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## **Suits and subcultures: Costuming and masculinities in the films of Pedro Almodóvar**

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### **Abstract**

This article combines an analysis of the fabrics, surfaces and styles chosen to dress Pedro Almodóvar's male characters with an exploration of how those codes might be read with respect to the specific and significant shifting historical contexts of 1980s and 1990s Spanish society. Through focusing our interdisciplinary analysis upon *Labyrinth of Passions* (Almodóvar, 1982) and *The Flower of My Secret* (Almodóvar, 1995), we will identify the multifarious ways in which the male subject mirrors societal and cultural trends in a rapidly changing Spain during the years following the country's emergence from isolation after the Franco years, its subsequent return to democracy and the emergence of a high-living, fashionable cosmopolitanism. In examining the tensions that emerge between pairings of key male figures in the Spanish director's work, we will pay particular attention to their costuming as central to the construction and performance of masculine identities. We will argue that in the films under examination, a series of binary oppositions are offered in which the suited male (whether a doctor or a military general) is self-consciously contrasted with representations that connote shifting bohemian, subcultural (or 'alternative') identities that destabilize and reconfigure the construction and performance of masculine identities and their more 'traditional' counterparts.

### **Keywords**

Pedro Almodóvar

Spain

la movida madrileña

cinema

masculinities

costuming

fashion

## **Introduction**

Since *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and other Average Girls*) (Almodóvar, 1980) was first released, much has been written on Pedro Almodóvar's women and his gay/queer male protagonists. As Spain's most famous contemporary cinematic auteur, he is known internationally for his 'cinema of women', creating memorable, vivacious, emotional and funny cross-generational female characters, who are both strikingly dressed and observed with a strong sense of empathy (Bloom 2016; D'Lugo and Vernon 2013; D'Lugo 2006; Smith 2000; Allinson 2001). The symbiotic relationship between costume, fashion, fabric, the body and performance simultaneously and self-consciously supports the construction and transformation of his characters and expresses their state of being and feelings (Almodóvar in Tindle 2017; Dapena 2013). For instance, in 'What lies beneath', Cath Davies eloquently and convincingly argues that fabric functions as an 'expression of corporeal vulnerability and subjectivity' (2017: 65). Whereas Almodóvar's narrative focus upon fabric, fashioning femininities and surfaces, together with psychological and aesthetic notions of embodiment and transcending gender binaries, are obvious recurring thematic preoccupations in the auteur's *oeuvre* (Davies 2017), one should not overlook the ways in which Almodóvar's films also explore a complex array of representations of masculine identities.

Whilst the male subject is not absent from Almodóvar's prolific cinematographic body of work, when such subjects do appear they are usually camp, queer and spectacular – or they are absent,

mad or dead. Scholars such as Mark Allinson (2001), Marvin D'Lugo and Vernon (2013), D'Lugo (2006), Kathleen Vernon (1995), Marsha Kinder (1997), Paul Julian Smith (2000), Chris Perriam (2013, 2003), Perriam and Santi Hernández Fouz (2000), Hernández Fouz and Alfredo Martínez-Expósito (2007), Jacky Collins and Perriam (2000), Gemma Pérez-Sánchez (2012), Marsh (2004) have all written at length about notions of identity, gender and sexuality, not only with respect to this director's work, but also within the extensive scope of Spanish popular culture. Along with this substantial body of research, more recent studies and edited collections by Lorraine Ryan and Ana Corbalán (2017), Mary T. Hartson (2017) and Juan Rey (2017) have provided invaluable material in developing our ideas for this article. Rather than simply contrasting opposing constructed gender binaries of masculinity and femininity, Almodóvar's representations of identities are multifarious, and a multiplicity of identities along the continuum of gender are offered within his *oeuvre*. Indeed, Rey indicates that '[a]lthough the vast majority of studies on this Spanish director have focused on women and the gay world, his films are crowded with many types and archetypes of heterosexual men' (2017: loc 47). This article takes films from this underexamined group to explore the costuming of male characters and the relationship between clothing, fabric and embodied performance.

Gerald Dapena argues that fashion and design are pushed to such a high level of visibility in Almodóvar's films, where the 'sensuous and decorative properties outshine, and even undermine, its purely narrative role' (2013: 504). Building upon his highly informative book chapter 'Making Spain fashionable', this article will focus through close textual analysis upon the costuming of masculinities in Almodóvar's *Labyrinth of Passions*, and *The Flower of My Secret* (Almodóvar 1995). It will argue that it becomes apparent that in representing the contrasts, intersections and tensions between old and new Spain, patterns of binary pairings, between the seemingly heteronormative suited men and the more fluid subcultural representations of other forms of masculinity, are used to highlight the shifting dynamics of

gender relations within the changing contexts of post-Franco Spanish culture. We could have focused on *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*) (Almodóvar, 1988,) or *Kika* (Almodóvar, 1993), but instead we opted for *Labyrinth* and *Flower*, since we hold that they offer greater scope perhaps than other Almodóvar films from the 1980s/1990s to examine masculine identities and costuming in detail.

