Carta(s)

Libidinal Economy of the Spanish Transition

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A Conversation with Germán Labrador Méndez on His Book  
*Culpables por la literatura: Imaginación política y contracultura en la transición española (1968–1986)* (Guilty of Literature: Political Imagination and Counterculture in the Spanish Transition to Democracy [1968–1986])

In the preface to his book *Libidinal Economy* (1974), Jean-François Lyotard asserts that “All social systems are maintained by a primary attitude of desire”—an attitude about what is desirable and what is not desirable, about what matters to us and what doesn’t, about what resonates with us and what leaves us indifferent. It functions at the level of the body, of the skin—it’s not merely ideological—and is channeled through a plurality of “drive mechanisms” that regulate the energies (cultural, political, and economic) in any given society. So, within this framework, a revolution can only be conceived as a *radical mutation of the attitude of desire*: socially defined desire begins to function differently, so that people desire other things or desire differently.

In *Guilty by Literature* Germán Labrador Méndez describes the “libidinal economy” of the Spanish transition.¹ The dispute, in the first place was between the countercultural drive mechanisms—especially literature and its capacity to magnetize desire through imagination—and the Francoist drives, based on powerful repressive structures and discipline that produced and reproduced on a daily basis a kind of body, of habits and affects. The countercultural challenge made the Francoist libido falter, and other forms and figures of citizenship, politics, and community participation became desirable again. One cannot understand the transition without grasping this. But the book also narrates a second dispute: between the countercultural “volcano worshippers” and the libidinal cooling of the energies that would have to be produced to install the “new democracy,” a democracy with a very low level of popular inclusion, where the management of daily life was delegated to a professional
political class. Of these two battles in the field of social desire, one was won and the other lost.

The journalist Guillem Martínez coined the critical term “Culture of the Transition” to refer to the web of legitimacy that protected the political Regime of ’78. The term became popular especially after the events of the 15-M movement, when crisis weakened this protective membrane and made criticism, discussion, and parody possible. But the term misleads one to believe that the consensual culture that prevailed at the end of the transition and has predominated for the past three decades was the culture that emerged in the transitional process. Actually, only the outward symbols changed, while the ways of seeing remained: While some praise a process of opening up and democratization, critics regard it as a closing down of political alternatives in favor of elitism, but we remain blind to the creative, subversive energies of that period. Germán Labrador’s strategy is different: not critical but affirmative. Affirmative precisely of that other which official history denies, erases, and makes invisible.

And affirmative in two important ways: First, Germán reassesses the Spanish transition by rearranging all the pieces of the dominant historical tale, showing us quite clearly how the “new democracy” did not actually break so much with the Franco regime as with proposals for a different concept of democracy and way of understanding citizenship that are fully described throughout these pages. Second, the book does not simply reduce the energies released during that historical period to a mere phenomenon worthy of attention and study but rather—through his quite poetic writing style—uses them as a vehicle to relaunch those energies in the present, generating vibrations and affects between the cultural, political, and existential cracks present then and now. Germán is what we could characterize as a “historian of energies”: not only concerned with objective historical rigor (which he does in a most exacting way) but spurred by the need to bring to the light of day certain intensities with which he has had intimate contact. Intensities and energetic forces that are vital for us today.
So we are not exactly or solely encountering a book of history but rather a *transformer* of the subversive energies present in a period of contemporary Spanish history, a “drive mechanism” painstakingly produced over a fifteen-year period, which we reviewed in great detail—as much for its content as its form and the creative process from which it emerged—in the following conversation between friends held in the summer of 2017.

**Amador Fernández-Savater** Germán, as I read your book, I couldn’t help asking the following question: How is it that we knew so little about the history you describe here? Perhaps I’m speaking too generally, but when my generation became politically aware in the ’90s—in the squat, anti-draft, and student movements, and later in the anti-globalization movement—we looked to May 1968 in France and the United States for references, as well as the political, cultural, and existential struggles and experiments that took place in Italy in 1977, but very little to Spanish counterculture. While it’s true that some work was carried out right away (by the writer Pablo Carmona and others), the collective memory of that period was not readily available. We began to look for those references during our political awakening, but we basically started from zero. I believe the memory we reconstructed was focused more on political than countercultural movements. I would like to ask if you have the same impression. And, if you share that sensation, how would you explain it? In short, why is there so much amnesia regarding Spanish counterculture?

**Germán Labrador Méndez** It’s true. There seems to be an obstacle to seeing the overwhelming political and artistic dimension to our counterculture, a difficulty in “believing” it. The assumption that nothing at all deserving of interest happened in the 1960s is widespread, even among people who could have a political or cultural affinity, like those with sensitivities similar to the 15-M movement. There is a kind of predisposition to thinking there are no traditions worthy of remembering in Spain. That condemns us to have to come to terms with the fact that either the Spanish transition was indeed that fantastic myth we’ve heard so much about (the “consensus”) or, to the contrary, a nightmare, a closed pact among
elites. It would seem like there was nothing else or that, if there were other sorts of projects, they were anecdotal and were defeated. That defeat seems at times to be the only thing we get to see, the only thing we can believe. It’s interesting, because we don’t assess the other references you cite—like the French and American ’68 or the Italian ’77—solely as defeats, when they certainly had their share of significant ones.

AFS  How do you explain all that resistance to considering local traditions?

GLM  I think various factors come into play here. On the one hand, there’s the importance of what has been called the “Culture of the Transition” (CT); that is, the power of standardizing cultural rationales that prevailed from the 1980s in Spain. The CT depicts Iberian traditions as being in some way “dysfunctional.” Therefore, there is nothing about them that is worth recovering. The only valid objective is to join the modern world, become more European; anything else would mean going back to the past.

The Culture of the Transition turns its back on history; it encourages the idea that it’s better to start from scratch because nothing in the past is useful to us now. Neither the anti-Franco struggles nor any countercultural experiments in the 1960s, not even our Republican lineage, nothing at all has any value. Those CT lenses have shaped much of the framework of our current collective consciousness. It’s terribly difficult to break free of this ahistorical vision of the CT, which is even replicated within critical circles, including the 15-M. The idea that the absence of predecessors guarantees success, that it’s necessary to start anew, is repeated over and over. Despite all this, in recent years there have been notable efforts to revive counterculture experiences.

In any case, this effort to reconnect has happened now. There was no interest in this type of work twenty years ago, as you said. The dominant culture of the ’80s and ’90s crushed anything resembling a critical drive. It was a culture with a great capacity for creating public opinion with little critical input from the outside. I think it’s safe to say that there is a considerable difference compared to France,
England, or the United States, where there was a greater political and cultural diversity, where other perspectives were accepted.

The Spanish public sphere from the ’80s on is very limited, very authoritarian. It demonstrates an enormous ability to expel anything that doesn’t reaffirm its official truths and parameters. We see this starting with the critical history of the transition itself, which only attracted attention relatively recently. One needs to look no further than the success of the latest reprint of Gregorio Morán’s *El precio de la Transición* [The price of the transition], as compared to the animosity it received when it was first published in 1991. His book is one of the first counternarratives about the transition. It is more often used than quoted. In a place with a different history of public discourse, it would have generated great debates, responses, and counterattacks when it first appeared. But here it was left out of any debates and anathematized.

AFS What other factors are there in this mix of silence and invisibility?

GLM Perhaps there is a lack of narratives associated with other historical countercultural memories. I’m talking about narratives capable of adapting the experience of the ’60s and ’70s within the context of the ’80s and ’90s, to leading figures able to pass on the inspiring potential of those struggles to a new generation. For example, I’m thinking of Toni Negri and the Italian autonomist tradition.

You could include Manuel Vázquez Montalbán here for example, but he isn’t quite the same type of public figure. Another key element is that many of those who deliberated and wrote back then did not survive the 1980s to define the terms of the memory of their own experiences. The generational loss is devastating, and many perished along the way.

The counterculture’s archives haven’t been consolidated. Documentaries, poetic works, catalogs of the ephemeral art from that period, young people’s magazines—this vast baggage has been relegated to the back of the shelf. When I think of your generation, many of the counterculture’s direct role models, those who were five,
ten, or fifteen years older than you and could have acted as a bridge, were out of commission by the mid-1990s or were shooting up in our cities’ historic quarters. By then, theirs was a memory marked by death, so that was surely another reason many decided to flee from it.

I believe there were places where the process was a bit different, such as in the Basque Country. There, music and the environmental and draft resistance movements were somewhat influenced by the counterculture. The nonviolent and self-managed parts of the nationalist milieu represent a factor in the continuity between alternative cultures, not only in the Basque Country but in Catalonia and Galicia. However, this doesn’t change the basic mind map described. There is a caesura between the counterculture of the transition and critical culture in Spain today, an absence in the collective memory and the cultural archives.

Counterculture and Its Stereotypes

**AFS** I wanted to ask you about another problem I see, and that is the bad reputation the counterculture has among some critical thinkers nowadays. Here and there, sometimes stated delicately and other times rather crudely, we find that our counterculture is considered to have helped modernize and strengthen the capitalist system. Indeed, the liberatory energies released during the counterculture aligned perfectly with the logic of deregulation inherent to capitalism. Such interpretations at times rely on sociological Marxism, which posits that the class origin of the counterculture is a determining factor in its nature and evolution. It seems to me that the impact of these interpretations today is that we have been cut off from the possibility of connecting with all those countercultural energies. Your book is clearly part of that debate. What is your position on all of that?

**GLM** You certainly hit the nail on the head there. There certainly is an inclination to think negatively about the counterculture. However, I can’t really explain why that is true to such a large extent. There is an enormous lack of willingness to recognize anything that emanates out of a completely unknown context, as in the case of
Spain. Several stereotypes are at work there and cause a chain reaction in such a way that people feel no need to attempt to understand anything about it. The first argument used to support that position states that there were only a handful of people in the counterculture, that it was an insignificant minority.

