

**From Provinces to National Television:  
Celebrity Culture and Collective Recognition in the New Spain**

Pablo Castagno

Spain's economy today is strong, with a dynamic of progress that opens great horizons to wider strata of its population.

King Don Juan Carlos I de Borbón,  
Madrid, Christmas 2000

The bourgeoisie has always had its ways of making a spectacle out of the exploitation of labor and culture. When I moved to Spain in 2000, I was shocked by the ways in which the Spanish bourgeoisie was persuading Spaniards to move forward with what *The Economist* called a "new Spain."<sup>1</sup> Listening to the stories of my Ourense roommates about their need to "make the grade," their nostalgia for Galicia, and their new *guay* forms of consumption, I was struck by the way the bourgeoisie and its various institutions were not only disciplining labor but also reorganizing sociocultural relations within the national space in ways that were consonant with its dream of a New Spain, a modern nation-state successfully located within the circuits of world capitalism, "global culture," and state power.

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My goal in this essay is to explain a phenomenon that allows the Spanish bourgeoisie to legitimate its control of the working class: the use of spectacle and fame as a mechanism of cultural regulation by the Madrid-based television industry. In the first section, I discuss discourses concerning the spectacle that have emerged in the media since the appearance of new private television channels in the early 1990s, and I relate the expansion of those discourses to material shifts in the Spanish social structure. In the second and third sections, I narrow the analysis to the practices of mediation in reality television.<sup>2</sup> I explain how the production of the spectacle carried out by the reality television industry is based on the exploitation of labor and culture from the different regions of Spain. Finally, I describe how fame is utilized as a mechanism of cultural regulation and collective recognition that allows the bourgeoisie to sustain its discourse of a New Spain replete with freedom, prosperity, and welfare for all Spaniards.

#### **Television in Contemporary Spain: Between Democracy at the Multinational Level and a Culture of the Spectacle Anchored in Madrid**

During the Franco dictatorship (1939–75), which constituted a mix of nationalist-Catholic authoritarianism and state-controlled capitalist modernization, the Spanish media system was controlled by the state. The state broadcast corporation, Radio Television Española (RTVE), had two national television networks, a centralized national radio network, and a network of locally and regionally oriented radio stations. The television network, Television Española (TVE), had two channels and no competitors. According to Richard Maxwell, TVE “was highly centralized and tightly controlled by the dictatorship, more so than any other medium,” intended to function as a main institution of ideological persuasion for the regime.<sup>3</sup> With the end of the dictatorship, the Spanish media system changed entirely. Spanish television passed from absolute state control to a regulated and competitive system of national and regional networks comprised of private and public companies.

From 1982 to 1990, the government approved the creation of eleven autonomous broadcast organizations. These organizations created a network of public broadcasters, the Federation of Autonomous Radio and Television Organizations (FORTA), to rival RTVE.<sup>4</sup> As Maxwell observes, this reform “was meant to cause controlled denationalization of television by creating channels that responded to the plurality of cultures, languages, and communities within the Spanish territory, a multinationalism suppressed since the end of the civil war.”<sup>5</sup> But in addition to these reforms, the government gave television licenses to three new private television channels in 1989; the media companies responsible for these channels became the main players in

the national system: Telecinco (controlled by Italian tycoon Silvio Berlusconi), Antena 3 (controlled then by Spanish newspapers groups), and Canal Plus (a cable channel controlled by Prisa and Canal Plus France).

By 1991, Telecinco and Antena 3 controlled a substantial part of the television market: TVE stations registered 55.4 percent of market share, Telecinco registered 17 percent, and Antena 3 registered 10.8 percent. FORTA companies received 15.4 percent.<sup>6</sup> Since then, these trends have continued: TVE went on to receive 21 percent of the market share, while Telecinco and Antena 3 together received 38 percent. From 2004 to the present Telecinco became the most viewed television station and Antena 3 came in second. Satellite television, cable, and new digital television networks (Canal Cuatro, La Sexta) all went on to receive around 24 percent of national audiences by 2007.<sup>7</sup>

Private television stations became the central agents in the formation of a culture of the spectacle. As corporate agents in search of market profits, these television stations needed to create audiences in the most effective and cheapest way. Indeed, they changed the dominant discursive framework to gain a foothold in the television system. Antena 3 and Telecinco appealed to the market discourses of spectacle, entertainment, and popularity to persuade Spaniards to consume cultural commodities. Of the two television stations, Telecinco brought about the most decisive change in production and so I will focus my analysis there. An early Telecinco advertisement in 1990, aired on TVE1, interpellated Spaniards in the following way.

It is in your TV remote control. Turn on Telecinco if you want to experience television differently. Turn on a spectacular, entertaining, joyful, and alluring television that everybody likes because it is a complete channel. Turn on Telecinco: the spectacle in your home.

Telecinco called on Spaniards to join the world of the spectacle and promised to bring that world into their homes. Telecinco stressed that it was “friendly television” and that in game shows like *VIP* (1990) “ordinary people” were going to “play with popular stars.”<sup>8</sup> “Together at Last” was Telecinco’s slogan for its opening gala in 1990. The television station appealed to “ordinary people,” to their languages, tastes, and bodies. It constantly reinforced the proximity between the network and the people, identifying Spaniards as “the audience” or “the public.” According to Maja, a fifty-one-year-old state administrative worker, “Telecinco was much less stiff than TVE” since its inception.<sup>9</sup> In Telecinco contests like *VIP*, *Entre platos anda el juego* (1991), and *La ruleta de la fortuna* (1993), “ordinary people” played with celebrities and television hosts. Telecinco’s incorpora-

tion of people's tastes and of "ordinary" participants into television programs became the spectacle itself. Moreover, according to Kiko, a communications student,

Telecinco changed Spanish TV. It introduced *Tutti Frutti*, popular humorists, the Italian style, beautiful girls. In the show *Las noches de tal y tal*, a television host responded to questions about society while lounging in a jacuzzi.<sup>10</sup>

*Las noches de tal y tal: Gil Superstar* was conducted by Jesús Gil y Gil, the mayor of Marbella and president of the popular football club Atlético de Madrid. Accompanied by *telenovela* celebrity Jeannette Rodríguez as well as the Chin-Chin girls,<sup>11</sup> Gil interviewed stars and answered general questions posed by the public from the jacuzzi in his home. Like a Spanish Berlusconi, Gil represented what people supposedly wanted to become in life; and Telecinco tried to associate the world of celebrity culture with "the world of businessmen and politicians."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, with these shows and new television magazines,<sup>13</sup> Telecinco introduced the values sacred to consumption in a burgeoning market economy, including success, money, youth, beauty, and fame. These values became the myths of the New Spain when the economy boomed from 1995 to 2007 after the slump of the early 1990s.

As Hugh O'Donnell has observed, Telecinco was "the most 'down-market' of Spain's new commercial channels, ... though it made considerable efforts to present itself as the preferred channel of the new middle classes."<sup>14</sup> In my view, O'Donnell's observation in fact reveals not a change in the social sector the channel was targeting but rather the cultural logic instrumentalized by Telecinco: its appeal stemmed from the social mobility it promised in the shows and in catchy slogans like "ordinary people will play with popular stars." First, Telecinco portrayed new forms of social distinction and taste embodied in the figure of celebrities, television hosts, Hollywood films, and the aesthetic dynamism of the channel. Second, in Telecinco's lottery contests, television hosts would interpellate the audience and participants in the following way: "Which celebrity would Spanish girls like to be?" "Maria participated in a beauty contest," or "Can you believe it? He doesn't want to win the money and return home, he wants to stay on television!"

