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# RHETORIC, SOCIAL VALUE AND THE ARTS

## But How Does it Work?

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Charlotte Bonham-Carter
and Nicola Mann

CHAPTER 6

# *Arte de Conducta:* On Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper Series*

*Andrés David Montenegro Rosero*

**Abstract** This chapter explores Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper* series (2006–present) as enactments of an artistic practice that wants to be directly inserted in reality. First, I trace the genealogy of *Arte de Conducta* as a reaction against the Anglo-European category of "Performance" art, which anchors her work to a cultural tradition outside of the English-speaking context. Then, I discuss how Bruguera's practice is informed by her engagement with the *Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante*, a short-lived correctional project that sought to re-educate and reintegrate Cuban youths into society. It concludes with an analysis of the *Tatlin's Whisper* series and how they activate images from the past to catalyse a critical awareness of the now, and by extension of the future.

**Keywords** Tania Bruguera · Performance art · *Arte de Conducta* · Behaviour Art · Free speech · Cuba

In December of 2014, in the immediate aftermath of the announcement of the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, Tania Bruguera (b. Havana, Cuba, 1968) tried to carry out a re-enactment of

A.D. Montenegro Rosero (✉)
Art History, Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, USA
e-mail: Andres.Rosero@bridgew.edu



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her controversial work *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*. As dictated by the 2009 intervention, for the 2014 version the artist wanted to create an unregulated public space where anyone could exercise the private right to free speech for a minute. Contrary to the "original" work, which took place inside the Centro Cultural Wifredo Lam, the most recent iteration was to be held at the *Plaza de la Revolución* (Revolution Square), one of the most contested sites in Havana, symbolically as well as historically. The 2009 version successfully created a public platform for freedom of expression, although it was abruptly stopped just after 40 minutes by governmental intervention. The 2014 version could not be carried out at all as the Cuban authorities detained Bruguera, collaborators, and other associates. Some of them, including Bruguera, were freed the day after, others many days later. Although not imprisoned, the authorities confiscated Bruguera's passport preventing her from legally leaving the island—a situation that lasted for over 6 months.

This chapter explores the *Tatlin's Whisper* series (2006–present) as enactments of what Bruguera has called *Arte de Conducta* (Behaviour Art), an art that seeks to be directly inserted in reality. The first part of the essay traces the genealogy of Bruguera's concept as a reaction against the Anglo-European category of "Performance" art, as well as a linguistic act of resistance that strongly anchors her works to a specific cultural tradition outside of the English-speaking geopolitical context. In the second part, I discuss how Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta* is informed by her brief engagement with the *Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante* (School of Conduct Eduardo Marante), a short-lived correctional project that sought to reform and re-educate troubled Cuban youths in order to be integrated into society. It explores how the school's understanding of art as a useful tool for the production of alterations in the behaviour of their pupils had a long-lasting impact for Bruguera's works, which often seek to impart change in the ways through which we interact and inhabit the world. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the *Tatlin's Whisper* series and how they aim to activate well-known images from the past for the tactical re-evaluation of the present. I explore how the works dismantle specific historical and political imaginaries in order to catalyse a critical awareness of how they conduct themselves now, and by extension producing a change in the way that we behave in the future.

In a public lecture delivered in Madrid in 2010, Tania Bruguera argued in relation to her work: "the first thing is that I call it *Arte de Conducta* (Behaviour Art) and not performance, because first of all, performance is an English word, so it does not belong to my history.

We can say its tradition does not belong to me" (Bruguera 2010b, p. 63). Ironically, perhaps even paradoxically, Bruguera was catapulted into the international art scene through a series of works that have been historicised as performances, in the institutional sense of the word, which directly involved the body of the artist, and were structured through the repetition of an action over long periods of time. In *The Burden of Guilt (El peso de la culpa)* (1997–1999), perhaps Bruguera's most "iconic" early work, the artist, clad in a sheep's carcass, stood in a room and for 45 minutes, mixed Cuban soil and salt water into small pellets that she proceeded to ritualistically ingest (Pinto 2003). For *The Body of Silence* (*El cuerpo del silencio*) (1997–1998), Bruguera sat inside a metal box lined with pieces of raw meat and methodically wrote "corrections" into an official Cuban history book. These works were imbued with singular authorial intentions as they symbolically addressed a political reality. In the case of *The Burden of Guilt*, this meant bringing to the present a local historical event that described how the Tainos, an indigenous tribe settled in Cuba, decided to commit collective suicide by eating earth as an act of resistance against European colonisation (Posner 2009, p. 68). This action resonated with the situation at the end of the 1990s in the island which was characterised by extreme austerity and state censorship, a situation further explored by *The Body of Silence*. Both works also maintained the classical distinction between artist and audience as the audience was spared both the physical struggle implied by eating dirt or the political danger of correcting an official history book. Furthermore, the works could be easily turned into commodities, art products, through standard documentation, such as photographs or videos, reinforcing their character as artworks belonging to a recognised artistic tradition and from a particular artist. For many years, *The Burden of Guilt* has been the standard Bruguera piece featured in surveys of performance, or global, or Latin American Art such as Deborah Cullen's exhibition and publication *Arte no es Vida* (Art Is Not Life) (2008), or Terry Smith's *Survey of Global Contemporary Art* (2011), or Birnbaum, Butler, Cotter and Curiger's *Defining Contemporary Art* (2011). It was also included in Coco Fusco's *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (2000) and in Diana Taylor's and Roselyn Costantino's *Holy Terrors: Latin American Women Perform* (2003).

