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Relating Narratives of Detention and Survival in Pinochet's Chile

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Relating Narratives of Detention and Survival in Pinochet's Chile

Vikki Bell

So you were in Chacabuco? Did you spend the night there? The stars are amazing, so beautiful... At night, you could walk by their light.

Orlando 'Caliche' Valdés

The Trip to Chacabuco

Signposts

We drive past the geoglyph – a large image formed by moving darker rocks to reveal lighter sands beneath or vice versa – on the hillside along the Pan-American Highway, twice. First time I miss it completely, concentrating as I am on the road ahead, somewhat anxious to be in the midst of the desert in a rental car with a troublesome gearbox and sharing the road with infrequent but huge lorries ploughing up and down the motorway. I do see the road sign with a symbol of a camera on it. I do not look up. There are very few turns on the road, but nevertheless we manage to take a wrong one, leaving the highway too early, which obliges us to come back on ourselves in a longish loop, back down the motorway and up again, taking us past the geoglyph once more. This time we see the figure, and although we do not stop, Mario snaps a quick photograph. Reading about it later, it seems these figures – often llamas or other zoomorphic figures, only occasionally human – probably date from AD 1000–1400; they could be signs of mountain worship, of solar alignment or offerings to Andean deities, although they may also have acted as signposts for

The geoglyph on Pan-American Highway, image courtesy: Mario Di Paolantonio



Chacabuco, seen from approach, image © Vikki Bell



Chacabuco detail, image © Vikki Bell

safe routes for llama caravans transporting food and cloth. They are, in other words, 'part signpost, part story-telling'.¹ This longer history of indigenous peoples and beasts marking out lines in the landscape to connect their worlds with others in the skies or on Earth, beautiful as it now sounds, was not in my sights that day. Instead, I was pursuing the threads of a more recent history of this desert, as we were en route to visit the ex-detention centre at Chacabuco, where during 1973–1974, hundreds of men were held prisoner in an old nitrate mine, political prisoners of the Pinochet regime. There, we were under the impression, we would learn something of the ways in which places 'hold' the stories. We were being drawn into the inhospitable landscape of Chile's northern deserts by an abandoned site precisely because we sensed the possibility that there we would find clues, 'part signpost, part story-telling'.

On arrival, I stop the car a little before the entrance, and we both jump out and start taking photographs. We cover our faces with the cameras and hardly speak; relieved to have found the place, we are also a little spooked. The site is huge and rows of single-storey brick buildings extend into the distance, their backs to us as it were, creating one long wall. A tall thin chimney rises up from within some way off, and further still, there is a wooden water tower; a few signs of the industry that once took place here are apparent. There is the sense of profound desolation that haunts many industrial ruins, exacerbated here by the desert that extends beyond its perimeter in all directions. And the sun is beating down, unforgiving.

A little further down the track, there is, precisely, a signpost. It is old, its blue metal battered, but still clearly legible. It gives one of the histories of this site and some data: 'Ex-Oficina Salitrera Chacabuco Construida en 1922–1924. Cant. Trabajadores 1.700. Poblacion 7.000. Habs Produccion Anual 180,000 T/M de Salitre... 1940 Cierra sus funciones como Oficina Salitrera. 1971 Declarada como Monum. Historico.'² As the signpost attests, the way in which Chacabuco was being inscribed into national memory in 1971 was seemingly motivated by a need to honour the efforts of the workers who lived in these mining towns in harsh physical environments. Immediately we noted that the more recent history was absent from this first signpost. Unsigned.

I park by the entrance but someone – later we will meet him and come to know his name, Walter Robertson – beckons us in, lifting the barrier and waving us on. We drive into what was once the central square of the Oficina, parking in the shadow of a large theatre that has been partially refurbished, relatively recently painted white, and for that reason now looking somewhat out of kilter with its surroundings. Wandering away from the car, my attentions are still drawn through the lens of the camera, framing images, the sun creating bold stripes where the wooden struts of porches cast shadow on the buildings. I am aware that I am approaching the task 'aesthetically', maybe even defensively. Yet there is something about the slats and the shadows that draws me, and draws from me, a memory-image.³ I am reminded of the work of Argentine artist Graciela Sacco, whose art frequently becomes a meditation on shadow, and who returns in particular to the use of a slatted fence or blinds, which, I have argued, is in large part because her work is also a prolonged meditation on the problem of discontinuity, and on how our ways of seeing and telling create ways of living with discontinuity.

1 K Kris Hirst, 'The Geoglyphic Art of Chile's Atacama Desert: Messages, Memories and Rites of the Landscape', *ThoughtCo.*, 2018, <https://www.thoughtco.com/geoglyphic-art-of-chiles-atacama-desert-169877>

2 Ex-nitrate mine Chacabuco. Constructed 1922–24. Number of workers 1,700. Population 7,000. Annual production 180,000 T/M of Nitrate. 1940 Stopped functioning as Nitrate mine. Declared Historical Monument 1971.

3 Somewhat as in Bergson's arguments about the co-emergence of perception and memory-images. The recollection is 'created step by step with the perception itself', as he writes (indeed, his analogy is as the shadow falls beside the body); Henri Bergson, *Key Writings*, Keith Ansell-Pearson and John Mullarkey, eds, Continuum, London 2002, p 144.



Graciela Sacco, *Adelante*, from the series 'Cuerpo a cuerpo' (1995/2012), heliography on found wood, image courtesy: Graciela Sacco



The theatre, Chacabuco, image © Vikki Bell

For many years, Sacco's art has used the motif of fencing, slates or sticks, as in *El incendio y las vísperas* (The fire and the days before, 1996) in which, by using heliography, she transfers the image of an unnamed uprising from a photograph onto wooden planks. She has commented herself that while sticks, fences and thrown objects participate in a riot and may themselves retain an impression of what has occurred, they tend to be forgotten in narratives of such events. Like my concern in this article, Sacco suggests that multiple potential tellings accrue to any event, reminding us that we need always to be attentive to how accounts, stories, rumours, 'eyewitness' accounts and, indeed, even sociological investigations, circulate and come to repeat each other, refracting and jumping gaps, producing accounts that borrow and countersign each other, while other accounts fall 'through the gaps', as it were. As do Sacco's pieces in this series, as do shadows that both interrupt and sustain the image, so ways of telling in academic work are distributed across many aspects of the research and are produced relationally. In other words, our production and presentation of the story attends to different aspects and accentuates the assemblage differently, not because we are negligent or subjective – although we are that – but because we are always producing and presenting the story *in relation* with various materials, (memory-)images, evidences and accounts.