Legitimizing a new taste for the spectacle as a marker of social distinction that it had a hand in creating, Telecinco, in turn, legitimized its monopoly on the cultural production of the spectacle. Telecinco hosts interviewed famous celebrities, *los famosos*, and engaged ordinary people in games and talk shows. Telecinco, as Maja indicated, was a "modern

channel." Its shows and games were the mechanisms through which it could plug non-ownership classes into the new dreams of the wealth and glamour of New Spain. In turn, Telecinco's mobilization of the popular belief in social mobility was increasingly credible because it was interlaced with shifts in the material existence of the working-class and popular cultures, that is, with a change in the conditions of the reception of television discourse.<sup>15</sup>

Transformations in the condition of various social classes were produced by capitalist reforms introduced by the "socialist" government of Felipe González (1982-1996) and especially by the new forms of capitalist growth in the mid-1990s, which changed the structure of social classes in economic, cultural, and political terms. Gonzalez's policies not only reorganized the structure of capitalist production — for example, through the privatization of state companies and industrial restructuring — but also created labor conditions consonant with Spanish capitalism's need to increase relative and absolute labor exploitation. As a result of the macroeconomic attack on labor with the currency devaluations between 1991 and 1993 and in 1995, the new labor laws of temporary employment,<sup>16</sup> the requirement that trade unions collaborate to increase labor productivity, and the new flows of capital that entered the economy with the consolidation of the European Monetary Union, the Spanish economy boomed. With the return of growth, the stratum of marginal social sectors, produced by the overall capitalist restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s, was reduced, while the GDP grew annually an average of 3.7 percent between 1995 and 2007.<sup>17</sup>

Unemployment decreased from 24 percent in 1995 to 8.2 percent in 2007;<sup>18</sup> these new jobs were created in the construction and service industries. The service industry went from employing 31 percent of the workforce in 1960 to employing 62 percent of the workforce by the end of the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> The new jobs were based on temporary contracts, which represented 32.5 percent of employment in Spain, and 53 percent of youth employment.<sup>20</sup> With the growth of the economy and the expansion of credit, new means of consumption were socialized. For example, during the first half of the new economic cycle, the number of housing mortgages rose from 412,000 in 1996 to 763,000 in 2003,<sup>21</sup> car sales rose from 834,000 units in 1995 to the record of 1.43 million in 2001 (75 percent on credit),<sup>22</sup> home appliance sales rose 30 percent between 1996 and 2000, color TV set sales rose 54 percent, and cellular phone sales rose 2,432 percent between 1995 and 1999.<sup>23</sup> These trends continued until the slowdown of late 2007.<sup>24</sup> Cell phones, new cars, and new apartments had become symbols of social identity and integration into New Spain.

New social aspirations, discourses, and forms of exploitation impacted

the working class (including the large stratum of self-employed service owners). On one hand, working-class consumption intensified and the working class was subjected to the dominant class's view that Spain had been transformed into a middle-class country.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the working class was required to raise its productivity and was disciplined through the expansion of temporary contracts as well as through the establishment of low minimum wages.<sup>26</sup> In turn, the formerly small middle class tended to dissolve as its "winning" factions intertwined with a reduced Spanish bourgeoisie (including the provincial landlord classes), the *pijos* as they are called in everyday life, and its lower strata intertwined with the working classes.

The institutions at the center of Spanish society (the Spanish Crown, the main political parties, the agents of capital, state institutions, the media) interpellated Spaniards into a New Spain portrayed as a nation of freedom, prosperity, and social progress that was economically and culturally "modernizing." For Spanish dominant institutions, New Spain is a democratic nation without class divisions. It is a nation in which people work hard for a happiness that is based on consumption and family life. It is also a plural Spain in which regional differences are integrated into a form of diversity regulated by Madrid. But, above all, New Spain is like a "big family," formed by simple and straightforward citizens, like every "neighbor," "brother," "husband," or "daughter." In this sense, the principal cultural icons of New Spain have been the successful sportsmen that represent the nation in global competitions, like Rafa Nadal or Pau Gasol, who are similar to every Spaniard but who are also superstars.<sup>27</sup>

On the ground, the core of the new society is made up of a working-class generation of *mileuristas* (58 percent of the workforce):<sup>28</sup> workers earning less than €1,100 per month and employed primarily in the service sectors.<sup>29</sup> *Mileuristas* are constrained by mortgage indebtedness; they have to work hard to validate their educational, labor, and cultural qualifications (e.g., modernize their lifestyle, learn English) and to be part of the Spanish dream, consuming more media and leisure commodities than have previous generations.<sup>30</sup> This entire process created the necessary conditions for the reception of reality TV discourse in the new century.

### From Towns to the National Television Stage: Reality TV, the Appropriation of Culture, and the Circulation of Spanish Celebrities

What is characteristic of myth? To transform a meaning into form. In other words, myth is always a language-robbery.

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957)<sup>31</sup>

Despite private television's early success, it took a while for it to obtain substantial profits. It was only after the Spanish economy started a new cycle of growth that Telecinco began to show better fiscal numbers.<sup>32</sup> Telecinco's revenues and profits rose dramatically with the broadcasting of reality television. In 2000, the reality television show *Big Brother* was aired on Telecinco and net profits rose 40 percent that year. At the time, Telecinco's president attributed the large profit margins to "cost efficiencies, a more popular demo and a growth in ads."<sup>33</sup> With the broadcasting of reality television, Telecinco became one of the most profitable European TV stations. The first season of *Big Brother* had a market share of 53.4 percent (reaching around 10 million people out of a total population of 44.7 million), but it peaked at 70 percent during the central moments of the show.<sup>34</sup> *Big Brother* is a form of cultural production filled with "conflicts, tensions, alliances, hate, love, and emotions"<sup>35</sup> that arise from the relationships among fifteen "ordinary participants" who are locked in a house for one hundred days and whose lives are constantly recorded by cameras.

While countless scholars have attributed the emergence of reality television to market competition,<sup>36</sup> for which the reduction of "labor costs" and the increased sale of cheaper commodities is an obligation, this explains the factor that had motivated the change but it does not describe the economic problem that this change in capitalist structures sought to resolve. The importance of reality television is that it allows the industry to regulate the growth of constant capital (fixed capital) in relation to variable capital (living labor), which is a consequence of firms' need to introduce cost-reducing innovations to survive in the market.<sup>37</sup> As Karl Marx demonstrated, this is the key factor behind the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: as the organic composition of capital grows (i.e., more technology is used in production), less living labor is exploited per commodity and mass of commodities, so in relative terms profits tend to fall.<sup>38</sup> Surplus value and profits, in Marx's account, are a direct result of the exploitation of human labor. Reality television fundamentally counteracts the tendency of the rate of profit to fall because it optimizes the use of constant capital (through technological

change),<sup>39</sup> intensifies the exploitation of labor, both in relative and absolute terms,<sup>40</sup> reduces wages, and creates new associations of production. In short, for the media industry, *Big Brother* and reality television in general appeared as an ideal capitalist process of production because it could combine a technological revolution with a substantial amount of cheap living-labor exploitation.<sup>41</sup>

In reality television, successive groups of media workers, called “participants” (and the corresponding TV crews),<sup>42</sup> produce surplus sentiment value twenty-four hours a day (since cameras and microphones constantly record them) for three months without any compensation thereafter. Participants renounce any legal action against the company for physical or moral damage. The production company holds all property rights, meaning that contestants must accept that the recorded material, including private information, can be exploited in any form. The contestants are only allowed to appear in the press if they are authorized, and for eighteen months thereafter they cannot sign contracts without the express permission of the corporation.<sup>43</sup> Participants increase their relative production of surplus sentiment value when they have to perform certain tasks, behave in specific situations arranged by the production team, communicate with the television host, or nominate two housemates for “eviction,” leaving the public to decide which “contestants” deserve to remain in the house. Next, the public votes by placing telephone calls, from which Telecinco and the television production company<sup>44</sup> make a good deal of money, in addition to the revenue generated by advertisements, in exchange for the “popularity” generated by the participants-contestants.