Instead of focusing on this kind of material, which according to the artist stands as a "failure" at being truly *Political Art* (Bruguera 2010a), I would like to explore how Bruguera's work can be characterised as a

*departure* from performance art. While trying to rescue performance's core spirit—the value of the gesture—Bruguera's works exceed and overflow the logic of the "medium" and aim at collapsing the categories of life and art. Bruguera's performative deviations produce a kind of artwork that analyses and produces behaviour, which lives through memory, spreads through rumours, and becomes public by altering the social realm.

## Don't Call It Performance…

In a 2007 interview with curator Rebecca Di Nardo, Bruguera spoke about her departure from performance art. She stated:

> My work has come out of my discomfort. First with the visual arts and their inevitable distance from life and later, with performance art, beginning with its name: "performance," a word in English that is linked to a cultural tradition that has nothing to do with my own. Many things have made me feel uncomfortable over the time with performance art: the expectations people have with it, its transformation into visual iconography and its apparent fatalism to become entertainment [*sic*]. (Bruguera and Di Nardo 2007, p. 79)

There are a few things worth highlighting from this dense passage. In the first place, it is important to underscore that most of Bruguera's works are driven by a deep sense of suspicion about established categories of art, in particular of performance art. In many of her accounts, there is a pervasive feeling that performance, as an institutionalised medium of contemporary art, has lost much of its relevance and urgency and has become just another art historical style or trope, sanitised and neutralised by institutionalisation. For Bruguera, this museification of the performative has severed performance art from its contextual relations, from its ephemeral quality, and from its political urgency (Bruguera 2010b). This kind of neutralised practice has turned ephemeral actions into still images valued for their potential posterity; site-specific actions have become "standards" or "canons" to be reworked, re-enacted, and reprised in different contexts and at different historical times. Transformed into a pre-packaged, standardised style—as a well-defined product available in the toolkit of contemporary artistic practices—performance art, according to Bruguera, has forgotten about the value of the gesture and, therefore, lost all touch with the realities and necessities outside of the realm of art (Bruguera and Di Nardo 2007).

Bruguera's statement also clearly separates her work from mainstream performance art in geopolitical terms by underscoring the linguistic imposition involved in calling some work *performance* art, a category rooted in the English language. In a 2012 interview with Patricia Vasquez, Bruguera recounted how, when she left Havana to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999, she realised that her work was "much more linked to political actions/performances/issues in Cuba, Latin America and the former Socialist countries than practices coming from New York in the 70s" (Bruguera and Vasquez 2012, p. 29). Furthermore, she also commented on how the word *performance* itself had become a kind of a shibboleth for her, as whenever she pronounced (or miss-pronounced) the word with a thick Caribbean-Spanish accent it became evident that she was not a native speaker, nor a native US citizen, but a non-native English speaker. As she claimed: "The fact of being unable to pronounce the word performance well also made me think quite a lot whether I wanted to do something which I did not entirely master, precisely because, culturally, it did not belong to me" (Bruguera 2003). Bruguera's departure from performance is rooted in a serious linguistic analysis of the pertinence of the word *performance* for practices that originated in contexts very dissimilar to the ones described as the cradle of performance, that is, major Western cities, in particular, New York. At the same time, calling her work *performance* would fail to signal that her practice is sited in a different genealogy, in a different tradition, related to the artistic and socioeconomic urgencies dictated by Latin American realities and, in particular, the Cuban context. By rejecting the term *performance*, Bruguera not only rejected the institutionalisation of the performative but also tied her work to what she calls a "Latin American tradition" that rescued the value of the gesture as the catalyst for ephemeral, contextually informed actions that tested the limits of the social and its relation with the personal (Curía 2009). This linguistic difference, along with the opinion that to speak of such practices in terms of *performance* was an act of intellectual and art historical colonisation (Bruguera and Vasquez 2012, p. 29), became the platform for a critique of the medium of performance art and for a more nuanced definition of her own practice.

