Stardom as mythology of the digital age: hyperculturality and Rosalía's *El mal querer*

El estrellato como mitología de la era digital: *hiperculturalidad y* El mal querer *de Rosalía*

Estrelato como mitologia da era digital: *a hiperculturalidade e* El mal querer *de Rosalía*

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Abstract

Stardom is a paradigmatic example of contemporary mythology. Through their function as semiotic-cultural and somatic-emotional receptacles, the stars serve as referents and mirror of the social collective that engenders them. Within digital communities and through interactive technology, celebrity liturgy, fan rituals, and the symbolism of this massive secular religion reach its zenith. Our first goal is to analyze the parallels between stardom and religion. To do this, we will place idols in a theoretical framework and describe the transformations that digital fan communities are undergoing. Our second objective is to interrelate the transmedia phenomenon of Rosalía's album El mal querer *with the notion of "hyperculturality" proposed by Byung-Chul Han. We will expose how the conceptual universe generated by the Catalan artist reflects the transformations that identities attend in the globalized, hyper-connected and digital culture. The article concludes by developing the idea of stardom as modern mythology and the importance of interactive digital technology in the transformation of online audiences. Likewise, the global and intergenerational dissemination of Rosalía's work is symptomatic of the non-fundamentalist model of globalized culture, as well as the prominence of the traditional, the consumption of the aesthetic-cultural and the active role of audiences in the configuration of contemporary cultural identity.*

Keywords: *Digital music; Virtual Ccmmunities; Cultural identity; Transmedia; Rosalía; Stardom*

Resumen

El estrellato constituye un ejemplo paradigmático de mitología contemporánea. A través de su función como receptáculos semiótico-culturales y somático-emocionales, las estrellas sirven como referentes y espejo del colectivo social que las engendra. En el seno de las comunidades digitales y a través de la tecnología interactiva, la liturgia de las celebrities*, los rituales de los* fans *y la simbología de esta religión secular masiva alcanza su cénit. Nuestro primer objetivo es analizar el paralelismo entre el estrellato y la religión. Para ello, situaremos a los ídolos en un marco teórico y describiremos las transformaciones que las comunidades digitales de* fans *están experimentando. Nuestro segundo objetivo es interrelacionar el fenómeno transmedia del álbum* El mal querer *de Rosalía con la noción de "hiperculturalidad" propuesta por Byung-Chul Han. Expondremos cómo el universo conceptual generado por la artista catalana refleja las*

transformaciones a la que asisten las identidades en la cultura globalizada, hiperconectada y digital. El artículo concluye desarrollando la idea del estrellato como mitología moderna y la importancia de la tecnología digital interactiva en la transformación de los públicos en red. Así mismo, la difusión global e intergeneracional de la obra de Rosalía es sintomática del modelo no fundamentalista de la cultura globalizada, así como de la prominencia de lo tradicional, el consumo de lo estético-cultural y el papel activo de las audiencias en la configuración de la identidad cultural contemporánea.

Palabras clave: *Música digital; Comunidades virtuales; Identidad cultural; Transmedia; Rosalía; Estrellato*

Resumo

O estrelato é um exemplo paradigmático da mitologia contemporânea. Por sua função de receptáculos semiótico-culturais e somático-emocionais, as estrelas servem como referentes e espelho do coletivo social que as engendra. Dentro das comunidades digitais e por meio de tecnologia interativa, liturgia de celebridades, rituais de fãs e o simbolismo dessa religião secular massiva atingem seu apogeu. Nosso primeiro objetivo é analisar o paralelismo entre estrelato e religião. Para isso, colocaremos os ídolos em uma estrutura teórica e descreveremos as transformações pelas quais as comunidades de fãs digitais estão passando. Nosso segundo objetivo é inter-relacionar o fenômeno transmídia do álbum mal querido de Rosalía com a noção de "hiperculturalidade" proposta por Byung-Chul Han. Vamos expor como o universo conceitual gerado pela artista catalã reflete as transformações que as identidades assistem no mundo globalizado , cultura hiperconectada e digital. O artigo conclui desenvolvendo a ideia do estrelato como mitologia moderna e a importância da tecnologia digital interativa na transformação do público online. Da mesma forma, a difusão global e intergeracional da obra de Rosalía é sintomática do modelo não fundamentalista da cultura globalizada, bem como da proeminência do tradicional, do consumo do estético-cultural e do papel ativo do público na configuração do contemporâneo. identidade cultural.

