of pensions, debt, fares, medicines, and stagnant wages, signalling that the “neoliberal laboratory” has become

the principal antagonist of Chilean common sense. A third cluster, 139 graffitis and banners (25 per cent), turns its fire on presidents, parliament, and mainstream media, announcing a wholesale crisis of legitimacy that outstrips the older (end of transition (*fin de la transición*) trope of “thirty pesos / thirty years.” Finally, 124 graffitis and banners (22 per cent) speak in the first-person plural—*Chile despertó, El pueblo unido*—marking the emergence of a collective subject that seizes the historical stage once the other three ruptures have been named. Even though in the wall-text corpus the last three recurrent elements – *Evade*, *Mapuche*, and *Dignity* – appear with comparatively lower frequency, their political and symbolic weight far exceeds their textual count and also according to context they appeared in the more general categories like in the first three of the cluster. Firstly, the portion of the text I took all graffitis and wall texts from singularly can no capture the dynamism of the power of the articulation on the walls. So, for example, according to Terri Gordon, an interdisciplinary scholar who works at the intersections of memory studies, gender studies, and cultural production, whom I interviewed with said “*Evade! was all over the walls that developed, and artists took to the streets. [...] an explosion of body expressivity*” (Interview with Gordon, 2024). *Evade* was the opening repertoire of the *estallido* – an embodied act of mass fare evasion that catalysed the uprising before textual slogans fully emerged – its meaning carried more in practice than in inscription. *Dignity* was not only written but spatialised in the renaming of Plaza Baquedano as Plaza Dignidad⁴⁷ and later institutionalised in formations such as the left-wing coalition *Aprueba Dignidad*, moving from a mental register to a spatial and political one. And also, it was one of the opening articles in first draft of the new constitution. *Mapuche*, meanwhile, appeared most powerfully in the visual field through the constant presence of the Mapuche flag alongside the Chilean flag, making it a central emblem of plurinational claims and territorial memory even if rarely inscribed in words. In this sense, these three elements operated as generative nodes that shifted the revolt from signifier to scene, from caption to embodied performance, and from immediate claim to longer-term political imagination.

⁴⁷ Better known as Plaza Italia and renamed de facto to Plaza Dignidad during the protests by protestors. This square is often considered the unofficial “dividing line” of Santiago. To the west lie the older, more densely populated, and generally less affluent central and western neighborhoods, while to the east are the wealthier, more modern, and sprawling eastern municipalities (like Providencia, Las Condes, Vitacura). This geographical marker has made it a powerful symbol of the city's significant socioeconomic inequalities.

In this regard, the wall texts enfold Marcuse's "Great Refusal" and Žižek's notion of the traumatic Act in a single frame. The raw imagery of mutilated eyes provides the irruption of the Real that shatters the regime's liberal narrative; the insistence on *dignidad* and *pueblo* sutures otherwise disparate grievances into a symbolic point around which new political desire can coagulate. Equally telling is the competition among historical "endings." Lines such as "El neoliberalismo nace y muere en Chile" or "El sistema nos está matando" appear with greater frequency than references to dictatorship trauma or the broken promise of the democratic transition, suggesting that the primary temporal horizon against which the revolt measures itself is the collapse of the neoliberal order rather than an incomplete reckoning with 1973.

Affective texture reinforces this reading. Among the slogans driven by a single, unambiguous mood, present-tense melancholy outnumbers backward-looking nostalgia by four to one, while future-oriented fantasy statements – "A different end of the world is possible" (*Un fin de mundo distinto es posible*), "Daydream so you don't live asleep" (*Sueña despierto para no vivir dormido*) – sit almost exactly between the two. The corpus, therefore, stages the very psychic oscillation theorised in this final chapter: a swing from disillusion with the immediate impasse to an as-yet-undefined desire, with only a marginal retreat into golden-age longing.

In sum, the wall inscriptions demonstrate that state repression, material precarity, institutional discredit, and popular self-assertion are not analytical abstractions but publicly legible facts, inscribed in real time on the surfaces of Santiago. Their distribution lends empirical weight to the dissertation's argument that the *estallido* ruptures four intertwined "ends": of democracy, of dictatorship, of neoliberal ideology, of the post-transition pact, and of history understood as elite monopoly.

Having mapped the public visibility of signifiers on the city's walls, I now turn to the interviews to test whether the cognitive layer voiced by 'subjects-supposed-to-know' aligns with, or contests, that wall-text archive. The design here is intentional: collapsing the slogan codes into four rupture-narratives (state repression, neoliberal antagonism, legitimacy crisis, collective awakening) allows a direct juxtaposition with the interview 'heat-map' and keeps the Marcusean-Žižekian reading grounded in parallel evidence streams.

This part was the semantic support for the further interpretation of the narrative. The next part will be the interpretation of these narratives into the new narrative arc of the *estallido*. The narrative arc of the *estallido* can be analytically plotted through four distinct but interconnected moments of refusal as “*changing of the history of its present*”. These moments are not merely sequential phases but represent the progressive deepening of a singular political gesture. Together, they trace the narrativization of the event, revealing the temporal and political logic of the rupture. Each moment builds upon the last, dialectically negating the established order while projecting a new political horizon. This process exposes the limits of institutional politics, ruptures hegemonic narratives, and demonstrates how the repressed historical content of popular struggle returns to interrupt the official narratives of “ends.” So, in basic terms, these moments are “what happened before” to “what the *Estallido* forces us to understand about what happened before.”

In the following sections, these interventions will be exposed through observations made during fieldwork and the cumulative sum from the interview corpus that could catch the moments: the negation, the rupture, the containment, and the transformation, hence how they were utilized for oppressive ends. As Jameson has already mentioned the importance of “*periodization and its categories*” in crisis just like today, “*the status of an individual “period” in which everything becomes so seamlessly interrelated that we confront either a total system or an idealistic “concept” of a period; and a diachronic one, in which history is seen in some “linear” way as the succession of such periods, stages, or moments*” (Jameson, 1983, p. 13). Hence, the individual period formulation as such secretly implies the narrative that I seek. In basic terms, the following sections will be the fixed realities within the temporalities of moments. Returning to our main research question, then, will help us to bring gains and lacks in the act of refusal.

6.1. Moment I – Negation: Changing the Desire

Desire-reorientation is a collective movement from administered enjoyment toward a transformed libidinal economy (Marcuse 1966; Kellner 2019; Bailes 2020). As it can be remembered, Marcuse casts the “Great Refusal” as both a protest against unnecessary repression (*Eros and Civilization*) and an elemental political *No* to a rigged (game) social order (ODM) – a refusal underwritten by a new sensibility that

negates system – sustaining needs and affirms erotic/aesthetic-political forms of life. This philosophical stance directly reflects the spirit of a “great refusal” – a rejection without necessarily a pre-defined affirmative alternative. Bailes (2020) clarifies how contemporary subjects rationalize and accept neoliberal conditions; ideology endures as both unconscious attachment and conscious justification, implying that transforming desire requires interrupting these dual supports. Hence, in the line of projection of the given Chilean status quo starting from 1973 onwards, the *estallido* can be described as a historical moment of radical negation (refusal) that remains open and irreducible, compelling recognition of conflict and exclusion. Concretely, the immediate ignition sequence is clear: the fare hike fixed by the Expert Panel on 4 October 2019 became a spark that secondary-school students translated into mass fare evasions beginning 6 October, stitching dispersed irritations into a single sentence – “No son 30 pesos, son 30 años” – that reframed a price rise as a thirty-year indictment. Even after the government reversed the rise on 19 October, exceptional measures remained, signalling that the object of refusal had already outgrown the pesos and converged on dignity. This is why the square itself was re-named—Plaza Baquedano became Plaza Dignidad—and why the slogan corpus elevates “Dignidad,” “No son 30 años,” and “Ni perdón ni olvido” as quilting points that link memory, justice and everyday survival to a moral project.

This first moment represents the subjective awakening, the point at which accumulated “*refuse to pay*” was transformed into a collective political demand. It is the moment captured in the uprising's most iconic slogan: “*¡Chile despertó!*” (Chile woke up!). This popular slogan is central, as I prefer to call it the master-slogan of the *estallido*. This narrative frames the *estallido* as the end of a long period of political passivity and the awakening to a “*collective awareness*” that well-being is not just a personal responsibility but a shared, social one against the neoliberal model of the Chilean people inherited from Pinochet's dictatorship. It also captured the sense that a “*it's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years*” slogan, the population long considered apathetic or resigned, had suddenly thrown off the ideological spell of the “Chilean miracle” (the idea that Chile's neoliberal model was an unquestionable success), expanding the field of the imaginary regarding what was possible. According to our perspective, this totality gives the moment a repoliticization and post-neoliberal desire under the changing desire praxis with a concurrent reinventing of the historical context. Macro

pressure comes from undoing post-politics, and the Chile-centred meso anchor is positioned at the end of the transition.

The interviews converge on an initial reorientation of desire rather than a shift of opinion. Participants from sociology, law, and political science describe the *estallido* as an ethical refusal of the everyday arrangement that privatized risk and humiliation while calling it “normal.” The condensation “no son 30 pesos, son 30 años” functions as a nodal point that gathers transit costs, indebted education, precarious wages, and failing pensions into a shared diagnosis of broken transition – a recognition that the post-1990 bargain did not deliver on its promise of dignity. In Marcusean terms, what is negated first is the administration of enjoyment that trained subjects to accept atomized “solutions”; desire is rebound from private coping toward public being-together. This is why ‘negation’ in this thesis is not mere rejection but a libidinal re-patterning that changes what feels livable.

On October 4, 2019, an Expert Panel of the Ministry of Transportation and Communication that regulates public transportation prices announced a new tariff system with a package of changes, including a 30-peso increase (%0.279 increase, i.e., 0.3 USD) in metro fare hikes in Santiago, Chile’s capital (Diario Oficial, 2019; “Transporte público anuncia”, 2019). The changes were going to lower prices during off-peak hours, but raise them by 30 pesos during peak hours, bringing the cost of a single trip to as much as 830 pesos (\$1.17 USD). This was the fourth price increase in two years for one of the world's most expensive public transport systems. According to INE (Supplementary Income Survey ESI 2018), half of the workers in Chile earned less than 400,000 pesos per month. For residents of Santiago, almost a quarter of their monthly income was already being spent on transport. And, in 2019, the working Chilean spent of their monthly budget on transportation costs was %13.8 (Cadiz, 2019). The most recent OECD (2024) Gini figures place Chile firmly within the organisation’s three most unequal economies: on a 0–1 scale (0 = perfect equality), its coefficient remains near the extreme end, far above the OECD mean and only marginally surpassed by a handful of peers. This persistent position in the inequality “top three” underlines how the neoliberal model critiqued throughout this thesis continues to reproduce deep structural disparities.

On the other hand, as sociologist Carlos Ruiz Encina points out, there was “no

specific economic crisis” in 2019 – Chile enjoyed one of the highest per capita incomes in the region and a veneer of macroeconomic success. Yet this prosperity narrative masked profound inequalities and daily indignities. “Healthcare, pensions, education, everything is broken,” Ruiz Encina observes, noting that ordinary Chileans experienced the fruits of the “miracle” as poor public services and insecure livelihoods (Interview with Encina, 2024). In reality, Chile’s vaunted middle class was mired in debt and precariousness, the working class faced stagnant wages, and basic rights remained privatized and stratified. As soon as people opened their eyes to these conditions, indignation set in: “*They just saw the inequality [...] as soon as they realized it, they said ‘Enough’*,” recounts Paul Marshall, highlighting a widespread awakening to social injustice (Interview with Marshall, 2024).

The elite narrative starts from now on, like a still-consistent neoliberal *Other* perspective through Chile. For this, looking to market-friendly business press (as neoliberal *Others*) gives the momentary gaze, such as *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg*, *Forbes*, and *The Economist* repeatedly portrayed Chile as Latin America’s “*economic miracle*,” an “*oasis*” of macro-stability, and the region’s most credit-worthy democracy (“Best Countries for Business 2018: Chile,” 2018; “IMF rates Chile at top,” 2018; Wallace, 2019), directly in line with this neoliberal *Others’* right-wing representation in Chile; President Sebastián Piñera said just before the protests gained national and worldwide attention:

“Look at Latin America [...] Argentina and Paraguay are in recession, Mexico and Brazil in stagnation, Peru and Ecuador in deep political crisis, and in this context, Chile looks like an oasis because we have a stable democracy, the economy is growing, we are creating jobs, we are improving salaries, and we are keeping macroeconomic balance.” (Scott and Mander, 2019)

This “oasis” narrative was also one of the predominant narratives in the articles and, notably, knowledge production about *estallido*. According to Žižek, a complementary act or moment of “*contingent upheaval*” in politics, “*is an Event when it gives rise to a commitment of the collective subject to a new universal emancipatory project and thereby sets in motion the patient work of restructuring society*” (Žižek, 2014, p. 180). A performative break that redefines politics as embodied refusal and breaks away not only with its one-dimensionality and its persistent confidence in the end of history, but also with its specificity in triumphalist discourses about the Chilean oasis, its stability, its prosperity, and its democratic institutionality in which any

demand or aspiration will find a place. And for Marcuse, only if men live “*in need of changing their way of life, of denying the positive, of refusing*” and “*find their way from false to true consciousness*” then the antagonism between the people (or as Marcuse calls society) versus the state wouldn’t lose its “*critical connotation*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. xiv).

Giving to its “*critical connotation*”, then, “*the end in the beginning*” (Paz, 1990, p. 178) was on October 7, when the first Monday following the fare increase, the first evading acts began with around 50 high school students from National Institute (Institute Nacional) initiated and encouraged large-scale fare evasion on the metro, chanting *Evade, don't pay, another way of fight!* (*¡Evadir, no pagar, otra forma de luchar!*). On the following, especially between 14 October and 16 October, massive acts of evasion by students expanded to other high schools and merged with ten metro stations. This refusal quickly gained traction, with metro users of various ages joining the evasion. These acts of defiance, initially dismissed by authorities, served as the primary form of refusal, a symbolic and physical “jump” over the barriers of the established order that would soon shake the entire nation, “*a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world*” (Marcuse, 2000, p. 6).

“The first slogan, 'Evade, don't pay, another way to fight,' was new and had not existed in the repertoire, in Chilean historical memory. (Interview with Garces, 2024)

In this sense, negation becomes a daily practice and event along with a creative slogan and act. It also brings the moment when the past erupts into the present with the swiftness of a ‘*tiger's leap*’ just like Benjamin predicted. Students call to evade the metro and make refusal into a shared act, “*and it's [commission of experts] such a technical, so closed, so bureaucratic and so neoliberal rationality at the same time, that it excludes any social value of transportation... I think that's where the trigger part begins*” (Interview with Julian-Vejar, 2024). In response to “neoliberal” rationality, this can be translated as a dialectical negation of the dominant political economy, which ends with the comprehension of the objective conditions of the society and all of its tendencies, possibilities, and the limits of political action.

Accordingly, right at this junction, it was on October 18, 2019, when the event reached a breaking point. The protests revealed widespread anger that had long been hidden beneath Chile's image as a successful neoliberal country, and everyone started to “*speak the language of the students*” (Kellner, 2005, p. 101). This powerful event was “intense,” “transformative,” and “disruptive,” full of sights, sounds, symbols, and feelings that deeply impacted society. The protest started as a peaceful gathering, but soon escalated as some protesters confronted the police. By evening, several metro stations were set on fire, visually representing the underlying social tensions. An informal conversation with a local journalist from Valdivia, the capital city of the Los Ríos region located south of Chile, recalls “[i]t's because for me, the *Estallido Social* is that Friday night when metro stations exploded” (Field notes, 2024). Also, showing the space-time dimension of the event, especially when it became the 18-O protests.

In the heat of the uprising, many interviewees spoke from the event with a performative charge that helped constitute a new social desire. After the question “*which moments were most significant to you?*”, many interviewees agreed on, from a participatory observation standpoint, “*the moment of joy*” of the *estallido* was certainly on 25 October 2019, the march of the million (*la marcha del millón*). This massive demonstration in Santiago, gathering over a million people, is consistently cited as a highly significant and historic peak moment. For example, Donoso's, and for many, experience of the October 25th march as “huge” and “diverse,” involving “average Chileans,” underscores the widespread nature of the discontent, making it impossible for the government to simply blame “a few radicals”:

“It was huge, and I felt like everyone was in the streets. And it was very diverse.” (Interview with Donoso, 2024).

“October 25th... That was the peak moment. There was truly a lot of joy, happiness, optimism, that was October 25th...” (Interview with Joignant, 2024).

“The people can only act through institutions: through an election, for example, or through representative institutions. So, the president passes a law, and that is, in a way, the law of the people approved by the people through various elections, the parliament, and the president, and so on. But, and this is interesting, it can also be applied to certain events, the actions of the people. And I would say that the only time the people really acted was on October 25th” (Interview with Marshall, 2024).

“... and I was in heaven, because I thought neoliberalism was coming to an end. How can it not come to an end when the first march I went to was a march that started in Viña, in Lima, and another one in Valparaíso” (Interview with Schield, 2024).

“And a week after the estallido began on Friday the 25th, there was that massive demonstration which we hadn’t seen anything like that in Chile, I think, since the days of Unidad Popular. And that surprised us all. It made it clear that this was something significant.” (Interview with Garces, 2024)

More to this, on YouTube, a video uploaded later day received 848 thousand views, described as:

“On October 25, 2019, the PEOPLE of Chile expressed their discontent and their desire for a dignified and peaceful life, demanding respect for human rights and the departure of the heads of government through music, the sound of their instruments and their voices singing the song by Victor Jara, who was a horrific victim of the Pinochet dictatorship, the right to live in peace.” (“El derecho de vivir en paz”, 2019)

The joy (refusal and Eros) and melancholic narrative here clarifies the fantasy expressed in the protests' general demands for “radical change” and the ruthless critique of everything. Juan Pablo Venables, a sociologist involved with the *estallido* through his work on education, neoliberalism, and return of “the people”, unequivocally states that the event “*shook the ground of our convictions*” (Interview with Venables, 2024). This prior state of conviction, often tied to the perceived “end of history” or “end of ideology” narratives in a supposedly stable neoliberal Chile, implied a certain resignation to the status quo. However, the *estallido*, for him and “many people,” “generated a horizon of expectations for transformation that they wanted to be a part of”. This personal commitment translated into tangible participation: “*I went to the marches every day, every single one*”. He recalls that “*during the outburst, what predominated was hope. It was a, let's say, an optimistic vision. It was, it was the possibility of a future, right? The possibility of a different future opened up*”. This profound emotional and intellectual shift from the pre-*estallido* state of *discontent* and ideological closure into an active, hopeful demand for a radically different future epitomizes the transformation. In the post-political age, where the negation of Chile is negated as a neoliberal ideological illusion projected as a model to be followed for the whole world, then

In this regard, there is also some narrative around the post-politics subject that defines the *estallido* and the long-run neoliberal subjectivity, then *the people* participated regardless:

“But I mean for some people the issue of the AFPs, for example, or healthcare, they’re not thinking in terms of “neoliberal,” or “anti-neoliberal.” They’re thinking about the fact that they’re in debt because of medical expenses. For some people, it’s just about their everyday reality. Their debt is too high. Not everyone has a political consciousness or an ideology or even knows what they want. They just refuse.” (Interview with Palacios, 2024)

“In the social sciences here in Chile... [we] shared the feeling that things were not going well politically and socially. There was a disconnect between citizens, the people, and their representatives. I wouldn’t say we were expecting something big to happen, but many people felt something was off.” (Interview with Disi Pavlic, 2024)

“What the dictatorship does is to generate a mostly individualistic being, who does not see collective solutions to their individual problems, but rather sees only individual solutions. We are not only an economic experiment, we are also an ideological experiment.” (Interview with Alvarado Espina, 2024)

“We are super individualized and we believe that no one can represent us...” (Interview with Venables, 2024)

“It wasn’t a rebellion against a specific policy that Piñera had implemented; it was exhaustion, a weariness with the way life itself was being managed. I think that’s specific to this moment in Latin America, not just Chile.” (Interview with Pinochet Cobos, 2024)

Together, these testimonies define the object of the Great Refusal not as a specific policy but as an entire subjective and structural condition. The “disconnect” and the feeling that “something was off” are the empirical signatures of a Marcusean one-dimensional society. This was not a society at peace, but one where profound social antagonism was managed under a post-political consensus, producing a latent but pervasive discontent. As it is stated, this was the result of a deliberate “ideological experiment” to create an “individualistic being” incapable of perceiving “collective solutions.” The *estallido* was therefore a negation of this very subject. The “exhaustion” was not merely economic but existential – a refusal of “the way life itself was being managed.” This was the core of the post-neoliberal desire: a collective, erotic impulse to break with the atomization of the neoliberal order and, as another interviewee put it, begin “*constructing a community subject.*”

The interviewees consistently link the energy of the revolt to a powerful act of

imagination. Whether it's the fantasy of collective self-creation, political maturation, or the destitution of the old order, fantasy is not an escape from reality but the very thing that makes a rupture with reality possible.

In this moment of acts, negation materializes through a repertoire that innovated (fare evasion) and revived (*cabildos*), condensing refusal into shared practice. Firstly, in the context of the *estallido*, *cabildos abiertos* were informal, self-organised assemblies or meetings that sprang up across Chile, held between October and November 2019 (Fuentes, 2019), serving as spaces for collective discussion and decision-making during the protests. The term itself carries significant historical weight in Chile, harking back to colonial times when cities gathered in *cabildos*, town councils, to make autonomous decisions, particularly during moments of political flux, such as Napoleon's invasion of Spain. This historical resonance framed them as a “return to that historical memory” and a reclaiming of direct political participation. In the event of an *estallido* in Valdivia, Gabriel Salazar explained this historical concept in detail. *Cabildos* are the mythic foundation of the people (*el pueblo*)⁴⁸. But *pueblo*, in this first moment, means *town* in Spanish. So, when someone back then talked about *pueblo(s)*, it meant the local communities gathered in town councils or assemblies (Field notes, 2024). Therefore, the gratification that comes from the “seed” and “myth” of this history becomes the main element of repoliticisation. It is obviously a long history that includes “popular” movements of Latin America, and especially in Chile, with the exclusion of the working class and of popular movements that were crushed under the first dictatorship, and then with the “peaceful” transition logic of post-political consensus. As a participant-observer, a prominent historian in Chile, Mario Garces remembers these moments:

“And then came something that was more systematic: the assemblies started to emerge. I was invited to about five or six assemblies in different neighborhoods. So, I went, I was in La Granja, I was in Villa Francia, I was in Ñuñoa, in two in Ñuñoa, in Villa Olímpica. I was in relatively emblematic places, in conversations, some in squares, others on a street corner, others in a closed

⁴⁸ The conceptualization of the collective social actor is complex. While this work employs *el pueblo* (the people) to emphasize an emergent, dynamic force, it's relevant to note other terms often discussed in analyses of social groups, particularly in contexts of unrest or inequality. These include, among others: 'anomic youth', 'lumpen', 'precariat', 'mass', 'multitude', 'citizenship', and terms designating excluded groups (such as 'below people').

space. It was interesting that the phase stimulated me a lot because it was more about conversation. And I think after a week, I started going once or twice a week to Plaza de la Dignidad (Dignity Square), and there it was also a bit between social, a bit festive, and also from my analytical perspective, I went to listen, to observe, to feel what was happening there.” (Interview with Garces, 2024)

A defining characteristic of the *cabildos* was their spontaneous, decentralised, and horizontal structure. Unlike traditional political movements with clear leadership or party affiliations, the *estallido* was largely “leaderless” and “without visible organizations” in its initial phase. Maria Angelica Illanes emphasises that there was “no construction of leadership” but rather “cabildos” mobilising “all the people [...] in all the territories” (Interview with Illanes, 2024). This leaderless aspect was seen by some as a strength, allowing for a more authentic expression of popular will, free from the mediation of established political parties, which were often met with an “anti-establishment” sentiment on the streets.

Right at this junction, the protests addressed some shortcomings in collective action; the remembering of dictatorship reverberated against “an inattention to history,” and the political process embodied itself with a concrete constituent assembly for dignified life by the people’s resilience fight for justice and equality with an urging antagonist stance against neoliberalism or global capitalism by experiencing “failure of failure” par excellence “as narrative pretext for the emergence of different ways of living” (Fisher, 2009, p. 2).

“Everyone sees the way to get rid of the obstacle, and yet, nonetheless, no one wants to remove it, as if there is some kind of pathological libidinal profit gained by persisting in the deadlock” (Žižek, 2004, p. 321).

Negated moment is the high-intensity rise of repoliticisation and post-neoliberal desire organized by dignity and the people, confirmed by spatial renaming and mass presence. In this moment, most of these voices are performative. They do not only describe; they take part.