The second one asserts that no concrete work, idea, or action worthy of remembering was produced then. Therefore, there is nothing that needs to be honored. The third one argues that its members were a bunch of elitist snobs, which is very questionable since countercultural expressions often took place in venues that crossed class barriers (something I discuss in my book). Of course, I don’t deny that social capital was at stake, but it seems to me that class lines were not as clear-cut as some would like us to think.

As our friend Rafael Sánchez-Mateos always says, these historiographical reflections on the counterculture have the effect of making the poor even poorer. It’s not enough anymore that they are poor; on top of that, they have no right to read a philosophy book, to experiment with aesthetics, or to refine their sensitivity. What they are supposed to be doing is, I don’t know, playing hard rock in a garage (with all due respect for the genre). Actually, what the counterculture did was to socialize, for later generations, bourgeois culture that hadn’t been available to the working class. Moreover, it fed on numerous underlying layers of popular culture—from comic books popular under the Franco dictatorship to folk songs—to create hybrids, interclass meeting places. The critics of the counterculture know practically nothing about these, yet they are truly fascinating.

**AFS** People tend to believe the exact opposite is true: that the counterculture acted as a solvent to dilute traditional popular culture and expressions of the underprivileged class. That solvent allegedly left the affected individuals like “elementary particles” at the mercy of the market.

**GLM** That theory has a deeply conspiratorial slant to it. It assumes that the political sphere and market are autonomous, which doesn’t hold water. Power mutates and creates resistances. It reestablishes
its base under other guises. It follows a different, more Foucauldian, less conspiratorial logic.

Moreover, neoliberalism does not necessarily imply being socially hedonistic. It can be supported by a system that restricts or prohibits the very same desires it purports to promote or activate. I’m thinking, for example, about societies in Russia, China, and the United Arab Emirates. While they have neoliberal systems, there is no place for citizens to participate actively that spring from any countercultural experiences. Our post-Franco system could perfectly well have been defined by radical Catholicism or neoliberal nationalist and xenophobic Catholicism, just like in other countries in the European Union. It’s a project that has its press agents and advocates here in Spain. What I’d like to suggest is that the counterculture’s achievements are not irreversible. Quite the contrary. There can easily be major setbacks. Donald Trump and the alt-right come to mind. Reagan, Trump, and Sarkozy’s slogan was and is very clear: We have to do away with the counterculture, we have to put an end to the “legacy of ’68.” Something they perceive as dangerous continues to live on for them. I can imagine the possibility of authoritarian neoliberalism perfectly well. That’s why I don’t agree with the theory that work undertaken by the counterculture to promote desire fed into market interests. To begin with, desires were activated through other economic channels. It’s quite another matter that marketing has been able to translate knowledge and codes produced by the counterculture to capital’s best advantage.

Another problem I see with these revisions is that they dispossess the countercultural actors from their own lives, which is the only thing they had. They dispossess the historical agents of the meaning that they gave to their own actions. When that happens, a naked Ocaña on the Ramblas turning everything upside down suddenly becomes a precursor of neoliberalism. He is no longer a guy whose performance art defies the society he’s living in, a brilliant, critical, satirical transvestite liberating himself, who risks it all every time he does an intervention. He is simply a harbinger of the market and its desires at work . . . That analysis sounds terrible to me. It’s another thing to talk about the counterculture becoming monetized. That began with *La Movida*, the first generation of professionals working
within Spanish creative capitalism. However, we would have to do that very carefully and be very specific. That's what I try to do in the last few chapters of my book, the ones devoted to how the counterculture was dismantled. There is an argument I believe is definitive: the impact the experience of the counterculture has on a macro level in the Spanish context. Beyond how it changes individual lives, it provokes an enormous break in Spanish society’s collective imagination, at least in four main areas. In the sphere of spirituality and religion, Spain, like Ireland and Greece, stops being a theocracy and becomes perhaps one of the most atheistic societies in the entire European Union.

As far as love, sexuality, and gender are concerned, Spain goes from being a deeply harsh country regarding laws and customs to becoming a much more liberal country, in record time. Spain’s relationship with authority undergoes a profound change too. Authoritarian constructions are no longer well-received; the military and army quickly lose their historical value, and so on. Finally, the transition to democracy leaves the concept of the Spanish nation wounded. This is due both to the centrifugal pressure placed by pro-independence movements and to people’s unwillingness to abide by those kinds of transcendent structures (although, over the last few months, things seem to be changing in that regard). Overall, I see the counterculture as a strong underlying base in all of those aspects.

The Older Siblings

AFS I’d like to hear more about how this matter and period affected you personally, Germaín. I think it would have been impossible to write your book without a strong empathetic connection to a number of personalities and lived experiences. I don’t share the academic supposition that says the best way to reflect on and tell a story is from a safe distance. I think the opposite is true, in fact. I believe that if you hadn’t had such an emotional connection, you couldn’t have created such a great narrative of that period. So, I wanted to ask if you agree, and, if so, where your passion for that historic moment came from.
GLM First, I’ll tell you a little bit about the evolution of my book. It’s a long process. I began to be interested in the democratic transition in 2002; that is, I’ve been involved with the subject for fifteen years. My first book, published in 2009, *Letras arrebatadas, Poesía y química en la transición española* [Raptured letters: Poetry & Chemistry during the Spanish transition to democracy], is like a first installment. It’s about counterculture’s *poètes maudits* and the transition. I wrote the first draft of *Guilty of Literature* as my doctoral thesis in 2008. I gave that manuscript a break for a while, and then I rewrote it once, twice, and even three times. Finally, last summer, I shut myself inside for four months and gave it its final form (for now!).

A lot of things have happened during those fifteen years, in general and to me in particular. The main circumstance is my dissention with most contemporary poetry. It’s the feeling that what is being written now is not at all what I’m looking for in literature. I also felt that many academic works had too strong of a philological perspective. This methodology seems inadequate when it does not take into account “the social lives of literature,” when it ignores the historical context and separates literature from other fields, such as political science and arts and history.

In addition to this literary crisis, I would add the sensation that in Spain there is a prevailing way of understanding philology that doesn’t represent me, one that faces the perspectives opened by cultural studies abroad. Finally, I don’t share the generally accepted concept of politics either, as if it were something that had to do only with an autonomous sphere of our lives, dealt with by specialists in public affairs. That makes three dissentions and rejections, three pursuits of something else that isn’t unique to me either. They are becoming increasingly common.

That is the context in which I hear memories told by people who were youth during the transition and were part of that *weird generation* of the counterculture. They are brief conversations with my parents and aunts and uncles. Those flashes reveal the ’60s and ’70s to be a crazy and fascinating time; as a time for creativity and
living together as a community, of a strong commitment to changing everything.

I got turned on to that world when I found boxes filled with magazines that my father had kept from that period. There were copies of *Ajoblanco*, *Bicicleta*, a few copies of *Viejo topo*, *Por favor*, and *Papus*, as well as fanzines like *La hormiga atómica*. They were very strange, very little-known. Well, all of those magazines, despite their differences, contained a common language that was very different than the one used nowadays. They called everything into question: the common good, institutions, power, the good and the bad, habits, drugs, sex, aesthetics, and so on.

Those magazines were published between 1973/74 and 1981, at the same time that the transitional consensus was supposedly being negotiated, the world as we now know it. Those publications were talking about something else; they were putting that entire consensus into question. The experience I had while reading was very intense, like a revelation or a poetic truth. I thought to myself that there was something there that nobody had told us about. There’s an entire reality that has been erased, that has disappeared.

So, I started reading research that had been done on countercultural poets such as Eduardo Haro Ibars and Leopoldo María Panero. It’s not hard for me to connect that world with the destruction of a generation in the 1980s, which I did remember. For fifteen years, one couldn’t walk into Pontevedra’s old quarter without coming upon junkies, the threatening presence of survivors of a shipwreck.

Little by little, I got myself in gear and started putting all the pieces together. It’s true that I feel a profound appreciation for those people, who worked so seriously, honestly, and altruistically to try to imagine a different future and yet so often ended up so badly. To me, they’re like older siblings who you’ve slightly forgotten about. They did things that were really cool, but due to twists of fate you never were able to meet or grow up with them. On the one hand, I get that feeling of having lost something marvelous; on the other hand, when I investigate that world, I find it has been shrouded in silence and cruelly treated.
AFS Are you talking about the “bifid generation”? Could you tell us more about that concept, which is so important in your work?

GLM I’ve observed that survivors from that period display a great deal of violence toward their colleagues who are no longer with us. The violence manifested by those who engineered the other transition, the one we do know about, is often deeply unfair. They’ve constructed this insipid, boring world of consensus culture, together with its institutions and party politics, etc. It’s as if, not being satisfied with dominating the scene, they had set out to erase the memory of the other world that they also used to belong to back then. They wanted to erase the evidence of their crime, which is the basis of the subsequent “democratic” legitimacy. That happened in every field: in politics, culture, and in higher education.

On the other hand, when you talk with people who remember their countercultural activism from that time, they explain things in different terms. There is an immediate recognition: “Yes, it’s true, that was the way it was; that’s what I found.” Or “It’s true, at that time, we weren’t interested in political parties; what we wanted to do was to change our lives.” Or “Back then, culture was at the vanguard of politics.” Those are the exact sentences different people told me in spontaneous conversations. That disassociation between what is remembered and what really happened, between people’s experiences and the state’s narrative, memory and history, success in politics and being true to your principles is what some people called the “bifid generation.” It’s a good metaphor to name that phenomenon. There was a sharp break between those periods, a schism that marked a before and after and meant an intense radical transformation in many people’s lives during that period of change.

The Work of Spiritism

AFS Conducting research in order to celebrate the lives and realms that you mention. Making a crack in that wall of silence and cruelty. Proposing an echo between the world that you help
us to remember and people who are questioning things nowadays regarding the relationships between life and politics, particularly after 15-M. I believe you’ve dealt with those issues in your work.

