

Democratic Gays, Modern Gays.
The Construction of Homosexual Characters in Spanish Films
During the Transition (1975-1978).

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes a group of mainstream films produced during the Spanish transition dealing with homosexuality as a main theme. The films are: *Hidden Pleasures* (*Los placeres ocultos*, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1976), *Sex Change* (*Cambio de sexo*, Vicente Aranda, 1977), *The Transsexual* (*El transexual*, José Jara, 1977), *To an Unknown God* (*A un dios desconocido*, Jaime Chávarri, 1977), *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait* (*Ocaña, retrato intermitente*, Ventura Pons, 1978) and *The Deputy* (*El diputado*, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1978). Each film is analyzed in light of the theoretical, political and cultural issues that arise in the films themselves and in the reactions to them, to uncover how the representation of gay identities is intricately intertwined with Spanish nationality. The main characters in the films represent homosexual identities to create and deconstruct cultural codes in relation to already established discourses of Spanish national identity and nationhood. The author brings into the analysis his personal experience to offer a specific example of how the struggle expressed by the characters in the films echoed the development of Spanish gay identity, both on a private and public level.

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INTRODUCTION

Political science studies define a transition to democracy as “an evolutionary period of reform coupled with regime change” (Bonine-Blanc 1987, 5) if the starting point is an authoritarian regime and the end-point is a democratic regime. Andrea Bonine-Blanc (1987) observes that the pluralization and mobilization of society, the liberalization of socio-economic politics, the constitutionalization of political activity, and the democratization of bureaucracy are some of the developments contained within such a period of reform (5-15). The transition to democracy in Spain has been of considerable importance for political scientists who have analyzed the politics of the transition in terms of strategies of reform “from above,” initiated by the ruling classes, and strategies of pressure “from below”, by the lower classes (Maravall 1982, 5). As Stanley Payne (1985) notes,

The democratization of Spain that has occurred since 1976 constitutes a political transformation without any clear parallel or analogy in twentieth-century systems, for an established institutionalized authoritarian system—no mere ad hoc Caribbean military dictatorship—has been totally transformed from the inside out by means of the personnel, institutions, and mechanisms of the regime itself, led by the head of state (25).

After Franco's death in 1975, Spain not only transformed itself from dictatorship to democracy, it did it through a markedly process of reform and a strategy of consensus. The process of reform began almost one year after Franco's death with the passing of the Law for Political Reform. A period of consensus was reinforced with the first democratic elections in June 1977 and culminated with the ratification of the 1978 Constitution defined by Carr and Fusi (1979) as "the first constitution in Spanish history that is neither the unilateral imposition of a particular party nor the expression of a single ideology" (244). Even though some historians consider that Spanish transition actually ended with the election of the Socialist government in 1982, for the purposes of this thesis I define transition as the first three years of the process when the period of consensus was the core of Spanish society.

A transition period always supposes a destabilization and a refusal of established identities, considered as non operative due to their association with the past, and the construction of new ones capable to represent the future. Laura Desfor (1998) notes that during the transition new symbols emerged and penetrated Spanish society. Symbols are multi-vocal; they are drawn from many domains of social experience and ethical evaluation forming an open series of cultural codes. For individuals, certain symbols can be shared across different social groups and at the same time be interwoven in other less consensual representations allowing for rational action and individual agency while creating and maintaining cultural patterns that are popularly intelligible and widely accessible. Desfor observes how the new symbols represented the process of transition: *a new beginning* symbolized separation from the old Francoist era and the setting out of a new course for the future; *national reconciliation* and *convivencia* (living together with

others) represented the homogeneity and communality needed in the new state; and *democracy* represented reaggregation to the new democratic social state (41-62). The emergence of these new symbols provided Spanish society with the ground rules of the politics of consensus for all individuals in order to overcome the past and this included the recognition and acceptance of the existence of a gay community.

Cinema is a particularly important medium to analyze the core symbols present in any society. Cinema is both a major instrument for the dissemination of cultural patterns and a major instrument for the construction of meaning. Reflecting and reworking institutional parameters, cinema generates a processing function in audiences that is especially significant in times of social change. In fast changing situations, cinema becomes a site where people establish, define and interpret social identities. In the case of the Spanish transition, this processing function of cinema was particularly remarkable. During the transition, “veterans, young and new [filmmakers tried] to make ‘their’ film. Using documentary or fiction, comedy or drama, they were going to approach any kind of problematic, theme, and opinion as it was never done before in Spanish cinema” (Equipo “Cartelera Turia” 1983, 240, my translation).¹ These films are important not so much for the success or failure of their interpretations and in the box office, but because they reflect the specificities of the period and enable the comparison of specific and generalized symbols and meanings. The films employ the new core symbols that emerged during the transition in different ways and situations, but nevertheless with a transcendent strand of shared meaning which reflected the ground rules of the politics of consensus.

This thesis analyzes a group of mainstream films produced during the transition dealing with homosexuality as a main theme. The films are: *Hidden Pleasures* (*Los*

placeres ocultos, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1976), *Sex Change* (*Cambio de sexo*, Vicente Aranda, 1977), *The Transsexual* (*El transexual*, José Jara, 1977), *To an Unknown God* (*A un dios desconocido*, Jaime Chávarri, 1977), *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait* (*Ocaña, retrato intermitente*, Ventura Pons, 1978) and *The Deputy* (*El diputado*, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1978). Paying attention to how the characters are constructed to represent the old institutionalized identities and the new emergent democratic ones in relation to their attitudes regarding social transformation, I examine the emergence in the public discourse of new forms of sexuality which allowed a gay reality to become visible and to be represented in film, permitting audiences to construct their new social identity taking into consideration a reality which had been constantly altered by the old authoritarian system. Looking at these films in terms of how they represent a set of identities in relation to already established discourses of national identity and nationhood, I analyze each film in light of the theoretical, political and cultural issues that arise in the films themselves and in the reactions to them, to uncover how the representation of gay identities is intricately intertwined with Spanish nationality. Thus, in my analysis, the politics of these films are important for what they say as well as for how they address their viewers in regard to their sexuality.

My analysis of these films does not attempt to be a complete analysis of a very complex period of Spanish history. This is not only because of space constraints but because of the impossibility of undertaking a full analysis of the circumstances which surrounded and intersected in that moment of history. I use these films as a specific example of how the transition period affected Spanish society, because as Richard Dyer (1991) wrote, “films are part of the politics, not only presenting political content but also

placing the viewer in relation to the processes of change the politics advocates” (212). Thus, as I mentioned above, the politics of these films are important not only for what they say but also for how they address the viewer. I examine who their implied audiences are, how they want them to react and their place in the political process. My analysis follows what Andrew Higson (1989) regards as an inward looking approach to national cinema. Higson considers that we must define, and by extension study, national cinema “in terms of its relationship to an already existing national political, economic and cultural identity (in so far as a single coherent identity can be established) and set of traditions” (42). Hence, I look at these films in terms of how they represent a set of identities in relation to ones already established by discourses of Spanish national identity and Spanishness.

The process of constructing a Spanish gay history as one of the multiple perspectives of historiography, without even including the representation of lesbianism, is not without difficulties. In fact, it can present more problems than other approaches due to the scarcity of material available for investigation and research. There are few sources which record the specificities of a gay culture, or gay movement, aside from the documents issued by some of the gay political associations, which began their activities during the transition, and a few articles which deal with homosexuality in a very oblique way. This difficulty is enhanced by the almost total absence of any analysis, both scholarly and other, attempting to recuperate a Spanish gay past. Two totally different authors, Juan Vicente Aliaga (1997) and Paul Julian Smith (1992), mention the almost non-existent social history of homosexuality in Spain. Aliaga comments that recently there have been some tentative attempts to create platforms to promote queer studies in

the universities and a small number of books trying to carry out serious studies of homosexual culture in Spain (60). Sometimes I wonder if Spanish scholars are obsessed only with the recuperation of a historical past in its mainstream visible side, the heterosexual one, forgetting or denying the existence of the presence of an homosexual reality. This problem is clearly noticeable in J.M. Caparrós's *El cine Español de la democracia* (1992). The first section of the book provides a general account of the Spanish film industry from 1975 to 1989. The remaining three chapters are divided into historical periods—the transition, the constitutional and the socialist—and each includes a brief filmography at the end. Each chapter is divided into sections dealing with a concrete film genre where Caparrós offers a brief analysis of the film production and a more detailed analysis of a specific film. The book has many deficiencies. Not only is Caparrós's analysis of the films selected superficial—they read more like newspaper reviews than scholarly studies—but his mainstream conservative attitude brings him to criticize any aspect of the films that deals with difficult aesthetic options and with open representations of sexuality. In relation to the latter, there is not a single mention of homosexual issues and only six films dealing with homosexuality are noted in the filmographies. Even Pedro Almodóvar's mention is only in relation to *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1987). Despite a more scholarly approach, the edited compilation *Cine Español 1896-1983* (1983) offers similar problems in its recognition of a homosexual reality. Divided by decades in essays which range between ten and thirty pages in length, the different authors' intentions to offer an extensive account of the film production during the period analyzed become a mere summary of facts and films and homosexuality a single signifier in relation to a few of the films mentioned. In *Historia*

del cine Español (1995), Román Gubern and five other authors offer an impressive recollection of historical, socio-political, economical and industrial data on Spanish cinema from its origins to 1992. Yet, documenting such an enormous amount of information in 450 pages results in a mere enumeration of facts without any in-depth analysis. Despite offering information, not only on mainstream cinema but also on independent and marginal works, the existence of homosexual themes is relegated to a couple of footnote observations.

It is interesting to note that the most important studies on Spanish cinema come from scholars in foreign countries, mainly Britain and the United States. In *Behind the Spanish Lens* (1985), Peter Besas gives the history of Spanish cinema from its beginning to 1985. He depicts the social situation and production history of major Spanish films, providing a detailed, and frequently personal, account of the Spanish society and even offers predictions for the future. In *Out of the Past: Cinema After Franco* (1986), John Hopewell describes the effect of Spanish history on Spanish filmmaking and the new directions that Spanish cinema has taken since 1975, arguing that due to the fragmenting effects of Francoist repression, Spanish filmmakers lack a sense of identity. In *Spanish Film Directors, 1950-1985* (1986), Ronald Schwartz offers brief histories of 21 Spanish directors analyzing them as auteurs, focusing on their individual personalities, and including summaries of their films. Despite the importance of these works in celebrating Spanish cinema, they all share a similar tendency to simplify and overgeneralize the themes analyzed. A more detailed analysis of many films is rendered by Marsha Kinder in *Blood Cinema* (1993). Kinder provides an uneven mixture of historical and economic survey with auteur study to explore and problematize the concept of national cinema. She

discusses political and cultural issues to investigate transcultural reinscriptions, the representation of violence in the Spanish Oedipal narrative, the challenge of exile to national unity and the tensions between regionalism and nationality. However, in all these books the transition is usually mentioned as a reference point and analyzed in a paragraph or a brief chapter dealing mainly with issues related to the sequels of Francoism, and homosexuality is briefly noted in some of the films discussed but never fully examined. The only work that examines homosexuality is Paul Julian Smith's *Laws of Desire* (1992). In the second half of the book, Smith performs a close textual analysis of some films by Eloy de la Iglesia and Pedro Almodóvar and pursues the question of how gay and lesbian cultures are intricately woven with Spanish nationality.

There are very few studies available, that I am aware of, regarding queer films and queer readings of mainstream films in Spain during the dictatorship. Although he has not written any essay exclusively dedicated to Spain, Richard Dyer's work (1977, 1991, 1992) in relation to European and more specific British culture is perfectly applicable to Spanish cinema. Perhaps the only work which can be compared, although the approach is merely personal, are some articles published in newspapers and magazines by Spanish gay writer Terenci Moix about his *mythomania* for some stars. This thesis attempts to be a first, although small, step towards filling this gap. I think that this work can be important because I offer a specific knowledge of a type of film which remains outside of the canonized body of Spanish work recognized and studied internationally. Hopefully, it will contribute to the development of queer readings in Spanish Film Studies which has been recently undertaken by some scholars. Although in this thesis I only deal with six films and they are all specifically gay, my future

professional objectives are to extend this personal approach to queer analysis towards other mainstream films—straight, gay and lesbian—realized during the transition and other periods of Spanish history.

My decision to analyze the gay films produced in Spain during the transition years became problematic when trying to decide which theoretical approach to take. In dealing with specific gay issues, my options moved between gay criticism and queer theory. Is there a clear distinction between both to make a choice? I consider that the answer is no. There is no critical agreement on the definitions of both theories. Both theories present a great variety of theoretical and critical approaches including structuralism, psychoanalysis, auteurism, genre, ideological criticism and others.

Gay criticism began in the late 1970s with the sociological examination of the ways in which homosexuals had been and were being represented on the screen and shifted towards a reassessment of established theoretical frameworks from a gay perspective to deal with issues of ideology and sexual politics. Thus, authorship was reintroduced in relation to homosexuality as a political tool to reconstruct “the contradictory history of homosexual identity in a heterosexual culture” (Smelik 1998, 138). Rereadings of Hollywood cinema raised the issue of gay spectatorship using feminist studies and psychoanalysis to focus on the organization of the look, the male gaze and the female spectacle; and representations of masculinity brought up issues of the eroticisation of the male body, homosexual desire and camp as an oppositional reading of the male spectacle and of popular culture. Currently, Gay criticism seems to relate more to the specificity of gay representation in films as affirmation of gay identity. Thus, the debate centers mostly around essentialist and constructionist theories. Essentialist identity

theories understand homosexual identity as a homogeneous and shared essence, ignoring differences within and between sexual identities. Presenting homosexuality as a unified category was useful for the organization and politics of gay activism in its beginnings to present and consolidate a visible identity. From a constructionist point of view, sexuality is not an unchanging identity but a construct of culture. Following Foucault's discourse and psychoanalysis, especially Lacan, homosexuality is understood as a product of social forces identifying how dominant culture has shaped, defined and regulated it throughout history. Nonetheless, present post-structuralist theories have opened up questions of identity and difference within gays and lesbians accounting for differences of class and ethnicity and the ways in which all these social categories intersect.

Due to its recentness, Queer theory is still under discussion. The general agreement on its objective seems to be the non-normative expressions of sexuality and gender in representation and reception, yet the ways in which they are articulated vary depending on the approach. The term *queer* began being heralded as classifying a new independent film movement which appeared in the early 1990s. What films like *Poison* (Todd Haynes, 1991), *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991), *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992) and *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1992) have in common is how they directly address gay audiences presenting sexually explicit images and they are unconcerned with positive images or with being politically correct.² Queer theory began being developed by the critical work around these films and the work of cultural critics like Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner and Diana Fuss amongst others. They use *queer* to describe how the combination of more than one socially established non-heterosexual or gender position in a personality, a text or a spectator articulates a range of *queer*—non-

normative straight—positions, readings and pleasures of popular culture. All established theoretical and critical areas are being revised, and sometimes rejected, by queer theorists seeking ultimately “to examine, challenge, and confuse sexual and gender categories” (Doty 1998, 150).

This work can belong to the category of Gay criticism because I read the films chosen as putting emphasis on the affirmation of gay identity. According to Anneke Smelik (1998), “strategies of consciousness-raising and coming out helped [gays and lesbians] to stimulate personal awareness and political action. Film was an excellent medium to lend visibility to [them]” (144). These strategies help to expose how the representation of gays in Spanish films during Francoism created archetypes rather than subjects. These archetypes provided for comic notes in the narrative having presented the homosexual condition as a pure artifice to accomplish and reaffirm the heterosexual norm. Yet, this work can be categorized as Queer theory because I read the films selected as embracing gays and projecting homosexuality out of the confines of minority discourse paralleling the strategical politics of these films with the transition process, or as Thomas Waugh (1993) mentions: “considering sexuality and nationality as overlapping matrices of culture, politics and identity” (146). I define *queer* as an alternative model in the constitution of subjectivity and social identity. What *queer* signals is a change which displaces the traditional notions of the Self as unique, abiding and continuous, while substituting it with a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational and discontinuous through a process constituted by repetitive and stylized acts. In reading the films retroactively, from the present to the past, I am focusing on how identities were constructed in order to represent certain meanings and values

which were changing in Spanish society and how the reception articulated different spaces within and outside the normative heterosexual understandings of gender. Therefore, if my work must be categorized, I feel more inclined to classify it as Queer theory. As Alexander Doty (1998) notes “given the existing range of understandings, uses and approaches to queerness in film and popular culture theory and criticism, it is not possible to establish one ‘politics’ of queerness” (151). I deal with films that construct gay identities by doing queer readings of those constructions according to some of the ideological, institutional and social factors which were occurring at that moment of history.

History always proceeds from and in relation to the present. A written history cannot extricate itself from the historical processes analyzed. The past is not a mere list of elements to be recovered. Inquiry is centered on the elements that have been formed by the same factors that have framed the understanding of the past. So, the historian cannot become a distanced subject in order to recuperate the past because the historian’s situation in the present is largely the result of the historical tradition they are inquiring into and its continuity into the present. The recognition of a connectedness within a culture and its traditions is what makes the understanding of the past possible. This understanding allows the historian to discern what is significant about works from the past to the present: which questions are asked, which elements into which to inquire and which elements are identified as significant or marginal. Thus, there is no external mechanism to map the complexity of the past. The historian is the mapping mechanism, as Henri Marrou (1966) wrote: “*Histoire* and *histoire*. . . . the capital letter indicates the real past that was lived by men of flesh and blood. The small letter signifies the lowly

representation which the historian's labor seeks to recompose" (40). Histories are multiple. They continually intersect, interconnect with, and effect one another. This multiplicity acknowledges that different perspectives are part of what it is to be historical because as historical beings, we are history.

Following this understanding, this thesis responds to my personal feeling of the necessity of applying some of my experiences into my work as a film scholar. From the beginning of my studies, I realized the impossibility of trying to be objective in my analysis of films. My personality, my sexuality, my film taste and many other personal factors would appear in some way or another despite my efforts to study a work in the most detached way. I recognized that, as a historical being, I was applying parts of my personal history to *my understanding* of those works. Following my interest in Gay Spanish cinema, I decided that the only possible way to fully realize this project of historical inquiry would be by recognizing and incorporating my personal background into the investigation process. Simply the recognition of my connectedness into the Spanish culture and of my sexual preferences would allow me to undertake a concrete analysis of the transition years, thus being conscious of my discerning process in the selection of the elements I would use or discard.

Considering that a politico-historical transition is neither a predetermined nor a linear structural process, this thesis is divided into four chapters that do not follow a chronological order. Each chapter focuses on two films, analyzing how their discourses create and deconstruct cultural codes to represent one of the emerging core symbols of the Spanish transition. Chapter 1, "The Transition Years", provides a historical backdrop to the Spanish transition. I trace a brief historical account of the Francoist period and how

its specific characteristics shaped the special idiosyncrasy that concurred during the transition. After a brief description of censorship, I describe how it shaped the film industry and the types of films produced. The chapter ends with an explanation of the understanding of homosexuality in Spanish society and how gay vindications during the transition are reflected in the films discussed.

Chapter 2, “A New Beginning: Revisiting the Past”, examines *To an Unknown God* and *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait*. This chapter analyzes how these films deal with the past and present democracy as the only effective alternative for Spanish society. Their characters portray the effects that Francoism had in the gay community and open the door for the possibilities offered by a democratic society.

Chapter 3, “*Convivencia*: Transforming the Present”, examines *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual*. In these films transsexualism can be read as a metaphor for the process of moving towards a democratic society where former stable identities are shattered. Analyzing the melodramatic narrative and following Marjorie Garber’s discourse (1992) of the transsexual as a *category crisis*, the films criticize the notion of essentialism established by Francoist society, presenting how identities are socially constructed and how they are a democratic right of the individual.

Chapter 4, “Vindicating Democracy: Melodrama as Pamphlet”, examines *Hidden Pleasures* and *The Deputy*. This chapter contains a stronger *auteur* approach due to the fact that both films were scripted and directed by Eloy de la Iglesia. In these films homosexuality is presented in an open and politicized manner. The filmmaker applies the generic narrative of a pamphlet to confront the audience with a direct vindictive claim about the situation of gays in society. Melodrama is used as a common ground for the

viewer to understand the characters, but de la Iglesia subverts the gender of the main characters transforming them into gays and leaves an open ending which forces viewers to question their ideology.

Due to the fact that most of the films are unknown to English audiences, I include lengthy descriptions to help the reader visualize the scene analyzed. In each chapter I discuss the films in terms of gay criticism and queer theory and in turn I bring into the analysis my personal experience as a teenager growing up during the transition years. In other words, I read the films in relation to Spanish society but also as how I perceived them as member of that society. Together, the chapters trace the uneven path, though never complete, of the development of Spanish gay identity both on a public, socio-cultural level and on a private, personal level.

THE TRANSITION YEARS

Franco's dictatorship can be divided into three distinct periods: the first one, roughly from 1939 to 1951, including military repression and economic autarchy that through an unparalleled privilege given to the Catholic Church and to the nationalist Catholic ideology was dominated by fascist policy; the second period, from 1951 to 1959, where neo-capitalism replaced the isolationist and outmoded model of fascism; and a third period, from 1959 to 1975, characterized by an unprecedented economic growth, internal social, political, and religious liberalization, but also a renewed repression by the regime (Desfor 1998, 5-6). After Franco's death in November 1975, following the dictator's instructions, Don Juan Carlos de Borbón was crowned king. Well aware of the disparities between Francoist Spain and the West European mainstream, the King skilfully began to transform the country. He appointed Adolfo Suárez, a former functionary of Franco's political movement, as president of the government in July of 1976. Suárez fostered the integration of a multitude of small political parties which had emerged in Spain into the Union of Democratic Center (UCD). The reformist initiatives of Suarez's government and his policy of pact-making with the Socialist and Communist parties, with operative structures which had been functioning in exile during the dictatorship, allowed for a successful political process towards the democratization of the country. The pressures exerted by the political parties and by the population facilitated the legalization of left-wing political parties and workers' unions. Suárez's victory in Spain's first democratic elections in 1977 and the ratification of the 1978 Constitution by a vast

majority were the fulfillment of the reform program initiated by him and the king. The Socialist Party's victory, under Felipe González, in the 1982 election was considered as the consolidation of the democratic process.

