Broadcasting the Crisis: Spanish Television as Critique

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BROADCASTING THE CRISIS: SPANISH TELEVISION AS CRITIQUE

by

EVA VELASCO PEÑA

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Date

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Date

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ABSTRACT

Broadcasting the Crisis: Spanish Television as Critique

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Eva Velasco Peña

Advisor: Paul Julian Smith

Television is often thought of as monolithic and totalizing, controlling viewers and upholding the status quo. This project will propose different understandings of the mass-medium. In order to historically contextualize my study, I will begin with a brief discussion of the role of television in democratic Spain (from c.1978-present). The thesis will primarily consist of an analysis of two sides of contemporary Spanish TV: fiction and politics; and will explore the way that certain programs, alternately catalyze critical thought and actions or enable spectators to, following John Ellis, “work through” traumatic events. I furthermore propose that imaging a concept might not be the same as naming it. Indeed, democracy was reimagined during the days of protests of Occupy Wall Street: the call and response heard repeatedly in Zuccotti Park emphasized vision (and embodiment): “Tell me what democracy looks like? This is what democracy looks like.” Similarly, imaging the financial crisis and its associated pathologies might be a way of changing our imaginations. Precisely because they have a distinct grammar, flows of television do not name crises nor reproduce them within an established set of terms.

During the last decade Spanish situation comedies, unlike film, have been able to speak about economic and social issues that originated from real estate speculation and the international crisis. Aquí no hay quien viva, La que se avecina, or Con el culo al aire all depict the history of contemporary Spain. Episodes often mention events that happened week they aired. In addition to fiction, I will critically assess programs that center on political debate. La Tuerka and Comando Apache are two such shows that I will analyze. Both are hosted by Pablo Iglesias—one of the founding members of the new, radical, left-wing party Podemos. Driven by the spirit of the Indignados and 15-M (left-wing protest movements), Podemos has become a real threat to Spain’s bipartisan system. Both of Iglesias programs are broadcast over the airwaves and on Youtube. Hence, as a result of capitalizing on the potential for world-wide distribution afforded by inexpensive new media, their reach is far wider. Thanks to TV, a medium traditionally considered merely low-brow and commercial, the very politically charged words Gentrificación, Indignados and Podemos are now key terms in contemporary Spanish discourse. The definitions of these terms are by no means fixed, as they are constantly reimagined on the small screen.
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I am very grateful to have been able to work with Paul Julian Smith on this project and to have taken various seminars with him. Paul’s capacity to lead graduate seminars and support students in the exploration of their ideas is superlative. My knowledge and imagination certainly expanded as a result of his advice and assignments.
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Broadcasting the Crisis: Spanish Television as Critique

Television is often thought of as monolithic and totalizing, controlling viewers and upholding the status quo. Because of its commercial nature, the contents of TV are often considered low quality and disregarded as mind numbing. This paper will propose different understandings of the mass-medium. I will explore the ways that a selection of Spanish television programs catalyze critical thought and actions or enable spectators to, following media theorist John Ellis, “work through” traumatic events. I furthermore propose that imaging a concept might not be the same as naming it. Indeed, democracy was reimagined during the days of protests of Occupy Wall Street: the call and response heard repeatedly in New York’s Zuccotti Park emphasized vision (and embodiment): “Tell me what democracy looks like? This is what democracy looks like.” It is important to note that the Occupy movement was heavily influenced by the Spanish 15-M, *Indignados* movement that earlier occupied Madrid’s main square (Puerta del Sol), which is considered the heart of the city. Imaging the financial crisis and its associated pathologies might be a way of changing our imaginations. Precisely because they have a distinct grammar, flows of television do not name crises nor reproduce them within an established set of terms.

The first section of this paper analyzes Spanish situation comedies from the last decade, which, to a far greater extent than film, have been able to show and discuss economic and social issues that originated from real estate speculation and the international crisis. Although cinema is typically considered a high quality product, often with intellectual and artistic value, it lacks a connection to current events and the present moment that television can achieve. Indeed because of the production schedules, episodes often mention current events that happened the week they aired. The sitcoms *Aquí no hay quien viva*, *La que se avecina*, or *Con el culo al aire* all depict the history of contemporary Spain. They reflect the changing urban conditions in Spain and provide
modes of imagining the interwoven economic and housing crises. These series are certainly not the only ones that have appeared in recent times to treat such issues. For instance, Stamos okupa2 (a deliberate breach of orthography, using the anarKist “K” and the “2” from text message spelling, which translates roughly to we’re busy/ we’re squatting) presents a cross-section of society obliged to live collectively in a property that is not theirs. Nevertheless, Aquí, La que, and Con el Culo are more compelling objects of study: in contrast to Stamos okupa2, all aired on a commercial network, rather than either of the public channels; moreover, and more importantly, all three were very successful—renewed for multiple seasons because of their high ratings. Clearly, audiences enjoyed these programs and they remained on the small screen primarily because of their connections with spectators.

The final section of my paper moves beyond fictional depictions and focuses on the interwoven histories of the newly shifting political sphere and new media, specifically the changing format of political programs in Spain. I will consider the expansion of television that internet streaming has enabled. No longer is TV solely viewed on screens at the center of domestic space. Instead, the medium has mutated. Television is more mobile and personal than ever, consumed through the ubiquitous telephonic devices we increasingly carry on our bodies. I will primarily discuss La Tuerka. Otra Vuelta de Tuerka, and Fort Apache, a series of programs streamed on YouTube and conducted by Pablo Iglesias Turrión, founder of the new, radical, left-wing party Podemos (which means We can). Driven by the spirit of the Indignados (activist protestors, in English The Outraged) and 15-M, Podemos has become a real threat to Spain’s bipartisan system. In addition to his own small screen platform, Iglesias Turrión regularly appears on broadcast television. As a result, his own celebrity has augmented. He has been repeatedly interviewed, parodied in sketch comedies, and has become the fodder of late night talk show jokes;
his “mediaura”—theorist Samuel Weber’s term for the increased cachet that results from mass-mediation—has helped him to become a household name; the population encounters his progressive ideas, even if they are summarily dismissed with (cheap) humor.

In 2013 Sally Faulkner published her *History of Spanish Film*. In it she speaks with great perspective about the current and future role of television—particularly in relation to the audiovisual production of a sense of the nation and the way the boundaries between the silver screen and the small screen have begun to dissolve. Faulkner argues:

> Television has been backstage in many of my regardings of middlebrow films, with their financings often including TV companies, their personnel often trained on the small screen, and their serious-yet-accessible treatment offer converging with the approach of their newer medium. The next study of the middlebrow in Spanish screen culture might center television center stage.¹

My present study aims to help blaze the trail Faulkner signals. Television is front and center in my account. Many of the actors and agents in the programs I discuss move in and between distinct cultural echelons. Nevertheless, I move into the thickets of the lowbrow as well, considering the way that televisual texts can be read on multiple levels and as well be a space for fomenting dissension and talking through issues that weigh on the national conscience. Ideas about distinct classes of culture began to crystalize in the mid-twentieth century.

While today the boundaries of distinct brows of culture are no longer policed by high-modernist critics such as Clement Greenberg, notions of different types of production linked to taste and cultural level do still inform our understandings of cultural output. Like Faulkner, I believe that these poles of culture are useful for situating television and film in order to properly

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understand them. Lowbrow culture is commercial, popular, easily digested and typically thought to epitomize popular “bad” taste. The middlebrow is a particularly labile category—one seen by commentators who zealously defended “advanced” art as encompassing “diluted” versions of high-cultural ideas or advanced forms repackaged for those with a “conventional sensibility.”

Viewed more positively, middlebrow texts enable complex and difficult ideas to have lives beyond the bounds of the ivory tower.

Both the sitcoms and political talk shows I address are nourished by current events; the contents of the programs are to a great extent contingent on the political, social, and even material conditions of their time. The immediacy of television and its capacity to reflect the landscape of contemporary Spain are part of its great merit and a quality that sets it apart from cinema; given its production schedules close links to actuality are harder for the more prestigious “seventh art” to achieve. As cultural products, the commercial aspects of the programs I discuss prevent them from being “pure” art forms. However, we must not forget that cinema (and indeed almost any form of art), just like TV, requires a certain degree of commercial success in order to survive. I propose we reconsider the value of television and suggest that its status as middle- or lowbrow should not result in our wholesale dismissal of the medium, or the facile assertion that it solely sustains the present order of things, or obscures a “truth” only visible to the trained eyes of academics.

Populist—or, viewed more positively, anti-elitist—appeals enable ideas to be disseminated beyond the rarified environment of institutions of higher learning. Indeed, thanks to the

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3 Isabel Estrada’s “Cuéntame cómo pasó o la revisión televisiva de la historia española reciente” is a prime example of certain academics’ tendency to dismiss popular representations without considering their redeeming characteristics. See Estrada, “Cuéntame cómo pasó o la revisión televisiva de la historia española reciente,” *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 547-564.
acceleration of popular language in the mass-medium, the very politically charged words \textit{Gentrificación, Indignados, Casta,} and \textit{Podemos} are more often key terms in contemporary Spanish discourse—constantly reimagined on the small screen.

\textbf{Historical and Socio-Economic Context}

Following economists Isidro López and Emmanuel Rodríguez, the Spanish version of the economic crisis had its own character and followed its own trajectory. The situation of the past years is a product of a longer history of housing and real estate development in Spain.\textsuperscript{4} Paralleling developments in consumer behavior after World War II in other Western nations, under Dictator Francisco Franco, the government promoted the idea of private home ownership with the slogan “\textit{proprietarios, no proletarios}”—property owners, not a proletariat.\textsuperscript{5} From the fifties onward there was a sharp increase in both the number of Spaniards who own their own home, and an expansion of the housing stock with the construction of new apartments. Between 1995 and 2007 Spain’s economy grew at a consistent rate. In almost the same period (from 1997-2007) house prices increased nearly 220 per cent. This fairly dramatic inflation of real-estate came to be known as “la burbuja inmobiliaria” or the housing bubble. Until the bubble burst, construction—an industry focused on domestic properties—had been one of the motors of the Spanish economy. At the same time, low interest rates and implementation of euro as a single currency in Europe created an atmosphere of security and optimism, which as well yielded an increase in investments in foreign markets.


The climate began to change quite radically in 2007, when the collapse of foreign banks started to impact Spanish investments. In 2008, then Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero uttered the critical word, “crisis,” for the first time. This is a word that the conservative opposition had been pressuring him to declare. It is important to note that in Spanish the word used to describe what is termed in English a “recession” is “crisis”—the former is a word that in both languages means much more than recession or recesión and perhaps more clearly points to understandings of the financial crisis as a kind of pathology or (mental) illness, which in some ways naturalizes the phenomenon.⁶

At the end of 2008 the stock market fell, the Spanish economy entered into a recession, and the government began to run higher and higher deficits. As the housing bubble had burst, construction no longer helped buoy the country. Since this moment, unemployment generally has continued to climb. The population has faced mounting debts and many are burdened with mortgage payments for overpriced homes, which are increasingly difficult to pay. Zapatero resisted the pressure to decrease the budget, but finally cuts arrived in April of 2010. These cuts were met by protests in Madrid and other major Spanish cities by a grass roots movement who came to be known as the Indignados (the outraged). These manifestations of disapproval took the form of occupations, with many protestors camping out in public space. The Indignados’ strategies of dissent quite quickly became the model for the Occupy Movement and spread across the globe in the autumn of 2011.

Nevertheless, the spirit of the Indignados did not translate into immediate political agency. Instead voter turnout was particularly low in the 2011 elections. The right-wing opposition party,  

the Partido Popular (PP), portrayed the socialists as an illness that had to be cured in order for the country to escape the crisis. Voters seemed most concerned with “punishing” the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and the PP won the general elections. Since then, the government of Mariano Rajoy has aligned with Germany and implemented austerity measures and spending has been significantly reduced. After four years of austerity, the elections of December 2015 saw Podemos gaining 69 congressional seats. At the time I write this paper, the government is still in limbo; however, it seems likely that some reversals in spending cuts will occur in the coming years.

The housing bubble left some sinister traces on Spanish society. The social pressure, perhaps even compulsion, to be the owner of a new home, while certainly not radical, did make economic sense in the 1980s and 1990s, prior to the inflation of prices, when a home cost on average 50 to 75 per cent less than in the late aughts. With soaring prices mortgage payments, often drawn out over as many as thirty years, were life sentences. Following the recession’s downward spiral, debt has become so oppressive that its effects are, in some cases, closer to a death sentence: in recent years a considerable number of people have committed suicide rather than face being forcibly removed from their homes after defaulting on their mortgages. The disciplinary apparatus of the state colludes with capital interests. In some cases, the police forcibly evict residents. According to the activist group Stop Desahucios Granada, 34% of suicides in Spain are the result of home evictions (desahucios). In Spain the repossession of a home by a lender does not necessarily annul the debt owed by borrower. In many cases, borrowers lose their apartments, but keep crippling

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8 In 2012, the Rajoy government approved the Real Decreto-ley 6/2012. This law opened up the possibility of exchanging a home for the total pardoning of debt in special case of vulnerability; it was not a universal or retroactive measure. In addition, while in some ways meaningful the decree was really just part of a set of best practices for Banks. On May 14, 2013 the government approved the law 1/2013, which further reformed mortgage law. This law increase the protections for indebted mortgage holders, even though it did not incorporate measures
debts. Thus, following López and Rodríguez, “the guarantees securing loans might include the homes of the mortgagees’ relatives and friends. This would result in alarming chain reactions of repossessions after the property bubble.” This splash effect meant that the effects of the crisis were borne across society.

The changes of the past decade are not merely limited to diminished purchasing power and a decrease in quality of life. Instead, the forms of life and personal interactions of inhabitants of Spanish cities have changed as well. For instance, while the international news has reported that Spain has begun to see people taking food from supermarket dumpsters—as is not uncommon in the United States. \(^9\) Before this crisis this was almost unheard of; although, as a way of trying to save a floundering restaurant, characters in Aquí do resort to “dumpster diving.” Although not all of the cases of debt are fatal, the fear and trauma provoked by the increasing indebtedness of the population has to some extent made people more docile. According to studies by the organization Strike Debt, people who are in debt are more governable, a condition that might explain the limited voter turnout in 2011.\(^10\)

**Situating the Sitcoms**

How does television respond to the crisis? How have contemporary Spanish television series reacted to the traumas of the recession? How are problems and changes in the city and social fabric to reclaim losses based on prior evictions.

\(^9\) López y Rodríguez, 18.


\(^11\) Strike Debt, “Colonizer as Lender,” Tidal 3 (February, 2013), 17. Internet. “Colonizer as Lender” by Strike Debt deals with the instrumentalization of debt in Palestine. However, according to a presentation by the authors at the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute at New York University on February 22, 2013, in the majority of countries, governmentality increases in a direct correspondence with debt levels.
imagined and reflected on the small screen? In what ways can television be therapeutic? How is TV political?

My discussion of the series unfolds in a chronological order, as the history of the country, and distinct forms of living, can be readily mapped onto each. Aquí, which aired from 2003 to 2006, did not reflect the desperate situation of the years following 2008. Nevertheless, the economic hardship faced by some characters is a constant theme. The program explores tensions that result from the divide between distinct classes of residents—all the while poking fun at different forms of pretentiousness. I then shift to the semi-official sequel, La que, which reuses much of the cast and many of the writers from the prior program and treats related issues. In La que (2007-present) and Con el culo (2012-2014), which were on the air in later years, the contents and tone are decidedly different: in the former, the mortgages, bloated by the housing bubble, threaten to throttle the neighbors; in the latter, the crisis, the bubble, and the dream of being home owners have all messily exploded.

