

## **“The wave of a *modern* magic wand”: genealogies of domestic décor processes in the magazine *Nuevo Estilo* (1977-1986)<sup>i</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Regarding recent decades, certain milestones have taken centre stage in historiographic narratives of Spanish social and cultural history: the political transition to democracy, countercultural and citizen movements and socioeconomic globalization. All of them have been profusely analyzed and refracted through their crystallizations in the public sphere, overshadowing not just the deep, albeit uneven, changes that have occurred in the private sphere, but also the heuristic consistency of domestic culture(s). An analysis of the evolution of domestic décor practices and discourses from the late seventies onwards, has proven to be an unexpected, yet extremely sensitive indicator of social and cultural changes in late modern urban dwelling imaginaries. We will focus on a first period (1977-1986) through an incursion into the archive of the home décor magazine *Nuevo Estilo*. Its written and visual narrativization of home-making processes (McElroy, 2006) should help us decipher the emergence of the ambivalences presented by the growing metropolis, by new ecologies of objects, and by modern symbolic economies of furnishing (Potts, 2006) and housing.

**Keywords:** Home décor magazine, modernization, domestic imaginary, ambivalence

## Full Paper

In her *prolegomena* to a case study on Norwegian homes, Marianne Gullestad pointed out that “western family-households have not only lost several functions in the process of modernization, they have also taken on new functions. The most important, in my view, is *to provide a setting for modern intimacy*” (Gullestad, 2001: 88, my emphasis). This performative articulation between the modernization of households and that of intimate life seems to resonate in the pages of the magazine *Nuevo Estilo* (in English, *New Style*). Published for the first time in June 1977 with an ambitious print run of 105,000 copies (which immediately sold out), it wove together a myriad of aspirational narratives of the time: that same month, the first general election took place in Spain, three years after the death of Franco and 41 years after the previous election had been held. A reconstruction of its inscription in this transitional context is interesting for both methodological and historical reasons. On the one hand, it makes it possible to enrich historiographic narratives about the Spanish transition to democracy, which has mainly focused on transformations in the public sphere, and draw a more attentive look towards the private and the everyday, making use of a home décor magazine as a source of popular culture (Gordon and McArthur, 1988, 1989). On the other hand, it sheds light on the complex domestic negotiations (McElroy, 2006) of a society brought up with traditional and national values, and an unprecedented type of material culture, from furnishing to housing, as well as a new and (or) foreign ethics and aesthetics of privacy and domesticity.

### **“Why ‘Nuevo Estilo’?”: traits and ambivalences of teaching people to be modern**

Until its appearance in 1977, when it rapidly became the home decoration magazine with the largest print run in the country (85,000 copies per month on

average),<sup>ii</sup> the only magazine of this kind in the Spanish press was *El Mueble*, founded in 1961. With its conservative tenor, aimed at a well-off feminine reader, *El Mueble* appeared during a decade in which living standards and consumption levels increased, a decade which bore numerous magazines for women, like *Ama* (1960) and *Telva* (1963). Its price and its pages distanced it from home domestic advice for a mass readership, which gossip and housekeeping magazines considered a supplementary subject, as well as from brochures published *ad hoc* and distributed by the regime, for which the house had been the space for a moral reconstruction of the country after the civil war (Diéguez, 2006). All of these appealed to devoted non-working housewives, regardless of their class. The following decade, especially from 1975 onwards, saw a very gradual (and class-fragmented) integration of women into the labor market, a relative generalization of consumerism, a consolidation of urban middle classes and, as mentioned, the arrival of democracy.

In this state of affairs, the initial answer to the opening question which the director of the magazine, Marisa Pérez Bodegas, asked herself in her welcoming letter included in the first issue is, to say the least, quite disconcerting: “Why ‘Nuevo Estilo’? Because modern life, with its excessive rhythm, makes us seek refuge in our home to feel calm. Because, very often, the ugliness of the streets makes it necessary for us to surround ourselves with an aesthetic tailor-made environment. Because the city landscape, turning its back on nature, creates the need to fill the corners with plants and flowers.”<sup>iii</sup> Such an anti-urban tone doesn’t seem to agree with a magazine published in the two biggest cities of Spain, Madrid and Barcelona, with a title and a subtitle on the cover announcing novelty as its *leitmotiv*: “Nuevo Estilo. Decoration to keep your house up to date.” It does not suit the spirit of an editorial team consisting of young decorators, gardeners and restorers (all of them women, except for the photographers). Moreover, it does not connect with the final reason employed in the welcoming letter itself: “Because the new style of life requires a new decorating style.”<sup>iv</sup> This apparently

