This paper presents an analysis of the management of gender and space in a middle class social club in Madrid, Spain. The purpose of the analysis is to describe an unusually tight fit between a set of ideas on gender and their expression in how bodies and space were classified and handled. From a feminist point of view, the ideas in question were negative, since they tended to conserve a hierarchical gender order. They fit well with other conservative ideas that were also prominent at the club, such as elitist beliefs in merits and social inequality, dislike of criticism, and acceptance of explicit norms of behaviour in general, even for leisure activities.

Starting from detailed ethnography of what life was like at this club, which I will call Club Aguafría, the paper arrives at a description of the ideas around gender that its practitioners wanted to defend and conceive of as traditional.

Many aspects of their thinking do resonate with general Western ideas, only in unusually clear form. But it is important for feminist theory to differentiate between tradition in the sense of long-lasting ideas that are usually reproduced with only slight modifications over long periods of time, and that which is presented as tradition in order to legitimate it. What was at hand at Club Aguafría was the latter, even though it certainly was inspired in old ideas that had been widespread in Spain, at least in some class contexts, and imposed during the dictatorship (1939-1977). Since then, however, these ideas have been widely and forcefully questioned. There have been profound changes in almost all areas of life in Spain during recent decades. Few things escape critical scrutiny (Thurén 1988). The ideas that dominate now in Madrid are diametrically opposed to those at Club Aguafría.

That does not make these latter uninteresting. On the contrary, they constitute a strategic piece of information for feminist thinking, in that they go so clearly against what most feminists, including Spanish ones, struggle for. In any struggle, one must know the arguments of the other side(s).

Feminist theory needs, among other things, data on how discourses about bodily freedom/control circulate, and how they are changed/reproduced. Since everything that happens influences human beings and since our experiences settle in our bodies (Bourdieu 1977, Rosaldo 1984, Moore 1994), it is politically important to understand, as well, what norms and habits pertaining to the managing of body and space do to us and to the gender order as a whole.

I will describe how ideas are constructed and reproduced at Club Aguafría through symbolic codes around the body, clothes, the organisation and use of space, and forms of sociability. Ideas around gender, body and sexuality permeate most norms and dispositions at this club, including many that seem at first sight to be about other things.

It is not easy to go against the tide of deep social and cultural change. It requires arguments. But arguments undermine the idea of tradition as given and natural, so open debate can be self-defeating for people who would like a world that stays as it is because it is beyond questioning.

This is a dilemma but there are solutions. One is to build a small world, apart from the tide, protected, where your own ideas can reign unquestioned. That small world should be securely separated from what surrounds it, materially and symbolically, and well ordered inside. Clear classifications, no fuzziness at the edges. Order and discipline. General agreement, no discussion.

Club Aguafría was such a place. Of course its gender discourse had not been created on purpose. It was a product of a historical conjuncture. But it worked very well, almost as if it had
been wilfully set up. And many of the members were quite clear about the aims of the club. They told me in interviews about the need for this kind of "safe" and "nice" place in "today's chaotic world" where especially young people run great risks of contamination from "uneducated" and "immoral" people.

The club members - at least the men - were well placed in society. They were mostly salaried university-educated experts: lawyers, teachers, politicians, businessmen or middle managers, engineers, economists, journalists, and similar. For this reason, the cultural processes at the club were of importance for Madrilenian life generally. For people with so-called "progressive" ideas, the type of ideas expressed at Club Aguafría was the epitome of that which had meant repression and suffering during the dictatorship and earlier and was now, luckily, being "overcome".

The various discourses on gender in Madrid moved in one cultural universe, speaking to each other and about each other. They must be understood in the light of each other. Unfortunately there is no room to describe the so-called progressive discourse in this paper. It can only be hinted at. But the clash of ideas on gender and sexuality is well illustrated in the following anecdote, which also shows how women at Club Aguafría reconfirmed their own world view in the face of threatening signs of its crumbling in the rest of Madrid.

In one group of middle aged women there was a discussion on a television program that several of them had seen. A young female reporter had stood outside a university building and asked the female students, as they came out, who was a virgin and who was not. It turned out almost all of them said they were not, and the reporter concluded that young women in Madrid today start their sexual life well before marriage and are not ashamed of that. The club women thought this was evidently wrong in more than one sense. The reporter should not have asked such a question in public, that was "bad taste". And she should not have drawn the conclusion she did, that was stupid, since the young women probably did not tell the truth; it just could not be true. Above all it was immoral of the reporter to present her conclusion as something positive. If it were true, it would be proof that society was deteriorating terribly. But the club women comforted themselves with two observations. First, the building belonged to a state university. It is possible, the women said, that the kind of people who go there are really quite immoral, what can you expect, all sorts of people go to university these days, anyone can get a degree, and this is certainly worrying in itself, but at least we can be sure that if the reporter had done the same thing outside a private university the answers would have been different. "Educated" young women do not "spoil themselves" before marriage. "Our daughters definitely do not," they said, quite convinced. Or at least quite certain that that was the image they had to present to each other. Second, one of them had heard, through friends of friends, that one of the young women who had said she was not a virgin, had later told her parents that she was, and that she had felt pressured by the situation to say she was not. The women did not think - as I did - that she may have felt pressured to assure her parents she was a virgin after all. They commented instead on what an awful thing it was for public pressure to go in the direction of sexual looseness. "Young women should not be ashamed of being virgins, they should be proud!" So that was bad. But the consolation was to be found in the fact of this pressure. In actual fact quite a few of the women who said they were not, were virgins after all, the club women concluded, relieved.

Club Aguafría can be seen as a sheltered place where conservative persons sought refuge behind high hedges, literally and metaphorically, in order to reproduce without interference their view of things and avoid having to take into consideration alternative discourses they experienced as hostile and hard to understand. But since the situation that forced them to do this was a new one, their discourses and ideas were also new. Believing that they defended something old, they created something new. But the fact that it was new did not mean that it was not conservative; on the contrary, the new thing was precisely the strongly defensive, conserving keynote in the discourses.

Background and method
The data for this article were gathered as part of a larger study, which was a continuation of an earlier study in another city.

In 1983 I did an anthropological study of the gender order and the ideas about changes in it in a working class area of Valencia, the third largest city of Spain. The study focused on how people linked interpretations of change and gender to each other, how these two things often served as metaphors for each other, and how both seemed to be among the culturally most central figures of thought. But the results would certainly have been different in a middle class area. Class differences are quite evident in Spain. An especially interesting phenomenon is a new type of middle class that has come into being during the last thirty years. It is far from constituting a majority of the population, but it has become very influential and is often seen as a symbol for the new Spain that emerged after the end of the dictatorship. Therefore I decided to do a study of that class with the same theoretical focus as in the first study.

This new middle class earns its incomes from salaries, and that differentiates it from the older type of middle class (doctors, lawyers, veterinarians...), but in contrast with most salaried Spaniards, they can live quite well on their salaries. They can be found anywhere in the country but are especially visible in the big cities. A whole new lifestyle is emerging there, and that was given a lot of attention in the mass media during the 1980's.

In the 1970's I was married to a Spanish engineer and lived middle class life in Madrid myself. I still had friends there who were willing to help. So that was how I came to do the new study in Madrid, between 1990 and 1992.

The focus of the study was on cultural negotiations around changes in the gender order in the new middle class in Madrid. When a society changes rapidly and profoundly, its inhabitants have to think about what is happening, compare their impressions with each other, arrive at new interpretations and understandings. They need to talk to each other. Gossip, you may call it, because these cultural negotiations often take the shape of comments on what people you know do and what is good and bad. What do middle class Madrilenians say about gender and other things that they consider related to gender? Which themes come up often and how are they handled? What are the differences of opinion around each theme? How do different opinions relate to each other and how do they relate to opinions on other things than gender?

