

NOTAS DE CARNAVAL (CARNIVAL NOTES)

Eduardo Abaroa

Translation: Paulina Ascencio

They say suicide is contagious. In some countries, newspapers would rather not publish the news when someone famous commits suicide, fearing to provoke the Werther effect, which was named after the large amount of young people in the 17th Century who emulated the suicidal protagonist of Goethe's famous novel. From the beginning, this magnificent writer displayed a distant irony regarding his character's destructive sentimentalism. Nevertheless, Werther became an emblem of romantic genre for the upcoming centuries, an anti-hero who is always on the brink of the abyss, capable of moving refined sensibilities with his own fatal melancholy. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare also deals with irony the passionate exaltation that leads both lovers to their own destruction. Certainly, these authors are subtle enough to avoid caricaturing their characters, achieving, through their pens, a reflection on human psyche that reaches the highest peaks. Though, we cannot but admit that there is a dose of black humor in these masterpieces. In both works, death seems to appear in series that follow a perverse logic. The path of self-destruction, no matter how sacred and noble the motive may seem in a superficial reading, lacks redemption. The motivations of the unfortunate youth are tied to a chain of errors and aberrations, which are the true axis (certainly pessimistic) of the stories.

One of the favorite acts of a magician is to pull out a white rabbit from an apparently empty top hat. To successfully perform a magic trick it is essential to practice it a hundred, maybe a thousand times. Perhaps, these repetitions became unbearable to the rabbit so, one day, he decided to commit suicide in the middle of a show. Dangling from the black top hat, a noose and the hanged rodent. The corpse is a testimony of the failed trick, but the magician disappeared. The hat floats in the air. Without a doubt, the small animal took control of the situation, although he had to pay an extremely high price.

To begin with a brief introduction to the work of Cynthia Gutiérrez, it is important to strongly emphasize this act of repetition. In her most effective sculpture pieces it is possible to clearly discern a pulsation on everything recurrent, which sometimes risks going unnoticed due to the elegant simplicity of her montages. How can this rabbit's mini-tragedy in *El gran truco* (The Great Trick) be seen as anything but as a thousand-times repeated ritual failing for the first time? In a related piece, we are witnesses of another failed spectacle when the hat is trapped in the wall in *The Show Must Go On* (2010). The show has stopped, but that is why it is interesting. However, we know it must go on over and over again. Repetition sometimes reaches a delirious tone, like in "Sweet Chaos" (2010), a weathercock that clearly points out four cardinal points: south, south, south, and finally south.

Several years ago, the World Health Organization's coordinator for mental illness revealed the fact that in total more people die each day from suicide than from wars and homicides. It is of little consolation that human beings are, at least from a statistical point of view, crueller to themselves than to others. But, in a violent atmosphere such as the one Mexico is currently in, victim proliferation is vertiginous as well as the constant ringing of violent-related messages: fear expressions, impotence, rage, scandal and resignation. I cannot help but thinking there is something dark recurring here, that message redundancy can trigger a mortal pulsation itself, a desire to die and kill.

This is how we get to the piece that concerns us. *Notas de carnaval* (Carnival Notes) is clearly a watershed event for the artist's work, which, in spite of her fruitful technical research, it had not been executed in these dimensions. It is an interactive piece, which also contrasts her other work. Within a simple mechanism consisting of a wooden container, a rope and a pulley, the spectator participates by rolling a coconut on a tilted platform. The platform ends abruptly at the top of a wall, and the coconut falls, bursting when hitting the ground of the museum entrance. The piece seems more like a part of an assembly line or an agricultural packing machine than like a carnival. A simple review of Gutiérrez's recent work would give us a clue to understand the story behind this piece. *Clásico accidente cerebrovascular* (Classic Cerebrovascular Accident) (2011), is a severed, white, classic-style head which seems to be falling to the floor, as if it were a still frame from a movie. A plastic plant sprouts from the neck. A decapitation that seems to announce some sort of reassuring and artificial hope. In *Decapitados: una decoración para nuestro tiempo* (Decapitated: a decoration for our times) (2011) the reference to the abominable practices of Mexican criminals, who, to terrify their enemies and society as a whole, seem to be looking for increasingly obscene ways of mutilation, including decapitation, is much clearer. In this work we can see how decorative silk scarves seem to be sprouting from a sculpture's cut off head. As in other of her pieces, we are in front of minimal narratives overflowing with irony. Gutiérrez's talent is to achieve these visual fables, which, in spite of their brevity, manage to open unusual interpretations in spaces of confusion and imbalance.

Notas de carnaval is a machine that brings to mind Raymond Roussel's great and macabre mechanisms in *Locus solus*. The coconuts falling from the top are metaphors of the infamous severed heads that have kidnapped the imagination of a whole country. The piece has little to do with a carnival, although the title alludes to the series of "heads" rolling, one behind the other, as marching through the main avenue. Criminal cynicism becomes increasingly sinister while our communities and mass media are getting used to the situation. We ourselves risk to one day become indifferent; we could even get to see these dead bodies as goods in their way to be happily consumed, in the spectacular cult of mass media. But in the artistic space, the darkest could be productive, and

perhaps black humor is the last bastion of compassion left before falling in total indifference; the banality towards violence and the pain of others observed by Hannah Arendt. Gutierrez's decapitation pieces used to have a melancholic tone, but they are now shoddy terror machines, the symptoms of a suicidal collectivity. Perhaps this carnival is the viable alternative. Perhaps, the repetition of the coconuts, one, two, three, four, as notes on a beat; shall be the rhythm of our delirium from now on.

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