

tunnel, between social movements everywhere. Wormholes complete the encounter, transmit messenger particles that unite all struggles across the planet. Charged particles transmit negative, repulsive energy, frequently saying to other particles ‘move apart’; yet every particle also has an opposite charge, has powers of attractions that say ‘come together’. In our contemporary, ever-expanding urban universe, little loops of energy generate incredible force; they literally make the world go around, light it up with electricity. It’s time, perhaps, for political struggles of the type exemplified in urban occupations to energize this new planetary charge, and convert it into unprecedented cosmic singularity – into our own concrete expressionism. Behind the mask lies more than flesh. Behind the mask lies an idea, and that idea circulates though the wormhole. There, it really is bulletproof.

Notes

1. The Guy Fawkes mask donned by the protesters is taken from the revolutionary hero of David Lloyd and Alan Moore’s graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, set in a dystopian future Britain, and the subsequent 2006 film directed by James McTeigue. My title is also an allusion to this work.
2. See Andy Merrifield, ‘Crowd Politics, or, “Here Comes Everybuddy”’, *New Left Review* 71, September/October 2011, pp. 103–14.

The Chilean winter

Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott

Since the beginning of 2011, student mobilizations in Chile have occupied the centre of public debate. On the one hand, most of the population, along with most of the political parties currently opposed to Sebastián Piñera’s government, agree on the crisis of secondary and higher education in a country that has been widely praised for fostering democratization and economic prosperity after the dark decades of Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973–89). On the other hand, there seems to be little agreement on what this crisis actually means, and even the government recognizes the necessity for substantial changes in the relationship between the state and the general system of education. At the same time, this new series of protests complements and further radicalizes those that took place in 2006, protests called the ‘Penguin Revolution’ with reference to the secondary students who played a crucial role in the demonstrations. What appears to be new in the present conjuncture is the involvement of students from both secondary and post-secondary institutions, public and private. The breadth and scale of participation are an indication of the nature of the crisis.

The current cycle of protests began in April 2011, when the CONFECH (Chile’s confederation of university students) decided to strike, demanding improvements in the government’s financial plans and changes to the distribution of scholarships, social benefits and transportation passes. CONFECH represents students from traditional universities, of which FEUC (Students’ Federation of the Catholic University of Chile) and FECH (Students’ Federation of University of Chile) are the most important, along with FEC, from the University of Concepción, in the south of the country. Very quickly many other universities and professional institutes got involved, along with secondary students from both private and public sectors; CONFECH actions were relayed by protests and

sit-ins organized by federations of high-school students (CONES and ACES), and by June the whole system of education was paralysed. The Chilean Winter had begun. Camila Vallejo, a communist militant, along with Giorgio Jackson, a socialist one, are the most visible leaders of a movement that challenges the hierarchical structures of political parties and other representative organizations and insists on horizontal decision-making processes (*basismo*), based on a commitment to democratic de-centralism.

The scale and impact of the protests are hard to exaggerate. Students have barricaded themselves into hundreds of schools, blocking access to teachers and staff.¹ They have staged dozens of massive demonstrations, which have often incorporated elaborate choreographies involving thousands of people; the largest gatherings, from 10 to 25 August, numbered from 100,000 to 1 million marchers.² These protests are far from over, and in November 2011 began intersecting with other regional mobilizations, notably in Brazil and Columbia.

After many attempts to invalidate the movement's claims and legitimacy, on 19 July the government replaced its minister of education (Joaquín Lavín, an ex-presidential candidate for the right wing) with justice secretary Felipe Bulnes, and launched a round-table discussion strategy, from which nothing good has yet come. The rapid growth of the protest movement and the multiplication of public meetings and of innovative mass actions, along with some international pressure, have reopened the wounds left from Chile's unfinished transition to democracy; by way of reaction, they have also helped revive the aggressively anti-communist rhetoric of the hard right, those who still consider Pinochet a national hero. This re-politicization of public debates, with its distinct streak of anachronism, has revived memories of the fight against military dictatorship in the national protests of the 1980s. For their part, student protestors draw attention to the structural complicity between the government and the main opposition parties, and remain deeply sceptical of formal political procedures, especially following the suppression of the 2006 'March of the Penguins' by the government of Michel Bachelet (a socialist who belongs to the Concertation for Democracy – a set of anti-Pinochet parties that is today in opposition).

The most urgent task for both the government and the opposition, therefore, is not to find a solution to the students' claims but to neutralize their direct political role, by redirecting the debate back to the formal-democratic institutions framed by the constitutional order set up to replace Pinochet's regime. Repeating the sacred principle of security that underlies the neoliberal regime's *urbe et orbi*, they insist that it is in the National Congress and between the professional politicians that the debate must take place, and not in the streets, among juvenile proto-criminals.

