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Variations on a fugitive's song: the performance of disappearance and forced migration in Chile

by Nicolás Salazar-Sutil

Initial statement: as though they were alive

This text could be read as if it were a fugue, beginning with a statement of intent, followed by a number of variations and a reprise. The word fugue derives from the Latin *fuga*, and the active infinitive *fugere*, meaning the act of fleeing, and it is linked etymologically to words such as refuge or fugitive, all terms indicative of an act of fleeing. The conceptual fugue I am embarking on here will take me through a creative analysis and political commentary of the acts of disappearance that took place during the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-1988). More specifically, what I have in mind is a study of the performative re-vocalisation of victims of State-sponsored terror through a particular medium: popular song.

The main thrust of the piece could be phrased thus: given the human need to repair and replenish loss, it is possible that exile, detainment, and political assassination may be conducive to a memorialising performance or "memory machine,"[1] what I call a performance of disappearance. I will contend that disappearance does not have to be understood as a terminal event or the complete silencing of a political voice by violent means, but rather, a regenerative and re-inscriptive process that triggers the performative and memorial demand for a re-vocalisation. The disappeared necessarily become those who must be given back their voice. Or as Paul Virilio puts it: "the aesthetics of disappearance renews the enterprise of appearance."[2] Drawing on Virilio's notion of "aesthetics of disappearance", Ackbar Abbas also points out that disappearance in certain cultural contexts does not imply non-appearance, absence, or lack of presence, but that it should be seen as an opportunity. It is not disappearance that endangers the need for perpetuity in life, but misrecognition, or the recognition of things as something else.[3] Likewise, Dwight Conquergood notes that the site of refuge (or fugitiveness, for that matter) is a liminal space where people must fall back on the performance of their traditions as an empowering way of securing stability, which is one

of the reasons why in refugee or exilic crisis, performative behaviour intensifies."[4] In short, my concern in this paper is the power of performance as memorialisation and loss substitution, what Joseph Roach famously called a 'model of surrogation' that forgets its antecedents in order to re-inject life into instances of loss.[5]

Political disappearance during the Pinochet regime is particularly relevant from this perspective, inasmuch as it resulted in different types of representations of those killed, exiled, imprisoned, or sent to concentration camps by the military dictatorship. Furthermore, disappearance elicited a performative wave in Chile's resistance movement that culminated in the carnivalesque musical upsurge of the 1988 plebiscite, after which Pinochet was ousted from power. Despite the attempt from the totalitarian system to silence opposition, popular music nonetheless surfaced as a sizeable weapon of political resistance. In sum, the underlying question of this text is whether disappearance, exile, or imprisonment can be seen as the de facto motivation for a programme of musical denunciation that was so powerful as to dent the military regime in a way armed struggle could not.

This analytical fugue is also intended as a discussion of some of the more memorable chants, songs, and rallying calls that surged during the latter part of the Pinochet regime. These political vocalisations are read as memorialising speech-acts that called back into existence or demanded the re-appearance of those men and women victimised by State-sponsored terror. I will contend that although the oppression of the military regime in Chile amounts to a civil-rights abuse at a massive scale (more than 3 thousand people were killed and anywhere between 300,000 and 1,200,000 were exiled or expatriated), the devastating effects of military rule were also, and paradoxically, conducive to a vibrant and highly creative regeneration process that led to the so-called transition period (*Transición)* following Pinochet's defeat in the 1988 referendum. As Cullinane and Gimenez-Maceda point out, dictatorships not only transform music, they also give birth to new music. Songs effectively

survive dictatorships because music performed in protest, even if clandestinely, becomes part of identity across generations.[6] In this way, music can become the backdrop for the performance of a political expressivity in spite of, and which prevails over, political oppression. It is worth noting, however, that with the collapse of military rule in Chile, protest music did not manage to find new points of entry into Chilean culture. Traditional protest song and Chilean folk has now been largely displaced by a post-dictatorship generation whose political message is largely spoken in the musical language of hip-hop, or other global musical idioms.

Like the colour revolutions of the post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, left-wing opponents to the various military regimes in Latin America overcame exile, torture, and death with a vivid and youthful counter-discourse, whose musical exuberance opposed the commanding, often abusive, speech of the military. Adelaida Reyes neatly articulates the following question in the introduction to her book *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free:* "in the context of forced migration, which often inhibits speech and induces guardedness in migrants in the face of danger and as a result of trauma, would music as an activity more readily shared with others have particular advantages as a point of entry to other areas of life?"[7] People cannot simply disappear; not from memory, anyway. Thus the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in the end, meaning the end or *raison d-être* of performing disappearance is to create a new presence, and to invoke the ghost of the dead as though they were alive.