‘Ordinary male sexuality’, as Richard Dyer argues, is frequently deemed to be ‘straightforward, universal, devoid of mystery and thus not the “other” warranting examination’ (see Bruzzi 2013: 19). Masculinity therefore becomes most legible ‘where and when it leaves the white middle class body’ (Halberstam 1998 cited in Bruzzi 2013: 19). It is only through examining the ‘invisible hegemony’ (Bruzzi 2013: 18) contained within representations across the complex continuum of gender that we can dismantle and understand the construction, deconstruction and reconceptualization of gendered identities and its intersectional status with specific cultural contexts. As Pamela Church Gibson has argued in her keynote address at the inaugural Fashion, Costume and Visual Cultures conference, masculinities remain an under-examined area of analysis in relation to gender, the body and clothing (2018), and therefore screen costuming analysis needs to explore that which is deemed as ordinary, everyday and thus invisible and not just the spectacular and the other.

Through drawing influence and building upon Stella Bruzzi’s seminal work in *Undressing Cinema* (1997) and *Men’s Cinema* (2013) we wish to explore the intersections of costuming alongside other stylistic elements of *mise en scène* and style that function to tell ‘the man’s story’. It is not simply a case of analysing what is worn, but also how and where it is worn and the ways in which the spectator is encouraged to survey costume and scenography and submit to the spectacular, visceral impact of what is worn on-screen. As Bruzzi maintains, the conjunction of stylistic elements to convey masculinity, and not just represent it, constructs

visceral responses that create a 'non-genderised response' (2013: 5). In destabilizing the premise of a stable gender binary and heteronormative desire, it is important for an analysis of masculinities to move beyond the masculine body and men 'in films', to a consideration of the intersections between masculinity, ideology and aesthetics (see Bruzzi 2013: 5–7). Accordingly, close textual analysis of the intersections between costume, the body and identities should not succumb to the dangers of becoming divorced from the specificities of wider social, cultural and historical contexts. In this examination of masculinities, costuming and aesthetics, there is a need to situate the texts not only within the moments of production but also within the broader continuum of the director's body of work.

### ***Laberinto de pasiones (Labyrinth of Passions) (1982)***

The first two decades of Almodóvar's filmmaking correspond to Spain's first twenty years as a reformed democratic nation. Traditional notions of masculinity prevalent during Franco's dictatorship were a means to ground male dominance and legitimize state control over the nation. This regime attempted to regulate its citizens through the promotion of traditional concepts of gender, with Francoist masculinity being associated with the victory and glory of the military (Vincent 2006; Bazo 2015). Whilst these concepts remained for some time after Franco's death, the transition to democracy ushered in a new approach to gender, characterized by a move towards gender parity, and increased public awareness of the unacceptability of *machismo*. Indeed, as Spain moved into the 1990s, 'the traditional father-figure, combining strength and self-confidence with an air of distance and inaccessibility, [was] now replaced with an equally self-confident, but manifestly more affectionate and caring figure' (Antón 2000: 210).

The director's second film, which he considered a reworking of the Hollywood screwball comedy, was more commercially successful than his first endeavour, taking ESP 98, 650, 920

at the box office in Spain, by comparison with ESP 43, 000, 000 for *Pepi, Luci, Bom*. As Marvin D'Lugo explains, *Labyrinth of Passions* 'represents the first extensive example of the devilishly complex plotting that characterizes many of Almodóvar's films' (2006: 26). *Labyrinth* was made during the golden age of *la movida madrileña* (1977–83), and is perhaps the 'quintessential' film of the self-proclaimed avant-garde expression of youth culture emanating from the capital, that encompassed new trends in music, fashion, design, art and film (Epps and Kakoudaki 2009: 319). Many of the key figures of the movement – painters, musicians, designers – are part of *Labyrinth*'s large cast. At the heart of this narrative lies the rejection of patriarchal desire and a challenge to social authority, both embodied in the representatives of the establishment.

### **Surveillance and desire**

The representation of new strategies of looking and surveillance offers a challenge that subverts the status quo of the Dictatorship. Between 1939 and 1975, Spanish society had been heavily regulated by the Brigada Politico-Social, the secret police whose legal remit had been to pursue and eliminate all opposition to the Regime was pursued relentlessly and removed. The systematic surveillance of all suspected political or cultural enemies of the state, carried out by the Brigada, consisted of surveillance, wiretapping, control of private correspondence, companies and cooperatives, indefinite government detentions, confiscation and seizure of property and the practice of torture for the purpose of investigation or as a form of punishment (see Cenarro 2004; Leizaola 2015; López Barceló 2019). Whilst the Brigada operated long before sophisticated technical means of surveillance were available, their far-reaching powers ensured that people frequently engaged in self-censorship or only expressed political views not in keeping with the regime's ideology, and took part in creative or cultural activities clandestinely. Under Franco, Spanish citizens were well aware that at every turn they were being watched, either by official bodies (including the Catholic Church and schools) or by a

neighbour or colleague who was happy to collaborate with the regime as an informer (Barba 2007; Cazorla Sánchez 2000; Ruiz 2005; Preston 2003).