GLM That’s right. There’s also a fourth one I’m interested in: striking up a conversation with the dead. It’s impossible to have a society that doesn’t imagine a way to have a dialogue with those who are no longer with us but once did have a place. Every society has a way of holding that conversation while at the same time refusing to have it, which, in its own way, is also a way of having it.

I’m interested in how we are going to have a discussion with those who have passed away: in this case, the departed from that first generation of our transition to democracy. Those people have not been honored by a collective mourning; rather, those deaths have only been mourned in private by their families. Their memory has been erased. They have left a traumatic mark on their loved ones. I believe a proper bereavement process still needs to be undertaken. I would go so far as to say that, more than mourning, it’s a job for spiritism, in order to allow those voices to be heard once again in the present. I think we would all benefit from that, both the living and the dead, as well as have a more interesting concept of democracy.

AFS I’d like to talk a little bit about the spiritism session your book represents. On the one hand, there is what you want to bring back to the present: those voices that have been erased and silenced. However, another important issue is how to do so. How the session is set up, who will use the Ouija board, who among the deceased you invoke, how you talk with them, and so on. None of that is obvious, because the departed are no longer here, only their remnants.

How do you establish a relationship with those vestiges? There are a lot of ethical decisions regarding how to put it into practice, so a discussion seems worthwhile. How do you contact the dead? How do you bring them to the present? From where? What precautions do you take, and what do you need to be careful with? What problems do you foresee?
What you’ve brought up is certainly important. The Ouija board and what you need to be careful with are two fundamental concepts for me. The idea of multiple voices, or polyphony, is a strong undercurrent in the poetics of my book, in a very conscious way. My voice acts as the medium, the voice that calls out to the other voices, without speaking in their name. My voice is endowed with a writer’s or magician’s tricks, although it exhibits and states them explicitly.

How can you conjure up voices on their own terms? You have to be very careful. First, many voices have been written down; many are direct quotes from talks and conversations. I transcribe interviews I conducted with the main figures, as well as their friends and family. So, a significant amount of research on the oral vestiges, as well as written polyphony, has already been carried out. The latter includes poems, articles, and graffiti. Second, taking those voices seriously, and taking care of them, means working within the theoretical and interpretive categories inherent to those sources. This means not projecting your own theoretical, analytical, or political vocabulary but relying on theirs. My text is based on their words.

In that sense, I’m hoping to tune in to a language that wasn’t included in the dominant culture but that exists and today rings true in the spirit of 15-M. Of course, one could say that the echo has been artificially produced; however, we are also present in that conversation with the dead. We do not have to give up our place and have a single voice emanating from the past imposed on us at all. That conversation exists because we enable it to happen. There needs to be a dialectic on both sides that changes the way we see the past and the present at the same time. Third, taking care of them also means placing importance on what may seem like small details: texts that are raw or fragmentary, poorly written, incomplete, or written by hand. Precariousness is a common characteristic at every level of minor countercultural archives.

What we need to do is to not only deal with the renowned figures in our counterculture, such as Panero and Ocaña. We need to descend to a second, third, or even fourth tier of anonymous people, to end
up including people for whom we haven’t even been able to find out their names even though they are in the narrative. We have to try to fit even the smallest pixel in there. Instead of outlining well-known figures or generalizing, I put more effort into making sure a wide variety of voices and figures is heard. Therefore, in the maximum enlargement of a photograph, you can still see silhouettes. Even if that’s all they are, the silhouettes are still there. My work is one of historical pixilation.

Every narration is about a subject; it tells someone’s story. However, in this case, the kind of story I’m interested in isn’t that of a country or nation but of certain individuals. That is a materiality I can hold on to. More than individual experiences, I’m talking about lives lived interdependently, in community. The only historiographical measurement category I have found to be democratic is life itself. That is the only category I can guarantee empirically: people’s lives and communities. It’s the only place where I believe one can articulate a history of civil society. I hadn’t made any of those decisions a priori before I began this research. On the contrary, they evolved during the process and developed thanks to the research itself. My awareness of these decisions is intricately tied to the world I am talking about.

**The Biopolitical Body of the Franco Dictatorship**

**AFS** Germán, I think a good starting point to discuss your book is your reflection on what you call “the biopolitical body of the Franco dictatorship.” You don’t consider the Franco regime to be simply an authoritarian institutional regime and a series of ideological convictions but more the *production and reproduction of a type of body*. That starting point will allow us to better understand how you deal with the countercultural revolt later on. If it’s alright with you, let’s get started by talking about the *internal dictatorship*. How did you come up with that concept, and what does it involve?

**GLM** It’s an idea I’ve developed based on Teresa Vilarós’s book, *El mono del desencanto* (The monkey of disenchantment). Teresa approaches the *somatic* dimension of the Franco dictatorship as a
key to understanding a lot of the production of that period. Therefore, for example, there is a scene in *The Back Room* by Carmen Martín Gaite, inspired by Franco’s funeral, in which the author recalls her own childhood, observing how another girl grows up: Carmencita Franco Polo. Martín Gaite was born the same year and had the same first name as Franco’s daughter. The two girls were both a product of the same period. The Franco dictatorship had occupied both of their heads. It had arranged their bodies in the same way and had trained them in the same way. Aware of being a reluctant daughter of the world around her, Martín Gaite rebelled. The idea is that totalitarian regimes based on a cult of charismatic leadership generate the image that we are all that leader and that that leader is each of us. That generates a very intense identification process in which there is a single magic body, that of the dictator. All of us are compelled to embody it subsidiarily.

That *incarnation* is organized socially in very sophisticated ways. The use of violence and discipline as an integral part of school, factory work, and military service induces everyone to imitate that imagined body of the dictator, *to embody it*. Antonio Mercero made a marvelous movie, *Espérame en el cielo* [*Wait for me in Heaven*], that deals with this idea. A man who looks a lot like Franco is abducted by the Spanish secret services in order to act as his double.

In that way, every Spanish man would essentially be Franco’s double without them even suspecting it. That theme appears over and over during the period. In Basilio Martín Patino’s films, in the book *Autobiografía del general Franco* [*Autobiography of General Franco*] by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, and in *El desencanto* [*The disenchantment*] by Jaime Chavarri. In Chavarri’s film we hear Leopoldo María Panero say that powerful statement, “I’m destroying myself in order to know who I am; that I’m not all of them.” We can find other cultural manifestations of exorcism from the Francoist body. However, I was particularly interested in seeing how, beyond artistic practices, the issue of the bio-body lies at the center of the generational political program.

**AFS** Power is not simply a series of convictions, opinions, or endorsements, not even of legitimacy; it is nothing but that which is
written in our bodies. The countercultural rebellion would therefore precisely be the exercise of getting rid of that body to take on a new one. So, we have to think about politics as it relates to sensitivity, the aesthetic work of shedding our skin. Emancipation is therefore a process that is channeled through our bodies.

GLM Of course, that’s something you find right away when you conduct research like this. The very exponents of the counterculture often say that themselves: we formed part of the Franco regime. That demonstrates their courage and lucidity. Meanwhile, all around them, those who occupy positions within our institutions were doing the exact opposite, covering up their dictatorial legacy. They pretend they have been democrats their whole lives. From the perspective of the young literary culprits, there was no clean break between the Franco dictatorship and its aftermath. There was only an all-encompassing reality with no untainted fringes.

A new world beyond those fringes had to be built up from scratch. Areas with lesser degrees of social density were gradually created. There were zones where the dictatorship showed less intensity, including red-light districts and areas where gays cruised. There were meeting places for alternative political cells, the student movement, and working class, flamenco, and Gypsy cultural expressions. Later on, countercultural paradigms were established in which sociability could be manifested in a different way. People found they could take on new roles that weren’t determined by surveillance and control. People who lived the longest under Franco had the hardest time breaking free. Their exit was necessarily more violent. The bodies that had been disciplined less by the regime were able to liberate themselves more quickly and easily. My idea is that in the early 1970s, around 1973, a very severe political crisis broke out. That crisis of presence and representation of power basically consisted of the fact that the regime found it increasingly difficult to get inscribed into the bodies it had to govern. Young people’s bodies became harder to discipline at school, church parishes, in neighborhoods, on the Ramblas, and at the beach. All of a sudden it was impossible for them to stay still; young people’s bodies had gotten out of control. The 1970s was characterized by a lack of social standards or the discontinuation of social hierarchies. That is, the
1970s marked an authentic before and after. That has to do with the issue of a break in moral codes regarding sexuality, drugs, membership in associations, anti-authoritarianism, and so on. It was an abrupt breakdown of every established principle, with long-term consequences. The transition led to a civil war being fought inside each and every body. It was a recurring theme of the time. The poets expressed that very clearly. For example, Leopoldo María Panero took that propulsion to a radical extreme that might provoke panic but needs to be fully understood.

It took me a while to realize that that conflict was politically important: to remove that foreign body from your own. It had become an integral part of you; they shoved it deep inside. You had to generate a violent confrontation in order to emancipate yourself from it, even at the risk of losing your life. All of that is alluded to in Vilarós’s book, but she mentions it as a fundamentally unconscious process. I, on the other hand, have concluded that it is more often a process subject to reflection, almost a planned process, involving a series of techniques that can be described in this light. It is the case of Eduardo Hervás, for example, who decided to commit suicide on the eve of the publication of his book *Intervalo* in order to transform himself into his own creation. Many of the principal figures in my book took the project very seriously. I’m thinking of Iván Zulueta and his cult film *Arrebato* [Rapture, 1980]. The film explores the concept of vampirism, or the external colonization of the body due to a presence that could be either friend or foe. That is, he represents the reappropriation of the body through aesthetic illumination. The literary idea appears in the film.

