

7.2 Queer zines in Madrid in 1990's

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A b s t r a c t

The aim of this paper is the study of queer zines produced in Madrid in the 1990's. There were two pioneer groups in queer activism in Spain, La Radical Gai formed by gay men and LSD, formed by lesbians. La radical Gai published six numbers of their zine *De un plumazo*, plus two dossiers (one about HIV and the other one about a homophobic attack). LSD was created one year later than La Radical Gai; they published four numbers of *Non-Grata*. Both groups share ideology, but had different aims and agenda because of their specific gender experience: the main theme for gay men was HIV, whereas lesbians mainly focused on visibility. Albeit the groups did not denominate themselves as queer when they were formed (1991 La Radical Gai, 1993 LSD), they were the first to coin this term in the Spanish context (Solá, 2012, p. 267). La Radical Gai named their zine *Queerzine* in 1993 and LSD use this term in their first zine published in 1994, where they already defined themselves as queer lesbians. This paper will analyze these zines as historical documents, which help us to understand the characteristics and history of the zine production in Spain; as well as, the introduction of Queer Theory in the context of Madrid in the 1990's. The zines were not only important for the academic group of Queer Theory but also for the activism movement of that period. Produced by university students, some of which continued their careers in academia, these zines promoted and boasted the introduction of Queer Theory in the University.

Keywords: *Zines, queer theory, La Radical Gai, LSD.*

keep it simple
make it first

1. Introduction

The zines are a potential weapon to disrupt the hegemonic discourse. In the 1990s, in Spain, two groups were pioneers disseminating the Queer Theory in Madrid and, for that purpose, they used their zines to disseminate the ideas and concepts proposed in the international context. Therefore, a revision and analyses of the zines give us keys about the arrival of this new trend in Spain, the principal aims of the queer activism, their alliances with foreign groups and the prospects of the zine use as a political instrument. One of the thinkers who addressed the zines and gender studies was Allison Piepmeier who wrote:

Zines are a collective media, in which their authors construct identities, communities, and narratives that shape their cultural moments: discourses, media, representations, ideologies, stereotypes, and even physical detritus. (Piepmeier, 2009, p. 2).

So, if the zines are narratives that shape their cultural, social and political moments, I am going to stop briefly what was going on in gender studies and western society in the '80s and its replica in Spain some years later. This way, we can understand why the zines that I worked with, are the respond of all this context.

2. The international and the Spanish context to origin the queer theory and movement

It had been three crises which lead to the creation of the Queer Theory and push the expansion of the Queer activism: the crisis of the feminisms, the crisis of the gay movement and the crisis of the AIDS. But let's go one step at a time.

The feminism emerged linked to a very specific woman model, normally white and from a high-middle or middle class. The dissonant voices were isolated. But in the USA in the '80s, some new theorists who spoke out from their subjectivities as black women, chicanas, and lesbians started to change the definitions of feminism. Some of these authors are already known by all of us: Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherie Moraga, etc. These women pointed out the movement as the representation and the fight of the priorities of a specific kind of women.

In Spain, this also takes place at the end of the 80's (Trujillo, 2009) but the focus was the sexuality. The subject of the feminism was questioned by lesbians who demand a plurality of identities inside of the feminism (Osborne, 2008, p. 93; Trujillo, 2009, p. 162). The lesbian groups from in and outside the feminist movement started to raise their voices. On one hand, there were feminism lesbians and on the other, there were autonomous lesbian. The first ones wanted a space inside of the feminist groups, whereas the second ones believed that some aspects were irreconcilables with the feminism and thought that this movement only looked for struggles from the point of view of heterosexual women.

Furthermore, debates around pornography, prostitution, and sexual fantasies were questioned, what caused that feminism were no longer a homogeneous struggle.

