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SEX, DRUGS, AND SELF DESTRUCTION: READING DECADENCE AND IDENTITY IN SPAIN'S YOUTH NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

SEX, DRUGS, AND SELF DESTRUCTION: READING DECADENCE AND IDENTITY IN SPAIN'S YOUTH NARRATIVE

By

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The novels of young Spanish authors such as José Ángel Mañas, Lucía Etxebarría, Ray Loriga, and Care Santos portray a hedonistic lifestyle of alcohol and drug abuse, casual sex, random violence, and thrill seeking. This narrative's sudden popularity and subsequent critical controversy pose the question of how to approach Spain's youth narrative of the 1990s, the so-called "Generation X." Due to its foundations in North American commodification, this thesis problematizes the term "Generation X" and seeks to redefine Spain's youth narrative. This study proposes an alternate term, the Novels of Disaffection, to more accurately reflect their origin in Madrid's "movida" of the late 1970s, the self-indulgence of contemporary Spanish youth, and its project of postmodern identity (as defined by Zygmunt Bauman). Spain's Novels of Disaffection frame identity as a liability, antithetical to youth's immersion in simulacra and the culture of spectacle. Youth's identities are radically unstable which precipitates a downward spiral into self-destruction. Thus while the Novels of Disaffection apparently celebrate youth's hedonism—reflecting its popular and critical perceptions as a risqué and subversive literature—simultaneously their portrayal of protagonists' depravity, lack of communication, and interpersonal disconnect serve to indict contemporary Spanish youth culture.

Dedicated to my mother and to Numa

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INTRODUCTION

"Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll," while bordering on being a cliché, is a slogan variously and internationally associated with hedonism, self-indulgence, rebellion, and personal autonomy. In the 1990s, a literature emerges in Spain that appropriates the "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" motto and follows its call-to-arms to destructive ends. This literature, commonly referred to as "Generación X," is written by, about, and ostensibly for young people. Its vivid depictions of drug and alcohol abuse, meaningless sex, graphic violence, and thrill seeking contribute to a narrative that is at once enormously popular and a point of debate among critics. The portrayals of hedonism highlight youth's self-destructive tendencies, which are subtextually posing a question of postmodern identity. This thesis will examine this project of identity and self-destruction in Spain's youth novel of the 1990s.

A problem in approaching Spain's youth narrative is the question of terminology. Due to its sudden emergence and a relatively limited amount of critical attention, "Generation X" emerges as the putative label that popular and critical discourse attaches not only to Spain's youth literature but also to Western youth culture in general. However, surprisingly few critics have defined what "Generation X" means or the implications of its usage in literature. Therefore, Chapter 1 will study the origins of the term, its trajectory through North American popular culture, and its applications to Douglas Coupland's Generation X, Richard Linklater's film Slacker, and Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting. The meanings

that surface connect "Generation X" with North American commodification and conspicuous consumption, which problematizes its application to Spain's youth literature of the 1990s.

Indeed, Spain's narrative not only lacks a generational cohesion, but its protagonists retreat into isolation and alienation. Their marks of identity are personal, not collective. Therefore, following a consensus of international critics that also question the reliance on "Generation X," Chapter 2 will examine how Spain's youth literature differs from the commodified narratives from North America and will propose an alternate term—the Novels of Disaffection—to more accurately describe Spain's youth narrative. The Novels of Disaffection emerge from the socio-cultural infrastructure of Madrid's "movida," focus on youth's self-indulgence, and portray characters whose disaffection posits a project of postmodern identity. Based on theories of Zygmunt Bauman, this identity project frames identity as a liability; it must be disposable and ever changing to take advantage of the present moment. This destabilization of the individual's identity precipitates a self-destruction, and this narrative's examination of the aftermath of youth excess ultimately leads to social and self-criticism.

Subsequent chapters apply Bauman's theoretical framework to the novels of four representative Spanish authors whose novels, through the portrayal of disaffection in Spain's urban youth, pose a project of postmodern identity. Chapter 3 will examine the Kronen tetralogy by José Ángel Mañas—Historias del Kronen, Mensaka, Ciudad rayada, and Sonko 95: Autorretrato con negro de fondo—and the aesthetics and meanings it shares with the punk movement.

Mañas's tetralogy contrasts its protagonists' fleeting identities as postmodern Tourists with the conceptualization of modern Pilgrims to show the self-destructive consequences of their hedonism. Chapter 4 will study two novels by Lucía Etxebarría, Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, which focus on the problems of fluctuating sexual identities. Etxebarría's novels explore the estranging effects of individual autonomy and the failure of intimacy. Chapter 5 will examine Ray Loriga's La pistola de mi hermano and Héroes, and the narcissistic identities of protagonists numbed by simulacra. These novels point up the paradox of characters' simultaneous goal and curse of the erasure of identity. And Chapter 6 will study Care Santos's Okupada, which, through a reading of the theory of the Stranger, shows the disintegration of youth communities and the failure of collective identity.

The estrangement portrayed in Spain's Novels of Disaffection produce radically unstable identities and, ultimately, underscore the consequences of their characters' depravity, lack of communication, and interpersonal disconnect. Thus the "sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll" become a decadent, downward spiral of "sex, drugs, and self destruction." This reading of postmodern identity points to the conclusion that, despite their shock value and antiauthoritarianism, the Novels of Disaffection are cautionary tales for contemporary Spanish youth.

CHAPTER 1. RECONSIDERING GENERATION X, OR "HERE WE ARE NOW, ENTERTAIN US"

Their story begins with a war. Armies of youth in their late teens and early twenties are the willing combatants, waging their war on the streets and in the nightclubs of Madrid. It is an undeclared war, without leaders or campaigns. And it is a war from which no one emerges victorious; it only produces losers. It is a war as described by Roger Wolfe:

> Una guerra. Hace falta una buena guerra. Limpiar a media humanidad. Que me toque a mí también, no me importa. Una buena guerra. Espacio, aire, limpio o sucio, qué más da. La profunda calma que sucede a los desastres. Una guerra. No tenemos otra salvación. (Guerra 34)

This untitled rant appears among hundreds of similar musings in the 1997 collection of "ensayo-ficción," Hay una guerra, by Roger Wolfe. This Spanish author with an English name[1] is a self-declared nihilist, curmudgeon, and alcoholic ("Viendo" 68-73). Like a Spanish Kilgore Trout, Wolfe's books of poetry, essays, and narrative are scattered among nearly a dozen different publishers and are mostly out of print. A confessed underachiever, Wolfe sardonically claims that by becoming a writer he is left with a paltry 37,059 pesetas in his bank account and a stack of unpaid bills (Guerra 23). Yet this practically

[1] In 1965, at age three, Wolfe and his family moved from England to Gijón, where he has resided ever since.

unknown author unwittingly wrote the battle plans for a war and became the literary progenitor of what is popularly known as Spain's "Generación X."

Wolfe, roughly 10 years older than most authors associated with Generation X, is the model and the literary hero of a central figure of Spain's youth narrative, novelist José Ángel Mañas, and captures a disillusionment that Mañas and others—such as Lucía Etxebarría, Ray Loriga, Care Santos—simultaneously develop in their writing. The passage quoted above is one of hundreds expressing dejection, alienation, and disgust with humanity, and establishes the subtext of Spain's contemporary youth literature. Wolfe's narrator sees the worst in humanity and feels so disaffected that he exalts the practical necessity of genocidal disaster. Redemption may come only from the elimination of half of the world's population ("limpiar media humanidad"), because apparently they deserve to be cleansed from the face of the earth. The "profunda calma" is merely a sarcastic afterthought. He fetishizes the spectacle of destruction, "una buena guerra" (in contrast to a "bad" war, he craves a good one, a particularly destructive war with innumerable casualties), a disaster for the purpose of satisfying his sadistic impulse to simply watch it happen. Moreover, he is seemingly so detached, unfazed, and uncaring that it does not matter if this war includes his own death ("Que me toque a mí también, no me importa"). Were he also eliminated, the "profunda calma" would be irrelevant, of course, since he would not be alive to enjoy what he ostensibly desires. Thus, it is tempting to second-guess Hay una guerra's apocalyptic vision. Is Wolfe's narrator truly as suicidal as he sounds or is he merely being hyperbolic? Is contemporary society

so incurably dysfunctional that the only remaining recourse is to call for the wholesale destruction of the human race and start over? Hay una guerra's response does not call upon transcendence, the perseverance of the human spirit, or the quest for universal truths. Rather, measured against his disgust for everyone around him—he is so sick of humanity that he calls for genocide—Wolfe's narrator considers humanity as too unredeemable to be worth caring about. In this war, his war, the battle cries are "I give up" and "I do not care."

Wolfe's narrator admits that, "En realidad, uno de mis mayores problemas es que no puedo soportar a casi nadie" (Guerra 129). In the context of 1990s Spain, a decade characterized by increasing economic globalization, instantaneous diffusion of information through mass media, and extensive interpersonal connectivity through cell phones, pagers, and the internet, Wolfe is questioning why someone would want to talk to anyone else in the first place. If humanity and contemporary society are unredeemable, there remains little hope for the salvation of the individual. Thus, as he contemplates the spectacle of destruction—"me aburre soberanamente todo aquello que no palpite con la fuerza, el vigor y la pasión de las 'sensaciones fuertes'" (Guerra 128)—he also considers the benefits of self-destruction. This suicidal tendency posits a fundamental question of identity: what has caused Wolfe's narrator to have such blatant disregard for his own life and well-being?

Wolfe's nihilism, cynicism, and antisocialism resonate with the narrative of a group of young Spanish novelists that are writing and publishing during the

1990s. Like Roger Wolfe's detached narrator, novelists José Ángel Mañas, Lucía Etxebarría, Ray Loriga, and Care Santos introduce characters that also see their surroundings in contemporary urban Spain without adornment and without redemption. Etxebarría laments an "estado de ánimo de una juventud que no conoce otro estado de ánimo que la desesperanza," (Eva futura 131), and the protagonist of Mañas's Ciudad rayada, Kaiser, bemoans, "ki si la corrupción, ki si tenemos una sociedad enferma, kon un kuartenta y cinko por ciento de paro jubenil y una educación de mierda kon la ke kerían konbertirnos a todos en mano de obra barata" (143-144 [sic]). They, too, are attracted to wars, yet not on the geopolitical scale as framed by contemporary historiography or mass media. They are indifferent to the international conflicts that punctuate the 1990s—in war zones such as the Balkans, Chechnya, Kuwait, Iraq, and Israel—and are apathetic to the domestic conflicts that strike even closer to home. In response to the terrorist aggression of ETA that occurs in Madrid during the 1990s, Spain's youth culture shrugs its shoulders in indifference. They refuse to acknowledge global wars and refuse to let national conflicts affect them. Whereas during the 1950 and 1960s, leftists and intellectuals directed their rebellion against social supra-structures and institutions like the Franco regime and the Catholic Church (Mangini), in 1990s Spanish narrative, in contrast, youth simply do not care (Pao 249-250). Their conflicts and warfare take place elsewhere.

Surrounded by the international, the global, and the hegemonic, they turn inward. Spanish youth are looking for their own personal disasters, mined from their broken homes, internal conflicts, and decadent behavior. Like Wolfe's

narrator toying with the idea of self-destruction ("Que me toque a mí también"), youth culture's pessimism and nihilism are catalysts driving their downward spiral of drug abuse, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, random violence, and ultimately, self-destruction. And when youth do not find disasters, they create them. In the 1990s, a narrative emerges which, at its essence, portrays youth going to war against itself.

These internalized wars capture a snapshot of the much maligned and often misunderstood youth culture of 1990s Spain. It is known popularly and among scholars alike as "Generación X," an adaptation of the internationalized North American buzzword, "Generation X." Gathering youth culture—both within the literary text and in society at large—under this catch-all, umbrella term poses a fundamental problem for the study of contemporary Spanish youth narrative. The term "Generation X" is used liberally, even reflexively, and oftentimes without consideration to its definition or implications. Since "Generation X" is the de facto, international brand name that youth culture wears during the 1990s, both in popular and critical discourse, the question of terminology is where an analysis of this culture[2], and later its literary manifestation, will begin. How can one define

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[2] In light of this study's focus on youth narrative, references to "culture" and "subculture" will be in terms of youth. First, this study will define "youth" according to Hebdige, as a series of struggles in the lives of young people that impact identity formation (68-80). Second, according to Jonathan Epstein (4-21), "youth culture" is essentially a space of identity formation in which young people experience a tension between childhood and adulthood that produces alienation. This alienation impacts contemporary youth culture in that youth experience a downward mobility. Estranged from society, youth culture becomes apathetic to its present and future, producing so-called "slackers." This definition of youth culture ties closely with the conceptualization of subcultures. Again based on the

youth culture and youth literature? And what does "Generation X" mean? The answers to these questions will necessarily guide this discussion through an examination of North American literature before returning to Spain. This detour is important in contextualizing Spain's youth narrative of the 1990s and will suggest an approach—disaffection and identity—to Spain's youth narrative of the 1990s that will guide the rest of this study. Thus, to understand the war that Roger Wolfe is describing and the corresponding aesthetic that a group of young Spanish novelists have adopted, it is necessary to analyze the development of Generation X (youth culture itself) and "Generation X" (the term) in its socio-cultural context, examine its development in different Western countries, and how it applies to Spanish narrative.

As a term "Generation X" is a multi-tasking workhorse. In popular parlance, "Generation X" juggles a vast array of cultural phenomena, being the buzzword noun to refer to youth of the 1990s in general and an adjective to describe their tastes in music, film, television programs, video games,

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theories of Hebdige, "youth subcultures" consist of young people that feel alienated on the individual level, not on the collective level. This individual estrangement is based on the concept of meaningfulness. That is, the alienated individual engages in a search for meaning, and thus is attracted to subcultures. However, a key to subcultures is that subcultural resistance to hegemonic culture affects only those engaged in the subculture, and has little if any effect on society at large (Epstein 11). In terms of "popular culture," which Kellner defines as the site of the implosion of identity and the fragmentation of the subject ("Popular" 144), youth culture and popular culture do coincide. However, due to the conceptualization of youth as alienated individuals, "popular culture" in this study will be defined as the culture of mass consumption and consumerism (Featherstone 21, McGuigan 83). Thus it should be recognized that youth culture's relationship (particularly as presented in Spain's narrative of the 1990s) with popular culture is at times contradictory: while youth feel alienated by the hegemonies of popular culture, they are simultaneously participating in it.

magazines, literature, fashion, advertising, nightlife, drugs, and most significantly, attitudes, as well as caricatures of all of the above. Vann Wesson identifies the historical, social, and cultural phenomena that epitomize Generation X, such as the breakup of the Soviet Union, the space shuttle Challenger explosion, grunge music, MTV, the threat of AIDS, divorce rates over 50%, the popularity of piercing and tattoos, gang violence, and the beginning of the internet revolution (xi). In addition, others cite more generalized characteristics of Generation X: Littwin signals their sense of entitlement and frustration (22), while Epstein considers them to be realistic in their status as a "generation who are without hope and have no illusions about a brighter future" (18). Throughout the 1990s, the term "Generation X," adhering to the elements of this wide cultural context, gathered momentum in popular parlance throughout the Western world. Once considered an underground or countercultural denomination, "Generation X" became a widespread cultural buzzword (Barnard 10-19). Moreover, the context of its usage is decidedly negative. Jonathan Epstein asserts that society implicitly sees contemporary youth as a social problem (3). William Strauss and Neil Howe note that Generation X breaks the traditional union of "youth" and "idealism" and instead is a profoundly cynical group (327-8), which Diane Owens echoes, referring to their general sense of "detachment and anomie" (87). Meredith Bagby summarizes the American popular news media's opinion of Generation X, which perpetuates the myth that "we can afford not to work. As the story goes, we are living in our parents' basements, glued to MTV, and using our college

degrees as coasters" (11). The popular perception holds that Generation X, while well educated, is an insular culture that lacks the motivation to better themselves.

Furthermore, through its extensive usage "Generation X" has spawned numerous permutations around the world. Vann Wesson identifies the successors of Generation X as "Generation Y," defined as those born between 1982 and 2003, who view technology as a way of life, have the immediacy of 24 hour a day news coverage, and feel that they are required to mature early (x). "Generation Y" is often derisively referred to as "Generation Whine" (Lamm 22) for their stereotypical proclivity to complain despite the social and economic privilege that they often enjoy, a perception readily apparent in teen oriented internet chatrooms. At times in popular speech, "Generation Y" is synonymous with "Generation I" (Dignan) the technologically savvy, hyperlinked, "screen-agers," a term that Microsoft founder Bill Gates adopts to describe children that grow up with the internet (Bridis). In 1999, an Hispanocentric "Generación Ñ" denotes a roving series of rock concerts promoting "rock en español" that toured through Spain and Latin America (Jarque). The Pepsi Cola Corporation morphed "Generation X" into a 1998 television commercial advertising slogan, "Generation Next," with an accompanying soundtrack by British pop group Spice Girls to promote their soft drinks. The commercial featured the five scantily-clad Brits singing the bafflingly meaningless lyrics, "It's over yeah / Cause it's over / Cause it's over / Yeah, yeah, yeah...Generation Next." Aside from using the concept of Generation X as a blatant marketing ploy, Pepsi obviously overlooked the fact that among Generation X hipsters, Spice Girls were widely considered a musical

punchline. In another example of advertising, "Generation D," the digital generation, is a trademark and advertising slogan of the ethically challenged multinational corporation WorldCom, which appropriates the Generation X moniker to sell wireless data solutions to mobile professionals. And Meredith Bagby notes a list of tangential labels that spring up in popular speech, such as "the Doofus Generation, the New Lost, Grungers, New Petulants, Boomerang (poverty stricken we return to our parents), Generation P (poor and pissed off), the Scarce, Busters, 13ers (the thirteenth generation born in America)" (2). This alphabet soup of generations is indicative of the problem inherent in understanding Generation X: since the late 1980s, "Generation X" has acquired a considerable amount of terminological mileage, and throughout Western cultures the term's usage has grown with little regard for its meaning or the contexts in which it appears.

As a literary denomination, "Generation X" is problematic because its usage began outside of literature as a socio-cultural reference to describe North America's economically privileged yet indolent youth. Neither literary nor cultural studies have embraced a commonly accepted definition of Generation X—as seen in the string of rechristenings, like Holloway's "The Free Generation," Littwin's sociological approach "The Postponed Generation," and Barnard, Cosgrove and Welsh's "The Nexus Generation"—nor have they codified an approach to youth culture in the 1990s. The multitude of uses complicates efforts to standardize its usage. In fact, the dilemma of definitions has vexed the study youth literature since it emerged on the critical radar in the 1990s. The problem is

succinctly and paradoxically contained in the term itself: the "X" denotes an unknown or unknowable entity, as in an undefined element in mathematics, an X factor. The letter hangs on the end of the term and at the fringes of popular culture and literary studies, begging certain questions: What does X stand for? Where did it come from? How far does it extend and what does it encompass? Who are the Generation Xers? What is this X factor that thrusts itself into contemporary literature and culture? In essence, what exactly does "Generation X" mean?

From its inception, the term "Generation X" is inherently nebulous. Although cultural critics, sociologists, literary scholars, and the mass media alike refer to "Generation X," to date surprisingly few have attempted to explicitly define it (Rosen 171). James Annesley, for example, referring to the manifestation of Generation X in the United States, resorts to describing a pervasive feeling:

> You might not be sure what it is, but you can be sure that it's out there. Turn on the TV and it's there. Go to the movies and you'll see it. Open a magazine and it'll be there. Flick through a rack of CDs and you'll find it. Turn the pages of a novel and you'll read it. You must have seen it, even if you're unable to name it. It's found in the images of excess and indulgence that dominate Larry Clark's "Kids" (1996). It's tangled up in the violence of Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho (1991)...You can hear it when Beck sings "I'm a loser baby...why don't you kill me?" Common sets of themes are

being articulated. There's an emphasis on the extreme, the marginal and the violent. There's a sense of indifference and indolence. The limits of the human body seem indistinct, blurred by cosmetics, narcotics, disease, and brutality. (1)

Annesley's observations are indicative of a critical consensus that indeed "something is out there," yet due to its fluctuating cultural manifestations, it is inherently vague and intangible (Geoffrey Holtz, Vance Holloway). Since it points to such a wide variety of youth culture phenomena, the term is a shifting and evolving entity and by itself inherently explains little. "Generation X" points to an age group—the twentysomethings—and their generally despondent and defiant attitude—but tends to leave other details undefined. To approach a more specific definition, one may say that Generation X is first and foremost a phenomenon of youth, defined here as individuals between eighteen and thirty years old during the 1990s—that is, those born in the 1960s and 1970s[3]—colloquially identified as

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[3] The question of age groups is a widely accepted common denominator for identifying Generation X, as well as its precursors and successors. Sociologists and literary critics—such as those mentioned above—have posited a dizzying array of birth years to identify generations throughout the later half of the twentieth century. The distribution commonly falls along the lines of the Baby Boomers (born 1943-1959), Generation X (1960-1980), Generation Y (1981-2000), and the Tweens (those currently aged 10-13). One should note that these dates represent averages of the aforementioned critics and do not imply a critical consensus. This study will define Generation X as those born around 1970 (i.e., from approximately 1965-1975), in general agreement with Epstein (18). This set of dates limits the focus to youth in their late teens and twenties during the decade of the 1990s, since it is the average age of protagonists in the novels written during this decade, internationally as well as in Spain. As will be demonstrated later, other factors such as decadence, disaffection, and identity are more important in defining youth culture, and particularly its literary equivalent in Spain.

the indefinite "twentysomethings." Second, in the broadest sense, "Generation X" names an intersection; it attempts to identify the convergence of popular music, film, literature, television, fashion, mass communications, marketing, alcohol, drugs, nightlife, and most importantly, an attitude. These phenomena intersect in the 1990s in the urban metropoli of Western nations which are experiencing not only relative economic stability but typically robust prosperity. The economic situation generates the Generation Xer's increased disposable income and leisure time, which of course funnels back into the consumption of the aforementioned music, films, fashions, booze, and drugs. Generation X demands absolute independence and unlimited freedom, a freedom that is "of" and "from": freedom of speech, action, movement, but also freedom from restrictions, rules, relationships, and responsibilities.

To approach a definition—particularly one that will be useful in an examination of literature—it is necessary to examine the brief yet diverse history of "Generation X," and to do so one must return to the punk rock subculture of the mid 1970s. Simon Frith argues that through the experience and performance of popular music one can understand cultural identity (109), and coincidentally, it is in the musical subculture of 1970s London where "Generation X" is born. During this decade local music scenes around England and the United States were reacting to the popularity of disco's synthesized dance beats performed by artists such as Gloria Gaynor ("I Will Survive"), The Trammps ("Disco Inferno"), Lipps Inc. ("Funky Town"), The Village People ("YMCA"), ABBA ("Dancing Queen"), and the superlative success of the Australian trio The Bee Gees

("Stayin' Alive," "Night Fever," "Jive Talkin'" "More Than a Woman") as well as the 1977 film Saturday Night Fever (Tomlinson 196). Following the socially conscious music and earnest protest songs of 1960s singer-songwriters such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, disco is a depoliticized pop music that embraces the comfort of middle class prosperity. Disco's raison d'être is to forget one's troubles, submit to the carefree atmosphere of disco dancing, and "boogy down" under a shimmering mirror ball on a blinking dance floor. At the same time that disco music is a staple of nightlife and radio in the 1970s, musicians are combining the intricate melodies and swirling crescendos of classical composers with the volume of electric guitars and synthesizers in an experiment known as symphonic rock. Songs such as "Nights in White Satin" by The Moody Blues, "10538 Overture" by The Electric Light Orchestra, and "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" by Pink Floyd are 10 to 15 minute opuses with complex instrumentation and musical scores, with accompanying elaborate concert performances that feature banks of fog rolling across the stage, laser lighting, and in the case of Pink Floyd, even inflatable flying pigs.

In contrast to the porcine bloat of symphonic rock and the self-indulgence of disco, a twenty one year old Londoner named William Michael Albert Broad was challenging the stylized aesthetics of disco and the complexity of symphonic rock with a rebel yell. William Broad adopted the stage name Billy Idol and in 1975 emerged on the club scene with the punk band Generation X. Their music was a raw blend of atonal guitar chords and sneered lyrics, combined with a tough image consisting of black leather jackets, spiked wristbands, dog collars,

and the trademark vertically spiked hair or mohawks. Generation X's lyrics covered such prototypical youth themes as debauchery, rejection, alienation, and defiance of authority in songs such as "Wild Youth," "Untouchables," "One Hundred Punks," and "Kiss Me Deadly." Thus the first popularized use of "Generation X" entered the public consciousness though punk rock[4]. These rowdy beginnings are revealing in that, as Generation X literature purports to flout the limits of popular culture through an anti-aesthetic, similarly punk embodied a desire to be ugly and offensive. Punk pioneers Johnny Rotten and Siouxee Sioux, for example, relished the shock value of wearing swastika armbands, and punks pierced their ears with safety pins and wore purposely tattered clothes.

According to Craig O'Hara, a tenet of punk was the spirit of "D.I.Y.," or "do it yourself" (153-4). This philosophy springs from punk's political rejection of mass produced products, as in the aesthetic of tattered clothing, which translates into a music that is simple to perform: the punk does not need a developed musical skill or even the ability to read musical notation. For example, The Sex Pistols, The Ramones, and The Stooges perform such punk rock standards as "Anarchy in the U.K.," "I Wanna Be Sedated," and "I Wanna Be Your Dog," respectively, entirely by hammering repetitive guitar chords. Punk rock takes pride in its musical amateurism and, in contrast to the intricate 15 minute

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[4] While this thesis will ultimately argue against the use of the term "Generation X" in Spanish literature, this early link with the rebellious roots of punk rock music will become particularly relevant in studying the Spanish youth novel of the 1990s, specifically in interpreting the narrative of José Ángel Mañas in Chapter 3.

symphonic rock songs, punk songs rarely use more than three guitar chords or rarely exceed two minutes. More important than musical dexterity is that the punk must have the attitude of defiance through which to express his/her energy and rage. Thus in contrast to disco and symphonic rock, the production value of punk is so deliberately low that, merely with the proper attitudes—disgust, frustration, anger—anyone can perform it. Similar to punk, this concept emerges in the youth literature of the 1990s in authors that reject formal training and the conventions of literary writing, and seek to shock readers through their blunt portrayal of social taboos such as masturbation, drug abuse, graphic violence, rape, and alcoholism.

Following its noisy and rowdy beginnings in London's punk scene, the term "Generation X" lies dormant throughout the 1980s until it resurfaces in North America in the early 1990s. Social and political pundits begin to use the term to describe the post baby-boom generation, the proverbial twentysomethings, those between twenty and thirty years old. The term "Generation X" spreads quickly in social discourse through the mass media, used derisively to describe an age group that consistently fails to live up to the expectations of older generations (Bagby 2). In North America, the popular image of Generation X is that youth is generally well educated, as reflected in the increasing enrollment in universities, but lack the motivation to apply their knowledge to middle class aspirations, institutions, or stabilities, such as a career, home, or family (Gaines 266). In Generations Apart: Xers vs. Boomers vs. The Elderly, political pundit Michael Kinsley chides Generation X's feelings of dejection in contrast to the enormous

privileges they enjoy: "These kids today. They're soft. They don't know how good they have it. Not only did they never have to fight a war, like their grandparents, they never even had to dodge one" (20)[5]. The "us versus them" argument typifies political readings of Generation X, which polarize around either the financial consequences that youth will have to bear as a result of the Baby Boomers' overuse of social, governmental, and environmental resources, or around the Baby Boomers' chastisement of the insubordination of contemporary youth culture (Craig 8-13). The popular image of Generation X highlights youth's tendency to drop out, to reject the middle class work ethic and gages of success indoctrinated by a middle class upbringing. It is paradoxical, then, that the Generation Xer lives a "do it yourself" philosophy, especially in that most salient of Generation X identifiers, music. Following the spirit of punk, Generation X embraces an emerging musical sound from the American northwest—namely Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington—called Grunge (Santiago-Lucerna 192). As its name implies, the music is dirty and unrefined. Grunge is frenetic rock music with pounding drumbeats and chugging guitar rhythms. Rather than editing out the imperfections from the recordings, guitar feedback and notes sung

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[5] Kinsley's observation is correct in the socio-political sense of a lack of an engaging, unifying international conflict. However, as Roger Wolfe posits and numerous other young Spanish novelists echo in their works, the current war is not external—spanning national borders with military hardware. Rather, they start their own internal wars. Like Roger Wolfe's call for war, it is not a politically motivated war or the warfare of Marxist class struggle. Rather because these "soft" kids live lives that are relatively free from conflict (Bagby 4), they create it. Suubsequent chapters will examine how Spanish youth narrative portrays a subculture that, in a hollow act of defiance, turns its aggression inward against itself.

out of tune at times characterize entire albums, such as the Meat Puppets' debut record titled Meat Puppets. Grunge bases itself on angst and raw emotion rather than the performer's innate musical talent. Thus, as Santiago-Lucerna (192) and Morrell (48) point out, grunge is a contemporary manifestation of punk. Like punk, grunge eschews popularity, reveling in its status as a peripheral and underground cultural expression. The grunge aesthetic is anti-corporate and anti-fashion; it boycotts name brands and expensive labels in favor of a working class aesthetic. As such the grunge garb consists of utilitarian and day laborers' clothes, such as torn blue jeans, faded tee shirts, industrial workers' boots, and the ubiquitous lumberjacks' flannel shirt, the traditional workers' clothing of the American northwest (Santiago-Lucerna 190-1). Grunge bands include Mudhoney, Tad, Heatmiser, Green River, The Melvins, Soundgarden, Pearl Jam, and the enormously influential Nirvana, whose singer and guitarist Kurt Cobain unwittingly comes to epitomize Generation X. The unrefined yowl characteristic of grunge "singers" (their atonality and penchant for screaming requires one to use the term loosely) such as Eddie Vedder, Mark Arm, Chris Cornell, and particularly Kurt Cobain, is a scream of rejection against consumerism, materialism, bourgeois prosperity and the perceived loss of individuality and personal independence that accompanies it. Nirvana's seminal album Nevermind (1991), the anthemic song "Smells Like Teen Spirit," and the violent, bumper-car dancing it inspired—moshing—expresses an alienation and estrangement that become the soundtrack associated with Generation X. For example, in "Smells Like Teen Spirit," Cobain sings, "I'm worse at what I do best / And for that gift I

feel blessed" and "I found it hard, it's hard to find / Oh well, whatever, Nevermind," an ode to underachievement and a rejection of personal fulfillment. Similarly in "Breed," Nirvana's message is more direct, "Get away, get away, get away, get away, away, way from your home," a command to young people to disconnect from their families. Through grunge, Generation X establishes itself as a term and a bona fide counterculture (Epstein 18-21). The "nothing-is-special" aesthetic of Generation X and the rejection of consumer culture of grunge contrasts with the relative economic prosperity in Western nations through the mid 1990s. Youth feel left behind, and a segment of youth culture simply drops out. Mark Renton, for example, mocks the optimistic and chirpy "Choose Life" slogan in a well-known passage from Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting:

> Choose us. Choose life. Choose mortgage payments; choose washing machines; choose cars; choose sitting oan a couch watching mind-numbing and spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fuckin junk food intae yir mooth. Choose rotting away, pishing and shiteing yersel in a home, a total fuckin embarrassment tae the selfish, fucked-up brats ye've produced. Choose life.
>
> Well, ah choose no tae choose life. If the cunts cannae handle that, it's thair fuckin problem. (187-8)

When faced with the possibility of bourgeois comfort, and economic and career successes, Generation X chooses not to choose. As reflected in Nirvana's music or Welsh's Trainspotting, Generation X is founded on the idea of dropping out, refusing to blindly accept the status quo that their suburbanite parents embrace.

However, Generation X's disdain for hegemonic, consumer culture is contradictory: the middle class prosperity and economic privileges they purportedly reject also allow them to drop out comfortably. With the security of middle class parents providing an economic safety net, youth can be slackers. Thus youth's rebellion is paradoxically founded on privilege and entitlement, and these economic conditions have shaped Generation X in North America.

Generation Xers are astute diagnosticians. They criticize the consumer culture (as they take part in it themselves) and lambaste the hypocrisies of modern society (while indulging their own hypocrisies). As the Generation X band and independent music icon Sebadoh sings, "It feels good / just to bitch about it" ("Magnet's Coil"). Youth does not propose an alternative, a radically new or utopic vision of a better world as was common in the discourse of the 1960s. Generation X simply drops out, content to feel contempt for the system they reject, without the gumption to create change. By refusing to act, they also avoid responsibility. Countercultures consistently challenge hegemonies and the slogan "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" is not original, of course. Yet whereas the counterculture of the 1960s offered a pacifist "flower power," and Timothy Leary suggested a mind-expanding LSD trip of "tuning in, turning on, and dropping out" to arrive at a higher level of consciousness (Calcutt 69-70), Generation X embraces no such grandiloquent philosophies. They follow the path of least resistance and drop out without suffering hardships (such as poverty, starvation,

or homelessness). They embrace a postmodern[6] vision to "lead an enjoyable life" (Bauman "Pilgrim" 34). Generation Xers are postmodern rebels who are literally without a cause; they bear no cumbersome ideology, politics, or social crusade to keep them from having fun.

