

A CONVERSATION WITH LUCÍA EGAÑA

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Concerning the conversation that we are just starting, we ask Lucía Egaña about *Producciones Narrativas* (i.e. “Narrative Productions”), a methodology developed by the group *Fractalidades en Investigación Crítica* (FIC) at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB), a group of which she is a member. This is a mode of production of knowledge that is “inspired by certain feminist narrative methodologies that seek to break with the hierarchies between the subject and the object being studied”. This applied methodology starts with a conversation, and then the researcher transcribes it freely, the result of which “might be in the form of a story”. The transcription is given to the other person from the conversation, and this person “is free to do whatever they want with the text, such as modifications, corrections, deletions or inventions, and they send it back. Only when there is consensus from both parties is the text ready, and when it is finished it can be used as a bibliographical reference, i.e. those writings will have acquired certain legitimacy”. We agree to use this methodology – which seems, to us, to be a potent way of constructing knowledge collectively, eschewing as it does the hegemonic forms in which knowledge is constructed *about* and not *with* others – for this conversation, and any editing of the text will be consensual, an extension of our dialogue. To help us, Lucía tells us more about how she is applying the *Producciones Narrativas* methodology (Balasch and Montenegro 2003; Martínez-Guzmán and Montenegro 2014; Fernández and Martínez 2014; García Fernández and Montenegro Martínez 2014): “Currently, I am developing, alongside the Chilean researcher Paulina Vara, a piece of work in which we use this methodology. It deals with artists and women linked with the arts, who live or who have lived in the diaspora. It’s interesting to see how this methodology works: for example, some people change nothing at all while

others, above all those who write for a living, turn the texts completely on their heads”.

This is not our first conversation; we know each other, the three of us have already spoken quite a lot. Lucía has been our teacher in this transversal pedagogical practice, built on dialogue – and not the usual academic monologue –, and our conversations have carried over from the classroom to the street, to the bar, and to life. Therefore, this is, more than anything, a polyphonic discussion between friends; a threesome, as it were. With all the epistemic generosity that she has shown us, and before we get going with the conversation, Lucía reads aloud to us a text written by the FIC (the research group *Fractalidades en Investigación Crítica* at the UAB), published by *El Salto Diario*, regarding the problems being addressed in the present edition of *Re-visiones*:

“Identity politics have allowed us to implement measures to combat our subalternisation (as women, workers, members of ethnic minorities, sexual dissidents or as disabled people). However, we have made the mistake of applying identity logic to the very systems that subalternise us. So, instead of decrying the growing discriminatory practices as legitimised by sexism, homophobia, racism, classism or ableism, we tend to discredit or insult the individuals behind such practices, branding them “misogynist thugs”, “racists”, etc. This strategy – to which we ourselves often succumb (so fitting as it is for messages of 140 characters) –, goes by the name of *psychologisation*. And what we can see today is that this strategy is counterproductive in at least two ways.

Simply calling these people “racist”, “homophobic” or “gullible”, with the aim of “exposing” or “shaming” them, does not affect the root cause of the problem: that is, the structures of oppression and the combination of “truths” that justify inequalities between people assigned to different categories” (*Fractalitats en Investigació Crítica*, 2019).

Diego: Tell us more about this concept of *psychologisation*.

Lucía: Like the both of you, I don’t come from the social sciences, nor from psychology, so in approaching these fields there is always the chance to broaden out and divert their meanings. Although she is not directly referenced in this article, one author who in some way addresses the idea of *psychologisation* is Sara Ahmed. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), she sets out how a State can feel hurt, “the pain of the State”, or a State that is scared there won’t be enough resources to go around if immigrants keep coming. These discourses are currently taking hold in Europe, and this would be a case of, following Ahmed, *psychologising the State*. Many current debates work along these lines, we can identify them.

Diego: It's interesting because, sometimes, within the movements that are formed around issues of identity, even when we are being critical of identity, what we are actually doing is giving our adversaries identity. In turn, this lays the ground for their hate speech.

Lucía: Exactly. Not long ago I went to a feminist summer school, and, in one round table discussion with immigrant women, a Catalan woman intervened to decry her own situation: she said that being Catalan meant she was part of a minority group. Given the fact we were in Catalonia, this felt a bit out of place. She insisted: "we're a minority, we're being minoritised, they're repressing us, the right are fucking us over". Here we have a clear example of this need to say you're part of a minority as a strategy to be able to speak, to give weight to your words. It's problematic for the discourse of oppression to be used so far out of context. Even though this is a group of people who, within the context of Spanish history, have indeed been oppressed (for example their language was banned for many years, and at the moment it is being repressed), a round table of immigrant women denouncing extractivism, racism and the colonial continuum did not seem to be the best place to air these grievances. You have to look at the individual contexts. We can't say that the Catalans haven't been oppressed, but we can object to their oppression being equated with colonial-era oppression, and we can object to them getting stuck in just when white feminism is being critiqued.

Lior: Can oppression be measured, on a global, geopolitical level?

Lucía: I don't think oppression can be measured on one sole axis; the global part is problematic. Oppression should be interpreted according to the context, and we know this from experience: we can be in one place and enjoy a great many privileges, and yet, when we move away from there, we start to be oppressed.

Diego: For me, what you say demonstrates that when we give a name to the people who exert violence we give them an identity, and this allows them to articulate their discourse based on that very identification. And this is how certain discourses come to be constructed, e.g. the discourses of *gender ideology*[®], of *political correctness* as a supposed form of oppression, of *cultural marxism* or *virtue-signalling*.

