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RESEÑA

Francisco Fernández de Alba. *Sex, Drugs, and Fashion in 1970s Madrid*. University of Toronto Press, 2020

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Spain's transition to democracy continues to fascinate, or perhaps I should say haunt, Iberian cultural studies scholars. The post-2008 economic debacle, the 15-M demonstrations, and their subsequent impact in the political arena triggered a new cohort of approaches that looked back at the official narrative of the transition to trace causal relations and explanations. Some of these expanded the debate to previously unexamined cultural production; others extended it in chronological terms to explore the years before and after. One common thread that unites almost all of them, however, is the unapologetically critical stance against the allegedly deleterious effects of the "official" narratives of the political transition in Spanish society's contemporary problems.

I believe we should evaluate Francisco Fernández de Alba's *Sex, Drugs, and Fashion in 1970s Madrid* against the backdrop of this new wave of studies about the transition. Immediately, several features separate this study from its peers. To begin with, it is refreshing to read a book that does not subscribe to the hermeneutics of suspicion, to borrow from Paul Ricoeur, that drives so much of the recent scholarship that is committed to unveiling the lies and misconceptions of the narratives of the transition. This is a school of thought, certainly the prevailing one in Iberian cultural studies, that pledged to what journalist Guillem Martínez famously deemed in a minimalist, and quite reductive, fashion the end of the "CT" (Cultura de la Transición). Instead of harking back in distrust, Fernández de Alba sheds light on the generative conditions that made possible the transformations in the collective sensibility that facilitated the socio-political transition to democracy. Instead of emitting blanket statements about how the official establishment of the transition orchestrated a top-down manipulation of cultural change, this book exposes readers to the bottom-up initiatives of citizens and consumers, especially youth, who carved out their own cultural spaces and created the conditions for democracy from below.

Two other elements make this book unique. First, *Sex, Drugs, and Fashion* does not deliver an all-encompassing theory that would explain how all Spaniards experienced "the massive 're-structuring of feeling' during the long seventies" (9), but instead zooms in on the case study of the city of Madrid and, in so doing, it tells a compelling story. Second, it challenges the somewhat artificial divide between the late-Franco years and the transition that scholars have traditionally used to conceptualize this period of Spanish cultural production. Although recent studies, including my own, have posed that we need to pay more critical attention to how the late Franco years created the conditions for a democratic and modern society, Fernández de Alba goes one step further: he does away with the distinction and invite us to consider the whole period between the late sixties and the early eighties as a continuum that he calls "the Long Transition."

This is not empty neologizing. Fernández de Alba backs it with convincing evidence of how the citizens of Madrid changed their attitudes and practices about sex, drugs, fashion toward the end of Francoism and, therefore, transformed the way they lived their everyday lives. He draws on a wide range of primary sources (urban plans, *destape* and *quinqui* films, influential contributions in magazines such as *Triunfo* and *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, popular novels, and mainstream media coverage) that are skillfully analyzed and framed within key debates in Iberian studies.

Chapter 1, "Madrid: Planning the Democratic City," offers a fascinating account of the transformation of Madrid's urban space during the 1970s. This is a multilayered story with several agents playing a crucial role. Fernández de Alba shows how urban planning and architecture became central topics of discussion in those years. Influential publications by Marxist intellectuals such as Manuel Castells and Ramón Tamames, the creation of six professional journals dedicated to architecture in Madrid during the 1970s, and the interest of generalist magazines such as *Triunfo* and *Cuadernos para el diálogo* in the topic prove that urbanism became a

major intellectual concern. Public debate focused on the need to develop democratic practices in urban planning and on giving citizens the right to own their city. The role of the architect as a socially conscious cultural agent that would decouple cities from the capitalist "machines of economic speculation and profit making" (26) was crucial in that endeavor. But what really made a difference in the concrete urban plans deployed by government officials in Madrid was the active role of urban social movements and neighborhood associations in imagining and lobbying for the kind of city they wanted to inhabit. The most significant insight that Fernández de Alba delivers in this chapter is demonstrating that the formation of a strong civil society was as important as the pioneering ways of theorizing urban spaces in the reconfiguration of Madrid's urban space in the 1970s.