Part of the problem in reading Generation X—the culture and the literature—resides in the fact that it is a new and understudied phenomenon, and thus it is difficult to maintain a critical distance. Francisco Rico observes that "un período se reconoce sólo cuando, al cerrarse, se descubre toda la complejidad del juego de acciones y reacciones en que se mueve siempre la literatura" (viii). Thus, the immediacy of Generation X exacerbates the problem. The proximity of

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[6] Selden and Widdowson identify two tenets to be characteristic (if it's not contradictory in and of itself to claim so) of postmodernism:

> first, the 'grand narratives' of historical progress initiated by the enlightenment are discredited; and second, any political grounding of these ideas in 'history' or 'reality' is no longer possible, since both have become 'textualised' in the world of images and simulations which characterise the contemporary age of mass consumption and advanced technologies. (174-175)

Postmodernism distrusts 'grand narratives' (also called meta-narratives, macro narratives, or universal philosophies), such as the life of the human Spirit, the emancipation of humanity, or the accumulation of wealth (Lyotard 37). At the root of this belief lies a fundamental skepticism in the ability to master a domain. In a narrative, postmodernism sees a crisis of representation in this aforementioned 'world of images and simulations,' that is the inability of that narrative to legitimize and adequately represent an object. Jean François Lyotard expresses a fundamental skepticism towards the grand narratives of history. In his consideration of language and the commodity of knowledge in The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard asserts that it is no longer possible to speak of totalizing reason, for there is no one reason, but rather multiple reasons. Lyotard argues that these master narratives, such as those in Selden and Widdowson's definition, no longer function in contemporary society. Linda Hutcheon echoes this point in that "no narrative can be a natural 'master' narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct" (13). In contrast with an overriding master narrative, Lyotard sees an inherent pluralism at work in postmodernism.

degenerate youth, their lifestyle, and their literature tends to produce a conceptual, critical, and cultural myopia: their immediate presence, literally on the streets before the eyes of the Western world, affords little critical distance from which to consider Generation X or their literature. Echoing James Annesley's affirmation that, "you might not be sure what it is, but you can be sure that it's out there" (1), similarly something is lurking in the dark corners of literary studies, creeping into the canon, and appearing on reading lists of contemporary literature courses in both Europe and North America. In the mid 1990s the Generation X existing on the streets and in nightclubs begins appearing as fictionalized representations in novels. The correspondence between narrative and larger youth culture is inescapable: Western youth use drugs, dance at all night raves, engage in casual sex, and (ostensibly) withdraw from hegemonic culture. Thus as the literary correlation also explores the seamy underbelly of society through this nocturnal subculture, the term "Generation X" by default attaches itself to youth culture novels. The sudden appearance and subsequent popularity of this literature creates a terminological vacuum, and "Generation X" fills the void. The term begins to infiltrate armchair discussions of contemporary literature by the mid 1990s, and not long after, literary scholarship, as well. However the application of "Generation X" to contemporary youth literature is not homogeneous. Rather, its literary usage varies as much as its sociocultural applications. In fact, the Generation X terminological problem escalates when its focus narrows to literature. The wider cultural context outside the literary text becomes inextricable from the so-called "Generation X literature." When one

examines its evolution and its present day (mis)applications, it will become clear that "Generation X" is a term of convenience; while it may fill a terminological vacuum, as a literary term it explains very little. The widespread dispersion of "Generation X" as a cultural buzzword throughout Western nations, and its resulting indeterminacy and relativism, ultimately calls into question the term's usefulness when referring to the literature of the 1990s. A survey of international Generation X literature will, first, serve to contextualize the phenomena and, second, will provide a segue to a discussion of youth literature that develops in Spain in the 1990s.

Generation X in literature originates in North America with Douglas Coupland. This Canadian novelist definitively codifies the term into literature in 1991 with the publication of his first novel, Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture, and as result it becomes the nucleus of the Generation X literary conundrum. The novel appears at a time when "Generation X" was gaining momentum as a term in social discourse, reemerging from its dormancy since Billy Idol's punk band of the late 1970s. Generation X is a marketing and publishing phenomenon (Davis 255). St. Martin's publishes dozens of editions in only a few years that sparks a friendship with R.E.M.'s enigmatic singer Michael Stipe and brings instant notoriety to the 28 year old Coupland among the North American hipster community (Romer 58).

Generation X revolves around a trio of underachieving twenty-somethings—Dag, Andy, and Claire—who converge in the desert outside Palm Springs, California, to escape the rampant consumerism of contemporary culture,

the "compulsions that made us confuse shopping with creativity" (11), as Dag claims. Yet their relationship with consumerism is symbiotic as they simultaneously criticize and celebrate consumer culture. The trio shuns luxury goods (in a spontaneous fit of vandalism, Dag incinerates an Oldsmobile) that defined their pre-desert existence. While their pilgrimage to the desert is ostensibly a form of escapism, they irrevocably attach themselves to the grammar of consumerism. Their journey away from crass consumerism paradoxically leads them to more conspicuous consumption: instead of convertible sports cars and brand name clothing, they fetishize and purchase the lowest common denominator tchotchkes, such as disposable Swedish furniture, Mojave rugs, taxidermed chickens, and bottles of sand crystallized in nuclear test blasts. The three work so-called McJobs, a "low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future job in the service sector. Frequently considered a satisfying career choice by people who have never held one" (5). While they trudge through a subsistence living, working mind-numbing, interchangeable, dead-end McJobs, in correlation they also lack any aspirations or goals, which offers them an absolute freedom from responsibility (to friends, to families, to lovers, and to themselves). Essentially, they have the ultimate freedom of choice and the freedom from choice. Dag, Andy, and Claire's educations and backgrounds from prosperous families primes them for successful careers and lucrative salaries. Yet like Mark Renton's credo in Trainspotting, ("Well, ah choose no tae choose life. If the cunts cannae handle that, it's thair fuckin problem"), they reject the bourgeois prosperity that is their birthright. Thus Generation X portrays

underachieving youths that occupy a position of privilege but refuse to exploit that privilege. Their meaningless employment provides a subsistence living which in turn reduces their lives to just that, meaninglessness.

As part of their escapism, they engage in an endless banter of storytelling. The three entertain themselves by narrating clever stories about the drudgery of life, such as Claire's story about a spaceman who crash lands on the near-earth asteroid named "Texlahoma," who must find true love from one of a trio of Texlahoma rubes—Arlene, Darlene, and Serena—to power his spaceship to return to earth. Their storytelling sessions have clear ground rules: no one is allowed to criticize anyone else's stories and no one is allowed to fall in love with each other. They strip their lives of risk, and hence, the chance of personal fulfillment, satisfaction, or progress. This avoidance of intimacy undermines protagonists' declared search for meaning, as Generation X is essentially a love story. Pushing their preoccupations into third person narratives, Dag, Andy, and Claire's stories are thinly veiled autobiographical tales that express the longings of their narrators: Dag's romantic desires for Andy, Claire's search for a fulfilling relationship with Tobias, and Andy's search for connection with his family. Andy's desperate search for meaning in his life comes to fruition with the serendipitous encounter with a group of retarded teenagers. The emotional connection with a group of strangers—and their spontaneous group hug—are surrogates for the loving family that Andy never had.

The structure of Generation X establishes the technique, often repeated in other youth novels of the 1990s, of the vignette-driven plot. The plot develops in

brief installments, averaging three to four pages each. As one train of thought begins, the narrative jump-cuts to another, rarely connected, story. This brevity and fragmentation mirror the lives of the protagonists, reflecting Dag, Andy, and Claire's notoriously short attention spans, their proclivity for distraction, and an urge not to be stuck on any one facet of life for too long. With the plot inextricably bound to the present moment, the protagonists frustrate their own attempts at transcendence. Indeed, their search for meaning is half-hearted. For the Generation Xers in Coupland's novel, the end of youth is essentially the end of meaningful existence, as evidenced in the chapter title, "Dead at 30 Buried at 70." They mourn their own emotional and spiritual "death" decades before they physically die. By entertaining a Peter Pan-esque fantasy of never growing old, they forestall maturity and growth. They have no burning political stance, no overriding philosophical position to defend, and thus Dag, Andy, and Claire do not have to try: disposable jobs are plentiful, products are always available for consumption, there is always another exotic location to which to travel which will always be better than their current location. They can idly complain about America's hyperconsumerism because that same hyperconsumeristic lifestyle allows them the luxury to do so. Thus the trappings of consumerism compromise them. Dag, Andy, and Claire reduce their lives to a sustained distraction that ultimately (and purposely) frustrates their search for meaning.

In conjunction with the disjunctive vignettes of the plot and the protagonists' escapist storytelling, an obsessive reliance on slogans thwarts the search for meaning. Generation X injects coined phrases, fabricated headlines,

and pop art graphics into the margins of the text itself. "Stop History," "Eroticize Intelligence," and "Bench Press Your I.Q." are a sampling of the pseudo-intellectual, bumpersticker philosophies that punctuate the novel. Thus despite their proposed search for transcendence, Andy, Dag, and Claire rely on hollow sloganism. The narrative itself perpetuates this philosophical posturing by adopting a user's manual format, including hip and clever definitions of Generation X terminology for the uninitiated. The tongue-in-cheek definitions feature terms such as "Survivulousness" ("The tendency to visualize oneself enjoying being the last remaining person on earth. 'I'd take a hellcopter up and throw microwave ovens down on the Taco Bell'." [62]), "Historical Underdosing" ("To live in a period of time when nothing major seems to happen. Major symptoms include addiction to newspapers, magazines, and TV news broadcasts" [7]), "Emotional Ketchup Bursts" ("The bottling up of opinions and emotions inside oneself so that they explosively burst forth all at once, shocking and confusing employers and friends—most of whom thought things were fine" [21]), or the "Mid-Twenties Breakdown" ("A period of mental collapse occurring in one's twenties, often caused by an inability to function outside of school or structured environments coupled with a realization of one's essential aloneness in the world. Often marks induction into the ritual of pharmaceutical usage" [27]). Coupland's crash-course lessons in "X" terminology attach an ironic playfulness to the drive to establish definitions.

Whereas one would assume that the act of defining Generation X terminology within the novel itself would be a welcome development–Coupland

has seemingly written a novel that defines itself—it is not the case. Generation X frustrates the reader's attempts to arrive at a definition of "Generation X." Coupland's intratextual definitions, which are often his own inventions, and his palpable sarcasm, subvert the act of defining from within; the novel appropriates the very mechanisms of establishing meaning and uses them to produce meaninglessness. A term like "survivulousness," for example ("I'd take a helicopter up and throw microwave ovens down on the Taco Bell"), and its implied rebellion against globalized fast food franchises is not only of questionable usefulness, but in essence it is a hollow act of rebellion. If one were the last living human being, according to its definition, the creation of a spectacle for spectacle's sake would be doubly meaningless as no one else would be alive to witness the destruction. Thus Coupland's novel captures the paradox of the Generation X zeitgeist: despite literally "writing the book" on Generation X, Coupland's novel purposely inverts the objectivity of a definition and turns its meaning into gibberish.

Vann Wesson contributes to the cacophony of Generation X terminology in his sarcastic field guide for spotting the Generation X creature in its natural habitat of the urban jungle. In Generation X: Field Guide and Lexicon (1997), Wesson attempts to define, word for word, the Generation X argot. In contrast to Coupland's subjective definitions, Wesson distances himself as an outsider looking in on Generation X, striving for ultimate objectivity in his definitions of "Generation X" ("Those born between 1960 and 1981. A generation characterized by the lack of specific identity or role (other than that of consumer)

within the larger society" [76]) and "Slacker" ("a rebel against the Puritan work ethic. A generic term for one who is usually perceived as a burden. Slacker implies laziness and a lack of motivation and direction toward any perceivable goal other than to enjoy oneself" [150]). The effect is sarcastic; Wesson is thumbing his nose at those not in on the joke by defining slang terms ("Grunge," "Nirvana," "Ren and Stimpy," "Mall Rats") that any self-respecting young hipster would already know. Thus Coupland and Wesson's alternating subjectivity underline the ongoing problem of establishing what truly defines "Generation X."

The publication and subsequent popularity of Coupland's Generation X coincides with another Generation X touchstone, Richard Linklater's 1991 film Slacker. Set in Austin, Texas, in the mid-nineties, Slacker consists of a dizzying 96 protagonists. Like the episodic plot of Coupland's novel, Linklater's film wanders through bars, nightclubs, convenience stores, and University of Texas dormitories, following a series of static characters. No one accomplishes any goals nor truly does anything of substance. Their random encounters with strangers are excuses to banter about their individual obsessions—reminiscent of Dag, Andy, and Claire in Coupland's novel—such as political conspiracies and existentialism. Linklater himself claims that his characters "would be smart enough to go to grad school but...definitely didn't want to go" (Rushkof 46). The randomness, lack of linearity, and, oftentimes, lack of coherence in Slacker mirror the aesthetics of Generation X. Moreover, the similarity between Linklater's film and Coupland's novel is particularly significant with regards to terminology. The simultaneous popularity and nearly coinciding release dates of

both works in 1991, and the perceived similarities between the protagonists and narrative structures of Coupland's novel and Linklater's film interwove the two titles in popular parlance: "Generation X" and "Slacker" became synonyms, making a slacker an inexorable member of Generation X, and vice versa. James Annesley, Mark Davis, and Jonathan Epstein, for example, use the terms "Generation X" and "Slacker" interchangeably (127, 256, and 18, respectively).

Despite the popularity of Coupland's novel and the ubiquity of its title, Generation X complicates the cohesiveness of defining a single youth narrative. Critical discourse adopts the novel's title to represent an entire social group, a group of young writers, and the literature they produce. Nevertheless, Coupland's novel and Linklater's film, although widely considered the progenitors of a so-called "Generation X literature," have remarkably little in common with novels published after 1991. In contrast to the literature that followed, Generation X and Slacker are relatively mild and inoffensive, even quaint, narratives about youth's search for meaning in an overly commercialized world. Characters in both narratives enjoy North America's relative economic prosperity, and ample disposable personal incomes, despite the fact that they perform a minimal amount of work. Coupland's dry sense of humor and Linklater's wry wit couldn't anticipate the implosion of all barriers against exploring and exploiting social taboos, such as in Dennis Cooper's hyperviolent and homoerotic novel, Frisk (1991). The narrator Dennis, along with Jorg and Ferdinand, kidnaps and drugs a teenage boy:

> The kid looked more beautiful than before...I leaned over and French-kissed his mouth for a while, sucking juice from his lips, biting them until they leaked a little blood, sucking that, then finger fucking his throat. The next time I rammed my cock down there and managed to get half inside. But it came out coated with blood, which I scraped on a finger and licked. I slapped his face five, six, seven times. It turned scarlet...Jorg, I want to open him up, I mumbled. He came over and squatted nearby, handing me the Swiss army knife. I rolled the kid over and cut his ropes. I pressed the point of the blade into the base of his throat and made a long, straight slit all the way down his chest, stomach...I managed to part small area between his nipples and see maybe two inches square of purple material. I licked all inside there. It was incredibly lush...We rolled the corpse onto its stomach. I enlarged the asshole with the Swiss army knife and worked one of my hands to the wrist inside. It was wild in there, like reaching into a stew that had started to cool. But it was tight too, a glove or whatever. The Germans [Jorg and Ferdinand] were carving their names in the corpse, laughing. I pumped my hand in and out of the ass feeling weirdly furious, with the dead kid I guess. (104-106)

Grouping the depravity of Cooper's Frisk together with the economically privileged youth of Coupland's Generation X as representatives of "Generation X" begins to strain the meaning of the term. Rather than establishing a template or a

common starting point for Generation X fiction, Coupland's novel is representative in name only.

Through the convention of relying on "Generation X" over the last decade (Acland 145-146), a putative generational cohesion emerges based on a common age group—the twenty-somethings—of novelists and their protagonists. While North American fiction is the torch-bearer of Generation X, the term has spread to describe an increasingly international literary phenomenon. The putative cast of Generation X novelists is certainly an international ensemble, which includes Canada's Douglas Coupland; the United States' Lynne Tillman, Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney, Dennis Cooper, Gary Indiana, David Wojnarowicz, and Evelyn Lau; Great Britain's Irvine Welsh, Will Self, and Helen Zahavi; France's Marie Darrieussecq; Italy's Enrico Brizzi; China's Wei Hui; as well as a group of Spanish authors that will reappear in greater detail in this study, such as José Ángel Mañas, Ray Loriga, Lucía Etxebarría, and Care Santos, as well as their contemporaries Benjamín Prado, Daniel Múgica, Marta Sanz, José Machado, Violeta Hernández, Martín Casariego, Pedro Maestre, Gabriela Bustelo, Ismael Grasa, and Caimán Montalbán.

The term "Generation X" sticks to a spectrum of cultural phenomena in Europe in general and Spain in particular. Jonathan Epstein recognizes the internationalization of American popular culture in Generation X's cult hero, grunge musician Kurt Cobain (19-20). The hegemony of American media, television programs, Hollywood movies, and American rock music attest to the American cultural influence in Spain (Maxwell 176). Yet the international youth

culture influences do not move exclusively from west to east across the Atlantic Ocean. There is a mutual appropriation of youth cultures, such as techno music and raves, which originate in Europe and found eager participants in North America (Locher 102-103). American Generation X literature tends to romanticize Europe as an exotic travel destination, such as in Lynne Tillman's depiction of Amsterdam's tolerant drug culture and sex trade in her novel, Motion Sickness (1992). Yet this youth culture interchange and the internationalization of Generation X would suggest a homogenization of youth culture. While a youth narrative emerges in the 1990s, the European phenomenon isn't as well codified as its American Generation X contemporaries, due to it's dispersion in multiple countries, multiple languages, and differing levels of popularity within their home countries. And aside from the commonality of youth narratives being an urban phenomenon (its plots take place in and around New York, Seattle, and Los Angeles from the late 1980s and through the 1990s, and in European capitals and metropoli such as London, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Rome, Paris, and Madrid during the 1990s), "Generation X" creates a terminological problem when applied to European literature. First, it refers to a specific social class and socio-economic background from North America, and thus it is a foreign term imposed on European literatures that ignores the specific national—even local—political, social, and cultural influences. Second, as a classification imposed on youth by older generations, it is hegemonic. Its use is decidedly negative, as well, most often couching youth in stereotypical rhetoric and hyperbole, such as Cornelia Comer's screed about youth ignorance:

> The rising generation cannot spell, because it learned to read by the word-method; it is hampered in the use of dictionaries, because it never learned the alphabet; its English is slipshod and commonplace, because it does not know the sources and resources of its own language. Power over words cannot be had without some knowledge of the classics or much knowledge of the English Bible—but both are now quite out of fashion. (81)

The criticisms are not limited to North America, as Vicente Verdú lambastes youth's scattershot focus: "Son enemigos de las ideas claras y el chocolate espeso. Sus músicas, sus ropas, sus amigos, sus lenguajes, son mixtura. La orientación de sus vidas, caso de existir, les llevaría a cruzar fronteras, razas, sexos en una elección de amistarse con el caos." At this point in its evolution, then, "Generation X" terminology becomes muddied and less reliable. In fact, beginning with the near simultaneous appearance of Generation X and Slacker in 1991, the concept of a singular "Generation X" and its ability to name an actual generation begin to splinter as soon as the term is applied to literature. For example, Voices of the Xiled (1994), a collection of short fiction by twenty to thirty year old writers, rejects the hegemony of Coupland's Generation X and Linklater's Slacker. Editors Michael Wexler and John Hulme argue,

> it became clear to us that we weren't connecting with any of the images that the new, self-appointed 'twentysomething' authorities had been creating. We're not in Seattle, not in the corporate world, not 'slackers,' not going to law school, not skiing in Colorado, not

> anything specific. It's disconcerting when you realize that Douglas Coupland's Generation X has no connection to your life...Does anyone out there identify with all this crap or is it just us who can't seem to get it? (vii).

Voices of the Xiled shows that as early as 1994, young writers already feel ostrasized from the exiles of Generation X. And moreover, as suggested in the contrast between Generation X and Frisk, the term does not encompass the range of the literary trend that is happening within the United States during the 1990s, let alone internationally.

British critic James Annesley jumps into the terminological fray by rejecting "Generation X" and instead proposing the alternative term "Blank Fictions" to describe the North American Generation X narrative. Annesley, whose Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel (1998) is the most authoritative and comprehensive study of this narrative to date, wisely avoids the denomination "generation" altogether. Instead he favors the broader label, Blank Fictions, a first step away from the "Generation X" designation that this study will emulate. Even though there is an implicit generationism uniting the authors of Blank Fictions[7] (that is, a common age group of authors in their mid-twenties, as well as their shared cultural, social, and

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[7] Annesley may or may not be aware that his "blank" terminology can trace its roots to punk rock. Richard Hell and the Voidoids, a New York City punk rock band, released an album in 1977 titled "Blank Generation." While perhaps coincidental to the focus of Annesley's study, punk will be increasingly important in approaching Spain's youth literature.

economic experience), Annesley argues that there is neither a discernable literary movement nor an organized, shared literary philosophy among them. A cursory reading of the texts variously associated with Generation X reinforces this point; the flippant and precocious style of Coupland's Generation X differs from the gritty, junkie narratives of Gary Indiana's Horse Crazy and David Wojnarowicz's Close to the Knives; which differ from the post-yuppie, power obsessions of Patrick Bateman in Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho, which differs from the transient, aloof travelogue of Lynne Tillman's Motion Sickness. To consider these diverse narratives, Annesley recommends a "looser approach" to a series of novels that "prefer blank, atonal perspectives and fragile, glassy visions" (2). In contrast to Slacker and Generation X's implicit search for meaning, Blank Fictions celebrate the mundane and reject traditional society and its values. These novels' narrators take a lackadaisical approach to even the most violent and gruesome events. For example, returning to Dennis Cooper's novel, Frisk describes the dissection of a teenage boy that Ferdinand, Jorg, and the narrator Dennis have just murdered:

> We cut him apart for a few hours and studied everything inside the body, not saying much to one another, just the occasional, Look at this, or swear word, until there was nothing around but a big, off-white shell in the middle of the worst mess in the world. God human bodies are such garbage bags. (106)

Dennis's detachment is so extreme—bordering on the apathetic—that he is hardly cognizant that he is probing a human being. Humanity represents nothing

more than walking and talking garbage bags. Similarly in American Psycho, Patrick Bateman is more fixated on his expensive audiovisual equipment than the fact that he is committing double homicide: "In an attempt to understand these girls I'm filming their deaths. With Torri and Tiffany I use a Minox LX ultra-miniature camera that takes 9.5mm film, has a 15mm f/3.5 lens, and exposure meter and a built-in neutral density filter and sits on a tripod" (304). The narrators of Blank Fictions approach their task with indifference; they would seem to prefer doing almost anything else than narrating their story. Thus, Annesley's reading revolves around the concept of blankness, a sense of "weightlessness and emptiness" (58), a self-conscious superficiality in which the narrator maintains a blank stare at society, unfazed by its contradictions and numbed by its spectacles. The protagonists in the novels by Ellis, Tillman, Cooper, and Indiana are so numbed by the noise and distraction of modern capitalist society that to a large extent they have stopped feeling.

Fundamental to Annesley's reading of American Blank Fiction is commodification. Blank Fictions explore the intrinsic interrelationships between the individual and contemporary consumer society, the status symbols of brand name products, fashions, advertising, food, music, and film. For example, Bret Easton Ellis's characters "don't drive cars, they drive 'BMW's,' they don't eat in restaurants, they eat in 'Spago's,' they don't wear sunglasses, they wear 'Raybans'" (Annesley 7). Thus blank fictions do not merely reflect their time and place, they literally speak its language, communicating to the reader in a commodified idiom. In Ellis's Less than Zero (1985), for example, Clay

submerges himself in Los Angeles's culture of mass consumption. The novel "can seem empty and uncontextualized, a narrative told, like MTV, in an abstract 'continuous present'" (Annesley 91), while simultaneously the product references ground the novel in a specific cultural context. Annesley continues, "Ellis favours a kind of commercial shorthand, relying on his readership's knowledge of contemporary products to create his effects rather than trying to reproduce impressions through descriptive prose" (94). As poststructuralists argue that literature exists in a symbiotic relationship with the culture that produced it, Blanks Fictions go a degree further. Extratextual references saturate these novels to the extent that even those without contact with youth culture and its vocabulary will identify Less Than Zero's cultural shorthand of MTV, Calvin Klein, and GQ.

Commodification tends to separate Blank Fictions into two categories according to the affluence of their protagonists. Part of these novels focus on the capitalist euphoria of the free market; Reaganomics; the culture of New York City, Manhattan, Wall Street, and yuppies; and white collar drugs like cocaine. For example, Ellis's Less than Zero and American Psycho, Brian D'Amato's Beauty, and Jay McInerney's Bright Lights, Big City and Brightness Falls portray a series of characters who are indolent, yet wealthy, élite, and exclusively white. Oftentimes these novels suggest contradictory readings by simultaneously mimicking the same process of commodification that they appear to be criticizing. Brian D'Amato's Beauty, for example, shows the commodified body under the knife of an unlicensed New York plastic surgeon. Angelo literally sells beauty,

framing the body as a consumer product while ostensibly attempting to criticize the superficiality of the process of commodification.

The other part of American Blank Fictions focus on equally gritty yet less affluent protagonists. For example, Dennis Cooper's novels Frisk, Closer, Jerk, and Try follow protagonists through a 1990s Los Angeles which mixes subcultures of drugs, prostitution, gay sex, and pornography into a blend of "revulsion and boredom... combining the brutal with the banal" (Annesley 30, 34). The "slick, depthless style" (Annesley 36) and casual tone are the essence of Blank Fictions, as seen in the grotesque yet lackadaisical example above from Frisk. Other novels that employ a similar "terse, unadorned prose" (42) are Gary Indiana's Horse Crazy (1989), whose title refers to the colloquial usage of "horse," meaning heroin; David Wojnarowicz's Close to the Knives (1991); Evelyn Lau's Fresh Girls (1994); Susanna Moore's In the Cut; and Lynne Tillman's Motion Sickness. While these narratives do not fetishize material possessions to the extent that Ellis and McInerney's novels do, they do commodify human relationships as an economics of exchange and objectification. As in Lynne Tillman's Motion Sickness, the individual may just as easily purchase a television as s/he does relationships or emotions.

The concept of commodification can extend to other contemporary American youth narratives. Not unlike the putative marriage between Generation X and Slacker, subsequent American Blank Fictions do not recognize distinctions of genre. In fact, film has been particularly effective in propagating and cross-marketing youth literature, and vice versa, as evidenced in the popularity of film

versions of the novels American Psycho, Less Than Zero, and Bright Lights, Big City. Thus like the commodification of culture and fetishization of products within the novel, Blank Fictions themselves have become lucrative commodities.

Commodification surfaces in various youth culture films. Thematically similar to Close to the Knives and Horse Crazy, torchbearers like Larry Clark's Kids (1995), Doug Liman's Go (1999), and Darren Arronofsky's Requiem for a Dream (2000) show the decadent underbelly of youth culture. A swirl of drug addiction, casual and violent sex, and murder act as a commodified means of exchange. The kinetic energy of Ronna, Simon, and Marcus in Liman's Go revolves around attempts to pay off a drug dealer. Similarly, Harry and Marion in Requiem for a Dream are codependent in their heroin addiction; they distill their relationship to the exchange of the commodities of drugs and sex. Their transactions exact a price in the graphic severing of Harry's left arm due to his addiction and Marion's descent into prostitution at the service of her drug dealer, so as to keep a supply of heroin flowing to meet her steadily growing addiction.

In addition, Kevin Smith's low budget yet wildly popular films Clerks (1994) and Mallrats (1995) posit a blank vision of society by exploring the minutiae of the lives of unremarkable characters. In Clerks, Randall and Dante (trapped in his own consumerist inferno) waste away their youth working at a convenience mart and video rental store. They bemoan their dead end jobs, surrounded by empty-calorie junk food and mindless film sequels. Yet by acting as intermediaries—clerks—they participate in its propagation and in the process of consumption of the products and consumerist lifestyle they purport to despise.

Similarly, "Mallrats" develops the consumption relationship as its characters wander the halls of capitalism: the American shopping mall. And the misadventures of the recurrent duo of drug pushers in "Clerks" and "Mallrats," Jay and Silent Bob (who appear in all of Smith's films), constitute the itinerant market supply and demand.

American Blank Fictions codify their relationship between the text and commodity, commercialization, and Jamesonian late capitalism. Blank fictions subtextually criticize late twentieth century America's marriage with conspicuous consumption by simultaneously appropriating its language and images, constructing an ironic play between a celebration and a critique of the market forces that saturate North American Blank Fiction and Generation X narrative. These narratives of late capitalism and commodification lead to ambiguous interpretations whether it be a wholesale submission to the perks of this commercialization (in the objectification of the body in Beauty or possession worship in American Psycho) or a conscious attempt to distance oneself from it (through the ironic postures of "Clerks" or the ironic consumerism of Generation X). One recalls that in Coupland's novel, Dag, Andy, and Claire escape to the desert Southwest to search for meaning in their lives but end up surrounded by the lowest common denominators of consumerism; like the disposable Swedish furniture and nuclear blast sand that adorn their bungalows, their flight from superficial consumer culture invariably (re)turns them into superficial consumers.

Annesley's reading of Blank Fiction in terms of commodification coincide with the sociological thinking of American Generation X. One could postulate a

pseudo-mathematical formula which would state, "X=$," where "X" is of course Generation X, so fixed is the correlation between Generation Xers and their commodity quest. This equation of youth as a target market and as a source of revenue is common discourse in media and marketing studies (Ritchie 27, 41-46). Similarly, Richard Thau and Jay Heflin use this commodified language to frame Generation X in their book, Generations Apart: Xers vs Boomers vs the Elderly (1997), predicting generational warfare between the Baby Boomers and Generation X over Social Security benefits, Medicare, and the burden of national debt, such that the generational conflict is essentially an economic conflict (11-13).

Yet despite the common language, common obsessions, and common context of commodification in Blank Fiction, it is significant that Annesley does not see an organized literary movement, much less a generation, nor any semblance of a "blank manifesto" explicitly or implicitly uniting these American authors. Arguing against the concept of a cohesive generation, Annesley reads the literature under the auspices of a "blank scene" (3). While downplayed in Annesley's own analysis, the idea of a scene actually represents a crucial shift in thinking about contemporary youth literature. Considering this literature as a loose scene—both intra- and extra-textually—serves to move the literature past a generational consideration (the common age group with common experiences). Among the so-called Generation X novelists there is no overt attempt to band together to form a generation or manifesto, nor are there clear cut distinction as to who is a member or who is not. Moreover, generational denominations tend to

ignore the passage of time and the accompanying changes that living authors may experience. The twentysomethings are destined (perhaps doomed) to become thirtysomethings. The cut off between youth and middle age is relative to the individual, and thus Generation X is a generation of perception.

While Blank Fictions represents a significant advance in the study of youth literature in the 1990s literature, Annesley admits the difficulty of attempting to bring blank writers together as a cohesive group, and that his own term, "Blank Fictions" is as slippery as "Generation X" (137). Like the twentysomething's blank stare, the terminology also suffers an emptiness. "Generation X" is so intimately linked to North American culture and its literature that to extract it from this context and graft it to contemporary European culture and narrative—specifically, the Spanish youth novel, which posits a distinct vision of youth culture than the commodification of its American counterparts—is to impose upon what the literature is communicating. Yet nevertheless, this application is precisely what has occurred in recent discourse. Moreover, Annesley is not alone in his dismissal of "Generation X." A series of critics discard the term in favor of more precise definitions such as Barnard, Cosgrove and Welsh's "The Nexus Generation."

The economics of consumption differentiate North American youth narrative from that of its international contemporaries. In the United Kingdom, for example, while Irvine Welsh's drug-addled novel Trainspotting (1993) bears thematic resemblances to David Wojnarowicz's Close to the Knives, Susanna Moore's In the Cut, and Gary Indiana's Horse Crazy, the concept of

commodification distinguishes it from the latter American novels. While Renton, Sick Boy, Tommy, Matty, and Spud consume drugs, alcohol, and punk music in Trainspotting, their taste for commodity and commodification are tangential, even nonexistent. The coinciding themes—drugs, sex, violence—suggest distinct interpretations: whereas American Psycho fetishizes the material world, Trainspotting evades it. The concept of "consumption" in the two novels is diametrically opposed; Patrick Bateman consumes (purchases) to own and to flaunt his economic power, whereas Mark Renton consumes (imbibes) to lose himself and to escape his problems. And whereas Generation X's Dag, Andy, and Claire create a protected space in which their lives are sterilized of risks, Trainspotting's Sick Boy, Spud, Matty, and Begbie live with jaw-dropping risks in their daily lives: sharing drug needles with people who are HIV positive, robbing a DIY home improvement store, having unprotected casual sex, and trafficking heroin and speed.