The story of Chacabuco as an *oficina*, a village complex built around and for the mine, is told inside the fairly large theatre, which stands improbably in the central plaza of Chacabuco and where in a room on the first floor, a small museum displays old photographs, objects and information sheets about the village at the height of its production. But the museum is not functioning as such. There are no personnel there, the glass cabinets are covered in dust and the contents dislodged; some of it has suffered damage. Despite the smart outward appearance of the building, therefore, the efforts of only a few years past – which have made the exterior imposing over the skeletal remains of the mine and the vast majority of the crumbling buildings that sprawl away from its central square – renovations have been halted, and it is becoming a ruin. Inside is revealed the neglect of the project of memorialisation announced by the plaque recording the fact that the building was declared an historical monument in 1971; the plaque itself was affixed to the exterior in only 2010. Unlike the external signpost, it also adds that Chacabuco was used as a camp for political prisoners in 1973–1974. The relatively recent restoration clearly included that of the wooden bench seating, the repainting of the murals above the stage and the hanging of the claret-red velvet stage curtains. But the painted scenes of green fertile landscapes and women dancing the can-can above the stage are in stark contrast to the air of neglect about the place. So much is broken, creaky and tattered. The wind that causes the curtains to billow also catches a roofing sheet of corrugated iron somewhere backstage, which bangs intermittently like the stamp of an animal in pain.

Clearly these restorations were abortive attempts to preserve the history of the 'white gold' period (between 1870 and 1929), when the nitrate mine was in full production and the enormous sales of potassium nitrate – an excellent agricultural fertiliser widely imported into Europe and the key ingredient of explosives in high demand in World War I – brought wealth to the English-owned Lautaro Nitrate Company, to the

nearby towns of Antofagasta and Iquique, and the whole of Chile.⁴ In the foyer there are several tall posters that reproduce old photographs of the mine, workers in long-sleeved shirts and sometimes overalls, in an assorted array of hats, posing with machinery during various stages of the process – drilling, exploding the caliche, lifting it up on cranes, transporting it on lorries, crushing it – and of the village of Chacabuco, with impressive shopfronts and modern motor cars of the era. We step out onto the stage. Someone has written on the wall backstage in felt-tip pen: ‘How beautiful to remember the times of our parents and families. How we struggle to achieve lives like theirs. The mines of the pampas: Historical Monument. 2/11/05.’

Upstairs, a room houses several glass cabinets that display objects from the period, including tins of condensed milk, beer bottles, clothes, a set of dominoes, details about the Chacabuco hospital, and several handbills from the theatre advertising plays and the silent films shown there. Quotations from interviews made in 2004 describe the dances with live jazz bands and orchestras, and the visit of the tenor Enrico Caruso, which drew crowds across the desert from other *oficina*, filling the square in front of the theatre. One image in particular catches my attention. ‘Masquerade at Coya Office’, a photograph from 1913, which shows a group of men in fancy dress standing in front of a banner held by a young boy: ‘Viva El Carnaval’. They are men of all shades, dressed as clowns, priests, conquistadors, some holding

⁴ Germany’s development of a synthetic nitrate in the 1920s spelt the end of this industry, which suffered, as one of the captions in the theatre’s museum puts it ‘a slow and inexorable death’.



‘Masquerade at Coya Oficina, 1913’, photograph on display at Chacabuco theatre from Imatura Archive, image © Vikki Bell



Chacabuco's rows of houses, seen from roof of the theatre, image © Vikki Bell

instruments (guitar, bandolin, lute). They are posed, unsmiling – no doubt the photographer required them to hold such glum expressions so that they would not blur the image, but they look exhausted, and one suspects not from entertaining but from the gruelling labour – and they stare out at us as if to defy the accompanying text that would have us see them as an example of ‘men’s strength, imagination, creativity and adaptability, both with regard to developing a new industry and to being able to survive the harsh environmental conditions inherent to the medium in which the mineral is produced (extreme thermal variations, great luminosity, intensive working hours etc.)’. The creation of cultural forms – forms of sociality created against the backdrop of such conditions – are described in the text accompanying the image as ‘heroic’: ‘Men and women from all over the world participated in this heroic deed, shaping a culture of their own from which stems the “Pampas Feeling” represented in innumerable works.’ The photograph, in other words, both confirms and questions this narration of events, working as Adriana Cavarero has said of the photographs in Sebald’s majestic novel *Austerlitz*, where the inclusion of photographs provides ‘validation’ for the ‘truth’ of the story being narrated, while also ‘allowing an inquisitive gaze that questions the narratability of this very story’.⁵ While Sebald has argued that narratives rely on the passage of time, and fiction must move through time, there is a power of pictures to ‘stem the flow of time’, interrupting, displacing, escaping. The workers were organised at their entertainment, but likewise, they gathered themselves to listen to the leaders who organised the unions in order to protest against the conditions of their labour, and their effective imprisonment in the *salitreras* from where they required permission to leave, where sanitation was lacking and where their payment took the form of vouchers only to be exchanged in the town’s shops.

The implications of this tension between the narratability of stories and that which halts or punctuates it, takes on greater resonance still insofar as we are here in order to seek out the history that brought us, across ocean and continents, that is to say, the more recent history that saw this place used as a detention camp during Pinochet’s regime. In the theatre building, this narrative is struggling to be heard, eclipsed by the heroic narrative of the mine and workers. The museum’s focus reaches back past the 1970s, through them as it were, and trains the eye and imagination on the ‘white gold’. From the very top of the building, risking the un-restored roofing that scares me a little, however, I still feel, nevertheless, that I am taking photographs of a detention centre, haunted as I am by the images my research has formed in my imagination. So poised, I am ‘looking for signs’.

Habla por sí mismo

I had not visited Chacabuco before, but I had entered through that same entrance gate imaginatively; I had seen Chacabuco full of prisoners in 1974, had ‘met’ them through the screen. The film *Yo he sido, yo soy, yo seré* (Heynowski and Scheumann, 1974) is a remarkable document, breathtakingly bold in its undercover documentation of the prisoners held in Chacabuco.⁶ The East German film-makers had gained permission to enter the camp from Pinochet, on the ruse that they were going to show the world

5 Adriana Cavarero, (2015) ‘Narrative against Destruction’, *New Literary History*, vol 46, no 1, pp 1–16, p 14

6 The title is a quotation from Rosa Luxemburg, who, in her very last words, had the revolution ‘speak’ to those who thought they had suppressed the uprising in Berlin in 1919 and restored ‘order’. She wrote: ‘Your “order” is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will “rise up again, clashing its weapons,” and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing, “I have been, I am, I will be!”’, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1919/01/14.htm>, accessed 20 September 2017.

that the camps were not as terrible as they were portrayed. The permission was granted but stated explicitly that they were not to speak to the prisoners; by simply not revealing the documentation in full, however, they tricked the guards into not only allowing them in, but also allowing them to speak to the prisoners, even to conduct short interviews with them.

