

# Notes towards a transfeminist technology

by Lucia Egaña Rojas (1)

This text began to gestate in the shower at home, after Elena called from her iPhone 4 to my Samsung (Galaxy Y Pro Young) GT-B5510 to inform me, amongst other things, that I would not be allowed to read a text for my speech at the Post-Apocalyptic Porn Days.

*It is what is used that is told, not the ways of using it. Paradoxically, these become invisible in the universe of generalised codification and transparency.*

de Certeau, (2000, 41)

*The power of parody lies in, precisely, the conversion of the practise of repetition into a posture that endows us with political power.*

Rosi Braidotti, Un ciberfeminismo diferente.

*I have seen things that humans will become accustomed to: playing cyber sex in Internet, I have seen porn in internet, thousands of pages at a megabyte per second. All these moments will be lost ... in the heteropatriarchal era .. as if washed away ... by the rain.*

paraphrase of Blade Runner

In the shower I start to think about writing as a technology for fixing a discourse. What would the methods be for the discursive elaboration of transfeminism ? While I avoid as much as possible the use of soaps and chemicals whose contents I am unaware of, protected as they are by the code that ends in the word petrol, I declare : transfeminist writing would have to include, as well as texts, blogs, performances, state updates and tatoos, vaginal discharges.

Is there methodology in technology ?

In the Puerto Hurraco after hours, Majo asked me to repeat the talk that I gave at the meeting “Women involved with Technologies” but, of course, to repeat it on the 10th birthday of PostOp would be like shitting outside the basket. That talk was made in the context of an association of guys who were filling their program (with the best of intentions) with some “examples” of women who work with machines. A noble (and perhaps for this, conservative) gesture to visibilise the work of bio-women in the field of technology. I took the opportunity to quote the conference that Audre Lorde read in the University of New York in 1984 where she states that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984). By “tools” Lorde refers to the classification of “feminist, black and lesbian” which provoked, within feminism (and with the praiseworthy intention to give them an space of visibility exclusive to their condition), a division in categories which excluded her from being able to refer to other important areas which were not solely those which refer to her condition of lesbian black feminist.

This text then is based on recycling, because from the material in that text I will be constructing this one. Here, in this post-apocalyptic meeting, I am not going to assault you with numbers (2) nor with experiments in technological self-education by bio-women, nor with my own self-education, always lacking, in the field of “new technologies”. The recycling method of this text will thus be the feminist method, the free software method and the method of many contemporary resistences, which are

continually recycling themselves, because, finally, nothing is completely new.(3)

I announce that I speak from the precarity of broken machines, I speak from the altered state of error, I speak as a porn-worker of code, as an outsider. I speak from the smartphone that I bought with my first winnings as a prostitute; I write, with Open Office, love letters to hackers that I don't know. Technology and science are words taken with anger from the definition in the dictionary. I speak this language mediated by the computer and online dictionaries as if bitter milk was coming out of my mouth. Technophilia and technophobia are two forces that fight within me. They are like the bacteria in the vagina: the danger is in their unbalance (and in these cases I use injections of kefir). I speak as a spammer, a streamer, a blogger and switcher.

To speak of technology is like speaking about those concepts which have two and a half million interpretations and so become pure potentiality. One could say "everything is technology" like saying "everything is subjective", to arrive, finally, at saying very little.

So the problem is to identify the concept, get rid of the noise that isn't ours around it. Redirect it, cuddle it to a shape which can be applied to our contingent monstrosity.

Just the crossing between gender and technology has so many possible readings (like access to technology, the gender gap, as a disciplinary construction, as techno discourses etc.).

To make a definition is in itself a political gesture, to pervert the laws from which the words were constructed, to change the components of its circuit, and as a result, make them work in another way.

In this sense, to start with the definition from a mainstream media is the first step and one of the easiest. To start with the wikipedia definition of technology, a media that we often consider legitimate due to its collective methodology of construction although this doesn't mean that its content escapes from closed and conventional ideologies.(4)

From wikipedia (5) :

Technology is the totality of technical knowledge, organised scientifically, which permits the design and creation of goods and services which help to adapt to the environment and to satisfy both the necessary essentials and the desires of humanity. It is a word of Greek origin, *τεχνολογία*, formed by *téchnē* (*τέχνη*, art, technique or profession, which can be translated as capacity) and *logía* (*λογία*, the study of something). Although there are many different technologies the term is often used in the singular to refer to a collection of them or the collection of all of them.

I want to establish some frameworks over those that are used in this definition:

1) The definition presupposes a division between the natural environment and that created by technology, and while it is interesting to think about oneself as something unnatural, the definition continues presupposing that there are things which are natural (like the environment), establishing an antagonistic relationship between them. In this sense it is not considered that nature can be constructed by technology (Preciado, 202, 123) but that their relation is a struggle that damages one or the other. Where it seems that one doesn't let the other live well.

2) The definition presupposes a scientific organisation of the generated knowledge. Although we can relativize the scientific, today it continues to be something concrete and a method that daily confines us as if it was the only valid path to legitimacy.

