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CINEMATIC INFLUENCES IN GENDER DISCOURSE: A QUEER DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED MANUEL PUIG'S NOVELS

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Abstract
The connection between mass culture and literature has grown extensively over the years. This is evident in the works of Manuel Puig, whose regard for popular culture, particularly films, is undeniable. He cinematically appropriates his characters, themes, narration, and plot making, such as the source text, instead of being the translated material. This paper is an exploration of gender politics and identity through the lens of the characters portrayed in the following texts: (1) Betrayed by Rita Hayworth (1968), (2) Heartbreak Tango (1996), (3) Kiss of a Spider Woman (1973), and Pubis Angelical (1979). The contention of this paper revolves around the influence of mass culture, particularly the role of films towards identity construction, specifically on gender-where issues like politics, patriarchy, and nationalism were taken into consideration. It is clear that the characters negotiated their identity through films which functioned as their threshold to consciousness, escape, and expression contrary to the society they're living in. Furthermore, the themes reinforced the discourse of gender politics making the texts a tool for criticism towards the strict conventions imposed by the Boom period; making Puig's writing a form of protest and a commentary on the issues relevant to the time and milieu the texts were written.

Keywords: discourse analysis, gender politics, Latin literature, mass culture

Introduction
Gender and popular culture are intricately interwoven in a variety of ways, and their interactions have significant and far-reaching societal implications. People learn norms and values through popular culture, which is one of the most important agents of socialization (Bauman, 2000). As a result, it plays a significant role in the development and reproduction of gender norms among gendered subjects, as dominant narratives in popular culture reinforce socially created gender conceptions. Images, texts, and sounds conveyed by a wide array of media and across cultural phenomena – such as television, film, music, performance, magazines, comics, novels, games, fashion, and advertising – all produce and represent the set of beliefs and values about masculinity and femininity dominant in each culture at a given time (Baertson, 2003).

As opined by Kerr (1990), mass culture has always been regarded as instrumental as a shaper of one's identity and this is no foreign in the writings of

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Manuel Puig where he has deep regard for Western popular culture as a major inspiration and influence in his works. Puig approaches literary and cinematic connections in two ways: through gender and identity issues, and reality and representation complexities, (Cruz, 2019). In doing so, he examines numerous perspectives on the so-called cinematic novel, tracking its evolution and becoming a canonical figure in incorporating cinematic elements into Latin Literature's literary landscape. Known for "Puigian" elements, the fragmented, multilayered narrative, the emphasis on psychological rather than external action, and the sometimes-outrageous fascination with popular culture (especially Hollywood films) it is evident that popular has a major influence in the writings of Manuel Puig (Mikkola, 2017).

According to Tittler (1993), discourses on gender and identity were explored mainly in the writings of Puig the one who established the threshold for norm-deviating writings to be noticed in the Latin Literary landscape which themes of gender are considered taboo. The literary movements in Latin literature classified as boom and post-boom have largely impacted the shift and focus of writings of some writings particularly those who write about marginalized themes that are often less tackled in the mainstream literary scene (Shaw,1998). These movements per se can be considered as major influences as to how Puig tackles identity and nationalism in his works where the post-boom movement is often attributed to be leaning on themes that are less constricted thus, departing from the conventions of the traditional and stiff scene of Latin writings and these are evident in some studies which regarded the undeniable connection of mass culture and literature (Colas, 1994).

Identity and how it was constructed is central to the characters of Puig and he is known for employing a memoir-based approach in his writings which makes the texts more personal and engaging (Bacarisse, 1993). This style of writing borders between boom and post-boom movements wherein discussion on identity and gender is tackled through the light of popular culture (Greenberg, 2018). His regard for films is impeccably shown through his characters where all are highly mass-cultured. There is no denying that movies have a powerful effect on us because the photographic reproduction of the material world is put at the service of wishes and fantasies which speaks on the disposition of Puig’s characters and simply encompasses the thematic focus of the text (Fuentes, 1992). The impression of reality is much greater in film and a writer might have a recourse to this experience of a paradoxically-dream-like reality or realistic dream by incorporating the devices of cinematic narrative which are used as tools by Puig to magnify and centralize the discussion on gender identity.

