

## How the Dramaturgical Practice of Chilean Contemporary Circus is Evolving and Adapting to the Different National Scenarios:

### The case of *Je tirerais pour toi*, by Collectif Merkén

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English translation, Neil Charlton

#### Abstract

The following article focuses on the dramaturgical process developed in contemporary circus by analysing the piece *Je tirerais pour toi* by the company Collectif Merkén, performed by the Chilean artist Pamela Pantoja. A theoretical and reflexive analysis is carried out on how the dramaturgical connection is shaped through its contextual and/or territorial limits with the Chilean circus scene.

The central hypothesis of the article argues the transition from a fragmented dramaturgy to an authored dramaturgy based on stage practice, which has rectified the dramaturgical discourse of circus with extended practices of an identity nature to hybrid practices influenced by the postdramatic, underpinned by the principles of the search for dramaturgical limits.

We believe that this hybridisation is reshaping the identity directly linked to an area of ideological and social creation to later converge in aesthetic and dramaturgical reflections that embrace the current state of contemporary circus.

Moreover, Pamela Pantoja develops her show based on the narrative of the Chilean dictatorship and circus, specifically in aerial silk and hair hanging. The piece emerged out of the need to dialogue with her past and seeks to question the “pact of silence” that has hung over Chile since 11 September 1973. She does so through research and archives based on concepts and questionings of the family, the Chilean identity and the legacy of the coup in Chile: censorship and the apology for violence.

**Keywords:** dramaturgy, contemporary circus, Chilean circus, *Je tirerais pour toi*, Collectif Merkén

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## How the Dramaturgical Practice of Chilean Contemporary Circus is Evolving and Adapting to the Different National Scenarios:

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#### **Introduction**

The dramaturgical process developed in contemporary circus is an area that requires reflection on its own definition and an academic development through theatre studies and particularly circus studies. Moreover, one of the reasons for this research is to theorise about the dramaturgical pieces shared by artists and creators through different perspectives in order to achieve a general understanding.

A theoretical examination is carried out in relation to the question: how is the dramaturgical connection shaped through its limits or borders, such as in the case of Chile and France? And it analyses how it influences its identity category from Chile. To this end, the dramaturgy of contemporary circus is studied and the contemporary circus show *Je tirerais pour toi* is analysed, which was created and directed by the Chilean artist Pamela Pantoja, who lives in Marseilles (France).

At a historical level, circus in Chile is an avant-garde performing arts practice thanks to initiatives developed in the 1990s, after the dictatorship, led by artists such as Andrés Pérez, Mauricio Celedón and Andrés del Bosque. Along with the street art movement, at that time a movement focused on promoting a protest and social art called Nuevo Circo Chileno emerged, influenced by the French Nouveau Cirque and the theatre avant-gardes developed in Europe after May 1968 and which reached Latin America in the late 20th century.

These companies create a complex network of readings and actions that reshape the Chilean identity through a transculturation that enables us to venture a series of relations of hybridisation regarding the categories of identity as well as the methodologies of creation. As Ana Harcha explains:

La cultura chilena no existe sino a partir de la hibridación de una serie de agentes y sólo si entendemos la chilenidad como una categoría híbrida y transculturada es posible hablar de ella.

Para la comprensión de la chilenidad también se sigue lo que explica Wilfrid Miampika (en su caso en relación con la cubanidad); entonces, la chilenidad sería una categoría cultural —y no racial, ni geográfica— que solo se hace válida cuando es completada por «la conciencia y voluntad de ser chileno (Harcha, 2017: 113).<sup>1</sup>

A complex net of readings and actions is created that reshape the Chilean performing arts identity, influenced by a theatrical and aesthetic discourse derived from the different foreign currents that had an impact in the political, cultural and social context, such as the case of Pantoja and French culture. This change of identity is directly linked to the field of ideological and social creation to later converge in aesthetic and dramaturgical reflections that cover the current state of contemporary circus in Chile and France.

Therefore, for this project we analyse contemporary circus pieces by examining the hybridisation of dramaturgical languages and performed outside Chile. This developed dramaturgy involves an ideological issue derived from the cultural current developed by historical politics in Chile.

The history of new circus in Chile encompasses a structural transformation that took place in the 1990s, framed by the cultural policies that had an impact on the development of this art, in which the Chilean exponents developed a *mise-en-scène* in search of identity, following a search for a post-dramatic performance.

Moreover, postdramatic language led to a rupture with the modern traditional circus of public and cultural policies, from which this new experimental and theatrical dramaturgy emerged, although influenced by major artists such as Andrés Pérez and the aesthetics of Ariane Mnouchkine's *Théâtre du Soleil*, which is clear in the work of Pérez with the Chilean company *Gran Circo Teatro*.

The main objective of contemporary circus is to understand by observing the new circus shows in relation to the historical and social context in which they take place. This enables us to understand which categories are related to the issue of identity, such as the national, the cultural, the art market, the folkloric, the marginal and the mainstream as well as to adopt a given stance with respect to the concepts of transculturation and cultural hybridisation.

To this end, we must assess our understanding and position with respect to theories that establish a critical relation with the project of contemporaneity, as well as the conception of the cultural; and, finally, what concerns us in general terms, the issue of the fixed or mobile limits that can be glimpsed in the questions: what is dramaturgy in contemporary circus? and Should we speak of contemporary circus dramaturgy in (and from) Chile?

Through theatre studies I focus on the doctoral research of the dramaturgical process of contemporary circus in Chile, Catalonia and France. I

1. Chilean culture only exists through the hybridisation of a series of agents, and only if we understand the "chilenidad" as a hybrid and transcultured category is it possible to speak about it.

To understand the "chilenidad", we also follow Wilfrid Miampika's explanation (in his case in relation to the "cubanidad"); thus, the "chilenidad" would be a cultural rather than a racial or geographical category, which is only valid when complemented by the "awareness of being and the desire to be Chilean".

carry out a research thesis on the processes of creation of circus in which territory and social identity meet in the circus language. And, in this article, I set out the analysis I developed in the paper presented in the Mutis Congress in Barcelona on 16 March 2021.