incoherent ebb and flow between the criticism of life in the city and the defense of urbanite features of novelty would continue throughout the issues. From “feeling desperate in your hostile balcony, full of pollution, unpleasant, sterile!”<sup>v</sup> to “living defensively, (...) for our vocation as a developed society with all of its consequences announces horrors analogous to those of London, Paris or New York”<sup>vi</sup> (in relation to the level of danger within urban areas), *Nuevo Estilo* seemed to invoke the anxieties and the fears of a population already urban, yet expelled to the periphery because of rising housing prices, or recently arrived from the countryside or from provincial towns, for work or for studies, and, thus, novices in the experience of “a capital.” At the same time, as we will see in the following sections, it embraced and extolled values linked to mental life in the metropolis, to put it à la Simmel, with special emphasis on individual self-expression and a modern design *ethos* of function (Baudrillard, 1972). When going over its pages, one gets the feeling that it wanted to convene the ambivalent emotions and experiences entailed by ongoing metropolitanization processes. For instance, by that time, 90% of the new family-households formed in Madrid could only find housing in the suburban and periurban areas (Leira, 2013), which were growing spectacularly,<sup>vii</sup> driven by a recently prolific private real-estate business. Advice was given on how to choose and to buy or rent a house in these conditions, for “the inevitable towers (...) can seem unsightly and stifling to you, but it must be said that we will inevitably end up in them. If the housing demand exceeds the supply and the price of the land reaches exorbitant figures, finding a solution in crowding together, gaining meters with height, is, to a certain point, understandable.”<sup>viii</sup> A feature on urban housing was included in the 41<sup>st</sup> issue: “the city offers you four types of houses: the single family home [including row houses]: an individualistic dream. (...) Old flats: there is class here. Today, as yesterday. (...) The modern apartment: all together, but comfortably. Comfort ... but lacking meters. (...) The attic: high roofs for profound spirits.”<sup>ix</sup> The *cliché*-like enunciations shouldn’t distract us from two very interesting points: first, these typologies were unknown in the urban landscape of Spanish cities, thus had not

been symbolically invested yet. Single family homes were never used as a first residence before the late seventies, and row houses were just starting to be built by that time (Arias, 2003). The rehabilitation of old flats and the occupation of attics were responses to the rise in prices of newly-constructed houses, as well as a manifestation of the extension of real-estate speculation to the city centre, after the boom of the metropolitan area. Yet they not only marked an inflection point in the facticity of metropolitanization processes, but also, and most importantly, in the order of the imaginaries on which they stood. Whether related to the American suburb, or to renovated lofts rescued from the bourgeois memory of the city centre, the residential movements of families looking for introverted forms of socialization in private residential areas and of youngsters having “the dream of everything bohemian”<sup>x</sup> come true, revealed to what extent new domestic imaginaries (including signs of distinction) regarding housing were entering certain Spanish urban middle classes. Second, it is worth noting that the title of the feature was “Changing residence.” Its lead-in invited the reader “as the first intention of January (...) to choose your favorite house among the types offered by the city of our sins. (...) Starting from similar resources, there is a house for every mood: pick the one you like the most.”<sup>xi</sup> This emphasis on the qualitative aspect of demand, i.e. the fact that it dealt with a *home improvement* demand, was absolutely unusual in Spanish cities: in 1975, in Madrid, households moved on average only 1.1 times during their family-cycle, compared to the 7 times of an American household during the same year (Leira, 2013). Therefore, we could think that *Nuevo Estilo* registered and participated in the incipient globalization<sup>xii</sup> of the symbolic economies of housing (extrapolating the notion of symbolic economies of furnishing: see Potts, 2006) within Spanish urban middle classes, a symbolic order which fed the materiality of both urban growth and renewal.