Although all three are ensemble cast situation comedies about cohabitation, each of the programs presents interactions between neighbors in a very different register—which to a certain extent correspond in almost real time to the realities of society at the time of emission. Aquí combines broad comedic elements with more nuanced and pointed satire. La que enters into the territory of the grotesque and hysterical. Con el culo is generally comprised of facile humor and involves more physical comedy. It bears remarking that this final program is also the only one in which the narrator-protagonist makes commentary and criticism of the then-current situation at the beginning of each episode.

I. *Aquí no hay quien viva*: Madrid’s Gentrification in the New Millennium
Aquí no hay quien viva, a common Spanish phrase that translates as Nobody can stand living here, aired for five seasons on Antena 3, one of the major private Spanish TV channels. During its run, the sixty- to ninety-minute weekly sitcom was one of the highest rated shows on television. The satirical comedy is set almost exclusively within one “stately” building in the center of Madrid. The diverse and colorful characters are spread among six apartments, a doorman’s office that doubles as residence, and a video club. While the program’s title seems to suggest that cohabitation is infernal, it ultimately comes down on the side of valuing the closeness of urban life despite its foibles. Hence, to a great extent it resonates with theories about urbanism put forward by Jane Jacobs in The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961). The activist and writer advocated against economic stratification determined by the built environment. Jacobs opposed the segregation the poor in housing projects and middle-income people into their own standardized towers. She believed society would become more just and richer as a result of physical proximity of its economically and culturally diverse members.¹²

The precise neighborhood in which Aquí transpires is never explicitly mentioned by name. The address of the building, Calle Desengaño 21, would mean it is located within Madrid’s Malasaña. Nevertheless, the number does not correspond to any real address. The spot on the street where the fictional edifice would stand is covered with cement (as can be seen in a Google Map search). Although it is to some extent naturalized by dint of being a place title, the street name surely appealed to Spanish pessimism in part because of its literal meaning: “Desengaño,” translates to “Desenchanted” or “Heart-broken.” Despite the name, all is not dour and hopeless in the building—though many characters face economic troubles along the way. The address is one of many winking references to contemporary conditions and the almost extreme mixtures of

residents who can be found in the neighborhood. Indeed, many of the characters represent exaggerated versions of Spanish social types (if not stereotypes). References to current political, economics, and cultural conditions abound in the program. For instance, gay marriage and its passage into law feature heavily in early seasons; equally, housing speculation, the situation of immigrants, and un- or under employment as well as exploitation by bosses and landlords are recurring topics. In addition, characters invoke the activities of mediatic celebrities, such as the Duchess of Alba or television presenter María Teresa Campos.

Malasaña epitomizes the transformation experienced by certain centric neighborhoods since the turn of the new millennium. Situated between major arteries Gran Vía and Calle Fuencarral (which separates it from Chueca), district, during much of its history, was a typical, Spanish working-class neighborhood with reasonably priced housing stock. In the years that Aquí aired (2003-2006) Malasaña underwent a process of gentrification, something which had recently also occurred in the adjacent neighborhood of Chueca. Today Malasaña is known as Madrid’s “Williamsburg,” equally for the indie spirit of its hipster émigrés as for its rising real estate prices, which have forced long-term residents and small businesses to close.

It is not surprising that by 2010 there were works of street art and graffiti on the walls of the narrow streets denouncing gentrificación—a word derived from English that is still not recognized by the Spanish Royal Academy of Language (RAE). Nevertheless, in 2013 Fundéu BBVA, an agency that assesses new language in tandem with the RAE, determined gentrificación to be acceptable.\textsuperscript{13} The relevance of the street art, which detourned a standard touristic menú del

día (1er Plato: Abandono; 2do Plato: Revalorización; Postre: Gentrificación [Starter: abandonment; Main course: Revaluing; Dessert: Gentrification]), demonstrates the self-criticality of some inhabitants and might raise the consciousness of others. Furthermore, the pioneering use of the term points to the neighborhood’s international ties and is also an indicator of globalized nature of activist discourse and not just consumer culture. Of course, the fact that the English term was effectively taken wholesale can be considered an instance of “gentrification” of language itself, a foreign invasion based on economic strength.14

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The choices regarding the profiles of each of the residents in the cooperative community of Desangaño 21 references the various stripes of social types that can be found in many neighborhoods in which the social and residential landscape is similarly shifting.15 On the first floor there is a “perfect” juxtaposition of cohabitants. On one side of the hall is the traditionally furnished apartment of Marisa (María Victoria Bilbao-Goyoaga Álvarez) and Vicenta (Gemma Cuervo), a pair of septuagenarian sisters (the former is a widow; the latter, eternally single). They have all the time in the world to gossip, spying through the multiple peepholes in their door and eavesdropping via the patio that connects all of the apartments. Their pronouncements regarding the activities of their neighbors are also transmitted through the building’s interior ventilation space, a practice they dub, “Radio Patio, 24 horas” (Radio Patio, 24 hours).16 The pair of


15 In Spain nearly all buildings are run as cooperatives. Neighbors pay a monthly quota for maintenance and share other charges; decisions affecting the building are made by votes in community meetings.

16 The choice of name of the low-tech “news” stream is amusing and perhaps even speaks to a kind of aspirational desire to be able to afford premium television, which relatively few middle-class people subscribe to, and
pensioners have lived in the property all of their lives: the sisters were born there and inherited the apartment from their mother.

Mauricio (Luis Merlo) and Fernando (Adrià Collado) live across the foyer from the “lovely little old ladies.” A couple, Mauri is a journalist and Fernando a lawyer and both have achieved professional success. They are cosmopolitan, consumerist, and slightly superficial. Their apartment bears the signs of middlebrow taste. Their one-bedroom apartment is open plan; fashionably decorated in neutral hues with a few touches of bright color, it houses an ample collection of fine wines, and contains a reproduction of a red and orange Mark Rothko painting (an artist whose output generally adheres to the proscriptions of critic and tastemaker Clement Greenberg about what constitutes highbrow modernist art). Although they have lived together for years, Fernando is still closeted. In the first episode the lawyer explains to his boyfriend, knowing he won’t like it, that he does think this is “the moment” to come out, as he is angling for a promotion at the conservative law firm where he works.

On the second floor left, we find the Cuesta family. Juan (José Luis Gil) is the pedantic and self-important building president, or, as he repeatedly puts it, “presidente de esta nuestra comunidad” (the president of this, our community). He is a gym teacher at a private religious school. His frustrations regarding the lack of respect from both his students and the priests who

acknowledges the interest in gossip (something that many people are fascinated by, but is often determined to be low class). The concept of a 24-hour news channel was relatively new in Spain at the time of the series. Most 24-hour news channels were only available on cable or satellite. Indicative of the novelty, RTVE’s Canal 24 Horas was only established in 1997. Greenberg had a particular take on Rothko, who he thought solely made good work from 1949-1955, and championed again in “American-type Painting.” See James Breslin, Mark Rothko: A Biography (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 383-84. Upon closer inspection, Mauri and Fernando’s canvas might even be a home-made Rothko, whipped up for decorative purposes rather than an interest in “difficult” work: it contrasts masterfully with the apartment’s lavender wall. Greenberg identified this potential of Rothko’s work to slide towards middle-brow decor in his 1955 essay, stating Rothko risked “the charge of being [a] decorator.” See Clement Greenberg, "American Type Painting," Partisan Review 22 (Spring 1955): 179-96.
are his bosses (a situation that unfortunately typifies many teaching positions these days) is converted into an obsession with his leadership role in the building. Nevertheless, his efforts are little appreciated by the neighbors, none of whom want to take on the presidential duties themselves. Juan’s overbearing wife Paloma (Loles León) is an insufferable gossip, who also attempts to wield power and influence in the building as the “presidenta.” She is greedy and materialistic and concerned with projecting an image of upper-middle class success—yet her outmoded taste, bad manners, and shameless cost-cutting tactics confound her bourgeois pretentions.

The Cuesta children as well do not wish to live up to their parents’ class aspirations and resist ineffective parental authority, perhaps typifying a shift in behavior in contemporary Spain (parents, who resented the harsh discipline they experienced, shift to the other extreme and are extremely lax): their teenage daughter Natalia (Sofía Nieto) does not respect her curfew, flirts with older neighbors, yet continues to charm her parents into giving her spending money; José Miguel (Eduardo García Martínez), despite being a “gifted” child is a failure in school, overweight, addicted to video games and junk food, and who spends much of his time unsupervised hanging out with the young men in (still many years older than him) in the building’s video club.

Doña Concha (Emma Penella) resides in front of the Cuestas. She is the third long-time resident of the building along with sisters Marisa and Vicenta. Her middle-aged, divorced son and her grandson live alongside her in the apartment. The only owner of multiple properties (second floor right and third floor right), she is also the most miserly. Concha retains—as far is convenient for her—many of the ideas of Franco-era Spain. It is perhaps less than surprising that her now-deceased husband “bought” the third floor apartment from a Republican maquis who fled into the mountains at the conclusion of the Civil War. Suggesting continuity between fascists and current
conservatives (which have not been parsed too closely in Spain), Concha parrots conservative former president José María Aznar’s call for the resignation of Felipe González in nearly every episode’s co-op meeting: ¡Váyase señor Cuesta, Váyase! (Leave Mr. Cuesta, leave!).

Concha rents her dubiously expropriated apartment to Belén (Malena Alterio) and Alicia (Laura Pamplona), two thirty-somethings who are never quite sure how they will manage to make it through the end of the month. Alicia is an unsuccessful actress (who rarely works) and Belén—chronically unemployed, despite doing whatever work she can find—holds a variety of unpleasant, precarious, and generally low-paying jobs throughout the run of the series. They are the only renters in the building, a fact that is constantly repeated by the other neighbors who even refer to them with the noun “alquiladas” (literally, “rented;” a transfer of the status of the real estate onto its tenants). Doña Concha as well refers to them as “golfas;” this appellation connotes both a lack of sexual mores and a lack of industry. Here we clearly see the way home ownership helps to produce subjects as a “proper” citizen: following this “logic” (a trace of Francoist thinking [see above]), Alicia and Belén must lead disreputable and dissolute lives as they do not own property. Despite her limited and spotty employment history, in the final seasons Belén is miraculously (or irresponsibly) given a mortgage that allows to purchase her apartment. Viewing the program in 2015, the ease with which she gets the loan for thousands from the bank is foreboding—it is indicative precisely of a situation that happened often and was ripe for the defaults that would more and more often occur after 2008.

In “this, our community” it is clear that private property ownership equates to status: tenants do not have a voice or a vote in the co-op meetings as they don’t have a right to attend them. One of the best examples of the class differences and how they are patrolled (and internalized) comes in the second season’s fourteenth episode. We see an example of ideology at
work embodied in the actions of the doorman, Emilio, who everyone looks down on and who does not have a contract or even receive minimum wage. He allows a property owner to step over the recently mopped floor; immediately afterwards he threatens Belén and Alicia as they try to cross the same path: “¡Estas no, que no son dueñas!” (No these two, they’re not owners!). As I briefly alluded to, Emilio lives in the porter’s lodge, which is in reality a former closet for garbage cans. The doorless room is barely habitable. But it is not just the doorman who resides there. His father, Mariano, a self-proclaimed “pensador y metrosexual” (thinker and metrosexual) is a slightly delusional, but totally shameless old man who sponges off of his son. Eduardo Gómez Manzano reprised the character for La que se avecina, inheriting an almost identical role in the later series. Emilo shares the lower floor with a video club/convenience store. Emilo, as well as various other younger male neighbors, spend time hanging out with Paco, the shop’s attendant and (à la Quentin Tarantino) an aspiring director.

The last to arrive in the building are Lucía (María Adánez) and Roberto (Daniel Guzmán), also in their thirties like Belén, Alicia, Mauri, Emilio and Paco. In what could be read as an allegory of the socio-economic differences between characters, Lucía and her boyfriend live on the top floor. Their bright, recently redecorated loft apartment—chock full of brand new consumer durables—starkly contrasts with the dark small rooms and workspaces of Paco and Emilio on the ground level. The contrasts between the different social types the various neighbors represent exist horizontally as well as vertically: for the renters Belén and Alicia also occupy the same floor as the new wealthy couple. Other than the older women who inherited their apartments, Lucía and Roberto are the sole residents who don’t have to pay a mortgage or rent. Their professions also set them apart from most of the other residents and speak to the important role of construction in Spain during the bubble years: Lucía, who holds a master’s degree in economics is a real estate developer
employed in one of her father, Rafael Álvarez’s various firms (his numerous corporate ventures, some of which it is later revealed own others, serve to obscure his operations and impede tenant complaints, taxation, and prosecution).\textsuperscript{18} Roberto studied architecture, but shifted to a career as a comic artist. Although he makes some money, it is primarily Lucía (or her father) who pays the couple’s bills. The income disparity leads other residents to almost immediately nickname Lucía “la pija” (the rich/ posh girl). The proportion of new neighbors and livelong inhabitants is equally split. Economic gaps are not the only fissures that divide the building: the wealthier younger couples as well as the renters butt heads with the pensioners and the teacher and his family. The tensions play out during the regular co-op meetings and in encounters in the common areas.

\begin{itemize}
  \item The relations between the residents are hardly ideal. At first glance, the series might seem to militate against the close proximity and forced negotiations and interactions with diverse individuals that characterize urban life—hence, aligning with the sentiments of critics of Jane Jacobs, such as Lloyd Rodwin. Nevertheless, the lives of all of the inhabitants and their fiscal and social networks, by accident and design, are intermeshed fiscally and socially. The small apartments, with their one or two rooms; the narrow staircase that surrounds the perpetually out-of-order elevator, which everyone must use; the single entrance, and the giant amplifier that is the patio, all catalyzes encounters. Unlike some recent mixed-income developments in New York, there is no “poor door” (the now-banned, second-class entrance that separated lower income

\footnote{\textsuperscript{18} This strategy of mediation by incorporation is popular for unethical businessmen the world over. The conceptual artist Hans Haacke illuminated these kinds of obfuscating operations (most famously in \textit{Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971} [1971]—jointly held by the Whitney Museum of American Art and Barcelona’s MACBA). Haacke made works in which he meticulously traced all of the links between shadow corporations and a small number of slum lords who owned numerous substandard properties. Additionally, he created a project exploring real-estate development in Spain in 2012 for an exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofia.}
tenants from their wealthier neighbors). It is important to note that these conditions are precisely those found in many of the buildings in and around Malasaña. Madrid’s central zone, like that of many other Spanish cities, contains numerous edifices that date to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of these buildings still do not have elevators, due either to architectural barriers or because the price of installing such a device would impose overwhelming costs on the relatively small number of residents: there are usually not more than five floors with two apartments each.

Rodwin, an urban theorist and professor, critiques Jacobs’s defense of mixed income urban space and her opposition to reformers’ segregatory plans: e.g. high-rise apartments for the poor and migration to the suburbs for the wealth. He states: “The irony is that most of the things she objects to are the effects of rising income and economies on parents hungry for more space for themselves and the kids. The reformers shared, perhaps even anticipated, this hunger...” It is necessary to interrogate the origin of families’ “hunger” for space; for, while Rodwin believes it to be the “natural” outcome of increases in wealth, this is not necessarily the case. Jacobs’s model for urbanism is Greenwich Village a tight-knit, mixed income neighborhood. This form of living, a relative rarity in the North American context, was long commonplace in the Mediterranean. The organization of the built environment in cities and towns predicated on a desire for coexistence and proximity has habitually helped dictate the form of life in Southern Europe. Trends toward

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20 La comunidad (2000) a film by Alex de la Iglesia is a dark comedy that inspired Aquí. In contrast to the series, where all of the sets clearly hail from a sitcom stage, the film was shot on location in various buildings erected around the turn of the twentieth century. If the story and tone do not serve as an illustration of my argument, the typology of the characters do (the older people with limited economic resources have always lived in the building). The scenes in the elevator, which is very dark and with limited light, correspond to the reality of these edifices. In any case, the film serves fundamentally to show the real aspects of these common areas.
22 See Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities.
lower density, decentralized cities, typical in the United States, have arisen in the last decades in Spain largely due to emulation of Anglo-Saxon models, rather than the anticipation of an intrinsic need for space. The writers of *Aquí* tacitly strike positions that align with Jacobs; at times difficult, and replete with agonistic interactions, cohabitation in the community of Desengaño 21 is not totally dysfunctional. The argument seems to continue in *La que* in which North-American-style real estate development does not yield happiness—and makes life in the city look particularly rosy in comparison. However, before moving on to discussing life in the outskirts, I analyze the unidealized relationships that can only occur in an urban context with a dense population: precisely the conditions of the characters in *Aquí*.

