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The Decadent City:

Urban Space in Latin American Dirty Realist Fiction

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Jamie Diane Fudacz

2012



ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Decadent City:  
Urban Space in Latin American Dirty Realist Fiction

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Maarten van Delden, Co-Chair

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This dissertation explores the treatment of urban spaces in Latin American dirty realist fiction from the 1990's to the present, focusing on the works of Guillermo Fadanelli (Mexico), Fernando Vallejo (Colombia), and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez (Cuba). Whereas Fadanelli centers his works in the megalopolis of a Mexico City straining under the pressures of rapid modernization and development, Gutiérrez depicts a Havana crumbling during the economic crises of the Special Period, and Vallejo portrays Medellín as utterly degraded by drug trafficking and its associated violence. All three authors, however, employ the gritty, almost visceral dirty realist style to best depict poverty-stricken societies populated by unexceptional individuals in a quest for survival in a rapidly transforming and decaying urban landscape. This dirty realist space is thus primarily defined by abjection and the uncomfortable coexistence of a focus on distinctive

local minutia and the homogenizing effects of global, postmodern consumer society, a phenomenon accompanied by the proliferation of non-places as defined by Marc Augé. In these non-places, the meta-narratives of family, religion and nation that previously marked spaces of identity formation no longer function, leaving a sense of purposelessness. While there exists some nostalgia for the spaces that produced and reproduced these previous narratives, these spaces also prove to be marginalizing and have contributed to the city's current state of violence and decay. In light of the negative meanings ascribed to earlier spaces of individual and community identity formation, the evacuation of all meaning from these spaces has a positive connotation. Even though the manner in which these dirty realist authors are conceptualizing the urban space shows this new space to be decadent, empty, and violent, its transitional nature and the questioning of previous narratives that it implies open room for the creation of a new type of space that could grow to be more inclusive, even if this is never accomplished within the narratives themselves.

The dissertation of Jamie Diane Fudacz is approved.

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2012

*For my family, with all love and thanks*

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## I. Introduction

When embarking on this study of the depiction of urban space in Hispano-American dirty realist fiction, three fundamental questions emerged as the starting point for analysis: Is there a distinct conception of space present in Hispano-American dirty realist fiction? If so, what defines this space as characteristic of the genre? If every society produces its own space, and if space “in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre 26), then what does the dirty realist space reveal about the societies depicted in these texts and the power structures inherent in these societies and their spaces?

However, before one can begin to explore these questions it becomes necessary to define the genre of dirty realism in both its original and Latin American contexts. The term “dirty realism” was first coined in 1983 by Bill Buford in *Granta* to describe a new trend in North American fiction epitomized by the short stories of Janye Anne Phillips, Richard Ford, Raymond Carver, Elizabeth Tallent, Frederick Barthelme, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Tobias Wolf. While omitted from Buford’s initial list of dirty realists, Charles Bukowski has also become synonymous with the genre. The delineation of the Latin American dirty realist “canon” emerging in the 1990’s is far less developed. It is for this reason that the present study will focus on three of the most renowned Latin American dirty realists whose works are generally accessible to an international audience: Guillermo Fadanelli, Fernando Vallejo, and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez.

Each of these authors is perhaps the most recognized representative of a dirty realist movement in his own country of origin. Through his work on various counter-cultural

magazines, and in his role as the founder of *Editorial Moho*, Fadanelli has emerged as the face of dirty realism in Mexico City.<sup>1</sup> Diana Palaversich includes him among “los llamados realistas sucios Mexicanos” (13) and Roberto Frías refers to him as “el epígono del realismo sucio” (“*Malacara*, de Guillermo Fadanelli”). Fadanelli is, however, far from the lone Mexican representative of the genre. His contemporaries include such authors as J.M. Servín, Mauricio Bares, Rogelio Villareal, and Fernando Nachón. Additionally, through his work with both the literary magazine *Moho* and *Editorial Moho*, Fadanelli had been instrumental in the launching of a younger generation of authors whose works lend themselves to the classification of dirty realist, Peggy López, Rafa Saavedra, José Ángel Balmori, and Constanza Rojas among them. While Fernando Vallejo is perhaps the most well-known author of the post-boom Colombian literary scene, he is less consistently tagged with the dirty realist moniker. Anke Birkenmaier nonetheless includes him in her list of dirty realist authors, and Celina Manzoni also links the Colombian author to the genre (59). Vallejo is not, however the only contemporary Colombian author associated with dirty realism. Rigoberto Gil Montoya and Octavio Escobar Giraldo admit the influence of North American dirty realist authors on their works, and authors such as Hector Abad Faciolince and Mario Mendoza both grapple with the sordid milieus and formal minimalism of the genre. Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, marketed by Anagrama as the Bukowski of the tropics, is, I would argue, more than the most prominent dirty realist in Cuba, the most recognizable example of dirty realism throughout Latin America. Even so, Gutiérrez is at the forefront of what Eduardo Heras León has called “el reinado del realismo sucio sobre la más joven narrativa cubana” (1), a movement comprised of authors such as Amir Valle, Fernando

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<sup>1</sup> Despite widely being accepted as such by critics, Fadanelli does not refer to himself as a dirty realist, preferring to categorize his works as “literatura basura,” a term of his own invention. Mario Javier Bogarín Quintana remarks, “cuando a Guillermo Fadanelli le preguntan si su literatura pertenece al realismo sucio, contesta que él sólo aplica esos dos términos en la cama,” a response which, ironically, would qualify as belonging to the self-same genre it appears to reject (“Basura Literaria”).

Velázquez Medina, David Mitriani, Jorge Aguiar, Yordanka Almaquer, and Ana Lydia Vega Serova.

This is not to say that Hispano-American dirty realism is relegated to Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba. David William Foster has written a thorough analysis of the Argentine author Enrique Medina's dirty realist portrayal of Buenos Aires. Manzoni links Salvadorian author Horacio Castellanos Moya to dirty realism through comparisons to Vallejo and Gutiérrez (59). In an article for *El País* Mayra Santos-Febres names Francisco Font Acevedo and Yolanda Arroyo as exemplars of Puerto Rican dirty realism. Valmore Muñoz Arteaga likens Venezuelan author Israel Centeno to Henry Miller, Raymond Carver, and the North American dirty realists ("Erotismo"). These are but a few examples of the widespread international nature of Hispano-American dirty realism or *realismo sucio*.

In Buford's initial depiction of the genre, several defining characteristics become evident: a focus on the small, mundane details of everyday contemporary life; an economy of expression and use of less refined prose; and a preoccupation with postmodern consumer culture. With regard to the genre's emphasis on the quotidian life of the everyman, Buford remarks,

it is not a fiction devoted to making the large historical statement. It is instead a fiction devoted to a different scope – devoted to local details, the nuances, the little disturbances in language and gesture...but these are strange stories: unadorned unfurnished low-rent tragedies about people who watch day-time television, read cheap romances or listen to country and western music. (4)

Buford goes on to remark that the brand of realism employed by these authors is "unadorned," raw, stripped down to the bare minimum needed to convey the emotional discomfort and

intensity typical of the works. This pared-down style has led to these same works being dubbed by some as minimalist rather than dirty realist within the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The description of these works as “dirty” stems from this combination of gritty unrefined prose and the “low-rent” nature of the characters and social situations this prose is used to describe. These stories represent the “belly-side of contemporary life.” There is nothing grand or heroic about the protagonists who are nothing but, “drifters in a world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism” (Buford 4). It is on this “dirty” subject matter that Robert Rebein focuses when characterizing the literary genre. In fact, he portrays minimalism (including the works of Carver and others featured in *Granta* 8) as distinct from dirty realism, which he suggests came into its own in the 90’s. He states,

Dirty Realism, as I would like to employ the term, refers to an effect in both subject matter and technique that is somewhere between the hard-boiled and the darkly comic. It refers to the impulse in writers to explore dark truths, to descend, as it were, into the darkest holes of society and what used to be called “the soul of man”...In terms of technique: not the detached, “unconscious” narratives of minimalism, but rather the probing, superconscious narratives of a Henry Miller.(43)

It is this description of dirty realism that applies most readily to the Hispano-American context.

The treatment of truly marginal or abject and even criminal aspects of society makes Latin American dirty realism even more “dirty” in its focus than Buford’s dirty realism, whose characters are more likely to be struggling blue-collar Middle-Americans than prostitutes and assassins. Nevertheless, the extreme nature of Hispano-American dirty realism does fall in line with Rebein’s depiction of end of the century North American dirty realism as exploring the

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of how the term minimalist emerged in the context of contemporary American fiction see the second chapter of Robert Rebein’s book, *Hicks Tribes and Dirty Realists*, entitled “Minimalism and its discontents.”

“darkest holes of society.” Such a focus makes the category of the abject even more important to and characteristic of Hispano-American dirty realism than it is to the North American version of the genre; although, as Brian Jarvis notes, abjection is key to American dirty realism as well. Additionally, just as Rebein stresses that the North American dirty realists of the nineties do not wholly conform to the minimalist tradition of the seventies and eighties, the Latin American genre is not quite stark or detached enough to fully fit the minimalist model. The predominance of first person narration, the juxtaposition of various points of views in fictions such as Fadanelli’s *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* and *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, and the apparent intertextuality of works like Vallejo’s *La virgen de los sicarios* speak to this difference.

In Buford’s original categorization of the genre, he characterizes the dirty realist landscape as one marked by the dominating presence of postmodern consumer culture (4). Rebein echoes this sentiment when he states that, in relation to minimalists and dirty realists, “there was the feeling that what the old fashioned realists had called ‘milieu’ had been replaced by brand names and other ‘surface details’ that clearly came not from the individual artist but from a ‘nonartistic source’ – the world of the television sitcom and the shopping mall” (33). The link between dirty realism and postmodern global consumer culture is also characteristic of Latin American dirty realism. From his mentions of Bic pens and Blockbuster video in *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* to his descriptions of the Seven-Eleven in *Lodo*, Fadanelli is perhaps the author in whose texts the connection to global consumer society is most clear. After all, he does describe his work as celebrating, “la esquizofrenia del consumidor en la sociedad del mercado” (J.C.M., “El mexicano”). Nevertheless, this trend is apparent in the works of Vallejo as well. As Gabriela Polit Dueñas remarks of Vallejo’s *La virgen de los sicarios*, “Si el narcotráfico es la criminalidad neoliberal...el sicario constituye el personaje perfecto para describir su ethos



siniestro. Pone en evidencia el perverso valor de sus virtudes: el súbito enriquecimiento, el culto a la individualidad a través de una sumisión a las normas del mercado en el consumo de modas, marcas, y objetos” (125).

It is interesting to note, however, that despite most clearly denominating his style as dirty realist, due to the fact that they are set in the Havana of the “Special Period,” the works of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez have the most tenuous link to the genre’s defining consumerism. In her book, *Vulnerable States*, Guillermina De Ferrari comments on the irony of Gutiérrez adopting a style known for its focus on consumerism while depicting an environment of extreme scarcity (197). That the society Gutiérrez describes is ostensibly socialist would also seem to preclude it from pertaining to the world of postmodern “late-capitalism.” Even so, I would argue that Gutiérrez’s work does have ties to this world. The scarcity present in “Special Period” Cuba is in large part due to the elimination of resources previously provided by the Soviet Union before its collapse. Thus, the resurgence of capitalism and ties to the global (capitalist) economy both directly affect the Caribbean nation. Much of the economic activity described by Gutiérrez is informal, taking place on the black market and not under the regulation of the socialist state. Thus, it can be seen as essentially unfettered capitalism. Moreover, the texts themselves, published in Spain and not readily available in Cuba, are global objects of consumption.

Despite the strong connection between the dirty realist genre and the postmodern society of consumption, Buford defines dirty realist texts in opposition to the “self-consciously experimental” (4) postmodern works of the sixties and seventies, referencing such authors as John Barth, William Gaddis and Thomas Pynchon. According to Paula Greyh, Fred G. Lebron, and Andrew Levy, the editors of the anthology *Postmodern American Fiction*, these postmodern works are characterized by a strong metafictional impulse, “pastiche, the incorporation of different

textual genres and contradictory ‘voices’ within a single work; fragmented or ‘open’ forms that give the audience the power to assemble the work and determine its meaning, and the adoption of playful irony” (x). Despite his agreement that dirty realists break with the postmodern literary tradition, however, Rebein claims that “contemporary realist writers have *absorbed* postmodernism’s most lasting contributions and gone on to forge a new realism that is more or less traditional in its handling of character, reportorial in its depiction of milieu and time, but is at the same time self-conscious about language and the limits of mimesis” (20). The postmodern metafictional concern with the artifice of narration remains present in the dirty realist text, yet this type of “self-conscious” reflection has been so completely established in the works that it moves into the background, giving way to an easy acceptance of the author’s treatment of the text without this making the work appear any less authentic. This change indicates that the general eschewing of extreme formal experimentation present in dirty realism does not rule out any and all ties to literary and cultural postmodernism.

It is important here to distinguish between postmodernism as a literary term and the postmodern as a cultural and historical point of reference. When Buford and Rebein stress the dirty realists’ (and minimalists’) break with postmodernism, they are referring to an American literary classification rather than postmodernism as a general cultural phenomenon. Whereas dirty realism counters the literary aesthetic dubbed “postmodernism,” at the same it embraces, and is representative of, the cultural shifts that mark the postmodern period. In fact, one could argue that the very act of repurposing realism whilst evacuating it of its original historical context of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial growth and faith in the scientific method could epitomize the very loss of historicity which characterizes the postmodern era (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 25).

Returning for a moment to the idea of dirty realism as originally being written in opposition to a previously established literary movement (in this case postmodernism) in the United States, another parallel can be drawn between the American and Hispano-American variants of the genre. As Anke Birkenmaier comments in her article, “Dirty Realism at the End of the Century: Latin American Apocalyptic Fictions,” the authors of Latin American dirty realism, “do not seem to know each other or of each other, even though they all coincide in positioning themselves against the previous tradition of Latin American magic realism”(491). She also affirms the existence of a dirty realist style characterized by an insistence on “a counter-aesthetic that incorporates a vision of history that is unofficial or unheard of, ‘dirty’ in its focus on the illicit and on underground cultures,”(491) as well as a straightforward narrative perspective that is minimally concerned with “collective cause” (489). The idea of a “counter-aesthetic” that shuns the experimentation and sheer verbosity of the “boom” and the magical realist and neo-baroque schools echoes the North American dirty realist movement away from the grand postmodern narrative. Much like in the case of the McOndo movement spearheaded by Alberto Fuguet, Latin American dirty realism counters the overly exoticized and commercialized vision of Latin America sold to foreign audiences under the brand of magical realism.<sup>3</sup> Diana Palaversich describes this movement away from the ethos of the “boom” as the depiction of “un continente globalizado y postmoderno- que existe en oposición nítida al Macondo de García Márquez- exótico, premoderno y subdesarrollado” (13). Thus, Hispanic American dirty realism places itself in opposition to an earlier aesthetic as well as the political, economic, and social image that said aesthetic has come to represent. As such, the “realism”

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that Latin American dirty realism doesn’t commercialize their countries and region in its own way. For a discussion of the commoditization of Cuba and Havana in the works of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, see Esther Whitfield’s article, “Autobiografía sucia: The Body Impolitic of *Trilogía sucia de la Habana*.”

inherent in Latin American dirty realism is a claim to reflect the true nature of the new urban Latin American context.

The juxtaposition of this new writing and society with those of the “boom” highlights the influence of postmodernity as a cultural construct, even if in opposition to the notion of postmodernism as a literary aesthetic. The focus that Hispano-American dirty realist authors place on the lack of value and expendable quality of their works underscores the postmodern nature of their texts. As Jameson notes in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, postmodernism can be seen as “aesthetic populism,” effacing the division between high culture and mass commercial culture (2). Thus, great literature is replaced by “the ephemeral, with disposable works that wish to fold back immediately into the accumulating detritus of historical time” (79). In Fadanelli’s choice to refer to his works as “literatura basura,” he emphasizes “una renuncia hipotética a la idea de durar, a las buenas costumbres literarias, y a la academización. Se inclina por el dislate, la acción desmesurada, las obsesiones del autor, la pornografía, además de celebrar de una manera sórdida la esquizofrenia del consumidor en la sociedad del mercado” (Fadanelli *Caretas*). Fernando Vallejo expresses a similar attitude towards literature. In a 2004 interview he stated, “Escribo porque vivo en una desocupación absoluta, por falta de oficio y de trabajo...No me queda más remedio que escribir. Y esto es una desgracia, pero ya no creo en la escritura. La literatura no vale la pena” (*La Ventana*). The dirty realist authors’ questioning of the inherent value of literature, of “las buenas costumbres literarias, y a la academización,” falls directly in line with the postmodern idea of literature as a disposable consumer product.

In their focus on the “dirty” and degraded aspects of contemporary life, Gutiérrez, Fadanelli and Vallejo echo another fundamental feature of the postmodern: incredulity toward

metanarratives as defined by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*. Narrowing their attention to almost exclusively marginal characters inherently questions the very notion of progress. More specifically, Fadanelli, Vallejo and Gutiérrez deny the previously widely accepted political and nationalist narratives at work in their countries. Through such a negation of the presuppositions of the nationalist discourse, these authors further distance themselves from their predecessors of the “boom,” who, while writing works critical of their current national political situations, generally proposed that progress towards national redemption was possible. Fadanelli contradicts the image of a strong, paternal, Mexican nation state and national identity with depictions of a country plagued by corruption and marked by globalization. Vallejo, in turn, attacks traditional religious narratives as well as demonstrating a total lack of faith in government and politics. Gutiérrez expresses a complete disillusionment with the Cuban Revolution and ensuing socialist regime.

In accepting the dirty realist text as tied to cultural and historical postmodernism, the issue of space becomes one of great importance. What Jameson calls “the spatialization of the temporal” emerges in the postmodern era as a direct result of the loss of historicity that he espouses as one of the primary markers of this period (*Postmodernism* 156). In *Postmodern Geographies*, Soja asserts that spatiality has wrongly been placed in a secondary position to historicity in Marxist critical theory, and that the contemporary conditions of a new, postmodern, more flexible, global and state managed capitalism demand a stronger emphasis on the role of space in the study of contemporary society. In the literary realm, as Buford remarked in his initial definition of the genre, dirty realism is intensely concerned with space and “devoted to local details” (4). Rebein remarks that this fiction “embraces past traditions and forms even as it remains resolutely topical, both in the sense of belonging to a particular location or place, and in

the sense of being of current interest, contemporary” (165). Nick Hornby similarly asserts that contemporary American authors “have made attempts to come to terms with the demands of topography which inevitably accompany realist fiction” (55). This specificity of the local appears in contrast to the “oppressive details of modern consumerism” that Buford also posits as defining the genre (4). In attempting to create a distinct sense of place through descriptions of the minutiae of the spaces in which their fictions take place, North American dirty realist authors as well as their Latin American counterparts paradoxically assert a sense of local identity whilst simultaneously expressing the homogenizing effects of a global mass consumer culture (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 148). Thus, these texts effectively break down previous criteria for differentiating the use of space. The boundaries between the local, the national, and the global become more complicated and porous, as do those between private and public spaces, as well as spaces of production, commerce, and consumption.

While the dirty realism of the United States and Latin America may share this renewed focus on the importance of place and consequent questioning of traditional conceptions of space, the regions and places on which they choose to focus vary drastically. Although American dirty realism does include some works centered on cities, it is primarily a rural genre, a phenomenon that Rebein, quoting an article by Jonathan Yardley, refers to as “hick chic.” Within the rural context, many North American dirty realist short stories, especially those of Raymond Carver, are highly stagnant, frequently confined to a single, and often domestic, space. Latin American dirty realism, by contrast, is almost exclusively urban in nature. The works of Guillermo Fadanelli, Fernando Vallejo and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez center on the cities of Mexico City, Medellín, and Havana respectively. Rural locations may occasionally appear in the texts, such as in Benito and Eduarda’s trip to rural Michoacan to avoid the police in Fadanelli’s *Lodo*, in

Fernando's reflections on his childhood *finca* outside of Medellín in *Los días azules*, *El desbarrancadero* and *La virgin de los sicarios*, and Pedro Juan's trips to visit his mother in the countryside in Gutiérrez's stories. Nevertheless, these forays into the rural are not the primary focus of the texts, acting more as a nostalgic point of comparison to the overwhelming primacy of the urban spaces to which they correspond.

The dirty realist presentation of the contemporary Latin American city varies drastically from the totalizing vision of the city that can be found both in 19th century realism and naturalism and in the works of the authors of the "boom." María Teresa Zubiaurre argues that, in the 19th century realist novel, depictions of space demonstrate a preoccupation with the newly important urban environment and a desire to order and control this chaotic space. She cites the prominence of the panoramic view in realist fiction as a manner of organizing the city space into a delimited and comprehensible whole (128). The attempt to explore the limits of the city in order to create a total vision of that space can also be seen in many works of the "boom." Carlos Fuentes' inclusion of seemingly endless economically, socially, and culturally diverse spaces in *La region más transparente* speaks to this attempt to reflect the entirety of the city space. As Ryan F. Long contends, at the end of the novel, a total vision of not just Mexico City, but of the whole nation forms; "Able to absorb Mexico City and eventually the nation's past through his eyes, Cienfuegos transmits what he sees with his voice. He becomes a focal point through which Mexico's total reality, past and present, emerges as a novelistic representation" (41). This totalizing view of the city falls in line with David Harvey's depiction of the modern industrial urban space. This capitalist industrial mode of production in the modern era required a tightly knit, centralized urban space where both capital and labor power accumulated. With the shift from a modern industrial society to a postmodern consumer society, however, came a consequent

shift in the conceptualization of the city. This transitional re-conceptualization of the urban space is prominent in Latin American dirty realist fiction.

As Zubiaurre remarks, in many contemporary novels, “la realidad moderna – metaforizada, encarnada en la ciudad – ya no puede contemplarse como totalidad, y no admite la visión panorámica y abarcadora, sino que se presenta como espacio fragmentado e inconexo” (256). This corresponds to Harvey’s vision of the postmodern city. Harvey asserts that the success of modern capitalist industry caused an over-accumulation of capital and labor in the city space. The need to solve the over-accumulation problem leads to the production of the physical and social space of capitalism, in the form of investments in infrastructure and the spurring of consumption, which in turn causes a shift to a consumer oriented post-industrial city. This new city is a massive, loosely-tied agglomeration of neighborhoods and suburbs complete with shopping centers. Urban sprawl provides a solution to under-consumption (39) while the dispersal of the working class and poor safeguards the late capitalist system as the concentration of “dangerous classes” who could provoke unrest is diminished (87). With the change in the physical organization of the city comes a change in its residents’ identities. Class consciousness is fragmented into community consciousness and consumer groups. This is the city space of Hispanic American dirty realism. Panoramic vistas, while present, are necessarily complicated or subverted, and the immediacy of particular, usually marginalized, neighborhoods, blocks, and streets overwhelm any possibility of viewing the entire city as a connected and manageable whole.

Whereas the totalizing tendencies of the earlier realist genre demonstrate a need to command the newly nascent cityscape, in Hispanic American dirty realism, the city is accepted as a given circumstance of contemporary existence that is so integrated into the individual



characters' lives that it warrants little if any conscious attention, angst, or feelings of alienation. The ease with which these characters embrace the public spaces of the city manifests itself in their constant movement through them and navigation of them. Unlike the stagnation of many North American dirty realist texts, the spatial logic of Hispanic American dirty realism is one of constant displacement within the confines of the city or areas of the city.

The logic of constant movement that permeates these texts and the transition to the postmodern era that they depict are paralleled by the transformation of places into non-places. Here I am referring to Marc Augé's assertion that "if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (63). In the dirty realist city, traditional spaces of individual and community identity formation have given way to spaces marked predominantly by transit and the circulation of global consumer products. Local business with historical and social connections to the spaces they occupy are replaced by homogenous international corporations and their products or the secretive black market dealing where little if any personal information is exchanged and anonymity is valued. Churches and monuments become little more than spectacles for tourists, the inherent history of the cemetery cedes to the clinical sterility of the morgue, and the street becomes a space of circulation rather than relation. Augé notes that a place is defined as a space in which the inscription of the "social bond" or "collective history" is apparent, and that "such inscriptions are obviously less numerous in spaces bearing the stamp of the ephemeral and the transient" (VIII). Thus, seeing as Hispanic American dirty realist texts are marked by transience, the preeminence of the non-place, and the embracing of these non-places on the part of the characters is logical.

Nevertheless, as Jameson notes, “the spatialization of the temporal often registers itself by way of a sense of loss. . . a nostalgia for nostalgia” (156), and this nostalgia repeatedly registers as a futile attachment to the no longer existent spaces of the production and reproduction of established identities such as the domestic home and the church. This sense of nostalgia is present in many Hispano-American dirty realist texts, especially in the context of some of the older generation of characters. This nostalgia, however, proves to be false and unwarranted. The domestic space in these texts more often than not proves to be one of institutionalized violence, desperation, oppression, and a complete lack of respect and acceptance. This perversion of the traditionally conceived domestic space and the accompanying grand narrative of the traditional family, with all of its nationalistic undertones, exposes this concept of domesticity as marginalizing and contributing to the current state of abjection in which many characters find themselves or those around them. Moreover, the identities that these spaces ascribe to those that occupy them often become burdensome. Similar processes reveal the church and other spaces imbued with historical, social and national significance to be equally as violent and marginalizing.

It is thus that the rise of the non-place, in its ability to empty these spaces of their traditional significances is often treated as a relief by the dirty realist characters not fully blinded by unjustified nostalgia. Rather than accept the identities formed in the spaces that produced and reproduced the structures contributing to the decadent state in which the cities depicted now find themselves, many dirty realist characters embrace or actively seek to create the non-places of postmodernity, welcoming the anonymity and/or lack of significant individual or community relationships that this implies. Furthermore, in that the transition from modern to postmodern society, from place to non-place, represents a shift in the signification of the various spaces of

the city and the power structures and identities inherent to them, it allows for the possibility of the non-place to act as an emptying of meaning necessary to then re-imbue said spaces with different meanings. Seeing as the previous societal and cultural structures linked to these spaces of individual and community identity formation are revealed to be profoundly negative in nature, the transitional dirty realist space marked by the prominence of the non-place, while often violent and insubstantial, thus becomes a space in which there is a glimmer of hope for the creation of new, more inclusive spaces.

Returning, then, to the three questions proposed earlier, I will argue that yes, there is a Latin American dirty realist space. This space is primarily characterized by abjection as well as what Augé calls the “intellectual difficulty in thinking simultaneously about continuity and discontinuity, local and global, place and non-place”(XVII), chiefly in the uncomfortable coexistence of a focus on distinctive regional and/or local minutia and the homogenizing effects of global, postmodern consumer society, a phenomenon accompanied by the proliferation of non-places. Despite false nostalgia for more traditional spaces, the acceptance of the non-place in the dirty realist space marks a transition from a space that promotes a violent and marginalizing social structure, through a period and space of perceived meaninglessness accompanied by its own form of social violence but also by a sense of relief from previously ascribed identities and structures, to a space capable of being imbued with more positive values and structures of identification.

My first chapter explores Fadanelli’s dirty realist interpretation of Mexico City. Given that the author centers his works in the megalopolis of Mexico City straining to maintain a distinct regional identity under the pressures of rapid modernization and international development as embodied by NAFTA, the focus of this chapter will be the role of postmodern

global consumer culture in shaping this space. In addition to Augé, Jameson and the other theorists already mentioned, I will employ the works of Zygmunt Bauman to help understand the manner in which the transformation of the Mexican economy from one of protectionism and nationalism to one of international neo-liberalism and consumerism affects the spatial logic of the texts. My analysis will demonstrate that the movement of the characters through the non-places of the city parallels the relatively free-flow of capital in this new economic system as well as the fluidity of identity that comes with the acceptance of the consumer good as a marker of this identity. Moreover, I will demonstrate that the older generation of characters clings to a nostalgic vision of the grand narratives of family and national history and their corresponding spaces, in part because they are unable to fully participate in postmodern consumer society due to their economic marginality, and despite the presentation of these spaces and narratives as equally decadent and violent as those of the present and as having contributed to this marginality. The younger generation of characters, however, openly accepts the globalized urban non-places of postmodernity. These characters prefer the public non-places of the city to the domestic space and the proscribed identities and relationships that come with it. This generational divide echoes the spatial contradiction of the dirty realist presentation of Mexico City as both maintaining regional specificity and as a megalopolis awash in global consumer culture.

