

Transforming the audience into citizen

By Tania Bruguera

As an artist I locate the political in the consequences of my work. While it is difficult to control or completely preview the consequences an action has it is in the consequences where the ephemeral and transitional condition of the political is established and documented, is in the consequences where the political metaphor is generated.

As an artist working politically I try to appropriate the tools and mechanisms of power. I do not want the work to represent the political but to create the political. For this I have used various strategies:

(SLIDE Tatlin's Whisper -Tate-) sometimes I recreate a situation under clear conditions of observation, to generate a different use and political implication of memory, one where the impersonal is owned through a direct experience, one where art evaluates the political response to an image.

I'm interested in working with citizens not with audiences, in reverting the transformation process demanded from citizens when they become audiences.

In this case I asked the mounted police to use all their training for crowd control with the visitors in the museum.

(SLIDE Moscow) Sometimes I follow to the letter propaganda done by organs of the state, not so much to reveal their contradictions but to force them to actually do what they want us to think they are doing. In this case the work consist in using ex-KGB agents to lead trust workshops with the citizens of Moscow.

Sometimes political work is hard to visualize and sometimes it is even an ethical problem to generate a visual product from a political work. There are times when I think that

artists working on politics are using strategies of propaganda instead of strategies of politics.

In my case I'm not interested to focus on an image but on the politics created in the process of experiencing the work. For me aesthetics is a process of convincing others about our idea of the rightness of something, political aesthetics is a process that is not permanent, that has no pre-determined form and that needs to adapt for efficiency.

In this case of course the image we are seeing is not one documenting the actual trust workshop, because there are no images of it. This is from the event in Moscow announcing that such workshops were going to take place. It is a room where you could chose to have your photo taken with eagles and / or monkeys. When the photo was handle to the visitors a minute or so after taken they could see the portrait of Felix Dzerzhinsky (the creator of KGB) incorporated to their exciting experience with the animals.

(SLIDE Just a Question) But some times political artist have to carry the unpleasant burden of the unwanted possible future. In this piece a veteran from the recent wars working as a security guard requests with respect some of the visitors to follow him. When entering an electrical closet room with images from previous wars and lynching the African American guard asks to the (mostly white) visitors why does he / she thinks some people want to see the death of president Obama.

To be a political artist is not exactly trying to please people, it is to deal with issues when and where they are not yet resolved. It is to enter the undefined spaces of society, that of fear (from the citizen point of view), that of illegality (from the power point of view). The insertion into the areas of the illegal is the insertion into either the non-regulated social spaces or the spaces from where the future can be re-defined, because law is the language of power.

(SLIDE Bogotá) in this case a conference was held by four participants of the Colombian conflict (a paramilitar in active, a leader of "los desplazados" movement, the sister of a kidnapped person, a soldier from FARC who was dismissed for suspicion of treason) while they were talking about the political construction of the figure of a hero, a person was passing by the audience with a tray with cocaine that could be consumed.

My work is in many cases the presentation of a negotiation between ethics and desire.

But it is also about the politics in the art world. For example when I show or I sell my performances in the contract it is clear that the visitors not only have the right to generate documentation of the work but that they have the right to sell it for their own personal profit. So it is also about sharing the economical control of the work with the "audience".

(SLIDE Tatlin's Whisper (Havana version) 1 Podium Vacío) Part of the transformation of the audience back into citizen is their liberation in terms of behavior expectations. Lately I have been just staging the elements and the work is completed and sometimes done by the citizens encountering the work. The work is the reactions it creates around specific issues. In this case it is about the freedom of speech.

(SLIDE Tatlin's Whisper (Havana version) 2) a Stage, a podium, microphones, one loudspeaker inside and one loudspeaker outside of the building, two persons dressed on military outfit, white dove, one minute free of censorship per speaker, 200 disposable cameras with flash.

I can proudly say that in none of the pieces we have seeing there was any bad consequence for anybody who took part of it. It was my job as an artist working politically to secure that things were done in such a symbolic as well as

practical way that the people in power were politically immobilized.

(SLIDE Autosabotage) As a political artist I'm interested in trying to generate something that could be seen as "new" and "challenging" in the art world as well as in the political world, a kind of art where one could say that the political was used to do art but also that the artistic was used to do the political.

Art is a concept that should appear later in the work, when it becomes a documented past. For me the challenges of political art at the moment is not about the spectacularization but about the monumentalization, it is not about the artist presenting visions of the utopic but about the actual building and engineering of the utopic; political art is about efficiency and about consequences.