NEW URBAN CARTOGRAPHIES:
SPACE AND SUBJECTIVITY IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2005

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES


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It was defended on


May 11, 2005


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NEW URBAN CARTOGRAPHIES: SPACE AND SUBJECTIVITY IN CONTEMPORARY
LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE

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University of Pittsburgh, 2005

The dissertation explores cultural representations of the new Latin American city that has emerged since the waning of national-popular development and the advent of neoliberal globalization. The discussion focuses on Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Mexico City in the 1980s and 1990s. The main argument is that, with the withering of the modern city and its narratives, new (post-civil and post-national) subjectivities have emerged, and that cultural cartographies of the city can help us to better grasp these new configurations.

The first chapter, "A Totality Made of Fragments," examines the construction of the image of the city in Modernist culture as an allegory for the totalizing and integrating impulse of the nation in the work of Fuentes, Sábato, and Vargas Llosa.

The second chapter, "Walking in the City," explores the relationship between walking in the city and writing about the city in Rubem Fonseca's and Clarice Lispector's texts on Rio de Janeiro, focusing on these texts' critique of literature and literacy.

The third chapter, "Public Spaces and Urban Geographies of Civility," enages uses and figurations of public spaces as sites for the expression of civil society. By reference to Poniatowska's chronicle-testimonio about the student massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968 and Eltit's novel about Santiago de Chile under dictatorship in the 1980s, this chapter offers a critique of the normative ideologies of *civil society* and *public space*.

The fourth chapter, "Homosexual Desire and Urban Territories," examines a novel by Zapata (1979) and an ethnographic study by Perlongher (1987) in order to map out how cartographies of queer desire in Mexico City and São Paulo disrupt public space's drive towards closure and universality.

The fifth and final chapter, "Deterritorialization and the Limits of the City," concentrates on neoliberal globalization in the 1990s in Buenos Aires. It combines analyses of cultural theory, fiction, and film in order to show the emergence emergence of new, post-national subjectivities that are reshaping the city in ways that depart radically from Modernism's drive towards integration, citizenship, and national culture.

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# PREFACE

I wish to thank my dissertation director, John Beverley, who has been an intellectual mentor as well as a friend, and to whose faith and support this project owes so much. It has also been a privilege to work with Gerald Martin, whose work on Joyce and the Latin American novel inspired me even before I came to Pittsburgh, and whom I thank for his many rigorous critiques of my work. I would also like to thank Joshua Lund, Eric Clarke, Tatjana Gajić, Gianpaolo Baiocchi, and Paul Bové, whose generous comments and friendly advice at different stages of the project have given me the privilege of an invaluable intellectual dialogue. I especially want to acknowledge my debt to Ronald A. T. Judy, who more than once has taken the time to listen, offer advice, and open paths for thinking.

I would like to express my gratitude to my friends and fellow graduate students at the Department of Hispanic Languages at the University of Pittsburgh, Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, Jaime Donoso, Rodrigo Naranjo, Juan Antonio Hernández, Teresa Peña-Jordán, Erick Blandón, and Therese Tardio. They are the best group of colleagues any graduate student could have.

I have been extremely fortunate in having so many friends whose affection has sustained me during the difficult period of writing my dissertation. I want to thank especially Kirsten Strayer, who showed me how to look at film as well as teaching me new ways of seeing and thinking. I also want to thank Brian Robick, Luis Tobar, and Carl Bergamini, Anustup and Manisha Basu, Richard Purcell, and Jennifer Whatley, whose friendship has made life in Pittsburgh so fulfilling.

I have had the privilege, during the years of graduate school, of a continued friendship with Anita Mannur and Neil Hartlen, former fellow graduate students in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Masschusetts, Amherst. I owe to Anita whatever

familiarity I have with South Asian literatures, and to Neil nearly everything I know about queer theory. I thank both of them for providing affection and support when they were needed. I also wish to thank Natalia Jacovkis, Juan Carlos Galdo, Christian Gundermann, and Luis Martín-Cabrera, whom I met during the summer seminar at Boston University, and whose continued frienship has been a source of joy during the last few years.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Susan Polansky at Carnegie Mellon University, who helped to make my semester as Spanish instructor at CMU extremely rewarding. I am greatly indebted to Nicolás Baldi, for his friendship and hospitality in Buenos Aires. In São Paulo, the help and generosity of many people were vital in providing me with the opportunity to explore the city. I want to acknowledge my gratitude to Cláudio Couto, Laerte Oliveira, Solange Munhoz, and Sergio Naranjo, whose hospitality proved invaluable. I want to thank Nicolau Sevcenko, who generously took the time to talk to me, and especially to thank Jeff Lesser and Ryan Lynch, who helped to guide me through the maze of São Paulo.

Finally, I want to thank my dear friend Marina Kaplan, for always pointing me in the right direction.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Celso López Saavedra and Ana María Vicuña, whose love of literature and philosophy has proved a source of life-long inspiration for me.

# INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is primarily concerned with *urban trajectories* or "recorridos urbanos" in Latin American fiction and other cultural texts. My contention is that by examining the ways in which texts construct specific trajectories across space, it is possible to understand how they discursively produce urban space and distribute bodies and populations in that space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau distinguishes between two ways of experiencing and apprehending the city. One is from above, as an urban planner; this he calls the "concept-city." But there is also the apprehension of the city at the level of the street, constituted by the multiple trajectories the users of the city trace during their everyday transit across urban space. These trajectories draw an urban map that, de Certeau argues, is not apprehensible in its totality, nor does it conform to the abstraction of the concept-city. Understanding these trajectories, de Certeau suggests, can help to critique and demystify the urbanistic ideologies that understand the city as a unified concept, as a legible, ordered totality, and as an apparatus of control; ideologies that, for de Certeau, suppress the city's dynamic social heterogeneity.

In the dissertation I often shift back and forth, attempting to facilitate a dialogue between these two modes of apprehending the city. In fact, urban trajectories only make sense by reference to a larger concept we may designate as "urban space" or "the city," even if this concept remains inapprehensible as a legible totality. While a good part of the dissertation engages in an effort to criticize and dismantle literature's attempts to represent Latin American cities as legible and unified totalities, my intention is not to celebrate the radical fragmentation of the social by suggesting that urban space can only be apprehended in the form of individualized and privatized trajectories. On the contrary, I attempt to focus specifically on texts that make it

possible to imagine the aesthetics of urban space as an aesthetics of the collective and of the possibilities for being in common in today's increasingly globalized urban spaces. In order to do this, however, I believe it is necessary to keep in mind both modalities mentioned by de Certeau, in their dialectic interplay.

The dissertation focuses on Latin American texts from the 1980s and 1990s, although some earlier texts are also discussed. It is my argument that during this period the idea of the modern city as a unitary concept began to wither away. The idea of the metropolis as a unified, dynamic space was strongly associated in Latin America with developmentalist economic models and with national projects of social and cultural integration, as well as with the production of a national consciousness. Increasingly, cities towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first have come to be conceived more in terms of splintering, heterogeneity, and the multiplication of spatial centers and social actors. If there has indeed been a shift in the configuration and meaning of urban spaces in postmodernity, this indicates a crisis, and change, in the sign systems that relate to many of the categories of modern consciousness and subjectivity, including the categories of community, public space, and citizenship. It seems natural then that literary and cultural texts register and make visible these shifts in understanding the relationship between bodies and their surroundings. I want therefore to argue that literary and cultural texts can be read as *urban cartographies*, in that they trace possible ways of imagining the individual's relation to the city and the collective in times of change and transition into a new global space.

*Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the "Lettered City"*

In Latin American literary and cultural studies, the figure of the "lettered city" has had especial significance in debates around how urban modernization processes impacted the formation of national cultures, as well as in discussions of writing's relationship to the political and to the production of a national public sphere. The concept was outlined by Ángel Rama in his unfinished, posthumous work *La ciudad letrada* (1984), and has since become influential in literary and cultural studies as a model for thinking about the limitations of literary culture's ability to represent the national community. As used by Rama, the concept of the "lettered city" is ambiguous. It sometimes refers to the population of "letrados" (scholars, bureaucrats, and urban planners) whose work helped to organize urban space, and who constituted a republic of letters, a literary public sphere profoundly embedded in the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, following the model of the Baroque courtly city. Often, however, the "lettered city" also refers to the discursive or conceptual city created by writers and scholars, which according to Rama misrepresents the social conflicts of the "real" city. In this sense the "lettered city" is ordered, ideal, and utopian – a projection of the ruling class's desires for protagonism in the shaping of the national project. It is also, however, potentially a mirror image of the left-wing intelligentsia's similar desire for protagonism in the context of social revolution.

Reading Latin America's literary history through a Foucauldian lens, Rama argued that the politization of literary intellectuals would remain ineffective if it failed to critique the lettered city and to question the hegemony of literature in the constitution of the national public sphere. Without such a critique, *La ciudad letrada* suggests, literary intellectuals and institutions of culture are condemned to continue reproducing unequal relationships of power in society.

Ultimately, in Rama's argument, a democratization of social relationships would have to lead to a displacement of literature from its hegemonic role in national culture.

Rama's concept of the "lettered city" must be situated within the larger context of Latin American cultural studies and intellectual history, including José Luis Romero's *Latinoamérica: Las ciudades y las ideas* (1976) as well as the work of urbanist Jorge Hardoy, historian Richard Morse, and cultural studies scholars Jesús Martín-Barbero and Néstor García-Canclini. These scholars were all engaged in trying to understand the development of Latin American culture and intellectual history as societies underwent urban massification and as societies began to rely more on telecommunications and the mass media, thus gradually displacing literature and lettered culture as the organizing center of national culture. In Romero's *Las ciudades y las ideas*, as in Morse's essay "Cities as People" and in Rama's *La ciudad letrada*, the multiplication of forms of subaltern, popular, and mass culture are seen as irrevocably displacing (elitist) literary culture from hegemony, thus opening up spaces for the democratization of national culture.

It is clear that the existence of "lettered cities" in Latin America varied considerably from nation to nation, in spite of the generalizing tendency of Rama's analysis. Mexico would appear to be the perfect example of continuity of literary culture from colonial times through nineteenth-century liberalism, passing through revolution and the post-revolutionary state. It may be that Rama had Mexico in mind when he conceptualized the "lettered city," as his reference to Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* towards the end of the book would appear to suggest. Mexico was a clear example of a society whose literary intellectuals were able to navigate successfully the turbulent waters of revolution and install the literary sphere firmly within the post-revolutionary national project. During the period of hegemony of the PRI in Mexico, literacy and

national education, along with the promotion of letters and literary intellectuals such as Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, played an important role within the consolidation of the state's hegemony.

A contrasting example is Argentina, where a vibrant literary public sphere more closely identified with liberalism and cosmopolitanism has traditionally taken distance from both populist and authoritarian governments. In spite of the political upheavals and the succession of military regimes in Argentina, Buenos Aires' cultural sphere has managed to retain its air of intellectual sophistication and worldliness, as can be seen from the protagonism of writers like Borges, Sábato, and Cortázar in Argentine literary history. One explanation for this might be the fact that populism in Argentina did not articulate the sphere of letters to its national project. As a result, the co-optation of literary intellectuals to help shape a nationalist discourse was minimal, contrary to what happened in Mexico. Instead, since the advent of Peronismo, literary intellectuals and populism continually antagonized each other. This explains why there was no "fall" of the "lettered city" in Argentina during or after the 1970s, as in other parts of Latin America. As it happens, the literary sphere had already "fallen" in the 1940s. When the followers of Perón entered Buenos Aires, the liberal elite lost much of its protagonism in the definition of national culture, a process David Viñas described as "la crisis de la ciudad liberal."[1]

Gareth Williams, for example, points out Peronism's reliance on popular culture and patriotic ceremonies – rather than on high culture – to disseminate its ideology of populist nationalism:

> Peronism chose to affirm national commonality by means of popular radio, commercial cinema, music (the tango), and theater; through popular cultural forms that could easily uphold and disseminate the image of Peronism … as the return of Sarmiento's rural

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[1] *La crisis de la ciudad liberal* (1965) is the third volume of Viñas' trilogy *Literatura argentina y realidad política*.

barbarians finally washing their feet in the fountains of the capital's liberal and conservative civilization. (52-53)

Peronism's reliance on theatricality and on national symbols and ceremonies is well known, as is its emphasis on a culture of technical knowledge, which was necessary to sustain agricultural productivity and urban industrialization. Hence populism in Argentina left the liberal city and its high culture out of the equation, which would ultimately facilitate the open and steadfast opposition of liberal intellectuals (along with conservatives) to Perón and Peronismo, as was the case of Borges and many others:

> In Argentina … populist nation formation and its labor of translation between language groups, classes, and ethnicities required very little cooperation from the traditional literary sectors. Indeed, Peronism's processes of state incorporation ultimately bypassed the liberal ideology of the Argentine intelligentsia. (51)

This may help to explain the persistence in Argentina of a semi-autonomous, highly sophisticated, and Europeanized sphere of letters even today, when literature has been effectively displaced from hegemony by the mass media and global capitalism.

During the period of intense urban modernization in Latin America, the protagonism of the lettered city was nowhere more visible than in the production of an international network of authors, referred to as "the boom" novelists, whose works functioned as national allegories. Many of these novels were urban or explored urban space, thus producing literary cities that served to represent the dilemmas of the nation. While these cities were not "ideal" or "utopian," but rather dealt with conflicts and shortcomings of the nation, they were nevertheless ordered in a certain way. They were organized around the development of the psyche of the main character – usually a literary intellectual of some sort – whose walking in the city organized urban

experience and gave narrative shape to the national community. In this way the *flâneur* of *Modernista* urban chronicle was revived as a subject whose development and conflict paralleled those of the nation. Although in the work of Baudelaire, Benjamin, and the Surrealists, the flâneur is associated with chance and with the unexpected, in the lettered cities of the boom novels the flâneur became more associated with the distance of the literary intellectual from the urban multitude, and with literature's ability to incorporate and transcend cultural (and class) differences by situating them within an allegorical space of national unity, a unity which paralleled (and depended upon) the development of the consciousness of the writer.

I will be arguing that this way of understanding and organizing urban space in literature coincided with the period of national development and state-led industrialization in Latin America, and entered into a crisis during the 1970s when nation states opened up their markets to intense global deterritorialization. Since then, Latin American cities have witnessed the multiplication of social actors and transnational affiliations, as well as the increasing prevalence of forms of subjectivity that are more mobile and flexible than during the modern period. Thus the fall of the "lettered city" has also witnessed a splintering of national and urban consciousness and a crisis in literature's ability to contain the national community within its discourse. New forms of writing began to emerge to respond to the challenge of engaging urban marginality and other forms of cultural heterogeneity without folding them back into the discourse of national development. It is these forms of writing and thinking that I will be exploring in the dissertation.

*Global Cities*

The transformations in Latin American cities associated with economic liberalization and globalization are forcing a reexamination of the dynamics between urban spaces, crowds, civil society, and cultural subjectivity. While cities have always functioned to a greater or lesser degree as nodes of control for the flows of the global economy, during the larger part of the twentieth century urban growth was associated with industrialization and the production and co-optation of a working class. Failure to integrate large sectors of the population into urban economies was seen as an anomaly and, particularly in the developing world, as a delay in modernization that would eventually be overcome. Since the 1970s, however, large cities in the developed world and elsewhere have begun to shift away from industrialization and to move towards the production of highly specialized products and services enabled by advanced communication technology. According to Saskia Sassen in *The Global City* (2001), in these "global cities" the shift away from industrial economies has led to an increased splintering of society into two distinct groups, a highly skilled professional force, and an unskilled labor force engaged in the provision of basic services. In *Splintering Urbanism* (2001) Graham and Marvin have stressed the impact of globalization on urban space, arguing that cities' splintering is visible in the privatization or decay of urban public space, the progressive urban sprawl and replacement of the city center by a multiplicity of centers, and the disconnection among these various urban centers.

During the twentieth century, the growth of Latin American cities was associated with national efforts towards import substitution industrialization that swelled the urban population while depleting the countryside. Cities were seen as spearheading the nation's industrial

modernization and as gathering together people and resources in a process of national integration and urban modernization. However, after the shift away from national industrialization and the move towards free-trade neoliberalism, followed by globalization, the urban crowd became increasingly marginal to the labor economy. The creation of a "permanent informal sector" in Latin American cities has thus manifested itself in a demographic explosion that dramatically transformed the face of cities in the 1980s. As a result of this, urban marginality became more prevalent than ever before, forcing political powers as well as intellectuals to reconceptualize the meanings of "the people."

In Latin American studies there appear to be two main axes of debate around the contemporary nature of cities. One of them focuses on the significance of globalization and the possibilities and limitations it brings about for social agency. Writing about São Paulo, for example, Teresa Caldeira argues in *City of Walls* (2000) that neoliberal globalization has brought about an increased segregation and surveillance of populations, along with the erosion of the democratic uses of public space. By contrast, García Canclini (1990; 1995) argues that by transforming urban spaces into communicational territories, globalization brings about openings and new possibilities of social affiliation and mixing.

The other axis of debate intersects with the discussions around globalization, involving the questions of education, literacy, and the public sphere, in relation to neoliberal urban spaces as sites for the exercise of citizenship. On this question García Canclini (1995) suggests that the market opens up the possibility of "negotiation" and therefore involves the production of a new form of citizenship based on consumption, which makes national societies coextensive with global civil society. On the other hand, critics like Beatriz Sarlo (1994) and Eduardo Rinesi (1994) in Argentina, see globalization and neoliberal free-market economics as undermining the

civil institutions required to sustain democracy and citizenship. In articulating their critique, however, these authors also, problematically, reaffirm the role of literacy and intellectual culture as necessary for social emancipation.

In "Ciudades multiculturales y contradicciones de la modernidad" (1997), Néstor García Canclini argues that in postmodernity, Latin American cities have acquired a new, infinitely more complex temporality. As in many of his other writings on urban studies, García Canclini attempts to suggest innovative, tactical ways of thinking, "estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad," to use his phrase. In order to critically engage the phenomenon of urban agglomeration in Latin America's megacities, Canclini suggests that we need a more fluid thinking that is attentive to global flows of people and information, so as to be able to reconceptualize what "the urban" could mean today.

According to Canclini, today's global megacities (Los Angeles, Tokyo, Mexico City, São Paulo) have rendered the classical models for understanding urban phenomena by contrasting the urban to the rural (eg. mobile social affiliations vs organic communities) no longer valid. Instead, contemporary cities are characterized by 'multiculturality': "Pareciera que en la actualidad la búsqueda no es entender qué es lo específico de la cultura urbana, la diferencia de la cultura rural, sino cómo se da la multiculturalidad, la coexistencia de múltiples culturas en un espacio que llamamos todavía urbano" (77). The urban fabric contains diverse ethnic groups, but also any number of urban subcultures that overlap, interact, and often stay separate, as well.

The megalopolis, for Canclini, contains at least four cities, superposed onto one another: the historical-territorial city (the historic center), the industrial city with its peripheral expansions, the informational-communicational city (defined by financial and informational networks), and a fourth city that contains all of these diverse temporalities, but cannot be fully

apprehended as a totality. This last city Canclini describes as a juxtaposition of contradictory and chaotic messages, a "videoclip" city (88). The totality of the city is rarely experienced by most urban dwellers: "Cada grupo de personas transita, conoce, experimenta pequeños enclaves" (82), but these trajectories do not provide a sense of coherence or belonging. However, Canclini believes that the communications industry (and communication studies) can provide a framework for grasping the "urban imaginaries" that allow social actors to stay connected rather than capitulate to the complete fragmentation of the urban process. Hence, he argues for the importance of developing a "sociocommunicational" concept of the city in addition to the more traditional socio-demographic one. Communications and Urban Studies need to enter into a dialogue, he suggests, in order to research and preserve those "urban imaginaries" that mediate a more collective sense of the city.

García Canclini's books *Culturas híbridas* (1990) and *Consumidores y ciudadanos* (1995) have had enormous impact on contemporary ways of viewing Latin American cities in urban studies, cultural studies, and other fields. His work will be discussed more at length in Chapter 3. For now, it is important to point out that he has been among the critics to introduce Deleuzian thinking – deterritorialization, flux, micropolitics – into the discourse of Latin American cultural critique.

In the 1970s, Manuel Castells had suggested in *The Urban Question* (1977) that 'the urban' was a fiction. The ways in which social science used the concept of 'urban space' did not allow for a specific object of study. Instead, it designated a number of diverse processes of historical change (capital accumulation, movements of populations, urban planning, architecture, local government, etc.). Castells therefore argued for a more rigorous critique of space based on an elaboration of Marxist-inspired critical sociology. However, it is the very semantic richness –

and ambiguity – of the concepts of 'city' and 'urban space' that has given urban studies their exciting dynamism, as well as serving as a central mobilizing trope in cultural and literary studies as well. Neither Castells' proposal for a Marxist urban sociology nor other attempts to develop a politically committed "critique of everyday life" (eg. Lefebvre, de Certeau) gave rise to a unified paradigm for the study of space. Instead, the work of Castells himself evolved in new, innovative directions, while at the same time "urban space" remained at the center of a number of heterogeneous, trans-disciplinary debates that developed in their own ways. Geography (David Harvey, Edward Soja) and sociology (Castells, Saskia Sassen, Janet Abu-Lughod) retained a certain paradigmatic coherence, but philosophy (Lefebvre, Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari), architecture (Manfredo Tafuri, Charles Jencks), urbanism (Mike Davis, Richard Sennett), and cultural studies (Michel de Certeau, Marshall Berman, García Canclini) have proved at least as influential on contemporary urban studies.

One point of convergence for many of these discourses on space was postmodernism theory, especially as articulated by Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Significantly, Jameson understands postmodernism not as a style that one may choose among, but as a 'cultural dominant' that expresses many of the tensions and problematics of our time. One of Jameson's main contentions is that the condition of postmodernity has produced a 'loss of historicity', which he also characterizes as a 'waning of affect'. This is another way of saying that the temporal horizon of Modernism (forward-moving development) has become uncertain, and that contemporary culture has witnessed a shift in emphasis from 'time' to 'space'. In Jameson's words, "our cultural languages are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (16). This is in no way to emphasize 'space' at the expense of 'time', which

would simply replace one form of reification with another. Instead, the task is to understand how categories of space are crucial in articulating our ideas of time, history, and progress, as well as nation, community, and individual consciousness.

In *Mapping the Present* (2001), Stuart Elden has warned against the limitations of focusing uncritically on 'space' as an autonomous category, at the expense of time and history. Elden argues that recent attempts to critically theorize space, in the fields of geography and urban history, run against two main problems: "One of these is that any theorist who talks of space is unproblematically appropriated as 'one of them', which conflates the work of thinkers whose understandings of space or place are quite different." The second problem is that while "there has undoubtedly been a heavy bias in favor of history and time in the past, to swing too far the other way through a privileging of geography and space is no solution. Yet much of this recent work does precisely that." Instead, Elden argues that "we need to both historicize space and spatialize history. … we need to recognize how space, place, and location are crucial determining factors in any historical study" (3). As both Jameson and Elden indicate, what needs to be grasped is rather the *interaction* between categories of space and categories of time, and their deployment at a specific historical moment.

Jameson's other crucial hypothesis is that postmodernity's 'waning of affect' implies an emphasis on surface rather than depth. This loss of depth (like the loss of historicity) is related to the loss of a transcendent outside of modernity, the aura or magical reserve represented by those spaces and practices that remained outside of Western modernity's logic. The 'outsides' of the city (the jungle, the pampas, the indigenous villages) retained in modernity a spiritual reserve that allowed them to become idealized and incorporated through the discourse of 'marvelous realism', as discussed above in the case of Latin American literature – although the subsumption

of the outsides of modernity through processes of development and globalization surely extends beyond Latin America.[2] We are thus faced, according to Jameson, with a situation in which culture has taken the place of nature, as nature is so fully enmeshed in the global economic order that it can no longer stand as an outside of culture. As he puts it, "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" (ix). Or, as he states later, "The *other* of our society is … no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify" (35). This helps to explain, Jameson argues, why in postmodernity everything (economics, politics, social science) has become "cultural," and why in turn culture has become a site for political and economic thinking.

Jameson's affirmative thinking is expressed in the concept of "cognitive mapping" as a strategy for connecting individuals with their surroundings in the current moment. Under the condition of postmodernity, Jameson argues, we have become unable to represent coherently to ourselves the global space we have begun to inhabit. Speaking of postmodern architecture and urban space, Jameson points out that "postmodern hyperspace has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself" (44). Thus our imperfect representations of global flows and networks only scratch at the surface of the problem: "I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism" (37). Hence an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping," conceived as a cultural politics, seeks to help us "begin to

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[2] Yet another way of thinking about this is by suggesting that in modernity capitalism had achieved a "formal subsumption" of human labor into capital, thus allowing non-capitalist modes of production to co-exist alongside capitalism. In post-modernity, late capitalism has finally achieved a "real subsumption" of labor into capital, thus endlessly inventing and producing new forms of human labor according to its own needs. This is the interpretation of our global moment offered by Toni Negri and Michael Hardt in *Empire* (2000), using Marx's concepts of formal and real subsumption.

grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" (54).

Jameson's 'cognitive mapping' is eloquent insofar as it opens up the possibility of an aesthetics of urban space that is not completely subordinated to neoliberal splintering, while at the same time resisting the Modernist models of totality and temporal unification. The term 'mapping' however is perhaps too inflexible to capture the fluid global dynamics to which Jameson points. Jameson also uses the term 'cartography', but as a synonym of 'mapping'. Both terms, in Jameson, carry the implication that the "world system" (as theorized by Ernst Mandel) can be adequately grasped through aesthetic and political critique, even if it cannot be represented in its totality.

I have chosen instead to use the term 'urban cartographies' because I believe it captures a more fluid, Deleuzian approach to space. The term 'cartography' has a history of its own in the works of Deleuze & Guattari, Guy Hocquenghem, and Néstor Perlongher, and has a genealogy that links it to subjectivity and desire in the work of Diamela Eltit, among others.

If, as Jameson suggests, nature no longer constitutes an outside to modernity, it is not surprising that the country no longer constitutes the *other* of the city. Instead, urban space (somewhat like culture) has become the cultural dominant in postmodernity, completely cannibalizing its peripheries. Cities themselves have become deterritorialized spaces, vast urban territories that absorb their margins and sprawl onto the surrounding areas. At the same time, the urban center itself has become blurred as a point of reference. While the historical center may still have a formal existence, other urban centers have multiplied, thus giving global cities the appearance of urban territories or archipelagos rather than concentric modern cities. Conversely, the historical

centers of Latin American cities have also been inundated with a new urban multitude that has developed its own forms of commerce, cultural expression, and strategies of survival. Thus the classic notions of 'center' and 'periphery' as applied to Latin America and its urban spaces have become confused and paradoxical.

The concepts of "the city," "urban space," and "public space," have become uncertain and ambiguous. At the same time, however, it does not seem possible to easily reject these concepts in favor of better, more adequate, ones. The 'city' has become a site of struggle over meaning as well as over political demands regarding inclusion, participation, social justice, and civil rights. Thus the slippage between 'city' and 'citizenship' has become productive as well as confusing. As a trope, urban space has also become a privileged signifier for talking about violence, marginalization, and the crisis of citizenship in contemporary Latin American states. It is these tensions that the following chapters will explore, trying to suggest that while the concepts of urban space and public space may be tremendously problematic, we cannot be done with them yet. At the same time, however, it seems clear that one of the tasks at hand is to unthink the totalizing impulse of Modernism without giving in to the absolute fragmentation of the social that is the impulse of neoliberalism. Clearly urban territories today can no longer be unified totalities. In fact, they look more like assemblages of fragments that do not quite constitute a totality, because their external (and internal) boundaries are constantly shifting. But perhaps it may be liberating no longer to think about these fragments as if they were fragments of a totality that once existed, or one that we wish to reconstruct in a utopian future. At the same time, to understand the ways in which urban spaces and their social universes are splintered and fragmented is not immediately to lament the disappearance of public space and citizenship, nor can it be, conversely, to immediately celebrate heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity. Instead,

understanding urban fragmentation requires being attentive to how power is exerted today in more diffuse ways, producing and encouraging more decentered and flexible forms of subjectivity at the same time that it exerts greater control over populations and individuals.

In the very short but tremendously influential article "Postcript on the Societies of Control"(1990), Gilles Deleuze suggested that we are witnessing the "progressive and dispersed installation of a new system of domination," one based on *control* rather than *discipline*. As theorized by Foucault, *disciplinary societies* organized spaces of enclosure around individuals: the family, the school, the barracks, the factory, the hospital, the prison. Modern society was thus able "to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force within the dimension of space-time" (3). Today, however, we are gradually becoming something other than a disciplinary society, Deleuze argues: "We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure" (4). The progressive crisis and crumbling of the family, the school, and the factory have given way to a logic of control that is more fluid and modulated: "Enclosures are *molds*, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other" (4). This modular logic becomes evident if we take the corporation, with its incentives and flexibility, rather than the factory or the family, as the embelm of the new society we now inhabit. Thus the principle of "salary according to merit" has replaced the standardized enclosures of the factory with its wages and unions. Money itself has broken free from the old gold standard, and instead "control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies. The old monetary mole is the animal of the spaces of enclosure, but the serpent is that of the societies of control" (5). Societies of control thus produce mobile and flexible individuals, and move flows of information using computers, whose modular flexibility is virtually infinite.

Society has become one big corporation, organized around spectacle and marketing. One thing that has remained constant in late capitalism, however, is the extreme poverty of the majority:

> It is true that capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explosions within shanty towns or ghettos. (7)

In many of the texts discussed in the dissertation, such as the films *Amores Perros* (2000) or *Pizza, Birra, Faso* (1997), the idea of an escape beyond the enclosures of the city (usually by means of delinquency and crime) is frustrated because there does not seem to be an outside of neoliberalism to which to escape. While this may sound like a hopeless thought, I believe that it is crucial to confront the consequences of globalization in order to begin to imagine a new understanding of agency and subjectivity. Perhaps one way of politicizing 'space' today is by affirming that there is no 'outside' of the global system, neither a 'future' in which social reconciliation will be possible (a temporal utopia) nor a physical place to which one can escape (such as the romanticized Montevideo in Piñeyro's film *Plata Quemada* or any other such spatial utopia). This forces us to confront urban space and its populations in their sheer immediacy. This may not be utopian, but I would believe we can think of it as affirmative.

*Chapter Outline*

The first chapter, "A Totality Made of Fragments," explores the production of images of urban space in the novels of Fuentes, Sábato, and Vargas Llosa, arguing that in high Modernism the city became a privileged allegory for imagining the nation as a space of integration that could still be contained and totalized within literature. The chapter attempts to trace the moment of crisis in the apprehension of the city as a legible totality, thus laying the foundation for a reading of contemporary urban cartographies as attempts to read fragmentation and heterogeneity affirmatively.

The second chapter, "Walking in the City," explores the relationship between walking in the city and writing about the city in texts by Rubem Fonseca ("The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro," 1992) and Clarice Lispector (*The Hour of the Star*, 1977). Focusing on Rio de Janeiro, the chapter explores the ways in which these texts dialogue with urban marginality, the displacement of literature from cultural hegemony, and the crisis of literacy as a model for civic participation. In doing so, I argue, these texts maintain an implicit dialogue with ongoing debates in Brazilian cultural studies and pose questions of citizenship and public space in the context of the weakening of both the literary public sphere and the institutions of civil society.

The third chapter, "Public Spaces and Urban Geographies of Civility," attempts to show the ways in which texts use images of urban public spaces to construct an intelligible image of civil society in moments of crisis. Specifically focusing on Poniatowska's chronicle-testimonio *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971) about the student massacre in Mexico in 1968, and Eltit's novel *Lumpérica* (1983) about Santiago de Chile under dictatorship, this chapter attempts to suggest

how these texts can help us unpack the normative and potentially exclusionary dimensions of the concepts of public space and civil society, as theorized by contemporary cultural studies.

The fourth chapter, "Homosexual Desire and Urban Territories," examines Zapata's novel *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (1979) and an ethnographic study by Perlongher, *O negócio do michê* (1987), in order to map cartographies of queer desire in Mexico City and São Paulo during the period of transition from national modernization to the opening up of global deterritorialization. The chapter examines the ways in which these narratives question and displace public space's drive towards normalization and universality by exploring other forms of being in common that do not take universal subjectivity and individual identity as their preconditions.

The fifth and final chapter, "Deterritorialization and the Limits of the City," looks at cultural theory, film, and literature of Buenos Aires in the 1990s. It explores the ways in which urban marginality and transnational displacement (as represented in films by Agresti and Caetano) during the recent period of intense neoliberal modernization complicate and exceed the idea of the city as a stage for the drama of national politics, heralding the emergence of a new, post-national space in the cities of South America. The chapter attempts a dialogue between these images of urban space and literary texts (Borges, Piglia) that subvert Modernism's drive for closure and suggest instead an open-ended (post-national) urban space.

# 1.    A TOTALITY MADE OF FRAGMENTS: THE CITY IN MODERN LATIN AMERICAN FICTION

Between 1880 and 1930, Latin America's principal cities experienced an unprecedented growth in population as well as an enormous expansion in their urban infrastructure.[3] During this period, writers and intellectuals developed a number of aesthetic strategies in an attempt to capture the rapidly shifting social, political, and spatial dynamics of Latin American cities. Whereas throughout the nineteenth century the city had been conceived as a promise of civilization and order (as in Sarmiento), towards the turn of the century urban life seemed much more uncertain. The promises of modernity appeared finally to have come to pass, but they had brought along a host of problems and conflicts that flung the traditional social order into disarray.

The centrality of the metropolis as a site for thinking Latin American culture culminated in the Modernist movements of the 1920s, in particular in the 'Semana de Arte Moderna' in São Paulo in 1922.[4] During the 1920s the urban poetry of J. L. Borges and Oliverio Girondo in Buenos Aires, and of Mário de Andrade in São Paulo (*Paulicéia desvairada*, 1922), celebrated the rapidity and excitement of the new urban experience. On the other hand, authors like Roberto Arlt and Juan Carlos Onetti in the Río de la Plata region, and Graciliano Ramos in Brazil,

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[3] See Arturo Almandoz, ed. *Planning Latin America's Capital Cities*, for an excellent overview of this period from the perspective of urban planning.

[4] Of course, there is a long history of literature about cities around the turn of the century, previous to the avant-garde moment I am discussing. Of great importance are the Naturalist and Realist novels dealing with the problems of overcrowding and massification in cities, among which should be mentioned Lucio Vicente López, *La gran aldea* (1884), Eugenio Cambaceres, *Sin rumbo* (1885), and Julián Martel, *La bolsa* (1891) in Argentina, Ángel de Campo, *La Rumba* (1890) in Mexico, and Aluísio Azevedo, *O Cortiço* (1890) in Brazil. Around 1900 writers associated with *Modernismo*, in particular José Martí and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, began to write chronicles in an attempt to capture the rapidly expanding urban space. One of the best books on this topic is Julio Ramos (1989).

For a number of excellent studies on the representation of cities in Latin American history and culture, see José Luis Romero, *Latinoamérica, las ciudades y las ideas* (1976), Ángel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (1984), Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires, 1920-1930* (1988), Julio Ramos, *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina* (1989), Gerald Martin, "Dead ends: Cities and Prisons" in *Journeys through the Labyrinth* (1989), and Richard Morse, "Cities as People" in *Rethinking the Latin American City* (1992).

explored the alienating, dehumanizing aspects of the modern metropolis.[5] Both strands of

discourse about the city would be gradually displaced during the following decade, however.

Following the financial crisis of 1929 and the political mobilizations that resulted in populist

governments in many Latin American countries, the parameters for evaluating and representing

modernity and national identity shifted considerably. After 1930, and well into the 1950s, Latin

American culture would experience a turning inward, a quest for national identity that developed

and expanded many of the questions posed by the Modernist and avant-garde movements of the

1920s, and which would crystallize in ambitious soul-searching projects such as Octavio Paz's *El

laberinto de la soledad* (1950) and Lezama Lima's *La expresión americana* (1957), among

others. Much of this quest for identity, I will argue below, was related to the pressing need to

create a dialogue between the modern metropolis and the rural interior of the country, a dialogue

that could no longer rely on the traditional antagonism between 'civilization' and 'barbarism'

that had fueled nineteenth century models of modernization and nation formation.[6]

During the decades leading up to the 1950s, industrial modernization and mass migration

from the countryside had forever changed the face of Latin America's metropolises. Especially

after the Second World War, a number of factors such as the strengthening of national industries,

the consolidation of national capitalism, the growth of the middle class, and the massification of

consumption and urban services, gave cities an enormous scale they had not had during the

1920s. Such rapid urbanization also gave rise to flagrant contradictions, however. Rather than

dissipating the social problems that had preoccupied writers and intellectuals at the turn of the

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[5] See Roberto Arlt, *El juguete rabioso* (1926), Graciliano Ramos, *Angústia* (1936), Juan Carlos Onetti, *El pozo* (1939).
[6] The dialogue between the city and the country had begun in the 1920s with Mariátegui's *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad Peruana* (1928) and the so-called regionalist novel or *novela de la tierra*, as well as with Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928), and would also give rise to works like Martínez Estrada's *Radiografía de la pampa* (1933).

century, urbanization intensified them. Thus the rift between a progressively deteriorating countryside and an impoverished urban periphery on the one hand, and an increasingly wealthier and more cosmopolitan urban middle class on the other, became more and more striking. Gradually a discourse of Latin America as a space of mixed and contradictory temporalities began to take shape, and cultural texts attempted to engage this troublesome heterogeneity.

Striking contrasts of uneven development were very much alive in Latin American cities at the beginning of the twentieth century. In *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), for example, Lévi-Strauss recalls that: "In 1935, the citizens of São Paulo boasted that, on an average, one house per hour was built in their town. … The town is developing so fast that it is impossible to obtain a map of it; a new edition would be required every week" (96). The downtown thoroughfares around the Praça da Sé and the commercial Triangle

> bristled with street signs and were crowded with merchants and employees whose dark city suits proclaimed not only their allegiance to European and North American standards, but also their pride in the fact that, although their town stands right on the tropic, its altitude (eight hundred metres above sea-level) spared them the heaviness of tropical heat. (97-98)

It is not surprising, therefore, that writers and intellectuals not only marveled at the growth of highly urbanized metropolises like São Paulo, Buenos Aires, or Mexico City, but also at the resilience of traditional, nonmodern, and non-Western elements in Latin American culture. Within the framework of a quest for national identity, these disparate elements would have to be integrated, somehow, into the narrative of the modern nation.

Thus the modern novel would become a privileged space for achieving such aesthetic integration. One of the most surprising aspects of Latin American fiction was that the renovation of narrative modes for writing about rural spaces (under the influence of Faulkner) took place

simultaneously with the growth of megalopolises. Writing about Guimarães Rosa, Jorge Amado makes evident the solidarity between the development of modern fiction and urban and industrial development:

> Led by the hand of Guimarães Rosa, the turbulent men and women from the heart of the backlands enter upon that immortality which art alone can give them. *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* bears witness –certainly as much as the great industrial establishments of São Paulo– to the maturity Brazil and its people have reached. (Amado 1963, x)

This statement by Jorge Amado, in a foreword to the English translation of Guimarães Rosa's classic *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1953), is significant. Perhaps one of the greatest of Brazil's modern novels, and a supreme example of Latin America's so-called 'new narrative', *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* consolidates Brazil's entry into the symbolic economy of Western literature. The "maturity" of which Amado speaks refers, presumably, to the ability to *narrate* the backlands in a thoroughly *modern* way; in other words, to *appropriate* history and geography from a modern, cosmopolitan point of view adequate to a developed industrial and urban nation. Such an achievement would give the Latin American novel its ability to integrate rural and urban spaces and temporalities into the discourse of modern fiction, thus producing the unique effect of multitemporal heterogeneity that we associate with such masterpieces as Asturias' *Hombres de maíz* (1949), Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* (1958), and García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967).

Thus when the city – in particular the large metropolis – appeared in modern novels, it was almost invariably subsumed within a larger narrative of temporal unfolding in order to produce a totalizing image of the nation that would reconcile modern and nonmodern elements. Such temporal unfolding or 'development', as it began to be articulated in the Modernist

imagination, was distinct from the uniform and homogeneous 'progress' that had informed nineteenth century thinking about modernity and nation formation, in which the elites simply carried out a war against 'barbarism' in the name of 'civilization'. As Gareth Williams has shown, alongside populism and cultural nationalism, a new model of development appeared. This model that had at its center a teleology of 'transculturation', as elaborated by cultural theorists such as Fernando Ortiz and, later, Ángel Rama.[7]

Transculturation (understood as the narrative integration – and transformative subsumption – of subordinate cultures into dominant ones in order to produce a 'national' culture), converged with populism (a progressive alliance between middle-class and popular sectors in a common front) in order to produce a new discourse of national modernity, whose key trope would be *integration*. As Williams explains:

> populist phenomena in the 1920s and 1930s were invariably rooted in urban social processes as if the city and the country (in profound contradiction and conflict since colonial times) suddenly needed to enter into a relationship of dialogue and mutual accomodation in order to facilitate the state's incorporation, domestication, and modernization of its peripheries. (33)

> Indeed, as can also be seen in what would later come to be called the tradition of the *novela de la tierra* (and, in particular, in José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine*, Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra*, and Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara*), the incorporation and dissemination of regional modes and mores testifies to one of the most lasting facets of Latin American cultural nationalism: namely, the fusion effect's drive to inscribe, translate, and domesticate the nation's outsides –its negative or noncontemporaneous foundations– into totalizing modes of representation and self-constitution. (43)

These totalizing modes are profoundly inscribed into the representation of modern cities in the literature of the 1950s and 1960s, as I will show below. In imagining the nation as a totality of

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[7] See Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940), and Ángel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1982).

multiple voices (and making the metropolis into an allegory of such totality), literature attempted to narrativize and thus contain the heterogeneity of the city's disparate populations and histories. Marginal, indigenous, feminine, rural, Catholic, and other elements in Latin American culture, were incorporated within the hegemonic narrative of the nation through a process of *transculturation* which was supposed to integrate them, *over time*, into the modernizing national project of the middle classes. As John Beverley argues, "the idea of transculturation expresses … a *fantasy* of class, gender, and racial reconciliation" (1999, 47). I would add to this that this fantasy required a *future* horizon onto which this eventual reconciliation was projected. And thus the idea of development (understood as a specific modality of national modernization) emerged as a framework for theorizing the resolution of social contradictions over time.

It was at this same moment that a social-scientific discourse of *development*, disseminated by the United Nations and the Comisión Económica para América Latina (CEPAL), became hegemonic as a way of understanding Latin America's (and the Third World's) uneven modernity. The discourse of developmentalism (whose genealogy Arturo Escobar has rigorously deconstructed) imposed a modernist temporality upon the globe by casting some areas as 'developed' and others as 'underdeveloped' along a universal continuum.[8] Again to quote Williams:

> Thus, as a result of the United Nations' attempts to neutralize critical evaluations of the capitalist world system, import-substitution became the hegemonic developmentalist discourse in the United States in the years following the Second World War. … Within the context of cold war anticommunism and the advent of the import-substitution model promoted by CEPAL (in which Creole national-populist development came to be structured through Keynesian state-led economic policy, injections of foreign capital, industrialization, the protection of internal markets, and the economic integration of

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[8] For a critical genealogy of the concepts of development and underdevelopment see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development*.

national populations) populism proved to be one of the privileged yet most problematic means of negotiating the legitimacy of the patrimonial state. (61)

Industrial development failed, however, to significantly solve (or even address) social injustice. The discourse of developmentalism remained technocratic, firmly anchored upon Western rationalism, and was therefore unable to provide a suitable basis for cultural integration and reconciliation. It is not surprising, then, that writers became interested in those outsides and peripheries of the nation that remained so resistant to modernity.  As Richard Morse writes in *New World Soundings*,

> The scientists, whatever the provisos and nuances of their analyses, *rationally* perceive Latin America as 'insterted into' explicable schemes of metropolitan domination, manipulation, and desacralization. The 'marvelous realists', on the other hand, however 'leftist' their political sympathies may occasionally be, *instinctively* 'marvel at' the intransigent resistance of their societies to the imperatives of Western rationalism, capitalism, and political management. (153)

Morse perceived in marvelous realism the possibility of a critique of modern rationality and temporality, and the possibility of imagining an alternative future for Latin America.

