

Respect and Indignation: The Performance of Poetries as an Opposition to Attritional Violence

This paper explores poetry performances as an opposition to the effects of attritional violence as it is perpetrated in the necropolitical regime of contemporary Mexico and in the austerity regime of contemporary Britain. Focusing on the corrosive, silencing and stifling psychosocial effects of attrition, it looks at four different poems that enact a 'redirection' of social energies, drawing on the ability of the poetry performance to join poetic verbalization with the capacity of *sensibilidad* as defined by Franco Berardi: the ability to communicate what cannot be verbalized. Poems by the Liverpool-based band She Drew The Gun and the Mexican poet *María Rivera*, counter the abjection of victims of violence and reclaim what Paulo Freire has referred to as the capacity to 'give testimony to the respect for the Other'. Poems by Bristol based poet Pete the Temp and by the Mexican poet Pájaro azul enact the 'anger at the acceptance of fatalistic docility before the destructions of peoples' (Freire) as a creative force that reclaims the future as possibility.

Key words: attrition, *sensibilidad*, pedagogy of indignation, poetry performance, poetic word

The performance of poetry mobilizes those interlaced layers of signification that actualize and embody the plenitude of human existence in the world. Performed poetry engages us sensorially. The sound, timbre and pace of the spoken word appeals to our hearing; visual elements of the performance like the poet's style of dress, stage sets or visual performance elements appeal to our sight; the poet's body language and the affective connection to other audience members appeals to our awareness through touch. Intellectually, the performance of poetry stimulates our ability to analyse and process, to listen and respond. Socially, the live performance appeals to our ability to respond to each other in the moment, to share time and space, to set our own boundaries, and to recognize the boundaries of the Other. Regardless of whether a poem is performed live or on other forms of media, it often grounds conviviality within the sociality of human existence by articulating a community's socially grounded experience, chronicling important events, or creating spaces of encounter, exchange and debate. This emphatic embrace and poeticization of the abundance and plenitude of life is 'political' in that it must necessarily oppose any violation of such an integrated way of being human in the world. It militates against alienation, fragmentation and atomization, and is

committed to a desirous politics of abundance: of being experientially, sensorially, and intellectually engaged with Mind and Body. Practitioners, scholars and critics have for years implicitly or explicitly emphasized and celebrated this multi-faceted vitality of the poetry performance.¹ In this article I will approach the poetry performance from an entirely different angle and consider performed poems situated within scenarios in which the plenitude of existence is under threat by the gradual erosion of the social and sensuous conditions for abundance.

Such erosions are the purpose and the effects of attritional violence, a structural, gradual and slow-paced form of violence. Different aspects of it have been theorized by Lauren Berlant and Rob Nixon. Their works complement each other, with Berlant focusing on attrition and affect in the social sphere of post-industrial societies, and Nixon focusing on the destruction of environments and socialities, mostly outside of post-industrial societies. Slowness and gradation are key features of attrition in the understanding of both theorists and account for the challenges in verbalizing its effects. Nixon argues that slow violence occurs “gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon, 2011). That it ‘occurs out of sight’ does not mean that it is invisible; in fact, attritional violence often goes unnoticed because it is actively invisibilized and denied, rationalized, or because attention is diverted from it, sometimes by direct violence. Lauren Berlant has argued that attritional violence is often not viewed as violence because public discourse is lacking genres through which to apprehend it as violence. Like Nixon, she insists on the tempo of slowness, and has introduced a language conveying slow, ongoing processes such as diffusion, fraying, unravelling to apprehend the effects of attrition (Berlant, 2011).

Attritional violence is currently perpetrated on a large scale on both sides of the Atlantic, in different and incommensurate ways. On the continent and the islands known as Europe, attritional violence is most commonly articulated through so-called ‘austerity regimes.’ Austerity politics dispense with or erode the corrective function that the state had taken on in post-industrial societies that had been deeply marked by class divisions. The result is the immiseration of entire sectors of the population, wide-spread social suffering for

¹ See Bearder 2019, Gräbner and Casas 2011 and Novak 2011 for analyses of poetry performances that draw heavily on theories of sensory perception and of embodiment. This article is a first attempt at laying conceptual groundwork for an engagement between such approaches focused on poetry and drawing on the oral tradition, with work by scholars developing politically and societally focused approaches of new materialisms, such as Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Marcus Boon’s *The Politics of Vibration* (2022), and Christopher Breu’s *Insistence of the Material* (2014).

an ever-larger proportion of the population and gluttonous enrichment for an ever-smaller proportion of the population, as well as a division in society along the lines of who may or may not be targeted by the next round of austerity (Blyth, 2013; Schui, 2014; Breu, 2014). Protest and rebellion are quelled, sometimes by direct repression but more frequently, by what Thomas Mathiesen presciently termed the ‘creation of acquiescence’ (Mathiesen, 2005) and by reducing the political imaginary to Margaret Thatcher’s notorious statement ‘There is no alternative’. In this scenario, ‘life’ is turned into an austere and reductionist version of aliveness, characterized by sensorial contraction leading to eventual atrophy, as well as a future that Paulo Freire described as ‘inexorable’. Below, I will look at poems by the Liverpool-based band She Drew the Gun and by Bristol-based poet Pete the Temp which capture and articulate the *zeitgeist* of austerity in Britain, and which reclaim a potentially transformative future from the social debris of austerity.

