

Violences and Creation

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Abstract:

In the past fifteen years, the women from Argentina and from a few South American countries have acquired growing freedoms.

Still, it is clear that they have not yet managed to change traditions that are heavily rooted in a system of male domination based on a dominating and archaic model.

This essay intends to analyze, in a heterodox manner, two works of art created by women that denounce violence: a poetic novel by Susana Romano Sued, a former prisoner under State terrorism in Argentina, and a tango composed by one of the few women of our time to renew this musical genre, Claudia Levy.

I do not paint [...] being, I paint its passage

Michel de Mointagne, Book III, chapter IX ,

This essay is dedicated to the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

Who re-enchant the world

I. Introduction

Poetry and music are intrinsically related to the disenchantment of the world caused, according to Max Weber, by the western rationalization process. It is not by coincidence that both poetry and music possess the ability to re-enchant the world, once and again, against the threat of the mechanization of human life. The present essay will thus surely position itself against the demands of scientific rigor. The creation of poetry and music often lessen the horror of cruel realities with the help of the “magic of art” or artistic creativity. The two works analyzed here were created by Argentinean women who re-enchanted a world marred with violence.

Still, it remains a dis-enchanted world. In the last fifteen years, women in some countries of Latin America including Argentina have gained access to spaces for action and leadership, from positions of executive power [1], ministries, to Supreme Courts, as well as upper and lower chambers [2]. And yet their names have appeared in the darker sections of the media as victims of femicide, frequently at the hands of already-reported husbands or former partners, or as child or adult victims of trafficking [3].

Women who have suffered and who suffer any kind of violence because of their status as women and because of their gender (these two terms are different) now benefit from legal, political, and media channels to report it: *Comisarías de la Mujer* (police stations for women), *Oficinas de Violencia Doméstica* (offices against domestic violence), programs by Ministries and multilateral agencies, specific sections in the media, print, radio and television, as well as reforms of the civil and criminal codes (from equality of spouses within marriage, to a legal definition of sexual violence that is separate from assault).

Nevertheless, in different cities of Latin America several rights remain under debate: the right to a safe, free, and legal abortion [4], and the right to marriage equality (Argentina was the first Latin American country to recognize this right). In Argentina, in the context of the past and current trials of the crimes against humanity committed during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), the specific violence that targeted the women illegally detained in concentration camps has yet to be taken into account. The rapes, the miscarriages resulting from torture, the abductions of sons and daughters, the perversions, due to the fact that many of the women illegally detained were forced to perform as “escorts, girlfriends, or prostitutes” [5], are still not criminalized.

New spaces to denounce and report violence have been created, but it is evident that their existence is not enough to modify habits and traditions that are heavily rooted in a system of male domination – as Françoise Héritier asserted – an archaic model based on a “differential valence of the sexes,” assigning men to hunt and women to collect (Héritier, 2011). And let us add that there are facts that cannot be modified no matter how much will is put into changing them. Women are the only ones granted with the ability to produce another human being, male or female. Men cannot. Women lose blood without being able to control it (menstruation), and back in the time of “magical thinking”, which relied on the principle of correspondence, women were banned from killing other beings for fear that their (unintentionally expelled) blood would attract the blood of another being. Violence then was left at the hand of men, who were allowed to spill blood intentionally. It is only in the 20th century that in most nation states women were incorporated into the armies, a consequence of a dis-enchanted world thanks to the improvement of technology and industry.

Nevertheless, the intention of this work is not to retrace the history of this system of domination and rationalization of the world, but rather to analyze art pieces by creative women who denounce violence. How does one “paint the passage” of an artwork? The analysis will be heterodox concerning its objects of study: a poetic novel entitled *Procedimiento Memoria de La Perla y La Ribera* [6] by Susana Romano Sued who was detained and made to disappear in the torture centers of Córdoba (La Perla y La Ribera); and a tango the melody and lyrics of which were created by one of the few contemporary women to renew this musical genre, Claudia Levy, a singer, songwriter and pianist. Both authors have undergone violence, directly or indirectly, and whether they decided to testify about it in judicial instances or not, they did express themselves through art.

Nevertheless, the theoretical and methodological frame of analysis will be far removed from what could be called semiology or discourse semiotics. On the contrary, we set out to analyze these textualities as creative, political discourses and to take into account the context in which they were created, rather than study them from an artistic or literary viewpoint.

