

Feminine Interferences: Three Performances by Jenny Jaramillo

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Handle plastic conveniently long
Stick on hook allows you to place
The brush in the toilet within easy reach
Container holders brush designed well with

Glass aluminum as such
Cleaning domestic general for
Fregona, melena, greña
The miracle mop

Recorded text from *Miracle Mop*

In the month of July 2004, Jenny Jaramillo performed three actions: *Miracle Mop*, *Deseasentar*, *Testa di sémola di grano duro*. Under these titles filled with irony, the artist from Quito staged multiple surprising representations of femininity about emptiness and contradiction. Jaramillo revisits her recurring theme: a gesture that trespasses the body, gender and social aspects. This time, however, with a post-minimalist language that rescues action, sensorial experience and sexual matters. The execution of varied routines that took place in the Benjamín Carrión Cultural Centre provoked a potent interaction with the public, who experienced a generalized interference of pre-established meanings about identity and gender. From the distance, the artist's performances have a restless strength that carves a unique place for her in the art practices from Ecuador.

Repetition and Subversion

In *Miracle Mop*, Jaramillo repeats words in English imitating a recording of a male voice. Her body has been painted with a military camouflage, and she keeps wings connected to her back and hands while a series of 28 slides are projected onto her. The slides show the artist wearing a sari, manipulating several cleaning tools. The images, the sound and her performance are repeated in regular intervals. The artist, a winged woman, insistently tries to repeat the recorded script, however as time passes, her task becomes impossible. The accent, tone, diction, *hispanidad* and femininity in her voice produce a distance between the pre-recorded model and her execution.

In this entire act, Jaramillo situates her action from a woman's subaltern place. "I don't understand where I can speak from. I am not a man, I am not a homosexual, I am a woman. I can only speak as a woman," says the artist. For this reason, *Miracle Mop* alludes to a masculine projection mechanism over her woman's voice and body. The slides images and recording suggest that feminine identity is a product of a copy or a transcription of the masculine order and desire. The performance represents a woman as a

lapse of an established script, like a stain on the projected image. Nevertheless, the mistakes, the interference, and the deviation end up transforming into a source of feminine creativity. The repeated male voice is transformed, violated, questioned. The Indian image, fixed and domestic, while projected over the artist's body, becomes warped, distorted and empty. This step from mimesis to *poiesis*, from imitation to replica, from copy to replacement, designates a subtle maneuver of feminine subversion. This strategy consists of liberating something unnamed by masculine law, something invisible in the stereotypes that anchor a woman's image to an identity or role. *Miracle Mop* alludes to this unnamed and invisible distance in an effective manner, pronounced through the repetition of common-places and stereotypes. The execution of routine actions, of verbal voiceover, and of a dislocation of images profiles a semantic residue that alludes to a non-identified being, a woman represented but always absent, in a "lost state," as Gayatri Spivak said.

Loquacity and Muteness

Desasentar begins with a video projection shot in Amsterdam, where Jaramillo appears seated on a chair surrounded by a multiplicity of objects and clothing articles. As the angle widens, the artist wears the attires piled around her. Live, she appears nude, carrying a bundle just as the Andean women do. She walks around the stage, stops, spits, and spreads her saliva around with her foot, as though demarcating her territory on stage. After finishing, she offers cigarettes to the public, and lights them. Finally, she returns to the stage, puts down her bundle, guards it, and abandons it.

In a strategy of Dadaist inspiration, Jaramillo articulates heterogeneous elements that never communicate. The images from Amsterdam, which allude to a suffocating First World consumerist society, engage in an impossible dialogue with the nude and submissive body of the indigenous woman from the Third World. The clothing articles, suffocating symbols of identity and culture in the video, become a heavy load in the live action, a mark of loot. As the artist stated, clothes are "a material sign that determines everything," and it is nothing more than "uniform" or "camouflage," all and nothing at the same time.

Desasentar shows how an eloquence of symbols seems to rhyme with their aponia. On the one hand, the corporal actions allude to a production of femininity from social symbols, like a dress or domestic chores. On the other hand, the repetition of routine acts absorbs meaning, revealing a pure game of signified without referent.

As Eve Kosofsky recalls, all performative act expands in two opposite directions: "the actor's extroversion, and the introversion of the signified." Jenny Jaramillo's art of actions confirms this statement in the sense of an impossible conjunction of loquacity and muteness. Video and theatre, dress and body, sexuality and culture, stage and public are juxtaposed configuring a palimpsest where acting and meaning are divorced. The repetitious and absurd acts dislocate pre-established meanings about cultural identity and gender. Representations of gender, nation and culture experience a symbolic proliferation, as well as absorption of meaning.

Untranslatable Identities

Finally, *Testa di sémola di grano duro* combines performatic actions with strategies of intervention of the public space. In the installations at the Carrión Centre, four players, including the artist, cook some noodles while the public arrives. Bearing ordinary pots and pans, and small boards hanging from their backs, they go out on the streets. Jaramillo writes the word “Testa” in each of her fellow performers’ boards, and one of them repeats the action on the artist’s. The performers then go around the block, walking backwards and on a single file formation, while they slowly ingest the noodles they carry in their pots. They go around the block four times, and in each of them they pause to write another fragment from the phrase that titles the performance.

Once again, repetitive acts devoid of any goal elude and allude to a series of signifieds related to gender roles. The pots and pans, and the noodles designate the kitchen, a conventional place of feminine recognition. The Italian phrase is an intertextual reference to the world of culinary publicity, and products in the supermarket. As in the previous two performances, pre-determined identity symbols are imbedded here. Not to affirm them or to essentialize them, as the media discourse would, but on the contrary, to question their meaning from a persistent semantical interference and symbolic rupture. These abundant significations about the feminine seem to be directed towards a dislocation of conventional representations of women. We could claim something similar about cultural identities the artist frequently evokes. The allusions to Indian society, to Andean tradition, to Italian and English languages, stage the problem of cultural difference understood according to what Jacques Derrida outlined as an “untranslatable translation.” The identity symbols presented here are in a permanent battle, in mutual confrontation and interference without solution or continuity. It is impossible to dialogue or translate around them. In that sense, a total and coherent reading of the cultural signifieds on stage is useless. The identity traits constantly appear fractured, incomplete, and undecipherable, displaced from their own centre, deprived of an original meaning.

Translated by Alessandra Santos

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