

TRANS-VISIBILITIES AND SEXUAL POLITICS: TEMPORARY PASSAGES IN SPANISH POPULAR CULTURES*

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Abstract: This article aims to review the models that historically have shaped technologies of gender through popular representations in Spanish culture. First, an anthropological view will be cast on the naturalised Catholic-Francoist models that exalted heterosexual dichotomies and reproductive marriage. This includes an analysis of how, although the criminalization of transsexuals aggravated their situation, resistance movements generated a wide range of cultural references and possibilities for inclusion. Second, the article will review the models associated with Spain's transition to democracy and their evolution moving on to the beginning of the 21st century. Finally, it will draw an outline of the trans models produced during the past two decades and their popular expressions.

Keywords: Performance, transsexuality, Spain, politics, gender, sexuality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is currently a growing interest in analysing the cultural representations that have sexualized Spanish society from its transition to democracy in the second half of the 1970s to our days (Colling and Sabuco 2021; Harsin and Platero 2021; Valcuende and Cáceres 2021; Rampova 2020; Nash, 2020; Platero and Roson 2019; Chamouleau 2018; Ballesteros 2001). Among all the pioneering studies that cover transsexuality in Spain during that period from an anthropological perspective (Guasch 1987; Nieto 1987, 1998; Cardín 1984), the work of Guasch and Grau is of particular interest. Their 2014 article described how the transvestite and the operated transvestite were hegemonic categories in what they call the “pre-gay period” (1970-1982), while the transsexual category has prevailed throughout the “gay period” (1982-2005). In the current “post-gay period”, the transgender category stands as a conceptual and discursive novelty that includes and at the same time goes beyond the preceding ones (Guasch and Grau 2014).

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Concerning terminology, and upon reviewing the use of terms such as transvestite, transsexual or transgender in popular Spanish culture, Platero's remarks appear relevant for our purposes:

“The word ‘transgender’ intends to avoid this distinction [between pre- and post-operative status] regarding transition and surgery, and contains different meanings and contexts (Hausman, 1995; Nieto, 1998; Valentine, 2007). However, this term has not had the same predicament in Spain. Taking these distinctions into account, throughout this article I will use the English term ‘transgender’ when referring to the term ‘transsexual’ as used in Spanish” (Platero, 2011: 599).

Bearing Platero's observation in mind, the terms transvestite, queer, transsexual or fluid gender will be used in this paper in their loose Spanish popular meaning. It should also be born in mind that different generations will prioritise different sets of terms over others as identification references. Now, like many other countries in the so-called Western world, Spain has an ageing population (Hercé 2016). Although immigration and the impact of Covid-19 may alter this circumstance, they do not affect it for the purposes of our reflection. The drop in birth rates explains the population prominence of people over the age of fifty. This in turn explains why to a great extent Spanish social mores and mentalities are still rooted in Franco's times. Franco's dictatorship imposed a Catholic morality based on the exaltation of the virtuous woman, wife and mother, the submissive, prudish and modest Perfect Wife. Sexuality was destined for reproduction and imprisoned in the institution of marriage. Military virility was incorporated into the figure of the breadwinner, the head of the family, acting as domestic and public authority. Homosexuality, bisexuality and non-binary identities were persecuted. *La ley de vagos y maleantes* (Layabout and Wrong-Doers Act), dating back to 1933, was amended in 1954 to allow for the arrest of homosexuals and transsexuals, as well as pimps, ruffians and “professional beggars” or exploiters of beggars, all with a view to preserving Spanish social honour (Subrat 2019; Ramírez 2018). Known as *La gandula*, the Act was implemented to send homosexuals, transsexuals and pimps to forced labour or to prison.

Democracy and membership in the European Union meant greater visibility of LGBTBIQ groups in public spaces and social organisations in Spain. This was part of a new kind of modernity that flourished during the 1980s, one that opened the country to new sexual subjectivities and that became popular through the work of internationally acclaimed artists such as Pedro Almodovar. Within the field of academic studies, Oscar Guasch' book *The Pink Society* (1991) framed the parameters of these new ways of living sexuality in Spain.

The new millennium has brought along significant changes in the field of sexuality, including the regulation of same-sex marriage in 2005 (Sabuco and Colling 2020) and the greater visibility of trans groups and fluid gender subjectivities. These changes express, in Lila Abu-Lughod's terms, the evolving cultural "patterning" of society (Abu-Lughod 1987). They point to a wider acceptance of transsexuality. This is expressed through legislative changes, a greater normalization of transsexuality away from the repressive

policies of Franco's regime and a larger diversity of identities as sex-gender referents. Yet social demands and legal achievements in this field continue to arouse social and political confrontation. This has reached feminist ranks, as we shall see, with some sectors of feminism embarking on a fierce battle against trans demands and the "erasure of women" to which, they argue, these demands will lead.