On the other side of the Atlantic, in Mexico, direct and indirect violence is perpetrated through the cataclysmically brutal violence unleashed within a necropolitical regime characterized by the lack of opportunities for non-criminal work, the rivalry of groups engaging in organized crime, the infiltration of the State by organized crime, an unashamed exploitation of natural resources for the purpose of trade, and an escalation of all existing conflicts by way of militarization. Since then-president Felipe Calderón declared a ‘war on drugs’ in 2006², about 86.000 people are known to have become victims of enforced disappearance, about 350.000 have been killed, and it is estimated that more than 1 million have been displaced. The two poems I will discuss here, by María Rivera and Pájaro azul, go against the grain of a public discourse that treats many of the lives that have been lost as disposable or – in Judith Butler’s words, not grievable – and in so doing, gradually erodes the social fabric and therefore, the possibility of a transformative future.³ This discourse gradually eroded the social fabric in Mexico which, in comparison to other countries, was fairly strong because solidarity – the concern for others as well as oneself – had been a characteristic feature of it. The result has been a society in which some lives are considered

² R.G. Emerson (2019) proposes a compelling analysis of necropolitics and thanatopolitics in Mexico. Especially relevant for the analysis presented in this article is his point that the experience of contemporary Mexico is that of living in a death world, which Emerson terms the practice of ‘living death’.

³ Butler argues that for ‘life’ to be understood or apprehended as a ‘life’ in public discourse, and to be protected as such by the State, it has to be placed within a ‘frame’. This frame is often articulated as grievability: when some lives are lost, they are grieved; other lives are not grieved when they are lost and therefore, such lives do not receive protection. Butler in her analysis refers to actual killings, and I also deploy her terminology in the necropolitical context. However, we could potentially explore whether the alienated, vacuous survival in austerity regimes can be considered a different version of a loss of life, when ‘life’ is understood as the actualization of existence in abundance.

grievable, and others disposable. In April 2011, poet Javier Sicilia in response to the assassination of his son Juan Francisco and five of his friends, addressed this situation in an ‘Open letter to Mexico’s Politicians and Criminals’ (Sicilia, 2011). In this letter he called for a restoration of the social fabric, for the people and by the people.⁴ Over the following months, Sicilia took on the role of the listener, traveling through the country and attending large gatherings in public spaces, as well as smaller meetings, where people listened together to the stories of those who had lost loved ones, restoring social grievability to the lives lost through acts of collective grieving and restoring the damaged social fabric. María Rivera’s poem ‘Los muertos’ and Pájaro azul’s poem ‘Yo no soy solo el hijo de un poeta’ were performed during these gatherings.

As we have seen from this brief introduction to the scenarios in which the four poems discussed here were created, the effects of attrition are difficult to apprehend and verbalize because attrition produces emptiness and absences, neither of which can be verbalized easily within the positivistic analytical thinking we are accustomed to. Attrition erodes what was once there and is not remembered, as well as that which could be, but has never come into being because it was stifled when it was only just announcing its emergence. Under these circumstances, the task of poetry is to imagine and to articulate what has been rendered absent, and to identify and denounce what produces these absences.⁵ The performance of poetry is particularly well suited to this task because in the performance, poet and audiences alike exercise what Franco Berardi terms the capacity of *sensibilidad*: ‘the ability of the human being to communicate what cannot be said with words’, which includes ‘the faculty that allows us to enter into relation with entities not composed of our matter, not speaking our language, and not reducible to the communication of discreet, verbal or digital signs’ (Berardi, 2012). The poetry we encounter in a performance exceeds ‘the communication of discreet, verbal or digital signs’; this is why we need *sensibilidad* to engage with it. *Sensibilidad* lets us attune to and perceive what cannot be expressed semantically or verbally; for

⁴ See Gräbner (2011) for an analysis of Sicilia’s letter as a defiant call to action. See Jacinto (2012) and Gräbner (2015) for two complementary analyses of these mobilizations, framed within the emerging Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity. Jacinto focuses on the dynamics of the social movement, while my own article focuses on the recital and performance of poems during the public events.

