

## CLEMENCIA ECHEVERRI: LIMINAL

*The threshold is the transition to the unknown. Beyond the threshold, a completely different ontic state begins. This is why death is inscribed on every threshold. In all rites of passage, we die to be reborn beyond the threshold. Death is experienced as a transition. Whoever crosses the threshold undergoes a transformation.*

BYUNG-CHUL HAN, *The Expulsion of the Other*

Disturbance and confusion are two of the emotions that the viewer experiences when visiting Clemencia Echeverri's video installations; not only when confronting them for the first time, but on every encounter.

The images and sounds in Echeverri's art are intense, excessive, and fragmentary. They surround and challenge the spectator in dark spaces, forcing him/her to stand or to wander around the exhibition space, acting, at the same time, as an active meeting point of the stimuli they broadcast. The works are not linear, they have no beginning or end. Even though they appeal insistently to emotions, they are not sensational, nor do they have a single meaning or a definite message.

In seeking to make sense of them, these feelings of distress and bewilderment are joined by others of frustration and, paradoxically, relief. *Frustration* at the lack of resolution or 'logical' connections among the audiovisual stimuli. *Relief* because the viewer is not forced to see, feel, or experience the facts that s/he senses, intuitively, and anticipates, because the artist never presents them explicitly nor suggests links between the components leading to a single conclusion. In fact, the works remain on the edge, on a limit or border that situates the spectator on a *threshold*, a point of transition (even literally, between light and shadow), by

confronting not the resolution but the *possibility*: what could have occurred or might occur. Echeverri's works do not focus on what happens, but on the very possibility that something might have happened or could eventually happen. They constitute a changing, relative, indeterminate point, partly due to the strategies used by the artist, and partly because each visitor must define his/her own level of tolerance: how much is s/he willing to feel, imagine, ask, or consider as a possible resolution. How to overcome the tension experienced, opening up to a new kind of sensitivity and understanding, or on the contrary, choosing to retreat, and not perceive or know.

Each work offers, in different ways, conditions designed to allow the viewer to decide whether or not to go beyond that limit, to experience the *liminal*.

The concept of the *liminal*, as proposed by Doctor of Psychology Brenda Elliot, involves at least two experiences: that of a possible transition, change, and transformation, and that of an intermediate, amorphous, and undefined situation that precedes the former and produces disorientation, tension, and a desire for resolution.

The term liminal finds its origin in the Latin *limen*, referring to a boundary or threshold. It may be likened to the threshold of a doorway, a place of transition from one state to another, a between state that leads to change, something new. Changes may be consciously chosen, or may, involuntarily and sometimes quite frighteningly, be thrust upon individuals, communities, or nations. A new set of circumstances may involve the dissolution of a former identity and the formation of a new identity. Between these two states, the condition of liminality suspends a person or a system in what may appear to be an amorphous and ill-defined state).

“Arts-based and narrative inquiry in liminal experience reveal platforming as basic social psychological process”, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 38 [2011], p. 96.

The feelings of confusion, disturbance, frustration and relief generated by Echeverri's video-installations could, therefore, be related to the presence of the liminal in them. Moreover, such presence could coincide with the experience many artists have during the creative process.

Art is, among an infinite variety of other definitions, the human expression and record of experience and movement through the liminal. Art is a neuronarrative archive of liminal experience, holding up a mirror to both subjective and objective features of the experience, allowing us to revisit it, speak about it, and learn from it (Elliot, 2011, p. 2).

Because the works are an "expression and record of experience and movement through the liminal" we can assume that this liminal state might take place not only while the viewer is interacting with the work, but also and above all, in the artist's perception of her Colombian environment, and her creative process. The two levels of the liminal experienced by the viewer –the state of disorientation and the state of transformation– seem to find an equivalent in the very processes the artist goes through when confronting and responding to the reality around her.

In an interview in 2015, Echeverri corroborates this assumption when answering a question about her process of developing works in relation to the Colombian context:

**Where does the investigative and creative work leading to your work with violent contexts begin?**

...When faced with a specific event, a space for dialogue, questioning, and tension opens up, especially when dealing with violence; responses to multiple states are triggered, which don't allow for calm, inattention, or indifference.

Dealing with violent contexts has meant creating my own time, a life without respite that has always been riddled with frustration, disenchantment, claim, and waiting. Being sensitive to difficult and violent events possibly coincides with sensations that resonate in one another, that had already penetrated an inherited past; the image already present in childhood, the return of a familiar sound [sic].

The task requires detonating what has been experienced and crossing boundaries using symbolic resources to make contact with

others. That is, to give power to incoherent, invisible states, revelatory acts, and collective gestures, through procedures found in the form, the rhythm of events, in the syntax of the materials that define a state of art (interview *Errata Magazine*, unedited, cited with the artist's permission).

Like the spectators, the artist in her creative process is thus situated at a point where diverse experiences converge: her feelings about what happens, the search for meaning, the confrontation with the visual and auditory material she collects, and a 'final' edited proposal, that supposes "transcending boundaries by means of symbolic resources to make contact with others". This proposal is, on the one hand, the expression and reflection of the way the artist feels and perceives her environment and, on the other, an artistic and ethical construction, given the type of issues and problems it poses.

The exhibition titled "Clemencia Echeverri: Liminal" includes a selection of videos and video installations made between 1998 and 2017: *Apetitos de familia (Family Appetites)*, *De doble filo (Double-edged)*, *Treno*, *Versión libre (Voluntary Testimony)*, *Juegos de herencia (Heritage Games)*, *Sacrificio (Sacrifice)*, *Supervivencias (Survivals)*, *Nóctulo*, *Sin cielo (Skyless)*, and *Subterra*. During this period, the visual language and the sound used by the artist changed significantly. As a result, the relationship with the viewer changed, becoming more complex.

Despite the changes over time and the differences between the works, each of them implies an experience of the liminal. Three different but interconnected levels –each essential to Echeverri and her processes of understanding what happens in her social context– make this experience possible: first, the interconnection between affective and intellectual dimensions stimulated by sound and images; second, the spectator's leading role in the construction of meaning, both of the works and what they communicate and propose; and finally, the technical level, associated with the medium –the video installation and the range of experience that it offers through processes of immersion and reflection–, which is handled differently in each work.