This is the basic economic mechanism of reality television<sup>45</sup> and the regulatory templates against which there are ongoing labor demands worldwide from former participants and production assistants, who feel exploited.<sup>46</sup> As a participant in an online forum on Spanish reality television put it, “[T]he machine just uses and discards you; its only goal is to feed the beast.”<sup>47</sup> However, the exploitation of culture in reality television is equally dramatic. Understanding this form of exploitation is fundamental to our understanding of the cultural meaning of reality shows.

To elaborate my argument on the connection between economic exploitation and cultural appropriation I will first discuss a comment made by Annette Hill and Gareth Palmer about the worldwide phenomenon *Big Brother*. According to the authors, “Cultural commentators miss a great deal when they seek to speak for ‘the people’ when it is clear from the contestants, press profiles, and audience research that all those taking part understood this to be an evolving competition.”<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to what Hill and Palmer claim, I argue that in order to understand the cultural meaning of *Big Brother* we must first look into the

*relationship* between both dimensions of the phenomenon Hill and Palmer mention: the relationship between the popular discourse — of, in, and around the show — and the conditions of production. The necessity of this step is observed by Mark Andrejevic, who, in the conclusion of his study, *Reality TV*, claims “that a critique of the notion of participation becomes central” for social theory, by John Corner, who calls for a dialogue between “popular culture perspectives” and “political economy accounts,” and by Mike Wayne, who argues that is vital to analyze the mediations between the capitalist mode of production, the media institutional formations, and the “cultural forms” elaborated.<sup>49</sup> From my position, this process of mediation within the social space includes the appropriation and transformation of cultural materials in the elaboration of commodities as well as practices of transaction, negotiation, and mediated contestation among various social agents (e.g., media managers, cultural intermediaries, citizens).

In fact, a historical perspective on reality television demonstrates that the phenomenon is not as new as we might think it is. The media has always engaged us in live national events, such as royal weddings, and has historically taken cultural forms from social life, transforming them into symbolic goods to be recognized by the public as popular products.<sup>50</sup> Regulating those mediations not only allows the media to claim authority as the symbolic center of society but also allows media elites to come together with dominant classes in the formation of political cultures. With reality television, those processes of mediation have been far more rationalized. We are sold not just melodramas and football culture but supposedly “the real” and “authenticity” as such. The process is part of a general reorganization of contemporary capitalism: to extract raw materials from labor, culture, and nature more directly and quickly.<sup>51</sup> In the media, this process is veiled under notions like “surveillance.”<sup>52</sup> However, in order to understand the processes of mediation, why should we take the categories provided by the culture industry and used to entertain us as categories of research practice? Why do no other programs, with the exception of football, have as many viewers as reality television shows such as *Big Brother* or *Fame Academy*?

This last question helps me grasp the cultural meaning of *Big Brother*. Leaving the issue of surveillance for a moment, it is noteworthy that for Spaniards reality television entailed a shift within the field of the production of “popular entertainment.” As Machaquito, a sixty-two-year-old bullfighting fan and library periodicals employee in Sevilla, has told me: “In the past the popular people were the football players, bullfighters, and singers. Now they have been replaced by the celebrities.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the majority of participants, with the exception of some *pijos*, belong to the working class as popular singers have in the past. They are junior workers in the service

industry (office workers, commercial employees, cultural services workers), public-sector administrative workers, self-employed owners of services (e.g., taxi drivers), and students.

In their *Big Brother* introduction videos, participants show their families, friends, neighborhoods, towns, and cities. The videos broadcast participants hanging out with “their people,” eating family food, celebrating with their friends, and showing how proud they are of the house they live in, of their neighborhoods, or of their towns. Sometimes the participants talk about their dreams, including paying off a mortgage, bringing their daughters from abroad (in the case of immigrants), paying for medical operations, having a wedding like that of El Farruquito (a famous flamenco dancer), working in television, and so on. Special participants not only embody the dream of working in the media industry but also demonstrate the ways in which participants might “help their people.” In turn, family and friends defend participants in the TV studio and they send cards, kisses, cakes, or videos of the family celebrations participants miss, like birthdays. The participants’ families ensure that their friends and their communities vote for “their guys and girls.” They circulate ballots to the community announcing the telephone number for voting. Families and friends of participants excitedly cheer on them as popular football stars, as “champions.”

In addition, working-class viewers always stress the origins of the participants in their comments to the show, a key marker of their social identity. They remember them according to their cities and towns of origin, like Zamora or Salau. In discussing which participant they liked most, two of my interviewees, Maja and Chiquita, both library periodicals employees in their fifties, asked each other whether “Mozito<sup>54</sup> was from La Coruña or Orense? Was Pato from Sevilla or Granada?” and whether “Mucho had a Catalan accent or was from La Rioja?” Maja told me proudly that she liked Salto and voted for him because he was from the same province as she was. In turn, the *Big Brother* host constantly refers to the cities or towns of the participants, asking, “What do you think the people of Salau are going to say? Eh, tell me!” According to Maja and Chiquita, *Big Brother* “is like life itself.” They identify with the stories of the participants because they “bear difficulties similar” to their own. Talking to me about *Big Brother* and helping me find news in the press, Maja laughed and sang the tango song *Perdóname* by David Civera, which was sung by the participants in the house.<sup>55</sup>

I live chained to misery  
For having given free rein to my ambition  
I did not know how to calm this heart  
That has driven me blind into unconsciousness

I wanted more and more, I compare myself to God  
And now I am lost without reason  
Forgive me!  
Life has already hit me.<sup>56</sup>

Working-class agents refer to the personal solidarities that develop in *Big Brother*, pointing to the conflicts between several participants and the *pijos*. According to Lauri, a twenty-two-year-old student and daughter of an industrial worker, in *Big Brother* “certain human values that you would like to have sometimes appear, like when the boyfriend of a girl was evicted and she left the house with him.” The struggles for respect and the dramas involving personal recognition and appreciation of friends for one another, of lovers for one another, and of the group for each of its members are important in the everyday life of people. Lauri said, “we like to have good and bad guys,” “we always look for good and bad guys,” “we like to see struggles between the good and the bad guys and we want the bad guys to be thrown out.” Who are the bad guys? According to her and other informants, the *mamporreros*, or bad seeds, who are evicted. *Mamporreros* are the guys that abuse authority, lead good people to act indecently, and “only want to have many presents under the Christmas tree without caring how.”<sup>57</sup>

Informants who do not like the show, like Federico — an actor and history student whose father is a university teacher — also connected reality television with Spanish preferences for popular celebrations, like the *ferias* of Cáceres and of Sevilla.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Federico believes that Franco tried to suppress conflicts between social classes by appealing to the Spanish people. Spaniards, he believes, still tend to behave in accordance with “a politics of bread and circus” managed by the dominant classes. He observes a continuation between the monarchy, Franco’s attempts to discipline the people, and the forms of popular culture constructed by the market. According to Federico, the expressions of *Big Brother* contestants are always repeated “by the media like fashionable phrases. Repeated by humorists, journalists, TV hosts. They do songs, jokes. And, of course, the Spanish people integrate them as new popular jargon in parties, social gatherings, celebrations.”<sup>59</sup>