The second crisis occurred inside the gay's movement. Actually, from

the beginning of the LGTB fight for their rights, the tensions between those who seek assimilation in the society and those who seek to fight against the establishment were widely acknowledged. Since 28th June 1969, when the riot at the Stonewall Inn broke out, which originated the first LGTB rights' groups in the U.S.A, the divisions started. Obviously, the possibility of assimilation in the society only was possible for some subjects. Sylvia Rivera, a Puerto Rican transgender prostitute who was one of the protagonists of the riot explained:

We were determined that evening that we were going to be a liberated, free community, which we did acquire that. Actually, I'll change the 'we': You have acquired your liberation, your freedom, from that night: Myself: I've got shit, just like I had back then. But I still struggle, I still continue the struggle. I will struggle til the day I die and my main struggle right now is that my community will seek the rights that are justly ours. (Rivera, 2013, p. 34).

In Spain, it was reflected this duality as well between either to pursue assimilation politics or the active opposition to the unequal structure which is founded the society. Unusual alliances were done, thus the Gay Capitalism was expanded and depoliticized the movement.

These two crises, at the beginning of the 90s in the USA, conduct to some intellectual lesbian started to reflect on the identity politics of "the women" and "the gay" and developed the queer theory. The background was authors as Michele Foucault, Monique Wittig o Gayle Rubin and although was Teresa de Lauretis who is considered inside of the western academia who started to talk about the Queer Theory, it was Judith Butler with the books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick with *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) who built a theoretical content to this new trend.

The last crisis inside this context was the AIDS crisis. It was much more than a health crisis or an epidemic crisis. This terrible disease showed how the value system works. Misinformation, poor investigation and the countless number of deaths were directly connected with the bodies that were infected. AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) also as known at the beginning of the 80's as "the homosexual illness" provoked an urgent activism. ACT UP, in the USA, was one of these groups of activists. As well as, one of the most important references to the groups that are the focus of my investigation. Government's inactivity removes a conciliatory approximation from this group. Their actions were radical and forceful. Some of its members founded in 1990 Queer Nation, whose most frequently slogan was: "We're here! We're Queer! Get used to it!"

In Spain, the phenomenon was very similar. Javier Sáez one of La Radical Gai's members explained:

The AIDS crisis showed that the social construction of bodies, their repression, the exercise of power, homophobia, social exclusion, heterocentrism, etc. They are phenomena that communicate with each other, that are produced by means of a complex set of technologies, and that the reaction or resistance to these powers also demands articulated strategies

that consider numerous criteria: race, social class, gender, immigration, disease ... fundamental criteria of struggle that put the queer crowds on the table (Sáez, 2005, p. 68).

3. First queer groups in Madrid: La Radical Gai and LSD

In the 90's the transsexual subject started to be more visible for the feminist movement in Spain (Gil, 2011, p. 178), but it is not until 1993 when within the *Jornadas Feministas Estatales* (State Feminist Conferences), they started to link the feminist and trans movement (Ortega & Platero, 2015). The questions about the gender and sexual dualism were increased and the rethinking of the feminism subject was constant. In these years, appeared the first queer groups. They were found a Radical Gai and LSD (although they did not start as a queer group and they come from the tradition of the gay movement -La Radical gai- and the lesbian movement -LSD-, who made the zines that are our study case.

In 1991 La Radical Gai (LRG) was born. It was an excision of COGAM that was the gay group in Madrid. The central debate was around assimilation in a normative structure or renegade the models that propose the social model. The change between the letter "y" from the gay word, to "i" was a rebel act to dissociate to the gay imaginary that it had become depoliticize and commodified.

Sejo Carrascosa, one of the members of LRG, said about how this group was born as an alienation from the reformist trend of COGAM with an institutional derivation for a "political pragmatism". For Carrascosa behind that it was the intention to be an association that offers information, psychological support, legal assistance, etc. to the gay community. LRG hatched as a new political thinking, and although are not known in this time, after would be known as queer (Pecorado, 2015).

In 1993 LSD was born, a lesbian group who decided to change the homogeneous representation of the women and more specifically of the lesbians. Fefa Vila, an LSD's member, said in an interview with Marcelo Expósito and Gracia Trujillo:

And from there came the LSD group that had many names: 'Lesbians without doubt', 'Lesbians spread', 'Lesbians different sex', 'Lesbians without destiny', 'Lesbians suspicious of delirium', 'Lesbian without God', 'Lesbians are divine', etc. There was, on the one hand, a discourse of identity and affirmation, and on the other, a discourse of displacement of one's own identities and one's own political strategies. We interrelated the discourses of identity with a series of discourses such as anti-capitalism, discourse against the army, against militarization, against war, etc. (Expósito & Garcia, 2004, p. 161).