Juan Cuesta and Emilio have one of the most touching and human relationships in the entire program. The doorman views the president as a kind of role model—despite his rather limited success as a teacher, father, or community leader. Juan’s behavior accords with his employee’s reverence and he gladly acts a kind of mentor to Emilio. On one hand theirs is a charming filial-paternal relationship; on the other, Juan is not beyond paternalism. At the moment Emilio is about to flee with Belén (following an insurance scam), he affirms as a farewell “usted es lo más parecido a un padre que he tenido” (sir, you are the closest thing to a father that I have had).  

Emilio is almost always servile in his speech, never using the familiar “tú” conjugation and always adding the prefix “Mr.” before addressing Juan. In another episode, when Emilio demands a much deserved and overdue raise, Juan reprimands him angrily stating: “te he tratado como un hijo, y así te comportas” (I’ve treated you like a son, and this is what you do).  

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without a contract or a raise for seven years, but as the building’s coffers are nearly empty none of the neighbors want to update his pay. He learns about his basic rights as a worker only as a result of a coincidence: he asks Fernando the lawyer from the first floor some simple questions while making some repairs in his home. Revealing he is more than just a “gentrifier,” Fernando offers to represent Emilio if speaking to the president does not correct the situation, ultimately getting the doorman the back payments for cost of living increases, vacation days, and the contract that rightfully correspond to him. Here, social interaction is the root cause of raising of worker consciousness and ultimately achieving social justice.

In another plot arc, Emilio attempts to change his position in life. He enrolls in an unnamed university in Madrid and begins to study primary education (magisterio), in Spain a somewhat maligned “lower” degree (diplomatura). He hopes to become a “maestro como usted, señor Juan” (a teacher, like you sir, Mr. Juan).\(^\text{25}\) Despite this, on the first day of class, before heading out to the campus he remarks to Belén that in reality he aspires to become “un dentista, como tu padre, que esos sí que ganan bien” (a dentist like your father; those guys really earn). When Emilio has just met his girlfriend’s parents, who receive him with open arms, he again searches for affection and the parental referent that he did not find with his own father. Although during the dinner the parents in question treat Belén poorly, repeatedly putting her down and celebrating the achievements of her brother, Emilio does not want her to cut ties with them: “Belén, si a ti tus padres no te quieren, pues deja que me quieran a mí, que si no ese cariño se pierde” (Belén, even if your parents don’t love you, let them love me; don’t let that affection go to waste).\(^\text{26}\)


\(^{26}\) Ibid.
Emilio briefly defects from his position as the doorman to try his luck as concierge in “una finca de alto standing” (a high-class residence), a place where they will pay him more and he won’t have to scrape clean the interiors of garbage cans.\textsuperscript{27} He soon ends up returning to Desengaño 21, having missed the humanity of the residents—especially “señor Juan.”\textsuperscript{28} Emilio’s conclusion about the other building, like all of the lessons showcased on the program, comes with irony and a certain degree of sharpness. In the swanky building, the neighbors are so classist they refuse to verbally acknowledge “the help.” Emilio’s new boss is a well-conserved and oversexed sexagenarian who demands he come up to her apartment perform certain special sexual services, or risk losing his job. She furthermore will not allow Emilio to bring his father to work, as having the uncouth old man roaming the building “\textit{crea inquietud entre los vecinos}” (the residents do not feel at ease with his presence).\textsuperscript{29} Interruptions that throw class differences into relief cannot be permitted. Emilio returns to his post and old life at Desengaño 21—a place where he feels integrated and the relations with the inhabitants, though not free of tumult, are decidedly more humane.

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The way that personal interaction can turn into an ideological opiate is also explored by the series. Emilio continues in his position as a “second-class citizen” in Desengaño 21, more or less happily residing in his makeshift home in the converted trash room. Nevertheless, he does not reproduce all of the values of his employers. In terms of social standing, he only finds himself above José María (Nacho Guerreros), a neighborhood junkie, who sneaks in a night to sleep on top of some cardboard boxes under the stairs. In many ways the relationship that proceeds between

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} José Luis Gil, \textit{Aquí no hay quien viva}, television, directed by José Luis Moreno (2003, Madrid, España: Miramón Mendi).
the doorman and José María is a continuation of that which he himself has with the other neighbors: socio-economic disparities are not miraculously’ eliminated, but by collective living, José María is not totally isolated from society and its support structures. In economic terms, there are positive externalities due to the physical closeness of city dwellers—the kind of benefits Jacobs argues can occur. Betraying his employers in the name of ethical treatment, Emilo hides José María from the neighbors and gives him breakfast on occasions. Nevertheless, he too takes on the role of exploiter asking his guest to give “un repasito a los rellanos con la fregona” (the hallways a little mop) before going to sleep.30 A significant moment in their relationship—which reproduces that between Emilio and el señor Juan—arrives when José María robs the DVD player from the Cuestas’ apartment. The doorman covers for him, telling the president that in reality it was he who had borrowed the device.31 Juan Cuesta feels let down by such an abuse of his trust and he admonishes Emilo. While this surely smarts, it prevents Juan from reporting José María to the authorities. Emilio’s gesture is enormously generous, especially given the admiration he feels for the president. His actions can only be explained through his description of his addict-friend. When Juan insists he cut off communication with José María and keep him out of the building, Emilio responds “Señor Juan, si es que este es un chico del barrio, que no ha tenido suerte en la vida” (Mr. Juan, it is just that he’s a kid from the neighborhood, who hasn’t been lucky in life).32 José María overhears the exchange; feeling extremely fortunate and touched he confesses emotionally that Emilio’s defense “es lo más bonito que han hecho por mí” (the most beautiful thing anyone has ever done for me).

30 Fernando Tejero, Aquí no hay quien viva, television, directed by José Luis Moreno (2003, Madrid: Miramón Mendi).
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
Guerreros’s junkie character is one of a few inherited by La que who appears throughout the second series (many of the other revamped characters only last a few episodes). Nonetheless, his relationship with the neighbors in the development of Montepinar (that program’s setting) is quite distinct. In La que the conceit is that he is a drug addict reinserting himself into society. However, he is not given housing by his employers. The lack of physical proximity to the neighbors, a result of the type of building they reside in, and the long distance to the city center are key elements that negatively influence their interactions, dehumanizing them. The politics of living together simply cannot be the same when citizens (and other members of the population) are so far apart, one of the fundamental points Jacobs puts forth. More contemporary thinkers concur: suggesting the form of society Jacobs championed is still very much desirable and highly relevant, the curator Okwui Enwezor explored the parallel theme of “intense proximity” in the important Paris Triennale in 2012—an exhibition of contemporary art that advocated for encounters between diverse actors being the essence of democratic society. In the enclave of Montepinar, there is not a place or stage for interaction with people of differing economic situations—class here much more literally corresponds to bounded space. The sad irony is that space is precisely what the new form of suburban development offers.

Let us indulge in a little time travel and return to the city center, to the small spaces and the human contact catalyzed by urban settings. It is still 2006. It is still possible to live in Desengaño 21. The housing bubble has not yet hypertrophied and exploded; and, although things are changing rapidly, some of the shifts are good. In the fictional story of the historic building, we become the happy witnesses of the trajectory towards the wedding of Fernando and Mauri. With this story arc, spectators were presented with a reflection and celebration of what was really happening beyond
their screen. It is impossible not to mention the constant vindication of the rights of the LGBT community made throughout the series. This strong current becomes even more visible when “binge” viewing one episode after another, rather than tuning in weekly. As the series progressed, more queer characters joined the ensemble. First Bea (Eva Isanta) and Ana (Vanessa Romero), a couple, move in with Belén, replacing Alicia. Later Raquel (Elena Lombao), a character who is a transsexual, but has yet to undertake complete gender-reassignment surgery, moves to the building. Again questions of economics and justice are brought into play: Raquel is on a lengthy waitlist in the public healthcare system, as she cannot afford the price tag having the operation in a private clinic. Indeed Aquí’s consistent defense of the rights of the nation’s gay and transgender population could be the topic of its own paper.

The show’s narrative interweaves with Spanish history, as on the third of July, 2005 the Iberian nation became one of the first to legalize gay marriage. Notably, in the fictional building, the evolution can be observed occurring in the mentalities and behaviors of the inhabitants—especially the old women. Fernando stops caring about passing for straight in front of the neighbors. He recruits Concha’s son to help him ask Vicenta (who he fears to be very retrograde) to borrow her dog to make a wedding proposal to Mauri, which she is eventually only too happy to do. Despite some initial prejudices (and Fernando passing nearly half of the initial seasons in the closet), their relationship is normalized in the eyes of all of their fellow residents (and arguably the television audience as well). The couple is separated due to Fernando’s work obligations and Mauri takes a series of other lovers (with mixed success), perhaps demonstrating a less heteronormative model of queer sexuality as well. While the gossips of “radio patio” continue to

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33 As far as I am aware, Lombao is not a transgender person. It might have been a more progressive casting decision to actually have a transgender actress play the part. Nevertheless, Lombao does play the role convincingly and the result is a three-dimensional character.
report on some of his amorous activities, just like they do with every other neighbor, his sexuality is not their central concern. Returning to Jacobs’s text, we might consider how much slower this process of acceptance could be in a more remote location. Cosmopolitan embrace of difference, which results in the other turning into the own, requires the daily contact with neighbors a dense urban setting facilitates.

Television provides expanded exposure for the content represented in the mass medium. As Aquí was one of the highest rated programs of the early 2000s, it is certain that its fictional events were seen by many Spaniards. Addressing a societal repression, the show prompted homosexuality and the issues Spain was then grappling with and would soon overcome to gain an immense level of visibility. Fernando, Mauri, Bea, Raquel y Raquel’s problems—which variously include the loss of work due to sexuality, issues of acceptance by their own families, difficulties regarding becoming adoptive parents, or negotiations of new forms of family structure in order have biological children, issues are aired openly and repeatedly discussed by the characters. Spectators witnessed, shared in, and empathized with the issues faced by the characters. Aquí could be seen as a motor for what John Ellis terms “an extensive process of working through.”

Aquí might be viewed as a kind of discrepant strand of contemporary history. Though it privileges humor, its treatment of events that directly correspond to its time and place clearly sets it at the turn of millennium: the program bridges fact and invention. Like the soap opera characters Ellis discusses, the residents of Desengaño 21 compelling occupy the same temporal trajectories as the audience and “live along with us.” But, because of its fact-based aspects, Aquí also works along the lines of the news. According to Ellis, TV news promotes and confirms a “connectedness”

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to the events portrayed.\textsuperscript{36} The media theorist affirms that televisual processing of trauma (which could be equally true for repression) “takes the form of a constant worrying over issues and emotions, dealing with a riot of ways of understanding the world without ever coming to any final conclusions.”\textsuperscript{37} Fortunately, in this case, the legal shift in society that gave all citizens equal marriage rights moved some of these issues toward a tentative end (a government-mandated mastery of trauma)—though not one that takes an absolutely fixed form and which is constantly reperformed.

\textit{Aquí’s} end came at the hands of “technical difficulties” experienced by the production company, Miramón Mendi, which was bought out by the rival Silvio-Berlusconi-owned Telecinco, stymieing Antena 3’s negotiations with the firm. The former acquired fifteen percent of Miramón Mendi, enough to prevent a renewal of the contract once it expired in 2006. Antena 3 unsuccessfully tried to use litigation to retain control of \textit{Aquí}.\textsuperscript{38} Ultimately, one of their top rated shows was effectively cancelled (though it was soon reborn on Telecinco) due to free market forces. As a way of concluding the series, the idea of “technical” problems was translated to the building at Desengaño 21. The kind of speculation that was behind the conclusion of the situation comedy was not so different to the fate of \textit{Aquí’s} central edifice.

Thus, on the screen the writers finally allowed the long, dark shadow of Rafael Álvarez (Nicolás Dueñas) extend over the building. Álvarez is Lucía’s father and the director of a construction empire. A kind of Iberian Donald Trump, who is not beyond using paying offs or

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 2.
violence to turn a profit, Don Rafael epitomizes the paradigm of corruption and speculation linked to urban development—an issue that plagued Spain continuously in the latter twentieth century (the criminal activities of crooked developer Don Pablo on Cuéntame cómo pasó, a very successful program that aired simultaneously, reminded viewers of the longer history of this kind of crime). From very early on in Aquí’s run, Rafael had expressed his desire to buy up and redevelop the lot: it was place that was really too small for his daughter and would make a wonderful location for a beautiful high-rise office tower. On another occasion, mirroring the tactics of real developers, he buys Concha’s apartment and fills it with his “nephews,” actually a bunch of thugs who have been instructed to make life for the neighbors as unpleasant as possible. In the final episode of the third season he orchestrates a plot to burn the building down: offering the neighbors a free trip to a “spa”—that it transpires is an old folks’ home from which he has evicted the geriatric residents and fired the staff—on the Costa Blanca to get them out while the blaze is set. This plan to turn Desengaño 21 into the towering inferno is code named “Operación Windsor” (Operation Windsor), a reference to a skyscraper in central Madrid that burned to a husk on February 12, 2005. The fictional building’s accountant, Gregorio, thwarts the plan and, while the residents award him a medal, they fire him immediately afterwards as they have used all of their funds on repairs after the insurance company refuses to pay the damages as they suspect arson.

In the end, it is not direct pressure from the developer, but structural issues that arise in the building from an infestation of termites. Suggesting a conspiracy, no one in the building has seen a single insect. Eventually, the disheartened residents leave and Marisa utters for the last time, “aquí ya no hay quien viva” (now, no one can live here). Rafael, in effect, gets what he wanted: he can purchase the condemned building at a good price and construct the office tower he had been

39 Marisa Benito (Marivi Bilbao), Aquí no hay quien viva, television, directed by José Luis Moreno (2003, Madrid, España: Miramón Mendi).
threatening to erect for seasons. The inhabitants are to be expelled from the center of city and must consider moving to suburban housing developments far from the place that brought them happiness (at least at times). With this, the city center becomes a bit more “Anglo-Saxon;” that is to say, a space of global capital and international corporations, not local residents and small shops. The finale of the TV series thus seems to illustrate ideas posited by the theorist of social systems Manuel Castells. The fate of the building is a microcosm of the trajectory of the network society he traces: the city is reprogrammed, replacing “the space of places” (where locally confined experiences and activities occur) and shifting to a form more conducive to “the space of flows” (a space for electronic, mediated networked exchanges). Castells argues that “space does not reflect society, it expresses it.” Indeed, speculation was rampant in c. 2006; both the takeover of Miramón Mendi as well as similarly aggressive maneuvers in real-estate, like those depicted in Aquí, are expressions of neo-liberal capitalism within society.

The final episode of Aquí is bitter-sweet. Given the sarcastic tone of the rest of the program, we could expect nothing less. Led by Mauri, the neighbors refuse to leave the Desengaño 21 and occupy the building so that it cannot be toppled to ground. In a meta-televisual moment, they chant and sing in unison: “¡De esta nuestra casa, no nos moverán! ¡Porque esta casa es parte de nuestra vida, no nos moverán!” (From this, our house, we shall not be moved! Because this house is part of our lives, no we shall not be moved!). The song is particularly rich in terms of its layered metaphoric associations. “¡No nos moverán!” was a slogan and folk song used by Republican loyalists defending Madrid from Fascist forces in the Civil War. In 1974 the Mexican-American folk singer Joan Baez released her own version, which was censored in Spain on her Spanish-
language album *Gracias a la vida*. Baez refused to perform in Spain while Franco was alive, but came in 1977, raising eyebrows when she dedicated her televised performance of the song to Isidora Dolores Ibárruri Gómez, the exiled communist leader known as “La Pasionaria.” The anthem continues to have radical purchase; in 2011, American leftists in Wisconsin sang it in a YouTube message in support of the *Indignados*, who also employed it while occupying the Puerta del Sol in protest of austerity measures.