Distinct economic circumstances guide the idea of consumption in these narratives. Bret Easton Ellis, James McInerney, and Douglas Coupland portray upwardly mobile, upper middle class characters who flaunt their material possessions. Patrick Bateman's conspicuous consumption extends even to the banality of his morning bathroom ritual which centers around brand-name products: "Once I am out of the shower and toweled dry I put the Ralph Lauren boxers back on before applying the Mousse A Raiser, a shaving cream by Pour Hommes...I always slather on a moisturizer (to my taste, Clinique) and let it soak in for a minute" (American Psycho 27). In contrast European novels tend to

portray lower class protagonists who are barely surviving, whose concerns turn inward, and whose consumption is internalized. Unlike the economic prosperity portrayed in North American Blank Fictions like American Psycho, Trainspotting portrays an era of massive youth unemployment and the HIV epidemic among the low-income housing projects of Edinburgh, Scotland (191, 193). The novel follows Mark Renton and his loose collection of mates—Spud, Sick Boy, Matty, Tommy, Begbie, and Mother Superior—through the gradual unraveling of the bonds that once united them. Their youthful solidarity disintegrates into heroin-fueled escapism and self-serving attitudes, as when consoling his best friend Tommy over the loss of his girlfriend Lizzy, Mark admits, "Ah struggle to show concern through ma self-centered smack apathy" (81). The assertions are that friends and mates no longer exist, rather everyone is merely an acquaintance (11, 313), or as Sick Boy succinctly declares, "Mates are a fucking waste of time" (28). Their emotional arrested development prevents anyone from expressing intimate feelings or forming substantive, lasting relationships. While Cairns Craig reads Trainspotting's "community of dependency" as a reflection of Scotland's economic and political dependency on Great Britain (the drugged youth form "a community of dependency—welfare-dependency, drug-dependency, money-dependency—which is the mirror image of the society of isolated, atomized individuals of modern capitalism" [97]), Robert Morace counters that such a reading downplays the nature of community and sharing in the novel (64). While characters do share drug needles, sexual encounters, and thus, diseases, theirs is a community without cohesion. It is the absence of community that, when

characters are sober enough to actually feel emotions, they lament most acutely. Mark reflects, "Ah'm surrounded by the cunts thit ur closest tae us; but ah've nivir felt so alone. Nivir in ma puff" (175). Most importantly, Mark's betrayal of his mates not only emphasizes the failure of community, but the guilt and shame that accompany it, leading to an ambiguous victory for Mark at best. Renton's escape and emigration to Amsterdam suggests the primacy of the individual over the kinds of fervent nationalism and capitalism that he so despises throughout the novel. While Renton does steal the 16,000 British pounds from his mates, he is not motivated by greed. He is already working in London, earning a steady income, and weaning himself off heroin. Betraying his mates, especially the homicidally violent Begbie, was less for financial gain than to force himself to make a change—the first proactive action in the novel—to construct a new life for himself in mainland Europe. Thus in contrast to American Blank Fiction, Renton's theft of the drug money is not about economic gain nor conspicuous consumption, rather its an opportunity to escape the downward spiral of self-destruction that Mark witnesses in Spud's incarceration, Swanny's amputated leg, Tommy's HIV infection, and Matty's death. Despite the "extreme moral cowardice" (Trainspotting 343) of the betrayal, the money guarantees Mark's passage to Amsterdam—paradoxically, he is destined for the drug capital of Europe—and a renewal: "He could now never go back to Leith, to Edinburgh, even to Scotland, ever again. There he could not be anything other than he was. Now, free from them all, he could be what he wanted to be" (344). Renton's

escape is a dash for freedom, breaking from the old to embrace the new, to construct a new Renton, and a new identity.

Thus, the commodified vision of Generation X is not globalized. Many young European novelists write novels during the 1990s that downplay the metanarrative of commodification, such as England's Will Self (Cock and Bull [1994] and Great Apes [1998]) and Helen Zahavi (Dirty Weekend [2000]); Finland's Rosa Liksom (One Night Stands [1993]); and Italy's Enrico Brizzi (Jack Frusciante Has Left the Band. A Love Story—With Rock and Roll [1997]). Thus, European youth literature in general and Trainspotting in particular omit the economics of conspicuous consumption, the showiness and pretentiousness that is so integral to North American Blank Fiction. For example, American Psycho suggests that Patrick Bateman wants to be caught for his killing spree–he yearns for public recognition—so as to showcase his wealth and prosperity. American Blank Fiction externalizes and broadcasts its commodification, a process through which protagonists define themselves. In European youth literature, however, there is an internalization of external stimuli and hence a production of identity that is more radically unstable and fluid, which will be the focus of subsequent chapters. Thus while European youth narrative and North American Generation X/Blank Fiction share thematic common denominators like drug use, shallow interpersonal relationships, and random violence, this development of the individual's identity distinguishes works by young European (and particularly Spanish) authors from those of their American contemporaries.

Not surprisingly, there is not a clear manifestation of Generation X/Blank Fictions in non-Western literatures or in literature under political dictatorships due to its commodified underpinnings and perception of exploitable privilege: American characters need not struggle to survive, fight political repression, suffer economic hardship, or even try to make a living. Rather the only dilemma, if one could call it that, is how to satisfy their whims. Nevertheless, in a handful of economically prosperous cities in non-Western nations, one can find analogous youth narratives. A footnote to the Western Generation X, for example, is novelist Wei Hui, from Nangbo, China. Known as a member of the Beautiful Generation—the young, yuppie-like subculture with a taste for Western fashion and music—Hui's first novel Shanghai Baby (1997) revels in jarringly frank depictions of sex and female sexual desire among Shanghai's "linglei," a loose Chinese equivalent of North America's Generation X. Despite (or perhaps because of) an official ban by the Chinese government due to its perceived subversive content, a public burning of 40,000 copies of the novel, and a prohibition imposed on state-run media from mentioning its name, the sustained demand for black market copies of Shanghai Baby testifies to its popularity among Shanghai's relatively liberal atmosphere (Gifford).

Vis-à-vis such extratextual restrictions, curiously, the characters in Shanghai Baby exercise such personal autonomy and freedom that they seem blissfully unaware or at least unconcerned with the political and social restrictions that surround them. In fact, Tian Tian must read the newpaper to remind himself

that he actually is living in Shanghai and not the West (12). The narrator Coco explains

> My friends and I, a tribe of the sons and daughters of the well-to-do, often use exaggerated and outré language to manufacture life-threatening pleasure. A swarm of affectionate, mutually dependent little fireflies, we devoured the wings of imagination and had little contact with reality. We were maggots feeding on the city's bones, but utterly sexy ones. The city's bizarre romanticism and genuine sense of poetry were actually created by our tribe. Some call us 'linglei'; others damn us as trash; some yearn to join us, and imitate us in every way they can, from clothes and hairstyle to speech and sex; others swear at us and tell us to take our dog-fart lifestyles and disappear. (235)

Their carefree pleasure-seeking and lack of contact with reality frames the individual's personal space as a zone of independence and thus a rejection of the larger political hegemony. In Shanghai Baby the personal is inherently political, a stance that would be considered anathema and anachronistic to the overt materialism of North America's Blank Fiction/Generation X literature. In contrast to the apoliticism of virtually all Western Generation X literature, Shanghai Baby may be read as a form of political resistance against China's communist regime.

Nevertheless, the protagonists in Shanghai Baby seemingly emulate the commodified formula of American blank fictions: Coco, herself a novelist writing a

novel about youth culture and harboring ambitions of literary superstardom (the playful autobiographical innuendos are inescapable), takes her name from French fashion magnate Coco Chanel. Her friend Madonna is a vampy hipster with a passion for high fashion, swanky popular restaurants, and (reminiscent of Brian D'Amato's Beauty) preserving her rapidly fading beauty. But the façade of commodified and westernized culture, as well as the aspirations for fame and success (Coco says, "Every morning when I open my eyes I wonder what I can do to make myself famous. It's become my ambition, almost my raison d'être, to burst upon the city like fireworks" [1]), evaporates to reveal an internalized struggle. Coco longs for intimacy and tries to define herself through her interpersonal relationships (love for her impotent, morphine-addicted boyfriend Tian Tian and the purely sexual affair with a married German businessman, Mark). Yet fundamentally Coco fears the intimacy and connection she is ostensibly seeking. She sabotages the stability of her relationships by betraying her love (Tian Tian) and her lover (Mark). Thus like the Scottish protagonists in Trainspotting, the young Chinese in Shanghai Baby grapple with an internal struggle that drives them to reject collective (romantic) identity and instead to isolate and emotionally insulate themselves.

Thus the youth narrative phenomenon of the 1990s does have a global presence. However, as one moves further from North America, the literature slips out of the commodified vision of Generation X/Blank Fictions. As with the distinctions between Trainspotting and American Psycho, for instance, the youth novel is ultimately relative to its home country and culture, morphing into distinct

forms from city to city and country to country. As Taylor argues, the identity project consists of the individual's efforts to define him/herself in contrast to the rest of society, and thus to distinguish him/herself from peers (50). Yet to a large extent, the characters in American Blank Fiction fail while European protagonists succeed. Commodification tends to homogenize the individual, to downplay differences, and essentially erase identity.

At the conclusion of American Psycho, for instance, a serial killer such as Patrick Bateman is only one of a whole subspecies of white-collar "killers." Even as a confessed murderer, perhaps implausibly, he cannot stand out from the crowd, as his colleague Harold Carnes confuses him with Davis, Donaldson, and other corporate types, and refuses to accept his confession that he brutally murdered Owens (386-388). His anonymity in the corporate machinery is captured in the dark humor of a misunderstood conversation in the din of a nightclub. Bateman admits, "I'm into, oh, murders and executions mostly," to which Daisy replies, "Well, most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don't really like it" (206), blurring the line between an out-for-blood, cut-throat corporate broker and a homicidal maniac. The hegemony of consumerism and commodification tends to blur differences between characters, while in the European youth novel the individual tends to be isolated and marginalized; youth emotionally separate themselves from each other. There is an unacknowledged yet intentional centrifugal force at work, continually pulling them in different directions and weakenig the cohesion of a generation.

Commodification carries with it an element of choice. The characters in Coupland's Generation X choose to be slackers. Dag Andy, and Claire purposely abandon lucrative careers in favor of the McJobs, searching for an alternative to the mind-deadening lifestyle of their parents, contemporaries, and younger siblings (such as Andy's younger brother, a member of the "global teens"). Meanwhile, Clerks shows characters that are literally stationary. Dante doesn't know what he wants, and rather than search for a better life, he remains in the comfort of his familiar surroundings. While belonging to a lower socio-economic class than the protagonists of Generation X, Dante forgoes the opportunity to advance himself—by putting off the decision to leave New Jersey, leave his job at the QuickStop, and attend college.

As the term "Generation X" indelibly links to "Slacker," and "Blank Fictions" link to commodification, fundamental differences emerge that differentiate the North American Generation X from that of Europe and more specifically from the so-called "Generación X" of the Spanish youth novel. When contrasted with the European scene, "Generation X" and its synonyms—"Slacker" and "Blank Fiction"—are unique to North American narrative. Grafting them onto European literature is fraught with problems, not the least of which is the baggage of commodification and the commodified subject that they carry. Fundamentally European youth narrative of the 1990s is different from the North American phenomena whose name it has shared. Thus the discussion again leads full circle to the problem of terms. As Annesley has said, "something" is out there, so what does one call it?

While decadent youth culture is certainly an international phenomenon, "Generation X" is not a universal, monocultural narrative. The superficial thematic similarities of sex, drugs, and rock and roll; disaffection and disillusionment; random violence and self-destruction do not serve to unite these multinational narratives. Rather, they serve as points of departure from which narratives from one culture distinguish themselves from those of another, and in many cases further separate themselves from other subcultures. Essentially, a process of fragmentation is occurring in these narratives, making it difficult to speak in inclusive terms, such as "North America's Generation X literature," "European Generation X literature," or "Spanish Generation X literature." As Jean François Lyotard's definition of postmodernism would suggest (13), a metanarrative such as an internationally cohesive, homogenous youth culture readily identifiable under the rubric of "Generation X" will inherently fragment under the strain of its differences.

In conclusion, David Leavit captures the essence of North American Generation X/Blank Fictions with his off the cuff remark, "We trust ourselves and money. Period" (Lipsky 103). This distrust of community and focus on commodification defines the American Blank Fictions. And while the distrust of community is a common denominator in many cultures' contemporary youth narratives, the emphasis on a commodified existence and the fetishization of consumer products sets North American Generation X narrative apart from its international—particularly, Spanish—contemporaries. Even those narratives that don't overtly fetishize conspicuous consumption (Generation X, Slackers)

maintain a symbiotic relationship with consumer culture, simultaneously criticizing and celebrating it. This contradiction manifests itself in the international Generation X icon, Kurt Cobain. While singing about the alienating effects of contemporary American culture, he becomes famous and a millionaire. In the chorus to the youth culture anthem "Smells Like Teen Spirit," Cobain sang—or more precisely, screamed—"With the lights out it's less dangerous / here we are now entertain us" (Nirvana). "With the lights out it's less dangerous" captures the subjective internalizing mechanism that youth protagonists use to formulate identity, as well as Generation X being a largely nocturnal culture. "Here we are now entertain us" illustrates Zygmunt Bauman's theory that the mission of the contemporary, postmodern citizen is to have fun and "lead an enjoyable life," to conceptualize life and identity as entertainment ("Pilgrim" 34). Youth culture embraces this hedonistic philosophy in its constant search for the next party, the next sexual encounter, the next drug high, and the next thrill.

CHAPTER 2. SPAIN'S NOVELS OF DISAFFECTION: CONSIDERING YOUTH'S FLEETING IDENTITIES, OR "I'LL BET YOU DON'T HATE US AS MUCH AS WE HATE YOU"

The image of youth has become the image of contemporary Spain (Graham and Labanyi 312), embodying its vitality, restlessness, diversion, and freedom. Not only does youth epitomize the popular image of Spain, but also, since youth's calling is to grow and change, that image parallels Spain's many transitions over the last four decades: the continuing transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy, the "despegue económico" of the 1960s, the continuing migration of populations from rural homes and town to the cities, the opening of borders to promote tourism, the transition from dictatorship to democracy, the renewal implicit in the ratification of the new constitution in 1978, the reemergence of personal and civil liberties, the trial by fire(arms) of the young democracy in the failed coup d'etat of 23 February 1981, the increasing education and professionalization of Spain's population, the growing importance of women in the workforce and government, the integration into the European Economic Community, the influence of regional allegiances, the ongoing threat of terrorism, the increasing immigration, and the growing impact of mass media and mass (internationalized) culture. The effects of these national growing pains frame contemporary Spanish society as one of transformation and exuberance; after 36 years of Francoism, Spain emerges as a renewed nation that, like youth itself, embraces the future and allows the past to fade, as Hooper notes Spaniards' willingness to forget the atrocities of the regime (New Spaniards 78).

Thus the image of youth symbolizes Spain, representing its transitions, renewal, unrest, and its future.

At the close of the 1990s, Spain has the youngest population in Europe (Allinson 265). The image of Spanish youth corresponds to a culture of the street. The explosion of personal and civil liberties—trampled under the boot of fascism since the end of the Second Republic—that accompanies the transition to democracy and spawns a carousing urban nightlife. Particularly in Madrid, weekend nights provide a space of exuberant activity and the supremacy of personal freedom. The "bar de copas" and the "discoteca" are the epicenters of nocturnal youth culture, spaces in which to retreat from daily life and responsibilities. Drinking, dancing, and "los ligues" continue until the daybreak hours and, in the case of "una discoteca 'after'" whose doors open at 5 am, the revelry extends well beyond daybreak. Home, for many of Spain's young people, is merely a waystation between "marchas" (as Miguel mentions to Carlos in Historias del Kronen, "Cada vez que llamo a tu casa, o estás durmiendo o no estás" [181]). Consequently, ties to family are straining as youth strive for ever more independent and untethered lives, increasingly free from parental supervision and influence (Cabrero 170). Moreover, the steadily declining birth rates in Spain signal a pessimistic outlook for the future of the family (Longhurst 20, Corkill 57). The contemporary Spanish family, once glorified as a prototypical national institution under Franco, is now fragmented by divorce, parents' increasing time commitment to career responsibilities, and youth's increasing desires for autonomy (Jones 388-90). Hence, as youth culture develops into the

representative culture of Spain it simultaneously has developed into a cultural problem (Allinson 267). The nocturnal free-for-alls have fomented a culture of excess; the supremacy of personal liberties overshadows the corollary of personal responsibility. For example, 20% of 14 to 18 year olds in Spain habitually smoke marijuana (Nogueira). Similarly, the "cult of the litrona" is the term for teenagers who, looking for a quick and inexpensive way to get drunk, purchase cheap liter bottles of beer to binge drink in the street (Hooper New Spaniards 201). The duality of the image of Spanish youth—as a vibrant national symbol and as a decadent social problem—sets the stage for its problematic representation in literature in the 1990s. As Chapter 1 has suggested, the novel is the de facto literary genre through which youth culture expresses itself internationally as well as in Spain. The preference for the novel is perhaps paradoxical considering the often-lamented short attention span of contemporary youth and the emphasis on the visual image and visual media as dominant cultural expressions. For example, in 1994 Spanish youth spend an average of 14 minutes a day reading, 75 minutes a day to "ir de copas," and 90 minutes a day watching television (Pizarro 44). Nevertheless, in the 1990s the novel emerges in Spain as the de facto literary genre of youth culture. This narrative, in its representation of the contemporary "marcha madrileña," captures snapshots of contemporary youth through oftentimes disturbingly intimate examinations of their lifestyles.

The hedonism and quotidian focus of Spain's youth novel are not unique to the 1990s. In fact the nihilistic tendencies can be traced from the socio-cultural

phenomenon of "el desencanto." As Mangini describes it, for the leftists and intellectuals that weathered the end of Francoism and the transition to democracy, the hope of "esto no puede durar" faded into the pessimism of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's slogan "*contra* Franco estábamos mejor." Thus following the euphoria of the arrival of democracy, intellectuals felt the disillusionment of a transition that failed to produce the significant social change they anticipated. "El desencanto" accompanied the dynamic energy and vitality of "la movida"—roughly encapsulated in the time period 1979-1983 (although the exact dates are a source of continuing debate)—and the social "happenings" of excess: flamboyant sexual adventures, alcohol, drugs, and the ripple effects of addiction, venereal diseases and AIDS, and death, as chronicled in Gallero's Sólo se vive una vez: Esplendor y ruina de la movida madrileña (1991). As the decadence of "la movida" was novelized and filmed (in Javier Memba's Hotel Savoy [1986] and Daniel Valdés's Báilame el agua [1997], for example, and in the early films of Pedro Almodóvar such as "Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón" [1980]), so was "la movida" appropriated by 1980s consumeristic tendencies: the formerly underground happenings of "la movida" were officialized, packaged, and exploited to promote tourism (a process that Juan Madrid parodies Días contados [1993], which foreshadows the aesthetics and themes of self-destruction that the youth novel would explore in the 1990s). The urban centers in Spain, since the years of the "despegue económico" of the Franco regime, have become meccas attracting emigrants "receptivos al materialismo y el individualismo del beneficio personal" (Hooper Españoles 35).

Furthermore under democracy the promises and trappings of consumerism add to the burgeoning and changing landscape of urban Spain, combining a frustratingly high unemployment rate with not only more emigrants but also a new class of immigrants from abroad (Corkill 53-56). Through continued urbanization, not only does democratic Spain conform to its European and international counterparts in a market-driven economy, but also, as Vilarós argues, there is a latent rejection of master narratives, including those of politics in general and of the PSOE and PP governments in particular following the 1982 and 1996 elections (23).

Thus the disaffection and pessimism of Spain's youth novel did not suddenly appear, rather its foundations—of apoliticism, nihilism, hedonism, rejection of commercialism—in Spanish urban society date back to the transition. Vis-à-vis this complex and contradictory background, Spain's youth novel emerges in an equally pluralistic literary landscape. In the 1980s, the line blurs between high and popular art—the so-called "literatura light"—such as erotic literature (Almudena Grandes, Ana Rossetti) and detective fiction (Eduardo Mendoza, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Juan Madrid) become canonized. While their fiction is not overtly erotic nor detective, Spain's young novelists also distinguish themselves from the literary tendencies of their older contemporaries—often referred to as the "nueva narrativa" of the 1980s—José María Guelbenzu, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Rosa Montero, Juan José Millás, José María Merino, Luis Mateo Díez, Soledad Puértolas, and Javier Marías. Holloway and Neuschäfer define the works of these older authors in terms of a focus on

the individual ("la vida íntima"), narrative experimentation, metaliterary references, ironic humor, and an objectivization of the political atmosphere (19). In contrast with this group, Gullón argues that Spain's young novelists of the 1990s "se niegan a aceptar, y con razón, que las relaciones interpersonales se basan en la autoridad o en el profesionalismo, exigen el contacto humano, y si éste no se les ofrece reaccionan con violencia, es decir, desafiando el estatus burgués" (x), signaling that the youth novel deviates from the categorization of canonical, contemporary narrative.

The coincidence of novels like Historias del Kronen, Mensaka, Ciudad rayada, Sonko 95, Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas, and La pistola de mi hermano in Madrid implicitly poses geographical questions. Why is the epicenter of so many (almost all) of Spain's youth novels located in Madrid? Why has this literature not sprung up to the same extent in other urban centers such as Barcelona (noting the exception of Care Santos's Okupada), Sevilla, Valencia, or Bilbao; or in the student-centric university atmospheres in Salamanca and Granada; or especially in the youth party capital of Ibiza? While it may be a mere coincidence that this indolent literature emerges simultaneously in Madrid, the above glance at contemporary Spanish history does suggest an explanation. As Chapter 1 shows, "Generation X" is the international default term for referring to this literature. And while the Spanish youth novel does have antecedents, they are not from North America. Rather, its influences come from within Spain itself. The preexisting social and cultural infrastructure, particularly in Madrid, upon which the Spanish youth novel

emerges is the "movida madrileña," and in a wider sense, the effects of the transition to democracy during the 1970s. In the years following Franco's death, Madrid witnesses an explosion of energetic nightlife. The artistically inclined "movida" of the late 1970s and early 1980s now has codified itself into a generalized and popularized "marcha madrileña" with the corresponding fallout from its excesses, namely the lingering problems of addiction to hard drugs and sexually transmitted diseases (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 264), which Vilarós refers to as the hidden "España infectada" (246-258). Thus, Madrid has provided and continues to provide a cultural context that facilitates the indolence found in the contemporary youth novel. But the youth novel of the 1990s goes beyond the disenchantment of many post-Franco narratives. Contemporary youth narrative updates the "anything goes" hedonism of Madrid nightlife—the nameless sexual encounters, heroin and ecstasy, rock and techno music—progressing beyond an exploration of freedoms to descend into a downward spiral of self-destruction.

Despite their differences, a commonality that young Spanish novelists do share with their fellow European and even American Generation X/Blank Fiction counterparts is a frigid critical reception, which oftentimes borders on outright rejection. David Lehman, for example, dismisses Bret Easton Ellis and James McInerney's novels as having "the intellectual nourishment of a well-made beer commercial" (72). Similarly some critics summarily dismiss Spain's young authors, their literature, and their particular marks of identity for their rebuke of their literary predecessors. José Antonio Fortes, for example, debases this

literature for "la chatarrería, el esnobismo y raquitismo de la penúltima producción de infantes anaerobios (los Ray Loriga, Bernardo Atxaga, J. A. Mañas, etc.)" (27). While the inclusion of Basque novelist Atxaga as an "infante anaerobio" is at best questionable, Fortes's opinions are representative of those who—like Ignacio Echevarría, Ángel Basanta, and Rafael Conte—frame Spain's young writers and their novels as frivolous, superficial, and unliterary.

Four Spanish critics challenge these condemnations and embrace youth literature in an attempt to reframe the concept of "Generation X" into peninsular specific definitions. Their work not only establishes a critical legitimacy for Spanish youth literature and garners it a broader—if not grudging—critical acceptance, but also takes the crucial first steps in exploring the formalist and aesthetic characteristics of this narrative. A comparison of their thinking reveals the age group for both novelists and authors alike—the often mentioned twentysomethings—as a common denominator, framing the former as the first generation of Spaniards and subsequently the first generation of novelists that are truly post-Franco (Urioste 457). While they popularly proclaim themselves the generation of "No Future," in Spain they are also the generation of "No Memory." Born around 1970, their earliest memories may only include the death of the dictator on 20 November 1975, and they may only vaguely recall the transition to democracy. These novelists are unburdened by the historical preoccupations of the authors of the Novels of Memory such as Juan Benet, Juan Goytisolo, and

Carmen Martín Gaite[8], and they avoid the malaise of the transition-era "desencanto" that hovered over leftists, intellectuals, and artists of the post-Franco era. From this shared background emerge four distinct definitions of Spain's youth narrative of the 1990s. A survey of this recent scholarship will serve to contextualize the current state of this literature and will segue into this study's approach of postmodern identity[9].

First, German Gullón is perhaps the most ardent defender of this literature. Like the protagonists these novels portray, Gullón frames Spain's youth narrative as a literary outcast (despite its immense popularity). And despite youth culture's rejection of the past, Gullón contextualizes their literature by looking to Spain's literary history, drawing parallels to Pío Baroja as well as the

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[8] The novel of memory of the final years of Francoism, namely the late 1960s and early 1970s, concerns the recuperation of history to right/"write" the distortion imposed by the regime's selective historicizing and censorship. David Herzberger notes that in the novel of memory "the individual self seeks definition by commingling the past and present through the process of remembering...the self [is] in search of definition, the definition of self perceived always within the flow of history" (67). In contrast, Spain's young novelists and their protagonists have the privilege of wiping clean the slate of memory and inscribing their narratives upon a tabula rasa. Due to their age between 20 and 30 years old, they sidestep the historical repercussions of Francoism and the transition to democracy.

[9] Identity studies traditionally have been founded on Foucaldian and Lacanian theories of discourse and psychoanalysis, respectively, to study race, nationalities, otherness, diaspora, and borders. Identity in these contexts can be read as a function of modernism, which conceptualized identity as a journey, or 'life as pilgrimage,' to find and define the self. As a life-long project one acquired tools with which to construct identity, such as memory, self-knowledge, religious faith, strength, and empowerment, as well as a home, career, marriage, and family which according to Douglas Kellner complement qualities of the modern identity, like autonomy, rationality, commitment, and responsibility (174). The purpose behind identity and identity building was to delay gratification as one journeyed toward a goal of self-fulfillment. Thus the modern identity was a future tense exercise: what is formulated today may not serve immediate needs but with perseverance would serve transcendent goals in the future.

social novel of the 1930s. Moving away from the ubiquitous "Generación X," Gullón proposes the term "Neorealism" to better capture the essence of this narrative, which gives primacy to the protagonist in his/her environment. Neorealism presents youth culture in its sordid and grotesque details, "como si el escritor en vez de estar escribiendo con un substrato de ideas tuviera puesta una antena parabólica que nunca deja de transmitir lo presente" (xxiii). It stresses youth's verbosity, which strives to include the maximum number of colloquialisms and profanities in the minimum amount of space. They simultaneously revel in and suffer from audiovisual overload, in which rock music, movies, television, and Nintendo video games are their cultural touchstones. Whereas the American Blank Fiction of Coupland and Ellis maintains a symbiotic relationship with capitalism, Spain's new authors reject such implicit hierarchies and bourgeois values (x). Yet while they revel in their superficiality, Gullón warns, "hay que leer bien, sin caer en la trampa de que el autor comparte los valores de este mundo que representa. Él es su portavoz, no su defensor" (xxiv). This distinction is crucial not only in addressing those critics who debase Spain's youth narrative and bemoan their superficiality "sin darse cuenta de que apuntan a los medios y no a las razones que han justificado esta escritura" (xxxi-xxxii), but also in recognizing that the verosimilitude suggests a level of social criticism that may include self-criticism. Indeed this double reading of youth narrative forshadows the conclusions that this study will reach.

Second, novelist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán gives a broad and illuminating perspective of youth narrative by exploring the many intangibles of

the new Spanish narrative that perplex critics. In a chapter from his book Un polaco en la corte del Rey Juan Carlos and a parallel conference presentation read in England, Vázquez Montalbán approaches this narrative as part of a larger literary context, tracing its evolution from Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's El Jarama to present day. Vázquez Montalbán coins the term "Generación X, Y y Z." He leaves it loosely defined, and thus suggests an aperture, a gateway to something in addition to the "X," noting the transience of youth: the twenty-something novelists that began publishing in the late 1980s are now over 30 years old. Vázquez Montalbán coyly parodies the "Generation X" moniker by arguing that the limits imposed by age groupings are ever changing—these novelists don't stop with the X, they spill over into the Y and the Z—which suggests the need to broaden the restrictions implicit in the term "Generación X." Of course, the terminological conundrum could then perpetuate itself if one were to ask, what follows the Z?

Vázquez Montalbán widens the scope of the Generation X question, claiming, "El gran problema que plantea la literatura hoy no es literario, sino de toda la sociedad" ("De El Jarama" 8), recognizing the implicit compromise this literature has with larger sociocultural trends. Regarding these "escritores sociales," Vázquez Montalbán posits some revealing observations:

> Son escritores que, a su pesar, sin que ése sea su propósito, son retratistas del talante de al menos un segmento importante de la población joven en la España actual. A pesar de su credo personal, moral e ideológico es profundamente narcisista, a pesar de ser una

> generación anclada en el yo, en el derecho individual a la conducta, cumplen un propósito coral y reflejan un nosotros porque, en su descripción de ese yo, retratan la tremenda frustración y desorientación que alcanza a toda una promoción. ("De El Jarama" 5)

Thus as Gullón reads neorealism as an expression of liberty and vitality, Vázquez Montalbán maintains a more pessimistic interpretation of Spanish youth narrative in that their frustration and nihilism serve as defense mechanisms against a chaotic world. Moreover Vázquez Montalbán identifies these novelists' tendency for the paradoxical (a "yo" that is in essence "nosotros"). These contradictions spill into the X, Y, Z protagonists, as well. This marginalized protagonist is

> un señorito de familia bien instalada, que pertenece a ese sector dominante, al sector cómplice con la apariencia de sociedad armónica, pero que no podrá cumplir un proyecto vital como el de sus padres. Hay un orden social que predispone a este marginado al fracaso, fracaso del que quizá alguno se salve individualmente, lo que no obsta para que, como segmento social, ya no tenga garantizado un lugar bajo el sol como ocurría con las generaciones anteriores. Este segmento social reconoce una cierta impotencia para sentirse plenamente integrado y desde esa certeza adopta una mirada crítica, distanciada, alternativa y desesperada. ("De El Jarama" 6)

The X, Y, Zer feels that s/he is truly unable to do or accomplish anything, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. Herein lies a critical difference between Spain's youth narrative and North American Blank Fictions: whereas this "señorito de familia bien instalada...no podrá cumplir un proyecto vital como el de sus padres," the prosperity and materialism of the North American Generation Xer outstrips that of his/her parents. And while the Generation Xer enjoys almost unlimited options and freedom of choice, Vázquez Montalbán insists that Spanish youth's predilection for marginalization and failure reflect a fundamental lack of choice as a result of hegemonic sociocultural forces. The marginalization and failure are not merely his/her destiny, indeed it is the basis of his/her identity.

Third, espousing a contrary yet still analogous approach to the more overarching vision of Vázquez Montalbán, Toni Dorca develops the most specific definition of a peninsular youth literature. Adhering to the homonym "Generación X," Dorca develops a checklist of eight characteristics that define a Spanish novel as "Generación X":

1) a first person narrative, whose structure resembles picaresque fiction
2) an autobiographical tone and a retrospective narration
3) a fragmentation and disorder, with no hierarchy of certain events over others
4) no singularity of events due to their repetition
5) a plot filled with uncertainty and an absence of authority which Dorca links with Lyotard's theory of the postmodern
6) a use of metafiction

7) a primacy of the spoken word and dialogue, with frequent use of idioms, colloquialisms, and digressions

8) a disingenuous sincerity which often blatantly gives the meaning of the novel without letting readers arrive at their own interpretations[10].

Dorca stresses the importance of contextualizing the "Generación X" novel and suggests a complicity with the reader, an assumption that the reader recognizes the references to rock music, drug culture, and street slang. Dorca echoes Gullón's observations in noting that these novels mark a return to realism and that their protagonists resist assimilation into bourgeois society. Inherently distrustful of familial, social, political or religious institutions, protagonists pursue individual liberty through drugs, sex, and violence, which counterproductively spirals into a profound pessimism. Dorca extends this textual absurdity to the

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[10] Dorca's list of Generation X characteristics recalls Claudio Guillén's definition of the picaresque from Literature as System. Indeed one could argue that Spain's youth narrative of the 1990s is a contemporary retelling of the picaresque based on their shared characteristics: the pícaro is an orphan which implies a detachment from history and/or God (in Spain's youth narrative, characters are metaphorical orphans as parents are largely absent from youth's lives); the narrative is a pseudoautobiography; the narrator's point of view is partial and prejudiced; there is a focus on the material level of existence, such as hunger and money; and the novel is loosely episodic (Guillén 74-85). However, two important characteristics distinguish the picaresque from Spain's contemporary youth narrative. First, in the picaresque, the pícaro is an "ongoing philosopher" and the "total view of the pícaro is reflective, philosophical, critical on religious or moral grounds" (Guillén 82). Second, the pícaro moves horizontally through space and vertically through society (Guillén 84). The philosophical role and vertical progress are absent from Spain's youth narrative. In fact, with the exception of Roberto in Mañas's Historias del Kronen, the nine novels studied here present static characters whose movement is only horizontal. And moreover, Spain's youth narratives replace the picaresque's itinerant philosopher with protagonists that recite superficial popular culture references from film, music, and television programs.

extratextual absurdity of this literature's double reception, namely the critical hostility toward Spain's youth novel in contrast to its popularity and profitability for its publishers.

Finally, Carmen de Urioste asks the germane question in her article titled, "La narrativa española de los noventa: ¿Existe una Generación X?" Her approach is unique in that Urioste sees the existence of a Spanish Generation X as evidence of the internationalization of Spanish culture during the 1990s. Working with Ray Loriga's Lo peor de todo and Caídos del cielo, and José Ángel Mañas's Historias del Kronen and Mensaka, Urioste explores the interrelation of the "cultura de masas" with literature. Implicit in this perspective rests a generational question, as Urioste defines "Generación X" as those who experience an absence of history and ideology. Similar to Dorca's conceptualization of "Generación X," Urioste also constructs a detailed checklist of characteristics of this literature, whose novels share the following qualities:

1) a virtually nonexistent plot, a focus on the minutiae of daily life, and hence, a lack of meaning; Urioste explains that these texts "rompe con el pacto de decoro del realismo tradicional, retratando en sus páginas una vida ajena a toda transcendencia" (457)
2) a testimonial, first person narrative that rejects dominant culture
3) an anti-bourgeois project that hides a disturbing reality
4) a fragmentation and relativism, tying the texts to postmodernism
5) an absence of morality
6) an absence of traditions; a discontinuity and "la cultura del espectáculo"

7) a cosmopolitanism, presenting a microcosm of urban life, yet a pervasive personal isolation.