Given the spectator's leading and active role in these works, I will assume, as the author of the present analysis, the role of someone who, without pretending to cover all the visitor's possible reactions, acts as a 'case' spectator. From a perspective that moves between empathy (in the way our shared environment is felt and perceived) and an analytical attitude, I interact with the artist's proposal suggesting revelatory –I hope– interpretive clues that might provide the basis for a dialogue with other visitors to the exhibition.

### **The Liminal: Between Vital Emotions and the Reflective Conscience**

The pre-eminence of emotional and affective dimensions, as well as the constant transition between the literal and the metaphorical (between existing events or situations and the possible associations they evoke) link Echeverri's works to a process of preverbal understanding, which Elliot considers intimately linked to the liminal:

Art provides a depth of personal experience beyond speculation, an experience that accesses foundational human developmental processes that are believed to have preceded human language and writing (Zeidel, 2005), and integrates that which continues to be part of human meaning making through symbol, metaphor, and imagery (Elliot, 2011, p. 2).

The emotional and affective aspects, as well as the role of metaphors and symbols in Echeverri's art, are fundamental to the initial reactions and the process of comprehension inspired by the works. It is enlightening to establish a parallel between the transition from the affective to the intellectual in these works and Ernst Cassirer's ideas regarding the dominant role of the emotional dimension in mythical thought. He situates this dimension in opposition, or as a complement, to the analytical attitude of scientific thought:

The mythical world is found, if you will, in a world much more fluid and fluctuating than our theoretical world of things and properties, substances and accidents. In order to grasp this difference, we could say that what the myth primarily perceives is physiognomic, not objective characters. Nature, in its empirical or scientific sense, can be defined as "the existence of things insofar as it is determined by universal laws" (Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Sec. 14). Such "nature" does not exist for the myth; its world is dramatic, of actions, forces, and conflicting powers. In every natural phenomenon it sees only the collision of these powers. Mythical perception is always imbued with these emotive qualities: what is seen or felt is surrounded by a special atmosphere, joy or sorrow, anguish, excitement, exaltation or prostration. The efforts of scientific thought are directed at erasing all vestiges of that first vision; in the new light of science, mythical perception must disappear.

It does not mean that the data related to our physiognomic experience are destroyed and annihilated as such; they have lost all objective or cosmological value, but their anthropological value remains... This restriction of their subjective qualities is what marks the general path of science that defines its objectivity, but it cannot completely destroy their reality, since every sign of human experience claim its reality (Cassirer, *Philosophical Anthropology*, pp. 119-120).

Continuing this parallel between the affective dimension of mythical thought and the scientist's intellectual-analytical dimension, Echeverri's works situate the visitor in a point of understanding between the emotional and affective –as "human experience (that) claims its reality" –and the theoretical and intellectual. By becoming immersed in the works' images and sounds, the spectator confronts, in the first instance, his or her own emotions –and also those of the artist–, emotions that, as in the case of mythical thought, provide key elements for the understanding of what is being experienced and confronted.

Simultaneously, and given that the transition between immersion and reflection is inherent to the medium of video installation, visitors can take a critical stance with regard to their experience and question it in order to create meaning. Especially, when Echeverri reinforces the possibility of this transition by constantly including *continuities* (which make immersion possible) and *ruptures* between images, and also in the soundtrack (which force viewers to become aware of the technical resources used by the artist).

The constant shift between the affective and the intellectual is intensified by means of a determining component shared by all the works: the veiled presence of the *sinister*, which according to Eugenio Trías, (whose observations are founded in Schelling):

...It is that *heimlich* or *unheimlich*, that which "expected to remain secret, has been revealed". Something, therefore, that perhaps *was* familiar and has turned strange and inhospitable. Something that, when revealed, shows its sinister face, despite being, or precisely because it is, in reality, deeply, very familiar, the most familiar, intimate, recognizable (Eugenio Trías, *Beauty and the Sinister*, pp. 32-33.)

Echeverri's works, given their liminal character, inhabit the boundary, the possibility, from where the sinister is perceived, without revealing it. They transition between the familiar and the unfamiliar without finally uncovering what could become intolerable. In turn, this suggestion of something sinister, without really showing it, is a "condition and boundary" of the works' disturbing character and aesthetic appeal:

The sinister constitutes a condition and boundary of the beautiful. As a condition, aesthetic effect cannot occur without the sinister being, in some way, present in the artistic work. As a boundary, the revelation of the sinister destroys *ipso facto* the aesthetic effect. Consequently, the sinister is a condition and boundary: it must be present in the form of absence; it must be veiled. It cannot be revealed (Trías, 1984, p. 17).



An analysis of Echeverri's video installations from the perspective of the process of comprehension and construction of meaning that they stimulate in the spectators, allows us to recognize their liminal character in several instances: in the transition from the affective to the reflexive dimension –parallel to that of Cassirer's mythical and scientific thought–; the role played in this process by the symbolic and metaphorical aspects; and the veiled presence of the sinister.

In *De doble filo* (1999), the process of sketching a house in the sand –constantly washed away by seawater or rain– as well as an always unfinished drawing on a sheet of paper complemented by sounds of rushing water, storms, and cuts inspire a mixture of desire, hope, frustration, and despair. The absence of an explicit narrative turns the transformations involved in such processes into metaphors of possible, and hoped for homesteads; also of diverse causes –including the socio-political conditions of a specific space and time–, by which the houses are never built or are destroyed once they exist. The ambiguity contained in this situation allows for the recognition of threats or dangers associated with what a house can, on occasion, represent. As in works like Louise Burgoise's *Passages dangereux (Dangerous Passages)* or Doris Salcedo's *La casa viuda (The Widowed House)*, we glimpse a sinister dimension linked to the fact that a reality associated with protection, shelter, and privacy, like the home, can become a place of different types of physical and verbal abuse, which cause it to be perceived as uninhabitable and undesirable.

