

Queer Shifts of Political Theatre: Expanded Sexual Dissidences in Chilean Contemporary Theatre

Ernesto ORELLANA GÓMEZ

Theatre School, Faculty of Arts, Universidad Mayor, Chile

ORCID: [0000-0002-0497-1467](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0497-1467)

ernestoigor@gmail.com

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: PhD candidate in Theatre Studies at the Complutense University of Madrid. Master's degree in Theatre Studies from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Bachelor's degree in Arts with honours in Theatre Performance from the University of Chile. Diploma in Semiotics of Culture from the University of Chile. Diploma in Audiovisual Narrative from the Film School in Chile. Playwright and director of the company Teatro SUR. University professor. Lines of research: political theatre, post-dramatic theatre, queer theory, and sexual dissidence.

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

The following article verifies the presence of sex-dissident discourses in contemporary Chilean political theatre that emerged in a context of intense feminist student movements (2017-2018-2019). Three artistic theatrical proposals that queerise the hegemonic sexual narrative from its lines of meaning, antagonising the regulated dictates of heterosexuality. In this article I will concentrate on demonstrating what I will call a "queer shift of political theatre", analysing the sex-dissident expansions in the proposals in order to detect the dissent to heterosexuality as a power by pointing out a new problematic hegemony in the theatre: heterosexuality as a political regime.

Keywords: political theatre, queer theory, sexual dissidence, feminism, power, heteronormativity

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*Everything in the world is about sex, except sex.
Sex is about power.*

Oscar Wilde

Introduction

The presence of sex-dissident discourses in Chilean contemporary theatre attests to a cultural transformation in the sexual imaginaries of the current context. In this field, debates on sex, gender, sexuality and non-sexist education have increasingly taken on more political significance due to a crossing of counter-hegemonic cultural imaginaries expanding from feminist movements and sexual dissidence activisms against the patriarchy and male hegemony.

This article will show that the proliferation of these antagonistic discourses in the cultural sphere pervades the modes of production of contemporary political theatre, recognising and highlighting another type of hegemony: heterosexuality as a political regime. As a general reference, we take political theatre, the queer, queer theories and sexual dissidences, focusing the analysis on the expanded presence of sex-dissident discourses in three plays because of their relevance in antagonising, from their lines of discursive and aesthetic meaning, the hegemonic sexual narrative. These plays were premiered amidst intense feminist debates in Chile between 2017 and 2019, prior to the social protests of 2019. They are *El Dylan*, by the company La Mala Clase (2017); *El amarillo sol de tus cabellos largos*, by the company La Niña Horrible (2018); and *Demasiada libertad sexual les convertirá en terroristas*, linked to Teatro SUR (2019), a company of which I am the director. As an introduction, by “political theatre” I am referring to a mode of knowledge, an epistemology that helps denaturalise the relations of dominance and whose object of analysis is power. It is not a style or a thematisation of power or the fight for it as is usually believed, but rather an aesthetic

mode to challenge the dimensions of the discourse that sustains power and its representations. By queer I am referring to the historic activist act of resignifying the homophobic insult, which mistrusts the normative stability of homosexual identity (gay and lesbian), and which, as David Córdova argues, “designates everything distanced from the sexual norm, whether or not it is expressed in identity figures” (Córdova, 2005: 22). Aware of its conflictive geopolitical semantics due to its interpretation implied between global north and global south, in this article I will use this adjective to reflect its inherent political interconnection between corporalities categorised as sexually “weird”, “bizarre”, “twisted”, “eccentric” and “deviated” from hegemonic sexual normativity.¹ By “queer theories” I am referring to the anti-normative epistemologies that challenge sexuality and gender, whose trajectories have permeated multiple postcolonial and critical debates but which acknowledge in the impulse of queer activism the antagonism with fixed universal sexual identities and the critical resignification of sexual deviation.² And which, as Lorenzo Bernani notes, takes into account “acts of insubordination and disobedience through which unruly subjects distance themselves from the regime of knowledge and power that defines and governs their sexuality by experiencing de-identification” (Bernini, 2018: 116). By “sexual dissidence” I am referring to critical stances that politically dissent from the agreed heterosexual norms, and which I will later explore in depth.

Given that in Chile political theatre is traditionally recognised as dramaturgical and/or theatre repertoires that challenge the social representation of class inequalities, the wounds left by the civic-military dictatorship, and the new forms of production that destabilise the hegemony of bourgeois theatre, I will focus on demonstrating what I call a “queer shift of political theatre”, with the aim of detecting theatre dissent in heterosexuality as power. My idea of shift is based on the suspicion of the heterosexualisation of political theatre that has historically focused on un-veiling hegemonic oppressions but without intercepting the social questionings of the political-sexual struggles of an antagonistic nature. The reading of these critical sexual discourses through political theatre as an episteme enables the antagonism against heterosexual power to be culturally expanded. Meanwhile, it challenges the category of “the political” in theatre. With this in mind, I will draw on research on political theatre and some Western queer theorisations from the global north and global south available in Spanish, but I will mainly review historical antecedents in the emergence of sexual dissidence in Chile and its expanded presence in student movements, to finally identify its expansions by means of bodies, discourses, aesthetics and representations in theatre. I will refer to the artistic productions that I called “plays”, respecting their forms of enunciation and focusing my interest on the modes of materialising discourses and aesthetics, discussing how they work by referring

1. For a stimulating article to review the components and conflicts underlying the term queer between geopolitical contexts, see Brad Epps, “Riesgos, pautas y promesas de la teoría queer”, *Revista Iberoamericana*, 225, 2008.