Nonetheless, the political changes in Spain must also be considered in relation to the role of the monarchy, the evolution of the Catholic Church, and the support of Europe and the United States.³ The conditions that the first country-members of the European Community imposed on countries which wanted to enter the coalition were quite influential in determining some of the political and economic measures undertaken during the first years of democratic rule and through the first period of the Socialist mandate until Spain's full membership in the Community in June of 1985.⁴ To comprehend the achievement of a peaceful, negotiated transition from Spain's dictatorship to democracy, we must understand that the process of socio-political, economic and cultural changes did not begin with Franco's death in 1975, but slowly developed over the forty years of dictatorship. As Elias Díaz (1995) notes:

[the] story of economic and social transformation in the 1960s and of the ensuing social conflict between the dictatorship and the new, demanding, upwardly mobile technical and professional middle classes on the one hand, and the labour and student movements on the other, plus the intellectual/cultural task of recovering a liberal tradition crushed with Republican defeat in 1939, is, in effect, the story of the long-term gestation of Spain's democratic transition (284).

DICTATORSHIP AND SOCIETY

According to Raymond Carr (1982) much of the twentieth century Spanish history “is explained by the tensions caused by the imposition of ‘advanced’ liberal institutions on an economically and socially ‘backward’ and conservative society”(109). The process of industrialization and modernization of the country which began in the 1950s forever changed the social structures. In 1955, Spain became a member of the United Nations. This brought the sense, more or less expressed by the government, that liberalization was necessary in order to rank the country as equal with the rest of the European democracies.⁵ Government changes favouring economic liberalization were advocated by the Opus-Dei, a strong politico-religious organization characterized by its strong conservatism. A timid cultural liberalization started by the Ministry of Education was heralded from within universities, which became the centres of a liberal and pluralist opposition culture, but was stopped after the student rebellion at Madrid University in February 1956. In total control of the government in 1969,⁶ the Opus-Dei technocrats opened the country up to foreign investment, froze wages and limited credit. Their policies forced Spain into greater reliance on export earnings, yet also ended any form of political or cultural liberalization.

Undeniable as it was, the economic growth of the country during the 1960s was undermined by its own consequences. As Díaz (1995) explains, “the structural weakness of the Spanish economy, the high social cost of the boom, disproportionately paid for by the poorest, and the lack of freedom (except for capital), seriously impaired the quality of life” (286). Massive migration from the countryside, mostly from the south, was trumpeted as a sign of prosperity and development. Yet, this mass immigration re-shaped

the physiognomy of cities like Madrid and Barcelona, which became centers of real estate speculation and low-cost housing development through large dormitory suburbs for the new arrivals.⁷ Borja de Riquer i Permanyer (1995) notes how the social transformation was quantitative as well as qualitative thus changing the social class configuration. A new urban bourgeoisie arose linked to the service sector—especially construction and tourism—new banking interests and foreign capital. Likewise, the old middle classes evolved into a new urban middle class made up of technicians and professionals with university qualifications who took over the administration of the financial and service sectors. The new working class was composed of young people, mainly from rural origins, with little or no professional skills working in the service sector or in the new industries and living in the new suburbs (264-5).

Despite the relative liberalization of the country “as tourists flocked to Spain and economic migrants and students left for northern Europe and America” (Díaz 1995, 288), the core of Francoist policies were cultural and intellectual isolation which created a mass culture quite different from most other European countries. As Riquer (1995) points out:

the process of cultural massification was extremely rapid, highly superficial, and rife with contradictions caused by the country’s peculiar political situation and by the substantial cultural shortfalls which existed. The spearhead of the phenomenon was television, popular music, and film. Spain passed rapidly from high levels of functional illiteracy to TV saturation without passing through intermediate states of cultural

development. This contributed to low levels of book and newspaper reading, still noticeable today (265).

Nonetheless, as Víctor Alba (1978) notes, “the isolation, imposed by the censorship and lack of participation in power, the fear of the police and the need to survive, instead of altering the structure of the Spaniard’s character, has clothed it in new flesh” (286). The softening of the Cold War and the huge influence of the mass media—despite the prosecution and silencing of any expressions hostile to the regime—began to create a greater public awareness particularly in the younger generation which had not lived through the civil war. The economic, social, and cultural changes aroused among this age group an increasingly critical attitude towards traditional values clothed in modernity. A greater awareness emerged during the last years of the dictatorship, allowing for a process of popular political education. Consequently, the softening and ulterior disappearance of the censorship was followed by an expansion of political culture during the transition. As Díaz (1995) writes:

as the population had greater access to more information, they participated in discussions previously the preserve of minorities. There was a flood of enthusiasm for knowing and discussing a wide variety of political issues which was bound to lose momentum. This is the source of the often misrepresented *desencanto* (political disillusionment/disappointment) of Spaniards after the transition (28).

In order to understand this flood of enthusiasm during the transition years it is necessary to understand the role that censorship played during the dictatorship, and how both consciously and unconsciously it had shaped public awareness through the mass media, especially cinema.

CENSORSHIP AND THE CINEMA

Román Gubern (1975) notes how censorship was officially created in 1913 to spread the official culture and dominate the rhetoric of the regime in control (10). At the beginning of the Civil War, The Supreme Board of Film Censorship was created by the nationalists as a tool to “dignify and rehabilitate” (Sala and Alvarez 1983, 87) all the materials which were being confiscated in the occupied territories. Its self-proclaimed aim was “the necessity of a political and moral education for Spaniards” (Gubern 1975, 26). Yet, a board that began as a wartime directive continued during the forty years of the dictatorship. Making criticism impossible, censorship operated both to control political opinion and to defend Catholic morality. Especially in the early days of the dictatorship, any attack on Catholic morals or suggestion of eroticism risked suppression. This strict censorship affected Spanish cinema, from production to distribution and exhibition. In a country where the cinema was extremely popular—in 1947 there were over 3,000 cinemas with an average seating capacity of 500⁸—the government was fully conscious of both the potential influence and dangers of film. The government used the film industry, desperately in need of government subsidies, for its propaganda purposes. The taste of the public did not matter, only the prescriptions of the government. Producers and

directors were willing to comply with the official preference for patriotic and religious films. Thus, until the 1960s the dominant genres were the historical epics, *folkloric* films, religious films, and child star vehicles which created what Diego Galán (1983) characterizes as a “mixture of genres and characters [which] made the priests Andalousian, the nuns or true believers folkloric figures, and men asexualized” (151).

With the political changes introduced during the 1950s and the necessity to promote the idea of modernity outside Spain, co-productions came as a means of exporting films to Europe. The phenomenon of the double version emerged concurrently. Thus, while on the Spanish screens there were tender smiles and in the 1960s kisses and women in bikinis,⁹ what export versions showed were passionate kisses and later full nudity. This apparent liberalization brought about a subtle reform in the censorship rules which consisted mainly in modifying a long list of specific prohibitions. For the purposes of this thesis it is noteworthy to mention the ones related to sexuality:

It will be prohibited: the justification of divorce as an institution, of adultery, of illicit sexual relations, of prostitution and, in general, of anything which attempts against the family institution and against the family; the justification of abortion and contraceptive methods; the presentation of sexual perversions as a main theme or as a secondary plot with the exception, in the latter, if it is demanded to the development of the action and has a clear and predominant moral consequence; any images and scenes which invite to low passions in the normal viewer (Santos 1983, 179-80).

Although this reform was more apparent than real, it could not prevent a slow and determined revival of liberal and creative culture which, if it did not explicitly reject the regime, shared none of its rhetoric and contained an implicit criticism of its values. The regime began to support a cinema of quality in order to gain political prestige internationally through the potential success of a new generation of young filmmakers grouped under the designation of New Spanish Cinema. They were allowed to make films which, by being open to different ranges of interpretation and categories of meaning, undermined the official view of life in subtle ways. The New Spanish Cinema created a specific film style to communicate with the public and, at the same time to avoid the censorship. As Carlos Saura explained: “for me and my compatriots, to make the stories we wanted to make, we had to use indirect methods. For example, we couldn’t use a linear structure or the ideas would be too clear” (Kinder 1979, 16). Critics praised these films for their quality and intellectualism and categorized them as art cinema.

This categorization was supported by the presence of Elías Querejeta who produced the body of what it is considered New Spanish Cinema with his company Elías Querejeta PC, founded in 1964.¹⁰ He continuously tested the limits of censorship by allowing the filmmakers’ personal and artistic expression and by assembling a stable team of collaborators “which created a distinctive style of indirection that could subtly address political issues” (Kinder 1996, 597). His team included production head Primitivo Álvaro; cinematographer Luis Cuadrado, who cultivated the darkness of the seventeen-century Spanish painters like Velázquez and Zurbarán; editor Pablo G. del Amo, whose elliptical style served a wide range of narrative functions; and composer Luis de Pablo, whose expressive scores suggested what could not be verbalized (Borau

1998, 722). The films produced by Querejeta are considered “the essential substratum for a dissident, critical, and frequently metaphorical production which appears in Spain in the mid 1960s and during the political transition” (Borau 1998, 722). According to Querejeta, in these movies “cinema viewing is transformed, becoming more creative, more demanding. Its rhythm and its time are modified. A new gaze appears in a cinema which searches not so much for meaning as it does for expression” (Hopewell 1989, 187). The filmmakers identified with this movement—Carlos Saura, Victor Erice, and José Luis Borau among the best internationally known—relied on metaphor, symbol, and ellipsis to create a web of “resistances to silence [which] include discreet references to a predictorship past [and] the civil war itself” (Evans 1995b, 304). Thus, Erice alludes to the repression exerted during the postwar years in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, 1973); Saura is able to critique fascist characters and families in *The Garden of Delights* (*El jardín de las delicias*, 1970), *Cousin Angélica* (*La prima Angélica*, 1973) and *Cria/Raise Ravens* (*Cria cuervos*, 1975); and Borau juxtaposes the rich lifestyle of a Francoist governor with the extreme poverty of the peasants in *The Poachers* (*Furtivos*, 1975).

The last five years of Francoism are commonly known as the *dictablanda*, the soft dictatorship.¹¹ This is the period when “liberalization was pushed to the maximum of permissiveness within the Franco era” (Besas 1985, 133). The film market was still much the same as in the 1940s and 1950s, with Hollywood films making by far the largest profits and only one of every four films shown being a Spanish production. The New Spanish Cinema received international praise, yet distribution difficulties and the lack of appeal of its cryptic style to mainstream audiences hampered, with a few exceptions, its

economical success in the domestic market. The Spanish film industry needed to be profitable but still lacked capital resources because of a decline in attendance due to the growth of television and the existence of censorship.¹² The flourishing of erotic and political cinema produced in Europe during the late 1960s and early 1970s attracted a great number of Spaniards to the south of France where they could see those films. *Time* magazine reported that between January and June of 1973, a Spanish subtitled version of *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) was seen by 110,000 spectators in Perpignan, a small border town between France and Spain with only 100,000 inhabitants (A. Torres 1983, 224). Light comedies and *spaghetti* westerns replaced folkloric cinema as archetypal Spanish genres and from the success of individual films two new local genres emerged: Landismo and The Third Way.

We Are Not Made of Stone (*No somos de piedra*, Manuel Summers, 1968) inaugurated “the infamous landismo genre which typically featured Alfredo Landa as a sex-starved male Spaniard in pursuit of curvaceous foreign bombshells” (Martín-Márquez 1999, 57). The enormous economic success of *Thou Shalt not Lust After Thy Neighbour from the 5th Floor* (*No desearás al vecino del quinto*, Ramón Fernández, 1970)—with more than four and a half million spectators, it ranks second in the Spanish box office of all time—established the conventions of the new genre. Basically structured in the vaudeville format, the films became a coy answer to the erotic films produced in Europe by using sex as the main aim of the characters even though it was not ideologically acknowledged and never fully visually displayed.¹³ The sexually repressed male characters of these films unsuccessfully pursue modern women—outspoken, independent, and sexually active—before settling down with a more traditional female—

sweet, submissive, and decent. The conflict between the characters became a reflection of the ideological conflicts in Spanish society. While the modern women embody the dangers of European influence with its message of modernity and end up alone, the male characters are able to find a happiness in the arms of women who embody the conservative values promoted by Francoism: virginity, marriage and family.

A Healthy Married Life (*Vida conyugal sana*, Roberto Bodegas, 1973) and *The New Spaniards* (*Los nuevos españoles*, Roberto Bodegas, 1974) instituted the short-lived genre known as The Third Way. As a middle of the road genre between New Spanish Cinema and Landismo, it consisted of films which integrated socio-political actuality by mixing sexy situations and using the conventions of Hollywood comedy. The aim was to attract a middle class audience by displaying good production values, believable dialogues, and most importantly, social type characters willing to accept the moderate changes which were taking place in Spanish society especially in the big urban areas. The presence of the same group of actors, like José Sacristán, María Luis San José and Ana Belén, allowed audiences to identify with the middle class post-war youth characters they portrayed, creating, as Hopewell (1986) notes, “a fluctuating sense of the film’s reality and [the audience’s] own reality outside it” (83). These features would be taken up by the transition cinema that would follow shortly.

Film historians note how after the dictator’s death, veteran and young filmmakers used the opportunity to engage with difficult themes and voice their opinions about controversial issues using a variety of stylistic approaches.¹⁴ After the abolition of censorship, as Evans (1995a) writes, “Spanish filmmakers rushed to speak the unspeakable, confronting the realities of everyday living, acknowledging the

inseparability of art from the frameworks of history and tradition” (326). The body of films produced can be grouped according to political and sexual subject matter. On the one hand, political films meant a direct engagement with issues from the past—mainly the civil war and the post-war years—which had been previously ignored or allegorized. Nonetheless, the majority of directors who had relied heavily on metaphor continued to do so.¹⁵ As Juan Antonio Bardem comments: “we felt that when political censorship ceased to exist, cinema would blossom forth the way that Italian cinema had after the fall of fascism . . . [but instead] the majority of the films made in Spain since 1977 are films that could easily have been made in the late Francoist era” (Besas 1985, 160).

The only films which approached the past in an explicit way were produced mostly by a new generation of filmmakers and were mainly documentary. Using a varied range of styles, from the montage of archival footage to interviews in cinema-vérité style, these filmmakers elaborated on an array of chronicles reflecting how the past had been manipulated by the old regime. Most of these films centered around Franco’s persona, the Republican front and the mirage of Francoist ideals, like *Leader* (*Caudillo*, Basilio Martín Patino, 1976), *The Old Memory* (*La vieja memoria*, Jaime Camino, 1977) and *Disenchantment* (*El desencanto*, Jaime Chávarri, 1976), respectively.¹⁶ Documentaries dealing with contemporary issues included: *The Pedralbes Murderer* (*El asesino de Pedralbes*, Gonzalo Herralde, 1978), *The Burgos Trial* (*El proceso de Burgos*, Imanol Uribe, 1979), *Rocío* (Fernando Ruiz, 1981), *After...* (*Después de...* Cecilia Bartolomé, 1981) and *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait*. Yet, in a country where the only documentary tradition was the *Spanish Film News* (*Noticiero Cinematográfico Español*) newsreels,¹⁷

these films remained marginal with brief theatrical releases and were not seen on television until recently.

On the other hand, there would be an avalanche of films dealing overtly with sexuality. Subjected to more pressure from the Spanish film industry and multinational distributors, who needed to expand markets and profits, the censorship board relaxed some of its regulations. The new Censorship Code of 19 February 1975 included the following article: "Nudity will be admitted only when justified by the total unity of the argument, being refused when presented with the intention of *awakening passions* in the normal viewer or fall under the category of pornography." (Torres 1983, 226, italics mine). With the allowance of frontal nudity for females and rear nudity for males, permission was granted to exhibit some of the banned foreign films, among them *Last Tango in Paris*, *Emmanuelle* (Just Jaeckin, 1974) and all its imitations, and *Il Decamerone* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1971).¹⁸ But this liberalization was only in relation to heterosexuality and lesbianism for heterosexual viewers. Male homosexuality would remain absent from the screens another couple of years. With the decree passed on 11 November 1977 which abolished the Supreme Board of Censorship, a new era began for the representation of homosexuality on Spanish screens.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND REPRESENTATION

Sexuality was a painful discovery during my teenage years. Growing up in a society where sexuality had been repressed for so long created a lack of knowledge of what real life was, not because it did not exist but because it was totally hidden from our eyes. The slow disclosure of sexuality usually happened with school friends, shared in conversations based on what others had eavesdropped from adult conversations, from banned books discovered and images in films which inspired our imagination. Living in a society where representations of heterosexuality were highly restricted, the acknowledgment of my homosexuality became more difficult due to the lack of models with which to identify. As Foucault (1990) observes, “repression [operates] as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there [is] nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know” (4). The release during the transition of the films I discuss in this thesis represented an important discovery. For the first time in my life, I was able to relate to and identify with characters who had my same sexual desires rather than feeling alien to the sexual pleasures that mainstream films had been offering me. Despite my personal feelings however, the restrained conceptualization of homosexuality present in Spanish society did not allow for an easy assimilation of the new cultural codes created for its representation in the rest of the society.

Oscar Guasch (1995) notes how during the dictatorship, homosexuality was “essentially based on an identification of male homosexuality with the feminine” (47). Accordingly, the Francoist heterosexual society classified the homosexual into two categories: the *marica* or effeminate homosexual and the *maricón* or virile homosexual.

While the former was more or less tolerated in society because of his visible renunciation of the male social roles, the *maricón* was totally stigmatized and his virility rendered him invisible. The repressiveness of the Francoist regime did not consent to the existence of an openly homosexual community. As in other countries with similar socio-political circumstances, there were no specific establishments for homosexual encounters, except a few highly discreet ones, usually located in the marginal areas of big cities where prostitution was also tolerated. The main places for homosexual encounters were public spaces like streets, parks, public washrooms and movie theatres. To be caught in such places was punishable by existing laws under the social concept of public scandal. In 1954 the Vagrants and Malefactors Law (Ley de Vagos y Maleantes) considered homosexuals equal to pimps and scoundrels to be interned into special institutions and totally isolated as a way to avoid the spread of contamination.¹⁹ It is important to note that this law, as all the others which followed, applied only to male homosexuality. The existence of lesbianism, as female sexuality in general, was not even considered. Replaced in 1970 with the Social Danger and Rehabilitation Law (Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social), the new law empowered police to arrest any man suspected of homosexuality because of the potential danger he represented for society for “it was not the homosexual who was dangerous but those who engaged in ‘homosexual acts’.”²⁰ Following its implementation, the Ministry of Education issued an Act in 1971 which banned homosexuals from elementary schools due to their so called physical defect or sickness, reinforcing one of the main Spanish myths about homosexuality as contagious and the homosexual as corrupter of children and pedophile.²¹ The Social Danger and Rehabilitation Law made explicit the notion of the medicalization of homosexuality by

insisting that the delinquent could be rehabilitated or cured from his *state of danger* but without specifying anything beyond internment. Juan Aliaga (1997) ironically notes that these cures, whatever they were, must not have been very satisfactory, considering that nobody condemned under this law benefited either from the reprieve or the amnesty of 1976 (29).²² Nonetheless, the severity of this law helped launch the Spanish homosexual rights movement and the three main gay organizations—MEHL (Movimiento Español de Liberación Homosexual), FAGC (Front d'Alliberament Gai de Catalunya) and Grup Dignitat—which were all founded between 1972 and 1976.

During the transition, all public rallies were celebrated within a political context where everything, including homosexual vindication, was supported. For the first time, homosexuality was being openly acknowledged and discussed in the media and in the street. Nonetheless, the strong visibility of *maricas* and transvestites at these rallies probably motivated the main gay organizations to support the right of the male to the feminine amongst their main claims. For instance, the eighth point in the FAGC's vindicative platform demanded "the right and guarantee of any person to dress and embellish themselves as they like" (Guasch 1995, 82). With the softening and the disappearance of censorship, the publication of magazines like *Torso* and *Party* which not only contained male nudity but also articles facilitating a positive assumption of homosexuality became possible. As well, there was a proliferation of cabarets and clubs—where transvestite shows alternated with female striptease—and a notorious increase of homosexual characters in films.

However, the vindication of a feminine homosexuality was double-edged. On the one hand, it allowed homosexuals to assert their rights within the standards of social

acceptability using a non-threatening femininity to parody heterosexist assumptions of homosexuality and the *pluma* in the *marica*. Even though *pluma* translates literally as feather, when used in relation to homosexuals it refers to the visible signs which allow heterosexuals to identify the female codes of behaviour in gays. Thus, the most common expression is *se le ven las plumas* (you can see his feathers). As José M. Cortés (1997) comments: “the camp ‘pluma’ in gays is, in good measure, a parody of women, a way of loosening the hostility which probably all men feel against women. A certain homosexual ‘pluma’ performs a disturbing mindless, asexual, and hysterical femininity” (128). On the other hand, the *marica* reinforced the archetypal representation within a homophobic society where the homosexual becomes an object of jokes and his condition, as a female soul trapped within a man’s body, an object of derision. This representation of the *marica* was a constant in mainstream Spanish cinema. When present in the narrative, the homosexual is a mere convention to provide comic relief. As a main character, he becomes either a masquerade that presents the homosexual condition as a pure artifice to reaffirm the heterosexual norm or a grotesque effeminate through the hyper-imitation of femininity. The only exception is the film *Different* (*Diferente*, Luis María Delgado, 1960) which deals with homoerotic desire as a main theme although without naming it explicitly.²³

Nonetheless, the fear and the difficulty of expressing a gay reality and desire began to break down during the transition years when, as Anneke Smelik (1998) states, “strategies of consciousness-raising and coming out helped [gays and lesbians] to stimulate personal awareness and political action” (144). The increased social visibility of homosexuality was well received due to the emergence in the public discourse of new

forms of sexuality. John Hopewell (1989) describes briefly this phenomenon by indicating that after the death of Franco and with the emergence of active heterosexual women and gay men as subjects of desire in film, sex is no longer the Other (164-78).

The films chosen in this thesis are usually lost among the titles overtly dealing with sexuality mentioned in any scholarly study about the Spanish cinema—with the exception of *To an Unknown God* and *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait* as examples of the New Spanish Cinema and of documentary respectively. Generally dismissed as mainstream sex-exploitation melodramas, they are important nonetheless because of the manner in which they embrace and project gays outside of the confines of a minority discourse. The choice of using a mainstream genre like melodrama allowed the films to connect more easily with the public. Due to the significance of melodrama as narrative and filmic tradition in Spain, spectators were able to understand the conventions and how they mediate the film's relation to the real. As Maruja Torres notes in an article published in *Tele/eXpres* (Barcelona), 15 February 1977, this is “a cinema of homosexuals, not *with* homosexuals.” Homosexuality is neither presented as a pretext for jokes nor as an excuse to reinforce the masculinity of the main character. It is not the subject for moral discourses. These films' approach to homosexuality offers a double advantage: it showcases modernity in dealing with sexual diversity, until then taboo, and it makes visible a repressed minority. Social change and sexual preference are not contradictory but interrelated. The homosexuality of the main characters expresses the struggle with established forms to articulate different ways of knowing and feeling offered by democracy in a country where until 1989 50% of its inhabitants still condemned homosexuality²⁴ and where until 1996 homophobia was not considered a crime in the

Penal System. The appearance of these films also had consequences for gay audiences. It was no longer necessary to do queer readings of mainstream films but everything, or almost everything, was displayed on the screen for our enjoyment and for our vindication.

