

## ***L'Auberge espagnole (2002): Transnational Departure or Domestic Crash Landing?***

Elizabeth Ezra and Antonio Sanchez

Cédric Klapisch's fifth feature film was an international success in both commercial and critical terms. Commercially, the film, which cost 5,300,000 euros to make, had earned 18,732,000 euros in France and Spain alone by August 2003, leading to the recent release of a sequel, *Poupées russes (Russian Dolls)*. Reviewers hailed the film as a 'love song to the new Europe' (Rea 2003), an 'appealing and persuasive picture of European integration' (Scott 2003). Indeed, the film, a Franco-Spanish co-production that literally speaks several languages, presents an image of a multicultural Europe in which national divisions are transcended and even personal differences are overcome. The narrator, a twenty-something post-graduate student, travels to Barcelona on an ERASMUS exchange in order to improve his Spanish as well as his chances of securing a job in the new EU bureaucracy. Xavier's geographical journey is paralleled by a voyage of self-discovery and personal growth, from which he returns with broadened horizons and a new sense of multicultural understanding—or so it seems. This essay will examine the implications, and indeed the conditions of possibility, of Xavier's new 'transnational' identity.

### **Take-Off**

The film both begins and ends with a narrative and visual 'take-off': as an airplane begins its ascent, Xavier's voiceover announces, 'That's where it all started—when the airplane took off'. Whereas Xavier's declaration at the beginning of the film that 'It all began there, when the airplane took off' is amended as 'No, no—in fact, this is not a

story about taking off', this amendment is itself amended at the end of the film, with a multi-layered soundtrack heightening the sense of confusion: 'It all started there. When the airplane took off. Well, no it didn't. This isn't a story about an airplane taking off/this isn't a story about a take-off. Actually, after all, yes it is: it is a story about take-off. It all started here.'

This 'take-off' can be seen as Xavier's allegorical flight from French national identity, a temporary leave of absence from the cultural identity that both constitutes and limits the individual. The career earmarked for him by his father, and for which his post-graduate degree in economics is intended to prepare him, provides the pretext for the trip to Spain, where he hopes to improve his Spanish. Xavier's journey is in large part motivated by the promise of success in the form of a post in EU bureaucratic corridors, in this case situated in an imposing Parisian building known to locals as 'le paquebot', or 'cruise ship', which from the beginning establishes Xavier's voyage as one of touristic discovery. But Xavier does not travel to Spain with the sole aim of professional and cultural development: in fact, it is the possibility of escaping, albeit temporarily, from his national, maternal culture that gives the film, and Xavier, an exhilarating start. The quirky, fragmented, and comic editing of the film's opening sequences enhances this quality (to cite a few examples: when Xavier visits his father's colleague, he is shown bustling through the labyrinthine corridors of the huge office building in accelerated time; when Xavier is informed of all the documentation he will need to provide in order to process his Erasmus application, the forms and identity cards multiply and overlap chaotically on the screen). The identity of the film itself is, like Xavier, unpredictable, refusing to be easily categorized.

This potential semiotic slippage is reflected in the different versions of the film's original title, which reflect various aspects of the nature and vision of the European project. The original French, *L'Auberge espagnole*, arguably stresses the temporary nature of Xavier's residence in Spain in its use of the term 'auberge' (inn), and blends French and Spanish cultures in the use of the word 'espagnole', while completely ignoring the Catalan cultural context as irrelevant and subsumed within the reference to Spain. The Spanish translation, '*Casa de locos*', 'madhouse', points somewhat more directly to the chaotic results of attempts at European integration. The North American translation, *The Spanish Apartment*, seems to suggest a more individualistic and practical approach to the transnational experience by replacing the traditional and more collective concept of an 'auberge' with the more modern and exclusive space of a private apartment, thus differing from the Canadian *Pot Luck*, which suggests a more hospitable, if improvised, view of the experience of cultural exchange. Finally, it is hardly surprising that one of the English translations of the title proposed in Britain, *Europudding*, provides a more sceptical view of the European project.

