



The Sound of Disappearance: on *Duelos* by Clemencia Echeverri

Chaire internationale de philosophie contemporaine: 2e semestre 2020-2021

Seminar session 7 "Grammars of Listening: on Memory after Trauma" from the Paris 8 University directed by the Colombian philosopher María del Rosario Acosta.

April 21, 2021.

Seventh Session

The Sound of Disappearance: on *Duelos* by Clemencia Echeverri

The Sound of Disappearance Main readings: J.D. Pérez, “Sonorous Rubble, Mourning Affect,” in Echeverri, C. *Duelos* (Museo Nacional y Ministerio de Cultura, 2019) 66-79; Acosta López, M.R. “Art as Resistance to Erasure: on *Fragmentos* by Doris Salcedo and *Duelos* by Clemencia Echeverri”, in Lina Britto and Ricardo López-Pedrerros, *Colombia Revisited* (2 vols) (NY: Routledge, forthcoming). Recommended: Chirolla, G. “The Politics of the Scream in a Threnody,” in Zepke, S. and Sullivan, S. (eds.) *Deleuze and Contemporary Art* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 15-33; Uribe, M.V. “Against Violence and Oblivion: The Case of Colombia’s Disappeared,” in Polit Dueñas, G. and Rueda, G. (eds.) *Meanings of Violence in Contemporary Latin America* (Palgrave): 38-52 Other: Bargu, B. “Sovereignty as Erasure. Rethinking Enforced Disappearances,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23: 1 (2014): 35-75.

[Introduce Clemencia and announce the session order]

Let’s go back to our previous session and some of the questions that I was tackling a week ago, because they are an important context for our conversations today with Clemencia and her wonderful and inspiring work. Part of what we addressed last time via Gabriel García Márquez and José Alejandro Restrepo’s work, are questions concerning the role art can play by consistently denouncing various forms of institutional and historical oblivion. In these contexts, I argue, artworks have the power to envision plausible ways of formalizing and materializing alternative, non-institutional modes of memorialization and, and *as*, resistance to forgetting, while also displacing the grammars that usually govern and decide in advance what deserves to be recognized, perceived and render believable. By introducing therefore and giving shape to alternative grammars of sense, art sometimes is capable of radically questioning the criteria that determine what is and is not made audible, and thereby, what is and is not taken as memorable, politically recognizable, and historically indexable. In doing so, to put it in terms that we’ve been using throughout our seminar, *art seems to be able to bring lo inaudito into audibility without necessarily deciphering it or reducing it to meaning, but rather by passing on the claim of the unforgettable, namely – as we’ve been dealing with this question in our seminar so far – the fact that the latency of the unheard-of is very much at the center of our present’s most unpostponable needs.*

Now, as a framework for these reflections on art and the task of what I described last time as listening to the erasures of history, we recalled García Márquez’s words in the context of his Nobel prize acceptance speech:

I dare to think that it is this outsized reality, and not just its literary expression, that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters. A reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths [...]. Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been *a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable*. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.

This statement gathers in a powerful way the task that we've been exploring along this seminar: when we are dealing with traumatic forms of violence, I've argued, what awaits and demands to be told—to be listened to and remembered—exceeds in each case all the mechanisms by which we usually represent and account for the world. This, we might say, is the contemporary form of the “crux” described by García Márquez in his speech: How can we render lives that would otherwise seem so implausible into *believable* lives? When it is extreme, as it often has been in Colombia, violence has that strange quality that Hannah Arendt described, as we also explored during the session devoted to her work, as a “horrific originality.”¹ That is, there are moments when violence goes beyond *destruction* and brings about something *entirely new*, something previously unimagined—realities so unprecedented that we often grapple with the absence of any grammar or framework of meaning that could allow us to apprehend, represent, and make sense of them.

Thus, the struggles with credibility that surround the difficulty of giving testimony and bearing witness to the traumatic, as we've seen so far, are not simply the result of a voluntary skepticism on the part of those who listen to such stories. Arguably, *the unheard of* (lo inaudito) enters the stage here in order to help us capture what is at stake in both Arendt and García Márquez's words: *it is because we are still wanting in categories by which to name, think, and denounce such degrees of violence that we refuse to acknowledge their possibility—to hear them as something believable—, and just for this reason such degrees of damage are ultimately cast under the category of the “unbelievable.”* Extreme violence, in its horrific originality, both outrages and renders us incapable of listening by depriving us of the resources—semantic, aesthetic, and even bodily—through which we might hope to grasp it.