Lucía: This makes me think of the tension between *political anti-racism* and *moral anti-racism*, where the latter in fact seeks to be politically correct. In other words, you cannot say *fucking immigrants*, because that's incorrect, there is a moral duty that stops you from doing so, but not because you hope to change the structurally racist system that allows somebody (or an entire system) to say *fucking immigrants*. These comments do not come

from the mouths of ignorant, stupid, uneducated or bad people, but rather they are based on structures that facilitate and reaffirm these kinds of statements. On the other hand, *political anti-racism* would in fact seek to bring down the existing racist structures, so that these hierarchies and injustices cease to exist.

Lior: I'm still thinking about what we were talking about before, regarding context-dependent oppression. I always wonder, about us, about myself – in my case, for example, I came here from Brazil, and I do have certain privileges in Brazil – but have I brought those privileges along with me? Despite the fact that I'm an immigrant, and that right now I am technically "illegal", I find it hard to place myself in the position of the subaltern here in Spain because I am aware that I am privileged, mainly because of my economic and social situation, and because I am white. And yet I see that many people who come to Spain from Latin America actually change their whole mindset, and suddenly they've forgotten all about their privileges from before.

Lucía: Yes, because the nuance of the context they come from is erased¹. This memory, and a more complex interpretation of reality – made possible due to having experienced two different places as the same person – are erased. So sometimes contextual information gets lost, and you set yourself out, in terms of identity, as an oppressed subject. And, alas, that's what you are. But you're also aware that though you face discrimination at certain times and in certain places, you do in fact have considerable access privileges elsewhere. This variable makes it impossible to consider, in this case, your oppression or your privilege as something constant. Not being able to pin down your own identity – what does it mean? It means your identity is not homogeneous, but rather it adapts to its surroundings.

Diego: For example, in Colombia I'm read as white, but then when I lived in Baltimore, I said to my black friends, in the middle of a conversation, that I was white, and they told me: "Say *what?* *White?* No, you're latino here, you're racialised."

Lucía: That's what happens to some Spanish people when they go to the USA – they stop being white, in terms of how they are perceived, and they become "latinos", people "of colour".

Diego: Over there, if you speak Spanish, and your English pronunciation is bad or different, you're Hispanic, and that's an ethno-racial category.

Lucía: These experiences could be really interesting, politically. Now, it must also be taken into account that sometimes the temporary taking up of an identity can be strategic. In fact, this is what Spivak says when she

speaks of *strategic essentialism* as a political strategy. Chela Sandoval, in the book *Otras Inapropiables* (hooks et al. 2004), re-examines the concept. It is a question of power, in some way, to strategically make use of the same essentialism that the hierarchical system has produced. For example, I can say that I'm a woman, and, well, this is a social construct which doesn't really mean much, or at least it doesn't always mean something. But then again, in certain spaces, at certain times, I can say that something is happening to me *because* I am a woman, and in some way I am "essentialising" my identity, albeit strategically. This is a double-edged sword, because the right also make strategic use of certain essentialism, like when Trump says all that "we white people are fucked" stuff. What seems arrogant to me is to think of identity as something that comes from the self, without contemplating the fluxes and variables within the surroundings that affect you. It's true that here, in this house, where no heterosexual people live, if a heterosexual person does come to visit they might well feel "minoritised" because of our resentment or our habits, but even so it would not be right if they used that fleeting "feeling" of theirs to fly the flag of exclusion, no matter how much they feel like the odd one out or an anomaly in those particular circumstances...

Lior: I was speaking to a friend the other day, and she said that "even though I only feel attracted to guys, I struggle to define myself as heterosexual, because for me heterosexuality is more of a political category".

Lucía: Or a system.

Lior: Or a system, ultimately it's not just about desire, it doesn't have to be about sexual desire.

Diego: I think that heterosexuality is a regime that does operate upon sexual desire.

Lucía: It operates upon desire, but when heterosexuals feel offended every time we have a rant about heterosexuality, that's because they over-identify with it, turning it into a question of identity. It's like they begin to feel uneasy. Ultimately, they are gradually being peeled away from the context and structure that contains and supports them as heterosexuals, the same structure that, historically, has given them the character of normality. In our culture, it is not only normal to be heterosexual, but you're heterosexual by default (unless you state or show otherwise). And this happens not only with heterosexuality. You say "fuck academia", and the people who have spent so many years inside the university system start feeling bad. Or "fuck the patriarchy", and then loads of guys say "but not all men are the same".

Diego: And white people, and europeans. We've had conversations about europe and the answer is "no, not all europeans". But we are speaking about generality, about systemic, structural issues. It's really difficult when new identifications come up in these kinds of discussions, because we are talking about structures, not about one person or their sexual practices.

Lior: Going back to the text that you read to us, and given that the oppressor uses the symbolic and grammatical tools of the oppressed in order to defend their own position, in this issue we have tried to think of a different grammatology, to think about whether we need other concepts, other terms that might somehow orient other constructive politics which try to avoid appropriation, such as the concept of *psychologisation*. It would involve thinking about concepts that can construct, as you have said in your classes in the Independent Study Program, a *survival toolkit* (Ahmed, undated). What concepts would you say, today, could help us get prepared, in such a context?

Lucía: That is a very tricky question, and I don't know if I will be able to answer it. Marisela Montenegro, a colleague of mine at the FIC, suggests that to deal with the problem you discuss – because it is a problem that has come up in the group – new metaphors and imaginative figurations must be invented, something which has been done very well by authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Donna Haraway. Anzaldúa is a master of this – the *new mestiza*, the *frontera*, the *nepantlera*, she's come up with so many concepts (Anzaldúa 2009). Or the *cyborg*, the *modest witness*, as proposed by Haraway (1997, 1991). They are more like exercises in science fiction than hyperrealism; they are figures that do not come about in reality, but instead they produce reality or other scenarios that force you to become detached and forget about overidentification. And in the field of art, poetry and culture, many such ideas can be formed; it seems easier, there, to invent and imagine such things.

