Cultures of Anyone
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central part of his life’s aesthetics. But I don’t think Benet would consider important aspects of his private life relevant to his *grand style*; for example, the fact that he worked as an engineer constructing reservoirs to help Francoism in its ‘colonization’ of farmland. Having said that, however, there were still times when Benet would let the two domains meet. The writer Javier Marías, disciple of Benet, recently shared an anecdote about this very thing: ‘One time, they gave him a medal from the School of Engineers, and he made sure all his literary friends went to the ceremony, although it didn’t matter to us and we couldn’t care less, but it was important to him’ (González 2014).

In few cases like this does that tandem between technocratic, engineering modernization and aesthetic modernity go so well together, perhaps because they are so well separated. But in many other cases, thanks in large part to the canonization of a depoliticized version of aesthetic modernity in which Benet was key, a fluid convergence can be seen between that aesthetic modernity and other aspects of capitalist modernization, which, considered as the only economic-political framework possible, would generate those dynamics Ferlosio condemned, in which the artist and the intellectual are reduced by the market and the state to the ‘decorative emptiness of their fame and their name.’ Especially since the onward march of neoliberalism intensified the search for brand names and tended to turn every culture into an object of economic speculation.

2.4. ‘Normalization,’ Deactivation, and Culture Bubble in the CT

2.4.1. A ‘modernizing, normalizing’ intellectual

Let’s rewind for a moment to 1985: only three years have passed since the PSOE’s historic rise to power, which the sociologist Lamo de Espinosa considered the victory of the ‘immense, historic national modernizing and Europeanizing project that first inspired the Enlightenment thinkers, and later the regenerationists, the Generations of 98 and 14’ (13). Javier Marías, Benet’s disciple—and one of the most distinguished heirs of both his paradigm of depoliticized ‘aesthetic modernity’ and that tradition of cultural elites to whom Lamo alludes—returns from Oxford and is surprised to find a country already very critical of the government. ‘I must admit,’ he says in his article ‘Visión de un falso indiano’ (1985), ‘that my surprise was considerable upon hearing opinions, reading articles, and studying supposed news reports about that same socialist government that had inspired both hopes and improvised support when I left.’ It concerns him, he says, that people now often say things like:
‘Before, we thought that in Health, in Education, in Housing everything was screwed up because it was them, but now it turns out it’s also us. There’s no doubt any more of how little the country gives back.’ That argument, as simple as it is simplistic, is what, to my way of thinking, is most surprising and worrying. It ominously recalls the somber comment that often closed political conversations in Franco’s time: ‘There’s no hope for this country.’

Even in a moment when one might expect collective enthusiasm for the new era just begun, people seem not only disillusioned with the government, but also, possibly, at a deeper level with themselves. But perhaps Marías shouldn’t be so surprised by the Spaniards’ lack of self-esteem. He himself would go on to write numerous articles that were critical of the socialist government and very critical of various aspects of democratic Spain. More importantly, he would admit only five years later that he couldn’t help but be happy despite himself when someone occasionally told him that ‘he didn’t seem Spanish’:

Unfortunately, every time some foreigner has said to me for some reason that I didn’t seem Spanish, I have had the embarrassing sensation that they were complimenting me and that I should therefore consider it an insult to my country, or at least to my countrymen. This didn’t seem like such an odd occurrence when I was younger; that is, in the past, when Spain was a despised nation that was then promptly associated with a decrepit dictatorship, with bullfighters, with a high crime rate where cases never got solved, with loud, rude people, with tricorn hats, with stone lifters,13 clay water vessels, guitars … But the most offensive thing is that even today, when one would think our country has changed so much, and always for the better, I still occasionally hear (not as often as I would personally want, and much more frequently than a civic perspective might want) someone tell me in the most complimentary tone, ‘You don’t seem Spanish.’ (2011, 30)

Marías’s statements here remind me of the dilemma of those who feel ‘avant-garde’ among their people. On one hand, they want to lead everyone to the long-awaited ‘modernization.’ But at the same time, their mission links them annoyingly to those ‘backward’ people—or at least, to an image of backwardness—from whom they want to differentiate themselves at all times.