*Big Brother* constantly uses popular words, colloquial expressions, popular sayings and proverbs, anecdotes, and humorous stories from the participants in the house. These are then commodified and circulated in the media realm as the “mythic phrases” and “gems” of *Big Brother*.<sup>60</sup> Lalo and Kiko, communication students from Jérez and Granada, quickly recalled these catchphrases in group discussions. Lalo and Kiko remembered Buenillo’s popular expression in *Big Brother I*: “¿Quién me pone la pierna

encima para que no levante la cabeza?” Other tags that circulated in *Big Brother* were the *muletilla* of Enganche, “Pa chulo, chulo ... mi pirulo,” and even Canaria’s comment to Oski, “Lo que te cansa es el concurso, no la casa!”<sup>61</sup>

Lalo and Kiko remembered that *Big Brother* was much more popular in the beginning because it was “more spontaneous,” “people had more expectations,” and “it was a party.” Federico recalled that “during the eviction of Majo all of Spain was watching, as though they were watching football ... there was total silence throughout the neighborhood and suddenly she was evicted and people shouted out of their windows and the floor of the apartment above us was trembling.”<sup>62</sup> Kiko told me that this was the year he got his mom to vote for a “candidate” he liked but was very disappointed with the results. Finally, Lalo, who stressed that he defines himself as a leftist Republican, recalled that in 2000 he especially liked the *pisha*<sup>63</sup> Rubio because “he was a man of the people” (*el pueblo*): “He was a no-nonsense guy. He sang and danced. I saw him as really belonging to the people. He was a popular guy, a *chiringota* guy. He was sincere, honest, of the people. He went to the end of the world with that other friend of his in the house. But then he changed, he betrayed his friend.”<sup>64</sup>

Unlike Federico, Lalo focuses not on what the culture industry does with the people but on what of the people remains in the industry of cultural productions. That perspective appears in press reports as well. For instance, one reporter stressed that when Rubio left the house to celebrate in the television staging area, outside the house, his friends shouted, “Pisha, Pisha, Pisha, you are the best! El más grande!” while his grandmother exclaimed, “My little boy, my little boy, I have missed you so much!”<sup>65</sup> The press also reported that Rubio’s “triumph” was widely celebrated in Cádiz. He was a “new hero.” The bakeries of the city baked cakes with Rubio’s face, the *chiquillos* (men) dyed their hair blond like Rubio’s hair, and T-shirt sales for the Cádiz SAD football club, Rubio’s beloved team, boomed. In turn, the Cádiz football players locked themselves in the club’s locker room to demand a raise, and the city’s mayor strolled by Rubio’s popular neighborhood to see if he could get a piece of the celebrity cake.<sup>66</sup>

On one hand, there is a popular appropriation of the show, as in the case of the Cádiz football players.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, the appropriation and circulation of Spanish culture that takes place in the show is clearly planned by the program since it can present itself as a popular product for the people because of the possession and display of these cultural codes. In addition, the host constantly reinforces media “populism,” for instance, by declaring that she is “sick of classism,” stressing that certain participants “have represented the feelings of all of us” or by asking the audience, “Who do you think is the

most popular in *Big Brother*?” Furthermore, according to Lista, another informant who is an experienced journalist in Spanish media, “When ratings fall, the *Big Brother* production company sends reporters to the neighborhoods and asks people what they want to have happen in the house. People love to see conflicts.”<sup>68</sup> Kiko, a *Big Brother* viewer, also noted that “in general the results in *Big Brother* coincide with the rumors that are circulating ... ehh, they are going to throw this guy away.”<sup>69</sup>

*Big Brother* is then a machine for producing “popular representatives” feeding off working-class social experiences and popular cultures. The formal mechanism of the program is intended to produce “popular representatives.” In all *Big Brother* shows in Spain a common pattern of elimination has been repeated: the dominant figures in the house, the supposed *mamporreros*, are evicted, and those who were dominated in the house become the “winners.”<sup>70</sup> This can be grasped by observing the patterns of nominations and expulsions; sometime between weeks six and nine a strong participant inside the house and his/her allies are eliminated, and this constitutes the climax of the show around which its cultural logic is organized. The popular representative belongs to the working classes, especially temporary workers in the service industry, students, and self-employed service owners (e.g., a taxi driver, an owner of a bar).<sup>71</sup> The participants of “high standing” are never chosen by either the program or the public to become the “winners” of the show.<sup>72</sup>

The public esteems the sincerity, spontaneity, honesty, and goodness of the popular people in the house. The host applauds how the (wo)man with a good heart has defeated the “malicious contestants” and stresses that all the taxi drivers in Alicante or all the women in Salau “are going to be very proud” of them.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, “all of Spain will be proud.” The host compares the behavior of the representative in the house to that of popular cultural figures in the national space: “Do you know that Fiorito in Madrid has succeeded in putting all the bulls in the corral, well ... you would have done the same!”<sup>74</sup> *Big Brother* broadcasts images and stories that subtly blame the strong participants in the house, who are usually called the “game players,” for their machinations against the good guys, “the poor victims,” those with whom the largest part of the Spanish audience identifies. With the help of scriptwriters, participants reinforce their positions with declarations of national fidelity to the public.

The audience has wanted Juan Manuel Valor to be in *Big Brother*, so I’m going to be here for them. For you I will be here.

[To the other participants:] You don't give a damn about all the support Spain is sending me!<sup>75</sup>

The chosen representatives become credible gifts of exchange in the culture. Through them the communities are recognized and they, in turn, recognize the representative through their telephone votes. The show turns representatives into "special" guys and girls that "represent Spain" and embody "the best" of their places of origin. All the winners of the Spanish version of *Big Brother*, with the exception of one, have been from the different provinces of Spain. Moreover, representatives embody the realization of dreams constitutive of particular social aspirations. Their status is elevated, as when male participants are seconded by "beautiful" female participants. Indeed, the representatives become living national myths for a short while.

For example, in *Big Brother VI*, Juanma was compared to Fiorito and described as an epic Don Quijote de la Mancha, who resisted the attacks of other contestants.<sup>76</sup> In addition, as a chosen national representative, he was the one in charge of incorporating the foreign housemates into the successful national culture. Asked why he decided to save the foreign housemate from Argentina from elimination, he said he would have done the same for Bailarina because, as an immigrant, "she was also beginning to make her way in Spain." In turn, the host and gossip journalists justified Bailarina's behavior because "she was escaping" from Cuba. Next, the host applauded Juanma because he explained the European Union constitutional treaty to a Polish participant.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, since the show serves as a platform for other national productions (e.g., the four hundredth anniversary of *Don Quijote*, the Formula 1 grand prix broadcast by Telecinco, the Christmas lottery), the elaboration of the representative as a mythic national figure is connected to those productions as well.

For example, in *Big Brother VI*, while promoting the book *El Quijote*, the program witnessed the unfolding love story between Juanma/Don Quijote and Di/Dulcinea, the female character of *El Quijote* that in Spanish culture represents ideal love. The host of *Big Brother* and gossip columnists announced that Juanma had fallen in love with Di, a "model" from Barcelona portrayed as the "sweet" and "beautiful" girl of the house. Juanma, in fact, named Di "Dulcinea." *Big Brother* thus broadcast a small melodrama that perfectly matched the collective representations dominant in Spanish society. The melodrama successfully sublimated the following social and sexual relations: the noble man as the head of the family and of the nation, heterosexual love as the leitmotif of Catholic marriage, and the synthesis of both as the guarantee of the Spanish nation's perpetuation. Juanma became

like Prince Felipe, who got his beautiful princess: Letizia Ortiz, a journalist, and of the Spanish people.

Furthermore, *Big Brother* tries to provide these fictions with a form of credibility through the use of realistic effects. For instance, in the following passage, the host did the impossible by making Di "confess" that she loved Juanma. This was just after Di declared she "was more attracted to Juanma than to Conan," an American participant.