In order to define this main objective, I carry out theoretical and practical research that answers the following questions: What is dramaturgy in contemporary circus? and How are the current theories applied in the field of study? Based on practice, we will look at and analyse how this dramaturgy affects the decisions regarding the piece *Je tirerais pour toi*, by Collectif Merkén, performed by the Chilean circus artist Pamela Pantoja.

## Development

To contextualise our study we must explain that in 2009 the Área de Circo was officially created in Chile by the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes. It was an important step to recognise circus as an art. Chile made a cultural advance but it did not become the norm in academic research. Moreover, at present two categories of circus come together which, over time, have separated politically and culturally: the Circo Tradicional Chileno (Circo Moderno) and the Nuevo Circo Chileno. However, there is a need to position the new circus with a discourse that seeks to understand and make up a dramaturgy within today's cultural reality and be innovative: in other words, placing circus within a contemporary language. This separation between new circus and traditional circus is mainly due to the new performing arts languages that have emerged in Chile: the street theatre of Andrés Pérez and Mauricio Celedón and the movement of young jugglers in Santiago, which emerged in the Parque Forestal in Santiago, and also the important contribution of the Escuela el Circo del Mundo to the national scene. However, we find contemporary Chilean circus references abroad, mainly in Europe, such as Andrés Labarca, Pamela Pantoja, and Teatro del Silencio.

## Circus as Artistic Research

The theoretical foundation of this article is based on the process of theoretical reconstruction and examination of different sources related to theatre studies.

With respect to the materials of reference in Spanish produced in the scientific field, we have different contributions in theatre studies, mainly in the field of new dramaturgies and issues such as the body, postdramatic theatre and performance, in which the circus appears in the form of publications written by researchers in the performing arts in general, such as the case of Mercè Saumell (circus and contemporary theatre in Catalonia) or the articles published by Jordi Jané in the newspaper *Avui*. In Chile there are publications on social circus and the historiography of traditional circus, with authors such as Ilan Oxman and Pilar Ducci and the Mexican Julio Rebolledo, who was a benchmark for theoretical work in Chile. The researchers Julieta Infantino in Argentina and Marco Bortoleto in Brazil have promoted

academic research on circus from diverse areas both in undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

Thus, we can analyse the contemporary artistic practice, displaced from the notion of play, based on a sensitive experience and re-appropriated in its cultural space. To this end, we look for work tools borrowed from both theatre studies and other fields, such as art, literature, performance, the visual arts, new media and even popular culture, and sources such as oral documents, interviews or living memory, recovering knowledge rather than merely recording data. In this case, we refer to “living bodies”, the artist as a creator and main figure of the performing arts creation.

We have two concepts of research into theatre processes, based on the hypothesis of Milena Grass in her *Metodología de la investigación para las artes escénicas en Chile* (Grass, 2011: 87).

On the one hand, traditional research through the scientific paradigms of social sciences, in which the problems, questions, designs and methodological tools (interviews and work notebook) are set out.

And, on the other, artistic research and its variants, based on practice, with questions and answers based on the discourses and practice of the pieces analysed.

These two fields of research guide us to the analysis of the history and historiography we need to collect: the oral and written sources and documents. And we report on the criteria that prevail in the history of circus, historical period, geographical areas and artistic periods.

With this we must adapt to a historiography of circus, to an approach of new narratives and dramaturgies, to a reconstruction and invention of this art with the aim of carrying out a historiographic and circus theatre studies analysis, mainly in Chile, similar to a hermeneutics of Chilean circus, in order to rewrite the work and study methods, with the aim of answering the question: what is the dramaturgy of contemporary circus?

### **Dramaturgy in Circus?**

The issue of the specificity of circus regularly returns to the centre of the debate, often linked to its artistic and institutional recognition. We should remember that the first modern circus was opened by Philip Astley in London on 9 January 1768. However, before that date there were already artistic expressions such as acrobatics, juggling and contortion with centuries of history. Loyal to the meaning of equestrian theatre, there are currently artists who reject the name of circus in favour of equestrian theatre such as the Théâtre Equestre Zingaro and others who believe that circus should preserve its origins and maintain irreducible elements such the round stage or the arena. Researchers such as Philippe Goudard in France provide valuable contributions on this historiographic aspect of today's circus. Nevertheless, it is difficult to define a single line of conduct for contemporary theatre and mainly for a line of dramaturgical actions and options.

To guide us in the bibliographical references, we mainly focus on the French discourse, understanding that most of the existing knowledge of the

discourse and theory of circus comes from France. France has developed a comprehensive archive on dramaturgy and circus studies. Authors such as Ariane Martinez, professor at the University of Lille, Jean-Michel Guy, circus researcher, Marion Guyez, with the recent publication of her doctoral thesis on dramaturgy and acrobats, and also Philippe Goudard, researcher at Montpellier University, recognise a contemporary circus that emerged in France in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Thus, we cannot ignore the work of these authors in terms of contemporary circus. It is therefore necessary to speak of the French context, where a circus emerged that has shifted to different contexts.

In 2020 the CNAC<sup>2</sup> and the Chaire ICiMa<sup>3</sup> published *Contours et détours des dramaturgies circassiennes* (edited by Diane Moquet, Karine Saroh and Cyril Thomas), a collection of articles written by the professors on the bachelor's degree in circus dramaturgy at CNAC and also researchers and artists who have contributed to the analysis of dramaturgy in circus. These include Thomas Cepitelli, Maroussia Diaz Verbèke, Marian Del Valle, Philippe Goudard, Bauke Lievens, Jean-Michel Guy, Marion Guyez, Ariane Martinez, Corine Pencenat, Karine Saroh, Franziska Trapp, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck. They have contributed valuable material to the analysis of dramaturgy in contemporary circus in Europe through an academic viewpoint but strongly influenced by the theoretical and practical construction and the process of reflection on the need to approach the complex concept of dramaturgy in the circus arts.

