DISCOVERING EVERYDAY LIFE:
REPRESENTATION, ETHICS, AND TRANSATLANTIC CONVERGENCE IN
CONTEMPORARY LITERARY JOURNALISM IN SPAIN

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Spanish and Portuguese

By

Jovana Zujevic, M.S.

Washington, D.C.
April 14, 2016
Copyright 2016 by Jovana Zujevic
All Rights Reserved
DISCOVERING EVERYDAY LIFE: REPRESENTATION, ETHICS, AND TRANSATLANTIC CONVERGENCE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY JOURNALISM IN SPAIN

Jovana Zujevic, M.S.

Thesis Advisor: Francisco LaRubia-Prado, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the interrelation between literary journalism in contemporary Spain, or periodismo de arte in Francisco Umbral’s words, and everyday life. Specifically I examine how weekly newspaper columns by fiction writers published in El País, a longstanding mainstream newspaper, and blogs published in FronteraD, an independent magazine of literary journalism, narrate, question, and redefine the two notions commonly considered transparent and thus overlooked: the everyday and reality. Drawing from Michel de Certeau, Ben Highmore, and other prominent scholars of everyday life, I argue that these diverse texts resist the idea that the everyday is a tangible reality that can be apprehended and described objectively and accurately in newspapers. They also reject the tendency of news media to portray daily life as dramatic and sensational, instead emphasizing its uneventfulness. I begin by exploring the indeterminacy and opaqueness of the everyday in Juan José Millás’s newspaper columns. I argue that Millás shows that what is considered as “reality” is not the natural state of things, but rather a construct of language, culture, and dominant world-views. The following chapter examines how Manuel Vicent’s columns redefine political and social criticism and challenge the dominant discourse. I contend that his decidedly literary style, his interest in the uneventfulness of everyday life, and his emphasis on universal moral virtues represent a more powerful form of resistance against social injustice than more flamboyant acts of rebellion. The final chapter looks at new perspectives that open up for periodismo de arte once it leaves the confines of mainstream
newspapers and print media. I propose that *FronteraD* and Laura Ferrero’s and Paco Gómez Nadal’s blogs within this magazine mirror the instability and heterogeneity of the everyday through the dissolution of boundaries between media, genres, orality and literacy, and the crossing of cultural and geo-political borders between Spain and the Americas. My analysis ultimately shows that contemporary *periodismo de arte* in both form and content represents an alternative to the discourses and practices of the dominant ideology and to the style of traditional media thereby transforming the conventional newspaper reader into a more engaged and conscientious subject.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Francisco LaRubia-Prado, whose enthusiasm for this project, keen insights, and desire for excellence have taught me to be a better reader, researcher, and writer. My graduate education would not have been the same without his continued encouragement, professional advice, and his wisdom for everyday life. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my committee members, Tania Gentic and Gonzalo Navajas, for their support, generosity, and valuable comments throughout the process. I owe special thanks to two Spanish authors whose newspaper columns inspired this dissertation, Juan José Millás and Manuel Vicent, for generously agreeing to discuss their literary journalism with me. Among the numerous colleagues and friends who have accompanied me on this journey, I would like to recognize a special group of “compañeros de guerra” who made this process more enjoyable and truly memorable. Álvaro Baquero Pecino’s steady friendship and advice on all aspects of graduate studies, Mercedes Ontoria Peña’s pragmatism and emotional support, Pablo Camus Oyarzún’s confidence in me, and Ángela Donate Velasco’s optimism have been invaluable to me. Finally, I am forever and profoundly thankful to my family: to my grandfather whose childhood stories inspired my passion for literature, to my grandmother and aunt for their love and support, and most particularly to my mother. Without her strength, perseverance, unconditional love, and unwavering faith in me, I would not be here today.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Periodismo de arte and Science of Singularity .................................................. 1

Chapter One: Uncovering the Everyday: Representation, Reality, and Unreality in arti(foto)cuentos by Juan José Millás ................................................................. 24

Chapter Two: The Philosophy of Everyday Life: Epicurean Ethics and Intra-History in Columns by Manuel Vicent ................................................................. 65

Chapter Three: Periodismo de arte and Convergence Culture: Smartness, Sincerity, and Transatlantic Gaze in FronteraD ................................................................. 104

Conclusion: Reading the Everyday ................................................................. 148

Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 154
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Juan José Millás’s column in the print edition of *El País*………………………………5

Figure 2. Manuel Vicent’s columns in the digital edition of *El País*........................................6

Figure 3. Photograph in “Receptores del sabor”.................................................................58

Figure 4. Photograph in “La diferencia entre el dedo y el pezón”.........................................60

Figure 5. Photograph in “Lo real y L’Oréal”.................................................................62

Figure 6. One of the photographs in the video *El extraño de la frontera*..........................107

Figure 7. Sections of *El País* and *FronteraD*...............................................................115

Figure 8. Blog header in *Los nombres de las cosas*..........................................................120

Figure 9. Illustration in “Mis lios con el periodismo”.........................................................121

Figure 10. Photograph in “Los ríos y la vida”.................................................................125

Figure 11. Photograph in “A pesar de la lluvia”.................................................................130

Figure 12. Photograph in “Viejas fotografías”.................................................................132

Figure 13. Blog header in *Reportero salvaje*.................................................................135

Figure 14. Blog header in *Otramérica*...........................................................................138
INTRODUCTION

PERIODISMO DE ARTE AND SCIENCE OF SINGULARITY

Is it not then time to recognize the theoretical legitimacy of narrative, which is then to be looked upon not as some ineradicable remnant (or a remnant still to be eradicated) but rather as a necessary form for theory of practices?

—Michel de Certeau, Heterologies: Discourse on the Other

On February 15th, 2008, nearly two decades since the beginning of Juan José Millás’s weekly contributions to the section “La Opinión” of El País, the highest-circulating daily newspaper in Spain, this prolific fiction writer and journalist published a brief metafictional text entitled “La columna.” Narrated in the first person by a fictionalized authorial persona, this playful text tells a story about the creation and almost immediate death of a perfect newspaper column. In the middle of the night, half-awake protagonist of “La columna” envisions a flawless column, deserving of the most prestigious literary and journalistic prizes, and writes it down as soon as he wakes up. The column, however, begins to show signs of decay almost instantly and despite the protagonist’s best efforts to save it and to advance its publication date, its imminent death takes place precisely on the morning of its appearance in the newspaper. Bewildered and saddened by the tragic fortune of his creation, the author dreams of a different deceased column that same night and once again writes it down in the morning. Contrary to his expectations, this lifeless column resurrects upon its publication in the newspaper.

Published in both print and digital editions of El País, “La columna” illustrates the essential characteristics of what Alexis Grohmann considers as a relatively new genre in the rich
tradition of Spanish literary journalism (11-43) and denominates *columna de escritores*.\(^1\)

According to Grohmann, the emergence of newspaper columns by fiction writers in the period following Francisco Franco’s death in 1975 is made possible by the development of Spanish new journalism in the sixties, proclamation of freedom of expression in the 1978 Constitution,\(^2\) as well as by the growing importance of journalism during the period of transition to democracy (13).\(^3\) This critic recognizes Juan José Millás, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Manuel Vicent, Javier Marias, Rosa Montero, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Eduardo Mendoza, and several other renowned authors as the most significant columnists in contemporary Spain. Having studied their texts, Grohmann identifies the presence of “un ‘yo’ autorial ficcionalizado (un columnista que es narrador y se convierte también en personaje)” (35) as one of the central features of *columna de escritores*. The narrator-protagonist of Millás’s “La columna” confirms this observation:

> Me desperté en medio de la noche y miré el reloj de la mesilla con un solo ojo,
>
> para no espabilarme demasiado. Eran las tres de la mañana, la hora en la que uno parece un extraño en su propia casa, en su propia cama, incluso en su propio

\(^1\) It should be noted that *crónica*, whose origins can be traced back to the first colonial accounts about the New World, and *artículo de costumbres*, which reaches its peak in the 19\(^{th}\) century in

\(^2\) The Constitution established the rights to “expresar y difundir libremente los pensamientos, ideas y opiniones mediante la palabra, el escrito o cualquier otro medio de reproducción” and to “comunicar o recibir información veraz por cualquier medio de difusión” (articles 20.1a and 20.1d).

\(^3\) In *Literatura y periodismo: Una tradición de relaciones promiscuas* (1999), Albert Chillón observes that the development of writers’ column in Spain also corresponds to that of New Journalism in the United States, but highlights that this particular style, which combines journalistic and literary techniques, did not have a major influence on Spanish writers and journalists, “Cuando en 1976 apareció *El nuevo periodismo*, la traducción castellana de la célebre antología de Tom Wolfe, periodistas como Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Eliseo Bayo, Francisco Umbral, Manuel Vicent, Montserrat Roig, Maruja Torres o Ricardo Cid Cañaverel ya llevaban años ensayando sus innovaciones” (353). According to Chillón, these writers and journalists were primarily influenced by the autochthonous Spanish tradition of literary journalism.
cuerpo. Cerré de nuevo el ojo y manteniendo un pie en el sueño y otro en la vigilia logré entrar en un estado de aturdimiento lúcido desde el que escribí mentalmente una columna periodística perfecta, pues en el interior de sus párrafos se agitaba el sentido como un gato rabioso dentro de una media de nailon. (2012: 310, my emphasis)

It is notable that the protagonist conceives his perfect newspaper column at small hours, that is, columna de escritores that lies at the frontier between literature and journalism is created while the author himself is in an in-between state, neither fully awake nor fully asleep. Furthermore, this ordinary state that everyone experiences on occasion is characterized by the feelings of strangeness and displacement in “La columna.” The inclination to locate and describe the peculiar in the apparent normalcy of everyday life, to render the familiar strange, is present throughout Millás’s literary works and will be examined further in this dissertation.4

Millás’s text also illustrates Grohmann’s assertion that columna de escritores plays a fundamental role in the internal organization of the newspaper due to its fixed day of publication, length, format, and location determined by the editor (24). Indeed, the protagonist’s attempt to convince the editor of “La Opinión” to publish his column a day early, on Thursday instead of Friday, fails because the pre-established structure of the newspaper cannot be disturbed, “[el editor] me dijo que no, que era un lío mover a todos los colaboradores por el capricho de uno. La publicaremos el viernes, como siempre, concluyó un poco preocupado por mi salud mental” (Millás 2012: 310). Thus, although columnists have certain thematic, formal, structural and stylistic freedom (Grohmann 33), they must still respect the rules and restrictions of the newspaper regarding the publication day and length of their texts. The protagonist does not

4 It is for this reason that Gonzalo Sobejano refers to Millás as “fabulador de la extrañeza.”
mention anything about the number of words that his deceased and resurrected column contained, but the version of “La columna” that was published in El País in February of 2008 contains fifty words fewer than the second version of the same column included in the volumes Articuentos completos (2011) and Articuentos escogidos (2012). This can be explained by the fact that there is no word limit once the columns are removed from the context of the newspaper. Furthermore, Grohmann correctly observes that they are read differently when included in books and that they can even transform into a different genre (31) or at least be denominated differently. Indeed, in 2001 Millás coins the term articuento, derived from the words artículo and cuento, to refer to a selection of his columns compiled in the aforementioned books, as well as in the volume Articuentos (2001).

Juan José Millás’s newspaper columns, as well as those by other renowned authors and public intellectuals in Spain such as Manuel Vicent, are therefore published in three different media and, consequently, in three different contexts: in the back page of the print edition of El País, on the web site of this newspaper, and eventually, in anthologies compiled by the author himself. When published in the back cover of El País (see figure 1), these columns are barely separated from the often-sensational news on politics, economics, and various adversities of both national and international importance. By simply turning the newspaper, the readers can switch between the front and back page, that is, between the official version of events narrated in the language and style of mainstream media and an alternative, literary-journalistic commentary on everyday life. Over the years, columns cultivated by fiction writers have reached such popularity that many readers of El País have remarked that they start reading the paper not from its first, but rather from its last page. The digital edition does not offer the same possibility since in order to read Millás’s Friday column or Vicent’s Sunday column, the readers must visit the Opinion
section, where the texts are organized in reverse chronological order, much like posts in a blog (see figure 2). Thus, the readers of columns in the cyberspace can either access them through the main page having previously glanced at the news, or they can chose to first visit the Opinion section in which case they will be several clicks away from other, primarily informative content of *El País*. Since the columns in the digital edition are further removed from the news than those in the print edition, they require greater physical engagement and conscious intention from the readers, who can no longer access them by simply turning the newspaper, whether intentionally or accidentally.

Figure 1. Juan José Millás’s column in the print edition of *El País*
Every several years Millás compiles an anthology of his columns by carefully selecting those that do not address immediate political and social circumstances, but instead deal with more universal topics, narrate various everyday experiences and practices, and question the very notion of reality. In the interview that I conducted with this author, he claimed that although he often uses his columns to criticize harshly the dominant ideology in Spain, he ultimately prefers writing more literary *articuentos* that capture the essence of his views on literature, journalism, and everyday life. The volume *Articuentos completos* is to this day the most comprehensive anthology of Millás’s columns published from 1990 until 2011. In this collection, the *articuentos* are organized thematically (in the sections *Cuerpo, Mente, Lenguaje, Sociedad*, and *Cajón de sastre*) and isolated from the news that surrounded their initial publication. These brief texts thereby represent “literatura en dosis homeopáticas,” as Francisco Umbral, a distinguished
intellectual figure during Spain’s transition to democracy, described newspaper columns pertaining to a subgenre of literature and journalism that he calls *periodismo de arte* (13-14).  

Umbral delineates *periodismo de arte*, or Spanish literary journalism, as “una cosa que se pone al servicio de la actualidad, o la crea, con todos los atributos de la información, pero con una prosa subjetiva, lo que implica también un pensamiento subjetivo (libre), que viene a donar al corazón de estraza del periódico los mejores hallazgos literarios de esta hora” (13). In Umbral’s view, the literary quality of this kind of journalism compensates for the purely informative content of the rest of the newspaper. In fact, many readers prefer the pages that include columns by well-known authors, both informative and entertaining, to those that contain endless information:

> Porque el periódico de cada día es una hecatombe de información, un ordenado desorden de la actualidad, y, contra esas pluralidades mareantes, el lector se refugia en el sombrajo de una columna, a resguardo de una firma conocida, para consumir literatura en dosis homeopáticas. (Umbral 13-14)

---

5 Alastair Fowler distinguishes between genres or “literary kinds” with a large spectrum of genre-linked features, “literary modes” (e.g. parody) which can function within different literary genres, and “subgenres”, which “have the common features of the kind – external forms and all – and, over and above these, add special substantive features” (112). In that sense, *periodismo de arte* could be understood as a “subgenre” of two wide kinds of writing: literature and journalism. As such, *periodismo de arte* adds certain journalistic features to its literary component (such as the importance of current reality and daily life as its topics), and certain literary features to its journalistic component (such as aesthetic elements and reflections about our human condition).

6 In the United States the term “literary journalism” is synonymous with “creative non-fiction” and it primarily refers to longer reportages based on thorough investigation and documentation and written by journalists that use literary styles and techniques. Spanish critics often refer to this subgenre as “periodismo literario norteamericano o estadounidense” thus pointing out that it differs from “periodismo literario español,” also known as “articulismo literario.” For lack of a better term in English, I will use in my dissertation the term “literary journalism” to refer to Spanish *periodismo de arte*. 
Columns are nourishing and aesthetically pleasing, thereby representing an oasis for those overwhelmed by the consumption of chaotic reality portrayed in the newspapers. These texts also possess a therapeutic effect and an ability to influence positively the totality of one’s being. It is for this reason that Umbral compares the experience of reading a column to that of “fumarse un porro: algo que serena el alma, conforta el cuerpo, levanta el espíritu y divierte la tristeza” (14). Another essential characteristic of literary-journalistic columns that makes them radically different from typical newspaper articles, yet very similar to personal blogs, is their focus on seemingly ordinary experiences and practices that comprise our day-to-day existence.

In this dissertation, I examine how different manifestations of periodismo de arte, namely, weekly newspaper columns by fiction writers and blogs published in an independent magazine of literary journalism, narrate, question, and redefine the two notions perhaps most commonly considered transparent and thus overlooked: the everyday and reality. I focus my analysis on Juan José Millás’s and Manuel Vicent’s columns published in El País and on Laura Ferrero’s and Paco Gómez Nadal’s blogs published in the digital magazine FronteraD. Drawing from Michel de Certeau, Maurice Blanchot, Ben Highmore, and other prominent scholars of everyday life, I show that these literary journalists approach the everyday as ambiguous and multifaceted, as an arena in which individual experiences, thoughts, and desires are interconnected with specific political and cultural mechanisms and structures designed to disseminate certain world-views. I argue that the aforementioned columns and blogs resist the idea that everyday life is a tangible reality that can be apprehended and described objectively and accurately in newspapers. They also reject the tendency of news media to portray daily life as dramatic and sensational, instead emphasizing its uneventfulness. My analysis ultimately shows that periodismo de arte in contemporary Spain in both form and content represents an alternative to the discourses and
practices of the dominant ideology and to the style of traditional media thereby transforming the conventional newspaper reader into a more engaged and reflective subject.

The curiosity about everyday life and interest in exploring and apprehending different experiences and practices that comprise it began to develop around 1980 first among French cultural theorists and philosophers such as Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, George Perec, and Roland Barthes, and later on elsewhere. Several scholars have suggested that the interest in the quotidian is closely related to the declining popularity of the novel in the last two decades of the 20th century and the emergence of hybrid genres such as travel writing, biography, and autobiography that aspire to document everyday realities (Sheringham 3). This tendency has continued into the 21st century that has so far witnessed the publication of The Everyday Life Reader (2002) and several comprehensive studies of daily life such as Joe Moran’s Reading the Everyday (2005), Michael Sheringham’s Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present (2006), and Ben Highmore’s Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday (2011), thereby showing the growing importance of everyday life studies. The point of departure in this relatively recent field of study is the realization that everyday life is not ordinary, transparent, and one-dimensional, but rather complex, problematic, and ambiguous. As French philosopher and literary theorist Maurice Blanchot states, “the everyday escapes” and is “most difficult to discover” (240, 238). Similarly, British cultural theorist and historian Ben Highmore asserts:

Any assumption that it is simply ‘out there’, as a palpable reality to be gathered up and described, should face an immediate question: whose everyday life? […] To invoke the everyday can often be a sleight of hand that normalises and universalises particular values, specific world-views. […] Claiming everyday life as self-evident and readily accessible becomes an operation for asserting the
dominance of specific cultures and for particular understanding of such cultures.

[...] Everyday life is not simply the name that is given to a reality readily available for scrutiny; it is also the name for aspects of life that lie hidden.

(2002:1)

Highmore’s observation is significant for two reasons. Firstly, he affirms that the notion of everyday life is (at least) dual by nature for it refers to both appearances and reality that constitute different daily practices. Secondly, if viewing the everyday as self-evident implies accepting the dominance of certain world-views, then questioning the transparency of the daily can be considered as a form of resistance to dominant discourses. In a later theoretical work on the everyday and the ordinariness that is traditionally ascribed to it, Highmore sees daily life as an arena of “con-fusion” or “the fusing together of disparate material in ways that aren’t reconciled into clear and discrete synthesis” (2011: 2). What is being con-fused in the apparent commonness of the everyday are individual experiences, thoughts, perceptions, sensations, desires, as well as specific social mechanisms aiming to normalize these numerous aspects of everyday life. Due to its indeterminacy and heterogeneity, contemporary scholars continue to develop a poetics of the everyday, the same endeavor that French philosopher Michel de Certeau undertook over three decades ago in his seminal work The Practice of Everyday Life (1984). De Certeau set to establish “a science of singularity” understood as “a science of the relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances” (1984: ix) namely because he understood that no single discipline, method or instrument were adequate for a comprehensive study of everyday life, “We know poorly the types of operations at stake in ordinary practices, their registers and their combinations, because our instruments of analysis, modeling and formalization were constructed for other objects and with other aims” (de Certeau, Giard, Mayol
These usual instruments are therefore incapable of and insufficient for analyzing everyday practices, which de Certeau described as ‘opaque’, ‘surreptitious’, ‘elusive’, ‘singular’ and ‘plural’, ‘multiform’, ‘dispersed’, ‘tricky’, ‘disguised’, ‘tenacious’, etc. (Highmore 2000: 93). The critical question that he then poses is which disciplines, methods, and genres, if any, are most apt to approach the real, the actual, the everyday. He responds to this question by suggesting that the science of singularity should employ fiction as a principal method for articulating everyday life. Literature is the only one capable of capturing and comprehending the plurality and diversity of daily practices and experiences:

As indexes of particulars – the poetic or tragic murmurings of the everyday – ways of operating enter massively into the novel or the short story, most notably into the nineteenth-century realistic novel. They find there a new representational space, that of fiction, populated by everyday virtuosities that science doesn’t know what to do with and which become the signatures, easily recognized by readers, of everyone’s micro-stories. Literature is transformed into a repertory of these practices that have no technological copyright. (de Certeau 1984: 70, my emphasis)

Although de Certeau privileges the long form of a nineteenth-century novel to record and interpret multiple ramifications of the everyday, I intend to show in this dissertation that newspaper columns by fiction writers published weekly in a major newspaper and blogs in an independent magazine of literary journalism represent more suitable forms for narration and critical examination of daily life. According to Sheringham, despite the fact Honore de Balzac, Charles Dickens, Benito Pérez Galdós, and other realist novelists observed and described human feelings and experiences, material culture, and quotidian practices, the novel is still incompatible
with the perception of the everyday (41). One reason for this is the fact that the realist novel prioritizes actions of the protagonists to descriptions of daily life, “In fiction, the everyday is often no more than a background. […] However rich and meaningful the details in which their unfolding is embedded, it is the destinies of individual fictional characters that are illuminated” (Sheringham 42). On the other hand, *columna de escritores* and blogs that blur boundaries between newspaper article and short story, reality and fiction, observations of daily routines and philosophy of life, are far more attuned to the intricacy of everyday life in the digital age than the realist novel. Whereas the novel contains “everyone’s micro-stories” as de Certeau stated, each newspaper column is a micro-story of its own, a more or less fictionalized fragment of everyday life. Whereas the novel is a complete work signed by a single author, many different writers publish continually newspaper columns and blogs, thereby creating an inexhaustible and multi-perspectival project just like daily life itself. While most novels require substantial time commitment, these brief literary-journalistic texts can be read in a single sitting\(^7\) and are thus suitable to the pace of life and the attention span of contemporary readers. Furthermore, the columns by fiction writers and blogs represent mini portraits of most diverse quotidian practices that together constitute an endless gallery of the everyday. The questions that emerge from these hypotheses and that my dissertation further elucidates are how these columns and blogs depict everyday life while addressing the problem of its representation and how the perspectives of specific authors and a particular magazine of literary journalism differ from and complement one another.

One of the principal dilemmas in everyday life studies has been whether the everyday is primarily characterized by individual acts or by collective practices. Although according to

\(^7\) According to Edgar Allan Poe’s short story theory, one of the defining characteristics of a successful short story is that its ideal length must be such that it can be read in one sitting.
Highmore the everyday “sits uncertainly across these two perspectives (the particular and the general)” (2002: 5), Juan José Millás, Manuel Vicent, and bloggers in FronteraD predominantly approach daily life as a realm of particularity. This perspective emphasizes experiences and feelings of individuals, their agency in daily life, and forms of resistance to dominant social structures and discourses (Highmore 2002: 5). Indeed, Manuel Vicent’s columns give special importance to people that would be described as “ordinary” in newspaper stories. Vicent insists that we should look up to a baker, plumber, and watermelon seller that perform their everyday duties well thereby distancing ourselves from corrupt politicians and criminals. Likewise, the narrators and characters of Juan José Millás’s articuentos are individuals such as a housewife whose husband is having an affair, a journalist trying to satisfy absurd requirements of the newspaper, a family man sick with flu, a man overwhelmed with the influence of news media in his life, and many others. Millás focuses on their internal realities and disregards the immediate social and political circumstances that surround them. Similarly to Vicent’s and Millás’s columns, various blogs published in the section “Mientras tanto” in FronteraD, and particularly the literary blog by journalist and philosopher Laura Ferrero explore individual experiences, feelings, and everyday practices rather than focusing on prominent political figures and issues in Spain and beyond. Journalist and activist Paco Gómez Nadal, on the other hand, uses his blog to tackle the injustices that Latin America witnesses on a daily basis thereby openly resisting the prevailing discourses in the Western world.

---

8 Although de Certeau dedicated The Practice of Everyday Life to “ordinary man,” contemporary scholars have brought into question the very existence of such category stating that it is nothing but a construct of politicians and the media (Ahearne 187). According to Raymond Williams, the phrase “ordinary people” became common in the mid-nineteenth century and it is often “an indication of a generalized body of Others… from the point of view of conscious governing or administrative minority” (1988: 266). Similarly, Joe Moran states that the usage of this phrase is “a way of silently evoking class without having to elaborate on it” (17).
Regardless of the specific subject matters that Millás and Vicent address in their columns and Ferrero and Gómez Nadal in their blogs, each text written by these four literary-journalists represents a different outlook on one aspect of daily life. I purposefully use the word outlook here because the ability to examine everyday realities critically and thoroughly and to communicate those observations to the readers is an indispensable quality of a chronicler, columnist, or blogger according to Argentine writer and journalist Leila Guerriero, “No hay temas, hay autores. El punto es tener una mirada. La mirada de un tipo que sabe contar” (cited in Angulo 14). It is for this reason that María Angulo refers to cronistas as “expertos voyeurs” (13). Furthermore, Angulo points out that the authors’ own experiences and subjectivity play an essential part in shaping their views of reality and making their texts seem honest and relatable to the readers:

El cronista desde el inicio nos dice: estoy soy yo, mirando, con mis obsesiones, mis prejuicios, mis limitaciones, mi identidad, mi sexualidad; y escojo esta parcela que acoto conscientemente porque sé que es la única forma que tengo de llegar a vislumbrar algo de verdad; el único medio de interpretar con cierta propiedad esta realidad. Y es esta postura pretendidamente honesta y esta fragmentación de lo real lo que convierte a nuestros ojos una crónica en verdad,

9 There are a number of differences between contemporary crónica, primarily cultivated in Latin America, and Spanish columna de escritores. In fact, newspaper columns by fiction writers resemble more closely the modernist crónicas published at the beginning of the 20th century by such writers and intellectual figures as José Martí, Rubén Darío, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, and José Enrique Rodó. As Colombian journalist Daniel Samper Pizano notes, “la crónica modernista es muy, pero muy distinta a la crónica narrativa. Aquélla está representada por notas de corte poético-filosófico-humorístico-literario, rara vez más extensas que una cuartilla o una cuartilla y media, y ésta corresponde al relato tipo reportaje” (as cited in Jaramillo Agudelo 12). Nevertheless, both contemporary crónica and columna de escritores are subgenres of literature and journalism that place greater emphasis on author’s subjective views and literary style than on conveying information. It is for this reason that certain theoretical and critical observations about crónica can be extended to columna de escritores and blogs that I analyze in this dissertation.
en un testimonio sincero. Lo que nos permite confiar en esa palabra, en ese relato sesgado de lo real. (13)

A spirit of resistance to dominant social structures and discourses is another fundamental characteristic of Millás’s and Vicent’s columns and the whole concept of *FronteraD* as a digital magazine of literary journalism without lucrative purposes. If de Certeau claimed that daily life could be seen as an arena of resistance, then *columna de escritores* and blogs with their focus on the everyday, the subjective, and individual agency represent the very embodiment of that resistance and an alternative to the idea of fixed and univocal reality. It is crucial that this attitude is not expressed through explicit criticism of the existing political system, but by distancing oneself from the dramatic political events that occupy the principal pages of the newspapers and writing about the uneventfulness of daily life. Relying on de Certeau’s concept of resistance Highmore explains that these practices are moderate, yet persistent, “In many ways resistance functions as a conservative force that is more easily associated with a slow tenacious refusal to adapt to the rhythms of modern capitalist culture than with the more flamboyant antagonisms performed by subcultures” (2002: 13). Similarly, American media scholar John Fiske contends that human activities related to leisure and consumption form part of the ‘micropolitics’ of everyday life and as such have the ability to challenge and resist the ‘macropolitics’ of political and social mechanisms and institutions. The ‘power-bloc’ is most vulnerable in the fields of leisure and consumption and the practices like going to the beach, playing video games, and watching television shows “provide a means of evading the sense of subjection to the parallel, required, repressive routines of domestic labour,” thereby becoming expressions of individual resistance (2011: 213, 2010: 53). Unlike the more revolutionary and radical assaults on the ‘power bloc,’ the resistance on the micropolitical level is progressive, evasive, and semiotic.
Periodismo de arte in contemporary Spain is characterized by both evasive resistance that consists in “avoiding capture, either ideological or physical” and semiotic resistance that lies in questioning and refusing the dominant meanings and developing the ability to think differently (Fiske, 2010: 9-10).

In the article “Un ataque político a las formas de vida” published in El País on December 26th, 2013, Millás emphasizes the importance of these forms of resistance on the micropolitical level. He declares in this text that reading a great literary work in the comfort of one’s own home on a Saturday afternoon is a more rebellious and dangerous act than planting a bomb in a public place. This is true revolt against the hegemonic discourse in Millás’s view since reality is constructed of words:

Quien las domina tiene más capacidad de destrucción que un experto en explosivos. Si los lectores de Madame Bovary, en fin, alcanzaran el tamaño que los sociólogos denominan “masa crítica”, acabarían generando un discurso que, colocado en el sitio adecuado, haría, al explotar, más daño que la Goma 2. (“Un ataque político a las formas de vida,” 2013).

Although it is expressed differently than in Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos, this rebellious spirit is also present in Manuel Vicent’s columns and will be discussed thoroughly in this study.