Variation 1: The Apparition

"*El Aparecido*" is a song about a fugitive written by Chilean singer-songwriter Victor Jara. Victor Jara is a well-known figure in the protest movement known as *Nueva Canción Lationamericana*, which emerged in the subcontinent during the mid-60s. The Nueva Canción or New Song movement was influenced by radical, left-wing ideology, as

well as folk tradition, unionism, and a revivalist indigenous discourse. The *Nueva Canción Chilena*, or Chilean New Song, as the movement became known in Chile, originates in the work of Violeta Parra and her family, who in 1964 organised a famous musical fair and community centre for political activism in Santiago known as the "*Peña de los Parra*". The Chilean New Song was also associated with Salvador Allende's left-wing coalition government in the early 70s, and later with resistance movement and exilic performance during the Pinochet years. Alongside Victor Jara and Violeta Parra, the key players of the Chilean New Song are the musical groups Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani, whose role in safe-keeping of political song and performance in Chile and abroad during the 15 years of military rule cannot be underestimated. "*El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido*" and "*Venceremos*" (Allende's election campaign song), have become well-known socialist anthems that established a lasting relationship between international socialism and Latin American folk music. As for Victor Jara, he became the figurehead and inspirational leader of many New Song groups, partly because his music dealt incisively with a number of pungent political topics. Most importantly, Victor was imprisoned and executed in Chile's National Stadium in September 1973, which resulted in his consecration as one of Chile's most cultic musical icons.

In the song of the "aparecido" or appeared one, Victor Jara touches on the theme of a fugitive who whose flight or fugue must keep pace if he is to stay alive (*correlé, correlé, correlá*). Running becomes a pre-condition for survival, not least because "crows with golden claws" (*cuervos con garra de oro*) have put a prize on the fugitive's head. What is interesting about Victor's fugitive is that he is described as the "appearing one", which is doubtless quite far from the classical notion of political appearance espoused, for instance, by Hannah Arendt. In Arendt's view, the members of the polis are rendered political by an act of physical

visibility in a shared "space of appearance"- the agora.[8] But rather than a concrete and material appearance, Victor Jara's fugitive:

> Opens paths in the hillsides
> Leaves his trail in the wind
> The eagle gives him flight
> And silence covers him.[9]

The appeared one has an almost mythological or religious dimension. He is a kind of political apparition, a ghostly leader who bonds communities in a common myth of deliverance from the oligarchic Establishment. As such, disappearance is not always a total dispossession of power but the constitution of an invisible political presence, a new type of political counter-appearance through invisibility and fugitiveness. In order to create this apparition, the fugitive must always be on the move, always relocating to the point of having no concrete identity, no definitive face, no home.

It is worth noting that this fugitive, whose name Victor Jara never discloses in this particular song, is in fact Che Guevara. At the time when the song was released in 1967, Che Guevara was understood to be in the mountains near Cochabamba, in Bolivia. After his death at the hands of the Bolivian Army, Guevara became known as Saint Ernesto de La Higuera, to commemorate the site of his 'martyrdom'. Che's iconic image took a performative life of its own, creating an irresistible combination of celebrity and rebel glamour. Today, Che Guevara t-shirts and headgear are synonymous with making a stand, although in many cases they are displayed in ways that bear no resemblance with the details of his exploits. The appeared one is commoditised and memorialised as a means of popular self-expression through street fashion, film, and of course, music. In other words, as the appeared one becomes an icon that serves the purpose of cultural self-validation and consumption, so

performativity enables a given narrative to function symbolically, in a way that can be re-spatialised and re-vocalised in ever-changing contexts.

"Crucifixion" at the hands of the powerful (*cómo lo ha crucificado la furia del poderoso*) transforms this Christ-like political martyr into a *parousia*, an apparition that cannot be killed again, and which thus claims an advantage over the repressive State as an enduring performative memory. The notion of a new presence through memory is crucial to the performance of disappearance. Memory in the context of persecution functions as the performative energy that invites more and more people to find their way into a common space to join their personal knowledge and experience to a wider, more emblematic meaning.[10] In an ominous anticipation of his own death, Victor's fugitive ceases to be physically real in order to become a memorialising presence that remains alive in song.

Doubtless, the political apparition that is invoked most regularly by the resistance movement in Chile is not Che Guevara, but President Salvador Allende, who allegedly committed suicide during the bombing of the Moneda Palace in September 1973. To this day, when Allende's name is shouted out amongst his supporters, one may expect the crowd to reply: "Present!" (*Presente!*) This cry could be seen as a performative utterance, a speech-act that brings a state of affairs into being. To shout present!- is thus to appresent the figure of Salvador Allende. The rallying cry engages a crowd and creates a shared space of re-appearance.