In Wyers (1983), the study tackled the functions of the film towards Manuel Puig’s character where the emphasis on the Latin American setting was highlighted. This suggests that films became a tool for liberation from the oppression that the characters are experiencing. Films offer an alternate world for gendered characters particularly gender-deviating characters who are marginalized in the society they are living in. As a writer who specializes in using mass culture in developing his character, it was further ascertained in this paper that films acted as an awakener of the sexual desires of the characters in conjunction with their gender identity, thus making it a threshold for queering identity.

Betancourt (2016) on the other hand discourses on the idea of "queerness" and identity construction wherein factors like political norms are considered major influence towards the character's development. The study focused on the impact of mass culture particularly films towards Manuel Puig's novel characters. There is a high regard given to films as an onset for constructing and reconstructing gender identity. Films reinforce the idea of recreating and manipulating realities that favor the characters being gendered and ostracized. The paper also highlighted Argentina's high regard for Hollywood movies and pop culture, hence the influence of Puig's style of writing.

McCracken (1981), the paper echoes the idea of the relationship between the gendered characters of Puig and mass culture. The paper illuminated the role of films as a caricature of class and division among people in Latin America. It also raised consciousness on the workings of mass culture on various classes of women as a character of gender. Hence, further elaborated in the study on seeing mass culture as something that enables characters to grow and develop particularly on their gender expression and identity as they further their contact with mass culture.

Mass culture as an agent of gender and identity discourse, can be seen as either a form of resistance or domination. This is forwarded in the study of Robbins (2011) who examined the functions of mass culture towards characters of Manuel Puig's characters. Manuel Puig uses the text as a guide on how to react to the culture of patriarchy and politics revolving around post-colonial Argentina. Through mass culture, Puig allows an individual (through the light of his character) to be aware of the ideological implications of the culture they consume, in this case, films.

The influence of cinema and films on the writings of Manuel Puig is expanded in the study by Cruz (2019) who delved into the genre of Puig as a novel writer. Puig blends the novel with cinematic elements with allusion to pop art and other post-modern cultural trends. He has brought suggestive socio-cultural and psychoanalytical considerations which consequently led to his genre/novels becoming collages of various films, texts, discourses, and narrative devices which has fused reality and imagination into dream and desire. This explains the complexity of the characters he uses and the dynamism of gender depicted embodied in each one of them.

This study strives to evaluate the influence of mass culture particularly films in the construction of identity among Manuel Puig's characters. It intends to see the parallelism of mass culture and literature in a Latin American setting, that tackles sexuality, and gender politics and counters heteronormativity and patriarchy as core themes and the influence they have towards gender identity. Specifically, this paper intends to (a) identify the forms of cinematic influences used that influenced the structure of the texts; (b) extract themes discoursed in each text; and (c) determine the functions mass culture (films) play towards constructing the gender identity of the protagonists in the selected texts.

Furthermore, through this exploration, it is the contention of the paper to understand how gender identity is constructed through the influence of popular culture particularly films as depicted by characters of the texts. Through this inquiry, the gap in seeing cinematic novels as a substandard genre (due to lack of novelty) will be addressed and the meager studies addressing the role and

relationship of mass culture towards gender politics, particularly in the works of Manuel Puig. Because there is no critical material published in English about the cinematic novel as pop literature, this paper also contributes to filling this gap in contemporary literary studies by using texts by a Latin writer whose influence on Gender studies is significant. It will elevate the understanding of how gender identity is constructed in a conservative and religious context that regards norm-deviating constructs as taboos. Hence, forwarding the focus to the themes employed in each text, it will concretize how such narratives have depicted the writer's regard for mass culture as a shaper of someone's gender identity in a heteronormative society where identity is molded from an ideology anchored from strict conventions of the church and patriarchy.

Method

This paper leans on a qualitative approach employing feminist stylistics analysis of four (4) novels by Manuel Puig. Feminist stylistic analysis is used since it merits textual analysis to reconcile how texts affect the representation of one concept, which is central in the selection of the texts where the characters are all gendered. Leaning on the formalist approach, a textual analysis was used to further evaluate how each character in the text constructs and negotiates their gender identity through interlacing influences thus, addressing ideological and conventional notions of gender. It is contended that the fundamental belief of qualitative research is that, to create meaning for studied individuals, the existence of multiple realities (McKee, 2003; Oten & Geppert, 2010); in this case is to look at how gender identity is constructed through looking into the influences of popular culture, heteronormative conventions, mass culture, and gender.

