

KEEP IT SIM- PLE MAKE IT FAST!

AN APPROACH
TO UNDERGROUND
MUSIC SCENES (VOL. 4)
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Keep it Simple, Make it Fast!

An approach to underground music scenes (vol. 4)

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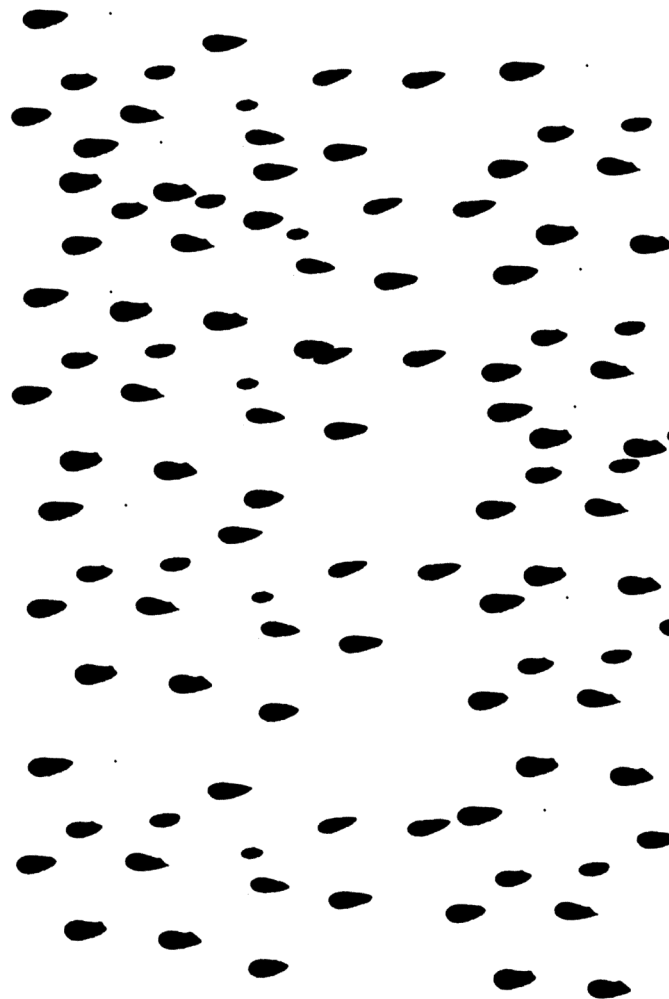
3.5. Music and fashion in Spain in the 80's

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A b s t r a c t

This paper explores the influence of music in the fashion choices of the women that witnessed the changing (gender) roles in the Spanish society of the late 1970's, a period of invisibility of women in all fields. The generation in this study are both baby boomers and Generation X, a powerful group of 10 influential professionals of the music industry, culture, arts and fashion born between 1953 and 1969. Their oral testimonies serve to understand how this generation with their attitudes, corporal aesthetic, sexuality and style, made fashion statements and found the melting point through music. Music, films, the urban art scene, videoclips or magazines, were global influences in the fashion choices of that generation.

Keywords: *Popular music, fashion, female subculture, Spanish history 1980-1989.*



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Rapper's Delight is one of the most influential songs in mainstream hip-hop released and produced in 1979 by Sugarhill Records, a label owned by Sylvia Robinson, a talented singer, record impresario, producer. Sylvia was and influential rap pioneer and is considered the "Mother of Hip-Hop". Sylvia died in 2011 at age 76 and her story, as most of the women that navigated on a very male dominated industry, went unknown. The present research takes off in Spain also in the late 1970s, a crucial decade after the political transition towards democracy after Franco's death in 1975. An account of a moment in history of women that witnessed the change of roles in society while few pioneers understood and defended feminism.

Before 1970 women in Spain were totally isolated and vetoed in the public sphere, from work to politics, from mass media to art. A very important rupture from the traditional scheme of the nuclear family unit happened when these women started working outside the home. Many women gaining control of their lives derived into freedom of expression in many fields such as art, as well as in music and fashion. The research takes the format of interviews to a group of 10 professionals of this generation and with their testimony we can understand and interpret this period and what was meaningful to them:

Christina Bifano is a textile designer and fashion historian that works predominantly in education and trends research. Michele Curel was a photographer in concerts, at interviews, backstage and now she is the president of the Asociación de Fotógrafos Profesionales (AFP). Movie director and writer Isabel Coixet qualifies herself in the 1980s as an aspiring filmmaker, now she says, "I am one". Lydia Delgado started as a classic dancer and became a leading designer in the Spanish fashion scene in the mid and late 1980's with her own label that has stood out for bringing a wilder edge to sophistication. Patricia Godes was the first music writer and journalist who offered a serious treatment of black American music in media. Patricia Soley Bertran was a professional fashion model in the 1980's today she is a university lecturer, researcher, writer and essayist. Marta Vall worked as a freelance in the late 1970's and 1980's, now she is the Marketing Manager of Universal Music in Spain. Anna Vallés started working as a stylist, fashion journalist, advertising stylist and fashion consultant for many magazines and became the Fashion Director of the Spanish editions of Woman and Marie Claire. Silvia Ventosa was the curator of the Museum of Ethnology Barcelona back in 1985 and now she is the Head of the Department of Fashion and Textile of the Design Museum in Barcelona. Bertha Yebra spent the 1970's and 1980's travelling, doing interviews around the world and going to rock shows. Founded *Popular 1* in 1973 a music magazine that still in business today.

In the 1960s, the representation of femininity that dominated many music discourses, together with the roles that women played while working in industries with almost nonexistent female representation, varied from country to country. ¿Had Sylvia Robinson in the US the same limitations than movie director Isabel Coixet or fashion designer Lydia Delgado in Spain? In the early eighties in Spain, the access to artistic and cultural creativity was limited to the main capitals in the country: fashion, art, film, music and design, were represented mainly in Madrid and Barcelona. After Franco's death, the desire to recover the lost ground, to join the vanguard, to recover "modernity", and to re-figure in the cultural panorama, explodes.

Political liberty led mostly left-wing forces to city councils. The sexual revolution was intensely lived. The young man and women, whose parents

had been subjected for decades to severe repression in this area, head first to promiscuity (which only halted the onset of AIDS in the middle of the decade) and accepted without reservation the new status of women by the feminist movements. The conditions of freedom established in Spanish society, where it no longer seemed possible to prohibit anything, also facilitated the rise of drug consumption among the young generations.

The decade of the 1980s was a decade of material prosperity, which favored the allocation of resources to projects of young, prepared and creative people who began to look towards London and New York, rather than Paris, pursuing their initiatives and looking for stimuli abroad. These group of people with new ideas and willingness to carry them out, and with enough economic capacity to do so, traveled and shared with their friends what interested them. They transited through all cultural territories in a completely transverse way; what today without hesitation we would call "entrepreneurs". An important nucleus of these entrepreneurs belonged to the field of design, but also highlighted professionals in music, literature, architecture, photography, journalism, fashion, illustration, comics, television and cinema. They did everything and experimented with everything. They created bars, shops, fashion collections, discos, magazines, television programs and movies, all of which had no reason to envy to their British or American counterparts.

But they were not mere copies: they all incorporated a character of their own that little by little gained fame and put Barcelona back at the head of the cultural vanguard. In the late 1980's Barcelona was chosen to hold the 1992 Olympic Games, legitimizing its modernization to the whole world. The first musical manifestations, the counterculture literature and new journalism became the agitators of the grey age of a dormant Spain of the late 1970's. More and more, Spanish people could communicate in English and were able to read the imported magazines from the UK and the US like *The Face*, *New Musical Express* or *Spin* showcasing that other modern young people existed beyond our borders.

Barcelona was prolific in terms of music publications: *Rock Especial* (September, 1981) was heiress of the legendary *Vibraciones* (the music magazine par excellence of the 1970's), as well as *Popular-1*, one of the oldest music publications in Europe. The movie theaters that displayed daily double sessions such as *Cine Céntrico*, *Spring*, *Loreto* or *Maldá* became the scenarios where paraded the heroes and dreams of this generation. In the art scene, the international influences came from the street art and fusion of genres like sculpture, photography, installations, painting and graffiti. Second hand stores for music, clothing and books were also very popular and people did things for themselves consciously seeking to feel fulfilled. It was a total DIY culture.

Back in 1979, the small coastal town of Canet de Mar, organized one of the first rock festivals at the style of the international events and pioneered the panorama by contracting the mythical bands of the NY punk underground scene like Blondie and Ultravox. The first urban tribes began to blur the hippies of the 1970's that followed the symphonic music style called *Música Layetana* and mainly settled in La Floresta outside Barcelona. The beards and long hair gave way to the tribes of the early 1980's: rockers, mods, punks and skins and with them those wonderful bands like Ramones, Sex Pistols, Dammed, Clash, Jam. "No future" as the slogan from punks was adopted also here by a whole generation that broke conservative molds and sought in music the religion

that will identify them with others through the simple and direct messages of pop and rock music.