In the second chapter, I will further explore the notion of false nostalgia and its relationship to the Latin American dirty realist space through an analysis of the works of Fernando Vallejo. Vallejo depicts Medellín as a once charming provincial city utterly degraded by the influx of impoverished internal immigrants. In the 1990's, due to a combination of guerilla, paramilitary and drug cartel violence, an average of 500 people were being displaced from their homes on a daily basis and congregating in urban centers, exacerbating the already

high levels of violence and poverty in these cities (Simons 125). That such high levels of violence and poverty already existed in Medellín, similarly reflecting previous political violence and demographic shifts that occurred in the era of the childhood of the narrator of Vallejo's texts,<sup>4</sup> already demonstrates the falsity of this narrator's nostalgic vision of the supposedly idyllic Medellín of the past. I will explore how the subversion of the spatial tropes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century realist novel in Vallejo's fictions demonstrate the deceptiveness of the narrator's nostalgia, revealing the order established in and by the past spaces of the city, in particular the domestic space and the space of the church, to be one of an exclusionary and rigid morality, especially with regard to homosexuals and women, and to have contributed to the current decadence into which Medellín has fallen. Moreover, the repurposing of these tropes establishes the manner in which dirty realism both builds upon and diverges from traditional realism in its treatment of space and beyond. Having established the way in which Vallejo and his narrator simultaneously treat the spaces of Medellín past with nostalgia and reveal them to be intensely negative, I will then demonstrate that, as such, the narrator embraces the emptiness of the non-place as a welcome alternative. Furthermore, in the particular case of the church, the narrator begins to inscribe new more positive meanings to these spaces.

The third chapter focuses on the works of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez and his depiction of how extreme economic scarcity, disillusionment with the socialist regime, and the opening of the island to ever greater numbers of foreign tourists help to re-characterize the urban space of a Havana crumbling during the economic crises of the "Special Period." Given the extreme nature of the poverty and marginalization experienced by Gutiérrez's characters, abject spaces,

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<sup>4</sup> Known as "La Violencia," in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century a civil conflict between liberal and conservative factions erupted. Much of the violence occurred in the countryside, causing many in these conflict-ridden areas to move into the cities, often establishing shanty towns.

while characteristic of all dirty realism, are of particular interest to the interpretation of these dirty realist texts. As the notion of abjection is closely linked to the scatological and the sexual, generally conceived of as private, the reconceptualization of the private/public divide that Jameson asserts as intrinsic to the dirty realist space will also act as a focal point of my analysis (*Seeds of Time* 155). Seeing as the spatial reimagining of the private and the public was of great importance to the Cuban Revolution and the ensuing socialist regime, and as Gutiérrez and his characters both express a deep cynicism toward the Revolution, the private/public divide also serves as a lens through which to view the negative portrayal of traditionally or revolutionarily sanctioned spaces of individual, communal and national identity formation. Thus, once again, the emergence of the non-place that accompanies Havana's transition into the postmodern global consumer society through such means as (sexual) tourism and the black market economy serves to evacuate meanings associated with the marginalization, hardship, and disillusion brought forth by the values of the Cuban Revolution, allowing for the possibility of these spaces taking on new, perhaps more inclusive and authentic significance. Likewise, the decay of the public space as constructed under socialism may aid the formation of a different type of public space more apt to the creation of a newly nascent, albeit fragile and flawed, civil society.

Despite varied geographic, societal, economic, and governmental contexts, each author embraces the dirty realist style to depict the degeneration, decadence and abjection of the urban space. In this space the tension formed by the coexistence of an anonymous, globalized, commercial urbanity and an attachment to the distinctly local emerges and is paralleled by the seemingly contradictory embracing of non-places and a nostalgia for the spaces that these non-places supplant. Nonetheless, the allure of the non-place generally overwhelms this sense of nostalgia, for the emptiness of the non-place presents both an escape from the destructive and

marginalizing structures of power, morality, governance and identity present in more traditionally sanctioned spaces and the possibility of replacing them with new, more positive structures.

## II. The Generational Divide: Neoliberalism, Domesticity, and the Non-place in the Works of Guillermo Fadanelli

Anke Birkenmaier has described Latin American dirty realist fiction as apocalyptic in its very nature (490), and, at first glance, Guillermo Fadanelli's depiction of Mexico City at the end of the twenty-first century as a space plagued with violence, abjection and an overwhelming sense of meaninglessness lends itself well to this interpretation.<sup>5</sup> In *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* (1997), *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* (1999), and *Lodo* (2002), Fadanelli explores this sentiment of purposelessness as being in part due to the homogenizing effects of postmodern, global consumer culture and the consequent proliferation of non-places, which in turn cause a loss of relational identities associated with accepted metanarratives of the family, community and nation. I contend, however, that Fadanelli utilizes a generational divide to explore the problematized, violent, and uncomfortable coexistence of the local and the global in the urban space, and that the depiction of such a space of cultural confrontation is characteristic of Latin American dirty realism. Moreover, I will show that the younger generation of Fadanelli's characters prefers the new space of the non-place to more traditional spaces, such as the domestic home, that propagate proscriptive and marginalizing identities. These previous spaces, despite their being idealized by many in the older generations, are also plagued by violence and inequality, albeit in a less visible and more insidious way, and thus are equally, if not more, problematic than the violent non-places embraced by the younger generation. I therefore argue that, although the dirty realist space is one of violence, abjection and marginalization in a

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<sup>5</sup> In her article, "Dirty Realism at the End of the Century: Latin American Apocalyptic Fictions," Anke Birkenmaier argues that novels by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Fernando Vallejo and Mario Bellatín are indicative of a time that is "apocalyptic, not only in a political sense but also in a literary one. These are fictions written in the void before the end of literature itself, which seem to issue out of a moment when the adequacy of the written text in response to crude reality is in doubt" (490). While Birkenmaier does not include Fadanelli in her study, his works do conform to her criteria for both dirty realism and apocalyptic fiction.



postmodern consumer society, it is not entirely “apocalyptic.” The meaning evacuated from this space is profoundly negative, and thus the emergence of an empty, although violent and decadent, space still opens room for the creation of a new type of space that could grow to be more inclusive, even if this is never accomplished within the narratives themselves.

In order to facilitate a deeper understanding of Fadanelli’s texts as postmodern works of dirty realist fiction, I will first provide a brief analysis of the literary, historical, and cultural context that they occupy. I will then demonstrate the emergence of the non-place as the prevalent spatial construct in Fadanelli’s fictions, focusing on the alignment between the younger generation of characters and this developing space. Having established the non-place as linked to postmodern global consumer culture, I will explore the inherent contradiction between the non-place and the distinct regionalism of Fadanelli’s works as characteristic of dirty realism, a theme that will continually arise in my interpretation of the texts. Given the importance of consumer culture in these and other works of dirty realism, the focus of my analysis will then turn to the manner in which the younger generation of characters, as an economically marginalized group, embraces the anonymity of the non-place. In an effort to contrast the welcoming of this anonymity to the manner in which the older generation of characters struggles to maintain traditional markers of identity, my analysis will then concentrate on Fadanelli’s portrayal of the domestic space as an exemplar of the manner in which the destruction of traditional values and identities associated with this space in favor of the comparative emptiness of the non-place can be ascribed a positive value.

## 1. Fadanelli in Context: Literatura Basura and the Non-place in the Postmodern Era

Guillermo Fadanelli broke onto the Mexican literary scene in the late 1980's and early 1990's with his participation in the counter-cultural literary magazines *La regla rota* (1984-1987) and *La pus moderna* (1989-1997), and his founding of the magazine *Moho* in 1988. With the creation of his own publishing house, *Editorial Moho*, in 1995, the author began to solidify his role as an alternative voice in Mexican letters.<sup>6</sup> Rogelio Villarreal, a contributing editor of *La regla rota* and *La pus moderna*, long-time collaborator with Fadanelli, and self-proclaimed “cronista eventual de la cultura posmoderna” clearly places Fadanelli's work in opposition to dominant trends in Mexican literary culture in an article for *La jornada semanal* in 1995 (Villarreal 32). In this article, provocatively entitled “Rebellion en el basurero,” Villarreal remarks in reference to Fadanelli, “muestra su desencanto con el *main stream* de la literatura mexicana y se delata como promotor de lo que se ha dado en llamar ‘literatura basura’” (32). In direct opposition to what he denominates as insubstantial “literatura light”<sup>7</sup> and the recycling and republishing of works by “los grandes,” most notably Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, Villarreal promotes the concept of “literatura basura” as coined by Fadanelli to express the way in which he and his contemporaries<sup>8</sup> “se burlan inteligente y despiadadamente de la pobreza temática y de

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<sup>6</sup> As Carlos Martínez Rentería notes in his book, *La cresta de la ola*, all counter culture “paradójicamente, sólo cumplirá su sentido de ruptura al hacerse de nuevo cultura” (10). The trajectory of Guillermo Fadanelli's work from practically unknown magazines to the creation of his own publishing house and his participation in such literary forums as *El Universal* and *Letras Libres* illustrates this point. Having gained such a degree of acceptance, currently the alternative nature of Fadanelli's work can be called into question.

<sup>7</sup> Among those that Villarreal considers authors of “literatura light” are Laura Esquivel, Ángeles Mastretta, Aguilar Camín, Guadalupe Loeza and Rosa Nissán.

<sup>8</sup> While Villarreal cites Mauricio Bares as Fadanelli's most immediate colleague in the writing of “literatura basura,” he also mentions such authors as Juan M. Servín, Cuauhtémoc García, Naomi Simmons, Enrique Blanc, Rafael Tonatiuh, and Julio Haro.

la ampulosidad formal de la literatura “literaria”, más preocupada por perseguir en vano la perfección y un lugarcito cada vez más cerca de ‘los grandes’” (37).

Rather than simply construct the genre of *literatura basura* in opposition to the more accepted and mainstream literary works of the time, Villarreal additionally attempts to positively define the works of “Bares, Fadanelli, y Cía.” who he succinctly labels as “sucios, feos y malos.” He notes that these authors demonstrate

la extraordinaria capacidad y sensibilidad no sólo para entender, sino para transcribir la enrarecida atmósfera de la posmodernidad y sus complejos y contradictorios efectos en las ideas y sentimientos del hombre; la sordidez de la abrumadora vida cotidiana en las grandes urbes del planeta. . . es asumida sin dramatismos fáciles ni estereotipados; por el contrario sus salidas sorprendidas e ingeniosas resultan en textos crudísimos de hiriente perspicacia, no en vano se alcanzan a percibir benéficas perfectamente aclimatadas:

Carver y John Fante, por citar solo dos. (35)

In this definition of Fadanelli and company’s writing, Villarreal elucidates several direct ties to dirty realism as originally laid out by Bill Buford, namely a focus on the complexities of postmodern culture as well as on the sordid or dirty aspects of this culture, and the general lack of the overtly dramatic in favor of the minimal in both subject matter and style. The mention here of Raymond Carver and John Fante, often viewed as the father and grandfather of dirty realism respectively, as great influences on the Mexican authors’ work further cements the overlap of *literatura basura* and the North American genre.<sup>9</sup>

This positioning of Fadanelli in opposition to the Mexican literary establishment and in line with the authors of North American dirty realism extends beyond the conception of the

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<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of the importance of Raymond Carver and John Fante to the genre of North American dirty realism, see Michael Hemmingson’s book *The Dirty Realism Duo*.

literary landscape presented by Villarreal, Fadanelli's former collaborator and friend. In a 2003 review of Fadanelli's novel *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, for example, Mayra Ibarra notes that Fadanelli,

haya sido inclemente con el movimiento literario mexicano llamado "Crack", del cual ofrecieron un manifiesto en 1996 Jorge Volpi e Ignacio Padilla, por mencionar tan sólo a los más destacados y premiados del grupo. La contrapropuesta de Fadanelli hace de lo urbano el destino trágico de los personajes, mientras que los autores del "Crack" pretenden asumir los mismos riesgos que caracterizaron al boom latinoamericano. Fadanelli rompe con esta tradición y se inscribe en otros registros en donde los ecos de Bukowsky [sic] o del existencialismo de Sartre y de Camus se manifiestan a través de una economía de recursos estilísticos y retóricos que lo asemejan a un Carver. ("Fadanelli o la literatura basura")

The "Crack" aimed to continue the aesthetic and formal experimentation of the "Boom" and shunned the focus on simple straightforward language and quotidian subject matter present in both the McOndo movement and dirty realism. While Ibarra references neither "literatura light" nor "los grandes," instead focusing on the "Crack," she rightly designates this movement and its most famed authors as the inheritors of the prestige and consecration of the "Boom" authors in Mexico. Therefore, once again, when situating Fadanelli's work, the emphasis lies on the contentious nature of his relationship to the Mexican literary establishment, including the younger generation of this establishment, and on his ties to the most recognizable figures in North American dirty realism: Bukowski and Carver. Moreover, the direct influence of authors such as Bukowski and of dirty realism on Fadanelli and the authors of *literatura basura* is apparent not only in the Mexican authors' own writings, but in the material chosen for

publication in the magazines that these authors created, directed, edited and to which they contributed. It is no coincidence that the very first article of the very first edition of *La puz moderna* is a translated excerpt from Bukowski's *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*.

The influence of Bukowski in particular can be seen in what both Villarreal and Ibarra posit as one of the most outstanding characteristics of Fadanelli's work: its urban nature. While most North American dirty realism deals with the rural or suburban environment, Fadanelli's work, like that of Bukowski, is very strongly urban. Whereas Bukowski explores the minutiae of Los Angeles throughout the course of his works, Fadanelli's texts concentrate almost exclusively on the lived realities of Mexico City. Although Bukowski's urban focus makes him more of an exception than the rule when discussing North American dirty realism, as Latin American dirty realism differs from its North American predecessors in this respect, Fadanelli's urban setting places him squarely in line with the conventions of the genre.

Fadanelli comments on his own engagement with the issue of the postmodern urban space in general, and Mexico City in particular, in a 1997 article published in *La jornada semanal* entitled "El ocaso de una ciudad." In this piece Fadanelli comments on the contemporary feeling of unrest present in Mexico City and its causes, stating, "el desconcierto proviene de una fisura histórica a partir de la cual el habitante de la ciudad de México se encuentra en un estado de guerra permanente: la calle es un territorio cuya propiedad ha dejado de ser comunal, no es ya el espacio público, no la plaza donde la comunidad se congrega sino el territorio que se ofrece a quien es capaz de apropiárselo" (4). In this analysis of the end of the public space, Fadanelli opens up his conception of space and the treatment of space in his works to an interpretation that utilizes Marc Augé's theorization of the "non-place." Augé states "if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as

relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (63). If, as Fadanelli expressly posits, the public space has become nothing more than a territory to be won, bought, or consumed, then it loses its traditional identity and relationship forming and maintaining capacity as a place where “la comunidad se congrega,” becoming a “non-place.”

Moreover, such a disappearance of the public space is characteristic of dirty realism. Jameson argues that the emergence of the dirty realist space is “betokened by the disappearance of the public space as such: the end of the civic, for example, and of official government which now resolves back into the private networks of corruption and informal clan relationships” (*Seeds of Time* 158). Here Jameson references the public sphere as both a conceived space and as a concrete space. The “dirtiness” of the conceived public arena is very explicitly explored in Fadanelli’s aptly entitled novel *Lodo*. The narrator’s brother Ernesto, a politician who is “corrupto hasta los huesos del pie” (85), belongs to a family whose members (a category from which the narrator excludes himself) “se movían en esta sociedad no como peces en el agua, sino como gusanos en el barro” (95). The idea of the public arena being one of corruption captured in the metaphor of mud and grime plainly echoes Jameson’s interpretation of the dirty realist public sphere. Moreover, on a less metaphoric level, the physical public spaces of the city, such as the plaza mentioned by Fadanelli in the aforementioned article, are no longer tied to the history of that space, nor the communally formed and public governments and institutions that were heretofore responsible for their creation, maintenance and use, but rather available only to whatever private group or gang or “clan” has enough capital or violent force to control them.

The ceding of the traditionally conceived places of the city to the emergence of the non-place is thus directly linked to what Villarreal describes as the “enrarecida atmósfera de la posmodernidad y sus complejos y contradictorios efectos en las ideas y sentimientos del

hombre” that so mark Fadanelli’s work in particular and dirty realism in general (35). Augé asserts the hypothesis that “supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike in Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places” (63). While Augé employs the term “supermodernity” rather than “postmodernity” these two concepts overlap considerably. Rather than tie the individual to a community and that community’s history, these non-places are more directly linked to the quintessentially postmodern conceptions of commerce, circulation, and transportation as they relate to contemporary society and its globalized neoliberal economy.

Once more, this postmodern understanding of space is inherent to dirty realism in both the North American and Latin American contexts. As Jameson notes, “the new literature Buford speaks of is one that follows and reflects this transformation of everyday life by the penetration of a corporate mass culture into its utmost recesses and crannies” (*Seeds of Time* 147). Buford himself describes North American dirty realism as taking place “in a world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism,” and as focusing on the “belly-side of contemporary life,” stressing a combined focus on the “dirty” and the postmodern (4).

Fadanelli’s works equally reflect this focus. As the name of one of the magazines with which he was associated, *La pus moderna*, would suggest, Fadanelli demonstrates early on a playful (and dirty) interest in postmodernity that carries through his work to this day and effectively transfers into the realm of modern-day Mexico.

In his analysis of the postmodern Mexican novel, Raymond L. Williams asserts that the 1968 massacre in the Plaza de Tlatelolco acted as a key turning point in the development of postmodern Mexico, forever altering the public’s relationship with the PRI, and spurring an entire generation of Mexicans to question the predominant political and national narratives of the

time. Additionally, the financial problems that the country faced in the late seventies and eighties, known as “La Crisis” was not simply an economic crisis, but “a crisis of authority, of legitimacy, and of truth” (*Postmodern Novel* 24). Thus, the incredulity toward meta-narratives that Lyotard asserts as the hallmark of postmodernity in *The Postmodern Condition* intensifies over the decades from the sixties on in the Mexican context.

Fadanelli’s middle-aged characters would have been born before this crisis reached its heights, and would have witnessed the shift from a modern to a postmodern Mexico, whereas the younger characters would have been born and raised in the very midst of this postmodernity, accepting it as the only lifestyle they had ever known. While the older characters begin to question accepted truths, the younger characters have completely abandoned the idea of absolute truth. The middle-aged Benito Torrentera in *Lodo* is a professor of philosophy who constantly cites authoritative academic texts only to interrogate their functioning in everyday life. Critic José R. Ruisanchez Serra describes this pattern as, “la cita de la autoridad y el cuestionamiento sobre el otro, que a su vez desautoriza la cita y con ella el sistema de seguridades de una enciclopedia que amurallaba la vida” (77). Torrentera is just beginning the process of dismantling the scientific, academic, and social truths on which he has built his life, still citing authorities even if he later discredits them. This type of questioning on the part of the older generation of characters develops into a fully-fledged negation of the idea of an authoritative truth or meta-narrative among the younger generation. It is thus that Susana, a thirty-year-old secondary character in *¿Te veré en el desayuno?*, can nonchalantly add to a trivial discussion about why her coworker is late the philosophical comment, “la verdad es cosa de cada quien y depende de la interpretación, del color con que mires las cosas” (140).



This crisis of authority occurs in the midst of a great economic and political shift in Mexican society and government. In 1982 the fall of oil prices severely weakened the Mexican economy preventing it from paying off its foreign debt, diverting resources from investment in growth, and causing massive capital flight, stagnation, and uncertainty. The perceived failure of corporatist national economic policies combined with pressure from organizations such as the World Bank spurred a faction within the PRI to advocate for a new, neo-liberal opening of the Mexican economy to participate in the globalized marketplace. The dismantling of protectionist barriers and the remnants of revolutionary nationalism by the Carlos Salinas de Gortari government in its adoption of NAFTA epitomizes this neo-liberal shift. In Guillermo Fadanelli's texts written during this transitional period, a new conceptualization of the public space as an open space of free movement and individual participation in consumer society emerges, echoing economic liberalism's focus on the free movement of international capital and emphasis on individual rather than state or collective involvement in the economy.

Yet, until the 2000 elections, the opening of the economic sphere was not met by a similar opening of the political one, as the PRI tried desperately to implement free economic policies without changing the authoritarian nature of the one party system.<sup>10</sup> The blatant election frauds perpetrated in 1986 and 1988 as well as the assassination of more than 500 members of the opposition party, the PRD, during Salinas de Gortari's term in office (Servín 380) speak to the force with which the PRI attempted to hang on to its monopoly of power. Thus, a lack of political freedom complicated the new economic freedom in the public sphere. This tension is heightened by the exacerbation of social inequalities caused by the new neo-liberal economic

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<sup>10</sup> For a more complete analysis of the combination of economic reforms and political entrenchment under the PRI in the 1990's see Lorenzo Meyer's article "The Second Coming of Mexican Liberalism: *A Comparative Perspective*."

policies. Economic marginalization made many unable to fully participate in the new public sphere marked by consumerism and caused some, both within and outside of the PRI, to call for the return to state sponsored social programs as well as state regulation of the marketplace. Thus, in this era there exists both a desire to embrace the opening of society and the public space to the free movement of capital and the individual in the global consumer marketplace coupled with an inability to fully participate in this space, as well as a seemingly futile desire to move back to the narrative of the closed nationalist space.

Accordingly, the generational divide seen in the postmodern crisis of authority represented by Fadanelli reappears in the related views of the economy and conceptualization of the public sphere and the urban space present in his texts. While in practice, age would not have been the only decisive factor in determining those who favored the new economic liberalism and those who advocated for a return to the corporatist security of the past, the old versus new dichotomy lends itself to a generational interpretation. The translation of these conceptual divisions into the spatial realm comes to light in Néstor García Canclini's observation that, while older generations continue to be drawn to more traditionally conceived and practiced spaces, "younger generations are drawn to what Marc Augé has called 'non-places'"(73). Such non-places proliferate in cultures such as that of Mexico at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, those described by Zygmunt Bauman in *Liquid Life* as rapidly changing, postmodern societies governed by the inextricably linked principles of individuality and consumerism.

## 2. Evacuation of Meaning and the Rise of the Non-place

The emphasis on the individual in postmodern society in which the grand narratives of state, family, and religion are often theorized to be waning, and in which a neo-liberal economic policy demands individual, private initiative and consumption, necessarily affects the space that these individuals inhabit. Richard Sennett posits that, “to know oneself has become an end instead of a means through which we know the world. And precisely because we have become so self-absorbed, it is extremely difficult for us to arrive at a public principle” (4). This decay of the public sphere is reflected in the proliferation of non-places within the public spaces of Mexico City as depicted by Fadanelli. Spaces previously marked by communion with either history, culture, and/or other people become instead dominated by transit, circulation and/or consumption.

Set in an unnamed poor neighborhood of Mexico City, *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* is the story of a young boy’s fascination with Johnny, a hit man who works primarily for drug dealers. While it is the boy’s sister’s romantic (or at least sexual) interest in Johnny that initially sparks the adolescent’s curiosity, he is soon swept up in Johnny’s lifestyle and ends up working for the hit man. The boy continues his relationship with Johnny even after he learns that his own mother hired Johnny to kill her husband’s (the narrator’s father’s) mistress. Eventually, the boy takes Johnny’s place after the original hit man disappears, likely having fallen victim to violence. The sections narrated by the unnamed boy take place for the most part in the street or the video arcade, with but a few mentions of his home, school, or a café. The sections narrated by a third person omniscient narrator focus mainly on Johnny and occur principally in the street, the hotel, the café, or the bar.

Of these spaces only the school, the café, and the bar would appear to fall into the category of a true anthropological place as defined by Augé. These traditional meeting places do not, however, perform their normal function of fostering human connection. Seeing some kids his own age, the boy remarks, “A mi lado pasaban aquellos que deben ser mis compañeros de clase y entre quienes nunca logré hacer amigos” (104). While school should create a bond of friendship, or at least identification, between classmates, it does not do so for the narrator. To him, these other boys are simply an undifferentiated and distanced “aquellos.” For the boy, school is a barren wasteland. He remarks, “la agreste extensión del patio de cemento vista desde los barandales del cuarto piso, donde estaba mi salón de clases, se me presentaba como un desierto que tarde o temprano cruzaría para no retornar jamás” (98). School is generally a place not only of socialization, but also of the dissemination and inculcation of the grand modern narratives of culture, history, and nation. That the school’s patio is described as a rugged, stark, and uncivilized desert, evacuates this place of its cultural and historical significance in addition to diminishing its role as a place of community formation and interpersonal interactions. Moreover, the narrator’s focus on crossing this desert indicates that a sense of pertinence to this space and permanence in it has been overwhelmed by a feeling of transience and a desire to move through the space without being affected by it and without harboring any connection that would cause him to return to it.

The café, too, has become so dilapidated and run down that it represents the ruins of a traditional public gathering place. In this way, the space of the café not only acts as non-place, but also further solidifies the link between the non-place and the space of dirty realism. As Paulette Singley notes in her discussion of dirty realism as it pertains to the space of perhaps the most recognizably postmodern of cities, Los Angeles, “the ‘dirty real’ clearly differs from

‘popular culture and the everyday,’ as an urbanism predicated upon conditions in the city that, while undesigned, is also incomplete, ruinous, fragmented, or unsupervised” (128-9). In *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, the space of the café is highly suggestive of this ruinous fragmented quality ascribed to the city as a whole. The “aislada penumbra del interior” creates “una atmósfera donde los rostros de los parroquianos quedaban sumidos en una especie de angustia sepulcral, como si estuvieran aislados del día o la noche” (108). The café is a place marked by isolation rather than communion. It becomes in essence the tomb of the place of communion that it used to be. The adolescent narrator admits that he goes to the café not to eat or meet friends, but “para ver la televisión y permanecer allí sin hacer nada” (98). Interpersonal interaction has been replaced by a passive absorption of mass media or by nothing at all. This lack of meaning transforms this space into a non-place.

The spatial focus of *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* centers around the domestic, private spaces of the characters’ apartments, yet when these characters venture out into the public spaces of the city, as they often do, these spaces too take on the characteristics of non-places. The novel tells the story of four main characters whose lives intertwine: Ulises, Cristina, Adolfo, and Olivia. Ulises is a lonely middle-aged bureaucrat who, after buying Cristina’s company for one night, decides to invite her to live with him and act as his de-facto wife. Cristina, recognizing that as she ages her days as a desirable prostitute are numbered, takes him up on his offer even though living with Ulises is stifling and drives her to alcoholism. Adolfo is Ulises’ only friend. Although he pretends to be a veterinarian, he never finished his degree, and thus ekes out a living by providing grooming and walking services for his neighbors’ pets. He is obsessed with and essentially stalks his young neighbor, Olivia. After Olivia is brutally raped by Cristina’s brother, Adolfo offers his help to her parents during her recovery, eventually winning them over and

convincing them to let Olivia, too traumatized by the rape to act in her own interest, live with him. Most scenes take place in Ulises', Adolfo's, and Olivia's parents' apartments, yet the office, the street, the bar, the hospital, and the hotel are also centers of action. These public spaces, however, are more often than not the sites of isolation or violence rather than communion. When going to the bar, for example, a place that would normally be considered a relational space of socialization, Ulises has more interaction with a poster of a woman in her underwear than with any of the other patrons.

The exceptions to this rule are Ulises' office and the hospital to which Olivia is taken after her rape. In the office, the coworkers do interact on a daily basis and do share some, albeit superficial, parts of their personal lives with each other, even if it is simply to complain. Additionally, Ulises does derive part of his identity from his work, noting that “se destacaba entre los otros empleados por su eficacia y antigüedad” (78). The mention of Ulises's time with the company puts a generational focus on the manner in which he interacts with the space. For him, that the space of his office is related to his identity and thus functions as a true place rather than a non-place is directly tied to his age.

Nevertheless, the majority of the younger office workers feel anonymous and invisible to the eyes of their bosses. After his manager is murdered in the street, Ulises dreams of getting the position, but is reminded by a coworker that, “podrían matar a diez gerentes más y jamás se fijarían en nosotros” (78). Additionally, Ulises tends to objectify and commodify his female coworkers in this space, indicating that consumer market relations have tainted this environment. Ulises is attracted to the idea of a woman who wears high heels, stockings, and skirts that fall just above the knee. When ogling his co-worker Susana, however, he notices, “no usaba una cosa ni otra y por lo tanto no podía ser considerada mujer, deducía Ulises, para quien los

espectaculares y carteles de media representaban el punto más cercano que podía tener un hombre con el erotismo” (23). Ulises’s conception of womanhood is marked by the advertising industry and consumer culture. Susana who does not conform to the conception of this woman-product by neither purchasing nor using the tokens of female identity being marketed to society, cannot be a woman at all, and completely loses her humanity in Ulises’ eyes. Here, the objectification and commodification of coworkers replaces traditional interpersonal relationships. Thus, the space of the office functions as a space of transition between place and non-place, for as Augé notes, “place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased and the second never totally completed” (64).

The manner in which the office plays into Fadanelli’s representation of a new postmodern conception of space further falls in line with Jameson’s analysis of the dirty realist space. He argues that the recent social experience reflected in dirty realist texts is complicated by “two new kinds of space that did not compute in the older paradigm that opposed the public realm to the family and the home: these new spaces are the space of work (seemingly public, yet owned by private individuals), and the space of the street” (*Seeds of Time* 154). Fadanelli’s depiction of the office as both a public space in which individuals relate to one another and form bonds of identification and as a space infiltrated by values of private ownership, commodification, and social anonymity reflects this complexification as described by Jameson. Whereas Fadanelli portrays the older generation of characters as attempting to hold onto the previous paradigm of public space versus private familial space, and the younger generation as recognizing the dissolution of this dichotomy through their outright rejection of the private domestic space altogether, the workplace emerges as a transitional space in which both the old and new spatial paradigms confront each other.

