POSITIONS, SITUATIONS, SHORT-CIRCUITS: LA ESKALERA KARAKOLA, A DELIBERATE SPACE.

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PROLOGUE

POSITIONS, SITUATIONS, SHORT-CIRCUITS.

«Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore, and no aspect of this society being in any way relevant to queers, there remains to the civic-minded, responsible and thrill-seeking queer only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and destroy compulsive heterosexuality.»

(SCUM Manifesto, sort of. Valerie Solanas, 1967. Adaptation from Karakola)

The sexual uprising of Stonewall has reached its turning point in the reordering of habits, spaces and bodies under I.W.C. (Integrated World Capitalism). Once-abject sexualities are every day more presented as an inconsequential option in the free market, a prefab bedroom set (pink or blue?) with which to redecorate the lack of a intense, joyful political life free to all.

In a democracy defined by free choice, when free choice is defined by consumption, our sexualities and our bodies--with all their critical potency for challenging the institutions which administer affections and resources-- have become tidy packages on the shelves of the global boutique.

Existing norms and classifications again and again provide raw materials for capitalism. What is really obscene these days is to be queer and poor, woman and restless, others and uncontrolled...

The image of the queers, the freaks, the wild ones, the cyborgs, the hysterics, the truck-drivers, the frigid ones and the loose ones, the ones in broken high-heels and the barefoot ones assaulting the supermarket of the world, the privatized garden and the wedding ceremony is our most cherished dream. To be divine is to always push the limits, experiment with the loss of composure which exposes the sexual discipline of Home and Crust; it is to disorganize anew all classifications.

Rights are a useful but insufficient charity, perverse in their disciplinary capacity. Now that capital has been embodied in us with hushed and persistent violence: (re)productive body, consumer body, clean and disinfected body which has repressed the ghost of stigma and death, versatile and accelerated body, it is time to ask: Is a different body possible?

It must be, because here we are.

We occupy. We occupy and we talk about territories. We situate ourselves as a node crossed by thousands of circuits. Circuits and accelerated currents. We are in the very mouth of the monster. We move, we decide, we talk politics. We situate ourselves and unmask our own bodies, our own lives, our own inhabiting of this city, this neighborhood, this social center.

While the vertiginous current of global capitalism impregnates every nook and cranny of our existance, submitting it to the virtual display window of the market-world, to the state of permanent global war, to the complete precarization of our lives, to the abysmal technocracy of the bureaucratic aparatus, to the privatization of services and of social and public goods, to isolation and solitude, to politics which can only be conceived in terms either of parties or else
of super-hip politicking like that of the NGOs, to boredom and to being ‘entertained’, to the appropriation of our knowledge and to copyrights, to compulsory heterosexuality, euphoric and erroneous…

But we shortcircuit, we move the currents into our own bodies; we have situated ourselves. In the same way we situate ourselves in urban space. We situate ourselves and we begin to speak about precarious work, about the wild ones and the dangerous ones, the housewives and the agitators, the frigid ones, the lesbians, the transexuals, the married ones and the single ones, those that come and go, the whores and the queers and the feminists assaulting the global display-market in open revolt, subverting normalized ‘life-styles.’ We situate ourselves because the personal is political. Because we want to launch ourselves into the open insurrection of our lives. Social centers and public spaces are indispensible for the expression and the constant experimentation of a new way of ‘doing city’ which is not considered in the diplomatic agenda of the scenic capital. Because we are part of these territories we daily struggle to construct them and reorganize them. Plastic designs of the world we want. Brutal expansion of constrained desires. Legitimate reappropriation of our own living space, our city, our world…

For this we occupy, for this the social centers…

The point of departure, of encounter, of crossing paths of which we speak is in the neighborhood of Lavapies, Calle Embajadores number 40. A feminist social center occupied there in 1996. In these almost seven years la Karakola has been a daily experiment in constant creation and action, and with its comings and goings, with its limitations and its changes, it has housed an infinitude of projects: we speak about work and precariousness, about war and globalization, about ‘making city’ and urbanism, about sexist aggressions and the abuse of women, about autonomy and self-management among women, about cooperation and the circulation of knowledge, about lesbian visibility and identities, about migration and borders… Meetings, assemblies, workshops, encounters, movies, videos, talks, actions…, but above all a gamble made, a bet placed decisively upon the collective, upon cooperation and subversion of the established lifestyles which bind us, which must be again resituated, again disemboweled in order to be able to begin, perhaps, to reinvent nature.
INTRODUCTION
SPACES FOR DAILY LIFE

La Eskalera Karakola is a women’s occupied house in a multiethnic working class neighborhood in the center of Madrid. For almost seven years, la Karakola has served as a convergeance point and a point of departure for feminist thought and political action both in the neighborhood and in the far-flung feminist networks in which we participate. An open and changing collective of women --mostly young, some not so young, of various sexualities, nationalities, class and educational backgrounds-- maintain the house as a public space for feminism, and from this space we generate projects which extend beyond the house itself.

The Karakola has housed projects investigating the working conditions and urban experience of migrant women, debates about the transformations of the LGBT movement, lesbian marriage and the ‘pink market’, discussions about the feminist grounding for antimilitarist interventions. We have introduced the workshop ‘Tools against Racism’ into local social movements, encouraging ourselves to constantly investigate our own discourses. We have initiated an ongoing campaign against violence against women which insists upon looking at the many and complex ways in which ‘violence’ and ‘security’ are constructed. We participate in a neighborhood network proposing socially inclusive urbanistic alternatives to the ‘rehabilitation’ currently under way. We have participated actively and critically in the lock-ins of ‘sin papeles’ in Madrid. These and hundreds of other investigations, mobilizations, discussions and publications have arisen from the crucible that is the Karakola. We insist that all these apparently diverse concerns are intimately related, and we attempt to trace the lines of their relationship, articulating them within the feminist and the global resistance movements, refusing to separate the academic from the activist, the local struggle from the global context.

