

**KINO LORBER**  
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presents

# **THE PEARL BUTTON**

A FILM BY PATRICIO GUZMÁN



2015 Berlin Film Festival- Winner Silver Bear for Best Script  
2015 Toronto International Film Festival

Chile/France/Spain | 82 minutes | 2014 | In Spanish and Kawésqar  
with English subtitles

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## Synopsis

The ocean contains the history of all humanity. The sea holds the voices of the Earth and those that come from outer space. Water receives impetus from the stars and transmits it to living creatures. Water, the longest border in Chile, also holds the secret of a mysterious button that was discovered in its seabed. Chile, with its 2,670 miles of coastline, the largest archipelago in the world, presents a supernatural landscape. In it are volcanoes, mountains and glaciers. In it are the voices of the Patagonian indigenous people, of the first English sailors and also those of its political prisoners. Some say that water has memory. This film shows that it also has a voice.

## Director's Notes

### Western Patagonia

The largest existing archipelago. Located in the south of Chile it has endless islands, islets, rocks and fjords and is known as "Western Patagonia". There are estimated to be around 46,000 miles of coastline. Parts of this region have never been explored. It encompasses the far south of the continent and stretches from the Gulf of Penas to Staten island (the southernmost point of South America). This immense labyrinth of water reminds us of mans' aquatic origins. According to the German scientist Theodor Schwenk, the inner ear is a winding mollusk, the heart is the meeting of two underwater currents, and some of the bones in our bodies are coiled in a spiral, like a whirlpool.

### Water in the Cosmos

Water doesn't just belong to earthlings. It is a common element in the Solar System. It is found in the form of vapour in some planets: Jupiter and Saturn. It is found as ice on Mars, the Moon, Europa, Titan. Beyond the Solar System there is also a lot of water in other bodies. In Chile, in 2010, a few stars were detected from the "La Silla" observatory that may contain liquid water and that orbit the planet "Gliese", in constellation Libra, 20 light years away from the Earth. At present, nobody can deny the possible existence of an archipelago such as Patagonia there.

### The Water People

Making a film about these places also inspired me to film part of its inhabitants' history. In the words of Theodor Schwenk: "...the act of thinking resembles water due to its capacity to adapt to everything. The law of thought is the same as that



of water, always ready to adapt itself to everything". Perhaps this explains how a group of humans managed to live here for ten thousand years, isolated and in polar temperatures, with winds of 124 miles per hour. It is thought there were eight thousand people in the 18th century. Now, around twenty direct survivors remain.

**A Conversation Between Frederick Wiseman and Patricio Guzmán  
Paris, Jan. 16, 2015**

FRED: What is the relationship between this film and your last film "Nostalgia for the Light"?

PATRICIO: I think it's a diptych, the first is set in the extreme north, and the second in the extreme opposite. I considered doing something in the other extreme and perhaps I'll make the third film about the Andes mountain range, the vertebral column of Chile and America. But for now I have no concrete plan and don't even know if I'd be capable of it.

F: I was struck by the beauty of the introduction.

P: We filmed in two sailing boats under the command of Keri Lee Pashuk and Greg Landreth, who've undertaken 17 voyages in Antarctica. They took us to the extraordinary glaciers, the impressive mountain range of Patagonia. It's a labyrinth of islands. We sailed many kilometres, from Seno del Almirantazgo to the Beagle Canal.

F: In my opinion all good films always have two voices: one is the literal voice and the other is the abstract and metaphorical voice. I think that in this case the true film exists in the passage from one to the other. Can you give me an example of how these two voices were connected in your film?

P: When I am editing and finish a sequence of two or three minutes, I immediately create the narrative voice and write it down on a blank page. I write down four or five sentences and then record them over the image. So the voice is improvised although it's always indirect, only rarely is it informative. I then consider it done and give it no more thought. I move on to the next sequence. There's a kind of intuition in the story I want to tell that already exists within me. Describing what I've been holding inside for such a long time seems easy.

F: I really like how you reconstructed the map of Chile and how it is unrolled during the sequence.

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P: My friend, the painter Emma Malig, has been making maps of fictitious continents she calls “errant” lands, lands of shipwrecks, of exile. In my film “Salvador Allende”, I filmed her imaginary lands for the first time. This time I asked her for a complete map of Chile- to scale- that is 15 metres long. It resembles the ochre coloured skin of a prehistoric animal. It’s a unique and admirable work of art.