Lior: Art as a space that is well-disposed for the creation of other political, subjective imaginaries. You have moved between academia and the arts, and perhaps you have seen how academia is losing its standing as the space for the diagnosis and prognosis of the present, due to its abstruseness. I increasingly see art as the space where different imaginaries are being created.

Lucía: Yes, artistic practice allows for political imaginaries to be created with a greater degree of freedom and in distinct registers, yet at the same time I regret the social disconnection of the institutional art world where many artists indeed end up. Sometimes I do perceive a greater social connection, not from academia, but from people who carry out theoretical or social research, and it is sad that the (official) art world remains so disconnected. Although there are artists who are politically and socially

engaged, when they enter the official space for art they end up being physically isolated within a gallery, and perhaps that's why most artists are socially isolated from the world.

Lior: Do you think that there could be activist art within the museum space?

Lucía: The museum can co-opt and embrace things we cannot even imagine; the museum can always make space. In that context, the category of "activist" is relative: what does "activist art" mean? What does "activist art" mean to you?

Lior: I think activist art is about how much it can transform the symbolic and material space to allow for the construction of new ways of coming together as a community.

Lucía: I agree with your definition, but I also think that the museum insofar as an inclusive space can deactivate that potential because it is not always inhabited by "communities". There might be one piece, one work by somebody that could hold that potential, but I don't think museums are the quintessential place where that transformation comes about most powerfully.

Lior: But because of an issue of structure within the museum? Or do you think this potentially could happen in the museum? Should activists and campaigners defend the museum as a space that supports their struggle, or should they challenge that space?

Lucía: This is very personal; there are people whom I love dearly that see do potential in the museum, and they work in that field. But I am quite cynical about the institutions in general, particularly the artistic institutions, I suppose as a result of my own studies in fine art. Although I do think that, in the museum, you can do and experience interesting things – not only because they have the resources to offer such things – I don't have much faith. Despite this, I work in this field, of art and museums. Regarding the social disengagement that we were discussing before, I don't think it can be solved by inviting communities into the museums or artistic institutions. For a while now I've noticed how cultural institutions are so walled in, they have such narrow routes to entry, and all this despite the fact that they offer free admission one or every day of the week, so it's not about having to pay to get in. It's about the accessibility to these places, things that are related to the many different layers that make up a person. Just because it's free doesn't allow everybody to go in – there are many other factors that make a person feel at ease, and make them want to enter a space, or not. So what are the real entry points, and what kind of things act like steps, that

is, imagining we enter the institution in a wheelchair. And also, looking beyond the physical elements that allow us to go in (the price, steps, etc.), how does a person go into an institution when, in that place, there is nothing at all that relates to their own life? How does a racialised person enter an institution where every single member of staff and all the art histories therein are white? It is important to reflect on the accessibility of spaces, be it the museum, educational institutions or shopping centres. Why do more people go to shopping centres than museums? What are the physical and cultural routes to access of these places? In a neoliberal context, where is it easier to be? I see it like different circles of accessibility; some narrower, some more open. I think about academic congresses, where sometimes there is free entry, there are no steps to climb, and even so nobody goes. What is it that allows you to go in and have an experience there?

Lior: I see a kind of *workshopification* of art. There are lots of artists who are leaving behind object – or image – based approaches; they're moving away from spaces where an object is just displayed to be looked at, and they are trying to create many more workshop-like experiences, a form of escape from, or abandonment of, the museum. Many artists enter the museum space, but then many leave, to try and think about art as something more like an experience.

Lucía: Yes, it's a trend in art and, furthermore, it fits with the neoliberal logics of cultural production, where those involved have to be more and more versatile and flexible in order to adapt to different tasks. And so new figures have arrived, very recently, on the scene, like the cultural mediator, the curator, these subjects who somehow act as connectors and who are becoming more and more important within the ecosystem, following this trend of the art world heading towards more relational issues. These roles are also taken up by the artists themselves.

Diego: Although in Latin America it's been going on for longer than it has here.

Lucía: At the institutional level?

Diego: No, I mean that here, when Bourriaud's *relational art* (2006) and that whole trend started off, over in Latin America it had already been going on for quite a few decades. Also, over there it was linked with the particular context of political needs there, to activate other things, and not to create objects. But I reckon that all this experience stuff isn't just going on in art, but also in the world of design and marketing – there are loads of master's degrees now focussed on the creation of experiences. Brands no longer just sell objects, but rather the whole experience of going to buy in a certain

shop, or the brand itself is understood as an experience. When you go to the museum, it's also about the experience of having been there.

Lucía: Definitely, and the art institutions, like so many others, have always been biased in terms of class, gender, race. That's why these mediating figures appear, who produce experience, pedagogy, social processes...

Diego: It's also part of capitalism today, and its newest modes of production, isn't it?

Lucía: Yes, in I.T. the whole idea of "user experience" came to the fore, which is a key issue in the so-called *Internet of things*. It never used to matter how the user actually felt when using technology – the most important thing was the programming, the software, and little else, how to use the mouse, almost mechanical things. And then, how the user felt began to matter, and then the issue of user experience is everywhere: the alarm clock gently glows like the sunrise, and it plays birdcall to wake you up; that whole field of experiential technology is pretty mad and dystopian.

Lior: Technology is a *medium* and it can be used in many different ways. I was thinking, as well, that today we see technology in spaces of surveillance, of control, and of subjectivation. Should activism necessarily become more technological in order to be able to act against technology, or, in a world where technology occupies such an oppressive place, are we better off turning around and trying to think of non-technological forms of activism?