We propose to maintain and improve a self-managed feminist space by and for women in the neighborhood of Lavapies. But what is a feminist space?

Urban space hides itself in an opaque neutrality. We move through it so naturally that it is difficult for us to see that this space is not neutral at all, but rather the product of decisions and policies, struggles and demands, an accumulation of history and an incarnation of power. It forms us and transforms us; we are molded by the spaces through which we move, which structure our daily life, which determine whom we encounter and in what terms. Thus the space we live in is something intimate which constitutes our subjectivities at the same time that urban space --the streets, the squares-- are “the public” par excellance, precisely that which is recognized as political.

To make explicit this unity, this non-differentiation, between “the public” and “the personal” and to insist that it is in this complex environment that ‘politics’ is done, is, like so many feminist struggles, a matter of making visible the invisible, of denaturalizing what passes for ‘natural,’ just as is revealing the hidden economy of domestic work or the concealed anguish of sexual violence. To speak about space as a feminist is a question of valuing and politicizing the quotidian; recognizing that that which each one of us experiences --instability, violence, little annoyances, isolation-- is that from which the productive and reproductive order is created, and also that from which resistance arises. Creating our own spaces is a matter of insisting that citizenship is a daily practice collectively built through the active and conscientious habitation of space.

Thus when we speak of a feminist space, we speak of a space in which the quotidian is recognized and approached as political, and where the political shows itself to be a daily matter: brought down from the heights, from the abstraction and the alienation, and occupied as a living space. Politicizing daily life --relationships, work, neighborhoods-- requires a space from which to develop knowledge collectively, from which to reflect and think, from which to organize and experiment with new forms, new interventions.

Living life as political is a potent challenge, taking up the spirit of so many feminist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic struggles which have insisted in NOT accepting violence, exclusion or annoyances as “normal.” If these struggles have achieved important changes in society it is thanks to many years of fighting and wagering on the collective. But lets not fool ourselves; much remains to be done, it is not time to rest on our laurels.
We find ourselves facing innumerable problems, among them employment which is less and less secure, life which is more and more expensive, the privatization of social services and of public spaces. Well we know that women suffer disproportionately the effects of these ills, overburdened with multiple part-time employment and the domestic and caretaking tasks which, after decades of feminist struggle, are still almost exclusively women’s turf. Women, precarious people and immigrants bear the weight of each social cut-back. Housing, thanks to wide-spread speculation, is expensive. Employment is scarce and precarious and requires special training which is also expensive. Health care is minimal and its purveyors are overwhelmed. There are barely any daycare services much less services for the elderly. And for those who have time for such things, leisure activity is limited, for lack of public spaces, to consumerism, which is also expensive not to mention boring and condescending. Institutions and advertising invite us to think of this whole situation as a series of problems for each individual to manage as she can.

This is not so. We must insist again: in this daily life resides the political. But that it may be recognized as such, that we may build bridges and break our isolation, that this may be conceived as the practice of citizenship, there must be spaces for us to meet each other, see each other, recognize each other. They must be public spaces open to all from which to continue the thrilling labor of forming bonds and relations between different people. They must be common spaces because the social fabric is woven upon the loom of what is shared. And the better equipped these spaces are, the less their users will be obliged to battle the walls which fall down around them.

The Eskalera Karakola has maintained itself as such a space since november 1996, but in a situation of physical insecurity which irremediably limits our inventive capacities. Now we are proposing a project to demand the expropriation, re-habilitit and the cession to the collective Eskalera karakola. That, would augment the functions and possibilities of a social space continually in construction. It is a bid to equip more infrastructures and thus to create an ever wider community which uses and maintains them. An auditorium, a library, a computer center: besides being urgent necessities in this neighborhood, these are also things which in diverse ways create community through their use.

And why do we insist that there be a space only for women? One response is that it brings us joy, strength and inspiration to be, create, speak among ourselves: we are comfortable, which is important in an often unfriendly world. But that’s not the whole story. We are also restless, agitated, upset. We fight our bid for collectivity, its difficulties and its limits. We stretch ourselves, mobilizing and pushing ourselves, daring ourselves to share our concerns and express our desires. We are many, different, each one with her story; the alliance is neither natural nor a priori but rather a continuous process of recognition and communication into which we launch ourselves again and again, committed to a strategy of uniting ourselves. To maintain a space where women can cultivate this kind of alliance is necessary because the general lack of meeting spaces is especially acute in the case of women, who either because we are between several precarious jobs or because we are confined to our houses and domestic tasks, because we feel threatened in the street or because we are marginalized within political organizations, have fewer opportunities to create the networks of support and solidarity which we need. It permits us a space from which to think through the multiple singularities of our lives, to create strategies and tools to politicize them, to explore new ways to express ourselves and relate to each other. A space for women is a deliberate space, a space which, because it situates itself outside the ‘normal,’ may function as a laboratory of social, political and artistic relationships.

In order that this space may maintain its function as a laboratory it must continue to be self-managed. This is not a social service center; there already are some of those, if not enough. Nor is it a cultural center in the strict sense. It is rather a necessary space in which each may express her fantasy and realize her project, creating political potency in the confluence of projects which this space houses.