But this frame must account for the fact that studying two different works (a literary piece and a musical one) will lead us to compare them, explicitly or implicitly. To achieve this, we will rely on comparative history, as this discipline allows us to choose two objects of study if intuition indicates that they may contain elements that clarify the specificities, as well as the common scenarios hidden behind the consequences of the great historical processes through which our humanity has undergone. To paraphrase Johan Heilbron [7], the use of comparison in the analysis of artistic variation lets us know whether the objects that are compared are produced by similar structures, or if they are the result of/produced by the circulation of cultural models. The answer can never be formulated beforehand, but only afterwards, on the basis of an empirical analysis. Therefore, the comparison of two objects that seem to share some things in common will not necessarily unveil a multiplicity of similarities, and, conversely, two objects that have nothing in common can shed global insights with the help of abductive reasoning [8].

2. Art and memory, or how literature denounces institutional violence and the difference between sexes.

Susana Romano Sued, the author of *Procedimiento Memoria de La Perla y La Ribera*, is a Jewish Argentinian woman from Córdoba, a writer, a philosopher, an academic, a translator, an artist, and a craftswoman. She has survived the concentration camps of Argentina’s last military dictatorship, which took place from 1976 to 1983. Her book is a devastating journey through the ruins of humanity; it defies aesthetic reception with the presence of torn bodies and devastating words, devastated bodies and heart-wrenching words. It gives a face to a horrifying period of the history of Argentina. Its reader bears witness to one of the most atrocious disasters, becomes a tourist in an experience undergone by “the others”, but she also becomes either a witness or an accomplice of what has happened depending on the gesture that she decides to undertake afterwards. *Procedimiento* is a courageous response to T. W. Adorno’s thought about poetry after Auschwitz: the way *Procedimiento* is written shows how one may write after the Shoah. And its author takes into account, wisely, the ethical and aesthetical implications and turmoils present in her work. The temporal distance and

the subjective closeness of history loosen the frames and walls of otherwise compartmentalized categories: account and fiction, poetry and document, cruelty and piety, violence against the body and against the text.

Jadeojadeojadeojadeo, señalética acústica de voltios y de docientosveinte, pantano, indignidad
vergüenza acorralada miseria llanto adentro chasqueamos en cepos gargantas funerarias.

Acá de tropiezo en caída larvados, gusanos; acá larvas hermanas, fraternas susurramos en son
con diapasón, con cuerda y cordón. Acá nuevos saberes dando valor a muertes con falta y sin final
abrevando en cariños estrenados y dedicados a noches ribereñas.

Acá han partido ebrias, dormidas en hilera enlazadas, han dejado rumores de ascenso trepando
acopladas a camiones, transportes de traslados cumpliendo presunción.

Acá oímos trayectos de ida solamente. A veces confundidos con sonos de fúnebres carruajes de ida a
San Vicente.

Acá dan paso bruto treintaytres desmandadas, cegadas de lagañas amasadas con pasta de miradas
practicando velada infinidad; cordeles enredados con nudos de hilos de señas, de nombres, de cosas,
tesoros reservados a ojos y manos de otra posteridad. Rogando en espera de manos y ojos futuros que
toquen y vean y lean y crean.

Acá procedimientos de noches de días creciendo en eficacia, perfectos, mejores, ganamos en pericia con
tripas florecidas de miedo rugiendo en armonía con cada puntapié.

-Quisiera tener bordados nombres, cualesquiera, anudados a vallados espesos manteniendo a raya
memorias de nombrar.

Allá en ciudades muertas rechinan cadáveres regando bermejas praderas veredas desagües pluviales
carnadas acalladas con música funcional. [9] [10]

This work of art is now an essential document for those of us who want to reflect further on the facts of a recent past. It is a photographic tale without a nationality. The author could be of any possible nationality, interchangeably: Argentinean, Israeli, Roma, Vietnamese, French, or American. But above all, this memory is local, from Córdoba, in Argentina; this cannot be questioned. And the observer/reader is not separated from the text anymore: Her reading is the rhythm and the music of *Procedimiento*. To stop reading or to decide not to read is little less than to shut out the sound of the celestial spheres, because, as Susan Sontag wrote, it is true that “the practice of representing atrocious suffering as something to be deplored, and (...) stopped, enters the history of images (...)”. [11]

Suffering at the hands of the army is an intrinsically secular theme – piety and mercy do not matter anymore here. In the title, “La Perla” and “La Ribera” appear to be the proper name of two heroines of a novel, but

despite the article “la”, these names do not refer to female figures but to two spaces of torture. Nevertheless, these two concentration camps contain women and figures of women. One is very specific and is named “Her”, a figure of humanity in an inhuman environment. Her, among the “Them” (who might be the *Gurbos* in the graphic novel *El Eternauta* from the disappeared Héctor Oesterheld) [12] and the women prisoners of a fiction that contains a testimony that ensures that the present and future generations will inherit a knowledge that history books are not able to pass down. We are perhaps beholding here evidence of how fiction delivers reality but from a creative and honest standpoint. Romano Sued’s book has garnered several responses already [13]. For example, according to María Semilla Durán [14], who wrote a report of the book for the German magazine *HeLix*, Romano Sued’s work is one of the most poetic and chilling texts authored by those who reconstitute the experiences of the survivors of the clandestine detention camps.