Across interviews, dignidad emerges as a new master-signifier (S1) that permits disparate injuries to be linked without being reduced to a single policy demand. Rather than being defined top-down, its content is performed: in kitchens

and cabildos, at bus stops and plazas, people test what “dignity” could mean when pensions, fares, and domestic care are treated as collective matters. Several interviewees stress that this felt like tasting a different desire: once bodies learned to prefer mutual presence over atomized coping, the inherited injunction to consume/commute/comply lost authority. This is the “new sensibility” in Marcuse’s sense—an aesthetic-ethical register where Eros is bound to solidaristic forms of life rather than to privatized survival (Ruiz, 2021).

In sum, it is a change in desire that is visible in three plain ways: an awakening that people can say out loud, a new reading of the last decades, and a set of practices and words – *evadir, cacerolazo, cabildo, dignidad, pueblo, Plaza Dignidad, marcha del millón* – that hold the break together. This prepares the ground for second moment, where the state responds with “war” talk and emergency and where the same voices that helped name the awakening are forced to decide how to speak inside a confrontation.

There is, however, a first gap I can name here. The cognitive universal (“dignity”) runs ahead of the national narrative it is trying to rewrite. Interviewees can articulate the 30-year link and even stretch it to 50 years, but when they turn to concrete distribution (*AFP, debt, metro fares*), they return to sectoral examples and let the ethical universal do the “quilting” work, therefore challenging simplistic narratives that solely blame Pinochet for neoliberalism, emphasizing its broader support and acceptance due to economic gains:

“The people who actually implemented the plan were the center-left coalition that governed for the next 20 years. And during those years, Chile experienced rapid economic growth. So, it was difficult to argue for a change in the model when your GDP, your per capita income, and your poverty rate were improving so quickly.” (Interview with Marshall, 2024).

As it was the case that, in the first moment, like in intellectual outcomes, they were also very much hinged to the Eros-charged moments.

In affective terms, fantasy is strong, and nostalgia is medium (repertoires, songs, memories, Plaza renaming), but the translation from ethical universal to institutional architecture is deferred. When “No son 30 pesos, son 30 años” stretches to 50 years,

and “Chilean awakening” comes together, then interviewees leap back to recharge the present to end the narrative.

“...narratively speaking, it's not 30 years, but 50 years... But what's interesting is the connection between the metro fare increase of 30 pesos and the slogan 'It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years. And the relationship between 30 pesos and 30 years also makes sense because we expected everything to change after the fall of the dictatorship, but that didn't happen.’” (Interview with Illanes, 2024).

It appears that the differentiation between the rational, historical understanding that the model is 50 years old, and the spontaneous, political genius of the slogan, which powerfully critiqued the post-dictatorship (30-year) period of unfulfilled promises. This shows a nuanced understanding of how political slogans function emotionally and historically, not just rationally. However, the symptomatic place of the end of neoliberalism cannot then grasp the frontier of the end of dictatorship and the end of transition narratives. Therefore, the main shift in the desire of the *estallido* (and the people) is that the “traumatic” and “erotic” coming together brought the symbolic dimension of the country down. And this line predominantly generates a cognitive narratization of bipolarity within the knowledge of the *estallido*. Therefore, the image of neoliberal governmentality and “*there is no alternative*” collapses only in the imaginary political sense, but not in the Real.

The corpus consistently demythologizes Chilean exceptionalism. The celebrated image of stability and meritocracy appears, in these accounts, as the ideological fantasy that masked generalized uncertainty: long commutes, indebtedness, precarious jobs, gendered care burdens, and the anxiety of aging into a pension scheme that so often fails. Here, melancholy and nostalgia are not simply regressive. They return as a negative mirror: the memory of curfews and authoritarian policing clarifies how much “normality” has continued to tolerate. In this first moment, loss is re-tooled into solidarity. Desire is now organized around dignidad and its public performance; in turn, this makes the Act (Moment II) legible as more than “disorder,” namely, as the cut that forces democracy to show its underside. Put differently, the Great Refusal becomes empirically visible as the reorganization of the thinkable and the desirable, the necessary hinge on which rupture will swing.

As reinventing-history is tied to dignidad/pueblo, with fantasy as the active affect. The leap clarifies desire faster than institutions can follow. That deferral is not

a flaw of the movement; it is part of the Great Refusal form that the signifier clarifies desire faster than institutions can follow. I therefore move to rupture, where the performative speech of the interviewees collides with the traumatic Real of state force – testing whether the intellectual act can endure as Act, or whether it will be retroactively domesticated by the university discourse’s knowledge-power matrix.

6.2. Moment II – Rupture: Repetition of Violence & Democracy

What comes around as a “rupture” name the Act in the Žižekian sense: the traumatic irruption that breaks the coordinates of the symbolic, returning the repressed (dictatorship, state violence) within democracy. What appears as a sudden “security response” is the repetition of a historical violence – now *in* a democratic key. This section tracks both sides of the rupture and shows, through the voices of “subjects supposed to know,” how their performative utterances (speaking as the event) later turn reflexive (codifying the event). The theoretical lenses at work here are those already established in the thesis: Marcuse’s Great Refusal (new sensibility, reorganization of desire) and Žižek’s Act (the Real breaking in; repetition of violence as structural). Chronologically, the rupture hardened within days: curfews on 20–21 October and Piñera’s “estamos en guerra” named an enemy and accelerated the passage from grievance to antagonism; the national strike of 21 October generalized refusal across workplaces. The executive’s cabinet changes on 28–29 October conceded the scale of the break while attempting to channel it; the cancellations of APEC and COP25 (30–31 October) exported the logistical cost while Chile internalized the symbolic surplus of 2019. A second general strike on 12 November widened the front, and by late November and mid-December, HRW and OHCHR reports had inscribed police repression into the official record. On the ground, Plaza Dignidad’s “street-museum”—murals, paste-ups, and the ubiquitous “Eyes” posters – reversed victimhood into a collective vision, as documented by the Museo del Estallido.

Rupture moment is frequently narrated as a contest between “violence” and “democracy.” This moment tries to identify a different logic of what *estallido* succeeded through which violence and democracy are co-present and internally related in the rupture, and also in the late capitalist logic of “*terrifying harmony of freedom and oppression*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 128).

In this line, the consensus among the intellectuals interviewed for this study is that the *estallido* of October 2019 constituted a profound and pivotal rupture in the nation's contemporary history. From the general look of the interviews, it was immediately perceived as a “*historic moment for Chile*”, though one defined by a powerful “*ambiguity*”. Its scale and “*intensity*” surprised the academic community and shocked most people, with many finding the initial phase unexpected and quite confusing. This sense of disorientation was so profound, as Marcelo Casals (Interview, 2024) noted, that observers felt “*we didn't even have the concepts to signify*” the events as they unfolded. As it proves, just like Marcuse has put it: “*the theoretical concepts terminate with social change*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. xii).

Along with the interview corpus, altogether, this rupture was characterized by a potent affective duality. On one hand, it unleashed an initial period of intense “*optimism*,” “*hope*,” and vibrant “*creativity and energy*”. On the other hand, this collective effervescence was met with an “*excessive action by the state*,” a level of police violence that many found traumatic, reigniting painful memories of the dictatorship. This dynamic fueled a collective “*outrage*” and a deep sense of “*anger and resentment*”, hardening into a widespread “*rejection of anything that came from anyone in a position of power*”.

Bearing the above context in mind, rupture begins when the sovereign voice re-signifies the people as an enemy. Interviewees converge on the turning point: Piñera's “war” rhetoric and the rapid state of emergency with troops on the streets.

“*When Piñera went on television and said, ‘We’re at war,’ he talked about this ‘powerful, invisible enemy.’ I think it was the commander-in-chief of the military, he said something like, ‘I’m not at war with anyone’*” (Interview with Donoso, 2024).

“*The government overreacted. They declared a state of emergency, they deployed the military, and they put the military in charge of things that had always been handled by civilians. And I think that was very symbolic*” (Interview with Palacios, 2024).

“*... after 17 years of dictatorship, with the military still very loyal to Pinochet, the threat of a return to military intervention was certainly significant; it slowed down the transformation process.*” (Interview with Marshall, 2024)

“*We hadn’t seen the army in the streets since the dictatorship. For some people, it was traumatic seeing the army back on the streets.*” (Interview with González Toro, 2024)

“[The state’s reaction] was repressive, widely repressive. First, the president at the time declared a state of constitutional exception. This created a moment where we basically had a city taken [Santiago] over by the military. That, in Chile, hadn’t existed since the dictatorship. I mean, no government, the democratic governments, had used this tool.” (Interview with Alvarado Espina, October 2022)

The President’s “*we are in war against a powerful, implacable enemy*”, a state of emergency, and soldiers in the city mark a sovereign also cut that several interviewees describe as the dictatorship’s grammar inside democracy as if repressing the Real of trauma within the mixture of feelings of melancholy and concern:

“In Chile, the transition, you could say that they negotiated everything, including memory. It’s like in these important cultural institutions, they’ve tried to control memory to suppress it. And I’m increasingly drawn to this whole field of the silences of memory in Chile...” (Interview with Garces, 2024)

“[...] there are the weeks leading up to November 15th, those were the weeks when you could just feel it in the air, this discussion, this murmuring about the possible deployment of the military to control certain types of protests that went beyond simple protest that bordered on looting, on crime. And those were very complex situations. And I’m going back on what I said earlier, but there was a moment, a brief moment of historical memory, so to speak, that was present, but it was only during that week.” (Interview with Freire, 2024)

The “war” utterance is an Act in the sovereign sense, and it redraws the friend/enemy line and repeats the dictatorship’s grammar inside democracy. In Lacanian terms, this “war” sutures a police/military jouissance – the obscene enjoyment of legitimate force – while disavowing the people’s ethical claim (*dignidad*). From a Marcusean angle, the state forecloses the new sensibility by reimposing the old sensorium of fear, curfew, and exception. This indicates a deep, unresolved societal trauma, a melancholic fixation on a past that continues to haunt the present and impede full societal progression.

In retrospect, interviewees name the continuity without hesitation – “*back to Pinochet’s constitution*,” “*the reaction was repressive*,” and even the learned habits of self-repression from the 1980s:

“And I think that self-repression that we have in Chile, it has a lot to do with those 17 years of dictatorship.” (Interview with Dammert, 2024)

If the first moment was a subjective negation, the second is the ruptural. Act itself – the explosive confrontation that tore through Chile’s political reality. I characterize Moment II by a seeming paradox: it was experienced as something *radically new* and spontaneous, yet it also constituted a *repetition* of unresolved historical traumas. In Žižekian terms, a truly revolutionary Act often involves a “*purifying repetition*” of the past: a re-staging of a fundamental deadlock in order to finally break out of it. The event’s unprecedented features – its leaderless nature, its sheer scale (the largest mobilizations in Chile’s history), its creative forms of protest – all signaled a new beginning. Yet, as many analysts and participants observed, the *estallido* also “*activated the long memory (larga memoria) of popular struggle*” in Chile. It was, in effect, the return of the repressed past in a new guise.

Well-known and critical historian María Angélica Illanes argues that October 2019 was an “*erupción*” of Chile’s long cycle of protests, connecting directly back through the student movements of the 2000s to the anti-dictatorship protests of the 1980s. Likewise, historian Mario Garcés identifies the *estallido* as the powerful culmination of a “long cycle” of contention, rather than an isolated outburst. In their view, the uprising drew upon collective memories of past resistance that had been kept alive in subaltern communities (even as the official narrative of the democratic transition tried to erase or depoliticize those memories). When the fare-dodging high school students sparked the revolt on 7 October 2019, they were unknowingly stepping into a stream of struggle begun decades before. This genealogy of resistance helps explain why the protest escalated so rapidly: society had been “*bearing an unacknowledged history*” of grievances and unhealed wounds, which suddenly burst into the open.

The discussion about the historical parallels of the *estallido* includes debate about whether it's most comparable to early 20th-century uprisings or those during the Pinochet era, for example, during the interview with Dasten Julián-Véjar (2024) suggesting closer ties to the latter due to shared motivations relating to the cost of living and a transgenerational connection between those who resisted the dictatorship and the younger generation experiencing neoliberal policies. As he observed, the events forced Chilean society to confront “*a social trauma...the obstinate ghost of the dictatorship*” that persisted in its institutions.

One key element of this repetition was the recurrence of state violence and the challenge it posed to Chile's democratic self-image. The heavy-handed repression during the *estallido*, widespread human rights abuses, thousands of arrests, reports of torture and sexual violence in detention echoed the dark practices of the Pinochet regime. The repressive arm of the state was wielded primarily by the Carabineros. Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and Chile's own National Human Rights Institute (INDH), compiled overwhelming evidence of widespread and systematic violations. The statistics paint a grim picture of a deliberate strategy of repression. The OHCHR (2019) reported that over 28,000 people were detained between October and December 2019, many arbitrarily. There were 33 deaths in the context of the protests being investigated. Most notoriously, police tactics led to an epidemic of eye injuries. The INDH (2020) reported 2520 cases of complaints and legal action, including severe ocular trauma caused by the indiscriminate firing of "less-lethal" kinetic impact projectiles, a practice that was condemned internationally as a form of mutilation designed to terrorize protestors. Furthermore, numerous reports documented cases of torture, ill-treatment, and sexual violence perpetrated by state agents against detainees ("Ojos sobre Chile", 2020).

In the collective psyche, 2019 collapsed into 1973; Chileans saw "*the ghost of the dictatorship*" resurface in their streets. The government's declaration of a "state of exception" (*Estado de Excepción*) in response to protests felt like history on repeat: once again, armed forces occupied city centers, curfews were imposed, and the president invoked an internal enemy. This had a profound psychological effect. By *repeating* the traumatic scenario of militarized crackdown, the Act of 2019 exposed that the so-called "Never Again" of the transition had never truly been fulfilled. The foundational violence of the state – which the *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos* frames as a closed chapter of 20th-century dictatorship – revealed itself to be still latent in the democratic era. In short, the *estallido* shattered the illusion that 1990 marked a clean break with 1973. It became evident that the authoritarian legacy had merely gone into latency, not extinction. However, focusing solely on the traumatic essence has a misleading attribute because it can basically hide the refusal's negation as a subjective awakening against the normalized violence of the neoliberal order.

Another aspect of repetition concerned the failure of the post-1990 democratic model. Many protesters framed their revolt explicitly as a judgment on the “30 years” since the transition – hence the popular slogan, “*No son 30 pesos, son 30 años*” (“It’s not about 30 pesos, it’s about 30 years”). This slogan succinctly communicated that a minor fare increase was only the spark; the powder keg was three decades of unmet expectations in the democratic period. Chile’s much-touted “transition to democracy” had, in the eyes of the street, ossified into a calcified oligarchy deaf to popular needs. By extending the narrative “30 years” to “50 years,” many Chileans were in effect asserting that the neoliberal system installed under Pinochet continued, with only cosmetic changes, well into the democratic era. Thus, the uprising *repeated the question of democracy itself*. Each time the crowd chanted “*¡El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!*” – the iconic refrain of the Allende years – they were invoking an unresolved fight for real democracy that had been deferred, first by dictatorship and then by a hollow transitional pact. In psychoanalytic terms, one could say Chile suffered a “*melancholy of democracy*”: an unavowed sense of loss for the genuine popular sovereignty that was promised but never delivered after 1990. The *estallido* transformed that melancholy into political anger and action.

From a theoretical standpoint, this dynamic illustrates what Žižek (following Hegel) calls the “*tarrying with the negative*” as a precondition for moving forward. Barria-Asenjo et al. (2020) explicitly connect the Chilean case to this idea, noting that the cycle of student protests and social movements in Chile involved “*necessary repetitions*” that gradually deepened the emancipatory struggle. Each wave – 2006 (“Penguin” high school revolt), 2011–2012 (university student movement), 2019 (*estallido*) – revisited the same fundamental issues (education, inequality, political exclusion) with increasing intensity. Rather than mere redundancy, these repetitions were *insistent demands* to overcome the legacies of the past. In October 2019, that pattern culminated: the *Act* was at once a break from routine and the *product* of a long apprenticeship in protest.

However, the *repetitive* nature of the rupture also points to its traumatic character. In Freudian terms, trauma is something that returns, unintegrated, demanding resolution. The *estallido* can be seen as a nation’s trauma returning to demand confrontation. “*The event was not a protest against a finished past, but a*

confrontation with something we imagined, as if I was remembering the good old song, that had never been overcome and continued to structure the present,” concludes one interviewee. The official story that Chile had peacefully transitioned to a stable democracy was, in this view, a fantasy covering a *void* – the void of unresolved social antagonism. In 2019, that void “spoke” through fire and protest. It is telling that government officials and analysts repeatedly expressed bewilderment: “*We never saw this coming.*” Political elites exhibited what Alfredo Joignant called a “*profound incomprehension*” of the situation (Interview with Joignant, 2024). This blindness was itself symptomatic of the disconnect that the movement was fighting against – a *total disconnect between the elites and society*, as Nicolás Freire observed (Interview with Freire, 2024). The surprise of the ruling class was the flipside of the people’s long-simmering knowledge. For the *pueblo*, it was not sudden at all – “*Chile has awoken*” carried the implication that the truth had been there all along, only now coming into consciousness. The Act thus forced into public acknowledgement what had been privately endured.

In sum, *Moment II* of the uprising was the performative rupture that both enacted a decisive break (a *refusal*) and reenacted Chile’s buried conflicts. It *repeated* in order to *overcome*. The burning of metro stations, for instance, which inaugurated the revolt, can be seen symbolically: the Metro – pride of technocratic Santiago – runs underground, just as the social discontent had run underground. Protesters literally and figuratively set the subterranean on fire. The result was a situation that the existing order could not comprehend on its own terms. Politics was suddenly taking place outside the normal parameters – in the streets, at midnight, in flames and chants, not in TV studios or parliament. Protesters frequently declared, “*No tenemos miedo*” (“We are not afraid”), and even, “*Nos quitaron tanto que nos quitaron el miedo*” (“They took so much from us that they took away our fear”). This captures the ethos of the Act: by repeating the worst (state violence), the people somehow lost their fear of it. In Žižek’s dialectical insight, what appears as a catastrophe can harbor liberatory potential: “*through traversing the fantasy, the subject loses its underlying fear.*” Chile traversed the fantasy of its peaceful progress narrative, and in doing so, shattered the spell of inevitability that kept people passive.

Terri Gordon, an interviewee, dubbed the estallido “*the most important social revolution in Chile’s recent history*”. Indeed, despite its ambiguous outcome, the rupture fundamentally redefined the possible. By shattering the official story of Chilean exceptionalism, unity, functioning neoliberal “inclusivity” and harmony, it reopened questions that had been declared settled. The very language of public discourse changed (as the next section will explore): words like *pueblo* and *dignidad* came roaring back, while the euphemisms of the neoliberal era (talk of *consumers*, *modernization*, *consensus*) fell into disrepute. In this sense, the Act was a *symbolic re-foundation* even before any institutional changes – it cleared space for new meanings to emerge, a point Jameson (1975) terms “*narrative negation*” or *world-reduction*: the imaginative act of negating the totality of the present to clear a “breathing space” for a new subject and desire to form. Through the very act of refusing the extant order, Chileans enacted a form of collective freedom, if only for an “eventful” moment.

A short field note from 2024 supports what the interviews already say. During a visit to Santiago for an interview, a political poster about coexistence and order (*convivencia y seguridad*) had a small sticker over the word order that read *dignidad*. The glue marks showed it had been replaced more than once. The pair – security/dignity – kept reappearing on street furniture like a low-grade argument that never ends. This is the everyday form of the split named in this section.

Along the same way, during my many visits I was walking all over the city and trying to read the pace of life. I used the metro and stopped at Plaza Baquedano (Plaza Dignidad), Plaza de Armas, La Moneda, the GAM, the Museo de la Memoria, Villa Grimaldi and Estadio Nacional. These places keep the recent past in the present. Small things survive a cleaning and return again. A taped note on a pole. A faded stencil on a wall. A bouquet left on a plaque. Field notes, 2024.

At Plaza Dignidad there is constant construction signed as Remodelación Plaza Baquedano. Fences and vinyl sheets repeat the same line. Interviews say the plan is to redesign the monument zone so people cannot gather as before. In some plans the square disappears as a square. This matters because that island sits on a line that cuts the city from east to west. It is a meeting point that became a habit and a symbol.

I walked the “great avenues” that Allende evoked before his death. Avenida Libertador General Bernardo O’Higgins, La Alameda. From Providencia, a middle-upper-class area, to Estación Central, I kept seeing the same sticker (two times) behind road signs. The familiar 30 was crossed out and rewritten as 50. It vanishes for a few blocks and then returns. Someone is insisting on another count of time. (Field notes, 2024).

This corridor is also the metro spine. Stations along La Alameda work as relays. Los Héroes was an early node where fare evasion spread. At Baquedano, the square and the station touch each other. Posters about convivencia y seguridad carry small stickers that say *dignidad*. The stickers are peeled and replaced more than once, and the glue halos stay. The pair of security and dignity keeps showing up on benches, poles, and signs. It reads like a low argument that never ends.

In this sense, the pressure comes from the post-transition settlement itself, which is also coded as the “end of history” ideology. This pressure occurs as part of the “social democrat” left coalition that remembers dictatorship as the only oppressor. The center-left Concertación pushed the problem back onto the dictatorship while keeping the market architecture in place through the “democracy of agreements” and policy continuity. The result cleans the present by fixing oppression in the past. On the other spectrum, right-wing government, starting from Pinera, blaming mostly the Concertación but also cunningly including and blaming “softly” the dictatorship, creates a hoax of narratives and functions as a demystifying apparatus of ideology as such. The right then recombines both registers. It denounces disorder and “thirty years,” calls for unity and security, and drives a full pro-market line. Piñera’s 2019 address casts the crisis as a defense of order and the nation against an internal enemy, which fits a constrained “*smooth democratic unfreedom*” that manages dissent rather than opening it.

Carla Pinochet Cobos (as a participant-observer), a social anthropologist from the University of Chile, recalls the *estallido* as a rupture in Chilean history that challenges the neoliberal model and also shows lines that still run from the dictatorship. She underlines how decentralized media and citizen archives reshape narratives and push back against official accounts. She also notes a risk. Symbols are reinterpreted, demands can fragment, and a conservative counter movement can rise.

Her remembrance of Plaza Dignidad's mark is persistent, and the debate over the Baquedano monument is active. The planned remodeling is read as an effort to stop the kind of meeting point that formed there. The point is not only urban design. It is also the way the node divides and connects east and west, wealthier areas and middle or lower-class areas. The same interview describes how the *estallido* reached the home even when some people could not go out. Cacerolazos, curfew, streets cut. If you did not go to the *estallido*, the *estallido* came to you. Fear was present because people were losing their eyes.

Rupture moment is frequently narrated as a contest between "violence" and "democracy." The corpus suggests a different logic: violence and democracy are co-present and internally related in the rupture. Here, it is possible to mark a second gap. The cognitive signifiers (dignity, people, and violence) and the national frame (end-of-dictatorship) pull in the same direction rhetorically, but they produce different tempos of action. "Dignity" wants expansion and inclusion; "People" gathers dispersed grievances into a "we" and authorizes disruption that travels across sectors; "Violence" appears double in the corpus; yet "war/emergency" forces defensive routines and compresses the horizon to keep a square open. This is why Moment II should be read as violence and democracy together, not as their opposition. The choreography repeats the dictatorship scene, but the meaning flips, and defense protects the possibility of democratic speech. In psychoanalytic terms, the return of the repressed is met by a reorganized enjoyment (being-together under risk), which holds the new sensibility inside an old script. Therefore, the gap seems temporal, and ethical universals move fast; state repetition slows the scene down. The fantasy of the end, therefore, reacts on the "potential" and "possibility", however, caught in the repetition (Zupancic, 2020).

The Great Refusal of the negated moment becomes dangerous in the ruptured moment because it touches the Real. The state answers with the archaic signifier "war." Yet, precisely there, Eros returns as mass presence and dignity in public space. The split is not between "violence/democracy" but between administered order and refounding desire. The Act thus cuts both ways, and it reveals the truth of Chilean democracy (its repressive underside) and the truth of the uprising (its democratic surplus).

6.3. Moment III – Containment: Institutional Leap

If the moment of the act is the refusal, just like happened in the first moment, and then the moment of the statement is the act. This crucial dimension of the Act of Great Refusal will operate in this section. An eventful moment is the desire to “change the system”. Institutionally, the hinge was the “Acuerdo por la Paz y la Nueva Constitución” (15 Nov), which re-channeled rupture into a constitutional exit—the paradigm of the *trampa institucional* discussed here. COVID-19 introduced delay as a technique of rule via the plebiscite’s postponement, yet the constituent horizon persisted and was ratified decisively on 25 October 2020 ($\approx 78\%$ Apruebo; $\approx 79\%$ Constitutional Convention), translating refusal into an institutional mandate.