This multiplicity of interpretive perspectives is actively accommodated within the film's potentially liberating process of self-deconstruction—which nonetheless risks turning into a process of self-destruction or, at the very least, an obsessive practice of self-indulgence. Xavier is eager to learn, and appears to absorb the lessons of unification and transnational cultural solidarity. His Spanish steadily improves through the course of the film, and he appears to get on well with his international flatmates, who all come together at the film's climax to help one of their number prevent her boyfriend from discovering her romantic indiscretion. When Xavier returns to his first love, writing, he

rejects the idea of a single cultural or individual identity, claiming a multiplicity of personal and cultural identities as his own ('I'm him, and him, and him, and him; I'm her, and her, and her; I'm Spanish, French, Danish, English...'). The film ends on a note of jubilant national schizophrenia and cultural inclusiveness. . . or does it? When Xavier insists that 'It all started there', where, exactly, are we? What if, in the words of Gertrude Stein, 'There's no 'there' there'?

### **X Marks the Spot**

When Xavier goes to meet his father's colleague Jean-Charles Perrin for the first time, the man shows him around his office, complete with a large painting of cars on a highway (a static depiction of mobility). The EU bureaucrat immediately draws Xavier's attention to the view of Paris from his window, pointing out various landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, the Sacré-Coeur, and the University of Paris at Jussieu. The scene is shot in accelerated motion and accompanied by a split soundtrack containing layers of sound recorded at different speeds. This early scene prefigures the film's emphasis on the function of tourism and the role of differential mobility in the construction and mapping of European identity.

In an interview prior to the film's UK release, Klapisch made a case for travel as the solution to some of the world's most intractable problems: '[W]hen people travel, things get better. And I think this movie is really an advertisement for travel. Travel is against racism, against prejudice. It's all about curiosity and respect' (Klapisch 2003). Klapisch's rosy image of transnational mobility invokes the standard trope of tourism not only as a vehicle for personal development, but also for cross-cultural understanding and

enrichment. This somewhat idealized vision overlooks the multiple meanings of mobility, which vary according to context. Mobility in the sense in which Klapisch describes it, and which is depicted in *L'Auberge espagnole*, is largely the privileged reserve of the moneyed classes, with echoes of the artistic or literary 'Grand Tour' of the nineteenth century. But increasingly, transnational mobility is coming to be defined by the diasporic and exilic displacements of economic and political migrants. Each kind of mobility is constrained by different sets of restrictions, which differ not only in degree, but also in quality: although Xavier must wade through a bewildering morass of paperwork, his obstacles are largely bureaucratic, and pale in comparison to those encountered by, for example, political asylum seekers or migrant workers subjected to the demands and vagaries of a 'flexible' global labour market. The porosity of borders, in other words, varies according to the social and financial pedigree of those trying to cross them. In some ways, the 'new Europe' looks rather like the old one, with immigrants from former Eastern bloc countries coming to play a similar role to that of subjects of the former colonial empires. When the European Union expanded its borders on 1 May 2004 to include ten new member states, there was a barrage of newspaper reports in Great Britain warning of the 'floods' of immigrants and asylum seekers who would usurp jobs and benefits from the more prosperous countries of Western Europe, while at the same time, the UK was quietly but actively recruiting Central and Eastern Europeans to overcome serious staffing shortages in essential but low-paid professions such as nursing.

The repercussions of this uneven mobility and the ambivalence it engenders find expression in *L'Auberge espagnole* in an exchange between Xavier and Anne-Sophie, who remarks: 'It's a shame that Barcelona's such a dirty city (...). There are lots of areas

here reminiscent of the Third World'. Xavier, eager to present himself as an enlightened traveller, comes to the Barcelona's defence, pointing out that Paris, too, has its pockets of deprivation: 'I know lots of places in Paris, too, that are reminiscent of the Third World'. Xavier is here evoking what Etienne Balibar calls 'a potential European "apartheid": the "dark side," as it were, of the emergence of the "European citizen"' (Balibar 2002: ix). Xavier's comment suggests that global cities are sites in which the geopolitical process of 'uneven development' is played out in microcosm, and are indeed the places in the post-Communist era where the terms 'First' and 'Third' World retain the most significance.