Urioste's seventh point is revealing in that she is the first to highlight an essential paradox of Spain's youth literature protagonists: despite being surrounded by the population of a major European capital—Madrid—these characters cannot tolerate being with others. They are antisocial and consistently retreat from meaningful interpersonal relationships. Regarding the question posed in the title of her article, Urioste defends the use of "Generation X" in reference to the emerging novelists in Spain based on their inspiration and roots in North America:

> Muchas de las obras de estos escritores españoles tienen sus fuentes en la tradición literaria norteamericana de posguerra—Jack Kerouac (1922-69), Charles Bukowski (1920-94), la 'generación beat,' el 'rock and roll,' los cuentos de motel, el cine de acción—y por lo tanto, se hace necesario situar la producción de los narradores de los noventa dentro de dos coordenadas narrativas del mencionado origen: el realismo sucio definido por Bill Bruford y epitimizado por Charles Bukowski y el minimalismo, cuyo máximo representante fue Raymond Carver (1939-88). Una vez establecida esta deuda con la tradición angloamericana, 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 del bienestar. (472-3)

While "Generation X" purports to reject historical influences, Spain's new narrative certainly owes a nod of recognition, if not a debt of influence to Bruford, Bukowski, and Carver. The Beat Generation and Urioste's conceptualization of a Spanish Generation X do share a testimonial style and rejection of middle class values (for the Beats, those of the often mentioned "squares"). However, the Beat project is fundamentally different from Spain's youth narrative. Beat writers such as Bukowski and Kerouac propose a countercultural rebellion (Johnson 39), with highly idealized representations of themselves and an implicit claim to superiority over the aforementioned middle class "squares" (Bennett 12-13). Not only do such metanarratives distance the Beats from Spain's youth culture narratives of the 1990s, but the Beats are also tied to a specific transitional moment in post World War II United States culture. And whereas the Beats sought a spirituality and transcendence through their rebellion, Spain's youth narratives are mired in a spiral of self-destruction. In defending the use of "Generation X," Urioste skips the recent history (from Bukowski and the Beats of the 1950s to present day) and the trajectory of the term itself (from the mid 1970s punk rock scene to present day), and thus avoids mentioning the decades when the term develops its meaning. "Generation X" is saddled by such North America cultural baggage that to extract it from that context and apply it to a culture and literature in Spain that merely coincides in age—the twentysomethings—is to overlook the term's inherent link to commodification and conspicuous

consumption of young, white, suburban America. One recalls, for example, that in American Psycho, Patrick Bateman's bloodlust intertwines with his fetishization of designer suits and brand name consumer goods, such as the aforementioned brand-name, Pour Hommes and Clinique toiletries and Minox video camera (27, 304). Thus the characters in North American Generation X literature construct and convey identity via their purchasing power and the status associated with the products that they buy. North American Generation X frames the self as consumer, such that name brands constitute an identity project. Coupland's dysfunctional trio in Generation X, for example, escapes to the desert ostensibly to avoid conspicuous consumerism yet their discourse and their identities revolve around their purchases. In contrast, the specific commercial references in Spain's youth literature are not the defining elements that they are in American fiction. In Spanish narrative, consumerism and commodification are supplanted by an interiorized relation with the self, as suggested in Urioste's own checklist of "Generación X" characteristics. Therefore as "Generation X" links itself to North American consumer culture, it is questionable and unreliable to graft the term onto Spanish literature. It applies well to the American "scene" as James Annesley describes it, but is of limited usefulness to an analysis of the Spanish phenomenon. Therefore, to answer Urioste's question in the title of her article, no, the literary precedents and influences of the beat Generation do not justify such a loaded term (as Urioste herself grudgingly admits [472]) as "Generation X."

These four critics run the gamut of approaches, from highly specific, checklist definitions to more general theories of how to read Spain's recent youth literature. Their peninsular specific definitions are fundamental in opening a wider critical dialogue, and for taking the formative steps in launching a serious study of this literature. And although this field is clearly in a state of continuing evolution and development, it is now apparent that "Generation X," when contrasted to the larger, international context of North America and Europe, provides diminishing returns for a critical examination of the Spanish youth narrative. Therefore, this study questions the reliance on "Generación X" and recommends following the lead of Gullón, Vázquez Montalbán, as well as Annesley, Rosen, Barnard, Cosgrove, and Welsh, in dropping the use of "Generation X." Not unlike the North American phenomenon of the same name, the homonym "Generación X" in Spain has functioned as an umbrella concept under which to gather novelists as diverse as not only José Ángel Mañas, Lucía Etxebarría, Ray Loriga[11], and Care

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[11] The most recent works by José Ángel Mañas (Mundo burbuja [2001]), Ray Loriga (Tokio ya no nos quiere [1999] and Trífero [2002]), and Lucía Etxebarría (De todo lo visible y lo invisible [2001]) suggest that they are distancing themselves from the aesthetics of their previous work. In short, they are growing as novelists and are already over thirty years old. The most recent production from the "tribal elders" of the Spanish youth novel phenomenon suggests its transitory nature. In the long run, it may just be a phase for these novelists. Considering a larger perspective, this change is not surprising. For example, it now sounds anachronistic to refer to the works of Antonio Muñoz Molina, Julio Llamazares, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Juan José Millás, and Rosa Montero as present day "nueva narrativa" (Perriam 175, Urbez 34-35). Thus it is not surprising to find that while studying a group of contemporary authors, and a literature still in its formative stage, that any literary terminology—including the Novels of Disaffection proposed in this study—may merely be a terminological waystation along the route of a longer literary trajectory. Also it should be recognized that over the course of the next few years this phase of Spanish

Santos, which will be examined in this study, but also Pedro Maestre, Caimán Montalbán, Daniel Múgica, Gabriela Bustelo, Violeta Hernándo, José Machado, as well those peripherally related to the phenomenon, such as Benjamín Prado and Roger Wolfe. When one begins to examine the various manifestations of the Spanish youth novel, the list of authors grows rapidly (Gullón cites thirteen [xxxvii], while Urioste names twenty-four [473-474])—which supports the fact that the phenomenon is indeed widespread—but at the same time "Generation X" as an international denomination begins to strain under the weight of so many disparate novels, novelists, and nationalities. Considering the tenets of commodity, commercialization, and Jamesonian late capitalism that define American Generation X literature, Spain's literature is not just a subset of the North American Generation X phenomenon. Thus this study proposes a different approach to the Spanish youth novel, which over the last decade has developed its own unique literary identity, its own "señas de identidad."

One may rightfully pose the question, does the "Generation X" phenomenon exist in Spain? Certainly a phenomenon exists, even a convergence of many phenomena. However, how closely Spanish youth narrative links with the concept of a "Generation X" is open to question. While it is applied liberally to youth literatures around the world, from the discussion thus far, as a literary concept, "Generation X" links closely to North America youth narrative. As it pertains to Spain in the 1990s, the homonym "Generación X" is

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youth narrative could quite likely fade into a literary past tense and these novelists will most likely have a different approach not yet envisioned.

both ubiquitous and ambiguous; it has become commonly accepted as a default term. But for Spain, "Generation X" is an import, a conceptual immigrant introduced from outside Spanish literature. Moreover, "Generation X" enforces a generational hegemony upon Spain's young novelists: authors and critics older than the youth novelists in question hang the term on their younger contemporaries. It is telling that few of the novelists themselves who are lumped under the umbrella of Generation X terminology actually embrace it (Davis 15). As a literary term, "Generación X" has become a term of convenience. The applicability and universality of "Generation X" is problematic since its usage began in a specific context among economically privileged American youth steeped in the grammar of consumerism.

Spain's young novelists make no concerted effort to form a generation, to emulate each other, or to develop a common aesthetic. Indeed, Gambarte argues that generational approaches, despite an apparent objectivity, are often ideologically biased and

> realiza la sustitución del yo por un nosotros arbitrario...el concepto generación es intrínsicamente perverso porque cierra la literatura a las fronteras de lo nacional, de lo regional, de lo local. Impermeabiliza de tal forma que ni siquiera permite hablar ya de una literatura en lengua castellana. (290)

Nevertheless, when viewing the production of these novelists from a macroperspective, certain commonalities do emerge. The authors are self-described outsiders, yet their novels sell tens of thousands of copies and, in the

case of Historias del Kronen, Mensaka, and La pistola de mi hermano, translate into enormously popular feature films. They flout literary good taste yet are quickly becoming canonized and required reading in universities on both sides of the Atlantic. From these inherent contradictions, it is possible to trace a general pattern. The phenomenon in Spain can be better served by considering it under the auspices of a "youth narrative": writing by, about, and presumably for twentysomethings.

Vis-à-vis North America's Generation X and Blank Fiction terminology, this study opts for an alternate approach that more directly applies to the novelistic phenomenon occurring in Spain in the 1990s. Spain's youth literature consistently poses the question of identity, a sustained questioning of the self and one's role in contemporary culture. Recently published editions of literary histories tap into this concept. Perriam's A New History of Spanish Writing (2000), for example, includes a brief discussion of contemporary Spanish youth narrative significantly titled, "Generation X: Who Am I?" (216), an approach that coincides with Hanson's study of young filmmakers: "the great theme that permeates this body of work is one of the most basic questions of human existence: 'Who am I? Where do I belong?'" (6).

As previously mentioned, this literature is intimately tied to its geographical location, Madrid, as it springs more from the influence of the "movida" than from the Americanized Generation X or Blank Fictions. In the face of hegemonic international influences—such as "Generation X" or mass media—this narrative is essentially a regional literature, and as such posits a local identity project, as

well. Its microcosmic focus on Madrid reflects Mark Currie's theory of the interconnectivity between globalization and fragmentation: due to the prevalence of cultural schizophrenia over narrative identities, globalization (typically considered Americanization) does not necessarily equal homogenization (112-113). Rather, globalization is the proliferation of difference, in which the local must negotiate with the global to produce unique meanings.

The rest of this study will focus on these meanings in novels by four figures in Spain's youth narrative, three canonical— José Ángel Mañas, Lucía Etxebarría, Ray Loriga—and one largely overlooked—Care Santos—whose narratives share two common denominators: the portrayal of decadence and disaffection, and the subsequent project of postmodern identity[12]. First, their novels ostensibly highlight the "fun" in which protagonists engage. However the quest for entertainment leads them on a downward spiral. These narratives revolve around the concept that the world around Spain's youth—interpersonal relationships, family, self-worth, even one's identity—is falling apart. This disintegration manifests itself in the extensive exploration of the themes of uncertainty, perpetual movement, and continuous change in these novels. Theirs

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[12] The modern identity was often related to the Other, associated with empowerment or vindication on the part of the marginalized (Kellner 141). Identity is no less a concern in the contemporary Spanish novel than it was under modernism. Yet as much in Spanish culture at large as its portrayal in literature, the identity paradigm has shifted and thus the uses of identity have changed. The modern identity constituted an interactive process in which one's relationship to others was forged alongside one's relationship to him/herself. However, as will be discussed in the following chapters, now postmodern identity is interiorized and subject to change on the whim of the individual, with no consideration of external or social repercussions.

is an unromanticized vision of contemporary Madrid, of not averting their gaze when facing the disturbing, the troubling, the disgusting, the vulgar, and the lewd. The context of their novels is imminently accessible and present tense—the nocturnal "marcha madrileña"—which unfolds in Madrid's streets, bars, and dance clubs. Their subject matter is taboo: alcohol abuse, drug use, casual sex, angst-ridden rock music, broken families, antisocialism, laziness, rejection of capitalist work ethics, and random violence. This social and personal disaffection truncates transcendence, as protagonists are unable to reach a deeper understanding of themselves. Furthermore, these novels often end abruptly; stories stop without a conclusion or denouement, implying that protagonists will continue spiraling downward, or as Caimán Montalbán succinctly summarizes, "están jodidos todos" (Bar 17). Protagonists try to stave off this disintegration and simultaneously fuel it by indulging in more decadent behavior—illicit sex, drugs, and violence. They never delay pleasure; their actions must carry instant gratification. Therefore, this study is proposing the addition of a new term to the dialogue on Spain's contemporary youth narrative, the Novels of Disaffection.

Characters are carrying out a project of postmodern identity as defined by Zygmunt Bauman, which is developed in the next chapter. They define themselves through debauchery and self-indulgence, and in turn, their debauchery and self-indulgence define them. Protagonists isolate themselves from their peers and feel alienated from the world that surrounds them. These novels focus on social subcultures as described in Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's concept of the tribes that inhabit Spain's urban spaces. Vázquez Montalbán

signals the fragmentation and lack of unity in the social structure of Madrid youth, which divides itself into nocturnal "tribus urbanas," as he phrases it, each manifesting their own particular marks of identity: "rockers, ciberhippies, siniestros, skinheads, heavies, punkis, ciberpunkis, skaters, bakalaos, mods, grunges, pijos" ("Generación X, Y y Z" 366-377). As will be discussed in the following chapters, protagonists experience a tension between, on the one hand, banding together into subcultures, and on the other, asserting an autonomous identity. Their identity project is inherently contradictory. One of the paradoxes of this literature is that characters are trying to carry out an identity project, trying to define themselves, broadcasting their actions, trying to scream out their identity, but no one else is listening. Indeed, no one is able to communicate with anyone else.

Spain's youth literature—the Novels of Disaffection—portrays characters' quest for the illicit, the taboo, the illegal, a vitality of existence around which youth culture protagonists wrap identity. The common age group, which includes both the protagonists and the authors, is an obvious commonality among many young novelists in Spain. However novels by many young authors, such as Carmen Bustelo or Benjamín Prado, bear only a slight connection to the identity project of the Novels of Disaffection. Therefore, this study is focusing on four Spanish novelists in particular—José Ángel Mañas, Lucía Etxebarría, Ray Loriga, and Care Santos—whose novels portray a disaffection that subtextually is carrying out a project of postmodern identity.

The following chapters develop the concept of the Novels of Disaffection as an expression of postmodern identity in the works of the four aforementioned novelists. The identity project in Spain's Novels of Disaffection recalls José Ángel Mañas's appropriation of the punk motto, "I'll bet you don't hate us as much as we hate you" ("Literatura punk" 40). It revolves around the individual's belligerence and quest to separate him/herself from hegemonies. However, as the next chapter will demonstrate, the project ultimately backfires, in that the individual becomes alienated from his/herself.

CHAPTER 3. PUNKS, PILGRIMS, AND TOURISTS: DECADENCE AND IDENTITY IN JOSÉ ÁNGEL MAÑAS'S KRONEN TETRALOGY

As an encore performance of Madrid's "movida" of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a subset of novelistic production emerges in the 1990s that explores the decadence of youth culture in the Spanish capital. Its most recognizable title, Historias del Kronen, begins with this passage:

> Me jode ir al Kronen los sábados por la tarde porque está siempre hasta el culo de gente. No hay ni una puta mesa libre y hace un calor insoportable. Manolo, que está currando en la barra, suda como un cerdo. Tiene las pupilas dilatadas y nos da la mano, al vernos. (11)

It is around this claustrophobic and alcohol soaked atmosphere—the Madrid bar—that José Ángel Mañas sets his novels to portray the seamy underworld of Madrid nightlife: thrill seekers, rivers of alcohol, pushers, junkies, drug use (the telltale sign of Manolo's "pupilas dilatadas"), angst-ridden rock music, all night raves, "la ruta del bakalao," casual sex, and gruesome violence. For example, these novels portray a brutal world of delinquency and thrill seeking, such as Carlos and Roberto's kamikaze driving the wrong way down a one-way street: "¡NO FRENES! ¡ACELERA! ¡ACELERA! ¡ESO ES, ROBERTO! ¡ESO ES! ¡QUE SE JODAN! ¡PITAD! ¡PITAD, HIJOS DE PUTA! ¡PITAD Y APARTAROS! ¡VENGA, ROBERTO, QUE SE APARTAN TODOS!" (Kronen 194). The sordid

and the grotesque accumulate to produce an image of youth not as a representation of hope for the future but as social blight:

> Me siento y saco el equipo de uno de los bolsillos de la chupa. Abro la papela, echo una buena dosis en la cuchara y la quemo hasta que el agua se evapora. Luego cojo la jeringuilla y me bajo los pantalones. Hago un pis muy amarillento. La sangre—oscura en esta luz—entra en la jeringuilla y miro la bombilla que ilumina esta mierda de cuarto de baño. Hay restos de mosquitos a su alrededor...Es jodido encontrar la vena detrás de la rodilla y fallo un par de veces antes de conseguirlo. (Mensaka 46)

This lurid narrative rejects highbrow pretension, philosophical contemplation, and even transcendence by portraying taboo lifestyles and flouting the boundaries of literary good taste. It is characterized by an unflinching verisimilitude, liberal use of profanities, and not unlike Dennis Cooper's Frisk, an attitude that nothing is off-limits: "Yo cierro los ojos mientras el travelo me desabrocha los pantalones y empieza a comerme la polla; enfarlopado como estoy, tardo también muy poco en correrme" (Kronen 119). Toni Dorca and Carmen de Urioste cite Mañas as representative of a new group of novelists, "los jóvenes," and largely credit him with ushering into Spain the narrative known popularly as Generation X (hereafter referred to as the Novels of Disaffection, as established in Chapter 2). Historias del Kronen, Mañas's first novel, serves as a template, the first in a series of four thematically and stylistically related novels known as the Kronen tetralogy, which consists of Historias del Kronen (1994), Mensaka (1995), Ciudad

rayada (1998), and Sonko 95: Autorretrato con negro de fondo (1999). Historias de Kronen is groundbreaking in two respects: chronologically, it is one of the first novels that this group of young authors published, and popularly, as a finalist for the prestigious Nadal Prize in 1994, it garnered a recognition as artistically vital and commercially viable. Mañas himself admits, "de no haber sido por el premio la gente no me hubiera leído" ("Cicno"), and indeed Historias del Kronen has sold over 100,000 copies, including hardback, paperback, and critical editions (Castilla). Historias del Kronen's infamy grew in 1995 with the release of Montxo Armendáriz's film version, which despite the liberties it took with the novel's conclusion and an unfavorable opinion from Mañas himself, became a box office success (Borau 83-84). The popularity of Historias del Kronen initiates a youth narrative phenomenon in Spain and serves as a point of departure for other authors such as Caimán Montalbán and Ray Loriga that chronicle the downward spiral of contemporary urban youth.

Despite receiving the recognition of Spain's literary establishment through the Nadal, the importance of the Kronen tetralogy is its implicit contrast with the popular images of Madrid propagated in the early 1990s. Unlike the PSOE government's appropriation of Madrid's "movida" as a marketing vehicle to sell Madrid as a tourist destination, the Novels of Disaffection undermines the message:

> Esto es tercermundismo puro, la España negra de siempre, cinicismo, incultura, doble moral y hedonismo postochentero...tío, no te pongas trascendente...y vendemos al exterior alegría, caña y

olé, gracias a los listillos como Almodóvar que siguen explotando unas señas de identidad archicaducas. (Sonko 95 161)

Coupled with the Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona and the World Expo in Sevilla, Madrid's designation as the 1992 Capital of European Culture, the renovation of the Atocha train station, and the premiere of the AVE high speed train present the capital as a sophisticated cultural center (Richards 45). While ostensibly 1992 in general and the Atocha reopening were to serve as a metaphor of Spain "leap-frogging technological backwardness, it joined its northern European partners in a post-Maastricht future," Tony Morgan describes the reality of the 1992 celebrations as "a damp squib" (58, 65). Novelists like Mañas, as well as his contemporary Caimán Montalbán, write a set of novels that stand in stark contrast to the public relations campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s. Their novels strip the polished, consumer-friendly, and tourist-friendly façade from Madrid as a center for tourism and culture, and expose the seamy underbelly lurking below the surface image. Historias del Kronen, set in the summer of 1992, reframes Madrid from a metropolitan European capital to a space of degradation. Or as Natalia unapologetically states in Mensaka, "Una mierda. Madrid es una mierda" (125).

Yet despite the contrast with the official image of Madrid for mass consumption, Mañas's narrative does not propose a political project. Stridently apolitical, antiauthoritarian, and anarchistic, characters in the Kronen novels regard Felipe González to be just as repugnant and useless as José María Aznar (Mensaka 22). For example, Kaiser complains that the 1992 Sevilla Expo and the

Barcelona Olympic Games was "todo para la mayor gloria de Felipe González. Ke después de trece años de socialismo nunka los kapitalistas habían estado más trankilos, y encima ahora entraba la derechona más fuerte ke nunka, y a ber ké hacía Aznar. Mamarrachadas de ésas, ke me entraron por una oreja y salieron por la otra" (Ciudad rayada 144). Similarly, rather than proposing a solution for societal ills, the Kronen novels take the role of diagnostician, only inferring what must change. This ambiguity—developing vivid descriptions of decadence yet never overtly condemning it—has in large part led to the popular and critical condemnation such as that by José Antonio Fortes.

However these perceptions can be misleading in that the Kronen novels' alternate face to the officialized images of Madrid are tinted with the quotidian. The thrill seeking of drugs, violence, and sex rarely occurs as an exhilarating, first-time event. Rather, protagonists' reactions suggest that they have seen and done it all before as the descriptions often carry with them the sense of banality. Kaiser, for example, at age 17 is already tired of taking so many drugs (Ciudad rayada 45). In spite of the apparent "shock value" that critics of this fiction disparage, for the protagonists in the Kronen novels, nothing is shocking. Mañas's novels patently reject even transcendence by focusing on the mundane and rigorously quotidian oftentimes with microscopic detail. Like the punk rock songs by The Ramones, "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue" and "I Wanna Be Sedated," taking drugs and getting high are the predominant themes of these novels. Thus the taboo becomes quotidian and even banal. Protagonists take drugs, binge drink, rape, joyride, and rave merely as a part of their day. To these

characters the thrill seeking is not truly thrilling. As the Kronen tetralogy progresses from Historias del Kronen to Sonko 95, the thrills become increasingly routinized. Carlos and Roberto's kamikaze driving down a one way street produces an adrenaline rush (Kronen 194-195). But by the end of Sonko 95 and the end of the tetralogy, José and Borja are snorting cocaine mechanically, out of force of habit as if it were an activity to pass the time (176-183).

Thus the phenomenon of the Novels of Disaffection in general and Mañas's novels in particular present a paradox: the context of this literature is eminently present in the nocturnal "marcha madrileña" unfolding every weekend on Madrid's streets, yet this proximity allows little critical distance from which to consider these novels. At the same time, youth subculture remains obscured in dingy bars, dark discothèques, and back ally drug deals. The problem, then, is how to approach them.

To decipher Mañas's profane, maligned, and often misunderstood narrative this study proposes an alternate approach to the working definitions of "Generation X" outlined in Chapter 1. Namely, the protagonists' misadventures suggest a reading of these novels as narratives of identity. Mañas's protagonists define themselves through vices and escapism, and the novels trace the fallout on their individual and collective identities. As with the drugs they inject or their interchangeable sex partners, identity is consumable and fleeting, a quick fix. These indolent youths engage in a search for changing "señas de identidad," a perpetual redefinition of the self. Their search reveals a vitality that,

paradoxically, creates a downward spiral into violently destabilized identities. Thus identity shifts from a long-term, modernist journey to a momentary, postmodernist pose that is quickly discarded in the haze of hangovers and post-coitus. In effect Mañas's protagonists highlight the difference between modernist Pilgrims and postmodernist Tourists in their push to seek deeper levels of withdrawal and social deviance and ultimately serves as an indictment of a morally bankrupt youth culture.

The aesthetics are an immediately noticeable quality ("Me jode ir al Kronen...") of the Kronen novels. These four novels develop like a roller coaster of frenetic movement, energy, aggression, ferocity, unchecked passions, and blurted dialogue. Yet this lifestyle is not without precedent, nor is the manner in which it is presented. Specifically, the Kronen novels share aesthetic connections with the punk movement, which can elucidate the fluctuating identities of their protagonists. Punk, more than just a musical phenomenon, shares the frenetic pace, aggressive attitude, and explicit rejection of hegemonic culture portrayed in the Kronen tetralogy. Mañas himself, unsatisfied with the definitions of "Generación X" and the comparisons to a "neo-realism," coins his own term – "literatura punk," or the "nobela"—that appropriates the aesthetics, nihilism, and most importantly the attitude of punk. Literary punk emphasizes verisimilitude, orality, street vernacular, and an anti-technique, as Mañas explains, "el punk prefiere probokar biolentando con la máxima inkorrección estilística. El punk es anti-técniko, antiliterario y anárkiko...el punk sospecha que detrás del hermetismo estilístiko no hay ABSOLUTAMENTE NADA...yo kiero ver de frente

esa Nada" ("Literatura Punk" 42). The implications of this "nada" and Mañas's literary punk become clear by foregrounding this narrative in its namesake.

First, Spain's Novels of Disaffection and punk rock share common denominators. As Chapter 1 mentions, the name of a defunct British punk band—Generation X—now serves as the international, catch-all term for the indolent youths of the 1990s and the specific name of youth literature in the United States and Canada. And in Spain, in its March 1994 cover story on Mañas, Ajoblanco christens Madrid's youth with the unofficial slogan, "No future" ("José Mañas: La novela del NO HAY FUTURO tras la década socialista"). The phrase, in fact, originates in a song by the seminal British punk band The Sex Pistols: "No future, no future, no future for you / No future, no future, no future for me" ("God Save the Queen"), and as Mark Sinker argues, "nothing is more un-punky than the belief in guarantees...Faith in a better future...is a trapdoor back into the order opposed and abhorred" (129). Moreover, punk rock music, both classic and contemporary, such as The Ramones (Mensaka 30), Fugazi (Sonko 27), Rancid (Ciudad rayada 159) and Sonic Youth (Kronen 186), serve as an ongoing background soundtrack in the bars where the Kronen novels take place.

Second, from its earliest manifestations in 1975, punk rock manifests a schizophrenia due to a geographical separation. The two epicenters of punk reside on either side of the Atlantic Ocean—London and New York City—where it developed distinct visions and icons, namely, the politicized band The Sex Pistols and the apolitical band The Ramones, respectively. In the Great Britain of 1975 and 1976, for example, a politicized punk takes root among white, working

class youth that feel cheated by economic and social inequalities (Henry 67). Punk songs like "Anarchy in the U.K." and the ironic call of "God Save the Queen" become political venting mechanisms for frustrated and unemployed youth. Thus, The Sex Pistols' album Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols and The Clash's London Calling became rallying cries.

However, despite Craig O'Hara's broad brushstroke denomination of a continental "European Punk" (71), José Ángel Mañas rejects the hybrid European/British concept of punk by reaching back across the Atlantic Ocean to define his literature. Whereas Spain's Novels of Disaffection are a departure from North America's "Generation X," paradoxically, the aesthetics of the Kronen novels gravitate back to North America to take inspiration from the depoliticized "roots" punk, best expressed in the music of the seminal band from Forrest Hills, Queens, New York. Indeed, Javi proclaims in Mensaka, "el punk y los Ramones siguen siendo mis raíces" (30).

Punk is not so much concerned with music as it is with attitude. When one harbors an attitude of rejection, the punk can trigger a release of "pure energy and fury" (Bayard 12). The raison d'être of punk is to confront hegemonies and dethrone any individual or tradition that holds power over the individual. Or as stated in punk's own vernacular, "saying 'fuck you' to the backwards attitudes and customs that hold us back" (Sinker 121). In rejecting tradition and socio-political hegemony, the punk movement is not limited to the fashion marks of identity—such as the mohawk and vertically spiked haircuts, tattered clothing, black leather jackets, spiked dog collars, and lips and ears pierced with safety

pins—that define punk for many outsiders. Rather, belligerent and aggressive attitudes exemplified punk, which establish the division between "us" from "them," those who are punk and those who are not. Thus rather than clothing, hairstyle, or even the music itself, an antiauthoritarian attitude is the identity project that punk carries out. Punk is inherently a process of identification, of establishing allegiances with one group and severing ties with others. While the physical signs (spiked hair, leather jackets, safety pins, albums) are important visual clues, they are secondary to the tenet of punk: the attitude.

Punk's spirit of confrontation has evolved into burgeoning subcultures that splintered from that attitude and identity, such as "cyberpunk" (Smith 235), the feminist movement of "Riot Grrrls" (Kearney 148), and the openly homosexual punk as embodied in the band Pansy Division. Marc Bayard explains

> The major problem with trying to explain punk is that is not something that fits neatly into a box or categories. Not surprisingly as punks had made the explicit aim of trying to destroy all boxes and labels. With that as a major hurdle, any project that tries to define punk or explain it must do so with very broad brush strokes. Punk and punk music cannot be pigeonholed to some spiked-haired white male wearing a leather jacket with a thousand metal spikes listening to music real loud. (Bayard 11)

Readers of Mañas's Kronen tetralogy and observers of Spain's Novels of Disaffection will recognize Bayard's argument as strikingly familiar. Similar to punk, Mañas and his contemporaries Caimán Montalbán, Lucía Etxebarría, Ray

Loriga, and Care Santos write novels that defy precisely defined categories (neorealism, dirty realism, Generation X). Rather, the common denominator that the protagonists of the Kronen novels share is this attitude of defiance. It is their identifier, the division that they implicitly establish between themselves and family, authority, government, and even each other.

The energy of punk rock music and the attitude of the punk scene mirror the aesthetics of the Kronen tetralogy. Implicit in the four Kronen novels is a desire to indiscriminately confront—"probokar"—the sanitized conceptualization of Madrid and challenge the construction of youth. This desire to "probokar" leads to a double reception with its audience. For example, the tetralogy may be complicit with young readers who recognize the slang and references to the pop culture minutiae of music, film, and drugs. This portrayal insinuates, "this is you" or "these are your friends." In contrast, the novels may alienate readers with these same references. The vulgar and salacious details of these novels can be troubling, perplexing, even shocking to readers in essence declaring, "this is your friend's/neighbor's/children's life and you don't understand it."

Another part of the confrontation occurs as an aesthetic challenge to readers' expectations. "La máxima inkorrección estilística" is evident throughout the four novels in a freestyle orthography. The most extended use of the nobela-esque incorrectness appears in Ciudad rayada as the narrator, Kaiser, is oftentimes narrating while under the influence of narcotics; like the slurred speech of a drunk, Kaiser's enunciation changes accordingly: "Kogí uno, lo encendí, y te juro ke en ese momento un porro de maría era lo ke me estaba

haciendo falta. Me relajó mogOllón, y con el solEcillO y la rutA y el de las trEncitas y a pesar del guitArrEo me sentí guAi" (151). These novels' freestyle orthography is a means of stripping away formality and artifice to capture the aesthetics of the streets and drug addicts, and extolling a break from the mores of good taste, political correctness, or even grammatical correctness, which mirror the punk movement[13].

Punks channel their antiauthoritarianism through music, a representation of "their discordancy and disrespect, the seditious fury of their unforgiving confrontationism" (Medhurst 225). The aggression of punk manifests itself both lyrically and sonically. Punk lyrics are abrasive and confrontational, as The Ramones demonstrate in songs such as, "Beat on the brat / Beat on the brat / Beat on the brat / With a baseball bat / Oh yeah" ("Beat on the Brat" The Ramones), and

> We're a happy family
>
> We're a happy family
>
> We're a happy family
>
> Me mom and daddy
>
> Sitting here in Queens
>
> Eating refried beans
>
> We're in all the magazines
>
> Gulpin' down thorazines

[13] Despite being a gesture of transgression, nevertheless it remains just that, a gesture. Ultimately the orthographic incorrections are an artifice that undermines the text's verisimilitude pact.

We ain't got no friends

Our troubles never end

No Christmas cards to send

Daddy likes men ("We're a Happy Family" Rocket to Russia),

as well as,

Slugs and snails are after me

DDT keeps me happy

Now I guess I'll have to tell 'em

That I got no cerebellum

Gonna get my Ph.D.

I'm a teenage lobotomy. ("Teenage Lobotomy" Rocket to Russia)

The aggression of punk echoes through the Kronen novels in acts of meaningless violence, such as when Borja, José, and Kiko savagely beat a junkie for no apparent reason (Sonko 156). Punk rock music builds on the ominous tonalities of chugging bass chords and the rapid-fire guitar riffs. Like the frenetic energy and rhythm punk rock, Mañas's Kronen tetralogy portrays characters that are in perpetual motion. Carlos and Roberto are constantly zigzagging around Madrid in Carlos's Volkswagen Golf in Historias del Kronen, Kaiser runs from bar to bar to sell drugs in Ciudad rayada, and David races across town working as a motorcycle courier, "un mensaka," in the novel of the same name. Historias del Kronen oftentimes adopts the structure of a detailed travelogue, narrating the precise route characters take in their "marcha" from bar to bar, discothèque to discothèque: "Santa Bárbara, Colón, Avenida de América,

Francisco Silvela" (Kronen 87). Readers can literally follow in the footsteps of Carlos, Kaiser, or José by retracing their precise movements around Madrid.

In terms of narrative structure, the plots of the Kronen novels progress in fits-and-starts, consisting more of a series of randomly connected vignettes than a logical progression of events. As a result, the hundreds of characters scattered throughout the novels—with perhaps the exception of Roberto in Historias del Kronen—are static. As will be discussed later, characters learn nothing from their experiences. Kaiser, describing his cocaine addicted acquaintances, observes, "Pues, los farloperos son como ratas que se pasan el día dando vueltas a la rueda loca de su jaula sin moverse del sitio, sabes" (Ciudad rayada 72). Thus the structures of Historias del Kronen, Mensaka, Ciudad rayada, and Sonko 95 define the individual in terms of his/her movement, which provides an insight into of his/her identity. Characters are too busy moving to arrive at any conclusion about what they are doing or why they are doing it. Indeed, the terms associated with Madrid's nightlife, "la movida" and "la marcha," themselves denote this sense of motion. As in The Ramones legendary yowl, "Hey Ho! Let's go!" ("Blitzkrieg Bop"), it is the movement that is important, not where they are going.

Moreover, the scenes and chapters of the Kronen tetralogy are seemingly interchangeable. If the reader shuffled and randomly reordered the chapters in Historias del Kronen or Ciudad rayada, one could legitimately question whether there would be any perceptible change to their development or dénouements. Thus the plot's linearity is less important than establishing an aesthetic of movement throughout the narrative. What happens and the order in which it

happens is subservient to the fact that it is happening. Characters are continually lurching forward toward the next event, the next copa, the next bar, the next rave, the next drug deal, the next orgasm, and all in all, the next distraction. Linearity has no meaning or relevance. Their movement is horizontal (through physical space) rather than vertical (an evolution or advancement).