⁵ The task at hand is the poetic version of the ‘sociology of absences’, an approach proposed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his seminal study *Epistemologies of the South* (2016). Sousa Santos proposes an inquiry orientated around the understanding that ‘what does not exist, is in fact actively produced as non-existent; that is, as a non-credible alternative to what exists’ (Santos, 2016). In the case of attritional regimes, what is actively produced as non-existent is not only the possibility of transformation but also, responsibility for the effects of austerity.

examples, whatever has been rendered absent. In what follows, I will respond to the poets' expression of two such absences which mark each of the scenarios.

To conceptualize these absences within the space available, I will draw on Paulo Freire's posthumously published *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004). Freire grappled with the impact of neoliberal policies across the world; but maybe most significantly, he articulated ways out of the hopelessness and despair that he perceived as defining features of life in the late 20th century. His reflections, presented in the form of letters, name two actions that can take us past what he terms 'immobilizing reactions' (Freire, 2004). Each of these actions is rendered impossible and therefore absent in a life marked by attrition. The first is the eroded capacity of 'giving testimony to one's respect for the dignity of the Other'. Freire argues that it "is fundamental, if one is consistently progressive, (...) to give testimony to one's respect for the dignity of the other" (Freire, 2014). Apart from the consequences that this has for the social and political status of the 'Other' and the possibility to form alliances and solidarities, the absence of this action isolates and impoverishes the Self, disenfranchising it of its ability to find and remake itself in the respectful encounter with an 'Other'. María Rivera and SDTG reclaim this capacity by recognizing and bearing witness to the dignity of the Other. The second absence is that of 'anger against fatalistic docility before the negation of peoples' (Freire, 2014). Freire passionately endorses such anger and equally passionately rejects the 'discourse in favour of settling, which exalts imposed silence and which results in the immobility of the silenced, the discourse of praise to adaptation, taken to mean fate or destiny'. This discourse, he writes, 'negates the humanization we cannot escape responsibility for' (Freire, 2014). Embracing anger at the 'fatalistic docility before the negation of peoples', and rejection of the 'discourse of praise to adaptation', is one of the endeavours shared by Pete the Temp and Pájaro azul.

Giving Testimony to the Respect for the Other: 'Poem' and 'Los muertos'

SDTG's 'Poem' and María Rivera's 'Los muertos' lead a life beyond the medium they were originally intended for. SDTG identify as a music band, and 'Poem' was written as a song lyric, is performed as a song, and was released on the album *Memories of the Future* (2016); María Rivera first published 'Los muertos' in print, and then took the poem off the page and onto the central public square of Mexico City when the need arose in April 2011. Both pieces, when they first entered the public sphere, achieved tremendous resonance. A video of 'Los muertos' went viral immediately after Rivera first performed it, and the poem was read and performed across the Western hemisphere; 'Poem' was hailed as perfectly capturing and

articulating the atmosphere and mentality of the austerity society created by Tory politics and received considerable airplay. Both pieces share an initial quietness, a search for resonance rather than a desire to announce or denounce, a sensitivity for the deep-seated psychosocial and political devastation caused by the attritional elements of violence. Both pieces counteract these effects by giving testimony of their respect for those 'Othered'.

'Poem' is a quiet piece. The text is half-sung, half-spoken over a fast, repetitive beat which ever so slightly emphasizes the Northern slant to the elocution. The tone and timbre evoke a one-to-one, quiet conversational situation between the speaker on the one hand, and a second voice articulating the internalized voice of austerity – addressed as an interlocutor – on the other. As the piece progresses, the division between the two intensifies, until it finally leads to a rupture. 'Poem' starts out with the introspective thoughts and observations one might have when reading the paper over coffee:

Can't believe what I'm reading when I open up these sheets
They've got police getting busier, cleaning up the streets.
'Cos that's what we need now to make the place neat:
Take the homeless man's rags, no sleeping bags no place to sleep.

What might initially appear an internal monologue immediately turns into a referred dialogue with an interlocutor, thus introducing an oppositional or contrarian dynamic into the speaker's reflections:

Because we're far too civilised around here to see
an unkempt human being, a broken human being.
Open up your eyes! Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Yeah,
A misplaced, made to feel disgraced human being.

What, it's not enough to just pretend that you don't see him?
You can't stand the sight so you've got to disappear him?
Well I hope you feel more comfortable doing your sightseeing
Taking pictures, buying fucking Union Jack magnets and keyrings.