The letters sent by readers and published in the “Consultancy” section sometimes exhibit reticence, sometimes enthusiasm, regarding their aesthetic criteria in matters of modern housing and decoration, and an atmosphere of disorientation shrouds the requests regarding the issues presented by the new forms of dwelling

(How to relate to a huge community of unknown neighbors? How to choose an apartment in a high-rise?). The rhetoric of the magazine was, consequently, cheerfully gentle and didactic, but also ironic and paternalistic. Even if its forms of interpellation seemed to be addressed to a wide range of publics, the material world of consumption and the cultural capital exhibited by the magazine limited the public to a learned urban middle class who cherished modernizing tendencies. As Campi and Moix (1998) noted, during the seventies and the eighties there was a generational shift in fashions and habits, for “the young couples in love started to desire ‘design’ furniture for their new homes, as a sign of modernity” (Moix, 1998: 66). In fact, on the basis of the letters received, the editorial team drew a prototypical portrait of the magazine’s reader: “a young person, yes, generally married. In your family, one of the members of the couple – probably she – buys the magazine, but both read it. If they already have children, they are small, even tiny. Nor is their apartment big, even if it is very often new and still being paid for. Not rolling in money.”<sup>xiii</sup> Dozens of reports were consecrated to them with titles like “How much does it cost to marry and set up a flat?”<sup>xiv</sup> and covers were riddled with solutions to their prototypical problem, the last brush-stroke in the former portrait: “they have *space problems*.”<sup>xv</sup>

### **“The war against space”: foundational dialectics of the modern house**

As Anahi Ballent notes, “the leading role attributed to ‘space’ is a new character which will be incorporated into the culture of habitation of certain middle sectors” (Ballent, 2014: 619). “The war against space” (declared as such in the second issue and reiterated throughout the years) was, first, a struggle with the domestic space available: its scarcity, its stinginess. The section of the readers’ decorative proposal, “Have your say,” was filled with proposals for “micro apartments” and “mini-studios”<sup>xvi</sup> and reports on “how to live without strain in 25 m<sup>2</sup>”<sup>xvii</sup> or “how to use 32 m<sup>2</sup>”<sup>xviii</sup> were a constant in the magazine’s content. The emergence of this

problem was linked to the reduction of the average size of houses, contrasting both with the generalization of the capacity for material accumulation made possible by mass consumption, and with the increase in expectations for individual space within households. From its very first issue, *Nuevo Estilo* imputed this problem to “modern houses,”<sup>xix</sup> “today’s apartments,”<sup>xx</sup> and this charge was reiterated year after year: “because the house is small and we must create, with ingenuity and good taste, a personal corner for every member of the family,”<sup>xxi</sup> or; “in modern houses, so poor in space, the square meter is more valuable than an oil well,”<sup>xxii</sup> or; “space is lacking nowadays. So much so, that there are people who only have a few square meters to live in.”<sup>xxiii</sup> The redemption of modernity would come from modernity itself, though: “the modern furniture industry is continually creating a series of functional elements which offer a good solution to the limitation of spaces.”<sup>xxiv</sup> The compliments to modern furniture are accompanied by several criticisms of classic furniture, which “does not really seem appropriate to the actual size of houses, so small.”<sup>xxv</sup> Paradoxically, modernity was accused of stealing space, but defended for giving furniture which “performs a trick and saves space”<sup>xxvi</sup>. Magic is the chosen language, mythically founding the modern house on this dialectic between space and furnishing: “Are you familiar with the pieces of furniture that double space? Each square meter is worth a fortune in our modern houses - they are so small.”<sup>xxvii</sup> The “trick” had to do not just with making spaces seem bigger, thanks to the sensuous qualities of modern design furniture, linked to simplicity and lightness (Garvey, 2013; McElroy, 2006). It was, rather, associated with its modular nature, for “the seventies bring with them the advent of modular and composable furniture, appearing during the late sixties” (Moix, 1998: 222). Dozens of advertisements crowded the issues of *Nuevo Estilo*: Cerco, Modul Kit, Biok System, Ane System, Möbel Confort, Maga Modulo and so on (Figure 1).



Fig. 1 - Möbel Comfort advertisement, Nuevo Estilo 26 (August 1979).

Furniture was “as modular as you need.”<sup>xxviii</sup> And it was celebrated as the key tool to multiply the uses of space. The section “Decorating lessons” in the 58<sup>th</sup> issue was devoted to shared bedrooms, where several examples of modular combinations were illustrated (figure 2).





Fig.2 - Extract from the report “Minibedroom for two,” *Nuevo Estilo* 58 (July 1982).