13 **Levantar piedras** is a traditional sport in the Basque Country, practiced by a **harrijasotzaile** or **levantador de piedras** (stone lifter).
The topic of negative self-perception is a slippery one. Thus, even when they are happy for the small progress of their compatriots, it seems that the avant-garde can’t help but be offended, as when in the same article, Marías pats himself on the back because something very worthy, though arbitrary, has been achieved: people in Spain today are blond and blue-eyed in ridiculously greater numbers than in the fifties or sixties, which, unlike the increase in average height, cannot be explained. But it is a great achievement, at least for the existence of a variety of images or physical types and the suppression of the monotonous individual of the past. (33)

At the same time, Marías says, ‘Spanish women are the cleanest and most conscientious [women] on the continent,’ and that men, ‘although less attractive … have made a tremendous effort to seem like normal beings and not delinquents, which is in itself a lot’ (33).

However, it isn’t all good news, it seems. If Marías still feels extraordinarily complimented despite himself when someone tells him he doesn’t seem Spanish, it is because the image of the country, ‘which, when all is said and done, is what counts in times like these, much more than the country itself for all intents and purposes,’ often keeps reproducing, out of sheer inertia, the backwardness and folkloric vulgarity that has been expected of it ‘for the last couple of centuries,’ despite the fact that in the last few years there has been ‘an awareness that such an image was not easily compatible with modern—or yet postmodern—aspirations’ (34).

Marías has returned repeatedly, in articles and interviews, to this topic of the supposed ‘backwardness’ or the ‘poor image’ of Spain. As noted in the previous chapter, in 2006 Marías was already complaining that ‘Spain is being destroyed by the trickery of construction firms, mayors, owners of public works, and independent counselors,’ but he also had time to continue developing his classic theme of the supposed ‘backwardness of Spain.’ So, in a long interview granted to The Paris Review, Marías responded in these terms to a question about the criticisms he had received throughout his career ‘for not being Spanish enough’:

There are people who expect Spanish literature, theater, movies, and painting to be folkloric, but the Spain I know is a fairly normal country. It was normal even during the dictatorship, in the sense that our cities aren’t so different from other European cities. In Spain there are educated people who haven’t been represented in any Spanish novel. There was a certain tendency to write about rural passions and rural
In other texts, Marías elaborates what he probably understands by that urban, educated ‘normality’ that, surprisingly, goes back all the way to the years of the dictatorship. In an article from years earlier about the Madrid of his childhood, entitled ‘En Chamberí’ (originally published in 1990), Marías defends his belonging to that ‘pure-blood’ barrio and compares it mockingly to the criticisms often made about it being ‘foreignizing.’ But pure-blood or not, it is interesting to note that what Marías highlights with pleasure about the Chamberí of his childhood is, for example, that ‘the sidewalk was a civilized, respectful place,’ in which the only vehicles to be seen were ‘very clean, shiny automobiles whose owners drove them as if they were apologizing.’ This was in stark contrast to ‘the indescribable flood of cars driven by habitual criminals’ that inundates Madrid today. Likewise, he entertains himself remembering how to his childish eyes ‘Madrid, or if you prefer, Chamberí, was a city dominated by bakeries and import stores, scenes of abundance and even of good taste’ (2008, 38).

Together with those symptoms of civility and abundance, there also existed some picturesque touches, like the ‘mule- or burro-drawn carts’ in which the junkmen carted their wares or, ‘always standing with her back turned, and so facing the trolleys or taxis, some girl or young lady with gypsy-like beauty and light-colored eyes.’ To that touch of archaic exoticism Marías adds another, rather less erotic one: ‘in the middle of the intense refinement of that barrio it was not unusual to suddenly smell a strong odor of cows,’ which came from the still existent ‘milking parlors.’ In any case, with those picturesque nineteenth-century details, Marías concludes, ‘the memory of the Madrid of those days is one of an unhurried and orderly city (perhaps too orderly; it is where I have seen the highest concentration of police in the streets)’ (39).