As the situation turns dialogical, the speaker moves from reflecting on what they read and observe, to commenting on it and to responding to the referred interjections of the

internalized voice of austerity. The speaker's commentary is littered with sarcasm and irony as she comments on the ideological commonplaces that are appealed to as justifications of austerity politics: the place is made neat, a hegemonic version of British civilization as clean and well-mannered has to be maintained. In practical terms, giving in to such statements would entail acquiescence to the abjection of a 'misplaced, made-to-feel-disgraced human being' by labelling them 'unkempt' and 'broken', as well as to condoning the theft of the few possessions a homeless person has left, and desperately needs: their clothes and sleeping bag. Then, the person who has been objectified into a blemish is disappeared from sight altogether. With them 'disappears' the embodied evidence of the failure of the promises inherent in the ideology of capitalist meritocracy in the Global North. Meanwhile, the interlocutor directs their gaze at the sights and at nationalistic symbols, which metonymically expose the jingoism of the merciless civilization they endorse.

The exchange between the speaker and the addressee intensifies as the speaker lists further consequences of austerity politics:

And how long until they build a wall and call it a private city
They got walls made out of laws to exclude you and me
Now they take away our right, to fight those laws for free
No legal aid, no more justice, only for the wealthy
Oh but they're trying to build a more healthy society
So that everybody knows you don't get nothin' for free
No scroungers, no living room loungers, living off me.

Can I suggest you're seeing exactly what they want you to see
A monster, cancer, threat to your liberty.
How about a scapegoat for their crimes, a victim of the times,
Everything that you're not meant to be?
How about a badly prepared, scared human being,
how about a necessary cog in their economic machine?

The internalized voice of austerity politics responds to the speaker's initial denunciation of the privatization of public urban spaces, of the privatization of the justice system and of the slashing of funding for legal aid with claims about building a 'more healthy society' where 'everybody knows you don't get nothin' for free'. The envisioned result is that 'scroungers'

and ‘living room loungers’ will no longer live off the interlocutor. The speaker points out that the interlocutor is ‘seeing what they want you to see’ and suggests an alternative vision: ‘a scapegoat for their crimes, a victim of the times / everything that you’re not meant to be.’ After this exchange, there is no longer a mutual response: the speaker is unresponsive to the internalized voice of austerity which feels entitled to hold others in contempt. As we will see, this creates a sea change within the dynamics of ‘Poem’.

Like SDTG, *María* Rivera calls out and opposes abjection and contempt. She, too, reclaims those who, in the idiom of necropolitics, have been turned into ungrievable life. Rivera wrote ‘Los muertos’ in 2010. In an interview with Dylan Brennan, she explains what she found herself writing against:

The dominating discourse in the media at that time was rooted in the governmental narrative that criminalised those who were killed (they were not considered ‘victims’ only occasionally ‘collateral damage’). Both the political class and the intellectual class embraced the government’s argument, legitimising killings and strengthening Calderon’s policies. Faced with international scandals, they even embarked on campaigns to convince the media not to cover violent acts, while at the same time they celebrated the supposed virtues of the country, converting the deaths into mere statistics. (Brennan and Rivera, 2017)

The Mexican governments have offered no or little protection to the migrants who are crossing the country on their way further North; whatever support they receive usually comes from social movements, community groups, the Church, or individuals. Central American migrants passing through Mexico are not only exposed to threats by organized crime and local gangsters but also, to xenophobia and prejudice. A turning point for public debate was the massacre of 72 migrants in August 2010 in Tamaulipas. Thanks to one survivor who was able to testify to the events, it became impossible to criminalize the victims. With ‘Los muertos’ Rivera creates a counter-discourse, one in which all victims, no matter who they are and where they come from, are equally grievable. She first sets the context of the cataclysmic brutality of the killings. The next two long stanzas of the poem reference killings that actually happened, as well as individuals who were killed. She first responds to the plea of migrants by sketching their stories and by listing places of origin from Central America:

Allá vienen

los muertos que salieron de Usulután,
de La Paz,
de La Unión,
de La libertad,
de Sonsonate,
de San Salvador,
de San Juan Mixtepec,
de Cuscatlán,
de El Progreso,
de El Guante,
llorando,
a los que despidieron en una fiesta con karaoke,
y los encontraron baleados en Tecate.⁶

The following stanza applies the question of ‘De dónde vienen?’ to the ‘sanguinarios, / los desalmados, / los carniceros asesinos’ without answering this question, suggesting that they did not come from a location but from the human abyss of a ‘gangrena, / o linfa’. Of course, many of these assassins are from Mexico, and the next part of the poem refers specifically to the landscape of death in this country:

Allá vienen
los muertos tan solitos, tan mudos, tan nuestros,
engarzados bajo el cielo enorme del Anáhuac,
caminan,

⁶ There they come
the dead who left Usulután
La Paz,
La Unión,
La Libertad,
Sonsonate,
San Salvador,
San Juan Mixtepec,
Cuscatlán,
El Progreso,
El Guante,
crying,
those who were bade goodbye at a karaoke party
and were found shot in Tecate.