Nonetheless, for younger viewers, the song’s primary reference is an iconic scene from *Verano Azul*, a highly popular program that initially aired in 1981-82, but was rebroadcast many subsequent summers. In *Verano Azul* there is a threat to one character’s home; children refusing to be moved while singing the song successfully take a stand against construction workers trying to demolish the residence. Certainly, Don Rafael has the manners, speech patterns, and attitude of the elites of the Franco-era—many of whom continued to triumph in the arenas of business and politics after the transition to democracy. His actions place him in a genealogy of unscrupulous real-estate developers—both fictional and real—who have appeared on the small screen in Spain. The last stand of the characters links to both the history of Spain and that of television. It is furthermore appropriate as winking acknowledgement of the actual fate of the program: the show had to end because of problems with the house (the network), it perhaps makes poetic sense for the residents to also have issues with the structure that framed them (the building). As the writers repeatedly introduced these types of jabs throughout *Aquí*’s run, it seems probable they ended by forging links between fact and fiction.

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While the occupation of Desengaño 21 is ultimately not a triumph—as the floor falls away beneath the characters—it is one of a handful of moments when residents of all stripes unite. The message in the sitcom is quite clear: the program is a defense of a form of life in which close physical proximity produces a community with a wide range of sometimes antagonistic voices. The pairs of vigilant eyes, at times uncomfortable and recording material to gossip over, are also the factors that guarantee the inclusion of those who have not had so much luck in life, like José María. By this collective witnessing we also get the normalization and acceptance of others, like Mauri, Fernando, Bea, Ana and Raquel. The fact all of the neighbors stand together suggests that convivencia (living together) is something worth fighting for.

II. *La que se avecina*: Rise of the Suburbs or the Translation of the American Dream

*La que se avecina* first aired on April 22, 2007. The second show’s title is another idiomatic phrase that could be translated as a warning: “Oh, no, look at what is coming now.” Heard aloud, it evokes “*la que sea vecina*”: that thing, which will be your neighbor. With the impossibility of continuing with precisely the same form as *Aquí* and after a brief hiatus, the writer-director, Alberto Rodríguez Caballero, found a way to provide continuity with the prior story, but as well keep his program in lockstep with the evolution of Spanish society relationship with real estate. Many of the actors continued in this “sequel.” Though none of the characters are identical, many have similar characteristics to those that buoyed the ratings of the first iteration. My analysis in this section will not examine all of the characters and instead will center on a few that are pertinent to my study.

*La que* almost exclusively takes place in a recently created suburban housing development called Montepinar. It is important to note that in *La que* the neighbors (initially) hail from a far
narrower strata of Spanish society. And indeed, the mode of single class living is precisely that which Jacobs decries; such developments are “truly marvels of dullness and regimentation.” All of the Montepinarians moved into the building because of their middle-high purchasing power. While there has been a long history of property ownership as being part of the route to complete subjecthood and proper citizenship, the “American dream” of a home with a private fenced in yard separating inhabitants from their neighbors is a relatively new phenomenon in Spain. At various times in *Aquí* characters mention the idea of suburban developments in relation to economic class. During the late 90s and early 2000s, purchasing a home outside the city was a status symbol for many Spaniards, supposedly connoting they had “made it.”

The business of this translated form of suburban construction was based on speculation: developers bought cheap land, built houses quickly, and used inexpensive materials. They then worked hard on promoting these properties as “luxury homes.” Once people were seduced by the development’s image (rather than convinced by its substance), they were turned over for a huge profit. In a number of cases these developments were built with the idea that once enough people arrived, the state would be obliged to provide basic infrastructure. With the crisis, many of the anticipated facilities and services, such as schools or good communications (public transport, roads, etc.), never arrived and the owners will never recover the money they put into their overpriced country home.

Enrique Pastor (José Luis Gil) is an updated version of Juan Cuesta. Like the gym teacher in *Aquí*, he is the president of the co-op, only too happy to assume leadership of the community when the others vote him in. He is a concejal (councilor), a low-level politician in Madrid’s City.

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45 Jacobs, 4.
Hall; which is to say, his professional achievements as a politician are fairly limited. Like Juan Cuesta, his profession should theoretically bring him a certain degree of respect in society. Instead, he is ignored and put down by the other neighbors in Montepinar and his work for the community (in both his post in government and as president) is not appreciated by his fellow residents.

Another set of parallel characters come in Maxi and Coque, respectively played by Eduardo Gómez Manzano—who gave life to the parasitic Mariano in Aquí—and Nacho Guerreros, who interpreted the junkie José María. Maxi begins as the doorman at Montepinar, but drifts away from this position one-third through the first season. Coque takes over his duties. In the type of twist that audiences have come to expect from the cynical writing team, it seems as though things have improved to some extent and that justice of sorts has been meted out. The new world of Montepinar apparently brings with it some adjustments: Gómez Manzano, who as Mariano was quick to look down upon the way his son Emilio earned a living as a doorman (even while he lived off of his charity), finally ends up becoming the concierge-doorman in the new building. His character, Maxi, has many of Mariano’s traits; he is the same shameless sponger, but initially he actually needs to put mop to floor in order to earn his living. Guerreros plays Coque with the same speech patterns and body posture as José María. Though his mind is drug addled like that of his predecessor, he appears to have slightly more agency. He has just been released from jail and has been hired as the gardener at Montepinar.

As was almost always the case in Aquí, things are not quite what they seem and poetic justice to some degree misfires. Maxi loses his job, but manages to worm his way into the home of Enrique Pastor. He convinces Enrique to go into business with him operating a bar (Max and Henry’s) in one of the commercially zoned areas of the building. Coque’s “promotion” from gardener to doorman is more curse than benediction. His salary stays the same; he simply has a
greater range of duties to perform at work. The promoters of the development seem to be happy to have him: because of his status as an ex-con he is less able to complain and less likely to quit when his pay arrives late or not at all. Life for the lowest earning workers is particularly harsh. He does not have more than a small reception office (he certainly does not have anything close to the humble dwelling Emilio resided in). He goes back to the city to sleep each night, mounted on the ride-on lawnmower he uses to groom Montepinar’s grounds; as he cannot afford another vehicle and, given that the development is not connected to city busses or metrorail, the mode of transport is initially his only option.

None of the neighbors seem to care about Coque’s working conditions. The doorman purchases a caravan after a few episodes. His immobilized, itinerant dwelling hammering home his marginal status, he parks his caravan in the street right in front of the housing development. The residents are scandalized and try to do all they can to ameliorate the uncomfortable visual situation: they moved outside of the city in order to escape unpleasant encounters with the poor and homeless. The bourgeois security that Rodwin discusses is interrupted by reality. Montepinar requires the services he provides (at the price of labor he offers). However, its inhabitants do not wish their space to occupied by someone or something that does not fit into their model of “alto standing” (high-class) living (they repeat this term incessantly)—something they all imagine they have achieved with the acquisition of their new apartments. The colorful caravan—siphoning electricity from their building—is an interruption of this dream and anticipates the end of it. The housing bubble burst soon after.

The opening credits of a television program speak volumes about the ways its creators and promoters hope it will be understood. They are a kind of condensed version of the program; the
credits frame the contents, priming the audience to understand the situations they are about to witness. In the case of the introductions to *Aquí*, *La que*, and *Culo* the moving images are accompanied by a catchy theme song with lyrics that describe the conditions of the sites the characters inhabit, respectively a traditional centric apartment building, a building in a new housing development far out in the periphery of the city, or an equally distant campground situated in less-desirable real estate—which I will return to in due course. The opening sequence of *La que* rather marvelously encapsulates the shifts in living conditions that the series portrays: both the lyrics of the theme song as well as the visual information align particularly well. Comparisons with the credits of *Aquí* help to understand the changes in Spain captured by the show.

In the earlier program’s intro the building façade appears to slide off, and spectators see into the different apartments. The bright bold palette that characterizes the program asserts itself from the start. Resembling the comic edifices from the world of famed cartoonist Paco Ibáñez in both the perspective and colors, the series connects to a longer history of the humor of collective living in Spain. *Aquí*’s characters dance through the building, occupying the stairs and foyer as they sing together in small groups until they finally all do a curtain call at the conclusion. While we mostly see (and hear) harmony, the song speaks about the difficulties of living with one’s neighbors: “Todos los días son así/ No podía imaginarlo cuando vine aquí/ Sólo buscaba algo de paz/ Ahora despierto cada día en medio de un huracán/ Aquí, aquí no hay quién viva, aquí no…” (Every day is like this/ I couldn’t imagine it when I arrived/ I was only looking for a little peace/ Now, every day, I wake up in the middle of a hurricane…).46

The images and lyrics of the sequence that introduces *La que* are an apt summary of the crisis situation in the country. The show opens with a table that contains a scale model of the

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housing development. It is the type of architectural model that firms would show prospective off-plan buyers; historically, this has been a particularly risky way of acquiring a home in Spain, but a route that eager buyers took in large numbers in the 2000s.47 Everything is sleek, linear, gridded, minimalist and almost completely white. The building initially looks like a high-tech computer rendering, but as the building starts to come apart, it becomes clear that it is made out of little more than paper: merely a cardboard castle. While this is an appropriate material for a model, it seems to as well evoke the shoddy and inexpensive materials employed in the construction (e.g. paper-thin walls) that the Montepinarians are forced to live with. Animated model residents go charging toward the building—racing each other and foreshadowing the manic competitiveness that undergirds their interactions. Each is interchangeable, photos of the owners’ heads rest on the identical geometric bodies of the dolls. In addition, in the auto-destruction process, a killer brushed steel washing machine slides down the stairs causing the puppets to flee. This uncanny consumer durable signals the unhinged tone that characterizes the program.

The lyrics talk about the financial effort necessary to acquire the Spanish suburban dream: the homeowners no longer can afford to go out because they have to pay their mortgages; despite immense debts, their luxury homes are in fact, defective.

La que se avecina, vecina./ Se acabó la discoteca/ ahora pago la hipoteca./ tengo piso, nueva construcción (¡Oh! ¡oh!)/ Lo pagamos sobre plano. / ¡Está mal alicatado!/ ¡Bienvenido a la urbanización!/ Compre usted ciertas casas./ De 100 metros con terraza. / Todo puede pasar./

¡Déjeme descansar!/ ¡Welcome to Montepinaaar!/ Atrapado en la comunidad/ Ahora sólo sueño en escapar./ En el vecindario no hay un solo día normal./ Atrapado en la comunidad./ Un millón de letras por pagar./ Pasen y disfruten, vendo piso en Montepinar.48

Look what’s coming now, neighbor./ The disco is over./ Now pay your mortgage./ Got an apartment, brand new building (¡Oh! ¡oh!)/ We paid for it off plan./ It is badly screwed together!/ Welcome to the development!/ If you buy certain houses./ Of 100 square meters and a balcony./ Anything can happen./ Let me rest!/ Welcome to Montepinaaar!/ Trapped in the community./ Now all I can do is dream of escape./ With these neighbors, there is not a single normal day./ Trapped in the community./ A million more payments to make./

Come in and have fun, I’m selling an apartment in Montepinar.

While the lyrics generally are fairly self-explanatory, the English-language “Welcome to…” requires a little more analysis. When the program began, it was popular to give developments names that contain English words as means of adding to their cachet. In an article from around the time La que began to air the newspaper El Mundo describes a number of developments taking the names of artists, adopting foreign place names, or including the English words “Hills” or “Queen.”49 By their attempts to evoke sophisticated culture, expensive foreign travel, celebrity (as in Beverly Hills), or nobility, all of these naming strategies imply a kind of putting on highbrow or high-class airs by developers (and residents). In addition, as these building forms were imported from a foreign context, it is appropriate they acknowledge their Anglo-Saxon roots as a potential selling point. Living in such a community is a constant performance; this cultural translation results in space, not place.

In his critique of Jacobs Rodwin suggests that the anxieties about peace and space drive people to buy homes in suburbia. The ugly underbelly of suburban life and the series of problems that it yields are the fodder for many episodes of La que. The already mentioned lack of good infrastructural connections to the city center and its cultural activities is a constant. The center is where Enrique’s adolescent son (Fran) wants to go in order to hang out with kids his own age. Unfortunately, the development is “sólo a 50 minutos en bus” (just fifty minutes away by bus) according to his mother, Araceli Madriaga (played by Isabel Ordaz, who played a hippie neighbor in Aquí).

The idea of the value of mixed zoning is not new; it also celebrated by Jacobs. See pages 6-7.

Worst of all, the apartments have many defects. When confronted by the neighbors, the constructor avoids their complaints until declaring bankruptcy.

Both on and off screen the real-estate bubble had burst in Spain and the only solution is to sell up. Of course, the characters find

50 Isabel Ordaz, La que se avecina, television, directed by Laura Caballero y Alberto Caballero (2007, Madrid: Alba Adriática).
52 See “¿Tengo derecho a que la constructora me dé una garantía para posibles defectos en la vivienda nueva?,” Consumadrid, accessed January 3, 2015,
themselves facing the same problems as many of the spectators: they are trapped by their home loan. Selling really was not a valid option as housing prices sharply decreased. Most people would have lost on average 53% of the price of their home—meaning they would still have been strapped with a significant amount of their mortgage payments to make.53 This is the difficult situation that “los Cuquis” (“the adorables”) face. The couple is married with three small children. They want to get divorced, but decide they cannot; selling the family home would mean losing their only investment. Another one of the neighbors, Judith Bécquer, who is single at the beginning of the series, also mentions that she would like to move, but that such a thing is just not possible. Reflecting on her situation in the first episode, “no sé ni como me han dao la hipoteca” (I don’t even know how they gave me a mortgage). Following in the wake of the crisis, banks became more stringent. It became harder to borrow money and new buyers dwindled. The residents of Montepinar realize that they are stuck, drowning in debt, holding on to the dream of escaping their circumstances. The isolation of the development makes the latter aspiration particularly difficult, as they are far removed from the distractions available in the center of the city. In the “stately” halls and grounds of Montepinar the suburbanites find themselves confronting equally annoying neighbors—who they try in vain to avoid. Nevertheless, in contrast with urban spaces, there are few options for finding alternative social networks.

The sitcom, which is recorded in the weeks and on occasion days before airing (it seems possible that only certain elements are reshotted or reedited to reflect current events) narrates almost in real-time the current conditions faced by numerous Spaniards. Despite this fact, the discussions of news items come with far lesser frequency than in Aquí. On one hand, the ease of identification

53 It is estimated that the houses that had the greatest drop are those that are “second hand” and outside of urban centers. See Cristina Galindo, “Pero, ¿cuánto vale realmente mi casa?,” January 31, 2013, accessed January 4, 2015, http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2013/01/31/actualidad/1359655482_090004.html.
with the story attracts and hooks spectators; on the other, because it is so exaggerated, it can serve as a mode of escape. Like with Aquí, there seems to be a potential for Ellis’s “working through” societal traumas when they are made visible to the nation in the mass media (though it is very much dampened).