A NEW BEGINNING: REVISITING THE PAST

During 1975, as Franco moved in and out of illness, I remember that everyone was asking, “after Franco, what?” The only thing everybody seemed to know was that *after Franco* meant the coming of a whole new era. The evaluation of his death was hardly consensual. Whether deemed good or bad, it evoked a total understanding of temporal separation; the closure of one chapter in Spanish history and the beginning of a new one. For most of the political parties, this break with the past was embodied in the appeals to “look forward, not back.” The 1977 election results were a defeat for extremism and the past. As Laura Desfor (1998) notes, the new democracy was neither a reform nor a continuation of Francoism but a *new beginning* reflecting the separation from the old social state (9). For Spaniards the *new beginning* was represented by a new generation, those who had been children during the Civil War. They represented innocence and potential for a new future because they did not “participate in either of the two bands of the Civil War, nor its consequences. In other words, what Spaniards were not supposed to look back at was the fraternal division, polarization and strife of Civil War and Francoism” (Desfor 1998, 43). The *new beginning* meant both the debut of democracy and the debut of national reconciliation.

Nonetheless, some films began acknowledging the inseparability of the new social reality from the frameworks of past and tradition because the possibilities of change had to take into account the cost that Francoism had on the personal level. The importance of a *new beginning* did not mean denying the past, but addressing and

assuming its consequences in order to face the future without repeating the same mistakes. Despite using completely different narrative structures, what *To an Unknown God* and *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait* have in common is how they draw audiences' knowledge and shared historical memory to present socio-political repression as the main cause for the feelings of marginality embedded in Spaniards for forty years. The Civil War is never addressed directly but its consequences are strong determinants for the marginalization of the characters. Democracy is presented as the only lively alternative for them and, by extension, for Spanish society. The fact that the characters are homosexual emphasizes their marginalization. It is used as a strategy to reinsert the history of gay men and gay culture within and as a constitutive part of a re-imagined national community.

Each film discussed in this chapter uses completely different strategies but follows the traditional notions of homosexuality present in Spanish society in order to evoke and contest sexual and political repression. *To an Unknown God* follows the style of the New Spanish Cinema. The film uses the figure of the *maricón* to communicate how Francoism tried to erase a socio-cultural reality—represented in the figure of poet Federico García Lorca—creating an inability in Spaniards to truly *be themselves* and originating a web of entangled memories which tended to create a romanticized view of the prewar past as a way to avoid the grim reality of Francoism. This view had become so real that it presented the risk of deforming the new democratic reality.

The film's director, Jaime Chávarri, was born in 1943 and began his career as a film critic. During the 1960s he alternated his work in television directing episodes for different cultural series with the realization of independent films in 8mm and Super 8mm.

He worked as co-writer and assistant director on *One, Two Three, English Hide and Seek* (*Un, dos, tres, al escondite inglés*, Ivan Zulueta, 1969) and as set director on *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, Victor Erice, 1973), *Ana and the Wolves* (*Ana y los lobos*, Carlos Saura, 1974) and other films before directing his first professional feature, *The School Trips* (*Los viajes escolares*) in 1974. His second film, *Disenchantment* (*El desencanto*, 1976), is considered one of the key films of the transition period. The film is an intelligent dissection of Francoism through a family interview of the widow and two sons of Leopoldo Panero, a famous Spanish Civil War poet, and it became an instant success amongst critics and the public. After the relative failure of his following *art films*, including *A Dedication* (*Dedicatoria*, 1980), Chávarri moved to more commercial endeavours obtaining great box office success with films like *Bicycles are for Summer* (*Las bicicletas son para el verano*, 1983), *The Matters of Love* (*Las cosas del querer*, 1989) and *The Matters of Love 2* (*Las cosas del querer 2*, 1994).

Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait is a documentary which alternates interviews with performances in drag in order to represent the subjectivity of its protagonist, a member of the new generation who did not live the Civil War. The film shows how Ocaña uses a Bakhtinian carnivalesque approach to rewrite the past in order to accommodate the possibilities for new gender identities in a truly democratic society. The film was the first feature of Ventura Pons. Born in 1945, Pons was an established theatre director who collaborated as a film critic in different magazines before directing *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait* in 1978. During the next decade he directed a series of successful comedies of manners such as *Do You Wanna Bet, Mari Pili?* (*¿Qué te juegas Mari Pili?*, 1990) and *Tonight or Never* (*Esta noche o nunca*, 1991). Pons has changed his style since the mid

1990s by adapting a series of novels and plays that have had good critical and commercial results, especially *The Meaning of Things* (*El porqué de las cosas*, 1994), *Actresses* (*Actrices*, 1997) and *Beloved/Friend* (*Amic/Amat*, 1999).

TO AN UNKNOWN GOD

(*A un dios desconocido*, Jaime Chávarri, 1977)

In the garden of a prosperous family in Granada where Federico García Lorca is a guest, the gardener's son José is having an affair with the family's son Pedro. During one of their nightly encounters, José witnesses the murder of his father by a group of men. Forty years later José (Hector Alterio), who works as a cabaret magician in Madrid, returns to Granada to visit the garden and the house where Pedro died soon after the Civil War began. During his encounter with Pedro's sister Soledad (Margarita Más), José steals a photograph of Federico García Lorca. With José back in Madrid, the film traces the subtle changes in character which this decision symbolizes for José and for his relationship with the people who surround him: his lover Miguel (Xabier Elorriaga), an emerging leftist politician; Clara (Rosa Valenti), Miguel's girlfriend; his neighbour Adela (María Rosa Salgado); Jorge (Emilio Siegrist), Adela's son; and Mercedes (Mercedes San Pietro), José's younger sister.²⁵

Co-scripted and produced by Elías Querejeta, Jaime Chávarri's *To an Unknown God* is the only film discussed in this thesis that it is critically categorized as an *art film*. As José Luis Guarnier noted in his review in the *Catalunya/Express* (Barcelona), 12 November 1977: "If [homosexuality] in *Hidden Pleasures* was developed in a

melodramatic form and structured following the very realistic scheme of offer and demand, in *To an Unknown God* it is done in a very 'art cinema' style and under the sign of culture, without forgetting political connotations." Thus, most critical reviews focus on the allegorical aspects of the film, and in some the film is compared to Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* and Carlos Saura's *Cousin Angélica* (*La prima Angélica*, 1973). With the former, it shares the main character's irrational identification of feeling partly responsible for a murder. With the latter, it shares figuration characteristics, a middle-age bachelor obsessed with the past and returning to the place of his childhood.²⁶ Nonetheless, as Marsha Kinder (1983) notes: "while Saura's film explores the mental processes as they reconstruct past and present, Chávarri's work is a character study that examines a complex, multifaceted individual within a particular social context" (68). Even though it does not seem to be presented as the main theme of the film, José's homosexuality conditions all others. Despite the different readings offered by this film, for the purposes of this thesis I want to focus on how it critiques the effects of Francoist repression on Spanish society, how homosexuality is represented and how it vindicates its normalization in a democratic Spain.

To an Unknown God analyzes the consequences of Francoism both on society in general and on homosexuals in particular. Set in the spring of 1977, the film reads democracy as an instance of regenerative healing through, as Chávarri pointed out, "the destruction of a sentimental past, assimilating a historical and poetical past which relates [José] to the present" (Hopewell 1989, 194). It constructs fragments of José's life and his relation to others using the figure of Federico García Lorca as a reference to the lost potential of the forty years of Francoism. As Marsha Kinder (1983) notes: "*To an*

Unknown God powerfully demonstrates that Lorca is very alive as a dead man and as an open wound in the minds of José and his generation, including the creative men who produced the New Spanish Cinema—an idea reinforced by Saura's recent stunning adaptation of Lorca's *Blood Wedding*" (68). One night in August 1936, the poet and playwright Federico García Lorca was taken away by a group of men from his home in Granada and his dead body was never found. There were no official explanations regarding his death but rumours spread quickly that he had become a threat to fascists due to his position as a leftist free-thinking intellectual, experimental artist and homosexual. Robert Graham notes how Lorca's "ill-explained death in Granada came to symbolize the killing of a cultural renaissance in Spain under the Republic which had put Spanish artists in the European *avant-garde*" (Hopewell 1986, 187).

The opening sequence of *To an Unknown God*, constructed as a prologue, establishes the layering of narration and history which pervades the film. A title situates the story in Granada in July 1936, the month when the civil war began. The cinematography emphasizes the luminosity of the garden to turn into a metaphor for a flourishing world about to be destroyed. The garden is a place of leisure. We see Pedro and Soledad on a swing while José, the gardener's son, is riding a bicycle. We see the three young people picking figs; and both siblings resting in the hammocks, while the adults are playing cards. It is in this idyllic world where José, Pedro and Soledad are able to unproblematically transgress, as in some of Lorca's poems, the socially constructed barriers of sexuality and desire. Class transgression is represented in the scene where José asks Pedro for help in repairing the bicycle. While they are talking, Soledad is called by her mother to remind Pedro that José should not be playing in the garden. In response,

Soledad laughs and Pedro mocks his mother. Pedro tells José that he will meet him later. This enigmatic answer hints at the second transgression, homosexuality, which is insinuated again in the scene where the three youngsters are picking figs. José hangs from the fig tree and asks Pedro to help him. Afterwards, Pedro realizes that it was all a trick. During the first night scene, we discover that Pedro and Soledad are involved in an incestuous relationship: the third transgression. Through their actions, the three characters represent a new generation with the potential of overcoming the limitations of the older. Their exchanges are represented as unproblematic in their acts as they give themselves totally to their feelings. Nonetheless, the eruption of reality shatters their idyllic lives, as it does in most of Lorca's works and did in his tragically interrupted life.

Although he is never seen in the film and is only referred by his first name, the presence of a guest in the house is established in metaphorical terms allowing to identify him as Lorca. His strong presence in Spanish culture despite Francoist attempts to erase his figure and the popular knowledge of the circumstances surrounding his death allowed the viewers to identify the unseen Federico as García Lorca. When the two siblings are resting in the hammocks, we hear piano music coming from the house. Pedro asks Soledad if she thinks that "he" would like something and presses her to call "him." As Soledad calls, "Federico!," there is a cut to a long shot of the front of the house highlighting an opening window and the appearance of a silhouette. The next cut from inside the room shows the silhouette looking at the garden from the same open window. Yet, it is night time and the silhouette belongs to Pedro who moves away and reads a short poem written on a piece of paper. This identification with Lorca extends to the last scene of the prologue with the irruption of a group of fascists in the garden. This action

becomes a metaphor for the onset of the Civil war and the killing of José's father in the garden a metaphor for Lorca's death.

If the prologue romanticizes the characters' transgressions by stylizing them, the last part of the film historicizes the same transgressions by placing them within the emerging realities of a new Spain. Thus, the transgression of class barriers is reenacted when José and Mercedes visit the suburbs. José teaching a young boy to ride a bicycle echoes his own learning to ride with Pedro. Nonetheless, if in the past the teaching implied a sexual seduction, in the present it becomes a paternal act and, as I will discuss later, a challenge to audiences' prejudices. The transgression of incest is re-enacted shortly after, in the scene when José dries and brushes Mercedes's hair following his second trip to Granada. They perform this everyday action with Mercedes sitting bare-breasted, confidently discussing her feelings when she makes love to a man. Her explanation of the similarity of heterosexual and homosexual physical responses to love while José brushes her hair creates an almost fetishist feeling in their actions which parallel the relationship between Pedro and Soledad.

Moreover, the frankness of shared emotions between José and Mercedes illustrates how he is able to overcome his loneliness by increasing his contact with others as he begins to break away from the past. The sense of loneliness shared by the characters as a consequence of the lost potential during Francoism saturates the film with what Chris Perriam (1989) calls a "queer intense melancholia" (267). While some of the characters have learned to deal with loneliness—Soledad through her parties, Mercedes through her teaching, and Adela through religion—José is the only one who has assumed and accepted it fully. The social invisibility provoked by his homosexuality increases his

loneliness and shows it as consequence of a double repression: political and social. José's nightly wardrobe ritual reappropriates these feelings. In a long sequence, with an almost static camera, José slowly undresses, putting every piece of clothing away and then examining his face in the bathroom mirror before going to bed. The sequence shows him in front of Lorca's photograph while Jose's own voice on tape recites Lorca's "Ode to Walt Whitman" from the book *Poet in New York*. The ritual ends with José in bed, turning off the light and reciting the line "Sleep on: nothing is left" (163.131).²⁷ In this moment of total intimacy, which the audience witnesses in full, José performs both his and Lorca's concern expressed in the poem: an individual's struggle for spiritual survival in a dehumanized world. José's obsession for affection and the longing for a sexual alternative freed from social constraints are opposed to the consequences of repressiveness in Spain.

In "Ode to Walt Whitman," Lorca defends freedom by speaking of the authenticity of love, claiming the homosexual's right to sexual experience, in contrast to the corrupted homosexual world of New York. Alberto Mira (1999) notes how in the figure of Whitman, Lorca seems to perceive the virtues of a certain model of homosexuality based on intense homoerotic desire. It is a love of men for men, shared and swollen by a deep desire, outside of politics and virtually without expression in the social sphere. Lorca proclaims his respect for all types of homosexuality except for the corruptors of innocence, the "urban faggots" as the poet calls them. This apparent contradiction appears as if Lorca needed to justify homophobia, displacing it from homosexuality in general towards a very specific attitude of certain homosexuals (540). The homoeroticism represented by Whitman takes place in a bucolic milieu away from

the oppressive atmosphere of corruption becoming an affirmation of homosexual pleasure.

As in the poem, José does not repress his homosexuality. He tries to live according to the Whitmanesque ideal of the undefiled homosexual who asserts his homosexuality without exploiting it for his own benefit. As the characters in Eloy de la Iglesia's films that I will be discussing later, José is constructed as *maricón*. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, for Francoist heterosexual society the categorization of homosexuality was based on the identification of male homosexuality with femininity. Accordingly, homosexuals were classified into the *marica* or effeminate homosexual and *maricón* or virile homosexual. The *marica* is expected to appear as and behave in the same socially conservative manner that is associated with women: a soft external appearance, delicately mannered, sensitive, affected, submissive and sexually passive. As long as he renounces to constructed male roles, the *marica* is socially tolerated because his identity is rationalized as biological. On the contrary, the *maricón* is more difficult to recognize because his codified features lack the visible markers of what is accepted. His virility betrays the foundation of male heterosexuality because his sexuality contradicts the same cultural codes used to categorize him. Hence, heterosexual males cannot use the *maricón* to compare and reinforce their own masculinity. The social invisibility of the *maricón* creates anguish in the heterosexual male because it poses a double threat: both physical and sexual. Physical because a violent aggression from a *maricón*—an equal rival to the heterosexual male—can be dangerous while coming from a *marica* is perceived as feminine outburst. Sexual because the heterosexual perceives the *maricón* as sexually active. The fear of being raped is translated into language by using the more

aggressive word *maricón*, an augmentative of *marica*, as a “defense mechanism to refuse what is not possible to understand nor to conceptualize from the available cultural codes” (Guasch 1995, 56). Because he cannot be rationalized, the *maricón* is associated with contagious situations such as “vice and corruption [with the] dishonest abuse of minors or the ‘inherent’ degeneration of certain people with money in the show business and in art environments, who ‘have tried everything’” (Guasch 1995, 58).

To an Unknown God uses José—both a *maricón* and a magician—and his actions to deconstruct the prevalent social prejudices regarding the homosexual. José refuses opportunities to seduce Jorge despite the youngster’s eagerness. Aware that Jorge is confused about his own sexuality, José shows his support by adopting a positive paternal position. When Jorge panics after having smoked pot, he begs José to remain with him. Reacting in a non-judgmental way, José stays in the bedroom until Jorge falls asleep. In the sequence when Jorge comes to José’s place with the excuse of having forgotten his keys, José realizes immediately that the youngster hopes to be seduced. Moved by curiosity, he exposes Jorge’s real intentions by making the boy acknowledge his curiosity about his lifestyle. When realizing Jorge’s inability to directly express his real feelings, Jose performs a trick giving him the keys. Upset, Jorge leaves. Yet, José expresses his support by stating, “come back anytime you want, anytime you feel like it.” His refusal to exploit this situation deconstructs the pederast overtones of his homosexual identity offering a positive view of him as a potential father figure. This potential is reinforced in the sequence where he accompanies Mercedes to the suburbs to visit one of her students. While waiting for her, he teaches a young boy to ride a bicycle. We see the warmth and pleasure he obtains in teaching the young boy. When Mercedes comes outside, the

camera focuses on her worried expression. Her reaction makes us aware of prevalent responses towards homosexuals and the widespread assumptions that they are child molesters, as Mercedes does immediately afterwards.

José's daily routines and his interaction with those who surround him emphasize his loneliness. José has internalized the impossibility for a homosexual to show real feelings and, consequently, he hides any open expression of affection towards everyone. José's profession as a magician is a metaphor for his situation. It allows him some measure of creative intervention even if his powers of transformation are largely based in illusion. Like his life, his work is based on the powers of illusion to disguise reality. Yet, despite this situation, he is able to maintain his integrity as a human being in his interactions with others and to be aware of their histories and desires, making him more tolerant than the society that surrounds him.

José's empathy for the desire of others is shown in the sequence where Miguel and Clara attend one of his performances. José asks her to choose a card. Refusing the ace of hearts that he offers, she asks for the seven of hearts. The ace reappears after each trick and José keeps switching it for the seven of hearts as Clara demands. If we read the ace as the possibility for a monogamous relationship with Miguel, Clara's attitude shows that she is aware and accepts the fact of being in an open relationship. Nonetheless, José exposes Clara's real feelings when, in the last trick, he transforms the rest of the cards into sevens and she ends up with the ace of hearts. José reveals that Clara's liberated attitude is only a cover for her longing for a stable relationship. Clara's longing is reinforced in the scene where she meets José on a terrace. When he asks her if she is in love, she answers that she does not know and asks him the same question. Seeing his

embarrassment, she apologizes and explains that she needs Miguel and is distraught by Miguel's unexplained disappearances. To her question regarding José feeling sorry for her and her feelings, he replies, "I envy you." Despite his answer underscoring his empathy towards Clara, José's disposition expresses his respect for Miguel's attitude despite his own foreboding that Miguel will leave him due to the social constraints of his political career.

The possibilities of healing offered by the new democratic process are represented by José's trips to Granada. The first return occurs immediately after the prologue when he walks through the garden—now in a neglected state, thus evoking a lost paradise. After being recognized by Soledad, he visits the inside of the house. In Pedro's room and looking at the garden from the window, José tries to recall the sentimental past that he has constructed during the last forty years. The camera shows a night table with a picture of Pedro and that of Lorca, and the tensions at play are foregrounded. While José confesses to Soledad that he feels that he has not stopped thinking about Pedro for a single day, a cutaway shot shows the table again with Lorca's picture missing. José's theft symbolizes the fusion of Pedro and Lorca established in the prologue. It is the historical figure and not the sentimental one which has been appropriated. The first step to José's healing is established by his having had an affair with Pedro yet stealing the picture of Lorca.

The next step in José's healing, explicitly related to Pedro, becomes clear upon his second return to Granada. It is during this trip that José is forced to face the past. When Mercedes asks him why he stole Lorca's picture, José's answer is that maybe Lorca is the only one who survived. From that moment on, the presence of an historical

past begins taking over José's romantic view. Thus, we learn that Pedro died during the Civil War of some illness at the age of eighteen and that both Soledad and José were aware of his sexual relationships with the other. During the party organized by Soledad that night, the past comes to haunt José. Someone knocks at the door while he is in the bathroom. The knockings increase in volume until they become an echo of the ones heard on the night José's father was murdered. Back at the party, he listens to a *habanera*, a melancholic song about a ghost soldier visiting his loved one every night, which Soledad and Julio are singing. Later on, José sees a female silhouette totally dressed in black and follows her to the garden to find out that it is Julio. The latter explains how Pedro seduced him and maintained their relationship until the day Pedro confessed that he really wanted to be with Lorca. It is interesting to note how the fact that Pedro was fifteen and Julio thirty echoes the earlier scene of Jorge's attempt to seduce José; the one used to reverse the audience's prejudice of homosexuals as pedophiles. The raw sexuality of Julio's reply shatters José's romanticized view of the past. When José asks if Pedro ever mentioned him, Julio kneels down and performs fellatio. José had transformed Pedro into Lorca's Walt Whitman with a romanticized view of homosexual love where "man is able, if he wishes, to guide his desire / through a vein of coral or a heavenly naked body" (161.88-9). Thus, when he returns to Madrid we see him destroying all of Pedro's letters and pictures that he had kept during those years.

The possibilities of homosexuality being normalized in a democratic Spain are embodied in the idea of resurrection alluded to by the title of the film, in a quote from *The Acts of the Apostles*: "because I noticed, as I strolled round admiring your sacred monuments, that you had an altar inscribed: To An Unknown God" (17:23 Jerusalem

Bible) During the scene in which Miguel is introduced, he is in a clubhouse watching Carl Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955). As José arrives, the sequence of Inger's resurrection begins. Miguel refuses to leave with José for fear of being seen leaving together, yet as José leaves Miguel follows him shortly after. The crosscutting between their dialogue and *Ordet*'s resurrection sequence establishes a metaphor for the possibilities of their relationship. If in Dreyer's film personal faith is able to overcome the constraints imposed by conventional religion, Miguel also seems capable of vanquishing his fear of social prejudices by following José. Once at home, and after José has hidden the tape recorder and Lorca's photo, Miguel enters the bedroom. After making love, they stay in bed and discuss Miguel's involvement with politics. Miguel notes the importance for a politician to be generous and not to be dazzled by power. José comments that Miguel is that kind of politician and asks him if he will stay overnight, but Miguel replies that he has an early engagement next morning. *Ordet*'s resurrection sequence resonates in José's attitude, yet the possibilities that personal freedom can offer are being hindered now by social conventions as well as Miguel's fear.