10 Whereas Millás himself coined the term articuento, the term artifotocuento derived from the words artículo, fotografía, and cuento is my own invention to refer to his columns about news photographs that he has been publishing in the section “La imagen” of El País since 2004. The approaches to everyday life in both articuentos and artifotocuentos will be examined thoroughly in the first chapter of this dissertation.
At the core of this dissertation is a close study of Juan José Millás’s and Manuel Vicent’s columns published since 1990 and Laura Ferrero’s and Paco Gómez Nadal’s blogs in FronteraD, published since May of 2013 and from February of 2009 to February of 2015, respectively. There are several reasons behind my decision to focus on this particular time period and these specific authors and magazine. Firstly, the development of columna de escritores, reaches its peak in the nineties (Grohmann 11-43), a rather tumultuous decade in Spanish history marked by the economic crisis, corruption scandals that involved the members of the socialist government, the signing of the Maastricht Treaty that led to the creation of European Union and single European currency, the growing separatist tendencies and terrorist attacks of ETA, the Olympic Games in Barcelona, and the Universal Exposition in Seville, to name just a few. The mass media market also underwent drastic changes during these years due to the establishment of free-of-charge press and digital newspapers (Mera Fernández 840-841), including the appearance of the digital edition of El País in the mid-nineties. It is in this erratic sociopolitical climate that Spanish columna de escritores thrives and it does so simultaneously with the consolidation of several interconnected discourses on everyday life into a new interdisciplinary field of study.

Secondly, although Vicent wrote Crónicas parlamentarias in El País from 1977 to 1978, which made him well known to the Spanish public, and then continued to collaborate in the paper, he and Millás coincide in “La Opinión” in 1990 when the latter begins to write his Friday columns. Thirdly, although there are several other acclaimed fiction writers and columnists that contribute in El País on a regular basis such as Rosa Montero, Leila Guerriero, Julio Llamazares, Almudena Grandes, etc., Millás and Vicent have been continually publishing anthologies of their columns thereby showing that these texts deal with universal themes and have a lasting literary value regardless of whether they are read in the newspaper or in books. Moreover, Millás stands
out as the first author among the Hispanic columnists collaborating in “La Opinión” who invented a specific term, *articuento*, to refer to his columns thus suggesting that these texts can be viewed as a distinct genre. Fourthly, Millás’s and Vicent’s columns initially published in the back cover of *El País* represent an alternative to the content, language, and style of traditional news and depict the plurality, indeterminacy, and uneventfulness of everyday life.

If Maurice Blanchot differentiates between the ostentatiousness of the newspaper and ordinariness and spontaneity of the street (243-244), which he employs as a metaphor of everyday life, then Millás’s and Vicent’s literary-journalistic texts could be considered as “streets.” These columns are of vital importance for depicting quotidian life, the task that newspapers are incapable of performing in Blanchot’s view. In fact, the conventional newspapers are only able to articulate strictly historical and sensational events:

…incapable of following the process of the everyday insofar as it is inapparent, the newspaper seizes upon it in the dramatic form of proceedings. Incapable of getting at what does not belong to the historical, but is always on the point of bursting into history, newspaper keep to anecdotal and hold us with stories [*histories*]. Having thus replaced the “Nothing happens” of the everyday with the emptiness of the news item, the newspaper presents us with History’s “Something is happening” on the level of what it claims is the day-to-day, and which is no more than anecdote. (243-244)

This could explain why Millás’s and Vicent’s columns, as well as texts by other fiction writers who collaborate regularly in *El País*, are published in the back page of this newspaper. Whereas all other pages are primarily dedicated to dramatic news about politics, economics, society, and
various adversities in the world, Millás and Vicent are concerned with the flow of daily life. Their columns render visible what newspapers fail to observe and they view the everyday as an inexhaustible source of non-events to which they manage to draw attention without turning them into news. Thus, these two authors do not only provide their readers with a plurality of perspectives on daily life, but also cause them to open their eyes in order to make sense of the surrounding world.

Although Millás and Vicent describe and narrate everyday realities differently from the mainstream news media thereby challenging the dominant discourse, they still do this from within the major newspapers that in Louis Althusser’s view invariably function as an interpellation device of certain ideology.\textsuperscript{11} It is for this reason that I extend the scope of my research to include \textit{FronteraD} whose objectives, structure, and content are radically different from those of \textit{El País} and other major newspapers in the Hispanic world aiming to disseminate specific worldviews. Furthermore, the very titles “El País” and “FronteraD” point to considerable differences between the highest-circulating daily in Spain founded in 1976 and the literary journalism magazine established in 2009 by Alfonso Armada and Antonio Lafuente as a result of their disappointment with the current state of press. Whereas “El País” (the country, state or nation) clearly designates that the main focus of this paper are information and news of national concern, that is, the events taking place within Spanish territory, “FronteraD,” or digital

\textsuperscript{11} During Spain’s transition to democracy and in the 1980s, the ideology of \textit{El País}, which was the first pro-democracy newspaper after Franco’s death, was situated in the centre-left supporting the social democratic politics of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE). In the recent years, however, the paper has been known to criticize the “populist left” tendencies in Latin America, as well as the political stance of Podemos, a left-wing party founded by Pablo Iglesias in 2014. This criticism and the appointment of Antonio Caño as new editor-in-chief in 2014 have been interpreted as the paper’s ideological drift to the right.
frontier,\textsuperscript{12} reflects the fluidity and transcendence of territorial and cultural boundaries in contemporary world. The title of this magazine also indicates that \textit{periodismo de arte}, as a meeting place of the subjective and the objective, of the literary and the informative, of the aesthetic and the empiric, is a literature of boundaries. Even though \textit{FronteraD} publishes a variety of literary-journalistic genres such as essays, \textit{crónicas}, art criticism, portraits, etc., I pay particular attention to this magazine’s blogs section, viewing blogs as successors of opinion columns in the cyberspace.

Another reason that I examine Millás’s, Vicent’s, Ferrero’s, and Gómez Nadal’s \textit{periodismo de arte} is the fact that these four literary journalists all reconceptualize the everyday while at the same time providing very different insights into quotidian practices, experiences, and feelings. For example, Millás approaches everyday life from an overtly postmodern and epistemological perspective for he treats the problematics of representation of everyday realities and continually dismantles the dichotomy between reality and appearance. Vicent, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with living the good life, both pleasurable and virtuous, and therefore emphasizes the ethical dimension of existence when writing about the everyday.

Ferrero’s approach to daily life is distinctly subjective for she openly shares with her readers her passions, concerns, embarrassing experiences, and her belief that literature, reading, and writing have the ability to alleviate our day-to-day angsts. Gómez Nadal, on the other hand, is less interested in individual feelings and experiences and more involved with raising our collective awareness about political and social injustice and everyday struggles in Latin America. These distinct perspectives mirror what I consider as defining characteristics of contemporary \textit{periodismo de arte}: the emphasis on everyday life, the blending of reality and fiction, the

\textsuperscript{12} See Chapter Three for further reflection on the meaning of the letter ‘d’ in the title \textit{FronteraD}. 
resistance to discourses and practices of the dominant ideology, and the blurring of boundaries between genres, media, public and private realms, high and popular culture, orality and literacy, and author and reader, to name just a few. The structure of my dissertation will therefore reflect both these different approaches to everyday life and the essential characteristics of periodismo de arte in contemporary Spain.

Chapter One explores the indeterminacy and opaqueness of everyday life by examining the duality realidad/irrealidad (reality/unreality) and the process of its deconstruction in Juan José Millás’s articuentos and artí fotocuentos. By obsessively referring to this dichotomy throughout his texts and insisting on the power of unreality, which consists of our dreams, desires, and fears, to influence our lives, Millás shows that what is considered as “reality” is not the natural state of things, but rather a construct of language, culture, and dominant world-views. Bearing in mind that newspapers are one of the essential devices for this fabrication of “reality,” Millás makes the stories in his columns as dissimilar to the news and as far removed from the public sphere as possible. Whereas columna de escritores is commonly narrated by fictionalized authorial persona, the articuentos have many different narrators and characters. Furthermore, Millás always observes certain strangeness in the apparent normalcy of their daily routines. The ambiguity of the everyday is also emphasized in the artí fotocuentos that show the inability of newspaper photographs to depict daily life. Millás’s playfulness with the notions of reality and unreality in the articuentos and artí fotocuentos thus reflects the blurring of boundaries between reality and appearances in everyday life and reality and fiction in literary journalism.

Chapter Two examines how Manuel Vicent’s newspaper columns published in El País redefine political and social criticism and challenge the dominant discourse. I argue that his decidedly literary style, his interest in the uneventfulness of everyday life, and his emphasis on
universal moral virtues represent a more powerful form of resistance against social injustice than more flamboyant acts of rebellion. My analysis shows that Vicent develops a particular philosophy of “the good life” based on Epicurean ethics and the primacy of inner, unofficial history, over singular events of historical importance. He recommends that we distance ourselves from current political issues and corruption within society and instead cultivate classical virtues such as kindness, decency, and honesty. Living honorably and justly are necessary conditions for leading a good and enjoyable life, and vice versa. Vicent thus suggests that our lives should be filled with both aesthetic and sensorial pleasures, which can be experienced through contemplation of works of art, delicious meals or being near the sea. Only virtuous and pleasant life can save us from social maladies and eventually lead to the salvation of the entire society. Due to their life-affirming character, Vicent’s columns emphasize even further the contribution of literary journalism as a genre, both in Spain and beyond, to the study of everyday life.

Chapter Three explores new perspectives that open up for *periodismo de arte* once it leaves the confines of the mainstream newspapers and print media. I examine in this section how *FronteraD*, a transatlantic digital magazine envisioned by its founders as the Hispanic equivalent of the *New Yorker*, illustrates what media scholar Henry Jenkins denominated “convergence culture” and defined as the merging of traditional and modern media made possible by the evolution of the Internet. According to Jenkins, this merging leads to the creation of a more participatory audience willing to navigate multiple media platforms in search of the desired content. Besides examining the concept and structure of the magazine itself, I analyze two blogs included in the section “Mientras tanto” that in my view best illustrate the dissolution of boundaries between media, genres, orality and literacy, as well as the crossing of national and continental frontiers that take place in the digital realm. These blogs are *El nombre de las cosas*
by Laura Ferrero and *Otramérica* by Paco Gómez Nadal. On one hand, Ferrero and Gómez Nadal continue the work started by Vicent and Millás of discovering everyday life and questioning the dominant ideologies, and on the other hand, their blogs enrich the genre of opinion column by combining textual and visual elements, placing greater emphasis on the authorial subjectivity and sincerity, and creating a digital transatlantic space.

Michael Sheringham asserts, “No genre can lay claim to the everyday, but subversive practices that cut across generic divisions have often been productive” (45). This dissertation aims to show that newspaper columns by fiction writers published in both print and digital form and blogs in a magazine of literary journalism represent the most adequate “subversive practices” for apprehending everyday life, that is, they could be used as the principal method of de Certeau’s science of singularity. My intention, however, is not to claim that these manifestations of *periodismo de arte* in contemporary Spain are capable of observing, narrating, and comprehending every single aspect of daily life and eventually providing a coherent and elaborate depiction of quotidian practices. Instead, I am proposing that everyday life and literary journalism could be approached from a new perspective. The indeterminacy, inexhaustibility, and (extra)ordinariness of the everyday could be scrutinized in different forms of *periodismo de arte*, while the subjectivity and literary style of *periodismo de arte* could be viewed as a way of liberating the everyday from a place where it is constantly overlooked. Due to its multifaceted nature, the meaning of everyday life cannot be fixed. This is what Blanchot refers to when he asserts, “the everyday escapes.” But so does literary journalism. Nevertheless, Juan José Millás’s and Manuel Vicent’s newspaper columns and Laura Ferrero’s and Paco Gómez Nadal’s blogs in *FronteraD* show that everyday life and Spanish *periodismo de arte* do not escape from each other.
CHAPTER ONE

UNCOVERING THE EVERYDAY: REPRESENTATION, REALITY, AND UNREALITY IN

\textit{Arti(foto)cuentos} by Juan José Millás

Paradójicamente, todo lo que el universo tiene de real se debe a su costado fantástico o imaginario.

— Juan José Millás, “Teologías”

In “El efecto cadera,” a column initially written for \textit{El País} and later included in the first anthology of Juan José Millás’s \textit{articuentos}, the fictionalized authorial persona employs a story of his grandmother’s hip fracture as a point of departure to ruminate upon the deceptive character of the cause-and-effect relationship: “Nuestra abuela se rompió una cadera al caerse, eso es lo que creíamos nosotros, pero llegó el médico y dijo que había sucedido justamente lo contrario: se había caído al rompersele una cadera. Las relaciones causa-efecto son engañosas” (Millás 2001: 103). Perplexed by the doctor’s explanation of what actually happened to his grandmother, the narrator observes that this change in the order of events inevitably turns our perception of reality upside down. This is further emphasized by his remark that confusing cause and effect is one of the most common logical fallacies in everyday life: “Seguramente, la vida diaria está llena de pequeños acontecimientos cuyos efectos se confunden con sus causas” (Millás 2001: 103).

“El efecto cadera” illustrates some of the essential characteristics of Millás’s \textit{articuentos} and \textit{artifotocuentos} as significant manifestations of contemporary \textit{periodismo de arte} in Spain, such as their focus on the opaqueness and indeterminacy of everyday life. These diverse texts also reveal Millás’s deep epistemological concerns and his desire to comprehend the complex realities of our daily existence. The central objects of his scrutiny are the various dualities of the
everyday, binary oppositions such as causaeffecto, realidadirrealidad, yootro, cuerpomente, dentrofuera, antesdespués, cercalejos, lógicoabsurdo, which he frequently inverts and dismantles. It is for this reason that Domingo Rodenas de Moya accurately describes Millás’s method as:

un pensamiento binario con arreglo al cual todo admite ser analizado como una analogía, una antítesis o contraposición, una escisión, una simetría o un paralelismo. Las relaciones lógicas, espaciales y causo-temporales no escapan a este binarismo básico, antes bien lo ejemplifican con singular brillantez. Un topos muy productivo es el de la reversión o inversión de tales relaciones. (73)

I suggest that Millás’s binary method both reflects and challenges the assumption that everyday life is inherently composed of numerous dualities. In “Questioning Everyday Life,” Ben Highmore argues that the everyday can be approached in two fundamental and opposite manners, either as a realm of particularity or one of generality. The macro duality particular/general thus encompasses other dualities such as agency/structure, experiences and feelings/institutions and discourses, resistance/power, and micro-analysis/macro-analysis (5). Newspaper columns by Juan José Millás and Manuel Vicent as well as blogs published in FronteraD emphasize the particular and the subjective aspects of the everyday and represent a discourse of resistance to dominant structures, as I have discussed in the introductory chapter. In Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos, these tendencies are most evident in his deconstructive treatment of the duality of reality/unreality, which in my view includes other binary oppositions already stated. Millás’s frequent consideration of the reality and unreality of our daily existence reflect Highmore’s understanding of everyday life as “the actuality behind the actuality” (6), which is inspired by the works of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. Highmore holds that Freud and
Marx, despite their disparate theories, both acknowledge the opaque character of the everyday: “For Freud, as for Marx, the everyday is both real and unreal, both actuality and the disguise of actuality. To put it as simply as possible: the everyday is not as it appears. Or rather behind (or alongside, or underneath) the appearance of everyday life lies another actuality” (Highmore 6). Whereas for Freud the appearance of the everyday is thought to conceal and repress our unconscious drives, desires, and fears, for Marx and Engels it distorts material circumstances forcing us to accept a certain ideology as if it were the natural state of things. Like Freud and Marx, Millás too approaches the everyday as an obscure and ambiguous realm whose multiple ramifications require careful examination. My analysis of a selection of articuentos and artífotocuentos in this chapter aims to show that Millás’s concepts of reality and unreality deconstruct the very notion of everyday life and acknowledge the inability of language and any form of cultural and artistic production to fully apprehend and objectively describe our daily existence.

The dichotomy between the two terms of the binary realidad/irrealidad as well as their overlap and interdependence has been a meaningful leitmotif throughout Millás’s literary and journalistic career. He elucidates his understanding of the concept of reality in the essay “Literatura y realidad” (1988), which was published only two years before he began to write the articuentos for the back page of El País. In this text, the author distinguishes between two realities, an external one that represents our conscious experience of the “real” and an internal one that is composed of our subconscious fantasies: “desde la teoría al menos, se puede establecer una división según la cual existe una realidad real (quizá sería más acertado decir una experiencia intersubjetiva de lo real), y una realidad interna, psíquica, conformada por las ideas, los delirios, las emociones, y en la que habitan los impulsos más oscuros del hombre” (1988:124).
Millás’s scrutiny of external and internal reality – the latter of which he often refers to as unreality – does not end, however, with this explanation; rather, the author continues to ruminate on these two concepts in numerous *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos*, thereby demonstrating their precarious nature. Considering that the dichotomy of reality/unreality represents a repetitive philosophical question that Millás himself repeatedly addresses in his attempt to understand it more fully, the treatment of this theme in his literary-journalistic texts deserves a thorough critical analysis. The narrators and characters of the *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* often highlight the importance of the internal reality and consider that its influence on our daily lives is greater than that of the empirical world, as illustrated by the narrator’s observation in the *articuento* “El agente de la Interpol”: “Siempre he mantenido que las cosas irreales han determinado nuestras vidas mucho más que las reales” (Millás 2001:81-82). Although this attitude toward reality and unreality, the intersubjective and the individual, is present throughout Millás’s literary-journalistic texts, I believe that his treatment of reality in the *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* is far more complex and thus requires further examination. Principally, the concept of reality is unstable in Millás’s columns since its referent frequently changes from one text to another. Furthermore, the borderline that seemingly divides reality from unreality, fiction, and appearance is often blurred if not completely dissolved. Millás’s treatment of the notions of reality and unreality therefore raises a series of questions that I intend to address in this chapter. Firstly, how does Millás’s persistent exploration of the dichotomy *realidad/irrealidad* reject the

---

13 In *Juan José Millás. The Obsessive-Compulsive Aesthetic* (2003), Dale Knickerbocker employs the psychoanalytic and psychiatric theory to examine the repetitive themes and motifs in five Millás’s novels and proposes that literary signs in these works function as obsessive-compulsive symptoms. Two of those OCD symptoms present in these novels are “repeated rumination of an insoluble idea, question or problem” and epistemophilia or “desire and need to understand everything, instinct for knowledge” (Knickerbocker 14), which can also be observed in Millás’s literary journalism through his obsessive-compulsive approach to the dichotomy *realidad/irrealidad* and his aspiration to comprehend reality.
presupposition that newspapers are a reliable source of information about reality and an authentic reflection of everyday life? Secondly, how are reality and unreality constructed and represented in the artifotocuentos and why is preference given to unreality? And lastly, what kind of readership do Millás’s columns require and create in view of this difference between reality and unreality?

In addressing these issues essential to the understanding of Millás’s literary journalism and its place within the field of contemporary Spanish cultural production, I will contend that his playfulness with the notions of reality and unreality not only deconstructs the assumption that everyday life is so simple as to be dualistic but also echoes the argument that “reality” is a construct of language, culture, and ideology made possible by what Louis Althusser regards as ideological state apparatuses (ISA). Millás therefore chooses to dismantle what is considered “reality” on the last page of the newspapers, which form part of the communications ISA thereby participating on a daily basis in the construction of the intersubjective reality. Relying on Mas’ud Zavarzadeh’s theory of ludic postmodernism and Michael Schudson’s theory of news as “public knowledge,” we will see that the articuentos and artifotocuentos ultimately deal with the problematics of representation of the “real.” I will also propose that the dichotomy of reality/unreality is closely tied to and perhaps equally as unstable as that of the public/private, one of the grand dichotomies of Western thought according to Jeff Weintraub (1). Indeed, in the artifotocuentos, “la realidad” is often represented by national and world news of public concern,

---

14 Althusser differentiates between the Repressive State Apparatus (the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc.) and the Ideological State Apparatuses, which he defines as “a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (12). The Ideological State Apparatuses include the religious, the educational, the family, the legal, the political, the trade-union, the communications, and the cultural apparatuses (12).
whereas “la irrealidad” is portrayed by the private matters, obsessions and fantasies present in our daily life.

The notions of reality and unreality in Millás could also be interpreted in light of Walter Benjamin’s distinction between passing information and the lasting story in his influential essay “The Storyteller” (89). This, of course, further affirms Millás’s selection of the word “cuento” for the compound name of his literary-journalistic texts. In my view, when the stories told by both the articuentos and artifotocuentos contain information about politics and society, it is only as a point of departure to address the intimate drama of a common man, a citizen of the media-saturated world. My analysis of the selected texts will therefore show that Millás’s columns correspond to Norman Sims’ observation that literary journalism deals with “the feelings and experiences of commoners” (1995: 3). This is also true for Manuel Vicent’s columns that express strong appreciation of common people and the uneventfulness of the everyday, as we will see in the following chapter. But whereas Vicent refers to people and their daily life in general, Millás transforms them into narrators and characters with whom his readers can easily identify. This does not mean, however, that the artifotocuentos are a simple and unstimulating read; on the contrary, Millás’s objective is to perplex and enliven his readers, who are overwhelmed and dulled by information by the time they reach the last page of El País. He calls for and creates a

15 For the elaboration of the main theoretical ideas in Benjamin’s essay and their application to Millás’ articuentos, see pages 41-42.

16 As I have explained in the introductory chapter (see note 7), the use of the phrases “common people” and “ordinary people” is problematic since this category is in fact a political construct of those cultures and classes that consider themselves “above the ordinary.” However, for lack of a better word, I will occasionally employ these two adjectives when describing the characters in Millás’s and Vicent’s columns that are never prominent political figures or celebrities regularly mentioned in the newspapers and on television. What is more, these authors do not even name their characters thereby enabling us to recognize ourselves in their aspirations, frustrations, experiences, and daily routines.
different kind of a reading public. Thus, his *arti(foto)cuentos* concur with the counter-strategy of contemporary literary journalism, which defies both the idea of the newspaper article as a source of superficial information that depicts the “reality” and the notion of readers as non-critical consumers of news. I therefore suggest that Millás’s scrutiny of the concepts of reality and unreality has a twofold objective: first, to rebel against the palpable reality constructed by the prevailing discourses in the last two decades, and second, to transform the conventional newspaper reader into a perplexed and rebellious subject.

Millás’s literary-journalistic texts thus create an alternative narrative of the everyday, which challenges specific worldviews imposed by dominant cultures onto the rest of the society under the guise of normalcy. Political theorist Antonio Gramsci denominates this form of domination hegemony, a concept which at once includes and goes beyond the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘ideology’ (Williams 108), and declares that the sphere of its effectiveness is not the state, but rather civil society, as represented by the media, church, school system, family, etc. Drawing from Gramsci, Steve Jones observes that civil society is an essential mechanism for maintaining dominance by blurring the boundaries between political authority and everyday life (48). Thus, hegemony is not manifested through coercion or manipulation but instead refers to the various practices, meanings and values that constitute daily life, as well as our perceptions of the world and our own existence (Williams 110). We therefore tend to accept the dominant worldview by consent since we “spontaneously” come to equate it with “common sense” or “a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute…” (Williams 110). It is precisely this artificial sense of reality that Millás constantly challenges by using his *arti(foto)cuentos* as a particular interpellative device. If according to Althusser, all subjects are
always already products of ideology by means of interpellation,\textsuperscript{17} then Millás continually questions what seems to be the natural order of things and brings about the formation of a different kind of subjects, which I consider anti-hegemonic readers. These individuals are not only interpellated by news, images, propaganda, advertising, and other aspects of what Guy Debord denominates “the society of the spectacle,”\textsuperscript{18} but also by Millás’s art(foto)cuentos that continually criticize our spectacle-driven world.

**The Instability of the “Real” and Its Representations**

Even though Juan José Millás’s articuentos present a series of binary oppositions that are later deconstructed, I consider the dichotomy of realidade/irrealidade fundamental because it defies the idea of everyday life as self-evident, as I have previously stated. Millás’s obsession and play with the concepts of reality and unreality throughout his columns also challenge the very notion of the “real” as stable and comprehensible. This approach is consistent with the belief that literary journalism functions “as a throwback to the idea of a stable text and stable reality that can be narrativized, a refutation of the pretensions of modernism in which eager journalists penetrate to the quick of what’s ‘happening’” (Keeble and Tulloch 8). The articuentos

\textsuperscript{17} As Althusser writes, “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: Hey, you there!” (32). Ideology therefore constitutes individuals as subjects, but the subjects are also constitutive of ideology.

\textsuperscript{18} In his influential work *The Society of Spectacle* (1967), French Marxist theorist Guy Debord argues that our authentic lives have been replaced with their representations as a result of the dominant mode of production in the modern society. Debord defines spectacle as “a social relation between people that is mediated by images” and “a worldview that has actually been materialized, a view of a world that has become objective” (1). His observation that the spectacle is “the very heart of this real society’s unreality” (2, my emphasis) makes Debord’s theory particularly apt for approaching Millás’s notions of reality and unreality.
could thus be read as textual examples of what Marxist theorist Mas’ud Zavarzadeh considers ludic postmodernism and defines as “that understanding of postmodernity which makes sense of it as a problematics of “representation” and, furthermore, conceives of “representation” as a rhetorical issue, a matter of signification in which the very process of signification articulates the signified” (32). Drawing from the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Zavarzadeh claims that the “real” cannot be considered the transcendental signified, the origin of universal truth, but only an “instance of simulation.” The knowledge and representation of “reality” are thus unattainable due to “rifts, slippages, and alterity that are immanent in signifying practices and above all in language” (32). The view that the portrayal of the “real” is impossible as a result of endless chain of signifiers explains why the concept of reality in the *articuentos* can have many different referents that range from poverty in Ethiopia (“Etiopía”) to father-son relationship (“El agente de la Interpol,” “Los delirios,” etc.). Furthermore, it justifies the fact that the multiform notion of reality has been a constant source of inspiration for Millás’s literary-journalistic texts for over two and a half decades. I interpret the author’s ludic approach to the binary opposition of reality/unreality and his preference of unreality as the act of “renarration” in Zavarzadeh’s terms that serves to emphasize the highly ambiguous nature of the real: “To renarrate is to activate the ‘other’ and thus to destabilize and show the contingency of the ‘existing.’ Renarration as a reading strategy, then, is a political act that calls attention to the construction of the real and furthermore opens up a space for contesting the existing” (91). The “other” that Millás repeatedly activates throughout his *articuentos* is the concept of unreality that, as my textual analysis will show, further undermines what is perceived as reality and frequently occupies the most relevant place in everyday life.
If the *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* challenge the notion of reality as I have suggested, then they also question any form of cultural and artistic production, and any act of communication, which purport to represent the real. Millás achieves this by commenting upon different global and local news and news photographs on politics, society, scientific discoveries, and popular culture and also by telling stories about the absurd requirements imposed by the newspaper from the journalist’s point of view. In this manner, Millás’s texts make his readers wonder to what extent they can rely on the information that is presented to them in the previous pages of the newspaper. In *Seeing Films Politically*, Zavarzadeh introduces the concept of the “politics of reality” according to which reality is a construct, rather than representation of the natural order of things, made possible by films and other arts:

Films, then, do not so much ‘report,’ ‘reflect,’ or even ‘interpret’ (in the conventional sense of the word) the world ‘out there’ or ‘in here’ as they do in fact ‘produce’ it and produce it historically; that is to say, within the frames of intelligibility available to a culture at a particular moment. (…) ‘Reality,’ in short, is not ‘natural’ but ‘constructed’ (92).

This argument could be extended to the communications ISA that, together with art, participate in the construction of what Zavarzadeh calls the “cultural inventory of representations” (107). Besides using realistic strategies to construct what is henceforth considered the actual state of things, films, the arts, and the media also have the power to educate the public on how to “accurately” interpret this everyday “reality” and organize their lives and relationships within that frame (107). Considering that both the *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* are published in the newspaper and that they frequently invoke local or world news, I will now address the role of the news media in the construction of reality.
Beyond the Principles of Journalism

With regard to the issue of the representation of reality in the news, linguist Roger Fowler and sociologist Michael Schudson, who address this question from different perspectives, concur in their opinion that the news cannot be considered a reflection of the actual events but rather a product of specific mechanisms such as language and culture, respectively. Fowler maintains that the news cannot objectively communicate “facts” precisely because they rely on language to do so, which, as a semiotic code, necessarily imposes certain social and economic values (4). In a similar manner, Michael Schudson argues that the news, to which he refers as “public knowledge,” is a form of culture produced by the media and is related but not equivalent to ideology and information (3). Schudson considers that journalists produce news while operating within a specific pre-established structure, which does not leave room for their subjectivity and whose rules they must follow. When Millás writes an artifotocuento that questions the portrayal of reality in a certain news photograph, or when he chooses to write an articuento about adultery that is unrelated to the current events of public concern yet present in everyday life, his approach openly deviates from the official strategies of the newspapers. This rift between the demands of the newspaper and the columnist’s creative freedom is humorously illustrated in the metafictional articuento “Lo real y lo lógico” whose protagonist declares, “En el periódico se han dado cuenta finalmente de lo difícil que es distinguir lo real de lo no real y me han dicho que escriba sobre lo que me dé la gana, pero que no diga disparates” (Millás, 2001:121). Although this articuento addresses the dramatic increase of traffic accidents in Spain, it uses this information only as a point of departure to undermine the very notions of logic and reality. In this manner, neither the journalist in “Lo real y lo lógico” nor Millás as the author of this articuento conform to the basic principles of news writing. Schudson reminds us that the
structure of the news must be such that it answers to five basic questions, but also contends that those five categories are not naturally given, but instead based on a series of assumptions:

News as a form of culture incorporates assumptions about what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in, what range of considerations we should take seriously. A news story is supposed to answer the questions “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “why” about its subject, but understanding news as culture requires asking of news writing what kind of categories of people count as “who,” what kinds of things pass as facts or “whats,” what geography and sense of time are inscribed as “where” and “when,” and what counts as an explanation of “why.” (14)

Unlike the news, Millás’s literary-journalistic columns seldom respond to all five of Schudson’s questions and do not aim to provide explanations. On the contrary, they tend to perplex the reader even further by asking a different kind of questions beyond the categories imposed by the newspaper. Furthermore, a large number of highly literary articuentos that address certain philosophical themes show that Millás employs his own subjective criteria to determine what to write about and what kind of readers to engage. In that sense, those articuentos and artifotocuentos that make reference to the news could be considered as a kind of documentary narrative in which “verisimilitude is ultimately a means toward an end rather than an end in itself” (Pizer 107). Contrary to the news whose main objective is “total absorption in event as event,” the goal of Millás’s literary journalism is the “exploration of event as meaning” (Pizer 118). The notion of unreality in Millás’s texts as “the other” which points to the contingency of reality thus serves to distance his columns from the journalistic principles of accuracy and objectivity and to bring them closer to the literary quest for meaning.
Individual and Collective Photo Albums

Thus far I have referred to the notions of reality and unreality in Millás’s literary journalism without specifying that the author’s approach to this dichotomy in the *articuentos* differs from his treatment of this theme in the *artifotocuentos*. I have done so because although there is occasional criticism that focuses either solely on the *articuentos* or the *artifotocuentos*, it is my belief that an in-depth understanding of Millás’s literary journalism can be achieved only if these texts are analyzed together, as pieces of the same mosaic. In fact, Millás’s interpretation of newspaper photographs and his constant search for the meanings behind the image provide clues for comprehending the notions of reality and unreality in the *articuentos*. It is essential, nevertheless, to point out that the *artifotocuentos* deal with this dichotomy by commenting upon the newspaper photographs that represent significant and often unfortunate events of public interest, whereas the *articuentos* further problematize the issue by examining supposedly ordinary circumstances in the everyday life of individuals. The categories of public and private are thus closely connected with the notions of reality and unreality in Millás’s literary-journalistic works. As I will demonstrate, his concept of reality refers primarily to events within the public sphere, while unreality represents the totality of concerns, obsessions, dreams, and emotions in the private life of the individual. When examining the whole of Millás’s *articuentos* written over the last two decades, it can be observed that the public and the private frequently overlap but also that preference is given to the private sphere. This concurs with Erving Goffman’s view that authentic “reality” can be found in private spaces where individuals can be themselves and is opposed to Jürgen Habermas’s thought which gives preference to the public sphere.