Many projects of investigation and feminist study meet in the Eskalera Karakola. The house’s unique position as a self-managed feminist space makes it an important convergence point between the feminist movement and feminist thought, which in other environments are often divorced from each other by institutional policies which habitually separate the ‘active’
from the ‘reflective.’ The breadth and flexibility which self-management permits has also permitted stunningly diverse projects to arise out of the Karakola, and has permitted the cultivation of far-flung networks of feminist cooperation. The capacity to fit all these projects and concerns under one roof has produced a rich process of recombination and mutual feedback which transforms and strengthens all. This flux of knowledges, this collectivity of abilities determines the projects which arise from the Karakola and the political forms in which they take to the street.

This flow of knowledge and abilities also contributes to the management and maintenance of the house itself. In the six years which we have occupied the Karakola we have made innumerable reforms, big and small, of the roof and the rafters, the plumbing and the electricity. We learn among ourselves, each one bringing what she knows, collectivizing our abilities and knowledge and leaving the neighbors quite surprised: ‘Those girls!’

Our project is a bid for public and self-managed spaces in general and also a bid for this house in particular, for its history and its structure, and for this neighborhood of Lavapies with all the specific problems it faces at this historic moment. Lavapies, faces a process of ‘rehabilitation’ which denies the active participation of the residents and turns its back on the urgent necessities of the neighborhood’s present inhabitants, opting instead for a transformation of the neighborhood which will imply expulsion and homogenization of its population. Innumerable urban investigations show that the homogenization of neighborhoods, that is, the reduction of diversity both of population and of use of space, impedes the formation of social density and leaves even more vulnerable all those who are not young, mobile, male heterosexual natives with steady employment. Women, precarious workers, migrants, handicapped people and elderly people prosper in environments in which we can all live, where all can cover our needs nearby and at decent prices, where there are sufficient social infrastructures like clinics, daycare centers and parks, where there are spaces for meeting and for organizing, where it might be possible to create a social fabric of mutual care and social cooperation and not of police control. We are talking about spaces in which an active, participative citizenship might be constructed.

Too many policies attempt to resolve the social needs of women through endowments for the family. These endowments are important and would that there be more of them, but in no way do they resolve the need which women have for our own spaces of encounter, creation and political and social organization. Not all women are mothers and all women are much more than mothers. The problems of family management are just some of the many which we face. The generalized flight of women from the traditional family and from reproduction makes ever more absurd this kind of attempt to speak of the necessities of women as if they were identical to those of reproduction in the bosom of the family. This practice constitutes an effort to deny and invisibilise the tremendous diversity among women, we who are young and old, who are singles, lesbians, transsexuals, migrants, students, precarious workers and so much more.

From this diversity, which is not merely a display of pretty colors but a convergence of intimate experiences, a complex and uncontrollable multitude, a yet imminent alliance, we throw down this challenge to whomever would invisibilise or pathologise us: here we are. We will make spaces for ourselves.
TERRITORIES.

1. FROM URBAN SPACE:

The processes which configure the space where we move, the space we inhabit, are processes saturated with power relationships. Urban space is configured from multiple transformations and political, social and economic negotiations. Urban space, then, is a non-neutral land. In this territories is where the stamp of the global capitalism order is inscribed, but it is from here also, from this micro-spaces (from the cities, from the suburbs, from the social centres, from the Karakola), where people constantly battle and renegotiate the configuration of territories. Different desires, different necessities or concerns, political practice, victories, defeats, are configuring the land where we move. That is why the streets we walk around, the town squares we fill, the market, the pavement, the trees, the houses we live in, are the result of certain politics, of the replies or acceptance they get, of private interests or neighbourhood and social fight, of new ways of capitalist accumulation (for example, the real state market), and of ways of answering and recovering urban space (for instance, social centres).

The Karakola inserts itself in this complex map and far from placing itself as a space outside this frame of power relationships, it is but a constant invitation to think ourselves and to place ourselves as political subjects capable of decision and action within our background and within our own lives.

This land emerges then as the urban space where we recognize ourselves, where we place ourselves, a physical and symbolic space we re-assign ourselves: this space is located in the centre of Madrid, in the neighbourhood of Lavapiés. This borrough is unique due to its social, urban and economic characteristics. Its population comes in a very high percentage from different countries such as Morocco, Argelia, Tunez, Nigeria, Senegal, Pakistan, India, China, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, etc. This social composing is in part new, and in citizens such as Moroccan, there are two and even three generations. Lavapiés has historically been a working-class area, poor, but with great folklore tradition, which is starting to give way to a huge multi-ethnic cohabitation. It is a privileged enclave because of its social composing and because of its tradition linked to neighbourhood and social movement in general (social centres, squat houses, support nets, solidarity shops, fair commerce, self-employment cooperatives, women’s groups, distributors, media projects such as ‘Madrid wireless’, ‘Tele pies’, or ‘Deyavi’, and a lot more multiple and powerful initiatives). On the other hand, it is one of the poorest areas of Madrid, marked by exclusion, precariousness, marginality, lack of social resources, infrastructure, equipment, green areas, meeting points, pavement for pedestrians, car parks, schools, nurseries, clinics. We can say Lavapiés is an area lacking of all kind of social resources and urban plans which speak about the necessities and the desires of its neighbours. This is not unintentional to us. It deliberately answers to a chain of politics which mind, above social and public interests, more about individual and private interests. Remarkably sexist urban planning which doesn’t take into account the necessities and desires of the citizens in general and especially of women. Lavapiés is a privileged area for speculative processes and the real state market. Its re-building and the commercialisation of a young, bohemian, alternative, different, multicultural imaginary, are weapons capitalism has used to sell the area as one of the most expensive and requested in Madrid. This way, we confront an urban rebuilding process addressed to young and wealthy people, and a process of segregation (nevertheless impossible) of the poorest, oldest, migrant, squat, etc, people. A lot of neighbours with old renting are barred from their own houses by real state companies that sell their apartments at inaccessible prices. Conditions for those who are able to stay, are equally hair-raising: 12 square metres flats with no bathroom inside; whole buildings supported by props and in constant danger of collapsing; flats with no smoke entry, without ventilation and with dampness. All these apartments where the ones that, with the 1997 Lavapiés Plan of Restoration, began to be recognize as infra-habitats. The mentioned plan of restoration promised to eliminate those habitats and relocate their inhabitants. Today, none of the infra-habitats has been eliminated, their inhabitants cannot pay the restorations imposed or
do not have ways to make them, the houses meant to relocate them are still abandoned and none of the equipment promised for the area has been built (not even the so looked-for clinic).