In contrast to the biopolitical body of the Franco dictatorship, we now come upon the bioliterary body made up of literature and aesthetics; that is, an imagined body for emancipation. Given that our existing body doesn’t satisfy us and we have to get a new one, we’ll have to see how we’re going to go about that. That is where the power of aesthetics to achieve emancipation becomes essential. Literature, film, poetry, music, and all aesthetic energies (in a broad sense) will be used to liberate that body, to imagine a different body as far as its relationships with others, its habits, travels, how it moves, excretes, inhabits society, surprises itself, and so on.
Literature as Liberation Technology

AFS  You’re talking about an almost programmatic process, in which a whole series of techniques, disciplines, and exercises come into play. In that “methodic disarray of the entire range of the senses,” it seems to me there is a specific element in the Spanish case, and that is literature. You could discuss the importance of music, drugs, or politics. Instead, you decide to focus on literature as a tool for liberation, or as a form of corporal revolt. Why is that?

GLM  Yes, that’s true. It’s one way of telling the story, not the only one. However, I do believe it is the most significant one at that time, or at least that’s what the principle figures of the period have told me. Even though I say, “guilty by literature,” I could just as well have said guilty by film, or by music, or by the revolution, or by drugs . . . Literature acts a bit as a summary of all of the above.

It’s a sort of synopsis of the entire range of interconnected possibilities that culture offers, much like the romantic idea of the “total work of art.” That is due to the fact that all countercultures have profound historical roots, not only in the case of Spain. Those roots all connect to the great trunk of romanticism and its contemporary reformulations. That could be considered a secret river beneath capitalist modernity that continues to flow right under our feet to this day.

I place literature at the center and, by extension, connect with aesthetics. In that context, literature is simply a radical way of inhabiting aesthetics, a sort of metatext of both the inner and collective revolutions. In fact, literature could be considered a paradigm that allows the two to be joined together: aesthetics and politics, vanguard and revolution, the personal and the collective, life and art. I discuss all of those key contrasting elements in my book. In my opinion, of all the possible forms that aesthetic-political imagination can take during that period, the one that contains all the rest—that is able to give voice to the others—is literature. As I read or heard the stories retold by those who lived through that period, everyone repeated the same thing: that reading books from an early age was what helped them to dream. Literature played an essential role in helping young people achieve mental emancipation under the
Franco dictatorship. It allowed many people to imagine themselves in a different way.

It was a way to escape from their current selves and reinvent their lives; the fiction of the other, of being someone else. Literature gave them a Superman uniform, an alternative life that allowed them to become someone else while remaining inside the regime. It allowed them to replicate or “hack” themselves. Reading was a factory where strange children were made. A factory of democracy, a very different one than we have now. It was a democracy of doing things, not just voting; a democracy of everyday life. It seemed to me like a very beautiful and powerful experience. I wanted to place it at the center of my book, using the protagonists’ own words.

**AFS** Does the fact that literature was the motor of subversion during Spain’s transition have anything to do with censorship? Given that its destabilizing potential is not self-evident, is not as explicit as a political essay, literature was often able to slip through the net laid by the censors. The literature that circulated clandestinely had an added fascination and aura of attraction. Once censorship ends, many of those prohibited books are suddenly available in Spain. You devote an entire chapter to that phenomenon of cultural democratization through the new boom in publishing. You consider a key moment to be when all those books that allowed and encouraged readers to dream of a different life were all of a sudden readily available.

**GLM** I don’t know if it’s unique to the Spanish counterculture or simply my way of approaching and discussing the subject. One would have to look into what happened in other countries, such as Portugal or the Soviet Union, for example. Perhaps there is a difference in intensity, but we do recognize the process in other places. Take the example of the legendary status of the *Catcher in the Rye* in the United States. The book was considered to be a dangerous, life-changing book.

While it’s true that the magnitude of the Spanish phenomenon was uniquely far-reaching, its impact was felt prior to the advent of literature, with comics. I have researched that topic within the postwar context. Adventure comics, from *El guerrero del antifaz*
[The masked warrior] to *Capitán Trueno* [Captain Thunder], proliferated under Franco’s dictatorship because they were not subject to as strict censorship as other publications were. Until the legislation known as Fraga’s Law [instituted by Minister of Information Manuel Fraga] was passed in 1966, nobody had taken those publications seriously, since they were targeted at children.

However, there is a generation or two of anti-Franco cartoonists who, in some cases, had also engaged in underground political activity, who used comics to construct an ideology that we could call adventurer; that is, of creating another life. Simply teaching children to disguise themselves as superheroes who fight against evil is a useful form of political resistance in any context. It teaches them to have a spare identity handy so they don’t get their heads bashed in if their true identity is discovered. That important work involving children is truly amazing.

**Youth as a Force Field**

**AFS** The counterculture’s proposal is to provoke a conflict. However, it’s a *biopolitical* conflict that has to do with bodies, affections, and habits. It’s not an obvious political conflict, as between parties or groups vying for power. It goes beyond those spheres. I wonder then what the *subject* of the change is. It cannot be limited to one social class, to one sociologically defined group; it’s more widespread and transverse than that. You frame it as a generational conflict, but how does a sociological concept such as “generation” fit into the proposal of a clash between two worlds, of a dispute in the sphere of the senses?

**GLM** Yes, absolutely. I talk about youth being a force field in which that conflict is played out. That classification couldn’t exactly be considered an identity. It’s more of a *zone of the bodies*, which is vaguer. It’s not clear what it is. In fact, it’s a category that the Spanish authorities were attempting to define at that time, using biopolitical procedures such as the Ley de Peligrosidad Social (Law of Social Dangerousness). The regime uses a certain language to cast suspicion, uses a narrative and a series of practices regarding young
bodies to cast them as untrustworthy due to the fact that they are not following the rules the regime has laid out. They are unable to properly incorporate the phantom body of the Franco regime. The surveillance procedures generated to address the suspicions provoke the bodies to react by separating in much more visceral ways.

To give you an example, that’s what happened with turning quinquis (small-time delinquents) into enemies. Quinquis were not originally connected with young bodies. It started as a racial or ethnic category, referring to Gypsies and others like them. As soon as the government obligated nomadic Gypsy communities to live in one location, whoever continued to maintain a nomadic lifestyle became a quinqui. The term quinqui thus denotes a type of resistance on behalf of Romany communities against being obligated to stay put in a single place, as required by the system.

The quinqui phenomenon would therefore be a response to the attempts by the Franco dictatorship to change the uses of the outskirts of Spanish cities. Nevertheless, in the late 1970s, quinqui and youth would become synonymous to a large degree. The very movement on behalf of transitional youth to escape and resist begins to be described as quinqui. Meanwhile, the introduction of the designation quinqui (following the case of El Lute), which was quickly declared a law-and-order problem, had served as an ideal smoke screen to discredit political protests since the student strikes of 1966–67. Ten years later, the designation quinqui is applied to describe a complex and broad amalgamation of juvenile habits that run the gamut from political protests to taking drugs.

During the transition, any bodies that didn’t fall into well-defined social categories were called youth. That type of determination is what I came to think was meant by the term youth; it should be understood as an area of bodies. The biopolitical conflict is fought in vague and far-reaching territories: within families, in the education system, in law enforcement, at work, in high levels of unemployment, and so on. We mustn’t forget that the end of the transition is marked by an exponential growth of structural unemployment in Spain.

Ever since then, a 10 percent rate of unemployment is considered to be structural unemployment in Spain, while in other parts of the
world, that rate would cause a government to fall. The emergence of unemployment during the transition is politically motivated, linked to the Moncloa Pacts. Interestingly enough, the high unemployment rate will affect the youngest workers the most. People under twenty-five years old will be the hardest hit. The ones who assimilated the sensitivities and aesthetics of the counterculture most completely, as well as the challenge of radically transforming life, are more often excluded from the job market. They are also unable to enjoy the benefits of the welfare state, consumerism, or other supposed advantages of the new society. Repressive law enforcement measures are taken against that first generation of the new democracy, including mass incarceration and judicial and extrajudicial violence.

What does the word class mean in this new context? To be a quinqui or worker? Those who call for a crackdown against young people might be their own neighbors in working-class districts. There is an assumption that the transition meant the triumph of the Spanish middle class. However, that youth subculture was confronting middle-class values in a very profound sense. The proponents of the counterculture are far from holding consumerist values. They didn’t aspire to get a job, buy an apartment or furniture, or go on vacation. They wanted to be on vacation all year round and possess themselves. They called into question the separation between work and vacation, public and private, etc. That generation calls for a profound redefinition of capitalism’s productive values as an integral part of its struggles.

In conclusion, youth is that vague area where sociology, the biopolitical, and culture all come together. We’re talking about a very complex force field. The political battle isn’t led by those with a strong identification with their group, although they do also exist and are mobilized during that period of time. I’m very interested in sociological and class conflicts. However, the youth category goes beyond those categories and connects them to each other.

AFS That’s where the tension would be the greatest, between the counterculture and classical leftist anti-Franco politics, isn’t it? What was the relationship like between those two worlds? Was there a separation, a clean break, or were there bridges between them?
GLM There were different types of relationships. Of course there was something that happened over and over during that period: culture overflowed into politics. Counterculture is a new way of mixing politics and culture together. It inevitably spills over into the unique ways anti-Franco culture was organized and its characteristic sense of discipline. That happens across the board. Young people flee from the PCE [Spanish Communist Party]. They see it as a sectarian, anachronistic structure, clinging to a set of rules that are not their own. The PCE is unable to speak to their interests and desires. However, that split also takes place within Maoist cells, in the abertzale or Basque Nationalist movement, in the CNT [the anarchist trade union], unions, seminaries, schools, etc.

When I spoke with former members of the PTE [Partido del Trabajo de España] who were trying to raise young workers’ political consciousness in factories, they told me that, beyond their problems with strict party discipline, as young proletarians they preferred to form alliances with middle-class activists through music and aesthetics. Countercultural political alliances came about within the existing labor structures that ended up spilling over into political and organizational ties. Politicization was no longer based on a sense of duty, discipline, and self-sacrifice. All of a sudden, it emerged from sensuality and pleasure. The classic left has an enormous problem with the issue of pleasure, you know? Mass organizations have always been very theological when dealing with pleasure. They always considered it should be put off until much later on, in a new world, or under very strict parameters.