se arrastran,
con su cuenco de horror entre las manos,
su espeluznante ternura.
Se llaman
los muertos que encontraron en una fosa en Taxco,
los muertos que encontraron en parajes alejados de Chihuahua,
los muertos que encontraron esparcidos en parcelas de cultivo,
los muertos que encontraron tirados en la Marquesa,
los muertos que encontraron colgando de los puentes,
los muertos que encontraron sin cabeza en terrenos ejidales,
los muertos que encontraron a la orilla de la carretera,
los muertos que encontraron en coches abandonados,
los muertos que encontraron en San Fernando,
los sin número que destazaron y aún no encuentran,
las piernas, los brazos, las cabezas, los fémures de muertos
disueltos en tambos.⁷

The evocation of the dead as ‘tan solitos, tan mudos, tan nuestros’, as well as her carefully looking at and taking in the brutal methods of disposing of the bodies, reclaims the dead as ‘ours’ from their abandonment (solitos, mudos) by a society that feels entitled to hold them in contempt because they were poor, because they left home in a search of a better life, because

⁷ There they come
the dead—so lonely, so silent, so ours,
hooked one to the other under the enormous sky of the Anahuac Valley,
they walk,
they crawl,
with a bowl of horrors between their hands,
their terrifying tenderness.
They are called
the dead found in a ditch in Taxco
the dead found in remote spots in Chihuahua,
the dead found scattered among plots of land,
the dead found dumped in La Marquesa,
the dead found hanging from bridges,
the dead found headless in communal farmlands,
the dead found by the side of the road,
the dead found in abandoned cars,
the dead found in San Fernando,
the countless hacked to pieces and not yet found,
the legs, the arms, the heads, the femurs of dead people
dissolved in barrels.

they were women who worked at night, and this put them in the wrong place at the wrong time. The responses of the audience to her recital – nodding, applause, crying – take the dead back into the collective fold. Rivera and her listeners reclaim society’s capacity for grief, for solidarity and for compassion, even when this is painful because the only way of giving testimony to the respect for the Other is by grieving them, by remembering them for what they were, what they hoped for and dreamt of:

Se llaman
chambrita tejida en el cajón del alma,
camisetita de tres meses,
la foto de la sonrisa chimuela,
se llaman mamita,
papito,
se llaman
pataditas
en el vientre
y el primer llanto,
se llaman cuatro hijos,
Petronia (2), Zacarías (3), Sabas (5), Glenda (6)
y una viuda (muchacha) que se enamoró cuando estudiaba la *priMaría*,
se llaman ganas de bailar en las fiestas,
se llaman rubor de mejillas encendidas y manos sudorosas,
se llaman muchachos,
se llaman ganas
de construir una casa,
echar tabique,
darle de comer a mis hijos,
se llaman dos dólares por limpiar frijoles,
casas, haciendas, oficinas,
se llaman
llantos de niños en pisos de tierra,
la luz volando sobre los pájaros,
el vuelo de las palomas en la iglesia,
se llaman

besos a la orilla del río,
(...)⁸

Rivera and the listeners on the *zócalo*, through their practice of speech, of listening and of responding with *sensibilidad* to a pain that exceeds what can be contained in syntax, oppose any claims on the entitlement to hold others in contempt in their words and actions alike and reclaim the dead – all the dead – as ‘ours’:

(...)
se llaman llanto,
se llaman neblina,
se llaman cuerpo,
se llaman piel,

⁸ They are called
tiny sweater woven in a drawer of the soul,
tiny t-shirt for a three-month-old,
photograph of a toothless smile,
they are called mamita,
papito,
they are called
tiny kicks
in the womb
and the first cry,
they are called four children,
Petronia (2), Zacarías (3), Sabas (5), Glenda (6)
and a widow (girl) who fell in love in elementary school,
they are called wanting to dance at parties
they are called reddening of flushed cheeks and sweaty palms,
they are called boys,
they are called wanting
to build a house,
to lay bricks,
to give my children something to eat,
they are called two dollars for cleaning beans,
houses, haciendas, offices,
they are called
cries of children on dirt floors,
light flying over birds,
flight of doves in the church,
they are called
kisses at the edge of the river
(...)

se llaman tibieza,
se llaman beso,
se llaman abrazo,
se llaman risa,
se llaman personas,
se llaman súplicas,
se llamaban yo,
se llamaban tú,
se llamaban nosotros,
se llaman vergüenza,
se llaman llanto.⁹

The alternation between past and present tense suggests that what remains in this death world and in the face of not having grieved them, of not having given testimony to their dignity, are the affects of shame and the action of weeping. ‘Llanto’¹⁰, ‘weeping’ is a response of humility if it is the shamed society that weeps, or an expression of loss and pain if those weeping are the dead. The ‘us’ that emerges from Rivera’s poem is shamed until, in the end of the poem, this ‘us’ finally owns up to its own reality, to living in a country that has been turned into a cemetery. Through this collective insight they reclaim the dead and with them, their own capacity to give testimony to their respect for the Other.