This is the territorie where the Karakola inscribes itself. To us, the report of the lack of public spaces where women can meet, the lack of decent homes, the savage speculation, are central points from where the “urban” side of our project can be understood. That is why one of the bets has to do with de demand of expropriation, for buildings such as the one of the Karakola, abandoned for years. It is about valuing use instead of valuing trade, about questioning the politics of the Administration which care about possessions at any social value. Expropriation is the weapon the Administration has in this hands whenever the duty of preservation of the buildings is not kept by proprietors and which allows to expropriate it so to became part of public goods. The interesting part to us is that this weapon reveals the links between private and speculative interests, which only survive thanks to the speculators’ protectionist politics, at the same time that it gives us the possibility of evidencing the negative of the power to apply the laws properly (or spaces such as the Karakola would have been expropriated long ago).

Also, what we want to remark is the necessity of creating public spaces for women where we can experiment, participate, decide, act, from a non-assistance relation. Conformation of urban territorie totally denies this desire, banishes it beforehand, so we not only have a hostile urban space for women, but are inhibited of any kind of creative initiative of other ways to inhabit the city and this area from our own point of view, autonomous and constituting ourselves as valid political interlocutors. But none of the configurations of this power is definitive. Other ways of relating and the praxis of resistance are plotted within its bosom. Lands are reorganised and question power structures. The Karakola is the attempt of other political constructions that can confront the hetero-patriarchal order and the greedy process of global capitalism.

2. TERRITORIES FROM CITIZENSHIP

Going from a map to a land has to do with the physical and symbolic re-appropriation of the space we inhabit we mentioned before. Because when we stop thinking about our background as a neutral element and it reappears as a space saturated with power relationships where we participate and where we move around, the map blurs and the capacity of drawing the lines again, of deconstructing the limits, of marking lands that can be real settings for political action is born again.

Women have historically been excluded from political activities. The eternal devotion to private or domestic space disappears, nevertheless, if we keep insisting that “personal is politic”. If the territorie makes us understand our background, our way of inhabiting, our life, it can’t be understood without taking into account the power relationships which configure it, it is then, impossible to understand the dichotomy between public and private. There is no foreign social land on one hand, and a private setting that would keep or lives and our bodies in an isolated way on the other. From this we can reset ourselves, relocate ourselves, land ourselves, to sum up, put the body in the centre. A body in which inside and outside cannot be distinguished, in which the prints of public and private use are blurred, and in which the incapacity to understand each other out of the political framework invited us to a vital bet of a constant politization of our lives.

To us, squatting has to do with all these: personal being politic also means that power inscribes within the most daily actions, it becomes a body, forms desire and saturates pleasure. Squatting is a bet to quit understanding politics as something apart from life. To make daily life, the smallest thing, a constant re-invention, a constant problematization, a constant daily creation which breaks with old conceptions of traditional politics.

In this sense, to us, self-management is something essential we wont give up in any case. Self-management means to make this political bet real through constant experimentation, and above all, from an active and collective participation. The Karakola is an invitation to break with assistance relationships which are the only way of participation of the institutions which
foster them. It is an invitation to put into action the creative capacity from the collective, to think real ways of cooperation that plenty of times have inspired us the real capacities to generate real political tools.

From here, from personal is politic, from the insertion of a new conception of politic in daily life, from self-management and the collective, is from where we insist on a new way of doing city. Political processes are not unfamiliar to us; because of that, this is about searching for ways to promote participation in them, capacity of decision, of action, of transformation, in what we could call the conformation of an active, public and participative citizenship. This is not something we take for granted, especially women who have seen the possibility to decide over their lives, their background, their city, their world always restricted. What this is about then is generating collective links that can transmit each other, fluctuate, create new ways of intervention and construction from ourselves that can really conform the city and the world we want and desire. Because we are part of this land we decide and fight daily to construct and organise it. Plastic designs of the world we want. Brutal expansions of constricted designs. Legitimate re-appropriation of our living space, of our bodies, of our boroughs, of our world…

3. TERRITORIES FROM THE KARAKOLA

To speak about territories is then to situate ourselves. And to place ourselves means to reveal the intertwined relationships which configure us and which we configure, it is to deepen in the necessity of understanding each other not as a stable subject (not from the essentialist perspective of being a woman), but as a constant process that can more or less be located in spite of the complexity of the social composing and the new world order. Situating ourselves, understanding each other from a partial position but not an indefinable nor an insufficient one, thousands of questions are raised and we consider them important to face. Some of the interests we raise from the karakola are:

1/ Investigation, analysis and reflection of the processes of transformation of work.