J: I have a theory that you have treated Juanma as your brother. You offended him as you can offend your brother, yes? Ah! But there is also another story here, eh!?

D: What kind of story?

J: We all have that question, Di. ...I don't know. ...it is like... like, like he... you withdrew from him, he withdrew from himself... then, when he had withdrawn from it all. ...you have gone on saying, "No, no, don't go forever." ...Is there something like that going on here?

D: Yes, because in the house... we were together... he was my support and when I was feeling bad, I was terrible to him, God!

J: You haven't found so many guys like him, have you? He is very special. ...

D: He is a person who has something!

J: Something and a lot of faults. ...You have said everything about him!! Is he really that bad?

D: No... but I adore him, the positive aspects win out...

J: The secret is that you fell in love inside the house, but you haven't dared to confess... just like Fresita.<sup>78</sup>

The secret of the *Big Brother* house, as they put it, is that through practices of mediation — including the management of social divisions (popular representatives versus "game players") and of discourses — the cultural materials and sentiments are taken from participants who come from specific locations to elaborate stories that connect directly to and ultimately succeed in seducing the public. Cultural producers, in this case the bourgeoisie,

appropriate culture from the people to present stories that are recognizable to the people. However, those stories do something else as well: they put the chosen representatives, the winners, on a level of distinction and differentiation. In this way, representatives are elaborated in such a way that they come to embody dreams of upward social mobility and collective recognition for all Spaniards. The former neighbors and brothers become popular Spanish celebrities.

As winners, these representatives become “special” gentlemen and ladies who are “rewarded with a moment to enjoy the house alone.” The host waits for them on the TV stage and they have to hurry to reach her. Then they are driven from the house to the studio in a Mercedes Benz, or flown in a helicopter, or ride upon camels. Representatives are accompanied by their scriptwriters, while their friends and family cheer them on from the sidelines. They walk down the red carpet of Telecinco. Once onstage, they become central figures, stars, on which the cameras are focused. They “sit comfortably to chat” with the host, while they cannot help but look condescendingly at the “losers” that have been cast out and are now silenced by the host. Representatives are stylized. They may wear a T-shirt with the logo of Spain or a suit similar to that of the most popular and fashionable singer at the time, all varying according to the current discursive framework of style. In turn, the host asks them to let her “arrange” their suits or dresses. “Freaky” hats are thrown away by the host, and representatives’ hair is set free and removed from their eyes.<sup>79</sup> Representatives are thus differentiated, distinguished, and distanced from their cultures as the ones “who have won *Big Brother*,” becoming those “who have achieved what they wanted.” In turn, the representatives can now participate as celebrities in VIP reality shows or appear in magazines. The industry feeds on the working-class and popular cultures and gives them, in return, fantastical products: stylized agents who seemingly represent dreams of upward social mobility to others through the production of specular recognition, which is the only way through which the fraction of the bourgeoisie who are the cultural producers — the taste traders — can legitimize their monopoly on the means of cultural production.

The point I wish to emphasize here is that what is hidden in reality TV is the social relation between the working class and the bourgeoisie. Certainly, as Nick Couldry argues, economic modes of social control on labor (e.g., the “individualization” of “players”) are enacted in reality TV as “play,” as economic norms have always been reproduced in media productions.<sup>80</sup> However, the reproduction of those norms, which is visible, does not explain the cultural and ideological characters of the phenomenon. Who are the ones playing in reality television programs after all? With what are they playing?

From my position, it is crucial to examine the social relations between the working class and the bourgeoisie in the production, circulation, and consumption of television celebrities, as well as to consider the specific cultural politics of the media.

The phenomenon of reality television as a total social fact, in the words of Marcel Mauss, is understood best when the following process and relations have been examined.<sup>81</sup> First, it is necessary to investigate the capitalist dynamic behind reality television, the mechanisms utilized to accelerate the production of “popular products,” and their regulatory templates (participants, contestants, authority, election). This capitalist process is the “economic basis” of reality television and a product of class relations. Second, it is essential to clarify the mediations between the reality industry and the working class, including popular cultures. This cultural production is the “popular discourse” of reality TV, including the circulation of “popular representatives.” Third, it is critical to uncover the ideological relations established by the reality industry between the economic basis and the popular discourse: that is, the use of fame as a cultural mechanism to legitimate the bourgeois control of the means of cultural production. It is the discovery of this relation that I believe explains the ideological character of reality television. Fourth, it is vital to explain the interconnections between the kinds of fame produced by the reality culture industry, the field of power (e.g., state institutions), and the transformation of civic culture. What determines the ideological and cultural significance of reality television as a total social fact is the bourgeoisie’s use of fame as a mechanism of cultural regulation of the working class and the national space.

#### Fame as a Mechanism of Cultural Regulation and the Spanish Nation-State

I got more in me and you can set it free  
 I can catch the moon in my hands  
 Don't you know who I am?  
 Remember my name (Fame)  
 I'm gonna live forever  
 I'm gonna learn how to fly (High)  
 I feel it coming together  
 People will see me and cry (Fame)  
 I'm gonna make it to heaven  
 Light up the sky like a flame (Fame)  
 I'm gonna live forever  
 Baby remember my name

*Fame*, performed by all singers in *Operación Triunfo* 2001

What, then, is fame? It is a mechanism of cultural regulation that permits the culture industry to appropriate the labor, characters, and meanings of the working class and of popular cultures because it legitimizes the constant renovation of “popular products” that the industry requires to reproduce its capitalist mode of the production of cultural commodities.<sup>82</sup> It is the cultural mechanism that legitimizes the bourgeois processes of appropriation, differentiation, and stylization, which transform the cultural labor of the working class and popular cultures into the elaboration of cultural commodities through which the cultural labor of the working class and popular cultures, *opus proprium*, are sold to them by the culture industry as a spectacle, *opus alienum*. It is the historical product of the dominant pole in the field of cultural production; a field, moreover, in which what is condensed is the need of the bourgeoisie as cultural producers to reproduce. Reality TV is a product that stems from the culture industry’s economic predominance in the field of culture and which serves the culture industry to sustain that predominance. The belief in fame, then, is the ideological effect that the culture industry must sustain in order to reproduce itself. It is the ideological device that allows the industry to introduce regimes of cultural competition into its productions. This belief is dependent on the function of and belief in social distinction, the cultural propriety and property of the bourgeoisie.<sup>83</sup> Further, fame may appear in different forms, including success.

The problem with *Big Brother* everywhere for certain parts of the bourgeoisie is not that the show produces celebrities but that it broadcasts conflicts and intimate life to produce celebrities more quickly. This is profitable for producers, but for the bourgeoisie at large it remains a problem, since the widespread appearance of conflicts in the house, in the streets, or on the screen has always constituted a problem for the bourgeoisie. In Spain, then, it was a relief for the bourgeoisie when, in 2001, TVE1 began to broadcast the reality music contest *Operación Triunfo* (Fame Academy), created by Gestmusic Endemol. The show was a success, peaking sometimes above 80 percent of market share during prime time and selling up to 400,000 copies of CDs per week. In *Operación Triunfo*, sixteen participants live in a performing arts academy. Classes are aired on television and a weekly concert is broadcast every Sunday night.

Of course, the fact that *Operación Triunfo* does not broadcast personal conflicts that might arise between contestants had little to do with moralism but reflected the industry’s need to sustain the belief in preserving an image of the singers as special talents. *Operación Triunfo* is about young singers who, coming from different regions of Spain, now find themselves on the road to success. According to its producers, *Operación Triunfo* is an oppor-

tunity for singers to realize their dreams of success. In contrast to *Big Brother*, in *Operación Triunfo* a jury sentences performers to be either saved or rejected by the public, which casts its vote by telephone. In turn, the public tends to identify with performers who have been rejected by the tough member of the jury (one member of the jury is always a “tough” and “bad” guy), so the rationalization of the mechanisms that mediate people’s tastes through the production of social divisions, as I analyzed above, is reproduced here by other means. The public saves “those that need to be saved” and who represent their tastes and feelings.

