

THE SPANISH *FIESTA*
The theatricality of a night club in Madrid

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INTRODUCTION

Spending weekends going out to bars and night clubs is an activity typical for young people, satisfying both the need for physical mobility and the desire for contacts and exchanges that accompany the individual's transition into adulthood. Of all European countries, Spain certainly represents the country where the festive mood is at its most explosive. Who has not heard of the Spanish *fiesta*? When weekends and holidays come around, young people in Spain mostly come to life at night. They are used to going out very late, rarely before 1 a.m., and they generally go to bed at dawn, or even when the sun is already high in the sky.

This article focuses on my fieldwork, conducted during 2000 and 2001, among young people in Madrid. More precisely, it deals with a youth group called in Spanish 'pijos', sometimes known in English as 'preppies', that is, young people who come or seem to come from the upper class. According to many Spanish sociologists, 'the *pijos* represent the hegemony of youth in Spain at the end of the nineties' (Díaz Prieto 1998:14; translation K.T., italics added). My research did not focus on this hegemonic aspect. Instead, I carried out a survey, involving participant observation and interviews with young people, in different places of Madrid in order to describe *pijo* customs and to examine their meaning with respect to the socio-cultural reality of Spain under José María Aznar's government. Among the spatial contexts that I studied was a famous night club in Madrid called 'Pachá'.

I will start with a brief description of Pachá, this public space which only opens when darkness comes. I shall then describe the proxemic and communicative aspects that are at the heart of relationships among the young people who go there. As its name indicates, the night club invites its clients to meet during the night, as if this particular time allows them to behave differently than during the day. Everyone knows that night is the time when people rest and relax, but maybe night can also have 'magical' or 'theatrical' dimensions. Finally, I shall deal precisely with these theatrical aspects included of interpersonal relationships, that is, in *pijo* behaviour. Erving Goffman (1959) contemplates 'social life as a theatre': this seems particularly true at night. The aim of this paper is precisely to illustrate that night is the perfect moment to engage in new experiences, to investigate unrealised possibilities, to adopt a different identity or personality in a theatrical way.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PACHÁ

Pachá is situated in the centre of Madrid. The building's historical background is interesting because it was a theatre during Franco's dictatorship and became a night club in 1976. From the outside it is a rather large building, made visible by a big neon sign. To go inside one must climb a few stairs, between two typical barriers formed of velvet ropes supported by copper posts. On both sides of this mythical passage, two bouncers observe the procession of clients who are wanting to go inside. In fact, these men seem to select clients on the basis of their looks, beauty and elegance, as if they were choosing actors for a play. Through this ritual of the climbing of stairs, Pachá satisfies 'the four criteria of the performance scene', that is, of the place where people perform a part in order to give an impression to others (Montandon 1995:763). The first and the most important criterion is distinction. This implies a presence on the scene of a select society, distinguished by its fortune and its fame (Montandon 1995:765). This criterion can be spotted outside the night club through the aestheticism of the building and the selection of the clientele, and it goes hand in hand with the second criterion, namely exclusion. To emphasise its difference, high society likes to protect itself, excluding anyone who might disturb the performance (Montandon 1995:766). In the night club context, anyone who is suspected of potentially causing a disturbance or who is simply not beautiful enough is refused entry. The third criterion is discretion: 'good manners have to be discrete' (Montandon 1995:766). This criterion is evidenced by the fact that it is only the 'good elements' who are allowed to go inside. The last criterion is visibility: 'élite members' like showing themselves in public places when they are looking their best (Montandon 1995:767). In Pachá, the young people are well dressed, in other words they are looking their best, satisfying 'the presentation of self', the first-order means of social communication according to Goffman (1959). As regards the use of space inside the night club, the structure is similar to that of a classical theatre, that is to say, it is semicircular. Armchairs and tables have been placed all around the dance floor, which is situated in the centre. Against the walls are large mirrors, and there are three bars. Two important details: above the dance floor there is a giant screen broadcasting videos, while on either side there is a stage featuring go-go-dancers. – Thus one wonders whether this night club might not in fact be still a theatre.