3) It is an utilitarian and progressist description (in the sense that it is oriented towards "progress"), orientated to industrialisation, and though industry assumes that technology can operate as a prosthesis of the body it always keeps these operations in the framework of capitalist productivity, reserved for the organs of industrial work (for example replace the broken hand of a worker by a mechanical one so

he can carry on working). (Preciado, 2002, 131).

4) It introduces the theme of “humanity’s desires” but then abandons it.

There are various types of technology (just as there are various types of feminisms), and the comrades of PostOp announce it in their statement (6) “all of us are constituted by precise social technologies that define us in terms of gender, social class, race”. (7)

How not to fall into a complete neoluddite denial of technology ? How to use what we want, tactically, how to turn it to our ends ? What should transfeminist technology look like, its use, its definition ? Here are some leads :

1) A transfeminist technology is NOT a competition of dicks.

What we call a “competition of dicks” is, in technological spheres, such a habitual practise that it is already naturalised (like the lust for results). In the competition of dicks it doesn't matter what you DO with yours , just it's size and how long it takes to become hard. It's a matter of effectivity and presence from a single viewpoint. In the competition of dicks nothing that isn't a dick or meat counts (nothing that isn't a gadget, an artefact, an invention, a machine, nothing that doesn't at least have a circuit, a cpu, computer code). In the competition of dicks the processes aren't important, neither are the observations, the narratives nor the senses. It is a dynamic that is reductive and material, and of an aberrant technological essentialism.(8) The competition of dicks is, as its name indicates, a parade of reductive capacities where eventually one will win (and here the possibility of “winning” is increased by the amount of machines available, access to gadgets, in other words, private property).

The competition of dicks is of no use as a methodology for learning, it serves only for admiring things. It is a dynamic based on property (“look how wonderful MY gadget is”) and in addition this practise is excluded by those of us who name ourselves tecnotransfeminists (it contradicts point 2).

2) A transfeminist technology will tend to be anticapitalist, deindustrialised and based on the principle of difference.

Capitalist technology is aimed at generating a progressive loss of autonomy. The best example of this is the iPad, a plastic tablet full of cables produced by children in China, that doesn't even have a USB port and with which you can only connect to an imaginary cloud that you don't know what it contains nor how it works, but that appears like the clouds that decorated the sky in the colourful fields of Heidi. Capitalism produces in series, it needs repetition because it needs (and produces) addiction and factories, and because the only difference between one article and another is its serial number, which, paradoxically, makes it “original”.

An anticapitalist technology doesn't have serial numbers, nor factories, nor white clouds on celestial backgrounds. An anticapitalist technology isn't in the clouds nor in China because it is, amongst others, in the rebel vagina that resists the “salvaslip” (9) as a paradigm of castrating homogenization (because yes, there is castration beyond psychoanalysis and beyond the fear of loving the phallus, for example the smell technologies that Evax proposes).

An anticapitalist technology will be transfeminist because it will not be in the clouds, because when the code is opened all the dirtiness of its writing appears, the bugs appear, the fine engineering of monogamy as the production of guilt, the chinese locks appear, the X rays and the default presets, as they say : the default operating system is Windows, the default sexuality is white and monoparental, addiction is a marketing niche, and when the code is open none of this is believable because it appears so banal and so “original” that at least it bores one to death. Repetition is weariness. A transfeminist technology is based on the unrepeatability of the small gesture, on serendipity, on synergy and chance.

3) A transfeminist technology is illiterate and promotes queer methodologies.

Can we imagine somebody who is illiterate in technologies of gender ? Someone who uses badly the dispositives, who pronounces badly their identity, someone who never learnt ? According to world statistics illiteracy is a feature of poverty, there is a relation between illiteracy, low access to technology and marginalised communities (on a map they are the biggest areas).

A transfeminist technology will value illiteracy for its improductiveness for industry, as a way of finding paths unimagined by speed and productivity. Aphasia, rather than a sickness, becomes a path for the development of new languages and the methodologies will be queer or not be at all.

Traditional methodologies (the “non queers”) propose a desincarnated search for results, where what is studied is an object over which are imposed questions and hypotheses which result (inevitably) destroying what life remained in it. It is the same with one’s personal life, experience, body, they are elements which should be excluded from the investigation as this is the way in which these regulations of the abject are kept closed, the closed code of the construction of subjectivity.

“A queer methodology is, in some senses, a scavenger methodology, which uses a diversity of methods to gather and produce information about subjects which have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour. Queer methodology seeks to combine methods which often appear contradictory and rejects academic pressure for coherence between disciplines” (Halberstam, 2008,32)

4) Some of PostOp’s transfeminist technologies.

4.1) The international power of contagion, pedagogy and workshops.

One of the forms that I see possible for the subversion of the cultural imperative for females to be caring is pedagogy, neither victimising nor altruist, rather the transmission of a series of unregulated pieces of knowledge, probably disproved by science, which are shared until they become viral. A contagious pedagogy, which operates through embodiment, a kind of anti-pedagogy, because it will never be recognised as such, because it works with the biography and the life of the participant and because the workshops become an extremely powerful tool for generating networks of resistance, for subjective contagion and to abandon this outmoded concept of “I”.