Thanks to these combinations, what had been monofunctional and private spaces became, at the same time, spaces for social life: beds were hidden, stacked up, fitted, dissimulated, and bedrooms became living rooms, sitting rooms, music rooms. Correlatively, detailed reports, such as “the revolution of tables,”<sup>xxix</sup> appeared, presenting modular tables that transformed any room into a work place, while study rooms, defined as the “*sanctasanctorum* for tired fathers,” “faded into history”<sup>xxx</sup> (both as masculin(iz)ed and private spaces, we could add). This emergent ambiguity of home spaces was metonymically condensed in the three star pieces of furniture during these years. First, sofa-beds (figure 3), where the nocturnal privacy of rest and sensuality coexisted with the publicity of daily activities, dissolving the traditional sense of *decorum* associated with beds (already in 1611, Covarrubias defined in his dictionary the palace as “the hall which is public and common, where there is neither a bed nor any other thing which could embarrass”, quoted in Cámara, 2006: 130, my emphasis).



Fig.3 - Cover of *Nuevo Estilo* 25 (July 1979).

Second, wheeled-auxiliary furniture (figure 4), from drink trolleys to sound-system and portable TV furniture, whose nomad wanderings changed bedrooms into living rooms, living rooms into dining rooms and every room into a music room.



Fig.4 - Extract from the report “Auxiliary furniture,” *Nuevo Estilo* 96 (January 1986).

Third, folding screens and panels (figure 5), which worked as “removable doors.”<sup>xxxi</sup>



Fig. 5 - Extract from the report “Plexiglas folding screens”, *Nuevo Estilo* 46 (June 1981).

This ode to the hybridization of spatial uses and to door removal was intensified by the clamor “Partition walls out!”<sup>xxxii</sup> and repeated in several features. In its 38<sup>th</sup> issue, the magazine presented a loft with no separating walls, introducing it as follows: “walls are left out. No partitions at all, only levels that lead softly from the living room to the bedroom and from there to the bathroom, with not even one door to cross. The perfect solution for our system of life, rather informal, and our mentality, which has just one fixed idea: freedom.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> The subject of the sentence was left indefinite, it could be the hypothetical owners talking (but it was not part of an interview), or the magazine talking in the name of its readers. This praise to the lack of separating walls is extremely eloquent if we take into consideration that, from the forties onwards, architects in Spain had followed very rigid precepts regarding the preservation of differentiated spaces within the house, regardless of the available surface space. As social housing architect Luis García de la Rasilla declared in 1942: “we would never think for a moment about adopting Marxist solutions, nor even remotely, projecting sitting rooms that can be converted into bedrooms, it is neither Christian, nor familiar, it’s immoral» (quoted in Diéguez, 2006: 104). Even if the following decades, especially from the sixties on, saw to a relaxation of this precept, allowing the creation of a single living room instead of the triad entrance hall/dining room/kitchen, modernizing architects would complain about the reforms immediately undertaken by the dwellers, always directed towards the rehabilitation of separate spaces (Diéguez, 2006). Domestic imaginaries in Spanish cities seemed to be not just heirs of a traditional sense of urbanity, related to the consolidation of spatial specialization from the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Blasco, 2006); they also appeared to be deeply rooted in the fears of sexual and social promiscuity invoked by shared spaces, which not only mixed boys and girls during the night, but even worse, disrupted family roles and social hierarchies when confusing reception halls with bedrooms, or dining rooms with kitchens. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, going from one room to another had not been a merely physical shift, but also a symbolic movement on a private-public *continuum* embodied by permanent walls and closed doors, working as social

borders for those (wives, children, servants and visitors) who ought to knock and ask for permission to enter (Giménez, 2006). As Baudrillard (2010) noted, in relation to late 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois houses, an evocative correlation seemed to exist between the scarce mobility of family members and that of furniture, as if one were the mirror image of the other. Renato Ortiz goes beyond this interpretation, linking the heaviness of the furniture of Parisian universes of bourgeois intimacy to the necessity of taking root within a context of rapid social change (Ortiz, 2000). Following this key to interpretation, the real or metaphoric dissolution of walls and doors by modular and mobile furniture could be interpreted not just as a response to the scarce space of the present, but also as part of a war against the rigid space of the past.