The texts used in this paper are four (4) novels written by Manuel Puig, which are considered canonical pieces when it comes to discussing gender issues in Latin writings. Two (2) of these are considered boom novels specifically: Betrayed by Rita Hayworth (1968) and Heartbreak Tango (1969) and the other two (2) are post-boom texts entitled: Pubis Angelical (1979) and Kiss of a Spider Woman (1973). According to Silverman (2006), textual analysis works well in qualitative research studies that are primarily concerned with organizing and categorizing large amounts of information, particularly novels which are known for their length and depth.

Findings and Discussion

Projecting the Cinema in the Text

One thing that Manuel Pug is known for is his use of cinematic conventions and putting them into his works. The way he structured and constructed his novels is tailored to the conventions that are too visually mediated and sometimes cannot be captured in a written form due to some medium constraints. This has created a different way of approaching films as a source text instead of novels as the source text. The way films are made and narrated is very visual which the narration truly relies on in terms of telling but to put the cinematic into writing is such a feat. This is evident in the works of Manuel whose regard for mass culture particularly films has impacted his approach to writing. This then led him to use cinematic conventions and translate it into writing which is very opposite of the

conventional approach to adaptation and translation studies which regard the text as the source rather than the visual material.

a. Fragmented and Multiple Narrations

Prominent in the presentation of Puig's texts is his use of multiple narrations, resulting in fragmented voices that somewhat provide a sense of equality in terms of narrative power. This is partly due to the nature and the character he discourses into which are mostly marginalized. It somewhat addresses the idea of silencing- through the use of multiple narrations, he was giving this character the chance to speak their mind and also for the readers to understand the characters from an introspective point. The sense of "multiperspective" in the narration has created a sense of discussion about how the characters interact with one another.

The case of Molina and Valentin in Kiss of the Spiderwoman presented a sense of pluralism in the discourse of politics and gender- Molina is a politically neutral homosexual and Valentin, a politically radical heterosexual. The juxtaposition of both characters has created a sense of addressing themes that the text focuses on. All the selected texts, even some of his non-included works are known for their multiple narrations. It creates a shift in perspective by presenting an equal way of understanding each point expressed by the characters which usually works in a film since you are visually guided as to how the story progresses, but in a novel, it doesn't since you largely rely on the text for reference.

The downside of doing multiple narrations in a text is manifested in the flow which tends to be confusing in terms of continuity making it fragmented. Multiple narration works only if there were only minimal characters involved in the dialogue which doesn't in the case of Heartbreak Tango which is one of the most confusing texts among the four in terms of narration. There were a lot of characters involved in the narration which made the flow of the story intersect chaotically. For a film, it might work since you are visually guided as to how the story progresses, but in a novel, it doesn't since you largely rely on the text for reference.

b. Use of Interior Monologue and Biographical Details

When reading Puig for the first time, utilizing an internal monologue improves the feeling from a normal to a dramatic degree. Internal monologue is a technique employed by performers in movies to show the thoughts of their characters. The presentation can take the form of a voice-over or actors inside the building. Without the apparent intervention of a summarizing and selecting narrator, internal monologue reveals the character's inner thoughts, impressions, and recollections as though firsthand. Manuel Puig's texts use this type of narrative method.

All of the texts utilized interior monologue which is quite unconventional for a textual medium for such technique is mostly used in films. He incorporated the monologue with biographical details attached below the page to reinforce the character's introspective expression to fully understand the character's point of view. This is about his purpose of portraying the frustration and alienation of his characters, whose only escape is offered by the vacuous world of films and pop

art. By delving into the deepest self of every character, he engages his reader to get a glimpse of issues that the character is in constant battle with, which are mostly associated with identity, sexuality, and freedom. Through this cinematic influence on narrative technique, Puig enables the readers to experience what the characters had experienced by employing a more engaging approach to narration.

c. Hyper-descriptive Language Use

"Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass" is a line from Anton Chekov that encapsulates Manuel Puig's use of language. When we think about films, we perceive most of them through our eyes, with ears being secondary. It is a different case when it comes to a text where describing something through words with no visual reference is a subjective experience. There are things that words cannot explain and that only our eyes can see. This was made possible by Puig with his approach to characterization and establishing the setting in his texts.