4.2) The parodic prothesis dispositives.

There is a PostOp image which I have seen more than 150 times and which still impacts me. Its a scene where a character with a make up brush in its mouth “cleans” or “goes over” the “flesh” of an inflatable doll. There is a macabre parody in this gesture, using the tension of various gender technologies in a cyberpunk context, the image disturbs me profoundly and, in passing, brushes out the last 10 years of videogame iconography and even such a traditionally lesbian icon like Lara Croft. Lara is nothing compared to Majo Pulido with a brush in her mouth. Excuse me for my manners, but Lara Croft is the inflatable doll.

It’s not that we dont know about protheses, we are born with them incorporated, we have mainly naturalised them. What we need to exercise a bit, perhaps, is their parody, in and out, incoherent use and of this PostOp offers us important examples.

4.3) Use public and institutional spaces to generate extreme experiences.

Barcelona postpornographic practises have done an intense job occupying public spaces. Performances or practical exercises after a workshop become tools for the appropriation of space, working from subjectivity and in a collective way. The dissolving of the frontier between public and private is a constant disorientating and destabilizing practice which disfigures the castrating divisions of space, divisions which maintain speciesist and disciplinary categories interrupting the paths of desire (or the generation of new desires.) In some way PostOp’s work proposes a blurring of the distinction between

private and public space as an experiential practise, because remaining in the role of observor would be, finally, to maintain this castrating spatial division.

5) A transfeminist technology is not afraid.

A transfeminist technology looks for safe spaces in parties, meetings, afters and must overcome the vulnerability of virtual public space. Youtube is not a safe space, Google is not a safe space. Facebook is not a safe space. Their servers are registered in the list of the tools of the heteropatriarchal discourse. We can go in and out of them (and often we are forced out of them), because in some way we have always lived in unsafe spaces, creating collective affective strengths for protection. But I am calling for a transfeminist technology that generates its own safe spaces, in the city and in the network. I am calling for free servers, without censureship, where we dont have to hide content, nor autocensure videos. I am calling for us to get organised. A transfeminist technology is not afraid, not afraid of machines nor the auto-exploration of the body, finding out what's in there, the cervix and beyond. A transfeminist technology will be an exercise in losing fear, a search for understanding how cables are connected (cultural or electornical) inside the grey boxes which are bodies or laptops. A transfeminist technology will laugh at the programmed obsolence of the body and program the obsolescence of gender, will get involved with machines, will recycle screws from old equipment, will know how to open a laptop or the pleasures of the anus. I call for us to explore artisanal technologies, without patents, technologies of error, hacking, dissident technologies, low profile, social technologies, of abject genders and the contraculture. I call, in a desperate shriek illuminated by Haraway, for fearless extraction of codes, to open the machines and not shed a single tear more for a dead computer.

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## Notes:

1.

Translation PS. Thanks to Carlos López and @M\_Langstrumpf for ideas and bibliographical suggestions. This text is part of an open process at <http://www.lucysombra.org/archives/category/textos/genero-y-tecnologia>. You can also find here the original spanish text “Algunos apuntes para una tecnología transfeminista.”

2. See this excellent analysis by FemalePressure of the principal festivals of electronic music in Europe : <http://femalepressure.wordpress.com/facts/> (consulted in march 2013)

3. Somehow I would like to propose that none of these resistences are enough, as some are hardly freed in process “puesto que liberan apenas procesualmente” (which is already something). As Simone de Beauvoir mentions about de Sade, “De Sade doesnt show us the work of a liberated man : he makes us participants in his struggle for freedom” (De Beauvoir, 2002, 74).

4. I have to communicate my traumatic relationship with Wikipedia, where the majority of my contributions have been vetoed with the argument that “it is not encyclopedic knowledge”. Amongst the vetoed definitions is, for example, the Spanish language entry about the Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo, who won the Golden Lion at the Venice Bienale in 2005. How is it possible that the Wikipedia editors can, so easily, decide that something is “not encyclopedic” ? Why has this happened on various occasions with entries to do with feminism and not with others that referred to geographical matters ?

5.

<http://wikipedia.org>

Translator’s note : this is a translation to english of the spanish definition of technology. I was not able to copy-paste from the english version of wikipedia as the definitions are constructed differently.

6. The statement is a tool used in the arts to legitimise a series of reflections or practises as art. In the Spanish speaking world the english word is used just as is done with other notions like “queer”, “engagement”, “flyer” or “cool”.

7. From the web <http://postporno.blogspot.com.es>

8. About a year ago (2012) in the LabSurLab gathering, in the round table dedicated to technology and gender, some companions from an indigenous audiovisual collective proposed that their knowledge of technology was extremely ancient. They cited observing the rivers and the cycles of the moon to guide their planting, listening to the earth in order to coordinate vital cycles etc. Of course this type of technology would not be selected in a “competition of dicks”.

9. The advertising campaign for Evax panty protectors in 1999 sported the slogan “What do clouds smell of?”. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-p8FxFs1\\_M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-p8FxFs1_M) (consulted march 2013).