Finally, it is important to highlight what most troubles Bruguera about performance art as a stylistic definition: "the expectations people have with it, its transformation into visual iconography and its apparent fatalism to become entertainment" (Bruguera and Di Nardo 2007, p. 79). As mentioned earlier,

*The Burden of Guilt* was for many years Bruguera's contribution to a variety of surveys on contemporary, Latin American, Global, Performance, or Feminist art. The vast majority of publications that included her work featured a very similar photographic documentation of *The Burden of Guilt*, where the artist's body covered by a sheep's carcass stands as a representation of the actual performative work. The majority of these images, in full colour and exuding high production values, bring the viewer's attention to the split carcass, the fresh flesh unfolded in front of our eyes. Paradoxically, this type of representation fails to recognise the most fundamental aspect of the performance, the physical ingestion of Cuban soil mixed with salt water, which during the late 1990s resonated with the Cuban context of scarcity and that, simultaneously, tapped into a historical legend of heroic resistance by the Tainos. A similar case can be made in terms of *The Body of Silence* where the imagery of raw flesh lining a small, cell-like room, dictated, for certain critics, the interpretation of the work as a Latin American take on Hermann Nitsch's actionist strand of performance art (Matt 2006, p. 64). Although Bruguera has publicly rejected this connection, even arguing that she was not aware of Nitsch's work until later in her career (Matt 2006, p. 64), these works were easily categorised, entrapped, and neutralised by a certain art historical exegesis and turned into documents disconnected from their original ephemerality and urgency. Just like representations of *The Burden of Guilt*, most of the documentation of *The Body of Silence* ignored Bruguera's action, her engagement in the rewriting of an official Cuban history book—ultimately thwarted by her own ingestion of the corrected pages due to fear of state-dictated repercussions. As both examples demonstrate, the works' reception and circulation reduced the symbolic and relevant actions to a snapshot detaching them from their temporality and contextual relations; live actions turned into frozen icons. In a 2006 interview, Bruguera commented on the expectations involved with performance art: "Then came the day when someone who had invited me to perform asked how many chairs I wanted in the space. I said to myself: okay . . . something is wrong here" (Matt 2006, p. 59). Her statement, very succinctly, but also very effectively, conveys one of the reasons for her dissatisfaction with the term: the very rigid expectations that the artworld has about performance art as a kind of theatrical entertainment. As her statement suggests, the term performance brings to mind a clear separation between artist and audience, an artist-/body-centred action that is clearly framed and defined as artistic which represents, symbolises, or comments on a particular context and that is there to be seen. As an event that is addressed from artist/author/performer to, or *towards* the spectator, it not only reinforces such dichotomies but also fosters a

contemplative reception, which makes the action easily objectifiable through photographic or video documentation. For Bruguera, performance is inextricably associated with spectacle, with entertainment (Matt 2006, p. 59).

## Arte de Conducta

For *Untitled (Rape Scene),* staged in April of 1973, the Cuban-émigré artist Ana Mendieta, a student at the University of Iowa, invited some of her fellow classmates to her flat. Unbeknownst to them, Mendieta had recreated a rape and murder scene highly publicised in Iowa City. Based on photographic documentation and other press materials, she positioned herself as the victim of the crime for her friends to discover (Breen 2011). Intentionally, she had left her apartment door slightly open, inviting her guests to enter the flat and become witnesses to a crime. A few months later, for *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt),* and in response to the same murder, Mendieta poured blood in different parts of the city, a desolate alley or right outside of her house, and documented the reaction of casual pedestrians who, more often than not, seemed unfazed by the implied violence. The works were significantly different—*Untitled (Rape Scene)* was a carefully constructed tableau that replicated the news report down to the smallest detail, whereas *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)* was a much more gestural, reduced action (insofar as it did not involve the same emphasis on reproduction and staging of an actual event); *Untitled (Rape Scene)* personified the victim of a crime while *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)* only alluded to the body of the victim through the trace of her blood (Breen 2011). However, both works emphasised the immediate reaction to a provocative situation, be it the instantaneous, sudden reaction of her fellow students entering her apartment and, for a few moments, thinking her friend had been sexually attacked, *Untitled (Rape Scene),* or the lack of public reaction to violence evinced by passers-by in *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)*. Furthermore, by engaging the immediate reaction of their dissimilar audiences—a private, friendly audience for *Untitled (Rape Scene)* and a public one for *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)*—both works directly engaged them by implicating them in the action as witnesses, observers, or participants. Mendieta's fellow students were not just guests, nor just audience members, but (apparent) witnesses to a crime scene. Similarly, the pedestrians in *Untitled (People Looking at Blood, Moffitt)* were not just pedestrians but unknowing participants being observed. According to

Bruguera, and although her engagement with Mendieta's work has been extensive, the aforementioned works by Mendieta were particularly important points of reference for her work (Goldberg 2004, p. 10). In an interview with RoseLee Goldberg, she described Mendieta's artistic strategy as "hyperrealistic, a hyperrealism that doesn't try to represent reality but to be inserted in it" (Goldberg 2004, p. 10). Mendieta's actions, according to Bruguera, studied and produced reactions and behaviours; the works triggered an automatic, immediate strong response cancelling the separation between the artistic action and its separation from other realms of activity, erasing the categorical differentiation between audience and participant (Goldberg 2004, p. 10).