Xavier appears determined not to limit his engagement with the city of Barcelona to that of a mere tourist. He displays a keen appreciation of Barcelona's urban landscape, and makes a considerable effort to get to know its many charms. Barcelona's transformation from nondescript site on a map to familiar territory is figured rather literally in the film by means of graphics that encircle Xavier in a 'You are here' pointer as he traverses a palm-tree-lined plaza (this transformation into an ambulatory icon recalling Borges's parable about a map as big as the land it charts). Forced to traipse through the city's streets and back alleys in search of accommodation, Xavier slowly becomes familiar with its contours. Barcelona is transformed from a place, or an assemblage of 'elements distributed in relationships of coexistence', into a space, which, according to Michel de Certeau, is 'activated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it'—in other words, '*space is a practiced place*' (de Certeau 1988:117).

This spatial territorialization is accompanied by a linguistic mastery of the initially opaque place names, which gradually become transparent by virtue of familiarity with the places they denote. As Xavier notes in his meditation on the unfamiliar place names of

Barcelona, ‘Urquinaona. This thing that sounded vaguely Sioux got added to the long list of otherwise bizarre names that lurk somewhere in a recess of the brain’. Xavier compares Urquinaona to difficult-to-pronounce French place names, noting that the Barcelonan place, like its name, would ultimately become familiar, even normalised: ‘After a while, you make it your own because you’ve lived there’. Michel de Certeau has written of precisely this phenomenon:

Disposed in constellations that hierarchize and semantically order the surface of the city, operating chronological arrangements and historical justifications, these words (*Borrégo, Botzaris, Bougainville. . .*) slowly lose, like worn coins, the value engraved on them, but their ability to signify outlives its first definition. *Saints-Pères, Corentin Celton, Red Square. . .* these names make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by; they detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting-points on itineraries which, as metaphors, they determine for reasons that are foreign to their original value but may be recognized or not by passers-by. (De Certeau 1988: 104)

Like a game of Chinese whispers, in which constant repetition gradually transforms one sign into another, the city’s signifiers assume a personal significance for Xavier, as the semiotic concept of *langue*, or linguistic structure, is both activated and transformed through usage (*parole*). The film draws an explicit and self-conscious analogy between

this process of decontextualisation and the act of narrative, suggesting that, like place-names, events, too, are transformed in the telling. In the same voiceover in which Xavier muses over the domestication of the city, he adds: ‘‘Long afterwards, back in Paris, each horror was transformed into an extraordinary adventure. It’s always this ridiculous thing: the worst days of a trip, the most horrific experiences, are those that you find yourself telling others about the most often’. This statement invites a reading of the scenes in which Xavier is shown writing his eponymous memoir, *L’Auberge espagnole*, that explicitly recognises this glossing-over of difficult facts and their transformation into a palatable and gratifying narrative—what Barthes (1973) called ‘the pleasure of the text’—and the attendant shift in focus away from content and meaning to celebrate the superficial features of both the city and its inhabitants. As one reviewer aptly noted, ‘Watching *L’Auberge espagnole* is like seeing the young Maoist revolutionaries of Jean-Luc Godard’s 1967 *La Chinoise* body-snatched by the international touring company of *Up With People*’ (Taylor, 2003).

### **The Geography of Gender**

Such textual pleasures are also repeatedly invoked in the film’s explicit association between linguistic mastery and sexual initiation. Both of the female characters closest to Xavier reinforce the stereotypical association between nationhood and femininity: the mother as the organic origin of the individual, and the girlfriend as the passive recipient of the male desire to possess and defend it from outsiders. The name of Xavier’s girlfriend, Martine, is explicitly noted in the film to have folkloric origins in classic French children’s literature, thus linking up with the French cultural *patrimoine*, or



repository of cultural memory. This linguistic/semiotic linkage of French literary heritage (especially in the context of children learning to read) with Xavier's girlfriend underscores the link, in Xavier's emotional identity, between language, place, and psychosexual ties. For, in leaving his mother country to learn Spanish, Xavier is also leaving behind his first language—and his mother. This connection is reinforced by Xavier's fear of losing his 'mother tongue' (*langue maternelle* in French, and *lengua materna* in Spanish). In a literal sense, Xavier's mother tongue is not particularly fluent to begin with, given that he barely speaks to his mother, with whom he lives; on those occasions in which he is shown to converse with her, it is to tell her to shut up. Xavier's father, though virtually absent from the film, plays an important symbolic role. His professional connections provide a way in to the EU bureaucratic structure to which Xavier initially aspires, and it is suggested that the son's initiatic journey is a (male) rite of passage that his father once undertook.

