

TEXTOS CRÍTICOS
/CRITICAL ESSAYS/

CLEMENCIA ECHEVERRI

A RESONANT IMAGE

by David Medina

The Escombrera is a place that concentrates the perverse logic of violence in Colombia and does so on a massive scale. It exists today, above all else, as a site of silenced lamentation. In Clemencia Echeverri's work *Duelos* a space populated by multiple views unfolds before us, creating a place of contemplation and listening that attempts to confront this dark and painful event, an event so painful that it can only be approached from a distance and observed on the surface. Faced with this fact, Echeverri constructs a work that might be interpreted as an intangible relic and a symbolic exhumation. She presents us with the construction of a memorial that can only show the diverse elements of that other funerary building constructed from rubble and fragments; an unprecedented building made of collapsed buildings, and one that in turn encloses the terror of systematic and unpunished deaths. Images of the site and its crumbling texture are shown together with the sound – also fragmented, in a kind of symmetry between the different material realms – of the voices of mothers looking for their children, the living who look for the dead in the mountain of broken materials, through the sound of an incessant cascade of debris. The etymology of the word image is funerary in its origin: an imago was a kind of mortuary mask that noble Roman families made of their dead, typically using beeswax. These would then be worn by silent actors in the funeral procession. ¹ In the mass grave where the dead cannot be found, the process of identification is interrupted and the victims' faces become invisible. It is thus through the act of mourning that an echo of the identity of the person who has disappeared is made present. The

work of art, from the very conception of the image (visual and audio), is consistent with this funerary dimension since it shows us a reality that disappears behind the symbolic, offering a spectral trace that informs our oral and written traditions in which each word is epitaph. The lament is a fundamental audial act that comprises crying, moans, screams and other gestures of deep affliction that within the literary historical tradition has generally been placed on the lips of women; women who have also been entrusted with the work of lamenting, in the funeral rites of many cultures, as professional mourners. 2 The lament and cry that in the sixteenth century was silenced by the synodal constitutions of the Spanish church, and replaced with secular clergy and silent religions, went on to survive in musical forms that sublimate the medieval *planto* and lament. 3, 4 In *Duelos*, Echeverri constructs a soundscape from the broken voices of the mothers such that any recognition or interpretation of their words is canceled out. By reducing the discourse to its essential phonetic elements and presenting it by way of repetition and accumulation, the voice of testimony becomes a choral space. The presence of a low masculine voice is then added and together they form a kind of continuous basso abstract, a counterpoint of diverse intensities. 5 The ensemble now comprises a set of polarities (word / melody, woman / man, particle / wave) and becomes a sort of funerary antiphon that accompanies the unfolding of this mausoleum of fragments and continuities. The *pneuma* is a concept that in Ancient Greece reunited sound, air and the soul in a vital principle characterized by complexity and ambiguity. Here breath and sound are impalpable substances that cannot yet be understood as a wave transported by the air, but as a form of displacement that is integrated with a substance that connects people and things. In Plato the sound is still pneumatic, and thus it moves within its own element. 6 At present, and even as an acoustic concept, sound retains a concrete physical quality: it is through sound that a vibratory link is made with the work. In the audiovisual work, sound is the only element that touches and crosses our bodies. 7 5 [Imagen] Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet. (2007 In *Duelos* the architectural dimension of this mausoleum of pieces is presented within a space that expands in all directions. The walls and the floor, which function here as supports for changing projections, show multiple and simultaneous images of the La Escombrera site. Contemporary technologies, including high-definition cameras, ultrasensitive microphones and drones, are used to construct an encounter with mortuary darkness and silence; paradoxically, this is achieved through the use of light and sound, the former having been reduced to black and white and the latter to its polyphonic and vibrating presence. In this sense, via the deployment of speeds, frames and distances the artist builds a space that seeks the plastic modulation of time. A time transformed by strategies of agglomeration, looping, and stratification that hold within themselves the constructive principles of a site cemented from debris and fragments. A time that is fragmented and reconstituted, via sound

as well, within a new space and in a broken mirror. 8 [Imagen] José Luis Brea. (1996). Un ruido In A Hidden Noise, Duchamp constructs an object that, in its turn, contains an unidentified object in its interior and which makes a sound when shaken. We don't know what the object is and in this case it becomes a machine that produces its own enigma. 8 In *Duelos*, Echeverri creates a machine that reconstructs a space filled with secrets. Secrets that are related to the essential silence of the grave and the official silence that prevents its unveiling (that is, removing the veil that hides the truth), as well as its subsequent veiling (that is, covering with a veil the bodies in the funeral ceremony that completes the necessary farewell). In the work *Duelos*, just as in the rest of her work, Clemencia Echeverri invites us to contemplate the phenomenon and confluence of persistently diverse and fundamental energies in their most pure of states, as carriers of primal meanings that unfold within the observer-listener. Meanings that in this case try to form a mask, a resonant image, which is both ours and that of our dead.