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Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas' chapter on 'Gender and sexuality in Post-Franco cinema' in *Contemporary Spanish Cinema* begins by stating that 'Spanish cinema is known for producing explicit images (of both sex and violence) more than most other contemporary European countries' (1998: 112). Sophia Petrillo, the oldest lady in Susan Harris' North American sitcom *The Golden Girls*, could not have read Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, but seems to agree when she claims: 'If you look for surreal drama, go and see a French film; if you look for [...] old ladies with stiff faces, see a British film; [...] if you look for sex, see a Spanish *film*'. From Vicente Aranda's works (including his most internationally successful film, *Amantes/Lovers*, 1991) to Bigas Luna and Almodóvar's filmography, Spanish cinema has projected, both nationally and internationally, the idea that screening sex is, or can be, part of its agenda. Thus, few spectators will be surprised if an explicit sex scene is found at some point (something that would be less expected in a Hollywood production). High-profile films such as *Lucía y el sexo/Sex and Lucia* (Médem, 2001) and *Mentiras y gordas/Sex, Parties and Lies* (Albacete and Menkes, 2009) seemingly have reiterated this inclination to provide overt, sometimes gratuitous and even unusual images of sex.

This proliferation of explicit images can be located during the Transition to Democracy. In a relatively recent television interview, *destape*<sup>1</sup> star Susana Estrada complained that:

What we [the actresses of the 1970s] used to do was no more than what actresses do today [...] but we were insulted and never respected [when, in fact] we were the one who opened the flood gate for future film-maker to express themselves freely.

(*Qué tiempo tan feliz*, 13 November 2010)

Estrada's comments on her work suggest that sexual discourses and representations in contemporary Spanish cinema have been largely determined by the pioneering films in which she participated. This chapter studies the legacy of the erotic cinema of the Transition in contemporary representations of sex in Spanish film-making. In order to do so, it focuses on two films that examine the Transition to Democracy as the time in which sex was first presented in Spanish film. It analyses two modes of representation of sex that can be associated with the erotic cinema of the late and post-Franco years, and which have helped to determine contemporary representations. First, *Torremolinos 73* (Berger, 2003) is studied in order to explore how the arrival of

explicit images of sex coincided with technological advances in film-making, thus continuing a tendency that has had various manifestations in cinemas of different nationalities. Second, the film *Los años desnudos/ Rated R* (Sabroso and Ayaso, 2008) is taken as an example of the re-elaboration of the body and sound landscapes that took place in the sexploitation cinema of the 1970s.

## **Screening Eroticism and Film Techniques**

Recent works on the uneasy relationships between sex and on-screen representation have insisted on the importance of film techniques in order to understand the chronological (albeit swinging) advances in the portrayal of sex in cinema. Linda Williams noticed this in her seminal *Screening Sex*, which is based on the premise that:

[S]ex is an act and more or less of 'it' may be revealed but [...] it is not a stable truth that cameras and micro phone s either 'catch' or don't catch. It is a constructed, mediated, performed act and every revelation is also a concealment that leaves something to the imagination.

(2008: 2)

Following Williams, Krzywinska analyses how 'cinematic sex is interwoven into a matrix of industrial, economic, social and cultural factors' (2006: 4). Krzywinska analyses the gradual liberalization of American cinema as far as the representation of sex is concerned. She concludes that the most relevant advances have come at times when new technologies were changing film-making, and even threatening its status as society's primary source of entertainment. Krzywinska, like Williams, is profoundly interested in how the formal features of a film play a crucial role in the ways that cinematic sex and sexual themes acquire their meanings and shapes: therefore, she analyses lighting, focus, editing, acting, music and camera styles in order to decode how meaning and values of cinematic sex are highly dependent on film techniques and their very machinery (cameras, lenses). She looks at the American comedies of the 1950s in which there was 'a great deal of (pillow) talk about sex, but this [was] not matched by what is seen' (2006: 9). Krzywinska goes on to study the melodramas of the late 1950s, such as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Brooks, 1958), which were made when Hollywood feared the expansion of television, and saw sex as the best of all possible hooks to attract a potentially evasive audience:

Hollywood's move into more overt sexual realms can therefore be linked to a crisis in the film industry, which went hand in hand with a shift in regulatory and censorship protocols. The use of sexual sensationalism to sell such films, which like many exploitation films of the era have far less sexual content than their advertising suggests, can be seen in the posters.