---

19 Performance theory challenges the idea of individual authenticity being possible in private spaces since, according to Richard Schechner, there are various “me’s” inside of each of us and our everyday lives consist of continuous performances of our multiple selves. All performances,
world and considers that private spheres have lost their authenticity with the development of “organized capitalism” (Wolfe 182-184).

Central to the understanding of the categories of public and private in Millás’s literary-journalistic works, as well as of the notions of reality and unreality, is the metaphor of a photo album that the author employs in the prologue to Todo son preguntas (2005), his collection of thirty-one commentaries on different news photographs. In this brief introductory essay, Millás distinguishes between “la realidad familiar” and “la realidad colectiva/social,” that is, the life of a family as represented by photographs in a family album and events in a society as represented by news photographs. According to Millás, a family album consists of images that capture joyful and memorable moments in the life of a family, whereas the unfortunate events such as illnesses, accidents and funerals are always absent: “Lo malo, en el álbum, sólo aparece como ausencia” (2006:11). “El álbum familiar de una sociedad” (2006:11) is, on the other hand, composed of the photographs published in the newspapers that primarily represent “sucesos desgraciados” (2006:11). The newspaper photographs about the events that took place in Spain and the world during the first decade of the twenty-first century provide Millás with a basis for creating a narrative about the reality and appearances of his time. In that sense, his three collections of artífotocuentos represent annotated photo albums that combine news, images, and literature. Despite their deeply hybrid character, these texts cannot be considered comprehensive, for they fail to examine day-to-day concerns and non-events in the lives of ordinary people. These are, however, present in Millás’s articuentos, the most comprehensive of his literary-journalistic works in my opinion, for they comment on both the front-page news and daily life. For this

including those in ordinary life are made of twice-behaved behaviors,” ‘restored behaviors,’”(22) that represent “Physical or verbal actions that are not-for-the-first-time, prepared or rehearsed. A person may not be aware that she is performing a strip of restored behavior” (22).
reason, I propose that the totality of the *articuentos* could also be considered a (textual) album where nothing is absent, and where all faces of reality and unreality, of the public and private worlds, are revealed and explored. By uniting *realidad familiar* and *realidad colectiva/social* in the *articuentos*, Millás concurs with Ben Highmore in his observation that everyday life is a realm of both particularity and generality and thus calls for an approach from both perspectives (5).

**The Public, Private and Intermediate Realms**

The distinction between public and private is one of the oldest dichotomies in the Western world and one that has given rise to innumerable theories and important polemics. Having already referred to Goffman and Habermas’ thought regarding the (in)authenticity of the private sphere, I would like to comment upon the more recent theories by Jeff A. Weintraub, Alan Wolfe, and Michael Warner regarding the dichotomy of public/private. These three contemporary thinkers agree that the division between public and private has been ambiguous and unsatisfying, yet necessary. Weintraub argues that this complex distinction encompasses a large number of notable oppositions:

The public/private distinction is also used as a conceptual framework for demarcating other important boundaries: between the “private” world of intimacy and the family and the “public” worlds of sociability of the market economy; between the inner privacy of the individual self and the “interaction order” […]. The public/private distinction, in short, is not unitary, but protean. It comprises not a single paired opposition, but a complex family of them, neither mutually reducible nor wholly unrelated. (2)
Much like public/private, the dichotomy of realidad/irrealidad in Millás’s columns is also a multifaceted one that includes not only the distinctions between private and public worlds but also several other aforementioned binary oppositions.\textsuperscript{20} Weintraub proposes that notions of public and private make sense only as elements in opposition and suggests “visibility” and “collectivity” as two fundamental criteria for distinguishing between these categories. Based on the criterion of visibility, the private/public dichotomy could be described as “What is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open, revealed, or accessible,” and according to the criterion of collectivity, this distinction could be defined as “What is individual, or pertains only to an individual, versus what is collective, or affects the interests of collectivity or individuals” (Weintraub 4-5). Both of these understandings of the private/public dichotomy are present in Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos, and they correspond to the dichotomy between reality and unreality, as my textual analysis will show. In addition to these descriptions of the division between the public and private, Warner maintains that their relationship could also take other forms such as political/nonpolitical, common/special, impersonal/personal, outside the home/domestic, and others, and also proposes that there are certain senses of private without an equivalent sense of public. The understanding of “private” most pertinent to my interpretation of Millás’s literary journalism will be that which is “related to the individual, especially to inwardness, subjective experience, and the incommunicable” (Warner 30). The boundary between private and public in Millás’s columns is drawn only to show that it is an unstable one and that these two categories constantly overlap as Weintraub, Warner and Wolfe suggest. Whereas Warner admits that “most things are private in one sense and public in another” (30),

\textsuperscript{20} See pages 25 and 31.
Wolfe goes a step further and introduces the idea of an intermediate dimension, thus proposing a trichotomous model:

Because we need to draw distinction between public and private, but also cannot accept any sharp or consistent way of doing so, we are best off if we give up the effort to force all moral, political, and theoretical issues into a dichotomous public/private frameworks; rather, we should recognize the existence of a third realm of social life, intermediate between public and private, that can resemble either in particular instances, but that also can be equated with neither. (182)

Although Wolfe acknowledges the efforts of thinkers such as Emile Durkheim, George Herbert Mead, and Hannah Arendt to define the “social,” he proposes his own trichotomy in which the intermediate realm is that of “distinct publics.” An example of this would be families and other communities whose members share identity, language, interests, beliefs, etc. and that are partially collective and partially private. This is determined by their internal standards, which cannot be imposed on the entire society, and their own particular needs. Although these groups share certain public norms, they tend to develop their personal identities (Wolfe 196-197).

Whether Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos include more or less explicit references to the public world (for example, “La realidad como videojuego,” “Enhorabuena,” “Una cuestión de carácter”) or whether they comment upon subjective experiences and the daily life of common people (“Diario,” “Confusión,” “El galán,” and others), his columns constantly dissolve the boundary between the public and the private. Furthermore, they create a public of their own, a community of readers with shared interests, beliefs, and literary taste – “a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself” (Warner 67) – and thus affirm the existence of the intermediate realm.
The distinction between public and private worlds in the *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* could also be understood as the distinction between information and story, as described in Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Storyteller” (1936), which discusses the decline in the communicability of experiences in the period after World War I. The main discrepancy between information and story according to Benjamin is that information must be verifiable and plausible, which is “incompatible with the spirit of storytelling” (89). The information is presented to us through daily news that contains facts and explanations, but does not incorporate important elements of storytelling:

> Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. (89)

Benjamin’s observation is particularly significant for understanding the majority of the *articuentos* in which Millás clearly prioritizes story over information. While the readers are offered news and reports about local and global events on every page of *El País*, Millás utilizes the back page of this daily newspaper to offer them either a combination of information and story or simply a story. Furthermore, when selecting columns for his collections of *articuentos*, Millás prefers to include those that are not tied to specific social or political circumstances but that deal with more universal themes related to human life. The volume *Articuentos escogidos* illustrates this tendency, for it incorporates solely those *articuentos* that tell stories about human concerns, desires, obsessions, and happenings in everyday life that do not contain any specific references to
the news. The relevance of these *articuentos*, which are separated from the contexts of the print or digital edition of the newspaper and framed into books, is not contingent on the moment when they were written; rather, they possess a lasting literary value. This corresponds to Benjamin’s thoughts concerning the passing character of the information and the timelessness of the story:

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. (90)

The story-like character of the *articuentos* could be ascribed to the fact that Millás has been a successful fiction writer for several decades. Yet according to Tracy Kidder, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, the techniques employed in literary journalism do not originate from fiction but rather from the art of storytelling (Sims, 1995:19). This once again justifies Millás’s decision to incorporate the word “cuento” into the name of his newspaper columns.

The stories that most *articuentos* and some *artifotocuentos* tell are about people with ordinary occupations with whom an average reader of *El País* could easily identify. A similar tendency can be observed in Manuel Vicent’s columns that I examine in the second chapter of my dissertation. Millás gives preference to writing about journalists, recently divorced men, housewives, adulterers, fathers and sons, etc. instead of writing about politicians and movie stars. The narrators and characters of the *articuentos* are therefore “personajes intrahistóricos,” who appear in Millás’s columns precisely because of this characteristic. Norman Sims indicates that these stories in particular have the ability to tell us more about life than the front-page news about famous people:
Literary journalism pays respect to ordinary lives. Literary journalists write narratives focused on everyday events that bring out the hidden patterns of community life as tellingly as the spectacular stories that make newspaper headlines. (…) Stories about wondering, work, family – about the things that happen all the time – can reveal the structures and strains of real life. They say more about most citizens’ lives than do the stories of singular disasters or quirky celebrities. (1955: 3)

My analysis of the selected articuentos and artifotocuentos in the following section of this chapter will show that Millás’s columns, despite their short form, aim to tell more and far more meaningful stories about public and private worlds, story and information, literature and journalism, and above all, about the reality and unreality of everyday life.

**Reality and Unreality in Articuentos**

The articuento “Gripe” marks the beginning of Juan José Millás’s weekly contributions to the back page of *El País* and illustrates how the author moves away from politics in order to address quotidian issues and subjective experiences. Nevertheless, “Gripe” is published during a flu epidemic in Spain and thus inevitably makes reference to the situation that was on everyone’s minds, without mentioning the measures of prevention, treatment, health care system, the number of individual flu cases, nor any other information that would turn this column into simple news. On the contrary, Millás suggests in this articuento that the flu is much more than an infectious disease that attacks the human body, and focuses on its effects on the mind and inner being. From the very first sentence, the narrator insinuates that there may be a connection between the flu and our deepest childhood fears: “La gripe viene de Asia; los fantasmas, del armario; el terror de las sombras. La gripe es un proceso. Un día, después de comer, empiezas a
The narrator, who himself is sick with the flu, proceeds to reflect upon his subjective experiences, his altered view of his office, colleagues, and cars in the street, his plans, and childhood memories, while also mentioning the physical symptoms of flu such as fever and chills. By examining how the flu influences the mind and changes our perception of the world, Millás dissolves the boundaries between body and mind, which is another great dichotomy of Western thought. Furthermore, he writes that the flu causes one to feel indifferent toward his obligations and responsibilities in the external world and thus functions as a special passageway that separates reality from unreality: “Mañana tenías un compromiso importante y te hace gracia pensar que el compromiso no te importa nada, como el resto de la realidad” (Millás 2012: 45). Alternatively, what matters to the narrator is the dream of his childhood happiness and his mother’s care, which presents a contrast to ephemeral pleasures of adult life. The flu thus takes the narrator into a world of dreams and memories that seems purer and more meaningful than his reality. He concludes with an observation that recalls the beginning of the articuento: “Algo así no puede venir de Asia, tiene que proceder de lo más hondo de uno mismo, como los fantasmas que parecen salir del armario, como el terror que emerge de las sombras” (Millás 2012: 46).

“Gripe” is a good example of Millás’s approach to periodismo de arte because it acknowledges the news about the flu epidemic while focusing on broader issues beyond the news and showing an appreciation for the subjective experiences, dreams, and imagination that constitute our daily life. It also brings up various philosophical and psychological issues such as the distinctions between body and mind and reality and appearance. By telling a story about a man with an ordinary office job and a caring wife, “Gripe” diverts readers’ attention from the information about the epidemic and provokes them to reflect upon their personal experiences,
thereby redirecting the focus from the news onto the individual. Millás’s preoccupation with internal reality is also illustrated by his mention of “lo más hondo de uno mismo,” which emphasizes both the literary character and the holistic tendency of the articuentos, for they address every single aspect of human life from the physical manifestations of an illness to its effects on the innermost self. Furthermore, what appears to be an unusual approach to a most common ailment in “Gripe” could be viewed as Millás’s interpellative mechanism, a way of “hailing” his readers in order to show them that there is always a certain strangeness behind the appearance of “normalcy.” Millás’s emphasis on the subjective individual experience while writing about the disease that affects people collectively thus initiates the anti-hegemonic discourse of the articuentos.

Millás’s interest in the subjective world and internal reality also receives consideration in the articuento “La verdad,” which refers to the news more explicitly than “Gripe.” “La verdad” illustrates how the public and the private coexist and constantly overlap in our daily lives and in Millás’s columns thus acknowledging the existence of the intermediate realm introduced by Wolfe. This Kafkaesque text narrates a single day in the life of a common family man with an ordinary office job who closely follows the breaking news to finally conclude that his existence must be irrelevant since his name does not appear in the newspaper, on the radio or television. Throughout this articuento, Millás skillfully combines information about the man’s private life with the national and world news. The protagonist is represented as a thoughtful husband who wakes up at dawn but hesitates to turn on the radio because he is afraid of awakening his wife. His anxiety and addiction to daily news, however, force him to leave the bedroom after all in order to tune in to the radio. We are also informed that he suffers from back pain and that his wife and child or children are likewise very thoughtful, for they gave him a cell phone as a gift
for Father’s Day. Lastly, the protagonist reveals his yearly family income in a conversation with his colleague. This information is not presented linearly; rather, it is interrupted by the mention of news such as the tornado in Miami and Spain’s fiscal amnesty as well as the protagonist’s concerns and efforts to discover whether or not he plays a part in these events. When he realizes at the end of the day that his name did not appear on the news and that no one called him to threaten his life, the painful “truth” is revealed, “Dios mío – se dijo –, no soy nadie” (Millás 2001: 31).

“La verdad” represents an ironic commentary about the overwhelming presence and influence of the news in our daily existence. The media has penetrated the life of the protagonist to such an extent that he assumes that this is a reciprocal process and that he too must be present in the media. Reading, hearing or watching the news is an integral part of his daily routine from the moment he wakes up in the morning to the moment he goes to sleep at night. The fact that he is not mentioned anywhere and that no one is looking for him ultimately causes him to question his own identity and reality. This articuento, whose title is not coincidentally “La verdad,” provides a clue for examining and understanding the dichotomy of realidad/irrealidad or realidad social/realidad familiar in Millás’s columns. External reality in this text is represented by the news pertaining to the public world, whereas the protagonist’s internal reality or unreality is constituted by his obsessions and subsequent identity crisis pertaining to his private world.

Although Millás combines the public and the private in this articuento, he does not comment any further upon the national and world news, but instead employs them only as a frame to reflect upon concerns, obsessions, and paranoia of an individual overpowered by the omnipresence and importance of mass media in everyday life. The fact that this articuento ends with the protagonist seeing his reflection in the mirror and acknowledging the instability of his
identity confirms that Millás gives preference to the unreality of the private over the reality of the public. Furthermore, it challenges the idea that the life of a simple family man who might be experiencing a midlife crisis is unworthy of mention in the newspapers. By referring only to the news about natural disasters and financial debacles, Millás emphasizes the tranquility of the man’s life in the context of his family. His poor protagonist, however, is so brainwashed by the news about catastrophes, heroes, and offenders that he feels completely self-alienated. According to Debord, this estrangement of the subject is caused by the overwhelming accumulation of spectacles in the society:

The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires. [...] the individual’s gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere. (7)

“La verdad” thus represents Millás’s attempt to acknowledge the private lives and self-alienation of ordinary individuals by writing about them on the last page of El País, away from the breaking news pertaining to the public realm and the sphere of the spectacle.

The articuento “Ficción” also brings up the notions of public and private, but it goes a step further by suggesting that the news belong to the world of fictions or narrations that structure and regulate our daily existence, as Michel de Certeau argues in The Practice of Everyday Life. The narrator of this articuento ruminates upon the influence of the media in our perception of both external reality and our own quotidian life. He observes that we are enmeshed in images and information about politics, economics, and society to such an extent that we have mastered them just like the pages of a narrative work that we have read a number of times: “La
cruenta realidad internacional, las miserias de la vida nacional, los acontecimientos culturales, la cartelera cinematográfica, todo, en fin, lo dominas como dominas una novela que has leído cien veces” (Millás 2011: 203). Considering that we start our mornings by reading newspapers and end our evenings by falling asleep in front of the television screen, the narrator observes that the external reality presented to us is constructed episodically and with the same level of suspense as serial novels: “Excepto en las tramas secundarias, con frecuencia imprevisibles, la realidad se comporta como una novela por entregas: siempre se suspende en el punto más alto, cuando en la cama te narcotizas con las últimas noticias” (Millás 2011: 203-204). He insists further on this equation of reality with fiction: “Manejas, pues, la realidad como si de la ficción se tratara” (Millás 2011: 204). Interestingly, Millás’s argument in “Ficción” is almost identical to de Certeau’s observation about the power of narrations to both organize our day and influence our subjectivity,

From morning to night, narrations constantly haunt streets and buildings…

Captured by the radio (the voice is the law) as soon as he awakens, the listener walks all day long through the forest of narratives from journalism, advertising, and television, narrativities that still find time, as he is getting ready for bed, to slip a few final messages under the portals of sleep. […] these stories have a providential and predestining function: they organize in advance our work, our celebrations, and even our dreams. (de Certeau 1984: 186)

By comparing the reality, as portrayed by the media, with literary fictions, Millás also confronts the problematics of representation to which I have already referred in this chapter and confirms Debord’s observation that “Everything that was directly lived has receded into representation” (1). The fact that “reality” behaves like a serial novel composed by a fiction
writer insinuates that it is carefully designed and constructed by the communications ISA. As such, “reality” can entertain us, but it cannot transform us into better and more responsible citizens. In fact, as Gramsci and Althusser would suggest, it fills our minds with the prevailing world-view and makes us consent to the authority and intellectual and moral leadership of dominant cultures. Although we may be enticed by the content of the daily news such as “La reunificación de las dos Alemanias, el hambre en Etiopia, la muerte en Suráfrica” (Millás 2011: 204), we are neither accountable for these events nor able to influence their course. On the contrary, we are interpellated by the news to such an extent that they can modify our own course of action. Furthermore, these events have the ability to penetrate into our daily existence and gradually erase it: “Ahora estás empezando el día y un 25% de tu alma está ocupada ya por la publicidad y por las noticias. Esta noche, cuando te acuestes, toda tu vida personal se habrá borrado, diluida en la ficción de los acontecimientos externos cuyo conocimiento no te habrá hecho mejor” (Millás 2011: 204).

This observation also explains why the narrator of “La verdad” experiences the identity crisis at the end of the day framed by Spanish and world news. The articuento “Ficción” ends with the narrator’s realization that the news about current events can make one ignorant about oneself: “el precio de saber todo lo que le pasa al mundo es el de no saber lo que te pasa a ti” (Millás 2011: 204). I interpret this closing sentence as Millás’s warning to all readers of his columns not to become alienated from their subjective inner world in favor of the external reality constructed by the news media. Millás alerts his readers that dominant discourses have the power to constitute all individuals as obedient subjects that vacillate their way through life convinced that their beliefs, values, and morals come from within. “Ficción” is therefore supposed to open
our eyes to the complex relations between our identities and different institutions and practices within the society and to prevent us from taking the appearance of the everyday for granted.

If “La verdad” makes reference to the external reality and “Ficción” describes the fictions that constitute it, the articuentos “El agente de la Interpol” and “Metales no ferruginosos” emphasize the importance of the internal reality in individual lives. “El agente de la Interpol” tells the story of a man who pretended that his father, a hardware shop owner, was in fact a secret agent of the international police organization. Whereas his true father was a middle-class man occupied with running his shop, the sophisticated Interpol agent prevented him from developing damaging habits, had a positive influence on his education, and broadened his horizons:

Ya sé que mi padre, objetivamente hablando, no fue más que un humilde tendero de barrio, pero ese padre apenas ha influido en mi educación. El que de verdad me hizo fue el imaginario. Él me dio los mejores consejos y orientó mi vida de tal modo que sin su existencia yo habría sido diferente. No sé si mejor o peor pero diferente. (Millás 2001: 82)

After the protagonist makes this confession to the narrator of the articuento, who is also his childhood friend, the latter concludes that the unreal has always determined our lives more than the real (2001: 81-82), as I have previously mentioned. In “El agente de la Interpol,” the unreal thus becomes more significant and authentic than the real itself since it shapes the protagonist’s decisions as he is coming of age and boosts his imagination. This, of course, seems paradoxical, which the narrator acknowledges by referring to his friend’s relationship with the imaginary father as “la relación real con un ser inexistente” (2001: 82, my emphasis).

Whereas “El agente de la Interpol” clearly prioritizes the influence of the unreal in our lives over that of the real, the articuento “Metales no ferruginosos,” whose plot is also related to
espionage, blurs the boundaries between the two, as well as between the public and private spheres. The narrator of this *articuento* confesses to the reader that his uncle, who recently died at the age of 90, spent the last months of his life telling everyone that he was a spy in his youth and that his main assignment consisted of passing intelligence to “Leo,” a British secretary residing in Paris, who afterward passed this information to the Russians. Although he contemplated abandoning espionage, he could never do it because of his love for Leo. The narrator is convinced that his uncle’s story was fiction, a product of his senility, until he reads in the newspapers about Melita Norwood, an 87-year-old British woman who was truly a KGB spy. Perplexed by this news, he begins to question whether there was any truth in his uncle’s story, “Al leer, sin embargo, la noticia de Melita Norwood y ver su foto en los periódicos no he podido dejar de preguntarme si no sería ella el contacto con el que mi tío se encontraba en las afueras de París. La realidad y la ficción se anudan a veces de este modo sorprendente” (Millás 2001: 117).

Besides dissolving the boundaries between reality and fiction, “Metales no ferruginosos” also challenges the distinction between public and private when their relation takes form of “open to everyone/restricted to some” and “in physical view of others/concealed” (Warner 29). If the narrator’s uncle indeed had been a spy, his mission should have been kept secret – that is, hidden from his family members and larger public. Likewise, Melita’s espionage would have remained classified had it not been for the memoirs of another Russian spy that made it to the newspapers. And if the uncle’s story was just a private fantasy produced by his aging brain, it became public when he revealed it to his relatives. His case therefore blurs the already thin line between the information and story in Benjamin’s terms. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Melita was officially employed in the organization that the narrator considers fictional:
Por otra parte, de Melita se dice que era secretaria de la Asociación Británica de Investigación de los Metales no Ferruginosos. Y eso si no hay quien lo crea, aunque sea verdad […]. Si a un escritor se le ocurre meter en una novela una asociación de este tipo los lectores le abandonan en el primer capítulo. Resulta más verosímil lo de mi tío, aunque fuera mentira. Aunque fuera mentira, me repito, observando la foto de Melita Norwood. ¿Pero lo fue? (Millás 2001: 117).

It is worthy of note that the narrator refers to novel writing in order to demonstrate the unbelievable nature of Melita’s real occupation, thus insinuating that readers expect certain degree of “verisimilitude” from literature even if a skillful fiction writer has to construct it. Paradoxically, what may be a fictional story in the case of the narrator’s uncle is true in the case of Melita, whereas her real employment seems fictional. Similarly to “Gripe,” “Metales no ferruginosos” suggests that the most common episodes and seemingly uninteresting stories in everyday life may often contain elements of strangeness, and reminds us how difficult it is to draw the line between reality and fiction, information and story, the ordinary and the extraordinary. In this manner, Millás encourages us to always search for the other, alternative side of the official story.

**Reality and Appearance in Artifotocuentos**

My analysis of the selected articuentos has shown that Millás frequently makes reference to current national and world news either explicitly, such as mentioning the fiscal amnesty in Spain, or implicitly, such as writing about the subjective experience of having the flu during the epidemic of this disease. In 2004, after nearly a decade and a half of writing columns in *El País*, Millás wrote his first artifotocuentos, in which the subject of his scrutiny are not textual news, but instead news photographs. In these texts, as well as in the artifotocuentos that were written in
the following two years, Millás openly raises the question of the problematics of representation by exploring to what extent news photographs are able to portray the reality of his time. The prologues to the three collections of *artifotocuentos* together form what could be considered Millás’s treatise on photography in general and news photography in particular. In the prologue to *Todo son preguntas*, his first book of *artifotocuentos*, Millás explains that press photos, which constitute the photo album of society, possess an important informational value:

> Del mismo modo que en la vida subrayamos, matizamos o desmentimos con el gesto lo que expresamos con la boca, en el periódico la foto buena (en el sentido pertinente) puede transmitir una información que desmiente matice o subraye lo que afirma la noticia escrita. La foto no es una mera mancha para descansar la vista; *es información pura y dura* y con el tiempo, como demuestran algunas de las que hay dentro de este libro, se convierten en iconos de una época. (Millás 2005: 13, my emphasis)

Bearing in mind that press photos complement the textual news and contain significant information about Spain and the world, Millás examines them with a fine-tooth comb throughout his texts and pays attention to the context of their publication and details in the image. The existence of the *artifotocuentos* confirms in my view Millás’s inclination to add a narrative to the information – in the Benjaminian sense – in order to come closer to a possible interpretation of reality. This concurs with Roland Barthes’s observation about the difference between the photograph and the text: “the Photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else (it is always something that is represented) – contrary to the text which, by the sudden action of a single word, can shift a sentence from description to reflection” (28). The *artifotocuentos* could thus be understood as reflections about press photos carefully selected by Millás, but they also
provide a commentary about our “society of the spectacle” that is increasingly saturated with images; they intend to “open our eyes” by transforming the way in which we observe the world from a passive gaze to a more engaged critical examination. If we tend to approach the image as if it were “the reflection of a basic reality” (Baudrillard 347), the artifotocuentos insist on recognizing and analyzing the phases of its progressive alienation from its referent. According to Baudrillard, the image can mask and pervert a basic reality, conceal its absence, or become its own simulacrum and bear no relation to any reality (347). Millás, who considers himself an apt observer, thus employs the artifotocuentos not only to express his opinion about certain news photographs and their (in)ability to represent everyday life but also to mediate the relationship between these images and his readers.

In the prologue to El ojo de la cerradura, the second book of artifotocuentos, Millás indicates that one of the greatest disproportions of our time is that many people own cameras and take pictures yet few know how to truly look at a photograph (2006: 9). As a professional fiction writer and therefore a member of that minority, Millás chooses to comment upon those news photographs that possess what Barthes refers to as the punctum or the second element of the photograph “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. […] Punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of dice. A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). The first element of the photograph according to Barthes is the studium, which refers to a kind of general interest and gives rise to a large number of likeable but not loveable photographs that do not make a lasting impression on the observer. Barthes denominates these photographs “unary” and considers that most news photographs can be characterized as such for they do not contain any memorable details that would have the ability to disturb or engage the viewer. Furthermore, they do not
communicate in any way the unstable nature of reality: “The Photograph is unary when it emphatically transforms “reality” without doubling it, without making it vacillate (emphasis is a power of cohesion): no duality, no indirection, no disturbance” (Barthes 41). It is precisely for this reason that Millás selects those news photographs that possess the punctum, that stand out in the newspaper and provoke further reflection about the small slice of reality that they represent. It is therefore unsurprising that he generally gives preference to the photographs that depict scenes from daily life over those that capture important events, politicians and celebrities. Even when he chooses to write about the press photos of influential people such as the Spanish prime minister or the president of the United States, these images tend to represent somewhat intimate moments as if they had been taken through a peephole:

Gran parte de las fotografías seleccionadas para este libro, incluida la de la cubierta, tienen la virtud de que, sin dejar de ser profesionales y de referirse a asuntos públicos, irradián un halo de fotografía familiar, de representación íntima. Parecen escenas captadas a través del ojo de una cerradura, lo que constituye una singularidad sorprendente. (Millás 2006: 11, my emphasis).

By recognizing certain qualities of an intimate family photo in news photographs of public events, Millás once again demonstrates that the public and private worlds constantly overlap in reality, in various representations of it, and in his columns.

