

## *Art and Creation in the Politics of Fear*

### Lía Arenas, Chile

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On October 18th 2019, time stopped for the people of Chile. Suddenly -but wanted way for many years- a social movement arose saying NO to the Chilean neoliberal system of Pinochet's dictatorship, the CIA, the Chicago Boys and Jaime Guzmán. The 30 years of "democracy" since 1989, didn't appear as such... especially today.

We are currently ruled by a Constitution created within a period of dictatorship, a process that to date has not made any review to state organizations, any human rights reparatory trials, given recognition to the victims and their families or repaired the annulment of culture, creation and knowledge. With the necessity of communication and time suspended, a question arises: how can we explain to others the way we live and understand the most neoliberal country in western culture?

Access to education, housing, health, the right to social gathering, rest, or even water are not guaranteed in Chile. Instead they are considered as property goods and whoever has the money to acquire them, has the right to choose. That's the education we'd been given, consumer citizens with no basic rights. They've taught us that the organization to demand our rights was because we didn't want to work, that was driven by our laziness, and we wanted chaos among the peace and quiet. The neoliberal reality doesn't allow any demands or requests, so we work with "what we got" and if the Government took on the costs of education or health, an economic deficit might kick in -or at least that is what they say each time a rise in the social budget is requested. Even further, the idea of keeping the population ignorant by reducing primary and secondary education to the efficient and pragmatic development of the human being is crystal clear, leaving aside the sensitive, reflective, creative and critical development before the system in which we inhabit.

This has produced a more competitive and less empathetic society, where there is no greater good, only *me* as an individual. The meaning of Success depends on the acquisition of goods and being above others. But this idea of "success" is nothing more than makeup for a population that doesn't have the money to support even two of the mentioned assets. The minimum wage in Chile is 400 US, from which a percentage is discounted for health and retirement plans, yet you have to pay an additional amount for any medical care. The average pension of a retiree is 150 US, which is clearly not enough to cover housing and food. In our country the highest suicide rate is precisely among the elderly.

In the allegedly most developed country in Latin America, people die waiting for attention in hospitals, and as they wait, they're running highly into debt, without education or housing, without the right to rest, perhaps without minimum wage and of course without access to art and culture. Now, if we talk about access to education, the tariff of the cheapest career at a "public university" is around US 5,000 per year, this without even considering tuition or any study materials. In between the Andes and the Pacific Ocean, one would think that Water isn't an issue in Chile, however, 96% of the water is consumed by large companies, which leave small towns without supply. Chilean water is private and large companies can buy the rights to consume and capitalize it, and the Government would have to buy water from companies to supply the villagers again in order to make this situation "sustainable". Today we say there is no drought, it's looting.

I live in a neoliberal country where everything is privatized, where laws of an economic market go over laws of social development and well-being, in a country where there's slavery still hidden as temporary work, where classism is rooted in our society as well as, discrimination, Christianity and patriarchy structures. Chile is a country where people mourn the destruction of business premises more than the death, torture, rape, kidnap and disappearance of protesters, or the mutilation of more than 350 eyes. BUT, within this time suspension all of that is changing.

Today, I have the possibility to be here and tell my experience as a woman, Chilean and art worker; what we've lived and how -from the place of art and culture we have become a citizen more in this awoken Chile.

Once again students have started everything. They jumped the subway turnstiles and carried out massive temporary occupations of subway stations for a whole week. On the last day, they achieved such a call out that everyone was encouraged to go out into the streets, expanding these protests in every major city in the country. Antofagasta, Valparaíso, Concepción, Temuco and Valdivia among many of them. After just one day of massive demonstrations, the President declared war on us by proclaiming a State of Emergency, leaving control of the country and the streets to the Army. To this day the government has applied an specific Law to condemn and process protesters throughout the country, the State Security Law aims to condemn those who have done any damage to public and private property in a context in which the stability of the country may be affected.

The message they wanted to convey with the presence of the army in the streets was the recurrent fear heritage of our dictatorship, and somehow with that, end the mobilization. But the new generations continue fighting. As the movement progresses the government fails to understand what the issue is and where it came from, why do we protest if we supposedly live in

the best country in Latin America?; The problem arises mainly because for them those problems do not exist, they are heirs of an economic dictatorship that assured stability for their companies and built laws to protect their privileges, being able to exercise control over culture and nature, and holding positions of power within the Government, the legislature and judiciary.

They blamed Venezuela and Cuba for a few weeks, then Russia and aliens, they said we are being financed from foreign countries, that we have cutting-edge technology to attack the State and its infrastructure, we are a powerful and implacable enemy with a clear and violent objective that doesn't respect nothing and nobody. It's precisely within that respects that where we're enemies, we respect dignity, organization, freedom, diversity, empathy, culture and nature. They respect the Capital, consumer goods, a colonizing history, exploitation and slavery, discrimination and violence in the name of order.