In this context, our anthropological reflections on the new gender politics open with the question of how trans representations have been made visible in popular culture. How have the representations of transsexuality changed in Spain since the dictatorship? How have they been approached by social sciences? To address these questions, this article proposes a diachronic review that contextualises the changes and the current state of sexuality in Spain, a country marked by the strong influence exerted by religion, as well as by a culture of dual politics, defined by the polarised confrontation between conservative and progressive positions. The different representations of sex and bodies are condensed between these two poles. In one extreme we find disciplined bodies that reproduce the hegemonic conservative order. The other is inhabited by subversive bodies that yearn for recognition and seek social transformation. Between the two there are a wealth of possibilities, concealments and transitions, resulting in a rich array of different and mobile itineraries. In this article, they will be analysed from the standpoint of queer theory (Halberstam 2015). The focus will be, more specifically, on artistic expressions, as these offer particularly useful tools when tracing the different models of representation of transsexuality that today subsist as technologies of gender (De Lauretis 1987).

The technologies of sexiness (Evans and Ridler 2015) give greater social value to bodies that reflect social ideals. The greater erotic capacity of diverse bodies, less stereotyped by class and age, has been reconfigured in Spain. Transgressing existing codes brings along new body landscapes, new possibilities for excitement and pleasure. The punishments, the dangers that underlie non-compliance, provoke fear and excitement at the same time. As Carole Vance warns in *Pleasure and Danger*, the exploration of sexuality has never been foreign to these polarizations (Vance 1989). They manifest different visions of the world, of present reality and of possible futures.

In view of all this, the standpoint of the genealogical methodology proposed by Michel Foucault appears useful for analysing how sex-gender technologies, based on the premises provided by Gayle Rubin (2007) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987), generate sexual representations. Films, songs and shows are powerful ways of creating, reproducing or modifying sex-gendered mentalities. Following de Lauretis, who in turn takes her "conceptual premise from Foucault's theory of sexuality as a 'technology' of sex",

"too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies such as cinema, as well as institutional discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices; by that I mean not only academic criticism, but more broadly social and cultural practices" (De Lauretis 1987: ix).

Conservative and progressive positions have become more entrenched and polarised with the pandemic. Modesty and the obscene clash even more starkly since Covid-19 came to disrupt both the public sphere and the private, domestic one. This makes it all the more interesting to investigate the subsistence of docile bodies forged in the norms of modesty and decorum, in the face of the virtual exposure of multiple, abject sexualities (Foucault 2010). The result of all this is the set of normative criteria that a society imposes on bodies, on their uses, on the images and words that accompany them. Timothy O’Leary points this out about transgression:

“Bataille, in his linking of spirituality, sexuality and excess, tries to develop a language for this experience – in effect his work constitutes, as Foucault says, a preface to transgression. The second point to make is that for Foucault (and Bataille), contrary to what one might expect, transgression is not essentially a matter of breaking limits. Of course, it involves a movement which is hostile to limits, but it cannot be defined simply in terms of a negative or violent assault on limits; it doesn’t aim for its own completion in an annihilation of the limit. Rather, the limit and transgression rely on each other in a mutual relation which is positive in nature. In fact, transgression, according to Foucault, is a kind of affirmation; an affirmation which has no other content than the existence of difference itself” (O’Leary 2011: 44)

As Domenec Font points out, obscenity is found on the border between order and disorder (Font 2005). Subject to social and aesthetic codes, it is both familiar and enigmatic, allowed in certain contexts, forbidden in others. It serves to point to the proscribed, the unrepresentable, while at the same time imbued with desire through the allure of prohibition. Its variability bespeaks its capacity to adjust to historical times, to technological dispositions, to the codification of rectitude and etiquette. Disruptions of these norms are signs of opposition and rejection, while at the same time generating new models, based on shamelessness and informality (Bataille 1984).

What follows is a diachronic review of the main sexual representations in Spain, structured in the three stages (pre-gay, gay and post-gay) proposed by Guash and Grau (2014). First, we will explore the changes brought about by the opening of Spain to tourism in the 1960s. Second, we will investigate the framework opened by Franco's death and Spain’s democratisation, and the changes and greater visibility of LGTBIQ groups that ensued. Finally, we will draft the characteristics of the new sexual expressions and their demands for more equitable laws, in a society where fluid genders embody a clear transition from binary and reproductive models.

2. DIFFERENT NORMALITIES AND THEIR RUPTURES: REPRODUCTIVE HETEROSEXUALITY, TRANSVESITITES AND CABARETS (PRE-GAY STAGE)

Spain’s opening to tourism during the 1960s was accompanied by the reaffirmation of traditional models of masculinity, with a view to curbing the impact that openness and modernisation could have on "the" Spanish identity (Nash 2018; Coll Planas 2010). Controlling men's sexuality was a matter of state relevance, related to national identity.

To this end two stereotypes were promoted and spread: the married, hard-working, urban figure popularly baptised with the also popular surname “*Rodríguez*”, and its counterpart, the *Don Juan*. Both served to reinforce the position of the father of the family and heteropatriarchal values.