¹ Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding* (New York: Schocken, 1994), 309.

[A consequence of this dearth of resources by which *to render our lives believable* is that whatever remains inaudible is confined to a region beyond memory. Oblivion is not only the result of a conscious decision to silence, erase and cover our ears when we are forced to confront the stories that horror can produce: where violence has destroyed all available frameworks of meaning, and thus all the dimensions along which we might perceive and apprehend the world, *oblivion embodies an induced paralysis of our capacity to as much as imagine a site, a point of encounter, a mode of communication that could actively enable an attentive listening, not only of something that we are told, but precisely of that which does not let itself be told—and yet must be remembered.*]

When we lack the resources by which to render those stories into what García Márquez calls, in the passage I just read, “believable lives,” we should not be looking for ways to confirm, corroborate, or lodge them into a linear chronology so as to invest them with a traditional (conventional) intelligibility. The question is rather how to create sites—imaginary, if necessary—where these stories may be told without being excluded as unbelievable. The question, then, is whether we can understand memory—and thus history, which will now have little to do with “monumental” history—no longer as a compilation of facts, the verification of data, or an archive of evidence, but as the task of conceiving and enabling *real and active forms of listening*. *How can we produce the conditions, the frameworks of meaning, the resources that would render believable—and therefore truly audible, even in their silences and erasures—the lives and stories of violence, the truths (understood always as plural) that emerge from out of the silenced site of lo inaudito? How, ultimately, can we offer companionship to those who endure unspeakable loss, and a space for mourning, remembrance, and grieving for horrors that do not always allow themselves to be told, but that nonetheless demand to be listened to?*

I would like to take these questions as guidelines as I now turn my attention to *Duelos*. I aim to explore the way in which the work imagines and shapes other modes of making memory and building history; more than anything else, I am interested in its capacity to make us aware of the need to create sites and temporalities where these tasks can be carried out under the imperative of a radical listening. Spaces and times where the fragments of memory can be heard as fragments without being compelled into a univocal order and appearance, because their legitimacy is no longer grounded on an objective correspondence, proven and tested against reality, but on the evidence (as clear as can be) of the ethical claim that constitutes them: that we must urgently find a grammar for them—a framework of meaning, both perceptual and semantic—that may allow them to become audible in their contradictions, excesses, and breaks. Most importantly, these

grammars should convey the strength by which such fragments call to us from out of that place, between life and death, whence the testimonies of the survivors – and of those that did not get to survive, but still claim to be heard – speak to us, reminding us that there can be no future, that there cannot even be a present unless we are able to sense that irregular ground that seems to open beneath our feet. The ground where the pain, the excess, the multiple silences, and the damaged spellings transform into a point of departure and the hinge of a promise—contentious, always open to dispute, barely murmured—of a different future and a different way of listening.

Before focusing our attention on *Duelos*, however, we must also approach the space where *Duelos* was exhibited and inaugurated for the first time: *Fragmentos*, the counter-memorial designed by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo as the first of three monuments commissioned as part of the Havana peace agreement between the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian government. As stated in the text of the final agreement, article 3.1.7: “*the weapons surrendered by the FARC-EP will be used to build 3 monuments: one located in the United Nations building, one in the Republic of Cuba, and one in Colombian territory, in a site to be determined by the political organization that will emerge from the transformation of the FARC-EP, in agreement with the National Government.*” The fact that *Duelos* was the first artwork and installation that was exhibited in the context of *Fragmentos* (together with a work by Colombian artist Felipe Arturo titled *Antibalas* [Bullet-proof] [slide 2] which we will not discuss today) cannot go unnoticed in our approach to Clemencia’s work. Let’s devote then sometime first to enter the space inaugurated by *Fragmentos*, before we try to imagine how it must have felt to be standing on those tiles under the projected video light and the polyphonic sonorous intensities of Clemencia’s *Duelos*.

