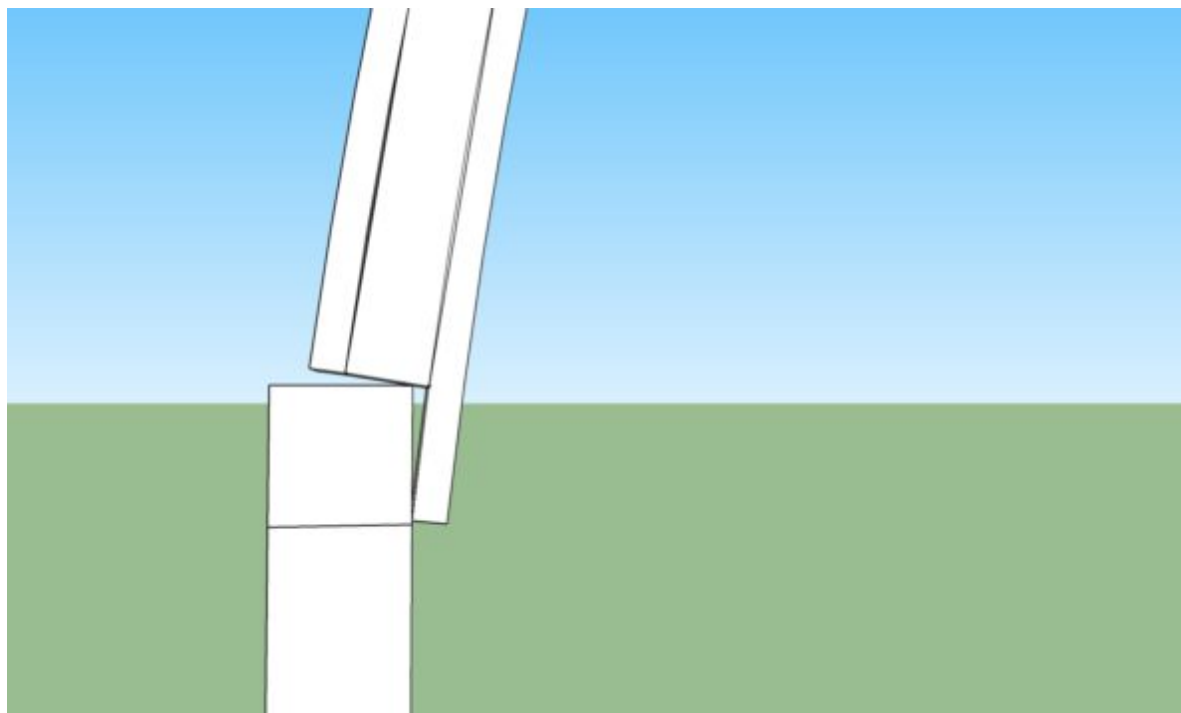


"A DESK IS A DANGEROUS PLACE FROM WHICH TO WATCH THE WORLD" (JOHN LE CARRÉ)

MAGAZINE

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THRIVING IN VAIN, NO. ON ZERO MILE CONNIVANCE [1] AND SYMBOLIC SMUGGLING

Lucía Egaña Rojas - Jara Rocha

An opening – a gap or a span – in a building or a structure can refer to any aperture in a compact surface. The dense compaction of the patriarchal framework on a local scale is easily identifiable, revealing the functioning of its institutions and the distribution of responsibilities in their bosom. The opening isn't a void, but the possibility of measuring the distance between the supports of a structural element. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism and speciesism are structural elements that mark a distance

You're constantly seeing and forming a part of bad institutional practices. Profoundly and mundanely harmful practices. Mostly you neither do nor say anything. You used to think that it was only fear of public exposition; but then you understood that there was an element of self-care. Hopefully, we may furnish ourselves with devices designed to eradicate blame. Very often, these bad practices are supported by subjects with a degree of institutional legitimacy (more than yours in any event). At other times, they are simply produced by inertia: bad practices form a part of the most mediocre of landscapes.