Pedro Lazaga's films, *El cálido verano del Sr. Rodríguez* (“Mr. Rodríguez’s Hot Summer”) in 1964, and *Tres suecas para tres rodriguez* (“Three Swedes for Three Rodríguez”) in 1975, served to popularise a middle-class or working-class male head of a family who enjoys some sexual permissiveness while his family is on holiday. The object of seduction was always a foreign woman, generally Swedish, who personified freedom and the dangers of a free, highly sexualised femininity. The films were inspired by the North American film *The Seven Year Itch* by Billy Wilder, *La tentación vive arriba* (“Temptation Lives Upstairs”) in its Spanish translation. In contrast to the sensuality exuded by the latter, *El cálido verano del Sr. Rodríguez* reinforced the values attached to the figure of the wife and made fun of the sexual fantasies that might be entertained by any honourable man of the time, particularly if they did not end up in extramarital sex. The failures of these Rodríguez met popular success. The expression continues to be a joke to this day, one that makes fun of the (stereotypical) secret sexual imaginations entertained by married men over fifty.

Working-class single men, for their part, enjoyed in the popular imagination the characteristics of *Don Juan*. Inexhaustible sexual desire, a physically attractive body and an oratory capable of conquering any woman at will, defined these young working-class men –Spanish men in general, although Francoist mores restricted this profile to (young) bachelors. Beaches, bars and hotels were the hunting grounds for these Latin lovers, who also stood as part of the Northern European imagination (Nash 2020). The sexuality they flaunted was dressed in animal-like savagery: it was the corporality of the nether regions, a natural and boundless primitive sex. To uphold Spanish national pride and reverse the play of geopolitical power, the summer conquistadors “took advantage” of foreign women. In these portrayals, foreign women were objects of consumption, “prey” for the Hispanic hunters who, at the same time, guarded the honour of Spanish women, to be “respected” until marriage, while letting off steam with the “*guiris*” (a rather dismissive slang term for foreigners). Swedish women symbolised the sadness of sunless, bloodless societies: cold, libidinous and alien to the Latin character, but very sexy. Spanish women, on the other hand, were to be respected and to counterbalance male fieriness. The latter was conceived as a biological attribute; in the case of married men the only demand was that their extramarital affairs be discrete. Still, bachelorhood was the vital phase during which sexual experiences should be accumulated. To this end, a crucial differentiation had to be drawn between easy women and marriageable ones.

In this context, the notion of the obscene focused on women's bodies. The fact that mayors had to obtain a special permission from government in order for bikinis to be authorised on their beaches stands as an eloquent example of this. In this moral and legal context, where transgressions only came to reinforce the normative, the Act on Social Danger and Rehabilitation (*Ley sobre peligrosidad y rehabilitación social*), of

1970, punished non-normative sexuality with sentences of five years' imprisonment or internment in a psychiatric centre (Espinosa 2020).

Yet there were also signs of rebellion. In 1971, Jaime de Armiñán directs *Mi querida señorita* ("My dear lady"), starring José Luis López Vázquez as an intersexual person. For some critics (Hopewell 1989: 103), the story describes the harsh situation of poor women in Spain, whose destiny was limited to domestic service or prostitution. Indeed, the plot reflects the loneliness and marginality of a spinster from the provinces who falls in love with the lady she works for. Yet it is about more than that, as the spinster is an intersex woman. Once diagnosed by a doctor, she becomes a man, moves to Barcelona and as a man conquers his "dear" lady. In 1974, the film *Odio mi cuerpo* ("I hate my body") by León Klimovski, describes the misadventures of an engineer who after an accident, and in order to be kept alive, has his brain transplanted into a woman's body. Two years later, in 1976, José María Forqué addresses in *Una pareja distinta* ("A different couple") the role reversal between a cabaret drag queen, again José Luis López Vázquez, and a bearded woman played by Lina Morgan.

Tourist destinations were, for homosexuals, centres of freedom, or at least places where the Francoist state showed more permissiveness. Stories at the fringes of the norm in tourist towns like Torremolinos and Benidorm were mythical; interestingly, during recent times of pandemic, they are being the subject of celebration and historical recovery through publications (Cáceres, Valcuende del Río, Parrilla Molina & Martín-Pérez 2021). During the seventies, transvestite, transexual and non-binary figures occupied the place of the obscene, and homosexual transgressions were heavily persecuted. Ocaña (1947-1983), a trans artist in Barcelona, used to dress as a woman while showing his penis in his walks along the Ramblas. His work as an artist, transvestite performer and homosexual activist was recognised early on in films such as Ventura Pons' *Ocaña retrato intermitente* ("Ocaña, an Intermittent Portrait") in 1978. His figure has also been recovered in the new millennium (Aliaga 2011; Colling and Sabuco 2021). In Valencia, Anastasia Rampova (1956-2021) embodied an irreverent ideal of freedom where life was a constant cabaret. Her memoirs, *Kabaret Ploma 2. Socialicemos las lentejuelas* ("Kabaret Ploma 2. Let's Socialise Sequins"), were published in 2020, including essays by Juan Vicente Aliaga and Lourdes Santamaría. The Spanish Cinema Academy has so far ignored the contributions made by these and other transgressors (Pérez Sánchez 1999, 2007).