Performers come from the working class and, on many occasions, from small towns in the Spanish provinces. They are temporary workers in the larger field of entertainment (e.g., casino singers, discotheque singers, flamenco singers). “We are humble people,” Hermosillo said while struggling to be selected for the show, accompanied by his family.<sup>84</sup> Managers look for “contestants able to communicate the feelings to the people,” and the belief in success is supported by the appearances of music celebrities at the academy and the Sunday gala.<sup>85</sup> Celebrities affirm that “there is only one train in life, and *trunfitos* — the singers — have to take it.”<sup>86</sup> In short, managers legitimize their exploitation of singers by controlling the means of producing legitimate music taste, that is, by controlling the means of stylization that open the doors to success.

In the casting calls, singers are asked if they would perform in a mini-skirt, dye their hair, lose weight, or sing in English. *Operación Triunfo* claims to reject singers based on the “quality” of their voices and “their problems of style.” Once in the academy, singers are not so much trained to sing but rather to “perform.” Teachers, usually trained in the stylish Spanish city of Barcelona, “arrange” the voices of the singers and teach them how to have a “presence” on the stage, to sing in English, to perform, and to “arrange” their bodies through makeup. There are also fitness and aerobic instructors, as well as a Zen relaxation instructor who seeks to introduce the *chavales* to the “integral health of happiness.”<sup>87</sup> On the stage, everything from the Spanish regions appears transformed: a *guapa* appears as a “venus,” a *guapo* performs as a “Latino,” love masquerades as “desire,” force is cloaked as “energy,” the performers’ friends and families become spectators, and *alegrías* become dance music.<sup>88</sup>

On the whole, *Operación Triunfo* superseded *Big Brother* in that it formally articulated the cultural axes installed by the bourgeoisie to control Spanish social formation in more efficient ways. It interlaced music fame with songs of global distinction, educational training, “hard work,” and “positive” community values, including the support of Spanish families for the young singers. As a result, *Operación Triunfo* (youth success) became the

distinctive value that, circulating in the national space, could link and unify the nation-state into a common dream of upward social mobility and collective recognition; a value, moreover, whereby a “middle-class” nation could attain global recognition.

The bourgeoisie at large praised the show. Mayors from Spanish cities recognized talented singers with “gold medals.” The conservative Popular Party, then in power, claimed that *Operación Triunfo* “defended the same values of the party,” celebrated the youths’ efforts to “reach their dreams,” affirmed that the show could take young people away from alcohol and drugs, and compared the exigencies of *Operación Triunfo* to new state regulations implemented in order to “validate” qualifications in the field of education.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the show created a belief in fame through which economic norms could be socialized. For example, in the attempt to instill the values of business acumen in teenagers, the economic minister portrayed the kids of *Operación Triunfo* “as examples of entrepreneurial spirit.”<sup>90</sup> As a result, *Operación Triunfo* fully achieved what *Big Brother* only partially accomplished: to become an instance and instrument of cultural representation and regulation for the Spanish nation.

For the nation, the kids of *Operación Triunfo* represented the ideal realization of New Spain, a Spain that would go on to compete globally for nation-state distinction. For example, in 2002, when the mortgage interest rates were still at 2 percent and the cultural climate was positive, the kids of *Operación Triunfo* embodied the dreams of the nation-state in recordings and broadcasts, performing at Real Madrid’s football stadium the song “Vivimos la Selección.”<sup>91</sup> This song was the Spanish Football Association’s anthem for the 2002 World Cup, in which all of the “illusions,” “emotions,” and “dreams” of a Spanish society that sought “to be number one” were put on display.

Later, the most charismatic voice of *Operación Triunfo I*, Rosa de España, accompanied by her former classmates, represented Spain in the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest in Tallin, Estonia. In the year of the euro, Rosa from Las Alpujarras sang the song “Europe’s Living a Celebration,” while the images of her transformation from a community singer to a slender national pop star were shown on screens that appeared behind her on the stage.<sup>92</sup>

All together we are going to sing  
 “Europe’s Living a Celebration”  
 Our dream became truth  
 Now time has changed us  
 And it will be for forever.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

I want to think I can keep on singing with or without them. I have my voice, and this is what matters.

Braveheart, from Hope Country,  
 Winner of *Operación Triunfo*

Concealed in reality television productions is the social relation between the working class and the bourgeoisie. The construction of the spectacle and of fame by the television industry centered in Madrid (usually interlinked with production companies from Barcelona) allows it to appropriate and exploit culture and labor, especially from the Spanish provinces. The industry uses fame as a mechanism of cultural regulation to legitimize the constant renovation of “popular products” the industry requires to reproduce its cultural commodities. First, the reality television industry appropriates and mediates labor and people’s culture, integrating the participation of people in the rationalization of its production of “popular representatives.” Next, through the work of stylization, the industry elevates reality television participants to a level of differentiation and distinction. In this way, the cultural labor, meanings, and experiences of the working-class and popular cultures, *opus proprium*, appear to them as a spectacle for everyday consumption, *opus alienum*. Reality celebrities become the national representatives of every neighbor, sister, or friend in Spain. They incarnate dreams of upward social mobility as well as of personal and collective recognition. They become living myths that indeed have represented the national state in global competitions for nation-state prestige.

The television industry’s promotion of celebrity distinction interacts with material shifts in the Spanish social structure and with the bourgeois discourse of a New Spain of prosperity for all Spaniards: if every neighbor can become a celebrity on reality television, all Spaniards can benefit from economic modernization in New Spain. This discourse is useful for the bourgeoisie in order to control the new working-class generations because it interpellates Spaniards as simple and straightforward citizens and consumers who are realizing their dreams, while on the ground Spaniards are more dependent on state power and on capital than in the past; this is a dependency, moreover, rendered all the more apparent by the expansion of mortgage indebtedness and by the overall stagnation of wages.<sup>94</sup> Whereas the discourse of a New Spain of prosperity constitutes a class project for the bourgeoisie, which remains able to articulate different ideologies, reality television is a cultural and ideological phenomenon that disseminates the

discourse of a New Spain according to the logic of the media field. This phenomenon — along with other forms of cultural productions — allows the dominant class to utilize success, the requisite of personal and national distinction, as a mechanism of cultural regulation. Taking advantage of the prestige of media fame, dominant agents circulate social norms of national integration and competition that permit the bourgeoisie to attempt to control the working class and organize the cultural sense of Spain.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “The Second Transition: A Survey of Spain,” *The Economist*, 26 June 2004, 1–18.
- <sup>2</sup> By mediation I mean the cultural process conducted by the culture industry, which includes not only the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural commodities but also the appropriation of cultural materials and their transformation, as well as practices of transaction, negotiation, and contestation within the social formation and among various social agents (e.g., media managers, specialists, cultural intermediaries, cultural workers, citizens). On mediation, for example, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations* (London: Sage Publications, 1993); Rosalía Winocur, *Ciudadanos Mediáticos: La Construcción de lo Público en la Radio* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2002).
- <sup>3</sup> Richard Maxwell, *Spectacle of Democracy: Spanish Television, Nationalism, and Political Transition* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994) 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Maxwell, *Spectacle*. Participating in FORTA are regional corporations from the Basque Country, Catalonia, Andalusia, Galicia, Valencia, Madrid, and Murcia. In 2006 five new autonomous regional channels were approved: Canal Extremadura, IB3 (TV Balear), TV del Principado de Asturias, Aragón Televisión, and 7 Región de Murcia.
- <sup>5</sup> Maxwell, *Spectacle* 22.
- <sup>6</sup> Maxwell, *Spectacle* 24.
- <sup>7</sup> Corporacion Multimedia, <<http://www.multimedia.es>>.
- <sup>8</sup> Opening gala of Telecinco and Telecinco advertisement, 1990.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with Maja, Sevilla, February 2005.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with Kiko, Sevilla, February 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> In the early 1990s *telenovelas* were a success in Spain and were broadcast by the regional networks.
- <sup>12</sup> Opening gala of Telecinco, 1990.
- <sup>13</sup> Magazines and talk shows occupy 26 percent of the broadcasting time of the

channel. Corporación Multimedia, <[http://www.corporacionmultimedia.es/menu\\_principal.html?>](http://www.corporacionmultimedia.es/menu_principal.html?>).

