MASS CULTURE IN FOUR SPANISH NOVELS, 1982–1994

A Thesis in
Spanish
by
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ABSTRACT

Using the theoretical differences between high and low culture as an analytical paradigm, this dissertation studies how four best selling novels published after the death of General Franco examine post dictatorial Spanish society. The introductory chapter explores critical writing about mass culture from the end of the nineteenth century through postmodern theory, followed by an overview of existing criticism dedicated to the theme of mass culture in Spanish literature. A summary of Spain’s major political developments since 1978 then helps to establish the social and historical context in which the novels were published.

In Rosa Montero’s La función delta (1981), contrasting representations of mass culture both praise its potential to encourage the imagination and imply that it can impede the development of relationships. The novel criticizes a society that is primarily concerned with the satisfaction of desire, but also suggests that storytelling, love, and solidarity are possible solutions to existential angst. The text proposes the need for society to embrace fiction but simultaneously warns against its seductive and potentially harmful nature.
Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa* (1987) examines the relationship between fiction and perception. While on one hand mass culture offers aesthetic models around which the plot and the characters are constructed, it also blurs the boundaries between illusion and reality to show that both are characterized by deceptively utopian ideals. The work’s focus on the textual nature of reality underscores the ubiquitous presence of mass culture in the contemporary world and highlights the inevitable mediation of perception by popular culture.

Eduardo Mendicutti’s *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1988) relates mass culture to gendered identity as it influences the construction of a transvestite’s female persona. Despite the protagonist’s struggle for political and sexual emancipation, the mass cultural icons that she regards as symbols of liberation are problematic because they also promote traditional gender roles and encourage conformity with paternalistic tradition. Mass culture is thus depicted as reinforcing patriarchal standards and potentially detrimental to the subject.

José Ángel Mañas’ *Historias del Kronen* (1992) exemplifies mass culture’s ability to negatively influence the individual, increasing his need for stimulation and
potentially resulting in moral corruption, alienation, increased violence, and a break down of human relations. The novel depicts the destructive nature of consumerism and stresses the importance of intellectual stimulation that may help the subject to avoid the dangers depicted in the work.

In the conclusion, commonalities between the novels are highlighted to show how each text uses the binaries related to the theoretical division between high and low culture to explore several of the political and cultural preoccupations brought about by Spain’s rapid immersion in a neo-democratic society. The relationship between mass culture and the repression of historical memory in this body of work ideologically aligns it with previous literature that also addresses the suppression of political discourse in post dictatorial Spain.
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Conclusions

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Introduction

In the second half of the twentieth century the semantic power of the image has gradually become the focal point of much scholarly attention. With the continued development and expansion of mass cultural media such as television, radio, cinema, and the Internet, images are now considered by many to be the fundamental producers of meaning in the contemporary world.¹ Accordingly, critical attitudes towards mass culture have reached a curious crossroads, for whereas in the past they were generally negative, scholars are now forced to acknowledge its significance and concede that it is often worthy of academic study. As such, the intellectual tradition of classifying popular culture as a “lesser” or “inferior” genre is challenged by newer perspectives that deconstruct the theoretical separation between the high and the low to show that mass culture can provide meaningful insight on social relations, aesthetic production, and on the construction of identities in modern society.

¹ One of the first important works concerning the importance of images is Guy Debord’s 1967 The Society of the Spectacle. He became the intellectual leader of a group of French scholars called the Simulation group, who theorized that originality scarcely exists and everything is just an imitation of something else.
But what exactly is mass culture and why has the intellectual elite consistently considered it to be an essentially negative construct? Due to its numerous genres and distinct manifestations, it is difficult or impossible to pinpoint an exact meaning to the term. Perhaps “mass culture” initially emerged when the advent of the printing press allowed the multitudes to have easy access to written texts for the first time. When the Industrial Revolution further enabled the masses to consume a large number of previously unavailable products, the upper classes started using the expression to suggest that anything produced in large numbers for many people was a non-elitist and anti-intellectual form of culture. Mass culture is often defined as any product with little aesthetic value whose primary function is to entertain rather than to serve or to enlighten human kind. As Patrick Brantlinger suggests in Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay (1983), a relatively inclusive definition is any cultural phenomenon designed for and shared by many people in an industrialized society (2). However one classifies it, mass culture has been criticized throughout the years as inferior to high art and is still looked down upon by many academics.²

² Brantlinger offers an explanation of the origin of the
With the proliferation of technology and the expansion of global markets in the Western world, mass culture is becoming an increasingly significant component of modern life. It forms part of the individual’s daily experience, dominates the airwaves, is readily accessible through cinema, television, radio, and the Internet, and ultimately becomes another source of information that influences emotions, thoughts, social expectations, and the way in which knowledge itself is acquired. The contemporary subject grows up in an environment mediated by multiple texts of mass culture and is inevitably affected by the images that he is exposed to throughout his life. Whereas in the past works of “high art” were celebrated because of their reputable aesthetic, social, and moral principles, mass culture now constitutes a large percentage of all art consumed today and is thereby more significant than ever before. Academics differ in their assessment of this term “mass culture”: “The phrase “mass culture” originated in discussions of mass movements and the effects of propaganda campaigns, film, and radio shortly before the outbreak of World War II. The systematic study of propaganda techniques began somewhat earlier, just after World War I, at approximately the same time that psychoanalysis was becoming widely influential. Kindred terms—mass art, mass entertainment, and mass communication—also crop up in the 1930’s. The main reason is not hard to discover: the convergence in that decade of concern about the effects of radio and the movies (with television clearly on the horizon) and concern about the rise of totalitarian parties and “mass societies” in Italy, Germany, and the Soviet
phenomenon and still discuss the possible social consequences that it may have.

A considerable amount of scholarly work has been published that has examined the inherent nature of mass culture in an attempt to differentiate it from what has traditionally been classified as “high art.” In order to establish the historical context that provides the theoretical basis for this study, a brief overview of the major critical writings on mass culture follows. The differing assessments of mass culture over the last two centuries reflect many of the social transformations that have significantly affected the current cultural and aesthetic practices of Western society.

Theories of Mass Culture

In their 1991 study Modernity and Mass Culture, James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger propose that critical assessments of high and low culture began well before the advent of the printing press, and suggest that intellectuals have perhaps always viewed mass culture negatively. They begin by discussing the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who criticized the majority for its inability to appreciate Union.” (30)
singular or unique qualities, claiming that it preferred the commonplace and resented excellence. His philosophy stemmed from the belief that the commoner was not interested in the invisible world of ideas but rather only in visible or tangible matter. Intellectuals therefore resisted the study of material things because they were associated with the ordinary man, and spent their time investigating the invisible world because they thought that value dwelled in the unseen, “hidden from all but the enlightened few” (3), and could only be uncovered through the analysis of ideas.

In more recent centuries, mass culture has also been consistently thought of in a negative manner. The advent of new democratic political systems after the French and American revolutions raised questions about the consequences that such politics might have on society: although some celebrated democracy and the capitalism that accompanied it as a social structure that would enlighten mankind, others viewed it as a threat to the learning process because it unified public thought behind a mask of liberation that only concealed another kind of totalitarian philosophy. Marx and Engels associated mass culture with the ideologies of the ruling classes and claimed that it necessarily stifled the political freedom of the worker. For them, the economically powerful manipulated society by manufacturing certain
products, and the control of material goods thereby became a discursive practice that instilled bourgeois values and alienated the less privileged classes. Their suggestion that mass culture tended to unify thought influenced theoretical writing for many years as is particularly notable in the first half of the twentieth century.

In *Inventing High and Low: Literature, Mass Culture, and Uneven Modernity in Spain* (1994), Stephanie Sieburth discusses the history of intellectual attitudes towards mass culture from the end of the nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth century. She begins by examining the origin of the word *culture* to point out that at some point in the eighteenth century it was used by the wealthy as a way of redefining their social status. The upper classes began associating themselves with *high culture*, and the lower classes were intentionally distanced from exposure to the arts and designated as uncultured. The term *high culture* accordingly became related to institutions such as universities, museums, concert halls and other spaces that could only be easily accessed by the wealthy, and thus helped to maintain and strengthen the divisions between social classes. The Industrial Revolution alongside the growth of the middle classes eventually gave the masses more access to products that were previously only consumed by the
affluent, and as a consequence a link was soon made between technological progress and cultural decline. Sieburth writes that the new availability of serialized fiction was...assumed to lead to corruption, and the development of this kind of mass cultural product was often seen as a metaphor for the development of an organized working class. Mass culture therefore meant, in the eyes of the dominant class, a threat to social control. In response, bourgeois discourses from the most conservative to the radical associated mass culture with corruption, triviality, and decay. (6)

While mass culture was associated with the lower classes, moral decay, superficiality and corruption for nineteenth century critics, it was also connected to the inferior realm of the lower body. According to Sieburth, Stallybrass and White argue that as another method of defining their social class, the growing bourgeoisie began to repress discussion of the functions of the lower body (sexual organs, excrement, and menstruation) because they associated them with contagion and corruption. However, these themes would later manifest themselves in works of art, especially in literary texts, that often focused on marginalized figures like the female prostitute who represented a perverse
sexuality and contamination that posed a threat to the higher classes. This connection led to the association of mass culture to not only morally decadent figures but also to females in general because their behavior was thought to have been primarily controlled by their reproductive organs rather than by the intellect. The male/female opposition thus functioned as a metaphor for the division between high and low culture: high culture was connected to masculinity and reason, whereas mass culture was linked with femininity and irrationality.

Like their predecessors, twentieth century scholars have often described mass culture as an anti-intellectual construct. Spain’s Ortega y Gasset, whose writings on the avant-garde also upheld the separation between high and low culture, was one of the first to address the issue. For Ortega, modernist works of art attempt to evade reality and create their own artistic domain, and as such are only able to be appreciated by intellectuals who can look beyond their own world and contemplate the beauty of abstraction. Because of a lack of connection between the aesthetic experience associated with contemporary art and the real experience of everyday life, Ortega proposes that the common man cannot understand newer works and consequently embraces other cultural forms that are more easily associable with the
world as he knows it. In *La deshumanización del arte*, Ortega implies that only the artistically inclined are privileged enough to accept and appreciate modern art. This implication recalls nineteenth century attitudes towards high and low culture, but differs in the sense that it is supposedly based on creative sensibility instead of on social status. Although he does not recognize class differences as a key factor in the ability to comprehend the avant-garde, his reader is nevertheless reminded that only the educated, or those who have been consistently exposed to high culture, is capable of understanding and embracing it.

In *La rebelión de las masas* (1930), Ortega’s insinuation that class division was indeed a factor in the ability to appreciate art is much more explicit than in his earlier essay. Commenting on the increasing influence of the masses in social policies, Ortega proposes that the common or “mass man” represents a threat to learning due to the fact that he has no inherent self-motivation or desire to improve his intellectual capacity. “Mass man” is content to consume goods, unappreciative of the processes that made them available to him, unconcerned about history, and decidedly egocentric. Ortega views this lack of desire for self-improvement as a danger to culture in general and suggests that humankind can never progress if it falls prey
to contentment: the true man always strives for intellectual and cultural growth and will never be satisfied with the status quo.\textsuperscript{3} Even though he insisted that “mass man” was not a product of a particular social group, it is difficult to accept that a class mentality did not affect Ortega’s thesis for his writing consistently implies that only the intellectually superior can identify the possible dangers of massification and avoid falling victim to self-contentment. This book was one of the first twentieth century works about mass culture to be widely read in Europe, and brought fame to Ortega as one of Spain’s most innovative and important contemporary thinkers.

Ortega’s work on mass society influenced many other scholars who also explore some of the inherent qualities of mass culture. In 1936 Walter Benjamin published “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production,” in which he theorizes about how modern technology has changed the nature

\textsuperscript{3} Ortega expounds: “My thesis, therefore, is this: the very perfection with which the XIXth Century gave an organization to certain orders of existence has caused the masses benefited thereby to consider it, not as organized, but as a natural system. Thus is explained and defined the absurd state of mind revealed by these masses; they are only concerned with their own well being, and at the same time they remain alien to the cause of that well being. As they do not see, behind the benefits of civilization, marvels of invention and construction which can only be maintained by great effort and foresight, they imagine that their role is limited to demanding these benefits peremptorily, as if they were natural rights.” (59)
of art by enabling its unlimited reproducibility. Focusing primarily on film, Benjamin suggests that the facile replication of the image undermines the authenticity and uniqueness of an original piece of art:

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be... The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity... Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so vis a vis technical reproduction... technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. (222)

Since traditional concepts of originality and authenticity are no longer applicable to contemporary work, Benjamin believes that a new aesthetic code that takes into account the ramifications of mechanical advances must be defined. Since mass culture proliferates alongside technological expansion, it will consequently take on an important role in this theoretical reassessment of art. By calling for the reevaluation of the essence of culture, Benjamin’s essay
 touches on many of the themes that will later characterize postmodern theory during the second half of the twentieth century.

Benjamin also notes that another consequence of mechanical reproduction is that the average person can now easily publish pictures or manuscripts due to the increased accessibility of the cameras, typewriters, and printing machines. As such, an abundance of cultural material may now be produced, professional artists have to compete with the masses for recognition, and the number of recognized high cultural works will most likely diminish. He predicts that the essence of art might thereby change from being spiritual to commercial in nature, and characterizes this shift as an essentially negative phenomenon. He also regards mechanization as generally detrimental to the intellect because it subjects the viewer to multiple images that he

4 Nevertheless, Douglas Kellner sees an element of emancipation in Benjamin's essay: "Whereas the other Frankfurt theorists treat the mass media or "the culture industry" in uniformly negative terms, as the cement of the status quo and the destroyers of genuine culture, Benjamin entertains the prospect of liberation coming about partly through the mass media. In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) at the same time that he recognizes the conquest of "mechanical reproduction" over traditional art as destructive, he also thinks of it as emancipatory. The new techniques have been nothing less than revolutionary... The emancipation of arts from ritual and also from the aristocratic monopoly of its ownership has politicized it in several ways. (Illuminations)
can no longer take the time to contemplate. This point will be further explored in Adorno and Horkheimer’s later writings on “The Culture Industry,” but the main tenets of the argument, that mass culture creates passive consumers that no longer reflect on what they experience, are already present in Benjamin’s essay.  

The next important mass cultural theory was produced by the Frankfurt school, a group of German sociologists that discuss mass culture in Marxist terms to suggest that it is intrinsically harmful because of its ability to influence human thought and reduce individuality. In Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), perhaps their most recognized and influential work, the ideological discursiveness of the Enlightenment is critiqued to propose that despite its supposed valuation of such humanistic ideals as universal freedom, self-determination and democracy, it was essentially another philosophy of domination that attempted to replace former ontological structures with a newer one that was also totalitarian in

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5 Benjamin comments on the way in which film limits the spectator’s ability of thinking about what he sees: “Let us compare the screen on which a film unfolds with the canvas of a painting. The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested... The spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by
nature (93). In the fifth chapter of the book, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they explore the manner in which the western culture industry (or the entertainment business) promotes uniformity with the ideological mainstream by providing the masses with an illusion of freedom and independence, when in reality it only limits the possibility of real autonomy. Adorno and Horkheimer propose that because of his regular exposure to media, the spectator experiences an endless repetition of images, ideas, and trends that influence him to such an extent that he begins to cherish that which is produced for him. Since the mass culture fed to the consumer by the entertainment industry is purposefully designed to satisfy his desire for spectacle and relaxation, it never significantly changes and thereby negates any prospect of intellectual stimulation. As a result of this process, Adorno and Horkheimer theorize that the consuming subject loses his capacity for prolonged thought. Like Benjamin, they also suggest that movies can be damaging to the intellect:

Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or their constant, sudden change." (240)
reflection on the part of the audience... They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. (126-127)

Moving pictures thus reduce mankind’s capacity for prolonged thought because the spectator is conditioned to react only in the moment of viewing and is not encouraged to contemplate or reflect upon the rapid array of images that he witnesses. The inherent dangers of mass culture thereby lay not only in movies themselves but rather in the type of man that their consumption produces: much like Ortega y Gasset’s characterization of mass man, Adorno and Horkheimer define the individual that unconditionally embraces film and other mass cultural products as one who can be easily manipulated and pacified. As such, they theorize that mass culture threatens man’s sense of individuality and can lead to the death of freedom, for if his capacity for thought is gradually destroyed, he is more easily controllable by exterior forces.6

6 An example of the association between mass culture and
The Dialectic of Enlightenment also touches upon many themes that continue to preoccupy contemporary scholars such as the changing nature of art, the mass media’s influence on identity, and the harmful effects that television viewing, exposure to violence, and consumption may have on society in general and on children in particular. Perhaps for this reason it is still widely read and considered to be an important critique of twentieth century industrialized society. Despite its shortcomings, the Dialectic’s characterization of mass culture as inherently manipulative affected other critical assessments of culture for many years, and some aspects of their work continue to influence contemporary thought.

Associated with the Frankfurt school, Herbert Marcuse

individual passivity is discussed with the advent of the radio: “The step from the telephone to the radio has clearly distinguished the roles. The former still allowed the subscriber to play the role of subject, and was liberal. The latter is democratic: it turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same. No machinery of rejoinder has been devised, and private broadcasters are denied any freedom. They are confined to the apocryphal field of the “amateur,” and also have to accept organization from above.” (122)

Commenting on filmed violence, Adorno and Horkheimer write: “The enjoyment of the violence suffered by the movie character turns into violence against the spectator, and distraction into exertion. Nothing that the experts have devised as a stimulant must escape the weary eye; no stupidity is allowed in the face of all the trickery; one has to follow everything and even display the smart
also published important theory in which he addresses the role of mass culture in modern society. Concerned with individual liberation throughout his career, Marcuse strays away from strict theoretical paradigms and attempts to create a new kind of analytical discourse that examines real-life and individual experience within a neo-Marxist framework. His discussion of the mass media in One Dimensional Man (1964) suggests that it is now the most effective form of controlling public thought, and as such can be used to manipulate the masses. Expanding on the work initiated by Benjamin and the Frankfurt sociologists, Marcuse hypothesizes that capitalism as a system is unable to generate lasting potential for future progress because it integrates people into a cycle of production and consumption by fostering what he calls the “false needs” of the consuming public. Douglas Kellner comments:

Mass media and culture, advertising, industrial management, and contemporary modes of thought all reproduced the existing system and attempted to eliminate negativity, critique, and opposition. The result was a “one-dimensional” universe of thought and behavior in which the very aptitude and ability for critical thinking and oppositional responses shown and recommended in the film.” (138-139)
behavior was withering away. (Illuminations)

Like others before him, Marcuse hypothesizes that mass culture, as part of the totalizing system of capitalism, represses man’s capacity for thought by attempting to eliminate all opposition to the prevailing discourses of the culture industry and/or of the state.

Nevertheless, Marcuse also proposes that mass culture contains some utopian qualities that can be potentially liberating to the subject. Rather than view mechanical innovation as definitively harmful, he also analyzes the beneficial aspects of mass culture to suggest that new technologies can be used for progressive social change. Since popular culture makes up an integral part of contemporary daily experience, he maintains that it must have some favorable qualities that can give meaning to the subject. It is perhaps this positive theorization of mass culture that most differentiates his work from that of his predecessors and links it to postmodern theory. Even so, his writing avoids association with postmodernism because it consistently upholds the Marxist goal of situating its subject matter within economic parameters. As such, Marcuse may be seen as a transitional figure that was one of the first to reevaluate mass culture and suggest that it has some liberating potential.
After World War II, cultural theory increasingly shifted away from modernist paradigms in order to explore a new or “postmodern” aesthetic in which forms of representation started to take preference over previous notions of artistic autonomy. Theorists from the Tel Quel group along with the French Situationists began examining the function of images and deviated from the neo-Marxist discourse of the Frankfurt school by neither explicitly discussing economic determination nor categorically condemning mass culture. As the cultural movement known as postmodernism gradually gained strength and contradicted some of the established tenets of modernist theory, critical attitudes towards mass culture also began to change. Spectacle and image became the new objects of academic study as many scholars started to consider television programs, movies, popular songs, serialized publications and other mass cultural products in a critical light for the first time.

The term postmodernism that has preoccupied cultural theory in the second half of the twentieth century attempts to characterize the changes in social, aesthetic and philosophical practices that took place in many western countries after World War II. Although some argue that postmodernism began before the 1950’s (as in the work of
Hispanic writers as a reaction against literary modernism or even before the turn of the 20th century, it became a popular intellectual concern after Jean-François Lyotard coined the term in his 1979 study The Postmodern Condition, in which he suggests that modern systems of knowledge are radically different from those of the past. Describing the function of narratives in society, he claims that narrative knowledge, which in the past was the dominant type of social discourse, used to strengthen bonds within a community and thus formed the basis of all law, human relations, and order. Claiming that scientific knowledge in the contemporary world is destroying narrative knowledge, Lyotard argues that man can no longer rely on the totalizing forces of the former grand narratives and that his perception of reality is consequently altered: scientific and technological advances thereby become the cornerstones of a new kind of knowledge, and narrative knowledge is no longer as significant as it once was. Accordingly, new forms of interpreting narrative that reflect the changes of the postmodern world must now be formulated and adapted to critical practices.

Lyotard also implies that the means by which information is produced is becoming more important than knowledge itself: as such, knowledge can no longer be
associated with objective reality and man's intellectual and ideological foundations are disturbed. For these reasons, Lyotard asserts that contemporary man must confront a new kind of world that is characterized by a plurality of truths. The decentralization of the meta-narratives associated with the past creates a multi-discursive world that Lyotard defines as postmodern.

After Lyotard, theorists have questioned, expanded, and redefined the concept of postmodernity so often that any attempt to summarize their work would be overwhelming; however, several ideas stand out as common denominators that characterize the postmodern condition. Perhaps most importantly, the earlier notion of a central or "inner truth" has given way to a prevailing lack of faith in the existence of any essential or authentic meaning. This mentality has led to the questioning and deconstruction of all entities that were previously associated with autonomy, unity, and authenticity. Postmodern theory suggests that the decentralization of meaning and the coexistence of conflicting discourses that characterizes contemporary society has changed the way that humans perceive the world. The postmodern subject is no longer autonomous but rather is a product of a multifaceted society in which there is no central discourse on which to place his beliefs. His reality
must therefore be assembled from a hodgepodge of many different narratives, and he often struggles to make sense of them all.

The advent of postmodernism as a theoretical concern also brought about important changes in the artistic world, for new works that reflected the decentralized nature of postmodernity were now becoming more and more common. Fresh critical attitudes towards the arts accompanied the postmodernist philosophy, and the essence of high culture was again starting to be questioned as forms of representation such as popular music, literature, and film were increasingly becoming recognized as meaningful and important. Postmodern works frequently juxtaposed a variety of styles with seemingly conflicting elements in order to intentionally create multiplicity of meaning. As such, they were often criticized for their apparent ambiguity or lack of discourse, for whereas modernist art attempted to break free of society to reveal the existence of a “pure” or “inner truth,” postmodernism mixes style, content, and genres in order to challenge some of the longstanding aesthetic notions of autonomy, originality, and discursive totalitarianism.

Mass cultural forms such as cinema, music, television, video, and even consumer goods were increasingly becoming
incorporated into contemporary work. At first, many did not appreciate their seemingly "gratuitous" inclusion, but they nevertheless emerged as important components of postmodern aesthetics. Little by little different popular cultures began integrating themselves into University curriculums and fields such as media, cultural, and women’s studies gradually started to appear in the academy. By and large, contemporary theorists acknowledge the growing importance of mass culture and attempt to analyze its various significance by questioning its artistic representation, examining the ideological reasons for its inclusion, and trying to determine its social implications. As artists keep on incorporating it into their work, scholars continue to debate the effects of mass culture on society.

Stephen Conner comments: "...a worrying fluidity began to affect the boundaries between the high culture which had traditionally become the reserve of universities and mass culture. Popular forms like television, film and rock music began to lay claim to some of the seriousness of high cultural forms and high culture responded with an equivalent adoption of pop forms and characteristics (Andy Warhol and pop art, or the semi-parodic annexation of forms like the Western or the detective story in contemporary literary fiction). The response to this explosion of culture, the increasing visibility as culture of forms that could previously be dismissed as simply not culture at all, was initially one of high-minded distaste, but increasingly took the form of appropriation as, with the (limited) growth of media studies, communications studies and womans studies, universities began to acknowledge that these forms might be studied with (nearly) as much profit and effectiveness as the high-cultural forms which had previously been the guarantee of the humanities in the academy." (16)
Some postmodern theorists also address the social significance of mass culture in their writing. Throughout his career, Jean Baudrillard theorized that the postmodern world is so regulated by the manipulation of images and information that contemporary man lives in a “hyperreality” of signals that radically alter his perception. In this mediated environment, the subject loses the ability to differentiate between his own world and the hyperreality of the media, resulting in his perpetual displacement from reality and in the negation of meaning. Douglas Kellner comments:

...[Baudrillard] claims that the media and “reality” implode such that it is impossible to distinguish between media representations and the “reality” which they supposedly represent... the masses absorb all media content, neutralize, or even resist, meaning, and demand and obtain more spectacle and entertainment, thus further eroding the boundary between media and “the real.” (Illuminations)\(^9\)

\(^9\) Kellner expands on Baudrillard’s notion of how media negates meaning: “Baudrillard's analyses point to a significant reversal of the relation between representation and reality. Previously, the media were believed to mirror, reflect, or represent reality, whereas now the media are coming to constitute a (hyper)reality, a new media reality -- "more real than real" -- where "the real" is subordinate to representation leading to an ultimate dissolving of the real. In addition, in "The Implosion of Meaning in the
Accordingly, Baudrillard believes that media has a large influence on the development of the psyche and is one of the principle causes of decreased social interaction. In terms of mass culture, his work is similar to that of the Frankfurt sociologists in that he also characterizes it as negatively affecting the subject and ultimately destroying meaning.

For Baudrillard, contemporary mass media is the principle means by which knowledge is disseminated throughout the globe and is therefore one of the most powerful producers of meaning in today’s world. The hyperreality it creates eventually becomes more important to the subject than his own reality, and as such the media dissolves all notions of traditional reality. Baudrillard thereby theorizes that the community able to successfully

Media," Baudrillard claims that the proliferation of signs and information in the media obliterates meaning through neutralizing and dissolving all content — a process which leads both to a collapse of meaning and the destruction of distinctions between media and reality. In a society supposedly saturated with media messages, information and meaning "implode," collapsing into meaningless "noise," pure effect without content or meaning. Thus, for Baudrillard: "information is directly destructive of meaning and signification, or neutralizes it. The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving and dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media.... Informationdevours its own contents; it devours communication.... information dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy" (SSM, pp. 96-100)." (Illuminations)
produce and manipulate the most images will accordingly have the most influence over others. His later assertion that those who control the flow of images to the masses will also regulate how knowledge is acquired in the future reflects what he believes to be the consequence of a technological process that places intellectual control of society in the hands of the owners of the mass media. Since Baudrillard focuses most of his attention on the form of the media rather than on the content it provides, he rather quickly concludes that the favoring of technology over content necessarily degrades meaning. As such, his work has often been attacked for being too superficial and for disregarding dialectic aspects of communication theory. Nevertheless, it remains influential in that it seeks a new discourse that adequately explains the adverse effects that the media may have on society.

Similarly, the Italian writer Gianni Vattimo theorizes that postmodern society originated alongside the emergence of the mass media in the second half of the 20th century. He proposes that the images that pass through the mass media become the contemporary world’s primary source of knowledge and also suggests that by manipulating images, one can control information. However, he does not view this process as a form of exploitation but rather as a potential tool of
liberation:

...newspapers, radio, television, what is now called telematics- have been decisive in bringing about the dissolution of centralized perspectives, of what the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard calls the ‘grand narratives’. This view of the effect of the mass media seems to be the very contrary of that taken by the philosopher Theodor Adorno... who predicted that radio (and only later TV) would produce a general homogenization of society... this in turn would permit and indeed favor the formation of dictatorships and totalitarian governments capable of... exercising widespread control over their citizens by the diffusion of slogans, propaganda (commercial as well as political) and stereotypical world views. Instead, what actually happened, in spite of the efforts of the monopolies and major centers of capital, was that radio, television and newspapers became elements in a general explosion and proliferation of world views. (5)

Vattimo claims that history as we know it is written by a dominant social class, and as such only includes information relevant to its own subjective perspective. Therefore, the
concept of history promoted by the culture industry is in reality just a series of images of the past that are unable to represent the plurality of voices that actually existed. From within this textual concept of history, Vattimo believes that the mass media constitutes a manner in which minorities can express their voices and thus rewrite history, because it enables them to champion their causes to a large public who otherwise might not be aware of their plight. He thereby regards mass culture as a mostly positive construct that encourages diversity of discourse instead of uniformity.

For his part, Fredric Jameson also discusses mass culture’s role in present society and similarly strays from purely negative representations. In his 1979 “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” he proposes a reevaluation of the binary between high and low in order to try and establish an appropriate means of analyzing contemporary art. Jameson writes:

...we must rethink the opposition high culture/mass culture in such a way that the emphasis on evaluation to which it has traditionally given rise, and which—however the binary system of value operates (mass culture is popular and thus more authentic than high culture,
high culture is autonomous and therefore utterly incomparable to a degraded mass culture)−tends to function in some timeless realm of absolute aesthetic judgment, is replaced by a genuinely historical and dialectical approach to these phenomena. Such an approach demands that we read high and mass culture as objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under late capitalism. (133-134)

Here, Jameson attempts to deconstruct the traditional division between cultures to show that both are interrelated and can be more productively seen as two logical manifestations of late capitalism. He goes on to analyze Jaws and The Godfather I and II, and highlights the function of repetition and symbolism in each movie to show how their discourse is both socially critical and optimistic. Jameson demonstrates that such texts, normally considered to be superficial and unworthy of academic study, have much to offer in terms of social insight and can be read as a commentary on contemporary American life. This essay was one of the first to illustrate that the analysis of popular culture can be significant, and challenged other academics to continue along this line of inquiry.
In other works on postmodern society, Jameson also links mass culture to the construction of individual and collective identities. In one of his most well-known volumes, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1984), he reconsiders the definition of postmodern art and examines some of its typical characteristics like repetition, non-critical parody, pastiche, deliberate juxtaposition of the high and the low, fragmentation, and multiplicity of discourse. Jameson asserts that these qualities are inherited from modernism and are simply brought to an extreme in postmodernism, and thus suggests that they should be seen not only as aesthetic phenomenon but also as part of a larger cultural trend that reaches all aspects of society. Like Marcuse and Vattimo, his writings on the postmodern characterize mass culture as a legitimate artistic form that can be just as meaningful as high culture. Although he does not view it in an entirely positive light, Jameson is one of the most recent and influential theorists whose work has shown that the analyses of popular texts can provide significant insight on social relations and is therefore a valuable academic exercise.

Modernism and postmodernism differ in their treatment of mass culture primarily in their perception of how it can influence patterns of behavior. Whereas modernism tends to
view it as inherently negative because it is unoriginal, unifies thought, and limits intellectual curiosity, postmodernism, while recognizing its manipulative possibilities, also considers its positive potential to suggest that it can be liberating to the subject. As such, with the increasing proliferation of mass culture in modern society, the necessity of analyzing the way in which it affects aesthetic production, social issues, identity, and daily existence is more important than ever. Since it is an easily accessible source of information that reaches almost every corner of the globe, it would be impossible to fully understand contemporary art without considering the significant role that mass culture can have in the construction of meaning.

Mass Cultural Criticism in Hispanic Literature

Although there has been a significant amount of work published on the integration of popular culture in Latin American literature, there have been very few studies dedicated to the incorporation of mass culture in the recent Spanish novel, and only limited attention given to its manifestation in specific works. Most articles that address this theme concentrate on the blending of fiction and
reality that exemplifies the ambiguity characteristic of postmodern writing. Robert Spires, Jo Labanyi, and Stephanie Sieburth have examined narratives that predate or accompany the Spanish transition to democracy to propose that their representation of mass culture challenges the repressive practices of the Franco regime and also reveals aspects of each author's political ideology. Nevertheless, very little work has been published on the role of mass culture in texts that have appeared during the last twenty-five years. Although some studies of serials, romances, and police novels have also appeared, they generally do not address the significance of mass culture's increasing presence in society nor do they expand upon authorial attitudes towards its incorporation into art. The full-length books dedicated to this theme are few in number and usually call for more investigation of popular conventions in contemporary writing.


11 For other works that investigate the use of the detective
In 1972, José María Díez Borque released one of the first books to specifically examine mass culture in Spanish novels in his *Literatura y cultura de masas: estudio de la novela subliteraria*. He addresses the lack of serious academic attention dedicated to mass cultural texts and asserts the need for more work in this area, justifying his claim by stating that they illustrate how individuals relate to their social environment on a day to day basis. In his study, he explores such popular genres as romantic stories, westerns, serials, photo-books, detective fiction,}

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12 Díez Borque writes: “La cultura de masas es un mundo variopinto si los hay. Incluye toda la gama de mass-media, pasando por el utilitario, frigorífico, la vestimenta standard para ir a desembocar en la literatura de quiosco, que será el campo específico de este estudio. Parcela particular—es cierto—que permitirá unas generalizaciones sobre el alcance, vigencia y función social de estos productos, intentando llegar a las capas más sosterradas e íntimas de la persona: frustración, índice subjetivo de felicidad, desacuerdo con su status, etc... Esta, creo, puede ser la justificación de mi intento, pues no se me oculta que a más de uno parecerá <<poco serio>> un estudio sobre novelas de quiosco y productos afines. Para mí tengo que es no sólo necesario, sino urgente replantearse esta cultura de los sectores menos favorecidos, sin dejarse cegar por ideas de aristocratism cultural, valores consagrados o monopolios tradicionales (13).
adventures, science fiction and horror novels to analyze their consumer/object relationships that provide insight on the subject’s daily experience. He also describes how romantic language blurs the barriers between fiction and reality, thereby connecting the realm of the unlived artistic world to that of real life.

In chapter three, Díez Borque discusses the influence of the mass media on literature, focusing on the replacement of the word by the image as primary signifier and on the cinematic narrative styles of many contemporary novels. Starting from the notion that true literature nurtures autonomy and self-awareness, he proposes that the mass media by contrast promotes conformity and reduces the subject’s capacity for original thought. Although he mentions the manipulative powers of the media, he does not address its reception and mainly concentrates on the classification of pop literary genres.\(^\text{13}\) His goal in the study is to provide a

\(^{13}\) In chapter three, \textit{Literatura y mass media}, Diez Borque explains: "...el peligro –realmente grave– de los mass-media es la difusión de estereotipos, que crean una conciencia uniforme y conducida en los individuos, privándoles de auténtica capacidad de selección. Entre los que están viendo u oyendo un programa radiotelevisivo hay un fondo de comunidad que no se produce entre los lectores de una auténtica capacidad de selección. El libro es el responsable de la aparición del "yo" occidental, de la individualidad recreadora. Hay que culpar, pues, a los mass-media de gran parte de la homogeneización y estandarización del gran público. Podría decirse que el libro aisla mientras que los mass-media uniforman... Recalcaré que la responsabilidad y
lexicon of popular novels and to demonstrate that they should not necessarily be depreciated as lacking artistic quality. Díez Borque does not expand upon related issues such as the political, cultural, and social implications that the appreciation of mass literature might have, but rather attempts to detail and define various types of mass literature.

