

Noisy Echoes

Pablo De La Cruz

Incluso el silencio que se produce entre cada canto es también un eslabón de esa malla, un signo, un momento del mensaje que la naturaleza se dice a sí misma.

Even the silence that occurs between each chant is also a link in that mesh, a sign, a moment of the message that nature says to itself.

Juan Luis Martínez

Wounds

Wounds and scars are a map of the history of a body. These wounds shape us, they traumatize us, they heal us. There are visible wounds, some people talk from their wounds, they talk about their wounds, they say, “look, this scar was a knife”, “this other was a rifle”, “this one was a gun”. The Irish rebel song tells you, “this is my home and I will not stop fighting until it becomes mine again”; black rappers in the US say “they kill one of us every 28 hours, so Fuck tha Police”; Victor Jara in La Nueva Canción Chilena tells you, “the enemy is the oligarch, the imperialist, your hunger is their fault, his wealth is exploitation”; the Rastaman say, “Babylon has stolen you from your original land, they oppressed you, so, get up, stand up”. But there are less visible wounds, hidden, they run underground, like background noises, invisible in their persistence, something goes wrong but you do not know exactly what it is, you try to focus your anxiety but you don’t know what to focus it on. And then suddenly the noise stops, and you understand the reason for your pain, it becomes present when you realize his absence, his meaning emerges from his disappearance. Certain messages, certain badly healed wounds, do not explicitly express their origin, they reveal themselves only as decomposition, as transition, as recoding of the meaningless present that only in the future might be properly tuned into (Burroughs and Gysin 1979).

Centred in two countries, Jamaica and Chile, and two sound expressions, Dub and Thrash Metal, crossed by two narratives: silence and noise. Two music expressions where noise and silence communicate something missing, quiet but meaningful, and you have to look for its meaning and origin in historical trauma, in disappearance and silence, in the catalyst power of noise

Trauma

Jamaica and Chile share similar stories: European conquest, slavery, colonization, industrialization, urbanization and globalization (Veal 2007: 26). With small variations in dates and masters, the same *dérive*

for both territories deformed by the European invasion, reshaping the original culture with the process of colonialism and then post-colonialism. A good image to represent this is the Catholic churches built on top of Aztec temples: they were built using the same bricks from the destroyed temples. The great rupture of the historical continuum caused by the slave trade, “a historical trauma characterized by forced erasures of cultural memory, and disruptions in linear conceptions of history and human progress” (Veal 2007: 204) and the destruction of the original cultures of America during the European invasion, could be placed as the first and great historical traumas that these two musical expressions carry. Both cultures burden in their origin the disappearance of the original culture and the imposition of new paradigms and models, new languages that demand the extinction of the original language, new generations are born in fictitious landscapes, artificial sets where it is impossible to feel complete, uprooted imaginaries (the oppressor inside the oppressed) that automatically position you below, always incomplete, fragmented, deceived.

But in certain historical moments these fragmented discourses become whole. In a type of archaeological sublimation they find the missing pieces and remember what is its origin. In the case of Jamaica in its African roots and its Rastafari spirituality that africanises white Catholicism. The Count Ossie's drums reflecting Africa's echo in new nation beat, the new music, Ska. Marley, in Manley words, recrossing the Middle Passage, “He who knows his past can believe that the future is the territory of hope”¹: Roots. Tubby drowned the vocals, the text, subtraction, erasure, decomposition: Dub. Following the same path towards the historical origin, Chile turns to the peasant folklore and the South American rhythms, *mestizo*

1 “Did Bob Marley redeem this identity by re-crossing the Middle Passage and re-entering the Kingdom of his past?(...) Faith begins with an acceptance of the possibility of continuity. If you cannot survey a continuity into your own past, you cannot believe in a continuity into your own future. Marley had that faith.” (Reggae International, p.12)

mix between the Amerindian cultures and the music brought by the Spaniards. Musicians such as Violeta Parra, Margot Loyola or Hector Pavez delve into the anthropological investigation and historical rescue of the folkloric tradition. Saving, recording, becoming memory agents. In that dig, in that trip to the centre, to the peasant, to the peasant feeding the labourer needs of factories and mines, in that deepening it's inevitable to find the wounds, the misery and the exploitation. The rescue of memory exposes, dissects the social body evidencing the disease and its causes.

At the late 60s and the beginning of the 70s, these forces mentioned in the previous paragraph were politically channelled by Democratic Socialism. In Jamaica, the People's National Party candidate Michael Manley was elected Prime Minister in the 1972 elections, ten years since achieved political independence from Britain. Ten years in which the Black Power and Rastafarianism, Marxism and Socialism expressed the disagreement of the working-class, peasant, students and unemployed against the oligarchy inherited from the British colonization and the increasingly strong and repressive control by the US. "We are with the West" Alexander Bustamante, Prime Minister (1962-67) and businessman, had previously proclaimed (Harsch 1981). The oligarchies of the Americas have never stopped being with the West. Finally, Manley arrived in power and began reforms aimed at redistributing wealth and achieving independence over foreign control.

Similarly, in Chile, after a long uprising of the people, Salvador Allende was elected president in November 1970, initiating the construction of what would be called La Unidad Popular (the Popular Unity), which would imply a series of reforms where the wealth of the country was redistributed, the companies of social interest were nationalized, and the workers became participants in the management of these companies. A government where improving the material conditions of the people, beyond the interests of the private and foreign capital was the main objective.