“I also remember very well when the entry plebiscite was won by 78% in October 2020. I, too, was exultant and happy. I went out to celebrate. And when the results of the election to the first constitutional convention came out, I also said, “Well, here we are. Finally.” It was hard not to be optimistic in that context. I, too, as a historian, perhaps a little less optimistic than the rest, because I know, and I’ve studied it many times, in different periods and different places, that social expectations are rarely fully met. There’s always an adjustment between what you expect it to be and what it really is. So perhaps with a certain reservation, but I was still optimistic. And today, I am pessimistic.” (Interview with Casals, 2024)

“I think there’s no doubt that during the outburst, what predominated was hope... The possibility of a different future opened up. That’s precisely, I think, what makes us see everything with hopelessness now... it’s as if the future has been obstructed, has been, has been closed...” (Interview with Mia Dragnic Garcia, October 2022)

“...after the estallido, there was the presidential election, and the left won. And that really weakened left-wing causes. Because you can’t win everything. So... the power... the left, at that moment, was... it was in power. It was seen as... as... as the establishment. And that also led to the loss of... the constitution...” (Interview with Carla Pinochet Cobos, October 2022)

This set of reflections powerfully articulates the process of institutional containment and its melancholic aftermath, the very core of the thesis’s argument about the “failure of failure.” Pinochet Cobos provides a psychoanalytic diagnosis of the consequence, perfectly illustrating Marcusean repressive tolerance: the movement’s political victory (the election) led to its subjective defeat, as the agents of refusal became the “establishment,” thereby losing their critical negativity and power. Dragnic Garcia describes the affective result of this containment: the transformation of

revolutionary fantasy into a profound melancholy. This is the psychic cost of system absorption. The institutional leap did not simply end the revolt; it inverted its emotional charge, turning the experience of radical possibility into a memory of loss and a “hard defeat.”

If the *estallido*’s opening act was destituent (tearing down symbols of the old order), *Moment III* encompasses the institutional responses that sought to neutralize, domesticate, or channel this energy. In late 2019 and 2020, Chile’s political system performed a dramatic balancing act: offering concessions and procedural pathways for change on the one hand, while exerting repression and narrative control on the other. This moment can be seen as the system’s attempt to “reassert the existing symbolic order” in the face of the rupture – what I might call the *counter-revolution from above*. I label it an “Institutional Leap” because the signature move was to leap from the streets into formal political institutions, most notably through the promise of a new constitution. On November 15, 2019 – less than a month into the turmoil – Chile’s Congress (led by the major parties of left and right) hastily brokered the *Agreement for Peace and a New Constitution* (“Acuerdo por la Paz Social y la Nueva Constitución”, 2019). It also brings the line between the narrative of “Octubrismo” and “Noviembrismo”. This pact called for a national plebiscite to ask citizens whether they wanted a new constitution, and it outlined a mechanism for a constituent convention. The significance of this cannot be overstated: it was the first time in Chilean history that a constitution-making process would be opened up to broad democratic election (previous constitutions, including Pinochet’s 1980 charter, were top-down affairs).

Interviewees had varied perspectives on this transition, but a common theme was a sense of opportunity mixed with disappointment. Diego Sazo, for instance, believed the constitutional path was vital yet lamented how it unfolded. “We really missed an opportunity,” he said bluntly, referring to how the momentum of late 2019 dissipated in the slow grind of 2020’s politics. First came the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced protests off the streets and delayed the planned plebiscite. Then, when the plebiscite was finally held in October 2020, Chileans voted overwhelmingly (78%) in favor of drafting a new constitution – a huge mandate for change. But the process of electing a Constitutional Convention (May 2021) and drafting the new charter (mid-2021 through mid-2022) introduced new complexities and political battles. The Convention

itself, composed largely of independent and progressive delegates, was an achievement of the movement – it embodied the diverse, bottom-up spirit of the *estallido*. Yet, as several interviewees observed, the very breadth of demands and voices that the uprising had unleashed became a point of vulnerability. Carla Pinochet Cobos noted that by the time the draft constitution was completed, a powerful backlash narrative had formed in society: “*a social consensus that... the estallido had been an excess.*” She explained that opponents of change painted the Convention’s progressive proposals (on gender parity, Indigenous rights, environmental protections, social welfare) as overreach, even “*cartoonish*”, likening them to a caricature of “*woke*” extremism. In the September 2022 referendum, this backlash narrative proved decisive: the ambitious new constitution was rejected by 62% of voters.

In terms of the cognitive narratives I have examined, only in historians (memory), constitutional analysts, and following them, critical theorists have I seen the consistent historicism and critical stance against the country’s long-standing desire for a change through the “below to top struggle” and “constitution”:

“I think it was more than just an intuition... it was a political standpoint, from the very beginning. We all knew that the constitution was the central problem.”
(Interview with Charney, 2024)

“So if there is any exceptionalism in Chile, it's not the estallido, it is the constitution of 1980... the most perfect vehicle for guaranteeing a complete and radical separation between economics and politics.” (Interview with Schild, 2024)

Many hailed this as a *cathartic Act* of its own – a chance to *refound Chile’s social contract* by peaceful, democratic means. Indeed, in the euphoric aftermath of the agreement, protest slogans shifted from pure negation to constituent aspirations: “*Nueva Constitución*” was chanted nearly as often as “*Tengo + miedo a los políticos que a los milicos*” and “*No hay Dialogo mientras haya milicos en la calle*”.

For a moment, it seemed the *Great Refusal* might be transfigured into a *Great Rewriting* of Chile’s national story. Yet from another perspective, this was also a classic instance of what Herbert Marcuse would term repressive tolerance – the system “tolerating” dissent by partially absorbing it, thereby diffusing its radical charge. By offering the institutional outlet of a constitutional convention, the elite deftly *channeled the rebellion into a legal process*. The immediate effect was to demobilize

the streets: after the agreement, protest attendance dropped, and by early 2020 (aided by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic), the mass demonstrations had largely subsided. In the Kojévian master–slave dialectic, one might say the Chilean state recognized the uprising’s force enough to “dialogue” with it in the realm of rights and laws – but this recognition simultaneously functioned to *retain mastery* over the terms of change. The constitutional process itself was bound by stipulations (e.g., a high quorum for article approval) intended to protect certain elite interests. Social movements were jubilant at having won the chance for a new constitution, but some grassroots voices already warned of a *trampa institucional* (“institutional trap”). In effect, the power structure was saying: “*Yes, let’s change everything – but through the proper channels, and slowly.*” This maneuver exemplified the “Cunning of Reason” of the established order. The state, media, and political class – having been caught off guard – reasserted themselves not just by force, but by *narrative framing*: they began to shape the storyline of the revolt as an unfortunate upheaval that had now wisely been redirected into constructive reform.

The dual nature of containment is evident in two parallel narratives that unfolded. Externally, the state promoted a discourse of criminalization: officials and conservative media incessantly highlighted looting, arson, and “violence” by protesters to delegitimize the movement’s demands. Internally, within the halls of power, they promoted a discourse of co-optation: celebrating Chilean democracy’s ability to “listen and adapt” (as if the very same political class hadn’t ignored popular clamor for decades). Both narratives served to *close* the radical openness the *estallido* had created. For instance, while millions celebrated the prospect of a new constitution, President Piñera and others simultaneously pushed a law-and-order agenda (including stricter protest laws and expansive definitions of public disorder). The message was clear: *dissent is acceptable only if it plays by our rules*. In Marcuse’s terms, this is the system “*confront[ing] and attempt[ing] to neutralize the very subjective refusal it generates,*” thereby maintaining the overall continuity of power. Chile’s *ancien régime* was cunning: it offered a controlled burn (the constitutional process) to prevent the wildfire of revolution.

Many protestors felt a sense of guarded hope during the 2020 plebiscite (which passed overwhelmingly in favor of a new constitution) and the subsequent 2021

Convention elections (which delivered a surprisingly progressive, independent-majority body). However, as the convention did its work in 2021–2022, a coordinated backlash brewed. The right-wing and segments of the center unleashed a campaign of fear, painting the proposed new constitution as dangerously radical or incompetently drafted. By the time the draft New Constitution was submitted to a plebiscite vote in September 2022, the mood had shifted dramatically. In a stinging defeat for the refoundational dreams, 62% of voters rejected the new charter. The reasons are complex – from legitimate concerns over certain clauses to a tidal wave of misinformation and scare tactics – but the upshot was unambiguous: the institutional system had *reasserted itself*. The revolutionary horizon seemed to close once more. As one interviewee put it, “*I think we're still in mourning and that we haven't managed to emerge from the desolation of a time that finally burst into hope and joy only to suddenly collapse*” (Interview with Dragnic García, 2024), among many who had believed change was imminent.

Yet, it would be too simplistic to say the Great Refusal was simply co-opted and defeated. I instead speak of a dialectical negation (in Hegelian sense): the uprising negated the old order; the institutional response negated the uprising (to an extent) – but in doing so, it preserved and internalized some of the uprising’s content. Gramsci’s notion of a passive revolution (the system changes just enough to prevent an actual revolution) is pertinent here. By mid-2022, Chile’s elites had been forced to endorse ideas that, prior to 2019, were completely off the table – a new constitution, indigenous recognition, social rights, gender parity, etc. Even though the first attempt at constitutional refoundation failed at the polls, the *window of discourse* in Chile shifted permanently. It’s notable that by 2023, a second constitutional process was launched (albeit in a more top-down format), reflecting a broad consensus that the Pinochet-era model is untenable. In that sense, the spirit of the *estallido catalyzed a historical process* that continues, albeit in contested form. We can draw a parallel to the 1988 plebiscite that ended Pinochet’s rule: the democratic transition that followed delivered less than what many hoped, but it nevertheless marked a break with what came before. Similarly, Chile post-2019 is not the same Chile as before – even if the transformation is incomplete and ambiguous.

From a psychoanalytic lens, I interpret the containment phase as the *return of the paternal Law* after the moment of carnival. Lacan's concept of the Master-Signifier is useful: during the revolt, the master-signifiers of the old order (e.g., "*Democracy*," "*Stability*," "*Progress*") temporarily lost their efficacy, and new signifiers like "*Dignidad*" took center stage. In the containment phase, the establishment strove to re-stitch the symbolic order, attempting to reassert "*Democracy*" (now cast as the hero that will deliver a new constitution) and "*Order*" (through law-and-order rhetoric) as the reigning *points de capiton*. The very title of the November 15 agreement – "Peace and a New Constitution" – reveals this strategy: by coupling *peace* (order) with *change*, the masters tried to re-legitimize themselves as agents of both. There was an implicit narrative: "*Yes, the people had legitimate grievances (so we'll give you a new constitution), but thank goodness our democratic institutions listened, so now everyone goes back home – peace has returned.*" The framing of the *estallido* in many mainstream post-mortems was as a "crisis" that was solved by Chilean democracy's maturity. This, of course, glosses over the fact that the crisis *was* Chilean democracy's failings, and its "solution" is still unresolved. Nonetheless, the containment moment must be credited with preventing greater violence – Chile did not spiral into open revolution or crackdowns on the scale of, say, Tiananmen or Syria; instead, it navigated back into a reformist track. This speaks to the strength (and shrewdness) of Chile's institutions, but also to their limits: they can incorporate dissent, but often by diluting its radical content.

One vivid way to understand a contained moment is through the concept of destituent vs. constituent power. Walter Benjamin's (1996) "destituent" or divine violence is a force that neither establishes nor maintains law, but rather dissolves order. Agamben (2014) takes Benjamin's concept of divine violence and updates it. For him, emancipatory politics is not about seizing power, but about neutralizing it. In other words, it's not "constituent" power, but "destituent" power. Marcuse's "Great Refusal" brings this logic to social critique. Žižek's concept of "Act," on the other hand, reinterprets this void as a radical rupture. The *estallido* began as a *destituent* power – aimed at *deposing* the old logic, "emptying the place of power" without a fully formed alternative in hand. This gave the revolt its chaotic, horizontal, radically democratic character, as Karmy Bolton notes (Interview, 2024). However, destituent energy alone is hard to sustain; it faces the risk of either fading or being forcibly repressed. The

constitutional process was an attempt to turn destituent power into *constituent* power – to channel the energies into building a new institutional order. The conflict between these two modalities was evident. Many protesters distrusted the political parties managing the transition; at the same time, many moderate citizens feared the destituent chaos and welcomed a return to normalcy via elections and deliberation. This tension is perhaps inevitable in revolutionary situations: the desire for *tabula rasa* versus the need to *institutionalize* gains. In Chile, the constituent path was taken, but the first iteration failed, reflecting a disconnect between the movement’s aspirations and the majority’s fears once the euphoria settled. Thus, containment succeeded in the short term (normalcy restored, Piñera finished his term, no collapse of the state) but left the deeper questions unresolved, merely postponed.

In summary, *contained moment* was about translation and betrayal in equal measure. The system translated the Great Refusal into the language of legal reform – and in doing so, inevitably betrayed some of its spirit. Yet, from the dialectical viewpoint, even betrayal is not an endpoint: it becomes fodder for the next cycle of resistance. By 2023–2025, a sense of “*failed promise*” lingered, but so did the knowledge that an organized populace had once shaken the pillars of power. The containment was real, but not definitive. A phrase that circulated after the eye injuries of 2019 captured this paradox with clarity: “Regalé mis ojos para que la gente despierte” (“I gave my eyes so that people would wake up”) (“Gustavo Gatica”, 2019), an allusion to the paradox that state violence and co-optation only clarified for many Chileans the depth of change needed. The Great Refusal was domesticated, yet it was not forgotten. Its echo continues to resonate in Chile’s political imagination, tempering cynicism with the memory that *another Chile momentarily existed* in the streets of 2019.

It is important to note that this unity and optimism carried an inherent utopian quality. By calling it utopian, I do not mean “unrealistic” in a pejorative sense, but rather that it was a projection of wishes and ideals not yet realized – a fantasy in the positive, political sense. As theorized earlier, fantasy serves a vital political function: it “breaks the ideological foreclosure” of the future imposed by hegemonic narratives. Neoliberal ideology had long told Chileans that their future was essentially a continuation of the present – that radical change was impossible or dangerous. The

estallido's collective fantasy disrupted this closure. In occupying squares and rewriting symbols, the protesters reclaimed the future as a site of contingency and radical possibility. What had been deemed unthinkable – a new constitution authored by citizens, an overhaul of the pension system, public control of water and electricity, justice for human rights abusers, etc. – suddenly became discussable. As one popular graffiti proclaimed, «Nos quitaron tanto que nos quitaron el miedo» (“They took so much from us that they even took away our fear”). The removal of fear unleashed imagination. Or, as another slogan put it, «No era depresión, era capitalismo» (“It wasn't depression, it was capitalism”) – suggesting that what had been pathologized as individual failings were actually systemic problems, now laid bare and open to change.

The melancholy is not a vague sadness but is consistently tied to a specific object of loss: the political failure of the constitutional process. This failure is described in strong terms: a “crushing defeat,” an “assassination,” a “disaster.”

The melancholy is complex. On one hand, it leads to paralysis and pessimism. On the other hand, for at least one interviewee, it becomes the basis for a more pragmatic, “moderate” approach to the future. This shows that melancholy is not just a passive state but a condition that forces a political response.

The master-hegemonic narrative of the Chilean transition was built on the premise of a successful restoration of democracy. This narrative, however, depended on a purely formal definition of the term, one that systematically ignored the deep continuities with the authoritarian model in the economic and social spheres. In psychoanalytic terms, “Democracy” functioned as a master-signifier that sutured the post-dictatorship social bond, but it was a signifier whose relationship to the signified—the lived experience of the citizenry—was becoming increasingly tenuous. This hollowing out of the central signifier of the political order is a crucial element in understanding the conditions of possibility for the 2019 refusal.

This internal decay of the democratic narrative in Chile corresponds precisely to the broader regional diagnosis offered by Catalina Botero (2019). Botero charts the continental journey “*from constitutionalism to political uncertainty*,” demonstrating a widespread erosion of the rule of law and a steady decline in popular support for

democracy (p. 25). She notes that while the “*third wave of democracy*” of the 1980s and 90s came with a “*constitutional promise*,” many states failed to move beyond formal elections to consolidate robust institutions, protect minority rights, or ensure accountability. The result is a regional landscape where citizens' trust in political parties and legislatures has collapsed. The Chilean case is thus a paradigmatic example of this broader crisis of the symbolic order, where the foundational narratives of the post-authoritarian era lost their coherence, creating the ideological void from which the *estallido* would erupt.

This is the place to mark the central gap of the analysis. The cognitive anchor (Dignidad) promised a universal ethical inclusion; the national container (*Proceso*) represented that promise as a choice inside a frame. The affect shifts from fantasy to administrative melancholy, so not despair, but a shortened horizon where energy is spent on thresholds, quorums, budgets, and sequencing, while the universal promise is presumed rather than restated. The difference I can name is not between good “*people*” and bad “*institutions*,” but between two legitimate grammars – ethical universals and procedural reason – whose speeds do not match. The subject supposed to know mirrors this drift: the same voices that spoke performatively in the first and second now speak reflexively and processually in a contained moment. However, that rhetorical slide is not betrayal, but it is the mechanism of absorption.

6.4. Moment IV – Refoundation as Negation of Negation

As articulated, the desire for liberation (Eros) is expressed through “new sensibilities” and emerges in counter-narratives that challenge the master-hegemonic narrative. *It is the fuel for refusal*. And the Act is the event that violently tears the fabric of the hegemonic narrative (when there is no big Other -or master), exposing its ideological fantasy and making a new political narrative (retroactively) possible. *It is the form of refusal*. Hence, this moment, what I call “changing the society,” is the last moment in which the axis of impossibility and possibility is echoed. On the opening toward refoundation, 155 constituents were elected on 15–16 May 2021 under a system of gender parity, with strong independent and Indigenous representation, thereby widening the language of the polity. The Convention was inaugurated on 4 July 2021 in the ex-Congreso, symbolically relocating sovereignty into popular constituent time. Gabriel Boric’s election on 19 December 2021 tethered street hopes

to an institutional vector, raising the stakes of the process and its possible disappointments. The draft's defeat on 4 September 2022 functioned as a successful absorption by hegemony without erasing the imaginaries and subjectivities opened up in 2019.

This moment, as a “*negation of negation*” or, in a sense, an act of refusal, represents the utopian surge and lasting legacy of the *estallido*: the extent to which it gave rise to new practices, narratives, and collective subjects that push beyond the initial rupture. In the aftermath of the uprising and amid the contested constitutional process, Chileans engaged in what I term experiments in *refoundation from below*. These ranged from local neighborhood assemblies convened in late 2019 (*cabildos abiertos*) to the incorporation of previously marginalized (outsider, excesses) groups and ideas into the national debate. The transformed moment is thus about the provisional transformation of society – those changes, tangible or intangible, that endure after the tear gas clears.

Was the *estallido* ultimately a failure or a success? The answer depends on what one considers the metrics of victory. Institutionally, many of the uprising's concrete aims – a new constitution, a sweeping social rights agenda – have been deferred or defeated for now. Yet in the realm of narrative and ideology, the *estallido* achieved a profound and likely lasting transformation. This final analytic section examines the legacy of the uprising, focusing on how it permanently altered Chile's political imagination and cracked the foundations of hegemonic common sense.

Interviewees and analysts alike suggest that, despite setbacks, the *estallido*'s greatest accomplishment was to destroy the aura of inevitability that surrounded the neoliberal order. In doing so, it created space for new conversations and desires that were previously marginalized. This is the “utopian legacy” of the movement – not a utopia realized, but a utopia reclaimed as thinkable.

“I think it's not so post-ideological because the outburst brought the return of the concept of pueblo, brought a lot of musical imagery that was from the 70s, brought the idea of, uh, transforming society in structural terms, that is, we need a new Constitution...” (Interview with Juan Pablo Venables, July 2024)

Provisional practices that both emerge from and push beyond the initial rupture.

“The estallido social said, “Things can change, structurally.” That feeling faded. Today, in terms of the demands of the estallido, nothing has changed. The political system hasn’t changed, the pension system hasn’t changed, the healthcare system hasn’t changed, and the way universities are funded hasn’t changed. So, there’s this feeling, again, that nothing changes.” (Interview with Güell, 2024)

In Chile, the narrative of “change is possible” and “there is an alternative” was mainly established at the end of the dictatorship, and at the end of the transition, narratives emerged together. Repetition of failures, however, returning to Figure 6.1 again, shows that the cycle does not collapse back into cynicism but settles into a different register. Hence, one significant legacy is the repoliticization of everyday life. For years, Chile had been cited as a case of political apathy – voter turnout had plummeted, social movements (barring student movements) were weak, and the idea of “There Is No Alternative” (TINA) to neoliberalism prevailed.

Another enduring transformation lies in the battle over language and symbols – what Karmy Bolton describes as a “*guerra de nombres*” (war of names). The most notable victory in this war was the rehabilitation of the word “*pueblo*” (meaning “the people”). For the 30 years of neoliberal democracy, *pueblo* had been virtually banished from mainstream discourse – it was seen as too radical, too redolent of Marxist class struggle. Instead, technocrats and politicians spoke of “*la gente*” (the people in a depoliticized sense) or “*los ciudadanos*” (the citizens), framing Chileans as individual consumers or voters rather than a collective agent. To chant “*el pueblo*” again in 2019 was a profoundly radical act of naming, reclaiming a subject-position that neoliberal hegemony had tried to erase. Slogans like “*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*” or simply “*el pueblo manda*” (the people rule) emerged in the plazas. Their return signaled a direct refusal of the consensus language that had dominated the post-’90 transition. Importantly, the “*pueblo*” that emerged in 2019 was not identical to that of the past; it was a new articulation – described by sociologist Carlos Ruiz Encina as a kind of multitude united only in its common rejection of the system. Multiple interviewees emphasize that this *pueblo* was *heterogeneous*, comprising students, precarious workers, feminists, members of the Indigenous movement, environmentalists, middle-class professionals, and unemployed youth. It was, as Verónica Schild argues, a “feminist *pueblo*” as much as a class one, forged partly in the massive women’s marches of 2018 and bringing a strong critique of patriarchy into

the heart of the movement. It was also, as Julián-Véjar notes, a “precariat” – a new class subject composed of indebted students, gig workers, and those struggling to reproduce life in a neoliberalized society.

The master-signifier that *quilting* this diverse coalition was undoubtedly dignity. As discussed earlier, Žižek and colleagues identified *dignity* as the nodal point crystallizing the movement. Our interviews reinforce this: dignity was invoked across various social sectors, in contexts ranging from healthcare to pensions to policing, lending *moral coherence* to disparate grievances. In Lacanian terms, *dignity* functioned as a point de capiton, stitching together the floating chain of demands into a new master-narrative of systemic injustice. This had a profound effect. It *elevated* what might have remained isolated economic complaints into a unified ethical and political demand for a life worthy of human dignity. Notably, this demand directly targeted the *core logic of the neoliberal model*. As constitutional scholar Paul Marshall observed, demanding dignity in domains such as healthcare or pensions implicitly demanded a new constitutional order, because the 1980 Constitution had enshrined those services as market commodities rather than social rights. In other words, *dignity* became the one-word banner under which Chileans contested the foundational neoliberal principle that everything – education, health, water, housing – is for sale. Demanding dignity meant rejecting the reduction of citizens to customers. It is telling that the eventual draft constitution in 2022 declared Chile a “Social and Democratic State of *Derechos* (Rights)” – a direct reversal of the subsidiary state model. Though that draft was not ratified, the very fact that such language was put forward shows the imprint of *dignity* as a guiding concept.