Palavras chave: *Música digital; Comunidades virtuais; Identidade cultural; Transmídia; Rosalia; Estrelato*

Translation by **Charles Arthur**

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1. Introduction: Stardom and audiences. From its academic foundations to mass culture

We define stardom as a process by which an individual is recognised for his or her exceptional qualities or talent (Loy et al., 2018). By contrast, while the terms "celebrity" and "egalitarian fame" derive from stardom, they convey a more ephemeral visibility and do not entail the need for a special achievement beyond the mere exposure of the individual to the media (Inglis, 2010; Busquet-Duran, 2012; Turner, 2014). We can chart the genealogy of stardom in the figures of mythical heroes, outstanding athletes, politicians, theatrical actors and, from 1930 onwards, members of the Hollywood star system. All these public figures have served as role models who fulfil an emotional-mythical need of people, or in other words, "they stand as mirrors of the dominant values of an era" (Busquet-Duran, 2012:13).

In the Spanish-speaking world, there is a profound lack of research on stardom and celebrity culture. Likewise, studies related to the phenomenon of the Catalonian singer Rosalía have not been carried out in the scientific realm. The aim of this article is to pave the way in both domains by providing a pioneering, theoretical approach to a universe where the only references, which are somewhere between essay and popularisation, are the books entitled *El Trap. Filosofía millennial para la crisis en España* (2019), by the philosopher Ernesto Castro, and *La Rosalía. Ensayos sobre el buen querer* [Essays on *El Buen Querer*] (Carrión, 2021), a collaborative book edited by literary critic Jorge Carrión, which brings together a myriad of reflections on the aesthetic, poetic and cultural aspects of the Rosalía universe.

Despite the undeniably polysemic and ramified nature of stardom as a social phenomenon, this scientific void is symptomatic of the fact that we still see a tendency to "mistrust" the academic realm regarding the study of eminently popular, massive phenomena such as stardom (Wolfheil et al., 2019). Ranging from the banal simulation of reality posited by the concept of the society of the spectacle (Debord, 1967), to criticism of the culture industry and mass culture by the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1998), we find that the cult of celebrity, as Chris Rojek (2001: 51) observes, has been condemned as "slavery, false con-

sciousness, and 'the work of the Devil'", and has been equated with "triviality and superficiality". As a result, mainstream music and its artists are part of a dynamic that is ultimately seen as merely another form of the ruthless language of capitalism, hegemonic globalisation, and commercialism (Illescas-Martínez, 2011; 2014), which are factors that are further heightened by the proliferation of the Internet as a *non-place* that eliminates distance and encourages the liquid relationships described by Zygmunt Bauman (Núñez Ladevéze & Irisarri, 2015; Han, 2020). Nowadays, as pointed out by theorists such as Byung-Chul Han, "What predominates today is communication without a community" (Han, 2020: 11).

Along the same lines, and following in the wake of critical post-structuralism, we might consider stardom and its associated practices as merely another way of legitimising technological capitalism and its dynamic of algorithmic government (Rouvroy and Berns, 2015). According to this view, the economics of individual desire –a concept attributed "to all forms of the will to live, to create, to love; to the will to create another society, another perception of the world, and other value systems" (Rolnik and Guattari, 2006: 255)– is redirected through practices that feed back into and legitimise the functioning of this neoliberal political theology. This circular dynamic, known as second-order cybernetics, is seen as "a necessary condition for ending the alienation of the human species" (Foer, 2017: 24), where various companies such as Apple, Facebook and Google follow in the wake of the Silicon Valley worldview and one of the founding fathers of its technological idealism, Stewart Brand: "[Technology] created the world's ills. Only technology can cure them" (Foer, 2017: 30).