Anthropologists usually select a small group of people and spend as much time as possible with them during a year or more. But I could not quite use that method in Madrid. To capture big city life, which is varied, complex and flexible, I had to move around. That is what Madrilenians themselves do, after all. Consequently I participated in all sorts of activities in many groups. But I concentrated a bit extra on a few, which of course Madrilenians themselves also do. I tried to make sure that these contexts were as different as possible from each other. It was not difficult for me to gain access to what are known as alternative spaces: feminist groups, leftists, cultural associations, etcetera. Following threads in the networks, I also got to know more average contexts. Finally I managed to enter one very conservative context, and that is the one I describe in this paper.

It was a so-called tennis club. It was not representative for the Madrilenian middle class, but it was theoretically interesting. In the midst of all the rapid change and the cultural emphasis placed on change as something good, there were people who refused to go along and instead defended "tradition".

I place the word tradition in quotation marks, because it is not possible to maintain the past the way it was when society changes. To do as you have always done is one thing, to "safeguard traditions" something else. Even if it actually consists of similar acts within similar symbolic frameworks. The difference lies in that what was doxa, i.e. experienced as self-evident, becomes orthodoxy, i.e. something that must and can be defended (Bourdieu 1977).

Spanish society as a whole is still changing at a fast pace, but that pace has slowed down since the 1960's and 1970's. The changes move toward increased complexity. The division of labour grows more complex, since there are ever more diversified tasks to be done. Most jobs require specialist education, so it becomes ever more difficult to change speciality during a life
time, but at the same time individual choice and creative combinations are emphasised in similar
ways as in other European countries. To the extent that experiences influence opinions and life
styles, and the total number of possible experiences grows exponentially, society becomes more
complex also culturally. In Spain today it is impossible to predict what sorts of persons know
what and have which opinions.

The most common experience in Madrid in 1991, in almost any context, was that one can
never know when one's own version of "common sense" is shared by the people one meets or
when other people might react in unpredictable or even incomprehensible ways. In such a histori-
cal conjuncture, cultural insecurity reigns. It is no longer possible to simplify everyday life by
categorising people and expect their profession or gender or regional origin to indicate what they
think and how they will react in a given situation. It then becomes natural for individuals to also
wonder what they themselves think, who they "are". Issues of identity grow important as iden-
tities grow hazy.

In such conjunctures people cannot just act according to established patterns. Opinions,
emotions and all kinds of meanings do not just exist, they have to be tested, rejected, recreated...
One must manage them one way or another. And when people do that - negotiate, talk, gossip,
compare, wonder, invent new interpretations, combine old things in new ways - the complexifi-
cation process accelerates, fuelling even more the cultural negotiations.

Ideal typical attitudes

Naturally people react variously to this process. There are different ways to manage meanings.
In the book I have written about the Madrid study I describe two ideal typical ways.4 I call one
the expansive mode and the other one the cautious mode of management of meaning.

People who would prefer to live in a simpler world, where most things can be taken for
granted, where one does not need to adapt to so much variation and change, tend to consider so-
cial organisation as given by God or nature, and believe that there are definite criteria to deter-
mine what is good. With such an attitude, one can easily be angered by the encounter with lots
of different opinions and life styles, as is the case in Madrid today. One interprets it as proof that
a lot of people are wrong. One might also become anxious, nervous. In any case one will
harbour negative feelings about variation and complexity. This is the cautious mode.

For people who enjoy exploring changing situations and expanding fields of opinions,
such a cautious attitude seems very negative. It looks to them as an irrational obstacle. If you
think in the expansive mode, you find that an "open mentality" is necessary for creative debate,
and debate is necessary if one is to stand a chance to understand what is going on.

So these two modes stand in each other's way. But they are equally logical products of
the present historical conjuncture in Madrid. Please note that I am describing two attitudes or
ideal typical discourses, not two kinds of individuals. It is not possible to sort people according
to discourses, since they are something people use. Most individuals certainly have a tendency
to prefer one discourse over another, but they can also use them strategically, in more or less
conscious ways, in order to adapt the self-image they want to present to others to the situation in
which they happen to find themselves. Many persons I met switched between the two modes, or
slid along a scale of mixed types, depending on what they were talking about or whom they
were talking with. But there were also contexts where either a cautious or an expansive mode
were cultivated in rather pure form.

The expansive mode could be consciously, explicitly cultivated. In so-called alternative
contexts, for instance among feminists or radical intellectuals, people liked to say that one must
"subvert" old ideas, "try out" arguments and "overcome" or "transcend" what one used to be-
lieve. It is in the nature of the cautious mode, however, to prefer not to speak at all about how
one thinks and not to notice that there is discussion; instead opinions are treated as if they were
self-evident, shared by all normal persons. That is not to say that opinions do not vary in such
contexts. But they are usually treated not as opinions but as moral characteristics of individuals.
Social clubs or sports clubs are common in Madrid. They are not necessarily fashionable places. Most middle class Madrilenians and quite a few from the working class belong to some club. There is always a swimming-pool and a restaurant. The higher up the social ladder, the larger the number of sports that can be practised at the club, and the fancier the installations. At the top of the ladder are clubs with golf courts. Sports are important, that is part of the self-image of the new middle class, but far from everyone actually practice any. The central club activity is conversation.

In a sense these clubs are the middle class equivalent to working class bar life. At a club one can be sure of meeting acquaintances without having to plan ahead (to plan is incompatible with leisure, Madrilenians feel), and without having to invite people to your home. But unlike the classical bars of working class areas, the social clubs are equally useful for women and men.

Membership is usually per family, and family life is important. The most common motivation of why one joins is "for the kids", "to have somewhere we can all go together on Sundays", "to be outdoors on weekends without having to spend hours in traffic jams", "to go to a place where your teenage children like to go, too, so you know where they are."

Club Aguafría was a rather typical club for middle-middle or upper-middle class. It was more conservative than most, but the installations were not luxurious and it was not expensive to belong.

The dominant mode at the club was the cautious mode. To provoke debate, to demonstrate originality in opinions or clothing, and so on - otherwise very common in Madrid - was interpreted at Club Aguafría as lack of courtesy, bad taste.

Since one was assured of meeting only the right kind of people, everyone could talk to everyone, even without formal introductions, without fear of social contamination. You could sit down and chat in a group, simultaneously staying in touch with other groups nearby, you could walk about, you could go into another room and participate in another activity for a while and then come back... Things happened. This was called "atmosphere" (ambiente) and is very important for Spaniards in general.

Status was very important at the club, however. The middle class is perhaps always insecure, everywhere, according to a common sociological interpretation; a middle class that has not existed for very long, in a country where class barriers have been and continue to be strong, and in a country where so much has changed so recently - such a middle class must be especially insecure.

But that was something club members did not want to admit. They had to pretend a lot, above all that they had more money than they actually had, and they pretended a personal security that they definitely lacked. Their role models were vague. They had to improvise often, and they could admit that. But for many it was the image of the elegant, self-confident, traditional upper class Spaniard one wanted to emulate. Life at Club Aguafría was relaxed in the sense that people did get what they wanted out of membership: permanent groups of friends where conversation was the most important activity. But life at the club was also tense, because one had to be careful at all times, protect one's status and accumulate prestige. This was called aparentar (pretend, show off, keep up appearances) and was something about which all club members complained. Everyone else aparenta so much, that is too bad, they all said. They criticised it, they did not admit that they themselves did it - but they did it. It was unavoidable.