The mixture of emotions, the metaphorical and symbolic dimensions, as well as the presence of threat and strangeness within what is familiar, were also made manifest in *Apetitos de familia* (1998). In this work, the interaction of a baby's voice with the squeals of a pig being butchered; the beating of a heart combined with sepia images of the pig's entrails caressed and turned red by the artist's hand, and the embraces of those participating in the event, generate diverse emotions: anxiety, satisfaction, rejection, disgust, and fascination.

As the artist herself mentions, the fragmentation of scenes and sounds by not proposing a linear narrative, again opens the possibility of metaphor and ambiguity, in this case of the cycle of death offered as a sacrifice for life. They also suggest a connection to the atavistic attraction of blood, and the union and strengthening of tribal or affective ties. Finally, they generate associations with behaviors that outside the festive-ritual context can be interpreted as violent.

On the other hand, the sinister dimension is insinuated to the extent that this family ceremony celebrated in regions throughout Colombia, becomes in the work strange and problematic when perceived and seen in perspective and depth through an audiovisual medium. The medium allows the artist to define the elements involved in the celebration which, when fragmented, lose the thread that gives them their unquestioned value. Subsequently, it opens them to the possibility of a metaphorical sense that transcends their literalness. The strange, extraordinary character they acquire makes them enigmatic, suggestive, and fascinating.

In a recent interview, the artist explains much of this process when responding to a question about the way she approached the subject of rituals, specifically the ritual in *Apetitos de familia*:

At the time I was mainly interested in family behaviors. I had just finished *Casa íntima (Intimate House)*, which provided me, in a very natural way, with access to a house – with my camera–, to privacy, during one day, certain voices, certain characters. I think that process led me to explore what was mine, my own family. With camera in hand, I recorded the year-end pig celebration. It was a very important celebration in my family. We all handled the different cuts of pork, turning them into wonderful dishes that we enjoyed throughout the day...

...At the time I had already begun to explore those kinds of events that included certain seemingly violent elements... At first I was attracted by the violence in the procedures and the naturalness with

which they were handled. I went on to discover that it was actually all about getting together and celebrating. When I went to organize the material in the studio I discovered the photos with all the blood. I hung them up on the walls and began to view the event critically... I managed to stop seeing it as the natural and familiar custom I'd known since childhood. Then I realized that the video made it possible for me to see other things: the senses are exacerbated, they expand, our attention for things becomes different...

...I understood that these celebrations around the sacrifice of animals unite families and bring communities together. There is an interesting justification, which is not negligible. I was interested in the brutality associated with the traditional way things are done in farms, which appears hard and cruel... But as I viewed the material, I understood that it was more about getting together and affection. When the heart and viscera are removed from the pig, and then shared, what does that mean? At that moment, the animal is participating in a communion, a community, a family group, a union... (interview with the artist by Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, pp. 187-189).

The closeness to and the distance from the private experience of this celebration made it possible to connect it with a more collective and social experience:

**How did the soundtrack develop? Did it come out of the work? Did you know that the sound of the pig would play such an important role?**

The soundtrack for *Apetitos de familia* developed from the pig's squeal. It burst out and became an opera. The animal became the lead singer. As in any process, I was not initially very clear about where I was going. I began to identify the power of the sounds, and the images in particular. To see what happened if I placed the pig noise behind the

images of the family embracing. That's when everything came together; the celebration escalates and behind it, that loud squeal seems to invade everything, even the mountains. Everything is flooded with pain, a death squeal.

I wanted to make that link between family gatherings and what was going on at the time. I wondered how to make that (part of the) country visible, along with all the horror that began in that decade... At the time, I used the violent events that were controlling us. I had just gotten my master's degree in England and Pablo Escobar had just died. A decade earlier I'd experienced all the horror in Medellin. Colombia was one big pain, one big bomb. When the pig squeals, it was like everyone's scream. A natural scream, a present scream, that was in the air (interview with the artist by Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, p.191).

In *Treno* (2009), the sounds of the voices calling to people by their names without receiving an answer, as well as the confrontation with an insurmountable river, also produce anxiety and expectation. Additionally, the images of pieces of clothing rushing down the turbulent river increase the unease and distress. The river, however, not only generates emotions linked to those presences that suggest absences, but in its incessant and violent passage throughout the day and night, accompanied by the sounds of the fauna around it, it generates another range of emotions from terror and fear to fascination, admiration, and tranquility. Thus, the literally powerful and fluid water becomes a metaphor for forces that transcend human beings and are beyond their control. The river, the clothing, and the sounds are simultaneously an attractive and familiar presence that becomes strange and threatening.

As in the previous work, and a constant in her work, during the creative process the artist's intimate feelings and private experiences interact with collective and social events. *Treno* developed not out of the river, but from a feeling of profound helplessness experienced by the artist when she had no way to respond to a call for help from someone whose relative had suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared.

By telling me her story, this woman placed me at a distance. She revealed to me the impotence in which the country found itself, of not being able to solve or help someone with a problem. She asked me for help, but there was nothing I could do. And when I said so, it was as if I were speaking of our condition as a country. How is it possible that we can't help, that there is nowhere to go and no one to ask for help? What does this mean? That's when the idea came to me of a place with two shores. Like "you over there and me over here". And the image of the river came to me, which was not there in the beginning. That reflection had nothing to do with the river at all. Later, when I went to film in Cauca...

While doing the fieldwork, I became aware that the river was a place of the disappeared (people). The most awful horrors had just occurred; paramilitaries murdering peasants at two o'clock in the morning and throwing them off bridges. And so it made sense to do all that: the clothes, go looking for them, fishing them out. And, of course, the calling... (interview with the artist by Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, pp. 78-79, 83).