With a certain naivety, Spaniards longed to see what at the time they could only imagine. This desire pushed many to cross the French border to escape from national Catholic narrowness and see European productions that were banned or harshly censored in Spain. Seeing Bertolucci's *The Last Tango in Paris* (1972) in Perpignan was an act of obscenity for the thrill of avoiding the 1972 censorship and of sharing banned scenes with friends when back at home. Married couples often travelled abroad with friends to watch it; the long queues, the feeling of transgression, the visualization of the obscene -the anus and butter sexual scene- remain unforgettable memories. The film was released in Spain in the midst of its transition to democracy, in 1978, and made a great impact, particularly because it fed the desire to experiment with parts of the body strongly stigmatised as related to homosexuality.

3. TRANSITION TO SEXUAL MODERNITY (GAY STAGE)

After Franco's death in 1975, films previously forbidden became accessible in Spain. Many were of little artistic value, but very popular. They would mark the so-called Spanish *destape* (uncovering), as the exhibition of nudity in cinema was nicknamed (Castro 2009). Exhibiting the naked bodies of beautiful women was the only aim of films such as *Pepito Piscina* ("Swimming Pool Pepito", 1978) or *El liguero mágico* ("The Magic Garter", 1980).

This new sexual freedom reached trans representations (Melero 2010, 2015). In 1977 Vicente Aranda's film *Cambio de sexo* ("Sex change"), Bibiana Fernández, a trans woman known as Bibi Andersen, debuted with her popular stage name, marking a significant shift in trans-visibility. The protagonist is a trans woman who must fight against her father's masculinisation attempts and flees to Barcelona to start a life more in line with her self-assignment. There, with the help of a cabaret star, played by a real trans artist, she opts for having her sex reassigned in Casablanca. The film is of documentary value, particularly because the centrality of the transformation process offers very realistic footage. In the 1977 film *El transexual* ("The trans"), featuring performers like Paco España, José Lara recounts the death of a trans star, Lorena Capelli, who died of complications in the sex reassignment operation. Though blurred by the success of Aranda's film, the mix between documentary and fiction makes it a valuable precedent for a forward-looking approach to transsexuality (Dentell 2011: 12).

In Almodovar's short film (1977) *Sexo va, sexo viene* ("Sex goes, sex comes"), a boy decides to mutilate himself to become a woman, in order to obtain the love of a girl he had met on the street. However, the bodily change provokes a new loving drive towards men, in a parody of the hybridizations that shape gender and sexuality (Grau 2015). In 1978 Pedro Olea filmed *Un hombre llamado Flor de Otoño* ("A man named autumn flower"), about the double life of a transformer in Barcelona, Lluís, interpreted by José Sacristán. Sex-change comedies became common in the late 70s and 80s: *Ellas las prefieren ...locas* ("Women prefer them...wild", by Mariano Ozores, 1977, playing with title of the film "Gentlemen Prefer Blondies", by Howard Hawks); *La tía de Carlos* ("Carlos's aunt", by Luis María Delgado, 1989), featuring Paco Martínez Soria; *Policía* ("Police", by Álvaro Saénz de Heredia, 1987); *Canción triste de ...* ("... blues", by José Truchado y Antonio Ozores, 1989).

Trans people occupied a space between the morbid and the fascination (Berzosa 2014). In live performances, transsexual shows were always expected to finish with a display of genitals. According to Mira (2008: 401), this is an expression of the privileges of the heterosexual gaze and its obsessions with the anomalous, with the extraordinary as opposed to the norm. At the same time, moralising arguments underlined the dangers of sex reassignment operations. Yet many demonstrations for LGBTIQ rights used the transvestite to force social change in gender dichotomies.

"In 1977 the Valencian countercultural magazine *Los Marginados* dedicates a monographic issue to «social dangers». On the cover, in the foreground,

we can see the face of a man with makeup. To represent transvestites, Nazario draws a funny picture of "Miss Social Dangerousness", a bearded transvestite who exclaims provocatively and happily "They say that for us the whole year is carnival" (Picornell 2010: 287).

During the transition years, the curiosity and attraction towards transvestites turned in their favour (Kwan 1999). Yet the popular appropriation of the figure of the transvestite responds to a metaphor of the desire for social change, for stripping dictatorial power of its old masks, not so much for a greater consideration towards transvestites themselves or for the desire to rupture with the heteronormative system (Moreno 2021). Trans marginality could be vindicated in a humorous tone, but what trans people demanded was greater integration, expansion of their rights and betterment of their living conditions.