**Figure 1:** Riza as a *flâneur* in the opening sequence of Pedro Almodóvar's *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982). DVD frame grab.

In a radical break from this surveillance society of the Franco era, the opening sequence of *Labyrinth* explicitly reconceptualizes the power of the gaze, granting the citizen the individual power to look, objectify and freely wander the cosmopolitan streets of Madrid. Riza (Imanol Arias) is introduced as a *flâneur*, both looking and offering himself as object of the gaze (see Figure 1). As Christopher Breward argues, the literary construct of the *flâneur* as 'the leisured connoisseur and critic of life, in mid-century Paris' is one that Charles Baudelaire (1863) saw as being the 'quintessential Parisian voyeur' (Baudelaire cited in Breward 1999: 153). In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin argues that the *flâneur* is a bohemian, a man uprooted, who is only at home in the crowd (1999 edition: 895). In analysing a post-Franco Spanish context, the notion of this roaming *flâneur* as a 'spectator and recorder of the shifting, elusive richness of a generic city life' and a symbol of urban modernity is particularly useful (Breward 1999: 153). The city functions therefore as a 'stage, a spectacle' where the desultorily walking figure can survey the types who appear before him. Whilst he may not know them personally the images linger; 'imagined moments' resonate in his mind's eye (Blanchard in Breward 1999: 153).

**Figures 2–5:** Riza surveys the bodies on offer at the Rastro flea market in *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982). DVD frame grabs.

As Riza casually strolls through the streets of Madrid, the camera cuts between mid-shots of his head and shoulders and fragmented crotch and buttock shots. Through the proliferation of sports jackets and stone washed denim worn by Riza and those he looks at, it is not immediately apparent where Riza begins and his desiring gaze ends (see Figures 2–5). Notably, the power to survey is further enhanced through the wearing of sunglasses. Connoting a sense of continental sartorial ‘cool’, the sunglasses also grant the power for the *flâneur* to act as a voyeur, without the gaze being surveyed by others. Sunglasses enable the wearer to remain incognito, detached and unseen; they create a barrier against the ‘urban chaos’, granting their wearer a freedom to roam the streets with a blasé attitude (Brown 2015: 15–16). Such new-found freedoms of the post-Franco era are further enhanced through the opening sequence being intercut with shots of Sexilia (Celia Roth), who gasps in delight at the array of bodies that pass her (see Figures 6 and 7). The Rastro Sunday flea market in which Riza and Sexila ‘prowl the stalls in search of sexual adventure’ becomes an ‘emblematic sign of the new Madrid’ (D’Lugo 2006: 28). The urban space becomes ‘the site of the tearing down of scopic and sexual barriers that will eventually lead to important social realignments’ (D’Lugo 2006: 28). Through the intercutting point of view shots of objectified anonymous bodies, the spectator is complicit in these new cross-gender strategies of looking, drawing attention to the fragmented bulging denim-clad crotch, whereby individual identity is subsumed by the desiring look. The flea market functions as a cruising space in which sexual desire, rather than state secrets, becomes the focus of surveillance in the public sphere.

**Figures 6–7:** Sexila ‘in search of sexual adventure’ at the Rastro flea market in *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982). DVD frame grab.

Furthermore, the proliferation of denim in the opening sequence signals the destabilizing of traditional Spanish masculinity with a new attitude to performing the male body and the construction of a new uniform for the masses. Denim has a global presence and has in many countries become ‘the single most common form of everyday attire’ (Miller and Woodward 2007: 336). Denim jeans in particular are ‘democratic rather than elite’, as every pair of jeans is ‘mass produced and cut from the same, basic quality cloth in exactly the same colour blue’ (Dant 1999: 105). The jeans in the sequence are stonewashed ‘authentic’, ‘original’, with the iconic, cult Levis red tag visible on the *derrière* of one wearer. Characterized by strategies of fragmentation, jeans present the body as a ‘fetishised object’ that is ‘chopped up and ready for consumption’ (Dant 1999: 105). Through brass rivets, stitching, pockets and seams, the visual effect of jeans – and in particular the exposed seams – is to ‘dissect the form of the body, revealing it as made up of parts’ (Dant 1999: 105). The camera lingers on the creases of repeated wear on the upper thigh that draw the eyes like a stocking-top to the bulging hard seam on the groin (see Figure 8). The seams frame the fly and trace the curve of the buttocks. In addition to showcasing the sexualization of the bodies on the streets, the appropriation of casual wear enables a performative disguise of ‘everyday’ dress in which Riza is seemingly able to pass as an ordinary Spaniard, rather than as a man from Tiran. Gender, ethnicity and sexuality intersect as he becomes read as *straight* through his apparent appropriation of a conventionally hetero, norm-core, muted and drab aesthetic.

**Figure 8:** A bulging denim clad groin on display in the opening sequence of *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982). DVD frame grab.