There is another issue regarding the relationship between practices and language. One of the recurring criticisms by all those young people of the party or union apparatuses is that their leaders speak in the name of others. There is a split between representatives and the represented within the organizations themselves. This can be seen very clearly during the illegal strikes that were violently repressed, like the one that took place in Vitoria in 1976. Political organizations appeared on the scene in an attempt to mediate between protestors and the government, but at a time when the striking workers were self-managed, with no need of hierarchical organizations to represent them.
The attempts by classic political movements and mass organizations to colonize new forms of struggle are a key element necessary to understand the transition. The classic left is terribly afraid of the tendency it sees toward autonomous, libertarian, and unaffiliated citizens’ movements. It is just as afraid as the state of these movements. I’m not referring strictly to the anarchist movement here, not even the spirit of 1977 alone, the so-called libertarian spring. It’s more a specific way of understanding emancipation, of feeling and placing a value on a radical sense of equality. That spirit manifests itself at many of the large-scale events that take place at that time, such as the demonstrations against the killing of labor lawyers in Atocha, Madrid, and the strikes in Vitoria. I’m talking about a spirit that cannot be defined by any specific initials or organizations, not even anarchist ones. Historiography will colonize, plunder, and memorialize that spirit contemptibly. Despite everything, that spirit provokes a deep emotional transformation among citizens, which political organizations didn’t know how to nor do they ever try to address. That is the authentic phantom hanging over the transition: the guardians of the myth of the transition need to erase any autonomous initiatives emanating from civilians at the base of the counterculture of the time.

Three Generations: Progressives, Libertarians, and Modernos

AFS Germán, when trying to pin down and give substance to that dim “phantom” of the counterculture, the fact that you break it down into three periods or generations—’68, ’77, and ’82–83—helped me to clarify many concepts. How did you decide on that periodization, and how would you characterize each generation?

GLM A lot of things were at play there. On the one hand, from the beginning, it was clear that people’s experience of the transition varied significantly according to when they had been born. On the other hand, Pablo Sánchez León wrote an article that provided a lot of insight about young people during the transition. He identified a recurring pattern that was true for many born in the second half of the 1950s. Moreover, when I set out to study mortality statistics derived from heroin use, I realized it takes its toll especially among
young people. Finally, in the interviews with the witnesses from that period there are precise generational references that establish clear differences among those groups; such as, “No, it’s that they came from I don’t know where, and we didn’t experience that at all.”

So, in a short period of three or four years, the political and cultural scene, as well as people’s perspective, could change drastically. At the same time, there were alliances between generations, and very strong friendships formed between individuals who may have been twenty years apart. It was a paradoxical situation that took me a long time to figure out. Decisive intergenerational bonds coexisted alongside brutal conflicts between demographic groups close in age. First, I estimated. Then, when digging deeper, those three orienting central concepts that you mentioned appeared. There were generations with their ascending and descending areas of overlap. First there was the generation of 1968, the *progres* (progressives). Next came the libertarians of 1977. The third generation consisted of *La Movida* and the *modernos* of 1982–83.

Each of those sets of years has its own behavioral guidelines and its own models for development. Therefore, the generation of the *progres* was the most legendary of the entire transition. They were the ones who ran from the *grises* [gray-uniformed national police officers], the ones who attended the Raimon concert [at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid], the ones who later joined the PCE or the PSOE [the Spanish Socialist Workers Party]. They sustained the better part of the legend of the transition and were running the democratic institutions as of 1982.

You could call it the Felipe González generation. I don’t say that to place him at the center but rather to put that milieu of duffle coats and beards on the map. Throughout the 1970s, the *progre* generation branches off. On the one hand, there are those who take the path of integration, assimilation, and erasing their previous political experiences. On the other hand are those who remain faithful or loyal (to different extents) to the movement that rebelled against the Franco dictatorship in their youth.

Then there is the second generation; the younger siblings of the *progres* from 1968. Those young people, who lived less time under
Franco, received less of their education under “the biopolitical body of the Franco dictatorship.” Therefore, they evolved as a generation much more quickly. In addition, they were radicalized by their older siblings. That is, at home and at school they had access to different resources from earlier on.

They are the ones who are twenty years old during the transition. Of course, when they hear their older siblings starting to talk about negotiating pacts, they say, “What do you mean you’re reaching an agreement? We’re here to revolutionize daily life!” That group of young people was going to go through the same process as their elders, but more radically and quickly. They want to take the break from the status quo further. They’ll be less afraid, but they will pay a higher price as a generation. Their generation is less socially fragmented, made up of young people from progressively more diverse and mixed backgrounds, as their generational identity was more inclusive and ubiquitous in relation to their immediate elders.

The third generation is the baby boom generation. It’s an important detail to take into account when discussing the generational conflict: suddenly, there are demographically more young people in society. The demographic perception is aligned with a political perception. In the 1960s, there were young people everywhere. There were objectively more of them. Many of them had moral and political thoughts that broke with the past. It’s very different from what is happening nowadays. Spain has one of the oldest populations in the world. This has meant that older members of society have the upper hand in the generational conflict. They have become radicalized over the last few years due to the economic crisis, which has taken us back to the same problematic situation we had in the 1970s.

This last generation is the baby boomers who lived under Franco for only a very short time. They are more children of the transition. They grow up during a time when there was a significant lack of social standards. None of the rules were valid anymore; respect for authority had fallen by the wayside. Everyone had become incredulous. Those young people were initiated into the music of La Movida. They’re the ones who, at the age of twelve, cried out
that they wanted to join a rock-and-roll band and who, at fourteen, set up a bar.

It is basically the generation that, particularly in working-class neighborhoods but not limited to them, will get hooked on heroin en masse. It is also in this age group that the AIDS epidemic killed the most people. This generation inherits many of the ideas and projects of the previous two generations. However, it reinterprets them in a different political context, marked by the end of the transition and the beginning of the socialist governments.

Later in the book that outline takes on some nuances. I mention numerous intermediary positions, but you get the general idea. I think it’s useful for explaining many of the underlying tensions present at that time. It has also been interesting to hear that many people who have read the book feel that those categories accurately describe them. They find them helpful in reflecting on their own experiences, saying things like, “I’m more from the second generation” or “My brother was from the third one.” That’s when I realize that the generational breakdown I described doesn’t betray the experience of the period. On the contrary, it helps to explain some aspects of it.

AFS It must be accurate then, right? It’s interesting that the people who lived through that period have found your periodization a useful tool when looking back on their own experiences; that it’s not imposed from outside onto the real experience.

GLM I’d like to tell you about a conversation I had following one of my book presentations. First, you have to realize that, to date, the three generations have had markedly different relationships with the legend of the transition. Those from the first generation still feel committed to the legend, those from the second have never been able to have their own narrative, and those from the third are still more attached to the legend of La Movida.

The great managers of the discourse of “The Transition,” with capital letters, have mainly come from that first generation: certain historians, opinion leaders, and intellectuals who are organically tied to the system of ’78. On the other hand, members of the second and
third generations generally have more open-minded perspectives on that period. They are more willing to accept criticism or to imagine other possibilities, since they take issue with many aspects of their predecessors’ narrative.

Now, I’ll get back to that anecdote: after the presentation, there was a Q&A. Two people who were members of the first generation were very upset by my talk. They both identified with the Communist tradition. They praised Santiago Carrillo’s political work and affirmed the value of the constitution of ’78, despite the fact that it was written by a handful of people in a secluded room. To them, the overall process was successful, so to question that it could have been conceived or put into practice any other way was simply unacceptable.

They argued that they couldn’t have done it any other way at that time, despite the fact that there were articles written in that early period, published in the magazines *Ajoblanco* and *Bicicleta*, in which the constitutional process was questioned because of the lack of participation from ordinary citizens. There is a great deal of evidence that proves there were indeed other ways of thinking at that time. They weren’t the ones that succeeded? OK, but that doesn’t entitle us to forget or erase those ideas completely. A project’s defeat doesn’t invalidate it. Why do they feel that recognizing alternative historical narratives challenges their own memory and emotions regarding the transition so deeply?

In the end, we managed to find some common ground and reach somewhat of an understanding. As I was leaving, one of the organizers of the event described himself, in private, as a member of the second generation. That is, he was one of those people whose perspective on the period had been erased and distorted by concepts like those espoused by the members of the first generation. Then he told me that 30 percent of his friends from that period had died. It’s a symbolic figure but an important one. The impact of that emotional loss seemed devastating to me. It reaffirmed my idea that the research I was conducting in order to restore the memory of that period was indeed very important. It confirms that conversations with the dead are valuable, because today they can help improve
relationships between different living generations, as well as relationships to the past.

**Dismantling the Counterculture**

**AFS** Germán, I wanted to go on to the second half of the book now, the part where you analyze the “dismantling” of the counterculture. The truth is that your proposal to seek to understand the political transition as a process by which to channel something that was opening up and growing is very powerful. We tend to conceive of the transition as a process of “opening up.” That’s the way it has been taught to us. In contrast, you encourage us to see it more as a process of containment of that opening up process, of closing out other possibilities. It’s a way to disprove the most neutral narrative of the transition, just like that consensus that proceeds despite the resistance from the far right, etc.

How did that process of containment and closing out alternatives happen? We’re not simply talking about police brutality, “betrayal” by the elite, or fear of a right-wing backlash. The *subject of change* in your narrative (young people) is wide-ranging and loosely defined. Therefore, the repression used to dismantle it has to follow suit. The repressive measures will be just as micro-political as the countercultural movement itself was. The process takes many forms—social, cultural, political, economic, and existential—to demonize and devastate transitional youth, seen as a social space, as a force field. You point out and analyze three milestones in that process: the criminalization of young people, the use of heroin, and, finally, the phenomenon of *La Movida*. What do you say if we go over each of them one by one, starting with the demonization of young people?