PROXEMIC AND COMMUNICATIVE ASPECTS IN PACHÁ

Some information on *pijos*' behaviour in Pachá was gathered from barmen. The latter, who can be identified by their 'uniform' of dark trousers and a T-shirt with the Pachá logo, form a 'team' in so far as 'they co-operate in staging a single routine' (Goffman

1959:79). In Pachá, this impression is remarkable because all the barmen form an extremely well co-ordinated ballet, with identical and complementary representations. While some work behind the bars, others serve at the tables. A Bulgarian barman said that he had the impression of being a servant rather than a barman: 'the young people call us because they need a glass, even though the bar is only 1.5 metres behind them and all they have to do is get up and ask for it'. This barman immediately called his clientele *pijos*, specifying that they were 'addicted to expensive and distinctive brands such as whisky JB (Justerini & Brooks) and Marlboro Light'. He also told me how alarmed he was by the quantity of alcohol young people drink, and even more, by the amount of money this requires. According to him, *pijos* sometimes spend up to 1 000 Euros in a single night. In Pachá, the armchairs are comfortable and the service is of high quality: conditions are optimised so that young people feel very comfortable – like pashas. Every Saturday night they call to reserve tables as if they were seats at the theatre, and if possible always the same ones. One informant, Ramón, said that he always reserves the same table for himself and his friends. His table has a strategic position, being situated near the bar so that they can be served quickly, and offering the best view of the dance floor and a good view of the mezzanine, which is reserved for VIPs.

Edward Hall (1969) demonstrates how man's use of space can affect personal and business relations or cross-cultural interactions. The main image which illustrates his theory is that each man's 'territory' is constituted by a series of 'invisible bubbles of space' whose dimensions are measurable (1969:113–129). According to the size of these 'bubbles', it is possible to learn about the link or relationship that the man establishes with his interlocutor. Hall's 'bubbles theory' is situated at individual level. Here, I am not so interested in these 'individual' bubbles as in other, 'collective' ones, which bring together several people at the same time. Let me analyse what happens in these exclusively male or mixed 'bubbles'.

According to some informants, 'there are never any exclusively female groups because it would be bad form for girls to reserve tables and consume alcohol without boys'. First, the drinks are always ordered and paid for by the boys. Whisky bottles follow one after the other, being paid for by the boys in turn. When there are only boys in the 'bubble', it is possible to see this rotation of payments as a succession of seizures of power. Therefore, each boy becomes the group master for part of the night, asserting his financial power by displaying his ability to pay for a bottle. These seizures of power, which only make sense in relation to the group, are probably more subconscious than conscious, since fieldwork showed that it is really taken for granted in *pijo* groups. In the second case, when there are girls in the 'bubble', the seizure of power has another dimension. I shall organise my observations as if the night club was a laboratory experiment.

When one or more girls are sitting around the table with boys, they may have one of three different statuses. First, a girl may be the lifelong friend or the sister of one of the boys. She is integrated into the group as a full member because she has known the

boys since infancy (same school, same district, the respective parents know each other). Thus, she fully participates in jokes based on common memories of their childhood. She can also give advice and play the role of a confidant. Nevertheless, this status is double-edged: she is highly regarded by the boys, but, in the night-club context, the latter attach little importance to her because no love conquest is possible. Rather, she plays the part of a sister: the boys protect her, keep an eye on her; she is no more and no less than a 'family member', especially when she is the sister of one of them. As for her, she is really proud to be surrounded by 'her' boys, 'her' brothers, and she is even more proud if she is the only girl in the group. If another girl – unknown, beautiful and attractive – is introduced into the group by one of the boys, she won't be nice to her. Indifferent, sometimes jealous and anxious to keep her 'place' in the group, she cannot open herself to 'new' female members.

The second status is the status of the girlfriend of one of the boys. If the relationship has been going for a long time (at least a year), the girl behaves as in the preceding case. The couple do not show their relationship through signs of affection; the girl is a full member of the group, and the longer she has been accepted into it, the more legitimate is her place within it. On the other hand, if the relationship is recent and, by signs of affection, the couple are making a spectacle of it, the girl rapidly becomes the group's nerve centre. Indeed, the group members judge her nice personality, her beauty and also her hold over the boy she has caught, because in the boys' minds, all girls represent a danger: a boy in love always distances himself from the group. Recently entered into the circle, she opens herself up to all the 'new' members, who are liable to become her allies.

Finally, there is the status of a girl, entirely unknown, that one of the boys introduces into the group. She is either a girl that the boy has met on the dance floor and is 'bringing back' to the table, or a girl that he has met before – at university, for example – and has told that she would be welcome at 'his' table. Indeed, she is well received and well treated, but only by the boys. For a moment, during the introduction, the latter focus their attention on her, question her and scrutinise her. Then they keep themselves in the background as much as possible in order to leave their friend with 'the new member', who inevitably sits beside him.