They consider themselves as feminists, even though they had a critical approach to this movement. LSD was born as a group like-minded LRG.

The chronology of both groups cannot be explained one without the other. Both groups made contributions to social movement and to the Queer Theory as we will see later. They fought together on several struggles, they share objectives and strategies. The location of their meetings was already a declaration of intentions, since they took place far from the traditional gay neighborhood, because it was an entertainment center for them, without any kind of demand. They moved to Lavapies, the immigrant neighborhood, where people of the lower and middle class lived. They understood that the LGBT struggle is intersectional with other factors such as social class, nationality, disability... They did numerous of striking performances and actions very much linked as groups like ACT UP (mostly from the delegations based in the U.S.A and France, with whom had a sort of connections). Other groups which were inspired by and had some contact along the '90s were Queer Nation, Grand Fury, Lesbian Avenger, Outrage, among others.

3.1. The zines: *De Un Plumazo* and *Non-Grata*.

Both zines, "*De un Plumazo* and *Non-Grata*", chose a name that gave a new meaning through an appropriation of pejorative words. A similar process to the queer word, that was a negative concept, but it was reclaimed for a group of people to give it a positive connotation and through it deactivate and change the power of the language. Thus, "*De Un Plumazo*" it is a play on words referring to the word "*pluma*" (feather) that in Spanish is used to refer "feminine boys" but the phrase complete "*De un plumazo*" also is used to refer "all of a sudden" or "at a stroke"; Whereas, the title "*Non-Grata*", is referred to people who are not welcome in some social circles.

De un Plumazo started its publications in 1991 and published six numbers in addition to a dossier about AIDS and another one about a homophobic assault in Madrid. The production of this non-professional publication had an irregular periodicity.

- N° 0 June of 1991 (15 pages)
- N° 1, octubre of 1991 (15 pages)
- N° 666, 1993 (19 pages) (without information about the month)
- N° 3 mayo of 1994 (27 pages)
- N° 4 of 1995 (31 pages) (month unspecified)
- N° 5 of 1996 (31 pages) (month unspecified)

The number published in 1993 was denominated QueerZine. Miriam Solá affirms that it was the first time the word queer was written in the Spanish Estate (Solá, 2012, p. 267) and it is very significant that it was in a zine, the sign of the active role which this kind of publications have. LSD started writing inside of this number (n° 666) of *De un Plumazo* an article titled "*El sida desde el lesbianismo. Un nuevo apartheid sexual*" ("AIDS from lesbianism. A new sexual apartheid"). But it was not until 1994 when *Non-Grata* commenced, and it was active until 1998. Along these years they published four numbers.

- N° 0 1994 (27 pages)
- N° 111 1995 (31 pages)

- N° 2 1997 (35 pages)
- Without number. L.S.D 1998 (44 pages).

As we can see on the dates of publication Non-Grata had an irregular production as well, and the zine was in constant development. The layout's evolution and its design were evident along the years, which also proves the progress of the technology in that decade.

These two groups belong to the activist scene, nonetheless, their contributions to the academia and the Queer Theory in Spain were numerous since some of the members developed a career linked to the university. Some topics cross through the zines, but although the trajectories were very similar in both groups, the social struggles as gays and lesbians change the approach to different issues. Moreover, the gender specificities within the society and the temporal context the 90s, demonstrated how these groups were the link between gay and lesbian fight and the queer crowd. The international influence and the Spanish historical context provide the zines with several topics that were exposed from a pioneering point of view, such as the word "queer" as mentioned above.

De Un Plumazo. In every number of *De Un Plumazo* appears their postal address, and in some of them, their bank account, since they accepted donations to realize their labor. In all the issues they point out that they were "anticopirait" [sic], in other words, they follow the zine philosophy of spreading the culture without author's rights. Additionally, we can observe that they published monographic zines as "Homosexual Body" (number 3), "Marica" (number 4) and the "Exile" (number 5). The main topics in all the zines could be resume in AIDS, homosexual body, identity and queer representation.