In the last scene of the film, José arrives home and finds Miguel waiting for him at the door. Without saying anything he lets him in and allows him to witness his bedtime ritual. Once in bed, José briefly smiles at a silent Miguel standing by the threshold, turns off the light and repeats the line, "Sleep on: nothing is left." Despite the ambiguity of José's attitude, the open ending, entitles the viewer, especially a gay one, to see the healing possibilities of his action. It is Miguel who has come looking for José and the latter has exposed his true self for the first time. Thus, it is up to Miguel—the new democratic generation—to either assume with his attitude the reality of homosexuality

and its consequences or to repeat the mistakes made by the preceding generation. José in bed, quoting a line from Lorca's poem, echoes *Ordet*'s resurrection sequence and throws an optimistic light on the resolution: as in Dreyer's film, there is a possibility that with individual faith, individual preferences will prevail over social prejudices in a democratic society.

OCAÑA, INTERMITTENT PORTRAIT

(*Ocaña, retrato intermitente*, Ventura Pons, 1978)

José Luis Pérez Ocaña was a famous character at the Ramblas in Barcelona during the transition years. Ocaña, in his home, recounts his life: growing up in Santillana, a small Andalusian village; how he emigrated to Barcelona to become an artist, even though he still needs to paint houses to earn his living; and why he has become famous as an exhibitionist and a transvestite. Intermittently, the filmmaker inserts scenes of Ocaña's street provocations, the preparations for his first art exhibition in a gallery, and theatrical reconstructions of his subconscious.²⁸

Most of the film's reviews were favorable due to its subject matter and the themes approached. José Luis Guarnier praised the film noting how "it is maybe the first film delivered in our country, where a post-Francoist mood is clearly exuded" (n.p., n.d.). Nonetheless, many of them criticized Ventura Pons's editing of direct-to-camera interviews alternated with dramatic performances creating an almost mechanical rhythm. In an interview published in *Guía del Ocio* (Barcelona), 29 May 1978, Ventura Pons gave two reasons for this sober aesthetic:

On the one hand I am interested in creating a distance between the narrative and the ‘provoked memory’ which goes beyond pure change in sequence, making the spectator in some way feel in himself the sense of the story. [On the other hand], all stylistic preciousness applied to the marginal world that appears in the film would have been an abusive imposition of the power aesthetic. . . . My intention was to make, in all honesty, an intimate story out of an extroverted person.

The understated *mise-en-scène* in the monologue sequences—Ocaña is shot in long takes with static medium or close-up shots while sitting on his bed with his image reflected in a mirror hanging on the wall next to him—allows for a non obtrusive camera presence during his process of reconstructing the past and for the audience to concentrate in Ocaña’s narrative due to their proximity to him. Thus, there is no apparent intervention by the filmmaker in constructing Ocaña’s personality. The camera becomes a mere witness letting the viewer become acquainted with Ocaña and the reconstruction of his particular world. In the press kit for the film, Antonio Alvarez Solís (n.p., n.d.) observes that “what is attractive in this picture about Ocaña is that it conveys to us the general horizons through very ‘local’ human anecdote.” In my analysis I want to focus on how the film elaborates on issues of identity and self-definition of an individual perspective—Ocaña’s struggle for self-expression—to the search for a new identity of Spanish society. This encounter of the *local* psychic of a subject’s relation to its own world with the *general* psychic world of a society relates to Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism.

Robert Stam (1989) defines Bakhtin's notion of dialogism as the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances, using utterance in the inclusive sense of the word. This inclusive sense implies that "the linguistic significance of an utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view [and] value judgments" (188). Stam comments how Bakhtin's concern with the dialogical relationship between self and other as expressed through language can be also applied to monologue "given the fact that every utterance, including the solitary utterance, has its 'other' and exists against the backdrop of other utterances" (189). The notion of dialogism is rich in analytical potential for a film like *Ocaña Intermittent Portrait*. The sincere and impudent confession of the painter Ocaña and the representation of his provocations and experiences convey an intertextual mimicry between documentary and fiction. This intertextuality speaks in the double-voiced discourse of Ocaña's artistic carnivalization.

Bakhtin traces the origins of carnival back to the Dyonisian festivities of the Greeks, but refers to its apogee as potentially subversive in the High Middle Ages.²⁹ During that period, carnival played a central symbolic role in the life of the community, representing an alternative cosmovision characterized by the ludic undermining of all norms. The carnivalesque levels social classes by abolishing hierarchies and creates a life free from restrictions and conventional rules where all which is daily marginalized and excluded takes over the centre in a liberating explosion of otherness. The material body becomes a positive force, and the festive enjoys a symbolic victory over all that is held sacred, over all that oppresses and restricts. During the festivities, the powerful

institutions of the period, including the Church, were mocked and symbolically relativized. For Bakhtin, carnival evokes a number of distinct concepts which include among others: the valorization of Eros and the life force; the concatenation of life and death, emphasizing ritual sacrifice; the practice of transvestism as a release from the burden of socially imposed sex roles; the foregrounding of social overturning and the counterhegemonic subversion of established power; a rejection of social decorum entailing a release from oppressive etiquette, politeness and good manners; and the view of carnival as participatory spectacle which erases the boundaries between spectator and performer (Stam 1989, 86-94).

All these carnivalesque concepts are present in Ocaña's discourse, his art, and the marginal world he represents. From his creative outskirts, Ocaña exposes the social repression of Francoist society, transvestism as a provocation, religion and fetishism, the male chauvinist repression, anarchy, homosexuality, the orgasm as a creative force, and the need to end with the taboos in traditional society. Ventura Pons declared in different interviews that the idea for the film came after seeing a transvestite Ocaña storming into a restaurant shouting and singing: "I was fascinated. I thought that behind that provocation was the use of transvestism on an dramatic level which originates with the Iberian 'esperpento' and the Grand Guignol but is also close to modern theories arising from street theatre" (*Tele/eXpres*, Barcelona, 10 May 1978). Thus, the double-voiced discourse of Ocaña's artistic carnivalization becomes present through the intertextual mimicry between documentary and fiction. This intertextuality is what makes apparent the filmmaker's intervention if not in constructing Ocaña's personality, in re-constructing it on the screen by alternating direct-to-camera interviews with dramatic performances.

Nonetheless, the reconstruction avoids presenting Ocaña in either a paternalistic way or from the perspective of the exotic allowing the viewers to contrast their own meanings against Ocaña's "concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view, value judgments" (Stam 1989, 188).

Ocaña places his feelings of marginalization in his origins, sexuality and profession when he explains that he was born in a small Andalousian rural village in a poor working class family, his parents were a construction worker and a seamstress, that he is a homosexual and that he is an artist who survives painting walls. The sense of the marginality of Andalusia can be traced back to its underdevelopment. The socio-economic and cultural reality of the region was "an agrarian and underdeveloped Spain dominated by religious superstitions, the Spain known for large and feudal landed estates, hunger, the cult of masculinity and for bullfighters" (Gubern 1983, 34). During the 1960s, the disproportionate economic growth in other parts of the country forced young people to migrate on mass to big cities like Madrid and Barcelona where they resided in large dormitory suburbs created for the new arrivals. Being working class and maintaining their cultural identity marginalized the new arrivals because of their different cultural specificities. This marginalization was stronger in the case of Catalonia, and Barcelona in particular, where the class issue only intensified their rejection due to the clichéd Andalousian stereotype which had been exploited by the Francoist regime as the signifier of Spanishness for foreign countries. As an Andalousian, Ocaña's sense of marginality is strengthened by his effeminate manners and his homosexuality; he is perceived as a *marica*, in a culture with a strong cult of masculinity. Yet, instead of resigning to his situation, Ocaña embraces the marginal by placing himself among other

socially outcast people and celebrating both his culture and his sexuality through his performances and art.

In no way does Ocaña make us aware of consciously articulating any kind of discourse. He is just a person, an artist, who still is maintaining a spontaneity as well as a positive attitude towards life and the world and who possesses the gift to express it. Ocaña relates how during his childhood he felt marginalized because he liked to pick up flowers and watch sunsets which was not the expected behavior for a male child in his village. His marginalization increased because he did not understand why people considered his sexual attraction to men as abnormal. The performance which follows clearly emphasizes the feeling of marginality. Dressed up in black as an Andalousian woman, Ocaña performs the role of a mother who has been interned in a mental asylum but has escaped in time to assist in the funeral of her only daughter. In a dramatic tone, she accuses her sisters of passing her off as crazy and having her confined. The improvised monologue reflects the same feelings expressed in the interview segment with sentences like “I want to live in my world but they don’t let me,” “I’m condemned to loneliness” and “as a madwoman I’m going to say what I feel.” The *mise-en-scène* is very simple, representing a funeral vigil with two life-size papier-mâché dolls as the daughter and the sister. The scene brings out a camp sensibility which connects with Federico García Lorca’s plays, also set in Andalousian settings with female characters facing dramatic circumstances and condemned to loneliness.

This camp sensibility appears in the next interview segment when Ocaña notes how beautiful it was to “do things with my friends in the fields and go to the river to observe the gypsies naked” and how he “felt like Mary Magdalene” when people threw

stones at him because of his “excessive sensibility.” The strong presence of García Lorca in the popular knowledge, as I noted in *To an Unknown God*, is made present when Ocaña compares his sensibility to García Lorca’s and states that the poet “was killed with two shots up his ass” because of his homosexuality. Nonetheless, his positive attitude appears immediately after this comment when he emphasizes that despite his marginalization and his sensitivity he has always fought to be himself, “to be a person, and to be what I want.” The two performances which follow emphasize his camp sensibility. In the first one he steps into the famous “Café de las Ramblas” dressed up in an Andalusian costume and sings “Yo soy esa” (I am that one), a famous folkloric song from the 1940s in which a woman explains her life as a prostitute. In this scene, the unsuspected audience at the bar accepts Ocaña’s performance and participates in his interactions with total naturalness as he sits on some people’s laps while commenting how her pimp hits her every morning but still she is “crazy about him.” In the second scene, he wanders through a cemetery, also dressed up in an Andalusian folkloric female costume, and begins to sing a *saeta*, a sad flamenco song, to García Lorca and his death, using some verses from the poet but largely improvising the lyrics.

The relativization and implicit criticism of the institutions present in the carnival is constantly manifested in Ocaña’s remarks about the Church. He expresses his admiration for the religious festivities and icons not because of their symbolic significance but because of their spectacularity. He explains the *mise-en-scène* surrounding the festivities of the Virgin of August during which the whole village participates. The performance which follows is an improvised *paso* (float) in which one of his full-size virgins is carried along the street by some of his friends who stop in front

of a balcony where a female Ocaña improvises a *saeta* to the virgin according to the Andalousian tradition he has just explained.

Ocaña remarks that the only positive legacy of the Catholic Church is the “fetish of its celebrations.” He expresses his contempt for academic institutions that want to take away those celebrations, asking them what do they have to offer instead. He acknowledges the contradictions of those festivities where sometimes “you can see a virgin like a real woman and a policeman with his gun standing beside her,” yet he adds that those contradictions embody the spirit of Andalusia, which is like “a surrealist painting.”

The carnivalesque spirit embodied in the Andalousian cultural practices that Ocaña explains is shown in two scenes where the camera wanders around the exhibition he is preparing in an art gallery and around his apartment. We see the multitude of themes which constitute his personality: paintings of virgins done with the bright colours of a naïf style; paintings which reproduce people and villages from his childhood; ceilings adorned with bells; full size sculptures of virgins and human figures made in papier-mâché and dressed in folkloric Andalousian costumes; rooms prepared for the vigil of the dead; walls decorated with paper garlands, etc. All these elements relate to the carnival spirit and to a camp sensibility which is also expressed in his improvised street performances where many of these elements also appear.

His carnivalesque approach to life is not only restricted to the past. The last part of the film is dedicated to the present. After explaining the circumstances which brought him to Barcelona, he comments on the marginal world which surrounds the Ramblas, where he lives. He talks about the prostitutes, transvestites, pickpockets, etc. which

inhabit a world located only streets away from downtown Plaza de Catalunya which acts as a border to the bourgeois neighbourhoods. He summarizes his love for this marginal world, “which gives colour to the grey people,” in his friendship with Maria, a crazy prostitute. The camera shows her dancing in a music store while the soundtrack plays Edith Piaf singing “La goulante du pauvre Jean.”

His attachment to the marginal world, his effeminacy and especially his crossdressing are the elements Ocaña uses in his art to express his critical perspective on society. As I will explain in Chapter 3, transvestism can be considered a subversive sexual transgression which questions the notion of stable identity. Nonetheless, Ocaña refuses to be categorized. He considers himself a “theatrical” person who uses female clothing to perform. He claims that he likes men but he does not consider himself a homosexual because he does not believe in labels, “I don’t know what I am but I am not a potato sack with a label on the side.” He criticizes the magazines which have exploited his image as a mere transvestite. As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, media is an important site for the construction of meaning, especially during a transition period when “people look to media to establish reality and to define and interpret events going on around them” (Desfor 1998, 22). Yet, the importance of the media can be double sided. On the positive side, it offers the opportunity to rearticulate and reform cultural categories when reporting on events which call up new meanings. On the negative side, it can reinforce old ones by manipulating and distorting the report of those same events. Ocaña admits having “abused” his transvestite image to draw attention to his works but resents how others are taking advantage of his image for their own interest.

His criticism also gets directed towards the current leftist political parties. He explains how he and his friends attended the Libertarian Acts (Jornadas Libertarias) organized by the C.N.T.—the union labour of the Socialist party—dressed in drag. He recalls how they were initially welcomed but by the third day the organizers panicked and did not want them to perform, cutting the music, because “they realized that we were too libertarian for them but we scared them saying that we would tell the journalists.” Nonetheless, he accuses those same journalists of showing pictures of the transvestites who attended one of the demonstrations organized by the F.A.G.C. in defense of gay rights and ignoring “the families with children who were also participating.”³⁰

Ocaña criticizes those men “who look at me totally fascinated but in order to reinforce their ‘macho’ appearance they hold their women as saying ‘you see, I didn’t fall for a man, yet’.” He admits that he wants to provoke. That is why he performs stripteases in the street and dresses in drag. “It’s a way to tell them things,” he explains, “I am a Pasolinian character. I love to suck penises in washrooms and gardens. Everybody is fascinated by that!” The film ends showing images of Ocaña performing a striptease on stage during a political act. While he is tearing his clothes, he exclaims, “repression gave me these dirty rags. I don’t want them any more!”

The dialogical relationship established by the film between Ocaña and his audience, both in real life and in the film, conveys the social feelings which were generating during the transition. Social utterances were expressed semantically as well as intertextually. If José’s generation in *To an Unknown God* sees democracy as a regenerative healing process which will destroy a sentimental past, for Ocaña, born in 1947, and his generation who did not live the Civil War and experienced the

contradictory effects of Spain's economic growth, democracy becomes an opportunity to reappropriate the past. By reappropriating the past in their own terms, the members of this generation offer society the possibilities for a new beginning: a society whose members are considered persons not labels and whose current deficiencies bring out a combative spirit to overcome them.

In this chapter, I have established how *To an Unknown God* and *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait* stress the importance of reconciliation in order to face a clear new beginning, commenting on the importance of not looking back to relive situations which still were present in Spaniards' minds. By reinserting and reconstructing the past and the figure of the homosexual into the representation of nation, the films emphasize the significance of rescuing a social reality that Francoism had tried to erase. The Francoist Spain in which José and Ocaña grew up is presented as one of manipulation and alienation. Through both characters, the films not only convey the feeling of a homosexual community in a country which according to Francoism was not supposed to have one, but speak to a broader community aware of its collective memory of isolation. Most of the critical reviews received by the films noted the significance of this broader message.

In regard to *To an Unknown God*, all the reviews praised its treatment of loneliness as the main theme commenting how the film "dares to makes us all feel alone" (García Rayo 1977, 50) and speaks about "something more universal: the terrible fight between Eros and civilization, regression and progress, possession and dispossession, life

and death” (Isabel Escudero, n.p., n.d.). Even in 1987, when it was shown on television, Esteve Riambau noted that the film was “an exercise about the historical memory from the particular perspective of the new debutant democracy” and how “the parable about contemporary Spain is crystal clear” because only by “breaking up with the unfaithful past and becoming reconciled with a solidary and hopeful present, the protagonist finds again meaning to life” (*Avui*, Barcelona, 9 January 1987). *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait* received similar reviews. An anonymous review praised the film as “the first lucid filmed chronicle about the Spain of the last thirty years” (*Sur/oeste*, Granada, 10 September 1978) and Antonio Alvarez Solís noted in the press kit how the film “possesses far-reaching validity to understand all of a specific time, a sociological mode for conceiving existence. . . [because] it conveys us to general horizons through very ‘local’ human anecdote which is what gives that anecdote a profound reach through its tenderness” (n.p., n.d.).

The importance of an over-reaching, broad message of reconciliation is clearly manifested in the strategies that the films use to engage heterosexual audiences with the world of homosexuality. To create a sense of empathy, *To an Unknown God* constructs José as an unthreatening character. By representing him only as a child and as a mature man, the physical threat is underscored. By reinforcing his paternal position towards Jorge, subverting heterosexual prejudices of homosexuals as pedophiles, the sexual threat is also underplayed. These strategies invite heterosexual audiences to confront their own prejudices and to make reconciliation possible through understanding.

Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait, follows a very different strategy to accomplish the same objective. Dealing with a contemporary character probably known by the

heterosexual audience through media accounts describing his scandalous activities, the film introduces Ocaña in a predictable manner by having him comment on his improvised stripteases and immediately after viewing him performing one in the middle of the street. Yet, Ocaña criticizes the hypocrisy of heterosexual men who approach him unable to hide their initial arousal, and the public performance shows how the multitude who surrounds him reacts in an amused and celebratory way. Allowing the viewers during the first minutes to witness what they knew only through the press, the film subverts the traditional homophobic structure of scandal, presenting it in its liberating and disruptive power. In doing so, Ocaña's subsequent biographical account allows heterosexual viewers not only to discover his individual identity but also to recall similarities in their own experiences despite differences in sexual preference, and the film establishes a sense of empathy towards his persona beyond social prejudices.

As a teenager discovering my own sexuality, the presence of homosexuality on screen and the realization of its historical participation in the realities of my country were very encouraging. For gay viewers, both films put homosexuality back onto the screens in a respectful and serious way, acknowledging at the same time the importance of the community in the history of the country. Not only do the films recuperate a past, as represented by Lorca, which the dictatorship had tried to erase, but they also address the reality suffered by an older generation, embodied by José, as well as revealing the efforts being made by the new one, that of Ocaña, to normalize the new situation. I remember that after seeing *To an Unknown God*, I began to avidly read any poem or play by Lorca that I could get my hands on. I was beginning to realize that there was more to my history than the scope offered by schoolbooks. Living in a highly politicized period, a socio-

cultural sense of awareness was very present in my life and the existence of a person like Ocaña made me realize the changes that must take place in a truly democratic society. The final image of the film—Ocaña walking alone in the Ramblas early in the morning—became a haunting metaphor for the dawn of a new society in which people would join others like him, and like me, to fulfill the democratic dream.

CONVIVENCIA: TRANSFORMING THE PRESENT

As Laura Desfor (1998) notes, Franco's death marked a *new beginning* for democracy, *national reconciliation* and *convivencia*. *National reconciliation* meant the ending the division, polarization and confrontation characteristic of Francoist Spain. *Convivencia* — literally meaning *living with others* but also including connotations of peace and tolerance—became the social, rather than the political, expression of reconciliation representing the homogeneity and communality needed in the new state (43-45). *Convivencia* meant transforming the possible feelings of revenge accumulated during forty years of repression into acceptance, acknowledging that in a democratic society all have the right to freely express their ideas and be themselves. *Convivencia* and tolerance did not spring naturally from society as a whole but were to emerge from individuals' everyday experiences, perceptions and interpretations of society. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, during the transition years a breaking down of the fear and difficulty of expressing new forms of sexuality resulted in an increased social visibility and emergence of a gay reality.

1977 was the year when censorship was officially abolished in Spain. Movie theatres were flooded by banned foreign films, as well as foreign soft-core porn products, which turned spectators away from domestic cinema. This, together with a general drastic decline of movie attendance—partly due to the diversification of Spanish television and the beginning of the home-video—has been used by some historians to explain why Spanish filmmakers used outrageous and sexually explicit material as one way of

competing for the viewers' attention within an unstable market.³¹ Nonetheless, and despite the possibilities of analyzing them as using a controversial subject matter for financial gain, I discuss *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual* in this chapter as films which make sex a political issue, using sex change as an effective trope for cultural transformation in a democratic Spain. Both films are not about homosexuality but about transsexuality. I follow Marjorie Garber's definition (1992) of transsexual as the term "used to describe persons who are either 'pre-op' or 'post-op'—that is, whether or not they have undergone penectomy, hysterectomy, phallo- or vaginoplasty" (106). Garber considers transsexualism not a surgical product but a social, cultural and psychological zone which manifestly questions the "very essentialism of gender identity, offering both surgical and hormonal—as well as psychological— 'solutions' to gender undecidability" (102). Garber notes that one of the most consistent and effective functions of this gender undecidability in culture is to indicate the place of what she calls "category crisis" which disrupts and calls attention to cultural, social and aesthetic dissonances; "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another" (16). This discourse of the transsexual as a *category crisis* is what makes *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual* appropriate films for discussion in my analysis of gay-related films. In these films, I read transsexualism as a metaphor for the process towards a democratic society where former stable identities are shattered. The films show how the legacy of Francoist repression is still internalized within a supposedly hyperliberated Spain and how only a full acceptance of all forms of sexuality can bring *convivencia* in a democratic society.

In my analysis, I establish comparisons of how both films embrace melodrama as a subversive genre, featuring stylistic excesses and ruptures of tone and highlighting sexual and generational conflicts within the family, and by extension within society. Thomas Elsaesser (1991) describes melodrama as a cultural form that initially emerged to express the “healthy distrust of intellectualization and abstract social theory” (72) of a growing bourgeoisie but evolved into a form of encouraging escapism, thus losing its subversive nature. Yet, Elsaesser acknowledges that melodrama has also “resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms,” insisting that “other structures of experience (those of suffering, for instance) are more in keeping with reality” (72). Thus, the focus on the private and the personal allows melodrama to act as a vehicle for expressing the personal. Susan Hayward (1996) notes how melodrama tries to counter anxieties produced by social change in relation to the advent of modernization and its effects on the family by mediating those anxieties within the private context of a home, investing the individual and the ordinary with significance and validating everyday life. Because the social is internalized, characters adopt primary psychic roles and the dramatic action takes place between and not within the characters (202). In *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual*, the characters are torn between the compliance to and the negotiation of gender constructions, not according to moral polarization but around specific conflicts between male and female sexuality. This use of melodrama articulates what Raymond Williams (1977) calls a *structure of feeling*.