*La movida madrileña*

As the first film to foreground new Spanish design and fashion trends from ‘inside an underground movement’, *Labyrinth* exudes a strong ‘sense of authenticity and authority’ (Dapena 2013: 502). Almodóvar’s involvement with this film began via musical collaborations produced in the early 1980s with Spanish artist Fabio de Miguel, a.k.a Fanny McNamara (D’Lugo 2006: 18) that exploded out of the fertile mix of newfound freedoms and various international influences from the world of popular culture. Ernesto Acevedo Muñoz describes this combination as ‘the country’s frenetic rush into democracy, accompanied by the relaxation of formerly repressive laws governing social and political relations and strict [...] censoring of all form of media’, the influence of 1960s British youth culture and the international punk culture of the 1970s (2007:12). The result of this fusion was an eruption of transgressive creativity, the main exponents of which were punk fashion and music, which encouraged an inclusive and tolerant acceptance of all kinds of marginal identities that Francoist ideologies had prohibited and repressed. It was, as Allinson concurs, ‘an era in which everyone had multiple creative projects, lots of free time, no responsibilities and few political convictions, as well as generous helpings of sex, alcohol and drugs’ (2001: 268–69).

**Figures 9–12:** Fanny meets Riza in *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982). DVD frame grabs.

Nevertheless, when *Labyrinth* was released, as Dapena points out, *la movida* ‘was still a relatively unknown phenomenon outside a small group of journalists and tastemakers’ (2013: 502). Yet, this film would provide a vehicle through which these burgeoning subcultures were revealed to a wider national audience. It is also worth noting that, in addition to the use of venues popular with the *movida* crowd, significant contributions from key individuals belonging to this destabilizing cultural movement were included in the making of the film, including Fanny McNamara’s cameo performance as punk drag artist, the set designs by painter

and sculptor Guillermo Pérez Villata and the costumes designed by musician and artist Carlos Berlanga. The ‘jolting camp performance’ of the fashion-conscious queer Patty (played by Fanny McNamara) signals the connection between *la movida*, drag and queer cultures and the trend-setting avant-garde that is central to the infusion of a ‘subversive edge’ within the film (Dapena 2013: 503). From his glistening black leather jacket teamed with garish pink blusher and lipstick, blue eyeshadow and a backcombed bouffant of dyed black hair, to his appropriation of ‘feminine’ garments with his pink and cream fur bolero and tanga briefs on the set of his ‘Photo porno sexy fever’, Patty is a disruptive, spectacular force (see Figures 9–12). The exposing of the flesh of his lithe, muscular legs and torso not only contrasts with the opulent tactility of the shaggy fur but also with Riza’s muted attire. Patty is everything that Riza appears not (yet) to be.

**Figures 13–16:** Fanny promises to transform Riza into ‘the Queen of Halloween’ in *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982). DVD frame grabs.

Promising to transform Riza into the ‘Queen of Halloween’, Patty uses the ever-familiar cinematic trope of a woman’s magazine as the inspiration for a make-over sequence (see Figures 13–16). Within feminine popular culture, the make-under ‘plays an essential role in establishing the signifiers of dowdy and aberrant’ gendered identities. A notion of the ‘natural’ pervades, where the scruffy and dowdy become transformed into a desirable gender normative ideal (Gilligan 2011: 169). In *Labyrinth*, the ‘natural’ is called into question, as Riza informs Patty that ‘I want to change my look [...] I want you to completely transform me’. A doubling takes place, which further draws attention to the process of make-under and make-over; in breaking from the past, gender, sexuality and ethnicity become a performative disguise as Riza’s ‘natural’ hair is revealed to be a wig. Riza removes his ‘disguise’ of stereotypically

‘Spanish’ hair, to reveal a short back and sides, more groomed and conventional than his unkempt dark, curly locks.

The make-over transformation of Riza initially appears to be one in which ‘the grand reveal’ will adopt a drag aesthetic of performing femininity. Devoid of a montage showcasing the ‘hard work’ so typical of the make-over sequence (see Gilligan 2011), Riza’s transformation is simply revealed – an effortless transformation fuelled by fashionable consumption and appropriation of an aesthetic dominated by a showy spectacle of surfaces and textures (see Figures 17–19). Leather, studding and the juxtapositioning of the t-shirt with the iconic biker jacket style appear straight out of the punk-infused stylistic traits of *la movida*. Yet, this look is overshadowed by the use of bright scarlet (rather than black) leather, which grounds the garment within the wider contexts of costuming in Almodóvar’s films, where (as we will discuss in relation to *Flower of my Secret*) red comes to signify passion, desire, confidence and the blood of Spain (Shaw 2000; Rennett 2012; Allinson 2001).

**Figures 17–19:** Riza’s transformation in *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982) is marked by the punk-infused stylistic traits of *la movida*. DVD frame grabs.