We part from the hypothesis that even though work was centred in the Fordist factory and in the chain production, this model has changed into a growing intensification of the productive process that on one hand has totally exceeded the old factory to reach the most unexpected corners of life in all its dimensions and, on the other hand, has meant the end of work as we knew it and the birth of a series of plural-formed activities denominated precarious. The main thing for us is to think of the impossibility of separating such analysis from the question of the feminisation of labour. This has to do with the transformation of power that goes from the social to the most intimate and vice versa (the characteristic of this power is in its production and in its reproduction, it is not a one-direction power, it’s circular, with no defined origin) which places the body as a privileged enclave from where to read and where political practices are inscribed, such as expropriation by capitalism for its central production of qualities historically defined as “feminine”. Questions such as care in general terms, affective capacity, relationship components, unstableness, invisibility, vulnerability, have become not only the support, but also the requirement and the key point of the new ways of production by global capitalism. To transit through this question of the feminisation of labour means to think that this way of work is not new but an extension of the “typically feminine” work that women have been doing always in the private environment, towards the whole society. In this sense, we do not define precariousness as a way of new work but, it being totally involved in life and not being able to distinguish itself from it, we’d rather talk about the precarisation of existence. Precarisation of existence and feminisation of labour are then the key points from where to part in order to begin to understand the new political and social scenery and to be able to articulate general hypothesis which lead us to think new possibilities of subversion and unstabilisation of the imposed order. As part of this uneasiness that we consider fundamental in order to be able to fight today’s social complex, two projects have come out in the Karakola which work from this point: Sex, Lies and Precariousness explores the new circuits of work, taking as a hub the Inditex multinational, where exploitation of women’s work is a central key of their production
ways. Moreover, subjects as women’s representation or body normalization become real mechanisms in the production of bodies and the feminine body, how does a Zara shop assistant change her uniform when she takes it home? Where are the boundaries between work/not work? What it is dealt with, what it is produced, are bodies, normalized, regularized, controlled ways of life, and here the body of a woman has a lot to say: Sex, Lies and Precariousness reaches its highest point with an action in a Zara shop where more or less 100 women took over it to report work exploitation, precarious contracts, the normalized and standardized size of clothes which promotes anorexic models that encourage terrible diseases such as anorexia, which makes us follow stereotypes of what “a woman should be”, and that keeps offering us models of subjection to the hetero-patriarchal order.

On the other hand, Precarious Women Adrift, which starts with one proposal: to “drift” towards the work circuits, physical and symbolical, in different areas: the work of women innkeepers, the immaterial women workers (translators, teachers, copy edits), women phone operators, women nurses, women audiovisual workers (radio and television) and women sex workers. These are the drifts that have been done this year and that part from the idea of the impossibility of differentiation between subject and object of study. As part of the social intertwinemement, the raised perspective is that of a partial analysis, located, fragmented, but not because of that less real. The question that raises here is the possibility of doing common rewritings, seek relationship nodes, points of inflection and common names which allow us to draw a more or less clear map, and the possibility of articulating a potent rebellious political discourse.

The new world order opened after September 11th and the Genoa events set the basis of the logic of war that reduces the world in two sides: terrorists, non terrorists, violent people, non violent people, they become subjection structures of legitimisation of the imposed order, of the criminalizing of social movements. To get out of these dichotomies, to seek new ways of expression that will really allow us to subvert these simplifying and oppressive prints, to sum up, to place ourselves from another perspective which is totally confusing and which will make the duality of the war empire explode.

Mobilisations against the war against Iraq were really a fascinating expression of the breaking with this discourse. To us the question rooted in how to place ourselves in the mobilisations: to be part of the spontaneity and the flow that ran around the streets those days at the same time as to place ourselves in a non neutral way, that is, to express our uneasiness with the sexist and homophobic chants, to place our bodies as complex marks which made impossible any attempt from the power to subject us to the simplifying, divisional and criminalizing violent/non violent discourse, at the same time as to express the necessity of broaden the discourse against the war. The war, we said, does not start nor end in Iraq. Women’s bodies are used in war conflicts as fields of battle; but it’s also in them where the weight of buried economy of the countries in conflict is printed. Poverty that starts and produces wars. Global war has to do also with the hetero-patriarchal order. Global war, we said, is also the daily war we suffer, fight against and negotiate daily. These processes cannot be separated from the social and immediate reality of our existence, from the militarization of our life with hair-rising discourses about the control and “legality”, from the precariousization of existence, the interruption of human rights, exploitation, marginality, misery.

In the situationis version of the drift the ‘drifters’, roam around the city allowing conversations, interactions, and urban micro-events to guide them. These allows them to establish a psychocartography funded in the coincidences and correspondences of physical and subjective fluxes: exposing themselves the gravitation and repulsion that certain spaces exert, to the conversations that emerge, and in a broader sense, to the way in which urban and social environment intervenes in the emotional changes and exchanges. In the ‘Precarías a la deriva’ particular versión, the aleatory drift of the flaneurs, so typical of a bourgeois male subject, was change for a situated drift that would roam the daily spaces of each of the women maintaining the multisensorial and “opened to happening” character. Thus, the drift becomes an interview in movement, crossed by a collective perception of the ambient. (Precarías a la deriva. Primeros balbuceos del laboratorio de trabajadoras. 2002)
With these questions, we created a mechanism that to us went further than the Karakola, and, in fact, a great diversity of people joined us: the operation pink\(^2\) and its weapon, the para-war\(^3\), a pink umbrella with which to make fun of police repression, take it out of context and fight the criminalizing of social movements. But it was also a weapon to open before the sexist and homophobic chants. We made up watchwords, we talked about the differences, we placed our irreducible bodies in the centre, we talked about a creative, active, public politics. About citizen’s participation and the crisis in the representation of power. We went around the streets dressed in pink to scream las calles the rosa son otra cosa\(^4\), to end with the two-sided system, to speak about sexuality, about our subversive bodies, to display the para-war against military logic, to own the marketed spaces of live: the pink way, we said, walks freely around our cities, does not have frontiers and wants you to own it. It gets out of the imposed normalized circuits and places itself directly above the bodies that today fight war to make other logics real.