1. *Fragmentos*: To Forge Pain into Strength [slide 3]

Just by walking into *Fragmentos* one gets a sense of the eloquence and power of this space. Whoever crosses the threshold is first welcomed by the ruins of the old nineteenth-century house that hosts Salcedo’s counter-monument [slide 4]. Carefully preserved, these ruins mark out the space as a site that is already itself an in between: a space that remains somewhere between the past and the present, life and death, the ruin and something that dwells on within. The space thus demarcated by ruins is divided into three areas, two of which are to be used as exhibition spaces and one equipped for video projection, although they all merge through connecting glass walls, as if to remind us that there is no inside or outside of violence, just as there is no inside or outside

of pain [slide 5]. Most importantly, however, when we decide to enter this space—to expose ourselves by accepting its invitation to exit the outside—we discover that it is not simply an interior to be in, for we also feel ourselves called upon to experience what it is like to be *on* it, to let the place hold our weight and be moved by the uneven floor tiles whose folds compel us to mind each step to avoid tripping, barring the possibility of idly strolling around the room. The past here is not simply a support, it also propels us towards the present—with a thrust that is no less measured, careful, conscious of the risks entailed by making one’s way through an unstable, broken, and fragmented terrain. [slide 6]

There is no way to describe what it is like to walk into *Fragmentos* without quoting the figures that welcome us silently with a discrete but incisive presence: this jagged horizontal plane is made out of 1296 individual tiles, themselves made out of 70 tons of melted weapons [slide 7] that were then molded into 50 zinc sheets hammered and shaped by 12 women [slide 8], survivors of sexual violence during the conflict, who projected onto the metal the resilience with which, after enduring so many hardships, they decided to remain strong in the face of atrocity. Ángela Escobar, one of these 12 women, describes her experience in a video that meets visitors as they enter the space: “We hammered for days”—she tells us—“powered by the hatred that sexual violence left in us and by the anger of war. But through this we could free ourselves of those feelings. Now we are standing on the weapons, and the weapons are no longer a weight on the country.”

[A version of the video can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7rAb2O0JV8>]

To experience *Fragmentos* is to tread on a floor that was forged with and through pain and tenacity—the tenacity that comes from survival—and to hear the sounds of the hammers blowing on the tiles as they echo through the room. To move across this space is to live in it and to lend an ear to its silences. In their many folds the tiles preserve the *mark* of a pain that is now *inscribed* on a material that was once the very source and means of violence, and which now sustains a powerful act of resistance (“now we are standing on the weapons”). What is thus *written* in this space is something that cannot be said aloud but whose eloquent silence nonetheless communicates, forcefully, through the very act of deforming and reshaping these tiles. There is something here, in the quiet dialogue between the space, the inside and outside of the gallery, and the uneven tiles that overwhelm us in their spectacular presence, that no longer represents

war and that now lays an uneven ground for the possibility of a present that is committed to its remembrance.

Here, then, Colombia's history of violence is translated into a history of resistance, of tenacity and resilience. The story told here is that of a capacity to stand over that history of violence, even if what comes from it is something other than words – perhaps **solely** the very gesture of having survived. Like the floor that shapes it, this can be a form of survival that persists quietly and patiently without drawing attention to itself. Because the memorial is both there and not there: these tiles, which at first may have been the sole protagonists of the space, are now to be inhabited by other modes of representation, by multiple ways of telling the history of the conflict and of dealing with the difficulties of its memorialization and the challenges of its remembrance. Dozens of artists will be invited to exhibit in these rooms during the next 53 years—equivalent to the duration of the conflict—and they will be able to use the space to forge history and memory in other ways, to produce remembrance and to find ways of resisting its disappearance. The temporality of the space is thus structured by a sustained engagement with an open form of listening, one that the Colombian State must support (and the National Museum must guarantee). The effort that must go into elaborating a memory and a counter-memory of the conflict will thus become audible, visible, perceptible **here** in its myriad forms of representation.

Salcedo has often stated that the purpose of a counter-monument is not to tell History with a capital H, to offer a triumphalist account of the facts or to establish a range of valid meanings in advance. Instead, it should aim to make the present sensitive to a plurality of pasts that resist disappearance, including those that do not let themselves be told, represented, or collected in official narratives. The floor tiles and the open space demarcated by *Fragmentos* are there to enable other modes of resonance for **sounds that might otherwise remain unheard**. Thus, by stressing the idea of a counter-monument Salcedo means to remind us that when we are dealing with a past that is yet to be produced we should not aspire to the monumentality of history understood as a discursive regime that settles on a *true* account and a *sole* meaning. Instead, we should cultivate the kind of gesture that she herself has often accomplished in her artworks: **that of denouncing the fact that there still are unheard-of voices—even if no one can ever hear them, of being there for those whose mourning has been stolen from memory, and of inscribing the very mark of oblivion, for in Colombia – as we discussed during our last session – history is not just erased but also made and remade by oblivion.**

Although Salcedo has enacted this gesture in many different ways throughout her works, her way of doing so in *Fragmentos* is singular and different. The work is responsive to its historical moment and takes sides in a present that, despite all uncertainty, has placed its trust on the end of the war. In that sense, there is a telling distinction to be made between *Fragmentos* and other works by Salcedo. Let's take one among many to gauge the significance and singularity of the decisions taken by Salcedo in developing *Fragmentos* vis a vis the main corpus of her work.