In the second chapter, "Sex: Building Plural Communities," the author shifts the focus to sex and gender as axes of modernization in Spanish society. Commercial hits of Spanish cinema in the late 1960s such as *Pero…¿en qué país vivimos?* (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1967) serve to illustrate how the burgeoning feminist values that were promoted by women's associations at least since the mid-sixties, and intellectual debate in magazines such as *Triunfo* reached the mainstream media. Destape-era films such as *No desearás al vecino del quinto* (Ramón Fernández, 1970), and sexually explicit controversial films such as *Me siento extraña* (Enrique Martí, 1976) and *Cambio de sexo* (Vicente Aranda, 1977) exposed that sexual liberation and LGBTQ issues were central topics of public discussion to the extent that they "took over front covers as the next social boundary to cross" (61). The chapter concludes with a brief analysis of Eduardo Mendicutti's popular novel *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1982) to showcase that sexuality and transgender issues were not merely deployed by cultural agents as a commercial strategy (sex sells). In this novel, transgender subjects are given the opportunity to discuss and even participate in important political processes of the political transition.

Even more controversial than sex was the increase in the use of recreational drugs and its cultural representations, particularly the use of heroin, which is the subject of the third chapter, "Drugs: The Burden of Modernity." The author begins with a distinction that he draws from Paul Manning: we must not confuse the actual practices of consuming drugs with the representations of drug use by media and cultural institutions. A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to unveiling the reductionist representations of drug use in mainstream print and audiovisual media during the 1970s. Fernández de Alba shows how many of these representations followed a moralistic, top-down approach in which youth were treated like mindless victims who turned to heroin merely to escape from their grim reality (unemployment, lack of education, and so on), or were persuaded to do so by the elites who were happy to see youth get high instead of participating in political processes. As the author rightly argues, this is a problematic, and extremely simplistic framing of the issue. Toward the end of the chapter, Fernández de Alba provides evidence that for many young people in 1970s Madrid, drugs were associated with modernity, and their consumption counted as "acts of rebellion" against the old cultural regime (90). Heroin use was part of the new cultural sensibility of youth who sought to detach themselves from the value system of Francoism and exercise their agency through drug consumption. In a nutshell, heroin use signified democratized access to pleasurable experiences.

The impulse to leave behind the regime's authoritarianism also infuses the evolution of the fashion industry in the 1970s in Spain. This is the topic of chapter four, "Fashion: Democracy Prêt-á-porter." Similar to the use of recreational drugs, fashion became a conduit to channel a renewed sense of modernity in the 1970s. Drawing on Margarita Rivière's work on the history of the Spanish fashion industry as well as on magazines articles and NO-DO newsreels, Fernández de Alba argues that the democratization of

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cultural taste – in the Bourdieu sense – regarding fashion trends became a cultural practice with political undertones. The emergence of a new generation of designers such as Francis Montesinos, Jesús del Pozo, Manuel Piña, and Sybilla, among many others who became widely known during the *Movida* years, coincided with a break from the system of *alta costura* and the notion of fashion as a privileged universe for the cultural elites. By embracing ready-to-wear fashion influenced by international styles and subcultures, fashion designers and the young consumers who wore their garments became what Fernández de Alba aptly calls "dealers of modernity" (115). No longer artistic mediators of class, fashion designers were major contributors in the march toward democracy and equality.

In the concluding chapter, "Legacies of the 1970s: The Origins of la Movida," Fernández de Alba recapitulates the main findings of each chapter to reiterate the idea that the examined cultural practices of the 1970s prove that many Madrid citizens had already embraced pluralistic and democratic ways of thinking and living even before the end of the Franco regime. Overall, this book makes an important contribution to studies on the transition to democracy. It guides readers to the path of giving far more credit to the 1970s Madrid youth and their agency to shape their own cultural spaces. It also opens new avenues of research, for instance, by posing fashion, typically overlooked in cultural histories of this and other periods, as a democratizing cultural practice.