

TRENO

MBelén Saez de Ibarra

*"Whoe'er you are, o armed one at our rivershore
we beg you to tell us why you have come o one that stands before.
This is place of shadows, of sleep and weary night
Where breath'n bodies cannot be taken on the Stygian boat's flight.
The ghosts rejected are th' unhappy crew
Depriv'd of sepulchers and fun'ral due:
The boatman, Charon; those, the buried host,
He ferries over to the farther coast;
Nor dares his transport vessel cross the waves
With such whose bones are not compos'd in graves.
A hundred years they wander on the shore;
At length, their penance done, are wafted o'er."*

Treno (funeral song) is the act of bringing to life the event of death. In order for us to experience this event Clemencia uses metaphors that are strongly rooted in the Western culture of death: Death as a frontier, as a limit of the truth; and the river itself as a channel that passes over the other side of that limit.

These two metaphors are laden with cultural meaning and they are repeatedly referred to in the history of our relationship with mourning rituals and with the history of perception of our existence and of death since the most ancient philosophical and religious contemplation of this.

The thunderous roar of the water in a huge river in the shadow of night and the installation of three large screens on opposite sides of the room with the images of the torrent that flood the exhibition space immerse us in its flow and place us in the middle of the edges of its shores, on the border.

Greek mythology contains various references to the river as the only means of communication with the Underworld. Virgil's *Aeneid* recounts extensively the passage of the dead through the voluminous river of Acheron and its shores guided to the other side by Charon, the ancient boatman who kept the coins he received in payment under his tongues. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante makes uses of this same narration in Canto Three of Hell. These images have been recreated in art history, particularly in painting up until and including the

twentieth century and have even permeated Christian religious iconographies and its temples.

'The subject is a host that should receive the infinite beyond his capacity for welcome'

Levinas.

In "Treno" the echo of a call travels from one shore to another. "The installation has two shores, we cannot cross, we cannot cross to the other side". "The voices call out from one side to the other" explains Clemencia.

Is it possible to cross this frontier, to cross this shore that is the passage towards the non-existence?

In the middle of the river, in the perception of its shores, of its border, without a single ounce of knowledge on what lies on the other side, without knowing if it is even possible this other place: the possibility of the impossible, the passing in death to not being.

The voices call in the midst of thunder. The language of a funeral rite is in operation at that moment to place us in the act of the grief. Perhaps this grief is an act of welcoming of the other in me, it is an encounter. For this encounter we place ourselves before the future of our own future that brings us closer to the shore, the border where we await that encounter that perhaps will happen or not. Perhaps it is already happening. Perhaps it will happen again. On the border we await an encounter with our own death, an encounter with the arrival of myself.

Another image comes with the cultural metaphor of the frontier of this river: Orpheus, the only mortal alive that manages to cross death in Charon's boat to bring his beloved Eurydice to this side. On his way back he loses her once again. "Che farò senza Euridice" sounds today the song of C. W. Gluck. This encounter – in love, in death – is marked out by the setback, there is no synchrony in departure and arrival.

One would have to mention here Derrida's reflections around 'hospitality', that will become essential when considering the event of death and the other crucial events in order to understand the existence of those that appear in numerous texts and conferences: love, friendship, forgiveness, gift, testimony. They are all intrinsically linked. The encounter in these events is impossibility itself.

The event is not only what occurs, but also the arrival, he who arrives....who is not necessarily an invited guest that I am prepared to welcome, that I have the capacity to welcome....Where the arrival of the other surpasses me, it seems greater than my own house, it will put my house in complete disarray....Its unexpected, unforeseen arrival.....For which there is no horizon of expectation.....The arrival of he who arrives

falls over me. I insist on the verticality of the thing, because the surprise could not come from a higher place.

The act of speaking is dismantled, completely taken apart by that very same impossibility, unprotected by the arrival that is always unique, exceptional, unforeseen by the other, from one event like another... The one that arrives will not constitute an event except for there where I am unable to welcome him, where I welcome him exactly there where I am not capable of doing so.

It is not possible to talk about the subject that I talk about verticality, about the absolute 'arrivance' [the action of arriving, of immediate coming, of something happening] without the act of faith having begun. Without some space of faith without knowing, beyond knowing.

Derrida, *Certain possibility impossible to say the event*

Love, death, hospitality, gift, forgiveness, testimony is only possible there where they appear impossible. The category of *maybe*, that Nietzsche forecasts for the philosophy of tomorrow. On the border silence is to be found in the encounter between Man's finity-infinity. The broken silence in the unforeseen arrival of every event that rips the weave of what is possible and of what I myself can do. The secret of a promise that is itself traversed by the maybe - the possibility of an impossibility

The unspeakable condition of the event in language is a constant preoccupation in Clemencia's work, that stages, through these metaphors, as in the case of Treno, puts us in situ for a substitute rite, almost invented by her, full of cultural meaning.

Only if I am not always and only on ceremony, but if I am assigned to a possibility and to a strength, only if in what is lived and understood by me are at stake in each and every moment of life and understanding itself - that is to say, in this sense, thought - a way of life can become, by way of its very factuality and thinginess, way-of-life, in that it is not possible to isolate something like a naked life.

Agamben, *Means Without End. Notes on Politics.*

Since the power of human thought cannot be wholly and simultaneously brought up to date by a single man or by a particular community, it is fundamental that in the human race there is a crowd through which it is possible to be brought up to date at full strength...the task of the human race, taken in its entirety, is that of incessantly bringing up to date the full power of the possible intellect, in the first place in view of contemplation and, consequently, in view of acting [I, 3-4]

Dante, *De monarchia.* (Quoted by Agamben)

The water keeps flowing in Treno. The river becomes red - in our imagery traces of violence, of the brutality of a war that we witness whereby we know that the dead are thrown into the

rivers, in this case the River Cauca in Colombia, from where these records hail. It is 1350 km long, a deep wet area that cuts through the Andes to the Magdalena River who spits out its waters in the Caribbean sea. Hundreds and hundreds of dead bodies that have been thrown in with weights on to make sure they sank in the current of this river and that of so many others in the world at this very same time. Just like the mythical River Acheron recounted in the first century B.C.

The current throws up a piece of clothing – evidence of a body that was formerly dressed – that a witness picks up just like he who recovers a dead body for his funeral rite, for his mourning.

All societies have had the necessity to perform burial and mourning ceremonies. The experience of death in a culture is so transcendental, that essentially it is actually what defines it. The way of dealing with death and its event, *a priori* implies a concept of existence, of way-of-life. It is on this point where death, the way it is treated is conceived as political. Because what is at stake is life, or rather, the how of life.

Life and its form cannot be separated. This debate lies at the heart of politics today.

This waste, these bodies deprived of burial, were divested of life – in life – of human attributes, of their dignity. Of their category of beings-in-the-language, of beings-for-death, in their category of host subject of the infinite and therefore, clearly crushed in the indignity in the way in which they were killed, by the filth of war. Isn't Treno also, and particularly, that substitute rite to give them a burial and mourning to the dead people from the barbarity, barbarity itself?

Grief in the arrival of my own death, in the encounter of the other, totally other, in me. There I cannot receive it, where it surpasses my capacity and I welcome it. The sorrow in the event of forgiving the unforgivable, there I cannot forgive. Perhaps.