(2006: 14)

Although Krzywinska never refers to Spanish sexploitation films, her words can be applied to cinematic models from the Transition. As in Hollywood, censorship regulations gradually had relaxed in Spain, until their disappearance in 1976. Similarly, most sexploitation films promised more sex than they actually delivered; moreover, advances in film techniques were to arrive and reshape models and practices of film-making, as will be discussed below.

The film *Torremolinos 73* tells the story of Carmen (Candela Peña) and Alfredo (Javier Cámara), who live on his pathetic salary as a door-to-door encyclopedia salesperson. When his boss Carlos (Juan Diego) tells them that there is an 'easier' way to make money - if they are willing to be filmed while having sex - they decide to give it a try. Carmen's unfulfilled wishes to become a mother contribute to her agreement. However, as they film more and more sex films, Alfredo becomes interested in this new profession (both for him and the rest of Spanish society, as the film clarifies at many points), as well as in the technical aspects of it.

*Torremolinos 73*'s concern with the technologies of cinema can be seen from the very first scenes. The film works with various metaphors that aim to represent the changing tendencies of the Transition, suggesting that they were not transitional at all, but instead very brusque and sudden. Carmen and Alfredo are seen reading encyclopedias in bed, while the show *La familia Telerín* is aired on their black-and-white television. This show, easily recognizable, is clearly associated with Francoist television and even values, as the Telerín family is an obvious expression of the 'Large Family' policy of the dictatorship. The same can be said about the encyclopedias that Alfredo sells and reads while lying in bed with Carmen. This works on two different levels: first, these thick and unwieldy books are compared to the new ways of buying knowledge as advertised on television, through 'los fascículos' or the serialized publication of books. Second, this scene is to be compared with subsequent moments in the film in which the couple employ the bed for very different purposes, thus

presenting sex as the modern, new substitute for the everyday life of married people. In case there is any doubt, Carlos states it clearly: 'Door-to-door encyclopedias salesmen are going to disappear.' Alfredo's sexual life (apparently limited to reading encyclopedias with his wife) will disappear very soon too, and be incorporated into the film industry.

One more representation of the contrast between the vanishing past and forthcoming technological times can be seen later, when Alfredo is presented with a Super 8 camera. Previously, the audience and the characters in the film have been introduced to Super 8 screening via a short film in which a Swedish entrepreneur explains the success of pornographic films. This man, dressed as a scientist, presents some facts about sex and sexology. Carlos explains: 'The sales for the serialized *Audiovisual Encyclopedia of Sex* have broken all the records.' Immediately afterwards, another pertinent character is introduced: Eric (Tom Jacobsen). He is a Swedish film director who is going to teach Alfredo how to use the technical devices, and will be a source of inspiration when Alfredo starts taking his profession seriously.

The sequence presenting the Super 8 camera is relevant both in terms of the representation of sexuality, and from the viewpoint of the film's narrative virtuosity. While Eric is teaching Alfredo the endless possibilities of new filmmaking, Eric's wife, Frida (Marie-Ann Jespersen), is teaching Carmen how sex is performed on-screen. While Eric asks: 'What is this?' as he holds a Super 8 camera - and answers himself: 'It is your eye' - Frida is explaining to Carmen how to undress cinematically. The film's very clever editing introduces a fast-speed soundtrack that accompanies Carmen's striptease and Alfredo's manipulation of the different parts of the camera; in doing this, both actions are combined and a very clear association is established. This new machine, with its many tiny parts (which Alfredo is putting together), will soon capture Carmen's body. As she drops the clothes she is taking off, Alfredo is building the technical apparatus that will capture his wife's body, and the fact that each piece of her clothing comes off as each part of the camera goes in highlights the connections between the creation of cinematic sex and the technological tools that it requires.