Concerning films- he describes, elaborates, and takes every reader to a cinematic experience as if you are technically watching a movie. Everything is in detail which is hyper-descriptive to give a realistic reference to an object. Most of his characters are into pop culture, especially films and one way of putting films into an auditory experience requires a language that paints the same thing as to what the film is all about. In the case of Molina, who tells film stories to Valentin every night, and for Valentin to get and understand the whole picture, Molina has to narrate it in a descriptive and detailed manner. Another one is Toto's retelling of his film and theater memories with his mother in Betrayed by Rita Hayworth was also noteworthy for its detail-oriented narration. He revisits his experiences to express himself, which requires him to describe in the most hyper-realistic manner, specifically the qualities of the actress he regards himself to be like. Simply, the language used was tailored to approach the character's profile, whose regard for the film is manifested in their descriptive and detailed monologues.

Themes Explored

Themes explored in Boom and post-boom literature largely differ in some ways due to the large influx of writers of gender in the latter, but Manuel Puig has been writing since then, right before the post-boom movement started. This can be traced back to the themes he focused on in every text under study. The constraint that the movement can give to a writer will most likely influence the kind of writing they will produce in response to what society asks them to. In the case of Puig, he rebelled his way out of these conventions by experimenting with the interplay of nationalism, sexuality, and politics in all of his texts. Thus, through the extracted themes from the texts, it can be inferred that there was no strict adherence to the time and the conventions in which each piece was written.

a. Gender and Sexuality

The topic of gender and sexuality is considered sensitive and have always been very malleable, especially in the Latin boom context where culture plays an important role in the development of gender and sex roles, and so do other factors such as religion, capitalism, the nature of the state, race and ethnic relations, colonialism, and law. Gender and sexuality have to be aligned with what is ethical

and morally acceptable. These conventions were addressed by Manuel Puig, who started writing about the stigmatized themes of sexuality and gender-deviating constructs as a protest against the conventions imposed by post-colonial Argentina.

In Kiss of a Spiderwoman, both Molina and Valentin are two characters that represent gender and sexuality. For example, Puig's description of Molina is essential since it aids the reader in determining Molina's gender: 'Something a little weird, that's what you notice, that she's not a woman like the others.' She appears to be in her twenties, with a diminutive face, a catlike appearance, and a small turned-up nose... We can make inferences from the descriptive text because she has her legs crossed, and her shoes are black, thick high heels, open-toed, with dark glossy toenails peeping out. This is a highly feminine description of Molina, who is characterized as being almost spider-like. The emphasis on sizes such as 'small', 'petite', and 'little' all resemble a small creature, in this case, a spider, and we also get a repetition of the color 'black' and 'dark'. Molina's sexuality is reflected in this strange description. Toto in Betrayed by Rita Hayworth, Nene in Heartbreak Tango, and Ana in Pubis Angelical are all victims of gender inequality. The politics in gender and sexuality portrayed in the texts subsumes Argentina's perception of it. It is portrayed as a Dystopia of marginalized genders. Molina is used as a political inside person who gets killed while carrying out a mission requested by Valentin, Toto is sexually harassed because of expressing himself as a feminine male, Nene is an inferior and battered wife of her husband, and Ana hates her gender as a woman since being a woman that time spoke unequal opportunities and was just considered as an object of pleasures by men. It is undeniable that such themes are attempts to explore the gender and sexuality discourse in post-colonial Argentina where patriarchy and political and religious conventions are largely imposed towards people of gender, simply making Puig's approach a memoir by creatively documenting what it means to be homosexual and a woman at that time.

b. Identity and Politics

As a post-colonial society, Puig has drawn inspiration from the Western influences that had shaped pre-colonial Argentina and depicted this as his setting and environment in all of his texts. It became a perfect way of understanding themes on politics and identity through the struggles of his characters, who are confounded with the problem of having a sense of authentic identity and being victims of political injustices.