In *Disremembered III* (2014) [slide 9], conceived in preparation for Salcedo's first major retrospective at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, we see thousands of burnt needles that seem to pierce and tear a piece of barely perceptible silk, clinging to a ghostly shirt-like body as it hovers from the wall. This is a work that lends itself to view and yet conceals itself, questioning its own visibility. One doubts whether it is there, present; from certain angles it can be mistaken for a drawing sketched in pencil—and from others it seems to vanish from view. The curator of the retrospective, Julie Rodriguez, has told me that Salcedo produced the piece in response to her encounters with mothers from Chicago's South Side who had lost their children to “gang violence”—a euphemism often used to obscure the structural nature of police violence against African-Americans in this city where historical racism is paradigmatically instantiated and translates into alarming statistics.

In *Disremembered III* a pain that cannot be shed covers the body like a second skin—it is worn *a flor de piel* (to use a Spanish expression that points back to another of Salcedo's works and which signals the point at which emotions can be said to “bloom” into skin) while also taking on the potential role of a protective layer, a shield against any attempt at external contact, for this shirt is as painful to touch as it is to wear [slide 10]. The work speaks to us about that state of latency brought on by loss and mourning that cannot be worked through, when the unresolved nature of violent deaths prevents those afflicted by them to even remember them, to grasp them as part of the past, leading the loss to repeat itself over and over, obsessively, as a present. The fragility of the fabric, along with its painful and yet imperceptible presence, the sculptural quality that places the piece somewhere between a drawing and a carving, an inscription that at once marks out and distances itself from a field of tangibility; everything in this work speaks to us about something that Salcedo has described, on multiple occasions, as the core of her work as an artist: “the work of mourning and its topology.”

Now back to *Fragmentos*: although the counter-memorial also places itself at this interstice between loss and its working through, its mode of appeal seems different. When we enter this site and walk on these tiles, as our imagination turns to the places inhabited by the voices of those who are no longer with us, we sense that Salcedo is no longer summoning a pain that “blooms into skin.” What we have here is not an image of a mourning that is trapped in its own impossibility, not even the timid promise of life that sometimes peaks through some of her works [slide 11]. Instead, we sense an affirmation, or at least a wager in favor of the possibility that one day we might no longer bear and wear this pain on our skin—that we will no longer have to. *Fragmentos* seems to suggest that the marks that this pain leaves on the body and the repetition of its occasionally insatiable demands do not exhaust the sense of the present, and that like Ángela Escobar we may yet be able to say that the pain is now beneath our feet, that it grounds us and sustains us—that we are standing on it.

The robustness of a ground that holds us is connected to the gesture by which a material so deeply charged with a history of violence has been transformed into beauty. This beauty compels us to occupy and redistribute the space of our own present; it dares us to set ourselves loose from the trap of pains, grudges, hatred, resentment, and rage, and to translate and transform them; to materialize them into the strength that summons memory and into the memory of that strength. Of course, there is no denying that Salcedo is here running the risk of aestheticization, and that there are further risks entailed in the symbolism of a pain that is molten and poured into an homogeneous structure that is ultimately too full, we might say, to make room for anything other than itself. The weightiness, the solidity, the ultimate monumentality of the tiles, which can almost be said to stand out from the ground, might not be enough for—and might even contradict—the kind of resistance needed to counter the temptation to monumentalize memory. These are indeed some of the risks that Salcedo has taken by producing a memorial like *Fragmentos*. Perhaps what I have described as an almost self-effacing floor that draws attention away from itself can be perceived nonetheless as the excess of a presence that, by being too grounded, too stable, too assured of its own strength, might hinder the sensitivity to fragmentation that is required by any real and open experience of listening.

It may indeed be inaccurate to describe a work like *Fragmentos* as instilling a sense of disorientation. But it would be just as inaccurate to say that the counter-monument leaves us with a sense of definite resolution and closure. It is rather an invitation to enter into what I was calling already since our last session a “site for believability,” where the truth is not something

to be proven but rather something to be experienced as the possibility and opening of the very act that could convey it, with all the interruptions, subversions, and contradictions that populate those sites that remain at the threshold between life and death, past and present, pain and resilience, as we wait and search for the appropriate grammars to render such truths audible.