### **“A new art of well being”: exhaustiveness and informality in domestic aesthetics**

The dissolution of social rigidity, led by the hybridization processes facilitated by modular furniture, took form in deep changes within two domestic spaces: kitchens and living rooms.

“Between 1960 and 1970, substantial reforms were made in most of the culinary spaces of Spanish houses. Stores proposing never seen solutions flourished, factories of modular furniture were created and we were invaded by robots (...). The kitchen turned gradually into the most expensive and most sophisticated room of the house (...). Thus, the fashion of the dining room-kitchen was born (...). Nowadays it is impossible to consider, when designing a kitchen, not placing a table for breakfast, lunch or dinner (Espinet, 1984: 129, my translation).”

*Nuevo Estilo* shared this vision, stating that “kitchens are no longer considered alone, but rather accompanied by a dining room.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> The report “Shall we eat in the kitchen?” (figure 6) insisted on the appropriateness of incorporating a table,



appealing to space and time efficacy above formality, and considered “open plan kitchens no longer a problem, but an actual decorative element.”<sup>xxxv</sup>



Fig. 6 - Extract from the report “Shall we eat in the kitchen?” in *Nuevo Estilo* 28 (November 1979).

In 1980, the magazine dedicated a whole report to the kitchen, entitling it “Cinderella’s Corner.” It started by reporting that “the insipid kitchen, the family’s Cinderella, is now the pretty girl of the house. Formerly thought of as a space for thankless tasks, now it is the warm heart of the family, the meeting point around a hurried breakfast, a happy meal and a relaxed dinner.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> One year later it insisted: “it is a fact: the new decorative norms have caused a revolution at home. The kitchen, for a long time considered the family’s Cinderella, once again occupies the prevailing position.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> The identification with this fairy-tale character was present in other issues during 1980 and 1981. This reiterated personification seemed to appeal to a double shift. On the one hand, the kitchen experienced an *ethical* recognition: no longer strictly linked to privacy, femininity and domestic labor, it welcomed social life, masculinity and leisure as part of its *ethos*. For instance, Siematic kitchens were “kitchens to live in. (...) Considered as living rooms for life.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> Also kitchens were proclaimed to be “rather a home,

than a kitchen: because a kitchen with Alno turns into the part of the house where one lives. Where one is at ease. (...) You'll be able to have a kitchen in which to welcome guests, have children's parties, eat and have daily breakfast and many more things."<sup>xxxix</sup> Very often, these slogans were accompanied by pictures of friendly meals, where women and men offered images of informal ease and sociality, cut off from the (idealized) scenarios of domestic discipline and feminine solitude, the way kitchens had been depicted in magazines and publicity during the Franco regime (figure 7).



Fig. 7 - Alno kitchens advertisement, *Nuevo Estilo* 14 (July 1978).

Ironically, the kitchens in *Nuevo Estilo*'s reports were generally empty. On the other hand, kitchens suffered *aesthetic* embellishment as well, for they "must be cute enough to invite friends proudly with no complexes at all,"<sup>xl</sup> and "in order to do so, of course, it is necessary to have a kitchen as appealing as a living room."<sup>xli</sup>

Just like for Cinderella, aesthetization was inextricably entangled with a more dignified position for kitchens, thanks to “the wave of a *modern* magic wand”<sup>xlii</sup>: the entry to modern public life was paid for with a modern aesthetic demand. Modernity showed up again in the (mythical) language of magic to keep on founding the dialectics of the modern house. This time, however, the entanglement was not new, but rather recovered and transformed. As McElroy (2006) underlines, neither the house as a reflection of its inhabitants’ taste, nor its link to the modern self as an ongoing project, constitute a novelty. What is a novelty is the extent to which the request for self-expressive aesthetics (loaded with class notions of taste) pertains across every single corner of the house, with unsparing exhaustiveness. Whereas from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, houses had strict scopic regimes of the visible and the invisible, which delimited the spaces of appearance and representation (Cámara, 2006), late modernity, according to *Nuevo Estilo*, seemed to erase this delimitation. This entailed profound changes in the relationship with domestic material culture, particularly epitomized in two examples. First, the treatment of the bathroom revealed a kind of removal of superfluity from the house, for everything became aesthetically meaningful, “down to the last detail,”<sup>xliii</sup> as the title of a report on bathroom décor stated. The 32<sup>nd</sup> issue, in March 1980, conceded numerous pages to that room (figure 8):