Although the articuentos and artifotocuentos comment on different aspects of everyday life, each artifotocuento is related to a specific current event and hence to the public sphere. Furthermore, the dichotomy of reality/unreality that I have examined in the articuentos takes the form of reality/appearance in artifotocuentos since they are always tied to the photographic image. If we take into account Debord’s argument that “the spectacle is an affirmation of
appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances” (3), then Millás’s careful examination of news photographs could be seen as an attempt to expose the spectator nature of our society. His approach to the distinction of reality/appearance thus enriches even further the understanding of the notion of “reality” in his columns. In the prologue to Sombras sobre sombras, the third and most recent book of artifotocuentos, Millás reveals that he considers photographs to be shadows of the world, which itself is a shadow of some other “realidad real.” In order to express this view, Millás evokes the origins of photography and writes about the symbolic meaning of camera obscura, the optical device that recalls Plato’s allegory of the cave, as represented in the Republic. He tells a story about waking up from a dream about an enormous camera obscura, which has taken in the entire universe, and still feeling trapped inside it and separated from his real existence: “Mi barrio, quizá mi mundo, no era la realidad, sino una huella de la realidad” (2007: 10). Affected by the dream, Millás suggests that we too are small cameras obscura “en las que penetran las imágenes del mundo, del mundo, atrapado a su vez en una cámara oscura mayor” (2007: 11). According to this metaphor, news and press photos interpellate our own being as representations of the outside world, which cannot be considered the origin or transcendental signified but rather nothing more than the sum of shadows. Drawing from Gramsci and Althusser, these shadows are nothing but a metaphor for the prevalent values and beliefs. Millás does not claim throughout his artifotocuentos that he knows what the real reality is, but instead warns his readers not to take for granted news and images for they are mere appearances – “sombras sobre sombras” or artificial constructs of the dominant ideology. He therefore invites us to view each text as “un modo de tantear entre las sombras el sentido de los bultos de los que estamos rodeados” (Millás 2007: 11).
Considering that Millás evokes Plato’s cave in this prologue, I propose that he sees his own role as a writer and intellectual as that of the prisoner who is freed from the cave only to realize that he was living in the world of shadows and that the true source of everything that he and his fellow prisoners had been seeing is the Sun. The shadows are far removed from the Sun, however, by the objects and the men who carry them, the shadows of the outside world, and its reflections in the water. Unlike the prisoner, Millás does not point directly to the source of everything but instead assumes the responsibility of informing his “imprisoned” readers about the multifaceted nature of reality. He correctly presumes that our attention is entirely captured by the endless imagery presented to us by the mass media, advertising, and different practices within society, and he takes on the role of liberating us from the constraints of hegemony. He does this in the *artifotocuentos* by carefully examining news photographs and by looking for a deeper meaning beyond the initial assumptions. Furthermore, Millás’s obsessive treatment of the dichotomy of reality/appearance and his constant disruption of the dominant discourse could be interpreted as his own interpellative mechanism that aims to raise our awareness of the world we live in.

Along these lines, the very first *artifotocuento* published in *El País* in August of 2004 entitled “Receptores del sabor,” raises the question of the relationship between reality and appearance. In this text Millás comments on the press photo of obese children eating McDonald’s French fries and drinking soda (see figure 3). He indicates that everyone will presume upon seeing the photo that the children are American because they fit into stereotypes about the obesity epidemic in the United States. This is, however, merely an appearance whose deceptive character Millás reveals in the opening sentences of this text: “Los niños de la foto no son norteamericanos, sino rusos. Y no están en Estados Unidos, sino en Tbilisi (Georgia). Para
que vea usted lo que engaña el ojo y lo que miente la lógica” (2005: 17). Nevertheless, what is truly deceiving in this context is not our eyes nor our logic, but rather the existing cultural stereotypes. The photograph, as Millás explains, was originally accompanied by a text about the efforts to produce fat-free food that tastes like food with fat, sugar-free food that tastes sweet, and salt-free food that tastes salty in order to produce healthy edibles which are also pleasing to the palate.

![Figure 3. Photograph in “Receptores del sabor”](image)

Although this *artifotocuento* refers explicitly to the human body, diet, and relations between the United States and Russia, it is also a commentary on the power of the image to mislead us in its portrayal of reality, as well as on the biases of our perception. The fact that Millás leads off his series of articles about the press photographs with this particular text insinuates that the main tendency of the *artifotocuentos* is to dismantle each photograph and to challenge its ability to represent reality, thus causing us question our power of perception and to
develop an awareness of the elusiveness and multiformity that characterize everyday life. Were it not for the text that initially accompanied the photo of the obese children and Millás’s *artifotocuento*, newspaper readers would automatically categorize the photo with other clichéd images of daily life in the United States. “Receptores del sabor” therefore aims to question our way of seeing and understanding the world and its numerous representations and it places Millás in the position of philosopher and educator.

The importance of interpreting reality and scrutinizing its various facets is further emphasized in the *artifotocuento* “La diferencia entre el dedo y el pezón,” published in the collection *El ojo de la cerradura*. Inspired by the photograph of the first baby born in Spain in 2006, the son of Ecuadorian immigrants, this *artifotocuento* represents a commentary about the deconstruction and construction of reality and individuals. Millás contemplates the photo that depicts the happiness of the new parents – the delighted mother breastfeeding her son and the father caressing the baby’s head (see figure 4) – and uses this scene as a point of departure to reflect on our inherent urge to dismantle reality. He points out that to the newborn the world seems like “una masa indiferenciada de la que él forma parte” (2006:43), a mass that begins to take shape as he is growing up. According to Millás, an individual is paradoxically constructed through the process of deconstructing his or her own surroundings:

Parece mentira que el término deconstrucción sea un neologismo, cuando crecer no consiste en otra cosa que en deconstruir el Universo. Uno se hace en la medida en que deshace lo que lo rodea. Se hace cuando diferencia el cuerpo de su madre del propio; cuando distingue el cerca del lejos; cuando intuye el significado de dentro y fuera; cuando separa, en suma, cuando desmonta la realidad como se desmonta un juguete. (2006: 44, my emphasis)
This observation is particularly notable because it demonstrates that the numerous binaries in Millás’s writing serve to deconstruct what we perceive as reality or, in Highmore’s terms, to question “the transparency of the daily” (1). Furthermore, “La diferencia entre el dedo y el pezón” reveals that Millás also uses the deconstructive method for the purpose of self-creation and personal growth. It is for this reason that his texts acknowledge the necessity of these and other dichotomies while simultaneously attempting to dissolve them. This blurring and dissolution of numerous boundaries, which characterize both everyday life and literary journalism as a hybrid genre, will be further explored in the third chapter of my dissertation about a digital magazine entitled FronteraD.

Considering that the articuentos and artifotocuentos are written for the readership of El País, I propose that Millás is also interested in the formation of his readers, who he hopes will be converted into critical anti-hegemonic subjects through the reading of his columns, examining
various aspects of the everyday, and dissolving the boundaries between seemingly stable categories. In Michael Schudson’s terms, Millás’s readers are supposed to evolve from informational citizens, “saturated with bits and bytes of information,” to informed citizens, who besides information also have “a point of view and preferences with which to make sense of it” (27). The news media, however, cannot engender the informed citizen who will see the news as something other than just “the contemporary catalogue of available information” (Schudson 169). Consequently, Millás assumes the responsibility of further cultivating newspaper readers by offering them both information and stories about daily life, creating characters with whom they can identify, causing them to wonder what is real and what is fictional, and constantly making playful remarks about reality.

After 2006, Millás continues to write about news photographs in the section of El País entitled “La imagen.” Although these texts are shorter than the original artifotocuentos, they nonetheless examine different aspects of everyday life, as represented by press photos, and critically reflect on the notion of reality itself. This is perhaps best illustrated by “Lo real y L’Oréal,” published on March 17th, 2013 in El País Semanal. Intrigued by the photograph of two construction workers in a small town in France (see figure 5), Millás begins his commentary by blurring the boundaries between photography and painting, and reality and appearance: “Hay fotos que parecen pinturas, y pinturas que parecen fotos, al modo en que hay realidades falsas que parecen verdaderas, y verdaderas que parecen falsas.” Millás finds the photograph of the construction workers perplexing because it reminds him of Rene Magritte’s surrealist paintings. In Millás’s view, the slightly asymmetrical composition of the photograph symbolizes “que no hay, ni siquiera frente al espejo, dos imágenes iguales, como no hay dos sinónimos que signifiquen lo mismo.” This observation confirms once again that the problematics of
representation has been a constant theme in Millás’s *periodismo de arte* that has persistently emphasized the impossibility of the accurate portrayal of reality.

![Figure 5. Photograph in “Lo real y L’Oréal”](image)

Enticed by this painting-like photograph, Millás decides to “google” the notion of the real, and surprisingly the first results he obtains have to do with the French cosmetics company: “Todo ello resulta tan estimulante que le dan a uno ganas de pinchar en Google el sintagma ‘Lo real’, a fin de refrescar o actualizar sus conocimientos. Lo fantástico es que lo primero que sale es L’Oréal, una marca de cosméticos. Lo real como una forma de maquillaje, Dios mío.” I interpret the final “Dios mío” as an expression of Millás’s astonishment that his assumptions about reality proved to be true. “Lo real y L’Oréal” shows that what is considered “real” is nothing else but a construction (hence the photograph of construction workers), design, appearance, or a layer of make-up, which conceals other layers that can be removed, reapplied and changed based on the
latest fashion trends or ideologies. In this *artifotocuento*, Millás does not look for a “true face” of reality hidden behind the cosmetics nor does he invite his readers to do so. Instead, his *artifotocuentos* together with the *articuentos* encourage us to acknowledge the contingency of the external public world and to rely on the subjective experiences, feelings, and dreams that constitute our internal reality.

By means of conclusion, I would like to comment on Millás’s article “Un ataque político a las formas de vida,” to which I have already referred in the introduction to this dissertation regarding the spirit of resistance that characterizes contemporary *periodismo de arte*. The purpose of this text is to criticize the notion of “consumo cultural” in light of government budget cuts affecting the arts and culture in the recent years, as well as to raise awareness of the importance of culture for understanding the world. Millás argues in this article that culture and the arts are ways of life and exposure to them enriches our perceptions of reality:

Ir al cine, escuchar a Beethoven, leer a Dostoievski o visitar el Museo del Prado no son formas de consumo. Son formas de vida. Así que, en vez de señalar en los periódicos, un día sí y otro también, que este Gobierno recorta las ayudas económicas al cine, al teatro, a la educación, etcétera, deberíamos denunciar que recorta las formas de vida actualmente existentes: “El Gobierno recorta una nueva forma de existencia”. “Desciende el número de formas de entender el mundo”.

(…) Tales deberían ser los titulares.

The fact that the Spanish government has neglected culture and the arts is particularly worrisome in Millás’s view because it prevents the citizens from proposing alternatives to the dominant discourse:
Las sociedades en las que se pierde la sensibilidad cultural son más dóciles, más fáciles de manejar, son menos libres porque carecen de un discurso alternativo al dominante. Sin discurso, no hay manera de modificar la realidad. La realidad es producto del discurso. La realidad actual es producto del discurso dominante actual. De ahí su calamitoso estado.

Although this article refers to the recent failures of the Spanish government to support the educational system and to invest into cultural programs and institutions, Millás’s observations are pertinent to all time periods and environments that disregard the value of culture and arts in everyday life and instead give preference to the branches that are considered more profitable. As hybrid texts that combine information, story, photographs, and reflections about the indeterminacy of the everyday, the *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* have always been an essential part of Millás’s resistance to the univocal worldview imposed by the prevailing discourse and disseminated through the news media. If Millás indeed considers that politics is attacking entire ways of life, as the title of his article states, then his *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* published weekly in the highest-circulating Spanish newspaper can be considered a literary, journalistic, and cultural rebellion against mainstream politics. To read his column every Friday in *El País* implies questioning and modifying the dominant discourse since, as Millás asserts in one of his *articuentos*, “Leer es rebelarse” (2001: 285).
CHAPTER TWO

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE: EPICUREAN ETHICS AND INTRA-HISTORY IN COLUMNS BY MANUEL VICENT

…cartesianismo de la vida no y no de la cogitatio.
—José Ortega y Gasset, Historia como sistema

Amo el espectáculo de la vida sobre todas las cosas.
—Manuel Vicent, “Anden”

The resistance to the discourses and practices of the dominant political and cultural institutions that underlies Juan José Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is, in fact, one of the most distinctive features of Manuel Vicent’s newspaper columns. Even though Millás considers the unreality of everyday life more authentic than the “reality” of immediate political and social circumstances, his texts still contain a more explicit commentary on the relations between the dominant and subordinate cultures, as well as the mechanisms that regulate them, than Vicent’s literary columns. In that sense, the resistance in articuentos and artifotocuentos is primarily semiotic, to use John Fiske’s term, forcing us to reexamine the very notion of reality and to make our own meanings of the everyday and of our identities. Vicent’s periodismo de arte, on the other hand, promotes evasive resistance that, as my analysis of his columns will show, consists in the avoidance of radical opposition to the existing system and the appreciation of simple quotidian pleasures that constitute human life.

In the latter half of the 19th century, German philosopher, historian, and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey began to develop the idea that human life is the starting point of all philosophy and as such must replace the metaphysical notions of substance and being in Western thought.
As the inaugurator of *Lebensphilosophie*, Dilthey saw human life as primary or radical reality considering that our thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of the physical world always appear within the context of our life. Dilthey thus inverted the traditional approach to philosophy and instead of searching for categories that would explain human existence, proposed that human life itself was “prior to all theory, reason, or explanation as the pre-cognitive and ultimate perspective through which the universe is given to us at all. All secondary realities must appear within the primary reality of our life” (Tuttle 1).

Dilthey’s philosophy of life influenced José Ortega y Gasset, Spanish philosopher, essayist, and journalist, who criticized rationalism and instead established *raciovitalismo* and *perspectivismo* as more adequate theories for comprehending the world. In *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (1923), Ortega considers essential “ordenar el mundo desde el punto de vista de la vida” (1981: 119) and suggests that each and every human life represents one point of view about the universe. Furthermore, Ortega declares that all philosophy that attempts to find universal categories alienated from human life in order to interpret the world is utopian. Ortega’s idea of human life that includes the “I” and its circumstances, as he famously declared in *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914), was conceived as middle ground between the opposing philosophical doctrines of realism and idealism. As Tuttle explains,

The fundamental reality proposed by realism and idealism can be neither the primacy of the independent and objective thing maintained by realism, nor the primacy of the subjective thinking thing as maintained by idealism. […] The “I” and its circumstances exist together in the bipolar relation that is the radical reality of human life. (48-49)
The notion of human life, as Ortega understood it, could no longer be explained by pure reason characteristic of positivist thought, but required a different kind of reason—razón vital—, which accepts that human life is prior to all other realities and “thinks the very form and function of life” (Tuttle 97-98). As Ortega’s thought further developed, the concept of vital reason evolved into razón histórica or historical reason, which acknowledged that human life is not static, but rather exists and progresses through historical time. In Historia como sistema (1935), Ortega affirms that human life can be fully understood only if its trajectory from the past, through the present and into the future is followed and described through the process of narration (16-17). The answers to the questions how we became who we are, what constitutes our life, and what motivated our past actions can be acquired only through storytelling. Historical reason is therefore “a narrative account of human life in its developing from what it has been to what it presently is and will become” (Tuttle 102). By introducing vital and historical reason as new forms of thought for comprehending human life, Ortega redefines the traditional conception of philosophy as obscure and far removed from the everyday existence and turns it into an essential method for the understanding of a complex relation between the “I” and its circumstances.

The aspirations that both Dilthey and Ortega had for philosophy during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, such as its focus on human life as radical reality and narration of our existence through historical time, have their echo in the recent newspaper columns by Manuel Vicent. The profound interest in human life, its appreciation, and concerns with how to live it at the fullest have characterized Vicent’s columns published in El País since the early nineties until the present. In these texts, Vicent narrates everyday life, diagnoses the general malaise within the society, establishes its causes, and proposes a path for regeneration, and above all for our individual salvation. In this manner, Vicent goes a step
further than Dilthey and Ortega since the purpose of his columns is not only to comprehend human life and employ it as a prism to cast light on all other or “secondary” realities but also to provide advice on how to live a good and pleasurable life. In other words, Vicent transforms Dilthey and Ortega’s philosophical project into an ethical one. This chapter aims to show that Vicent’s columns compiled in the volumes *A favor del placer: Cuaderno de bitácora para náufragos de hoy* (1993), *Las horas paganas* (1998), *Nadie muere la víspera* (2004), and *El cuerpo y las olas* (2007) develop both a philosophy of and for human life focusing on our day-to-day existence.

In *Philosophy and Everyday Life* (2001), Laura Kaplan affirms that philosophy is traditionally perceived as “an attempt to soar above everyday life, to think on a higher plane and spin sophisticated theories about the world” (1). Yet according to Kaplan, most people have a philosophy of life that frequently manifests itself as a series of principles that they follow on a daily basis. These two approaches to life – the theoretical and the practical one –, however, do not necessarily exclude one another, as several philosophers have shown. From the ancients such as Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus, who dealt with the questions of pleasure and the good life, to Bertrand Russell’s seminal work *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), and more recently Alain de Botton’s founding of the School of Life, there has always been a tendency to apply philosophical pondering about the universe to the everyday existence. In that sense, Manuel Vicent’s literary-journalistic texts can be observed as a creative manifestation of the inclination

---

21 The School of Life was established by the Swiss-British philosopher Alain de Botton in the summer of 2008. Its main objectives include applying philosophy, literature, and culture to the everyday questions and concerns such as how to achieve a successful career, how to communicate with a family member or a partner, how to deal with one’s past, etc. Although its headquarters are in London, the School of Life operates around the world through classes, therapy, and various publications. For more information, visit [www.theschooloflife.com](http://www.theschooloflife.com).
to incorporate philosophical discoveries into our everyday practices. Furthermore, these complex, thought-provoking, often ironical, and sometimes humorous texts published every Sunday in print and digital editions of *El País* are significantly shorter, more easily accessible, and thematically closer to everyday realities than philosophy books. In order to show that Vicent’s columns provide readers with a small weekly doses of literature, human life, and defiance of the dominant world-view and discourse, I will examine in this chapter how Vicent interprets the Spanish society of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, what constitutes his ethics and resistance, and why the hybrid genre of a newspaper column is the most apt way of articulating this particular philosophy of everyday life. As a manifestation of contemporary *periodismo de arte*, Vicent’s columns illustrate the emphasis that this frontier genre places on the quotidian. His ethical texts also enrich Spanish and perhaps global literary journalism by transcending the immediate circumstances and promoting universal values and timeless classical culture.

Throughout my analysis of a selection of Vicent’s columns in this chapter, I will demonstrate that his approach to human life reflects Ortega y Gasset’s *raciovitalismo*. Furthermore, Ortega and Vicent both use the metaphor of the shipwreck (*el naufragio*) to refer to our human condition in the world. After I examine Vicent’s criticism primarily directed towards contemporary Spanish society, I will focus on his concept of salvation from the previously mentioned “shipwreck.” More specifically, I will argue that Vicent’s philosophy of life has three different yet mutually compatible aspects: the cultivation of classical virtues, the emphasis on small sensorial pleasures, which are defining characteristics of Epicurean ethics, and the primacy of unofficial, inner history over History. Living our lives by Vicent’s prescription is not only supposed to bring us happiness and fulfillment in this author’s view, but it also implies escaping from the social control at the level of minuscule everyday practices.
Vital Perspective and the Metaphor of the Shipwreck

In Human Existence As Radical Reality: Ortega y Gasset's Philosophy of Subjectivity, Pedro Blas González considers as Ortega’s most important contributions to philosophy the foundation of “a metaphysics of life,” as well as his insistence that philosophy “must remain a vital possibility for man. Philosophy must be practiced as a way of life” (xiv). When Ortega maintains that human life is radical reality, he does not refer to collective biological life (16), but rather to individual life understood as biography in which past actions and circumstances determine our present condition. Drawing from Ortega’s Historia como sistema, Antonio Gutiérrez Pozo infers that human life possesses historical or narrative reason since in order to comprehend certain event, we tend to recount and analyze the events preceeding it, “La racionalidad de las cosas humanas consiste en suma para Ortega en una narración” (71). This emphasis on the vital perspective on reality and the process of narration as a means to achieve it is precisely where Ortega’s raciovitalismo and Vicent’s philosophy of life converge, as I have already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Given that one of the central themes in Vicent’s columns is the good life and that they narrate different episodes from our everyday existence, these texts can be considered a literary materialization, from an ethical point of view, of Ortega’s vital and historical reason. In fact, one need not look further than the word náufragos in the title of the 1993 compilation of columns in order to notice similarities between Ortega and Vicent’s thought. Thus, A favor del placer: Cuaderno de bitácora para náufragos de hoy is not only an appropriate title for this collection of texts, but it also summarizes Manuel Vicent’s approach to newspaper columns and to daily life in general.

As the first part of the title states, Vicent’s philosophy of life is based on pleasure and as such can be considered a type of hedonism, which I will discuss more broadly later in the chapter.
In the second part of the title, Vicent employs two metaphors related to the sea, “cuaderno de bitácora” and “náufragos de hoy,” which refer to his compilation of columns and to the entire humankind including his readers, respectively. The dictionary of Real Academia Española defines “cuaderno de bitácora” as “libro en que se apunta el rumbo, velocidad, maniobras y demás accidentes de la navegación.” Accordingly, Vicent addresses in his columns the course of human life, the passing of time, actions that we carefully plan and willingly take, as well as unpredictable events that may interrupt our daily routine and/or our direction in life. The metaphor of the logbook also implies certain frequency considering that this notebook is traditionally filled with new information every day at a determinate hour just like Vicent’s columns can be read in El País every Sunday morning. The second metaphor related to the sea, “náufragos de hoy,” suggests that Vicent sees our human condition as a shipwreck, as a consequence of some kind of destruction or ruin. The connotation of this metaphor, however, is not entirely negative in my opinion since Vicent ultimately sees all human beings as survivors who are “swimming” or “navigating” through life despite all the difficulties they might encounter. His columns are thus supposed to offer information, advice, motivation, and instruction to these survivors on how to avoid drowning and make the most of each day. The phrase “de hoy,” which modifies the noun “náufragos,” enables the readers of Vicent’s book, whether they read it in the early nineties when it was first published or more recently, to recognize themselves among the survivors and suggests that the topics addressed in these columns have a timeless relevance.

22 In the column “Nadar,” Vicent writes about the importance of learning how to swim in order to survive, “El ideal es estar siempre con el agua al cuello. Con ese nivel nadie se ahoga; en cambio te permite cierta emoción al desafiar las olas que te manda el azar” (2007: 208).
The fact that Vicent makes human life the center of his writing and approaches our daily existence from a pragmatic point of view shows that his texts reflect Ortega’s raciovitalismo, as I have already suggested. Along these lines, it is interesting that the metaphor of the shipwreck, which only occasionally appears in Vicent,\(^\text{23}\) represents one of the central metaphors in Ortega’s works. As Ricardo Tejada observes about Ortega’s philosophical writings, “No sólo la metáfora del naufragio recorría la casi integralidad de su obra, adquiriendo casi el título de metáfora preferida, sino que además incidía en el núcleo de su filosofía, a saber, en el quicio entre el yo y las circunstancias y, por ende, en el estatuto metafísico de la vida (humana)” (2). Ortega’s metaphor of the shipwreck and his idea of human life as radical reality are closely related since this philosopher considers that our life circumstances, which can never be controlled, and which constantly interact with the “I,” are precisely what makes us feel “shipwrecked.” In “Qué es la filosofía?” (1929), Ortega writes that we have no other choice but to accept these coincidental and provisional conditions, “Vivir es encontrarse náufrago entre las cosas. No hay más remedio que agarrarse a ellas. Pero ellas son fluidas, indecisas, fortuitas” (cited in Tejada, 5). Ortega’s description of circumstances as fortuitous, which contributes to our feeling of helplessness, is related to his impression of modernity as an utter confusion in which nothing makes sense and in which man is submerged in self-doubt (Tejada 10). As a result of the careful analysis of all passages where Ortega employs the metaphor of the shipwreck, Tejada infers that it does not refer to a sudden unfortunate event that interrupts an otherwise peaceful and pleasurable course of life, but rather to a permanent characteristic of human existence, “la vida es intrínsecamente naufragio. […] El naufragio no es un accidente de la vida, algo que podría suceder en cualquier

\(^{23}\) Whereas the use of the shipwreck is clearly metaphorical in several of Vicent’s columns, the protagonist of his novel Son de mar (1999) Ulises Adsuara survives a literal shipwreck and then eventually drowns in another one with his wife Martina.
momento o nunca ocurrir, ni tampoco el destino último y fatal de la vida: la muerte.
Sencillamente forma parte de la trama constitutiva de la vida. Vivir es siempre naufragar” (5-6).

Despite the fact that Vicent and Ortega have in common the appreciation and concern for human life as radical reality, it would be impossible and perhaps even futile to determine whether or not and to what extent the philosopher has directly influenced Vicent’s use of the shipwreck metaphor. It is reasonable to assume, however, that Vicent’s overall fascination with the sea (especially with the Mediterranean) and his belief that it can have a profound impact on human life, have been the source of inspiration for the metaphor of *naufragio* in his columns. Focusing on Vicent’s longer fictional works, María Alma Morán argues that the sea functions as a character and a metaphor of man in four of his novels: *Contra Paraíso* (1993), *Tranvía a la Malvarrosa* (1994), *Del Café Gijón a Ítaca* (1994), and *Son de mar* (1999). Every single stage and sensorial experience in man’s life has its counterpart in the sea, “El mar es un escenario vertebrador de las obras de Vicent, está siempre presente, produciendo reminiscencias en todos los personajes. El recuerdo de la infancia, la adolescencia y los primeros momentos de la vida adulta, van ligados a los aromas, los colores, las luces y los cambios de estado del mar” (5). Furthermore, the Mediterranean that appears in Vicent’s works is not just a physical or literary territory, but rather a mental space, “un mar interior,” as the author himself declares in an interview given to Pilar Cabañas (105).

Among Vicent’s literary journalism, the column that perhaps best illustrates the meaning of the sea and its vital importance for human beings is “Las olas,” which opens the volume *El cuerpo y las olas*. In this text, Vicent employs the sea and the waves as metaphors of the totality of human life and of specific days and hours that constitute it:
El mar sólo es un conjunto de olas sucesivas, igual que la vida se compone de días y horas, que fluyen una detrás de otra. Parece una división muy sencilla, pero esta operación, incorporada a la mente, ha salvado del naufragio a innumerables marineros y ha ayudado a superar en tierra muchas tragedias humanas. (2007: 19, my emphasis)

Whereas Ortega y Gasset identifies the human condition with the shipwreck, Vicent, in a more optimistic manner, compares our life to the sea, sometimes agitated and sometimes calm, and contends that its power and unpredictability can be controlled if we master specific practices and incorporate them into our daily existence. The principal strategy for survival according to Vicent consists in approaching life as a sum of individual days, and each day as a sum of hours. In this manner, life is never perceived as immense tragedy or extreme happiness, but rather as a constant alternation and passing of different moments, “Como las olas del mar, los días y las horas baten nuestro espíritu llevando en su seno un dolor o un placer determinado que siempre acaba por pasar de largo” (Vicent 2007: 20). Although Vicent’s initial comparison between human life and sea can be considered somewhat abstract, he also gives a concrete recommendation for developing and practicing certain survival tactics. Vicent proposes that we should look up to children who do not perceive the sea as an invincible totality, but instead as a sequence of waves in which each wave is a battle to be won:

24 In an interview given to Pilar Cabañas, Vicent confirms that his philosophy of life presupposes the division of time into smaller units,

El tiempo es una cosa que se hace, tú haces el tiempo. Entonces, considerando que los días, las horas y los minutos son divisiones de las cosas que estás haciendo, resulta que estas cosas constituyen la sustancia tuya. Eres lo que haces. A partir de eso, yo extraigo toda la filosofía vital: se vive al día, la felicidad no existe – son pequeños actos felices, o pequeñas desgracias – , todo se produce a unos niveles de minutaje. (103)
La práctica de aquellos baños inocentes en la orilla del mar es la mejor filosofía para sobrevivir a las adversidades. El infinito no existe, el abismo sólo es un concepto. (…) La única sabiduría consiste en dividir la vida en días y horas para extraer de cada una de ellas una victoria concreta sobre el dolor y una culminación del placer que te regale. Una sola ola es la que te hace naufragar. De esa hay que salvarse. (2007: 20, my emphasis)

Vicent’s column “Las olas” thus provides specific wisdom and knowledge on how to survive the pain and embrace the pleasures in life. It is notable that his principles of survival are derived from both his personal experience and literature – he mentions having read about the shipwreck in a novel by Joseph Conrad (2007: 19). Vicent therefore applies literature to the everyday the way Ortega claimed that philosophy should be practiced as a way of life and the way de Certeau suggested when he set to develop science of singularity. Furthermore, “Las olas” demonstrates that Vicent creates literature with a practical function, namely to instruct us how to achieve a satisfying life. This is illustrated by the description of pleasure that one experiences after a day at the beach, “Con cuánto placer dormía uno esa noche con los labios salados y el cuerpo cansado, abrasado de sol, pero no vencido” (Vicent 2007: 20, my emphasis). “Las olas” implies that as long as we can experience pleasure, there is no adversity that could possibly defeat us.

