

BETTER A CABRONA THAN PRETTY

listening as an intersubjective practice in the project
«Las 7 cabronas e invisibles de Tepito»¹ by Mireia Sallarès

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Abstract

In this article, I analyse how Mireia Sallarès's project "Las 7 cabronas e invisibles de Tepito" breaks with ocular-centrism and brings about the appearance of perception and listening, thus proposing that a form of looking be exchanged for a form of feeling. Following a journey along other routes for the learning and building of knowledge, I propose the imagining of epistemic alternatives, based on intersubjectivity and the affects. The act of listening becomes an attempt at loving the other, as well as their language and its untranslatability, and it urges us to imagine spaces of knowledge intersected with feminist and decolonial practices.

Keywords

Intersubjectivity; listening; body; affects; aesthetics; epistemology; ocular-centrism.

What is truly monumental is life as it is lived, all that you have lived and that shapes you - that is the only thing that has the sheer force of a monument. When I began to get to know these women, I was amazed... they deserved a monument, and nobody had ever made one for them.

Mireia Sallarès

Mireia looked at the seven women sitting around her, at the meeting table in the Centre for Tepiteño Studies. They looked back at her, and they looked at each other. A first encounter, no bonds formed yet, a prelude to many other encounters.

The situation is somewhat tense. She doesn't know them, and nor do they seem to know each other. Mireia introduces herself; she tells them who she is, the things she does, and she shows a fragment of "Las Muertes Chiquitas" ('The Little Deaths')². They exchange glances, searching for acknowledgment that is not there yet. The film ends, and the *7 cabronas*³ look at Mireia. Mireia looks back at them, and she bursts into tears.

— It's been a cloudy morning, the weather will change tomorrow and you'll perk up —says one of the *cabronas*, handing her a tissue.

Mireia brings the session to a close, and she asks them to think about the topics they'll talk about in their interviews with her. They reply that there are things that they simply do not think about, which, in academic terms, could be interpreted as how not everything passes through the checkpoint of rationality and the logos, and that the *cabronas*, as Lacan said of the artist⁴, are ahead of the game. The interest (at a local, neighbourhood level, and now at an academic level) is based on imagining epistemologies that sidestep the focus on discourse, and instead go through our bodies. It is based on plotting to attack the centre from the edges, like breakdowns in meaning that are able to disrupt formal devices of enunciation.

Better a *cabrona* than pretty

A *cabrona* is a woman who fights. It's not that she's bad, or that she goes around getting stuck in, no - that's not a *cabrona*! That's a dumbass! Someone who just goes looking for trouble. A woman should be worth something, and she's worth whatever she wants to be worth. It's like... around here, you don't grumble that life has given you a raw deal... You decide how you want to live your life, and that's the life you've got, because in this neighbourhood you just get on with it⁵.

The Seventh of the 7 *cabronas*

A *cabrona*⁶ is a woman who does not fit the mould of what a woman should be, within a misogynistic and patriarchal system. She is somewhat on the outside, occupying the borderline spaces of a canonical model of submissive and self-sacrificing femininity, using strategies that make moving from one space to another possible. A *cabrona* works hard in the neighbourhood, and she fights against having to depend economically on men. She accepts herself, and she defiantly stands up to everything that tries to suppress her. The *cabronas* are women who are highly self-aware, in a neighbourhood where there is not enough time and money to invest in therapy. They exemplify the difficulties of being a woman in a sexist system, and they work up strategies and masquerades to avoid their own fate, to break from it and twist it. They live in the present, and they have relatively short-term memories: "What a lovely morning, yesterday can go fuck itself", "If life turns its back on me, the best thing I can do is kick it up the arse so that it turns back around."⁷

In Tepito, it's better to be a *cabrona* than be pretty. Invisibility becomes a kind of aesthetic strategy, in a space of possibility, in order to reach a higher degree of agency. The invisible is powerful, because it allows

strategies of resistance against power to be set in motion, and it questions the demands of transparency and clarity that are typical of Western modernity.