- <sup>14</sup> Hugh O’Donnell, “Media Pleasures: Reading the Telenovela,” in *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies*, ed. Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tomasunas (London: Arnold, 2000) 302.
- <sup>15</sup> For other accounts of the expansion of the culture of the spectacle into other cultural registers during the 1980s and 1990s, see the collection of essays in Eduardo Subirats, ed., *Intransiciones* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2002). I am aware of the problems in using the category of “popular culture.” However, in certain social spaces such as Spain, the category permits us to grasp cultural matrices that underlie the everyday. Take, for example, the culture of flamenco or the religious processions in Andalucía. From my perspective, popular cultures are characterized not only by their positions of inequality within the social structure but also by their strong capacity to re-elaborate their conditions of existence. The category grasps a social area of conflict and negotiation, intermixed with the class structure. For a similar position in Spain, see Isidoro Moreno, *La Globalización y Andalucía: Entre El Mercado y La Identidad* (Sevilla: Mergablum, 2002).
- <sup>16</sup> Felipe González’s government implemented new labor legislation that introduced temporary labor contracts, reduced payroll taxes, and facilitated the lay-off of workers by firms. Labor reforms were approved in 1984 and 1992–94, and complemented by José María Aznar’s government (1996–2004) in 1997. Aznar’s labor reforms focused on facilitating the laid-off workers by firms. See Gemma García, “Mercado De Trabajo: El Problema Del Paro,” *España, Economía: Ante El Siglo XXI*, ed. José Luis García Delgado (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1999) 327–53.
- <sup>17</sup> *World Economic Outlook*, International Monetary Fund, <<http://www.imf.org>>.
- <sup>18</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), <<http://www.ine.es/>>.
- <sup>19</sup> Juan R. Cuadrado Roma, “Sector Servicios: Una Visión De Conjunto,” *España, Economía: Ante El Siglo XXI*, ed. José Luis García Delgado (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1999) 179.
- <sup>20</sup> “El trabajador temporal es joven y del sur,” *El País*, 1 May 2005, 58.
- <sup>21</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), <<http://www.ine.es/>>.
- <sup>22</sup> “La venta de coches bate un récord en 2001,” *El Mundo*, 9 January 2002.
- <sup>23</sup> Manuel Sánchez Pérez, “Distribución del consumo de electrodomésticos en España,” *Distribución y Consumo* Nro. 67, February 2003, <<http://www.mercasa.es/>>.
- <sup>24</sup> My analysis focuses on the cultural, political, and economic cycle from 1995 to 2007. Even before the current crisis, Spain was predicted to fall into a slump, with the IMF predicting a GDP growth of just 1.2 percent for 2009. “El único gran recorte de las previsiones de crecimiento del FMI para 2009 es el de España,” *El Mundo*, 17 July 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Media and political discourse effaced the term “working class.” On this question, see the comments of Vicenç Navarro, “¿Existe la Clase Trabajadora?” *El Periódico de Catalunya*, 28 October 2001.

<sup>26</sup> For example, minimum wage was set at €512 in 2005. Moreover, contemporary Spain has the lowest ratio of minimum to median wages in OECD countries: 30 percent in 2002. OECD, *OECD Employment Outlook* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007) 86. According to Vicenç Navarro, contemporary economic growth in Spain has been based on the exploitation of low-cost labor rather than on the rise of productivity. See Navarro, *Bienestar Insuficiente, Democracia Incompleta: Sobre Lo Que No Se Habla En Nuestro País* (Madrid: Anagrama, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> My interpretation is based on an analysis of Don Juan Carlos Christmas’s discourses during the last decade and of everyday discourses in television news.

<sup>28</sup> “Casi el 60% de los asalariados españoles son ‘mileurista,’” *El País*, 9 October 2007.

<sup>29</sup> *Mileuristas* designates, in economic and cultural terms, the generation of Spaniards born between 1965 and 1985.

<sup>30</sup> For example, the average national consumption of television rose from 183 minutes in 1990 to 223 minutes in 2007. Corporación Multimedia <<http://www.corporacionaudiovisual.es>>.

<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 113.

<sup>32</sup> Enrique Bustamante and J. M. Alvarez Monzoncillo, “España: La Producción Audiovisual En El Umbral Digital,” *ZER Revista de Estudios de Comunicación*, no. 7 (1999), <<http://www.ehu.es/zer/>>.

<sup>33</sup> “Telecinco Tops European Rivals,” *Daily Variety*, 8 March 2001.

<sup>34</sup> “Telecinco revalida su liderazgo de audiencia gracias a ‘Gran Hermano,’” *El País*, 2 August 2000. As of 2008 *Big Brother* is still being aired, with an average market share of 25–30 percent.

<sup>35</sup> Telecinco, <<http://www.telecinco.es/granhermano/>>.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Colin Sparks, “Reality TV: The Big Brother Phenomenon,” *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory*, no. 114 (2007), <<http://www.isj.org.uk/>>, and Chad Raphael, “Political Economy of Reali-Tv,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 41 (1997), <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/>>. All the authors mentioned in this essay in connection with reality TV have analyzed the phenomenon in the United Kingdom and the United States.

<sup>37</sup> For example, according to Telecinco’s CEO, *Big Brother* “costs 8 million euro, but if we take into account that it is broadcasted six days a week, several times a day, its cost per minute is below the biggest of television productions.” “‘Gran Hermano’ cuesta 1.380 millones: Normal, para un programa excepcional,” *El País*, 10 May

2000, 40.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1991) 317–75.

<sup>39</sup> For example: fewer television sets and filming locations, lower production costs, less equipment, digital technology, new filming and recording techniques, and less imports of films and television serials.

<sup>40</sup> In reality television, workers produce value twenty-four hours a day, a form of production that intensifies in particular moments.

<sup>41</sup> In other words, as Alex Callinicos observes on capitalist crises, the case of reality television shows that it is a mistake to see the economy’s tendency to increase productivity by relying to an ever greater extent on fixed capital to direct labor as leading inexorably to a fall in the rate of profit. See Callinicos, “Capitalism, Competition, and Profits: A Critique of Robert Brenner’s Theory of Crisis,” *Historical Materialism* 4:1 (1999): 13.

<sup>42</sup> According to a study by Ramón Reig, ninety people work on the Spanish version of *Big Brother*. Reig, ed., “Mensaje y Audiencias: El Programa Gran Hermano, El Sueño De Orwell,” *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, no. 43 (2001), <<http://www.uil.es/publicaciones/latina/>>.

<sup>43</sup> “El ‘Gran Hermano’ francés desata la polémica por los contratos abusivos a sus participantes,” *El País*, 7 May 2001.