Bruguera's notion of *Arte de Conducta* has been translated as Behaviour Art. This translation is problematic as the immediate associations and implications summoned by the word *behaviour* differ significantly from the Spanish word *conducta*. Whereas *behaviour* is usually associated with a particular set of manners, ways of life, attitudes or responses of an individual towards others (Oxford Dictionary 2010), *conducta* not only includes the way a person acts but also has a secondary meaning that highlights the ability to conduct, to direct, or to orchestrate (Real Academia de la Lengua Española 2010). Furthermore, *conducta* can also be associated with transference, as in the ability to be a conduit, a channel, or passageway for something else (Real Academia de la Lengua Española 2010). Finally, *conducta* also describes both the social behaviour of humans and more immediate, physiological reactions and responses of living beings generally—including, but not limited to, humans (Real Academia de la Lengua Española 2010). The multiplicity of meanings associated with the word *conducta*, therefore, clearly exceeds a narrow definition of *behaviour* understood as the "manner of bearing oneself," or in close relation to the word *good*—as in *good manners*—a marker of value judgements and measurement against an established rule or ideal (Oxford Dictionary 2010). In this way, and articulating a similar process of critique of the appropriateness of the word and category of *performance* art, Bruguera rejects the loose translation and emphasises the Spanish name with the intention of locating her practice in a different site, tradition, history, and language—a different genealogy altogether—from the hegemonic Anglo-speaking conventions. As she said to Patricia Vázquez, "It was important that the concept was in Spanish to highlight the fact that you were missing some cultural references, as well as stating clearly that it belongs to another tradition, another context" (Bruguera and Vasquez 2012, p. 29).

In this summary of Bruguera's understanding of the difference between *Arte de Conducta* and its translation, Behaviour Art, there is one last important point to highlight. Before she graduated from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) (The University of Arts of Cuba) in Havana in 1992, she started working at a short-lived, government-independent, foundation for the visual arts led by the Cuban painter, and ISA staff member, Tomás Sánchez (Bruguera 2007). Bruguera described the foundation's aspirations as follows: "The foundation had an ecological platform, including interpersonal relationships and society. Art was conceived of as an agent of change . . . He [Sánchez] wanted to create a program in which new ways to relate to others would be built in to the environment through art classes, thereby affording students a better social situation" (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). As her account suggests, the foundation's emphasis was the imbrication of art and life fostered by an understanding of art as a tool, a method, or a conduit, for fostering changes of behaviour, of habits and immediate responses, complemented by a belief in art's capability to act as a platform for the creation of better ways of sociability (Bruguera 2007, p. 65).

As part of her work for the foundation, Bruguera started teaching at "Escuela de Conducta Eduardo Marante"—loosely translated as "School of Conduct Eduardo Marante" or "Behavioural School Eduardo Marante." According to Bruguera, the School's name "was a euphemism for what really was a prison for kids ages five through sixteen" (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). The pupils had been sent there after they were found guilty for "low-risk" crimes, such as robbery, assault, vandalism, or fraud (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). Describing the institution, Bruguera wrote,

> The goal in these schools (there are several in Havana and on the rest of the island) was to re-educate, to prepare students to "function" in society, to "adjust," to learn how to deal with authority in a non-confrontational way, to not let others manipulate them (many were working under orders from older people); in other words to change their social conduct. In cases where these achievements were not fulfilled, students went to an "Escuela de Oficios" (a trade school) where they continued their re-education and, in the process, learned a skill that would help them obtain an honest job afterwards and become integrated into society. (Bruguera 2007, p. 66)

As her account makes perfectly clear, the school's main objective was the re-education of troubled Cuban youngsters in an effort to encourage their

reintegration into productive society. Art, under this logic, was literally used as a "tool to provide people with some freedom, some calm, some attention or even a language to express their traumas," as Bruguera commented (Bruguera 2007, p. 65). Through her art lessons, she was trying to effect a change in the conduct of her students, seeking to influence the lives and futures of her pupils, looking for "real results" in "real life," not in the world of art. She commented: "I sought a change of behaviour that could be noticed, that could be 'proved'" (Bruguera 2007, p. 66). This implied an actual change in the ways that a pupil reacted to reality, in his or her understanding of both the world and themselves. During her time in this correctional school, Bruguera was "creating reality" by trying to demonstrate that art could affect and change people's lives, that its strategies could also be pragmatic and produce a change in her pupils. Art could have a function, or as Bruguera said "some sort of utility" (Bruguera 2007, p. 66).