The novels in the Kronen tetralogy develop like a punk rock concert. Punk bands rarely break between songs. Rather, each song, essentially a two minute burst of musical energy, rams into the next. Moreover, a tenet of the punk rock concert is the disintegration of the separation between audience and performer (O'Hara 15). Punk rock musicians make no attempt to separate themselves from punk rock fans, through common identifiers, such as clothing, lifestyle, or attitude. The practice of "gobbing," or spitting, goes both directions: punks spit from the stage onto the audience and the audience spits back. Gobbing is a symbolic equalizer—"We are just like you" and "We are you"—eliminating the hierarchy between stage and floor, performer and spectator. Indeed the idea of a "punk rock star" is an oxymoron. The real "stars" of punk are the punks themselves that make up the audience. They are not passive spectators, rather active participants (gobbing, slam dancing, and stage diving). And while mostly devoid of spitting, Mañas's novels show a similar connection and complicity with the reader. All four novels have first person narrators that narrate a world familiar to the implied readers' experience, describing places and events that the reader presumably knows as well as the narrator, such as El Lunatik, El Kronen, and the clearly labeled street routes—"Estoy en la Moraleja, entro por el Soto, calle

Begonia, paso la ermita de las Irlandeses, calle Azalea, Paseo de Alcobendas" (Kronen 150). Thus analogous to punk, the Kronen novels remove the separation between narrator/reader and even playfully flout the boundaries of the implied author/reader through the process of involvement and identification as described by Wayne Booth (156-158). For example, the protagonist of the largely autobiographical Sonko 95 is a character named José and coincidentally Mañas himself owned a moderately successful bar in Madrid in 1995 called El Sonko. And in first sentence of Ciudad rayada, the narrator Kaiser depreciatingly declares, "Mira, tío, tú no sabes nada de mí, vale. Y si sabes algo es porque has leído una de las novelas de Mañas, que se dedica a contar historias de los demás, pero te aseguro que hay un mogollón de cosas que exagera" (Ciudad rayada 9). The implications are that, like punk, the implied reader—young, drug using, alcohol abusing, and antisocial—is a member of this same subculture that the novels are describing. As with the punk to punk rock, the Kronen novels are playing his/her tune[14].

Furthermore the punk subculture demands no formal training to participate nor any musical dexterity to perform punk. In fact, punk rock emerged in part as a reaction to the highly stylized music popular in the mid 1970s, namely,

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[14] Yet despite the aesthetic connection between punk rock and the Novels of Disaffection, each embodies distinct visions of community. The punk seeks shelter, a space of belonging from the rejection and alienation he/she feels in society. Madan Sarup explains that, "identity is not an inherent quality of a person...it arises in interaction with others and the focus is on the processes by which identity is constructed" (14). In contrast the Kronen series portrays the individual separating him/herself from all others. They scatter from centralized communities and move toward isolation. Since their isolation is self-imposed, it points up a question of identity.

symphonic rock and disco. Punk considers symphonic rock and disco self-indulgent, musically bloated, and not surprisingly, rebels against them. Rather than the training required to perform symphonic rock or the stylized dance beats and style consciousness of disco, punk embraces the philosophy of D.I.Y., "do it yourself." To "do" punk, one only needs energy and fury. In contrast to the 15 minute intricate rock symphonies, punk rock songs rarely exceeded 2 minutes. In contrast to the "Stayin' Alive" and "Jive Talkin'" of disco, punk rock standards include "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "Gimme Gimme Shock Treatment," "Sheena is a Punk Rocker," and the anthemic "Anarchy in the U.K.," which can be performed on a single guitar chord with mere minutes of practice. Thus, similar to the convergence of performer and audience, punk sent the message, "You, too, can do this."

Similarly, the Kronen novels address a specific readership, implicitly stating, "You, too, do this," "this is your life," and "this is you." Indeed, the DIY ethic permeates Spain's Novels of Disaffection. It rejects the notion that the author needs an intellectual pedigree to write a novel. Mañas, for example, has no formal training as a writer and wrote the manuscript of Historias del Kronen in only fifteen days (Ribas 32), a "burst" writing style that mirrors and even contributes to the frenetic pace of the novel. The concept is for the author to simply write what s/he knows, precisely in the manner s/he knows it. To borrow computer terminology, it is a WYSIWYG literature ("What You See Is What You Get"). Hence, Mañas's novels skip philosophical contemplation ("Quiero ver de frente esa NADA"), labored prose, word games, and clever turns of phrase, and

instead spit out vulgar street slang. Mañas reacts acerbically to works by contemporary novelists like Antonio Muñoz Molina and Juan José Millás:

> Ese primer párrafo de El jinete polaco que dura dos páginas es anacrónico. El lenguaje ha ido evolucionando y tiene que ser más claro, más sintético, más preciso. Otros, por ejemplo, como Millás, no alcanzo a comprender lo que quieren decir, sus personajes están perdidos, buscan un estado interior y una significación de las cosas que, a mi juicio, no tiene significación. (Ribas 34)

Moreover, the Kronen novels are intimately tied to popular youth culture, citing identifiers like Malasaña and Chueca; El Kronen and El Lunatik; Kronenbourg; Doc Martins; Seven-lleven; Huaitlabel and Jotabé; los porros, el costo, el jaco; Jenriretratodeunasesino; Killer Barbies and Los Planetas. The implications of these popular culture references have less connection with globalization (as Currie would argue [112-113]) than to the theory of reader response, as at the end of his article, "Literatura Punk," Mañas defiantly challenges the reader in his "Test de kultura básika punk" to answer a two question quiz: "1. ¿Kuántas referencias has reconocido? 2. ¿Ké libros kompras?" (43). As the readers who immerse themselves in the nocturnal scene "get it," recognizing the references to music, drugs, and Madrid, readers outside this subculture will be alienated[15].

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[15] Punk's prominence in Spain's Novels of Disaffection is, of course, contradictory. While protagonists live a hedonistic "carpe diem" and ostensibly ignore the past, they also embrace a cultural form—punk—which rose to prominence more than 25 years ago, when Mañas and his contemporaries were beginning EGB. Nevertheless, as Clarke argues, youth typically do not accept

That Mañas's protagonists are constantly on the move provides an insight into their identities, the dynamics of which can be seen in the contrast between modern and postmodern identity, and subsequently their divergent visions of the road. Modernism considered identity as a road, but in contrast to the Kronen novels, modernism conceived a "road of life," a journey, or "life as pilgrimage." The Pilgrim embarked on a life-long Journey to find and define the Self. Along the road of life, the individual acquired tools with which to construct identity, such as a knowledge of the past, a sense of sacrifice, diligence, empowerment, self knowledge, which are buttressed by a career, family, community, spirituality, and faith. The life-long journey of finding and defining the self, according to Douglas Kellner, complemented the qualities of the modern identity, like autonomy, rationality, commitment, and responsibility (174). Zygmunt Bauman takes a different but congruent position in that the concern was not so much how to build an identity, but rather how to preserve it. Bauman explains the modernist construct of identity with a banking metaphor: in the past, as the individual constructed identity, s/he was investing and saving for the future. Building the self consisted of delaying pleasure and gratification in order to reap long term rewards, as one does through physical exercise, saving money, or religious devotion. Over time, identity construction would reward the investment with accrued interest, all the while the personal, social, and religious institutions—in the examples above, the body, banks, even God—would remain intact and

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any doctrine in its entirety, rather they "draw on particular elements of subcultural style and create their own meanings and uses of them" (92).

trustworthy for a lifetime. Thus the modern identity was a future tense exercise; what is formulated today may not serve immediate needs but with perseverance would serve higher goals in the future. The image of the Road codified this worldview in that life was a trajectory that could be planned for, and the metaphorical traveler could have faith in institutions and in the future.

However as Bauman argues, the world is now inhospitable to pilgrims, and nowhere more so than in José Ángel Mañas's Kronen tetralogy. Identity is no longer part of the sustained journey that modernity envisioned. Rather postmodern identity resides in the here and now. Identity defies the terms of a lifestyle choice—career, family, ethics—as it is disposable and ever-changing to take advantage of the present moment. In other words, the question of identity associated with Mañas's novels can be framed not so much in terms of being ("Who am I? Where have I been? What has shaped me?"), but rather in terms of acting and doing ("Where am I now? What am I doing, saying, drinking, smoking, injecting now?"). Similarly, the road no longer represents a trajectory of life-long stability. Rather, the road now is an escape route. The Kronen novels refuse to see identity as part of a master life narrative[16]. Returning to Bauman's metaphor, in Mañas's novels the "bank" has been bulldozed to the ground (symbolically, a moral bankruptcy) and in its place now stands a bar (symbolically, a temple of escapism). It is in and around these bars—El Kronen, Lunatik, El Sonko—that

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[16] Mañas's contemporaries echo this state of vacant identity and superficiality. In Caimán Montalbán's novel, for instance, appropriately titled Bar, the protagonist Lobo unabashedly explains, "qué pocas ganas de hacer el gilipollas meditando sobre la condición humana" (Bar 100).

the Kronen series develops. The pounding techno and rock music, the endless succession of "copas" (the concept of "moderation" is unknown), and hoards of acquaintances and strangers alike with "los ojos de estar puestísimos" (Sonko 34), frame the bar as a space of escapism. Mañas's protagonists spend their evenings at bars in a chemical-induced stupor; when they are not drinking alcohol, they are taking drugs like ecstasy, speed, cocaine, and heroin. In fact, the bartender in El Kronen, Manolo, serves double duty as a drug pusher. Similarly El Sonko serves as a front door to a larger drug scene. The perturbed owner, Gustavo, watches as "está todo el mundo fumando porros" (Sonko 42), oblivious to the sign above their heads which ironically warns, "prohibido fumar porros" (Sonko 36). The back office of El Sonko, ostensibly a space in which to conduct the bar's business is secondary to the real business of the bar—pushing drugs (61)—as well as a private space where Roberto, Jaime, and José "meten los tiros" of cocaine and heroin (176). Alcohol and drugs are the tools for escapism and it is around this escapism of the drug culture that characters wrap their identity. As a space of escapism, the bar allows protagonists to disconnect from the outside world and disconnect from themselves.[17] In Historias del Kronen

[17] Returning to Montalbán's novel, the bar manifests this duality by serving as both a refuge and as a trap. Lobo, for example, defines the bar as his protection, "Mi barra barricada" (Bar 81), as well as his prison in which he feels like "un animal enjaulado" (Bar 88). His interaction with the space of escapism points up a vicious cycle. Lobo explains, "Casi todo el dinero que gano lo gasto en bares" (Bar 53), even though Lobo is himself a bartender. The money he earns in his bar, in turn, he spends and drinks in other bars.

Carlos's girlfriend[18] Rebeca relates her drug use to a form of pop philosophy Buddhism: "Cuando has tomado el suficiente ácido puedes llegar a olvidarte de ti mismo, a olvidar tu nombre y tener que preguntarte quién eres, qué haces en este lugar y en este momento" (36). More than merely recreational usage, drugs become their means of interacting with others and with their surroundings. For example, in Mensaka Laura shoots cocaine to "centrarse" and Ricardo mentions "me centré con la coca" (62, 77). In Sonko95, Pacheco even snorts cocaine off of his "carné de identidad" (55), a portable—and appropriate—surface off of which to take the drugs which are becoming the definition of who he is and the basis of his identity. Thus daily life becomes redefined as escapism. The trajectory of identity building has contracted to the span of a drug high. This present moment-ness recasts identity to fit the constricted time span; immediate wants (and addictions) trump long term needs. As escapism becomes their modus operandi, identity becomes ever more shallow and transient. Thus identity is not constructed, it is replaced.

Yet as with any drunk or drug high, the effect is fleeting; the "subidones" are inevitably followed by "bajones." Like the booze they imbibe and the drugs they inject, identity is consumable and fleeting. Drugs, alcohol, sex, and rock music are the new "señas de identidad," the masks upon which individuals graft identity. And like a mask, their identities are superficial. As easily as protagonists

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[18] Rebeca is a girlfriend in name only; more precisely, she is merely Carlos's sex partner. As with most interpersonal relationships in the Kronen tetralogy, there is little semblance of intimacy nor interaction that transcends the physical. They have relationships of convenience, as they are merely using each other for instant gratification.

move from bar to bar, change the music, pour another drink, cook up another hit of heroin, swallow a different pill, or change sex partners, so too does their identity change. The changes are instantaneous, from a chemically induced trance one moment (in Ciudad rayada, Kaiser enters a trance state while taking ecstasy and listening to techno music) to spontaneous fits of rage the next moment (in Sonko95, Borja, Kiko, and José pummel a junkie for no apparent reason) segueing into uncontrollable sexual urges (in Historias del Kronen, Carlos and Roberto pay a transvestite to perform oral sex). The individual does not construct identity (singular), rather she casts and recasts identities (plural) for the purpose of instant gratification. Thus in contrast to the long-term, modernist journey, identities shift to momentary, postmodernist poses which can be changed on a whim or even discarded altogether in the haze of hangovers and post-coitus.

Identities are in a state of continual adaptation. Bauman equates the postmodern identity to a video cassette tape, which is "eminently erasable and re-usable, calculated not to hold anything for ever, admitting today's events solely on condition of effacing yesterday's ones, oozing the message of universal 'until-further-notices' of everything deemed worthy of recording" ("Pilgrim" 18). Identity is destabilized, disposable, and ever-changing for the purpose of instant gratification. In the Kronen novels identity is no longer a construction, rather it is a replacement.

These novels' framing of identity as replacement has repercussions on the concepts of time and memory. Characters' drug use, alcohol abuse, and

orgasms are acts of evasion, serving to evade permanence. In Mañas's novels the future is immaterial ("no hay futuro") and the past no longer dictates one's actions in the present. By restricting their vision to the immediate present and continually moving, protagonists are unburdened by memory and emotional connections, developing a personal timeline that mirrors what Frederic Jameson defines as the perpetual present. Moving from bar to bar—their spaces of decadence—in search of the next "copa," the next hit of heroin, and the next orgasm, their existence becomes a series of disconnected vignettes. As such these novels establish no clear sense of the passage of time. Nights in bars and discothèques are exploited and instantly forgotten, ceding to the next night's experiences; one evening fades into another (these characters rarely see daylight) as weeks and months slip by. Even murder is unmemorable. In Historias del Kronen, Carlos drowns the diabetic Fierro with a bottle of whiskey. While the homicide was unintentional, Carlos shrugs off his role in Fierro's death as soon as it occurs; since it is past tense for Carlos, it is as if it had not happened. Similarly, at the conclusion of Ciudad rayada, Kaiser, momentarily reflecting on his misadventures—including his complicity in the shooting death of a police officer—declares, "prefiero olvidarlo" (222), casting insignificance over the killing as well as the entire novel he has just narrated. It is as if the narrative were inconsequential which, of course to Kaiser, since it is past tense, it is. This memory vacuum contrasts with the David Herzberger's definition of the Novel of Memory as discussed in Chapter 2. In contrast to the process of historicizing the individual in Juan Benet's Volverás a Región (1967), Juan Goytisolo's Señas de

identidad (1966), or Carmen Martín Gaite's El cuarto de atrás (1978), in Mañas's narrative the individual actively dehistoricizes him/herself. For example, Carlos complains about his dying grandfathers stories, "Las viejas historias del pasado. El pasado es siempre aburrido" (Kronen 83) and calls for mandatory euthanasia for everyone over 55 years old (Kronen 54). Their historical disconnect is partially biographical: due to the author's and their protagonists' age (typically between 20 and 30 years old) they are unburdened by the memory of Francoism and may barely remember the transition to democracy (and as such the dictatorship/democracy dichotomy lacks the immediacy it had for authors such as Goytisolo or Martín Gaite). Carmen de Urioste refers to them as truly "la primera generación de escritores de la democracia española" (457). The other part of their historical discontinuity is that they simply do not care, in that, since history seemingly does not directly affect them, they reason, they do not have to care. As such, they ignore the past as meaningless and reject historicizing institutions, such as the family. The family structure seeks to transcend the self and the present moment by linking its members to a collective history and hence a shared identity, to a connection between generations, both present and future. Throughout the four novels, the seventeen to twenty year old protagonists—Carlos, Javi, Kaiser, and Borja—lack any semblance of family structure or parental guidance. Parents are rarely mentioned and virtually absent from the protagonists' lives. In Historias del Kronen, Carlos describes the members of his family as disembodied voices calling from the other side of his bedroom door. On the rare occasions when he is at home—mostly to masturbate

and sleep—Carlos lies cocooned in his bedroom, thus eliminating any interaction, let alone face-to-face communication, with his parents. During the few instances in which his family dines together, meals center around the Telediario programming (Kronen 84, 208), which stifles attempts to meaningfully communicate with one another and subverts the cohesion of the family unit to the blare of mass media. While Mañas's characters are unemployed in the traditional sense (not considering drug dealing as a profession), their lackadaisical attitude comes from their comfortable, middle class upbringing and parents that provide them with the disposable income to afford their drugs, alcohol, and cars. In Historias del Kronen, Carlos does not have a summer job because he does not need one. The economic reality of skyrocketing youth unemployment during the 1990s in Spain is lost on Carlos. His parents are physically and emotionally distant from his life, and as such merely fulfill a role analogous to that of an Automatic Teller Machine, dispensing cash to their children. Carlos's father does not even react when Carlos scurrilously states, "Yo no necesito comprensión...Necesito tu dinero. Eso es todo" (Kronen 67). Thus through their lack of involvement in their children's lives—parenting is redefined as little else than financial support of one's dependents—parents indirectly support youth's drug habit.

In Ciudad Rayada, Kiko symbolically subverts the family to his drug habit when he cuts and sniffs cocaine off of his mother's wedding picture (214). The two dimensional photograph is at once a hollow surrogate for Kiko's family and a representation of the disconnect between family members (even though they live

in the same apartment, they only see each other in pictures). Kiko's cocaine on his mother's photo debases the institutions—family, marriage, home—that would give an historical context to the individual. Indeed, characters find no reason to cling to institutions such as jobs, family, religion, or social mores. Moreover, as if peering through a camera lens, Carlos and Kiko's focus constricts to that which is immediately before them in the present moment. Like a lens, there is an implied filter and distance between the individual and the experience. The continuous present—a disconnect from the past and hence from memory—filters out emotional connection, guilt, responsibility, even love, as Kaiser claims, "De repente me había sentido komo muy muy fuera de todo, komo si ...nada me importara de berdad" (Ciudad 222). This emotional disconnect and separation between generations again appears in Historias del Kronen in Carlos's (forced) relationship with his dying grandfather. Carlos, Kaiser, and Javi are self-centered because they feel no connection with anything greater than their own circumstances. Thus they take drugs because they can take drugs without suffering any (apparent) consequences.

The deshistoricized self of the Kronen tetralogy is the antithesis of the modern pilgrim and the pilgrimage of identity construction. The Kronen novels are chaotic narratives of perpetual motion which reduce the totalizing pilgrimage to the erratic unrest of twenty-somethings in "la marcha madrileña." In contrast to the modern Pilgrim, the Kronen novels reflect what Madan Sarup calls the postmodern Tourist. While the pilgrim followed a life journey to construct the self, his/her postmodern counterpart, the tourist, dismisses the identity building project

altogether. The tourist rejects metanarratives like the pilgrimage because for the tourist, the desire to continue moving, seeing, and experiencing restricts time and life to the present moment. The continuous present feeds off of the protagonists' aforementioned continual movement. In Sonko 95, for example, José mentions that during one weekend, "hemos recorrido trescientos kilómetros sin salir de Madrid, de discoteca en discoteca, de casa de uno a casa de otro" (34). This perpetual motion affords no time for self-reflection or identity construction, rather it breeds further escapism, continually seeking the next thrill, the next "copa," the next hit of heroin. Their physical movement, circling Madrid—"Bajamos por una perpendicular a Fuencarral, pasamos una iglesia y seguimos por la calle del Espíritu Santo hasta la calle de la Madera, donde está el Agapo (112)"—resembles a spiral. Through this frantic movement, the Kronen tetralogy frames life as a snapshot; as a tourist clicks a picture and moves to the next attraction, characters in the Kronen novels essentially become tourists through life, constantly moving and never establishing roots. As such their existence becomes an erratic tourist itinerary, consumable moments that provide instant gratification. Theirs is a quest for what's next. Booze, drugs, rock and roll, and sex give them impetus but no direction. In contrast to the pilgrimage, the tourists' journey is horizontal, not vertical; their aim is not progress, but merely to keep moving.

The pilgrim followed the road of life to construct a stable identity, one that would withstand the tests of time and adversity. Now, however, a stable identity is a liability. Bauman states, "the snag is no longer how to discover, invent,

construct, assemble (even buy) an identity, but how to prevent it from sticking. Well constructed and durable identity turns from an asset into a liability. The hub of postmodern life strategy is not identity building, but avoidance of fixation" ("Pilgrim" 24). The Kronen novels exemplify this teflon identity in the absence of roots, memory, and tradition. As such, the Kronen tetralogy presents a series of hundreds of static characters that move but do not grow. The only exception is Roberto in Historias del Kronen. In the Epilogue, Roberto's meeting with his psychologist is the sole example of self examination or a critical look at self definition and identity.

As postmodernism, according to Jean Lyotard, posits the fragmentation of master narratives (37), and as identity is itself a narrative, Mañas's novels demonstrate the splintering of a unified, coherent identity. Identity falls together piecemeal and literally "sobre la marcha." Considering the lack of a stable concept of the self, the present moment is not only what these characters embrace, but by necessity it is also what they must cling to to maintain a definition of the self. As postmodernism emphasizes fragmentation, Mark Currie theorizes that the "fragments have acquired a new awareness" (113), a new sense of urgency and importance. Indeed, for the individual lacking a fixed definition of identity upon which to depend, the present moment necessarily becomes all encompassing. Analogous to the drug culture in which s/he is immersed, the individual's identity is like a junkie's craving, simultaneously a desire and a need. Like the lie implicit in the junkie's promise—"Just once more, then I'll stop"—the adoption of identities spirals uncontrollably. Without the

constant movement for the next identity "fix," the self would be left blank. Mañas's tourists need identity "injections" to maintain their momentum and constancy. And once is never enough. This replenishment reflects Currie's idea of a cultural schizophrenia, which is "to experience selfhood not as an ordered narrative but as multiple identification amongst the babble of discourses" (103). Through an incessant exploration, the protagonists relinquish unity in favor a schizophrenic self, a being of multiple, destabilized identities. Replacement and renewal is, paradoxically, their only stability. Thus identity becomes an act of maintenance.

Identity may be fleeting but it is also as close as the next "copa" or the next hit of heroin. The hedonism of Mañas's tourists is a quest to feel alive, yet it also spurs a vicious circle. The tourist is wildly successful in the avoidance of identity fixation, in "preventing it from sticking," in that through drugs, alcohol, sex, rock music, and perpetual motion they not only escape from the outside world, but also from themselves. For example, while using cocaine Carlos says, "he desconectado con la realidad," and he uses acid to "olvidarte de ti mismo" (Kronen 22, 36). Carlos is untethered from identity; living in the immediate present pushes him further inward, seeking deeper levels of withdrawal, social delinquency, and escapism. The continual temporariness of identity has a corrosive effect. Like a junkie's dilemma, as the effect of the drugs fade and the identity fix fades, the junkie needs more in order to replicate the high. The cycle repeats itself and each time the effect is less potent, so s/he must do more. It foments a vicious, downward spiral.

The nihilism of disconnecting from one's identity plagues Mañas's protagonists and, paradoxically, it is also the foundation of their identity. They continually chase what they are trying to escape. As such their vices define them. By placating their addictions, Mañas's protagonists define themselves through escapism as alcohol and drugs come to supplant identity. Returning to the Kronen tetralogy's relation to punk, Mark Sinker asks of his fellow punks, "How do we know right from wrong when community has no call on us?" (134). Community fragments into subcommunities, tribes (according to Vázquez Montalbán), and eventually recedes into internalization, a community of one, like the punk: "This dance, of directness and obliqueness, of posture and evasion, of obscure attack and sometimes startling tolerance, is the punk's private argument with him/herself, only made public for specific and possibly irrelevant effects as it circles justification, legitimation and rationalisation" (Sinker 135). Recalling Roger Wolfe's declaration, through their decadence the protagonists in the Kronen tetralogy declare war on themselves.

The hedonistic "carpe diem" of protagonists in the Kronen tetralogy reflects Zygmunt Bauman's argument that it is the mission of the postmodern citizen to simply have fun and "lead an enjoyable life" ("Pilgrim" 34). The call to arms to seek diversion differentiates Mañas's tourist from the modern pilgrim. In the process of constructing and defining identity, the pilgrim acquired stability and laid the foundation for a socially, financially, emotionally, and spiritually prosperous future. In contrast, in the cultural paradigm of the Kronen novels the tourist revels in his/her superficiality. This is the "nada" from the definition of

"literatura punk," which, to repeat Mañas's desire, "yo kiero ver de frente esa Nada" ("Literatura" 42). This search for "la nada" parallels Kellner's contention that postmodern texts as well as identities are shallow and thus essentially without meaning ("Popular" 146). Far from an existentialism or a metaphysical angst, identity may be fleeting but it is also as close as the next hit of heroin. And thus the vicious cycle begins again: the nihilism of disconnecting from one's identity plagues Mañas's tourists and, paradoxically, it is also the foundation of their identity.

In conclusion, the dilemma of identity in Mañas's Kronen tetralogy is a dilemma of nothing, "la nada." Protagonists' existence is empty. The promise of refuge in bars—their spaces of decadence—is their escape and their trap. The novels—Historias del Kronen, Mensaka, Ciudad rayada, and Sonko95—depict the fallout for Spain's youth: the withdrawal, the distance, the lack of community and communication among a group of postmodern tourists. For the tourist, escapism is its own reward and escapism is its own curse.

CHAPTER 4. LUCÍA ETXEBARRÍA: "*NO FUTURE*. GENERATION X. HAY QUE JODERSE," OR THE DISTANCE FROM SEX TO INTIMACY

Thus far, Spain's Novels of Disaffection posit an identity project diametrically opposed to that of the modern identity. The long term journey to build identity is truncated into an errand, a temporary and ultimately forgettable trip. A stable and fixed identity—once the ultimate life goal of the individual, the prize which one sought through decades of work and accretion of effort—now is detrimental, a hindrance to one's flexibility.

As the Novels of Disaffection begin with Mañas's Kronen tetralogy, Lucía Etxebarría's novels Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas (1997) and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes (1998) develop the concept of identity as a problem for contemporary youth as well as expand the readership of Spain's youth narrative. In 1998, Etxebarría won the Nadal Prize and an accompanying widespread acclaim for her second novel, Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, which not only extended the acceptance of Spain's young novelists and their literature but also increased sales through dozens of editions of her novels. Thus Mañas and Etxebarría pave the way for a wider literary and scholarly acceptance of a narrative that was already reaching best-seller status. Perhaps the least introverted of the authors studied here, Etxebarría enjoys an enormous literary celebrity and fits the public role of a controversial young novelist (Pizarro 141). Not unlike the autobiographical elements in Mañas's narrative, particularly Sonko 95: Autorretrato con negro de fondo, Etxebarría's public image mirrors that of her protagonists that rush through the "marcha madrileña."

In contrast to the political and social repression of Luis Martín Santos's "tiempo de silencio," Etxebarría's protagonists live in "tiempos de sida" (ACPD 14)[19], in which the personal, the sexual, and the intimate supplant the political and the social. In fact, nothing about them is silenced or hidden. Etxebarría's novels permit the reader to peer voyeuristically into the most intimate and salacious details of characters' lives: lesbian sexual trysts, emotional breakdowns, physical and sexual abuse, alcoholism, hits of the drug ecstasy, and even murder in a drug deal gone awry.

The sexual exploits, alcohol and drug abuse, perpetual motion, and violence recall José Ángel Mañas's Kronen tetralogy. In fact, the appetites of Etxebarría's protagonists for sex, drugs, and escapism are as voracious as those of their Kronen counterparts. However, Mañas's and Etxebarría's similar plots develop into distinct conceptualizations of identity. Recalling the blatant misogynism (women are referred to as "cerdas") and sexual objectification by Mañas's protagonists, Etxebarría presents a counter perspective to Mañas's male dominated narratives. The narrative voices belong exclusively to female protagonists who are more socially engaged and committed to institutions than are Mañas's characters. In Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas, the trio of sisters Cristina, Ana, and Rosa are employed, look to marriage as a goal, and their parents actually appear in the text and interact with their children. However, the result is hardly uplifting: their jobs are a source of alienation, their parents'

[19] Parenthetical references to Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas will be abbreviated to ACPD.

marriage is in ruins, and the relationships with their parents show how emotionally distant parents are from their children. And while they are as alienated as Mañas's characters, Etxebarría's characters are capable of feeling. Indeed they lament the lack of intimacy and feel its influence on their identity.

Two of Lucía Etxebarría's early and most popular novels, Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes add the perspective of interdependency to the youth identity question. In particular, Etxebarría's novels shift the focus from the absolute autonomy of the individual to interpersonal relationships. Whereas Mañas's novels suggest that interpersonal estrangement is the cause of isolation, escapism, and identity, Etxebarría's narratives frame it as an effect; characters suffer the emotional fallout from the lack of interpersonal contact and the breakdown of communication.

This chapter focuses on these novel's two protagonists, Beatriz and Cristina, their fluctuating sexual identities, and their frustrated attempts to forge identity in conjunction with others. As in Mañas's novels, the music and drugs that Etxebarría's characters consume produce estranging effects on the individual's identity. This estrangement extends to their interpersonal lives, as well. Protagonists entertain the fantasy of interpersonal relationships, allowing themselves to have feelings and to be vulnerable (something Mañas's characters would never do), exposing themselves to emotional risks to attain a meaningful relationship and connection with friends and lovers. However, consistent with Bauman's theory of postmodern identity, their efforts are not merely frustrated, but characters even sabotage their own efforts. Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas

and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes explore the alienating effects of individual autonomy and thus the failure of intimacy.

As in the Kronen tetralogy, the "bar de copas" and the discotheque are also the epicenters of Madrid's youth subcultures in Etxebarría's novels. Nightlife in the Spanish capital produces an alienation for Etxebarría's characters, not due to their seclusion from others but rather in their inability to ever be alone. Bea and Cristina feel overwhelmed by the hoards of people inhabiting the shared spaces of "la marcha," and being constantly surrounded by people has an estranging effect on identity. In describing a dance club, Cristina says, "Alrededor de mí los cuerpos, compridos y multiperforados, se empujan unos a los otros, las personas ya no son personas porque la identidad de cada uno se funde en el crisol de la masa" (ACPD 46). The crowded dance club exemplifies the erasure of identity, a process of dehumanization ("las personas ya no son personas") in which, beneath the blinking strobe lights and blaring amplifiers, identity is diluted and lost in the crowd. The distinction of one's individuality slips into the mass identity of the group (Malbon 91). Yet the "crisol" in this scene doesn't truly melt identities together into a collective unity, rather they form an amalgamation of individuals that blurs individual differences. Hesmondhalgh observes this phenomenon in techno music raves which, despite a discourse of collectivism and unity, actually display little sense of community (272). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the fixed and stable identity (singular) again inexorably fades into decentered identities (plural); the individual relinquishes the ability to maintain the sense of individuality as music precipitates the dilution of identity.

In contrast to the paella of musical genres that provide the soundtrack for Mañas's novels—punk, alternative rock, heavy metal, dance music, grunge—Extebarría's characters move to the beat of techno. Also known in Spain as "el bakalao," techno builds on a high-speed, thumping backbeat, layered with computer generated sound effects and electronic bleeps and pulses, reminiscent of the endless rhythm of a train passing over tracks. Oftentimes songs stretch on for ten minutes or more, looping the same samples for hypnotic effect, such as "For What You Dream Of" by Bedrock, "A Final Hit" by Leftfield, or "Born Slippy" by Underworld. Recalling "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter describes the "decay of the aura" of early twentieth century art that had lost its uniqueness due to its ability to be easily mass produced (222). Yet like Andy Warhol's "100 Campbell's Soup Cans" or "Marilyn (50 Images)," in techno music's use of repetitiously looped sounds, the reproduction occurs within the work of art itself. And yet in Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas, Cristina describes techno in terms of a messianic experience: "El DJ es el nuevo mesías; la música, la palabra de Dios..." (ACPD 42). And despite a handful of internationally known artists, such as The Prodigy, BT, and Paul Oakenfold, most techno music originates from anonymous deejays in front of turntables, computers, and MIDI audio equipment. In techno, an artist's name recognition is scarcely important; similarly, techno only occasionally includes lyrics or vocal tracks, eliminating the human presence from this computer generated music, as its name implies. It focuses so strictly on beat and rhythm—its purpose is to make people dance—that it is widely considered

dehumanized. Thus techno's integration into Etxebarría's narrative, as a mark of identity for Bea and Cristina, is as fitting as it is paradoxical: discotheques are packed with young people, leaving little room to dance or move (one recalls the similarity to the opening sentence from Historias del Kronen: "Me jode ir al Kronen los sábados por la tarde porque está siempre hasta el culo de gente" [11]). And despite the suffocating physical proximity, characters are unable to communicate with each other. Thus particularly as depicted in Etxebarría's novels, techno is also an appropriate musical representation of Madrid's disaffected youth subcultures. This dehumanized, faceless music blares at such high volumes that it undermines attempts to communicate. Characters must scream to make themselves heard, and even then their words are garbled and misunderstood. Furthermore, characters frequent these clubs night after night, suggesting that they are attracted to and take comfort in an atmosphere in which it is difficult, oftentimes impossible, to talk with one another. It is as if they do not want to communicate.