The creation of a new political imaginary was not confined to discourse but was made material in the streets. My observations at the *Museo del Estallido Social* (an ad hoc museum of the social outburst created by activists) show this directly. The museum is currently in the La Florida district of Santiago. Due to the characteristics of the property itself (it is a quadrangular place⁴⁹ with a huge open area, a garden), the tour

⁴⁹ I use “quadrangular” only as a site note. What matters is how this layout concentrates dispersed signs of the revolt into one walkable ensemble. Visitors move through shields, posters, murals, and small altars. They sort and connect them. This is my aim with “cognitive mapping” in Jameson’s sense. It is not a map of streets but a practice that helps subjects place their own experience inside a larger social and global totality. As it can be remembered, Jameson generalizes Kevin Lynch’s mental maps of the

becomes more like a journey, a transit through rooms and patios where different narratives and expressions are displayed, but without this making it a univocal or specific description of each piece instead using images and art as a semantic repertoire and configured in different hermeneutics or possible interpretations to allow visitors to articulate their own memories. In this context, the museum itself is like an extension of the revolt's logic. It is not a traditional, hierarchical institution but a horizontal, dialogic, co-constructive space. The museum's collection includes, among many others, protest shields, popular posters showing Eyes (signifier of the ocular trauma) of the people demanding 'Dignidad,' canvases, stencils, paste-ups, graffiti, murals, banners, a Mapuche altar for offering to death (heading to north because of in the Mapuche's worldview the north is where gifts and offerings to the dead are expressed) and a sculpture of the 'perro Matapaco,'. This works as a grassroots archive of key signifiers of the revolt: Dignity, the people, and violence. Marco Solá, a leading figure in the activist movement in Chile and one of the founders of the museum, presented a narrative centered on memory, symbolism, and the therapeutic power of collective art. His perspective is that of a participant-artist whose "trench" is art, and whose project is to preserve the "*fabric of different narratives and memories*" from the revolt. According to him, in the design and distribution of the museum, there is no intention to generate any chronological narrative, much less an evolutionary one, understanding that the images are the ones that incorporate all that "*phantasmagorical*" dimension, as of the fears, of the symbolisms, of the metaphors, of the desires. Perro matapaco stands out as a significant symbol. During the visit, it was this dog, as if the main square of fantasmatic post-estallido society, in the center of the living experience at the garden. And each day, inhabitants of this micro-communal estallido ritualistically and symbolically put the red bandana around the dog's neck. Perro matapaco means "cop-killer dog," a mixed-breed street dog (*quiltros* in Spanish), became a symbol in 2011-2013 student protest cycles of Chile, when the dog (not that it killed a cop) with its red bandana: "[e]very time there was a march, the dog appeared. So, the students were struck by the fact that this dog, intuitively, spontaneously, participated in the

city to this wider orientation task under late capitalism. He argues that any politics adequate to the present must invent forms that enable such mapping. The museum's assemblage works as one such form, a counter-archive that orients rather than narrates in sequence. My aim here is orientation for the reader, not a morphology claim. It supports the thesis's use of cognitive mapping by tying a site layout I encountered to how people move, remember, and name the act of refusal in the protest cycles. Hereby, this visit represented a kind of concentrated state of remembering and creating the future.

protests. And they named him Matapacos because the dog barked at the pacos [slang used in Chilean Spanish for carabineros – a police force] when the students were being repressed. Many times he attacked them, but to stop them from hurting the students” (Interview with Solá, 2024). It is also *“representing the precariousness of the populations, of the roofs, of the people who live in very precarious conditions. So that’s why the dog also represents that struggle”* (Interview with Solá, 2024). It further represents the “abandonment, the mistreatment suffered by Chilean society” under a system where the wealthy 1% hoard the nation's resources. In a leaderless revolt marked by *“distrust of the political class,”* the animal becomes the perfect symbol because it acts *“intuitively, without personal interests”* and *“demonstrating discontent and discomfort for the same precariousness that system offers”* in which young people, students carried out the struggle when the others cannot (“Documental Matapaco”, 2013). Observing such artifacts in the museum and at subsequent anniversaries, it became possible to sense that a counter-memory had been established, parallel to the official memory of the dictatorship displayed in the State Museum of Memory (Field notes, 2024).

Within another layer, Chile’s refoundation moment reverberated beyond Chile’s borders, contributing to a broader Latin American (and global) rethinking of neoliberalism. As critical theorist Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott notes, the Chilean fight for *“vida digna”* (dignified life) has become an international reference point, part of a “common script” linking disparate movements from Chile to the United States (e.g., Black Lives Matter) and Europe. In this sense, Chile’s post-neoliberal desire spoke to a universal condition – it named what many around the world were feeling in the late 2010s: a rejection of obscene inequality and a yearning for human dignity over market values. Returning to the notion that “it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism,” in Chile’s plazas during the estallido, people began to imagine the end of neoliberal capitalism – not as an apocalypse, but as a *utopia*. The draft constitution’s visionary elements (e.g., declaring Chile a plurinational state, enshrining the rights of nature, and achieving gender parity in public institutions) reflected these utopian aspirations, even if they proved too much, too fast for the electorate in 2022. The recoil against the draft can itself be seen as evidence of how profound a rupture the estallido represented: it opened a door to a future so different that many Chileans, when confronted with it on paper, balked. Yet the genie of possibility is not so easily

put back into the bottle. “*Something that was not supposed to happen came to life with the estallido,*” as one analysis put it. That “something” – the collective experience of empowerment and horizon-expansion – is the revolution’s true remainder.

To be sure, by 2025, Chile also faced a conservative backlash and the reassertion of some elites who claim the *estallido* was a costly mistake. The presidential election of 2021, which brought former student leader Gabriel Boric to power, signaled the high point of the movement’s influence at the institutional level. Subsequent political turbulences (including the rejection of the constitution and rising concerns over security and inflation) have tempered the optimism. Some commentators speak of a frustrated revolution or warn of a “restoration” of the old order. However, the story is far from ending. The events of 2019–2020 profoundly altered Chile’s political DNA. They demonstrated that the “end of history” was a narrative construct, not a fate – and that it could be broken. Chile, once the poster child of neoliberal inevitability, became, in the words of one essay, “*anti-neoliberal laboratory*” rather than a neoliberal laboratory. The *pueblo* found its voice, and even if that voice was temporarily stifled or splintered, it is unlikely to remain silent for another decade.

For Karmy, the perception of Chilean exceptionalism is seen as a “Portalean idea” and a “mythical machine” designed to “neutralize conflicts” and suggest a “stable country” without “big conflicts” or “social upheavals” (Interview with Karmy, 2024).

In a sarcastic tone, this line of exceptionalism was caught as:

“From the very foundation. We are the first state, well-organized, in Latin America with the Diego Portales model. We are the best example of a democratic government. We are the first country to undergo agrarian reformations. We are the first socialist, non-military government, with Allende. And then we have the best, modernizing dictatorship. And then we did an exemplary transition to democracy. And if that's not enough, we have the end of neoliberalism in Chile.” (Interview with Villalobos-Ruminott, 2024)

From a more global perspective, Chile’s *estallido* has contributed to a wider counternarrative against the “end of history” ideology. Chile had been the exemplar of that ideology; now it became a symbol of its undoing. As the thesis posited, the *estallido* helped “shed light on the unique character of the 2019 Chilean refusal” in a post-political era where master narratives like “end of history” had begun to collapse.

In breaking its own chains, Chile provided inspiration (and a cautionary tale) to movements elsewhere questioning neoliberalism. The phrase “Chile despertó” was echoed in protests in Colombia and elsewhere, and the Chilean experience was closely watched by social movements in Latin America and beyond. The notion that “*if it can happen in Chile, it can happen anywhere*” has become part of the discourse. This intangible legacy – Chile as a beacon of both the possibilities and challenges of re-politicization – is something the interviewees were proud of, even amid their frustrations. “*The demands being made, though local, were very universal... against the neoliberal system present in many countries,*” Carla Pinochet (Interview with Carla Pinochet, 2024) pointed out, highlighting a sense of global solidarity the *estallido* tapped into. The uprising demonstrated that neoliberal hegemony is not invincible – an insight that is itself a form of hope transmitted internationally.

6.5. From Negation to Utopian Legacy

Across Moments I–IV, refusal begins as a libidinal and narrative re-alignment (Moment I), travels through traumatic repetition that both stalls and propels articulation (Moment II), pivots to organizational invention (Moment III), and stabilizes as erotic refoundation (Moment IV). This arc resolves a classic tension as it was articulated and anticipated: Žižek’s Act as thanatic cut vs. Marcuse’s Great Refusal as life-affirming utopic projection. This captures the needed convergence in the “Evental Act,” which means the whole returns in circular movement.

In the afterlives, one-year anniversary mobilizations on 18 October 2020 evidenced affective persistence despite institutional redirection; the “Acuerdo por Chile” (12 December 2022) initiated a second process that culminated in a second rejection on 17 December 2023, leaving reformist desire stalemated yet unextinguished. Field observations – Matapaco, the “Eyes” iconography, and the continuing circulation of “Dignidad” – confirm a living popular archive that exceeds electoral cycles, while survey and interview materials indicate that the ethical kernel of the *estallido* outlasts procedural containment.

“I miss the feeling I had back then, the feeling that anything was possible. It felt like the future was open, like some of the things being discussed could actually happen. There was this collective sense that structural change, big change, was within reach... And then it didn't happen. We're not in that place anymore.” (Interview with Disi Pavlic, 2024)

As for the latent introductions of each moment, we have seen the synthesized functioning of the *Act of Great Refusal*. These moments are the collective Eros-politics (instead of the determination of economy-politics), which eventually led to the streets to make the impossible. This occurs in Marcuse's one-dimensionality when "*all contradiction seems irrational and all counteraction impossible*" (Marcuse, 2007, p. 11). As Žižek has said for the Turkish uprising in 2013, "*this was a country in which the last thing one would have expected was widespread protests — they simply should not have happened,*" because of its "*model thriving liberal economy*" and then the "*unexpected happened*" (Žižek, 2015, p. 107). This model also implies perfectly to Chilean refusal, in very much was seen in the interview corpus such as, "*Its sheer scale and intensity surprised the academic community and shocked most people*" (Interview with Casals, 2024), "*even we, who had been working on this, we didn't see it coming. Not like that, not as radical as it was as formless as it was.*" (Interview with Charney, 2024), "*it genuinely caught everyone off guard*" (Interview with Garces, 2024), "*the intensity and scope of the mobilization was something that really shocked most people, and I include myself*" (Interview with Sazo, 2024). So, the question of what it was about can be answered by the anti-capitalist dimension of the protests, in which the course of the imaginary frontier emerges as all ends in one historical event.

"So October marks [...] a historic landmark (una cifra histórica). It's a historical landmark because it shifted the importance from the coup d'état to the popular moment of the fiesta. It's the new narrative. That's why the progressive and the conservative want to crush the whole imagination of October because they know that the whole imagination of October calls for another order. That is an order which is just not the dictatorship presence or the transitional frame." (Interview with Rodrigo Karmy, 2024)

Central to this narrative is the transformation of the people (*el pueblo*) as a dynamic social force that emerges through shared struggles and acts of dignity reclamation. As a class created by itself, the people have evolved into a social force with its own needs and a dynamic structure that influences the dominant ideology throughout an organized (hi)story of struggles, often coming with an act of refusal demanding a *dignified* life. The Chilean protests of 2019, with their diverse participants and demands, exemplified the subject of "the people" (*el pueblo*) as a dynamic social force. This force has forged through shared struggles, acts of "violence," and reclamation of "dignity," challenged the dominant ideology, and

demanded recognition for its constituent moment from society. This social force has become a reality by moving, growing, and flourishing from taboos and mythical intentions—from the founding element. As such, the *estallido*, which evolved similarly to the contemporary wave of protest that follows a specific leaderless path, encourages the intellectual to question the main reason for the emergence of such signifiers and the political and cultural accumulation arising from the “alienated” state of life in a political process without leading cadres and vanguard parties.

This narrative lens also recasts the Žižekian *Act*. The *Act* is no longer just a mute confrontation with the Real; its primary function is to shatter the symbolic order’s narrative coherence. It is an anti-narrative gesture that exposes the hegemonic story as a fantasy and creates the traumatic void that *demand*s a new narration. This is why the anonymous, leaderless narratives of the *multitude*—as it was seen in a graffiti that covered Plaza Dignidad (Pez Espiral, 2020)—are not mere byproducts of the protest but are central to the event itself. They are the first collective attempts to write a new narrative in the space cleared by the *Act*.

The temporal consciousness of the *estallido* was not linear; it was a knotted configuration of past, present, and future. As research by Raimundo Frei (2016) on Chilean generational narratives shows, the social imaginary was already saturated with distinct forms of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy that provided a crucial backdrop for the 2019 uprising, which eventually enacted a “*broad process of (re)politicization*”. Even though Frei employed a variety of nostalgia research in the sense of retroactive and prospective that contains melancholy and fantasy together for future aspects, I turn my interest to critical theory, which means the very psychoanalytic notion of remembering/memory can be gratified or mourned, so that the present counter-hegemonic narrative maintains the “*sense of endings*.” As Marcuse puts it “*the so-called utopian possibilities are not at all utopian but rather the determinate socio-historical negation of what exists [...] for through its mere existence defeatism betrays the possibility of freedom to the status quo*” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 69).

Two forms are particularly relevant. The first is a melancholic or resigned nostalgia, prevalent among older and working-class cohorts, which mourns the loss of social solidarity and communality that existed before the full implementation of the neoliberal model, particularly during the anti-dictatorship struggles of the 1980s. This

nostalgia is suffused with disillusionment, a sense that the democratic promise of “la alegría ya viene” (“joy is coming”) was a lure that never fully materialized, feeding directly into the “30 years” narrative of betrayal.

The analysis of the *estallido*'s affective origins must begin with nostalgia, but a nostalgia understood in its most politically productive sense. The nostalgic memory of pre-neoliberal solidarity – specifically the era of Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular and the subsequent anti-dictatorship struggles of the 1980s – functioned not as a regressive longing for a bygone era, but as a Marcusean “*remembrance of gratification*.” This recovered memory provided a critical, qualitative standard against which the atomized, precarious, and depoliticized present was judged and found wanting.

This dynamic is masterfully captured in the work of Chilean documentarian Patricio Guzmán, whose film *Nostalgia for the Light* serves as a cultural touchstone for the nation's collective trauma. The film draws a powerful parallel between astronomers in the Atacama Desert searching the cosmos for humanity's origins and the women of Calama searching the same desert for the bone fragments of their relatives “disappeared” by the Pinochet regime. Guzmán highlights the profound paradox of a nation that can look billions of years into the past through its telescopes but refuses to look forty years into its own history. This national struggle with memory and willed forgetting is the terrain upon which the nostalgia of 2019 was enacted. The Pinochet regime, as multiple sources confirm, not only murdered its opponents; it attempted a second crime of denial by erasing their bodies and silencing their memory, a project of forgetting that the women in Guzmán's film refuse to accept.

Furthermore, when analyzed within the immediate context of the event, the reaction to the metro fare hike can be reduced to the prevailing cognitive mapping of the day. However, with the benefit of hindsight and historical maturation, this reaction can be primarily attributed to a surplus stemming from a primal negation and then rupture from it. The metro, much like the mines that have long been symptomatic of Chile's exploitation, can be interpreted through the underground metaphor: “*The relevance of the Metro is also linked to the symbolic weight it has acquired in the case of Chilean society. The Metro is the subject of social conversations and multiple narratives that tend to constitute metaphors about society as a whole. All kinds of*

stories that coexist are generated about it." (Araujo 2019, p. 116) Here, one can easily remember the movie, "The 33", about 33 miners trapped underground in a mine, which eventually became a heroic narrative of the right-wing president of the time. In which the ideology of seeing life-affirming survival as a way from historical exploitation is again the exploiter (neoliberal economics). Therefore, this surplus-repression (a symptom of dictatorial trauma) and surplus-enjoyment (a symptom of Chilean exceptionalism and its related narratives like democratic stability, modernisation, and economic oasis in Latin America) functioned as an explosion within the context of Chile's neoliberal model (miracle).

The nostalgia present in the *estallido* was, therefore, not merely sentimental; it was a political act of "retroactive historicism." The recurring invocation of the Allende era (generational transference) or the 83-86 protest cycles, student movements, feminist march, environmental movements, and so on (last charged remembrances) was not simply about missing the past. In a Marcusean sense, the memory of this "qualitatively different" social project – democratic socialism – provided the necessary *imaginative content* to desire a future beyond the confines of neoliberalism. Consequently, this nostalgia reveals itself to be fundamentally future-oriented. It "re-members" – in the sense of re-assembling – the fragmented promises of the past to fuel a *utopian fantasy* for the future. It transforms a passive feeling of loss into an active political force, providing the Eros-driven fuel for the Great Refusal. But this is also the failure and conformism (both at the same time) of this democratic socialist project, especially after returning to democracy (with Concertacion governments), containing all three nostalgic, melancholic, and phantasmatic concepts as well, which are: "progress" narrative (GDP is increasing, Jaguar of Latin America, "*we are now a modern country at the end of history, finally*") with its infinite perfectibility that pursued a spiral course (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 258-261). However, *estallido*'s present time remembers the "*post-1968 monad*" not as "*a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time,*" mustered all the ends to its presence, but "*a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past*", seeing this in the four moments of *estallido* (negation, violence and democracy, containment and negation of negation) (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 262-263).

The 2019 social uprising in Chile cannot be understood as an isolated or spontaneous event. Rather, as the evidence from this study's interviews demonstrates, it must be framed as the most visible manifestation of a long-term narrative crisis. This exhaustion of the neoliberal model was not merely a structural condition; it was a lived, psychic state of trauma that required a symbolic break. The master slogan of the revolt, “¡Chile despertó!”, functioned precisely as this rupture. As Barria-Asenjo et al. (2020) argue, the “awakening” was an event that tore through the monolithic “nightmare” of the post-dictatorship consensus, revealing the repressed trauma of a fractured society. The slogan was not a description of a process but a performative act that, in its very enunciation, drew a line between the traumatic past and an “uncertain future” (p. 284), shattering the illusion of the neoliberal “oasis” and forcing a confrontation with the Real of its inherent antagonisms.

Historian Marcelo Casals provides a powerful conceptual lens for this process, describing it as the *'ocaso del modelo neoliberal'* –the twilight of a hegemonic model that had, over decades, lost its capacity to generate hope and social mobility (Interview with Marcelo Casals, October 2024).

Field notes from the XII Congreso Chileno de Sociología reveal that multiple panels were dedicated to the 'structural malaise' and 'social fracture' predating the revolt. Similarly, the entire 'Conferencia: Crisis en Valdivia' was framed around understanding the roots of this systemic crisis, confirming that the intellectual field was actively grappling with the exhaustion of the neoliberal model long before the protests erupted.

This structural exhaustion took place within a society that possessed a deep, often subterranean, historical consciousness. Contrary to narratives that frame the *estallido* as an ahistorical outburst, historian María Angélica Illanes argues that it was an “eruption” of the *'larga memoria'* (the long memory) of popular movements in Chile (Interview with María Angélica Illanes, July 2024). This memory, transmitted intergenerationally, connects the struggles of 2019 directly to the student movements of the 2000s and, crucially, to the anti-dictatorship protests of the 1980s. Historian Mario Garcés corroborates this, identifying a “long cycle of protests” and suggesting that the *estallido* was its powerful culmination (Interview with Garcés, June 2024). Therefore, the “Act of Great Refusal” in 2019 was not an invention; it was the

reactivation of a learned political culture of resistance, a popular memory that the official narrative of the democratic transition had sought, but failed, to erase.

This “long cycle” is not merely a history of failures but of necessary repetitions. From a Žižekian perspective, such repetition, far from being an obstacle to change, is the very mechanism that “allows one to advance, to go further and to deepen an emancipatory struggle” (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2020, p. 289), with each wave of student protest serving as an insistent demand to overcome the legacies of the past.

The *estallido* cannot be understood as an isolated event but as a traumatic repetition that shattered the official narrative of a successful democratic transition. The state violence deployed in 2019 functioned as a historical catalyst, reactivating the unresolved legacy of the Pinochet era. The atmosphere of exception connected the youth of 2019 with the generation of the 1980s, forcing a confrontation with “a social trauma. The traumatic dimension of the dictatorship. And the ghost of the dictatorship in its obstinacy” (Interview with Julian-Vejar, October 2024). This psycho-political dynamic confirms that the Chilean refusal operated through a process of retroactive historicism; the present crisis did not simply recall the past but resurrected its “ghost,” exposing the transition as an incomplete project of mourning. The event was not a protest against a finished past, but a confrontation with a traumatic Real that had never been overcome and continued to structure the present.

This structural decay translated directly into what Sociologist Pedro Güell, who was also one of the chief advisers to the Bachelet government, terms a profound 'crisis of the social promise' of neoliberalism. The model's core narrative—that individual effort and debt-fueled education would lead to social mobility—had fractured. For an entire generation, as Güell notes, this broken promise was the fundamental root of the societal 'malestar' or malaise (Interview with Pedro Güell, April 2024). This was not merely economic disappointment, but a deep crisis of subjective well-being. As Marcel Solá argues, Chile had become a 'sociedad de malestar' (a society of discontent), where impressive macroeconomic growth failed to produce a basic sense of a good and secure life for the majority (Interview with Marcel Solá, July 2024). The *estallido*, from this perspective, was an explosion against the intolerable contradiction between the official “oasis” or “progress” narrative and the lived reality of permanent stress and precarity.

This 'eventful mobilization' was more than a reaction to specific policies; at its philosophical core, it was a confrontation with what Rodrigo Karmy Bolton identifies as the '*vacío-significante*'—the signifying void at the heart of the Chilean model. For decades, the hegemonic narrative of neoliberalism, with its promise of prosperity and modernization, functioned as the master-signifier that gave meaning and order to social life. The *estallido*, in this view, was the moment that this signifier collapsed entirely, revealing that behind the fantasy of the “Chilean miracle” there was nothing—no collective project, no social bond, only the logic of the market. The eruption, therefore, was not a demand *for* a new political program, but an explosion of the void itself onto the streets.

This explains the fundamentally 'destituent,' rather than 'constituent,' nature of the revolt. As Karmy Bolton argues, the energy of the protest was aimed at deposing the old logic, at emptying the place of power, not at building a new state with a pre-defined ideology. This “destituent power” is what gave the revolt its uniquely chaotic and radically democratic character, but it is also what made it fundamentally untranslatable for the existing political system, which only understands the language of constituent power and programmatic demands.

The central ideological battle of the *estallido* was, as philosopher Rodrigo Karmy Bolton describes it, a 'guerra de nombres'—a war of names. The most significant event in this war was the political return of the word '*pueblo*' (the people). As sociologist Juan Pablo explains, for thirty years this term had been effectively “forbidden” in public discourse, deliberately replaced by depoliticized and consensual terms like '*la gente*' (the folks) or '*los ciudadanos*' (the citizens) that fit neatly within the neoliberal, post-political framework. To say '*pueblo*' again was a radical political act, brought into being by many slogans. This motto functioned not as a simple statement but as a form of “deferred punctuation,” an unfinished symbolic interpellation that opened a radical space of questioning by leaving the crucial “to what?” unanswered, thereby exposing the subject to the enigma of the Other's desire (Sánchez, 2024, p. 423). The re-emergence of this word from the streets signaled a profound repoliticisation of society and a direct refusal of the consensus language that had defined the democratic transition.

This re-emergent *pueblo* was not, however, a simple repetition of the past. As multiple interviewees attest, the collective subject of 2019 was a new historical articulation. It was what Carlos Ruiz Encina, drawing on contemporary theory, terms a “multitude”: a heterogeneous multiplicity of actors united only in their common rejection of the system. Its composition was diverse. It was, as Verónica Schild argues, a “feminist *pueblo*,” whose consciousness had been forged in the massive feminist mobilizations of 2018 and whose critique targeted the patriarchal foundations of the neoliberal model. It was also, as sociologist Dasten Julián Véjar defines it, a “precariat,” a new class subject composed not of the traditional industrial working class, but of indebted students, precarious service workers, and citizens facing a crisis of social reproduction. The power of the *estallido* lay precisely in its ability to temporarily unify these different subjectivities—the student, the feminist, the worker, the neighborhood resident—into a single political force.

The articulation of a new, heterogeneous *pueblo* – a precarious and feminist multitude – was made possible by the emergence of a master signifier that unified their disparate struggles: *'dignidad'*. This was not merely one demand among many; it was the very concept that gave the revolt its moral grammar and political coherence. Empirical evidence from interviews underscores this interpretation. Güell provides a metaphor for this function, describing the social discontent as a “*puzzle with many pieces: pensions, health, education, abuse...*” In his words, the demand for dignity was the decisive element that allowed for a collective understanding of the crisis:

“Dignidad' became the concept that could piece together the puzzle... 'Dignidad' was not just another piece; it was the frame of the puzzle itself. It gave meaning to all the other pieces.” (Interview with Pedro Güell, April 2024)

Mario Garces also described it as “*'Until dignity becomes a habit,' impressed me; it's an ethical and political expression of the estallido. We want other social relations...*” (Interview with Garces, 2024).

Güell's metaphor is crucial. It reveals that 'dignity' operated as what Lacanian theory would call a *point de capiton* (a “quilting point” or nodal point). It was the signifier that “stitched” the floating chain of grievances—the 'malestar' over pensions, the anger at the cost of living, the frustration with the healthcare system—to a single, unified narrative of systemic injustice. It elevated the conflict from a series of isolated

economic complaints into a profound ethical and political demand for a life of mutual recognition and respect.

This demand for dignity was not an abstract cry; it was aimed squarely at the core logic of the neoliberal model. As constitutional scholar Paul Marshall argues, the demand for dignity was implicitly a demand for a new constitution because the 1980 charter treats fundamental social needs not as rights, but as commodities to be purchased in a market. To demand dignity in healthcare was to reject the business of health; to demand dignity in pensions was to reject the capitalization of old age.

Finally, the power of this signifier extended beyond Chile's borders, connecting the local revolt to a global cycle of struggle. As critical theorist Sergio Villalobos Ruminott notes, the fight for a “dignified life” is the “common sheet” that unites contemporary movements, from the *estallido* to Black Lives Matter in the United States. In this sense, *dignidad* was the universal concept that allowed a particular Chilean crisis to speak to a universal condition of discontent with the devastating effects of global capitalism. It was the name for the ‘post-neoliberal desire’ that animated the revolt.