## *Tatlin's Whisper* Series (2006–Present)

Bruguera's notion of *Arte de Conducta* is further explored through the *Tatlin's Whisper* series. The series is composed of a combination of actions in which the artist activates, as a direct participatory experience, images that have circulated in the press and other mass media outlets (such as a Molotov cocktail or a public podium) and which, by virtue of their ubiquitous presence and circulation, have lost their mobilising power. Paradoxically, however, in the *Tatlin's Whisper* series, the images undergo a process of "de-contextualisation" where the images are plucked from their everyday circulation, and from the "event that gave way to the news," in order to be "staged as realistically as possible in an art institution" (Pérez Moreno 2009). Under these parameters, Bruguera has produced several actions in different geographical locations, such as London, Moscow, or Madrid, seeking to de-anaesthetise past images sedimented in the social imaginary with the intention of formulating a critical re-evaluation of the present.[1]

The images to which Bruguera refers have been entrenched in the construction of the identity of certain sites. As she has described, "it's the quotation—the visual quotation—is an image I've seen on TV, in the news. And this is very important, because it's how can you transform our main source of political education or bad education, which is the news, into something else?" [*sic*] (Tateshots 2008). Throughout the series,

certain images are constantly re-evaluated and re-signified in such a way that they become active tools for critique, not only of the past, but also of the discourse of the present. At the same time, the works foster a more direct relationship between the images selected and the audience members. As Bruguera argues, these images "have not been previously linked to a personal experience," but through their deployment in *Tatlin's Whisper* they become appropriated by the spectator transforming what Bruguera calls an "intellectual political knowledge into a personal memory"[2] (Tenconi 2009).

Bruguera created *Tatlin's Whisper #3* in 2006, for the Helga de Alvear gallery in Madrid. The work, as explained by the artist, consisted in "show(ing), with information downloaded from the Internet, the instructions to make a Molotov cocktail" (Bruguera 2010b). Simply put, it was a practical class on how to create incendiary bombs. It was staged during the opening night for one of the gallery's shows and offered, instead of cocktails, wine, and finger food, what Dinorah Pérez-Rementería called a "training workshop for making bombs" (Perez-Rementería 2008, p. 96). For this piece, Bruguera appropriated the symbolic image of the Molotov cocktail, an ever-present image of protests and political uprisings and revolutions. Usually confined to the street, to an active political moment, the image of the Molotov cocktail has circulated around the globe. The Molotov cocktail, however, although locally adapted and used for specific purposes which vary from country to country, has had a life of its own in the media, where every time there seems to be a social uproar, no matter where, the image on the newspapers the next morning always seems to make room for a person launching a Molotov cocktail, usually at the police.

As noted by Pérez-Rementería, the workshop, open to the general public, disregarded either suicidal or homicidal tendencies among the audience members (Perez-Rementería 2008, p. 96). For the duration of the class, the audience was exposed to dangerous chemicals, but more importantly, without them the "educational" component of the lecture would have been null and void. The audience, therefore, was responsible for what it would do with the information provided by Bruguera's workshop, which placed them as protagonists of the piece itself. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty suggests, in *Tatlin's Whisper #3*, "Bruguera happily sent her audience into the night armed with Molotov cocktails and the knowledge of how to make them: she *actually* made them *potentially* dangerous. Her Arte de Conducta assumes that art viewers are all 'political people.'

And if we are not, she makes it so" (Lambert-Beatty 2009, p. 43). By staging a work where the audience members would learn about the ins and outs of making an incendiary device, Bruguera brought the "ideal" image of the Molotov cocktail, and its symbolic implications, into the realm of the personal and individual, where the knowledge of how to produce one could be used or not by the audience members. The work, initially, surprised the spectators by not fulfilling their expectations of a convivial opening night and instead bombarding them with information about bombs. This created a closer, more personal relation with the image of a Molotov cocktail that implied a certain degree of responsibility on the part of the viewer. *Tatlin's Whisper #3* encouraged the participants to take responsibility for the possibility of embodying an image, to relate personally to the actions portrayed and not have a distanced—both historically and ideological—relation to an image of social disruption.

*Tatlin's Whisper #5*, produced in 2008, also explored the ways in which audience members can become politically activated through a work of art. For this piece, staged at the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, Bruguera placed two mounted policemen who awaited the crowd of museum goers. The policemen directed the movements of the people by using riot and crowd control methods learned in the academy. With simple movements, accompanied by verbal directions to the bystanders, the mounted policemen choreographed the human topography of the space. As Griffin stated, "They [the policemen] marshalled the gathered audience around the gallery space with the quietly awesome authority with which the animals endowed them" (Griffin 2008). The image of mounted police, usually seen during riots, protests, or urgent situations of social unrest, is the one that is being rescued, and questioned, by *Tatlin's Whisper #5*. As Bruguera argued, "Mounted police is something you can see in the photos of'68. You can see it in 1935, 1968 and 2000, you know, so it's a kind of historically recurrent image of power. And always linked to a very specific political action in order—from the audience—I mean, from the people" (Tateshots 2008). By locating an actual set of mounted policemen who would actually direct the audience, the sterile image of abstract "mounted police" became a live experience for the spectator and created a closer emotional relation to that image. For this work, the audience had to comply with several commands made by the policemen, either verbally or physically suggested by the sheer bodily might of their horses. The action, therefore, as noted by Santiago Olmo,

"reproduced power relations between policemen and people in the streets . . . but inside a museum" (Olmo 2010, p. 14).