No matter how critical writers might have been, however, the fact remains that their novels were totalizing artifacts and, as such, reproduced the logic of the nation-state's hegemony even in the process of criticizing it.

In Fuentes' *La región más transparente* (1958), for example, the Mexican Revolution is seen as having failed because instead of delivering the people from exploitation it has created a new ruling class, a technocratic bourgeoisie whose interests are strongly linked to those of multinational conglomerates. Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, Ernesto Sabato, and others, were responding to the crisis of the national modernizing process brought about by the limitations of

industrial development in peripheral countries. Without constant injections of foreign capital, Latin American industries were not capable of sustained growth. In the process of developing, therefore, these nations were becoming increasingly more dependent on the world system (a realization that would form the basis of dependency theory). Fuentes' novel clearly outlines the emergence of this new dependent bourgeoisie and the erosion of Mexico's cultural independence under the influence of multinational corporations' economic interests.

In the novels of the boom, cities appear as spaces of contradiction and conflict, where social heterogeneity cannot be fully smoothed out. Their protagonists thus take on the dimensions of existentialist anti-heroes facing the puzzle of the nation and its dilemmas. Ultimately these anti-heroes are defeated and reduced to dreaming of a future resolution, or to exiting the narrative, leaving space open for a new social subject that may emerge. The boom novels expressed ambivalence towards the national community as it had been constituted, reflecting a moment of crisis in the national-popular alliance that had sustained the modernizing project until then. Hernán Vidal for example describes the boom novels as displaying a phantasmagoric panorama of the modern city, without being able to offer any resolution to its dilemmas:

> La Revolución Mexicana es mostrada en descomposición por influencia de los conglomerados. La antigua ciudad sarmientina, foco irradiador de la civilización, se convirtió en mundo de la muerte y de los cuerpos mutilados. Entrar a ella es ahora penetrar en el ámbito de las distorsiones. (Vidal 263)

Vidal concludes: "De manera consciente e inconsciente, temática y estructuralmente la narrativa del boom ha reflejado el proceso de la desintegración nacional" (263).[9] Perhaps "national disintegration" is too strong a term for the literary projects of the boom novels, which remain, after all, national allegories. Perhaps, we should see them instead as literary artifacts in which the crisis and the dilemmas of the modern nation are laid out as puzzles to be solved and labyrinths to be traversed.

### *Totalizing urban novels*

> Pero existe … el escritor, que invariablemente toma partido por la civilización y contra la barbarie, que es el portavoz de quienes no pueden hacerse escuchar, que siente que su función exacta consiste en denunciar la injusticia, defender a los explotados y documentar la realidad de su país. (Fuentes 1969, 12)

> si los hispanoamericanos somos capaces de crear nuestro propio modelo del progreso, entonces nuestra lengua es el único vehículo capaz de dar forma, de proponer metas, de establecer prioridades, de elaborar críticas para un estilo de vida determinado. (Fuentes 1969, 98)

Urban space in the boom novels became a figure for totality, for the integration of multiple voices and subjects into one – Modernist – temporality. The tendency towards aesthetic totalization became prevalent in the literary discourse of the 1960s (Emir Rodríguez Monegal and others, for example, championed the idea of *la novela total*). As in European Modernism, the aim was to transcend the fragmentation of modern experience and achieve an aesthetic reconciliation. This idea had been formulated by T.S. Eliot in *The Wasteland* ("these fragments I

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[9] For Vidal, the boom novels are ultimately limited by their genealogical filiation with the discourse of nineteenth-century liberalism.

have shored against my ruins") and by W. B. Yeats in "The Second Coming" ("things fall apart,

the center cannot hold"), and had been carried out in the novels of James Joyce and Virginia

Woolf, among others.

In Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), the totality of Irish history is brought to bear upon the

consciousness of the narrative subjects. *Ulysses* does, however, embrace radical polyphony, so

that there are shifting centers of discourse. In the novels of the boom, by contrast, more often

than not the narrative is centered upon *one* consciousness: that of the Creole man of letters. It is

in the psyche of the artist that the totality of the nation and its contraditions can be resolved and

harmonized, through the aesthetics that Ángel Rama described as "narrative transculturation."

Thus, while novels like *La región más transparente* and *Rayuela* (or Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*)

are formally reminiscent of *Ulysses*, they are in spirit much closer to Joyce's *A Portrait of the*

*Artist as a Young Man* (1916), where Stephen Dedalus sets out to "forge the uncreated

conscience of my race." It is for this reason that the boom novels often feature an author-writer

doubled in the figure of a founder, the "demiurge who founds the polis through his writing"

(Avelar 31).[10]

Modernism's desire for totality in the face of modern fragmentation was best summarized

by Virginia Woolf when, early on, she tried to lay out her own literary path by breaking away

from the Realist novel. Woolf wrote in one of her notebooks in1908:

> I attain a different kind of beauty, achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords,
> showing all the traces of the mind's passage through the world; achieve in the end, some
> kind of whole made of shivering fragments; to me this seems the natural process; the
> flight of the mind. (Bell I:138)

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[10] On the author as writer-demiurge-founder see Jean Franco, "Narrator, Author, Superstar," and Roberto González
Echevarría, *Myth and Archive*.

This idea of *symmetry by means of discords* and *a whole made of fragments* seems to aptly sum up the literary project of the modern novel. The project links the perception of reality to the discurrence of the mind, which will take the form – in Woolf, Joyce, and others –, of interior monologue. In the boom novels, perception will similarly take the form of the flight of the mind. As in the case of Ixca Cienfuegos in *La región más transparente*, Martín and Fernando in *Sobre héroes y tumbas*, Santiago in *Conversación en la Catedral*, and Oliveira in *Rayuela*, the main character walks in the city and the disparate impressions of the urban setting converge in his consciousness, producing an articulate image that spatializes national history and culture. In the novels of the boom, urban space is also conceived as a labyrinth that can be traversed, and rendered intelligible, by the main character – the (male) author's projection. The protagonist's trajectory, even when when it ends in defeat or exile, is conceived as providing the key to the resolution (and therefore escape) from the labyrinth of history, somewhat in the manner of Stephen Dedalus' flying away (into exile) in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

In *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, Gerald Martin notes that: "In no literature … are images of labyrinths as persistent and pervasive as they have been in Latin American literature, not just recently but since the 1920s" (25). In addition to Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), and García Márquez's *The General In His Labyrinth* (1989), any number of Latin American texts have reiterated the trope of Latin America's history, cities, and destiny as labyrinthine. It is easy to see why the history of Latin America, plagued by failures and repetitions, would give rise to the idea of a cyclical labyrinth of time, as in *Cien años de soledad*. Jean Franco writes, for example: "For many writers of the boom generation, history was a cycle of failed experiments, for their novels reenact the inevitable foundering of those other booms – of rubber or coffee, of bananas or mining – that left a landscape marked by the monuments of

failure" (2002, 9). According to Martin however, the Modernist labyrinth can be traversed, and ultimately overcome:

> Yet somehow there must be a way out. When that way out has been found, Latin Americans will know where they are, who they are, where they have come from and where they are going. They will have escaped from the labyrinth of solitude, have completed the quest for identity: they will be able to look at themselves in the mirror and see what is truly there. (28)

In similar fashion to *Ulysses*, where Stephen states that "history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake," the voyage followed by the heroes of the boom novels is one of self-awareness, leading to a moment of illumination in which national history becomes present to the Ulyssean subject. Many of the boom novels thus adopt, Martin argues, a 'Ulyssean' perspective.[11] They

> are all novels in which the symbolism of national (within international) history is fused with the symbolism of individual (within universal) myth … each of them is a novel which unites the history of a continent, a country and an individual, the writer himself. (169)

These novels dramatize a journey through a specific type of labyrinth defined by the 'forking paths' of race, gender, nation, and class. What makes 'Ulyssean' novels distinctive is the personal voyage from the village or city to Europe and from there back to América again (as in *Los pasos perdidos* or *Rayuela*) with the acquired knowledge and insight that allows the writer to make sense of Latin American reality.

It is no surprise that James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) provided the decisive model for organizing this dialectic between the local and the cosmopolitan as a personal odyssey. As

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[11] The paradigmatic examples are *Men of Maize, Adán Buenosayres, Paradiso, The Lost Steps, Pedro Páramo, The Devil to Pay in the Backlands, Hopscotch, The Death of Artemio Cruz, The Green House, One Hundred Years of Solitude,* and *I the Supreme*.

Martin shows, some of the most significant aspects of Joyce's legacy were the structural incorporation of myth into the novel, the exploration of language through and in fiction, the exploration of the nature and experience of consciousness in narrative fiction, and the search for totality.[12] Joyce's uniqueness had been recognized by Borges when he wrote, in his essay "El *Ulises* de Joyce" (1925), "En las páginas del *Ulises* bulle con alborotos de picadero la realidad total" (26). Later Borges would write in "Invocación a Joyce"(1969):

> Tú, mientras tanto, forjabas
> en las ciudades del destierro,
> en aquel destierro que fue
> tu aborrecido y elegido instrumento,
> el arma de tu arte,
> erigías tus arduos laberintos,
> infinitesimales e infinitos,
> admirablemente mezquinos,
> más populosos que la historia.
> (1989, II:382)

Joyce's *Ulysses* illustrated how, through the exploration and play of language, everyday life in a big city could become a dazzling linguistic adventure, and thus indicated a literary path for breaking away from the confining limitations of modern massification and alienation. Thus, Joyce's followers discovered that "if the cities are physical and ideological prisons, perhaps they may at least be partly redeemed by language, imagination and new techniques" (Martin 116). This attempt to apprehend urban agglomeration and heterogeneity by transcending it aesthetically, *in and through language*, was one of the unifying traits of novels that used the city not merely as a setting, but as one of their main characters.

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[12] See Gerald Martin's chapter "Into the Labyrinth: Ulysses in America" in *Journeys through the Labyrinth* (123-169)  for a comprehensive overview of Joyce's decisive influence on Latin American fiction. On Joyce and Latin American fiction, see also César Augusto Salgado, *From Modernism to Neobaroque: Joyce and Lezama Lima*. For a useful collection of essays on Joyce and urban space, see Michael Begnal, ed. *Joyce and the City: The Significance of Place*.

Carlos Fuentes' *La región más transparente* (1958), sometimes considered the first novel of the boom, provided a compelling portrait of the City of Mexico at its moment of radical modernization in the 1950s. At the time, a discourse of artistic and cultural 'integration' had become prevalent in different sectors of Mexican society. As urban historian Anahí Ballent has shown, the "integración de las artes" movement, which emerged within architecture but attempted to include the visual arts as well, reflected a larger concern in Mexico with the idea of 'integration' (linked to a new discourse of cultural nationalism). The movement "intentaba incorporar elementos de la cultura nacional a los edificios, creando un modernismo mexicano" (Ballent 107). The journal *Espacios* (1948-58), edited by architects and painters, aimed to foster an art/industry collaboration following the example of Mario Pani's architectural projects. One of the journal's main concerns was with integrating tradition and modernity in order to "reconstruir la 'unidad orgánica' que (había imperado) en todas las grandes culturas" (108). In other words the project involved laying the foundations for an aesthetics of *modern national identity* – of a Mexican identity rooted not in tradition, but in modernity. Ballent notes: "En parte, se trataba de un eco de la 'unidad nacional' que ya Ávila Camacho había propuesto a la sociedad y que se prolongaría como ideología del alemanismo" (108). The idea of an integration of art, architecture, nationalism, tradition, and modernity, would influence the large architectural projects of Ciudad Universitaria and Tlatelolco square, among many others, which have given Mexico City much of its modern identity.

In a similar vein, *La región más transparente* makes an effort to integrate and represent the social multiplicity of the city in an inclusive, totalizing portrait. Such multiplicity is brought together and narrativized in the figure of Ixca Cienfuegos, a character who circulates throughout

the city conversing with all of the other characters, and listening to them talk about their lives. Significantly Ixca also walks across the urban spaces of Mexico City, while the narrative tells us what he thinks and perceives, thus making connections between spaces, people he observes in the streets, and those to whom he talks. Ixca Cienfuegos also acquires the mythical dimensions of a 'guardian', an Aztec deity who interprets the characters' life stories in terms of Aztec mythology and symbolism as well as often giving his own everyday actions the mythical meanings of Aztec rituals. Another character that functions as a point of narrative convergence is Rodrigo Pola, an existentialist anti-hero who has given up his ambitions of becoming a writer in order to marry into money, but laments the intellectual mediocrity of his life and the limitations of modern Mexico to live up to the expectations of the Mexican Revolution. Thus his conversations with Ixca provide an important space that mediates the rest of the narrative. The novel's verbal style also seeks to create a space of integration by using multiple references to pop culture, Mexican *corridos*, and the slang and linguistic affectations of different social classes, from the popular vernacular of the prostitute Gladys García to the snobbish language of the aristocrats (which is peppered with French and English words).

The banker Federico Robles verbalizes the ideology of national progress as anchored upon the development of a middle class: "Los ricos se preocupan demasiado por sus riquezas y sus dignidades para  ser útiles al bienestar general. Por otra parte, la clase menesterosa es, por regla general, demasiado ignorante para desarrollar poder. La democracia dependerá, para su desarrollo, de los esfuerzos de la clase media activa, trabajadora, amante del adelant" (249). These words spoken by Robles correspond to a quotation, *verbatim*, from Porfirio Díaz's interview with James Creelman in 1908, and bring a smirk to Ixca's lips when he hears them

being pronounced by Robles. Here Fuentes suggests that the Mexican Revolution has come full circle, creating a society that repeats the economic ideologies of the Porfiriato. Robles continues:

> Cuál no será la verdad de lo que digo, Cienfuegos … que hasta los gobiernos de más izquierdistas han forzado la marcha hacia esa estabilidad burguesa. El capitalismo mexicano le debe gratitud a dos hombres: Calles y Cárdenas. El primero puso las bases. El segundo las desarrolló en vivo, creando la posibilidad de un amplio mercado interno. (249)

By contrast Rodrigo Pola sees the nation as a problem, a puzzle. Rodrigo says that when he was young "me enteré de … mi capacidad para conocer todos mis defectos, y de mi incapacidad para superarlos." Ixca responds, "te pareces al país." Rodrigo then contrasts himself with the banker Robles: "Él sí está centrado, sabe lo que quiere. Está convencido de que trabaja por el bien del país. ¿Es suficiente hacer lo mismo que él y sentirse como él? Por Dios, ¿qué es este país, Ixca, hacia dónde camina, qué se puede hacer con él?" to which Ixca responds, "Todo" (262). As Rodrigo and Ixca walk down the Paseo de la Reforma, the disjointed context of urban traffic becomes a counterpoint to Rodrigo's excited and confused mind:

> Rodrigo levantó la cara, despertado por la insistencia de los claxons en la glorieta de Cuauhtémoc; los ríos de vehículos encontrados que subían y bajaban por la Reforma y desmbocaban de Dinamarca y Roma, de Insurgentes y Ramón Guzmán, se torcían en sierpes amalgamadas y sin solución; los claxons no cesaban, el policía pitaba infructuosamente y las cabezas emergían de los coches a gritar palabras y volvían a caer sobre los claxons unadostrescuatrocinco veces. (261)

The narrative perspective sometimes even transcends Ixca Cienfuegos, however, panning across the city as an impersonal 'seeing eye' in order to interconnect different characters in separate neighborhoods (in a manner reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*). In once scene, Federico Robles looks out his office window at the urban landscape:

Desde la oficina, Robles veía los techos feos, las azoteas desgarbadas. … Volvía a mirar a lo lejos: hasta el humo de la terminal de Buenavista, y más allá del puente, hacia la Villa. Gladys García, parada sobre el puente, fumaba un cigarrillo apestoso y luego lo dejaba caer sobre el techo de una casucha de lámina y cartón. Por el rumbo de Balbuena … Gabriel jugaba rayuela mientras esperaba a los cuates –Beto, Tuno, Fifo– para empezar a celebrar su regreso. Rosa Morales buscaba una caja barata entre los enterradores del barrio, mientras que Juan esperaba, con los labios embarrados de sangre y vino, en una plancha de la Cruz Roja. (192-93)

The apprehension of the cityscape moves beyond Federico's consciousness as it follows "todas las hebras de la ciudad que pasaban inconscientes del rascacielos y de Federico Robles" (192) and becomes intersubjective, seeing things Federico could not possibly see directly. Thus the narrative suggests that the City of Mexico is itself one of the main characters in the novel. The city, it is implied, has a life of its own and somehow connects all of its diverse individuals together.

Of crucial importance is the section entitled *Maceualli*, a Mexican pre-Hispanic term meaning "the common people." This section represents an attempt to give voice to those who have no voice in modern society. The narrative weaves together the life stories of people like Hortensia Chacón (whom Federico Robles will marry in the end), Gladys García, and Gabriel (who is back from working as a *bracero* in the United States). While Beto and Gladys talk, for example, the narrative is constantly cross-cut with italicized paragraphs inspired on pre-Hispanic texts about the creation of the universe. Myth becomes for Fuentes a language for articulating the common memory of those who have no name, as opposed to "los que sí tienen nombre" (as Fuentes states about the historical personages he catalgoues in the *Memoria de Personajes Históricos* that precedes the novel). Something similar is true of Ixca's mother Teódula Moctezuma, a widow who is also characterized as a 'guardian' and whose actions have mythical

resonance as well. The scene when she is sweeping the floor of her house, "se paseaba con la escoba sobre el piso de tierra de su jacal" (332) reenacts the myth of the Aztec goddess Coatlicue (Huizilopochtli's mother) who conceived her son after finding a ball of plumes while she was sweeping. Thus, in this section on the common people, the category of "the popular" acquires mythical dimensions within the discourse of the nation.

Another moment of mythical signficance takes place in the Zócalo in Mexico City's historic center. Ixca's hand is bleeding from a bite he received from a young boy; he walks towards the center of the Zócalo and lets his blood touch the ground:

> Bajó la cabeza y embarró la mano herida sobre la tierra suelta: apenas una gota de sangre chupada, transformada a un color seco por el polvo. Volvió a morderse la mano; hundió los dientes en la misma herida hasta sentir que por los labios le corría la nueva tibieza. (370)

This moment signals a mythical renewal and rebirth, and appears to be linked with the death of Gabriel in a bar fight. The ritual appears to ensure that his death will not be in vain, but instead will have a 'sacrificial' value. Indeed, when Ixca sees Gabriel's dead body, Teódula whispers in his ear, "Ya se cumplió el sacrificio" (508). After seeing Gabriel's body, the banker Robles feels a renewed sense of the preciousness of life. He later makes love with the dark-skinned and indigenous Hortensia Chacón, whom he ends up marrying and with whom he will have a child. This moment could be taken to symbolize ethnic and class reconciliation through love, which ensures the reproduction of the national community and opens up a space of hope for the future.

The communion with the city –or the attempt to do so– is often limited, however, by the social and cultural boundaries that cause individuals to be unable to transcend their own

limitations and fears of opening up to others. Thus Rodrigo Pola walks in the streets of downtown, observing the crowd from which he feels alienated:

> Y los cuerpos pequeños, las eternas caras mongólicas, de especie olvidada, como ictiosaurios comprimidos, jorobados sobre las comidas ardientes, escondidos detrás de sus máscaras. Y él anclado en el centro, el único hombre con conciencia de la zona intermedia, del estar entre dos mundos que lo rechazaban. (373)

The figure of the flâneur is here articulated with the idea, developed by Octavio Paz, that Mexicans wear masks that make their true selves unreadable to others.

In the final section ('La región más transparente del aire'), after the mythical cycle of death and rebirth has been completed, the narrative voice becomes disembodied. It is the impersonal voice of the city. It gives a long list of names of historical figures of Mexican history and culture, "nombres que gotean los poros de tu única máscara, la máscara de tu anonimato … mil rostros una máscara" (547). Panning over fragments of citations from Mexican history, the narrative becomes "el polvo veloz que acarrea todas las palabras dichas y no dichas" (564), which is followed by a number of disembodied voices from everyday life, bringing the novel to a close with the final paragraph:

> y sobre el puente de Nonalco se detiene Gladys García, veloz también dentro del polvo, y enciende el último cigarrillo de la noche y deja caer el cerillo sobre los techos de lámina y respira la madrugada de la ciudad … y la voz de Ixca Cienfuegos, que corre, con el tumulto silencioso de todos los recuerdos, entre el polvo de la ciudad, quisiera tocar los dedos de Gladys García y decirle, sólo decirle: Aquí nos tocó. Qué le vamos a hacer. En la región más transparente del aire. (565)

Significantly, Ixca's voice would like to touch ("quisiera tocar") Gladys García's fingertips but cannot quite reach her. The novel ends on this note of ambiguity which suggests the text's awareness of the limitations of its own aesthetic totalization.[13]

Ernesto Sabato's novel *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (1961) takes place in the early 1950s and follows the story of Martín, a poor boy from Buenos Aires who is despised by his mother and feels alienated and lonely. He falls in love with Alejandra, an intelligent but depressive, distant, and slightly insane girl from an aristocratic (but impoverished) family. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Alejandra has an incestuous relationship with her father, the psychotic Fernando Vidal, who suffers from paranoia and persecutory delusions. In the section entitled *Informe sobre ciegos* Fernando relates the plot he believes the Sect of the Blind, who dominate the underworld of Buenos Aires, are carrying out against him. He fears they mean to capture and blind him by piercing his eyes, and ultimately to murder him. In the end Alejandra sets fire to the old family house, burning herself and her father along with it. Heartbroken and estranged from the city, Martín leaves to go to Patagonia in the far South, although it is stated that he later returns to Buenos Aires.

The novel dramatizes the passing away of the ruling class that shaped nineteenth century Argentina, through the displacement (impoverishment and insanity) of a family that is able to trace its lineage back to the founding heroes or *próceres* of the nation. It thus suggests the end of the mythical 'one hundred years of solitude' evoked by García Márquez's novel, and the transformation of Buenos Aires into a materialistic, commercial, and massified city. Political resistance against the establishment (either in the form of populism or left-wing insurgency), is

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[13] For a detailed discussion of Fuentes' *La región más transparente* as an allegory of the Mexican state, see Ryan Long, *Challenging the Foundations of History: The State, 1968 and the Mexican Novel*.

characterized as ineffectual, and no social class is seen as having any coherent national project. Sabato's frustration resembles Fuentes' and Vargas Llosa's frustration with their own countries, which may explain why the narrative opens up the possibility of Martín fleeing to the mythic South that Borges had written about (and problematized) in his short story "El Sur."

The city of Buenos Aires thus becomes an allegory for the nation's failure to come into its own. In the earlier sections of the novel Martín and Alejandra frequently meet in public squares and parks, which draws attention to the nineteenth century urbanism that shaped Buenos Aires' public spaces in downtown as ample, open, and vaguely European. They often run into each other unexpectedly, as if some secret unconscious force connected them (which very much resembles the chance encounters between La Maga and Oliveira in Cortázar's *Rayuela*). Martín and Alejandra also spend some time in her family's decaying old home in Barracas, which contrasts with Martín's working-class neighborhood with its Italian immigrants.

The apprehension of the city is mediated by the paranoid delusions of Fernando, as if his pathological consciousness represented the madness of the national soul. Thus for Fernando the city appears as a labyrinth of intrigue and perversity organized by the Sect of the Blind. One day he follows one of the blind men in downtown, into a house and through a secret doorway, which leads to an underground passage below the city. The underbelly of Buenos Aires, symbolized by the network of sewers, becomes one of the book's organizing metaphors:

> A medida que iba descendiendo sentía el peculiar rumor del agua que corre y eso me indujo a creer que me acercaba a alguno de los canales subterráneos que en Buenos Aires forman una inmensa y laberíntica red cloacal, de miles y miles de kilómetros. (424)

> por ahí abajo, en obsceno y pestilente tumulto, corrían mezclados las menstruaciones de aquellas amadas románticas, los excrementos de las vaporosas jóvenes vestidas de gasas, los preservativos usados por correctos gerentes, los destrozados fetos de miles de abortos,

los restos de comidas de millones de casas y restaurantes, la inmensa, la innumerable Basura de Buenos Aires. (425)

Needless to say, Sabato here continues a long tradition in Argentinean literature of suggesting that there is an obscure 'other city' lurking behind the visible city, which goes back to Arlt, Marechal, and even Borges and Cortázar.[14]

Towards the end of the novel, when Martín finds out about Alejandra's death, he wanders the streets of Buenos Aires aimlessly. The city becomes a counterpart to his feverish mind:

> Caminaba a la deriva, como un bote sin tripulantes arrastrado por corrientes indecisas, y realizaba movimientos mecánicos como los enfermos que han perdido casi totalmente la voluntad … Así que subió al 493 y mecánicamente pidió boleto y durante media hora siguió viendo fantasmas que soñaban cosas activísimas, en la estación Florida salió por la calle San Martín, caminó por Corrientes hasta Reconquista y desde allí se dirigió al hospedaje … subió por las escaleras sucias y rotas hasta el cuarto piso, y se arrojó sobre el camastro como si durante siglos hubiese recorrido laberintos. (529)

Simultaneously, the narrative of Martín's wanderings is cross-cut with the tale of General Lavalle, a Unitarian general who was murdered by the Federalists in the 1850s while fleeing North to reorganize an attack. Lavalle's soldiers carried his rotting corpse and ultimately his bones and head to prevent their enemies from getting the head of Lavalle (which they feared the Federalists would display publicly).

As Lavalle's soldiers flee Argentina towards Bolivia, Martín flees Buenos Aires towards Patagonia, riding on a truck. When he gets out in the pampa he breathes the cold night air and notices the starry sky. The driver, his friend Bucich, goes to urinate on the ground, and Martín follows him. The scene repeats the moment towards the end of Joyce's *Ulysses* when Stephen

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[14] See especially Marechal's episode "Viaje a la oscura ciudad de Cacodelphia" in *Adán Buenosayres* (1948) for an antecedent to Sabato. Arlt's trilogy of urban novels, *El juguete rabioso* (1926), *Los siete locos* (1929), and *Los lanzallamas* (1931), is also very relevant, as are the short stories by Borges, "La muerte y la brújula" (1944), and Cortázar, "Casa tomada" (1951).

and Bloom –who has become a sort of spiritual father to Stephen– urinate together under the stars. And thus, the novel ends:

> El cielo era transparente y duro como un diamante negro. A la luz de las estrellas, la llanura se extendía hacia la inmensidad desconocida. El olor cálido y acre de la orina se mezclaba a los olores del campo. Bucich dijo:
> – Qué grande es nuestro país, pibe…
> Y entonces Martín, contemplando la silueta gigantesca del camionero contra aquel cielo estrellado; mientras orinaban juntos, sintió que una paz purísima entraba por primera vez en su alma atormentada. (551-52)

The immensity of the countryside suggests a space of openness, so that while Buenos Aires has become a phantasmagoria of delusional insanity, the novel leaves the possibility open for a new national space and a new subject, one which the narrative can only conjure subjunctively.

Mario Vargas Llosa's *Conversación en La Catedral* (1969), while it revisits the author's concerns with Peru's irremediable social and racial antagonisms, as expressed in *La ciudad y los perros* (1962) and *La casa verde* (1966), would appear to be Vargas Llosa's most pessimistic novel. Set in the 1950s during the dictatorship of General Odría, the novel follows the life story of Santiago Zavala, a young journalist and the son of a successful businessman, who goes to work for the crime pages of the newspaper *La Crónica* after a fleeting (and failed) attempt at becoming a left-wing revolutionary during his college years. The frame story is organized around the chance encounter between Santiago and his father's old chauffeur, the lower-class and dark-skinned Ambrosio. As Santiago and Ambrosio drink and talk for hours at a bar, 'La Catedral', their memories weave into multiple storylines, drawing a portrait of the city as 'Lima la horrible', an imprisoning web of deceit and perversion, prostitution, prisons, political and

military corruption, crime, and homosexuality (which appears to disgust Vargas Llosa as much as it does his characters).

As a writer for the crime pages, Santiago gets to see the worst side of the city and its underworld. It is thus that he discovers, by accident, that his father's chauffeur Ambrosio is not only his hired gun, but also his lover. These discoveries deepen Santiago's estrangement from his father and his family. Towards the end of the narrative, Santiago and Ambrosio's differences and antagonisms become more marked, and they end up arguing and parting in anger. The narrative thus suggests that the nation as it stands offers no possibility of integration for these diverse social subjects, and that their encounters merely illustrate the unbridgeable heterogeneity of Peru. Unlike Fuentes, however, Vargas Llosa does not offer any redemption of national society by recourse to pre-modern myth, focusing instead on the collective degeneration of Perú under the Odría years (1948-1956), which he describes as "la profunda corrupción que, desde el centro del poder, irradiaba hacia todos los sectores e instituciones, envileciendo la vida entera" (Prologue to the 1998 edition).

The novel begins with Santiago leaving his office at the newspaper and walking down the street:

> Desde la puerta de *La Crónica* Santiago mira la avenida Tacna, sin amor: automóviles, edificios desiguales y descoloridos, esqueletos de avisos luminosos flotando en la neblina, el mediodía gris. ¿En qué momento se había jodido el Perú? … Las manos en los bolsillos, cabizbajo, va escoltado por transeúntes que avanzan, también, hacia la plaza San Martín. Él era como el Perú, Zavalita, se había jodido en algún momento. (17)

A few pages later, as Santiago rushes to the pound to retrieve his dog, he observes the 'shit-colored' buildings: "Depósito Municipal de Perros, era allí. Un gran canchón rodeado de un muro ruin de adobes color caca – el color de Lima, piensa, el color del Perú" (23). Ambrosio,

Santiago (like his father) end up defeated, and Santiago's conversation with Ambrosio provides no friendly resolution of their differences. Santiago is also estranged from his family, having quit the university and left his parents' house early on to live at a *pensión* where he rents a room, living on his salary as a journalist. Santiago repeatedly rejects his father's offers to take him back and does not accept any of his money. He also rejects his father's attempts to persuade him to finish his law degree and help him to run the family business.

Santiago further alienates his family by getting married in secret to Ana, a nurse who is lively and sweet but evidently working class and dark-skinned (*chola*). His family immediately finds out about the wedding, however, and Santiago and Ana are pressured to visit for dinner. The evening could not be more tense, as Santiago's mother can hardly contain her anger and classist contempt for his wife: "no disimuló ni su contrariedad ni su estupor ni su desilusión; sólo su cólera, al principio y a medias. … no la abrazó ni le sonrió; se inclinó apenas, rozó con su mejilla la de Ana y se apartó al instante" (660). This makes things uncomfortable for everyone, and the visit ends explosively, with his mother yelling: "¿No ves con quién se ha casado? … ¿No te das cuenta, no ves? ¿Cómo voy a aceptar, cómo voy a ver a mi hijo casado con una que puede ser su sirvienta?" To Santiago's retort that Ana has done nothing to deserve her contempt, his mother cries, "¿No me ha hecho nada, nada? … Te engatusó, te volteó la cabeza ¿y esa huachafita no me ha hecho nada?" (663). After this Santiago refuses to see his parents, and it is only after his father's death that an uneasy reconciliation and a distant but friendly relationship with his mother is possible.

Santiago and his wife find a modest apartment in Miraflores, the same neighborhood where his family lives, but they rarely run into any of them. "El mundo era chico, pero Lima grande y Miraflores infinito, Zavalita: seis, ocho meses viviendo en el mismo barrio sin

encontrarse con los viejos ni el Chispas ni la Teté" (683). Santiago has betrayed his upper-class origins, if only to affirm his sense of pride and fierce individualism. He does not become integrated into another collectivity, but keeps to himself as he and Ana do not cultivate a circle of friends. Santiago goes out drinking with his work buddies and slowly sinks into a life of mediocrity. One day he runs into his brother, who starts talking about his current involvement in politics and asks Santiago if he is still a "communist." Santiago responds, "No soy nada ni quiero saber nada de política. Me aburre" (685).

Even as a condemnation of Peru, however, the novel achieves an aesthetic totalization, bringing to bear all of the nation's social conflicts upon the consciousness of Santiago, who can synthesize and express the defeat – or impossibility – of the national project. The novel brings Peruvian history and social diversity together by situating Santiago as an anti-hero in an odyssey of personal and national soul searching that turns out to be a voyage of defeat, but also a heroic renunciation – a kind of Modernist exile. Santiago's marriage to Ana would appear to negatively open up a space for imagining a future although that remains uncertain. Like Sabato, Vargas Llosa leaves open the possibility of a new social subject and a new national project that may emerge out of the defeat of Santiago's generation. However, Santiago's modernist alienation from upper-class society and his inter-class marriage remain confined, ultimately, to the realm of individual success or failure.

The aesthetic totalization achieved by the novels I have discussed could only be made possible by creating a privileged, trans-subjective point of view that roughly coincides with the writer's subjectivity. These novels traced meaningful and legible (if often tormented and pessimistic) urban trajectories for their characters, reproducing the idea of the city as a totality made out of

fragments, rendered intelligible in and through writing. The totalizing, Ulyssean perspective thus reflected the authoritative place of literature and of the Creole writer in modern Latin American society. The boom writers strived to achieve a radical critique of the nation that would transcend its imperfections and limitations by positing literature as a utopian space in which change was possible, always with the horizon of future-oriented temporality. In this literary space, personal and national development were both seen as coextensive with the Creole, Ulyssean perspective.

As Gareth Williams has suggested, the boom novels can be read as totalizing attempts to compensate for the inadequacies of real nations, and to produce in writing a utopian space that could not be achieved in actuality:

> Thus the calculated and orchestrated presence and promotion of the boom writers within the institutional circuits of the First World can almost be read as an aesthetic overcompensation for Latin American development's persistent inability to mediate between language groups, classes, genders, and ethnicities (that is, between its centers and peripheries. In other words, the boom – the dazzling technical prowess of Latin America's monumental national allegories – can be read not just as Latin America's moment of symbolic universalization, but also … as a last ditch attempt to breathe symbolic-aesthetic life into the persistent inability of modernity … to come to its own. The boom, in this sense, would be the writing of modernity's and of the nation-state's recalcitrant state of crisis, rather than that of its felicitous moment of symbolic universalization. (64)

The novels of the boom, and in particular the urban novels, display a radical ambiguity towards the nation's modernizing project. They attempt a sustained and rigorous critique of their societies, but the thrust of their critique is against the ways in which modernization has been carried out (which is perceived as authoritarian and corrupt), not against modernity as such. In other words, because most of the boom authors accept development (i.e., modernization with integration) as ideological truth and world destiny, they are only able criticize the forms it assumes, but not to reject its foundations. However, the years between the massacre at Tlatelolco

in 1968 and the military coup in Chile in 1973 ushered in a period of crisis leading to the final exhaustion of the grand narratives and teleology of development, as well as the withering of the role of literature as organizer of national culture, destiny, and experience.

### *The city after 1970: heterogeneity without synthesis*

In 1969, the same year that *Conversación en la Catedral* was published, José María Arguedas, despairing of the possibility of any resolution to Peru's social and ethnic divisions, committed suicide. In his last novel, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971), Arguedas included the personal diaries that chronicled his despair and his decision to kill himself. In an article entitled "The End of Magical Realism: José María Arguedas' Passionate Signifier," Alberto Moreiras argues that it is possible to read Arguedas' suicide, and its inscription into the novel, as the end or unraveling of the ideology of transculturation, which had sustained the literature of magical realism. The "end" of magical realism means, for Moreiras, not only the exhaustion of the ideology of transculturation, but also the final *end* to which transculturation pointed: modernity's ultimate inability to offer a way to reconcile and transcend cultural heterogeneity, a dead-end which Arguedas' suicide emblematized.

The kind of forced modernization that Arguedas observed in the port of Chimbote did not support his earlier ideas about the social and cultural integration of the Indians and other marginal populations. Thus the writing of *Los zorros*, Moreiras argues, would come to undo not only Arguedas's previous literary work – such as *Los ríos profundos* (1958) – but also the critical reading of these works which sustained Ángel Rama's version of 'narrative transculturation' in

*Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1982). Hence, "Arguedas' suicide must be read not as the end of the novel, but as the novel's own end" (198). His death is an event that produces a fissure in the text, a moment of unreadability that signals the implosion of meaning. Thus "Arguedas' suicide, the end of the narrative, is a moment of denarrativization" (206). It forces us to read magical realism's ultimate horizon as an impossibility, a "representation staged from a colonizing perspective," which reveals the doubtful conditions of possibility of the ideology of a "magical-real mediation of cultures" (207). Arguedas' suicide points to a moment of denarrativization and crisis of Latin America's cultural master-narratives, as a result of the very logic of modernization these narratives were meant to sustain.

The rapid modernization of urban spaces in Latin America was not producing the kind of social and cultural integration that the modern novel, and the Modernist concept of the city, had envisioned. Indeed, as the marginal populations of cities grew, the modern notion of the city as an urban center surrounded by a periphery in a situation of precarious (but eventual) integration began to take a more ambiguous shape, complicating the notions of center and periphery. This gradual splintering of the concentric and centripetal notion of the city was also related to the emergence of a multiplicity of social actors and subjectivities that could not be contained within the frameworks of representation of the modern city. One crucial moment in which urban space and politics coincided was marked by the public demonstrations of the student movement in Mexico City in 1968, ending in the infamous student massacre of October 2 at Tlatelolco square. Elena Poniatowska's chronicles of the event, collected in book form as *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), marked a definitive break with the totalizing mode of apprehending Mexico City, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. Poniatowska's book juxtaposed a heterogeneous collage of oral testimonies, thus making visible not only the political fracturing of Mexican society, but

also the emergence of new social actors and subjectivities with their own demands and ways of understanding the political.

Of equal importance was  Poniatowska's novel-testimonio published in 1969, *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, based on interviews with Josefina Bórquez, a woman from the slums of Mexico City, whom Poniatowska gives the name Jesusa Palancares in the novel. Narrated in the first person, in a tone of aggressive defiance towards society and its institutions, the novel is a female picaresque of sorts, reflecting the precarious integration and ways of making do of subjects like Jesusa, who oscillates from defiant individualism to superstitious faith in spiritualism. *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* paved the way for new forms of writing about Mexico City and for representing new, marginal subjectivities without folding them into the city as a national allegory. It would appear to be an important antecedent for Luis Zapata's mock-testimonial novel about a gay hustler in Mexico City in the 1970s, *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (1979), which will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

The post-1960s era thus witnessed a productive splintering and multiplication of ways of thinking about urban popular subjects and about popular cultures. Subjects like Jesusa Palancares and the workers and activist women interviewed by Poniatowska challenged the idea of a homogenous popular subject that could be easily co-opted and managed by the state through labor unions and other organizations, as had been the case during most of Mexico's modern history under the rule of the PRI. At the same time, these social actors revealed the limitations (and contradictions) of the modernizing process. Urban development was producing a large urban population that could not be easily contained or successfully integrated, while the countryside was becoming increasingly depopulated and impoverished. While making the city their territory, however, these populations were also producing their own forms of urban popular

culture, thus breaking away from the state-sanctioned notion of 'the popular' as a cultural identity inscribed within the totalizing discourse of the nation.

Carlos Monsiváis has eloquently chronicled and described many of these newer forms of urban subjectivity in Mexico, focusing on all kinds of cultural sites and practices. In one of his chronicles from the 1970s, "Dancing: El hoyo fonqui," he explores the emergence of the *hoyos fonquis* ('funky dives'), makeshift live-rock venues located in working-class neighborhoods in the Northern end of Mexico City. There, kids were able to drink and dance cheaply, without the need to venture into the urban center for entertainment: "démosle a estos chavos arraigados a la fuerza en sus colonias la oportunidad de una discoteque" (1988, 233). Monsiváis links the emergence of this subculture, and of the kind of rock music it cultivates ("el rock huehuenche") to a renewed sense of community among those working-class and dark-skinned youths (referred to popularly as "nacos") who feel rejected and out of place in the historic center of the city. In Monsiváis's words, "aquellos que se sienten (y son) desplazados de un centro aferrado a la exclusividad que los distancia de la realidad. ¡*El naco en México*! Aquel que no niega desde su apariencia su adhesión a la Raza de Bronce" (240). "Naco" in Mexico designates social marginalization, but Monsiváis uncovers the word's link to *totonaco*, which makes it a racial epithet as well:

> Los nacos, aféresis de totonacos, son la sangre y la raíz indígena sin posibilidades de ocultamiento. El término … alude por fuerza a la nación sumergida, distante incluso de la óptica de la filantropía, allí donde se extiende y renueva todo el desprecio cultural reservado a los indígenas. (Monsiváis 1988, 238)

Monsiváis then concludes by celebrating "el rock huehuenche" (a fusion of indigenous elements with heavy metal), as an affirmation, "la música clásica de esta generación de nacos que se

contempla y refleja en pasos y gritos y ademanes de rechazo y desprecio" (243). Thus Monsiváis attests not only to the endurance, but also to the multiplication of urban counter-cultures in spite of the repression that youth culture faced under the authoritarianism of the post-1968 era in Mexico.

Poniatowska and Monsiváis also contributed significantly to displacing the authority of the traditional writer as cultural figure (one thinks mainly of Octavio Paz or Carlos Fuentes) and creating a space for other, more marginal and heterogeneous, ways of narrating the city and its subjects. Anadeli Bencomo has argued that Poniatowska's testimonial chronicles de-solemnize the writing about the metropolis that was hegemonic in Mexico. In the work of Poniatowska and other Mexican chronicle writers such as Monsiváis and José Joaquín Blanco, for example, the classic flâneur associated with the nineteenth century man of letters gives way to a new kind of sociological observer that establishes a different relationship with the city and its multitudes.

Bencomo writes, for example, that "Luego de la *Noche de Tlatelolco,* el rol del cronista-intelectual se vería remodelado y reforzado en su labor crítica. Con Elena Poniatowska podemos hablar de una renovación que aglutinaba las propuestas de-solemnizadoras ya apuntadas en los autores de la Onda y la apertura del periodismo … en la década de los setenta," and she adds that "Monsiváis se asoma con la curiosidad del comentarista de ocasión … busca … sumergirse entre la masa urbana y tratar de entender la fuente de las motivaciones gregarias y las articulaciones de la cultura de los medios masivos" (20). Thus the role of the  writer as flâneur changes: "a la figura del *flâneur* mundano y romántico, le sucede … la personalidad mucho más política del observador social que todo pone a prueba bajo la doble lente de su mirada crítica" (24). Such changes respond to the massification and rapidity of the postmodern megacity, which has complicated and multiplied the modern metropolis, bringing about a new temporality and new

ways of apprehending the social. The unified temporality of the Modernist discourse about the metropolis has been shattered, Bencomo argues, giving way instead to a more horizontal perspective, at the level of the street.

While in its more radical formulations the figure of the flâneur is open to chance and unpredictability (as in Baudelaire, Benjamin, and the Surrealists), in many of the Modernist texts about the metropolis and the experience of modernity the flâneur's distance from the multitude constitutes the condition of possibility for the development of individuality. A dialectic between subjective interiority and objective exteriority is a crucial dynamic for the constitution of the modern individual in the metropolitan setting. Georg Simmel's famous essay of 1903, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," represents one of the most influential formulations of this idea, although the dialectic of individuality he describes can be observed in many European novels of the nineteenth century, as well as in Latin American urban chronicles and novels of the same period, as Julio Ramos has shown.[15] The distance associated with the flâneur and with the development of modern individuality does not necessarily require an aura of cultural authority, however. As Richard Sennett has shown in *Flesh and Stone* (1994), modern urban planning and individualism have combined in ways that allow most subjects in contemporary urban settings to pass each other by in public spaces with a minimum of friction, thus ensuring a sheltered individuality against a true encounter with the other.