In her 1994 Inventing High and Low. Literature, Mass Culture, and Uneven Modernity in Spain, Stephanie Sieburth investigates the use of mass culture in two novels by Pérez Galdós (La desheredada 1881, Tormento 1884), and two works published soon after the death of Franco, Juan Goytisolo’s Reivindicación del conde Julián (1976) and Carmen Martín Gaite’s El cuarto de atrás (1978). Her study attempts to show that popular culture in these texts has a direct relationship to the political ideologies and monetary practices of each era. By examining the high/low relationship in the works, she proposes that the historical alcance de los mass-media supera los terrenos de la estética y entra en el campo de la ética aunque no se ha establecido todavía el alcance que estos medios tienen en cuanto al deterioro de las costumbres” (104). Later, after analyzing the similarities of the results of a poll about why people enjoy reading works of mass literature, he concludes: “Los que aceptan el final feliz como el óptimo para cualquier tipo de novela y confiesan desearlo subjetivamente y sentirse defraudados si no ocurre así, son ejemplo típico de víctimas de la manipulación, externa a la estricta función de lo literario” (232-33).
conception of culture in both periods was largely contingent upon economic factors. She establishes connections between the novels’ treatments of mass culture to suggest that Galdós and Goytisolo use it to point out that the industrial and technological revolutions taking place in both centuries threatened the survival of high culture itself.\textsuperscript{14} By contrast, Sieburth proposes that Martín Gaite represents mass culture positively as it helps her female protagonist recover a sense of autonomy in the aftermath of a repressive patriarchal regime that had subordinated women to male discourse for many years.

Sieburth’s study demonstrates that authorial attitudes towards mass cultural texts in both time periods were negative and positive, and establishes some connections between masculinity/ high culture and femininity/ mass

\textsuperscript{14} Sieburth explains: "In Spain, novels of the late nineteenth century react to industrialization, the rise of a newly literate lower middle class, the organization of the working class, greater participation by women in the workforce and in the writing of fiction, and the popularity of the serial novel in the previous decades. In the 1970’s and 80’s, novels respond to the transformation of most of Spain from a state of underdevelopment to a consumer society during the 60’s, and to the role of television and advertising in those changes. In both periods, the first mass cultural novels to react to the preceding changes suggest that the new forms of mass culture that have recently developed mean the end of culture. In the writers’ metaphors, the high has become contaminated by the low, and Spain is a prostitute who has sold out lofty ideas for love of material comforts" (12).
culture. It also suggests that contemporary Spanish literature may use pop culture in ways that challenge some of the theoretical divisions between the high and the low. For Sieburth, Martín Gaite's novel marks a turning point in the way that Spanish writers might use mass culture in their work since they no longer feel the need to write against the dictator. She calls for further investigation in this area and wonders how the next generation of authors, who experience a political and artistic freedom unheard of under the Franco regime, will treat mass culture in their work.¹⁵

The most recent book concerning mass culture in Hispanic literature is Ana María Amar Sánchez' *Juegos de traición y seducción* (2000). Throughout the study, she describes the evolution of conflict, appropriation, and

¹⁵ Sieburth writes: "In the present day, Spain continues to undergo rapid transformation. And novels which incorporate forms of mass culture continue to appear. But the high/low division is not at issue, nor is politics foregrounded... Literary characters who dream of something better through mass culture do not abound as they did in the 1970's. Martín Gaite's novel can thus be seen as pivotal, making a transition between two ways of writing about mass culture. On the one hand it looks forward, working to neutralize the high/low division, vindicating mass culture just as it valorizes other phenomena treated as marginal or nonexistent under Franco. On the other hand, the novel still has a clear purpose, a sense of itself as an intervention in Spain's transition to democracy. The younger generation of novelists does not feel the need either to attack or to defend mass culture, nor to link literature clearly to politics. It remains to be seen whether such recreational literature will continue in the new Spain, as it strives yet again to catch up with Europe" (23-24).
resistance to mass culture that characterized the work of many Latin American authors. She examines novels by Puig, Carpentier, Arlt, Bayly, Fuguet, Gómez, and Zapata to show that despite their reference to and appropriation of pop culture, they still maintain a critical distance between their texts and the lowbrow forms that they incorporate.\textsuperscript{16} She claims that this literature demonstrates a prevailing negative attitude towards mass culture, which is used for its seductive qualities but also disdained as artistically inferior.

In the final chapter of her study, she describes the work of the “McOndo” group, young authors whose life-long exposure to institutionalized mass culture has significantly influenced their artistic production.\textsuperscript{17} According to Amar


\textsuperscript{17} She writes: “Un trabajo sobre la presencia de estas formas masivas en la literatura de fin de siglo tiene ya un cierre ineludible: la narrativa reunida bajo el discutido pero muy efectivo nombre de grupo McOndo. En la producción de sus autores puede leerse mejor que en cualquier otra estética la consolidación de la cultura de masas dentro del sistema literario. La larga tradición de lucha, apropiación y resistencia parece haberse clausurado con ellos. Puede vérselos como el producto de un momento en que la presencia de los medios masivos se ha efectivamente
Sánchez, McOndo novels differ from their predecessors because they not only refer to popular culture but are constructed from within a media-oriented environment and consequently do not demonstrate the tension between the high and the low typical of many boom texts. These novels instead highlight the mediated character of the modern city, underline its association with the masses and question the notion that contemporary man is most able to communicate in an urban setting.\textsuperscript{18} McOndo texts replace the social atmosphere of the city with various forms of media to represent an empty environment, or a "no-place," where man’s only companion is a television screen and contact with other human beings is severely limited. The McOndo text’s depiction of mass culture exposes contemporary man’s dependence on the media, which ultimately leads to the breakdown of interpersonal communication and to social alienation. As such, these novels highlight the omnipresence of technology in the twenty-first century to suggest that it...
can be damaging both to the individual and to society at large.\textsuperscript{19}

The idea that mass culture is inherently harmful to the subject is not new given that theorists have discussed its relationship to human behavior for years. Nevertheless, Amar Sánchez claims that McOndo texts are innovative in that they no longer uphold a separation between the high and the low but rather simply portray the alienating potential of the different kinds of culture that mediate the environment. As technology continues to progress, its influence on human thought also needs to be consistently observed and evaluated. Assessing mass culture’s function in literature can shed light on historical developments, the construction of cultural identities, and the way in which human beings interact with each other and with their surroundings. As

\textsuperscript{19}Amar Sánchez comments: “Si la ciudad es “a la vez un lugar para habitar y para ser imaginado” como señala García Canclini en Imaginarios urbanos, en los relatos McOndo el cable ha reemplazado a la ciudad, nada hay para ver en ella, nada puede imaginarse que no sea a través de una forma mediática. La ciudad no tiene nada que ofrecer sino peligros... Las ciudades son intercambiables porque son espacios de pasaje o “no-lugares”, aeropuertos y hoteles donde se mira televisión y donde se está siempre solo... La desconexión y el aislamiento corporal se refuerzan en esos “no-lugares” característicos de la era mediática” (159). “Si la ciudad...habla a sus habitantes y nosotros le hablamos a nuestra ciudad, ese diálogo resulta interrumpido en estos relatos del fin de siglo. Los personajes se repliegan y ya no acuden a la cultura de masas como un sistema que permite decodificar los signos de la ciudad, antes bien sustituyen con ella el contacto con el mundo
such, literature can help us to better understand the real-life relationship between man and media that only promises to grow more important as we progress further into the twenty-first century.

**Spanish Literature, Thesis Presentation and Novels**

Ever since Don Quixote lost his sanity because of his infatuation with novels of chivalry, mass culture has been progressively incorporated into Spanish literature. In the twentieth century, scholars have analyzed its function in various texts to propose that it allows authors to explore and respond to the economic, political and social ideologies of different time periods. Three novels that have been studied in relation to their incorporation of mass culture are Juan Goytisolo's *Reivindicación del conde Julián* (1973), Juan Marsé's *Si te dicen que caí* (1973), and Carmen Martín Gaite's *El cuarto de atrás* (1978). According to critics, mass culture in these works helps the protagonists come to terms with a troublesome political reality while it

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20 Some of the most insightful research on the use of mass culture in contemporary Spanish literature has been published by Robert Spires, Jo Labanyi, Stephanie Sieburth, and José María Díez Borque.
simultaneously explores and challenges the official Nationalist rhetoric of the dictatorial state.

Stephanie Sieburth proposes that the narrator of Reivindicación del conde Julián perceives mass cultural texts, including rock songs and Hollywood cinema, as foreign invaders that have permeated both Spanish and Moroccan society. In his view, they threaten to destroy the authenticity of his "native self" by flooding his environment and parasitically integrating themselves into his daily life. Sieburth suggests that Goytisolo uses the metaphor of a mass cultural invasion in order to criticize the Franco regime's effort to revitalize the national economy in the 1960's by revamping the tourist industry and encouraging American and European visitation, resulting in what he believed to be the country's voluntary prostitution to external capitalist values. Nevertheless, the narrator also appropriates mass culture as he imitates its invasive power and transforms himself into a "James Bond" who rebels against foreign inversion by attacking it in an effort to

Sieburth writes: "Mass culture is linked to the chaos of the modern city, to the crowd, to social climbing, and to prostitution. Spain's transformation to a consumer society, via the tourist industry, is graphically described as voluntary prostitution. As a giant Vagina, Spain allows itself to be penetrated by groups of tourists. The Vagina--and the mass cultural discourses associated with it--have become the devouring female rodent of excess flesh, oozing organs, terrifying sexuality" (137).
undermine the rhetoric of homogeneity, nationalism, and racial purity characteristic of Francoist ideology. Mass culture is therefore both criticized and imitated by a narrator who uses it to challenge some of the official discourses of the state.

In *El cuarto de atrás*, mass culture plays a significant role in the recollection of historical memory. For Sieburth, radio songs, magazine photographs, and even ice-cream wrappers help the narrator remember her childhood as she incorporates them into her memoirs as a way of offering another, perhaps more valid version of the postwar years than that given by the official histories of the state. Sieburth addresses the importance of the pop song in the novel, claiming that it constitutes a subtle form of social protest because it was the only kind of "text" that could examine the plight of marginalized characters such as prostitutes without being censored.\(^2\) Joan Brown has also

\(^2\) Sieburth writes: "...popular texts serve as triggers that bring back the past along with all its sensations. She remembers that she idolized and imitated the heroines in the short novels of Elisabeth Mulder in the magazine *Lecturas*. The memory of a romance novel read in adolescence, *El amor catedrático*, gives rise to an explanation of the difference between the feminist woman idealized during the Republic and the self-sacrificing, active, yet domestic woman set up as a model by the Falange’s Sección Femenina. A photograph of Conchita Piquer triggers memories of doing homework while listening to boleros on the radio and being jolted into attention by her bitter songs. The image of Deanna Durbin skating to school while eating a lemon ice cream brings back
studied the intertextual aspects of the novel, which she claims include everything from high cultural works like Todorov's theory of the fantastic and Kafka's *Metamorphosis* to such mass cultural texts as childhood songs and magazines. For Brown, all serve to highlight the derivative nature of memory, suggesting that official or state endorsed versions of history are greatly fictitious.

In *Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel* (1989) Jo Labanyi has analyzed the use of mass culture in Juan Marsé's *Si te dicen que caí* to suggest that it is appropriated by the group of youngsters in an attempt to create an alternate reality that is significantly better than their own while living in post war Barcelona. The protagonists consume comic books, television shows, Hollywood movies, and admire mass cultural heroes, which allows them to overlook some of the unfavorable aspects of Franco's Spain by providing them with a more attractive imaginary world. However, mass culture ultimately only offers a temporary escape from a negative political reality: the protagonists simply use popular fiction to help combat monotony and view life in a more positive and tolerable memories of her own comic attempts at skating, and of the lemon ice cream which was a valued treat during the poverty of the postwar period. For the narrator, mass culture is the mediator between the present and the distant past. These texts make her personal past come alive again" (190-191).
According to these scholars, each novel incorporates mass culture and uses it in order to examine some of the negative aspects of post-war Spanish society. Even though the aforementioned studies are innovative and insightful, very little critical attention has been dedicated to the role of mass culture in Spanish novels published after 1975, the years that correspond to Spain’s transition out of dictatorship and through its first two decades of modern democracy. Sieburth argues that El cuarto de atrás may mark a turning point in the way that mass culture will be portrayed in contemporary narrative because younger writers will no longer feel the need to write against the dictator, and ultimately calls for more examination of its manifestation in recent texts.²³

Alongside the fall of the dictatorship and the lifting of the censor, Spanish literary production began to significantly change in the second half of the 1970’s. After the publication of Eduardo Mendoza’s La verdad sobre el caso Savolta (1975), many writers began to steer away from the experimental novel and returned to a more reader-friendly

²³ Sieburth explains: "The younger generation of novelists does not feel the need either to attack or to defend mass culture, nor to link literature clearly to politics. It remains to be seen whether such recreational literature will continue in the new Spain, as it strives yet again to catch
narrative style, thus initiating a trend that resulted in increased sales and a significant rise in the amount of new works published in Spain. So called “postmodern novels” began to appear that generally reflected the changing ideologies of a transitional society, and were distinguished by a questioning of historical discourse, the decentralization of truth, and an innovative combination of stylistic elements. Popular genres such as detective fiction, romance novels, and adventures also flooded the market and became more widely accepted, and many authors started to incorporate conventions from the cinema, detective serials, erotic films, and adventures into their work. So doing, they instigated the legitimization of a number of mass cultural genres and were both lauded and criticized for their efforts. Some very politicized texts also began to appear that revisited the past and offered new up with Europe.” (24)

24 Some well known authors and works that used various elements of mass culture include Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s Carvalho series, Juan Goytisolo’s Revindicación del conde Julián, Antonio Muñoz Molina’s Beatus Ille, El invierno en Lisboa and Beltenebros, and Carmen Martín Gaite’s El cuarto de atrás. Vázquez Montalbán was particularly criticized for compromising his literary style in favor of mass genres. His Carvalho detective series was extremely successful and some claimed that his decision to write popular literature reflected his abandonment of true literary ideals. Nevertheless, others suggest that he simply uses the genre of the detective novel as a frame on which he can create a new kind of literature that intentionally incorporates mass
interpretations of history that were contrary to the official versions promoted by the Franco regime. The experimental literary technique of the previous years was thus gradually replaced by new approaches characterized by reader-friendly narration, multiplicity of discourse, combinations of differing elements, and the intentional incorporation of popular conventions. This trend also allowed authors to reexamine contemporary history while it enabled them to enjoy a degree of commercial success that they had not previously known.

Since the fall of the dictatorship, the production of popular novels in Spain has become greater than ever before, and elements of mass culture have been increasingly incorporated into literature. As Sieburth asserts, it still remains to be seen to what extent they will be used in contemporary works and for what purpose. In accordance with Jameson’s assumption that the analysis of popular texts can help us to better understand the intricacies of modern life, this dissertation explores the use of mass culture in four best-selling novels published after the death of General Franco that highlight many of the social transformations brought about by Spain’s democratic integration. So doing, it reflects on several economic, political, and cultural cultural conventions.
changes that affected post-dictatorial society and provides significant insights on capitalism, consumerism, individualism, the relationship between culture and identity, and the significance of art in contemporary society.

This project is the first to study a group of novels published after 1978 by using the theoretical binaries between high and low culture in order to examine the various consequences of Spain's evolution from dictatorship to democracy. It continues the postmodernist mission of analyzing popular literature and shows how best selling texts can be culturally significant in many different ways. By developing a theme that characterizes and unifies the selected novels, the dissertation contemplates the social function of contemporary narrative and contributes original analysis to existing criticism dedicated to these works. By highlighting mass culture's fictional relationship to such concerns as the manipulation of thought by the mass media, the fragmentation of the nuclear family, the repression of historical memory, the collective deterioration of ethical values, and society's escalating and potentially destructive individualistic nature, the project underlines the significance of these novels and aligns them with other works that also examine similar themes. It thereby opens the
door for future investigation of more texts that explore the various relationships between contemporary social practices and different kinds of culture.

The dissertation expands our current understanding of how elements of mass culture function in contemporary Spanish narrative. It establishes connections between recent literature and cultural theory, links mass culture with the supposed repression of historical discourse characteristic of post-dictatorial Spain, points out a renewed intellectual preoccupation with the role of mass culture in present-day society, and reflects on the inherent nature of different kinds of culture. The representation of various forms of mass culture in these works contemplates its beneficial and detrimental character, and ultimately suggests that it necessarily influences both contemporary aesthetic production and everyday life. By using the theoretical binary of high/low culture to analyze popular literature, the project also helps establish an innovative critical paradigm while it contributes a thoughtful critique of post-dictatorial society to the field of contemporary Spanish narrative.

The four novels to be examined in this project, Rosa Montero’s *La función Delta* (1981), Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa* (1987), Eduardo Mendicutti’s *Una mala*
noche la tiene cualquiera (1988), and José Ángel Mañas’ Historias del Kronen (1994), were selected because they all highlight mass culture’s relationship to the construction of identity and reflect upon many of the changes that have taken place in Spain since the beginning of its democratic transition. Although these novels have been analyzed to some degree, scholars have not fully explored the way in which they incorporate elements of mass culture nor have they contemplated how the fictional binaries depicted in the texts reflect and respond to existing cultural theory.

Whereas Montero and Muñoz Molina are well known authors that belong to a progressive and socially conscious generation of writers, Mendicutti and Mañas are lesser known in academia and their work has generally not yet been interpreted as socially critical. Apart from its incorporation of various sources of mass culture, Mendicutti’s novel was also chosen because of its unique representation of a transitional figure that fears the return of Francoist politics, making it an important text that documents a crucial moment in Spanish history when the continuance of democracy was definitively ensured. Since Mañas has been designated as a member of a “Generation X” that has no direct memory of life under the Franco regime, juxtaposing his novel to those of Montero, Muñoz Molina, and Mendicutti serves as a useful
point of comparison in order to evaluate how different
generations may represent similar themes in their work.
Finally, each of the selected texts addresses different
aspects of the changing ideological positioning that
seemingly affected the national conscious as the country
established itself in a newly democratic political
environment, and all highlight the mediation of perception
by various forms of mass culture.

By representing mass culture in various manners, this
literature provides considerable insight on social
relations, on consumerism, on the mediation of perception by
different forms of media, and on some of the individual and
existential concerns that emerged in Spain during a period
of rapid political and cultural change. In each of the
following novels, mass culture is portrayed as an important
component of contemporary life that can have a significant
influence on the construction of identity.

In Rosa Montero's *La función Delta* (1982), a moribund
Lucía seeks existential solace by composing a diary and a
novelistic memoir about her past. Through the process of
writing, the protagonist learns that the only way to find
spiritual consolation is to balance the fantasy that she has
looked for all of her life with the reality of her
experience. In a meta-fictional text that treats of such
universal themes as friendship, love, old age, loneliness and mortality, mass culture becomes a tool of writing that helps Lucía find some sort of meaning in what she perceives to be an otherwise chaotic and dreary existence. Throughout the work, her Manichean mentality recalls the theoretical differences between high and low culture, and as the novel progresses it deconstructs such binaries to suggest that true happiness can only be achieved by establishing an equilibrium between polar opposites. By incorporating mass cultural conventions into her writing, Lucía is ultimately able to accept her love for Ricardo, confront her emotional insecurities, and achieve a sense of agency that helps her come to terms with her mortality. Mass culture is thereby neither criticized nor praised in the novel, but is rather portrayed as an influential construct that can be both beneficial and detrimental to the intellect.

One of the recurring themes of Antonio Muñoz Molina’s El invierno en Lisboa (1987) is the mediation of perception by different sources of mass culture. The novel follows the narration of a nameless storyteller who recounts the tale of Biralbo, a jazz pianist in love with a mysterious woman (Lucrecia) that leads him deeper and deeper into a circle of intrigue and deception. As in La función Delta, mass culture inadvertently mediates the narrator’s perception as he
unwittingly incorporates its conventions into his writing, revealing that he is unable to escape its influence as he attempts to create an autonomous text of his own. Mass culture is thus portrayed in an ambiguous manner throughout the work, for even while certain characters embrace its pleasurable nature and seem to find meaning through its consumption, it is simultaneously depicted as an unreliable construct that cannot resolve conflict or bring about narrative closure.

In Eduardo Mendicutti’s *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1988), a transvestite (La Madelón) anxiously listens to a radio broadcast that details Colonel Tejero’s attempted take-over of the Spanish Congress on February 23rd, 1981. In the course of the novel, the protagonist recounts her struggle to repress her inherent maleness as she tries to become both physically and psychologically female. Various sources of mass culture influence the construction of La Madelón’s identity and many aspects of her split personality reflect theoretical divisions between high and low culture, as her feminine self symbolizes the liberal present (democracy/ freedom) while her masculine side stands for the conservative past (dictatorship/ repression). The novel deconstructs a series of binary opposites to examine such issues as gendered identity, the
mediation of perception by mass culture and its influence on political ideology while it simultaneously highlights the impossibility of ever truly forgetting about the past.

In the most recent work to be analyzed, José Ángel Mañas’ *Historias del Kronen* (1992), mass culture is depicted as generally endorsing self-interested behavior, alienating, and potentially destructive to the intellect. Brought up within a society of consumption, the young protagonists demonstrate little regard for conventional morality as they actively strive to satisfy their material desires. Excessive consumerism leads to a growing appetite for sexual gratification, moral corruption, social isolation, and the breakdown of interpersonal communication as the characters consistently ignore the welfare of others and mainly concentrate on personal concerns. The novel thus highlights the paradoxical nature of a society that vends products designed to satisfy the individual’s basest desires while it simultaneously claims to promote ethical conduct. Through the detailed and graphic presentation of the protagonists’ injurious lifestyles, *Historias del Kronen* denounces their destructive behavior and reflects on some of the negative consequences that a consumerist society can produce.

The body of the project examines the portrayal of mass culture in the aforementioned texts to propose that it is
generally used to explore such issues as technological progress, globalization, social alienation, the shifting ethical standards characteristic of modern society, the mediation of perception, the role of the media in the construction of identity, and the importance of artistic creation to the individual’s sense of self. The dissertation also considers the beneficial and detrimental influence that mass culture can have on behavior and emphasizes its significant role in the contemporary subject’s sentimental education. Finally, theoretical characterizations of high and low culture are related to the capitalist ideology of post-dictatorial Spain to expose and reflect upon its paradoxical nature. As such, the representation of mass culture in these novels ultimately constitutes a kind of neo-existentialist discourse that contemplates some of the negative aspects of a newly democratic society that privileges individualism and consumerism over the well-being of the other.

**Historical and Political Context, 1975-1996**

In Spain, the transformations of the last thirty years have drastically altered contemporary life. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to detail all of the
noteworthy political developments, it is nevertheless helpful to outline some of the major events that have significantly affected the country since the fall of the dictatorship. As it transitioned into a new democratic system, Spain consciously strived to modernize itself and become a progressive society on par with the other major European powers. The political, economic, social and cultural changes initiated during the Transition have enabled the country to integrate itself into world politics, and it is now recognized as a major player on both the European and international stages.

General Francisco Franco’s death on November 20th, 1975 opened the door to significant cultural change in Spain. In a period of eight years (1975 – 1983) the country transformed itself from a dictatorship to a full-blown democracy in a rapid transition that brought about considerable political and social reforms. Although a successful democratic system was eventually established, the initial years of the Transition were characterized by uncertainty, for nobody knew in which direction the new regime would direct the country. When king Juan Carlos took control of the government upon Franco’s death and appointed the conservative Carlos Arias Navarro as its first Prime Minister, it did not appear that Spain’s political system
would change very much and many Spaniards thought that the practices of the dictatorship would continue. However, the King immediately revealed his egalitarian tendencies and declared several socially progressive royal decrees, granted amnesty to political prisoners, and used the established legal mechanisms of the dictatorship to steer the country towards democratization. When the Law of Political Associations of June 1976 legalized the reestablishment of political parties (except for Communists and Separatists) and opened the door to legitimate opposition, Arias resigned his post and the King appointed the relative newcomer Adolfo Suárez to replace him. Together, Juan Carlos and Suárez successfully led the country in the creation of a democratic constitutional monarchy that would eventually completely dismantle the fundamental doctrines of the Franco regime.

25 In 1976, to calm rising unrest about the political future of the country, it became clear that Spain would no longer practice the rigid practices of the dictatorship when Juan Carlos “...declared before the United States Congress his desire to achieve full democracy and said that Carlos Aria’s government had been ‘an unmitigated disaster’...the king called on Arias to resign, and on 3 July 1976, via the mechanisms allowed him by Francoist law, he appointed Adolfo Suárez, former general secretary of the Movement, as the new president of the regime.” (Juliá 109) Upon his appointment, the government began a series of reforms that would eventually bring the country back into a full state of democracy.

26 Ramón E. Arango writes: “Together (Juan Carlos and Suárez) they embraced democracy and set out on a course that rejected any attempt to revive continuismo. The reforms they
Suarez’s administration quickly began to negotiate with opposition groups and soon implemented several important reforms. In November of 1976 the Law of Political Reform legally ended the dictatorship and called for the creation of a bicameral legislature. Among other initiatives, in 1977 the first group of political parties was recognized, the rights to strike and organize free trade unions were established, the National Movement was abolished and the Partido Comunista de España (Communist Party) legalized. The first general elections (June 15, 1977) resulted in the victory of Suárez’s moderate party the Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD), but since it had not achieved a majority in Congress, it was obliged to compromise and pact with other parties in order to effectively promote its agenda. This initial division of power was ultimately beneficial because it assured that all political perspectives would be considered in the forthcoming drafting of the new constitution.

The Moncloa Pacts of October 1977 proposed a variety of economic reforms intended to stabilize wages, control public

adopted emerged out of the extant Fundamental Laws of the Franco regime and initially followed their provisions to the letter, yet eventually legally dismantled both the laws and the regime and created a democratic, constitutional monarchy. The idea of a republic was never entertained.” (98)
expenditures, regulate social security, taxes, and unemployment insurance as well as other important financial issues. They simultaneously urged social reforms such as the legalization of contraceptives, the decriminalization of adultery, the modification of rape stature, and the reorganization of the police and the military Civil Guard among others. Regional demands were also starting to become recognized, and after Catalonia and some Basque provinces were granted pre-autonomy decrees in September of 1977, many other regions were also given similar statues in anticipation of the forthcoming constitution. Although all of the proposed initiatives of the first few years of the Transition were not implemented, many of their ideas helped to outline the ideological foundations on which the new democracy would be constructed.

The ratification of the Constitution of 1978 ensured the future of democratic Spain and allowed long-term social initiatives to start to take root. Since the UCD had not won a majority in the Cortes, the team assigned to draft the document was made up of members of every major political party, which ensured ideological diversity and ultimately resulted in a text that was acceptable to all. The Constitution acknowledged the inherent duality of human nature (social/individualistic) and insisted on a balance
of power between the executive and legislative branches. Among the many rights that it granted were freedom of political association, of expression, from prior censorship, of conscious, of peaceful reunion without prior permission, of unionization, and freedom of religion. Some of its social commitments included health protection, social security, unemployment benefits, housing and education programs, and the right for every citizen to have access to culture. Children, the elderly, and the handicapped were granted special rights, separation and divorce were advocated, and the legal definition of the family was modified so that it was no longer based on the institution of matrimony. The Constitution was essentially designed to protect against many of the civil abuses experienced under the Franco regime, and was sometimes purposefully open ended in its wording so that specific reforms could be later legislated by Congress. It was passed by the Cortes in October and ratified by public referendum on December 6. King Juan Carlos signed it into law on December 27, 1978 and it took effect the next day.

Although democracy had now been legally established, Spain was still plagued by earlier problems that seemed to grow stronger after the ratification of the Constitution. Basque terrorism and Catalan separatist sentiment
flourished, unemployment persisted, the national economy continued to be weak, and apprehension about the UCD’s ability to effectively promote its agenda started to develop. Since the military had strong ties to Francoism and was generally antagonistic towards reform, many feared that it might attempt to overthrow the new regime to restore order in what it perceived to be a weak and chaotic political atmosphere. The Catholic Church had also lost significant government backing and generally supported conservatives who were critical of the new administration’s programs. As such, anxiety about Spain’s political future never dissipated and pessimism soon infected the national conscious as many realized that the stability of the UCD was crumbling. The so-called desencanto (political disenchantment) arose because of communal disappointment in a fragmented government that could not put into practice many of its promised reforms. El pasotismo, the intentional evasion of political discourse, soon became a new catch phrase as many Spaniards began to focus on personal interests instead of on collective issues.  

27 The sociologist Eduardo Subirats describes el pasotismo: "Socialmente fueron estos los años del "pasotismo," corriente popular que abrazaba ampliamente una ética de la apatía y el fatalismo. Aquella palabra, y sus diversas variaciones verbales y adjetivas estuvieron en boca de todos. Había intelectuales pasotas, y muchachos y muchachas
Simultaneously, the phenomenon known as la movida madrileña was in full swing during the first few years of the Transition. This term refers to the general euphoria that accompanied the establishment of the new democracy and manifested itself in a thriving and hedonistic cultural movement that was centered in Madrid. During la movida production of rock music, cinema, and pop art prospered, diverse kinds of shows and concerts were regularly staged, nightlife flourished, and many people engaged in intense partying, excessive use of drugs and alcohol, and sexual experimentation as they actively celebrated their new freedoms. A self-indulgent frame of mind that concentrated on the joy of the present began to overtake the public conscious: sensuality, narcissism, and the search for pleasure became the guiding principles of a new mentality that privileged individualism and the gratification of physical desire above all else. According to Eduardo Subirats, intellectual thought also started to steer away from political, societal, and cultural renovation and instead contemplated the materialization of a modern subject that promised the forthcoming realization of a heroic and

que “pasaban” de todo. “Yo paso, tío” se convirtió en un verdadero rito de cortesía castiza. La descolorida expresión encerraba asimismo, en su fondo, el culto social a un pesimismo abúlico.” (208)
triumphant Spanish society.\textsuperscript{28}

In the aesthetic world, the lifting of the censor legalized new kinds of art, and works characterized by formerly taboo subject matter started to proliferate. In particular, pornographic cinema and films that portrayed the experiences of marginalized figures such as women, prostitutes, homosexuals and transvestites catered to the public’s fascination with different forms of sexual representation that had been previously repressed by the Franco regime. In general, an eclectic artistic style developed that used a variety of conventions, discourses, and popular elements to generate art that can most accurately be described as postmodern. Social criticism was regularly subordinated to entertainment value and was often conspicuously absent from texts of this era. Internationally

\textsuperscript{28} Describing some of the essays published during this era, Eduardo Subirats writes: “Es notoria que ninguna de estas obras plantea una problemática sociológica propiamente dicha. Tampoco ellas exponen algo así como una crítica de la cultura, ni sugieren una revisión de la conciencia histórica. Ni siquiera se plantea a lo largo de estos ensayos un proyecto de renovación política e intelectual. Lo que en realidad se construye en estos textos, celebrados en su día con premios y aplausos, es un nuevo sujeto político, sustancial y carismático, con elementos prestados del idealismo europeo del siglo XIX, de Fichte a Striner, salpicados por algunos motivos románticos, y una versión vitalista y anarquizante del superhombre de Nietzsche. Se diría que tras la etapa transicional de una originaria alegría popular, y acabado el descenso a los infiernos del desencanto y escepticismo colectivos de los primeros años de democracia real, resurgía la promesa, asimismo arcaica, de
produced mass culture was also well regarded, and spectacle began to overshadow substance as artists and intellectuals alike were admired more for their marketability than for their production of high quality and thought-provoking work. This cultural "renaissance" was thereby paradoxical in nature, for even as the jubilation of la movida led to a significant rise in aesthetic production, pessimism still lingered underneath its blissful exterior and artistic quality was often compromised by commercial interests.

The cultural criticism that accompanied la movida began to focus on the postmodern characteristics of new literature, cinema, and music. Many fictional works of this period intentionally incorporated popular genres and represented alternative lifestyles that were not normally integrated into art. The movies of Pedro Almodóvar exemplified this type of aesthetic by portraying the struggles of women, homosexuals, and other marginalized figures through the use of a variety of artistic styles like melodrama, kitsch, parody, camp, and comedy among others. By depicting the peculiar mixture of the patriarchal and liberal discourses that coexisted in the newly democratic Spain, his films exemplified many social trends of the time and were generally regarded as reflections of a new and una felicidad heroica." (208-209)
emerging national identity.\textsuperscript{29}

During the initial years of the Transition, a growing lack of confidence in the new government’s ability to promote its agenda placed the UCD in a precarious political situation that would eventually lead to its downfall. When Suárez resigned in January 1981, a new wave of uncertainty began to fester and the prospects of prolonged democracy were endangered once again. One month later, on February 23rd, a military coup led by Colonel Antonio Tejero attempted to overtake the Spanish Parliament, which, as it was broadcast live on television, only further strengthened the growing feeling of insecurity about Spain’s democratic future.\textsuperscript{30} Even though the King immediately intervened and subdued the uprising, the UCD’s authority faltered and it was subsequently incapable of stabilizing the country’s unsteady political atmosphere. New elections were called for in October of 1982, and Felipe González’s Partido Socialista

\textsuperscript{29} Kathleen M. Vernon and Barbara Morris have edited a collection of articles dedicated to the films of Almovodar, in Post-Franco, Postmodern. The Films of Pedro Alomdóvar. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995. The book’s introduction provides an informative history of some of the cultural, political and artistic changes that occurred in Spain during the transition to democracy.

\textsuperscript{30} Upon Suárez’ resignation, Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo presided over the UCD until the next general elections were held in 1982. It was during Sotelo’s inaugural congressional proceedings that Colonel Tejero attempted to take over the Cortes in a military coup.
Obrero Español (PSOE) came into power. González’s government promised to modernize the country under an innovative system of democratic socialism. The PSOE promoted itself as a progressive authority that would “...be the bearer of a new political ethic, of a project of moral regeneration for state and society” (Juliá 115), and it used the optimistic rhetoric of la movida to help create the triumphant image of a contemporary Spain far removed from its dark past. Among other reforms, the socialists attempted to increase jobs, fight unemployment, improve the national highway system, modernize factories, combat tax fraud, and revamp social security and public education. During the eighties the government flourished and the nation enjoyed an economic growth that resulted in a political

31 Subirats describes the association between the aesthetic characteristics of la movida and the official rhetoric of the socialist government: “Las aspiradas reformas políticas se transformaron en espectáculo. El lugar social que el intelectual había perdido como conciencia reflexiva e independiente, lo conquistaba el artista neo-vanguardista, sumarísimamente redefinido como animador social. En los medios de comunicación, en la joven narrativa y en el interior mismo del discurso político socialista este artista fue estilizado como nuevo héroe postmoderno, al mismo tiempo conciencia nihilista, estrella carismática y productor de simulacros estético-políticos. El nuevo cine, la nueva novela popular o la nueva arquitectura de masas definieron el ámbito de una sorprendente cultura vanguardista y estatal al mismo tiempo, y del consiguiente Estado cultural como administrador del espectáculo nacional y sus réplicas micronacionalistas.” (210-211)
stability that guaranteed the long-term continuance of democracy. Spain’s entry into NATO and the European Community only strengthened national optimism and encouraged wide scale investment on both individual and corporate levels. The triumphs of the eighties highlighted the country’s ability to overcome the trauma of totalitarianism and political isolation, and Spain became known as an urban, industrialized and modern society on comparable terms with the rest of Western Europe.32

Nevertheless, in the 1990’s the PSOE’s control of the government started to unravel. Plagued by economic recession, growing unemployment and continued nationalist activity in Catalonia and the Basque country, public support started to fade and the party steadily began to lose ground. Despite winning the June 1993 election, it was unable to

32 For Rosa Montero, despite increased equal rights and other beneficial social reforms, near the end of the eighties negative traits such as increased corruption, xenophobia, racism, cynicism, pretentiousness, superficiality, and selfishness started to characterize the general Spanish conscious: “The day before yesterday we were poor and now we are not, and the bonanza seems to have gone to our heads, bringing out in us all the defects of the new rich: pretentiousness, ostentation, superficiality, selfishness, and a rejection of the poor worthy of a new convert, manifested in an increase in xenophobia and racism. And the combination of easy money with the current loss of values, and the fact that we have acquired wealth before acquiring culture, provides a perfect breeding ground for one of the most glaring and harmful features of Spanish society today: corruption, and that climate of general cynicism which makes people think that anyone who does not
secure a majority in the Cortes and was thereafter subject to significant political opposition. Accusations of corruption and the police scandals of the early nineties reached their climax when some top government officials were indicted for their involvement in the workings of the illegal anti-terrorist group GAL (Grupos Antiteroristas de Liberación), after which point public confidence in the PSOE virtually disappeared. González was forced to call for new elections in March of 1996, and the conservative Partido Popular (PP), under the leadership of José María Aznar, secured a majority of the popular vote and took control of the government.