**GLM** To answer the first part of your question, yes, I believe there is a shift from an all-encompassing change in 1976–77 to a very different situation afterward. That next period is defined by the 1978 elections, when the system opens up and embraces many changes: languages, people, bodies, attitudes, interests, etc., that until that point had been focusing exclusively on making a clean break.
Carta(s)

El País, November 20, 1977

ARTE Y PENSAMIENTO

En esta ocasión el dibujante sevillano de 35 años, conocido también en Madrid, habla del mundo de los homosexuales, un mundo, por otra parte, profundamente anclado en la cultura de la sociedad española.

Para los intelectuales, Nazario es un fenómeno de prestigio. Sus colaboraciones en El País, El Semanal y otras publicaciones, han hecho de Nazario una figura importante en el panorama cultural español.

En el cómic, el dibujante sevillano Nazario se adentra en el mundo de la homosexualidad. El personaje principal es un joven llamado Pablo, que trabaja en un bar y se encuentra constantemente en contacto con la comunidad gay.

El cómic está lleno de humor y sátira, reflejando la realidad de la vida gay en la sociedad española de la época.

En resumen, Nazario es un dibujante talentoso que ha logrado hacerse un nombre en el mundo del cómic, y su obra es un reflejo de la realidad gay en España.
However, that embracing and opening up also contains a great deal of closure and exclusion as well. That’s what is usually invisible.

The legal and law enforcement systems imposed some very stringent limits on the opening-up process. There are generational limitations as well. In my opinion, the transition basically consisted of that contradictory movement: an apparent opening up from above, combined with a harsh closing down from below, which excludes many people. For some of them, it’s because they were already left out from day one; for others, it’s because they voluntarily took themselves out of the game, they believed it’s best to challenge the system from the outside.

Criminalizing young people is as old as the concept of youth itself, if both of these processes aren’t one and the same. Álvarez Cobelas used a quote from [Luis] Carrero Blanco as the title of a book about the student protests. He said Spanish young people were “poisoned in body and soul.” Their bodies, thanks to sex and drugs; their souls, due to Marxist and atheist ideas, as well as literature (they were already talking about literature!).

An institutional reaction is set in motion in which police and the judicial system work hand in hand against the existential challenge that young people represent. They fight against what they call juvenile delinquency, which really covers up a rejection of a certain way of life: people who leave their homes and head to the island of Ibiza in search of a new world that includes experimental drugs and deviant behavior. Young people’s desire to break with the established moral order is seen by the Franco dictatorship as antisocial or immoral behavior.

A new form of legislation was thereby instituted, featuring specially designed prisons, specific forms of repression against non-heteronormative behaviors, and against any form of alternative lifestyle in general. Repressive actions were even taken against some bourgeois young people who flirted with a bohemian lifestyle. All of this was accompanied by an extremely moralistic discourse in the press against young people. Although they had allegedly been given “every opportunity in the world,” they were being “so ungrateful” by
refusing to simply fit into the mold that had been created for them; they wanted to create a different reality.

A book by Amando de Miguel entitled *Los narcisos: El radicalismo cultural de los jóvenes* [*Narcissus: Cultural radicalism and youth*] names all of those negative stereotypes that are still so present today: young narcissists and egomaniacs who are egocentric and lack common sense, etc. That discourse will become even more radicalized as of 1978, when democracy is associated with delinquency. The idea is that democracy represents a period of unacceptable collective disorder. Or, to put it in the words of a fascist supporter in the documentary by the Bartolomé brothers: democracy “turns all men into inverts and all women into prostitutes.”

**AFS** Regarding those issues, it seems to me that in your book you highlight a critical debate: the differentiation between *political* and *ordinary* prisoners. Whose cases are worth defending? Who should be granted amnesty and benefit from other programs? Those holding a more traditional view make a distinction between the two: prisoners of conscience are different (better?) than those who have *simply* committed a crime for *personal reasons*. That discussion reveals the underlying issues within the debate to redefine the collective imagination: While some argue that emancipation will come through politics in a traditional sense (parties, unions, etc.), others see that there is a *biopolitical* conflict that affects society as a whole and manifests itself in many ways (various forms of transgression against the repressive and disciplinary order, etc.)

**GLM** COPEL [Coordinadora de Presos en Lucha; Organization of Spanish Prisoners in Protest], a collective created in 1976 to defend the interests of all imprisoned citizens, plays a key role in this debate. COPEL didn’t differentiate between ordinary and political inmates. They used the term *social prisoners* to emphasize the fact that the disciplinary system represses poor people just as much as it does ideological dissidents. Their objective was to push for the initiation of the new democracy to be joined necessarily by an amnesty that would empty out the prisons.
The COPEL-led pro-amnesty protests were not aimed at getting just political prisoners released, just that handful of political leaders needed to head up the struggle for democracy. Instead, they demanded freedom for people unjustly imprisoned by a harsh repressive system, which is a completely different animal. I remember when El Lute complained about that double standard. On the one hand, there were political prisoners who had committed violent offenses and were given amnesty, while on the other hand there were inmates sentenced for robbery, jailbreak, or recidivism, like him, “who had only stolen a chicken.”

COPEL was an amazing social movement due to its complexity, daring, and unity. It managed to coordinate a simultaneous strike by ordinary prisoners in numerous prisons throughout Spain. Their determination was so great they didn’t hesitate to risk bodily harm: hunger strikes, self-injury, and even an occasional suicide. They were very aware that their struggle was to achieve an authentic democracy to be enjoyed by every last member of society. However, their complaints were not allowed to come to light, and their voices were depoliticized.

Then they launched that massive campaign of strikes and riots to have their voices heard. They obtained many concrete results. For example, they won the right to organize themselves in several prisons. In some cases, guards weren’t allowed in the spaces they had liberated. They self-managed cleaning, cooking, and maintenance shifts, etc. All of these gains didn’t distract them from their main objective: the obligation of every prisoner was first and foremost to escape from prison.

That activism offered a radical break from the cold-blooded adherence to law and order under the Franco regime, and certainly to the logic of the system of ’78. The prisoners’ achievements were well-known at the time. Far from being kept on the fringe, the progressive judiciary of the time, civil society, and political and countercultural organizations were all involved in the struggle for prisoners’ rights. However, the story had a sad ending. The prison directors didn’t keep their promises, they lied to the inmates, and hostages were taken in prison modules.
The impressive levels of solidarity that were reached were broken by the typical strategies used to divide and conquer. Thanks to repressive measures, the seed that might have founded a “post-concentrationary” democracy ended abruptly. COPEL’s demands had connected to those first expressed in the 1930s. As soon as they were defeated, the penitentiary policies of the UCD and PSOE parties never prioritized emptying out the prisons. On the contrary, they maximized containment, making escape-proof prisons with cement floors and small modules to isolate prisoners. In the 1980s, heroin and AIDS ran rampant in those secure prisons. We know much too little about what prisons were like during the transition, even less so in women’s prisons. It’s a topic we should continue to research, although some fantastic studies have appeared recently.

One last point we should keep in mind is that in 1978 the Ley de Peligrosidad Social [Law of Social Dangerousness] was still on the books, so alternative sexual behavior was punishable by imprisonment. Transgender people and their struggles were severely persecuted. Overall, the exact same repressive measures used under Franco continued to be used to contain youth under the new democracy, in one way or another. In that context, the struggles against the Ley de Peligrosidad Social and the struggles by ordinary prisoners to be granted amnesty were on the same wavelength. You could say there is a cultural and social war being waged between the Francoist perspective and young people’s point of view. Judging by the human devastation left at the end of the process, we could certainly call it a youthicide.

**Heroin, the Flip Side of the Counterculture**

**AFS** A second factor in that youthicide is clearly heroin. It’s a very sensitive topic that takes up a lot of space in your book. You discuss it in great detail. You describe and reflect on the different moments when heroin was introduced, its evolution, the different types of people affected, and so on.

Correct me if I’m wrong, but I understand that your position is not to victimize. You certainly don’t deny the devastating nature of the
process, but you don’t victimize anyone. You try to understand why people become addicted to heroin and not simply see it as something imposed from outside. You reject the conspiracy theory that its introduction was politically motivated or promoted by the police in order to undermine widespread social protests, especially prevalent among young people. You tie the desire for heroin to the main topic of the book: guilty of literature. One sentence that had a strong impact on me is when you say, “You’re not just getting a fix; you’re shooting up an entire legend.” I understood then that the junkies who inhabited urban historic quarters in the 1980s are related to countercultural youth. Am I right?

GLM It’s a complex, sensitive subject. On the one hand, heroin appeared as yet another technology for liberation. It dismantles preconceived visions of the world and transforms ways of seeing. However, it is not just another technology. I mean, it’s not like dropping acid. It is a world apart. It has an extremely violent impact on one’s body. Heroin is accompanied by a legend—it introduces the idea of death from the very beginning. The introduction of needles means committing oneself to taking a risk. It means coming to terms with the fact that the process of leaving Francoism behind can mean precipitating one’s own death, dissolution, or devastation. That undoubtedly formed part of the dark allure of the drug.

Is there a death drive that runs through much of this transitional generation? Undoubtedly there is. Does that drive explain everything? I’d say it doesn’t. However, at the same time, we’re talking about a very dynamic generation that takes the transformation of relationships between people very seriously. Paradoxically, behind that death wish was unbridled vitality. You would have to place the idea of defeat between those extremes.