This is manifested in Betrayed by Rita Hayworth where Puig's use of a relatively simple plot of a teenage boy's coming age in the mid-twentieth century in small-town Argentina (most likely a fictionalized autobiography) paints a portrait of a place deeply affected by European and American cultural imperialism. Poverty, masochism, and economic issues are presented in this film, where the discourse of power is seen from a patriarchal lens. Toto's awakening of these issues got him to realize that the Argentina that he once knew is far from the movies that he is obsessed with- full of injustices and full of masochism. There was a battle between who he was as a boy with all the colonial influences around him. The sense of nationalistic identity is largely at stake in his disposition as a young boy, which is also relevant to Molina's character in Kiss of a Spiderwoman.

He can be considered a detached character in terms of his identity since he identifies himself with qualities from films that the European colonizers bring. Nene's regard for theater in Heartbreak Tango is a colonial influence where most of the films she watched are from the West.

The interplay of politics and nationalism has impacted how these characters have negotiated their gender roles since such roles are constructs of the interweaving interaction of politics, culture, and gender. Furthermore, through discoursing into this thematic underpinning, Puig made it clear that such aspects are powerful in how his characters have chosen to be the characters that they are- some are resistant, and some just regard it as the norm.

Beyond Just Films

Films per se transcend all senses in terms of experience, but to look at it differently and approach its form as a source rather than an output is one thing that Puig is known for. This approach to post-modern literature is one thing that has always been overlooked. Considered as cinematic novels which are known for incorporating cinematic collages into a text, it can be seen that films unconventionally became the source as opposed to the tradition of having the text as the source for film adaptation or any form of translation per se. Manuel Puig developed the cinematic novel in a pop mosaic of different texts, films, discourses, and narrative devices, hence aside from being the source, films as a form of pop culture are beyond just films. It's more than the form it inhabits; thus, through examining the character in each text, pop culture influences will be evaluated through the form of films as to how much culture transcends beyond the conventions of functionality. Examining the functions that films serve towards the characters, will yield how identity (gender) was constructed concerning how films and the character's exposure to pop culture have shaped his/her understanding of identity as a whole.

Films as an Escape, Expression, and Consciousness.

There is always an unexplainable feeling when we watch the film; it brings us to a different world. A world that is devoid of all the ugliness of the world that we naturally live in, and this is how Puig used film as a tool for the characters to confront the realities of the world that they live in. The power of films inevitably transcends all forms of consciousness- it creates the norms and ideologies that we believe to be natural. Concerning the context (place and time) in which these texts are situated, there is no denying that they are prisoners and victims of such realities.

Molina for instance used films by seeing himself as a woman which is totally in contrast with his gender as a male homosexual. Through films, she constructs herself as a woman who is adored by men. This alternate reality is his form of escape from the masochist society that Argentina is that time. He expresses himself as a woman which is juxtaposed with how Valentin sees him- as a man. Valentin becomes the society who constantly reminds Molina that he is a man and he cannot change it. As a man involved with his radical political views, he demands change from his society as a way of protest. Through films, Molina confronted the realities of being a homosexual stuck with a political prisoner. For Valentin, films become his consciousness in perceiving homosexuality- that a

man can become a woman just the way he expresses himself. For Kiss of a Spider Woman, films function as a form of expression, escape, and consciousness simply making it influential and instrumental towards how both characters approach their identity from an exterior level.

Homosexuality is taboo and condemned by society which is Toto in Betrayed by Rita Hayworth. As a young child, he sees reality from the lens of cinematic experiences he had with his mother. Adoring female actresses, he sees himself as a woman and regards himself as a gender devoid of the biological sense. Society dictates him to become masculine but through the films he watched, he started to know more of himself not as masculine as his family wants him to be but as feminine as Rita Hayworth. Toto's relationship with his father is representational of his relationship with his society. His father is a figure of masochism and imposes it on him and becomes the masculine child that his family expects him to be. In this regard, films get him to realize his homosexual tendencies- of what he truly is in terms of his gender identity. Films became his point of consciousness and his tool of expression. There was a battle between the idealistic world of films and the dystopic image of the real world. It became his escape until such time that he must face the sad realities of the society which speaks loudly to how such issue is encountered in Pubis Angelical.