Thus, during a 25-year period the Spanish population experienced a radical change in lifestyle as the country evolved from being a primarily agrarian nation to an urban consumerist society. Spain’s rapid modernization, egalitarian constitution, integration into international politics, and progressive social programs shook its ideological foundations to the core. A neo-capitalist philosophy that focused on consumption and the gratification of desire began to materialize, and as a consequence some longstanding ethical principles and societal norms were inadvertently starting to change. Political, economic, and

dip his hand in the coffers is a fool.” (Democracy 238)
geographic developments also influenced the national conscious as intellectuals and the population at large became seemingly more interested in personal issues than in the welfare of the community. According to Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi, a postmodern society based on individuality and consumerism developed that initiated the erosion of long-established communal values. Both scholars characterize contemporary Spain as culturally schizophrenic, as a country in which modernization coexists with traditional structures in such a manner that identity is constantly being redefined within the context of a new and evolving culture:

Spain's transformation into a modern consumer society over the last thirty years has meant the erosion of traditional forms of social and political solidarity and the predominance of money in a hierarchy of social values... The result of Spain's fast-track transformation inevitably means that certain traditional values, such as solidarity and sense of community, have been eroded (though in some contexts these are being relearned in new ways) and others, associated with an individualistic, consumerist society, are more prominent. (413-415)

As such, contemporary Spanish life is significantly
different than it used to be. Accordingly, the novels to be analyzed in this dissertation address many of the changes that have taken place in Spain over the past three decades and exemplify the cultural schizophrenia that Graham and Labanyi describe in a variety of ways. Each text examines the emergence of an egocentric democratic ideology and reflects upon its various consequences. In particular, these works investigate the role that mass culture can have in the construction of identity to expose its intrinsic qualities and to highlight its relationship to some of the behavioral, ethical, and aesthetic practices of the era (1981-1994). So doing, the study continues the postmodernist project of analyzing popular literature in order to show that it can provide captivating and meaningful insights on present-day society.
Chapter 1: Rosa Montero’s La función Delta

Rosa Montero is one of Spain’s foremost female journalists and novelists. Mostly known for her politically committed reporting and best-selling fiction, she has experimented with various genres of fiction throughout her career and has generally maintained popularity with her reading public and literary critics. Since releasing her first novel in 1979, she has enjoyed lasting success as a novelist and continues to contribute to El País on a regular basis. To date, she has published several novels, biographical essays, interviews, short stories and children books, and has been awarded many prizes for journalism.¹

¹ Born in Madrid in 1951, Montero was diagnosed with tuberculosis and anemia at the age of five and spent the next four years confined in her home, unable to attend school or interact with her classmates due to her illness. It was during this time that she became an avid reader and soon began composing her own stories. After switching her university major from psychology to journalism, she started writing again and began to collaborate with different magazines and periodicals on a regular basis. Working for El País, Montero quickly became recognized for her provocative interviews and politically committed journalism, and after a few years began to publish novels. She is currently known as one of Spain’s leading journalists and continues to contribute to El País and publish novels. For more detailed biographical accounts of Montero’s youth and career, see the introduction of Kathleen Thompson-Casado’s dissertation on Rosa Montero: “The Novels of Rosa Montero.” Diss. Ohio State U, 1994,
Montero’s second novel, *La función Delta* (1981), is a representative example of the narrative of the Transition that uses a neo-realistic style to highlight and examine contemporary social, existential and aesthetic issues. The novel tells the story of a hospitalized Lucía, who in the year 2010 keeps a diary documenting her daily life while she also writes a novelistic memoir about an important week of her past when the first movie that she directed was about to premiere. During her time in the hospital, she converses with her old friend Ricardo who visits her on a regular basis and acts as her confidant, literary critic, and eventual lover who helps her through the final days of her life by discussing the events of their past and reading and criticizing her writing. In her memoir, Lucía describes her decision to leave her ex-lover Hipólito and marry the mathematician Miguel, with whom she spent several years of marriage until his death years later. Although she claims to have been happily married to Miguel, Ricardo’s interventions help the reader to realize that her

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idealistic description of marriage is no more than a fiction designed by its author to represent the events of her life in a more positive and optimistic light than they actually occurred. Lucía melodramatically reinvents her past and writes about her relationships in a way that she would have liked them to be, distorting historical fact in the process.

The novel’s themes include friendship, love, loneliness, old age and mortality, and it metafictively explores how fiction can affect perceptions of reality. As she nears the end of her life, Lucía’s diary and novelistic memoir combine into one as she loses touch with the real world and is eventually unable to differentiate between the facts of her present life and those of her fictionalized past. The blending of fictional and actual realities that accompanies the death of her body provides an intriguing reflection on the relationship between art and perception that highlights the textual nature of experience and undermines memory’s capability of accurately representing the past. Faced with her own death, Lucia’s thoughts on love, mortality, and the loneliness of modern life combine to express an existential angst that underlines the fragility of the human condition.
La función Delta has been critically examined in a variety of ways: Concha Alborg, Vanessa Knights, and Phyllis Zatlin have offered feminist interpretations of the novel by addressing the role of meta-fiction in the work, claiming that Montero uses it to establish a feminine presence within the context of a neo-liberal society that is still dependent on patriarchal conventions. Through metafictional discourse, the textual nature of reality and the unreliability of the narrator are exposed to underscore how fiction can affect the construction of the protagonists' sense of self.² For Kathleen Glenn, the novel exemplifies the problematic nature of writing an

² Vanessa Knights writes: "Both Ana of Crónica del desamor and Lucía of La función delta attempt to define the female self through textual means which protest against the dominant parameters of patriarchal discourse. These novels appear to reflect a need, at that time in Spain, for women to question prevailing cultural paradigms...The use of a realist framework which appropriates features of popular genres thus allows for a wide readership of texts of polemical content, whilst the use of meta-fictive techniques gives the reader an active role in the construction of meaning... (85-86) ... I would argue that meta-fiction can be used, as it is here by Montero, as a tool for the interrogation of cultural narratives and for the social critique of patriarchal substructures still in place in Spanish society, despite formal equality between the sexes. It is also a means of conscious-raising through which an analogy can be drawn between the process of writing and reading a narrative and the process of constructing the self.” (106)
autobiography because the narrative voice of the present attempts to rewrite its past in a fictitious and positive manner. Focusing on Lucía’s subjectivity and on the lack of credibility of her memoirs, Glenn proposes that the text questions the power of memory to accurately represent the past. Montero’s use of an unreliable narrator helps the reader recognize the rhetorical nature of Lucía’s writing and reveals that her subjective version of the past may or may not be historically accurate.³

Other scholars have highlighted other characteristics of the work, claiming that Montero conscientiously uses her fiction to scrutinize society and to promote social change. Joan Brown, Kathleen Thompson-Casado, and Javier Escudero suggest that Montero’s second novel marks a stylistic advance from her first and addresses the contemporary subject’s preoccupation with such themes as love, mortality, writing and solitude. In his recent book on Montero’s fiction, Escudero has also studied the novel’s transcendental aspects, treatment of la desmemoria, and

³ Glenn proposes: “As we look back on La función Delta, it is clear that Lucía is a master (mistress) of self-invention. Her writing is re-writing, her reading of experience is a misreading. Her distorted vision renders her retrospection as well as her introspection untrustworthy” (Fictions 200).
criticism of capitalism to propose that La función Delta both explores the preoccupations of the modern individual and provides an existential reflection on some of the pressing issues of contemporary life.

Two critics that have examined some aspects of the use of mass culture in La función Delta are Catherine Davies (1994) and Isolina Ballesteros (1992). For Davies the work is a science fiction novel that hypothesizes about the scientific, cultural, and electronic advances of the future and describes a society run by a highly organized and automated Western Information Bureau: “...the novel envisages the emergence of a new social order, a dystopia, which—in the insecure years of the ‘transition’—betrays fears that a new, technically advanced Spain might promote egocentricity to the extent that all human relationships are thwarted.” (119) Davies suggests that the rapid technological advances of the electronic revolution have led to the formation of a community in which social interaction is minimized and mechanization dominates. For her part, Ballesteros examines the role of cinematic and literary creation in the novel and relates them to feminist and meta-fictional concerns. She proposes that the opportunity to direct a movie offers the protagonist a chance to escape from the sexist world of
television advertisement and move into the more autonomous realm of the cinema, enabling her to challenge the established standards of a patriarchal professional community:

For Ballesteros, the younger Lucía attempts to establish her autonomy by breaking free of masculine discourse and directing a movie. Cinema thus becomes a vehicle of self-affirmation for women and helps Lucía to escape from the oppressive realities of her professional environment.⁴

⁴ Ballesteros writes: “El cine presenta el modelo de mujer satisfecha, independiente y liberada. En la película
While these articles are insightful and clarify many aspects of the novel, they mostly focus on meta-fictional and feminist issues and do not fully address the possible meanings associated with mass culture throughout. This chapter will expand upon these studies and concentrate on the various discourses related to mass culture to show how they psychologically influence the protagonist, expose some of the problems of contemporary Spanish society, criticize overt valuations of technological development, and reflect upon the liberating possibilities of artistic creation. *La función Delta*'s depiction of television, cinema, love, aesthetic production, and technical progress examines some of the consequences that industrialization, capitalism and expanding globalization may have on the individual psyche and also on society at large. In her novel, Montero explores these and other themes with the hope of providing some existential comfort to a subject that is increasingly confronted by the confusing realities of a consumerist and materialistic world.

[...]

perfecta, la protagonista es dueña de su tiempo y de su vida, es igual al hombre que ella envidia, el hombre “capaz de embriagarse con su discurso mental, de perderse gozosamente dentro de sus propios recovecos” (62).” (102)
Representations of the Media

The cinema is the genre of mass culture that most consistently appears throughout the novel. In her memoir, Lucía often refers to herself as if she were a movie heroine because in film women are presented as being equal to men, strong, independent, liberated, and generally satisfied with their place in society. Associating films with freedom and autonomy, her younger self dreams about being a movie character that engages in intellectual adventures:

En mis ensoñaciones solía y suelo verme como protagonista de una película mental—me había visto autosuficiente, profunda y satisfecha. Envidié a todos los hombres ilustres—sobre todo hombres—que parecían vivir intensas aventuras interiores: los filósofos, los escritores, los científicos. Todos aquellos capaces de embriagarse con su discurso mental, de perderse gozosamente dentro de sus propios recovecos...

(61-62).

Lucía longs to be able to participate in the intellectual endeavors that have been historically dominated by male
scientists, artists, and philosophers. She imagines her ideal self as independent, profound and proud, capable of engaging in high cultural discourse just as easily as men. However, she soon realizes that reality does not coincide with her fantasy and she is unable to maintain the sense of confidence and security that she dreams about. Her true self turns out to be unlike her cinematic models: she is dependent on others, emotionally unsatisfied, and constantly struggles to overcome the limitations that stem from her social conditioning as a woman. Blaming her emotional instability on the years and years of “feminine” education that she believes has fragmented her personality, she does not fully understand her persistent sense of incompleteness.5

5 In a Freudian manner Lucía describes her emotional insecurities: “Y, sin embargo, yo, que también poseía un mundo propio, que tenía mis películas, mis ambiciones, mis placeres intelectuales y estéticos, mis inquietudes plurales, sin embargo yo, digo, que poseía objetivamente todo cuanto <<ellos>> poseían, era incapaz de contentarme con mi espacio, me asfixiaba, me sentía cercada de ausencias y estrecheces, embargada de urgencias sin motivos razonables. Como aplastada por siglos de educación femenil que hubieran robado mi integridad, mi paz, mi redondez. Era la maldición de la mujer-pareja, de la mujer-carente, de la mujer apoyo y apoyada. Es la maldición de la mujer amputada de sí misma.” (61-62)
By describing and admitting her envy of masculine discursive practice, Lucía reveals her desire to exert her creativity and enter into the intellectual world of high culture. She finds work in a busy and lucrative advertising agency and eventually has the opportunity to produce her own full-length movie. She hopes that directing a feature film will give her access to a more autonomous creative realm, which in turn would enhance her personal and professional security. At the beginning of the novel, she nervously awaits the premiere of her film that is set to open in one week’s time.

At first, the cinema appears to offer her an artistic escape from the limiting and sexist world of television advertising. As Ballesteros affirms, the novel portrays how women working in commercial advertising are forced to perpetuate masculine discourses about females by selling stereotyped imagery counterproductive to their liberation. Lucía is assigned to produce commercials that are appealing to women because her boss believes that she can give them an air of legitimacy that they otherwise would not have under a man’s direction, demonstrating the sexist nature of the business and implying that her gender ultimately determines the kinds of texts that she is allowed to work
on. Even though she is aware that her ads propagate stereotypes about women, she cannot do anything about it and is subjected to the authority of the script writers who take advantage of the popular appeal of feminine liberation and use it as a rhetorical device to try and sell products (tampons and washing machines): "<<Tampones Securi. Para las que no quieren perder oportunidades>>"... "<<Fasser, la lavadora de las mujeres libres>>." (31) The ads promise opportunity and liberty to women but they do nothing to combat preconceived notions that females must wash clothes and are physically inferior to men. By agreeing to film the commercials, Lucía reluctantly participates in a patriarchal discourse that promotes consumerism as a way of providing temporary relief from an unchangeable and inferior feminine condition. Frustrated with her day job, she feels trapped within the sexist world of advertising and longs to assert her creativity elsewhere.  

6 Lucía complains: "...el jefe se empeñaba en que yo hiciera los anuncios femeninos para darles un toque moderno, para que no resultaran anticuados ante las exigencias de las feministas... De la mujer del futuro, como él solía decir. Tienes que conseguir unos anuncios que te convengan a ti misma." (30)  

7 Lucía describes the two advertisements that she is supposed to produce for the agency: "Uno era el anuncio de unos tampones higiénicos: un guateque, es decir, un
Lucía’s criticism of her ads reflects different aspects of cultural theory that negatively characterize mass culture. Advertisements are intentionally rhetorical and do not capture genuine human interaction. A typical scene from one of her ads shows a group of boys dancing a furious rock, a handsome young man crossing the stage, approaching a beautiful young girl sitting in a corner and trying to get her to dance. She refuses and lowers her head embarrassed. A close-up of two other girls commenting on the incident, "How strange, Marisa doesn’t want to dance with Juan, I thought he was a boy she liked a lot,” and the other adds with a smile, "Wait, I think I know what’s going on.” Next sequence, the two girls— the embarrassed and the astute friend— leaving a bathroom with cheerful dynamism, the camera follows them, entering the encounter, Marisa approaches Juan, she puts a hand on his shoulder, he expresses a happy surprise on his face, they begin to dance something lively. Last sequence of three quarters of the back of the girl, squeezed into a very tight pant and writhing frenetically, and overlay of the final slogan: <<Tampones Securi. Para las que no quieren perder oportunidades.>> In short, abominable. (29-30)

The second ad was about an old model washing machine, taken from behind, a washing machine in the middle of a white and empty room. There are soft and insistent thuds. The camera’s approach, gradually getting closer to the washing machine and circling it, while increasing the mood of the thuds. Close-up of the machine: you can see a woman locked inside the gadget, a woman pounding frenetically against the window giving inaudible screams. "Stop being a prisoner of your clothes," cries a voice. Zoom on the eye of the bellow and transition to the new model of the announcer house, buzzing and in motion, with the clothes spinning inside. The camera gradually moves away from full shot and beside the new appliance we see the same woman who was locked inside, dressed aggressively— tight pants, boots— and planted defiantly on her open legs in compás. And on the final image, the legend: <<Fasser, la lavadora de las mujeres libres>>.” (30-31)
not promote prolonged thought nor seek artistic autonomy. Since the images used for promotion often have nothing to do with the products themselves, content becomes subordinated to spectacle and thereby loses relevance. This exemplifies the postmodern conception that the form of the media will take preference over substance and thereby alter the way that the general public acquires information. In the novel, the commercials intentionally attribute false characteristics to their products by associating them with liberation and opportunity to make it seem like menstruation and housework are only minor problems that can be fixed by buying quick and easy solutions. As they are also linked to the feminine, dwell on corporal excretion, and criticized for being deceptive and degrading to women, the ads embody many of the problematic traits that have been theoretically associated with mass culture.

Lucía’s critical attitude towards advertising is contrary to that of her boss Fariño. Whereas she feels that the ads that her agency produces are awful, calling them “...machistas, ridículos, estéticamente feos y tramposos...” (65), he regards advertising as the art of manipulation and delights in the purposeful deception of
Fariño’s custom of using fiction to influence others will be paralleled later on in the novel by Ricardo’s custom of telling tall-tales and by Lucía’s rewriting of her own past, for even though all are aware of the deceptive qualities of their texts (ads, stories, and memoirs), they deliberately use them towards specific ends: to sell products and to improve the quality of life through the narration of melodramatic fiction. However, Lucía’s seeks self-affirmation through the construction of fiction whereas Fariño and Ricardo find pleasure in the intentional deception of others. Her criticism of the ads may thus be seen as an attack on a male discourse that she finds superficial, deceptive, and degrading to women.

Advertising is thereby represented in the novel as a discourse organized and controlled by men, for even though

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8 Lucía describes an encounter with her boss: “...De modo que, cuando al fin sacó el tema de los dos anuncios, le comenté que eran espantosos con una acritud espoleada por mi sentimiento de culpabilidad. -Espantosos, espantosos... pero, mujer, ¿cómo dices eso? Tenía Fariño un arte especial para embadurnar sus palabras de un paternalismo empalagoso. --Porque lo son, Fariño. Son machistas, ridículos, estéticamente feos y tramposos. --Mira, pequeña, la publicidad consiste precisamente en hacer de la trampa un arte...--Bueno, Fariño, no merece la pena seguir hablando de esto. Sabes que de todas maneras los haré. Intentaré que queden lo menos ridículos posible, cosa difícil, y rogaré a todos los santos que no se entere nadie de la profesión de que los he filmado yo.” (65-66).
Lucía films the commercials for her agency, she has little or no voice in the decision making process nor in the content of the commercials themselves. In this section, the advertising business metaphorically symbolizes a patriarchal society in which the masculine is associated with activity and power and the feminine with passivity and weakness. In tune with the postmodernist assumption that the controllers of the mass media also regulate the acquisition of knowledge and power, the novel suggests that men still dominate Spain’s cultural and political environment in spite of the rhetoric of the Transition that called for equality of the sexes in all social arenas. The protagonist’s resentment toward the status quo alongside her longing to escape from the limitations of her advertising job reflect her desire to leave the world of mass culture and establish her own intellectual presence, thereby challenging the practices of patriarchy in the process.

The younger Lucía longs to affirm her professional identity by becoming involved in what she believes to be a higher form of art, the cinema. She thinks that making movies offers her not only a creative outlet but also a chance to distance herself from being typecast as a
producer primarily concerned with feminine issues. She tries to produce a realistic and transcendental chronicle that will accurately portray some of the problematic aspects of contemporary society. However, she later discovers that her movie is not socially conscious but rather a romantic and sentimental film that is mostly preoccupied with emotional issues: "Pensándolo bien, me dije,... es una película romántica. Me inquietó el descubrimiento. Yo creía haber hecho una obra realista, una crónica, y ahora esto me parece no serlo... presiento que hay algo que se me escapa de la película, hay algo que equivoca y desconecta mi memoria." (303) This realization disturbs her, for what she originally considered to be an artistic achievement turns out to be simply a typical example of mass culture. Her intellectual project is unwittingly influenced by the popular texts that inundate her environment and consequently becomes one of them: it is criticized as a melodramatic movie and immediately classified as a romantic work. Although Lucía attempts to

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9 Lucía describes her job at the agency: "Pues, bien, ese horror era mi oficio, mi ocupación, mi verdadero trabajo, a la espera de mi película, la película, al fin, me liberara de estropajos de acero inoxidable, limpiavajillas de limón, lavadoras de prodigioso automatismo y compresas." (31)
create an intelligent and provocative film, her efforts ultimately adhere to the established norms of sentimental mass fiction.

Lucía’s directorial experience turns out to be quite different than what she expected, and she convinces herself that her movie is not very good and unlikely to generate very much revenue. Her attitude recalls that of studio executives who view films as material objects and depend upon box office numbers to determine whether or not they are successful. Realizing that movies are essentially commodities, her perception of the cinema starts to change, for what she previously considered to be a higher form of art turns out to be just another mass cultural product that subordinates integrity to spectacle and box office earnings. This disheartening revelation subdues her immediate desire to create meaningful texts, and she subsequently gives up her pretensions to enter the realm of high culture by choosing not to direct any more films. She abandons her cinematic career, conforms to the patriarchal discourses of advertising, and decides to settle down and marry.

Lucía’s professional insecurities emerge partly as a consequence of many years of living as a female in a
totalitarian society that severely subordinated women to men, but they also stem from the difficulties experienced by artists that attempt to break free of the world of commercialized culture and produce autonomous works of art. As Benjamin suggests, modern art is often degraded by external forces (commercialization, mechanization, mass competition) and consequently suffers a loss of uniqueness and value. The young Lucía can be seen as a victim of this phenomenon because even though her film is supposedly well made and interesting, she gives up her cinematic career for fear of commercial failure and continues to promote the stifling discourses of the advertising business. The novel thereby exposes some of the complications involved in contemporary cultural production and reinforces theoretical assumptions that commercialization endangers the realm of high art. This is true not only for cinema but also for all genres of culture including novels, which are subjected to similar pressures and often valued only if they turn out to be best-sellers. In this manner, La función Delta suggests that the commodification of culture can significantly influence an artist’s work by forcing them to conform to the workings of a capitalist market.\footnote{The fictional representation of this theme seems to be}
Apart from her professional goals, another reason that Lucía wants to become a movie director is because she finds the cinema to be emotionally satisfying. For her, the cinema represents an intense and exciting world quite different from her own:

Como el cine. Como cuando ves una película que te atrapa, que te conduce a su mundo, una película con la que vives, sufres, y respiras, con la que llegas a olvidarte de ti misma. Pero la proyección se acaba, y justo al apagarse la pantalla, al encenderse las luces de la sala, sufres un momento de estupor, un desconcertado instante en el que has de reunirte de nuevo con tu cuerpo... Vuelves dolorosamente a la monotonía tras la fascinación (115).

She claims that movies make the spectator forget himself by providing access to an artificial reality in which he can live, breathe, and experience intense emotion. Lucía seems to prefer the virtual realm of the cinema over the tedium of the real world, for when the projection is over, she describes the inevitable return to reality in terms of another meta-fictional reflection by Montero, whose own novels have generally been classified as bestsellers.
suffering, surprise, pain and monotony. By becoming a movie director she attempts to bestow more meaning to her life and experience constant excitement: “Quizá fue precisamente por todo esto por lo que yo quise desde siempre hacer cine, ser realizadora. No para comunicarle nada a nadie, sino para atesorar instantes de fulgor, para adueñarme de la intensidad: por una avariciosa ansia de vida.” (115) By treasuring the intensity of the cinema, Lucía reveals that she is bored with her existence and seeks something extra to help her feel more alive. Her statement also implies that she believes that emotional satisfaction can be achieved through the act of artistic creation.

Lucía’s portrayal of the cinema is similar to Miguel’s description of the “Delta function”, a mathematical equation characterized by extremely brief moments of high intensity that metaphorically reflect the ups and downs of his wife’s sentimental history.¹¹ The Delta function also

¹¹ Miguel describes the mathematical equation of the Delta Function to Lucía: “—La función Delta. ¿No sabes lo que es? Es una función matemática de la mecánica cuántica, una función preciosísima, de las más bonitas que hay... Es una función que describe fenómenos discontinuos de gran intensidad, pero brevísimo duración—seguía diciendo—. O sea, fenómenos cuya intensidad tiende al infinito y cuya duración tiende a cero. Si se pudiera visualizar sería como una línea quebrada—y diciendo esto dibujaba con su mano el
recalls Lucía’s characterization of passionate love, which she similarly defines as intense but criticizes as temporary and false, a love that “...no existe más que en las novelas rosa.” (82) She labels both cinema and passionate love as fictions, as narratives that attempt to illuminate the chaos of contemporary life by adding to it excitement and intensity. However, they are simultaneously portrayed as illusory for they tend to exaggerate everything and are short-lived and passing phenomenon. Lucía thereby starts to view cinema, passion, and intensity as deceptive constructs and will later argue against them when she rationalizes the superiority of complicit over passionate love.

There are also several passages throughout the novel that criticize some of the cinema’s negative characteristics. The movies can lead to mental instability by encouraging unrealistic and harmful behavior, exemplified by the actor José-Joe who jumps out of a high-rise building because he thinks that he is Count Dracula. Cinema is also linked to the lack of historical memory of the spectator, recalling the Frankfurt school’s notion that perfil de una sierra en el espeso aire con olor a siesta—de ángulos agudísimos..." (177-178)
watching film can limit the capacity for prolonged thought and damage recollection. To calm her nerves about the possible failure of her movie, Lucía’s producer tells her that the memory of the average spectator is limited and not important enough to cause alarm: “…en el mundo del cine nada tiene verdadera importancia, ni un triunfo ni un fracaso, yo no he visto nada más desmemoriado que el espectador de cine.” (284) His uncanny ability to crank out successful religious, historical, campy, and feminist films to satisfy the current whims of the public also suggests that cinematic fads are temporal and have little aesthetic importance. Like advertising, the motion picture business is similarly characterized by constantly changing images, commercial interests and superficiality.

The cinema is thereby portrayed as aesthetically unimportant, momentary, superficial in nature, and essentially just another commercial object. The link between lack of memory and movies not only underscores the possible deterioration of mental capacity as a result of too much exposure to film, but also parallels Lucía’s own limited historical consciousness as she is similarly “memory-less” with respect to her sentimental past and Spain’s political history. In her memoirs, there seems to
be a conscious evasion of historical reality as she presents a romanticized version of past events characterized by the ideals typical of mass culture. On a metaphorical level, her attempt to forget the negative aspects of her personal past represent the discourses of a transitional Spain that also repressed aspects of its historical memory in order to facilitate the establishment of a new and democratic state.

On a lesser scale, television is also negatively represented throughout the novel. Advertising is associated with patriarchy as Lucía attempts to escape from its limiting and stereotypical discourses. Other criticisms emerge when she is pressured to cast her boss’ girlfriend into the starring role of one of her commercials, even though both know that she is not a talented actress. (234) Later, Ricardo directly blames the invention of the television for hurting society: “—Lo malo es cuando el ocio sólo consiste en consumir tus días delante del tele—... El televisor, Lucía, con toda su maravillosa extensión de videos [películas], nos ha quemado la vida.” (166) Ricardo thus regards watching television and videos/movies as a solitary act that isolates the spectator in front of a screen and does nothing to encourage social contact. It is
therefore one of the worst forms of media, for instead of bringing people together it separates and divides them, reinforcing the increasingly cold and antisocial experience of contemporary life.

The media throughout the novel is consistently represented in a negative manner. While Lucía initially thinks that the cinema promises the possibility of autonomy and artistic freedom, it is ultimately depicted as illusory, manipulative, temporary, commercially regulated and potentially harmful to the mind. In accordance with Adorno and Horkheimer, the cinema is portrayed as yet another mass cultural form that does not encourage artistic integrity or foster intellectual development. Television is also shown to be sexist, degrading to women, superficial, and guilty of promoting passivity and social indifference. The novel thereby exemplifies some aspects of cultural theory that reflect on the possible consequences that visual media can have on society, but it conspicuously does not address the utopian potential that Marcuse, Jameson and Vattimo acknowledge in their writing. Rather than characterize it as a positive force, the text’s treatment of the media primarily focuses on its negative attributes and depicts it as a possible threat to high culture.
Mass Culture, Writing and Love

The younger Lucía is disillusioned by her cinematic experience and decides that movies only offer an illusory vision of the possibility of emotional and professional contentment. She therefore gives up her film career and marries Miguel, thinking that she is establishing a secure and happy future for herself that will subdue her existential preoccupations. Years later, her best friend Ricardo criticizes her decision, claiming that by moving in with Miguel and leaving the business she voluntarily chose to lead a mediocre life. For Ricardo, the cinema offered Lucía much more than just a career opportunity and provided her with a creative outlet that he believed was vitally important to her sense of self. He maintains that the moment that she let it go, she lost some of her uniqueness and began to hide behind the safety of patriarchal convention: her decision to abandon her creative aspirations resulted in the suffocation of both her personal and artistic identity.\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) Ricardo criticizes Lucía’s decision to stop directing and move in with Miguel: “Cuando comenzaste a vivir con Miguel te acabaste como persona. No volviste a hacer una sola
Lucía’s older self seems to agree with Ricardo and attempts to recover some of her lost identity through the act of writing. When she takes up the pen in the hospital, she finds some consolation in rewriting her past and demonstrates a renewed interest in fiction’s power to modify and improve reality. She uses melodrama to try to make her past appear as exciting as possible, and romanticizes her memory by painting a better-than-life portrait of her marriage in order to justify her earlier decision to leave her passionate life behind. By incorporating many of the conventions of romance novels into her memoirs (hyperbole, Manichean comparisons, and sentimental discourse), she exposes her inherent affection for the genre and reveals that she has not yet given up on her desire to experience passion. The mature Lucía thereby turns to writing as she tries to re-experience vitality through the process of literary creation.

The importance of artistic creation (film or writing) is highlighted throughout the novel as Lucía consistently associates it with emotional security and personal autonomy. Her younger self initially seeks affirmation... escogiste el papel secundario, la dulce mediocridad de la seguridad.” (214)
through cinematic production but quickly falls victim to disenchantment and gives up her directorial career. Her more mature self demonstrates a renewed interest in the possibility of agency through literary means and seeks to reconstruct her identity by rewriting the past. Writing also helps her to confront mortality, for as she draws closer to death she seems to find some comfort by reflecting on her life in her memoirs. Through writing, she is able to confront certain issues that have consistently troubled her (love, death, personal and professional insecurities) and attempt to make peace with them before passing on. Artistic creation thereby becomes Lucía’s psychological legacy, a way that she can find meaning, challenge mortality and establish her own voice in a society in which females must constantly struggle for agency. In this manner the novel suggests that artistic creation is one way in which the subject can attempt to achieve autonomy and experience some sense of emotional and existential comfort in an otherwise confusing and worrisome world.

Lucía’s writing is characterized by many of the conventions typical of mass culture such as melodrama, polarized opposites, exaggeration, and a focus on typically
“feminine” themes like women’s issues, love, relationships, and sentimental discourses. Throughout her memoirs her recurring debate over the superiority of complicit versus passionate love (el amor cómplice and el amor apasionado) constitutes one of the main themes of the text. Her younger self represents passionate love while the more mature woman defends complicit love and attempts to justify her decision to marry Miguel by claiming that passion is only a temporary and fictitious phenomenon. Nevertheless, the melodramatic descriptions of passionate love that later emerge in her memoirs imply that she is still fascinated by its possible realization. By the end of the novel, passionate love and mass culture become linked to each other as the older Lucía’s writing demonstrates her renewed interest in fiction’s regenerative power.

As previously discussed, the younger Lucía aspires to enter into the artistically superior sphere of the cinema and break free of television, what she considers to be a lower form of culture. However, as she settles down with Miguel, she gives up her professional goals and starts rationalizing her decision by viewing artifice pessimistically, claiming that it is both misleading and unrepresentative of real life. She criticizes fiction for
being deceptive and also defines passionate love as an illusory construct:

Porque el amor pasión era en realidad una cosa tan ficticia, exigía tal entrega de la voluntad, tal predisposición consciente a estar enamorada. El amor pasión era un trabajo intensivo, un pluriempleo de los sentimientos, una invención delicada que necesitaba de la gimnasia afectiva diaria para subsistir... con el amor pasión se busca engañar a la muerte, se intenta alcanzar la agudeza del vivir, esos instantes intensos en los que llegas a creerte eterna. Con el amor cómplice se busca vencer a la muerte pero sin engaños, afrontar su existencia en el apoyo de otra persona. (137-138)

Lucía links passionate love to intensity, emotion, and deception, and also claims that it creates an illusory sense of immortality for those who experience it. This characterization is similar to the way that her younger self views the cinema, as both offer an escape from the dreary realities of the world and add an emotional element to life that makes it more tolerable. The young Lucía connects the two together and embraces them as a way of
seeking happiness, but her rational self tells her that both are illusory and defines passionate love as an overwhelming force that possesses, blinds, and causes one to act stupid, ridiculous and undignified. She therefore claims that passionate love only exists in romance novels and begins to defend the superiority of complicit love, arguing that it is better because it is real and based upon mutual affection. The dichotomy between complicit and passionate love parallels that of high and low culture, as the former is characterized by stability, truth, and reality and the latter with instability, deception, and

13 Describing the two types of love, Lucía contemplates: "Esto es lo que más me irrita del amor pasión: esa necesidad de consumir el tiempo que media entre un encuentro y otro, esos deseos de dormir indefinidamente hasta poder volver a verle. Al amor pasión le entregas todo tontamente, hasta la propia vida; tus días, tus horas, tus minutos sin él parecen vacíos e indignos de ser vividos. Es una repelente y enfermiza obsesión. En el amor pasión estás poseída por otro yo infinitamente más estúpido que el tuyo real, que queda relegado al último rincón de la conciencia. Desde allí, prisionero de tu atolondrada y mentecata personalidad amorosa, tu <<yo>> real gime y se desespera: ¿no te das cuenta de que estás haciendo el ridículo? ¿No te das cuenta de que no conviene, que no es hábil, que no es útil, que no es digno actuar así? Pero la Lucía enamorada se obstina en su ceguera. ¿No comprendes que no puedes tirar tu vida por la ventana y amargarte tus días sólo por mil otros? El yo real derrocha lúcidos alegatos y razones, pero la Lucía enamorada da media vuelta en la cama y se empeña en seguir durmiendo y en perder la conciencia de la ausencia." (229-230)
fantasy. Lucía’s rational self voluntarily seeks the security associated with complicit love/high culture and consequently distances itself from passion/mass culture.\(^{14}\)

Other characters also represent contrasting types of love that can be allegorically related to distinct manifestations of culture. Hipólito, a scriptwriter, personifies passionate love and is associated with the intensity of the cinema; by contrast, Miguel, a mathematician, symbolizes rational love and is connected with intellectualism throughout the work. Accordingly, Hipólito is also linked to the temporality and

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\(^{14}\) Commenting on her characterization of love, Ricardo tells her that by choosing Miguel over Hipólito she effectively gave up on her dreams of autonomy and conforms to patriarchal tradition: “—Sí, sí, claudicar. Por lo que cuentas, para ti el amor pasión supone la lucha, la batalla, la independencia, el mantenerte viva, el ser persona. Y lo que llamas amor cómplice, al contrario, supone ampararte en el otro, resignarte a ser menos libre a cambio de la seguridad, de la protección. Eso es precisamente lo que yo defino como claudicación... De hecho, tal como tú te obsecas en clasificar las relaciones, en el amor pasión tú adquieres las cualidades que tradicionalmente se llamaban <<masculinas>>, es decir, que te mantienes centrada en ti misma, segura, activa, batalladora, independiente, libre. Y en el amor cómplice asumes el papel tradicionalmente femenino, de mujer necesitada de cobijo, de amparo, de protección. En realidad ese absurdo problema que te planteas entre esas dos inexistentes categorías amorosas no es más que una sublimación de tu problema de identidad como mujer: entre la mujer independiente que querías y creías ser, y la mujer...
superficiality of mass culture and Miguel to the permanence and depth of high culture. Lucía is torn between these two poles, for although more excited by her feelings for Hipólito, she recognizes the stability offered by Miguel and struggles to decide which one is better for her. Describing her relationships with both men to Ricardo, she comments:

--No te rías...Los dos juntos, además, serían magníficos.