Legitimacy also works as a luxury passport that grants access to spaces of power, that is, it produces subjects suitable to circulate through the structures of power. A compact network of smuggling of symbolic and social capital exists in contemporary institutions. We could say that symbolic capital operates silencing the abuse exerted by those who hold it. Quite likely, their praxis is doubly endorsed: by legitimacy at different levels (almost always a white, European, heterosexual cis man with a Ph.D. in some field, although it could also be a white, slim woman, sufficiently hetero, sufficiently feminine) and by the connivance of their social and professional circles. The legitimacy of their dominant features and the hegemony that divides communities are two of the elements that naturalise and integrate such bad praxis, turning it into just another praxis. A 'normal' praxis.

Possible Outcome No. 5

You became an active part in one of the most influential feminist lobbies. Along with other female companions you admired, you wrote reports for international organisations on the subject of cultural management from anti-patriarchal gazes. You think you're contributing something to humanity from well-known structures, but you've already forgotten the meaning of 'bringing cultural practices down to earth'.

The doors of institutions are triumphal arches: they produce the local and self-congratulatory spectacle of triumphant communities by

when they remain silent. When their thresholds are crossed, the walls

will declare that everything inside is done 'for social transformation'.

At first, nobody took much notice: the crust of naturalised praxes was thick and rigid. By force of repetition, those ways of being in the world had become common. The layers of sediment of naturalised praxes even appeared to be the ground we needed in order to be able to carry on walking together. If you made a hole in it, you ran the risk of losing the ground. Some people feared they would lose their job if they took a stance. Others said they preferred to work on their damage individually, in therapy sessions. And when you tried to communicate the malaise generated and accumulated by the behaviour patterns of an individual fathead, you were accused of over-reacting and of being distrustful, malicious, opportunistic, a feminazi, resentful or simply confused. Then the institution also replicated/increased/reproduced the bad practice: it denied the conflict, silenced and isolated accusers, suggested that it was a matter of power struggles, delayed each communicative twist, was unclear about the tools of power management, etc. Basically speaking, it continued sedimenting forms in the tectonic crust of the institutional patriarchy.

Who can allow himself to discuss or challenge institutional management? Through what channels, in what language, with what strategies, under what terms, with what audience/interlocution, etc.? And yet, who never felt they could allow themselves to do so?

Possible Outcome No. 4

You became a male, hence, one of the voices of reference of the new masculinities. They all became feminists: an important niche that at long last enabled men to be feminists. The most brilliant leading articles sneaked into your in-box and you chose a literary path to cleanse yourself of those complaints.

We could open cracks, but we would also like to penetrate openings.

Not openings designed to celebrate the victory of the sirs of the city's

cultural brand, but apertures recovered to celebrate the affirmative

appear to some as triumphal arches ready to be celebrated.

You seek out other people who can understand and share your criticism. Discussing a problem turns you into the problem. You end up meeting other people in a museum or university café. Having a beer together after a lecture. The (naïve) intention of these encounters is to rally your trans-institutional forces to work explicitly with cases of harassment, abuse of power or opaque cultural management. You believe that by joining a group of people with different types of institutional connections you'll trigger something. You feel as responsible as you are capable, and that's where the delirium begins: you fantasise with a workshop, a meeting with an anti-racist feminist of a renowned (para)academic trajectory, the production of a fanzine, a group-complaint website or a series of direct actions, such as painting graffiti on the door of the institution in which an abusive person works. The doors of institutions condense ideological statements. They could verge on purplewashing. The doors of institutions are still triumphal arches: they still produce triumphant communities inviting and encouraging the quick march of those who only continue to belong if they continue to remain silent. You imagine you produce tools of institutional self-defence. You wonder whether speaking of feminist bureaucracy is an oxymoron. But at the same time, you're unsure whether you're empowered, slightly confused or simply mad.

Possible Outcome No. 3

You don't know how, but you took on the direction of that museum. For a number of years you were the only woman running a cultural space in Barcelona. Now, to cover quotas, there are two more female directors and one gender fluid person.

Possible Outcome No. 1

You decided to give everything up and moved to a platform in the mid-Atlantic to grow vegetables. Sometimes you made silkscreen prints or wrote a fanzine on self-management health. You never wanted anything

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The void left by bodies when they leave a structure. The light that penetrates the gaze of someone who can no longer not see the violence.

