

**Oh, Echoes of Shadows of Memories of Songs. (\*)**

**Autobiography as a performative act.**

*There are important senses in which "queer" can signify only when attached to the first person. Queer is as queer does. It's all about performative actions. Autobiography can be a performative act.*

*Alone of the things that queer can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically.*

*Homosexuality, its strongest associations, as we have noted, are with effeminacy, transvestism, promiscuity, prostitution, continental European culture, and the arts.*

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

*Let this be the epitaph of my heart  
Cupid put too much poison in the dart...  
Who will mourn the passing of my heart  
Will its little droppings climb the pop charts.*

The Magnetic Fields

*Cambio de idea. Cambio de forma. Cambio de tiempo. Cambio de sentido.*

Astrud

## dig me out

I've been very fond of music and dancing since I was very young. My family from my mother's side used to sing flamenco. I remember a time without a record-player, then my parents bought a Grundig pickup in the early sixties, and immediately after that, television came up. At first, we didn't have a set and we used to go and watch it at a hotel as if we were going to the cinema, it was such an amazing thing; later, my parents bought our first TV set around 1963. I say that because I heard of Kennedy's murder on TV, I like being able to answer the question *where were you when President Kennedy was murdered?*, which is maybe the first international American question I'm aware of. Access to television was highly important for Spain opening up to popular culture massively. Having a record-player, a TV set and a car was sheer luxury in here at that time. In the mid-sixties, The Beatles were a massive cultural phenomenon everywhere, including Franco's Spain. Living near the Costa del Sol with its British tourists and a couple of American military bases (Morón y Rota) in Andalusia, my siblings and I were quickly introduced to American and British rock, folk and pop music, to soul and Motown our big favourites. I'm only going to mention women for the purpose of this article, Aretha Franklin, Janis Joplin, Joan Baez, the Mamas and the Papas, the Ronettes, The Shangrillas, Petula Clark. We also had some Spanish versions of these songs. I dreamed of being a hippy, a yeah-yeah-girl. The influence from France was big then, the existentialist Juliette Greco, Francois Hardy and then, came Jane Birkin, after May 68. In my late teens and early twenties, I loved listening to both Latinamerican: the great Violeta Parra, Spanish, French and Italian protest and pop songs, Nova Cançó and counterculture from Catalunya, Guillermina Motta, along the Velvet Underground and Patti Smith, and Nina Hagen, Cecilia and the influential duo Vainica Doble. And of course there

## dig me out

were films and musicals like *Hair*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Tommy*, *The Harder They Come*, *Cha-Cha*, *Cabaret*, *America Grafitti* ... and *Saturday Night Fever*. Then I was crazy about glam, even if it was mainly a straight guy thing. Then, came the Talking Heads and Tom-Tom Club, Laurie Anderson, Soft Cell, The Human League, and the Pixies (Tanya Donnelly).

The Spanish movida started in the late seventies. Being already twenty-four I thought I was perhaps too old and too leftist (progre as my generation was knew, shortening for progressive) to belong there, after all the most emblematic song of the movida was *Para Tí* (For You ... that has just turned fifteen), although I went to many gigs. I listened to Conchita Piquer and Olga Ramos, old singers of the cuplé and the copla. I was very lucky of being friends with Antoñito el primo (the cousin), a big fan of music that later started the first massive yearly festival The Asparagus Rock, being asparagus, the most important vegetable cultivated in his hometown Huétor-Tájar, Granada. It was an activist, political event. I listened to a lot of music in the second half of the 80s, thanks to two male friends: one Spanish and one English. I mostly listened to punk and postpunk. In 1989, I went to London with a grant and began to know more about punk women in music and the riot grrls. I met the first woman who was really a big music fan when we were both taking our M.A. in English at Queen Mary College, ... and she was Joy Press!!! So, I read *Blissed Out* by her boyfriend Simon Reynolds.