AIDS

AIDS was all over their heads. The uncertainty of the situation provoked that they started to share information and started campaigns of prevention. Meanwhile, public institutions chose to be quiet. The gays' groups did not want to talk openly about this, because they were afraid it could increase the stigma around homosexuality. The slogans of *La Radical Gai* were "The first revolution is survived"; "somebody must start the prevention". They included provocative images in zines, and they designed posters to put on walls, bars, etc.

In the first numbers of the zine, the HIV appears in the "news" section, but later on they decided to distribute a Dossier (without date, but probably published between 1991 and 1992).

This dossier has been prepared by La Radical Gai. Answer the question that rise up in our group of new forms of operation that are articulated. It also responds, in one way or another, an our personal reality. It responds, finally, to what we consider a need: the articulation of a direct fight against AIDS and against everything that it is assuming; a struggle open to all the people considered relevant, and a fight that, of course, must have a clear anti-homophic component. This dossier is, then, a first response. Now it's your turn (La Radical Gai, n.d., p. 2).

They assert that it is urgent to prepare prevention methods and education programs that would be inclusive. They stress that it is important to refer to “risk practices” instead of “risk groups”. LRG reflect like all the groups inside of the gay movement affirm to be anti-army, feminist and contraries to any social or political oppression, it is the moment to define themselves as a seropositive movement (La Radical Gai, n. d. pp. 5-7).

Also, they are sensitive to the lesbian invisibility regarding this disease. Moreover, LSD wrote an article in *De Un Plumazo*, before they had their own zine, where demanded information and political actions.

Homosexual Body

AIDS accentuated the corporal dimension of the gays and the negation of the body was a pernicious strategy in a big part of the gay groups. Some associations and groups deny being a potential sick body and decided to turn a blind eye. LRG pointed out that, historically, the characteristic of the “hypercorporality” in the individual it is inversely proportional to the consideration as a citizen, this is evidenced in slaves, women, etc. (La Radical Gai, 1994, pp. 4-7). But they reclaim as a homosexual body, the issue dedicated to this theme (La Radical Gai, 1994) demand the corporal dimension: they are bodies, bodies that could be sick, die, be discriminated, enjoy, bodies whereby fight...

By agreeing with this corporality and sexuality not only do a condom apology to avoid HIV in the penetration, but also inform of a broad range of sexual practices and the possible risk involved.

The strategy is to change this place of oppression to a place of resistance, they affirm “only being a body, will be something more” (La Radical Gai, 1991, p. 8).

Sexuality

Each number of *De Un Plumazo* question What does it mean to be gay? They know that their identity goes far beyond purely biological or psychological terms. For them, sexual relations acquire, depending on the historical and cultural context, a different political dimension (La Radical Gai, 1991, p. 3). They position themselves in a revolutionary spot. They emphasize what ties them to the rest of the social struggles, rather than what bonds them to the Gay community for the simple fact of their sexual orientation. In any case, they know that the identity is not independent of the external look. They were a group in one side in danger, the object of all the kind of aggression, but on the other side, the HIV had turned into a risk group, a danger to the society. AIDS shaped their identity (La Radical Gai, 1993).

In the monographic about the homosexual body, they confess to using two strategies/theories of liberation. On one side, the dissolution of the sexual category, and, on the other side clinging to gay identity (La Radical Gai, 1994, p. 16).

Queer Representations

Queer art was present in different facets through the zines of *De Un Plumazo*. They wrote and investigated about literature, cinema, music, etc... Every topic where the representation could be more or less appropriate or maintain stereotypes and show the great value from those were not accommodating. But also, the own zine published poems, stories, illustrations and any kind of queer cultural production. The visual component is very important in the zines

and these are not an exception. Comics, posters, collage, and reproduction of provocative pictures were essential in these publications. Some of them were extracted from foreign books, magazines, zines, etc. Such as the reproduction of the comic strip by Allison Bechdel from 1988 (La Radical Gai, n.d., p. 16).