The invisibility of the seven *cabronas* is also a nod to the women's unseen, unacknowledged and hidden role as breadwinners and providers in the neighbourhood. When Sallarès's project was presented publically in the neighbourhood, and they listened to the audio recordings of the conversations, people started to wonder about the identity of the participants. The priest of the San Francisco de Asís church stated in a homily that these women did not really exist, and that the life stories they were telling were fictional⁸. This statement, which makes them even more invisible, was contested by one of the *cabronas* who went to confession, identified herself as one of the *cabronas*, and asked the priest not to repeat that they did not exist.

The encounter between Mireia Sallarès and the 7 *cabronas* of Tepito is based on the affects, intersubjectivity and listening. There are hours of audio recordings of interviews that show the transformative potential of entering into dialogue with the other, of opening up, of the ability to be affected, of trading places. How do you turn an encounter that is voice, that is body, into something material? How best to give it shape, and turn it into an artistic project?

Listening is a key element in the artistic projects of Mireia Sallarès. A kind of listening that, in "Las Muertes Chiquitas" and "Las 7 *cabronas* e invisibles de Tepito", is based on exchange, on giving and taking. Mireia talks so that they talk, and at the start of "Las Muertes Chiquitas" she sets herself out as just another woman who will appear in the film: she tells the story of her first orgasm, she talks about her childhood, about violence and love... Women who use their voices to build their own projects are not objects of study, but rather agents who talk and listen, who give and receive, who offer their story in order to affect the other, fully aware that, at the same time, they too will be affected by it. The political power of empathy comes from presenting oneself as a vulnerable subject. As a subject willing to be situated in a position of estrangement, in which part of oneself might be modified. Both projects reveal the importance of listening, understood as an exchange, and the ability of Mireia to speak and listen, placing herself, as she has noted, in the position of the foreigner, of one who does not know.

But listening does not only influence the methodology of the artist's research process, but also the way in which it is made material: this work is presented to the public in three listening sessions at the La Fortaleza Housing Unit⁹, where those gathered, both outsiders and locals, listen to the stories of the 7 *cabronas*.

Proposing the act of listening as a method and a form entails, in this case, demolishing the scopic hegemony upon which the Western history of art and the aesthetic of modernity is built. In this sense, Sallarès and the 7 *cabronas*, each in their own way, and using their own knowledge, break with the hegemonic record of visibility, founded in the eye which both looks and consumes with its gaze, in order to explore that which is unseen. Replacing the pre-eminence of the visual with the act of listening and the affects, emerges as a borderline, decolonial strategy that opens the door to other ways of thinking about aesthetics. It opens the door to an aesthetic of the incalculable, and to amorous transport¹⁰. Hearing proposes and sight disposes (Connor, 2004).

First was the monument, raised at the entrance to the La Fortaleza Housing Unit, a place where some of the *cabronas* lived or had some connection. A concrete monolith with an inscription in a steel plaque: "To the 7 invisible *cabronas* de Tepito, those from before and all those yet to come. Tepito, July 2009."

I didn't decide what it looked like, nor where it would be placed. I wanted to build a pedestal, and I was going to make a nice bronze plaque, there was money for it, but the women changed my mind. They told me it'd just get stolen if it were made of bronze. So I looked into the public pieces in the neighbourhood, and there was nothing left, no plaques, no materials of worth... The *cabronas* said to me: "Around here, you've gotta be more *cabrona* than pretty."¹¹



Monument to the 7 invisible *cabronas* of Tepito.

Photograph: Ramiro Chávez. Tepito, Mexico City, 2010 ©Mireia Sallarès

The monument makes no concessions to the canon of beauty, or to the seeing eye. It is more *cabrona* than it is beautiful, and it had one specific function: to act as the meeting point for the listening sessions of the interviews. Like a plinth without a sculpture, the monument becomes an anti-monument, intended to elevate any *cabrona* who may decide to climb upon it. It adopts the aesthetic of the neighbourhood, and it accounts for how being a *cabrona* is a form of femininity that is very much typical of Tepito.