If it were an accusation of sexual abuse, the institution would probably call another company (the institution has ceased no announce itself as a 'public institution', resorting to its private quota; most institutions usually have mixed funding resources, which enables them to strategically turn to one or other source) to outsource research. They would hire an expert company in workplace risk prevention. You would imagine yourself smothering the aggressor with a fire extinguisher. This company would demand confidentiality and limit its questions to the physical space of the museum, reducing the case to a 'mere work conflict between two people'. All this is frustrating: the technocratic minions hired for the occasion would simply fulfil their duty, as detailed in the regulations. The institution would operate as the space in which patriarchy displays its banality. Legalistic logic would declare that there had been no abuse. Its jurisprudence would help establish that with these procedures, in fact, there never will be. That's the point: patriarchal justice, at all its scales and in all its administrative forms, is devoted to erasing abuse day in, day out. The aggressor, however, would feel damaged by the accusation and would want to repair his public image. He would think of taking legal action. He would plan to publish something on the subject, perhaps a book on new masculinities. Or brainy excuses about how the discourses of the majority are ideologically affected by certain provincial forms of behaviour that he, as a man, naturalises and believes he will carry forever. And so on and so forth.

If it were a case of abuse of power, the institution wouldn't even outsource the conflict. It would end almost before beginning. Abuse is an everyday landscape: there would be nothing to talk about. Or if there were, it would perhaps be at a therapist's practice, as if it were a case of sexual abuse. Like a sort of therapist, the female labour attorney and specialist in gender recommends non-legalistic repair processes, direct actions on the fringes of the law.

state its intention to design its own protocol for different forms of

aggression: sexual, sexist, racist, homophobic, ableist, ageist and classist.

The institution would print out its protocol on A4 sheets and put them up on doors and in corridors, publicising their posters through Instagram stories, perhaps publishing a few tweets. Contradicting its silence, the imposed silencing, and in spite of the A4 sheets and of the political correctness expressed by the social media, women are still intimidated in the institution ('you're a bad worker') and migrants are still excluded ('research projects are only for nationals').

Possible Outcome No. 6

The burn-out, or psychological and physical consequences of the entire complaint process, was a long-drawn-out process. You spent a great deal of your salaries and resistance boxes on therapy for many many years. You lost your jobs, organised social gatherings and ended up carrying out performances.

Moving symbolic capital from one area to another of the structures. Removing, injecting legitimacy from top to bottom. Patriarchal and colonial smuggling when the arch that some consider a monument to triumph and a recognition of its survival is considered by others a checkpoint or customs house of rugged materiality, sticky, hurtful, exclusive or directly incapacitating. Neither glass ceilings nor head bashing against the wall: the trans-feminist struggles in Barcelona will either be self-legitimising or they won't exist. They expose openings, spans, gaps in the institutions that continue to defend and take care of so many aggressors.

You will have wondered about the meaning of the word 'repair', whether this notion can exist in certain contexts. Whether it would pathologise certain lives and experiences, blocking their transformation into other ways of being in the world. Perhaps throughout your life you've misunderstood the implications of *repairing*. You will have carried on wondering.

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You founded a cultural project in conditions of self-legitimation. An institution or, rather, an extitution. A publishing collective, for instance.

A female friend of yours who is directly affected by the abuse, renounces the institution. The institution expresses surprise and sadness (can the bodiless organs of institutions feel anything?). Your feelings are selective: you feel sad for the loss but you also feel angry at the accusation of abuse that led to your friend's renunciation. While the other female workers get organised to complain, the institution at last expresses its indignation at what it perceives to be a form of 'blackmail'. Throughout the conflict some people renounce and the accused renews his position, assuming more responsibilities than ever. The designed protocol is not applied: if the aggressor is reinstated, the institutional aggression is reinstated. The triumphal arch of patriarchy is systematically rebuilt thanks to the celebration of the most mundane and commonplace victories. Or to the celebration of the culture of silence and/or pretence.

Professional colleagues from your affinity network showed their support and involvement in the struggle, especially by e-mail or instant messaging. In person too, though not publically. Broadly speaking, they feel that their perception of the conflict is partial and that they don't have the necessary first-hand information to take a public stance. Or else they are afraid of losing their delicate balance as members of Barcelona's precarious cultural sector. Could this be interpreted as connivance or is it just self-care? You read a tone of defeat and concealment in all this.