With democracy and the recognition of civil rights, new sexual stereotypes were sought through cinema. Bigas Luna shot *Tatuaje* ("Tattoo") in 1978 and reached the Cannes Film Festival in the same year with *Bilbao*, a film where a psychopath falls in love with a prostitute. The highly erotic content of his films provoked both rejection and excitement, as they dealt with taboo subjects. It is notably the case of his 1979 film *Caniche* ("Poodle"), which tells two siblings' incestuous story. Despite the scandalous relation between the two, Dani, a French poodle, is the real protagonist in this representation of zoophilia.

The popularity of filmmaker Pedro Almodovar marks an era of exaltation of sexual freedom and transgression: *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (English title: "Pepi, Luci, Bom") of 1980, *Laberinto de pasiones* (English title: "Labyrinth of Passions") of 1982, *La ley del deseo* (English title: "Law of Desire") of 1987, all frame the imaginary world of the 1980 for wide sectors of the population, now in their fifties. *La movida madrileña* ("Madrid Movement") was a symbol of the democratic transition and sexual freedom -an association between the transition to democracy and greater sexual freedom that has been criticised by Villarós (1988) and Labrador (2017). Actresses like Antonia San Juan and Bibiana Fernández achieved great popular recognition, which they used to overcome the obstacles posed by a transphobia still very present in the performing arts. Almodovar will once again represent transsexuality in his 2004 film *La mala educación* ("Bad Education").

Even in this new context of openness, however, trans groups continued to be seen as the source of greatest scandal and moral panic, hence excluded and marginalised. Indiscriminately included under the category of transvestites, their visibility was reduced to the artistic environments of the cabaret, with figures such as Paco España or Angel Pavlovsky, and to prostitution.

The 1980s mark, in any case, a generational break with the Catholic and Francoist morality of the older generations. Musical groups such as *Kaka de Luxe*, *Alaska y los Pegamoides* and *Radio Futura* achieved great popularity with songs in which the body and pleasure are expressed beyond normative limits. The female punk quartet *Las Vulpes*, with their song *Me gusta ser una zorra* ("I like being a bitch", 1983), generated great controversy. Based on *I Wanna Be Your Dog*, by The Stooges, it used obscene language to defend

masturbation or social climbing through fellation. The political reactions were resounding, and the group members were sued for public scandal. The B-side of their single *Inkisió*n criticised religious sentiments and Catholic double standards. The director of the television program where it was broadcast was fired. Conservative politicians of the time demanded five years' imprisonment and ten years' disqualification from public office for him.

Vestida de azul ("Dressed in blue", 1983), Antonio Giménez Rico's documentary on the lives of trans women, based on their own life stories, enjoyed wider acceptance, as well as great success at the San Sebastian Film Festival, where it was premiered with its protagonists in attendance. In 1987 the first association of Transsexuals in Spain was created: Transexualia, which sought to bring the struggle for visibility and the recognition of civil rights away from the previous stigmatising gaze (Mejía 2006). Zacarías Urbiola premiered in 1989 a film entitled *La pitoconejo* or *El regreso de Eva-man* ("The cockpussy" or "The return of Eve-man", 1982), which shows continuity in trans representations. The film tells the story of two transsexuals at the service of a scientist, Professor Pissinguer, who uses a Love Gun on them. The leading roles were played by trans actresses Ajita Wilson and Eva Coatti, who had worked with actors closely linked to Franco's times in the popular culture, such as Mariano Ozores and Andrés Pajares. The film comes to show the survival of traditional stereotypes surrounding women's exuberant bodies, now applied to trans women. Curiosity about the bodies of trans women is highlighted when, after Wilson's death, journalists insisted on corroborating whether she was transsexual, or not. To this Carles Aured, director of the 1982 film *Apocalipsis Sexual*, simply replied: "She was charming, beautiful and very professional. The rest is not important" (Mulholland 2020).

Despite boasting greater trans visibility (Melero 2010), however, this period is best characterised by the strong presence that homosexuality gained in cultural imagination, by homosexuals' vindications and by their eagerness to embark on the consumerist prototypes of the pink market: body cult, saunas, exclusive venues (Guasch and Más, 2014), as a way to grow their own cultural roots in Spanish brand-new democracy.

4. TOWARDS A NEW SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP (POST-GAY STAGE)

Despite resistance, the generational change multiplied sexual possibilities. These became closely associated with the left and erased part of the social stigma against divergent sexualities, criminalised until the end of the eighties. Visualising naked, non-binary bodies, experimenting with a sexuality not associated with reproduction and its associated dangers, characterise the so-called X generation. Improvements in women's sexual health were achieved and sexual liberation claims were strengthened. The impact of AIDS served to articulate protest movements through collectives such as *Radical Gay* or *Lesbianas Sin Duda* ("Lesbians No Doubt").

The 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium enriched queer proposals with what became "a bible": *El Manifiesto Contrasexual*, by Preciado (2002). Many feminist groups engaged in the manipulation of dildos, in making instruments that imitated the penis in order to urinate in the street and in the transgression of norms

around modern femininity as established by institutionalised feminism. Despite advances in laws seeking equality and recognition of sexual diversity, millennials felt that not enough progress was being made, especially as regards the breaking down of gender binary premises and a sexuality that, from the institutional point of view, was still predominantly heterosexual.