When I met the *cabronas*¹² I was struck by their sharp tongues and their aesthetic: hair tied up, swept above a face with no make-up, and chequered tabards with a pocket for holding the cash they handle as they work their stalls. The *cabronas*, furthermore, seemed to me like psychoanalysts, because they mirrored me and they would often repeat my words back to me, modifying thus the terms of the conversation.

The statement “it’s better to be a *cabrona* than pretty” leads me to think about how, in Tepito, there exists an inverse masquerade¹³ of femininity: to get by, and to earn the neighbourhood’s respect, they suspend the normative representation of femininity and they avoid occupying the place of the object of desire. The point is not to be what the masculine other desires, and so *cabrona* femininity is not based on the visual, because it is not constructed to satisfy the seeing eye. Instead, their femininity enters into a game with the invisible as a space of resistance and possibility.

Beyond the eye

“I always favour the ear over the eye. I always try to write with my eyes closed.”

Hélène Cixous (1984, p. 146)

Knowledge, and the forms in which we learn in Western culture, are mainly ocular-centric. I am interested in analysing how the work by Mireia Sallarès, “Las 7 cabronas e invisibles de Tepito”, breaks with ocular-centrism and gives rise to perception and listening, proposing that a form of looking be exchanged for a form of feeling.

Joaquín Barriendos has defined the coloniality of the gaze as the very origin of the coloniality that underlies all visual regimes, based on the polarisation and inferiorisation between the observing subject and their observed object (or subject) (Barriendos 2011, p.15). His analyses reveal the ways in which the gaze operates in order to frame, naturalise and perpetuate relations of otherness and domination. For Barriendos, the coloniality of the gaze is a

founding principle of modernity, and modern/colonial ocular-centrism cyclically reinvents a regime that produces and consumes the Other, while hiding the sameness of the observer.

There are two possible options: to break with visuality and try out other forms of perception that eschew the pre-eminence of the eye, or, as Barriendos notes, to look into adjacent scopic paradigms, "inscribed – but invisibilised – by the historical development of modernity/coloniality" (Barriendos 2011, p.25).

In feminist critical theory, authors like Irigaray (1978, 2002) and Cixous (1984) have offered critiques of ocular-centrism, situating it within the paradigm of phallogocentrism. In some of her earlier works, Irigaray highlights the complicity between masculine identity and the supremacy of the eye, and she discusses the privilege of vision over the other senses:

Investment in the look is not as privileged in women as in men. More than other senses, the eye objectifies and it masters. It sets at a distance, and maintains a distance. In our culture the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality. (Irigaray 1978, p.50)

But we can search for logics from other traditions, in which the hegemony of the scopic is not as clear as it is in the Western tradition. I will give as an example the case of the Mexica statue of the goddess Coatlicue, which, after its discovery during the Colony (in 1790) in the main square of Mexico City, was moved to the patio of the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico. In the early 19th century, the authorities buried the statue under the patio, due to the fact that increasing swathes of people were coming to worship it, something which has since been interpreted as the awakening of the earliest desires for independence (Matos Moctezuma, 2010). This turn of events highlights the power held by the statue of Coatlicue as a material presence, which led to the colonial authorities hiding it away.

A form of understanding images that would explain why the presence of Coatlicue is not inscribed within a representational logic, as we would call it in the Western aesthetic tradition, but rather that could be understood as one's being before a palpable entity, before the cosmos itself and in an intersubjective relationship with it. As a visual presence which is not only a look, but that looks back at you, that reflects your looking at it.

The first academics to study Coatlicue were surprised that its base was relief-carved with an image of Mictlantecuhtli. Justino Fernández tells how León y Gama assumed that the sculpture was originally suspended on columns and supported by its elbows, and he adds that "it is curious that it

has a relief carving on its base, so that it cannot be seen, which itself also has a magical meaning” (Fernández 1949, p.209). It is interesting to note how León y Gama imagines the sculpture’s being suspended as the only possible explanation for the carving on its base, given the utterly implausible idea that something might had been carved that was not intended to be seen. Western scopic hegemony makes it enormously difficult to consider the image as something that is not destined to be the object of our vision. But Coatlicue is not here just to be looked at; the sculpture interpellates other senses, it places us, materially, before all of the gods and goddesses that constitute it. It is a palpable presence, which is able to enter into an intersubjective dialogue with whoever stands before it. In this sense, encountering Coatlicue places us before a kind of aesthetic experience that transcends the scopic in order to include the affects and the magical.