In none of these three cases does the girl ever pay for her drinks or offer to pay for them. As Pierre Bourdieu (1998:14) notes, 'sexual division seems to be in the nature of things, as we often say in order to speak about what is normal, natural, unavoidable'. Here, the gender distinction is visible from whether one pays or not, which symbolically expresses a certain male domination. As it is imposed and submitted to, it is not unpleasant for the dominated person, the girl. This situation is almost a paradox. If the boy dominates by offering drinks, does not the girl also dominate him, given that he pays for her? At this level, we are confronted with Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence' (1998:39–48), by which he means violence that is not physical but psychological, sweet and often invisible to its victims. Indeed, if the dominat-

ed person's schemes of perception and appreciation correspond to those of the dominator, relations between them are considered to be natural and therefore invisible. The girl who accepts such drinks truly feels that the boy surpasses her since he is affirming his superiority, but she becomes prouder, living in 'enchanted submission' (Bourdieu 1998:47).

In order to deepen this aspect, let me return to the third case, which is the most interesting one for my analysis. In the first and second cases, with the girl playing the role of either a lifelong friend or one of the boys' girlfriends, the drinks offered by the boys correspond to a routine. In the third case, by contrast, the fact that the boy is offering a drink to a girl he has only just met can be seen as an attempt by the boy to obtain prestige and popularity.¹ However that may be, it is possible to see a form of 'gift exchange' as analysed by Marcel Mauss (1999:143–279). Mauss refers to archaic forms of 'gift exchange', such as the *kula* or the *potlatch*, with which the present case has both similarities and differences. In so far as the boy is inviting the girl to come and sit down at his table and is offering her a drink, he can be said to be giving her a gift, a service and a consumer good at the same time. If the girl accepts this 'gift' from the boy, this means that she is receiving and is thus more or less engaged to give back a return for this gift. Thus, in *pijo* groups, we find the acts of 'giving, receiving and returning' mentioned by Mauss. The boy is not obliged to make these propositions to the girl (giving), and his action can be seen as being 'apparently free and gratis' (Mauss 1999:147); but nonetheless, in *pijos*' minds, the boy knows that this behaviour is more or less required in order to seduce a girl. The girl can either accept his offer or not, but her status as a *pija* means that her refusal would be impolite. It is also obvious that the girl is not obliged to return the gift – that is to say, to show him a sign of love – or at least she can take as long as she wants to return it. The performance is rather free in this case, even though the more the drinks that are offered, the more a return gift becomes required. The girl knows that if she does not return the gift her relationship with the boy will fail in the end, and that even friendship with him will be impossible. This is the rule of the game in *pijo* groups. It does not only exist in *pijo* groups, but it does also not exist in all youth groups. Nowadays, offering a girl a drink in order to seduce her is often seen as being out of date.

Mauss (1999:161) says that 'to accept something from somebody is to accept something of his spiritual essence, his soul'. This is perfectly illustrated by the present case: the boy and the girl are offering each other the best of themselves, particularly through non-verbal communication. A night club is not a literary café. The music is so loud that people never have serious conversations. Verbal communication is really limited, although the couple are generally physically close. In fact, the couple represents

¹ My observations in this night club often reminded me of the rules of dating in the USA in the 1940s as described by Margaret Mead (2001:265): 'boys are to ask, dates should be in public for display purposes, and dating is done for prestige, not out of sexual attraction'. Cf. also Lohmann (2004:126).

a bubble within the bubble, an 'intra-bubble' with, possibly, the shape of a heart. Indeed, the situation is interesting for both the boy and the girl. All the signs of a nascent complicity can be observed as they exchange engaging smiles. The girl crosses her legs to allow a better view of her slit skirt, she adopts a languorous movement of her hand to do her hair, or discretely looks in the mirror to check if her image is good. Every night club is a paradise of 'intimate distance in close phase' (Hall 1969:117). Pachá is no exception. In general, the music in night clubs is so loud that people are obliged to come as near as possible to speak to one another, directly into the ear. This explains why verbal communication is less important than non-verbal communication. Bodily movements made in order to express a wish (raising one's hand to order a drink) or a feeling (smiles, glances) and clothing (or perhaps costume) all play an important part in this non-verbal communication. In this theatrical mixture of communicational signs, everything happens by 'look'. According to my observations, there are two kinds of 'look'. The first is the 'passive look' which exploits the whole space of the night club. The second is the 'active look', that is, when someone stares at another person in particular, generally a man staring at a woman. This kind of look can be impolite if it is directed at body parts like the breasts. With this active look, the idea of 'an enchanted submission' again arises. This look generates a rapport between the dominator and the dominated person, but this kind of 'symbolic violence' is sweet, because the girl likes it; she is delighted to see a boy staring at her, since it is evidence of her beauty. The predominance of this type of communication confirms the theatrical dimension of Pachá. In the theatre, spectators come to see a performance, and actors act to be seen.