In La Metralleta (Beatriz 172) (Etxebarría's pseudonym for the popular Madrid nightclub Revólver [Eva futura 130]), for example, techno inspires the dancing of a "masa humana" (ACPD 46) in which Christina is unable to differentiate one person from another. She also loses her own identity in music, booze, and "club drugs" such as ecstasy. The dancing mob forms a collective without establishing internal connections with anyone; it is a group of individuals, together yet isolated and alone. Through the physical, mechanical motion of dancing to a dehumanized music, the individual disconnects from thoughts and

emotions, as Bea chants to herself in an Edinburgh discothèque: "Baila, olvídate de todo, deja de ser persona, fúndete en esa masa que baila contigo. Deja de existir como individuo, deja de pensar por tu cuenta y dejarás de sufrir" (Beatriz 177). The dehumanization extends from the mechanized beats to the individual, erasing vestiges of her humanity and that of those surrounding her. Furthermore, in this proclamation to herself, Bea frames her dancing as an escape from suffering ("deja de pensar por tu cuenta y dejarás de sufrir"). Dancing to techno music is a means of shedding identity, and with it, the weight of emotions, the distress of being unable to communicate with others, and the inability to love or feel loved.

This quest for emotional disconnect points to the catalyst for escapism of these novels: the inability to cope with emotions and the resulting problem of interpersonal intimacy. Bea continues, "Y es que en medio de aquella extrema exaltación sentía que me perdía por algunos momentos en una vida superior, divina, que me absorbía y me integraba en ella. Como un lucero al despuntar el día, mi identidad se borraba ante una luz mayor" (Beatriz 177). Thus Bea equates the loss of identity with a spiritual freedom, a higher level of consciousness, and transcendence. The description is analogous to the escape of a psychotropic drug trip, coinciding with the feelings of ascension from the confines of the body, communal love, and intimate connections that accompany the use of ecstasy (Tomlinson 202).

However, such grandiose notions of transcendence are, not surprisingly, fleeting. Ultimately, the ecstasy, dancing, and punchy rhythms of techno

precipitate an interpersonal disconnect and the loss of identity. Bea and Cristina's escapism is ironic: they are unaware that their supposed absorption into a unity greater than themselves is establishing a trajectory of self-destruction. Instead of transcending, Bea is trapped: "Podía escapar de Malasaña, de los bares oscuros, de los picos y las malas compañías, pero no de sí misma" (Beatriz 226). This attitude is a leitmotif of these two novels by Etxebarría as well as Spain's Novels of Disaffection in general: escapism is ultimately a form of deterioration. Malasaña, the central-Madrid neighborhood known as an epicenter of youth culture nightlife and location of the popular club La Vía Láctea, is their space of decadence. Yet Etxebarría's novels in essence turn out to be cautionary tales, in that as much as Madrid's youth indulge their whims in Malasaña, as Bea stated above, they cannot escape themselves. As established in Mañas's novels, it is not surprising that Etxebarría's characters escape identity by submerging themselves in techno music and drug use, but of particular concern here is the emotional fallout that results. For example in Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, Mónica's boyfriend Coco suffers from a crippling drug addiction that leads to a complete loss of self-recognition ("no sabía quién era" [Beatriz 262]). Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes portray ephemeral highs coupled with enduring consequences. The euphoria of the drug high is consistently tempered by the damage it causes, and characters express a tacit recognition of the self-destruction in which they are engaged. Cristina admits, "La heroina le chupa a uno la sangre y a cambio solo ofrece la seguridad contra la carencia de ella misma" (ACPD 287). The vampiric

quality of their drug addiction—it leaves them bloodless, sucking the life from them—signals the downward spiral in which Etxebarría's protagonists are trapped. Furthermore, they are merely one group of many immersed in this self-destructive drug scene, a subculture of "yonkis consumidos, flacos y nerviosos, de esos que llaman 'mi mujer' a la novia. Esqueletos andantes que solo piensan en el jaco. Mirada moribunda, confusos, resentidos, deprimentes, estúpidos" (ACPD 287). As Bea, Cat, Mónica, Coco, Cristina, and Iain consume drugs, the drug culture consumes them. Drugs change from a form of weekend escapism to the organizing principle of their identities:

> Y luego está todo lo que el jaco significa, ese submundo que vive regido por el reloj de la droga: sus tres chutes diarios y, entre un chute y otro, llenar el tiempo de cualquier manera, esperando el próximo. Esto si eres pijo y rico, claro. Si no, debes emplear ese tiempo en encontrar el dinero para agenciarte otro chute, ya sea robando, trapicheando o haciendo la calle.
>
> Una vida en perpetuo movimiento, la búsqueda en la calle de la droga, el temor al palo y la denuncia, la travesía continua de la ciudad, salidas a horas intempestivas, encuentros en lugares inesperados, persecuciones, engaños, traiciones, revanchas, nuevas caras, nueva gente, nuevos yonkis y camellos, chinos, chutas, papelinas, rohipnol, palos, broncas, buprex, monos, pastillas para superar el mono, calabozos de cárceles y celdas de clínicas, la amenaza constante de los maderos, idas y venidas,

> ningún lugar seguro, ningún día igual a otro. El vértigo de la aventura, el coqueteo con la muerte. Una vida dura. Una vida a cien. El éxtasis del héroe. De la heroína. (ACPD 286-287)

Notably absent from Cristina's description of the drug lifestyle is a mention of the euphoric effects of drugs nor carefree escapism. Extebarría's characters engage in a paradoxical pursuit of pleasure. Surpassing any semblance of "recreational drug use," they indulge to such extremes that they drain the pleasure out of their thrill-seeking. Drugs become drudgery and a burden. Addiction and identity are interconnected as drugs supplant identity. Indeed, Cristina adopts this multifaceted self to pacify her drug cravings, reflecting Gergen's observations on postmodern identity, "With each new performance site, new patterns of action may be required; dispositions, appetites, personae—all may be acquired and abandoned and reappropriated as conditions invite or demand" (140). Thus tying identity to Cristina's perpetual movement (as described above) to is fitting, since "for many people such chameleon-like shifts are now unremarkable; they constitute the normal hurly-burly of daily life" (Gergen 140). Moreover, the pun in the last line of Cristina's description ("El éxtasis del héroe. De la heroína.") is significant in interpreting her identity. The double meaning encoded in "ecstasy" (the feeling and the drug) ties the psychotropic experience to the protagonist, as further expressed with homonyms: heroin defines the heroine. The drug culture is an integral part of who she is. Similarly in Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, Bea progressively immerses herself in the drug culture, from the acquaintances with pushers through her girlfriend Cat, to becoming a casual user of the

aforementioned club drugs, to working as a "camello" (93), selling and transporting ecstasy for Mónica and Coco (Beatriz 111, 172, 175-176), to her own chemical dependency: "Necesitaba las pastillas, ya no sabía vivir sin ellas" (Beatriz 177)[20]. The quest for fun goes beyond a mere desire to become a need. Cat, Bea, Mónica, and Coco do not merely take an occasional drug, rather their indulgences accelerate and intensify into addictions, such that drugs become the basis of their identity.

Their drug trips mirror their aimless physical movement. One recalls Cristina's portrayal of Madrid's drug culture:

> Una vida en perpetuo movimiento, la búsqueda en la calle de la droga, el temor al palo y la denuncia, la travesía continua de la ciudad, salidas a horas intempestivas, encuentros en lugares inesperados...idas y venidas, ningún lugar seguro, ningún día igual a otro. (ACPD 286-287)

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[20] Bea's progression is not unique in Spain's Novels of Disaffection. Both Cristina in Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas as well as Lobo in Caimán Montalbán's Bar work in bars and end up spending and subsequently consuming their income there. Following a path of increasing chemical dependency similar to Bea, Lobo follows downward trajectory of drug use: after escaping a quagmire of bars, savage beatings, homelessness, the mange, working as a "camello," and discovering his girlfriend is a porn actress, he returns to the bar: "Un bar se parece un poco a un cerebro...He tratado con cerebros ajenos al mío. He tenido tiempo de estar en bastantes bares. La conclusión es que bares y cerebros están jodidos todos" (17). Thus the spaces of decadence in Lucía Etxebarría and Caimán Montalbán's novels are both external and internal, "bares y cerebros," in which the external determines the internal. Identity is no longer a process of negotiation between the individual and society, as Sarup argues. Instead drugs and alcohol replace identity, permitting the individual fewer and fewer choices as time and the chemical dependency progress.

As catalysts for escapism, drugs allow them to pass into and out of identities, such that they are continually creating new personae. Characters wander in search of identity, amalgamating whatever is in their surroundings into their conceptualization of the self. The continual search for drugs parallels the drug trips themselves as Cristina engages in a movement without progress.

The concept of travel is at the center of both the modern and postmodern approaches to identity. The modern trip—recalling Bauman's idea of the pilgrimage—was a sustained trajectory that would transcend the minutiae of day to day life, aiming instead to fulfill a higher purpose of self-actualization. While the modern identity represented a long, difficult journey of self-sacrifice, the process also paved the way for personal development. The individual grew as a result of facing and overcoming his/her adversities. In contrast, postmodern identities evade hardships and challenges, and consequently, growth, as well, by defaulting onto the path of least resistance. Postmodern identities are like "los tripis," the trips of a drug high. It is short term sprint, a dramatic and dizzying ascent, a euphoria which inevitably peaks, and then plummets and crashes, jolting the individual back to a reality that is uglier and more hostile for having experienced the ecstatic drug high. Cristina's exasperation, desperation, and disillusionment are exemplified in her run-on sentences (ACPD 285-294) as she faces more and more excursions to buy drugs, in order to take more drug trips, which in turn necessitate more trips to find drugs. Thus Bea and Cristina's trips are vicious circles. They have laid no foundation for an identity—as modernism insisted was essential to the project of defining the self—so they must begin

again. And rather than promoting growth and progress, the postmodern identity trip leads to self-destruction. The drugs saddle them with addictions, alienated friends, and no progress to show for their travels.

Like Carlos, Kaiser, and Borja from Mañas's drug-addled novels, Etxebarría's protagonists also submerge themselves in Madrid's drug culture. Yet an important distinction between the works of the two novelists is the purpose behind their characters' chemical abuse. The exorbitant drug usage that largely characterizes Spain's Novels of Disaffection beg some obvious questions: why? What are character's motivations for consuming so many drugs? What drives their downward spiral of self-destructive behavior? Chapter 3 shows that Mañas's protagonists have no apparent reason to indulge in drugs. Unemployed yet comfortably living off of their parents' generosity (and apathy), they seemingly have nothing better to do than seek thrills. Rejecting the institutions which would lead to the modern project of identity construction—family, community, religion, employment—characters in the Kronen tetralogy indulge for the sake of indulging, escapism for the sake of escapism. Their attitude is similar to that of Mark Renton in Danny Boyle's film version of Trainspotting, who succinctly states, "And the reasons? There are no reasons. Who needs reasons when you've got heroin?" Ultimately, characters are self-serving and care about nothing outside of their own pleasure. But the effect is contradictory in that neither Mañas's and Etxebarría's protagonists experience pleasure. They take drugs to evade a fixed identity, such that they are constantly pacifying whims and thus circumventing the modern identity construction project.

However, Etxebarría's characters express explicit reasons for their drug usage. Their descent into drugs is due to two factors that are distinct from Mañas's novels. First, Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes emphasize Madrid's rave scene and the club drugs that inherently accompany it (as shown above). Second and most importantly, Etxebarría's protagonists turn to drugs as an escape from alienation, the pain of failed relationships, and the inability to make emotional connections with others. For example, in Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas, Cristina narrates her typical weekend:

> Los sábados por la noche estaba tan harta que...salía a la desesperada, a ponerme hasta las cejas de cubatas y de rayas para olvidarme de la mierda de vida que llevaba, y aquel año me agarré las peores cogorzas que haya agarrado en todos los días de mi vida, y me follaba a cualquier cosa, de verdad, a cualquier cosa, a cualquier elemento que se me pusiera a tira a partir de las seis de la mañana... (37)

She continues,

> Trabajo en una barra y los domingos los paso de garito en garito, bebiendo como una esponja, gastándome el sueldo en éxtasis, para olvidarme de que mi novio me dejó. Por muy delgada y muy mona que sea. Por lo visto, no le resultaba suficiente. Las relaciones de los noventa, dicen. Efímeras. *No future*. Generation X. Hay que joderse. (45)

Reminiscent of the Kronen tetralogy, it is not surprising that Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes frame drugs as a catalyst for escapism. Yet in contrast to other Mañas's narratives, Etxebarría's novels suggest that protagonists delve into drugs due to a failure to find meaning and fulfillment in their lives ("la mierda de vida que llevaba") and a failure to maintain emotional connections with others ("para olvidarme de que mi novio me dejó"). Drugs dull the pain of severed relationships, separation, and isolation. To evade her feelings of emptiness and isolation, Cristina expresses an air of desperation, a willingness to cling to anyone or anything that the present moment provides ("me follaba a cualquier cosa, de verdad, a cualquier cosa, a cualquier elemento que se me pusiera a tira a partir de las seis de la mañana"). Sex is used like a drug, satisfying a desire while simultaneously filling an emotional void.

This connection between drugs and feelings is expressed in the title itself of Etxebarría's first novel: Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas. The three emotional states—love, curiosity, and doubt—are punctuated by a brand-name pharmaceutical, a drug taken to temper and control emotions. Prozac, the anti-depression drug, becomes an international trend among women in the 1990s. There is a gender role implicit in Prozac and its "brother" drug, Ritalin. Whereas Prozac provides extra confidence to young women, Ritalin calms down young men. Both pharmaceuticals, in fact, alter one's identity.

In the context of Etxebarría's narrative, the prominent role of Prozac suggests that emotional imbalances may be chemically remedied[21]. One need not commit to the time and work of psychological counseling; the long road to overcoming mental illness can be avoided through a pharmaceutical short-cut. Recovery from depression can be instantaneous, and like the effects of narcotics, identity comes instantly available in pill form. Indeed, Prozac is a fitting metaphor for postmodern identity: it is an easily acquired commodity, it provides an instantaneous identity, the identity change is effortless, and most importantly, the effect is transitory. In the novel which contains its name, Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas, Rosa, is dependant on Prozac, "que me ayuda a no llorar" (ACPD 254). With prozac, Rosa is no longer a miserable person, at least until the chemicals wear off and she must take more. The pharmaceutical is her coping mechanism to deal with a tedious job as an executive financial director, a distant and uncaring family, failed romances, suicidal thoughts, and extreme social anxiety.

Yet, rather than helping to stabilize identity, the drug in effect is merely patching it. The identity she has developed, or more to the point the one she has failed to develop, is bandaged by chemicals. When Rosa takes Prozac to stop crying, the drug is not making her a contented person. It is modifying the manifestation of identity such that to continue to be contented and stable, in order to maintain her new identity, the chemical must be present. Otherwise, she

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[21] Sacks describes the effect of Prozac as changing the individual into the person most valued by contemporary culture, one having "outgoing, vibrant, dynamic personality types" (82).

returns to her true identity as a depressed woman yearning for intimacy yet isolated in her Madrid apartment. With the chemical identity of Prozac it is no longer necessary to face problems. While they can be averted by drugs, however, they are not solved by drugs. Prozac is Rosa's escape route; it is not helping her to reestablish relationships or recover from depression (Rosa admits, "Los últimos años he sido una máquina. Eso es todo. He sido como una réplica de mí misma, pero que en el fondo no era yo, porque no soy yo, no puedo ser, alguien que no siente absolutamente nada. Nada" [ACPD 310]). Repercussions are simply delayed. The clinical resolution of depression—years of talk therapy, self-examination, revisiting and confronting painful memories—may be sidestepped for instant gratification.

In highlighting drugs' ability to transform identity, Etxebarría's novels blur the line between illegal (yet readily available) narcotics and the legal (and socially accepted) pharmaceuticals[22]. Drugs—whether they are the commercially available Prozac, Rohipnol, Diazapán, and Viagra, or the illegally pushed ecstasy, heroin, or cocaine—are the catalysts by which the individual can easily modify or switch into and out of identities. Like her sister Cristina's alcohol,

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[22] Etxebarría herself criticizes society's double standards toward Prozac and ecstasy:

> Ambas pildoritas, desde su respectiva posición a uno u otro lado de la línea divisoria que separa el crimen y la honorabilidad, representan lo mismo: la felicidad química, el sustituto de la auténtica paz de espíritu imposible de encontrar en una época caracterizada por las familias desestructuradas, las relaciones violentas, el empleo precario y el sexo infectado. (Eva futura 132)

The author's perspective also insinuates the latent identity project associated with drug usage.

ecstasy, and heroin abuse, Rosa's drug abuse also spurs dependency. Thus, the consumable identity of legal drug complements the narcotic identity in Spain's Novels of Disaffection. Prozac must be absorbed into her bloodstream for her chemically improved and contented identity to stick. Indeed, the paradigm of identity is less about what it is than how long it lasts. This concept of the pill as a simultaneous cure and a poison recalls Jacque Derrida's theory of the pharmakos and pharmakon (95-100), and as such, Prozac is simultaneously beneficial and harmful. As depression is a frequent cause of suicides (which Rosa contemplates [ACPD 258]), Prozac may help the individual correct an emotional imbalance and thus to stay alive. But at the same time it is a poison in that it alters the body's system. Drugs—both legal and illegal—numb the pain, subjugate feelings, and act as surrogates for fulfilling interpersonal relationships. Like their "monos" of addiction, characters are burdened by the problem of intimacy.

Mañas's characters, in contrast, seemingly exist in an emotional vacuum. From Fierro's death (Historias del Kronen) to Javi's betrayal (Mensaka) to José, Borja, Kiko, and Roberto brutally beating a fellow junkie (Sonko 95), they express neither compassion nor loyalty to their friends or lovers. Carlos and Kaiser, for example, are essentially loners whose respective acquaintances come from the relationships of convenience that Madrid's drug subculture provides among fellow users and pushers. Mañas's characters take for granted that interpersonal relationships are neither possible nor worthwhile; they are inherently distrustful of love and do not bother trying to establish intimate connections with others.

Lacking a conscience, empathy, and loyalty, they use their friends and lovers for personal gain: in Historias del Kronen, Rebecca serves as a sexual exploit for Carlos; and in Mensaka, Javi does not feel enough concern to simply open his mouth to warn David of the thugs approaching to attack his friend with baseball bats. For this group of characters who are so steeped in the euphoric sensations of alcohol, drugs, and sex, they prohibit guilt, responsibility, and love from penetrating their emotional defense mechanisms.

While Mañas's characters are emotionally anesthetized, Etxebarría's protagonists, when sober, are overwhelmed by their feelings. The interconnecting relationships—between Bea, Cat, Mónica, and Ralph in Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes; between Cristina and Iain in Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas—highlight the overriding instability of intimacy presented throughout these two novels. Etxebarría's protagonists seek identity through interdependency and relationships with significant others—both male and female lovers. They are attracted to the metanarratives of emotionally fulfilling interpersonal relationships, of experiencing a meaningful connection with another, as a friend, lover, or both. For example, Bea moves into Cat's apartment in Edinburgh, a cohabitation and commitment that in theory would serve to strengthen their relationship. Bea seems willing to trust in the metanarratives of emotional connection, fulfillment, and meaning in her interpersonal and romantic relationships. But recalling Bauman's banking metaphor, the investment no longer yields rewards. On the contrary, it is a liability. Unable to achieve the modern ideal, they become disillusioned and embittered, and immerse themselves in drugs, techno music,

and infidelity to escape. And their escapism further forestalls attempts to establish intimacy with acquaintances, lovers, and much less their families.

Etxebarría's characters suffer the repression of personal identity along with the dissolution of romantic identity: they replace the dream of interdependency, of the loving, emotionally fulfilling interpersonal relationship with purely sexual relationships. Bea and Cat's so-called togetherness, for example, does not transcend the physical and as such the production of identity through the relationship with her lover is simultaneously a source of security and anxiety. Bea clings to Cat since, without her, she would be stranded in England. The threat of isolation is compounded by Bea's status as a foreigner in Edinburgh confronting geographical, linguistic, cultural estrangement. Yet, even when Bea is with Cat—as a friend and as a lover—she feels alienated. Known simply as "la novia de Cat" (Beatriz 48), a person without a name or an individuated identity, Bea resents the strains of this imposed identity. Bea thus becomes tethered to Cat and Cat's identity; Bea's apartment, acquaintances, and social life are exclusively those of her lover. Like characters' drug abuse throughout the Novels of Disaffection, Etxebarría's novels show a corresponding indulgence in relationships. Essentially, protagonists are unable to establish healthy balances or boundaries in their relationships.

Bea perceives her relationship with Cat as an abandonment of personal freedom and space for individuation—"te acabarán definiendo por medio del otro" (Beatriz 49)—which violates the first rule of the postmodern citizen, that one must live life with no strings attached: "En cuanto te conviertes en la pareja de

alguien, esa persona, y por extensión de los demás, empezarán a pensar que siempre *tienes* que estar allí. Y yo quería definirme según mi deseo de estar allí, no según la imposición de estar" (Beatriz 49). Bea's indignation points up the problem of interpersonal relationships in Etxebarría's narrative, in which intimacy infringes on individual's autonomy. Connections are a limitation to personal freedom, and thus, alienating. As the "postmodern experience of intimacy derives its identity from eliminating all reference to moral duties and obligations" (Bauman Ethics 105), thus interpersonal connections must be held at an emotional distance. Couplehood may stunt the individual's autonomy and is a violation of the postmodern credo to live by no one's rules but one's own. Etxebarría's protagonists are unable to establish balance in their relationships, and therefore Bea seeks to reaffirm her autonomy and independence. Unable to establish identity as a couple with Cat, and burdened by her relationship and threatened by the looming attachments of intimacy, Bea individuates herself by forging a distinct identity. Bea explores heterosexuality for the first time by having an affair with Ralph. By destabilizing and violating the boundaries of the relationship, the novel suggests that emotional connection is antithetical to the individuated self. In fact, there is a pattern of sabotaging relationships in Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes. It is also paradoxical that protagonists avoid long-term relationships in order to avoid the risk of pain if the relationship fails, since as a result they are in constant emotional pain. Bea returns to Madrid in search of security and intimacy with Mónica. Yet Bea seemingly lacks accumulated memory, failing to learn from the

mistakes she made with Cat and falling into the same pattern of co-dependency with Mónica. Although she flees Edinburgh and returns to the familiarity of Madrid, Bea is unable to escape the overriding problem of intimacy.

Similarly Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas problematizes identity. Cristina frankly explains, "Estoy muerta. No soy yo. Soy un doble cibernético, una réplica catódica, un zombi andante, cualquier cosa. Hablo como yo, visto como yo, miro como yo, pero no soy yo" (ACPD 173). Cristina's admission reveals the dispiriting reality behind the façade of youth culture intemperance. Cristina feels like a walking zombie and a machine, even now while she is immersed in the presumably care-free and self-indulgent "marcha madrileña." Feeling drained of joy-de-vivre in her youth does not bode well for her future identity. In fact, Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas foreshadows this possible future self for Cristina, and by extension the rest of Madrid's youth culture, in the life of Rosa. Cristina's older sister by six years, Rosa is a cog in a multinational corporate machine and represents the capitulation to conformity and corporate anonymity of a formerly free-spirited individual (ACPD 64-67). This alter ego of Cristina anesthetizes herself with Prozac (as discussed earlier) to dull the pain of her isolation, signaling a disillusioning example of the "No future" which Madrid's youth faces but continually ignores in the Novel of Disaffection.

Despite the problem of emotional intimacy, physical intimacy is never a problem for the protagonists in Etxebarría's novels; sex is a foregone conclusion, particularly as is a series of nameless and meaningless "polvos" in order to satisfy physical desire. And rather than being passive recipients of the sexual act

or objects of the male gaze (according to Foucault), Etxebarría's female protagonists are aggressive in satiating physical desires and fulfilling sexual fantasies. Cristina, for example, is "promiscua y devorahombres" (ACPD 27). And behind that physical desire lies a latent desire to control the sex act. Cristina describes of her lover Iain,

> Podía pedirle cualquier cosa. Hazme esto, hazme lo otro, bésame en este sitio, en este otro. Fóllame aquí y ahora. Nunca fallaba. Nunca, nunca, nunca fallaba. He sido la niña más mimada de la creación. He follado donde y como he querido. En el sofá, en la cama, en la mesa del comedor, en el portal, en el ascensor. (ACPD 188)

Etxebarría's characters flaunt an overt sexuality and lust that defies traditional gender roles. These novels detail the most intimate and oftentimes sordid sexual details of characters' lives. Cristina, for example, narrates in graphic detail her first experience of having anal sex:

> Al principio duele, ligeramente, luego es una mezcla de placer y dolor, por fin el dolor se diluye y todo es goce. Sientes que hay un millón de laberintos dentro de tu cuerpo, pasadizos secretos que conectan todos sus agujeros con tu cerebro. Millones de circuitos que transmiten descargas eléctricas de tres mil voltios. Dinamita pura. Pequeñas explosiones dentro de tu cuerpo. Eres un terrorista tecnológico. Mi unibomber del sexo. Eres mi ejército de liberación. Dispara tu fusil. (ACPD 189)

In addition to reaffirming that nothing is taboo in this literature, the description of anal sex also reveals Cristina's need for ever-increasing states of arousal. For Cristina, the experience begins by mixing pain and pleasure; receiving bodily harm accompanies sexual satisfaction. This masochism points up the nature of her sexual impulses: at 24 years old, she is already jaded by sex. It is as if sexual intercourse no longer provides enough stimulation for her, and thus she expresses an erotic restlessness and a penchant for experimentation in her relationships. (This sense of sexual exploration extends to her sexual identity—not straight, lesbian, or bi-sexual—as her actions will later show.) Like the snowballing effect of her drug use, Cristina desires increasingly heightened sexual stimulation. The phallus delivers sensations similar to electric shocks "de tres mil voltios." Such a charge is reminiscent of the electroconvulsive therapy used to treat psychological disorders, in which a patient endures a purposefully destructive charge in order to "cure" a malady. This sexual electroshock therapy suggests a psychological dysfunction, as Cristina's desires to be harmed in order to receive sexual gratification.

Christina furthers the metaphor as her experience of pain/pleasure becomes increasingly violent: "Dinamita pura. Pequeñas explosiones dentro de tu cuerpo. Eres un terrorista tecnológico. Mi unibomber del sexo." Invoking the nickname of anti-technology fanatic Theodore Kazynski during the realization of her sexual fantasies demonstrates the ways in which Christina interiorizes this metaphorical and physical violence. First, she makes herself a willing recipient of the explosions within her body. Second, the phallus—"un fusil"—symbolizes

killing and destruction, which Cristina commands—"Dispara"—to be fired, carrying out a quasi-suicidal act, such that sex has escalated to the maximum expression of self-destruction. Harkening back to Roger Wolfe's creed, Cristina is waging a war against herself.

As disturbing as it may be that Christina enjoys such sexualized violence, and as shocking as it may be that she is directing such an act (noting her use of the command form of the verb), the pathology deepens when considering that the pleasure/pain dichotomy serves as "mi ejército de liberación." She uses sex, an admittedly painful act, as a form of transcendence and yet another form of escapism. Although Cristina perceives a sense of freedom and liberation from the heightened sensations of this sex act, the transcendence is, like the millions of tunnels she perceives running through her body, hollow. Her lover Iain—in the description above as well as throughout a large part of the novel—is a nameless, faceless, anonymous phallus, functioning as a sexual orderly, a "fusil" made to perform on command, to give pleasure and pain. Thus her liberation is less about freedom than being "liberated" from sharing, intimacy, and ultimately, Iain. In Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas sexual descriptions are limited to the individual's perception of the act, rather than a shared experience. As drugs like Prozac and ecstasy replace feelings in Lucía Etxebarría's novels, sex too becomes a surrogate for intimacy, recalling Cristina's aforementioned declaration that "me follaba a cualquier cosa, de verdad, a cualquier cosa, a cualquier elemento que se me pusiera a tira a partir de las seis de la mañana..." (37).

The sexual content has to a certain extent defined the public perception of Etxebarría's novels, particularly Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, as she admits "Hay un género que es la novela gay en la que el conflicto surge precisamente de que el protagonista es un gay...No es mi caso. En mi novela el personaje es una lesbiana, pero esto no le supone ningún problema" (Moret). Yet when considered through the lens of identity, this public categorization of "lesbian novel" is overstated. The two novels in question present an overarching fluidity of sexual identity. Bea explains, "Yo puedo amar a hombres y a mujeres. No distingo entre sexos" (Beatriz 213). The female protagonists certainly engage in lesbian relationships, as well as heterosexual relationships. However, with regards to sexual identity, like the rest of the identities that they adopt, characters remain uncommitted, undeclared, and undecided. Describing her relationship with Ralph, Bea says,

> Desde la primera vez que me acosté con Ralph, desde que compartí al uno y a la otra, mi corazón se convirtió en algo borroso, indefinible, indescifrable. Porque si me hubieran preguntado en ese momento si yo era lesbiana o si era heterosexual, e incluso si era bisexual, que parecía la respuesta más convincente, no hubiera sabido qué responder. Estaba tan perdida... (Beatriz 221)

Thus for Bea, it is not a question of bisexuality, which would imply its own identity in an attraction to both males and females. Rather than hybridity, then, her sexual identity is more a question of refusing to identify with anything in particular ("algo borroso, indefinible, indescifrable"); rather than "both," her orientation is

"neither/nor." As characters reject commitment in their interpersonal relationships, so too do they reject a clear adherence to a sexual identity. For Bea and Cristina, it is partially a question of youthful sexual exploration and experimentation. Yet at the same time, this indeterminate state reflects a postmodern flexibility such that their refusal to commit to a fixed identity grants them ultimate freedom (Bauman Discontents 13). Like drugs, Bea and Cristina use sex for instant gratification. It is the catharsis of the orgasm, not the emotional connection of love making, that they perceive as the purpose of sex. Sexual identity is fluid such that characters, not wanting to be locked into a single sexual identity, do not find it necessary to identify with a sexual orientation.

This pair of novels focuses so intimately on the sexual identities of young women that one would anticipate the issue of "coming out" to arise, and it is notable that it never does. Neither Bea nor Cristina endure a process of coming out to their parents or peers as lesbians or bisexuals. More importantly, they experience no internal struggle with their sexuality, either. Since there is such flexibility to her sexuality and sexual identity—Bea considers herself neither a lesbian nor bisexual—she suffers no agonizing internal struggle with sexuality, of having to come to grips with an alternative sexuality to society's norms. There is no process of hardship or internal rejection of one's sexual orientation, as Wilkerson describes (254-268). Rather their sexual identities simply change to fit the moment, as is seen in the back-and-forth sexual encounters of Bea between Cat and Ralph (Beatriz 191, 205, 206), and the spontaneous ménage à trois between Cristina, Line, and Santiago (ACPD 263-265). These characters reserve

the right to change their sexual identities when it pleases them. By following the paths of least resistance and of instantaneous pleasure, protagonists are not burdened with the "Who am I?" dilemma or the task of developing a unique self of the modern identity (Kellner "Television" 233). Since sexual identity is as easily adopted as it is discarded, they effectively sidestep any "identity crisis" of which to speak (Kellner "Popular" 158). For them, identity produces no existential anxiety, no critical self-examination, and no inquiry into the self.

Moreover, simply because Bea does not suffer the angst or self-doubt of an identity crisis, it does not necessarily mean that she is content. Quite the contrary, Bea constantly seems disturbed, enraged, anxious, troubled, and even paranoid. But, when one reads these novels through the lens of postmodern identity, this disturbance is an effect rather than a cause. In modern identity construction, self-doubt and existential preoccupations were part of the journey to define the self. The individual had to encounter and overcome obstacles to make the journey worthwhile, so as to emerge stronger, with a more solid and wholly defined identity. Challenge was positive; one had to persevere to achieve an identity.

In contrast, Spain's youth culture has it easy because they take it easy; they seek the path of least resistance. Their feelings of unrest and discontentment are a result of the fluidity and superficiality of their identity. Whereas the dilemma of modernism was a stepping stone to identity—i.e., the catalyst that would lead to a greater, more fulfilling, and more transcendent self—the disquietude portrayed in Etxebarría's narrative is the effect of having

nothing against which to struggle, except perhaps for characters' own complacency. Their refusal to face challenges ultimately stymies their progress. This "pasotismo" emerges even in the most basic elements of the plot. For example, the majority of protagonists in Etxebarría's novels (and Mañas's, as well) are ostensibly students, yet not once do they attend class, take an exam, or even pick up a textbook. Mónica, in fact, fails her courses on purpose to be able to spend summers in Madrid with Bea (Beatriz 77). This desire to drop out and reject success extends to their interpersonal relationships and sexuality, as well. If it takes effort, they will pass. So the disquietude and anger is the effect of shifting identities, not the cause of something more profound.

Resonating with the novel's title, in Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes Bea uses the presentation of her body to carry out an identity project. The goal of this project is not necessarily to construct identity (as Bauman would argue [Discontents 24-25]), but to blur the distinctions between gender identities, to avoid a fixed identity and at the same time a fixed gender. In her trip abroad Bea finds an opportunity to physically and sexually define herself. Her body functions as a space of experimentation (mirroring Kellner's theory that the self's identity may be transformed through the manipulation of image, fashion, and style ["Television" 234]), within which she establishes a series of "señas de identidad": "Me largué a Edimburgo. Y allí me rapé el pelo y me compré unas botas de comando. En la calle nadie sabía si yo era chica o chico. Fue la última transgresión. La última transgresión" (Beatriz 214). This foreign—both overseas and new—environment provides Bea an opportunity for redefinition. She

undergoes a physical change popularly associated with the image of a "butch" lesbian, framing her physical change as an offense—"la última transgresión"—overturning of traditional conceptualizations of feminine beauty (Phelan 51-55). Yet her physical transformation belies the solidity of her sexual identity. Bea's self-proclaimed transgression is not in the establishment of herself as a masculinized female, rather in the combination of gendered identities that blur the lines that separate one gender from the other. She is both feminine and masculine, and simultaneously neither wholly feminine nor masculine; her transgression is in projecting an aura of indeterminacy ("nadie sabía si yo era chica o chico") that frustrates easy categorization. Whereas Homi Bhabha belies the "in-between" status for the subaltern, here Bea perceives the indeterminacy as liberation and thus she presents her body as an ambiguous space. The result of her shaved head and "botas de pocero" (33) is not a change of gender or a declaration of sexual identity (as will be shown momentarily), rather it is a straddling of gender lines, of being one gender yet overtly suggesting another.