2. The concept “queer theory” was introduced by T. De Lauretis in 1990 in his paper “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: An Introduction” to question a critical alliance between gay and lesbian activism. Since then it has been adopted as a political theory.

to “gestures”. With this research I do not intend to argue that those working on political theatre and/or studying it must “include” within their cultural frameworks discussions about sexual dissidence but should rather reflect on how these discussions expand the meanings of the “political” in theatre and contribute to de-heterosexualising their discourses. This also involves archiving theorisation processes of these plays based on their linkages with feminist and sexual dissidence movements, which continue to drive very profound and relevant political debates, detecting and reporting the violence produced, reproduced and normalised by heterosexual hegemony.

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The Object of Political Theatre: Power

The tradition of political theatre is longstanding and dates back to the early 20th century in Germany after the publication of *Political Theatre: A History 1914-1929* (1929), by Erwin Piscator (1893-1966). In the foreword to the Spanish edition of 1976, the theatre director Alfonso Sastre notes that it is “one of the essential books to understand what has happened in European and American theatre during the last century and what may happen in the course of time” (Piscator, 2001: 32). Piscator revolutionised the discursive and aesthetic frameworks of modern theatre, whose most relevant consequences can be found in the legacy of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre. We understand his proposals as dissent from the ideological project of “humanist theatre” based on the universalist existence of “human nature”, which refuses to consider the political conditions of the history that forms it. In contrast, in political theatre, the interest lies in dismantling such a historical construct, de-universalising it and highlighting its contradictions. For our particular interest, the philologist César de Vicente, one of today’s most notable researchers on political theatre, argues that political theatre is characterised by its “antagonistic dimension”. He reminds us that since it appeared it freed theatre from the abstraction of the human being, looking into and challenging “the complex constitution of individuals in historical subjects, and this constitution – in its turn – is imbued by relations of dominance and antagonism” (De Vicente, 2013: 65). He notes that political theatre seeks to understand the “constituent” historical processes rather than just describing “constituted” historical processes. Based on his proposals, we will understand that the practices of political theatre intervene in what is established, constituting antagonistic imaginaries, and that the production tools point to a new object of study: power. We will understand that the production strategies of its materialisation are not only discourses and aesthetics but the situated procedures that constitute them: production forms that make the hegemonies in the sphere of the cultural complex and destabilise them. Collective artistic construction processes that bring about ruptures in the

3. We will cite the name of the writer and activist val flores in lower case, in keeping with how she introduces herself.

prevailing aesthetics and open up problematic possibilities that entail new practices which question the structures of power that determine the social conditions in which the events and their consequences occur.

In Chile, according to the theatre researcher Juan Villegas, the practices of political theatre were mainly antagonistic during the 1960s (1960-1973) and during the cultural resistance to the civic-military dictatorship (1973-1989), but during the first decade of the post-dictatorship “theatre gradually depoliticised” (Villegas, 2009: 193). It was not until the turn of the century that political theatre established itself again as a debate, mainly since the emergence of the 2006 and 2011 student movements. Some researchers insist on highlighting political theatre from thematisation while others question it from its modes of production. The latter is explored by the researcher and theatre director Patricia Artes, when she distinguishes political theatre as a productive system whose materials and procedures are indissolubly linked to the historical processes in which they take place. In this respect, she asks herself: “If we argue that political theatre emerges closely related to the contextual aspects, what would be the relationship between current theatre practices and today’s situation?” (Artés, 2015: 137-141). Considering her question and when verifying that the sexual dissidence movements in Chile have revealed that heterosexuality is a production of power, how is it that we can see these plays as productions that cause a shift in political theatre following the sudden emergence of the queer? With this in mind, we will next review some historical antecedents that make the territory of sexuality shift to the political, and later explore its discursive presence in Chile and its modes of re-presentation by means of theatre.

Heterosexuality as a Political Regime of Power

Since Michel Foucault denaturalised the sexual organisation between the 17th and 19th centuries, fostering the questioning of sexuality as a “historical device” constituted by technologies of power acting directly on bodies and pleasures (Foucault, 1997: 97), both sex and gender and sexuality have been identified as historical categories. Since the second half of the 20th century, feminisms and queer theory have placed their political nature at the centre of the contemporary sexual debate. As J. Sáez recalls, for Foucault power “is not a fixed vertical identity that is applied from isolated and hierarchical places but rather a relationship of relationships, discourses, practices and institutions that is present in the whole social space and in all subjects in a horizontal and permeable manner” (Sáez, 2005: 73). We should take into account that the hegemony of power in the contemporary sexuality device is heterosexuality: a network of historical domination of the sexual policy that produces norms to maintain and perpetuate a common meaning of homogeneity of thought, desire and action, present in social relations, identities and corporalities. Both Monique Wittig when she identifies “heterosexuality as a political regime” (Wittig, 2006: 45) and Adrienne Rich when she reveals “heterosexuality as a political institution” (Rich, 1980: 15-42) contributed pioneering analyses to understand the structural character of this hetero-

sexual regime which produces “heteronormativity”.⁴ In the early 1990s, Judith Butler argued that heterosexuality operates by making sex and gender “intelligible” in a relationship of binary identity that re-produces the oppositions between woman/feminine-man/masculine (Butler, 1999: 23). She coined the concept of “gender performativity” to show that the sex-generic identity is not biological or natural, that it does not exist by an inner essence, but that it is socio-politically constructed through a “heterosexual matrix” that discursively produces sex as a gender category and gender as a category of heterosexual desire (Butler, 1999: 45) through a normative regime that determines which lives should be visible and which should not.