The unwritten norms had to do with behaving so as to show class belonging. One must avoid being suspected of working class background, unusual family circumstances or radical opinions. Since a large proportion of today's new middle class does have a humble background, most had plenty to hide. Many, especially the women, also had meagre schooling, and since education and accomplishment were important signs of status, it was necessary to hide this, too.

But in spite of all the limitations, the conversations at the club had as their most important true goal and only admissible goal the pleasure of being with friends. In verbal Mediterranean culture, conversation is an art. It is like music. A conversation should have rhythm and
harmony, and it should develop varied themes and surprising turns, otherwise it will be boring. And boredom is the spectre to be kept at bay at all costs. Pleasure is the opposite of boredom, in the same manner as sociability is the opposite of loneliness, according to most Madrilenians.

So the conversations were fuelled by two strong forces: the striving for pleasure and the need Madrilenians felt in these changing times to negotiate what was to be what, what was to be considered valid. Pleasure was a morally dangerous area, so it was necessary to constantly watch out and define what was allowable, desirable and "natural" and what was negative, "unhealthy" and supposedly unthinkable.

Most Madrilenians prefer to socialise with people who are similar to themselves. But Club Aguafría was extreme in this respect. The members were conservative and negotiated with great caution. They denied change, pretended not to notice it, or, if that was impossible, commented on how negative it was, and how one must uphold stable real good truths. Controversial topics were avoided. The club was surrounded by high hedges, as if one had wanted to underline the defensive attitude towards the world outside.

**Discourses on gender, body and sexuality**

When gender was discussed at Club Aguafría, it was usually in a context of change, expressed as critical comments on the bad behaviour of women and men "nowadays." It was taken for granted that the differences observed between women's and men's personalities, talents, tastes and opinions were as given and unchangeable as the differences between their reproductive organs, and this stability served as a basis for judging actions as right or wrong.

Gender was sex, in other words, and sex was closely connected to sexuality. Thus, sexuality was constantly present in the conversations, but only indirectly. Everyone was interested in it, as something one must have an opinion on in today's society, but at the same time it was uncomfortable to talk about, because it was easy to slip into a situation where you revealed, without realising it, too much or too little knowledge on something sexual, or just as unintentionally adopted an unacceptable position. To have the wrong opinion on something sexual was to risk one's reputation in an especially uncomfortable manner.

In general, sexuality is a common topic for conversation in Madrid. Around the Mediterranean, the meanings of gender and sexuality are frequently linked, almost synonymous. Traditionally they have also been culturally central matters. In times of change they therefore become especially important and simultaneously especially controversial. They easily become symbols for all kinds of change, good and bad.

In Madrid today the whole scale of opinions on sexuality is present, from outright hatred of the body and its functions to the feeling that sexuality is the best gift life has to offer and that everything that enhances sexual pleasure is good for individuals and for society.

The ideas on sexuality are connected to ideas and emotions concerning the body as a whole, especially its visibility. Around the Mediterranean, the eye is the most important erotic organ, someone has said, and it is hardly a coincidence that many customs have developed there to hide in clothing whatever is considered most exciting at a given time and place - but at the same time perhaps highlights it in subtle ways. One example is the Spanish lace mantilla, which was originally invented to hide women's hair so that it would not distract men in church, but which enhances and draws attention to the sensuality of hair.

Ideas on body and sexuality were also closely connected to, practically emblematic of the two ideal typical attitudes to social and cultural change. The "progressive" and "modern" attitude to adopt towards the body was to like it, show it off, take care of it, decorate it, perfume it, enjoy it, not just sexually but in all imaginable ways. To make that possible, the body must be pampered: one must keep a check on one's weight, practice sports, dress nicely, know how to put on make-up, care for one's hair, and so on. This could perhaps be talked about as keeping in shape, living a healthy life, but words like health and soundness were problematic for progressive discourses. Discourses on "healthy bodies" used to be about religious mandates, the rejection of "unhealthy" things, and sexuality was then the foremost example of what was seen as unhealthy.
Such discourses were hegemonic during the dictatorship. They are no longer common, but they are still around, and they were prominent at Club Aguafría. Hence "health" was an ambivalent symbol that could refer to change as well as to resistance to change. Beauty and pleasure were safer progressive and modern symbols. They also served well to signal opposition to the "traditional" discourses that in general de-emphasised both even when they were not directly about sexuality.

Madrilenians said that there was a continuum of "openness", on which most others (one usually labelled oneself "normal", "not extreme") were said to belong at one of the two extreme positions: "very closed" or "very open". What one was closed or open about was change. There was of course an infinite number of possible positions, depending on what the conversation was about, and in what combinations the topics appeared. The issue was further complicated by change as such - what was radical ten years earlier was now cautious.

Discourses are both verbal and non-verbal. At the club non-verbal codes were the most important ones when it came to the body and all the sensitive things that had to do with the body and therefore were difficult to formulate in words.

Gender was a central topic for club members, but it was almost always intertwined with other important themes, above all sociability and class distinction. Sociability was emphasised positively, it was an ideal one made efforts to live up to. Class distinction and social status in general were not talked about directly, but they were nevertheless symbolically and emotionally important. Most norms and rules at the club were motivated with references to the ways of "educated" or "elegant" or "civilised" persons - in contrast, one must assume, to the ignorant, clumsy and primitive persons on the other side of the hedges whom one did not want to be like.

The club in its surroundings

If you arrive at the club on a summer day and not by car, you will experience strongly the disconnection between the club and the surrounding city. Summer temperatures usually hover around 35 or 40 degrees centigrade in the shade. You have travelled by the dirty Madrid underground, waited at a bus stop with no shade, then travelled by bus through a boiling hot asphalt jungle, until the bus has suddenly dipped under a freeway and come out at the other side into a different world, an affluent suburb with cool greenery around all buildings. The traffic noise and the crowds are gone. When you pass the club entrance and watch club members arrive in air conditioned cars, just showered and well dressed, you feel the contrast stamped on your own body, wrinkled and sweaty as it inevitably is. Inside the fence there are trees and lawns and flowery bushes. From the tennis courts comes the soft ticking of tennis balls and the sleepy whir of the irrigation. There are human voices, but they too are soft, muffled. The persons you meet look as if they belonged to a different race from the ones you saw in the underground. They look taller, blonder and healthier. They really are taller and healthier, since they have access to good food and good health care, but the blondness is more of a question of fashion and hairdressers.

Club space

Madrilenians in general are rather category conscious. The areas of the city are defined by social status, and the space inside dwellings is demarcated by function. In conservative discourses there is, in addition, a clear ideological distaste for disorder.

Consequently, at Club Aguafría space was categorised, and logically enough the main criteria were the same ones as in social life in general: function, age and gender. Class was a decisive criterion for belonging to the club, but once inside it was not relevant, since the assumption was that all club members were of acceptable social standing.

All the classifications were tinted with symbolic expressions of a cautious attitude towards the human body, especially sexuality. This was quite conscious and could be used to legitimize segregation. It was possible, for instance, to refer to age with sexuality as an implicit reason: "I don't want the children around when we sit and chat, in case someone should happen to
use certain words..."; or refer to function with nudity as an implicit reason: "It is a good thing the hedges have grown so well; before, you could see the people around the pool from the parking lot!"

The arrangement of space was clear-cut. There was respect for all kinds of separations. Many of the norms were even spelled out in a set of written rules (Reglamento de régimen interior), the breaking of which incurred formal sanctions, such as fines or being barred from an activity for a specified time. But the most effective sanctions were the informal ones, i.e. gossip and heavy social disapproval of anyone who broke the rules, written or not. Many of them were about specific behaviour in the various areas.