As such, seemingly innocent practices such as massive data-gathering (big data), algorithmic personalisation, self-promotion on Instagram, Tik Tok, various fashion platforms, and the phenomenon of stardom as contemporary mythology would be examples of the toxicity of the *pharmakon*[1] technique: the demoralisation, automation, and proletarianization of social values due to the theological-political use of technology as a proposed solution to contemporary malaise (Stiegler, 2015). This is political fiction self-perpetuated by a system of quasi-invisible domination that proposes technological-utopian narratives in line with the Siliconian, post-humanist, techno capitalist worldview (Sadin, 2018; Andrea Sereni, 2021).

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However, given the relevance of these theological-political processes, we should not remain anchored solely in the scepticism and libertarian pessimism of the post-structuralist view (Eagleton, 2016), as such a view might tend to polarise regulatory institutions as intrinsically malevolent and result in their subversion being seen as something that is always desired, yet without taking into account the negative consequences, or toxicity, that might arise from such a view. Likewise, together with the development of technology and neoliberal dynamics, if one views capitalism as a scapegoat that represents the eternal cause of contemporary malaise, this might result in a somewhat reductionist socio-historical analysis of both our cultural evolution and stardom as well.

If one takes a more technophilic stance that contemplates the re-appropriation of such *pharmakon*, the origin of interactive digital technology and the Internet has been assimilated as a potential stimulus for the exchange of information, the construction of digital communities, and the expansion of democratic life (Rheingold, 1996; Siles González, 2005). Recent studies in the field of stardom indicate that due to social networks, audiences who gather around artists tend to be more active regarding political awareness, involvement in activism, and the creation of communities based on a common cause (Jenkins, 2012; Jones, 2012; Click et al., 2015). Thanks to the digitised ecosystem, the binarism between content producers and audiences is becoming blurred, which is a development that questions the precepts of critical theory related to the passivity of audiences in favour of attitudes that are more active and engaged; this phenomenon is reflected in the concept of 'networked', or 'connected' audiences' (Ito, 2008: 11).

As a result, the imaginary, one-way relationship with celebrities dissipates (e.g. the creation of imaginary romances with Hollywood actors), and we move to a realm that intensifies intimacy with a celebrity through interaction with his or her "publicly private self" through social networks (Marshall, 2010).

From this point of view, stardom might enable practices that involve the exchange of knowledge, greater independence compared to conventional or "mass" channels, the promotion of education and self-education, free association and community solidarity, recognition of minorities, collective empowerment, mutual care, and hospitality toward others. In short, this situation implies a myriad of spaces and

rituals that allow the economics of desire to be directed toward a therapeutic notion of *pharmakon*. As Adolfo Vera reminds us, the Hellenistic concept of *pharmakon* can refer both to "a cure that can kill" and "a poison that can cure" (Vera, 2020).

At the crossroads between apocalyptic and integrated intellectuals, to paraphrase Umberto Eco (1984), we must ask ourselves the following question: is there really a crisis of the community, or are we witnessing a transformation of the community? The intermediate position we have tried to explore in this article has led us to ask ourselves the following question: Is it possible to inhabit stardom from a critical, self-conscious, committed position that generates spaces for reflection, community, and transcendence beyond narcissistic individualism?

2. Methodology

The relevance of our object of study is based on its impact as a phenomenon of the digital era in our country. According to reports by *Google Trends*, Rosalía was the figure who received the most search queries by the Spanish population in 2018[2]. Her appearance in Almodóvar's film *Dolor y Gloria* (2019), and in the 2019 Goya Awards Gala have allowed her to be acknowledged as a national media and cultural icon. Internationally, the promotion of *El mal querer* in Times Square, the winning of a Grammy in 2020, and being awarded eight Latin Grammys (two in 2018, three in 2019, and three in 2020), speak volumes of her global reach. *The New York Times* included the single *Malamente* in its international list ,the 25 Songs That Matter Right Now, while the specialised magazine known as *Pitchfork* awarded *Malamente* 23rd place on the list of the 200 Best Songs of the 2010s.

Through a critical case study of Rosalía, our objectives are as follows:

1. To broaden the theoretical scope of the study of stardom in the digital age.

2. To define stardom as the contemporary mythology and religion of the digital age.

3. To delve into the identity processes that act as a catalyst for a contemporary figure of great media reach and socio-cultural relevance, speaking once again of the Catalonian artist.