Once in Spain, however, Xavier's linguistic and cultural identification prove so overwhelming that he fails abysmally to open up and engage with other cultures. Although his native country (like his mother and girlfriend) seems to have been left behind when he boards the plane for Barcelona, he cannot seem to shake its influence. What initially appears as his desire to achieve a certain independence is soon undermined by his emotional entanglement with another mature French woman, Anne-Sophie, who, like Xavier's mother, is married to a patriarchal figure for whom Xavier feels a combination of respect and intimidation. Xavier's seduction of Anne-Sophie is conducted as he leads her up various Barcelonan landmarks, where she ultimately succumbs to his advances. This conflation between sexual desires and the city as a space of seduction is

completed when the couple's first sexual encounter is shot through a window that shows a reflection of the city: as Xavier disappears behind Anne-Sophie, we see the woman's face superimposed on the city skyline. However, Xavier's 'possession' of Anne-Sophie will eventually lead to a cul-de-sac not unlike that of his relationship with his mother, and the pleasure of his triumph will soon turn into displeasure and the desire to be rid of her. Similarly, when Xavier meets up with Martine for the last time upon his return to Paris, a montage sequence figures the passage of time between their first and last kiss as a series of literal, topographical passages, in which Parisian street scenes and close-ups of maps of Paris are accompanied by Xavier's voice-over: 'To think that so much happened between those two kisses. All those streets I walked down with her. This whole complicated trajectory to get here, today, without her'. 'Here' turns out to be 'a street in Paris where Parisians never go', that is, a tourist destination, in which Xavier feels like 'a stranger among strangers'. His feelings of romantic estrangement are inseparable from his experience of cultural alienation—and vice versa.

It is highly significant that all the women with whom Xavier has sexual or emotional ties are French or Francophone: if Martine and his mother provide him with the basic foundation of his identity as a French man, Anne-Sophie and Isabelle, his lesbian friend and confidante, provide him with the opportunity to develop his sexual identity. Xavier's only romantic (or, in this case, flirtatious) contact with Spanish women is restricted to the end of the film, when Xavier flirts with a woman in the bar during his going-away party, and even then the suggestion of a future meeting is based on the fact that she is willing and able to speak French, and expresses the desire to go to Paris. In this regard, it is significant that his 'breakthrough' in acquiring fluency in Spanish occurs

when he learns the expletive-laden version of the language. This is interestingly illustrated by his use of the popular Spanish exclamation ‘puta madre’, which can be loosely translated as ‘Great!’ but which literally means ‘mother-whore’, hinting at Xavier’s problematic relationship with his mother in particular and women in general.

Similarly, Xavier’s guilty fear that Anne-Sophie’s neurologist husband can peer into his brain and detect his desire for her is compounded by his deeper anxiety about the possibility of losing his mother tongue as he perfects his Spanish. (However, it must be said that, for native Spanish-speaking viewers at least, Xavier’s actually limited progress with the Spanish language does not warrant this concern.) It is also notable that the British character Wendy’s only romantic encounter in Barcelona is with another English-speaker, an American whom she admits is ‘stupid’: their only connection seems to be a linguistic one, although even this is tenuous at best, as the American’s utterances consist of little more than barking like a dog and singing the grammatically limited (if culturally influential) Bob Marley song ‘No Woman No Cry’. The film’s attempt to transcend national identities and to chart a process of self-liberation as pursued by Xavier clearly disintegrates when he is confronted with his growing fear of losing those signs of cultural identity, the mother and language, from which he was initially running away.

### **The Ghost of History**

Xavier’s cultural journey swiftly becomes a narcissistic voyage of sexual and emotional discovery—a return ticket to the ‘exotic’ and back to his familiar, but ultimately limited, sense of national identity. Despite the claims to cultural heterogeneity and creative schizophrenia suggested in the final resolution to Xavier’s personal crisis at

the end of the film, and despite his desire to escape his constraining identity, Xavier never really takes off.