Children were exempted from most of the rules. They must put on shoes and preferably some other piece of extra clothing when they moved outside the pool area, and they were never seen naked, but they moved freely between all the areas and behaved in a rather self-assured manner most of the time.

Club members socialised mainly in small-to-medium-sized groups, and there was little overlap between the groups. Most of the groups had their favourite corners of the various areas, but there was no monopolisation of any facilities.

The main pool area was a central scene of activities, the most important one in summer. The big pool was surrounded by lawns where one could sun-bathe, a secondary area where one could rest in the shade of trees, and a third area around the children's pool. Parents of small children spent most of their time by the children's pool, most adults sat around the big pool, while the elderly preferred the shade.

There were two ways to reach the pool area. The normal one was to go by way of the building which housed the gymnasium, the showers and the dressing rooms. The showers and the dressing rooms were separated by gender, and only very small boys accompanied their mothers into the female side. The borders of the dressing areas were marked at the entrance by a desk with clothes-check-girls and at the other side by shallow pools for cleaning feet, built in such a way that it was impossible to enter the pool area with shoes on. The dressing area was thus a liminal zone between zones, out of which one could only walk barefoot and dressed for swimming in one direction or fully dressed for the street in the other.

The other way to reach the pool area was by way of the so-called terrace. This was an area with flagstone floors, flower beds, a bar, tables with sunshades and high hedges separating it from the non-pool areas. It was possible to come into this area from the street or from the main building, as well as from the pool area, and this had to be so, since both swimmers and people who came to the club for other purposes might want a drink or a meal, and the indoors bar and restaurant were closed in summer. Therefore it was in theory also possible to walk from the street across the terrace directly to the pool. But that was not done. If one came to the terrace in street clothing, one left for the street or for the dressing-building. If one came to the terrace from the pool area, one was dressed in pool clothing and could therefore not go anywhere but back.

Because the terrace was the only area where people in street clothes mingled with people in pool clothes, it was a liminal area in a much stronger sense than the dressing-building with its mere frontier-guarding role and where the unavoidable mixture was segregated by gender and hidden away. But precisely for that reason there were a thousand norms about clothing and behaviour on the terrace. More on that below.

The largest outdoor area was dedicated to ball sports. The pool was not used for swimming very much. Children and youngsters did some swimming but much more playing. Most adults used it only in the same way they used the outdoor showers: to cool off every so often in order to withstand the rigors of sunbathing. Tennis, on the other hand, was a true sports avocation for many club members. The tennis courts were continually occupied, year round.

There were three main buildings. The most important feature inside them was a number of rooms called "salons", where one could sit in groups, talking, and if one wished order drinks or snacks from the bar.
One room was called the library. It had shelves with a few books, donated by members, many prizes the club had won in bridge or tennis tournaments, newspapers, a few magazines and several catalogues from select gift shops. Usually it was empty.

The TV room was almost as quiet as the library except when there were popular programs, such as the Latin American soap operas, *telenovelas*, which mainly women watched, or the news, which mainly men watched. There was thus a tendency to gender segregation, but it was total only when important football games were transmitted; then the room was crowded with men only, of all ages, even the doormen peeping in from the hall.

The indoors spaces could be graded on a noise scale, from the well-respected silence of the library, via the murmur of polite conversation in the salons, the livelier conversations around the card tables (except during bridge tournaments when almost complete silence reigned), the joking and laughing by the bar counters, and finally the din of family life in the dining-room at meal times. The only shouts heard were when important football goals were scored, then the TV room would explode and the enthusiasm or grief could be gauged all through the building.

Quarrels were made invisible. If voices started to rise, someone would stop it before it went too far.

There was a gender difference in the use of acoustic space as well as in the space used up by body movement, and the difference was always such that women had to watch out more than men and make themselves smaller than men, in order to comply with the norms. Just like in other Madrilenian contexts, the men strode with longer steps than the women, gestured more widely, called the waiters or shouted greetings or each other's names across longer distances, and so on. But at the club, this common gender difference was not very pronounced. The men drew a fine line between male expressivity and what they would have considered vulgarity. The women were exactly as subdued as "elegance" required, and that included some deference to men in the usual European and Mediterranean ways (play down and find excuses for the men's errors, not protest in public against men's decisions, etcetera) and it included a definition of femininity as low visibility. But this tendency was balanced, sometimes cancelled, by the general Spanish disposition for self-affirmation (cf Thurén 1988), so that a woman upset, a woman enthused or a woman surprised could temporarily use as much space as any man for both body and voice without anyone finding fault.

In some groups, couples socialised together; in other groups women and men separated at arrival. One building was dominated by men. The largest salon in the main building was dominated by groups of women only. Usually only men stood by the bar counters; women ordered whatever they wanted and then sat down. In mixed groups, it was always a man who got up to order. For men, the bar was the place to go if they did not find any of their friends immediately upon arrival, so there were sometimes solitary men there. Women without company were seldom seen anywhere. If they could not find their friends, they might sit down alone in a salon, but they would be uncomfortable, so they usually preferred to join their husband at the bar or even by a table with card-playing men while they waited for some female friends to show up.

The different spaces of the Club were thus quite well defined by function and noise level. Gender and age were always relevant principles of categorisation, but they were flexibly applied. The groups of friends were based on shared interests and opinions, and husband and wife always belonged to the same group (even if they separated by gender while at the club), while children and teenagers formed their own groups for which the parents' groupings did not seem to matter much.

Of the various principles for organising interaction, gender, age and function were conscious and verbalised, while opinions and mode of management of meaning were not. Age and function organised as much as or more than gender, and in contrast to gender they were considered legitimate principles. Nevertheless, gender was the only principle that was always present and always carried a symbolic load. Noone was ever unaware of the gender composition of a group or the dominance of one gender or the other in an area, and there was no playing with gender symbols, no ambiguities or experiments were permitted as to gender.
Clothing and bodies.

The human body was a key symbol for all categorisations and for the gender regime of the club as a whole.

Suspicion of the body has long been common in the Mediterranean area. In Christian countries it has been reinforced by Christian norms and expressed as Christian values and feelings. I am thinking of the complex treatment of sexuality, but also of little everyday things like women covering their hair and arms in church, nuns' cover-all dresses, including veils, and the pupils' drab, uncomfortable and concealing uniforms in religious schools. The norms vary in time and space and also according to opinions.

In Spain, today, conservative persons are almost always practising Catholics, and they feel strongly about "propriety" in dress, by which is meant that one should dress so that the shapes of the body are blurred, and female shapes must be hidden more carefully than male ones. But this norm is not always easy to translate into practice. At Club Aguafría, the dress code was influenced by at least three equally important criteria: we can call them propriety, elegance and modern leisure. Simplifying, we can say, that propriety tended to cover up and elegance tended to reveal and underline the (beautiful) body, while modern leisure did either according to function, which meant it sometimes went much farther towards nudity than elegance would (e.g. bikinis to become tanned almost all over), while at other times it concealed much more than propriety would require, but did so in a way that went counter to both propriety and elegance (e.g. bulky jogging dresses).

The contradictions were resolved in various ways according to groups and gender. Women had to and usually wanted to think much more of propriety than the men. Dilemmas around the management of the body became especially crucial in summer around the pool, where anti-body feelings clashed with the modern requirement of exposing the body to the sun (and possibly to the water). The problem was solved by careful attention to rules and through a number of symbolic markers to tone down the nakedness.