--¿Qué dos?

--Mis novios, como tú dices... Porque Hipólito es la aventura, el amor loco de la adolescencia, la pasión. Cada vez que le veo se me acelera el corazón, me entra dolor de estómago, me dan vértigos...

--Apasionante perspectiva.

--Y Miguel en cambio es la ternura, la serenidad. Cuando le veo me entra una especie de gratísimo calor por la boca del estómago, una sensación de bienestar... Miguel es mi compañero e Hipólito es mi amante. (81)

<<esposa de>> que llevas dentro de ti y para lo que fuiste educada.” (213)
Although she mentions that her perfect mate will be a composite of these two poles, a mixture of the adventure and excitement associated with Hipólito and the serenity and companionship offered by Miguel, she does not realize until much later that Ricardo personifies the balance between fantasy and reality that she seeks in an attractive and non-threatening manner. Ricardo acts as her companion, entertainer, and critic who emotionally supports her while he simultaneously aspires to be her lover. As literary critic, he admonishes her for distorting historical truth in her memoir and casts doubt on memory’s ability to accurately represent the past. Despite questions about his own credibility, he points out Lucía’s narrative subjectivity and the reader begins to suspect that her memoirs are not very trustworthy or accurate. Through his interventions, her writing is proven melodramatic, historically inaccurate, and intentionally deceptive; although she does not view her work as misleading, his observations make her start to realize that her memoir is fictitious and subjective.

By pointing out Lucía’s narrative subjectivity, Ricardo underlines the subtle influence that pop culture has on her literary production. He does not overtly
criticize the use of fiction in her memoir but rather warns against believing in its discourse as if it were historical truth. He himself tries to improve reality through storytelling, which he admits is often intentionally deceptive. At one point Lucía criticizes him for lying all the time: 

---te pasas la vida mintiendo---

-Cierto, cierto—admitió magnánimo—. Pero olvidas una sutil y fundamental diferencia: la mentira, para mí, es una opción vital; digamos que es una posición filosófica... Yo he escogido las mentiras. Las mentiras me protegen y además habrás de reconocer que mis mentiras mejoran la realidad. En mí es, por lo tanto, una opción voluntaria. Pero tu caso es distinto: tú quieres creer y hacer creer que dices la verdad. Lo tuyo es verdaderamente inmoral, querida. (52)

Maintaining that lying is a philosophical option, Ricardo defends his habit of inventing fictions because he believes that it makes life better by providing it with fantasy, mystery, and excitement. However, since he is always aware of the deceptive nature of storytelling, he is still able to maintain a critical distance between reality and fantasy and does not believe that stories represent or communicate
truth. Ricardo is thereby essentially different from Lucía, for as he acknowledges fiction’s exciting but misleading nature, she demonstrates a desire to believe in its values and uses it discursively to try and reinvent her historical past. His awareness of textuality distances him from being exclusively associated with deception, and he thus personifies a steady balance between fact and fiction, high and low culture, and passionate and complicit love. It is only near the end of the novel that Lucía realizes that he embodies everything that she has been looking for in a mate, and she scolds herself for never having appreciated him before. In Ricardo, she finds an intellectual, artistic, and emotional equilibrium that gives her some peace of mind before her imminent physical demise. Lucía’s ultimate acceptance of her feelings for Ricardo helps to weaken her fear of death and marks the end of the sentimental insecurity that has troubled her for so long. The realization of true love is thereby presented as a viable way in which emotional insecurity and existential anguish may be combated and subdued.

Ricardo’s interventions throughout the novel also touch upon the importance of creative agency in the construction of the self. While other characters symbolize
some rather melodramatic and Manichean visions of love and culture (passionate love/temporality/deception/mass culture versus complicit love/stability/truth/high culture), Ricardo personifies a more complex mixture of the two to suggest that fiction is a necessary and fundamental component of society that should not be repressed or subordinated to other discourses. By pointing out that Lucía’s writing is influenced by mass cultural conventions, he helps expose some of the complications involved in creating autonomous art and also acknowledges the inevitable presence of popular paradigms in contemporary work. Since he defends fiction and storytelling as life-enhancing phenomenon, Ricardo’s ideology metaphorically recalls the postmodern conception that mass culture contains utopian elements that can enlighten the spirit and afford agency to the subject. His love of storytelling and Lucía’s consistent desire to assert her creativity through writing both acknowledge fiction’s regenerative power as each character strives to construct their identities around the stories that they tell. By using melodrama in her memoirs and accepting Ricardo as her mate, Lucía reevaluates some of her past decisions and ultimately
starts to regard mass culture as a legitimate form of narration.

The Electronic Revolution and the Criticism of Capitalism

Apart from exploring the complications involved in contemporary aesthetic production, the novel also discusses what it calls "the electronic revolution" of the turn of the century and the effects that it has had on the society of 2010. Throughout the text there are frequent allusions to the technological advances that brought groundbreaking products to society and supplied the masses with various forms of diversion. These innovations are criticized for encouraging the satisfaction of individual desire and doing nothing to promote human interaction or to stimulate social change. From within the context of a society of consumption like that of a newly democratic Spain, the novel’s presentation of a highly mechanical and dehumanized future raises questions about some of the possible consequences that extreme capitalism and globalization might eventually bring about.\footnote{The novel’s description of an alienating and mechanized future aligns it with other works of science fiction that}
Ricardo and Lucía discuss the technical advances of the turn of the century that are described in a magazine article that praises the achievements of the electronic revolution. According to the text, the microelectronic revolution brought about two positive changes to civilization: the realization of the “society of leisure,” and the disappearance of international frontiers that formerly divided the world. The magazine claims that the mechanization of the work force brought about by technical innovation is positive because it allows a full year of paid vacation for anyone who works for eight months and thus maximizes leisure time. However, Lucía points out that *Ciencia 2000* is a state-endorsed publication and as such ignores the possible negative effects that this revolution might have had. Ricardo and Lucía describe some of the destructive consequences of this “progress” and claim that the fluctuating demand for a work force has augmented the geographic displacement of the public as many are forced to move according to the changing availability of jobs. Lucía also believes that the disappearance of international frontiers is the consequence of a European economy similarly describe the possible dystopia that technological advances might bring about.
dominated by multinational corporations who control work opportunities and displace people according to their economic interests, resulting in an impersonal and machine-like professional community that largely ignores social or ethical concerns.  

Lucía describes an article about the turn of the century electronic revolution: “Por cierto: esta mañana, hojeando los números de Ciencia 2000 antes de devolvérselos a María de Día, he encontrado un artículo sobre la revolución de la microelectrónica. Me lo he leído por encima. Dice que los computadores miniaturizados se aplicaron experimentalmente en el campo de la relojería alemana de 1975 a 1980, y que en el transcurso de esos cinco años hicieron desaparecer el 70 por 100 de los puestos de trabajo del sector. <<A partir de entonces, la revolución microelectrónica, de mayor envergadura histórica que la revolución industrial>>, dice el artículo, <<se desarrolló a velocidad imparable (...). La microelectrónica ha supuesto para la Humanidad, entre otros logros, la realización de dos viejos ideales sociales. Uno, la implantación de una sociedad del ocio (...) en la que los individuos pueden gozar de un año de paro remunerado por cada ocho meses de trabajo (...) y en segundo lugar la desaparición, en la práctica, de las fronteras del mundo occidental, es decir, el utópico internacionalismo de la Edad Industrial, convertido hoy en realidad por la flexibilidad de la sociedad actual y el continuo desplazamiento de los ciudadanos>>. Ciencia 2000, Época II, número 84, 10 de julio de 2007. Es decir, de hace tres años. Como la revista es seudo oficial y está patrocinada por el Comité Coordinador de Investigaciones Científicas, no dice que <<el continuo desplazamiento de los ciudadanos>> se debe a la demanda de mano de obra y al reparto de producción entre las multinacionales que gobernan la economía europea. Calla también que <<la flexibilidad de la sociedad actual>> favorece al consumo, y que la población asalariada trashumante cambia así no sólo de polígono, sino también de casa, coche, electrodomésticos, cerebrodomésticos y muebles cada año. Y demuestra ignorar igualmente que es en los servicios
The novel’s description of the technological revolution parallels many aspects of the cultural theory outlined in the introduction of this dissertation that hypothesized about the negative social consequences that mass culture might have on society. In the “society of leisure,” the owners of the mass media control the exchange of information and thereby manipulate the acquisition of knowledge itself. Commercial institutions also exert their influence over the economy by praising capitalism and promoting an ideology of consumerism, resulting in an “official” definition of happiness based primarily on ownership. The objectification and constant displacement of the worker recalls Marxist theory, while the disappearance of international frontiers suggests that global capitalism has become a totalizing force that represses cultural and political identities. The supposed benefits brought about by the microelectronic revolution are thereby undermined in the novel by their depiction as hegemonic discourses that centralizadost de la policía en donde el internacionalismo parece manifestarse en su más avanzado estado.” (209-210)
unify thought and encourage conformation to a consumerist ideology.\(^{17}\)

For Ricardo, perhaps the worst consequence of the electronic revolution is the realization of the perfect system of repression that enables the police to classify and control information about everyone at the push of a button. The improper use of electronic devices can lead to a lack of individual freedoms because those who control the flow of information necessarily hold superior positions over the average citizen. Even though he maintains that the government has enhanced the dehumanization of society by reducing identity to codified pieces of data, Ricardo insists that he is not opposed to technical progress itself but is rather only against the negative and hurtful practices that it can lead to. (273) Despite his claims to the contrary, his discussion of the electronic revolution reveals a sharp criticism of the capitalist system that

\(^{17}\) The only character who seems to have escaped from this institutionalized consumerist society is Lucía’s pianist friend Rosa, who lives with several colleagues in a commune somewhere far away from the city.
represses individual rights and affords the owners of technological capital ultimate control over society.\(^{18}\)

In this "electronic society," cities are also portrayed as lonely and impersonal places, where even though people live in close proximity, contact between them is minimized and they are increasingly isolated from each other. This is perhaps best exemplified by a chain of restaurants that provides people with resources to entertain themselves (videos and magazines) so that they don’t have to worry about eating alone. Even though she recognizes the possibility of being comforted by the ”shared loneliness" offered by the restaurant, Lucía describes its atmosphere as horrific and underlines its inhuman quality by dwelling on the mechanical buzzing of

\(^{18}\) Ricardo discusses his concern over the international police state: "--Porque se habla mucho de las maravillas de la revolución microelectrónica, sí, todo el día nos están alabando el condenado milagro microelectrónico. Pero, qué casualidad, nadie dice nada sobre el mayor logro de la técnica: haber creado un sistema de represión perfecto... Pero hoy, querida Lucía, no hay manera de perderse. Ahí estamos todos, en la COI, convenientemente codificados, transistorizados, perforados. Y es todo tan sencillo, con sólo teclear tu código personal en alguna terminal de la araña microelectrónica, la Central Occidental de Información escupe toda tu vida, todos tus datos personales, el exhaustivo recuento de todos tus comportamientos equivocos. Me temo que en las bandas magnéticas de mi carnet de identidad deben constar hasta mis dientes postizos..." (166-167)
machines. For Lucía, The “One on One” restaurants become emblematic of an impersonal society increasingly inclined towards social isolation and self-entertainment.¹⁹

The uniformity of city housing also enhances its impersonal nature and reveals that most people are content to live in identical looking buildings that have no personality or uniqueness whatsoever. Highways are filled with travelers who hate each other, and isolation and physical deterioration abound. For Lucía, mechanization has destroyed the spirituality that once flourished in the city, converting it into a ruinous and agonizing space that parallels her own physical and spiritual demise. Even though it should be a conglomeration of inhabitants, businesses, and cultures that represent diversity and social plurality, the novel depicts the urban atmosphere as

¹⁹ Lucía comments on the “One on One” restaurants: “Pensé en irme a un <<De uno a uno>>, la cadena de restaurantes para personas solas, que entonces acababa de ser inaugurada. Pero me llenó de desaliento el recuerdo de sus múltiples mesitas individuales, todas provistas de un aparato de video y de una colección de libros y revistas para que el comensal se entretuviera hasta la llegada de los platos... he llegado a acostumbrarme e incluso apreciar las ventajas de los <<Unos>>... Los <<Unos>> matan los vacíos y te ofrecen el anonimato de las muchas soledades compartidas. Y, sin embargo, qué sobrecogedores son esos restaurantes, esas enormes salas en las que sólo puede escucharse el mecánico murmullo de los vídeos, el inhumano bisbiseo de las máquinas...” (69-70)
a cold, asocial and uniformed space that has little or no progressive characteristics. The protagonists feel that their current reality is in part a consequence of the realization of the society of leisure that was supposed to have significantly improved society. Montero thus warns her readers against the possible dangers that might some day accompany the kinds of progress depicted in the novel.

The technological advances of the microelectronic revolution are depicted as the main causes of the increased loneliness and isolation that characterize the society of 2010. The dehumanization associated with progress

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\[20\text{ There are many examples of the inhuman and cold nature of the city throughout the text, as when Ricardo remarks: "Hoy lo normal es ser feliz en los polígonos, en esas preciosas cajas urbanas todos iguales. Hoy lo sano es vivir contento y conforme con este superestado policial" (166). Lucía calls her day nurse’s attempt to personalize her condo by painting it black a pathetic struggle for uniqueness: "Resulta patética que María de día quiera pintar su casa de un negro original, su casa tipo A, B o C, idéntica hasta la más mínima detalle a todas las casas A, B, o C que componen las ciudades modelo, tan bonitas, tan verdes, y tan amplias, esas ciudades perfectas y absolutamente iguales que se repiten incansablemente a sí mismas por todo el mundo" (88). Lucía later reflects upon the imminent destruction of a bridge: "Serás una ruina más en esta ruina urbana, víctima de la pobreza y pequeñez de un ayuntamiento que carece de personal y medios para mantener el enorme cuerpo herido de esta ciudad que se muere... Pero la ciudad acaba poco a poco, y su agonía es tan palpable que he podido constatar el avance del destrozo a mi regreso, tras estos meses de ausencia." (354-355)\]
throughout criticizes an ever-expanding capitalist economic system that discourages interaction, converts the public into consumers, destroys uniqueness, and does little to encourage intellectual stimulation. As Javier Escudero points out, in such a society the possibility of individual expression is minimized and the subject consequently experiences an existential emptiness: “El sujeto tecnológico y racionalizado, que domina el universo, con sus conocimientos científicos, manifiesta una carencia fundamental, una falta absoluta de realización personal.” (13) The novel’s depiction of a mechanical future thus provides little hope for humanistic renovation in the context of a capitalist and global consumer society.

Nevertheless, discourse throughout the novel also implies that artistic creation is one way in which the subject can attempt to achieve agency and experience some sense of personal achievement in spite of the unifying pressures of a capitalist environment. Lucía’s friend Rosa is a pianist who is able to break free of the social conventions that regulate city life and experience a significant amount of intellectual autonomy. She lives with her companions in a remote commune, and is relatively free to live as she pleases without worrying about conforming to
the rigid norms of mass society. Rosa claims to be content with communal living and does not feel the sense of alienation that Lucía and Ricardo experience in the city. Her example suggests that individual and artistic freedom can be achieved by intentionally challenging the discourses of a social system in which consumerism and entertainment are valued above all else. Ricardo’s story telling and Lucía’s writing may also be interpreted as attempts to break free of the restrictions of their society, as acts of protest against a world in which art (movies/writing) is subjected to commodification and uniqueness is consistently repressed. By nurturing fictions, they attempt to redefine their identities and assert their individuality in order to fight against what they perceive to be an increasingly mechanical and dehumanized society. The novel thereby underlines the necessity of artistic creation as a way of undermining the totalizing discourses that accompany the never-ending advance of global capitalism.  

21 Discussing the microelectronic society’s incapability of providing existential solace to the contemporary subject, Javier Escudero writes: “La ‘avanzada’ sociedad ‘microelectrónica’ en la que habita, en la que el racionalismo económico ha eliminado toda dimensión espiritual, trascendental o sagrada, no consigue, sin embargo, dar respuesta a los grandes dilemas existenciales. El consumismo desaforado alentado por el sistema
Conclusions

La función Delta traces the psychological development of a moribund Lucía who struggles to come to terms with many of the issues that have bothered her throughout her adult life. Rosa Montero creates a protagonist who sees the world through a series of polar binaries in order to explore such themes as love, death, the subordination of the female in a patriarchal world, and the consequences that a totalizing capitalist political system might have on future society. Shortly before the close of the novel, Lucía realizes that her tendency to fantasize and view everything in terms of black and white has only led to emotional distress, and she acknowledges that a more balanced perspective is necessary in order to help calm her existential preoccupations. By accepting Ricardo as her ultimate companion, Lucía reevaluates her life decisions, recognizes the regenerative value of fiction, and finally
experiences some sense of comfort in a newfound peace of mind.

The theoretical differences between high and low culture function as a useful tool with which the binaries depicted in the novel can be deconstructed. The contrasting representations of mass culture throughout praise its potential to encourage the imagination and improve reality, but also show that it can impede the development of relationships and have a alienating effect on the individual. After submitting to commercial pressures and abandoning her artistic aspirations as a younger woman, the older Lucía takes up the pen and rewrites her personal history in melodramatic terms, revealing that she still regards mass culture and the values associated with it in a positive and empowering manner. Montero’s use of genres that have been traditionally classified as low literature (diary, sentimental novel, and science fiction) suggest that she is purposefully vindicating mass culture and using it as a structural device around which she can construct her text. At the same time, the novel’s focus on the theme of love alongside the depiction of the daily struggles of a professional woman living in a patriarchal society also imply that Montero attempts to use popular subject matter
as a vehicle in which she can explore contemporary social
issues.

On the other hand, negative representations throughout
the text make it impossible to claim the existence of any
definitive discourse in terms of the novel’s vindication of
mass culture. Mass culture is also depicted as a deceptive
construct, anti-intellectual, sexist in nature, historically indifferent, and alienating to the subject. The mass media is portrayed as yet another patriarchal
structure that empowers men and subordinates women, and Lucía accordingly longs to find her own voice in an
intellectually suffocating professional atmosphere. The
state-endorsed rhetoric associated with the microelectronic
revolution and its mass cultural products is revealed to be
a hegemonic discourse that promotes unity and discourages
freedom of thought. One of the worst consequences brought
about by technological innovation is the realization of an
advanced police state that controls the flow of information
and reduces identity to pieces of data, eliminating the
possibility of individual autonomy and severely limiting
civil rights. In these ways, the novel recalls many of the
presumptions of cultural theory that characterized
mechanical innovation and mass culture as inherently destructive to the intellect and to society at large.

Perhaps most importantly, the novel reflects on the process of cultural production in the postmodern world to imply that mass culture influences all forms of art in some way or another. Living in what they consider to be an increasingly mechanical and alienating society, Ricardo and Lucía try to exert their sense of individuality through the process of narration. Through writing, both attempt to establish their intellectual presence and experience narrative agency. Nevertheless, they are so conditioned by mass culture that they unknowingly incorporate its conventions into their work and are consequently unable to create autonomous or unique texts. The novel thus highlights the difficulty of escaping the influence of popular paradigms during the composition of contemporary art. Rather than criticize this phenomenon, the protagonist’s discussions of the empowering role of fiction, alongside the recognition of Lucía’s memoir as a mass cultural text, imply that agency can be achieved by using popular structures in order to create literature. Writing about different types of love ultimately helps Lucía come to terms with her emotional insecurities and
achieve some sense of personal satisfaction. Reflecting on her memoirs, she realizes that true love consists of a combination of the passion and stability that she has sought throughout her life, and she finally accepts Ricardo as her one and only companion. By writing out her past and acknowledging fiction’s regenerative power, Lucía is able to resolve some of the issues that have consistently troubled her and find some spiritual comfort before passing on.

Narration and artistic creativity are thus depicted as legitimate manners in which the subject can exert its individuality and attempt to improve reality. Love and art are both presented as constructs that can help subdue existential anxiety, enabling the individual to confront reality and come to terms with the chaos of contemporary life. Through meta-fictional and mass cultural discourse, La función Delta explores ways in which society can try to make sense of an increasingly complicated world through the process of fictional creation. The novel thus points out some of the possible dangers of mass culture while it simultaneously supports the postmodernist position that it also contains a utopian element that can enlighten the spirit and empower the subject.
Chapter 2: Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa*

Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa* (1987) recounts the tale of Santiago Biralbo, a jazz pianist hunted by a counterfeit art-dealer who believes that the musician will help him find Lucrecia, his estranged wife, who had robbed him out of an important and expensive painting. Constantly on the run, Biralbo becomes involuntarily involved in a circle of murder and intrigue and is eventually obliged to change his identity to Giacolmo Dolphin in order to avoid imprisonment. Near the close of the novel, just when Biralbo seems to have escaped his turbulent past, his enemies emerge anew and he disappears again in an unending cycle of persecution that has little or no hope of future resolution.¹

¹ For readers unfamiliar with the novel, a brief plot summary follows: Santiago Biralbo, a jazz pianist, is hunted by Malcolm, a counterfeit art-dealer who believes that the musician will help him find Lucrecia, his estranged wife who has been involved in a long-term love affair with the instrumentalist. Midway through, the reader learns that Lucrecia had cheated Malcolm and his partner Toussaints Morton out of a Cézanne masterpiece and later made millions of dollars by selling it on the black market. Consequently, both relentlessly pursue Biralbo hoping that he will lead them back to her so that they might reclaim the money that they feel is rightfully theirs. The pianist is thus involuntarily involved in a circle of intrigue and deception that reaches its climax when he kills Malcolm in
Throughout the novel, Biralbo relates his fragmented story to a nameless narrator, who in turn passes on his version of events to the reader, resulting in a displaced and melodramatic text whose credibility is rendered questionable by a romanticized account of the protagonist’s life. The reader must attempt to decipher Biralbo’s real story from within the subjective context of the narrator’s version, which has many similarities to the plot of a *film noir* and appears to be largely a product of his creative imagination. The melodrama that characterizes the story reveals the innate influence of mass cultural conventions on the narrator’s thought process, suggesting a close relationship between fiction and reality and revealing that his perception is greatly mediated by popular texts. Its subjective narration alongside the incorporation of various mass cultural conventions makes *El invierno en Lisboa* a thought provoking text that examines the act of writing

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self defense by pushing him off of a moving train, after which he is obliged to run from the Portuguese authorities and change his identity to Giacolmo Dolphin in order to avoid going to jail. After an ambiguous amount of time passes and Biralbo appears to have escaped the troubled events of his past, Morton reappears in the his hotel room, still following the pianist and hunting the woman who got away with “his” money. The novel closes with Biralbo’s renewed disappearance as his persecution continues with no suggestion of future resolution.
while it simultaneously questions its own discursive authority.

Upon publication, El invierno en Lisboa won immediate praise and was awarded el Premio de la Crítica Nacional de Literatura in 1988, and critics were quick to point out its postmodern characteristics, incorporation of popular and cinematic conventions, and ambiguous resolution. However, Gonzalo Navajas proposes that the novel should not be classified as strictly postmodern because in his view it has some closure that results in an affirmation of meaning. For Navajas, Biralbo’s life takes on a new direction after Malcolm’s death, and as such there is a consequent loss of ambiguity and confirmation of unity that distances the work from postmodern paradigms. Since the novelistic discourse shifts away from uncertainty and the protagonist ends up feeling the “certidumbre de una verdad incontrovertible” (230), Navajas concludes that the novel should be read as an “integrative postmodern text” in which some certainty is reached in the subconscious mind of the protagonist.²

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² Navajas comments: “De modo paralelo, en El invierno en Lisboa, el tratamiento irónico concluye en una visión integrativa. Hay también una resolución del enfrentamiento de figuras contrapuestas con la muerte violenta de Malcolm en su disputa en el tren con Biralbo, que cita escenas similares del cine de Hollywood... La terminación de la
For her part, Ana Carlota Larrea has studied the filmic intertext of the novel by comparing it to the Hollywood genre of *film noir*, showing how Muñoz Molina incorporates some of its prevailing characteristics into his novel such as the dark atmospheres, focus on late night culture, urban settings, and basic story line of a man who is led towards his destruction because of his love for a woman. Larrea suggests that the author not only uses this parodia del roman noir se produce en *El invierno en Lisboa* a través de la trascendencia de la mediocridad afectiva y estética para elevar la vida de los Übermenschen caídos a una categoría superior, similar a la realización de los arquetipos humanos sintéticos de Beltenebros. En *El invierno en Lisboa* la confirmación sintética se produce a través del éxtasis estético y afectivo que justifica y da consistencia integradora a la vida desorientada de Biralbo. En esos momentos se clausura la indefinición de la vida de Biralbo y sus compañeros de jazz y se afirma la posibilidad de la afirmación en el otro personal y estético. El texto se detiene en una *stasis* temporal, una epifanía espiritual, muy próxima a las visiones singulares y privilegiadas de las novelas *Ulysses* de James Joyce y *To the Lighthouse* de Virginia Woolf, ambos textos canónicos de la estética modernista. En realidad el yes final de Molly Bloom, titubeante en la novela de Joyce, se magnifica y se asegura en la novela de Muñoz Molina.” (228-29)

Larrea describes the influence that film noir has on the novel: “Apart from several intratextual references to movies and movie going, the genre of *film noir* provides the novel with its narrative framework. Traces of *film noir* can be found both in the type of story told, and in the way the story is told. The story unfolds as a flashback, told by a first person narrator whose name is never mentioned.... In the tradition of *film noir*, Biralbo becomes involved in a series of situations that will put his life in danger.
cinematic style as a frame around which to construct his novel, but adds to it an artistic sensibility and intellectualism which makes it a true piece of literature, superceding the conventions of a typical detective novel by choosing an intellectual musician as his protagonist. In her view, the novel challenges the stereotypes associated with best selling fiction by intellectualizing the popular to create a thought provoking text with various layers of meaning.

Along similar lines, Olimpia González has examined the use of music as a structural device throughout the text to propose that the repetition, rhythm, and circular vision of time in the work can all be related to musical technique. For González, the novel parodies the Orpheus myth, highlights the textual nature of reality and imitates the repetitious nature of jazz music, thus creating a circular temporality that deconstructs the notion of originality. Reality is characterized as a continuous present that produces a sensation of timelessness, a feeling of eternal return that reappears over and over again throughout.

because of his relationship to the woman... Like film noir, the novel is characterized by a feeling of suspense and threat, and a sense of doom hovers over the protagonist.” (31-32)
González suggests that the novel thereby questions the literary effort to abolish the differences between the imaginary and the real, ultimately depicting the concept of origin as essentially an act of imaginative narration.⁴

In his 1995 dissertation on mass culture and modernism, Richard Sperber proposes that in El invierno en Lisboa, mass culture acts as a vehicle of memory and is used to create a renewed collective vision of modernism.⁵ He

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⁴ González concludes: “En resumen, la repetición de palabras y situaciones en esta novela corresponden a la construcción de una parodia del mito de Orfeo. La ambivalencia del narrador y su peculiar interpretación de los hechos logran revelar el texto como una construcción artística. Un triángulo de muerte, arte y amor articula las bases del mito de Orfeo. La obsesiva ordenación de la novela a partir de una personalidad solitaria, aunque sus episodios aparezcan de manera fragmentada en la memoria del narrador, simula el movimiento reiterado de la música en la que no puede detectarse el sentido sin la repetición. Aunque se ha dicho que en nuestro siglo la mayoría de las versiones del mito órfico se reducen a una historia de amor, Muñoz Molina ha elaborado un texto que, parodiando la relación amorosa, se proyecta con la imagen del músico que imita a otro músico, sin transcender las limitaciones del crimen y la muerte. La trama no está sujeta al cierre final, como si el narrador quisiera que la carrera infernal de Biralbo no terminara nunca. La novela consigue alcanzar, como la música, un presente continuo que puede concebirse como interpolación de la atemporalidad dentro del tiempo, una noción muy parecida al eterno retorno, donde las diferencias tienden a repetirse infinitamente.” (52)

⁵ Sperber explains: “In both novels, this search for memory is embodied in the protagonists who have only a fragmented memory of the past. It is through the apparitions in both novels that their memory is reinvented... it must now be
views jazz as an older form of mass culture whose function in the novel is to reveal the hieroglyphics of a secret modernist language that "...illuminate[s] a modernist form of art, that is, a Cézanne painting... jazz reveals the epistemology of this painting... the epistemology of modernism lies in mass culture..." (87-88). Robert Spires also highlights the presence of mass culture in the novel, claiming that the protagonists achieve a certain degree of enlightenment through its consumption. In Post Totalitarian Spanish Fiction (1996), he explains that Muñoz Molina not only refers to multiple sources of mass culture throughout but also comments on its potentially empowering properties. The novel thereby attempts to show that agency can be achieved through the process of intertextual revisitation. By focusing on the imitative nature of modern life and underlining some of the possibilities offered by mass culture, Spires proposes that the text challenges the reemphasized that this construction of modernism takes place on the basis of images from mass culture. This combination produces powerful results: not only is modernism rescued or reinvented, it also foregrounds visions of community, such as the political community in Beltenebros or the community of foreigners in El invierno en Lisboa. As I will argue, it is the influence of mass culture which generates this collective vision of modernism." (61)
notion that art must include elements of surprise in order to effectively communicate its message.

The most recent analysis of Molina’s novel is Lawrence Rich’s 1999 *The Narrative of Antonio Muñoz Molina*, in which he explores the subjectivity of a narrator who reconstructs the protagonist’s life story by piecing together news of his past accessed through newspaper clippings, recordings, and conversations with the musician himself. Rich asserts that while recounting the pianist’s adventures, the narrator and Biralbo’s identities blend into one, blurring the distinction between the two and making it difficult for the reader to know whose versions of events is being told. The narrator becomes both an author and an interpreter of ambiguous events, forced to piece together the details of Biralbo’s life from disjointed and unreliable sources. In this way, he is similar to the actual reader of the text, who must also construct his own version of events out of

Commenting on the author’s examination of the concept of originality, Spires proposes: “Muñoz Molina may be suggesting that what is needed in literature are linguistic constructs that de-emphasize the importance of information based on new plots or surprising twists. The unexpected turn of events was not a part of oral literature, and he seems to be striving for a minstrel effect by relying on familiar intertextual models in *El invierno en Lisboa.*” (222)
the unreliable and biased version of the narrator. Rich also examines the significance of the various filmic intertexts throughout to claim that all such references underscore the cinematic nature of the characters themselves and of the world in which they live. He thus concludes that it is not a detective novel but rather one of development that examines the textual nature of reality. His analysis upholds Muñoz Molina’s own claim that El invierno en Lisboa is not in any way a novela negra, but is instead a type of work that avoids generic classifications.

This chapter will expand upon existing criticism by offering new interpretations of the role of mass culture in the novel and examining its significance. Muñoz Molina uses mass cultural conventions throughout to reflect on the

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7 According to Rich, “The narration of Biralbo’s actions and thoughts is inevitably contingent on both Biralbo’s and the narrator’s imagination and memory. The narrator may attempt to “disappear” by dropping references to his “I,” but the reader is continually reminded that the account of Biralbo’s adventures is in fact the product of two limited narrators’ imaginative fantasies and subjective memories. When the narrator insists that he “sees” rather than “imagines” events, he is self-consciously and ironically pointing out that the opposite is really the case.” (27)

relationship between art and reality while he highlights the contamination of perception by various forms of media such as cinema, music, and recordings. Memory is mediated by these texts to such an extent that conventional methods of understanding and perceiving reality are shown to be unreliable. The novel thereby questions whether mass culture can provide a satisfactory frame of reference in which the subject can establish an identity and interact with reality, ultimately suggesting that some agency can be achieved through the process of artistic creation.

*El invierno en Lisboa* also depicts a type of society that largely ignores Spain’s political reality and whose inhabitants are primarily concerned with the satisfaction of individual desire. The novel thus inscribes itself in a capitalist present where foreign culture is privileged and historical discourse is devalued. Biralbo’s plight thereby allegorically represents that of the contemporary subject who, while still haunted by memories of the past, struggles to redefine his identity in an newly democratic and consumerist society.
Cinema, Imitation, and Narrative Agency

If cultural theorists have criticized aspects of mass culture for being temporal, deceptive, and manipulative, then how does Muñoz Molina use and incorporate them into his novel? Does he attempt to vindicate mass culture from its negative connotations or is he also critical of its detrimental qualities? On a first reading, mass culture in *El invierno en Lisboa* seems to be positively regarded by different characters who delight in the music, movies and popular texts that they consume. As has been noted by the aforementioned critics, references to the cinema appear throughout and the protagonists often compare themselves to film characters. On numerous occasions their dialogue imitates that of movie scenes, underlining the connection between their reality and the cinematic world while suggesting that they consciously strive to be like their filmic counterparts in both speech and behavior. As Lawrence Rich observes, this reflects Muñoz Molina’s belief
that the contemporary subject is greatly influenced by film.⁹

It is important to note that the cinematic vision of the entire novel originates from a narrator who invents many of the dialogues of his protagonists and presents them as if they really happened; since Biralbo’s story is incomplete and fragmented, the narrator fills in its missing gaps with imagery and dialogue that he borrows from the cinema. The reader is thereby confronted with an inexact story filtered through the narrator’s subjective interpretation of events, which in turn is mediated by ideas and imagery derived from films. The narrator’s appropriation of cinematic imagery reveals his appreciation of the narrative function of the cinema and also suggests that he considers it to be a legitimate and empowering tool of writing, an appropriate way to recreate a reality that

⁹ Lawrence Rich explains: “The narrator’s imaginative vision reflects Muñoz Molina’s belief that cinema has profoundly affected the modern psyche: “nuestra imaginación [está] contaminada por el cine” (“La cara del pasado”), given that we interpret the world through a filter of our previous “readings,” which include the films we have seen. The narrator’s memory and imagination are indeed “contaminated by the cinema” for he admits that his “recuerdo ... pertenece... a una película” (21) and the images that he evokes are typical motifs of film noir: abandoned streets, a stark contrast between light and dark, and men with revolvers dressed in hats and overcoats.” (82).
is significantly mediated by mass culture. The narrator thus seems to regard it as a meaningful entity and uses it to help construct his tale as he attempts to achieve agency through the act of narration.\textsuperscript{10}

However, other allusions to mass culture undermine its authority as a narrative device. From the outset, the cinema is related to forgetfulness, inebriation, and to an unreal sensation of living in an alternate reality. Describing his first encounter with Malcolm, the narrator associates deception with the cinema as he depicts himself as an actor with no explicit direction (25). He acknowledges that many of his thoughts seem to originate in movie scenes and admits that he sometimes has trouble distinguishing between reality and the cinema.\textsuperscript{11} Many other

\textsuperscript{10} Ana Carlota Larrea also describes Muñoz Molina’s belief that mass culture influences the subject: “Fuentes and Handke share with Muñoz Molina an interest in how the images of Hollywood films have shaped the consciousness of individuals in our century, illustrating the postmodern awareness of how texts and fictions constitute our subjectivity. When Muñoz Molina's narrator daydreams while listening to Biralbo's music and lets his imagination run, his mind is full of the traditional iconography of movies” (224).