Williams describes kinds of feeling and thinking that are social and material but also embryonic and not fully articulated. They exist in a complex relationship with the already articulated and defined, representing “a set, with specific internal relations, at

once interlocking and in tension” (102). These structures of feeling refer to the quality of social experience and relationship distinctive to generations or periods that are marked by stylistic changes and which are inflected by gender. Aesthetic forms and conventions often offer the first evidence of an emerging structure of feeling. Williams’s description of structures of feeling and the way they interact with established forms presents a way to understand and explain in the films discussed the ideologies articulated by Francoism, as well as their implicit tension with those pre-emergent presences that were embodied and given expression during the transition. The implication of melodramatic sensibility in the production and education of feeling, together with the destabilization of gender, allowed *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual* to construct a new image of homosexuality by moving away from the self-contained categories of the *marica* and *maricón*.

Sex Change’s director Vicente Aranda was born in 1926. After working for a North American electronics company in Venezuela until 1956, Aranda returned to Spain and decided to pursue a film career, co-directing his first film *Bright Future* (*Brillante porvenir*) with Román Gubern in 1964. His next film, the experimental feature *Fata Morgana* (1966), is considered the precursor of the Barcelona School Movement. Following a series of failures, he regained the favor of critics and public with *Sex Change*. The film also initiated his long-term collaboration—10 films in 20 years—with actress Victoria Abril. Aranda has shown an inclination to adapt novels that help him to explore his favorite theme: female sexuality as agency. In films like *The Girl with the Golden Panties* (*La muchacha de las bragas de oro*, 1979), *Time of Silence* (*Tiempo de silencio*, 1986), the two parts of *El Lute* (1987 and 1988), *Lovers* (*Amantes*, 1991) and *Libertarias* (1996), Aranda has explored how women used sexuality to compensate for

social repression during the Francoist regime. He also revisited the representation of female sexuality in the thriller genre in films such as *Murder at the Central Committee* (*Asesinato en el comité central*, 1982), *Fanny Strawhair* (*Fanny Pelopaja*, 1984) and *Intruder* (*Intruso*, 1993). Regarding José Jara, the director of *The Transsexual*, I have not been able to find any information, except that he was born in 1942, studied Law and that this film was his second feature.

SEX CHANGE

(*Cambio de sexo*, Vicente Aranda, 1976)

José María (Victoria Abril) is a sixteen year old who lives with his parents and his sister in a Catalanian village. The whole family works in a hotel that his father (Fernando Sancho) owns. Due to his delicate appearance and attitude, José María is usually mistaken for a girl in the restaurant and he is the centre of cruel jokes by other students at his high school. His father decides to transform him into a so-called real man by sending him to a farm as a laborer and taking him to a prostitute in Barcelona. At a cabaret, José María sees Bibi (Bibi Andersen), a transsexual, performing a full striptease. After José María suffers a panic attack with the prostitute, his father sends him back to the farm threatening to repeat the experience in a month. José María runs away to Barcelona after stealing some female clothes. He lives in a guesthouse run by Doña Pilar (Rafaela Aparicio), finds work as a hairdresser, and begins to dress in women's clothes when he is alone in the house. In the beauty salon, José María meets Bibi and becomes her hairdresser and friend. When his sister Lolita (María Elías) comes to visit, José María

dresses as a woman and calls herself María José. In a club, they both meet Pedro (Daniel Martín), a man who has followed them. Dressed as María José, she begins to date him until, upon finding out that she is a man, he fiercely hits her. In an act of desperation, José María tries to cut his penis. He returns home willing to please his father, but one day, after having discovered a dress, his father violently hits him. As María José, she returns permanently to Doña Pilar's house in Barcelona. Bibi introduces María José to Durand (Lou Castel), the owner of the cabaret, and convinces him to hire her and to cover all the costs of her clinical transformation. After her debut, María José secretly falls in love with Durand, but his distant attitude leads her to drink heavily. Durand follows her one night after the show and finds her dancing with a bottle tied up as a phallus surrounded by transvestites. Enraged, he forces her to perform a full striptease. After realizing that he is in love with her, Durand and María José fly to an unnamed place where she has sex change surgery and becomes a complete woman.³²

As the above summary makes clear, *Sex Change* focuses on the process of sexual transformation. Being the first film in Spain that directly deals with such a controversial theme, the representation of the character is carefully constructed for audiences to understand the transformation taking place. Therefore, the film initially constructs José María as a *marica*, when he alternates dressing as a man and as a woman during his first stay in Barcelona, and later as a transsexual when he returns to Barcelona and begins the process of becoming María José. In keeping with Garber's notion (1992) that "transsexualism demonstrates that essentialism is cultural construction" (109), the film introduces José María as a socially recognizable homosexual and then subverts those preconceived essentialist notions. The film's strategy serves to expose how gender and

sexuality are so varied that they cannot be easily categorized and how those categories are mere cultural constructions. In view of this strategy I refer to the main character as José María or María José using the correspondent pronouns depending the gender he/she is performing at that moment.

The opening sequence constructs José María as embodying all the physical and behavioral characteristics associated with the *marica*. A long crane shot shows a teenager walking down the street. The short hair and the slim figure—wearing a denim jacket and jeans, carrying a shoulder bag—has a certain feminine quality that makes it difficult to ascertain the teenager's gender. As the teenager enters a hotel, a man in the reception desk calls the teenager "son" and urges him to help in the restaurant. Stopping in a room where a baby is crying, the teenager talks to the infant in a maternal manner when the father's voice calls him "José María." It is interesting to note how, in both instances, it is the paternal figure who clarifies for the viewer the possible ambiguity of the teenager's gender by addressing him as a male. The feminine attributes of José María are reinforced in the following two scenes. The camera cuts to a long shot of the restaurant where he is serving at one of the tables. As he moves away to bring the order, one of the customers calls him *nena* (girl). José María looks uncomfortable but does not react and walks towards his father who looks with disapproval. There is a cut to a long shot of a classroom full of male teenagers banging at their desks and shouting, "we want José María to cry!" The camera slowly moves towards him and stops in a medium close-up as tears begin to roll down his face.

This identification of José María as a homosexual is reinforced in the scene where the teacher tells his mother that José María is "too docile and too delicate." The teacher's

comments articulate a common social response to homosexuality. He qualifies the presence of José María as a “constant provocation for the rest of the students” and wonders if he “must endanger the formation of normal boys” by having José María in the class. From that moment on, the gender undecidability embodied by José María triggers the melodrama as the characters are torn between the compliance to and the negotiation of gender constructions. As Joaquín Jordá, one of the screenwriters, recalls: “I worked as if [*Sex Change*] was a melodrama in the style of Douglas Sirk; something wild, false, within a genre which does not respect life but its own laws” (Alvares and Frias 1991, 104). If melodrama is based, as Peter Brooks (1995) notes, on a moral polarization and schematization mainly reflected in the struggle between good and evil (11-13), *Sex Change* is structured not according to polar concepts but around specific conflicts between male and female sexuality.³³ While the males all feel threatened by the gender undecidability and are unable to negotiate it, the females are able to express different degrees of empathy. The only male exception is Durand, as I will discuss later.

If José María’s father embodies the hypermasculine patriarchal dominance expected from the heterosexual male in Francoist society, his sexual stability is compromised by his exaggerated womanizing machismo. He displaces his own sexual instability onto José María by reacting violently every time that his son does not act within what he considers the *real man* paradigm. When he finds out about José María’s expulsion from high school, he blames the mother for overprotecting their son and threatens to kill him if the “bull’s ball” cure does not succeed.³⁴ After José María’s failed sexual encounter with the prostitute Fanny, the father takes him back to the farm warning him that they will repeat the trip to Barcelona and adds, “pray that everything goes right

because if not I will kick you until I break your ass.” The violence finally explodes during their last interaction. When the father finds some female clothes in José María’s suitcase, he forces him to dress as a woman. Defiantly, the nude José María confronts his father—the frontal view denied to viewers as the camera shows the character’s back. Then, wearing the red dress, he adopts a provocative come-on gesture which elicits a slap on the face from his father. This action echoes the brutal attack by Pedro earlier in the film and connects the two male characters.

Pedro is constructed as the empowered heterosexual male seducer of melodrama. The first time we see him, he is sitting alone at one of the tables in the terrace of the bar where Lolita is waiting for her brother. The shot-reverse shot of the couple emphasizes his flirting attitude. When María José arrives and winks at him, Pedro is shown smiling in a close-up. Having followed the sisters to the club, he observes them from a distance. Yet, the camera reveals the characters’ awareness through close-ups and the editing clearly emphasizes that Pedro is not particularly interested in the sisters but in any woman who will react to him. His next encounter with María José is constructed as a romantic scene. They meet again in the club and dance while she repeats romantic lines from the TV soap opera she had just watched and he talks as if knowing everything about her. This misrecognition on both sides unleashes the drama in the seduction sequence in the sports complex. When they arrive, the image is overexposed by the sunset light, giving it a romantic look which contrasts with the coarse walls and harsh lighting of the locker room where he has created a bedroom. Although Pedro seems to show empathy for María José’s fear, he remarks on her virginity that “a man does not have many opportunities like this one.” His soon-to-be disempowered heterosexual macho attitude is

fetishized by the camera panning away, stopping at the huge poster of the Olympic swimming champion Mark Spitz wearing the seven gold medals earned at the Munich summer games of 1972 that dominates the room, and returning back to the couple after Pedro realizes the truth and furiously hits her.

The male characters become representatives of the repressive power structure and the traditional values promoted during Franco's dictatorship. The traditionalist outlook is expressed by the father's comments, after realizing that Bibi is a transsexual, that he fancied the show more when they danced *jotas* (regional folklore) and sang "La violetera" (folkloric songs) and in Pedro's comments about the few opportunities left for men to have sex with a virgin. In clear opposition, the female universe constructed in the film understands gender beyond the essential boundaries imposed by society and it is able to comply to gender undecidability despite external appearances. The more independent women are from male rule, the stronger their empathy and solidarity with José María. His mother is able to face the teacher's criticism when her husband is not present, yet, unable to escape the patriarchal dominance of her husband, she reproaches her son of having brought "hell to their home" when José María returns home after his mutilation attempt. Similarly, Lolita enjoys partying with María José in Barcelona and tells her that she will like her to be permanently a woman but breaks down when she must return home, confessing that their father had sent her. In the same way, Fanny tries to seduce José María in front of his father in a vulgar way, yet acts very gently when they are both alone in her room. As a truly independent woman, Doña Pilar, the owner of the guesthouse, is the one who shows unconditional solidarity to José María. In the scene when she returns to the house with her boyfriend finding José María dressed as a woman, she apologizes

for arriving early and ignores the man's criticism by leading him away. When José María returns to Barcelona to permanently become María José, Doña Pilar becomes a surrogate mother not only advising her about clothes and make up, but lending her one of her own outfits and later on moving to the new apartment to help María José during the hormonal treatment.

During his first stay in Barcelona, José María moves progressively towards the feminine. As José María, he works as a hairdresser, a profession which was socially associated with the *marica*. The scenes in which he dresses as a woman accentuate this association. As María José, the identity she constructs relies on an exaggerated femininity. In the sequence when José María is alone in the guesthouse on a Sunday, he puts on a night-gown while listening to a women's program on the radio.³⁵ A series of shots show her sewing, putting on a red dress, and having breakfast in front of the TV listening to a soap opera and repeating its romantic lines which later on she uses in her conversation with Pedro. By crossing back and forth between genders, the character seems to confirm the heterosexual expectations that entrench the *marica*'s visibility. These expectations are shattered in the mutilation scene. The impossibility of a gender duality, embedded in the concept of *marica*, is represented in María José's dual reflection during her desperate action. As María José tries to cut off her male genitalia, her image is reflected simultaneously in two mirrors. The camera shows her face(s) as she opens the razor and expresses his pain when she brings it down. Only then, there is a cut to a close-up that shows a drop of blood running down her thighs.

After returning to his family, the film summarizes the progressive transformation of José María into María José in a montage sequence accompanied by classical music.

Despite being assigned an arduous work regime by his father, the performance of repetitive tasks is presented as evolving from a masculine to a feminine world: from doing accounting while his father observes him, to cleaning the pool to cutting a watermelon in the kitchen and helping a maid to load the washing machine. This evolution climaxes when a defiant José María wearing a dress becomes María José in front of his father. As she is liberated from patriarchal dominance, we never see José María again. The next shot shows María José back in Barcelona looking for Bibi in the cabaret. The definitive psychological and physical process of transformation of María José is presented in a montage sequence again with classical music on the soundtrack, which alternates shots of Bibi and Durand talking to her with shots of diverse beauty treatments: electrolysis, depilation, massages, piercing and make up. While the earlier work montage presented José María in rather realistic medium and long shots, this time the imagery consists of stylized facial close-ups of María José. The transsexual has imposed herself in the narrative and she is going to remain there for the rest of the film until her final sex change following the surgery.

Despite the melodramatic construction of the narrative, the film maintains a distanced approach that tones down, rather than accentuates, the melodramatic elements. Aranda, who got the concept for the film from a press clip in *Le Nouvel Observateur* about a Belgian transsexual who had died during an illegal sex change surgery, commented in some interviews that “the story [in the film] is told in a very clinical form. What we wanted was to describe a singular case, but without emphasizing the possible morbidity of the theme. If there was morbidity we didn’t refuse it but it wasn’t something that we were looking for” (Alvares and Frias 1991, 104).³⁶ In fact, the working title of the

film was *A Clinical Story*. From this perspective, *Sex Change* can be read as documenting the case of a woman trapped in a male body and the long process of transformation she must undergo. Yet, since María José's ambition is to become a real woman who can find love and happiness in a heterosexual marriage, the film can also be read as a subversive transsexual woman's film. The opposition between the elaborately structured series of melodramatic situations rupturing the ordinary realism of the case study recalls Peter Brooks's redefinition (1976) of melodrama. Brooks defines melodrama as an abiding mode in the modern imagination characterized by excess. He claims that the extravagant representations and moral intensity of melodrama simultaneously place it in opposition to the realistic mode while requiring a realistic context (viii-xvi). Aranda recognized that under the melodramatic structure of the girl who goes to the city and becomes famous while also finding true love lies the real story of the intimate desire of becoming another:

There was a moment in which I was quite astonished about what I was doing. Néstor Almendros, the cinematographer of the film, told me something that, suddenly, clarified everything. Our film didn't tell the life of a transsexual exclusively; that was only an anecdote, a metaphor to address something more generic, personality, subjectivity. At heart, we were filming "The Ugly Duckling" (Alvares and Frias 1991, 104).

This is precisely how melodrama functions in *Sex Change*. The film raises a complex series of subversive ironies which try "not only to show, but to suggest beyond what is shown"(Guarner 1985, 20). Considering that the idea for the film first came to

Aranda in 1972 and that different scripts were consistently refused by censorship until its approval in 1976, it invites an alternative reading as a metaphor for a Spain that wants to change. The characters represent different social classes and positions on democratic change. Patriarchy (the father and Pedro), economic power (the father) and culture (the teacher) react against the destabilization of norms and the possibility of social change embodied by José María/María José. In contrast, female characters embody the focus of resistance exercised by the minority groups during the dictatorship years and the need of solidarity to accomplish the objectives of change.³⁷ The construction of these polar binaries—male and female sexuality, patriarchal laws and transgressive desire, tradition and change, dictatorship and democracy—around the figure of a transsexual character enables the film to express the *category crisis* present in Spanish society at that time.

While the narrative constructs the main character in a way which allows the viewer to identify with the figure of the transsexual, “the extraordinary power of [transsexualism] to disrupt, expose, and challenge, putting in question the very notion of the ‘original’ and of stable identity”(Garber 1992, 16) is given to the character of Bibi, a spectacular looking female and a real life transsexual who did not exist in the first treatments of the script but was incorporated shortly before production. As Aranda has explained,

I was thinking about the film and by chance I went to ‘Starletts’, a cabaret in Barcelona. There I met Bibi, who was performing a number based on the pretense that she was a woman and at the end showing her real sex. I thought that it was a way to introduce in the film an element of reality

with a documentary value. . . . What we saw in that world was terrifying and deserved to be in the script. We had a written plot, but what surrounded us was much more dramatic and terrible (Alvares and Frias 1991, 108-9).

Bibi becomes a metaphor for the dissonant realities that had been hidden to Spaniards and needed to be faced and accepted. Bibi carries the awareness that, for Spain to become a modern nation, the traditional values promoted by the dictatorship had to be refused. The film introduces Bibi performing the act that made her famous during the transition. Offering an alternative, and condensed version, of Fanny's previous act, she performs a provocative striptease. To see another woman performing does not come as a surprise. This normality is reinforced by the narrative when Fanny asks José María what he thinks of Bibi. As viewers, we must agree with José María's assessment that she is very beautiful. Therefore, the display of her male genitalia acquires a shock value. This display has a double objective. On the one hand, it introduces the existence of transsexuals to José María and reinforces the traditional macho attitude of his father. On the other hand, it confronts heterosexual viewers with their own reactions and consequently with questions about character identification. As Bibi says in a later scene, her penis is crucial to her performance, because it proves the double nature of her act as a dancer and as a woman which must be read against two different sets of norms; without it, she has to rely solely on her own talent without the uncanny spectacle of the hybridization of the sexes. Thus, her character serves two distinct functions. As a real transsexual, she is a vehicle for heterosexual viewer empathy with Jose María's sex

change because the viewer sees a woman—Victoria Abril—playing a man who desires to be a woman. As a character, Bibi is codified by melodrama. Paralleling her transformation into a *real* woman after having surgery, Bibi becomes the friend transformed into rival for the love of the hero.

While the other male characters function as melodramatic villains, Durand is constructed as a representative of social change. His shift from Pygmalion to romantic interest follows melodramatic rules perfectly. Because he is the detached cabaret impresario who exploits sexuality as part of his business, self-interest guides his treatment of María José. After showing some interest in her, he becomes distant when Bibi surprises them kissing in the dressing room. Immediately after forcing María José to sing “Mi cosita” (My Little Thing) while performing a full striptease in the cabaret, he apologizes and admits his love.³⁸ The change of Durand’s feelings has a double purpose. First, Durand’s redemption by love provides the happy ending required by melodrama. Second, because it is not sexually threatening, it represents the possibility of change for the male characters and by extension the viewers. If Durand’s awareness of a dissonant reality allows him to evolve as a human being, so too can society evolve, by refusing repressive traditional values and accepting—and incorporating—different sexual identities into the reality of modern Spain.

If Aranda’s distanced approach de-dramatizes the melodramatic, as discussed above, the mode of the last ten minutes of the film accentuates the possibility-of-change message. The sex change surgery is shown through a detailed slide show. The graphic drawings demonstrate that a sex change is basically a simple inversion: “The skin of the penis, still with its tube-like shape, is turned inside out . . . and inserted into the new

cavity . . . [which] becomes a functioning vagina.” The slide show becomes a fully didactic experience for the viewers while, at the same time, it justifies the truthfulness of the story emphasizing the simplicity of transformation. *Sex Change* ends with a close-up of María José, looking directly at the camera, while a voice over narrator informs us that she had her first female orgasm six months later. Through this declaration regarding her sexuality and pleasure—with María José facing the camera and thus the audience as a *new woman*—she is incorporated into the subjective consciousness of society. As Garber (1992) notes:

Transsexualism as depicted in films, novels, and memoirs, paradoxically amounted in effect to a *new essentialism*. . . . The body was again the focus of gender determination. The boundary lines of gender and of subjectivity, never clear or precise, their very uncertainty the motivation behind the anxious desire to define, to delimit, to *know*, are not only being constantly redrawn, but also are receding inward, *toward* the mysterious locale of ‘subjectivity,’ away from the visible body and its artifacts (107-8).

If María José has been able to transform herself, and by extension Durand, into new subjects, so the audience, as witnesses, may become aware that transformation is possible despite arduous labour and suffering. For a society beginning to face change, the message of assimilation and transformation came loud and clear. If Spain was to become a full democracy, all had the right to be themselves and to be accepted for what they were.

THE TRANSSEXUAL

(*El transexual*, José Jara, 1977)

Lona (Agata Lys), is the main attraction in “Gay Club”, a cabaret of transvestites. One night, she meets Sergio (Paul Naschy) an ambitious journalist who convinces her to write an article about her transsexual life and experiences. When Lona mysteriously disappears, Sergio tries to locate her but his investigation leads nowhere. Nobody seems to know what happened; not even at the cabaret where another performer has replaced her. Slowly, Sergio begins to follow different clues that bring him to Eduardo (Vicente Parra), a professor of theology engaged to Lona. Realizing that Lona was in love with Eduardo, Sergio finally finds out that she has been admitted to a hospital for an illegal sex change operation. When Sergio and Eduardo arrive at the hospital, it is too late. Lona has died during surgery. Intermittently, the plot is interrupted by the first person address narrative of Yeda Brown, a real-life transsexual.³⁹

Like *Sex Change*, *The Transsexual* is constructed as a didactic melodrama. Yet, while *Sex Change* integrates both modes in a fluid way, constructing believable characters and bringing the viewer along in the process of discovering the realities of transsexualism, *The Transsexual* separates both modes to become two films in one. On the one hand, the melodramatic elements are constructed through Sergio’s investigation and flashbacks that tell Lona’s story. On the other hand, the didactic justification for the fictional narrative is constructed with Yeda Brown, a Brazilian transsexual, telling her life and explaining the psychological and physical processes of transformation involved in transsexualism. Hence, the strategy of *The Transsexual* is completely different from that of *Sex Change* because instead of subverting social preconceived notions of

homosexuality, the film addresses an already present reality and exposes the dramatic consequences of social repression.

The main problem of *The Transsexual* is that, in contrast to *Sex Change*, it disallows any affective identification with Lona. Although it is a film about her, her character is totally underdeveloped. The few scenes in which she appears try to represent different aspects of her personality but fail to go beyond mere sketches, creating an implausible subject. Furthermore, the schematic figuration of the supporting characters and the confusing fragmentation of the plot de-emphasize the engagement that melodrama could bring to the story. Yet, the inclusion of the film in this thesis, despite its failed intentions, relates to its ability to address sexuality in an explicit way in the context of the recently disappeared censorship and to the references to the social reality of the transition comprised in the more engaging real-life segments with Yeda Brown.

The total disappearance of censorship, prior to the film's release, is noticeable in two ways. First, it is indirectly addressed by Yeda Brown. Talking about the normality of her sexual relationships, and mentioning the high sensitivity of her vagina, she looks off camera to inquire if her comments are permitted by censorship. The fact that she continues talking without interruption becomes a statement for the now acquired freedom to say anything on screen. The second way is through the gratuitous presentation of female nudity, as when the camera lingers on a bare-breasted female customer dancing in the club.