The notion of listening implicit in the project “Las 7 cabronas e invisibles de Tepito” (an act of listening that does not consist of hearing, but rather putting oneself in the other’s skin) takes us to a similar place as that of the encounter with Coatlicue, a place where those things which elude visibility can be found, inhabited by presences that urge us to develop other models for perceiving, mediated by the affects. Neither Coatlicue nor the *cabronas* permit visual appropriations that turn them into objects of representation; they break with the supremacy of this distancing eye that so perpetuates the binary subject/object relations of traditional aesthetics. They propose a coming together, a materiality that fosters relations of intersubjectivity and challenges the issue of the hegemony of the neutral eye. A way of feeling, exchanged for a way of looking, mediated by placing the body and the ear, by being physically and affectively implicated in the act of acquiring knowledge.

Sallarès’s proposal, by favouring the acts of meeting and listening, intervenes in our ways of perceiving and facing the aesthetic experience, placing intersubjectivity at the forefront. Sallarès does not go to the Tepito neighbourhood to portray or put the lives of the people there on show, but rather, over the course of the project, they all experience change, the women are transformed by each other.¹⁴

Mireia had to talk a lot, too. Like how you’ve listened to all our lives, Mireia listened to all of us too, and, one by one, she told and retold us her own life. Just like we told her ours.¹⁵

Listening starts with not knowing, which assumes that the other knows that which I do not, and it is linked to a position of vulnerability that allows one to be taken in and affected by the other’s discourse. The way in which this project is presented, by means of listening sessions, brings together

divergent audiences: people from the neighbourhood and people from the world of contemporary art share a space and lend their ears to the invisibility of the *cabronas*.

Well, it really was unusual, loads of people came, they brought them here to La Fortaleza, they sat down, they listened, but... do you know what the most interesting thing was? Seeing their faces, how the people acted. Some of them turned up all rigid, arrogant, but they came round in the end, all 'no fucking way!' Like, maybe they were dealing with the same shit in their own lives, or something? It was staggering to see how people identified with those recordings.¹⁶



Listening session at the La Fortaleza Housing Unit, Tepito, Mexico City, 2009.
Photograph: Natalia Alonzo.

In a press interview with Mireia Sallarès (Sesé, 2013), when they ask her who has taught her what she knows, the artist replies “the 7 *cabronas* of Tepito”, thus breaking with the expected lineage of influential white male artists, and placing right in the centre of the aesthetic experience other kinds of knowledge and other ways of working and learning, that intersect with the affects. By recognising the teachings of the *cabronas*, the artist legitimises other epistemological routes that are outside of the official history of art and academia, and the figure of the genius is replaced with “us women”.

I learnt so much working with those women. When I’m feeling low, it helps me to remember the *cabronas*. They taught me to never give up, to throw

myself into everything I do, and to live in the present. And the need for a sense of humour, too. And to have the guts to speak up, to not let them silence you. They taught me all this I've mentioned, but in very different ways.¹⁷

Ab'al (the act of listening)

The factors of time and care are highly important when it comes to work or research based on epistemologies of the intersubjectivity of listening. However, the current productivist and neoliberal policies of academia, which demand the continuous publication of results and conclusions, make long-term research processes considerably more difficult. Something similar happens in contemporary art, where there are a great many projects that interact with different communities of people for short periods of time, quickly followed by the presentation of the results. This allows for the proliferation of a kind of practice which, despite claiming to be politicised, in fact often reproduces opportunistic ways of doing things which hardly ever take the interests of the relevant community into account.

'Ab'al, as Carlos Lenkersdorf says, is the word that Tojolabal Maya communities use to refer to language in its listened-to form. The Tojolabal people understand language not only from the act of speaking (*k'umal*), but also from the act of listening (*'ab'al*). The author defines the Tojolabal language as dialogical, because instead of just saying I told you, the speaker says I told you, you listened (Lenkersdorf 2008, p.13), because this language requires correspondence, a two-sided act.