Being lesbian/gay/bisexual as a choice or phase rather than a fixed or predetermined identity stood as a critique of identity politics. The impact of the internet and dating technologies have changed the forms of courtship, the durability of the bond and the content of desire. As in other countries, the technification of sexuality has meant major changes in the further sexualisation of bodies, pornification, the pursuit of success and the increase in venues, possibilities and objects of pleasure (Langarita 2015).

The commodification of sex and the rise of toys encouraged so-called *tuppersex*, sexual meetings organised in the style of Tupperware parties in houses, where one is invited to try out different sexual gadgets. Its diffusion in Spain ran parallel the transformation of sex shops and perceptions of sex work and the increased consumption of pornography. The regulation of same-sex marriage in 2005 was the culmination of this wave of sexual modernity in Spain (Sabuco and Colling 2020). Getting there was not easy, as the project was caught between the poles of political confrontation: it was perceived as a provocative stance of the Socialist Party *PSOE* and gathered strong opposition from right-wing parties and the Catholic Church, which organised mass demonstrations against homosexuality and in favour of heterosexual reproductive marriage. In this context, the film *Veinte centímetros* (“Twenty centimeters”, 2005), by Ramón Salazar, continued the line of visibility initiated by Almodovar, yet without the same public success. It shows how Marieta's desire not to be named after her father and not to have the same size penis as him is aggravated by narcolepsy and her dreams of musical shows. The film was awarded prizes for Best Screenplay and Best Soundtrack at the Malaga Festival.

The 2008 economic crisis led to an increased desire for security through affection and sex. Spanish cities were filled with padlocks placed by young people, symbolizing mutual support and attachment. The liquid bonds of a transforming sexuality met with this search for solidity and support. In 2011, well within the crisis, the so-called 15M (15 May) movement revitalized the protests against a state that had manipulated and distorted the meaning of democratic citizenship. Feminist, left-wing and LGTBIQ groups demanded real and effective sexual democracy (Fassin 2009). The politicisation and confrontation between left and right brought the emergence of new left-wing parties such as *Podemos* (“We Can”). A few years later, an extreme right-wing party, *Vox*, railed against sexual advances and revived the Francoist ideology with a strong following among a portion of the disenfranchised young.

Against this backdrop, the so-called Z generation, born between 1994 and 2009, is characterised by a strong entrenchment in communication technologies, pleasure-based learning, practical hedonism, greater sexual diversity and a revision of hierarchies. Along with millennials, they have been most sexually affected by the pandemic. During lockdown, LGTBIQ groups stressed their social presence through the internet. In the midst of limitations

to access premises, bars or places of sexual exchange, they have thus maintained their public presence, just as heterosexual groups have. In this way, they are being increasingly normalised in Spain. Normalisation was already underway (Mira 2004; Coll Planas 2010). The film *Elisa y Marcela* (“Elisa and Marcela”, by Isabel Coixet, 2019) tells the true story of two Galician teachers (Marcela Gracia Ibeas and Elisa Sánchez Loriga) who were married in Church on 8 June 8 1901. It was the first same-sex marriage in Spain, and the only one officiated by the Church. It was possible because Elisa passed herself off as a man, Mario Sánchez, and deceived the parish priest of Dumbría (A Coruña). Regarded as a film about lesbians, it also pays some attention to transsexuality or cross dressing, indeed a central theme in the story. It has received numerous distinctions for its contribution to education in values.

Transsexual groups have gained high visibility and have carried out a huge struggle during the pandemic. Visibility has been enhanced by a national Draft Bill on LGBTBIQ rights, which has given rise to strong political controversies. The struggle for sexual self-determination and the search for measures against the stigmatisation of non-binary children have been central. The most conservative positions have allied to prevent expressions of transsexuality in childhood, which has caused a great division of opinion even among intersexuals. At the other end, the Spanish Federation of Transsexuals has multiplied the presence of transgender people in the media through photos, art exhibitions and demonstrations. There has also been an increase in virtual meetings and the fight to gain support through social networks. The use of Tinder and TikTok among the youth contrasts with the majority use of Facebook among the older generations.