In the introduction to Monsiváis' *Mexican Postcards*, John Kraniauskas argues that Monsiváis' narrative perspective in his urban chronicles can be characterized as one of 'critical closeness' rather than critical distance. In Monsiváis

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[15] See "Decorating the City: The Chronicle and Urban Experience" in *Divergent Modernities*, 112-147.

there is no simple critique of the false consciousness of those in thrall of such practices [of popular religiosity], which would only serve to celebrate the post-colonial ideology of progress, the myth of the Mexican Revolution, and the devastation they have produced … What may be detected instead is a constant and steady sympathy and solidarity for the poorest and most marginalized sectors of Mexican society, and a huge appreciation for their strategies of survival. (xiii)

Such practices of survival include popular religion in its syncretism with mass culture, humor and fun ('relajo'), and any number of underground cultural and artistic practices. Writing as a willing participant among the crowd, both fascinated and ironic towards such cultural phenomena, Monsiváis restores some of the unpredictability associated with the more radical understandings of the flâneur as someone that mixes with the crowd rather than standing aloof from it. The new modes of narrating the city exemplified by Poniatowska and Monsiváis are not exclusive to the *crónica urbana*, however, but have a history of their own in literary fiction, as will become evident in the discussion of writers such as Rubem Fonseca, Clarice Lispector, Diamela Eltit, Luis Zapata, and Néstor Perlongher, in the following chapters. The work of these writers illustrates the multiple strategies and tactics that writing has invented in order to engage with the challenges of the new urban space and the displacement of literature from its role as organizing center of cultural meaning.

### The Postmodern City: Amores Perros

There is a sense in which Alejandro González Iñárritu's film *Amores Perros* (2000) heralded Mexico's entry into the new millennium, announcing at the same time a new, global, Latin American cinema. *Amores Perros* does not merely represent the dilemmas of Mexico's

neoliberal postmodernity, but also exhibits within its own narrative procedures, and process of production and circulation, a global style. *Amores Perros* marked the end of an era, that of the political hegemony of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico. It expressed the uncertainties of its own moment as well as the widespread desire for political and social change.

The film begins with a spectacular, fast-paced car chase scene with very tight, enclosed shots and breathless rhythm that leads to the car crash. This car crash opens up and holds the movie together by linking all three stories and their characters. From the very opening then, the urban space is linked to chance encounters and face-to-face collisions. The aesthetics of urban space in Mexico City are easier to appreciate by reference to the image of the city proposed by Modernism. As seen in Carlos Fuentes' *La región más transparente*, for example, the Modernist city is centered, offers legible trajectories and its logic is centripetal, one of integration into the national project. It articulates multiple voices from different social sectors into a polyphonic harmony. It responds to social fragmentation with an attempt to reconcile and transcend (social, cultural, ethnic, gender) differences by positing a national space in which these differences become integrated into a unity that is larger than the sum of its parts.

*Amores Perros* represents a radical break with that model. Conflicts are centered around the family, but the family is seen as an institution in radical crisis and in a process of dissolution. The family is not seen as a place of security or private shelter from the city, but instead is seen as penetrated by market and other forces, as expressing a degree of violence that mirrors the violence that is prevalent in society. In the first story, Susana's husband Ramiro is abusive to her. Her mother-in-law, however, does nothing to defend or shelter her, but instead supports her son and lets him do as he will. It is Ramiro's brother who stands up for Susana, but his romantic interest in her will develop into a violent conflict between the brothers. In the last story, El Chivo

is hired to kidnap and murder a wealthy businessman. The man who wants him dead is his half-brother, and the motive is money. El Chivo leaves the brothers together, telling them (ironically) to "work things out", in a scene that shows the brothers fighting like dogs.

Dogs, however, are not merely emblematic of social violence in the film. They also signify the precariousness and worthlessness of human life under neoliberalism. In fact, the only way that Octavio can escape the confines of his life is by putting his dog Cofi to fight. Unlike a commodity that is exchanged, or labor that produces wealth, what is being given value is the dog's very life, which points to the prevalence of the exchange of bare life in neoliberal society. Cofi could die at any minute, which becomes analogous to the situation of most of the characters in the film. Similarly, Valeria (the model) only has her body to ensure her financial security. After getting into the car accident, and having her leg broken and later amputated, she becomes as expendable as a dog. Valeria's dog Richie, similarly, is not safe from harm simply by virtue of being a fancy dog: it gets trapped in the basement and is almost eaten to death by rats.

The film's chance encounters and intersecting trajectories also blur all reference to an organizing center in the city of Mexico. Shots are such that it is difficult to place them in any kind of geography of the city, which suggests a degree of blurring between the center and the periphery. Similarly, violence appears to be disseminated across society, as the dog-fighting venues suggest, and as is confirmed by the fact that almost everybody in the film is armed. All of this suggests that in the face of the weakening of civil institutions, the means of violence have become increasingly privatized. The film's collisions and chance encounters thus point to the ways in which most social groups have become "insecure" under neoliberalism. Before holding up a drugstore, Ramiro expresses this thought comically. As he is putting on his ski mask, he comments that soon after this he is quitting the city because "hay mucha inseguridad."

The trajectory of El Chivo is significant in this regard. After 1968, when civilian insurgent movements turned to guerrilla activity to combat the government's intransigence, El Chivo became an anarchist guerrilla. But now he lives in a situation of marginality and works as a mercenary assassin. The irony is that it is the very police officer who caught him who brings him the jobs. Hence they both participate in a decentered system of violence that has privatized the means of violence, putting them to work for private individuals. Conversely, the film also suggests that the transformation into a free-market society has radically depoliticized insurgent violence, displacing political violence onto a more diffuse and ambiguous war machine.

The violence between the brothers Octavio and Ramiro mirrors the one between Gustavo and his half-brother. Both Octavio and Gustavo use private means of violence to get their brothers out of the way. Conversely, Octavio's brother Ramiro tries to rob a bank, only to be shot dead by a security guard, another instance of the privatization of security and violence. At Ramiro's funeral Octavio, himself hurt in the car accident, attempts to confront Susana about bailing on their project to run away together, and tries to persuade her to meet him at the bus station to leave for Ciudad Juárez. But Susana does not turn up, and rather than leaving alone, Octavio remains in Mexico City. It is interesting that throughout the film Susana remains somewhat inscrutable. There is a significant shot when Octavio tells her that all is ready for them to run away and mentions, rather ominously, that Ramiro will not bother them. Octavio looks away from her, and Susana gives him an inscrutable look he does not see. Is it clear to her what he is implying? Is she consenting to having her husband attacked and beaten up so she can run away with his brother? Or is she already planning to betray Octavio? And why does she betray him and choose to stay with her abusive husband? When he confronts her at the funeral all she says is "he was my husband." This reaffirming of tradition does little to explain her motives,

however. What the film points to, perhaps, is the way in which the crumbling of the institutions of the family have left working-class women even more defenseless than before. Trapped in this highly masculinized space, between the violent brothers, and not knowing where to turn, Susana probably finds ways of acting and of protecting herself (and her baby) that remain unstated and unreadable to the viewer.

Ironically, the young Octavio does not leave the city, and instead the older man, El Chivo, adopts Octavio's dog Cofi and and takes off into a space of uncertainty. By leaving his life as a paid assassin, El Chivo displays a politics of refusal, of exodus. Although he leaves a sentimental (and somewhat moving) confession on his daughter's answering machine, the circle "El Chivo y Maru" is not closed. This moment in the film is sometimes seen as "conservative": as a reaffirmation of family values and a disavowal of El Chivo's political past. I would argue that things are not so clear. El Chivo, after all leaves. He walks away into the distance of an urban landscape, on a piece of land that is cracked and dry, which suggests openness and uncertainty at the same time.

The aesthetics of urban space in *Amores Perros*, as in many contemporary literary and filmic texts, are fundamentally different from Modernism. The film moves across social classes, from marginal spaces to wealthy apartments. But the shots are taken so that the spaces of the city are not easily recognizable. Nor is there any emphasis on the monumental architecture or the gigantic open spaces of the Federal District's historic downtown. What is offered instead is a city that appears to have no recognizable center. The blurring of the center is accompanied by a lack of legible urban trajectories. The characters move across space and across society, but they do not describe life-stories that are intelligible in any larger sense. Instead of converging towards the center, towards some space of integration, characters seem to follow their own paths

according to chance and unpredictability. There is even a tendency towards exodus at the end. Octavio attempts to leave Mexico City and move to Ciudad Juárez, but his attempt is frustrated. El Chivo, instead, adopts Octavio's dog and walks away in the final scene, disappearing into a landscape of desolation marked with uncertainty. This suspension of legible trajectories suggests the passing away of the horizons of integration that made social trajectories meaningful in Modernism. The life-stories of Octavio, Susana, and Ramiro, Daniel and Valeria, and El Chivo and his daughter Maru, are fragmentary images of the social. But although they are eloquent, they are not transcended in a larger totality or reconciled into some larger meaning about Mexican society. The film does not provide aesthetic or moral reconciliation, but offers instead a kind of openness and uncertainty that can be read affirmatively as a space for change – which is one way in which the film was received in Mexico.

Instead of closure or reconciliation, the film offers chance encounters that open up moments of thinking, momentary epiphanies. There is a significant moment when El Chivo is walking down the street, mulling over how (or whether) to kidnap the businessman, and he passes Susana and Ramiro in the street. Susana has abandoned Octavio and their plan to flee in order to stay with her abusive husband; Ramiro's face is black and blue from having been beaten by thugs sent by his brother. Similarly, El Chivo is getting ready to kidnap and murder someone and being paid by the victim's brother, in a transaction arranged by the corrupt cop who originally brought El Chivo to justice (thus ending his career as a revolutionary). This entire constellation of familial and social disintegration is brought to the fore as they exchange looks in the street. At that same moment, the salsa song by Celia Cruz, "La vida es un carnaval," begins playing. The lyrics are:

Todo aquel que piense que la vida es desigual,
tiene que saber que no es asi,
que la vida es una hermosura, hay que vivirla.
Todo aquel que piense que esta solo y que esta mal,
tiene que saber que no es asi,
que en la vida no hay nadie solo, siempre hay alguien.

Ay, no hay que llorar, que la vida es un carnaval,
es mas bello vivir cantando.
Oh, oh, oh, Ay, no hay que llorar,
que la vida es un carnaval
y las penas se van cantando.

Todo aquel que piense que la vida siempre es cruel,
tiene que saber que no es asi,
que tan solo hay momentos malos, y todo pasa.
Todo aquel que piense que esto nunca va a cambiar,
tiene que saber que no es asi,
que al mal tiempo buena cara, y todo pasa.

Ay, no hay que llorar, que la vida es un carnaval,
es mas bello vivir cantando.
Oh, oh, oh, Ay, no hay que llorar,
que la vida es un carnaval
y las penas se van cantando.

Para aquellos que se quejan tanto.
Para aquellos que solo critican.
Para aquellos que usan las armas.
Para aquellos que nos contaminan.
Para aquellos que hacen la guerra.
Para aquellos que viven pecando.
Para aquellos nos maltratan.
Para aquellos que nos contagian.

At this moment in the film, the song can only signify bitter irony. It invokes (and parodies) the use of music in Latin American film as aesthetic compensation. Music and carnival's supposed ability to transcend sadness, poverty, and despair, are here reduced to the absurd. This moment strongly suggests *Amores Perros*' refusal of an aesthetics of reconciliation.

The film thus references, in order to refuse, the aesthetics of Modernist Latin American film and its use of music to produce a sense of national harmony by "transcending" poverty through art. The best example of this is the Brazilian film *Orfeu negro* (1959), directed by Marcel Camus. The film works in a similar manner to the Modernist novels, by producing an aesthetic integration of the social margins into a unified image of the nation. The characters, Orfeu and Euridice, acquire mythic proportions by repeating the myth of Orpheus in the context of the Carnival. The use of music (*bossa nova*) is significant, as its sweet, soft and pensive rhythm helps to mediate the translation of social marginality (poverty, violence) into a level of artistic transcendence that incorporates these elements into a larger image, one that can help Brazilians look at themselves, as well as making Brazil visually intelligible to the rest of the world.

The film opens with a group of children from the slums playing in one of the hills (*morros*) of Rio de Janeiro. As the camera follows them running down the hill and into the *favela*, the song "A felicidade," by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Vinícius de Moraes, starts playing. The song talks about "sadness" and "happiness": "Tristeza não tem fim / Felicidade sim" (Sadness has no end / Happiness does). It describes the "happiness of the poor" as "the great illusion of Carninval": "People work the entire year for a moment of dreaming / To play the fantasy of a king, a pirate, or a gardener." Thus the sadness of the poor, which has no end, is transcended in the space of play, for the duration of the play (the film is based on a play by Vinícius de Moraes). In that space of Carnival and costumes, "happiness" becomes a moment of dreaming that compensates – aesthetically – for the endless time of sadness. The loud, flashy, colorful space of Carnival is therefore appropriated and transcended in the wistful music of *bossa nova*. And the poor slum dwellers become players in a drama of mythic proportions. The myth of

Orpheus then signals, indirectly, the constitution of the film itself into a sort of myth of Brazil and its people. It is precisely this kind of aesthetic reconciliation that *Amores Perros* refuses. Instead, it opens up a space in which the fragments of the nation can be put together in ways that remain uncertain, open, like chance encounters or car collisions in the urban space of Mexico City.

## 2. WALKING IN THE CITY: WRITING AND THE WITHERING OF THE LETTERED CITY

In his influential study of nineteenth-century Latin American culture, *Divergent Modernities*, Julio Ramos states that "The chronicle offered Martí a (deterritorialized) exit to the street. It enabled him to launch a critique of the book, as well as a reflection on the risks of the autonomous will of literature as a phenomenon of modernity" (2001, 143).[16] According to Ramos, Martí used urban chronicle – an impure and worldly genre, not clearly distinct from journalism – in order to capture everyday life in modern cities, thus marking a departure from (and response to) the emergence of a discourse on the autonomy of literary space in the poetry of *Modernismo*. Urban chronicle thus served to balance the intimate, poetical space of *Modernismo* with a space of exteriority that functioned as counterpoint as well as limit to the interiority of pure literary space. But urban chronicle also represented, Ramos reminds us, a way of organizing and integrating the fragmentation of modern experience. Urban chronicle achieved this by means of what Ramos calls a "rhetoric of strolling" (*retórica del paseo*): namely, the narrativization of isolated sections of the city by means of "a subject who, while walking through the city, traces an itinerary in the *discurrence* of, or the speaking about, strolling. The stroll orders for the subject the chaos of the city, establishing articulations, junctures, and bridges between disjointed spaces (and events)" (126).[17]

Thus at the heart of the literary practice of chronicling the city, or capturing the city in writing, lies the tension between two impulses: on the one hand, writing as a chronicle or *record*

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[16] "La crónica le permitió a Martí una salida –desterritorializada– a la calle. Le permitió una crítica del *libro*, así como una reflexión, muy avanzada, sobre los riesgos de la voluntad autonómica de la literatura" (Ramos 1989, 142).
[17] "Es decir, la narrativización de los segmentos aislados del periódico y de la ciudad a menudo se representa en función de un sujeto que al caminar la ciudad traza el itinerario –un discurso– en el *discurrir* del paseo. El paseo ordena, para el sujeto, el caos de la ciudad, estableciendo articulaciones, junturas, puentes, entre espacios (y acontecimientos) desarticulados" (Ramos 1989, 126).

of a way out into the streets; and on the other a rhetoric of walking as a device for mastering and domesticating the chaos of the city. We can think of these two modes of knowing – and writing – the city as analogous to the distinction Michel de Certeau makes between viewing the city from above – as a concept, the way an urban planner visualizes the city – and walking in the city as a *spatial practice*. As de Certeau writes, "The ordinary practitioners of the city … are walkers … whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (1984, 93). According to de Certeau, these urban practices "elude legibility," they are characterized by "opaqueness" and "blindness." De Certeau's argument, however, also opens up the question whether walking in the city can provide the basis for a form of knowing, of thinking, of a different order than the abstract knowing of the concept-city. In this chapter I want to argue that in the writings of Rubem Fonseca and Clarice Lispector we find a critique of modern literature's ambition to know and represent the city and its social characters. Both writers give us a kind of knowledge about the city in its contemporary formation, but they do so by means of undercutting and displacing literature's authority and ability to represent contemporary urban life.

### Rubem Fonseca's "The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro"

Rubem Fonseca's story "A arte de andar nas ruas do Rio de Janiero" (The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro, 1992) suggests that walking can indeed be a form of knowing and communing with the city, and that writing can be a record of such knowing. But even in doing so, the story also questions and undermines modern literature's attempt to represent the city as a

legible, coherent space, and exposes the limits of literature's ability to adequately integrate the urban multitude into its discourse.

The main character is a writer, Augusto, whose real name is Epifânio. After winning the lottery he has quit his job at the Water and Sewage Company to live as a flâneur. Every night he walks the streets of Rio and at three in the morning returns home to work his book, "The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro," where he records what he observes. One day he steps into a cinema-temple, a film theater that is occupied by the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls during the morning, and in the afternoon exhibits pornographic films. The pastor of the church mistakes Augusto's strange appearance and dark demeanor for a visit from Satan himself – which will later lead the pastor to try to sell his soul to Augusto in the street. Augusto also meets a prostitute, Kelly, whom he attempts to teach how to read and write. He socializes with a homeless family that lives under the canopy of the Mercantile Bank of Brasil, and also meets and has a conversation with one of the leaders of the Union of Beggars. As he walks back home, Augusto observes a small riot in progress in one of the downtown streets, Rua Uruguaiana. Street vendors that have been barred from occupying that space, aided by unemployed youths and other passers by, attack the stores, smash windows and steal merchandise. Soon enough the military police comes in, heavily armed and throwing tear-gas bombs. After walking in the city extensively, Augusto comes to formulate and try to answer the question, "Why do people want to go on living?" Augusto finds an answer for himself: he likes trees, he likes to walk, and he likes to write his book.

One explicit antecedent for the story is Joaquim Manuel de Macedo's *A Walk Around the City of Rio de Janeiro* (1862), a text dating back to Rio's days of splendor as the capital of a powerful new nation, which is filled with social commentary and descriptions of the rich and

powerful. Partly as a parody of this text, Fonseca describes in detail the streets and places Augusto walks by, everywhere encountering a panorama of urban decay, poverty, unemployment, and hopelessness, a state of affairs that in part reflects the effects of the city's impoverishment after the transfer of the national capital to Brasília in 1960, but also in part the enormous disparity of wealth distribution in Brazil. Augusto writes down what he sees: "Como anda a pé,vê coisas diferentes de quem anda de carro, ônibus, trem, lancha, helicóptero ou qualquer outro veículo" (Fonseca 600).[18] But Augusto also intends to avoid the commonplaces of writings about urban Brazil:

> Ele pretende evitar que seu livro seja uma espécie de guia de turismo para viajantes em busca do exótico, do prazer, do místico, do horror, do crime e da miséria, como é do interesse de muitos cidadãos de recursos, estrangeiros principalmente; seu livro também não será um desses ridículos manuais que associam o andar à saúde, ao bem-estar físico e às noçoes de higiene. Também toma cautela para que o livro não se torne um pretexto, à maneira de Macedo, para arrolar descrições históricas sobre potentados e instituições … Nem será um guia arquitetônico do Rio antigo ou compendio de arquitetura urbana; Augusto quer encontrar uma arte e uma filosofia peripatéticas que o ajudem a estabelecer uma melhor comunhão como a cidade. Solvitur ambulando" (600).[19]

It is significant in this passage that Augústo outlines a negative ethics/aesthetics of writing about the city. While it is harder to explain what his book is or does, it is easier to see what it is *not*. It is neither tourism, nor hygiene, nor sociology or anthropology. The passage offers a catalog of forms of writing about Rio de Janeiro (and other cities) that Augústo (and Fonseca) rejects. It suggests that writing can function like walking: not as a way to seize, capture, and fix the city

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[18] "As he walks on foot, he sees different things from those that go by car, bus, train, boat, helicopter or any other vehicle." All translations from Fonseca's "A arte de andar nas ruas" are mine.

[19] "He intends to prevent his book from becoming a sort of tourist guide for travelers in search of the exotic, of pleasure, of the mystical, of horror, of crime and misery, as is the interest of many well-off city dwellers, mainly foreigners; his book will also not be one of those ridiculous manuals that associate walking with health, well-being and notions of hygiene. He is cautious as well not to allow his book to become a pretext, in the manner of Macedo, to list historical descriptions of the wealthy and of institutions … Nor will it be an architectural guide of old Rio or a compendium of urban architecture; Augusto wants to find a peripatetic art and philosophy that can help him to establish a better communion with the city. Solvitur ambulando."

into a text of sociology or memorialism, but instead as a trajectory, a cartography that moves with the dynamics of urban life,  and as such produces a kind of knowledge and thinking that resists the closure of the concept-city. Such knowledge corresponds to what Augústo calls a "peripatetic art and philosophy" of knowing the city.

'Solvitur ambulando': 'It is solved by walking'. Walking becomes, for Augusto, a way of working through the problems of the city and encountering its social multiplicity. Fonseca writes that "Em suas perambulaçoes Augusto ainda não saiu do centro da cidade, nem sairá tão cedo. O resto da cidade, o imenso resto que somente o satanás da Igreja de Jesus Salvador das Almas conhece inteiramente, será percorrido no momento oportuno" (597).[20] Thus the story expresses an attempt to engage the urban multiplicity, which translates into the fragmentary texture of the narrative. But at the same time, it also illustrates Augusto's problematic and ultimately unachievable desire to capture the totality of the city and to tame its chaos through the practice of writing. Fonseca parodies and undercuts this tendency by making Augusto into a displaced man of letters or *letrado*, and endowing him with an outdated desire to teach others how to speak and write correctly.  Hence the text parodies not merely the conventions of writing the city in late nineteenth-century literature – and the social conditions that made possible such conventions – but also exposes the anachronism of the figure of the literary intellectual in the midst of the new urban realities.

Augusto's "infallible method" for teaching prostitutes how to read involves the use of a newspaper, an emblem of civility which civic participation with literacy. Fonseca's anachronistic and impossible character serves to highlight, in an ironic way, the bankruptcy of the project of

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[20] "In his walks Augusto has not yet left the center of the city, nor will he leave it so soon. The rest of the city, the immense rest that only the Satan of the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls knows in its entirety, will be traveled at the appropriate time."

national education whose overt purpose was to serve as an engine of national integration and upward social mobility. To quote from the story:

> Além de andar ele ensina as prostitutas a ler e a falar de maneira correta. A televisão e a música pop tinham corrompido o vocabulário dos cidadãos, das prostitutas principalmente. É um problema que tem de ser resolvido. Ele tem consciência de que ensinar prostitutas a ler e a falar corretamente em seu sobrado em cima da chapelaria pode ser, para elas, uma forma de tortura. Assim, oferece-lhes dinheiro para ouvirem suas lições, pouco dinheiro, bem menos do que a quantia usual que um cliente paga. (600)[21]

Most of the migrants that swell the urban population come from the interior, from Brazil's Northeast. They are uneducated and often illiterate. But for Augusto reading and writing, as well as speaking and spelling correctly, are essential conditions for civic participation. When he runs into two young men spray painting the walls of the Municipal Theater with graffiti, he is not so much concerned about what they are doing, as with the fact that they make spelling errors:

> Dois jovens escrevem com spray nas paredes do teatro, que acabou de ser pintado e exibe poucas obras de grafiteiro, NÓS OS SÁDICOS DO CACHAMBI TIRAMOS O BASSO DO MUNICIPAL GRAFITEROS UNIDOS JAMAIS SERÃO VENSIDOS … "Hei", diz Augusto para um dos jovens, "cabaço é com cê-cedilha, vencidos não é com s, e falta um i no grafiteiros." O jovem responde, "Tio, você entendeu o que a gente quer dizer, não entendeu?, então foda-se com suas regrinhas de merda." (600)[22]

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[21] "In addition to walking [Augusto] teaches prostitutes how to read and write correctly. Television and pop music have corrupted the vocabulary of citizens, especially prostitutes. It is a problem that needs to be solved. He is conscious that teaching prostitutes how to read and write correctly in his apartment at the top of Chapelaria street can be, for them, a form of torture. So, he offers them money to hear his lessons. Not much money, much less than the amount a customer usually pays."

[22] "Two young men write with spray-paint on the walls of the theater, which is freshly painted and exhibits few graffiti, WE THE SADISTS OF CACHAMBI PULL THE BACE FROM UNDER THE MUNICIPAL GRAFITISTS UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATID … 'Hey', says Augusto to the two youths, 'base is spelt with s, defeated is not with i, and there's an f missing from graffitists'. The young man responds, 'Uncle, you understood what one wanted to say, didn't you? Then go fuck yourself with your little shit rules'."

Augusto correctly reads the youth's vandalism as a political intervention of sorts. But he tries, comically, to lend a hand with spelling and grammar.

Fonseca's story also draws attention to the ways in which language and linguistic ability become crucial in the process of integration into urban culture. The story of Pastor Raimundo, for example, illustrates how his gift of speech allows him to enter into the Church and thus progress socially. His trajectory is in no way mediated by literary or Enlightenment models of knowledge, however:

> O pastor Raimundo migrou do Ceará para o Rio de Janeiro quando tinha sete anos, junto com a família que fugia da seca e da fome. Aos vinte anos era camelô na rua Geremário Dantas, em Jacarepaguá; aos vinte e seis, pastor da Igreja Jesus Salvador das Almas. … Tinha sido um bom camelô, não enganava os fregueses, e um dia um pastor, ouvindo-o vender suas mercadorias de maneira persuasiva, pois sabia falar uma palavra depois da outra com a velocidade correta, convidou-o a entrar para a Igreja. Em pouco tempo Raimundo chegou a pastor; agora tem trinta anos, quase se livrou do sotaque nordestino, adquiriu a fala neutra de certos cariocas, pois assim, imparcial e universal, deve ser a palavra de Jesus. (596)[23]

Raimundo's ability to speak clearly and to shed his Northeastern accent makes him an effective pastor. But the kind of knowledge and values he exhibits could not be any further from modernist ideals of civic emancipation. Indeed, in interpreting Augusto's visit to his Church as a manifestation of the devil, Raimundo blends Christian theology with popular religion, spiritualism, and superstition. Following the advice of his bishop, who suggests that a pact with Satan might help to ensure larger attendance and better profits for his parish, Raimundo seeks out

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[23] "Pastor Raimundo migrated from Ceará to Rio de Janeiro when he was seven years old with his family, which was fleeing drought and hunger. At twenty years of age he was a cart vendor on Geremário Dantas street in Jacarepaguá; at twenty-six, pastor of the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls. … He had been a good cart vendor, never cheating his customers. One day a pastor, hearing him sell his products persuasively –for he knew how to speak one word after the other at the correct speed– invited him to join the Church. In a little while Raimundo became a pastor; now he is thirty years old, has almost fully shed the Northeastern accent, acquiring the netural speech of certain Cariocas – for such, impartial and universal, must be the word of Jesus."

Augusto. When he finds him and asks for his name, Augusto gives his pen-name, then immediately adds "Epifâno." Raimundo then attempts to bring up the issue of a pact, but Augusto pays no attention and walks away, leaving Raimundo disconcerted and shivering in the rain. He then goes into a snack bar: "toma um suco de goiaba e rememora seu inominável encontro. Ele descobrio o nome sob o qual Satã se esconde: Augusto Epifânio. Augusto: magnífico, majestuoso; Epifânio: oriundo de manifestação divina. Ah! ele não podia esperar outra coisa de Belzebu senão soberba e zombaria" (621).[24]

The misunderstandings and misreadings that take place in the story point to national education's inability to produce a unified cultural space. Instead, it seems that the language can be spoken and understood in multiple ways, in the same manner that urban spaces can be used in divergent and incommesurate ways (by using a pornographic theater as a Protestant temple, for example). It is therefore signficant that Augusto, like the protagonist of Vallejo's novel *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994), is obsessed with grammar and correct speech. I believe it is possible to read Fonseca's story as alluding to, first, a generalized crisis of Enlightenment models of pedagogy based on literacy and literary culture and, second (and more specifically), a number of debates among Brazilian cultural critics in relation to the status of literacy vis-à-vis mass culture and civic empowerment. I will explore each of these dimensions, respectively.

Historically grammar has been, after all, closely linked to the modern nation-state in Latin America. As Julio Ramos demonstrates in *Paradojas de la letra* (Paradoxes of the Letter, 1996), in the 1840s Andrés Bello established grammar as a foundational discourse of the state. For Bello, grammar was meant to safeguard the coherence and unity of the language spoken within the national territory against fragmentation: "En Bello el discurso gramatical se erige en

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[24] "he drinks a guava juice and recalls his unnameable encounter. He discovered the name under which Satan hides: Augusto Epifânio. August: magnificent, majestic; Epiphanic: manifestation of divine origin. Ah! What else could he expect from Beelzebub except pride and arrogance."

respuesta a un terror específico: la monstruosidad, para el intelectual ilustrado, de la dispersión y fragmentación acarreadas por el uso popular de la lengua" (Ramos 1996, 11). And hence, "Para muchos intelectuales, como para el mismo Lugones, por ejemplo, la inmigración generaba – según las metáforas de más circulación en la época– una crisis del 'alma' nacional; crisis cristalizada en la 'contaminación' de la lengua en boca de los millones de inmigrantes proletarios" (8). Whether it involves illiterate proletarians or migrants from the interior, the multitude is always in danger, for the literary intellectual, of disfiguring language into a myriad of mutually unintelligible dialects and thus frustrating the linguistic closure necessary for the consolidation of civic order, the law, and national culture. It must be remembered, Ramos insists, that for Bello speaking correctly was the expression of a certain *order of discourse*, of a *cognitive faculty* that ensured the subject's entrance into the civic order. By means of grammar and correct (clear, distinct) speech, it became possible for the individual's subjectivity to be sutured to the symbolic order of the law.

Thus when Augusto states that "television and pop music have corrupted the vocabulary of citizens, especially prostitutes," Fonseca is parodying literary intellectuals' tendency to blame the mass media for education's failure to effectively produce a public sphere of informed opinion, action, and citizenship. What "A arte de andar nas ruas" makes visible here is the withering of the discourse of national formation that linked subjectivity, reason, and law to literature and literary culture. Namely, what Ángel Rama famously analyzed as the *lettered city* in Latin American culture. [insert here: rama's idea was that the politicized lettered city would bring about democratization. (intro)]

But Fonseca's text situates itself at a moment when literature has been effectively displaced from hegemony by mass culture and urban agglomeration. It seems then to pose – or at

least to suggest – the question about what writing can be in the context of a radical displacement of literature from its hegemonic function in the reproduction of national culture and state institutions. In this context, does the displacement of literature from hegemony represent a triumph of the "real" city over the lettered city, or should it be seen instead as a symptom of the decline of a larger configuration of discourses and knowledges that sustained those very institutions – civil society, citizenship, education – that the withering away of the lettered city was supposed to render more democratic? This question references specific debates in the Brazilian cultural sphere regarding the status of literacy and literary culture and its relationship to mass empowerment and social justice. These debates that have involved, at different times, intellectuals from Paulo Freire and Antonio Candido to Roberto Schwarz and Silviano Santiago.

In "National by Imitation," for example, Schwarz starts out by stating that "We Brazilians and other Latin Americans constantly experience the artificial, inauthentic, and imitative nature of our cultural life" (264). He then proceeds to show that the sense of inauthenticity is not the result of Western culture having been inappropiately "copied" in Brazil – as cultural nationalists wish to suggest – but of the exclusion of the majority from the realm of modern culture in a country that built its modern social structure on the basis of slave labor. Schwarz explains: "The argument [against "cultural imitation"] obscures the essential point, since it concentrates its fire on the relationship between elite and model whereas the real crux is the exclusion of the poor from the universe of contemporary culture" (279). Thus the answer to cultural inauthenticity "lies in the workers gaining access to the terms of contemporary life, so that they can redefine them through their own initiative" (280). Schwarz thus understands "culture" as something from which the poor are fundamentally marginalized. He also implies that without a process of political democratization, "culture" is bound to remain alienated from

the majority of the population. Hence, Schwarz forcefully rejects the idea that mass culture can provide a framework for the emancipation of the majority: "antinationalists invoke the authoritarianism and backwardness of their opponents, with good reason, while suggesting that the reign of mass communication is either emancipatory or aesthetically acceptable" (268). He in turn characterizes the celebration of mass communication's democratizing potential as "fundamentally conformist."

Schwarz's arguments echo a more traditional Marxist position previously articulated by Antonio Candido in his influential essay of 1973, "Literatura e subdesenvolvimento." In "Reading and Discursive Intensities," Silviano Santiago summarizes Candido's position in order to polemicize with it. Candido calls attention to the small size of the reading public in Brazil, which condemns writers to be producers for minorities and effectively marginalizes the masses from access to culture. He believes that "For the market of books to improve and for Brazilians to emancipate themselves as citizens, it should be enough for them to become literate" (244). This conclusion was problematic for Candido, however, "because of the acute and (for him) pernicious interference of the mass media in the relation between literary high culture and its newly alphabetized potential audience" (244). Candido was thus indirectly criticizing the military dictatorship's effort to restructure literary education. The dictatorship had created, Santiago notes, a Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização (MOBRAL) "to replace the popular literacy workshops championed by Paulo Freire" (243 n3).

In Candido's view, alphabetization was insufficient to ensure access to education and civic emancipation for the majority because mass culture would ensure that new urban subjects passed directly from oral folklore to the urban folklore created by the culture industry, without the mediation of literary culture. Mass culture is thus seen as an enemy of the social and

intellectual improvement of the population. Candido compares it to the Jesuit catechism used to convert Indians and Africans to Christianity. In his view, "the mass media, in our own day, employs the production of simulacra to indoctrinate the peasantry and urban proletariat" (244).

Santiago responds directly to Candido's arguments by pointing out that "The acquisition of literacy, as they [Candido and his followers] understand this, was, indeed, the path of human emancipation a century ago, when the access to modern knowledge depended crucially on the degree or reading skills an individual possessed" (245). This is no longer the case, however, since the advent of film, television, and the culture industry. Santiago therefore criticizes the "defenders of cultural modernism" for holding on to a nineteenth century ideology of education and literacy. Furthermore, Santiago argues, cultural modernists pay too much attention to the analysis of the *production* of cultural commodities, but very little to their *reception* (247). Instead, he suggests that we should focus on the *act of reading* as the space of emancipatory possibilities:

> In a mass society of peripheral capitalism such as Brazil, we should look for ways to improve the interpretation of both spectacles and simulacra by ordinary citizens. This means that the production of meaning ceases to be a monopoly of restricted minorities … Meaning in symbolic and/or cultural production becomes plural and unattainable in its plurality. (247-48)

The production of cultural meaning thus "is no longer necessarily articulated by the traditional institutions of knowledge and their acolytes" (248). Powerful as Santiago's argument is, however, it has its own limitations. As Jean Franco points out:

> This recommendation reasserts the pedagogical function of the intellectual and extends the concept of critical reading to the media. But it does not take into account the severely

impoverished nature of the media themselves, an impoverishment that has everything to do with ratings. (264)

Santiago advocates a notion of "cultural literacy" instead of the traditional models based on grammar and national literature. At the same time, however, his argument implies a committed cultural pedagogy, but leaves open the question of where the agency for such an endeavor is to be located. If we are to understand that the agency of reading is disseminated across society, as he suggests, it is hard to see how a critical pedagogy can compete against the host of private interests that control the production and dissemination of images and cultural messages. This is in no way to dismiss Santiago's argument, merely to point out that the debate surrounding the relationship between mass communication, cultural literacy, and civic emancipation, remains open.[25] Perhaps one of the problems with the notion of critical pedagogy in cultural studies is that it shares with the cultural modernism it rejects a modern idea of civil society which is no longer viable in global society, as the spaces of civil society have been folded into the market or into deterritorialized mechanisms of surveillance and control.

In "The Withering of Civil Society" (1995) Michael Hardt, following Deleuze, argues that we may be witnessing today a passage from a disciplinary society to a society of control. This means that the mechanisms and diagrams of power in modern societies are being reconfigured. Civil society, understood as a network of institutions (the family, the church, the school, the factory) or "disciplinary enclosures" aimed at the education of the collectivity and the mediation between the people and political society, is withering away. Power no longer works primarily by reproducing fixed points and identities, but instead by enabling flexibility, mobility,

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[25] One example of committed cultural pedagogy might be the *Revista de Crítica Cultural* edited by Nelly Richard in Chile. The journal engages a broad spectrum of literature, the arts, and mass culture, bringing all kinds of cultural practices and texts under critical analysis. As in the case of most alternative and independent publications, however, the *Revista* remains alive among radical academics and intellectuals, but nobody would confuse it with a publication of broad popular appeal.

and speed (Hardt 1995, 36). What has declined in importance then are "these functions of mediation or education and the institutions that gave them form" (40). On the one hand, the withering of the concentric city and its enclosures suggests a blurring of the center-periphery structure of cities and societies, indicating perhaps a more dispersed space of control with flexible and modular institutions. On the other, the decline of the state's ability both to discipline and to educate its citizens can be taken as indexes of a larger crisis and reconfiguration of citizenship where discipline (conceived as education, integration, and even reform) has acquired a secondary role. This crisis signals the passage from a strong disciplinary and authoritarian state – in Brazil and elsewhere – to a decentered, managerial state, much more open to the flux of neoliberal globalization.

*Cities as People*

The urban characters Augusto meets do, after all, find ways of surviving and enduring in adverse conditions and of making their voices heard one way or another, even if they fail to live up to traditional standards of civility. They *make do*, sometimes displaying what de Certeau calls "tactics of resistance." Young men find ways of expressing their frustration by spray painting the walls of public buildings, the unemployed riot against stores. Furthermore, some of these tactics of resistance effectively signal collective political mobilization, even if the do not correspond to mainstream politics and therefore fall short of achieving hegemony. Kelly, for example, states that she is considering whether to join the prostitutes' association: "Mas aí eu descobri que tem

três associações de prostitutas e eu não sei para qual delas entrar." Then she reflects, "organizar

marginal é a coisa mais complicada do mundo" (610).[26] Augusto also meets and chats with Zé

Galinha, the president of the beggars' union, who is upset to hear their movement referred to by

that name, however: "Nosso nome é União dos Desabrigados e Descamisado, a UDD" (623).[27]

The beggars have organized, Zé Galinha explains, to display their misery and filth as overtly as

possible for all to see, in order to make it impossible for the city to deny their existence.

But Fonseca's story also illustrates the limitations and fragility of these ways of "making

do."[28] Just as the art of walking may be threatened by urban decay, overpopulation, and

insecurity, the arts of everyday endurance are also menaced by violence and displacement. The

appearance of McDonald's on Rio de Janeiro's urban landscape threatens to disfigure the city's

cultural fabric, while at the same time it also expresses relations of deterritorialization and global

capital flows. Augusto of course simply includes McDonald's into his discourse of walking: in

downtown, they make useful stops for urinating, as their public bathrooms are clean and

odorless, unlike those of taverns:

> Vai até Cinelandia, urinar no McDonald's. Os McDonald's são lugares limpos para urinar,
> ainda mais se comparados com os banheiros dos botequins, cujo acesso é complicado; no
> botequim ou bar é preciso pedir a chave do banheiro, que vem presa num enorme pedaço de
> madeira para não ser extraviada, e o banheiro fica sempre num lugar sem ar, catinguento e
> imundo, mas os dos McDonald's são inodoros, ainda que também não tenham janelas, e
> estão bem localizados para quem anda no centro. (601)[29]

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[26] "That's when I found out that there are three prostitutes' associations and I don't know which one to join";
"organizing marginal people is the most complicated thing in the world."

[27] "Our name is Union of the Shirtless and Shelterless, USS."

[28] I am referencing here the title of de Certeau's book *Arts de faire: L'invention du quotidien* (trans. *The Practice of Everyday Life*). It might be possible to translate *arts de faire* roughly as "the arts of making do," which I think captures de Certeau's idea of the endurance and survival of the multitude in the midst of regimes of power.

[29] "He walks to Cinelandia, to urinate at McDonald's. McDonald's are clean places to urinate, especially when compared to the bathrooms in taverns, whose access is complicated. At the tavern or bar it is necessary to ask for the key to the bathroom, which comes fastened to an enormous piece of wood so it won't be lost, and the bathroom is

At the same time, however, the beggar Benevides tells Augusto that he and his family are afraid of being kicked out of their place under the canopy of the Mercantile Bank of Brasil: "Estão dizendo que vai ter aqui na cidade um grande congresso de estrangeiros e que vão querer esconder a gente dos gringos." Benevides feels safe by the bank, and has made the downtown his home. Augusto, who was born and raised in downtown Rio, understands his unwillingness to move anywhere else: "ele também não sairia do centro por nada" (614).[30]

I want to suggest then that "The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio" can be read as an attempt to think through its own historical moment. It eloquently exhibits the ambiguities of the moment of transition from one regime of power to another, from the crumbling of the enclosures of civil society to the prevalence of the flexible modulations of control. It thus offers the tension and dialogue between two images, on the one hand Augusto using the McDonald's to urinate and thus being able to continue his lifestyle as a flâneur in the old downtown; on the other a congress of foreigners (presumably businessmen) displacing the poor from their shelters in the downtown urban space. Fonseca's story thus invites us to think about the possibilities and limitations of the aesthetics of urban space in Latin American cities. If indeed, as Walter Benjamin once wrote, "Streets are the dwelling place of the collective" (1999, 423), Fonseca's text radically problematizes the relationship between the streets and the collective by showing how the consequences of globalization and state devolution in Latin America are redefining what we understand by the street, the city, public space, and the collective.

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always located in a place without air, stenchy and filthy. But McDonald's are odorless, even though they also have no windows, and are well located for those who walk in downtown."

[30] "They're saying that there's going to be a large congress of foreigners in the city, and that they're going to have to hide us from the gringos"; "he would also not leave the downtown for anything."

In his article "Cities as People" (1992), urban historian Richard Morse argues that during the later decades of the twentieth century, the status of the urban crowd in Latin American cities began to change noticeably. As migrants invaded the urban centers and take over its public places, developing their own informal economy, they began to define the outlines of a permanent self-employed, informal sector: "The informal sector does not constitute a 'reserve army' but, as it has assumed permanent features, an alternative rather than a subordinate realm of urban society" (17). It no longer makes sense, Morse argues, to understand urban migrants as "marginal" to the city. "For impoverished migrants," Morse writes, "are not marginals; they are the *people*. The marginals are the elites, technicians, bureaucrats, and academicians. It is *they* who require incorporation" (18). He continues:

> It is rather a people's invasion that appropriates the city center, creates its own space for commercial activity, causes deterioration of tourist hotels and promenades, and in seaboard locations appropriates the beaches. For the first time since the European conquest, the city is not an intrusive bastion against and control center for the rural domain. The nation has invaded the city. Urban physical and social space now reflects national society as a whole. (19)

Morse saw an enormous democratizing potential in the invasion of the city center by the multitude. Indeed, he saw this development as an instance of the *people* (the *nation*), appropriating urban space and shaping it in their own ways.

Morse's contention is problematic mainly because it does not take into account that, even as urban physical space changes and urban populations redefine the economic and social order in large cities, the parameters that define "the people" and "the nation" also change. Parameters such as "the people", "civil society", "public space", and "citizenship" are also being redefined

as urban society changes. It is therefore difficult not to be skeptical, as urban populations begin to be increasingly more vulnerable to the effects of the retreat of the state and to the pressures of the global market. Under these conditions, there is no guarantee that the "people" are indeed included within any larger entity called "the nation." Hence the proximity of the people to the urban centers of power does not necessarily ensure access to the benefits of citizenship. Indeed, the question of the status of the urban crowd needs to be posed as a question of the redefinition of the meanings and boundaries of citizenship, and not merely as a question of the people's *presence* in (and appropriation of) public spaces.