Unfortunately, the tone of the series has become increasingly histrionic and hysterical with each subsequent renewal. The crisis of the economy increasingly translates into the characters’ psychopathologies. The desperation of the economic reality is reflected in the storylines and characters in the worst possible way. We have moved from the intelligent humor of Aquí and arrived at easy jokes and frequent vulgarity. Some of the characters, such as “los Cuquis,” who began as stereotypes of preppy Spaniards have deformed to an absurd degree. While it may be fun to see this class of character humiliated, the situations push the limits and resort to slapstick gags. For instance, the Cuqui father ends up prostituting himself in a retirement home where his wife works. The woman he is about to have sex with dies of a heart attack while he is performing a striptease. He ends up having to run away from the place, pants down, in order not to be caught. His wife, who abreast of the situation, is annoyed because he did not finish the job.

The program is also more politically ambiguous than its predecessor; working with a postmodern unstable irony, the writers often lose sight of boundaries: female characters sometimes show flesh gratuitously; some characters are offensive, but it is not always clear if their belligerent lines are meant to get laughs or an attempt to poke fun at social types who might use such offensive language. For instance, Parrales (Carlos Alcalde), a one-dimensional stereotype of a desperate Latin-American immigrant who works at the development, is a character who receives piles of abuse from the Spaniards. Jordi Sánchez, the actor who play the most horrible and bigoted character, Antonio Recio, believes that his on-screen work is purely critical of those who he views
as “fascists,” who continue to be our uncles, brothers-in-law, bosses, and co-workers in Spain.\textsuperscript{54} He affirms: “Los españoles, somos racistas” (Spaniards, we’re racists).\textsuperscript{55} Sánchez’s well-meaning (if not a little too convenient) claims aside, it is difficult to determine whether audiences will laugh at the small minded, prejudiced Montepinarians or if they will laugh along with them about the plight of the immigrant-other.

The shrill, hyperactive, spectacular qualities come from a drive to augment audience numbers, related to the shift to Telecinco, and align with that network’s other programs—many of which are hysterical reality shows. The overstimulation \textit{La que} provokes results in a sensory overload, which from my perspective confounds working through trauma: the grotesque elements prevent even the most minimum identification and empathy with the characters; the frequent screams and insults (which are on occasion bigoted, racist, or misogynistic) prevent relaxation with the viewing experience (something necessary according to Ellis). Curiously, the aforementioned actor, Sánchez, makes the claim his program helps people; by provoking laughter it allows spectators to momentarily forget their material conditions: “\textit{El humor es terapia social}” (humor is social therapy)\textsuperscript{56} Despite his declaration, \textit{La que} seems like more of a palliative than of real therapeutic value. Finally, there is one more reason why the show is a poor device for working through: it is devoid of any hopeful message; it shows no positive values (friendship, solidarity, etc.). It imagines a world in which cynicism is the absolute ruler, a world in which neo-liberal capitalism has triumphed, a world—to quote Margaret Thatcher—in which “there is no such thing as society,” only individuals and their fragmented families.\textsuperscript{57} While \textit{La que} and \textit{Aquí} are both

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Margaret Thatcher, “Interview,” \textit{Women’s Own Magazine}, September 23, 1987, reproduced online at Margaret
commercial series, their differences are revealing. The overload of the latter throws the value of the carefully tooled dialogues and sympathetic characters of the earlier production are thrown into relief. From La que we learn that dredging the depths of the low brow results in browbeaten spectators.

The Doorman in Crisis: from Emilio to Coque

The doorman (and gardener, concierge, and handy man) is a key figure for understanding the social hierarchy presented in La que and Aquí—precisely because he largely falls outside of the scale other characters measure themselves against in order to feel superior to their neighbors. While neither takes on the traditional role of a narrator by providing commentary with a voice over, both Emilio and Coque help spectators see things in perspective.

Emilio is not a property owner, nor is he a tenant, and cannot really aspire to hold either of these real-estate-contingent statuses. Nevertheless, in the final season the neighbors decide to give Emilio the deed to the doorman’s residence, which we must remember is actually a trash closet, an abode so humble that many of the other inhabitants of Desengaño would be ashamed of it. They are less motivated by altruism than economic necessity: he will have to start paying maintenance. Nevertheless, the move does encourage mixed-income housing rather than pushing service workers further into the peripheries, as is often the case with gentrifying neighborhoods. Emilio is absolutely overjoyed when he hears the news, remarking while overwhelmed with waves of emotion “ahora ya soy uno más” (now I’m one of you).58 Emilio adds a very different point of view. The doorman shows how “the other half lives,” but as well prompts reflection on the needs

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58 Fernando Tejero, Aquí no hay quien viva, television, directed by José Luis Moreno (2003, Madrid: Miramón Mendi).
of all members of society: he revels the services and labor (and the conditions in which these must be performed) that make it possible to live in the big city. In a relative rarity for mainstream television, Emilio’s unglamorous work—mopping the floors, cleaning out the garbage cans, locking up the building, or making repairs—is regularly shown on screen. The idea is not to degrade the doorman, but to demonstrate the despicable behavior of the neighbors who employ him. The depictions highlight normally invisible labor, showing the honor in these services and prompting a consideration of their value.\(^{59}\)

As a character, Emilio makes the audience see the ironies of the lives of the residents. The doorman views them almost with the perspective of an outsider. Perhaps given the amount of time he inevitably spends watching the others, he could almost be seen as a “participant-observer” who develops anthropological insights. He resides on the street level and is charged with overseeing and taking care of the entranceway—a liminal space that connects the private and public realms. He is not a security guard or a cleaner, but something in between.

Despite the precariousness of his job, he is entrusted with significant responsibility within and without the building. Inside, he has a key to all of the apartments, although we suppose he shouldn’t abuse the trust of the owners. Outside, all of the neighborhood knows him, and understands his position in the urban system. Although he does not have any legal authority, he does possess a certain amount of moral authority—which is usually enough to prevent strangers from entering the building. As Jane Jacobs describes, it is this presence in the street as well as eyes on public space by its users that guarantees their safety and security and collectively helps regulate the order of things.\(^{60}\)

\(^{59}\) A more clearly committed and series filmic text that aims to perform a similar function is the Berwick Street Collective’s *Night Cleaners* (1972-75), which depicts the activities of low-paid, nocturnal workers.

\(^{60}\) See Jacobs, 42.
The constant contact with people who we have not selected as our neighbors, who we do not know, and who are of distinct backgrounds and economic levels—those who might otherwise be considered the Other—arguably yields a humanizing of society. The types of cosmopolitanism encounters this form of living catalyzes turn otros (others) into nosotros (us), a plurality of others. With Emilio we get a small spark of hope (when witnessing his solidarity and compassion with José María and his loyalty for Juan Cuesta), which keeps the satirical Aquí from drifting into cynicism.

Coque’s job function in Montepinar is similar to Emilio’s in Desengaño 21, but the former is in a far more precarious situation. His relationship with the neighbors is very different to that Emilo enjoyed too: he is much more literally their servant; they barley are willing to maintain a conversation with him. The Coque character emerged at the beginnings of the recession, at a time when work conditions were far worse and unemployment significantly higher than in the prior decade. Coque represents someone who is outside of the “rat race” and self-conscious of the difficulties of achieving middle-class success. The effects of long-term drug addiction—and his continued half-stupefied state, the result of regular marijuana consumption—cause him to miss double meanings or misinterpret them. This is in part a device employed by the writers, which allows them to reiterate situations from the point of view of false naiveté: the supposedly naïve Coque often utters truths that strike like fists.

The grotesque side of the character comes in the relationship that he maintains with the inhabitants of Montepinar. In order to earn a little more income, Coque sells the real estate of his body—NASCAR style—to the arriviste wholesale fishmonger, Antonio Recio. Recio’s face, along with his corporate logo grace the doorman’s back. Recio, one of the cruelest and most classist characters, speaks of achieving “el sueño español” (the Spanish dream), an ironic commentary on
the wholesale importation of the American dream and its associated myths to the Iberian Peninsula. Some of the female residents use him for sexual ends—titillated by crossing the class boundaries and taking advantage of his caravan parked in the entrance of the building. In the end, and with much dark humor, one of these women (Berta, Antonio Recio’s supposedly very Catholic wife) ends up infatuated with the doorman. However, this relationship occurs without any dignity and the human relationship does not help to process any kind of trauma. The suburban residential system only seems to yield chaos and misery punctuated by fleeting pleasure achieved at the expense of others. *La que* refracts the change in the “texture” of the society as a consequence of a shift in the economy; the program works with trauma rather than working through it.

**III. Con el culo al aire: A Comedic Return to the Commons**

*Con el culo* is yet one more ensemble comedy dealing with contemporary Spain and the crisis. The title *Con el culo al aire* is, like those of the other shows, another common saying in Spanish that refers to somebody that has lost everything and have been left unguarded. It literally means “with your pants down” or “showing your ass.” As the title of the series signals, the residents live hand to mouth, trying to cover costs as best they can. In part because it is so up-to-date, it is a fairly different kind of televisual product compared to the other two programs—largely due to the shifting conditions of contemporary Spain. It depicts an exaggerated version of the country in 2012. This was a moment when Spain’s economy had spent years in one of its worst recessions in recent times, when crisis seemed to have become chronic, despite the long period of austerity measures atrophying state-provided services. *Con el culo* is primarily characterized by facile humor; it lacks the more sophisticated dialogues of the scripts of *Aquí*; in comparison with *La que*, it is less hysterical in tone and more simplistic.
Albeit with heavy doses of humor, the program does actually show an alternative way of forming a community by living just outside the grid. While most spectators surely do not view it as an instruction manual for returning to the commons, it is contains diluted, tongue-in-cheek versions or visions of some of the ideas about sharing resources and communal politics put forth by Autonomist Marxist theorists like Tony Negri and Michael Hardt. Indeed, if slightly modified and delivered with less jest, the utopian model of life shown in *Con el culo* might actually be possible: striking debt payments and using a barter system in order to live inexpensively at the edges of society and the city that expelled them, their community represents a radical refusal (one of the few courses available to them) to conform to the pressures of late capitalism. The program imagines another system, one that is fairly barebones, predicated on mere survival, and which should be unnecessary, but certainly in 2012 was not. In this new or renewed form of living, solidarity with your fellow humans becomes necessary for survival.

The story occurs in a campground, a place where, according to the law, the occupants cannot reside permanently. The population of this once seasonal location have lost almost everything with the crisis and no longer can afford conventional housing. The campground is located in the outskirts of the city. It is even possible to see the skyline of Madrid on the horizon, separated from this provisional dwelling by a sea of garbage in an abutting landfill. The urbanist Paul D. Spreiregen described skylines as, “a physical representation [of a city's] facts of life ... a potential work of art ... its collective vista.” In *Con el culo* the edifices on the horizon are a reminder of an imagined community that the characters no longer form part of. They have been cast out of the collective that corresponds to the vista.

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Those that have made their way to the peripheral site come seeking refuge. They hail from a range of social strata and professional backgrounds. Nonetheless, all have lost their homes. Indeed, corresponding with reality, 2012 (when the series premiered) was the high water mark for evictions. *ABC*, the most conservative newspaper in the country, mentions there were an average of 517 evictions a day. This figure was statistics based on the first three months of the year that suggested a total of almost 375,000 families had been affected by these evictions. These numbers are described as “scandalous” by this conservative paper. It is shocking to see that even a right-wing outlet like *ABC* would publish detailed data of evictions.

While there are numerous characters (more than fifteen primary actors), Tino is arguably the hero of the show. Paco Tous plays the character, who tries to eke out a living selling churros from a food truck (Tous gave life to a similar protagonist in the series *Los hombres de Paco*), but is also involved in a barter economy in the campground. He very much lives at the boundaries of the law and modern state bureaucracy, as he does not even have a drivers’ license. Given that the program premiered when the country was at a nadir, it seems impossible not to understand *Con el culo* as a light but serious critique of current affairs. The program frankly speaks about housing, the lack of work, and how to survive at this historical moment. It is nearly impossible to avoid thinking about the occupation of the 15-M movement only months prior—as well as its associated campgrounds, assemblies, and collectivism—when viewing the show. As in the cases of the other programs, the opening song and credits help us to understand *Con el culo*:

Rodeados de anuncios al vicio/ De la compra insana con falta de juicio/ Si no tienes nada vas al precipicio capital/ Marcas caras, 60 pulgadas/ Relojes de oro, una visa plata/ Viajes al Caribe con una mulata ideal/ Letras de hipoteca, notificación fiscal/ un

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coche en tu puerta y un pisito al lao del mar/ Y aquí estoy, con el culo al aire/ Sin casa,
sin curro y no le importa a nadie/ Si vivo y respiro, qué más puedo necesitar.

Surrounded by ads for vice/ Making insane purchases against your better judgment/ If
you don’t have anything make your way to the capital cliffs/ Expensive brands, 60
inches/ gold watches, platinum visa/ Trips to the Caribbean with just the right mixed-
race girl/ Mortgage payments, eviction notice/ a car at your door and an apartment on
the seashore/ And here I am, with my pants down/ Homeless, jobless, and no one cares/
If I can live and breathe, what else do I need.64

In a voice over that begins the first episode Tino presents a kind of monologue-manifesto.
These types of voiceover narrations continue throughout the series. In this soliloquy he denudes
himself literally and metaphorically. Following in the tragic path of many others who have lost
their homes, it seems as though Tino is about to commit suicide, jumping into nothingness—but
that is not the case. In reality, it is just from the diving board into the full swimming pool that he
jumps. But before he makes this leap he lays out the situation in Spain in a speech dripping with
irony: he rejects the abstracting forces of the capitalist bureaucratic system in which he once had
faith; Tino describes how one might live just slightly beyond the system he can no longer believe
in:

Ruega por una hipoteca./ Reza por un trabajo./ Sueña con un coche que no puedes
permitirte pagar./ Gana más que tu cuñado y díselo./ Vive de tu tarjeta de crédito y si
no puedes, usa otra./ Hazte del Madrid o del Barça, no seas un perdedor./ Apréndete tu
número del DNI porque para ellos eres sólo eso, un número./ Un número al nacer./ Un
numero en el colegio./ Un numero de parado./ Un número de cuenta, un número de la

64 Con el culo al aire, directed by David Fernández, David Abajo, Joaquín Mazón, Manuel Tera, César Rodríguez
lista de espera./ Un número de Hacienda./ Hasta que te conviertes en un número rojo./ Y ya no eres nada, como yo./ Este es el mundo que vamos a dejar a nuestros hijos./ Por eso yo he decidido salirme de él, porque no me lo creo.

[Children scream: ¡Papá no!]

A veinte minutos de la ciudad, vivimos de otra manera./ Sin hipoteca, al aire libre, con zonas verdes y barbacoa./ No tenemos nada que un rico no tenga, con una diferencia, nosotros no hemos jodido a nadie para conseguirlo.

Beg for a mortgage./ Pray for a job./ Dream of a car you cannot afford./ Make more than your brother in law, and let him know it./ Live on your credit card and if you can´t, use another one./ Root for Madrid of Barcelona, not for a looser./ Learn by heart your social number, because that´s all you are./ A number./ A number when you are born./ A number at school./ An unemployment number./ A bank account number./ A waiting list number./ A taxpayer number. /Until you become a number in the red./ And then you become nothing, like me./ This is the world we are going to leave for our children./ That´s why I have decided to leave this world./ Because I no longer believe in it.

[Kids yelling “Don’t do it Daddy”]

20 minutes away from the city, we live in a different way./ With no mortgage, in fresh air, green areas, and with barbecues./ We don’t lack anything that the rich have./ But with a difference./ We have not fucked anyone over to get it.65

Ellis contends that television can enable spectators to “com[e]to terms with what we have witnessed.”66 Indeed, the opening of Con el culo works is this way. Tino’s actions conjure up the

65 Paco Tous, Con el culo al aire, dirigido por David Fernández, David Abajo, Joaquín Mazón, Manuel Tera, César Rodríguez Blanco, Luis Santamaría, César Martí y Álvaro Fernández Armero (2012, Madrid: Notro Films). See the first episode of the series at the following: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fHL_tzCoVl.
66 Ibid, 80.
numerous suicides and emotionally harrowing removals from homes that occurred in the time around its airing. However, by raising the possibility of continuing in a new utopian fashion the character provides hope for the present. Although framed within a humorous discourse, not all of the ideas presented are jokes; precisely because they were couched in humor, ideas that might radically change people’s imaginations could be broadcast to a mass audience by a commercial channel.