Additionally, while Frida invites Carmen to be totally naked, Alfredo inserts the tiniest parts into the camera. He then proudly displays the recording device, while Carmen, semi-naked, kisses the religious image she carries on her necklace: everything is almost ready for the full exposé, and the editing compares the new technological advances with Spain's traditional Catholicism.

Eric's voice-over names the different parts of the camera, while Carmen takes her bra off. 'I'm going to teach you two or three things', says Frida to Carmela, as she starts a striptease which includes most of the cinematic conventions associated with this ritual since the times of *Gilda* (Vidor, 1946), a film that has an unusually prominent place in the collective Spanish imagination. Frida shakes her head sensually, so that her hair looks wilder; she raises her hands above her head, and so on. Frida makes clear that these are the conventions that an average Spanish woman of the 1970s had not been taught. The implications here are crystal clear: both technology (presented here as exclusively masculine) and the performance of sex on-screen (feminine) arrive in Spain via more 'modern' European countries. Frida confirms this when she says to Carmen: 'I'll show you how to dress in modern style', although what she actually does is show her how to undress (see Vidal, 2010).

However, even though the technologies required for filming sex arrive from abroad, the next scene presents the Spaniards as the new experts on this matter, suggesting that the students have exceeded their masters. Alfredo is filming and directing Eric and Frida, who are having sex. Although it is presumably the first time that Alfredo has done this, he shows his efficiency and ability to use the vocabulary and techniques of film-making, much to Eric's bewilderment. He suggests that his new camera can help film better sex, saying:

You see... I think Frida puts you in the shade, and I believe that a high angle is not the best one for... capturing the action. I believe that a low angle with a telephoto lens - from there - would be more satisfying.

Eric does not know how to respond to this, and limits himself to quoting Ingmar Bergman again, implying that foreign industries might be better when it comes to auteur cinema but, in terms of sex on-screen, no one can compete with the Spaniards.

Not much later in the film Alfredo, always fascinated by audiovisual devices, presents Carmen with a new television set: 'Supercolor, the latest in the market', which subsequently will play an important role when their marriage begins to disintegrate - the machine will break as their relationship is about to come to an end. Their new colourful screen (compared to the time in which the black-and-white television accompanied their readings of encyclopedias) has arrived only after their incorporation into the worlds of film technologies and sex.

By using media technologies and technological advances as metaphors for the introduction of new sexual discourses to Spanish cinema, *Torremolinos 73* succeeds in continuing with the tradition noted by Krzywinska, in which

'industrial [...] contexts also have a role to play in shaping cinematic sex' (2006: 12). Only the availability of cheaper and domestic equipment allowed Spain to develop a still-illegal sex industry that would provide the model for the first erotic cinema of the Democracy (the film ratifies this when Alfredo becomes a professional director, once Franco is dead). In fact, some of the 'Cine S' films of the Transition had been interested in the technologies of recording and screening sex. One of the most interesting cases is *El maravilloso mundo del sexo* otherwise known as *Las maravillas del sexo/The Wonderful World of Sex* (García, 1978). This film was notorious for its last scene, which was the main attraction during its publicity campaign: 'Don't miss this film in which Susana Estrada fucks... the camera!' Estrada, who nowadays argues for recuperation of the cinemas of the Transition as pioneering examples of contemporary sexual filmic discourses, anticipated in the most physical and explicit of ways that screening sex is the result of complex technological procedures. For, as Linda Williams claims, 'to screen is to reveal on a screen' (2008: 2), and therefore technical manipulations are always required. For Sandra, there is no need to 'fuck the camera'; when Alfredo is filming her with her baby (whose father is an actor who made love to her on-screen), Sandra smiles, full of satisfaction. The frustrating and sterile times of the past are over, and screening sex is as much an episode from their past as the dictatorship itself.