“Oh! What a time when the bathroom was merely the “excusado” [as the toilet was traditionally called in Spain, etymologically linked to “escondido”, that is, hidden], the embarrassing corner of the house, furnished with four indispensable devices and at best some few discrete lace curtains. Love for hygiene and for light converted it into an important room of the house for which a pleasant environment is sought. (...) Like a glove, this room can be pretty as well.”<sup>xliv</sup>

A few pages later, a report on the bathroom’s history was included, ending up with a play on words: “please, put more interest in this room, which is everything but a secondary room, invest time in it, please.”<sup>xlv</sup> This double meaning of time



investment in the bathroom, for decorating it and for getting oneself tidied up, could point to parallel emerging trends of aesthetization in the relationship with the self and with the house. Jacob Delafon advertisements, meanwhile, were declaring the bathroom a “revealer of one’s lifestyle.”<sup>xlvi</sup>



Fig.8 - Extract from the report “Eight sparks of salt”, *Nuevo Estilo* 32 (March 1980).

The second example takes into consideration the treatment of family legacies, joined together in the reiterative expression “grandma’s furniture,”<sup>xlvii</sup> emphasizing the generational breach: “they’re not antique, but antiquated; they’re not valuable, but you are fond of them. If you’re capable of brightening them up, they’ll be very useful, giving to the house that touch of color and life typical of family objects.”<sup>xlviii</sup> In the report “how to decorate with memories”, it was said that “a nostalgic mood can be combined with the most modern comforts with just a few touches of that ‘antiquated’ tone in some corners of the house.”<sup>xlix</sup> Typical rustic chairs and tables appeared painted in light blue or dark pink (figure 9), and compositions with old family portraits were shown as examples (figure 10).



Fig.9 - Extract from the report "Old furniture, new faces," *Nuevo Estilo* 4 (September 1977).



Fig.10 - Extract from the report "A nice gesture for grandma," *Nuevo Estilo* 14 July 1978.

This decorative emphasis on the aesthetic potentialities of family legacies generated, according to their letters, feelings of trivialization among some readers, and of independence and creativity among others, revealing heterogeneous sensitivities towards the past and its presence in the home. Additionally, these legacies conjured up conflictive relationships with traditional ecologies of objects. *Nuevo Estilo* was Jacobin in this aspect: lifelong white net curtains must be checkmated,<sup>i</sup> the classic trilogy of headboard, mattress base and footboard ought to give way to other pieces of furniture,<sup>ii</sup> glass cabinets were pretentious,<sup>iii</sup> and the study room belonged to history.<sup>iiii</sup> This relentless logic of obsolescence cleared the path for modern ecologies of objects which introduced unknown visual and material universes: colorful plastic and crockery flatware (figure 11), adapted to dishwashers,<sup>lv</sup> pine-wood and metallic furniture (figure 12),<sup>lv</sup> plasterboard accessories,<sup>lvi</sup> radio-cassettes and mini stereo systems,<sup>lvii</sup> and so on.



Fig. 11 - Extract from the report "Guess who's coming for lunch," *Nuevo Estilo* 45 (May 1981).



Fig.12 - Extracts from reports on living rooms, Nuevo Estilo 48 (September 1981).

In relation to the living room, the magazine contrasted the former sitting rooms, “for receiving visits put into a straitjacket,” with present-day living rooms, “for watching TV, playing, eating, listening to music, working, reading, chatting, in one word, living.”<sup>lviii</sup> Generational domestic difference was condensed in the relaxation of practices and their temporalities: “Our everyday living-room,” as the title of the feature announced, was in opposition to the static fixation of sitting rooms, where furniture waited for the weekend visits to come in a sort of taxidermic state. The emerging domestic informality found its bodily correlatives in the easygoing gestures and sloppy positions sheltered by seats with organic shapes, either sofas, beds, or pillows, very often indistinguishable. As the Roche Bobois advertisement professed (figure 13): “a new generation of seats has conquered many homes (...). Modules of different shapes and giant pillows which stack, align, join according to the caprices of fantasy: a demonstration of the fact that *there is a new art of well being, a new way of sitting*. Forgotten are the old lessons of correct behavior advising us to sit up ‘straight’; here, postures and movements are free and relaxed and each one finds comfort without compromise, in his own way.”<sup>lix</sup>





Fig.13 - Roche Bobois advertisement, *Nuevo Estilo* 9 (February 1978).

