

"THE CONSTRUCTION OF YOUTH"

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Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies

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letting off steam. Unfortunately, such bohemian behaviour as well as official indifference and laxity, created the climate for the spread of other socially less acceptable indulgences, including the use of hard drugs and also the arrival of Aids. And yet, as some have argued over the last two decades, the alarming rise in the figures for the use of legal and illegal drugs, especially among the young, responds in some measure to Spain's rapid economic and social change and attempts by various groups of people to cope with the dizzying speed of such change.

If Francoism imposed a popular culture of escape and evasion, this has arguably been reinforced by one of excess and addiction. As some of the essays in this section show, Spaniards, like few other peoples, appear hopelessly addicted to football and to television; indeed the medium and the sport are virtually synonymous. As part of the entertainment and leisure industry, football in Spain is largely indistinguishable from other aspects of consumption activity, be it television serials and soaps or breakfast cereal and snacks promoted by major football stars, and advertised as wholesome, healthy family food. Identification is the name of the game, as is the construction and reproduction of a sense of belonging through the purchase of club shirts, hats, bags, soap, toothpaste, and so on. By doing so, consumers of football seek to buy into that special, collective spirit of tribal loyalty, which both welds them together as fans but also (sometimes aggressively) differentiates them from rival tribes and teams. Moreover, the culture of contemporary Spanish football promotes deep attachments to place and locality, creating a nostalgia for 'imagined communities', when these have succumbed to economic imperatives and are long gone. This is especially so among the large Spanish clubs, where club loyalties and commitments to their fans are daily sacrificed on the altar of global media marketing pressures and the increasing commodification of the game. Such pressures and tensions are readily picked up and echoed in many of Spain's popular television serials and soaps, which seem dominated by story-lines involving generational conflicts and struggles between community and self-interested, individualist consumption. In short, whilst in the world of official Spanish politics, notions of community and collective responsibility appear increasingly marginalized given the current neo-liberal economic climate, paradoxically perhaps Spain's *telenovela* continues to provide spaces in which viewers can find a nostalgic outlet for other 'imagined communities'. Here, unlike the world of aggressive individualism and commodity fetishism, values of solidarity, respect, tolerance and community appear to survive and prosper.

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The construction of youth in Spain in the 1980s and 1990s

MARK ALLINSON

Introduction

Youth culture in Spain in the 1980s and 1990s represents something of a paradox. It shares with many other youth cultures the characteristics of spontaneity, disrespect for authority, playfulness and erotic curiosity; and it also shares the social context of mass youth unemployment which conditions the predicament of youth across contemporary Europe. But Spanish youth culture is distinct in that its emergence from the heady excesses of a suddenly liberated post-Franco Spain deprives it of the social signification as deviance or resistance often associated with youth subcultures.¹ Thus, where other national youth subcultures, such as punk in the UK, are constructed as counter-hegemonic, Spanish youth culture has become 'the official image of Spain' (Graham and Labanyi, 1995, p. 312). In most societies, the construction of youth can be understood as a cyclical process where the adult population sees youth as a 'liminal phase' (Wulff, 1995, p. 1), and young people as incomplete adults, sometimes prone to unacceptable behaviour causing a wave of moral panic. The generational divide is then replicated when youth grows up. This cycle is interrupted in Spain, where the younger generation have not always been the radicals, and where the political and social context has created infra-generational divisions virtually corresponding to each decade from the 1940s to the 1990s. Despite the increasing disavowal of Franco's legacy by the young in Spain, the history of the dictatorship remains central to the formation of Spain's particular youth culture.

Pre-history

In the 1940s, youth in Spain was channelled into various falangist organizations, a strategy typical of Fascist control. By the post-autarky late

1950s, youth, and in particular the middle classes and students, were smuggling prohibited books into the country, and American culture was fashionable thanks to the pact with the USA. The 1960s were characterized by limited university protests, swiftly followed by the removal of radical professors like Enrique Tierno Galván (who would later become Madrid's most popular democratic mayor). But there was no 1968 in Spain, at least not until 1972 when student protest led to the closure of the University of Valladolid. After Franco's death in 1975, while the adult population cherished the new-found democracy, the youth of Spain preferred, unsurprisingly, to enjoy the social and personal freedoms of the new order. The late 1970s in Spain were characterised by apolitical hedonism, *pasotismo* (apathy) and an excess of 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' among the youth population.² Nowhere is this generational divide better portrayed than in Pedro Almodóvar's first commercial feature film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom, and Other Girls on the Heap*, 1980), where the spectacle of democratic elections which gripped the adult community is parodied by the partying young in a drug and alcohol-enhanced competition, entitled 'erecciones generales' ('general erections'). The 1980s mark the beginning of Spain's full integration into European institutions and with it, the gradual alignment of Spanish youth culture and the 'youth problem' with the rest of Europe. The context of mass youth unemployment quickly dissipated the excitement of the early post-Franco years, and the hopes invested in the new Socialist government of 1982 was only partially vindicated by the following years of PSOE rule. The anxiousness, defensiveness and pragmatism of the individualist 1980s, tended to stabilize into widespread disaffection, sometimes delinquency or at the very least the cult of 'vivir al día' ('living for the day').

