

Gabriel Acevedo Velarde

Paranormal Citizen

Fisuras Program 25 September 2013 - 6 January 2014



Gabriel Acevedo Velarde, *Cliente secreto* (Secret Client), 2013. Video

Every time I walk past a State building, I perceive something I can't quite understand. And, strange as it may seem, what I ask myself is who really lives there.

These are the words of the TV presenter of *Paranormal Citizen*, the video that constitutes the nucleus of this project by Gabriel Acevedo Velarde (Lima, Peru, 1976). This is a program based on interviews with witnesses of supposed paranormal phenomena in official buildings in Peru. By means of two complementary exhibition spaces (Espacio Uno and Sala de Protocolo of the Sabatini Building), Acevedo reflects on the *phantom* presence of the State and of an authoritarian market.

Espacio Uno receives the viewer with a number of engraved nameplates, formally close to op art and kinetic art, which recall the transitional spaces of old cinemas, such as the lobby or the box office. The first intermediate phase between the individual and the expository discourse, it refers indirectly to that which mediates between the citizen-spectator and the State-spectacle, between politics and the show: television, the architecture of power, the civil service, and commercial establishments.

Once inside the “black cube”, the viewer is invited to choose one of several seats used throughout the history of the Museo Reina Sofía (office chairs, viewing benches, etc.) and exhumed from storage by Acevedo for this film theatre. Besides narrating paranormal experiences in official buildings, the film also shows what happens in front of the camera during commercial breaks, a lost dimension of television broadcasts that reveals their constructed and artificial nature. The space of the TV studio flaunts its precariousness and lack of architectural sense without the presence of a narrative and a montage to normalize it for the gaze.

Television has been called “the phantom image”, one based on its own narrative and on a carnivalesque falsification of the real through deliberate strategies of montage and staging. Logically, it has been the most effective tool for power since the mid-20th century. The connection between medium and message (television and program with paranormal contents) therefore suggests the presence of a “phantom state”, avowedly transparent yet intangible, which appears and disappears. In this way, the television show displays the symptoms of an absence. We encounter the architecture but not the institution, while civil servants act as a dubious *mediator* between that specter of the State and the citizen-spectator. The question asked at the beginning therefore re-emerges: who really lives there? That is, where is the State really to be found? Some answers to the question are found in the video *Secret Client*, shown in the museum’s Sala de Protocolo.

As various Peruvian analysts observe, the country’s recent economic growth is not accompanied by a strengthening of its institutions, which leads to the impression of a State that is progressively fading away. Symbolizing the way in which the economic boom and consumerism produce unexpected effects, the exquisitely uniformed staff of the supermarket in *Secret Client* behave with a servility disguised as enthusiastic patriotism which associates their image and working system with that of a beehive society or an army. They are marked by an interiorized and obedient discipline. Their working routines, martial in appearance, are likened in Acevedo’s project to a sort of cathartic collective ritual which annuls individuality. These are two poles of utopian discourse which are nevertheless expressed in practically the same way, with current institutional propaganda on the one hand, and on the other the modern choreographic rituals of the sixties, of which the subversive group Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) provides a Peruvian example that is both anachronistic and premonitory.

What interests Acevedo is precisely the intermediate space where utopian delirium lives together with consumerism, institutional normality with the “paranormal”, and the individual voice with the institutional. Were this not so, we might assume, for instance, that this text had been written solely by workers at the museum, with no sign whatsoever of the artist himself writing spectrally in the third person.

**Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte
Reina Sofía**

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Museum hours

Monday to Saturday
and holidays
from 10:00 a.m.
to 9:00 p.m.
Sundays from
10:00 a.m.
to 7:00 p.m.*
Closed Tuesdays

Galleries close
15 minutes
prior to Museum
closing

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*From 2:30 p.m.
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