3/ About differences and their visibility. the question of visibility of other sexualities

These has been a crucial issue for us. On one hand to think the social order as an order ruled by the empire of the heterosexual enclave, which has been one of the most important hubs that sustain the logic of capitalism. An ahistoric, immobile notion of sexuality that maintains gender roles in a rigid way. But also and furthermore, to think about gender not only as a social and political construction but also as sex as a powerful technology from which ways of social relationship are normalized, cohesion ties are sowed, bodies made, institutionalised and frontiers and borders drawn. To think then about the space of subjection as the line which normalises and establishes sex/gender and desire. The proliferation of other sexualities, makes the denaturalisation and shifting of the sex/gender/desire system. Nevertheless, we assist to a process in which the proliferation of gay and lesbian sexualities is constantly being absorbed and gotten back by capitalism. A product that capitalism re-designs in the most attractive way, including a stunning capacity of re-appropriation and which gives it back normalizing the discourse, the daily practices of life and drawing new and more complex boundaries of exclusion. To us, breaking with the normalizing discourse, with the claiming of equality, with the creation of stereotypes and the growing gay market, to make the sexualities that are “out” visible, are prime questions to make a critic politics against the hetero-patriarchal order. Proposals such as the “bollo no es una marca, es un desorden global”\(^5\), went towards that line. On one hand, to insist in the denaturalisation of sex (including both heterosexual and homosexual identities), on the other hand to fight for the irreducibility from capitalism to our sexuality. This is always excessive, an excess that opens and makes possible the constant subversions and resistances against capitalism.

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\(^2\) Operation Pink took its formal idea from a womens initiative developed it the USA called Code Pink. In our adaptation in Madrid, we wanted to express our ‘Say no to war’ as a ‘Stop global war’. Talking about the use that capital does of our bodies as battle fields where to exercise aggression and violation; and raising a struggle for re-appropriation of our daily lifes and spaces where global politics are inscribed. “We won’t accept a counter-political language that insults our diverse intelligence. Desire, bodies and sexualities are not a weapon for submission but for pleasure. Pink say: we take the streets from our own power. We re-dress our bodies –in pink, of course- to shortcircuit the boundaries between violent and non violent. Pink disassociates. It doesn’t practice militar nor police logics, it refuses to be its reflected image: neither martirs, nor heroes, nor victims. Pink attends to collective action. It dissolves itself in common desire to re-appear again.” Operation Pink manifesto.

\(^3\) An umbrella is called paraguas in Spanish, a word that sounds very similar to para-war. The Operation Pink played with words and called it para (which means stop) wars (using the English word war).

\(^4\) “It is another thing to walk around in pink”

\(^5\) In Spain we have a fruits trade mark called “Bollo”, word that we can also use to mean dyke, so the slogan would play with this double sense saying “Dyke is not a trademark, it is a global disorder”. This intervention was articulated in view for the Gay Parade of June 28th 2002 day of Gay Pride. This Parade has become in Madrid a colorful display of a trivialized, and commercialized stereotype of “The Homosexual” that invisibilizes a wide range of experiences place differently in a variety of axes of domination. Where were we lesbians, precarious, transexuals, transgenders... and so foth, in this parade?
But also proposals as that from the group Gender Rethorics: for this year parade, they planed a deconstruction of the id cards that had to do also with paying attention to other differences. Not only sexual, but also your country of origin, race, ethnicity, are crucial questions in the configuration of identities. In this documents, everything was changed, in a way that showed the subjection of such categories and their political and social construction.

This is a small sketch of the land of the Karakola. These questions, the precarization of existence, the global war and the deconstruction of the sex/gender/desire system, are questions that constantly come across each other, they join, they support each other and they articulate in common discursive practices. Other questions such as violence against women, appear in our daily work, thinking and interventions constantly.
MAKING PROBLEMATIC

How can we think, then, how can we conform, the feminist political contribution as a long-term proposal capable of generating, strengthening and correctly driving energies that are able to put a strain on the enclosures? How can we craft it as a powerful mechanism that pushed and forced the boundaries which tie and restrict us, with the aim of making room around us for broader relations and spaces of freedom? This is a main concern for the Eskalera Karakola.

Since we understand power is not a site but a series of symbolic and material practices and relationships, we believe our own conception of “personal is political” must includes “daily is political”. The feminist bet, thus, must be one that brings politics into daily life as well as daily life into politics. It has to take into account flows and daily power relationships and get involved in their transformations as well. To conceive the places of institutional condensation of these relationships as absolute actors, as their causes, more than as crystallizations engraved in the circuits where flows of power pass, can only confuse our analysis and disorientate our practices.

Of course these places of institutional condensation vary greatly in the magnitude of their volume and capacity of incidence –from governmental institutions, supra-governmental and transnational to non governmental organizations, of the trade unions, neighbouring, academic, of the citizens, cultural and different pressure groups and social collectives--; but what is important is our cartographies placing them in the same multi-relational sphere more than in a hierarchical system of one or two directions.