The hospital also serves as a space hovering between place and non-place. After Olivia's rape, Adolfo sees her time in the hospital as the opportunity he has been looking for to finally approach her parents and ingratiate himself into her family. Although he has lived in the same apartment complex as Olivia and her family for many years, his only relationship to them has been one of a voyeuristic intrusion into their lives. In the space of the hospital, however, he finally speaks to Olivia's parents, Ernesto and Ofelia. He offers them his condolences and support, and begins to form the relationship with them that will eventually lead to their acceptance of his presence in Olivia's life, an acceptance that Olivia herself will never truly give him.

Even so, when Adolfo first attempts to form a relationship with Ernesto and Ofelia, the couple initially views his actions with deep suspicion. He tells the family that the nurses are not worried about Olivia's condition, and that what she will need more than anything is love. Ernesto responds, "las enfermeras se preocupan de su familia y nosotros de la nuestra – dijo Ernesto, seco, ¿quién era ese tipejo para saber lo que necesitaba o no su hija?" (124). Ernesto asserts that even though Adolfo, Ernesto and the nurses interact in the space of the hospital, this interaction is superficial at best. Each individual is concerned only with his or her own problems. In this sense, the hospital very much takes on the role of a non-place. There, the individual is free to wait, wander and occupy the space as he or she pleases, sharing it with a multitude of other individuals with whom he or she neither feels nor creates any true ties until it is time to leave and be replaced by another group of individuals. Thus, despite the fact that Adolfo eventually does form a bond with Ernesto and Ofelia, the expectation of the space is not one of relation but one of circulation and isolation. The hospital functions as both place and non-place.



*Lodo* is similarly marked by the absence of traditionally functioning public gathering spaces and the presence of non-places. The story is narrated from prison by the protagonist, Benito Torrentera. Torrentera recounts how his unremarkable and mediocre life as a middle aged philosophy professor is turned upside-down by his obsession with Eduarda, the young cashier at his local Seven Eleven. Benito and Eduarda's relationship begins one evening when, having missed the last train and bus back home, Eduarda invites herself over to Benito's apartment for the night. Soon thereafter, Eduarda robs the Seven Eleven and, believing she has killed her supervisor in the process, turns to Benito for help, offering sexual services in return for a place to hide from the police. Benito becomes increasingly obsessed with Eduarda, getting her a new identity with the help of his brother, a corrupt politician, and fleeing with her to Michoacán. Despite his sacrifices, Eduarda does not treat Benito with appreciation or loyalty. Eventually, Benito becomes overwhelmed with jealousy and kills two men for their sexual involvement with Eduarda.

Before Benito and Eduarda flee, the majority of the actions take place in Benito's apartment, the university, on the street, or in the Seven Eleven. Only the private space of Benito's apartment, however, acts as a true place. As is the case in *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, the space of the school (this time the university rather than the high school) loses all relational and cultural significance. Explaining his decision to become a professor, Benito remarks,

Al cuestionamiento de si deseaba ser un hombre apreciado por mi comunidad respondí que me importaba un pito. Resumiendo: '¿Estaba dispuesto a participar en el progreso de la cultura o el conocimiento humano?' '¡No!' ... ¿Qué podía hacer entonces sino

dedicarme a ser un profesor de filosofía que ganaba cincuenta pesos por hora de clase?”

(29)

Benito sees the space of the university as completely lacking in community or cultural value. He also reframes the space of the university into one of commerce rather than learning. He boils down his interactions with others in the university to an impersonal economic exchange. As Paul Goldberg notes, “Benito reduce su profesión a la sencilla fórmula de un salario por horas” (140).

The other space of consumption in the novel, the Seven Eleven, is an impersonal space of global consumerism rather than a small shop grounded in the history and identity of the local culture. Benito wonders, “¿Desde cuándo comenzaron a aparecer estos minsúper en las esquinas con las heladeras a reventar de yogurt y adolescentes majaderas tras los mostradores? Cuando era niño lo usual era una tienda con cajas de refrescos amontonadas y una amable mujer que solía llamarte por tu nombre” (38). Here the generational divide comes to the fore. Benito is nostalgic for the personal relations of the past when faced with the anonymity of postmodern consumer culture. He views the younger generation of adolescents as inane in their acceptance of and pertinence to this new space of consumption. Yet, as evidenced by Eduarda’s act of violence toward her supervisor, even for the younger generation, relationships are not formed or maintained in this environment. Eduarda and Benito’s relationship within the Seven Eleven is limited to brusque exchanges and insults over the prices of products. It is only later in Benito’s apartment that their relationship deepens to a degree. Once again, the public spaces of the city no longer function as traditional places, but rather take on the characterization of non-places.

Perhaps the truest depiction of the public space as a non-place occurs in the case of the street. Whereas the street often connotes a neighborhood identity or a place of public action as found in the common phrase “take to the streets,” such action proves difficult if not impossible in

the space of limited political freedom that was Mexico in the 1990's. For Jameson, the space of the street takes on new significance in the context of dirty realism. He posits, "the space of the street, henceforth called daily life or the everyday, the quotidian, which is fully as much a sign of the breakup of the private and the personal as it is of the emergence of consumption and commodification over against the public realm itself" (*Seeds of time* 154). The dirty realist space of the street thus combines a focus on common everyday life and the disappearance of the traditionally conceived public space. In Fadanelli's work, the street is similarly reduced to a place of transit, impersonal commerce, or violence. For Cristina, the street acts as a place of business, a place to pick up clients. Her interactions here are of a purely commercial nature rather than indicating any true notion of community or personal connection. For Olivia, the street does not simply represent a lack of community identity formation, but rather a place where her identity was actively destroyed. The violent rape that she suffers occurs in an alley as she walks home from renting a video at Blockbuster. After this rape in the public space of the street, Olivia becomes resigned to whatever fate befalls her and almost completely devoid of emotion, losing her identity altogether. Although her rape does not actually occur in a Blockbuster, the association of the international commercial entity with violence is reminiscent of Eduarda's violent actions in the Seven Eleven. Once again the presence of multinational big business is linked to violence and thus the destruction of normal interpersonal relationships. The street acts as a non-place of impersonal multinational commerce and violence.

In *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, the transformation of the public spaces of Mexico City into a series of disconnected non-places of meaningless anonymity reaches its height. The anonymous narrator states, "las calles vacías, taciturnas, sin mayores diferencias, bautizadas con nombres de personalidades cuya existencia la gente ignoraba, nombres muy complicados, como

del siglo pasado” (53). Here the streets all merge together, as they remain anonymous, and have no defining differences. Whereas the aforementioned named travel routes through the city lose their specificity and meaning in the focus on movement rather than location, here even the names of the streets, the very identifying markers which would by definition preclude anonymity, no longer hold any significance for the citizens of the Distrito Federal. Augé remarks that the labeling of streets with names of historic events or figures can cause the residents of the city to experience “a sort of mechanized daily immersion in history” that can cause them to view such events and personages “as spatial landmarks rather than historical references” (69). Fadanelli takes this phenomenon a step further, evacuating the streets and their names of any historical significance, echoing Jameson’s notion of the postmodern era as being marked by a loss of historicity. It is not simply that since the “siglo pasado” the citizens have forgotten those after whom the streets are named, but rather that they have willfully chosen to ignore the very existence of these historical figures. This new generation has opted to disregard the difference and history implicit in the public space of the city as “muy complicado.” Instead, they favor the relative ease of a non-place without relationships, history, or any concern for identity.

A seeming contradiction in the preponderance of non-places in Fadanelli’s texts arises in that, despite the fact that these public places are no longer functional as sites of communion, culture, or identity formation, much of the action of these novels occurs in these seemingly meaningless environments. The neo-liberal spatial logic of the free movement of capital through the global public marketplace translates to the constant movement of characters through the non-places of the city. Often, this movement is marked by the same economic logic that governs global consumer society. For many of Fadanelli’s character’s, for example, the travel to and

from their places of work is given as much or more attention than the workplace itself. Whereas in *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* there is no mention of the specific name or location of the café that both the unnamed narrator and Johnny frequent, the narrator makes sure to specify the owner of the café's route home. "Se iba caminando hasta la Calzada de Tlalpan para tomar el último metro" (98). Here, the focus is on the movement rather than the destination. The only specifically named location is that of a main thoroughfare and subway station, two places which in and of themselves signify movement, transit, and circulation, and which are quintessentially non-places. Similarly, Fadanelli emphasizes Eduarda's voyage to work in *Lodo*. "Eduarda tomó el metro e hizo viaje por la línea nueve. Llegó a Tacubaya donde realizó un cambio de trenes para trasladarse a la estación Sevilla. Recorrió la calle de Cozumel hasta su desembocadura en el parque España, giró a la derecha y a unos cuantos pasos se encontró con el Seven Eleven" (74-75). Once again, the specificity of the route gives importance to this movement through a city plagued with the general anonymity inherent in the non-place. Each time an end of the movement is proposed with words such as "llegó" and "hasta," this destination is averted in favor of continued movement, emphasizing the seemingly endless dislocations implied by "hizo viaje," "trasladarse," "giró," etc. until she finally reaches work. All of this movement in the public sphere avoids traditional places of communion and cultural and historical identification such as the parque España in favor of the space of the multinational corporation and place of consumerism that is the Seven Eleven. Thus, Fadanelli forges a strong connection between the logic of movement within the novel, and the logic of the free circulation of capital that distinguishes neo-liberalism from previous economic policies.

Not all movement in the novels, however, has an economic motivator. Nevertheless, the focus on continual dislocations over an emphasis on destination remains the same. In *¿Te veré*

*en el desayuno?*, when Ulises takes Cristina to go see Adolfo, they must traverse much of the city: “Para llegar a casa de Adolfo tendrían que desplazarse desde Juan Cano hasta el Canal de Miramontes. Tomarían la línea ocho en Tacubaya y luego en la estación Chabacano harían un cambio de línea para llegar a Taxqueña” (166). The specificity of the route means little, for despite the fact that these streets and neighborhoods demarcate certain geographical territories, the spaces that Cristina and Ulises actually occupy are the non-places of transit: the metro station, the train, etc. They are simply passengers who have no real interaction with the places through which they move, and the anonymity of their shared identity as passengers allows them to move through these various spaces with great ease. All that is involved is the switch from one line to another. Upon arriving at their destination, there is no description of Taxqueña that would differentiate it from any other public space in the text, giving the impression that, despite the inclusion of details that concertedly fragment the city into distinct local spaces, due to the prevalence of non-places in the text, these localities begin to blend into an anonymous mass. The movement through the city is more important than any location in particular; nevertheless these locations continue to be named with great specificity.

The tension between the focus on the anonymous non-place or the site of global consumerism and the inclusion of distinct geographical sites in Mexico City characterizes Fadanelli’s work as dirty realist. Despite Buford’s claim that the protagonists of dirty realism “could be just about from anywhere; drifters in a world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism” (4), in actuality, these characters pertain very clearly to particular, generally rural or suburban, areas. It is thus that the authors he presents have come to be called “neo-regionalists” (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 148). Moreover, as Michael Hemmingson notes in his book, *The Dirty Realism Duo*, both Bukowski and Fante “are writing

about, and addressing, the city of Los Angeles – they are reacting to the city, and the city reacts back: it is a relationship” (54). Thus, the strong presence of a globalized consumer culture in these texts is confronted by the equally strong presence of the regional or urban space in all of its particularity. Just as old and new spatial paradigms of place and non-place confront each other in the workplace, so do these paradigms clash and overlap in the conflict between the global and the local that characterizes the space of dirty realism.

### 3. The Younger Generation: Economic Marginalization, the Embracing of Anonymity, and the Commodification of Self

Yet another apparent contradiction arises when we consider the parallel circulation of characters and goods in the neo-liberal marketplace of Fadanelli’s Mexico City in the context of the economic marginalization that these characters face. Mexico’s new economic liberalism calls for the free flow of international capital and emphasizes individual rather than state or collective involvement in the economy. Fadanelli’s Mexico City reflects this new focus in the conceptualization of the public space as an open space of constant movement and individual participation in a consumer society; a space predominantly marked by the non-place.

Nevertheless, for an individual to fully function in this society of flexible capitalism, he or she must be able to fulfill the role of consumer. Bauman explains that the paradox of postmodern individuality is that, in a society where everyone is expected to act as an individual, everyone is the same in that they all “must follow the same life strategy and use shared – commonly recognizable and legible-tokens to convince others that they are doing so” (*Liquid Life* 16). In

essence this “strategy” is the acquisition of consumer goods. Thus, individual identity formation becomes inextricably linked to the consumption that drives the new neo-liberal economy.

Identity is part and parcel of products for sale with price tags that ensure “individuality remains and is likely to remain for quite a while a *privilege*” (Bauman, *Liquid Life* 26), yet Fadanelli’s characters, cannot afford such a privilege.

This helps to explain why the scope of the characters’ movements is rather limited in comparison to flow of international capital whose constant free circulation is interpreted in the spatial logic of the texts. As Lorenzo Meyer notes with regard to the Salinas era, “NAFTA’s free trade between Mexico and its northern neighbor liberated the movement of goods and capital. People, often envisioned as labor power, were to remain in their home nations” (293).

Fadanelli’s characters move throughout Mexico City and its outlying areas, but they do not travel very far by the standards of global capital, and they do not cross international borders. While experiencing constant dislocations on a local level, they are limited in their movements by their lack of economic resources.

One of the defining characteristics of dirty realism is its focus on the lower echelons of society, the poor, the mediocre, and the marginalized. Fadanelli clearly follows this tendency, as evidenced by the opening words of *¿Te veré en el Desayuno?*: “La siguiente es la historia de cuatro personas cuyas vidas no merecían haber formado parte de novela alguna” (7). Thus, from the outset, the author asks his readers to question the identity of his characters by blatantly presenting their unexceptional natures. Fadanelli’s characters’ poverty is coupled with the lack of a distinctive and distinguished identity. For these characters, “whose chances of jumping on the bandwagon of individualization are at best distant, and more likely non-existent, a tooth-and-nail resistance against ‘individuality’ and all that it stands for will not only seem to be a more



reasonable option, but will indeed be a ‘natural’ outcome of their predicament” (Bauman, *Liquid Life* 27).

Fadanelli’s characters lack the material wealth necessary for the purchase of their individuality. Both the anonymous narrator in *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, and Eduarda in *Lodo* break laws and act violently in order to gain money. That each would go so far in order to increase their purchasing power would appear to indicate that they would like to attempt to establish their individuality through consumerism. Eduarda in particular seems motivated by this goal, as she often presses Benito to buy her new clothes. In both cases, however, whereas these characters may have more money after their illicit acts than before them, they are still too poor to buy the quality and number of products necessary to truly be recognized by the rest of society as unique. Johnny only gives the narrator fifty pesos for his first job, and Eduarda only manages to steal two thousand pesos from the Seven Eleven. Benito recognizes the paltriness of this sum, stating, “Dos mil pesos nos servirán apenas para mal pasarnos acaso quince o veinte días” (107). Thus, these characters never truly acquire the ability to participate fully in the new individuality-driven consumer society.

In response, these and other younger characters rebel through the purposeful rejection of the very notion of individuality. An extreme example of this lack of identity can be seen in the fact that the first person narrator of sections of *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* remains unnamed throughout the novel. In this way, Fadanelli’s brand of dirty realism aligns with that of another Latin American dirty realist author, Enrique Medina. Critic David William Foster remarks,

in a certain sense, the individual exists only to carry out the social code, and any unique subjectivity the individual is alleged to possess is a recurring fallacy of our cultural ideologies. It is along these lines that Medina often chooses not to individuate his

characters . . . they are undifferentiated ciphers of an unalleviatingly and mercilessly dirty urban landscape. (164)

Similarly, Fadanelli's characters are equally as unable to assert any true individuality, and this lack of individuality is spatialized as these characters embrace the anonymity of the "dirty urban landscape" of Mexico City.

Many of Fadanelli's named characters reject the notion of individuality by means of considering themselves to be commodities rather than individuals. David Harvey explores the inherent contradiction of an individual identity based on the acquisition of mass produced consumer goods when he asserts that individual choice is lost to the pressures of the capitalist production process, and that due to this process "we move from a situation in which individuals can express their individuality and relate in human terms to each other to one in which social relations between people become replaced by market relations between things" (123). The commodification of self takes this claim one step further.

As a prostitute, Cristina, one of the main characters of *¿Te veré en el desayuno?*, perhaps best exemplifies this commodification of self. While waiting for a client to come along, she thinks to herself, "si cada semana se acostara con veinte hombres, si no le ardiera la vagina apenas después de que el segundo cliente de la noche se desinflara encima de su vientre, si no fuera por todo eso, entonces no tardaría mucho tiempo en dar el enganche de un auto" (12). Cristina distances herself from the sexual act, objectifies her body, and sees herself in terms of her exchange value. Her body, her physical self, can be used to purchase a material possession; a car. Paradoxically, in an effort to acquire an item which could function as a token of individual identity in the consumer society in which she lives, she defines herself as another item of

merchandise and thus rejects the notion of her own individuality. She, like other younger characters in Fadanelli's novels, adopts a form of anonymity.

In *Lodo*, Eduarda, in her efforts to flee her criminal past, is able to obtain a different identity, that of Magdalena, with the help of Benito's brother, a politician. Here, the commodification of identity becomes apparent, as new identities are quite literally bought and sold on the black market. The ease with which this "official" name and identity change occurs is an indication of the lack of substance and meaning attached to all names and identifying markers. Moreover, the ease with which Eduarda accepts a new identity indicates the lack of value that she places on her original one. However, unlike Bauman's elite who constantly remodel themselves according to the latest fashion (*Liquid Life* 6), Eduarda can only afford this identity change because of the corrupt generosity of one of these elite. Given her economic position and her situation as a fugitive, the plasticity of her identity is more a function of need and opportunity than of choice.

When in the public sphere, inhabitants of the city take on anonymous and undifferentiated characteristics, even when they are not specifically commodified. When the unnamed first person narrator of *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* searches for Johnny Ramírez, the hit man he admires and later emulates, "éste pasó junto a mí como un espectro. Abrió de un suave empujón la puerta del café y se fue sin que yo lograra ver su rostro por entre los ideogramas" (42). Exiting to the street, Ramírez becomes ghost-like, losing his physical presence to his urban surroundings. The café once more is marked by a sepulchral atmosphere, alluding to the death of its function as a true place and its transformation into a non-place. In the context of this non-place, individual identity is lost. Additionally, when the narrator later sees Ramírez on the street in the midst of a crowd, he is, at first, equally unable to recognize him;

“entonces lo descubrí en medio del gentío, estaba allí desde el principio pero no había logrado reconocerlo” (72). In this scene, the anonymity that the street provides is not limited to the character of Ramírez. The narrator goes on to comment that he sees, “una mujer a quien también había visto en algún lado, uno de esos rostros con los cuales me habría de encontrar muchas veces durante la vida” (73). This unnamed woman, while familiar, is almost completely interchangeable for any other female figure. The narrator will continue to encounter her, or others who look like her, for the rest of his life without ever really knowing her or distinguishing her from anyone else. In this public atmosphere, people become indistinct and unrecognizable.

#### 4. The Generational Divide and the Domestic Space: The Evacuation of Meaning as a Positive Development

In an article published in the second issue of *La puz moderna* entitled “¿Posmodernismo en Mexico?,” Siro Basila, a contemporary of Fadanelli’s, argues that postmodernism “es subversiva en su forma y anárquica en su espíritu cultural para apresurar la disolución artística y cultural en la búsqueda de nuevos valores más estables” (13). He nevertheless admits that in this “disolución” there exists “el sentimiento de pérdida recurrente en la actualidad ya sea de espíritu, de objetivo o de valores, esta ausencia está presente” (13). In his works, Fadanelli spatializes this concept of prizing the destruction of the traditional order and its values while recognizing the sense of loss that accompanies it through his treatment of the domestic space. The older generation of characters nostalgically clings to the domestic space as a representation of an outdated spatial order where identity is in large part based on what Fadanelli presents as the now

bankrupt metanarrative of the family.<sup>11</sup> The image of the family and the familial space that these characters take great lengths to create, recreate, and protect, is, however, consistently mundane and insipid at best, and foul and violent at worst. In this way, Fadanelli's use of space echoes many critics' interpretations of North American dirty realism as a "critique of the dominant discourses of Regan's America, especially in relation to hegemonic definitions of gender and family" (Jarvis 192). Traditional spaces such as the home and the identities formed there are thus revealed to be as profoundly negative in nature as the current state of decadence in which Fadanelli depicts Mexico City as having fallen. The rejection of these spaces by the younger generation of characters in favor of the city spaces that have been evacuated of their traditional identity-forming meanings and converted into non-places can therefore be understood as a positive development or at least as a relief. For them, a loss of identity is preferable to the identity ascribed to them in the home space.

Richard Sennett notes that the withdrawal from the public sphere into the private sphere occurred as a consequence of personal and societal interaction with capitalism and secularism. As a part of this shift, "the family came to appear less and less the center of a particular, non-public region, more an idealized refuge...with a higher moral value than the public realm" (20). In *¿Te veré en el desayuno?*, Adolfo, as a member of the older generation of characters, treats his apartment as just such a sanctuary, while in truth it is but a twisted and problematized version of this long-gone ideal. Adolfo has lived in his apartment since childhood. After his parent's death, he keeps it exactly as it was when they lived there, down to the clothes in the closet and the toothbrushes by the sink in the bathroom. This desperate attempt to retain a familial

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<sup>11</sup> The nostalgia that marks these characters is in direct contradiction to Birkenmaier's assertion that, in Latin American dirty realism, the past has no real bearing on the lives of the characters, and that "only in extreme circumstances is it remembered with nostalgia as something irrevocably gone and devoid of relation with the here and now" (493). The attitude toward the past taken by the younger generation of Fadanelli's character's, however, is very much in line with Birkenmaier's thinking.

environment that is frozen in time makes this private space more of a crypt for the domestic ideal than a true home. The space is, in fact, overwhelmed with a sense of death. Adolfo believes himself to be “un hombre maduro que jamás abandonaría su casa y orinaría por siempre en el baño donde todavía colgaba del perchero el albornoz que vestía su padre el día del infarto” (42). This attention to bodily waste in the form of urine and to illness and death in the form of his father’s heart attack falls clearly in line with what critic Brian Jarvis denominates as the dirty realist focus on the abject, especially when taken in combination with its tie to the physical space of the apartment. Linking the dirty realism of Jayne Anne Phillips to Julia Kristeva’s theorization of the abject, he states that the “fascination with dirt and waste, both geographical and corporeal, represents a recognition of drives that constantly threaten to disturb identity, system and order” (193).<sup>12</sup> The irony of the situation is that, while Adolfo preserves all the minutiae of the domestic space of his childhood in an attempt to cling to the identity and order that this space has provided for him, “ejecutando casi al pie de la letra la rutina impuesta por la inercia” (38), these very efforts reveal the horror and futility of maintaining this same identity and order.

Adolfo’s domestic space is disturbing not only in its most recent incarnation as an anachronistic preservation of an era long dead, but has always been marked by the presence of death and decay. He ponders his father’s death, wondering “¿Cómo es que nadie se dio cuenta de que había sido preso de un infarto y que permaneció tirado en el piso a lo largo de tantas horas mientras el volumen de dos televisores colmaba con garrulería pertinaz el minúsculo departamento?” (46). That his father could suffer a heart attack and subsequently lie dead in the family’s small apartment for several hours without any other family member noticing speaks

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<sup>12</sup> Jarvis is here referencing Kristeva’s seminal work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

both to the fact that death has been stamped onto this domestic space for quite some time and that the familial identity and bond that Adolfo seems so intent on preserving after his parents death was in the process of dissolution even before they passed away. The small household was already dominated by the presence of not one, but two television sets to the point where even the death of the father and supposed leader of the family unit became secondary, taking Bill Buford's initial definition of dirty realism as "low rent tragedies about people who watch day-time television" (4) to another level of absurdity. The family and its corresponding private domestic space does not here conform to the idealized refuge theorized by Sennett, as these familial bonds had previously given way to the isolating pressures of the postmodern culture of mass media. In other words, the quintessentially modern and identity-forming metanarrative of the patriarchal family was already in the process of decay.<sup>13</sup>

The idealized traditional conception of the space of the home was dead and rotting well before Adolfo's father, and Adolfo becomes aware of this in his middle age even as he attempts to conserve this space as it was. "Adolfo descubrió que la casa había tenido siempre ese olor dulzón como de manzanas cocidas, de azúcar podrida, un olor y un polvo que estaba en su piel, en su cabello, fundido en la pared de sus tabiques nasales y en la bata que colgaba del baño" (43). The smell of the house, while sweet to Adolfo, is the smell of rot. References to both dust and to the robe that we now know belonged to his deceased father further link this idea of rotting to decay and death. This odor has always permeated his home as well as his being. The domestic space that Adolfo conserves unchanged in an effort to maintain the identity and order of his youth was never a real representation of an ideal metanarrative of family. It is thus the decay of this ideal that Adolfo is truly preserving.

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<sup>13</sup> Here I employ the term metanarrative as the concept is presented in Jean-François Lyotard's study, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

Along with the family, another of the primary markers of personal and collective identity challenged by the actuality of Adolfo's domestic space is that of the nation.<sup>14</sup> Adolfo's efforts to preserve the space of his childhood home as an extension of the traditional familial metanarrative also indicates a desire to protect this space from the outside influence of global consumer society that forms part of the postmodern culture threatening the existence of such unique regional or national spaces. The apartment itself has nods to traditional Mexican architecture such as the "baño de mosaicos azules" (39). Adolfo's adolescent choice of decoration in the form of the "cuadro titular de su equipo: el Cruz Azul de los buenos tiempos, cuando lograba ser campeón durante tres temporadas seguidas" demonstrates a level of not only national pride, but pride in Mexico City as well, a pride mixed with a sense of nostalgia in the recognition that "los buenos tiempos" have ceased to exist. Nevertheless, Adolfo also displayed and continues to display his poster of Farrah Fawcett, an icon of American mass media culture and consumerism, indicating that even in his adolescence, global media and culture had a direct influence on him and his home. In fact, the apartment building itself was originally built as housing for the Pan-American games, indicating that the concept of global society permeated this space from the beginning. Additionally, as we have seen, the prominence of the television in the family's home is representative not only of the dissolution of the traditional patriarchal family order but also of the fact that this space is becoming overwhelmed by the postmodern tendency for common mass culture to supersede and overtake the culture particular to the region.

As previously noted, Frederic Jameson posits that this combination of a desire to stress and preserve the local while still admitting the vast influence and homogenizing effects of

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<sup>14</sup> Critic Francisco Villena Garrido remarks that Fadanelli pertains to a generation of authors works "se trata, pues, de elementos principales para la construcción de una nueva identidad individual y colectiva que pasan, con inusitada frecuencia, por la superación de la nación, la familia, y la iglesia, como instituciones tradicionales de la demarcación subjetual" (14).



postmodern, global, consumer culture is characteristic of the space of dirty realism. Jameson argues that by including the “detritus” of consumer culture in a distinctly regional setting, dirty realism seeks to “validate its credentials as a realistic representation of North American life which can in the process reassure North Americans as to the persistence of a distinctive regional or urban social life about which everything else in our experience testifies that it has already long since disappeared” (*Seeds of Time* 148-9). While Jameson was no doubt speaking of the United States alone when referring to “North American life,” the observation holds true in the Mexican context. Fadanelli, echoing the efforts of the “neo-regionalist” authors to whom Jameson refers, insists on highlighting the specific geography of Mexico City in his works, and his character Adolfo looks for the reassurance of his distinctive youthful identity and thus continues to cling to a past that has “long since disappeared.” His conservation of the tokens of his *chilango* identity proves equally as futile as his preservation of the familial space as a whole. He is only maintaining a ridiculous mockery of the model of traditional familial and national life that he so desperately craves.

Adolfo only agrees to make minimal changes to the apartment when he finally gets the much younger Olivia, his long-time obsession, to move in. He has been stalking Olivia ever since she was a child, peering into her bedroom window across the courtyard from his own and watching her every movement. He is only able to approach her and her family due to the tragic rape that she experiences. Nonetheless, he sees his efforts to create a family with her as a moral activity in keeping with the “higher moral value” that he ascribes to the traditional, private domestic space he so absurdly tries to preserve. He has always imagined Olivia as a part of his family and his home, “a sus treinta y nueve años cultivando todavía la imagen de una misma mujer habitando la casa en que se fraguaron su infancia” (38). This idealized vision of a

domestic life with her is only heightened by the prospect of him “saving” her from her role as victim of sexual violence. “La certeza de ser una especie de benefactor le infundía nuevos ánimos: el ser a ojos de todos el amante de una desgraciada, lo hacía doblemente vanidoso” (159). The family he has made for himself is a mockery, yet he views himself as a hero for including Olivia in it because of her status as tainted by sexual assault, disregarding the fact that Olivia herself only agrees to become a part of this so-called family out of a complete lack of hope or other options. He believes his domestic space to be a moral haven even though it is built on voyeurism, lies, and violence. Nevertheless, he thinks that this domestic space that he has created will give him a positive identity visible to others, that of the “amante de una desgraciada.”