Lucía: Well, I personally have opted to use open software. But in the last few years, social media has become almost inescapable, and along with smartphones, to connect with other people it would seem that you "need" to use private apps, belonging to macro-companies, and so the non-capitalistic infrastructures and tools have been hit hard. It takes a while to understand how the algorithms work on social media, you really have to put some thought into it, and then suddenly you get how it works, but you still can't figure out how they do it. In terms of projects of technological sovereignty, it's really hard to compete with macro-corporations that have millions of dollars at their disposal. And yet, there are collectives trying to counteract them with just three thousand dollars – how can they do it? But in terms of thinking of technologies as tools for transformation, in the discourses about open software there is and there has been the chance to think of transformation using these tools, which implies rethinking technology itself, rethinking how we work and how we get organised. The fact that all their coding is open-source is a way of reconsidering everything: gender, life, food, seeds. If you think you can change things because of the way they've been built, then it spurs you on to open up your

computer and see what's inside. Or even better, open up your identity and see how that's been built. It's about opening up the source codes which are completely closed in commercial products, a fact that in itself increases the all-seeing and oppressive character of the technology that we use on a daily basis.

Lior: It's the formation of a language too, isn't it?

Lucía: Yes, but it's not about digital literacy, it's more of a practice that seeks to find out how things are built – it's an active practice that goes beyond one's technological ability. Also because I'm not a programmer – I use open software, but I don't know how to program anything. Instead, it is a beginning, a political driving force, or a way of thinking that makes me want to know more about the identity that is here, now: how it's built, what it's made of, how it's coded. Your identity as a homosexual, let's say, or as a white person – how is that coded? How has it been written? These inscriptions, writings and codifications are historical, social, cultural, physical and material.

Diego: We think about social networks as spaces of socialisation that define us. But if we look at other spaces for socialisation, like cities, which are also constructed spaces that limit and control the way we relate to one another, we come across non-conforming practices and ways of inhabiting these spaces. We can think about non-conforming or dissident sexual practices, such as *cruising* (i.e. clandestine sex with strangers, in public spaces) – although social networks have partly replaced them. Can we use these older, dissident practices to help us come up with alternatives?

Lucía: Yes, definitely! But it's difficult, isn't it, to think of alternatives when your product is welded shut and they only tell you how to use it, as it is, or how to buy it. And it can be a speculative exercise; maybe I'll never fully grasp how my own gender identity has been pieced together, maybe I wouldn't understand all the code there. But, well, even as a speculative exercise it lets you imagine the possibility of rebuilding it, or of changing parts of the code, because that too is a big plus of open software: you don't always have to reprogram everything or start from scratch, as the neoliberal rhetoric would have you think. You can also modify just tiny parts, and yet make huge changes.

Diego: Applying this way of thinking to social media might be tricky; you'd have to find, as with cruising, somewhere dark so that we can connect in a different way. It seems a bit complicated.

Lucía: It's complicated with social media because the platforms are designed, physically and he activism conceptually, by corporations. But

there are certain things that we can open up and try to understand. For example, success on a given social network is measured in terms of interaction; someone reacts to your post, or they leave you a comment. This equates to success on these networks because they focus on exposure, on visibility – and so they overlook other possible interpretations of the word. Currently, we tend to think of activism with regards to visibility; the success of a campaign depends on its visibility, and this is something that happens particularly with LGBTI issues – lesbian visibility, gay visibility... But this is a European/Western regime of the visual, where it would seem that everything works via the gaze. I am interested in, and I thought about this as I was reading the book *An Archive of Feelings* by Ann Cvetkovich (2003), activist campaigns of invisibility. For example, there is the abortion activism in Latin America/Abya Yala, the success of which depends on invisibility, on networks that fly under the radar, on their remaining hidden. Nobody can post online “I’ve got loads of abortion pills, give me a like and I’ll send you some over”, it just doesn’t work like that. And there is a long history of political resistance against dictatorships, carried out from positions of invisibility. Today, the case of clandestine abortion activism is important, as well as many others that are going on in our times.

Diego: Well, before the gay liberation movements, all non-conforming sexual practices were carried out amid invisibility of some form.

Lucía: Yes. There have always been, for example, lesbians who have children and bring them up together, and they were able to survive because they were not visible as a lesbian family per se. By discussing visibility in this way, it is not that we are opening up the source code of a social network. But we are identifying one key element of its construction, and we might ask ourselves: what happens if we invert this logic, if we modify this part of the code? What happens? What is this tool for, how can we use it another way? Well, in the case of the corporate social networks, which are the ones we tend to use, the truth is that there is no such thing as invisibility there, because they are observing/monitoring us all the time (they observe how you scroll down, your behaviour, how long you spend there, as well as your interactions and movements in that space, etc.), so there’s nowhere to hide. But, ultimately, the absolutist rhetoric of visibility belittles all the other forms of activism that have, historically, worked from a different place, that have guaranteed the survival of their own struggles and processes of transformation by means of secrecy or the non-visual senses, like listening or the oral culture. And, besides, the visual regime is what sorts our bodies into genders, races and classes.

Lior: Thinking about the question of visibility, and with particular regard to abortion activism, this does require, on a pragmatic level, some degree of invisibility if it is to work. Even so, there is an aspect of visibility that is

fundamental to these movements, so that they can fight, within the institutional space, on a legal level, for abortion rights.