The interview with Allende's doctor, Danilo Berulin Fodich, who was taken prisoner the day after the attack on La Moneda, is alone testament to the suffering caused by indefinite detention. The film-maker's seemingly simple questions reveal its physical and psychological effects:

Interviewer	How long do you think you'll be here?
Fodich	I don't know.
Interviewer	What do you do in the camp?
Fodich	I'm in charge of medical care in the clinic we have here.
Interviewer	Are there many patients?
Fodich	We treat a population of 850. More or less, we see between thirty and forty people daily.
Interviewer	With serious illnesses?
Fodich	The most important are neurosis, psychological infirmities...
Interviewer	How do these manifest?
Fodich	By insomnia, restlessness, trembling.
Interviewer	What do you think has provoked these illnesses?
Fodich	The situation in which we detainees are held. And the uncertainty about our cases. ⁷

Remarkably, even at this point in 1974, the film's approach was not simply to denounce the regime for its incarceration of these men and the lack of process. Or it was not *only* a denunciation of the cruelty and injustice of what was happening to these men and at that time. There was also a thesis argued through style, a multi-layered approach to story-telling that posed the issue of time, even in this extreme moment, as a complex theme. *Yo he sido* is quoted by the magnificent *Nostalgia de la Luz* (2010), but its approach was also clearly a direct influence and forerunner to Patricio Gúzman's later film, as both play with the same 'crystal images', as one analysis has it.⁸ Both films capture the sense in which although time divides – as the actual present appears but passes, while virtual pasts are preserved but un-actualised – their distinction becomes 'momentarily indiscernible'.⁹ Thus *Yo he sido* sees the story of Chacabuco the nitrate mine, and the exploitation of the workers whose labour was relentlessly hard and barely recompensed, refracted through the contemporary conditions suffered by the political prisoners. These older stories of labourers, 'arise like stones from the quarry', the voiceover says, creating Neruda's 'comrades of the spade'. Their detention without due process, with such uncertainty and cruelty, recalls and reflects that of the earlier exploitation of the labourers such that the relation between the two films is prefigured in *Yo he sido* as it itself was also referencing 'back' not only to the archive images of the workers, through shots showing the remains of the abandoned mine, but also through interviews the film-makers sought out with an elderly man who had worked in the mine and another who had worked there when only a child.

Like the workers who created carnivals during the time of the mine's operation, *Yo he sido* shows the prisoners in Chacabuco engaged in creative pursuits, particularly woodwork, carving and making. In an interview

7 Author's translation

8 David Martin-Jones, 'Archival Landscapes and a Non-Anthropocentric "Universe Memory"', *Third Text* 125, vol 27, no 6, november 2013, pp 707–722

9 Ibid, p 713

with the film-makers, the military officer in charge of the detention camp, General Lagos, calls it 'recreation' and implies that this is a sign of humane treatment, but the prisoners describe it as a way to survive the boredom and pointlessness of each day. The one artwork that the film returns to several times, and that acts as something of a leitmotif throughout, is the sculpture – an assemblage – put together by Orlando Valdés. It consists of the handle of a spade that he had found in the camp, which he placed in a wooden display box of some sort, and to which he had attached a metal tag with someone's name on it, something that he had also found in the camp. The film-makers ask him what the sculptural assemblage means. Valdés replies, 'it speaks for itself (habla por sí mismo)', a perhaps understandably evasive response to a film crew about whom the prisoners knew nothing.

This response points to the role of such creative works; while they blatantly fail to '*speak* for themselves', they gather and give form and duration to concerns of present and past. Valdés's response was remarkable, therefore, for its unintentional mimicry of the film-makers own crystalline approach to the different stories about Chacabuco, stories to be preserved and held together until such time that they might be told. For while the sculpture absolutely could not '*speak*' it nevertheless '*proposes*', as Isabelle Stengers might put it, and constitutes an explicit attempt to put things in relation, to create an assemblage that would provoke viewers – whether in present or future – into thinking about how multiple pasts leave their traces.



The church mural on the wall of Orlando Valdés's house, Chacabuco, image © Vikki Bell

Caretaking

As it turned out, Mario and I were not the only ones in Chacabuco looking to preserve the more recent story of the political prisoners. Walter Robertson is the caretaker, the person who had waved us in and who we met again when we emerged from the theatre and its 'museum'. A local man, he tells us he has stuck it out here where previous incumbents have had to admit defeat. He is happy to greet us, to welcome us, to extend his hospitality to showing us the sites of Chacabuco *qua* the detention centre. We jump into his jeep and drive out along the dust road past several empty rows of little mud and brick houses, staring blankly out one after another, to the first site on his tour, followed of course by the dogs – one is Walter's own, the others are strays, driven to Chacabuco and abandoned there, Walter believes, because they know he's there. The 'care-taker'.

We stop outside one of the little squat houses, to all appearances the same as those in their rows all around us. But inside, there was a surprise. One wall of the small front room had been transformed into a three-dimensional mural of a church amid a few small houses that resemble those of Chacabuco. It is made of mud and painted white and red. Walter explains that one of the inmates, whose nickname is 'Caliche', returns to Chacabuco intermittently to repaint and repair this mural. A work of restoration, taking care of a past one might assume he would rather forget, which takes on its meaning within the context of the whole complex that is falling into ruin; indeed, mostly becoming rubble. They have become friends, Walter says, reaching into the car to retrieve some photographs of the two of them together. We are amazed at this returning prisoner, caring for the place that was his cell; we are surprised to see his photograph, him smiling and joking with Walter, sharing an *asado* (barbecue) at this site where he was held for the best part of two years. Walter is proud of his friend's artistic talents, showing us also photographs of the sculptures that Caliche made in the central square. Only later do we come to realise that this is the same man who appeared with his sculpture in *Yo he sido, yo soy, yo seré*. But this is not a heroic narrative. It is a passing on of the joy of friendship. Walter wants to share this story; he is positively bursting with the pleasure of being able to tell these visitors from distant countries about their friendship. 'You should meet him,' he says, 'I'll call him!' And he takes out his cell phone and calls the number. We are introduced and the phone handed over. We arrange to meet in Santiago the following Wednesday. 'At the new Museum of Human Rights,' suggests Caliche. Such a story must be passed on, we agree, must be gifted, the task of preservation attempted and its passage facilitated.