Aborder la question de la dramaturgie se révèle être une entreprise particulièrement stimulante, d'une part parce que cela implique de défricher un concept entouré d'un certain flou définitionnel – le dramaturge, originairement, est en effet à la fois l'auteur de textes de théâtre et une collaboratrice-collaborateur artistique dont le rôle est soumis à variations – mais surtout parce que la dramaturgie se trouve à l'intersection de polarités qui sont souvent opposées. Entre la piste et la table, entre intellect et sensible, savoir et tâtonnement, création et réception, la dramaturgie et le/la dramaturge se trouvent dans une zone de transition difficile à situer, dans une posture d'«errance» qui amène à remettre en cause et à dépasser ces oppositions schématiques pour mieux enrichir création circassienne contemporaine<sup>4</sup> (Moquet, Saroh and Thomas, 2020: 9).

2. Centre national des arts du cirque. A higher education and research centre, the CNAC, based in Châlons-en-Champagne, was founded in 1985 at the initiative of the Ministry of Culture. Almost 400 artists from 35 countries joined this higher national school, thereby becoming an important benchmark of international contemporary circus.

3. Chaire d'innovation sociale et territoriale Cirque et Marionnette. Research centre which, since its creation in 2012-2013, has shown its commitment to innovative and always interdisciplinary projects. At a documentary and heritage level, CNAC and ICiMa are centres attached to the National Library of France. This similar stance and their rooting in a common territory led them to work since 2014 on the convergence and complementarity of their facilities, their teaching methods, and research and innovation projects.

4. Addressing the issue of dramaturgy is a particularly stimulating enterprise, on the one hand, because it implies clearing a concept surrounded by a certain blurring of definition. The dramaturge, originally, is in fact the author of a theatre text and an artistic collaborator whose role is subject to variations but above all because dramaturgy is at the intersection of polarities. Between the ring and the table, between the intellect and the sensitive, knowledge, judgement, error, creation and reception, the dramaturgy and the dramaturge are found in an area of transition that is difficult to localise, in a stance of "wandering" that leads to question and overcome these schematic oppositions to better enrich contemporary circus creation.

Thus, we also understand that, with its fragmented and non-linear dramaturgy, circus seems to perfectly correspond to the postdramatic and performative evolution, but also that this reasoning can be problematic (Moquet, Saroh and Thomas, 2020: 21).

In her publication *La dramaturgie du cirque contemporain français: quelques pistes théâtrales*, Ariane Martinez explains that “contemporary circus has a dramaturgical state of mind”<sup>5</sup> (Martinez, 2018: 13) as a result of the hybridisation with theatre, dance and performance art that developed in France but also the involvement in the search for new forms and the development of a reflection on the definition of the word *circus*, no longer as a fragmentary and identical reproduction of a know-how but as a search for its own dramaturgy. This shows us that circus is enjoying good health in French art.

Patrice Pavis, a renowned theatre researcher, explains in his *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* in the section “Dramaturgy”:

For all who lacks an overall, unified image of the world, the reproduction of reality in theatre must necessarily be fragmentary. The question is no longer one of developing a dramaturgy by artificially correlating a coherent ideology with an appropriate form, and a single performance often draws on several types of dramaturgical analysis. The performance is no longer based solely on identification or alienation effects; some productions may even try to divide up the dramaturgy by letting the actors organize their narratives according to their own world views. The notion of *dramaturgical choices* gives a better account of current trends than a dramaturgy seen as a global and structured set of homogeneous aesthetic and ideological principles (Pavis, 1998: 126).

The dramaturgical evolution in circus has a multidisciplinary, fragmentary and reflexive character about its own fragmentation as structure. It no longer consists of a succession of acts but is also favoured by the mixture with other arts, such as theatre and other forms of the visual arts, which has led to the emergence of the “circus of creation” (Soler, 2016: 40). To some extent, the paradigm of circus tends to be increasingly closer to the multidisciplinary and fragmentary theatre scene, approaching the contemporary language of the arts.

We then consider that circus skills area language and, therefore, a code of aesthetic and ideological transmission. The following challenge has a dramaturgical character: it consists of managing to bring together in a single discourse the circus specialities (kinetic circus) and the narrativeness of the piece in question (non-textual language, in most cases). Jordi Jané, a journalist and circus critic, explains that the today “és públic i notori que no tots els actuals espectacles europeus de circ d'autor superen aquest repte dramàtic”<sup>6</sup> (Jané, 2017).

5. Jean-Marc Lachaud, citing Bernard Dort, recently spoke of “a dramaturgical state of mind” (Lachaud, 1999: 13; Dort, 1986) present in contemporary circus.

6. It is well known that not all current European auteur circus meets this dramaturgical challenge.

We are aware that the history of contemporary circus is young. Events and stories have always been told in circus. In traditional circus its dramaturgy is fragmented, made up of acts, is attractive to the audience and maintains its nature as a show, like variety and cabaret shows. But by building a “narrative”, a “narrativeness”, we are speaking of an incipient dramaturgy that tries to emerge in the dialogue with the circus artists.

Circus has always been an all-embracing genre, which embraces everything, and juxtaposed to the arts. If the separations were previously marked, contemporary circus, the deserving heir of new circus, persevered in the other form of fusion of the arts, without being subject to its rules, exploiting them and deviating from its own field. In the words of Jean-Michel Guy, “Nous n’avons pas le même présent ni le même avenir, selon que nous ayons ou non les mêmes histoires”<sup>7</sup> (Guy, 2010: 23).

In contemporary circus, there are relations with tradition, its sources of inspiration, its artistic references, its intentionalities and its writings. The choices made with respect to the movements, sounds and colours of the gestures, as well as the costumes and privileged make-up, are not based on any pre-existing norm. They are plural. As a result, it seems that they are moving away from the strategies chosen by their predecessors or that they sometimes dissent from them. Alone or in partnership at different levels with other artists such as comedians, dancers, musicians and visual artists, often with the involvement of a stage organiser (whose thought and visions structure the final objective and the modes of its development, exhibition), they produce pieces whose overtly open kaleidoscopic nature is to some extent attenuated as soon as the ruptures that punctuate its progress are less evident. But, above all from the reference of the late 20th century in contemporary circus, with pieces by French companies such as Gosch (1991), Cirque Ici, by Johann Le Guillerm and Pocheros (1993), Le Colporteurs and Que-Cir-Que (1994), and the company Cahin-Caha (1998).