In an article on crime and the imagined geography of citizenship in Rio de Janeiro, "Pariahs of the Wonderful City," urban sociologist Gianpaolo Baiocchi argues that the period of transition to democracy in Brazil (1977-1982) witnessed as well the emergence of a number of public discourses on new urban criminality, discourses that aimed to cast slum dwellers (*favelados*) as violent, irreformable criminals, who did not "belong" in the city and should not be entitled to civil rights. Since the late 1970s, explains Baiocchi, the slums have been characterized by city officials and the media as places of danger, corruption, and moral decay, belts of crime that are choking the city: "The slum, by association, became a source of an alternate order that threatened the order of the city … a world deemed beyond normalization and integration," (153-54) and as such could only call forth the most repressive measures by the police.

As new social movements began to gather force, politicizing urban space and demanding political democratization, social justice, and inclusion, the uncertainties associated with the transition to a new society called forth new discursive constructions of the poor in order to fix their place in the new order: "As these 'frontiers' were called into question in Rio de Janeiro

during Brazil's democratic transition, new discourses were summoned to re-stabilize their boundaries" (146). Baiocchi continues:

> what was unique to discussions about the city and its problems at this time was that they underwent a shift away from constructing social problems as individual problems and toward other sorts of explanations. While individual failings call for individualized interventions and surveillance –the kind of 'panopticist' disciplinary techniques Foucault describes as part of modern regimes of power– demographic explanations that explain crime as a by-product of excess population call forth responses of division, separation, and population control, and pose the impossibility of these 'excess persons' enjoying the benefits of citizenship. (147)

Hence demographic explanations for crime (the "excessive" or "uncontrolled" reproduction and proliferation of the poor) combined with the discourse on "new criminality" (the irreformable nature of these "violent" new criminals) to give rise to a new relationship between the city and the people, in which boundaries and peripheries were no longer defined by a logic of integration, but instead by borders of inclusion/exclusion.

Unlike disciplinary logic, which is interested in enclosures, ordering, and reform of criminals, the non-disciplinary model works on the basis of the idea of the 'city besieged by the plague'. The poor began to be seen not as belonging in any specific place in the city, but rather as posing an external threat to the city's order. Discourses about the dangerous and irreformable nature of criminals are of course coherent with the insecurity of economic crisis and the downward mobility of the middle classes. Nevertheless, Baiocchi argues, they also suggests contradictions in the democratic process itself. Hence: "A more complete explanation would have to include the uncertainties associated with the transition to democracy and with the future of the city. In a sense, the transition away from a dictatorship also meant a transition away from ordered and safe cities and very fixed political horizons" (156). As Baiocchi explains:

The fact that this takes place during Brazil's transition to democracy is particularly significant, as it reveals contradictions in the democratization process itself. Attention to discourses about the city and its places brings attention to the fact that the transition to a formal democracy was part of a process of the re-organization of citizenship that, in significant ways, drew boundaries around the political community that were ultimately more exclusionary, despite the demands of social movements. (147)

This reorganization of citizenship traced new, more subtle (but no less forceful), boundaries around the community. Such boundaries are reinforced today by what urban anthropologist Teresa Caldeira for example, in her book on crime and segregation in São Paulo (*City of Walls*), analyzes as discourses of violence and criminality that aim to strip urban dwellers of citizenship rights.

The transition from the 1970s to the 1980s was therefore of particular significance in the political and symbolic redefinition of urban spaces in Latin America. The flexible, post-disciplinary subjectivities that have become universally prevalent in cities in the time of globalization (as seen in Fonseca's story) began to emerge and to be produced in this transitional period, summoning a crisis of the imagined geography of citizenship along with a crisis in literature and culture's ability to represent the national community.[31] In the case of Mexico, for example, new social movements and social actors at the street and neighborhood level began to contest and redefine the state-sanctioned concepts of the city, the people, citizenship, and civil society. This process was captured in detail in the chronicles of Monsiváis in *Entrada libre* (1987) and Poniatowska in *Nada, nadie: Las voces del temblor* (1988). In the case of Brazil, two

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[31] In the countries of South America (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay), this transformation coincided with a transtion to a "post-dictatorial" society. In *The Untimely Present*, Idelber Avelar has eloquently analyzed the crisis in literature's ability to represent the national community in post-dictatorial, neoliberal times. However, the spatial and symbolic processes I am discussing also apply to the crisis of authoritarian populism in Mexico, and indeed extend beyond Latin America in the form of global modulations of control. Thus they go beyond the post-dictatorship logic and require a broad focus that can allow us to take into account, rather, processes of *long duration*.

crucial texts from this period are Clarice Lispector's famous novel *The Hour of the Star* (1977), which will be discussed next, and Héctor Babenco's film *Pixote: A lei do mais fraco* (1981), which focuses on the life of a street kid from the favelas of São Paulo who escapes from a reformatory to lead a life of delinquency and precariousness. *Pixote* and *A hora da estrela* can be read as early traces in literature and film of the radically different new status of urban marginality and of the uncertainties of the new nation in its transition to a democratic (but also neoliberal) model of governance. The reconfiguration of urban geography and citizenship challenged culture's ability to continue to represent marginality as 'marginal' as well as its ability to imagine and represent the national community.

*Urban Trajectories in Lispector's The Hour of the Star (1977)*

I want to suggest that the questions of the reconfiguration of urban geography and citizenship, which became very urgent in Brazil and the rest of Latin America towards the end of the 1970s, provided the occasion for a rethinking of the practice of writing and its relationship to subalternity. One example of this is Clarice Lispector's novel *The Hour of the Star* (1977). Rather than taking writing as an occasion to represent urban poverty, Lispector uses writing to interrogate the authority of literature and to suggest a practice of writing that resists thinking of itself as representation of the other or as critical pedagogy.

In the afterword to his translation of Clarice Lispector's *A hora da estrela*, Giovanni Pontiero notes that:

Back in Rio, [Lispector] also began to make regular trips to the street market specializing in crafts and wares from North-eastern Brazil, that takes place every Sunday in the São Cristóvão district of the city. It was here that the author could observe at her leisure the lowly immigrants from the North-east who came to buy and sell or simply to watch, re-enacting for a day the customs and traditions of their native region. The São Cristóvão market evoked the sights and sounds Clarice Lispector had savored as a child and the unmistakable physical traits of the North-easterners who gathered there provided her with mental sketches for the principal characters in *The Hour of the Star*. (Lispector 1992, 90)

The emphasis on recognizing Northeasterners through physical traits will become important in *A hora da estrela*, as a segment of the narrative hinges upon Macabéa's and Olímpico's encounter in the streets of Rio, immediately recognizing each other as Northeasterners:

no meio da chuva abundante encontrou (explosão) a primeira espécie de namorado de sua vida, o coração batendo como se ela tivesse englutido um passarinho esvoaçante e preso. O rapaz e ela se olharam por entre a chuva e se reconheceram como dois nordestinos, bichos da mesma espécie que se farejam. (43)[32]

This question of recognition of the other, in the streets, haunts the narrative and constitutes, indeed, the spark that prompts the act of writing, according to the narrator:

É que numa rua do Rio de Janeiro peguei no ar de relance o sentimento de perdição no rosto de uma moça nordestina. Sem falar que eu em menino me criei no Nordeste.

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[32] "In a downpour of rain, she met (bang) the first boy-friend of any kind she had ever known, her heart beating furiously as if she had swallowed a little bird that continued to flutter inside her. The boy and the girl stared at each other in the rain and immediately recognized each other as native North-easterners, creatures of the same species with that unmistakable aura" (42).

Também sei das coisas por estar vivendo. Quem vive sabe, mesmo sem saber que sabe. (12)[33]

This tension, however, the recurring question of how it could be possible for the narrator, Rodrigo S. M., an educated middle-class man (and lurking behind the narrator, the author, Clarice Lispector), to understand and represent the poor and semi-literate girl from the Northeast, will continue to haunt the novel, problematizing the very act of writing. This will lead the text to deauthorize and unravel itself.

Lispector's text constitutes a meditation of the very possibility of writing as a space of encounter with the other. The crucial question it poses, it seems to me, is how to represent the subaltern other without approaching her in a spirit of humanism – which would prompt a recognition of *myself* in the other – but instead, by allowing for the possibility of recognition of the other *as other*. This would correspond to what Gareth Williams has characterized as thought's opening up to a "relation not just *to* the Other … but to a relation *with* the Other and with otherness that is, itself, Other" (288).

The text uses multiple strategies of distancing in order to complicate the relationship between author, narrator, and 'star' (*estrela*, who in this case may be a 'star', but is also somewhat less than a character). Gerald Martin has noted the effectiveness of this overlay of disidentifications:

> The narrative device of employing a masculine presence works brilliantly in a number of ways: not only does it subvert possible hostility, conscious or unconscious, to feminine

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[33] "In a street in Rio de Janeiro I caught a glimpse of perdition on the face of a girl from the North-east. Without mentioning that I myself was raised as a child in the North-east. Besides, I know about certain things simply by living. Anyone who lives, knows, even without knowing that he or she knows" (12-13).

special pleading; it so heightens the glare of knowledge and sophistication, through the implied author's obsession with philosophy and the nature of fiction, as to shine back upon the reader himself (or even herself), who is almost certainly as bit as committed to consumer society and its messages as the hapless protagonist whom he or she pities but probably disparages. (350)

Clearly the novel mobilizes (and parodies) stereotypes about women writers in order to create a space for writing about social injustice without sentimentality:

> Então eu grito.
> Grito puro e sem pedir esmola. Sei que há moças que vendem o corpo, única posse real, em troca de um bom jantar em vez de um sanduíche de mortadela. Mas a pessoa de quem falarei mal tem corpo para vender, ninguém a quer, ela é virgem e inócua, não faz falta a ninguém. Aliás – descubro eu agora – também eu não faço a menor falta e até o que escrevo um outro escreveria. Um outro escritor, sim, mas teria que ser homem porque escritora mulher pode lacrimejar piegas. (13-14)[34]

*A hora da estrela* is of course parodic and playful, a tone that is captured perfectly by Suzana Amaral's film based on the novel. This parodic tone de-dramatizes the story of Macabéa, and yet it remains perfectly eloquent. The title suggests the story of a movie-star, which is what Macabéa dreams of becoming. Her death is trivial, yet profoundly ironic: she is run over by an expensive foreign car, and as she lies dying on the road has her only minute of fame. Incidentally, the novel is written, the narrator tells us, "sob o patrocínio do refrigerante mais popular do mundo" (23).[35]

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[34] "So, I am shouting. A simple shout that begs no charity. I know that there are girls who sell their bodies, their only real possession, in exchange for a good dinner rather than the usual mortadella sandwich. But the person whom I am about to describe scarcely has a body to sell; nobody desires her, she is a harmless virgin whom nobody needs. It strikes me that I don't need her [*I am not needed*] either and that what I am writing could be written by another. Another writer, of course, but it would have to be a man for a woman would weep her heart out" (14). The translation is incorrect when it states "I don't need her either." What the narrator says, of course, is that "I am not needed either," a theme that will be revisited when the narrator dies along with his character.
[35] "under the sponsorship of the most popular soft drink in the world" (23).

*The Hour of the Star* has rightly come to be regarded as a paradigmatic text of postmodernism. However, the novel is not merely about textuality unraveling itself (as in Italo Calvino or Umberto Eco); there is also a serious effort to engage poverty in and through writing. And thus while the text repeats some tropes of postmodern literature, such as the exhaustion of narrative styles, it also attempts to practice an ethics of poverty in writing, an aesthetic austerity that links it to writing as an art of hunger, as in Kafka or Borges.[36] This must be distinguished from Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha's aesthetics of hunger, formulated in response to the situation of poverty and social injustice in Brazil, a decade earlier. In Rocha's manifesto for 'Cinema Novo' of 1965, *An Esthetic of Hunger*, 'hunger' has a much more revolutionary force:

> We understand the hunger that the European and the majority of Brazilians have not understood. For the European it is a strange tropical surrealism. For the Brazilian it is a national shame. He does not eat, but he is ashamed to say so; and yet, he does not know where this hunger comes from. …
> Cinema Novo shows that the normal behavior of the starving is violence; and the violence of the starving is not primitive. …
> From Cinema Novo it should be learned that an esthetic of hunger, before being primitive, is revolutionary. It is the initial moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the colonized. … As long as they do not take up arms, the colonized remain slaves; a first policeman had to die for the French to become aware of the Algerians. (Martin 1997, 60)

In Cinema Novo's aesthetic, hunger – when it becomes consciously realized – can lead to the creative production of revolutionary violence: a formulation that recalls Franz Fanon and that sets Rocha's thinking firmly along the lines of national liberation struggle of the 1960s. In Lispector, however, this revolutionary (and even collective) horizon is far behind. It is not merely that Lispector's (feminine) perspective on poverty is different. After 13 years of military

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[36] On postmodern literature as exhaustion, see John Barth, *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967). For a rigorous discussion of the aesthetics of hunger and poverty and their political implications in *A hora da estrela* see Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, *Literatura Latinoamericana y Razón Imperial*.

rule (1964-1977), poverty had become so widespread, not merely in the Northeast but also in the large metropolises of the South, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, that even the very idea of a future, as the novel's Macabéa thinks at one point, seemed like "a luxury" (58).

In Europe, Lispector was authorized by the renowned feminist critic Hélène Cixous. In her lectures at the Université de Paris VIII, Cixous pointed out the rigorous poverty of Lispector's writing style in *A hora da estrela:* "The *tour de force* of the book is that it is small, " writes Cixous (159). She explains:

> In most texts, there is somebody, a protagonist, who struggles. This is not the case in *The Hour of the Star*, where the 'protagonist' is so infinitely small that she is not even noticeable. (149)

According to Cixous, "The text raises the general question of how to narrate. How can one know, how can one tell the infinitely small? … Our problem, when we want to write, speak, evoke the other, is how not to do it from ourselves" (143).  Thus Lispector's artifice of 'writing as a man' (indeed as a man who is being transformed into a girl, says Cixous), becomes more than a mere strategy of distancing, and indeed works to interrogate the limits of writing as a practice of representation of the subaltern other. Cixous writes:

> Says the author that when he sees the northeastern girl looking at herself in a mirror, if he looks straight into the mirror, he sees his tired and bearded face. … She has to make space for someone as tiny as the northeastern girl. Clarice has to efface herself. But a total effacement would bring about that of the northeastern girl as well. Defying conventions of literary description, Clarice is drawing attention to the very locus of disappearance. (159)

In Lispector's writing, the nordestina ('the girl from the North-east' in Pontiero's translation) is less a character than a *cipher* for that space occupied by a new social subject: the new urban poor, particularly the young migrants from the Northeast. Lispector is writing at a time when urban marginality is becoming everywhere massive and highly visible in Brazilian cities.

The nordestina is not, however, a completely marginal character, but more of a half-outsider. She is neither a delinquent nor a slum-dweller, a beggar, or a prostitute. She survives by working as a typist, although she is about to lose her job when the narrative begins. She shares a bedroom with four other women, lives on hot dogs and coca-cola, and, as is revealed later, is in the early stages of pulmonary tuberculosis. She simply fades into anonymity and silence. She does not exhibit the aggressive defiance towards society that would make her a *pícara* such as Jesusa Palancares in Poniatowska's testimonio *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969). There is a certain negativity to Macabéa that suggests that she is less a character than a cipher, a figure.

The narrative emphasizes this near nonexistence, or insignificance, of the girl from the Northeast:

> Como a nordestina, há milhares de moças espalhadas por cortiços, vagas de cama num quarto, atrás de balcões trabalhando até a estafa. Não notam sequer que são facilmente substitíveis e que tanto existiriam como não existiriam. Poucas se queixam e ao que eu saiba nenhuma reclama por não saber a quem. Esse quem será que existe? (14)[37]

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[37] "There are thousands of girls like this girl form the Northeast to be found in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, living in bedsitters or toiling behind the counters for all they are worth. They aren't even aware of the fact that they are superfluous and that nobody cares a damn about their existence. Few of them ever complain and as far as I know they never protest, for there is no one to listen" (14).

She does not complain. There is a culture of silence in poverty, the endurance that Paulo Freire described in *Pedagogy of the Opressed*. Even at the moment of her death, when she becomes a 'star', Macabéa "struggled in silence":

> Fixava, só por fixar, o capim. Capim na grande Cidade do Rio de Janeiro. À toa. Quem sabe se Macabéa já teria alguma vez sentido que também ela era à-toa na cidade inconquistável. … E Macabéa lutava muda. (81)[38]

In response to the silence imposed by poverty, Paulo Freire outlined in his book a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' that would allow the poor, through literacy and awareness of their circumstances, to speak out of silence and to radically politicize the project of national education. [39]

But it would seem that literacy as a framework for political engagement had become less and less viable with the massive impoverishment of urban and rural sectors in Brazil. Furthermore, the whole project of literacy had become questionable as popular sectors developed their own forms of expression through popular religion and consumer culture, as in the case of Macabéa, who adores coca-cola, dreams of being a movie-star, and listens to the clock-radio for decontextualized bits of culture she fails to be able to connect or communicate to her boyfriend, Olímpico.

Macabéa's uneasy relationship with literacy and typing can be read as a figure for this divergence between literacy and the possibility of becoming integrated into urban society

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[38] "Grass in the great Metropolis of Rio de Janeiro. Adrift. Who knows if Macabéa had ever felt at some time that she, too, was adrift in the great unconquerable city? … Macabéa struggled in silence" (80).
[39] After having been exiled from Brazil in 1964, Freire wrote *Pedagogía del oprimido* in Chile in 1970, in a context of revolutionary effervescence, and after working in the highly successful literacy campaigns preceding Allende's victory.

through training. Macabéa's aunt had given her a crash-course in typing, but she had only gotten

as far as the third grade, and her spelling was so bad that she constantly made mistakes:

> Por ser ignorante era obrigada na datilografia a copiar lentamente letra por letra … Embora, ao que parece, não aprovasse na linguagem duas consoantes juntas e copiava a letra linda e redonda do amado chefe a plavra 'designar' de modo como em língua falada diria: 'desiguinar.' (15)[40]

> nada argumentou em seu próprio favor quando o chefe da firma de representante de roldanas avisou-lhe com brutalidade … que só ia manter no emprego Glória, sua colega, porque quanto a ela, errava demais na datilografia, além de sujar invariavelmente o papel. (25)[41]

> Havia coisas que não sabia o que significavam. Uma era 'efeméride'. E não é que Seu Raimundo só mandava copiar com sua letra linda a palavra efemérides ou efeméricas? Achava o termo efemírides absolutamente misterioso. Quando o copiava prestava atenção a cada letra. Glória era estenógrafa e não só ganhava mais como não parecia se atrapalhar com as palavras difíceis das quais o chefe tanto gostava. Enquanto isso a mocinha se apaixonara pela palavra efemérides. (40)[42]

Macabéa is fascinated by words like 'efemérides', and also by what she hears on the radio. She

tries to make this a subject of conversation with Olímpico, but fails again and again.  She asks:

"A Rádio Relógio diz que dá a hora certa, cultura e anúncios. Que quer dizer cultura?" But

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[40] "She was so backward that she was obliged to copy out every word slowly, letter by letter. … even though she appeared to have some difficulty in stringing two consonants together. When she copied out the attractive, rotund handwriting of the boss, whom she idolized, the word 'designate' became 'designate', for that is how she herself would have pronounced it" (15).

[41] "she made no protest when the boss of her firm which distributed pulley equipment bluntly warned her … that he was only prepared to keep on her workmate Glória. He told her he was fed up with her typing mistakes and those blots she invariably made on the paper" (24).

[42] "There were certain words whose meaning escaped her. One such word was *ephemeris*. For didn't Senhor Raimundo ask her to copy from his elegant handwriting the word *ephemeris* or *ephemerides*? She found the word *ephemerides* altogether mysterious. When she copied the word out she paused over each letter. Her workmate Glória could do shorthand and, not only did she earn more, but she even seemed unperturbed by those difficult words that the boss was so fond of using. Meanwhile, the girl became enamoured of the word *ephemeris*" (39-40).

Olímpico has only one response: "Cultura é cultura, continuou ele emburrado. Você também vive me encostando na parede" (50).[43]

Both Olímpico and Macabéa have an exotic relationship to 'culture'. And yet it would seem, at the same time, that they are unable to communicate except through the language of advertising and mass culture. This tension would seem to point to the idea that often the subaltern 'cannot speak', because she (I use the pronoun advisedly) cannot express herself adequately in the dominant codes. This was Gayatri Spivak's argument in her well-known essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In another influential essay, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (1988), Spivak suggested that the subaltern could be understood as a negative space that resisted narrativization into official histories:

> the arena of the subaltern's persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogenous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in *his* efforts in this awareness, that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic. (Spivak 16)

*A hora da estrela* thus problematizes the possibility of representing the subaltern in literature. Literature, as it had been historically constituted, could only serve to represent the popular as the source for national culture, or as the pre-modern past out of which the modern nation was emerging. Literature was not able to represent what Gareth Williams refers to as the "other side of the popular," the subaltern as the necessary zone of exclusion – those marginalized by modernity – of the modern nation-state. Thus one question that Lispector's text seems to be asking – and that Rubem Fonseca's "A arte de andar nas ruas do Rio de Janeiro" will reiterate –

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[43] "Radio Clock says that it broadcasts the correct time, culture and commercials. What does culture mean? …
Culture is culture, he replied grudgingly. Why don't you get off my back?" (50).

is whether writing can be something else, an affective (rather than representational) engagement with the subaltern other.

Although *The Hour of the Star* does not abound in detailed descriptions of Rio de Janeiro's urban space, there are many key references, in passing, to Macabéa's relationship to the geography of the city. Significantly, the novel shows neither the postcard Rio of Copacabana and Ipanema, nor the exotic and violent Rio of the favelas. Like Rubem Fonseca's "A arte de andar nas ruas do Rio de Janeiro," Lispector's novel situates her character in the depressed old downtown of the city, in the red-light district and by the docks. As the narrative sums it up: "Rua do Acre para morar, rua do Lavradio para trabalhar, cais do porto para ir espiar no domingo" (31). Macabéa sleeps in a room with four other women, "Maria da Penha, Maria Aparecida, Maria José e Maria apenas." As their names suggest, they are somewhat interchangeable, and they all work as shop-assistants at the Lojas Americanas. They pay little attention to Macabéa as they are so exhausted from work that "Elas viravam para o outro lado e readormeciam" (31).[44] Macabéa had arrived in Rio with her aunt, who had found her a job. After her aunt died, Macabéa was left alone, lodging in the room with the four Marias: "O quarto ficava num velho sobrado colonial da áspera rua do Acre entre as prostitutas que serviam a marinheiros, depósitos de carvão e de cimento em pó, não longe do cais do porto" (30). The narrator makes no secret of his dislike of this place: "Rua do Acre. Mas que lugar. Os gordos ratos da rua do Acre. Lá é que não piso pois tenho terror sem nenhuma vergonha do pardo pedaço de vida imunda" (30).[45]

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[44] "Acre Street for living, Lavradio Street for working, the docks for excursions on Sundays"(30); "They turned on their other sides and went back to sleep" (31).

[45] "The bedsitter was in an old, colonial-style tenement in Acre Street, a red-light district near the docks inhabited by women who picked up seamen in the streets between the depots of charcoal and cement" (29); "Acre Street. What a

Lispector is here mocking her narrator's middle-class sensibilities. Early on, he states that "there are thousands of girls like this girl form the Northeast to be found in the slums of Rio de Janeiro," who aren't even aware "that they are superfluous and that nobody cares a damn about their existence" (14). The original Portuguese states that "são facilmente substituíveis e que tanto existiriam como não existiriam" (14), literally, that they are 'easily replaceable' and might as well 'exist as not exist'.[46] In fact, the narrator states, these girls often "sell their bodies, their only real possession, in exchange for a good dinner rather than the usual mortadella sandwich" (14). So, girls like Macabéa are expendable and, what is more important, exchangeable (*substituíveis*), not merely for a mortadella sandwich, but for one another. In Fonseca's story Augusto, another masculine narrator, says that he does not want to hear Kelly's life-story because "já ouvi vinte e sete histórias de vida de putas e são todas iguais" ("I've heard twenty-seven life stories of prostitutes and they are all the same," 619). While certainly from the point of view of capitalism, Kelly and Macabéa are easily exchangeable for each other, Lispector will make a strong effort to map out the diversity and heterogeneity of these female popular subjects. Thus the narrative frequently contrasts Macabéa with the other women in the story. She is not like the four Marias, nor is she sensual like her workmate Glória. And she has nothing in common with Madame Carlota. These other women's life stories map out alternative urban trajectories, while Macabéa's remains the most silent and insignificant one.

The nordestina, we are told, is "lost in the crowd," yet her relationship to the cityscapes that surround her is childishly wistful: "A nordestina se perdia na multidão. Na praça Mauá onde tomava o ônibus fazia frio e nenhum agasalho havia contra o vento. Ah  mas existiam os navios

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slum. The plump rats of Acre Street. I keep well away from the place. To be frank, I am terrified of that dark hole and its depraved inhabitants" (30).

[46] But the narrator also states that he is himself also replaceable by any other writer, a line that is translated incorrectly in the English version (14).

cargueiros que lhe davam saudades quem sabe de quê" (40). At the same time, she is a stranger (or half-outsider) in the metropolis: "Vez por outra ia para a Zona Sul e ficava olhando as vitrines faiscantes de jóias e roupas acetinadas – só para se mortificar um pouco" (34). In fact, what Cixous calls her "condition of nonhaving" is so radical that even the smallest indulgence constitutes a luxury for Macabéa. One day she stays home from work, pretending she has to have a tooth extracted. She can hardly believe that "all this space was hers to enjoy," so she dances with delight: "Dançava e rodopiava porque ao estar sozinha se tornava: l-i-v-r-e! … Não devia nada a ninguém e ninguém lhe devia nada" (41-42).[47]

At the same time, Macabéa is a virgin, having grown up in the Northeast with a strict aunt, who "considerava de dever seu evitar que a menina viesse um dia a ser uma dessas moças que em Maceió ficavam nas ruas de cigarro aceso esperando homem" (28). It is ironic, therefore, that she lodges in the red-light district. The novel is peppered with similar references that outline an urban geography of those spaces Macabéa is to keep away from. At one point, annoyed with her constant questions about the meaning of things, Olímpico bursts out: "E para que serve saber demais? O Mangue está cheio de raparigas que fizeram perguntas demais" (55). And when Macabéa decides to start wearing bright red lipstick, Glória picks on her by saying that she could be mistaken for a tart. "Sou moça virgem!" exclaims Macabéa, "Não sou mulher de soldado e marinheiro" (62).[48]

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[47] "The girl from the North-east was lost in the crowd. She caught the bus in Mauá Square. It was bitterly cold and she had no warm clothing to protect her from the wind. But there were the cargo ships that filled her with yearning for who knows what" (40); "Occasionally she wandered into the more fashionable quarters of the city and stood gazing at the shop windows displaying glittering jewels and luxurious garments in satin and silk – just to mortify the senses" (34); "She danced and waltzed round the room for solitude made her: f-r-e-e! … She owed nothing to anyone, and no one owed her anything" (41).
[48] "she considered it her duty to see that the girl did not finish up like many another girl in Maceió standing on street corners with a lit cigarette waiting to pick up a man" (28); "Why do you have to keep on asking questions about things that don't concern you? The brothels in the Mangue are full of women who asked far too many questions" (55); "I'm a virgin! You won't find me going out with soldiers or sailors" (62).

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Another time, Macabéa also blurts out that she would like to become a movie-star, to which Olímpico brutally replies that she has neither the face nor the body to be a film star (53). Indeed, shortly after that, Olímpico will break up with Macabéa and start dating her workmate, Glória, who is physically the opposite of the plain, underfed, and tubercular nordestina:

> Olímpico talvez visse que Macabéa não tinha força de raça, era subproduto. Mas quando ele viu Glória, colega da Macabéa, sentiu logo que ela tinha classe.
> Glória possuía no sangue um bom vinho português e também era amaneirada no bamboleio do caminhar por causa do sangue africano escondido. Apesar de branca, tinha em si a força da mulatice. … O fato de ser carioca tornava-a pertencente ao ambicionado clã do sul do país. Vendo-a, ele logo adivinhou que, apesar de feia, Glória era bem alimentada. E isso fazia dela material de boa qualidade. (59)[49]

There are clearly elements of both race and class at play in making Macabéa less desirable according to Brazilian society's standards of beauty. One day Glória teases her asking her why she 'has no face'. To which Macabéa replies: "Tenho sim. É porque sou achatada de nariz, sou alagoana" (65).[50]

After being dumped by Olímpico, and having been diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis (which she does not understand), Macabéa follows Glória's advice and goes to see the fortune teller. She takes a taxi (an unusual luxury) to Olaria to Madame Carlota's apartment. The contrast between the two of them could not be more stark: "Madame Carlota was voluptuous; she painted her rosebud mouth a vivid scarlet and dabbed her plump little cheeks

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[49] "Olímpico probably realized that Macabéa lacked substance like most inferior products. However, when he set eyes on Glória, Macabéa's workmate, he felt at once that here was a girl with real class. Glória had rich Portuguese wine in her blood and a provocative way of swinging her hips as she walked, no doubt due to some remote strain of African blood. Although she was white, Glória displayed the vitality one associates with a mulatta. … To be *carioca* identified Glória with the privileged class who inhabited Southern Brazil. Looking closely at her, Olímpico perceived at once that, although she was ugly, Glória was well nourished. This was enough to transform her into someone of quality" (59).
[50] "Of course I have a face. It's just that my nose is flat. After all, I'm from Alagoas" (65).

with rouge, which became shiny when applied to her greasy complexion. Madame Carlota looked like a large china doll that had seen better days" (72). Before reading her fortune, she proceeds to tell Macabéa her life story, which reads somewhat like the reverse or negative of the nordestina's trajectory. Madame Carlota tells her about how much her life has improved since she is a fan of Jesus, and in the meantime keeps popping chocolates into her mouth without ever offering Macabéa one. She tells the girl that she was once in love with a beautiful man whom she kept for a while, and even allowed him to mistreat her. Then, "Depois que ele desapareceu, eu, para não sofrer, me divertia amando mulher. O carinho de mulher é muito bom mesmo, eu até lhe aconselho porque você é delicada demais para suportar a brutalidade dos homens" (74).[51] She then muses over her former life as a prostitute in the red-light district:

> Ai que saudades da zona! Eu peguei o melhor tempo do Mangue que era freqüentado por verdadeiros cavalheiros. … Ouvi dizer que o Mangue está acabando, que a zona agora só tem uma meia dúzia de casas. Em meu tempo havia umas duzentas. Eu ficava em pé encostada na porta vestindo só calcinha e sutiã de renda transparente. Depois, quando eu já estava ficando muito gorda e perdendo os dentes, é que me tornei caftina. (74-75)[52]

This scene recalls the Marquis de Sade's novels (in particular *Justine*), where the virtuous heroine is given advice by the more experienced prostitutes on how to live for pleasure and get ahead in life. There is of course a sense of the absurd in having this conversation with the nordestina.

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[51] "After he disappeared, I took up with another woman to try and forget him. To be loved by another woman is really nice. It would even be preferable in your case because you're much too delicate to cope with the brutality of men" (74).

[52] "How I miss the red-light district. I knew the Mangue when it was at its best and frequented by real gentlemen. … They tell me the Mangue is finished and that there are only about six brothels left. I used to stand in the doorway wearing nothing except panties and a bra made of transparent lace. Later on, when I put on weight and started losing my teeth, I decided to run my own brothel" (74).

Madame Carlota forecasts a brilliant future for Macabéa: her fortune will change as soon as she leaves the house; she will meet a wealthy foreign gentleman who will fall in love and marry her. Macabéa leaves the apartment in a daze, and as soon as she crosses the street she is hit by a foreign car, a yellow Mercedes. She falls to the ground and lies helpless, adrift, looking at the grass, until her small life is finally extinguished. As she dies she says in a clear, distinct voice: "As for the future" (84). The ending of the narrative thus emphasizes Macabéa's insignificance and silence, her lack of either a legible life-story or any discernible future. The nordestina is like a line in the water, leaving no trace upon the urban fabric.

### *Subaltern Affect and the Ethics of Writing*

In the preface to the novel, Lispector writes: "Esta história acontece em estado de emergência e de calamidade pública. Trata-se de um livro inacabado porque lhe falta a resposta" (10). And later in the narrative: "Este livro é um silêncio. Este livro é uma pergunta" (17).[53] Lispector was doubtless referring to the "state of emergency" provoked by the military dictatorship in Brazil, which ostensibly came to an end in 1985. The redemocratization of society was not able to give an answer, however, to the thousands of migrants who, like Macabéa and Olímpico, had moved to the cities in search of a better life. Thus I want to suggest that Lispector's line "in a state of emergency and public calamity" can be read as referring not only to the state-sponsored repression under military rule, but can also to the larger problem of social marginalization, of

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[53] "This story unfolds in a state of emergency and public calamity. It is an unfinished book because it offers no answer" (8); "This book is a silence: an interrogation" (17).

society's inability to successfully integrate those populations that modernization displaces. Already at the time when Lispector was writing, it seemed evident that the new face of Brazilian cities posed a question with no easy answer.

It is this feeling of uncertainty that *A hora da estrela* expresses so distinctly, from the point of view of the author as well as the character. Lispector states about the nordestina: "Macabéa didn't worry too much about her own future: to have a future was a luxury," (58). At the same time the book itself is "a silence, a question." One of the subtitles of the book, ".As for the Future." (between periods), suggests that the horizon of development towards the future, that had sustained the modernizing project in Latin America, has suddenly become fraught with uncertainty. This links Lispector's novel to other texts that emerged in the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s, in particular Héctor Babenco's film *Pixote* (1981). The film ends with Pixote disappearing into the night, in an image that suggests a certain degree of openness, but also uncertainty and precariousness.[54]

*The Hour of the Star* does not, then, attempt to represent or to speak for the subaltern.[55] It *indicates*, points to a locus of encounter in the streets where the subaltern other appears, and the author falls silent and ultimately fades away. It is in this sense that Lispector's writing is situated in the world, in the now. It is eventful, open: "Como eu irei dizer agora, esta história será o resultado de uma visão gradual … É visão da iminência de. De quê? Quem sabe se mais tarde saberei. Como que estou escrevendo na hora mesma em que sou lido" (12).[56] As Hélène Cixous notes, in *A hora da estrela* Lispector "writes in the now": "She accomplishes a form of writing

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[54] It is important to point out that the actor who played Pixote (a natural actor) did indeed die very young as a result of a shoot-out in the streets.

[55] As has been demonstrated by Bobby Chamberlain in an article entitled "Sob o limiar da fala: linguagem e representação do subalterno em *Vidas secas* e *A hora da estrela*."

[56] "I should explain that this story will emerge from a gradual vision … It is the vision of the imminence of … of what? Perhaps I shall find out later. Just as I am writing at the same time as I am being read" (12).

that does not tell, that does not come back to something. To the contrary, she produces a kind of event that is being progressively transformed" (162). Thus when Macabéa dies, so does the narrator – he has no afterlife after that of his character. Immediately after she dies, the narrator states: "Macabéa me matou" (86). The narrator thus dies *in the telling of the story*. This fulfills what the narrator, Rodrigo S. M., says about himself at the beginning of the novel, a statement that at first may have seemed perplexing: "A açao desta história terá como resultado minha transfiguração em outrem e minha materialização enfim em objeto" (20).[57]

Although *The Hour of the Star* is quite explicit about the forms of marginalization so many young urban dwellers experience in Rio de Janeiro, it deliberately resists aestheticizing poverty in the manner of films such as *Orfeu negro* and *Cidade de Deus*. Lispector's aesthetics are closer to those of Suzana Amaral's filmic version of *A hora da estrela* or Babenco's *Pixote*. In order to write about poverty, the text tends to impoverish itself: "Eu que também não mancharia por nada deste mundo com palavras brilhantes e falsas uma vida parca como a da datilógrafa" (36).[58] Thus the text attempts to strip down everything, even rhetoric and narrative, to its bare minimum: "Juro que este livro é feito sem palavras. É uma fotografia muda. Este livro é um silêncio. Este livro é uma pergunta" (17).[59] It suggests an ethics of writing that shifts away from the transparent representation of social injustice and instead questions its own status by unraveling or undoing its narrative procedures.

And yet, for all its negativity, the text is marked by a strong affirmation of life, and of the significance of those lives that for whatever reason cannot be subjects of their own (or national)

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[57] "The action of this story will result in my transfiguration into someone else and in my ultimate materialization into an object" (20).

[58] "Nothing would persuade me to contaminate with brilliant, mendacious words, a life as frugal as that of my typist" (36).

[59] "I swear that this book is composed without words: like a mute photograph. This book is a silence: an interrogation" (17).

histories. What *A hora da estrela* affirms is that subaltern life, *in its very precariousness*, is precious. At one point Macabéa thinks: "Vagamente pensava de muito longe e sem palavras o seguinte: já que sou, o jeito é ser" (33).[60] Thus, while remaining historically immanent, the infinitely small becomes an infinite universe in its own right. The novel begins with affirmation, with a 'yes': "Tudo no mundo começou com um sim. Uma molécula disse sim a outra molécula e nasceu a vida" (11). And it also ends with a 'yes': "Não esquecer que por enquanto é tempo de morangos. Sim" (87).[61] This conclusion evidently recalls the last line of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, "yes I will yes."

Thus while the novel is radically uncertain, it is also radically affirmative. This affirmation of life does not stem from hopefulness about the future, but from an attempt to grasp life in its immanence, and not as a future projection. In the midst of death, it seems to say, there is life. It opens up a space for a new engagement with subaltern affect. But such engagement can only come out of "a gradual vision," an insight that becomes possible when we question literacy and the literary and open up our eyes, ears, and mind to that silence, that opaqueness, that Macabéa enfigures.

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[60] "mused in silence and the thought came to her: since I am, the solution is to be" (33).
[61] "Everything in the world began with a yes. One molecule said yes to another molecule and life was born" (11); "Don't forget, in the meantime, that this is the season for strawberries. Yes" (86).

### 3.     PUBLIC SPACES AND URBAN GEOGRAPHIES OF CIVILITY

As recent studies of the history of urban public space make clear (Caldeira 2000, Gorelik 1998, Almandoz 2002), the production of public space is normally the result of elite-driven, and often authoritarian, initiatives to organize and discipline society. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, and in response to neoliberal privatization and the transition from an authoritarian to a managerial state, cultural critics have started to emphasize the importance of public space as a site for social agency, and to denounce the erosion of public space by neoliberal policies. But public space becomes significant only insofar as it is the visible expression of civil society's political agency. In García Canclini, for example, "civil society" becomes a normative concept whose dynamics are expressed in the "cultural hybridity" that takes place in urban spaces. It is possible then to suggest that urban public space becomes the necessary metaphor that makes the idea of civil society intelligible and palpable.

As Adrián Gorelik argues in *La grilla y el parque* (1998), the concept of "public space" contains a radical ambiguity. It names physical places while at the same time referring to a sphere of human action. Therefore a similar slippage to the one that occurs between "city" and "citizenship" also exists with urban "public spaces" and the idea of the "public sphere" of action and citizenship. In Latin America's capital cities, in particular, urban public spaces (especially squares, avenues, parks, and monuments), have tended to organize civil life – conceptually and physically. These places have been conceived as spaces where civil society's public sphere exercises its right to challenge the state and its ability to articulate hegemony. That is to say, public spaces have symbolically organized around themselves geographies of civility. This overlapping of "civil society," "public space," and the "public sphere" has been productive in that it has allowed for discussions of city planning and privatization to directly engage the ideas

of political participation, mass protest, and the configuration (or erosion) of civil society in a time of economic neoliberalism. At the same time, however, Latin American cultural studies' reliance on the concept of "civil society" is problematic in that it fails to interrogate the normative and disciplinary dimension embedded in this concept. In particular when theorized as "cultural hybridity" (as in Canclini) or as social agency from below (as in Poniatowska and Monsiváis), civil society retains the problematic legacy of the bourgeois public sphere and its tendency to judge the political field and civic participation according to bourgeois norms and standards.

Gorelik writes: "Quienes han conceptualizado el espacio público han dado por supuesto esta conexión entre espacio público urbano y esfera pública política, pero, tal vez por su ambigüedad constitutiva, no existe una teoría que guíe el análisis de su producción mutua" (20). Gorelik argues that a general, universal theory about the relation between public space and public sphere is not possible. Instead, he suggests understanding the relationship between the two as a *singular* articulation:

> no hay nada preformado en la ciudad que responda a tales características de 'espacio público'… es espacio público en tanto que es atravesado por una experiencia social al mismo tiempo que organiza esa experiencia y le da formas. Se trata, por tanto, de una cualidad política de la ciudad que puede o no emerger en definitivas coyunturas, en las que se cruzan de modo único diferentes historias de muy diferentes duraciones … se trata de una encrucijada. (20-21)

Following Gorelik's idea that "public space" denotes a singular articulation, an intersection between space and politics, I want to read Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971) and Eltit's *Lumpérica* (1983) as ways of thinking about public space and civil society in singular conjunctures. Both texts respond to given political situations: the student massacre at Tlatelolco

in 1968, and the state of siege (and curfew) imposed by the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile in the 1970s-1980s. In its own way, each text opens up the possibility of reading civil society otherwise than through the normative lens of "cultural hybridity."

## *Poniatowska, Tlatelolco, and the Mythical Founding of Civil Society in Mexico*

In an article on Mexican culture during the twentieth century, Carlos Monsiváis notes that during the post-war period, the monumental architecture built in Mexico City represented a crucial gesture on the part of the state to achieve an interpellation of national unity, while at the same time blocking class interpellations. Referring to the government of Ávila Camacho, Monsiváis writes: "Everything is absorbed by the spectacle of national growth, the show at which dams, motorways, stadiums and universities are unveiled" (1996, 18). And referring to the events of 1968, and specifically to the government's inflexibility towards the student movement, he writes: "Such inflexibility is expressed in architecture. The buildings in Tlatelolco are an extension of the reason of state: gigantic proportions must exorcize its inferiority complex and prove us to be the equals of any nation" (26).

The Plaza de las Tres Culturas at Tlatelolco expresses significant aspects of the modernizing project of the Mexican state. Firstly, its modern buildings suggest an openness towards the future as the developmentalist horizon in which class differences will be transcended over time. Secondly, the desired reconciliation and synthesis of heterogeneous cultures is suggested through the square's symbolic incorporation of each culture's temporality into a space of architectural coexistence. The "three cultures" (indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican) are

synthesized into one large spatial allegory, which helps to achieve precisely the national interpellation Monsiváis points to.

The project of national integration was included explicitly into the design of Tlatelolco square's multi-family apartment buildings (*multifamiliares*) as well as in other architectural projects in Mexico City. As urban historian Anahí Ballent has noted, the architect in charge of many of these housing complexes was Mario Pani, who was strongly influenced by the ideas of Le Corbusier. Pani privileged the creation of "urban cells" with tall buildings and spaces for recreation that would make it possible to maximize urban density as well as, simultaneously, producing new relations of sociability and community. Pani defined the project as an attempt to recreate a concept of the neighborhood (*barrio*) understood as:

> comunidad donde conviven elementos de diferentes estratos que comparten los servicios dentro de un ambienet que propicia la paz social. La segregación produce el odio sobre el que finca la agitación, mientras que la convivencia borra o atempera las inevitables diferencias sociales. (Pani 1966, qtd. Ballent, 87).

Clearly, then, it was expected that urban development would help to consolidate the "national unity" proposed by Ávila Camacho and his successors, in a vision of national integration that rested upon a project of economic modernization. The modern multi-family buildings at Tlatelolco represented as well an attempt to conjugate tradition and modernity, expressing the state's will to synthesize, in a series of monumental gestures, "todos los Méxicos" (to use Octavio Paz's expression):

> junto a la Plaza de las Tres Culturas, las ruinas de Tlatelolco, el Colegio de la Cruz y la Iglesia de Santiago. … El nuevo conjunto se transforma en un símbolo de México: "crisol de la mexicanidad" … Tlatelolco fue exitoso en la creación de un nuevo ícono de la

ciudad de México, que se reproduce ampliamente, por ejemplo, en postales de la ciudad. (Ballent 109-10)

Nevertheless, Ballent comments, , "Podría decirse, según el resultado final de la obra, que la armonización entre culturas sólo puede ser planteada cuando una domina a las otras" (110). Post-revolutionary Mexico thus invested enormous amounts of resources in the development of artistic and architectural projects that would help to express the multitemporal synthesis desired by the developmentalist state. The night of Tlatelolco (October 2, 1968), however, would come to interrupt and fracture this ideal of synthesis and would radically question the possibilities of a strong centralized state of carrying out social integration mediated from above.

