

The Territories, the Needles, the Failures

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Translated from the original Spanish by Juan Julián Caicedo

The land cannot be tranquil in the wake of sacrifices: It is a restless land, plowed by presences as much as it is by absences, limited not only by physical boundaries of blood and fire but by invisible ones as well, of added terrors and secrets. Such is the land of war, which won't fit in with pacifier narratives. How can it be named then? How can it be made visible?

As Didi Huberman has put it, ours are times of obfuscations and invisibilities. Light sometimes goes missing so that we see nothing, and it shines sometimes to such extremes that it makes us blind. Space becomes discontinuous, according to Passolini, when it is subjected to focal points of light that get switched on and off at the whims of the powers that be. So it is too in the nocturnal horizons of the Colombian fields. Minute quivering lights become visible, make themselves present in the distance, and at the same time, however, they usher in a zone of unfathomable and mute shadows: The fringes of the official narratives and iconography.

Clemencia Echeverri's off-center image emerges from that zone, from those fissures, from those silences, to reflect on what goes unseen notwithstanding an excess of visibility, to meditate on the steep and profound forces of memory's layers, on the fraught present, on the impossibility of repose in anxiety-ridden times. It is the reverse of glittery mediatic fanfares, the counter-narrative of the documentary and the newscast, as it assumes a perspective that shuns light, distinctness, immediacy, and plunges – iconoclastic – into the blind labyrinths of the unseen and the unnamed. It is there that a dense space solidified by time gets unfurled. The territory has been broken physically and mentally. How is a new map to be drawn?

In one of Echeverri's works, a house taken – as in Cortázar's tale – emerges with its atavistic symbolism in full display: Doors opening and closing, corridors leading who

knows where, inscrutable nooks and corners. Then, finally, an invasion of ghostly, overflowing presences. The ancestral house, the sheltering one, the dwelling and the refuge – the one that Bachelard conjured up – is now ridden with porosities that cannot curb the exterior pressure.

Analogous to the river of *Treno* [Funeral Song], here a human cluster gets scattered throughout the rooms and inundates the house. This house no longer protects, and neither does it fix boundaries or provide lodgment. The territory has come undone in the non-site of war, and so has the house which used to stand at the center of that territory. Privacy, intimacy and rootage succumb before the invasion of violent forces. The endless amount of alien presences that have taken possession of this house provoke a circular movement. Nothing remains, everything moves, and yet, nothing advances either. There is in fact a centripetal movement within which the stage and its characters appear to be simply sinking. There is no future; time and space collapse inward.

That piece, loaded with silences, with spectral presences, with closing doors, stands as the counterpart of another piece that Echeverri put on display simultaneously in the 43rd *Salón Nacional de Artistas* at the *Museo Antioquia (Casa del Encuentro)* in Medellín. In this occasion it has been as though the artist were proposing to show the two sides of the moon in two simultaneous expository events in two cities, thus creating another symbolic territory that stands to overflow its expository enclosures. Still, both of those images appear as dark sides: neither one shines, both may be counted as part of the invisibilities that Didi Hubermann has posed; but however that may be, they are two interrelated instances of darkness.

While the house of *Supervivencias* [Survivals] displays the wound of its looted private spaces, the piece at the *Salón Nacional* capsizes in the whirlpool of a loud, apocalyptic, public and collective sacrifice. A fury is let loose there with the power of fire in an ancestral altar, which stands in contrast with the house – that other altar meant for mute and minor sacrifices. The two pieces are united, nonetheless, by their rhythm, by the same circular movement, by the impossibility of a lineal deployment of space and time, and reasserted with the über-darkness of the exhibition halls, the damming, the claustrophobia.

Simultaneously, and as an element in an oblique relation with the work, a spider offers a small and silent commentary, as subtle as it is potent: It spins its web, unweaves it, spins again. Echeverri's images stand also as frustrated spiders, unable to construct a homogeneous and faultless fabric. A resource of choice for the artist is then the strategy of the visual and sound montage when the intention is to point at the gaps, the hollows in territories, in language, in images. Montage turns out to be thus the proper strategy when juxtaposing distinct realities between which there is no solution of continuity, even as they are part and parcel of the same framework of lights and shadows.

Nothing may be seen, but something has transpired in the dark, between image and image, between one and another focal point of light. Their exteriority notwithstanding, the fields, the mountains, the villages, the houses will no longer be displayed in a placid and Cartesian space. This work's space is presently a surface full of scars, not unlike the skins of the survivors. History has passed over it, has shaken, broken it. Shadows may perchance be concealing the humps and pits of the new map; and the same may be said of Echeverri's images. But the latter have other ways of speaking to you and me ... as is the case with that feminine hand in *Doble Filo* [Double-Edged], which imaginarily rebuilds with drawing strokes of a needle, over and over, the house that natural and man-made disasters obliterate in turn, over and over. Echeverri's image may be conceived as that obstinate needle, in the hands of a Sisyphus whose stubbornness equals his awareness of the futility of his labors.