Olivia, on the other hand, has no desire to become a part of, or engage with, the domestic space that Adolfo has cultivated. When Olivia first enters Adolfo’s apartment, she sees his childhood room, unchanged by the years, and is repulsed: “En los cuatro muros de la habitación de Adolfo se repartían los banderines del Cruz Azul, las posters de actores y actrices que a Olivia le resultaba muy poco conocidos. También estaba la fotografía de Adolfo luciendo el pelo engomado y la sonrisa blanca de un niño de nueve años. ‘Jamás viviré aquí’, se dijo a sí misma” (161). The markers of Adolfo’s adolescence belong to a past that is both unfamiliar and unappealing to the younger Olivia, who shares none of Adolfo’s nostalgia for childhood nor his idealization of the home. Her repulsion is tied most directly to the space that Adolfo has created rather than the man himself, although the presence of his childhood picture creates a clear link between the two. Nevertheless, she does not state that she will not have a relationship with him, but rather that she will never live in the space that he both occupies and preserves. However,

despite her outright rejection of this space, left with no other viable option, she does end up moving in with Adolfo, “como si la historia ya no tuviera remedio” (161).

Nonetheless, upon moving into Adolfo’s apartment, Olivia initially insists on dragging the space out of the past. When Adolfo asks if she would like to put up any paintings, she replies that she prefers portraits, but that “si vas a colgar mis retratos quiero fotografias nuevas. Asi como estoy ahora” (160). At this moment Olivia is still both mentally and physically recovering from her rape. As part of this process she has kept her head shaven and taken to dressing in men’s clothing. When Adolfo reminds her that her hair will grow back and she will look like she did before in previous photographs of herself, she remarks, “nada va a ser como antes, pero haz lo que quieras” (160). Without taking any responsibility for the decoration of the apartment, stating that it is his choice to hang the photos and that he should do as he pleases, Olivia asserts that she is not a willing participant in his fantasy of preserving the myth of the past traditional family unit, and that she is only agreeing to be part of his life and his space because she is still, in essence, broken, a fact that allowed Adolfo to ingratiate himself into her family’s life and assert his position as a refuge for their violated daughter. Thus, while Olivia is aware that it will be impossible to recreate the myth of the past ideal of family life with Adolfo in his space, she nevertheless allows him to continue to attempt to live out this fantasy as he pleases. Olivia’s participation in this fantasy is, however, very obviously less than ideal. At the end of the novel, when Adolfo cleans his apartment with Olivia’s help, “introdujo en la casetera una cinta de música que su padre solía escuchar cuando limpiaba su arma” (171). In drawing a parallel between cleaning a gun and cleaning the apartment, both the falsely mythic domestic space of the past and the degradation of that space that in the present are associated with the violence of a firearm. It is only this type of violence, acting as an extension of the sexual violence that she has

already suffered, that holds Olivia to this domestic space dominated by an outdated idea of patriarchal order.

The irony of Olivia's acquiescence in her relationship to Adolfo and his space is that, despite her assertion that nothing will ever be as it was before, she ends up recreating the already isolating, depressing and unsatisfying domestic environment of Adolfo's apartment prior to her arrival in it, as well as of her own familial space and upbringing. Before Olivia's rape, Olivia's family attempts to take refuge in their apartment and has very little interaction with the outside world. Her mother Ofelia is a housewife, her father is retired, and Olivia is home schooled. Thus, none of the family members have work or school obligations requiring them to leave their home. Additionally, rather than venturing outside the home to see the latest international film releases, her father's favorite pastime is watching rented westerns, particularly Mexican ones starring Mario Almada. Nevertheless, Olivia rents these videos for them at the Blockbuster, a multinational mega-corporation. Thus, this leisure activity that they partake in within the closed confines of their own home, despite its ties to Mexican cultural production, is directly linked to the open, international, and neo-liberal space of commerce. That Olivia is raped on her way home from the Blockbuster underscores the association between this space of open circulation and the inability to maintain a traditional private domestic space safeguarded from outside intrusion. Like Adolfo, Olivia's family cannot preserve the traditional family environment from the pressures of postmodern consumer culture.

Even if it were possible to truly preserve the traditional model of the Mexican family and its space, Olivia's relationship with Adolfo and his home, and her mother Ofelia's interaction with her husband and home demonstrate that this supposed ideal is actually quite flawed and problematic. Olivia helps Adolfo to clean the apartment "no porque le interesa la limpieza de

una casa que le pareció mugrosa desde el principio” (172), but because she believes such an action to be part of her duties as Adolfo’s pseudo-wife. These duties also include sexual activities. “Olivia abría las piernas y él entraba precavido no más de cinco minutos, descargando su semen en la fría vagina de su mujer. Ella lo dejaba hacer sin oponer ninguna resistencia; era su obligación” (172). Both the apartment and Adolfo are disgusting to her, yet Olivia, now feeling herself a captive in the domestic space and life constructed for her by Adolfo, treats both as a burden that she must bear seeing as she now belongs to both this space and this man. These sentiments echo almost exactly those of her mother, Ofelia. Despite the outward appearance of being in a “matrimonio longevo y aparentemente sin fisuras” (65), Ofelia is extremely unhappy in her familial life and its corresponding space. She admits that once her husband retired and was able to spend time in their home, “me di cuenta de que nos era difícil convivir” (72). She feels so alienated by her domestic life that she even begins to question whether Olivia is actually her daughter. Nonetheless, she attempts to maintain her family and their living environment, “recordando las obligaciones que ante Dios contrajo con su familia” (72). Once again, family life and the shared domestic space of the family become nothing more than a contractual obligation. Both mother and daughter view their familial relationships and the spaces that they occupy as profoundly negative while maintaining the appearance of the traditional nuclear family in their domestic home.

The character of Cristina in *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* makes an even stronger example of the rejection of the traditional family structure and its corresponding domestic space in favor of the non-places of postmodern consumer culture. Cristina makes minimal money in an illegal profession, that of a prostitute. While she embraces the anonymity of her life on the street, she knows that her options are limited and hopes for something better. When Ulises asks her to

move in with him she sees this as an opportunity, even though Ulises himself admits that in his home “todo estaba desordenado y sucio: el esmalte de la estufa eclipsado por el cochambre acumulado durante años, el fregadero ahogado de trastes sucios” (56). While, unlike Adolfo, Ulises makes no attempt to preserve the past and its myths and metanarratives in the concrete form of his apartment, his domestic space is also marked by the presence of dirt, rot, and decay. Thus, once again, in true dirty realist fashion, the domestic space is marked by abjection and placed in a distinctly negative light.

After spending more time with Ulises in his home, Cristina begins to wonder whether or not she has made a mistake. She asks, “¿Hasta dónde tendría que aguantar por un techo y la posibilidad de ser la mujer de alguien?” (143). She wants both the economic benefits that come with having “un techo” and the familial identity that comes along with being in a relationship, yet she finds the domestic space and her subordination and belonging to a patriarchal figure to be so unbearable that she can only survive it through extreme alcoholism. She comforts herself with the idea of a return to the public space stating, “total, si no me va bien, siempre estará la calle” (142). For this younger and economically marginalized character the anonymous non-place of the street, a space where she does not bare the identity of being “la mujer de alguien,” becomes a more appealing option than that of the private domestic space of the home.

Even before her relationship with Ulises, Cristina preferred the non-places of anonymous transaction to the identity-forming domestic space. While she had her own apartment, she often preferred to stay in the hotel where she took her clients. “Después de todo, era mucho más cómoda la cama del hotel en la que podía dormir hasta la una de la tarde; una cama suave tibia, aún con las huellas del aliento alcohólico y la sangre excitada del último cliente” (13). What Cristina finds comforting about the hotel is its relationship to commerce. The bed remains

marked by the remnants of her last trick. The emphasis here lies equally on the sexual and economic nature of this transaction. While there is sexual excitement associated with this space, it is derived from an anonymous interaction with any of a multitude of possible clients rather than a singular named partner. Thus, this hotel, a non-place by definition of its generic and transient character, is also marked by the anonymity of the commercial transaction.

Augé denominates the traveler's space, including the hotel, as the "archetype of *non-place*" (70), and goes on to state that the foreigner in an unknown country "can feel at home only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains" (86). While Cristina is not a foreigner in Mexico City, she nevertheless feels more at ease in the non-place of the hotel room marked by its utterly common and standard character. The room has, "pocos muebles, las cortinas plisadas y limpias aunque un poco manoseadas, un armario sin polvo y un baño con olor a desodorante, equipado con toallas ásperas aunque limpias, una cama con sábanas tías pero limpias, con almohadas duras en demasía, pero limpias" (59). This hotel room is completely interchangeable with any other cheap hotel or motel room in virtually any city around the world. Its cleanliness however separates it, in all of its generic anonymity, from the filth that is Ulises' apartment, and thus places this commercial non-place in a more positive light than the domestic space of his home. Cristina, as a prostitute, favors the public spaces of the street where she meets her clients and the non-place of the hotel room where she engages in her commercial sexual transactions with them. Additionally, she is more comfortable in these spaces of transit and commerce than in the private space of her own home which would presumably be inscribed with her identity as an individual or in the space of Ulises' home inscribed with her identity as "la mujer de alguien."

Fadanelli presents us with the same vision of the older generation clinging to a false ideal of the family and domestic space while the younger generation rejects it completely in *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*. The mother of the unnamed adolescent narrator goes as far as to commission the murder of her husband's lover in order to preserve her family and home intact. When speaking to Johnny, the hitman she is hiring, this mother and housewife justifies her actions by stating, "Quiero a mi familia, señor Ramírez, y quiero conservarla . . . Me casé, soy una buena esposa, una buena madre, me chingo todos los días por ellos y sólo pido una cosa, quiero llegar a vieja con mi familia completa, al menos mi pareja" (83). The character defines herself based on the traditional familiar roles as a good wife to her husband and a good mother to her children. In the choice of the phrase "me chingo," this character additionally evokes an association with the traditional long-suffering icon of Mexican female identity: la chingada. Thus, she becomes the epitome of the Mexican wife and mother. Nevertheless, she is willing to contract an act of violence in the immoral public sphere in order to preserve what she views as her familial refuge from this public space. Her own immorality however signals the futility of her actions. That she sees murder as the only way to save her family and consequently her identity demonstrates that this conception of the morality and value of the traditional Mexican family order is pure myth, particularly as she is no longer the object of violence but the perpetrator of it. Moreover, her husband is already absent from the family's space, spending all of his time betraying his wife and children with another woman. Her overly idealized home is already broken past the point of recovery, yet she still attempts to safeguard the domestic space as one of the few places of relation and identification left in the city. She elects what, in *Liquid Life*, Zygmunt Bauman calls "'Fundamentalism', *choosing* to hold fast to inherited and/or ascribed identity" (27), and to cling fast to this "sole identity available and to hold its bits and



parts together while fighting back the erosive forces and disruptive pressures” of the outside world (6).

Paradoxically, in her useless attempt to preserve her traditional identity and her private space, she must venture out into the anonymous public space of the city. When the unnamed narrator’s mother first approaches Ramírez on the street to hire him to kill her husband’s mistress, both the reader and Ramírez are initially unaware of her identity. She is only recognizable as “una vecina cualquiera” (81) hidden in the crowds of passersby. Throughout their interaction, Ramírez never asks her name, and her identity is never explicitly revealed but rather implied through consequent actions taken by the characters in the book. When Johnny questions her as to why she approached him on the street of a city he describes as “sigilosa, entretenida en lamerse las heridas” rather than in the relative cleanliness and safety of the hotel where he resides, she responds, “no quiero que me vean con usted” (87). The public arena provides her with the anonymity she desires in order to hide her illicit act, an act that she deems necessary to preserve her identity and her private, domestic space. This is the anonymity typical of the dirty realist space. As Jameson notes, “dirty here means the collective as such, the traces of mass anonymous living and using” (*Seeds of Time* 158). Despite her presence in this “dirty” arena, this character approaches this space of the “collective mass with the stark terror of the earlier inner-directed bourgeois individuals for whom the multitude threatened a fall, as in naturalism, where the collective space seemed radically unclean in the anthropological sense” (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 158). The association of this public space inhabited by the masses with violence and murder, and her desire to keep these outside elements away from the supposedly morally superior and idealized space of her familial home is a testament to this earlier attitude

toward the territories and anonymous non-places of the new urban environment. Yet her morality has already fallen into decadence as she herself resorts to violence in this public sphere.

Acting as a counter point to this female character is her son, the anonymous first person narrator of *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, for he wants nothing more than to escape his home environment to the streets. He remarks,

Comienzo a sentirme bien en la calle. . . ahora podría tirarme a dormir en cualquier callejón oscuro o en una azotea, o en lo que queda del cine Maya, dormirme tan bien como en mi casa, aún mejor porque no tengo que estar oliendo ese tufo a comida y a desinfectante de limón, ni ver a mi madre aguantándose las ganas de llorar o de echarme de una vez por todas de la casa. (105)

For the narrator, the public space of the street has become more comfortable than the private space of the house, illustrating Jameson's observations that within the dirty realist space "the opposition between inside and outside is annulled" (*Seeds of Time* 155), and that the "traditional values of privacy have disappeared" (*Seeds of Time* 158). The smells of food and cleaning products, smells which normally have a positive connotation when associated with the home environment, here become disagreeable. Additionally, the narrator views his relationship with his mother as burdensome and depressing. Rather than have to continue these unpleasant interactions, the narrator prefers to inhabit public non-places, where his lack of ties and relationships provides him with a certain degree of freedom. The narrator chooses to remain in a space of unattached anonymity over returning to a more complicated relational identity tied to his home space.

His choice of the ruins of the old movie theatre in particular underscores the degradation of the traditional public gathering spaces of the older generation in favor of destination-less

meanderings through the decadent city. García Canclini uses the disappearance of the movie theatre to the home-viewing of videos as a prime example of the crumbling of the public space and community in favor of the “restricted sociability” of the private space (111). Canclini’s assertion when placed in relation to Fadanelli’s text further underscores that the spaces of the novel are the spaces of dirty realism as theorized by Jameson, marked by the “disappearance of the public space as such” (*Seeds of Time* 158). The narrator, however, rejects his true home and uses the ruins of this public space as if it were his private home, even though this public place turned non-place does not provide him with any traditional sense of privacy. Thus, whereas García Canclini posits the strengthening of the public space at the expense of the public space, this character of the younger generation demonstrates an acceptance of the breakdown of the modern distinction and divide between public and private spaces as the text re-conceptualizes them after the dirty realist fashion.

Throughout the text, the narrator continues to covet the anonymity of the dirty realist, public non-place over the identity of the private place. This decision becomes more permanent when he chooses to live in the quintessential non-place of a hotel rather than stay in his mother’s home or get his own apartment. The hotel similarly demonstrates a generational divide in the conception of domestic space in relation to the non-place. Before the adolescent narrator moves into the hotel, Johnny, the hitman, and his sister, Rebecca, live in this same hotel, managed by Rogelio. While Rogelio is not old, as he has managed the hotel for over ten years it seems likely that he is older than Johnny and Rebecca, and he is certainly older than the young narrator who Johnny takes under his wing. The hotel is a place of business, known primarily for the renting of rooms to prostitutes and drug dealers, and thus it falls squarely into public sphere. As we have seen, the hotel continues to act as a non-place governed by the qualities of transience and

commerce and “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (Augé 63). Nevertheless, Rogelio seeks to create in this space a traditional home environment. He manages the hotel “como si cada habitación fuera un compartimiento íntimo de su propia casa” (47). Yet, despite these efforts to cling to a domestic ideal, none of the hotel’s younger clientele views it in the same light. In fact, they are attracted to this space as distinctly non-domestic, and feel no relational or identifying bond to it.

Rebecca and Johnny, despite actually living in the hotel, do not view it as a home. The narrator explains Rebecca’s perspective of the hotel as being under “una luz huera que dotaba a los objetos de un contorno fantasmal y una presencia dudosa” (55). Rather than an intimate space that provides privacy and protection from the outside, the hotel becomes a ghost-like, ephemeral, unreal space. As a home for Rebecca, the hotel lacks substance; it barely exists. For Johnny, the hotel also lacks the draw of a home. After murdering a bartender for a client, Johnny thinks to himself, “<<¿Para qué volver al hotel? >>...Caminaría mejor por Isabel la Católica hacia el norte y pagaría un cuarto en cualquier modesto hotel del centro” (66). Despite the fact that his sister is waiting for him back at Rogelio’s hotel, his ties both to his sister and the space of that hotel are inconsequential, and he sees no need to return to them at the moment. Here, it becomes apparent that for Johnny all the hotels are interchangeable commodities, not truly private and intimate spaces. He chooses to move through the city, focusing on his route rather than his destination, for the destination is unimportant. Any hotel will do insofar as he prefers to remain unattached to a specific person or space.

In *Lodo*, the characters of Benito and Eduarda further illustrate the generational divide in attitudes toward both the domestic space and the non-place. Even before meeting Benito, Eduarda has always rejected the private domestic space in favor of the public non-places of the

city. Eduarda favors the street over her home environment and familial relationships. “Estaba convencida de que cualquier destino sería preferible a continuar durmiendo en el mismo cuarto de sus hermanos menores en una camastro rechinante...Después de ayudar a su madre a realizar algunas tareas de limpieza, tomó una maleta ligera y salió a la calle” (74). Sharing an intimate space with her siblings and helping her mother maintain the house does not appeal to Eduarda. These relationships and tasks are burdensome obligations. Paul Goldberg asserts, “Eduarda había sido obligada a llevar una vida pública desde una etapa temprana de su adolescencia por la necesidad de contribuir al bienestar económico de la familia” by working at the Seven Eleven (139). Eduarda also finds the economic obligation a burden, yet, while she may have been forced out of her private space due to economic necessity, she does not wish to stay at home and nurture her relationships but instead embraces this “vida pública” and desires to leave behind her relationships and disappear into the “calle.” She knows that, as she intends to break the law by robbing the Seven Eleven, she will be unable to return to the defining space of the home and will need to leave behind her old identity in order to stay out of prison. She still finds the anonymity of a life of crime on the street more appealing than domesticity of her familial home.

Eduarda asks to stay in Benito’s apartment after she attacks her coworker at the Seven Eleven and empties the cash register. Despite his previous antisocial and isolationist tendencies, Benito happily takes in the much younger woman in the hopes of receiving sexual favors in return. As Goldberg notes, the contractual nature of Eduarda and Benito’s sexual relationship, combined with Benito’s previous reliance on prostitutes for sexual satisfaction place all of Benito's sexual relations in a mercantile context (146). Thus, the novel “reduce los dos lugares públicos donde Benito satisface sus instintos, el sexual y el nutritivo, a los espacios hiper-económicos del prostíbulo y el minisúper” (Goldberg 146). However, when Benito’s

relationship with Eduarda is threatened by one of his neighbors who confronts him about harboring Eduarda, Benito does not turn her in or abandon her to her fate, as would make sense for a man who is only involved in a commercial transaction of shelter for sex. Benito tries to maintain his relationship with her, indicating that having entered into the private space of his home, Eduarda no longer acts solely as one of many replaceable and interchangeable prostitutes, but as a part of a family space that Benito desires to preserve. Benito himself admits that despite the fact that, “en mis clases disuadía a mis alumnos de formar una familia – una acción contra la inteligencia, sostenía yo – ahora me veía usufructuando, a mi manera la infame, aborrecible institución” (81). No matter how cynical he is, and how little faith he appears to have in the traditional notion of family life, inevitably, he ends up forming his own type of family unit and its corresponding spaces, and he defends them vehemently.

As with Adolfo in *¿Te veré en el desayuno?*, Benito’s attempts to preserve his “family,” formed in the domestic space of his apartment, is paralleled by a desire to maintain ties to local culture within this private space. The notion of an ideal familial identity and space becomes linked to the meta-narrative of national identity as well. Once Eduarda has settled in his apartment, he buys “algunas verduras frescas en la añeja verdulería de la esquina, chayotes, berenjenas – vergas del árabe -, nopales para asar con charales, flor de calabaza para preparar con jitomate” (71). Instead of going to a large internationally owned market, he goes to the vegetable stand which by way of its age and purely local nature could be considered what Augé would call a true place. Here, he purchases distinctly local foods such as nopales and chayotes, despite the joke about the foreign provenance of the eggplants. Benito attempts to adopt and maintain a more traditionally and specifically Mexican identity in his newly family oriented domestic space. However, after his local shopping he does go to the “minisúper a comprar donas

empaquetadas” (71), indicating that this more traditional identity that he embraces is necessarily tempered by the presence of postmodern consumer culture. That he meets Eduarda, his new “family,” in a Seven Eleven, a huge global chain, and that she only enters his domestic space due to the violence that she herself commits in this consumerist non-place, once again stresses the dirty realist nature of these spaces in which both neoliberal consumerism and regional distinction attempt to coexist, however uncomfortably.

Benito only decides to leave the newly domestic private space of his apartment for the anonymity of public space in order to protect his relationship with Eduarda, and thus he attempts without success to force a relational identity onto non-places preciously devoid of it. After his neighbor threatens to report Eduarda to the police, Benito proposes that he and Eduarda flee Mexico City together to Michoacán. The car, the road, the hotels, and the entire space of Michoacán pertain to the space of travel, a space that Augé designates as the “archetype of a *non-place*” (70). Before heading out of the city, however, they immediately move to a cheap hotel in town while they plan their escape. Benito notes, “El hotel elegido para nuestra reclusión pasajera se encontraba en la calle Motolinía, en el centro de la ciudad” (106). He is confident that they can remain undetected in the urban center for some time. Once again, the city provides a cloak of anonymity that allows a character to hide an illegal activity in an ill-fated effort to preserve an interpersonal relationship.

Whereas for Benito the hotel had previously been a place of sexual commerce with prostitutes, and the commercial aspect of these interactions in combination with their wholly impersonal nature would lend to the classification of the hotel as a non-place, Benito moves Eduarda to the hotel not to underscore the transactional nature of their dealings but rather in his attempt to transform this relationship from being purely commercial into being at least emotional

if not truly romantic. By moving what he views as a newly private, intimate relationship with Eduarda into the public space, he starts to relinquish his “disposición introspectiva y antisocial” that Goldberg characterizes as the personification of one reaction to “los efectos sociológicos del impacto de la globalización en la experiencia contemporánea” (139). Benito thus begins to interact with and integrate himself into this public sphere in a more substantial way. Therefore, the hotel acts as an interface or a midway point between Benito’s previous rejection of the public sphere in favor of reclusion in his private sphere and his necessary acceptance of and movement into the public sphere in order to maintain the relationships formed in the private sphere.

The space of the hotel becomes of even more interest in the context of Zygmunt Bauman’s characterization of the subject in the post-modern globalized city as either tourist or vagabond. For Bauman, these tourists

put the bitter-sweet dreams of homesickness above the comforts of home- because they want to; either because they consider it the most reasonable life-strategy ‘under the circumstances’, or because they have been seduced by the true or imaginary pleasures of a sensation-gatherer’s life. (*Globalization* 92)

Benito personifies this type of tourism and makes it literal. The most “reasonable life-strategy” that he can think of “under the circumstances” of wanting to maintain “the comforts of home” in the form of his relationship with Eduarda is to turn himself into a literal tourist. His tourist’s life begins with his residency at the hotel in Mexico City, and continues as he and Eduarda travel through Michoacán. Yet even as Benito takes on the life of the tourist, moving from hotel to hotel, place to place, he does not fully embrace this post-modern identity, for he takes on this movement in order to maintain one relationship, one emotional and physical sensation, rather than constantly search for new relationships and sensations. Bauman remarks, “for the consumer



in the society of consumers, being on the move, searching, looking for, not-finding-it or more exactly not-finding-it yet is not malaise, but the promise of bliss; perhaps even the bliss itself” (*Globalization* 83). For Benito, however, holding on to Eduarda, the object of his consumption, is his “promise of bliss” rather than movement, and “being on the move” is only desirable insofar as it will allow him stay with her.

Thus, although Benito uselessly tries to recount the history and significance of each stop of his journey with Eduarda, the true purpose of his trip is not to appreciate national history but to appreciate his relationship with Eduarda. Accordingly, the journey of this pair conforms to Augé’s categorization of travel as the visiting of “spaces in which the individual feels himself to be a spectator without paying much attention to the spectacle” (86). It is through the act of traveling, of moving from space to space, “that we are most likely to find prophetic evocations of spaces in which neither identity nor relations, nor history really make any sense; spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality” (87). Perhaps it is for this reason that Benito’s attempts to cling to his identity as Eduarda’s lover through venturing into these non-places fail so fantastically, as she is constantly and blatantly unfaithful to him, driving him to violent extremes.

In contrast to Benito, Eduarda embraces the anonymous non-place of travel and movement for its own value. When Benito reveals his plan to flee he notes, “la idea de comprar un auto para salir a carretera la emocionó. Me sorprendió su capacidad de relajamiento, su propensión a olvidarse del motivo principal de nuestro viaje. Se comportaba como si estuviéramos planeando unas vacaciones, no escapando de la mano policíaca” (106). Like Bauman’s tourist, Eduarda is excited both by consumption, in the form of buying a new car, and by wandering. She can remove the proposed travel from its context and revel in it for its own

merits, as when one takes a vacation. For her this movement is unrelated to maintaining her relationship with Benito or even to maintaining her freedom, for the freedom is found in the movement itself. The freedom of this travel outside of the city thus parallels the freedom of movement within the city itself, for both are predicated on the anonymity of the non-places of transit and mimic the free circulation of goods and services in the neo-liberal marketplace.

Eduarda does not view the hotels as places of protection for herself or her relationship with Benito, and will not even confine herself to this semi-public space, but must continue to move through the public sphere. When they first arrive at the hotel in Mexico City, she tells Benito that the cheap hotel is the perfect place to hide, yet, much to Benito's dismay, she does not hide, but rather sneaks out of the hotel every chance she gets. This pattern continues throughout all of their hotel stays. For Eduarda, the hotels in which they stay act only as way-stations along the path of her constant journey through the public space. Seeing as how Benito is trying to convert the quintessential non-place of the hotel into a traditional domestic space imbued with the markers of their identity as a type of family, Eduarda rejects these spaces just as she did her own familial home. She instead prefers the anonymous space of the street, devoid of any relational or identity-forming meaning.

Rather than respond to urban anonymity with feelings of alienation and angst, Fadanelli's younger characters feel at ease in and embrace the non-places of the public urban space in order to cultivate this obscurity and escape from the relationships that might otherwise dictate their identity in the place of the consumer goods that they cannot afford. This presentation of such non-places as appealing despite their often violent and overwhelmingly abject character is distinctive to the dirty realist genre. Augé notes that in the non-place the individual sheds his or her identity in order to take on the anonymous and shared role of consumer, passenger, etc., and

remarks that the “relative anonymity that goes with this temporary identity can even be felt as a liberation” (81). Nevertheless, for Augé this relief is tied to the fact that this anonymity is temporary. In contrast, Fadanelli’s younger characters crave a more permanent shedding of the determinants and places of individual identity formation.<sup>15</sup> This rejection of places of identification manifests itself most strongly in the complete rejection of the domestic space. As an enclosed, private, guarded space, the domestic home opposes the neo-liberal spatial logic of free movement, more closely resembling the spatial logic of a culture reflecting previous protectionist economic policies. Sennett notes that “if the private was a refuge from the terrors of society as a whole, a refuge created by the family, one could escape the burdens of this ideal by a special kind of experience, one passed among strangers, or more importantly, among people who are destined to remain strangers” (23). Essentially, Fadanelli’s younger characters feel “burdened” by the domestic environment, and have completely lost faith in the modern metanarratives, especially that of the family. The domestic space does not live up to the ideal envisioned by the older generation, and the economic pressures of attempting to achieve and maintain this ideal is not tenable. In true dirty realist fashion, the domestic space is viewed as profoundly negative. Thus, these characters eschew the private space of the home and seek to lose their individual identity “among strangers” in the non-places of the public sphere, and this loss of identity is a great relief.