⁹ (...)

they are called cry,
they are called fog,
they are called body,
they are called skin,
they are called warmth,
they are called kiss,
they are called hug,
they are called laughter,
they are called people,
they are called pleading,
they were called me,
they were called you,
they were called us,
they are called shame,
they are called cry.

(...)

¹⁰ Jen Hofer translates ‘llanto’ as ‘cry’. In Spanish, the noun ‘llanto’ connotes the verb ‘to weep’. While ‘cry’ is the correct noun to use in English (an alternative would have been ‘tears’), I here wish to emphasize the connotation of the action of crying unconsolably, which is implicit in the Spanish ‘llanto’.

The audience of SDTG has an attitude similar to that of the Mexican public before Javier Sicilia's open letter and the ensuing movement. They are disorientated and therefore, uncritical. The speaker of 'Poem' picks up the shards and shambles of austerity society, quietly and patiently looking at the damage, with *sensibilidad*, so as to come to a realistic assessment of reality. This patient exercise leads her to address in a gentle and non-judgemental way the manifestations and the problematic of a passive, inarticulate civil society:

We're like a caged bird and they got us by the beak
Give us enough to eat, enough to sleep, enough to tweet,
but there's not enough space between the ground and our feet.
We're singing songs of freedom but we're not flying free.

Her attention has shifted from the 'broken' and 'unkempt' human beings who are disappeared from sight, to those individuals who have just enough to not disturb society's veneer by their very existence. It is these people who are invited to share in the entitlement to hold others in contempt – but this, the speaker realizes, comes from a place of lack of self-respect:

And this whole world's got me hurting,
got me feeling undeserving,
got me questioning my worth in this sad system that we're serving.
Found no place in this twisted race for property
Is making profit the sole aim of humanity?
Protect the banks, bring out the tanks if they disagree
While we're at it lets invest some more in military
All our friends have shares so why shouldn't we?
(...)

The speaker does not let her interlocutor get away with such resignation and acquiescence. Her voice is as quiet as it is firm when she places a boundary against the silent forces of civic, psychosocial and political attrition:

Well sorry I forgot the free market would set us free
I forgot to only think about I, mine and me,

while brothers and sisters have nothing to eat,
brothers and sisters, at home and overseas.
So I can't lie down and I won't let it be
while we are working for a market that doesn't work for we.

She expresses a solidarity with her brothers and sisters who have nothing to eat, implying that this does not apply to her, while expressing that even though she will oppose the system that does not work for any of the many populations addressed throughout 'Poem'.

In contradistinction to Rivera, who can address an audience that came out *en masse* to reclaim the dead and to reclaim its own capacity to give testimony of their respect of the Other, SDTG wants to get their listeners to a place from which they can do this. Placing blame will not achieve this aim. Making them see their role in the internalization of the ideology of austerity might. The line that must not be crossed, SDGT imply, is contempt for others. When this occurs, we have reached the point at which boundaries have to be placed. The speakers in 'Poem' and 'Los Muertos' turn away from contemptuous interlocutors, outward. Rivera reaches out to the listeners on the zocalo who are willing to face up to their country having become a cemetery; SDTG reach out to their listeners so that they may come to resonate with the opening track of SDTG's following album: 'Resisters'.

Reclaiming the Social Body, Restoring the Social Fabric: Poetic Indignation and *Sensibilidad*

The genre of spoken word poetry mobilizes the performance of poetry as an oral device and sees itself as an expression of what Walter Ong termed 'secondary orality': the orality 'of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print' (Ong 1982). Many spoken word poets draw on a community-orientated tradition of poetry recitals and performances. The poem will be created on the page, and will then be taken into live or recorded recitals. There, it is enriched or, in some cases, completed, by integrating performative elements available only in the performance: sound, beats, timbre, tone, accent, the physical language and appearance of the poet, engagements with the location and the setting, etc. Spoken word poems are often created for the purpose of interventions into public debates and discourses. In these scenarios, the 'Poet' acts as a giver or a channeler of voices. This can take the form of the poet listening to the verbal and non-verbal expressions of others, forging these expressions into specific words and articulating them

publicly. During the performance, the poet then articulates the content of these expressions, as well as conveys the energy and force that drives them. Pájaro azul and Pete the Temp draw on the repertoire of spoken word poetry to reclaim the critical and potentially transformative ‘anger against docility in the face of the destruction of peoples’ (Freire, 2014).

Pájaro azul’s ‘Yo no soy solo’ was performed during an event in Nuevo León, organized as part of Javier Sicilia’s first journey through the country. Thus, the poem was probably written for, and was certainly performed as a contribution to a genre-defining event that formed part of a genre-defining movement. The poem is a precisely worded intervention into the discourse surrounding the assassination of Juan Francisco Sicilia and his friends, recognizing the loss and pain of the killed individual and of their loved ones, while articulating the embeddedness of the individual killing within the necropolitical context of the destruction of human and non-human life.