As in *Sex Change*, *The Transsexual* constructs the male characters as villains. While in the former they represent male fear of gender undecidability, in the latter they serve to criticize heterosexual gender performance and to justify some female nudity.

Sergio is constructed in an unsympathetic way. He works for a sensationalist tabloid newspaper and his interest in Lona is purely exploitative. She provides him an opportunity to write a scandalous article which may implicate important social figures. Even in his relation with other characters, there is no sign of caring but only self-interest in finding Lona. His hypermasculinity is questioned by his regular visits to the “Gay Club” and his only sexual encounter, with Loti, is interrupted after he screams in pain because one of her earrings has hurt him.

The Transsexual presents the social reality of transvestites and transsexuals, exposing a world that was more visible during the transition. The film contains scenes depicting their cabaret performances to reveal aspects of this world that were probably known to the viewers due to media coverage. To counteract what is already familiar, the film also contains scenes showing transvestites and transsexuals in the intimacy of their homes to offer a glimpse of daily life away from the stage. Although these scenes can be considered exploitative, especially the birth and the wedding scene which I will discuss later, the film justifies them through the interview fragments with Yeda Brown explaining the meaning of those realities.

What is more intriguing is the apparent contradiction between Brown’s emphasis on the essentialist aspects of transsexualism and the narrative emphasis on the constructedness of gender in Lona’s story. This apparent contradiction becomes manifest in the opening credit sequence. As the credits begin to appear, there is an inserted medium shot of Yeda Brown, a good-looking woman, sitting and looking directly at the camera. She begins to explain the differences of what heterosexual viewers might consider a homogeneous homosexual world by defining four categories: homosexual,

bisexual, transvestite and transsexual. She continues by explaining that she belongs to the last category because she “was born as a boy, treated as a boy but inside I was a girl.” While listening to her comments, we see the images of a transvestite getting dressed and applying make up. Hence, while her remarks stress the essentialist nature of her transsexualism, the film is showing the mechanisms of gender construction.

The apparent contradiction is carried on in some of the other interview segments where Brown explains how different doctors mentioned that she had an excess of feminine hormones and a certain degree of hermaphroditism that could be solved with “a small surgery” to define her sex. In fact, what this apparent contradiction addresses, as already mentioned in regards to *Sex Change*, is what Marjorie Garber (1992) calls “transsexual zone”, a zone which exposes how “transsexualism is both a confirmation of the constructedness of gender and a secondary recourse to essentialism”(109). Garber notes how as we turn to medical discourses for specificity and distinction, gender categories and boundaries become more blurred. She explains that, despite the efforts of some medical experts to explain transsexualism as a mental state, the medical discourse invariably becomes a succession of gendered subjective elements: surgical alterations, hormonal treatments and social styles. Although the transsexual body is not an absolute insignia of anything, it makes gender references seem knowable because of its emphatic interest in gender-marked and gender coded identity structures (106-10).

This significant interest in gender-coded identity structures justifies some of the sequences in the film which would otherwise look sensationalistic and exploitative. For instance, when the transvestite Soraya explains to Sergio that the last time she saw Lona was when Jacobo was born, a flashback sequence shows her in bed screaming and

attended by other transvestites acting as mid-wives. In a voice-over Brown recounts how as a child she used to simulate being pregnant using dolls. She explains that for homosexuals and transsexuals to want children is not a sickness which should be mocked, but an expression of their pure feelings to be respected. She justifies this purity by explaining that affectivity is equally composed of male and female features, thus creating a stronger sensibility that distinguishes them from the rest of the people. This plea for understanding validates what may otherwise be seen as a merely sensationalistic recreation of heterosexual identity structures. Rather than mocking social constructions, transsexuals are trying to emphasize gender categories. It is this discourse that makes intelligible a later sequence in which Sergio attends a wedding ceremony in a private home between Toni Greco, one of the club performers, and Soraya, dressed in a spectacular bridal gown. The possible mockery of the ceremony is counteracted by the fact that the couple sign a legal document of common goods. Their act expresses how despite the blurred gender identities, there is an affective identification with the symbols of heterosexual marriage.

Like Durand in *Sex Change*, Eduardo represents the possibility of change for male characters and, as the love interest, he is constructed according to the conventions of melodrama. From the beginning, he is introduced as a shy man who confesses to Sergio that he is in love with a beautiful woman and knows that this relationship may not be successful. The progress of Eduardo's affair with Lona is given in three flashback sequences. The first one shows a first encounter with the characters bumping into each other at the club and includes a series of close-up reaction shots of both as Lona leaves. The second shows Eduardo offering Lona an engagement ring after one of her

performances. The melodramatic elements are emphasized in their dialogue through sentences like “I would love to stop time”, “I will always be with you”, and “be patient, someday I will tell you the truth.” Following these conventions, the third sequence begins with a montage of different shots showing the couple in the countryside laughing, walking and kissing. The shift from idyllic to dramatic takes place when they arrive to Lona’s home and Eduardo tries to make love to her. Lona refuses and when he tries to force her, she locks herself in the bathroom. The romantic construction of Eduardo’s character is undermined by his reaction to Lona’s true gender. When Lona tells him that she used to be a man, he reacts angrily because he imagines everybody at the cabaret laughing at his ignorance. By calling her a circus freak, he reveals his heterosexual concern for social appearances. As Lona undresses in front of him asking whether or not she is a real woman, he is unable to express his true feelings for her and sobs. In spite of admitting to Sergio that he loves her, Eduardo is punished by the end of the film. As he searches for Lona in the hospital, he comes across a corpse and is unaware that it is hers. Through the punishment of Eduardo, the film addresses and confirms its moral message that intransigence and fear of social prejudices only can lead to failure and death.

The excessive melodramatic tone of the narrative is justified in the film by its message against social intransigence. The illegality of performing sex change operations in Spain is the driving force behind the plot. Sergio’s difficulties to find Lona are motivated by the sort of underground system that enables transsexuals to fulfill their dream. Yeda Brown confirms the dangers of this illegal procedure. Her direct address statement, during Lona’s sex change surgery, stresses that the risks of the surgical intervention derive from its illegality due to the lack of clinical support in the case of

medical complications. The last sequence of the film invites the viewer to judge the outcome of a full sexual change by presenting Brown's cabaret striptease performance. After a shot of Eduardo wandering along a hospital corridor searching for Lona, there is a fade to black and a male voice announces Yeda Brown as a sex mystery. With the direct address, "Is it a man? Is it a woman? Judge for yourself," and Brown's ensuing performance, the film solicits from the viewers a recognition that what they are seeing is a real woman, understanding the benefits that change in social standards—in this particular case, the legalization of sex change surgery—can bring to individuals in a democratic society.

The implication of a melodramatic sensibility in the production and education of feeling, together with the destabilization of gender, allowed *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual* to construct a new image of homosexuality detached from the self-contained categories of *marica* and *maricón*. On a surface level, melodrama is used to provoke empathy in both a heterosexual and homosexual viewer towards a controversial figure. For heterosexual viewers, the transsexual is initially presented as a non-threatening character, because at a narrative level what María José and Lona try to achieve through surgery is an established gender identification towards the fulfillment of their dream for a conventional heterosexual marriage. This reassurance is equally reinforced by the fact that the transsexual is played by an actor of the gender to which the character aspires. Seeing both Victoria Abril and Agata Lys playing a man who desires to be a woman enables heterosexual viewers to identify with the process of sex change. Yet, when we

see female stars performing such complex sexualities, particularly alongside real-life transsexuals like Bibi Andersen and Yeda Brown, the power of their sexual mobility becomes subversive, regardless of the outcome of the narrative evoking the radical socio-political and cultural changes that Spain was undergoing at the time. For homosexuals, the transsexual has been controversial because she is seen as denying her own homosexuality by searching for a full integration within heterosexual norms and even adopting homophobic attitudes. In *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual*, transsexualism can be read as a metaphor for the process towards a democratic society where former stable identities are shattered. Through these characters, the films present sexual transgression of prevailing social boundaries as a possibility—an imperative for the characters—to break away from repression and, by presenting femaleness as social performance, contest the socially accepted notion of gendered identity as a natural, biological fact.

I remember that I saw *The Transsexual* for the first time in a double program with *Emmanuelle* (Just Jaeckin, 1974) in 1977. Despite being a soft-core product constructed to fulfill heterosexual fantasies, the French film impressed me for its philosophy of carefree and mobile sexuality. Watching immediately after *The Transsexual*, I was just as bored by its narrative as captivated by Yeda Brown. She embodied a similar discourse of sexual mobility but her sexual preferences were similar to mine. Although I did not feel like a woman trapped in a man's body as she did, she presented me with the recognition that it was possible to carry out your sexual option despite social opposition. When a couple of weeks later I was able to sneak in a downtown movie theatre to see *Sex Change*, I was totally fascinated with the film and especially with Bibi Andersen. Along with having the same sexual discourse, the film presented me with a world in my city,

Barcelona, that I did not know existed. Once I located the cabaret where Bibi was performing, I went there a few times and saw her entering the club. Her stunning female beauty and her reassuring attitude confirmed for me what I was beginning to realize: in a democratic society we all have the right to be ourselves regardless our sexual orientation. By accomplishing that we would comply with the true meaning of *convivencia*.

VINDICATING DEMOCRACY: MELODRAMA AS PAMPHLET

Laura Desfor (1998) observes that the *new beginning* for Spanish society was not merely the debut of *national reconciliation* and *convivencia*; yet, most importantly, it marked the debut of *democracy*. Democracy was the *theme* of the transition; it became the new civil religion. Democracy was understood as a system of popular sovereignty and public liberties as well as a system of open dialogue, debating problems in depth without taboos, and consensus, accepting the majority (51-2). This understanding is what links *democracy* with *national reconciliation* and *convivencia*. Just as popular sovereignty symbolically opposes authoritarianism—with its implicit violence—dialogue and compromise symbolically oppose confrontation and demagoguery—with their implicit irrationality and extremism (53-5). Democracy also implied modernization. The transition from Francoism to democracy meant that Spain would be transformed into a modern western European nation, both in the sense of acceptance into European political and economic organizations, and in the sense of attaining status within western European intellectual and cultural communities (56-7). In this chapter, I discuss how *Hidden Pleasures* and *The Deputy*, both directed by Eloy de la Iglesia, address directly all the symbolic meanings of *democracy*, and their implicit dichotomies, that appeared during the Spanish transition.

Born in 1944, Eloy de la Iglesia directed plays for the Children's Popular Theatre and wrote scripts for children's television programs before making his first feature, *Fantasia 3*, a trilogy of fairy tales, in 1966. With *The Glass Roof* (*El techo de cristal*, 1970) de la Iglesia obtained his first box-office success. The film borrows conventions from the thriller and horror genres to tell a story containing strong sexual connotations. Despite his continual problems with censorship,⁴⁰ he continued on the same line with films like *Cannibal Man* (*La semana del asesino*, 1972), *To Love, Perhaps to Die* (*Una gota de sangre para morir amando / Le bal du vaudou*, 1973) and *Games of Forbidden Love* (*Juegos de amor prohibido*, 1975). With the softening and disappearance of censorship de la Iglesia begins to include explicit sexual scenes meant to shock audiences. He explores the consequences of sexual repression in contemporary Spain in films like *The Other Chamber* (*La otra alcoba*, 1976), *The Creature* (*La criatura*, 1977) and *The Minister's Wife* (*La mujer del ministro*, 1981). With *Criminals* (*Navajeros*, 1980), de la Iglesia initiates a series of films reflecting marginal youth and drug abuse which culminates with *The Shot* (*El pico*, 1983)—one of the top ten of all time in the Spanish box office—and its sequel in 1984. After a personal adaptation of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (*Otra vuelta de tuerca*, 1985), he returned to the marginal youth theme for *The Tobacconist from Vallecas* (*La estanquera de Vallecas*, 1987), as of now his last film.

Equipo "Cartelera Turia" (1983) classifies Eloy de la Iglesia's films as purely commercial venues with themes of high impact closer to the tabloids (256). In a dictionary of Spanish filmmakers (n.p., n.d.), his films are described as an "excuse for the exhibitionism of sexual perversions or pathological behaviors" (159). Yet, Paul Julian

Smith (1992) defines them as representing “what is perhaps a unique moment during the transition to democracy when the topic of homosexuality and the mass audience coincided in the Spanish cinema” (129). In the only contemporary critical account that de la Iglesia’s films received, Javier Vega (1981) takes a materialist approach. If cinema is a tool used by the governmental power to reproduce ideology, films are equally interventions that challenge dominant ideology. The films are politicized from this point of view because de la Iglesia uses cinema as “a way of defending the interests of the people talking about the things which are being talked in the street, the things which ‘are a problem’ in the country at this moment” (23).

The option chosen by de la Iglesia recalls the debate between Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukács regarding the effectiveness of drama in the 1920s and 1930s. Brecht considered viewers as detached individuals capable of using their minds critically, so he sought to estrange the audience from the dramatic action to make them adopt a critical attitude. Lukács sought to bring the audience to identify with the tragic hero to undergo an emotional cleansing or catharsis. Being an avowed Marxist like Brecht, de la Iglesia considers cinema to be an instrument to denounce poverty and economic exploitation. Yet, his approach is closer to Lukács. His films are a blend of honesty and radicalism that forces the spectator through emotional involvement to take a stand without hiding behind the fallacy of objectivity. The power of persuasion of the films does not rely on exquisite images but on strong exposition and narrative force. This creative decision implies a reduction of the *mise-en-scène* to a strictly functional role, evoking a comparison of the films with pamphlets (Vega 1981, 24). A pamphlet is a rhetorical mode characterized by its extreme and redundant tone, by a conjuncture with discourse that nonetheless contains

more general theoretical claims. De la Iglesia adapts these features to his films but, unlike the pamphlet, the aesthetic and technical simplicity are a conscious option, not merely an economical consequence of limited resources. Together with the consideration that the pamphlet is not a traditional narrative genre, this simplicity makes his films particularly difficult to read in conventional academic terms. This narrative technique becomes more refined by its rigorous application in every consecutive film. The choice of using a mainstream genre like melodrama allows the films to make the pamphlet structure entertaining to audiences. Melodrama is used as a basic structure to expose the topic, yet the films become “highly closed, with an exceptional absence of ‘noise’ in a formalist sense” (Vega 1981, 25).

HIDDEN PLEASURES

(Los Placeres Ocultos, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1976)

Eduardo (Simón Andreu) comes from a well-positioned family. He manages a bank branch and is a homosexual. His sexual encounters with male prostitutes are clandestine. He picks them up either on the street or in public washrooms. One day he meets Miguel (Tony Fuentes), a working-class youth, at the exit of a business academy. In his effort to seduce him, Eduardo decides to protect the youth by offering him a job in a company and employing him as an assistant for a book he is writing. Miguel has a girlfriend, Carmen (Beatriz Rossat), but also maintains sexual relations with Rosa (Charo López), a married woman. Slowly, Eduardo falls in love with Miguel, and when he reveals his feelings, Miguel rejects him and disappears. Only after Eduardo is assaulted in his apartment by

Nes (Angel Pardo) and a group of male prostitutes, Miguel returns and accepts his friendship. Knowing that he never will become his lover, Eduardo establishes a father-son relationship with both Miguel and Carmen. Everything works perfectly until Rosa, resentful for being abandoned by Miguel, seduces Nes to plot a revenge by insinuating to Carmen's parents that Miguel is homosexual. Having been banned from seeing Carmen and after being attacked by Nes and his friends, Miguel goes to Eduardo's bank and causes a scandal by outing him publicly. Alone again, Eduardo is relaxing in his apartment when the doorbell rings. He looks through the peephole and smiles. The film ends with a freeze-frame of his face in close-up as he opens the door.⁴¹

Different from other movies which rely on a surprise factor by revealing the main character's homosexuality when the plot is well advanced, *Hidden Pleasures* makes it explicit in the opening sequence by implicating the viewer in the visual economy of homosexual voyeurism and the eroticization of the male body as the object of a commercial transaction. The film begins with a medium long shot of a naked young man in the shower. The camera follows him to the bedroom, where he starts to dry himself. A cut to a medium shot shows a middle-aged man in a dressing gown. Crosscutting between the watching man and the dressing youth suggest that the shots of the latter are from the man's point of view. The man takes some money from his gown and gives it to the youth. As they move to the door, the dialogue reveals the commercial nature of their relation:

Boy: Can you spare some money for the taxi?

Eduardo: OK. Here you are. Maybe we could get together again sometime.

Boy: Give me your phone number and I'll call you.

Eduardo: No. I'm hardly ever at home. I'll see you around.

Boy: I hang around the billiards halls a lot. So you know.

Eduardo: All right. One of these days I'll drop by.

The spectator is asked to identify with the gay male gaze and is therefore positioned to respond to the eroticized male body from that perspective. José M. Cortés (1997) notes that the male body is the most personal and social symbol of human identity and is the site for the production of desire and meaning whereby economic and moral power is affirmed and destabilized in permanent tension (126). The body acts as a metaphor or symbol of the self. It becomes a code which allows us to read and understand how we see ourselves and how we are seen. Social and sexual roles are normalized through stereotypical models apprehended both culturally and ideologically. Thus, as mentioned before, in Spain, the homosexual is made visible only as an effeminate construction. The opening sequence of *Hidden Pleasures* is important because for the first time in Spanish cinema, the vision of the male body is not offered from the *marica*'s point of view, therefore, at least on the surface, devoid of erotic connotation. Here the viewer is asked to identify with a masculine gay character, the feared *maricón*. This identification is emphasized in other scenes of the film. For instance, when Eduardo spies on Miguel and Carmen in the park, the blurred green foreground reveals, with a change of focus, to be shrubs behind which Eduardo is hiding. Again, when the young couple is having sex in Eduardo's apartment, the focus shifts from a framed photograph of Eduardo in the foreground to the naked couple in the background. In both moments, as in the opening sequence, the spectator is implicated in Eduardo's homosexual voyeurism,

and the change of perspective within a single shot emphasizes the irreconcilability of the three gazes in the film: Eduardo's objectification of young men, especially Miguel, Miguel's eroticization of Carmen and that of the viewer positioned between the homosexual and the heterosexual gaze.

The so-called safer heterosexual gaze on the female body is always destabilized by Eduardo's position as the main character. Only during the first erotic encounter between Miguel and Rosa does the film offer the female body as an object of pleasure. Rosa remains naked in front of the camera and her body is shown without any interference in its integrity in a static medium long shot. Once we are aware of Eduardo's amorous feelings towards Miguel, the film seems to shy away from showing the latter heterosexual encounters by the camera always moving away. The most significant example is the sequence where, for the first time, Miguel makes love to Carmen at the lake. Constructed to emphasize the romantic through the bucolic setting and melodic soundtrack, this sequence uses three cuts to change from a medium close-up to an extreme long shot as soon as the young couple begin to kiss. The viewer is denied the erotic gaze of the female body by being situated in a position that seems to remind us not to betray Eduardo's feelings.

The movement in the opening sequence from the inside to the door of the apartment is not accidental. Eduardo listens through the door to make sure that the male prostitute has gotten into the elevator and only after he is convinced of that he moves away, puts on a record of classical music and relaxes while tanning under a sunlamp. The door becomes the border between the private and social space announcing the separation of affectivity and objectification. In his apartment, protected behind the safety of the

closed door, Eduardo is able to express his real feelings without any fear. Outside the apartment, relations are always mediated by economic exchange or by social repression. It is in his apartment where he confesses his love to Miguel and where Raúl reminds him that their relation was love, too. Eduardo's reaction when Miguel goes to the bedroom with one of the female prostitutes shows that he is oblivious to the other prostitute's reaction. Only in the security of his apartment or in non-urban spaces, can real feelings be expressed. In a montage sequence, Eduardo, Miguel and Carmen are shown having fun on a roller coaster and having a picnic on a lake. It is during the picnic that Eduardo confesses to Carmen his real feelings for Miguel, assuring her that he will never try anything because he loves them both. She accepts the situation without reservation because he has been honest with her. The scene concludes with underwater shots of the three characters swimming and having fun, reinforcing that their relationship is only possible away from the socially constrained urban environment.

The sublimation of the totally asexualized relationship between Eduardo and Miguel is an intelligent strategy. The narrative presents for the first time a gay hero to the Spanish mainstream heterosexual society and thus needs to find a way to create empathy for him without hiding his sexuality. By constructing a positive image of the homosexual, the narrative redeems Eduardo and makes him sympathetic through a sublimated love. The aspects of his sexuality that are considered sordid are shown to be a consequence of society's refusal of homosexuality; of being confined *to the closet*. The conventional heterosexual fear of contamination is subverted by showing how Eduardo is able to respect Miguel's heterosexuality without corrupting him. If the drama takes place, it is a

consequence of society's intransigence and not because of the attitude of the homosexual character.

As the narrative develops, *Hidden Pleasures* creates "a theoretical framework"(Aguilar and Llinás 1996, 133) to offer a (re)presentation of the homosexual according to identifiable socio-cultural structures: the ephebe and its iconography as representation of male desire and the figuration of homosexual identities according to the codes of melodrama. The construction of the young man as an object of desire is based on the tradition of the classic European culture of the ephebe. José M. Cortés (1997) relates the origin of this conception of male beauty to the myths of Narcissus and Saint Sebastian. The former represents a triple ambiguity related to an identity which is "continuously changing, transitory and brief, observing that all in life is simulacrum", to a desire which is "ungraspable, a sad loving lament," and to the masculine/feminine roles which "show a beautiful and self-sufficient figure which recalls the myth of the androgen" (132). Saint Sebastian was iconographically adopted by homosexuals not only because of the representation of a sensual young naked male but the "highly erotic content of the arrows which symbolize the double meaning of love instrument, sent by the god Eros, and of a metaphor of phallic penetration" (133).⁴² Installed in the tradition of Mediterranean culture, these images of desire were deeply rooted in the artistic tradition in Spain and can be found in the work of literary figures like Luis Cernuda and Juan Gil-Albert, amongst the most important ones who deeply influenced homosexual cultural practices.⁴³

The film's figuration of homosexual identities follows what Peter Brooks (1995) defines as one of the fundamental characteristics of the melodramatic mode:

Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. They assume primary psychic roles, father, mother, child, and express basic psychic conditions. Life tends, in this fiction, toward ever more concentrated and totally expressive gestures and statements (4).