<sup>44</sup> The television production company Zeppelin TV is owned by Endemol. Endemol, moreover, was formerly owned by Telefonica International. Endemol is now owned by a consortium consisting of Goldman Sachs Capital Partners, Mediaset Group, and Cyrt Group. <<http://www.endemol.com>>.

<sup>45</sup> For other accounts of economic exploitation in reality TV, see Mike Wayne, “Surveillance and Class in Big Brother,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 117 (2003): 34–42; Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); Sparks, “Reality TV.”

<sup>46</sup> “In Reality, TV Contestants Turn Up Losers,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11 May 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Online commentary provided by “Elia” in “Sin fama no eres nada,” *El País*, 20 April 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Annette Hill and Gareth Palmer, “Editorial: Big Brother,” *Television & New Media* 3:3 (2002): 252.

<sup>49</sup> Andrejevic, *Reality TV* 218; John Corner, foreword to *Big Brother International: Formats, Critics & Publics*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Janet Jones (London: Wallflower Press, 2004) xii–xvii; Wayne, “Surveillance and Class in Big Brother” 37. Despite his emphasis on mediation, for Wayne the “world of *Big Brother* is very similar in many ways to the world of work: along with the instrumental calculation of performing for colleagues and superiors, there is the tension between cooperation

and competition, the rules and conditions already imposed, the futile tasks, and the boredom” (40).

<sup>50</sup> See Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony*, and Néstor García Canclini, “Popular, Popularidad: De la Representación Política a la Teatral,” in *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias Para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad* (Avellaneda: Paidós, 2001) 237–58.

<sup>51</sup> On the acceleration of contemporary capitalism, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> For different perspectives on surveillance, see, for example, Gareth Palmer, “Big Brother: An Experiment in Governance,” *Television & New Media* 3:3 (2002): 295–310; Wayne, “Surveillance and Class in Big Brother”; Andrejevic, *Reality TV*.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Machaquito, Sevilla, February 2005. I conducted research interviews in Sevilla with old workers, students entering the labor market, housewives, and TV professionals. The research was based on a “snowball” sample. People interviewed were from different Spanish regions and half of them were women.

<sup>54</sup> I use fictional names for all reality TV participants mentioned in this essay.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews with Maja and Chiquita, Sevilla, February 2005.

<sup>56</sup> David Civera, *Perdónname*, my translation.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Lauri, Sevilla, February 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Created in the nineteenth century, *ferias* were originally trade fairs. Later they became festive social gatherings in which the entire population of a given city participates.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Federico, Sevilla, February 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Telecinco, May 2008.

<<http://www.telecinco.es/granhermano/detail/detail261.shtml>>.

<sup>61</sup> The participants often utter these kinds of phrases to intervene in conflicts in the show. However, the show appropriates and commodifies them as colorful “comic” and “mythic” expressions without substance. For example, Buenillo’s phrase originally meant that somebody was unjustly keeping him from doing what he wanted and needed to do. Enganche’s phrase was a quip directed to a cocky and lazy participant. *Chulo* also means pimp and the word, as in Enganche’s phrase, is used by popular sectors against those who want to take advantage of everything without doing any kind of work: “for *chulo chulo* . . . my penis.” However, the show commodified Enganche’s *gracia* as a “vulgar” one. Finally, Canaria’s comment was aimed at making Oski and others realize that the conflicts in the house were a consequence of the television contest and not a consequence of interpersonal conflicts among participants.

<sup>62</sup> Group discussion with Lalo, Kiko, and Federico, Sevilla, February 2005.

<sup>63</sup> A friendly name used to call male persons from Cádiz.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Lalo, Sevilla, February 2005. *Chiringotas* are Cádiz carnival performances.

<sup>65</sup> “¡Pisha, pisha, pisha! ¡Eres el más grande!” *El País*, 22 July 2000.

<sup>66</sup> “El Glamour de Ismael,” *El País*, 22 July 2000.

<sup>67</sup> During the 2006 World Cup, the popular football commentator Andrés Montes also drew an analogy to *Big Brother*, claiming that football commentators lived locked-up in the stadium and overworked without actually enjoying the football matches.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Lista, Sevilla, February 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Kiko, Sevilla, February 2005.

<sup>70</sup> In my research of the 2007 *Big Brother* shows in Argentina I arrived at similar conclusions on the international format of the show.

<sup>71</sup> Sociological socio-professional categories do not coincide with the show’s classifications. For example, *Big Brother* portrays self-employed service owners as “businessmen.”

<sup>72</sup> This was true of Rubi, a financial worker who in *Big Brother VI* was accused of trying to “control the nominations” with “his group of the suite.”

<sup>73</sup> *Big Brother V* and *VI*.

<sup>74</sup> *Big Brother VI*.

<sup>75</sup> *Big Brother VI*.

<sup>76</sup> Don Quijote, the character of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, is a symbol of Spanish national identity. In the first part of the novel, Don Quijote, a knight-errant, fights with traders.

<sup>77</sup> In *Big Brother VI* the Spanish government agreed with Telecinco to promote the European Union constitution in the show. According to the press, government sources stated that “anything that helps to promote the constitution amongst the Spaniards is a good thing”; “Gran Hermano servirá para divulgar las bases de la Constitución Europea,” *El Mundo*, 26 November 2004.

<sup>78</sup> *Big Brother VI*.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, the final gala of *Big Brother VIII*.

<sup>80</sup> Nick Couldry, “Reality TV, or the Secret Theater of Neoliberalism,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 30:1 (2008): 3–13.

<sup>81</sup> Marcel Mauss, *Sociología y Antropología* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1971).

<sup>82</sup> This mechanism of cultural regulation includes professional media practices, discourses, and formal proceedings.

<sup>83</sup> On the reproduction of class relations in consumption, see, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002).

<sup>84</sup> *Operación Triunfo VI*.

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<sup>85</sup> *Operación Triunfo I* and *VI*.

<sup>86</sup> *Operación Triunfo VI* and <<http://www.telecinco.es/operaciontriunfo/>>.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> A *guapa* is a beautiful woman, a *guapo* a handsome man. *Alegrías* is a festive type of flamenco music. Certainly, the process of appropriation of popular culture is not a new phenomenon. For a historical and anthropological study of the commercialization and political disputes around flamenco music, see William Washabaugh, *Flamenco: Passion, Politics and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 1996). For other historical perspectives on the appropriation and transformation of popular culture into “mass culture” as a step in the process of hegemonic nation building, see, for example, Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1997) and Matt Karush, “National Identity in the Sport Pages: Football and the Mass Media in 1920s Buenos Aires,” *The Americas* 60:1 (2003): 11–32.

<sup>89</sup> “Operación Triunfo impulsa los mismos valores que el PP,” *El Mundo*, 12 February 2002.

<sup>90</sup> “Cómo ser un espíritu emprendedor según el ‘profesor’ Rato,” *El Mundo*, 25 September 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Real Madrid is the most important football club in Spain along with FC Barcelona. The title of the song can be translated as, “We Live the National Team.”

<sup>92</sup> The year 2002 was an optimistic one for the European Union, of which Spain is a member. On 1 January, the new community currency, the euro, introduced to financial markets in 1999, was launched as physical coins and banknotes.

<sup>93</sup> “Europe’s Living a Celebration” (title in English in the original), my translation.

<sup>94</sup> According to the Asociación Hipotecaria Española (Spanish Mortgage Association), while in 1990 the average period of payment of a mortgage was twelve years, in 2004 it was twenty-four years. Moreover, half of workers’ wages is destined to pay off mortgage. “Condenados a la hipoteca perpetua,” *El País*, Domingo, 20 March 2005, 6. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the average annual growth rate of real average wages in Spain from 1995 to 2005 was -0.4 percent. OECD, *OECD Employment Outlook*.