Susana Romero Sued’s testimony is not realist, but poetic, no matter how harsh her evocations are. Its aim is not to comprehend each of the represented acts as verified facts, but to show the dreadful logic of the concentration camp in which no act is unlikely. To write down memory is in fact to rewrite without losing sight of an exterior objective – the reader – that forgets or does not know. It is also to rewrite one’s own history, to fight not to forget, not to accept fictions, not to give up entirely on the throb of one’s conscience.

As the writer Luisa Valenzuela mentions, the absence of definite articles is a highly electric act of creativity, as it involves all of us, as a collective, as a society. This process includes us in this terror, the representation of a feeling of that time, a deep mark in the Argentinean identity. While it cannot be imagined on a personal level, in individual subjectivity, horror rises from the deepest folds of the collective memory of this *Procedimiento*.

As the poet remarks, *Procedimiento* is not an autobiographic account, but an act of testimony, from her own life, the life of her family (ours) and friends, activists, survivors, the dead, and those responsible for horror.

Procedimiento is perhaps a “literary photograph”. Its Truth is built with lyricism and fiction, and it burns the eyes of its readers. But this “physical discomfort”, if indeed it confirms the revulsion against institutional violence, also runs the risk of making the reader avert her gaze and ignore history.

Susana Romano Sued’s work of art results from an immense solidarity towards the humanity, who should read her. Back in that time, all was destroyed but the word. Bravely and tenderly, *Procedimiento* depicts a fresco of the years of horror, seen from inside, from the gut. Thus it becomes deeply and immensely necessary.

3. The sound from the celestial spheres: a divine abode

With its classical 2/4 rhythm, its structure of verses, verse and chorus, and the sound of a piano and bandoneón, “Me dijeron” (2007) [15], is one of the few tangos created and sung by a woman blaming a man for his terrible actions. As is well-known, tango has always been a male domain, a music from the suburbs that speaks, most of the time, of a female character that provokes distress and suffering (a *mina* [16], a wife, a *pebeta* [17], a mother, a daughter).

Here are Claudia Levys's lyrics:

“Me dijeron que te vieron a las tres de la mañana,/la corbata enmarañada, caminando de coté,/que ya estabas tan en curda [18], que le hablabas a los postes,/que pateabas la basura por culpa de una mujer.
/

No te hagás el pobre tipo porque todos ya sabemos,/que a vos te importa un bledo [19]/ si hacés mal o si hacés bien/que a la mina que llorabas, arrastrado por las calles/la fajaste [20] siete veces y la maltrataste cien.

(Chorus) Llorá , que no hay Cristo que te salve./Llorá , que llorar te hace tan bien./Y bajate del caballo y anda poniéndote al día,/y dejá la cobardía de pegarle a una mujer.

Me dijeron que el domingo se te fue un poco la mano,/que tu mina ya cansada fue a la cana [21] a denunciar,/después hizo las valijas y escribió en un papelito/no me busques, no me llames, porque ya no aguanto más.

Vos miraste indiferente como si no fuera nada,/y pensaste esta pavada [22] pronto se le va a pasar/y hoy que ya hace cuatro meses desde que se fue tu mina,/no sabés por qué la vida te ha tratado a vos tan mal. (Repeat chorus)” [23]

But its theme is not classical at all. Quite on the contrary, it is very innovative given the heritage of the genre. In Romano Sued's book as well as in this song and in other ones – that will not be mentioned here for the sake of brevity – a transculturation of art is clearly at work, that is to say, the processes of resistance and permeability of a culture, in its practices and behaviors, when another culture is imposed to it. Transculturation is a complex process of transformation in which moments of acculturation alternate with moments of deculturation, and neoculturation, loss, reencounter, selection, and incorporation. Transculturation is the very complex process of cultural transformation in terms of economy, institutions, law, ethics, religion, art, language, psychology, sex and life. Art, then, what we are analyzing here, is the space of culture; it is the decided/active transformation, the self-aware transformation. According to Adolfo Colombes (2013), if the mission of art has been to give power to the other social functions, and not to take pleasure in itself, why does a certain aesthetic becomes a rejection of what is social?