Some aspects of life in the campground and its barter economy are quite realistic; other more improbable situations arise as well: in the first episode we are introduced to the main female character, Sandra (María León), a young doctor, who arrives to the campground with her two little twin daughters. She has lost her job, and subsequently her home, as a consequence of the stress she suffered through her divorce: she was caught prescribing herself drugs. The campground does not have clinics nearby, and she convinces the owner, who has health issues, of the convenience of having a medical practice in the campground (the ethical issue about practicing medicine after having got her license suspended is not really addressed). She soon connects with real estate agent Ángel (Raúl Fernández), who represents a slightly more believable situation. He was once very successful thanks to the housing industry; this is the same industry that has kicked him out of the city and almost out of society, since his ex-wife threatens to take their shared-child custody away. She still has a job and does not want the child—who lives with her—to spend weekends in a place like the campground. With this level of deprivation of dignified work, income, housing and even family relationships, Ángel embodies the country’s shift in society and economy and how the crisis got people displaced economically, physically and morally. Sandra’s husband holds similar sentiments and also wants to take their twins away from her. The relationship the doctor and real
estate agent strike up is one of the focuses of the first season; although they repeatedly appear to be moving into romance, there are always interruptions that keep their relations platonic.

“Los Marqueses” (the Marquis) fulfil a similar role in the campground as the “Cuquis” and Recios in the Montepinar development. They represent conservative, posh Spaniards. The existence of the characters enables Con el culo to mount attacks against the values and mindset of the traditional upper classes (or aspirants to those classes). The husband in the couple was once a successful businessman; his proper, preppy wife did not work (she was a kind of “señora de” [Mrs. Husband’s name]). They maintain some delusions of grandeur and desperately attempt to keep up appearances. They still have the expensive furniture and brand-name clothes that hail from their former life. Although they don’t have enough money for petrol, their Mercedes sits in front of the cabin they inhabit. They explain their presence in the campground by stating that they are merely “on sabbatical” in their country home. Los Marqueses proclaim that their taste for rural living in the countryside (el campo) stems from the fact they are so “campechanos” (folksy and good-natured), just like King (at that time Juan Carlos I). This adjective was not a chance selection, as it is the term that was often used to describe the relaxed style of the monarch. Critics on the left often brought up Juan Carlos’s campechano nature when making fun of him, proposing that his down-to-earth attitude was merely a pose to win over the citizens of Spain.67

The invocation of folksiness is not the sole thinly veiled criticism of a monarchic state during the show. A new female character appears only in one of the last episodes of the series, which aired on the 11th of June of 2014, nine days after (June 2nd, 2014) Juan Carlos I had announced that would abdicate the throne and allow his son, the current king Felipe IV to reign.

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Her primary function was to raise questions about the validity of continuing in a constitutional monarchy. She is Dani’s new girlfriend. Dani is a teenager who lives in the campground with his mother, a judge who lost her job and home due to her alcoholism. He is nervous about introducing his girlfriend to his mother and, despite not being very sure about this, accepts the help offered by the los Marqueses to pretend to be his parents for an evening.68

The evening ends up being a disaster: she arrives wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the Spanish republican flag, a symbol used by the left to declare anti-royal feelings.69 Los Marqueses stare in horror. After inviting her to change her clothes, la Marquesa intentionally drops food over her. They end up fighting over her political ideas and rejection of the new king’s validity. Dani’s girlfriend ends up leaving in a storm (which means he will continue to be a virgin—a running joke in the show—despite his high hopes to lose his virtue with a woman of “liberal ideas”). One of the last sentences that she yells back at los Marqueses is “¡Yo no le he votado!” (I have not voted for him!)—a reference to prince Felipe, who would soon become the nation’s figurehead.

There was much controversy surrounding the rapid process of succession, which did not only come from the far left. Juan Carlos, who had always expressed a desire to die in his post, had experienced a dramatic drop in popularity since April of 2012. This was a moment when the monarch was forced to publicly apologize on TV to the economically beleaguered population over a scandal that emerged following his injury and costly evacuation while hunting endangered species in Africa. Even conservative press outlets amply documented Juan Carlos’s

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68 It is important to note that, for a long time, “los Marqueses” have unsuccessfully tried to have children, which is the reason why they feel like playing the role for the night. Unfortunately they cannot afford a fertility treatment out of pocket in a private clinic and have being denied to get treatment in a public hospital. A constant critique of the massive budget cuts that are part of the “austerity measures” the Spanish government has imposed on the public healthcare system percolates through much of the series.

69 This flag, red, yellow and purple instead the current red, yellow, red flag, was Spain’s official flag during the Second Republic, historically a very progressive time.
transgressions. As the Spanish economy was at a nadir, the King’s expensive vacation to Botswana was perceived as an insensitive choice, one that proved his insincerity: a month earlier, with unemployment at 50% for people under 35 years old, he declared that “hay noches que el paro juvenil me quita el sueño” (Some nights I cannot sleep thinking of youth unemployment).

Even more shocking for the country’s conservatives, was the confirmation of the rumor of being in company his lover Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein during the African trip (the Spanish royal family is officially Catholic, a faith professed by the majority of right-wingers). This came to light when Sayn-Wittgenstein used the opportunity to make the cover of Hola (the Spanish version of Hello) to talk about, amongst other issues, her “entrañable amistad” (dear friendship) with the king. Sayn-Wittgenstein was concerned with setting herself apart from the corruption case that embroiled Iñaki Urdargarín, the king’s son-in-law. The public was indignant.

Juan Carlos holds an important place in the common televisual imaginary of the nation. He used the airwaves to communicate with the population every year in his Christmas remarks. Moreover, in 1981 the king gained the respect and sympathy of most of the population by broadcasting on live TV his rejection to a military coup d’etat. This was an extraordinary and powerful gesture, which had enormous impact on the attempted coup, effectively knocking the wind out of it. The images of the young king in dress uniform have been reproduced and rebroadcast hundreds of times over the years. As a result, despite the fact some Spaniards may lack

71 "El rey se duerme en un acto tras decir que el paro juvenil 'le quita el sueño,'" La Republica, March 16, 2012, http://larepublica.es/2012/03/16/el-rey-se-duerme-en-un-acto-tras-decir-que-el-paro-juvenil-le-quita-el-sueno/#.
72 Hola is a publication that profiles the rich and famous of Spain. The magazine often creates profiles with luscious photographic spreads of the subjects in their domestic settings. See http://us.hola.com/.
formal knowledge of the history, partially the entire adult population have some awareness because they have seen the video of the broadcast. The average citizen considered the king was to have “saved the country” from entering into another dictatorship like the one that had finished six years earlier.

The renowned journalist Iñaki Gabilondo, who directed RTVE (Radio Televisión Española) news on February 23, 1981 (the night of the failed coup) and had felt grateful for the King’s intervention, epitomized the disillusionment that many long-time sympathizers with the monarchy felt. Demonstrating an awareness of the importance of new technologies, Gabilondo harshly censured of the Crown in a video-blog. Elpais.com, the website of Spain’s largest paper, hosts his digital project. While the paper help to underscore the gravity of his messages, the middlebrow platform had a modest circulation. The videos each garnered thousands of “likes” on Facebook (9,694) and were subsequently viewed on YouTube 1,398 times. Claiming Juan Carlos’s actions demonstrated “irresponsabilidad e inconsciencia superlativa” (superlative irresponsibility and lack of consciousness), he demanded the king’s abdication in a video on April 16, 2013.73 About a month and a half later Gabilondo’s call had become reality. The episode of Con el culo, “Hacienda somos casi todos,” employs a very different tone and register, but the same ideas and anger: “I have not voted for him!” The program was seen by far more citizens, with an 11.4% ratings share, nearly 2,070,000 people tuned in. The former asks for the king’s abdication, the latter complains about the continuity of the monarchic system (reinstated by Franco) without consulting the population. Both forms of televisual broadcast demonstrate a similar reaction to current events. We have observed this phenomenon in the other series already discussed. And, as

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we’ll see in the next section, with the expansion of television into the internet there is a possibility for feedback as well.

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Ideally, Con el culo as well as Gabilando’s blog got “witnesses” talking through and not just visually working through the events on their screens. While TV can produce passive audiences of consumers, it also has the potential to catalyze conversations. In fact, television is a potentially safe topic at the water cooler or dining table. With programs like Con el culo, spinier, less comfortable ideas must be engaged as well. The show jesting remarks yield more than cynical chuckles or apathetic disconnection; by getting the audience to deal with trauma, imagine alternative realities, and discuss future actions, it was just what was needed.

IV. Podemos: Mass Media against the Status Quo

The left wing political party Podemos (“we can”) emerged following the protests of the Indignados or 15-M movement. Unlike in the United States where the activist energies of Occupy continued to be directed outside of traditional politics, Podemos is a radical party working within the established system. Most of its leading figures are under forty and had pursued rigorous academic study—working in the academy—before turning to politics. Podemos is led by Pablo Iglesias, who has, with his trademark ponytail and goatee, become an iconic figure in the contemporary Spanish mediascape. To a great extent, Iglesias has become a metonym for his party. Indeed, based on surveys conducted in Spain in the early history of Podemos, a greater percentage of Spaniards had heard of Iglesias than the party he represents.74 The existence of Podemos has

galvanized Spanish politics in general. The party’s visibility and name recognition have surely shifted since it became the third greatest political force in the country. In the last general elections of December 20, 2015 they won 69 seats in the Congress.

Podemos does not accept direct donations from private individuals or corporations (it finances itself via crowd funding and through micro-credits from their supporters). Instead, the media-savvy party, has concentrated on earning mediatic “capital”—using online streaming television, social media, as well as more traditional outlets to transmit their messages. Indeed, the brand new left-wing party won visibility in the media in a year and a half since its formation, which translated into success in the general elections. At the head of the media blitz is the party leader, Pablo Iglesias Turrión, who has acquired celebrity status in the Iberian nation. Beginning with a local television station and continuing onto the studios of political debate programs as well as lighter chat shows, Iglesias became an almost ubiquitous figure, occupying the airwaves and a great deal of bandwidth in Spain. He continues to grant numerous interviews. Perhaps more importantly, he has as well hosted or starred in various programs of his own—which generally consist of political debates and background information about the issues being discussed. I shall consider both Podemos and its leader’s relation to television. Through an analysis of select TV appearances and the programs they have produced (La tuerka, Fort Apache, and Otra vuelta de tuerka), I will demonstrate the importance of Podemos and television in Spain’s recent history.

Following cultural theorist Raymond Williams’s well-known analysis of television, it is necessary to complicate and nuance beliefs that the technology is either: A) one of the primary

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forces controlling human activity, or B) “a tool that human beings completely control.”\textsuperscript{76}

It is undoubtedly true that technologies can use their users, disciplining activities. As Podemos’s use of the media proves, technologies are nearly never neutral, but are not always totalizing either. There are opportunities for misuse, resistance, and play. Williams believes that technology and politics are intertwined. By extending the functions of technology beyond advertising or commercial use, an open communications system proper to “a genuine democracy” might be approached.\textsuperscript{77} Podemos’s use of television as a potent tool for democracy aligns with Williams’ notions: they reach out to a wide audience, aiming to educate people and activate them politically.

\textbf{Mixing the real person and the TV Persona: the rise of the media/tic star}

In order to properly comprehend Pablo Iglesias Turrión (1978), the public figure, some detailed biographic information is necessary. His background marks him as very different from prior generations of Spanish politicians. Iglesias, is the child and grandchild of left-wing activists; his mother, a trade union lawyer, and his father, a labor inspector and history teacher, named him after the founder of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) Partido Socialista Obrero Español (The Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party) and the Unión General de Trabajadores (General Union of Workers) (UGT) Pablo Iglesias Posse (1850-1925). The contemporary Pablo Iglesias joined the Communist Party at age 14 and remained an active member until age 21. At age 13, after his parents’ divorce, he moved with his mother to the district of Vallecas in Madrid. There he attended public high school in the nearby district of Moratalaz. Both are working class neighborhoods and


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
they have a long tradition of left-wing organizations based on them. To this day Iglesias still lives in Vallecas, in a modest apartment that his mother inherited after his great aunt’s death, which allowed him to *emanciparse* (leave home) and not have to spend a significant percentage of his income on housing which, as *Aquí, La que* and *Con el culo* portray, is one of the most difficult challenges for young adults in contemporary Spain. Podemos is very aware of the situation Spaniards face. As a matter of a fact, dignified housing for all coupled with the prevention of eviction has been one of the first and core points of Podemos elections program.

Indeed, as he is politically committed and determined to pull down and change the old hegemonic order, Iglesias fulfills many of the criteria of the “organic intellectual” theorized (perhaps even prophesized) by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Iglesias’s profile is sharply contrasts with those of figures of *la casta* (the caste): the stripe of conservative politicians he criticizes and rejects. Armed with debating skills and profound knowledge, he is much younger, possesses much more formal education, is a savvy communicator, and is familiar with new technologies. These last two elements have been key for creating his mediatic (his detractors call it messianic) persona. Like his parents, Iglesias studied law, as well as a second bachelors (*licenciatura*) in Political Science. He holds two master’s, one in humanities with a specialization in cultural studies and philosophy, and a master’s of arts in communication with a specialization in philosophy, film and psychoanalysis. He also undertook practical studies in radio, film and TV, acting, and short-filmmaking. He obtained a PhD in political science from Madrid’s Universidad Complutense, the same institution where he was a lecturer prior to his political career. There he worked part-time, primarily teaching Geopolitics, and earning an average salary of approximately

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79 See further discussion of vocabulary below.
900 euro a month. Iglesias, like many Spaniards under 40, fits into the category of “mileurista” (literally 1000 euro earner): underemployed workers with low monthly salaries.

Fluent in English, Italian and French, and the recipient of grants and fellowships to undertake research in England, Italy, Mexico, Switzerland, Bolivia and the US, his resume seems impressive. However, it is not so different from those of other founders of Podemos, such as Íñigo Errejón. Their extensive academic formation perhaps parallels that of many of their generation in Spain. A lot of young people have extended their adolescence, piling up degrees and certificates, as it was impossible for them to enter the labor force. It is important to note that in the previous Spanish government only 7.8% of deputies in the congress hold PhDs. Not a single Spanish Prime Minister has demonstrated the ability to communicate or even follow a conference in a foreign language. Former president José María Aznar and his wife, former mayor of Madrid Ana Botella, were ridiculed on television, in the congress, and in internet videos following public speeches in heavily accented, stilted English. The media similarly critiqued José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Mariano Rajoy for their inability to speak English. Capacity for foreign languages, and its associations with an outward looking, globalized worldview, distinguish the leadership of Podemos from those of “La vieja política” (old [party] politics) (such as Rajoy or Zapatero), as Iglesias usually refers to them.

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80 While this does mean Spain has a highly educated and theoretically qualified workforce, it has resulted in a kind of inflation. Candidates for positions that in the past could have been acquired with merely a licenciatura, now require hyper preparation to be competitive.
81 See Carolina Ferreiro, “¿Qué nivel de formación tienen los diputados españoles?” Mastermas.com, December 19, 2014, http://www.mastermas.com/Noticias/html/N15165_F19122014.html. The qualifications of politicians has augmented with the new government. Other parties surely felt some pressure to find candidate who could try to match Podemos’s credentials. See “¿Qué han estudiado los diputados y de qué trabajaban antes de entrar en política?” ABC.es, January 15, 2015, http://www.abc.es/espana/abci-estudiado-diputados-y-trabajaban-antes-entrar-politica-201601151512_noticia.html. There have been other leaders who have held positions in universities, such as former president José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.
82 Both speak French, as this was the most typical foreign language to learn during their formative years.
Furthermore, Iglesias is much more relaxed in manner and dresses in casual and cheap Alcampo (a sort of Spanish Target) clothes. His sartorial selections for his public performances also help to differentiate him from Spain “old party politicians”: Representatives of both the PSOE and PP typically wear suits and ties; those of Izquierda Unida (United Left), another older party, appeared with unbuttoned collars and corduroy jackets. The shift is certainly substantial, and is not exclusively related to a change of manners with the new generation.