Both Fadanelli’s texts as works of dirty realism and postmodernism, and the younger generation of his characters are essentially defiant in their advocacy for the destruction of

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<sup>15</sup> Another difference in Fadanelli’s use of the non-place within the novels is the lack of what Augé calls “criteria of innocence” needed to access the non-places of the city. Augé asserts that such proof of individual identity (credit cards, tickets, passports, etc.) must be presented in order to grant the individual access to the relative anonymity or the non-place and the freedom that it affords (83). With the possible exception of Eduarda’s fake identity papers, no such documentation is ever required of Fadanelli’s characters.

previous conceptualizations of literature and culture or space and identities respectively. However, as Siro Basila noted in regards to Mexican postmodernism, this tendency is “subversivo en su forma y anárquica en su espíritu cultural para apresurar la disolución artística y cultural en la búsqueda de nuevos valores más estables” (13). Similarly, Fadanelli presents us with a vision of Mexico City in which the violence and emptiness of the non-place emerges as an effect of what he argues is the “disolución” of traditional values that are no longer functioning or desirable. Thus, the ruinous and decadent spaces of contemporary Mexico City represent a stage in the possible creation of these “nuevos valores más estables.” Paulette Singley echoes this concept in her discussion of dirty realism as it relates to Los Angeles when she notes that the “dirt of LA provides fertile ground” for its reconceptualization and ultimately its regeneration. She cites the editors of *Assemblage* in their interpretation of Richter’s view of this postmodern city as a belief that “a critical reading of the negative characteristics of Los Angeles might generate new, constructive principles” (129). Fadanelli presents a similar possibility for Mexico City in his fictions. The “negative” aspects of that city present themselves in two ways: the critical and the absent. Fadanelli provides a highly critical, dirty realist, and abject depiction of some spaces of the city, while also demonstrating the evacuation of meaning from others and the proliferation of the non-place. This criticism and negation allows for the anonymity and absence of grounded meanings to provide a new space that can later be inscribed with different, perhaps more constructive, positive, and inclusive meanings.

### III. Fernando Vallejo and the Creative Destruction of Medellín

As in the fictions of Fadanelli, the concept of a false nostalgia for a time and a space which prove to be as, if not more, violent or degraded than those of the present emerges as a primary theme in the writings of Fernando Vallejo. In this chapter, after arguing for Vallejo's inclusion in the ranks of dirty realist authors, I will demonstrate how, through the refiguring of 19<sup>th</sup> century realist spatial tropes, Fernando Vallejo's narrator expresses nostalgia for traditional spaces of individual and community identity formation while simultaneously asserting that these same spaces proved to be violent and marginalizing. It is thus that, despite the strong presence of this nostalgia, the emptying of meaning that comes with the transition from place to non-place apparent in the narrator's contemporary Medellín becomes a positive action in that it allows for the possible creation of new, more positive significances for these spaces.

#### 1. Fernando Vallejo: Mutant, Deviant, or Dirty Realist?

Categorizing the work of Fernando Vallejo proves a daunting task. His fictions defy the established boundaries between literary genres, confusing fact and fiction, autobiography and novel. This indefinable aura of transgression paradoxically makes his work representative of a trend in post-boom literature in Colombia. In a literary community so dominated by the presence of one author, Gabriel García Márquez, in both the domestic and international imaginary, his contemporaries and subsequent authors have struggled to emerge from the background and define and differentiate themselves. Colombian critic Orlando Mejía Rivera cites the influence

of García Márquez as the defining factor of Colombian literary production from the 1960's to the turn of the century. He argues that the generation of writers coming to age in the post-boom period could not break free of the shadow of Macondo,

y tratando de imitarlo, o de rechazarlo (que es otra forma de estar penetrado por su influencia), los aplastó el recuerdo de otro, la memoria mítica de símbolos que se filtraron en sus propias narrativas y las contaminaron de inautenticidad. La denominada Generación Perdida se perdió, precisamente, porque nunca se conectó con su propio pasado. (35)

However, a new group of authors arriving on the literary scene in the late 1980's and 1990's, finally managed to put some distance between themselves and García Márquez's brand of magical realism by accepting the author's influence as they would the influence of any classic text that acts as part of the canon. This new generation, "se ha conectado con su propio pasado, con sus auténticos recuerdos liberados del arquetipo macondiano" (36). This "liberation" is most often characterized by a sense of rupture with the past from which these authors are freeing themselves. Hence Mejía Rivera refers to this group as "la Generación Mutante," in reference to the hybridization of cultural codes, literary genres and conventions present in their work.

While Vallejo's work embodies this "mutant" quality and shares a temporal connection to, and thematic characteristics with, the group of authors studied by Mejía Rivera, the scholar does not include him in his categorization, perhaps because Vallejo had already achieved a degree of fame and acclaim above that of the other writers Mejía Rivera does include, and perhaps because Vallejo has not fully extirpated the need to respond to García Márquez through his very rejection of him. In multiple interviews, Vallejo has referred to García Márquez's work as trite and hackneyed, lacking syntactic and lexicographic richness, and expressing an outdated

exoticism.<sup>16</sup> This outright disparaging of the novelty and quality of the boom author's work is accompanied by somewhat more subtle critiques in Vallejo's fiction. For instance, that the room where Vallejo's narrator Fernando first meets his adolescent gay lover, a room specifically set aside for such trysts, is named "el cuarto de las mariposas" appears a self-conscious parody of *Cien años de soledad*.

Nevertheless, Vallejo is perhaps the best known example of a contemporary Colombian author connected with a distinct vision of his own past that has little or nothing to do with Macondo, instead embodying a violent break with this literary tradition. Francisco Villena Garrido remarks that Vallejo, "toma distancia con respecto a los modelos genéricos ortodoxos y se interesa por desprenderse de las formas literarias tradicionales, para seguir el camino de la transgresión de las fronteras y límites de los géneros tan frecuente en las literaturas posmodernas" (13). While Villena Garrido stresses the quality of transgression as typical in Vallejo's works, the critic forms his own characterization of Vallejo's work as part of what he denominates as "literatura desviacionista en términos discursivos y temáticos con respeto a tradiciones anteriores" (14). Belonging to the overarching category of postmodern Latin American literature, this "deviant literature" is marked by cynicism, the quotidian nature of violence, exaggeration, dissident ideologies, an exacerbated individuality, the resurgence of various discourses on self-representation, narrative or thematic ties to memory, the figure of the "sicario" or hit man, biography and autobiography.

Villena Garrido widens the scope of this literature beyond the borders of Colombia, including the Central American author Horacio Castellanos as well as Mexican authors Luis Zapata, Elmer Mendoza, and perhaps most pertinently to our discussion here, Guillermo

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<sup>16</sup> For a more complete analysis of Vallejo's commentary on, and relationship to, García Márquez, see the chapter "Fernando vs. Gabo" in Jacques Joret's book, *La muerte y la gramática*.

Fadanelli amongst the Colombian authors Darío Jaramillo, Laura Restrepo, Alonso Salazar, and Jorge Franco in his short list of Vallejo's contemporaries in this "deviant literature." The critic asserts,

estos autores retratan las formas concretas que la posmodernidad toma en distintos puntos de Latinoamérica, donde se dio una modernización desigual y, por lo tanto, se aprecian problemáticas concretas en cada lugar. Sin embargo, a pesar de sus diferencias, se puede observar en estos textos la congruencia de un proyecto crítico común contra el discurso de la modernidad a través de la exhibición de la grotesca y desmesurada violencia nacida en su proyecto en un contexto local, la configuración de los afectos en una episteme en crisis que acerca al sujeto a un individualismo exacerbado, y la textualización narrativa que vadea hacia el cinismo como herramienta que escrutina las aporías de su contexto social y cultural. (15)

Despite Villena Garrido's apt and accurate description of these works, he glosses over the very substantial differences between these authors, allowing his criteria for inclusion in this category of literature to cut too wide a swath for the creation of a meaningful characterization of an emergent literary genre. Even within the Colombian context, to place the testimonial nature of Alonso Salazar's *No nacimos pa' semilla* in the same category as the melodramatic glamour of Jorge Franco's *Rosario Tijeras* seems a bit of a stretch if we choose to analyze style and tone in addition to the shared thematic content of drug trafficking.<sup>17</sup> Taking stylistic and thematic concerns into consideration, one can create subdivisions within the overarching concept of "deviant literature" to construct more meaningful and viable generic groupings that maintain the

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<sup>17</sup>Margarita Jácome does, in fact, define a literary genre centered solely on the thematic figure of the *sicario* in her work, *La novela sicaresca: testimonio, sensacionalismo, y ficción*, in which she provides a detailed analysis of Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* as a foundational example of the "sicaresque."



discursive and thematic similarities proposed by Villena Garrido. One such grouping that would include Vallejo would be dirty realism.

While many critics have sought to identify Fernando Vallejo's literary influences within a national or global context, few have linked him to the dirty realist tradition. Great efforts have been made to claim Vallejo as part of a greater Colombian literary tradition by linking him to the antioquian iconoclast Tomás Carrasquilla, or to Fernando Gonzáles and Gonzalo Arango, members of the nihilistic *nadaista* movement that emerged in Medellín in the 1960's.<sup>18</sup> Oppositely, writers and critics such as Jacques Joset, William Ospina, and Óscar Collazos, have placed Vallejo in the literary tradition of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, citing similarities in tone, rhythm, a certain political incorrectness and reviling of society, and a shared love of animals amongst other commonalities.<sup>19</sup> Despite the admitted influence of Céline on authors such as Henry Miller and Charles Bukowski who in turn influenced or pertained to the genre of dirty realism, few scholars have, however, linked Vallejo's work to the North American literary school, with Anke Birkenmaier being the notable exception. While Vallejo himself admits no connection to the authors of North American dirty realism, many of his contemporaries cite the direct impact that this literary genre has on their work. Rigoberto Gil Montoya and Octavio Escobar Giraldo, two authors whom Mejía Rivera includes among the "generación mutante," provide concrete examples of this phenomenon. Gil Montoya asserts that his work is heavily influenced by "Bukowski y su recreación de universos sórdidos" (Mejía Rivera 130), whereas Escobar Giraldo declares, "el minimalismo de mi obra obedece a varias razones. En primer

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<sup>18</sup> See Pablo González's article, "Visión y evocación de Medellín en *La virgen de los sicarios* y *El fuego secreto* de Fernando Vallejo," Pablo Montoya's *Fernando Vallejo: Demoliciones de un reaccionario* and Juan Fernando Taborda Sánchez's, "El corazón desnudo de Fernando Vallejo."

<sup>19</sup> In *Fernando Vallejo: Demoliciones de un reaccionario*, while Pablo Montoya does acknowledge the influence of the French "poetas malditas" on Vallejo's work, the scholar argues that the novelist belongs more fully to the Antioquian tradition.

lugar a la influencia de escritores minimalistas, yo soy aficionado a la literatura estadounidense: sobre todo a Carver y a Wolf” (Mejía Rivera 185). Such clear links between the works of his contemporaries and these North American authors indicates that dirty realism did have a presence in the Colombian literary scene in which Vallejo rose to prominence.

Stylistically, Vallejo’s connection to dirty realism is clear. Expanding upon Bill Buford’s original definition of the genre as “unadorned unfurnished low-rent tragedies” (4), David William Foster describes the genre in the Latin American context as,

the commitment to describe the daily experiences of life with no attempt to euphemize them, either by turning away from certain aspects as somehow too gross to be related in literal terms or by supplementing them with a transcendent (social, political, religious) meaning that would detract from the imperative to examine the facts of life as unflinchingly as possible. (150)

While Vallejo’s prose may be slightly more laden with literary references and descriptive markers than one might typically associate with minimalist “unadorned” fiction, his “commitment” to plainly portray the quotidian abjection and violence of life in Medellín remains unquestioned. Vallejo himself comments on his literary style and abhorrence of euphemisms in *El fuego secreto*. When recounting his grandfather’s final days, the semi-autobiographical narrator self-consciously comments on his need to state the facts without any attempt to sweeten or obscure the harsh reality of death. He remarks,

El ciudadano metido a escritor (en mala hora) se cree, llegado al tema, en la obligación de inventarse perífrasis: ‘Cruzó la laguna de aguas eternas’ o ‘Transpuso el umbral de la eternidad’, o cosas así. Yo no. Aprovecho que me han dejado el paso libre y me voy

derecho, por el camino recto, sin circunloquios, y así puedo decir aquí, como si fuera el alba del primer día, con antiquísima novedad: mi abuelo murió. (56)

Through the voice of his narrator, Vallejo asserts what he sees as a great difference between himself and other authors: his ability to capture the harsh realities of life as they are without unnecessary description or editorializing, and this places his works firmly in the realm of dirty realism.

Cuban author Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, whose works are widely recognized and marketed as exemplars of Latin American dirty realism, has himself commented on the similitude between his own narrative style and that of Fernando Vallejo. In an article he wrote for *La Ventana*, the Cuban author, while still acknowledging his connection to North American dirty realism, seeks to stress his Latin American identity by way of his association to “literatura de la violencia.” However, despite the sheer volume of post-boom literature situated in violent environs, he admits that the barefaced manner in which he believes violence should be depicted places him in the company of a distinct group of authors, one being Vallejo. Gutiérrez recounts,

Recuerdo siempre, por ejemplo, una escena en *La virgen de los sicarios*, de Fernando Vallejo, en que el asesino con quien convive el protagonista, le dice: “¿El vecino te sigue molestando?”. El protagonista le dice que sí, pero que no es nada importante, solo cosa de vecinos. El joven asesino coge su pistola, toca la puerta del vecino y cuando este abre, le dispara en la frente. Cierra la puerta, regresa tranquilamente y le dice al protagonista: “Ya no te molestará más”. Todo esto narrado de un modo sencillo, directo, escueto, periodístico, sin que sobre ni una palabra; no hay drama, ni ampulosidad, ni regodeos lingüísticos: se utiliza un lenguaje funcional, el más adecuado para describir una escena tan violenta. (“Apuntes”)

Once again, it becomes apparent that Vallejo's works not only reflect the quotidian violence characteristic of "deviant" literature, but the style and tone characteristic of dirty realism as well.

It is precisely upon this manner of depicting violence as commonplace and devoid of moral significance that much analysis of Vallejo's work focuses. As we have seen, Pablo González and Juan Fernando Taborda Sánchez place Vallejo in the nihilistic tradition. Ana Serra asserts that the Nietzschean discourse is foundational to the understanding of *La Virgen de los Sicarios*. Pablo Montoya goes as far as stating that Vallejo "es un iconoclasta que odia toda noción de humanismo y es ajeno a cualquier idea liberador para los hombres de América Latina" (10). Nevertheless, I argue that despite this social, moral, political and religious agnosticism characteristic of Vallejo's works, the Colombian author leaves room for the possibility of the emergence of a less bankrupt society in the future.

This inherent contradiction in Vallejo's outlook is perhaps most thoroughly expressed in his quintessentially dirty realist treatment of space. The nihilism of the works adds to the postmodern feeling present in Vallejo's texts if we accept Jean Baudrillard's evaluation of postmodernity as a nihilistic epoch. Playing with Jameson's appropriation of Buford's term "dirty realism" and adaptation of the term to postmodern spatial theory in *The Seeds of Time*, Paulette Singley remarks, "while eschewing any ethical imperative, the postmodern sublime successfully colonizes the uncultured, feral, filthy, and raw as viable design terrain," and that the "dirty real" acts as "an urbanism predicated upon conditions in the city that, while undesigned, is also incomplete, ruinous, fragmented, or unsupervised" (128-129). This conception of "dirty real" space aligns with two characteristics of space as portrayed in literary works of dirty realism: a focus on the abject and the evacuation of traditional meaning from spaces of identity formation.

In his article examining Jayne Anne Phillips (one of the original dirty realist authors featured in *Granta*) and her pertinence to the dirty realist movement, Brian Jarvis stresses the importance of abjection and abject spaces as both integral to Phillips' fiction and characteristic of dirty realism.<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that both in Phillips' work and in that of the Latin American authors studied here, the abject need not apply only to Singley's "uncultured, feral, filthy, and raw" and their associated spaces. Rather, "the working class, the underclass and various racial and ethnic groups constituted what could be termed a socioeconomic abject" with their own associated spaces of abjection as well (Jarvis 193). Vallejo's insistence on the depiction of spaces of violence as well as social and economic marginalization, such as gay bars, slums, and a house-turned-AIDS hospice, certainly expresses a similar dirty realist preoccupation with abject spaces.

Additionally, by manner of the evacuation of traditional meanings from spaces of identity formation such as the domestic home and the church, Vallejo's texts also express the "incomplete, ruinous, fragmented" nature of the "dirty real" as presented by Singley. Devoid of their traditional significance, the spaces become non-places and contribute to a feeling of purposelessness and lack of grounding or direction. This phenomenon is very much in line with Jameson's observations on the inability to establish a system of cognitive mapping in the new, abstract postmodern space, and the consequent sentiment of "bewildering immersion" in the urban space (*Postmodernism* 43).

Nevertheless, it is precisely this exploration of abject spaces and this loss of established relationships to physical and symbolic spaces that allows for the possibility of the construction of more meaningful ones in the future. In this manner, Vallejo depicts a spatial occurrence akin to

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<sup>20</sup> Jarvis employs Julia Kristeva's theorization of the abject as those objects and experiences that "disturb identity, system, order."

what David Harvey calls “creative destruction,” an experience tied to the developments in postmodern consumer culture also characteristic of the dirty realist genre. Harvey asserts that capitalism in its present form is dependent on a cycle of construction, destruction, and reconstruction. “Capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis at a subsequent time” in order to then reconstruct a new landscape more apt to the post-crisis society (83). The ruinous nature of Vallejo’s Medellín is in part due to the presence of the drug trafficking industry, an industry which, due to its illegal nature, can be viewed as pure, unregulated capitalism. The culture of the *sicario* prizes the acquisition of consumer goods with the proceeds of this capitalistic enterprise, proceeds obtained through violence. However, with the death of Pablo Escobar, one of the organizing forces of the drug industry in Medellín, came a crisis in this industry and the exacerbation of the culture of violence and consumerism leaving the city in a state of even further decadence that is perhaps a step on the path to the reconstruction of a new space more appropriate to the next incarnations of newer social, cultural, and economic structures.

In this chapter, I will explore how Fernando Vallejo’s narrator creates a false sense of nostalgia for spaces that created and recreated a marginalizing and violent social structure, particularly with regard to sexuality and sexual identity. I will then argue that, by emptying the spaces of the city of their traditional significance, Vallejo is in essence destroying them and thereby allowing for their reformation. The intensely negative depiction of these spaces thus allows the reader to view their destruction as a positive development and to hope that their next incarnation will be an improvement. This attitude relates back to the dirty realist aesthetic. As Singley notes in the conclusion to her study on the dirty realist nature of postmodern Los

Angeles, a focus on the “dirty,” even without any ethical or moral judgment, can lead to the development of the “clean,” and she reiterates the interpretation of Richter’s argument that “a critical reading of the negative characteristics of Los Angeles might generate new, constructive principles” (129). As a dirty realist, Vallejo similarly exposes the violence and abjection plaguing the spaces of Medellín in a critically detached fashion while allowing that less marginalizing spaces may eventually emerge from this ruinous fragmentation.

## 2. False Utopia, False Nostalgia: Past and Present Spaces of Medellín

In his analysis of Vallejo’s work, Francisco Villena Garrido argues that it pertains to an emerging literature that seeks to create new individual and collective identities through the “superación de la nación, la familia y la iglesia como instituciones tradicionales de la demarcación subjetual” (30). In order to accomplish this goal, within these texts, both the conventional manners of treating space and the traditional spaces themselves must also be transgressed and transformed. Vallejo develops this tension between past and present spaces of Medellín through the questionable nostalgia of his eponymous narrator. In his constant comparisons of the spaces of past and present, the insidious social violence of the past shines through the gloss of a childhood utopia, while the slight possibility of a new, more positive social identity emerges amongst the violent destruction of the present.

One of the pillars of Vallejo's most renowned work, *La virgen de los sicarios*, is the contrast the narrator, Fernando<sup>21</sup>, attempts to create between his nostalgia for the idyllic spaces of the Medellín of his youth and his contempt for the violent, impoverished urban mass that Medellín has become. This depiction of the Colombian city is carried throughout all of what critics Villena Garrido and Joset denominate as Vallejo's *autoficciones*<sup>22</sup>, including the five works comprising the collection *El río del tiempo* (*Los días azules*, *El fuego secreto*, *Los caminos a Roma*, *Años de indulgencia*, and *Entre fantasmas*) as well as *La virgen de los sicarios* and *El desbarrancadero*.<sup>23</sup> However, of these texts, *Los días azules*, *El fuego secreto*, *El desbarrancadero*, and *La virgen de los sicarios* deal most consistently and explicitly with the context of Medellín, and thus these works will act as the focus of this analysis.

In the specific context of *La virgen de los sicarios*, Fernando develops the dichotomy between past and present Medellín in the very first line of text: "Había en las afueras de Medellín un pueblo silencioso y apacible que se llamaba Sabaneta" (7). The use of the imperfect implies that the Sabaneta here remembered no longer exists. This impression is confirmed two pages later when the narrator remarks that, after a long absence, upon his return to Antioquia, "Sabaneta había dejado de ser un pueblo y se había convertido en un barrio más de Medellín, la ciudad la había alcanzado, se la había tragado; y Colombia, entre tanto, se nos había ido de las manos. Éramos y de lejos el país más criminal de la tierra, y Medellín la capital del odio" (10).

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<sup>21</sup> The semi-autobiographical nature of Vallejo's works is underscored by the fact that the narrator shares the author's first name: Fernando. The works are, however, novels and thus author and narrator are not one in the same. Therefore, to avoid confusion, I will refer to the author as Vallejo and to the narrator as Fernando.

<sup>22</sup> Joset argues that an *autoficción* is characterized by a pact between the text and the reader in which he or she "acepte (y reconozca) la siempre posible infiltración de un intersticio entre el autor y el narrador; que se toma el derecho de manipular los recuerdos del primero, que son, por supuesto, los mismos del protagonista, mediante recursos propios de la ficción" (109).

<sup>23</sup> Given the consistency in the plots, characters, and narrative voices of these works, I will be treating them as parts of one overarching narrative dealing with the life of a singular narrator: Fernando.



Thus, according to Fernando, the city, marked by the violence of a predatory animal, has captured and swallowed up his formerly peaceful hometown.

Yet, even at this very first juncture, Fernando invites the reader to question the validity of his own characterization of Medellín, past and present. Although Margarita Jacomé cites the opening line of the text as evidence that “*La virgen de los sicarios* se presenta a sí mismo como un relato típico de la tradición oral al establecer desde el comienzo el marco de la historia” (72), the color of this opening can be more specifically ascribed to a children’s fable. While the first line of the novel starts simply with “había” and not “había una vez” or “érase una vez,” it still has the ring of the opening to a fairy tale. This allusion to the world of fantasy and myth not only heightens the nostalgic tone of the narrator’s reminiscences of his childhood, but also impugns this nostalgic vision of Sabaneta through its association with the realm of make-believe. Thus, from the very outset of the work, Fernando invites the reader to question his judgment with regard to Medellín’s fall from grace despite his often straightforward declarations about its former glory and present decadence. Fernando is a quintessentially unreliable narrator.

The structure of *La virgen de los sicarios*, as well as Vallejo’s other *autoficciones*, further forces the reader to critically examine Fernando’s vision of the past. The presence of constant flashbacks to different times in the narrator’s life confuses any clear demarcation between past memories and the present context. Additionally, Fernando often questions his own trustworthiness as a narrator of the past, for, despite his claim to be “la memoria de Colombia” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 21), he admits that “con esta memoria cansada se me empiezan a embrollar los muertos” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 47). Therefore, in spite of Fernando’s assertion that he is acting as the memory of Medellín and the chronicler of its demise, he calls into question his own ability to faithfully comply with this task.

### 3. Miniature and Viewpoint: The Deconstruction of a Nostalgic Utopia

In order to assert the alleged harmony of the Medellín of his childhood in comparison with the state of chaos he currently ascribes to the city, the narrator revisits the spatial tropes of the nineteenth century realist novel while concurrently assailing the validity of these same rhetorical devices. The simultaneous inclusion and discrediting of such conceits not only encourages the reader to question Fernando's presentation of Medellín but also marks the manner in which dirty realism has mutated from the historical realist model. Whereas the use of space in the nineteenth-century realist novel demonstrates an effort to adapt to societal change while still embracing the dominant narratives of progress and human control over the environment, the use of space in twenty-first-century dirty realism questions these narratives in what Joset has called a complete "rechazo de las ideologías" (49). Thus, dirty realism moves away from the modernity of realism and aligns more closely with the conception of the postmodern as presented by Lyotard.<sup>24</sup> The French philosopher asserts,

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or the work. These rules and categories are what the work itself is looking for. (81)

In much the same manner, through the voice of Fernando, Vallejo attempts to employ the "rules and categories" of realism, looking with nostalgia to recapture the supposed stability of the past, yet demonstrating that these rules no longer function in the same manner and replacing them

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<sup>24</sup> In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard remarks, "I define postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). While metanarratives and ideologies are certainly not identical ideas, ideologies could be included under the umbrella concept of the metanarrative.

with skepticism, even towards the narrator's own assertions of truth. Moreover, the use of space in the traditional realist novel is gendered, representing and reproducing the predominant patriarchal norms of the time, whereas the use of space in Vallejo's texts is marked by a far more explicit notion of gender, sexuality, and homosexuality that adds to the proclaimed "dirtiness" of the realism in these fictions.

In *El espacio en la novela realista*, María Teresa Zubiaurre argues that depictions of space in the realist novel demonstrate the 19th century preoccupation with the newly important urban environment and the consequent attempts to order and control the chaotic and industrialized spaces of the city that were rising to prominence in this time period. Among the systems used by nineteenth-century realist authors to "organizar y hacer abarcable el espacio urbano" were "la miniatura, el espacio enmarcado, y el *mise en abime*" embodied in "distintos objetos y símbolos espaciales" (Zubiaurre 232). Zubiaurre provides Brüggemann's analysis of the time period's fascination with the magic lantern as an example of the way in which an object can echo the age's attraction to "todo lo reducido, toda replica, en pequeño, de una realidad que, contemplada en su verdadera dimensión, resultaría confusa y escaparía a los sentidos. Ante el caótico urbano, la miniatura se hace necesidad" (232). Within the context of Vallejo's works, the recurring image of the crèche or *pesebre* functions in a similar manner to the magic lamp, bringing together, in miniature, a replica of reality or at least of a religious conception of reality. In *Los días azules*, Fernando remarks, "Antioquia es una tierra montañosa. Por ello también nuestra representación del advenimiento de Jesús, nuestro pesebre, tiene cascadas y pueblitos antioqueños" (128). Rather than simply depict religious iconography, these scenes attempt to authentically capture in miniature the physical space surrounding those residents of Antioquia

who are creating them, thus making both the mysteries of Christian doctrine and the rapidly changing landscape of the area comprehensible and controllable.

Fernando further underscores the representational qualities of the nativity scene in *La virgen de los sicarios*. Describing his childhood memories of Christmas to his young lover, Alexis, the narrator remarks,

El pesebre de la casita que te digo era inmenso, la vista de uno se perdía entre sus mil detalles sin saber por dónde empezar, por dónde seguir, por dónde acabar. Las casitas a la orilla de la carretera en el pesebre eran como las casitas a la orilla de la carretera de Sabaneta, casitas campesinas con techitos de teja y corredor. O sea, era como si la realidad de adentro contuviera la realidad de afuera y no visa versa, que en la carretera a Sabaneta había una casita con un pesebre que tenía otra carretera a Sabaneta. Ir de una realidad a otra era infinitamente más alucinante que cualquier sueño de basuco. (14)

Albeit in oxymoronic fashion, the enormity of the miniature serves to encapsulate the reality of Antioquia in its entirety with such precision that the line between the real and the simulated becomes blurred. The miniaturization of the physical space of Medellín and its outlying areas, and its ability to capture a larger reality, is “alucinante,” broadening the viewer’s ability to comprehend the incomprehensible. Thus, once again, the miniature aims to enable one to dominate a chaotic and ungraspable actuality; in this case, the annexation of the quiet town of Sabaneta complete with “casitas campesinas” by the growing urban mass of Medellín via the development of the “carretera.” The miniature, however, isn’t fully able to attenuate the disorderly tumult that such a transition implies. Even in the context of this more manageable miniature version of the city, the viewer becomes lost among endless details, is unable to take in

the entirety of the replica at once, and thus is unable to fully dominate or possess this space with his gaze.<sup>25</sup>

The *pesebre* serves not only to encapsulate an entire geographic space but to compress a significant period of time as well. The crèche acts as an object of nostalgia, or as a *lieu de mémoire*, linking the adult narrator to his childhood memories, yet, at the same time, it also connects the childhood Fernando to his future life. When Fernando continues to tell his lover about his past experience with the nativity scene, he states, “Mira Alexis: Yo tenía entonces ocho años y parado en el corredor de esa casita, ante la ventana de barrotes, viendo el pesebre, me vi de viejo y vio entera mi vida. Y fue tanto mi terror que sacudí la cabeza y me alejé” (14). Fernando sees his whole life, past, present, and future in the *pesebre*. Given the horrors that the narrator describes in the Medellín of the present, it is not unreasonable to assume that the terror young Fernando experiences while glimpsing what his life is to become is due both to the sheer bewilderment evoked by such an occurrence and to a natural reaction to the future state of his beloved hometown. To connect the miniature, more controlled, and more comprehensible replica of greater Medellín (a flawed effort in and of itself to preserve a nostalgic vision of the already changing provincial town) to the turbulent and unintelligible future version of the metropolis forces the reader to further recognize the artificiality of this attempt at control. Once again, Fernando creates discordance between his expressed characterizations of the Medellín of his past, failing to fully portray it as the orderly and idyllic space of his nostalgic vision. Fernando makes no attempt to miniaturize, encapsulate, or dominate the unbridled chaos of the contemporary city, yet he also questions whether his attempts to do just this to the Medellín of his past are no more than futile efforts.