The Emergence of Sexual Dissidence in Chile

The relevant research by feminist and queer activists in the contemporary political-sexual scenarios reveals disputes and sudden emergences of imaginaries that move between feminisms, sexual diversity, queer theory and sexual dissidence. The activist Felipe Rivas San Martín has identified as an antecedent of the emergence of sexual dissidence a change in sexual policy that took place at the turn of the century with the decriminalisation of sodomy in 1999. In this respect, he notes an antagonistic conflict by pointing out the category of “state homosexuality” (Rivas, 2011: 1-9) to refer to an identity sexual policy within the margins of the recognition of governmental institutionalism that does not collide with the sexual and moral hegemony normalised by the heterosexual political regime. Although sexual dissidence as a gesture has been present since the early homosexual protests, the conceptualisation of “sexual dissidence”, Rivas argues, began to circulate in 2005, as a way of distancing from the integrationism of homosexual diversity in the neoliberal heterosexual state. It emerged within the university as a space of strategic intervention between student and activist groups, such as CUDS⁵ and gender and sexuality secretariats, which would focus on pointing out the relations between sex and power, displacing the epistemological uniformity of the fight against homophobia and sexual discriminations, thereby constructing active and creative resistance that continues today and uses multiple aesthetic practices and policies against heteronormativity.

As the critic and essayist Nelly Richard reminds us, the emergence of secondary student movements in 2006 and later the university student movements of 2011 marked the end of the transition and the start of a new era (Richard, 2018a: 60). In this way, the need for social transformation stirred an antagonistic mobilisation that has continued. One of the most important manifestations of this has been the feminist and sexual dissidence movements. The legacies of feminist activism of resistance to the dictatorship,

4. The concept of “heteronormativity” was introduced by Michael Warner in the foreword of *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Warner, 1993: 15). In this article we will use Miguel López Sáez’s definition: “Heteronormativity is the political, social, philosophical and economic regime that generates violence towards all those individuals who do not follow a pattern of gender, sexuality, practices and desires related to heterosexuality” (López, 2017: 228).

5. Coordinadora Universitaria de Disidencia Sexual (University Coordination Unit of Sexual Dissidence).

the end of the transition to democracy and the increase of the circulation of queer theories in the student movement promoted feminist and sexual dissidence re-articulation in educational contexts, and transformed the educational political terrain around “gender equality” and the call for a “non-sexist education” that broke out as a cross-over demand with the historical feminist mobilisations of 2018.⁶ Indeed, this call that challenged the production and transmission of knowledge within the education centres rapidly conveyed a desire for cultural revolution that extended to all forms of expression and signification of the prevailing culture, based on how such a culture subordinates the experiences and knowledge of the body, sexuality and gender to the pattern of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, all the prevailing representations of the masculine that unfold from the heterosexuality devices as power were questioned. For Richard, what happened was a symbolic redesign that modified the cultural imaginaries of society, which concerns all its power and gender mechanisms, enabling the word *feminism* to diversify its fronts of antagonism against the patriarchy and the neoliberal hegemony (Richard, 2018a: 61). The term “non-sexist” stressed that education in Chile is heteronormative and firmly established a historical alliance never seen before between feminist and sexual dissidence groups. In this way, the educational practice becomes “a critical interceptor of the state plans of subjectivity and bodies” (Flores, 2013: 256) that organise heteronormativity. Based on this, we will understand “sexual dissidence” not as an identity but as forms of political production and critical stances that politically dissent from the heterocentred and agreed sexual norms which make something that has the air of a social and political construct seem natural.

Sexual Dissidences in Chilean Theatre

Research on theatre and sexual dissidence is scarce, but two articles provide data of interest to us: the research conducted by Daniela Capona, in Chile, and Ezequiel Lozano, in Argentina. Both have been useful for analysing the ephemeral memories of a twisted theatre. Both coincide in pointing out the presence of queer epistemologies and sex-dissident groups to affect the notions of gender and sex in theatre, as well as the “use of testimony to dissent with the hegemonic policy” (Lozano, 2017: 1-10). In the case of Chile, the successive political persecution of homosexuals partialised the antagonisms. Indeed, the turn of the century began a new course that modified the cultural issues around sexual policy in theatre. However, the phantom of the prejudice managed by the power devices of heteronormativity that permeated the discourses in the state, school, health and Church continued. Although homosexuals are frequent in theatre, plays that challenge non-heterosexual sexualities do so from the perspective of sexual diversity, following the official discourses promoted by “state homosexuality”. As Capona concludes, “in general plays that have dealt with issues related to sexual diversity are