The next stop on Walter's impromptu tour is more tricky, more testing of politesse, and of the positionalities we occupy. A short ride away from Caliche's church, another small house bore a polished metal plaque, recently placed there by the detainees of the Chacabuco survivors' association. A little green velvet curtain, held up with pink plastic wire and tied with string, frames it. It tells a tragic story, as it commemorates Oscar Vega Gonzalez, who was detained in the house and who committed suicide on 22 November 1973. He was an older prisoner, aged sixty-seven at the time, and was, shockingly, also a former worker in the Oficina Salitrera who lived in Chacabuco with his family at that time. The plaque names the various workers'

organisations that he had been part of, but it also names the cause of his suicide as the depression that resulted from the physical and psychological mistreatment he received during his imprisonment.

Walter wants Mario to try to feel the ghost of Oscar. 'Stand here,' he says, as he positions Mario in the centre of the room, 'close your eyes,' he instructs, 'can you feel it?' Mario stands there a while, but shortly he has to step aside, gently shaking his head and saying 'no', smiling, his negative response qualified and nuanced in gesture and tone. Mario understands that this is a scene in which a gift is being given, a story which Walter wishes one not just to hear from him, but to feel. It is not only the hospitable gift from one person to another who wanders unannounced, as did we, into his home; it is also a ghost story, and, as such, it is a challenge to our modes of accounting for how the past, including the dead, continue to ask questions of us. How their stories can intensify our sense of ourselves, achieving a connection and even a quickening of hearts. The distinction at stake is not between the existence of ghosts and reality, but about how we express that 'haunting'. As Vinciane Despret would say of her work on how the dead are kept in relation to and by the living, there is no either/or, but an 'and and':¹⁰ no either/or between 'is it my desire or *really* the dead?' Perhaps we need not impose any hierarchical order – certainly no dichotomy between rationality and enchantment – on the different ways in which we offer the dead another mode of existence? That is, the living continue to act towards the dead, whether that is by the 'reality' of a life gone but remembered as stated on the plaque – 'Su recuerdo permanecerá por siempre en nosotros' (Your memory will stay with us always) – or by the sense of a presence at the site of death, as implied by Walter's request, or indeed by the visual verification sought via the shadowy photos that he later shows us on his phone, sent by visitors who believe the images capture glimpses of ghosts. Or even, one must surely add, the research project in which we are engaged, offering further passage for the stories to be shared in different forums elsewhere. This is our task, to preserve and to share, but also to put these things in relation in order to make our own propositions. Since none of this – the images I take, the 'presences' nor the bald materiality of the place – will tell alone. The bullet holes in the walls of buildings do not tell the story of how they appeared there; similarly, the canteen area that has largely collapsed – bar a few wooden poles sticking up out of the ground (together Walter and Caliche were beginning to rebuild it) – is merely a collection of wood and poles until a narrative or proposition does that joining for us, until Walter explains that it was the canteen, and until Caliche fills the site with his memories of prisoners gathering there. It is 'rubble' until it becomes inscribed, animated, by and with those who care to sustain this past, those who take care of the words and images they make of it; and, of course, those who care to listen.¹¹ Each of these stages is slippery and complex, fraught with issues of composition, of how each element is put in relation, how it is brought to presence, of reception, how and where it is received and able to be preserved, and of ethos, the atmosphere and ability for an ethical subjectivity to be creatively inspired and forged in its light, as it were.

Before we leave Chacabuco, Walter shows us the sculptures in the square in front of the theatre, made by his friend. Maybe it was at this point that we realised that Caliche was the very man who made the sculp-

10 Vinciane Despret, 'Talking Before the Dead', Seminar at Goldsmiths, University of London, 25 January 2017

11 Gastón Gordillo, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2014



Orlando Valdés's 1974 sculpture in Chacabuco Square, image © Vikki Bell

ture in the 1974 film. The arms of a small tree reach up and the head of a human figure has been carved from the tree trunk; the head tilts slightly to one side. It is somewhat reminiscent of Munch's 1893 painting *The Scream* and I saw here the figure of a man being tortured. Yes, Walter confirms, it is a monument to those who went through that pain, a depiction of the effect of the military's behavior, standing in the broad daylight of the square, a depiction that Valdés was only able to get away with by insisting that it was obviously the figure of Christ. Carved into the sculpture is 'Orlando Valdés "Caliche" 1974'. His sign, his (counter-) signature.

But *That* You Cannot Forget: The Interview

[T]he time, and therefore the story, belongs to them. Yet the meaning of the story, what makes it worthy of being told, is what we can see and what inspires us because we are beyond its time. Those who read or listen to our stories see everything as through a lens. This lens is the secret of narration, and it is ground anew in every story, ground between the temporal and the timeless. If we storytellers are Death's Secretaries, we are so because, in our brief mortal lives, we are grinders of these lens.

John Berger¹²

When Benjamin suggested that the gift of story-telling requires not only the teller's many abilities – he mentions to 'preserve and concentrate' the story's strength, to rid the story of any accompanying 'explanation' or 'interpretation', to co-ordinate eye, soul and hand in the telling – he also proposed it a listener's art, one which requires the somewhat surprising qualities of 'relaxation' and its accompanying 'self-forgetfulness'.¹³ Only by relaxing is the story impressed on the memory of the listener, such that, while all stories carry the traces of their tellers 'the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel',¹⁴ the listener is able to retain the story and effortlessly to pass it on in his or her own retelling. Benjamin writes: 'this, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled'.¹⁵ A story-teller receives a story, but the retelling is not an attempt to convey 'the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. [Story-telling] sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller in order to bring it out of him again'.¹⁶ Unlike novels, for Benjamin, stories do not end, they are passed on, and they continue to provoke questions.