### **Buttoned-up repression**

One of *Labyrinth*’s key narrative strands is the binary structure of passion and repression. If Riza is the embodiment of the former, then the incarnation of the film’s libidinal polar opposite can be found in Dr de la Peña (Fernando Vivanco), renowned bio-gynaecologist and Spain’s ‘father of artificial insemination’ (see Figures 20–22). Whilst many of the vast array of protagonists in *Labyrinth* appear to be enjoying sexual freedom, the good doctor finds sexual intercourse to be repulsive. We first see de la Peña taking a telephone call in his office. As befits the profession he is wearing the traditional white doctor’s coat over a pale blue button-

down shirt and navy blue and white striped tie. In contrast to the casual, open styling of Riza's attire with an open collar and jacket, which reveals and frames the flesh of the eroticized neck and jawline, the doctor is literally and metaphorically 'buttoned up', his costuming clearly signifying his sexual repression. The doctor's collar and white coat remain tightly fastened, constricting his neck, concealing his flesh and the contours of his body. Rather than skimming the body, the whole coat somewhat swamps him. The ill-fitting garment, with its overly long sleeves and excess fabric, swaddles and swathes the doctor, creating an all-encompassing, excessively protective, bright white layer that deflects attention. The white coat, shirt and tie therefore appear as a cohesive and stable sartorial statement, a repressive suit of armour, as opposed to being clothed in an assortment of garments that are fashionable, transitory and signify sexual liberation.

**Figures 20–22:** Dr de la Peña's buttoned up repression as the embodiment of an outmoded authoritarian Spain in *Labyrinth of Passions* (1982). DVD frame grabs.

His slicked-back hairstyle is also reminiscent of an outmoded authoritarian Spain that was now being left behind. In scenes shot outside the surgery, for example at a party, clothed in a dark suit, white shirt and dark tie Dr de la Peña maintains the same professional air, however, in addition to understanding the doctor as a patriarchal figure embodying social authority in science, his being clinically 'buttoned-up' self further reflects his inability to engage in intimate relationships, despite attracting a lot of attention. However, this is an Almodóvar film and accordingly it comes as no surprise when Dr de la Peña is shown as finally disrobed and liberated. Having had sex with his daughter's double, Queti (Marta Fernández Muro), this 'incestuous performance' can be understood, as D'Lugo explains, as the 'mocking of all forms of psychoanalytic solutions to the question of desire' (2006: 27).

### ***La flor de mi secreto (Flower of my Secret) (1995)***

Twenty years after the death of Franco, notions of masculinity in Spain were unquestionably undergoing significant changes. Now a member of the EU, greater cultural influences were felt from the other member states including fashion trends. Nevertheless, traditional values and attitudes around identity constructs did not disappear overnight and this tension between old and new can be observed in the following film under discussion.

Almodóvar's eleventh film represents a significant change in his creative direction; the director himself describing this as a film 'about pain, about the growth process' (2004: 113). We should also note that, as D'Lugo informs, in this film 'the values and emotions of the characters [...] seem to embrace an optimistic world view despite many outwardly negative themes, such as marital infidelity, attempted suicide, and drug addiction' (2006: 85). As is characteristic of this director's filmmaking, *Flower*, which follows the loves, losses and revitalization of beleaguered author Leo (Marisa Paredes), is a film that explores the notion of identity and finding oneself; however, this time the audience takes that journey without the usual array of flamboyant marginalized 'others'.

#### **Paco and military masculinity**

The first glimpse that we catch of Leo's husband Paco (Imanol Arias), shows him framed in a black and white portrait shot found on Leo's dresser. Despite the lack of colour, it is evident that this man is wearing the kaki *uniforme de gala* ('dress uniform') of a military official, specifically that of the Ejército Nacional (Spain's Army), which carries all the connotations of the military support of General Franco from the military uprising that sparked Spain's Civil War (1936-1939) through the years of his dictatorship. We later see Leo's husband in the flesh, as he returns from peacekeeping duty in the Bosnian conflict, on the premise of a short leave of absence (see Figure 23).

**Figure 23:** Paco adorned in his *uniforme de gala* is reunited with Leo in *Flower of My Secret* (1995). DVD frame grab.

Attired in his crisp, starched military uniform, we are reminded of the hegemonic phallic masculinity associated with victory and the glory of the military. Leo is eager for Paco's approval and affection and in her red dress performs a glamorous, passionate, yet subservient presentation of femininity. Initially, their meeting feels positive as the couple are reunited, but as they embrace, the camera moves away from Leo's point of view to focus upon the couple's reflection in the hallway. Instead of a single large mirror, a gallery of numerous frames is revealed. Echoing picture frames, the reflections represent ruptured and fragmented selves, showing us fleeting, hazy images that evoke memories of the couple's lives. The unity of Leo and Paco's kiss is hidden from view, as the frames intrude, creating a distancing effect that draws the spectator's attention to the fracturing and lack of cohesion in their relationship. Paco's masculine image dominates five frames, drawing attention to his hat and military insignia, whereas Leo appears almost pushed out of the image, reduced to glimpses of her unruly curled hair and her red dress. He dominates and controls her, silencing her voice and her subjectivity.

