

## Preface to the post-dictatorship

Valderrama Castillo, Miguel. (2018). *Prefacio a la postdictadura*. Santiago: Palinodia. 119 pp. ISBN 978-956-8438-53-1

*Prefacio a la postdictadura*, by Chilean historian Miguel Valderrama, is proposed as a reading exercise of the *post-dictatorship*, of “that archive or book that has continued to be produced or written for 30 years now, from the very day the *No* campaign won in the 1988 plebiscite” (p. 13).

The *post-dictatorship* is the term chosen by the author to propose a set of theses on the temporality, historic representation, and the impossibility of mourning in the context of the Chilean post-dictatorship. Valderrama uses the figure of the *prefacio* as warning or protocol, announcing, from the very beginning, the aporetic character of the reading exercise proposed.

The post-dictatorship archive features a certain illegibility in the context of a temporal representation that seems *unthinkable* in the context of the regime crisis of modern history. In that sense, *Prefacio a la postdictadura* goes in-depth and broadens a thinking on history, postmodernity, and present day that Miguel Valderrama has addressed as author in works like *Posthistoria. Historiografía y comunidad* (2005), *Heródoto y lo insepulto* (2007), as co author together with Luis G. de Mussy in *Histo-*

*riografía posmoderna* (2010), and as editor of the edited collection *¿Qué es lo contemporáneo? Actualidad, tiempo histórico, utopías del presente* (2011).

In the context of the *post-dictatorship*, what is in question is the very historian profession, any time in which the combination of reading and writing procedures belonging the discipline are challenged by an un-representable time, without temporality or categories, that questions the very possibility of *history* while presenting a mimetic representation of history.

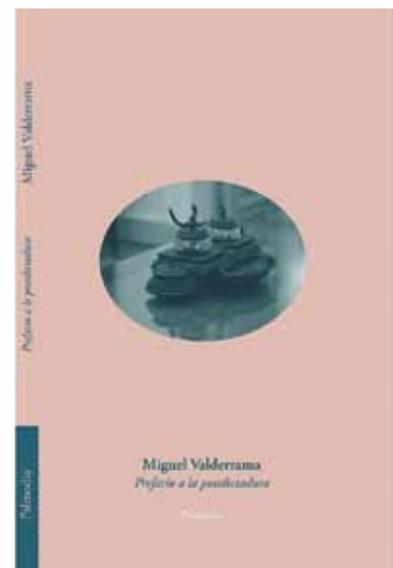
However, the essay’s sphere of reflection cannot be reduced to a dispute between different disciplines. Philosophy, literature, art, and cultural critique are some of the fields questioned in terms of their procedures and facticities in the arrival of the post-dictatorship era; acts of reading and writing share a sense of historicity in decline. “If reading is to decipher, to understand, to translate, then one must be warned that in the landscape of mourning the post-dictatorship, these operations of deciphering, comprehension, translation, are held in suspension following the death toll marking an end to the world” (p. 44).

Valderrama poses the following question: “what to call the time period following the dictatorship and under whose shadow we still inhabit under the name post-dictatorship?” (p. 17), understanding that the prefix *post* conveys a notion of temporality that does not define a time where past, present, and future “become confused and cease to exist in the timeless memory of

a present devoid of a horizon, a world, of representation” (p. 18), a place where the present is no longer representable, cannot be appropriated, the result of the catastrophe.

It is the time following the dictatorship which has become unrepresentable, as the result of the trauma derived from the violence of the State, of the irreparable loss and disappearances. It has led to a variation in the realm of sensitivity and the possibility of representation that harkens back to the 80s, for example, in the shift from the suffix *ismo* to the prefix *post*, in a context marked by debate on post-dictatorship and post-modernity, and the problematic relation between both concepts.

This decline of historic narration experienced in the context of the post-dictatorship would result in the appearance of the *image*, as scene of the impossible mourning, because if the *post-dictatorship* occurs under the form of an eternal present, then any attempt at narration or a reading is ruled out.



The essay comes with a series of pictures of the Palacio de la Moneda that represent this coming of the image-monument in the twilight of history, such as the immortalization of a present and constant reminder of the military coup and the catastrophe. "The coup sets the stage for trauma, a resistance to the memory in the memory, a kind of unhealable wound, an invincible impediment to the work of transformation or imagining of the representation. As such it informs one on what is not representable in the forms of experience inherent to realism, history and historicity" (p. 57).

Photography, as image, does not give way to catharsis or dialectics. "It is precisely the mournful nature of photography which has made it the artistic darling art in the landscape of the post-dictatorship scene. What photography panders to is that the suspension of dialectics, or better yet, the image affirms non-dialectical temporality (p. 85). The negative aspect of representation in the image doesn't match or relate to the act of mourning or history. For Valderrama, this process produces the key to critically approach our times, where a transition to aesthetics would provide the more privileged or favorable point for analysis of the neoliberal present, which takes on the form of a regime of visibility.

The book begins with an epigraph by Walter Benjamin: "history is broken up into images", foreshadowing Miguel Valderrama's thesis on the *post-dictatorship*. The thesis of *Prefacio*, which as a preface hedges all its bets on paratext, foreshadows that which we are about to

read; and especially, what we are about to write.

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