If we pay attention to Marías’s other related texts, they confirm that in fact his ideal of ‘normality’ seems to fit better with that city of businesses, civility, good taste, and sparse traffic that was Madrid under Francoism, that with the noisy, crowded, vulgar neoliberal metropolis it became during the ‘democracy.’ I will not travel too far down the thorny path that would open up if we began to wonder why in that orderly Madrid of the 1950s some traveled in shiny cars and others in donkey carts, or why some lived in a world of abundance and ‘good taste’ while others’ lives were merely ‘picturesque,’ or even why there were so many police in the streets. I will merely recall that after a civil war that resulted in half a million deaths, the state went on to kill some 100,000 more of the defeated parties until
1949; that 200,000 people ended up dying of hunger the decade before; and that in the years following the establishment of the dictatorship, 20% of the population would migrate from the countryside to those ‘normal’ cities in which so often the recently arrived migrants, without access to such central districts like Chamberí, were crowded into shacks on the outskirts of town.

But what I want to do now is show that the efficacy of Marías’s discourse, while representative—voluntarily or not—of the thesis of Spain’s ‘normalization,’ is to some degree independent of his opinions about the time period and places that best embody that normalization. For the stability and hegemony of the CT, which I see here as the legitimizing framework of a project of neoliberal transformation which mainly uses that modernizing, pro-European discourse, what is important isn’t that Marías sees the Francoist city as more ‘normal’ than the democratic one, but that it disseminates and embodies an idea of what is ‘normal’ (and, in contrast, what is ‘abnormal’) which is compatible with that modernizing, pro-European tradition. Thus, Marías can both praise the civility of the Chamberí of his childhood and criticize the management of the first PSOE, or regret the survival of Spain’s ‘poor image’ into the nineties. At the same time, he can keep adding material that will construct a desire for modernity and Europeanization which is understood as ‘normality,’ even though at times it is expressed in very surprising ways.

Marías recently compiled an enviable number of political articles in his book Los villanos de la nación, most of them very sharp and critical of various institutions and governments. This would seem to contradict the image of the ‘disactivated’ culture in the CT proposed by Guillem Martínez. But I think that the loyalty to the roots of the CT felt by intellectuals and artists like Marías is more structural than deliberate. This kind of structural coincidence can be better understood if we add to the analysis not only the ‘standardizing’ discourse of notable cultural figures but also their occasional activity as ‘columnists.’

2.4.2. The columnist’s individual authority

The literary critic Ulrich Winter (Abiada, Neuschäfer, and Bernasocchi 2001) has called attention to the growing importance of the ‘columnism’ of Spanish writers since the middle of the 1980s, in parallel with the commercialization of the literary industry. Winter relates this columnist figure to the classical roots of the intellectual à la Bourdieu, which I mentioned earlier. To be an intellectual, says Winter, ‘one must have or be a confirmed authority because of competencies or achievements acquired in a relatively independent field like science, the humanities, literature, and culture in general’ (294).
Examples of this type of intellectual would, for Winter, include some notable columnists from the democratic period, like Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Rosa Montero, Francisco Umbral, Antonio Gala, Juan José Millás, or Antonio Muñoz Molina. We could also add Marías himself to this list. What worries Winter, in line with Ferlosio, is that besides these writers, there are also those who have gained access to the intellectual’s position when the only thing they have achieved is ‘commercial success.’ This preoccupation seems, in fact, to contain an element of suspicion regarding the legitimacy of the very position of authority held by the intellectual—in general—in the mass media: ‘Once she appears in the opinion pages, the writer gains a certain moral authority; she is granted relative superiority to symbolically interpret the world, simply because of the fact that she appears in mass media, that she expresses an opinion and is heard’ (297).

I think it is especially important to consider what happens with intellectuals like Marías, whose achievements in the literary world no one will deny, and who, thanks to that legitimacy, have access to the media. It is important to analyze these figures by remembering above all that the artistic field—literary in this case—in which they earn legitimacy has been conceived from that hegemonic ‘aesthetic modernity’ in post-dictatorship Spain which tended to erase the necessarily common aesthetic dimension: that ‘revealing the authentically common at the heart of the common’ to which Laddaga refers, and which has occasionally been interpreted as a possibility for uniting art with life.

In an interview in 1995, Marías said ‘with democracy, political activity can been pursued through political channels, thus ending the subordination of fiction to external factors’ (invoking the phantom of those ‘fraudulent interruptions’ that Benet condemned in the ‘social novel’). But this assertion denotes a very narrow conception of the possible political consequences of the aesthetic. As Labrador explains in his analysis of the poets of the transitional underground, there is no reason why loyalty to the experimental principles of aesthetic modernity should eliminate the necessarily relational, community aspect of artistic creation.