> *Compañero Salvador Allende!...presente!*
> *Ahora!...y siempre!*
> (Comrade Salvador Allende!... present!
> Now!... and Always!)

Likewise, the watchword *Allende Vive!* (Allende Lives!), clamoured by supporters of the former President, is more than a constative statement of the people's unity and loyalty.

Once again, this is a performative commitment where the rallying cry is not setting out to describe a situation, an event, or an action: it *is* an event or an action. What is implied here is that the act of disappearance and forced migration in Chile did not efface political opposition. The killing of thousands of people led to a kind of political séance whose participants poured into the streets to demand information on the victims' whereabouts. If the elimination of political opposition did not achieve its desire effect, it is because Pinochet's terror campaign replaced a real presence with a performative one. The act of getting rid of the political enemy only led to the return of the victims in song and chant. In this way, the military could no longer engage squarely in the struggle for power.

Variation 2: Performing NO

International human rights groups recognised the case of 'disappeared detainees' in Chile largely through family members of the victims, particularly the *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (AFDD). The AFDD has insisted on approaching political reconstruction as a matter of "Truth, Justice and Memory."[11]In this reconstructive process, the performance of disappearance has become a crucial technique in maintaining a historical memory alive. Performance is crucial to the continuity of a political present that is not severed from a tradition and a sense of history, which is why the AFDD calls for a memorialisation that will "give back the victims their faces, their stories, the secret places where they went through."[12]

It is interesting that the relatives of the disappeared should base their campaign not only on chants and song, but also on the faces of the victims- in other words, on the visual representation of disappearance. Like the famous mothers of the Plaza the Mayo in Argentina, whose performative display is often noted by scholars, particularly by Diana Taylor, the families of the disappeared in Chile armed themselves with photographs of the faces of their

relatives in order to bring them back to the streets as though they were alive. Taylor notes that the Mothers of the victims in Argentina insisted that the disappeared had names and faces, that they were people, and that people did not simply disappear; their bodies, dead or alive, were somewhere. Taylor adds: "the Mothers inscribed the time and dates of the disappearances. Instead of dismembering, remembering."[13] Crucially, the face in the placard, the date, and the chant insisted on the impossibility of total elimination. The point made by this artistic representation is that people do not forget, no matter how much violence is inflicted upon them. On the contrary, people may die, but whilst memory lasts, they remain apparent.

Alongside this strategy of public visualisation, performance of disappearance in Chile relied on hard-hitting slogans that emphasised the poignancy of the face of the victims. *Dónde Están?* (Where are they?) and *Nunca Más* (Never Again!) became powerful captions under the black-and-white images of young men and women 'disappeared' by the Chilean State. The image and this seething question carried in banners and shouted in the streets of central Santiago became a counter-interrogation manoeuvre that turned Pinochet's heavy-handed State policy on its head. And although the performance of disappearance did not have an immediate political effect, Pinochet eventually began to lose international support. Crucially, by the late 80s the US no longer deemed it necessary to back military dictatorships to prevent communism in Latin America, so the regime began to fall under sustained pressure from abroad to re-establish democratic rule in Chile.

The performance of disappearance reached its climax in October 1988, when President Pinochet faced a recall referendum. The country was polarised between opposite camps: YES v. NO. The *Concertación de Partidos por el NO* (Coalition of Parties for NO) mobilised a compelling media campaign characterised by a positive vision of a democratic future. The visual symbol of the campaign was a multicoloured rainbow- a pronounced

contrast to the uniformed and monochrome visualisation of the Pinochet campaign. More importantly, perhaps, was the opposition's musical slogan, which was vociferously proclaimed in a song that became an overnight media phenomenon. The song, entitled *Chile, la alegría ya viene* (Chile: joy is coming), mobilised an impassioned electorate, and proved to be hugely important in the success of the opposition parties. The performance of disappearance thus focused on an optimistic representation of post-dictatorship Chile, mobilised in an intense advertising campaign and a *franja electoral* (campaign spot) made memorable by yet another sing-along anthem that helped to choreograph the political success of the anti-Pinochet movement:

> Because the rainbow is born after the storm
> Because a thousand different ways of thinking will bloom
> Because without the dictatorship happiness will come
> Because I think about the future,
> We are going to say NO.[14]

The youthful and almost naïve confidence about the campaign remained unnerved despite attacks from Pinochet supporters. In spite of accusations from the SI campaign of an underlying communist plot, the musical assault orchestrated by the NO Coalition insisted on the idea of a 'joyous democracy'. By linking their campaign with song, theatre, and radical street performance the NO Coalition showed how the performance of disappearance could serve as a mark of democratic self-determination.