For Echeverri, the strength of the river, the space and the size of the video installation, evoke this inability to respond to those who ask for help from "the other shore":

In *Treno* I develop a sound and video installation from two different shores. It's a sad calling, a lament. An audio-visual space that dialogues, seeks an echo. A circular narrative fusion. A local, continuous, and recurrent scream that falls into the void. Silences swept away by Colombia's Cauca River. A familiar scream that goes unanswered. The voice that calls and invokes from one shore, bounces off the other, like a binding sound that circulates through space, touches the walls, tries to arrive. Matter supported by the flowing water and by the riotous cry (Clemencia Echeverri, "An Unanswered Call", *Sin respuesta*, p. 54).

Within the same Colombian context, relationships can be established between violent attitudes that imply abuse but are seen as 'normal', and celebrations like the 'party of the pig', on which *Apetitos de familia* is based, and that of the 'cock' in *Juegos de herencia* (2011). The set of gestures in *Juegos de herencia*, such as the blindfolding and spinning of the boys until they become dizzy; the indifference of those who attend the celebration; behaviors such as the striking and caressing of the half-buried rooster; and the sounds of the machete, the sea, and the digging of holes in the sand recreated by Echeverri, although alluding to an ancestral tradition, inspire fear, expectation, rejection, and fascination.

The artist finds the sound of the machete, central to this work, especially evocative:

The use of the machete, a cultural tool used in farming and to perpetrate acts of violence in this country in past and recent times, resonated in my conscience, pointing to its sound, its timbre, as the axis of the project. I follow this tool to uncover its hidden sound, its power, and the threat it represents (interview with the artist by Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, p.131).

Gustavo Gómez highlights the connection between these elements and the atrocities committed in Colombia while stressing the fundamental role played by audiovisual media in raising awareness:

At the same time, the "game" with the video camera makes it possible to capture the aftershocks of this situation, which in the midst of the bustle and the complexity of the ritual are difficult to perceive; for example, the moment when someone kicks the rooster's head after the ritual has ended (sic). This seemingly inconsequential event shows that the ritual is not a simple symbolic construction, a fictitious representation, but that it channels the latent impulses in our manner or way of inhabiting the world that are generally not perceived directly. In other words, it could be said that in this case the video camera captures, beyond the crucial moment of the animal's death, uncommon images related to the meaning of the

spectrum of violence. Thus, the video rescued from oblivion an event that, despite having been repeated many times, perhaps had not been captured with the appropriate intensity (Gustavo Gómez, "Juegos de herencia: la lógica de los espectros y la tecnología de la memoria" ("Heritage Games": The Logic of the Spectra and the Technology of Memory"), *Sin respuesta*, p. 25).

The rooster as a metaphor for helpless beings in any circumstance, and the questions regarding a celebration that evokes a rite of passage suggest other possible interpretations that, as in the case of *Apetitos de familia*, relate to the meaning of sacrificial rituals, the price of the transition to adult life, the mystery of the links that unite a community. The festive and familiar thus turn ominous and strange, but the strangeness also contains elements that reconnect with traditions and customs that are not so foreign and that hold clues to what it means to be human.

The allusion to animals in danger of being exterminated reappears in *Sacrificio* (2013). In this case, they interact with an uncontrollable fire, a force of nature as powerful as the river in *Treno*. The spectator is overwhelmed by fear, anxiety, and fascination as s/he stands before the flames that invade the screens and listens to the sound of the cattle that dominates the space.

As in Echeverri's other works, interpreted literally this may suggest connections with "normalized" events from the armed conflict in Colombia's rural areas, where cattle have been one of the victims in the struggle for territory:

... In *Sacrificio* the sound defines the stomping of cattle in captivity, cattle under permanent threat in rural Colombia. The event contains revenge, play, extortion, and threat. *Sacrificio* surrounds the viewer with six synchronized projections in which sound plays a leading role: the trepidation of the hooves on the patios fleeing towards extermination expresses stampeding evacuation and conflict. The horror and fear are

constructed through the soundtrack, which travels through, and overwhelms the space. This soundtrack is on a larger scale and rises above the stories and the spectator (interview with the artist by Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, p.200).

In *Sacrificio* the livestock also takes on a metaphorical connotation by referring to confined, abused, and endangered animals or human beings. Additionally, the fascination with the power of fire and death suggests an alternate perspective related to the horror's appeal and attraction, linked once again, to the sense of sacrifice.

*Supervivencias* (2013), the piece's sister-work, originally conceived as part of *Sacrificio*, confronts the viewer with another dimension linked to the sense of the sublime –similar to the feeling generated by the power of the river in *Treno* or of the fire–, suggested in this case by aspects of Colombia's topography: the immense distances and the almost insurmountable obstacles represented by the mountains and the immense rivers, the tropical exuberance, the sensation of distance and vulnerability. The latter are enhanced by images of a house in uncertain conditions: we can't tell if it is inhabited or being invaded by a group of men who, insistently and repeatedly, climb and descend the stairs inside the house. As in others, this work inspires multiple emotions and interpretations. It is possible to assume that the house is literally being captured by people seeking to take over the territory, or intimidate and displace its inhabitants. Also to see the scenes in its various metaphorical connotations: ie, relating them to the fascinating and terrifying nature of the topography; and the at once cozy and threatening aspects of the house, which as in *De doble filo*, question it as a symbol of protection and privacy.

The fear and vulnerability experienced at times in *Supervivencias* is also present in *Versión libre* (2010), in the presence of ghostly male figures projected onto fabrics hung in the middle of the room. These figures can be associated with the implicit and explicit invaders in previous works. They can also be related to the dark forces that inhabit our unconscious, or to powerful people who 'behind the scenes' are responsible for violent events in society. In the work, the faces of these individuals are only partially visible (masks cover their faces



almost entirely) during the process in which they emit words alluding to their personal stories and their previous connections to armed groups. The artist insistently and repeatedly superimposes both their words and their gestures as they lift the lower part of their balaclavas. The interaction between the movements of their fingers, the interspersed and interrupted voices, and the changing expressions of their eyes inspire a confusion of emotions including rejection, compassion, scorn, and sympathy. In them we sense the normalization of violent and criminal behavior, which coexists alongside repentance, and the individuals' strange and difficult relationships with their personal stories. At the same time, their attempts at communication –successful and frustrated at the same time– become metaphors for recognition of one's self and of others, of acceptance and rejection. The interaction with these individuals makes us see them as strangers, while also allowing for a possible familiarity with their processes, by putting ourselves –if we allow ourselves– in their place. This occurs partly because of the way in which the protagonists confront us, their voices and semi-visible faces in the foreground on a scale that makes them larger than us, forcing us to listen to them, to give them the opportunity to communicate and give us the chance to recognize them and create community, as the artist stresses:

**Based on a piece like *Versión libre*, nominated for the Luis Caballero Prize in 2011, what would you say is your position on the complex gray line between victims and victimizers?**

In this work, I journey through voices, ghosts, the unknown, through boundaries and questions. It's a path through an elapsed time laden with difficult stories, hidden truths, chapters in our barbarity contained in layers of victims and victimizers. A huge number of players are involved, including the viewer who, when standing in front of the work, feels as if he's being questioned. And this interpellation takes place in various directions: from the victimizer to a possible victim, that could be the spectator, or when the victimizer shows his vulnerability through his speech, becoming a victim of the same dominant forces to which he belongs. Guilt and suffering seem to flow through this piece and are

reinvented, secrets are discovered, and in the end the spectator finds him/herself in a complex place of assimilation and understanding...

...Rather than exploring directly the places of opposition where we think we stand, I created a thickly charged space that remained in the darkness: the former combatants' balaclavas intrigue the viewer and prepare him/her to listen carefully, to wait, to refrain from judgement, and even to forgive the almost unforgivable, as one of the victimizers requests. I think that by establishing borders between victims and perpetrators we create moral and differentiating positions that do nothing to clarify the confusing moment of confrontation and disagreement that occurred throughout the conflict. Knowing allows us to understand, to yield, open up space, and reconstruct rhythms of agreement. The artist in these cases tries to touch deep wounds, to risk and attempt to expose the human condition (interview in *Errata Magazine*, unedited).

Byung-Chul Han reinforces this notion of listening set forward by Echeverri and recreated by her in works such as *Voz, resonancias de la prisión* (2009) (Voice: Prison Resonances) (2009) and *Nóctulo* (2015):

Listening is not a passive act. It is characterized by a peculiar activity. First I have to welcome the other, that is, I must affirm the other in his otherness. Next, I listen to what he says. Listening is a lending, a giving, a gift. It's the only thing that helps the other to speak. It doesn't passively follow the other's discourse... Listening invites the other to speak, freeing him for his otherness... (*La expulsión de lo distinto / The Expulsion of the Other*, pp. 113-114).

...Listening has a political dimension. It is an action, a participation in the existence of others, and also in their sufferings. It is the only thing that links and intermediates between men so that they can create community (*La expulsión de lo distinto*, p. 120).

In *Nóctulo*, the voices of people forced out of their homes play simultaneously with the ultrasonic emissions of bats –which we presume now inhabit these places– and the sound of seeds as they drop incessantly until filling the screens. The fact that the spectator listens to the voices of these humans and bats fulfills a crucial ethical and social role for the artist:

I'm concerned about what happens at a distance, the unheeded and unattended, the unexpressed. I used the voice in several projects as a link and a contact. One example was in *Voz/resonancias de la prisión (Voice: Prison Resonances)*, where the National Museum, designed as the first penitentiary in Cundinamarca, operated as a platform to receive the voices of Colombian inmates in English prisons. The voice is also very much a part of works like *Cal y canto (Lime and Song)* (2000), *Treno* (2007), *Frontera (Border)* (2011), *Versión libre (Voluntary Testimony)* (2011), and now in a new project, *Nóctulo* (2015), operating as a presence that articulates the purposes of each work.

*Nóctulo* is supported by an ultrasonic sound platform, in resonance with its echo that guides the bat's flight and provides its location. Echoes have a primordial relationship with space, especially with the natural environment. Listening to the echo moves one from an earlier sound, passing through the present, then situating it in the 'after'. I apply distance to the sound, producing a wall that is broken, that is penetrated in a timeless way. The echo in *Nóctulo* pierces, brings closer from afar experiences, voices, fears, inaudible moments that ask to be heard. It's a moment of geographical and political distance in which the image shows us a continuous flow, from back to front, and the sound reverberates from outside and from within.

Speaking requires the other's attention; the voice is the organ between two elements. The person trying to communicate finds silence in the other. The voice is not a vacuum; on the contrary, it is a space for contact, of political presence, of attention. It is difficult to express, to let the body become manifest; the path of silent self-punishment has been

long. Speaking, calling out, and expressing are actions that break the isolation to produce reintegration, convergence, value. It's about giving the other back his dignity, doing him justice, being able to speak and generating an echo that resonates and values the importance of recognition. It's being able to be heard. Art will have to shorten distances between language and experience. Visual and sound mediation drive the encrypted to give it the place it deserves (interview in *Errata Magazine*, unedited).

Being impelled to listen and make sense of those voices and those sounds generates emotions ranging from sadness to compassion, fear and curiosity. The nostalgia and discomfort inspired by the images –perhaps the former inhabitants of the abandoned house– of unattainable ghostly beings overwhelm us. Metaphors re-emerge in relation to memories, the house, and the life cycle made possible by the plant-pollinating bats. Despite the strangeness produced by their flapping and the sounds they produce, they can still be recognized as sources of life. On the other hand, the familiarity embodied by the house is lost with the absence (forced or natural) of its inhabitants, the distance in time, and the arrival of the new inhabitants.

Finally, *Sin cielo* and *Subterra* (2017), in contrast with the presence of the sublime in the contemplation of the mountainous landscape in *Supervivencias*, question the ‘normalization’ and unfortunate familiarity acquired by Colombia's eroded and mistreated mountains. The presumably toxic liquid colors and stains –both attractive and disgusting– mixing in with the streams that flow into Colombia's mighty Cauca River allow one to sense the sinister pollution, even if we never actually see it. Neither is the relationship with the possible causes of this dumping of liquids ever established. The temptation exists to point an accusing finger at those who in several of the images seem to be dumping waste. However, the panoramic views of their physical environment and the ruins of a village on the mountaintop cause us to wonder whether they are the perpetrators or the victims in this scenario.