Barcelona was ahead of most cities in Spain with a small circuit concert hall where local bands like Los Burros, Loquillo, Brighton-64, Decibelios or Rebeldes played every so often. In that context, music promoter Gay Mercader created scenarios in bullrings and stadiums where fans met their idols: Police, Bob Marley or Elvis Costello. Madrid was forging a countercultural movement called "*La movida*" that expanded all over the capitals and in all forms. The independent underground mass media spread the buzz and the music industry signed record contracts with all the bands of the moment like Kaka de Luxe, Alaska y los Pegamoides, Zombies, Aviador Dro, Las Chinas, La Mode, Vulpess, Radio Futura, Gabinete Caligari or Parálisis Permanente.

The representatives of such artistic and spontaneous cultural movement of the late 1970's congregated around clubs and markets, art galleries and multidisciplinary artistic scenes of the capital of Spain to reclaim their more cosmopolitan spirit, from a country that was slowly recovering their voice, identity and future. The first local television was born in Catalonia and Spain in 1981 in an atmosphere of political transformation. This environment favored participation in the public life and demanded freedom of expression. Catalan culture and language were persecuted under Franco's dictatorship for more than forty years. Catalans took conscience that the recovery of their identity was essential and for that reason various media groups and organizations launched local newspapers, FM radios and tv-stations written and spoken in Catalan.

Transportation was becoming more democratized and travel helped youth around the globe to become part of a generation that sought the modern world that was being showcased on the magazines or in one's imagination. London, Paris or New York were global tastemakers that dictated the direction of fashion, art, music and design across the world. The 1980's was sort of the golden age for music journalism since technology enabled the coverage of many shows live and bands agreed on being interviewed backstage or in hotel rooms. Journalists versatile in languages were invited by record companies and culture industries to interview their artist, promote exhibits and performances. No technology could substitute the direct contact with the idols (Guerra, 2018, 2019).

The design bars were the sanctuaries for fun both in Barcelona and Madrid and all over the peninsula. These comfortable spaces were created for the enjoyment by a very prolific vanguard of artists, designers, architects and engineers that changed the previous underground concept by the one of modernity, "Copeteo" (drinks) with VIP's while socializing in the newly decorated city industrial grounds. The male dominated effervescent music scene yielded little space for female artists, to the exception if the female sang in a band of men. Fortunately, a whole new generation of liberal women who travelled, worked as DJ's, fashion designers, movie directors or journalists were advancing into their claims of not conforming to being sexualized objects.

In the early 1980s, the socialists began revitalizing the textile industries. Zara, opened its first store in La Coruña back in 1975 and started experiencing growth outside the country. In Barcelona, brand-based Mango opened its first store in 1984 in Paseo de Gracia and gradually expanded. The local fashion magazines were in sync with the creators of the trends: *Dunia*, *Telva* and the local editions of *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle* and *Vogue*. Miller's quote enlightens how fashion choices are linked and influenced by music: "Music has the powerful link to search for authentic experiences: emotions, creativity and lifestyle.

Fashion has long been charged with superficiality yet is one of the most financially successful creative industries, with a power and reach that extends beyond itself" (Miller, 2011).

Media played a crucial role in the expansion of marketing opportunities and the global success of the fashion and music industries in late 1970's and 1980's. The music industry alone could not have constructed idol's images without the help of the editors, art directors, managers, photographers and stylists; video performances and photo shoots shaped the cultural and social dialogue. The media provided certain models of femininity and masculinity to which young men and women could adhere to; enabling the possibility to communicate more democratically. The changing decade needed to portray the youth subcultures, the stars, celebrities, fans, glamour, and seduction on the glossy pages of the new magazines with reference headers like *i-D magazine*, *The Face*, *Blitz*, *New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker* and *Rolling Stone*.

The modern cable music channel *MTV* emerged in the US in the early eighties as a new powerful medium reaching the media capitals of New York City and Los Angeles and creating an absolute necessity for the bands to be appealing and aesthetically perfect when standing in front of a crowd. Marketing strategies made use of the musicians looks and attitudes to make fashion statements that influenced and were imitated by the young generations. Radio stations were programming the new wave artist and "the power of fashion was used as a commercial tool: punk sold newspapers, and the new romantics sold fashion" (Blame, 2016, p. 33).