We have already noted the cautious management of space around the pool area. It was separated from the rest of the club premises by high fences and hedges. The normal and correct way to pass in and out of the pool area was by way of the dressing rooms, where each individual body was transformed to fit the norms for each side of the fence.

In the pool area, everyone wore bathing suits, of course, since they were mandatory, but middle aged women would sometimes drape a piece of material around their waist or wear a big unbuttoned blouse over the bathing suit. Only very young women, or women with exceptionally good figures, wore bikinis. Small girls, too, wore suits that covered their nipples. Teenage girls would often throw a t-shirt over their shoulders or tie a towel around their waist. There was also a norm, although neither written nor verbally explicit, that differentiated between what was decent lying down and moving around. As soon as a woman got up to go somewhere, she would ascertain that the bathing suit had not slipped out of place anywhere, and she would often add some of the little extra pieces of allowed clothing.

The men preferred to use a bit more material than average Spanish men do on a beach. I saw no man in "slip"-type swimming trunks for example; they all used the boxer shorts model, sometimes knee-length. This was true for small boys, too. Just like the women, the men were careful to put on sandals and a shirt to go to the terrace, and they might put on a shirt even when just walking across the lawn, but this norm was not as consistent for men as for women.

Another way to disguise the nakedness was to wear jewellery. Most of the women wore gold chains around their necks, ear-rings and finger-rings and sometimes bracelets at all times in the pool area, even when they went into the water.

Young people of both sexes ran around a lot, and the adults commented on that, saying that "youngsters like to show themselves off." To move about without much clothing on, then, was to exhibit one's body. That might be permissible for youngsters, but it was doubtful to what extent, and for middle aged women it was risky, both for reasons of decency and for reasons of
prestige, since their bodies were no longer so beautiful as they should be in order to offset the lack of propriety with elegance or modernity.

The feeling for propriety was considered correct and morally good, but also somewhat old-fashioned. It must not be overdone. And just what was overdoing it was different for different groups. I am sure it was no coincidence that I was told the story about how bikinis were permitted at the club innumerable times. It was a story of a clash between two dress codes. It went like this: Up until a few years ago, bikinis were forbidden at the club. But they had been fashionable on the beaches for many years, and the topless fashion was already being introduced, too. So a group of young girls decided to start wearing their bikinis at the club to see what would happen. They were warned by the administrator and then by the board, so they had to stop. But then a sympathising middle-aged woman invented a trick, which the younger rebels soon imitated: she made a bathing-suit for herself that looked very much like a bikini but was technically one-piece, because she sewed on a string of material uniting the upper and lower parts in front. This precipitated a dramatic vote at the next general assembly, which the pro-bikini people won by a narrow margin.

The terrace was just as liminal as the dressing-building in that it separated the pool area from the rest of the premises. It was less liminal in that it did not allow for the nakedness of showers and backstage manipulations like combing hair and making up faces, but it was more liminal in that it allowed mingling of people in street clothes and people in pool clothes. To make this possible, the people in pool clothes had to put on some extra pieces of clothing and wear shoes, and the people coming in from the street usually signalled some relaxation in dress, for instance taking off jackets and ties and adopting relaxed body postures.

Around eight o'clock, the people who had spent the day by the pool prepared for an evening on the terrace: refreshments, cards, talk. The dress now was shirts and sports slacks for the men; the women emerged from the dressing building well combed, perfumed and made up, and wearing good quality cotton shifts with bare shoulders, preferably with a matching short-sleeved jacket to put on after dark, or perhaps a straight cotton skirt and a light coloured short-sleeved blouse. They seemed to move more gracefully and talk more once dressed.

After dusk, the mixed-type dress that was acceptable on the terrace during the day disappeared. The excuse for the relative nakedness had been the requirements of sun and water, so when the sun went down and the pool closed (swimming after 8 PM was forbidden), the body had to be presented according to the principles of propriety and elegance only. The nakedness that "modern leisure" required was demarcated in both time and space.

Winter dress was less problematic, since there was no question of nudity. But for the women there was still an issue of propriety versus elegance. In most of the groups propriety won. Madrid had become a fashion city in the late 1980's, and in downtown night life one could see very imaginative outfits, but at the club there was little daring.

The usual club dress for women for a winter afternoon was skirt and blouse. The skirt should not be too narrow but preferably straight. The blouse should be cotton or silk and freshly ironed. Whereas the skirts were almost always in one colour only, and a rather dark one, the blouses could have imaginative patterns and could be any colour. A pant suit was acceptable in most groups, but there were a couple of groups in which the women never wore slacks. The shoes were usually pumps with medium size heels. Almost all the women had fur coats, and usually they wore colourful silk scarves which they did not always take off with the coat but left over the shoulders for a while or sat and played with. Or, if a woman had a skirt which tended to creep upwards as she sat, she would drape the scarf over her knees, to cover them but at the same time to show off the beauty of the scarf. The hair-dos were impeccable, usually short and permanent. Not a grey hair in sight on anyone below sixty. Long hair was a sensitive matter because it expressed the dilemma of propriety versus elegance, and it did so in a dangerous symbolic language of sensuality.

The men were slightly more casual. They too would always be very well ironed, showered and perfumed, but they avoided the kind of suits they all wore at work. They preferred casual slacks, white or pastel-coloured shirts (sometimes striped but never any other patterns), and
in winter they would usually wear a sweater in "masculine" colours, such as brown, beige, dark blue, dark green or dark wine-coloured.

Compared to everyday dress, the women dressed up for the club, while the men dressed down. This made sense, because for both genders it was a way of marking club life as leisure. Most of the women were housewives and did not have to dress up at home, where nobody could see them, and domestic chores require practical clothing. Practically all the men worked in offices where they had to dress in strict suits. The men came to the club to see friends, as opposed to colleagues or clients, so they signalled relaxation; the women came to the club to see friends, as opposed to being alone at home, so they enjoyed dressing up.

The various groups at the club had different dress codes. They all subscribed to the general preference for propriety over elegance or originality. But some emphasised leisure more than others. Some club women were knowledgeable about fashion because they had boutiques of their own or worked in boutiques; they would sometimes test the limits of propriety, but suggestively sensual dress was never seen. Women's summer dresses were made of thin, cool materials but never of the kind that clings to the skin. The men never wore imaginative shirts, they never wore their shirts sexily half open, they never wore scarves or other colourful details, they never wore attention-catching belts, and their slacks never hugged their behinds.

This code of propriety was not unique to Club Aguafría, it was well-known for all middle class Madrilenians, but it was practised to varying degrees. It was not usually interpreted as strictly as it was at Club Aguafría. Furthermore, there were two other principles in Madrid, apart from elegance and leisure, that contradicted propriety in dress. One was originality. Dressing was one scene on which the disposition for self-affirmation could be acted out and find many expressions. The other principle was what we can call a code of progressivity, i.e. a way of dressing that signalled an expansive mode of management of meaning and left-leaning political opinions. This meant tight blue jeans for both men and women most of the time, colourful shirts for the men at least for leisure, not very sensual dressing but less emphasis on the clearly anti-sensual. Strong colours and unusual materials could be used by both women and men. This dress code communicated resistance to the idea that the body must be down-played, and this in turn communicated opposition to a whole set of opinions and "traditions" associated with "proper" middle class life.

If one has the opinion that the body is something dangerous or ugly that should be hidden, and if one participates in a constant game of prestige, it becomes important to conceal the body with expensive clothes in such a way that one is assured of prestige points for quality and decency. Extra points for elegance would be welcome, but one would rather relinquish them than risk possible minus points for exaggerated daring, "bad taste". This was the average view at the club.