### **Screening sex and sounds**

Recent scholarship on the complexities of screening sex has paid attention to a wide range of categories that have expanded theoretical approaches to filmic representations of the body, desire and sexual acts. The inclusion of Sex and Porn Studies in the programmes of prominent universities (such as Berkeley and the State University of New York) has contributed to the development of these question within the area of film studies. The consideration of 'sonoric landscapes' (to use Richard Lappert's terminology) in the construction of the sexual body in visual arts is one of these recent theoretical contributions. Lappert suggested that the study of visual representations of sexual bodies demands that the sounds that accompany them are taken into account, as the body is as much as 'an aural phenomenon' as it is a site of tactile sensation:

[T]he body *sounds*: it is audible; it hears. Sound constitute the atmosphere supporting and confirming life on and in the terrain of the body. The ether of aurality is vital; it is constitutive of noise, language and music. The body is a sight and a sound [...] the body is sighted and hears; the body sees and makes audible.

The film *Los años desnudos* is about the struggles of the pioneering film-makers of Spanish eroticism during the Transition: a time in which a new sexual discourse was emerging. The study of the sonic landscape of this film can provide useful ways to understand how contemporary Spain looks at its past, and remembers the processes involved in the development of sexual narratives in society and cinema.

*Los años desnudos* tells the story of three young women who work in the exploitation film industry of the late 1970s. Their biographies, which are based on real-life characters, illustrate that convulsive and changing period, and constitute an interesting testimony of the so-called 'Cine S' - especially if we take into account that the film-makers went through a long process of research and interviews with the actresses and other practitioners who worked within it<sup>2</sup>. The presence of Susana Estrada playing a small cameo role is further evidence of the film's interest in recuperating the legacy of the eroticism of the Transition.

The film is particularly relevant for contemporary debates about the consequences of dubbing in Spanish film history. Hayley opened Pandora's box when he published a controversial article in which he claimed that:

[Spanish cinema's] biggest problem is a cultural and social one, and has to do with authenticity and individuality. The Spanish language from Spain does not suit cinema [...] One only needs to switch the television on to see and hear the theatrical and forced voices, manners and grimaces.

(Hayley, 2010)

Hayley considered that the Spanish 'obsession' with using non-direct sound challenges the very essence of performing for the screen: 'Most American stars - Marlon Brando, Robert de Niro and Marilyn Monroe - speak in particular ways. They would not have found a job in Spanish cinema.' Although he admits that 'most directors and actors achieve performances that are *natural* in the Spanish context: he believes that their acting 'looks artificial for foreigners' (Hayley, 2010). Many critics and academics such as Díaz Naval (2010) and Vernon (2011) have responded to Hayley's theories, and the debate has not been limited to strictly academic areas. The Transition is an essential period in order to understand the relevance and potential limitations of dubbing in Spanish cinema. The late 1970s and early 1980s were the times when this common practice became obsolete, as can be seen from the fact that the generation of



film-makers who started working during the Transition has been the last to use non-direct recording.

*Los años desnudos* looks at this filming procedure of the past, and connects it to the difficulties of filming sex which, like the incorporation of direct sound, was one of the novelties of film-making during the Transition. There are various moments in the film in which the process of filming sex is recreated. One scene is particularly relevant for the study of the connections between on-screen sex and sound, and its place in Spanish film history. The three actresses - Sandra (Candela Peña), Lina (Goya Toledo) and Eva (Mar Flores) - are filming an erotic sequence that takes place in a convent, a set-piece that can be found in several films of the period. The director (Antonio de la Torre) is giving them some instructions when one of the actresses admits that she has not learned her lines. Much to Sandra's indignation, the director confirms that not being able to recite the text is far from being a problem, as no direct sound is going to be used; therefore, the actresses can recite a succession of numbers, 'but not in order'. This comic situation presents an additional twist when only Sandra says the text while their counterparts recite random numbers. A few minutes earlier, when Lina and Sandra had met to rehearse, Lina had said: 'I've been told that they might dub us', to which Sandra replied: 'They'll dub us for sure: Sandra, the only one of the three friends who sees herself as a real actress, knows the mechanisms of the Spanish film industry.