It is worth noting that this was not only a highly performative event but also a media-oriented event, with the NO camp lining Chile's most famous soap-opera actors and musicians in their colourful TV and radio spots. More importantly, the influence of the media on Chilean politics led to the first live debates on Chilean TV. In the UC-TV programme '*De Cara al País*', guest politicians and pundits where allowed to discuss political issues

relatively openly. This became a window of opportunities for a mediated performance of disappearance. In August 1988, only two months before the national referendum, the most compelling criticism of Pinochet's regime was aired live when Ricardo Lagos, then leader of the Party for Democracy (PPD), waved his index finger at the camera in a memorable, premeditated media gesture that became known as '*el dedo de Lagos*' (Lagos' finger). In a personal attack on General Pinochet, and as he glared straight into the camera, Lagos exclaimed:

> I will remind you, General Pinochet, that on the day of the 1980 plebiscite you said that you would not be a candidate in 1989. And now, you promise the country another eight years of torture, murder, and human rights violations […] I speak for 15 years of silence. To me it seems vital that the country knows it faces an impasse, and that the only way to come out of this impasse in a civilised way, is through the triumph of NO. [15]

Lagos' 'finger' caused a media furore. Silence was only the pregnancy of a powerful voice of resistance that paralysed Chilean audiences in their living-room sofas, as though, in fact they had seen an apparition. The performance of disappearance was now not only disguised in clandestine song. In one of the most poignant examples of the democratisation of television, a member of the opposition was for the first time able to point straight at President Pinochet, in order to spell out how fifteen years of silence had come to an end.

Variation 3- The Song of the Exile

Arguably one of the most significant chapters in recent Chilean history, at least from the point of view of the countries' social and cultural transformation, is the period of

exile spanning the fifteen years of military dictatorship. The forced migration of thousands of Chileans during the period 1973-1988 was tantamount to a national taboo. With the return of hundreds of thousands of Chileans following the result of the 1988 plebiscite, two very different countries came to head. Many exiles found that post-dictatorship Chile had little in common with their memories of Chile, adding to what had become an increasingly bi-polar democratic identity.

As Pinochet's economic policies had become central to his political vision, so political opposition was ultimately won over not by force, but by the penetration of a neo-liberal culture implemented by the so-called 'Chicago Boys'. Chile was 'normalised' at an accelerated pace by the introduction of a revolutionary free-market economy that resulted in unprecedented economic prosperity. In the interim, the Chilean diasporic community did not partake of Chile's cultural and economic transformation, but continued to perform the memory of a bygone era. In their own ideology of home, notes Marita Eastmond, location was a political issue; it rested on maintaining a sharp division between the places of home and exile, and a moral obligation to return.[16]

In her work on identity, performativity and exile, Jane Blocker notes that exile, like nationality, is performatively produced. That is to say that nationality and exile are not descriptive terms but rather active conditions, the limits of which are created in a performance.[17] According to this reading, many Chilean exiles would have had to broadly perform their banished (and vanished) Chileanhood in order to challenge presumed realities and imposed re-culturalisations. Being an exile was tantamount to the fabrication of a hybrid performance that reflected both the nostalgia for home and the horror of the authoritarian legacy, what Argentinean film-maker and poet calls *tanguedia*, a performance of exilic disappearance.[18]

Chilean bands like Inti-Illimani, Quilapayún, and Sol y Lluvia made the theme of banishment a subgenre within the New Song movement. It is interesting that the idea of the bird in flight became a recurrent metaphor; Sol y Lluvia called it the 'distance of the human bird' (*el pájaro humano/ usó la distancia en su exilio*), which in spite of losing its strength after a drawn out flight will nonetheless defeat death in the end (*venceremos a la muerte/ a la muerte venceremos*). In Patricio Manns' famous song "La Exiliada del Sur" (Exiled from the South), featured in Inti-Illimani's album *Autores Chilenos* and first produced by the communist label DICAP, the theme of exile is addressed pungently through the idea of an endless musical journey at the end of which the guitar is broken and unstrung, but where the music continues to be played by a band of accompanying birds (*banda de chirigües*). In "Vuelvo," a song from the 1979 album *Canción para matar a una culebra* Inti-Illimani address the subject of the return to Chile in a less metaphorical fashion, highlighting the contradictions of the final homecoming.