If one participates in the same game for prestige, but with a "progressive" idea about the body as something good, it becomes important instead to emphasise it. That is probably the reason for the extremely small bikinis one can see on Spanish women on public beaches, and it is clearly the reason for the great interest in fashion among most middle class women. For working class women, fashion is too expensive, and both women's and men's work requires practical clothing, so both women and men use a practicality criterion above all. They downplay their bodies, too, however, because they usually share the Christian definition of the body as something that should not be noticed.

The family and the children.

The club defined itself as a family club. It aspired to create "a healthy atmosphere" for adults, children and youngsters alike. It wanted to promote family togetherness. It wanted to provide a place for leisure without such drawbacks as the wrong kinds of people or morally doubtful activities. Political discussions and professional contact-making were banned, since the competitiveness of both politics and working life was construed as opposed to the ideally peaceful family life. According to the dominant discourse at the club, everyone knew everyone, or could get to
know everyone if they wanted to. There should be no clique-building and no hierarchies. Everyone addressed each other by the first name and the informal pronoun of address, tú. In other words, the duality of private and public was reproduced in various ways and emphatically, and the club was defined as a place in the private sphere, with friendly sociability and family life as the purpose.

It was not, however, private in the Northern European sense of a preference for intimacy. True, club life was separated from the surrounding society, but within the club what was sought and obtained was a lively social life with many friends and acquaintances, preferably in big groups and almost always in full view of all the others present. One could say that the club was a theatre; members were actors and spectators at the same time, they showed themselves off (aparentar) and judged each other. Therefore the club was an important stage for cultural negotiations, and what happened there had consequences for larger cultural and social processes.

Naturally, official ideology seldom coincides totally with practice, but the overlap at the club was large; members made efforts to live up to the ideology. They truly came to the club to live family life and to have fun, to widen their circle of acquaintances, to have a place to meet their friends under relaxed conditions, to offer the children space for play and playmates from a similar social background.

But not everyone knew everyone. One of the most common complaints (especially from relatively new members) was that the club atmosphere was "closed", i.e. that it was difficult to get to know people. "People function in groups," they said. The other constant complaint was that the atmosphere was not at all relaxed but centred on the need to aparentar. Nor was the atmosphere as family centred as members and board liked to underline. Certainly there were plenty of children around, but there were few special facilities for them. And even if they ran about freely, and certainly could be admonished when needed by anyone, their presence was never very emphasised. It was not even desirable in the vicinity of the parents' groups. The children would play on their own, and when they came up to the parents' tables on various errands, the parents would usually show slight irritation. They would comply with the children's wishes if they were about ice-cream, handkerchief, water or bandaids, but it was very uncommon for a parent to get up and go and see what had happened if a child complained of abuse from another child or from club employees, and I hardly ever saw a parent play with their children.

In other words, it was evident that the adults came to the club to be with their adult friends, and the children came along and were expected to take care of themselves. And so they did, just fine most of the time. But of course it happened that some child stood by its mother's chair whining, without letting itself be persuaded to "go and play" ("¡Vete a jugar!" was the standard parent response, pronounced as a command and hardly ever elaborated with any specific suggestions). This was experienced as awkward, almost shameful, by the adults. It was difficult to combine the upkeep of perfect social façades with children's requirements. A fretful child was a symbol of weakness, failure, and it was an inconvenience for the most important activity, that of adult conversation.

The children were not emphasised, then, as growing individuals. But they were emphasised as links in the construction of families. The conversations almost always contained plans for future weddings and comments on recent ones. New-born children were always greeted with enthusiasm the first few times they were shown off at the club. Everyone who had any connection at all to the parents would come up to look at the child and comment on it, not so much its looks, size and health, although that too, as the fact that the family in question had increased, that so-and-so had become a father, so-and-so had become a grandmother for the third time, so-and-so had become an aunt for the first time, and so on.

This great emphasis on the family as an institution, and as a source of emotional satisfaction, in combination with the programmatic emphasis on marriage and the socialising in groups, had several consequences for gender at the club. For instance, it made it almost impossible for a separating couple to remain members. It made it unlikely that separated, divorced or unmarried individuals would apply. It made it necessary for professional women to demonstrate that they
were good mothers and wives, too. It made it necessary for mothers of near-adult children to show pride in their accomplishments and demonstrate strong emotional commitment to their steps towards family building of their own, and play down deviations from the normal paths. It made it difficult to discuss that which is discussed more than almost anything else in general Madrilenian conversation: the changing gender roles in today's Spanish reality, and the many urgent and painful issues related to that.

Club Aguafría could be read as an ideological text translated into social practice that went to prove that The Family was alive and well. And the family model referred to was a hierarchical one, with well-defined roles and gender identities. The emphasis on hierarchy and the distaste for any loosening of clear boundaries was the opposite of the "progressive" ideals around gender that were otherwise common in Madrilenian discourses.

A gender order reproduced

From this ethnography we can conclude that the gender order that was created/ defended/ reproduced through these symbolic processes at the club was based on the following central ideas:
- Gender is given by nature. It is what it is and it cannot be changed.
- This natural thing is not just given but also good. To try to change it or stretch its limits, is therefore immoral and dangerous.
- The proof of that is all around us: things are changing for the worse and as a consequence there is a lot of suffering.
- Marriage is just as natural. Women and men are different, so they need each other, so they want to get married and have children and are happiest if they succeed with this project.
- Marriage should be lifelong, for only on that condition can all kin ties, which are just as natural and important, be as permanent and indubitable as they should be.
- Thus divorce should not exist. Divorced persons prove that they do exist, and their presence might cause more divorces to happen. So divorced persons should be avoided.
- If marriage is to last, there must be a clear-cut division of tasks and power of decision between husband and wife. It is in the nature of women to be more compliant, forgiving and compromising, therefore they should normally accept the decisions of their husbands. If there are problems in a marriage, it is thus (almost) always the woman's fault.
- Unmarried persons exist but are, of course, unhappy.
- Sexuality is given by nature, too, so it is unavoidable and in some sense good, but it is a strong force that makes people wrong and hurt each other. It is also somehow disgusting. Therefore sexuality must be controlled and concealed. Adults must not behave so as to remind each other of sexual matters. It is even more important that they not behave so that children find out that sexuality exists. The sexuality of youth must not be encouraged. Any talk of sexual matters in the presence of children or youngsters is wrong, including sexual education, even though it is nowadays mandatory in school, unfortunately.
- The body must be concealed, since it is a reminder of sexuality. To the extent that the body is visible, it should carry other meanings, for instance elegance or health. Women have a greater responsibility than men for sexual thoughts to be kept out.
- It is difficult to conceal the body. Therefore it must be disciplined and especially women must be made to tone down their physical presence of their own accord through moving with caution, dressing with care and occupying less physical and acoustic space than men.
- Space should be organised so that women and men are separated when the body is cared for or becomes visible, and so that bodies with different degrees of nudity are kept apart, and so that the function of a place defines the degree and type of nudity allowed.
- The safest thing would be for women and men to be kept more or less apart at all times. But an exception can be made when married couples are together, for then sexuality is domesticated. Therefore social life is organised either in groups of couples or in gender segregated groups.
- Since women and men are different kinds of people, they usually enjoy sociability with their own gender more than mixed company anyway.
- Children should be protected as long as possible from knowledge of sex. But sooner or later they should marry. A wedding is the most important ritual in life, it must be celebrated. But it is also a very sensitive matter, since it allows young people to become sexual beings. This aspect of weddings should not be talked about.

- Since all these circumstances of gender are natural, deviations are unnatural and consequently something to be avoided. They cause uneasiness and they might be contagious.