It is important to mention that the work was a surprise to the majority of the visitors. It intruded policemen into a civil space that is supposed to be free from direct police control. This intrusion implied an ideological dislocation of a particular place; Tate Modern suddenly became a space for the organisation of people; there was a repressive hand in an artistic institution. As Pérez-Rementería noted, "The police were convoked beforehand in order to prevent unhappy incidents. But, at the same time, the police themselves were the cause of the disruption and the disarray among the viewers, since nobody expected to be so controlled" (Perez-Rementería 2008, p. 97). The policemen were put in a double position where, on the one hand, they were feared and intimidating, while on the other, they were "keepers of the peace" in case some catastrophe struck. They were the silent, yet active, markers of power, surveillance, and control.

*Tatlin's Whisper #5* emphasised what Griffin called the "behavioural responses in the audience that are ingrained on many levels: respect for men in uniform, fear of animals and passive subjection before an artwork and a performer" (Griffin 2008). By highlighting what Jiménez called the physical, embodied, corporal experience of "control and manipulation mechanisms" (Jiménez 2009, p. 64), the work encouraged the audience to re-evaluate their responses, their preconceptions, when faced with an authority figure. The artist, therefore, explores the tensions and complicities that direct individual behaviour in a public sphere. At the same time, in *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, the artist's treatment of the audience, as what Lambert-Beatty called a "mob" (Lambert-Beatty 2009, p. 43) that could potentially be disturbing and therefore closely controlled and organised, considered the space of Tate Modern not as a zone of freedom, but as a coercive area that conditioned, and still conditions, behaviour. The embodied and living image of the mounted policeman, therefore, became the means by which to analyse, and perhaps try to change, the behaviour of the spectator.

*Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* (2009) was presented at the Centro Cultural Wifredo Lam in Havana as part of the Tenth Havana Biennial. For it, the artist constructed and installed a stage where a podium with a microphone permitted a minute of free expression to any visitor who attended the event. Two actors dressed in military uniforms, every once in a while, placed a trained dove on the shoulders of whomever was using the microphone flanked this podium. Before the action had officially

begun, Bruguera had distributed 200 disposable cameras among the public, surrendering any artistic/authorial right to document the action to the attending audience members (Bruguera 2010c). Nearly 40 people took advantage of Bruguera's opportunity to express themselves freely, some clamoured for freedom, some demanded a radical change in Cuban government, some openly criticised the government's antidemocratic and repressive apparatus, others, overwhelmed by emotion, could not articulate a word and simply cried.

A few days after the event, the Biennial's organising committee released a press statement rejecting and criticising the individuals that had participated in Bruguera's action. The committee branded the participants as "professional dissidents," "opportunists," and described them as servants "of the anti-Cuba propaganda machine," who "repeated the worn out clamour of 'freedom' and 'democracy' demanded by their sponsors" (Comité Organizador 2009). The organising committee immediately tried to disassociate itself from the event and from the comments made by the participants, arguing that those who took to the microphone took advantage of the situation and co-opted and instrumentalised with political intentions a work of art (Comité Organizador 2009). The press release finished with the following sentence, "Rising above these provocations, the Biennial will continue to be that space for anti-hegemonic rebelliousness, of heresy and authentic dissidence that definitively conquered the Cuban Revolution for the artists of Cuba and the world" [*sic*] (Comité Organizador 2009).

According to Mosquera, within the context of Cuba, this work took advantage of the relative permissibility that characterises the world of art in order to create a space where, contrary to the immediate reality, a public tribune could exist. The work countered the long governmental control of public spaces and collective addresses, fulfilling the Revolution's broken promise of free exchange of ideas. As Bruguera noted in an interview with Yanét Pérez Moreno, "The work had an open structure where the responsibility fell on the audience. With it, I put forward a different space to talk about Cuban reality. I would like to consider it a model where privilege is used and not simply enjoyed" (Pérez Moreno 2009).

*Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* sought to re-energise a mass-media image from the past. In this instance, the image that Bruguera brings to the present was a famous photograph of Fidel Castro giving one of his most well-known speeches in 1959. During this public

address, Castro was surrounded by uniformed men and engaged in a passionate speech when, suddenly, a white dove landed on his shoulders. To many Cubans, followers of afro-Cuban religious practices, the fact that a white dove landed on Fidel's shoulders meant a divine seal of approval, a mystical act of recognition of the new national leader (Santiago 2009). By imitating this historical moment, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* mobilised Cuba's historical memory by bringing to a present characterised by government repression and control, the ghost of one of the foundational moments of the contemporary Cuban state. Castro's privilege, the power that made it possible for him to address an entire nation, was dispersed and atomised towards the silenced members of the audience. In this way, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* not only opened to contemporary critique and debate the existing conditions of repression in Cuba, but also made possible a critical re-evaluation of the past through a democratic and participative dialogue. Although highly controversial, the work had been approved and officially sanctioned by the Biennial's organising committee. The committee, however, was not prepared, or did not expect, that so many Cubans would be willing to loudly, and publicly, voice their opinions, mostly critical of the Cuban governmental apparatus. In a context characterised by repression of dissidence, perhaps the Committee expected the podium to remain empty, devoid of any participation. This scenario, the possibility of no one willing to speak, was also factored into the genesis of the work as Bruguera considers the installation itself as a monument to the Cuban silenced. If, for example, no one had stepped up to the podium, the work would have become a living index of extreme levels of self-censorship, a cruel reminder of the impossibility of freedom of expression. The empty podium would reproduce Antonia Eiriz's painting of an empty tribune, *Una tribuna para la paz democrática (A Tribune for Democratic Peace)* (1968), therefore confirming all the fears and doubts that led the painter into forced exile in the late 1970s. Although the work succeeded in inviting others to participate, the phantom of their absence was also taken into account (Bruguera 2010a).

Within the context of Cuba, the encouragement of freedom of expression, the abolition of censorship, and the equal valuation of everyone's opinions are radical political actions. As a result, the work does not only offer a representation of the repressive circumstances in Cuba but an actual enactment of political agency. The work successfully breached the limits between art and life by offering a chance for freedom of expression

through, and by, an artistic platform. The work's consequences, each minute of free speech as well as the subsequent condemnation of them by the Organising committee, took place beyond the realm of art; each minute spoken was not just an audience member participating in a work of art, but also moments of individual, civilian empowerment. As a "performance that snowballed into an unexpected, spontaneous political rally" (Mosquera 2009, p. 26), as described by Mosquera, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* not only created an opportunity for political action, but effectively enacted it for 39 minutes and for 39 different people. By imitating a foundational historical moment, *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* mobilised Cuba's historical memory by bringing to the present—characterised by government repression and control—the ghost of one of the foundational moments of the contemporary Cuban state—paradoxically, a moment of public expression.

In December of 2014, in the immediate aftermath of the announcement of the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, Bruguera tried to carry out a re-enactment of her controversial work *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*. As dictated by the 2009 intervention, for the 2014 version the artist wanted to create an unregulated public space where anyone could exercise the right to free speech for a minute. Contrary to the "original" work, the most recent iteration was to be held at the *Plaza de la Revolución*, one of the most contested sites in Havana, symbolically as well as historically. However, the 2014 version could not be carried out at all as the Cuban authorities detained Bruguera, collaborators, and other associates, on the day, or eve, of the event. Some of them, including Bruguera, were freed the day after, others spent many days detained. Although not imprisoned, the authorities confiscated Bruguera's passport preventing her from legally leaving the island—a situation that lasted for over 6 months, from late December 2014 until July 11, 2015.

Bruguera's public reiteration of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* was part of a broader platform initiated by the artist called *#YOTAMBIENEXIJO*, translated as #IALSODEMAND. This civic movement calls for the restitution of civil, political, economic, and cultural rights to all citizens in Cuba through artistic actions that provide concrete solutions to specific public needs (Bruguera 2014, 2014a). The restaging of the 2009 work sought to, on the one hand, trigger the participation of Cubans in an act of free speech. On the other, it hoped to reclaim an important symbolic public arena—the *Plaza de la Revolución*—as a space for a possible insurrection against State limits on

political dissent, free speech, freedom of the press, or political diversity within the island. Importantly, although the work was proposed to the Cuban authorities via the official channels, it was not a sanctioned event, as the government never granted Bruguera a permit for a gathering in a public square. Notwithstanding, Bruguera tried to undertake the work and was detained on December 30, before she could carry it out.

Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta* has real consequences. As demonstrated by the failed restaging of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)*, one of the main outcomes of the work was State repression. The 2014 attempt seemed to confirm all expectations regarding the Cuban government and its intolerance for dissidence. The visceral rejection of the first iteration of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* by the Biennial organising committee was echoed by the suppression of its re-enactment. During a time of renewed talk about systemic changes in Cuba, these instances of censorship reaffirmed what Cuban art critic Glexis Novoa, among many others, argues is a repressive and dictatorial State apparatus (Santiago 2009). Bruguera's 2014 iteration questioned how Cubans could conduct themselves in important public spaces, provoking a behavioural response from the Cuban authorities. Bruguera's thwarted attempt at recreating *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* also catalysed a global response against the Cuban authorities from artists, curators, philosophers, and other important intellectual and political figures from all over the globe. For example, a *New York Times* Editorial condemned Bruguera's detainment (Archibold 2016). Additionally, several museums including the Guggenheim, MoMA, Tate Modern, the Hammer, or the Queens Museum, publicly restaged *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* in different public spaces of their institutions as a sign of solidarity (Chung 2015; Tateshots 2015; Hammer Museum, 2015). Their support and demand for her release was voiced through editorials, articles and interviews, social and other digital media. At a time of growing optimism about the possibilities for change within the island—at a political, economic, and social level—the cancellation of Bruguera's work came as a timely reminder of the challenges that accompany the thawing of relations between Cuba and the US.

However, as pointed out by Cuban-American artist and intellectual Coco Fusco, the reiteration of *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* did not trigger the kind of response from "the Cuban people" as it did from the government or the international artistic/intellectual community (Fusco 2015). In one telling image widely circulated through several social media platforms, the *Plaza de la Revolución* is seen completely empty

except for several cameras mounted on tripods. These belonged almost exclusively to international newscasters. Fusco argues:

> Bruguera's reliance on the internet to convene the Cuban public has provoked a certain degree of skepticism from critics about her intentions. "The Cuban people" did not show up at the plaza and it is likely that most Cubans on the island have no idea of what *#YOTAMBIENEXIJO* is. (Fusco 2015)

This points to an important paradox at the heart of Bruguera's initiative. Perhaps tight control on media outlets and the Internet limited the local reach of the project's call to exercise free speech, or self-censorship also drove the notable absence of Cubans at the site. Whatever the reason, there was little immediate response to the project by the Cuban public. Albeit delayed, however, *#YOTAMBIENEXIJO* has arguably had a long-lasting local impact.

While Bruguera's passport was confiscated she met with various local activists and political dissidents, such as prisoner and fellow artist Danilo Maldonado Machado (El Sexto). She also began several artistic projects within her home, including a continuous reading of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, broadcast to the street through loudspeakers. These activities contributed to the creation of the *Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt* (INSTAR) (Institute of Art Artivism), an independent organisation supported by a *Kickstarter* fundraising campaign and fully autonomous from the Cuban government. Inaugurated in 2016 in Havana, the goal of the institute is to "transform ideas into civic actions" and "foster civic literacy and policy change" in Cuba (Bruguera 2015). As an extension of Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta, INSTAR, #YOTAMBIENEXIJO,* and the *Tatlin's Whisper* series seek to create useful art that instigates change in the present. They view behaviour as "the language that society uses" in order to regulate subjectivities and as a tool for political and social change (Tenconi 2009).

## Notes

1. According to Bruguera, the works belonging to the *Tatlin's Whisper* series seek to,

   > . . . activate images, well-known because of having been repeatedly seen in the press, but are here decontextualised from the original event that gave way to the news and staged as realistically as possible in an art

institution. The most important element in this series is the participation of spectators who may determine the course the piece will take. The idea is that next time spectators face a piece of news using similar images to those they experienced, they may feel an individual empathy with that distant event towards which they will normally have an attitude of emotional disconnection or informative saturation. The experience of the audience within the piece may allow them to understand information in a different way and appropriate it because of having lived through it. (Pérez Moreno 2009).

2. The name of the series, Tatlin's Whisper, is relevant for two reasons. In the first place, the title alludes to what the artist calls "the present weakening of the impact of a moment of Western history in which great transformations took place as the result of social revolutions." By this we can understand that Tatlin's Whisper tries to highlight the historical process by which once radical, avant-garde artistic practices, such as Vladimir Tatlin's art and architectural career, have become domesticated and assimilated by hegemonic discourses and ideologies. According to Bruguera, the series explores how "the intensity, credibility and exaltation of socialist revolutions, just as Tatlin's tower, which was never built, were frustrated and utopia is rethought with the effort implied in a weak whisper." By conjuring the avant-garde aesthetic project of Tatlin in its title, the series redefines his practice based upon its failure and not its projected monumentality. In the Tatlin's Whisper series, utopian grand schemes are rendered small, ephemeral, almost powerless whispers. The series revise "an icon of the enthusiasm and grandiosity of the Bolshevik Revolution"—as she describes Tatlin—and re-evaluates the "intensity, credibility and exaltation of socialist revolutions," which, in many cases and as exemplified by Monument to the Third International, have been characterised by failure in the implementation of utopian designs (Pérez Moreno 2009).

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**Dr. Andrés David Montenegro Rosero** Assistant Professor of Art History, Department of Art and Art History, Bridgewater State University, USA.