\textsuperscript{11} A good example of the blending of reality and cinema is when Biralbo describes his break-up with Lucrecia, and the narrator replies that it must have been raining: “Me dijo: <<¿Has visto cómo llueve?>> Yo le contesté que así llueve siempre en las películas cuando la gente va a despedirse...
passages also blur the boundaries between the two, raising questions about the narrator’s ability to accurately describe events and suggesting that much of what he passes on to the reader did not really happen. This highlights the fictitious nature of his narration and reinforces the cinema’s influence on his discourse, rendering it untrustworthy because his “text” turns out to be largely an imitation of different cinematic conventions.

In particular, conventions of film noir abound as the main characters are depicted as types associated with this genre, including the cynical musician, the femme fatal, the street-smart bartender, the criminal mastermind and the hit man. They are one-sided and flat Hollywood figures that are described in a movie-like fashion: Biralbo is the pessimistic hero who must constantly escape danger: “...[Biralbo salía] como salían los héroes de las películas...” (141) Lucrecia is a dangerous and mysterious woman always on the move, a “...mujer fantasma. Muy impaciente. Enciende muchos cigarrillos y los abandona a la mitad. Phantom Lady. ¿Has visto esa película?” (82) She is

Me preguntó por qué sabía yo que aquel encuentro era el último. “<Pues por las películas>, le dije, “<cuando llueve tanto es que alguien se va a ir para siempre>.” (38)
portrayed as an impatient ghost or a shadow that disappears as quickly as it appears. Malcolm is like an obsessed private investigator that relentlessly pursues Biralbo in order to find Lucrecia, and Toussaints Morton is described as a cinematic gangster through his rough demeanor and curious manner of speech. These and other descriptions reveal that the narrator’s characterization of the protagonists is mostly derived from the movies. His efforts to create an autonomous text are thereby undermined as the characters are generally depicted as flat and one-sided personalities that rarely demonstrate qualities atypical of their models.¹²

¹² Other passages also describe the characters as Hollywood types: Lucrecia is compared to an “unreal” magazine model: “Asintió, mirando los cajones abiertos, la turbia luz de la mesa de noche. Iluminada por ella, por el fervor vacío del bourbon, la cara de Lucrecia tenía esa cualidad de perfección y distancia que tienen las mujeres en los anuncios de las revistas de lujo. Parecía más alta y más sola que las mujeres de la realidad y no miraba como ellas.” (187) The narrator describes seeing Malcolm outside of his window: “—Malcolm nos espiaba... Alguna vez lo vi rondar el portal de mi casa, como un policía torpe, ya sabes, parado con un periódico en la esquina, tomando una copa en el bar de enfrente. Esos extranjeros creen mucho en las películas.” (32-33). Toussaints Morton: “Hablaba como ejerciendo una parodia del acento francés. Hablaba exactamente igual que los negros de las películas y decía amegucano y me paguece y nos sonreía...” (52)
The narrator’s descriptive passages are also characteristically cinematic and he often describes everything as if he were looking through the eye of a camera. He also portrays the protagonists as being fans of the movies, and so doing projects his affinity for the cinema onto others. He thus tries to create a collective recognition of the importance of film because he thinks that this might help to establish an authorial tone and make his narration more convincing.

Music and cinema are also associated with each other throughout the novel and influence the narrator’s perception. Music often functions as a spark that ignites the narrator’s cinematically mediated memory:

Constantemente la música me acuciaba hacia la revelación de un recuerdo, calles abandonadas en la noche, un resplandor de focos al otro lado de las esquinas, sobre fachadas con columnas y

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13 The novel begins when the music of a piano activates the memory of the narrator: “Yo estaba sentado en la barra, de espaldas a los músicos, y cuando oí que el piano insinuaba muy lejanamente las notas de una canción cuyo título no supe recordar, tuve un brusco presentimiento de algo, tal vez esa abstracta sensación de pasado que algunas veces he percibido en la música, y cuando me volví aún no sabía que lo que estaba reconociendo era una noche perdida en el Lady Bird, en San Sebastián, a donde hace tanto que no vuelvo.” (9)
terraplenes de derribos, hombres que huían y que se perseguían alargados por sus sombras, con revólveres y sombreros calados y grandes abrigos como el de Biralbo.

Pero ese recuerdo que agravaron la soledad y la música no pertenece a mi vida, estoy seguro, sino a una película que tal vez vi en la infancia y cuyo título nunca llegaré a saber. Vino de nuevo a mí porque en aquella música había persecución y había terror, y todas las cosas que yo vislumbraba en ella o en mí mismo estaban contenidas en esa sola palabra, Burma... (21-22)

The narrator again recognizes that the images that music provokes in his mind pertain to the films that he has seen rather than to his own experience, which reaffirms the cinema’s influence over his perception and casts doubt over his ability to accurately remember the past. As before, images from film noir fill his thoughts as music recalls the persecution, terror, abandonment, guns and clothing typical of this genre. He acknowledges this phenomenon and ponders the textual and fallible nature of memory, questioning his recollection and undermining his credibility as storyteller in the process.
The allusions to cinema throughout the novel help create the figure of a storyteller that attempts to decipher the mystery of Biralbo’s tale by reinventing it and filling in its missing gaps with content and imagery taken from the movies. The narrator seems to consider elements of mass culture to be legitimizing devices with which he can create an appealing and credible work of his own. However, his narrative is shown to be so derivative and dependent upon other texts that its credibility is compromised and the process of narration is ultimately depicted as an act of imitation. The novel’s lack of resolution also suggests that mass cultural conventions are invalid narrative codes that cannot accurately decipher reality or recognize truth, but rather only lead to the proliferation of more fictions that may or may not be misleading. The use of a drunk, unreliable, and memory-less narrator who embraces them may thus be interpreted as a reflection on this type of discourse: even as he attempts to create an autonomous text by incorporating it into his narrative, mass cultural discourse, rather than enlighten the narrator, only alienates him further from the truth as he loses track of the real events of his protagonist’s life.
By portraying an unreliable narrator who seeks agency through the process of writing, Muñoz Molina inscribes his text in a postmodern context in which the notion of literary credibility is challenged. In regards to the narrator, the novel portrays mass culture to be a fictitious construct that is ultimately incapable of seeking out and defining truth. The work thus asks whether narrative fiction has any discursive validity, or if it is simply another form of art that has no epistemological legitimacy. In this work Muñoz Molina seems skeptical about literature’s power to decipher reality and therefore points out that all styles of writing are in fact textual fabrications. His uncertain narrator thereby exemplifies many of the limitations of written discourse and metaphorically represents literature’s inability to convey or define truth.

Mass Culture, Love, and the Illusion of Happiness

Besides being depicted as an unreliable mode of narration, mass cultural discourse is also shown to be problematic in terms of the novel’s representation of love. A shared affection for cinema and popular music distances
Lucrecia and Biralbo from the other characters and becomes one of the pillars on which they form their relationship. Malcolm jealously declares that Lucrecia’s high regard of the fictional world of movies, books and music united her with Biralbo and compromised her marriage:

Hablabais mucho, lo hacíais para poder miraros a los ojos, conocíais todos los libros y habíais visto todas las películas y sabíais los nombres de todos los actores y de todos los músicos, ¿te acuerdas? Yo os escuchaba y me parecía siempre que estabais hablando en un idioma que no podía entender. Por eso me dejó. Por las películas y los libros y las canciones. (133)

He compares these texts to a language that he cannot understand, claims that Lucrecia left him because he does not fit into her cultural world, and later suggests that she and Biralbo consider themselves superior to others due to their knowledge and love of this indecipherable code.¹⁴

¹⁴ Malcom again criticizes Lucía’s love of movies, books and songs: “—Películas—... Eso es lo único que os importaba, ¿verdad? Despreciabais a quien no las conociera, hablabais de ellas y de vuestros libros y vuestras canciones pero yo sabía que estabais hablando de vosotros mismos, no os importaba nadie ni nada, la realidad era demasiado pobre para vosotros, ¿no es cierto?” (141)
Their relationship is thus constructed around different texts of mass culture that in Malcolm’s view forms a special bond between them and alienates others. He also asserts that they seek out the fantasy offered by mass culture because they consider their own reality to be unattractive and poor (141).

Throughout the novel Biralbo and Lucrecia actively try to incorporate mass cultural texts into their lives because they seem to believe that they make their existence more meaningful. For them, mass culture is a constructive entity, an important part of their daily lives and a staple that binds them together. It provides them with a common interest around which they can form a relationship, offers a temporary escape from reality, sets them apart from others, and increases their sense of self-definition. In this manner, their attraction to each other echoes Fredric Jameson’s assertion that popular texts can provide a

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15 An example of their self-identification with their cinematic heroes happens when they go to the Lady Bird after Lucrecia’s return from Berlin: “...Porque habían nacido para fugitivos amaron siempre las películas, la música, las ciudades extranjeras. Lucrecia se acodó en la barra, probó el güisqui y dijo, burlándose de sí misma y de Biralbo y de lo que estaba a punto de decir y amándolo sobre todas las cosas: --Tócalo otra vez. Tócalo otra vez para mí. --Sam--dijo él, calculando la risa y la complicidad--. Samtiago Biralbo.” (80)
foundation around which social relations and identities can be developed. In Biralbo and Lucrecia’s case, the novel appears to paint a positive portrait of the association between mass culture and the construction of identity.

Nevertheless, aspects of mass culture are also portrayed as problematic throughout the text, for they do not provide the protagonists with security or stability and only fill their minds with delusions of unrealizable dreams. Both Biralbo and Lucrecia harbor romanticized visions of love that they are unable to realize, never spend much time with each other, and can only establish transient friendships and temporary relationships that have fleeting significance. While separated, both characters idealize their time together in such a manner that their recollection is tainted and their memory becomes fictionalized. When they finally meet in Lisbon after having spent a few years apart, they discuss the impossibility of ever again achieving the happiness that they once knew together:

16 Their belief in false values promoted by mass culture echoes Rosa Montero’s use of the bolero in Te trataré como a una reina, where the protagonists foolishly believe in the deceptively emotional lyrics of popular songs.
Porque sólo buscábamos cosas imposibles. Nos daba asco la mediocridad y la felicidad de los otros. Desde la primera vez que nos vimos te notaba en los ojos que te morías de ganas de besarme.

--No tanto como ahora.

--Me estás mintiendo. Nunca habrá nada que sea mejor que lo tuvimos entonces.

--Lo será porque es imposible.

--Quiero que me mientas—dijo Biralbo—. Que no me digas nunca la verdad. —Pero al decir esto ya estaba rozando los labios de Lucrecia. (167)

The night that they spend together in Lisbon is a momentary realization of a fantasy that Biralbo had dreamed about for several years. However, it is short-lived because he claims that his continued presence would endanger her life and insists on leaving the next morning. Biralbo asks Lucrecia to lie and to never tell him the truth, and so doing implies that he does not want to experience the reality of her presence even though he finally has the chance to stay with her for a prolonged period of time. In this manner he visualizes their relationship as a fiction, as a dream or a fantasy that adds an element of intensity and passion to his life that might disappear if they were to stay
together. Even though he is aware of its falsity, he seems to prefer this dream over the possibility of confronting the monotony of an inferior reality. His decision to leave Lucrecia after having finally found her reflects his predilection for illusion and reinforces his attempt to ignore truth by embracing fantasy. His affinity for fiction (mass culture/ fantasy/ melodrama) thus becomes a filter that displaces reality and renders their chances of definitively staying together impossible.

Even so, on several occasions Biralbo also describes his attempt to get beyond his love for Lucrecia. When he recounts his story to the narrator, he maintains that he has finally gotten over his addiction to illusion and defines both happiness and perfection as popular superstitions:

—Me he librado del chantaje de la felicidad—dijo Biralbo tras un breve silencio, mirando a la camarera, que nos daba la espalda. Desde que empezamos a beber en la barra del Metropolitano yo había estado esperando que nombrara a Lucrecia. Supe que ahora, sin decir su nombre, estaba hablándome de ella. Continuó—: De la felicidad y de la perfección. Son supersticiones
Claiming to no longer believe in such things, Biralbo criticizes religion and popular songs for creating deceptive ideals, distorting reality and encouraging people to develop unreliable systems of belief. He leads his interlocutor to believe that he has reevaluated the role of popular culture in his life and is now trying to forget about his romanticized past: he thereby attempts to reject his cult to fantasy in order to seek out a new and more realistic existence. However, his efforts are undermined as the ending of the work reveals that he cannot really escape from history as Toussaints relentlessly pursues him: he is trapped in a circle that connects him to his former identity and is ultimately forced to accept the fact that he cannot really forget about his emotional past.

The novel’s representation of the negative connotations of mass culture lies mainly in its promotion of an alternate and illusory reality that separates the subject from the truth and leads him into a cycle of unrealized desire. Some ideas of the Frankfurt theorists who thought that mass culture unified thought and filled the mind with delusions of false ideals is thus represented
in the novel by both the characterization of the protagonists and by the way in which the narrator attempts to appropriate mass culture as a discursive tool of writing. Even though Lucrecia and Biralbo appreciate mass culture early on in their relationship, their inability to establish a permanent relationship and their constant geographic displacement nullifies its favorable depiction. *El invierno en Lisboa* may therefore be read as a novel in which the protagonists maintain an ambiguous relationship with mass culture, for even though they embrace the illusion that it offers, they also realize that it is a misleading and deceptive form of discourse.

Cinema, radio songs, and the fantasy associated with mass culture are thus depicted as potentially harmful constructs due to their deceiving nature that distances the subject from objective reality. Music is another genre of culture that also has a significant presence throughout the text. The analysis of music’s role in the novel provides insight on the practice of cultural production, explores the essence of art as an oral or a written phenomenon, and examines the problematic relationship between fiction and memory. The representation of music in *El invierno en Lisboa* highlights the protagonist’s attempts to achieve
agency through performance as well as mass culture’s connection to memory, resulting in another reflection on the mediation of perception and on the various influences that pop culture can have on the conscious.

**Music, Escapism and Alienation**

References to music and popular song throughout also have a significant role in the novel’s exploration of the relationship between memory and artifice. The story centers around jazz, a musical genre that dwells somewhere in between high and low classifications. Although jazz is generally considered to be an evolved type of mass culture characterized by repetition and improvisation, it began to acquire a new status as a highly stylized and intellectual music in the second half of the twentieth century and is now considered by many to be an exceptional form of high culture. Muñoz Molina believes that authors and jazz musicians alike must meticulously study their art in order to present an appearance of spontaneity in their work that conceals their expertise.¹⁷ He has written about the

¹⁷ Molina writes: “La improvisación, que es el rasgo soberano del jazz, no es posible si no hay un previo legado
impulsiveness and ingenuity of jazz musicians to suggest that writers also must experience a similar type of inspiration when they compose literature, maintaining that the creative drive requires a special kind of aesthetic sensibility that both kinds of artists must choose to embrace: “Del jazz pueden aprenderse algunos secretos y algunos comportamientos muy útiles para la escritura, pero no es obligatorio escribir sobre jazz para cultivarlos: lo que hace falta es ser íntimamente un jazzman, y esa elección estética implica sin remedio una actitud moral.” (Jazz 23) This moral attitude involves the incorporation of the spontaneous emotion and “swing” typical of jazz music, qualities that can make their texts meaningful and turn them into better works of art. Nevertheless, he also asserts that both musician and writer realize that their art ceases to exist as soon as its production ends, and as such its beauty lies in the fleeting moment of an unrepeateable present:

   Cuando sucede el swing, al músico y a quien lo oye lo exalta una simétrica sensación de presente que es irrepetible. Lo que está sonando ahora de sabiduría y silencioso estudio: exactamente lo mismo ocurre en literatura.” (Jazz 24)
mismo nunca más sonará igual que ahora, y quien
toca esa música sabe que nunca volverá a tocarla,
y quien la oye es trastornado por la certeza de
que ese instante nunca volverá. El jazzman
trabaja a este lado de la frontera del silencio,
y cuando se encienden las luces de la sala el
público se retira y enciende cigarrillos y ya
nadie podrá repetir lo que ha sucedido, pero ese
es el privilegio de las artes cuya materia es el
tiempo. El escritor escribe, y sus palabras serán
impresas y parecerá que duran, pero también eso
es mentira: las palabras no existen más allá del
momento en que se las escribe, no valen cuando
uno ha dejado de leerlas, a no ser que sigan
existiendo en la memoria y en el corazón del
lector como el recuerdo inexacto de una música.

(Jazz 24)

In this manner the author links music and literature
together to suggest that both are regulated by the
emotional pulse of the artist and significantly lose
presence after the moment in which their production ceases.
He thus views them as temporal arts that leave only
fragmented images in the mind of the reader/listener, and
asserts that their beauty can only be truly experienced by witnessing their spontaneous composition. Memory is thereby incapable of accurately capturing the entire meaning or intensity of any performance. This correlation of music, writing and recollection has an interesting manifestation in _El invierno en Lisboa_, for Biralbo’s discourses on the temporal nature of music and memory seem to echo the author’s deliberations concerning the impossibility of remembering the experience produced during a live performance.

_El invierno en Lisboa_ presents jazz as if it were a form of high culture, evidenced by the narrator’s idealization of his musical hero and by its appreciation by a select group of characters. For Ana Carlota Larrea, by centering his novel on a jazz musician, the author creates a unique kind of text that lies somewhere between the traditional classifications of high and low literature.¹⁸

¹⁸ Larrea compares literature and jazz: “Barth compares postmodern literature to good jazz and to classical music: the listener enjoys it the first time, and also in successive listenings. The comparison with jazz is a particularly good tool for understanding Muñoz Molina’s approach to art and his use of American movies as an intertext. Jazz falls between classical music and popular music in the same way as his novel falls between art and popular fiction. Besides American film noir, jazz is the other American art form that Muñoz Molina is paying homage
Music throughout the text is indeed favorably depicted on several occasions. From the beginning, the narrator admires Biralbo’s ability to play apparently without thinking or demonstrating technique as his music floats along and changes shape, creating an illusion of randomness that conceals his experience and preparation. The narrator also believes that Biralbo’s songs often tell stories, suggesting that music itself has an inherently narrative function. As previously discussed, music helps form images in the narrator’s mind that awaken his memory and activate his cinematic imagination, allowing him to dramatize and reconstruct the plot of his own text.

Music is also related to escapism as Biralbo experiences a kind of therapeutic power while performing that distances him from the exterior world and enables him to in *El invierno en Lisboa*. By basing his narrative on such popular models, Muñoz Molina “pacts with the public,” as Bértolo puts it, but he manages to go beyond the popular referent to create a work that “rises above” coterie fiction and junk fiction. (208)

19 The narrator comments: “...sus manos se movían a una velocidad que parecía excluir la premeditación o la técnica, como si obedecieran únicamente a un azar que un segundo más tarde, en el aire donde sonaban las notas, se organizase por sí mismo en una melodia, igual que el humo de un cigarrillo adquiere formas de volutas azules.” (10)
to explore unknown regions of his psyche. He describes the sensation of playing to the narrator:

Aquel verano, me explicó dos años después, había empezado a darse cuenta de que la música ha de ser una pasión fría y absoluta. Tocaba de nuevo regularmente, casi siempre solo y en el Lady Bird, notaba en los dedos la fluidez de la música como una corriente tan infinita y serena como el transcurso del tiempo: se abandonaba a ella como a la velocidad de un automóvil, avanzando más rápido a cada instante, entregado a un objetivo impulso de oscuridad y distancia únicamente regido por la inteligencia, por el instinto de alejarse y huir sin conocer más espacio que el que los faros alumbran, era igual que conducir solo a medianoche por una carretera desconocida.

(54)

Music is now characterized as a cold and absolute passion that flows through Biralbo like the current of a river. Overcome while performing, he is swept away in its fluidity and escapes into an unexplored space metaphorically compared to a dark highway. On one hand, this escapism seems positive for performance allows him to enter an
alternate reality described as fluid and serene like the
passage of time, unreserved yet controlled by intelligence.
On the other hand, it is also directed by a dark impulse
that increasingly gains velocity, implying that danger is
intrinsically connected to the artistic impulse. Biralbo’s
passion for performance represents the actualization of his
unrestrained emotion and it thus becomes the vehicle
through which he attempts to escape from the negative
realities of his world. However, the novel also implies
that the release of such emotion can be potentially
damaging if it starts to spin out of control.

Biralbo’s attraction to Lucrecia also has a
significant influence on the development of his musical
talent. When he tells the narrator of his decision to
abandon teaching and return to performing, he recognizes
that Lucrecia not only inspires his erotic desire but is
also the primary reason that he attempts to perfect his
musicianship:

... Pensó que únicamente había aprendido a tocar
el piano cuando lo hizo para ser escuchado y
deseado por ella: que si alguna vez lograba el
privilegio de la perfección sería por lealtad al
porvenir que Lucrecia le había vaticinado la
primera noche que lo oyó tocar en el Lady Bird, cuando ni él mismo pensaba que le fuera posible parecerse algún día a un verdadero músico, a Billy Swann.

--Ella me inventó—dijo Biralbo una de las últimas noches, cuando ya no íbamos al Metropolitano--. Yo no era tan bueno como ella pensaba, no merecía su entusiasmo. Quién sabe, a lo mejor aprendí para que Lucrecia no se diera cuenta nunca de que yo era un impostor... (74)

Lucrecia embodies what Biralbo perceives to be the ideal listener whose presence encourages him to refine his skill and strive towards perfection. His desire to be appreciated as an artist inspires him and he falls in love with Lucrecia because she listens and understands his music.20 In this sense her character functions as a catalyst of artistic creation, but, due to her consistent absence and ambiguous relationships with Malcolm and Billy Swann, she

20 This is further evident when Biralbo tells Lucrecia: “—Siempre he tocado para ti—dijo Biralbo--. Incluso antes de que nos conociéramos. Incluso cuando estabas en Berlín y yo estaba seguro de que no ibas a volver. La música que hago no me importa si no la escuchas tú. --Ése era tu destino. --Lucrecia seguía en pie ante la tarima del piano, firme y lejana, a un paso de Biralbo--. Yo he sido un pretexto.” (80-81)
is also connected to the potentially perilous nature of passion as described in the previous citation. She thus turns into a muse that arouses Biralbo’s passionate but dangerous artistic impulse, and as time goes by, he gradually becomes more and more obsessed with her image.

Despite the enthusiasm that it inspires in its creators, music itself is portrayed as apathetic and devoid of all sentiment throughout the novel. Billy Swann tells Biralbo that the feeling that artists invest in their music has no lasting significance and that the only real compensation to the musician is the temporary satisfaction and escapism experienced during the act of performance.21 This separation of music from emotion nullifies the possibility of achieving enduring meaning through performance as musicians are inevitably alienated from their art. This kind of alienation is also reflected in the novel by Biralbo’s criticism of recordings and by the ongoing separation of the lovers, who despite Malcolm’s death are unable to realize their love and get caught up in an unending cycle of displacement and isolation. Music is

21 Billy Swann tells Biralbo: “<<No le importamos a la música. No le importa el dolor o el entusiasmo que ponemos en ella cuando la tocamos o la oímos. Se sirve de nosotros, como una mujer de un amante que la deja fría.” (72)
thereby generally characterized as a powerful and impersonal force that can inspire great passion but can also estrange the artist. Lucrecia’s association with passion, elusiveness, and her role as a potentially destructive muse also recalls some theoretical characteristics of mass culture and reinforces the alienating nature of music.

**Live Performance, Recordings, and the Repression of Memory**

Biralbo’s discourses on the value of music as a live phenomenon throughout the novel also suggest that recorded music can be detrimental to the subject. His appreciation for live performance and professed disdain for recordings inverts the traditional binary that characterizes high and low art as permanent or temporary entities. Biralbo’s idea of valuable music is precisely that which has no ties to the past, expresses the emotion of the present, and disappears the moment that the concert ends. Commenting on the temporal nature of music, he tells the narrator:

—Pero un músico sabe que el pasado no existe…
Esos que pintan o escriben no hacen más que acumular pasado sobre sus hombros, palabras o
cuadros. Un músico está siempre en el vacío. Su música deja de existir justo en el instante en que ha terminado de tocarla. Es el puro presente.

--Pero quedan los discos.--...

--He grabado algunos con Billy Swann. Los discos no son nada. Si son algo, cuando no están muertos, y casi todos lo están, es presente salvado. Ocurre igual con las fotografías. Con el tiempo no hay ninguna que no sea la de un desconocido. Por eso no me gusta guardarlasm. (13)

Biralbo believes that recordings are nothing more than relics of the past, are associated with death, only represent a captured time frame and are far removed from the reality of current experience. Recorded music thereby has little significance for it only recollects by-gone meanings that are no longer relevant to the present. This underscores music’s nature as a temporal signifier and reinforces the idea that actual performance is more valuable than written texts. The act of recording is thus presented as a stale method of expression with little importance, inferior to the spontaneity and emotional intensity of live performance.
Biralbo’s criticism of recorded music also partly stems from the sentimental experience that he associates with not performing, listening to albums and writing letters. When Lucrecia leaves San Sebastián, he stops playing in clubs and teaches music for a period of three years. It is during this time that her memory haunts him as he daily awaits the arrival of her next letter. Her prolonged absence starts to make him feel like he no longer really exists (19), and as her correspondence begins to arrive less and less frequently, he gradually secludes himself at home and spends most of his time writing letters and listening to records: “...se encerraba con llave y ponía discos. Había comprado a plazos un piano vertical, pero lo tocaba muy poco. Prefería tenderse y fumar oyendo música. Nunca en su vida volvería a escuchar tantos discos y a escribir tantas cartas.” (43) The emotions experienced while waiting for Lucrecia to contact him again are thus connected to written culture (recordings and letters), distance and passivity as he takes refuge in listening, reading, and writing letters to while away his time. These texts become the physical reminders of his relationship to Lucrecia, the only concrete objects linking him to the past, and he eventually learns to distrust them as he
realizes that they never make him feel any better. When his last letter comes back to him postmarked “return to sender,” he thinks that their relationship is over, resolves to put the past behind him and starts performing again.²²

Nevertheless, Biralbo’s passion is awakened anew after Lucrecia eventually returns from Berlin and asks him to help her flee San Sebastian. The narrator links recorded music and memory together when his two protagonists drive away from the city together, suggesting that Biralbo purposely brings tapes with him in order to help rekindle their former love:

…miraba de soslayo sus manos que manejaban la radio o subían el volumen de la música cuando

²² When he thinks that he will never see Lucrecia again, Biralbo reconsiders the role of music in his life: “Hasta entonces su música había sido una confesión siempre destinada a alguien, a Lucrecia, a él mismo. Ahora intuía que se le iba convirtiendo en un método de adivinación, casi había perdido el instinto automático de preguntarse mientras tocaba qué pensaría Lucrecia si pudiera escucharlo. Lentamente la soledad se le despoblaba de fantasmas: a veces, un rato después de despertarse, lo asombraba comprobar que había vivido unos minutos sin acordarse de ella. Ni siquiera en sueños la veía, sólo de espaldas, a contraluz, de modo que su rostro se le negaba siempre o era el de otra mujer. Con frecuencia deambulaba en sueños por un Berlin arbitrario y nocturno de iluminados rascacielos y faros rojos y azules sobre las aceras
sonaba una de aquellas canciones que otra vez
eran verdad, porque habían encontrado en el
automóvil de Floro—también es posible que él las
dejara premeditadamente allí—antiguas cintas
grabadas en el Lady Bird de los mejores tiempos,
cuando aún no se conocían, cuando tocaron juntos
Billy Swann y Biralbo y ella se acercó al final y
le dijo que nunca había oído a nadie que tocara
el piano como él. Quiero imaginar que también
oyeron la cinta que fue grabada la noche en que
Malcolm me presentó a Lucrecia y que en el ruido
de fondo de las copas chocadas y las
conversaciones sobre el que se levantó la aguda
trompeta de Billy Swann quedaba un rastro de mi
voz. (98)

The music of the tapes evokes a nostalgic image in the
narrator’s mind that does not correspond to the reality of
the present, a present in which Lucrecia is decidedly cold
and uninterested in engaging in another romantic encounter
with Biralbo. This scene constitutes another imaginative
creation of the narrator in which he attempts to impose his

bruñidas de escarcha, una ciudad de nadie en la que tampoco
estaba Lucrecia.” (54-55)
opinion of recorded music as a meaningful form of expression onto his protagonist. By speculating on the possible significance of the tapes and inventing the details of the action, the narrator once again fictionalizes the discourses of the other characters and undermines the credibility of his text.

Biralbo’s reaction against the “written” and recorded music in general may thereby be related to his alienation from Lucrecia during the period of her absence: as her presence fades, he attempts to wipe away her memory by discarding written culture and returning to the world of performance. In an attempt to erase her from his recollection, he begins to repress his sentimental memories and tells the narrator that he aspires to be like a movie hero that has no personal history. When Billy Swann later encourages him to forsake his sedentary lifestyle and go on tour with him, he decides to give up teaching and start playing again. His decision to leave the past behind and return to performing reveals his persistent appreciation for the temporality, focus on the present, escapist nature.

23 The narrator comments: “...Decía que no se acordaba nunca de San Sebastián: que aspiraba a ser como esos héroes de las películas cuya biografía comienza al mismo tiempo que la acción y no tienen pasado...” (40-41)
and lack of historical consciousness associated with mass culture, and he in turn becomes a metaphorical representative of these qualities. This “return to performance” also reflects his desire to live in an eternal present with no significant ties to the past.

Nevertheless, Biralbo’s attempts to forget the past are eventually undermined as he realizes that memory can never be completely repressed:

Entendió que era mentira el olvido y que la única verdad, desalojada por él mismo de su conciencia desde que abandonó San Sebastián, se había refugiado en los sueños, donde la voluntad y el renkor no podían alcanzarla, en sueños que le presentaban el antiguo rostro y la invulnerable ternura de Lucrecia tal como los había conocido cinco o seis años atrás, cuando ninguno de los dos había perdido aún el coraje ni el derecho al deseo y a la inocencia. (151)

He recognizes that his attempts to ignore the past are futile and that he cannot truly overcome his persistent feelings for Lucrecia. He discovers that dreams can give some meaning to his existence as they enable him to temporarily re-experience some of the amorous feelings that
he has lost touch with over time. Biralbo ultimately understands that memory can be partially recovered through such fictional simulations: even though dreams are fantasies, the illusion that they offer still allows him to momentarily experience love. Dreams are thereby characterized as kinds of fictions that can create meaning and temporarily improve the present.

The novel’s examination of memory’s ability to accurately represent truth indeed forms the crux of its subject matter. Memory throughout is generally portrayed as fallible and mediated by different genres of mass culture (cinema, music, and recordings). Recognizing dreaming as a meaningful creative process undermines Biralbo’s previous discourse on the suppression of memory, and also implies that some existential comfort may be secured through fictional production. The work can thereby be read as a novel of development in which the protagonist evolves from trying to repress history to acknowledging the benefits of its fictional recuperation: memory and fiction are thus inevitably intertwined and can have a positive influence on present experience. The treatment of history and memory throughout the novel thereby suggests that all acts of recollection are necessarily influenced by fictions, but
that they are nevertheless still valid ways of revisiting the past and attempting to decipher reality. In accordance with Vattimo’s assertion that history is made up of a never ending series of intertexts, the novel proposes that even though perception is always mediated by different cultural texts, fictional creation is still a viable way for the subject to achieve some sense of personal agency and spiritual comfort.

Conclusions

The meanings stemming from the various manifestations of mass culture throughout El invierno en Lisboa reinforce many of the novel’s themes and primarily draw attention to the author’s preoccupation with the mediation of perception. Biralbo’s psychological progression from rejecting history and embracing the anti-historical nature of mass culture to acknowledging the role that it can have in the process of recollection marks his implicit approval of the use of fiction in the recuperation of lost memory. Viewed in relation to the historical context of Spain’s transition to democracy, the novel allegorically represents the mentality of a neo-democratic society that repressed
some aspects of its political past in order to facilitate the establishment of the new democracy, addresses the significant presence of the various mass cultural texts that appeared alongside the country’s rapid immersion in a global consumerist economy, and examines some of the positive and negative consequences that these changes may have had on the general public psyche. In aesthetic terms, Muñoz Molina incorporates different elements of mass culture into his novel in order to question the possibility of representing truth through the act of narration. The novel asks whether true agency can be achieved through the creative process even though it recognizes that perception is inevitably mediated by culture.

The narrator, Biralbo and Lucrecia embrace mass culture in various ways and seem to believe that it has a beneficial presence in their lives. However, positive representations of mass culture are also undermined as it is consistently linked with uncertainty, illusion, and displacement throughout. The narrator uses imagery derived from popular texts in an attempt to establish his authorial voice and legitimize his narration, but the imitative nature of his descriptive passages, the stereotypical characterization of the protagonists, and the recognition
of his cinematically mediated thought also emphasize the
intertextual character of his narrative and thus weaken its
credibility. His admitted confusion over what is real and
what is not leads the reader to question the veracity of
the entire narration, which undermines his authority and
casts doubt on fiction’s ability to accurately represent
truth. The ambiguous resolution and the continued
persecution of the protagonists at the end of the novel
only further highlight the inability of mass cultural
discourses to resolve conflict and provide narrative
closure.

Even though they construct their relationship around a
shared affection for films and music, Biralbo and
Lucrecia’s inability to establish a permanent union along
with their continuous displacement strengthens the
connections between mass culture, alienation and
instability. Both characters possess qualities similar to
those theoretically attributed to mass culture: Lucrecia,
(the feminine), is portrayed as a femme fatal who inspires
a dangerous passion that infatuates Biralbo and instigates
his artistic drive. When she is with him, time passes in an
intense present that recalls the temporality and lack of
historical consciousness of mass culture, and she becomes a
symbol of the passion, desire, and fantasy that Biralbo seeks. Significantly, he seems to prefer the values that she represents over the reality of her presence and keeps her image mentally alive by romanticizing their sentimental history. A modified image of the past thus affects his behavior as he consistently runs away from the actuality of the present.