From its brutal inauguration until its dying day, Pinochet's dictatorial regime was characterized by its reformulation of the nation's social contract. With the new constitution of 1980 and with systematic implementation of neoliberal priorities (privatization of the public sector, deregulation of the economy, liberal tax policies, etc.), it was only a matter of time before something similar happened to the education sector. Sure enough, promotion of privatization as a means of compensating for the lack of financial resources resulting from the new orientation of the state – the distinctive feature of the new political economy blessed by the Chicago Boys and enthusiastically implemented in Chile in the 1980s – was soon extended to apply to education policies.³ The euphemism used to name that process was 'rationalization': in this context, 'rationality' involves an unfounded assumption about the virtues of market forces and the dynamic and efficient character of the private sector, basis for the reckless wager that its promotion to a commanding position in a new 'competitive' education sector would 'drive up standards' and improve the quality of teaching and research.

By the 1990s, with the new transitional governments, this tendency was accentuated thanks to what was presented as a new social contract between the state, the private sector

and the universities.⁴ If the proliferation of private institutions of higher education was a consequence of the dictatorship's policies, the deregulation proposed and radicalized in the 1990s explains not only the impoverishment of traditional and public universities but also a decline in quality in indicator after indicator (undergraduate teaching, libraries, laboratories, and professional and academic careers in general). The intervention of the private sector, contrary to original expectations, came to be widely seen as the cause of the corruption and collapse in standards that characterizes the current situation.



The corruption at issue here, however, refers less to a moral issue than to an effectively criminal conspiracy between the state and the private sector. This conspiracy is apparent in the 'circulation of the elites'; that is to say, in the fact that the same politicians responsible for making decisions regarding the education system also belong to, or have belonged to, the boards directing these institutions.⁵

Along with this, many Chileans are scandalized by the financial arrangements whereby the banks, with state guarantees, lend money to students at extortionate interest rates. Today these rates make the cost of higher education in Chile, proportionally speaking, the most expensive in the world.⁶ The banks stand to make a killing, risk-free: if students default, then the state steps in to pay off the balance of their loan – a policy that fits very nicely with the widespread practice of hiring influential political figures to the boards of financial institutions. On the other hand, it is estimated that more than 40 per cent of the student population will not be able to finish their degrees, which makes the prospect of repayment still more remote. The whole configuration of student debt now operates as a mechanism whereby banks profit through a process of what David Harvey calls 'accumulation by dispossession'. Systematic extension of the student debt relation has become a structural mechanism in the current accumulation process.⁷

Such accumulation through exceptionally punitive forms of debt can also be read as marking a final break with the old liberal apparatus of ideological interpellation – that form of interpellation that promised a fair and 'socially responsible' distribution of income, combined with the promise of social mobility through educational qualification. As the possibilities for social mobility tend to vanish, so then the whole argument of modernization is disclosed as an argument that overtly and emphatically complements the process of popular dispossession and the concentration of capital. Despite (or because of) the praise Chile has earned from the World Bank and the IMF over the past couple of decades, its distribution of income is now one of the most unequal in the world.⁸

If reduction of human beings to the status of human resources and human assets is at the heart of neoliberal biopolitics (to invoke Foucault's analysis⁹), then nowhere has this process gone further than in Chile, where the conversion of students into customers and debtors is virtually complete.¹⁰ The same thing could be said about the precarization and casualization of academic labour and the emergence of a post-Fordist regime in which 'academic careers' are regulated through profoundly exploitative contractual regulations – a career status that in Chile has acquired the name 'taxicab professorship'.

What is at stake in today's student mobilizations, therefore, is far more than a discrete series of economic claims (lower interest rates for their loans, free public transportation, better scholarship programs, etc.). What is essential is the demand for

free higher education for all, a demand that has been criticized as unrealistic and naive; this demand goes right to the heart of calls for a reformulation of the social contract inherited from Pinochet's regime. The only way to implement free education for all is through a renationalization of the copper companies and through essential associated reforms, but to do that it is necessary to demolish the political equilibrium that still preserves the illegitimate constitution of 1980. This is why the student mobilizations are inherently political, and subversive: they expose the unjust distribution of wealth, and the real purpose of those mechanisms of appropriation and accumulation shaping the current class configuration of Chilean society. However spectacular the recent celebrations of Chile's bicentenary, they could not hide the actual reality at issue in the temporality of capitalism. Piñera's government has not listened to the students and perpetually challenges their claim for free education for all, replacing it with the empty notion of a 'better quality' education for all. The notion of quality operates in the government's discourse in very much the same way as the notion of 'excellence' does in what Bill Reading calls the 'University in Ruins', as an ideological device that means more or less whatever you want it to mean, if not nothing at all.¹¹

I would like to conclude, however, with an observation regarding what I consider to be the 'limits' of this movement. On one hand, the mobilizations can be treated as an eruption of the political into the midst of neoliberal Chilean democracy – that is, a regime organized around a small number of financial institutions belonging to a few rich families, working in conjunction with a few privileged foreign companies. The mobilizations thus serve to make visible what was formerly invisible, producing what Rancière calls a redistribution of the sensible. On the other hand, though, after more than eight months of demonstrations, the mobilization has fallen into a sort of routine. Its charismatic leadership has acquired a recognizable place in the political debate, and the government (together with the opposition) has largely succeeded in recasting that debate around the configuration of the budget for the new fiscal year. The students have good reasons for their rejection of political parties, but this, compounded by their relative inability to articulate their demands with other sectors of the population, has also served to isolate them and to weaken their position; the coming holiday season will also disperse many students, and take some of the immediate pressure of the government.