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Regarding research on stardom, we consider celebrity studies to be one of the "new" academic disciplines, which emerged in the mid-20th century with multidisciplinary origins (Marshall and Redmond, 2015), influenced by cultural studies (Dyer, 1998), the sociology of media and the fan phenomenon (Morin, 1972; Jenkins, 2010; 2012), film studies, and popular music analyses (Duffett, 2013; Loy et al., 2018), among others. As part of a larger research project, the theoretical, exploratory approach used in this article proposes a method in line with the inter-disciplinary aspect mentioned above.

In the first part (Sections 3 and 4), we have carried out a critical analysis of the transformational dynamics that the notion of community and fans surrounding stardom is undergoing. We will also produce a bibliographic summary of academic voices that provide a conceptual framework beyond "outdated stereotypes" (Duffet, 2013: 301), thereby avoiding descriptions of these phenomena through reductionist concepts such as passivity or commodification (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944/1998; Illescas, 2011; 2014). As Mark Duffett reminds us, "the fan phenomenon has been shaped by the legacy of commentary on mass culture and its many critics" (Duffet, 2013: 301). In the case of this article, we aim to reconcile this legacy with other equally productive conceptions that open the field of study to a more individualised, active, dynamic understanding of audiences in a globalised, hyper-connected world (Ito, 2008; Jenkins, 2010; Jones, 2012).

In the second part (Section 5), we review the notion of hyperculturality proposed by Byung Hul-Han through the case study of Rosalía's *El mal querer*. This key concept will allow us to describe the processes that contemporary cultural identity is undergoing in the context of digitised societies. This type of proposal represents a theoretical crossroads that has not yet been examined, which highlights the novelty of this exploratory research.

3. Theoretical framework

After posing a hypothetical community crisis, and within the framework of the academic debate between apocalyptic and integrated intellectuals mentioned above, it is worth focusing attention on stardom as a process that joins two oppos-

ing positions: on the one hand, it represents a popular, mass phenomenon embedded in a standardised production framework belonging to the context of the culture industry (Findeisen, 2015); on the other hand, it is a post-mass consumption phenomenon within the interactive digital space. Therefore, stardom inevitably involves the welcoming and co-creation of idols by a community of prosumers and fans. By combining both points of view, we can determine that celebrities operate as follows:

1. As semiotic focal points that condense cultural meaning (Dyer, 1998). These prominent figures reflect the complex processes we experience as a civilisation in a digital, global, hyperconnected context: attitudes, narratives, myths, stereotypes, moral values, archetypes, and culturally imbued frames (Terrasa Rico, 2021).

2. As non-semiotic, somatic centres of attention that channel affection, emotion, and personal experience (Redmond, 2015). When we "feel" close to a celebrity who puts into words our deepest desires, fears and aspirations, we establish a bond of intimacy or identification (non-reciprocal) that brings us closer to the notion of "parasocial relationships" (Rojek, 2001: 52). The environment surrounding celebrities is where values such as companionship, solidarity, and the feeling of belonging to the group are forged.

This occurs in a specific way. Thus, based on the semiotic-cultural and somatic-emotional function, celebrities combine a myriad of actions which, starting from the micro-social level of the individual, have an impact on the public sphere and political action (Fiske, 1989). It would be reductionist to perceive stardom simply as flirtation between popular mass culture, consumerism, and the gregarious rituals of religion. In order to examine its impact on our everyday lives, we should think of stardom as contemporary mythology where "celebrities are ordinary companions of ours; they are a key 'narrative' in the intimacies we construct and the stories we tell and share. We narrate the story of the world through celebrities" (Marshall & Redmond, 2015: 9).