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<sup>25</sup> Given the rampant misogyny and general lack of fully developed female characters in Vallejo’s work, the choice of the masculine pronoun here is intentional.

Fernando's description of the *pesebres* in *Los días azules* further emphasizes that, despite the underlying desire to replicate the space of Antioquia, the miniatures reflect more of a fantasy than a reality:

En los pesebres de Antioquia todo se vale: el Niño Dios, por ejemplo puede ser más grande que sus papás. San José y la Virgen entre sí están proporcionados, y lo están por lo general con la mula, el buey, y los reyes Magos, pero puede haber un pastor gigantesco, cinco diez veces mayor que cualquiera de ellos, cargando una ovejita que es el doble de San José. Por la carreterita que lleva al pueblo van caminando arrieros con una recua de mulas, y detrás de ellos, como si nada, viene un tigre. A un lado de la trocha se ve un pescado enorme que se salió del lago. (*Los días azules* 128)

Here the ridiculousness of such an effort to capture, compress, or control the spatial reality of greater Medellín surfaces through the nonsensical proportions of the fictional inhabitants of this area, as well as an incoherent mix of religious, laic, and animal figures who in reality would never occupy the same space. The devaluation of religious tenets and traditions here expressed plays into Fernando's constant criticism of the Church. At the same time, the obvious physical distortions call into question any possibility of recreating a more contained and ordered reality, insinuating that any attempt to do so is absurd. Additionally, seeing as these descriptions are of Fernando's childhood, rather than his present, Fernando provides for the possibility that the Medellín of his past is equally as irrational as the Medellín of his present.

Of all the *pesebres* mentioned in Vallejo's works, that of Fernando's great aunt Elenita was famed for being one of the most spectacular, and its ruin was equally as staggering. Elenita's *pesebre* was a representation of her relationship with her husband. Married at the age of fifteen to a man of seventy, Elenita saw her husband Alfredo as father figure, just as he treated

her almost as his child. He thus displayed his love for her by showering her with what are essentially toys: figures for her *pesebre*. When he passed away, “como Elenita era una mujer vieja, de treinta años, no se volvió a casar. Alfredo la dejó sola en el mundo sin casa y sin un centavo: todo se lo había dado en casitas y santicos y figuritas de pesebre. Por eso Elenita vive arrimada” (129). Without any other economic resources, Elenita dismantled her *pesebre* and sold off all the pieces to pay for her husband’s funeral expenses. This *pesebre*, an idealized Antioquia in miniature, is thus torn apart by economic hardship and death much like contemporary Medellín.

The story of Elena’s *pesebre* emphasizes the flaws of the traditional patriarchal family structure that encouraged Alfredo to take an unsuitably young bride by modern standards, act as both husband and father to her, and leave her an undesirable widow at the age of thirty. While Fernando’s designation of thirty as old reflects the ageism faced by women in the era of his grandparents, that Fernando continues to practice this sort of ageism when picking his own sexual partners demonstrates the continued prominence of these antiquated values. In the context of Elena and Alfredo’s marriage, the *pesebre* itself also becomes a symbol of another problem plaguing modern Medellín: rampant consumerism. Alfredo spends all his money on trifles, neglecting the actuality of his true economic situation, and eventually placing an undue hardship on his widow. On a more symbolic level, the space of Medellín itself in the form of the *pesebre* ends up for sale. Similarly, the *sicarios* of contemporary Medellín are driven by modern consumerism to purchase status symbols that they can ill afford while remaining in a state of abject poverty. Gabriela Polit Dueñas aptly describes the consumer culture of the *sicario* when she states that the *sicario* is the character of choice to represent the “*ethos* siniestro” of the neoliberal economy. “Pone en evidencia el perverso valor de sus virtudes: el súbito

enriquecimiento, el culto a la individualidad a través de una sumisión a las normas del Mercado en consumo de modas, marcas, y objetos” (125). In its ability to demonstrate the effect of consumer culture on the city, the use of the miniature in the form of the *pesebre* once again twists the notion of the idealized and controlled space of the Medellín past that Fernando views with nostalgia and demonstrates the parallels between Medellín’s past and current degradation.

Earlier in *Los días azules* Fernando links the *pesebre* with fantasy and nostalgia by means of a story about witches that his grandmother would tell him in his childhood. In this scary tale, the witch would fly through the night, “volando, alto, muy alto en la noche pasaba por Santo Domingo, que desde arriba se veía como un pueblito de nacimiento, de pesebre, con sus foquitos encendidos abajo titilando” (*Los días azules* 16). The ability to see Medellín’s neighborhoods, in this case Santo Domingo instead of Sabaneta, in a compressed, miniaturized version is nothing but a flight of imagination on a par with witches on their broomsticks. Presenting the image of the city in this manner further echoes the concept of the fairy-tale established in the first line of *La virgen de los sicarios*. By extension, the charming nature of the *pesebre*-like city with its thatched roofs and twinkling lights can also be viewed as a fantasy or a personal and nostalgic alteration of reality.

Furthermore, this childhood story links two of the spatial tropes used in nineteenth-century realism: the miniature and the panorama. Maria Teresa Zubiaurre also cites the panoramic vista as a method of ordering and controlling the urban environment (106). Fernando himself connects a position of height with a position of power. In *El fuego secreto*, likening homophobia to religious intolerance, the narrator imagines himself a Muslim imprisoned by a Christian king. He then states, “creen tenerme prisionero mas no hay tal. Desde mi alta torre, mi atalaya, viendo pasar las nubes, domino el tiempo, domino el mundo” (176). Fernando directly



states that his viewpoint from up on high places him in a position of complete dominance, while at the same time underscoring the deceiving nature of appearances. What would to some be a prison cell is for Fernando a watchtower, a space from which to oversee and control those around him rather than to be controlled by them. Thus, Fernando compels the reader not only to associate height and the panoramic vista with freedom, power, and control, but also to continue to question initial descriptions and impressions of the spaces in the text.

In his nostalgic remembrances of Medellín, Fernando often includes panoramic vistas. One very clear example occurs in *Los días azules* when the narrator remembers looking down on Medellín with his uncle Ovidio from the roof of his childhood home. “¡Alta atalaya de tejas dominando a Medellín! Y Medellín inmenso, inmenso, con sus veinte barrios y tejados bermejos. Iba mi vista prisionera en un vuelo de campanario a campanario” (26). As in *El fuego secreto*, the narrator creates an image combining the contradictory elements of the watchtower and its inherent power with the idea of confinement or imprisonment. In this instance, however, the imagery is directly linked to the space of Medellín. Fernando asserts that his viewpoint puts him in a position of dominance over the immensity of the city. He presents his need for order and control of the urban space, a space that he feels has become disorderly and unmanageable in contemporary society, as attainable from the “atalaya” of the rooftop of his childhood home. Zubiaurre remarks that, in the context of the nineteenth-century realist novel, in some instances “la visión panorámica funciona a modo de evocación nostálgica de un espacio ‘espiritual’ – el de la infancia, el de la inocencia – antes poseído pero ahora ya perdido para siempre” (140). The overwhelming feeling of nostalgia that Fernando’s descriptions of the Medellín of his youth evoke would allow for this aforementioned roof-top view of the city to be placed into this category of panorama. Further comparison between this view of Medellín past with the

numerous harsh descriptions of Medellín present underscore the presentation of this childhood space as an “espacio ‘espiritual’” as defined by the realist tradition.

From his high vantage point, Fernando’s gaze travels among the belfries of Medellín’s numerous churches and cathedrals, echoing the adult Fernando’s pilgrimages to these same churches throughout *La virgen de los sicarios*. In these later visits to the churches of Medellín, however, the narrator’s perspective changes drastically, from one of dominance to one of subordination. “Pasamos a la iglesia y miré arriba, y por primera vez vi desde adentro la alta cúpula que había visto desde afuera mi vida entera dominando el centro Medellín” (92).

Whereas previously the narrator looked down upon the churches of Medellín from a position of control, he now looks up at the Iglesia de San Antonio de Padua and describes this church as being in a position of power over the entire city and by extension its inhabitants, himself included. This switch in dominance is woven through Fernando’s continued description of the church. “Adentro un Cristo pendía de la alta cúpula, suspendido en el aire sobre las miserias humanas” (92-3). This is a traditional religious image of Christ gazing down upon the masses, yet in the context of this particular church, it takes on a more specific and concrete meaning.

The narrator informs the reader that this church is referred to as “la de los locos” because of “los mendigos locos que duermen afuera bajo este puente cercano que es un cruce de vías elevadas y que vienen al amanecer, cuando arrecia el frío, a la primera misa a pedirle a Dios, por el amor que le tenga a San Antonio, un poquito de calor, de compasión, de basuco” (94). The statue of Christ is thus literally hovering above the poorest and most marginalized of Medellín’s population. Rather than being an image of religious comfort, however, in the context of Fernando’s relentless criticism directed toward the church, and given the position of the Christ as literally hanging over the public’s heads and the previous mention of the church’s position of

dominance, the image becomes an almost threatening one. It highlights the power and control that the space occupies over those who visit it. This feeling is heightened by the extreme marginality of these people.

The dominion the church here exercises extends to the nearby public space outside of its walls. The mendicants who frequent the church live beneath a crossway. Once again they find themselves in a subservient position. However, this time, they are subordinated by the city itself in the form of its infrastructure. That the bridge under which these vagrants live is in the form of a cross underscores the correspondence between this space and the space of the church. By remarking that the beggars ask God for a bit of crack cocaine, Fernando further strengthens the connection between the spaces of street and church. Under the dominance of these spaces, people are reduced to begging either from other people or from God himself. The control over the immensity of the urban landscape dotted with churches that the narrator feels from his rooftop in *Los días azules* is absent. It is now the urban space and its churches that exercise the power.

The primacy of these urban spaces over the inhabitants of the city, and Fernando in particular, would appear to support his previous assessment of Medellín as having fallen from a previous state of grace. Yet Fernando remarks that the cathedral's cupola has dominated Medellín for his entire life, his "vida entera" (*La virgen de los sicarios* 92), and even from the vantage point he commands in his childhood the sense of control and of the ideality of the cityscape is questionable. Thus, despite the similarities to the nineteenth-century realist panorama, this viewpoint does not fully evoke a space "de la infancia, el de la inocencia – antes poseído pero ahora ya perdido para siempre," nor even "un espacio pretérito retenido con ahínco, pero que amenaza con ceder a las imposiciones del proceso histórico" (Zubiaurre 140). Even in

his youth, Fernando has already lost control. While he may claim to have possessed it at one point, his own description of this possession belies any attempt at controlling this space.

Fernando refers to his gaze as “prisionera.” It is captured or imprisoned by the belfries of the city’s churches. Unlike his fantasy of being the captured Muslim in *El fuego secreto*, here the narrator does not question his imprisonment but rather employs the word himself to characterize his situation. Thus, the narrator establishes the two centers of control in his life as a child: the domestic space of the roof from which his gaze attempts to command the city and the churches that command his gaze. Even in his nostalgic remembrances of his and Medellín’s past these spaces are exercising control over him.

From the “atalaya” of the rooftop, it is Ovidio who acts as Fernando’s guide to the “veinte barrios” of the city that stretches before them. It is thus that Fernando comes to associate each of these neighborhoods with one of his uncle’s girlfriends. The narrator explains;

Veinte novias tuvo Ovidio, en los veinte barrios de Medellín . . . Una novia era tuerta, otra coja, otra desbalanceada . Una nariguda y otra chata. A una le sobraba orejas y a otra le faltaban. La de Manrique: despechada; la de Buenos Aires: semiciega; la del barrio san Cristóbal: despiernada. Cada cual, a su modo, más fea que las otras. Juntas sumaban toda la fealdad del mundo, pero novias al fin. (29)

This description of a Medellín embodied by Ovidio’s sexual partners is highly ambivalent.

María Teresa Zubiaurre explains; “dominar, con la vista, un panorama es, en primer lugar, una ostentación de poder, una forma de conquista, antesala muchas veces de otras colonizaciones y apropiaciones violentas,” and “no es de extrañar que la conquista de una ciudad se haya equiparado en tan numerosas ocasiones con la conquista de una mujer” (119). The temporal link between Fernando’s description of his panoramic view of the city and his association of the

different areas of the city with his uncle's various lovers demonstrates a similar link between visual and sexual conquest. This link in turn would appear to reinforce the traditional realist use of "esa visión panorámica que restablece el orden, dibujando, ya sea desde las Alturas o desde la lejanía abarcadora, un paisaje 'completo,' en armonía con su entorno" (Zubiaurre 106). A form of visual and sexual dominance places the narrator and his uncle in a position of power and comfort that corresponds to the depiction of the city of Fernando's youth as idyllic.

Nevertheless, that Ovidio's girlfriends are marked by their disfigurement and often more specifically the absence of functional body parts indicates that this landscape is anything but "un paisaje 'completo'." In his article, "Representations of the City in the Narrative of Fernando Vallejo," Rory O'Bryen references De Certeau in his analysis of the image of nephew and son gazing down upon the city, remarking that "height reduces the city's density to the two-dimensionality of the image, a 'world-view' that rigidly spatializes relations between self and other" (198). O'Bryen continues to state that Ovidio presents this "spatialization of otherness – and corresponding mapping of power in terms of an economy of desire" where "sexuality becomes a locus through which to plot relations of social inclusion and exclusion as the otherness of each peripheral suburb is embodied as a deformed sexual object" (198). These women are "others" who should be excluded from Fernando's vision of the idyllic space of his youth. Thus, despite the fact that Fernando and his uncle place themselves in a position of power over these women both spatially and in terms of class, the extreme marginality of Ovidio's girlfriends and the intensely negative depiction of them makes their symbolic connection to the neighborhoods of Medellín indicative of an urban space that is already in the midst of a physical and moral decay.

Given the narrator's homosexuality and expressed misogyny, however, it is important to note that these spatial relations of power and otherness are not simply inscribed onto the bodies of "sexual objects" but rather onto those of deformed women specifically. For the adult Fernando, women continue to embody an otherness that is repulsive and corrupting. This condemnation of women<sup>26</sup> is far more overtly violent than the portrayal of them as "agentes pasivos e intercambiables" typical of the nineteenth-century realist novel (Zubiaurre 119). In *La virgen de los sicarios*, Fernando admits, "para mí las mujeres era como si no tuvieran alma," and goes on to tell his adolescent lover, Alexis, "es que estudié con los curitas salesianos del colegio de Sufragio. Con ellos aprendí que la relación carnal con las mujeres es pecado de la bestialidad, que es cuando se cruza un miembro de una especie con otro de otra" (18). Thus, all women, deformed or not, represent a soulless and inhuman otherness to the narrator, and despite the humor and irony of the statement, this intolerance and feeling of superiority towards women stems from the narrator's childhood rather than being a product of the expressly decadent and violent contemporary society. As Héctor D. Fernández L'Hoeste remarks,

La cita sirve, no sólo para ventilar la homosexualidad encubierta, sino también para denunciar el dictamen desigual ratificado por la Iglesia, según el cual la mujer queda relegada a un papel de segundo nivel. A raíz de la intolerancia fomentada por sus feligreses, la Iglesia, o por lo menos, las injusticias penetradas en su nombre, comparte buena parte de la responsabilidad del descalabro social. (764)

In light of the intense criticism of the Church present in Vallejo's works and particularly in *La virgen de los sicarios*, L'Hoeste's assessment is quite apt. It is important to note, however, that, seeing as the Church and its churches occupy positions of power (spatial and symbolic) both in

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<sup>26</sup> Throughout the entirety of Vallejos' *autoficciones*, the only woman that the narrator shows any true affection is his grandmother. All other women are portrayed with varying degrees of disdain, misogyny and violence.

Fernando's childhood and adult lives, the partial responsibility that the Church holds for the disaster that Medellín has become stems from the period of the narrator's supposedly idyllic childhood if not earlier. Additionally, through his continued acceptance of such intolerant dogma and his ironic attempt to twist this intolerance to fit his own agenda, namely the validation of his homosexuality, Fernando himself shares in the blame.

Given Fernando's explicit and seldom contradictory disparaging of women, the gendering of the city space becomes highly meaningful. In *El fuego secreto*, Fernando contemplates this very subject. When describing the prolific homosexual conquests of his friend, he remarks, "De chisme en chisme, de calle en calle, de barrio en barrio, iba el nombre de Jesús Lopera como un incendio por la escandalizada Medellín. ¿O escandalizado? Aún no se sabe si es hombre o mujer. Con las ciudades, como con las personas, a veces pasa así" (9). This statement plays with the overall theme of homosexuality explored in this novel detailing Fernando's sexual coming of age. Nevertheless, given the tradition of viewing the city as a woman to be conquered, such a comment becomes quite laden with complicated and often conflicting interpretations. To question the city's gender is to question its ability to be dominated. Yet, the context of the quote urges the reader to challenge the heteronormative values which historically present sexual conquest as that of a man over a woman. However, that all of Medellín is scandalized by Chucho Lopera's escapades would associate the city itself with these more traditional values. In Fernando's world-view, were the city to be fully female would place it in a distinctly negative light. Thus, the confused gender of the city reflects Fernando's confused sentiments towards it and interpretations of it. Fernando ponders the city's gender in his present while discussing his past, indicating that this ambivalence toward Medellín exists in both time periods.

The prolific sexual exploits of Chucho Lopera also serve as a bridge between the sexualization of Medellín in the narrator's childhood by means of Ovidio's girlfriends and the sexualization of the *comunas* via the narrator's desire for the *sicarios* who inhabit these marginalized communities in his later adult life. *El fuego secreto* chronicles Fernando's life as a young man, forming a midpoint between these two time periods. In this novel, Fernando describes Chucho Lopera's notebook, in which he writes the name of every boy he has had sexual relations with and where they met. The list thus reads as a sexual map of the city: "A Manuelito Echevarría la había conocido en el colegio San Ignacio de los padres Jesuitas, y a Hernando Elejalde en un liceo del gobierno. A otro en una iglesia, a otro en un terminal de camiones, a otro en el Metropol . . ." (10-11). The city's religious, educational, governmental, infrastructural, and recreational places, which in conjunction form a representation of the entire public space of the city, become synonymous with spaces of sexual desire.

However, whereas Ovidio's girlfriends and the neighborhoods they represent were a clear representation of marginality and otherness, Chucho Lopera's many lovers occupy a more contradictory place in society. While they could be considered "others" due to their homosexuality (or in some cases simply their willingness to have sex with Chucho for whatever reason), seeing as Fernando is a strong advocate of homosexuality, the narrator does not ascribe to these males the same sense of subalternity and otherness as he does to Ovidio's lovers for their condition as women and as disfigured. In reference to Chucho's list of sexual partners, Fernando remarks, "todos, todos los nombres, simples y compuestos, y los apellidos antioqueños iban desfilando por las páginas de esa libreta" (11). Here, the emphasis is on inclusion rather than exclusion. Not only are all names represented, but these names are characteristic of the region, giving the people to whom they belong a sense of pertinence rather than marginality. In fact,



Chucho's goal is to sleep with all fifty thousand inhabitants of Medellín who he deems "aprovechables," for "de esos no descartaba ninguno: alguna cualidad les veía, del cuerpo o del espíritu" (11). In a way, Chucho, through his extreme promiscuity, creates an accepting, diverse, and all-embracing community of lovers and maps this community onto the spaces of the city through his detailed list of meeting places. Thus, the possibility of a positive manner of spatializing interpersonal relationships mediated by desire arises.

Nevertheless, this relatively inclusive community is based on the objectification of people, negating the possibility of any deeper bonds of identification between the inhabitants of Medellín, and once again discrediting any idealized vision of the past state of the city. Those who Chucho considers to be "aprovechable" are only males between eleven and twenty years of age. While he can see special qualities in all the adolescent and young males of Medellín, adult men "ya no sirven" (11). The very choice of the word "aprovechable" connotes more than simple availability, but rather the ability to be used or taken advantage of. Chucho's book is more of an accounting record than a sentimental memento. "Los ajenos, vacíos nombres de la libreta" (11) are dehumanizing, and, like Ovidio's panoramic map of power relations as expressed through sexual conquests, create a two dimensional spatial scheme of distance and possession. Chucho first possesses these boys sexually, and then does so again by writing their names and associated locations in his book, an act which transforms them into distant and empty others. The sexualization of the city space embodied in Chucho's adolescent male partners can be construed as more inclusive than the extreme social marginalization inscribed on the bodies of Ovidio's female sexual conquests, yet it is nonetheless far from idyllic.

In his adulthood, Fernando continues to most strongly associate female sexuality with what he sees as the downfall of Medellín. He asserts that the problem of poverty is caused, or at

least exacerbated by the high birthrate amongst the poor, and places the majority of the responsibility for this high birthrate on poor women, as they are the actual bearers of these, to him, unwanted children. Fernando argues,

¿Cuál es la ley del mundo sino que de una pareja de pobres nazcan cinco o diez? La pobreza se autogenera multiplicada por dichas cifras y después, cuando agarra fuerza se propaga como un incendio en progresión geométrica. Mi fórmula para acabar con ella no es hacerles casa a los que la padecen y se empeñan en no ser ricos: es cianurarles de una vez por todas el agua y listo; sufren un ratico pero dejan de sufrir años. Lo demás es alcahuetería de la paridera. El pobre es el culo de nunca parar y la vagina insaciable. (*La virgen de los sicarios* 68)

While Fernando speaks of poverty and the poor in general, including men in his analysis of “una pareja de pobres,” his derisive references to “la paridera” and “la vagina insaciable” place the blame for urban poverty and the consequent decadence of the urban space squarely on the shoulders of what is for him the ultimate other: the sexualized and impoverished woman. Yet, seeing as even in his childhood he associated Medellín with female sexuality, a sexuality that he had been taught to view as filthy and immoral, this manner of conceptualizing urban abjection establishes a continuous connection between the city of his childhood and the contemporary urban space rather than a break between a peaceful and unspoiled past and a degraded present.

Such violent invective on the part of the narrator has led some critics to classify him as a fascist.<sup>27</sup> Both O’Byrne and Polit Dueñas attribute this perceived fascism to Fernando’s nostalgia. O’Byrne maintains that, “in spite of its ostensible subversion, the narrator’s voice, like the crumbling architectural forms of the city centre, represents the spectral survival of an

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<sup>27</sup> See Mario Correa Tascón’s article, “Vallejo, Poeta del Racismo” and Jean Franco’s *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*.

outdated social order that actively refuses to come to terms with change. In this sense it may legitimately be said to be ‘fascist’” (201).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Polit Dueñas asserts that Fernando is marked by “su nostalgia por un Medellín que dejó de existir cuando la invasión de las comunas,” and that “hay en la construcción de ese pasado personal idílico, la manifestación de una nostalgia de clase que está presente como un residuo cultural, como remanencia del privilegio del hombre letrado” (130). Pablo Montoya argues, “en el caso de Vallejo hay un claro anarquismo de derecha, sesgado por el racismo, que abomina de todos los procesos de transformación social dados en Colombia y en América Latina” (10). These critics assert that Fernando is nostalgic for a level of class, privilege and power, an “outdated social order” and “residuo cultural” that no longer exists in contemporary Medellín. Yet the death of this class, the “change” to which O’Bryen and Montoya refer, is simply an exacerbation of the already severe cracks in the social fabric of the city that Fernando himself sees in his childhood. Even Montoya recognizes the contradiction in Vallejo’s “fascist” nostalgia when he remarks that the author demonstrates both a need to “ensalzar un paraíso, una especie de patria, un jardín perdido que se ubica en la infancia del escritor,” and an equally pressing desire to “derrumbar, atacándolos, los valores de esa Antioquia goda” (14).<sup>29</sup> These are values that, while partially shared by the narrator, lead to the very destruction of Medellín that he denounces. Thus, this “change” is not as drastic as either the critics or the narrator make it out to be.

Furthermore, Fernando sees in his own past, family and social class the same problems that he attributes to the poor. In *El desbarrancadero*, he expresses a deep-seated anger and resentment toward his own mother for her reproductive role. He claims to have discovered the

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<sup>28</sup> Despite O’Bryen’s concession on this point regarding Fernando’s supposed fascism, his overall argument is that, through exaggeration and repetition, the narrator’s discourse subverts itself. Thus, Vallejo’s work “can also be read as a demonstration of how the fascist’s discourse will ultimately undermine itself through its own excess” (203).

<sup>29</sup> Montoya does actually use the word fascist when describing Vallejo’s work. He states, “la obra de Vallejo está permeada por un furor racista que lo sitúa como el último escritor fascista de Colombia” (19).

gran secreto de las madres de Antioquia: paren al primer hijo, le limpian el culo, y lo entrenan para que les limpie el culo al segundo, al tercero, al cuarto, al quinto, al decimosexto, que encargándose exclusivamente de la reproducción ellas paren. Así procedió la Loca y yo, el primogénito, que no era mujer sino hombre, varón con pene, terminé de niñera de mis veinte hermanos mientras la devota se entregaba en cuerpo y alma, con la determinación del funicular que sube Monserrate, a propagar su sacro molde.

(57)

Fernando disdains all mothers, not just impoverished ones. Just as he impugned the poor for their constant need to procreate, so he vilifies his own mother for solely occupying herself with “la reproducción.” In referencing his mother’s constant drive to breed as well as the necessity that someone “les limpie el culo” of his ever-growing family, the narrator is clearly including them in the classification of “el culo de nunca parar y la vagina insaciable” that he ascribes to the poor in *La virgen de los sicarios*. Nevertheless, his mother and siblings pertain to the “outdated social order” and privileged class that the narrator supposedly idealizes and clings to through his nostalgia.

This depiction of his mother as representative of Medellín or of Antioquia as a whole does, however, fall in line with his childhood association between disfigured women and the urban environment as expressed in *Los días azules*. By referring to his mother as “la Loca,” as the insane woman, he is ascribing to her an identity that would easily fall in amongst those of the twenty deformed girlfriends of Ovidio who embody the twenty decaying neighborhoods of the city. Therefore, rather than stressing the differences between his own family and upbringing in an upper-class environment and the situation of the marginalized urban poor in the contemporary *comunas* of Medellín, Fernando connects the two. In *La virgen de los sicarios*, he explicitly

states, “ni en Medellín ni en Colombia hay inocentes; aquí todo él que existe es culpable, y si se reproduce más” (83). Despite his caveat about the evils of reproduction, Fernando’s anger is not directly solely at the poor, but rather at all of the institutions and residents of the city that from his childhood to the present have contributed to its ruin.

With a great deal of irony, Fernando continues to explore this concept in *El fuego secreto* when, upon seeing two poor young boys playing in the rain, he remarks,

oh si en el limpio mar de la inocencia, donde chapotean este par de hijueputicas,  
sucumbiera mi frágil barquita. . . Y no es la demagogia del partido liberal la que habla,  
qué va, es el amor ecuménico de la Iglesia, que comparto yo: en mi amplio corazón sin  
distinciones caben todas las razas y condiciones sociales, con tal de que no pasen a los  
veinte años. (80)

The narrator’s irony goes beyond that of professing both the innocence of and his love for two children while calling them “hijueputicas,” and of insisting on his great love for all with the significant exception of their having to be young. The strong sexual innuendo of Fernando’s “boat” succumbing to temptation in these children’s waters, an innuendo heightened by the narrator’s declaration of ageism, also belies any innocence in this statement. Fernando here manages to lay blame on both the liberal party and the Church for the societal corruption he describes. The liberals are but demagogues with no compassion for others, while the Church shares in Fernando’s less than chaste passion. His inclusion of the liberal party further implicates the Conservative party as being uncompassionate, for, while the liberal party may be all talk, the Conservative party is likely omitted because they do not even go so far as to claim sympathy with and charity for the poor and the marginalized. An additional layer of irony becomes apparent when we consider that, just as Fernando affirms his love for all people as long

as they are less than twenty years of age, the Church's "ecumenical love" is often exclusionary of homosexuals such as Fernando himself. Thus, while Fernando highlights the hypocrisy of political actors and the Church, by association, he also admits his own, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Despite some critic's assertion that Fernando attempts to distance himself from any blame in the collapse of his society, with regards to those on the fringe of society he demonstrates himself to be no more nor less "fascist" than the rest of his community.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless and despite his sarcastic tone, in his sexualization of all youths, the narrator does demonstrate a belief in a type of equality amongst the races and classes, calling into question the sincerity of any professed desire on his part to violently target one group of people.

