

The Weight of Suspension: Tania Bruguera's *Vigilantes* Performances

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Silence first came to mind. Tania Bruguera's recent performances, two of four in-flight segments from Chicago to Montreal/Toronto and back, take place in complete silence. No discursive relation emerges, no explanation, no contextualization.

In the first, Bruguera wears a white cotton mask which she painstakingly sews, using her own hair. It is a pas-

senger who suggests the word to be sewn. No motif is immediately available—only she knows if her sewing will finally dispel the silence with a word. In the second, her voice is numbed by the ingestion of ice, her mouth full and waiting, melting ice giving rise to a new mouthful.

But over the time it took me to begin to digest these experiences while viewing the video documentation of Bruguera's performances, it seemed to me that silence was only a peripheral factor. What these performances are really calling forth is a rethinking of time.

Even more than the silence we have come to expect of air travel, where I often do not seek to know the person sitting next to me, we feel air travel through an experience of time, suspended. From our first moments in the airport, to the plea not to unfasten our seatbelts until the plane safely arrives at the terminal, we feel the weight of this suspension.

It is this very suspension that has been indelibly altered since our experience—near or far—of 9/11, an experience which has forced us to make a connection between the weight of suspension

and politics. We have learned—even those of us who have not wanted to think these links—that there is a sense in which the time of travel involves a certain kind of unknowable risk. While we always knew of this risk—the risk of falling out of the sky—we now know it from the particular experience of the incessant re-playing of an image which won't soon be forgotten, the image of planes stopping time.

Time, then, seems to be at stake. This time is not a single time. In the case of Bruguera's inflight performances, it is the doubled time of the performance

and its documentation. What we are dealing with here is not the performance "as such" but its replaying, through the eyes of another passenger, on a videotape that will always betray a certain directive, a perspective given by the very call of that performance. Bruguera will have asked a stranger sitting next to her that the performance be taped without giving her any specific directions. An amateur video will have resulted, where the camera will have decided in advance that the event in question become the unspeakability of the performance of the silence in the next seat, the timed timelessness of Bruguera, sitting

in an airplane, waiting for the trip to end. The performance will never have been understood as the flight itself.

The second time, the time of the documented performance—to call this a film would be to overestimate its simplistic qualities of documentation—is a particular time, and it is this time which concerns me most in light of Bruguera's inflight performances. In this "second time", the time of the flight is re-arranged; it is the time when the question of the performance becomes the question of Bruguera. From the experience of having nothing to do with the other bodies in our midst,

simply waiting for the weight of timelessness to pass, to the experience of keeping an eye on Bruguera and feeling, with her, the experience of the wait, we are engaged in a political rethinking of the time/space of performance.

To rethink politics is to place the composition of spacetime at the centre of its problematic, asking not how a performance fills spacetime, but how it creates it. To challenge spacetime with such subtlety is to find a way to recast the politics of time after 9/11. Tania Bruguera offers us not a mute performance, but a renegotiation of the silence of the weight of suspension.