Lucía: On a legal and social level, so it stops being a stigma. Because abortion could continue to be illegal, but if it were socially legitimate, it wouldn't be quite so serious. People do lots of illegal things every day, even in their own houses, that aren't stigmatised. I'm not claiming that visibility is useless, or suggesting that in itself it doesn't work – I am only trying to question the relevance and central importance that some activist groups have given it, because such a reading overlooks other practices that have had to exist undercover. Having a network of people who are there for you when you have an abortion, for example, is a transformative experience, the result of a whole social structure in operation. Also, thinking about political achievements as only being valid when they are deemed legal does not seem right to me anyway. Not when there are laws that kill, every single day. The *Ley de extranjería* [Spain's 'Immigration Law'] is a death factory that must be abolished, and to achieve that, the more visibility there is of the violence exerted by that law, the more likely it is there will be social change that leads to its abolition. However, in terms of those practices or forms of activism that could deconstruct certain hegemonic conceptions in other spaces, like Diego mentioned with cruising, these practices subvert ideas, like the one that says if you want to fuck someone you have to be in love with them. Within heterosexuality, this is very clear. You fuck someone when you love them: you "make love". By contrast, gays and lesbians (in a more invisible way, particularly the latter) have developed strategies to fuck around whenever they get the urge, by having casual hook-ups, by separating sex and feelings. And this decodes a, let's say, heterosexual or catholic framework. We could think of cruising as a tool that decodes the heterosexual framework because it has facilitated access to sex, without necessarily having an emotional bond, at least in the heterosexual sense, because there is undoubtedly intimacy there. I'm not sure what the experience is like in each case, but I don't think cruising is completely void of feeling. There is another way to interact with people, which has nothing to do with "first we must fall in love, and then we can fuck".

Diego: Also, as a form of affection, it is not so much about words, but more about touch, gestures, and other languages. However I do think that cruising is, for the most part, a male privilege.

Lucía: There's a really interesting article by a researcher called Matilde Albarracín (2008), who interviews lesbians who lived through the Francoist dictatorship in Spain. The article gives an account of the strategies employed by some lesbians so that they could have children. For example, lesbian couples might ask a gay male friend for sex, so that one of them gets pregnant, and then say in public that they are a widow and her dead

husband's sister, bringing up the poor little thing without a father. In the same article, Albarracín mentions a cruising site in La Barceloneta, Barcelona, in the beach hut changing rooms, which became spaces for casual sex between women. This is now long-gone, and it seems unlikely today. These practices were possible because they were not visible, and we have to consider the context of the Law on dangerousness and social rehabilitation² in Spain, where there are practically no records of lesbians affected by this law. This shows that a subject can be so invisible, overlooked to such an extent that they are not even seen in the eyes of the law. I understand and support the idea that lesbian women should be afforded greater visibility and space, because otherwise we lesbians have no role models, nothing to cling onto. And yet, despite this, to think that right in the middle of the dictatorship there were cruising sites for women, or lesbians who had worked out their own ways of having and bringing up children, is so truly powerful, and this was only possible precisely because they were not in spaces where they would have been more visible.

Lior: You've made a link between the use of technology, open software, and the decoding of identity-based codes. What other points of contact would you say there are between reappropriations of technology and feminist strategies?

Lucía: At the moment there are, especially in Latin America, many transfeminist projects. In particular I am thinking about the *Kéfir*³ server, a project from Mexico that sets out the relationship with the server as a practice of caring, of looking after the data, the information, without having to provide a 24/7 service, accepting that those who look after the server are people who cannot always be available. As such, we can put forward a material, physical parallel for all this technology which, in the collective imagination, is somewhat dematerialised – we talk of the cloud, of information that zaps through the air, and yet in reality servers are boxes, cables, minerals, machines and electricity. In fact, I was reading the other day that each Google search uses up two hours of electricity through the interconnected servers: the information travels around the world when you search for something in the whole Internet universe, until it comes up with a result. To our eyes, this happens in a mere fraction of a second, but there is in fact a far larger use of electricity. I am convinced that thinking of tools as physical things is a feminist approach to technology. Highlighting the importance of all the caring practices that are necessary in everything that we use, not only in terms of servers, but also when we think about where we store our information, what visibility means, appearing on search engines or not, and so on. In the post-porn movement, there was a problem with the Internet, because it wasn't possible to upload content without being censored on the commercial platforms. Self-produced porn, made at home, and not for profit. You can put it on YouPorn, but if you

want to share it on a commercial blog, or on privately-owned social networks or corporate video sites, you can't upload certain contents. This is where self-run, transfeminist servers become important, like in projects in Mexico, Brazil (*Vedetas*⁴), or from the kingdom of Spain (*Anarchaserver*⁵). There are networks of transfeminist servers thinking about the sustainability of these tools. They also think about how best they can share, somehow, the information you need to know to keep all of this infrastructure running. How to maintain a house, how to take out the batteries from your server, these are still feminised tasks, but not necessarily carried out by women. Also, for me, it is about how we can think of technology outside the logics of competition, as something more closely linked to collective self-teaching and learning. Also, to think of technology, as we mentioned before, as something that never starts from scratch, where you can make use of what other people have already done, reformulating it according to your own needs, your own context. I think that the projects of transfeminist servers that exist at the moment, and that are being run by feminists, are consciously fragile services that include this fragility within their very conception. Right now, if Facebook goes down for 24 hours, its shares will plummet on the stock market, and it becomes a huge global problem. Just imagine that the servers could collapse for 24 hours and yet the world doesn't come to an end. And why not? Sometimes I collapse too.

Lior: Don't those spaces want to be scaled up, globally?

Lucía: There is a lot of debate around how to make these projects sustainable, debate which is both political and material. I don't think these proposals are seeking to provide services at a global level, but rather they want to encourage more projects of this type. It's a non-corporate logic. The commercial social networks want the whole planet to sign up, but for an independent server that's just not sustainable, even for autonomous, highly stable servers, like *Riseup*⁶ – it's just not viable for everybody to have an email account with them. However, we do need more projects of this kind, assembled as part of a network, sharing resources and code. These projects do not consider success as something which comes from being rolled out around the world, but rather it would come from the global proliferation of autonomous infrastructures which are housed in different spaces.

Lior: Technology has a role, which is somehow connected to the transformation of the means of production of the technological object, of understanding such an object in the material sense, i.e. how it is built, how else it could be built, and making that production process visible. I see a very close relationship between this, and what you were saying before about alternative feminist methodologies – in some way, it is about understanding how thought is produced, and how to reconfigure such modes of production. You mentioned some methodologies before, if you like

you can tell us some more about the project you are setting up, it sounds like it could be a really powerful tool.