Possible Outcome No. 2

You had two children and these subjects simply ceased to interest you. For a long time you belonged to a film club, convinced as you were that everyday cultural practices and the visibility of those who practice them shouldn't be assumed to be correlative.

This is how an arch is erected. What triumph, triumph in the face of what or over what? They're not doors that define the relationship

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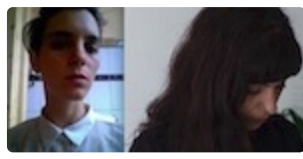
semiotic and material conditions of what is considered triumphant for a given community, in a given territory, and subjected to given rules of governance. There are triumphal arches everywhere. We are made up of molecular triumphal arches. The genealogies that they want us to extend are no more than long strolls under robust arches. The tools of totalitarian innovation are simply props for supporting heights.

You've received a written invitation to give a talk at an art centre in the framework of an international seminar on power and governance in Barcelona. You'll be paid 200 Euros (including tax) and, although you're not freelance, you have to issue an electronic bill. You write to some of your female friends to collectivise the situation (not that of the bill but the commission). You'd like to present something in a voice that has been divested of individuality, but the institution *wants* a typical contribution: a single person, presenting (hopefully in Catalan or English) a one-off subject before a silent audience. You insist so much that finally you're invited to present the essay at a meeting with thirty Fine Arts students. You don't like to think that your expression will be 'reduced' to an audience defined by its belonging to an official art school. Then you suggest not taking part yourself and inviting a few people and/or collectives that would never be summoned to that meeting behind closed doors to eclipse the thirty students. It's a way of making the workings of the politics of closed doors and buffer walls partially obvious. You think of people who don't usually penetrate those walls because of the atmospheres they inhabit, the roles they play, their places of origin or their colour of skin, the languages they speak and how they speak them, their ages, the forms they choose, etc. Most of these people, obviously, refuse. They have no interest in taking part in this space, not even as "inquirers". They prefer to speak of power and governance in other contexts, to set the conditions themselves. In short, you're the one who appears with tentacles at the zenith of a certain contemporary, white, heterosexual, cultural institutionalism, the same institutionalism that demands you be yourself (or you, for instance), with your own name, surname, symbolic credentials and your body actually there. Everything vertical and contained, everything standard. Beginning with yourself. A still photograph to capture the modes of reproduction of the Eurocentric and androcentric character of the

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[1] In this text, that is greatly inspired or influenced by certain ideas expressed by Sara Ahmed, we use the Spanish term *connivencia* as a possible translation of the English word *complicity* given that the Spanish term *complicidad* has positive meanings it doesn't have in English and which do not correspond to the concept posed by the author. This possible translation of the term was suggested during the break in the first session of the Feminist Academic Reading Group held in January 2019 in Barcelona. Moreover, it is important to point out that some of the arguments and sensitivities that emerge in this essay have developed collectively over the course of rich conversations and a study session with a group of kindred spirits in recent months. See, too, a brief remix of this Wikipedia article <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vano> (<https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vano>). You may copy, spread and reuse this material as long as you do so without commercial or institutional gain.

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Lucía Egaña Rojas
Feminism, rubbish, pornography, low-fi, writing, free software, image, tarot, sex, Internet, video, hacking, sexuality, spic, trans-feminism, gender, urban cycling, DIY, art, technophilia, technophobia, esotery, real time, residues, collage, handpoked words, errorism, Spanglish. Jara Rocha is a cultural agent in interdependence with others. For example, along with Femke Snelting she is now responsible for the Possible Bodies project; with Nicolas Malevé she is researching the promises of algorithms of artificial vision; together with Xavier Gorgol and Kym Ward she studies the somato-politics of voice production in the Vibes & Leaks workshop series; and with Laura Benítez and Helen Pritchard she is straining the notion of partial repair and exploring the notion of queer analytics with regard to experiences of damage. She often works in the spheres of the politics and aesthetics of the infrastructure and logistics of textual masses, tending to focus on the semiotic-material needs of cultures from a trans*feminist sensitivity. She also explores non-formal forms of learning in collective situations such as the Euraca, Teaching to Transgress, The Relearn Summer School, and The Darmstadt

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