Joseph Danan, a dramaturge and professor at the Institute of Theatre Studies at the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, explains in his book *Qué es la dramaturgia*:

No es solamente intentar definir una noción que sabemos hasta qué punto es huidiza para quien pretende aproximarse a ella, sino también enfrentarnos a un estado del teatro, el nuestro, al inicio del siglo XXI, cuando se deshace todo lo que creíamos saber del drama, de la acción, incluso del teatro mismo. ¿Qué sucede con la dramaturgia cuando el teatro cede a la tentación de expulsar al drama de su esfera, cuando la acción se desintegra y se desacredita hasta el punto de parecer anularse, cuando el teatro se hace danza, instalación, performance? (Danan, 2012: 11).<sup>8</sup>

7. We don't have the same present or the same future, depending on whether we have the same stories or not.

8. It is not only about trying to define a notion, knowing how far it is fleeting for those seeking to approach it, but also about facing a state of theatre, ours, at the start of the 21st century, when everything we thought we knew about drama, action and even theatre itself is unravelling. What happens with dramaturgy when theatre surrenders to the temptation of expelling drama from its sphere, when the action disintegrates and discredits itself to the point of seeming to annul itself, when theatre becomes dance, installation, performance.

For Danan, the word *dramaturgy* does not address the activity in a strict sense, as an art of composition of theatre plays, a definition unanimously recognised by the *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, by Émile Littré,<sup>9</sup> or the *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, by Patrice Pavis.<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that today we do not feel a little limited by it, even if we remain exclusively in the field of this first meaning. Danan proposes a definition of dramaturgy as a “Movimiento de tránsito de las obras de teatro hasta llegar a la escena”<sup>11</sup> (Danan, 2012: 13), in other words as the slippery and unnoticed practice that enables the transfer of the text onto the stage, or the materialisation of a content of any type in the “here and now” of the theatre sessions, this space-time. As Bernard Dort, cited by Danan, also argues “Yo daría una definición extremadamente vaga de la dramaturgia: es todo lo que pasa en el texto y todo lo que pasa del texto a la escena”<sup>12</sup> (Danan, 2012). He also alludes to the definition of the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy as the “organisation of the action.”<sup>13</sup> Danan explains that the word *dramaturgy* has been loaded with negativity. As if it recalled too much what had been rejected in the literary text, i.e., the scene, *play*, even *dramatic poem*, is accepted as a literary genre, but not *dramaturgy*, which would relate to the practice of the shared stage, where actors and audience coproduce the content of the show.

However, dramaturgy is not necessarily linked to the text. It could be described as the codes of representation, even if this very dramaturgy presupposes a critique or deconstruction of these very codes. With this, we establish the limits for an analysis of a circus dramaturgy, at first fragmented, but now open to new modes, from the dramatic action and its search in the development of contemporary circus.

### **Analysis of *Je tirerais pour toi***

*Je tirerais pour toi* is a theatre-circus solo which is the result of documentary research carried out by the Chilean artist Pamela Pantoja and her company Collectif Merkén, from France. The piece tells of the experience of the guerrilla fighter Fabiola, the only woman who participated in the attack against the dictator Augusto Pinochet in 1986 in Santiago. Through the disciplines of aerial silk and hair hanging, the artist brings together two worlds relegated to silence: the national political history and her own family history, in the role of women (mother and grandmother) in a macho Chile. Using the ritual of braiding her hair, the two stories are combined to weave together the fragments of a national and intimate memory until now disparate and covered up by the brutality of an authoritarian and patriarchal power. By working on breaking taboos, both in political and personal history and

9. *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (compiled between 1859 and 1872).

10. *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2002.

11. Movement of transit from the theatre plays to reach the stage.

12. I would provide an extremely vague definition of dramaturgy: it is everything that occurs in the text and everything that is transferred from the text onto the stage.

13. Jean-Luc Nancy says more precisely “staging of the drama” / “activation of the action” (Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, “Dialogue sur le dialogue”, *Études Théâtrales*, No. 31, 2004, p. 80).

in circus techniques, the artist pays witness to the struggles led by women against different oppressions.

I had the chance to talk to Pantoja in Marseilles in January 2020. At that time I saw the show *Je tirerais pour toi*, directed and performed by Pantoja, at the Pole de Cirque ARCHAOS.

The following day we had the interview in which she told me about her creation. She also described to me the research process she developed as a student in the Master ARTS, *Parcours Arts et scènes d'aujourd'hui* in the Department of the Arts at the University of Marseilles where she prepared the theoretical apparatus that gives life to her show. Moreover, Pantoja reveals that she calls her circus product “documentary circus”.

*Je tirerais pour toi* is a piece based on actual events and fed by documents that the artist collected, and narrates the attack on Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, perpetrated by the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR) whose members decided in late 1986 to assassinate the dictator. The action was called Operación Siglo XX,<sup>14</sup> and was led by José Joaquín Valenzuela Levi (called Commander Ernesto), a member of the national leadership of the FPMR. Pantoja develops a story based on her family memories with a two-fold role: that of a family woman and of Fabiola, the only woman who participated in the FPMR attack.

« Sur des fait réels » cela veut dire que je me rapporte à des événements passés qui s'inscrivent dans des histoires familiales et nationales qui m'ont impactée d'une manière ou d'une autre et qui me dépassent. Quant aux documents ils m'ont permis d'obtenir de la matière au récit mais aussi ont transformé ma pratique circassienne<sup>15</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 11).

This practice was worked using data (the length of the attack, Fabiola's speech used to build the aerial silk act, the emotional state of the activist at the time of the shooting, the possible resonances with the practice of hair hanging, the braided hair for hanging, which takes on new meanings in contact with these stories). At the end, *Je tirerais pour toi* asks about the representation of history in theatre and circus.

But, to this end, Pantoja begins her research with questions and the creation of hypotheses with which she analyses the issue and the work she will develop, based on the following question:

How can historical data (family, national, activist) be mobilised in theatre and circus with an artistic objective even when these stories are still difficult to tell?

14. Augusto Pinochet suffered an armed attack when he was returning from a weekend in his residence in El Melocotón. The attack, carried out by the Marxist-Leninist armed organisation Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR), resulted in 5 dead and 11 wounded; however, the FPMR did not achieve its objective and Augusto Pinochet survived (Hertz and Verdugo, 2021).

