

## **Long life to Cutre Chou!!!**

To my friends from el Cutre and their followers.

by Miguel Benlloch

It's the Corpus Christi festivity in Granada in the year the early 1980s at the venue Caseta El Meneillo (The Little Shake) where el Cutre performs two shows during the Fair, on Wednesday and Saturday at 1 a.m.

There we were, we used to gather at 11 p.m., ready to dress and make us up for the session. The dressing room was just below the stage. We had to bend while moving (like hunchbacks) since the height of the room from ceiling to floor was 1.40 metres. A dim bulb allowed us to open the trunk and pick up our new garments and the latest accesories for the season. Life was frantically boiling, moving to and forth, our laughing and making gestures, just looking how we were transforming ourselves from Marxist-Leninist agitprop activists to a carnivalesque show: the fuss of the sequins, the veils, the big fake cocks and tits, the impossible wigs and the new garments prepared for the occasion. Lipsticked lips, mutated genders, the craziness of a soap opera cabaret with torn stockings. And the... Where did you put this? Pass me the lipstick and the mascara... please, Nico, apply me the make-up, I can't do it by myself without a mirror. In the meantime, we had a look at the audience through the holes of the piece of cloth that covered the bottom of the stage. An expectant audience, faithful to their date with el Cutre, had already started to shout: Cutre! Cutre! La Estrella, La Lola, La Santa (The Saint) shortening from Santaella, were becoming supervedettes, the stars of the night of the Corpus Fair.

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Nothing could be funnier than those minutes, when everybody was ready to go up among the yelling of dozens of people who blissed out as soon as the music that opened the show started and the eccentric and transgendered master of ceremonies welcomed them with his exaggerated and eloquent words. The audience certainly congratulated themselves to be lucky enough to be there under the huge tent of the CUTRE CHOU!!!!!!

Cutre Show was a bunch of friends, most of them militants of the organization Movimiento Comunista de Andalucía (MCA), the Communist Movement of Andalucía. The name of the temporary venue came from the rather 68 and pompous name "movement" being transformed into "el meneillo" "the little shake" which was more appropriate and favoured an entertaining atmosphere. The place offered food, drinks and some shows during the Corpus Fair and it was the main way of getting funds for the organization, "nuestro entrañable grupúsculo" "our endearing grupuscule" as we called it. At that time the party was heavily involved theoretically and in practise in the new social movements (feminism, antimilitarism, ecology, sexual freedom for different identities and the opposition to the entrance of Spain in the Nato). It was the historical time after the attempt of coup d'etat when the colonel of the Civil Guard Tejero stormed the Parliament in 1981, later, the Socialist party won the elections which marked the end of what is called la Transición, 1982, the decaffeinated Spanish Transition to Democracy, the certainty that the revolution would not take place.

That was the context in which el Cutre was born, a new space for activism that left behind the black and white troubles and exhaustion of the struggle against Franco's

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dictatorship that had lasted forty years, a struggle that was somehow defeated by the "ruptura pactada", the consensus between the reformist sectors of Franco's regime and the democratic parties, known as la Transición. It brought along the collapsing of most of the revolutionary parties on the left of the official Communist party. El Cutre was the expression of the fracturing of a number of maximalisms and certainties of the revolutionary left and the opening up of new struggles such as feminism and sexual freedom that gave more centrality to our own lives in relation to social changes. But, above all el Cutre was the expression of deep affects intertwined among us, and we were ready to celebrate them in a space to share the laughter and the astracanada after having lived through so many defeats. Life rising again, as Pinito del Oro, Juanma, dressed in tuille and glitter went up and high from a fake trapeze with her flying cap, he seemed to ascend up to the sky and risk her life in saumersalts, one after another, in the company of her husband that was her assistant in those circus exercises that, the exaggerated narration of the M.C, made real.

CUTRE CHOU!!! Represents every foolishness, every improvisation, fantasy and wildness on the stage, hardly ever following the script and sometimes missing a few of the supposed participants that had decided not to show up at the last minute. People pushing each other, big laughs and even the performers getting fed up in the middle of the show: Santa, cutey, please come up, we can't stop this, and the conductor, yours truly, left the stage, mike in hand, and went down to the dressing-room, and broadcast behind the black curtain the disruption that was happening there, some primadonnish row between the actors and actresses that delayed the beginning of the show: and

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one could hear the audience laughing like crazy because of the empty and abandoned stage, and finally, Santa showed up again with her browning but looking smashing; then, she joined the chorus singing that song which says we're the swimming girls, we always go forward, our spirit is endless..., a hymn of the resistance made sequins, with a loud plastic duck head life-saver around the waist of the improvised ballet that faded away, in such a disorderly fashion, that make people clap and shout, pointing out with their fingers to the faces and twisting of their own transgendered comrades that were changing roles, transgressing what was supposed to be masculine and feminine in such an extreme manner that we could say they were pioneering what queerness has meant to come for the transformation of the feminisms a few years later.

The different number of el Cutre came from classic, old popular songs: la copla, Spanish highly dramatical traditional forlorn love songs, Mexican rancheras, cuplés, Spanish version of cabaret, flamenco rumbas ..., whose lyrics were changed adapting new meanings or, the lyrics were kept but were transformed when sang in a certain way, depending on certain clothes worn. So the effect was critical through the use of parody that allowed the opening up of discourses of deformed mirrors that were narrated through performative construction. A narration from the inside.