The death drive that heroin channels has to be understood in part as a response to the failure of the ideal of creating an alternative way of life. We sometimes say that hatred is like love, but turned inside out, like death-threatening love. By the same token, heroin would be a death-threatening version of political utopia and the counterculture. You could interpret self-destruction as a process of subjectification. When your world has been deemed invalid and you no longer have a
voice, self-destruction paradoxically affirms you as a political entity. There are many types of relationships with heroin. There are many examples of stoic junkies who have maintained a pretty harmonious relationship with the substance for decades. There are also numerous examples of giving it up and reinventing oneself. On the other hand, there are also many times when one’s relationship with heroin goes back and forth. At the beginning, it was not an easily obtained drug; it wasn’t on the market. People with access to the drug were doctors and hippies who traveled to Afghanistan or the country then known as Burma, who were connected with what some beatniks were writing. Then suddenly, during a second stage, everything changes when massive amounts of the drug arrive in Southern Europe during the transition. When the drug becomes popular, it already has its countercultural legend, closely associated with Lou Reed, for example.

Another important issue is that when we talk about the heroin epidemic we aren’t just talking about the drug. The key here is the way it’s used: shooting up heroin, its intravenous use. That is the key factor to help us understand the degree of addiction it leads to, as well as the proliferation of infectious diseases. When injected, heroin attacks the body much more aggressively. All of this will generate a culture of dependence and an underground economy to guarantee economic access to the substance in the 1980s. All of a sudden, the problem is how to get a dose. Based on that logic, an entire world of urban relationships will become interwoven in such a way that young people in public places are automatically perceived as being junkies. This new identity emerges when heroin distribution is organized in the 1980s at the confluence between networks of drug dealers and police interests.

The junkie phenomenon begins to be seen as a symbol. They have an identifiable physical shape and markings, certain habits; they use certain colloquial language; and so on. At the same time, it is seen as a destination people are drawn to. There are many different types of junkies who come from all different places. Some come from the counterculture and others from Maoist organizations. Entire generations of political and countercultural activists end up using needles. Then there are also young people from poor
neighborhoods. Both masculine and feminine prostitution becomes a consubstantial part of that reality as well.

It’s a social ferment in which the junkie phenomenon functions as a visual art figure, a stereotype that allows this heroin-addicted youth to be managed in a disciplined way. A culture appears, not only of exclusion but of immunization. It’s a logic, very prevalent in the 1980s, based on creating an immune system to guard against the junkie phenomenon: “don’t go near any needles in the parks,” “careful with the fountains,” etc. An entire series of youth-related features, such as long hair, earrings, certain music, indigence, and dressing sloppily, including ’80s sweat suits, are associated with the junkie phenomenon and begin to be outlawed. My impression is that the junkie phenomenon is used to classify and close out a certain reality.

As far as victimization goes, the heroin problem would be inconceivable without considering the fact that drugs were against the law. The immune practices and necro-policies that allowed tens of thousands of young people to simply die would not have happened if it weren’t for the severe prohibitionist context of the time. In the name of protecting society, and even of defending the heroin addicts themselves, all of those exclusionary procedures were put into place that allowed an entire generation of young people to die, in a political and often a physical sense as well.

There are people who participate actively in that milieu from the very beginning. A pharmacological citizenship emerges that asserts that unfettered access to drugs is just another civil right, within the context of the rest of the struggles taking place at the time. This has important philosophical consequences on individual freedom and sovereignty. At the same time, there is a whole field of pharmaco-political thought. That is, there is a field of social criticism that questions the way drugs are used politically, from the idea that societies are complex systems of dependency, to the idea that drugs form part of, and are a metaphor of, those systems.

Finally, the other question is the discussion that remains open, regarding to what extent the state actively used heroin during the transition in order to do away with countercultural young people,
based on the threat their political rebelliousness posed. Nowadays, that is simply an urban legend. An urban legend is a belief that hasn’t been demonstrated but has been transmitted by word of mouth to many people, whether it’s true or not.

As a belief, an urban legend provides us with insight that, regardless of whether it’s historically true, alerts us that something is amiss. It’s symptomatic of a social wound or damage being done. What that legend puts forward is true to some extent. During the transition, young people are taken out of action at the end of the decade, and intravenous heroin consumption is one of the main causes of that process. All of that is useful for the interests at play during the path to the new democracy. Nevertheless, the reasoning doesn’t work the other way around, which is how it is usually contemplated: “since the new democracy needs rebellious youth to be taken out of action, heroin is introduced.” It doesn’t work that way: cause and effect. It works in a sequence in which every new effect introduces new causes.

Of course, there was collusion between networks of police and drug dealers and illegal party financing, but there is no proof that it was all an organized plot against young people. There is no proof that there was a structural design. No maps have surfaced revealing a pharmacological final solution for the Spanish transition. It exists only as part of a mythology of the left, especially in the Basque Country. Once again, the fact that it’s an urban legend doesn’t mean there isn’t some truth to it, because it tells us about a social reality that still requires attention and work to be done. That’s why I devoted the end of that chapter to that generation’s collective memory, to the many people, particularly poets, but also artists, who set out on that intravenous path of no return.

La Movida (The Scene)

AFS Germán, the last phenomenon in the dismantling process I wanted to ask you about is La Movida. Once again, just as in the case of the heroin problem, you undertake a very meticulous analysis. The first problem you point out is that there was actually
another movida prior to the well-known La Movida. Somehow the fixation on the myth has erased its origins: a set of practices, people, and places such as La Prospe or the social meeting place known as Mantuano. However, you don’t fall into the trap of repeating the superficial criticism of La Movida, which casts it as a postmodern or depoliticized frivolity. Instead, you frame it as a complex force field in which we can observe distinct stages, paths, and moments. You delve into that field very carefully in order to analyze, almost year by year, how La Movida gradually slips down a slope. It starts with the cultural expression of a city-citizenship reinventing itself after having been repressed under Franco and ends with the comprehensive implementation of a market-driven logic that emphasizes success, self-fulfillment, and icon-trademarks. That slip down the slope produces an inoffensive, depoliticized, and depoliticizing culture in the end, which is very similar to what we now know as the Culture of the Transition.

GLM Several things were happening there. On the one hand, when I began to research that section in 2007, the mega-exhibit about La Movida was taking place in Madrid. The regional government of Madrid appropriated La Movida to associate it with its image and use it as a marketing tool to brand the city. They had no qualms about doing so at the exact same time the real estate bubble was at its height, and there was a crackdown on public drinking in the Malasaña neighborhood. It was precisely in the Plaza del Dos de Mayo [May 2nd Square], the iconic center of La Movida, where Félix Lorrio took the photograph that appears on the cover of my book.

It's a textbook example of gentrification. The local government appropriates a collective cultural capital with no heirs. It serves to advance a successful city brand using that prestigious historical image, while promoting a neoliberal model of consumption through the use of violent means to control public uses of urban space. The new brand represents the exact opposite mindset of the botellón, or public drinking. What amazes me the most is that both the spontaneous social practices initiated by young people and the law enforcement crackdown in 2007 were heirs to the social practices and violence exercised against young people thirty years
before. They all took place in the exact same public square where other citizens had suffered before them, during the transition.

It was there that you could clearly observe a double-edged phenomenon: on the one hand, the continuity of the state’s biopolitical policy, which was anti-youth, authoritarian, and demonstrated an unabashed abuse of power; on the other hand, the transformation of the counterculture that created that emblematic scene three decades earlier, into a commercial brand that legitimized the use of violence against those who celebrated an updated form of counterculture in 2007. While it’s not the counterculture or La Movida’s fault, this irony does highlight the importance of taking careful note of the continuities and discontinuities present in public places and the memories of them. Based on that observation, I developed the theory that La Movida itself had been invented as a discontinuity—a discontinuity from the counterculture.

When you analyze it, the myth of La Movida is very vague; for example, dates are never mentioned. That’s certainly where my concern stems from regarding establishing exact years and months. The myth is devoid of dates. The myth asserts, “In that period, Spain became democratic once again,” “the 1980s,” etc. But what do they mean? Between “Spain became democratic once again” and the height of pop music in the 1980s, many years went by. Some of these issues have already been discussed in [José Luis] Gallero’s book, Solo se vive una vez: Esplendor y ruina de La Movida madrileña [You only live once: Glory and destruction of La Movida in Madrid]. In my opinion, it’s the first key book to help us to reflect on the cultural scene in Madrid during the ’80s. There is a very interesting interview in that book with Pedro Almodóvar, someone who has been intimately associated both with the film scene in the new democracy, as well as the countercultural scene in Madrid. Almodóvar says very clearly in that interview that La Movida never existed. If you want to be honest, you have to conclude that the movement loses its power in 1981; that is, before the PSOE victory [in 1982] and before Enrique Tierno Galván is reelected as mayor [of Madrid]. There are several key figures associated with La Movida who point out that by 1981 there had already been a break with what had been happening before.
It’s absolutely true: If you analyze certain legendary figures who are the standard-bearers of *La Movida*, such as the punk rock group Kaka de Luxe or the film *Arrebato* [Rapture], you realize that they actually belong to the previous period, to the counterculture and the key political and aesthetic moments of the transition. Nevertheless, there seems to be an imperative need to associate that cultural capital with its iconic productions, radical artists, night animals (like Haro Ibars), or clubs like La Vaquería, with the legitimacy that other types of cultural and economic practices will gain. To a certain degree, *La Movida* is mostly known for its pop music and large-scale tours. That is, at least in my opinion, what constitutes and is automatically identifiable as being *La Movida*: large-scale tours of new musical groups that were connected with the process of developing a nationwide post-Franco pop-rock music industry.

At that point, there were some interesting and some not so interesting new developments. Huge macro-concerts held in 1982, 1983, and 1984 were often financed by city governments. That is the true standard-bearer phase of *La Movida*, the genuine one, featuring *La bola de cristal*, *La edad de oro*, and *La Luna de Madrid*. We’re talking about 1983–1985. Thus, these processes appear at a very late date in our narrative, and they contain many displacements.

