

INTERPELLATIONS APROPOS OF CLEMENCIA ECHEVERRI'S *VERSIÓN LIBRE*

In *Versión Libre* [Loose Interpretation], as in other instances such as *Funeral Song* or *Inherited Games*, Clemencia Echeverri utilizes the totality of the hall as the space for her installation, in such a way that we, the onlookers, may find ourselves always “within.” When Boris Groys argues that the installation is the paradigmatic form of contemporary art, he ascribes to space the corporeity that is inherent to this artistic practice. The notion of space itself as a material implies, in this case, that elements of a heterogeneous nature may find there a way to be summoned and situated, a warp that assembles and connects them. Visual and sound images, as well as words and documents, may have the most diverse of origins, yet the way in which those get situated is what makes an installation singular: an installation is a singular topological inscription.

We could, consequently, ask ourselves: What are we in the midst of when we find ourselves “within” as well as before *Versión libre*? Our answer could well be that it has to do with a possible reading, that we are in a definite “situation of speech or enunciation”: A series of discourses, versions in regard to certain facts, testimonies or confessions interpellate us. Nevertheless, those *addressing* us are nothing but specters; they are not facing us there in the same way as we are; they are not there in flesh and blood; they are at once present and absent; they appear and re-appear; they *gaze after* us while we are unable to do likewise. Within the order of another axis, perpendicular to the main one, a life-sized silent phantom walks through the hall following our own steps; we see how it appears and approaches us without hesitation and then turns its back to disappear at the other end; this re-apparition will return in an endless circular movement. As conformed by those two axes, the place where we find ourselves is by force both *a site* and *a siege*: a placement and a confinement. Visual and sound images, gazes and voices, silences and murmurs have us under siege; we are being besieged by phantoms.

In the space of inscription that, according to Groys, constitutes the matter of the installation, Clemencia Echeverri has installed a specter; the material medium ends up being the locus for the advent of the immaterial. And therefore, as the

appearing of the specter is different from the presence of the corporeal thing, neither does its immateriality belong to the immateriality of the concept. We come thus to understand that the artistic mediations are so far spectral. In *Versión libre* a specter has been installed at the same time as the spectral nature of the medium is pointed out.

For a long time the phantom of violence and the violence of the phantom have been making their way through the Colombian artistic milieu. But aside from that, the challenge posed by Clemencia Echeverri in this piece lies, according to our interpretation, in the problematic and paradoxical *mise-en-scène* whereby the phantom is perceived not from the perspective of the victim – something she had done with the phantom of the *desaparecido* in *Funeral Song* – but rather from the perspective of the victimizer. The fact that the perpetrators are bound to be besieged, tormented by the phantoms of their crimes is of course an issue as ancient as the Greek tragedy. However that may be, even if guilt and remorse play parts in the *mis-en-scène* of *Versión libre*, the location where we are immersed transports us to another place, leads us to a different situation – one of enunciation and of interpellation. There, while wandering within and surrounded by a blocked-up space, it is actually us that are being interpellated. As Louis Althusser would have it, we set ourselves up as subjects of interpellation when we recognize ourselves as the addressees of a discourse. We are admonished to reply there, to in some way correspond, relate. In what way we do it, that is the question, as the piece throws us into the uncertainty of relating with the phantoms of the victimizers, with their interpellating discourse, their narrative, their confessions, their demands.

Then again, given the nature of those narratives, we become aware that, facing a camera, they too have been interpellated, questioned, summoned to give a loose interpretation – that is, a *Versión libre*. The title itself is indeed a paradox. Those people have been summoned to respond for themselves, to account for their own actions before an absent, anonymous and equally phantasmagoric audience chamber. As they surface from diverse groups – paramilitaries or guerrillas – they are “re-inserted.” These are “real” persons, not actors; they are phantoms and yet

they are not dead: they are the phantoms of live beings. As well, if their speeches and their voices interpellate us, that is because they themselves have been interpellated. It happens to be a doubly phantasmagoric scene of summoning and interpellation, as it has been carried out without the possibility of any face-to-face.

Jacques Derrida – who I have followed without giving him credit – commenting in his *Spectres of Marx* on the apparition of the murdered king's phantom in *Hamlet*, alludes to *the visceral effect*. According to the witnesses that the prince interrogates in regards to his father, the latter has appeared wearing his own armor, so there is no way of identifying him if not for his shield and his voice. His appearing with his helmet's visor raised heightens the dramatic affect of the gaze of someone who may not in turn be gazed upon. What the French philosopher designates as the *visceral effect* consists, there then, in the sense that we are being seen by a gaze with which our own gaze will never be able to cross paths. An impossible synchrony and an absolute asymmetry are thus generated. The balaclava masks worn by the persons that appear in *Versión libre* bring about a very similar ghostly effect. We know that the encounter with a visual image, even where a face presents itself to us, implies indeed an insurmountable asymmetry. However that may be, in such condition the face would offer a backing for the voice; it would function as a genuine *mouthpiece*; a subject of enunciation would become visible. It is important to “show one's face,” as the popular *dictum* commands. The balaclava is there to hide the face, however, reinforcing the visor effect that has become by now the image itself: here is a faceless Other, who must have his/her reasons for taking cover in such a way and who, nonetheless, interpellates us with his/her stare.

Judith Butler has pointed out that any narrative whereby one claims to account for one's actions cannot escape a certain opacity or some sort of bias, since the life experience is inapprehensible by means of language. Narratives do not stop getting re-edited, recomposed, and reassigning meanings here and there. This is not in any way an impediment when it comes to assuming responsibility for one's words and one's actions. Now then, in *Versión libre* the voices that account for themselves account as well for that opacity. Multiple versions present themselves, in one way

or another conforming to certain formats. Dates and sites, justifications and confessions follow one another repeatedly under some sort of codification. On occasion, however, the code breaks down and then a visceral narrative comes to the surface, which comes closer to the life experience, without, of course, ever making it transparent. On the other hand, as narratives are multiplied, the voices get juxtaposed and the subjects of enunciation get muddled up, which gives rise to an inaudible murmur: opacity upon opaqueness.

The assertion that we are being besieged by phantoms in this installation is stated in the sense in which the summoning that takes place is as singular as it is paradoxical and problematic. Singular because we are besieged by the phantom of the victimizer in a circumstance of enunciation and interpellation. The problematic, in turn, lies in the fact that from this perspective there are many ways in which the phantom can appear: as a threat, through fear, as the return of the worst, while some political agenda will manage to exploit this track for its own advancement. The apparition of the phantom admonishes us to respond – notwithstanding the opaqueness of opacity, the inevitable murmur, the furtive face, requested or not – with a demand: in Derrida's words, "To forgive the unforgivable." Those atrocious crimes, those 'unforgivable' massacres will have to be forgiven. But, who forgives, who is forgiven? Is the victim's place our place? Then perhaps, this *site* besieged between two axes, amidst faceless gazes, murmurs and confessions, may be a phantom site: we dwell in it without being able to occupy it; hence our bewilderment and our confusion. How, in what manner can we set ourselves up as subjects of such interpellation?

Gustavo Chirolla, August 22, 2011