A series of homosexual types, apparently contradictory, are distributed amongst the characters in the film: the gay, the *marica*, the liberationist and the prostitute. Eduardo is the gay: a loving son, respected employee, and devoted-platonic lover who gives up commercial sex for unconsummated but passionate romance. The *maricas* are Eduardo's friends, whom he neglects after meeting Miguel, and the performer in the club. The friends mock Eduardo for his chaste devotion, claiming he must have become a socialist or a nun. Acting in a totally effeminate way, they are not too far from the stereotype exploited by the artist, Paco España, in his performance at the cabaret. Raúl is the liberationist. His comments, trying to encourage Eduardo to join the collective struggle against the homosexual oppression, link him with the beginning of the gay movement in Spain during those years. The prostitutes are presented as a social product of the capitalist modes of exploitation; exploited by capitalism, they exploit homosexuals. The film does not seem to be interested in passing judgment on these homosexual types but only in presenting the way society has conditioned their different positions. The narrative centers

on the social struggle of the homosexual and uses these types to reinforce a positive image.

Another socio-cultural structure which strengthens the figuration of Eduardo as a positive image is the incompatibility between the traditional and the modern Spain. Eduardo's family is associated with a traditional Spain where attitudes and values are ruled by religion and hypocrisy. His mother is always in her bedroom with a crucifix prominently displayed on the wall behind her. On her deathbed she confesses to Eduardo that she always knew about his homosexuality but, as a good mother, needed to overlook it. Eduardo's brother reveals the same knowledge when he suggests to Eduardo to protect the family's honor by using his contacts with the police to discreetly solve any problem. At a time when the modernization of Spain was being debated, homosexuality is presented by the film as the representative of a modern and secular society. Elements of the *mise-en-scène* reinforce the respective associations by displaying the family flat crammed with religious icons and pictures, while Eduardo's apartment looks modern and functional and his office is clearly dominated by a steel table and design gadgets. Heterosexual characters are presented as anchored in the past, unable to adapt to the modern times, while the homosexual characters are the only ones who have adapted to the new society.

The pamphlet construction of the narrative becomes explicitly didactic in the scenes where the homosexual characters justify their behavior. For instance, Eduardo explains to Miguel that homosexuality is not an illness and that each person has the right to be as he or she really is. In another scene, when Miguel confronts Raúl saying that he will not allow gay men to take advantage of his poverty, the latter urges him to "learn

how to struggle but not just against a *marica* who offers you 500 pesetas to sleep with him. Think that you may be selling more important things than your ass and you haven't even realized that's what you're doing." In this dialogue, the liberationist homosexual exposes the mistaken consciousness of the proletarian heterosexual and by extension of the film's viewer by placing homosexual prostitution within the context of capitalist exploitation. Later on, when Eduardo explains to Raúl that he is trying to form a kind of family with Miguel and Carmen and that by doing so, he will not be alone in his old age, Raúl sadly comments that if Eduardo once merely bought boys' bodies, he now buys their lives. Raúl expresses the politics of the emerging gay movement when he replies that he and his comrades will not be alone either at the time of the struggle and that it is useless to rely on individual efforts. Again the film does not pass judgment on either attitude but merely reflects the situation of gay politics at a time when disparities existed between coming out politically or trying to adapt individually to social conventions.⁴⁴

Homosexuality in the film, as Paul J. Smith (1992) suggests, is "presented both as a mimicry of the heterosexual, an attempt to recreate its structures, and as a deviation from it, a perversion of the natural order" (141). A mimicry because Eduardo tries to recreate the heterosexual model to maintain his relation with Miguel and Carmen but a deviation because this solution is contemplated as perverse by the heterosexual society which surrounds them, hence precipitating the drama. Yet, the film subverts the initially apparent ideological principle by presenting heterosexuality as the real perversion, grotesque and intransigent. Thus, Eduardo's niece and nephew are examples of extremist political positions pleading for violence to solve social problems, and Rosa is a "voracious man-eater" who is unfaithful to her husband, seducing first Miguel and then

Nes, to fulfill her sexual needs. Her seduction method, licking the cake off youth's mouths, becomes even more grotesque with the use of shock cuts: from a close-up of her breast to a religious image on the wall when she is making love to Miguel and with the crosscutting between her sexual act with Nes and her washing his hair shown only with the soundtrack of the shampooing. Yet, the problem of the perverse is inextricably linked to the normal. In an interview with Tomás Delclos published at *Mundo Deportivo* (Barcelona), 15 February 1977, Eloy de la Iglesia claims that

The homosexual is a marginalized being, and will always be in a society of classes, because he maintains an unproductive sexual relation. That's why his gesture is revolutionary. It happens the same with adultery, free love, etc. They are forms of sexual exchange which not only move away from the established model but also prevent the reproduction of the family nucleus, and for some, family is a political institution.

Therefore, the decision to have a gay hero love a straight man is not a sign of fear in addressing a controversial theme, but it becomes a subversive narrative by stressing the necessary coexistence of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the same social space, and under the same economical and political laws.

The almost impossible and truncated relationship between Eduardo and Miguel in *Hidden Pleasures* reveals more about the relation between gays and society in the Spain of that period than a reciprocal love affair might have been. The open ending of the film suggests that while a happy ending is required, it cannot be represented. As Paul Julian

Smith (1992) argues, the final freeze-frame of Eduardo smiling as he opens the door offers a double reading:

if homosexuality is depicted (as it is in the film) as a disturbance in existing heterosexual relations, it will necessarily be doomed to failure; but if it is also a “democratic right” to “be as one really is” (as the film also proposes), then in the new Spain of the transition homosexuals can no longer be punished for their sexual-object choice (143).

As a gay teenager viewer in 1977, my response was, and still is, to create a happy ending. Interestingly, I had two different finales, both quite satisfactory for my fantasies. The first ending was absolutely clear: after Miguel outs Eduardo in the bank, he calms down and realizes that Eduardo is the only person who really loves him; Carmen disappears after her father believes Rosa’s lies and forbids Miguel to see her; if you really love somebody, you do not care what everybody else says. So, when the door rings, I know that it is Miguel who, having realized what his true feelings are, comes back to Eduardo and they will live happily ever after. Nonetheless, a second ending was also plausible: the last time Raúl is in Eduardo’s apartment, he places their portraits together signaling that he still loves him. After Miguel disappears, Eduardo sees the portraits and realizes that he is also in love with Raúl. So, when the door rings, I know that it is Raúl who is standing on the other side and that they will live happily ever after.

The open ending perhaps is not a “paradoxical result of a compromise formation between [melodramatic] genre and [Spanish] history” (Smith 1992, 143) but an option for

the homosexual viewer, me, of choosing my own ending. If the heterosexual gaze has been elicited from the beginning to identify with a gay male gaze, the freeze-frame shot of Eduardo's smiling face, synonym of happiness, encourages the heterosexual viewer to construct a closure according to that image. The possibilities are not too many and they may be quite conditioned. Yet, in order to create a democratic Spain everybody must have the right to decide for themselves.

THE DEPUTY

(El Diputado, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1978)

Roberto Orbea (José Sacristán) is a lawyer and a member of an illegal leftist party. While serving time in prison as a political prisoner, he has a homosexual encounter with Nes (Angel Pardo), a street hustler imprisoned on a morale charge. After being released, Roberto confesses to Carmen (María Luisa San José), his wife and comrade, what happened. Carmen, knowing that her husband had homosexual relations before their marriage, is sympathetic and understanding. Yet, Roberto continues having relations with young hustlers supplied by Nes. When his party is legalized, Roberto is elected deputy of Madrid. With Nes's help, a fascist underground organization plans to blackmail Roberto by paying Juanito (José Luis Alonso), a young hustler, to seduce him. Juanito agrees but soon both men fall in love. Carmen discovers their relationship and decides to participate in it in order not to lose her husband. When the fascists discover that Juanito has disclosed their plan, they murder the youth in Roberto's apartment the night before he is going to be elected as the leader of his party. Roberto spends all night driving around

Madrid trying to decide what to do. The film ends with a freeze-frame of Roberto at the party congress singing “The International” before addressing the delegates.⁴⁵

The first sequence of the film situates the narrative as Roberto’s flashback on the morning following Juanito’s murder. While Roberto stops his car to look at a couple of policemen, his voice over states: “I have nothing to fear. I’m a legal politician, a democratic congressman, a representative of the people. And I am important despite being in the opposition. But there have been so many years operating clandestinely...” The haunting experience of oppression under Franco is depicted using a Brechtian *mise-en-scène*. Placed in undetermined but sinister bureaucratic settings, a series of civil servants read Roberto’s police files while directly addressing the viewer; each reading alternates with a flashback on the particular event to illustrate the character’s biography. They recount that Roberto is Basque; the son of a famous fascist architect; the pupil of an ex-professor purged by the regime; an expelled university professor; and the defending lawyer of ETA terrorists during their court martial. As Roberto imagines how he would defend himself, a similar montage recounts his homosexual history, explaining his sexual encounters as a student in the subway and in movie theatres as well as his first full homosexual relation during his military service.

The different vignettes place Roberto’s life within historically recognizable events, thus allowing the viewer to recognize the biographical trajectory of real members of the Spanish left wing parties. Despite the pre-credits title, “all the characters and events in this film are fictitious. Any resemblance with reality is pure coincidence,” any viewer in 1978 could easily identify real characters and events. Thus, the ex-professor can be recognized as Tierno Galvan who had been expelled from the University of

Madrid in the mid 1960s and was the founder of the PSP (Popular Socialist Party); the court martial relates to the Burgos Process in which five terrorists were condemned and executed three months before Franco's death; and in 1978 there were well known rumors of a bisexual deputy from the PSP being blackmailed. The recurring layering of narrative and history in the film links the fiction to the country's political actuality: Carrés, the leader of the fascist organization, looks suspiciously similar to Blas Piñar, the leader of the ultra right-wing group Fuerza Nueva (New Force); the Argentinean fascist can be identified with Jorge Cesarsky, an Argentinean journalist detained in 1978 for his links with right-wing paramilitary organizations; Roberto is detained during the demonstrations against minister Fraga Iribarne in April 1976; there is archival footage of the king's speech during the opening of the first democratic Courts and of the celebrations during the legalization of the leftist parties; and we see images of real politicians like Felipe González, leader of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party) and Prime Minister from 1982 to 1996, Santiago Carrillo, leader of the PCE (Spanish Communist Party), and Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez.⁴⁶

The revelation of the main character's homosexuality at the beginning of the film positions the spectator to identify with the *maricón*, encouraging a double identification process. On the one hand, Roberto's use of the first person narrative implicates the viewer as addressee of his story: "I have the obligation and the right to explain myself to you, comrades." On the other hand, the construction of the narrative as a flashback aligns the spectator with a gay male gaze, implicating the viewer in the visual economy of homosexual voyeurism and the eroticization of the male body. During his first encounter with Nes in the prison, there is a shot from Roberto's point of view showing how Nes

caresses his naked body and genitals. At the gay orgy scene, the camera tracks along the room showing all the naked bodies until it stops on Juanito, who is receiving fellatio. The camera holds a close-up on his face until he reaches orgasm. If in *Hidden Pleasures* the heterosexual gaze on the female body is constantly destabilized, in *The Deputy* it is totally denied even during the scenes involving Roberto and Carmen. The scenes between the couple place their sexuality within the frame of a homosexual context. After Roberto explains his homosexual affair to Carmen, and they begin to kiss, there is a cut to a point of view shot of a phone booth with Roberto's voice over explaining how he began to contact Nes to get more boys. In the other scene where Roberto and Carmen kiss, the heterosexual gaze is again denied because Juanito is kissing both of them in a threesome.

The relation between Roberto and Juanito is fully sexualized and becomes mutual. However, Roberto pays hustlers for sex and Juanito belongs to the proletarian class. The basis of homosexual desire is once again determined by capitalism and economic power. Nes and Juanito agree to help the fascists for financial gain. Juanito explains to Roberto that he became a hustler when he saw how easy it was to make money. When Roberto asks Nes why he betrayed him, Nes replies, "You found it easy to buy me; so did they." If the drama takes place, it is a consequence of society's intransigence and not of homosexual attitudes. Yet, *The Deputy* situates society's intransigence in direct relation to politics.

Roberto's apartment becomes a metaphor for political and sexual clandestinity. The place had been used during Francoism for covert meetings of the party and the production of political pamphlets. With the party legalized, Roberto begins using the apartment for his clandestine sexual encounters with Juanito. As Roberto explains later to

Carmen, “I still need this place for certain aspects of my life. I still need the secrecy.” In some interviews, Eloy de la Iglesia critiques left-wing parties for postponing the defense of sexual freedom and becoming accomplice of the conservative bourgeois ideology fearing a loss of popular support. For him, sexual freedom is associated with the rest of the individual freedoms and cannot be partial and the parties are postponing it with the excuse that there are more important issues that need to be addressed.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, as political opposition flourished in Roberto’s apartment in the past, the possibility for homosexual romance does it in the present. Using a functional mise-en-scène, the film presents the first encounter of Roberto and Juanito by crosscutting between their faces and the posters of revolutionary leaders on the wall. A montage of all these posters is inserted when they go to the bedroom and begin to make love. It is in the apartment where Juanito begins to recognize his own homosexuality—when he asks Roberto for their first kiss—and where Carmen, after Roberto has revealed his affair to her, goes to meet both men, accepts the situation and suggests that Juanito could be their son.

Paul Julian Smith (1992) considers striking that “in spite of [the film’s] ‘personalized’ depiction of politics and its autobiographical narrative (complete with ‘intimate’ voice-over), Roberto is never set up as a (pseudo-medical) case-history, and indeed never thinks to ask himself the cause of his homosexuality” (149). What Smith fails to see is that this cause was not questioned in *Hidden Pleasures* either. Eduardo is asexualized to create a positive and unthreatening homosexual for heterosexual viewers; he is an agent that facilitates the viewers’ access to the world of homosexuality. Now that Spanish society knows that a homosexual is like everybody else but with a different sexual choice, or as de la Iglesia defines him, “a man who sleeps with men because he

likes it and that's all" (*Triunfo*, Madrid, 14 February 1979), Roberto is constructed to plead for the democratic rights of homosexuals. This plea motivates the layering of fiction and reality; of sex and politics. The pamphlet construction of the narrative becomes even more evident in *The Deputy* than it was in *Hidden Pleasures* through a strong reliance on melodramatic structures. Smith (1992) criticizes that the film relies on three narrative devices: schematic simplification, sentimentality and crude topicality (150). What he fails to see is that those are the characteristics of melodrama, as described by Peter Brooks (1995): "the world according to melodrama is built on an irreducible manichaeism, the conflict of good and evil as opposites not subject to compromise. . . . Polarization is not only a dramatic principle but the very means by which integral ethical conditions are identified and shaped, made clear and operative" (36). These "ethical conditions" are reinforced by the extreme and redundant tone which characterizes the pamphlet, allowing the narrative to be broken temporarily to let Roberto deliver what Smith (1992) considers "unashamedly expository dialogue" (149) but which nonetheless articulates the film's didactic function.

It is through these strategies that the film structures its political discourse to educate the viewer. Roberto and Juanito's relationship is didactic as well as sexual. When both men go camping Juanito comments that he always thought of leftists as workers without money but never as queer. Roberto remains silent but is shown in the next shot reading from a Marxist theory book to answer Juanito's earlier question: "the proletariat dictatorship that contradicts the role which Marx assigns to democracy, is not his invention. It arises from the most radical and social current of the Jacobean principle." Later on, in the apartment, Roberto explains to Juanito that the revolution proposed by

the left has as its objective a just and free society in which everyone has the right to be free and participate. Political and sexual rights are equated in the ideological education of Juanito. Roberto and Carmen take him to museums and teach him art, literature and socialism. During a Socialist rally in which Roberto is participating, Juanito raises his fist in the Communist salute and decides to join the Socialist Youth group. The process of acceptance of his own homosexuality and his love for Roberto takes place at the same time as his political education. This evolution towards a new consciousness, summarized in Juanito's indoctrination into a new social order, is intended to parallel the viewers' education into a new ethical order.

The narrative of *The Deputy* centers on the social struggle of a positive homosexual figure and uses the other characters only as convenient agents to reinforce this model. Roberto is patient and understanding with Juanito's education; he is also an honest person, husband and politician who is ready to sacrifice his career and his marriage when the fascists inform him that they have captured Juanito. The use of José Sacristán and María Luisa San José in the roles of Roberto and Carmen allowed audiences to easily empathize with their characters because of the actors' association to representations of the ordinary Spaniard. In *El Periódico* (Barcelona), 5 November 1978, Luis Cantero defines Sacristán as the actor "who better knows how to perform the desires and frustrations of the common Spaniard." As I explained in Chapter 1, the popular knowledge and acceptance of both actors as representative of the middle class post-war youth had been established a few years before with their roles as a couple in *The New Spaniards* (Roberto Bodegas, 1974) and other films of the Third Way. Thus, their casting

in *The Deputy* becomes an intelligent manoeuvre to subvert the viewers popular association of their characters to conventional heterosexual marriage.

The stark ethical conflict between good and evil, structured by the melodramatic conventions, reaches its climax with the murder of Juanito. His transformation from hustler and enemy to lover and comrade heightens the theoretical claim of the pamphlet narrative. Roberto's possibilities to contribute to the construction of a democratic country, expressed during the film, are jeopardized by society's denial of freedom. Despite the possibilities of acquiring the new ethical values associated with a democratic society, the postponing of sexual freedom can only generate dramatic consequences. Smith (1992) argues that de la Iglesia "fails to examine the bourgeois sexual ideology of the left, as he does not show the party reacting to Roberto's declaration" (150). Yet, as in *Hidden Pleasures*, *The Deputy* gives viewers the option to choose their own ending. Roberto's final words are very explicit: "What decision can I make? For the moment, to tell you all comrades. Tell you the truth without hiding anything. The whole truth." His address in voice over using the pronoun "you" directly involves the viewers, us.⁴⁸ We are the comrades, the party. The film cannot show the party's reaction because we are the party. Over the frozen image of Roberto, it is up to us to decide if we want to participate in the construction of a fully democratic country.

Hidden Pleasures was initially banned without any official explanation and *The Deputy* was assigned the "S" classification. Before the legalization of pornography, the Film Board created the "S" category defined as "films in which content can hurt the sensibility of the viewer." It was strictly restricted for a public older than eighteen. This category became a mixed-bag for soft-core and films which were uncomfortable for the Board but they could not ban. Given these problems with censorship, the adverse reactions of the critics were not unexpected. De la Iglesia notes that "in those times the critique with most impact, the press, was in the hands of very reactionary people; there were critics who were even censors. There was a huge distance, which doesn't exist today, between the daily and the specialized critic" (Aguilar and Llinás 1996, 127).

Reading press files about both films obtained at the Spanish Filmoteca, I noticed that the relatively kind reviews for *Hidden Pleasures* were mainly motivated by the critics' opposition to censorship still in effect one year after the death of Franco. Their praise recognizes that it was the first Spanish film to deal with the marginalization of homosexuality and its consequences. The rest of the reviews on file display attacks, some of them quite homophobic, from all sides of the political spectrum. In *Tele/eXpres* (Barcelona), 23 March 1977, J.E. Lahosa accuses *Hidden Pleasures* of simplicity, paternalism, having a lack of narrative, and trying to commercialize on its prohibition with a theme unrelated to freedom of expression. On 27 January 1979, in his review of *The Deputy* for *El País* (Madrid), a newspaper of socialist affiliation, Fernando Trueba accuses the director of double servility: to a left militancy and a shameless and uncouth commercialism. He writes that no other Spanish director tolerates the grotesque and the ridiculous in order to sell his films, that the characters are inauthentic, the dialogue

unintentionally comic and the aesthetics amorphous. He concludes that de la Iglesia is not only a bad director who never made even one good film, but also that nobody can believe that what he makes can be called cinema. Right-wing critics use the same language and make similar arguments against the film. In *ABC* (Madrid), 9 February 1979, Pedro Crespo calls de la Iglesia's cinema ineffective as a pamphlet and comic as a melodrama due to its excessive and ludicrous exaltation of marginal homosexuals. In *Pueblo* (Madrid), 24 January 1979, Tomás García de la Puerta accuses his films of being "full of obscene and repulsive scenes" and notes that the director shows the world of *mariconeria* as if he had lived it.

The outrage over homosexuality voiced by critics entitles them to question the director's sexual preferences, as in some interviews where he is asked why is he so interested in homosexuality.⁴⁹ It seems clear that what critics found threatening was "the unmediated irruption of homosexual desire into the mass form of commercial cinema" (Smith 1992, 132). This emergence of gay characters did not scare the public; on the contrary, the films did extremely well at the box office. *Hidden Pleasures* had a good commercial run⁵⁰ and *The Deputy* remained in some theatres for more than seven months. When shown for the first time on national television, on 15 November 1985, it broke all records when it reached an audience of more than three million (Smith 1992, 145).

The open endings of both films actively vindicate homosexuality's right to a future in democracy. The pamphlet construction of the films accounts for both heterosexual and homosexual audiences. For heterosexuals because the films are constructed as an educational process designed to engage them with the world of homosexuality, overcoming their social prejudices and learning new ethic values and

respect for each individual sexual choice. The emotional involvement sought by the film and the direct exposition of ideas forces them to take a stand without hiding behind the delusion of objectivity offered by other films. The freeze-frame images of Eduardo and Roberto, and especially Roberto's direct address, demanded from the heterosexual viewers to take a position whether by embracing their plea for acceptance, therefore becoming truly democratic, or refusing it, therefore aligning themselves to the right-wing anti-democratic reaction. For homosexuals, because after engaging us in a pleasurable visual economy of voyeurism through the male characters' gaze, the pamphlet construction exposed the dramatic consequences of remaining in the closet in a democratic society. After sneaking in to see both *Hidden Pleasures* and *The Deputy* a few times within a very short period of time—I saw *Hidden Pleasures* four times in the same week when it played in a second class theatre and *The Deputy* twice—I began to realize that remaining in the closet was no longer a solution for justifying social repression anymore. In spite of only being fifteen at the time, I began to participate in some of the demonstrations organized by the main gay organizations—I must confess that they always ended with a lively party on the street and that they were a good way to meet other people like me. Nevertheless, I understood that if we wanted to end the consequences of forty years of Francoist repression, we needed to engage ourselves actively in the democratic process vindicating, amongst other freedoms, the right to our own sexuality. Only in this way the future of democracy would be truly possible.

CONCLUSION

The period of consensus in Spanish society culminated with the national referendum celebrated on December 6, 1978 when the new Constitution was approved by a vast majority.⁵¹ Laura Desfor mentions how this accomplishment was celebrated in the media with expressions like “a *new beginning of democracy and national reconciliation*” and as an event that “opens the doors to *convivencia*, dialogue and respect for other persons” (Desfor 1998, 104-5, italics mine). Desfor observes that the successful ratification of the Constitution represented reaggregation and the closing of the process of transition since the core symbols that had emerged during the transition became institutionalized (102). The passing from Francoism to democracy had been achieved, and from then on individuals were expected to behave in accordance with the norms and ethical standards of the new social state.