15. “Based on actual events” means that I relate to past events that form part of family and national narratives that have in one way or another had an impact on me and are beyond me. The documents have enabled me to obtain material for the story but also transformed my circus practice.

Quel usage faire des documents, des données ? De quelle histoire parle-t-on, une histoire nationale/familiale, individuelle/collective, la grande histoire, la petite ? Faut-il cloisonner les époques ? Qu'est-ce qui fait événement ? Parle-t-on des continuités ou des discontinuités ? Comment donner à voir une histoire sans illustrer puisqu'il s'agit de théâtre ? Quelle place accorder au silence ? Autant de questions que je me suis posées durant l'élaboration de la pièce<sup>16</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 11).

Following this general problem, Pamela develops two central theoretical questions for her work:

#### *Aesthetic question 1*

How are the theatre practice and circus techniques (aerial silk and hair hanging) not only spectacular elements but also represent a story that is intimate, family and political, and that fights to be publically asserted?

#### *Aesthetic question 2*

Do the data collected and the documents from which it is extracted transform the document? In other words, what will be imposed on the director? On the other hand, how does the director transform historical data?

### **Circus as a Creative Vehicle between the Intimate and the Political**

The show *Je tirerais pour toi* is an artistic creation firmly framed within theatrical performance. Using tools from theatre and circus, it references people and events that are not present. Pantoja is also a player of herself; her body serves as a medium to represent these people who are not there and to show events from the past. At the same time, her body represents Pamela Pantoja as a Chilean woman; she talks about herself, her story, what she feels. This is the hybridisation of circus, no longer as an all-embracing element but as a device to act against the story and its actions. And the essence of self-referentiality that allows Pantoja to express her intimate relationship and relate it to historical events.

The political history represented in this show is multiple. It corresponds to the history of the political arena in Chile or its institutional history (figures such as Salvador Allende and Augusto Pinochet, although successive political parties, institutions and regimes are also present). As a revolutionary activist, Fabiola is part of this story when she tries to overthrow a dictator. The show represents Chilean politics through a woman and her militant group who broke into the political game. At the same time, Pantoja challenges these decisions:

Mais est-ce là la seule histoire politique qui est montrée ? J'aurais pu prendre l'histoire d'une des femmes des 5 gardes du corps de Pinochet qui sont morts

<sup>16</sup> How should documents and data be used? What story are we talking about, a national/family history, individual/collective, the big, the small history? Should the eras be divided? What makes an event? Are we speaking about continuities or discontinuities? How to tell a story without showing it as it is theatre? What place should be given to silence? So many questions that I asked myself during the development of the piece.

durant l'attentat ou même faire un spectacle depuis la perspective du petit-fils de Pinochet. Petit-fils qui était dans la voiture avec son grand-père au moment de l'attentat. Mais je me suis basée sur l'histoire de la seule femme qui a participé à l'attentat et me suis donc intéressée aussi à une histoire politique des militantes opposées à la dictature. Par ailleurs, ce spectacle représente une autre dimension de la politique<sup>17</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 15).

Pantoja's story and that of her grandmother are interrelated with Fabiola's. The fact that she is the only woman who participated in this attack against Pinochet shows that there was a sexual division of militant actions. Pantoja's mother and grandmother are on another level and, in their own way, suffered and reacted to the violence of the men in their family, a patriarchal dictatorship. These women faced oppression in different ways.

For Pantoja, this show pays homage to heroic actions, to the courage needed to achieve them, whether these actions take place at home or in public spaces to assassinate a dictator. This is not the same thing, but in both cases it requires action, breaking an established order (dictatorship or patriarchal model) and breaking with a form of inertia. "Ces personnes ont mené à ce niveau des actions politiques que je veux rendre visibles"<sup>18</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 16).

Thus, there are different ways of seeing politics in this show, and the intimate is also a space in which politics is located, acts and works on bodies, like that of her grandmother, her mother, Fabiola and, therefore, Pantoja's body, who somehow represents all these women.

Il y a de l'intimité non pas seulement parce que je parle d'une histoire familiale non-dite, mais parce que je m'intéresse dans ce spectacle à l'intimité du corps, et à rendre visible ce qui normalement n'est pas montré au public. Il s'agit de dévoiler ce qu'on appelle souvent « l'envers du décor » tel que le mouillage de cheveux, le tressage, l'habillement, la préparation de l'artiste pour monter au tissu, la mise en place de l'agrès et de la mécanique nécessaire à la suspension<sup>19</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 16).

### a) Dramaturgical construction

Pantoja undertakes an extensive task of collecting the data and sources used, and we will now describe each stage.

There is an unpublished text, *Yo desapareceré por ti*, by the Chilean writer Jorge Scherman. This text was actually the starting point of Pantoja's research. *Yo desapareceré por ti* tells the story of Beatriz, a fictional character inspired by several living or existing female figures (Fabiola and Commander Tamara).

17. But is this the only political story shown? It could have taken the story of one of the wives of the five Pinochet bodyguards who died during the attack or even create a show from the perspective of Pinochet's grandson. The grandson who was in the car with his grandfather at the time of the attack. But I based myself on the story of the only woman who participated in the attack and that is why I was also interested in a political story of activists opposed to the dictatorship. Furthermore, this show represents another dimension of politics.

18. These people have carried out political actions at this level that I want to highlight.

19. There is intimacy not only because I am talking about an untold family story, but because in this show I am interested in the intimacy of the body, and in highlighting what usually is not shown to the audience. It is about revealing what is usually called "behind the scenes", such as wetting the hair, braiding, combing, the preparation of the artist to go up to the fabric, setting up the equipment, and the mechanics necessary for hanging from the hair.

This text awakens in Pantoja the desire to know more about the history of the guerrilla Fabiola, the only woman who participated in the attempted assassination of the dictator Augusto Pinochet in 1986 and partly inspired Jorge. It is interesting to give a voice to a woman at the centre of the story.

