

*In the effort of looking, one forgets that he can also be the object of a look.*

**The obvious and the obtuse.**

***Roland Barthes***

**Playwright and performing arts writing exchange days**

**La Central del Circ**

**3, 4 and 5 December 2019**

A grey space that becomes bright thanks to candles, lamps and l.e.d.s. Plants, sofas and books. Many books, from the *"A Cyborg Manifesto"* by Donna Haraway to *the "Ciutat Princesa"* by Marina Garcés, line the reflection and meeting room. It's all a statement of principle. From post humanism to the city of change. This year, the Playwright and Performing Arts Exchange Days have a different slant. And not only because the warmth of the space contrasts with the coldness of the "Fòrum", this season, the fourth, there are no commentators, the sessions are closed and the participants chosen from a public call. It's only open to normal users for a couple of hours, opening to share the reflections created by the generating group.

Elena Zanzu, Marta Gorchs, Alice Rende, Veronica Capozzoli and Candela Casas were those who presented the most suitable projects for these working days, it will be they who for three days think, analyse use their intuition to define what is circus and how to articulate a performing art which, because it is unknown, is often side-lined.

The first session starts slowly, it's a rainy day outside and at 10 a.m. the first researchers arrive. The door closes and Vivian Friedrich, circus artist and facilitator of these meetings proposes beginning with a 20-minute silence. Looks, smiles, changing body postures, and the silence serve as excuses to explain oneself without words. "Create from the silence", "emanate from the silence", "unblock from the silence", are some of the reflections which form the starting point for these five women. However, aware that on stage it is the artist who has the privilege of speech while the audience is silent and processes, one of them argues that the lack of words is discomfoting. They talk about the episode in the play *"The mysteries and the smaller pieces"* where the actor, after being silent on stage was harangued by the audience: "We paid" they said-But, what does the audience want? What does the audience want from circus?

Silence, they say, can be aggressive, one must be responsible to the audience. The artist can notice the audience's energy, but not the way in which they look at him/her. So, how is circus created? Where does the playwright begin? What is the dramaturge of circus?

These work days beginning from a silence have been weaving a multi-vectoral framework of questions whereas Vivian says "we have no answers, these work days are just a starting point for thought and thinking. Thus, the activities have been a series of more or less free formulas but guided by the facilitator to evoke a dialogue rather than focusing on answers.

### **Create from a table**

In the next interrogative action, the participants split: some to create with "bodies and circus" and others to ask the question: Who listens in a creative act? What do I listen with in an act of creativity? Thoughts linked to the movement and the responsibility of performing.

In turn, while Candela, Elena and Marta questioned the dramaturge of circus, Alice and Veronica were putting it into practice. Starting from a table hung from the ceiling of the staging room the two women played with the fact of having or not having and the uses of the table. The audience, small and active (the rest of the participants and Johnny Torres), felt urged to participate with their own awareness as limits. The question now was: where was all this coming from? As Veronica reflected in her pre-session writing we begin from the construction of collective imaginary ideas as well as personal imaginary ideas. But, what is a table? What do we do with it? And how does the body enter into play with the table? How do I myself come into play as a bio political subject? Veronica during the scene turns herself into a piglet, a plate of animal remains which appears on the table. The artist with her back naked showed her breasts and was pricked by the audience's forks. The audience became the diners. The political body, the activated body.

Alice, sensitively presented what Luiz Guilherme Veiga de Almeida, author of *"Ritual, risco e arte circense: o homem em situações-limite"* ("*Ritual, risk and circus arts*") called the "ordinary bubble of the senses": everyday acts which are distanced from circus prowess but which live within it: drinking a cup of tea or dying on stage, playing with hot water, the glasses and plates, all elements inalienable from a table and an everyday dining room scene.

### **Where is Circus?**

The session, although closed to other audiences from La Central, came about as the result of new questions:

Where is circus technique? Is looking at a trapeze circus? And the big question: What is circus?

The participants eager for answers and to share these new ideas left the session to interact and question other Central users: what does circus mean to you? The answers ranged from "passion", "sweat" and "technique", to "risk", "movement", "abnormality" and "popcorn". Is circus the popcorn we eat watching the movie?

Circus for Johnny Torres is disorder, it's what escapes from the 19th century postulates, it's the centrifuge.

But why, in an artistic environment which looks towards the mix of disciplines and transversality, does circus have to be defined?

Why can't circus be my son or my grandmother's soup, as participants from the open session stated? Do you want to define circus in order to run away from institutional marginalization?

Thus, for Vivian "Circus has for some time been applying other artistic tools such as dance and theatre to its language in order to justify itself as art and right now we are at a point in which we question the base, the DNA of circus. For me, the DNA of circus is the rule free action and thought which sometimes finds itself in conflict with certain institutional regulations."

In the same vein, for Marta, trained in dance and theatre, "transversality is a "drip" hard pushed by institutions, very interesting in the rehearsal room, but still difficult to fit into our country's programming. In the end, we have to fit into a box: circus, dance, theatre, puppet theatre, musical... and you can make a multi-discipline show as long as you're well anchored in one of these compartments. Therefore, some of the projects must enter some of the sectors forcefully, that is to say it is clearly dance, clearly theatre, clearly circus. Although we can argue whether looking at a trapeze is a circus act, for there to be circus, there must be circus technique (I feel talking about technique causes discomfort), more or less show".

