

CONVERSATION. TANIA BRUGUERA'S MESSAGE

Author: Antonello Tolve

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Antonello Tolve. From provocation to action. From the reflexive accident on the present to the transformation of reality into what is extraordinary Your work frequently intends to dislocate what is commonplace and show some passages of life to provide evidence, with sharp blows, of places and occasions stemming from varied background and nature. Although in this recent work you have organized a discourse with its starting point in the encouragement, incitation and astonishment of the audience to be then able to break – or at least wear out – the links of reality.

Would you like to talk about the performance you created for the Madre?

Tania Bruguera: Although your analysis of my work is correct, this time it is not a performance. I knew it would be risky to express what has happened to me in an artistic context, in part because those who are familiar with my work know that I research the negotiations of the space existing between reality and art and that I do not see art as something different from living experience. Another element that I believe did not help was the type of public that attended, because the message was not for them. I thought that making this announcement in Madre would be the chance to have it in the press so the message would reach the people it should. I do not think I could have called the press specifically for this message, because nobody would have believed what happened to me. That is why I did not tell the director or the curators of Madre who had invited me what I had to say. I believe this was what made the director so angry with me, but this was the only way I had to send the message and fulfill the mission entrusted to me.

The message I read at the lecture was this, more or less, because I jotted it down rather hastily in my notebook: Those who just want to satisfy material desires through the accumulation of goods without bearing in mind the suffering of so many and making selfishness... I cannot read very well what I wrote here, something having to do with "nations."

Then the voice said we needed to raise our soul to God through good actions. The last words were the ones I really liked (this I clearly heard): the new Epiphany of beauty is to be found in the ethics of human beings.

In a given way I consider unbelievable what happened to me, because I have always been hounded to define and say why I consider the things I do as art when "they do not seem to be so" and now that it is not art they say it looks like art.

A. T. The aesthetic line you used in this new endeavor tends to create a short circuit, I believe, in the media to put distortions and mistakes in evidence.

T. B. The experience I had does not seem real to me either. It was late at night. I was very tired because I had been the entire day assembling my exhibition and I had just offered some workshops in Vigo (I was all the time coming and going from Pontevedra to Vigo). I actually thought I was half asleep or dreaming. It was a rather weird experience, as being “out of my body.” I had the impression that someone was watching me, but when I turned around there was nobody there. I continued to feel... I don’t know... what I call a presence and then began to hear a voice.

I don’t actually remember what it initially said, because I was not paying attention.

The first things I remember were that the volcano that has paralyzed Europe, the oil accident and the Guatemala volcano were not mere chance, but signals from God. And that they were a message for people who go about without seeing everything surrounding them to stop and give love, to think over what they are doing with their own lives. It also added that people were too focused on money and consider success was that: just money.

This is part of the problem we all face right now: the emphasis – and this is my understanding – in money. The voice also spoke of violence.

It spoke in terms that I believe are defined as Ethical Capitalism. When at last I arrived in the hotel there were two things that had an impact on me. The first was that I did not know anything about what had happened in Guatemala because I had been traveling for some days and had not followed the news. I was very frightened, but said: “Ok, Tania, you are not crazy. There is no way you could have known this.” The second was when I looked for the words *totus tuus*. I asked the voice to give me its confirmation, something I could cling to because nobody would believe me and the voice confirmed *totus tuus*, which I had not understood, but then I found in Google (I had misspelled the words, but Google gave me the correct spelling). I found out it had to do with John Paul II. There was a last thing the voice said would happen: there was going to be another full-scale event in Asia, but I didn’t say it in the press conference. You can imagine the responsibility of saying something like that, but it is a sure thing that all this is a sort of global call, if I understood well.

A.T. The day of the performance, with the *Important Notice* sent to the entire Madre mailing-list, you thought it would create a large media kermesse. What was the main purpose of that seemingly sudden gesture?

T. B. The purpose was to comply with the mission of spreading the message as widely as possible and that was what I had in my hands at the moment. It was not a sudden gesture. This happened to me at dawn on Wednesday to Thursday. I was tormented all the time, sharing this secret with two friends who gave me some advice, although it was difficult for me to have them believe me.

Because of my artistic and existential experience, I am the last person who anyone could imagine something of that sort would happen and I still do not understand why it happened to me. Everyone know my position on these topics and, especially, on the church.

After deeply thinking what to do, I said to myself: "There are things I cannot explain and that I could verify. Perhaps I should not play with this." I decided that doing both things, the performance and the message, would not be right for the message because it would have created too much confusion.

There was no possible link between *Touched by Discipline*, the performance I had prepared with the *femminielli* for the Madre Museum, and the importance, the urgency of this message. I really did not consider it appropriate. It was confusion enough because of the swiftness with which things took place: the press had said that I was upset with the city or something like that, and it certainly wasn't so. This was inaccurate information because of the chaos caused by the sudden change in the program practically the very day when my performance was to take place.

A.T. One last question: Reading one of your papers on aesthetics, I have noticed that you frequently work between what is spontaneous and what is programmed, between what is immediate and what is planned, what is natural and what is artificial.

T.B. In this case, some very odd things have happened. A Spanish friend of mine said that the day I had this experience, last Thursday, was that of the Corpus Christi. What can I say? Some things did not seem to be mere chance to me.