Ultimately, we are interested in observing how the struggles of class, race and gender originate around such a prominent phenomenon as celebrity culture. Ac-

cording to Foucault (1976/1995: 116), power and its regulative mechanisms produce the hegemonic standard and, inherently, the very spaces of resistance that they seek to exclude. In other words, the regulatory regime is never entirely free from the possibility of subversion. Could the mainstream mythology of celebrities and their fan communities reflect one of these types of struggles? Can stardom be a battleground where the dynamics of power, subversion, and transformation experienced by the community in the digital age take shape? Carrying out politics from the socio-cultural field, or in other words, from disciplines such as gender movements, environmental mobilisations, or stardom, means taking politics out of its constrained notion of "legislation" (Brough & Shrestova, 2012: para. 3.4). Let us now reflect on artists such as the following: David Bowie in his performative experimentation with diverse alter egos and gender roles; Sam Smith and the identification with *queer* and fluid sexual identity; Lady Gaga with the Born This Way Foundation (BTWF) and her support of victims of HIV and AIDS; the South Korean boyband BTS with their denouncement of youth academic pressure and bullying; and the generational clash between tradition and modernity prompted by Rosalía's concept album, *El mal querer*. All these examples reflect the kind of political activity that takes place within the domains of culture and art, the media situation, and virtual communities. Moreover, these struggles range from the micro level of the individual to the macro level of social collectives.

4. What are stars for? Stardom as mythology and religion in the digital age

The concept of *pop* as a secular religion (Till, 2010) implies a breach with certain narratives and discourses of modernity, such as the distinction between "high culture and low culture" (Abruzzese, 2004: 190), between "elite culture and commercial or mass culture" (Jameson, 1991: 4), or between "sacred and secular culture" (Till, 2010: 1). With the "death of God" in the post-Nietzschean era, we have witnessed a transformation of Western spiritual role models. Heroic, divine figures representing ideal behaviour have been replaced by the celebrities of mainstream culture. In addition to representing a dimension of the ideal, these new divinities integrate human behaviour with that of bourgeois society itself (Dyer, 1998: 22). This type of mythology consisting of exalted characters and heroes, together with

shadows and lights, embodies objects of desire, fear, judgement, and worldviews that are deeply rooted in the culture through which they are transmitted.

In order for a personality to rise to prominence, not only is it necessary to have a certain position within a hierarchy of talent (Rosen, 1981), but it also requires idolatry or collective recognition by "mimesis": to satisfy their need for consumption capital, individuals emulate the listening habits of their peers, resulting in the concentration of media attention on some figures rather than others (Adler, 2006). Through the hierarchy of talent and collective investment of consumption, a type of contemporary media mythology of celebrities is constructed. This creates a space of belonging and recognition where idols offer moral values, rituals, narratives, and moral guidelines that compete with traditional institutions such as the family or religion (Rojek, 2001: 97).

Like shamans or priests, artists are considered individuals with extraordinary qualities who are capable of breaking the usual rules and bringing us closer to enraptured, transcendental experiences through ceremonies and rituals (Rojek, 2001). In the words of Edgar Morin (1972: 23), "Raised to the status of heroes and deified, stars are something more than objects of admiration. They are objects of worship as well. An embryonic religion is formed around them". The fame that these public figures achieve is only heightened by the digital ecosystem and the activity of connected audiences. Fervent idolatry, mass appeal, and billions of video clip views achieved by artists such as Bruno Mars, Ed Sheeran, and Dua Lipa can be compared to the charismatic authority (Weber, 1922/2002) practiced by spiritual leaders such as Gandhi, Gautama Buddha, or the religious figure of the Pope. Events such as the death of David Bowie or Amy Winehouse raise these figures to the Parnassus of contemporary mythology, the point from which, in the words of the Beatles, we can declare with certainty that popstars are more well-known than Jesus Christ himself.

Thus, parallelisms among religion, popular music, and stardom are well-known: the similarity between the naves of churches and concert halls –with the placement of the stars (as mediums between the divine and the earthly) on the altars, the sense of congregation and group catharsis, the shared symbolism between groups

of fans and acolytes, the feeling of grandeur, the act of "confession" performed by an individual in intimate connection with the artist, the importance of the great historical narratives, the sensory appeal, the value of relics and autographs, religious artefacts and the auctioning of celebrity memorabilia, offerings to the deceased, as well as visits to the tombs of the famous and the cathedrals that house the sarcophagi of saints. In the end, all of these aspects belong to the realm of the ritual-symbolic and, as Byung Chul-Han (2020: 11) observes, function as "a sign of recognition, or a 'password', among friendly people (*tessera hospitalis*)".

