

Radiografía de lo *cutre*: políticas y estéticas de una España neocostumbrista

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Introduction

This project analyses the cultural war in a post-dictatorial Spain, where questions regarding the identity of class, race, gender, and sexuality were the main concern for the cultural elite. The article aims to study the social impact of the liaison between the working class and popular culture, often depicted in the social, aesthetic, and moral construct of "lo cutre." The conception of cutre —which defines a subject/object/space/idea related to "bad taste," tawdry, cheap, and vulgar conduct— has led to multiple misinterpretations and stereotypes of the Spanish working class after the dictatorship. Therefore, this research opens the door to new debates about how class and gender grapple with contemporary representations of art and culture.

Methodology

Through A. Appadurai's "ersatz nostalgia" (1996) and A. Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory (2004), I argue that subjects need a "prosthesis" (nostalgic elements and its depictions) to assimilate memories of a past that they did not experience. Along with Susan Sontag's reflections in *Notes on Camp* (1964), who defines camp as an artistic excess that results in a comic and ironic perspective of life (1), I explore how nostalgia ironizes certain customs and elements that determine the construction of "lo cutre." This research demonstrates how memory is constructed intergenerationally by examining several material and space theories. With my focus on stigma and identity crisis, the project evaluates the intersection of historical, individual and collective memories.

Content and Findings



The corpus of material analyzed consists of 18th, 19th, and 20th-century texts, such as *Traducción de los Cuatro Libros Sapienciales de la Sagrada Escritura, en que se enseña por el Espíritu Santo* (Ángel Sánchez, 1785), Emilia Pardo Bazán's short stories "Las Cutres" (1910) y "La Tribuna" (1883), Leonardo Fernández de Moratín's *Epistolario* (1825) and Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *La corte de los milagros* (1927). On the other hand, the analysis also comprises visual and musical material: the mockumentary *Paquita Salas* (2016-2019), tv shows such as *Aquí no hay quien viva* (2003-2006) or the biopic *Veneno* (2020), and musical performances by Rosalía, C. Tangana, and Camela. These cultural representations share a pattern of repetition, which displays a recently constructed nostalgia: "lo cutre" is reproduced as a consequence of stigma inheritance and class consciousness. On the other hand, contemporary visual materials (linked to the early literature and arts) romanticize the Spanish working class. Elements and behaviors labeled as "cutre" because of their social class are no longer stigmatized but rather idolized.

Thanks to a process I name "cutrificación," which involves a transformation via imaginary/ersatz nostalgia and prosthetic memory, I discovered that irony and parody are in charge of developing new meanings for the notion of "bad taste" in contemporary Spain. These findings are essential to conceive Spanish working-class culture as one that paradoxically has been stigmatized and commodified. Cutre traits have been notably commercialized since 2015 with the social media boom. For instance, Twitter and Instagram promulgated new definitions of "lo cutre" that derived from class appropriation and reformulations of national customs.

Conclusion

"Lo cutre" differs from camp and kitsch for its direct link to the working class, and it can be materialized in various ways (from morality and time to space and materiality). Thus, contemporary cultural depictions (such as the ones in *Paquita Salas*) suggest a critique that presents "lo cutre" as the *zeitgeist* ("spirit of the age," a Hegelian notion). However, this does not arise from "lo cutre's" cultural connotation, but from its (potential) economic and social transformation. Amongst these concerns, I emphasize the following findings: the perpetual commodification of social class —and post-Francoism materials and objects—, identity crisis, post-transition customs that stem from neoliberalism, and the reformulation of the concept of time and space by technological trends.