Lucía: Like Diego, I come from a Fine Art background, and in the art world people hardly ever talk about methodologies because it's all about procedures, which, ultimately, even if you consider them to be methodologies, do not have quite the same status. As far as I'm concerned, methodologies are an invention which serve to legitimise certain procedures and results. In science, for example, methodologies are used in which the same experiment is repeated twenty times, and yet if the desired result comes up five times (having failed the other fifteen times) then you can draw a conclusion (I'm simplifying and exaggerating...). So, on the one hand, I feel a certain aversion towards scientific discourses, because I'm just not that interested in the production of truth (my interests are the other way round: how to construct uncertainty), and furthermore, on the other hand, I do not trust the ways that truth is constructed on the scientific or academic level. There are also spaces for legitimising knowledge that are not necessarily within academia: for example, there is talk of "artistic research" and how it could be standardised in some way, to see how artists produce ideas, thought, knowledge. My intention would be to produce, as far as possible, different strategies and possibilities to get away from the traditional forms of producing knowledge. This could come about in very different ways; there is a whole series of feminist research methods which have already made proposals, which are consistent and can be replicated with subtle differences, like the one we mentioned at the start of this conversation, but also the production of metaphors that we spoke of could be a feminist methodology for the production of knowledge. What I am trying to achieve with the research project *Metodología subnormales*⁷ ("Subnormal methodologies") is to investigate how the production of knowledge works in the traditional sense, and then how different ways of doing so can be recorded. I'm not saying that leaving a record of this is going to change the world, but if there are lots of us who record these different ways, then over time the many people who research or produce delegitimised knowledge that is not considered valid, will eventually have more tools and space at their disposal to put into practice their ways of doing, thinking and seeing. I think that many methodologies can be invented, but the scientific method has been formed in such a way that it does not allow for invention. I am not clever or creative enough to invent a huge pack of possible methodologies, I can compile some of them, come up with a couple of new ones, but then each one of us can create another three or four methods, and my aim is, more than anything, to be able to make cracks in the system so that more and more new inventions can sneak into those spaces that are usually closed off.

Lior: Going back to the central theme of this issue, which seeks to think about the far right, around the world, and the processes of their renewed growth and reach, we are aiming to think both in terms of diagnosis and prognosis about what is happening and what can be done, about what tools we have and what other tools we could develop. And also we aim to think about the relationship between the liberal democratic system and these new political forms, or rather, what is innovative, but also what is being repeated. How do you interpret the appearance of this ultraconservative politics, and the way we, as members of academia, artists, activists, deal with this reality?

Lucía: I would like to call into question the apparently “indisputable” analysis about the rise of the right, and of fascism. Although there are fascists who are gaining quite a lot of exposure and visibility – they’re on TV and in the papers, on a daily basis – at the same time I feel like we are paying them too much attention. That’s why I feel somehow conflicted that this journal is dedicating a special edition to this matter, because we are spending a lot of time and effort on thinking about the far right, giving them power, when I honestly think that Vox⁸ is just a handful of people. Not long ago they held a rally in Plaza Espanya, and there were hundreds of helicopters watching over about four people, there was nobody there. But, of course, great numbers of journalists and police had been deployed there, which meant they had to close off the big roads, and so it felt like a huge gathering, even though hardly anybody had bothered to gather at all. That’s why I’m suspicious when so much attention is paid to the right, because it is often disproportionate to its actual physical presence. I understand the fear that this produces, but I don’t understand the paralysis that is a result of this constant gazing at fascism. In some cases there is a certain selective memory. A few days ago, a friend of mine made me realise that lesbians, particularly in the social context that we inhabit, are better off than ever before, because we can exist in the public space in such a way that would have been impossible a hundred years ago. Though it might seem that fascism is stronger than ever, it does not have a clear historical correlate in all fields. The right has always been powerful. Fascism, colonialism, racism, so overbearing that in the US, in the 1950s, a black person could not sit at the front of the bus because it was reserved for white people – these are incredibly high levels of violence. And seventy years later we are talking of a rise in the right and unprecedented levels of fascism. It makes me suspicious, because what has happened throughout western history? The historical constant is markedly fascist, and violent. The church has wielded great power, and yet today, given all the paedophile priests out there, it has lost legitimacy. This discrepancy in the different interpretations of history seems like a case of selective memory, even if we can discern a parallel in the current technologies we use, for example. The social networks are increasingly oriented towards – and this makes me dizzy – what they call

“stories”, that is, ephemeral records, a (hi)story that lasts just 24 hours. This “fixation” with the present is so strong and in “real time” that you can’t tend to anything that has happened before. It makes me think about the figuration of the “angel of history”, and how it compares to a figure from Chilote mythology, i.e. from an island in southern Chile, called the *Invunche*, with its head twisted back and all of its orifices stitched up. There are figurations that allude to a sterile relationship with the past. This is why I am suspicious of contemporary accounts that declare we are living through an unusually strong period for the far right. I of course do not mean to be a denier, I just think that if we spend the whole day focussing on the nonsense spouted by the far right, we give them great power and we remain “fixated” by them. In this sense, I don’t think the far right and fascism are new, quite the opposite: these are really old issues, and so in some way we already know how they work, or at least we could find out if we wanted to.