Ana's struggle with her gender is a clear manifestation of how fascism is practiced in Argentina. She possesses a strong hatred towards men which leads her to despise her gender. Being exploited by Alejandro who used her for political reasons, is clear of how women are treated at that time. They are helplessly portrayed as prostitutes and commodified in the eyes of men. This leads to an interplay between reality and fiction, between fact and illusion, and the propensity of individuals to take refuge in a world created exclusively by the imagination. She fabricated her world by inducing herself into a world anchored and referenced from a film. It reinforces a sense of gender inequality by introducing the character of a Viennese actress who suffers from being ignored of autonomy by her powerful husband. Through the power of this reference, it gave her a strong sense of realization about the realities of the real world. This became her point of survival from the issues she was facing- the control of her husband, the poverty-driven society, and the hospitalization of her mother. In the film, the actress killed her husband to escape from her suffering making it Ana's point to also fight such a form of oppression and break free from it. Films became her escape from reality and provided her with such a firm approach to consciousness that made her embrace her gender being a woman instead of condemning being one.

Lastly, the phenomenon of popular culture has largely forced its fantasies on the people involved in the narratives, particularly in the character of Nene. Puig's wide use of pop culture motifs in this novel is satirical and misplaced because the worldview it promotes works its effect on the characters directly, but not on the reader. Molina's sexuality is reflected in the typical description of her. It imposes a different view as to how Nene sees pop culture as reality and becomes too detached from what is real. Certainly, it became her tool to escape her unpursued romance with Juan Carlos. She imagined herself being one of the actresses that Juan Carlos is paired with considering his job as an actor. Nené wistfully laments the loss of her unrequited love, refusing to accept that she has settled for the life she has always known: married to an uninteresting, long-suffering husband who

gives her two children and a comfortable house. She got consumed with such an illusion and later on, decided to confront it and embrace the reality of marrying a man she never loved and having a house that she never wanted. Just like the previous texts, Heartbreak Tango is preceded by quotations from films, tango lyrics, or commercial advertisements—quotations that reveal a romanticized view of reality which strengthens how films function just beyond films that mediate reality from fantasy.

Conclusion

The paper attempts to update the critical material about the cinematic novel and presents the cinematic novel as a typology linked to pop literature, particularly the use of films as a source text instead of being the product. As subgenres of the postmodern, cinematic pop fiction are exemplified by works from different countries and languages, particularly the works of Manuel Puig, whose regard for films has transcended the way he approaches novels as a cinematic text.

How the cinema is projected in the texts, asserts the writer's idea of seeing films as a suggestive tool for depicting sociocultural and psychoanalytical issues that fuse reality and imagination into dreams and desire (Cruz, 2019). Through using films, Puig tackled the issues of sexuality and gender by using films as a threshold of consciousness leading to a realization that could either be utopic or dystopic, which is very transparent to the themes he explored. There was no correlation between the time it was written with the themes underpinned by the author. Puig has always been bold about his choices of themes and has always been consistent ever since. He had always incorporated politics, culture, and nationalism within the discourse of identity and gender, simply making him a postmodern writer, which is in assertion to (Shaw, 1998) who considered post-boom as a response and a criticism to boom.

It is also evident that the way each character approaches mass culture is seen through how it creates categories of reality – a false consciousness, commodity fetishism, and capitalism's ideology (Robbins, 2011). Through their exposure to films, they created a sense of ideology and even a world that is in response to how they perceived the real world around them. It makes up a system that is uniform as a whole and every part and has it filtered based on their preference, simply making it their idea of utopia. Hansen (2012) found out that the way the masses see culture is fabricated and tailored to the way the government wants it to be perceived. These conventions were challenged by the characters who perceived such in a different way, making the discourse of gender construction contrary to the conventions imposed by such hegemonic culture. The characters negotiate their gender in terms of construction due to the context they are in, which practices fascism and patriarchy and condemns homosexuality. This is parallel to how (Kimmel, 2000) perceived gender roles to be dependent on the context- the culture, time, race, and sexuality making it socially constructed in social contexts having masculine and feminine as socially determined instead of biologically determined.

It is crystal clear that the texts are a commentary on how it is hard to be a woman and a homosexual in post-colonial Argentina. The influence of pop culture could somewhat create a sense of utopia in a world where people of all genders

perceived it as a dystopia. Furthermore, their identity was deconstructed and re-constructed through the influence of pop culture, which functions more than just films and inevitably has projected the cinematic view in the discourse of constructing identity.

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