The concept of the EU as a genuinely multicultural space is sharply undermined by the representation of the different European cultures coexisting in the same apartment while sharing little more than the fridge and the rent. One critic noted that, 'In essence, the movie is Klapisch's rosy view of the new united Europe and the way youth will lead the way to the member nations' overcoming their differences. If they had gathered on a hillside holding bottles of Coke and crooning "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" (in Esperanto, perhaps?), Klapisch's message couldn't be any clearer' (Taylor, 2003). Yet despite the film's undeniably optimistic pretence to cross-cultural togetherness, the housemates display little interest in discovering and understanding each other's cultural backgrounds, and although there is much condemnation of cultural stereotypes, the flatmates themselves are in fact walking, talking caricatures of national identity. There is Wendy, the matriarchal and sexually repressed Englishwoman who asks Xavier at his interview for the apartment if he likes riding horses, and whose representation of one of the poles of 'Britishness' is complemented by her overtly xenophobic, lager-lout of a brother; the efficient, studious, and well organized German student; Soledad, the passionate and volatile Spanish woman; Alessandro, the disorganized but sympathetic Italian; and Lars, the sexually lax Scandinavian, the existence of whose illegitimate baby he (like the viewer) only learns of near the end of the film. Xavier himself, the only male member of the household who appears to take an interest in cooking, quickly becomes the household's diplomat, propagating the universalist values of the French

Enlightenment (or, at the very least, using Cartesian logic to negotiate with the landlord for an extension of the lease).

Whatever Xavier's personal development throughout his time in Barcelona, his understanding of Spanish contemporary culture in general and of Barcelona in particular is not impressive. Both Xavier and the film do their utmost to ignore the massive urban transformation that Barcelona experienced throughout the 1980s and 90s, when the 1992 Olympic Games served as a pretext for the reinvention of the city as a serious destination for cultivated Europeans. Both Xavier and *L'Auberge espagnole* actively avoid the history that has shaped the urban and social space in which they live, invoking instead the classical French view of Spain as the exotic land, brimming with sex and passion, of Bizet's *Carmen*. To invoke de Certeau once again, 'spaces' are determined by the 'actions of historical *subjects* (a movement always seem[ing] to condition the production of a space and to associate it with a history); whereas 'places' are 'ultimately reducible to the *being-there* of something already dead' (de Certeau 1988:118). For de Certeau, this distinction is crucial to the work of narrative: 'stories', he writes, 'thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places' (de Certeau 1988:118). *L'Auberge espagnole* would most certainly fall into the latter category, as it ignores the socio-historical factors that constitute Barcelona as a complex and meaningful urban environment, repressing the city's living history as a cultural space in favour of a superficial rendering of it as a timeless place, a dead surface. As if to illustrate this deathly transformation, Xavier is literally haunted by the ghostly figure of Erasmus, the sixteenth-century Dutch philosopher and namesake of the academic European exchange programme. Although Erasmus is shown wandering the city streets in two scenes from

the film, he ultimately plays no more than a walk-on part. Like the spectral presence of the ghost of Hamlet's murdered father in Shakespeare's play, the ghost of Erasmus signals that something is wrong with the film's representation of Barcelona, something that has been repressed or neglected but which comes back to haunt us. While Klapisch's vision of Barcelona is clearly sympathetic and positive, there is hardly any attempt to engage with the social or historical forces that have shaped an abstract space into a complex cultural place. By ignoring the complex reality that emerges from the relationship between space, history and society and by focusing exclusively on the pursuit of iconic images of Barcelona, the film parallels Xavier's superficial search for pleasure.

To understand the specific socio-historical context in which Xavier has landed, it is necessary to take into account the cultural conditions and consequences of Spain's period of 'la transición' from the Franco regime to democracy and beyond. Following the death of Franco in 1975, Spain experienced a fast and radical cultural transformation. This historical process is often epitomised by reference to the cultural phenomenon of *la movida madrileña*. *La movida* was essentially an underground cultural phenomenon characterized by sexual transgression, a rejection of high culture and the celebration of pleasure, the body, and the present, which dominated some parts of Madrid from the movement's early days in the late 1970s until its disappearance in the mid 1980s. Despite its local specificity, *la movida* soon became a metonymic sign of an emerging dominant post-Franco culture. Barcelona, despite its particular cultural differences, experienced a similar cultural transformation: old traditional values were fast dismissed by an increasingly self-confident young generation celebrating a break from the past and the