Social Criticism and Separation from Politics

It is by now evident that el naufragio in Vicent’s columns symbolizes unfortunate circumstances that may surround one’s life, yet to what does it refer more specifically within the

---

25 Manuel Vicent was born in Villavieja, Castellón and spent his childhood and youth in the Valencian Community where he frequented the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea.
context of contemporary Spanish society? What is Vicent’s view of our time and how does he express social criticism throughout his weekly contributions in *El País*? In order to address these questions, I will examine a selection of Vicent’s columns in which he diagnoses what could be considered as the illness of the society. Although he does not name this condition, but instead mainly describes its causes and symptoms, I will refer to it as “basura actual” (1998: 58), a phrase that Vicent uses in his column “Goya negro”. It is notable that in the texts included in the four compilations published since 1993 onwards Vicent never mentions a specific political figure, a criminal or a catastrophic event that may be responsible for the decay of the Spanish society. It is my view that this is because he is guided by the principles of ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus who advocates a tranquil life devoid of tumultuous political engagement (O’Keefe 139). Vicent thus expresses his criticism either by commenting the overall decadence of the society or by referring to politicians, police, the media, etc. in general, without naming anyone in particular. For instance, in the column “Redentores” published in the volume *Las horas paganas*, Vicent describes the “daily misery” of the Spanish society in the following way, “Fuera no hay más que ruido, basura, chapuzas, estupideces galácticas y palabras gastadas” (1998: 224). Another example of this broad criticism is “Habas” included in the compilation *A favor de placer*, “Como en Sodoma y Gomorra, ahora también vivimos en un tiempo de pensamiento débil y realismo sucio” (1993: 63). Vicent’s literary description of the social maladies is rather philosophical and thus requires an active reader who would develop his/her own interpretation of the metaphors such as “noise” or “galactic stupidities.” The abstract

---

26 The central idea of this column is that the Black Paintings by Francisco Goya can be understood as a metaphor of “la España de siempre,” which has managed to preserve its morality and purity despite the corruption and decay of moral values. As Vicent writes, “Debajo de la basura actual, de la corrupción política y de la caverna también existe una España limpia y moral que sustenta todavía un sueño ilustrado” (1993: 152).
character of Vicent’s observations also shows that every single aspect of the society is going through a process of deterioration, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint the source of the problem. In any case, it is interesting that Vicent’s criticism addresses “worn-out words” since the economy of words is one of the defining characteristics of the genre of newspaper column, and since columna de escritores in particular tends to incorporate carefully selected and highly connotative vocabulary. This implies that Vicent’s conception of a healthy society is based on similar principles as those that he employs for writing newspaper columns.

Some of Manuel Vicent’s texts written for El País offer more concrete criticism focusing on particular flaws of the society or certain groups of people, such as the governing class, within it. For instance, his column “Cortesía” condemns the violence and aggression that have penetrated into different spheres of life from politics to entertainment, “La violencia hoy es una de las formas que adopta el aire. (...) Por todas partes cunde la agresividad: está en la boca de los políticos, en la pluma de los comentaristas, en la risa de los cómicos” (1998: 177). Vicent is even more specific in other columns where he explicitly blames the media, politicians, and bankers for the social decay, “Los periódicos bombean cada día un poco de basura hacia la superficie de la sociedad y en ella flotan panza arriba políticos corruptos, banqueros libidinosos, especuladores con dientes en la tráquea y otros tiburones de secano” (1993: 63). The media, represented by the newspapers in this case, thus create a fertile ground for corruption, greed, and a lack of scruples, which already characterize contemporary society. Other difficulties according to Vicent are that social maladies such as violence, corruption, and fraud are often disguised by good looks and nice manners and that they can be found in our immediate surroundings, “Sé muy bien que hay

---

27 In some other columns, Vicent’s criticism is directed towards the sensationalist character of television (“Butaca”), the role of mass media in reporting about violence (“Violencia”), and the priority that is given to the news about national and global catastrophes over the uneventfulness of everyday life (“Resistente”).
asesinos guapos, estafadores simpáticos, políticos corruptos, periodistas canallas y policías sádicos, todos muy entretenidos, pero no me gusta que estén en el mismo andén del metro esperando el convoy que yo espero” (1993: 25). As we can observe from the cited examples, Vicent’s means of rebellion against such reality is not to explicitly attack a certain corrupted politician or journalist, but rather to distance himself, as Epicurus would advise, from their way of thinking and acting, which is represented in this case by the gap between the opposite train platforms. Furthermore, Vicent makes his criticism as far removed from the dominant discourse and as literary as possible thereby evoking Fiske’s notion of evasive, slow, and progressive resistance. This essential characteristic of Vicent’s columns is further elaborated in “La corriente,” which clearly prioritizes everyday life of individuals over political affairs. The narrator of this column tours the city much like the protagonist of “La Nochebuena de 1836” by Mariano José de Larra, observes the passers-by, and overhears the fragments of their conversations. Among the people he notices is a beggar sleeping underneath the cardboard, a woman talking to her friend about her daughter’s lack of ambition, a man who suspects that he has a tumor, young people collecting signatures for a petition about an important social issue, elderly people waiting in line to collect their pension, a rose seller, etc. Vicent’s style in this column, in which the narrator simply lists what he sees, purposefully resembles the flow of life, as the title already announces. The narrator’s concluding remark is that politics have no relevance in the face of everyday concerns:

Durante este trayecto por el centro de la ciudad, llevado por el río de la gente, he escuchado estos diálogos fragmentados: el máster de mi hijo, la pensión no me da para nada, la vidente me ha asegurado que lo mío se va a resolver, he perdido dinero en los fondos de inversión de renta fija, no me aguanto de lo gorda que
“La corriente” therefore confirms that Vicent’s primary interest is in experiencing life and narrating those experiences in his weekly columns. Although these texts frequently offer social criticism thus illustrating our human condition of “náufragos” in the sea of unfavorable circumstances, Vicent does not turn to political activism for salvation. In fact, he finds politics incompatible with the stream of everyday existence and instead creates a philosophy of life based on the revival of classical virtues, pleasure, beauty, and intra-history. My discussion of each of these categories, beginning with Vicent’s classicism, will show that his recommendations on how to live both virtuous and satisfying life cannot be separated from his understanding of the hybrid genre of *columna de escritores*.

**Classical Framework and Universal Virtues**

In the prologue to *Las horas paganas*, the 1998 compilation of columns, Máximo correctly detects Vicent’s enthusiasm for the classical tradition, “Todos sabemos que los autores que frecuenta Manuel Vicent son gentes como Ovidio, Horacio, Safo, Séneca, Hesíodo, Homero y Tales de Mileto. Cuando quiere deslizarse hacia la contemporaneidad abre un libro de Keats o del Paul Valéry. […] Manuel Vicent va para clásico” (17). Indeed, it is not surprising to find references to the spear of Hercules, the philosophy of Epicurus, and the stories of Odysseys, Penelope, and other classical figures in Vicent’s columns. The title *Las horas paganas* also evokes the antiquity considering that the origin of the word “pagano” is Latin “pagānus,”

---

28 The lack of references to political affairs in Vicent’s columns brings to mind the famous opening verses of the poem “Politics” by the Irish modernist poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), “How can I, that girl standing there, / My attention fix / On Roman or on Russian / Or on Spanish politics?” (348)
meaning peasant or inhabitant of the countryside, and subsequently referring to Ancient Romans and Greeks who observed a polytheistic religion. It is precisely the ancient world, the unspoiled Arcadia and its universal values, that inspire Vicent’s philosophy of life, as my analysis will confirm. The word “horas” is also significant for it reflects one of Vicent’s strategies of survival according to which time should be divided into smaller fragments such as days and hours as illustrated by the previously examined column “Las olas.” Due to Vicent’s fascination with the classical thought, art, and literature, his texts could be considered as a part of the classical tradition, which Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow have defined as follows:

The classical tradition covers a millennium and a half of cultural achievements, historical developments, facts, fictions, and phenomena on many levels. It subsumes the many ways in which, since the end of classical antiquity, the world of ancient Greece and Rome has inspired and influenced, has been constructed and reconstructed, has left innumerable traces (sometimes unregarded), and has, repeatedly, been appealed to, and contested, as a point of reference, and rehearsed and reconstituted (with or without direct reference) as an archetype. (3)

The fact that Vicent relies on classical wisdom, ancient heroes, and philosophers to develop strategies for living the good life in the 21st century, which he then presents in a hybrid genre of a newspaper column in its print and digital form, is another tactic of his evasive resistance, yet it may seem somewhat problematic. If the classical tradition has consistently been associated with high culture, authorities, and canonical practice (Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow 4, 119), how can Vicent employ its themes to address the contemporary globalized and volatile world? What kind of reading audience do his columns require? An educated reader familiar with the Greek and Roman philosophy and mythology? Or an ordinary man or woman disappointed
by the moral decay and in need of a new approach to life? Is there a discrepancy in writing about atemporal values in a medium such as newspaper whose every edition could be considered ephemeral? The answer to these questions lies in T. S. Eliot’s acclaimed speech “What is a Classic?” (1944) and subsequently in Frank Kermode’s observation about the contemporaneousness of the classic, “The doctrine of classic as a model or criterion entails, in some form, the assumption that the ancient can be more or less immediately relevant and available, in a sense contemporaneous with the modern – or anyway, that its nature is such that it can, by strategies of accommodation, be made so” (Kermode 15-16). This argument is illustrated in the column “La bondad” that discusses the timeless relevance of certain classical virtues such as goodness, kindness, tenderness, and generosity. The premise of this text is that the most essential ethical principles that would make one’s life worth living have been forgotten and that there is nothing more significant and modern than being good, “No existe nada tan moderno como la ternura del corazón. […] Vuelve a estar de moda la bondad clásica” (Vicent 1993: 211).

This appreciation of the universal values, which are often taken for granted, represents an alternative to the world governed by consumption and politics and devoid of morality. Vicent gives specific recommendations on how we can revive certain universal virtues and become “classically modern:”

mientras la violencia florezca en el asfalto, tu obligación consistirá en sonreír, cultivar a los amigos, ensayar nuevos postres caseros en las tardes de domingo, sentirte apasionado por la felicidad de tu perro, recobrar la ternura, ser generoso y no esperar a cambio sino un dulce sentimiento compartido. Si encima te conviertes en un especialista del siglo XVIII que no sirva para nada se podrá decir que eres moderno. (212)
It can be observed that Vicent’s prescription for the good life is largely based on being a mindful and benevolent person and not expecting any material rewards in return. Besides the virtues mentioned in “La bondad,” Vicent expands his list of desirable qualities that one should possess in the previously referenced “Andén” and “Cortesía.” The solution Vicent proposes for distancing oneself from the corrupted politicians and spectacle-driven media is cultivating “virtudes clásicas” such as “la ingenuidad, la fe en las personas, la templanza y cierto grado de decencia antigua” (1993: 26). These virtues should be sufficient to keep one immune to the diseases of modern civilization according to Vicent. The somewhat vague “la decencia antigua” can be equated with courtesy, a classical virtue that deserves a column of its own for its power to change the world. “Cortesía” provides a contrast between harsh social criticism, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, and the urgency to save the humanity by practicing good manners. Vicent considers refined social behavior as one of the most powerful means for securing the future of humankind, “en medio del Apocalipsis, uno puede salvarse. Cuando han caído todos los ideales aún queda en alto un valor supremo que da fundamento a las personas que quieren vivir con dignidad y cohesiona a la sociedad que lucha por no extinguirse. No se trata de una moral profunda, sino de la vieja cortesía que mantenía en pie esta gran ficción de la existencia” (1998: 177).

Besides the advocacy of good manners and other universal virtues, Vicent’s reflection of the classical paradigm is also evident in his appreciation of the Epicurean way of life based on simple sensorial pleasures. In this manner, Vicent’s columns follow the idea of the ancient philosopher that living virtuously and pleasantly are mutually dependent, “For prudence is the source of all other virtues, teaching that it is impossible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honorably, and justly, and impossible to live prudently, honorably, and justly without
living pleasantly. For the virtues are natural adjuncts of the pleasant life and the pleasant life is inseparable from them” (Epicurus 31). Vicent thus considers a life filled with pleasure as an alternative to and a rebellion against destructive politics and lack of integrity in public life. His column “Bajo el olivo” relates how Epicurus and his followers undermined the established order not by starting an armed revolution, but rather by living a pure and fulfilled life in contact with nature:

Leyendo a Lucrecio debajo de un olivo se entiende por qué los epicúreos fueron tomados en su tiempo por subversivos. Frente a la tiranía de los dioses enarbolaban las leyes de la naturaleza; frente a los terrores de ultratumba proclamaban que el alma desaparecía con la muerte puesto que no era distinta de los sentidos; frente a los crímenes de los políticos y la corrupción de la vida pública se purificaban huyendo al campo para acogerse allí a los deleites sencillos de cada día y con ellos levantaban un bastión inexpugnable. (1998: 193)

It is notable that these conclusions about the Epicureans are drawn while reading the works of the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius in no other place than under the olive tree, which shows that Vicent’s approach to his own life is consistent with the Epicurus’ pleasure-seeking philosophy. Furthermore, written in 1995 during the controversial last period of Felipe González’s government (1982-1996), “Bajo el olivo” demonstrates that this ancient wisdom still has resonance in our contemporary world where state crimes and political corruption are not uncommon. Although Vicent does not mention specific corruption scandals and murder cases, it
is evident that this column represents a reaction against state terrorism\textsuperscript{29} and other illegal practices during the González’s term. Vicent’s biggest concern regarding this detrimental political situation is its power to brainwash Spanish citizens thus impelling them to constantly analyze and judge the politicians’ wrongdoings, “Los españoles estamos asistiendo a un espectáculo putrefacto. […] Lo peor de los crímenes y de la corrupción política es que han acabado por ensuciar la mente del ciudadano corriente hasta convertirlo en sospechoso o inquisidor, en colaboracionista o conjurado, en culpable o inocente de su propia opinión” (1998: 193-194). The only possible rebellion and salvation in those circumstances are resistances of the micro level that, as Fiske asserts, “may well act as a constant erosive force upon the macro, weakening the system from within so that it is more amenable to change at the structural level” (2011: 11). In “Bajo el olivo,” these resistances consist of turning to the idyllic rural life, classical philosophy, and simple pleasures that life has to offer:

El deterioro de la vida pública es tan profundo que uno debe volver a armarse moralmente desde la naturaleza, allí donde las ovejas escarban en busca de raíces. Leyendo a Lucrecio debajo de un olivo puede uno comenzar a redimirse de la suciedad que la ciénaga política le ha dejado en el cerebro la última temporada ejerciendo ahora el pequeño placer de los sentidos. (Vicent 1998: 194, my emphasis).

Considering the important role that pleasure, which is always in junction with moral virtues, plays in Vicent’s philosophy, I will now examine his treatment of both aesthetic and physical pleasure throughout his columns.

\textsuperscript{29} The Spanish government officials established in 1983 Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación (GAL), the illegal death squads whose objective was to fight the Basque separatist militant group ETA.
Pleasure, Beauty, and the Good Life

In an interview given to Javier Ochoa Hidalgo in 1997, Manuel Vicent asserts that all human beings are driven by their desire to experience pleasure, “El ser humano se mueve por placer; única y exclusivamente por placer. Lo que pasa es que cuando se dice esto se tiende a pensar en un placer grosero, o en un placer físico. No. Hay gente que siente más placer escuchando a Bach que robando, y otra que experimenta más placer robando que oyendo a Bach” (5). In the universe of Vicent’s columns, however, experiencing pleasure and performing an illegal and immoral act such as stealing are mutually incompatible. Vicent promotes throughout his columns aesthetic pleasure, which can be attained through the appreciation of high culture, but also simple sensorial pleasures that one can experience while observing the waves, smelling the sea breeze, having a delicious breakfast or an exquisite cocktail. In that sense, Vicent’s approach to everyday life can be described as a type of hedonism if this doctrine is defined as “a view that a life is better in itself for the one who lives it as it contains a more favorable balance of pleasure over pain” (Feldman 20). Hedonism primarily has to do with “what makes a person’s life good in itself for the person” (Feldman 22) and not with the feeling of happiness per se. In order to better understand Vicent’s hedonism, it is essential to go back to the Classical Antiquity and briefly comment the early theories on pleasure.

In *Pleasure and the Good Life: Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists*, Gerd van Riel identifies two particular models of pleasure among the ancient philosophers. Whereas Plato understands pleasure as a replenishment of a lack and a return to the harmonious “natural condition,” Aristotle sees it as an additional element, that is, as the perfect performance of the activity that already forms part of our natural state (van Riel 2, 51). Plato believed that only a wise man could experience true pleasure, which he conceived as a mixture of pure physical contentment and moderate intellectual activity (van Riel 19). In addition, Plato acknowledged the importance of our senses in experiencing delight, “the good life is a life containing all
intellectual activities, combined with pleasure in virtue, health and temperance, *pleasure in pure odours, colours, sounds and forms*, and pleasure in studying, at least if such pleasure does not proceed from a previous distress, plus the (necessary) pleasures of eating, drinking and sex” (van Riel 38, my emphasis). Although Manuel Vicent mostly makes reference to Epicureanism, my examination of his columns will show that his hedonism has a lot in common with Plato’s conception of pleasure as a combination of sensory experiences, satisfaction of the most basic bodily needs, and intellectualism. Unlike Plato, Epicurus did not pay much attention to mental pleasure primarily focusing on the pleasure of the body, and more specifically of the stomach, whose needs can always be fully satisfied. Another essential aspect of the Epicurean thought is the idea of prudence, which I have already mentioned, contrary to the popular conception of hedonism as extreme indulgence. Epicurus believed that pleasure could be achieved by freeing the body and soul from all pain and disturbance\(^{30}\) and by satisfying all other necessities wisely and moderately:

> For it is not drinking bouts and continuous partying and enjoying boys and women, or consuming fish and the other dainties of an extravagant table, which produce the pleasant life, but sober calculation which searches of the reasons for every choice and avoidance and drives out the opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men’s souls. (31)

In a similar manner, Vicent promotes simple pleasures in his columns such as admiring the sunrise, eating a tomato, or reading a poem. Epicurus declared that “pleasure is the beginning and the end of the blessed life” (van Riel 80), and Vicent goes a step further by showing that pleasure is an essential element of survival. This is true for both aesthetic pleasure experienced\(^{30}\) Feldman uses the term “static pleasure” to refer to this condition.
through the contemplation of art, and for physical enjoyment achieved with a simple yet
delicious meal and a glass of wine.

Vicent’s column “Vanguardia” included in the volume Nadie muere la vispera (2004) illustrates the power of beauty and art to save one’s life in a dangerous and hopeless situation. This text tells a story about a Jewish art dealer who managed to survive three executions by firing squad in the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. During the first execution, he fainted from fear in front of the firing squad and ended up in a mass grave from where he managed to escape after a substantial effort. The second and the third time, however, he decided to take advantage of this experience and collapse on purpose seconds before the bullet reaches him. Once he found himself in the mass grave surrounded by cadavers, the young man survived following the advice that his late father, art dealer in Berlin, gave him, “Le dijo que en los momentos en que se sintiera más degradado se aferrara a la belleza de una melodía o al fragmento de un cuadro para purificarse. En medio de la miseria de Auschwitz el muchacho imaginaba la luz que despide el pañuelo de la infanta Margarita, pintado por Velázquez” (2004: 103). This detail from the 17th century painting La infanta doña Margarita de Austria31 provided the young Jew with all the necessary strength and taught him how to survive, “Cuando por tercera vez fue llevado al paredón ya era un experto […] en agarrarse a esas pinceladas luminosas de Velázquez para salvarse” (Vicent 2004: 103). “Vanguardia” also reveals that after the war this young man become a famous art dealer and gallery owner in Berlin and that he always refused to use the word “vanguardia,” originally a military term, to designate “cualquier actividad que tenga alguna relación con la belleza” (Vicent 2004: 104). Vicent, who is an art

31 Recent investigations at Museo Nacional del Prado have revealed that the author of this portrait of King Philip IV’s daughter was not Velázquez, but his son-in-law, Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo.
connoisseur himself, shows in this column that violence and even death become utterly impotent in the face of beauty and splendor of art.\textsuperscript{32}

Vicent continues to develop his views on art as a form of resistance in the column “El vacío,” published in \textit{El País} on February 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2013, which could be understood as an implicit ethical commentary about the corruption in Spain. Instead of openly expressing his opinion about the scandal known as “Caso Bárcenas”\textsuperscript{33} and revealed several weeks prior to the publication of “El vacío,” Vicent approaches corruption as a universal problem that has existed throughout history and art history. By transcending the current news in this manner, Vicent manages to communicate “más verdades, aunque más despacio,” which is an essential characteristic of \textit{periodismo de arte} (Umbral 14). In “El vacío,” Vicent lucidly observes that the realization of the monumental works of art and architecture throughout history has been made possible by various cases of corruption:

\begin{quote}
La corrupción de los faraones nos regaló las Pirámides; de la corrupción de la antigua Grecia heredamos el Partenón; la corrupción de Roma nos ofreció el Panteón y el Coliseo; con la corrupción de la iglesia medieval se erigieron el románico y el gótico de las catedrales; la corrupción del Renacimiento nos dejó la Piedad de Miguel Angel, encargada al artista por un papa Borgia, que impartía el
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} The idea that art has the power to save a human life is the central theme of Vicent’s novel \textit{La novia de Matisse} (2000) in which the health of the female protagonist Julia, who is diagnosed with leukemia, improves whenever her husband purchases a painting or a sculpture that fascinates her. Julia is completely cured by the end of the novel primarily owing to a drawing by the French impressionist Henri Matisse.

\textsuperscript{33} In January of 2013, the Spanish newspaper \textit{El Mundo} revealed that José Luis Bárcenas, who was the treasurer of the incumbent People’s Party from 1990 to 2009, had concealed a number of secret payments to senior party members that he made from a fund of donations from businesses.
veneno como un sacramento. Se puede llegar hasta hoy a través de todos los crímenes que la humanidad ha cometido alrededor de la belleza. (2013)

In this manner, Vicent expresses his agreement with the famous declaration by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, “From a moral point of view, the great moments of culture were always times of corruption” (Nietzsche 13:16 [10]). “El vacío” also relates that while the corruption contributed to the existence of these majestic monuments, the subsequent crimes deprived them of their initial material value. Nevertheless, the desolate spaces that remained after the robberies eventually developed into a creative emptiness, which managed to maintain the spiritual value of the monuments, “Allí ya no hay nada, salvo el vacío. Los dioses se han esfumado, el oro fue robado, el cadáver del héroe ha desaparecido, pero el vacío de aquel lugar hermético es el fundamento más sólido, similar al espíritu, la única fuerza que sustenta toda la antigua gloria” (Vicent 2013).

“El vacío” reflects Manuel Vicent’s view that art possesses a two-fold nature. On one hand, it represents timeless beauty and spirit, and, on the other hand, it can awake the dark, inaccessible part of our personality and it is contaminated by all the crimes committed around its creation and preservation. In this manner, the ruins mentioned in “El vacío” function as a witness of what Vicent denominates “la ruina humana,” phrase that also reflects current corruption issues in Spain. But at the same time, the contemplation of art and pleasure obtained from it can provide a shelter from corruption and other unlawful and immoral activities. This reaffirms Epicurus’ idea that pleasure, in this case aesthetic, always goes in conjunction with moral virtuousness. At the end of the column Vicent declares, “La corrupción y la basura moral que hoy nos asfixia tienen un punto de fuga. El arte es una escapatoria hacia ese vacío donde habitaron un día los dioses, que es el fundamento del espíritu. Sálvese quien pueda” (2013). It is
important to notice that in both columns Vicent makes explicit reference to salvation. Whereas “Vanguardia” deals with the survival and purification of a specific person, “El vacío” focuses on everyone affected by corruption and lack of morality. The only road to salvation in these columns is through contemplation of works of art, which is supposed to not only bring us pleasure, but also to make us better people. Vicent ultimately prescribes art and beauty as remedies for the social maladies and essential mechanisms for survival.

Much like painting and sculpture, literature also has the power to save and purify our lives and perhaps even the entire society, as illustrated by the column “Diamante” published on the New Year’s Eve in 1994. In this text, Vicent ponders about his plans to spend the last night of the year in bed reading the poems of Paul Valéry, which is also a way of expressing his attitude toward politics, as previously discussed in this chapter. Instead of protesting against different political issues and suggesting a series of improvements to be made in the year to come, Vicent opts for a different form of resistance based on Epicurean ethics,

No pienso clamar contra la corrupción ni recordar que vivimos sobre una cloaca abierta. Voy a tratar de salvarme individualmente siguiendo las normas del tiempo epicúreo y para eso este último día del año intentaré redimir al mundo metiéndome en la cama a las diez con un libro de poemas, y bajo la luz tenue de la mesilla brillarán unos versos de diamantes junto a mi memoria toda la noche.

(1998: 197, my emphasis)

There is a stark contrast in this quote between the filthiness of an open sewer as a metaphor of the degradation of contemporary politics and society and Valéry’s poetry as a symbol of purity, beauty, and delicacy. It is also notable that the concept of salvation throughout Vicent’s columns
primarily relies on individual commitment and effort. According to his philosophy of life, one must first save oneself by living a moral life filled with simple pleasures and only then contribute to the salvation of the entire society. In fact, Vicent praises those who live their lives focused on their own wellbeing and do not have any expectations,

Debemos volver a la clandestinidad para luchar desde allí contra la suciedad que nos envuelve ejercitando *pequeños actos felices*. Cada día son más los que intentan salvarse sumergiéndose dentro de sí mismos. Existe ya un inmenso ejército de individualistas que ha abrazado el anonimato como una disciplina. No exige nada, no espera nada. […] *Intenta ejercer los derechos a una felicidad diaria, a unos placeres medios.* (1998: 198, my emphasis)

Another essential aspect of Vicent’s prescription for salvation is being moderate and observing life not as a whole, but rather as a series of fragments similarly to what is suggested in the column “Las olas.” In his view, the good life is not about indulgence and constant happiness, but about moderate pleasures, intellectualism, and individual days filled with joy thus representing a combination of Plato and Epicurus’ theories of pleasure. Whether Vicent employs impressionist painting, Ancient Greek and Roman architecture, classical music and jazz, or symbolist poetry, his philosophy of life is always based on quiet appreciation of what is considered as high culture and on peaceful resistance to the dominant discourse.

Philosophical pondering on beauty and art, however, are not the only ways of living a fulfilled and happy life. We can experience moments of joy through the realization of very mundane acts such as having a cup of coffee or reading a newspaper over breakfast as long as we do not let the daily news embitter our coffee. As Vicent writes in “Café sólo,” “Mi lucha por la
La existencia consiste en que a la hora del desayuno sea mucho más importante el aroma del café que las catástrofes que leo en el periódico abierto junto a las tostadas” (1998: 463, my emphasis). Relying on our senses is therefore infinitely more important for living the good life than paying too much attention to the external events that we cannot control. News about politics, economics, and natural disasters, as well as religion, and metaphysical and scientific theories do not actually have a significant impact on our everyday existence primarily consisting of different sensorial experiences, casual talks, and certain established routines:

Tal vez la muerte consiste en no tomar ya más un cruasán crujiente con el café por las mañanas junto al ventanal ni enterarse ya nunca jamás de los resultados del Campeonato de Liga cada domingo. Al final de todas las religiones y filosofías, en medio de tantos dioses, héroes y sueños, resulta que la vida no es sino un conjunto de chismes y un nudo de aromas, una pequeña costumbre cuyos pilares tan sólidos son de humo y salen de ciertas tazas frente a las cuales uno ha sido feliz. (Vicent 1998: 464)

Due to the fact that Vicent puts so much emphasis on the ordinary moments comprising our everyday existence, his approach to life could be considered as a micro-philosophy and micro-sociology. The title “Café sólo” further confirms this hypothesis since a simple cup of coffee in the morning is all we need to begin a new day. In addition, experiencing a moment of delight at the very start of each day implies according to Vicent’s understanding of time that the rest of that day and our life will be equally pleasant. His conception of time is developed in the column

---

Laura Ferrero, whose blog *Los nombres de las cosas* I analyze in the following chapter, references this column by Manuel Vicent in her blog post “La importancia de un vino y unas aceitunas” that discusses the crucial importance of details, seemingly trifling matters, and little pleasures in our day-to-day existence.
“Cóctel” in which the simple making of a Cuban cocktail “Alexander” on a melancholy afternoon inspires rumination about the relation between the past, present, and future. The mixing of different liquors leads Vicent to realize that life is a constant repetition of the already lived moments and sensations,

El enigma de la existencia consiste en que el tiempo entero se acumula en el presente. El pasado y el futuro bailan en la punta de una aguja de nieve que es el alma, de modo que estar vivo no es más que repetir lo que a uno le queda todavía por vivir. Según esta teoría, si me procuraba un pequeño placer ahora mismo, todo el placer del mundo se expandiría a lo largo de mi vida hasta llenarla por completo. (2007: 83)

The implementation of Vicent’s philosophy for the good life based on simple pleasures therefore seems to be a relatively effortless process. Reading a column about beauty of art or life itself on a Sunday morning and simultaneously sipping a cup of coffee already implies experiencing a moment of joy, a sensation that will then endlessly repeat throughout our life or at least until the publication of another column the following Sunday.

**The Primacy of Intra-History over History**

It is evident both in “Café sólo” and “Cóctel” that Vicent focuses on the typical everyday life of common people, those of us that enjoy hearing the results of a football game over a morning coffee or an afternoon drink. These men and women are in Vicent’s view in a complete juxtaposition with gods, heroes, politicians, and criminals. In other words, the crucial aspect of Vicent’s philosophy of life is precisely the appreciation of the local, the everyday, that is, of what Spanish philosopher and writer Miguel de Unamuno named *intrahistoria*, as I have already
suggested in the introduction to this chapter. In order to comprehend the primacy of intra-history over History in Vicent’s vital philosophy, it is fundamental to briefly examine this controversial concept developed by Unamuno in his collection of essays En torno al casticismo (1895). According to Unamunian scholar Mario Valdés, the boundary concept of intra-history at the crossroads between a singular event and everyday reality emerged not so much from Unamuno’s reaction to the loss of the colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in 1898, but rather as a result of the overall moral decay of the Spanish society (247, 239). This is how Unamuno introduces the idea of intrahistoria in a much-cited paragraph from his essay “La tradición eternal:”

Las olas de la Historia, con su rumor y su espuma que reverbera al sol, ruedan sobre un mar continuo, hondo, inmensamente más hondo que la capa que ondula sobre un mar silencioso y a cuyo último fondo nunca llega el sol. Todo lo que cuentan a diario los periódicos, la historia toda del “presente momento histórico,” no es sino la superficie del mar, una superficie que se hiela y cristaliza en los libros y registros y, una vez cristalizada así, una capa dura, no mayor con respecto a la vida intra-histórica que esta pobre corteza en que vivimos con relación al inmenso foco ardiente que lleva dentro. Los periódicos nada dicen de la vida silenciosa de los millones de hombres sin historia que a todas horas del día y en todos los países del globo se levantan a una orden del sol y van a sus campos a proseguir la oscura y silenciosa labor cotidiana y eterna […] Esa vida intra-histórica, silenciosa y continua como el fondo mismo del mar, es la sustancia del progreso, la verdadera tradición, la tradición eterna, no la tradición mentida que se
suele ir a buscar al pasado enterrado en libros y papeles y monumentos y piedras.