The state’s multi-pronged reaction to the *estallido* –from direct repression to narrative criminalization and institutional co-optation—is best understood not simply as a clash between “the people” and “the government,” but as a dialectical confrontation between an emergent subject and the institutional “Other.” In the Kojévian master-slave dialectic, the Other is a figure to be overcome in a struggle for recognition. In a more developed Hegelian analysis, however, the “Other” is precisely “*the existing state of affairs or institution which is the taken-for-granted ‘object’ which the subject both acts upon and uses*” (Blunden, 2019, p. 75).

Framing the conflict in this way is crucial. It means the hegemonic response was not a purely external force acting *against* the movement; it was a reaction from the very objective social substance—the state, the media, the legal framework, the political class—that the movement had itself erupted *from within* and was attempting to transform. The strategies of criminalization and the *trampa institucional* were, therefore, manifestations of the established order's “*Cunning of Reason*,” a systemic reassertion of its logic. This brings back Marcuse’s critique of “*repressive tolerance*”

and systemic absorption, revealing how the objective order confronts and attempts to neutralize the very subjective refusal it generates.

The state's narrative strategy of criminalizing the protest's violence can be contrasted with the work of official memory institutions. Even though I was aware that the official memory can be coopted with everyone to ease and taking and advantage of brutality during dictatorship (not to forget that right-wing political parties and left-wing political parties both against it to legitimize their political justifications in contemporary Chile), my fieldwork at the *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos*, a world-renowned memory museum opened under Michael Bachelet's first presidential term, showed how state violence from the dictatorship is framed as a historical aberration. Among all things represented I saw from the burned books (surprisingly Marcuse's ODM was also burned) buried underground to traumatic narratives from all repressed and out struggled victims of dictatorship to political narratives that shaped the countries neoliberal institutional construction such as Plan Laboral, Plan Z, Operation Condor etc., the one especially I saw was a burned flag of Chile during the bombings of La Moneda, created this monadic messianic heterogeneity when the new flags of Mapuche and Chile all came together in the streets during *estallido* (Field notes, 2024). This contrasts sharply with the popular perception during the *estallido* that it was a continuation of historical practice. Furthermore, academic discussions, such as the one at the launch of the book *'Imbunches de la dictadura,'* in Valdivia, reveal an ongoing intellectual struggle to understand the deep, psychological legacies of dictatorial power, a legacy the state's *'politics of forgetting'* seeks to obscure (Field notes, 2024).

The immense *repoliticization* of the social sphere was met with a direct and calculated strategy of depoliticization from the state. As political scientist Lucia Dammert argues, the government's immediate response was to frame the *estallido* not as a legitimate political crisis, but as a problem of "public order" and security. This "securitization" of social discontent is a classic post-political maneuver, designed to bypass political negotiation in favor of police repression. This strategy was executed through a deliberate narrative of "criminalization," which sought to divide the popular movement by separating "good, peaceful protesters" from "violent vandals" or "delinquents".

This narrative was further reinforced by what Lucia Dammert and Diego Sazo identify as a strategy of “*scapegoating*”. To avoid confronting the systemic causes of the revolt, the government and its allied media promoted narratives that blamed the violence on external forces or internal enemies. As Sazo explains, the initial targets were foreigners –Venezuelans and Cubans– implying a foreign conspiracy. When this failed to gain traction, the narrative shifted to blaming the ‘*lumpen*’ and organized crime. This two-pronged strategy of criminalization and scapegoating was a clear attempt at hegemonic recuperation: by reframing the conflict around the signifier of violence instead of dignity, the state sought to delegitimize the protesters' claims and justify its own repressive response.

While the discursive and cultural strategies of criminalization and forgetting were effective in shaping public opinion, the most decisive act of hegemonic containment was institutional. As constitutional scholar Paul Marshall argues, the political class channeled the explosive energy of the *estallido* directly into a pre-existing ‘*trampa institucional*’ (institutional trap): the 1980 constitution itself. This constitution, Marshall explains, was designed by the dictatorship not merely to enact specific policies, but to create a political system of “neutralizations”—a set of high quorums, veto points, and electoral rules that make fundamental change nearly impossible. The “Acuerdo por la Paz y la Nueva Constitución” (Agreement for Peace and a New Constitution) of November 15, 2019, while appearing to be a concession to the protesters, was in fact the very mechanism that led the revolt into this trap.

This maneuver shifted the site of conflict from the open, unpredictable, and popular terrain of the street to the closed, rule-bound, and elite-dominated terrain of the political institution. The political class, which, as John Charney notes, had been “completely blind” to the social crisis, saw the constituent process as a way to regain control of the narrative and the political timeline. By accepting this institutional path, the popular movement's “destituent” energy, as described by Rodrigo Karmy Bolton, was forced into a “constituent” process it was not designed for and could not win. This institutional channeling was the most effective form of system absorption, as it successfully demobilized the streets and replaced the radical demand for dignity with a technocratic debate over legal articles.

Yet, the interregnum is not merely an endpoint; it is an open, contested space. The memory of the *estallido* remains a potent political force, an archive of possibilities for the future. This memory is actively preserved in the 'Museo del Estallido Social,' which, as Marcel Solá explains, functions as a direct counter-narrative to the state's "politics of forgetting" (Interview with Marcel Solá, October 2024). The utopian question that the revolt opened remains the central challenge for Chilean politics. As sociologist Carlos Ruiz Encina posits, the task is now to imagine a new form of politics—a "politics of the common"—that can institutionalize the desire for community without falling into the traps of the old state. While the event of the *estallido* is over, the 'Act of Great Refusal' it embodied persists as a political potential, a repressed memory, and a utopian horizon that will continue to shape the struggle for Chile's future.

The current state of political melancholy, expressed by so many interviewees, is palpable within the public academic sphere. My observations at the "*Congreso Nacional, Conflicto, política y protesta: A cinco años del 18 de octubre*" confirm this mood. Panels were dominated by analyses of failure, institutional blockage, and the successful co-optation of the movement's energy (Field notes, 2024). The very title of the '*Conferencia: De la agencia a la paciencia*' another event that I attended in Valdivia, captures this affective shift perfectly – a move from the active, world-making 'agency' of 2019 to the melancholic 'patience' of the present interregnum, where actors are forced to wait for a new political opening (Field notes, 2024).

To understand the deep melancholy that permeates the post-*estallido* landscape, one must look to the foundational compromises of the democratic transition. As Donoso and von Bülow serve as proof of this temporal paradox in which they claim that Chile as "a less studied country" (Von Bülow & Donoso, 2017, p. 4). Published just two years before the insurrection, the volume charts the rising tides of student, indigenous, and environmental protest. It analyzes their strategies, their relationship with the state, and their political impacts. Yet, it operates within the conceptual horizon of the post-transition order, analyzing cycles of contention *within* a system whose fundamental coordinates are assumed to be stable. As outlined in their introduction, the post-1990 period was defined by a deliberate demobilization of the very social movements that had been crucial in challenging the dictatorship. The leaders of the

new *Concertación* governments, haunted by the “traumatic experience of the 1973 democratic breakdown,” actively sought to contain social conflict and prioritize elite political bargaining (Von Bülow & Donoso, 2017, p. 13). This led to what many protesters experienced as a betrayal: a “traumatic acceptance” of the institutional and economic limits imposed by the Pinochet regime. The melancholy of the present is therefore not simply a response to the failures of the *estallido*; it is an affective state with a thirty-year history, a mourning for the lost promise of a truly democratic rupture that was sacrificed in the name of stability.

A core finding is the emergence of a triadic temporal framework that structures the protest narratives. The interview data indicate that protestors evoke a potent sense of nostalgia for a past when communal bonds and collective memory provided a counterweight to neoliberal alienation. This longing is not merely a sentimental regression; rather, it functions as a critical lens through which the protestors assess the loss of socio-political values such as dignity and equality. The language of nostalgia situates protestors within a continuum of historical struggle, positioning their collective memory as an essential resource in contesting the neoliberal “miracle” narrative—a narrative that, while publicly lauded as a success, has long masked deep structural fissures.

In contrast, the present is imbued with a pervasive melancholy that speaks to the disillusionment stemming from unmet promises of progress. Protestors articulate a lived experience of systemic neglect—a present marked by contradictions where the spectacle of neoliberal triumph coexists with everyday experiences of inequality and social precarity. This melancholic register is indicative of a broader crisis of subjectivity in contemporary societies, where the collapse of hegemonic narratives leaves individuals in a state of existential disquiet. Such disquiet is not merely reflective but actively mobilizes a critical awareness that challenges the post-political status quo.

The future, as articulated through these narratives, is envisaged through a dimension of fantasy—a realm where protestors project alternative possibilities for societal transformation. This fantasy is not escapist; rather, it represents a strategic rearticulation of desire and political agency. Through signifiers like “changing the system” and “changing society,” protestors articulate visions of a radically reformed

future, one that transcends the inherent contradictions of a neoliberal framework. This future-oriented discourse emerges as a direct response to the disjuncture between the remembered past and the disillusioning present, functioning as a catalyst for collective mobilization and the formation of counter-hegemonic identities.

From a critical theoretical perspective, the affective reconfigurations identified in the protest discourse signal a rupture in the symbolic order of neoliberal capitalism. The nostalgic reclamation of lost communal values and the melancholic recognition of present failures provide the emotional substrate upon which a transformative political imagination is built. The fantasy of a reconstituted future—where systemic inequities are not only critiqued but actively re-envisioned—serves to destabilize the entrenched narratives of democracy, dictatorship, and neoliberal transition that have long structured Chile’s political landscape.

The prevalence of key signifiers such as *dignidad*, *el pueblo*, and *violencia* in the protest narratives must be understood within the psychoanalytic context of the capitalist discourse itself. As Tomšič (2020) argues, drawing a homology between Marx and Lacan, the capitalist mode of production does not merely exploit labor but also produces a particular kind of “damaged subjectivity” through its logic of “production for the sake of production” (p. 300). This endless drive, which structurally mirrors the Lacanian concept of *surplus-enjoyment*, creates the very social and psychic precarity that the *estallido* rose up against.

Our analysis of the master signifiers of the *estallido*, *dignidad*, *el pueblo*, *violencia*, must be understood not as a list of policy demands, but as the articulation of what Marcuse termed a “*new sensibility*,” to a “new Chile” with many narratives as it has been seen so far. As Funke and others (2017) argue in their reading of contemporary movements, the “quest for dignity” is rooted in an “*emancipatory philosophical anthropological critique of alienation, domination, and suffering*” that goes far beyond purely economic grievances (p. 25). This reframes the entire problematic. This wholesale rejection of the logic that reduces human life to instrumental calculation was condensed into a signifier. As one intellectual participant explained, in a system where neoliberalism becomes an “increasingly authoritarian regime,” the rebellion was unified by the ultimate value that remains when life is made worthless: “*The last value that remains of life is dignity[...] for the epic of a people*

[...] *it's a story in itself. So, there was no better concept that could bring together all that*" (Interview with Julian-Vejar, October 2024). This framing of dignity as an epic, constitutive force is a practical expression of Marcuse's Great Refusal against the administered society.

In Chile, during the dictatorship and even in the years of democracy, the ruling elite used a *neoliberal master narrative* claiming that free-market policies and strict public order were the only path to development and prosperity. This narrative was so dominant that it was presented "*as the only possible way of development*" for Chile – a classic example of how a master frame can achieve hegemonic status, making alternatives literally unthinkable for a time.

The demand for dignity in Chile was not merely a demand for better pensions or lower transit fares; it was a demand for a different way of being, a wholesale rejection of the "one-dimensional thought" that reduces human life to market calculations. The eruption of affect in the streets—the rage, the joy, the solidarity—was the practical expression of this new sensibility, a political and instinctual refusal to continue living within the psychic and material confines of the neoliberal order. It was, in essence, a move from a critique of economic conditions to a "*critique of the existing ways of producing, consuming, communicating, and living together*" (Gandler, 2017, p. 330), a collective attempt to forge new, non-alienated forms of life.

To fully grasp the political force of dignidad as the signifier of the *estallido*, it must be situated as a direct response to the subjective condition produced by the "*end of history*" narrative. In his influential thesis, Fukuyama (1992) did not simply predict the global triumph of liberal capitalism; he diagnosed the psychic state of the subject who would inhabit this new world: the "*last man*." This figure, borrowed from Nietzsche, is the quintessential post-historical being – sated, secure, and concerned only with his own comfort, having lost the will to struggle for higher ideals.

Even Fukuyama finds this figure deeply problematic, an "uneasy" and "decadent remainder" who "makes him uneasy." The life of the last man, a life of material plenty without meaningful struggle, raises the question: "*Is this really what the human story has been 'all about'?*" (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 312). The demand for dignidad that erupted in Chile is the "No!" to this question. It is a practical and symbolic refusal of

the subjectivity of the “last man.” It asserts that a life reduced to economic calculation and consumer satisfaction is a life lacking in dignity. The *estallido* was thus a rebellion not only against a set of economic policies but against the anthropological horizon of neoliberalism—a collective demand to re-enter history, to recommence the struggle for recognition that the hegemonic narrative had declared finished.

However, Mario Garces, conversely, dismisses the “end of history” in Latin America, stating:

“In Latin America, it seems there’s never going to be an ‘end of history,’ because Latin America isn’t Hegelian—it’s not even Cartesian. Like Gabriel García Márquez said, ‘In Latin America, we’re closer to Kafka than to Descartes.’ The story of The Metamorphosis—a man who goes to bed, begins growing hair, and wakes up as a cockroach—feels more natural to us than ‘I think, therefore I am.’ So yes, we’re closer to Kafka than to Descartes. And that’s what you see in García Márquez’s magical realism: reality and fantasy, reason and emotion—they’re always intertwined, constantly interacting. So, talking about an ‘end of history’ in this context is difficult. What is true, I think, is that society has been transformed. And politics is struggling to express the desire for change within this transformed society. That’s the relevant point.” (Interview with Garces, 2024)

The re-emergence of the term *el pueblo* (the people) was a profound political act. The post-dictatorship transition narrative had deliberately replaced the antagonistic *pueblo* with the depoliticized, individualistic “citizen” (*ciudadano*) or “the folks” (*la gente*). To say *pueblo* is to re-invoke a history of class struggle and popular sovereignty, directly refusing the neoliberal ideal of a society of individual entrepreneurs. It is the linguistic performance of a new collective subjectivation, a “we” that stands against the elite “them,” shattering the consensus that the transition narrative had worked to build.

This re-emergent *pueblo* was not, however, a simple repetition of the past, but a new historical articulation. A more rigorous theoretical language for this phenomenon is found in Hegel’s dialectical triad of the Universal, the Particular, and the Individual, which provides the means to analyze the composition of a collective subject (Blunden, 2019, pp. 119-122). In the context of the *estallido*:

The real success of the *estallido*’s *pueblo* lay precisely in this dialectical relation. It is a universal that did not erase the particulars but rather drew its force from

them, unifying a heterogeneous and fragmented society into a political subject capable of a collective Great Refusal.

This re-emergent *pueblo* has a long, repressed history. Pedro Milos's (2007) analysis of the 1957 uprising reveals a strikingly similar composition, where a student-led protest against increase of the transportation fares in Santiago was quickly joined and transformed by a massive influx of workers (*obreros*) and residents of the urban periphery (*pobladores*), demonstrating that this heterogeneous collective subject has been a recurrent, if often unrecognized, actor in Chilean history.

“And the protests or the gatherings were very friendly and very performative during the afternoon with daylight. You know, there were families where you could breathe some happiness. Even for me, being like a conservative, and I was against that, and it was really hard not to feel seduced by it.” (Personal communication with J., 2024)

Violencia (violence) was the most contested signifier of the *estallido*. It was observed within various forms, including state repression, property destruction, and symbolic acts of defiance or aggression. The state and its allied media sought to frame the entire protest through the lens of looting and vandalism to “criminalize” it and justify repression. This narrative sought to divide the movement into “good” peaceful protesters and “bad” violent ones. From within the movement, however, counter-narratives framed violence in multiple ways: as a legitimate act of self-defense against brutal police repression (the *Primera Línea*), as a necessary and symbolic rupture with a violent system (burning a metro station as a symbol of neoliberal modernity), or as a cathartic expression of accumulated rage. The struggle over the meaning of “violence” is the struggle for the moral legitimacy of the entire refusal. It reveals the core antagonism: is the primary violence the broken window, or the 30 years of systemic precarity? The Act of Great Refusal forces this question into the open, challenging the state's monopoly on defining legitimate force.

“In Plaza Dignidad, the opposite happened. This primera línea, which was confronting the police, was the group that... in a way... made it possible for the square to become this mass gathering point. So, the primera línea took on a different meaning. They were seen as... part of the people... who were putting a stop to the police.” (Interview with Mario Garces, 2024)

“Because they were saying, ‘People are so angry, they’re so fed up with everything that this isn’t a terrorist attack, this is citizens expressing their anger,

their exhaustion with the system. 'So in a way, they were justifying the violence. And I still don't understand that.' (Interview with Gonzales Toro, 2024)

"Anger and rage were translated into optimism, I mean, anger can be transformed into beauty, because burning down a church can be the beauty of liberation. We were like that... my parents, for example, who are center-left, were also a little, uh, scandalized by all those things... why are they burning down a church?" (Interview with Venables, 2024)

For understanding the signifier of "violence" within the *estallido*, returning to Marcuse's analysis of the 'affluent society' provides a crucial theoretical lens. He argues that sustaining the system requires more than just economic management; it necessitates a political and psychic strategy for handling the surplus aggression generated by its own repressive logic. The modern capitalist state, even under the guise of a democratic welfare apparatus, functions as a "militaristic and belligerent state." Its stability, Marcuse contends, depends on its capacity to channel the frustrations inherent in a system of pre-established needs and alienated labor. This is achieved through the perpetual fabrication of a total "Enemy, with a capital 'E'," which serves to externalize discontent and justify state control.

This manufactured state of exception "activates and intensifies a basic aggression within this society" to an unprecedented degree. The genius of the system lies in its ability to mobilize this aggression in "socially useful ways so that it does not explode against the system itself." Aggression is thus deflected away from its structural source—the repressive order—and redirected inward, toward the self, or outward against designated others, but never against the totality. The *estallido* can thus be read psychoanalytically as a moment of critical rupture where this carefully managed circuit breaks down: the repressed aggression is no longer socially useful, and it explodes directly against the "inclusive neoliberal" system that produced it.

The *estallido* represents a definitive rupture with the post-political consensus, demonstrating not the absence of ideology but its forceful return. Contrary to intellectual attempts to frame the uprising as a "post-ideological scenario," the event was, as one interviewee insisted, "*a deeply ideological movement [...] an assemblage of different ideologies*" (Interview with Julian-Vejar, October 2024). This characterization is crucial, as it reframes the revolt not as a simple negation but as the complex birth of a new political subjectivity forged from the convergence of multiple,

often latent, historical narratives. This new subject was not pre-existing but was “born” in the act of refusal itself.

The prevailing “transition narrative” in Chile serves to ideologically foreclose the political sphere by framing the post-Pinochet period as a successful, if imperfect, restoration of democracy. This constructs a fantasy of resolution that obscures the persistence of neoliberal structures and historical trauma, fostering a Marcusean one-dimensionality wherein qualitative alternatives are rendered either superfluous or inconceivable. The *estallido*'s slogan, “it's not about 30 pesos, it's about 30 years,” constitutes a direct rupture with this hegemonic narrative.

The era of post-dictatorship Chile was framed by this narrative of democratic transition, one that typically privileged stability and economic progress under neoliberalism while minimizing the continuities with the dictatorial model and escalating inequality. As Žižek contends, ideology functions to mask foundational social antagonisms by projecting a fantasy of societal harmony. Similarly, Marcuse argued that a one-dimensional society neutralizes critique and constricts the horizon of possibility via dominant discourses and language. The Chilean transition narrative performed precisely this function, positing the post-1990 order as the sole viable reality and thereby obscuring the antagonisms created by neoliberalism and the unsettled traumas of the past. This process engendered a state of ideological closure (in the Žižekian sense) and one-dimensional thought (as per Marcuse), which severely limited the political imagination. Consequently, the *estallido*'s repudiation of the “30 years” narrative signifies an attempt to shatter this foreclosure and lay bare the underlying fantasy.

The Chilean *estallido* must be understood as a direct refusal of the hegemonic narrative of the “End of History” and its national variant, Chilean exceptionalism. The uprising was fueled by the stark contradiction between the official narrative of a stable, prosperous, and democratic nation and the lived reality of profound inequality and political alienation. The intellectual class was aware of a deep “*disconnect between citizens, the people, and their representatives*” (Interview with Rodolfo, July 2024) long before the outburst. This disconnect was a symptom of a post-political order where foundational antagonisms were masked by a discourse of technocratic management and stability. The *estallido* violently shattered this fantasy, proving that

“History has not ended” and that systemic contradictions could not be indefinitely contained. This “exceptionalism” is thus re-framed from a point of pride to a painful condition, a national *refusal* rooted in unresolved historical processes and persistent inequality.

This rupture was not a relapse into a pre-modern past but a specific response to the failures of the neoliberal project. The event exposed the “legacy of the dictatorship” (Interview with Rodolfo, July 2024) not as a resolved historical chapter, but as a traumatic wound that continued to structure the present through economic precarity (pensions, healthcare) and institutional corruption. In Žižekian terms, the protest was an Act that forced the return of the repressed Real of Chilean society. The collective melancholy over the failed promise of the democratic transition –the sense that “it didn't happen”– transformed into a nostalgic fantasy for a different future, one where “anything was possible.” It was this dialectic of melancholy and fantasy that gave the Chilean refusal its political force and utopian charge.

The temporal dynamic of the *estallido* cannot be fully understood by a simple opposition between nostalgia for a good past and melancholy over a bad present, or from melancholy to fantasy as gratifying death drive. This affective circuit must be seen as an economy, a struggle over the political use of loss. Rosaura Martínez Ruiz (2021), in her reading of Freud, provides the crucial distinction between melancholia and mourning. While melancholia involves a pathological identification with the lost object, leading to paralysis, mourning is a “work of thought” (p. 150) that allows for the eventual reinvestment of libidinal energy. The challenge for any radical political project is to transform collective melancholy into a productive, collective mourning.

The analysis shows that nostalgia did not function as a simple retreat from the present, but as a critical political resource. It provided a framework for understanding what had been lost to neoliberalism and what could be regained. Carla Pinochet Cobos, when reflecting on the unique fusion of art and politics during the *estallido*, found only one historical parallel: “*the only precedent was the UP the Allende government*”. This is not merely a historical reference; it is an act of nostalgic invocation. The memory of the UP era, a time of perceived collective projects and social solidarity, serves as a benchmark against which the atomized, neoliberal present is judged and found

wanting. This longing for a past moment of communal political energy provides the emotional and imaginative fuel for desiring a new form of collectivity in the present.

If nostalgia provided the memory of a “good object,” melancholy provided the diagnosis of the “bad object”—the present-day political order. This is not a passive sadness but an active, critical disillusionment. Sergio Villalobos Ruminott diagnoses the entire post-dictatorship era as an “*orchestrated process of transition... implemented on... impunity and forgetting*”. Lucia Dammert confirms this affective state when describing the aftermath of the failed constitutional process, noting that the left was left “so disheartened”. This shared sense of being disheartened, of living within a system defined by “institutional forgetting,” is the core of the collective melancholy. This affective state, born from the unfulfilled promises of the democratic transition, creates the intolerable condition from which a radical desire to break with the present must emerge.

The affective landscape of the *estallido* is characterized by a dialectic of nostalgia and melancholia. On one hand, nostalgia for prior struggles, such as the 1983-86 protest cycle, or for a fantasized historical unity, supplies the libidinal energy for protest, yet it carries the risk of idealizing the past. On the other hand, melancholia—originating from historical trauma like the dictatorship and contemporary disappointments—fuels collective rage. However, it also threatens to devolve into political paralysis or non-transformative, repetitive cycles of protest, a notion that resonates with Žižek's critique of repetitive drive (*jouissance*).

Protests are fundamentally driven by affect and are deeply entangled with notions of time and memory. The textual fragments analyzed demonstrate a profound engagement with historical memory (the UP, the dictatorship) and trauma during the *estallido*. Whereas nostalgia entails a yearning for a lost past, melancholia signifies an unresolved state of mourning and loss. Narratives might articulate a nostalgia for the solidarity and objectives of the UP era, functioning as a form of Marcusean “utopian memory” that inspires present action. Concurrently, these narratives can reflect a profound melancholia over the UP's violent demise, the enduring trauma of the dictatorship, and the perceived betrayal of the transition, a state which, while fueling anger, may ultimately impede the capacity to envision a genuinely new future. This dynamic interplay constitutes the movement's libidinal economy: nostalgia offers a

positive cathexis (investment), while melancholia contributes negative energy (resentment, fury). Grasping this dialectic is crucial for explaining the affective intensity and the inherent contradictions that animate the movement's political drive.

The triadic temporal framework of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy finds its political point of application in the concept of the future. The neoliberal “end of history” narrative functions by colonizing the future, presenting it as a simple, linear continuation of the present. Any radical alternative is thus rendered unthinkable, utopian in the pejorative sense. The political function of protest fantasy is precisely to break this ideological foreclosure. It is an act of reclaiming the future as a site of contingency and radical possibility.