- Spain used to live up to these patterns. There used to be values of the right kind ("there are no values anymore" was a phrase I heard often, not only at Club Aguafría). Consequently tradition should be kept alive.11

- But it must be modified. Society has changed and in general for the better, not for the worse. Rationality and knowledge has won over ignorance and rigidity. We know that it is rational to behave naturally, so there is no contradiction; it is just a matter of adapting the surface forms of old customs to the requirements of modernity. The essence remains the same.

This summary is of course not literal, but it is based on recordings of what club members said in interviews, as well as on my visual analysis of club space. Club members usually did not express themselves so clearly, and many would deny some of these ideas in words. But they lived and felt them.

That is how culture works. What surrounds us expresses ideas, and we incorporate them as a result of moving in a world that is structured, symbolically and materially and not least spatially, in a certain way. That world shapes our habits, knowledge, capacities, values, wishes, so that we tend to reproduce it in our own ways of speaking, moving, fantasising, and so on. Neither bodies nor identities can be separated out from culture. We shape and are shaped.

That does not mean that culture determines us totally. The messages are always many, ambiguous, interpretable, and often contradictory even within a more or less coherent discourse. In addition, there are always many discourses in any given context, and all discourses look slightly different depending on from which perspective you apprehend them. And all of this is especially the case in complex societies, like big cities with a complex division of labour.

In addition to living in such a city, the new Madrilenian middle class earns its living thanks to education and merits. Hence it is logical for it to applaud all kinds of knowledge, debate, critique and development away from old taken-for-granted things, and to turn against "tradition". As does the majority. Those who want to defend tradition in spite of everything have to make complex calculations, invent intricate arguments. That is tiring. Dilemmas and contradictions keep occurring. Even inside Club Aguafría, inevitably. Nevertheless Club Aguafría offered a relatively sheltered place, where what its members wanted to consider natural also functioned as relatively self-evident. And this meant that the gender order they wanted really was created/ defended/ reproduced. It became real, at least inside the hedges. And that piece of reality had consequences outside the hedges.

Conclusions

The new Madrilenian middle class, as a whole, is an improvising set of people. They have lived through basic changes in all aspects of life, so they know that categories are not forever. New categories develop and one must test, experiment. The fact that gender is a cultural construction has become visible, and it has become at least semi-permissible to play around a bit with it. Even the preference for strict classification is no longer unquestioned. Flexibility might be an alternative.

But that was not how one reasoned at Club Aguafría. Most members did not want to have to hesitate and choose. They wanted to guard against change and reinforce threatened categorisations. Thus they practised active resistance. It was not resistance in the sense of critical-minded opposition to the powers-that-be. Theirs was a struggle to maintain hierarchies. But resistance it was, since it went against the currents of strong and well legitimated processes of change.
The opinions of the club members clashed head-on with mine. In spite of that, I often had a good time at the club. One should differentiate between cultural patterns and human relationships. It hurts to think that people I socialised with and sometimes liked as individuals probably will be upset when they read what I have written about them.

This said as a personal and ethical point. It is out of consideration for the people concerned that I call the club by an invented name and do not describe members as recognizable individuals. But the important point is strategic and methodological: feminist descriptions do not necessarily have to be about change, feminist resistance or radical experiments in order to serve as interesting material for theory building. On the contrary, it is of the utmost importance to describe also contexts where changes that feminists consider positive are resisted, especially if these contexts are meeting places for people who possess influence and power.

Club Aguafría is an example of a place and time where the struggle for "normality" was unusually palpable. Club members protested against current changes by defining them as abnormal. But they did not see their resistance as political agency. In spite of being aware of the tensions at the club and in spite of making efforts to *aparentar*, and in spite of the uncomfortable contradictions that kept creeping into the conversations and the sociability, and even though they surrounded the body with so many clear-cut and often confining norms, they affirmed that they acted only as one *should* act, "normally", "naturally", "soundly".

In other words, they used a figure of thought that contained a central construction of gender and other social relations as natural, and their management of meaning, verbal as well as non-verbal, was centred above all on maintaining this figure of thought by means of making sure that physical bodies conformed to the ideas and did not slip out of line. What they thought was natural did not seem to be trusted by them to come naturally.¹²

I do not mean to imply that club members were hypocrites. Perhaps they were, some of them, some of the time. But in general, I think they did experience as natural that which they called natural. We human beings always experience our bodies with the aid of cultural schemas of interpretation (Strauss and Quinn 1997). These schemas are not conscious rules or models or desires, but everyday patterned reactions, grounded in the culture that is all around us, the ideas we use in order to live. Such ideas can be more or less conscious, more or less verbalisable and discussible. The ones that go deepest (imprinted on body and soul through long-lasting meaning-laden practice) are the most invisible and the most painful to change (*doxa* in Bourdieu's terminology).

I cannot know to what extent the club members really believed in what they said or whether they lived according to the norms they expressed belief in. The fit could hardly be total, since such strict norms are hard to live up to, and since the fit between norms and reality is never total in any human society, but it was probably not very loose either, since in that case life at the club would have been uncomfortable, and to be a member was after all voluntary, something one did for leisure and fun. In any case, the fit between discourse and reality is not the focus of my analysis but the strong and culturally effective, but also defensive, coherence among the various symbolic expressions of the world view Club Aguafría members wanted to uphold.

Space and bodies are the main focus in this paper. They were severely disciplined in the sense of managed according to firm norms, not allowed to be fluid or innovative. As a feminist, I consider such gender discourses repressive, because they set up rigid definitions of what is female and what is male, and they include ideas that make these definitions ideally unchangeable and that create real barriers to actual change. They are also ideas that consistently give right of way and more physical and moral space to men than to women.

Club Aguafría members would not agree to the last point. Women as well as men at the club felt that their gender order was based on complementarity, not hierarchy. Women and men are different, they said, and that must be so, because it is natural, so it is unnatural and therefore both dangerous and impossible to try to change it - but women are as *valuable* (the word they usually used) as men.

It was true that the norms restricted individual freedom of both men and women. But women were more limited than men as to the things that are most important in this kind of soci-
ety, such as freedom of movement, freedom of choice of life style, sexual freedom, access to resources, and so on. The club members defended gender difference, and denied that difference leads to hierarchy, but in the kind of society of which the club was a part, it does.

All societies have norms about all sorts of behaviour, of course, not least around whatever is thought to have to do with sexuality, and that usually includes the body in one way or another. These things are hardly ever left to individual whim. But such norms can be more or less clear, more or less severely sanctioned, more or less legitimate, more or less under discussion, etc. They can be variously placed on a scale of rigidity, from the immovable and unquestionable to the kind of norms that invite reflection and criticism. Club Aguafría was a case of unusually category-conscious and unusually explicit management of body and space near the anti-reflexive end of the rigidity scale.

At Club Aguafría orderly borders divided space up according to function. Orderly borders separated the two genders. Orderly borders defined the gender of colours, the sound level according to gender and according to place and activity, the range of permissible opinions and permissible topics for conversation. Order was equated with good morals. Fluidity and flexibility were feared. Disorder was chaos, and anything that did not comply with conservative, well-sanctioned, norms, seen as emanating from some authority (from written club rules to God), was disorder. The kind of order that develops through debate, compromise and experimentation is no order, only disorder, according to this view.

There was little room for improvisation or individual creativity at the club. This is of course functional if you want to protect a set of ideas from criticism. It was a very well ordered world, therefore persuasive, and therefore leaving lasting strong imprints in the habitus.