The key question is where to obtain that artistic ‘authority’ that will then allow the intellectual to participate in the political arena. Does that ‘authority’ not develop, like every human value, from the ‘relationships with others’ that always constitute our frame of meaning and through which, says Labrador, the transitional artist was ‘destined to grow and better himself by living in community, with her limits and opportunities determined by the community, and committed to its improvement to achieve in this way her own improvement?’ (2008) But the ‘depoliticized’ artist believes that, in fact, aesthetics is the suspension of community.
Only after having found her aesthetic enlightenment in solitude will that artist become an ‘intellectual’ and be able to enter into ‘relationships with others’—but she will do so from an already elevated position that articulates those relationships pedagogically, like lessons, or at least ‘guidance’ for those not in the same elevated position. Thus, Winter notes:

The loss of universal reference points in the increasingly impenetrable political and economic world does nothing more than increase the need for guidance in every one of the domains of daily life. That is where the successful writers and their columns come into play; their presence is also a consequence or a symptom of the changing function, or of the concept, of ‘intellectual’ in today’s world. (296)

Intellectuals, already unable to impart ‘guidance’ to their peers through universal truths, will do it now by concentrating on those ‘domains of daily life’ from a ‘premeditatedly subjective or personal perspective.’ This turnaround is interesting: the intellectual who has been legitimized through a ‘pure’ art of ‘great style’—that is, an art supposedly practiced individually and without reference to the community of meaning from which the intellectual came and to which he will necessarily return—can now not only give lessons on politics, but also ‘guide’ his audience on how to live their daily lives. This intellectual had eliminated his own attachments to networks of daily relationships to become legitimized as a creator distanced from ‘external factors.’ But now he uses his legitimacy not only to chant Zola’s ‘I accuse,’ but also to share the prevailing postmodern disorientation, from a platform that keeps up a pedagogical pretense. That is, the intellectual answers questions that are neither technical nor specialized—and thus could be answered by anyone—but on which he still has more of a right to express an opinion than others.14

This way, the columnists of the Spanish democracy whom Winter discusses would become an odd mix of those artists and intellectuals who were asked, as Ferlosio said, to write ‘whatever occurs to them’ (from their ‘premeditatedly subjective or personal perspective’) and the classic figure

14 Bauman explains that in the intellectual’s transition from modern ‘legislator’ to postmodern ‘interpreter,’ he retains part of his privileged authority, even if he no longer tries to make his discourse universal: ‘While the post-modern strategy entails the abandonment of the universalistic ambitions of the intellectuals’ own tradition, it does not abandon the universalistic ambitions of the intellectuals towards their own tradition; here, they retain their meta-professional authority, legislating about the procedural rules which allow them to arbitrate controversies of opinion and make statements intended to be binding’ (1987, 5).
of the Philosopher as described by de Certeau, who is legitimized precisely by going beyond the technical, specialized knowledges that make up the nucleus of technoscientific modernity.

Thus, erasing her specific position in any community, speaking from the authority of one whose ‘personal’ achievements (aesthetic, cultural, intellectual) are supposedly due only to herself, the archetypical individual of the Spanish world of institutional, celebrity culture could produce copious critiques of the political and economic powers. But it seems to me that these critiques were in some sense stillborn.

2.4.3. Structural deactivation of intellectual critique in the CT
As noted earlier, it isn’t as easy as one might think to find public intellectual demonstrations that defend explicitly the great milestones of the CT. Rather, the kind of participation that predominates is critical, at least in part. It is also more ‘subjective’ and ‘personal’ the greater prestige of the author in that cultural field. And, of course, it is always very discreet regarding the collective processes which generated that prestige, and therefore, regarding the criterion of the validity of what he expresses.