In this way, according to the artists, circus needs risk and technique, but how do you portray the story? How do you depict landscapes starting with the body? For Vivian the creation processes are related to the play writing, however, in circus it is difficult to define the role of the playwright who in theatre has the job of writing the play which will be acted and directed. It is not necessary for the theatre playwright to be part of the creative performance process, because the written word indicates the action, but in circus?

**From the playwrighting to the external vision**

For the participants the playwright can be the first audience, the one who accompanies the creation. And again, do you need a playwright? How do you write down a creative process? One of the actions is to describe a creative "*time-lapse*", but where is the starting point?

For Veronica a creation can have its roots in doubt and this can be foundational but also fundamental. According to the artist, doubt doesn't have to be resolved, because it is in that doubt that the genesis of an investigation is encountered. The playwright can, in the face of doubt, generate coherence, bringing the idea to the surface while it is still a draft. Is the drama invisible? According to the artists, consistency can be generated from invisibility but where does that leave the story?

For Marta the playwright is the one that creates space for possible answers, ensures the coherence of the discourse, ensures the unity/permanence of the thread, stands up for the ideas of the creation and makes the "*leitmotiv*" stand out in the performance. For Vivian "a playwright can place herself as the accompaniment of a process or the co-writer of a piece. A playwright tries to understand the internal processes of a collective, its creative universe or she can adopt the role of mediator between the piece and the creator so that she can then construct questions and proposals."

The author is ultimately responsible for the creation, she is the one who uses dramatic parameters in her writing, in a conscious or unconscious way. Authorship in circus can be defined as the uniqueness of expression in circus language, the writing of movement indications or the composition between space, apparatus, movement, text and/or sound. A playwright can accompany the consciousness of these dramatic parameters.

And where does that leave what we refer to in circus as the external eye? Is the external eye a playwright? A director? A facilitator? An author? The participants say that one of the characteristics of the external eye is that it is "the home-made form of direction". It's someone who comes intermittently and is given the power to comment on what she sees. "It is the recognition that there is an external vision but also the resistance to obeying orders coming from outside. An external eye can be disobeyed more easily than a direction." The theatre actor, in Marta's opinion, "accepts, to a high degree, the hierarchy". The circus artist hinders it. "

However, the external eye can complete different functions and perhaps one of its characteristics is that it maintains distance from the creation in order to see it from a point of view that is not particularly influenced by the process, from her personal point of view based on experience. "For example, if I invite a person who usually works with a lot of dance technique, I can guess that she assesses what she sees from this point of view or if I invite a philosopher, she will share her vision from a more academic point of view. The key is that the external eye looks in from the outside.

## **Create without performing, an ethical conflict**

From investigation to creation there is an itinerary which can be reflected upon from written lines, sensory writings, from the body.... Christoph Huysman writes his works in the form of poems and Maroussia Diaz Vebèke records her texts as audio tracks known as "*Circographe*".

However, if I write what I believe, I shape it, I am accompanied by a story, an external eye... must the objective be the performance? What is the "*télos*" of circus creation?

In the final session, The Central opened up to other groups beyond circus. There were participants from theatre, dance, art, video art.... they were asked to define creative processes, from where did they create and write. One of the conclusions was that circus is in a process of interrogation and definition in order to place it in the programming process. However, if circus questions itself and seeks to define itself in order to rise to the level (in number of scheduled shows and in funding) of other arts, why are we thinking of non-show, non-exhibition, non-performance?

Is there an ethical dilemma between creating and not performing what was created? Is there a show without an audience? Is there literature without readers?

For Marta "When there is no stage objective we enter the framework of the investigation. The investigation prioritises the way to a result. It does not seek to close paths but to open spaces. In contrast, when you enter into research processes for creation, the created material may not end up in the way you had thought, but it will end up appearing in other performing projects sooner or later." Therefore, for her, the creation processes are essential, as they feed into future creations in a deep way and in a time-space which is not at all the time for creation-production marked by institutions. In the same vein "if we only create with the intention of performing in existing circuits, we can fall into the trap of repeating established codes, with formats which for sure work, and as artists we become repeaters, rather than creators with our own voice."

Can the creation be performed for oneself? Candela asks. Are there other exhibition frameworks that don't go through the audience-spectator? How can we make a political impact if we do not show the creation? Is the democratising of art not making it affordable?

The objective of this report is to expose the process of investigation of these workdays. And are you, reader, the audience? Is it ethical to not share this document with the participants and all people interested in playwriting? If I show what I have written will the reader/audience judge me? I have been looking at you for so long, I forgot that you can look at me.

Roland Barthes says that the author has died, therefore the text is no longer mine, it is yours.

**Neus Molina**

**Translated by Edwin Sargent.**

Translators note: The words playwright and dramaturg were used interchangeably in the original text. Dramaturg may be more appropriate in circus due to the balance of action vs spoken word. I have used the translation “playwright” in order to create consistency in the text.