Pete the Temp’s ‘Manifesto for a Revolutionary Poetics’, in contrast, was released on the album *For the Streets* and has no direct addressee. The poem responds to the *zeitgeist* of austerity Britain and builds on a practice of listening, as the poet picks up seeds of indignation from various contexts and turns them into a ‘manifesto’ that articulates the revolutionary poetics needed at this moment, in order to reclaim the future as possibility. ‘Manifesto’ starts by setting out the analytical diagnosis of the historical moment in poetic terms:

Because of the tyranny of dullness
and the brain bleaching regime of speech
screamed from walls and screens
the action needed is words
with their magical power to spell the future.
I mean what is a metaphor?
Can we do without seeing and saying?
Do we not speak change?
Shall we not scream its name?
Shall we not speak a future
where solidarity is not dismissed as a romantic ideal,
but [is] living energy fields passed between lips,
fingertips and the breath of the wind.

The 'brain bleaching regime of speech / screamed from walls and screens' refers to the semio-capitalist world of dulled senses and transactionary speech, severed from the human body as it screams 'from walls and screens.' This regime is contrasted to the 'magical power to spell the future' – a future that, as we have seen, is no longer a given and needs to be recreated – 'spelled' – from scratch. 'Living energy fields passed between lips, / fingertips and the breath of the wind' evoke the capacity of *sensibilidad*, which connects the Body and perception with the abundance that holds us. Thus held within abundance, poetry can do the work of reclaiming the social body and reconnecting it with public intelligence:

Our poetry's duty is to truth and beauty,
It labours to harvest the intelligence of heart
It labours to fuel the human spirit
It labours to put exactly the right words
in exactly the right places
and the legacy of its labour is incalculable.

While Pete the Temp has to analyse and define the *zeitgeist* of his revolutionary poetics, Pájaro azul is responding to a specific event and a specific discourse which requires an equally specific and precise poetic intervention. The first stanza of his poem sketches out, by response and reaction, the discourse it responds to: the media coverage and public debate focusing on the assassination of one son, and on the grief of one well-known father – even though this father had always and from the beginning placed his own grief in the service of a common cause. Pájaro azul's intervention expands the frame through which 'life' is apprehended to include all human and non-human life.

Yo no soy sólo el hijo de un poeta.
Soy las lágrimas de las madres de San Luis,
de las abuelas de Zacatecas, de los hijos de Durango.
Soy el luto de Monterrey.

Yo no soy sólo el hijo de un poeta.
Soy el paramilitar que mata a su propia gente.

Soy 140 y un chingo de cadáveres en una fosa.¹¹

The first stanza refers to human life, and the poem refers to human responses to death and loss, such as tears and weeping. The necropolitical death world, however, includes non-human life:

Yo no soy sólo el hijo de un poeta.
Soy el alma de un encino en Cherán, y un arroyo en Huitzilac
Soy la sangre arrastrada de la tierra en San Javier.
Soy siete cadáveres encontrados en la cajuela de un coche.
Soy un jicorí que nunca más florecerá en Wirikuta.
Soy el mercado local que ahora se llama WalMart.¹²

The non-human lives included in the poet's 'yo' are the landscapes and spaces destroyed by logging and mining in Cherán, Huitzilac, and San Javier, as well as the spirituality of the sacred landscape in Wirikuta, under threat from open-air mining. Physical, psychosocial and natural forms of life are then connected to political life which geographically extends far beyond Mexico:

Soy el grito de protesta ahogado en la gas en Barcelona.
Soy los muertos en Vietnam, el Golfo Pérsico, los Balkanes, Palestina, Iraq, Korea,

¹¹ I'm not only the son of a poet.
I'm the tears of the mothers from San Luis,
the grandmothers of Zacatecas,
the children of Durango.
I'm the mourning of Monterrey.

I'm not only the son of a poet.
I'm a paramilitary who kills his own people.
I'm 140 and a fuck load of cadavers in a mass grave.

¹² I'm not only the son of a poet.
I'm the soul of an oak tree in Cherán, and a stream in Huitzilac.
I'm the blood ripped from the earth in San Javier.
I'm seven cadavers that were found in the boot of a car.
I'm a Peyote plant that no longer blossoms in Wirikuta.
I'm the local market that is now called WalMart.