Paradigmatic of this is a column by the journalist and writer Juan Cueto (1985) published in El País the day after Spain entered the EEC, which was one of those ‘great milestones’ of the CT: ‘Just one detail worries me after yesterday’s signing of the Treaty: the European demand for specialization. Everything else can be taken care of, from the sweaty cultivation of unirrigated farmland and the national bad temper to the snooty smoke of our protected red-brick chimneys.’ From the beginning, the columnist’s ‘I’ is presented as the source of the discourse, with no need to explain the source of ‘whatever occurs to him’—thus running the risk that it becomes a mere ‘whim.’ But what is interesting about this article is that in it, form and foundation coincide, because what Cueto’s whimsical word defends is precisely a defense of the ‘specialization in everything.’ Indeed, once those ‘little problems’ of agriculture and industry were ‘solved’ (which was done, as we know, through subsidies granted for not planting and intense modernizing), Spain could join Europe and, in the face of excessive technicalities, contribute her so-called ‘wisdom of the ages’:

In the tower of free-trade reason they want us specialized, and that’s why they tempt us with all kinds of materialist happiness to pull us from the old historical mistake. For now, that aspiration is non-negotiable. We know that 90% of everything here is unspecialized, and even unrefined. But in exactly that arcane resistance to the discipline of the specific lies our wisdom of the ages. ... We will contribute to
Europe our famous specialization in everything, and in the Whole, to counteract so much abstraction of the specific.

Despite the apparent contradiction, the complementarity of this type of discourse with that of technoscientific modernity is made clear in that ‘just one detail worries me ...’ Opening a window of critique and ‘subjectivity’ on the empire of the technical surely constitutes ‘just one detail’ when so many other technocratic experts—here supporters of free trade—agree not to question the narrative of necessary political and economic ‘modernization’ that legitimized the pacts for the transition to a parliamentary monarchy within a globalized capitalist framework. The rest is, essentially, ‘details.’

As early as 1977, Fernando Savater, one of the most celebrated intellectuals of Spanish democracy, had already exemplified in his analysis of the transition that mix of apparent lack of enthusiasm and structural acceptance that has seemed to characterize the ‘opinion makers’ and columnists since the beginning of the ‘democratic’ era:

Now at last we are included in the game of Europe, of the West. But every once in a while, one remembers with longing the covert clarity of that indistinct hatred for the dictatorship and, with the proliferation of new political definitions and explanations, one mutters glumly into one’s beard that famous saying of the small-town mayor: ‘How can things be so bad that I don’t even know if I’m on our side!’ I don’t doubt that this ‘defusing of national coexistence’—the saying, one would suppose, is from a liberal commentator of the day—is, generally speaking, the best that could happen to this country, but those of us who don’t understand politics, the few of us that are left, now find ourselves, even with so much light, more in the dark than before. (Gracia García and Ródenas de Moya 2009)

I understand that the danger whenever one talks about the transition is, indeed, the same one that Savater tacitly acknowledges in this text when he asserts the unquestionability of that ‘defusing of national coexistence’: that of minimizing the threats of violent political conflict that were still latent at that time. But it seems unnecessary for my argument to evaluate that danger. Never mind whether there was a little or a lot of precaution or whether the level of criticism of one or the other was greater or lesser. I believe we have the right to ask what is the place of the intellectual who, like Savater, accepts the model of columnism in particular, and that of the ‘depoliticized’ capitalist liberal modernizing paradigm in general. It is more a structural than a personal problem; it doesn’t actually matter for my argument who may have done what, or whether or not they did it. Rather, what matters is
which cultural repertoires were hegemonic and which remained arrested possibilities.

In this sense, I repeat that what interests me is the figure of the intellectual who, although he says he speaks as one of ‘the people,’ does so from a space that can only be reached through the prestige obtained from supposedly individual activities—according to the depoliticized aesthetic individualism predominating in the cultural panorama of the post-dictatorship, and by which the ‘intellectual’ was granted a ‘letter of authenticity.’ I am interested in that intellectual who speaks as one of ‘the people’ without revealing the relationships of interdependency with them that have made it possible for him to be able to say what he says. This invisibility permits things like using the names of these intellectuals, rather than the culture of the ‘provincial’ people, to represent Spain. For instance, upon Spain’s entrance into the EEC, *El País* began to publish examples of the excellent cultural products that Spain exports to the world despite its inevitable ‘backwardness’ in its opinion section. In these, the names of Fernando Savater and other ‘exceptional individuals’ were ‘taken out for a walk’ (to use Ferlosio’s expression):

