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Silvia Márquez Pease

Evita, *Rapsodia Inconclusa* by Nicola Costantino, sixty-eight years later.

The exhibit of contemporary Argentinean artist Nicola Costantino, “Rapsodia Inconclusa,”¹ at the 55th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia in 2013 depicts glory and tragedy. More than sixty-eight years after the death of Evita, informed by generations of Argentine women, Nicola Costantino portrays the beloved national icon of Evita. Indeed, as the artist explains, the installations highlight both Evita’s glory and her tragedy, in an unusual way that must not go unexamined. “Rapsodia Inconclusa’s” video installations and kinetic sculpture tell the story of a woman, Eva Duarte de Perón, in a series of aesthetic encounters that frame the ambiguous or inconclusive narrative of what we can and can’t see. Just like a rhapsody that is a stitched together free form of song composition, Costantino stitches life-moments of Evita to reimagine and reinterpret an inconclusive end, neither positive nor negative. What did Evita represent for the Argentine women ?

I argue that even though there will always be an implied narrative explicitly connected to ideologies in the depiction of Eva Perón, the work of Nicola Costantino, “Rapsodia Inconclusa” propels a new poetic narrative dismantling previous conceptions of the mythic form of Evita depicted in the agitprop posters of 1946. Indeed, “Rapsodia Inconclusa” transports the audience into poesis, negating a unilateral previously staged myth of Evita through agitprop. Furthermore, Costantino’s installations of Evita at the Biennale, integrate a cacophony of Deleuzian voices

and viewpoints as a mean to reframe discussions of the political struggles and institutional power, gender, and identity.

Constantino artworks' representations are indeterminate, explained by John Cage's notion of a silent grey area in which imagery objects and video can pose and overdetermine the previous historiological coherence of the ideal myth. The artist remixes the historical political content for a new context disrupting preformed associations with the myth of Evita. The exhibit "Rapsodia Inconclusa," makes us reflect upon a new visibility for women through a contemporary representation of Evita. Which leads us to other questions: What does this contemporary metaphor reclaim in relation to Eva Perón? Can any narrative become so fixed, finished that a subsequent reading is untenable? How does it affect the contestation and liberation of gender identities? How is the retroactive critique represented here, being read, seen, and heard?

To briefly answer these questions, I will start defining the term metaphor that composes the subtitle of Constantino's installation "metáfora contemporánea."¹ During postmodern times, continental philosophy paid attention to metaphors because they questioned the boundaries between subjects, ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics. Indeed, through metaphors we conceive things in terms of other things, which in turn translates into attributes of significance and action affecting our realities. I insist that contemporary key epistemological concepts contain metaphors at their roots (e. g. Eva, the Espejo – Eva, the Mirror; Eva, el sueño – Eva, the dream). Furthermore, a metaphor dislocates forms and challenges the boundaries where one subject defines itself in relation to another. It is precisely these forms of relations situated in the 'in

¹ Metáfora contemporánea means contemporary metaphor.

between' that mediate our understanding and interpretation of the world. The other term to define is 'inconclusa' that means inconclusive (Inconclusive Rhapsody), explained by John Cage's indeterminacy in duration notion, where chance, chaos, and escape from the "mind as a ruling agent" occurs while a resolution is not reached (27). Additionally, Constantino creates videos overlapping multiple figures and actions forming Cage's universe of many 'somethings' after a 'silence' (or nothing), a universe of uncertainty; yet, full of transformative potential. Evita is depicted by a juxtaposition of images, performances, and instances, that produces a chaos of uncertainty. No doubt this uncertainty expresses "indeterminacy" or acts of 'silence' channeled through chance, capable of producing endless, unexpected, shocking content (Cage 221, 223, 272).

The thoughts of John Cage, Giles Deleuze, Eduard Glissant, Agamben and others will assist in the understanding of the process in which a form inscribes and reinscribes itself, revealing itself to us. Thus, if left unexamined, we would miss the opportunity to comprehend that such forms have the capacity to dominate fundamental individual identities and meanings.

“Eva los sueños” (“Eva the dreams”)

The video installation “Eva los sueños” (Eva the dreams) depicts six representations of Evita who are living together in the same space at different times of the day. The video is layered with forms of glory and tragedy in the representations of the ill Evita, Evita modeling a beautiful summer dress, Evita enjoying a Sunday morning, the tireless hard-working Evita in a tailored suit and a bun, and Eva the stunning queen dressed for a theater gala. All these instances of Eva are choreographed in the same video panoramic space, personified by Nicola Costantino and shot with three different cameras which showed the video through six projectors (Figure 1).