The evolution of a youth identity from the 1940s to the present has created a dangerous paradox for generational relations in today's Spain: an ideological consensus but no capacity to build a common future. Serrano and Velarde (1996, p. 23) describe this paradox: 'The only generation of parents since 1960 who have succeeded in making their children believe them, and accept the world of adults, have not been capable of offering them either a project or a place in that world.'³

Unlike the familiar ideological generation divide, which tends to be deactivated as the young assume positions of responsibility, this situation (where generations agree but the young are deprived of their opportunity to inhabit the adult territory of responsibility) leads to frustrations which generate social problems. As Spain's youth population is, at 24.44 per cent of the total population, the highest, proportionately, in the EU, then the problems which affect the young are arguably the most serious facing the country. (Compare this to northern Europe where an ageing society and the demands this makes on the Welfare State constitutes a more serious problem.)

The 'youth problem'

Unemployment is at the root of almost all the problems affecting youth in Spain. The massive migration to the cities from the 1950s to the 1970s created the conditions for a consumption-led popular youth culture with a diet of music, television, sport and fashion, and for authentic youth subcultures. Urban life also allowed far greater access to education for the majority rather than for the privileged alone. The education of many young people up to university level created an expectation of similar access to appropriate employment which the 1980s and 1990s have spectacularly failed to deliver. This has forced many young people to live in the parental home much longer, extending the transition into adulthood, but also depriving many young people of the chance to live independent lives.⁴ This problem is exacerbated by a disproportionate rise in housing costs in Spain over the last 10 years (Ross, 1997, p. 207). The housing problem has reached the point where the Comunidad de Madrid announced in September 1998 the building of 2400 subsidized flats with low rents for young people.

The response to the frustrations of the expectations of youth has been apathy and evasion. The vacuum created by the relative loss of a work ethic and associated respect for the educative value of the parental class has typically been filled by what Serrano and Velarde refer to as 'presentismo' ('living for the moment'), and 'endogamia' ('loyalty to peer groups') (1996, p. 24). Both these tendencies lead to increased consumption on the part of young people: the young are particularly susceptible to peer pressure 'to try new things'. These can take the form of fashion and music. But where they involve legal and illegal drugs further problems are created. Consumption of tobacco is falling in Spain, but none the less 50 per cent of 18–25-year-olds in Spain smoked according to a study in 1992.⁵ And while Spain remains largely free from the binge drinking excesses of northern Europe, a 1993 survey showed that 50 per cent of 15–29-year-olds in Spain had consumed alcohol in the preceding week, and 28 per cent had either stopped drinking or had never tried. One significant feature is the widening gap between numbers who drink heavily and those who do not drink at all. The recent cult of the *litrona* (large plastic glasses of lager often consumed by the young on the streets) may well account for this increase in heavy drinking among a minority. The media response to increased alcohol consumption has been somewhat sensationalist, the slightest urban disturbance among the young being reported in detail. Among the headlines, however, is the fact, reported by the right-wing daily *ABC*, that drink-driving is the number one killer of 18–30-year-olds in Spain.⁶

A much greater problem is posed by drug-taking. Analysing the official figures, Hooper concludes that Spain's drug problem is significantly greater than that of the rest of the EU and comparable only to that of the USA (1995, p. 204). Spain has the highest rate of Aids of any European country, largely because of drug use, especially heroin (Truscott and García, 1998,

p. 266). One of the earliest measures of the PSOE government was to legalize soft drugs for personal use in public and in private in 1982, and only in 1992 did the government prohibit public consumption. While for the governing class, drugs had been a sense-increasing experiment in the 1960s, for the youth of the 1980s and 1990s, drugs were sense-numbing, a means of opting out of the established community for an alternative (frequently crime-ridden) marginal culture. But even for the many whose habits have not led them to crime, drugs have represented the ultimate product, part of a whole youth culture based on the consumption of nightlife, alcohol, music and fashion.