This reclamation can be understood through a more rigorous, non-appropriated reading of Hegel. While interpreters like Kojève sealed history in 1806, Hegel himself insisted on the “fecundity of the unrealized future” (Dale, 2014, p. 21). For Hegel, the Owl of Minerva flies at dusk, meaning philosophy can only comprehend what has been; it cannot, and must not, legislate the future. The future remains the realm of freedom and contingency. The fantasy articulated in the Chilean protests – the desire for a society that tries to break the old symbolic order – is therefore not a flight from reality but a profound political Act. It is an act of refusing the anti-Hegelian closure of the future performed by the master-hegemonic narrative, thereby reopening a temporal horizon where, as Hegel understood, the “universal end of history” is not a finished event but a constant struggle for the realization of spirit (Dale, 2014, p. 233).

In conclusion, these three temporal affects are inextricably linked. The nostalgia for the collectivism of the past highlights the alienation of the present; the melancholy with the present makes a break necessary; and the utopian fantasy of the future provides the hope that such a break is possible. This dialectic constitutes the very structure of “post-neoliberal desire,” providing the essential affective energy for the “Act of Great Refusal.”

The analysis of 28 interviews reveals that the Act of Great Refusal in Chile was fueled by the affective energy generated from a collective melancholy with the present and a nostalgic-utopian desire for a different future. This act directly ruptured the hegemonic narrative of the 'Chilean Miracle,' but its transformative potential was

ultimately captured and neutralized by the very political system it sought to overcome, resulting in the complex 'failure of failure' that defines Chile's post-estallido landscape.

These findings from the Chilean *Estallido social*, particularly regarding the dynamics of ideological rupture, the channeling of alienation into desire, and the articulation of utopian moments, resonate with patterns observed in numerous contemporary global movements. Applying the 'Act of Great Refusal' as an analytic lens, we can see how these broader themes manifest...

The Chilean estallido functions as a potent case study of resistance to the particular form of post-political consensus that has been imposed through neoliberalism within a Global South context. It illustrates the convergence of Žižek's critique of post-politics with Marcuse's critique of the one-dimensional society within a conjuncture marked by the legacies of historical trauma, profound inequality, and externally dictated economic models. In doing so, it provides a specific lens through which to view global anti-capitalist struggles.

Žižek critiques the “post-political” condition, in which ideology becomes invisible and foundational social antagonism is disavowed. Marcuse, in parallel, critiques the “one-dimensional society,” where the very possibility of alternatives is neutralized. Chile's post-dictatorship period has frequently been characterized as a stable democracy founded upon a neoliberal consensus that effectively depoliticized fundamental social grievances. This precisely matches the definition of a post-political, one-dimensional order. The estallido violently ruptured this consensus, forcing repressed antagonisms—most notably inequality and historical trauma—back to the forefront of political life. This eruption took place in a Global South context historically conditioned by a legacy of neoliberalism imposed via structures of dependency and authoritarian rule. Consequently, the estallido provides a concrete instantiation of how the theoretical critiques of Žižek and Marcuse manifest, and are arguably intensified, under the specific conditions of the neoliberalized Global South, thereby challenging any claims to the universality of a post-political consensus.

The nostalgia for the “Chilean road” embodies both melancholy/grief and fantasy, within the effect of Eros, yet remains trapped in the narrative of global linear historical progress (sometimes referred to as postmodernity). This was, at one time,

the legacy of the Chilean revolution, experienced as Allende's socialism “flavored with empanada and red wine.” However, those who now enjoy contemporary times under the current political system—a system drastically transformed by the political, cultural, and economic interventions of Pinochet's military dictatorship—are not the same individuals who benefited from the previous era of popular politics.

Therefore, the research closely observes how these dynamics are unfolding in the recent constitutional process and ongoing debates about Chile's future. The *estallido* may not have provided all the answers, but it forced the nation to confront fundamental questions about justice, equality, and the type of society it aspires to be. In this regard, the outburst, responding to the ongoing counter-revolutionary era (a call made by Marcuse in his later years), has fostered new and yet unknown subjectivities within a clandestine network society, opening the door to a Hegelian *Aufhebung*: a transformative event where there is an abolition of the previous, but also a preservation, never in a static form.

The outburst represents a moment of sublation (in the Hegelian sense of *Aufhebung*) where previous static or revolutionary singularities – informed by post-1968 narratives – are preserved and transformed. In other words, it can be seen as the meeting point of these various strands of discontent, a perspective informed by the “long 60s” and the post-1968 world, where the debate about the rupture between the old and the new began. This sublimation encompasses various expressions of discontent, from student demands for educational reform and feminist challenges to patriarchy, to human rights defense and suburban mobilizations, representing a broader shift from the old to the new. It echoes the transition from a Freudian understanding of individual discontent/denial to a Marxist framework rooted in class struggle, which then evolved into predominantly cultural or post-industrial movements.

However, the , unfolding within the context of the master-hegemonic narratives of the “end of history” and the “end of ideology” – narratives that exert a master-hegemonic influence – becomes a process of repressive desublimation in the political arena. Precisely because of its leaderless, decentralized, and seemingly spontaneous nature, the outburst paradoxically becomes highly vulnerable to external control and manipulation, its trajectory shaped and potentially limited by these dominant narratives.

Thus, the research explores the complex interaction of post-neoliberal psychic structuring (subjectivity) and historical memory within the narratives that fueled the Chilean *estallido*. This aims to provide not only a deeper understanding of the Chilean case but also contribute to a broader comprehension of rejection, radical change, and the enduring power of collective action in a world still grappling with the legacies of neoliberalism. Furthermore, it seeks to reveal, free from panic and fear, the persistent ghost within the symbolic order of the promise of the “end of history,” a promise that even its creator ultimately rejected.

Finally, and most importantly, incorporating the concept of the failure of failure into the dialectical process reveals how, within and beyond the outburst, the counter-hegemonic narrative—through Eros and Thanatos, a renewed dystopian acceptance, and a utopian imagination starting from scratch – expose the Real of the very negation.

In the global multipolar world, where the big Other does not dictate what to do, humankind, caught up in multiple expectations without a guiding meaning, experiences frustration, despair, melancholy rather than happiness.

The universal demand for dignity suggests a libidinal reconfiguration of political space. For Marcuse, dignity cannot be attained through the satisfaction of false needs within administered society. Similarly, for Pleyers (2023), dignity in the *estallido* was not a vague slogan but a concrete rejection of the neoliberal subject-form that commands individuals to find fulfillment in meritocratic suffering and indebtedness. This shared subjective core marks the refusal not only of exploitation but of the *structure of desire* itself.

6.6. End of Analysis

Arriving now at the conclusion of this examination, the final turn will be intended to take the form of a redoubling, in the sense when Freud (1964) asked, “[i]s there such a thing as a natural end to an analysis?” (p. 219) and to that what Lacan has put it as if like an answer to that, “*the end of analysis comes when the analysand de-supposes the analyst of knowledge, so that the analyst falls from the position of the subject supposed to know,*” because what the analysand finds in the analyst is *objet petit a* or in our perspective to be able to converge with Marcuse, is creative ex-nihilo

through political imagination. Psychoanalysis, the end of the analytic process, always, and uncannily, coincides with the impossibility of Thanatos-politics and its beginning so that it can refuel the Eros-politics which was our main articulation at the end of Chapter 3.

So, I thought that President Piñera's "last interview" before his death⁵⁰ after a helicopter crash over Lago Ranco, a lake in southern Chile ("La última entrevista", 2024; Bartlett, 2024), appears as the last guarantor of the order, the master-signifier underwriting the university discourse in late capitalism, precisely the position whose credibility the *estallido* shattered. This framing also marks the moment when the narrative of "changing the president without killing" is symptomatically staged through allegory. In our analysis, reclaiming what remains from the Other against the self-certainties of the "victorious" and their re-invented narratives allows us to read Piñera as master-protagonist and master-elite of the event/political dimension, as a conduit for discourses that operate through "*the unsaid implied in what is said*" (Žižek, 2015, p. 24). Through this prism, his statements stitch together a familiar chain of closures: "end of democracy" to "Marxist dictatorship"; "end of dictatorship" to "democracy and institutions are the only means of dialogue toward a constitution"; "end of transition"; and, finally, "end of neoliberalism" to "oasis." As a prominent representative of the established political-economic order – above all the Chilean neoliberal consensus – his discourse has long shaped and legitimized public understandings of national events.

⁵⁰ This observation derives from my fieldnotes (Valdivia, 2024). During fieldwork, I witnessed President Piñera's body being transferred in an ambulance in Valdivia. I include this not as proof, but as a reflexive note. The scene affected me and shaped a transfer of feelings toward the figure of the "last guarantor" of the neoliberal order from the right wing. However, the point is theoretical. This moment helped me see more clearly how his discourse tries to stitch together a chain of "ends," while the *estallido* breaks that stitching. It is included to clarify the research trajectory and interpretive stance rather than to supply forensic evidence. No personal details beyond public actors are included, and no images are used. The scene's analytic value lies in how it intensified the thesis's concern with allegory and the master-signifier in moments of systemic closure (see also my methodological discussion of researcher positionality and reflexivity). Moreover, within the thesis's "two deaths" frame (first biological and then symbolic), Allende's death is read as a tragedy and melancholy – the closed horizon of a defeated possibility. By contrast, Piñera's helicopter crash can be read as a comedy or farce: the "capital's death" image that stages an end to neoliberalism without resolving anything, echoing the logic of "first as tragedy, then as farce." In this sense, the scene works allegorically; when the totality cannot be shown directly, it returns as a figure that "stands in" for the whole, allowing us to read how closure is stitched together and then broken by the *estallido*. In the case of allegory, I follow the minimalist use common to late-capitalist analysis: allegory names a necessary stand-in for a system that cannot be represented directly within ordinary narrative space.

This moment of exchange between the narratives is a crucial part of our methodology. Two empirical signatures mark this rupture. First, Piñera's reflections on the *estallido* reveal a profound sense of bewilderment and a “disconnect” from the underlying societal discontent. He recalls that “no one saw it coming,” just like the many interviewees said, and even the Carabineros were “overwhelmed”. This “surprise” and “profound incomprehension” (as described by many interviews) are empirical signatures of a Marcusean one-dimensional society where deep social antagonisms are managed and obscured by a post-political consensus. The *estallido*, in this view, was a Žižekian Act that functioned as a “*violent return of the repressed social truth*,” shattering the fantasy of Chilean exceptionalism. Piñera, as the guarantor of the order of this “oasis” narrative, experiences his presumed knowledge *vaporised* by the unexpected eruption of the Real of social antagonism. Second, Piñera consistently frames the *estallido* as a destructive force that “*divided and confronted*” Chileans, in contrast to unifying events in his first term, like the earthquake rescue in 2010 or the miners' ordeal in 2010 again. He laments a return to “violence,” “disqualification,” and “cancellation”. This perspective aligns with the “master-hegemonic narratives” that sought to define the “end of ideology” and “end of history” by presenting a linear, progressive, and consensual trajectory for Chile. The *estallido* violently disrupted this coherence, exposing the “*signifying void*” (as Rodrigo Karmy Bolton terms it) at the heart of the neoliberal model. Piñera's lamentations about division and violence can be seen as an unconscious grappling with this void, unable to integrate the *estallido* into his prior consensual framework.

According to Piñera's narrative, it was a democracy that had cost Chileans so much to recover and rebuild step by step, and in this sense, “a wave of cruel, limitless, implacable” violent confrontation between the democracy and the people, the outcome was not neoliberalism at all, but democracy. Piñera remembers the UP government as an attempt to “*impose a Marxist dictatorship*” that “*advanced without compromise*” and “*did not respect democracy*”. He asserts that this period “*divided [Chileans] deeply*”. This re-narration, while official, ironically repeats the historical “end of democracy” narrative that sought to legitimize the 1973 coup. The “end of analysis” here *redoubles* the initial trauma, showing how the official discourse struggles to move beyond a foundational antagonism by re-narrating the past to confirm its present ideological stance.

Piñera's concluding dream of a “*more united Chile [...] without violence and in peace*” is, paradoxically, an echo of the utopian fantasy that fuelled the *estallido*'s Act of Great Refusal. The “*end of analysis*” here brings to light the persistent, underlying “*struggle for Eros*” – the collective desire for a liberated life – that continues despite ideological fragmentation. The *estallido* represents the violent rupture of this consensus. However, to fully grasp the significance of this event, we must recognize that it did not occur during the zenith of the “end of history” era, but during its chaotic collapse.

This brings the analysis to four concrete interventions that the uprising plotted “*against the unity of Chile*”: (1) changing desire – from private adjustment to a collective claim on a dignified life; (2) changing the president without killing – a symbolic dethronement that refused the sacrificial script; (3) changing the system – naming the model as the problem, not only policies; and (4) changing society – expanding the “we” through new alliances and practices. Across these moments, something that “was not supposed to happen” happened: the hegemonic narrative of linear progress broke down in public. Marcuse helps us name this rupture as the end of the taboo on utopia: an insistence that the present contains real possibilities for a different life, blocked not by nature but by power.

The findings clearly reveal that the concept of “dignity” has become the central “master signifier” of the movement. Diverse and concrete grievances, such as low pensions, costly healthcare services, and debt-based education, have converged under the demand for a “dignified life.” In this context, the identification of dignity with unfulfilled civic promises has re-emerged as a collective objection to neoliberal meritocracy.

Similarly, one of the most radical actions of the *estallido* is the reintroduction of the concept of “the people” (*el pueblo*) into the political arena. This concept, almost erased from public discourse during the neoliberal consensus, now appears as a conflictual and collective subject positioning itself against a “governing elite.” This new “people” is a heterogeneous “multitude” encompassing feminists, students, precarious workers, and indigenous groups, bringing different ideologies against neoliberalism. Subjectivity formation is central to this shift. Neoliberal common sense produced the entrepreneurial self, privatized remedies, and individualized coping,

displacing structural conflict into personal adjustment. Marcuse's account of one-dimensional integration clarifies how comfort and repression couple under affluence; Žižek's notion of the act names a break that cannot be absorbed back into the old coordinates; Jameson's cognitive mapping indicates why new names and images are required once the previous map collapses.

The convergence of these two signifiers confronts the signifier of "violence," termed the "*third traumatic*" (Žižek, 2014, pp. 13-14). This "third traumatic" represents an absolute obstacle to the formation of the pair—a challenge they must face or an impediment they must overcome to realize their desire to unite. This "third" functions as an inverted mirror, revealing the structural violence of the state and capital, thereby legitimizing self-defense and redefining the ethical boundaries of action.

It is a "failure of failure"—a last social movement standing as a signifier of new emancipatory subjectivity that was regulated by the post-1968 setting. Therefore, the Chilean *estallido*'s desire to change the past, in the first place, reflected the totality of accumulation and reactivity of this process. This failure, as such, consists of nostalgia as a past tense recovery, then melancholy as a present tense effort to fail this recovery, and lastly fantasy as an imaginary possibility to create a new system and society. This sum of acquisitiveness and struggles corresponds to the death drive's eros (act of great refusal).

The terms "democracy," "dictatorship," "transition," and by extension "neoliberalism" operate here as ideological markers rather than neutral descriptors. From Frei Montalva's "*Revolution in Liberty*," through Allende's defeat and Plan Z to Operation Condor, the uprisings in 1983-1986, to the 1988 plebiscite and the Concertación period, and to 2006 and 2011 student movements onwards, antagonism was not resolved; it was technically and administratively managed. The transition restored electoral procedures while preserving the core market order and the 1980 constitutional shell, installing a consensus style — *en la medida de lo posible* — that normalized the 1975 neoliberal turn as common sense. In this sense, political time was organized by master signifiers that closed alternatives and translated conflict into administration.

“Chilean exceptionalism” has shifted after the *estallido*. It is no longer a solitary success story but part of a wider Latin American horizon that foregrounds *dignidad* and *el pueblo* as democratic signifiers and as the ground for a new political subjectivity facing global capitalism from the periphery. Yet when the knowledge that claims to “totalize” the process tries to speak for that universality, *dignidad* (identification), and *el pueblo* (class) show their limit: they work as empty signifiers, names that hold the place of a universal that cannot be fully said or owned. This is the impossibility of the Real – the universal appears as a gap, a void that cannot be filled by doctrine or policy. In our material, that void is not paralysis. It functions as a site of practice. The track that can be followed is the collective work that inhabits the gap – *cabildo*, care, defense, assembly – treating the emptiness as a commons where a people is made rather than discovered. The Latin American experience here is not the recovery of a hidden essence but the learning to dwell in the void as the condition of invention: universality is produced from below, in acts that refuse closure and bind disparate demands without erasing their difference. The Act names this step into the gap without guarantees; the Great Refusal names the decision to keep the space open against restoration. Together they generate a new sensibility capable of facing the future struggle within a post-neoliberal desire that is concrete in practice and modest in language, but firm in its ethic of dignity and its wager on the people. So “*the fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period*” (Marcuse, 2007, p. 261).

Master slogans such as “Until dignity becomes a habit!” (*¡Hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre!*), “Neither forgive nor forget” (*Ni perdón ni olvida*), Neoliberalism is born and dies in Chile (*El neoliberalismo nace y muere en Chile*), and “It’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years of violence” (*No son 30 pesos, son 30 años de violencia*) radicalize and bring into the public sphere the microphysical violence accumulated from economic and post-political exploitation in daily life. Žižek explains it through Korean traumatized events such as atrocities committed during the Japanese invasion in World War II, when Koreans articulated two different versions of “*neither forgive nor forget*” as one is the standard formula of “*we will forgive but not forget*” and the other “*we forget but not forgive*” (2015, p. 5). He ultimately says that “*superego blackmail*” is in operation within “*we will forgive but not forget*,” so “*we forget but not forgive*” is not manipulative in this sense and “[t]he previous trauma is that of the birth of subjectivity

itself" (Žižek, 2014, p. 97). Returning to the Chilean case, then, here, traumatized violence isn't merely physical conflict; it's a mirror reflecting precarizing policies, debt-based citizenship, the policed city, and, beyond that, a global order. In Marcuse's terms, it's an aestheticized negation and a rejection of systematic forms of repression; in Žižek's frame of action, it's the explosive expression of symptomatic excess. Thus, "violence," by dramatizing the asymmetries repressed by hegemonic discourse, re-establishes the constitutive agency of the people as a collective actor through the desire for a dignified life, and therefore, a *desire for change*.

The energy driving the protests is fueled by a complex emotional and libidinal economy. On one hand, there's a nostalgia for collective solidarity moments, like those experienced during the Salvador Allende government or in 1983-86 protests against military dictatorship or from 2006 to 2011 student movements (Interview with Pinochet Cobos; Garces; Dragnic Garcia; Pablo Venables; Angélica Illanes, 2024). On the other hand, a profound melancholy exists regarding the unkept promises of the democratic transition process or to see the military again on the streets (Interview with Disi Pavlic; Dammert; Palacios; Gonzalez Toro; Alvarado Espina; 2024). Qualitative analysis within the study, conducted along the axes of "Affective Temperature" and "Narrative Visibility," strikingly reveals this situation.

According to the analysis, the narratives of "Dictatorship Trauma" and "Democracy Crisis" are both the most frequently expressed and carry the highest emotional charge. This indicates that the movement's energy largely stems from unresolved traumas of the past and the institutional failures of the present. From the tension created by these two emotional states, a fantasy or utopian desire emerges, envisioning a radically different future. This "post-neoliberal desire" has provided the movement with its forward-driving impetus.

The global "end" narratives were translated into a specific set of Chilean national narratives that served to legitimize the neoliberal model. Each narrative functioned to create consent and obscure antagonism, and each was met with a specific counter-narrative during the *estallido*. This process reveals that ideology operates on nested scales, with global myths made concrete through national stories. More importantly, it reveals the *temporality* of refusal. The 2019 protest was not just about 2019; it was a retroactive re-narration of the entire post-1968 period.

Our findings further show that the *estallido* retroactively re-narrated the period not as “30 years” but as 50 years: dictatorship and transition appear as one continuous experience of neoliberal violence when viewed from 2019. This retroactive move is exactly the temporal logic of the Act described in the Žižekian literature: the present changes what the past “will have been,” altering the field of possibilities that the past now appears to contain. This act of historical re-narration is the essence of the “Act of Great Refusal.”

I found that the impact of this process was replicated in interviews with subjects supposed to know. These interviews largely illustrate a cognitive-individual narrative filled with nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy from the “voices” of the intellectuals writing about the *estallido*. Many questions seem to be intertwined and overlapping in the end “narrative”, so to speak, the study of *estallido* constantly and persistently turns into specific “end” narratives of Chile. Through this lens, the *estallido* emerges as a direct intervention into hegemonic “end” narratives of democracy, dictatorship, transition, and neoliberalism. It not only proclaimed the end of neoliberalism but also retroactively re-signified other supposed endings in Chile’s modern history – revealing that the “end of dictatorship,” the “end of transition,” and even the “end of Pinochet’s constitution” had never delivered the closure or justice they promised. In short, the uprising was experienced and narrated as the return of history. In this context, the “*return of the repressed*” emerges as a questioning and a call from the present; as a remnant that returns with its own identity (as itself) or within the framework of social conflict and as a call for identification within the internal redefinition of power relations and strategic perspectives of the social movement.

The ultimate success of the *estallido* was narrative. It shattered the local version of the “end of history” ideology by making it impossible to continue telling the story of the “Chilean Miracle” or the “successful transition” without critical challenge. The revolt created a new symbolic reality from which the past fifty years of Chilean history are now viewed differently. It transformed Chile’s global significance from a “neoliberal laboratory” into a key site for understanding the contradictions and affective forces that define the global search for an alternative. This shows the psychic emptiness that the *estallido*’s demand for meaning and dignity would later fill.

It was also ideological in the sense that, given the context of Latin America, as it has been seen in Chapter 4, the political struggle is more of a “class component” than the rest of the world. It doesn’t disappear as an element of identity. So, many of the demonstrations can be critical of the parties, critical of the political system, but they identify themselves as working class, or as opposed to the bourgeoisie, or the elite, or the rich. In this sense, by looking to the given names to *estallido*, from student protest to precarity of the neoliberal subject, which was represented by millions of Chileans’ whole body act on 25 October 2019, and the 80% approval of the new constitution showed the lack of possibility and gain of impossibility.

Today, five years after the *estallido*, when the opinions and citizen perceptions about the events of October have changed considerably compared to those of that time, the underlying problems remain. According to the UNDP (2024) survey, 88% of the Chilean population wants a change in the country. 67% want to transform both the past and the present, and only 7% of those surveyed want to maintain the current state. Over time, the desire for change has always remained high, with 89% of similar responses in the 2013 survey (UNDP, 2013).

In Chile, what happened was not a “*one-dimensional social movement*” in a counter-narrative sense, obviously on both political and cognitive levels, but a national and global form of organization against the counter-revolution that emerged in the 70s and is still valid under the name of “neoliberalism.” Therefore, the refusal enacted in Chile in 2019 is not simply a repetition of 1970-73. It is a refusal articulated against a different form of domination: a “neoliberal authoritarianism” that has, as Maley (2022) argues, “morphed” liberal democracy into a system that serves a global plutocracy (p. 17). This new order is characterized by what he calls a “proto-fascist syndrome,” where the state and capital engage in a “counter-revolution of the elites” to dismantle the social safety net and discipline the population through precarity (p. 26). The Chilean *estallido* must be seen as an eruption against this specific historical formation, a moment where the “*return of the repressed in neoliberal reason*” takes the form of a mass popular uprising (Maley, 2022, p. 26).

As it was part of the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3, the shift from the Marcusean to the Žižekian problematic can be understood as a move from a critique of total administration to a critique of post-politics. While Marcuse’s one-dimensional society

absorbed dissent, Žižek's post-political order forecloses it by framing systemic antagonisms as technical issues to be managed. The Chilean insurrection serves as a powerful example of the refusal of this post-political logic. The revolt is significant because, like other movements of the last decade, it stages a *repoliticization* that rejects the neoliberal consensus. By putting the core antagonisms of the economic and political model back at the center of ongoing debate, the *estallido* overcomes the depoliticizing strategy that is the hallmark of our era.

The entire neoliberal order is structured around a struggle against elements that expose its immanent impossibility: crises, failures, and collective refusals. Rather than confronting its own contradictions, neoliberalism projects them onto externalized “disruptions” such as moments of refusal, dissent, or socio-political upheaval, which then become *fetishist* embodiments of the very blockage at the heart of the system. These elements are treated as anomalies to be disciplined or co-opted, obscuring the fact that the instability lies within the system itself. This displacement not only neutralizes alternative imaginaries but also sustains the illusion that the global capitalist order is a seamless, self-reproducing totality. As the Chilean case illustrates, however, acts of refusal puncture this ideological fantasy, forcing the repressed contradictions of the system to the surface and revealing that what appears as an unassailable order is, in fact, contingent and fragile.