(41-42, my emphasis)

It can be observed in this quote by Unamuno that the prevailing metaphor in his concept of intra-history is that of the sea, its depth and surface, thus calling to mind Vicent’s metaphors of waves and shipwreck. The sea therefore seems to be an endless source of imagery and analogies for both authors. Another interesting aspect of Unamuno’s definition in the light of contemporary periodismo de arte in Spain is his insistence that newspapers only report about singular events of historical importance, as represented by the metaphor of the crystalized sea surface, and neglect the silent everyday life, as expressed with the image of the bottom of the sea. As we have seen in the introduction to this dissertation, Maurice Blanchot makes the same observation several decades later when he states that newspapers are “incapable of seizing the insignificance of the everyday” (243). The genre of columna de escritores and especially columns by Manuel Vicent and Juan José Millás, however, show that disseminating news and the hegemonic discourse is no longer the sole focus of the newspaper. In fact, Millás’s and Vicent’s weekly contributions in El País represent an alternative to Historia in the Unamunian sense, which still occupies the great majority of the newspaper. Vicent’s philosophy for the good life implies distancing oneself from this dramatic history and politics filled with intrigues and scandals, and focusing on uneventful daily life. As Celso Medina writes:

La intrahistoria no es un relato de intrigas, sino el reporte de la cotidianidad, que puede despertar interés sin que se venda emvasada en escándalos. Implica la abolición del predominio de la política en la narración historicista. Esa historia que se vanagloria de las conquistas, que habla de vencidos y vencedores, va a ser sustituida por la saga de la cotidianidad. (128-129).
Vicent’s column “Historia” about the role of politicians and dominant ideologies in the construction of the official narrative echoes this unfavorable attitude toward History present in Unamuno. Vicent equates History with ideology and the artificial symbols of what is mistakenly considered as glorious past, “La Historia no existe: sólo es ideología. El pasado son huesos en las tumbas, archivos polvorientos, nombres de calles, estatuas en algunas plazoletas y ciertos desfiles de pollastres con polainas y medallas” (2004: 159, my emphasis). This enumeration of bones, archives, monuments, medals, etc. resembles Unamuno’s description of the past as buried “en libros y papeles y monumentos y piedras” (42). Furthermore, Vicent also employs the metaphor of the sea characteristic of Unamuno’s concept of intra-history, as well as metaphors of the sand and shellfish to illustrate the fleeting nature of the seemingly important events and apparent acts of heroism, “Los hechos insignes que sucedieron hoy son polvo de la memoria colectiva, como la arena del mar es el sedimento de infinitos moluscos muertos y aunque algunos mejillones un día también se creyeron héroes el mar ya no los recuerda” (2004: 159, my emphasis). Vicent’s description of History contains vocabulary related to death such as huesos, tumba, polvo, muerto, etc. thus presenting a contrast with his dynamic representation of intra-history always situated in the present.

The columns “Redentores” and “Fontanería” best illustrate what could be considered as Vicent’s conception of intra-history for they both place emphasis on ordinary people leading a tranquil life, having an honest job, and performing it well. I have already commented on the social criticism present in “Redentores,” but Vicent also proposes in this column a solution for escaping “esa miseria diaria” (1998: 224). He insists that the salvation and progress of the society entirely depend on the “new prophets,” as he refers to citizens with the most ordinary occupations:
Son fontaneros, escritores, ebanistas, jueces, artistas, agricultores, verduleros, profesores y otra gente que nadie conoce. De pronto emergen de su soledad y realizan la gran misión de redimir al mundo cada día: el carpintero fabrica una silla perfecta; el escritor escribe un libro necesario; el fontanero repara el desagüe a la conciencia; el juez dicta una sentencia ponderada; el verdulero vende las legumbres a un precio razonable; el agricultor siembra el trigo con la pasión de una obra de arte. A cambio sólo esperan un dinero que no sea superior al placer de la perfección y la belleza. Estos redentores nos salvan del ruido, del fulgor y la basura. (1998: 224, my emphasis)

The primacy of intra-history and the vital importance of pleasure and beauty for the good life come together in this column, as the cited paragraph demonstrates. Vicent’s mentioning of “otra gente que nadie conoce” echoes Unamuno’s “millones de hombres sin historia,” whereas the occupations such as carpenter, plumber, farmer, grocer, etc. resemble the hardworking people that wake up at dawn and work the land every single day in the original definition of intrahistoria. Vicent, however, enriches Unamuno’s concept by connecting it to the notions of perfection, pleasure, and beauty, thus evoking Aristotle’s idea that pleasure is a result of the perfect performance of an activity that already forms part of our natural condition. In Vicent’s view, people are supposed to experience joy from doing their jobs honestly, prudently, and passionately, which is, ultimately, all it takes to save the society from the moral and political degradation. Vicent considers these people to be “héroes del momento” (1998: 227), the metaphor he employs in “Fontanería,” and asserts that their names cannot be found in the history books or in the front page of the newspaper, but rather in the Yellow Pages. Furthermore, Vicent astutely observes that the past reforms in Spain failed precisely because these people and their
skills were neglected in favor of political institutions, that is, the primacy was given to History over intra-history,

El regeneracionismo que se inició en España con los krasistas en el siglo pasado sólo trató de incidir en los políticos y en las instituciones del Estado, sin caer en la cuenta de que la vida pública tiene su base en el plomero, el ordenanza, la verdulera. Frente a la descomposición moral de esta sociedad, uno necesita agarrarse a los valores firmes, a los primitivos héroes. Éstos se han refugiado hoy en las páginas amarillas, donde está la gente que con su trabajo sustenta toda la política y la felicidad concreta que uno puede adquirir. Un país se puede permitir que sus políticos sean unos ineptos, pero no que lo sean sus fontaneros. (1998: 228)

Once again Vicent promotes in a very pragmatic manner strong universal values, the ordinary, and the everyday as the only means not only to improve the society and politics in the country, but also to achieve personal happiness. Good manners, decency, hard work, as well as simple pleasures, which are often direct consequence of the honorable behavior, but which we should also seek in works of art and gourmet meals, form part of Vicent’s ethics leading to a happy and fulfilled life. This philosophy simultaneously implies a kind of rebellion against the official narrative constructed in the previous pages of the newspaper thus raising a question about the public role of the intellectual in the contemporary world.

The Intellectual’s Resistance

Although the spirit of resistance is present throughout Manuel Vicent’s columns written in the past two and a half decades, the importance of alternative versions to the status quo and
the writer’s commitment are explicitly discussed in his texts “Resistente” and “Compromiso.” In “Resistente,” Vicent juxtaposes the news about violence and natural disasters with the episodes from everyday life such as having seafood or planting a favorite vegetable, “Este año, los mejores erizos de mar han coincidido con las bombas de Chechenia. La primavera pasada, mientras la gente se degollaba en Ruanda, también fue una gran temporada para las habas y los espárragos de Resurrección. Ahora, el terremoto de Japón, […] no impedirá que los almendros florezcan allí al amparo de las llamas” (1993: 217). These observations about the incapability of newsworthy catastrophes to interrupt the course of the everyday lead Vicent to formulate his philosophy of life:

Toda mi filosofía se reduce a que la crueldad de la historia, la imbecilidad humana y los zarpazos de la naturaleza no me cieguen hasta el punto de ignorar que éste es el momento idóneo para plantar berenjenas. Las gemas están a punto de reventar. Ninguna noticia es tan importante como para alterar el desayuno de nuestros lectores: ésta era la divisa del diario de The Times de Londres. (1993: 217)

Vicent not only advocates this way of life, but he employs the very same philosophy when writing his Sunday columns. Their purpose is to redirect his readers’ attention from the news that could ruin their morning to pleasant moments that comprise their everyday life. Thus, Vicent’s resistance primarily consists in creating and disseminating alternative intra-historical narratives, “Soy un resistente. Siempre estaré de parte de los erizos perfumados de enero y en contra de la injusticia. Mientras haya una panadería bajo el bombardeo, la historia universal estará a salvo” (1993: 218). The fact that Vicent writes about exquisite works of art, sea urchins, eggplants, almond trees, and bakeries in his newspaper columns during the period marked by
financial crisis, political tensions, extremely high unemployment rates,\textsuperscript{35} natural disasters, and violent conflicts could be seen as out of tune with the serious challenges that Spain and the world have been facing in recent years. Drawing from Fiske, however, Vicent’s intentional praise of simple quotidian pleasures can be understood as his own rebellion, one that he gradually instills in his readers, against the oppressive strategies and discourses of macropolitical forces:

The threat to the power of the dominant is evidenced by their constant attempts to control, delegitimate, and disparage the pleasures of the people. But despite centuries of legal, moral, and aesthetic repression, the everyday culture of the people […] has maintained these evasive, resistant popular forces without which more active resistances would have no base and no motivation. (2011: 9)

In the case of Vicent’s columns, the evasive resistance can be observed both in the aesthetic and physical pleasures that this author promotes and in the act of reading his text on a Sunday morning, and even more so, when that reading comes before glancing at the news in the front page of the newspaper. Considering that Vicent’s literary language and his universal classical values are in radical opposition with bureaucratic forms of expression and the dominant worldview, he could be considered as a “disturber of the status quo,” as Edward Said describes the public role of the intellectual (x). The fact that Vicent is more interested in speaking to himself and his readers than to the authorities shows that he gives primacy to individual subversive tactics and salvation over the collective ones. Furthermore, the language and themes of his texts differ from those of other public intellectuals who openly and harshly rebel against specific political figures and forms of injustice.

\textsuperscript{35} The unemployment rate in Spain has been growing since the global financial crisis in 2008 reaching its peak of 26.94\% in 2013.
Vicent’s column “Compromiso” is precisely about an internal obligation of an intellectual, in this case a writer, to be socially committed. While sipping a cold drink in a harbor surrounded by palm trees and reading the news about various disasters taking place in different parts of the world, Vicent suddenly feels compelled to write about human suffering, “Mientras sorbía un granizado de limón a la sombra de las palmeras, contemplaba la imagen de varios niños levantados por un mortero. La visión hedonista de mí mismo, allí felizmente sentado, me llenó de rubor; entonces tomé la decisión de escribir acerca del sufrimiento de los demás. Ésa es la misión de un escritor” (1993: 245). At that moment, however, an unknown man approaches him and gives him advice on how to recognize good melons and crabs in case he wishes to buy some. This sudden irruption of everyday ordinarity into his thoughts about saving the world leads Vicent to rethink his decision, “Y quedé pensativo con las páginas ensangrentadas del periódico en la mano. Quiero salvar mi conciencia. ¿Qué puedo hacer? Creo contribuir a la felicidad universal anunciando al mundo la fórmula de descubrir los mejores melones y cangrejos. Con esto hoy he cumplido” (1993: 246). It is not Vicent’s understanding of the role of the intellectual that changes here, but rather his preferred method for expressing it. He is still convinced that a writer should stand up against violence, corruption, and lack of morality, as my analysis of his columns has confirmed, but he chooses unconventional means of resistance consisting in writing a weekly newspaper column removed from the political actualities. Vicent also believes in the existence of universal atemporal values like truth, responsibility, and morality despite the postmodern dismantling of these categories. In that sense, he coincides with Said’s challenging of Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism, which devalues the role of the intellectual,
The purpose of the intellectual’s activity is to advance human freedom and knowledge. This is still true, I believe, despite the often repeated charge that “grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment,” as the contemporary French philosopher Lyotard calls such heroic ambitions associated with the previous “modern” age, are pronounced as no longer having any currency in the era of postmodernism. According to this view grand narratives have been replaced by local situations and language games; postmodern intellectuals now prize competence, not universal values like truth and freedom. I’ve always thought that Lyotard and his followers are admitting their own lazy incapacities, perhaps even indifference, rather than giving a correct assessment of what remains for the intellectual a truly vast array of opportunities despite postmodernism. (17-18)

Lyotard’s understanding of the public role of the intellectual that Said criticizes in this passage cannot be applied to the spirit of resistance in Manuel Vicent’s columns because unlike Lyotard, whose primary concerns are with the question of legitimization of knowledge, Vicent’s concerns are not epistemological, but rather vital. In fact, this is the main difference between Vicent’s columns and Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos analyzed in the previous chapter. Vicent’s interests lie in the narration and affirmation of the everyday life of ordinary people. He differentiates between right and wrong, between timeless values such as kindness, truthfulness, and decency, and the present ugliness and corruption of the society. His philosophy of life and prescription for happiness consist of cultivating classical virtues, relying on our senses, enjoying art and literature as sources of beauty, finding pleasure in delicious meals, daily routines, and well-performed activities, and embracing the flow of life. Vicent’s weekly columns with their carefully chosen words and their ability to calm our soul and raise our spirits (Umbral 14)
represent a manifestation of his personal ethics that he disseminates among the numerous readers of both print and digital editions of El País. Furthermore, reading his column every Sunday implies already living the good life filled with virtue, pleasure, beauty, and peaceful, yet powerful resistance to the dominant discourse.
In the last two chapters I have shown how literary journalism in contemporary Spain diverges from the writing in the mainstream newspapers by focusing on the narration and fictionalization of seemingly ordinary moments and practices that comprise the everyday. Through the examination of Juan José Millás’s *articuentos* and *artifotocuentos* and Manuel Vicent’s columns, I illustrated the tendency of *columna de escritores* to defy the hegemonic discourse by avoiding explicit references to immediate political and social circumstances in Spain and the world and by distancing itself from the language and style of mainstream media. Whereas Millás achieves this by emphasizing the impossibility of representing faithfully our day-to-day existence that is determined to a greater extent by our internal subjective experiences and feelings than by external events of public concern, Vicent develops his own philosophy of the good life based on evasive resistance, Epicurean ethics and intra-history. Although Millás and Vicent approach and articulate the everyday in a manner radically different from that of the conventional media, they still do this from within the highest-circulating daily newspaper in Spain. In this chapter, I continue to explore the “poetic or tragic murmurings of the everyday,” in de Certeau’s terms, as portrayed in *periodismo de arte*, but I turn my attention to *FronteraD*, an independent and non-profit digital magazine conceived as the Hispanic equivalent of the North American *New Yorker* by its co-founder and editor Alfonso Armada. Differently from *El País* and other major newspapers in the Hispanic world, *FronteraD* focuses almost exclusively on literary journalism, essays, art criticism, profiles, and other genres in the borderland between nonfiction and fiction.
Unlike the authors of weekly columns in *El País* restricted by the thematic and structural requirements of this newspaper – let us remember Millás’s *articuento* “Lo real y lo lógico” and Schudson’s critique of the five basic questions that each news story is supposed to answer –, the contributors in *FronteraD* have greater freedom regarding the themes, style, and length of their texts. This is largely due to the fact that this magazine exists only as a digital publication contrary to *El País* where the texts published in both print and digital editions, such as Vicent’s and Millás’s columns, must still comply with the restrictions of the print edition. Thus, in the process of my analysis of *FronteraD* and its blogs section entitled “Mientras tanto,” it will become clear that the digital realm opens up new perspectives for literary journalism. In addition to examining the concept, organization, and aspirations of the magazine itself, I focus in this chapter on two blogs – seeing that blog is considered as a digital successor of opinion column –, that in my view best illustrate the dissolution of boundaries between media, genres, orality and literacy, as well as the crossing of national and continental frontiers that take place once *periodismo de arte* leaves the confines of print newspapers. These blogs are *El nombre de las cosas* by Laura Ferrero and *Otramérica* by Paco Gómez Nadal. On one hand, Ferrero and Gómez Nadal continue the work started by Vicent and Millás of discovering everyday life and questioning the practices and discourses of the dominant ideology, and on the other hand, their blogs in *FronteraD* enrich the genre of opinion column by combining textual and visual elements, placing greater emphasis on the authorial subjectivity and sincerity, and creating a

---

36 *FronteraD* was initially conceptualized as both print and digital weekly publication, but due to financial restraints its founders finally decided that it would only exist in a digital form (Rodríguez and Albalad 63).

37 We have already observed the combination of text and image in the *artifotocuentos* where a certain press photograph inspires a written reflection. Thus, it is evident that the text would not exist had it not been for the image and there is clear distinction between the two. In Laura
digital transatlantic space. But before entering into the analysis of the blogs *El nombre de las cosas* and *Otramérica*, it is necessary to discuss the very concept and structure of *FronteraD*.

**From Diogenes to Digital Age: Convergence Culture in *FronteraD***

“Dina le preguntó a Dimitri ¿y qué es lo que le extrañó en Internet? *FronteraD*. ¿Con D? ¿De qué? Pues de Dimitri.” These are the opening lines in the thought provoking and amusing video located in the section “Quiénes somos” of the *FronteraD* web site and designed to introduce the magazine. Envisioned from the very beginning as an independent and non-profit weekly publication, *FronteraD* is described by its editorial team as:

una revista de momento solo digital, con sede en la nube centrada en el periodismo narrativo, la crónica y el ensayo (porque duda de que muchas noticias lo sean en realidad), y que intenta explicarse el mundo y explicárselo a quien se haga preguntas: una inmensa minoría, tal vez (*FronteraD*, “Quiénes somos”).

This eagerness to understand multiple facets of reality and cultivate a participatory, smart and critical audience can also be observed in the already mentioned video that in only forty-nine seconds manages to captivate our attention, confuse us, and prompt us to think. Entitled *El extraño de la frontera en “¿D de qué?”* the video consists of a rapid sequence of sepia-tone photographs of men and women with dramatic facial expressions that resemble old newspaper ads or television commercials. Their formal clothing and hairstyles from the fifties bring to mind the images from the golden age of Hollywood (see figure 6). The sound effects only reinforce this sensation since the entire video is narrated in voice-over accompanied by the famous rolling and clicking sound of an old film camera. After the brief summary of the dialogue between Dina

---

Ferrero’s blog, however, texts never refer explicitly to the image (a photograph taken by Ferrero or a professional photographer, digital art, drawing, etc.). On the contrary, it is the image that complements and embellishes the text.
and Dimitri, who use an old-fashioned telephone made of black plastic to communicate with each other, the voice-over continues to recount the search for meaning of the letter D in the title *FronteraD*:

> Y así se fue pasando la voz de lo que aquel extraño que había llegado al pueblo leía en Internet hasta llegar el último vecino que se llamaba Damián y que era un tipo joven y moderno y había decidido ponerse a Internet. Y lo primero que hizo fue ir y leer FronteraD. Y se dio cuenta de que todos habían mentido. (*FronteraD*, “¿D de qué?”)

According to the playful narrator, having concluded that the letter D does not come from Diógenes, Dulcinea, Darío, etc., Damián called all his neighbors liars, but did not reveal to them the origin of the mysterious letter “por no tener Internet ni leer *FronteraD*.”

---

Figure 6. One of the photographs in the video *El extraño de la frontera*
The names of an Ancient Greek philosopher, a 17th-century fictional character, and a modernist poet expose the pensive, inquisitive and literary tone of this magazine. Moreover, the mention of a contemporary medium of communication such as the Internet, the use of an old-fashioned fixed phone, and references to old newspapers, television ads, and the cinema of the fifties cleverly illustrate not only the pastiche character of *FronteraD* but also what the media scholar Henry Jenkins defines as “convergence culture.” Having analyzed diverse manifestations of the contemporary digital culture, Jenkins observes a series of technological, industrial, cultural and social changes, the flow of content across different platforms, and the merging of the traditional and modern media that lead to the creation of a more engaged and active audience willing to navigate various web pages in search of the desired content (2-3). Drawing from Jenkins’ argument, this chapter shows how *FronteraD* in general and Laura Ferrero’s and Paco Gómez Nadal’s blogs in particular not only exemplify the convergence that characterizes the contemporary digital culture but also enhance it by surpassing the national and continental boundaries and gazing at the Atlantic space. Indeed, *FronteraD* and its blogs map a territory where Spain, North America, and Latin America intersect either through the magazine’s aspiration to resemble the North American so-called smart magazines such as the *New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Esquire*, Laura Ferrero’s physical and textual journey through New York City, or Paco Gómez Nadal’s demystification of the Western perception of Latin America. How *FronteraD* opens up new perspectives for *periodismo de arte*, how it questions political boundaries while cultivating writing at the frontier between genres, how Ferrero and Gómez Nadal narrate everyday life and why they consider blog as the most suitable medium and/or genre for their literary-journalistic reflections are other relevant issues that I address in this chapter.
Transatlantic Smartness: *FronteraD* and the *New Yorker*

Besides the fact that *FronteraD* celebrated five years of its existence in 2014 with the print publication of *Antolojía* that compiles texts and illustrations initially published online, this magazine has not yet received due attention from critics. Paradoxically, even though contemporary scholars are becoming increasingly dependent on the Internet to conduct their research, digital publications still attract far less attention than more traditional print editions. This is even more untenable in the case of literary journalism considering that the evolution of the Internet has impacted significantly its development and diversification. It was Web 2.0, a new version of the World Wide Web developed at the beginning of the 21st century, that made possible the intersection of image and text, the existence of hyperlinks, the interaction between writer and reader, multiple categorization of content, etc. All these characteristics of the Web that seem extremely familiar in the second decade of the 21st century gave rise to the emergence of blogs, wikis, social networks, web applications, and other digital textualities created by Internet users. As a digital medium that disseminates information, *FronteraD* takes advantage of these Web 2.0 innovations and opens up new possibilities for literary journalism as observed by the few critics that have analyzed this magazine.

At present, the only critical article about *FronteraD* is included in the edition *Crónica y mirada* (2013), and it briefly examines five digital magazines of literary journalism. Another useful source of information about the magazine is an interview with its editor Alfonso Armada included in the volume *Microperiodismos: Aventuras digitales en tiempos de crisis* (2012). Having investigated how the evolution of the Internet has influenced the development of literary

---

38 The spelling of the “antolojía” with “j” instead of “g” resembles the writing of the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez thereby highlighting the literary and rebellious tone of *FronteraD*. 
jornalismo, Jorge Miguel Rodríguez and José María Albalad consider that *FronteraD* belongs to the small group of magazines that rebel against the establishment – resembling in that sense the resistance in Millás’s and Vicent’s columns – with its content and format as well as the relationship it builds with the audience:

> se ha eliminado al intermediario, no se amarran a la publicidad ni dependen de propietarios con afán lucrativo, no están sujetas a líneas editoriales con intereses ideológicos ni mercantiles, interactúan con los lectores […], liberan contenidos en el ciberespacio difundidos con anterioridad en las ediciones impresas, etc. (86-87)

Eva Domínguez and J. Pérez Colomé believe that in a time of financial crisis that has had a negative impact on the state of press the Web represents a new domain for the development of high-quality journalism. They denominate *FronteraD* and other independent magazines that cultivate this type of content and style “proyectos de micropodiumismo” (9). In the interview that these critics conducted with Alfonso Armada, the journalist explains that the Anglo-Saxon literary journalism, both rigorous and creative, and particularly the *New Yorker* magazine have been the main sources of inspiration for *FronteraD* since its beginnings. The purpose of this magazine has been to address those topics and parts of the world that are usually absent from the more traditional media. Domínguez and Pérez Colomé use the words “periodismo sin prisas” (61) to describe the typical content of *FronteraD*, and in a similar manner, Armada points out that the aim of the magazine is to “estimular la inteligencia y el espíritu crítico de los lectores abrumados con la velocidad y la confusión de internet” (62).³⁹

³⁹ These observations evoke once again Umbral’s description of “periodismo de arte” in which he differentiates between the overwhelming chaos of the newspaper that offers “[una] hecatombe de información” and “literatura en dosis homepáticas” present in the opinion columns of a renowned intellectual (13-4).
In its inclination to both attract and cultivate an intelligent, enlightened, and omnivorous audience, *FronteraD* is comparable to the *New Yorker*, which has been considered as a prime practitioner and advocate of literary journalism in North American culture. The fact that Alfonso Armada, as he himself admits, looks up to the *New Yorker* and not to the magazines published in Spain and Latin America is hardly surprising in the digital age and illustrates the dissolution of national and cultural boundaries that according to several digital media scholars takes place in the cyberspace. Thus, Martín-Barbero points out that the Internet calls into question the concept of a fixed geographical position (10) and Lengel and Murphy assert that it creates “an increased sense of borderlessness” (187), that is, the impression that the borders between different nations and communities have been eliminated due to a wide range of possibilities for communication in the digital realm. By drawing inspiration from a North American magazine with a global reputation, *FronteraD* illustrates the spatial – in this case transatlantic – convergence that occurs on the Web and aspires to become the stronghold of literary journalism in the Hispanic world. Furthermore, due to its carefully selected and diverse content, wittiness, and creativity that evoke the tone and style of the *New Yorker, FronteraD* could be considered as a Hispanic “smart magazine.”

The so-called “smart magazines” began to appear in the United States in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, the period that was marked by the expansion of the magazine industry. Their witty and often humorous texts and illustrations created by the most talented writers and artists in the country, as well as the occasional ridiculing of the high society made them radically different from the mainstream publications. As such, smart magazines were meant to appeal to cultured readers living primarily in urban areas:
Smart magazines were written and edited for the leisured classes (although not necessarily for the very rich) – for sophisticated urbanities, for the kind of person who was well travelled, well read, well acquainted; for people who wanted to be entertained, but on an exalted plane; people wishing to sidestep the bromides and sugarcoated confections being dished out to standardized middle-class culture by the mammoth of mass-circulation magazines. (Douglas 9)

This tendency to attract the intellectual elite was only a “mannerism” that gradually disappeared (Douglas 1-2) and the smart magazines eventually began to appeal to large and diverse audiences thereby gaining in popularity and commercial success. Founded on February 21st, 1925 by journalist Harold Ross, the New Yorker was one of the first magazines that “incorporated and advertised smartness as learned symbolic capital” (Newton 65). Ross achieved this by distancing the content, style, and tone of his magazine from the sensationalism of both mainstream news media and tabloids. Instead, he created a publication that would focus on the less obvious details and seemingly unimportant stories about everyday life in the metropolis. These and other characteristics of the New Yorker that Ross outlined in the prospectus for the magazine were to become defining features of literary journalism as a genre in the United States and beyond.

Although at first glance Millás’s and Vicent’s columns and the blogs section in FronteraD differ in format and length from the longer pieces commonly published in this North American periodical, the focus on everyday life, literary style, and wittiness of periodismo de arte strongly resemble the kind of literary journalism cultivated in the New Yorker as a smart

---

40 In addition to its blogs section, FronteraD contains longer articles, reportages, essays, critical pieces, and illustrations that resemble more closely in length, format, and style the articles published in the New Yorker. I focus on blogs in this dissertation, however, because of their formal, stylistic, and thematic closeness to columna de escritores.
magazine. In fact, the ground for the emergence and growth of smart magazines in general was set in the opening lines of Ross’ prospectus:

The *New Yorker* will be a reflection in word and picture of metropolitan life. It will be human. Its general tenor will be one of gaiety, wit and satire, but it will be more than just a jester. It will not be what is commonly called sophisticated, in that it will assume a reasonable degree of enlightenment on the part of its readers. It will hate bunk. (as cited in Douglas 143)

Ross, therefore, envisions a magazine that will combine text and image, focus on everyday life in an urban setting, tell human stories that would otherwise remain untold, be humorous and intelligent, openly satirize current events and certain social norms, and engage knowledgeable readers interested in gaining information and broadening their general culture. With the exception of the focus on urban life in New York City, all of Ross’ ideas for the *New Yorker* are put into practice to a greater or lesser extent in *FronteraD*. *The New Yorker*, too, has evolved since those early days, and although it still covers events and people of interest in the city (in the section “Goings On About Town”), it also reports on national and world news while remaining faithful to its particular tone and style.

Perhaps the most important element of Ross’ prospectus for the *New Yorker* that has become fundamental in distinguishing literary journalism from the mainstream news and tabloid journalism is the insistence on paying attention to details and looking for the meaning of events instead of simply recounting them: “As compared to the newspaper, the *New Yorker* will be interpretative rather than stenographic. It will print facts that it will have to go behind the scenes to get, but it will not deal in scandal for the sake of scandal nor sensation for the sake of sensation” (as cited in Douglas 143). The “smartness” of the *New Yorker*, and consequently of
*FronteraD*, is therefore noticeable in their tendency to both narrate and interpret critically the less obvious aspects of current political events, social debates, and cultural tastes thereby cultivating semiotic resistance and enabling their readers to discover complexity in the apparent simplicity of everyday life. In the case of *FronteraD*, this “smartness” is also apparent in its structure, that is, in a particular digital (dis)order that Armada and his editorial team create in order to organize the content of the magazine.

