

Pripublikarrak isn't a rock band

by María Mur Dean from Pripublikarrak

When María José Belbel invited us to participate in the project Dig Me Out, that relates to music and feminism, our first thought was to tell her that we don't really have much to do with pop music, although when Arakis, the director of Centro Montehermoso in Vitoria-Gasteiz, introduced us to Beatriz Preciado as Pripublikarrak, she took for granted we were a music band. It was funny for us the fact that, either the name of our collective, our looks or any other reason would have projected the idea of being a music band. We often have asked ourselves what kind of music Pripublikarrak would make. But even if we have never thought about becoming musicians or choreographers, it is true that music has played a significant role in our projects, more significant than what it might seem at first sight.

Pripublikarrak is a Bilbao-based group that proclaims itself and begins its work as a humble heritage of the myths of Remedios Zafra's Netianas, Donna Haraway's cyborg and Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subjects with the aim of helping to deconstruct the patriarchal system. It was created in 2005 as a mere concept and as a way of reflecting on a number of issues, as a dialectical interplay to rebuild as a collective, ideological ground at an individual and social level. We quickly became a collective of women that from its inception, set in motion multidisciplinary projects relating arts and feminisms. Our goal was the creation of a space of meaning that focuses on the retroalimentation, the direct feedback, between the private and the public, and the deconstruction of gender as

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gender is a normative construction. Pripublikarrak doesn't establish anything new to what other women have lived, experienced or theorised about, it doesn't vindicate the new, but it tries to add up different issues together, as in a cocktail, to vomit it through contemporary art. We pretend to analyze the different ways in which representation and the art system itself work.

In this sense, although art is the context from which Pripublikarrak stems, its field of action has expanded thanks to all the collaborations in every single project we've put forward, food-for-thought projects that always step aside the white cube. And that's the way music has been part in Pripublikarrak's projects, through professional musicians that have collaborated with us... but it is not just that... If we carefully dissect both cultural fields (visual arts and music), we soon find out that both prompt out similar debates, debates in which Pripublikarrak usually takes sides.

Music has a massive popular impact that the visual arts lack, which means that the music industry is more developed with a higher degree of professionalization, sharing, at the same time, similar lack of resources with other artistic endeavours. Both, the singer and the artist, attract the same type of mysticism. "Music seems to be the most appropriate artistic manifestation to express the concept of Wholeness, the Absolute and the Idea, its condition being asemantic and aconceptual", says Nuria González in her study on Theodor Adorno's On Music.

So, singers and visual artists are geniuses blessed by the gods. Allelujah! Therefore, talent, the huge fallacy that marks a difference into its practitioners, the valid

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(chosen artists, with a majority of them putting up with poor labour conditions since it seems that art feeds their soul and they don't need to satisfy human needs, because we shouldn't forget they are gods) and no valid ones (the rest of the human beings). The talent and the technical expertise also define what art is and what it is not. That was the reason that Pripublikarrak's first project Optikak (www.optikak.org), was conceived as a dispositive, a framework to enable 35 women to take pictures of their everyday life instead of the organisers being the photographers themselves or asking artists to take them.

Punk brought us the DIY ethic to destroy this notion of the supreme talented human beings and gave us the possibility of having access to the modes and means of production and of bringing down these pagans gods. This is something remarkable, as long as we skip that contemporary and ongoing contemporary attitude according to which everybody knows everything, can do anything and has an opinion about everything. We vote to select Rosa de España to go to the Eurovision contest, vote for the supermodel, the audience makes the decision ...we are told, there is nothing more democratic than TV as it calls for participation non-stop, and we even had the likes of Norma Duval publishing her memoirs. So we can be easily trapped between this "meritocracy" and the "we all know about everything" attitude. If it is difficult for anyone to give an opinion about the best way to conduct a heart operation, (although it would be hardly surprising if shortly we have these operations on TV and we are asked to send a sms-s to decide what and how operate), why are we entitled to decide then about the skills of somebody trying to find her or his way for a space in music if we haven't got the faintest clue?

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The first approach of Pripublikarrak to music ,was precisely through the audience in the Project Optikak, where apart from asking the 35 women participants for pictures of their everyday life, they were also asked to select a song that were relevant for them. These listeners, which are neither unbiased nor without a sense of history, chose songs that other people had composed and played but they have made them part of themselves. They have decided the songs were the soundtracks of their lives.

Our next approach to music was through the Project Galleteras, memoria activa(www.galleteras.net), which was commissioned by the Bilbao Town Hall to give voice to the women who used to work and still work in a factory that make cookies called Artiach biscuits. They have fought and still fight for their rights. We made a video to record their memories and every day struggles, and instead of using any music already recorded, we asked composer Aranzazu Calleja to make the music for the video. Aran, as she's known among friends, has already produced some soundtracks films of varied length and footage. We usually work with women and always pay them (even if it is a symbolic fee when we are working on a tiny budget). We wanted to reflect on women and work, women that in many cases, Calleja's case being one of them, work in male dominated professions. Some people tell us that we are giving priority to gender instead of looking for the best professionals. We always answer it is not so, it is just a matter of researching more. The music of Aranzazu Calleja perfectly fits the video's intention and becomes another testimony of a woman's work. DJ Baseline, took also part in the project playing her selection in Artiach's old factory.