Non-direct sound was used commonly in both erotic and non-erotic Spanish cinema. It is a well-established fact that the actor José (Pepe) Isbert very rarely knew his line, especially in his latter films when his memory was failing. Another key star, José Luis López Vázquez, is known to have been rather lazy when it came to learning his texts. More research needs to be done in order to understand how this practice has set Spanish cinema on a particular trajectory. To cite just one example, in the 1970s and 1980s Antonio Ozores became very popular for his talent for deliberately not making sense when he spoke; in films such as *Cuatro mujeres y un lio/ Four Women and a Mess* (Mariano Ozores, 1985), he capitalized on his ability to speak as quickly as possible. If one pays attention, it is not difficult to see how his lips do not coincide with the text, which was added in post-production (it certainly must have been much easier to say idiotic and extremely fast line using this method). By recreating this tradition, *Los años desnudos* is one of the first films to explore the possibilities afforded by a practice that is a very important part of Spanish cinema history; tellingly, this is a practice whose end coincided with sex-on-screen ceasing to be an exception and becoming the norm. The tensions between direct and non-

direct sound are not the only aspect of the use of sound in erotic films that interests *Los años desnudos*. The film's soundtrack bears testimony to a new tendency in popular film and music that determined the representation of sex in cinema. The 1970s was the decade in which a new music genre emerged and changed the way that people dance and socialize: disco. Richard Dyer wrote what is possibly the first and definitely one of the most influential essays on the subject, 'In defence of disco'. This piece, which has been reprinted on numerous occasions following its publication in 1979, proves particularly useful for an understanding of the mechanisms that underpinned the sexual discourse of the 1970s. Dyer takes disco music and, after comparing it with previous forms of popular music, considers it the first one to present what he terms 'full body eroticism':

Popular song's eroticism is 'disembodied ': it succeeds in expressing a sense of the erotic which yet denies eroticism's physicality. This can be shown by the nature of tunes in popular songs and the way they are handled [...] The tune is not allowed to invade the whole of one's body.

(1979: 21)

Moreover, Dyer says, disco refuses to 'place its tunes within a conceptualization of love and passion as emanating from "inside", the heart or the soul' (1979: 21), in the way that popular songs traditionally have done so as to 'express an erotic yearning of the inner person, not the body' (1979: 21). On the contrary, in disco, 'not only are the lyrics often more directly physical and the delivery more raunchy [...] but, most importantly, disco is insistently rhythmic in a way that popular song is not' (1979: 21).

This conceptualization of passion as emanating from inside is revealed by the presence of human sounds (moans, sighs, laughs, breathing) in the music. Donna Summer's 'Love to Love You Baby' is perhaps the most famous example. Released in 1975, the song became notorious for including the sound of Summer's twenty-two allegedly real orgasms, which earned the singer the nickname 'The first lady of love'. Radio stations, including the BBC, banned the song, considering it too 'graphic'; this in itself poses relevant theoretical questions about how sounds and soundtracks can add graphic information to visual narratives.

*Los años desnudos* participates in this debate by including on its soundtrack the song 'Aún vivo para el amor' ('I Still Live for Loving'), sung by Fernando Fernán-Gómez, in which human sounds accompany the actor's deep and easily

recognizable voice.<sup>3</sup> This was not the only Spanish song during the Transition to include human sounds as part of its 'full body eroticism'. Susana Estrada imported the sexiest disco music with songs such as 'Gózame ya' ('Enjoy Me Now') or 'Hagámoslo juntos' ('Let's Do it Together'). In *Los años desnudos*, Estrada's song 'Acaríciame' ('Caress Me') is heard when Sandra is trying to flirt with Ángel (Luis Zahera), the film producer with whom she is in love. When Sandra caresses her hair and prepares herself for the ritual of attracting the object of her desire, Estrada's sensual moans can be heard; the film's soundscape provides the sexual allure that this scene requires. Sandra asks Ángel to kiss her while Estrada is singing 'Caress Me'; while Sandra is waiting for Ángel to respond, Estrada's orgasms are clearly heard.