F: Why are you obsessed by the stories of Pinochet’s coup d’etat? Why do you believe it’s so important that you always come back to this theme?

P: I can’t get away from this moment. It’s as if I’d witnessed my home being burnt down in my childhood. And all my story books, games, objects, comic books, had been burnt before my eyes. I feel like a child that can’t forget this fire, that happened only recently, For me time is different for each person. In Chile, when I ask my friends if they remember the coup d’état, many of them say it’s far away now, that it happened a long time ago. But for me, no time has passed. It’s as if it happened last year, last month, or last week. It’s as if I exist inside an amber filled capsule, like those ancient insects that have remained immobilised forever, inside a drop... Some of my Chilean friends tell me that I “live in a trap, that I’m sick”. I look at them and see that most of them are older than me, fatter than me, more stooped than me. And I conclude that I’m perfectly alive within my capsule.

F: Do you believe that the public and Chilean people want to forget these questions? Is this part of your motivation, I mean for it to never be forgotten?

P: The young people are eager to know everything about what happened. Their grandparents, their parents, their teachers, most of them haven’t told them anything in real detail. That’s why they’re hungry for a past that they don’t really know. Also they belong to the generation that is not afraid, they’re open to understanding what happened. There’s a strong student movement in Chile. We interviewed a few of its leaders (Gabriel Boric, Giorgio Jackson). For them Salvador Allende’s project was a model...On the other hand, “modern” Chile is a paradox. “Modern” Chile is far older than the Chile I knew. “Modern” Chile is a country in which homosexuals have no rights, in which abortion is illegal, and which lives under Pinochet’s Constitution.

F: How do you explain this?

P: During 40 years, the right wing has maintained a Constitution that had many traps. The democratic opposition’s votes could never outnumber those of the right entertaining the concept of the “internal enemy”. This might change since the Parliament just approved a reform of the binominal system which will now be



proportional (on January 20th 2015). Little by little Chile gets rid of Pinochet dictatorship's legacy. I hope the country will return to a more interesting, diverse and democratic place. Salvador Allende was precisely this: a democratic and libertarian man. This is the great legacy he left to this country, as long as a spaghetti.

F: Why has Pinochet's Constitution remained the same for so long?

P: Pinochet was thrust from power by a popular movement. The agitation that was present in the working class neighborhoods, universities, high schools, central Santiago, etc. was so strong that the CIA ordered Pinochet to organise a referendum to neutralise this possible rebellion. Pinochet organised it and lost it. The next day the professional politicians came to power and made a pact of silence with the military.

F: This happened because the army was involved?

P: The army has always been involved in Chilean affairs, even today. It is its main force. The idea of this pact of silence probably came from Felipe González's influence during the transition period. The pact, which was used in Spain after Franco's death, involved talking about everything except historic memory and the communal graves. In Chile, the popular masses that fought against the dictatorship were kept away from power. Power was taken back by the central left. But this "left" is a left that has become increasingly diluted up until present day. Around 40 percent of the dictatorship's crimes have been brought to trial. But the other crimes have not. The civilians involved in the dictatorship, for example, have barely been touched. Basically, Chile is one big solitary island on which people work a lot, work hard and get up very early. Sometimes employees have only one suit that their wives iron every night and they struggle to belong to a middle class in which there's no happiness. I believe that the coup d'état will hang around for a century. It's an island with no right to strikes, no freedom of expression, and whose church meddles with affairs of the state. When I was young, the Chilean church was one of the most tolerant on the continent. This is why I think that the real Republican "modernity" is behind, not in front of us.

F: In your current film, does water play the same role as the desert did in your last film?

P: I think this is true. What was solid in the last film is liquid in this one.

F: Bodies are found in both places... Are we talking about two cemeteries? Does this play a literary or metaphysical role in both works? I think it's a metaphor.

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P: It does both. I like working on metaphor in order to take the documentary away from informative media and because it's a very rich narrative tool that provokes people to think. But there is also a "literal role" because these *natural* cemeteries really did exist. The first option when it came to making bodies disappear was the desert, next came the volcano craters and lastly the ocean. They tied the bodies to a piece of railway track so they'd sink with no trace.

F: Is the person you interviewed a pilot?