This web of receptivity and generosity, of attentiveness and relaxation, of gifting and receiving in Benjamin's account of the story-teller also infuses Haraway's recent writing, especially her use of the metaphor of string figures, the 'cat's cradle' game that becomes central to her argument, enabling her to weave her thesis together with the arguments of Isabelle Stengers, who writes:

[in cat's cradling, at least] two pairs of hands are needed, and in each successive step, one is 'passive', offering the result of its previous operation, a string entanglement, for the other to operate, only to become active again in the next step, when the other presents the new entanglement. But it can also be said that each time the 'passive' pair is the one that holds, and

12 John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, Bloomsbury, London, 1984, p 31

13 Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov', in Hannah Arendt, ed, *Illuminations* [German, 1955], Harry Zorn, trans, Pimlico, London, 1999, p 90, p 89, p 96, p 107

14 Ibid, p 91

15 Ibid

16 Ibid

is held by the entanglement, only to 'let it go' when the other takes the relay.¹⁷

Haraway seeks to encourage a thoughtfulness about how we inherit the entanglements of our current times, seeing in Stengers's argument a resonance with her own insistence that how we receive, our response-ability, can be thought of not as a passive inheritance, but as a creative ethical enterprise.

Meeting Caliche outside the new, and very large, Museo de la memoria y DDHH (Museum of Memory and Human Rights) in Santiago, Chile, was an opportunity for his story to be told. He is smiling and jovial, and he has a surprise for us; he is accompanied by a friend of his, Luis Mondaca, who had also been imprisoned in Chacabuco, and who is going to help to tell their story. Mario and I are keen to be attentive and to prompt as little as possible in order to allow the story to flow. This is our interviewers' stance, the element of passive 'receiving'.

As in my opening epigraph, Caliche displays an astounding ability to retain a joyous wonder about the world; his very first words to us – 'the stars are amazing' – are infused with his openness to the beauty of the natural world, as he recalls the moon and stars that guided the men at night, and that they even studied, during their time imprisoned in the desert. '[With the astronomy professor imprisoned with us] we'd even have astronomy classes at night with corresponding sticks laid out... We would lie down on the ground and we would mark the movements of the planets.'¹⁸ His wish to connect with us through this experience of the constellations seen from the desert indicated his commitment to maintaining a sense of wonder in the face of adversity, something that has been said of critic John Berger.¹⁹ Like Berger, one senses that Caliche has a strong attentiveness to place, and performs, with his returning to Chacabuco, a repair work which is not – or not only – a kind of therapy for himself, but also an enactment of forgiveness for the place itself. Caliche forgives Chacabuco, and even cares for it, as if it is for him a sad misfortune that the old mining village was enlisted into this role. To give his time and attentions to the church and other structures, still, is not only to preserve something of their time there as a history lesson for future generations, but is also an act of creativity motivated by something both more gentle and more profound, a treasuring of a precious but transient life amid the timelessness of the stars and planets.

In the interview, it is striking that the two men settle into telling their story by reference to peoples and stories that one might consider, on the face of it, to be unrelated to their imprisonment, but, having seen the film *Yo he sido, yo soy, yo seré*, one recognises it as a similar gesture of solidarity across temporal contexts. They speak about the contemporary situation of the Mapuche people in Chile, whose land rights are not recognised, and of past workers of the *salitrera* at Chacabuco, who suffered hardships and injustices.

'Caliche' Valdés To come and work in any of those company towns was like working in a prison. Why? Because they would pay them with vouchers. They could only buy things that were sold there...

17 Isabelle Stengers, quoted in Donna J Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016, p 34

18 Interview, Santiago, May 2016

19 Ben Lerner writes: 'All of Berger's work – which includes poems, novels, drawings, paintings and screenwriting – is to me a beautiful and bracing argument that political commitment requires maintaining a position of wonder. Sexual desire, the rhythms (or increasing arrhythmia) of the seasons, the mysterious gaze of an animal, the spark of camaraderie released by sharing a meal and story, the way certain artworks transform an idiosyncratic way of seeing into a commons – such experiences promise us, albeit briefly, an alternative to a world in which money is the only measure of value. And, Berger's work suggests, 'they aren't forms of forgetfulness but of presentness, memory, recovery, because they place you in relation to, in community with, the dead'. *The New Yorker*, Postscript: John Berger 1926–2017, 6 Jan 2017.

Luis Mondaca So if there were wage increases, they'd simply put the price of sugar up... compared with the coup [the 1973 *golpe de militar*] there is freedom in the streets but you're taking away the workers' rights to better themselves, to demand better working conditions.²⁰

The link with their own experience of the place is made by drawing the stories of these earlier lives and hardships through time, and through the shared experience of an attempt to survive, the infinitive becoming a mantra. Luis said: 'Like those workers, we were living in order to survive. Our sole aim was to survive, during the dictatorship, to feed ourselves and to survive.'

Luis and Caliche were taken to the National Stadium in Santiago in the early days of the coup, among the estimated 12,000 who were held there between 11 September and 7 November 1973.²¹ This is where they first met, in the cramped conditions of the locker rooms where prisoners were held, some 150, in Caliche's estimation, in a four-metre-square space. 'We slept like a collection of spoons,' Luis told us: 'somebody would get cramp, and then they'd... shout out and we'd [all] turn over!' At the start of the interview, Luis and Caliche spoke about the stadium in terms of these cramped conditions, and the lack of food: 'There was insufficient food. We had to steal food that was meant for the soldiers... with the danger that they could shoot us if they saw us.' Caliche went fourteen days without eating, Luis ten days. It was only at the end of the interview, perhaps because the men trusted us or perhaps because they wanted to be sure that we understood the seriousness of the crimes committed by the Pinochet regime, that the men returned to the topic of their imprisonment in the stadium to tell us about the torture they suffered there.

Luis They put me on the *parrilla* [the grill] and then the *submarino*. There was a barrel full of sewage, all the waste matter was there. What was I going to say [to their request for names of others]? Nothing. I would faint. I would just hold my breath and just faint. There was a doctor there, a doctor who would check us and would examine us if we were passed out. And the doctor would say – there's an expression in Chile – 'this one is faking it!' ['se está haciendo!'] And they would do it again, and then leave me hanging.

Luis said that he tried to distract himself, to remove himself mentally from the pain: 'When I was hanging, I would pretend that I was at the beach. My body was hanging but I wasn't hanging like that.'

This experience of extreme physical torture was followed by the deep anxiety of not knowing what was happening, whether the torture would be repeated, whether one would give in:

Luis It was the uncertainty of knowing if they would return or not. Keeping that all inside you, questioning yourself 'what will become of me? I am [to survive] or I am not. What condition will I be in? [Will I] spill the beans or keep things to myself?'