Nagasaki,
Tlatelolco, Atenco, Chiapas, la Plaza de Mayo,
el Palacio de la Moneda, Ciudad Juárez, Iran, Afghanistan
y 12.000 etcéteras que susurran a la historia.¹³

The interlacing of human, non-human, social and political life is also a theme in Pete the Temp's 'Manifesto.' In contrast to Pájaro azul, who addresses human life, non-human life and the repression of protest in different stanzas, Pete the Temp intertwines all three in one stanza, directly after situating his poem within the *zeitgeist*:

We are the vibration of a melody resonating
in every creature, however microscopic, that shakes free.
We are an impulse tearing down neural pathways,
an inter –face, a movement, a transfer of energy,
the shudder of an earthquake caused by a fracking rig.
We are Mother Nature clearing her throat.
A microphone, a megaphone, a spray can, a stage;
to those despaired by TVs
to those wrongly caged
in the vertical bars of the word illegal.

Pete the Temp fuses the emerging human 'we' with non-human life: we are 'every creature, however microscopic, that shakes free'; 'the shudder of an earthquake caused by a fracking rig'; 'Mother Nature clearing her throat'. Expressions of protest, indignation and non-conformism – like those articulated by the protesters referenced by Pájaro azul – are symbolized by the microphone, the megaphone, the spray can, and the stage, and both poets

¹³ I'm the cry of protest drowned out by the gas in Barcelona.
I'm the dead in Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, Palestine, Iraq, Korea, Nagasaki,
Tlatelolco, Atenco, Chiapas, the Plaza de Mayo,
the Palacio de la Moneda, Ciudad Juárez, Iran, Afghanistan,
and 12.000 etceteras that whisper to History.

lend their voice to those who no longer have one, or who are being refused one: the dead of Nagasaki and Vietnam, as well as ‘those wrongly caged / in the vertical bars of the word illegal.’ Pájaro azul implicitly and through his energetic performance evokes the energy that Pete the Temp explicitly refers to (‘the vibration of a melody / resonating in every creature / (...) / an inter-face, a movement, a transfer of energy). Both channel energy and analysis into critical indignation at the *status quo*. Their indignation empowers them to embrace and assert who and what they are and what they can come to embody:

Yo no soy el hijo de un poeta.
Soy el hijo de un país que agoniza.
Soy el dragón levantándose de las cenizas
Soy un grito de la esperanza
En medio del desierto.¹⁴ (Pájaro azul)

We fizz with an energy that will not be channelled
into the algorithm of social media campaigns.
Our pulse will not be found on billboards and TVs.
We are everywhere,
rich with indignation that cannot be ring fenced by riot police.
We come with sharp pointed implements behind our teeth,
amplified devices in our chest
and love in our clenched fists.
We are the iambic heartbeat of the human race.
We are communities of words
and actions.
We are poetry. (Pete the Temp)

‘We are poetry’ and ‘I’m a cry of hope / in the middle of the desert’ claim a future which becomes possible only when there is indignation, ie. when individually and collectively we

¹⁴ I’m not the son of a poet.
I’m the son of a country in agony
I’m the dragon rising up from the ashes
I’m a cry of hope
In the middle of the desert

refuse to accept fatalistic docility before the destruction of peoples and the planet. Pájaro azul and Pete the Temp gather dispersed affects and voices using their capacity of *sensibilidad*, and forge them together in their poems in a verbal expression of indignation.

Conclusion: Redirection

Christopher Breu has argued that any promising resistance against austerity must entail an intellectual and affective reorientation, as well as a turn towards a new sensuality. Then, he argues, we would recognize the abundance inherent in each object and in each subjectivity – and, I would add, potentially in each collectivity (Breu, 2014). The capacity we need for this resistance, is *sensibilidad*. As we have seen, necropolitical and austerity regimes, while incommensurate in terms of death toll and direct brutality, both strip human and non-human existence of its abundance. Both regimes close down the future as a possibility for transformation, and trap living beings in an existence which is whittled down to the bone. The performance of poetry, because of its ability to conjoin *sensibilidad* and verbalization, is in a fortunate position to act both diagnostically as well as pre-figuratively specifically in the context of attrition. The poets we have seen at work here, each in their own way and appropriate to their context recognize the affects of attritional violence: passivity, despair, resignation, contempt for others and for oneself. Rather than judging those holding these affects, they conjoin *sensibilidad* and verbalization to raise awareness of what has been intentionally rendered absent: dreams, hopes, love, the ability to give testimony to the respect for the dignity of the Other, anger at fatalistic docility before the destructions of people. They patiently explore the affects that trap people in the acceptance of the destruction of people and the planet, recognize individualization and fragmentation as causes, and redirect the fractured, shattered, exhausted energies towards an embrace of the abundance of human and non-human existence of the planet. In so doing, they pre-figure in their poetry performances a future that is worth fighting for. Crucial to this redirection of energies is the poetry performance's capacity to mobilize *sensibilidad and* verbalization at the same time, and to create a dynamic in which these two capacities mutually nurture each other to the point of creating poems that articulate language as well as the 'excess' that reclaims a future of possibilities worth fighting for.

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