P: He's an ex-mechanic for the PUMA helicopters. It was Judge Juan Guzmán who gave me the lead. The judge's conclusion was the following: they've found around 100 bodies in the desert, where are the others? There are two possibilities: at the bottom of the sea or in the volcano craters. They looked in the sea and the judge ordered inspector Vignolo to find the rails off the Quintero coast. Embedded in one of the rails they found a shirt button. This rail is in Santiago, in the Villa Grimaldi museum. Judge Guzmán believes that further out at sea more rails might be found. If there were an enormous submarine boat they'd be able to carry out an extensive search in the great marine depths and they'd certainly find many more.

F: Who is the poet Raúl Zurita?

P: In my opinion he's one of Chile's best modern poets. He's an extraordinary, remarkably talented artist. I love it when he says that the military are cowards. He gave me the example of Achilles and Troy, and Hector's cadaver that was returned to the Trojans as a matter of honour to the enemy warriors. But I didn't use it in the film as he says many other important things in this sequence.

F: In your film there are some elements that lie between fiction and documentary because you asked people to do certain things. And there's real directing, like in a fiction film. Why did you do this?

P: I did a reconstruction of the rails with the bodies as I had read a book by a journalist (Javier Rebolledo) who'd carried out a very detailed investigation on this subject. I spoke to the journalist, who explained these hidden facts to me. For me, seeing the dummy prepared and ready to be thrown into the sea was a blood chilling experience, because it seemed like a real dead body. It also gives me a shock to think that behind all this there must have been a considerable amount of organising, to make 1.400 people disappear. If each flight took nine bodies, it means that there were hundreds of flight missions. They also threw bodies from boats. A small group of soldiers appeared one night in a port and forced the owner of a fishing boat to take "packages" on board, with bodies, to be thrown



into the sea. This also happened in lakes and rivers.

F: What happens when you show your films in Chile?

P: I have a public who is familiar with my films. There must be around 5,000 of them. But no television channel broadcasts them. It has only happened once. They showed "Nostalgia for the Light" at one o'clock in the morning and with the film reels reversed. They made excuses and had to show it again, but almost at the same time of day.



## Cast Biographies

### Gabriela Paterito

Gabriela was born near an island called “*Calao*”, in the Picton fjord. She is about 73 years old. She learnt to row and dive under water when she was just six years old. Gabriela travelled hundreds of miles in a canoe, from Punta Arenas to the Gulf of Penas together with her family. She’s the last descendant of the *kawéskar* ethnic group, able to recount her life and that of her family with total lucidity and precision. Thanks to her son, Juan Carlos Tonko, who has brought Gabriela’s life into the public eye, it is no longer one of anonymity. She lives in Puerto Eden and earns a living making handicraft. During the filming we met other of her fellow countrymen, Alfredo *Renchi*, Francisco González and Yolanda *Mesier*.

### Cristina Calderon

Cristina is the last descendent of the *yagán* ethnic group, recognised as a “living human treasure” by Chile’s National Council of Culture and the Arts. She is 86 years old and also makes a living from woven handicrafts. She and her family have worked to conserve their culture, traditions, stories and *yaganes* legends. She lives in Villa *Ukika*, opposite the Beagle canal, near Puerto Williams (the southernmost city in the world).

### Martin G. Calderon

Cristina’s nephew. Martin discovered cave paintings by his *yagán* clan on *Shapine* island. He also makes canoes in the ancient style that he learnt from his father. He crossed Cape Horn with his father when he was a child. The canoe was driven by paddles and a small sail. Today the Chilean Navy doesn’t allow him to sail because his boats are so small.

### Gabriel Salazar

A professor at the Philosophy department and the Law department at the University of Chile. Gabriel Salazar, a social historian, was awarded with the National History Prize in 2006. During Salvador Allende’s government he was an active militant of the MIR (the radical left). He was tortured in Pinochet’s prisons, where he was held prisoner for two years. When he was released he was offered a grant from England to do a PHD in Economic and Social History. He returned to Chile in 1986. He is one of the most vehement intellectuals, dedicated to studying the *Chilean working class*. In 2011 he led the support for Students of Chile.