The distancing device is further utilized as Paco showers and dresses. As a site of intimacy, we would anticipate that Leo joining him in the bathroom would lead to proximity and passion. Instead, he turns from her. She aches for affection, but he remains shielded and impenetrable. As we see Paco dressing again after taking a shower, he puts on pristine, bright white underwear comprising a t-shirt and boxer shorts (see Figure 24). His t-shirt functions as a traditional male undershirt, a soft protective, absorbent layer to enable the exterior uniformed image to remain pristine. The sweat of the body thus remains concealed and contained. He showers, grooms,

brushes his hair and applies deodorant, but does not do so to revel and luxuriate in the processes of tending to his looks, but to reconstruct the body as an armour that remains in control and does not *leak*, exposing a level of vulnerability. While this military costume that adorns his body as a protective shield may speak of honour, duty, integrity and purity, it is shown here to be but a sham, a performance. Paco may be serving his country, but he is also having an affair with his wife's best friend. Rey cites Paco among the group of male characters found in Almodóvar's work who are 'unfaithful husbands, abusers, rapists and sexists' (2017: 169), dictatorial hegemonic males without empathy or compassion. Standing in the bedroom, Leo is framed in a mirror adjacent to Paco. Through this doubling, the replication speaks of separation. She exists as a memory, like an image of a long-lost love in a locket. It is the silenced idea of her, rather than the reality of Leo's hysterical excess, that Paco desires. He wishes for her not to shout, cry, show emotion or express her opinions. He must retain (an illusion of) control.

**Figure 24:** Paco's undershirt enables his performance of masculinity to remain pristine. DVD frame grab from *Flower of My Secret*.

### **Ángel and intimacy**

In stark contrast to this hegemonic masculine subject, the audience is offered an alternative manifestation of heterosexuality in the form of Ángel (Juan Echanove) and as the character who succeeds in lifting Leo out of her professional and personal malaise. *Where Leo and Paco are marked by their distance and contrasting costuming, Leo and Ángel are characterised by their mirroring within scenography and costume.* As Leo meets Ángel at the journalist's office to discuss a possible case of plagiarism of her work, the strategy of reflections and visual fragmentation, as the protagonists appear to merge, creates a sense of unity, rather than distance and separation. Leo is fragmented through replication, a doubling in which her reflected image

becomes layered and superimposed upon the body of Ángel. Whilst Leo's material body initially remains out of sight, her image becomes the feminine upon and in him, which creates a sense of the two being equal and connected. Where Paco repeatedly turned his back upon Leo, Ángel's performance is characterized by proximity and softness. He and Leo turn towards one another as they walk side by side, mirroring one another's body language, their postural echo imbuing their interactions with flirtation and intimacy.

Adopting Almodóvar's trademark red attire, which is most often reserved for female characters, Ángel is immediately signalled in terms of his contrast to hegemonic notions of masculinity. The use of the colour red by this director has received much attention in many of the previous studies mentioned above. Deborah Shaw (2000: 57) argues how in *Tacones lejanos (High Heels)* (Almodóvar, 1991) the use of this colour serves to evoke a sense of drama and passion in the central mother and daughter protagonists Becky (Marisa Paredes) and Rebeca (Victoria Abril). Allinson (2001: 183) makes mention of how reds and related warm colours dominate the final scenes of *Women on the Verge*, in particular, the clothing worn by Pepa (Carmen Maura) and Marisa (Rossy de Palma). Further, Michael Rennett points out how 'Almodóvar perpetually utilizes a consistent red colour palette to express his film's important themes [...], mak[ing] red the central and predominant aspect of his film's mise-en-scène' (2012: 68–69). In addition, Maria Braga and Vaz de Costa (2011) claim that the use of colour in cinema may reveal associations with physical, psychological and aesthetic features tied to characterization. Colour is vital to Almodóvar; in 1994 he argued: 'I establish a palette of colours like a painter, only I work in the three-dimensional' (quoted in Tindle 2017).

It would appear that the vast majority of analysis provided on this aspect focuses chiefly on the vivid scarlet (Armani) red as worn by the female protagonists, or as part of a set decoration with a focus on broad sweeping references to the story-telling capacity of costume, rather than an exploration of either the nuances of colour or their connection with fashion cultures.

However, for this study, we seek to turn that focus of this feature onto the character of Ángel; here it becomes clear that there is not a singular unified use of red, but that a broader, more nuanced palette of red hues is used to signify the complexities and subtleties of his performance of masculine identity within a specific context of Spanish fashion cultures.

**Figure 25:** Ángel's costuming in *Flower of My Secret* (1995) offers a nuanced palette of red hues. DVD frame grab.

As we are introduced to Ángel in his office, he is adorned in a fine ribbed red woollen jumper, teamed with indigo denim jeans and a light denim shirt (see Figures 25). In contrast to the tightly buttoned-up and starchily pressed Paco, Ángel's attire is characterized by its casual and soft styling. Rather than being clean shaven, and wearing sharp creases and suited shoulder pads, Ángel's shoulders are soft and unstructured, his shirt is open and the collar is tucked into the neck of the jumper that frames his greying, unshaven face and neck. His jumper appears as another layer casually added upon his body, rather than a cohesive and powerful sartorial statement. The hidden collar implies that the jumper has been added almost as an afterthought. In contrast to the trademark bold red so frequently worn by Almodóvar's women, Ángel's jumper is a more muted hue that tends towards a hint of salmon pink. Its softness is further emphasized against the contrasting 'smart-casual' aesthetic of deep indigo denim. Where Paco's costuming draws attention to the construction of a hard, phallic body, Ángel's sweater envelops his body, clinging to the soft, rounded curve of his belly. His body is devoid of the rigidity, conformity and control of the military body; instead it is (as he later remarks) a body of someone who likes their food. It is a body that carries the markers of comfort and consumption, but does so with a confidence and ease.