6. For a review of the student feminist movements that led to the emergence of the feminist mobilisations in Chile, see “El feminismo es una necesidad: movimiento estudiantil (2000-2017)” by the feminist researcher Luna Follegati, in *Revista Anales*, 14, 2018.

plays that revolve around the conditions of sexual and gender inequality rather than looking into the domination mechanism that produces them” (Caponá, 2016: 63). However, since the student movement disrupted the lines of meaning in 2011, occasional destabilisations of the heteronormative script have taken place in theatre.⁷

The common ground in the selection of plays I will analyse next is that they have features of the queer shift in political theatre: the three take place within a political transformation of the feminist and sexual dissidence movements, the aesthetic issues reflect queer epistemologies to enunciate their antagonisms, all of them advocate urgency from a non-sexual inclusive education that coincides with the call of the student movements and, finally, the collective factor prevails over the individual. *El Dylan* reveals an adultcentric and heterosexist educational institutional movement. *El amarillo sol de tus cabellos largos* challenges the gender binary and features the subversion of identity through transvestism. In *Demasiada libertad sexual les convertirá en terroristas*, the emergence of the real on the stage enables the experiences between activisms and sex-dissident corporalities to be mixed in order to de-heterosexualise theatre, working directly with queer theory.

*El Dylan*⁸

Non-Sexist Education and Gender Performativity

By reconstructing the events underpinning the hate crime against the young transgender woman Dylan Vera,⁹ the play was specifically conceived for an audience of teenagers and teachers with the aim of challenging sexual education and gender identity, highlighting the social contradictions of a heteronormative education system that attacks sexual dissidences. The company uses a polyphonic narration in which the physical presence of “Dylan” is absent, a political decision that shows that Dylan Vera was murdered and we must not forget it. Thus, the causes of her tragic death are featured through dialectally constructed situations, whose story mixes the representational voices of those who surrounded her: her mother, neighbours, school teachers, the media and her best friend, la Gina (transsexual).

The political core consists of stirring reflections and contradictions on the need for a non-sexist education, in a context of students and teachers, which overcomes the heterosexual hegemony within sexual education. In this way, the play is framed within a cultural context of student movements that shift firmly towards the public call for a non-sexist education. One of the scenes that encapsulate this issue is the interview by a journalist with

7. The theatre performance *Cuerpos para Odiar* (2015), by the group Furia Barroka, based on the transvestic poetry book by the activist Claudia Rodríguez, is a major milestone in the crossover between theatre and sexual dissidence, using theatre academia as a space of intervention (Universidad de Chile). On this, see Mariairis Flores, “Cuerpos para odiar: una trans-escena que nos acerca a lo posdramático”, *Karpa*, 9, 2016, and Ezequiel Lozano, “Cuerpos para odiar: sexopolíticas en combate”, Universidad Nacional de Rosario Acta III, 2016.

8. The fifth production by the company La Mala Clase, with dramaturgy by Bosco Cayo and direction by Aliocha de La Sotta, was premiered in 2017 at the C. C. Matucana 100, in Santiago.

9. Dylan Vera was murdered in Puente Alto, Santiago, in 2015; her face was burnt with acid and she was stabbed four hours later, and bled to death.



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the teachers in charge of the “sexual education programme” of the school with the highest rate of homosexual discrimination in the town where El Dylan was murdered. The scene performed by three actors features three symbolic institutional characters: a journalist, a biology teacher, and a language and communication teacher. Faced with the question about the content of “the programme”, the concise answer is that it consists of “contents on sexual and reproductive health,” that the “sexual orientation of a student is not the focus of our research,” and that “we do speak of homosexuality, but to demystify and show it as an option as valid and respectable as heterosexuality” (Cayo, 2019: 40). After the ironic representation that uses exaggeration in the body gestural characterisation, which parodies the gender binary stereotypes, the contradictions of an adultcentric educational programme that intervenes in a heteronormative manner in the cases of sexual and gender discrimination in the educational process are highlighted, rejecting the sexual orientation of the non-heterosexual students by considering that “homosexuality has to do with the orientation of pleasure, and a student has not yet made such a clear decision” (Cayo, 2019: 41). The metaphor is explicit: there is no free talk about sexuality, there is no talk about the production of sexist violence, the political contradiction of the heteronormative educational model is unveiled, which refuses the right to sexual pleasure, prejudging the students’ homosexual desire. The play points out that a sexual education that rejects the participation of non-heterosexual sexualities in the educational process reproduces negationist mechanisms involved in sexist violence. By dialoguing with the calls of the student movements, it fosters debates on an integral sexual education that respects and educates on the ways of life of non-heterosexual identities. It is in this gesture where it distances itself from other theatre productions that have included the reporting of hate crimes against the so-called “sexual minorities”, stressing the violence towards LGBTIQ+ communities but without producing in the

