

Sofía Córdova

The Revolution Will Be ...

Eva Díaz

Sofía Córdova, Stills from
GUILLOTINÆ Wanna Cry,
Act Yellow: Break Room,
2019-21. Three-channel
video, color, sound

Courtesy the artist and Kate
Werble Gallery, New York

Eva Díaz is an associate professor of
contemporary art at Pratt Institute.

The electrifying, unpredictable sweep of historical change!

And . . . the soul-crushing monotony of showing up every day for a job you may not like.

Sofía Córdova's *GUILLOTINÆ Wanna Cry, Act Yellow: Break Room* (2019–21), a three-channel, twenty-five-minute film installation, toggles between these seemingly incommensurate experiences, depicting both the elation of collectivity and the frustrations of social and physical isolation. Córdova, an artist based in Oakland, California, trained as a photographer and now works in performance and video. In *GUILLOTINÆ*, she brings a quartet of dancers, one of whom is the artist herself, into a yellow room, juxtaposing their actions against photographs and film footage of revolutionary events.

As Córdova describes the historical sources: "Some are bombastic speeches, but this might unspool into Cuban revolutionaries talking about hardship, about sharing a blanket, smaller voices that speak to collectivity, care, and sharing." Investigating the iconic status of those considered revolutionary heroes, she often obscures snippets of the documentary films she appropriates; for example, Lenin's head and Castro's face are overlaid with pixilated squares. By contrast, the four dancers' faces are exaggerated, made-up with stylized emoji expressions. In the portfolio presented here, Córdova combines stills from the various channels of the film to create a photographic collage that incorporates archival imagery along with scenes of the dancers.

In *GUILLOTINÆ*, the dancers interact with props such as a yellow Hula-Hoop, a vase of roses, and a yellow, ladder-like shelf. The dancers wear different, but coordinated, yellow, zip-up jumpsuits; the version Córdova sports pushes utilitarian garb into the realm of the playfully surreal, her pregnant belly exposed by a large, oval cutout. The dancers largely ignore one another and, instead, explore the mysterious room—posited in the work's title as possibly an office break room—in private reveries of boredom and engagement.

In individual "interviews," the dancer-actors silently pantomime to audio tracks of their voices reading appropriated texts. The passages Córdova recites in the film, some of them by the feminist poet Adrienne Rich, reflect nuances about the condition of pregnancy and its relationship to social reproduction and artistic creativity. These writings stand in opposition to the somewhat nonsensical snatches of text the other performers deliver—bits of YouTube commentary and TV psychics' pitches—words that broadcast the often superficial sense of self-reflection and interiority that passes for authenticity in media culture.

At times, the dancers appear like prisoners lined up for a drill, each one following the cues of a provisional "leader" who initiates an action for a brief period that the others then riff on. Enmeshed in flickers of archival photographs and films—including Black Panthers and Young Lords protests, and mass marches from the Soviet era through gay liberation—the four "break room" participants' subtle gestures of communion contrast with the anonymous crowds of revolutions. The difficulty of mobilizing individuals into politically active masses is an implicit theme of the project. "Everyone idealizes revolutions as rapid and immediate, but, in fact, they may be incredibly tedious; the labor of organizing is slow," Córdova notes. "This labor is very hard, messy, and indeterminate."

GUILLOTINÆ foregrounds the tension between the collective nature of political action, itself often hijacked by leaders speaking in the name of the public, and the stilted speech and awkward but earnest interactions of individuals working together in small groups to accomplish social change. Córdova calls this discomforting sense of the difficulty in predicting political change a "leak in time," whereby multiple realities—the historically charged and the quotidian—exist simultaneously in a series of glitchy encounters.