Unlike many of the leaders in the other parties (such as Mariano Rajoy), Iglesias has not had a long career in local or national politics. Instead, he honed his skills in the classroom and with the development of academic papers. As I will describe in greater detail, he employs tactics that work in teaching in the political arena. The professor at his everyday lecture, the politician who strategically has requested to have a blackboard on set. The young left-wing activist who uses twenty-first-century technology, and a name (his own) from the ninetieth century that doesn´t need further introductions. “It was meant to be,” say right-wingers with a smirk. The media star has been born.

**New Keywords and Television as Anti-Elitist Pedagogy**

Pablo Iglesias represents a new kind of politician; and Podemos a new kind of political party. It is perhaps not surprising that in their contributions to redirect the political discourse of Spain, they have also developed a new vocabulary to more elegantly and directly address concepts they view as pressing. New meanings of a number of words have developed in relation to Podemos’s concepts have entered into wider use: “casta” (cast), “patria” (patrimony)/”patriota” (patriot), “plaza” (public square) “puertas giratorias” (literally revolving doors, but referring to politicians
entering into industry), and “zaska!” (an onomatopoeia referring to the sound of a slap on the back of the head, which has come to refer to haymakers in verbal sparring).

The shift in language in contemporary Spain is quite similar to that Raymond Williams observed in Post-War England. The cultural critic noted that different sectors of society used English in such a way, it was almost as if “they just d[id]n’t speak the same language.” Williams argues that in moments of intense and important change, such as war or financial crisis, the meanings of particular words are “tested” and altered. “Keywords” is the term he arrived at for a selection of words he believed particularly fraught and charged. The above list of terms similarly consists of keywords in contemporary Spain: “they are significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation; they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought.”

Using television and social media Podemos has popularized the keywords. Indicative of their success and the extension of the changes in thought the party has provoked, other media outlets have as well circulated many of the terms along with their definitions. Indeed to a certain extent Podemos has re-educated the population by changing the significance and frequency of certain elements of language.

The first term, casta, rapidly became a short hand for the entrenched politicians and economic elites that Podemos saw themselves opposing. The party largely stopped using the word

83 Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 11.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid, 15.
about seven months ago, as they believed it was sufficiently diffused that it was no longer necessary for them to emphasize it, but instead should develop new terms for the changing circumstances: they had “podemosizado” (“podemosized”) Spain according to Íñigo Errejón, the party’s second in command. Revealing that it has continued to circulate, the word appeared on a list of important terms of 2015 issued by El País. Indeed, their opponents have employed the terms (tacitly legitimating Podemos’s inflection), claiming that they are conservative but not “casta.”

Other terms, such as “plaza”—a reference to the public squares occupied by the 15-M movement—to mean an open public discussion have been adopted by the PP too.

In the past year, Podemos’s leadership have moved toward shifting and reclaiming another piece of fraught linguistic terrain. Patria is a term very much associated with Francoism. Indeed, towards the end of the dictatorship (1973) “todo por la patria” (all for the fatherland) became the slogan of the armed forces and civil guard. The word was reclaimed in 2009; it formed part of the title of a series of essays by historian Josep M. Fradera about the history of Catalonia: La pàtria dels catalans. Podemos shifts the term to suggest that it can refer to a common history and the imagined community of “common” Spaniards. Iglesias claims himself a patriot as well, implying not that he is blindly nationalist, but instead that he truly has the best interests of the nation and its citizens in mind. Because of the word’s powerful associations with the dictatorship, parties on the

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87 Errejón quoted in Rubio Hancock.
88 In an article penned in the popular news outlet 20Minutes.es by an unsympathetic journalist, the term is defined as a “simplista y carlschmittiana” (simplistic and “carl-schmittian”) understanding of political opponents as enemies. The fact that their language prompted him to drop in with almost no explanation the adjective form of the political thinker Schmitt—not a figure who is well known by the general population—signals the richness of ideas associated with Podemos’s language. Their interest in Schmitt’s concepts is due to Chantal Mouffe’s affirmation that sublimating ideas of “friend” and “enemy” into political ally vs adversary (though not keeping these categories as static absolutes) can be useful for the practice of politics. See Nacho Segurado, “El diccionario de Podemos: los conceptos fetiche del partido, desde la ‘casta’ a los ‘círculos,’” 20minutos.es, October 20, 2014.
left and right have previously avoided it. By returning *patria* to political discourse, there is a potential to short circuit opponents thought processes and arguments. Their detractors are surely confused when they initially hear it and then might be pressed to suggest that they are the “real” patriots—linking them to fascism.

Members of the PP generally employ the capitalist inflected “*marca España*” (Spain brand) as well as “*gran nación española*” (great Spanish nation) to refer to the nation-state and its citizenry.90 Equally, Podemos’s introduction of terms could be seen as a tactical mimicry of marketing and branding activities. Perhaps rather like the way Starbucks prompts customers to align with the brand by performing their language—using their distinct sizes of beverage, rather than the standard “small,” “medium,” “large”—we might consider the introduction of new language a subtle form of coercion or control against the status quo. Of course, not all forms of authority and behavioral control are as worrying as they may initially sound. Nearly all texts (academic or popular) try to convince their readers or viewers of something, changing their minds and prompting their audience to take new stances. Perhaps more than any other realm, the classroom is a site where new, specialized vocabulary is introduced in order to inculcate a disciplinary (maybe even disciplined) worldview all in the name of aiding understanding and forwarding knowledge.

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The leaders in the party, accustomed to teaching, bring pedagogy to the small screen. Podemos’s roots are very much in Madrid’s Universidad Complutense. Aligning with Williams’s notions about television’s political potentialities, Podemos deftly uses the mass media. The party’s most visible faces in the media have been Iglesias, Ínigo Errejón and Juan Carlos Monedero, the

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three of them Political Science professors at the aforementioned university. Thus, in a way their political activities are just an extension of the professional activities in their daily routines. It is no accident that Pablo Iglesias ended being the primary face of the party. With his studies in film, media, and acting, and being half professor, half lawyer, he does in front of the cameras what he does behind them: he educates his audience, both building arguments to convince them and arming them with information to convince others.91

From the beginning of their entrée into the political sphere, the PSOE and PP have “accused” Pablo Iglesias and Podemos of being very good communicators, “... son muy buenos hablando.” Invoking high culture in her put down (Troilus and Cressida), Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, the vice president of the PP, states: “Algunos hacen un discurso muy fácil. Shakespeare decía las palabras no pagan las deudas” (some [of our opponents] produce facile discourse. As Shakespeare said, words pay no debts).92 This “recrimination” is probably hard to believe for an American audience, since good communication skills are not just desirable, but effectively the norm for any candidate running for the White House. However, this is a quality that Spanish politicians have not always shown as being their forte, since traditionally Spain’s education system has always been oriented towards promoting writing rather than speaking skills. Although Podemos certainly does not reject literacy, they do appeal to orality. The back-handed comment that they are “well-spoken” implies both that working class people cannot normally express themselves and enables their detractors to avoid actually engaging the content of the effectively delivered remarks. Moreover, the maneuver to “smear” Podemos’s silver tongues is

91 According to Iglesias, the idea that the information he provides could be used by militants in the party in informal debates is an important goal. See Iglesias, “En Clave Podemos,” Fort Apache, 52:24, April 24, 2015, https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=t74enbM4mQI.
couching in attempts to portray them either as charlatans, or elitists because of their extensive academic formation.

An exemplary instance of Iglesias’s pedagogical skills comes in one of his many appearances on “La calle pregunta” ([people on] the street ask).93 This is a weekly TV show that airs in prime time every Saturday night at 9:30 pm on La Sexta channel. The most prominent figures of the national political arena have attended, from well-known judges such as Baltasar Garzón to the current Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy. During the program a number of regular citizens ask them questions live and in person for over 30 minutes (supposedly they have not been fed pre-prepared questions and are drawn from the general public). Rather than brand Iglesias a populist, it would be better to understand as anti-elitist: his clear, direct style of communication is accessible to many.

In the November 11, 2015 edition of the show, the head of Podemos answers questions, giving exact figures and explaining how he would reduce the cost of electricity and why he thinks that a monopoly has been sustained in this industry over time. Former prime ministers, such as Felipe González and José María Aznar, joined the board of directors of energy companies after retiring from their positions in the government. Retaining many contacts in the government, they were able to negotiate deals that were beneficial for their companies at the public’s detriment, which has been highly criticized by Podemos. Iglesias uses simple and direct language, and terms that he has popularized to describe this phenomena. The keyword here is the very graphic “puertas giratorias” (revolving doors), which references the action of retiring from politics and joining a board of directors of a company, or similar position, creating a situation of conflict of interest.

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penalized by law.\textsuperscript{94} The lawyer-professor orally presents the main elements of his answer, numbers and the term “board of directors,” while writing them on a blackboard. The gesture of exposition of ideas on a blackboard is not very common in the show, since right after his intervention the moderator felt compelled to say he was the first one to use this didactic tool.

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But political debate shows are not the only type of TV programs that the leader of Podemos appears on; the party makes sure to get the widest array of audiences possible. Iglesias has been extensively interviewed by TV anchors as different as Risto Mejide and Ana Rosa Quintana. Mejide (inclined to moderate left-wing ideas) conducts “\textit{Al rincón de pensar}” (To the thinking corner) (Antena 3 TV), and “\textit{Viajando con Chester}” (Travelling with Chester) (Cuatro TV) primetime one-to-one programs that center on interviews with the most relevant personalities of contemporary Spain. These shows got, respectively, a share of 12.4\% and 14.5\% of viewers with Iglesias’s presence. According to the Wikipedia entry on Podemos, this final appearance, broadcast in September of 2014, was the most watched in prime time, with almost three million viewers.\textsuperscript{95}

Ana Rosa, a Spanish Oprah Winfrey copycat, got a share of 17.1\% when she spent “24 hours with Pablo Iglesias”, even when they did not talk much politics. Unlike Mejide, Quintana, is a right-wing personality whose target audience is mostly housewives. Ana Rosa went on a walking and jogging tour of Iglesias’ native Vallecas. He showed her, for the first time in the media, his modest inherited apartment, which had been mentioned in the press since the beginning of his foray into the political arena. It is important to note that the other candidates for prime

\textsuperscript{94} There is an extensive Wikipedia entry just for the political meaning of “puertas giratorias.” There is also a NGO called the same (http://www.puertasgiratorias.org/), which denounces the numerous cases of right and left–wing Spanish politicians that have crossed the line of legality through the revolving doors).

\textsuperscript{95} Wikipedia, s.v. “Podemos (partido político),” https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podemos_%28partido_pol%C3%ADtico%29, 2015.
minister also shared a full day with Quintana. The four shows were broadcasted within ten days of each other in September of 2015. Like Iglesias, the other candidates were accompanied by Ana Rosa’s crew for part of their daily routine and shown at their respective party headquarters.

However, none of the other candidates showed their own homes, which are probably more lavish inside and, at the very least, located in less humble neighborhoods. Seeing the politicians’ domestic stability and comfort might prove upsetting to see for spectators whose own dwellings are less luxurious or have been repossessed. The other candidates were surely concerned about “escrache,” a practice that emerged in the crisis in which aggrieved citizens camped out in front of politicians’ homes and loudly censured the inhabitants. As a further reaction to this popular critical tactic, at the end of June 2015 a gag law limiting certain kinds of speech was approved by the PP-dominated government.

Rivera, Rajoy, and Sánchez got, respectively, a share of 17%, 16.5% and 15.4%. Participating in these shows does not only give Iglesias an incredible amount of visibility, but also a kind of prestige: only the most relevant people of contemporary Spain (politicians, celebrities, artists) get invited to these programs. By dint of appearing on the air, framed by the same programs, Iglesias transmits the idea that he is as legitimate a politician as any of the other candidates from the older parties. All of the coverage surely augments the politician’s “mediaura.” It seems as though Iglesias has tactically reverse engineered a process similar to that which enabled movie stars like Ronald Reagan or Arnold Schwarzenegger to succeed in the US. While purely being mediatic is insufficient, having an awareness of the value of television, print journalism, radio, and assorted new media forms is necessary to broadcast a set of ideas is essential: in order to reprogram politics, it is necessary to change the direction of discourse in programming the public consumes.
Podemos Produced Programming: the Guest becomes Host

Podemos does not only rely on being invited to mainstream TV to get their message out to the average Spaniard. Indeed, even before the party had officially taken off, figures who would become key members were discussing issues pertinent to 15-M on the airwaves. They have their own interview platforms and political debate shows. They broadcast via two platforms: on small TV channels and YouTube. Thus, while it is televisual, the internet platform enables a far wider range of spectators to access the streams of content. Many episodes of their programs have watch numbers in the hundreds of thousands. The net effect is something that might resemble “going viral.”

YouTube very much works with the intermediate logic that Williams identified for traditional TV; it is neither a totally user determined technology nor does it yield total control of users by technological determination.96 The platform does generate profits via the regular advertisements that algorithmically tailored to fit the viewer’s taste. These publicity spots are insinuated into the flow of broadcast information—though usually only for five to fifteen seconds if the visitor clicks a button. The open-source liberalism of YouTube means that a wide range of its users can produce and post content. It is not quite the same as what Walter Benjamin imagined for the revolutionary newspaper in his classic “Author as Producer”—in which the reader could be activated in order to become a writer—but in many ways not so far removed.97 All of the content Podemos produced as well as interviews with key figures, especially Iglesias, on other channels can be found on the video streaming site too.

In contrast to supporters of the right, the generally younger followers of Podemos as well possess computer skills that have further yielded increased YouTube visibility for the group and augmented Iglesias’s mediaura. There are many “fan videos”—montages resembling those produced for celebrities hailing from the realm of television and pop music. There are particularly amusing videos that show Iglesias providing a rapid riposte to verbal jabs from an opponent accompanied by the term “¡zaska!” It is worth noting that the onomatopoeic word, common in colloquial language and comic books, is included by El País in the list of ten words that have acquired relevance in Spain’s social and political life during the year of 2015.  

In all of the programs Podemos has created, Iglesias has played the role of moderator or interviewer, largely allowing others voice to opine on historic and contemporary political situations despite the fact he exerted some control over the shape of the conversation. I will analyze the opening of La Tuerka, as well as the opening and format of Fort Apache as an example, although there are other programs such as Otra vuelta de tuerka y En clave de tuerka. They all take between one hour and an hour and a half.

Like with the sitcoms, the scenes that accompany opening credits serve as an introduction to the programs and prime spectators for the content they are about to view. Hence, analysis of this section of the show is particularly illuminating and enables us to comprehend the ostensible and tacit goals of the creators. The opening credits for La Tuerka are quite minimalist and short with a limited dark color palette. From a variety of different angles they show a man and a woman dressed in black and grey tone t-shirts setting up the stage. Hence, rather than glorify the figures who are about to speak, the introduction makes visible the labor of the TV crew. In addition, the site where

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the debate will occur comes into focus: by opposing two vacant chairs—there is an emphasis on an open space and a potentiality to fill it with free political discourse.