Henry Jenkins (1992/2010: 24) explains that the word fan –an abbreviation of "*fanático*" in Spanish and "*fanaticus*" in Latin– originated from the Latin root word "*fanus*", meaning "of or pertaining to a temple, the servant of a temple, or a devotee". This kind of similarity shows how stardom, along with other collective movements such as environmental activism, sports, or politics, emulates the unifying role, collective zeal, and sense of communion offered by religions. If we bear in mind that "the word '*symbolon*' belongs to the same semantic domain as 'relationship', 'totality' and 'salvation'" (Han, 2020: 16), we can see how in all of these secular post-religious spheres, the practice of symbolism and rituals function equally in engendering "an alliance, a totality, and a community" (Han, 2020: 17). If Durkheim (1912/2017) claimed that the rise of individualistic morality was destined to reduce the importance of religion, in this article we call for the renewed consideration of the importance of *symbolon* as a tool for the cohesion of subjectivities. We have observed the way in which digital communities provide a gregarious alternative to the self-referential, narcissistic circle described by apocalyptic readings of contemporary techno culture (Baudrillard, 1970/2009; Lipovetsky, 1983/2000; Eco, 1984; Han, 2018, 2020).

5. Rosalia's *El mal querer* and the transformation of contemporary cultural identities

The aesthetic-musical universe created by the Catalonian artist represents a type of mythology related to our country. With *El mal querer*, her second studio album, Rosalía and her team have generated a transmedia narrative (Jenkins, 2006) related to gender violence, male chauvinism, and toxic love. This narrative

unfolds through eleven songs, five video clips, the album's artwork, biographical glimpses of the author herself, Instagram stories from the @rosalia.vt account, and fan-generated content on various online platforms that analyse the album[3]. Moreover, this conceptual universe maintains intertextual dialogue with the anonymous Occitan-language novel, *El román de Flamenca* (Romance of Flamenca) (1287).

After publication of *El mal querer* on 2 November 2018, Rosalía's vertiginous popularity became evident through several of the following cultural milestones: her cameo in Pedro Almodóvar's film *Dolor y gloria* (2019); her performance of "*Me quedo contigo*" at the 2019 Goya Awards; the marketing of *El mal querer* in Times Square; and the mention of the single "*Malamente*" at number 23 on the list of The 200 Best Songs of the 2010s by the highly-acclaimed, specialised magazine *Pitchfork*. There is no doubt that the Catalonian artist has generated symbols that we associate with a well-defined personality in our collective imaginary, such as the intergenerational leitmotiv, the "*trá*" chorus of her single "*Malamente*", Rosalía's faceless portrait created by the popular artist Coco Dávez, and the campy style of the long gel nail extensions in her video clips. Created as a "sign of recognition, or 'password', among friendly people (tessera hospitalis)" (Han, 2020: 11), all of these shared symbols of international dimensions are a testimony of the charismatic authority achieved by the Catalonian artist in the national domain and beyond.

In this regard, Max Weber (1922/2002: 172-173) speaks of charismatic authority –an alternative to traditional, bureaucratic domination– as a type of power with religious origins where a singular or heroic individual is elevated based on extraordinary personal qualities. In the case of stardom, Richard Dyer (1998: 18) argues that "such charismatic appeal is especially effective when the social order is precarious, unstable, or ambiguous, and when the charismatic figure or group offers value, order, or stability to counteract this situation". In the case of the Rosalía phenomenon, we can see how the narrative of *El mal querer* (the abuse and subsequent heroic rebirth of *Flamenca*, the female protagonist subjected to a possessive relationship), the fusion of sounds between traditional flamenco and experimental electronic music, and the campy aesthetics of the video clips produced by the *Canada* company that addresses social issues in vogue, such as gender violence, the political agenda of LGTBIQ+ gender movements, and the search for social equality

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in the music industry, are issues grouped under the umbrella of the feminist fourth wave (Sternadori, 2019). Such issues include debates on cultural appropriation, the traditions of a location, ethnic differentiation in the global era (McLaren, 1997; Hall, 2003; Steingress, 2005; Mbembe, 2016; Han, 2018), the generational clash between the *zeitgeist* of digitised millennial culture, *the Trap*, and the use of samplers and urban popular music with traditional aspects such as bullfighting, *copla*, the *Caló* language, flamenco heritage, and the nationalist imaginary.