Is creativity, then, a performativity of customs, or an appropriation of the world? A symptom or an unconscious act? A daydream, or the impossibility of dreaming?

In *The Order of Discourse*, Michel Foucault conceives “discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity.” [24] “Four notions must therefore serve as a regulatory principle for analysis: event, series, regularity and conditions of possibility. Term for term, we find the notion of event opposed to that of creation, series opposed to unity, regularity opposed to originality, and condition of possibility opposed to signification.

These other four notions (signification, originality, unity, creation) have in a general way dominated the traditional history of ideas, where by common agreement one sought the point of creation, the unity of a work, an epoch of a theme, the mark of individual originality, and the infinite treasure of buried significations.” [25] But what happens when the opposites are paired together?

4. The unutterable and creation: a conclusion

As mentioned in the beginning, creative action by women has an advantage that affects art. According to Adolfo Colombres, written art is an identity card of paramount importance in the different areas of everyday life as well as in extraordinary times, but its most important achievements lie in action.

Both artists, in their own way, do not only give a stage to the social and personal imagination, but also render the deep meanings of collective experience easier to perceive. It seems difficult to call it “art”, given that this concept is occidental, and appeared in Renaissance Europe, reclaiming the autonomy of the human from the sphere of the sacred, that is to say, as a separation of the sacred and artistic expression (Colombres, 2004, p.13). In the same line of thought, Foucault warns us that the individual was favored over the social, the artist’s creative freedom was celebrated and attributed to the “genius” (not “genia”), to the exceptional being, to what was original, meaning innovation and rupture rather than faithfulness to the origin.

It is precisely about the latter that native culture concerns itself with. As Rodolfo Kusch writes in his work *Geocultura del Hombre Americano*, the society of a country with a colonial past must define its culture by observing its own experience and give up on European categories that only denigrate this experience. Kusch then gave a fundamental space for creation here in America, and especially in Argentina, where no original philosophy exists. To conquer a technique of our own to think about ourselves would not only imply getting rid of the fear of owning what is ours (Kusch wrote at the dreadful time that Romano Sued’s novel refers to), but also to claim the materials that are born and which blossomed in our Latin American lands. An effort that the present essay strived to achieve.

But to push forth these attempts, we must avoid the fear to criticize what was inherited and infused with “monoculturalism”, to paraphrase Bouaventura de Sousa Santos. Precisely what Kusch did not notice is the aesthetic exclusion his own book contains: the category “man” and the lack of reference to woman – even if we are conscious that we could be accused of anachronism, we remain surprised. The tactical absence of women leaves out the potentiality of diversity and therefore of the two works analyzed (Romano Sued’s and Claudia Levy’s), which belong to an accumulation of creative facts resulting from the efforts of women who do not forget the difference between the sexes. Creativity is not here at the service of lamentation as an action but rather it follows indignation and the awakening to emancipating and rebellious action, which offer tools to fight violence. It is then the responsibility of the reader/spectator/listener to take up these pacific, generous weapons that are creatively offered to change her life and her relationship to the others.

As González García (2011) observes in *Max Weber y Rilke: la magia del lenguaje y de la música en un mundo desencantado*, the literary metaphor as well as music become a language that has the ability to build a divine

abode, a place where reason reaches its limits and the unutterable becomes tangible through the poetic word as well as through music, both of which re-enchant our universe.

5. Footnotes:

[1] With examples such as Michelle Bachelet, Cristina Fernández, Dilma Rousseff.

[2] The examples are many, but one of the most eloquent is Camila Vallejo, former leader of the Centro de Estudiantes (student center) of the Chilean university, who now sits in the Chilean Congress.

[3] In Argentina, the prime example is the disappearance of Marita Verón. Her mother took upon herself to keep a watch on clandestine brothels. In her search for her daughter, she rescued many women from sexual slavery. She is now considered the leading figure in the struggle against human trafficking.

[4] Let us point out that Cuba is the Latin American pioneer for this right, which also exists in Uruguay and Puerto Rico, while the Federal District of Mexico legalized it in 2007. See Ortiz Millán, 2009.

[5] As shown in the book *Putas y guerrilleras* (Hookers and Guerilleras, translator's note) published in 2013 and authored by Olga Womat and Miriam Lewin, a journalist and a former "disappeared" detainee.

[6] First published in 2007, third edition published in 2012.

[7] Heilbron, J. (2009).