Through her relationship with Cat, Bea joins Edinburgh's lesbian scene. While at times falling into caricatures and broad stereotypes, it is nevertheless defined in the novel by "la frivolidad... una característica de la cultura gay" (Beatriz 39-40) and consists of "marimachos que consumían comida macrobiótica y bebidas inteligentes, que llevaban el pelo rapado al uno y teñido con peróxido, que vestían camisetas de talla infantil y chaquetones de peluche y zapatillas de jugador de fútbol búlgaro, que se anillaban hasta la mortificación" (Beatriz 43), who furthermore "llevaban anillos en los pulgares, tatuajes en los

antebrazos, pequeñas chapitas con triángulos rosas y collares con colores del arco iris" (Beatriz 48). These marks of identity are the membership cards for inclusion in this community—based in bars and dance clubs—that provides a freedom of gender and freedom from gender. For example, this subculture upends the assumption of female sexual passivity and allows women to aggressively express sexual desire: "¿O sólo lo hacen en los bares para chicas? Esos bares en los que pueden comportarse *como un hombre* y abordar directamente al objeto de su deseo" (Beatriz 55). Once again, gender roles are double coded. By positioning itself in the grey area between genders, the lesbian community that Bea describes has the freedom to act with the (stereotypical) sexual predatorship of men while functioning within a community of women with (again, stereotypical) identifying markers—peroxide-died and shaved hair, thumb rings, pink triangles, and rainbows. "Gender is not a stable thing; it is certainly not a set of anatomical or biological attributes," as Jane Flax points out (454). As such, Bea is donning the prototypical postmodern identity that may be discarded as the need arises. For Bea, this indeterminacy provides freedom and liberation in that she need not commit to anything or anyone.

Yet despite the physical changes Bea makes to her body to mirror this culture, she cannot fit in with Edinburgh's lesbian community, nor more importantly with her lover, Cat. Her physical change is part of a dynamic identity project; like shedding a skin, Bea sheds a past that is tied to Madrid, such as clothing, hairstyle, language, sexuality, relationships, in essence her identity. Her move to Edinburgh is a liberating experience, taking advantage of a foreign

culture to adopt new identities. However, the freedom afforded by her geographic displacement does not guarantee long-term harmony. The geographic change cannot compensate for the superficiality of her identity. Although through her physical change Bea is attempting to participate in the collective identity (a concept which will be discussed at length in Chapter 6) of this subculture, the sense of belonging quickly turns into a threat. Specifically, her involvement in intimate relationships stifles the freedom she established with the ambiguous gender and the indeterminacy of her body. Bea finds herself typecast, her identity blurred and amalgamated with that of her lover; by committing to this subculture, the freedom to change her identity at will is subverted and she ends up losing her identity, individuality, even her name, as she explains, "yo no era sino La novia de Cat" (48). She rebels against this transgression against her freedom:

> me había convertido en la mitad de una unidad, de una pareja; o así es como empezaba a vernos la gente: Caitlin y Bea. Yo encontraba aterradora esta noción y deseaba que una larguísima fila de puntos suspensivos se interpusiera entre nuestros nombres, que la gente dijera:
>
> Caitlin ..... y Bea.
>
> (48-49).

Bea's declaration of independence reveals the indeterminacy inherent in postmodern attitudes, namely the avoidance of commitment, obligations, and responsibilities. Unity appalls her, and she suggests that it tramples her attempts to individuate herself.

Furthermore Bea expresses a resistance to intimacy, the public perception of intimacy, as well as an underlying resentment toward Cat for being known as a couple. Coincidentally, Bea reflects Rosen's theory of "chameleonism" among contemporary youth, a process of shifting identities in order to guard one's self-esteem and seek personal safety, which as a consequence produces "a deep reluctance to depend on others, coupled with a dark distrust of all but a few friends, and sometimes even these" (13-24, 45). The feeling of connection, the intimate sharing of oneself with another, the transcendence of loving another and being loved—ostensibly the reasons for being in a romantic relationship—are anathema to Bea, who instead tries to distance herself from her partner.

Thus her physical transformation backfires: in attempting to individuate herself, to be ambiguous, and by extension fit in with a subculture, Bea becomes pigeonholed. Thus to counterpunch the perceived imposition on her freedom, Bea is unfaithful to Cat by taking Ralph as her occasional lover (191, 205-206). Bea acknowledges that her relationship with Ralph is merely a service agreement ("Todo lo que había entre nosotros era sexo, entendí" [Beatriz 219]) but longs for something more meaningful[23]. Thus repeating a familiar pattern,

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[23] Bea seeks a sense of transcendence through sex: "Ansiaba la perfección de un estado primordial, un estado de fuerza y autonomía anterior a lo masculino o a lo femenino...y creo que buscaba la Totalidad a través del sexo, añorando dolorosamente una reunificación que sabía de partida imposible, mero deseo de fusión" (Beatriz 215). She is attracted to the metanarratives of belonging, loving and being loved, being included in a connection greater than her own self interests. But her approach to this "totalidad" through superficial sexual relationships is self-defeating. One could question whether Bea is in fact seeking this failure so that she would not have to commit herself, and thus limit her options. Of course the paradox of Bea's behavior is that she is blind to the fact

Bea tries to give it transcendence: "Ralph pasaba mucho, mucho tiempo a mi lado, incluso cuando él mismo no sabía que estaba conmigo" (Beatriz 219), and "Yo quería que él quisiese algo más de mí" (Beatriz 220). The results, however, are predictable. The relationship crumbles and Bea flees. By putting thousands of miles between her lovers and herself, Beatriz's trans-European trip from Madrid to Edinburgh and then back again symbolizes the distance and disconnect of her relationships. She refuses to allow a relationship to develop, maintaining an abandon-ship mentality when intimacy approaches.

This abandon-ship attitude mirrors the series of shipwrecked relationships in Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas, "este naufragio general de familias desunidas, empleos parciales, relaciones efímeras y sexo infectado" (ACPD 23). The inability to establish meaningful relationships is not surprising considering the models of dysfunctionality present in protagonists' family lives. The family structure is in shambles: Christina's father is absent from her life, she describes the relationship between her and her mother as an "abismo que nos separa" (ACPD 23), and mentions that in the relationship with her sister Ana, "prácticamente no nos hablamos" (ACPD 23). Similarly in Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, Bea's models of relationships are equally dysfunctional and even more traumatic. Like Cristina, Bea is distanced from her mother ("ella es feliz con tal de no verme" [Beatriz 82]), and even expresses outright hate for her ("Empecé a odiar a mi madre con todo mi corazón," [Beatriz 100]). Bea's father, in turn, is

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that the indeterminacy established in her body and her uncommitted relationships are the cause of her anxieties.

equally distant from Bea's mother, as she recalls, "hasta donde mi memoria alcanza, siempre durmieron en habitaciones separadas y jamás se permitieron, al menos ante mí, ningún tipo de proximidad física: ni cogerse de la mano ni besarse. Ni siquiera se miraban a los ojos" (Beatriz 83). The physical distance between Bea and her parents—she is forced to visit her parents in their business offices to see them—is indicative of the emotional distance that separates them. Infidelity is a family trait, as well, as Bea's actions mirror those of her philandering father. The fallout of the broken family manifests itself years later in Bea's relationships as a young adult. The disconnection, lack of communication, and infidelity of her parents replay themselves in the splintered relationship between Bea and Cat. Miller and Miller echo this pattern of youth replicating the failed romantic relationships of their parents, explaining that for young people that "experienced loneliness in their childhood and entered adulthood confused by the meaning of relationships...may have the right to feel cheated by parents who cheated on each other, and then on their kids by abandoning them to pursue their own personal goals" (4-5). Furthermore, there is evidence that Bea's father physically abuses her (Beatriz 127) and at one point almost strangles her to death (Beatriz 122-123). Predictably, Bea repeats the cycle by seeking fellow victims and becoming involved with victimizers. For example, the novel includes suspicious references to scars and violent sex which imply that Bea's lover Cat was sexually abused by her father, as well (Beatriz 247). And recalling the violence inherent in her description of anal sex with Iain, Bea describes Ralph's penchant for domination, his "manía de inmovilizarme con las piernas contra el

colchón, de sujetarme los brazos encima de la cabeza" (Beatriz 220). Back in Madrid, after Coco tries to rape her (207), Bea feels that "a pesar de todo, le tenía cierto cariño a Coco" (210). She fulfils her role as a victim by idealizing and sympathizing with her victimizer. The abuse she suffers during childhood impacts Bea's identity: she is a manic depressive (181), suffers "decensos drásticos de autoestima" (177), contemplates suicide (164, 169), and expresses self loathing and self pity, "Nadie me aguantaba y nadie me aguantaría nunca porque era una persona insufrible, incapaz de controlar mis arrebatos mi mala leche, porque estaba tocada" (Beatriz 179). Thus Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes and Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas establish a trajectory that their protagonists are doomed to follow from traumatic childhood to dysfunctional and victimizing relationships in young adulthood.

In summary, when considered alongside their superficial sexual relationships, these dysfunctional family and sexual relationships point up the overriding problem of intimacy in the Novels of Disaffection. Protagonists do not want relationships to develop, and when intimacy approaches, they sabotage their connections and truncate their amorous relationships. This inability to maintain stability, even though ostensibly it is what they want, occurs to Bea in a moment of lucidity:

> Me pregunté a mí misma, Beatriz, ¿por qué? Cuando resulta evidente lo que te pasa, que dentro de ti ya has elegido, que te quedas con la legítima, con tu chica gato [Cat], la que puede ofrecerte una estabilidad y un lazo sólido que os une, tejido a base

> de tiempo y complicidades construidas poco a poco, ¿por qué no asumes hasta el fin tu elección? (Beatriz 237)

Yet she ignores her epiphany and abandons Cat nonetheless, and with her, the possibility of intimacy. Bea is unable see a relationship to fruition, to be faithful, to make a lasting connection, a commitment. This evasion of intimacy and permanence reflects Bauman's concept of "flotation," a postmodern (and short-term) attitude that allows the individual to enjoy the pleasures of love without the accompanying sacrifices nor expectations for long-term rewards (Ethics 104-108). When relationships do crumble, as when Ralph leaves Bea, it is "como si no tuviéramos memoria" (Beatriz 235). Postmodern identity highlights the obsolescence of memory, in which the past can be forgotten, and indeed must be forgotten, instantly. To dwell on the past is to limit one's options in the present moment. The goal of youth in Spain's Novels of Disaffection is to avoid attachments, to have relationships without commitments.

As such Etxebarría's novels blame youth culture for its selfishness, short-sightedness, and their erroneous assumption that individual autonomy precludes love. Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes celebrate protagonists' freedom, hedonism, and excess, yet paradoxically protagonists suffer consequences for enjoying it. By presenting the fallout of leading directionless lives, Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes and Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas lament the atomization of the family, the waning of its role as support system, and the lack of trust among parents and siblings.

Furthermore, Spain's youth (and by extension, adults as well) show romantic connections as liabilities and infringements on personal freedom, in which characters look to sex in search of feelings of belonging. Autonomy and freedom become redefined as freedom from anyone else. Correspondingly, characters grow ever more frustrated with their directionless escapism and absence of meaning in life, as Cristina explains:

> Durante los últimos cinco años mi vida no ha seguido un rumbo fijo. Yendo de nada a nada, sin patrón ni destino, sin refugio ni brújula. A la deriva...Bebiendo cubalibres y fumando chinos y tragando éxtasis y sirviendo copas y besando labios y chupando pollas...Politoxicómana confesa y pendón vocacional." (ACPD 285).

The novels argue that the series of meaningless, revolving-door relationships are responsible for the alienation that characters suffer. They produce a vicious cycle of loneliness that youth must learn to endure as a hard fact of life, as evidenced in this exchange between Ralph and Bea: "¿Qué sucede?, preguntó él. Me siento sola. Todos estamos solos, respondió. Cuanto antes te acostumbres a ello, mejor." (Beatriz 236). Even when in the presence of her lover Cat, Bea feels "esta certeza de estar siempre sola" (Beatriz 29).

The title of Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas is an appropriation from Dorothy Parker's poem, "Inventory": "Four be the things I'd been better without: / Love, curiosity, freckles, and doubt" (41). Indeed the novel presents an inventory as seen in its alphabetized chapter titles ("E de enclaustrada, enamorada,

empleada y encadenada" [47], "F de frustrada" [61], "L de lágrimas" [133]) of the problems facing young Spanish women. It is also a pessimistic commentary that, freckles aside, its protagonists would be better off without love, curiosity, and doubt. And returning to the title Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, the image of "heavenly bodies" opens and closes the novel (14-15; 233-35, 242), as well as provides the metaphor for their disconnect. Apart from characters having highly sexualized "cuerpos celestes," like orbiting planets they experience the tug of overwhelming physical attractions, yet they are condemned to be alone, seemingly light years from contact with others. Monica reads,

> 'A 36.000 kilómetros de la tierra—leyó ella—se halla una órbita geoestacionaria, fija a la atmósfera porque se mueve a la misma velocidad de la Tierra: la Órbita Cementerio, como se denomina a aquella a la que se envían los satélites cuando pierden su vida útil'...Imagínate, Bea: unos cachivaches enormes cuya labor principal era la comunicación, mudos, aislados para siempre, rodeados de un ejército de cachivaches similares que tampoco podrán comunicarse nunca más. Alucinante, ¿no? (Beatriz 14).

Indeed, this metaphor applies to both novels studied here. It is not a coincidence that Cristina works in a bar called "Planeta X," a space marked by an absence of emotional attachments, as she describes, "Necesitaba alguien a quien aferrarme, una razón seria para vivir. Alguien alejado del caballo y de los éxtasis y del Planeta X" (ACPD 293). Like planets and stars circling in their own geostationary orbits, individuals circle each other but never connect. Their solitude gives way to

defeatism, as Bea, for example, laments that the time she invested in caring for Mónica was simply wasted: "Todo aquel amor que he mantenido vivo durante cuatro inacabables años no ha sido más que la luz de una estrella muerta" (Beatriz 263). The metanarrative of (relative) long-term love results in failure, and characters take failed relationships like this one as proof that long term commitments are meaningless and, moreover, detrimental.

Etxebarría's protagonists are unreachable and unable to connect with others. The emptiness of feeling worlds apart from others is the crux of the message of Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas and Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes. Etxebarría's novels stress the patterns of postmodern relationships: fragmentation, ambiguity, and temporariness. The creation of identity through and with another person is continuously frustrated. Bea and Cristina substitute the ideal of interdependent identity with sex, replace spiritual fulfillment with carnal and fleeting pleasures, and exchange the long term for the momentary.

Recalling Cristina's declaration, "*No future*. Generation X. Hay que joderse" (ACPD 45), one notes the double meaning behind the last phrase ("You have to fuck yourself/be fucked over" [Perriam 217]). Christina sends the message that one can only count on him/herself to fulfill one's own needs, and even then, characters sabotage their efforts. And like the other Novels of Disaffection, Etxebarría's are adept at diagnosing the problems in which contemporary Spanish youth culture has immersed itself, yet they decline to prescribe concrete solutions. They point a finger to blame everyone—crumbling families and uncaring parents; an unsupportive government, a faltering economy,

and widespread youth unemployment; disrespectful youth—suggesting that the responsibility for the decadent state of youth is shared equally, including youth itself. The fallout for the individual is radically unstable identities. The ability not to stick to anything supersedes the need to be strong-willed ("Fuertes, no. Fuertes lo eran ya la piedra y el hierro—afirmó ella categórica—. Flexible. Ahí radica la diferencia. No puedes sobrevivir ni no lo eres" [Beatriz 248]). They carry out a self-fulfilling prophecy: they must be flexible, unstable, yet this same flexibility and instability is the root of their solitude and insecurities.

CHAPTER 5. "NADA DE NADA DE NADA DE NADA": RAY LORIGA AND THE PARADOX OF SPAIN'S NOVELS OF DISAFFECTION

When read as projects of postmodern identity, Ray Loriga's Héroes (1993) and La pistola de mi hermano (1995) introduce a fascinating twist to "knowing" Spanish youth culture. By following two anonymous twenty-somethings, a delinquent and an outsider, these novels present narcissistic protagonists numbed by simulacra. Their immersion in postmodern simulacra destabilizes identity and, more than the other Novels of Disaffection, points up the paradox of characters' avoidance of a fixed identity by carrying their self destruction to its logical conclusion. While Foucauldian theorists see identity as a constructed entity, La pistola de mi hermano and Héroes reverse the process, fragmenting the self until it reaches the erasure of identity. The protagonists' instability results in the destruction of identity, which poses a problem: what could remain after the loss of the self?

Loriga's novels plunge into the turmoil and isolation of their protagonists who are numbed by a barrage of simulacra—random voices, films, rock music, television—which muddies their identities. The catalyst of La pistola de mi hermano, for example, is a handgun that an anonymous twenty-something male finds in the garbage. The protagonist shoots a guard in a Madrid VIPS restaurant, carjacks a BMW along with a teenage girl in the back seat, and escapes on a roadtrip across Spain. Yet the murder of the VIPS guard is bafflingly meaningless, as he explains, "El guardia de VIPS, el de siempre, el que siempre nos molesta, empezó a agarrarme por el brazo y a decir delante de

todos que yo era un ladrón. No había robado nada" (151). The staggering disconnect between this minor affront (an accusation of which he is innocent) and his hyperviolent response triggers a radical shift in identity. In an instant he transforms from a disinterested introvert into an enraged killer. Thus his sense of self is fluid and subject to spontaneous metamorphosis.

Similarly, the protagonist later shoots a gas station attendant in the face for saying "algo sucio" (152) about his hostage/girlfriend, a teen he met only hours earlier. As he kills this second victim, the protagonist senses a distance between the act and himself. The narrator explains, "No sentía la mano y no sentía el peso de la pistola" (81), as if he didn't pull the trigger, and continues, "cada vez que respiró tuvo la sensación de respirar un aire nuevo y cuando por fin se vio en el espejo...se encontró tan diferente y tan lejanamente familiar que estuvo a punto de saludarse" (82-83). This disconnect from the self suggests a a rebirth as someone else. His identity is so unstable and the change is so instantaneous that he does not recognize his reflection. This loss of self links to a moral ambivalence, as he claims, "no me imaginé que matar a la gente era tan fácil" (153). Thus identity is so unstable that having a pistol in hand precipitates an ethical degeneration. Douglas Kellner notes that "there is something amoral or morally threatening about postmodern selves which are fluid, multiple, and subject to rapid change" ("Television" 156). The fragmentation of a unified self produces in a subversion of morality. Moreover the protagonist experiences identity swings against a backdrop of emotional and mental emptiness ("no siento nada en concreto...una especie de ausencia de todo" [127]). Not only is

there seemingly no reason for his radical changes of identity but also identity itself is hollow and depthless. Since it has no roots, he can adopt and discard it on a whim. Thus in contrast to the modernist construct of identity as a sustained journey, La pistola de mi hermano inverts the journey. While on the road, the protagonist's physical mobility generates transient identities. Rather than "life as pilgrimage," this novel conceptualizes life as carnival bumpercars in which identity changes direction suddenly and violently, or even steers for head on collisions, as the traffic dictates.

The narrator of La pistola de mi hermano is the protagonist's younger brother, who is also anonymous.[24] In reconstructing his brother's story, he attempts to reconstruct his brother's identity in order to clarify public misconceptions: "Los de la televisión lo pintaron como el loco de la tele. Ponían películas, trozos de películas, y decían que era lo mismo. Pues no señor, no lo era" (17). Adding to the narrative chaos is the media scrutiny which trails the doomed roadtrip. Live television coverage, radio talk shows, newspapers, and magazines contribute a din of screaming voices regarding who and what is "mi hermano." For example, to satiate the popular appetite for the cross-country trek,

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[24] The younger brother's own identity as a narrator is unstable as well. At times he is omniscient, recounting conversations he never heard and channeling his dead brother's innermost thoughts, while at other times he is detached and distant, narrating as if from within a haze of ignorance. Still in other instances, he relies on second or third hand information from "ella," the nameless abductee and girlfriend of "mi hermano" who feeds the younger brother details about their flight from the authorities. The series of filters and intermediaries dilute the narrator's veracity as well as highlights the fractured identity of the nameless protagonist. Thus the structure and source of the younger brother's narration foil his attempts to construct an identity for his brother.

the younger brother and mother appear on one such program, "Todos somos uno," a talk show which champions family unity. Yet emulating its name, "Todos somos uno" blurs the distinctions between identities, merging the individual into a deterministic amalgamation of the family unit. The television host affirms, "Si uno muere morimos todos, si uno sufre sufrimos todos, si uno mata...matamos todos," to which the studio audience replies, "Porque todos somos uno" (83). While Madan Sarup comments that identity is not only individual but also collective (23), La pistola de mi hermano overcompensates for the collective at the expense of the individual. Furthermore the television program manipulates the younger brother's image, as the stage crew applies cosmetics and a costume to make him appear like a juvenile delinquent and thus shadow the popular image of his brother. As the novel criticizes the culture of spectacle in Spain—and by extension, the rest of the Western world—it also mirrors Douglas Kellner's observations on the primacy of the image, where simulacra are confused with reality. The media's (mis)representations flood the text with disparate and increasingly subjectivized images producing imminently mobile and unstable identities. This instability and fragmentation of the subject defies the modernist concept of the master narrative. The narrative itself splinters into subjectivized points of view such that, consistent with Baudrillard's theory of postmodernism, the medium becomes the message. Despite the narrator's intent to clarify his brother's image, his purpose not only remains unfulfilled, but the "real" story of "mi hermano" becomes more elusive in the process: who is he and why does he embark on a cross-country killing spree? Indeed, the irony of the

novel is that, despite the barrage of television coverage of his exploits, the reader never learns the protagonist's name.

In contrast to the loss of identity in La pistola de mi hermano, which envisions a labyrinthine outside world at the expense of the individual, Héroes retreats inward to the self at the exclusion of the outside world. This serpentine, disjunctive novel highlights a succession of disposable identities and a process of trying identities on for size as the lone character, again an anonymous "yo," lives vicariously through others. He finds solace, escape, and identity in music. His saviors are rock stars, his personal "héroes" David Bowie, Iggy Pop, and Lou Reed. Like Fran, Javi, and David from José Ángel Mañas's novel Mensaka, the protagonist of Héroes is himself a rock star. However, his identification with fame is tenuous. The protagonist suffers alienation to the extent that music becomes his surrogate parent ("espero de las canciones todo lo que no me han dado mis padres" [59]). The disconnect echoes throughout the text as a continuous monologue; the protagonist avoids commitments and relationships, and his isolation borders on paranoia ("Quiero estar solo porque no confío en los que tengo alrededor" [45]). Thus identity in Héroes, despite the implicit connection with fame, is internalized. Simon Frith argues that identity is produced in performance (109) and similarly Héroes demonstrates an internalized performance, a rock star performing for himself, where identity becomes his mask, a protection and an escape from reality: "Lo que sé: no siempre soy lo que quiero. De ahí la importancia del disfraz. El disfraz es la verdadera intención. La verdadera voluntad" (55). As Christopher Lasch notes,

"identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume" (33), which is an apt metaphor for the masks that the protagonist dons in Héroes. The novel presents a vacant identity where rock idols rush in to fill the identity vacuum: "Sentirte como Jim Morrison no te convierte en Jim Morrison, pero no sentirte como Jim Morrison te convierte en casi nada. Yo nunca saldría a la calle sin sentirme como Jim Morrison o Dennis Hopper por lo menos" (69). The protagonist frames identity in terms of fame, which is logical considering that he is a rock star. However his identity is an act of imitation. He appropriates identity by living vicariously through other rock stars like Jim Morrison and screen idols like Dennis Hopper. His performance implies a fantasy and a sense of playing roles, imitating heroes to avoid himself and his descent into solitude. Building on the concept of identity as mask, the costume shrouds him in make-believe; moments of lucidity ("¿Cuándo vas a ser capaz de afrontar las cosas?" [81]) succumb to masked identities ("Cambiaba de nombre todas las semanas" [159]). The repercussion of these costume changes is an identity that is continually mobile and disposable.

Loriga's protagonists display narcissistic tendencies in their withdrawal into the cocoon of their own sensations. Green argues that narcissism is a defense mechanism that the individual employs to maintain his/her individuality (11). While the two protagonists in Loriga's novels are seeking defense mechanisms against a world they consider hostile, their retreat into self-absorption backfires. Rather than stabilizing their identities, their concepts of self become dispersed and ultimately unknowable. Indeed, narcissistic withdrawal,

according to Green, is destructive rather than constructive: "the object's sequestration...becomes the focus of a merciless struggle in which the ego, believing it is bruising the object, merely succeeds in bruising itself" (110). These self destructive tendencies appear throughout Héroes and La pistola de mi hermano, not only in the obvious physical self destruction, but also in the destruction of identity.

Due to reflexive identity shifts, for Loriga's protagonists the present moment becomes all encompassing. Whereas modernism conceptualized time as an interrelated past, present, and future, a function of postmodern identity is that time is reduced to the imminent present. Loriga's characters disregard the future as futile dreaming and ignores the past as meaningless. The older brother in La pistola de mi hermano, for example, boldly claims, "Antes de Hendrix no había nada" (68). As Loriga's narrative limits life to the present moment, characters recast their identities to take maximum advantage of them in a minimal amount of time. Artifacts no longer construct identity, rather they replace it. Drugs, alcohol, sex, rock music, and violence are the new marks of identity, the new skins for characters in Spain's Novels of Disaffection, the masks upon which they graft identity. And like a mask, postmodern identities are superficial, only skin deep.

Moreover the recasting of identity springs from a latent nihilism. Far from the modernist concept of identity construction, Héroes and La pistola de mi hermano recast it as identity destruction. Specifically, this destruction permeates the novels in the concept of "nada." In La pistola de mi hermano, for example, the

protagonist exclaims, "Nada, sí señor, eso es todo lo que le pido a la vida, nada." When his girlfriend inquires, "¿Nada de nada?," he responds unequivocally, "Nada de nada de nada de nada de nada de nada de nada de nada de nada" (104). The avoidance of identity fixation causes the loss of the self and the disconnection from identity. In Héroes, for example, the protagonist asks himself, "¿Y qué eres ahora? Nada. Una especie de cartucho rellenable" (84). This "nada," a blankness of identity, is the paradox Ray Loriga's narrative as well as that of Spain's Novels of Disaffection.

In conclusion, Loriga's novels posit a larger consideration of the Novels of Disaffection by questioning what unity or individuality could remain after the erasure and loss of identity. The answer, paradoxically, is "nada." The protagonists of Héroes and La pistola de mi hermano dwell in superficiality. Their "real" identities are dispersed and unknowable. At the conclusions of the novels, identity is as mysterious—perhaps even more so—than at the beginning. The continual temporariness of identity has a corrosive effect: the search for identity results in the erasure of identity. Yet it is not an existential crisis. Identity may be fleeting but it is also instantly replaceable. And thus the vicious cycle begins again: the nihilism of disconnecting from one's identity plagues Loriga's characters and, paradoxically, it is also the foundation of their identity.

CHAPTER 6. STRANGERS IN A STRANGE HOUSE: OKUPADA AND THE DYSTOPIA OF SPAIN'S NOVELS OF DISAFFECTION

Tracing a trajectory through the narrative of José Ángel Mañas, Lucía Etxebarría, and Ray Loriga, Spain's youth novel of the 1990s has plumbed the depths of the individual's identity. As if obeying a centripetal force, protagonists retreat inward, shelter themselves in asocialism, recoil from family and friends, sever communication, and crawl into drug and alcohol induced stupors. This "ensimismamiento" has overshadowed a broader reading of this literature, namely, the role of collective identity among the amalgamation of fiercely independent individuals. In essence, the discussion of identity in the novels studied thus far leaves certain unanswered questions: can collective identity exist in the Novels of Disaffection? Can an identity transcend the individual's immediate needs to encompass the dynamics of a group? Might the individual find sanctuary in community? In the face of an increasingly hostile world, disintegrating families, and transient friends, is unity and community possible? What form would it take? In response to these questions, Care Santos's Okupada (1997) posits an alternate model of the Novels of Disaffection and an alternate approach to the identity question in Spanish youth literature of the 1990s. Specifically, Okupada surveys Spanish youth culture by following a group of 17 to 22 year-old social outcasts as they stage an "okupación." The representation of these outsiders—an anarchist, a junkie, a bohemian, a homosexual, a refugee, an exile, and two teenage runaways—exemplifies the theories of the Stranger proposed by Madam Sarup and Zygmunt Bauman. As

society's undecidables, strangers live with perpetual uncertainty. They resist social hierarchies and thus, being "strange," their very presence causes disquietude and disorder. As strangers in an appropriated house, the "okupas" band together to construct a utopian microcosm of tolerance and acceptance. But the romanticized okupación, like the okupas' collective identity, is fleeting. Their modernist utopia crumbles as the okupas turn their symbolic act of social resistance against each other, stranger against stranger, upending their idealism, debasing the construction of community, and questioning collective identity in Spanish youth culture.

The identification with youth has come to define, and to an extent confine, Santos's early novels. Recalling Toni Dorca and Carmen de Urioste's definitions of Generation X literature, being published at an early age is the putative membership card to the club of youth culture literary icons; and like her contemporaries Mañas, Etxebarría, and Loriga, the age question casts a shadow over Santos's work as well. Santos began writing at age 10, started a career in journalism writing for the "Diari de Barcelona" at 19, and published her first collection of short fiction, Cuentos cítricos, at 25. Alba Editoriales markets her first novel, La muerte de Kurt Cobain (1997), as well as Okupada under the category "literatura juvenil." Both novels, like the other Novels of Disaffection previously studied, accentuate the correlation between readers and protagonists; young people reading the novel ostensibly connect with its teenage and twenty-something characters. This youth audience is particularly evident in La muerte de Kurt Cobain (1997) whose 15 year old protagonist Sandra engages in an

adventure of teenage wish-fulfillment: she is unusually independent and has curiously adult sensibilities while playing detective in a post-mortem search for the true identity of her friend, Merche. Facing evidence that Merche has died violently in the explosion of an airliner en route from New York to Madrid, Sandra confronts an adult world that is distanced and uncaring of her intense emotional plight. Once again, parents are predictably absent from the plot, this time vacationing in idyllic Czechoslovakia (12), a nation whose internal collapse mirrors the unraveling family structure in Spain's youth novels. As one would expect, the teenagers use pop music and film as their reference points for reality: songs by Nirvana—"Come as You Are," "On a Plain"—provide the soundtrack for the novel's plot points, the narrator alludes to hip filmmakers—"Aquel discurso era intenso como una peli de Tarantino" (44)—to provide exposition, and the protagonists reject traditional notions of family and adulthood—"Nosotros creemos que eso de casarse es una mierda y que lo que hay que hacer es vivir la vida" (30). Emulating other Novels of Disaffection, La muerte de Kurt Cobain grounds its plot in readily identifiable contemporary events and headlines, and is loosely based on two sudden and violent deaths: that of its namesake, the suicide of grunge icon Kurt Cobain in April 1994 and the explosion of TWA flight 800 from New York to Paris in July 1996. Yet, against the background of death and in contrast to the debauchery of Spain's Novels of Disaffection, La muerte de Kurt Cobain actually develops as an innocent coming of age story. Sandra obsesses over her first romance, describing the giddy feeling of her boyfriend Santi putting his arm around her shoulders (39) and the thrill of her first kiss (40).

Thus in addition to pop culture references and teenage disenchantment, the novel identifies with its youth readership by portraying the heartbreak of an unfaithful boyfriend and the anguish of betrayal by and loss of one's closest friend. In the end, Merche's death is a case of mistaken identity, and in a conclusion of questionable verisimilitude, Sandra and Merche reunite to celebrate the value of friendship and solidarity among teenage girls.

In retrospect Santos expresses misgivings about this early novel ("ya hace bastante tiempo que me arrepentí de publicarlo" ["Entrevistas"]). Because she founds the Asociación de Jóvenes Escritores in 1992 and receives Sevilla's Premio Ateneo Joven in 1999, the "young writer" and "youth literature" labels stick to Santos and her novels.[25] Yet, as with the problematic age groupings like "Generación X" discussed in Chapter 1, the "literatura juvenil" category tends to obfuscate the content of her later narratives. Particularly for Santos's second novel, Okupada, "literatura juvenil" is misleading. The challenges that the protagonists face in Okupada—disillusionment, abandonment, homelessness, self-preservation (they must scrounge for their own shelter and food), drug addiction, threats of violence, death—are adult predicaments. Having to fight for basic human needs points up the paradox of Santos's novel; labeled as "youth"

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[25] However, like recent fiction by Mañas, Etxebarría, and Loriga, Santos's latest novels break from the putative aesthetics and themes of the Novels of Disaffecttion to explore different contexts, age groups, and even epochs. For example, Santos's 1997 novel, El tango del perdedor, despite the title's apparent suggestion of Generation X defeatism, actually explores the internal struggles of a female artist in 1920s and 1930s Barcelona. And Trigal con cuervos (1999) follows a band of immigrants through the Middle East in the 1940s. Thus the importance of the "youth" age group further diminishes when considering the development of Santo's narrative.

narrative, the protagonists are youths in name and age only. The novel portrays youths who—unlike Mañas, Etxebarría, and Loriga's protagonists' carefree and responsibility-free existence—no longer have the opportunity to be young. Okupada modifies the youth literature formula established by Historias del Kronen, Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, and La pistola de mi hermano. They are no longer the "niños mimados" in search of weekend escapism and hedonism; rather Okupada reframes "youth" as a struggle for survival. A nurturing, emotionally well-adjusted home and upbringing are laughably anachronistic notions for these protagonists. They are fiercely independent and prematurely mature. Forgoing teenage rites of passage, Okupada follows its characters into an existence in which they must instantaneously become adults.