Elena Poniatowska's chronicle-testimony, *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), is therefore significant because it eloquently captures a moment of crisis in the relationship between the state and civil society in Mexico. Furthermore, I want to argue that in Poniatowska's text the *uses* and *significations* people give to urban spaces (streets, plazas, squares) come to embody *images* that make the idea of "civil society" intelligible. Thus, Poniatowska's text articulates the practice of writing about the city as a *practice of citizenship*, and thus makes urban chronicle into a discourse about civil society, as well as into civil society's discourse.

Poniatowska's text does not, however, represent an already existing civil society, but instead writes Mexican civil society into existence by carving a space for political dissidence within the official discourse of Mexican nationalism. *Tlatelolco* uses chronicle/testimonial writing to produce a space of civility in which the exercise of civil rights can become intelligible. "Civil society" is thus not represented, but is *produced* in the text. Writing thus invokes an *image* or *fiction* of civil society. In order to achieve this effect, Poniatowska's main strategy is to superpose different voices from diverse social sectors, using a technique of narrative collage.

Recent studies of Poniatwoska's writing (Corona Gutiérrez 2001, Bencomo 2002) have analyzed in detail the aesthetic procedures involved in the organization of her chronicle-testimonies. Among the techniques discussed are the fragmentation of narratives through interruption and resumption, the reiteration of meaningful phrases, and the use of montage to produce an effect of "textual polyphony" (Bencomo), among others. These studies make very evident the importance of the aesthetic arrangement of texts in Poniatowska's chronicles – the artificiality and artistry that goes into producing an effect of narrative polyphony that in turn works towards producing an image of civil society in action.

In addition to these procedures, however, other formal strategies are also vital in producing an image of civil society in Poniatowska's text, such as the use of images of convergence towards the square and other places of massive encounter and the use of fragmentation to express the idea of a shattering of civil society. In the book's first part, "Ganar la calle," the testimonies reconstruct the urban mobilizations that led to the strengthening of the students' movement and the growth of its power. Massive marches down Mexico City's avenues lead the protesters toward places of massive assembly. The rhetoric that organizes these urban trajectories is one of *convergence*: students, workers, women, and other people march together and their trajectories converge at specific urban sites: the Zócalo and Tlatelolco square, for example. The juxtaposition of testimonies, press clippings, and the opinions of many government officials alongside those of the movement's leaders, serves to heighten the contrast between the civil, open attitude of the students and the inflexible position of the government, which refuses dialogue. Thus the text's formal organization enacts a juxtaposition of social voices and quotations that produce an aesthetic (and political) effect of "dialogism" (Bencomo) in the narration of the events of 1968.

The second part, entitled "La noche de Tlatelolco," gathers numerous eyewitness and indirect accounts of the massacre in an attempt to reconstruct the different points of view on what happened. It thus attempts to fight, discursively and dialogically, the official silence of the government on the events. Now the diverse voices sound very different however: they are chaotic, dispersed, uncertain. Poniatowska attempts to reconstruct the horror of the massacre – its fear and confusion – while at the same time confronting the "official version" of the government and the press with the testimonies of students, activists, and other victims of the state's violence. As a result, the effect achieved by the juxtaposition of voices is no longer one of dialogue and convergence, but one of dispersal and shattering. Poniatowska thus dramatizes the violent fracturing of the civil imaginary articulated by the student movement. Hence the main organizing images in the second part of the book are images of the *rupture* of civilian order and the *dismemberment* of the polis. The images are repetitious, reiterating gestures of *dispersal* and chaos: people running in all directions, arrests and beatings of students, shoes abandoned on the ground, blood, horror. Amidst the confusion, anonymous voices are heard: "Mira qué pasa allá; le tiran a todo. (Una voz en la multitud)" (219). A phrase pronounced by a soldier is repeated several times and, in fact, is the line that ends the testimonio: "Son cuerpos, señor" (273).

In a moment of frustration, an officer is barely able to conceal the explicit violence and hatred of the government towards the students: "¿Qué van a hacer? ¿Derrocar al gobierno? A poco, a poco. ¿A poco se sienten tan cabroncitos? (Un oficial a unos estudiantes en la Federal de Seguridad)" (58). As a counterpoint, students appeal again and again to the lack of a public opinion more critical of the government:

> El gobierno cree que en México sólo existe una opinión pública: la que aplaude, la que lo lambisconea. Pero existe otra: la que critica, la que no cree en nada de lo que dice, y otra

más aún, la del importamadrismo, la que no sabe de promesas, la que no se ha encauzado, la indiferente, la que nadie ha sabido aprovechar, y que es, a pesar de su incredulidad e incluso de su ignorancia, una opinión libre.  (53).

The rhetorical strategies embedded in *La Noche de Tlatelolco* suggest a moment of emergence, in Mexico, of a discourse of civil society in its more classical sense: as a discourse of the *public sphere* or *public opinion* against an authoritarian or absolutist state. It is in this sense that I think it is possible to claim that Poniatowska's text enacts a *mythical founding* of civil society. Poniatowska's reading of the crushing of the student movement as a shattering of civil society and its possibilities contains the seeds, I want to argue, of what will become a normative discourse of civil society in Mexico and Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s.

*Tlatelolco*'s image of a shattered civil society will thus become, over time, the basis for a discourse on the *reconstruction* of civil society, a discourse that will be embraced by theorists of new social movements and by cultural critics alike. In Monsiváis' *Entrada libre: crónicas de la sociedad que se organiza* (1987), and in Poniatowska's chronicles of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City (*Nada, nadie*, 1988), both writers are interested in exploring the ways in which the crumbling of the strong, and authoritarian Mexican state (often characterized as "corrupt"), opens up a space for the constitution of civil society from below. As we will see, this idea of civil society constitutes itself in opposition to an authoritarian state, and therefore reproduces the norms and standards of the bourgeois public sphere. Furthermore it acquires, over time, a normative force that will be used to discipline the social field by discriminating between "civil" and "uncivil" forms of political participation, and ultimately to legitimate neoliberalism as the only valid horizon from which social change is possible.

Is it possible to read *La noche de Tlatelolco* otherwise? Because the urban trajectories and geographies of civility Poniatowska deploys in the testimonio have not yet acquired their

normative force, I believe that the book's textuality leaves open a space for reading it in reverse, so to say. In such a reading, the images of multiplicity and dispersal would not point to the shattering and future reconstruction of civil society, but instead would open themselves up to a radical heterogeneity without resolution. The fragments and voices that constitute the image of society, and its deployment over urban space, are organized rhetorically to achieve an effect of social polyphony and, as such, hover inconclusively between integration and disintegration. These social fragments are thus conceived as fragments of a lost *totality*, or at the least, of a totality that is *desired*, and that must be (re)constructed cognitively and politically.

Conversely however, Poniatowska's testimony also produces moments of suspension, in which the horror and confusion of the scene suggests a deeper fragmentation of voices and social subjects that cannot be recuperated within the civil discourse of the student movement. This opens up the text to a radical social fragmentation. Fragmentation thus becomes not an interruption of the civilian order or the premise for the reconstruction of a new order, but instead emerges as an image of the radical heterogeneity that constitutes the suppressed other (and constitutive outside) of the state-civil society articulation. Such a reading suggests understanding civil society as a necessary fiction for the constitution of the state and for the disciplining of society. It opens up a reading of Tlatelolco square as an embodiment of the profound *fissures* in the nation-state in Latin America, and as an example of Mexico's heterogeneous and often irreconcilable traditions of race, creed, and law.

This opens up the possibility of reading both Tlatelolco square, and the violence of October 2, otherwise. If the violence at Tlatelolco appears to have been inexplicable and uncalled for, it was also an instance of the government using violence to establish the law and to restructure civil society according to its own view of what modern Mexico should look like. In

that sense, Tlatelolco foreshadowed the horrors to come under the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s in the rest of Latin America. It is this violence, and not civilian protest, which constitutes the true founding of civil society.

Reading Mexico City from the perspective of such heterogeneity means understanding the city as a space in which politics, culture, and imagination come together in a singular moment as a clash of forces. In order to grasp this heterogeneity conceptually it is necessary to suspend our understanding of the city as a space in which history or tradition unfolds. In *La noche de Tlatelolco,* Mexico City emerges instead as a field of forces engaged in a struggle to define the state's sovereignty and the limits that make the state thinkable as such. Violent repression establishes new conditions under which social and political forces can operate, and in doing so exposes the fissures of Mexican society. The discourse of civil society thus emerges as a critique of violence, but also as a way to smooth over the contradictions that violence makes evident. Images such as "mixed times," "hybridity," or "democratic polyphony," will therefore be summoned by the discourse of civil society to reassemble the fragments and smooth over the image of radical heterogeneity.

It becomes then possible to read Poniatowska's text as ambivalent. It discloses the radical heterogeneity of social and cultural forces that constitute (and dismember) the Mexican nation-state. Indeed, Poniatowska is radical in showing these voices and forces in dialogic interplay and struggle, precisely in those urban spaces that the state had designed to express the image of a society integrated in time and space. *Tlatelolco* can therefore be seen as a transitional text, suspended between Modernist narratives of integration and an open space in which social configurations have not yet acquired normative force and expressive clarity. In this moment of suspension, heterogeneity emerges in the interstices of what is perceived as a fracturing of the

social totality. Ultimately, however, Poniatowska chooses to reterritorialize these forces and *resolve* their problematic heterogeneity by positing an image of struggle between "civil society" and "the state," an image that will acquire increasing force in Poniatowska's and Monsiváis' writings in the 1980s. However, in order to think beyond the conceptual limit marked by the normative ideology of civil society, it is necessary to interrogate and dismantle the articulation between urban chronicle and the city as a space of democratic polyphony, as it is expressed in the texts of Poniatowska and Monsiváis.

### *Civil Society Theory and Public Space*

In "Learning from Sendero: Civil Society Theory and Fundamentalism" (1999), Jon Beasley-Murray argues that "civil society," as a normative idea, can only be rendered intelligible by opposition to a noncivil outside, defined as "fundamentalism." As outlined by Cohen and Arato, the concept of *civil society* is primarily defined as a system for the *mediation* between social forces and society at large. They define civil society as:

> a sphere of social interaction between the economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of association (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. (qtd. Beasley-Murray, 77).

Civil society's "functional role is as the self-limiting sphere of *mediations* between subsystems of society" (77). As the economy, the state, and other subsystems begin to differentiate themselves, civil society emerges as a sphere of mediation between separate spheres, so that

society can still be regarded as a cohesive whole. The danger that haunts civil society then, Beasley-Murray argues, is ultimately the demand a given social sector might make to participate *immediately* in the constitution of a state, *without the mediation of civil institutions*. Such a social movement would fall outside the sphere of civil society, earning the label of "fundamentalist." Paradoxically, then, the social forces that constitute civil society, and on whose behalf mediation is invoked, also contain the potential of destroying the civil order and of producing fundamentalisms when they refuse to submit their demands to institutional mediation. As Beasley-Murray writes: "If fundamentalism is the outer limit of an ever-expanding civil society, it is also the everpresent limit that makes civil society an impossible construction" (82). Civil society theory thus defines the conceptual limit beyond which political action becomes unthinkable, unintelligible.

But in Latin America neither society nor the nation-state are cohesive entities that could easily be mediated by a sphere of mediation as conceived by civil society theory. Specifically, any radical social movement that declares war on the state and that demands the constitution of an alternative, or parallel, state falls outside of the realm of society, becoming "fundamentalist" and "unintelligible." The example Beasley-Murray cites is Sendero Luminoso, a radical movement whose declaration of war against the Peruvian state defines the outer limit beyond which politics ceases to make sense. Such a movement "represents what is strictly unthinkable from within such theory: the presence of another state form" (84).

Keeping this in mind, I would like to examine García Canclini's notion of civil society, as theorized through the image of "hybrid cultures." García Canclini's book *Culturas híbridas* (1990) is significant because it is both foundational and mythical. Like Poniatowska, Canclini also offers a mythical founding of a specific discourse of civil society and, in doing so, founds

*hybridity* as a fundamental (and mythical) operative category of the social. Doubtless one day Canclini will be counted among the great myth-makers of Latin America, along with Fernando Ortiz and Ángel Rama. The genius of *Hybrid Cultures* consists in its displacement of the myth and the categories of magical realism in favor of a new myth, more appropriate to its time. Thus categories of space and circulation (flux, deterritorialization) come to fill in the space left open by the waning of temporal models of development.

Images such as "mixed times" and "strategies for entering and leaving modernity" appear to do away with developmental time and offer a synchronic model for the analysis of the social. Paradoxically, however, such images also mask a return of the old categories of developmental time: indeed, "mixed times" represent a dialectical synthesis that incorporates, rather than transcends, modern temporality. "Mixed times" incorporate different "cultures" in the same space, only to then reassert their different "temporalities" in the scene of hybrid cultural mixing. As Joshua Lund has argued, "mixed times" becomes a postmodern figure for talking about race and cultural difference in Latin America. [62] In this reassertion of space, cities become, for Canclini, "laboratories of postmodernity" where cultural hybridity is happening before our very eyes. Canclini thus develops the aesthetics of globalization (deterritorialization, flux, cyborgs) into a theory of the social as a space of constant hybridization, and transforms postmodern urban spaces into the privileged ground for grasping (and studying) how "mixed times" coexist in the same space.

Speaking of cultural hybridity in art, for example, Canclini argues that high art manages to survive among market forces because it incorporates mass and popular aspects and resonances within its texture. He argues, for example, that Mexico has a long history of interactions between

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[62] For a critique of "hybridity" as a concept profoundly imbricated in the "production of race," see Joshua Lund, *Theories and Narratives of Hybridity in Latin American Writing*.

elite and popular visual cultures. This kind of artistic dialogue between high and low culture becomes emblematic, for Canclini, of the larger interaction between traditional and mass-media cultural forms in contemporary cities: "More than an absolute substitution of urban life by the audiovisual media, I perceive a *game of echoes*" (212). Starting from this premise, it becomes possible for Canclini to read in urban space a process of confusion and mingling of diverse discursive orders and spaces: the museum, art, propaganda, advertisements, monuments, the mass media.

In one significant moment, Canclini analyzes a photograph of a monument to the foundation of Mexico, near the Zócalo. Canclini comments that "the crossing of the historical iconography with contemporary signaling suggests combinations that can end up being contradictory or parodic: Are the Indians pedestrians? Are their hands pointing to the political propaganda of today?" (213). The Indians in the sculpture, representing the founders of Tenochtitlán, are pointing towards the valley of Mexico, but the city has surrounded them with a myriad of visual signs that complicate any easy reading of the monument. Instead, the Indians appear to be pointing to the street signs, or to advertisement, or appear to be about to be crossing the street. What Canclini's discussion of course leaves unstated is the profound temporal disjunction between "historical iconography" and the contemporary iconography which surrounds and devours it. From the point of view of the present, the monumentalized Indians appear parodic or contradictory with their surroundings. But the monument does not have the power in the least of interrogating or interrupting the present temporality of neoliberal globalization. In other words, it is only from the point of view of the present that historical iconography (or "tradition") becomes legible as *hybrid*. There is no *other* temporal point of view from which the icons of postmodernity can be seen as exotic, parodic, or contradictory.

This moment in *Hybrid Cultures* illustrates one of the main limitations of Canclini's concept of "mixed times." Namely, the way in which hybridity tends to work successfully only in one direction, not unlike transculturation. What Canclini's analysis leaves in a zone of ambiguity is whether the monument as "historical iconography" refers to the moment it depicts (the Indigenous past), or to the historical moment that produced it (Mexican nationalism). As a monument, the sculpture illustrates the modern discourse of the nation-state that relegated the Indians to a monumental, but petrified, past. Problematically, neither the monument's rhetoric, nor Canclini's discussion of it, appear to be susceptible of opening up to an *other* temporality that could challenge or interrogate either the modern or the postmodern hegemony. What this illustrates is that, as an operative category of the social, *hybridity* can only work when one of the terms is dynamic, and the other one is petrified.

Speaking of Tijuana, for example, Canclini writes that: "During the two periods during which I studied the intercultural conflicts on the Mexican side of the border, in Tijuana, in 1985 and 1988, several times I thought that this city is, along with New York, one of the biggest laboratories of postmodernity" (233). Tijuana, argues Canclini, exhibits a radical logic of deterritorialization of languages, cultures, and identities:

> The multicultural character of the city is expressed in the use of Spanish, English, and also indigenous languages in the neighborhoods and *maquiladoras*, or among those who sell crafts downtown. This pluralism diminishes when we move from private interactions to public languages, that is, those of radio, television, and urban advertising, where English and Spanish predominate and coexist "naturally." (235)

Along with this process of radical deterritorialization, then, Canclini also discerns a process or "reterritorialization": "The same people who praise the city for being open and cosmopolitan want to fix signs of identification and rituals that differentiate them from those who are just

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passing through, who are tourists or … anthropologists curious to understand intercultural crossings" (239).

It is in these moments of *reterritorialization* of identity that Canclini perceives the dangers of "fundamentalisms" emerging in postmodern culture, a topic that he will address again in his next book, *Consumidores y ciudadanos* (1995). Therefore Canclini sees fundamentalisms and tribal identities as posing a threat to the city's constant logic of mixing and mingling. "Cultural hybridity" emerges, in this context, as the operative category that can allow for a certain openness (and democratization) of relationships between diverse cultural and social groups. Hybridity appears, in fact, as the very dynamic of civil society in its ability to challenge partisan ("fundamentalist") particularisms. Specifically, in *Consumers and citizens*, the logic of hybridity is aligned with the logic of the market and the democratic possibilities it opens. Even if one were to agree with Canclini that tribal identities are undesirable and undemocratic, however, what seems problematic in his theory is that he sees these residual identities as the result of insufficient deterritorialization, instead of seeing them as the expressions of subalternity (i.e. social injustice).

In *Consumidores y ciudadanos*, Canclini argues that "consumption is good for thinking" (*el consumo sirve para pensar*). Consumption is defined as "el conjunto de procesos socioculturales en que se realizan la apropiación y los usos de los productos" (1995, 43). Therefore, thinking about citizenship from the point of view of consumption implies "intentar la reconquista imaginativa de los espacios públicos, del interés por lo público" (55). In a global city, however, greater connectivity also exists alongside a greater differentiation of social groups: "Nuestra tarea es también explicar cómo la aparente mayor comunicación y racionalidad de la globalización suscita formas nuevas de racismo y exclusión" (73). In this narrative, it is the

urban anthropologist who emerges as the *mediator* of these different "relatos" or *tales* of the city – the anthropologist becomes the postmodern storyteller and appropriates the place of the modern writer (hence the reference to Borges in this section). Canclini continues: "Como en los videos, se ha hecho la ciudad saqueando imágenes de todas partes, en cualquier orden. Para ser un buen lector de la vida urbana hay que plegarse al ritmo y gozar de las visiones efímeras" (101). Refering to *Modernista* urban chronicle (Canclini cites Julio Ramos' *Divergent Modernities*), he argues that the coherent narrative of the city sought by urban chronicle has become impossible in today's world. *However*, he then goes on to mention journalistic chronicle (Poniatowska and Monsiváis) to argue that attempting to chronicle and organize the discontinuities of the postmodern city is an impossible, but necessary, task. Canclini's argument about the death of the classic *flâneur* can thus be understood as an attempt to appropriate his place; to substitute the postmodern ethnographer for the classic literary chronicle writer. The practice of cultural critique therefore becomes the postmodern equivalent or authorized mediation for apprehending the cultural heterogeneity of the "videoclip city."

Julio Ramos' text, "Decorating the City" (Ramos 2001) specifically mentions the transformation of urban space into a space of consumption at the turn of the century. In citing his text in passing however, Canclini leaves out the connection between the emergence of the *flâneur* and the production of a space open to free-market exchange. Canclini therefore leaves out the possibility that what he sees as a democratic opening in the "deterritorializing" global market may in fact have *always already* been the condition for the emergence of any "public space" in the modern sense. In Ramos, therefore, urban chronicle is always already subject to market forces and represents literature's attempt to engage and confront its own worldliness. What Canclini sees as an opening, in consumption, is therefore really no more than the very logic

that shaped the idea of civil society and public space in modernity, and not a feature of contemporary deterritorialization.

Thus Canclini fails to theorize the constitutive tension (and solidarity) between the market and the state in their mutual production of a civil society organized around property and exchange. Both the market and the state, in producing civil society and the public sphere, leave a remainder that they cannot fully subsume or transcend, but which they distribute in space as inequality and difference. This limit to the market, the production of subalternity that cannot be integrated, appears to lie at the basis of what Canclini considers the dangerous proliferation of "fundamentalisms" in contemporary society. Discussing the relation between civil society and hybridity in García Canclini's *Culturas híbridas*, John Beverley argues that:

> If hybridization comes to be in effect coextensive with the dynamics of civil society in Canclini's argument, then despite his appeal to deconstruction … the binary that is not deconstructed is the one that is constitutive of the concept of hybridity itself: the opposition of the state (and ISAS) versus civil society, in which the first is seen as monolithic and reductionist in its concept of the nation and the national, and the second as heterogenous, mobile, autonomoulsy creative, subject (through consumer choice and the market) to popular will. (1999, 127).

For Canclini, then, civil society functions as a sphere of autonomy and creativity made possible by the market as a space of relative freedom, as against the constraints of the nation-state. But the state's role in defining and making possible this free market space is never interrogated. Therefore what Canclini's theory obscures is the nation-state's ability to control the terms upon which hybridization works, as well as its ability to decide what falls outside of the legitimate horizon for social action. As John Beverley writes, "Canclini … offers in a way a disciplinary *solution* for the problems of exploitation, inequality, and ungovernability that afflict our societies" and then goes on to make "cultural studies a heuristic model for a new type of

state/nongovernmental organization practice" (131).[63]  One way of interrogating the normative horizon of civil society, and its dependence on the uninterrogated market/state binary, is to attempt to engage with the subaltern remainders or residues that neoliberal modernization leaves in its configurations of urban space. This is what, I will argue, Eltit's novel *Lumpérica* attempts to do.

## *Diamela Eltit's Lumpérica*

Like *Tlatelolco*, Diamela Eltit's novel *Lumpérica* (1983) also articulates a moment of trauma in national history. Written during the years of Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile, which ousted Salvador Allende from power in 1973, the novel concentrates on the image of the public square in Santiago as a space from which to rethink civic participation under conditions of brutal repression, torture, and disappearance.

The novel is framed by a couple of interrogation scenes, which set the tone by positing the question about the "usefulness of the public square" in a situation of dictatorship and state of siege when citizens are barred from public spaces at night. The interrogation begins with the question: "Me preguntó: - ¿cuál es la utilidad de la plaza pública?" The interrogated responds, "Para que jueguen los niños." As the questions continue, he produces more possibilities: the public square offers relaxation, it is a space used by lovers who hug and kiss, it is also frequented by old people, beggars, the insane. The interrogator continues to ask: "¿Quiénes más acuden a la plaza?"; "¿Qué más has visto?" After running out of nearly running out of answers, the

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[63] Indeed, Beverley argues that the formation of a "historic bloc" capable of displacing the hegemony of neoliberalism "depends on cultural studies but will not happen from the position of cultural studies itself, except to the extent that cultural studies is interpellated critically by subaltern studies" (132).

interrogated is made to recapitulate: "Está bien, revisemos todo de nuevo, ahora en forma ordenada y coherente. Describe la plaza, sólo eso, descríbela en forma objetiva" (49). After the interrogated describes the square, its trees and benches, the interrogator snaps: "¿Y los cables de luz eléctrica y los faroles? … ¿acaso no los has visto?" The frustrating and terrifyingly Kafkian dialogue continues:

> – ¿Y qué efectos dan cuando la luz está encendida?, dijo el que lo interrogaba.
> – Se ve fantasmagórica la plaza, como algo irreal, dijo. Para ejemplificar parece un sitio de opereta o un espacio para la representación. Todo eso está muy desolado entonces.
> – ¿Has estado allí en la noche?, preguntó, quiero decir: ¿has permanecido?
> – No, dijo, nunca he permanecido allí en la noche, sólo he pasado cuando he ido en camino a otra parte, pero quedarme, jamás. (50)

As the dialogue progresses, it becomes clear that beggars, by contrast, do remain in the square, during the day and at night. The interrogated continues: "Se ven demacrados y envejecidos. Las mujeres apartan a sus hijos y ellos mismos ni siquiera intentan conversar con nadie. Se saben alejados del resto. Pero, sin embargo, están con la propiedad que les otorga el lugar público" (53). *Lumpérica* will draw on this transgression of the beggars and marginals, a transgression that appropriately/inappropriately uses public space, in order to push the question of urban public space to its conceptual limits.

As in the texts of Joyce, Beckett, Lezama Lima, or Sarduy, Eltit's language is constantly in a process of metamorphosis. Thus, *Lumpérica*'s textual complexity often encourages readings that reterritorialize the text as an allegory of military dictatorship and national trauma. *Lumpérica* is often seen as a testimony of the dictatorial violence, of the disarticulation of language and subjectivity occasioned by the military regime in Chile. As a text that has become emblematic of the Chilean post-dictatorship, Eltit's novel is sometimes referred to as an expression of horror

and pain that cannot be articulated in language and thus leave discourse paralyzed and beaten –

what has become known in Chile as "el golpe a la lengua" caused by the military coup (*el golpe*

*militar*). While it is true that these elements are all present in the text, my attempt here will be to

resist the tendency to translate Eltit's novel into one dramatic gesture that artificially provides

closure to the text's meanings.

It is true that Diamela Eltit has in part encouraged a reading of her works as testimonies

of national fragmentation. In reference to the schizophrenic language of El Padre Mío, for

example, she writes:

> Es Chile, pensé. Chile entero y a pedazos en la enfermedad de este hombre … Es una
> honda crisis del lenguaje, una infección en la memoria, una desarticulación de todas las
> ideologías. Es una pena, pensé. (15)

It is true that the military dictatorship brought about a crisis of language and of speech, in

particular because it closed down the public spaces of assembly and debate. I would like to insist,

however, that Eltit's novel is not merely an attempt to register the very real horror of an

indefinite state of exception. Rather, *Lumpérica* starts from a situation of permanent exception as

an occasion to rethink the meaning of the city and its margins, of the public, and of modern

subjectivity. We could say, then, that *Lumpérica* does not merely register a violent disarticulation

of meaning, but it also affirms a desiring proliferation of meaning that reinvents subjectivity and

space.

It is important to emphasize this because discussions of historical memory in Chile often

gravitate towards a phantasmatic recuperation of suffering and tragedy as affects that return to

haunt the present, but that are severely limited in their ability to transform the present. One

example is Patricio Guzmán's film *La memoria obstinada* (1996), where the black-and-white

footage of Guzmán's documentary *La batalla de Chile*, filmed during the Allende years, is juxtaposed against the colorful but amnesiac and depoliticized present. Guzmán's interruption of the hegemonic narrative serves an important purpose: that of unmasking and destabilizing the operational whitewash and the smooth surfaces of the so-called "transition to democracy" in Chile. This critical operation is marked by its own negativity, however. It functions as a denunciation of the present, but it is not able to establish an affirmative relationship – and dialogue – between the past and the future. As Gareth Williams writes in regard to Tomás Moulián's book *Chile: Anatomía de un mito*, the critique of transition remains trapped within the transition's own hegemonic logic: it names the residual signifiers from the past, but is unable to articulate their negativity. Thus, it implicitly disavows what Williams, quoting Spivak, calls "the possibility of a reading that could be characterized as an active transaction between past and future" (287). What is needed, suggests Williams, it to open up "thought's relation not just *to* the Other (to the grief, groans, remorse, nostalgia, pain, etc. of the past) but to a relation *with* the Other and with otherness that is, itself, Other" (288). In other words, what is at stake is opening up thought's relation to those affective remainders that *in the present* demarcate the necessary zone of exclusion produced by liberal democracy.

I believe it is necessary to dissociate *Lumpérica*'s politics of writing from any writing of denunciation. Rather, I want to suggest that the text enacts an encounter with the living, multiple, and heterogeneous remainders of the city in its moment of constitution as a neoliberal space. At the same time, the novel offers a testimony of the limits of narrative reason when it confronts its own margins and zones of exclusion.

In the preface to *El Padre Mío* (1989), Eltit relates that since 1980 she was involved in research on the city and its margins, together with the visual artist Lotty Rosenfeld. The research attempted to capture and express ""el movimiento vital de esas zonas como una suerte de negativo –como el negativo fotográfico– necesario para configurar un positivo –el resto de la ciudad– a través de una fuerte exclusión territorial" (9) In this context, the world of urban vagabondage "resultaba … ejemplar para pensar órdenes cívicos que transgredían pasivamente la vocación institucional por el refugio en el espacio privado" (10). Diamela Eltit's interest – along with other members of the Colectivo Acciones de Arte (CADA) –in the city and its margins needs to be situated historically. In spite of its similarity with other dictatorial processes, the Chilean situation under dictatorship was exceptional in one aspect: the establishment of a permanent state of siege (*estado de sitio*) and a curfew (*toque de queda*), which effectively closed down the public spaces of assembly and discussion.

The transgression carried out by the homeless vagabonds, the only ones who occupy that city which is closed at night, produces a gesturality (*gestualidad*) that inverts and theatricalizes the civic order established by the expulsion of the citizens from public spaces. "Sus presencias," writes Eltit, "armadas en la pura apariencia, siguiendo un complejo y desgarrado orden cosmético, dejaban entrever significaciones múltiples"; "[su] exterioridad se constituía desde la acumulación del desecho y la disposición para articular una corporalidad barroca temible en su exceso" (10). This presence of the urban vagabonds exhibits the *other* of the city. It constitutes a remainder (*residuo*), a negative that cannot be easily narrativized within the historically constituted national community. It therefore represents what Gayatri Spivak defines as *the subaltern*: "the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic" (Spivak 16).

Elsewhere, Eltit tells of the CADA collective's *interventions* in Santiago's urban space under dictatorship (starting in 1979). Using graffiti and other forms of intervention in public spaces, CADA strived to exercise a "micropolitics of the city": "Materializó, mediante gestos sucesivos, el hambre de ciudad, es decir, el imperativo de instalar una nueva circulación cuyos flujos removieran el militarismo que controlaba … a aquellos cuerpos ciudadanos" (1999, 37). The artistic interventions in the space of the city, as well as *Lumpérica*'s writing practice, materialize a certain kind of city-dwelling and citizenship. These gestures of dwelling do not create a utopian outside, however, but emerge in the very interstices of surveillance and dictatorial oppression.

The gestures *Lumpérica* indexes can be understood as a sort of *ritual of citizenship*. This ritualism does not attempt, however, to found a new "civil society" from below, as in the texts of Monsiváis and Poniatowska. In these authors the popular subject appears substantivized as the agent and constitutive power of a new political order. *Lumpérica*, on the other hand, forces us to rethink the traditional categories of the political by situating at the center of the public square a subject who is female and marginal, a *body* whose speech and gestures can be read as a moment of denarrativization in the constitution of the national public sphere. Such crisis of narrative logic manifests itself in writing's encounter with subaltern affects and gestures. In the context of Eltit's writing, *affects* can be understood not merely as the circulation of affectivities, but also as *affectations* (postures) of the body and its movements.

These affects and gestures, in the context of occupying public space, acquire the signification of rituals of civility. According to Idelber Avelar, in *Lumpérica* "la misa negra de Eltit viene a representar un espacio marginal y utópico que, si bien no sobrevive a la luz de la mañana, anuncia su repetición cíclica para la noche siguiente" (32). Avelar insightfully picks up

on the ritualism involved, but the connotations of the "black mass" do not cover all the resonances of the ritual performed by L.Iluminada and the *lúmpenes*, which opens itself up to a pagan and indigenous ritualism, incorporating, for example, elements of the Mapuche *machitún*:

> adorna, perfora, conquista y ronda / danzante machitú
> collar de plata al cuello
> …
> machi
> mater se encumbra pa los quiltros
> trompa pa los perros
> bozal pa los animales
> …
> toqui toque tocada en plata fina l'oscura
> …
> la bailan en rueda ya esos quiltros. La raza
> …
> sáltenla del collar / pierda la plata
> el pecho se l'electrifica, la ruca asola
> la perra entrega su collar de plata:
> el toqui al señó / al amo al trompa
> danza su trutruca en festival  (102-103)

Clearly this is not a secular ritual of civility, but a ceremony that invokes the marginalized names of Mapuche culture (machitún, machi, ruca, toqui, trutruca) at the very limits of the Spanish language. L. Iluminada thus ritualizes the cultural and corporal margins (in the affect of bodies that touch each other to resist the cold) of the nation, the radical heterogeneity where the nation stops making sense.

In a moment of communication / communion with the marginalized, Iluminada "se para bajo el farol y sobre el metal su dedo caligráficamente escribe en forma imaginaria … 'dónde vas' con letras mayúsculas y con la mano completa borra lo escrito" (122). But the communion only becomes possible after several attempts, writing with chalk and erasing the words on the ground of the square, then moving aside to let the *lumpen* themselves write, and finally lying on

the ground and erasing the chalk writings with her dress (but imprinting their meanings on her back). This scene problematizes the practice of writing as a discursive, intellectual practice, and opens it up instead to a physical dimension. The moment when Iluminada writes on the metal with her finger recalls Pedro Rojas in Vallejo's poem, who "escribía con su dedo en el aire." Writing thus becomes more gesture than discourse, initiating another civil ceremony, also invested with non-secular, mystical, features, a Eucharistic partitioning of the chalk:

> acercándose a cada uno le pasa un trozo de tiza que va rompiendo entre sus dedos. Con la cabeza baja lo hace y ellos de la misma manera la reciben, pero cuidando de no rozarla. Tan sólo la punta de sus dedos toca el trozo de tiza. (124)

In this city of Santiago, closed during the night due to curfew, the question about the "usefulness of the public square" becomes immediate, urgent. This question cuts through the two scenes of interrogation in the novel. The public square is lit, which provides the basis for the protagonist's name, Iluminada. The irony of a city closed by night, but efficiently illuminated, becomes the paradox that invites a meditation on the deeper meanings of civility and public space. Public lighting, the dense electrical web that crosses urban space, on the one hand, and the illuminated neon signs (*letreros luminosos*) on the other, converge in a double interpellation: surveillance and consumption. Iluminada's gesturality becomes possible within those parameters, as if her illumination were only possible during those brief moments in which the light flickers: "una acción posible para ser realizada durante el parpadeo de la luz eléctrica" (91).

Electric lighting thus initiates a rhetoric of cinematic performance. Iluminada rehearses and repeats "escenas múltiples de caídas" for the cameras, for the eye of power. Conversely, electric light becomes – in the section where she becomes-mare – an electrical discharge that could be associated with the flash, in memory, of the horror of torture. Even within such matrices

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of power, however, Iluminada is able to articulate a counter-interpellation. She *performs* her own marginality and corporality *for the eye of power*. She lets herself be *illuminated* by the neon sign, and in doing so perverts the authoritarian and commercial meanings of the electric lighting. She thus ruins, suspends, and makes inoperative the literal meanings of the neon signs in the space of (her) play:

> Nada más ocupaba su pensamiento, hasta que una idea emergió de su cerebro: todo ese espectáculo era para ella. … Alguien había montado esa costosa tramoya en la ciudad, como don para sí; con escritura y colores, con colores y movimientos, cálculos ingenieriles, trabajo manual, permisos. Todo eso para que ella sentada en la plaza en la noche se dejara llevar realmente por el deslumbramiento de esos vidrios que insuflados de colores, activados por baterías, la sometieran a ella. (212-13)

The neon sign (*el luminoso*), an image of the sovereign, illuminates, surveils, and names the citizens. As a mare, Iluminada lets herself be branded by the name of the father, which remains written on her body:

> No hay dualidad para la bestia, su ardor está en el césped que rastrilla, cárcel y cordel bajado que el anca raja al punceteo de su febril marca, el fuego, el hierro que caliente va a trasponer su hegemonía. … su anca, la ancada no tiene más propósito que la tenaz marca sobre su posterior señal … (77-78)

It is the name of the father, of sovereign power, which grants identity, surname, and legal identification ("carta ciudadana"). When she becomes-bitch, however, this woman of breed (*raza*) and surname mixes with the mongrels (*quiltros*), the nameless multitude, and thus makes circulate a desire for contamination, for bastardization of the father's name. Such a desire would give rise to an impure race/breed:

El padre cuida la raza. … L'incesta el apellido. La procacidad del nombre propio que la gime el pater consolándola; … + huye del estigma, el animal pierde su rasgo distintivo; esta potranca falla mas no el anca que remite a su carta ciudadana, sólo entonces l'anca de verdad (99)

In her multiple becomings-animal (mare-cow-bitch), Iluminada lets herself be illuminated / enlightented (and branded) by the names of power. At the same time, however, she perverts the name of the father and thus in some manner liberates herself from the surname, from identity/identification: "Brusca la fina raza se enraíza con su metal collar al cuello … la perra fina es perseguida por los quiltros" (101). She frolics with the mongrels until she loses her silver chain/collar (*collar de plata*).

This unorthodox sexuality, "la escritura como refrote" (137), made of circulation of affects and desires, reinscribes the citizen's body as a marginal and feminine corporality that destroys, in some way, the fiction of the universal subject (implicitly masculine) that would ideally constitute the political citizen, the user of urban public space. Ronald Christ notes, for example, that in *Lumpérica* Eltit dismantles one of the most classical and privileged images of Western culture: Leonardo Da Vinci's universal man, a male body centered in a square, inscribed in a circle. This is the image that defines the "golden mean," man as the measure of all things. *Lumpérica* instead elaborates a different image: a marginal woman, at the center of a public square, surrounded by the circle of urban traffic (Eltit 1997, 205).

Eltit's installation of a female subject does not imply, as one might think, the inscription of a "marginal" or "minor" identity that *speaks* its difference in a coherent and articulate manner. Such an identity would be susceptible to recuperation within an eventual re-narrativization of the nation. But Iluminada does not allow for such recuperation. Like the baroque and schizophrenic speech of El Padre Mío, the gesturality of Iluminada remains undecipherable, opaque, because it

does not hide any occult or arcane meaning. In this sense her presence and her gestures can be compared to Paz Errázuriz's photographs of mad lovers in the book by Diamela Eltit and Paz Errázuriz, *El Infarto del alma*. These photographs confront us with a place where the hegemonic categories of community, communicability, transparency, and legibility, become inoperative. As Gareth Williams points out: "Errázuriz's work opens us up as witnesses, and as desiring witnesses, to the necessary devastation and annihilation of our own thought and of its potential relation to any critical desire to cross and to recuperate that which is uncrossable and unrecuperable" (301).

In *Lumpérica*, the ritual dance of the bitch-woman surrounded by mongrels, when she becomes an Araucanian Machi, concludes – like the Mapuche ritual –when the woman goes into a trance, spins on herself, and finally falls down. At that moment, a man runs to hold her and prevent her from falling to the ground. As she falls Iluminada says, or in fact murmurs, something we do not hear. This word, or phrase, becomes the target of the interrogation that is repeated twice during the novel: "Tú eras el único que estabas cerca y por eso la sostuviste y entonces ella te habló," dice el interrogador. "Eso lo saben todos, dime simplemente qué te dijo" (147). But the man cannot explain what Iluminada said because, as it seems, they were words without importance.

If the result of the illumination does not hide any occult meaning, then *Lumpérica* would appear to be admonishing us not to become interrogators. It warns against folding subaltern affects and gestures into our own parameters of history and community. In other words, it suggests we should not *interrogate* the margins in order to discover a coherent narrative, or to project a "solution" for the future. What the text does propose, and affirmatively so, is to let ourselves be affected by the radical heterogeneity and multiplicity that unravels the idea of the

nation as we know it. The illumination suggested by the text is only possible on condition of suspending our own intellectual and narrative authority. The text also suggests that a true encounter with the other requires interrupting our habits of identification with the other:

> Su alma es ser L. Iluminada y ofrecerse como otra.
> Su alma es no llamarse diamela eltit / sábanas blancas / cadáver.
> Su alma es a la mía gemela. (97)

Instead of prompting an encounter with the other in which we recognize *ourselves*, *Lumpérica* invites us to see the other *as other* – only as such can the other soul become a kindred soul.


Eltit therefore does not envision a reconstruction of civil society by means of a dialogic polyphony. Instead, she reimagines the categories of city-dwelling, public space, gender, transgression, and the body, and renders inoperative the nation's power to incorporate these categories into a coherent narrative of citizenship, thus approaching the nation's residual fragments and social heterogeneity without synthesis.

Eltit's politics of writing is significant because it resists the hegemonic narratives that present the moment of destruction or fragmentation of "civil society" as an interruption within an otherwise linear history. This is especially true in the case of the Chilean "transition to democracy." As in other post-dictatorial societies, the hegemonic narrative of the "transition to democracy" was articulated in terms of a "reconstruction" of a civil society – as the reconstruction of a totality that was once lost (or desired). But such a narrative obscures the state's constitutive violence and instead suggests that military repression represented a moment of "interruption" or "excess" within the otherwise smooth and trajectory towards development

and national integration. This hegemonic narrative makes it possible to fold in and transcend the

violence of the "past" into a success story of neoliberal modernization. In Jean Franco's words,

> The power of the media, on the other hand, has supported the official versions of events. In Chile, the story goes, a nation dangerously divided went through periods of chaos and internal strife; order was restored by the military and this allowed the eventual transition to democracy and a policy of reconciliation. Torture, exile and death, the wreckage of the Left, the overturning of a democratically elected government, and the dirty wars that destroyed the innocent as well as the guilty lives are folded in to an upbeat narrative. (Jean Franco, 239).

*Lumpérica* challenges this hegemonic narrative. It does so not by invoking a politics of memory

and mourning, but by forcing narrative thought to confront its own constitutive outside, liberal

democracy's necessary zone of exclusion and subalternity.

# 4.    HOMOSEXUAL DESIRE AND URBAN TERRITORIES

Homosexual desire constitutes one of the visible limits where the public sphere's claims to universalism fail. Homosexual desire, understood as a circulation of affects and sexualities in public and urban spaces, challenges the normative distinctions between the public and the private, and therefore demonstrates the exclusionary nature of such norms. The texts of Luis Zapata and Néstor Perlongher to be discussed in this chapter explicitly reflect on the practice of homosexual cruising and hustling as they existed in Latin American cities in the 1970s and 1980s. They look at practices that are socially and sexually marginal, but rather than denouncing such marginalization or demanding the incorporation of homosexual life within the public sphere, these texts show instead how cruising takes advantage of public spaces of gathering and, in turn, shapes territories into spaces of sexual desire and sexual meaning. Gay cruising can thus be seen as a practice that carves territories for itself within regimes of power.

Zapata's *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* (1979) and Perlongher's *O negócio do michê* (1987) correspond to a significant moment in the redefinition of contemporary urban space in Latin America's metropolises. The transition away from a regime of discipline centered on a strong state and institutions of civil society and towards a decentered, managerial state organized around economic flux and a dispersed system of control, also witnessed the crumbling of traditional social, political, and sexual identities and the emergence of minority identities, lifestyles, and non-traditional politics. It is within this context that we should approach Zapata's and Perlongher's texts. They respond to the emergence of a public homosexual identity in Latin America and describe new, more mobile and flexible, forms of social and sexual subjectivity. At the same time, these texts explore the more marginal forms of social contact and sex in public involved in gay cruising and prostitution, mapping them out even as they begin to disappear or to

be pushed further and further away from the city centers and to be rendered somewhat obsolete by the emptying out of public space as the privileged space for social contact, as a result of privatization and neoliberal modernization.