2. *Duelos*: The Sound of Disappearance [slide 12]

<https://www.clemenciaecheverri.com/studio/index.php/proyectos/duelos-2019>

If the floor in *Fragmentos* can strike us as all too solid, something in the work might yet unsettle the sense of a misplaced firmness beneath our feet. This is exactly what Clemencia Echeverri taps into in her work *Duelos*, the first installation to take over *Fragmentos* as an exhibition space. In complete darkness we see a video projected onto the floor where mounds of earth seem to rise out of the cold tiles, abruptly transforming the room into a space inhabited by specters. Still at first, the earth slowly begins to speak to us. We hear a rumor, a murmur, whispers that gradually become louder—or maybe it is just that it is getting harder and harder not to hear them—and whose shrill—feminine?²—intensity and fragmented, interrupted—although stubborn and insistent—texture contrast with a masculine background voice, a low, clean, even chanting that reminds us of the gravity of Gregorian choirs. The voices—reduced to their “essential phonetic elements”²—are fragments of the testimonies of the female relatives of those who lie buried under a field of rubble and who can no longer take up a place in the space of the sonorous.

These images and sounds over which we stand refer to those who disappeared and whose bodies lie buried in La Escombrera, a place in Medellín that is literally known as ‘The Rubble Dump.’ The site of La Escombrera is a conspicuous scar on the city landscape: a dumping ground for ruins and residues that hides the ghastly secret—a secret well too known to all—of a series of “operations” (code-named Mariscal, Potestad, Antorcha, and Orión) during which Colombia’s Military Forces, National Police, and Air Force, in collaboration with paramilitary groups, disappeared a number yet to be determined of young people from the Comuna 13 neighborhood (the figure is somewhere between 100 and 300, although the official count is 138). After a series

² See David Medina, “Una imagen resonante,” in the exhibition catalog *Duelos*, edited by Clemencia Echeverri (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia and Mincultura, 2019), 106. The final voice arrangement by singer Ximena Bernal is a musical composition, a spectral analysis, a sort of whispered funeral chant.

of failed operations by the Office of the District Attorney the authorities have still not been able to retrieve the remains of those whose mutilated bodies were dumped on this site.

A relentless murmur whispers without saying anything, seemingly rising from the earth as it gradually begins to shift under our feet—shaking with the rhythms of the mumbling voices, as if heeding their injunction to unbury, to remove, to scratch the earth that hides the bodies for which this choir of voices is calling. Suddenly, these voices are overshadowed by a thundering noise: in videos that are now projected on the walls we see a dump truck about to unload its contents on that lifeless mountain [slide13], and we hear the sudden, clattering sound of debris falling on the heap followed by the sound of rubble falling on rubble, piling layer upon layer of waste. Likewise these layers of noise now pile over the sound of the voices, preventing us from understanding what they might be saying beneath the mountain's deafening clamor. As the projections multiply—first one, then two, and eventually one for every wall in the room—one cannot help but feel surrounded by this tumultuous and repeated collapsing, crashing, and booming through which the work aims perhaps to create an audible counterpart to the experience of silencing *it speaks about*. [slide 14]

We realize then that this shifting earth that loosens the tiles of *Fragmentos* and makes them resonate above the empty metal of which they are made (and which itself shelters so many lifeless voices), is not moving so as to overturn, dig out, or release something that lies buried there and calls out for visibility. *It is an earth that swallows us, that gives us vertigo, that confirms what La Escombrera silences out loud: the disappearance of those bodies that, known to be there, will not be found [according to estimates, it would take over four million dollars to exhume what may be Latin America's largest shallow grave]; the impossibility of a mourning those voices that call for these bodies; and the impotence that comes with feeling in your own body if only an inkling of the awareness of that impossibility.* Thus, the earth from which nothing emerges becomes a host of stones that now heap over one another, absent tombstones for those graves, a proper name for each but an epitaph for none [slide 15].