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Raul Zurita

A communist militant who was imprisoned and tortured in the hold of the boat “*Maipo*” after the coup d’état. When he was released Zurita became a radical member of the CADA group (Art and Action collective). He performed acts in which he used his body as an expressive medium, going as far as martyrdom and self-mutilation: burning his cheek with a burning iron or spraying acid in his eyes to express “powerlessness” in the face of the dictatorship and the “necessity to express without words”. He etched in sand of the Atacama desert his incredible sentence: “Neither pain nor fear”. In New York, five aeroplanes wrote one of his poems in the sky, 9 kilometres long. Little by little Zurita moved closer to the total art form. He published his poems “Song of rivers in love”, “Paradise is empty”, “New life”, “Dead poems”, “Dead countries”, “Cities of water”, etc. Zurita became Chile’s favourite poet and received the National Literature Prize in 2000.

Claudio Mercado

Founder of the Indigenous Music Archive at the Chilean Museum of Pre-Columbian Art. Founder of the music group “*La Chimuchina*”. An anthropologist with mention in Archeology and a Masters in Musicology, Claudio Mercado is a composer and performer of experimental music and respects the traditional songs that he plays with groups of peasants on the coast and in central and northern Chile.

Paz Errazuriz, Martin Gusinde

This film could not have been made without the historical photographic images. An incredible woman, Paz Errázuriz, travelled in the 1990’s to meet the *kawésqar* survivors in the small village of Puerto Eden. She was motivated by intuition and talent. She decided to set herself up in the southern region in order to photograph the natives with a skill that remains unequalled. At the beginning of the last century, another great photographer, the Austrian priest Martin Gusinde took more than one thousand photographs of the *Selk’nam* ethnic group in their canoes, going about their daily lives and their ceremonies that still remain mysterious. The quality of these black and white works enabled me to relive a fleeting moment of that amazing life that was destroyed by the colonists’ crimes.



## Director Biography

Patricio Guzmán

After the coup d'état that brought down Salvador Allende, Patricio Guzmán was held in solitary confinement in Santiago's National Stadium and threatened with execution. He abandoned Chile in November 1973. He has since lived in Cuba, Spain and France, where he lives now. Six of his works have been premiered at Cannes film festival, amongst which stand out "The Battle of Chile", "The Pinochet Case", "Salvador Allende" and "Nostalgia For the Light". The latter was awarded the Grand Prix by the European Film Academy in 2010. He is the founder of the Documentary Film Festival of Santiago. Recent retrospectives: British Film Institute, Harvard Film Archive. In 2013 he was invited to be part of the Hollywood Academy. His trilogy "The Battle of Chile" is considered one of the best documentary films ever made.

## Filmography

### NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT

Best documentary, European Film Academy Prize 2010; Official Selection Out of Competition, Cannes Film Festival 2010; Best documentary, International Association of Documentary makers IDA EU 2011; Selected one of 20 best documentaries of the century (*Sight and Sound*), England 2013

### SALVADOR ALLENDE

Official Selection Out of Competition, Cannes Film Festival 2004

### THE PINOCHET CASE

International Critics' week, Cannes Film Festival 2001; Grand Prix, Marseille Film Festival 2001; Golden Gate Award, San Francisco Film Festival 2002

### OBSTINATE MEMORY

Grand Prix, Florence Film Festival 1997; Grand Prix, Tel Aviv Film Festival 1999; Best Documentary, Hot Docs Film Festival, Canada 1998



## THE SOUTHERN CROSS

Grand Prix, Marseille Film Festival 1992; Tiempo de Historia Award, Valladolid Film Festival 1992; Spirit of Freedom Award, Jerusalem Film Festival 1994

## THE BATTLE OF CHILE I-II-III

Directors' Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival 1975, 1976; Filmforum, Berlin Film Festival 1975, 1976, 1979; Grand Prix, Havana Film Festival 1979

### Credits

Writer/Director.....Patricio Guzmán  
Producer.....Renate Sachse  
Editing.....Emmanuelle Joly  
Assistant Director.....Nicolás Lasnibat  
Sound Recording.....Álvaro Silva Wuth  
Original Soundtrack.....Miranda & Tobar, Hughes Maréchal  
Photography and Camera.....Katell Djian  
Additional Photography.....Patricio Guzmán, David Bravo, Yves de Peretti, Patricio Lanfranco, Raúl Beas  
Still Photography.....Martín Gusinde, Paz Errázuriz  
Sound Editing and Mix.....Jean-Jacques Quinet  
Producer and Artistic Advisor.....Renate Sachse  
Executive Producer and Production Coordinator..... Adrien Oumhani  
Line Producer, Chile..... Verónica Rosselot  
Co-Producers..... Bruno Bettati, Fernando Lataste, Jaume Roures Llop