It’s true that Spain still has to make up a lot of lost time, and has a lot to learn about Europe, from which it was cut off for so many years. But if you’ve spent almost 20 years away from Spain, as I have, and been around the globe more than 15 times, maybe you will better understand why, other than the provincialism of some Spaniards who can be heard saying on the buses in Rome, ‘Well, I don’t see anything for Ciudad Real to be jealous of in this city,’ I can’t help but recognize that Spain has a lot to export besides oranges and wine. What is true is that Spain, in today’s world, is proud of its culture. Gades is applauded, and Savater and Vázquez Montalbán is read here in Italy, and people line up to see one of Saura’s films, and our orchards are insignificant. (Arias 1985)

In conclusion, it seems that at best, the cultural world that had been ‘disactivated’ during the CT produces interesting critiques of political and economic power from people such as Mariás, Cueto, or Savater. But they pay a high price for their structural complicity in that same power, because they have effectively ‘deactivated’ the necessarily relational, communitary, and interdependent aspect of every cultural production (in part thanks to their identification with the figure of the ‘columnist’). Perhaps they confuse the hoped-for ‘de-emphasizing of national coexistence’ that Savater discusses with an acritical acceptance of liberal, capitalist, individualist modernity
as the only frame for reality (something none of the other ‘offspring’ of aesthetic modernity—avant-garde, counterculture, civic—had done).

And at worst, the culture of the CT would be reduced to a sometimes grotesque decoration, ridiculously ‘transgressive’ and swollen with empty prestige, that serves to reinforce the austere authority of the technocratic experts, simply for being such a striking contrast to it. I offer a classic example that allows us to explore interesting continuities with Francoism.

In that historic act of joining the EEC, someone decided that it would be a very good idea to add a little art to the occasion, and commissioned Salvador Dalí to do a personal interpretation on the topic of the ‘Rape of Europe.’ And so, as explained in *El País*, ‘all the signers of the accord and the protocols for Spain’s entry into the EEC, will receive, after signing their names at the ceremony to be held tonight, a violet-colored file folder containing 25 pages, with Dalí’s signature thermo-engraved in gold on the cover’ (García Santa Cecilia 1985).

Doubtless this fact would have delighted Ferlosio. For his part, Dalí himself took advantage of the opportunity to declare, in a kind of megalomaniacal contribution to the never-ending motif of ‘Spain is different,’ ‘The only one—the only one!—who understood that myth was Salvador Dalí. The bull, which is Spain, did not rape Europe; it took her with all its spirit, with all its courage, and it keeps her where she is. Europe owes her entire being to Spain.’

2.4.4. Artist and intellectual in the image domain

The technoscientific and political experts have directed and executed the program of implanting neoliberalism in the Spanish state for the last three long decades. But it is worth asking whether they could have done it without the army of public intellectuals and artists who have embodied the model of modernity and pro-Europeanism that has served as a justification for this transformation.

Marías observes in his article ‘No pareces español’ (1990) that television and the other mass media have become ‘the most reliable reflection that citizens have of themselves, much more so than “reality”.’ If Spain’s ‘poor image’ is too well kept, he adds, the fault belongs to the leaders who decide what gets shown on television. In the image era, the pedagogical mission of teaching the masses (in this case, regarding how they should represent themselves) normally claimed by the liberal elites must be shared with political and media power. But the compensation for the intellectuals is that they can now blame that media power for ‘backwardness,’ for promoting a poor image.

The entire population might also share part of the responsibility.
Nevertheless, Marías asserts, magnanimously offering up a kind of postmodern version of the elitist meta-story of Spanish modernity:

this [entire population] can’t be blamed too much, since fortunately it is always characterized by its anarchy, its contradictions, and its limited vision of the future. But the professionals of the future, that is, the politicians, are guilty of cowardice, negligence, and cynicism at the moment of directing, configuring, and manipulating the image of Spain in the present. (1990, 37)

What seems a diatribe against politicians and an excuse for ‘el hombre vulgar,’ as Marías likes to say, can only run the risk of falling into extreme paternalism, if not outright disdain, for the multitudes. Marías gleefully takes up the peoples’ supposed ‘anarchy’ and ‘lack of vision for the future,’ but in other cases the tone of the pro-European intellectual, above all the one who isn’t willing to so easily accept the fact that image is more important than reality, takes on darker tones, close to those of the illustrious and foundational precedent of *La rebelión de las masas*.