They created very provocative posters, mainly around the AIDS topic and they usually use as the image of these posters as the back cover. The main objective of these images was to speak openly and to attract the society's attention.

Non-Grata

The members of LSD created their own zine in 1994. Likewise, *De Un Plumazo*, they included in every number their postal address and bank account, for suggestions and financial support. We can observe in their zines not only that they were influenced by the American and French thinkers, but also by the overwhelming reality from Spain.

In the editorial of the first issue declared:

Of LSD we know that you can talk at length, with the risk, even of losing the 'sex appeal', but we do not care too much about who we are, where we come from and where we are going, although we do not stop nosing about our identity and its representations [...] We are lesbians, lesbian feminists, lesbians and 'queer', lesbians here and there, perverse fat, immense thin, short rebel, tall southerners ... we fight to transform a heterosexist world, racist, patriarchal, lesbophobic and capitalist, and, turn it into a Dyke Earth where to continue practicing Sex D / R / SM / GT / SV / SA / SL / SS ... GGGGG!
(LSD, 1994, p. 3).

Non-Grata is also permeated by recurrent topic listed below.

Invisibility

The main problem was the complete invisibility as subjects. Faced with this tremendous problem suffered by lesbians, they played with two strategies, exactly in the same sense that LRG. On one hand, "hyperidentity", and on the other, the mobility of identities. It may seem contradictory, but both strategies served them depending on the moment. From the first issue of Non-Grata, they define themselves as queer lesbians and move away from the traditional lesbian feminism that they considered to be essentialist. They preferred to play with the gender, mobility of identities, and in order to prove that they changed their name, so it had a different meaning according to the moment, only the L standing for Lesbian was kept.

Identity

As it was stated above, the first article that they wrote as a group is inside of *De Un Plumazo* and there, they addressed the disease and lesbianism. They also continued to write about this topic in their zines. The first problem was to be a visible subject that could get sick. There was an utter silence in the few prevention campaigns that existed. They wrote in their 1995's zine:

We lesbians do drugs, we have sex with women and men, we are promiscuous, we bleed, and we are sexually assaulted. Our sexual identity does not make us immune (LSD, 1995, p. 4).

The truth is that the pandemic did not affect at the same level to gay men than to lesbian women, however, they demanded inclusive campaigns and insisted on discuss openly the drugs issue.

Our sexual identity is not understood as an aseptic sexual preference, but as a political option as the queer define it (...) From this reflection we can understand certain alliances with gays, because lesbians (as women) have been socialized and culturalized under the oppression of a patriarchal system. We fight for our lesbian sexuality, we work for our representations, and from them we want to expand, as one of the most sublime subversive acts, the pleasures and possibilities of our bodies (LSD, 1994, p. 4)

The invisibility, stated above, impregnated their identity. They were the otherness, the invisible opposition. Utopia for them was a world without sexual identity, where homosexuality does not exist because heterosexuality does not exist either. But they understand that they need a label, a category to be visualized as individuals, for that reason they state that to be a lesbian means to be visible (LSD, 1994, p. 4).

They oppose to the essentialist definition of women and reclaim to the feminist movement to rethink sexuality and questioning it.

Foreign influence and the introduction of the queer thinkers

The influence of queer thinkers in the reflection of the performative of the lesbianism and the political identity is sometimes implicit (LSD, 1995, p. 10) but it is explicit as well, introducing terms as "political fiction", or by doing an overview and connections between Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, Kate Millet, Luce Irigaray, Adrienne Rich or Virginia Woolf (LSD, 1998, p. 11) or fundamental authors for the development of the queer theory as Michel Foucault (LSD, 1998, p. 18). The number of 1998 it is the first one with a subtitle: "Memory in invention: eroticism and lesbian politics". In this number writes Beatriz Preciado, Paul B. Preciado now, a renowned queer author in Spain and with wide international repercussion (LSD, 1998, p. 6). In his article brings some ideas that will be developed in his book *Manifiesto Contrasexual* (2002) one of the most important works of Queer Theory in Spain.