*Sin cielo* suggests a relationship with the consequences of unlawful or out-of-control

mining, as suggested in the description of the work that appears on the artist's website:

Because of gold mining, the soaring mountainous landscape in the town of Marmato, Caldas, in Colombia, disappears and topples down like successive voids out of control or boundaries. A landscape transformed into aggressive blotches along which travels the toxic virus. A restless territory in pain. It is a dark and somber landscape that surprises and paralyzes with its open, naked, and exposed condition, stripped of its origins.

Mining activities leave traces of cyanide and mercury, stir up the gray and green water producing devastation and suffocation. This activity leaves the death of the landscape hanging from cables, debris, garbage, and dense waters that carved as environmental pollution in every sense of the word. This "moral ruin" has profound effects on the territory's important political, social, and ideological dimensions ([www.clemenciaecheverri.com](http://www.clemenciaecheverri.com), on March 25, 2018).

In *Sin cielo*, as the cited text suggests, the mountain can also be seen as a metaphor for the planet and the human actions executed on it, and the viewer may well wonder about the social and economic interests and lifestyles for which, as humans, we are all, in lesser or greater measure, responsible.

All the works, therefore, offer the possibility of developing an affective and intellectual process of understanding and imagining of what was or is possible. From his/her liminal position the viewer fluctuates between the emotional and the reflective, the literal and the metaphorical, the aesthetic and the sinister. Although the works themselves are the condition of possibility for these processes, it is the spectator who determines their meaning and is the agent of what the received stimuli communicate. Therefore, the second level in which the works' liminal character becomes apparent, corresponds to the spectator's agency in the construction of meaning.

**The viewer at the liminal point: creator of meaning between the pregnant and the imagined resolution.**

One of the essential components of a video installation, especially those like Echeverri's that exploit the possibilities of space, is the complex interaction required with the work as Meigh-Andrews points out:

Video installations that utilise the exhibition space's possibilities for spreading the work spatially, and on multiple screens, require a viewer who is willing to indulge in a bodily, navigational and simultaneously reflective and synthesizing experiential process... Video installations are thus based on a form of expanded understanding of the work and the image, which takes the viewer's sensory and cognitive activities into account as a co-creative factor in the work's construction and meaning (Meigh-Andrews, pp. 340-41).

In addition to the aforementioned components, it is the characteristic incompleteness and fragmentary nature of Echeverri's works that demand the spectator's participation. They are incomplete not only because they lack a linear narrative with a final resolution, but above all, because the artist chooses to make visible only certain scenes

and avoids developing what is intuited as a 'logical' conclusion of the events.

In *Apetitos de familia*, the sounds and the images suggest a family ingesting a live pig, but we see neither the pig (except for its entrails) nor the food during the sacrifice.

*Juegos de herencia* is comprised of a series of gestures, objects, and sounds that could very well lead to the decapitation of the buried rooster, but there are no images showing the headless animal, its head, or the slaughter itself. Gustavo Gómez characterizes this situation from the "logic of the spectral":

Thus, returning to Jacques Derrida's ideas (Derrida and Stiegler, 1998), the idea of heritage referred to here is not of a past that has been left behind and that does not recur or repeat itself in the present, but is seen from the logic of the spectral: in this case, the specter of murder or violence that returns to the scene of a ritual in which an animal dies. We are faced with a specter because violence or death appear not as an enclosed whole, but as a voice, a sound, a fragmented and evanescent image (Gustavo Gómez, "Juegos de herencia, la lógica de los espectros y la tecnología de la memoria", *Sin respuesta*, p. 22).

The fire and cattle in *Sacrificio* seem destined to coincide in several of the videos, but that never happens; in the same way that it is impossible to say whether or not the house in *Supervivencias* has really been invaded.

In *Treno*, the metonymy of the articles of clothing floating down the river that someone on the shore tries to fish out remains unresolved: they allude to bodies that, dead or alive, are never seen. Nor do we have any idea about the motivation or the result of the calling from across the river. As Gustavo Chirolla points out, in this work what predominates is the *clamor* not the horror:

In her sonorous video installation, the Colombian artist places the

spectator in the midst of two large projections of the Cauca River, and without resorting to images of horror or extreme cruelty, as the water rises, the spectator in the middle feels as if he is sinking. Only at the end, by way of an allusion, do we discover certain traces –the *tanatopolitical clothing* swept away by the river. It is not a question of avoiding these representations out of moral modesty, but of achieving something else by avoiding the sensational and the spectacle of death: *Treno* is more the shout, the clamor, than the horror (Gustavo Chirolla, “Política del grito en una trenodia” (“Politics of the Shout in a 'Trenodia'”, *Unanswered*, p. 46).

Other equally absent beings make their presence felt through the traces of their actions on the mountain, the river and their precarious homes in *Sin cielo*, but as indicated, their role as victimizers or victims of abuse remains undefined.

Similarly, in *Versión libre* we hear fragments of the words and phrases used by half-masked individuals attempting to confess truths, but there is no elaboration or explanation that makes them coherent; their faces and hands are partially visible, but we do not face the individuals, whose character of perpetrator or victim is also undefined.

In *Nóctulo*, the boundary is created almost imperceptibly through the use of the bats' ultrasound and the semitransparent fabrics. Furthermore, the suggested space's past, inhabited by ghostly figures and voices is confused in a simultaneous whole with the present of the exhibition, where they become slightly visible and audible, and the future promised by the seeds and the animals' flight.

In all these works it is ultimately the viewer who can define and decide, if s/he so wishes and dares on the possible relationships between the elements that compose the works, and the consequences and implications of what they suggest and propose. It is up to the viewer, as well, to make sense of what s/he confronts within the exhibiting and experiential space, and to develop an understanding of the thematics to which the artist alludes in her works.