This casual ergonomics for modern intimacy showed not just to what extent “lines of sensual acceptance (and acceptability) have been withdrawn” (Highmore, 2011: 170), but also, as Ben Highmore (2011) defines it, the *sensual pedagogy* involved in modernization processes, such as that of the domestic space. Moreover, during these years, the carefree and uninhibited postures of Pepi in her living room, in Almodóvar’s *Pepi, Luci, Bom and other average girls* (1980), circulated through the puzzled gazes of a society who would rather recognize feminine privacy in the orthopedic rigidity of Luci having a coffee in her dining room, for the aesthetics of women’s intimacy still bore oppressive ethics of decency (the whole dining room, with its overloaded print wallpaper and tablecloth, seemed to incarnate its metaphoric *mise-en-scène*).

## **Home-making narratives and the performative potential of domestic imaginaries**

The moment of modernization coinciding with the so-called “Spanish transition” implied a profound destabilization of social imaginaries, especially where, as in the case of domestic imaginary, formerly there were strong narrative weaves (due to their prescriptive character) and they stood on powerful conventional practices (due to their ritual nature). It is perhaps in this articulation of discourse(s) and praxis where “the performative potential as mediation” (Berdaoulay, 2012: 52, my translation) of imaginaries lies: “(...) it proceeds from the construction of a coordinated narration translated into action. This way, imaginaries present themselves as a dramatization of behaviors, thus allowing them to be shared and become the places they correspond to” (*Ibid.*). Therefore, if domestic imaginaries, in their speech-praxis entanglement, can be conceived of as the mediation element from which intimacy is enacted and home is performatively produced as a spatiotemporal scale, we might read in *Nuevo Estilo* an attempt to influence the forging of a certain (bragged-about “modern”) imaginary of urban dwelling. Indeed, it carried out a new written and visual narrativization of home-making (McElroy, 2006), where the house functioned synecdochically as the actual *figuration* (Castoriadis, 1998) for domestic modernity as a whole, in its material (and immaterial) dimensions: from furniture to practices, from aesthetics to ethics. In this sense, the magazine is, as Ballent noted regarding the Argentinian magazine *Claudia*, “a patchwork (...), a complex object, thus composed, plural” (Ballent, 2014: 601). It revealed the deep ambivalences entailed by what was considered “modern life, which broke up everything in its wake at home.”<sup>lx</sup> As a paradigmatic example, in 1981, its section “Our money” was dedicated to a fictional autobiographic short story entitled “I had an ultramodern kitchen.” The tragicomic vicissitudes of the female protagonist, whose pagan worship of small electrical household appliances had turned cooking into an endless liturgy of

plugging machines in, and had converted the kitchen into an unfeasible profane altar, served as a pretext to warn the reader not to go with the flow of domestic technology and its incessant proliferation and innovation. It advised having a kitchen “halfway between the wood-burning stove and the laser beam to grill chicken. Comfortable, practical and touching (...). Don’t turn your back on technology. Simply buy what you really need. If you don’t follow this, you’ll just waste money in return for nothing: appearance and that’s it.”<sup>lxi</sup> By that time, two novelists had also chosen the kitchen as the metonymic chronotope for critically portraying the contradictory effects of domestic modernity. In her novel *The Back Room* (1978), Carmen Martín Gaité wrote:

“I’m appalled by today’s kitchens, aseptic, luxurious and impersonal, where nobody would seat to chat; these rooms presided by the cult of smoke extractors, waste shredders, dishwashers, by the stereotyped smile of the housewife, created with effort and skill from TV models, this woman who is obliged by propaganda to “organize herself well” as a goal and a triumph, unable to build a relationship with the utensils and machines continually renovated and handled by her immaculate hands” (Martín Gaité, 1997: 66, my translation).

And Malena, the protagonist of Almudena Grandes’ *Malena Is a Name from a Tango* (1994), described a kitchen in the early eighties as follows:

“Hundreds of artifacts as petty as they are useless: a special piece of cutlery for the spaghetti, a pot to cut eggs in slices, another one to separate whites from yolks, a thick glass disc to be placed in the bottom of the saucepan so that milk didn’t overflow when boiling, a net to prevent chickpeas’ skins from coming off, and much other silly stuff of the same class” (Grandes, 1994: 439, my translation).