This is the case of the quasi-Hobbesian lament of Antonio Muñoz Molina in *Todo lo que era sólido* (2013), his recent book on the current Spanish crisis, a lament in which he seems to come to the conclusion not only that Spaniards seem to be or act like ‘delinquents,’ in Marías’s words, but are thus by nature:

In thirty-odd years of democracy and after almost 40 of dictatorship, there has been no democratic pedagogy. Democracy must be taught, because it isn’t natural, because it goes against the deeply-rooted inclinations of human beings. What is natural is not equality, but the domination of the strong over the weak. ... Barbarity is more natural than civilization, the scream or the punch and not the persuasive argument, immediate gratification and not long-term effort. ... Ignorance is natural: there is no learning that does not require effort and that does not take time to bear fruit. (103)

The other side of the ideology of pro-European, modernizing normality is the scorn for ‘backwardness,’ for the *paleto*, the lack of ‘culture’ that is occasionally seen, by desperate metaphysical extension, as a natural characteristic of human beings. In this sense, perhaps the public intellectuals of ‘Spanish democracy’ contribute significantly to the ‘standardization’ of society by disseminating and embodying an aspiration for modernity and progress. But, more significantly still, they disseminate and embody the idea that only a certain few are prepared to guide the masses towards that
modernity, because in general the masses are incapable of thinking and of improving their lives for themselves.

In any case, it seems to me that while the human ability for collective self-representation is being appropriated by the mass media, the importance of the pedagogical role of intellectuals and artists is growing, since they are the ones who will be in a more favorable position in the media environment. While experts and politicians undoubtedly have considerable visibility and authority in that media ‘reality,’ their discourse is dull, limited, and excessively specialized. This is in contrast to the humanistic depth, the aesthetic development, and the proximity to the daily worries of the ‘common people’ that intellectuals and artists include in their repertoire, especially those who have adapted better to the tyranny of the ‘image,’ who give more ground to so-called ‘entertainment.’

In these media versions of the intellectual and the artist, the values of modernity, progress, and Europization are often reduced to an even greater simplification, which consists of nothing more than ‘international impact.’ During Francoism, the regime’s constant aspiration to be legitimized by demonstrating the exportability ‘abroad’ of Spanish culture, art, and sports was already well known (Jorge Luis Marzo (2010) has researched this in detail with respect to art). But later, the years of democratic ‘standardization’ would take this ambition even further, with the leitmotif of the famous ‘incorporation into Europe,’ which is often announced as an incorporation into the group of ‘most advanced countries.’

2.4.5. Culture as ’Brand Spain’

Now we are approaching the present, in 2009 now, and the narrative about Spain being the ‘eighth world power’ is still very fresh. In a book that incidentally hopes to offer a critique on the spectacularization and commercialization of culture, the previously cited Más es más, we find a brief assessment of the cultural value of Spain in these classic terms. Using metaphorical language that reveals a conception of culture as a matter of individual competitive exchanges, the authors assert:

Spanish letters have very seldom enjoyed the credit they have today in other European countries. ... The same thing is happening in other cultural spheres, which doesn’t change an obviously deficient trade balance. But it does partially correct the tendency, which is what happens with the exportation of values (including of consumption) that could be painters and sculptors (Eduardo Chillida, Miquel Barceló), architects (Santiago Calatrava, Rafael Moneo), actors (Antonio Banderas, Javier Bardem, or Penélope Cruz), movie directors (Pedro
Finally converted into a product ready for export, ‘culture’ will be difficult to distinguish from consumption, and so the arts, sports, design, and entertainment form an amalgam in which the only important thing is the ability to impress, or at least sell to, other countries. The world of the culture-product (‘the Spain brand’) thus inherits, like mass media, a version adapted to the new times of the program of intellectual elites who aspired to Europeanization, modernization, and international incorporation. The elitist meta-narrative of modernity behind it all doesn’t disappear, it is merely transformed.