modes of stage/aesthetic operation opportunities to transgress the normativities that create this violence. Indeed, just as Butler has noted that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1999: 43) and that “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” (Butler, 1988: 521), in this play the aesthetic operation renders the non-sexist educational gestures complex through its acting/performative realisation, which does not personify the characters in fixed identities, but all move performing many voices and identities, performatively showing that gender is a cultural construct that uses performance and theatricality to enunciate itself through actions. And just as Córdova, following Butler in the framework of queer theories, argues that “identity is not the expression or external manifestation of a natural or essential interior but the idea of the existence of that inner essence is an effect of identity that is no other than its own external manifestation” (Córdova, 2005: 53), throughout the play the cast builds different roles polyphonically, transgressing the gender stereotypes subordinated to the essentialist identity, building up a transgender choreographic story. To support this gesture, all are covered with a uniform female dress whose light fabric reveals their anatomy to highlight that the gender issue in this play addresses the constitution of the “female” under the educational matrix of heteronormativity, parodying it, noting its violence and subverting its mandates. The latter is made clear with a symbolic gesture of how “Dylan” is named. Gina, the only non-heterosexual role in the story, uses the pronoun “la” to refer to her friend, self-determining the female gender of “Dylan”. Through the word “la Gina” the heteronormative language is interrupted. The bodily-vocal-emphatic tone of the gesture and the strategic repetition of the action throughout the play produces a new performative gesture, thereby managing to embody the meaning by insisting on the repetition of the action. The name articulated with the female pronoun “la” highlights the transition of “el Dylan” to female gender, contradicting the language of heterosexuality that obliges the bodies to behave in a cisgender form.¹⁰ Although the title of the play is *El Dylan*, the playwright has pointed out that the choice was to emphasise the start of the sexual journey of a boy: “To inform about the journey, the transit undertaken by the main character, moving from el Dylan, to la Dylan, and from la Dylan to la Andrea... El Dylan is the beginning and there is a journey that must we know about.”¹¹ The dramaturgical story reports that Dylan was murdered by the neighbours after having appeared for the first in public dressed as a woman and with her chosen name, Andrea, revealing that the homosexual desire that the neighbourhood apparently accepts of the young is denied when she goes beyond the obligatory condition of gender. In other words, if the gender

10. *Cisgender* is a neologism of German origin used to signal the gender identities that coincide with their sexual phenotype. The concept, adopted and resignified by transactivism, points out its imperative to dismantle how the differences between people who recognise themselves as “cis” and “trans” are articulated, and to highlight the indifference that sustains the “cis” privilege.

11. See the interview: <www.lacallepassyo61.cl/2019/05/>.

is wrongly played it is punished; if the gender is rightly played it is rewarded. Hence the play shifts towards the queer, transgressing norms of how the body should be represented according to gender mandates. The theatre strategy of highlighting the construction of the representation by blurring the edges in the acting contributes to un-silencing the gender representations. The play evokes the thesis that language builds reality and shows that heterosexual education materialises normative languages, producing in it corporalities that matter and others that do not. The relevance of this fact in a framework that links theatre and education for students and teachers makes us think about what Val Flores calls “anti-normative pedagogies”, given that the play reports normative signs of heterocentred education, antagonistically constituting a theatre language that disobeys it. In other words, through the materialisation of its language, it proposes a discourse and an anti-normative theatre aesthetics, which in the educational-artistic context in which it is placed contributes to breaking the educational practices reproduced by heteronormativity in the school and theatre.

*El amarillo sol de tus cabellos largos*¹²

Transvestic Aesthetics and Subversive Maternities



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The last production by the company La Niña Horrible seeks to resignify social constructs that the heteropatriarchate obligatorily classifies with the weight of the institutionalism that it has built and under which it shelters by enacting laws and naturalising norms, especially the nuclear family. In this play, “the transvestic” twists the hegemonic lines of cultural meaning of the heterosexual political regime. It challenges the maternity subordinated

12. The sixth production by the company La Niña Horrible, with dramaturgy by Carla Zúñiga and direction by Javier Casanga, was premiered at the Teatro Camilo Henríquez in January 2018, in the framework of the Festival Teatro Hoy by the Fundación Santiago a Mil.

to the heteronormativity produced in the “mother” and “female” category. In contrast to previous productions by *La Niña Horrible*, in which the dramatic conflicts are arranged based on the “woman” identity questioning the patriarchy and performed by actors who use transvestic aesthetic resources that challenge the gender performativity and the “female” category, here “the transvestic” takes on the role of represented identity and the stories of these transvestic feminine identities will support the dramatic plot conflict and its aesthetic arrangement. In other words, both plot and aesthetics are constituted based on the representation of transvestism. Nine non-heterosexual characters, six introduced as poor transvestites and three as lesbians, whose professions and sexual orientation symbolically allegorise their narrative presences, are embodied by actors and actresses, respectively, and enable us to revise female representations within the framework of the heteropatriarchal society, sharing with us subversive identities and warning us about the violence that undermines the lives of those who disobey the political statuses of sexgeneric binary. *Alma*, *Desasosiego*, *Desamparo*, *Adoración* and *El travesti sin cara* are the names of the transvestites, with which the exacerbated sentimental character of their femininity is shown. One of them wants to be a mother and she is not permitted, another a teacher but she is not allowed, one of them protects the community resisting the harassment of the transphobic police officer, another cannot see because a macho shot took her face off, and another promotes the adoration of transvestism as a form of survival. All of them protect and take care of each other in a room that is a house, a dressing room and a shelter at the same time, and that symbolises a transvestic community that collectively survives in the sex-dissident policy of self-care. The narrative story revolves around how *Alma*, with the support of her transvestic family, attempts to recover her son and exercise her maternity, after the kid had been snatched by *Alma*’s mother and father, a family with a marked sexist negationism and defended by a ridiculed police officer whose purpose is to detect transvestites, who she mistakes for women.