I remember the number of la Monja Salvaje (the Wild Nun): On top of a red plastic box of coca-cola, standing still like a statue, dressed in green and red, surrounded by embroidery as a San Pancraccio (Saint Pancrass) -the saint to pray if you want to win the lottery-, dutifully holding some parsley in his hand, there was Pepe el de Alfacar, Pepe from Alfacar, skinny, certainly smoking cigarette but

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dead still, looking to the horizon and, down on him, praying to the saint, giving her back to the audience, a nun dressed with a zebra striped uniform was heard to say in a voice that seemed to come out of her grave: yooo lo queee quieeeeero es que me cooomaa el tigre, que me cooooooma el tigre...( what I really want is to be eaten by the tiger). They repeated the chorus over and over, faster and faster, until finally, the music blasted all over the venue with the song in the version made by Rosa Morena. Then, all of a sudden, the nun left her zebra uniform and underneath, there was the typical Andalusian dress with dots that went up. The green tunic of San Pancraccio, Pepe el de Alfacar, curled around himself following the rhythm of que me coma el tigre, que me coma el tigre, mis carnes morenas, (that the tiger eats, my dark flesh) as if he were being taken by the devil, with his bright red lipsticked lips, her huge bald patch covered with a flower, while the audience was bursting with laughter. Then, they made their way out of the stage still dancing; and the lights were finally turned off. The show was over.

At the beginning of the 1990s, el Cutre performed a music hall comedy, with texts in playback that were made out of the dialogues of the different characters that took part in the number. Hilarious and crazy scripts that narrated the story of the love affair of the Mexican sister of the opera singer Monserrat Caballé, Lola la del Puerto, Lola from El Puerto de Santa María, Cádiz, my Lola, with her sister's husband. They showed a variety of characters that hid multiple sexual identities and different entanglements that were delivered mixing up Colombian soap operas and Andalusian costumbrista comedies. Lo Cutre has moved from sheer improvisation to ways of creating a script, the use of fragments that were put together as they came up in

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previous meetings to the performance. Meetings were scarce which was prevented a canned product but fostered keeping it fresh and alive shows, and paying much attention to the now, to everything that was relevant at the moment, and these events were narrated and, thus, made known. The numbers could be defined as actions, always trying to escape from theatricality and rehearsals.

Two important events took place in Spain in 1992: the commemoration of the five hundred anniversary of the Discovery of the Americas (el Descubrimiento), the year of the International Expo in Seville and the Olympic Games held in Barcelona. The numbers that el Cutre produced that year were deliriously funny, the format chosen was la revista, a Spanish version of high camp cabaret whose literal meaning is magazine. And so it was a magazine, staged and edited. 500 hundred years later we could listen to the song Tatuaje/ Tattoo: Él vino en un barco de nombre extranjero, lo encontré en el Puerto un anochecer/He came in a boat whose name was foreigner, I met him by the harbour at dusk... sang by the beautiful "Indian", Estrella, dressed in Sarita Montiel fashion in the movie Yuma, a western in which she played the starring role with Gary Cooper. Behind her, in a boat made of cardboard, Columbus showed up, with a yellow wig, scared to death. Juanma played the role in a way that made us remember Stan Laurel and showed his arm in which the name of Queen Isabel la Católica, who funded the Discovery, was tattoed. In the meantime, we could listen to the song which said:

Mira mi cuerpo tatuado	Look at my tattoed body
con este nombre de mujer,	it has a woman's name,
es el recuerdo del pasado	it's the remembrance of past times
que nunca más ha de volver.	Never to come back again.
Ella me quiso y me ha olvidado,	Her love for me was forsaken

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En cambio, yo no la olvidé  
Y para siempre voy marcado  
Con este nombre de mujer.

But I can never forget her  
and that's the reason I'm marked  
With this woman's name

Or the five companions that dressed as a rhythmic gymnastic olympic team moved frantically throwing laces, balls and hullahops with their movements and gestures that lack any rhythm, an odd ballet on the backstage being at the front a bearded Montserrat Callaté/Monserrat Shutup, brought to life by Carmelo, dressed in golden tunic, her surgery tits big as balloons, a long, seventies mane of hair that got transformed in a beehive hairdo, her beard all made up so one has to guess whether hir was Montserrat or a trans sumu warrior, singing a duet with a Freddy Mercury's version, Juan Meca style, short and elegant, facing the megadiva. They both sang at the top of their voices the exaltation of the Olympic Games: Barcel000na!!! Barcel0000na!!!  
Barcel00000na!!!

The carnivalesque vision from Cádiz of the apotheosis of the year 1992 showed the ruin of the year 93, a bit of a laugh after the ten-year-kingdom of the Socialist party, celebrated with Games and a yearning for the Discovery.

This blending of what has been understood as popular culture in songs, theatre, costumbrista comedy, soap opera, trite couplets, the low music hall performances, the trans shows of the first bares de ambiente (gay bars) of the end of the seventies, was a political framing that didn't enunciate itself as a pamphlet but as a juxtaposition of gender bender images, feminist discourses, flamboyant politics of life as action. All these stirred to provoke laughter through a kaleidoscope that never ceased to create

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images and help the audience to join in bewilderment: that is el Cutre.

El Cutre Chou has gone on for twentysomething, producing similar effects on the privileged audiences that pop in year after year in the Corpus Granaíno. El Cutre has finished off this year.

Long Life to Cutre Chou!!!