The global dissemination of all the characteristics described above through the Internet is symptomatic of how the Rosalía phenomenon reflects the notion of hyperculturality described by Byung-Chul Han (2018). If Zygmunt Bauman spoke of "the volatility of identities" in liquid modernity (Bauman, 2002: 188), it is necessary to contemplate a space that also loses its solid characteristics in order to promote the flow of data and the exchange of identities. Han (2018) speaks precisely of hyperculturality as a state assisted by virtual space where "all relations are equidistantly close" (Núñez Ladevéze & Irisarri, 2015: 482), and where the facticity of culture is eliminated –in other words, its traditional attachment to a geographical point and its rigid fixation within defined borders, space, and time—. This displacement of culture from its "original" space dissolves into a hypertextual universe: the possibility of access to an infinity of juxtaposed phenomena that are not organised in a sequential or hierarchical manner, opens the user's horizons to the "hyperspace of possibilities", or the essential eclecticism of hyperculturality (Han, 2018: 18).

Interactive digital technology and the Internet, with the latter construed as a communicative space rather than a medium (Llorca, 2005), are the factors that have fostered hyperculturality and the volatility of traditional perceptions of space and time to a greater extent. Examples of these are the opportunities offered by the computer as a meta-instrument that controls all phases of production (Márquez, 2010), or the unprecedented freedom achieved by artists when it comes to accessing global audiences through the digital environment (Loy et al., 2018: 11). Media such as YouTube, Spotify, Google Analytics, and Instagram, or editing/creation software such as AutoCAD, Photoshop, Logic-Pro and Sony Vegas, are just a few examples of the infinite panoply of tools that open the digital 'hyperspace of possibilities' (Han, 2018: 18).

It is precisely this context that has allowed the dissemination and renown of popular music and artists to experience steady growth. According to the VEVO Music Fan Report: The Millennial Fan Tribes (2015), music ranks as the most widely shared entertainment category on social media (surpassing social celebrities, sports, TV, and films). Compared to influencers or Hollywood celebrities, musical stars stand out as the most popular role models, having the largest amount of perceived talent according to 51% of respondents (VEVO, 2015). In conceiving identity as a process that mediates between our own subjectivity and the group (the "I-We" parity), music is a powerful tool that allows users "to generate shared cultural identities through the discourse of sound" (Hormigos, 2010: 97). As the articulation of identity requires role models in order to be constructed, music offers a directly aesthetic, somatic experience that integrates the individual within an intersubjective cultural landscape (Firth, 2003), while celebrities act as vectors or *totems* that aggregate such communal practices around their acclaimed personalities.

As such, the rapid global expansion of a phenomenon as idiosyncratic as the Rosalía universe is symptomatic of digitised hyperculture and the transformations that contemporary identities are undergoing, including the following:

1. Individuals transcend pre-established social labels: the millennial generation shows less tendency to identify with musical tribes[4] and more inclination toward unprecedented eclecticism (Spotify, 2018). Moreover, not only is it a question of taste, but also of the practices and forms of enjoyment surrounding cultural and aesthetic goods that currently determine the configuration of identities in the hyperspace of possibilities (Hennion, 2010).

2. In the process of building minorities and generational groups, macro phenomena have been displaced by a myriad of micro spheres that are much more intimate and linked to personal experiences, as well as to the consumption of that which is labelled "aesthetic-cultural" (Luchetti, 2009: 8): "Societies that increasingly identify with cultural, rather than political events, almost certainly reveal the effectiveness of cultural industries in shaping identity" (Luchetti, 2009: 8).