In this sense, for example, the *Ley de extranjería* in Spain is the continuation of colonialism. And that already existed five hundred years ago. It’s not that I refuse to think about how repression and the right are operating today, but I just wish it didn’t have to be the absolute epicentre that everything else revolves around, all our energy, effort, and attention, without considering the historical side, its roots. It’s always about right now, and this right now doesn’t let you see what happened yesterday because, literally, it appears to have been deleted (I’m referring here to the example of the social networks, that although they create the illusion of disappearance, they in fact save all the files on their servers). And this is linked with a loss of meaning, and what we were saying before about violence and aggression. These words don’t mean much anymore; anybody can suffer violence, anybody can be attacked, anybody can be a feminist. The figure of the victim has gained back its power. Anybody can be oppressed, anybody can be offended, there is a loss of meaning, but is this the new right, or is it a loss of meaning? Stripping things of all meaning in this way prevents us from being able to “hold on” to something, and it prevents us from having a place where we can speak. I don’t know if the right is more violent than before; Catholicism, the Church, Europe, heterosexuality, they all form part of a continuum of violence and repression. What’s new is what Lior was saying before; the fact that racialised and/or poor people would actually vote for Bolsonaro or Donald Trump. For me, this forms part of the loss of meaning, where people vote for Trump because they feel he speaks to them, the oppressed white people. So oppression doesn’t make sense as a concept, it’s empty, and this really could be a new strategy, whereby these fascist, Hitler-like positions come to power democratically.

Lior: That's right, and if you ask a black or indigenous person in Brazil, they might say "look, this is nothing new". It's as Benjamin said – for the oppressed, there is a permanent state of emergency, it's always been there. The key issue is to think about, on the one hand, the specifics of this particular moment in time, because there are lots of new things: Bolsonaro's discourse, not just the discourse, but the mode of discursive production and how it comes about. Also to think about the Evangelicals, they are a new phenomenon and yes, for me, it completely changes the meaning of oppression and the construction of an authoritarian government. That doesn't mean they didn't exist before, but there is a reformulation there. There is a kind of hermeneutic desperation to understand the present moment, and all its unique traits. We are asking ourselves whether we need to understand, first of all, the dialectics, to understand the present, understand it to be able to do something about it. We strive to give it a name, it's this, or it's that – so what is it? What do we call it? Bifo, for example, says that it's not fascism, it's *ethnonationalism*, that people are in fact joining forces along racial lines. We need to understand this to come up with new tools, or try a lot harder to bring back other tools, understanding that this is a repetition of the same gesture.

Lucía: It's not that I think it's the same, but I do feel there is a great deal of historical disconnect. Last Monday we read, in the *Instituto de Estudios del Porno*⁹ ("Institute of Porn Studies"), some feminist texts from forty years ago, which is still pretty recent. Back then, feminists were discussing the same issues we discuss now, but with a greater degree of complexity. Today, why do you have to be either for or against sex work, in such strictly binary terms? Why are those who are against sex work called abolitionists? For me, this is – and I keep saying it – cultural appropriation. Abolitionism referred to slavery, first of all. How can a word that was used to end the slave trade now be used in such a way that would force poor, racialised and migrant women into even more precarious situations? This is cultural appropriation, distorting the term to use it in a way that has nothing to do with its original sense.

Lior: There are also people in the legal sector who talk about abolitionism when calling for the closure of prisons.

Lucía: Exactly, but there is a continuum in that case, there is a meaningful link between abolitionism with regards to slavery, and abolitionism with regards to prisons. Basically, prisons are full of racialised people. And poor people. People feeding the industrial complex of the prison. There are no rich or white people in prisons. But to go from there, to the abolition of the sex work of racialised migrants who often manage to migrate and survive because of this work, is a massive leap which is so hard to fathom. I'm not saying we all have to be historians now, and I'm a really bad example

anyway, but I do think we should try to look back a bit more. Because discourses like accelerationism – in fact, Bifo is a fundamental reference there – concern me. I've found it hard to understand accelerationism, and I think it's hard because it's such an individualistic proposal. If we accept, as a starting point, that the current capitalist system is unsustainable, then this proposal seems to suggest that we should step on the accelerator, and drive capitalism forwards until it reaches its end, as if things had a clear beginning and end. It's complicated to think about it in that way, given that the crisis caused by neoliberalism is already underway, and it's already hitting rock bottom. There are islands of plastic rubbish; there are areas of the world where the mining of coltan, for our phones, has already pushed extractivist capitalism to its limit; there are "sacrifice zones", so called because they are permanently damaged and barren. So, to think that the crisis will hit when you run out of water – whilst there you are, shitting into a toilet full of perfectly clean water, not concerned that elsewhere in the world there is no water at all, just horrific droughts – is to think that only when I am fucked over by the capitalism I live and breathe, will capitalism have collapsed.

Diego: This can only be understood from a European city, and from a very comfortable position. People think very teleologically, and capitalism is not a straight line, it's a tumour, neoliberalism is the metastasis, and accelerating it might kill us all, surely?

Lior: Who dies in the process of ending capitalism? Who is it going to affect?

Lucía: And who pays for your water? Where does the food in your fridge come from, and the meat that gets thrown away, and the imported organic food? This idea that there are hundreds of people who, from their place, their context, their daily lives and with their own biased perspectives, can claim that capitalism will come to an end if they use up lots of resources to accelerate the process, reminds me of certain discourses that want to ban sex work, inasmuch they say that you can whore yourself out with your conditions and everything, but poor women cannot be in control of their own work. You can do it, because you've got your privileges, but not them. And so a certain infantilisation arises, an undervaluing of the agency of the poorest people. Linda Porn, a migrant activist for sex work, is working along these lines. She maintains that, in fact, what the *Ley de extranjería* entails is coming here under any conditions. If they offer you the chance to come to Europe, to work for a year in a flat, and they'll sort out the paperwork and pay for your transport, these are the only conditions many women can get. I am referring to women who cannot come to study, those who don't have a scholarship, those who aren't married to someone here. So, these are the options that the *Ley de extranjería* gives you, if you want to

migrate. Prohibitionism calls this human trafficking, and yet Linda Porn (2019) says that a woman who has come from Africa on her own, with two kids, and who has done sex work to survive through this uprooting – that woman knows exactly what she’s doing. She’s not a victim, and you can’t say she doesn’t understand what’s going on. These are the options that certain subjects have if they migrate, given the conditions imposed by the *Ley de extranjería*. They are discourses that look at themselves from the place of speech, undervaluing any other experience. This is manifested in the discourses against sex work, when they claim “the O.T.R.A.S.¹⁰ union of sex workers is a very particular case, but it’s not like that with normal sex workers”. Who are you to say that a woman who has crossed five borders to get here hasn’t been aware of what she’s doing? These are techniques of survival for so many people.