1980s: music, politics and postmodernism

The proximity of youth culture to the market through consumption of popular music is not unique to Spain. And the appropriation of counter-hegemonic subcultures by market forces is well argued by the likes of Dick Hebdige (1979). What distinguishes the case of Spanish youth cultures/subcultures from those of London's 'swinging sixties' or later punk, is the extent to which large parts of society embraced this culture, including the PSOE government. The phenomenon of the *movida madrileña* justifiably dominates the (very limited) attention given to Spain's youth (sub-)culture of the 1980s. The word '*movida*' originated from marginal Madrid drug culture, which makes the establishment's espousal of the term all the more astonishing. Paradoxically, the supportive political environment in which the *movida* flourished may well have also been instrumental in its demise by the mid-eighties, coupled with the more familiar commercial appropriation of subcultures, and other local, national and international historical factors.

Madrid's *movida* was born out of the fortunate coincidence of internal and external music and fashion styles. Emerging from the British trends of punk and new wave as a response to the boredom of rock music, young Spanish musicians and aspiring stars converged on Madrid and found venues for their bands (however amateurish) and even record labels willing to support them. The decade of the eighties was undoubtedly Spain's golden age of pop music, firmly wedded to youth culture as indicated by the title of Radio Futura's 1980 debut album, *Enamorado de la moda juvenil* (*In Love with Youth Fashion*). The sudden explosion of both venues (El Pentagrama, La Vía Láctea, El Escalón, El Sol, El Jardín, El marquee and Rock-Ola are some of the most significant names) and new groups which included Paraíso, Tos (later, Los Secretos), Nacha Pop, Mamá, Radio Futura, and Alaska y Los Pegamoides, was matched by sponsoring record labels such as Hispavox and Polydor, and friendly radio stations, especially Radio España FM Onda 2. The excitement created by this new vigour in youthful, and playfully transgressive popular music was self-perpetuating, and soon attracted young groups from outside Madrid, including Loquillo, Rebeldes,

Siniestro Total and Derribos Arias. The seemingly limitless accessibility of this culture for anyone wishing to participate, create or perform became a magnet for those aspiring to produce things in other media. These included the designers Antonio Alvarado, Jesús del Pozo, Paco Casado, Francis Montesinos and Agata Ruiz de la Prada, the painters Ceesepe and las Costus, and the photographers García Alix, Miguel Trillo, Ouka Lele and Pablo Pérez Minguez. The early films of Pedro Almodóvar are products of this artisan culture of production. (*Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* was filmed over a year and a half with Almodóvar's friends acting without pay, and scraping together the money to buy further lengths of film.) But they are also a mirror of their times, portraying an era in which everyone had multiple creative projects, lots of free time, no responsibilities and few political convictions, as well as generous helpings of sex, alcohol and drugs.⁷

That the political establishment of 1980s Spain should lend its support to the frenzy which was *la movida* is perhaps not so surprising considering the previous years of social and political proscription. Indeed, given that there was no complete rupture with the Franco regime, but rather a transition in which many of the old political players remained, the permissive society allowing youth to run free represented something of a catharsis. For the PSOE, the emerging alternative youth culture was both popular internally and profitable for the selling of Spain's image abroad. Madrid's socialist mayor, Tierno Galván, who had been removed from his university post during the dictatorship, headed a City Council which organized rock concerts. At one such concert Tierno declared 'Todos al loro y el que no esté colocao que se coloque' ('Everyone on their toes and whoever isn't stoned yet better get stoned quick!'). A youth magazine from the suburb of Alcobendas with the name *Eyacuación precoz* (*Premature Ejaculation*) was financially supported by none other than Madrid's City Council. Tax-payers' money was also spent on subsidizing a San Isidro *fiesta* where the main act was a group called La Polla Record (Record Prick). (An equivalent in the UK would be the London Borough of Westminster subsidizing a Sex Pistols concert in Westminster Hall.) Madrid's beloved Mayor Tierno personally promoted the 1984 exhibition in the Centro Cultural de la Villa, entitled 'Madrid, Madrid, Madrid' and showcasing primarily the youth culture of the *movida*. But while politicians seemed limitlessly interested in youth culture, the youth of Spain were not similarly interested in politics. Few of the younger protagonists of this period had been active politically against the dictatorship in the way that many of their parents had been. Most were happy to let the older generation enjoy the excitement of political freedom while the young concentrated on the pursuits more natural to them. It is unlikely that the youth of older democracies would be labelled 'pasota' (apathetic) merely for not being interested in politics, but the adult population in Spain was apparently surprised at the apathy of the young. The lack of enthusiasm could be accounted for by the slow pace of change in the early days of democratic Spain. With the election of the PSOE government in

1982, expectations were raised among the young. But their espousal of largely free-market economics led Spain's youth into the same mass unemployment and associated problems which was affecting Europe as a whole. And on the only specific issue which has consistently mobilized young people, the definitive removal of Spain's hated military service for all young men, the Socialists were unable to deliver.