3. As mentioned above, the Internet has introduced a non-mainstream model of culture: culture has been liberated from its "original" setting and its space-time limitations. That which is local can be experienced through digital space and global consumer dynamics, leading to a more fluid conception of cultural identity. This tension between the local and the global, known as *glocalization*, is an extolment of the "power of identities" in the age of the "network society" (Castells, 1997: 163), in which "the reaffirmation of identity by human collectives, or the localisation" (Martí, 2000: 55), becomes a reaction against the loss of otherness caused by hypercultural overlap (Han, 2018; 2020).

Returning to the notion of political action exercised from the cultural sphere and stardom, the Rosalía phenomenon reflects the interests of the LGTBIQ+ collectives, and social equality. Moreover, it brings to the table current debates on cultural appropriation and reflects the convergence of modernity and tradition: "Cultural identity involves endless mediation between tradition and renovation, permanence and transformation, emotion and knowledge" (Hormigos, 2010: 94).

6. Conclusions

Through their service as semiotic-cultural and somatic-emotional focal points, celebrities are a reflection of the civilisation that produces them. Ennobled to media prominence, they are responsible for supplying the emotional-mythical needs of the public. Through the common channelling of content for consumption and the practice of endowing certain individuals with charismatic authority, we generate a Parnassus of exalted characters who project our collective values, fears, and desires. In this way, the parallels between celebrity culture and religion have led us to consider the transformation of fan communities in the digital age, where stardom is established as a modern, secular mythology that allows us to delve deeper into our understanding of ourselves as a collective.

While Byung-Chul Han points out that "the world today suffers from a severe shortage of symbolism" (Han, 2020: 12), and that "the current crisis of community is a crisis of synergy with others" (Han, 2020: 23), the article herewith concludes that the interconnected digital space allows for a more active, engaged transfor-

mation of audiences. By interacting in more direct, two-way communication with their idols, fans move closer to the concept of "connected audiences" (Ito, 2008). Digital community engagement and the intersecting struggles of race, gender, and class that converge with stardom provide a fertile breeding ground for the gregarious practice of *symbolon* and post-religious rituals.

Given the polymorphic nature of stardom, we see the Rosalía phenomenon as a paradigmatic example of a cultural battlefield from which political activism can be exercised, and from which the toxic effects of *pharmakon* can be subverted. The environment surrounding *El mal querer* is where debates are brought back to life regarding cultural appropriation and ethnic differentiation in the global, hyper-connected era, and is also the place where current social issues are addressed, such as the struggle for gender equality, the agenda of the LGTBIQ+ movements, or the clash between the millennial imaginary and traditional Spanish culture. In the end, these struggles reflect the transformation experienced by tradition, the non-traditional concept of culture, and the active role of audiences in shaping contemporary cultural identity.

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Notes

[1]   Stiegler's understanding of *pharmakon* takes us to an essentially economic/ political dimension of the concept used by Derrida, as well as by Plato in *Phaedrus*. Thus, *pharmakon* is equated with technique as an exo-somatic extension of the psychophysiological faculties and an externalisation of human memory itself. Referring directly to Nietzsche, Stiegler outlines an exo-somatic genealogy of morality, from which he observes how the material or technical conditions of each epoch determine the *humus* of shared values and the collective psyche of each society. Incorporation of that which is artificial or technical into the cultural evolution of man lays the foundation for his organological theory and contemporary algorithmic ills (the toxic relationship between psychosomatic organs, artificial organs, and social institutions), which determines how the toxic effects of *pharmakon* and technological capitalism are reflected in contemporary malaise and the nihilism of the Anthropocene. See *La société automatique I. L'avenir du travail* (2015) by the same author.

[2]   Information about Rosalía as the most widely searched personality of 2018 was extracted from *Google Trends*: https://trends.google.es/trends/yis/2018/ES/

[3]   See the analysis of the music and marketing of *El mal querer* by Jaime Altozano and Neus Díez, respectively, on the YouTube platform.

[4]   In the streaming era, belonging to a *tribe* is no longer defined solely by a musical genre (eclecticism and the constant search for novelty are habits typical of young audiences) (VEVO, 2015), but also involves patterns and modes of consumption. In the case of the VEVO report (2015), four profiles of musical tribes are proposed: the talent hunter (A), the front row fan (B), the crowd surfer (C) and the soloist (D).