Nonetheless, I put the word 'limits' in scare quotes because the inability of students so far to articulate themselves as part of a counter-hegemonic bloc is actually not their responsibility but a failure of political understanding more broadly. If real victory requires more than a capacity merely to interrupt the distribution of the sensible, any 'romanticism of the multitude' is also insufficient to grasp what is at stake here. On the other hand, the return of what Daniel Bensaid might call 'the question of strategy' need not involve a choice between starkly opposed options: either traditional parties or a new messianic political organization; either the self-assertion of the multitude or a more traditional form of class antagonism; either the traditional dogmatic Left or the chastened, reformist or 'realistic' socialism of the new millennium. To resolve these tensions is less the responsibility of the students than of the wider radical Left, one that is able to contest the ongoing savagery of capitalist accumulation without ceasing to imagine a better and more equitable world.

Notes

1. Gideon Long, 'Chile's Student Protests Show Little Sign of Abating', BBC News, 25 October 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-15431829.
2. See, for example, the online edition of Clarin.com: 'Bajo una intensa lluvia y mucho frío, miles de estudiantes marcharon por Santiago', 18 August 2011, www.clarin.com/mundo/intensa-estudiantes-marchan-capital-chilena_0_538146385.html. Cf. 'Dozen Injured after Clashes on Day Two Of Chilean Strike', *Guardian*, 25 August 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/26/two-chile-nationwide-strike-violence; 'Chile Strike: Clashes Mar Antigovernment Protest', BBC News, 26 August 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-14677953.

- 3 Thanks to Anustup Basu for his generous help in the preparation of this article. See, in particular, Carlos Ruiz, *De la república al mercado. Ideas educacionales y políticas en Chile*, LOM Ediciones, Santiago, 2010.
4. José Joaquín Brunner, Hernán Courard and Cristián Cox, *Estado, mercado y conocimientos: políticas y resultados de la educación superior chilena 1960–1990*, FLACSO, Santiago, 1992.
5. María Olivia Monckeberg, *El negocio de las universidades en Chile*, Debate, Santiago, 2007. This volume complements a former one entitled *La privatización de las universidades en Chile. Una historia de poder, dinero e influencias*, Copa Rota, Santiago, 2005.
6. ‘Data from the OECD states that, at relative prices, higher education in Chile is the most expensive in the world. With an average cost of US\$ 3,400 yearly, the rate of domestic tuition fees is equivalent to 22.7 per cent of GDP per capita, higher than nations such as United States, Australia and Japan’ (‘Chile, la educación superior más cara del mundo’, <http://aquevedo.wordpress.com/2011/07/05/chile-la-educacion-superior-ms-cara-del-mundo/>). The cost of tuition has increased by over 100 per cent in the public sector and even more in the larger private sector over the last ten years.
7. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.
8. See the CIA World FactBook, www.indexmundi.com/chile/distribution_of_family_income_gini_index.html.
9. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, Picador, New York, 2010.
10. Particularly telling is the doctoral dissertation of the current president of Chile, Sebastián Piñera, ‘The Economics of Education in Developing Countries’, Department of Economics, Harvard University, 1976. See also Sebastián Piñera, ‘El Costo Económico del “Desperdicio” de Cerebros’, *Cuadernos de Economía*, vol. 15, no. 46, 1978, pp. 349–405.
11. Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1996.

Occupy time

Jason Adams

Until recently a casual observer might have thought that Occupy had developed a time-management problem: it was increasingly managed by movement a static, essentially timeless image of space. While Occupy Wall Street initially began with the declaration that 17 September would be the starting date and that it would continue for an unspecified period, the focus soon shifted to a general strategy of occupying public space. While this produced many victories, a certain ossification also emerged. What should have been one tactic among others began to harden into an increasingly homogenous strategy. For many of those involved, maintaining this spatial focus became the *sine qua non* of ‘the’ movement, even in the face of the changing of the seasons and the nationwide campaign of police evictions. In nearly every history-altering moment of the past, from the Paris Commune to the anti-globalization movement, it was the element of time that proved most decisive. Indeed, events of the past that are narrated as failures can be renarrated from the standpoint of the *possible* successes they have left behind, which remain to be actualized.

Rather than maintaining this spatial strategy at all costs, what is most interesting about Occupy now is that it is increasingly complicating static images of space by occupying time. This has meant a shift to a more fluid, tactical approach, one not only appropriate to the specifics of constantly changing situations deployed from above, but one that, more importantly, allows it to bring forth new ones, from below. Indeed,