## **The liminal in video installations: between immersion and interaction, the virtual and the real.**

The liminal situation experienced by the spectator as creator of meaning is enhanced by the artistic medium used by Echeverri; video installations themselves have a liminal character. On the one hand, as with *performance* and other ephemeral art forms, the experience of the work is temporary; after the show closes, only audiovisual or photographic records remain, which cannot reproduce the kinesthetic experience or the situation generated by the multiple screens and speakers. The condition of the images and sounds that make up the works is therefore one of existence bordering on non-existence. Even while they are exhibited in a gallery or museum, the works have a dual character, fluctuating between the *factual* –objects, people, and situations that have been videotaped– and the *fictitious* after being edited and reproduced. The screens, the curtains, the projectors, and the speakers transcend their materiality to move to a new level of reality: virtual and digital. The projection rooms imply a transition through the threshold; frequently, viewers leave behind the light from outside to enter the darkness of these rooms and readjust their senses to a new sensorial experience.

On the other hand, returning to Chris Meigh-Andrews' quote, video installations imply that the viewer transitions between states of immersion and critical reflection; in this process the body plays a fundamental role. "Video-installations that utilize the exhibition space's possibilities for spreading the work spatially, and on multiple screens, require a viewer who is willing to indulge in a bodily, navigational and simultaneously reflective and synthesizing experiential process" (*A history of video-art*, p. 340).

The works progressively changed technically and formally depending on the available technology, and so did the character of the liminal experience procured by the video-installations.

*De doble filo* and *Apetitos de familia* (in addition to *Casa íntima*) are two of her earliest

works. Both are single-channel projections: the images appear on a single screen and the sound comes from a single source. The larger-than-life scale of the screens, the location of the speakers (behind the screen in the former and surrounding the viewer in *Apetitos*), and the darkened rooms immerse the viewer in the audiovisual experience, complemented by a juxtaposition of events recorded with the video camera, photographs, and paintings. This experience involves a permanent transition between reality and fiction not only implicit in the relationship between what is filmed and what is edited. It is also highlighted by the artist by simultaneously including different media within a single work, ie, a house drawn on the sand and on a torn fabric ; the squeal of the butchered pig, the artist's hand running across a photograph of the pig's interior, and images of the family gathered in celebration; an abstract painting on a canvas and the blood that fills the screens in both works.

In *De doble filo*, Echeverri began to take advantage of the possibilities of the exhibition space to make the viewer aware of his or her psychic and corporal involvement with the work:

The space itself becomes a new datum, a fundamental problem that builds thoughts and strengthens the idea. *De doble filo*, for example, was exhibited for the first time as part of the Bogotá Museum of Modern Art's "Art and Violence" exhibition in 1999, by extending a piece of fabric across the middle of the room, dividing it with a kind of membrane. I wanted the sound to travel from an inside to an outside and ensure that the viewer, from any given place, would receive the rear sound in front of him/her. It was a way to begin discovering the languages that allow us to locate the values of the sound image and the video image (interview with the artist by Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, p.190).

Sol Astrid Giraldo describes the physical and psychological effects created by this "membrane" as well as the images and sounds, drawing attention to the significance of the boundary and the disturbance generated by the video installation.

...The pencil that draws also scratches violently until it tears the support; the houses engraved with difficulty on the ground are immediately erased. The spatiality of the installation emphasizes the feeling of exclusion experienced by the spectator's body, unable to circulate freely in the room because of the screen, the membrane that expels and prevents the viewer from appropriating the place. The sound of the pencil-knife alters the homogeneous and neutral perception of the white cube; the increasing roar of the river moves from one side of the screen to the other, insisting on the division of space, inconveniencing the bodies, physically relocating them in a sensory metaphor of displacement... (Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, pp. 60-61).

The activation of the exhibition space occurred more thoroughly, however, in *Treno*, which in its most developed version includes six screens that fill the room from floor to ceiling, and speakers that surround the entire exhibition area. Filming for this work, which took place on the banks of the Cauca River, required the participation of people whose images and voices play a central role, despite the limited duration of their presence. The dimensions of the work regarding both the audio and visual levels, represented a huge change in terms of the viewer's involvement. In later work such as *Juegos de herencia*, *Sacrificio*, and *Supervivencias* this transition between immersion, self-consciousness, corporal and emotional involvement, and critical distance became more complex as the viewer was forced to continually change position, watch several screens at the same time, wander through the space, and perceive sounds that, in most cases, did not coincide with the projected images. All of this situated the viewer in an unstable, indeterminate, and changing place of constant decision-making, as Chris Meigh-Andrews points out when referring to multichannel projections in general:

A multi-channel work challenges a viewer to engage with the work on a spatial level, in that she/he is deliberately left to make decisions about the order of priority of the images, the relative relationship between the multiple screens and the viewing position, and to consider the space

between the screens, their relative size and even how they are mounted or displayed. A further potential level of signification can be articulated by the artist who has control of the images across the multiple screens as well as within the space of the single screen, and this of course in addition to any manipulations of the soundtrack. This is clearly a complicated art form, requiring the sort of attention from the spectator that traditionally might be expected of music (Meigh-Andrews, pp. 295-296).

Phenomena that characterize the "physical turn" –of perceptual and phenomenological changes–, implied in the video installations that began to be seen in the seventies. According to Katherine Hyles this "turn" supposed,

A distancing from patterns centered on the ocular vision of distance contemplation and the development of a multi-sensory form of experience, characterized by an increase in motor dynamics, physical involvement, and phenomenological self-reflection (Meigh-Andrews, pp. 323-324).

This awareness of one's body in the installation space acquires an additional nuance in *Juegos de herencia*, to the extent that the spectators confront the projected image of a rooster virtually "buried" on the floor of the gallery surrounded by a circle of sand. In this case, the boundary between the virtual space and the real one is even less defined.