Unlike the mainstream newspapers where the content is categorized in the already established sections with the headings such as World News, National News, Business, Technology, Science, Health, Sports, Arts, etc., thereby enabling the readers to browse the paper effortlessly, the unusual structure of *FronteraD* requires a more participatory and analytical audience (see figure 7). Acknowledging that the organization of a traditional newspaper influences our perception and understanding of reality, *FronteraD* challenges the categories determined by the press and introduces a new way of structuring the content more attuned to the contemporary world. This decision is explained in the very description of the magazine: “*FronteraD* entiende que el mundo no es susceptible de ser segmentado en ámbitos artificiales como internacional, nacional, local, economía o cultura. De ahí que hayamos optado por unas secciones que no solo a Google le cuesta entender” (“Quiénes somos”). This last remark confirms that *FronteraD* is conceptualized as a smart magazine and wittily implies that Google’s classification system is not sophisticated enough to understand and organize its content. Indeed, in terms of its structure, *FronteraD* could be considered more original than the *New Yorker* whose different departments⁴¹ in both print and digital editions are titled more traditionally, such as “Goings On About Town,” “The Talk of the Town,” “Fiction,” “The Critics,” etc. Besides the

⁴¹ According to Kathy Roberts Forde, “The term ‘department’ was the magazine’s special nomenclature for its different genres and categories of writing” (40).
creativity of its editorial team, the alternative mode of organization in *FronteraD* is also made possible by its digital format thus illustrating David Weinberger’s argument that everything is miscellaneous beyond the limitations of the physical world. Having compared the organization of Staples, major office supply store in the United States, and that of iTunes, a multimedia store and library developed by Apple, this philosopher points out that unlike the world regulated by the physical limitations where the organization of our ideas and knowledge is determined by the same principles as that of our businesses, governments, schools, etc., the digital world suggests another way of organizing knowledge thus altering our idea of reality (1-7). *FronteraD* manifests this tendency with its unconventional sections, creative headings, as well as multiple ways to access the same content and jump from one web page to another via hyperlinks.

Figure 7. Sections of *El País* and *FronteraD*

Once the readers open the home page of this magazine, they may choose to continue their reading from among the following sections: “Brújula,” which consists of global news on culture, “Mientras tanto,” consisting of tens of blogs authored by journalists, philosophers, and writers, “Acordeón,” which includes newspaper reportages, essays, and podcasts, “Arpa,” which is
comprised of profiles, self-portraits, poetry, etc., “Universo elegante” with articles about science, technology, and digital culture, and “Sociedad de espectáculo,” dedicated to art, literature, and theatre and film criticism. All these sections can be accessed from various pages of the magazine whereas the tags underneath each text enable us to further explore those topics that interest us thus enhancing our awareness and knowledge. In this manner, *FronteraD* confirms Weinberger’s observation about the advantages of the miscellaneous organization in the digital sphere: “The digital world thereby allows us to transcend the most fundamental rule of ordering the real world: Instead of everything having its place, it’s better if things can get assigned multiple places simultaneously” (14). This kind of organization creates an ideal ground for the convergence of visual and written content, texts about everyday life, literature, and politics, and Spanish, North American and Latin American cultures that this chapter examines in the blogs *Los nombres de las cosas* and *Otramérica*. But before entering into the analysis of Laura Ferrero’s blog, it is paramount to discuss blogs as an exemplary medium and/or genre of convergence culture.

“*Mientras tanto*”: At the Frontier between Medium and Genre

The fact that so far I have referred to blog as both medium and genre reflects the critics’ diverging views on this matter, which has impeded the formulation of a unanimous definition of blog. Whereas some critics maintain that blog represents a unique genre or a combination of the already existing genres, others primarily consider it as a communication medium (Gardner 490-491). These different approaches to the blog analysis are due to the fact that blogs are “both the product of blogging and the medium through which the blogger produces their expressions. Blogs emerge because bloggers are blogging. And yet, what they are blogging to is the blog itself” (Boyd 11). This distinction between the concepts of medium and genre has been additionally blurred by the evolution of the Internet. I therefore agree with Jill Walker’s assumption that
blog can be considered both a communication medium used for the organization and sharing of information, and a literary genre, that is, a type of text, depending on the perspective that one takes and that the blogs in question require (32-33). My analysis will show that the blogs section in FronteraD and particularly Los nombres de las cosas and Otramérica reflect this multifaceted nature of blog.

The very title of FronteraD blogs section, “Mientras tanto,” represents in the first place a temporal metaphor that indicates simultaneity, which, in the case of blogs, can translate into coexistence of various literary genres, as the Bolivian writer and literary critic Edmundo Paz Soldán observes:

The blog is a travel log in cyberspace, a textual practice which combines elements of the diary, the notebook, literary criticism, the opinion column, the short story, the epigram, and whatever other literary genres we might care to add. The blog is currently threatening to replace the novel as the great genre in which everything can find its place. (260)

Even though Paz Soldán compares the blog with the novel, the already mentioned periodismo de arte seems a more fitting denomination for the blogs section in FronteraD. This is not only because periodismo de arte in itself combines elements of multiple genres but also because its central characteristics are brevity – let us remember Umbral’s metaphor “literatura en dosis homeopáticas” (14) – and focus on daily life and culture, much like in the case of blogs included in “Mientras tanto.” Thus, this title can also be interpreted as a reflection of the bloggers’ interest in the seemingly ordinary, in those everyday events, experiences, and banalities that take place “in the meantime” and that are never found in the pages of the mainstream newspapers reserved
for the important historical events, or, in Maurice Blanchot’s words, for “History’s ‘Something’s happening’” (244).

Besides these traits of blog, scholars have also identified as its other essential characteristics the ability of readers to arrange the narrative consisting of blog posts according to their liking, the difficulty to distinguish between the author and the audience that have the opportunity to comment each post, the incompleteness of blog since readers always expect new entries, and the mixing of the personal content from the blogger’s daily life with the public and political (Himmmer 2004). Moreover, returning to the section “Mientras tanto” and considering that the word “mientras” implies continuity and temporal openness, this title illustrates another distinctive feature of blog that cultural critic Alan Kirby denominates “onwardness.” Having compared the blog with the personal diary considered as its predecessor, Kirby observes that they differ from one another in the progression of their textual time:

The entries in a diary or log progress from left to right through a book, such that internal time flows in the same direction as reading about it; but as the eye descends the screen of the blog, it goes back in textual time. Why is this? The reason lies in the digimodernist onwardness of the blog: it’s text under development, one currently being constructed, being built up, a text emerging, growing. (111)\(^4\)

The blogs in *FronteraD* exhibit this digimodernist tendency to grow and develop either by continuously incorporating new content and genres (essays, poems, interviews, short and micro

---

\(^4\) According to Kirby, digimodernism is a new cultural paradigm that replaced postmodernism in the second half of the nineties due to the computerization of the text. Blogs represent a perfect example of the digimodernist texts whose essential characteristics are “onwardness, haphazardness, evanescence, and anonymous, social and multiple authorship” (1).
stories, illustrations, photos, videos, etc.) or by bridging the gaps between the Western world and Latin America. Furthermore, in *Los nombres de las cosas*, the constant development of the blog goes along with the personal growth of its author Laura Ferrero resulting from her everyday experiences, readings, and travels.

**The Life of the Author: Sincerity and Bibliotherapy in *Los nombres de las cosas***

Initiated in May of 2013, Laura Ferrero’s blog represents a digital space where everyday life, literature, journalism, philosophy, and art intersect. An avid reader with a degree in both philosophy and journalism, Ferrero combines her personal experiences with the morals she extracts from Hispanic and world literature, philosophy books, and works of art in order to confront and reflect upon what she refers to as “dramas cotidianos.” In *Los nombres de las cosas*, literature and everyday life seem inseparable. Thus, this blog will primarily attract a well-read audience that shares Ferrero’s passion for fiction. Indeed, it is impossible to read Ferrero’s posts without writing down the titles of her most recent reads and copying the quotes from her favorite literary works in order to add them to one’s own library. It is noticeable, however, that Ferrero does not present herself as an authority on literature and philosophy nor does she profess superior intellect and talent. On the contrary, this blogger frequently confesses her weaknesses, laments the gaps in her knowledge and skills, and recounts her quotidian struggles. In this manner, Ferrero enables her readers to take part in her everyday life and her reading process and encourages them to apply wisdom found in literary works to their day-to-day existence. Her blog

---

43 In the blog post published on July 29th, 2015 and entitled “Dramas cotidianos,” Ferrero recounts how she came to use the phrase “limpiar el baño” to refer to a complicated situation, a specific problem or concern that needs to be addressed. This anecdote serves as a point of departure for reflecting upon *The Opposite of Loneliness*, a collection of essays and stories by Marina Keegan who died in a car crash several days after graduating from Yale University. Keegan’s death at a young age causes Ferrero to rethink her own daily struggles and reflect upon the fleeting nature of life.
could thus be considered as a form of bibliotherapy that Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin define as “the prescribing of fiction for life’s ailments” (xi). Ferrero’s aspiration to improve her readers’ lives through her blog posts inspired by various literary works is reminiscent of Vicent’s developing of a philosophy of the good life in his newspaper columns. In addition, due to the fact that Ferrero shares her experiences, routines, concerns, dreams, and passions with her audience in each blog post, Los nombres de las cosas dismantles the hierarchy between writer and reader thereby echoing the poststructuralist decentering of the author. At the same time, however, the emphasis on Laura Ferrero’s feelings and reflections about everyday life, as well as the sincere and intimate tone of her blog resemble diary writing and call for a reevaluation of the poststructuralist views on authorship. On one hand, this ambiguous approach to the question of authorship characterizes blog as a medium (Singh 21-35), and, on the other hand, it is consistent with Ferrero’s overall concept of writing.

![Figure 8. Blog header in Los nombres de las cosas](image)

Whether this blogger chooses to describe one of her daily routines, tell an anecdote, reflect upon a book that she has recently read, narrate an episode from her time in New York City, express her dissatisfaction with the current state of journalism, or tackle larger themes such as identity, love, and survival, her writing can never be easily categorized. Instead, her blog posts are always
situated at the frontier, a space of ambiguity and duplicity, “less than one and double” in Derrida’s words (as cited in Bennington 2000), between genres, disciplines, and media. I would argue that even the title “Los nombres de las cosas” and the header with an image of the word “SOPA” in which the letter “O” is half submerged in a bowl of soup (see figure 8) illustrate the frontier character of Ferrero’s blog whose one aim is to explore the precarious relationship between words and things, the space between the signifier and the signified.45

Figure 9. Illustration in “Mis líos con el periodismo”

The blog post “Mis líos con el periodismo” published on May 13th, 2015 perhaps best highlights Laura Ferrero’s writing across and about boundaries in Los nombres de las cosas.

44 The author of this and all other blogs headers in FronteraD is a cartoonist, illustrator, and graphic humourist who uses the pseudonym Dodot.

45 In the blog post “Querido Camus” written for the 100th anniversary of Albert Camus’s birth, Ferrero recalls her struggle to choose a topic for her master’s thesis and confirms that frontiers, this time between literature and philosophy, have always had a special appeal for her: “Así que rechacé al primer novio, a Camus, porque me dijeron que no era ni filósofo ni escritor. Se quedaba a medias. A mí, que siempre me han gustado las cosas a medias, aquella objeción debió de haberme convencido. Pero era más joven y aún creía que era mejor hacer lo que los demás me decían” (my emphasis). Having considered several other philosophers, Ferrero ended up writing her thesis about Camus after all.
“Mis líos con el periodismo” consists of an image of a note pad with an inscription “Trust me. I’m a journalist,” a cup of coffee, and a black pen (see figure 9), as well as a text that discusses the blurred boundaries between journalism and literature, rejects the notion of journalistic objectivity, and makes references to everyday life. Thus, this blog post not only illustrates Umbral’s understanding of periodismo de arte as a fusion of “literatura, actualidad y noticias” (14) but also synthesizes the principal themes and concerns in Ferrero’s writing. “Mis líos con el periodismo” also reflects what I refer to as a transatlantic gaze in Los nombres de las cosas considering that its point of departure is Ferrero’s literal crossing of the Atlantic on her trip from Barcelona to New York City. As her plane is about to land, she experiences an identity crisis triggered by entering into a different time zone and intensified by her inability to articulate her profession, a question commonly asked by a U.S. customs and border patrol officer. While still inside the plane, somewhere in-between the sky and the land, Ferrero finds herself in “ese limbo horario” that leads her to question to what extent is one’s identity determined by one’s profession and to reflect upon her (mis)understanding of journalism:

¿Qué soy? ¿Lo que he estudiado? Filosofía. Pero lo de responder “filósofa” nunca lo he visto claro. Reproduzco palabra por palabra una conversación que tuve hace exactamente un año en un control:

–Filósofa…¿y qué hace un filósofo? ¿Pensar?
–¿Y?
–Que hago de todo. Multitasking. (“Mis líos con el periodismo”)

Since this answer makes her look suspicious in the eyes of the border patrol officer, Ferrero decides to respond to the question about her profession from then on by saying that she is a
journalist. This other response, however, also proves to be unsatisfactory and only provokes further interrogation thereby causing Ferrero to share with her readers the history of her problems with journalism. She confesses that her decision to major in journalism came from her fascination with the writings of Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Ryszard Kapuscinski, and others primarily known for using literary techniques and immersing themselves into stories that they investigated and wrote about. Inspired by these authors, Ferrero ends up being a rather unsuccessful university student:

Siendo honestos no destaque por ser una alumna especialmente brillante en la carrera. Sobre todo en las asignaturas de prácticas, es decir, en las importantes. Un dato ilustrativo: fui la primera alumna en cinco promociones que repitió las prácticas de radio. Lo peor del caso no es que repitiera, siempre hay una primera vez, ¿no? Lo peor es que era tan absolutamente negada que mi equipo de radio únicamente me dejaba redactar el parte meteorológico. Aún y así suspendí. (“Mis líos con el periodismo”)

The fact that Ferrero confesses openly and spontaneously some of the most embarrassing episodes of her undergraduate studies confirms Steve Himmer’s observation that blogs are commonly characterized by “mundane, banal, sometimes embarrassing personal content” (2004). Thus, in “Mis líos con el periodismo,” Ferrero continues to reflect upon her problems with journalism that have only been increasing over the years:

reportajes suspendidos –Laura, eso que escribes es una opinión–, crónicas suspendidas –Laura, eso que escribes es una opinión–, columnas con un 4,5 – Laura, esto que escribes tendría que ser una opinión—… Me perdí un poco con todo ese debate tan trillado entre la objetividad y subjetividad. En qué
Ferrero’s assertion that all writing is inherently subjective and her honesty and readiness to share with her readers some of the most bewildering moments in her love-hate relationship with journalism reveal the connections between diary and blog writing. According to Amardeep Singh, blogs are public texts that resemble and reinvent the diary form of the early modern period (21). By adopting the “rhetorics of sincerity and immediacy” from diary writing and emphasizing “originality, collective ethics, and the authorial persona” blogs suggest a rebirth of an author-figure (Singh 21-22). In the case of “Mis lios con el periodismo,” however, the author does not present herself as a transcendental creator, but as one of us, a human being passionate about literature, journalism, and writing, and at the same time unable to fit into the established categories. Whereas Ferrero finds the principle of objectivity and the supposed search for truth in the conventional journalism troubling, she believes in what she refers to as “mi periodismo,” that is, a type of journalism whose main subjects are literature and writing:

Nunca he sido capaz de escribir nada que no sea acerca de literatura. Es el único territorio en el que me siento a salvo. Escribo sobre ficción porque ahí las reglas son conocidas por todos. Nada es verdad ni es mentira, ni pretendo que lo sea. El problema llega cuando cojo el periódico y me dirijo a la sección de economía o de política y veo que ahí se pontifica con datos y porcentajes. Y ahí todo es verdad. Y es mentira. (“Mis lios con el periodismo”)

This observation complements the image at the beginning of the blog post and emphasizes the irony in the statement “Trust me. I’m a journalist.” Combining elements of a diary entry and a
metafictional essay about journalism, “Mis líos con el periodismo” leaves us doubting mainstream news media, but trusting Laura Ferrero and the contents of her blog. I would argue, however, that Los nombres de las cosas is not primarily about literature but about the relationship between fiction and everyday life, which is also the underlying theme of Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos as we have seen in the first chapter. Ferrero contemplates her understanding of journalism while mentioning various episodes from her personal life such as her trip to the United States, passport controls that she experienced in the past, and her failure to read weather forecast on the radio. At the same time, she makes references to daily life in Spain by bringing up high unemployment rates and criticizing Sálvame Deluxe, a television program about the lives of celebrities and politicians such as Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera. As this chapter shows, references to everyday life in Spain and the Atlantic space, Ferrero’s daily routines, recent events, and unforeseen feelings are, in fact, recounted throughout Los nombres de las cosas making this blog a collection of “personal narratives” (Volker and Hoffmann 85).

Figure 10. Photograph in “Los ríos y la vida”
“Los ríos y la vida,” published on June 17th, 2015 is another one of those personal stories in which Ferrero describes a noteworthy event in her life, a visit to Gonzalo Sobejano, renowned literary critic and professor of Spanish literature, in his New York City home. During their conversation, Sobejano recalls Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio’s novel *El Jarama* (1955), which leads Ferrero to ruminate about the power of fiction to discover and capture those seemingly ordinary moments and apparently insignificant details in our day-to-day existence. This blog post opens with a photograph of a tranquil river reflecting the sunset and a rope swing hanging from the tree above the water (see figure 10) thereby implying human presence and playfulness and establishing a dialogue with Sánchez Ferlosio’s novel whose action revolves around the Jarama River. Ferrero cites in this post Sobejano’s words that explain his admiration for the highly acclaimed novelists in post-war Spain: “creo que las novelas que escribieron todos ellos – Delibes, Cela, Laforet, Sánchez Ferlosio, etc.– eran el mejor retrato de España. Novelas que no versaban sobre nada extraordinario. Solo contaban la vida en nuestro país” (“Los ríos y la vida”). It is notable that Ferrero finds herself drawn to Sobejano’s story about *El Jarama*, whose uncomplicated plot develops in less than a day, although she embarrassingly admits that she has never read this novel. If we consider her admission truthful, then her spontaneous decision to write about Sánchez Ferlosio’s book without previously reading it could be interpreted as mirroring the continuous flow of the river and that of everyday life. Since the river never stops flowing and the everyday never stops moving forward, Ferrero herself does not take time from her daily commitments to read the book, but writes about it immediately inspired by Sobejano’s story. An alternative explanation would be that Ferrero who is a passionate booklover has read *El Jarama*, but refuses to admit it thereby challenging the idea of the literary canon, the validity of which has been debated among literary scholars since the emergence of cultural studies in the
1960s. This is pertinent in light of the fact that Sánchez Ferlosio’s novel provoked both positive and negative criticism when it was first published, as Sobejano informs Ferrero, and was not entered into the canon of the 20th-century Spanish literature until later. Nevertheless, Sobejano still considers that El Jarama illustrates the whole purpose of literature:

Añade, enfadado, que muchos intelectuales de la época criticaron el libro de Ferlosio diciendo que era un peñazo y, ademas, muy vulgar. Se quejaban de que las conversaciones no iban a ninguna parte: eran parcas y secas. ¿Pero hacia donde tiene que ir la literatura sino justamente a ninguna parte, a contar lo pequeño, lo de cada día? (“Los ríos y la vida”)

The fact that Ferrero decides to cite in her blog these particular words inspired by the novel that she is (supposedly) not familiar with confirm that her own understanding of the relationship between literature and everyday life is similar to Sobejano’s. While listening to his thoughts on El Jarama, Ferrero concludes that the appeal of the novel, which ends with a young girl drowning in the river, lies precisely in the fact that it simultaneously captures “una historia cotidiana” and “la vida entera.” “Los ríos y la vida” thus represents homage to Sánchez Ferlosio, Sobejano, and the art of storytelling. The tone and style of this blog post, however, are not grandiose for it is also an account of several hours in Laura Ferrero’s life, a Sunday afternoon on a warm summer day, similar to that in El Jarama, spent having a casual conversation about literature and everyday life. In the last paragraphs of this post influenced by Sobejano’s comment that the girl who drowned in El Jarama only wanted to be loved, Ferrero recalls Bluets, a book by an American poet and essayist Maggie Nelson that tells a story about a woman who fell in love with the color blue. This final part of “Los ríos y la vida” seems somewhat disconnected from the story about Sobejano and El Jarama as Ferrero herself admits:
Sinceramente, no sé por qué pensé en ese libro el domingo por la tarde. Tampoco por qué estoy hablando ahora de él o lo relaciono con El Jarama o con lo que aquel hombre tan increíble trataba de explicar. Supongo que hablamos del amor constantemente y muchos decimos que es el centro de la vida. Tal vez el problema sea que nos pasa como a Maggie Nelson, que nos olvidamos de que los colores son colores. Que uno puede enamorarse del azul, claro, pero no por ello dejará de ser un color.

If, however, we observe this blog post not as a literary text, but as a fragment of a young woman’s everyday life, the apparent disconnectedness between the first and last paragraphs is no longer perceived as a flaw. Ferrero is writing self in this text, her memories of an afternoon with Sobejano, her (apparent) embarrassment because she has not read a canonical Spanish novel, her fascination with a contemporary book combining poetry and prose, and her views on literature, sudden death, and unfulfilled love. In this process, she extracts from literature what she considers as important life lessons and becomes both her own and her readers’ bibliotherapist.

In The Novel Cure: From Abandonment to Zestlessness: 751 Books to Cure What Ails You, British author Susan Elderkin and artist Ella Berthoud, bibliotherapists at The School of Life in London, have organized in alphabetical order a number of emotions, addictions, and misfortunes and have provided a list of literary works for each of the entries that could help those who are experiencing hardship and are open to looking for cure in literature. If Elderkin and Berthoud were to include blog posts among their literary recommendations, Laura Ferrero’s “A pesar de la lluvia” published on March 25th, 2015, as well as books that she references in this text could be used to cure sadness, melancholy, and even hopelessness. Written after several rainy and cloudy days in Barcelona and only a day after a tragic crash of Germanwings Flight 9525
deliberately caused by the suicidal co-pilot, “A pesar de la lluvia” represents Ferrero’s attempt to enliven herself and her readers. This is already evident from the image at the beginning of the post, a photograph of a rainbow seen from behind the window covered in raindrops (see figure 11). Similarly to the previously analyzed blog posts, Ferrero begins her mediation on rain, city life, and writing by painting a somewhat ridiculous picture of herself: “estos días me doy cuenta de que lo de conducir con lluvia es arriesgado. Sobre todo si llevas moto, si eres torpe y sí, para rematarlo, tienes que calzarte un chubasquero negro que te convierte automáticamente en una bolsa de basura que ondea al viento” (“A pesar de la lluvia”). These observations in which Ferrero laughs at her own appearance are in stark contrast with the subsequent mentioning of the plane crash. In addition, Ferrero admits that she has been delaying writing her blog since there have not been any humorous or pleasant events that she would have liked to share with her readers. The gloomy weather combined with the news reports on the tragic accident that left no survivors cause Ferrero to question the power of fiction in the face of harsh reality:

Esta semana me había quedado sin ideas para escribir. Me había planteado hablar de un libro increíble que acabo de leer, Revivir a los vivos, de la francesa Maylis de Kerangal, pero me parecía demasiado trágico escribir un post a raíz de un argumento tan duro como el de esta novela. Pero claro, luego los periódicos revelan que la realidad suele superar a la ficción. En tragedia y en extrañeza. (“A pesar de la lluvia”).

Despite her melancholy mood and lack of inspiration, Ferrero is able to stop doubting the power of fiction when she hears that the prestigious literary prize, Premio Alfaguara de Novela, was awarded to the Chilean writer Carla Guelfenbein for her book Contigo en la distancia, in which the protagonist draws inspiration from Clarice Lispector’s works. The news of the award
causes Ferrero to suddenly recall a quote from one of Lispector’s writings: “Una de las cosas que aprendí es que se puede vivir a pesar de. A pesar de, se debe comer. A pesar de, se debe amar” (“A pesar de la lluvia”). This observation by the famous Brazilian author as well as her declaration that she must continue to write as long as there are things that she cannot explain, lead Ferrero to conclude her post with a hopeful message for her readers: “Nunca llegamos a entender bien las cosas. Pero es cierto que hay que vivir a pesar de la lluvia” (“A pesar de la lluvia”).

Thus, in this blog post Ferrero reflects on everyday life, describes rainy days in the city, comments on the news of the tragedy that made a strong impact on Spanish people since the plane in question departed from Barcelona, informs us about the winner of the Alfaguara literary...
prize, and mentions three female writers, Maylis de Kerangal, Carla Guelfenbein, and Clarice Lispector, whose works can have therapeutic effects on her readers. Ferrero’s optimistic tone at the end of this text and her faith in the power of literature to treat life’s ailments are consistent with the photograph of a rainbow included in “A pesar de la lluvia” and traditionally perceived as a symbol of hope and promise. Furthermore, this blog post illustrates Francisco Umbral’s argument about the healing and comforting abilities of periodismo de arte that I have cited in the introductory chapter.

If in “A pesar de la lluvia,” Ferrero focuses on the ability of fiction to provide instant and therefore fleeting comfort and pleasure to the readers, in “Viejas fotografías,” she wonders if literature and photography can teach us about the pursuit of more permanent happiness. In this blog post published on July 3rd, 2014, Ferrero considers the tendency of photography to glorify everyday life and ponders whether appearances, things that are false and events that have not happened yet, can in fact make us happier than reality. “Viejas fotografías” is reminiscent of Millás’s artifotocuentos in that it deals with the representation of reality and its relationship with fiction, but Ferrero’s approach to and reflections on photography are nevertheless different from those in Millás’s columns. Whereas Millás writes about newspaper photographs or what he refers to as “el álbum familiar de una sociedad” (2006:11), Ferrero focuses on old family photos that are carefully arranged and therefore far removed from the spontaneity of the everyday:

Siempre sonreímos en las fotografías. Salimos agarrándonos a gente que nos da francamente igual, aparentando risas y momentos inolvidables. Nada suele desentonar en los álbumes familiares, tan alejados de la cotidianidad y la vida. Las fotografías son estáticas, momentos congelados en el tiempo en los que nadie quiere salir mal. (“Viejas fotografías”)
An old black and white photograph of two young couples smiling while having a picnic lunch in the park (see figure 12) included in this blog post gives the impression of being staged thereby confirming Ferrero’s argument. The perfection and bliss captured in this photograph make it closer to a newspaper ad than to an image of relatives or friends enjoying each other’s company. According to Ferrero, photography is not only incapable of representing our day-to-day existence, which is, as we have seen, the underlying theme of the artifotocuentos, but it also presents us with lies about the everyday: “Pero las fotografías son falsas. Una manera de mentir como otra. Porque está, en primer lugar, lo que vemos en ellas. Después, lo que imaginamos. Y por último está el tiempo, que les confiere a esas instantáneas un significado que en ese momento no tienen aún” (“Viejas fotografías”).

Figure 12. Photograph in “Viejas fotografías”

While Millás considers that this misrepresentation of reality has more influence on our lives than reality itself, Ferrero finds that it is also a key to our happiness. Unlike Millás whose interest in
photography is primarily epistemological and evolves around the question of whether or not it is possible to come to know the world through images, Ferrero is more concerned with the pursuit of happiness similarly to Vicent. A brief novel by English author Jonathan Coe entitled *The Rain Before It Falls* (2007), in which one of the protagonists records a description of a series of twenty photographs for another blind character, leads Ferrero to believe that the most attractive thing about photographs is precisely what is absent or disguised, thereby bringing to mind Vicent’s reflections on creative emptiness in “El vacío.” Ferrero writes that the most meaningful part of Coe’s novel is a scene in which a little girl says that her favorite kind of rain is the rain before it falls because it is not necessary for something to exist in order to make you happy. In Ferrero’s view, this brief literary work asks the key question about life, happiness, and photography:

La de si son las cosas *de verdad* las únicas que pueden hacernos felices. Si las cosas, antes de que sean, no nos pueden hacer también infinitamente felices. Si la lluvia antes de que caiga no puede hacernos más felices que la lluvia que después se convierte en barro. [… ] quizás lo que más nos gusta de las fotografías es lo velado de su significado. Muchas veces esas imágenes apuntan a una felicidad que aparentemente existe, pero quien sabe si en realidad, si *de verdad* […] es así. (“Viejas fotografías”)

Unlike “A pesar de la lluvia,” “Viejas fotografías” is not supposed to cure a particular ailment such as sadness or melancholy, but rather to make us think critically about our relationship with photographs. Considering that we live in the age of digital photography, online photo-sharing services, and social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, and others, it is pertinent to question our tendency to take, view and share photographs that capture almost every
aspect of our lives and to wonder whether or not this everyday practice leads to happiness. It is notable that Ferrero does not discuss explicitly this obsession with photographing and exhibiting our lives, but instead resorts to literature acting once again as her readers’ bibliotherapist. As part of this endeavor, Ferrero keeps crossing the Atlantic both literally and textually by drawing inspiration from Guadalupe Nettel, Leila Guerriero, Julio Ramón Ribeyro, Clarice Lispector, Raymond Carver, Joan Didion, Alice Munro, J. D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and others. Los nombres de las cosas thus becomes a transatlantic and even transnational space – this blog also references Japanese author Haruki Murakami as well as various French and British writers – despite the fact that its authoress identifies herself as Spanish and a citizen of Barcelona in a number of posts. There are, however, other blogs in the section “Mientras tanto” whose authors do not only turn their literary gaze to the Atlantic space but also come to embody the transatlantic. In fact, in the brief biographical notes that every blog in FronteraD contains, few bloggers declare their nationality, and if they do mention any geographical references, these point to the city where they studied, to the places they visited on their travels, and at times to the region where they currently reside. Thus, Bruno H. Piché, the author of a relatively new blog entitled La vida en Comala City, writes that he completed his studies in Montreal, Mexico City, and London, and describes his blog as a space “sin fronteras temáticas y en que las sombras y presencias fantasmales remiten al escurridizo entrecruce entre los géneros literarios” (“Sobre el autor”). This confirms that La vida en Comala City is a site of convergence of various geographies, genres, and themes. In a similar manner, Nazaret Castro, the authoress of the blog Entre la samba y el tango, says that she was born in Extremadura, but she also considers herself

46 In addition to having spent several months in New York City, Ferrero mentions in her blog that she used to live in Buenos Aires and makes references to several other trips to Latin America and other regions of the world.
as a native of Madrid. Furthermore, she lived in São Paulo and currently resides in Buenos Aires. The brief description of her blog reveals that Julio Cortázar’s and Eduardo Galeano’s works awakened her interest in Latin America and that her texts aim to explore multiple facets of everyday life in this continent, as well as to denounce political and economic inequality. Lastly, Javier Molina, the author of the blog *Reportero salvaje* whose title evokes Roberto Bolaño’s enigmatic novel *Los detectives salvajes*, identifies himself as “escritor español arraigado en Latinoamérica” and states that his blog aims to be “la mirada latinoamericana de un español y la mirada española de un latinoamericano adoptivo” (*Reportero salvaje*, “Sobre el autor”). The photograph of this blogger smiling and smoking, which resembles the famous image of Che Guevara with a Cuban cigar, and the header of his blog representing a reporter with a Mexican sombrero, a pen between the corners of his mouth and literally the world at his feet (see figure 13) announce that the focus of *Reportero salvaje* transcends Spanish borders despite the nationality of its author.