This way, what turns into the object of political transformation is the wider field of power relationships which go through these crystallizations. When, on the other hand, one of them is placed throughout the whole political horizon, there is little space for real transformation, since often proximity, concealing the complex plot existing outside our approach, allows us to only articulate a reactive politic –the “refusal-as-denial” of one or several of these institutional condensations, or a confusing and undetermined amalgam of them, which pretends to find an “outside” not contaminated by it as a way of escaping those relational flows-, or a normalizing politic –in search of an “inside of” some of these manifestations of crystallisation in which be able to fit as an assimilated element.

These approaches diminish our vision and reduce our range, making, in both cases, from the place of condensation an undifferentiated absolute of the very plot of influences in which it shows. In the case of “refusal-as-denial” the condensed manifestation of practices is mistaken both with the origin and the cause of themselves, and it is this sliding what allows the imagination an “outside” when it puts in the same level the “outside of the institution” and the “outside power relations”. In the case of “refusal-as-insertion”, they are conceived as possible only in an axis of verticality instead of as a multiform net in which diverse actors mutually able to be influenced according to the magnitude of their capacity –understanding capacity here as possibility and will.

Conceiving, in other ways, the political transformation articulated in the “refusal-as-reversion”, allows us to take into account not only flows and relations but the places of their crystallisation. It allows us to recognise ourselves as saturated and pierced bodies without putting out the possibility of their emancipation, without being stolen the capacity of placing ourselves critically and deconstructively within these relations.

Reversion is an effective type of subversion, a practice which allows us to deviate the running using our own bodies to de-contextualize them, getting them to mean in a new and change(d/ing) context, deconstructing them, linking them or breaking them, dying them with our own filters.

To us, this is a bet to make a political project of each life, a project of transformation of relationships that can only be carried out within a collective. With its limits and stumbles this is a bet for social centres in general and the Karakola in particular.

“A women’s project arising from the necessity of experiencing ourselves, of relating and inventing ourselves, of communicating and breaking the mechanisms of production of a heterosexual normalizing state, and of rigid marking of the imposed gender roles. A women’s collective that tries to constantly question the world and themselves from a feminist stance,
which means to confront the world from an analysis crossed by a complexity of structures, the very ones that comprise us, never innocent and always complex, the very ones that strain us and call us to understand ourselves as rooted in a certain sex-gender-desire system, in a certain socioeconomic class, in a certain age, in a certain ethnic group... in a certain space and time. This is how we occupy and inhabit the Eskalera Karakola. Squatting as re-apropriation of physical space but also as re-apropriation of our own life time, our own desires and emotions, our own bodies.  

Coherence and survival of a project like this requires to formulate and build a feminist space as a connectivity field which allows to get down to the complex plot of socio-economic, ideological, cultural, psychic... hubs of domination which parting from dynamics of alienation, coercion, exploitation, prohibition and invisibility, act upon ours conforming our bodies and the space of constant transformation in which they act and are acted upon. If we all affect and are affected by practices and relationships in which we develop, if this is the only possible “inside of”. An effective political practice would try to negotiate the kind of practices we are going to allow with other actors. We claim this capacity of negotiation of our lives as one of the main prerogatives of the conformation --always collective-- of the political subject. Negotiation we must get down to with potency and responsibility, which means, again, to place ourselves and cartographe efficiently the territory –local-global, symbolic-material-- where we play (ourselves).

To equip ourselves with means for this negotiation, to be able to establish powerful alliances which allow us to redirect these relationships and practices towards a different place from that of domination and imposing, will depend above all, on the cartographic tools we choose to equip ourselves. As since decades ago the voices of innumerable women remind us –most of them women of the third world and “women of colour” from the Anglo-Saxon world-the recognition of the possibilities of alliance-through-difference is an indispensable requirement for the conformation of feminism in an space of powerful connectivity.

This task is by no means evident, as one of the members of the Pink Operation expressed:

“I know which rhetoric figures I am willing to assume, but I am not that sure if some men, who, for instance, I have seen in marches dressed in pink, are willing to do it, unless those of “straight lesbian-lover man” and I don’t think we are ready to fit them in the queer catalogue, I won’t accept octopus as a pet.”

And several days later:

“How can we articulate this cyborg-queer alliance against the sadian subject, for example? What alliances are possible with those women who want to still be goddesses and not cyborgs? Which ones will they want with us? Will they want any? What about us/them men?”

What we are risking here is the limit of the “difference which kills my difference”, the possibility that our well-meant analysis hide from us that the alliances cannot be established towards any of the versions of what we’ve called institutional condensation, in a voluntary way from one of the sides that would become the “dependent” and “assisted” part, but that all the actors have to recognize the principles of the “alliance-through-difference” if they want to avoid the reproduction of the domination relationships we want to transform.

Besides experimenting with the building of a connectivity field where differences not only coexist, but contaminate and empower each other as transformational agents, in the Eskalera Karakola we wonder daily how to maintain, being inserted within the wide and perverse movable nets of influence, our transforming power as not normalized bodies. This is, how can we maintain performativity as something more than mere theatre and acting? How can we avoid being eaten by the over saturated black hole where the relational hubs of governmental, consume, shows... cross and be spit out afterwards as a mere hologram lacking of the deepness of what we once were, marketed as a souvenir?

One of the participants of the Operation Pink pointed out about this:

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6 La Eskalera Karakola, Karakola Manifesto.
7 “Octopus as a pet” is an expression taken from a famous Spanish commercial.
“Pink cannot be a colour, I would not like it either to be words more or less diffuse such as difference or I don’t know, I get tired with meta linguistics. Pink should articulate a more elaborated discourse about daily wars. Pink as a connectivity field, and this is not dykes here talking about their things, the “no global” there talking about whatever, whores there and precarious women whatever… Pink as a symbol of the despised because it’s weak, because it’s funny, because it’s the seasoning, etc., it has to become a dangerous weapon which establishes powerful connections between questions such as sexualities-exploitations-consume rules and size 36- the dispositions of the flexible reproduction and so on and so forth”.