*Urban Space and Queer Subjectivity  in El vampiro de la colonia Roma (1979)*

Luis Zapata's 1979 novel *Las Aventuras, Desventuras y Sueños de Adonis García, el Vampiro de la Colonia Roma*, published in English as *Adonis García: A Picaresque Novel*, was the first Latin-American gay novel to be translated into English. It was published in 1981 by the Gay Sunshine Press in San Francisco. It is a text that has played an important role in the consolidation of Latin American gay male fiction since the 1980s. Despite the novel's popularity, however, its mainstream reception has tended to view it merely as an interesting document of juvenile street slang and minority sexual lifestyles in the city of Mexico of the late 1970s. I would like to suggest, however, that rereading the novel today can help us to critique the contemporary production of space in Latin American cities as well as to interrogate the narratives of personal and social development that accompanied these cities' processes of modernization.

The novel consists of a long monologue by a young gay hustler, nicknamed Adonis on account of his good looks. Presented as an ethnographic interview with an implied listener, the narrative recounts Adonis' sexual adventures in the Mexico City, his encounters with the police, and his failure or refusal to change his lifestyle and become a disciplined subject and a productive member of society. Most of the narrative takes place in the neighborhood known as the Colonia Roma in Mexico City, which according to José Joaquín Blanco:

has been, over the last twenty years [i.e.,1960s and 1970s], one of the principal settings for homosexual life in the city of Mexico. The fact that it was near the downtown permitted anonymity and freedom among the multitudes; its decadent décor was a fitting backdrop for marginal people, living on the fringe of society, ranging from unsuccessful painters and sculptors to writers without editors and musicians without contracts to those engaged in prostitution and the drug trade. (6)

The novel has many picaresque elements, including the adventures and misadventures of the main character, the irreverent treatment of figures of authority and middle class values, and the narrator's humorous persona, sometimes boastful and defiant, sometimes self-deprecating. However, if in the classical picaresque the pícaro moves, according to Claudio Guillén, "horizontally across space and vertically across society," *Adonis García* suspends and questions the character's personal trajectory as a story of development of the self, and instead gives us an homage to the possibilities of endless circulation and cruising in a large metropolis like Mexico City.

Appropriately, the novel closes with a meditation on anonymity and circulation. "I get sick and tired," says Adonis, "of seeing the same people   the same fuckin shmucks    the same faces and the same places    and that's when I feel like moving on     but then I say to myself "move on    but where to?" (198).  At this point, he has a dream about being abducted by gay Martians and leaving the planet. As he flies away in the spaceship, Adonis watches the City of Mexico from above as it gets smaller and smaller, in a dreamy and ambiguous moment that can be read, perhaps, as a wish to escape the marginalization and uncertainty of his daily life:

I don't think I'd take time to think twice about the offer    I'd drop everything    like that    I wouldn't take anything that'd remind me of this world … and from the spaceship I'd watch the city of mexico getting smaller and smaller and smaller    and goodbye to the statue of the angel of independence     and goodbye to the statue of the horseman      and goodbye to the

> monument to the revolution    right? … and we'd travel at incredible speeds … through the
> window I'd see the stars zooming past    and then I'd close my eyes and make a wish    that
> I'd never   never ever    for any reason   come back to this fuckin world
>     now turn it off   right?  (202)

This conclusion suggests Adonis' ambivalence towards his own life. His sad tale of poverty, loneliness and marginality is peppered by humorous anecdotes, irreverence towards the system, and celebration of pleasure and self-determination. At the same time, however, the conclusion of the novel points towards the fact that Adonis is also a prisoner of the system. If in some ways he is a "vampiro" who lives in the shadows and sucks money out of his clients, life in the streets and the life of hustling and economic uncertainty also sucks the life out of him so that like a vampire, perhaps, he also becomes thinner and more invisible the more his life-story advances. His storytelling can therefore be seen as a performance for his audience, not merely to validate his lifestyle and conjure away the judgement on his sexuality and lifestyle, but also as a way to arrest time and to keep at bay the reality of marginalization and insecurity.


In *Del Lazarillo al Sandinismo* (1987), John Beverley argues that in order for the early modern novel to emerge in Spain, it was first necessary for *an individual life* to become available as a unit or item that could be circulated and exchanged in the form of a book.  In other words, the early modern novel – whose earliest expression was the Spanish picaresque – emerged at the same time that books began to circulate as commodities. Thus the modern novel represented a world in which social relationships were beginning to be dominated by commodity exchange. In Beverley's words, "La novela moderna tiene la peculiaridad de ser la mercancía cuyo valor de uso es representar un mundo social  dominado por la forma de la mercancía" (48).

The Spanish picaresque novel – whose paradigm was *El Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) – responded to and depicted a society in the midst of a process of modernization that was to prove highly contradictory: what Beverley elsewhere calls "una modernidad obsoleta." This process can be described as the transition from feudalism to early capitalism – what Marx labeled *primitive accumulation*. Primitive accumulation presupposes a number of social transformations such as the destruction of feudal forms of land ownership and rural labor, which results in the production of an urban population that is "free" to sell its labor, and also obligated to do so. The swelling of the marginal urban population thus leads to the emergence of a permanently unemployed sector, a marginal population that is "excessive" because the economy cannot fully absorb it, and yet is necessary for capitalist accumulation to occur. Such "excess" or "marginal" population constitutes, according to Beverley, the 'objective correlative' of the social world of the early picaresque novel: "prostitutas, rufianes, jornaleros, soldados, hidalgos pobres, alguaciles, mendigos, clérigos menores, etc." (57).

If we recognize that primitive accumulation is both a necessary precondition for the emergence of capitalism, *and* an ongoing process in capitalist societies as they continue to produce populations susceptible to becoming urban proletariat or subproletariat, we will understand why the conditions that gave rise to the early Spanish picaresque are so similar to the social world of modern Latin American cities. The figure of the *pícaro* in the Hispanic world therefore has a double status: it represents the emergence of the modern, individual subject, and a desire for upward social mobility. He does not accept his poverty, but he also resists proletarianization and work ethics. The *pícaro* remains a marginal figure, in Claudio Guillén's phrase a 'half-outsider' to society. Ultimately, however, the *pícaro*'s story criticizes the wealth

and corruption of the upper classes, and condemns, directly or indirectly, the enormous social costs of modernity.

Similarly, in the decades after 1940 in Latin America, and especially in the more industrialized countries –such as Mexico and Argentina–, industrial modernization produced a depopulation of the countryside and a massive migration to the cities. Until the 1960s, however, it was still possible to believe that 'development' – conceived as a forward-moving process – would provide the conditions for the successful integration of subaltern populations into the national project. By the 1970s, however, the promises of developmentalist thinking had become much more questionable. I want therefore to argue that we can read Zapata's novel as marking a moment of inflection in Latin American culture, when the so-called marginal populations of cities began to become visible, not as marginal, but as prevalent and constitutive of the new city that was beginning to take shape. Zapata's writing thus responds to the emergence of a new urban subject, which can neither be fully integrated into the urban economy, nor wished away by hopes of development towards the future. *Adonis García* challenges the idea of the city as conceived by Modernism: as a space for the integration of diverse populations into one culture, for the production of citizenship, and for the production of personal identity and individuality.

*El vampiro* is not a novel of personal development or growth. Towards the end of the narrative Adonis' situation is not much more socially stable than it was ten years ago when he first arrived in Mexico City – he does not move 'vertically across society'. His is not a story of personal development leading to self-knowledge and self-possession, or to the consolidation of subjectivity. Instead it is a story of roaming and cruising told from a point of view that seems to be situated in a perpetual present. And yet in being told in this way, the story reveals its own

historical moment, when personal (and national) narratives of development and historical progress begin to founder.

The narrative begins, appropriately, with Adonis wondering what there might be of interest in telling his life story – what might be the *meaning* or *trajectory* described by its unfolding:

> what the fuck!    tell ya my life story?    why? who'd be interested in that?    besides I got a very bad memory    I'm sureta forget a whole lotta important details    i mean    unimportant details    because I don't really think anything very important's ever happened to me … I don't think I was destined to be anything    or if I was    my destiny got lost on the way    I mean all my life I've spent here    in the city    y'understand?    on the street –    with my friends    bumming around if y'like    working sometimes    hustling almost all the time    in other words    tryna stay alive  (15)

It is therefore significant that Adonis' life story does not become allegorical of the development of the nation-state, as was common in the Modernist novels. In this respect it may be symptomatic that there are hardly any references to the larger narratives shaping Mexican society in this period, including the student movement of 1968 and the tense political climate of the 1970s.  These issues appear to have little or no impact on Adonis' life, which is narrated, it would seem, from an eternal present. Or rather, from a situation in which time appears to move, but leads nowhere.

And yet Adonis' references to everyday life in Mexico City are precise and densely referential, revealing an intricate knowledge of the city and its spaces. One of his many encounters with the police turns into a festive celebration of desire. A group of young men are driving down the calzada de Tlalpan: "we were all gay … two of the guys    the kinda gays who have no inhibitions   were hugging and kissing each other right on the highway in full view of

everybody" (81). They are speeding and soon they are stopped by a couple of police officers who make them get off the car and start frisking them. Soon enough, however, the frisking degenerates into heavy petting, and the boys use the situation to their advantage, asking the officers to come along to a party. Adonis states, "and that's how we had sex   and very good sex it was   with two worthy and hunky minions of the law   I saw one of them   the one we called 'captain' quite a few times after that and we got to be kinda buddies" (83). This episode saturates urban space with desire and play.[64]

But the narrative also shows that another feature of "everyday life" in Mexico City was violence against young people. The novel abounds in stories about Adonis and his friends getting kicked out of their apartments for smoking pot, or being harassed by the police for having long hair, or even being arrested for no good reason. This has to be put in the context of the overall repression of young people by the PRI's authoritarian policies in the 1970s. Following the 1968 student massacre and the development of guerrilla insurgent movements in Mexico, young people who did not conform to bourgeois standards of dress and behavior became immediately "suspicious." José Agustín, for example, relates that in 1967 the *jipitecas* held a 'be-in' at Parque Hundido in Mexico City, singing the song "All together now" by the Beatles, and marched down Insurgentes to the Ángel de la Independencia, handing out flowers to pedestrians and drivers. When they arrived at the Ángel, the police started dispersing and beating them. This moment initiated a constant repression under Díaz Ordaz, writes Agustín:

> Los arrestos tenían lugar sin motivo alguno, simplemente porque los agentes veían a jóvenes con el pelo largo. Los rapaban, los golpeaban, los extorsionaban y después los consignaban por 'delitos contra la salud.' De 1968 a 1972 la crujía Efe de la cárcel de

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[64] This episode, in its utopian irreverence, recalls Reinaldo Arenas' stories about the Cuban military in *Antes que anochezca*.

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Lecumberri acabó como la de Teotitlán: con hongos, flores, signos de paz, murales sicodélicos y rock pesado en los altavoces del patio. (78)


Los chavos de la onda siguieron siendo perseguidos, golpeados y encarcelados, porque nunca hubo un movimiento articulado que permitiera la cohesión de tanto joven y la defensa de sus derechos. Más o menos pudieron sentir su peso colectivo en septiembre de 1970 cuando jipitecas y onderos se congregaron en Oaxaca para presenciar un eclipse solar total. (84)

It is thus only indirectly that Adonis' narrative reflects these events, and it does so from a more "countercultural" than from an overtly political perspective.

Zapata's novel was radical for its time in that it mentioned the exact places where homosexual cruising, hustling, and sex could happen. *El vampiro*'s references to the downtown area of Mexico City becomes saturated with sexual meaning. It is explicit about street names, corners, and public places. One notorious example was the men's room at *Sanborns*, an "extremely popular chain of … cafeteria-drugstore-restaurants operating in various parts of Mexico City, traditionally the favorite cruising-grounds of homosexuals" (Zapata 1981, 53 n1). "Cause y'know," Adonis comments, "the sanborns restaurants are irresistibly attractive to gays" (105). He specifically names the *Sanborns* at Aguascalientes, Niza, Centro Médico, and el Ángel. Adonis also recounts that he stands so often at a well-known cruising spot, the corner of Insurgentes and Baja California, by the Cine de las Américas, that one of his friends jokes that he should have a statue of him erected there. It would be magical, Adonis teases, and would bless those that rubbed its crotch with the gift of eternal potency.

Thus while a good part of the narrative deals with Adonis' social marginalization, the novel also celebrates and maps out his ability to carve a space of desire and pleasure for himself in the metropolis of Mexico City. As José Joaquin Blanco wrote, "*Adonis García* – made up of poverty, desperate sexuality, sickness, hunger, persecutions, abandonment and outlaw elements –

turns out to be, by a sort of magical transformation, a positive, cheerful, even optimistic book"

(7). According to Blanco, Adonis "never typifies, represents, or classifies: he lives, with a

toughness which is a higher form of love for his own body, for his life and for the bodies and

lives of others," and thus becomes "an idealised, exemplary figure – more the yearning, lyrical

vision of the ideal hustler than one of the all too well-known naturalistic portraits of the hustler

as a clinical case" (8).

Blanco's remarks open up the possibility of reading the novel as moving away from the

constitution of individuality or personhood, and instead as presenting Adonis as the point of

convergence of diverse discourses that define the semantic terrain in which he moves, but fail to

completely capture his subjectivity. Adonis after all resists proletarianization and the work ethic

and is unable to keep a job – or a lover – for very long, choosing instead to live for the moment,

for the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. Faced with a number of disciplinary discourses of

social, moral, economic, and sexual normalization that attempt to tell him who or what he should

be, Adonis adopts an ironic distance from them or, more accurately, dips low enough to dodge

them. His ironic poise is  marked by his ability to mock the language and rhetoric of each and

every discourse – what Blanco calls an "ironic criticism of the use and misuse of language."

Adonis' language is thus highly self-reflexive and irreverent, starting with sexual identity

which is, after all, *performed*. Adonis states: "it's the queens who drag down the reputation of us

dedicated homosexuals   us serious homosexuals   ha   those of us who don't have to go around

letting it all hang out and letting the whole world know that we're fags" (46). He easily slides

over the terms (homosexual, queen, fag), neither fully identifying with them nor fully rejecting

them. His his little ironic comment, *ha*, not even a word, merely a sound, marks the entire

statement as playful and self-ironic.  In fact, this *ha*, which interrupts and arrests this self-

identifying statement, is prevalent throughout the whole text; it constantly comes up in Adonis' speech to mark an ironic awareness of the artificiality of language – of language, discourse, and identity as nothing but surface and play.

But Zapata's novel marks a moment when disciplinary discourses based on education and social normalization begin to lose credibility. Adonis' irony thus serves to unmask the moralistic rhetoric of certain discourses. When one of his lovers, a wealthy diplomat, tries to convince him to give up hustling and to "do something with his life", Adonis comments: "because the famous zabaleta was really quite a moralist at heart    that I should mend my ways and go back to the straight and narrow   that I should start studying something and 'forge a future for myself'   ha as the women's dress-making academies say" (115). This moment points towards the exhaustion of developmentalist discourses based on national modernization, the disappointment of the promises of social and economic integration of marginal sectors, and the weakening (and eventual crumbling) of the enclosures of disciplinary society.

This moment also marks the emergence of gay identity –in the contemporary sense– in Mexican society. But I want to point out the constitutive ambiguity in the way the novel deploys homosexual desire: Adonis identifies as gay, but in his case this does not imply either a sense of personal identity, or an awareness of the struggle for gay rights or gay visibility.  Thus while Zapata's text is itself a gesture of gay liberation, it also demands that we think more carefully about what 'gay' or 'liberation' might mean in this text.

The significance of the moment when the novel was published will become clearer if we remember that *Adonis García* was written between 1975 and 1977, and published in 1979.  It was the year when the first 'gay pride' march took place in Mexico City.  The very small number of demonstrators were made to walk down a street parallel to the Paseo de la Reforma, thus

rendering the march virtually invisible. The next year, however, gays and lesbians received

support from other social sectors and 7,000 people marched down the Paseo de la Reforma, from

Chapultepec to the Hemiciclo a Juárez near the Alameda.  Significantly, gays and lesbians chose

to congregate and take shelter under the monument to the great Mexican reformer Benito Juárez.

The Gay Pride march became an annual tradition and has continued since then, although later

marches have been significantly less massive (eg. 2,000 in 1995) (Cruces 58).

Zapata's novel was thus published in this moment of gay awareness. While celebrating

and advocating a liberation of desire, however, the book also gives a word of caution by

indicating how gay identity emerges within a mesh of power in which identity can also become a

technique of surveillance and control. After being taken in for questioning about one of his

friends who is suspected of theft, Adonis spends three days in jail and, shortly before being

released, is interrogated about his occupation:

> I remember one of them asked me what I did and I told him I hustled and so on     and he
> says to me 'and where do those things go on? 'cause i     well I'm interested in that'     just
> think what class that guy had     'I'm interested'   he says     'in the problem of homosexuals
> in mexico'  (147)

No longer able to cast homosexuality as criminal or pathological, this 'enlightened' discourse

turns gay visibility into the occasion for the production of knowledge about a sociological or

medical 'problem'. The novel thus sounds a warning against reading Adonis' life story as merely

another "case study" of sexual pathology or social marginality, and opens up instead the

possibility of reading Adonis as a figure for thinking about the production of non-normative

subjectivity and its relation to specific uses of urban space and to dwelling in the streets as a

historical possibility that neoliberal privatization is making increasingly unviable.

*Sex in Public*

While Zapata's character has no interest in queer activism or gay identity, however, the novel does affirm a queer politics of desire. It is not merely a narrative denouncing social oppression or marginality, but instead an attempt to open up other forms of being in common. Its politics can best be grasped in relation to the novel's production of space and territoriality. Adonis' wandering and cruising in the city actively participates in the production of sexual and affective relationships that are collective, but at the same time also *impersonal* and *decentered*. And here lies the novel's radical dimension: desire generates relationships that are not necessarily linked to the reproduction of the family, private property, or the state. In this sense, Adonis' urban trajectories trace something like a *cartography of desire*, to use Guattari's expression, producing and expanding territories of collective desire and pleasure.

In an article entitled "Sex In Public" (1998), Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner investigate the correlation between public space and the production of queer sociability. Indeed, the authors argue, while the existence of an open public space facilitates queer interactions, queer sociability is itself an important element in the production of public space, so that both dimensions sustain each other. Berlant & Warner argue that the production of the category of sexuality as 'intimate' and 'private' is linked to the emergence, in modernity, of a 'public sphere' that must be defined as separate from the private or domestic sphere. This distinction is essential to ensure the reproduction of a society based on the model of the heteronormative family and on private property. Casting sex as intimate is necessary to produce private personhood, citizenship, and ultimately the national community. The idea of 'sex in public' naturally violates this model because it delinks sexuality from the production of private personhood. Thus non-

heteronormative, and in particular queer sexuality, open up the possibility of affective affiliations that are not mediated by, or conducive to, citizenship and the national community. To quote Berlant & Warner: "Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation" (558).

Thus queer sexuality in public spaces is not merely an instance of transgression, but also participates in the production of alternate territories and ways of being in the world. It is not surprising therefore that queer sex, particularly sex in "public" places, is perceived as a threat to public morality and family values.  The authors cite New York City's 1995 Zoning Amendment, an initiative to cleanse the city's public spaces of adult businesses by relegating them to certain areas zoned as nonresidential and forcing them out of areas defined as 'residential'.  Such zoning initiatives can only conceive of a neighborhood in a very limited way as a "community of shared interest based on residence and property."  "But a district like Christopher Street," the authors argue, "is not just a neighborhood affair. The local character of the neighborhood depends on the daily presence of thousands of nonresidents. … Urban space is always a host space. The right to the city extends to those who use the city" (563).

It is possible to see, then, why the protagonist of *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma* exhibits precisely the kind of sexual mobility that interrupts the development of personhood and private subjectivity.  If Adonis' sexuality is 'radical', it is not by defining an oppositional identity or a community of shared interest, but instead by remaining apolitical and irresponsible – by pursuing narcissistic pleasure for its own sake. Paradoxically, however, this irresponsible production of territories of desire creates its own forms of collectivity and being in common.

We can better grasp the dynamics of this apparent contradiction if we bring to bear upon this discussion Leo Bersani's analysis of the constitutive tension between homosexual desire and community. In a discussion of André Gide's *The Immoralist*, Bersani points out that the main character's erotic relationships with Arab boys without the development of a personal relationship, but merely for the pursuit of narcissistic pleasure, can nevertheless be seen as radical in that it imagines relationships between bodies as surfaces, and does away with the categories of the psyche and personhood that are necessary for the reproduction of discipline and citizenship. "Michel's itinerary," writes Bersani, "suggest[s] that if a community were ever to exist in which it would no longer seem natural to define all relations as property relations (not only my money or my land, but also my country, my wife, my lover), we would first have to imagine a new erotics" (128). Bersani thus characterizes what is 'revolutionary' about *The Immoralist* in the following terms:

> Michel's pederasty is the model for intimacies devoid of intimacy. It proposes that we move irresponsibly among other bodies, somewhat indifferent to them, demanding nothing more than that they be as available to contact as we are, and that, no longer owned by others, they also renounce self-ownership and agree to that loss of boundaries which will allow them to be, with us, shifting points of rest in a universal and mobile communication of being. If homosexuality in this form is difficult to know, this is because it no longer defines a self. (1995, 128)

Adonis moves across the space of Mexico City, "an idealised, exemplary figure," in José Joaquín Blanco's words, and in his meanderings, as in his playful awareness of language and discourse, we recognize a 'mobile communication of being' that dwells on surfaces and neither requires nor attempts to produce any kind profundity, selfhood, or identity. If *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma* is indeed a foundational text for gay awareness in Mexico and Latin America, it is also something else: it is a text that suspends many of the categories of identity and citizenship we

have come to accept as essential to gay awareness. Rereading Zapata's novel today serves to remind us of the revolutionary potential of queer sexuality, a potential that cannot be fully contained or articulated within the larger political issues and struggles at the level of civil society. It is important not to underestimate the urgency and significance of such issues nor to undervalue the ongoing struggle over them. Yet it is also important to remember that perhaps gay activism should be as polymorphous as gay desire or, for that matter, all sexual desire.

In his preface to the novel, Blanco attempts to outline the politics at work in *El vampiro*: "With authors like Luis Zapata," he affirms, "we go a step further [in the examination of contemporary city life]: toward the defence and enjoyment of this urban life and the defence of the liberties and civil rights (not merely the patriotic, economic, racial or class rights) of the individual" (7). He then concludes by pointing out that Zapata's "novel contributes, in my opinion, not merely to the struggle for the civil rights of the homosexual but also to the whole movement of criticism of and resistance to the generalised social oppression prevalent in Mexico and elsewhere, of which the persecution homosexuals have suffered is only a manifestation" (8). Blanco's invoking of civil rights here, while understandable from a tactical point of view, is questionable as a reading of the novel's politics of desire. It suggests that homosexual desire can function unproblematically as a demand for inclusion within the civil and public spheres. In order to do so, however, sexuality must be privatized. It must be transformed into a "civil right" of the "individual." This discourse, which has been prevalent among gay activists and queer theorists in Latin America (for tactical reasons) has unfortunately become an unthought dogma of gay liberation. I believe that Zapata and Perlongher outline a very different articulation between politics and desire, one we would do well to revisit today. Similarly, in "Historia secreta

de los homosexuales en Buenos Aires" (1997), Juan José Sebreli also concludes by affirming the civil rights of the individual:

> El derecho al placer es una reivindicación que no sólo atañe a los homosexuales sino también a las mujeres, y que aún no ha sido conquistada en vastas regiones del mundo, como el continente africano. El homosexual no debe, por lo tanto, ser respetado como el Otro … sino como un individuo. El problema deja el ámbito ontológico … para bajar al plano más prosaico de la juridicidad; se trata de una reivindicación esencial entre las libertades individuales, la de ser dueño del propio cuerpo, y el derecho a la privacidad, a la intimidad, un punto aún no cumplido de los derechos humanos. (364)[65]

I want to outline instead a reading of Zapata and Perlongher that goes in the opposite direction to Sebreli's argument. These authors suggest that it is possible to conceive of homosexual desire as the production of *other* forms of being in common, that do not require the production of individuality or normative civility. But in order to do this, it is necessary to follow Guy Hocquenghem's idea that : "Homosexuality is first of all a criminal category. … In fact homosexuality is a matter of delinquency first and foremost" (67).

### Cartographies of Desire: Perlongher's *O negócio do michê* (1987)

In his essay "Los devenires menores" (1991), the poet and anthropologist Néstor Perlongher defined the task of the "desiring cartographer" as follows:

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[65] Sebreli's allusion to those "vast regions of the world, such as the African continent" which have not yet gained the individual's right to pleasure, is very telling. It points to the Eurocentric and vaguely racist baggage that comes along with the discourse of universal human rights.

La tarea del cartógrafo deseante no consiste en captar para fijar, para anquilosar, para congelar aquello que explora, sino que se dispone a intensificar los propios flujos de vida en los que se envuelve, creando territorios a medida que los recorre. (1991, 14)

The concept of a *desiring cartography* (or *cartography of desire*) alludes to Félix Guattari, whose trip to Brazil in 1982 resulted in a book co-authored with anthropologist Suely Rolnik, *Cartografias do Desejo* (1986), which linked the emergence of new social movements in Brazil to the deployment of multiple desiring forces. In his article, Perlongher wonders about the fate of the various minority movements that at the time traced the map of "another Brazil," very different from that of 1990. Contemporary social movements in Brazil appear to have moved away, Perlongher writes, from the desiring expansion of "territorios que vuelvan vivible la existencia," towards a demand for recognition within the established order (16). The feverish explosion of desire that helped to bring about the democratic transition in Brazil corresponded to the mingling of social and affective demands and to the productive confusion between politics, culture, and sexuality.

It was during this period that Perlongher carried out his own *cartography of desire*, an urban ethnography of male prostitution in São Paulo, between 1982 and 1985. *O negócio do michê* (trans. *El negocio del deseo*) studies the dynamics of a doubly transgressive practice: homosexual prostitution. Perlongher resists, however, fetishizing transgression as in and of itself subversive, and instead attempts to show by what networks of power and knowledge transgressive subjectivities are linked to the dominant order and subject to its logic. Similarly, Perlongher also resists introducing categories of identity in order to explain the behaviors and urban trajectories of his subjects. It is in this sense the Perlongher understands *cartography* – as an effort to grasp the fluid dynamics of desire without solidifying such flux into rigid categories. In fact, Perlongher questions the usefulness of the notion of identity for grasping the dynamics of

marginal and minority groups: "Es interesante constatar que la propia noción de identidad resulta de una suerte de 'contrabando ideológico' de las ciencias sociales sobre los grupos de minorías" (1991, 16). According to him, categories of identity work to "translate" desiring singularities into the dominant code. Perlongher's study does not, however, naively imply that transgression exists outside of the dominant code. On the contrary, it traces the ways in which *desire*, in its very moment of emergence, is already captured or "translated" into what he designates as a "code-territory" – a space of meaning demarcated by the interplay between *binary tensors* related to the dominant categories: age, race, social class. It is only within these parameters that *homosexual desire* (in this case) becomes intelligible and can be translated into monetary value in the scene of prostitution.

The notion of "desire" used by Perlongher requires some clarification. It is derived primarily from the writings of Deleuze & Guattari and Guy Hocquenghem. In *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze & Guattari criticized the traditional conception of desire as "lack," inherited from the psychoanalytical tradition. Instead of conceiving desire as lack, they argue, we should understand it as force, production, and vitalism. Following Deleuze & Guattari's ideas, Hocquenghem outlined a political theory of homosexual desire in which he understands sexual desire as fundamentally polymorphous, mobile, and productive. In *Homosexual Desire* (1972), Hocquenghem argues that "Properly speaking, desire is no more homosexual than heterosexual. Desire emerges in a multiple form, whose components are only divisible *a posteriori*, according to how we manipulate it" (49-50). Indeed, following Deleuze & Guattari, he notes that while Freud discovered that sexual energy (libido) is polymorphous, he "immediately enchains [the libido] as the Oedipal privatization of the family. The first appearance of the libido is accompanied by the most amazing system of guilt-inducement ever invented" (73). Thus when

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Freud discovers homosexual desire to be related to desire in general, he forcloses the revolutionary potential of this discovery by inscribing homosexual desire as a failed Oedipalization: "Freud asserted the universality of homosexual desire, as a translation of the polymorphously perverse. But no sooner had he discovered the universality of this 'perversion' than he enclosed it, not geographically but historically, within the Oedipal system" (79). This is how psychoanalysis, Hocquenghem asserts, renders desire "negative" rather than "affirmative": "Desire, as an autonomous and polymorphous force, must disappear: in the eyes of the psychoanalytical institution, it must exist only as lack, or absence" (77).

The psychoanalytic institution thus works hand in hand with mechanisms of repression in order to control and harness desire to (capitalist) productivity and Oedipal guilt. Homosexuality emerges, after all, first and foremost as a criminal category and a social/psychological pathology. Hocquenghem writes: "Homosexuality is first of all a criminal category. … In fact homosexuality is a matter of delinquency first and foremost" (67). And he continues by stating that: "The psychiatrisation of homosexuality has not taken the place of penal repression: rather, the two things have gone hand in hand" (73). It is in this oscillation of homosexuality as a category of clinical pathology and social pathology that Hocquenghem discerns homosexuality's revolutionary potential as an interruption of the normalizing logics of the state, private property, and the family.

In order to "work" for society, homosexuality must be harnessed through guilt and shame, in order that it may be repressed and *sublimated* into productivity and reproduction within the family. But as the institution of the family has begun to crumble in modern societies, Hocquenghem argues, capitalism "has turned the family into the rule inhabiting every individual under free competition" (93). Thus free-market society does not impede non-normative

sexuality, but places it "under the sign of guilt and transgression." Hocquenghem here notes how sexual desire is captured by the images the market puts to circulate, thus translating sexual trangression into value: "the advertising media flood us with the images of naked young *ephebi*; the meaning, however, is: 'What we desire has already been translated into a marketable transgression'"(94). By establishing a space of exception/transgression, capitalism reasserts its normalizing logic: "Capitalism turns its homosexuals into failed "normal people," just as it turns its working class into an imitation of the middle class" (94).

Because the category of homosexuality is marked by shame and transgression, Hocquenghem sees very little potential in appropriating it as an identity. The only true revolutionary politics, he asserts, is one that challenges identitarian categories that attempt to restrict and classify sexual desire, not one that turns a minor identity into a source of pride: "Homosexual desire has got entangled in a game of shame, and it si no less perverse to turn this into a game of pride. In fact people are always a little ashamed of being proud of being homosexual" (143). In order to outline a revolutionary sexual politics, Hocquenghem uses two images, that of the "community of the anus" and that of the "cruising machine" (or "pick-up machine"). In the Oedipal order, the anus is the ultimate site of privacy. In Freud's theory, the anal "stage" is a necessary step in becoming a socially responsible individual. In contrast to this, Hocquenghem proposes a "socialization" of the anus as a site for the production of social relationships. These relationships, the argues, are not mediated by phallic competitiveness and individualism, but instead contribute towards the creation of a collective and de-individualizing space. The annular community becomes possible through the "pick-up machine," the endless *dérive* or circulation of male bodies in search of sexual pleasure, which Hocquenghem compares to the "schizo-stroll" described by Deleuze & Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. He writes: "instead of

translating this scattering of love-energy as the inability to find a center, we could see it as a system in action, the system in which polyvocal desire is plugged in on a non-exclusive basis" (131). Hocquenghem thus describes gay cruising as a specific way of being in common.

All of this allows Hocquenghem to outline a politics of homosexual desire (and homosexual liberation) that asserts desire as polymorphous and multiple. This gives rise to a politics based on desire, not on identity. Speaking of the gay liberation movement, he discusses its determining relation to desire as its most revolutionary feature: "the homosexuality of the gay movement invests the social field directly, without passing through sublimation; in fact it desublimates everything it can by putting sex into everything" (138). It is this desublimation that Hocquenghem sees as radical, because in blurring the boundaries between the public and the private, it puts into crisis the traditional categories of politics. The gay movement thus invests politics with desire: rather than starting from a general political theory, it starts from a specific desiring situation. Finally, the homosexual movement is not invested in the future, but in the now. Those who attempt to repress homosexuality normally do so on behalf of "the young, the sexual minors." "The Oedipus complex," Hocquenghem writes, "is based on the succession of the generations and on the conflict between child and adult" (41). The gay movement, instead, "is related to the ungenerating-ungenerated of the orphan desire, and is unaware of the passing of generations as stages on the road to better living. It knows nothing about 'sacrifice now for the sake of future generations', that cornerstone of socialist enlightenment" (147). By breaking away from traditional leftist politics' investment in the future and temporality, Hocquenghem opens up the possibility of thinking about specific practices and uses of space as inherently revolutionary, because they are able to "invest the social field directly," without reference to a Modernist teleology of emancipation.

Hocquenghem's model has been criticized for its excessive reliance on Freudian categories and for its extreme emphasis on male sexuality, which leaves lesbianism out of his analysis. In his 1978 preface to the book's English translation, Jeffrey Weeks argues that it is not sufficient to simply reverse Freudian categories in order to escape their logic, and thus expresses some skepticism about Hocquenghem's use of sexual desire as a reversed form of the Freudian libido. He also argues that the notion of the "community of the anus" can only have a figurative, not a literal meaning, as evidence shows that anal sexuality is the most marginal, even among homosexuals. Hence, Weeks argues, "the major problem here is that the emphasis on the anal has clearly a metaphorical rather than a properly scientific meaning" (39). Finally, Weeks also argues that Hocquenghem's disinterest in understanding female homosexuality limits the scope of his analysis.

Hocquenghem's exclusion of female sexuality, however, which opens his work up to the same criticisms that are often leveled against Foucault, can be explained (if not justified) from his perspective. His intention is not to "represent" sexuality in all of its varieties; it is rather to indicate those places where sexuality *interrupts* the normalizing logics of power. As such, male sexuality is a privileged category in psychiatric and legal discourse, and "sex in public" is also a privileged space of interruption, in ways that female sexuality, historically, has not been.

From today's perspective, however, there are perhaps other aspects of Hocquenghem's work that open up more urgent questions. It seems that the model of sexuality he celebrates as revolutionary is inherent to historically specific configurations and uses of urban space. In fact, as I will show below, Perlongher's ethnography of male prostitution emphasizes the mutual dependency between spatial configurations and the forms of subjectivity they allow or discourage, a topic that will be further investigated by reference to Teresa Caldeira's book on

crime and segregation in São Paulo. There is a question then about the conditions of possibility for "revolutionary" forms of sexuality. If urban space encourages or sustains modalities of cruising, the demise of public space discourages them. The AIDS crisis in the 1980s can also be seen as initiating a process of radical discouragement of collectivization of gay male sexuality. At the same time, since the 1990s, internet technology has succeeded in producing new forms of cruising and privatization of space and sexual experience, which do not necessarily embody the more radical aspects of Hocquenghem's pick-up machine and annular community.

Furthermore, these marginal forms of sexuality, which Hocquenghem sees as immediately revolutionary (granted, only when expressed in public) acquire a more ambiguous character in Perlongher's ethnography. Perlongher shows how desiring trajectories and their lines of flight are always already inherent (if not fully captured) within a social field that is defined for them. Indeed, sexual desire and its trajectories emerge, Perlongher will show, within matrices of power and their deployments of force. Having said all of this, however, *Homosexual Desire* remains a crucial critique of dominant understandings of sexuality. Its notion of desire as affirmative force and its resistance to understanding sexuality in terms of identities and categories, have a powerful resonance today.

Perlongher's *O negócio do michê* (1987) was originally submitted as his Masters Thesis in Social Anthropology at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP) in São Paulo. After having been active in the Argentine *Frente de Liberación Homosexual* (FLH) –which dissolved in 1974 as a result of the increased repression of homosexuality (Sebreli 338)–, Perlongher eventually accepted a scholarship in 1981 to do graduate work in Brazil, where he remained until his death in 1992. Based on interviews with male hustlers (*michês*) in the streets of São Paulo, the ethnography

assembles both a map of the "code-territory" that the *michês* define and traverse, and – based on

the "life story" testimonies of many older homosexuals – a history of the semiotic configurations

of São Paulo's gay ghetto between the 1960s and the 1980s.[66] A *michê* can roughly be defined as

a young man whose main appeal is a conspicous display of youth and masculinity. Often *michês*

are also fair-skinned and can pass for white in Brazilian society, which enhances their appeal.

Age, masculinity, and race then become the main *tensors* (Perlongher's term) that define the

michê's desirability and "value." At the same time, *michês* do not recognize themselves as *gay*.

They may be ostensibly heterosexual or bisexual, or even if they have sex exclusively with men,

they tend to see their sexual activities as something they do "for money" but which does not

define their identity.

In his preface to the book, Peter Fry argues that Perlongher's ethnography provides a

testimony of a certain kind of *cultural resistance* exhibited by the michês (male prostitutes)

against the dominant culture:

> Los *michês* están sometidos a los ataques de la policía; pero el mundo del cual forman parte, el mundo de los hombres, de los maricones, las lesbianas, etcétera está sometido al ataque de la modernidad. Una cultura entera está bajo la mira no sólo de la policía, sino de todos aquellos que adscriben al esquema de lo que llamé anteriormente "anglosajón," pero que participa, de hecho, de las clases dominantes, protagonistas fundamentales de la ideología individualista de todos los países modernos. (15)[67]

Fry here shows suspicion towards the categories of identity that are used to name the ambiguous

and multiple sexual identifications and affiliations of the *michês*. He is pointing to the ways in

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[66] Perlongher uses the word "ghetto" as a descriptive spatial term, not as a negative qualification. He appears to prefer this word because the territorial zone of the *michês* is not a "gay neighborhood" but rather a "moral region" associated with transgression and marginal night life.

[67] All quotations from Perlongher's ethnography are from the Spanish translation by Moira Irigoyen, *El negocio del deseo*.

which modernity constantly attempts to attack and discipline the margins and residues it produces. In this case, those who are marginalized retain a *nomadic* sexuality that resists being easily incorporated into categories of identity and social integration.

According to Perlongher, "En líneas generales, la forma de agrupación de las poblaciones en el área del centro de San Pablo parece corresponder a la clásica 'región moral', cuya tendencia a la dispersión ya fue prevista por el propio Park y descripta por Castells" (51). The dispersion of this "moral region" follows the appearance of sites for night life and specifically *gay* venues in residential and middle class neighborhoods such as Jardins, Pinheiros, and Vila Madalena. It is also possible to observe, Perlongher notes,

> cierta tendencia (todavía incipiente) a la instalación de homosexuales manifiestos en las áreas propias de la "clase media liberal," donde habría cierta tolerancia para comportamientos *gays* más o menos evidentes. … Sin embargo, ese éxodo molecular de "homosexuales asumidos" puede no apuntar específicamente a constituir *gay ghettos* a la usanza americana. Por el momento, aparentemente esos *gays* de clase media yuxtaponen a los rasgos de su peculiar "subcultura" otros propios del sector socioeconómico al cual se acoplan. (52)

Perlongher here is marking a divergent tendency (rather than an absolute distinction) in North American and South American gay cultures. While in the United States and Canada gay men tend to constitute "gay neighborhoods," in Brazil and Latin America generally class affiliations tend to weigh heavier on the territorial distribution of populations, so that gay life demarcates primarily spaces of circulation rather than spaces of residence. He continues:

> En el caso del Brasil urbano, la inexistencia de un proceso de agrupación residencial de la población homosexual, en el sentido clásico de la noción de *ghetto*, se corresponde con

un desarrollo aún no monopólico de las formas de "homogeneización" de esas poblaciones en beneficio del "*gay*-macho," como ocurren en las ciudades americanas. … Fry tiende a vislumbrar un avance del modelo "*gay*-igualitario" como efecto del mayor peso de las clases medias urbanas democráticas en la vida social brasileña. (56)

Perlongher perceives therefore a gradual displacement of popular forms of representation of homosexual genders, but a displacement that is not linear. Indeed, he notes, there is a certain "resistencia de la marica" that can be discerned in popular sectors and that works against the homogeneization of *gay* identities.

Many of the testimonies of Perlongher's informants are life-stories and thus serve to outline the transformations of the gay ghetto in the downtown area of São Paulo from the 1960s to the 1980s. Clovis, for example, explains that in the 1960s, cruising and sex normally involved *maricas* and *machos*. Among the theater crowd, he notes, some people were trying to impose a more modern style of *gay* with *gay*: "pero era muy criticada, considerada 'escandalosa', muy mal vista" (68) and was seen as an intellectualoid fashion of "maricas locas." Clovis continues, "La diferencia entre la 'loca' y el macho era mucho más nítida que la de ahora, se hablaba en términos de loca y chongo, no se usaban mucho las clasificaciones de homosexual, ni de activo/pasivo. También entre las lesbianas la diferencia entre la *lady* y la *sapatona* era muy rígida" (69).

During the 1960s, and especially after 1965, there was a tendency for gays to "take over" urban public spaces. Such was the case of the Galeria Metrópole, an architectural monument to São Paulo's modernity, which was patronized by homosexuals as well as other social groups. The Galeria became a space of social mingling, where different social classes shared the same space. One of Perlongher's informants contrasts the circulation of young men in that space, side

by side with São Paulo's bohemian sectors, with what he sees as the sad display of boys standing around on the sidewalks in the 1980s, waiting to be picked up for money (73).

The persecution of homosexuals was not felt immediately after the 1964 military coup, but only after 1969, when the AI-5 decree suspended civil liberties. Thus a persecution of gays, transvestites, and other "undesirables", in an effort to expel them from public places, was unleashed. The Galeria Metrópole became a privileged target of police and military persecions. Persecution by the police did not of course bring about the disappearance of gays from public spaces, but it did force homosexuals to use spaces in more discreet ways, retreating to cinemas and public lavatories, and always under threat of expulsion, arrest, torture, and death. Around 1974, however, with the emergence of an anti-dictatorship movement, many non-normative urban identities began to flourish, and among them *gay* identity appeared in its contemporary sense. According to Clovis, "Ahí ya aparece claramente el *gay* como personaje. Fue alrededor de 1974. Era un cuestionamiento de los valores burgueses, un cansancio de lo convencional. Todo el mundo buscaba actividades alternativas: artesanía, artes" (75). This assemblage of hippy-gay-alternative youth movements concentrated around specific spaces: the street Nestor Pestana, the Largo do Arouche, and the street Rego Freitas. However, Perlongher's informant points out, these places were all patronized by middle class *entendidos*: "Seguía existiendo el foco más pobre, más lumpen, de la Avenida Ipiranga y São João y de la Plaza de la República" (75).

As Perlongher makes clear, *gay* identity emerged in Brazil originally as a *differential* identity from the traditional feminized homosexual identity associated with transvestites and "queens". The gay activist group *Somos* defined a more masculinized identity in its initial stages in the late 1970s, and was therefore unsuccessful in its attempts to integrate transvestites or more flamboyant queens into the movement. In practice, this resulted in the constitution of a gay

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visibility drawn mostly from the middle classes: "De hecho los militantes *gays* … fueron en general reclutados entre los *entendidos* de la vasta 'clase media', y no entre los travestis ni entre las locas pobres más 'escandalosas'; sin embargo, cuando el grupo comienza a decaer (1981), pasa por una aguda fase de lumpenización" (82). But gay visibility also began to come under close scrutiny by the São Paulo police in 1980. A large scale raid against homosexuals at the tiem was defined as a "cleansing operation." From the police's point of view, however, the operation discriminated, conceptually and practically, between gays and transvestites. The latter were seen as dangerous, deceiving, and criminal, perceptions connected to transvestites' class origins, while gays were seen as "ordinary people" who, according to the secretary of security, "may have a job." In practice, then, transvestites and queens hanging out in the streets were perceived as a social danger, while "gays" quietly having drinks at the bar, were perceived as safe. Perlongher comments ironically: "Se puede sospechar algún tipo de 'caja chica' bajo esta complacencia policial por el microcapitalismo del placer *gay*, muchas veces controlado por la mafia o por la propia policía, como es común en otros países latinoamericanos" (90). This history serves to complicate the commonsense understandings of "gay visibility" and "coming out." The logic of "coming out" or *desbunde* (in Portuguese) becomes intelligible and even tolerable as long as it is circumscribed to spaces of production (jobs) and consumption (bars). Conversely, transvestites and queens are seen as dangerously lower-class, dark-skinned, and prone to violence and crime. They can only be conceived as "out of place." Therefore, the police sees it as its job to expel them from public places.