As Hilary Radner (1999) suggests, the greater erotic capacity of diverse bodies, less stereotyped by class and age, has been reconfigured. Imaginary bodies have been replaced by a greater need for real bodies in the pandemic. One interesting example of this is Rodrigo Cuevas (Oviedo, 1985), a multidisciplinary artist with an academic musical background, who defines himself as a folk agitator. Cuevas has created what he calls the *elektrocuplé*, a style that re-signifies popular artistic traditions, notably the *cuplé*, especially from Asturias and Galicia. His immersion in local traditions, and his transgression of the codes of cabaret and *cuplé* with an interactive “divism”, it has all made an impression on audiences. In 2019 he began a tour, which he called *Trópicos de Covadonga* (“Tropic of Cavadonga”), toying with the literature of Henry Miller and the importance of sexuality. Through 2020 he filled theatres and venues all over Spain whenever it was possible to perform. Considered the inventor of the *tonada glam* and *cabaret underprao* (a pun on the pairing of underground venues and rural culture), he sports a *montera* (a traditional Asturian hat) and other traditionally Asturian inspired clothing, transformed by the designer Susana de Dios. His aesthetic has become a reference for creativity. His *Manual del cortejo* (“Textbook on courtship”), produced by Raúl Refree, also a singer and discoverer and promoter of figures such as Rosalía, was released at the end of 2019.

In his shows Rodrigo Cuevas criticises the expansion of foreign dances such as swing or the *capoira* and reclaims local body codes. Asturian dances such as the *xiringüelo* or Galician dances such as the *muñeira* are frameworks of affective significance, which differentiate his from works such as Rosalía’s *El Mal Querer* (“Bad love”). From Cuevas’ point of view,

their differences are down to a question of age. While Rosalía adjusts to the patterns of a millennial, the search for a universal sense of beauty and eternity is the basis of Cuevas' proposal for seduction. Contrasting with the liquid links of today's social networks and their abundant use of emoticons, it is the poetic word, he argues, that must not be forgotten. In this sense, his work connects with distant generations, that of the older grandparents marked by the rituals of seduction from agricultural times, the rituals of the seasons.

As he recalls in his shows, the difference between old forms of courtship and masturbation lies in beauty. The subtlety of romance and sex between older people contrasts with the liquid contacts of the young who prefer quantity to quality. He transgresses because he advocates multiple bodies (his use of traditional clothes and garters, his poses in underpants next to a donkey, the ostentation of an erotic body far removed from hegemonic codes). The syncretism of his staging is rooted in memory: a Galician *montera* hat, colorful lace T-shirts, the traditional waistband, a Japanese *yukata* and Asturian *madreñas* shoes (Hidalgo 2021a). His is the body of a homosexual man who lovingly loves other men but who sings of love itself as a personal and collective quality: it all shows awareness of one's own body and its musical configurations. In his interviews he alludes to the homophobic discourses of the extreme right; in his work, he upholds the authenticity of traditional sources in the face of mass individualism. Located at the fringes of the counterculture, he has altered well-known folk songs and made an impact with low budget videos in which friends and residents of his village take part (Hidalgo 2021b). Not being afraid to ask the audience to shout like their grandmothers is a way of questioning evolution and unstoppable modernity.

On authenticity, he declares "When something is too contrived, I stop liking it". Rodrigo Cuevas has claimed the countryside for the young and the city for the old. He lives in the small Asturian village of Vegarrionda, with fifteen inhabitants. From his home he broadcasts free streaming of different performances that have gathered many followers. He has maintained a strong public support for LGTBIQ struggles. Indeed, he has recovered and dedicated many of his songs to well-known homosexuals from the past, such as the *habanera* he dedicated to Rambal, who cross-dressed in a neighbourhood in Gijón and was murdered in the 70s.

Samantha Hudson, the alias of Ivan González Ranedo (León, 1999), goes one step further. A singing artist and non-binary LGTBIQ activist, she was fifteen when, in 2015, she recorded the song *Maricón* ("Faggot"), causing a huge scandal both at her school and beyond, when the song appeared on Youtube. Right-wing and religious sectors protested her obscenity, as she used constant references to the Catholic Church in her performances and interpretations. The far-right group *HazteOír* ("Make yourself heard") called for the school teacher who approved her work to be removed from public employment, for the broadcast to be banned from the internet and for her performances to be blocked. In the end, the video was removed from the platform.

Her camp provocations go beyond transgression to seek an interpellation of class. Songs such as *Burguesa arruinada* ("Bourgeois ruined") and *Dulce y bautizada* ("Sweet and baptized") enquire into the possibilities of being gay and Catholic. Her first show

in 2021, *Eutanasia Deluxe*, is a pun based on the title of one of the most popular gossip programs on Spanish television, *Sálvame* (“Rescue me”) *Deluxe*. Many of her themes are inspired by television programmes. Her non-binary position, her trash aesthetic, her class-consciousness -she declares herself Marxist and anti-capitalist- and her use of obscene language serve to politicize art.

In her/his graduation speech (s)he said:

“The moment I put on a crown, it is a political act. The moment I put on a princess backpack, I am fighting against a system that oppresses me. And when I wear pink and go out on the street *and draw attention to myself*, I am fighting against a society that rejects me and denies me the right to enjoy my own life. Because I really am in danger because of who I am («Samantha Hudson, una historia de fe, sexo i electro queer». <https://ib3.org>.)”