Luis was adamant that he owed his life to those who did not mention his name under torture, and he told us how he used his strategy of detach-

20 All quotes in this section are taken from the interview with Caliche and Luis, Santiago, May 2016, unless otherwise stated.

21 Many more were held over the course of the dictatorship – one estimate is 40,000.

ment to survive even the most extreme pressure, including mock executions:

Luis [At the police station where I was first held] they said ‘OK we’re going to execute you, what do you want to say to us?’ ‘Nothing, nothing, I have nothing to say.’ [At those times] my family did not exist for me anymore, because I detached myself, through my thoughts, from my family...

Caliche also reported that he was made to suffer one of these simulated executions:

Caliche When this happened to me in the stadium, I had my eyes covered so I couldn’t see anyone, I heard someone say ‘OK, with this one, execute him, this one has to die!’ and they made me walk ten metres to a wall... And somebody beside me said, ‘Son of mine, confess! Why are you going to die for others who are guilty? Say their names! You’re going to get yourself killed.’ So I would [say] that I know nothing, so don’t ask me anymore. I was ready to die. So I hear ‘Aim! Fire!’ And I hear the rifles fire. I hear the banging, the explosion, but I am still standing and I am still there! And I begin to hear noise. These guys haven’t killed me!’

Caliche laughed at the end of this terrifying account; typically, as he laughs often. The two men worked together like this, moving the story along by moving us through different emotional reactions. Throughout the interview, Caliche often spoke in this anecdotal form, recounting scenes and tales of how the prisoners ‘spoke back’ to power, recounting how the men somehow forced the military guards to recognise their common humanity, or how they managed to laugh amid the worst of circumstances. Luis’ role differed; he wanted to be sure that they did not underplay, and that we understood – despite his friend’s emphasis on the resistance and the absurd, often perverse, situation – those worst experiences, those that risk breaking the fight and even the very soul of a person. For him, the way he was forced to witness the torture of others was unforgettable:

Luis They took me and made me do a tour around the stadium, around the passageways south and north... They would lift the hood for me to see and I saw children, girls of sixteen-, seventeen-, eighteen-years-old. There were these milk bottles with a mouth like this [showing the shape with his hands] full of rats and they were placed against the vagina. Dogs on top of women, on top of men, sons on top of their mothers, on their sisters. I was seeing how they were all being sexually abused, made to do sexual acts, against the university girl students.

And they also made me see where they would yank the nails out, where the electrical prods were used [to electrocute people in different parts of their body, including] in the anus, women always in the vagina, on the breasts. They made me do this tour, and they said ‘now we’re going to massage you’. I suffered more seeing [the others] than what they did to me. When they put me on the *parrilla*, when they beat me up, when they hung me. That was small. What hurt me most was to see [the others].

According to Luis, it is the memories of such suffering that stays with him and also with others who were subjected to such witnessing, including those who have not been able to regain their mental health as a result, and many more who suffer inwardly and silently.

Luis Many of us who saw, who lived, we cannot leave our memories, [some] go crazy. [There's no] forgetting. [Some continue] to say nothing of what happened in the stadium and when they were in prison. *Compañeros*... who accompanied me to Chacabuco, these guys haven't even told their children or even their wives all that happened. [Men held at] the Technical University, the Stadium of Chile, the National Stadium and Chacabuco, their families know nothing, nothing. They have remained traumatised. But *that* you cannot forget.

The two men shared the telling of this tale, confirming and adding to each other's account, occasionally correcting, discussing the sequencing of events or updating each other on the current health or passing of a comrade. Theirs is a shared history, and the entwined telling – 'two pairs of hands are needed' – suggested they were happy to help each other to convey and confirm the sense and the sentiments of it. Indeed, it's as if they concurred, performatively, that the telling of their story was too delicate an art not to craft together. It was a shared story, but it was also a shared life story, and as such required an art that, as Cavarero has put it, should seek not to capture a meaning of a story, but 'to reveal the finite in all its fragile uniqueness and sing its glory'.²²

Upon arrival at Antofagasta, a town on the northern coast of Chile, and after an uncomfortable three-day journey by sea,²³ the men were disembarked and then suffered an uncomfortable journey in cramped train carriages, before arriving at the camp, where they were stripped naked and assembled on the football pitch, their clothes and few belongings in piles in front of each of them. 'We were received by Carlos Humberto Minoletti, then captain. And he welcomes us newcomers with punches and kicks. He beat the shit out of us',²⁴ reserving particular insults for particular prisoners, striking each as he did so. To the history professor, Mario Gastón Céspedes Gutiérrez, Minoletti said he was going to teach true Chilean history, not the 'shit you teach on television and in the universities'.²⁵ To Ángel Parra, musician and son of Violeta Parra, he said that he was going to teach them true folklore – 'not the shit you sing' but the music of *Los Huasos Quincheros*,²⁶ the neo-folklorists of Chile, who sang what Luis describes as 'the "postcard" version of Chile, about the *campesinos* sowing the wheat who had to toil so there would be blond shafts of wheat'.²⁷ And to them all, Minoletti said that if anyone were to contemplate suicide, be sure to use two blades:

"Be sure to cut your veins well because the desert has a thirst for communist blood. Make sure you cut the veins because otherwise we'll kill you ourselves." That was the first day.²⁸

After these insults and beatings, the men collected their belongings, now scattered around, and carried whatever they could – 'some wore several layers of clothing' even in the heat of the desert – to where they were allocated their houses in the rows of workers' housing, wondering where they were being held.

22 Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Routledge, London, 2000, p 3

23 Caliche and Luis were taken from the national stadium to Chacabuco in a ship called the *Andalien*, a ship for the transportation of caliche, into whose storage spaces the men were compressed, with nowhere to relieve themselves except a simple bucket. On the three-day journey, Caliche recalls, he was able to be mostly above deck, as he had been assigned the task of preparing vegetables for the meals. On the last day, he recalls, a warplane with mounted guns started to swoop down onto the ship, threatening them. It came and went, and several military personnel became sick with watching the plane while also negotiating the tilting movement of the ship. 'An officer asked me, "Can you fire a machine gun?" And he passed over a gun to me in case we had to fire at the plane!' After a couple of dives, however, the warplane flew away: 'they probably thought the better of it' (interview, May 2016). This unpredictable alteration between the captors' cruelty and their seeming trust in the prisoners was to continue as a theme in their account of Chacabuco.

