

# Homoheresy on Film: Subversive Gay Cinema in Spain in the 70s and 80s

Berzosa, Alberto. (2014). *Homoheresy on Film: Subversive gay cinema in Spain in the 70s and 80s*. Madrid: Bru-maria. 385 pages. ISBN 978-84-939935-7-3

In this book, based on his doctoral thesis, Alberto Berzosa carefully and entertainingly analyzes a dozen diverse Spanish movies from the 70s and 80s. The author analyzes the movies in two of the five chapters that comprise the book. Then it is dedicated to analyzing the concepts used for almost 60 pages. Chapters 2 and 4 are dedicated to the sociopolitical context of homosexuality in the decades studied and Chapters 3 and 5 analyze 13 movies: 6 short films in Catalan: *Una senzilla història d'amor* (1970) by Ferran Llagostera; *Gais al carrer* (1977) by J. R. Ahumada; *Cu-carecord* (1980) and *Buscando el camino de tu amor* (1978) by the Els 5 QK's collective; *Actuació d'Ocaña i Camilo* (1977) by the Vídeo-Nou collective; *Silencis* (1982) by Xavier-Daniel; 2 documentaries in Catalan: *Ocaña, retrat intermitent* (1978) and *Informe sobre el FAGC* (1979) by Ventura Pons; a short film in Spa-

nish by Pedro Almodovar: *Dos putas o historia de amor que termina en boda* (1974) and finally 4 feature films in Spanish: *Manderley* (1981) by Jesus Garay; *Los placeres ocultos* (1977) and *El diputado* (1978) by Eloy de la Iglesia and *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980) by Almodovar.

Each movie is presented in its context of appearance, with an introduction to the director or collective and its work, a description of one or several sequences and the analysis of the representation of homosexuality as subversive on different levels. For such, the author has mainly used information collected in newspaper and magazine articles, monographs on the directors, interviews and personal correspondence with some directors. For this layout, the author went with a chronological analysis: the decade of the 70s and the decade of the 80s. The originality of this

work consists in bringing largely little known movies into the spotlight.

Berzosa classifies these movies in a subcategory of gay cinema, the "subversive gay cinema" that subdivides into three types: underground, militant and commercial. Subversive gay cinema is composed of, according to him, movies in which the representation of homosexuality transgresses the dominant sexual norms.

Some movies are so unheard-of that there are no copies on record. Such is the case of the first short film analyzed, *Una senzilla història d'amor* (1970) by Ferran Llagostera that even Berzosa has not been able to see. Therefore, study of this militant film is based on secondary sources and in conversations with the director. It is the "first example of subversive gay cinema" according to him, because it expresses a pride for sexual difference at the height of Francoism. Despite the innovative character of Llagostera proposal, this short film was seen by very few (mainly in movie clubs and neighborhood associations).

The same goes for *Gais al Carrer* (1977), a shortfilm by the

FAGC, the Front d'Alliberament Gai de Catalunya. It is a documentary on various important events for the homosexual liberation movement that emerged in Barcelona. The first gay pride march in Spain occurred in June 1977, still illegal then, among other protests with discourses criticizing the Law on Social Dangers and Rehabilitation with which sentenced some homosexuals were still, and discourses in favor of sexual freedom. It gives visibility to the collective in a militant form and in Catalan despite limited distribution and exhibition.

In addition, various collectives emerged from Barcelona's underground scene in the 70s like Els 5 QK's and Spain's first public service video collective called Video-Nou created in Barcelona in 1977. They used alternative circuits like cultural centers, neighborhood associations, bars, the creation of a "Video-Bus" –a bus with screens facing the outside in order to show works to passers-by – and they had, therefore, a very limited audience according to Berzosa. In his short film *Actuació d'Ocaña i Camilo* created in 1977, despite difficult material circumstances, they represent an image of homosexuality as a "liberating and subversive instrument" (155) via transvestism (feather boas, manila shawl, flamingo dresses, etc.), street shows and pornography with an orgy and religious hymns.

At the beginning of the 80s, although the cultural center



of the Spanish State changes to Madrid with the famous move, in detriment to Barcelona, Berzosa names another two movies still made there: *Manderley* (1981) by Jesus Garay and *Silencis* (1982) by Xavier-Daniel. The first was classified as erotica, and therefore, this classification caused it to have a small audience. It was only distributed in Barcelona according to correspondence between the di-

rector and the author. Beyond topics already addressed in previous like transvestism and the feather with Ocaña, Manderley proposes a very novel question about the sexuality of children and with children at a time in which this topic was not as taboo as it is today, since some movements asked for "recognition of sexuality from childhood" or sexual liberation of children (261).

The large majority of these movies, almost all filmed with low budgets, had a small audience. On the contrary, more commercial movies were those of Almodovar starring with Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón and those of Eloy de la Iglesia, but they are all very-well studied movies and have numerous monographs.

Finally, this work presents some methodological and conceptual doubts. The monograph organization presents a problem. Only two out of five chapters analyze movies and two chapters analyze the context. What Berzosa says is interesting but maybe it would have been better to briefly include that context in the chapters on cinema itself, like the author already does in fact, but without overdoing it with two separate chapters.

This category of "subversive gay cinema" is not very productive. Despite the justifications of the author for limiting this category to the 13 movies selected, it could be said that all gay cinema is subversive by definition, on different levels according to the context in which it appears. For the mere representation of homosexuality on screen, you could say it is subversive. Obviously, not as much as a gay orgy with religious hymns sung by Ocaña, but that's why I would say that the subversive character of homosexuality in cinema can be seen in almost all the gay movies, only the level of subversion changes. As a result, I do not consider this ca-

tegory analyzed by Berzosa of "subversive gay cinema" that would start in the early 70s and would end in the mid-80s to be very successful.

Moreover, another problem could be proposed: How can a piece whose exhibition was so little and limited be subversive? Obviously, the subversion of these movies resides in its same existence. You could also say that the level of subversion also depends on the reception it has. A following project could possibly be that the author could analyze the audience's reception of the supposed subversion, or lack thereof, of these movies. Despite these necessary critiques, one has to applaud the work of Alberto Berzosa for finding movies of which a majority are practically inaccessible today, via first-hand interviews and for the thoughtful editing done with images from the movies in the annex.

#### **Geoffroy Huard**

Universidad de Cergy-Pontoise  
geoffroy.huard@gmail.com

#### How to Cite:

Huard, G. (2017). [Reseña de Libro] Homoheregías fílmicas: cine homosexual subversivo en España en los años 70 y 80. *Comunicación y Medios*, (36), 157-159.

DOI: 10.5354/0719-1529.2017.45756