Biralbo is portrayed as an adventurous and cinematic hero who is admired by a narrator that wants to take part in his life experiences. At first, Biralbo embraces popular texts and performance because they enable him to forget about the past and exist in a dream-like present. His criticism of recorded music parallels his desire to repress memory, and for most of the novel he actively suppresses the recuperation of the negative emotions associated with his sentimental history. Believing that the present is more meaningful than the past, he shuns his former identity and tries to live only for the moment. His behavior reflects el pasotismo of the era and his character accordingly may be seen as a metaphorical representative of a Spanish public that largely ignored political discourse during the initial years of the Transition. However, by the end of the novel Biralbo realizes that memory cannot truly be forgotten and
he starts to selectively fictionalize his recollection. His renewed acknowledgement of the importance of memory suggests that although history cannot be totally disregarded, it can be mediated by fiction in order to improve present experience.

The temporal discourses throughout the text also provide insight on the relationship between types of culture and artistic agency. The present is depicted as a meaningful time frame in which subjectivity can be achieved through the act of creative production. In the novel, the dichotomy between past and present parallels the separation of high and low culture in which the former is associated with permanence and the latter with changeability. Here, the more passive actions of listening and reading are delegated to the realm of written culture and the active measures of performing and creating to the oral, implying a rejection of the stability of the high in favor of the temporality associated with the low. As such, performance and narration ultimately give some meaning to the protagonists’ lives in spite of their essentially illusory and transitory natures.

When viewed in relation to some of Molina’s other novels that also challenge the accuracy of historical
memory (Beatus Ille, Beltenebros, and El jinete polaco among others), this analysis shows how El invierno de Lisboa examines the same theme through the exploration of the affiliation between the process of narration and some of the values theoretically associated with mass culture. Biralbo’s animosity towards the past and his deliberations on memory may be interpreted as a metaphor for Spain’s problematic relationship with historical discourse during the first few years of the political transition. Seen in this manner, he becomes symbolic of a newly democratic society that struggles with its own history as it fictionalizes some aspects of its past in an attempt to create a new and progressive present.

The various discourses related to mass culture throughout the novel do not overtly criticize it as an artistic genre, for it is represented both positively and negatively and also forms an integral component of the work’s identity. Instead, they highlight the growing influence that all kinds of cultural texts can have on people and communities across the western world. The novel focuses on mass culture’s role in the fictionalization of memory and on the consequences that such mediation can have on the conscious. Exposing the affinities between art and
reality in a typically postmodern fashion, *El invierno en Lisboa* blurs the boundaries between them to heighten the reader’s awareness of the inevitably textual nature of perception. Since memory is ultimately depicted as necessarily mediated by culture, the novel emphasizes the increasing influence of mass culture in modern society and calls for the reevaluation of all fictions that make up the collage from which contemporary history and knowledge are constructed.
Eduardo Mendicutti’s *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1988) describes the plight of La Madelón, a male transvestite who anxiously listens to the radio on the night of February 23, 1981, when military forces invaded the Spanish parliament in an effort to overthrow the country’s unstable democratic government. As the night progresses, the protagonist talks about her emotional distress before the possible coup d’etat, recounts moments of her personal history, and juxtaposes memories of the emergence of her transvestite persona with some of the political changes that took place in Spain after the death of Franco (1975). In a newly democratic society that advocated political and sexual freedom, the protagonist and her friends initiate the gender switching process by taking hormones and performing as transvestites in an attempt to change both their bodies and frames of mind from masculine to feminine. For La Madelón, the attempted coup of the 23rd thereby represents a political and a personal threat, for if successful she might be obliged to repress her female persona and live as a male, forced to relive an era of life that she has tried very hard to erase from her memory.
The novel explores the unstable sense of identity and emotional distress that a body in physical transition experiences, and as such may be read as symbolic of the unsteady political environment that characterized Spain during the years of the transition to democracy. The psychological trauma of the transvestite in danger of losing her individual freedom reflects the political unrest and anxiety of a divided country whose democratic government was not yet firmly established after the fall of Francoism. By juxtaposing La Madelón’s personal story of emotional and sexual liberation with Spain’s transition

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1 In her 1998 dissertation Gender and Sexuality in Transition: the Novel in Spain from the Early 1960’s to the Late 1980’s, Gema Pilar Pérez Sánchez writes: “Mendicutti brilliantly turns transvestism into a metaphor for the newly democratic Spain... transvestism is the true condition of Spanish democracy. This is exemplified by La Madelón’s self-characterization of hers and La Begum’s transgenderism. Having confronted the real, life-threatening implications of the potential success of the coup, which would mean a reversal to a fascist dictatorship, Madelón explains how it helped them realize “cómo somos todas. Del pasado tan chiquitísimo que tenemos, y de lo espantoso que eso es. De lo mal que nos encaja el medio cuerpo de cintura para arriba, con el medio cuerpo de cintura para abajo” (102)... This negotiation of contending political/sexual forces is often painful, jarring, and confusing. Yet... [La Madelón] deals with her contradictions, assumes them, and festively (in the true spirit of la movida) concludes that “mejor pintarse el ojo, plantarse clavel reventón en el canalillo de los pechos, hacerse la sorda y salir corriendo para los toros, que se hace tarde” (103).” (157-58)
from dictatorship to democracy, Mendicutti creates a metaphor of an insecure body that is in danger of collapsing: the transvestite could be forced to return to being “male” and Spain to the conservative practices of Francoism. The novel thereby metaphorically exemplifies many Spaniard’s fear that a totalitarian government could emerge anew and counteract some of the political reforms that were initiated during the Transition. The protagonist’s fear of the renewed sexual repression that might accompany such a political change highlights the continued existence and underlying presence of the ideological conservatism typical of the Franco regime.

Besides allegorically addressing the politics of the Transition, the novel examines the mental workings of a protagonist whose schizophrenic personality exemplifies a postmodern subject that is torn between multiple and conflicting discourses. By depicting the emergence of La Madelón’s feminine persona and her attempts to repress masculinity, the text reflects on the concept of gendered identity and on the influence that mass culture can have in its construction. Mass culture becomes of central importance to the creation of La Madelón’s new identity and
she actively embraces it in order to help her establish a feminine sense of self.

To date there has been little criticism dedicated to Mendicutti’s work in general despite the many interesting possibilities that it offers. However, critics are beginning to recognize _Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera_ as more than just a work of light literature because it addresses questions of gendered identity and political change in innovative and unique ways. In 1998, Gema Pilar Pérez Sánchez viewed the figure of the transvestite in the novel as a metaphorical representative of the newly democratic Spanish identity. She proposes that by constructing his novel around such a figure, Mendicutti ultimately seeks the peaceful coexistence of different social groups within the young democracy: “Through the transvestite, Mendicutti… delivers a brilliant lesson in peaceful, democratic coexistence… the goal of democratic Spain should be to accept and live with its differences—be they political, sexual, socio-economic, or otherwise.”

(158)²

² Gema Pilar Pérez Sánchez explains: “This representation of the transvestite functions as an allegorical representation of the incipient democracy of the late 1970’s, a regime that had to negotiate the opposing forces of the old,
On a similar note, in “Dragging Spain into the “Post-Franco” Era: Transvestism and National Identity in *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera.*” (2000), Patrick Paul Garlinger considers the validity of the metaphorical use of the transvestite as an icon of Spanish identity during the Transition. In his study he highlights criticism that has tended to view the figure of the transvestite in two ways, either as a symbol of liberation from the conservative past or as an illusory figure that only superficially covers up an underlying Francoist discourse. Garlinger deconstructs this binary to propose that the metaphor is unable to accurately characterize the contemporary subject, and that such corporal comparisons over simplify the concept of identity. (378) For Garlinger, the novel underscores the modernist, conservative Spain ... and the new, postmodern, progressive Spain.” (157)

Garlinger writes: “The use of drag as a metaphor to reconceptualize Spanish national identity tends to understand the transvestite in binary terms: before Franco/after Franco, old/new, modern/postmodern, authentic/artificial... the drag metaphor appears, on the one hand, as a sign of liberation—a border-crossing that signifies agency and newly constructed identities—or, on the other, as a mere masquerade that cloaks an underlying identity. As a result, the postmodern transvestite represents alternately a celebratory emblem of a Spain finally breaking free of its repressive past (Garland, Labanyi) or a deceptive sign of superficial changes behind which hides a fundamentally unchanged Spain.” (365)
need for a new type of ontological discourse, one that views the Spanish collective psyche as an entity still in the process of evolution. He affirms that by depicting the ambiguous metaphor of a drag identity, Mendicutti’s novel breaks down traditional binaries and represents identity as a constantly changing process.⁴

Both studies explore the use of the transvestite as a figure of national identity to underline some of the social and political issues that the novel examines. Because of its consistent use of and reference to different mass cultural texts, *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* may also be studied with regards to the cultural theory outlined in the introduction of this dissertation. This chapter will expand upon the work initiated by Pérez Sanchez and Garlinger by discussing the role of mass culture in the novel and relating it to La Madelón’s changing sexuality in order to examine the influence that it can have on the construction of identity. The figure of the transvestite becomes a symbol for a new political body that struggles to

⁴ Garlinger comments: “By underscoring the inherent ambiguity of drag as a metaphor, Mendicutti suggests a possible new approach beyond the discourse of “post-Franco,” one that eschews facile dichotomies to read and interpret the complex and dynamic panorama that is contemporary Spain.” (377-78)
establish a stable ideology within the context of a newly democratic social system. As La Madelón embraces various sources of mass culture in an attempt to solidify her feminine identity, she simultaneously upholds patriarchal norms that subordinate women to men and thereby loses the autonomy that she seeks through the process of becoming female. By depicting the transvestite's obsession with mass culture and ultimate conformity to established social norms, the novel underscores some of its negative characteristics and calls for more reflection on the potential influences of mass culture on the psyche.

**Cinema and the Mediation of Perception**

Like the other works examined so far, there are several allusions to the similarities between reality and the cinema throughout the novel, and the protagonists often relate their lives to the characters and events of the films that they watch. La Madelón and her friends like to pretend that they are movie stars, which reveals their affection for the movies and also implies that performance is an important aspect of their transvestite identities. They frequently use cinematic references when describing
their past, as when La Begum learns about Bagdad from a film, feels drawn towards the Middle East and consequently reinvents her personal history by claiming that she was born in Iraq. The movies introduce her to such an attractive alternate reality that she seeks to recreate it by comparing herself to film characters, idolizing the Arab world, and eventually developing a strong erotic attraction to all men of Arabic descent. For La Begum, the melodrama provided by the cinema thus influences the construction of her feminine identity as she repeatedly compares herself to film characters in an effort to escape her former and masculine reality.

La Madelón also describes reality in cinematic terms and often compares life to movie characters or to scenes from specific films. A good example of this emerges when

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5 The protagonist explains: “...[La Begum] se monta unos embustes exageradísimos y dice que nació en Bagdad, porque cuando chica vio una película por María Montez que pasaba allí y se le quedó clavadito.” (62)

6 La Madelón later describes La Begum’s tendency to forget about the real world while watching a movie: “...a ella lo que le pasa cuando va al cine es que se mete mucho en los argumentos y en seguida se ve de protagonista, y entonces ya puede venir un jeque de esos que mean petróleo, que ella ni caso....” (89)
she relates La Begum’s life to a movie about Victor Hugo’s daughter:

...pero ella dijo que le seguiría hasta el fin del mundo y cruzó el Estrecho muy dramática, como la hija de Victor Hugo, Adele, en aquella película tan preciosa; la vimos en el Carretas, y La Begum se pasó todo el rato llorando, sin echarle cuenta al ajetreo que allí siempre hay, en las últimas filas. Qué dramática la vida de Adele Hugo... Al salir, La Begum, con el corazón encogido por culpa de la llantera y todo el rímel corrido, que parecía el velo de la Verónica, sólo pudo decir: <<Mi vivo retrato>>, y se echó otra vez a llorar...” (48-49)

La Begum identifies, empathizes and cries along with the protagonist as she gets caught up in the sentimental intensity of the film. Her love of this kind of melodrama is further reflected in her apolitical demeanor throughout the text as she constantly seeks out excitement and emotion instead of political security in times of crisis. La Madelón sums up her friend’s uncommitted attitude by describing her relatively calm behavior on the night of the 23rd, when she seems to be unaware of the frightening
consequences that a successful coup might bring about: "A ella todo lo que se le ocurría es que de allí podía salir un peliculón de los de no olvidar nunca, con el Mambrú aquél haciendo de Burlan Caster... en De aquí a la eternidad, o mejor todavía Errol Flynn en Murieron con las botas puestas..." (88) Viewing the evening’s events as if they were those of a feature film, La Begum does not realize the severity of the attempted coup and only thinks about its cinematic qualities, revealing how the movies have conditioned her to seek out sensational events and ignore those that are non-spectacular. She thereby personifies the spectacle and lack of intellectual depth characteristic of mass culture as she consistently embraces the melodrama of the cinema.

As in La función Delta and El invierno en Lisboa, the multiple references to movies throughout the text along with the similarities between the protagonists’ lives and the cinematic realm illustrate how mass culture can have a significant effect on the subject’s way of thinking. The novel’s depiction of such a mediated reality underlines the cinema’s escapist nature and also shows that perception can be considerably influenced by the consumption of popular texts. Films in particular produce images and content that
can become so ingrained in the mind that they eventually function as paradigms of learning, suggesting that mass culture may inevitably alter the construction of thought and the manner in which the general public acquires knowledge.

The Dual Identity of a Transitional Body

If 19th century critics associated mass culture with the lower body/ femininity and high culture with the intellect/ masculinity, then the figure of the transvestite represents an interesting inversion of this cultural dichotomy. Whereas La Madelón’s lower body is inescapably masculine, her psychological outlook is purposefully feminine and this disparity creates a troubled figure plagued by a contrasting and conflicting sense of identity.7

7 La Madelón describes an article that discusses the peculiar plight of the transvestite: “Y es que en aquel momento tuve yo otro bajón de la moral... y en el fondo era como si ni siquiera supiera a ciencia cierta quién era yo. La Plumona lo dejó escrito en aquel reportaje tan grandísimo que escribió sobre nosotras en su periódico: <<Ellas encarnan, como nadie, la tragedia y la gloria de la imprecisión, del tránsito, el drama del trasvase de una tierra a otra, el dudoso y pícaro vodevil del balanceo entre un sexo y otro. Ellas son puro trasvase, puro balance, la quintaesencia de la emigración, desterradas españolitas de a pie, criaturas movedizas y errantes,
She often refers to the tension between her biological masculinity and feminine mentality and calls herself a “half creature,” a mythological centaur or siren destined to live in a marginalized social arena (25). She notes that even her manner of speaking reflects her ambiguously gendered identity: “Ahora lo digo todo mezclado. Una fatalidad. El destino de una que es así. El destino de una que es ser mitad y mitad; pero no en orden—como las sirenas, como los centauros—, qué va, qué más quisiera yo. Lo nuestro es ser mitad y mitad, pero a la rebujina, para qué engañarse.” (25) La Madelón is unable to escape her biological maleness and cannot resolve the tension between her two genders in spite of her hormone treatments and conscious efforts to repress her masculine past.

By using the metaphor of the centaur and siren, the protagonist tries to legitimise her transvestite condition by associating it with strong and magical creatures of classical mythology.\(^8\) However, the transvestite’s body is

\[\text{exaltados nenúfares que flotan en las aguas más turbias del día y de la noche>>.}(81)\]

\(^8\) Calling herself a mythological monster also recalls the plight of the female according to Gilbert and Gubar, who theorize that in the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century there was a tendency to view the feminine condition in a duplicitous manner, both as the angel of the house and as irrational monster.
not as clearly divided as that of the mythological figures, for no real boundaries exist and the two genders do not live in harmony with each other. This corporal ambiguity leads the self through a continuous state of fluctuation that results in a high degree of emotional insecurity. La Madelón thereby attempts to use her intellect to promote femininity and repress her masculine lower body, but she simultaneously recognizes that she will most likely never really be able to experience a sense of feminine completeness.⁹

The psychological tension experienced by the transvestites also stems from their perceived lack of personal histories: realizing that their feminine selves are relatively young, they acknowledge that their new personas have no legitimate pasts or established historical

⁹ Another example of the corporal tension experienced by the transvestite is evidenced when La Madelón describes the strange odor that emanates from her body on the night of the 23rd: “Y entonces, como si estuviera removiendo un poco más de la cuenta, me dio como un olor raro, me vino al pronto un olor a sobaquera y polvos de arroz, a crema de afeitar y laca barata—no me puedo explicar por qué; nosotras usamos siempre de la mejor--, a tabaco negro y esmalte de uñas, a café cargado y a <<Charlie>> de Revlon. Era un olor extraño y de lo más confuso. Y yo creo que me salía del cuerpo. Era como si, con aquella inquietud, toda mi persona, de la cabeza a los pies, me bizqueara, se me torciera un poco y dejara escapar aquel olor tan raro.” (39)
records. They are still officially recognized as male on their national identity cards and consequently must explain their female appearances in order to be able to vote, pay taxes, and participate in other legal or state-sponsored activities. While contemplating her missing feminine history, La Madelón again claims to feel like a monster:

Es que llega el momento, cuando una se siente mal y hasta con ganas de acabar para siempre, en que ya no sabes ni cómo hablar contigo misma. Parece que estás hablando con un monstruito que eres mitad tú y mitad otra cosa. Un bicho de feria que tuvo una vida que ya no es suya de verdad, porque ha cambiado tanto que, cuando se acuerda de lo que fue, parece que está cogiendo lo que no es suyo, pero no ha cambiado del todo, y por eso una no puede, por más que quiera, cortar por lo sano, olvidar y empezar de cero. (103)

10 Contemplating her feminine persona’s lack of a past, La Madelón comments: “A veces lo pienso, y es como si no fuera conmigo: La Madelón no tuvo juventud, nació con la verde....” (10-11) She also brings up the subject when describing La Begum’s emotional stress: “La desdichada parecía darse cuenta de pronto de cómo es ella de verdad. De cómo somos todas. Del pasado tan chiquitísimo que tenemos, y de lo espantoso que eso es. De lo mal que nos encaja el medio cuerpo de cintura para arriba, con el medio cuerpo de cintura para abajo.” (102)
She views herself as a mixed entity that has changed so much that she is unable to think clearly or accurately remember the past. The transvestite’s sense of identity is thus depicted as unstable and in a constant process of reconstruction. She is consequently confused, self-conscious, and no longer has a firm grasp on her emotional or ideological development.

The novel’s presentation of a transvestite that so questions its autonomy and attempts to repress its past even though it recognizes the impossibility of ever completely letting it go may be interpreted as a metaphor for a newly democratic Spain that also tries to shed its ties to a former identity but is ultimately unable to do so. As Garlinger suggests, the figure of the transvestite as depicted in the novel should not be regarded as a symbol of the general Spanish consciousness but rather as a representative transitional entity that struggles with a relatively new and constantly changing ideology. The use of an ambiguously gendered body that is evolving towards a specific gender thus becomes an appropriate symbol of a country that is still trying to solidify a new political system after having gone through the initial stages of a transition from dictatorship to democracy.
In allegorical terms, the figure of the transvestite in the novel also personifies the deconstructed binary between masculinity/high culture and femininity/mass culture, resulting in a multi-faceted persona that exemplifies many of the typical characteristics of postmodern theory. La Madelón represses her former self and feels powerless before the thought of having to return to legally enforced maleness. Her feminine persona is linked with the lack of historical consciousness associated with mass culture, whereas her former self, connected to masculinity and totalitarianism, is intentionally repressed in an effort to solidify her new identity. Despite her desire to shed her maleness, she acknowledges the coexistence of distinct discourses in her being, which suggests that binary divisions between gendered identities as well as between types of culture are incapable of accurately defining and representing reality. Identity and culture are thus characterized as fluid entities that are in a constant state of fluctuation. The transvestite thereby symbolizes a breakdown of binary ontological paradigms and demonstrates that the construction of both reality and identity is a never-ending process.
Even so, La Madelón is unhappy as a divided creature and wants to establish a firm identity as a female. As such, she attempts to further strengthen her feminine self by embracing different mass cultural texts that in her opinion epitomize models of ideal femininity. The transvestites thus imitate various female icons physically, psychologically, and through performance as they try to solidify their new identities and repress their masculine pasts. The protagonists seem to believe that mimicking the behavior of famous women will help them to firmly establish their own female personae. However, by emulating such figures, they also involuntarily subjugate themselves to established social norms that undermine the feminine liberation that they seek. Mass culture thereby only provides an illusion of autonomy that does not really liberate the protagonists from longstanding and oppressive patriarchal practices.

**Mass Cultural Icons as Representatives of Female Strength**

Allusions to famous actresses and well-known women abound throughout the work. At first, these references seem to be of a frivolous nature, but on closer inspection they
have a significance that goes beyond La Madelón’s simple affection for female celebrities. She finds many of the traits embodied by her mass cultural icons attractive and they thus become role models that she emulates in order to try to strengthen her feminine persona. This is initially evident in the novel when she feels comforted by the feminine voices that she hears on the radio and characterizes them as marvelous and divine tropical birds (26). While at first this comparison seems somewhat negative because of the allusion to a group of gossiping women, La Madelón finds satisfaction in the sound of their voices and depends on them to keep her up to date about the events of the coup. She thereby looks up to these radio personalities as reliable and confident figures who can comfort her in times of emotional distress. In a reverential fashion, she describes the female announcers of Radio Nacional as courageous and punctual:

En seguida puse el loro, o sea Radio Nacional ... y hay que ver cómo son siempre de puntuales esas mujeres de Radio Nacional... puntuales hasta

11 Describing the voices of the radio, La Madelón proclaims: "... al segundo salieron charlando como cotorras medio histéricas, pero divinas, todas esas mujeres tan maravillosas de Radio Intercontinental.” (26)
morir. Qué coraje. Allí estaba yo, con el corazón en un puño, arrugadita como un perrillo enfermo, lo mismo que la Bautista en Locura de amor junto al ataúd de su hombre—que menudo pendón tenía que ser el gachó, todo hay que decirlo—y las de Radio Nacional impertérritas, oye, hay que ser sangregordas. (9)

In contrast to the strong radio personalities, La Madelón compares herself to a movie character that is emotionally distraught, physically wrinkled and upset about the death of her husband. She relates to the image of weakness depicted in the film because she also finds herself in an insecure position and is afraid of the imminent demise of her political freedom. The contrast between the perceived strength of the radio hostesses next to her own weakness suggests that La Madelón desires to internalize the self confidence that she associates with the media voices because they exude courage and determination in the midst of a politically dangerous situation. Her initial reaction before the coup is one of cowardice and fear, but as she continues to listen to the radio, she becomes less scared and attempts to convince herself that she can also be strong.
Appropriating this confidence, the protagonist later fantasizes about defying danger and claims that she would gladly perform her show if her public wanted to see her in spite of the current political situation:

...Y si aquella noche, con la zapatiesta tan gordísima que se había armado, con lo peligroso que tenía que ser todo, Federico me llamaba en cualquier momento y me decía: <<Madelón, aquí hay público que ha pagado su entrada y hace falta que vengas>>, pues servidora iría como si tal cosa, maravillosa, deslumbrante, con mi número hecho como siempre, sin una prisa de más, mi número de Marlene Dietrich, que es una sensación, una cosa medio morbosa, muy sexual, pero con mucho gusto, y de aparecer los civiles tendrían que echarme de la pista a empujones o esperar como lobas a que terminara el número. Mi arte para mí es una cosa sagrada. (63)

Calling her show a “sacred art,” she finds emotional satisfaction and courage through the erotic imitation of a famous actress, and performance thus becomes a stabilizing activity that enhances her self-confidence. In this imagined scenario, La Madelón acquires a power that she
thinks will allow her to confront the social hardships that a successful coup might bring. Show business thereby becomes an empowering ideology that subdues a disturbing political reality and enables La Madelón to overcome her fear of state persecution.

Nevertheless, the idea of empowerment through performance is also challenged by several problematic passages. La Madelón describes the personal tragedy of the folk singer Conchita Bautista, a self-assured woman who went into a period of severe emotional crisis after losing a child. The protagonist attempts to convince herself that if a similarly devastating situation happened to her, she would be able to get through it by relying on the power and confidence that she can attain through performance.\textsuperscript{12} This comparison is significant because the figure of the folk singer was popularly known as a strong and unyielding type of woman, who as a mass cultural icon represented female agency, character, and a high level of independence that

\textsuperscript{12} Contemplating this possibility, La Madelón writes: 
"...siempre he pensado que, si alguna vez me pasara un drama espantoso, un drama de étos que te dejan hecha mixto y como sonámbula durante meses—como a la Conchita Bautista, cuando se le murió su única hija de doce años, que era lo único que tenía; algo así—, servidora saldría a escena..." (63)
was not shared by the average Spanish woman in the post war years. La Madelón accordingly looks up to this kind of model as she struggles to repress masculinity and achieve her own sense of autonomy. However, her reference to Conchita’s breakdown underscores the very real possibility that such a figure might also lose her self-sufficiency, for despite her apparent strength, she is just as prone to experience the same kinds of emotional insecurity that La Madelón tries to repress. The protagonist thereby aspires to distance herself from this example by trying to confront and overcome possible oppression through her own acts of performance.

On another level, the role of the folk singer in the novel is also significant due to its political implications. Even though the themes of the traditional folk song often included infidelity and taboo subjects that would normally have been considered morally subversive by the censor, Carmen Martín Gaite, Manual Vásquez Montalbán, and Jo Labanyi have suggested that the Franco regime appropriated and molded the figure of the female folk singer into an icon of political propaganda. Taking

13 For different perspectives on the use of folk figures as political propaganda, see Carmen Martín Gaite’s *Usos*
advantage of its popularity with the general public, the regime used it to promote national unity, pride, and ideal femininity while they attempted to unite and rebuild the country after the Civil War, and accordingly the folk singer became a representative of the uniqueness and strength associated with the traditional Spanish state. Consequently, by comparing herself to Conchita Bautista, who represents both a weakened feminine presence and the ideal Spanish woman, the protagonist inadvertently supports national unity and the conservative ideology practiced by the country’s former oppressive political regime.

La Madelón also aspires to be like the German bombshell Marlene Dietrich, a well-known sex symbol admired for her beauty and sensuality across the western world. By imitating Dietrich, she attempts to seduce her audience and invites her male public to visually ravage her. She thereby voluntarily turns herself into an object of masculine desire, which contradicts her proclaimed desire for emancipation and implies that she really wants to be subordinated to male authority. The excitement that she
feels by being carried off stage by the Civil Guards also suggests that she finds the power represented by uniformed officials sexually exhilarating. La Madelón’s emulation of sex icons and her voluntary submission to masculine desire thus render her claim that performance is liberating somewhat untrustworthy. By depending on the masculine gaze, she inadvertently upholds traditional gender hierarchies by taking on the role of the female who needs male attention in order to find happiness.

Conchita Bautista and Marlene Dietrich are only two of the female icons that are mentioned in passing throughout the novel. Although the movie stars and famous women that La Madelón idealizes on one hand help her attempt to suppress masculinity by providing gendered models to emulate, they are also problematic because they almost always adhere to patriarchal standards that define and limit feminine autonomy. Mass cultural icons throughout are thereby depicted as misleading because they do not afford any real power to the subject and instead encourage adherence to established social norms. In this manner popular icons promote subordinated positions for women

despite the illusion of agency and equality that they promise. La Madelón’s desire to be like these figures thus represents her intrinsic longing to conform to paternalistic standards even within the context of a newly liberal and democratic society.

Uniforms and Masculine Authority Figures

Throughout the text, La Madelón often talks about her erotic attraction to uniformed men. Patrick Garlinger writes that the military uniform, like the transvestite’s clothing, functions as a code for identity and thereby should symbolize the conservative and patriarchal values that the armed forces usually promote. However, because soldiers become the objects of homosexual desire in the novel, Garlinger proposes that the uniform loses its authority to represent a specific sexual orientation and thus cannot definitively represent the traditional principles of the state. Even so, La Madelón seems to be attracted to the military uniform because it is associated with masculinity and power, which again suggests that she
intrinsically wants to be subjected to a strong patriarchal authority and become the object of masculine desire.  

Powerful figures such as the King, Nazis, and soldiers throughout the work wear uniforms and represent the authority that frequently attracts the protagonist’s attention. La Madelón expresses her attraction to these men so often that the reader begins to question her motives and wonders if she truly seeks political emancipation or if she really is more interested in satisfying her sexual desire. As she admits, uniforms consistently catch her eye:

*Ay, los uniformes... A mí es que me privan los uniformes. Desde siempre. De toda la vida. Desde que era un renacuajo y se me iban los ojos detrás*

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14 Garlinger explains what he believes to be the function of the uniform in the novel: “She [La Madelón] recognizes that the state dresses its military figures in the same manner as the transvestite uses clothing: as a code for identity. This interpretation of military garb undermines the ability of the state to use uniforms as a guarantor of subjectivity, since it shows that the military uniform cannot ensure that the individual wearing it is free from homosexual desire (whether as object or as desiring subject). While the state might require heterosexuality of the individual wearing the uniform, the military uniform certainly cannot guarantee it... Her political resistance is risked in part because of her homosexual identity, which perceives the military figure as an object of sexual desire... La Madelón, for all her apparent opposition to the military coup, cannot help expressing her desire for the very same men who would detain and reject her as a homosexual subject.” (374)
del municipal que dirigía el tráfico en la calle Ancha, frente a la plaza Cabildo. ¡Todo por un uniforme! Mi reino de plumas y ligueros, de cremas carísimas, de perfumes, de importación, por un uniforme... Ay, los uniformes... La Madelón es dulce y complaciente, La Madelón a todos quiere igual; da su amor a todo el frente, del soldado al general. Ay, La Madelón: muerta en la bañera por un paracaidista. (58)

Here, La Madelón claims that she would voluntarily give up everything to be with a uniformed man, even objects important to her female identity such as skin creams, garters, and “feathers.” Upon seeing soldiers, she becomes weak in the knees, sweet and complacent; she forgets about rank and claims to love the entire army equally, revealing that she is not really interested in the power hierarchy of the military order but rather in becoming a sexual object. This attraction also suggests that she psychologically upholds traditional structures that afford power to males and subordinate females. She wants to depend on men for security, for so doing she thinks that she can reaffirm her feminine identity and solidify her position in the accepted social order. Her desire to pertain to a hierarchy in which
men remain in control is thereby depicted as stronger than her liberal ideology and professed need of autonomy.

Another image associated with the uniform throughout the work is the Fascist as an icon of sexual aggression and physical strength. On several occasions La Madelón characterizes the Nazis as uncompromising totalitarian forces whose uniformed soldiers impose their authority on all weaker beings. Despite repeated allusions to the violence that accompanies their presence, the fascists are consistently depicted as sexually attractive. The protagonist juxtaposes her fear of a Nazi invasion with allusions to intense sexual pleasure, indicating that she is intrigued by the fascists’ sadistic behavior while she simultaneously fears them. When waiting for La Begum to come home on the night of the 23rd, La Madelón fantasizes that her friend is being tortured by a group of Nazis in a concentration camp:

Así que, como no había noticias, con algo tenía que entretenerme, y me dio por pensar que La Begum estaba ya camino de un campo de concentración. Una es así de novelera. En seguida pienso en cosas horribles... casi siempre pienso en cosas de mucho sufrir y me encanta. De modo que
ya veía yo a mi Begum hecho unos zorros, sin pintar y sin nada, rodeadita de porquería y de unos soldados alemanes maravillosos de guapos, y ella en los huesos, demacrada, zarrapastrosa, pero divina a pesar de todo, lo mismo que Vanesa Redgrave en Julia, qué mujer tan ideal. (13)

She daydreams about being persecuted by attractive Nazis. Rather than denouncing them for hurting her friend, La Madelón calls them handsome and compares La Begum to a famous movie star, describing her as “divine” and “ideal” even in her suffering state. As such, any criticism of fascism practically disappears behind her rather positive portrayal of the soldier’s physical appearance. Even though only a daydream, her thoughts reveal that military men remain the primary object of her erotic attention and that she finds the idea of torture at the hand of a strong male exciting. In her fantasy, torture thus becomes trivialized by the possibility of sexual pleasure, which displaces the violent nature of the perpetrators and turns them into admirable and even attractive figures.

Similarly, when La Madelón thinks that the coup could be successful, she once again associates the Nazis with sexual gratification: “Porque seguro que aquellos salían de
allí como los nazis—que hay que ver cómo eran, qué barbaridad--, organizando cacerías de maricas y unas orgías fenomenales, regando los geranios y los jazmines hasta achicharrarlos con la sangre hirviendo de los judíos, los gitanos y las reinas de toda España.” (17) She fantasizes about engaging in sexual relations with her potential captors and gets excited by the thought of being involved in their phenomenal orgies. La Madelón’s fascination for sadomasochism thus reveals that physical stimulation is more important to her than her liberal ideology, which yet again undermines her quest for feminine autonomy.

The protagonist’s representation of sadomasochism recalls imagery derived from some of the erotic movies that started to become widely popular in Spain during the initial years of the Transition.15 Since cinematic eroticism was forbidden throughout the dictatorship, many considered this type of movie to be subversive and therefore potentially liberating from the confining ideologies of the state. After Franco’s death, erotic films started to be

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15 The Spanish premiere of Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter* in 1975 was one of the films that seems to be paralleled in the novel by La Madelón’s fantasy. In the film, an ex-prisoner of a concentration camp meets a former prison guard after the war and they engage in another sadomasochistic sexual relationship.
produced in such large numbers that they eventually became readily available to the consuming public. Consequently, society's affection for these films may have resulted in the subconscious trivialization of their sadistic imagery: sadism became spectacle and movies turned into sources of sexual pleasure as the violent actions depicted on film were often seen as fictitious and dismissed as harmless. Frederic Von Gelder discusses a similar phenomenon in an article about the treatment of the Holocaust by various forms of mass media:

> In his analysis of Visconti's *The Damned*, Avisar captures something essential about all mass media treatment of the Holocaust: ... *The Damned* has contributed to a distinct kind of fascination with the Nazi era, a new cultural trend which sees in Nazism a source for cheap romantic indulgences and aesthetic attractions. Visconti's work, undoubtedly inadvertently, has inspired numerous works which exalt in the perception of a period with uncensored behavior, and yet a period characterized by a special attention toward aesthetics and quasi-ritual ceremonies... In other words, this approach to Nazism offers
sensual, or instinctual, stimulations, and then their gratification through the medium of artistic verisimilitude, which also ensures a comfortable distance from the real terror of Nazism because of the inherent playfulness of the discourse of art.