And another one affirmed:

“I still don’t know how to say no to war with our own bodies, when I think our own bodies have been built from a saturation of identities, desires and powers of war. Why don’t we think, parting from that, how to evolve into cyborgs, how to constitute ourselves into real war machines? I still don’t understand how it is so easy to re-own our own lives and walk around public and private spaces, go out the streets, give back territories, misadjust them, short-circuit them, etc., just because we are carrying a pink paintbrush in our hands”.

Which is like saying “only because we are capable of naming it”.

The analysis, the investigation, must be tensed and tested by its practical articulation. Being able to imagine feminism as an ideal space of negotiated coexistence doesn’t mean we are going to be able to build this space. The transformation of our life conditions cannot remain in the “world of ideas”, it must be articulated in movement. Political action is configured as a theory-practical laboratory. A laboratory where failure, defeat, are always an opportunity of improvement and astuteness.

When we name our bodies as political bodies, agent bodies, bodies pierced by and power producers, denied bodies, exploited, torn apart, technological bodies that ring the alarms of the border security lines, airports, ministries, supermarkets; bodies full of a complexity too big for the tiny sizes of the anorexic normalization of global capitalism; imperfect bodies, polluted, full of misery, subjection and contradiction, lacking of all politeness and ready to be rude and rebel. When we name our bodies as bodies full of oppositional and transforming potency, we are assuming the responsibility of not turning into a simulacrum, accepting the challenge so clearly raised in the sentence of another “pink operator”:

“Why not bursting into that public space as real obscene furies showing the parody of what we are?”

The challenge of collective and connectively turning into an ungovernable incarnation, empowered for restless negociation and for plucking the plugs out of their sockets and deflecting them to wherever we choose, articulating a new concept of negociation that casts aside masculinists imaginations of battle and victory-or-dead where no space is left for learning, cunning or showing a greater cleverness a second, third, n° time, but only for absolute annihilation. An articulation of negociation that conforms it as anything other than harmless.

Imagining social contestation in the simple—and liar— terms of a confrontation infested with dichotomies –us/them, victory/defeat, inside/outside, cause/effect-- is not possible anymore; rather we should imagine it as a fierce discussion of multiple voices, although in occasions it is possible for some of these voices to sing the same chord. This leaves us in a difficult and slippery ground where our very identity can be kidnapped and turned into something as unrecognizable as to eject us to even more dangerous and difficult landscapes. Such are normalization threats when the struggle is for exploding the very figures of normality and must take place from its fissures.

When our bodies become a mere consumer object-subject, when they are expropriated from us and evicted of all their power and complexity to be projected just as a cathodic phantom

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8 In this sense, also within the Operation Pink it took place a little discussion about the description of the para-wars as a harmless weapon. Its power lied, precisely, in its not being harmless at all, it was able to subvert the war logics that were playing their part in the mobilization and actions, to destroy the threats hanging over certain moments of civic expression, to counteract agressions, to contest and confront annihilatory practices..., in a word, to redirect intervention flows towards the possibility of a real space of empowered and creative connectivity.
in the family screen; what we get back is not much than an alienated and lobotomized image that turns us in something thrown, at the back of that image, to the realm of the intolerable.

A body whose “difference”, whose sense and possibility of breaking the normalized, is turned into an ornament in a shelf, into a neutralized, polished and disinfected consumer object, cleared from all its complexity to make it fit into the narrow shelves of the supermarket, is a body whose capacity for subversion and rebellion has been shortened, an easy-to-govern-and-manage body.

We feminists ought to stay aware of this mechanisms, asking ourselves constantly what kind of images and relations we are to reproduce.

Thus, the task opened from and for social movements in general and feminism in particular has to do with the three questions we have raised in this article:

a) On the one hand the need of reactivating a sense of politics that foregrounds personal, quotidian, bodies, sexualities…, that puts life itself at its centre. The need of thinking and creating spaces that make these political practices feasible and that take account of the task of generating real and powerful connectivities in ways that facilitates a coming together that will allow the articulation of political hypothesis that account for the world around us.

b) On the other hand thinking about the tools of which we provide ourselves for the generation of such connectivities; what their lacks and possibilities are, what are the real practices and alliances that they allow. In this sense, to commit ourselves not to a policy that locates us in an "outside" nor an "inside" –immaculate, pure outside; institutional, neutral inside—but to the ability of constant negotiation that makes possible for us the straining of our claims in multiple directions.

c) And last, how to be able to effect real displacements and shifts in the very matrix of power. On the one hand, as we have noted, it is of crucial importance to address the issue of normalization or standardization of which capital nourishes, bringing to visibility what the new borders of exclusion and marginality are. We need a political imagination beyond normalization but capable of articulating a speech not from an alien "outside". On the other hand to conceive ourselves as situated, colonized, power-saturated subjects and being able of provoke real break-ups and destabilizations from there.

In this sense we know that such break-ups—with their placing of the body, quotidian and life at the centre—cannot rest in individual, isolated elections; it requires a collective practice. The point for us is how to generate real collective *agenciaments* inscribed in daily practices, that are not suppressive of differences but able to deconstruct and dislocate processes of normalization? How to build up a discourse that, from a sense of parciality, the local and a fragmentary nature, can account for the multiple connections of the new global network. These are the mayor questions that we asking by now. For the moment we keep insisting: lets make of our bodies, our sexuality, our desires, our emotions… global disorder!
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