PACHÁ: A THEATRE ON THE MOVE

Every theatrical frame has a clear separation between stage and seating area. According to Goffman (1986:124), '[a] line is ordinarily maintained between a staging area where the performance proper occurs and an audience region where the watchers are located'. This duality is evident in Pachá, where the dance floor is like a stage and the space where armchairs and tables are located is the seating area. This duality leads one to think that actors will be on the dance floor and spectators will be sitting in armchairs. However, some qualification is needed with respect to the present case. Clearly, clubbers do not stay fixed to their armchairs as in a theatre, and dancing without stopping is also rare. Young people go to the stage to dance, then sit down again in order to rest and have a drink. Thus, between the stage and the armchairs, there is an endless coming and going. Consequently, the spectator can continually become an actor and vice versa. In so far as roles can be exchanged, these young people can be considered 'spect-actors', to borrow a term from Pascal Lardellier (2003:209), who uses it to

define the participants in a community ritual, thus giving a fundamental role to the procedure at the heart of ritual. Indeed, in a ritual, no one is just an actor or a spectator. The two groups look different, essentially asymmetrical, but they are complementary. This notion of 'spect-actor' puts all of Pachá's clients on an equal footing.

This status equality can also be seen if we look at another aspect, namely dress. All the young people in Pachá wear the same clothes, the same costume, and seem to present the same image. The attention focused on dress leads us to see these young people as being masked. Pere-Oriol Costa *et al.* (1997:139) evoke this notion of mask in their study of violent and dissident youth groups. Clothes and accessories worn in bars and night clubs by rebellious young people are important on two levels: to identify young people as members of a group, and to give them a personal identity. In other words, these signs are like a mask which hides and marks at the same time. The interplay between the two identities, declared and hidden, makes young people more audacious, and also makes them individuals. We also recall, with Mauss (1999:350), that 'persona means mask'. This leads to the question of which identity or 'persona' aspect is reflected by the mask worn by the *pijos*?

In Pachá, dress does not express a wish to be marginalized, but rather expresses belonging to a group of *pijos* (etic perspective) or a group of 'posh' young people from 'good' families (emic perspective). Here, the notion of a mask is very relevant. Clearly not all the young people who go to Pachá are from the upper class but, through the play of mask, they give the illusion of belonging to high society. The mask is a kind of strategic element integrated into the performance: it hides what these young people are and displays what they hope they will become in the future. In more explicit terms, by wearing darts trousers and well-ironed shirts, boys take care of their appearance as possible future lawyers or company managers. In any case, reserving tables reinforces this notoriety play. As for the girls, they accentuate their femininity by wearing evening dresses, enticing and fashionable tops and skirts, jewellery and make-up. This way of optimising beauty gives the impression that the girls want to embody the image of either the top model or the future lawyer's wife. Through the play of the masks they display, both girls and boys theatricalize a movement toward a higher class.

As we see here, the notions of spect-actor and mask are linked. In Pachá, it is noticeable that girls are much more frequently present on the dance floor than boys. A girl, as an actress, knows that others are watching her, so she tries to drag the spectator into her world as if, by magic, her mask could hypnotise him. This is not without consequence for the girl. Having won a boy's attention by catching him in the trap of her mask, she may become trapped by the boy's mask, meaning that the boy passes from the status of a spectator to that of an actor.

In Pachá, as in any contemporary night club, music is commercial and international, and young people perform individual dances that are not of interest in this analysis. Nonetheless, some remarks are in order. Dancing, as has already been pointed out, seems to be above all a girls' affair. Not only are there more girls than boys on

the dance floor, but they are also the first to go and dance. Rarely do they go alone to the dance floor; rather, they prefer to go in groups of two or three. Dancing face to face or forming a little circle, they share among them the looks they receive. The shared reflection of one or two girls is also very reassuring. During my fieldwork, I observed on several Saturday nights four girls who, among other young people on the dance floor, assiduously performed the same choreography as that of the singer on the giant screen. In other words, these girls performed 'as if' they were stars. The pleasure of imitation was clear and amazing, and this 'real performance' (Goffman 1986:127) gave the impression of the theatrical 'as if' being fulfilled. Another performance provides this same sensation, namely the go-go-dancers' show. On the podiums on both sides of the dance floor, professional dancers execute the same choreographies, thus providing a mirror image. As they are half naked, all eyes are fixed on them. These two examples are interesting for two reasons. The first is that they represent 'a play within a play'. The second is that these 'events' represent a kind of upward movement: the girls performing on the dance floor, then the go-go-dancers perched on the podiums, and finally, on the top, the star present virtually through the image on the giant screen.