[8] What we understand by "abductive reasoning" is the inference used to form an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation that allows for the introduction of new ideas. (Cf. Hoffmann, M. (1998)).

[9] Romano Sued, 2012: 95-96

[10] « Gasp gasp gasp gasping, an acoustic signal for volts and for two hundred and twenty, swamp, indignity trapped shame misery sob inside we snap in cuffs funereal throats./Here latent from stumble into fall, worms, here sister larvae, fraternal, we murmur in tune, with a rope and a string./Here new knowledge is giving value to deficient deaths without end quenching with cuddles crafted and debuted for nights at La Ribera./Here they have drunkenly departed, asleep and bound in rows, they have left behind rumors of ascents creeping up towed to trucks, transportations of transfers serving presumption time./Here we only hear outward routes./ Sometimes mixed with sounds of hearses heading outward to San Vicente./Here thirtythree wild ones collapse brutally, blinded by rheum amassed with paste of glances practicing infinite wakes, cords tangled with knotted threads of signals, names, things, treasures reserved for eyes and hands of another posterity./ Praying in wait of future hands and eyes that will touch and see and read and believe./Here processing of nights of days increasingly efficient, perfect, better, we gain more skill our guts flowering in fear howling in harmony with each kick./I would like to have embroidered names, whichever, knotted to thick fences keeping in check memories to name./There in dead cities corpses grind their teeth irrigating red meadows pavements rain gutters baits silenced with functional music. [Transl. Flor Méchain]

[11] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 2003: 42.

[12] *The Eternauta* is a science fiction graphic novel that hinted towards the period of State Terrorism to come. This remarkable work of art was created by scenarist Héctor Germán Oesterheld and artist Francisco Solano López. It can be found online here: www.taringa.net/comunidades/eleternauta/7342326/APORTE---El-Eternauta-I-II-y-III-en-PDF.html

[13] Among other commentaries available online, see those by Luisa Valenzuela, Ludmila da Silva Catela, Daniel Goldman, Mauricio Tarrab, Pérez Esquivel, Amílcar Romero, and Daniel Riera.

[14] Semilla Durán, M. (2012: 122).

[15] Translator's note « I was told »

[16] Argentinean slang: a woman.

[17] Argentinean slang: a young woman.

[18] Drunk

[19] Popular expression meaning "you do not care"

[20] To beat up

[21] The police

[22] Stupidity

[23] "I was told you were seen at three in the morning/your tie was all tangled, you were walking sideways/
drunk enough you talked to the street lamps on your way/and kicked on the trash cans because of a woman./
Stop posing as the poor guy because we all know/you don't give a damn about doing right or wrong/that the
girl you'd be crying for out and about/You've smacked her seven times and mistreated her tens. (Chorus) Cry, no
Christ will save you/Cry, crying does you good/Now get down from your horse and catch up with the news/give
up that cowardice, you don't strike a woman. I was told on Sunday you let a bit too loose/your girl got too tired
and went to see the cops/then she packed her bags and left you a little note/don't look, don't call, I can't take
it anymore./You acted cool and looked as if nothing was going on/you thought this bullshit she will be over it
soon/and today it's been four months since your girl has gone/you don't understand why life is so harsh on you.
(Repeat chorus)"

[24] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, transl. By I. McLeod, in R. Young (ed.), *Untying the Text : A Post-Structuralist Reader*, London, Routledge, Kegan and Paul (1981), p.67.

[25] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, transl. By I. McLeod, in R. Young (ed.), *Untying the Text : A Post-Structuralist Reader*, London, Routledge, Kegan and Paul (1981), p.67.

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Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny. Article. May 2006. Arguing that the development of the co-creation paradigm in branding demands a [Show full abstract] recasting of brand management, this paper revisits the conventional theoretical notions of BI and BIm and their reciprocal relationship. Read more. Chapter. The violence and bloodshed of the religion of atheism. iStockphoto. by Don Hardgrave. Evolution, the atheists' creation myth, is effectively government endorsed and sponsored. Here we have the dangerous situation of religion, atheism, mixed with political power. Even Richard Dawkins wrote 3. Forms of Violence in Plath's Opus 3.1 Historical Violence 3.2 Medical Violence 3.3 Sexual Violence 3.4 Psychic Violence and Death 3.5 Mythological Violence. 4. Mythologization of Violence. 5. Violence and Language. Before digging deeper into the matter of violent, aesthetic creation, in the following chapter I pick out some examples of the broad scope of forms of violence in the author's work to illustrate the predominance of destructive themes and their reciprocal action. 3. Forms of Violence in Plath's Opus.