The Spanish transition is outstanding for historical and political, as well as cultural reasons. Historically, because it is the first time in Spanish history that a parliamentary democracy has successfully worked. Politically, because the country was able to transform itself by using a strategy of consensus. Culturally, because, in a critical period of destabilization where old institutionalized identities were refused, the new system of shared symbols that emerged enabled the construction of new democratic ones. As I mentioned in the introduction, cinema was a particularly important medium for this symbolic generalization. The films produced during the transition employed the new core of symbols in different ways and in different situations, but nevertheless created a strand of shared meaning in the representation of the old and new identities. As John Hopewell

(1991) recalls, “films, one felt, could incite the whole of a nation’s consciousness” (120).

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I have analyzed how the symbol of *a new beginning*—meaning both the debut of democracy and of national reconciliation—is employed in *To an Unknown God* and *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait*. Both films draw on viewers’ knowledge and shared historical memory to present socio-political repression as the main cause for the feelings of marginality that were embedded in Spaniards for forty years. Even though the Civil War is never addressed, its consequences are strong determinants for the marginalization of the characters. Democracy is presented as the only lively alternative for the films’ characters José and Ocaña, and, by extension, for Spanish society. Their homosexuality emphasizes their marginalization and is used as a strategy to reinsert the history of gay men and gay culture within, and as a constitutive part of, a re-imagined national community.

In Chapter 3, I have examined how in *Sex Change* and *The Transsexual* transsexualism can be read as a metaphor for the process towards a democratic society where former stable identities are shattered. Analyzing the melodramatic narrative and following the discourse of the transsexual as a *category crisis*, the films criticize the notion of essentialism established by Francoist society presenting how identities are socially constructed and how the legacy of the dictatorship’s repression is still internalized within a supposedly hyperliberated Spain. Both films present how only a full acceptance of all forms of sexuality can bring *convivencia*—meaning literally *living with others* and connoting also peace and tolerance—in a democratic society.

The symbolic meanings of democracy and their implicit dichotomies—popular autonomy / authoritarianism, dialogue and compromise / confrontation and demagogy,

modernization / tradition—that appeared during the transition are addressed directly in *Hidden Pleasures* and *The Deputy* as I have discussed in Chapter 4. Both films present homosexuality in an open and politicized manner. Eloy de la Iglesia applies the narrative structures of a pamphlet to confront the audience with a directly vindicative claim about the situation of the homosexuals in society. Melodrama is used as a common ground for the viewer to understand the characters, yet de la Iglesia subverts the gender of the main characters, transforming them into homosexuals, and leaves an open ending which forces viewers to question their own ideology.

The emergence in the public discourse of a gay reality allowed for its incorporation—and vindication—into the cinema. The films analyzed here became a site where people established, defined and interpreted new social identities. Yet, if the experience of watching a film is a process, the meanings generated are the result of an interaction between a subject and a text. In this way, each spectator's experience will be unique. However, as social subjects sharing the same socio-historical context, the spectators' experiences will also have points of commonality. In this thesis, I have shown how the six films discussed incorporate the core symbols of the transition shared by society into their representation of gay identities to create and deconstruct cultural codes in relation to established discourses of national identity and nationhood. Bringing my personal experience into the analysis, I have tried to offer a specific example of how the struggle expressed by the characters in the films echoed the development of Spanish gay identity, both on a private and public level.

As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, my analysis is only a sampling of the work produced during that period. Due to space constraints, I decided not to include

two films which also present homosexuality as their main theme. In *Clear Motives of Desire* (*Los claros motivos del deseo*, Miguel Picazo, 1976), the dramatic coming-of-age story of a young woman, her homosexual brother and their mutual boyfriend portrays a realistic and penetrating analysis into the sexual frustrations of teenage life in Spanish society during the last years of Francoism.⁵² The film presents the risks and disastrous consequences of sexual repression for the new generation of Spaniards, no matter their sexual orientation. Sexual repression is used as a dramatic catalyst to critique prevalent social patterns and to promote the necessity of *a new beginning* and *convivencia* in the emergent democratic society.

A Man named Autumn Flower (*Un hombre llamado Flor de Otoño*, Pedro Olea, 1977) fictionalizes the true story of Luis de Serracant (José Sacristán), a bourgeois lawyer who defends union workers and anarchists during the day, but becomes the transvestite performer “Autumn Flower” at night. Even though it is set during General Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship in the 1920s, the film can be read in contemporary terms because of the way it deals with the politics of national and homosexual identities. The film presents the figure of the transvestite as a *category crisis* to criticize socially accepted notions of identity as a stable category. The use of a real-life character vindicates the historical role of homosexuals in the fight for a democratic Spain and reinserts them into the national community.

There is, still, a lot of work to be done on gay representation in Spanish cinema. The films produced during Franco’s dictatorship, particularly the folklore musicals, are excellent vehicles for queer readings. Gay male audiences were keen consumers of the folklore genre. *Folkloric* films, their stars and their songs became, and still are, an

important part of Spanish camp culture. Jo Labanyi (1997) notes how “the early Francoist *folklórica* has in recent years enjoyed a revival with Spanish gay audiences because of its camp exposure of the constructedness of gender roles” (230). The restrained representations of sexuality in those conspicuously innocent films offer immense possibilities for studying how gay audiences were able to construct subversive readings. For example, I am currently working on the films of Sara Montiel, the most famous actress-singer in Spain in the 1960s. Paying special attention to issues of character representation and performance, I analyze how her star persona encourages heterosexual as well as homosexual identification.

Another area that deserves closer analysis is the explosion of soft-core porn films during the transition. After the disappearance of censorship in 1977 and with the increasing vindication for sexual freedom in Spanish society, some filmmakers began to produce films overtly dealing with sexuality in an effort to compete with the erotic foreign films being distributed in the country. Yet, the Spanish films represent heterosexuality and lesbianism for heterosexual viewers only. The presence of supporting gay characters is merely a narrative justification for the sexual appetite of neglected women. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to study how the films articulate gender relations and power in regard to the new democratic socio-cultural discourses circulating in the country. Another question raised by these films is their reception by gay audiences. In other words, how these films can be read in terms of pleasure elicited by the sight of male naked bodies.

To truly understand the homosexual paradox presented in 1980s Spanish cinema, a more extended knowledge of gay history and gay representation is needed. During that

decade, the Socialist government—in power since 1982—promoted an official ideology of so-called libertarianism. Impeccable anti-discrimination clauses were written into the constitutions of the new autonomous geographical regions. Yet, while in Anglophone countries the lesbian and gay community continued to provide an example of a visible and viable public sphere fiercely critical of the establishment, in Spain the majority of the community moved away from political vindications, claiming that they did not suffer the burden of governmental hostility. Consequently, the creative explosion brought by the films that I have discussed in this thesis, with its (re)construction and vindication of homosexual identities, did not materialize again. Only a handful of films dealt with homosexuality in the 1980s. Most notable are the documentary *Dressed in Blue* (*Vestida de Azul*, Antonio Gimenez Rico, 1983), about the life of a group of transvestites, and the feature *Mikel's Death* (*La Muerte de Mikel*, Imanol Uribe, 1984), the story of a Basque left-wing militant who comes out of the closet and dies under mysterious and unexplained circumstances.

Pedro Almodóvar deserves special attention in the history of gay representation in Spanish cinema. His cinema is inextricably indebted to the films I have discussed because they opened the way for his emergence and success as a director and for the commercial and cultural significance of his films. Almodóvar's work signalled the end of the transition. The lack of references to Franco and the past in his films indicates a definitive break with a dictatorship that no longer needed to be recalled in order to explain the present. Moreover, the narrative of almost all his films in the 1980s normalizes homosexuality. Earlier films like *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mom* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, 1980), *Labyrinth of Passions* (*Laberinto de pasiones*,

1982) and *Dark Habits* (*Entre tinieblas*, 1983) present narratives populated by gay and lesbian characters, revealing an open pleasure in camp kitsch and homoerotic fantasies. Yet, in his only feature to centre on a gay male relationship, *Law of Desire* (*La ley del deseo*, 1987), “one never has the sense that the characters’ homosexuality in and of itself is the main subject” (David Leavitt, quoted in Smith 1992, 165). Almodóvar has repeatedly denied that this is a film about homosexuality, insisting that it is purely incidental that the main characters are gay (Smith 1992, 165). Almodóvar’s claims relate directly to a carefully self-constructed identity. Even though his homosexuality is widely known and accepted, he has never declared it publicly. His public persona is consistent with the Spanish official ideology of libertarianism, an ideology that can be best described as containing and neutralizing the variety of sexual options celebrated in Almodóvar’s films.

Ocaña’s death—the real-life character of *Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait*—can be used as a metaphor to establish the relevance on Spanish society of the films of the 1970s that I have discussed, and on those produced in the next decade. Ocaña died during the 1985 carnival celebrated in the village of his birth, Santillana, as a consequence of third degree burns when his paper costume caught fire. His death represents, in a sense, the death of the possibilities that the films analyzed in this thesis offered to homosexuals during the transition. However, Ocaña died while dressed as a sun. Thus, his costume represents, in another sense, a metaphor for these films that shone with such intensity that they enlightened society and, consequently, opened the way for the meaningful changes that followed. Personally, I prefer the second interpretation. As a teenager, these films were an important step towards an awareness and acceptance of my own sexuality.

During the 1980s, I learned to accept myself and to construct my personality according to my own decisions. Maybe the rest of society did the same. If so, it would explain why David Leavitt suggests in regard to *Law of Desire* that “the characters in the film live, like Almodóvar, in an atmosphere in which homosexuality is so taken for granted that the choice between making a film with homosexual or heterosexual protagonists becomes a purely artistic one” (Smith 1992, 165). A lot of work remains to be done, by me and by others, to find out which of the two interpretations of the meaning of Ocaña’s death is the most appropriate. I hope that in this thesis I have provided a starting point for understanding the significance of gay representations in the history of contemporary Spanish cinema.

NOTES

Introduction

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Spanish are my own.

² Other films included in the New Queer Cinema movement are: *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingstone, 1990), *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, 1990), *Edward II* (Derek Jarman, 1991); *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991) and *The Hours and Times* (Christopher Munch, 1992)

Chapter 1 - The Transition Years

³ For a detailed analysis of the first two years of the transition and the role of the monarchy, the Catholic Church, Europe and the United States see Alba (1978), 251-84.

⁴ For an analysis and explanation of the political and economic measures undertaken during this period and their relation to foreign policies see among others: Carr and Fusi (1979); Maravall (1982); and Preston (1989).

⁵ Spain officially declared its wish to join the European Community in 1962.

⁶ A great economic scandal, known as the “Matesa affair”, which implicated some ministers, forced Franco to restructure the whole government. The new one was composed in its entirety by members of the Opus-Dei. While the rest of Europe was living a total opening up and freedom, Spain moved back to the spirit of the 1940s.

⁷ “Between 1955 and 1975, 6 million Spaniards—20 per cent of the population—changed provinces. Two million migrated to Madrid and 1,800,000 to Barcelona. (Moreover, it should be remembered that in that period nearly 1,500,000 Spaniards emigrated to Europe in search of work.) . . . The number of cities with populations of over 100,000 rose from twenty in 1960 to forty in 1975” (Riquer 1995, 263).

⁸ Only the United States had a greater number of cinema seats per capita. See Carr and Fusi (1979), 119.

⁹ In *Bahía de Palma* (Juan Bosch, 1962) Elke Sommer wore the first bikini seen on a public screen in Spain.

¹⁰ Querejeta pursued this project well into the 1980s. He produced all Carlos Saura’s films from *The Hunt* (*La caza*, 1965) to *Sweet Hours* (*Dulces horas*, 1981), the first three films by Victor Erice, all Montxo Armendariz’s films, and some of the films by Francisco Regueiro, Ricardo Franco, and Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón among others. He also produced Jaime Chávarri’s second feature *Disenchantment* (*El desencanto*, 1976).

¹¹ *Dictablanda* is a pun term for *dictadura* (dictatorship): *dura* means hard while *blanda* means soft.

¹² If only 1 per cent of Spanish homes had a television set in 1960, 90 per cent of Spaniards were watching it in 1970. Attendance to cinemas declined from 400 million spectators in 1965 to 273 million in 1974. The number of cinemas dropped from 9,029 theatres in 1966 to 5,178 in 1975. See Carr and Fusi (1979), 128-9.

¹³ The sexual innuendo is reflected in titles like *The Apartment of Temptations* (*El apartamento de las tentaciones*, J. Buchs, 1971), *What a Wedding Night, Girls!* (*Qué noche de bodas, chicas!*, F. Merino, 1972), *Manolo la nuit* (M. Ozores, 1973) and *The Blue Begins in the Pyrenees* (*Lo verde empieza en los Pirineos*, V. Escrivá, 1973).

¹⁴ More than fourteen filmmakers directed their first feature between 1976-77.

¹⁵ Saura directed *Elisa, My Love* (*Elisa, vida mía*, 1977), *Blindfolded Eyes* (*Los ojos vendados*, 1978) and *Mama Turns 100* (*Mamá cumple 100 años*, 1979) in his well known allegorical style until his change to a realist aesthetic with *Hurry Up, Hurry Up* (*Deprisa, deprisa*, 1980) and the beginning of his "musical" trilogy with *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de sangre*, 1981); Borau only directed *The Sabina* (*La sabina*, 1979); and Erice did not direct any film until *The South* (*El sur*) in 1983.

¹⁶ Documentaries around Franco's persona included also *Race, The Spirit of Franco* (*Raza, el espíritu de Franco*, Gonzalo Herralde, 1977). Other documentaries about the Republican Front were *Why did We Lose the War* (*Por qué perdimos la guerra*, Galindo y Santillán, 1977), and *Dolores* (José Luis García Sánchez and Andrés Linares, 1980). *Priests Night* (*Noche de curas*, Carlos Morales, 1978) is another documentary dealing with the mirage of Francoist ideals.

¹⁷ The government created the *Noticiario Cinematográfico Español*, popularly known as *No-Do*, in 1942. It had exclusivity of production and obligatory exhibition in all national movie theatres until 1975.

¹⁸ Also released were political films like *To Die in Madrid* (*Mourir à Madrid*, Frederic Rossif, 1965) and *The Great Dictator* (Charles Chaplin, 1940)

¹⁹ For a more detailed description see Aliaga (1997), 28-33.

²⁰ This Law defined “homosexual acts” as “all which include active or passive perineal carnal intercourse between persons of the same sex and all oral onanism ‘in vase praepostero vel in buca’, as well as masturbation and lascivious fondling of any kind” (Aliaga 1997, 29).

²¹ The publication of a bulletin called AGHOIS (Homophile Group for Sexual Equality) began in 1972.

²² The concept of “homosexual acts” was withdrawn from the Social Danger and Rehabilitation Law in the Constitution of 1978.

²³ With a script written by dancer Alfredo Alaria, the film is a quite surprising musical extravaganza for its time. A young man, orphaned by his mother, lives with his father who has given him an exaggerated freedom. Surrounded by a bourgeois family, the youth lives in a world of fantasy and reacts violently when the unpleasant face of life appears. His father knows that his son is different and that those reactions are only mere defenses against anything which hurts him. Although the film does not contain any openly sexual comment, it contains some sequences which do not leave any doubt as to the sexual preferences of the main character. In one scene, he openly stares at the bare arms of a construction worker. During a sequence in a library, the camera slowly tracks along the spines of books whose authors were all gay. It seems that the censors did not understand these details because the film was approved without any problem.

²⁴ The newspaper *El país* (Madrid) published a survey entitled “El 50% de los españoles cree ‘condenable’ la homosexualidad” in 1989. Cited in García and Maldonado (1989), 63.

Chapter 2 - A New Beginning: Revisiting the Past

²⁵ *Production*: Elías Querejeta, PC; *Producer*: Primitivo Álvaro; *Screenplay*: Elías Querejeta and Jaime Chávarri; *Director of Photography*: Teo Escamilla; *Editor*: Pablo G. del Amo; *Music*: Luís de Pablo; *Cast*: Hector Alterio, Margarita Más, Xabier Elorriaga, María Rosa Salgado, Angela Molina, Mirta Miller, Rosa Valenti, Mercedes San Pietro, Emilio Siegrist, José Joaquín Boza; *Duration*: 99 min.; *Released*: 3 November 1977.

²⁶ For a detailed comparison of the three films see Kinder (1983).

²⁷ References are to page and line.

²⁸ *Production*: P.C. Teide / Prozesa; *Producer*: Josep M. Forn; *Director of Photography*: Lucho Poirot; *Editor*: Emilio Rodríguez and Valeria Sarmiento; *Music*: Aureli Vila; *Cast*: José Luis Ocaña; *Duration*: 80 min.; *Released*: 23 May 1978.

²⁹ Although deeply rooted in Spanish tradition, the Francoist government banned the celebration of carnivals until the early 1960s.

³⁰ Despite being illegal, the Front d’Alliberament Gai de Catalunya was publicly recognized by the press and some of the political parties. Its public participation in

political rallies and other public events lead to its legalization in 1981. For a more detailed history of the Catalanian gay movement see Barranco (2000).

Chapter 3 - *Convivencia*: Transforming the Present

³¹ For a more detailed discussion of the use of sexually explicit material as one way to solve the economic crisis of the Spanish film industry see Hopewell (1989), 281-300 and Caparrós (1992), 113-163.

³² *Production*: Impala S.A. / Morgana Films S.A.; *Producer*: Jaime Fernández-Cid; *Screenplay*: Joaquín Jordá and Vicente Aranda; *Director of Photography*: Nestor Almendros; *Editor*: Ricardo Miralles; *Music*: Maricel; *Cast*: Victoria Abril, Lou Castel, Fernando Sancho, Rafaela Aparicio, Montserrat Carulla, Daniel Martín, María Elías, Bibi Andersen, Rosa Morata, Mario Gas; *Duration*: 104 min.; *Released*: 15 May 1977.

³³ For an extended discussion of the uses of melodrama see Brooks (1976), especially 11-55.

³⁴ While “bull’s ball” (cojón de toro) was a very common expression meaning “macho attitude”, in the narrative it acquires a double meaning when we realize that the father, who remains nameless throughout the film, is addressed by some characters as “bou” (bull). Despite being a very common Catalanian last name, it is never explained whether it actually is his last name or a nickname.

³⁵ These radio programs were dedicated exclusively to female audiences and dealt with their issues offering solutions ranging from their daily problems to their most extreme situations from a very reactionary position. The clearest example of their ideological message and doubtful position was unmasked a few years ago when it was revealed that the answers given by “Mrs. Francis”, a favorite program for more than forty years, were in fact written by a man.

³⁶ See also Enric Ripoll-Freixes, “Un tema que deixa d’ésser tabú,” *Avui* (Barcelona), 7 July 1977.

³⁷ For a more detailed description of women’s resistance using popular culture, especially songs, during the dictatorship, see Graham (1995).

³⁸ Even though Aranda opted for a happy ending to make the film more engaging for audiences, the initial script did not include one: “I would have liked to end without the ‘repentance’ of the character. I would have preferred to show what he really was, an exploiter of circus freaks” (Alvares and Frias 1991, 110).

³⁹ *Production*: Laro Films, S.A.; *Producer*: Ricardo Merino; *Screenplay*: Juan José Porto, Jacinto Molina and Antonio Fos; *Director of Photography*: Polo Vilaseñor; *Editor*: José Luis Pelaez; *Music*: Carlos Montero; *Cast*: Agata Lys, Vicente Parra, Paul Naschy, Sandra Alberti, Eva Robin, Yeda Brown; *Duration*: 88 min.; *Released*: October 1977.

Chapter 4 - Vindicating Democracy: Melodrama as Pamphlet

⁴⁰ De la Iglesia's films have had the dubious honor of holding the record for the most cuts and alterations imposed on a film before being authorized for exhibition. *Cannibal Man* received 62 cuts and *Games of Forbidden Love* had its dialogues totally changed plus some scenes cut. For a more detailed account see Torreiro (1996), 21-25.

⁴¹ *Production*: Alborada P.C.; *Producer*: Oscar Guarido; *Screenplay*: Rafael Sánchez Campoy, Eloy de la Iglesia and Gonzalo Goicoechea; *Director of Photography*: Carlos Suárez; *Editor*: José Luis Matesanz; *Music*: Carmelo Bernaola; *Cast*: Simón Andreu, Charo López, Tony Fuentes, Beatriz Rossat, Angel Pardo, Josele Román, Queta Claver, Germán Cobos; *Duration*: 97 min.; *Released*: 21 March 1977.

⁴² The homosexual erotic symbology of Saint Sebastian is explicitly elaborated in Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976).

⁴³ For an account of the evolution and influence of the ephebe image in European and especially in Spanish homosexual culture see Cortés (1997), 131-44.

⁴⁴ For an account of the beginning of the gay movement in Spain and its problems see Guasch (1995), Aliaga (1997), Cortés (1997) and Barranco (2000).

⁴⁵ *Production*: Fígaro Films / UFESA / PROZESA; *Producer*: Carlos Orengo; *Screenplay*: Eloy de la Iglesia and Gonzalo Goicoechea; *Director of Photography*: Antonio Cuevas; *Editor*: Julio Peña; *Music*: different authors; *Cast*: José Sacristán, María

Luisa San José, José Luis Alonso, Enrique Vivó, Agustín González, Queta Claver, Angel Pardo, Juan Antono Bardem; *Duration*: 116 min.; *Released*: 20 October 1978.

⁴⁶ Some of the reviews of the film note the similarities with real events and a few of them include some of the names. See *Tele/eXpres* (Barcelona), 20 October, 1978, and *La calle* (Madrid), 5 February, 1979.

⁴⁷ As examples of his opinions see interviews in *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 24 October 1978 and *Avui* (Barcelona), 9 November 1978.

⁴⁸ The English subtitles distort the intended meaning by changing the pronoun “you” for “them,” thus making it less direct.

⁴⁹ As an example see the interview with Monty Padura in *Catalunya Express* (Barcelona), 19 October 1977.

⁵⁰ The film made 120 million pesetas (\$1.4 million) in box office. See *Tele/eXpres* (Barcelona), 20 October 1978.

Conclusion

⁵¹ “Nearly 68 percent of all eligible voters participated in the referendum and only 7.8 percent rejected the Constitution” (Desfor 1998, 104).

⁵² Even though I was the same age as the main characters when this film opened, which makes it a great example to be included in this thesis, the film is currently unavailable and I could not find any copy on video.

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