24 Luis, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

25 Caliche, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

26 Ibid

27 Luis, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

28 Caliche, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

Oscar Bonilla, the minister of interior defence,²⁹ visited Chacabuco and came to the men gathered in the canteen: 'He told us "you're not political prisoners, you're hostages to what happens outside to this regiment. You'll be the first dead"'.³⁰ Caliche explains: 'He said, "If a military personnel dies outside, ten of you are going to be shot. For each one of them, ten of you will die"'.³¹ The men recalled this as a moment of 'honesty' but its effect was to send a wave of anxiety and fear throughout the men: 'rumours spread: "they are going to kill us"'. The anxiety caused by these rumours was awful, Caliche remarks, but Luis is quick to explain that the men's response was to work to lift the mood; he gestures towards his friend with pride: 'the ingenuity of the Chilean is represented in my friend, Caliche!'

Caliche smiles and takes on the story, explaining that he had a friend, another Luis, called Luis Cabezas, who he had met at the National Stadium. Luis suggested that in order to lift the spirits of the men, they should perform some comedy sketches together: 'Make people laugh. Laughter is the best medicine for everything.' At first the men performed at meal times:

Caliche Every afternoon we would tell a joke and people would laugh. That's right. But we started running out of jokes [laughs] and we started asking other people to come up and participate... There were people who could recite poetry... we formed an orchestra, 'Sounds Behind Bars' ['Sonores entre rejas']... There was a lot of music, *cumbias*, music to dance to, but the principal part was the comedy... me and Luis Cabezas. We dedicated ourselves to it.

The two of them were given stage names:

Caliche [Someone] said 'hey you can't keep performing without having a name, guys!' As the pampa produces caliche, so my compañero was called Pampa and I was Caliche. Pampa and Caliche. That became the act. [Laughs]

With much merriment, Caliche recounts the organising of the shows with comedy and other sketches. Astonishingly, General Lagos, the first general in charge of the infamous 'caravan of death', was interested in these shows, and called Caliche out of the camp to ask – 'calling me with "Calichito" with much affection' – if the prisoners would also perform the show for the military troops in the old theatre which was outside the permitted area for the prisoners. Caliche agreed to repeat the show for the troops, but only if the prisoners could also attend the show for a second time in the theatre. So it was agreed. The first show included a farce about Tarzan, Caliche remembers, and the compañero who was playing Tarzan swung around the theatre on a rope, going higher and therefore faster than he meant to do, swinging out of control, to everyone's amusement. 'As he passed by, he was calling "Stop me! Stop me!"' chuckles Caliche. The prisoners also played tricks on the generals, fixing the raffle so that they would win the prize, which turned out to be fictive and worthless,³² and arranging a sketch about fortune-telling which was making a joke out of the fact that the camp had informers (from the notorious DINA) within it.³³

Caliche We dressed up as gypsies who were going to predict the future. We invited people onto stage to sit at the table [and] to ask us something...

29 Oscar Bonilla was one of the principal architects of the coup, first minister of the interior then minister of defence. He spoke out about torture he witnessed at the concentration camp Tejas Verdes, but died shortly afterwards, in March 1975, in a helicopter accident under mysterious circumstances.

30 Luis, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

31 Caliche, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

32 They had announced a prize of a Chilean football team kit; in fact they had packaged up a worthless photograph of the team torn from a newspaper.

33 Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional were Pinochet's secret police, given powers to detain anyone indefinitely during the 'state of emergency', and responsible for detainees mistreatment, torture, sexual abuse, murder and disappearance.

34 Caliche, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

35 Ibid

36 There was music in the camp, as mentioned, including Angel Parra, Violeta Parra's son. Luis tells us: 'He was very famous, nationally and internationally, because of his mother, Violeta. Angel never sang for the *milicos*. Never did he sing. He formed the group, *El Chacabucano*, and he composed the "Passion according to St John", which was also sung to [Cardinal] Silva Henríquez when he came to visit us. But Angel, he only played the guitar. And he directed the band. He never sang. The only time he sang was when they announced him, "a certain day when it's 6pm Angel Parra will be singing, Luis Angel Parra" where they told him, that he would be transferred to Santiago and then liberated into freedom. And what was the story? That Parra was going to be set free, it was the Festival de Vina, it was a music festival, folkloric, quite famous. And the idea of the junta was to present Angel Parra in the festival of Vina... to showcase him. So there is an announcement that he is going to be transferred, given freedom, and that is the only time that Angel sang to us. He sang for us a song about his daughter and his son, and another one I don't remember.' Parra did not sing at the Festival but managed to leave Chile and take up exile in France. Interview, Santiago, May 2016.

37 Caliche explains that people would buy them because they knew they were made by the detainees. The prisoners would ask for things in return – tomatoes, lemons and often raisins. The latter were no longer granted when the military realised that the prisoners were using them to make alcohol ('we had several excellent

Whatever they asked, we responded, 'You're going to soon be leaving, going to your freedom' or 'Don't worry, you're going to be liberated!' or 'Your wife hasn't cheated on you!'... Just things for fun... But we had already prepared a bucket full of water. And we had arranged that someone would come on stage [as if he were a volunteer], and ask 'has anybody infiltrated Chacabuco?' and we replied 'if anybody has infiltrated the Chacabuco prison camp, let a drop of water fall'.

So this guy sat at the table and asked, and we pulled on the string... and a bucket of water soaked the guy and even the general sitting in the front row! [Laughs].

The sketches were of course a means of survival in the camp, a group activity that reveals something of the negotiated relationship of the prisoners to the military guards, as well as of the mutual support, the improvised sociability, the prisoners gave each other. On the first of these, both Caliche and Luis offered accounts of how the prisoners were not infrequently kindly to the military guards, passing up kettles of hot water to those guards on duty in the watchtowers in the winter, playing a game of football together – which the prisoners easily won since they had professional players among them – and even trying to help save the life of a soldier who shot himself, as there were several doctor and surgeons among the prison population. Caliche remarks: 'We changed some of the military's minds about us... because we, the political prisoners, made a queue to donate blood, to save this military guy. It was impossible to save him, though.'³⁴ The guards rotated every fortnight, however, and the official stance, that of officers higher up, would 'readjust' the attitude so that the prisoners were again subjected to humiliations and 'demoralised' by the military.³⁵

As for the prisoners, their mutual support took numerous forms, as they tried to maintain their resolve. The sketch-shows were one such, music was another,³⁶ as was the making of the woodcarvings such as those shown in the documentary (some are now held in the museum's collections). Caliche taught woodwork to many prisoners and there was even a little industry that developed whereby the military personnel would sell the pieces at the market in Antofagasta.³⁷ But the prisoners also organised themselves in other ways, in order to maintain their sense of dignity and purpose. Luis explains the way in which they organised themselves into a political structure:

Luis The logic of the army was 'raise the morale and then drop them'. To keep them just alive... We, being conscious workers, being committed activists, being militants of different parties, nevertheless managed... to make a *consejo de ancianos* [council, as in the French revolution]. So the camp became organised into battalions – each of the rows, about ten houses, would be a battalion and each one of those had a representative who went to the *consejo de ancianos* to represent the battalion. There they elected a leader. And that was Mariano Requena [who had been Allende's personal physician], the first leader.