Evita, who simultaneously exists in a Deleuzian multiplicity of subjects or is represented by many women, might also be characterized as an opaque form in the sense defined by the Martinican writer Edouard Glissant who states: “There is an opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today. . . . Opacities must be preserved”(54). An integral aspect of opacity and confusion, then, is to maintain indeterminacy amid the constant flux of forms in the life of Evita. Formalist allusions of opacity are depicted in her facial expressions; in the mirror reflection that does not reflect her in her entirety; and, in the ambivalence of her body language not facing the viewer.

Myth legitimizes sameness and deviates from reality, yet the mythical thinking still persists in popular culture. Nicola Constantino’s work is concerned with not only exposing the cultural myth of Evita but also retelling it, in a perverse way (from *père-verse*), slipping away from the engrained patriarchal society. Certainly, Constantino enacts Evita with an attitude that doesn’t match her biography. What is portrayed in Constantino’s installation is not ideology, but a *mélange* of emotions embodied in the representation of the imperfect Evita. Art is depicting a reality not a myth, while disrupting and reimagining Evita’s history.

“Eva el espejo” (“Eva the mirror”)

In the second video installation, “Eva el espejo”, Evita –and all her simultaneous depictions–are preparing to step on a stage. Evita is reflected in a bedroom’s mirror sharing a tender side of her character that was never publicized before (Figures 3). There are multiple images of Evita and they do seem to be animated and worried, but it is as if they could speak to us. Constantino aims to represent the unrepresented in a non-mythical manner, as if she is rendering a historical trauma through art. There is an ambivalence in Evita’s posture, sadness,

and confusion, in preparation for the big appearance. In the center of the stage Evita remains static, without movement, silent; a moment of pose that creates subliminal messages as a “never ending echo” (Glissant 19). Perhaps referring to the persona of Evita and her inner torments while reflecting herself onto the mirror. Glissant describes that the cultural identity is inextricably tied to the feeling of “the torments of inner exile” (19). Hence, Evita could be considered in exile in her own country because she grew up in a foreign socio-cultural status of poverty.

“Eva la fuerza” (“Eva the force”)

These two video installations are contrasted by a mechanical, grotesque object machine sculpture. Constantino’s “Eva la fuerza” is an iron machine-dress that moves erratically on wheels in a walled, octagonal corridor. John Cage notes that to conceive under “chance and the escaping of the mind” means a movement without a clear direction such as the one depicted in Constantino’s installation “Eva the force” (Cage 14) (Figure 3). This artwork was inspired by Evita’s last days of life when she was held with a similar machine-dress to maintain a stiff posture during her public appearances, faking her medical condition. Constantino uses a very strong material to build the hollow sculpture of the dress depicting a stable appearance; yet it is a framework of small inter-connected metal parts that can only exist as a whole. The kinetic sculpture of a dress, without a head, moves fast and aggressively, pointing to the systematic institutional neglect of gender equality. Within a plurality of mediums, Constantino looks at the Argentine society as a recurring space of fracture and conflict, voicing nonconformity.

“Eva la lluvia” (Eva the rain)

Lastly, “Eva la lluvia” represents what Constantino sees as the Argentinian people’s never-ending sorrow for Evita’s unfulfilled promise as a political and spiritual leader. Constantino investigates the ways death and grief affect the body and mind. The artist creates this installation, more than seventy years after the death of Evita, depicting the Argentinian consciousness inside a brightly lit autopsy room. Constantino’s cold stainless-steel table covered with ice tears at the center stage, offer a rain-like sound as they melt. Above, a bright surgery light points to the tears, where emotions are processed. Constantino’s “Eva la Lluvia” is inconclusive and enigmatic. Just as there is no one way to grieve Evita’s death, there is no correct response to the pain of others (Figure 4).

To experience Nicola Constantino’s installation, “Rapsodia Inconclusa,” is to understand the complexity of Argentina’s history and its references to myth and non-myth, reality versus illusion, rising out of the glory and tragedy of the life of Evita. But Nicola Constantino has prompted various debates among critics who question her representation of the Argentine myth. “Rapsodia Inconclusa,” does not have a positive or negative end. It is inconclusive. It invites to a moment of ambiguity, greyness, inconclusiveness, diversity. Thus it might be explained by Glissant’s floating archipelagos, the Deleuzian plurality and multiplicity of non-linearity, Cage’s magical experimental movements of exchanges and beginnings, or as expressed by the artist Nicola Constantino: “it is a new poesis and representation of Evita.”

Cited Works

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Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relations*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.



Figures 1. Costantino, Nicola. Eva, los sueños. 55th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2013



Figure 2. Costantino, Nicola. Eva, el espejo. Video installation. 55th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2013



Figure 3. Costantino, Nicola. Eva, la fuerza. Kinetic Sculpture. 55th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2013



Figure 4. Costantino, Nicola. Eva, la lluvia. Kinetic Sculpture. 55th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2013

Videos of the installation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSrymLoR0aU&t=4s>

<https://vimeo.com/69752652>