> With anger, with suspicion,
> With active certainty,
> I step down onto my country,
> And instead of whimpering,
> Of grinding my sadness to the wind,
> I open my eyes and its vision,
> And I contain my discontent.[19]

The difficulty with the returning exile was not the disappeared homeland but the widespread indifference of a country that did not seek to involve exiles actively in a transition to democracy. Home and return almost became mutually exclusive realities; two identities that could no longer be performed in harmony. And yet, re-insertion and reunification meant the exilic dichotomy had to be overcome one way or another. In other words, exiles had to

come to terms with a reality that was often traumatic, or else opt out. Chilean exiles had to face the reality that the political views they had live for, the country they had carried with them and memorialised fervently, were no longer to be found in present-day Chile. Illapu, another well-known Chilean folk band that returned from exile in the late 80s phrased the dichotomy in a song that was to become a hit single, and the hymn of returning expatriates:

> Under a new face made of cement
> Lie the same old people
> The hungry are still waiting
> More justice, less monuments.[20]

The country had prospered and it had rebuilt itself in a new guise, almost to the point that for many exiles Chile had changed beyond recognition. Although the song indicates that the fugitive can still see traces of the "same old people", post-dictatorship Chile had changed so fundamentally that the protest song movement no longer found points of entry into a new democratic, free-market society. As such, the performance of disappearance gradually lost its momentum, as capitalist prosperity created myriad points of engagement and a new cultural precedent borrowed largely from American popular culture. The collapse of left-wing ideology and the emergence of a free-market economy and ultra-consumptive society led to the commoditisation of the song of the exile, and its real-subsumption within a completely different, almost bi-polar Chilean identity. Political performativity had been replaced by economic performativity.

Reprise

The aim of this paper has been to interrogate the performative power of disappearance. Victor Jara's song for a fugitive is compelling not least because it illustrates the paradox of

disappearance: to disappear is in fact to appear again, only in a different guise. As a religious presence, a political representation, the space of disappearance is perhaps more real than the lifeworld itself, more enduring than the political establishment it seeks to undermine. I would like to conclude with a general notion of the performance of disappearance- one that is not only applicable to the story of the fugitives and exilic refugees in recent Chilean history. Swiss philologist Karl Meuli made the interesting proposition, often overlooked, that theatrical performance may not have originated in Dionysiac rites, as it is often assumed, but in funeral rituals that sought to perform the disappearance of the dead. The mask was in fact the face of the departed, brought back to a space of ritual remembrance. Theatricality, according to this classified ethnological reading, is inherently a performance of disappearance; meaning theatrical behaviour, like the protest song, is in fact the re-presentation of someone or something that is not there, but which is re-membered and re-vocalised as though they were.

NOTES

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[3] Abbas, Ackbar. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis, MI: Minnesota Press, 1997), 7.

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[5] Roach, Joseph, *Cities of the Dead: circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[6] Cullinane, M & Giménez Maceda, T. "The Power of Song," in *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule.* Eds. K. Bilbija, J. E. Fair, C. E. Milton, L. A. Payne (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 49.

[7] Reyes, Adelaida, *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free: Music and the Vietnamese Refugee Experience* (Philadelphia, PEN: Temple University Press, 1999), xiv.

[8] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 198.

[9] Jara, Victor. "El Aparecido", in *Victor Jara.* DICAP 1967, *my translation*.

[10] Stern, Steve J. *Remembering Pinochet's Chile* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 110.

[11] *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (<http://www.afdd.cl>).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Taylor, Diana. "Making a spectacle: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo". In *Radical Street Performance*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz (London: Routledge, 1998), 80.

[14] Canción del NO, Online video clip, Youtube, *my translation*.

[15] Lagos, Ricardo. 'Dedo de Lagos. Versión precisa'. September 11, 2006. Online video clip. Youtube. *my translation*.

[16] Eastmond, Marita. "Beyond Exile. Refugee Strategies in Transnational Contexts". In *Forced Migration And Global Processes: A View from Forced Migration Studies* eds. François Crépeau, Delphine Nakache (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 230.

[17] Blocker, Jane. *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity and Exile* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 27.

[18] Taylor, J. M. *Paper Tangos* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 42.

[19] Manns, Patricio & Horacio Salinas "Vuelvo", Inti-Illimani, in *Canción para matar una culebra,* RCA, 1979, *my translation*.

[20] Márquez, Andrés (Illapu). "Vuelvo para Vivir". In *Vuelvo amor… Vuelvo vida*. EMI, 1991, *my translation*.

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