To be an enemy has enabled me to see my work displayed in pure manifestation and living expression of struggle against a system. We've transformed the space and rewritten history, the city walls speak to us and the architectural space starts to belong to the population as a platform for registry, that pure and effective manifestation. Poetry, music and dance takes their space in the streets and through the organized cries of struggle, society expresses itself with whatever they know about art. This movement carries out an innate cultural management that organizes and mobilizes it, and in two months the cultural billboard of the cities have been filled with community lunches, film and documentary cycles, activities for children and adolescents, masterclasses and seminars, festivals of the most diverse artistic expressions, performance, constitutional community empowerment/work days. None of these organized by any artistic or cultural institution, instead was the people in charge of their own culture/programming.

As artists we have been questioned by society, which has decided on the relevant themes for art creation, whereas musical manifestations have been the most immediate and have addressed in lyrics and music what happens day in and day out in the streets. Also embracing new methodologies of cultural management by organizing events and festivals among neighbors, thus forcing cultural centers and venues to open spaces for organizations and activities programmed under the themes of protests. For the first time I see art workers transferring their knowledge and contributing as part of the social organization of a country.

As the enemy, we find the body as the main support of manifestation and territory, today we are a body that expresses, acts and decides. We are the body they seek to eliminate: they have weapons, we have body. Deep act of resistance to a system that denies, persecutes, criminalizes and represses it. Today we are body, and the body is pure movement in space and time. We are recovering the multiplicity of the human being.

It is from the so-called social outbreak, that all fields of knowledge have been organized to work deeply on what defines them and how they carry out the work, what their working conditions are and how they operate in society. In this suspended time of Chile, artists have felt the deep need to organize and dialogue. We all wonder why we did not do it before, and it is because we lived for many years in a system that did not allow us to understand ourselves as partners and collaborators of a shared knowledge. Networks of dance, theater, music, art teachers, cultural management and production workers have emerged. Workdays have been organized to ask ourselves what art we are building, how art and cultural work have been functioning in society, how art has been developed in education and how we can be a social instrument.

While all this happens, in a peaceful demonstration the police decide to shoot their service weapons to the people who participated and in that exchange a ballerina receives a 32-caliber bullet in her knee. This fact reminds me that the only law regulating our working condition as performers was passed in recently in 2019 bringing together theater, dance, circus, opera, puppetry and oral narration. This law only talks about promotion and accessibility, but at no time about specific working conditions and the establishment of a particular health and pension system for performing arts professionals. Today there is no legal instance to ensure that this ballerina can continue to exercise her profession after being shot by state agents.

I feel again that art in Chile is an act of resistance. Resistance to the scarce spaces of development, distribution and exhibition, to the null artistic education that promotes elitism and a deep ignorance in the face of the diverse manifestations of art, the little public and private budget for its development, the scarce and unsuitable infrastructure, and the almost non existing minimum working conditions.

It is on this resistance during an eternal October, on the international day towards the elimination of violence against women, a performance created by a feminist group of artists stood out massively. Performance puts us rhythmically, musically and politically in an active state of resistance for the first time. One of the phrases of the song alludes to the historical guilt that others have made us feel for the violence that men exert upon us, the fact that we are to blame for how we are, where we were and how we're dressed, at the end of the day they can act above us. That same violence is with which they condemn us every time we go out to protest inside this social movement, they make us feel guilty if we stop traffic and people cannot return to their homes, they make us guilty for interrupting classes in universities, when we fight for a free education, prolonging/extending the academic years and threatening to remove scholarships to low-income students. They make us guilty when we call-out against Companies and raises in water, gas and electric tariffs, and they most certainly make us responsible for the death of our colleagues telling us that we shouldn't have been there.

Both in a feminist struggle and the general social struggle, guilt is something we need to eradicate, because it is not about guilt, it is about assuming and demanding political responsibilities regarding social issues. Rape is a political act of power of one over the other. Exploitation, punishment and murder as well.

Today, I deeply believe the movement has to be feminist, as an invitation to travel into a path that proposes us to deeply reconstruct ourselves culturally, and to doubt the social, political and economic foundations in which we have lived.

Immersed in everything that has happened, I remembered why I applied to the residence. What struck me the most about the experience was the fact that we didn't have to create an artistic work around what we were going to do. As artists we're used to being those who create works of art, but it's rare for us to stop and really feel like inhabitants of a context before artists. I deeply feel this is what this residence encourages us to this idea, been that how I understand the School of Paris. A group of Artists who worked in an specific context, mobilized for artistic, political and social reasons, and for that point on their art developed widely gathering a diversity of cultures, languages and ways of making art in a city that received them and generated a creative effervescence.