Carla Zúñiga has noted that in her dramaturgy the problems that interest her emerge out of her identity as a woman and the awareness of her female gender, taking on the discrimination implicit in it and using political theatre as a strategy. In several interviews she mentions that her own motherhood led her to reflect on how to rethink motherhoods from feminism “because it might seem that feminism and mother did not go hand in hand, as if it were impossible to think about being a mother outside the patriarchal structure.”¹³ Something that is in keeping with the calls of feminist movements of which Zúñiga forms part and that question the social judgement of the woman=mother, the so-called “natural maternity,” “natural upbringing” and “well-constituted family”, produced and defined by the heterosexual political regime. This explains why the conflict introduced in this play causes feminist intersections that combine gender, sex and class by having as its main character a transvestite, mother and poor woman, whose allegory politically

13. See: <www.fundacionteatroamil.cl/noticias-2019/>.

defies the essentialist constructs on the heterosexual gender and heterosexual norms imposed by the patriarchy on female bodies, among an intense debate of feminist imaginaries to counter-hegemonise male dominance.

What makes the company take on the transvestite identity as the place of political enunciation this time? An answer could be to acknowledge that from the outset the company has continuously questioned the female gender, experimenting with the excess of the grotesque¹⁴ as an aesthetic strategy to reveal what is not usually seen under the blanket of violence that male hegemony exercises on bodies. Hence we can read the transvestic resource in theatre as a visual aesthetic gesture of distancing that follows Brecht to denaturalise the violence produced by the patriarchy. Another possible answer would be to recognise that the company's deeper challenging of the female gender, the arrival at "the transvestic", would be inevitable given that transvestism manages to materialise the variability of identity. And it is here where the political gesture appears implicitly because, as Nelly Richard argues, "gender" is a power of "subversion of identity" by introducing, following Butler, "the potential of doubt in sexual definitions that should remain unalterable" (Richard, 2018b: 46). Indeed, by taking as a reference the transvestic group *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis*,¹⁵ Richard has noted that "by involving itself not with the essentiality of the feminine but its representations the transvestic rite of sexual conversion is an iconological rite" (Richard, 2018b: 23). By distinguishing the iconological character she is saying that the transvestite exists by adopting culturally ritualised female representations. In other words, the transvestite occupies the representations produced in the "woman" by the power technologies, to revert and point them out as given constructs. Something that the dragging¹⁶ has done from a reverse perspective as the bodies sexualised as "female" reveal the constructed social character in "masculinity" (Halberstam, 2008: 23). Culturally accepting that "transvestism spectacularly dogged all apparent unity of signification of the 'man' and 'woman' category with the rupture of its rhetorical and performative torsion" (Richard, 2018b: 58), its presence in this play is explained as it reveals essentialist practices produced by heteronormativity in maternity and, in its turn, enables female imaginaries that challenge the supremacy of masculinity. The aesthetic proposal of the show uses the extravagance of transvestism that parodies the gender binary, but also grotesquely indicates the stereotypes produced by heterosexuality on sex. What the company calls "the transvestic" contributes to thwarting the essentialist assignments that heterosexuality obliged in the bodies classified as "women", in a country that controls biological and technomedical reproduction, depriving of the right to freedom to decide on reproduction and obliging women to be mothers,¹⁷

14. In the mini documentary by FITAM on the company's creative process, its directors comment on their interest in the "grotesque" as theatre experimentation. See: <www.youtube.com/watch?>.

15. *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* was a homosexual group formed by Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas, which worked on the transvestic performance during the military dictatorship.

16. Person assigned as female (women, lesbians, bisexuals) that performs the masculinity in a hyperbolic and realistic manner, parodying the gender binary stereotypes.

17. In Chile, getting an abortion is only possible in three circumstances according to Act 21.030, passed in 2017.

excluding from the democratic cast the bodies that are not socially classified to receive the benefits of in vitro technologies,¹⁸ which hinders the generation of other types of paternities and maternities that are not subject to the biologist essentialism through the possibility of adoption. Indeed, the transvestic family transgresses the representation of the nuclear family, given that for the heteronormative society the family must be constituted according to social productions that determine the categories “man” and “woman” and foster the political imagination of new maternities and new upbringings through a transvestic mother who transvestically brings up her little boy.

***Demasiada libertad sexual les convertirá en terroristas*¹⁹** **Trans-Theatre and Counter-Sexualities**



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Assuming the challenge of writing about a play promoted, coordinated and directed by myself, I propose a theorisation from the traces left by the situated experience with the group, through an exercise of dismantling the critical references and aesthetic operations with which we work. The project was born out of a trans-theatre workshop that I set up in January 2019, called “Twisting the scene: obscenity and counter-sexuality”.²⁰ By trans-theatre I am referring to a practical laboratory methodology I have been researching since 2015, which crosses theatre imaginaries, queer theory and sex-dissident activisms, twisting the discipline that the performing arts cause in bodies

18. Artificial insemination in Chile depends on purchasing power.

19. *Demasiada libertad sexual les convertirá en terroristas*, with my own dramaturgy and direction e, premiered in July 2019 in the theatre of the Universidad Mayor, in Santiago.