With this installation Echeverri has found a way to invest disappearance with a body and a voice, a sound of its own. Walking into that dark room is like entering the digestive apparatus of Colombia's ghastly state and parastate system that has fostered the atrocious crime of forced disappearance. As we stand in the middle of the room—assuming we are able to stay on our feet: the feeling of dizziness is unavoidable—we feel little by little how these bodies that we do not

see, but that we know are lying there, beneath our feet, around us, are “digested,” as if there were a gigantic stomach churning and revolving us as it tries to cast from itself what it has decided to brand as disposable—dispensable, killable. La Escombrera is the perfect symbol—perfectly horrifying—of what Banu Bargu, coining a new category by which to understand the workings of state power in the postcolonial context, describes as the “sovereignty of erasure.” [See Banu Bargu, “Sovereignty as Erasure: Rethinking Enforced Disappearances.” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23:1 (2014): 35-75.] According to Bargu, in the postcolony the state’s absence of legitimacy paradoxically coincides with its nearly paranoid urge to become legitimate, or better, to compensate for that absence of legitimacy with the excessive spectacle of its power. However, what is publicly displayed in this spectacle is no longer the state’s right to punish, but its capacity to erase—albeit spectacularly—the traces of its own violence.

An erasure, then, that displays itself as spectacular: there can be no better way to describe La Escombrera. The mountain could not be said to hide—on the contrary, it rises gigantically for everyone to see, concealing a secret that “everybody knows” but nobody dares to denounce. And if an accusation were to be made, or a suit to be filed, there is not even any need to play deaf: even when the state agrees to a forensic inquiry—an operation that Echeverri tracks with her camera, lucidly picking up what is paradoxical about such a search—there is no way of proving what happened there. The very spectacle of the state’s capacity to render invisible, to obliterate—not only to take life and to brand as *killable*, but to disappear the body—and to thereby erase from itself all trace of that dark and ghastly side, is thus constitutive of and essential to its operation.

And yet, as Juan Diego Pérez argues in his reading of Echeverri’s work, the rubble as a notion entails a resistance to any will and attempt to make it vanish. Something about the rubble outstrips this power to erase and obliterate, a remainder that will not allow itself to be disposed of:

as an abandoned remainder, piled up and exposed to degradation like fistfuls of dust in the air, the rubble is nonetheless always an obstacle, however precarious and obstinate in its precarity, to the consummation of the violence of disappearance; and so an obstacle that reminds us of the impossible erasure [...]. [T]he presence of the rubble reminds us that there is no body, no matter how vulnerable its appearance in the world, whose matter can (be made to) disappear outright, without remainder. [Juan Diego Pérez, “Escombros sonoros, afectos dolientes,” in *Duelos*, 82]

Indeed, if *Duelos* manages to communicate the modes in which disappearance, in the ghastliest of its forms, is carried out through a visible theatricality, the work also and simultaneously stages an effective resistance to the spectacle of disappearance by turning to the register of sound in order to interrupt the mode of functioning by which power has come to monopolize the grammar of the visual. *Duelos* presents as audible what is not seen, it presents it as something that never ceases to make itself heard, to resonate. No matter how thunderous the rumor of the falling rubble, the voices are, if not noisier, more persistent in their murmuring. They return, they fill up the empty space—the voice here becomes space, as though to inhabit the place that the body of the disappeared person cannot occupy.

“How does one speak to a disappeared person?” wonders José Roca in his reading of *Duelos*. I think that the work rather allows us to imagine how those who are disappeared can speak to us from out of that place of resistance to forgottenness, calling out for a place in the regime of the audible, since the most that the state and its mechanisms can and mean to do is to keep them from view. How, then, does the disappeared person speak to us?—or, if one prefers—and ultimately this is perhaps what makes the work so powerful—how is it that disappearance becomes audible and resonant, and will not desist in sounding? What is the sound of its unforgivable erasure? What is the sound of the voices of those who do not cease to look for the bodies, what is the resonance of the state’s efforts (and those of the parastate, the legal and paralegal violences that have forged such a singularly sinister alliance in Colombia) to silence them? And how is it that nonetheless their resonant noise is both non-digestible and impossible to ignore?

I think, then, that the call that the work places on us is not the demand to utter a discourse, a claim, or a reply. Instead, we are being summoned to listen, to imagine how we can receive and interpret the voice that speaks from out of that place between life and death, which in radically challenging all the categories available to us for making sense of the world runs the danger of going unperceived amidst the rubble that, in such a case, would finally manage to definitively bury what the work so powerfully endeavors to overturn. This may not yet be a resource by which we could finally grasp those seemingly impossible lives as something believable, lives whose impossibility is framed by a visual narrative that the state controls and struggles to perpetuate. But it is at least our first glimpse of a sonorous grammar that could be powerful enough to render them audible—and thereby to interrupt and disarticulate the regime that, try as it might to hide them, will not be successful in silencing them forever.