Conversely, *Fort Apache*’s opening is more elaborate and richly layered. The program co-opts its name from a mid-twentieth century Hollywood Western. It commences with a cinematic action sequence of sorts. While Spanish rap music plays in the background, we see a lone biker—a kind of mash up of Mad Max, Michael Knight, and James Dean—this rebel *with a cause* appears to be a larger-than-life, action hero version of Iglesias.99 He looks back toward the city of Madrid from the periphery, an indeterminate place that looks very similar (and very well could be) the location where *Con el culo* is located: an appropriate position for a post-crisis subject. We can see a close-up shot of his eyes with piercing in his right eyebrow, a piercing that, as Iglesias has admitted in interviews, he no longer wears in order to appeal to a wider spectrum of possible voters.100 Slung on his back is a compound bow, which, based on the top hat in the logo for the program, is going to be put to use targeting the *casta*. The decision to shoot the iconic introduction as if it were a film surely owes much to Iglesias’s own audio-visual theories. While his mind has perhaps been changed in the last years, he argues (in 2013) that “la estética propia del lenguaje cinematográfico puede alcanzar niveles de valor epistémico mucho mayores que los del resto de la cultura audiovisual” (the inherent aesthetic of cinematic language can reach an epistemic value far higher than that of other forms of audiovisual culture).101 Thus, by associating the program with cinema, *Fort Apache* gains in gravity.

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99 It is notable that hip-hop soundtracks—rather than the folk or rock music associated with older counter-cultures—also accompanied many YouTube videos related to the Occupy Movement.  
The format of the *Fort Apache* changes slightly from chapter to chapter, but it is generally not so different to the type of political debate program that has become increasingly popular in Spain. As it is particularly relevant, I will use “*En clave podemos*” (Podemos in depth) as a case study, since the episode involves a discussion of the new party as a phenomenon. Iglesias moderates the spoken exchanges and briefly introduces each episode’s topic (sections presenting key concepts that float free of the debate on YouTube). He then introduces the four guests of the night: Eric Juliana, journalist from the *La Vanguardia* newspaper; Yolanda Már mol, from the paper *El Periódico de Cataluña*; Manolo Moned eo, a politician from Izquierda Unida; and Jacobo Ribero, writer. Each is given a minute to introduce his or her points of view on the subject, which is the same amount of time they are given at the end to summarize their ideas and, in this particular episode, express their recommendations for the future to the moderator and leader of the party. The guests behave in the same manner the moderator does when he is in their place: they do not yell and they never interrupt each other. The tone is serious, but there is no tension in the air; nobody gets frayed nerves. The interventions are quite long (longer than in the debates in commercial TV) and there are no advertisements. We could say that the show, in comparison with the commercial ones, is more of a middlebrow intellectual conversation than a typical political debate. The lack of need to create a “spectacle” or “to put on a show” is in all likelihood based on the fact that the continuity of the program does not depend on sponsors and they are not under the pressure to get a certain share.

Half-way through *Fort Apache*, they interrupt the back and forth with a clip of the philosopher Slavoj Zizek, who explains that “the left did not yet really fully assumed the fact that the twentieth century is over… all three formulas or organizational principles of the twentieth

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century left [do not work]: state socialism, social democracy, and anti-state local organization.\textsuperscript{103} After listening to the Slovenian philosopher we get an unusual moment of ironic sense of humor and self-reflection in this kind of TV shows. A 30-second sketch in which three actors dressed as caricatures of the founders of Podemos—Iglesias, Errejón, and Juan Carlos Monedero—appear watching a Spanish political debate show. The camera is located behind a TV they are watching. The room is messy and stuffed with books, from the table in front of the characters to the floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with them. There is a whiteboard with writing in it in the corner. We do not see the screen of their TV, just the faces of the three professors focused on it. We hear different political commentators yelling, but rather than words they just make sounds: a metaphor for basic language, which is very expressive, but does not provide with any actual information. Errejón’s character then states, looking satisfied: “See, politics debates have actually changed a lot since we came into the scene”—a self-aware allusion to the limited impact they might have within the current political system or “formula,” as just mentioned by Zizek.\textsuperscript{104}

Iglesias, as he explains himself, plays a slightly different character depending on the program he appears on.\textsuperscript{105} In \textit{Fort Apache}, just like in the other ones he conduces, he does not speak much and lets the guests be the center of the conversation. In “En clave Podemos” Iglesias the moderator is mellow and relaxed, despite the fact he confesses that he does not to feel totally at ease that day—since the topic to be discussed at the table is the party he leads. One consistent mode of acting Iglesias has developed is not “frown[ing] while telling people off”; in an interview

\textsuperscript{103} Slavoj Zizek in ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Errejón in ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Iglesias in ibid.
with Risto Mejide, he tells the journalist that he considers doing this detrimental to the image he wants to communicate to possible voters and that he tries to avoid it.\textsuperscript{106}

The “En clave Podemos” episode of \textit{Fort Apache}, which as of January 1, 2016, has been reproduced 28,774 times on YouTube, starts with a brief and totally didactic introduction. In his introductory remarks Iglesias presents three notions encapsulated in three quotes: the first from Antonio Gramsci (“\textit{En ciertos momentos de su vida histórica los grupos sociales se separan de sus partidos tradicionales... La crisis de hegemonía de la clase dirigente}” [in certain moments of their history social groups separate from their traditional parties...[provoking] the crisis of hegemony of the ruling class]), the second by Ernesto Laclau (“\textit{Todo cambio político en un sentido progresista pasa por constituir al pueblo como actor colectivo... Demandas individuales que confluyen en imágenes comunes}...” [all political change in a progressive sense occur in order to construct the population as a collective actor...individual demands flow into common imaginaries]), and the last from Perry Anderson (“\textit{El único punto de partida concebible hoy para una izquierda realista consiste en tomar conciencia de la derrota histórica}” [today the only conceivable position for a realist left consists of being aware of the left’s historical failures]).\textsuperscript{107}

Each thinker’s words help explain and define the historical circumstances that provoked the creation of Podemos and continue to guide the party. Citing authors and theorists is a usual gesture at a university lecture, but it is not so typical to incorporate what almost amount to “epigraphs” in the more mainstream media. Thus, while it is perhaps only the sound-bite versions, Podemos

\textsuperscript{106} Pablo Iglesias in Viajando con Chester, “Pablo Iglesias - Viajando con Chester," \textit{Viajando con Chester} video, 38:05, September 28, 2014, \url{http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x26t8l_pablo-iglesias-viajando-con-chester-programa-completo_webcam}.

\textsuperscript{107} Gramsci, Laclau, Anderson quoted in \textit{Fort Apache}, “En Clave Podemos,” \textit{Fort Apache} video, April 24, 2015, \url{https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=t74enbM4mQI}. 
makes “high-brow” academic ideas accessible to the general populous. The names of thinkers typically only uttered in college classrooms and conference halls gain traction in other settings. At one point Iglesias explains the creation of two public personas (and the contradiction it could imply), the “enfant terrible” who won a place in mainstream politics by participating in polemical TV debates versus the more dignified leader who must be seen (and imagined) as a future prime minister. He admits that creating the mediatic character provided him with the opportunity to gain “más televisión, más minutos” (more television, more minutes), in sum, the visibility the party needed to have their breakthrough and run in the elections for European Parliament. He also states that from the beginning, the party was very aware that TV was the place to communicate and send their messages from. He felt that gaining airtime on network television was even more crucial than emitting content on the internet and social media, which have been important supplements to the messages transmitted on television. All his guests agree that the Spanish political arena has changed as a consequence of the arrival of Podemos and the way they use new technology. Journalists Manolo Monereo and Henric Juliana call Podemos “el partido de internet” (the internet party). Indeed, while the common, synchronized spectatorship of Iglesias on broadcast television helped to establish him as a national figure, the deferred viewings of the programs online quite literally counted the hardcore followers of the party. In a sense, the number of hits on the video streaming site—more than TV ratings—functions as a kind of poll. It moreover, enables spectators to feel they are part of a mass movement: tens of thousands of others have clicked their way to watch the same figures and learn about the same ideas.

108 See note 88.
109 Iglesias in Fort Apache, “En Clave Podemos,” Fort Apache video, April 24, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t74enbM4mQI.
Iglesias explains that Podemos developed their media strategy during *La Tuerka*’s inchoate moments, when they examined weekly what was happening around 15-M.110 According to Podemos’s leader, there was a fair amount of trial and error when choosing what to circulate in the media (on YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter, etc.) in order to create a reaction. Iglesias believed television was the most important way of presenting ideas, primarily because the oral exposition of arguments could serve spectators as a kind of model: the TV show gave people the instruments to debate in their own circles, in “el bar, en la cola de la pescadería, en el instituto” (in the bar, in the fishmarket line, in the high school).

While practice has helped them move toward perfection, Podemos has also borrowed practical and theoretical ideas from many other sources. Iglesias’s selection of guests for one-on-one interviews in *Otra vuelta de tuerka* make clear inspiration and origins of Podemos’s use of the media as well as many their tenets. For instance, the episode with 45,029 views in which he talks with vice-president of Bolivia Álvaro García Linera is particularly revealing. García Linera is almost a mirror image of Pablo Iglesias or Íñigo Errejón. The Bolivian politician spent seven years in prison for his political beliefs. Afterwards he was invited to lecture at university and he started a small television show, which he notes is much like Iglesias’s, because “Tenía que hablar en la tele. Yo sabía que tenía que hablar en la tele” (I had to speak on TV. I knew that I had to speak on TV).111 Upon hearing this directly from a man he clearly admires, a pleased Iglesias responds: “el campo de batalla ideológico son los medios de comunicación, claro” (of course; the ideological battlefield is the mass media).112

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110 Ibid.
The name Chantal Mouffe is rarely heard outside of academic and cultural institutions. Nevertheless, surely indicative of an interest and appreciation of her ideas, the political theorist’s appearance on Otra vuelta de tuerka has garnered 57,750 views.\footnote{The interview with Mouffe is conducted totally in Spanish; thus, the content is not accessible to the Anglophone audience already most familiar with her work and ideas.} The fact that she co-authored the book Construir pueblo. Hegemonía y radicalización de la democracia with Errejón surely added to her appeal amongst the members of Podemos. Once again Podemos’s programming exposes a broader audience to ideas that are normally cooped up in the ivory tower. Mouffe, along with her collaborator the now-deceased Laclau, is one of the primary reference authors for Podemos. Mouffe and Iglesias discuss how the left has traditionally wanted to detach their discourse from “las pasiones” (the emotional), which is not the right approach according to the Belgian theorist.\footnote{Chantal Mouffe in Otra vuelta de tuerka, “Pablo Iglesias con Chantal Mouffe,” Otra vuelta de tuerka video, 53:32, February 15, 2015, https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=BX55zqijfA4.} Moreover, Mouffe’s ideas about politics as necessarily agonistic, consisting of a rhetorical battle between adversaries who strike distinct positions—but respect the rules of civil society—has guided Podemos’s censure of the casta. The various figures that participate in the programs conducted by Iglesias do not always agree; and hence, we might think that one of his achievements is opening up a space for a democratic interaction of the agonistic variety theorized by Chantal Mouffe. Fort Apache quite literally provide images of what democracy should look like. Further aligning with Mouffe’s recommendations, at the beginning of Podemos as a party, they determined that is was necessary to try to overcome the apathy and disgust many people in Spain felt about the political system. Podemos hoped to re-energize the political arena so that citizens who were fed up with the two primary parties would “recuperar la ilusión por la política” (regain faith in politics).
In his interview with Mouffe, Iglesias affirms that it has increasingly been important for him not think in terms of left and right, as this reproduces the parameters of an already established system in which “the house always wins.”¹¹⁵ He does not believe it useful to be defined by the terms of an old paradigm. Instead, he holds that it is better to think in terms of below and above—and to move against those who wield power within the hegemonic order. Similarly, rather than use the previously established modes of acquiring political capital, Podemos have blurred high and low forms of culture to establish something new. Mirroring the operations of the new keywords they have popularized, Podemos have also helped to reimagined Spain with new audiovisuals. By taking over the airwaves, intervening in the public sphere, they have been able to reprogram Spanish politics.

V. Conclusion: From Complicity to Action

“Too often puritanical Marxism throws out the baby of pleasure with the bathwater of ideology” affirms film theorist Robert Stam.¹¹⁶ Stam holds that cultural forms can simultaneously “appeal to deeply rooted but social frustrated aspirations—for new, pleasurable forms…for solidarity, for festivity, for community…”¹¹⁷ Certainly, the television programs I have discussed in this paper to greater or lesser degrees succeed in providing audiences with a pleasurable product. As I hope has become clearer, the fact that a cultural form is enjoyable to digest does not mean it can be dismissed as merely facile entertainment: instead TV can help to build collectives with political potential.

¹¹⁶ Robert Stam, Subversive Pleasures (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 238. Thank you to Kenneth Yanes for bringing this text to my attention.
¹¹⁷ Ibid.
John Ellis affirms that “television’s very use of narrative forms pushes them towards an openness that in many other media would be intolerable.” Programs like *Con el culo, Aquí, Fort Apache*, and, to a more limited degree, *La que*, all provide a surplus of material to consider. As the series reproduce (week to week in some cases) the events that are occurring in the political and social spheres of contemporary Spain, real world shifts guide the flows of their plots, dialogues, and primary talking points: they refract and reflect contemporary conditions. Ellis further argues that television as well as photography and cinema: “introduced a new modality of perception into the world, that of witness... confront[ing] us with much more about the wider world than previous generations had encountered.” Each of the programs enables a certain kind of “working through” of contemporary conditions. In the case of the sitcoms, contemporary challenges become risible when portrayed on the small screen—in some cases providing an opportunity for mastery over events out of our control, they enable spectators to have a better grasp on the present, as it is reworked, chewed over, and represented in distinct ways before their eyes. It is important to remember the limits as well and not to mistakenly over-value this process and confuse the effects of working through with social services. Witnessing the absurdity and cruelty of the real-estate system does not provide roofs over people’s heads. The purpose of TV channels is not to necessarily provide public service. Instead they usually require high ratings to exist.

Discussing British programs that dealt with a housing crisis in that country’s era of scarcity, Ellis notes that witnessing a televisual version of the material conditions endured by fellow citizens can yield results. He argues that although seeing myriad TV images can harden spectators, viewing events on television also makes us feel somehow complicit in them: “a sense of complicity that

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118 Ellis, 82.
119 Ibid., 10.
lurks within the experience of witness could sometimes bring about positive action.”120 Additionally, the high ratings mean that the shows I have discussed are producing connections between spectators, who feel that they have something in common by dint of their shared, simultaneous activity. Imagined communities, the type of polity described by Benedict Anderson predicated on common experiences of texts, might form with the TV audience as well.121 Thus, although it is difficult to prove a direct correlation, programs representing the difficulties many Spaniards are facing surely contribute to collective outrage about living conditions and sympathy toward anti-eviction activism. Given the possibility of feeling complicit in the broken system, the sentiments of anger surely translated into votes for change at the polls.

The process of working through that televisual representation can achieve is “an important in an age that threatens to make us witness to too much information without providing us with enough explanation.”122 Surely pedagogy as well aids in sifting through the deluge of data and helps turn it into knowledge. Podemos’s programs and their leadership’s TV appearances work to help spectators make sense of the climate they live in—rather than feel powerless in the face of economic and political systems seem beyond the control of the average citizen. Exposure to new information prompts us to shift our views of the world ever so slightly: pedagogy is ultimately a matter of positioning—maneuvers that carry political implications. Podemos’s programming, seen by a multitude of outraged citizens, has resulted in a collective striking of positions, one that has reprogramed the government.

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120 Ellis, 46.
122 Ellis, 79.
All of the series I have discussed are valuable documents for determining shifting interests and tastes in society. They provide a snapshot of Spanish society. If one purpose of academic study is to comprehend societies past and present via close interpretations of their culture, it is imperative that we do not solely focus on the cultural forms of social or economic elites. Many in the academy are still reticent to accept the objects of cultural studies as legitimate. We can only hope that this process of democracy buoyed by the mass media and the results of the recent elections help academics see the importance of culture that is not so much popular as anti-elitist. The study of television is a field that should concern more intellectuals, not just those who have backgrounds similar to those of Podemos’s central figures.


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