![Figure 13. Blog header in *Reportero salvaje*](image)

By means of these brief autobiographical notes, descriptions, and images in their blogs, Piché, Castro, and Molina consolidate their transatlantic identities that they have been constructing over the years through their interests, travels, experiences, and writings. What
happens in the case of these bloggers whose texts reflect the fact that they have lived in both Europe and Latin America is a fusion of spatiality and corporeality made possible by blog as a medium (Boyd 12). Their blogs transcend both real and imaginary boundaries, enable them to express their views on the current issues and give voice to their discontent with the dominant culture. In addition, the section “Mientras tanto” as a virtual space situated in the cloud between Europe and the Americas allows them to create digital transatlantic bodies thereby illustrating Boyd’s argument that “blogs are the bodies of bloggers, offering a representation as well as a space for the embodied digital individual” (17). The FronteraD blogs also open up new prospects for the uses of the Internet that we could consider as decolonizing as Stefano Tedeschi notes: “la ruptura del sentido tradicional del concepto de espacio puede servir también como reapropiación de un lugar propio: el hecho que se puedan proponer contenidos heterogéneos desde los ángulos más dispersos del planeta permite vencer posibles usos neocolonialistas de la Red” (675). This redefinition of the concept of space accompanied by the desire to bring to light current injustices in Latin America and denounce the neocolonial gaze of the Western world is most evident in the blog Otramérica by Paco Gómez Nadal.

**Narratives of Resistance in Otramérica**

One of the longest existing blogs in FronteraD whose first post dates from December 2009, Otramérica is according to its author a lot more than a simple blog. Rather, it stands for a new concept and an alternative view of the world “con ojos limpios de eurocentrismo, con sensibilidad cargada de posibles” (“Otramérica y su hermano mayor”47). According to María Angulo Egea, the notion of view or gaze takes on a particular meaning in literary journalism.

47 The words “su hermano mayor” in the title of this post refer to the web site Otramérica, de sur a norte, founded by Gómez Nadal and several other journalists in 2011 in order to disseminate and analyze the information about Latin America and the Caribbean.
since it implies changing the focus, paying attention to the marginalized groups, bringing order to chaos, narrating reality, and denouncing inequality and injustice (8). In the case of Otramérica, Gómez Nadal’s transatlantic gaze and voice manage to gather and recount the stories and struggles of the everyday Latin America thereby demystifying the lasting perception of this continent as exotic and savage. In a sense, the mission that Gómez Nadal undertakes in his blog seems to have been inspired by Walter Mignolo’s words about the political and cultural cornerstones of the prevailing impression of Latin America: “‘América’ nunca fue un continente que hubiese que descubrir sino una invención forjada durante el proceso de la historia colonial europea y la consolidación y expansión de las ideas e instituciones occidentales” (28). With this in mind, we can derive at least two meanings from the very title of Gómez Nadal’s blog. On one hand, “Otramérica” refers to the fact that Latin America has always been seen with imperial eyes, in the words of Mary Louise Pratt, and, on the other hand, it confirms that Latin America is indeed other, different from what we have learned to imagine from within the Western world. It is for this reason that in the brief description of his blog located to the right of his entries Gómez Nadal writes: “Me perdí en Otramérica, esa que no es Iberoamérica, ni Latinoamérica, ni Indoamérica, ni Abya Yala... y que es todas esas al tiempo” (“Sobre el autor”). Wandering through “Otramérica,” this blogger does not identify himself as Spanish but declares that he has been living and working as a journalist in Latin America for over thirteen years, that he currently resides in Panamá and that his identity card states that he was born in Murcia (“Sobre el autor”). Gómez Nadal claims that the purpose of his blog is to fight his own Eurocentrism, clichés, and stereotypes with words. He is also devoted to creating a more just and egalitarian Latin America, a commitment that extends beyond his blog since he collaborates with indigenous and rural communities “en la resistencia a los megaproyectos económicos (porque no me como el cuento
del desarrollismo)” (“Sobre el autor”). Thus, Otramérica represents a digital expansion of Gómez Nadal’s projects, travels, testimonies, and struggles against the coloniality.

Despite the fact that Otramérica belongs to the category entitled “Periodismo, crónica y actualidad” within the section “Mientras tanto,” the strong presence of the authorial self in this blog, similarly to what we have observed in Ferrero’s Los nombres de las cosas, situates it on the frontier between the personal and the journalistic thereby confirming Tedeschi’s observation that each blog is “un diario intelectual” (661).48 Otramérica can also be considered a literary blog despite the fact that its posts in most cases are not about the world of literature but mainly about current issues in Latin America such as indigenous rights, violence, drug trafficking, diplomatic relations with the United States, environment protection, freedom of press, etc. This is because the contexts in which a blog appears and the way we experience it take precedence over its content when classifying it as a literary (Himmer 2004). The visual structure and the header of Otramérica (see figure 14) contribute to its literary character and once again exemplify the convergence of media and techniques, which can be observed in the correlation between image and text. The function of the header is on one hand promotional – it makes the blog more

48 Besides Tedeschi, several other new media theorists, such as José Luis Orihuela, Amardeep Singh, and Mary Garden, have pointed out that the intimate and personal tone of the blog takes us back to its origins as a personal logbook.
attractive for the readers and thus convinces them to keep on reading – and, on the other hand, it is more than a mere decorative element. If Tedeschi differentiates between a denotative integration of image into text solely for the purpose of accompanying it, and a connotative one in which case a dialogue is established between image and text (671), then the function of the illustration in *Otramérica* can be considered as connotative since it illustrates the presumed otherness of Latin America according to the Western perception.\(^{49}\)

In this simple but effective image, we can observe what seem to be the coasts of two continents, Europe and Latin America, separated by the Atlantic Ocean and seen from Europe. Whereas the European continent is in the foreground emphasizing its political and economic supremacy in the (neo)colonial relations, the Latin American continent lies in the background. Europe is also green in color as traditionally represented on the world map, which makes it appear “normal,” while Latin America is white and checkered with orange lines, which could represent both the exotization of this continent and its actual complexity. Thus, the header of *Otramérica* and the textual content of the blog complement one another and enable us to move away from the antiquated Eurocentric gaze and to observe and understand everyday life in Latin America in a manner more attuned to its present-day issues and concerns.

Whether Paco Gómez Nadal writes about the violence and drug trafficking in Mexico, the Colombian conflict, poverty in Central America, the struggle against multinational companies in Bolivia or the disappeared in Argentina, the posts in *Otramérica* are always demystifying. Gómez Nadal dismantles the great fiction about Latin America that the Western world has constructed thus echoing Ricardo Piglia’s view on the relationship between politics and literature. Drawing from *Operación masacre* (1957), the famous literary-journalistic work written by the

\(^{49}\) Unlike Ferrero, Gómez Nadal almost never incorporates any other images in his blog so the header of *Otramérica* is the only illustration that accompanies each post.
Argentine Rodolfo Walsh, and the oppressive regimes in Latin America in general, Piglia asserts that both literature and the state create their own narratives resulting in mutual tension between them. The main task of literature, according to Piglia, is to help us understand how the state develops and implements its fictions and to dismantle them by offering alternative stories (85). Although Piglia primarily refers to the relationship between fictional writing and the official state discourse, his argument can be extended to any kind of writing that rebels against the narratives constructed by powerful countries and their mainstream media in order to maintain and maximize their political and economic dominion. These hegemonic fictions can be disputed only by radically different stories such as personal accounts of people’s daily lives, “Un contra-rumor […] de pequeñas historias, ficciones anónimas, micro-relatos, testimonios que se intercambian y circulan” (Piglia 86). Gómez Nadal’s blog posts in Otramérica represent this kind of writing; they are tales of resistance against stereotypes, texts that resemble detective stories whose objective is discovering what lies hidden behind the fiction of a seemingly different and violent continent opposed to development.

“Tiempos de soberbia y decadencia” published in Otramérica illustrates how Gómez Nadal manages to dismantle this distorted image of Latin America and simultaneously challenge the idea of Europe as a civilized and prosperous environment. The blogger’s point of departure in this post is the news that announces the expulsion of Coca-Cola from Bolivia on the day that marks the end of a cycle according to the Mayan calendar, thus symbolizing the rejection of capitalism. Gómez Nadal condemns the reactions of the Western World to this decision of the Bolivian government interpreting them as a reflection of Europe’s “coloniality” and “vanity.” This arrogant attitude becomes even more problematic once it extends beyond the political realm into the sphere of culture and everyday life:
Ya se sabe: lo que se cree en Europa son religiones, lo del sur son creencias o supersticiones; acá se construye ciencia, allá se tienen saberes; lo que aquí es cultura, allá se convierte en folclore; nosotros tenemos Historia, el Sur Global tiene etnografía; lo que no conocía Europa se descubre, e, incluso, hemos manipulado la brújula para que Europa y Estados Unidos sean Occidente, Asia sea Oriente y el resto del planeta se quede sin una denominación que lo enraíce en el presente. (“Tiempo de soberbia y decadencia”)

This passage brings to mind the observation of the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano that the relationship between the European culture responsible for the colonization and the colonized cultures has been one of inequality between “subject” and “object” in which only the former has been considered rational and consequently superior (174). Gómez Nadal thus denounces in this blog post the distinction between “subject” and “object,” Europe and Latin America, which has been artificially constructed and consolidated over the centuries as the cornerstone of the Eurocentric thought. In order to emphasize the ridiculousness of the official narrative about Latin America, the blogger juxtaposes the historical failures and the current decadence of Europe divided by national tensions and socio-economic crisis with the authenticity, consistency, and tolerance that characterize Bolivia. Referring ironically to the Europeans as “racionales” and “pragmáticos,” Gómez Nadal reminds us of certain European traditions that may seem absurd to the citizens of other continents, the part that Europe played in the slavery and two world wars, and its incapacity to deal with the rise in nationalisms:

_Nos reímos nosotros, los españoles, que rezamos a estatuas de madera para que nos toque la lotería; […] nos reímos nosotros, los europeos, que hemos provocado y librado dos guerras mundiales, que aún no hemos pedido perdón por haber_
trafíca con 15 millones de personas africanas para enriquecernos [...] A nosotros nos da risa que los pueblos originarios de América esperen el cambio de era marcado en un calendario elaborado por una civilización científicamente incuestionable. A nosotros nos da risa que Bolivia haya entendido lo que es un Estado plurinacional cuando acá todavía no sabemos convivir entre comunidades autónomas o entre nacionalidades europeas equivalentes. (“Tiempo de soberbia y decadencia”, my emphasis)

Through a series of contrasts and repetitions of “nos reímos” and “nos da risa,” Gómez Nadal convinces us that the decision of the Bolivian government regarding the expulsion of Coca-Cola does not deserve to be mocked unlike the arrogance and decadence of Europe that continued to watch Latin America from above instead of learning from it. In addition, by using the pronoun “nosotros” the blogger includes himself and his readers in this group of conceited Europeans thereby confirming his aspiration to eradicate Eurocentrism that has affected our culture and way of thinking without us realizing it. The use of repetitions, present tense, and the first person plural pronoun correspond to the use of formulas, the focus on the present moment, and the sense of community. These are main characteristics of what Walter Ong denominates “secondary orality” when referring to the similarities between the language of the media and that of the oral culture (136). Blogs exemplify Ong’s concept according to several new media scholars (Walker 38-39, Boyd 14-15) and as illustrated by a number of posts in Otramérica. Indeed, the tone and style of “Tiempos de soberbia y decadencia” make us wonder if we are reading a text or listening to a populist speech delivered by Gómez Nadal with a sole purpose to mobilize us so that we can begin to change the imaginary perception of Latin America at once. It is precisely this ability of blog to blur the boundaries between writing and orality and diminish
the hierarchy between the author and his audience that makes it the most suitable medium for Gómez Nadal’s decolonizing project designed to dismantle the binary opposition between the Western world and Latin America.

Nevertheless, although the purpose of Otramérica is to demystify the image of Latin America as a continent with no power and no agency subordinated to the dominion of the West since the Spanish conquest in the 15th century, it could be argued that Gómez Nadal, in fact, perpetuates this image of Latin America by continually victimizing its everyday realities. Paradoxically, while criticizing the binary model of examination, Gómez Nadal unknowingly falls into it and views Latin America not as a member of the fluid, heterogeneous and transcultural Atlantic space but as Spain’s helpless offspring. In other words, he fails to acknowledge the multiple influences that Latin America has had on Spain and that Alejandro Mejías-López refers to as “inverted conquest” in his critique of the univocal, neocolonialist approach to Latin American history, literature, and cultural production. According to this scholar, “Cultural theories of transculturation, dependency, hybridity, and parody, while undoubtedly seeking to empower Latin American cultural production through difference, have ultimately perpetuated, in one way or another, the imperial sameness of the metropolitan center under critique” (5).

Gómez Nadal’s rebellious attitude is slightly different, less neocolonialist, and more informed in the text “Las coordenadas de la vorágine,” one of the earliest posts in Otramérica, in which he not only denounces the great political fictions about Latin America but also criticizes literature and journalism, both Latin American and Western, that have contributed, to the exotization of this continent. This blog post aims to dismantle the image of Latin America

---

Venezuelan novelist Manuel Díaz Rodríguez originally coined the term “inverted conquest” approximately over a century ago.
created by its very own magical realism and subsequently supported by the Western media. Its other purpose is to open the eyes of the readers used to view Latin America as an extravagant and barbarous environment: “No pueden pensar lo diferente. Un cierto barroquismo en todo, en las telenovelas y en la muerte, en las fiestas y en la tristeza, en el sembrado y en la cosecha, en el fracaso y en las épicas y pírricas victorias. Siento defraudar a los lectores, pero no todo es así” (“Las coordenadas de la vorágine”). In order to change the readers’ focus, Gómez Nadal highlights, similarly to what he does in “Tiempos de soberbia y decadencia,” that certain European customs must seem bewildering to Latin Americans:

Para un habitante de Otramérica, la manera de celebrar de los españoles alrededor de la comida es pantagruélica, la muerte de mendigos en la soledad del frío es de una crueldad inimaginable y el consumo desbordado de cocaína y otras hierbas es obsceno. También el gélido gesto en la calle o el terrible silencio del vecindario desagradan en el Trópico. (“Las coordenadas de la vorágine”, my emphasis)

It is notable that Gómez Nadal uses exaggerated, even stereotypical descriptions, characteristic of the Western representations of Latin America, in order to describe European customs, thus showing that the act of exotization and cultural and linguistic conquest can happen in both directions. According to the blogger’s diagnosis, the current perception of “Otramérica” results from the journalists’ tendency to only describe instead of also interpret the events that occurred. The sensationalist descriptions worthy of appearing in the front page of the mainstream newspapers thus replace the search for truth:

Así, armados de imaginarios y de Macondos nunca existidos, pocas veces se nos ocurre señalar que detrás de la sangría mexicana está el mercado y la sobredemanda de drogas en Europa y Estados Unidos, que detrás de la guerra
nada ilógica de Colombia hay un botín en reparto del que participan muy dignas empresas españolas (entre otras), […] que Centroamérica se come su banano entre pobreza y violencia por, entre otras cosas, las medidas proteccionistas de la Unión Europea. (“Las coordenadas de la vorágine”)

In this last passage, the descriptive and ostentatious language of the Western media partially responsible for the othering of “Otramérica” is challenged by the honest, transparent, and nonconformist tone of Gómez Nadal. In this manner, the blogger denounces Western fictions about Latin America not only with a different kind of stories but also with different language and style. His reproachful tone and sincere concern for the unjust treatment that Latin America has experienced recall Ricardo Piglia’s remarks about the disparity between the language of politics and that of literature. According to Piglia, the state and the market economy create a uniform and opaque language and use the mass media to diffuse it in the society in order to eliminate the possibility of any critical discourse: “La economía de mercado define un diccionario y una sintaxis y actúa sobre las palabras; define un nuevo lenguaje sagrado y críptico, que necesita de los sacerdotes y los técnicos para descifrarlo y traducirlo y comentarlo” (92). For Piglia, the only solution to confront this “oscuridad deliberada” and “jerga mundial” is clarity (93), which is precisely what characterizes the language and stories in Gómez Nadal’s blog.

“Las tercas personas que nos hacen humanos” is another one of these narratives that differ radically from the official story due to its sensibility and transparency. Moved by the news about the grandson of Estela Carlotto, the president of the association Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, who had been adopted illegally by a military family in Argentina during the dictatorship and who discovered his true identity only recently, Gómez Nadal ponders about the search for truth and justice: “Buscar no es tarea fácil. No es fácil buscar la verdad, buscar la justicia, buscar el rastro
de un desaparecido, de un secuestrado por el poderoso poder”. Once again, by means of repetition of the verb “buscar,” Gómez Nadal emphasizes the importance of discovering what the official discourse conceals, as well as his own inclination as a journalist and intellectual to participate in the process. The blogger’s personal and emotional tone far removed from the principle of journalistic objectivity, but characteristic of blog and opinion column, is even more noteworthy: “cuando la verdad se reubica, respiramos, sentimos un descanso profundo, un par de lágrimas nos corren por la cara interior de la mejilla y el aliento se rearma de razones para volver a fluir” (“Las tercas personas que nos hacen humanos”).

Another important aspect of this blog post is that Gómez Nadal does not offer any information about the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the pregnant daughter of Estela Carlotto or the illegal adoption or her grandson Guido. The blogger does not reduce the truth to a compilation of dates, places, and names connected with the oppressive regime in Argentina in the seventies and eighties, but instead searches for more universal explanations that transcend the immediate circumstances. His most important discovery are not the clandestine documents and political conspiracies but the realization that being stubborn and resistant makes us more human: “Mientras otros se rinden rápido, se desesperan, se sienten incapaces de enfrentar a la bestia, hay gentes que son tercas, que resisten, que pelean, que preguntan, que caminan despacio para así poder llegar muy lejos” (“Las tercas personas que nos hacen humanos”). The posts in Otramérica consisting of brief tales of resistance written in a clear and moving language thus represent Gómez Nadal’s way of denouncing the injustice in Latin America and enabling his readers to get to know the state of things through literary journalism.

Although the two blogs analyzed in this chapter, Los nombres de las cosas and Otramérica, differ from one another in themes, style, and form, both Laura Ferrero and Paco
Gómez Nadal tell stories about everyday life, provoke their readers to think critically and aim to enlighten them further, employ a sincere tone, share their personal feelings and experiences, and cross textual and geo-political boundaries between Spain and the Americas thereby creating a digital transatlantic space. Included in the blogs section of FronteraD, a Hispanic smart magazine, these blogs reject the sensationalism and apparent objectivity of mainstream news media. Whereas Laura Ferrero achieves this by sharing stories about her passion for literature, her travels, and occasional embarrassing episodes in her daily life, Gómez Nadal narrates everyday struggles and injustices in Latin America and urges us to rethink the distorted image of this continent created in the Western world. Even though the strong presence of the author-figure can be observed in both blogs, Ferrero represents herself as one of us, a person with big dreams and little weaknesses whose aim is to cure her own and her readers’ life’s ailments through writing and literature. Gómez Nadal, on the other hand, resembles a detective working to uncover the truth and a rebel expressing loudly his discontent with the dominant discourses and practices. Hence, the main difference between Los nombres de las cosas and Otramérica is that the former blog revolves around the pursuit of happiness and the latter around the pursuit of justice. These two quests coexist in FronteraD along with the convergence of literature and journalism, text and image, writing and orality, and Spain and Latin America. It is for these reasons that this independent and non-conformist magazine provides an ideal environment for digital literary journalism and the “immense minorities” eager to comprehend the world.
CONCLUSION

READING THE EVERYDAY

As my project on periodismo de arte and its connection to everyday life was nearing its completion, I visited the exhibition Wonder at the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., which featured a large-scale installation by Tara Donovan, a contemporary American artist renowned for her sculptural works made of everyday manufactured materials. At first glance resembling icebergs, pine trees covered in snow, or white corals, Donovan’s installation rising from the ground of the gallery is, in fact, an enigmatic landscape made of index cards, metal, wood, paint, and glue. The use of these simple, mundane elements can be noticed, however, only upon a close examination. Much like the literary journalists and bloggers whose works I have analyzed in this dissertation, Donovan collects small and seemingly frivolous objects – pencils, toothpicks, buttons, straws, scotch tape, etc. – that we tend to overlook despite the fact that they form an inherent part of our day-to-day existence. By transforming familiar things into unrecognizable sculptural installations, this artist inspires us to pay closer attention to infinite meanings and possibilities of the everyday. Donovan achieves this transformation through an overwhelming accumulation of supposedly ordinary materials, which is reminiscent of the onwardness that characterizes the continuous writing of newspaper columns and blogs in Spain in the last two and a half decades, as we have observed in the previous chapters. In an earlier installation entitled Colony, Donovan employs used pencils of different lengths to create what could be interpreted as a dense urban landscape or a colony of insects. This work therefore changes our perception of both everyday objects and urban or natural spaces in a similar manner that periodismo de arte challenges and broadens our understanding of everyday life, columna de escritores, and blog.
Throughout this study, I have focused on the contribution of periodismo de arte, a hybrid genre combining elements of literature, journalism and author’s subjective views on current issues, to the articulation, exploration, and interpretation of everyday realities. I have examined what I consider as the most significant manifestations of this type of literary journalism in Spain: columns by fiction writers published in both print and digital editions of a longstanding mainstream newspaper and blogs published in a relatively recent independent and non-profit digital magazine dedicated to creative non-fiction. In particular, I have explored how Juan José Millás’s articuentos and artifotocuentos, Manuel Vicent’s newspaper columns, and Laura Ferrero’s and Paco Gómez Nadal’s blogs in FronteraD challenge and redefine the prevalent conception of the quotididan, constructed by the news media as self-evident, unambiguous, dramatic, and sensational. As we have seen, these authors achieve that by distancing themselves from the language and style of the mainstream media, by giving priority to story over information in the Benjaminian sense, by reflecting primarily upon private, subjective experiences and feelings instead of singular events of public concern, and by prompting us to think critically about the everyday. It is through their columns and blogs that these literary-journalists create an alternative to the dominant discourse thereby cultivating less docile and more sensible and conscientious readers capable of questioning the status quo.

While critics have acknowledged the crucial role of journalism in the opening of the Spanish society following the end of Franco’s dictatorship and the proclamation of freedom of the press, the development of literary journalism in democratic Spain in the last few decades has received scant attention. Scholars of Juan José Millás and Manuel Vicent have primarily focused on their novelistic production despite these authors’ regular contributions to El País in the form of newspaper columns and longer opinion pieces and their growing influence as public
intellectuals. Similarly, there has been scarce criticism on creative digital magazines such as
_FronteraD_, and the possibilities of literary journalism in cyberspace are yet to be thoroughly
investigated. This is also true for blogs that have mainly been analysed from a more formal,
quantitative point of view and have not been observed as a genre/medium that has expanded the
boundaries of what Francisco Umbral delineated as _periodismo de arte_. Indeed, Ferrero’s blog
posts in _Los nombres de las cosas_ with various illustrations, photographs, hyperlinks, and tags –
these are also found in Gómez Nadal’s _Otramérica_, but to a significantly lesser degree – are no
longer just “literature in homeopathic doses.” The same could be said of Millás’s _artifotocuentos_
that combine text and image and of Vicent’s columns that frequently reference works of art
urging us to open another tab in our browser and look them up. By analysing Millás’s and
Vicent’s columns, the concept and structure of _FronteraD_, and Ferrero’s and Gómez Nadal’s
blogs, I hope to have demonstrated that contemporary _periodismo de arte_ lies at the constantly
expanding intersection of literature, journalism, visual culture, and digital media, thereby calling
for an interdisciplinary analysis.

Another purpose of this study has been to show that _periodismo de arte_ should be viewed
not only as a passive curiosity in need of theoretical and critical inquiry, but also as a necessary
form for theory of everyday practices, to recall De Certeau’s words cited at the beginning of the
introductory chapter. Indeed, as much as I have drawn from the continually emerging field of
everyday life studies to theorize Spanish literary journalism, I have also employed Millás’s
_artifotocuentos_, Vicent’s columns, and Ferrero’s and Gómez Nadal’s blogs to elucidate the
quotidian. Through the close reading of Millás’s columns in Chapter One, I have shown that
“reality,” as we know it, is nothing other than an appearance of everyday life meticulously
constructed by the dominant ideology, culture, and language. Thus, the actual everyday emerges
from the constant confrontation between the “reality” of the public sphere and the unreality of our private world, composed of our subjective feelings, experiences, fantasies, and fears.

Paradoxically, by consistently addressing the problematics of representation of everyday life in his articuentos and artifotocuentos, Millás comes nearest to capturing its opaque and multiform nature. His postmodern approach to the everyday and epistemological concerns are contrasted by Vicent’s ethical perspective and modernist return to classical antiquity, discussed in Chapter Two. As we have seen, Vicent envisions an ideal human life as a peaceful coexistence of small quotidian pleasures and great virtues. The cure for both personal anguish and the current malaise in our society, according to this author, lies in evasive resistance, that is, in escaping any kind of ideological capture. His philosophy for the good life thus consists in the contemplation of beauty and appreciation of everyday routines and uncomplicated pleasures.

If Vicent’s columns take place time and again in Ancient Greece and on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, Ferrero’s and Gómez Nadal’s blog posts, discussed in the last chapter of this study, transpire in the present day Atlantic space. As I have shown, these digimodernist texts published in FronteraD, a Hispanic smart magazine, mirror the instability and heterogeneity of everyday life through the dissolution of boundaries between media, genres, orality and literacy, and the crossing of cultural and geo-political borders between Spain and the Americas. Although Ferrero acknowledges the elusive nature of everyday realities, similarly to Millás, and deconstructs the dichotomy between writer and reader by placing emphasis on authorial subjectivity and sincerity, her primary concern is curing our life’s ailments with philosophy and literature, thereby echoing Vicent’s quest for a joyous and fulfilled life.

Unlike Ferrero, Gómez Nadal does not share his everyday experiences and feelings with his readers nor does he attempt to give them advice on how to achieve happiness. On the
contrary, his blog *Otramérica* differs from other manifestations of contemporary *periodismo de arte* examined in this study in that it tackles current news on Latin America and major issues of public concern that this continent has been facing since the colonial times. Furthermore, Gómez Nadal is the loudest in his criticism of the dominant discourse and the most tenacious in his pursuit of justice and a changed image of Latin America in the Western world. For this journalist and activist, everyday life is a realm of eternal struggle between the power bloc and the subordinate cultures, represented by the Western World and “Otramérica,” respectively. Through his persistent and assertive efforts to achieve justice for the Latin American continent, Gómez Nadal challenges the concept of evasive resistance that characterizes Vicent’s columns. At the same time, however, he remains captured within the neocolonialist worldview that he so ardently rejects. Whether Millás, Vicent, Ferrero, and Gómez Nadal pursue knowledge, virtue, happiness, or justice in everyday life, their *periodismo de arte* undoubtedly represents an alternative to the ideology, language, and style of the mainstream news media causing us to think differently about both the official history and our personal, quotidian stories.

I hope that my exploration of contemporary literary journalism in Spain will spark future research on this constantly developing hybrid genre that privileges the interpretation over the narration of everyday life. As I have already mentioned, one of the principal characteristics of newspaper columns by fiction writers and blogs is their onwardness for they are regularly emerging and growing thereby mirroring the flow of daily life and representing an inexhaustible source of interpretation for critics. In addition to Vicent and Millás, there are other Spanish authors and journalists whose columns are worthy of examination and other newspapers - though with smaller circulation than that of *El País* – that include opinion columns. The same is true for
digital magazines that continue to emerge in a time of financial crisis and that may soon become the principal domain of literary journalism.

Another issue that deserves consideration is if we should continue to refer to this genre as “literary journalism,” “periodismo narrativo” or “articulismo literario” bearing in mind the extent to which it has been influenced by visual culture. In that sense, Umbral’s “periodismo de arte” that was initially derived from “obra de arte” to refer to transcendental and inspiring character of this kind of journalism in comparison to traditional news writing, but that also evokes visual arts, may indeed be the most appropriate term for this writing practice at the beginning of the 21st century. If we are to continue theorizing daily life in all its complexity and spontaneity, we must go beyond the realm of traditional academic texts, aiming to assign specific meanings to everyday practices, and embrace the interpretative possibilities of periodismo de arte. With this in mind, it is appropriate to refer once again to Michel de Certeau and his understanding of writing and reading. For this philosopher, writing is an activity attached to specific things and places such as books and libraries, while reading implies an improvisation of meanings, a process during which readers insert their own history into the text. In this sense, periodismo de arte in contemporary Spain may be the upshot of writers clearly trained in books and libraries, but its powerful present and its projection towards the future is an unmistakable mark of reading the everyday, either in the print media or in cyberspace.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


______________.* Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota


Orihuela, José Luis. La revolución de los blogs. Cuando las bitácoras se convirtieron en el