LSD made a worthwhile contribution by translating texts which were not accessible in Spain, for example, an article by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (LSD, 1998, p. 34) one of the pioneers of the Queer Theory.

Queer art/gender performativity

Representations and a lesbian imaginary are necessary to be able to exist as a subject. According to this, LSD makes two photographic exhibitions of

which include a selection in the number of 1995. They were discussing about the body in both of them. One of them is "Menstruosidades" (LSD, 1995, p. 11). It was a word game between the word period in Spanish and the word monster, in which they treat the social taboo about the menstruation. The period marks the passage from childhood to maturity. It is the moment when you are seen as a sexual being, so they wrote: "therefore it is the first step towards sin and shame". But at the same time marks the moment you can start the reproduction, but from the lesbian body, the discourse is different. They use it as a language to turn upside down the public and private rituals. In that same zine, there are photos of the other exhibition *Es-cultura lesbiana*¹⁶², showing nudes from another gaze, from her gaze. This is not a traditional woman nude. Of course, as they explain, they were labeled as pornographic. But they defend that they were tired of being sexually used, so for them it was better to use their bodies to confirm a different imaginary (LSD, 1995, p. 19).

Not only these photographs respond to the corporal and conceptual deconstruct, but also the images reproduced in the different zines continue this line. In the last two numbers are recurrent the review of literature, music, cinema...even the reproduction of poems in their pages. Photomontages, illustrations, and comics had a prominence in the zines. All of them with the same intention: representations of the queer and lesbian reality.

4. Conclusion

These zines are powerful instruments which filter discourses not hegemonic. The two zines analyzed in this paper proved this. These zines were made in a crucial moment when the questions about the subject of the gender studies or the idea of identity for gay people, crash with an epidemic crisis. The desperation provoked a convergence between the absorption of the international theories in gender studies and a strong presence in their particular context. The reflections between the sexual practices which categorized them, and the development of their own identity culminate in two strategies: "hyperindentity" and the dissolution of the identity. The images they used were quite raw and inflammatory. They looked for an impact and an urgent answer.

In the case of these zines, it must be considered, that they are important for both the social movement and the academic theory. The groups were formed by activists, but we must not forget that many of them came from the university and after the dissolution of both groups, some of their members continued working at the university. They brought certain theorists that years later would be introduced in the academia, and especially the LSD translated several articles for dissemination. There was a greater intention to publish the ideas and authors that were effervescing in Europe and the USA, and that was changing the feminist thought of the time.

In *Non-Grata* wrote an article Paul B. Preciado, which years later would be a fundamental reference in queer theory in Spain.

Queer Theory disembarks entirely in Spain in the 2000s (although in 98 Ricardo Llamas one of the members of LRG wrote *Teoría Torcida*¹⁶³), it is not up until 2002 when Paul B. Preciado writes *Manifiesto contrasexual* (edited then under the authorship of Beatriz Preciado), a book that has quite an impact and the theory spreads. Some of his ideas were published in the zine *Non-Grata*. Paco Vidarte and Javier Sáez, two members of LRG were the first in Spain to teach a

¹⁶³There is not an official translation of the queer word into the Spanish language. *Teoría torcida* ("Distorted theory") it was an attempt to give it, but finally, had been maintained its English version.

¹⁶²It is a word game. On one side, the meaning is "It is lesbian culture", but as well could be read as "lesbian sculpture".

course on queer theory; it was in 2003 at the UNED (Spanish Open University) introducing in an official way, the Queer Theory in the Spanish academia.

I emphasize that its scope was limited, but with the perspective that has given us the time, we see its importance as a background in the academic field and in the field of activism. They were the first queer groups in Madrid and the zines are the testimony of the great work that they made¹⁶⁴.

Funding: This work was supported by the Foundation for Science and Technology under Grant PD/BD/143049/2018.

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164 A previous version of this work was published in Spanish in 2017. “Fanzines y teoría queer. El caso de un plumazo y Non-Grata”- Ciberpolítica. Hacia las Cosmópolis de la información y la comunicación. VV.AA. Ed. INAP. Madrid.