20. The workshop was supported by sessions by the filmmaker Camila Donoso, the biologist Jorge Díaz and the essayist Nelly Richard.

and that create certain normativities. The concept of obscenity prompted us to wonder about what is excluded from theatre: the “dirty”, “immoral”, “perverse”. “Counter-sexuality” (Preciado, 2011: 13) invited the creation of in-disciplined counter-productivities in sexual hegemony.

That experience brought together several young artists and activists of sexual dissidence. After the workshop, we met up to think and make a group play that would put the biographical and creative experiences that we had shared in the theatre, using “sexual terrorism” as a stage activation, ironically suggested by Pier Paolo Pasolini in the title of a short essay that questions the heterosexualisation of lives. From there, and crossing personal artistic and creative experiences, we will understand by sexual terrorism the situated aesthetic-political practices that critically redevelop sexual imaginaries. Inspired by Pasolini, and with post-porn influences, we refer to creative productions and bodily actions that transgress, parody and crack hegemonic sexual norms to reveal their contradictions and oppressions. The Pasolinian phrase that opens the title of the play suggests that the greater the sexual freedom, the greater the terror for society. What at first glance could be read as a moralistic warning can also be seen as a tactical one. The operation that the play promotes is the counter-sexual tactic: explicitly against the heterosexual political regime. For this, the fiction of an academic lecture presented by the Núcleo de Acción Contrasexual Sudamericana (NACS) was performed, composed of five sexual terrorist speakers who politically challenge their sexual identities and freedoms, parodying the terror that their corporalities and sexualities cause to the heteronormative culture, passing through scenes that point to the Church, the school, the university and the family as institutional powers that oppress them. On stage, their biographical experiences and sexual demands are featured in a testimonial manner, revealing that behind the production of their identities there is desire, subversion and resistance. A porn actress and prostitute who works independently. A transvetite actor who works making performances that he calls “travestias”. A transmale and lesbian actress who demands her right to be a transgender actor. An actor who makes an issue of his seropositivity and who complains that, behind the HIV-AIDS public policies, there are social prejudices and consensual stigmatisation in a culture lacking non-sexist education. And a fat woman photographer and model against fat phobia, who proudly positions her fat in addition to denouncing a society that discriminates against her because of her physical build.²¹ On and off stage, they all develop an embodied political discourse of their sexualities, defending their bodily autonomies, which antagonise heteronormativity. Something that the actress and sex worker of the cast, Vesania, points out in a televised public interview: “What we have in common is that we dedicate ourselves to activism from different points of view and fight. We are called ‘minorities’, exceptions to a rule, a norm which is heterosexuality” (Dominik, 2019: 03:00-05:00). The play traces a fragmented journey between scenes that combine representation, testimony,

21. On the representation of identities in the play, consult the review by Jorge Letelier in: <https://culturizarte.cl/critica-de-teatro-demasiada-libertad-sexual-les-convertira-en-terroristas-resistencias-politicas-de-los-cuerpos-libertinos/>.

performance, theory and document, alternating the deconstruction of the performative production of their identities with feminist theoretical reflections, but mainly with Monique Wittig, who is quoted explicitly pointing out that “the heterosexual political regime” totalises, universalises and “materialises a form of dominant thought through language and the production of difference” (Wittig, 2006: 45). Hence, the group, after positioning its deviant identities, articulates questions to de-naturalise heteronormative languages. “Whore”, “AIDS carrier”, “fatty”, “fag”, “dyke” resonate as insults, but also as queer re-significations, adopting the insult to counter-sexualise, revealing violence and proudly calling for sexual liberation. The stated idea that is proposed as a “Performance-Lecture” combines a play that is shown as a “performance” and uses the academic “lecture” as a format. The former refers to the dynamics of the “real” that installs this practice as a signifier in the field of the performing arts, and the latter, to the “academic” character that triggers the lecture. The researcher José Antonio Sánchez has called this the “irruption of the real” (Sánchez: 2007) in the performing arts, based on wondering about the proliferation of testimonial voices and real documents on contemporary theatre, thus variably displacing the dramatic representation (without renouncing or dispensing with it). The playwright and researcher Carles Batlle has retrieved in his research on the dramaturgies of the real the idea of “direct testimonies” (Batlle: 2020), identifying them as individuals that combine the performance of their role on stage with references of multiple origins that highlight the intimate nature of the plays. Both conceptualisations, explored in this play, can be read as a need to sharpen the urgency for political action and the re-presentation between body-discourse and body-image, by criticising the circulation of “universal” knowledge about sexual identities on and off the stage, and as a political antagonism to the exclusion in theatre of identities that do not represent the traditional ideal of the “white”, “healthy”, “organic”, “heterosexual” actor/actress body and of “normal” physical build.²² Simultaneously, the real document is enhanced in the play, through data about sexual discrimination in Chile, images of the iconic activist Hija de Perra,²³ a video in which the lesbophobic crime against Nicole Saavedra is condemned,²⁴ scenes in which the participation of the audience is directly involved to collect data on their sexualities, and a poster screened towards the end that calls to “decolonise gender and destroy the heterosexual dictatorship,”²⁵ while the hooded naked bodies dance wildly accompanied by screenings of social protests in Chile. The play tells us that it seems that dramatic representation is not enough to transform the