historical acceleration transforming Spain into a modern European society. Probably one of the most successful images of Spanish transformation was that provided by the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. While many other parts of Spain, Madrid included, were beginning to 'wake up' in the early 1990s from the carnivalistic atmosphere that had pervaded the late 1980s to face the looming economic recession and continuous scandals of political corruptions (denting the popular support enjoyed throughout the 1980s by the governing socialist party, the PSOE), Barcelona went on celebrating itself, celebrating its own transformation into a city of spectacle. Indeed, the 1992 Olympic Games had provided a unique opportunity to bring popular and political consensus as well as technical and financial means to the protracted idea of redeveloping the city. Its popular success had, arguably, allowed Barcelona to remain blind to the financial and political storms gathering over the rest of Spain.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the image of Barcelona in the late 1990s provided by *L'Auberge espagnole* is that of a city characterized by hedonism; a culture in which partying, sex, drugs and aesthetic design seem to be all. Yet, while on a superficial level, this image seems to be true to the existing cultural reality of that period, it is a deceptive one. Beyond this image of hedonism there were clear signs of a growing disappointment with some of the outcomes and compromises involved in the modernisation of Spain. The growing dissatisfaction with a materialistic reality predetermined by the market forces and the pervasive economic imperatives was paralleled by the broken ethical and politically progressive hopes of many. From this perspective, hedonism can be understood as an act of desperation rather than a celebration of life. *L'Auberge espagnole's* re-enactment of the old cliché of Spain as a land of sex, *fiestas* and wine fails

to acknowledge the growing frustration with the illusory ‘miraculous’ transformation of Spain into a modern society which the film itself helps to promote. Moreover, the cultural promotion of Barcelona as a narcissistic mirror reflecting back to its citizens and visitors an aestheticised, sanitised image of itself overlooks the resistance and importance of socially marginalised groups. As Graham and Sánchez have pointed out, such present-centredness ‘stands as a symbol of the most sterile aspect of the postmodern condition. [Its] form effectively preclude[s] any real engagement with history (understood as the cultural mediation of the past). Yet without such an engagement we cannot read that past, cannot achieve the perspective that reveals to us the cultural process by which identity — national or otherwise— is actively constructed. (...) Without history, cultural sense cannot be made’ (1995: 418).

### **Crash Landing**

At the end of the film, Xavier has returned to his point of departure, both literally and, to a certain extent, figuratively. He abandons the EU cruise ship, returning to his childhood home, in whose vicinity he can only mimic flight by flapping his arms and running down a tarmac at the airport. He may have rejected his father’s career path, but he has embraced the familiar domesticity of his mother’s house, and reclaimed mastery of his mother tongue by embarking on a career as a (French) writer. His metaphorical horizons have been expanded—he has gained the confidence to pursue his lifelong literary ambition—but his cultural horizons have not. Xavier’s claim in the concluding voice-over of having achieved a truly transnational identity is ultimately open to question. The European characters presented in the film lack psychological and cultural



depth, and the urban spaces that these characters inhabit remain little more than dots on the map, deprived of both historical past and present complexity. If the film seems undecided between New World Order and Old World stereotypes, perhaps it is because the latter are inherent in the former. And if postmodernism is characterised by its dismissal of history, and by its celebration of the schizophrenic or fragmented subject, then *L'Auberge espagnole* could be understood as an exercise in the promotion of postmodern global culture. But both postmodernism in general and the film in particular are open to critique for their failure to deal with the consequences of the past, and the responsibilities of the present. Until these consequences are fully acknowledged, we will continue to be haunted by their ghostly spectre.

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**ABSTRACT*****L' Auberge Espagnole* (2002): Transnational Departure or Domestic Crash Landing?**

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Cédric Klapisch's vision of encounters within the new Europe in *L'Auberge espagnole* offers a positive account of the new European project. The film's exclusive focus on young European ERASMUS students already underlines the aims and limitations of what is supposedly a broad cultural and educational exchange. The emphasis on learning about 'other' national cultures to achieve a more integrated European union quickly dissolves when the students abandon any interest in local culture, history or politics to focus instead on their own sexual and emotional rites of passage. Challenging the film's construction and ostensible celebration of the new European transnational identity, this article questions the validity and implications of constructing a representation of both Barcelona and Europe riddled with cultural clichés and iconic images of a city as a purely aesthetic experience. It also notes the film's failure to engage with the larger social and historical context that injects meaning into the urban fabric of Barcelona itself.

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