J'ai apprécié le fait qu'il s'agisse pour une fois d'une femme combattante placée au centre de l'histoire. J'avais été nourrie de modèles masculins, d'hommes révolutionnaires tels que Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, Miguel Enriquez ou encore Victor Jara. Ici on parlait d'une femme. Par ailleurs, j'ai aussi été marquée par le fait que dans le texte de Jorge Scherman, malgré les violences que la protagoniste subit, c'est avant tout une histoire de « résilience ». Je dirais plutôt qu'il s'agit d'une histoire de force de vie et de courage. J'ai retenu de ce texte la représentation d'une figure féminine puissante et qui n'est pas placée en position de victime<sup>20</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 17).

In her research, Pantoja explains how the coherent narrative view and the stereotypes alluded to were reworked.

C'est ainsi qu'a commencé la quête pour en connaître davantage sur l'histoire de Fabiola. *Je tirerai sur toi* devint un défi et en même temps l'opportunité de connaître plus précisément l'histoire politique et militante du Chili durant la dictature et la transition démocratique. Au début j'ai pensé que c'était le texte de Jorge qui servirait de base au spectacle. J'étais très accrochée émotionnellement au texte pour les raisons précédemment évoquées. Cet attachement ne m'a pas permis de voir dès les premières lectures le manque de cohérence esthétique et narratif. J'entends par là que le langage ne correspondait pas aux personnages, que la mise en mots et en récit n'était pas aboutie, et que le texte comprenait de nombreux stéréotypes. En résumé, le récit tel qu'il a été écrit ne constituait pas une bonne base pour créer un spectacle. Plusieurs échanges m'ont permis de commencer à cerner plus nettement les difficultés qu'il y aurait à rester fidèle à ce texte (Pantoja, 2019: 18).

For Pantoja, Jorge Scherman's text was not enough, either in aesthetic or historical terms. It did not allow the character of the female combatant to be portrayed in a show since it reflected a grotesque and stereotyped view of the history of Chile, a view that Pantoja sought to challenge. On the other hand, Pantoja wanted to work on a figure who might have existed to possibly develop her as a theatrical character based on historical sources and non-fictional data.

From there, she went in search of testimonies and other documents more directly related to the assassination attempt. In Scherman's text, this historical event occupied an anecdotal place and Pantoja wanted to know more. So the more in depth she investigated, the more she distanced herself

20. I was pleased that for the first time it was about a woman-combatant placed at the centre of the story. I had been inspired by male models, revolutionaries such as Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, Miguel Enriquez and Víctor Jara. Here we were talking about a woman. In addition, it also caught my attention that Jorge Scherman's text, despite the violence suffered by the protagonist, is above all a story of "resilience" I prefer to say that it is a story of life force and courage. I have retained from this text the representation of a powerful female figure that is not put in the position of victim.

from Scherman's text. Each testimony, each report, each book contributed new information and new perspectives.

"It was essential to listen to the people who participated in the armed struggle" (Pantoja, 2019: 18). Pantoja conducts interviews that allowed her to stick to the official story and listen to unknown voices until then. Pantoja studied the archive, but also oral narrative as a method of constructing the past. On the other hand, these testimonies were not collected to be used directly as material to be transposed theatrically. Unlike verbatim theatre or documentary theatre, Pantoja does not use the words of the people interviewed directly in the show. Rather she uses these interviews to absorb details, colours, smells and gestures. She also asks them what they think of politics today and how they viewed their past commitments.

Je voulais savoir si 30 ans ou 40 ans après ces personnes restaient encore fidèles à leurs engagements de jeunesse? En fait, je trouvais ces personnes très conséquentes. Pour répondre à la question que je posais préalablement les données obtenues ont servi à alimenter le jeu de l'acteur plus que la trame narrative. Les données ne se sont pas imposées en tant que faits historiques qu'il fallait suivre à la lettre mais comme un regard sur le passé et le présent, une sensibilité politique avec laquelle j'étais en accord et que je voulais mettre en scène<sup>21</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 19).

One part of her inspiration for the development of stage work was the book *Self-Defense: A Philosophy of Violence*, written by the philosopher Elsa Dorlin. The book offers a "genealogy" of Krav Maga martial techniques in the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw, of jiu-jitsu of English suffragettes or even of slave dances in the Antilles. The book also returns to the issue of gun ownership in the United States. Elsa Dorlin forges the concept of self defence for a very specific purpose and within a defined framework:

Ce dispositif défensif à double tranchant trace une ligne de démarcation entre, d'un côté, des sujets dignes de se défendre et d'être défendus, et de l'autre, des corps acculés à des tactiques défensives. À ces corps vulnérables et violentables n'échouent plus que des subjectivités à mains nues. Tenues en respect dans et par la violence, celles-ci ne vivent ou ne survivent qu'en tant qu'elles parviennent à se doter de tactiques défensives. Ces pratiques subalternes forment ce que j'appelle l'autodéfense proprement dite, par contraste avec le concept juridique de légitime défense. À la différence de cette dernière, l'autodéfense n'a, paradoxalement, pas de sujet – je veux dire que le sujet qu'elle défend ne préexiste pas à ce mouvement qui résiste à la violence dont il est devenu la cible. Entendue en ce sens, l'autodéfense relève de ce que je propose d'appeler des « éthiques martiales de soi »<sup>22</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 22).

21. I wanted to know if thirty or forty years later these people were still faithful to their youthful commitments. In fact, I found these people very consistent. To answer the question that I know in advance, the data obtained served to nourish the acting more than the narrative framework. The data was not imposed as historical events that had to be followed to the letter, but as a look at the past and the present, a political sensibility with which I was in agreement and that I wanted to put on stage.

22. This double-edged defensive device draws a line of demarcation between, on the one hand, subjects worthy of defending themselves and being defended, and, on the other, bodies forced into defensive tactics. Only subjec-

For Pantoja, the important thing about this book is the possibility of building oneself as a political subject from an act of self-defence. Regarding her grandmother's action against her husband, the term *self-defence* seems to describe the situation well. And this in particular through the use of an "innocuous" everyday object (a plate of pasta that she throws at her husband), which, through the gesture performed by her grandmother, becomes a weapon. In the case of the guerrilla Fabiola, it is obviously not self-defence in the sense in which Dorlin uses it. However, it seems that Fabiola's action also establishes her as a political subject in her own right and makes other (feminist) acts struggle to resonate. Fabiola as a figure uses something that goes beyond activism and that allows her to also be represented from a feminist perspective without forgetting that she was fighting for a classless society. Thus, as an artist, Pantoja makes the story of this woman her own by favouring an illumination, that of a woman who amplifies her struggle with the lives of other women she puts on stage.