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Later on, in Seville, we participated in the exhibition Panel de Control, curated by Fundación Rodríguez within the organization Zemos 98, with Shift ctrl, a project centered on the sonic part not on images. We try to analyze fear as a way of self-control for women, when they try to live the city. We organized some radio sessions (in the free radio Tastas Irratia from Bilbao and in Fluido Rosa of Radio 3). Sounds seem to us a more precise way than images to represent something so unconscious and difficult to apprehend as fear. As a matter of fact, in every horror movie the star and the audience are at some point, in total darkness surrounded by strange noises. Sounds have this capacity of interiorizing meanings and projecting our own personal images, of setting to work our own imagery whereas images convey this to a lesser extent.

We participated in the art program Idensitat with the project Femzine Manresa, it was our first project that included a concert at the closure act. We developed a fanzine which was a crossed game of questions and answers between the collectives and individuals that deal on feminisms in Manresa, Cataluña. We discussed the relationship between making music and fanzines, vindicated the role of women as creators as a way of thanking all the women participants their collaboration and generating a moment to gather women that work along the same political lines but don't know among themselves or they don't usually collaborate together.

It is true that the control over the production and transmission of music is still done by men, being the most extended role for women that of the consumers, as Angela McRobbie and Simon Frith discussed in their research (see the highly recommendable book La perspectiva de género y la música popular: dos nuevos retos para la musicología by

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Laura Viñuela). For that very same reason, it is highly important for us to stress the presence of women like Anari that produce both music and cultural constructions that enable different women to identify with.

For each of us, Anari's lyrics and songs have had a huge impact in our personal lives. So having her performing in Manresa perfectly fitted with the idea we had of an intimate concert, gratis and open for everybody at The Bar Bermell, where all the people who were coming were as heterogenous as the people that had participated in the project: from 83-year old Rosa Rius to the teenagers of the Clit Column, the Gestalt therapist Mireia Marin, the male collective Grup d'homes contra el patriarcat (Group of men against the patriarchy), etc. The language used in the project was mainly catalan, and we thought it important to share with them our own language: the euskera (Basque). I love the lyrics of the song Zebra nekez nau hainbeste aldatu / zebra naiz oraindak / lehen zuria arra beltzez / ta orain beltza arra zuriz... And the concert really moved us, even those who hadn't previously known her work.

Our last project, Rolling Rolak was carried out in collaboration with the cultural web Nontzberri from the Basque Country. It is the project we have made in which the presence of music, and its ability to create meanings, has been a key factor in this project. It is an analysis on the construction of gender and its possibility to be represented. The project offered two formats on line (a photography quiz www.argazklik.com and the photographic chain "camera crossing") and an off line format, the seminar The Production of Gender and Bodies. To encourage the participation in the quizz and set some possible thematic lines, we invited to participate five artists

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whose work is focused on these issues, among them Bianca Casady from the band Cocorosie. We love the songs and live shows of the Casady sisters and also the way they analyse gender. As Blanca says in an interview in a web about about the way lesbians are represented in the media, www.afeterellen.com : "My sexuality is explored in my work," Bianca said, "[but it's] more my gender than my sexual preference. It's really not about being gay or ungay, it's about being yourself in a patriarchal, heterocentric, heteronormative, monotheistic world. It's always the changing question and answer, and it's the forefront of my work." Bianca Casady has participated in our project as part of the collective Voodoo-EROS with a series of pictures to go over the subject: Inter-Especies, a greenish alien creature that is beyond and above the discourses on gender issues.

The quizz argazklik.com has become an interesting archive of pictures with 700 series and more than 30 countries represented. There is a series that I am particularly fond of because it deals with the roles that rock has constructed in their male and female audience. "Are the daughters of rock and roll happy?" by Luis Melón Arroyo, which discusses the role of the groupie imposed to women by the music industry. So borrowing Mc Robbie and Frith words again in their text "Rock and Sexuality", it is important to research the way rock generates ideology, not merely articulate a predetermined ideology existing outside the rock's world.

This way, although cultural discourses are universal constructs used by the hegemonic powers in a foucauldian sense, they can also be used by other groups in a subversive mode to promote alternative models through

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counternarratives and carnivalesque celebrations. But, as Laura Viñuela points out, these subcultures are often related to age and are, therefore, ephemeral, a passing fade. As Viñuela says: "If subcultural identity could work in the long run, its impact on the change of gendered roles in society would be more evident now".

For the project Rolling Rolak, a project about gender roles, we invited Tender Forever to give a concert, free for the audience, at the venue Bilborock, Bilbao. The concert was meant to be the end of that long and ambitious project in a celebratory mood, to open up the project to a larger public and also to thank our collaborators their participation. Tender Forever seemed a perfect option for us, we love the songs and its lyrics encompass micropolitics. The concert was fabulous and the audience fell in love with her. After the concert, I asked Melanie Valera, the woman who is Tender Forever, if she's conscious that her ironic declarations of love to Beyonce in public, or her intimate love songs to women that we could or wish we could be, generate new constructions and spaces for identification and there are part of short distance battles. She agreed with me and said that she fully embraces the political in her songs. Tender Forever, as Cocorosie, Peaches, Anthony and the Jonsons and many others, build with their song and mise-in-scene other imageries with whom we can identify, leaving behind what the mainstream musical canon want us to enjoy.

A lover dedicated to me the song Good Friday by the Cocorosie in the middle of a thunderstorm in the region of Levante, I sang in response to it, close to her ear "Today it's your Birthday" by Tender Forever and another time, we

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shared over the phone "Heart Broken Forever", another song of Tender Forever. I firmly believe that there are certain love songs, and certain love, as certain kind of sex that can be political and I also believe in emancipatory practices that build from the private and most intimate part of ourselves, public and visible politics that go back again to the personal and alter it, influence the construction of personal and collective identities in a continuous and endless process that maybe is more important than the final goal. And music is a social process that has the ability to construct it... so does art ... as a virus ... as a plague...