In his latest film, *El botón de nacar*, Patricio Guzmán2 continues his exploration of Chilean memory. It is a common theme running through his artistic output. In the film, an object — the pearl button that gives the film its title — becomes the metaphor for a dark past shaped by two intersecting stories. The first is that of Jemmy Button, a South American Indian who comes from the Yaghan ethnic group in the Tierra del Fuego. Button is said to have been sold to the English in 1830 for transportation back to the United Kingdom in exchange for a mother-of-pearl button. The second story is about a button found attached to a railway track at the bottom of the ocean in Quintero Bay (Valparaíso province). It was recovered during recent investigations into the crimes committed by General Pinochet’s regime, instituted after the overthrow of Salvador Allende in September 1973. The regime used railway tracks to make the bodies of the “disappeared” — the victims of the dictatorship, who had usually been tortured beforehand — sink to the bottom of the sea. Both the recovered railway track and the button were transferred by Judge Juan Guzmán to the Villa Grimaldi museum in Santiago in 2004. These material traces, evidence of the crimes committed, are now an integral part of an installation called the Monumento Rieles3, which was unveiled in 2007. This one object then, the mother-of-pearl button, thus serves as a metaphor for the condemnation of a double crime, one committed against the indigenous people of the American continent

1 Testimony of one of the leading members of the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, quoted by Layla Renshaw, *Exhuming Loss. Memory, Materiality and Mass Graves of the Spanish Civil War*, Walnut Creek, California, Left Coast Press, 2011, p. 159.

2 The film was released in the US on 23 October 2015 and in the UK on 18 March 2016 under the title *The Pearl Button*.

3 Images can be found on the Villa Grimaldi museum website: [http://villagrimaldi.cl/parque-por-la-paz/monumento-rieles-2/,](http://villagrimaldi.cl/parque-por-la-paz/monumento-rieles-2/) accessed 31 October 2017.

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by the European colonists, and the other against the political opponents of the Pinochet regime. The ocean echoes with the voices of the Patagonian Indians and the thousands that disappeared during the dictatorship.