In this way, *Self-Defense: A Philosophy of Violence* widened her focus by also enabling her to talk about everyday life and something that is familiar, something close to home. Elsa Dorlin talks about everyday life both within and against sexist attacks. Her goal was also to broaden her research to address these struggles to the challenges of female self-defence in family circles, in everyday life. This approach led her to question the members of her own family: why did my grandmother throw a plate of hot pasta at my grandfather's head one day? Pantoja asks herself while developing her creation. Pantoja reads this moment as an act of individual self-defence based on an everyday object and as a rupture within the family, like the attack on Pinochet, which was also an event; that is, a moment of rupture in the history of Chile. The history of the country and family history, therefore, begin to connect from the moments of rupture and this is perhaps the reason why she was faithful to the data collected. These links strengthen the motivations for creating this show.

*Self-Defense: A Philosophy of Violence* provides a better understanding of why Fabiola's story became a challenge. She also developed a reflection on the ways in which violence is present in everyday life, in family ties and in the intimate sphere.

Ces violences nous ne pouvons pas les dissocier d'un contexte plus large qui est social et politique. Elles sont donc structurelles et nous avons besoin de les identifier pour les combattre dans tous les aspects de notre vie. Relier les luttes du quotidien et de l'intime aux luttes politiques ne peut que nous rendre plus fortes et plus cohérentes dans ce combat contre les abus exercés contre les femmes depuis bien trop longtemps.<sup>23</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 23)

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tivities with bare hands correspond to these vulnerable and violent bodies. Respected in and by violence, they only live or survive to the extent that they manage to acquire defensive tactics. These subaltern practices form what I call self-defence proper, in contrast to the legal concept of legitimate defence. In contrast to the latter, self-defence, paradoxically, does not have a subject; that is, the subject that defends himself or herself does not pre-exist this movement that resists the violence of which he or she has become the target. Understood in this sense, legitimate defence fits into what I propose to call "martial ethics of the self".

23. We cannot dissociate this violence from a broader context that is social and political. Therefore, they are structural and we need to identify them in order to combat them in all aspects of our lives. Linking daily and intimate

In August 2018, Pantoja travelled to Chile to carry out research within her family. She talked with her mother, her father and her aunt (her father's sister) about their family memories. She rediscovered the family bond, and sometimes contradictory and very different points of view.

In other words, observing the way in which each person organises their memories and emphasises different aspects is interesting as a process of viewing and restructuring a self-referential dramaturgy. Everyone (re)builds their story in a personal way:

Au Chili je m'entretiens avec d'autres femmes et d'autres militants et continue de rechercher Fabiola. Cette enquête s'avère difficile. Le sujet de la lutte armée reste encore un tabou au Chili. Des anciens combattants contre la dictature vivent encore en exil et peu d'entre eux se permettent aujourd'hui de sortir de leur anonymat et de raconter publiquement leur histoire. Cela fait partie d'un passé encore non avouable. Ma famille ne comprend pas le lien et me questionne sur ma recherche autour de Fabiola. Au final et en dehors des contextes militants, les discussions sur la lutte armée s'avèrent infructueuses et souvent confuses. Vis-à-vis de ma grande-mère, je comprends que parler de son action face au grand-père contredit l'idée d'une «bonne grande-mère» tendre, pacifique, passive, cette image qu'elle souhaite maintenir<sup>24</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 24).

Before leaving for Chile, Pantoja met the Chilean Marcos Riesco in Toulouse. Marcos Riesco, a political refugee and exile in France, produced *Casting*, an interactive installation about the attack. She contacted him as it seemed necessary to meet other artists working on the same subject. There was also another motivation: maybe she could get in touch with Fabiola? Marcos told her that he wanted to make a documentary about Operación Siglo XX and that he had tried several times to meet Fabiola, but unsuccessfully. He faced resistance from activists to tell her story on camera. Ultimately, he did not make the documentary in question. The intense conversation she had with Marcos Riesco made her think of "revenge", similar to the theme of Quentin Tarantino films (*Kill Bill*, *Inglorious Bastards*). She mentioned the work of Tarantino to illustrate the different ways in which we approach the question of the representation of history artistically. It is an idea that has remained present in her work and research, in particular, to always remain attentive to and critical of the images she constructs. The meeting with Marcos Riesco also had other effects.

Pantoja's main reason for going to see him was to try to get in touch with Fabiola and meet other artists who worked on the attack on Pinochet;

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struggles to political struggles can only make us stronger and more coherent in this fight against the abuses that have been practised against women for too long.

24. In Chile I spoke with other women and other activists and I continued to look for Fabiola. This research was proving difficult. The issue of armed struggle continues to be taboo in Chile. Former combatants against the dictatorship still live in exile and few of them today allow themselves to come out of their anonymity and tell their story publicly. This is part of a past that has not yet been confessed. My family does not understand the link and questions me about my research into Fabiola. In the end, and outside of militant contexts, discussions about the armed struggle are fruitless and often confused. In terms of my grandmother, I understand that talking about her action in front of my grandfather contradicts the idea of a tender, peaceful, passive "good grandmother", an image that she wishes to maintain.

she knew that his work also linked him to struggling Mapuche communities. Another reason for the trip to Chile that she was planning was to go to the south to make contact with these indigenous communities. This is because she considered that they could not be interested in the social struggles in Chile without taking into account the demands and current situation of the Mapuches in the country. Then Marco Riesco contacted the machi (traditional doctor) Cristian Collipal. Pantoja went to meet him in Coñaripe, southern Chile. They exchanged projects with him by connecting him with Mapuche spirituality and with the current struggles led by these people.

