

## FEATURE ARTICLE

### 1

## The *Inner Cries* of Silence

Fewzia Benyelles Bedjaoui

### Abstract

This essay is a personal interpretation of Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo's famous photographic exhibitions and installations, notably KI – Hasht-Bihisht (Irish Georgian Society, Dublin, 2015 Ireland), KII – Pantonecropolis (Auditorium Arte, Rome, Italy 2016), KIII – Pantonecropolis – Columbarium (Centro Nacional de las Artes, Mexico City 2018). Certainly, cemetery spaces are perceived more than demarcated sites of burial as they nurture the significance and meanings of sacred spaces for people's life, including religious, aesthetic, moral and transcendental dimensions.

*Keywords:* cemeteries, death, hope, life, photograph.

It is therefore an atypical invitation that Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo addresses to us, like a mythical poet, for an inner odyssey where the soul takes a journey through a cross-cultural landscape of cemeteries and gardens. The route that Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo has drawn allows us to outline a reflection on memory that preserves "intact" images beyond the wear of time, and on the reading of photography, because any "image fixes an infinity of possibilities" (Roland Barthes 1973) where imagination would express the unspeakable.

The garden of cemeteries, a pictorial transposition of reality, serves as a space of both death and life. It testifies to the uncontrollable cycle of life and the unsearchable power of nature. This space consoles memory, transcending the tyranny of time – "a time which would evolve without dying" (Giorgio Bassani 1962), where a fragile and precious plant universe is preserved by a

carefully delineated, heavenly setting. In contrast, the decadent garden, with its survival of wild and unmanageable vegetation, instills a pervasive sense of dread. This dread is assigned to an enigmatic game of chance, leaving us perplexed by the imperceptible, or offering a defiant derision to grief, perhaps even hinting at hell or nothingness.

Is this one location due to social and religious disengagements to their own ways, or amnesia inserted in the register of insurmountable torments and the many cares of life? Such is the fate intended for cemeteries, once places of solemn commemoration, now, in many cases, temporary memory spaces. This is indeed an impromptu walk through a maze of multiform tombs, where a universe of trees and stones symbolises the human soul in all its complexity, a metaphor on the meaninglessness of life and the tragic factuality of human condition and confinement. Countless questions and speculations emerge on such sites, both paradoxical and emblematic. Sometimes, the presumptuous language of epitaphs appears as a hasty utterance, though it sounds exemplary. The wording also translates, in a caricatural fashion, the loss of a loved one or other unknown personalities whose names remain silent forever in a capricious memory.

The silent reading of words engraved on tombstones resonates as a painful prophecy or a moving, if shameful, complaint. It recalls that the shared emblem is tragedy or inevitable relief, chanting the aberrations of insatiable desires, illusory hope, or the unnecessary investment of a rebel consciousness. Yet, it grants this auditory and visual perception the musicality of an obsessing incantation, becoming then the “patience of passivity” (Maurice Blanchot 1980).

Both intriguing and captivating, silence is nevertheless evocative and polysemous. Is it the victory of the spiritual over the material, the timeless over the ridiculous, the incomprehensible over knowledge, instinct over reason, or evil over good? Probably. But the silence of cemeteries, with its “inexplicable mystery” (T.S. Eliot 1948), cannot be consigned to oblivion. Thoughts and memories flood and drain, jostling with time and emotion on the borderline of the present and the past.

Nevertheless, these cemeteries are transformed into metaphorical spaces of remembering, where the past and the present meet and blend, or rather, where every remembrance is engraved in an indelible memory. These spaces engage in meaningful messages of remorse and regret, leaving astray those in grievous tears and desperate desolation. Certainly, this deep attachment to this symbolic transfiguration intensifies and appeases the binding thread of earthly lives with departed loved ones. And even if eyes weigh heavy with timid tears and fog the mind, a small smile sometimes appears at the corners of the mouth, with a superstitious reserve that annoys and weakens. While eyes are sickened by funeral objects and thoughts, the heart eludes an oppressive fate, and on the wings of time, sadness flies (Jean de la Fontaine 1694).

However, against all aesthetic dogmatism with its indecipherable arcans, Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo helps us comprehend the originality and clarity of the prints with a natural ability. He offers a poetic take where hope serves as a stepping stone between life and death, pierces the walls of an eloquent silence, and removes the veils of an eternal sleep.

Indeed, the very print stands as a go-between reality and utopia, where the compelling desire to pop a truth of reality, or at least an interpretation devoid of any hesitation, reveals its full meaning, as only a “pledge of eternity” and not “a sign of death” (Susan Sontag 1979)

No doubt, some deliberately blurred prints arise as defiant sensorial images that soften or amplify our de/constructed internal world of preconceived ideas and exquisite emotions. Conducive to meditation, they remind us that our landmarks and the boundaries between reality and illusion are growing increasingly hazy. Is our understanding not closely confined to our intimate recollections and visual perception of the real world, altered as time passes?

Even if these prints are calling at the doors of our heightened sensitivity, where doubt interferes insidiously, they generate a world of nostalgia and prophecy. White Angel, Mictecacihuati, Phoenix, Simurgh, Albatross, or any other mythical tinged creatures combine to weave the quintessence of a waking dream. Whatever its semantic richness, mystical name, or magical “glorified” (Octavio Paz 1972)

belief, death is steeped in imagination and sensuality, where impulses and thoughts take a heartbreaking turn, and where the mystic and spiritual sense resists all kinds of singleness.

“Polyphonic” (Mikhail Bakhtin 1929), this photographic exhibition/book remains an “open work” (Umberto Eco 1962): a recognition of the uniqueness and multiplicity of human experience torn between hope and pain, a revelation of blurred boundaries and deep connections that man nurtures, “facing the urn of his destiny” (Victor Hugo 1837). But, above all, these prints highlight subtle accents of testimony sublimated in terms of art and represent an inevitable step in the realisation of this photographic journey that metamorphoses the common man into a creative and visionary photographer, in search of a “poetic idealisation” which reclaims authentic emotions and intuitive perception, restores the sacred and the profane and frees temporal elasticity forever and never.

A liminal space or rather a “no-wo/man’s land” where art is a scrumptious subversive pathway into the mythic realm of imagination and the world of the soul: that is the kind of fascinating, timeless, and unforgettable voyage through the senses, Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo perceives, during these secret moments of extreme loneliness and intense emotions.

## Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Oeuvre*. Translated. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963. Originally published 1929.
- Barthes, Roland. *Le plaisir du texte*. Paris: Seuil, 1973.
- Bassani, Giorgio. *Le jardin des Finzi-Contini*. [Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini, 1962], translated by Michel Arnaud. Collection Folio (no. 634), Paris: Gallimard, 1964.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *L'écriture du désastre*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980.
- De la Fontaine, Jean. *La jeune veuve. Livre 6*, Paris: Claude Barbin & Denys Thierry, 1694.
- Eco, Umberto. *Lettre ouverte*. Paris: Seuil, 1962.
- Eliot, T. S. *Tribute to Walter de la Mare*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1948.
- Hugo, Victor. *Les voix intérieures*. Vol. 2, Paris: Gallimard, 2002. Originally published 1837.
- Paz, Octavio. *Le labyrinthe de la solitude*. Translated by Jean-Clarence Lambert, 1990. Originally published 1972.
- Sontag, Susan. *La photographie*. Paris: Seuil, 1979.