Apart from the gratuitous support of the political class, the *movida* found favour in its declared allegiance to postmodernism. The most emblematic magazine of the *movida* was *La luna de Madrid* which was founded in November 1983. The main feature of its very first edition was entitled 'Madrid 1984: ¿la posmodernidad?' and its contents were suitably eclectic and hybrid. There was the first instalment of the memoirs of pornography star Patty Diphusa (penned by Almodóvar), articles on punk, pop music, painting, photography, cinema (new and old), theatre, free radio, football, poetry, as well as a month-planner, an advert for Almodóvar's second film, *Laberinto de pasiones*, cardboard cut-outs of Madrid buildings and lyrics for songs like 'Sexo chungo' by playful punks Siniestro Total. Another feature compares Madrid with New York, commenting on the sheer quantity of cultural phenomena radiating from Madrid's youth culture. One month later, the second issue of *La Luna de Madrid* testifies to the transitory nature of the dizzying cultural wave that had hit the city, headlining the news that 'la posmodernidad ha muerto' ('postmodernity is dead'). As far as the *movida* is concerned, most interested parties signal its death between 1984 and 1985. In 1985, the city saw the closure of Rock-Ola, the most famous *movida* venue and a cultural crossroads for all kinds of products. The same year Spanish television decided to drop the most significant pop programme of the times, *La edad de oro* ('Golden Age'). But 1985 was also the year in which the 'happy consumption of drugs' (Momba, 1985, p. 639) began to turn into a serious problem of addiction, and the year in which Aids surfaced internationally. In any case, by this time, Spain was increasingly integrated into European and Western society and culture, the aspects of national culture most particular to Spain increasingly diluted by the internationalization of global consumer culture. Indeed, the late eighties and the decade of the nineties are marked by something of a deficit in national youth cultures at the expense of imported cultural products.

1990s: internationalization, pragmatism

Although the 1990s have seen something of a revival in the popularity of *cantautores* (singer-songwriters), among them Javier Alvarez, Pedro Guerra and Albert Plá, the music industry in Spain has come down from its 1980s cloud, with recession-hit record companies concentrating almost exclusively on the more profitable end of the pop spectrum. Only those capable of

riding this commercial tide survived, and figures such as Alaska, Bonezzi, Miguel Bosé, Carlos Berlanga, Derribos Arias, Gabinete Caligari, Luz Casal, Mecano, Miguel Ríos, Nacha Pop, Radio Futura and Siniestro Total all had to make concessions to professional commercialism which they would not have considered during the heights of the DIY *movida*. While Spanish music has waned, international currents have become stronger than ever. The music of the nineties in Spain was *bakalao* (including house, techno, ambient, techno house – all imported styles). Nineties music festivals such as Espárrago Rock and Benicassim, have seen a representative mixture of international pop stars and Spanish artists, some of whom now call themselves 'indies' in the wake of the Britpop explosion. Unlike their *movida* predecessors, who imported the music of punk but not the English lyrics, these new indies (Australian Blonde is perhaps the most famous) sing in English, with their sights, doubtless, set on world markets.

Many of the artists of the generation of the *movida* are now consolidated mature professionals. Almodóvar's recent films are increasingly polished and their themes much less transgressive. Alaska is as famous as ever, but largely due to her many television appearances. But even the younger generation of creative talent in Spain appears much more mature and pragmatic than their equivalents 15–20 years ago. Young director Alejandro Amenábar whose 1995 film *Tesis* made him famous at only 26, speaks like a middle-aged film expert and knows who his market is and what they want.

The globalization of the media has also led to the diluting of Spanish youth culture. CD-ROMS, the Internet and satellite television offer a diet of international consumption in which the standard communicative mode for young people is the MTV style of spectacular, fast-moving, short-duration video clips. And the products promoted are also the same world-wide: a Doctor Marten fan in Spain, who is also into raves, piercing, fanzines, Beavis and Butthead and Tarantino, now has little to distinguish him (or her) from young people throughout the Western world. With notable exceptions such as the Barcelona-based *El Víbora*, even the popular Spanish form of the comic is now imported, largely from Japan.