I deeply believe that the issue of art today has to be once again inhabiting a context and transforming it into a social instrument that dialogues with it where the artistic work is not absolutely an end in itself or the only objective. Rather one more manifestation within a complex definition of the work of art.

Understanding ourselves as workers of a specific knowledge with which we build and propose, is what led me from being a dancer to a cultural organizer, transforming the knowledge of the movement into the understanding of art and culture as moving bodies in different spaces.

Thus, the dialogue is transformed into an act of resistance because of its main strength: the fact that it happens constantly. Through dialogue we can shed colonialism and act together from what each one does in their specific territories. Dialogue allows different manifestations to inhabit the same context, mobile in space and time. It allows us to relate according to the different definitions of what we do, enabling reflective and sensible knowledge to be built permanently.

Everything I've shared fills me with deep emotion, and in the act of speaking out, oneself realizes -and materializes- what has been happening, although there is always more than what I can tell you today. Also, while this was being written, information arrived from social unrest in other Latin American countries. We are in a very specific social moment, where we have to take

a great breath to continue resisting and making the territory something of our own and for everyone.

For the government and its institutions, Chile has not changed and has no reason to do so. Every week a new bill is created that aims to continue the criminalization of protests and even regulating the right to assembly. The repression increases every day, and meanwhile we see it in action in the main squares of the country, in the poorest small towns it is silent and without warning. All international agreements on demonstrations, riots and war protocols have been ignored. Today they attack us with chemical weapons that have many protesters with severe burns on their bodies.

For us, the Chilean people, the change has been profound. We have been regaining confidence, dialogue, union, all of which has given us strength to go through the instability of what it means to carry out a social movement. But that instability makes much more sense than a life full of bank loans, debt, material goods and extreme competitiveness. Today parks in neighborhoods have been filled again with children playing, community activities and popular dining rooms.

Now we know each other.

The change we want requires time and a lot of effort, and we will be there. As I heard in a talk by Indo-American women, one of the participants mentioned that we are rehearsing new ways of inhabiting the world, which comforts me, in the face of such violence and incapacity from the government and its weapons. It gives me great comfort because it allows me to be an art worker in the social movement. As artists, we rehearse to reach the end of our processes, and if we can expand that rehearsal methodology to society, we are also sharing and transmitting our technical knowledge to a community knowledge.

Por todos nuestros muertos  
Arriba los que luchan  
No estamos todos, faltan los presos  
Piñera culiao  
Que muera Piñera y no mi compañera  
Hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre  
Chile despertó

Gracias.

Thank You

### ***Since January, and Acknowledgements***

I arrived to Paris to attend the residence in January 2020 with the feeling of leaving behind something important, somehow something was left in Chile making me feel a mismatch in what I was doing.

Since October 2019 a large social movement had been generated throughout the national territory; these had been and still are a very important months in the history of our country. A constant question was within me: ¿Why I was traveling so far at a time when I feel I have to be in the streets? I felt a big contradiction, I want to share what was happening and at the same time forget about other contexts and stay in the movement that was being lived.

Being able to share with the other residents, I came to realize this movement was with me, it was continuous and detached from any borders. The possibility to share not only my work, but what was happening in Chile was gaining strength every day. I had prepared a essay and video for the Symposium that, as a manifest, brought together what I had experienced and observed during months of mobilizations. BUT! I did not want to do it alone, I felt that if I invited my residences mates to be part of the presentation, I could share even more what was happening and transform this specific movement into a collective one.

Finally in this action of “sharing” was the answer of what I was doing in Paris. Sharing ultimately means building together, to weave relationships, making art an instrument for dialogue and creation and culture something we can transform into collective power and cooperativism. I abandoned the feeling of being from a developing country to the feeling of being a part of a wider territory that is in constant resistance, generating new ways of doing and being art and culture.

In the end my presentation not only transformed itself but also transformed those of us who participated and enhancing the sense of trust and collaboration in the way we work. Chile's social movement was not longer just in Chile, it was everyone's, and everyone's context we could transform what was being demanded in the streets of Chile into any global movement.

I can only thank the compañeras who participated with me in the Symposium, and those who opened the doors to the Creative Power platform, platforms that not only brings together from diverse actions and perspectives of artistic and cultural works but through trust and mutual collaboration: Deanna Galati, Karina Muñoz-Pagán, Zsuzsi Lindsey Page, Crystal Willie, Alexandra Hatcher and Julie Fossitt. Also to Mila Ovchinnikova and the organizer team from L´AiR Arts for have the amazing and bold idea of brings together artists and cultural workers in the same residency program.