The most conspicuous demonstration of this trend can be found in a branch of pornography, including x-rated movies and dime novels, which makes extensive use of World War II settings and Nazi paraphernalia to play upon the pornographic imagination. The examples range from highbrow works like Lina Wertmuller's *Seven Beauties* and Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* to the cheap sexploitations of the porno industry. These works feature the interactions of Eros and Thanatos, sex and violence, uncensored gratification and brutal oppression, which in the historical case of Nazism were also particularly demonstrated in a special concern with biological reproduction coupled with the creation of factories of death. (162-163)
In her fantasies, La Madelón evokes the imagery associated with this genre of film in order to relieve her fear of persecution and help her mentally escape from the impending dangers that might be brought about by a successful political coup. She correlates sexual pleasure with physical brutality in her daydreams and thereby reveals her inherent willingness to submit to totalitarian forces. Her obsession with the Nazis may thus be related to the images prevalent in erotic films of the era that inadvertently promoted the trivialization of violence, sexual aggression, and fascist ideology.

La Madelón’s desire to submit to masculine authority is further demonstrated when she and her friends decide to attend a Falange rally in Madrid’s Plaza de Oriente, where right wing groups often held political demonstrations during the Transition. Although the presence of transvestites at such a gathering might seem to undermine the political ideology of the demonstrators, the real motive behind the protagonists’ attendance appears to be that they are physically attracted to the participants, and as such, their activism becomes of secondary importance to the possibility of gratifying their sexual desire. Since the fascists represent physical strength, brutal sexuality
and authority for La Madelón, her attraction to them seems to contradict the liberal ideology that she claims to promote as a member of the Communist Party.¹⁶

The autonomous and feminine self that La Madelón tries to construct is thus restricted by her inherent desire to conform to paternalistic tradition. Her use of clothing as a code of identity also suggests that she longs to become an accepted member of a conventionally patriarchal community. This is perhaps best illustrated at the end of the novel when she attends a victory demonstration dressed in a conservative manner:

Y para aquella manifestación tan Hermosa del Viernes, 27 de febrero, servidora se puso un sastre de corte la mar de sobrio, solapas anchas, hombres un pelín marcados, la chaqueta más bien

¹⁶ Upon deciding to attend the rally, La Madelón writes: “Y es que fue, hace dos o tres años, que mejor ni me acuerdo, uno de esos domingos en que todo el loquerío facha se arremolinaba en la Plaza de Oriente, que hay que ver cómo eran, pero La Soraya decía que podía ser la mar de excitante, que toda esa gente suele ser la mar de guapa, que hasta los había con unos uniformes a lo nazi que a ella le ponían la carne de gallina, y con unos perrazos de espanto, que yo no me explico cómo no acabamos hechas piriñaca, y La Soraya, medio histérica de miedo y de gusto—que hay que ver la marcha tan rarísima que a veces se busca la gente--, explicaba que en el fondo todo eso a ella le rejuvenecía.” (93)
corta y con un poquito de frunce, la falda cuatro
dedos por debajo de las rodillas, y un cinturón
del mismo tejido: pura lana virgen, a cuadros
príncipe de Gales. Me veía yo irreprochable.

(158)
She now chooses her clothes because they are purposefully
non remarkable, which implies that she no longer desires to
attract attention but rather prefers to present herself as
a normal middle class woman. Her decision to modify what
she wears from a spectacular expression of transvestitism
to a more conservative and less conspicuous outfit suggests
that she now favors a more traditional kind of image and
does not want to stick out in the crowd. Her change in
attire also undermines her professed liberality as it
reveals her final rejection of subversive representation in
favor of a more socially acceptable behavior.

For La Madelón, becoming a normally dressed woman
represents another step towards the ultimate resolution of
her identity crisis. Alongside the victory of democracy as
a political system, her conservative outfit signifies the
possible triumph of her feminine identity over her
masculine past. At the end of the novel she believes that
she has overcome her psychological trauma and no longer
feels the need to wear drag queen clothes. With the reestablishment of democracy, she thinks that she is closer to being accepted as a woman and delights in her new “freedom” to be middle class. Her change in clothing thus symbolizes her psychological evolution from subversive liberality to acceptable conservatism. However, to reach this point she had to sacrifice her progressive political agenda in order to fit in and conform to preexisting patriarchal standards.

La Madelón’s affection for King Juan Carlos also reveals that she depends on a strong male figure for emotional and political security. On the night of the 23rd, she is filled with a sense of confidence when she sees him appear on television:

En cuanto apareció el rey, con su uniforme de capitán general, que le sienta de morir, y esa seriedad tan voluntariosa, pero al mismo tiempo tan juvenil, tan de muchacho sensato y responsable, una seriedad que a mí me da mucha ternura... en cuanto me miró a los ojos como si no hubiera otra persona en este mundo—que luego La Begum me confesó que ella había sentido lo mismo, como si de pronto se hubiera quedado a
solas con él--, y en aquellos segundos que tardó en empezar a hablar, a mí es que me volvió la tranquilidad al cuerpo, y eso que aún no sabía nadie lo que iba a decir. Pero a él, nada más verle, se le notaba una decisión y unas ganas de hacerlo bien que ya eso sólo te daba confianza.

(121)

La Madelón’s reaction shows that she considers Juan Carlos to be a powerful man who can restore stability, protect the fledgling democracy, and permit the personal and sexual liberation of all of his subjects. Because he looks young and serious on television, she feels almost a maternal affection for him and proudly reacts as if her young son has saved the day by resolving a serious problem in a calm and dignified manner. By defending democracy, the protagonist believes that the King tacitly approves of her alternative lifestyle and will be tolerant of homo and transexuality. She begins to view him as a type of personal savior who will protect all Spaniards despite their lack of homogeneity.17

17 She really believes that the King will be tolerant of homosexuality: “Cuando él dice—y lo ha dicho montones de veces—que quiere ser el rey de todas, una por supuesto que se lo cree... Yo estoy convencida—convencidísima—de que
Nevertheless, Juan Carlos’ uniform is the first thing to catch her attention, which again raises questions about the motives behind her affection and suggests that her political ideology falls secondary to her desire for physical gratification. Ironically, despite the democratic values that she believes the King represents, he is also a symbol of patriarchal power that embodies the paternalistic hierarchy of historical Spain, and is thus linked to a traditional past that subordinated women to male authority.

Clothing and uniforms throughout the novel thereby function as codes of identity that represent determined social roles and gender specific modes of behavior. While La Madelón originally carefully selects her attire in order to construct a sexually exciting female persona, she constantly evolves and wears different kinds of things at distinct moments of her feminine history. Initially using provocative clothes to cause a sensation and exaggerate her otherness, she later strives to establish a more respectable image by rejecting her former garments in favor of more traditional ones. This not only highlights her
desire to be socially accepted but also implies that she finds her flagrantly transvestite persona emotionally unsatisfactory, for even though it gathered a lot of attention from a certain public, it was not generally well received by society at large and could not provide her with any sense of existential security. Clothing thus becomes an essential construct that influences La Madelón’s new identity as she actively tries to become recognized as a normal and middle class woman.

Her psychological evolution may also be interpreted as a metaphor for the general change in attitude that many Spaniards experienced after the jubilation of la movida started to fade away and the politics of the new democracy revealed a disenchancing reality in need of stabilization: upon realizing that the government was unable to establish social harmony despite its decidedly optimistic rhetoric, many longed for new reforms that would initiate economic growth and provide stability to a country still plagued by a variety of problems. In La Madelón’s case, her will to accentuate her transvestite identity dies alongside the end of la movida, and her desire to become a middle class woman parallels a general societal attitude that started to seek out a more satisfying political program. As such, her
mental transformation from radical liberal to bourgeois woman allegorically represents a society struggling for ideological stability even after the official implementation of a new democratic system.

**Political and Ideological Ambiguity**

La Madelón’s association with mass culture lies mainly in her imitation of pop-icons, cult to performance, focus on the present, and reliance on appearance to create meaning. She also demonstrates a limited historical awareness that parallels some theoretical characterizations of mass culture’s temporary and superficial nature. Despite her claim to be socially proactive, her supposed political agenda is open to discussion because she often seems more interested in being seen at rallies than in promoting their cause, which suggests that spectacle is ultimately more important to her than ideology. Although La Begum admits not caring about politics, La Madelón maintains that she does and acts as if she actively campaigns for freedom and democracy. However, she acknowledges that one reason that she attends political rallies is to draw attention to her feminine image: “...en
aquel domingo, 4 de diciembre, Día de Andalucía, nada de eso [la política] tenía la menor importancia. Nos pusimos guapísimas porque queríamos causar sensación, que eso es algo que siempre gusta...” (56) She primarily wants to be seen with her companions and emphasizes her appearance rather than the political agenda of the gathering. Whether or not the transvestites actually support the ideology of the demonstration is unimportant next to the emotion that they experience by being watched and getting people to notice them. For the protagonists, politics thus fall secondary to pleasure and they take advantage of every opportunity to exaggerate their otherness in order to attract attention.

La Madelón’s desire to be seen at demonstrations results in her unwitting trivialization of the political agenda that such gatherings represent. This is further illustrated when she relates “las sevillanas,” a popular form of Flamenco dance, to democracy while socializing with a group of handsome men: “Empezamos a cantar y a bailar bajo la lluvia las sevillanas de la democracia, las sevillanas de la autonomía...” (58) As she flirts with possible suitors and delights in the dance that she perceives to be liberating, she associates it with autonomy
and political freedom. However, it seems that it is not really independence but the possibility of sexual gratification that excites her, and her words thus become a discourse that is contingent upon male attention and the satisfaction of her erotic desire. Ironically, this style of dance was also linked to the Flamenco singer, which, as previously discussed, was an icon used by the Franco regime to promote national unity. By calling the dance an artistic representative of democracy, she demonstrates her ignorance of its older political connotations and reveals that she primarily wants to peak the interest of possible male suitors.

La Madelón’s proclaimed social consciousness is thus unwittingly undermined throughout the novel by her sexual drive and search for pleasure. She gets carried away by spectacle and primarily focuses on the melodramatic qualities of significant political events. She claims that she needs liberty in order to survive, but this declaration seemingly stems more from her desire to be seen than from any real social agenda. She needs democracy not only so that she may continue to live as a female, but also because without it she would be out of a job: if the politics of the Franco regime were to return, she would no longer be
able to “play her role” as La Madelón, be forced to give up her job as an actress, and have to return to prostituting herself in order to make a living. Thus, her political activism is contingent on the possibility of performance, and her political ideology consequently never really stabilizes. Her social agenda thereby lacks stable ideological pillars and also reflects the historically unaware, temporal, and changeable nature of mass culture.

Conclusions

Throughout the novel, numerous manifestations of mass culture have a marked influence on the protagonist’s sense of identity. La Madelón’s multifaceted personality metaphorically represents different aspects of Spain’s political history, where the past is linked with masculinity and totalitarianism, and the present with femininity and democracy. Despite her desire to promote progressive ideals and maintain her freedom to live as a transvestite, the mass culture that she embraces throughout

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18 While contemplating the possible loss of her freedom, she writes: “¿Y qué iba a pasar ahora con la libertad? Me dio por pensar en eso. Y es que a mí me hace falta la libertad. Porque, si no, a ver de qué como.” (16)
undermines any authentic liberal discourse and consistently reinforces traditional patriarchal standards that subordinate females to males. La Madelón’s imitation of feminine icons, need of a strong male figurehead, focus on the present, reliance on the image to help construct personality, desire to perform, and ambiguous ideology all reflect some of the theoretical characterizations of mass culture described in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. As such, mass cultural discourse almost always upholds traditional gender roles and encourages conformity with paternalistic tradition.

The protagonist is caught between two genders and cultures, allegorically symbolizing a country that still experiences tension between the remnants of a conservative past associated with masculinity/high culture and the modern democracy related to femininity/mass culture. La Madelón is unable to eliminate the ghosts of her male past and thus cannot definitively establish a socially acceptable and non-conflicted feminine identity. The transvestite struggles to construct a concrete identity, but is so hindered by biological, historical, and cultural restrictions that her quest for feminine autonomy proves to be very difficult if not impossible.
While the transvestite may be seen as an appropriate representative of postmodernism because of its multiple and conflicting discourses embedded within one body, this analysis shows how the novel examines this figure in order to emphasize the influence that mass culture can have on identity. La Madelón’s rejection of her masculine past in favor of a feminine present recalls 19th Century theories that associated mass culture with women, who supposedly lacked intellectual maturity and for the most part behaved according to the desires of their reproductive organs. However, the novel also subverts this theoretical perspective by presenting a male that intentionally rejects his masculinity and chooses to become female: the transvestite embraces mass culture as a way of defining her new identity as a woman, and in the process purposefully rejects all association with masculinity/high culture. This inversion might suggest that the novel attempts to vindicate mass culture from negative representation, which would support postmodern perspectives that characterize it as a meaningful form of art. However, La Madelón’s insecurities and ideological ambiguity also undermine this assertion and render it impossible to claim that the work
vindicates mass culture or even proposes to do so in any definitive manner.

The protagonist’s masculine and feminine histories reflect many of the characteristics that have theoretically separated the spheres of high and low culture. As La Madelón, she is connected to mass culture by way of gender, image, repression of the past and lack of historical consciousness, which ultimately leads to emotional insecurity and unstable ideological foundations. By contrast, her former self, Manuel García Robollo, is linked with high culture through masculinity, patriarchal tradition and autonomous discourse. The novel examines this binary division of the self and ultimately underscores its inability to accurately portray the mentality of the contemporary subject who often vacillates between differing political, emotional, and cultural ideologies. Thus, the transvestite in the novel not only represents the insecurities of a marginalized subgroup but also becomes a symbol for a general population that experienced a similar type of anxiety during the Transition. Some of the subversive behaviors that publicly emerged during la movida (drug abuse, sexual experimentation, repression of political discourse, and a revolution of popular culture
among others) may be seen as byproducts of the changing political and social environment that characterized the new democracy. As such, by constructing his text around the figure of a transvestite struggling to find her identity, Mendicutti creates a fascinating novel that promotes discussion of the political, social, and cultural changes happening in Spain during the initial years of the Transition.

Although this thesis views the treatment of mass culture in *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* in a primarily negative manner, high culture is not praised or vindicated in any way either; instead, the novel suggests that culture can influence identity in various ways that need to be more closely evaluated. La Madelón’s portrayal as an insecure being that is unable to find existential comfort by embracing mass culture encourages the reader to contemplate the role that it plays in the construction of identity and to question the possible social consequences that it can have. By depicting the influence that mass culture exerts on the subject, the novel invites the reader to reevaluate the essence of both high and low culture and draws attention to the increasingly close relationship between art, identity and politics in contemporary society.
Chapter 4: José Ángel Mañas' Historias del Kronen

With the 1992 release of José Ángel Mañas' Historias del Kronen, a new wave of best selling literature by a young group of Spanish writers later called the generation X started to become popular with the reading public. In Spain, the term generation X refers to artists that grew up with no direct memory of life under the Franco regime and thus supposedly had no desire to represent or challenge its discourses in their work.\(^1\) Scholars such as Santiago Fouz-Hernández, Carmen de Urioste and Toni Dorca have suggested that what differentiates this generation from their literary predecessors is that it is generally not interested in recovering a historical reality formerly repressed by the state nor in addressing antiquated social concerns, but rather prefers to focus on current issues by

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\(^1\) Santiago Fouz-Hernández writes: “The term ‘Generation X’ has been adopted by the media to describe those born between 1961 and 1981, arguably the last generation(s) of youths before the millenium. In the North American context, the term has come to refer specifically to the children of the so-called ‘baby-boom’ generation (born between 1946 and 1964, a time of economic prosperity and political stability). In a age of global economy and media-dominated, rapidly disseminated culture, the term ‘Generation X’ (like ‘X-ers’ or ‘slackers’) has been, and is still being used world-wide.” (83)
examining the daily lives of individuals before the immediate challenges of the contemporary world. According to Urioste, the novels composed by generation X writers are generally characterized by minimal plot lines, first person narration, the use of the present tense, dialogued passages, references to popular culture, urban environments, unimposing or relatively objective narrators, and a focus on individual rather than collective issues. They are also thematically similar:

...se hace factible la adopción de la denominación “generación X” para agrupar a unos autores que priman lo urbano sobre lo rural y que retratan de una manera directa, concisa e introspectiva las otras caras del Estado de bienestar: el paro juvenil, la drogodependencia, el sexo por el sexo en la búsqueda de una identidad sexual, la falta de ideologías, la velocidad sin límites, la enfermedad, la inestabilidad, el aumento de la criminalidad, la

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Although to date critical attention to these novels has been scarce, scholars are starting to acknowledge their importance as texts that explore the progressively asocial behavior of many contemporary youth. In the introduction to his 1994 paperback edition of Historias del Kronen, Germán Gullón writes that such works should be further studied so that the disturbing behavior of their characters may be better understood. He asserts that the conduct of their protagonists is not only attributable to a fictional subculture or marginalized group, but also represents a growing and alarming reality that affects today’s youth in general. Nevertheless, so far most literary scholars have been reluctant to study generation X novels because they feel that they are primarily produced for commercial purposes and consequently have little or no aesthetic value.

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3 Discussing the importance of studying the work of younger novelists, Germán Gullón comments: "No podemos en ningún caso resistir a ver en estas novelas una realidad existente. Decir de ella que no debería existir o que no es así, equivale a hablar con tono paternalista de algo que desconocemos" (XII).
As both Urioste and Dorca have noted, the plot lines of many generation X novels are minimal and mainly focus on the daily activities of their young protagonists. Accordingly, Historias del Kronen tells the story of Carlos, an upper middle class university student who spends his summers hanging out with a group of friends at the Kronen bar. The novel details their search for physical gratification as they engage in a variety of subversive behaviors including excessive alcohol and drug consumption, frequent sexual intercourse, driving while intoxicated, and regularly watching violent and pornographic films. Carlos becomes increasingly aggressive throughout the work and eventually forces Fierro, a diabetic buddy, to drink an entire bottle of whiskey, killing him almost instantly. Instead of accepting responsibility for his actions, Carlos goes on vacation with his family and demonstrates no remorse whatsoever for his participation in the death of his friend. The novel ends with an epilogue narrated by Roberto, who describes the murder to his therapist as he struggles to understand Carlos’ increasingly violent and socially apathetic behavior.

Stylistically, Historias del Kronen is made up of three narratives. The lyrics to a rock song appear on the
first and last pages, thereby framing the text and foreshadowing the themes of alienation and identity crises that will appear throughout. The body narrates the action from Carlos’ perspective and in highly dialogued format portrays the protagonist’s daily routine, asocial behavior, sadomasochism, homosexual tendencies, emotional apathy, and growing obsession with various texts of mass culture. In the epilogue, Roberto relates his concerns to a psychologist and admonishes Carlos’ disconcerting behavior while trying to come to terms with what he perceives to be an increasingly dehumanized world. Closing with the repetition of the initial poem, the novel restates its preoccupation with the sense of alienation that can originate in a society that privileges individualism and the satisfaction of personal desire over the welfare of the other.

Although originally dismissed as simply a best-selling work of pop culture, in the past decade literary critics have started to pay more attention to Historias del Kronen. Germán Gullón and Carmen de Urioste have written that the fast-paced world of consumption, sexual activity, and violence represented in the novel reflects an existing and alarming reality that demands more observation. Santiago
Fouz-Hernández relates the protagonists to their American literary counterparts while trying to decide whether or not the term *generation X* appropriately characterizes Carlos and his friends. For her part, Pilar Capanaga has noted the novel’s stylistic accomplishments by focusing on the speech of young Spaniards, and claims that if for no other reason, it is noteworthy due to its linguistic innovation. Although these critics acknowledge the presence of the different forms of mass culture that appear throughout the text, their significance has yet to be fully analyzed and developed. Rather than exalting violence and praising the behavior of its protagonists, *Historias del Kronen* depicts a problematic relationship between the individual and mass culture, for even though movies, music and television afford some pleasure to the subject, they are also shown to promote unethical behavior and stifle social relations.

Since movies, television, music, drugs and alcohol constitute their main sources of entertainment, the protagonists of *Historias del Kronen* start to shun other activities and routinely engage in dangerous and morally questionable activities that imitate the content of the

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mass cultural texts that they consume. Audio-visual imagery turns into their most important signifier and thereby becomes their principal source of knowledge. The protagonists’ exaltation of the image alongside their rejection of the written word demonstrates that their acquisition of information primarily stems from various sources of mass culture. The novel depicts some of the consequences of this new epistemological paradigm to suggest that it can potentially harm the psyche and result in alienation, violence, asocial behavior, and in the total disregard for the well being of the other. By examining the relationship between rock music, cinema, television and the individual, Historias del Kronen explores the influence that mass culture can have on the conscious and draws attention to some of its possible dangers.

Music, Alienation, and Degradation

Rock music is prominent throughout the text and appears from the very beginning of the novel. The prologue and epilogue consist of lyrics that introduce the theme of

social alienation and challenge the individual’s possibility of really being able to know itself:

The sun is high and I’m surrounded by sand.
For as far as my eyes can see
I’m strapped into a rocking chair
With a blanket over my knees
I am a stranger to myself
And nobody knows I’m here
When I looked into my face
It wasn’t myself I’d seen
But who I’ve tried to be.
I’m thinking things I’d hoped to forget.
I’m choking to death in a sun that never sets.
I clugged up my mind with my personal grief
And turned all my friends into enemies
And now the past has returned to haunt me.
I’M SCARED OF GOD AND SCARED OF HELL
AND I’M CAVING IN UPON MYSELF
HOW CAN ANYONE KNOW ME
WHEN I DON’T EVEN KNOW MYSELF.

The lyric voice of the song is unable to communicate with others because it claims to no longer understand itself. It cannot control thoughts that it had struggled to erase from
its memory and does not even recognize its own image. This lack of self-definition suggests that the speaker has repressed its genuine identity and distanced itself from its friends in the process. The sense of alienation alluded to here foreshadows the same theme that permeates the novel, and as such the song may be considered as symbolic of the protagonist’s social estrangement as he isolates himself from others and becomes increasingly obsessed with violent texts, drugs, and music. In his patriarchal society, the mass culture that Carlos embraces tends to subordinate the feminine to the masculine and advocate gender-specific behaviors. The apathetic and violent person that he becomes by the end of the novel may thus be understood as a reaction to established behavioral codes, as the result of his subconscious desire to cover up a fear that his true or essential self, characterized by homosexual tendencies, might become known and condemned by his peers. Accordingly, the lyrics that frame the text address the theme of identity crisis that permeates the work and expose the dilemma of a subject who struggles to subdue its essence within the restrictive context of a paternalistic society.
Rock music throughout is almost always associated with the sensational and threatening activities of Carlos and his friends. Lyrics sometimes ironically reflect the plot, while at other times songs are either playing or alluded to when the protagonists are in physically dangerous situations and intoxicated: they sing along with Metalica songs while driving around the city and snorting cocaine (16), talk about bands as they climb up a half ruined building in the middle of the night (21), and slam dance and abuse drugs while attending a Nirvana show (106). During the concert Carlos reveals his latent homosexual tendencies by toying with Roberto: “Le agarro a Roberto del cuello, cosa que sé que odia, y le doy un beso en la boca. Roberto aparta con un empujón. <<Underneath the bridge animals are crawling... there is a leak... it’s okay with fish cause they don’t have any feelings...>>” (107) Here, the crowd is characterized as a bunch of animals, the leak may refer to the rupture in heterosexual relations exemplified by Carlos kissing Roberto, and the apathy towards fish is reflected in Carlos’s lack of respect for the other as he egotistically tries to upset his friend. At this point Carlos is unaware that Roberto is secretly in love with him, and as such ridicules homosexual behavior by
imitating it and kissing him on the lips; ironically, he prefers to make fun of the other and does not recognize that his own homoerotic tendencies also emerge when under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

Other lyrics are also juxtaposed with the subversive actions of the protagonists, as when Carlos and Roberto get high on cocaine and pay a transvestite for sexual favors while listening to different kinds of music. Roberto prefers to listen to the generally upbeat ‘bakalao’ genre (dance music for clubs and discos), while Carlos favors heavy metal characterized by aggressive subject matter (killing, throat cutting, and dancing on somebody’s tomb). Violent and sexual themes also abound in the music played in the bars where the gang hangs out, and Carlos is particularly impressed by sadistic lyrics. The novel’s inclusion of popular song thereby highlights the affiliation between lyrical content and the protagonist’s reality, which are both characterized by types of

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5 Some of the violent and sexual lyrics that characterize the music that Carlos listens to follow: “Te mataré con mis zapatos de claqué... te degollaré con un disco de los Rolinestones o de las ronetes... y bailaré sobre tu tumba” (119)... “Tendría que violarte y desnudarte y luego, luego, besarte, hasta que digas sí, hasta que digas sí... Era una chica muy mona que vivía en Barcelona, cuando estábamos en cama uh me bailaba la sardana...” (140).
oppression: the words consistently promote the degradation of the other and the subject must struggle to exert his individuality in a patriarchal society that advocates specific and gendered modes of conduct. The music that Carlos embraces thus seems to influence his behavior as he becomes increasingly violent, humiliates his friends and lovers, and alienates himself from others in the process. As such, rock music functions as an influential signifier that encourages Carlos and his peers to act upon their violent and aggressive instincts.

Finally, popular music as an art form is also characterized as simple and repetitive. Carlos’ friend Herre describes the way in which his band composes songs:

Lo que hacemos es música simple, lo más simple, sabes, como Nirvana, eso es lo que le gusta a la gente, un ritmillo guapo y unas letras con un poco de tequieroyyotambién y ya está, sabes. El cantante, de todas maneras, mete mucho sexo... pues yo me curro un ritmo guapo y luego le meto la melodía que me va saliendo, medio inventada. Yo no tengo ni guarra de solfeo, sabes, yo saco tres acordes, un ritmo y ya está; luego metemos
la batería y el bajo, y así las canciones salen como churros. (51)

Rock is now defined as spontaneous, repetitious, and superficial, produced to please the masses and as easily made as a bowl of 'churros.' Popular music is thus characterized as an anti-intellectual form of art that requires little or no musicality in order to be composed or performed. This music is created for commercial purposes and is embraced by the younger generations for its supposedly subversive content. Because of its anti-authoritarian nature, rock has perhaps always been attractive to youth, and its presence in the novel accordingly reflects the protagonist's desire to rebel against established social norms. However, its commercialization undermines its subversive nature by marketing the concept of rebellion and incorporating it into the mainstream. This kind of music only deceivingly affords agency to the subject by coercing it to embrace a supposedly "anti-authoritarian" product that is really a part of the established market system.

Popular music in Historias del Kronen thereby foreshadows some of the larger themes of the novel, highlights the relationship between fiction and reality,
favors patriarchal modes of behavior by privileging the masculine over the feminine, promotes the degradation of the other, and encourages egotistical and self-centered behavior. Its lyrics throughout thematically parallel the plot of the novel and influence the mindsets of the protagonists who act out scenarios that are eerily similar to those of the music they consume. In an even more direct manner, the images of the cinema, video, and television will also affect the group of young Madrilenians and similarly encourage aggressive, violent, and asocial behavior.

**Cinema, Escapism, and Social Conditioning**

Like popular music, references to the cinema are also prevalent throughout the text and influence the group of friends in various ways. The protagonists praise several movies for their spectacular and violent content, and some film scenes have direct parallels with the development of the novel’s plot. In numerous passages the boys recognize that their reality is similar to that of the movies, begging the question of whether art imitates life (or vice-versa) and suggesting that both are closely related. A
telling example of the novel’s blending of cinematic and “true” realities emerges when Carlos’ nose starts to bleed because of cocaine use and he cannot discern what is real: “Me quedo unos instantes mirando la mano y me asombro de lo poco real que es el color de la sangre. Es como si estuviera viendo una mala película.” (23) Perceiving his blood as that of a bad movie, he doesn’t fully realize that he is bleeding and is relatively unconcerned about his condition because he is so accustomed to seeing fake blood in films. Similar examples arise when he explains his vision of Madrid’s Gran Vía like a camera shot (71), as Chus’ attempt to commit suicide is compared to a scene from a bad movie, or after Amalia performs oral sex on Carlos and he exclaims: “Me río satisfecho. Ha sido igual que una peli porno.” (78). Later, he describes his grandfather’s coffin like that of a Dracula movie (166), and near the end of the novel when the group harasses Fierro, Carlos asserts: “¿te parece una película, ¿verdad?” (221) Each allusion blurs the boundaries between cinema and reality, and also highlights the protagonists’ desire to make their experiences similar to the exciting and entertaining ones of films.
The above passages demonstrate that Carlos consistently thinks of life in cinematic terms and relates his actions to the videos or films that he has seen. He begins looking at the rest of the world as if through the lens of a camera, which emotionally distances him from others and turns him into a kind of director/actor of his own movie. He starts to think of himself and his friends as fictional characters that live in a cinematic reality, and his awareness of the significance that his actions may have in the real world is consequently disturbed. Accordingly, Carlos begins disregarding established social norms and comes to believe that he may do as he pleases without having to suffer any penalty for his behavior. Although he recognizes the detrimental influence that the cinema has over his behavior, stating “Últimamente tengo ideas algo macabras en la cabeza. Debe de ser por ver tantas películas de psicópatas. Comienzo a preguntarme qué se sentiría matando a alguien” (134), he expresses no real concern over the phenomenon and begins contemplating the possibility of actually killing someone.

As Roberto later confirms, Carlos never sentimentally commits himself to anything, which appears to be another consequence of his obsession with the cinema (237). In the
epilogue Roberto tells his analyst that Carlos used to describe his friends as if they were the fictional characters of a movie: “—Imagínese que es una novela, o una mala película... Eso era lo que Carlos decía siempre: que la vida era como una mala película. Le encantaba el cine...—Nos veía a todos como si fuéramos personajes de una película, de su película.” (237). He often comments that his most stimulating affairs and dangerous actions should have been recorded, and starts to believe that nothing is very important unless it can be captured on film or related to the movies. Viewing life through a cinematic filter thereby impedes Carlos from establishing normal relationships and alienates him from others. His attempt to "live in a movie" allows him to evade emotional involvement and to add excitement to what he perceives to be an ordinary and boring existence. Cinematic images thus become an essential component of Carlos’ mentality and function like drugs that offer an escape from the mundane world into an alternate and more exhilarating reality. Similar passages throughout the novel also reveal the high degree to which his perception is mediated by cinema, suggesting that his education has been fundamentally influenced by the mass cultural images that he has been exposed to for years.
References to the cinema often appear when the protagonists are under the influence of drugs and alcohol, thereby establishing a relationship between the mind-altering effects of narcotics and that of the movies. Drugs and cinema are metaphorically compared to each other through the effect that they have on the mind: both can inhibit rational thought and reduce consciousness of established social norms. Rebecca’s comparison of Buddhism to a drug trip that aspires to clear the mind of worldly thought is akin to what happens to Carlos as he mixes cinematic fantasy with reality. While under the influence of drugs and alcohol, he sees things as if through a camera and compares his activities with those of a movie; as such, drugs become the catalysts that enable him to enter a cinematic reality in which he acts as an invincible protagonist. The mind-altering effects of drugs and movies eventually enable him to act upon his homicidal instincts and coerce his diabetic friend into drinking himself to death. Watching film and the use of narcotics are thus both depicted as having a potentially destructive and alienating effect on the mind.⁶

⁶ Santiago Fouz-Hernández comments on the role of drug abuse in the novel: “John Hooper suggests that the Spanish
Carlos’ fascination for the cinema encourages him to imitate his filmic heroes and he progressively mimics their behavior. His obsession with creating a film-like reality is essentially detrimental because it causes him to lose grasp of social norms, friendships, and personal responsibility as he becomes increasingly estranged from the rest of society. Perceiving the world through a cinematic filter alienates him from society, helps develop his apathetic and egotistical mind set, and pushes him to strive to satisfy his own desires without regarding the well being of the other. Since the cinema influences his behavior in such a manner, Carlos may be regarded as a product of an audio-visual society in which long-established sources of knowledge are being replaced by the Socialist government’s relaxed attitude to alcohol and tobacco consumption ‘helped to create an atmosphere conducive to the spread of yet more perilous drugs’ (Hooper, 203)... The Socialist government legalized consumption of narcotics in 1983. Nine years later the public consumption of drugs was made illegal again... Hence, the drug consumption of the young characters of Kronen is not necessarily meant as a criticism of the generation itself but rather as a critical reflection on the liberalization of drugs in Spain or even as the consequence of the cultural pessimism generated by the government’s corruption and mismanagement that led the young to consume drugs as a form of escapism—a situation that holds for the politico-cultural context of the film, produced in the year when the Socialist government’s political scandals were beginning to emerge.” (85)
images derived from various manifestations of mass culture. He is so accustomed to obtaining information from the media that more traditional forms of culture are no longer meaningful to him and he privileges the content derived from visual imagery over the written word. This is particularly evident when he criticizes a book of poetry that he is supposed to buy for his father:

A mí no me gusta la poesía. La poesía es sentimental, críptica y aburrida. Me repugna. Es un género en extinción: no hay nadie que pueda vivir de la poesía en estos tiempos. Es una cultura muerta. La cultura de nuestra época es audiovisual. La única realidad de nuestra época es la de la televisión. Cuando vemos algo de que nos impresiona siempre tenemos la sensación de estar viendo una película. Esa es la puta verdad. Cualquier película, por mediocre que sea, es más interesante que la realidad cotidiana. Somos los hijos de la televisión, como dice Mat Dilon en Dragstorcauboi. (42)

Calling himself a child of television, Carlos describes poetry as unintelligible, boring, emotional, economically unviable, and labels it an unremarkable form of “dead”
culture. So doing, he defines himself in relation to commercialized mass culture and rejects other artistic manifestations. Given that audiovisual texts have become his most important signifiers, his affection for the movies, video, and music is the natural result of his lifelong exposure to the mass media. Besides citing the death of poetry, Carlos disdains the ideology associated with high culture in favor of a new set of values primarily derived from popular texts. The gap between older and younger generations is further reflected in the kind of culture that each consumes (older/high versus younger/low), and a newer self-indulgent philosophy of consumption starts to prevail over former codes of conduct. The privileging of audio-visual culture by the protagonists throughout the novel also allegorically recalls Lyotard’s assertion that technology supplants narrative as the central discourse around which modern society is constructed, disturbing traditional behavioral paradigms and augmenting existential anxiety in the process.

Carlos criticizes older generations for being out of touch with contemporary society: “Los viejos son personajes del pasado, fósiles. Hay una inadecuación entre ellos y el tiempo que les rodea. Son como fantasmas, como películas o fotos de un álbum viejo y lleno de polvo. Estorbos.” (47)
The younger generation’s affection for mass culture may also stem from their instinctive feelings of powerlessness. Carlos criticizes his elders by claiming that they have robbed him of any meaningful ideology:

El viejo comienza a hablar de cómo ellos lo tenían todo mucho más difícil, y de cómo han luchado para darnos todo lo que tenemos. La democracia, la libertad, etcétera, etcétera. El rollo sesentaiochista pseudoprogre de siempre. Son los viejos los que lo tienen todo: la guita y el poder. Ni siquiera nos han dejado la rebeldía: ya la agotaron toda los putos marxistas y los putos jipis de su época. Pienso en responderle que justamente lo que nos falta es algo por lo que o contra lo que luchar.” (67)

By so complaining, Carlos demonstrates a longing for subjectivity, for a reason to live, and for a cause to uphold or to fight against; however, since he does not have one, mass cultural texts (movies, videos, and music) become his primary outlet to stave off boredom and combat monotony. Because much of their leisure time activities involve the mass cultural works that they hold in common esteem, these texts become increasingly significant in
regards to the protagonists’ sentimental education. Since they depend on audio-visual culture in order to be able to communicate with each other, it functions as a unifying discourse that brings them together and alienates those who do not embrace it. The images of the mass media thus turn into the younger generation’s most important signifiers, and the boys accordingly seek subjectivity and self-definition through their consumption.