Samantha’s frequent use of social media is characteristic of her XXY generation. (S)he has a large number of followers on Instagram. (S)he appears on platforms like *Netflix* or *Filmin* and enjoys cameo appearances as famous Spanish personalities. (S)he has even featured in a *Filmin* documentary about her own life entitled *Una historia de fe, sexo y electroqueer* (“A story of faith, sex and electroqueer”). With the record label *Subterfuge* and the production company *Putochinomaricon* (s)he will release her/his third single *Disco Jet Lag*. Her/his lyrics are obscene both for their content, their exhibitionism and for the bodily performance accompanying them. These activities have allowed her/him to abandon the sporadic jobs on which (s)he used to make a living in Barcelona and to dedicate her/himself exclusively to her/his shows. In the last year (s)he has become the *new Spanish* queer icon.

The visceral nature of her (as she now prefers to be known) performances generates both enthusiasm and rejection. Her *mamarrachadas* (extravagant, ugly and ridiculous acts), which she defends as part of a social class, scandalise; she even includes in her lyrics a call to Marxism or photographs herself with a pink hammer and sickle, which is widely applauded among her followers. Among art critics, her figure has been both dismissed as lacking aesthetic value and praised. Joan Porcel documented Hudson’s transition from high school icon to instagram in 2018. In 2021 Marc Ferrer directed *Corten* (CUT) with the participation of Samantha Hudson and La Prohibida, another famous trans, in a queer horror film. Fran Granada is responsible for the recording of *Todo por España* (“Everything for Spain”) where Samantha Hudson and Papa Topo resignify the values of transgression in the Franco era and even shoot the dictator. The soundtrack of *Corten*, composed by Adrià Arbona, spread very quickly through whatsapp, internet, instagram and other social networks.

5. SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

The performances of Rodrigo Cuevas and Samantha Hudson express contemporary hybrid ways of conceiving sexuality. Some are rooted in the past, others focus on a

non-binary future and incorporate new technologies for inventing and building new corporeality. They are all representations of sexual choices, of a way of life that goes beyond pre-established constraints, that adopts sarcasm and confrontation as a means of expression. At the core of it lies the idea of fluidity (Langarita and Grau 2017). It should not come as a surprise that different political positions have referred to this idea. *Vox* has done so to criticise the social and sexual decadence of Spanish society; at the other end, we find parties such as left-wing *Más Madrid*, which has joined together with icons of sexual diversity such as La Prohibida, Cuentos Rosales, and the filmmaker and cultural manager Alex de la Croix. The picture, however, is more complex. Alexia Herranz, a trans woman, aspires to become the first head of the Popular Party, the main conservative party in Spain. Gender fluidity is the great central theme of sexuality in today's Spain. For young people, it is a necessary demand and has led to battle for a national law on trans rights, which is finally being discussed in Spain, and that is generating great upheaval. Linking popular traditions to a new vindication of love experiences regardless of the sex of the individuals shows the porous limits of normativity and transgression. Vindicating intersex, Catholicism and the desire to be a mother, and doing so with obscene language, might still be reprehensible, but is very popular within the most progressive sectors.

Beyond gender fluidity, transphobia also divides and fragments Spain and Spanish feminists. The expression TERF (*Trans-exclusionary radical feminist*) speaks of trans exclusion and is also used as an insult against these sectors of feminism. TERFs have been identified as inciting hate crime. A lawsuit was filed in 2019 against the *Feminist Party of Spain (PFE)* and its leader since 1979, the Marxist feminist Lidia Falcón, for disseminating hate against trans women. Although it did not succeed, it led to the expulsion of the PFE from the *United Left*, a left-wing political coalition, and its gradual proximity with the ultra-conservative *Vox*. For their part, right-wing politicians, such as Isabel Díaz Ayuso, Head of Madrid Regional Government, have announced their opposition to any attempt to update the existing legislation on gender identity. Ayuso has accused left-wing parties of using homosexual and transsexual demands to gain political ground by claiming to be their only legitimate representatives.

While the Spanish population strives to adjust to a “new normality” after recent lockdowns, the youngest propose a different pace for sexuality and the meanings of citizenship, set by the globalized meanings of the obscene and the political potentials of body transgression. Mar Cambrolle, a politically prominent trans activist who boasts publications and activism at the national and European levels, has joined transsexual intellectuals such as Preciado (2021) and Lucas Platero (2012, 2016) as points of reference. As Platero and Ortega-Arjonilla (2016) stated in their study about Elsa Ruiz Cómica, a Spanish transgender influencer, the new constructions about sex and gender are mapping a different political trans visibility where digital media acquire centre stage, in line with the consumption habits of the youngest generations (see also Tortajada, Willen, Platero and Arauna 2021). The presence of fluid gender experiences is becoming more frequent every day. A new trans visibility is becoming evident on television, movies, talks, meetings, news.

The crisis associated with the pandemic, social fears in the face of an uncertain (fluid) future, Spain's growing political bipolarisation, all seem to place us at a kind of crossroads: either we go down the road of a ground-breaking, open, multiple and fluid approach to sexuality or we return to heteropatriarchal reproductive constraints. The choice should be clear.

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