Fernando even extends the purportedly "fascist" violent fantasies that he proposes as solutions for the urban problem to his own family. His anger and resentment toward his mother is so strong that he lusts to take "las medidas drásticas que el caso amerita: como un juguito de naranja con banano espolvoreado con azúcar, con amor, con devoción, con alma, y una pizca de cianuro eficaz" (*El desbarrancadero* 62). Just as the narrator proposes cyanide poisoning as a solution to end the suffering of the urban poor in *La virgen de los sicarios*, with the same breed of ironic affection he would poison his own mother in *El desbarrancadero*, and for much the same reasons. Thus, Fernando's expressed hatred toward the poor falls more in line with Joset's analysis of the character's purported racism.<sup>31</sup> Joset cites the following passage from *El desbarrancadero* as proof that "el racismo deja paso a la misantropía y el antihumanismo" (56):

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<sup>30</sup> Margarita Jacomé asserts "Al liberarse de culpa como 'hombre invisible', el narrador -letrado se muestra a sí mismo como marginado de una sociedad responsable de la injusticias sociales que consumen el país" (103).

<sup>31</sup> While the author's political views have been the subject of much debate due to the semi-autobiographical nature of his work, I must agree with critic Rory O'Bryen when he states, "Whilst readers such as Tascón and Franco imply that his writing is simply a platform from which to impart a 'fascist' programme, I shall suggest that the search for the author's 'real' opinions is unimportant" (196).

Y que quede claro para terminar con este asunto que los demagogos obnubilados tacharon de ‘racista’, que yo a los negros heroinómanos de Nueva York no los odio ni por negros ni por heroinómanos ni por ser de Nueva York, sino por su condición humana.

Unos seres así no tienen el derecho de existir. (182)

In much the same manner, the narrator’s apparent classism has less to do with social standing, upbringing, and wealth than with a general disgust for human nature and the human condition. Fernando’s youngest brother, who he calls “el Gran Güevon, el semiengendro” (*El desbarrancadero* 9) and his mother are from the same social class as himself, and yet his diatribes against them are just as vicious as those against the poor.

Fernando’s hatred for his mother in part stems from the dominance that she exercises over him as a child as well as what he sees as her profligate reproduction, both of which are again expressed in spatial terms. In *El desbarrancadero*, Lia’s ability to assert special control through height is firmly established. Almost immediately upon entering his mother’s house, Fernando remarks, “y mire hacia arriba, hacia la planta alta donde estaba la bestia. Asomada estaba a la ventana de la biblioteca que daba al jardín, atalayando al mundo: desde hacía quince o veinte años no bajaba la escalera para no tener que volver a subir” (22). In referring to his mother as “la bestia,” his disdain for her is apparent. This classification of her is also right in line with his claim that to him it is as if women “no tuvieran alma” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 18). Nevertheless, to liken her to an animal of any sort demonstrates a certain amount of sympathy, as Fernando clearly and explicitly prefers animals to people and considers his dog to be his most loveable companion. This slight contradiction in Fernando’s opinion of his mother can also be seen in her position on the top floor of the house which she has turned into her watchtower from which to scrutinize the world below her, possessing and controlling her

surroundings via her gaze. Fernando's intensely negative depiction of his mother lends a sense of a malign need for power to her continued occupancy of this high ground.

However, despite Fernando's insinuation that Lía prefers her perch on high out of laziness, never leaving it so as to never have to climb back up the stairs, that she has been confined to the top story of her house for over a decade questions her position of power. Her refusal to leave that space may be due more to a physical or mental restriction or inability than a domineering or indolent personality. Viewed in this context, Lía's confinement provides an opposite image to that of Fernando occupying his prison-cum-watchtower in *El fuego secreto*. Both images combine contradictory concepts of height, power and imprisonment. Yet, whereas Fernando defies those who seek to imprison him by viewing his cell as a lookout from which to dominate the world (176), he describes Lía as dominating her surroundings from her watchtower when this tower may very well be more of a prison from which she can only look out on her surroundings while lacking the agency to truly interact with them. Following the long tradition of linking women to the domestic space, Lía has not left her home in fifteen to twenty years. The boundary between her controlling this space and her being controlled by it has, however, become completely blurred.

As an adult revisiting his family home, Fernando's mother has little control over him or over his actions, and yet he still spatializes her presence in terms of his perceived domination by her, expressing a continued belief in her authoritarian nature from his past into his present. As a child, he believed himself to be emasculated in his role as a caretaker while "la devota se entregaba en cuerpo y alma, con la determinación del funicular que sube Monserrate" to her reproductive activities (*El debarrancadero* 57). Fernando once again metaphorically places his mother in a position of height, climbing up to one of the most famous vista points in all of



Colombia. She is removed from the chaos in a location from which to order or control it, yet according to Fernando she is also a contributing factor to this chaos. This ambivalent attitude echoes the disposition that Fernando displays towards the Church. Monserrate is not only a look-out point, but also a traditional sight of religious pilgrimage and home to the sanctuary of “El Señor Caído de Monserrate.” The religious implications of his mother’s metaphoric journey to this site are heightened by the narrator’s references to her devotion and her soul. Thus, Fernando links his mother’s problematic fecundity to the Catholic faith and a particular site of worship. The narrator consequently implicates the Church in general, and Church dogma concerning women’s reproductive roles more specifically, in Colombia’s contemporary social and urban decay. The two institutions which form the cornerstones of Fernando’s childhood existence, family, as represented by Fernando’s mother, and Church occupy a place of height and dominance through the panoramic concept, while at the same time acting as underlying causes of the degradation and chaos occurring below.

The distortion of the controlled panoramic gaze found in the traditional realist novel reaches its apogee in *La virgen de los sicarios* when Fernando describes the economically marginalized communities of the *comunas* in the hills surrounding Medellín. He states,

Sí señor, Medellín son dos en uno; desde arriba nos ven y desde abajo los vemos... Yo propongo que siga llamando Medellín a la ciudad de abajo, y que se deje su alias para la de arriba: Medallo... ¿Y qué hace Medellín por Medallo? Nada, canchas de fútbol, en terraplenes elevados, excavados en la montaña, con muy bonita vista (nosotros), panorámica... (84-85)

Here the narrator once again casts part of the city and its inhabitants into the category of the other, separating Medellín from the “Medallo” of the *comunas* that he depicts as having invaded

the idealized space of his youth, “pesando sobre la ciudad como su desgracia” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 28). The relative affluence of Fernando’s nostalgic “Medellín” in comparison to the extreme poverty of the mountain communities of “Medallo” would generally lead to the situating of “Medellín” in a position of power over “Medallo.” The narrator implies that the inhabitants of the lower city have a responsibility to help the residents of the upper one in order to ameliorate the social ills that both groups face, criticizing the “ciudad de abajo” for doing “nada... para la de arriba.” Thus, Fernando implicates the more affluent citizens of Medellín, a group that would include himself and his family, for exacerbating the problems about which they constantly complain and ascribe to the poorer denizens of the city. This discourse, however, suggests a paternalistic relationship between the two groups where the “lower city” is in a position of authority over their neighbors higher up in the mountains.

Nevertheless, the *comunas* have the panoramic vista of the older city below, occupying a traditional space of dominance. This dominance is not simply a metaphoric spatial anomaly rooted in the topography of the landscape, but also a lived condition. While the residents of the *comunas*, most notably the *sicarios* with whom Fernando has his affairs, appear to travel freely between the two areas of the city, the narrator insists that “cristiano común y corriente como usted y yo no puede subir a esos barrios sin la escolta de un batallón” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 31). The *comunas* hold a certain degree of power through brute force and thus become inaccessible to outsiders. In the context of the gendering of the city space, the name “Medallo” takes on more significance. Whereas Fernando muses that the gender of Medellín is undetermined, “Medallo” is distinctly male. In the context of both traditional values and of Fernando’s rampant misogyny, this gendering lends the upper city of Medallo a degree of power consistent with the use of violence and freedom of movement through the public space.

Fernando not only genders the space of the *comunas*, but he sexualizes it as well. Speaking of these marginal communities, Fernando remarks, “las he visto, soñando, meditado desde las terrazas de mi apartamento, dejando que su alma asesina y lujuriosa se apodere de mí” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 30). Fernando sexualizes the *comunas*, stating that the soul of these communities is marked not only by violence but also by lust. Nevertheless, given the character of the narrator’s sexual relationships with poor adolescent boys from the *comunas*, Fernando would appear to be the lustful one holding the majority of the power. Alexis acts as the tangible object of the narrator’s sexual appetites and the embodiment of the “alma asesina y lujuriosa” of the *comunas*. Shortly after Fernando’s ruminations on the *comunas* from his balcony, he asks Alexis, “Señálame, niño, tu barrio, ¿cuál es?” ¿Es acaso Santo Domingo Savio? O El Popular, o La Salle, o Villa del Socorro, o La Francia? Cualquiera, inalcanzable, entre esas luces allá a lo lejos” (31). The narrator links Alexis to his sexualized characterization of the *comunas*, while at the same time, his use of “niño” to designate Alexis underscores the narrator’s position of dominance within the relationship.

Fernando’s contradictory assessment of the *comunas* as being both powerful and powerless, a phenomenon applicable to their sexualized nature as well as to their marginalization and capacity for violence, is here coupled with another spatial contradiction inherent to the dirty realist genre, that of a space steeped in local detail yet awash in the homogenizing effects of postmodern culture. The narrator insistently focuses on the naming of the specific *comunas* and thus highlights the unambiguous nature of the setting of the works in Medellín. Nevertheless, he simultaneously negates the differences between these spaces with his assertion that it doesn’t really matter which one is Alexis’s home. These specific named spaces are nebulous and intangible. Marc Augé cites De Certeau’s observation that “names create non-place in the

places” (69), emphasizing the idea that in naming a place, it becomes nothing more than a point on a map or a place to travel through, losing its tangible ties to culture and identity. While much of Augé’s theorization of the non-place is concerned with the material trappings of post-modern consumer culture, he also includes spaces of abject poverty and marginality, spaces such as the *comunas*, in his analysis. He states that non-places abound in a world where “temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shanty towns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity)” (63). The interchangeability of these named “shanty-towns” due to their similar “inhuman conditions” includes these spaces in the realm of the non-place. Yet the narrator insists on their particularities via their naming in addition to their amorphous nature as non-place. This attitude demonstrates the ambiguity of the dirty realist space posited by Jameson in the *Seeds of Time* when he states that North American dirty realists evoke a “persistence of a distinctive regional or urban social life about which everything else in our experience testifies that it has already long since disappeared” (148-9). The narrator’s nostalgia for the unique Medellín of his youth that he claims is lost in present day Medellín would at first blush appear to support the notion that such “distinctive regional” identity has “long since disappeared.” Nevertheless, the narrator insists on the particularities of present day Medellín. Thus, the contradiction inherent in Fernando’s false nostalgia for an era no less marginalizing or violent than the present is paralleled by the distinctly dirty realist contradiction of the persistence and loss of unique regional characteristics. This in turn parallels Fernando’s contradictory attitude toward the power dynamic between the *comunas* and the rest of the city as embodied in his relationship with the young *sicarios* from these spaces.

The scene in which Fernando’s friend José Antonio introduces Alexis to Fernando first establishes this slanted structure of sexuality and power between city and *comuna*, Fernando and

his lovers. Fernando remarks, “¿a quién sino a él le da por regalar muchachos que es lo más valioso? ‘Los muchachos no son de nadie – dice él - , son de quien los necesita’” (12). Polit Dueñas uses this evidence to draw a well-founded connection between Fernando’s sexual use and dehumanization of these adolescent male “gifts” and the idea that these boys are also used as objects by the drug traffickers who treat them as expendable assets in their work as assassins for hire (129). Fernando forms part of a power structure that objectifies the *sicarios*, although in his case it is via his own sexual desires. Yet, Fernando inverts this power structure, stating that it is the *comunas* that are taking control of his person rather than the other way around when he asserts, “su alma asesina y lujuriosa se apodere de mí” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 30).

This inversion in power is mirrored by an inversion in height and the panoramic gaze when making this statement. Despite the similarities between Fernando’s balcony and the rooftop of his childhood home, in this instance, the position of height that Fernando occupies does not allow him a panoramic view of the city, as this height is subsumed by the heights of the *comunas* on the mountains even farther up. Fernando’s gaze is thus directed upward rather than below. Through their supposed monopoly on violence, the *comunas* manifest their physical position of dominance and take a form of control over the city below and its residents, as represented by the narrator himself. Thus, the violent and marginalized population of the poorer areas of the city, a population which Fernando sees as the very problem that faces the city, has paradoxically risen to a position of potency and strength, enacting a distortion of the traditional spatial organization of power associated with the panoramic gaze and the distance provided by height. This distortion is compounded by the contradiction inherent in Fernando’s implication that the current situation is due to inaction on the part of those residents of lower Medellín, the objects of the domineering panoramic gaze in question. Yet this contradiction becomes

somewhat resolved when we take into consideration the fact that the “alma” of the *comunas* only exercises control over Fernando because he allows it to do so, “dejando” que “se apodere de mi.” Fernando thusly takes on some responsibility for himself, and by extension the traditional space of Medellín that he inhabits, in succumbing to brutal violence and to lustful desire for the acquisition of human and material “gifts” as represented by the *sicarios* and the tumultuous space of the *comunas* that they inhabit.

The partial inversion of the power structure associated with spaces of height and the combination of both degradation and power that Fernando comes to relate to these spaces is not characteristic only of the corrupted and abased Medellín of the narrator’s middle-aged life, but rather is a dynamic that he helps to construct in his supposedly ideal youth. In *El fuego secreto*, Fernando recounts how he would take young boys up into the mountains to engage in sexual activities in an area where they could “escrutar el panorama” (220). He explains these trips in the following manner:

¿Pero a qué demonios acarrear las víctimas (quiero decir muchachos) tan arriba en la montaña? ¿No era demasiado excéntrico del designio? Así es, en efecto, usted lo ha dicho: “excéntrico”, fuera del centro. Los sacábamos a la periferia para cortarles todo vínculo con lo conocido, para aligerarlos del tabú, de la ciudad, de ropa. Subir a lo más alto para caer a lo más bajo, diría un moral antigua. (219-220)

The inversion of the “morally elevated” and the “morally base” is expressed in spatial terms. What from the height of the mountain is a liberation from the restrictions of Medellín’s provincial society would be considered corrupt or “taboo” down below. For Fernando, this height once again provides power: power in the form of freedom from what he views as an outdated moral order and power over his “victims.” Looking down on the city below, the

narrator breaks free of its domination and imposes his own moral viewpoint. The power that his partners gain from this height is more questionable, for whatever liberties they may gain they are still “victims” under Fernando’s control.

While the mountain here described does not likely occupy the same physical space as the *comunas* surrounding Medellín, it does form an analogous symbolic space, as Fernando allows for many parallels to be drawn between the two. Several critics have noted that the structure of *La virgen de los sicarios* evokes a reverse journey to hell where the upper region of the *comunas* takes the place of the underworld.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the usage of the expression “a qué demonios” associates the height of the mountains outlying Medellín in Fernando’s youth with demons or devils and the underworld. Moreover, both the *comunas* and this mountaintop occupy positions of height and are sexualized or associated with intercourse. Both are marked by conflicting notions of power, for they (as representative of their inhabitants) are in some regards marginalized and in others dominant. Just as the poor and uneducated residents of the *comunas* are social “others” denied power by the social structure while simultaneously taking on a different kind of power through violence, so the “muchachos” that Fernando takes up to the mountains with him in his youth are social outcasts due to their sexual orientation, are helpless victims of Fernando’s predatory sexuality, and at the same time demonstrate the power to break with social convention and a restrictive moral code. In both cases, Fernando admits culpability in the creation of these contradictory spaces. He allows the *comunas* a degree of control over his person and indirectly includes himself when placing the blame for the marginality of these areas on the failings of the traditional social order. Similarly, it is he that brings the boys up into the

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<sup>32</sup> See Héctor D. Fernández L’Hoeste’s article “*La Virgen de los Sicarios* o los visiones dantescas de Fernando Vallejo” and Gabriela Polít Dueñas’ “Sicarios, delirantes y los efectos del narcotráfico en la literatura colombiana” for analyses of the parallels between *La virgen de los sicarios* and Dante’s *Inferno*.

mountains and forces them into a sexual liberation or what the older established order would call moral degradation.

What Fernando creates as a positive space that he looks back on with great nostalgia, when taken to an extreme, results in the violent chaos that he abhors. The traditional provincial society that he attempts to present as idyllic is the very same society whose restrictive morality he denominates as “antigua.” It is from this society that, in his youth, he seeks to escape to the freedom provided by the height of the mountains. Yet this same idea of a community removed from the center of Medellín by height, and where this “moral antigua” is shed in favor of a supposed amorality or a moral code of the inhabitants of this space’s own making can be applied to the *comunas* that Fernando blames for the city’s downfall. Thus, once again, it becomes apparent that nostalgia warps the narrator’s vision of the Medellín of his youth, poorly attempting to conceal the deep running social divisions and inequalities that not only lead to the current state of decadence that the city is experiencing, but that additionally caused the narrator himself to feel restricted or marginalized in his youth, and that he himself criticizes throughout the texts.

As Gastón Alzate remarks, when faced with the brutal decadence of contemporary Medellín, Fernando’s response “es la huida hacia otras realidades estéticas e históricas que se sitúan en el ambiguo territorio de su infancia... Todos ellos son espacios míticos marginales que constituyen utopías efímeras y sin futuro” (12). In order to construct this esthetic utopia, the narrator utilizes the traditional spatial tropes of the realist novel, namely the miniature and the watchtower or vista point. Yet these spaces are mythic not only in the symbolic sense but in that they are fictitious, flawed and ephemeral constructions of a narrator not unaware of the falsity of these creations. Therefore, Fernando simultaneously constructs and deconstructs the utopic



spaces of his youth, revealing these spaces to be inextricably linked to the spaces of the reality of present day Medellín.

#### 4. Home and Church: Restructuring Traditional Spaces of Socialization

An analysis of the two dominant spatial axes of Fernando's childhood, the domestic space of the home and the space of the church, demonstrates that the narrator's depiction of the present is equally as conflicted and contradictory as his depiction of the past. Whereas Fernando ostensibly presents the Medellín of his childhood as ideal while in actuality describing a space governed by traditional social values that are both marginalizing and destructive, he purports to abhor the violent and impoverished Medellín of his present while exhibiting affection and awe for much of the culture born in and of this violence. The evacuation of traditional meaning from the identity forming spaces of home and church is accepted and even welcomed by the narrator who sees these spaces as symbolic of the "moral antigua" that is in large part to blame for the current state of decadence to which Medellín has fallen. Thus, despite the obvious and grave problems presented by the culture of the *sicario*, insofar as this culture represents a partial rejection of what Fernando sees as problematic traditional values, he is able to recognize some merit in it.

Given Fernando's general animosity towards women and towards his mother in particular, as well as his abhorrence of reproduction, it follows that he would place the conventional family structure and its corresponding domestic space in a decidedly negative light.

Even the supposedly idealized space of Santa Anita, his family's *finca* in Sabaneta and the refuge of his saintly grandmother, is plagued with problems. Villena Garrido asserts,

en los cuadros del recuerdo, los espacios privados están contruidos para acentuar el tránsito afectivo positivo del narrador. En este sentido, las representaciones de Santa Anita resultan más reveladoras del contexto utópico/utopístico del pasado vallejiano. Por el contrario, según el orden de la distopía se inserta en la cotidianidad, los espacios privados devienen tan negativos como el exterior. (87)

Yet despite the narrator's nostalgic statements, the space of Santa Anita is never truly utopic, indicating that Fernando is at least partially aware that his memories are a flawed representation of a false ideal that bears as much resemblance to the present as contrast with it. In *Los Días Azules*, Vallejo's chronicle of Fernando's childhood and thus the text that deals most profoundly with the space of Sabaneta, the initial description of Santa Anita mixes images of beauty and peace with those of danger and violence;

Al término del camino estaba la casa. Con sus amplios corredores de baldosas rojas, frescas, con sus piezas espaciosas, con sus techos altos, con sus anchos patios. Y en uno de los patios una enredadera frondosa, una bugambilia, un curazao para más precisión, por dónde se perdían, sinuosas, las culebras. Aunque a veces llegaba a tal su descaro que se metían en la casa. La abuela al amanecer, las mataba con un garrote torcido, goroveto, su bordón. (34)

Fernando describes the house in terms of its open spaciousness and freshness, linking this space to the patios and gardens that surround it. The inclusion of the lush climbing plant further heightens the conception of this space as one situated in the natural environment. This not only serves to distance Santa Anita from the decidedly urban Medellín but, in combination with the

narrator's nostalgia for the lost "utopia" of his past, transforms the *finca* into a sort of Garden of Eden. This is, however, paradise after the fall, for the serpent has already insinuated itself. Snakes literally invade this idealized space. It is significant that the narrator insists on associating these serpents with the *curazao* plant in particular, for, rather than the more general *bugambilia* that can be found throughout North and South America, the *curazao* is a distinctly Colombian name for this plant. Thus, the snake, a figure typically associated with betrayal and violence, occupies a specifically Colombian space, as if to indicate that these negative qualities were national characteristics present throughout Colombian history and tainting the supposedly utopic space of Fernando's childhood *finca*.

In this space, even his grandmother, who he describes with great affection, and who is the only female figure whom he regards as a positive force, demonstrates a capacity for violence. She does not simply protect her house by driving the snakes away but brutally kills them by beating them to death with her walking stick. Whereas Fernando regards his mother Lía with contempt for what he views as her excessive reproduction as well as for her perceived assault on his manhood, and whereas this antipathy towards his mother appears to extend toward womankind in general, the narrator always seems to exempt his grandmother from this disdain. This exemption is contradictory, seeing as his grandmother too had many children. In the aforementioned description of Santa Anita, the domestic space associated with his beloved grandmother, Fernando also hints at the possibility of her power to demasculinize. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud asserts that the snake is a phallic symbol, a representation of male virility and sexuality. When applied to the image of Fernando's grandmother killing the snakes in her home, this interpretation reveals the grandmother as a threat to his manhood, or to masculinity in general. Moreover, due to the traditional gendering of the domestic space as

female, and seeing as the grandmother kills the serpents in the act of protecting this space, it is possible to extrapolate that the domestic space in and of itself is an emasculating one.

Elsewhere, Vallejo further explores the emasculating nature of the domestic space of Santa Anita in his quintessentially satirical fashion. In *El fuego secreto*, Fernando recalls an incident where his brother, Darío, arrives at Santa Anita with a car full of young men and one rather elegantly dressed young woman named María Cristina, who later reveals herself to be Alvarito Restrepo, one of Fernando's lovers, in drag. In order to be welcomed into Santa Anita by Fernando's grandmother, this young man literally sheds his male identity and adopts a female one. Speaking with Fernando's grandmother and great aunt, María Cristina complements the space indicating, "que Santa Anita era una delicia." After a short while, "compenetradas como vecinas de toda una vida, hablaban de macetas, de curas, de sirvientas, de recetas" (85). Amongst these "women," the topics of conversation, with the exception of priests, all revolve around the domestic space, reinforcing the notion of this space as one directly linked to a feminine identity and thus in some way threatening to a traditionally masculine identity.

When María Cristina finds a private moment with Fernando, she guides him down the hallway and makes sexual advances towards him. Fernando at this point is still unaware of María Cristina's true identity and describes the scene as a type of assault. He states, "inmovilizada su víctima entre la pared y el muro, sin escapatoria, me aplicó un largo, sabio, y concienzudo beso que supo a cigarrillo" (85-86). Here Fernando is emasculated in the sense that not only is he sexually victimized and as such robbed of his power, but in addition because his "attacker" is at this moment believed to be female. Despite the complicating factor of María Cristina's true gender, in appearance, this is a scene of a woman stripping power away from a man. She is aided by the space of the house itself, for Fernando is trapped between the very

structural elements that define this space, the “pared” and the “muro.” Thus, once again, Santa Anita proves to be a space of emasculation.

When María Cristina finally leaves Santa Anita, the grandmother asks Fernando, “decíme una cosa muchacho, ¿nunca se te ha antojado casarte?” (86). She is hopeful at the possibility of a traditional lifestyle that her grandson’s apparent interest in María Cristina has aroused, a lifestyle based in the heterosexually normative space of the familial home. The obvious irony of this hope being based on a complete farce of gender identity and heterosexuality aside, the grandmother’s comment demonstrates her allegiance to these traditional values, values that Fernando criticizes with great vehemence.

In *El fuego secreto*, Fernando explores his non-conformity through his sexuality, but it is only in the domestic space that he keeps this exploration a secret. After a night of carousing, Fernando’s brother Darío shows him a way to sneak back into Santa Anita without attracting attention. The narrator remarks, “en ese instante, decidí convertir a esa entrada en una verdadera entrada secreta: a una vida secreta como dirían bajo el reinado de su graciosa Majestad Victoria los puritanos: secreta pero que me importaba un comino que se hiciera pública” (61). While within the public space Fernando frequents gay establishments and engages in homosexual activity in his car, his “cama ambulante,” yet in the private space of Santa Anita he keeps a secret entrance and a secret life. Both the public and private spaces of the Medellín of his past are governed by these “puritanical values,” but it is only in Santa Anita that he feels the need to hide his activities. Villena Garrido posits, “el narrador construye una identidad contestataria a partir de la utilización de los espacios públicos, como la cama ambulante, y otros necesariamente privados o semiprivados, como el palomar de Santa Anita” (61). Yet, while the critic believes the privacy of Santa Anita necessary due to the extremely violent hostility facing homosexuals in

the public space, I contend that, given Fernando's openly promiscuous behavior in public and the secrecy necessitated in private, this hostility is at least equally present in the traditional domestic space of Santa Anita. Thus, despite his love for her, Fernando's grandmother and her domestic space of Santa Anita are representative of the same abhorrent and "puritanical" values that Fernando ascribes to his mother and the spaces in Medellín most associated with her.

One such space is the house in the Boston neighborhood of Medellín where Fernando spent part of his childhood. Much like Santa Anita and its snakes, the Boston house also faces an invasion of pests: scorpions. "En las cuarteaduras de las paredes vivían los alacranes. Allí podían permanecer, vivos, sin comida, sin aire, sin agua, hasta veinte años" (*Los días azules* 25). As with the snakes at the *finca*, the scorpions also face violent attacks. Fernando and his siblings would force the scorpions out of their hiding spots and then surround them in a ring of paper that they would promptly light on fire. "Viéndose cercado de fuego por todas partes, el alacrán volvía su arma temible sobre sí mismo, y desesperado se daba muerte clavándose la ponzoña" (*Los días azules* 25). That the two domestic spaces of Santa Anita and the Boston house are inhabited by vermin is in and of itself evidence of the negative value ascribed to them by the narrator; however, the interpretation of such experiments with scorpions that Fernando supplies in *El fuego secreto* sheds more light on the relationship between these pests and the domestic space. He remarks, "Con este pecado de mi niñez, que en lo que me reste de días no alcanzaré a expiar, ahora lo sé, me estaba quemando el alma. Porque el alacrán es mi signo, signo de fuego" (100). Fernando associates himself with the scorpion. Like the scorpion he is able to "permanecer" in the stifling environment of his home for almost twenty years before leaving his family and Medellín. In light of Fernando's memories of his mother's complete lack of desire to cook for her family, the comparison between himself and the scorpion gains even more credence.

Fernando recalls that after feeding her family nothing but sausages for two or three years, “Lía descubrió que el ser humano podía vivir sin ellas. Esto es: sin comer. Entonces dejamos de comer” (*Los días azules* 101). Enconced in his house, Fernando survives without eating, furthering his metaphoric connection to the scorpions inside the walls of his childhood home.

For Fernando, the domestic spaces of his childhood are akin to those occupied by the scorpion: stifling and violently chaotic. His only option is to hide away in the metaphoric cracks in the wall until he is drawn out by the family that he describes as “desavenidos, desunidos, anárquicos, perdiendo peso rumbo a la insubstancialidad y en plena guerra civil” (*Los días azules* 101). To exist in such a space is analogous to the torture that Fernando himself inflicts upon the scorpion. The domestic space that Fernando occupies in his youth permits, if not fosters, these acts of minor violence, and it is thus that by being raised in such an environment Fernando comes to do harm to himself, burning his soul in a manner for which he will never be able to atone. Here Fernando references his guilt at having so unmercifully harmed a living creature. Additionally, his participation in the familial domestic space and his exposure to the traditional values embodied in this space will always mark him despite his best efforts to escape them. It is thus that in his adult life, looking back at the chaos that was his childhood household, he can remark, “Investigando sobre los motivos profundos de la guerra, los historiadores han llegado a determinar una gran causa operante: Lía, General Jefe Supremo, nunca supo establecer un sistema de jerarquías que asegurara el orden, la paz” (*Los días azules* 98). Despite his expressed disdain for the old moral order and the violence and aggression perpetrated in Colombia, Fernando here couches his vision for peace in very traditional values of hierarchy and militarism. Moreover, while he clearly expresses the belief that the stereotypical Colombian ideal of the large patrician family is outdated and absurd, Fernando sees the domestic space as only capable

of functioning under the control of a benevolent matriarch, buying into the very mythification of maternity that he seeks to discredit, and establishing that the only way for him to truly reject this model of domesticity is to escape the domestic space all together. While this escape is not that of death as chosen by the scorpion, the narrator's eventual complete desertion of this space continues to link Fernando and the scorpion.