A final aspect is that, in Pachá, the ladies' rooms are comparable to theatre wings or the 'back region' referred to by Goffman (1959:112). Indeed, satisfying more than biological needs, toilets have many functions for these girls. First, they go there to 'restore their image' by doing their hair and checking their make-up or their clothes. Secondly, as girls must play a role in the 'anterior region' of the dance floor or even sitting in armchairs, the only place where they can leave their role, their appearance, is the toilets. Dominique Picard (1995:57) suggests that, 'if we consider social life as a representation that requires a constant effort by the actor to keep his role, we understand that the existence of intimate places is indispensable in giving the actor the liberty of relaxing and being himself'. Thirdly, these girls go to the ladies' rooms to speak to their best friends and exchange secrets, often talking about their experiences or 'performances' on the dance floor. For these girls, the ladies' room is just like an artists' dressing room in that, away from the loud music of the 'anterior region', they can explain their scene performances to their friends, and what they perceived of the reactions of their 'spectators'. Thus ladies' rooms in Pachá are like wings, 'a back region' where 'illusions and impressions are openly constructed' (Goffman 1959:110), where one reviews one's role before acting, where one can also leave one's role and relax. Because of the constant comings and goings between the 'anterior region' and the 'back region', it is again possible to regard Pachá as a theatre on the move.

CONCLUSION

Known for its sense of *fiesta*, Spain has long and spectacular nights. The *fiesta* is almost an institution in this country. Summer and winter alike, every weekend, on Friday and Saturday nights, most Spanish young people go out until the early hours. It is true that this craze for these night 'excursions' has its origins. After four decades of Franco's dictatorship, Spain wanted to come back to life and proclaim its freedom. Thus many social and cultural movements, as well as many rebellious 'urban tribes' (such as punks or hippies), appeared in Spanish towns. All of these actors from the end of the 1970s and the 1980s had in common the will to celebrate democracy, to have a wild time. They occupied many bars and other spots of night-time leisure, which then became very numerous in Spanish towns. And although this explosive period, nicknamed the *movida*, has been over for more than ten years, the *fiesta* is going on. Anti-establishment youth groups have been replaced by other youth groups, who were 'better behaved' and supporters of the Partido Popular of José María Aznar (in government from 1996 to 2004), just like the *pijos*.

The *pijos* are fond of selected clubs, of which the Pachá night club is a good example. First, in order to be accepted for admission to Pachá, young people must be elegant. Then, once inside, as I observed, these *pijos* behave in a rather normative way. Three main types of behaviour have been brought out here. The first is that of 'the all-powerful boy', when there are only boys sitting around a table and one of them pays for a bottle. The second type of behaviour, when the girls keep to themselves to dance or go to the ladies room, can be seen as involving solidarity. Finally, the third type of behaviour, which involves the co-operative interaction of a boy and a girl, is one of charming play. Even though the *pijos* are apparently behaving normatively, we cannot forget that some of them are under the influence of alcohol and drugs such as cocaine, in order to make themselves look even more like show-business people.

This article has underlined how *pijos* wear the mask of Very Important Persons. 'Well born' or not, during the night and under the artificial lights of the Pachá, the *pijos* can pretend to belong to high society, to escape from daytime reality and opt for another identity. Enrique Gil Calvo (1996:31) sees in these night excursions a form of 'initiation rite', sometimes even a form of 'nobility of status rite', which perfectly corresponds to the *pijos* schema. As young people in Spain continue living at home until quite late in life, often till they get married (Gaviria 2002:45), it is clear that they need to appropriate a space for themselves and a moment to escape from parental control in order to lead an alternative life.

The aim of this paper has been to show – through the case study of a 'night' club – that the night is the perfect moment to engage in new experiences in a theatrical way. Carles Feixa Pámpols (2000:32) reminds us that, in occidental culture, the night has always had magical and contradictory references; not only is it considered a time of rest, it also has connotations of illusions, dreams and ambiguity. Night is lived

as a conquest, mixing imagination and reality, and is also the realm of performance and theatricality. As Pachá was a theatre before it became a night club, it was easy to make a comparison along this line. Besides the intrinsic characteristics of this night club, it is above all the relationships between the young people which recall the theatrical atmosphere. The latter indulge in role-playing, masking themselves and negotiating the statuses of spectator and actor. Without doubt, it is this spatio-temporal context that allows them to behave in this way: during the day, in the university, in public spaces like bars or cafeterias or at home, they are not in the same reality, but act differently (Tinat 2002). Night offers other possibilities that may be complementary to those of the day, and may be just as theatrical, if not more so.

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