Carlos and Gudrun Lenkersdorf, researchers originally from Germany, lived for twenty years in Chiapas with the Tojolabal people; they learnt their language and they translated, alongside them, the New Testament into Tojolabal, responding to a need and request which came from the community itself. Carlos Lenkersdorf, linguist, philosopher and polyglot, recognised in the grammatical structure of this language a kind of logic somewhat different to the languages he was familiar with (the Tojolabal Maya language is an ergative language), which he interpreted as "us-centric" and intersubjective, because it has no objects and everything is deemed to be a subject. The linguistic structure of the Tojolabal language is reflected in the inhabitants' socio-political and community organisation, based, according to Lenkersdorf, on the importance of 'us' as opposed to 'I', and on logics that could be defined as intersubjective.

"[...] the act of listening does not only understand words from the perspective of the other culture, but it also demands that we understand it with empathy, that we respect and also love it." (Lenkersdorf 2011, p.17)

It is an act of listening that entails using the body, to affect and let oneself be affected by the difference, that each act of listening may imply not only a cultural translation, but also an act of love.

The Tojolabal people were, for us, great teachers, and by no means ignorant Indians. They taught us what they knew, and what we didn't know. The classes, furthermore, became dialogic; we learnt their language and they

learnt how to write it down. There was a change in the usual relationship between representatives of the dominant society, or rather us, and the indigenous people. The Tojolabal people became educators and we became pupils thanks to them. (Lenkersdorf 2011, p.15)

The position traditionally occupied by indigenous people in Western culture is modified. Although they have repeatedly been visualised as exotic objects and thus annulled as subjects, due to a kind of intersubjective practice based on the act of listening, the Tojolabal people cannot continue to be objects of study for the researcher, for they are active political subjects. Lenkersdorf says that if we do not listen to the Tojolabal people, we will never discover what 'ab'al is, "which reveals to us another way of perceiving, understanding and living in the world" (Lenkersdorf 2011, p.17). Understanding a culture that is very different to one's own must therefore take into account the act of listening, and the cultural tradition understood as an affective act, an act of love.

Colonial modernity brings with it a hard epistemological core that is imposed on local traditions in the territories it conquers or settles upon. This is why it is necessary to be critical of translation when understood as an act that domesticates and incorporates otherness into the dominant language, in order to think of cultural translations as performative acts or, as Spivak would say, as an act of love from subject to subject (the text or the language would no longer be objects), mediated by intimacy and desire (Spivak, 1993).

In both Lenkersdorf and Sallarès there is an eagerness to understand the irreducible difference of the other, which thus replaces a false desire to be considered equal to those who, for various different reasons, are not equals, and whose equality has traditionally been considered within the logics of assimilation, domination and neutralisation.

Amorous transport changes the terms of research and artistic production. Lenkersdorf and Sallarès, respectively, claim that the Tojolabal people and the *cabronas* are their teachers, in a dialogic exchange in which those who have traditionally carried out the task of teaching are now the learners. A kind of learning that entails listening, understood as being affected by the other's language, and that indicates, to a certain extent, that you can only learn when you love. The act of listening urges us to forget our own language, and learn to speak the other's language, as the only way of approaching their cultural reality. But listening is embedded in the inability to understand the other completely, in the impossibility of being understood by the other. The key point is the acknowledgment of difference, the unleashing of an unfamiliarity that can modify both the speaker and the listener. To consider the relationship as something that forces a rupture, as a union/separation, as a dialogue over borders, more than a joining together.

In Tepito, language, by means of *albur* (i.e. localised, sexually suggestive wordplay)¹⁸, becomes a strategy for differentiation and decolonial resistance in the face of the power of others, whom I can confuse and disorientate with a linguistic code they do not comprehend.