This same phenomenon occurs, although in another form, in *Versión libre*. In this multi-channel video installation, the spectators, in addition to facing images of half-hidden faces, gesturing hands, and the superimposed speech of the former combatants who appear in the work, are impelled to interact physically and psychologically with fabrics hanging in the middle of the room, onto which the artist projects enlarged images of these individuals' full bodies, now completely hooded, dressed in black, and very dimly lit. As a result, the limit between the virtual space and the real one is rendered even

more complex. According to Kate Mondloch, there are at least three spaces in this type of installation, whose characteristics are similar to those in works by artists Gary Hill and Michael Snow:

Screen-reliant installations such as Snow's grapple with (at least) three screen spaces simultaneously: the space behind the screen, the space before the screen, and finally the spatial presence of the screen object itself. (Kate Mondloch, "The matter of illusionism: Michel Snow's screen/space", en Tamara Trodd, 2016, pp. 68-69).

Echeverri had already explored this kind of complexity in previous works, such as *De doble filo* and *Exhausto aún puede pelear* (the latter not included in this exhibition), and took it to an even higher level in *Nóctulo*. Unlike most of her productions, in the latter the viewer remains outside the scope of projection and must walk around a cube composed of semitransparent fabrics that, like veils allow only a glimpse of the images projected inside.

The fabrics and the ultrasound noises of the bats play literally in this case a liminal role. Apart from this physical-spatial aspect (the impassable but perceptible point between the inside-outside, the audible and the inaudible), the liminal aspect is also temporal. In *Nóctulo* several temporalities coexist placing the spectator in a situation of uncertainty: between a 'before' related to the ruin of the house, the ghosts, and the voices; a 'now', the presence of the house, the memories and associations it evokes, and the spectator's self-perception —in this, perhaps more than in other works, the spectator, excluded from the virtual space, experiences a greater awareness of him/herself; and a possible, contingent, potential 'after' suggested by the seeds.

The experience of the liminal in *Nóctulo* is also produced through the soundtrack and its trajectory through the space, as described by the artist:

... In *Nóctulo*, the space inside the projection reflects its inverted condition with the outside: what we sense behind the wall is akin to the fragile density of a dark system, of what has been lost and disappeared. Exploring the acoustic perspective of what is behind establishes a

relationship between what is outside and what resonates from within. I want this situation to attract the viewer. For example, the echo as sound expanded in space is a multiple sound amplification that disorients the origin and the place, mentioning a previously fragmented distance. The structure of this echo partially blurs and muddies the original sound, producing a spatial polyphony and suggesting open spaces and wide geographical axes. In *Nóctulo*, this echo descenters the gaze and the place, unfolds the origins, and forces the viewer to reposition himself. Based on the way that sound circulates in space the viewer's attention is forced to shift (not only as a sensation, but also driven by the movement of the image). There are murmurs, shades, nuances in the piece that prevent the viewer from standing still in one place. There is no doubt that I created the work for this precise moment that the viewer devotes to it. It's a reciprocal moment (interview with the artist by Sol Astrid Giraldo, 2017, pp. 200-201).

Finally, *Sin cielo*, one of Echeverri's most recent works, commissioned by Colombia's Central Bank (Banco de la República), incorporates a technological innovation, the *video-wall*. Although the spectator is neither inside the screening room, nor outside as in *Nóctulo* but in front of the work, its scale, multiple monitors, and enveloping and disquieting soundtrack push the experience of fragmentation and disintegration to a limit, where the work itself seems to be in danger of coming undone. This process nearly occurs in a sister-work, *Subterra*, as we observe the crumbling reality under the perceptible cracks on the surfaces of the mountain, the protagonist of both works.

In all these video-installations the experience of the liminal is made possible, therefore, by the characteristics inherent to the medium and the artist's complex technical and formal manipulation of digital technology.

Each of the thresholds indicated makes the works, first and foremost, ambiguous, undefinable and irreducible to a single type of experience or interpretation. Consequently, they can also generate uncertainty and ambivalence in the viewer; feelings comparable to those experienced by the artist in relation to her environment. Insofar as the crossing of thresholds is in the hands, body, or imagination of the visitor, he or she can experience the attraction and the fear of becoming an accomplice and accepting the transgression that each work suggests is possible.

It is therefore plausible for the viewer to expose him/herself and open up, or resist the works as audiovisual realities and as opportunities for transgression.

The images, sounds, screens, curtains, projectors, speakers, and wandering in the darkness offer an aesthetic experience that can vary between total immersion and critical interaction; between an emotional and affective experience and an imaginative and intellectual one. A choice too, between a passive, and an active, daring attitude that inquires for possible causes and outcomes, implications and consequences. In short, instead of offering answers, the artist exposes problems in bordering-liminal circumstances that each viewer must face and address.

Admitting to the experience of the liminal therefore, implies openness to irresolution; the questions raised, rather than shedding light, reveal their own mystery. The desired and expected responses regarding the human and social complexity that could clearly distinguish the white and the black, the true or the false, the guilty and the innocent, the reprehensible and the admissible, in Echeverri's works get dissolved and complicated within gray areas where multiple opposites coexist.

Additionally, the transgression that makes it possible to recognize the veiled presence of the sinister supposes a type of understanding and experience that includes the recognition of the strangeness that resides within the familiar, as well as the familiarity of what appears as strange.

Echeverri's work –produced from her own location in the liminal– invites us to share

a testimony lived and perceived from her sensibility. A testimony that she has reconstructed as a plastic reality through critically distancing herself in attempts to find meaning in the events that she (as well as we) finds disturbing and disconcerting. This plastic reality is a fragmented and discontinuous mirror that exposes our need to recompose and problematize the image we have of ourselves and of our reality from empathic, nuanced, contradictory and complex perspectives.

To face the distress and the confusion that the works generate is, therefore, to take a first step towards a possible process of transgression of thresholds. Given their liminal nature, we can conclude that Echeverri's works possess the character of the "rites of passage" mentioned by Byung-Chul Han in the epigraph of the present text: "In all rites of passage, we die to be reborn beyond the threshold. Death is experienced as a transition. Whoever crosses the threshold undergoes a transformation."

Unlike, however, those generally collective and obligatory rituals, Echeverri's works confront individuals, who can choose to actively make sense out of their own experience, and the work that generated it. Thus welcoming the possibility of creating a new identity based on an enriched understanding of art, of their surrounding world and themselves.

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