The seventies were years of utopia in many ways. Artists and designers were eager to transform the rules of the culture and society of the time and construct alternative realities in the public sphere, art, architecture or design scenes. An experiential and participatory attitude was the radical reform. People preferred to be engaged in city streets, parks, communes, nightclubs and festivals than in galleries, museums or conventional studios. This was the atmosphere that influenced also the trends and tastes in the Spanish society. In terms of fashion, the end of the seventies was the end of an era in many senses were hippies, the glam, the disco music and bands with the looks of the Bee-gees or the late Elvis all coexisted in one space. Iconic artists like David Bowie or bands like the New York Dolls were using unisex looks with platforms, leopard patterns, silk blouses and tank tops from the women's stores.

The Spanish females interviewed in the study, identified themselves mainly with the garments that had to do with their tribe: leather pants and jackets, stiletto boots, velvet, lipstick, oversize plaid blazers, lace-up costumes, bright, fringed or voluminous dresses, fishnet shirts, skirts held together by safety pins, fur vests, leather-clad, shredded fabric, denim and more. French sociologist Michel Maffesoli coined in 1980 the term urban tribe to describe the young city people gathering in relatively small, fluid groups, sharing common interests that were different from the interests of mainstream culture. Since then, the subculture phenomenon became part of everyday city life in Spain and around the world as urban tribes proliferated calling themselves punks, mods, new romantics, new wave, rockabilies or hip-hop.

Fashion brands and the entertainment industry understood the powerful message that those subcultures expressed with their androgynous looks or punk rock attitudes and steered the glamour of the grunge styles, the mysterious personalities of their divas or the sexiness of the free-spirited creators. "Fashion and music open up a constant dialogue on a territory that

has to do with identity, feminism, gender, sexuality, and cultural appropriation as references to understand the role of fashion as a medium to innovate, communicate and seduce" (Baron, 2016, p.3).

The female's roles that helped this generation construct their fashion identities and choices were a mix of styles. In the representation of female bodies, the roles and values of women musicians are critiqued, sexualized or admired more on how they look besides their artistic attributes. In that context, the representation of femininity in punk music, portrayed the most defiant, ambiguous and androgynous contradicting the traditional notions of sexuality. Debbie Harry (as cited in Harry, 2012), a punk icon, was highly imitated, and was mentioned frequently by the group interviewed. Her look was very chic and personal, and she gives the credit of her mix of downtown punk and pop sensibility to Steven Sprouse, an influential fashion designer and artist from NY of the 1980's. Her ability to constructing her identity was not just a lack of money but a very high sense of creativity and purpose:

I did my own hair and makeup because I didn't have enough money for anyone else to do it. Sometimes I didn't have time to bleach my hair, so the roots were just there. And the brown in the back was because I couldn't see back there to do it. I wore black high-waisted tights, peg-leg pants and men's tuxedo shirts, or underwear as outerwear. Sometimes I wore a bridal gown and ripped it up. But my style changed after I met Stephen Sprouse around 1975, when he moved into my apartment building on the Bowery. Steve was horrified by the things that I would try—like a red Forties dress with white cowboy boots. But I was just wearing what I had... (Harry, 2012, p. 45).

The legacy of poet and performer Patti Smith is also considered an inspiration for many frontwomen in the music industry. Her album "Horses" has been considered by critics as one of the greatest and most influential albums in the history of the American punk rock movement. The cover photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe portrays the singer on a very unisex pose wearing her own clothes and showcasing her natural way of dressing. In the words of Viv Albertine (2017, p. 104), leader of the Slits, one of the most radical female punk bands of the early 1980's: "I have never seen a girl who looks like this. She is my soul made visible, all the things I hide deep inside myself that cannot come out. She looks natural, confident, sexy and an individual. I don't want to copy her or copy her style, she gives me the confidence to express myself in my own way".

Viv Albertine is also considered a pioneer feminist who used fashion to define her anti-establishment punk nature and identified anger as her gasoline. The Slits, her band, hasn't been properly acknowledged because they were ahead of their time in a music industry that was ruled by the laws of patriarchy. In the music scene, punk feminism, in the late stages of 1970s and early 1980's, became a rule of thumb for a generation willing to overcome prejudices. Punk feminism served to destroy stereotypes and behaviors and became a way to survive the male-dominated record industry. Punk as a raw expression was not only an attitude but a fundamental part of the spirit of these female pioneers in Spain. These women used it to gain social power on a global world that can very well serve feminism today.

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