In synthesizing the findings, it is evident that Chile's refusal represents more than a transient political upheaval; it embodies a profound reorientation of collective subjectivity. The affective registers of nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy coalesce to form a counter-hegemonic narrative that challenges the legitimacy of the neoliberal model. This narrative not only interrogates the historical and contemporary forces that have shaped Chile's socio-political reality but also offers a blueprint for imagining alternative futures. By leveraging critical theory and psychoanalysis, the analysis reveals that the Chilean refusal is both a symptomatic and an emancipatory act of refusal –one that exposes the fissures within the global capitalist discourse while simultaneously forging new pathways for collective empowerment.

Moreover, Chile, as part of the Global South, inhabits a neoliberal future, emitting a signal that reflects one of the final stages of the post-neoliberal subject. The inherent complexities are recognized, but it is argued that Chile's refusal – through

reflective engagement with its traumatic history and the reactive presence of social mobilization – exposes fissures and failures within the global capitalist discourse. This act of refusal, an attempt to reinvent history through narrative, reveals underlying symptomatic connections. These manifest in its intersection with narratives of “exceptionalism,” “reformist transition,” and “neoliberal laboratory,” and as a political act navigating nostalgia, melancholy, and fantasy through interventions aimed at “changing the desire,” “changing the president,” “changing the system,” and “changing society.” These interventions are interconnected dimensions of refusal, reflecting the interaction of the past, present, and future in the post-neoliberal psyche.

This dissertation has argued that the 2019 *estallido* in Chile is intelligible both as a tenacious, everyday refusal of an administered order and as an evental rupture that re-opens the horizon of political subjectivity. Framed through “cognitive” and “end” narratives, and through a retroactive reading of national and global master-plots, the study has traced how Chile’s refusal unsettles the temporal and symbolic coordinates by which neoliberal hegemony organizes sense, desire, and action. In doing so, it fills a gap in the literature by treating the “act/refusal” problematic not only in the Global North but from the South, showing how local historicities articulate with global debates on ideology, narration, and subjectivation.

The theoretical contribution has been to stage a sustained encounter between critical theory and psychoanalysis in the register of social movements: Marcuse’s politicization of Eros and refusal as life-defense against an affluent, one-dimensional rationalization; Jameson’s concern with mapping and the narrativization of contradiction; and Žižek’s insistence on parallax critique and the act. Read together, these strands clarify how “administrative” logics saturate both consciousness and attachment while leaving open cracks for counter-rationalization, fantasy, and negation.

Empirically, the Chilean case concretizes these stakes. As a historic “laboratory” of neoliberalism, Chile exhibits how economic design spills into culture and subjectivity, and how refusals reorganize meaning beyond policy reaction. The *estallido* thus becomes legible as a break in the “completeness” of neoliberalism that re-opens an affective and symbolic space for politics, even where institutional outcomes remain ambivalent.

Methodologically, the dissertation proposes that the dialectic of resistance is not something to be “overcome,” but a structural motor of historical experience: resistances that stall, delay, or displace are themselves productive, and their sequencing helps us read the movement from negation, through containment, toward refoundation (*Aufhebung*) or utopian legacy. This aligns with recent accounts that catalogue resistance as the very medium of movement, while preserving the possibility of interruption against the positivity of capitalist modernity. Hence, the analysis proceeds retroactively: the meaning of “democracy”, “dictatorship”, “transition”, and “neoliberalism” becomes legible from the standpoint of the rupture, not the other way around. “Melancholy,” “nostalgia,” and “fantasy” are treated as social operators that bind subjects to an order promising stability while foreclosing alternatives. Knowledge that came out of *estallido* dislocates this binding and reactivates antagonism as a political principle.

Finally, the dissertation offers a platform for future work. If “the end” does not end – if endings are ideological condensations that foreclose mapping – comparative research could test whether subsequent protest waves elsewhere also function as repairs to cognitive-mapping deficits. Such studies should track how melancholy, nostalgia, and fantasy (as temporalities and contingencies under the fixation of one-dimensional thought) operate not as residues but as resources that convert trauma into openings for collective re-symbolization – what the Chilean refusal has already intimated.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on post-neoliberal resistance, positioning Chile’s protests as a seminal moment in the evolution of political subjectivity in the global South. It underscores the transformative potential inherent in the rearticulation of affective temporalities and the symbolic reconstitution of collective memory, offering crucial insights for understanding both the nature and trajectory of contemporary social movements.

This is the core lesson of the Chilean act (lack) of refusal (gain). The *estallido* did not deliver a new, stable order. It failed. But in its “failure of failure,” it initiated a collective process of mourning for the violence of the dictatorship, for the broken promises of the transition, and in so doing, it freed a certain libidinal energy for the ongoing struggle. To be a political subject in the wake of the *estallido* is to be a duelist:

to hold onto the memory of the wound not as a source of paralysis, but as the very reason to continue the fight, to invent new Erotic paths in the full knowledge that the drive toward destruction can be delayed and rerouted but never vanquished. This is the difficult, open, and ultimately hopeful political horizon that Chile's refusal offers to a world grappling with its own global ends. In this beginning, the end is in one aspect - and perhaps in one aspect only - the narrative form of the intellectual who illuminates the singularity of the new life. And thanks to Marcuse, repeating Benjamin is again vital in our fragmented times; hope remains "for the sake of those without hope."



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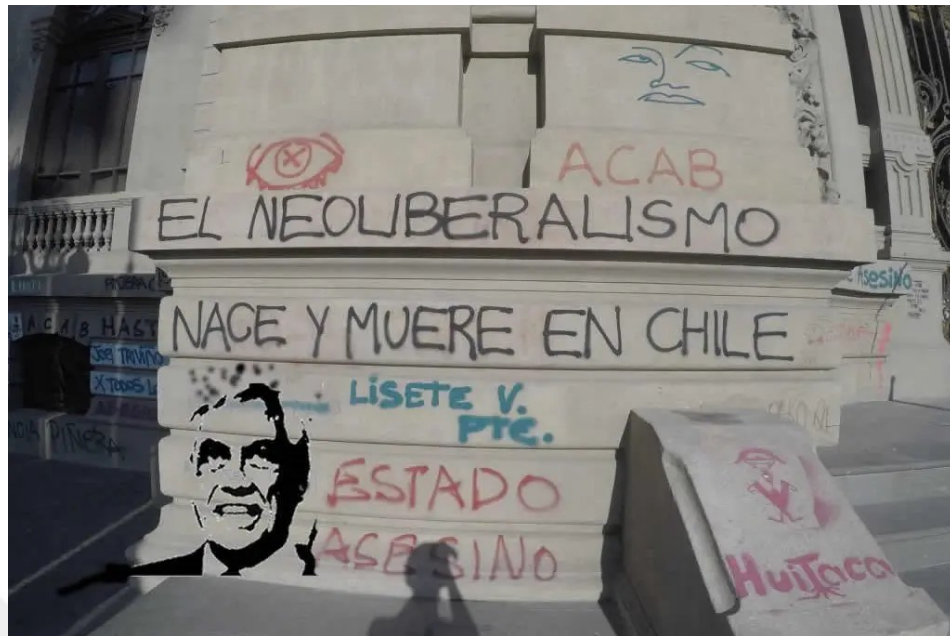
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**APPENDIX 1: SLOGAN CORPUS CODEBOOK AND PICTURES THAT
WERE TAKEN FROM FIELD RESEARCH AND FROM THE MEDIA**

Table Codebook (concise descriptions)

Code	Shorthand label	One-line description
A1	Pensions / Elderly	Critiques of the AFP system, low pensions, and fear of ageing in poverty.
A2	Cost of living & general inequality	Broad attacks on economic precarity, prices, and wages.
A2.1	Fare-evade sub-grievance	Specific to Metro/bus fare hikes and call to “evade”.
A3	Health / Education / Debt	Slogans about CAE loans, hospital waits, tuition, and medicines.
B1	State brutality	Denounces police or military violence, “pacos” shootings.
B2	Eye-trauma reference	Mentions of lost eyes, “Ni un ojo menos”, ocular stats.
B3	Political-elite blame	Direct insults to Piñera, ministers, “los políticos”.
B3.1	Congress generic blame	Targets Parliament/parties without naming Piñera.
C1	Awakening / Loss of fear	“Chile Despertó”, overcoming fear narratives.
C2	Unity – <i>El Pueblo</i>	Collective subject, solidarity, “pueblo unido”.
C2.1	Mapuche / Territorial rights	Mapuche slogans, <i>Newen</i> , plurinational claims.
C3	Feminist / Intersectional	Women’s, LGBTQ+, anti-patriarchy lines.
C4	Counter-media narrative	Distrust of TV/press, “Mi tele está castigada hasta que diga la verdad”
D1	New Constitution	Demands for Asamblea Constituyente, plebiscite.
D2	Dignity horizon	“Hasta que la dignidad...”, dignity as ultimate goal.
E1	Rage / Defiance	Adrenaline, resistance, “no te rindas”, explicit anger.
E2	Melancholy / Historical pain	Dictatorship memories, mourning dead protesters.
E3	Poetic-hopeful fantasy	Utopian, lyrical, nature metaphors, and future hope.
E3.1	Humour / Pop-culture irony	Sarcasm, memes, Pokémon, musical jokes, playful insults.
Z	Unclassifiable	Lines are too cryptic or too abstract and off-topic to code confidently.



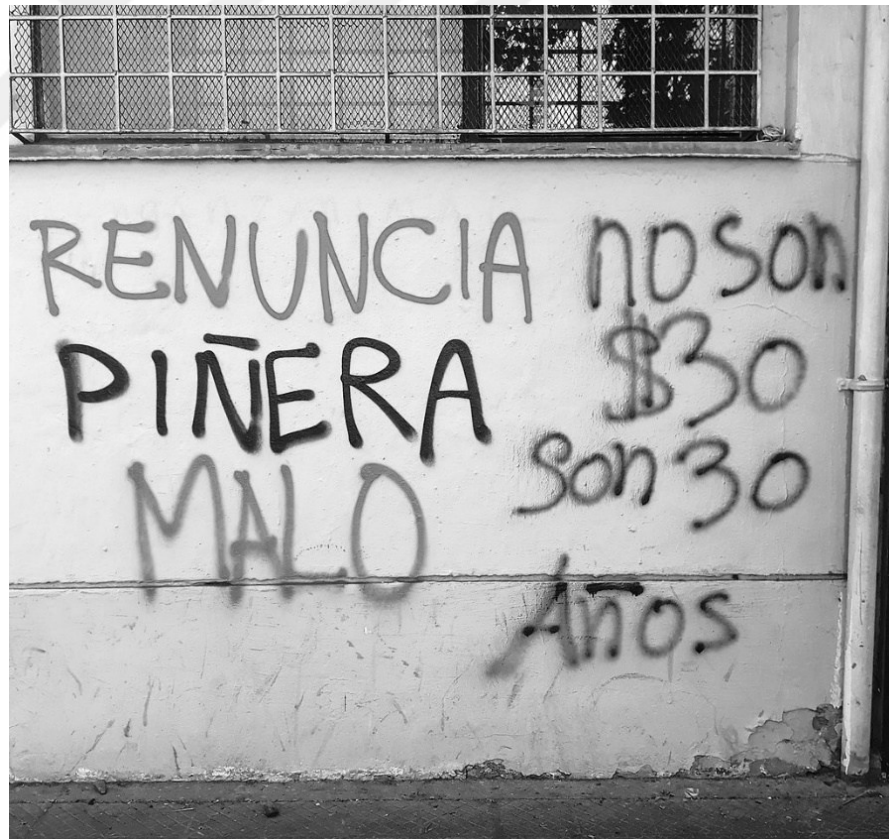
(Neoliberalism is born and dies in Chile)



(Dignity Square)



(Neither forgive nor forget)



(It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years)



(Until dignity, until it becomes a tradition)



(Dignity)



(Because revolutions are necessary, revolution is possible)



(El negro matapaco – Black Cop-Killer)

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW-CORPUS NARRATIVE - SIGNIFIER MATRIX

#	Intellectual Output (Intellectual act)	Interviewee	Primary Affiliation	Cognitive Narrative	Key Signifiers
1	No Water in the Oasis: The Chilean Spring of 2019–2020	Rodolfo Disi Pavlic	Universidad de Santiago de Chile (<i>University of Santiago of Chile</i>)	Chile's 2019 estallido is read as a grassroots rupture with a detached neoliberal party system. Accumulated grievances over privatised welfare and stagnant mobility erupted when leaderless, <i>weak-tie</i> digital networks funnelled outrage into the occupation of emblematic public space, turning Plaza Baquedano into a civic agora and re-politicising society beyond traditional SMOs.	Dignity: Plaza Dignidad, 30 años, El Pueblo: Weak ties, Violence: Represión
2	No Water in the Oasis: The Chilean Spring of 2019–2020	Rodrigo Medel Sierralta	Universidad Andrés Bello (<i>Andrés Bello University</i>)	<i>Same as Above</i>	<i>Same as Above</i>
3	The 2019-2020 Chilean Protests: A First Look at Their Causes and Participants	Ricardo González	Centro de Estudios Públicos (<i>CEP Chile</i>)	Survey evidence links high expectations, stubborn inequality, and party detachment to a democratic-representation deficit. Diverse, <i>leaderless</i> publics rallied, while a legitimacy spiral between protesters and police drove the protest's rapid violence escalation	Dignity: Fairness New Constitution, El Pueblo: Diverse actors Leaderless Violence: Metro burnings, Barricades
4	Scapegoats of the 2019 Chilean Riots: From Foreign Intervention to Riff-Raff Involvement	Lucia Dammert	Universidad de Santiago de Chile (<i>University of Santiago of Chile</i>)	Shows how Piñera's government reframed the estallido as a security menace: casting foreign "agitators" and domestic "riff-raff" criminals as culprits to instil fear, criminalise protest, and defend the neoliberal order. This scapegoat discourse delegitimised popular demands and normalised police violence.	Dignity: Neoliberal model, Narrative of fear El Pueblo: Popular dissent, Social uprising, Violence:

					Agitator view, Riff-raff, Police repression
5	Scapegoats of the 2019 Chilean Riots: From Foreign Intervention to Riff-Raff Involvement	Diego Sazo	London School of Economics	<i>Same as Above</i>	<i>Same as Above</i>
6	Crisis of Wellbeing and Popular Uprising: The Logic of Care as a Path to Social Emancipation in Chile	Mia Dragnic	University of Chile (<i>Universidad de Chile</i>)	A pandemic-sharpened crisis of wellbeing lays bare neoliberal abandonment; a feminist “logic of care” and bottom-up mutual-aid networks re-inscribe dignity, while intensified state coercion escalates violence.	Dignity: Vida Digna, Care logic El Pueblo: Ollas Comunes, Violence: Police violence, Violence: Police violence, Starvation quarantine
7	Social Protests in Chile: Inequalities and Other Inconvenient Truths about Latin America’s Poster Child	Sofia Donoso	University of Chile (<i>Universidad de Chile</i>)	Frames the <i>estallido</i> as the unsurprising eruption of a “widespread malaise” rooted in multi-dimensional inequalities that condemn large segments of the population to an “ <i>undignified standard of living</i> ” and erode faith in political institutions. The protests’ <i>extensive, leaderless participation</i> confronts a delegitimised elite, while the dramatic escalation from fare-evasion to the burning of twenty metro stations and sweeping police/military repression crystallises a struggle over dignity and democratic renewal symbolised by the demand for a new constitution.	Dignity: Undignified living, Welfare gaps El Pueblo: Extensive participation, Leaderless protest Violence: Metro burnings, Police repression
8	It Is Not 30 Pesos, It Is 30 Years’: Reflections on the Chilean Crisis: Introduction	John Charney Berdichewky	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso	Read the <i>estallido</i> through the emblematic slogan “No son 30 pesos, son 30 años,” framing it as a <i>transitional-justice moment</i> that exposes 30 years of post-dictatorship neoliberalism. The uprising’s constituent drive (78 % voting for a new charter) seeks to bury Pinochet’s “cheating constitution” and recover	Dignity: “30 años” · New Constitution El Pueblo: Student movement · Constituent moment Violence:

				collective agency, led by a student movement turned ‘grave-diggers’ of neoliberal legality. Yet the path is shadowed by a violent present: large-scale police brutality and executive “war-on-the-enemy” rhetoric that revives dictatorship-era logics of repression.	Police brutality · War rhetoric
9	It Is Not 30 Pesos, It Is 30 Years’: Reflections on the Chilean Crisis: Introduction	Pablo Marshall Barberan	Universidad Austral de Chile	<i>Same as Above</i>	<i>Same as Above</i>
10	Chile’s 2019 October Protests and the Student Movement: Eventful Mobilization?	Indira Palacios-Valladares	Missouri State University	Reads the October 2019 estallido as a <i>national rupture</i> rooted in deep inequality, leaderless youth mobilisation, and unprecedented state–citizen violence. Yet, for the student movement, the cycle proved surprisingly <i>non-transformative</i> : earlier feminist and secondary-school waves had already re-defined identity, while weak, fragmented organisations and episodic, non-quotidian repertoires blunted further change.	Dignity: Plaza Dignidad; Decommodify services El Pueblo: Acephalous coalition; Youth vanguard Violence: State repression; Violent protests
11	Social Upheaval in Chile: No One Saw It Coming?	Nicolás Freire Castello	Universidad Central de Chile	Reads the 2019 outburst as the shattering of Chile’s self-styled “oasis.” A 30-peso fare hike ignites three decades of frustration: leaderless #Evasión Masiva fare-dodging swells into nationwide protest, Plaza Baquedano is renamed Plaza Dignidad, and the cry “Chile despertó” links dignity to a new constitution. Piñera’s “we are at war” stance, curfews, and armoured policing accelerate a spiral of violence and human-rights abuse.	Dignity: 30 años, Plaza Dignidad El Pueblo: Evasión Masiva, Chile despertó Violence: Metro burnings, Police brutality
12	October 2019: Social Uprising in Neoliberal Chile	Mario Garces	Universidad de Santiago de Chile (University of Santiago of Chile)	Casts October 2019 as a “riot of the unheard”: secondary-student fare-evasion sparks a chain reaction that spreads from Metro turnstiles to malls and, ultimately, Plaza Dignidad. Youth–unburdened by dictatorship-era fear–use digital networks to drive cacerolazos, blockades, and	Dignity: Social malaise, Structural inequality, Plaza Dignidad El Pueblo:

				nationwide marches, stitching peripheral anger into a unified popular front. The revolt lays bare thirty years of structural inequality and elite–society detachment, forcing Piñera to decree a state of emergency and militarise the streets, while simultaneously opening a constituent horizon for a post-neoliberal Chile.	Evadir no pagar, Youth vanguard, Leaderless uprising Violence: Metro burnings, State emergency, Piñera war
13	Disrupting normalcy. Artistic interventions and political mobilisation against the neoliberal city	Carla Pinochet Cobos	Universidad Alberto Hurtado	Frames the estallido as an <i>aesthetic rupture</i> with the “neoliberal normalcy” that organises Santiago’s segregated space. Street-level performances, murals and light-projections act as “strategies of estrangement,” exposing the precarised life-world produced by market urbanism and stitching dispersed grievances into a shared civic imagination. These artistic occupations reclaim the right to the city, galvanise neighbourhood cabildos and keep the constituent horizon alive—even as curfews, states of emergency and systematic police violence aim to restore the old order.	Dignity: Plaza Dignidad, 30 años, El Pueblo: Art interventions, Citizen reconquest, Violence: Police repression, State emergency
14	Revolts Against Neoliberalism in the Southern Cone: The Argentine Crisis of 2001 and the 2019 Chilean Social Explosion in Comparison	Carlos Ruiz Encina	Universidad de Chile	Reads the October 2019 revolt as a “ <i>riot of the unheard</i> ” that buries Chile’s “advanced neoliberalism.” Secondary-school fare evasion ignites three decades of buried grievances; youth digital networks knit scattered malaises into a <i>nuevo pueblo</i> that proclaims dignity (“¡Chile despertó!”), renames Plaza Baquedano as Plaza Dignidad, and forces a constituent horizon, even as Piñera’s “we are at war” militarisation unleashes unprecedented police brutality and ocular mutilations.	Dignity: 30 años, Plaza Dignidad , Nueva Constitución El Pueblo: Chile despertó, Evadir no pagar , Primera Línea Violence: Guerra Piñera ,Estado emergencia, Ojos mutilados
15	Chilean revolts and the crisis of neoliberal governance	Sergio Villalobos Ruminott	University of Michigan	Reads the October 2019 revolt as an existential <i>destituent</i> uprising: the streets’ occupation reveals the fiction of the many narratives such as “Chilean miracle,” delegitimises Chile’s neoliberal <i>juristocratic</i> state-	Dignity: Chilean miracle · Nueva Constitución El Pueblo:

				of-exception, and re-opens an “impossible” but urgent demand for a truly democratic constitution.	Destituent power · Pueblo ocupa · Existential revolt Violence: State exception · War rhetoric · Ocular injuries
16	The Singularity of the Social Uprising	Alfredo Joignant Rondon	Universidad Diego Portales	Quantitative “radiography” maps 3,300 protest actions in just ten weeks (a nine-fold rise over 2011); more than 40 % involved direct violence. Interprets the 2019 Chilean “social outbreak” as an atomized, unprecedented, leaderless, and multi-tactical wave of contention that uncovered deep socio-political disaffection, triggered a mutually-reinforcing spiral of protest violence and state repression, and made evident the need to re-open institutional channels (e.g., a new constitution) capable of processing heterogeneous yet diffuse popular grievances.	Dignity: Plaza Dignidad; Nueva Constitución El Pueblo: Sin liderazgo; Descontento difuso Violence: Acción violenta; Represión policial
17	El Estallido social de Chile: Piezas para un Rompecabezas	Pedro Güell	Universidad Austral de Chile	Sees the <i>estallido</i> as the long-ignored eruption of a <i>shared malestar</i> : four lived experiences—structural inequality, distant-abusive elites, classist/ineffective services, and neoliberal abandonment—combined to shatter Chile’s self-image. The protests’ leaderless, demand-diffuse character nonetheless voices a common claim for reciprocity and recognition, while the violence on the streets functions as <i>castigo simbólico</i> against perceived impunity. The path forward, he argues, is to channel this energy into a democratic refoundation capable of repairing the dignity breach.	Dignity: Desigualdad · Mérito roto El Pueblo: Malestar extendido · Sin liderazgo Violence: Castigo simbólico · Represión policial
18	¿Revolución, revuelta, despertar de un pueblo o “estallido social”? A un año de la crisis	Hernán Cuevas	Universidad Austral de Chile	Treats the <i>estallido</i> as an open-ended rupture that dislocates Chile’s neoliberal democracy and fractures the elite–citizen frontier. A heterogeneous multitude re-grounds politics around the nodal claim of dignidad, while exposing both the decades-long “violencia lenta” of inequality and the	Dignidad, Pensiones dignas El Pueblo: Multitud, Ciudadanía

	de octubre de 2019 en Chile			street violence that forced a constituent horizon.	Violence: Violencia lenta, Violencia desatada
19	“Nos volvemos a llamar pueblo” El retorno del concepto “pueblo” en los lenguajes políticos de la revuelta social de octubre/2019	Juan Pablo Venables	Universidad Austral de Chile	Reads the 2019 revuelta as the moment in which the concept “pueblo” is reclaimed from decades of technocratic depoliticisation. Through a socio-historical lens, Venables shows how the term resurfaces as a <i>performative self-designation</i> that fuses living memory of the Unidad Popular with present-day grievances of debt, inequality, and exclusion, generating an emotionally charged, horizontal “we” that aspires to a post-neoliberal constitutional horizon.	Dignity: Plaza Dignidad; vida digna; derechos sociales El Pueblo: Pueblo unido; autodesignación; nos volvemos pueblo Violence: Represión estatal; violencia neoliberal; primera línea
20	Social Revolt in Chile: A political counter-hegemony challenging the Neo-Liberal narrative?	Eduardo Alvarado Espina	Universidad de Playa Ancha	Uses Mouffe’s “populist moment” to read the 18-O revolt as a counter-hegemonic break with Chile’s neoliberal consensus. The insurrection for a <i>Nueva Constitución</i> crystallises the <i>pueblo vs. elite</i> cleavage and the rise of independent electoral lists, revealing a democratic re-alignment that sidelines traditional parties and delegitimises elite authority.	Dignity: 30 años; Nueva Constitución El Pueblo: Pueblo-élite; Listas independientes Violence: Estado emergencia; Represión estatal
21	La batalla de la memoria: ensayos históricos de nuestro siglo	María Angélica Illanes O.	Universidad Austral de Chile	Historical Memory, Critical Historiography	transmisión, 68-ismo, memoria
22	Fragmento de Chile	Rodrigo Karmy Bolton	Universidad de Chile	Reads the 2019 estallido as the latest crack in a centuries-long “matriz de golpes”. Chile appears as a land of “nada más que fragmentos” held together by a neoliberal, theological-political machinery that sacralises the 1980 Constitution and normalises a “larga violencia” inscribed in law, war, and everyday discipline. Against that backdrop, Karmy recovers the potencia	Dignity: <i>Karama global; Potencia constituyente</i> El Pueblo: <i>Pueblo fisura; Performance singular</i> Violence:

				constituyente del pueblo – a fleeting, performative force that erupts whenever populations refuse to remain mere biopolitical “poblaciones” and become pueblo. Dignity, he argues, names this refusal in a global key (“karama”, “dignidad”) and signals the possibility of inventing ourselves anew outside the sacramental frame of existing institutions.	<i>Larga violencia;</i> <i>Estado guerra</i>
23	The End of Neoliberalism in Chile?	Marcelo Casals	Universidad Finis Terrae	Frames the 18-O revolt as the <i>rupture</i> of Chile’s neoliberal-democratic consensus. A student-led fare evasion over “30 pesos” escalated into mass mobilisations that set metro stations ablaze and exposed the authoritarian reflexes of the state. The crisis, he argues, crystallised around a quest for <i>dignity</i> through a new constitution and a broader social-rights pact; it also revealed a new political subject–independent, territorially rooted and suspicious of the parties of the transition–driving the process. Yet the pathway is marked by persistent police-military repression, showing how violence continues to guard the neoliberal order even as it unravels.	Dignity: Nueva Constitución; Social pact El pueblo: Independent lists; Student vanguard Violence: Metro fires; Police repression
24	Chile’s Estallido Social and the Art of Protest	Terri Gordon	The New School in New York	<i>The Walls of Santiago</i> portrays the <i>estallido</i> as an aesthetic insurrection: graffiti, paste-ups, performances, and iconoclasm erupt across the capital, turning walls and bodies into a leaderless “printing press” that voices discontent the parties can’t channel. These visual palimpsests knit disparate demands—from “Dignidad” to a new constitution—while police clamp-downs, rubber bullets, and nightly curfews inscribe a counter-violence that artists re-signify (bleeding statues, eyeless portraits). In Gordon’s telling, creativity and repression dance in Plaza Baquedano/Plaza Dignidad, exposing both the fragility of the neoliberal order and the constitutive power of the pueblo’s imagination.	arte-calle, estética-revolución
25	Los sindicatos en la revuelta	Dasten Julian-Vejar	Universidad Arturo Prat	Reads the 2019 revolt as a moment that forced Chilean unionism beyond its institutional limits. Union leaders	Dignity: <i>dignified pensions;</i>

	social del 2019			became rallying nodes that denounced precarious work, the failed AFP pension scheme, and the broader neoliberal order; their coalition (Mesa Unidad Social) sought to weave workplace struggles into a multi-sector front, using strikes and street protests to demand a dignified, democratic economy and to restore social legitimacy to organised labour.	<i>worthy work; Plaza Dignidad El Pueblo: workers' unity; social majority; Mesa Unidad Violence: precarious labour; state repression; economic abuse</i>
26	The gendered political economy of Chile's rebellious discontent: lessons from forty-five years of neoliberal governance	Verónica Schild	University of Western Ontario	Uses a gendered political-economy lens to show how the 1980 Constitution locked-in an entrenched neoliberal order that commodifies social reproduction. The long crisis of care, debt and "precarious life" for women feeds a broad demand for dignity and a <i>Nueva Constitución</i> , while the huge feminist marches of March 2019 and the self-managed neighbourhood cabildos embody <i>el pueblo</i> reclaiming politics. State and police repression of the uprising expose the structural violence of market rule	Dignity: vida digna, social rights El pueblo: feminist masses, neighbourhood cabildos Violence: precarious life, state repression
27	Social Crisis in Chile 2019: Review of Two Hypotheses as to its Cause	Sergio Zuniga-Jara	Universidad Católica del Norte	Revisits 18-O as a backlash not against sheer income gaps but against "inequality of treatment." Rampant corruption, elite impunity, and wrist-slap justice convinced a cross-class, leaderless multitude that the law protects the powerful alone. The million-strong Santiago march crystallised a quest for equal respect, while metro burnings and looting prompted a nationwide state of emergency.	Dignity: Igual trato, Fin privilegios El Pueblo: Marcha millón, Sin liderazgo Violence: Saqueos, Estado emergencia
28	Curator of the <i>Perro Matapaco</i>	Marcel Solá	Independent curator / Museo del Estallido Social	Social-Diagnostics Aesthetic Artivism	bienestar, colapso-sistema, protesta

APPENDIX 3: QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK

This codebook translates the conceptual spine of the dissertation into a compact set of analytic tags. Each code is written so that a reader with no specialist software background can follow the logic and, if desired, replicate the coding manually.

This codebook is designed for a retroactive-interpretive, psychoanalytic/critical-theory reading of 28 intellectual interviews, 9 academic events, and supporting field notes, artefacts, and protest repertoires (slogans, graffiti, banners, and so on). All codes are applied inductively. The codebook was iteratively refined using *MAXQDA Manual 24* and memo functions.

Coding unit – usually one sentence (max. one short paragraph) that expresses a single idea.

1. MASTER-HEGEMONIC NARRATIVE LAYER (“Macro Codes”)

Code	Operational Definition	Inclusion Cues	Exclusion Cues	Illustrative triggers
POST-POLITICS	Statements that normalise consensus-driven governance, and the impossibility of street politics in the absence of conditions of possibility.	“Protests are irrational and unexpected”, “technicians know best”, “leave it to the markets”.	Pure policy detail without a value claim.	“Todo es lo mismo”... technocrat praise
END OF IDEOLOGY / END OF MARXISM	Claims that grand visions (socialism/revolution/utopia) are finished or naïve.	“Left & right are obsolete”, “only pragmatism works”, “ideologies died in ’89”.	Simple criticism of a party.	“Ya no hay ideologías”
END OF HISTORY / POST-IDEOLOGY	Assertions that liberal-neoliberal modernity is the final stage of human progress.	“Chile showed the future”, “there’s no alternative”.	Meritocratic optimism directed only at a sector (e.g., fintech).	“Llegamos al modelo definitivo”

2. NATIONAL NARRATIVE LAYER (“Meso Codes” – four Chile-centred ‘end-of’ master narratives)

Code	What to Tag / Tag-when	Triggers / Slogans
END-OF-DICTATORSHIP	Any reference that the Pinochet trauma (1973-1990) is still open <i>or</i> finally closed; state of emergency, tanks on the streets, talk of state violence, truth-justice debates, eye-injuries, “Nunca Más”. Refusal of amnesia; ongoing trauma.	“Ni perdón ni olvido”, mentions of 1973-90, truth commissions, police repression, parallels.
END-OF-TRANSITION	Claims that the 1990-2006 or to some till 2010 democratic pact (“la transición”) has expired, was incomplete, or betrayed. Blames the Concertación period for unfinished promises. Failure of social democracy.	“No son 30 pesos, son 30 años”, critiques of Concertación, “se acabó la cocina”.
CHILD CODES: → REFORMIST-TRADITION: gradualist lineage, “cocina”, Christian-Democrat nostalgia, Eduardo Frei’s Revolution in Liberty (<i>Revolución en Libertad</i>), constituent moments in history, institutionalization, containment → CHILEAN-WAY – praise/critique of an allegedly unique consensual path, democratic socialism, institutionalized way.		
END-OF-DEMOCRACY (CRISES OF DEMOCRACY)	Feeds from Pinoche’s act (1973). Death of the democratically elected president (Salvador Allende) and its pathological aspects in contemporary Chile. Assertions that formal institutions have collapsed/hollowed out into oligarchy, corruption, or post-democracy; calls for constituent rupture. Inclusive neoliberalism. Elite framing.	“La élite no nos representa”, “democracia secuestrada”, low voter trust stats.
END-OF-NEOLIBERALISM	Calls Chile “a laboratory,” demands systemic rollback. Statements positioning Chile 2019 as birthplace+graveyard. Economic and political representation of the Chilean neoliberal model.	“El neoliberalismo nace y muere en Chile”, critiques of AFPs, long-range aspiration for life beyond debt (indebted subject), health, water, education as commodities, precarity
CHILD CODES: → ADVANCED / COMPLETENESS: fullest stage label, “neoliberalismo avanzado” → NEOLIBERAL-LABORATORY: Chicago Boys imagery, “laboratorio,” model, completeness, successful experiment		

→ **CHILEAN-MIRACLE:** Speech acts presenting Chile as the poster child of market success. Any claim that Chile is proof that the free market works. “Chile is an oasis of stability...” (Piñera, 7-Oct-2019).
 → **EXCEPTIONALISM:** meta-physical existence of Chile in the region, with its long model case, boasts “Milagro.”

3. COGNITIVE-SIGNIFIER LAYER (“Micro Codes”)

Code	Precise Meaning / Tag-when	Illustrative Quote (trigger)	Operational note
DIGNITY	Using <i>dignidad</i> as an ethical-political demand that unites grievances (not mere income demand or charity). Moral-existential claim against humiliation/precarity.	“Queremos vivir con dignidad, no con limosnas.”	Flag for master-signifier test.
THE PEOPLE (<i>El Pueblo</i>)	Invocation of <i>pueblo</i> as emancipatory agent or contested subject, collective subject invoked (“we, the people”). Construction of collective protagonist (who’s in/out)	“Nos volvemos a llamar pueblo.”	Memo if inclusive/exclusive.
VIOLENCE	ANY reflection on protest violence (state or crowd). Talk about force—legitimising, condemning, or resignifying. Moral framing of unrest: justified, cathartic, condemnatory.	“La violencia nació del Estado,” “La violencia empezó con el modelo”	Regrettable Excess, Systemic-Self-Defence, Pure Criminality

4. COGNITIVE / PSYCHO-SYMBOLIC LAYER

Code	Definition / Tag-when	Trigger
NOSTALGIA	Affective longing for an imagined better past (pre-neoliberal social pact, Allende era, The Socialist Republic of Chile in 1932, etc.).	“Volver a la UP...,” Allende songs, Victor Jara and Los Prisioneros songs, “Éramos comunidad antes,” [“Once we had solidarity...”]
MELANCHOLY	Present-tense disillusion / stalled mourning for unmet hopes of transition, paralysis, stuck affect, unresolved loss, “we failed”, failed promises of democracy. Stuck in past mourning, melancholic in the present.	“Nada va a cambiar,” “Nada cambió al final.” [“Nothing is going to change,” “Nothing changed in the end.”], “Everything changed, yet nothing did.” “Neither forget, nor forgive”
FANTASY OF THE END/UTOPIA	Future-oriented desire that projects a radical alternative (care society, plurinational democracy), radical alterity. In particular, concrete utopian	“El modelo muere; todo es posible.” “Imagine a Chile

	designs or abstract yearnings. Repetitions, potentials, possibilities.	where...,” “Imaginemos otra Constitución”
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5. CRITICAL-THEORY ACTION CODES

Code	When to Apply / Tag-when	Purpose in Thesis
ACT OF GREAT REFUSAL	Excerpts framing estallido as total rejection and historical rupture.	Shows post-neoliberal desire in the post-political age with moments and processes.
SYSTEM ABSORPTION	Descriptions of how state, media, or market domesticate dissent (co-optation, constitutional canalisation).	Tests the “repressive tolerance” hypothesis.
REPOLITICISATION	Evidence that estallido reopened ideological contestation (“Chile despertó”, revived protest culture).	Counters the ‘end of ideology’ and ‘end of history’ narratives.

6. PRAXIS / GREAT-REFUSAL LAYER

Code	Definition / Tag-when	Trigger
POST-NEOLIBERAL DESIRE	aspirations beyond commodification.	“dignidad” frames
MOMENT-OF-ACT	Evade, jump, the biggest march in the history of Chile, point of no return, constituent moment.	“Chile despertó,” Speakers emphasise unpredictability– “nadie lo vio venir”
REINVENTING-HISTORY	explicit “write history anew,” counter-canon, meta-statements that attempt to rewrite Chile’s national story; Walter Benjamin’s “tiger’s leap”	“refundar la patria”
→ CHANGING-THE-DESIRE	moral-affective shift.	language of the new sensibility
→ CHANGING-THE-PRESIDENT	personalised elite ouster.	“Fuera Piñera”
→ CHANGING-THE-SYSTEM	constitutional overhaul.	“Nueva Constitución”
→ CHANGING-THE-SOCIETY	deeper transform.	“otro modelo de vida”

7. SOFTWARE / RELIABILITY RULES

Step	Note
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Pilot double-coding	10 % corpus (3 transcripts, 1 event transcript) → 83 % agreement; consensus reached.
Locked dictionary	Codebook frozen prior to full pass in MAXQDA 24 .

8. MARCUSE–ŽIŽEK CONSTRUCTS

Construct	Linked Code Families	Psychoanalytic Comment
ONE-DIMENSIONAL CLOSURE (Marcuse)	Post-Politics, End-of-Ideology, End-of-History,	Ideological repression of the negative; pleasure principle tied to the status quo. Talk of “awakening,” “veil lifted.”
ADVANCED / COMPLETE NEOLIBERALISM	End-of-Neoliberalism + child codes	Commodity form saturates lifeworld; late-capitalist superego (“Enjoy!”).
TRAUMATIC RETURN OF THE REPRESSED	End-of-Dictatorship; Nostalgia/Melancholy	Dictatorship ghost resurfaces; unworked mourning.
POST-NEOLIBERAL DESIRE	Praxis layer (all)	Eros resurgence; emergent collective libidinal investment.
THE ACT / GREAT REFUSAL	Explicit rejection of the <i>entire system</i> of needs/values. Estallido is depicted as an unpredictable, world-shifting Event. Moment-of-Act; Reinventing-History (and intensity = 5)	Žižekian cut in symbolic order; Marcusean negation that opens new possibilities.
DEATH-DRIVE vs. EROS DIALECTIC	Fantasy-of-the-End ↔ Changing-the-Society	Oscillation between catastrophic jouissance and constructive libido.

9. CODEBOOK ADDENDUM (FOR CROSS-MEANING OF INTERPRETATIONS)

Macro-code	Three-level location	Illustrative child-codes / anchors
POST-POLITICS	Hegemonic critique ↔ National	techno-media governance, elite struggle, depoliticised management
END-OF-IDEOLOGY	Hegemonic critique	death of meta-narratives, “post-ideological” debate, end of Unidad Popular, “everyone brought their own ideology”
END-OF-HISTORY	Hegemonic critique	Fukuyama's thesis, liberal euphoria, “oasis” claim, Concertation governments, transition

END-OF-DICTATORSHIP	National → Historical layer	Pinochet legacy, truth/justice debates
END-OF-TRANSITION	National layer	“30 años” slogan, reformist tradition, Chilean road
END-OF-DEMOCRACY (REPRESENTATION)	National ↔ Hegemonic crisis	Death of the president, traumatic essence, party collapse, constitutional deadlock
END-OF-NEOLIBERALISM	National ↔ Cognitive bridge	neoliberal laboratory, Chilean miracle, exceptionalism
DIGNITY	Cognitive core	“Hasta que la dignidad...”, collective well- being, dignified life, identification, and recognition
THE PEOPLE (PUEBLO)	Cognitive core	heterogeneous pueblo, assemblies, cabildos
VIOLENCE	Cognitive core	state repression, Molotov/barricades, “No Miedo”, ocular traumas, loots, metro burning

10. HOW THIS CODEBOOK SUPPORTS THE THESIS

- Tri-Level Structure mirrors the dissertation’s architecture (hegemonic → national → cognitive) and feeds directly into Figures 6-1, 6-2, 6-3.
- Action codes (e.g., “Great Refusal”, “System Absorption”, “Repoliticisation”) operationalise the Marcuse-Žižek frame and allow quantifying its presence (see Intensity Figure).
- Affect codes (Nostalgia, Melancholy, Fantasy) map the psychic economy of post-neoliberal desire, grounding the psychoanalytic reading of chapter 6.

With these tags, raw discourse is converted into an analyzable matrix that demonstrates how Chile’s *estallido* disrupted hegemonic closure and re-opened ideological imagination—the core claim of the thesis.

Therefore, this code-book operationalises the dissertation’s theoretical argument that Chilean *estallido* or revolt functions as an “Act of Great Refusal”, channelling post-neoliberal desire through four “reinvented” national ‘end-of’ narratives while breaking the stalemate of global post-politics.

Matrix Intensity Default suggested starting value (0–5) for the Ideology–Narrative Match attribute when this code is primary. Adjusted per segment in *MAXQDA*.

Intercoder reliability (Krippendorff’s $\alpha = 0.82$, $n = 240$ double-coded segments) confirms consistent application of all macro-codes.

11. THE OPERATIVE LOGIC

- Four nested narrative layers.
- *Global / Hegemonic, National / Historic, Cognitive-symbolic and Praxis (Great-Refusal)* codes were inductively drafted from pilot readings and then aligned with the thesis's theoretical lenses (post-politics, end-narratives, Marcuse's "Great Refusal", Žižek's "Act").
- Dual-pass reading.
 - Surface pass captured explicit references to hegemonic or national narratives (e.g., "No son 30 pesos, son 30 años" → *END-OF-TRANSITION*).
 - Depth pass tagged latent affect (*nostalgia, melancholy, fantasy*) and moments where respondents leapt from critique to transformative desire (*Moment-of-Act, Changing-the-System, Society, President, Desire*).
- Intensity rating (1-5).
- Each coded segment received an @Intensity score: (0 = reproduces hegemony [...] 5 = radical rupture / Great Refusal). Stored as a *Code Variable* in MAXQDA. This scalar variable powers the heat maps in Figure 2 and the narrative-signifier matrix in Figure 3.
- Reliability safeguards.
- Saturation was reached after the 24th interview: no new master-signifier or counter-narrative emerged.
- A 10 % sub-sample (three transcripts) was independently double-coded in MAXQDA 24; initial agreement reached 83 %. Discrepancies were reconciled, the dictionary was "frozen", and the remaining corpus was coded by the author.
- Marcuse-Žižek constructs.
- Section 8 and Section 6 of the code-book link each family of codes to the dialectic of *one-dimensional closure* versus *Great Refusal / Act*. This bridge enables systematic movement from empirical utterance to the thesis's psychoanalytic-critical interpretation.
- After second-cycle coding, the built-in *Summary Grid* exported a case-theme matrix to Excel 365, where a 0–5 *Ideology–Narrative Match* score was applied. Diagrams were rendered in the Python-based libraries (Matplotlib, NumPy) using the raw Excel CSV as input.

Psychoanalytic note on coding procedure:

Every unit of meaning is first registered under its discursive surface (narrative or ideological signifier), *then* re-inspected for latent affect (nostalgia, melancholy, fantasy) and for praxis-oriented eruptions (desire, refusal, act). This dual-pass operationalises the interpretive-psychoanalytic stance without requiring clinical jargon inside the main thesis chapters.



APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE USED IN ALL INTERVIEWS

(Mandatory questions in bold; optional follow-up probes in bullet points.)

1. **“How would you situate yourself—professionally and personally: observer or participant—during October 2019?”**
 - Why did you choose to write about *estallido*?
2. **“What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say *estallido social* after 5 years?”**
 - What was the real moment of the *estallido*?
3. **“Do you think the *estallido* reflect or engage with global trends in social movements?”**
 - What specific policies were targeted, and why?
4. **“What earlier events or memories do you think led up to those days?”**
 - Anything from the '70s, '80s, or '90s that still matters?
5. **“Five years later, what issue from 2019 still bothers people the most?”**
 - Can you recall a moment or slogan that captures that feeling?
 - Did you sense any sense of belonging, do you now?
6. **“The demand for ‘dignity’ was everywhere; what did it mean in everyday life?”**
 - Was violence ever part of that claim?
 - How did the idea of the *pueblo* show up for you?
7. **“What kind of Chile would you like to see in ten years?”**
 - If the 2019 October-18 returned tomorrow, what should it focus on?

Average interview length: 67 min; probes used only when responses were brief.

Guide version: Final (v4, November 2024).

APPENDIX 5: CHRONOLOGY OF THE ESTALLIDO SOCIAL

This chronology lists the key moments of the 2019–2023 Chilean cycle of acts of refusal, aligning street-level ruptures with the institutional track (plebiscite and constitutional process). It supports Chapter 7's analysis of the narrative/affective coordinates dignity – the people – violence by providing a precise temporal scaffold.

2019 — Ignition and nationwide escalation

- **4 October 2019 — Metro fare increase.** On October 4, 2019, an Expert Panel of the Ministry of Transportation and Communication, which regulates public transportation prices, announced a new tariff system with a package of changes, including a 30 peso increase (% 0.279% increase, i.e., 0.3 USD) in metro fare hikes in Santiago, Chile's capital.
- **6 October 2019 — Mass fare evasions begin.** Secondary-school students launch a coordinated fare-dodging campaign against the 30-peso metro fare increase, which serves as the spark for the uprising.
- **18 October 2019 – “Estallido” begins.** Mass fare evasions by high-school students over a CLP \$30 metro hike trigger nationwide protests; metro stations burn, looting and clashes occur; government declares a state of emergency with the military deployed in Santiago.
- **19 October 2019 – Fare hike reversed; emergency continues.** President Piñera cancels the metro fare increase but maintains exceptional measures as unrest spreads.
- **20–21 October 2019 – Curfews; “We are at war.”** Nightly curfews imposed in major cities; Piñera says “estamos en guerra,” intensifying public anger.
- **21 October 2019 — National strike.** A general strike paralyzes the country, signaling a shift from scattered disruption to a coordinated, society-wide refusal.
- **25 October 2019 – The “March of the Million.”** The largest mobilization in Chile's democratic era (over a million in Santiago; millions nationwide)
- **26–28 October 2019 – Easing measures.** Curfews lifted 26–27 Oct; state of emergency fully lifted 28 Oct.
- **28–29 October 2019 – Cabinet reshuffle.** Piñera replaces eight ministers (including Interior and Finance).

- **30–31 October 2019 – Global summits canceled.** The government cancels APEC and COP25 in Santiago amid turmoil; Spain and the UNFCCC relocate COP25 to Madrid (2–13 December).
- **12 November 2019 – Nationwide General Strike.** A cross-sector huelga general (general strike) brings mass stoppages and marches nationwide.
- **15 November 2019 — “Acuerdo por la Paz y la Nueva Constitución.”** The political class agrees on an institutional exit through a new constitutional process; later referred to in the thesis as a key mechanism of absorption and containment.
- **26 November 2019 – HRW report.** Human Rights Watch documents serious human-rights violations by Carabineros and calls for urgent reform.
- **11 December 2019 – Interior Minister Andrés Chadwick sanctioned.** The Senate upholds a constitutional accusation, disqualifying the former Interior Minister from public office for five years over the protest response.
- **13 December 2019 – UN OHCHR report.** The UN human rights office confirms multiple violations in policing the protests.

2020 — Constituent horizon ratified

- **19–24 March 2020 – Plebiscite postponed.** Parties and Congress rescheduled the entry plebiscite from April 26 to October 25, 2020, due to COVID-19.
- **18 October 2020 – One-year anniversary protests.** Large anniversary mobilizations with clashes and arrests in Santiago and regions.
- **25 October 2020 – Entry plebiscite.** Apruebo wins 78.27%; the Convención Constitucional is chosen as the drafting body with 78.99%.

2021 — From streets to convention

- **15–16 May 2021 – Election of 155 constituents.** Historic results with strong independent presence and gender parity rules in place.
- **4 July 2021 – Convention inaugurated.** Convención Constitucional holds its first session in Santiago (ex-Congreso).
- **19 December 2021 – Gabriel Boric elected President.** Wins 55.87% in runoff, amid expectations tied to the constitutional process.

2022 — Progressive draft rejected

- **4 September 2022 — Progressive draft defeated (62%).** Despite enshrining social rights, gender parity, and environmental protections, the draft is rejected in a mandatory plebiscite; the thesis reads this as the culmination of a successful strategy of absorption.

2023 — Conservative-led draft rejected

- **12 December 2022 – “Acuerdo por Chile.”** Parties launch a new constitutional process (experts’ commission + elected Consejo Constitucional).
- **7 May 2023 – Election of 50 Constitutional Councillors.** New drafting body elected.
- **7 June 2023 – Council installed.** Consejo Constitucional begins work, led by Presidenta Beatriz Hevia.
- **17 December 2023 – Exit plebiscite II.** Voters reject the second draft (“En contra”) with 55.76%.



TEZ ONAY SAYFASI

Üniversite : T.C. GALATASARAY ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Enstitü : SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
Hazırlayanın Adı Soyadı : Emre Önkibar
Tez Başlığı : Towards New Narratives and Signifiers Against
“Global Ends”: Chile’s Great Refusal
Savunma Tarihi : 09 / 08 / 2025
Danışman : Doç. Dr. Feride Selcan Serdaroğlu Polatay

JÜRİ ÜYELERİ:

Unvan, Ad-SOYADI

İmza

Prof. Dr. Beyza Ç. Tekin

Prof. Dr. Eylem Özkaya Lassalle

Doç. Dr. Esra Akgemci

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Zeynep Arıkanlı

Prof. Dr. Ulun Akturan

Enstitü Müdürü