These two nations were in similar processes of recognizing the value of their own people, a process of regional character that marked the contingencies of the majority of the countries in the Americas.

During the 70s and 80s, the US government, in a political campaign to reach dominance over the whole region, started what is now known as the Condor Operation. In Chile, not only the overthrow of the socialist government was part of the project, but the military implementation of the neoliberal model. Chile was used as a guinea pig by the Chicago School of Economics. On the 11th

of September 1973 there was a coup d'etat, a very abrupt one, forever transforming the morphology of the country. Although in Jamaica the process was less abrupt, foreign intervention generated a climate of political violence, both through the US and due to the influence of the British colonial legacy. Armed gangs were formed to support one or another political party. This "tribal" warfare from the ghettos evolved into pure violence, "detached itself from political ideals and became self-sustaining, a type of random violence born of social frustration" (Veal 2007: 206).

Lost

Disappearance does not only mean losing substance, its complexity lies in the permanence of a "deep memory and the presence of what refuses resolution." Disappearance brings afloat the "experiences of loss, fragmentation, and even death" (LaBelle 2018: 42).

Disappearance activates mechanisms that move through the dark areas of consciousness. We must look for alternative mechanisms to the reason to dialogue with the unspeakable. The result of filling the violent erasures goes into the logic of noise, in the degradation of information. In the noise as denial, as the image of what is not.

The generations that grew up during the military dictatorship were moulded in a mixture of noise and silence. What happens, for example, with the Thrash Metal that emerged in Chile in the decade of the 80s, a music born in the USA and Europe, which in Chile developed with great strength becoming one of the most productive scenes of the Americas. Music that developed basically in the absence of explicit discourse, the lyrics were in a language that no one really understood, in English, sung with guttural cries that prevented anyone from understanding the lyrics even more, played live in venues with bad acoustics, with low quality amplifiers, with low quality microphones, low quality drums, with teenagers trying to play virtuoso guitar solos having more desire than technique and with audiences and musicians with a lot of alcohol and paraguayano (cannabis mixed with mysterious chemicals for purely economic purposes) running through their veins. The format in which the music travelled was the cassette, the pirate cassette, the copy of the copy of the copy. In each copy the recording mutated, each recorder added its own information, the AM/FM Radio Cassette Recorders were mainly imported from Asia thanks to the new commercial treaties, the incipient new global economic order acting as a DJ remixing the original with new information through the electronic pieces and circuits,

a whole new global order expressed in microscopic changes within the sound.

Listening to bands like Massacre, Necrosis, Torturer, Carbonized, and Pentagram, with an aesthetic of death, skeletons, devils, sacrifices, blood, the symbolic description of recent terrors¹, this 80s young generation grew in silence, because talking was dangerous. Nobody wanted to die, nobody wanted to be hungry, nobody wanted to be poor. No one wanted to receive electric shocks at police stations. Intrinsicly we all carry the fear, alongside the scarcity, the incompleteness of living on implanted imaginaries. A whole part of the story was erased with blood and supplanted by images of others, the economic bonanza. A whole generation moulded under fear. The military in power. It is difficult to feel safe in front of someone armed and who "only receives orders". When silence means to stay alive, a whole generation is raised under the most violent silence. To embrace the noise is just the natural path.

Disappearance, erasure, death. Incomplete stories, laden with absence. Although Dub was born out of an error, although on side A-side there was the presence, complete, without absences, the dubbed 45 rpm single B-side generated a radical aesthetic paradigm shift, expelled into the future in infinite echoes that never cease returning to their origin, to look for the lost, the erased, the absence that becomes present in the very act of disappearing, disappearing in silences, in screaming, in spaces emptied or saturated with chaos. Electronic prosthetics as weapons. Sound and electricity share an abstract nature, apprehensible only by transduction, electrons travelling tortuous ways, looking for the exit between resistances and condensations, between filling and emptying, almost ethereal energy amplified and projected in the air space, moulded by engineers in studios as patchwork products of the planetary clash. The imperialist technoscience that seeks to devour everything, control everything, and the Antropofaga (De Andrade, 1928) nature that devours everything, the new race, the new humanity, the clash of the Old World with the even older New World. Engineers moulding electrons and projecting them into space into the future, the echoes of Dub continue to recode, the sonic starship in which they escaped from chaos and blood, from death. In its decomposition it leaves scattered new worlds, new interpretations and recodifications, in their absence generates infinite presences, repetitions, reverberations, it reflects and disappears.

Taking two points you can deduce the position of a third one. Two points on a map show a third one. Lee Perry

¹ Living in fear/Of the menace known/The future unveiled/Shows frozen horror. (Lyrics from Pentagram song Fatal Predictions)

mixing Dub tracks "full of ghosts". Dark teenagers, with kilometres and years away, dancing in a circle immersed in noise and screams, full of demons. Obscured meaning showing the same wounds, echoes that do not stop to wander. Soundscapes like purgatories. Echoes that meet and resonate generating new cartographies. Cartographies made of sound and time.

Two points on the map that resonate closer than the old maps show.

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Pablo De La Cruz studied Fine Art and Sound Technology, and failed at the trumpet. Early on, he took the path of free improvisation, playing alone or with others, in more or less stable configurations, swapping instruments and visions. Nowadays he focuses on connecting various machines and softwares to channel the s Sharing Science ound flow. (This bio is full of gaps filled by leisure and proletariat labour).

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