Diego: You think it is possible to think of places of speech, thinking again about identity, that would allow us to have more ways of fighting capitalism that go across the political spectrum. If we think in terms of the left, in terms of anti-colonialism, anti-racism, anti-heteropatriarchy, how can we think of ways of positioning ourselves that might allow for a more comprehensively transversal approach to this struggle, which does not solely revolve around identity?

Lucía: Sometimes it feels like we’re being given orders, like we must form an alliance, and sometimes you just can’t or don’t want to become allies with any given person, under any condition. Here’s where it gets complicated. Many people talk about alliances as if they were the solution for everything, and it’s not that I’m against them, but I do think that there has to be a way to be able to organise alliances that is not all-inclusive. It cannot be the case that I am forced to band together with somebody who produces violence, for example. I cannot be forced to join an alliance as if that alone is an objective, because it is not. Perhaps we could think up forms of alliance that come with conditions. In some feminist spaces in Barcelona they’re thinking about violence and punitivism, to try and imagine forms of reparation that are not punitive. It would be interesting to discuss this, because it is related with what we were saying before about pain: you’re hurt, you’re suffering, so what can we do; it won’t disappear because it’s an experience and you can’t just get rid of it, so what can we do to make it less painful. I was speaking with my friend Patsilí Toledo about this, and she said that an exemplary form of reparative justice would demand, as a condition, that whoever exerted the violence must acknowledge it as an aggression. It’s the first crucial step. And in terms of gender-based violence, to give a more specific example, this happens in less than ten percent of all cases. For every hundred cases of rape, fewer than ten of the rapists actually acknowledge the fact that they have committed rape, and so it is very difficult to initiate a process of reparation in these terms. So

why have I brought this up? Well, because one basic condition for forming alliances could also be to acknowledge the acts of violence that have been committed over time, both today and historically. How the hell could I ever be Margaret Thatcher's sister-in-arms?! Therefore – and I know this is an extreme example, there might be more local, everyday examples – regarding being able to form alliances with certain people who exert violence, they should be alliances with the condition of the assumption of aggression, and the start of a dialogue around reparation. And all of this, all of the above and below, is because the three of us are in positions where we too would probably exert some form of violence, in a given space or context. We'll only be able to join forces if we start doing exercises to break down the hierarchy in our differences too, because I think we need to have differences, just not with such levels of hierarchy. With regards to race, you cannot say to a person who endures racism every day that "we're all brothers, we're all humans". You'd have to stop being human first, or some of us would have to be less human so that others can be more human, and only then, perhaps, could we come together somehow.

Lior: Regarding punitivism, this also leads us to another issue. When I was working alongside Rio de Janeiro's Truth Commission, we spoke a lot about this, about the extent to which it's worth choosing to spend one's energy on trying to get torturers convicted, and also the issue of rapists, or how to criminalise racism and homophobia; all of this forms part of a penal logic that in fact works against the poorest and most marginalised people.

Lucía: And there is no reparation...

Lior: Right, there's no reparation... I have a teacher, of *Gender Law*, who believes in the symbolic aspect of prison.

Lucía: Symbolic aspect?

Lior: The symbolic aspect of prison, how prison works in terms of the collective social imagination, as the way to repress certain conducts. Obviously, this comes at the end of the process, the conduct itself is the final step, the act, the symptom, but prison does not attack the root cause, whatever it is that leads somebody to this conduct.

Lucía: There are indigenous communities in Latin America/Abya Yala, and I'm sure there are thousands of other places too, with experiences of community justice. It works so much better and yet we find it hard to understand, and they demonstrate that prisons are pointless. When I think about whether I want the rapist to go to prison, or whether I'd rather he paid for me to go to therapy, I'd go for the second option because, ultimately, I think it'd be a better form of reparation.

Diego: It's difficult here to think about justice in cases of homophobia, sexism or in particular racism. In the case of migrants, we call the police and the police end up getting violent with us, and we're asking them to defend us. It's clear – I see the police and I feel like hiding. I'm never going to ask the police for help, because they're always going to be against me. Would we call the police to report racism? No. The way you feel when there are police around says a lot about where you stand in a given context. Who is allowed to feel protected by the police? I shout, I run away, but the police never...

Lucía: I agree, but looking beyond the police, beyond the State and the institutions, how are we going to come together? We are at a moment in time when anybody and everybody can feel they have been subjected to violence. First we have to talk about what we mean by violence, to know how to recognise it and how to stitch up the wounds, because they're not just going to vanish, we can only try to repair the tissue that has been broken. But, right now, I think it's time for a beer or two.

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Notes

¹ It is true that, when a person migrates to Spain from outside of the EU, many things are “erased” – university titles lose validity, and many of your social rights cease to exist.

² This Spanish law (the *Ley sobre peligrosidad y rehabilitación social*), in force between 1970 and 1995, was intended to suppress “antisocial” conduct. This included dissident sexual practices (e.g. homosexual acts). (Translator’s Note).

³ <https://kefir.red/index.html>

⁴ <https://vedetas.org/>

⁵ <https://anarchaserver.org/>

⁶ <https://riseup.net/>

⁷ <https://gridspinoza.net/projects/manual-pr%C3%A1ctico-para-investigadoras-desadaptadas>

⁸ Vox is the newest and most visible far-right political party in Spain [Translator's Note].

⁹ <http://institutodelporno.net/>

¹⁰ <http://www.sindicatootras.org/>