In order to analyse the encounter between Sallarès and the *cabronas*, if we use the metaphor of translation, we understand that language cannot be considered co-opted by subjectivity and by the cultural imprint of its translators. A translator is whoever makes the effort to understand the ever-unsettling difference of the other, whoever is affected by their language, their culture and their ways of doing.



Listening session at the La Fortaleza Housing Unit, Tepito, Mexico City, 2009.
Photograph: Natalia Alonzo.

The *cabronas* speak the language of their neighbourhood. A language teeming with *albur* and slang words, which in many cases are incomprehensible and untranslatable and delimit a very specific bodily and geopolitical position. Language, in Tepito, is also a kind of tool for survival, a strategy of identification and resistance that marks the difference between inside and out. Silvia Artasánchez situates *albur* as a decolonial linguistic practice that allows the subaltern to speak:

in its evolution from the Nahuatl chants, to the pinpointing of the rise of *albur* during the colony, in the mines or the pulque bars in Pachuca, Hidalgo, *albur* was used by the conquered peoples to make fun of the Spanish by using double entendres that could not be understood, as a subversive response to the exploitation exerted by their masters. So the conquered peoples would mock their conquerors, who wouldn't even realise. Note how, by using *albur*, the subaltern speaks. (Artasánchez, 2016, p.8)

This stance is corroborated by one of the 7 *cabronas* when she comments: "As long as they don't take away our way of speaking, we haven't been conquered."

Albur consists of using language to sexually penetrate the other. The winner penetrates, and the loser is penetrated, and given that it is traditionally practiced between males, it is used to emasculate the opponent and place him outside the hegemonic canons of masculinity. Despite the fact that local wisdom deems that women are not allowed to speak in *albur*, assuming their inability to penetrate, the *cabronas* defend their command of *albur* in their dialogues:

We'll give 'em all ten fingers, they've got arseholes too, so we've gotta finger them just the same. Well that's how we're going to fuck 'em up, a good fingering. Do you reckon they'll handle all ten fingers?¹⁹

All the time I spent in Tepito chatting to the *cabronas* about Mireia's project, I occupied, in relation to them, the position of foreigner. A foreigner who spoke some of their language, but not all of it. Marked by an inevitable difference, I left Tepito having taken my fair share of *albur*, "penetrated" due to my condition as a white European woman, and with the sensation of not being able to understand a sizeable amount of what had happened.

According to Artasánchez, *albur* modifies the formal apparatus of enunciation; it alters, albeit momentarily, how hegemonic knowledge is shared out. The *cabronas* always speak from a place that they have to take for themselves, that is not simply handed to them. And in their interaction with Mireia Sallarès, *albur* materialised, it turned language into a difference upon which they had to construct a relation between women and an artistic project. Instead of the ideal of fusion and clarity, a distance, an opacity, a continuous negotiation that is resolved in the act of listening as affective methodology. Distance, forged in this case as a difference in class, origin and skin colour, acts as the pivot point, as a space of possibility for this encounter. Love thus becomes a contamination, a fragmentation mediated by my language in constant dialogue with the language of the other. And the act of listening becomes an attempt at loving the other, as well as their language and its untranslatability.

The encounter between Mireia Sallarès and the 7 *cabronas* of Tepito urges us to reflect on the places in which other forms of knowledge and critique are being produced, that move and affect us, which nowadays are not the spaces or times legitimised by academia. In order to facilitate such a drastic shift, i.e. an epistemological and philosophical about-turn at University and in the world of art, it would first be necessary to learn how to unlearn, to prioritise the times and unpredictable outcomes of such encounters over the demands of any given curriculum. To teach, at University, that which is neither universal, nor university-like. To recognise the other's knowledge as an epistemological principle. To base the generation of knowledge on encounters, and not on individual reflection. To blur one's own outlines, to make oneself somewhat invisible in order, as stated by Lenkersdorf, to let "the subject we are learning about appropriate us in our act of learning" (Lenkersdorf 1996, p.103).