Throughout the majority of scenes that feature Ángel, his costuming contains a reoccurring use of red hues, both as a thematic preoccupation and to support the representation of his inner emotions and character. The deep rust of his duffel coat, the coral knitted sweater with flecks of paler creams, the red plaid shirt and washed-out red of the *mise en scène* of the décor of his apartment offer a palette of red-infused tones that disrupt our expectations of Almodóvar's usual deployment of the colour red in his films. Rennett argues that it 'is this recurring intersection between colour and themes that marks Almodóvar's distinctiveness as an *auteur*' (2012: 88–89). Where for Almodóvar's women red is frequently fiery and bold, symbolizing blood, death, passion and religion (Rennett 2012), for Ángel there is a softness and gentleness, which is heightened through the combination of colour and fabric. The knitwear, coat and shirt invite the sensory pleasure of touch. Where Paco's costuming repels tactility by creating a hard armour, Ángel's look offers vulnerability, tenderness and affection without the drama of passion. This is particularly evident in the scene where the doctors protest on the streets. Ángel rescues the distraught Leo, and as he envelops her in his arms they become one. Not only does she sink into him, but together their costuming resembles that of Paddington Bear. Leo with her bright blue wool coat and red floppy cloth hat merges with Ángel's red-toned duffle coat. She, like Paddington, needs looking after, and he becomes the bear who protects her (see Figure 26).

**Figure 26:** As Ángel rescues the distraught Leo in *Flower of My Secret* (1995), the pair's costuming evokes Paddington Bear. DVD frame grab.

The palette of muted reds is further echoed within Ángel's apartment, signalling his break away from established notions of Spanish masculinity. With his penthouse city-centre apartment overlooking the streets of Madrid, colour is seamlessly infused into his apartment and he is

afforded the opportunity to survey the city, whilst retaining a level of privileged privacy. Through the *mise en scène* of his apartment, he is represented as a single man who decorates and looks after his own home, filling it with beautifully crafted goods, and who can tend to a woman within it. He combines classic romanticism and protective tenderness as he brings Leo breakfast in bed, complete with both a single red rose and a box of vitamin C to help her recuperate (see Figure 27). The rose functions as an obvious reference to the passion and drama more commonly associated with red and femininity in Almodóvar's films. Tending to and caring for her as she collapses, he combines a sense of masculine strength and dependability, with a tenderness that evokes femininity. Through such gender blurring, Ángel is a cosmopolitan, modern and seemingly unconventional (particularly in contrast to Paco) representation of masculinity.

**Figures 27 and 28:** Ángel offers a tender, fluid representation of masculinity in *Flower of My Secret*. DVD frame grabs.

This unconventionality is further displayed when Ángel reveals that it is he who wrote the two recent novels under the guise of Leo's pseudonym (Amanda Gris). Adorned in a lumberjack shirt, jeans and t-shirt, his look is far removed from that of Paco. Where the lumberjack shirt is stereotypically associated with the mythology of an active, outdoorsy, working-class masculinity (Mackinney-Valentin 2017), Ángel's shirt is an oversized check in a palette of cream, blues and purple. Rather than being fastened, it is left casually undone on top of a grey t-shirt (see Figure 28). Where for Paco the t-shirt was a pristine white undershirt, Ángel's t-shirt becomes a marker of a more fluid masculinity, imbued to a certain extent with the camp sensibility that nods to the transgressive, oppositional and subversive roots of *la movida*. The open shirt reveals a print of a lingerie-clad woman kneeling on all fours, her suspenders tracing

the line of her thighs to her buttocks, which are raised in the air. Her arched back draws our attention to her dark long hair with strong ‘bangs’ and her arm, clad in a long glistening black latex glove. The combination of hairstyle, lingerie, pose and fetish wear functions as a clear textual reference to 1950s pin-up Bettie Page. With her playful BDSM and fetish wear photoshoots, Page offered a subversive image of female sexuality (Mason 2014).

With its clear referencing of the subcultures of sexual subversion, the t-shirt acts as a marker of his (sub)cultural capital and his representation as a sexually liberated man who does not conform to dominant heteronormative notions of masculinity. As Valerie Steele notes, ‘the “playful” use of fetishistic themes has been increasingly assimilated into fashion’. It is, she argues, ‘no longer associated primarily with individual sexual “perversions” or sexual subcultures’ (1996: 33). Ángel’s look is not one emerging from the subversive underground of *la movida*, but rather a watered-down commercialized and fashion-centred version, which highlights the way in which the subculture’s style was – as Dapena posits – commodified as ‘spectacle, masquerade and fashion statement’ (2013: 503). Ángel is positioned as edgy, but not deviant. Adorned in an image drawn from fetish pin-up iconography, Ángel becomes the bearer of the object of desire and the gaze, rather than the active consumer of such an image. When feminine performance is coupled with the lumberjack shirt, Ángel offers a fluid (and arguably queered) masculinity that appears both straight and queer, evoking the ‘bear’ styling of gay men (see Geczy and Karaminas 2013; Steele 2013; Cole 2000). As Dapena (2013) argues, in constructing a modern subjectivity, Madrid’s urban subcultures were precariously poised between hedonism and consumerism. As a city of pleasure and desire, the liberating, transgressive and trendsetting avant-garde subverted the canons of taste, identity and behaviour. Ángel’s image is not anywhere near as subversive as that of Patty in *Labyrinth*, and thus marks an integration and watering down of *la movida*’s looks into Spanish mainstream fashion.