In any case, the genesis of that process takes place within the heart of the transition and the counterculture. That’s where we’ll find numerous artists, poets, intellectuals, and music critics from the generation of 1977. That’s the generation I call the real counterculture, given that they generate ideas that the next ones, the young people of the baby boom generation will make their own a few years later, when they lead the next stage. Just as there is a connection between the last stage of the bifid generation of 1968 and the countercultural young people of 1977, there is also a legacy between the countercultures of 1977 and the generation of *La Movida*. There are even phenomena, such as Eduardo Haro Ibars and Camarón [the flamenco singer], who unite all three generations.

For Haro, electric guitars and microphones allowed the underground’s minority poetry to reach a mass audience. One of the guys who performed that operation brilliantly was
Xaime Noguerol, a countercultural figure in Ourense. He had come out of the hippy struggles of the end of the 1960s and had intense international experiences in the 1970s. He published underground books of poetry at the height of the transition and managed to reformat them as rock songs with a variety of groups, such as Banzai, Cucharada, and in close collaboration with Miguel Ríos.

Noguerol has a very powerful narrative regarding the tensions involved in that process. On the one hand, there are production companies that offer to invest money in them, which means they can now earn a salary. A few of those young people are going to generate some serious income in the early ’80s. We shouldn’t be tempted to magnify La Movida’s ability to co-opt people. However, it is important to note how a small number of young people are able to begin a successful career and generate wealth as long as they orient their creative capabilities the right way.

Then there is an entire scene of musicians and public relations service providers who find a way to make a living off all of that. In the midst of that commercialization process, a time suddenly arrives when music loses its ability to name the present, to explain what is happening in the present to that generation. All at once, their impetus is left without words, without an audience, a base, and, finally, without money. It’s the terrible image I describe in my book, of Miguel Ríos, who, after reaping great success thanks to his tours, suffers a resounding failure. Noguerol talks about a midsummer night’s dream. As the dream fades away, in its dissolution we see the structure of a new regime emerging to replace it: the neoliberal city is born. At that time, there are poets who talk about the movida city that represents the idea and sense that someone changed the city right under our noses. The world has changed without warning, and we didn’t even realize it.

**How the Book Was Received**

**AFS** To conclude, Germán, I would like you to tell me about the initial feedback you are getting from your book. What have you found when you present the book, what kind of conversations are
you having, who says they feel like you’re talking to their experience with the story you tell? Your book doesn’t appear at just any old time. It appears within the context of a challenge, when a crack has appeared in the official narrative of the Culture of the Transition. The cracks started to become visible during the 15-M movement, when ordinary people from all walks of life took center stage in public squares in cities across Spain to shout, “Real democracy now!” and “You don’t represent us.” They call the myth of the Culture of the Transition into question in a radical way with the emblematic cry, “They call it democracy, but it isn’t.” Following 15-M, the party Podemos was founded and took that questioning inside the seat of Parliament. So, I’d like to hear about the impact your book has had within the context of the walls beginning to crack. I’d like you to talk both about the response of people whose story you try to bring to light, such as academics and the press, as well as the journalists who are more attached to the official narrative of the transition, which you call into question.

**GLM** In general, I found two or three types of reactions. On the one hand, for the people who had lived through that period, there was the issue of the different generations. Many witnesses and participants in the underground had provided key testimony for my book. They and many other people involved in that reality had highly positive responses, albeit with some criticism and with each one placing emphasis on certain areas. One thing they have all said, and this is the most important thing, is that they all felt their stories had been reflected in the book, that my narrative took their experiences into account. I’m not saying that mine is the only way to tell the story of that period, but at least they felt they had a place in my narrative.

Although the book has been very well received by Hispanists, it has been pretty much overlooked by official Spanish culture. The only official response I have seen was very interesting, since it recognized that PSOE culture did not emanate from countercultural or prodemocracy struggles. Instead, it acknowledged that it developed out of sociological Francoism, that the culture of the 1980s was inherited from the logic of the dictatorship. Also, that all of the projects I refer to in my book that attempted to build a democratic system were considered problematic by the new regime. In essence,
they shouldn’t have happened at all, and that’s that. It’s interesting
that the only way one can continue to defend the myth of the
transition today is by coming to terms with that which the myth
hoped to displace and hide. One would need to accept that the
regime that evolved out of the transition represents an authoritarian
change that turned its back on the mobilization of civil society and
simply updated government practices common under the Franco
dictatorship.

**AFS** Are you referring to the critique by Jordi Gracia in *El País*?

**GLM** His is certainly one example, but what I’m interested in is the
underlying cultural logic present in his argument. His reasoning is as
follows: it may be that the countercultural minorities were indeed
the most learned, the best educated, and the most pro-European
(although I wouldn’t describe them in those terms). Nevertheless,
one of that is important, because sociological Francoism was the
dominating wavelength during the period, and the transition took
place based on that libido. That is, when considering how to describe
the atmosphere present at that time, a decisive element would be a
desire for continuity, for maintaining a society that was very similar
to the one that already existed, rather than any real willingness to
provoke a profound change in the life of the country.

The question is posed perversely, because, on the one hand, it may
be true that the society that evolves out of the dictatorship does so as
a moral and geopolitical continuation of the ways of organizing
government and daily life, but it is not the only position that exists
historically. Above all, that’s not the way any democratic conquests
are gained. In the 1970s, there was a powerful culture that wanted to
make a clean break with the past, from the streets to the factories.
The *underground* forms part of that culture, and even though it is a
minority, it did serve as a spearhead and had a profound impact on
society. In addition, the countercultural world we are discussing
contained a significant utopian potential, which pushed the country
in the direction of being more interesting and less old-fashioned. It
strove for a world made up of people who enjoyed a wider variety of
dignified lifestyles, one that was more respectful of one’s own life
and that of others around them, as well as the environment. In that
sense, one gets the impression that the problem perceived about that way of seeing things is that it represents an alternative at that historical moment, a possibility of organizing things in a different way. Many people react violently to the very existence of such an alternative. The fact is that many decisions and criticisms of the democratic system were made under duress, pressured by assertions that there was no other way to do things, when it has been proven that there were indeed alternative ways. The coercion of the process has become apparent.

On the other hand, the aggressive disdain for the counterculture is unjustified. It’s as if it had an authoritarian or solipsistic character, as if it were attempting to impose some kind of Soviet-style counterculture in which everyone was obliged to smoke joints and practice free love. The domino effect that inspired so much fear was not pertinent at all; in fact, the exact opposite was true. It is precisely that difference that many consider to be so threatening.

While it is true that there was a strong anthropological otherness to the countercultural world, which led to a great deal of tension at the time, it was actually a very porous realm that affected many other realms. Nevertheless, over time that porosity seems to have turned into walls and barriers. Many of the negative opinions regarding that world and its proposals are based on fear. The myth of the transition has gone into a tailspin; it’s reaching the end of its narrative. Its horizon of expectations, closely tied to the experience of power of a generation on its way out, is going along with the breakdown of the Culture of the Transition and the system of ’78.

At the same time, new dialogues are emerging. My book has been very well received by the youngest generation, which is heartening, because I am able to transmit a different collective imagination to them that way. The book offers a narrative to young people today who are surprised to discover a picture of a period that seems more contemporary than they thought it was. One young student said something interesting to me. He said he felt his generation was repeating the experience of the bifid generation, in that the 15-M generation had also had a bifid experience. Some went on to become
part of political institutions, while other remained outside of them, whether voluntarily or not.

However, the next generation that has become known as the ni-nis [neither students nor workers] or Spanish millennials, hasn’t even been granted recognition by the generation immediately preceding it, the 15-M generation. That was a date that generation either missed or experienced only glancingly. In any case, that generation was not the main protagonist. At most, someone told them about it, and they don’t necessarily identify with it. However, they do see themselves reflected in certain wavelengths, in certain expressions of dissent. They make those politics their own; that democratic radicalism of daily life, as well as that sense of not having a future, of wanting to make something happen on your own, without waiting for anything from the outside. That’s where I see some similarities to that period opening up. On the other hand, the book is expensive for young people to afford. At least it gets around by word of mouth and is being lent from one person to the next. That’s a bit like it was back during the counterculture. I have also received messages from people for whom the book evokes things from the past. It’s a gift for me that people I don’t know feel involved in it. The relatively good reception the book has had in the media has to do with the fact that lots of people believe in the project. There are friends and accomplices. You could say it has been particularly homemade, based on personal conversations. It is as if all of the work behind writing the book was coming back to me generously. In conversations with readers I’m hearing great stories that give me food for thought. The truth is, I’m extremely happy about how it has been received.

1. In the text, the terms state and transition are deliberately left uncapitalized. This is a choice with democratic consequences. Rather than a celebration of the period, what we sought in this conversation was a more complex critical perspective. The capital letter serves to capitalize in both senses on the myth of the transition as the foundation of the contemporary era. Instead of The Transition, we prefer to think here of the different transitions, the many and varied ways of traversing the period, with all their contradictions. We therefore use the term with a capital only when Transition refers clearly to the myth, the construct of historiographers and publicists. When it refers to the period or the way it was experienced, we use a proudly plebeian small letter.
No se puede leer el texto de la imagen proporcionada.
Seguimiento de una noticia
(Following a piece of news)
Concha Jerez

Seguimiento de una noticia (Following a piece of news) is based on the press coverage of the death at the hands of the police of five workers during a labor demonstration in Vitoria. The artist records the appearance and progressive disappearance of the news in the pages of the newspapers El País, Informaciones and Diario 16 from May 5 to 25, 1977. The work was initially presented in the format of an artist’s book.

Concha Jerez
Seguimiento de una noticia (Following a Piece of News), 1977
Photocopy and drawing
Thirty-two photocopies of newspapers modified with self-censored writings
29.6 × 21 cm each
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
AD06357
EL PAÍS
OPINION

...Contenido en la imagen...
Carta(s)
Libidinal Economy of the Spanish Transition

Amador Fernández-Savater
A Conversation with Germán Labrador Méndez
on His Book Culpables por la literatura:
Imaginación política y contracultura
en la transición española (1968-1986) _01

Concha Jerez
Seguimiento de una noticia _49