

TRENO (Funereal Song)

Audiovisual Installation

Clemencia Echeverri

One day just like any other in Bogotá, I got a phone call. ... At first it appeared to be just a puzzling piece of news coming from the countryside, but the tone of the female voice – uneasy and even agitated – made it sound like an outcry in need of response: “*I don't know what we're going to do, Ma'am. They took my child. ... At midnight they came and snatched him away.*” The woman was calling me from a hamlet in the Caldas Province, in the environs of the Cauca River.

This is a story just like thousands of others, which are recounted and lived in the Colombian countryside – both today and for many years now. They are stories that blend supplication, misgiving, impotence and abandonment – stories that unleash further stories like a pack of dominoes, written by people fleeing; from deserted homes; like an exodus; from displaced families. Houses and farmsteads abandoned, left to age in silence, their daily business interrupted – just as a party draws to an end.

Throughout the whole of that telephone conversation, all I sensed was a dry voice lingering in the air, a harsh and arid echo – an appeal for a solution yet without response. From this side, where I was, I could hear the silent retreat; the hidden fear; the unpredictable bends of the highway; the river upstream, raging and empty. I felt for a moment that I was walking through that house ... those endless rooms, one by one ... the beds all made; the wooden floorboards, dried out and squeaky; corridors that led nowhere. I went on searching, found the doorframes ragged, the termites at work, the dried-up toilets, mirror-less bathrooms... yellowing portraits on the walls of my grandparents, my great grandparents, my parents, the dogs, the creek.

Nothing to say, nothing to offer as a response. Overwhelming is the distance, but the story remains close at hand, in the media and the voices of the protagonists. I felt that this war was close to me; as if it were my own. That voice remained with me, resonating in my eardrums, over here, on these banks. My own voice was speechless, disturbed by its silence, without weapons. ... That sadness led me to search for a voice that would return to a ‘third space.’

With *Treno*, I developed a piece that stands as a sound-and-video installation coming from opposite banks: a sorrowful plea for reparation; an audiovisual space for a dialogue in search of a resonance; a circular narrative fusion; a local outcry, continuous and recurring, which falls into the void. Silences that are dragged along by the Cauca River; Colombia – a familiar scream, without an answer.

The voice pleads and invokes from one side of the river, then rebounds off the other as a linking sound that travels through space, grazes walls, attempts to reach home. It is matter supported by the flow of water and the revolt of the cry.

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