In combining references to subcultural marginal groups and new identities in Spanish culture, fashion design and the styling of individual looks offered new modes of consumption and consumerism. Ángel's costuming therefore signals a new fashionability within Spanish metropolitan culture tied to the consumption of European (and not just Spanish) fashion brands. The release of *Flower of My Secret* comes at a point where city-dwelling Spaniards were both increasingly prosperous and comfortable with their European identity. His (and Leo's) clothes are intrusive and characterized by their newness. They are devoid of bobbling, stains and signs of wear, tear and repair. In contrast to the fragile, intricate details of the hand-woven lace in the village that speaks of regional heritage and tradition, Ángel's clothes convey a sense of cosmopolitan confidence that is expressed through the adoption of luxurious Italian fashion. Costume designer Hugo Mezcuca (who acted as wardrobe assistant on *High Heels* and *Kika*) refrained from brash, trendy European couture in favour of dressing Ángel and Leo in Ermenegildo Zegna and Max Mara: Sportmax. In adopting looks from long-established Italian fashion houses, Ángel's look (which although less obtrusive than Leo's) carries the status of quality imbued in 'Made in Italy' brands. The brand values of the 'Made in Italy' trademark highlight the (stereotyped) perception of an Italian preoccupation with luxury, style, elegance, quality, taste and enjoying 'the nice things in life combining beauty and tradition' (Amatulli et al. et al. 2017: 78–79). This preference for luxury clothing that is made in Europe, rather than 'Made in Spain', mirrors (as Dapena also argues) a shift from the 'national and local' to new modes of consumption 'shaped by cosmopolitanism and globalism' that reflects the ever-increasing purchasing power and prosperity afforded to Spanish consumers through the years of a Socialist government (2013: 497, see Figure 29).

**Figure 29:** Ángel and Leo adorned in Italian brands Ermenegildo Zegna and Max Mara: Sportmax in *Flower of My Secret* embody Spain's new consumer confidence in the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

Through costuming (and the appropriation of European fashion brands), Almodóvar contributes to the shifting representation and international visibility of Spain as a modern, up-to-date, fashionable European nation characterized by its 'hip (post) modernity' and 'cultural effervescence', as a centre of 'artistic creativity' (Dapena 2013: 496). Through Almodóvar's representation of both young people and the rising middle class as 'consumers of designer clothes and accessories of national and foreign origin', his films offer clear links between a proliferation of identities and the aspirational desire for Spaniards to be schooled in how to be fashionable and thus 'perceived as fully-fledged modern subjects' (Dapena 2013: 496). In representing Spanish masculinities at a crossroads, Almodóvar offers a schism between the past and the present, the authoritarian and the disruptive, pointing to a nation on the verge of diversification.

Rizo offers the viewer a punk-infused confrontational image, which brings a necessary spectacular intervention, designed to challenge the dominant notions of 'acceptable' masculinities in 1980s Spain. Conversely, by the mid-1990s, there is a greater acceptance of a variety of masculine identities. As suggested by Ángel's less intrusive and confrontational styling, he does not need to be shocking to subvert dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity. The softness, quality and layering of his clothes convey a greater acceptance of the subtle nuances of identities that break beyond binary oppositions of gender.

Peter William Evans affirms that '[a] number of Almodóvar's films can be considered explorations of a socially conditioned general crisis of masculinity' (2009: 105). The monolithic, fixed notion of masculinity as a heterogeneous concept is called into question, particularly through the characters of Rizo, Ángel and Patty. It is not simply a binary between gay and straight, but the suggestion of a more complex spectrum of sexualities that intersect with new formations in gendered identities, where clothing offers a space in which to try on

and explore new identities that ‘fit’ within the ever-shifting contexts of a new cosmopolitan Spain.

By the turn of the millennium, it was the notion of ‘masculinity in crisis’ that was increasingly discussed by Spanish scholars and sociologists. We, however, see it rather to be masculinity at a crossroads, because in this rephrasing the changes become imbued with possibility and positive change, rather than simply with an angst-ridden negativity. We would hold that this phenomenon pointed to a social and cultural context where, as Hartson observes, ‘[p]ersonal pleasure and the satisfaction of one’s desires replace submission, obedience and self-abnegation-leading to a reconstruction of masculine identities in a social context that appears increasingly fragmented, plural and individualistic’ (2017: s/n). It is these notions of intersections and pleasures that will form the focus of our future work on costuming masculinities in Almodóvar’s films from the new millennium.

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