When I participated in a visual art exhibition *100x 100: Ten Andalusian Women* at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Sevilla, 1993, I made a phonocollage, recording in a cassette 90 minutes of music made by different women, the

## dig me out

tape was stolen thirty minutes after the opening began. I also made and 500 copies of a fanzine with the translation of the lyrics of women such as: Michelle Shocked, P.J.Harvey, The Sugarcubes, Throwing Muses, Patti Smith, My Bloody Valentine, Hole, The Lunachicks and Diamanda Galás.. In the beginning of the 90s I also was a big fan of Algerian, Cheika Rimitti, and The Master Musician of Jajouka, men that danced in a way that seemed highly camp to me. A couple of years later, when Joy Press and Simon Reynolds published the book *The Sex Revolts*, 1995, I tried to find a publisher to translate it with no luck. All that I could do was to write the article that follows in a lesbian fanzine and make a discography with the music made by women that I was so crazy about... I continued with my phonocollages and my translations of lyrics, like two hundred songs, that I passed to friends like the artist Vicky Gil that played drums with the women collective Drumcore in New York City. It was pre-Internet's times, so getting hold of the lyrics was pretty hard, just done by listening carefully and asking for help to British friends. And I used to go to lots of concerts..., most of the time still with male friends only, sometimes, on my own.

I met some artists from the Basque Country in the mid-nineties, thanks to Azucena Vieites, and through her I got acquainted to the work of Chico y Chica, the demo tapes of El Dúo Estático, Hidrogenesse, Astrud, Feria and dominioaustrohúngaro's activities. Most of the books on the movida and the articles written on the electronic and pop music I truly hated, so I started to link these works to researching on feminism and popular culture, together with queer theory, which led me to think and write about music and subcultures. To me, the most interesting musicians of the movida (the mid-70s, the 80) and of the 90s and the

## dig me out

present decade, could be read as a renewal of the best tradition of the protest singers of the 70s (Guillermina Motta, Vainica Doble, Sisa, Pau Riba, Cecilia) in many way. They were so poorly contextualized and so badly misinterpreted by the rock and electronic macho press, and it made me so furious that I felt the urge to do something about it. I had to wait for some years to give a lecture on feminism and popular music *Hot Topic is the Way we Rhyme* in the seminar *Queer Critique. Dissident Narratives and the Invention of Subjectivities* invited by Beatriz Preciado and organised by Uniaartandthought, Sevilla, 2007.

[www.uniaartandthought.com](http://www.uniaartandthought.com) I'd like to thank Alicia Pinteño that insisted I had to talk about music and feminism. It led to my first project on music and gender: Dig me Out, in collaboration with theorist and DJ Rosa Reitsamer from Vienna whom I met at the event Prologue II, Graz, 2006. Our two meetings in Graz and Vienna in 2006 and our emailing each other since then, has been a great help I'd like to acknowledge. I had for the first time a consistent interlocution on feminism and popular culture.

I'm writing it mainly to explain the difficulties of a 54-year-old woman, who had wanted to have a women band aligned with punk-political-arty-pop in the 80s, couldn't find soulmates to do so, among the many women heavily involved in feminist and leftist politics. But anger and sadness had to be transformed into political action, *autobiography can be a performative act*, and that's one of the reasons of initiating this project, that has been feasible through networking from a feminist and queer theoretical and artistic background. Trying to open up spaces for feminism and women who love music and still have limited access and lack the context to be artists; hoping to translate the work of theorists like Angela McRobbie, Susan McClary, Joy

## dig me out

Press, Sarah Thorton and Richard Dryer, among others; to agitprop a conceptual frame to music and its link to other activities on popular culture: like fashion, performance, the visual arts, lyrics as poetry, and to insist on the highly due empirical research about the way the new economies of the do-it-yourself, the small popular culture enterprises and free-lancing survive, and create micropolitics, micro-creative industries at this stage of capitalism. And to give their right place to musicians and other artists that are often being attacked with the homophobic, antifeminist and reactionary labels of "soft, superficial, banal, hedonistic, narcissistic, copy of the 80s...", another way of saying effeminate, feminist, gay and queer. They deserve to be thanked for their uncompromising intelligence, political astuteness and generosity. Quite a few of them are in this project, which is really a modest beginning to be continued..

(\*) Taken from the song *When my boy walks down the street* by The Magnetic Fields.

María José Belbel Bullejos, 2008

dig me out