*Michês* on the other hand occupy a more ambiguous space. They are marginal and lower-class, but because they are fair-skinned and hypermasculine they are not immediately perceived as homosexual or as "undesirables." Therefore they are able to drift more easily in and out of

power's gaze. *Michês* normally circulated, Perlongher notes, in different sub-districts around Avenida São João and close to the Praça da República, in the heart of the gay ghetto. As Perlongher goes on to demonstrate, the complex interplay of desire, value, and circulation in the streets of São Paulo makes it difficult to speak of gay "identities." Instead, *michês* often travel across "code-territories" (the term is Deleuzian) that shift even within the space of a few blocks. Skin color, class, masculinity, and age may be measured by different expectations in one street or square than in another. The *dérives* or trajectories of the *michês* are not merely spatial, therefore, but also define define a range of shifting identifications and valorizations.

These expectations and values Perlongher defines as tensors of  gender (maculine/feminine), age (young/old), class (rich/poor), and – the least explicit one –, race (lighter/darker). The *michês* micro-migrations in urban space therefore demonstrate the fluidity of subject-positions which these young men traverse. A hustler is subject to a series of "becomings" (another Deleuzian term), Perlongher argues, that constantly redefine his gender and sexuality. A *michê's* appearance of masculinity is what *valorizes* him for his clients. Many michês for this reason feel threatened (as do most men) by any attempt on the part of their clients to "feminize" them. It is not uncommon, however, for michês to adopt, "off the record" a passive role in the sexual relationship, and therefore to become-feminine. This is kept confidential, however, as a michê's sex-appeal (and therefore livelihood) depend on projecting the impression of masculine dominance. Desire simultaneously traces lines of flight, and becomes reterritorialized according to binary codes. These codes translate the surfaces and gestures of the body into meanings that define what is "desirable" and what has "value": "Esta operación de expropiación/confiscación de los cuerpos revelaría, en el dispositivo de la prostitución, uno de sus mecanismos básicos, que es el hecho de estatuir equivalencias entre el nivel de las

intensidades pulsionales y los segmentos monetarios" (220). This translation is never absolute, however; it retains a degree of uncertainty: "las micromobilizaciones pulsionales que entran en juego en el dispositivo de la prostitución no dejan de mantener cierto grado de heteronomía, de 'indiscernibilidad', con relación a la traducción jurídico-monetaria que el contrato estipula" (221). Hence, while they *enact* the binary tensors of the dominant code, they also have the possibility of perverting them and opening lines of flight.

If gender, class, age, and race are the tensors that define the trajectories of the michê, Perlongher argues, there are also crucial tensors that define the "value" of these trajectories: *desire/interest* and *chance/calculation*. Money, of course, becomes the main signifier that translates desire and sex-appeal into value. *Michês* justify their homosexual behavior by saying that they "do it for money," which cleanses them from any homosexual desire. Perlongher's point is that the openings of desire or "lines of flight" are immediately "captured" within the dominant logics that assign value to the body and its trajectories. Similarly, the urban drifting of the male hustlers can be compared to the classic image of the flâneur: it is open to chance and the unexpected, to the eventfulness of night life. But this openness is immediately captured, in the scene of cruising, by a *calculation* and evaluation the *michê* makes of the situation at hand: the monetary possibilities of every client, the expected sexual behavior, the danger of the situation, the profit to be made. Thus, Perlongher shows, the "cruising machine" is also balanced out by a "calculating machine." He therefore concludes that *michês* function as a "zone of translatability" between libidinal intensities and monetary values. The machine of crusing puts to circulate bodies, affects, and desires into a social field defined by binary tensors that *express* the dominant social contradictions (age, class, gender, race) in Brazilian society.

Perlongher's ethnography was written at a time when diverse social movements were engaged in a struggle over public space and civil liberties, contesting the authoritarianism of the military dictatorship and mobilizing energies towards a democratic opening. As his narrative of *michê* life makes clear, however, this was also a period in which the redefinition of the boundaries of gender and sexuality produced contradictory effects of identification ("coming out" as gay) and disidentification (refusing to identify as gay). Urban territories, as they are explored in Perlongher's cartography, dissolve the idea of the city as a space where people "adopt" new "identities" and instead point towards a radical deterritorialization. The shifting nature of this urban dynamic suggests that the concept of identity reveals, more than anything else, a methodological impasse in theorizing the marginal manifestations of desire, what Perlongher calls "una suerte de 'contrabando ideológico' de las ciencias sociales sobre los grupos de minorías."

If we restore *El negocio del deseo* to its historical moment of political openness, it becomes possible to read in it a space of indeterminacy, an *interregnum* of sorts in which the categories of masculinity and femininty, desire and politics, are momentarily suspended. Perlongher points to the ways in which sexual identities always emerge within a social field of contending forces. Sexual desire is in principle indeterminate: the *michês'* trajectories in the downtown of São Paulo are defined by a code-territory of multiple (and shifting) identifications and affiliations. Hence the "old" distinction masculine/effeminate is being partially displaced by the "modern" *gay* identity. The affirmation of this identity, however, emerges from a middle class position that seeks to distinguish itself from queens and transvestites. Similarly, the *michê*'s refusal to identify as *gay*, and the openness of his trajectories, are also subject to the translation of the body and its desires into monetary value. Ultimately, what Perlongher's analysis makes

evident is the ways in which, at both ends, desire is susceptible to being captured by the managerial logic of capitalism. His ethnography undoes, in a sense, the linear narrative that suggests a progressive movement from "oppression" to "liberation" and instead suggests a more nuanced view of the politics of desire. This opens up a space for thinking this transitional moment – a moment of conceptual and political indeterminacy – as an open field that would soon come to be filled by market forces. As Jean Franco writes, in Latin America "the great democratic opening for women, gays, transvestites, and ethnicities also occurred at a time when difference had become marketable" (2002, 272). In this light, it is easier to understand why in 1991 Perlongher already perceived a shift among the new social movements from the explosion of desire and the production of territories towards a demand for recognition within the dominant system. At the same time that democratization in many Latin American countries opened up possibilities for minority politics, market forces were already commodifying and particularizing these differences in ways that tended to splinter the social field, thus moving away from the convergence of diverse forces in a common space signified by "cartographies of desire." As identity-based forms of minority politics have become more integrated into the democratic political system, other forms of social marginality have instead been emptied of their political meaning and have begun to motivate calls for increased repression of marginality and delinquency, increased surveillance and "security" in public spaces.

## *São Paulo and the Disappearance of Public Space*

In her study of crime, segregation and citizenship in São Paulo, *City of Walls* (2000), urban anthropologist Teresa Caldeira outlines the process of erosion and withering of "public space" as we have come to understand it in modernity:

> Haussmann's boulevards embodied conditions of anonymity and individualism, allowing both free circulation and inattention to differences and therefore helping to consolidate the image of an open and egalitarian public space. These are exactly the values that are under fire in contemporary São Paulo and in many other cities, where public space no longer relates to the modern ideals of commonality and universality. (214)

Caldeira traces the history of "patterns of segregation" in São Paulo and shows how architecture and city planning have evolved to serve the purposes of sustaining segregation rather than integration. While in the early twentieth century the city followed a logic of center-periphery spatial dispersion, since the 1980s São Paulo has been moving into a model of proximity between the social classes, but separated by high walls, fortified enclaves, and tight security. The 'center-periphery' model, with its organization of the city into a center and several 'rings' around it, is still very much present in the infrastructure of the city, however. Caldeira argues that this model became consolidated in the late 1940s, the era of populism under Getúlio Vargas, and depended on the availability of public transportation in the form of buses, a system organized in the late 1930s. The consolidation of this arrangement and the expansion of the periphery led to the production of a city where the poor lived in precarious neighborhoods in self-constructed houses while the upper and middle classes were centrally located in well-equipped neighborhoods. Thus: "The dream of the Old Republic's elite was fulfilled: the majority owned and lived in single-family houses, with the poor out of their way. This pattern of residential

segregation depended heavily on roads, cars, and buses, and its consolidation occurred at the same time that São Paulo and its metropolitan region were becoming the main industrial center of the country and its more important economic pole" (229).

This pattern of social segregation became increasingly marked until the 1970s, when people in the periphery began to use land-ownership as a way to pressure the state for provision of urban services (water supply, electricity, health, education).  Although somewhat successful, this strategy led to the valorization of certain peripheral neighborhoods  and the consequent inability of the very poor to live in them. At the same time, during the 1980s and 1990s suddenly the city 'stopped growing'. For many young people in the city then, auto-construction in peripheral neighborhoods is no longer a viable option, and they have begun to move into the city center, where they can afford to rent *cortiços*. Thus while the center-periphery model is still in place, a shift has been taking place that has brought the different classes in close proximity and has produced the conditions for a 'talk of crime' that justifies the withdrawal of elites into 'fortified enclaves' and increasing support (across class lines) of police violence to repress 'dangerous criminals'. Caldeira summarizes the urban landscape of São Paulo in the following way:

> Contemporary  São Paulo is a metropolis in which there are more favelas and cortiços, but in which many working-class neighborhoods in the periphery have improved considerably; in which old inner-city areas have been transformed by both gentrification and decay; in which rich people live in the central and well-equipped areas but also in new enclosed enclaves in precarious and distant regions, close to the very poor … It is also a metropolitan area where in which the physical distances that used to separate different social groups may have shrunk, but the walls around properties are higher and the systems of surveillance more obvious. (254)

The 'talk of crime' and suspicions of other groups, as well as the sense of basic insecurity in the city, have contributed to what Caldeira sees as an erosion of public spaces and public life. It is not only the rich, but also the poor, who see slum-dwellers and nordestinos as dangerous and who demand more violent means of repressing them. It is not only the rich that isolate themselves in their fortresses, but the poor who are also terrified of going out in the street. Favelas, Caldeira comments, are as 'exclusive' as fortified enclaves, and nobody who does not 'belong' there ventures into one (310).

This 'privatization' of urban public space has been accompanied, Caldeira argues, by a privatization of the means of security and the exercise of violence. The delegitimation of state authority by the escalating cycle of violence in São Paulo has led the rich to hire private systems of security, while the poor have increasingly taken justice into their own hands. There has been a noticeable increase in violent crime, but the causes given for this increase in everyday 'talk of crime', such as the poverty of slum-dwellers and their proximity to the rich, are inaccurate and ideological, Caldeira suggests. Traditional explanations for violent crime include the incidence of factors like urbanization, migration, and poverty, as well as the effectiveness and performance of the institutions of order, like the police. But to these factors we would have to add, Caldeira argues, the role of the public delegitimation of individual rights in Brazilian society, the increasing privatization of security, and the effects of police violence. She writes:

> I suggest that the increase in violence cannot be explained either by socioeconomic and urbanization variables or by state expenditures on public security alone, but arises from a combination of factors that culminate by delegitimating the judiciary system as a mediator of conflicts and privatizing the process of vengeance, trends that can only make violence proliferate. (137)

This 'cycle of violence' and the delegitimation of the state then, is the main dynamic behind the increase in violent crime. Although Caldeira does not state this forcefully, it is clear from her analysis that police violence plays an important role: "the violent action of the state in dealing with crime can only enhance violence, not control it" (130).

São Paulo's urban infrastructure then, has not evolved into greater integration but into new forms of segregation. The problems with the erosion of the possibility of urban community life pointed out by many critics in the 1950s became consolidated in a center-periphery model of spatial segregation. While this pattern of segregation has been in some ways displaced by the provision of social services to parts of the periphery and by an overall shrinking of the distances between the rich and poor, discursive boundaries of segregation have been reinscribed. In the context of a delegitimation of state authority, increased pressure on the police to use more violent tactics in dealing with 'criminals', and the privatization of security, these new boundaries have brought the urban poor in closer proximity with the elites but have rendered them, ironically, even more invisible than before.

Similarly to the process described by Baiocchi for Rio de Janeiro, recent policies and public discourses have tended to shift away from a regime of discipline towards a post-disciplinary regime of inclusion/exclusion. "Violence" – as a discourse – plays an important part in the redefinition of the meanings of urban space. This discourse is concurrent with a process of "privatization" of public space which became highly visible in Latin American cities during the 1990s. The marginal and transgressive uses of public spaces outlined by Zapata and Perlongher, then, can be seen as "political" in the sense that they interrupt the privatizing logic that seeks to turn against public spaces. As strategies, however, they are also bound to run against the disciplinary surveillance and increasing security of the post-modern state.

Caldeira's critique of "public space" is useful even if we are not ready to accept that there has ever been a truly open and democratic public space in modern cities. Similar critiques of the erosion of public space by neoliberal policies have been put forward by cultural critics in Argentina (Sarlo 1994, Rinesi 1994) and Chile (Richard 1998). I believe that the point of these critiques is not to idealize or to wish to reconstruct modern urban space, but to show how those practices of appropriating and using public space that emerged in the interstices of regimes of power are under attack by current policies and discourses of "crime" and "security." To identify these attacks is not to propose a normative idea of universal and democratic public space, but to attempt to understand the ways in which contemporary "liberal" and "democratic" policies function to reproduce patterns of segregation, marginalization, and repression in new ways.

# 5.    DETERRITORIALIZATION AND THE LIMITS OF THE CITY: BUENOS AIRES IN LITERATURE AND FILM

This chapter discusses literature, film, and cultural critique about Buenos Aires in the 1990s. In the aftermath of Argentina's transition to democracy, after the years of military dictatorship, Buenos Aires opened up to intense monetary and cultural internationalization. State-owned industries were rapidly privatized following the neoliberal model that was also being applied in Chile, Brazil, and other countries. Buenos Aires thus renewed its sense of being a prosperous, "European" city, connected to the world. This image, which dates back to the turn of the previous century, was strongly associated with the national self-understanding promoted by Argentina's liberal and cosmopolitan intelligentsia. What made the myth of first-world prosperity believable to so many was the government's establishment of dollar-to-peso equivalency, which gave Argentine currency the appearance of solidity of a developed country.

At the same time, however, the retreat of the state and the strict economic policies of neoliberalism were intensifying the problems of urban marginality and the impoverishment of the middle classes brought about by military rule. In this paradoxical context of apparent prosperity and widespread poverty, the urban space of Buenos Aires became a contested terrain of images. Cultural critics began to challenge the transformation of urban public space into a showcase for private interests and consumerism. Filmmakers began to show the city of Buenos Aires as taken over by the unemployed and the dispossessed, thus radically overturning the meaning of the city's architecture as a celebration of European modernity and liberal prosperity. This chapter will begin by historicizing the idea of urban public space in Buenos Aires as a legacy of the liberal project, in order to situate the interventions of cultural critics who protest the radical privatization of urban life. It will then move to a discussion of urban space in recent

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Argentine films, concentrating on emergent forms of collectivity linked to urban marginality, displacement, and life in the urban center, to conclude by examining the possibilities film and literature offer for conceptualizing post-national collectivities in global urban space.


*Urban Space and Public Culture*


Buenos Aires' liberal elites actively sought to transform the city into a grand European metropolis, and in doing so used resources and made planning decisions in an authoritarian manner in order to achieve the effect of modernity and grandeur the city to this day exhibits: "Buenos Aires shows this scenery," writes urban historian Ramón Gutiérrez, "with the proud certainty that it is the Americas' most European city" (Almandoz 72). As Gutiérrez shows, the urban expansion and reconstruction of Buenos Aires that followed the federalization of the city in 1880 followed the ideals of openness, hygiene, circulation, and Haussmannian monumentality that the liberal and positivist Argentine elites embraced at the time.

The city invested resources in bringing French experts to draw up plans and suggest solutions to the urban congestion, as well as to implement urban planning to "beautify" the urban space. The opening up of diagonal avenues reflected the perceived need to open up the city for pedestrian and traffic circulation, as well as a strong condemnation of the square grid, which was seen by many as boring, repetitious, and alienating. The square grid was in fact seen as an undesirable legacy of the Spanish colonial period, when cities had been built and organized around a checkerboard pattern. As Adrián Gorelik has shown in *La grilla y el parque*, Buenos Aires' urban planning during this period (1880s-1930s) responded to the perception that it was

necessary to limit the city's unchecked expansion into the pampa. Hence the grid pattern (*la grilla*) was seen as a detriment rather than a possibility, and urban planners, as well as literary intellectuals, denounced its boring and alienating aspects (Gorelik 40-1). It did not occur to them, Gorelik points out, to consider the democratic possibilities of the grid as a social leveler – or perhaps, he implies, it was precisely this democratizing possibility that frightened the elites. Conversely, the park, which was seen as an emblem of the democratic mingling of cultures, fulfilled the function of serving as a natural limit to the expansion of the city. The green areas helped to bound and contain the city and thus demarcate it from its western edges that mixed with the pampa.

The French and positivist tendency dominated Buenos Aires urban planning. Diagonal avenues were built to "open up" the streets and "help circulation" (in hygienic fashion), parks were used to provide open spaces for enjoyment of the city space, and boulevards and monumental buildings and other monuments were erected. After the 1920s the French model still persisted, although it was rearticulated in the Modernist tendency promoted by Le Corbusier, who visited Buenos Aires in 1929. The spending on monumental projects continued, culminating in the enormous Obelisco, which became the symbol of the city in 1936. The Obelisco was set in the gigantic Avenida 9 de Julio, which had been opened up in the 1930s and was described as "the widest in the world" (Almandoz 71). The legacy of urban planning – Buenos Aires' European scenery – left a strong imprint on the city and on the uses of public space it encouraged and enabled. The French model, which the elites considered prestigious, was imposed upon the city with very little concern for what the inhabitants might want or need. In doing so, the elites exerted an authority that combined the positivist rationalism of the time with the style of

governance that almost recalls "despotismo ilustrado," the enlightened despotism of the Spanish crown under the Bourbon kings in the eighteenth century.

The urban space of Buenos Aires thus constitutes an ambiguous legacy. Liberal elites shaped the city as a façade for the spectacle of European modernity, as a showcase for Argentina's prosperity as well as its connectedness with the metropolitan world. Avenues, parks, buildings, and monuments expressed the ruling elite's desire for modernity and cosmopolitanism, but they remained merely a façade for a society that was unable to successfully bring about social justice and to democratize social relationships throughout the nation. As Buenos Aires grew in population, the contrast between the architectural façade and the social realities of the city and its poor neighborhoods became more stark. At the same time, however, as Buenos Aires massified and the urban spaces created by liberalism began to be enjoyed by the multitudes, they acquired an important role both in the formation of citizenship and in the formation of a common space of social contact, political agency, and historical memory.

Gradually people would thus come to occupy and appropriate public spaces in their own ways. During the time of Perón public spaces would be taken over by the multitudes, thus causing the "crisis of the liberal city" described by David Viñas, and the panic of the liberal bourgeoisie.[68] As in all large cities, then, public spaces would eventually acquire the status of national patrimony, symbols of being in common and of social contact. It is this ambiguous legacy of public space that cultural critics like Beatriz Sarlo, Eduardo Rinesi, and Adrián Gorelik attempted to address in the 1990s, in the face of radical privatization of public spaces and of urban life during the Menem years. Against neoliberalism's emphasis on private space and

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[68] Cf. David Viñas, *La crisis de la ciudad liberal* (1965).

consumption, on efficiency and velocity, critics began to affirm the importance of face-to-face interactions, social contact in the streets, and historical memory.

In *Escenas de la vida posmoderna* (1994) for example, Beatriz Sarlo criticizes the communicational velocity and consumerism of contemporary Argentina as complicit with a depolitization of public life and a forgetting of the violent past that served to establish this new neoliberal system. Sarlo expresses skepticism towards the idea that consumer choice in the market can be equated with a form of democratic participation. Instead of seeing the shopping mall as a place of postmodern citizenship (as consumption), she tends to see it as a place of forgetfulness, where history is dissolved in the rapidity of technological images, and where the flux of consumption tends to erase and take over the "real city." Sarlo writes: "Se nos informa que la ciudadanía se constituye en el mercado y, en consecuencia, los shoppings pueden ser vistos como monumentos de un nuevo civismo: ágora, templo y mercado como en los foros de la vieja Italia romana" (18). Although she does not name her implied interlocutor, it is evident that she is referring to García Canclini. She goes on to add that:

> Frente a la ciudad real, construida en el tiempo, el shopping ofrece su modelo de ciudad de servicios miniaturizada, que se independiza soberanamente de las tradiciones y de su entorno. … La historia está ausente y cuando hay algo de historia … es usada para roles serviles y se convierte en una decoración banal. …
> Evacuada la historia como 'detalle', el shopping sufre una amnesia necesaria a la buena marcha de sus negocios, porque si las huellas de la historia fueran demasiado evidentes y superaran la función decorativa, el shopping viviría un conflicto de funciones y sentidos: para el shopping, la única máquina semiótica es la de su propio proyecto. (19)

It is significant that many of the infrastructural transformations associated with contemporary Buenos Aires (building of highways, privatization of spaces) took place under the years of the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, and continued at a feverish pace during

the neoliberal government of Menem. It is precisely these continuities between dictatorship and neoliberal free-market economics that Rinesi wishes to underscore in his book *Buenos Aires Salvaje* (1994). Rinesi starts out by suggesting we can read, in the visible cityscape of Buenos Aires, the underlying social processes that shape it: "sugerimos que el liberalismo argentino … se dedicó a soñar, en la fachada de su capital, el rostro visible de Buenos Aires, la sociedad europea que siempre quiso y nunca pudo ser" (13-14). Liberalism, argues Rinesi, establishes politics as a sort of representation: in liberal democracy politicians "represent" the people. But in doing so, they also become actors who "represent" politics *for the people*. Politics thus becomes a performance that transforms people into an *audience*, a public. The whole city, with its theaters and balconies, thus becomes a theater, and the people become spectators in the drama (or representation) of power. Liberal democracy is therefore radically different from what we might imagine direct democracy to be, which Rinesi envisions more as a party: "La fiesta (la democracia) supone un *pueblo*, el teatro (el liberalismo) reclama, en cambio, un *público*" (18). As Rinesi will point out, *that* liberalism and *this* liberalism are really not all that different.

It is therefore not surprising that Rinesi, like Sarlo, is skeptical of the mass media's democratizing potential. Whatever the divergences of their approaches to the city and to politics, both intellectuals denounce "media neopopulism" (the term is Sarlo's) as an usurpation of the people's participation in political life. Instead, the people are produced as a public, an audience for whom politics is represented, and who are said to be represented in politics. Sarlo's and Rinesi's antipathy to the mass media must be situated, of course, in the context of Menemismo's technocratic style of governance, with its emphasis on privatization and simulacra of all kinds.

The city of Buenos Aires under Menem privileged change and velocity. Thus in comparing Menem's neopopulism with the old populism of Perón, Rinesi suggests an image:

*Menem es a Perón lo que Madonna a Marilyn Monroe*. Como la de Marilyn, en efecto, la figura de Perón está asociada a ciertas poses fijas, a ciertos instantes *privilegiados* en los que la grandilocuencia o el encanto de un gesto … dejaban asomar … un aura de sacralidad o de grandeza. (45)

Menem, en cambio – como Madonna – hace de su infinita capacidad para *no ser nunca idéntico a sí mismo*, para no estar nunca en el mismo lugar, ni en el mismo rol … el secreto de su personalidad subyugante. (46)

This endless circulation of ideologies and postures make politics into a spectacle that has left the public balconies of the old city in order to move into the private homes of the spectators. Politics, like policy decisions, thus moves with the velocity of a video-clip, and incorporates into its style of governance the rhetoric of television.

Television, Rinesi argues, becomes the privileged space that *expresses* the underlying social and political forces that constitute present-day urban life. If television attracts us, he states, it is because we have been expelled (and politics has been expelled) from public places. In Rinesi's words, "la televisión se convierte en el sitio donde procuramos un re-encuentro con aquellos espacios públicos de los cuales la fuerza de las tendencias sociales, políticas, económicas y urbanísticas nos han expulsado" (87). But as a medium or space for the expression of citizenship, Rinesi argues, television is not neutral: "La televisión es … un *escenario* que impone a quienes quieren utilizarlo sus formas, sus ritmos y sus códigos" (107). Similarly, the production of a "virtual city" through television is also not neutral. Thus television produces its own "city," its own streets, urban sceneries, and actors, organized according to an underlying logic to which spectators are not privy: "La calle, en rigor, 'entra' a la televisión sólo en la medida en que también es producida por ella" (90); "La calle invade la televisión, entonces. Pero al mismo tiempo, e inversamente, la televisión invade, coloniza y devora la calle" (91).

Rinesi thus sets out, as a dweller of Buenos Aires, to read the social transformations of

the city through the urban trajectories or *recorridos urbanos* that the new urban space enables or

discourages. He critiques, for example, the vacuous individualism represented by people who

walk around everywhere with cell phones, people he calls "el Hombre del *Movicón*" (22). The

endless and useless chattering on the phone reaches its culmination in the fake phones (which

became widespread Latin American cities in the 1990s), which are not real phones, but allow

people to pretend that they are talking to somebody. The cell phone is not merely a sign of status

but, for Rinesi, primarily a way of feeling recognized (when someone calls). Rinesi's critique of

individualism here follows Richard Sennett, whom he cites, and who also discusses the

problematic nature of smooth pedestrian transit in urban spaces without friction, contact, or true

communication.[69] The combination of individualism, self-imposed surveillance, and circulation

without contact, outlines the contours of an urban space designed for fast transit rather than for

lingering in the public areas. Thus, the new city proclaims "the right to circulate" as the main

right of citizenship. The city becomes a space of transit in our voyage towards private spaces:

> La ciudad ya no es pues ese ámbito compartido en el que protagonizamos nuestras interacciones sociales, sino el espacio que debemos atravesar, que debemos *salvar*, en nuestro camino hacia los sitios –privados– en que esas interacciones encuentran su escenario (¿hay que decirlo?: "el trabajo" y "casa"). (35)

As he puts it elsewhere, "Cada día más de velocidad, y cada vez menos de *vida urbana*" (54).

Velocity and vehicular circulation as criteria for urban planning are not innocent, Rinesi argues.

This is evidenced by the fact that: "las grandes autopistas que atraviesan hoy toda la ciudad de

Buenos Aires hayan sido levantadas, de modos particularmente brutales, destructivos y

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[69] Rinesi refers to Sennett's book *The Fall of Public Man* (1974). Sennett's later book *Flesh and Stone* (1994), which also addresses many of these issues, appeared the same year as Rinesi's.

autoritarios, durante los años de la última dictadura militar, que hizo de *todas* las formas de encuentro y comunicación entre los habitantes de la ciudad … un motivo de censura y un objeto de represión" (55).

Rinesi emphasizes the transformations in urban space, such as the building of highways and the opening up of diagonals, as a repetition of the liberal ideology of urban planning. The very concept of a diagonal, he argues, is based on the idea of "saving" time and distances: "Se trata de *atravesar la ciudad,* y *la hipotenusa es siempre menor que la suma de los dos catetos*, y no tiene esquinas" (36). Diagonals have often been cut across parks or squares in order to "improve circulation," completely disregarding the function of the park as site of social encounter. At the same time, private initiatives (from shopping centers and malls) have attempted to expell vendors from parks where they hold arts and crafts fairs and sell used books, claiming that they occupy that space "illegally."

Privatization goes beyond the mere destruction or displacement of "public spaces," however. In fact, Rinesi claims, it turns the whole city into one large private space. In addition to having squares and parks be "looked after" by private corporations, bus stops and street signs begin to exhibit commercial advertising. The supreme example of the privatization of the city is, predictably, the mall or shopping center: "un teatro que ya no *cuida* ninguna empresa privada, sino que *pertenece* a ellas, y que en cambio cuida una abundante cantidad de intimidatorios personajes disfrazados de policías. Por supuesto: privados" (39). Here Rinesi makes explicit an important link between the privatization of space and the privatization of the means of security (and violence) in neoliberal society, a connection that some of the Argentinean films to be discussed also explore.

Although Rinesi does not address it directly, urban marginality represents the residue which neoliberal society produces and cannot fully discipline or eliminate. If people have indeed been "expelled" from the streets, and put into private spaces of consumption (the home or the shopping mall), then those who cannot qualify as private (property-owning) subjects constitute an anomaly to the system's idealized self-understanding. Widespread urban marginality and poverty serves to confirm the idea that urban public spaces are "insecure." As some recent Argentine films suggest, however, it is those who are thrust into poverty by the economic system who are most exposed to insecurity and violence. And yet, I would like to argue that films like *Buenos Aires Viceversa*, *Pizza, Birra, Faso,* and *Bolivia*, resituate the question of urban marginality by asking what kinds of collectivities can be established in the streets. These films thus propose the possibility of inhabiting a collective public space and thus refuse the discourse of privatization. At the same time, however, they also show that this urban space is an ever-receding space, and that those who attempt to use it collectively are subject to increasing marginalization and displacement. The films thus pose the question of "public space" without reiterating the Enlightenment idea of a universal public space of normative civility. Instead, they open up ways of reimagining citizenship and, I want to suggest, ultimately resituate the questions of social justice and citizenships as post-national issues.

***Buenos Aires in Film***

In Alejandro Agresti's film *Buenos Aires Viceversa* (1996) Daniela, a young woman who is unemployed, finds a job through the papers producing videos on current urban life. Her

customers are an older couple who are interested in viewing the city through videofilms. They themselves do not step outside the house, and have remained home since the time of the military dictatorship, when their daughter was disappeared. Daniela is herself the daughter of disappeared parents, and the film suggests the possibility that she may be the old couple's granddaughter. The couple appear to blame their daughter, however, for getting involved in politics. Since they are terrified of the city, they hire Daniela to make a video of Buenos Aires so that they can enjoy it from the safety of their home.

Daniela then goes out and films, with her video camera, what she observes, which turns out to be urban poverty and unempolyment, street kids in the poorer areas of the city, and *villas miseria*. Her video, which appears as a film within the film, evokes the style of neorealism and imperfect cinema. The couple violently reject this image of Buenos Aires, protesting that she has perversely concocted this falsehood merely to "shock" them. They decide, however, to give her another chance, and send her out again admonishing her not to dwell on the ugliness of the city, but on its beauty. Daniela keeps looking for the beauty of Buenos Aires, but it is nowhere to be found. She sighs, in frustration: "¿Dónde mierda se puede encontrar belleza en esta puta ciudad?" So, she decides to make another video focusing on the postcard places of the city: churches, plazas, trees. As she is preparing to take the perfect shot of a gorgeous tree in one of the plazas, a street kid appears at the base of the tree and refuses to leave unless she gives him some money.

The boy, named "el Bocha," becomes Daniela's friend and, as he is also an orphan, the two of them bond. Bocha helps Daniela make the film for the old couple, showing only picture-perfect views of the city, ideal for neoliberal consumption. *Buenos Aires Viceversa* is of course a self-reflexive film, which thinks about the aesthetic possibilities of filmmaking in Latin America

in the context of neoliberalism. Agresti's filmmaking style involves the hand-held camera, out-of-focus and uneven sound quality, and recurring zooms, all of which imitate a documentary style. There is also profuse improvisation of scenes, in the manner of Godard, and the interweaving of several storylines that remain fragmentary and do not offer a final resolution or integration, although all of the characters end up at the mall in the final scene. One of the storylines involves a security guard at the mall, a man who, it is revealed, collaborated with the dictatorship and even tortured people. In one brutal scene, he seduces a blind woman, takes her to a hotel, and tortures her psychologically, telling her how "we used to do this all the time with women like you." Towards the end of the movie el Bocha, who is at the mall with Daniela, goes into a store and – significantly – steals a camera. But he is caught by the video surveillance, and the security guard – the torturer – sadistically kills him in front of several witnesses. Later the news reports the shooting as an "accident." The news "habla de un 'lamentable accidente' en vez de denunciar el acontecimiento por lo que fue, un brutal e injustificable asesinato policial que emblematiza la instalación de la impunidad en la sociedad postdictatorial" (Gundermann 2002, 115).

The consumption of reassuring images, in the comfortable spaces of our homes, and the "security" that protects private property from the multitude of the hungry and unemployed, are thus both seen as aspects of a continuity between the past and the present in Argentina. The neoliberal image of the city, sanitized from poverty and political insurgency, is expressed physically in the space of the shopping center. Many of Buenos Aires' fanciest shopping malls were built in the 1990s under Menem (eg. Patio Bullrich, Alto Palermo). The shoot-out at the mall is thus emblematic of the continuity between dictatorship and postdictatorial society. The violence is metonymic rather than symbolic, as is indicated by the fact that the security guard

was also a torturer in the past. The emphasis is therefore on continuity rather than on mere resemblance. In a larger context, however, the figure of the security guard also signals the way in which neoliberal society reabsorbs those previously involved in the repressive state apparatus, or the unemployed more generally, into a decentered web of private security. If, as Rinesi points out, public spaces are privatized, so is "security"; hence, while the state shrinks and becomes more managerial, it nevertheless disseminates its technologies of surveillance and repression across society. In many ways Agresti's film is very attentive to the economic and political dynamics associated with the Menem years, and anticipated many of the developments that would lead Argentina to the economic collapse of 2001.

*Buenos Aires Viceversa* explores two dimensions associated with the social and cultural transformations in the city of Buenos Aires during the 1990s: dollarization and social amnesia. Further, these are seen as working together to sustain each other. Political amnesia, a feature of post-dictatorial regimes in the Southern Cone, involved specific policies designed to erase the memory of political resistance through a discourse of "looking ahead" and "leaving the past behind." During the 1990s also, the dollar-peso equivalence in Argentina made it possible to sustain the illusion of prosperity that could justify neoliberal policies and rapid transformation that would eventually lead the country to economic disaster.

During this period, however, the image of the city was one of enormous prosperity, an image that began to attract large numbers of migrants from the provinces of the interior of Argentina (Córdoba, Tucumán, etc.) and, soon enough, also immigrants from neighboring countries like Bolivia and Paraguay. In 1996, the city had repealed the discrimination laws against homosexuals that had been in force since the 1970s (Sebreli 322), which contributed to liberalizing the cultural life of the city. At the same time, however, urban poverty and

marginality were on the rise, while the middle classes were sinking deeper into an economic depression. With urban poverty on the rise (the other face of neoliberal modernization), the city's contradictory social dynamics brought about, on the one hand, critical filmmaking of the type exemplified by Agresti and by Caetano and Stagnaro (to be discussed below), but on the other also efforts to aestheticize and contain the image of the city according to the postcard view criticized by Agresti. Alan Parker's film *Evita* (1996), starring Madonna, aestheticized (and completely depoliticized) peronismo in an attempt to recreate and romanticize the old Buenos Aires of the 1940s. The film was shot partly in Budapest which is meant to suggest the urban scenery of the old city after the populist takeover in the 1940s. Something similar can be said of Piñeyro's film *Plata Quemada* (2000), based on Piglia's (1997) novel of the same name. In the novel, after robbing a bank in the province of Buenos Aires, the bandits run off to Montevideo where they hide in an apartment. The police finds out their whereabouts, however, and they are besieged by both Argentine and Uruguayan police forces until they decide to give up all hope of escape. Ritualistically, they burn the money and let it fall upon the street as it burns. The crowd and, through television, the whole city, is paralyzed with horror and disbelief. Immediately the outlaws are branded as monsters and as insane. As a TV reporter puts it, "Burning innocent money is an act of cannibalism" (Piglia 1999, 5). The bandits' transgression against money is understood as "a declaration of total war, a direct, well-organized war against society as a whole" (5). After the money is gone, the police go in and the entire gang is massacred. Piglia's novel thus shows, and critiques, the transformation of crime and money into pure spectacle.

Piglia's novel is also, very clearly, a critique of neoliberalism as based on the fetishism (and delusion) of currency, and a critique of the simulacrum of wealth that sustains the illusion of prosperity. The idea of "the fiction of money" constituted an urgent critique of Menemismo.

At the same time, however, *Burnt Money* also indicates a larger process of abstraction that is consistent with neoliberalism: the fetishism of the money form. The idea of "innocent money" in the novel suggests that money has become emancipated from its connection to crime and violence. Regardless of the criminal way in which it was obtained, and of the deaths of the criminals, the money has a life and a death of its own. If Foucault eloquently described, in *Discipline and Punish*, the emergence of modern society organized around discipline and the enclosure of populations as a way to prevent crimes against private property, the idea of "innocent money" perhaps heralds another turn of the screw to Foucault's society of discipline and surveillance, a society in which "crimes against money" will become the ultimate transgression. Although Piglia's novel suggests a strong critique of the neoliberal system, the novel itself was, problematically, subject to market forces, including the controversial awarding of the Premio Planeta and its publication and distribution by Planeta, a printing house associated with marketing and the promotion of "light" literary styles in Latin America. It is no surprise that the novel became an instant best-seller and was almost immediately made into a high-budget film.

Piñeyro's film *Plata Quemada* (2000) follows the tragic – in the sense of inevitable – death of Ángel and El Nene, and the impossibility of their doomed love. Doomed not because it is homoerotic, but because the money involved in the bank robbery seals their fate. As David Foster explains in his analysis of the film, "there is no escape for them simply because … they must be liquidated in order to obscure intentions by the police to confiscate the loot in the robbers' possession" (2003, 141). During the robbery, Ángel gets caught in the crossfire and wounded. While the correct decision would have been to leave him behind, El Nene refuses to do so and thus complicates the bandits' situation by compromising their escape and burdening them

with a wounded body. Although it is clear that a bond of love unites the two men, they do not have a sexual relationship in the space of the film. Apart from Ángel's own tormented psyche and personal demons, his illness and physical suffering contribute to increasingly alienating him from El Nene, who begins to feel claustrophobic. It is only at the end, when they make their last stand against the police that the lovers are reunited.

Problematically, then, although Ángel and El Nene are constructed as lovers, the film never shows them having any intimate contact. The only time we see El Nene naked is when he makes love with the prostitute, Giselle. We also see the other thief, Cuervo, having sex with his female lover. While this is in keeping with the construction of Ángel and El Nene as macho criminals, who would not consider themselves gay or queer, the contrast between the eroticized bodies and the chasteness of the erotic contact seems contradictory. As Foster points out, "El Nene and Ángel's tragic homoerotic relationship … has hardly anything more visually provocative than the two thieves kissing each other through face-covering bandanas" (139). At the end of the film, amid smoke and flames, the lovers finally die in each others arms, facing police annihilation "as tragic heroes" (143). But the hypermasculine, muscular bodies of the characters are highly eroticized. The actors who played them, Eduardo Noriega and Leonardo Sbaraglia, are both hunky and masculine, and overtly straight. Thus the film's display of their bodies creates a horizon of visibility that is very consistent with the aesthetics of neoliberalism, in that it harnesses the homoerotic potential of the male body in order to transform it into pure virtuality and, ultimately, into consumerist desire, as in the underwear ads of Calvin Klein and Abercrombie and Fitch, which have taken to the extreme the commodificaiton of the male

body.[70] Thus the image of the muscular, tanned, hairless male body corresponds less to a queer politics of the desire than to a mainstream commodification of the body as image.

The question of the body is not incidental, as I belive it expresses the underlying tendency of the film to contain and sanitize its own topics: homoerotic desire, violence, criminality, and urban space. The film's *mise en scène* strongly recalls the *mode rétro* that Jameson associates with "nostalgia film." A filmic rhetoric or style of the past (the film noir) is recovered in order to incorporate the past as pastiche, but without an active dialogue between past and present. The film's nostalgic and romanticized view of the city is constructed through the use of bluish hues and scenes by the beach and in the amusement park. The escape to Montevideo then, regardless of its function within the plot of the film, can be read visually as an attempt to contain and romanticize the dreary contemporary reality of Buenos Aires. Montevideo is a city that retains, after all, much of the appearance and flavor it had in the 1950s and 1960s – as such, it could be read as a stand-in for Buenos Aires at the time the film is set (1965), before the period of brutal military repression that began in 1966. El Nene's affair with Giselle, his tragic and chaste love for Ángel, and the retreat to Montevideo all suggest a space of utopia, a regression into a world that was less complicated. *Plata Quemada*'s nostalgic wistfulness thus represents, perhaps, one response to the increasing impoverishment, social marginalization, and violence that contemporary Latin American cities exhibit. But it is a response that is partially blind to its own conditions of production and circulation in neoliberalism, and as such, blind to the fact that an escape from the city is no longer possible.

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[70] This process of commodification was critiqued, for example, in David Fincher's film *The Fight Club* (1999), although in a very ironic and self-referential manner. Brad Pitt's character Tyler Durden points out an underwear ad and asks Edward Norton, "Is that what a man is supposed to look like?" The film then cuts to a scene of Brad Pitt excercising, showing off his perfectly sculpted physique.

While mainstream films tended to indulge in a highly aestheticized and sanitized image of Buenos Aires during this period, some independent filmmakers were working to elaborate a very different aesthetic, one that exposed the fissures and residues in the neoliberal project. Like Agresti's film, however, the two films I will next discuss go beyond merely exposing or denouncing social injustice. They take urban marginality, displacement, and life in the streets as the basis for imagining other forms of collectivity that challenge the hegemonic form of the nation, in order to suggest the opening up of postnational spaces and collectivities.

Israel Adrián Caetano's and Bruno Stagnaro's low-budget film *Pizza, Birra, Faso* (Pizza, Beer, Cigarettes, 1998) is often said to have revolutionized recent filmmaking in Argentina. It followed shortly after Agresti's *Buenos Aires Viceversa*, and immediately after Wong Kar Wai's film about Buenos Aires, *Happy Together* (1997). Taken together, these films opened up new ways of seeing and thinking about the city.[71] Caetano and Stagnaro put the film together rather quickly, in order to compete for the INCAA (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales) award. Considering its extremely low budget (US$ 40,000), the film did very well and received numerous national and international awards. The storyline is very simple, and can almost be summed up by the film's tagline: "Cuatro amigos. Una ciudad. Una única salida." Four teenagers, Cordobés (who is from the province of Córdoba), Pablo, Frula, and Megabom, live as squatters in a house in Buenos Aires, and survive on petty robbery, which gives them barely enough to improve their situation. But as long as they have change for "pizza, beer, and cigarettes," everything is fine. Or so it seems, until Cordobés decides that, in order to insure a

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[71] Migration to Buenos Aires was beginning to produce a certain kind of globalization from below of a very different kind than the Europeanist cosmopolitanism of the liberal elite. In *Happy Together* (1997), Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai captured, from the perspective of Chinese migrants, this transnational moment in its very moment of emergence. *Happy Together* is a film in Chinese about two gay lovers from Hong Kong living out their love, pain, and marginality in Buenos Aires. The films captures the city's poverty and wistfulness, juxtaposing the poor neighborhoods with the sad music of the tango, using spaces like the *mataderos* (slaughterhouses), and the popular Buenos Aires version of tropical music, the cumbia villera played at *bailantas* (popular dance halls).

future for himself and his girlfriend – who is pregnant – he must get involved in a bigger, more dangerous, robbery.

The film broke with many of the conventions of Argentinean filmmaking: it resisted giving any simplistic or edifying "message"; it showed teenagers speaking as they really do in Buenos Aires, with profuse use of slang or *lunfardo*, thus breaking with the standardized speech of Argentine cinema; it used the downtown cityscapes of Buenos Aires without any kind of touristic romanticization of the city, focusing instead on poverty, delinquency, beggars, and street kids. The film also has a good feeling for the absurd and comical situations, using cityscapes and urban monuments in creative and irreverent ways, as in the remarkable scene when the boys climb up inside the Obelisco.