This use of the soundtrack as an essential element of the sexual landscape of the film is not far from Laura Mulvey's theories on the limits of screen space. According to her:

[T]he function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception. Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist), combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism) all tend to blur the limits of screen space.

(2006: 348)

Sounds and music, it could be added, are a central element in expanding the limits of what is seen on-screen. The soundscape of *Los años desnudos* blurs the limits of the screen as it provides relevant information in terms of storyline and, more importantly, sexual representation. When Sandra's lip are mouthing the lyrics of the disco song, she is just doing what the characters that she plays do on-screen. The music she listens to is dubbing her own life, letting spectators know that in her desperate search for love, she is being sexually abused. Her life, like that of the nun she plays, needs non-direct sound to uncover what the performance of sex does not reveal.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined two contemporary films in order to analyse how today's film narratives look back to the Transition as a landmark in the exploration of sexual discourses. Many of the debates about the representation of sex on-screen flirt with the idea of the limit, and assume that when it comes

to filming sex, there is always a line that cannot be crossed. Bazin noticed that as far as sex goes, the 'cinema can say everything, but not show everything. If we wish to remain on the level of art, "we must stay on the realm of imagination"' (1971: 174) - but the literature of film studies has shown that 'the realm of imagination' is a concept that can be easily problematized. As far as a sex on-screen is concerned, the biggest contribution of Spanish cinema of the Transition was to take what had been traditionally elided and place it at the centre of the film. If we take *Simón, contamos contigo / Simon, We Count On You* (Fernández, 1971) and look at its sex scenes, we can see that despite the relevance of sexual acts for the film's narrative (it is about a man who cannot help attracting all the ladies he meets), sex is always avoided. Hence, for example, at the beginning of the film Simón (Alfredo Landa) is tempted by his fiancée, with whom he has never had sex. When she is semi-naked and Simón cannot resist temptation, spectators are deprived of the representation of sex, as the editing cuts to a shot of the balcony of their room. Moreover, non-diegetic music is played loudly, as if to block the human sounds that could escape through the window (we can compare this to the sex soundscape of *Los años desnudos*, in which music not only does not block sex, but actively contributes to its representation).

A few years after Ramón Fernández's film, an ellipsis would not be required for the representation of sex. In many films such as the ones recreated by *Torremolinos 73* and *Los años desnudos*, those scenes were both the main attraction and principal motivation for their production. These novel representations of sex demanded new ways of filming and reworking the technical possibilities of cinema, for there was no tradition or knowledge as to how they should be made. Alongside films such as *Días de cine/Cinema Days* (Serrano, 2007) and *No lo llames amor... llámalo X/Don't Call It Love... Call It X* (Capel, 2011), both *Torremolinos 73* and *Los años desnudos* are good examples of how the study of the representation of sex in Spanish cinema must look at the Transition years, as they constitute a crucial period for understanding contemporary cinematic sexual discourses in Spain.

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## Notes

1. *Destape* (literally 'uncovering') is a wide category that refers to a popular trend in Spanish film-making during the early 1970s when most of the films included nudity and sexual innuendo. It was followed by the more official category, 'Cine S', which legislated these visual representations post-1977.
2. Félix Sabroso says that 'in order to make the film we talked to many of the actresses of the time, some of them well-known, and others not so famous, although I prefer not to say who they are, as they didn't want me to' (cited in Montserrat Zaragoza, 2008).
3. Fernán-Gómez (1921- 2007) had one of the most famous voices in Spanish cinema, theatre and television. His successful career lasted for over sixty years, and includes some of Spain's most important films.

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