Even in its most crudely consumerist, mass-market manifestations, such as the sporting victories attributed to ‘Spain,’ that desire for incorporation and international recognition, that ‘negative balance’ of modernity the country must exorcise however it can, reappears. Many of us remember, as an iconic representation of the years of the ‘economic bubble,’ the image of those great postmodern mausoleums of culture, left half-built or now falling down, which the real estate-political-construction complex proliferated throughout Spain during its years of speculative frenzy. It is well known that the dizzying increase in the price of housing created a ‘wealth effect’ for the 87% of Spaniards who became homeowners. Something similar happened due to the magnification of Calatrava’s ‘cultural success’ in architecture, or the success of others like Almodóvar in movies or Barceló in painting. Such magnification produced an analogous kind of ‘culture effect’ whose true value, beyond intensifying the ‘manic’ anxiety of modernity discussed by Ángel Loureiro, is questionable.

It might even be worth reading the increasingly buoyant universe of the tabloids as a kind of negative catharsis in which free rein is given to all the ‘backwardness,’ ‘folklorism,’ and ‘delinquency’ that the elitist modern paradigm constructs as a collective phantom to serve as the opposite of its ideal. Probably a large part of the humor that appears in the mass media during the years of democracy is built upon similar foundations of obsession with the paletos, backwardness, and folklorism, although these are questions that I won’t be able to examine directly here.

The commercialization of culture and the spectacularization of big media have come very far during the years of Spanish neoliberalism. I would like to point out, however, that despite this, the model of the classic intellectual, with his pedagogical legitimacy and his aura of aesthetic exceptionality, is far from gone. As Labanyi (2013) said, with the coming of democracy to Spain,
literature went from being an elitist practice managed by ‘well-intentioned bureaucrats’ like the editor Carlos Barral to a panorama commercialized and dominated by the big publishing groups and cultural supplements in the mass media, which clearly implied a certain ‘departure of literature from the ghetto of intellectuality’ (147). But Labanyi and Graham also indicated that, while it is true that this commercialization increases access to the ‘high culture’ distributed commercially by the same mass media, that doesn’t mean everyone can understand and enjoy it equally. Perhaps it should be added that those who do understand and enjoy it also can’t help but receive with that culture a model of valuation (‘high culture’) that tends to assume the exceptionality of the individual author, relegating the majority of people to simple passive access.

A good example of the survival of this type of cultural exceptionality attributed to authors, and to their ability to keep legitimizing the political discourse of public intellectuals, would perhaps be the emergence of new figures who have acquired important public visibility, years after the ‘hard core’ of the intellectualism associated with democratic ‘normalization’ was forged, but who continue to perform a similar function of legitimation. I am thinking, for example, of the figure of Javier Cercas. The mass media didn’t ‘discover’ him until 2001, but he then became a key voice in opinion columnism in the same newspaper, El País, that, as we saw with Manuel Vicent, represented itself as heir to the tradition of ‘enlightened minorities’ which supposedly brought Spain into ‘modernity.’

Cercas criticizes various powerful institutions and key aspects of the workings of the neoliberal system, such as the submission of the state to commercial speculation or the weakening of institutional democracy. But as with Marías and the PSOE government, these criticisms are by no means incompatible with his ascription, conscious or not, to that tradition of cultural elites who have become an essential tool—as defenders and symbolic bearers of the ideal of European modernity—for the legitimation of the same neoliberal system they criticize.

15 The commercialization of written culture is inscribed within the much broader context of the turn towards informational or cognitive capitalism in the final decades of the twentieth century. This has been analyzed by theorists of the Italian post-workerism tradition related to the journal Multitudes, like Negri and Hardt, Blondeau and Lazzarato, and Franco Berardi (‘Bifo’). These authors have called attention to the fact that the great innovation of post-industrial capitalism has been the potentiation of the ‘immaterial goods’ sector (knowledge, relationships, emotions, communication, subjectivity, etc.). I touched on some of these developments relative to Spain in my article ‘La imaginación sostenible: culturas y crisis económica en la España actual’ (2012).
Since the crisis began in 2008, the visibility of this contradiction has increased, as the failures of the political, cultural, and economic spheres—built with the help of these intellectuals inheriting the modernizing project—have become more evident. But the same thing hasn't happened by any means with the connection between their critical ability and the legitimacy of the social order—an order which, despite themselves, these intellectuals cannot help but support as long as they continue to occupy the hierarchical position that has historically defined their work.