By the mid-1990s, the lives of young people in Spain were in many respects indistinguishable from those of the young across the Western world. The 1980s had projected an image of frenzied creativity, irony, parody and postmodernism in the early films of Fernando Colomo (*¿Qué hace una chica como tú en un sitio como éste?*, *What's a girl like you doing in a place like this?*, 1978) and Almodóvar (*Pepi, Luci, Bom...*, 1980; *Laberinto de pasiones*, 1982). In the 1990s, the image of youth painted by José Angel Mañas in his 1994 novel, *Historias del Kronen*, (made into a successful film by Montxo Armendáriz) is much less entertaining, its culture hedonistic, escapist and lacking in creativity.⁸ Mañas' protagonist Carlos refers to the eighties *movida* as 'la generación de los 80' (1994, p. 32), equating it firmly with the past. Nor is he interested in previous generations, rejecting, among other things, Buddhism because 'apesta a jipismo y a

sesentayochismo' ('it stinks of hippies and 1968') (p. 35). Also 'out' are Antonio Machado's 'horribles poemas' (p. 42), old people, the Civil War and Europe. Carlos is a 21-year-old student from a prosperous family who lives in the comfortable Madrid suburb of la Moraleja. He lives for the night, especially for drugs, alcohol, dangerous driving and sex, all of which he shares with his friends and with various female casual sex partners. At home, he sleeps, eats, masturbates and takes money from his parents. He visits his sick grandfather, which only serves to convince him further that only the strong are worthy of respect. For Carlos, friendship is a sign of weakness. The spiral of drugs and alcohol-induced madness culminates in a party in which Carlos forces the diabetic host, Fierro, to drink whisky. Carlos reacts angrily when Fierro passes out. When they take him to hospital he dies. The scenario of Carlos' story is little different from Cohen's 1950s idea of juveniles as opposing sobriety and conformity with hedonism, defiance of authority and the quest for kicks.⁹

This rather desolate picture of youth is contrasted by certain more positive signs, such as the limited resurgence of Spanish grotesque humour among young creators, following the line that stretches from Quevedo, through Goya and Valle-Inclán to 1990s films such as *Justino, retrato de un asesino de la tercera edad* (*Justino, Pensioner Assassin*, 1994) by Cuadrilla, *Acción Mutante* (1992) and *El día de la bestia* (*The Day of the Beast*, 1995) by Alex de la Iglesia, and *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (*Torrente, the Stupid Arm of the Law*, 1997) by Santiago Segura. Though not a return to the excitement of the early *movida*, these films do reflect interesting currents in Spanish youth culture, and encouragingly, they have been helping to bring about renewed interest in home-produced cinema among the young.

It may well be too early to evaluate the 'youth product' of the 1990s in Spain. Youth-led phenomena like punk or the *movida* tend to be consolidated and theorized only after their demise. But at a time when the cultural boom of the 1980s in Spain is now almost venerated by critics and nostalgics, it remains difficult to foresee, 10 years from now, the same aura surrounding the youth culture of the 1990s.

Notes

1. See Helena Wulff's chapter, 'Introducing youth culture in its own right', in *Youth cultures. A cross-cultural perspective*, Amit-Talai, V. and Wulff, H. (eds), London: Routledge, 1995, p. 1.
2. There were politically active sections of the youth population of Spain, but these formed around issues (particularly the women's movement and peace protests) rather than institutionalized party-political activity.
3. Las únicas generaciones de padres desde 1960, que han conseguido que sus hijos y sus hijas les crean, y que acepten el mundo de los mayores, no han sido capaces de ofrecerles un proyecto ni un lugar en ese mundo.
4. According to Hooper, 1995, 70 per cent of Spanish 18–29 year-olds live in the parental home, p. 178.

5. Statistics are from an Instituto de la Juventud report, 'Youth and Drugs in the '90s', Madrid, January 1997, p. 8.
6. ABC, 21 February 1993, p.18.
7. There are clear parallels here between the *movida* and punk: the qualities of DIY and bricolage common to both periods, the links between music and fashion, the taboo contents of song lyrics, the debt both subcultures owe to the alternative press and fanzines, as well as the obvious aesthetic parallels. Many of these comparisons are made in *Sólo se vive una vez*, José Luis Gallero (ed.), Madrid 1991.
8. An alternative cinematic vision of Madrid's working-class suburban youth culture is represented by Fernando León de Aranoa's 1998 film *Barrio*. A very different picture, but of an equally relevant social phenomenon, the film depicts how boredom and petty crime lead to more serious crimes and eventually destruction.
9. Cohen's model is explained by Hebdige in *Subculture. The meaning of style*. London, 1979, p. 76.

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