But it was also vulnerable. What is very tightly organised can seem suddenly very disordered if some little detail slips out of place. The anxious vigilance of club members around their norms becomes comprehensible in that light.

To the extent that this type of ideas on gender, and on tradition and social stability, can still be considered legitimate and desirable for some Madrilenians, they constitute a threat to the ongoing changes in the wider gender order that point towards increasing possibilities for women. Therefore it is important for feminist research to identify and criticise this type of discourses on gender, even if they are only accepted in small isolated pockets of social life. And the members of Club Aguafría were not isolated. They withdrew inside their hedges to be among their own kind in their free time, but at other times they were well placed in society (at least all of the adult men, and some of the women, too) to influence wider debates.

What happened at Club Aguafría was that a group of persons who did not approve of the general trends of change in the gender order in Spanish society as a whole had found a place and a way to delegitimate that which they disliked by constructing it as abnormal, immoral, dangerous, unnatural, and to propose very different ideas as if they were eternal and natural, while they were in fact inspired in old ideas but purified of contradictions, adapted to current conservative religious and political discourses, and very strictly interpreted. What made it persuasive for the members was not so much that it overlapped with old ideas as the coherence between its symbolical expressions in different aspects of life at the club. It was a tight, strong set of ideas. Not designed on purpose, but a factor not to be taken lightly in the field of conflicting discourses on gender in middle class Madrid.

References


Author:

Prof. Britt-Marie Thurén
Concordiavägen 6
127 34 Skärholmen, Sweden
britt-marie.thuren@cws.umu.se

1 I have described it elsewhere, in Thurén 1998 and forthcoming, and I have described very similar ideas in working class contexts in Valencia, in Thurén 1988.

2 "Educated" was the common euphemism for "upper middle class" at the club. It was not acceptable to talk about class as structure, but it was important to differentiate "us" from "them" in moral terms, and "us" was a question of being well placed on a scale of status and money. "Education" was an appropriate symbol for that for these people, whose situation was not (mainly) based on family or inherited money but on salaried positions for which university education was a requirement. This created a new dilemma, however, since many of the women did not have higher education (only their husbands). And the irony of the label in this example is that it was used about university women, revealing thus its real meaning of class/ religion/ politics.

3 Bourdieu's thinking has made my analysis possible in various ways. His concept habitus underscores that experience does not just consist of that which is conscious and possible to verbalise, but also, and above all, it is in the body, and that bodily experiences also shape other experiences and ideas. Like most anthropologists I take it that no individual can exist before society. As Henrietta Moore has expressed it, "Experience is thus intersubjective and embodied, it is not individual and fixed, but irredeemably social and processual." (Moore 1994:3) According to Bourdieu's theory of practice there is no contradiction between analysing structures or actors, or between objective and subjective approaches. What becomes central is the issue of reproduction of social and cultural circumstances. Change is always going on, and its direction is not given. As to the reproduction of gender orders, bodily practice, including the organisation of space, becomes crucial. Moore again, "The powerful symbolism of notions of place, location and positionality in contemporary feminist theory demonstrates just how much we come to know through our bodies, and how much our theorizing is dependent on that knowledge. The multiple nature of subjectivity is experienced physically, through practices which can be simultaneously physical and discursive." (1994:81) The fact that symbolically constructed space functions so that it reproduces interpretations and experiences and reminds people of how the world should be understood and lived is an old anthropological insight. For critical theory it is important to study the complexity of these processes in order to find the nooks and crannies, the contradictions and ambiguities, that make change not just possible but unavoidable. Cf also Strauss och Quinn 1997, and, as to culture in complex societies, Hamnerz 1992.

4 "Ideal typical" is a term that has nothing to do with ideal in the sense of something desirable. It means only that the writer highlights certain aspects of something, in this case ways of reacting to cultural change. Highlighting makes patterns and tendencies stand out clearly. There is a risk that it turns into a caricature. One must remember that the ideal types do not exist in reality. But reality can be interpreted with their aid.

5 Other activities are e.g. lectures, celebration of festivities like carnival and new year, parties for children, disco for youth, cultural excursions and visits to museums, courses of various types, exhibitions and auctions. Card games are very common, as are Sunday family dinners.

6 In 1990 a club share, which each family had to buy, cost 500,000 pesetas, about 3000 euros, which was also approximately the average monthly income among member families, as far as I could tell. Then there was a monthly fee of 10,000 pesetas, approximately 60 euros, the same for all regardless of family size.

7 It is possible that there were more varied discourses at the club during its early years (in the 1960's). But over time there had probably been a process of homogeneization. It had not reached a point of stability (there were varied opinions among the members on many issues, even if they were always cautiously expressed), but because of the
A conservative image of the club, it attracted mostly conservative new members, and people with less conservative attitudes would tend to leave.

Of interest are both the specificity of the behaviour the rules referred to and the vagueness with which most norms were expressed; a vagueness interpreted as courtesy and elegance. Some examples: In the ball courts, "it is forbidden to play with the upper body naked, with inappropriate shoes or in general wearing anything that does not adjust to the norms dictated by the Royal Tennis Federation." The players "should try to maintain an adequate tone of voice so that co-players or players at adjacent courts are not disturbed." Breaches of norms at the courts were classified into light, serious and very serious and the corresponding sanctions for each category were specified. Among light breaches were non-payment for use of courts, wrong clothes and "expressions of bad taste". Among serious breaches were destruction of facilities and "serious defects in education, provocative vocabulary or gestures." Quarrels were classified as very serious breaches. In all areas of the club, members and visitors were reminded "that they are in a place destined to the stay and play of children, so therefore it is forbidden to show any behaviour that is not appropriate for their age." The careful monitoring of voice level and vocabulary was again insisted upon for the salons. Men were reminded that they had to wear "correct shoes, long trousers and buttoned shirt". Women's dress was not specified; I was told that the reason for that was that no woman would voluntarily dress in a way that would be considered out of place. Silence was imposed in the TV room when there was a program on. In the children's TV room, children's programs had the right of way. Sports clothes could not be used in the game rooms. Drinks and snacks, but not food, could be consumed in the game rooms but must not be placed on the game cloths. In the pool area, the main prohibitions were: no eating at all, no drinking from receptacles made of glass, street clothes were forbidden, especially hard shoes, but it was also forbidden to walk barefoot outside the pool area, radios were not allowed, one must shower before entering the pool, and finally, the rules prohibited "any act of nudism; even children of young age must at all times wear a "slip" or similar piece of clothing." Boys over five years must use the male dressing area. In the dressing areas games and food and drinks were forbidden, and "it is forbidden to walk about naked in the halls", i.e. between a shower and a dressing room. "Minors" were not allowed to consume tobacco or alcoholic drinks inside the club, but the age limit was not specified.

But not all Catholics are conservative, I should perhaps point out.

All members, that is. The employees of the club were addressed with the formal pronoun, usted, and responded in the same manner. In this way the members fenced off their leisure and private life; it was limited to persons of their own social standing and excluded the people they interpreted as servants. Even age did not override this hierarchical social marker, i.e. even very young employees would be addressed as usted by even elderly members.

Those who think that tradition should not be kept alive often harbour the same idea that these gender constructions are the traditional ones. Feminist research, however, has uncovered great variations.

One could read life at the club as an example of performance in Judith Butler's sense. True, she usually exemplifies with performances that subvert traditional Western ideas around gender, while at the club it was all about defending them, but the actions of club members were to a large extent precisely performances of gender, and just like subversive behaviour tends to be exaggerated when it has to go against the tide, the gender performances at the club were, as I see it, exaggerated due to the fact that they formed part of a semi-conscious resistance against ongoing strong tendencies in society at large.