On a discuté sur le rôle des cheveux dans la tradition et sur la libération de l'esprit du corps. « Quand ils ne peuvent plus toucher ton corps, alors tu es libre », m'a-t-il dit alors que l'on parlait de grèves de la faim menées par plusieurs autres machis de la région, persécutés par les forces armées et incarcérés arbitrairement par la justice chilienne. La situation historique de vulnérabilité que vit le peuple Mapuche a été accentuée par des lois et des pratiques appliquées pendant la dictature et qui ont été pérennisées par les gouvernements démocratiques qui se sont succédés. Bien que le rapport avec cette lutte n'est pas explicite dans *Je tirerais pour toi*, les deux seuls morceaux de musique diffusés appartiennent à l'artiste et militante Mapuche Béatriz-Pichi Malén<sup>25</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 25).

### b) Dramatic structure

As previously explained, the materials that feed the piece are diverse and are translated into multiple forms on stage: we go from a fragmentary circus to a hybridisation with the narrative and even with the document. Pantoja explains that the texts spoken on stage are both unmodified (have remained faithful to the source) and rewritten and transformed.

During the research process, a notebook of phrases, thoughts, drawings, ideas, writings and lines was created. She arranged the enunciation of the texts accumulated in this notebook to listen to fragments of Fabiola's story, her mother's story, her grandmother's story, and her own story.

They are also represented by other important elements such as light, sound, spaces, the movement of the actor on stage, during the moments in the fabric and during the hair hanging. The dramatic structure is made up of the arrangement of all these tools while trying to take into account the desire for a non-hierarchical dialogue between heterogeneous elements.

Pantoja explains that it was by connecting textual issues with corporeal issues that drama began to be structured. The first evidence appeared in connection with hair hanging. It is mainly this disorder linked to the tacit, to the silence, which inspires the writing of *Je tirerais pour toi*.

25. We debated the role of hair in tradition and the liberation of the spirit from the body. "When they can't touch your body, you're free," he told me while we were talking about the hunger strikes carried out by several machis from the area, persecuted by the armed forces and arbitrarily imprisoned by the Chilean justice system. The historical situation of vulnerability experienced by the Mapuche people has been worsened by laws and practices applied during the dictatorship and that have been perpetuated by successive democratic governments. Although the relationship with this struggle is not explicit in *Yo dispararía por ti*, the only two pieces of music released are by the artist and activist Mapuche Beatriz-Pichi Malén.

Ainsi surgit l'idée de montrer dans le spectacle ce que nous ne montrons pas souvent : le processus de tressage. Celui-ci devient un élément structurant de la pièce. Une résonance se met en place entre les histoires qui se dévoilent à travers ma parole et le dévoilement du secret professionnel du tressage. Au-delà du secret révélé, mes cheveux deviennent une métaphore de cette multiplicité de voix et de récits qui s'entremêlent. Le tressage relie ainsi les histoires qui a priori n'ont rien à voir. De la même façon, d'autres aspects souvent cachés de l'œil du public et qui ont à voir avec la préparation de l'artiste de cirque pour son numéro sont dévoilés. Ici on peut nommer par exemple l'utilisation de la résine pour le tissu aérien, le déshabillage / habillage, la mise en place de l'agrès<sup>26</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 26).

The dramatic structure of this show is designed as a plural form that brings together memories that are sacrosanct but are organised and exist. This form becomes a way of reconstructing a lost memory through theatre and strengthening an idea, a position towards events and towards the construction of an identity. Through this theatrical action, Pantoja appropriates her story or some fragments with which she tried to develop a new story. This approach gives her the tools to challenge a story model she does not find convincing: that of the construction of the nation-state of Chile today.

By seeing this show, we observe the way in which Pamela Pantoja delivers a re-appropriation of a contemporary circus framed in the research into part of the political history of Chile and part of the history of the Chilean family. Attention focuses on hidden, unrecognised, stories that create confusion, that reveal contradictions. And this process is linked to intimacy, not only because of the stories that are told and that directly affect them but also because of the experience of the performer, of her own body that publicly knows her stories through the stage.

Par rapport à mon positionnement politique : je crois que l'histoire officielle ne veut pas accepter la légitimité d'une autodéfense à travers la lutte armée soutenue par el Frente Patriótico qui a cherché à faire justice de ses mains après la configuration d'une pseudo-démocratie articulée, contrôlée et négociée par les mêmes vecteurs sociaux qui ont soutenu la dictature<sup>27</sup> (Pantoja, 2019: 27).

In summary, we see that the story of Fabiola and Pantoja from a self-referential perspective is attractive as the bearer of a word full of action, which defends its autonomy and capacity for self-definition, which opens the space for new constructions of identity through contemporary circus.

26. Thus emerges the idea of showing in the production what we often do not show: the process of weaving. This becomes a structuring element of the room. A resonance is established between the stories that are revealed through my words and the disclosure of the professional secret of braiding. Beyond the revealed secret, my hair becomes a metaphor for the multiplicity of voices and stories that intertwine. The braid thus connects stories that a priori have nothing to do with each other. Similarly, other aspects that are often hidden from the public gaze and that have to do with the preparation of the circus artist for her performance are revealed. Here we can mention, for example, the use of resin for the aerial silk, undressing/dressing, the setting up of the equipment.

27. In relation to my political stance: I believe that the official history does not want to accept the legitimacy of self-defence through the armed struggle supported by the Frente Patriótico, which sought to take justice into its own hands after the establishment of an articulated, controlled and negotiated pseudo-democracy by the same social vectors that sustained the dictatorship.

The discovery of stories as forms of resistance in the family context means family history can be linked with Fabiola's specific history of resistance. We stop seeing a fragmented circus, which has evolved or hybridised into a narrative circus by means of aerial silk and hair hanging.

We observe the expanded practice and its cultural hybridisation, of circus dramaturgy that is found in a cultural interrelation framed by a positioning in the languages of performing arts practice, archiving and documenting that includes the political, as a form of story, from the hegemonic violence of the dictatorship and how this is reflected in systematic violence. This is an artistic piece, with a dramaturgy that is composed with the purpose of linking the technique and skill of a so-called "metaphorical liberation" with an investigative search through contemporary theatre art, which reveals an interesting process for the future of Chilean circus.



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