In this light, Carlos and his friends may be seen as the byproducts of a capitalist society that promotes an ideology of consumerism primarily through the production mechanism of the mass media. Historias del Kronen examines some of the consequences of this phenomenon and details the protagonists’ problematic relationship to the various mass cultural texts that they embrace. The novel shows how the former moral, social, and educational equilibrium established by older generations is disturbed by excessive consumption and implies that the media helps to develop asocial behavior by selling products (pornography, video, music, books, etc...) specifically designed to satisfy the individual’s basest desires. The text thereby criticizes a capitalist system that on one hand endorses ethical conduct, equality of the sexes, and respect for life, while
on the other vend cultural goods that encourage violence, promote self-indulgence, and sanction the degradation of the other. The individual is thus caught between two contradictory discourses and must struggle to establish his own moral and ethical convictions. By detailing the protagonist’s obsession with certain mass cultural works, inability to differentiate between reality and fiction, violent tendencies and eventual realization of homicide, Historias del Kronen demonstrates how this dilemma can be lethal: Carlos’ behavior may therefore be interpreted as a byproduct of the dehumanizing and paradoxical forces that characterize his society.

**Cinematic Role Models and Violence**

Carlos attempts to incorporate the fantasy of the cinema into his daily life by consistently imitating the behavior of movie characters that engage in a variety of sadistic acts. In *Henry, Portrait of an Assassin*, one of his preferred films, the protagonists record their acts of homicide so that they can later watch them on video, which reveals a fascination for seeing violence on film that parallels Carlos’ own viewing preferences. A *Clockwork*
Orange is another movie that he labels as a “violent classic,” whose best scene involves a writer that is forced to witness the rape of his wife. While watching this episode, Carlos sodomizes his lover Rebecca, constituting a rape that directly parallels the imagery of the film:

Yo le indico que se dé la vuelta... No, por ahí no, de ninguna manera, que no me apetece. No, mi niño. Ay, qué cabrón eres, qué cabrón, al menos ten cuidado, ten cuidado, joder... Ah, ah, ah, no tan rápido, mi vida, que me haces daño, hijo de puta, hijo de puta. Cuando estoy a punto de correrme, me doy cuenta de que la película ha llegado a mi escena preferida. Alex está violando a la mujer del escritor. Rebeca gime debajo mío y el orgasmo es bastante prolongado... Rebeca refunfuña un poco, pero yo ya estoy viendo la película y no la hago mucho caso... (34)

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8 Mentioning the film, Carlos states “¿Te gusta Lanaranjamecánica?—Yo le digo que es una de mis películas preferidas, un clásico de la violencia. Mi escena favorita es cuando Alex y sus amigos están violando a la mujer del escritor. Alex corta con tijeras el traje rojo de la cerda mientras los otros sujetan al escritor, obligándole a mirar. Alex está cantando Aimsingininderein y le da patadas al compás de la música.” (32)
The juxtaposition of their sexual encounter with that of the movie highlights Carlos’ intention to imitate cinematic imagery and also associates voyeurism with sadistic sexual activity. Using Rebecca as an object of erotic desire, Carlos identifies with the protagonist of the film who forces penetration on others and experiences little or no remorse about the feelings of his victims. As soon as he realizes that his favorite scene is playing, he reaches orgasm, brushes Rebecca aside and starts to ignore her. This passage exposes his egotistical and cruel tendencies early on in the novel and demonstrates that the well being of other people is not at all important to him. Carlos is only interested in his own physical satisfaction, and as the novel progresses, his appetite for pleasure increases to such an extent that he eventually disregards all emotional ties to others and becomes totally self-absorbed.⁹

Other violent intertexts also appear throughout the novel and similarly influence the group of friends. The boys praise *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*’s vicious imagery

⁹ Carlos’ girlfriend Amalia also scolds him for only caring about himself and being too egotistical: “—No se puede ser siempre yo, yo, yo. En algún momento tienes que contar con los otros. Hay veces en las que necesitas y aprecias el que estén allí.” (168)
but criticize it for lack of sexual content. They admire Brett Easten Ellis’ controversial novel *American Psycho*, whose protagonist also consistently reaches sexual climax while watching sadistic films (92). They are fascinated by Snuff movies, real-life murders captured on tape, and express their desire to obtain and watch them. In a Snuff movie, the brutality of what is really happening becomes trivialized by spectacle, and the violence, rape and murder depicted are not treated like horrible crimes by the spectator but rather as cinematic texts to be watched for pleasure. Physically aggressive and cruel actions are thus regarded as simulations that have no relevance or consequences in real life. In turn, the viewer gets used to seeing brutally graphic images and is not morally or psychologically upset by them. In Carlos’ case, he is so...

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10 Carlos and Roberto talk about the existence of this type of film. --A ti, Roberto--digo--, lo que te encantaría son los Esnafmuvis. --¿Qué es eso? --Unas pelis que están ahora de moda en las que filman a un tío o a una tía, normalmente una puta o un chavalito, se los follan y luego les matan. Pero de verdad, y delante de la cámara. --Pero sí, me molaría. Pero, ¿hay de eso en España? --Venga, dejad de decir burradas, que lo de Beitman está muy bien, pero es una novela y punto. --Anda, Pedro, no seas moralista. Dime, Carlos, ¿hay películas de ésas en España? --Pues claro. (93)
attracted by cinematic violence that he eventually starts to act out film scenes and intentionally hurt others.\footnote{11}

Alongside their devotion to violent films, the boys look up to a “mythic hero,” the protagonist of American Psycho, Patrick Beitman. Beitman is a young American

\footnote{11} Fouz-Hernández describes a significant irony included in the cinematic adaptation of the novel: “The irony becomes even more bitter when they realize that, by filming the party and catching Pedro’s death on the hand-held video-camera, they had accidentally made a snuff movie (with which both Carlos and Roberto are obsessed). Yet, their home-made video is real and it constitutes, moreover, the only evidence of manslaughter that could potentially result in their imprisonment. Here, there is a sense in which reality is not only painful (the loss of their friend), but also qualitatively different from their constructed ‘realities’. Yet the unreal/real binary is disrupted since even the death of Pedro/Fierro itself becomes the latest video flick for Roberto and Carlos, reabsorbed into the simulacra-chain of their constructed worlds. In the film, this shocking appropriation of their friend’s death is disturbed when Carlos uncharacteristically fights Roberto for the video in order to hand it to the police: a grown-up, responsible act, for once. In the novel, however, Roberto is left having to confess to a psychiatrist both his guilt at Fierro’s death and his homosexual feelings for Carlos whilst the latter escapes (once more) by going to Santander on holiday as planned before Fierro’s funeral has taken place, refusing to face up to the reality shock which Roberto has also recognized. Thus, the film, in contradiction to the book’s narrative, offers an unexpected twist in Carlos’ personality which could be read as the shattering of his fictional sub-world and his sudden maturation and first acceptance of responsibility represented, perhaps, by the shattered mirror on the wall, a mirror that could stand for Carlos’s shattered fantasy world or even, in a Lacanian reading, a shattering of Carlos’s identification with the Imaginary or even his Ideal identification with his grandfather.” (94)
businessman who fantasizes about sex, violence and destruction as a way of mentally escaping from the monotony of his yuppie lifestyle. As such, the novel is characterized by episodes of murder, rape, sadism and crime, all of which are stimulating and noteworthy experiences to the group of friends. Accordingly, they talk about Beitman’s delusions as if they were honorable visions and idolize his asocial and violent philosophy. He thus becomes a role model who personifies the subversive and asocial values that the boys embrace.

Significantly, Carlos and Beitman seem to share a similar value system based upon the premise that friendship does not exist and that one must preserve himself before all others. Such a mindset might also be the result of a dehumanized society that privileges individualism, egoism, and self-gratification over the welfare of the other. Carlos acknowledges his egocentric philosophy after Roberto plays a sadistic game with Fierro:

...Luego salió sangrando, lleno de arañazos, y me dijo que había sido cojonudo, que lo hiciera otra vez. --¿No sentiste ganas de atropellarle de verdad? --No se me ocurrió, no. Fierro es mi amigo. --Beitman lo hubiera hecho. --Pero Beitman
no tiene amigos de verdad. Por eso es como es: le faltan vínculos afectivos. –Y tú, ¿te crees que tienes amigos? –Pues yo creo que sí. Tú eres mi amigo, ¿no? –Nadie tiene amigos, Roberto. La amistad es cosa de débiles. El que es más fuerte no tiene necesidad de amigos. Beitman te lo demuestra.-- (137)

Although Roberto blames Beitman’s sadistic tendencies on his lack of friends, Carlos maintains that friendship is a sign of weakness and that the strong have no use for it. By the end of the novel this attitude enables him to eschew responsibility for Fierro’s death and go on vacation with his family without feeling any remorse or guilt.\(^{12}\)

Carlos believes that one must assert his will on others in order to assure self-preservation, and his adulation of violent texts reveals his sadistic attitude

\(^{12}\) In the epilogue, Roberto describes the influence that this novel had over his group of friends: "—...Sobre todo después de leer Americansaico. —¿Eso qué es? —Un libro. Un libro cojonudo. La única novela que Carlos soportaba. Me influenció mucho en una época. Bueno, nos influenció a todos. Todo aquel rollo que llevábamos nos embruteció tanto que a nadie le pareció rara la idea de Carlos. Yo creo que si Carlos nos hubiera propuesto matarle, tampoco nos hubiera extrañado nada. Creo que lo hubiéramos hecho. Siempre hablábamos de darle una paliza un día, aunque nunca lo hacíamos. No sé, el rollo era mental más que real. Pero el resultado es el mismo: hay un muerto.” (237)
towards society at large.\textsuperscript{13} He perceives the world as a kind of jungle in which instinct overpowers reason to ensure self-conservation. The cinematic figures that he emulates personify this philosophy and thus become his role models: he imitates their behavior either to attempt to become a "mythic being" himself who need not take responsibility for his actions, or to elevate his masculine persona and subdue aspects of his being that he does not wish to make known to his peers. Since his fictional idols are dominating masculine figures that acquire their power by hurting others, Carlos starts to associate masculinity with strength and emotional apathy, and femininity with weakness and sentimentality. After denouncing his father for demonstrating too much emotion, his mass cultural heroes become like new paternal figures that stand for aggressive, unsentimental and self-interested behavior.

Carlos also criticizes homosexuals as effeminate and inferior, and tries to distance himself from them whenever he is sober. However, he occasionally participates in homoerotic encounters while under the influence of drugs or

\textsuperscript{13} In another declaration of his asocial attitude, Carlos declares: "En la vida hay que ser fuerte; si no, te comen. Desde muy pequeño lo tuve muy claro." (48)
alcohol. His imitation of the super-macho sadistic film icon may thus also be interpreted as an attempt to subdue his own weaknesses in favor of a public show of strength, which suggests that the maintenance of his masculine image is more important to him than revealing his “feminine” and/or homosexual inclinations. Like Beitman, Carlos tries to escape from a personal reality that he finds unattractive by imitating film icons, associating his experiences with movies, and routinely engaging in dangerous and sadistic activities. From his mass cultural heroes, he ultimately learns that he can preserve himself by hurting, raping, and degrading the other without having to reveal his own limitations or suffer the consequences of his actions.

**Television, Spectacle, and the Dissolution of the Family**

The references to television that appear throughout the work also relate the medium to the spectacle and brutality associated with the cinema. Carlos compares television to a Roman circus, an ancient forum of bloody entertainment for the masses, and declares that it would not be entertaining without depictions of suffering and
war.\textsuperscript{14} He acknowledges his attraction to sadistic imagery and asserts that T.V. is only worth watching because of its violent programming (28). He also criticizes the military action in Yugoslavia because it is not as visually stimulating as the Gulf war, revealing that he ultimately considers televised combat to be just another form of entertainment. The bloodshed and atrocities normally associated with war are suppressed by the spectacle of watching them on television, resulting in the trivialization of military conflict and augmenting the viewer’s insensitivity to real violence. Whenever TV describes scenarios of death and destruction, Carlos praises it as being fun to watch and consequently starts to associate entertainment with violent programming. Accordingly, eventually only representations of death attract his attention and he gets bored when the news takes on a milder tone. Television as depicted in the novel thereby promotes the development of his lowest instincts by

\textsuperscript{14} Carlos comments: “Para mí que debieran dejarles matarse entre ellos. El telediario, sin guerras, no sería lo mismo: sería como un circo romano sin gladiadores.” (28)
trivializing violence and encouraging him to take pleasure in witnessing gruesome events.\textsuperscript{15}

The telediario also plays a prominent role throughout the work as the family regularly watches the news while eating dinner. References to the current events of 1992 (military conflicts, the World Expo, drug problems, terrorism, and the Olympic torch) are common, and particular emphasis is placed on extraordinary or shocking stories. Since the news always captivates their attention, the novel also implies that families that consistently watch television often do not communicate well with each other: “Comemos, como siempre, sin decir ni una palabra y viendo el telediario...” (66) Television thus starts to replace social interaction and ultimately subordinates communication to audio-visual culture.

The novel thereby highlights the negative influence that television can have on relationships and suggests that the nuclear family is less united than it used to be due to its fascination with the media. Carlos’s grandfather

\textsuperscript{15} Carlos describes a typical day in front of the television: “Nos sentamos a comer y vemos el telediario, que hoy está entretenido. Nueve inmigrantes polacos han muerto en un incendio en Mósteles. En China ha habido trescientos muertos por una inundación. Y sigue la guerra en Yugoslavia...” (100)
complains: “La televisión es la muerte de la familia, Carlos. Antes, la hora de comer y la hora de cenar eran los momentos en los que la familia se reunía para hablar y para comentar lo que había pasado durante el día. Ahora las familias se sientan alrededor de la tele; no hay comunicación. La familia se está resquebrajando como célula social... (84) For him, TV may also be related to the increasing development of an individualistic and emotionally apathetic society:

—... no os envidio porque el mundo que os va a tocar vivir es cada vez más deshumanizado. Antes, en mi época, había otra manera de tratar a la gente, había un cierto calor y un respeto. La gente salía a pasear por la calle y se saludaba. Ahora, esta mínima ética civil se ha perdido. El otro día vi un programa en la televisión en el que alguien fingía caerse muerto de un ataque al corazón en la Gran Vía y nadie se paraba a ayudarle. La inseguridad ciudadana es abrumadora... En mi época... había un sentido del compañerismo que ya no existe.” (83)

He reproaches the character of many young Spaniards for being too self-interested, lacking common courtesies, and
refusing to socialize or even to greet others on the street. In his view, the sense of community that used to exist has now been replaced by a general feeling of insecurity, and as a result people are unable or unwilling to help others even in times of need. As such, the grandfather condemns some of the detrimental consequences of the technological advances that progressively characterize his world, and seems to believe that television can contribute to the breakdown of the family by inhibiting communication, trivializing violence, and privileging pleasure over the general good of the populace.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} Analyzing the cinematic version of \textit{Historias del Kronen}, Santiago Fouz-Hernández writes: “In the film, the novel’s \textit{Telediario} news about the events in 1992 is replaced by reports on the various political frauds and scandals. The television, set always too loud, is a disturbing, overbearing and ubiquitous presence during the family lunch time, clearly interfering with communication: a brash and jarring challenge to the putative security of an older Spain, centered around the paternal Catholic family. The news is a constant reminder of the idea of a kind of ‘powerlessness’ mentioned in the earlier quotation, as if the country’s state served as an explanation, perhaps even a justification, for the young people’s extreme behavior. Carlos (Juan Diego Botto) makes this very point to his father (José María Pou) who picks him and his friend Pedro (Aitor Merino) up from the police station and pays a fine in order to secure their release (Pedro had been caught hanging from a bridge above busy traffic competing against a rival). Carlos explains: ‘lo hacemos para jugarnos la vida, lo único que nos dejáis hacer’. As if to prepare the
The representation of television throughout the novel thereby exemplifies many aspects of the cultural theory that has often criticized mass culture for being potentially damaging to the intellect. The text explicitly examines this concept in order to reflect on the relationship between the hedonistic lifestyle of Carlos’ group of friends and the mass culture that they depend on for various kinds of fulfillment. As such, it contemplates the possible dangers that the implementation of a democratic and self-indulgent social system may have on the individual conscious, which in turn can lead to a variety of disturbing and problematic behaviors.

Conclusions

In Historias del Kronen, different kinds of mass culture are portrayed as intrinsically harmful texts that can alienate the subject and encourage him to behave without worrying about the possible consequences of his way for this startling nihilism, in an earlier scene in the film, Carlos’s dying grandfather (André Falcón) points out his dismay at the way in which society had changed for the worse and voices his concern about how the ‘lack of principles’ in the politicians might affect his grandson’s generation.” (86)
actions. Although on one hand mass culture appears to be praised by the Kronen group’s affinity for violent movies, pop music, rejection of poetry, and admiration of cult books, the novel also explores the moral ambiguity and injurious lifestyles associated with such texts in order to outline their potential hazards. However, it does not explicitly describe a tension between high and low culture but instead points out some of the detrimental influences that mass culture can exert on the psyche. The text illustrates how excessive consumerism can enhance the individual’s need for physical gratification, which can consequently lead to moral corruption, alienation, and to the disintegration of all meaningful communication with others. The paradoxical nature of a capitalist system that supposedly promotes ethical behavior is thus brought to the forefront by its own mass cultural production that panders to the subject’s basest desires and encourages the proliferation of subversive conduct.

Believing that his society is too luxurious and that there is nothing left to fight against, Carlos lives only to seek pleasure; as the novel progresses, his desire for gratification becomes harder and harder to satisfy and he progressively consumes drugs, movies, music and alcohol in
his constant attempt to stimulate himself. His seditious behavior along with his unfailing economic means to buy narcotics and all sorts of mass cultural products are highlighted throughout to point out some of the inherent dangers of extreme consumerism. A seemingly unlimited supply of cash carries the young protagonists through a never-ending search for pleasure that only increases with time. Contrary to their elders, whose chief preoccupation was to achieve political freedom and earn enough money to improve their general standard of living, Carlos’ generation is faced with another dilemma: they are no longer in need of economic or political security and therefore seek fulfillment through the consumption of different kinds of mass culture, which inadvertently provides them with destructive behavioral models to imitate. However, their affection for such texts ultimately alienates them as they begin to disregard the feelings of other people and become more and more preoccupied with the satisfaction of their own desire.

The epilogue constitutes the novel’s most direct criticism of the disturbing behavior depicted throughout the work. As Roberto converses with his therapist, he laments the lack of communication between his friends and
recognizes his own need of emotional interaction. He also accuses Carlos of killing Fierro on purpose and expresses remorse for his participation in the homicide (232-233). By describing the influence of violent mass cultural texts on the boys and detailing their plan to cover up Fierro’s murder, Roberto acknowledges their lack of ethics and considers confessing their crime to the authorities. Motivated by a fear of the mortality that now forms a part of his universe, he realizes that he cannot continue living in such a fashion and starts to reflect upon the injurious lifestyle of his group of peers. Even though he ultimately does not go to the police, his deliberations comprise Historias del Kronen’s most acute social criticism: rather than uphold the behavior of the protagonists, it condemns their sadistic conduct and disapproves of the escalating irresponsibility of many young people. The epilogue thus aligns the novel with other works (Clockwork Orange, Trainspotting, and American Psycho among others) that

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17 Roberto asserts: “--...Con ellos no se habla nunca. Cuando salimos, contamos chistes, decimos tonterías, burradas, hablamos de tías–eso siempre–pero nunca hablamos de nosotros. No sé. Llevamos toda la puta vida juntos, desde el colegio, y es como si no nos conociéramos en absoluto. No nos contamos nunca nada. No comunicamos, ¿comprende? Por eso vengo a verle, para poder contarle a alguien mis movidas.” (233)
similarly denounce the alarming habits of contemporary youth through the detailed representation of their daily activities.

*Historias del Kronen* also addresses the ever-increasing influence of the media on society and on the escalating loss of local cultures. Throughout the work, manifestations of Spanish-ness are almost non-existent, and internationally produced mass cultures dominate cinematic, television, and music production. The ideological differences between older and younger generations also seem to be related to the kind of culture that each consumes. Whereas Carlos’ friends demonstrate a very limited historical awareness and value momentary pleasures, their elders hold onto memory and recognize the importance of political discourse. This duality parallels theoretical classifications of culture, where the older generation is associated with history and permanence (high culture), and the younger with the present and temporality (mass culture). By depicting the protagonists’ repression of the past and the differences in lifestyles between age groups, the novel suggests that traditional arts are increasingly being subordinated to forms of mass culture and thus lose the significance and status that they used to enjoy.
Simultaneously, Historias del Kronen underlines the need for a resurgence of other kinds of advantageous cultures to act as a stimulus against the homogenization brought about by mass culture. By depicting some of the negative effects of popular culture, the novel laments the loss of other discourses and customs that may be more enlightening or beneficial to the subject. Even though there is no explicit mention of high art in the text other than a brief disapproval of poetry, it tacitly criticizes artistic production that disregards moral concerns and specifically caters to the satisfaction of individual desire. Some of the theories of the Frankfurt sociologists are thus recalled by the novel’s critical representation of mass culture, but the Marxist emphasis of their writings is decidedly lacking here; instead, Historias del Kronen generally reflects on the ethical connotations of cultural production in capitalistic society in order to examine the possible consequences that it can have on the psyche. Although it contains no direct plea for a renewal of higher forms of art, the text exposes the destructive nature of consumerism, proposes a need for cultural renaissance, and stresses the importance of a new kind of intellectual development that might help the individual avoid the
dangers exemplified in the work. Through the graphic
description of the asocial activity of its protagonists,
the novel highlights the problematic relationship between
man and media to examine the potentially hazardous
consequences of extreme consumerism.
Conclusions

Over the past five decades, the significant political, historical, and cultural developments that have taken place in Spain have considerably influenced its fictional production. Alongside the various literary trends that surfaced throughout these years, the manner in which elements of mass culture were incorporated into novels also changed. In the social realist work of the fifties and sixties, Spanish authors like Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Carmen Martín Gaite, and Ignacio Aldekoa imitated the objectivist style of the Italian cinema in an attempt to create photographic portraits of society, objectively depict reality, and limit authorial interventions as much as possible. At the time, many writers thought that such a style would incite the reading public to think about the problems that they observed in literature and to consequently react by actively promoting social reforms. Mass culture in these texts was generally portrayed as a part of reality, but its presence was not particularly highlighted nor was it thought of as an especially important component of a work’s overall meaning.
In the mid to late sixties, when many realized that literary objectivism had not achieved its goal of instigating the public consciousness, authors began experimenting with styles and a more subjective kind of realism soon emerged. After the 1965 release of Luis Martín Santos’ *Tiempo de silencio*, several writers re-acknowledged the appeal of narrative subjectivity and started to produce some of the most complex and thought-provoking novels of the century. In this literature, a mixture of subjective narration and realistic description characterized texts, and references to mass culture appeared somewhat more frequently than they had in the work of the social realists. Although allusions to pop culture were more common than in the preceding years, they were still relatively unimportant and were often overshadowed by other conventions such as sarcasm, irony, and partial representations of a post-war society plagued by political oppression and a multitude of social problems.

Nevertheless, some novelists soon began to intentionally incorporate aspects of mass culture in their work and use them towards specific ends. Subjective realism quickly led to more kinds of literary experimentation that manifested themselves in different ways throughout the next
few years. One trend that emerged was the so-called experimental novel, in which reader-friendly narration was often disregarded in favor of complex intellectual discourse. In this style, mass culture continued to appear in works and was used to critique various aspects of society, as is perhaps best exemplified by Juan Goytisolo’s 1969 Reivindicación del conde Julián. According to Jo Labanyi and Stephanie Sieburth, this novel incorporates different mass cultural texts in order to question the political practices of the Franco regime and to show that Spain was increasingly in danger of being manipulated by exterior forces. Even though this work used the theme of mass culture in innovative ways, its paradoxical nature and multiple discourses made it particularly difficult to interpret. Because experimental texts in general were so hard to understand, they were not widely embraced by the reading public and did not enjoy much commercial success.

The experimental style also coincided with other types of narrative that started to focus more on storytelling than on pure intellectual reflection. In Juan Marsé’s Si te dicen que caí (1973), a group of boys values comic books, movies, and serial publications for their escapist qualities as they attempt to improve their lives by
imitating their content. For them, mass culture represents an alternate reality that is superior to their own monotonous experience of living in an economically depressed Barcelona. Marsé’s novel was one of the first to contrast mass culture’s utopian character with the repressive nature of post-war society, and thus acknowledged the potentially positive influence that different kinds of popular texts may have on their consuming public.

After the publication of Eduardo Mendoza’s La verdad sobre el caso Savolta (1975), a work that uses a variety of popular genres to create a new kind of picaresque narrative, the postmodern novel started to become fashionable in Spain. In this style, references to mass culture were juxtaposed with elements of high culture in a seemingly fragmented and half hazard manner. Nevertheless, the incorporation of pop culture alongside more straightforward kinds of narration increasingly attracted new readers, which enabled authors to continue publishing novels and also gave them an economic stability that they had never previously known. Although the multiplicity of discourse typical of postmodernism makes it difficult to pinpoint an exact purpose to its general use of mass
culture, it was common to find several references to various popular texts in different works. This period led to a significant increase in novel production and opened the door for many best selling texts to be published throughout the eighties and nineties.

As such, references to mass culture have been increasingly incorporated into Spanish novels over the last fifty years, and its presence in literature is more significant now than it ever has been before. Since Sieburth’s 1994 study was the last major work to examine the theme of mass culture in Spanish novels published up until 1978, this project has continued her line of investigation by looking at how four more recent texts use, characterize, and represent its relationship to contemporary social practices and to the mindset of the subject.

One of the objectives of the dissertation was to study the manner in which current Spanish writers incorporate elements of mass culture into their work and to examine their relationship to many of the social transformations that started to take place in Spain after the death of General Franco in 1975. Another goal was to continue the postmodernist mission of analyzing popular literature in
order to show that it can provide significant insights into the workings and intricacies of every day life. Therefore, the project looked at four best selling novels published during the post-dictatorial years that integrate mass culture and portray some of the problematic aspects of neo-democratic Spanish society.

First, the project outlined several theoretical writings about high and low culture to demonstrate that they can function as constructive models of literary analysis. Although it is impossible to summarize all of the theories examined, pre-World War II theory generally associated high culture with the intellect, the upper body, masculinity, freedom and rational thought, whereas mass culture was related to instinct, the lower body, femininity, subordination and irrationality. The former was thereby considered to be beneficial to mankind while the latter was seen as detrimental to society.

Through the analysis of the selected works, this project attempted to show that the theoretical division between high and low culture can help to deconstruct novelistic binaries and reveal meanings that otherwise might not be apparent through traditional methods of study. By showing how high and low cultural theory relates to
similar oppositions in works of art, the construction of modern identities along with humankind’s relationship to its ever evolving technological environment may be elucidated and better understood. Hence, this dissertation examined the shifting ideological values of contemporary society by comparing their fictional representation to both cultural theory and to the changing social conditions of post-dictatorial Spain.

By representing popular culture in various manners, La función Delta, El invierno en Lisboa, Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera, and Historias del Kronen explore some of the possible consequences that the implementation of a newly democratic and consumerist society can have on identity, relationships, and on the construction of ideological and ethical values. In each novel, mass culture significantly influences the way in which the protagonists interact with each other and with their community at large. As such, this literature reflects on many of the individual, political, and social concerns that have preoccupied many Spaniards since the implementation of the new democratic system.

La función Delta and El invierno en Lisboa primarily address the role of mass culture in the process of artistic
creation. In both texts, the protagonists' narratives are influenced by popular genres to such an extent that they unknowingly incorporate their conventions into their work. As such, they point out that perception is necessarily mediated by mass culture and that the concepts of artistic autonomy and originality no longer really exist. However, each novel simultaneously suggests that mass culture can also function in a meta-fictional manner and afford some agency to the subject that seeks meaning through the process of narration. Although both texts represent this phenomenon differently, they mainly concentrate on mass culture's relationship to the creative process.

By contrast, *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* and *Historias del Kronen* do not focus on aesthetic issues and primarily explore the influence that mass culture can exert on the individual conscious. Although their protagonists embrace various popular texts and seem to look upon them favorably, both novels also negate their positive representations by exposing the detrimental consequences that they can have on behavior. Instead of providing liberation from repressive discourses, mass culture as depicted in these works consistently upholds oppressive patriarchal structures and promotes the degradation of the
other. As such, *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* and *Historias del Kronen* expose some of the problematic characteristics of mass culture and show how they can be damaging to both the subject and to society at large.

Another common tie between the four novels is that they all establish and deconstruct different series of binaries. After juxtaposing their fictional oppositions to the high/low theoretical model, the protagonist’s Manichean mentalities are ultimately shown to be an insufficient means of coming to terms with reality. In its own way, each text implies that emotional and existential stability can most effectively be secured by finding a steady middle ground between polar opposites.

All four novels also address the repression of memory and associate mass culture with the general public’s lack of historical awareness, which reflects the pasotismo of the transitional era in which history and politics were supposedly ignored by many Spaniards. Whereas the protagonists of *La función Delta* and *El invierno en Lisboa* ultimately acknowledge mass culture’s role in the fictionalization of historical discourse, those of *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* and *Historias del Kronen* attempt to erase the past from their memory in order to exist in an
eternal present. This body of work thus reflects on a neo-democratic society that experienced a problematic relationship with its totalitarian past as it struggled to establish its new political system. These texts contemplate mass culture’s presence in this new society, and although some criticism and some valuation of the way in which it can influence thought is evident—Montero and Muñoz Molina acknowledge its potentially positive role in the recuperation of memory whereas Mendicutti and Mañas do not—an underlying tension towards its coercive and manipulative nature is still evident in each work.

These novels thereby address mass culture’s increasing presence in the contemporary world and reflect on the various ways that it can influence the construction of ideology. To some extent, each text highlights mass culture’s role in the repression of memory, the fictionalization of historical discourse, the mediation of perception, the redefinition of ethical standards, and the gradual loss of local and domestic cultures. Whereas Montero and Muñoz Molina’s work primarily focuses on mass culture’s relationship to artistic creation, Mendicutti and Mañas’ concentrates on the way in which it can manipulate thought to show that it tends to uphold repressive
patriarchal structures despite its seemingly liberating potential. As such, the latter texts demonstrate that younger authors are no longer generally preoccupied with aesthetic paradigms and rather use mass culture in order to study specific social, political, and personal issues. This discourse distances them from the ambiguity associated with postmodern literature and instead offers realistic and neo-existentialist fiction that examines the deterministic function of culture within the context of a burgeoning democratic and consumerist society.

This literature also touches upon various other themes such as love, death, technological progress, and the discursive construction of identities and cultural ideologies. Mass culture is consistently related to deception, social alienation, violence against the other, the deterioration of ethical values, and, according to several characters, it also has a significant role in the ongoing dehumanization of society. Each novel depicts its association with the mediation of perception in order to point out the inherent difficulty of ascertaining autonomy in the contemporary world. Like Amar Sánchez’s characterization of McOnedo texts, this body of work acknowledges the growing significance of mass culture yet
remains critical of it, which implies that despite their recognition of its importance, authors still do not fully accept the notion that it can enlighten the individual to the same extent as high culture. As such, these novels challenge some of the principles of postmodernism and show that a division between the high and the low still exists in intellectual circles.

Through the contemplation of this theme, Montero, Muñoz Molina, Mendicutti and Mañas explore the potentially destructive influence that mass culture can have on the psyche and reflect on the growing consumerist mentality of a newly democratic Spain. Their protagonists are egocentric, demonstrate little social awareness, are primarily preoccupied with their physical needs, and lead lifestyles that mostly revolve around consumption and the immediate gratification of desire. Their work generally portrays a society that attempts to exist in an eternal present, delights in the pleasures of consumerism, avoids unpleasant memories and represses historical discourse. Their novels point out how ideologies can change alongside the proliferation of mass culture, and thereby recall the notion that the control of the media is what most
significantly regulates the contemporary acquisition of knowledge.

This literature thus implies that unbridled consumerism can be harmful to the intellect and may lead to the deterioration of relationships, psychological instability, alienation, and the proliferation of different kinds of violence. Even so, despite the fact that the problems depicted in the works are never really overcome or resolved, the concepts of love, friendship, solidarity, and artistic creation are all presented as possible manners in which the subject can attempt to combat hardship and achieve some sense of fulfillment.

The discourse of this body of work thereby echoes much of the cultural theory outlined at the beginning of this project that suggested that the construction of contemporary knowledge is necessarily mediated by various mass cultural texts. The themes examined in the selected novels do not only address Spanish issues but also reflect global concerns about how the culture industry can manipulate ideologies around the world. The vast influence of a capitalist market, one that reaches virtually all corners of the globe, becomes a discursive entity that shapes the way that individuals perceive reality. The
representation of such a phenomenon in recent Spanish novels thus takes on a more universal significance as it also reflects similar concerns in other capitalist societies in which excessive consumption can lead to the deterioration of traditional social practices. As issues related to globalization increasingly preoccupy critical thought, the continuing importance of the cultural theory described at the beginning of this project becomes ever clearer.

In many ways, the treatment of mass culture in this literature recalls the work of various cultural critics that theorized about its potential dangers. However, whereas in the past authors generally did not pay a great amount of attention to mass culture in their work, this group of writers recognizes its signifying potential and intentionally incorporates it in order to examine various social issues. With the possible exception of *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera*, each one of these novels quickly became a best seller that afforded a considerable amount of fame and recognition to their authors. Upon their publication, they were rapidly integrated into the capitalist machinery that publicized and sold them as products of mass consumption. Because they concentrate on
the potentially detrimental aspects of mass culture, their generally critical discourse is somewhat paradoxical because it seemingly attacks the very system that led to each novel’s commercial success.

Be that as it may, their authors appear to accept the notion that in order to sustain a significant readership and continue publishing, they must acknowledge and abide by the workings of the commercial market to some degree. They thereby compose literature from within the framework of commodity culture and try to produce meaningful texts that are simultaneously popular. This attitude may be understood as an artistic compromise in which writers deliberately attempt to create best-selling work while they still maintain a literary goal of generating thought-provoking and culturally valuable art. So doing, authors can ensure that their novels, along with their various themes, messages, and political discourses, reach a much larger audience than they normally would if commercial pressures were largely ignored. The decision to follow the rules of the market also appeases editorial companies and helps artists maintain their own economic viability, ultimately giving them the freedom to continue writing for whatever future purposes that may come to mind.
Each of the novels analyzed in this dissertation explores the mentality of a contemporary subject that is inevitably conditioned by the various forms of mass culture to which he is exposed throughout his life. By addressing its various significance through the high/low theoretical perspective, these texts shift away from the conventions of social realist, experimental, and postmodern novels and examine some of the political, historical, and cultural changes brought about by Spain’s transition to democracy. By representing the significance of mass culture in diverse manners, *La función Delta*, *El invierno en Lisboa*, *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera*, and *Historias del Kronen* demonstrate that best selling texts often provide important insights that help readers to better understand the complexities of a world that is increasingly influenced by various sources of culture. As such, they show that commercial texts can be just as culturally valuable as works of high culture and stress the need for more study of best selling literature.
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