Therefore, if inscribed in a wider constellation of narratives and counter-narratives on modern intimacy, *Nuevo Estilo* could be treated as a precious heuristic tool to study not only the changing geographies of domesticity, but also the transformations of the house as an intercultural object (Giglia, 2012) where different dwelling cultures and their correlative domestic imaginaries nest under

the same roof, those of the expert (architect, decorator, journalist) and of the user, those from the past and those from the present.

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## Notes:

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<sup>ii</sup> According to its "News" section in *Nuevo Estilo* (from now on *NE*) 5, October 1977.

<sup>iii</sup> *NE* 1, June 1977, (all the quotes from the magazine are my translation).

<sup>iv</sup> *NE* 1, June 1977.

<sup>v</sup> *NE* 2, July 1977.

<sup>vi</sup> *NE* 10, February 1978.

<sup>vii</sup> Madrid was, starting in the fifties, the European city with the highest rate of metropolitanization in terms of demographic growth (the most eloquent table can be found in Sassen, 1991: 43). During the sixties, the population of the first metropolitan ring grew 24% compared to 4.3% for the city; during the seventies, both the first and the second metropolitan crowns grew (18.2% and 3.8%, respectively) far more than the city (0.1%), which would present a negative growth by the eighties (Leal and Domínguez, 2009: 84).

<sup>viii</sup> *NE* 1, June 1977.

<sup>ix</sup> *NE* 41, January 1981.

<sup>x</sup> This is how *Nuevo Estilo* defined the case of the attic (*Ibidem*). The renewal of the ideal of "living in the centre" was linked to the feature of young professionals from the very first issue, which already contained a report entitled "Old house, young owner".

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>xii</sup> As sociologist Jesús Leal emphasizes, "the growth of the middle classes as an effect of economic globalization has produced a higher demand of new residential spaces" (Leal, 2002, 68-69, my translation). On his part, town planner Eduardo Leira points in the same direction regarding the emergence of a home improvement demand: "many European corporations and multinationals established offices in Madrid and their transferred executives "also" demanded



good houses. Qualitative demands of housing began to appear apart from the quantitative ones deriving from the new households" (Leira, 2013, my translation).

xiii *NE* 12, May 1978, my emphasis.

xiv *NE* 14, July 1978.

xv *NE* 12, May 1978.

xvi *NE* 45, May 1981.

xvii *NE* 56, May 1982.

xviii *NE* 46, June 1981.

xix *NE* 2, July 1977.

xx *NE* 96, January 1986

xxi *NE* 1, June 1977.

xxii *NE* 38, October 1980

xxiii *NE* 56, May 1982.

xxiv *NE* 2, July 1977.

xxv *NE* 1, June 1977.

xxvi *NE* 58, July 1982.

xxvii *NE* 13, June 1978.

xxviii *Maga* advertisement in *NE* 2, July 1977.

xxix *NE* 41, January 1981.

xxx *Ibidem*.

xxxi *NE* 11, April 1978

xxxii *NE* 56, May 1982

xxxiii *NE* 38, October 1980.

xxxiv *NE* 38, October 1980.

xxxv *NE* 28, November 1979.

xxxvi *NE* 38, October 1980.

xxxvii *NE* 50, November 1981.

xxxviii *NE* 1, June 1977

xxxix *NE* 14, July 1978.

xl *NE* 48, September 1981.

xli *NE* 50, November 1981.

xlii *NE* 38, October 1980, my emphasis.

xliiii *NE* 44, April 1981.

xliv *NE* 32, March 1980.

xlv *NE* 32, March 1980.

xlvi *NE* 48, September 1981.

xlvii *NE* 4, October 1977; *NE* 35, June 1980.

xlviii *NE* 4, October 1977.

xliv *NE* 14, July 1978.

i *NE* 50, November 1981.

ii *NE* 58, July 1982.

iii *NE* 11, April 1978.

liii *NE* 41, January 1981.

liv *NE* 2, July 1977 and *NE* 45, May 1981.

lv *NE*, June 1982 and *NE* 58, July 1982.

lvi *NE* 96, January 1986.

lvii *NE* 15, September 1978.

lviii *NE* 59, September 1982.

lix *NE* 9, February 1978, my emphasis.

lx *NE* 59, September 1982.

61 *NE* 50, November 1981.

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