

Lotty Rosenfeld

*Cuenta regresiva / 11.09.2006*

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The performances staged by the artists' collective Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA) in public spaces were among the most outstanding artistic events in Chile under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The group, consisting of the sociologist Fernando Balcells, the writer Diamela Eltit, the poet Raúl Zurita, and the artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, was active between 1979 and 1985. Since then, each of its members has gone on to pursue a separate career, but they still collaborate occasionally. Lotty Rosenfeld became famous internationally between 1979 and 1999 with her interventions in public spaces. What she did was to draw crosses through the white markings in the middle of the road—including in front of the White House in Washington, D. C.—turning what looked like minus signs into plus signs and thus using art to symbolically transgress social rules.

*Cuenta regresiva / 11.09.2006* is a video installation based on a thirty-minute film she made in 2005. The script *L'invitación, el instructivo* (The Invitation, the Handbook) was written by Diamela Eltit. Each of the six people in the installation suffers, as Eltit writes, "symptoms of nervousness: cough, allergies, asthma, stuttering, cramps, palpitations." The video installation is a kind of allegory for the situation in Chile after the dictatorship, whereby the authoritarianism of the Pinochet regime re-emerges in a new guise in the democracy that follows it. The suppressed trauma of the dictatorship manifests itself in aggressiveness and mutual distrust. The formerly oppressed begin to resemble their oppressors. The situation oscillates between explosion and implosion.

The scene is a disused factory. Some of the actors have been invited to a mysterious official banquet at which they must arrive at “7:00 p.m. on the dot” with “hands well washed, impeccable” and are not allowed “to make any comments.” The dialogues revolve around the question of why another actress has given their names for the banquet and we see each of them engaged in efforts not to have to attend the banquet. All that is left to each individual is his or her name, body, and memories of the dead. The only means of opposition left to the main character is control over her own body—out of protest she urinates standing up on the floor every time she encounters a conflict situation.

Here Rosenfeld expands the first linear film version that she made in 2006. Changing camera angles and distorted projections into the space are used to deconstruct events. The dissolution of coherence now takes place on the media level as well. Fear fragments language, identity, the narrative, and even the technical equipment. Not only do the cameras and microphone seem to lose their stability, even the camera team has trouble orienting itself. The room with no exterior, along whose walls the cameras repeatedly feel their way as if they were the walls of a labyrinthine prison, recalls the prisons of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, while in their hopelessness the events resemble a story by Franz Kafka.

The actors—including the representative of the authorities—are dysfunctional, in other words, they don’t fit in any social function; they react inappropriately, are full of inner contradictions, and are incapable of behaving in any kind of coherent way. In one scene one of the characters pours a tub containing his partner’s urine over the projection of an image on the wall. The image is of Rosenfeld’s *Accion de arte: casa de gobierno La Moneda, Santiago/Chile* taken in October 1984 when she painted crosses over the road markings in front of the presidential palace, changing them into plus signs. The artist’s protest, hopeless at the time, is symbolically erased twenty years later in an act of rage and powerlessness. Time runs backwards; nothing can reverse the destruction of democracy in 1973. Every action

remains a reaction to this initial injustice, which spreads like an infection through language, gestures, and facial expressions. Time moves on, but it does not heal wounds and brings no change.