The act of listening, understood as epistemology of intersubjectivity, challenges those academic logics that standardise and commoditise

knowledge, and it urges us to imagine spaces of knowledge that are intersected with feminist and decolonial practices:

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The relation of listening brings at least two people together, bearers of their own social and historical quirks. Their positions on the social stratum may even be diametrically opposite. In my experience with testimonies, I have often felt as if I was relying on stereotypes, which, when you have a conversation, begin to fall apart. Little by little, dialogue gradually weaves bridges over rifts in class, cultural habitus and generation. The perceptions of the interrogators and the interrogated are transformed, in a lengthy process whereby, ultimately, a knowledgeable and intersubjective "us" can but arise. But what role does our voice play in this? What effects does our listening have? How much can it alter, from its distinct position, the voice that is listening? And to what extent does that subject not invade, in turn, the person who is listening?

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2015, p.286)

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Notes

¹ This is a project by the Catalan artist Mireia Sallarès, based on audio recordings of conversations between the artist and seven women of different generations from the Tepito neighbourhood, in Mexico City. It was carried out in 2009 as part of *Obstinado Tepito* ('Stubborn Tepito'), a project curated by Yutsil Cruz in which 15 artists were invited to "carry out specific proposals in the Tepito neighbourhood, based on experience and *in situ* connection" (Cruz, 2012), with the aim of making an impact on the neighbourhood's public space and bringing about "other shared imaginaries of Tepito by means of artistic practice" (Cruz, 2012). Among people of the region, Tepito is usually considered one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods in the capital, a belief propagated by the mass media. It is characterised by the informal economy of its large street market, which has existed since pre-Hispanic times. It is also a *barrio popular* [i.e. an underprivileged yet close-knit neighbourhood, with its own cultural identity], and combative, with a fierce sense of belonging.

² This is a project by Mireia Sallarès about the orgasms, pleasure, pain, power, violence and death of women (note that the expression *muerte chiquita*, i.e. 'little death', has a double meaning, stemming from a French term for 'orgasm'). Over four years, the artist interviewed over thirty women from different regions of Mexico; women of a range of ages, social strata, professions and religions.

³ The closest equivalents to 'cabrona' in English, perhaps something like 'tough bitch', tend to have an overt sexual and/or pejorative connotation which is not necessarily present in this word in the Mexican context. For this reason, and due to this word's central importance in the text, it shall be reproduced here in its original form. See footnote 6 for the author's explanation of the term. (Translator's Note)

⁴ In the Homage to Marguerite Duras, Lacan states: "the only advantage that the psychoanalyst has the right to draw from his position, were this then to be recognized as such, is to recall with Freud that in his work the artist always precedes him, and that he does not have to play the psychologist where the artist paves the way for him". Lacan, J. (1965), *Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras, du ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, Paris, Gallimard, 52, 7-15.

⁵ The original quote, reproduced here due to its use of slang: "Una cabrona es una mujer que lucha. No es que sea mala, que se ande peleando, no..., iesa no es una cabrona! iesa es una pendeja!, que se busca problemas gratis. Una mujer debe de valer, y vale lo que quiere valer. No es de que ay... aquí no

es de que me tocó esa vida... Es la vida que tú quieres vivir, esa es la que tú tienes, porque aquí en este barrio se sale adelante".

⁶ The term *cabrona* is not an insult in Mexico, and nor does it have the same negative connotations as in Spain, and it means, according to the Royal Spanish Academy, that a woman is "experienced and smart". Mireia Sallarès, interested in the shared imaginaries and narratives that this term entails, proposed it to the *cabronas* as the title of the project, and they accepted, given that they identified with it.

⁷ The original quotes, reproduced here due to their use of slang: "Qué bueno que amaneció hoy, chingue a su madre el ayer"; "Si a mí la vida me da la espalda lo más que puedo hacer es picarle el culo para que se voltee."

⁸ Interview with Mireia Sallarès, Barcelona, June 2016. Yutsil Cruz also gives an account on this (Cruz 2012, p.76).

⁹ In 2007, Marcelo Ebrard, then head of the Federal District Government, repossessed the housing unit at "No. 40 Tenochtitlán Street", in the Tepito neighbourhood, claiming that its inhabitants were involved in illicit activities. In front of the media, Ebrard got mixed up, and he instead claimed to have repossessed *La Fortaleza*, a housing block that would go on to symbolise the neighbourhood's resistance.