... It was a democratic organisation, it could have been anybody... but we had to be strategic. [Requena] was worldly and he knew how to speak to authority.

Such organisation, and such commitment to surviving the ordeal of imprisonment, was also evident in the mutual care and concern the men

chemists among us!'). Nor were the military consistent in their support for the prisoners; every fortnight, with the personnel change, 'we would lose our tools' as the guards would confiscate them. Interview, Santiago, May 2016.

showed each other in terms of mental health. Caliche explained that in the wake of Vega's suicide, the men became vigilant, and if there was concern about someone who was potentially falling into depression they would try to lend him supportive companionship.

When he started working on the church mural, Caliche reports, the men thought he was spending too much time alone, heading off as he did after midday lunch to continue his project. But when they discovered his endeavour, it became a communal project, and the men worked together to mix the mud and to paint the relief of the church on the side of the room. Luis was one of those who helped. It was, he explains, a way of surviving, of leaving a trace of something, creating a picture that they believed would help their story circulate. They would attempt to sustain and inspire the other men, saying, 'The world is not going to... forget you. Throughout the world [people will remember] the prisoners of this concentration camp, the prisoners of Chacabuco... That [church] is the portrait [*postal*] of Chacabuco for the world.'³⁸

A high boost to morale was received when the prisoners were visited by Cardinal Silva Henríquez, 'the highest moral authority' in Chile at the time. He inaugurated and blessed the house where the church was constructed and received gifts from the men. 'I gave him a crucifix made out of wood that Caliche helped me make and form,' reports Luis.³⁹ Moreover, Luis states that Henríquez had defied Pinochet in choosing to be at Chacabuco with them, sending a delegate to represent him at an international event taking place in Santiago hosted by the Pinochet military junta.

Furthermore, it was *La Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, the important human rights organisation set up by Henríquez, which organised for the families of the detained to visit them in Chacabuco; the organisation sought to defend their cause during Pinochet's regime. To this struggle on their behalf, the men feel profoundly indebted, as they are to the enormous campaigning efforts by the women in their families:

Luis The most important combatants were our women – I'm speaking of my mother, my sister, Caliche's wife and the old women who cared. The elderly women who fought during the whole dictatorship with little money... were very combative. My mother, her relatives too, I think, they marched in protest to La Moneda, were in front of La Moneda with the widows of those executed and disappeared.

While he himself survived by imagining himself unbounded by his intimate relations, Luis's relatives protested against his plight not only as one of hundreds, but also in all his uniqueness.

Concluding Remarks

What makes a narration a political act is not simply that this narration invokes the struggle of a collective subjectivity, but rather that it makes clear the fragility of the unique.⁴⁰

Although we do not claim to be as accomplished as Benjamin's storyteller, Caliche and Luis's story felt precious, unforgettable, and certainly one beyond, as they put it, the knowledge offered inside the museum

38 Interview, Santiago, May 2016

39 Ibid

40 Paul A Kottman, 'Translator's Introduction', in Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Routledge, London, 2000

walls; it was meant as a gift to be gifted on to others. It is important, Luis remarked, 'to get as many people as possible to know that Chile is not simply a remote long skinny country... [but] that we are people who have lived a history and that the survivors of the dictatorship are still combatting and continuing the struggle... our truth which cannot be negated... because we lived it... we shared it'.⁴¹ We feel this responsibility to 'take the baton' keenly, in Stengers's sense, not just for the story to be set against the ruination of the world (in Hannah Arendt's phrase), but also because its careful entanglement of affect, memories, facts, and calling out of named others must not be 'dropped' because of a failure on our part. Sociology, typically, involves such retellings of stories; there is a necessary re-weaving or re-emphasis that writing about their story entails, a reorientation in order to 'grind the lens' for readers to receive the story of Chacabuco, as gifted to us by Luis and Caliche.⁴² To pull the story through the mists of time, away from the shadow of the destructive violence of the Pinochet regime that threatens to capture them, is central to the sociological task, especially as there are multiple stories about the camp of Chacabuco that risk not just fading in the course of time but being eclipsed by other accounts, as our trip there suggested. Caliche and Luis are acutely aware of this potential for resistance – that turns on the incommensurability of discourse and life, or discourse and a life – that offers the possibility of inserting a different account. Furthermore, insofar as they told the story, together and with such attention to detail and such honesty and humour and sense of purpose, helping each other do so, they simultaneously acted as witnesses to each other, as much as did Mario and I. They implied something interesting about this period of their lives – that although, of course, they can speak for themselves, they prefer that the story is recorded as a joint effort. They preferred, in a sense, to not only 'speak for themselves' but to speak both *of* others – of the workers in the mine, the Mapuche, their fellow compañeros – *and in front of* others. Here we are close to Cavarero's thesis that there is a human desire to hear one's life story told, so that as the tale of one's life unfurls, one might make a political intervention that is both about a collective struggle and subject and also the tale of a unique existence.⁴³ Similarly, one might understand Caliche's remarkable efforts to maintain the house-cell and its church mural at Chacabuco as a 'repair' work that not only asks that the story of what happened there be told, that not only insists that the political prisoners' stories never be eclipsed by the story of the mine – nor indeed vice versa – but also affirms the uniqueness of his own person, his own endeavours. The work is not to preserve and maintain his mural as it was, as a static moment in his life or in the history of Chile, but it is about marking an experience through which individuals lived, together, at this place, as a reminder of the care and creativity that sustained them amid the darkest of times. As such, it is profoundly orientated to the future, a proposal to keep relating stories.

41 Luis, Interview, Santiago, May 2016

42 Howard S Becker, *Telling About Society*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2007

43 Cavarero takes a cue from Arendt, who argued that 'who' someone is in their singularity retains a 'curiously intangibility', and is a matter of biography; there is a uniqueness to each individual that philosophy cannot express, so instead moves to speak of 'what' a person is or was. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958], Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1998.

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