The novel's namesake springs from "la okupación," or squatting, a practice in which Santos's protagonists participate, as some marginalized young people do throughout Europe. During an okupación a group of young people band together to occupy an abandoned building or flat. While an okupación addresses a basic human need—to seek shelter—its implications extend beyond the physicality of the four walls of a building, as a political cause. In particular, a "casa okupada" tends to be a neosocialist, pseudoanarchistic living experiment modeled after the commune lifestyle[26]. These terms—neo-socialist, pseudo-

[26] The okupación has an electronic corollary in "la ciberokupación." As identity on the internet is linked to user names, domain names, and URLs, one can appropriate virtual spaces by being first to stake a claim to an internet name and then profit from reselling that name and subsequently that identity. For example, according to "El País Digital," Tunisian student Anis Darragi purchased the domain name "www.repsol-ypf.com" and, like other "pícaros virtuales," attempted

anarchistic—are inherently vague since in Okupada there is no rigid ideological framework that defines the okupación. Rather, the okupas' philosophy incorporates a hodgepodge of socially progressive slogans ("Somos los herederos directos del anarquismo...para defender valores como la ecología, el antimilitarismo, la insumisión" [36-37]) and a stereotypical youthful idealism ("No somos adultos ni tenemos ganas de serlo. Somos ciudadanos libertarios, antiautoritarios, revolucionarios, pacifistas, contrarios al sistema y casi mayores de edad, aunque esto último no nos preocupa demasiado, como casi nada que dependa de las leyes que dicta el poder establecido" [13]). The okupas' allegiance to these ideals is half-hearted at best; indeed, the illusion of unity under a shared ideology foreshadows their eventual downfall. The okupación combines an atmosphere of tolerance for social outcasts with a tacit agreement that its members pool resources (such as money, food, skills, and education) for collective benefit. In order to serve their community they host a series of "talleres" in which, for example, Beatriz teaches music, Begoña teaches painting, Oswi-Wan teaches poetry, Alma conducts aerobics classes, and the flamboyantly

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to exploit Repsol for millions of pesetas upon news of its proposed merger with YPF (Torreiro). Yet despite similar terminology and a common link to the question of identity, there is a fundamental difference between the ciberokupación and the street okupación. Like the landgrabbers or "sooners" of western American lore of the 1850s, profit and economic advantage drive the ciberokupa, whereas the okupas in Care Santos's novel (as well as the okupas throughout Europe) would reject such a capitalist project. Their okupación originates from an inherently socialist philosophy in which profit is neither a goal nor even a consideration and any resources are shared equally with the group. Returning to the definitions developed in Chapters 1 and 2, the overt materialism further distinguishes Okupada and Spain's Novels of Disaffection from the North American Generation X and Blank Fiction.

homosexual Óskar gives lessons in "el dragqueenismo," the delicate art of being a transvestite. Their duality of purpose distinguishes the okupas from the homeless. Homelessness implies a low socioeconomic threshold accompanying poverty and often unemployment. While an okupación also entails poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization, it incorporates a political position as well, as in the case of family politics (the runaway), local politics (the anarchist) or national/global politics (the migrant). An individual joins an okupación partly by necessity—s/he does not have a place to live, is economically disenfranchised, or is thrown out of a home—and partly as an act of rebellion and social defiance. For example, the quest for a home for the group of outcasts in Okupada springs from their distinct backgrounds: two teenage runaways, a drug addict, a Cuban exile, a bohemian artist, an Iraqi Kurd seeking political asylum, a homosexual shunned by his parents, and a university dropout. Whereas the homeless seek a space in which to live and survive, the okupas seek a space in which to belong and feel wanted. In essence, theirs is a community building project. The okupa seeks shelter not only because s/he currently may have none, but also because s/he has often made a choice to leave a place no longer considered home. This distinction of needs (survival versus belonging) and the element of choice inherent in the okupación project distinguishes the okupa from simply being homeless. Okupas belong to socially ostracized groups—drug addicts, illegal immigrants, homosexuals—that have decided to further marginalize themselves.

The choice to "okupar," however, does not occur everywhere under the same legal conditions. In particular, northern and central Europe provide a

figurative open door to squatters. In Amsterdam, Holland, for example, a dwelling left uninhabited for 18 months is legally available for habitation by squatters. According to the legal precedents for squatting in Great Britain, A.M. Prichard explains that while it violates civil law, squatting enjoys a de facto legal and social tolerance (166). The city government in Geneva, Switzerland, even directs the phenomenon, known in French as "le squat," through the establishment of officially designated squat houses. While such a sanctioned counterculture is an oxymoron, le squat's overt organization contrasts with the lawlessness and chaos of the okupación in Spain.[27] Article 245 of the Spanish Código Penal prohibits okupaciones and as such leaves no ambiguity that okupas are lawbreakers. In fact, the concept of an organized or government sanctioned okupación would be antithetical to the Spanish okupa. Their rallying cry is antiauthoritarianism, to wage a "batalla al odioso poder establecido" (Okupada 59). The nebulous social establishment—police, government, capitalists, and especially property owners—is anathema to their itinerant lifestyle. The okupas base their fragile community on the property owner not discovering their presence: "Para entrar a okupar, es imprescindible que no te vea nadie, que la pasma no te pille *in fraganti* cuando estás entrando...Por eso lo mejor es okupar de madrugada, cuando los vecinos duermen y, si se puede, hasta cortar el tráfico para que no te pillen en plena faena" (38). The illegality of the okupación forces its inhabitants to live a nocturnal existence. To take possession of their

[27] In Okupada, Óskar further specifies the difference between Spain's scrappy, downtrodden okupas and the rest of Europe's squatters, who he dismisses as "okupas con pedigrí" (59).

new abode, for example, the okupas in Santos's novel sneak in at night through a back door in the garden, always entering and leaving by the same clandestine route under cover of the night. Their relationship with darkness produces another duality of existence, both practical and symbolic, in that the night serves to hide them (a form of protection) while it simultaneously keeps them hidden (a form of isolation) from the rest of Barcelona[28]. This living in darkness pushes them underground—out of sight of property owners and law enforcement—but also further marginalizes these outcasts from society at large. They assume the role of the trespasser who, according to Begoña, straddles the fine line between a "ciudadana correcta" who has a home and a "delincuente común," the homeless okupa (142). As trespassers, they are unwanted and unwelcome wherever they stay. Regardless of the space they inhabit, their occupation continually works to ostracize them. Although the okupación offers a shelter, the okupas occupy the gray area between "being" ("estar") and "belonging."

Okupada highlights the okupas' transience and instability; although they do choose this lifestyle, it is implicitly an elected uncertainty, a decision to choose ambiguity. Indeed a sense of clarity and certainty are anachronistic in the postmodern era. Reliance, let alone faith, in other people or institutions is

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[28] In contrast to the Madrid-centrism of other Novels of Disaffection, Santos sets Okupada, as well as the aforementioned La muerte de Kurt Cobain, in Barcelona. Whereas the novels that take place in Madrid by Mañas, Etxebarría, and Loriga tend to downplay ethnic diversity, Okupada reinforces the image of Barcelona as a pluralistic city. The diversity of protagonists' nationalities and ethnicities–Inge the German drug trafficker, Mustafá the Kurdish refugee, and Oswi-Wan the Cuban exile—reflects Barcelona's reputation as an international crossroads, yet simultaneously emphasizes the paradox of their marginalization.

archaic. Career, friendship, marriage, family, home, and community, institutions once known and depended on as long-term sources of stability now have been transformed into relationships of convenience. Each is disposable, stripped of the guarantee of stability, and couched in until-further-notice clauses (Bauman Discontents 24). Skills and experience run the risk of being outdated at a moment's notice. Continual and even violent renewal is paradoxically the only constant in life. Whereas modernism conceptualized life as a journey and a pilgrimage (as shown in Chapter 3), postmodernism reduces the long-term journey to erratic, day to day wandering. As a template for contemporary life, the model of the pilgrimage has lost its relevance. Pursuing goals, long term planning, following a life philosophy, adhering to a religious faith, indeed leading a principled existence, once the foundation upon which to base personal growth, is now considered superfluous baggage. A totalizing life project is incongruent with the world that now surrounds the individual. Whereas principles, morality, and dogma were once to remain constant in the face of life's adversities, now one's whims and the allure of instant gratification take precedent. The foundation of a belief system cedes to the vicissitudes of daily life. In the face of uncertainty and the impossibility of depending on anyone or anything for the long term, the individual must remain independent, flexible, and keep his/her options open. Mark Currie refers to this uncertainty as "a flight from the present...to hurry everything into the past even while it is still happening" (97). Subsequently the perception of reality, rather than an interconnected past, present, and future, now contracts to a series of vignettes and short term opportunities. In the individual's

flight from the present, time has become so fragmented and disjunctive that one must live day to day, even hour to hour, and as such life lurches forward as an ever-evolving contingency plan.

Identity is not immune to this pervasive instability. Douglas Kellner affirms that "postmodern identity is an extension of the freely chosen and multiple identities of the modern self that accepts and affirms an unstable and rapidly mutating condition, which was a problem for the modern self, producing anxiety and identity crisis" (158). Postmodern identity is chameleon-like; it is as radically unstable and subject to change as are an individual's surroundings. Thus identity shifts to exploit the environment, like a reflex or a survival mechanism, in which guiding principles and life philosophies bend to external pressures. Society and identity exist in a relationship of stimulus and response. It is no longer a question of having the vision and fortitude to weather adversity while sticking to one's morals and beliefs. Rather, external stimuli dictate an individual's actions and the content of his or her identity. Reliance on institutions (family, career, community), and thus a fixed notion of identity, is not only futile but also potentially detrimental. As the individual becomes fixated, "stuck" on any one act, s/he cedes the ability to spontaneously bend and change, and hence loses his/her survival mechanism.

Identity formation is also an experiential process. From the postmodern viewpoint the accumulation of life experiences is beneficial only if they do not impede the individual's flexibility. The inherent instability reduces the long term plan or life journey to that of a tourist itinerary. One feels pushed to see, to

quickly assimilate the experience, and then move on, never staying in any place nor fixating on any act for too long. In essence, the postmodern era sends the message that one should pass through life as a vacationer, what one experiences in the here and now must remain in the here and now, as in the tourist mantra, "this is a nice place to visit, but I would not want to live here." Bauman suggests, "Like everything else, the self-image splits into a collection of snapshots, each having to conjure up, carry and express its own meaning, more often than not without reference to other snapshots" (Discontents 24). The snapshot metaphor is fitting, as postmodern identity is a series of superficial images, constructed piecemeal, even randomly. The order of these identity snapshots is of little importance. Like trading cards, they can be shuffled and seen at random as there exists no metanarrative that strings them together. Hence the fragmentation breeds further uncertainty.

Wandering through the fog of uncertainty is a figure that lurks on the periphery of Western societies: the stranger. A primer of this concept is in order. Strangers are society's undecidables; they resist categorization into artificial social orders. The Other, in contrast, is based on dichotomies and hierarchies, such as man/woman, citizen/immigrant, inside/outside, and good/evil, where the former necessarily dominates the latter. The stranger, however, falls into ambiguity, as s/he is neither wholly inside nor outside, neither dominant nor submissive, neither friend nor foe. As such strangers' identities are unstable and unclear. Their stranger status comes from "their tendency to befog and eclipse boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen" (Bauman Discontents 25). They

muddy the divisions between belonging and being cast out. Strangers occupy a gray area, they fit in neither here nor there, but meanwhile they obviously must be located somewhere. Since they are constantly out of place, their strangeness exists always and everywhere. Similarly, the Spanish okupa lacks these foundations of identity construction such as home, family, and community. For example, in Okupada Óskar is ostracized from his family who is intolerant of his homosexuality, Mustafá flees his home in Iraq to escape political persecution, and Kike, a professional okupa, experiences the perpetual transience of the okupación movement, stating, "De hoy a mañana te han echado de tu casa. Te sientes como una basura" (37). Since they live with a sense of permanent uncertainty, the concept of home for them is an estranged place. Madam Sarup states, "Unlike an alien or foreigner, the stranger is not simply a newcomer, a person temporarily out of place. S/he is an eternal wanderer, homeless always and everywhere" (11), and as a stranger, the okupa manifests the absence of home and roots. They do not fit anywhere. Indeed the foreigners in Okupada are also strangers. Oswi-Wan and Mustafá face political persecution if they return to Cuba and Iraq, respectively, yet as illegal immigrants they are outsiders in Spain as well. Inge, a junkie, drug pusher, and drug trafficker, cannot feel safe at any point along her drug route (from Morocco, to Spain, France, and her native Germany) because the basis of her identity—drugs—pushes her to the social and legal peripheries wherever she may be. Thus strangers are "home-less," both without domicile and without the building blocks of identity that a home implies. Even the Other, while marginalized, can in fact go home; s/he has a

place to call home, a space of security and protection. The stranger, on the other hand, suffers the uncertainty and instability of lacking any place of refuge.

In addition to being out of place, the stranger produces a wider, ripple effect throughout society. Strangers are messy. Since they cannot be easily classified—neither inside nor outside—they disarrange the neatly constructed social hierarchy. The "problem" of the stranger hinges on a vision in which everyone remains in their right place. Since strangers do not fit anywhere, they stand out, making their presence more noticeable. As such, Santos's strangers, the okupas, must move about at night. The strangers' presence causes disquietude due to their lack of a clearly defined place. As appropriators of others' property and spaces, okupas like Kike, Kifo, Begoña, and Óskar inherently violate the social contract of allegiance to private property and the legal system. As such strangers confound order; they throw a monkeywrench into the order-making machinery of society and therefore society perceives their presence as enough of a threat to blacklist them. Similarly an ordered and orderly society, as Mary Douglas argues, is one that is free of "dirt":

> Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment...In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience. (2)

Thus to reestablish an ordered, hygienic environment, society must cleanse the impurity that contaminates order. In an effort to create order, to put people in their right places, attention necessarily turns to what is out of order: "if uncleanliness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanliness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained" (Douglas 40). For this reason, the stranger represents an ongoing "problem"; as an impurity, s/he fosters a dream of purity. The stranger threatens the ordered environment and pushing out the stranger would, in theory, restore an ordered and orderly society. This dirt elimination project also implicitly imposes a hegemonic order, pitting insider against outsider, the clean against the dirty. While cleansing dirt would reestablish order, it simultaneously posits a utopian vision of society. The hegemonic power seeks a utopia, a space that is either uncontaminated and stranger-free, or in which the stranger fits into the social order. However, recalling that strangers are unable to be insiders nor outsiders—they are constantly out of place—their inherent ambiguity strains the utopian hierarchy. It is the tension between ordering—purging—the stranger and the quest for utopia—a social hygiene—that entangles the stranger.

Western societies simultaneously generate and mistrust strangers. Spain in particular still must contend with the "problem" of strangers as perceived contaminants, meddlers, and disorderers. Yet, Care Santos's Okupada posits an alternate perspective to the stranger problem and its subsequent dream of purity in what one could call "the stranger's revenge." In the novel the okupas, themselves the strangers of Barcelona, construct a space of belonging, their own

utopia. Okupada debases the hegemony by contemplating the dynamics of a space if it consisted of nothing but strangers. The perpetual outsiders are now, literally, inside. They are off the street and in their own house. In their alternative utopia they are no longer strangers, rather they become the majority. With the structure of the house serving as a partition from the rest of Barcelona, they now have the power to draw the lines that separate the inside from the outside, the insider from the outsider, and who belongs and who does not. In the teeming, consumeristic landscape of the Barcelona portrayed in Santos's novel, the okupas declare their house a free space (19, 52) and work to transform their dwelling—which they christen with the tongue-in-cheek name, Bákinjam—into a utopian micro-society, an urban "locus amoenus" of freedom, tolerance, equality, and mutual respect. The okupas recreate the dream of purity by retreating into a space of cleanliness. The evidence of purification in the novel is quite literal. The group of eight strangers converges on a house in a state of decay. Abandoned for twenty years to an accumulation of grime, their first task is to clean. Alma narrates the clean up effort:

> Todo estaba asqueroso. De cualquier rincón salían sopresas desagradables: preservativos usados, jeringuillas, mierdas como catedrales y hasta un carburador y una batería de moto...llenamos bolsas y bolsas con escombros que habían caído por todas partes, pedazos de puertas y muebles podridos. (28, 29)

Upon their arrival, Bákinjam is a house without a reliable structure, literally and metaphorically. Rats are "occupying" the basement and above there is "una

buhardilla que, literalmente, se caía a pedazos...y podía pasar que el suelo cediera o que el techo se desplomara sobre nuestras cabezas" (26). Through a physical cleaning, they transform the dwelling from a space in disrepair into a space of purity. Kike pirates electricity from powerlines in the street and throughout the house's four floors they designate spaces in which to construct a bar, a concert hall, and individual bedrooms. The rebuilding project represents a movement larger than themselves and their own self-interests—a metaphorical act of community, collective identity, as well as a metanarrative—which draws them together. The repairs to the house transcend the act of construction: the okupas begin to forge a community of strangers around this project and simultaneously begin to forge a collective identity. Their house serves as a metaphorical framework upon which to build this identity. No longer the strangers, within its protective shelter they are free to express and develop their personal identities. Through their "talleres" (music, painting, poetry, aerobics, and of course "el dragqueenismo") each shows their particular "señas de identidad." Alma, for example, seeks "un ecosistema original y divertido en el que me apetecía mucho quedarme a echar raíces" (28). As is common in Spain's Novels of Disaffection, like Historias del Kronen, Lo peor de todo, Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, parents and family are largely absent from Okupada. Alma observes of her parents that "ninguno de los dos está nunca en casa porque sus múltiples obligaciones les mantienen entretenidos" (89). Hence the okupas look to the collective identity of the okupación as a surrogate family. Mirroring Alma's desire to "echar raíces," they seek a sense of belonging and the stability of a space in

which to found an identity. Moreover Alma's family unit disintegrates; her parents divorce while she is participating in the okupación. Finally, in distancing themselves from their parents and an adult world they consider hypocritical, the okupas reveal a Peter Pan syndrome. Their utopia is merely a "culto de juventud" as they declare, "no somos adultos ni tenemos ganas de serlo" (13) in a desire to stave off maturity and adulthood.

For that reason, their utopian vision is short-lived. While the itinerant strangers of Okupada find shelter in an abandoned house, they do not find a home. By taking up residence, the outsiders become insiders. In the process of occupying the house they unwittingly replicate the same hierarchies and power structures against which they are ostensibly rebelling. The group christens their run-down dwelling "Bákinjam" after the British royal palace of the same name. Adopting the name of the house of Windsor, center of a monarchical and formerly colonizing world power, is an ironic choice for a supposedly collective, neo-socialist experiment in living. It also foreshadows the hypocrisies into which they fall and the eventual disintegration of their utopian microcosm at the hands of abused authority. The okupas replicate the same dream of purity that drove them from their previous spaces (the streets, broken homes, intolerant families, Cuba, Iraq) to occupy Bákinjam in the first place. By creating a utopia for society's strangers, they reproduce the project that necessitates the drawing of boundaries, the establishment of order, a "clean" space, free of the stranger. Their rigorous cleaning evolves into a crusade. The okupas replicate the dirt elimination project by upholding the ideal of purity, sweeping out the filth, and

cleansing their microsociety of its unwanted, the disorderers among the strangers themselves. Namely the presence of Inge, the German pusher, trafficker, and drug addict, represents a faultline along which the okupas divide. The hashish, cocaine, and heroin that Inge brings into the house begin to fragment their community and test their tolerance, a test which they ultimately fail. Despite their supposed acceptance of outsiders, Begoña condemns Inge's drug addiction as immoral (117) and Oswi-Wan attempts to exclude Inge from their house, alleging that "Inge no era de los nuestros" (131). The gathering of okupas fails to make the house an accommodating home. Their utopia (re)produces divisions and the need to again seek out and purge the unclean, that is, the stranger. In essence they single out a stranger amidst strangers. The confrontations multiply and the okupas abandon their utopian idealism and fall into the same trappings of power and hypocrisy they fiercely criticize in society outside the okupación. For example, once they claimed unwavering loyalty to their ideals: "las ideas no las desalojarán jamás. Esa es nuestra fuerza...Nuestra lucha es social y libertaria y no vamos a renunciar a ella ni dentro de cuarenta años" (40-41). On two occasions Kike affirms that, "somos pacíficos y detestamos cualquier acto violento" (46) and "somos pacíficos...no debemos olvidarlo bajo ningún concepto, pase lo que pase" (131). Yet their interpersonal conflicts escalate into violence, for instance, among the love triangle of Alma, Kifo, and Inge who fight and threaten each other at knife-point (110-111). Furthermore, Kifo defends the okupación with growing violence, fending off the invading police force with molotov cocktails, vowing that "no nos iremos de aquí si no es por la fuerza" (73).

As mentioned above, a principled existence is futile when faced with the vicissitudes of the postmodern world. Similarly, hypocrisy infiltrates the core values of the okupación and rips at the fabric of their pacifist movement. The romanticized community splits apart and the spirit of equality and tolerance splinters into petty individualism. As they turn against each other, the okupas become ever more self-involved. Begoña, for example, the longest serving okupa, expresses disillusionment with the metanarrative of their movement, claiming, "la okupación es un modo de vida alternativo sólo apto para falsos idealistas" (157) and abandons the okupación for a lucrative job. Inge and Kifo withdraw from the collective and retreat into drug-induced escapism and subsequently promise, "en cuanto encontremos un lugar donde quedarnos, nos largaremos" (118). As such their microcosm fragments and subdivides, reproducing the "us versus the stranger" dichotomy. Thus the okupas' modernist utopia crumbles.

Louis Marin notes that a utopia (from the Greek "ou topos," or "no place") degenerates due to the contrast it implicitly draws between utopian and non-utopian spaces (286). The euphoria of utopia turns into disillusionment when one goes "back to reality." In Okupada, the difference between the utopian and non-utopian spaces is similarly unsustainable; the okupas' idealized, modernist goal of unity and equality for all cedes to the grim reality of capitalist greed and xenophobia, which is paradoxical considering Barcelona's reputation as an international crossroads and a destination for immigrants. The contrast between the utopia (the okupación) and the non-utopia (Barcelona) emerges when the

okupas leave the protection of the okupación. Attempting an anarchist public relations campaign (Kifo says, "Yo propongo movilizar a la opinión pública...hacer algo que llame la atención de la gente para que nos conozcan y estén a nuestro favor" [93]), the okupas scale the Ayuntamiento and, in a move reminiscent of a band of pirates, tear down the Spanish flag and in its place hoist the black flag of the okupación (105). Yet their act of symbolism—the flag serves as a mark of identity and as a rallying point—lasts an underwhelming three and a half minutes (106). Rather than rally massive public support for their cause, the flag-raising incident provokes an eventual police invasion of Bákinjam to force out the okupas. The idealism of their utopia collides with the reality of the hegemonic non-utopia. In fact, the okupas' very idealism (the utopian ideals, the dream of purity, the elimination of dirt, and the attempt to spread the utopia outward into Barcelona) contributes to the destruction of their okupación. Thus like the ideological emptiness of raising their flag, the foundation of their identity—the okupación—is hollow; the okupas show that they can easily discard their dreams and goals as the circumstances fluctuate. As the okupas' symbolic act of social resistance turns against each other, the metanarrative of the okupación is overturned and the promise of utopia degenerates into dystopia.

The breakdown of the okupas' community parallels the breakdown of their collective identity. As the identity of the stranger is uncertain and unstable, Okupada reproduces this instability as identity shifts from group interest to self-interest, from solidarity to solitude. Beatriz conveys the sense of hopelessness and detachment in her view of interpersonal relationships: "Estaba convencida

de que nunca viviría en pareja una larga temporada. ¿Para qué? ¿Para herir y que me hieran?" (102). Beatriz's cynicism reflects the ephemeral nature of postmodern identity; identity is located in the imminent present, rejecting the modernist notion of an interrelated past, present, and future. Relationships, marriage, family, home, career, indeed any attempt to give identity a structure is futile in postmodern life. Structure, like the foundation of a house, is useless when facing the tectonic shifts of a world of radical uncertainty. Thus identity cannot be evaluated for the long term; rather, like the drugs that Inge injects, it is a "quick fix." Therefore as the community in Bákinjam implodes, the okupas shift and change out of a stagnating, collective identity and reaffirm their autonomous identities. To construct and trust in a metanarrative such as "collective identity" or "group unity," indeed any commitment beyond the self handicaps the individual. Therefore the okupa/stranger burrows ever deeper into self-involvement and seclusion. As Madan Sarup comments, "amid the universal homelessness [of the stranger], individuals turn to their private lives as the only location where they may hope to build a home. In a hostile world, what can one do?" (11). The strangers in Santos's novel exist as society's undecidables, caught in an uneasy tension between belonging and exclusion, between inside and outside. As such, their identity is unstable:

> Instead of constructing one's identity, gradually and patiently, as one builds a house—through the slow accretion of ceilings, floors, rooms, connecting passages—a series of 'new beginnings,' experimenting with instantly assembled yet easily dismantled

shapes, painted over the other; a palimpsest identity. (Bauman Discontents 24-25)

In Okupada, Bákinjam's lack of architectural integrity and stability reflects their shaky community. The collapse of collective identity mirrors the physical collapse of the house: in the climactic confrontation with police, amidst growing violence, the structure falls apart, the floorboards crumble, and Kifo falls to his death.

The okupas attempt to extend the utopian ideals of their collective identity through the structure of the narrative itself, writing the text as a testament of their short-lived community. Each contributes one chapter to the story of the okupación, democratically adding their individual identities to an idealistic collective identity in an "e pluribus unum," telling their own story in their own words. They also declare a metatextual rebellion against hegemonic narrative voices: "No estamos de acuerdo con esos narradores cretinos que a menudo aparecen en las novelas, que son uno solo y que fingen saberlo todo de todo el mundo, narradores oligárquicos, manipuladores y fascistoides" (14). The okupas' rejection of authority appears as an orthographic rebellion in the purposely misspelled words scattered throughout the novel (i.e., introdukzión klarifikadora, ke, okupas, Óskar). But like the drug-induced orthography in Mañas's novels, the changes are a superficial transgression, an artifice that purposely draws attention to itself and thus breaks the pact of verisimilitude. On a textual level the utopian narrative structure of Okupada, like the structure of their house, is unstable and perhaps doomed from the start. Mustafá's unintentionally comical chapter captures the textual chaos. Truly an inhabitant of a tower of Babel, his

inadequate language skills necessitate a hybridized usage of Spanish, French, Italian, English and at times Arabic:

> Yo le digo que to travel es molto facile para kurdos, porque sonno pueblo nómada, de artesanos, ganaderos y agricultores (Alma me ayuda con las palabrotas) y es exacto lo que soy moi: vivo de entallar power-rangers y otras cosas, I travel como mis antepasados (los del arca, por ejemplo), plantuve tomatos y náscaros na mi window y si no teno cabras es because en Barcelona no hay. (79)

The multiple narrators create a textual schizophrenia by narrating from subjective, contradictory, and self-serving points of view. Who is to blame for the okupación's failure depends on who is narrating. Under the guise of a collective project, the structure of the novel itself undermines the okupas' attempt to construct the okupación as a metanarrative. Reflecting Baudrillard's theory of postmodernism, the medium becomes the message as they collectively produce a schizophrenic narrative, exposing their own hypocrisies and condemning themselves for a superficial adherence to their principles.

The protagonists of Okupada engage in a modern project in a postmodern world. Rather than celebrate an inclusive, alternative lifestyle, the okupación in fact recreates the social hegemony and stranger segregation of the metropolis that surrounds them. The okupas' hypocrisy strips the project of renewal, rebuilding, and revolution of its ideological foundations and humanistic transcendence. Recalling Toni Dorca's affirmation that Spain's latest narrative

suffers a crisis of values, Okupada demonstrates that unity is a liability, permanence is detrimental, and commitment is meaningless. The identity problem for the okupa and the stranger is that the construction of home is impossible. The message is pessimistic: Okupada criticizes equally the hegemonic, materialistic society and the alternative, radical lifestyle of the okupación. Both sides lose. The novel demonizes the police for using excessive force and for the death of Kifo. Meanwhile the okupas' quest for a better life and a more enlightened existence ends in failure. They lose their battle against the police, authorities, and eventually lose their house. Later a politician, Avel·lí Pi Sureda, appropriates Bákinjam's collapse for publicity photos and television news cameras to further his political clout. Adding insult to injury, it is a "humanitarian" organization called "Techos para todos" (directed by Alma's own father, no less) that enlists police force to evict the offending okupas so that the house can be made available for the homeless, while of course, the okupas are themselves homeless.

In conclusion, the internal conflicts in Okupada fragment idealism, unity, and collective identity, transforming the okupas' utopia into a dystopia. As they construct a personal space in their "casa okupada," they betray their own search for identity; they fragment the collective into the individual, and the metanarrative of the okupación falls apart. Thus Okupada explores postmodern identity by questioning whether unity, community, and collective identity are at all possible in Spain's Novels of Disaffection. As society's unclassifiables, these strangers in a strange house can only find home in a space of uncertainty.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION: SPAIN'S NOVELS OF DISAFFECTION, OR THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL WITH MISSING PAGES

The story of Spain's Novels of Disaffection begins with a war. It is an internal war that Spain's youth declare on themselves, a war that lacks objectives other than self-destruction. The Novels of Disaffection are adept at diagnosing youth's problems, showing the causes and effects, but they refrain from prescribing solutions. The ways in which these novels end (not to say "conclude," with perhaps the exception of Okupada's consciousness of its own narrative structure) rarely feature a denouement. Novels like Ciudad Rayada, Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes, and Héroes arbitrarily stop, seemingly on the whim of the narrator. In this sense, their endings are open and ambiguous. They suggest the roots of the problems (lack of communication, atomized families, personal autonomy at the expense of relationships), but refuse to clearly indicate whether returning to traditional metanarratives and institutions would improve the lives of Spain's youth. Thus the Novels of Disaffection are like an instruction manual with missing pages: the vivid portrayal of youth hedonism is hobbled by a lack of solutions or resolutions. Spain does not have jobs for them, a university education is a meaningless rite of passage, families are anachronistic, and interpersonal relationships are impositions on the individual's autonomy. Thus the Novels of Disaffection suggest no transcendence, no redemption, and no hope for a better future; indeed it means a continued rudderless existence for Spain's youth. These novels delight in exploring the minute details of its characters' hedonism (the often mentioned rock 'n' roll, sex, alcohol, drugs, and

violence). Yet whether they accept it or not (and most do not), protagonists do suffer the consequences of their actions. Despite the repeated assertions that there is "no future" and that tomorrow will never come, characters do pay the price for their actions (which is not to say that they accept responsibility for them or even recognize their own culpability) in the form of fragmented identities, shattered relationships, interpersonal isolation, emotional and physical trauma, debilitating addictions, and death.

Youth, family, and Spanish society alike witness this disaffection. Yet like the protagonists who do not recognize their own self-destruction, no one benefits from it. Beyond youth's obvious culpability, these novels also indict Spanish society and the family for indirectly contributing to youth disaffection. A striking absence marks these novels, namely that of parents and parental influence. Youth receive scant guidance, little or no parenting, little attention or time or love, and live largely unstructured lives. Despite the metanarratives of struggle, emancipation, transition, freedom, triumph, success, and accumulation of wealth (they stoically weathered the Franco regime, experienced the transition to democracy, endured the vicissitudes of economic crisis and labor shortages, and saw the integration of Spain into a continental and global environment) that may define the lives of Spanish adults, they failed to communicate these metanarratives to their children.

Throughout Spain's Novels of Disaffection, the instability of identity and self destruction are constant traveling companions. Characters are unable to transcend the circumstances of their decadent lifestyle to emerge more

knowledgeable, more enlightened, or more mature. That is to say, no character is saved, no one wins, and no protagonist climbs out of the morass of drugs, alcohol, and meaningless sex. Of this group of youths on the cusp of adulthood, no one "grows up" to accept adult responsibilities. Rather, they demonstrate a pronounced lack of self-awareness. As such, the Novels of Disaffection portray a series of static characters, which presents a paradox to the question of identity. These novels emphasize characters' identities that are scarred by their internalized war. Youth are ostensibly trying to find and define themselves, to answer the salient question, "Who am I?" Yet simultaneously they are trying to avoid the answers to that question. By satiating their whims, desires for escapism, and instant gratification, they are displacing the process of identity formation. Thus, the question of identity in the Novels of Disaffection is inherently contradictory.

This contradiction reveals a message in this narrative. As Germán Gullón suggests, these novels present a social criticism that includes self-criticism (xviii-xix). Through the depravity, instant gratification, lack of communication, and interpersonal disconnect, the Novels of Disaffection trace the downward trajectory of Spain's urban youth subcultures. Thus despite its popular perception as a risqué, subversive, and rebellious literature, in essence the Novels of Disaffection transmit cautionary messages. Throughout this narrative, the highs are tempered by the damage that they cause, and thus this literature frames escapism as a form of deterioration. The identity project in these nine novels leads to protagonists' self-destruction and the collapse of identity consistently

serves as a warning for youth culture throughout this narrative. The Novels of Disaffection frame the atomization of community, family, commitments, human relationships, individual autonomy, and particularly the self in terms of their consequences. As portrayed in this narrative, the hedonism of Spain's youth shows the identity project to be hollow. And thus from a macroperspective, this narrative presents the collapse of linear meaning and the unknowability of the discourse of identity in Spain's youth narrative of the 1990s.

In conclusion, the youth portrayed in Spain's Novels of Disaffection reject the bourgeois project of their parents and write the missing pages in their own instruction manuals—their identities—in the slipstream of daily life. Their intemperance and disaffection define them, fragment their identities, and leave them at war with themselves. Spain's youth, once a hope for the future, now reflect a postmodern present of sex, drugs, and self-destruction.

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