¹⁰ I use the term 'amorous transport' as an attempt to consider the aesthetic as an intersubjective encounter, in which something of me is seized by the other/otherness, and vice versa. Julia Kristeva notes that "in amorous transport, the very limits of identities themselves are lost, at the same time as a blurring of the precision of the reference and of the meaning of amorous discourse." (Kristeva, 2006, p.2)

¹¹ Interview with Mireia Sallarès, Barcelona, June 2016.

¹² When I decided to work on this project, following several conversations with Mireia Sallarès, I felt it was important to go to Tepito and meet the *cabronas*. With the help of Sallarés and Alfonso Hernández, neighbourhood chronicler and director of the Centre for *Tepiteño* Studies, I visited Tepito many times in 2016 and I made links with some of the seven *cabronas*. I also invited them to speak at one of the sessions of a seminar I gave at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 2016.

¹³ In 1929, Joan Rivière conceived femininity as a masquerade in her conference "Womanliness as a masquerade" (Rivière, Joan, "Womanliness as a masquerade", *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, X, 1929 pp. 303-313). She discusses the case of a woman who suffers from anxiety every time she occupies public space due to her intellectual and professional achievements. She feels like she is taking over a space that is not rightly hers, that she is grabbing hold of the paternal phallus, and in order to rid herself of this anxiety and defend herself, she seeks the approval of the opposite sex. She disguises herself with all the attributes that are considered typically feminine, and she flirts with the men, placing herself in the position of object of masculine desire. Such masquerading is the strategy that many women use so they can be allowed to be placed as subjects of the discourse. In order to be a subject, I objectify myself: I turn myself into the object that the other desires. I am what the (masculine) other desires, or at least I pretend to be what the other desires.

¹⁴ I think that issues of time are very important in this project. One year before she started recording the interviews, Sallarès went to Tepito to meet the *cabronas*, and when she returned to Barcelona she sent them a postcard. Later, there were many lengthy visits to the neighbourhood, and many hours of conversations. The artist and the *cabronas* acknowledged that they transformed over the course of the project.

¹⁵ Interview with the fifth of the 7 invisible *cabronas* of Tepito, Tepito, Mexico City, 2016.

¹⁶ Interview with the fifth of the 7 invisible *cabronas* of Tepito, Tepito, Mexico City, 2016. The original quote, reproduced here due to its use of slang: "Fíjate que fue algo muy fuera de lo común, venía mucha gente, la traían aquí a La Fortaleza, se sentaban, escuchaban, pero... ¿sabes qué era lo interesante? Ver las caras, ver las posiciones de la gente. Algunos llegaban muy firmes, muy prepotentes, y terminaban así, como diciendo: ino mames! O sea, a lo mejor estaban reflejando algún

pedo propio, ¿no? Estaba cabrón ver de qué manera la gente se identificaba con esos audios.”

¹⁷ Interview with Mireia Sallarès, Barcelona, June 2016.

¹⁸ *Albur* is a form of wordplay with double meaning, of a sexual nature, very typical of Mexico and with strong connotations of gender and class, since it is considered a male, lower-class practice. The people of Tepito uphold their neighbourhood as the birthplace of Mexican *albur*.

¹⁹ Interview with the fifth of the 7 invisible *cabronas* of Tepito, Tepito, Mexico City, 2016. The original quote, reproduced here due to its use of slang: “Se comerán los diez dedos, también tienen agujero y también se los introducimos. Pues esta es la manera en la que nos los vamos a chingar, introduciéndoles los putos dedos. ¿A poco se tragarán los diez?”

²⁰ An important place to think about, due to the relevance it has afforded Oral History (and the act of listening), and because it has taken place within academia (albeit at the margins), would be the Workshop of Andean Oral History, founded in 1983 by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and students of the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (Bolivia), mostly Aymaran people, but also some people of mixed heritage. Their mission is research via the methodology of Oral History. See: <https://thoabolivia.wordpress.com/about/>