*Pizza, Birra, Faso* begins with rapid cuts taken from a car with a hand-held camera (somewhat like *Amores Perros* would do). The view from the car replicates a touristic outlook on the city, focusing on its streets and monuments, but all we see are long lines of the unemployed, beggars and street kids. Thus the cityscapes surrounding the Plaza de Mayo in the *microcentro* (the banking and commercial area) are thus reappropriated and resignified. At 9 de Julio avenue, by the Obelisco, a man gets into a taxi which continues along the avenue. The boys jump in, rob him, and afterwards divide the spoils with the cab driver, their gang leader.

The use of downtown cityscapes continues, as the boys meet up with the rest of the gang (including Cordobés' girlfriend, Sandra) at the bottom of the Obelisco. Cordobés and Pablo stop at one of the cheap pizza places along 9 de Julio and as they wait, they look back at the Obelisco. Pablo comments, "¿Sabés que conocí una mina que la calentaba el Obelisco?" He explains, "Decía que era como una especie de pene que captaba todas las ondas porongóticas que

circulaban por la ciudad."[72] Cordobés looks at him and says, "Esa mina era una puta." Afterwards the boys decide to mug someone more defenseless than themselves in order to get a little extra cash, and so they choose a handicapped man who sings for money in one of the pedestrian walks (Lavalle or Florida). The scene is shot with a cold matter-of-factness that recalls Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*.

The film continues to parody the Obelisco's status as an urban monument of prosperity by having the boys climb inside and all the way to the top to "get a view of the city." Once they get to the top they complain that "no se ve nada." The man they have just mugged shows up with the police, however, and has them take away Sandra (who is waiting at the bottom of the Obelisco). After spending the night in jail, Sandra decides to leave Cordobés, admonishing him: "Si querés que vuelva, buscate un laburo como la gente." The rest of the film revolves around Cordobés and his friends trying to move up by obtaining weapons and planning a larger robbery. When they finally succeed in putting their plan together and hold up a bailanta discotheque, however, a security guard shoots and wounds Cordobés as they are escaping. Although he manages to get away with Pablo (leaving the other two behind), Cordobés is fatally wounded as he reaches the ferry, where he is supposed to leave for Uruguay with Sandra. There follows a long, slow shot while the ferry leaves with Sandra and Cordobés dies by the river. The police arrive and pick him up, while they communicate over their radios that the young man has been found dead. The police language is neutral, cold, having nothing to do with the vivacious slangy language of the teenagers. In the final shot, the camera moves very slowly away from the shore, in a long pullback from the ferry, as Cordobés is being taken away. As we pull back, we begin to see the outlines of the port and the city in the background. As soon as the film ends, one of the theme songs begins to play, a bouncy bailanta-style cumbia, "La última birra," which tells the

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[72] "Poronga" is porteño slang for penis.

story of a boy who is saying goodbye to his girl and asks for the last beer and the last kiss before leaving.

The end of the film thus puts the viewer in the position of leaving the city, making that moment coincide with the first general view of the cityscapes that the film shows. By contrast, when the boys climb up the Obelisco with the intention of getting a better view of the city, they discover that they can't see a thing. This suggests that a privileged point of view from which to make sense of their experience is not available to the boys, and that such a position of knowledge and understanding is only possible once one has found a way out. The film's tagline "una única salida" plays with the double meaning of the word. *Salida* means "way out," but it also means "solution." In the sense of "solution," the film points out that the only way for the boys to escape poverty is by working their way up through delinquency. As "way out," however, *salida* acquires a more pessimistic meaning: the only way out for Cordobés (the possibility of an escape from the city and into a new life) is blocked, and ends in death.

This tragic ending makes visible the precariousness of the boys' lives and the extent to which such lives have become expendable in late capitalism. The characters' trajectories across the urban space of Buenos Aires do not trace legible trajectories nor outline meaningful life stories, but instead tend to repeat cycles of wandering and stealing with very few prospects of moving up or moving out of such circuits. The idea of "pizza, beer, and cigarettes" stands for a lifestyle of subsistence in the streets. As long as the kids are young and agile they can continue to sustain this lifestyle and resist normalization and alienating labor. But the film also suggests the extent to which their subsistence delinquency is becoming increasingly hard to sustain in contemporary cities. The classic delinquents, pícaros and half-outlaws in Latin American society could coexist with the modernization process as long as society had enough resources to sustain

a marginal population and as long as crimes against private property were not penalized too harshly. But the characters' lives occupy an ever-receding space of sustainability within an economic system that is pushing more people into poverty and making urban marginality proliferate.

The risks and dangers of life on the streets thus become very evident. In order to sustain petty thieving, the boys need to be able to outrun those they mug. There is a significant moment, however, when after stealing a wallet, Pablo and Cordobés run off at full speed and jump onto a bus. As soon as they are on the bus, Pablo collapses from asthma and has to be taken to the hospital. This scene, along with Pablo's later asthma attack, foregrounds the precariousness and fragility of these teenage lives. Furthermore, Sandra's pregnancy makes Cordobés' lifestyle unviable, as the kind of minor delinquency the boys engage in cannot sustain an extra life. This realization, along with Sandra's demand that Cordobés get a "real job," is what prompts the final attempt to make a big robbery and take off. As they walk along the docks, Cordobés suggests to Sandra that the two of them could run away to Uruguay. "Three," responds Sandra. Cordobés kneels down and rests his head against her belly, in a shot that suggests openness and the possibility of escape by having the Río de la Plata in the background. Immediately after, there follows a shot of two guns being put on the table as the boys are planning their next hit. Thus the expectation of a new life followed immediately by the prefiguration of death, and the possibility of escape is blocked by the certainty of violence and danger.

It is significant that, as in *Buenos Aires Viceversa*, it is a private security guard who wounds Cordobés, foiling his attempt to escape the city and his own marginality. As soon as the boys become more serious (and more ambitious) about crime, they run up against the private security apparatus that protects the discotheque they are trying to rob. Cordobés gets wounded

but manages to escape with Pablo (and with the money), while the other two boys are left behind. As one of them is being clubbed by a policeman, an Argentine cumbia plays on, the kind of music that would be playing at the bailanta they have just robbed. This moment could be seen as suggesting the violence and repression that are necessary to sustain the upbeat and flashy lifestyle of neoliberalism, which would be associated with the bouncy cumbia music. However, I want to suggest that the use of popular music in Caetano's films is a little more complex, as it points towards a realm of subaltern experience and affect that cannot be fully captured by neoliberal consumerism. *Pizza, Birra, Faso* ends with Cordobés dying at the docks, while Sandra manages to get away with the money, suggesting the possibility of new life in Uruguay, but also pointing to the enormity of the sacrifice required to sustain this possibility. As we pull away, the police communicate over their transistor radios in neutral, official language, the death of the boy. The film then closes with the song "La última birra," an Argentine cumbia just like the music heard as the boys are trying to escape from the dance hall. In this case, however, I believe that the song is not merely a suggestion of neoliberal superficiality, but that it contests the neutral language of the police, filling in the silence left by the disappearance of the teenagers' voices and their porteño slang. Like slang, the popular music points to forms of (subaltern) collectivity that appear to subsist and circulate (like the teenagers) in spite of being threatened with insecurity and death.

In spite of its critique of poverty and of the myth of Argentine prosperity, the film is not moralistic, nor does it offer any easy solution. It neither condemns nor idealizes delinquency and marginality. It does however condemn the society that makes such marginality possible, along with its aspects of unemployment, poverty, and police corruption. In this sense the film offers no redemption for the teenagers or for Argentine society. The film's moral ambiguity resists

locating one single agent of illegality, violence, or injustice. Conversely, it also suggests that any solution we could imagine would have to be a collective solution. It is significant in this sense that the film resists giving any individual solution or escape from marginality, and instead focuses on the ways in which the boys and Sandra create a kind of (however precarious) collectivity.

Adrián Caetano went on to direct *Bolivia* (2001), a harsh critique of Buenos Aires society which came out immediately after the economic crisis of 2001. *Bolivia* focuses on another dimension of urban marginality. Namely, the displacement of populations from the interior of Argentina and from neighboring countries towards the urban center, perceived as a space of prosperity and possibility. By taking displacement as its premise, the film also questions and (to a certain extent) suspends the categories of national identity and national affiliation, showing the ways in which immigration throws these categories into crisis while at the same time it provokes a violent and dangerous (and, the film suggests, deadly) reassertion of categories of race and class. Like Caetano's previous film, *Bolivia* also destroys a prevalent myth of Buenos Aires: that of the democratic and egalitarian nature of porteño life. The film offers a meditation on the fragility of norms of politeness and tolerance in the context of middle class downward social mobility, and the force of class antagonisms as they deploy categories of race and nationality in order to justify (and come to terms with) exclusion and marginality.

Freddy, an undocumented Bolivian immigrant, has arrived a week ago in Buenos Aires, and takes a job as cook (*parrillero*) at a corner café-bar in downtown. The film opens with his boss showing him the place and running him through the work schedule. Then he asks whether Freddy learned to cook meat in Perú. Freddy responds that he is not from Perú, but from Bolivia,

an exchange that sets the tone for the movie. Soon after, one of the taxi drivers who patronize the café is attempting to locate a street and explains that it is in the neighborhood where streets have names of Central American countries, like Perú. The opening credits show a game of football between Bolivia and Argentina in progress on the television, while Andean music (possibly Bolivian music in Aymara) plays in the background. All of these details emphasize the artificiality of national identities and borders in South America (football teams, street names). Without the context of the territorial wars that demarcated national boundaries, the relationships and limits between countries have come to be mediated not by open war but by economic domination and supremacy, as well as cultural prejudice.

The most regular customers of the café are a group of taxi drivers, and the film revolves around the tensions and affiliations between the customers and those who work at the café (the boss, Freddy, and Rosa). One of the drivers, "Oso," is in dire financial trouble and in danger of losing his car, which would seriously compromise his livelihood. As Oso's desperation increases, and as he drinks more, he also becomes more aggressive and ultimately violent towards Freddy, leading to the predictably violent ending of the film. Freddy bonds with Rosa, an attractive young waitress whose father is from Paraguay, although her mother is Argentine. As both don Enrique and one of the cab drivers express sexual interest in Rosa at different times, Freddy's friendship with Rosa is viewed with suspicion and contributes to making the other men jealous.

Oso spends the evenings drinking with one of his friends, complaining about the economic situation and about "these immigrants" who have it so easy, like the Uruguayans who are "screwing him" by not extending his loan and thus forcing him to give up his car. While don Enrique, the boss, tolerates this behavior to a certain point, eventually he decides to stop

allowing Oso to eat and drink on credit, demanding that he pay up or leave. The tension between don Enrique and Oso thus triggers the latter's resentment against Freddy, who is instructed to stop serving Oso drink or food, and eventually also instructed to throw him out of the bar. While Oso confronts don Enrique for not speaking to him directly, he nevertheless continues to harass Freddy by calling him "Boliviano de mierda" and by making references to "negros" and "Paraguayos." Finally Oso gets too loud and Freddy has to kick him out of the bar, which provokes a fight between the two men. Freddy punches the drunken Oso on the nose, and Oso leaves indignantly. As his friend attempts to drive him away, however, Oso unexpectedly pulls out a gun and shoots and kills Freddy, who is standing outside the café. The next morning, following a brief chat with the police, don Enrique is shown putting up another sign: "Se necesita cocinero – parrillero."

The tensions are not merely between don Enrique, Oso, and Freddy, however. Rosa becomes the object of desire and jealousy among the men. Another storyline follows Héctor, a young salesman who comes into the café occasionally and who is known to be having an affair with one of the cab drivers, although they keep it very discreet. The cab driver stops showing up, however, and Héctor begins to look at Freddy, whom he finds attractive. This prompts don Enrique to have a talk with Héctor, telling him that he can do whatever he wants in the street, but to stop "making trouble" and "making people nervous" at the bar, or leave. Towards the end of the film, Oso accuses don Enrique of being homophobic for refusing to give Héctor a job when he needed it. Oso's sympathy for Héctor is not very convincing, however, as he is in the process of denigrating Freddy (who remains polite and friendly towards Héctor). Similarly, don Enrique's momentary bonding with Oso over "foreigners" ends when he decides that Oso's credit is up.

The film is shot in black and white, using 16 mm which gives it a quasi-documentary, grainy look. It is organized around long, slow takes, often at table-level. The camera moves in a wandering gaze that is not particularly attentive to narrative – as narrative appears rather repetitive or even banal – focusing instead on objects and details: hands, drinks, smoking, cash. There are plenty of close-ups, however, whose effect is to produce an effect of tightness, of claustrophobia that gets more intense as the film advances. The café-bar illustrates a microscopic space where the manners and prejudices of the lower middle class play themselves out. In Buenos Aires, as in many other places, taxi drivers are often downwardly-mobile middle class professionals, educated but unemployed. The men relate to each other with typical porteño civility, including the standard kiss on the cheek Buenos Aires men use as a greeting (regardless of sexuality). The way they relate to each other and ask for things begins gradually to erode the more their prejudices become evident and their tensions over money grow.

It seems appropriate that in the context of economic depression and downward social mobility these (white) men feel a strong anxiety about social hierarchies and a strong resentment against what they perceive as social injustice towards them. One significant moment in the film takes place when Freddy has to get some customers who have slept on the tables out of the café in the morning. The men grumble and almost immediately begin to call Freddy "negro" and "Paraguayo" as they are forced to leave. In the evening, after work, Freddy (who still has not found a place to stay) walks to a nearby café, orders some coffee, and falls asleep on the table. The man who serves him (whose face we don't see) appears to be a white Argentine with the same build and appearance of Freddy's boss, don Enrique. This moment of inversion and displacement of hierarchies and roles points to the shifting nature of social identifications in the context of neoliberal globalization. Clearly the men's attempts to summon identitarian (national,

racial) categories to stabilize social roles respond to these anxieties. Ultimately, however, these categories become inoperative as indicators of identity or social hierarchies. They do, however, function to justify violence against those who are more defenseless in contemporary society.

The categories are shown to be inoperative, however, in the sense that national identities slip and become confused. The slippage threatens those who, like Rosa, sometimes become "Paraguayans" in the men's eyes, even though Rosa is Argentine. For a moment, don Enrique and Oso bond over their suspicion of foreigners. "It's those damn turcs, gypsies, foreigners," Oso complains, who come here and "make money," while people "like us" work and never prosper. Don Enrique agrees and, in reference to Freddy, comments: "se hacen los boludos para pasarla bien. Cuando te querés acordar, son tus patrones." But the antagonisms between the men (related to class or sexuality) do not simply disappear in the face of racism against outsiders. All relationships in the film thus remain precarious and subject to constant flux and rearrangement.

As soon as don Enrique tries to get Oso to stop drinking, their resentment against each other becomes evident. Oso criticizes don Enrique for hiring illegal workers, while people in Buenos Aires can't find jobs. "¿Cuánta miseria hay acá?," he complains. "Pero a cualquier Paraguayo de mierda le das trabajo." Oso is here refering to Héctor, the salesman, who at the very beginning of the film asks don Enrique why he did not tell him he needed somebody to work in the kitchen, instead of hiring an illegal worker. Don Enrique claims he did not know Héctor needed a job. Héctor replies, "Tiene que fijarse en la gente de su país." Oso suggests that don Enrique refuses to give Héctor a job because he is gay. The film thus shows the national community fractured along the lines of class, sexuality, and race and, like *Pizza, Birra, Faso*, gives no hint as to a possible resolution of these social conflicts. With the exception of Rosa and

Freddy, who are the victims of prejudice, no one in the film is truly redeemed. Instead, most of the other men are shown as mobilizing prejudice and when they feel threatened.

At the same time, however, the film also resists locating a unitary source of social injustice, prejudice, or violence. Social injustice appears to affect everyone, and also to come from everywhere. *Bolivia* thus portrays the decentered and impersonal webs of violence and exclusion that the contemporary economic order has brought about, using filmic language to communicate a sense of claustrophobia in which everyone feels trapped within the system and is not sure who should be blamed. In spite of the fact that Oso is the source of violence towards Freddy, neither Oso nor anyone else in the film is constructed as a villain. Instead, it becomes clear that violence results from people's desperation and hopelessness. Although *Bolivia* strongly condemns racism in Argentina, it also suggests that the problems of displacement and violence the film brings up exceed the national sphere. At one point Rosa is asking Freddy about his life in Bolivia, and he tells her he was a seasonal farmer before coming to Argentina. But when the Americans came and tried to get rid of the coca plantations, they also burned the fields where Freddy worked: "Los yanquis quemaron todo." This moment in the film illustrates how transnational displacements have causes and effects that exceed any individual nation-state's capacity to contain or solve, and open up a space of transnational displacement and migrancy that, at least in South America, can be read as the underside of the Mercosur and of neoliberal globalization.

In spite of the film's pessimistic ending, however, *Bolivia*'s fracturing of the national community also appears to open up ways in which collectivities might assemble differently in a post-national space. Rosa's and Freddy's short-lived, but meaningful, bonding takes place when they go dancing at a local bailanta, a place one of the taxi-drivers later describes as "esa cantina

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donde se juntan todos los bolivianos," when he tries to ascertain whether Rosa spent the night with Freddy (which she denies). Surrounded by other immigrants, Rosa and Freddy dance to Argentine cumbia, which in the space of the film acquires a transnational resonance. This space of dancing and popular culture points to the emergence of migrant communities and affiliations from below that are both redefining the urban space of Buenos Aires and challenging any project of cultural homogenization.

In this regard, the film's use of music is significant, as it provides some sense of popular cultures in the process of constituting a transnational affiliations from below, the other side of neoliberal globalization.  Some of the music is neo-Andean, in Spanish and Aymara. Rather than being linked to a specific nationality, it is music that *circulates* in the Andean area and, following the migrations, in the Southern Cone as well. Along with this music, the film makes use of "cumbia villera," which was also used in *Pizza, Birra, Faso*, and which is associated with the popular spaces of bailantas that, in this film, are enjoyed by immigrants. "Cumbia villera" (associated with the villas or slums of Buenos Aires) also has the connotation, in Argentina, of celebrating delinquency and of therefore constituting a truly popular discourse of resistance. But in its different regional styles, cumbia also circulates throughout South America, hinting at a transnational popular culture that inhabits a space of flexible borders and affiliations.

Thus in spite of the film's pessimism, it also shows the irrevocable permeability of national borders and the opening up of a postnational space. This space is far from utopian, but it does force a rethinking of community and collectivity by imagining the nation's fragments entering into new, unforeseen assemblages. The film also shows, at the same time, the danger and violence involved in this process of deterritorialization, and the social cost of the erosion of the nation and the retreat of the state. In response to this mobility of bodies in contemporary

capitalism, *Bolivia* shows how the displaced middle and lower classes invoke discourses of race and national identity to attempt to fix boundaries artificially. Hence the slippage between Uruguayo / Paraguayo / Boliviano / Peruano / Negro reveals the artificiality of these identitarian categories, and the anxiety they indicate. *Bolivia* thus explores the radical heterogeneity that is challenging Buenos Aires' attempts to conceive of itself as a "European" city, and that is producing, throughout South America, a globalization from below whose implications and effects we have yet to witness.

*Literature and post-national space*

In the concluding section of this chapter, I would like to suggest ways of tracing a cartography of Buenos Aires by making reference to the figure of the edge in the Argentine literary tradition. In the work of Borges and, more recently, in Ricardo Piglia, the edge of the city as figured in fiction works not as a descriptive boundary but, rather, as a conceptual limit that frustrates and undoes the closure of the image of the city. This particular strand of Argentine literature is relevant today because it brings up questions of boundaries and territories that, when crossed, question or undo the national community as it has been historically imagined, and suggest the possibility of collectivities that exceed national space. Thus even though Piglia's works do not deal explicitly with urban marginality or transnational migrants, I believe that his texts can help us to imagine a space that approaches conceptually (even if not referentially) the post-national space suggested by some recent Argentine films.

Furthermore, Piglia's works propose a rereading of the literary history of Argentina through Borges and Arlt, enabling a different genealogy of the city of Buenos Aires in Argentine literature and culture. Such a genealogy exposes the limits of the figuration of the city as an allegory for the national community, and thus departs from the modernist literary history emblematized by texts such as Marechal's *Adán Buenosayres* (1948), Sábato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (1960), and Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963), among others. Indeed, the writings of Jorge Luis Borges and Roberto Arlt about Buenos Aires provide many examples of resistance to the boom's tendency towards narrative totalization, in Argentina and elsewhere. In Arlt's *El juguete rabioso* (1926), for example, Astier's trajectories across the city of Buenos Aires remain fragmentary and episodic, and the novel's conclusion is uncertain, refusing to offer any kind of political or aesthetic redemption. In Borges' story "El Sur" (1944), Dahlmann's voyage south ends with the openness of the pampa and the uncertainty of clasped daggers. The totalizing resolution one might have expected from the urban narrative fails when it encounters the edge where the city and the open country meet.

In Borges edges represent a space of danger: they are demarcated by gunmen and bandits, and thus are sharp as knives. This can be illustrated by revisiting briefly Borges' well know story, "La muerte y la brújula" (Death and the Compass, 1942). The main character, Erik Lönnrot, a dective styled after Poe's Auguste Dupin, undertakes the task of solving a series of murders using the Kabbalah and abstract geometry. Spaced a month apart from each other, the three murders take place in equidistant points of the city. Although the city is fictitious, several clues indicate that it is a stylized version of Buenos Aires. A letter signed 'Baruj Spinoza' makes explicit to Lönnrot the symmetry of the murders: the three points are connected to form an equilateral triangle. Borges writes, "el plano demostraba en tinta roja la regularidad de ese

triángulo" (1989, I: 503). The red ink suggests the bloody outlines of this urban geometry, the kind of geometry that, as Borges demonstrates, intertwines murder with both planning and chance. Several clues, in particular the references to the four Hebrew letters in the name of God, lead Lönnrot to hypothesize a fourth geometrical point where the next murder is expected to take place. Lönnrot sets towards the south of the city to prevent the murder, towards the southern end of the city, which is marked off by gunmen and dagger-wielders (*cuchilleros*). There Lönnrot meets his death at the hands of his arch-enemy Red Scharlach, who has woven a symmetrical urban labyrinth around the detective.

One of the most interesting aspects of the story is the way it illustrates different forms of geometrical sectioning of space, and the interplay of chance and symmetry between them. We learn that the first murder happened accidentally, and that it was around Lönnrot's interest in using Hebrew mysticism to solve it that Scharlach planned his symmetrical death. It is precisely Lönnrot's astuteness in reading the incompleteness of the geometrical clues that leads him to knowledge and to death. By adding the fourth vertex to the map, he produces a mirror-image of the northern section of the city, thus discovering or un-covering the city's shadowy other, the triangle that lies south. He pays with his life the acquisition of such knowledge, and marks with his blood the deadly contours of the urban map. "La muerte y la brújula" is therefore a deconstruction of the traditional detective story associated with Poe and Conan Doyle. The detective succeeds in uncovering the plot, only to fail by being trapped in a labyrinth devised by his nemesis and mirror-image. As Piglia has stated about "Death and the Compass," in this text the *form* of the detective story reaches its climax and its dissolution: "la forma [del relato policial] llega a su culminación y se desintegra" (*Crítica y ficción* 68). The image of the city, in Borges, leaves open a space of incompleteness: its symmetry is therefore deceptive.

Speaking of "La muerte y la brújula," Borges stated in his essay "El escritor argentino y la tradición":

> Durante muchos años, en libros ahora felizmente olvidados, traté de redactar el sabor, la esencia de los barrios extremos de Buenos Aires … luego, hará un año, escribí una historia que se llama *La muerte y la brújula* que es una suerte de pesadilla; pienso allí en el Paseo Colón y lo llamo Rue de Toulon, pienso en las quintas de Adrogué y las llamo Triste-le-Roy; publicada esa historia, mis amigos me dijeron que al fin habían encontrado en lo que yo escribía el sabor de las afueras de Buenos Aires. Precisamente porque no me había propuesto encontrar ese sabor, porque me había abandonado al sueño, pude lograr, al cabo de tantos años, lo que antes busqué en vano. (1989, I: 270-71)

This dreamlike quality of the urban landscape and its proliferating symmetries, which do not produce closure but rather a constant unfolding of limits, could be taken to signal the crisis (and critique) of the legibility of the urban map that had been the aesthetic endeavor of the classic detective story.

In his rereadings of Borges and Arlt in *Crítica y ficción*, Piglia attempts to identify what he sees as the underlying narrative matrices that define the trajectory of modern Argentine literature in the twentieth century. He argues, for example, that Borges takes to the extreme – but also parodies and undoes – the style of deductive reasoning that underpins the logic of the British detective story, while Arlt works with a completely different narrative model. In Arlt, the narrative logic has very little to do with the deciphering of enigmas, and instead revolves around money as the ever-present yet also ever-absent (phantasmatic) presence that organizes action and society around itself. Arlt's logic is therefore more closely linked to the genre of the *roman noir*, associated with the industrial capitalism of the 1920s, while Borges is closer to the classic detective story, linked to the patrician bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century and the role of the detective in safeguarding their interests. Piglia's analysis suggests that both Arlt and Borges, in

different ways, use crime as a way to read the urban map and thus to produce something we might call a cartography, or a cognitive mapping, of the underlying symmetries of the city (in the manner of *roman noir*), while resisting or undoing narrative totalization.

In his essay "Roberto Arlt and the Fiction of Money" (1974), Piglia briefly outlines the relationship between money and narrative form in Arlt. For Arlt, he writes, "money is a machine for producing fictions, or better, because it is constantly de-realizing the world, money is fiction itself" (13). In Arlt, money is always linked to crime, never to work: "Theft, invention, falsification, blackmail: to become rich is always an imaginary adventure, the epic of a magical and outlawed appropriation" (13). Money thus functions as the motive and trigger for narrative action, and in turn money evokes all sorts of narratives about what might be possible *in having money*. But money always conceals (or creates a mystery around) its origins. Thus "For Arlt's characters, the enigma of this appropriation – on which 'high society closes its iron gates' – puts society as a whole in doubt" (14). Money then can be read, in Arlt, as that absent (because always in motion) center around which society, conceived as fraud and conspiracy, is organized.

As a stand-in for value, money is fictive, but produces very real effects of desire and power all around itself. The mystery of money is thus similar to what Marx describes as the mystery of the commodity form, although without the use value. As John Kraniauskas argues, Piglia's essay "traces the narrative logic of *real* abstraction, capital experienced in its money form, both in the marginalized contexts that are the stuff of Arlt's fictions and at the level of literary composition" (11). Thus Piglia's reading of Arlt, Kraniauskas argues, departs from any sociology or cultural anthropology of literature, and instead "explores a possible critique of the political economy of narrative. Which is, perhaps, one reason why in an era of intense capitalist

deterritorialization ('globalization') his article on narrative and money seems, like the work of Arlt himself, so contemporary" (12).

Piglia's argument suggests the possibility of reading the fiction of money as a second order abstraction, a fetishism not of the commodity, but of currency. One way of thinking about this in the context of Latin America is that money has become both the most *real* and the most *fictitious* agent of contemporary social organization. The abstraction of money both organizes countries' underdevelopment through loans and external debt, and in turn becomes completely fictional and worthless by agency of inflation and devaluation. In other words, as Deleuze points out in "Postscript on the Societies of Control," while disciplinary societies referred to minted money, contemporary society exerts control based on "floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies" (5). Money has thus become emancipated from its reference to goods or to the gold standard. Arlt also anticipated, almost prophetically, the way in which money would become increasingly delinked from work in contemporary society, so that moving up in society by means of crime and fraud would come to seem more "logical" than attempting to move up through work.

Piglia's preoccupation with the production of narrative as a kind of economy plays a role in *La ciudad ausente* (1992), where the production of narratives is linked to a machine that generates narratives by combining smaller units of meaning and fragments of national historical memory. These fragments, however, enter into new and unforeseen combinations which reflect the crisis of historical memory in the face of neoliberal deterritorialization. Instead of summoning memory as an attempt to recover history, however, Piglia ungrounds historical memory by making national narratives into a function of the machine's combinations of bits and fragments of stories and languages that inhabit a transnational space of migrancy and exile, and

that therefore threaten to dissolve the unity of the national community, producing a post-national space. Furthermore, Piglia *spatializes* this post-national space by locating the narrating machine in the liminal space of the islands and rivulets at the edge of Buenos Aires, in the delta of the Río de la Plata.

In the films by Caetano and Agresti, urban space does not contribute to the production of individual, national, or cultural identities. As in Perlongher's cartographies of desire in São Paulo, the city is a space where identities are in flux, and where national culture reveals its irreducible heterogeneity. Social contact is thus marked by shifting affiliations and antagonisms, rather than by modern transculturation or postmodern hybridity. Similarly, in Piglia's *La ciudad ausente* the space of Buenos Aires is broken down into multiple boundaries that the main character, Junior, must cross in order to arrive at the limit of the city (and of the nation), the place where Macedonio's machine for the production of narratives is housed. As Junior moves away from Buenos Aires and towards the *delta* of the Río de la Plata in the area of El Tigre, boundaries as well as rivers, islands, and narratives multiply, bringing Junior closer to Macedonio's machine – the origin of all narratives – but also further away from any space of closure.

The image of the delta is significant because it offers a conceptual image of national territory that is constitutively fragmented and whose space undoes the categories of inside and outside of the nation. It is in one of these islands that Junior hears the story of the "island of Finnegans," a utopian space (or dystopian) place where voices in different languages and fragments of narratives circulate and enter into new combinations, but where the community of exiles that inhabits the island can never achieve the closure of a historical nation. The space of the island of Finnegans challenges the categories or utopia and dystopia and instead represents a

space of possibility and openness (but also uncertainty) related to the nation's inability to achieve closure by clearly distinguishing between inside and outside. It is significant, therefore, that the museum where Macedonio's narrative machine is located is in one of the islands of the archipelago where Buenos Aires (and Argentine national space) begins physically to disintegrate. The novel ends with the voice of the machine, a feminine voice that evokes the voice of Elena, Macedonio's wife, and whose words reference the end of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which ends with the river Liffey flowing into the ocean. *La ciudad ausente* closes with a final yes uttered at the water's edge:

> soy la cantora, la que canta, estoy en la arena, cerca de las bahía, en el filo del agua puedo aún recordar las viejas voces perdidas, estoy sola al sol, nadie se acerca, nadie viene, pero voy a seguir, enfrente está el desierto, el sol calcina las piedras, me arrastro a veces, pero voy a seguir, hasta el borde del agua, sí. (168)

The idea of the edge ("el borde del agua") is significant here. As in Borges, the edge ("la orilla" for Borges) is neither a boundary that is crossed in order to enter a space of utopia, nor a borderland of cultural hybridity. Rather, it is a conceptual limit that problematizes the closure of the image of the city and, in this case, of national territory. In fact, if the space alluded to by Piglia (El Tigre at the delta of the Río de la Plata) stands for a utopian possibility in *La ciudad ausente*, this possibility is marked by a deconstruction of the classical image of utopia.

In Thomas More, Utopia is an island that is completely separated by water, and it is only as a space that is separate from ordinary society that the notion of utopia can function. In many other utopias, the idea of the bounded and centered city (eg. the Platonic or Augustinian city) also implies separation. As in the "lettered city" theorized by Rama, literary culture (the humanities) imagine a political utopia that is bounded and ordered, and whose space remains, for

that reason, ideal. Utopian thinking is thus unwilling or unable to think about contiguity, or to imagine utopian spaces as contiguous with the non-utopian or (even) dystopian. Finnegans island on the other hand remains situated within that archipelago where national space dissolves into the river, where the territory is still part of the nation, but is also fractured to the point of eluding legibility and physical cohesiveness.

Piglia's island remains a figure, whose actual space can only be conceptual, even in the space of the novel. It is posited as the place that houses the machine for the production of narratives. The machine could thus be taken as a point of origin of narratives, of literature, and of national history. But this origin, the novel makes clear, is empty and ungrounded. The machine starts out with short narratives that are fed into it, and then begins to combine them in new and unexpected ways, producing unpredictable results.

But Piglia also deconstructs the notion of narrative by bringing it back to its basic material: language. As in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, the languages of the island drift constantly, incorporating new words and entering into new combinations of languages so that the island's language never solidifies. As a linguistic utopia, the island incorporates the multiplicity of languages of the diverse peoples that constitute its population. But this utopia also becomes an impossibility, because the endless circulation of languages prevents such a territory from achieving linguistic and cultural unity. Numerous languages circulate, making it hard – if not impossible – to make sense of the voices that are heard. The feminine voice of the machine which concludes the story of Finnegans island (and the novel) with a "yes" is thus affirmative of a community that is also radically heterogeneous and therefore ultimately ungrounded. The utopian affirmation that concludes the novel is thus ambiguous, in that it is as ungrounded (but

also as open) as the narratives that the machine produces, and which may or may not serve to put together the fragments of the national community into new and different combinations.

Gareth Williams describes Finnegans Island as a utopian space of post-hegemonic possibility: "All currents in the island's *riverrun* of language are to be found there in their differential singularity, yet no one can inhabit the island … for there can be no notion of the nation to unify, standardize, nullify, or repress the eternal production of differences" (166). Thus the island, as a conceptual image, illustrates a space of being in common with no common grammar of experience: "a narrative such as that of Finnegans Island traces the grounds of a communitarian space that is anchored in radical difference and in the collective experience of constitutive negativity" (167). Within the space of the text, however, that world cannot be appropriated or represented, and thus the island "remains an absent space within the novel." All that remains at the end of the text is "the intermittent generation of a distant, untimely, yet ultimately affirmative female voice (or accumulation of female voices) from beyond the grave" (167). For Williams, this affirmation opens up the possibility of a dialogue between history (or memory) and the future, but a dialogue that is not mediated by the categories of (national) hegemony or counter-hegemony: it "allows us to hear say yes in that which remains, in curious and promising suspension, on the other side of (counter)hegemonic cultural, historical, and social configurations" (170). This utopian possibility, argues Williams, "suspends the completion of the social field" and therefore suggests an opening to "an *other* thought that is not thought by hegemony" (149).

Jean Franco has recently argued (Franco 2002) that what she calls the "decline and fall of the lettered city" has also brought about the foundering of political utopias that were grounded upon literature and literary models for imagining the political and the national community. The

exhaustion of the narratives that sustained the lettered city and its political utopias in Latin America, including national development, the city as a space of social integration, and literature as a democratizing space of cultural pedagogy, have thus displaced both literature and national culture from their hegemonic place in the formation of the national community. Piglia's *La ciudad ausente* takes seriously the displacement of literature from hegemony and proposes, I would argue, a practice of writing that ungrounds both the discourse of the nation and the discourse of political utopia, in order to imagine a post-national space in which collectivities may come together in ways that are not thought by the national community as historically formed – what Williams calls a "post-hegemonic" space.

The post-national in Piglia is a space of crisis, a new territory whose outlines are not clearly defined. This image of an archipelago at the edge of the nation, where different languages and cultures enter into unforeseen combinations, approaches conceptually the image of the city of Buenos Aires in a film like *Bolivia*, where migrants from the interior and immigrants from Bolivia and Paraguay produce forms of collectivity that are transient and precarious, but that ultimately are radically reshaping the urban landscape into a heterogeneous assemblage. Indigenous music, cumbia villera and other forms of culture, language, and community come together in this post-national space. But the city here is not conceived as a space of synthesis, transculturation, or supersession of social antagonisms. The post-national is not that which supersedes or exists outside of the nation. It is not a space of utopia, but a space of dislocation and crisis of national language and culture vis-à-vis the neoliberal state. In this space collective affiliations are immediate, local, transient, and shifting, as seems appropriate to a globalized space.

The transnational space we now inhabit, and the features of the "global cities" which are beginning to become more marked in some of the cities of the South, exceed the parameters of the national community as it has been historically constituted, and challenge many of the premises not only of the city in literature, but also of the concepts of "public space," "civil society," and "citizenship" that cultural studies has inherited. As the case of Buenos Aires illustrates, these questions need to be resituated in a post-national framework that is also attentive to mobile and flexible forms of subjectivity, affiliation, and collectivity.

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout the dissertation I have explored contemporary representations of urban space in Latin America that respond to and attempt to engage an important shift in the spatial and symbolic organization of urban life. Namely, the passing away of the modernist city with its model of concentric circles organized around a political center, metropolitan public space, and social integration. The modernist model for understanding and experiencing the city relied on developmental temporality (the idea that modernization would lead to greater cultural integration over time) and on the understanding of urban life as the basis for the production of modern, individual subjectivity and personal identity. In modernist texts, therefore, walking in the city became associated with the formation of an individual consciousness that constituted itself by observing as well as taking distance from urban life, as in *Modernista* urban chronicle and in the urban novels of the boom.

In the modernist novels, the main character's personal trajectory parallels the development of the nation, giving meaning and direction to the character's trajectories across urban space. The city thus came to function as an allegory of the nation in its moment of modernization and development. Similarly, the city was apprehended in Modernism as a figure for a larger national totality, which is conceived as a space of integration and synthesis of cultural differences, corresponding to the literary ideology of transculturation. These were "lettered cities," not because they were classical utopias like the cities of Plato or More, but because they reproduced a masterful gaze over urban space and national history, bringing the fragments of the nation into a unity in the literary intellectual's consciousness. The literary cities of high modernism thus replicated de Certeau's notion of the "concept-city," the city as seen

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from above, by an urban planner. The boom novels thus conferred upon left-wing intellectuals the task of figuring out and resolving the conflicts of the nation into a space of cultural reconciliation, which was itself grounded upon the belief in national modernization and the eventual integration of populations into the national project. The "fall of the lettered city" – the displacement of literary intellectuals and literature from cultural hegemony – has thus also meant, as Jean Franco suggests, the fall of the idea of utopia as a nation-to-come. The displacement of literature from hegemony has made more visible the conflicts and heterogeneity that constitute contemporary urban formations, making it necessary to figure this complexity and heterogeneity without reducing it to a unified narrative.

The literary texts and films explored in the dissertation point towards a contemporary space that is in the process of shifting and which we would do well not to attempt to reterritorialize using the old categories of identity, the individual modern subject, or universal civil society. This space exceeds the modern distinction between utopia and dystopia, and that instead can be better grasped in terms of decentered webs of power and surveillance, as well as spaces of resistance and affiliation within those regimes of power. I believe that the "urban cartographies" suggested by writers like Perlongher, Zapata, and Eltit, when they attempted to capture the emergence of our contemporary moment in the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s, can help us to grasp the dynamics of the contemporary urban and post-national spaces that are taking shape. As Perlongher wrote: "La tarea del cartógrafo deseante no consiste en captar para fijar, para anquilosar, para congelar aquello que explora, sino que se dispone a intensificar los propios flujos de vida en los que se envuelve, creando territorios a medida que los recorre" (1991, 14).

The texts discussed thus situate themselves at the level of trajectories that necessarily remain fragmentary and open-ended. These trajectories attempt to trace the dynamics of shifting identities, affiliations, and territories, and in the process of mapping them out, also transform and intensify those territories. This perspective does not abandon the political, but it conceptualizes the politics of writing very differently, refusing the modern politics of utopia and dystopia. Instead, authors like Fonseca, Eltit, and Perlongher are attentive to what de Certeau described as tactics and strategies of resistance, and show how these strategies carve territories within the interstices of power and surveillance. But they also keep in mind, however, Foucault's idea that power is decentered and that it comes from everywhere, which makes a total overturning of the system highly unlikely. The territories described do not constitute escapes from the labyrinth of history, nor spaces of utopia. They are contiguous rather than separate, and they constitute appropriations of space that remain contingent and bound to their own historical moment. The texts explored in the dissertation thus pose the question of how territories and forms of subjectivity can be rearranged within structures of power, which are themselves mobile and flexible.

I believe that reading these texts as urban cartographies can help us to displace modernist ideas about urban formations which are still prevalent within cultural studies and social theory, such as the idea of the city as a space of disciplinary enclosures that can eventually domesticate and incorporate its peripheries, or the idea of the metropolis as a space for the production of modern individuality and identity. In the dissertation I have argued against the ideas of "public space" and "civil society" that are sometimes invoked in cultural studies, as these concepts' reliance on Enlightenment ideals and norms of rational civility also carry the baggage of the

modern subject, identity, and the normative public sphere that I believe should be displaced rather than reaffirmed.

But rather than doing away with these concepts, I believe that interrogating them can help to resituate the concerns they stand for. Understanding urban space as radically heterogeneous and splintered should bring about new forms of thinking, rather than the reaffirmation of modernist ideals or the categorical rejection of contemporary urban space as dystopian. The splintering of the city is everywhere evident and has been analyzed by theorists of global cities (Sassen 2001, Graham and Marvin 2001, Caldeira 2000). Urban splintering is also linked to the very real withering of the urban as we have known it and to the proliferation of slums, which Mike Davis has recently analyzed. In "Planet of Slums" (2004), Davis argues that the proliferation of slums in the Third World's megacities today can be directly linked to the neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s and 1990s, whose Structural Adjustment Programs contributed to the growth of economic inequality by pushing the middle classes into poverty as a result of the retreat of the state (12-15). Contemporary Latin American culture is in the process of grappling with this legacy and with the new urban configurations it has produced. Novels like Lins' *Cidade de Deus* or Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* suspend moral judgment in the face of urban violence and social injustice. Something similar occurs with José Roberto Duque's chronicles of Caracas, *La ley de la calle*. Films like *Amores Perros*, *Pizza, Birra, Faso, Bolivia,* and Gaviria's films *Rodrigo D* and *La vendedora de Rosas* also remain open, suspending intellectual and moral judgment and leaving open the question of political agency and ethical responsibility. Unlike films like *City of God* and *Plata Quemada* (discussed in chapter 5), which use marginality and violence to create a highly aestheticized image of the nation which today, emancipated from the national project, can circulate in a global market of international cinema,

the films mentioned above show the nation in fragments and leave open the new configurations into which those fragments may enter.

Contemporary cultural theory has also responded to urban splintering by reworking traditional political categories in order to address the issues of the moment. In the face of the emergence of multiple and heterogeneous social actors, and the withering of literacy and public space, critics like Candido and Sarlo have responded by reaffirming the necessity of a public space of rational action and citizenship, separate from the corporate interests of the market and its values of consumerism. These critics are committed to cultural modernism, reaffirming the normativity of literacy, education, and rational debate. This position is problematic because it presupposes the classical model of the intellectual as leader (and representative) of a political collectivity. Cultural critics like Poniatowska and García Canclini, on the other hand, argue for the emergence of a new civil society from below, as I tried to show in Chapter 3. This civil society emerges in dialectical tension with the state and, in Canclini's argument, is made possible by the logic of the market, which makes it open-ended and flexible. This new civil society is then folded, unproblematically, into a global civil society that represents an intermediate space between the market and the state. This conception, however, posits civil society as "hybrid," which invests political agency with the normativity of the market (making consumption into a form of citizenship), and therefore misrepresents the relationship between the market and the state as one of antagonism, when it should perhaps be seen more as a collaboration.

Instead of reaffirming these norms, however, cultural theorists like Rinesi and Caldeira identify and map out the mechanisms the neoliberal economics uses to justify privatization and to destroy the modern ideals of commonality and openness. These intellectuals also show how contemporary culture makes hegemonic discourses that emphasize the private realm, security,

surveillance, and the violent repression of criminals. Unlike cultural modernists, however, these critics use modern space as a background from which to understand the contemporary society of control and its mechanisms of exclusion and segregation, but they do not idealize modern urban space as such. Instead, they see their critical task as identifying mechanisms of exclusion and repression that need to be understood, resisted, and contested.

I believe that the texts I have attempted to read as urban cartographies participate in their own way in this endeavor. They register transformations in urban configurations in moments of historical transition, and thus help us to trace a history of the present. They disclose the forms of marginalization and exclusion prevalent in the present by reference to the past, but they do not idealize that past. They explore forms of cultural resistance and map out the territories that they produce, but they also see these territories as transient and historically contingent. While these texts can help us to critique and deconstruct the modern categories of the subject, individuality, public space, and civil society, they do not disregard the political questions these categories stand for. Rather, they reinscribe what Lefebvre called "the right to the city" in a global and post-national framework of mobility and flux where the fragments of the nation and of literature are open to radical heterogeneity and uncertainty, but also to possibility.

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