22. The activist Jorge Díaz pointed out that: “The production addresses one of the most important criticisms pending in the world of theatre after the feminist May: that is, in addition to male domination and abuse in the world of acting, we now also have to question, at the same time and with the same strength, the narrow bodily shapes that appear on stage.” See: <<https://www.eldesconcerto.cl/2019/07/20/>>.

23. Hija de Perra is the stage name of the transvestite activist and artist Víctor Hugo Wally Peña Loza, an icon of post-porn stages in Chile. He passed away from AIDS-related problems in 2015, but his legacy continues to inspire sexual dissidences.

24. Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes (23) was a young masculine lesbian, murdered in 2016 in a lesbophobic crime. The case is emblematic of justice, mainly of transfeminist lesbian organisations grouped in @justiciaparanicole and other sex-dissident groups.

25. See: <<https://ernestorellana.cl/project/demasiada-libertad-sexual-les-convertira-en-terroristas/>>.

precariousness of our non-heterosexual identities. Hence the importance of trans-theatrically combining activist positions of sexual dissidence with documentary, creative and metaphorical strategies made possible by the performing arts. For just as theatre needs to be infected by activist political imaginaries, activisms need the creative and aesthetic strategies of theatre to enunciate their struggles, producing counter-hegemonies.

Conclusions

We have shown that the presence of queer epistemologies in theatre appear by combining dramaturgies, images, representations, corporalities and actions. And just as political theatre has helped us to understand the dimensions of how power is re-produced and acts, queer theories have contributed to dismantling the re-productions of the power of heteronormativity and building possible alternatives to its political regime of dominance. In the plays reviewed here, we can see that their sex-dissident gestures disturb the heteronormative cultural landscape, signalling counter-hegemonies from their theatrical stage metaphors. We can conclude that, on the one hand, the denaturalisation of discourses and heterosexualised aesthetics is promoted in theatre and, on the other, discourses and re-presentations of sexualities that dissent from the heterosexual political regime are expanded.

These plays, which emerged in the contexts described, produce a queer shift in political theatre, since they twist the continuity of the culturalised and socialised lines through their historical tradition, re-presenting sex and gender as networks of powers and resistance. They highlight urgent sex-dissident debates that are culturally transforming the country. In this way, it becomes clear that the problems that have driven sexual dissidence in Chile are shaping the theatrical cultural artistic imaginaries and becoming their aesthetics. And certain theatrical productions are helping to break open the hegemonic representations of sexuality by expanding the problems posed by sexual dissidence.

Asking ourselves about how sex and gender productions are represented in theatre is an ethical matter. Since theatre works from the re-presentation of bodies and their social relations, it then needs to critically ask itself about the ways in which the bodies are produced with the urgency of current debates. To avoid the problem of the re-presentations of sex and gender in theatre is to evade their interwoven productions and to collaborate in the naturalisation of the heterosexual political regime with its male dominated apparatuses and the re-production of its violence. The strategies that these three plays have used are also strategies that sexual dissidents use to enunciate and expand themselves: queer stances, feminist criticism, awareness of gender performativity, denaturalisation of the essentialism of sex, and activist action. The political seal that we recognise in them is their antagonistic character: they challenge heterosexual power, they mark it as hegemony, they reveal its consensual political constructions, they denounce its violence, they construct scenic imaginaries that alter the order of normativity. And in deep harmony with one of the greatest demands of the student movement, which has

been responsible for the most urgent social transformations in Chile since the post-dictatorship, they promote the discussion of comprehensive, non-sexist, feminist and anti-neoliberal sexual education. In other words, these political theatre plays make the political in theatre shift from their queer epistemologies to point out the power that heterosexuality naturalises in our bodies and relationships. And just as César de Vicente invites us to think about political theatre in its “constituent” character, and not only in those “constituted” imaginaries, we recognise these plays as cultural productions that are articulated with the current context, constituting in their collective actions non-heterosexual sexual imaginaries, from dissent to normal sexual reality. This disruption of knowledge that was promoted by the student movements – just as these plays question the heteronormative and sexist education of the current social model – evidences their political character insofar as they not only represent history but also constitute antagonisms in history, disturbing its socialised stability in order to rewrite it. Given that political theatre plays should not be read as reflections of what is happening, but in their implicitly and/or explicitly antagonistic character, we consider them as disruptions in the events of the present. Therefore, we can also note that the queer shift of political theatre not only seeks to re-present “other” sexual imaginaries different to the hetero-sexualised ones. Because for a sex-dissident politics, sexual identities are not intended to be stabilised in normativity, nor desire to be adjusted to normativities but to possibilities of producing variabilities in the body, sex and gender, to go on disrupting the trend and linearity of hegemonisation on bodies and desires, and liberate the body and sexuality.



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