Snakes and scorpions, are not, however, the only unwelcome intruders into Fernando's childhood homes. *Los Días Azules* begins with a description of how the stream through Santa Elena ("la quebrada de Santa Elena") overflowed and burst into Fernando's home on Ricaurte Street precisely on the Day of the Holy Cross (*el día de la Santa Cruz*). In his depiction of this one incident, Vallejo manages to connect the extreme violence and destruction of a flash flood with the three pillars of traditional Colombian society: nation, church, and family. Fernando calls specific attention to each of these three axes of society in his lead up to the destruction of his home. He states, "Vivíamos en la calle de Ricaurte. Ricaurte el héroe, el prócer, ya saben, el que durante la guerra de Independencia se voló con todo un parque de pólvora para no dejarlo caer en manos de los realistas, gachupines enemigos de la patria" (8).<sup>33</sup> This statement, dripping with sarcasm and denominating the royalists as realists, in and of itself demonstrates a deep contempt for Colombian nationalism. Linking the idea of the patriotic ideal to the destruction and havoc of a flood only further underscores the opinion that such ideology is and has been a damaging force in society.

The author brings religion into his description of the disaster through the narrator's focus on both the river's name and the day on which it floods. The young Fernando expresses the irony of a river named after a saint causing a flood on a religious holiday. He asks his

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<sup>33</sup> The Ricaurte in question is Antonio Ricaurte, famous for immolating himself at the battle of San Mateo in 1814 when exploding a royalist stronghold.



grandmother, “-Pero abuelita, ¿por qué la Santa Elena, que es una santa, el día de la Santa Cruz precisamente se vuelve un demonio y se aloca? No entiendo. -Ya dejen de preguntar tanto niños, y a seguir rezando” (13). By framing the incident in this light, the adult Fernando here stresses his frustration with a religion that asks for blind faith and that discourages logical questioning in favor of the mindless repetition of prayers. Once again, to link this ideology with the violence of a flood, and indeed to have a river named after a saint flood at all, reveals religion to play a detrimental role in Medellín and to have calamitous effects. That it is the narrator’s beloved grandmother who acts as the agent and upholder of this religious credo adds to the hypocrisy of a narrator who extolls her virtues while criticizing everything she represents.

In the context of this flood, the domestic space is not only the seat of the traditional family, but also has a direct connection to religion not only through the saintly name of the flooded river and the religious holiday on which the flood occurs, but also through the portrait of Jesus that hangs inside the home and that is damaged by the waters. Fernando remarks that after bursting into the house, the water rose and rose “hasta que llegó al cuadro del Corazón de Jesús y lo arrancó del marco” (13). The choice of the verb “arrancar” signifies the violence with which the waters are attacking this religious iconography inside the home; the portrait is not simply washed away, but wrenched off the wall. That a river named after a saint would flood on a religious holiday and destroy not only a home, but a religious home and the religious iconography within that home is highly ironic. With the inclusion of such an incident, Vallejo urges the reader to question the validity of a religion that would test its believers in such a fashion and renders absurd the belief that the faithful practice of the brand of Catholicism which demands processions and iconography both within and outside of the home renders one any closer to the divine. The insinuation is that the inclusion of Catholicism in the domestic space

invites destruction and contributes somehow to this space's violent demise. Thus nationalism and religion, beliefs that would typically be passed down through the family structure in the space of the home are all associated with the destruction of that self-same space.

Fernando creates a further connection between the violent act of the flood and his violent depiction of the domestic space through the construction of a parallel between the river and his mother. When fueled by torrential rainstorms, the Santa Elena "cambiaba de nombre y se tornaba en un avalancha: La Loca, la quebrada La Loca" (11). As we have already seen, Fernando confers the very same pejorative moniker on his mother in *El desbarrancadero* (57). This is in keeping with Fernando's description of his mother as a destructive force through her constant reproduction, power to emasculate, general chaotic behavior and inability or lack of desire to run her household in what Fernando would deem a proper manner. She and the role she occupies as the traditional Colombian mother act like the savage force of nature that is the flooding river, violently ripping apart everything in its path. At first glance it may appear odd that a mother, a role conventionally viewed as the cornerstone and foundation of the domestic space, would be the hastener of this space's destruction. However, in light of Fernando's constant criticism of traditional moral and societal values, this representation carries its own logic. It is precisely because the mother figure is so tightly bound to the traditional image of the domestic space that she becomes a figure of violence and destruction. The provincial values that this mythic mother figure and her home space represent are part of the old order which we have seen Fernando characterize as exclusionary, hypocritical, and ultimately at least in part culpable for the degradation of the city of Medellín. Thus, the traditional domestic space and the matriarch who governs this space are immediately destructive to those such as Fernando who are marginalized in these spaces due to their lack of adherence to such values. Additionally, these

values are eventually self-destructive through the creation of poverty, social marginalization, and violent unrest that threaten the traditional order.

Vallejo further explores the theme of the mother figure devastating the domestic space in *Los días azules* when the ghost of the previous owner of Santa Anita appears to Lía and leads her on a wild goose chase for the treasure that he supposedly buried somewhere in the house. This treasure hunt leads Lía to literally destroy the house, for she tears up floors and tears down walls in her quest yet never finds a thing. Lía believes that, “muerto el viejito, se convertía en un alma en pena: del Purgatorio no podía salir hasta que un alma caritativa no se sacara el entierro” (56), and her devotional persuasions lead her into a full-fledged obsession over finding the buried wealth. The actions of Fernando’s mother are tied to a sense of religious devotion, even if this sentiment is more superstitious than in line with Church doctrine. Lía represents the convergence of three pillars of traditional antioquian society: motherhood and family, domesticity and religion. These three facets of society and their ascribed morality and values become inextricably linked. Lía clings to the past. Literally, the ghosts of the past are still a presence in her life. And it is not just any ghost, but rather the ghost of the wealthy and aristocratic landowner Don Francisco Antonio Villa, a representative of the traditional social order, that appears to her. Lía reinforces this class distinction herself in her search for the buried treasure. When Don Francisco presents himself to her and tells her that his wealth lies under the *zapote* tree, it is not Lía who goes to work digging it up, but rather “al día siguiente los peones a escarbar” (56). The choice of the word “peon” to describe the agricultural workers on the *finca* is laden with the connotation of a person in a subordinate position. Lía still clings to the outdated social order in which Don Francisco would have lived, and she both literally and

metaphorically seeks to uncover the legacy of this period, unearthing it in the present, and in the process destroying the domestic space.

While Lía insists that her desire to uncover the lost wealth is a pious act of charity necessary to “sacar un alma en pena del Purgatorio” (58), Fernando describes his mother’s obsession in terms of greed. In the end, Lía has almost the entire house torn down in her mad search. The narrator describes this destruction stating, “Así terminó la finca de Santa Anita: por una ambición” (58). However, Lía is not alone in her quest for gold. Fernando remarks, “El abuelo anocheía dudando: Santa Anita, su casa, ¿qué iba a ser de ella? Pero el espejismo áureo le hacía amanecer decidido: reverberan en el horizonte las morrocotas de oro, y a tumbar” (58). Thus, the domestic space is brought to ruin by a type of greed and a desire for easy profit that is pervasive in the household rather than solely the actions of Fernando’s constantly vilified maternal figure. In present day Medellín, Fernando ascribes a similar avaricious voracity for consumption to the residents of the *comunas*, and to the *sicarios* more specifically, yet he admits that this flaw existed in multiple generations of his own aristocratic family during the idealized era of his youth and in the idealized space of Sabaneta. Just as such rapacious behavior contributes to the violent degradation of modern Medellín, so does it cause the furious destruction of the traditional domestic space and the conventional society to which this space was bedrock.

In describing the annihilation of the *finca* the narrator makes a literary allusion to Edgar Allan Poe, stating, “caída Santa Anita como la casa Usher” (59). Such a comparison to the gloomy and macabre centerpiece of Poe’s gothic tale rids the reader of any illusion of Santa Anita as having been an idyllic space. Furthermore, this reference connects the domestic space of the *finca* even more concretely to a particular family, social class, and value system. In Poe’s

text, the narrator makes of point of stressing the equivalence between the physical space of the dwelling and the family who inhabited it. He states that the name “House of Usher” was “an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion” (117). The two concepts are fused. Thus, through his comparison of Santa Anita with the House of Usher, Fernando urges the reader to view the destruction of the domestic space as synonymous with the destruction of his family as well.

Like the House of Usher, Fernando’s family is representative of an antiquated social order. Both are examples of a dying aristocracy. Poe’s narrator attributes the “perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people” to the fact that “the entire family lay in the direct line of descent,” and then goes on to place both in a most negative light, remarking that the purity of the line was a “deficiency” and noting that the most prevalent characteristics of the house, and therefore of its eponymous occupants, are antiquity and an aura of decay (117). Thus, it seems that the maintenance of a pure aristocratic line has plunged both family and residence into a type of gloomy decadence ending in the complete annihilation of both. While Fernando’s family certainly cannot claim such an unadulterated noble heritage, its members belonged to an elite class built on the long-established bases of landed wealth, Catholicism, nationalism, and reproduction of this class and its beliefs through the traditional family structure. Such elitism relegates the majority to the fringes of society. As such, Lía’s “peones” are equivalent to the Usher’s “peasantry.” In this context, the fall of house and family in both Poe and Vallejo’s tales contains an allegorical message: by closing itself off to social change and by marginalizing much of the population, the aristocracy will bring about its own demise. The elitist values and traditionally held beliefs propagated by this segment of society in the end are destructive forces. Therefore, Fernando here demonstrates an awareness that

whatever nostalgia he may have for the domestic spaces of his youth cannot cloak the underlying social brutality and decay already inscribed in these spaces, spaces that portend and reflect the violence of contemporary Medellín.

The allusion to Poe's work is of particular interest in light of critic Pablo Restrepo-Gautier's study of *La virgen de los sicarios* and its relation to the gothic novel. Restrepo-Gautier argues that the narrator negates the modernity of the Antioquian city, instead focusing on the pre-industrial landscape dominated by churches, many of which are in the gothic style. He asserts that Vallejo's most renowned work, "transforma a Medellín en una caricatura grotesca, en una ciudad monstruo que se aleja de su modelo en parte por el uso de técnicas afines a la novela gótica inglesa cuyas bases técnicas radican en la estética del terror" (97). Additionally just as the gothic novel employed the concept of the sublime, so *La virgen de los sicarios* relates terror in the face of the incomprehensible, this time in the form of the incredibly violent urban mass. Yet Vallejo's novel also negates the possibility of the sublime by rejecting the notion of any spiritual transcendence. Thus, "la novela ofrece representaciones tradicionales de lo sublime para cuestionarlas o anularlas" (101). The plotline of Fernando's mother believing herself to have been visited by a ghost and subsequently falling into a deep obsession which in turn causes her to ravage her own home lends itself nicely to the gothic mold. Nevertheless, the telling of this story is so matter-of-fact and so untouched by any sentiment of mystery, wonder, or awe that it distances itself completely from the genre. Instead, Fernando views the manic actions that Lía takes in violently rending the structure of the home with a critical and disdainful acceptance. This would appear to strengthen Restrepo-Gautier's argument.

Yet, in *Los días azules*, Fernando references Poe's gothic not in the context of the Medellín-monstruo cited by Restrepo-Gautier, but rather to describe the less industrialized

Medellín of his youth. The critic admits that even though “Fernando lamenta la desaparición de la ciudad de su infancia donde en sus engañosos recuerdos la violencia no existía,” the narrator’s nostalgia is “impotente ante el caos de la violencia actual” (98). Nevertheless, in employing a direct allusion to the gothic to describe not the current violence but the destruction wrought in his childhood, Fernando demonstrates that his memories are not as deceiving as he may portray them, and that he is keenly aware of the existence in the past of the nihilistic terror that Restrepo-Gautier cites as a present phenomenon. Thus, while Vallejo’s work may support the assertion that the “ilegibilidad de la ciudad moderna lleva a la experiencia de lo sublime” (Restrepo-Gautier 98), the pseudo-sublime terror can also be found in the domestic space of a country house from the narrator’s past.

Fernando’s disdain for the domestic space is not, however, limited to remembrances of childhood. His depiction of his family’s house in contemporary Medellín is equally as unflattering. Whereas the domestic space has traditionally represented a refuge from the inhospitable chaos of the urban environment, the family’s current abode is plagued by the same sense of death and destruction that characterized their previous homes. As we have seen, Fernando’s childhood homes faced many natural and man-made disasters ending in various forms of physical destruction that echoed the decay of a traditional, and in Fernando’s view stifling, society. While the family’s current home may remain structurally sound, it becomes marked by death in a way that both continues to link this space to the terrors of the House of Usher and that links this private space to the public violence that dominates the city.

*El desbarrancadero* is the only of Vallejo’s novels that thoroughly depicts the narrator’s familial home in present day Medellín, and in this novel the domestic space acts as a place in which to die rather than to live. Fernando’s sole motive in returning to this space is to be with

his brother, Darío, who is dying of AIDS. While the novel centers on Darío's illness and death, it also narrates the death of Fernando's father, a death that occurs in this same domestic space. After a prolonged bout with pancreatic cancer, it becomes apparent that Fernando's father is on the brink of death, and the other members of the family "habían aceptado que papi se muriera y que se nos derrumbara la casa" (95). While in this instance the collapse of the house is metaphoric rather than literal, it reinforces the concept of the domestic space as being inextricably linked to the people who occupy the space. Thus, as in the "House of Usher," the death of the leader of this house is tantamount to the destruction of the space itself. Once again it appears that the traditional domestic space cannot survive the disintegration of the traditional social and moral order that is hastened by the demise of those persons pertaining to the upper echelons of this order. As a landowner and politician, Fernando's father would certainly fall into this category.

A young gay man dying of AIDS, Darío certainly would not be a representative of conventional morality and social standing, and thus his death is not described in terms of the destruction of the domestic space; nevertheless, his illness and death, like those of his father, do transform the domestic space. Whereas the home as a concept is generally associated with life through both sexual reproduction and the reproduction of conventional social values, Fernando's family home becomes marked by both the deaths of its inhabitants and the death of these same values. Fernando refers to his family's home as a "moridero" (*El desbarrancadero* 95), stressing the presence of death as its most outstanding characteristic. The domestic space thus begins to mirror the space of Medellín as a whole; a space that, as Fernando describes it, is overwhelmed with the omnipresence of death. While the domestic space is a "moridero" a place where people go to die, the narrator describes the city itself as a "matadero" (*La virgin de los sicarios* 67), a



slaughterhouse, a place where they go to be killed. In either case, death is inescapable and breaks down the boundaries between the violent chaos of the urban environment and the supposedly protected space of the private home. Fernando further underscores the decay of this barrier when he leaves his mother's house stating, "Salí pues, como quien dice, del infierno de adentro al infierno de afuera: a Medellín" (*El desbarrancadero* 53). While these two hells may display it in different ways, they are both marked by the decay of outdated social and moral constructions, whether that be by the literal wasting away of the representatives of those constructions as in the case of the domestic home-cum-"moridero," or in the outwardly anarchic and senseless violence perpetrated against all in the city-cum-"matadero."

The insistent presence of disease and death in this domestic space highlights the abject nature of this space, further marking Vallejo's texts and the spaces therein as dirty realist. Fernando describes the domestic space as one very much in line with what Jarvis describes as the dirty realist obsession with the space of abjection as defined by Kristeva; a space that "is disgusting and fearful because it ties the subject to the impure, to animality, to disease, waste and ultimately to death" and thus threatens to "disturb identity, system and order" (193). Similarly, Vallejo's distinctly dirty realist focus on disease and death in the space of the domestic home here highlights a disturbance of traditional patriarchal identity and morality.

In accordance with the distinctly negative values that Fernando ascribes to the domestic spaces of his childhood and all that they represent, as well as to the continuance of such a space into the present day, he welcomes the evacuation of traditional meaning from other contemporary domestic spaces. In *La virgen de los sicarios*, after introducing the reader to his childhood home in Sabaneta through his memories, Fernando immediately transitions his story into the space of his friend José Antonio Vasquéz's apartment. This space is of particular

significance to Fernando, for it is here that he first meets his lover Alexis. Fernando asks the reader for permission to describe the site of this encounter, “el cuarto de las mariposas,” stating,

un cuartico al fondo del apartamento que si me permiten se lo describo de paso, de prisa, camino al cuarto, sin recargamientos balzacianos; recargado como Balzac nunca soñó, de muebles y relojes viejos; relojes, relojes y relojes viejos y requeteviejos, de muro, de mesa, por decenas, por gruesas, detenidos todos a distintas horas burlándose de la eternidad, negando el tiempo. (11)

Fernando highlights the dirty realist aesthetic in relation to a significant change in the conception of space. He stresses the straightforward narrative style in which descriptions are hurried and stripped of any excess detail or elements. In this outright rejection of the extravagant descriptions of Balzac, one of the fathers of European realism, Fernando distances his narrative technique from that of that literary genre. Simultaneously, he depicts a space that defies time. Previously, in both the realist tradition and in Fernando’s own personal history, the domestic space was linked to the past, acting as a refuge for the traditional values threatened by modernization and its accompanying industrialization and urbanization. In José Antonio’s apartment, however, the collection of not just old, but “really really old” and unsynchronized timepieces “burlándose de la eternidad” is so exaggerated and ridiculous, that it parodies this desire to stop the passage of time within the confines of the domestic space. Fernando goes on to assert, “Estaban en más desarmonía esos relojes que los habitantes de Medellín” (11), further stressing the idea that this space is not the falsely nostalgic domestic space of his youth, nor the refuge from the outside world that the home becomes in the realist novel, but rather a space as lacking in peace as the city itself.

In remarking upon the lack of harmony created by the presence of so many stopped and unsynchronized timepieces, Fernando underscores the sense of non-conformity about the space. In the context of the pressure to conform to what he asserts as an antiquated sense of morality and social convention that Fernando associates with the domestic spaces of his youth, this lack of harmony can therefore be placed in a positive light. The constant presence in the apartment of gay male youths, or at least of young men willing to have sex with other men, demonstrates this acceptance of non-conformity as well as Fernando's attraction to the space, an attraction reinforced by his encounter with Alexis, who he purports to love. Given the previously explored equivalence between the domestic space and its inhabitants, Fernando's valuation of José Antonio himself as laudable denotes the positive nature of his home. Fernando remarks that his friend is "el personaje más generoso que he conocido" (12) and that he has reached a level of "perfección" that allows him to offer up his home and allow these young men to pass "por su apartamento sin tocarlos" (11). Thus this domestic space becomes imbued with a positive sense of alternative sexuality and freedom without the negative association of sin or impropriety, particularly seeing as Fernando insists that this apartment is not a brothel, a claim supported by the fact that while Fernando does give Alexis money after their first sexual encounter, José Antonio does not receive anything in return for introducing them and giving them a space in which to have sex. The apartment thus becomes a space marked by what Fernando considers to be the positive and pleasurable aspects of sex without the trappings of domesticity and family that are the objects of Fernando's criticism and scorn.

It is true that without these trappings, the un-domestic domestic space and those who inhabit it lose their traditional identity markers and the relationships that go along with them. Fernando makes a point of referring to José Antonio as a "personaje y no persona o ser hermano"

(12). The narrator thus strips his friend of any true identity or humanity. Moreover, while Fernando may be referring the sexual and physical when he remarks that José Antonio does not touch the young men who pass through his home, the same is true on an emotional level. He does not touch their lives in any substantial way and vice versa. No bond forms between them and they remain virtual strangers to each other, as evidenced by their remaining unnamed in the text, instead being categorized as simply “una infinidad de muchachos” (11). Fernando does begin a relationship with the named Alexis here, albeit one plagued by an unequal power dynamic. This action is, however, definitely the exception to the rule. As with José Antonio, these boys are also stripped of their humanity. Fernando is in awe of José Antonio for the fact that “¿a quién sino a él le da por regalar muchachos que es lo más valioso? ‘Los muchachos no son de nadie – dice él –, son de quien los necesita’” (12). Rather than people or even characters, the young men are objects, gifts to be given to whoever is in need of them. While the lack of propriety over these boys softens their objectification somewhat, it also highlights the lack of any real ties between them and those to whom they are temporarily “given.” In this space they are simply anonymous objects unbound to anyone.

The commodification of these young men speaks to the predominance of postmodern, capitalist consumer society in present-day Medellín. David Harvey notes that in such a society “we move from a situation in which individuals can express their individuality and relate in human terms to each other to one in which social relations between people become replaced by market relations between things” (123). While these boys are “given” rather than purchased, the ideology of the market has certainly replaced any notion of a true interpersonal relationship when it comes to their interactions with others. Seeing as these young men are more often than not *sicarios*, their commodification also strengthens Gabriela Polit Dueñas’ argument that the *sicario*

is the character of choice to represent the “*ethos* siniestro” of the neoliberal economy. “Pone en evidencia el perverso valor de sus virtudes: el súbito enriquecimiento, el culto a la individualidad a través de una sumisión a las normas del Mercado en consumo de modas, marcas, y objetos” (125). Thus, the association of this space with postmodern consumer culture through the presence of these boy/products coupled with a lack of traditional identity and relationship forming meanings transforms the apartment into a non-place of supermodernity as theorized by Marc Augé, for Augé states “if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (63).

Additionally, within the private space of the apartment, these young men shed many of the behaviors that define them in the outside world. “En ese apartamento nunca se tomaba ni se fumaba: ni marihuana ni basuco ni nada de nada” (11). The lack of drug and alcohol usage in the apartment can be construed as a positive development; however, seeing as the main social activity in this community is the use of drugs and alcohol, the removal of this type of communion also acts as the removal of a marker of both individual and community identity. Without such behaviors to fall back on, “¿Qué iban a hacer allí? Por lo general nada” (11). These boys come to the apartment to do nothing. In this space, they lose their established individual and group identities without gaining any new ones, and thus, the space functions as a non-place within the text. However, given that, as a non-place, the apartment no longer holds the negative associations of the domestic space for Fernando, and as the identities that these young men are losing are ones characterized by drugs and violence, this evacuation of meaning from the space has a positive connotation for the narrator. He describes the apartment as “un templo” (11). It is not a church, a space laden with the multiple and conflicting meanings ascribed to it

by the lapsed-Catholic that is the narrator, but a temple. It is a true sanctuary to Fernando, not because it represents the tradition, family, and domesticity safeguarded from the rapidly changing urban environment as in the case of the realist novel, or because it acts as the “idealized refuge” posited by Richard Sennett (20), but rather because it is a space that defies conventional meaning. It is a private domestic space, but it is not a familial environment, and it is constantly inhabited and visited by strangers. It is not a brothel, but paid sexual encounters occur there. It is a place where young men come to do nothing, in essence to be nothing, and this nothingness is a relief.

In the case of his own apartment, Fernando takes this concept of nothingness or the evacuation of meaning from the domestic space, to an extreme, manifesting it physically. He states, “Este apartamento mío está rodeado de terrazas y balcones. Terrazas y balcones por los cuatro costados pero adentro nada, salvo una cama, unas sillas y la mesa desde la que les escribo” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 17). The emptiness of this space is concrete as well as metaphoric. After Alexis’ murder, when Fernando returns home, he describes the space as “mi desierto apartamento sin muebles y sin alma” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 89). The emptiness of the space leaves it without a soul. Fernando reiterates this lack of soul and couples it with a sense of detachment or isolation when describing his apartment at night. He states,

En lo alto de mi edificio, en las noches, mi apartamento es una isla oscura en un mar de luces. Lucecitas por doquiera en torno, en las montañas, palpitando la nitidez del cielo. . . como esas lucecitas ya dije que eran almas, viene a tener más almas que yo: tres millones y medio. (*La virgen de los sicarios* 31)

The narrator’s apartment is a space characterized by absence. In this case it is the absence of soul symbolized by the absence of light. If the soul is the essence of a person, of his or her

individual identity, then Fernando's apartment completely lacks identity. Furthermore, it is a space marked by its isolation; it is a soulless desert and a dark island in a sea of lights. Thus, the space is not one for forming and maintaining relationships, familial or otherwise, but rather a space in which to distance oneself from others. This combination of a lack of identity and a lack of relation characterizes the apartment as a non-place.

Nevertheless, Fernando actively cultivates this emptiness. While he does invite Alexis into his apartment, ostensibly to form a relationship with him, the only time the narrator enjoys his lover's presence in this space is when they are engaged in sexual activity. During the day, he does not want to interact with the adolescent and so buys him a cassette player in order that he may have something else to occupy his attention. Yet the narrator is so bothered by the presence of the tape deck that he buys for Alexis that he throws it out the window. When the narrator replaces the broken radio with a television set, he admits that "el televisor de Alexis me acabó de echar a la calle" (23). While Fernando claims that it is the noise alone that he cannot abide, it seems that what he truly cannot tolerate is having any sort of tangible presence in this space. He is perfectly capable of purchasing noiseless items such furniture, art, décor, etc., but chooses not to. Additionally, in describing his thought process for buying the television in the first place, Fernando states, "el vacío de la vida de Alexis, más incolmable que el mío, no lo llena un recolector de basura. Por no dejar y hacer algo, tras la casetera le compré un televisor" (22). Therefore the expressed purpose of this object, although an admittedly futile one, is to help fill a metaphoric void in Alexis' life, to give his life meaning. Fernando, however, finds the metaphoric "filling" of his domestic space so off-putting that it forces him out of the house. It seems that all the meanings and identities associated with the domestic space are for Fernando so negative, that he actively cultivates a comparatively meaningless non-space to inhabit. While he

brings Alexis into his space for sexual companionship, within the confines of his own apartment, the narrator prefers “soulless” isolation to the cultivation of a real relationship or shared identity.

In the public spaces of churches, however, Fernando attempts to connect to others in a meaningful way, although this connection is far from the traditional formation of community and individual identities typically associated with the church space. Unlike with the rest of his childhood memories, the narrator never paints his religious upbringing with any strokes of nostalgia. The primary religious space of Fernando’s past in Medellín is the Salesian school that he attended in his youth. His description of this space is intensely negative, demonstrating a hatred of the clergy that permeates all of Vallejo’s *autoficciones* (Villena Garrido 87). The church space, however, undergoes a distinct transformation from Fernando’s past into his present. As Medellín and its inhabitants change, so too do its churches. In the presence of overwhelming violence, drug trafficking, prostitution, and all the other social ills facing the city, churches either close their doors or are infiltrated by what the Church would deem moral decay. However, this degradation of traditional church morality and sanctity allows for the creation of a different, and in Fernando’s view more favorable, type of communion in the religious space.

This transition in the church space begins in Fernando’s young adult life. In *El fuego secreto*, Fernando recounts a sexual conquest in a church, a conquest that ended in violence. The choice of a church for their rendezvous, a sin in the eyes of the Church, demonstrates that this space has already lost a portion of its traditional “sanctity.” When a sacristan comes upon Fernando and the other young man engaged in sexual intercourse in his church, he first berates them, screaming, “Ah condenado impío, pervertido, malnacidos, desgraciados,” and then threatens to excommunicate them (127). Thus, despite Fernando and his lover’s obvious disdain for the Church’s proscribed morality, a representative of this morality still inhabits the space and



attempts to defend it from what he believes to be its disgrace. Fernando responds with incredulity and then physically assaults the sacristan, as if to say that the old religious morality no longer holds any authority over him. He and his seemingly sacrilegious behavior are the future of the Church and thus incapable of being excommunicated by a representative of the old dying order. Fernando then tells the father that he has sinned, but that he does not repent. This moment, however, rather than causing strife and separation between the religious man and the narrator, evokes compassion and understanding between them. Fernando remarks that the sacristan, “me miró derecho a los ojos. Vio en ellos un brillo ausente. Sintió una gran compasión por mí, y yo una gran compasión por él” (128). Ironically, it is only once the supposed righteousness of the church space, a space that while traditionally associated with compassion, in Fernando’s eyes is a space of intolerance, has been defiled that two apparent enemies can form a personal bond of sympathy and compunction.

Churches in contemporary Medellín continue this trajectory of change. The only churches that remain immune to the societal transformations occurring in the city at large remain so because they are no longer open to the public. Speaking of the present state of the city’s churches, Fernando tells the reader, “por lo general, están cerradas y tienen los relojes parados a las horas más dispares, como los del apartamento de mi amigo José Antonio” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 53). These churches no longer function as public spaces and become almost meaningless in their lack of utility. They are not stuck in the past, but rather lost in time, no longer playing a role in the lives of the citizenry. Like José Antonio’s domestic space, these churches have lost their traditional meaning, as they are no longer houses of worship or community gathering places, and in this sense, they too can be conceived of as non-places.

Those churches that do remain open to the public are affected by the same social changes happening elsewhere in the city, and are thus in this process of shedding the old religious moral order in favor of a new religiosity.<sup>34</sup> When Fernando takes Alexis to the church in Sabaneta housing María Auxiliadora, la virgen de los sicarios, this change is palpable.

La luz de afuera se filtraba por los vitrales para ofrecernos, en imágenes multicolores, el espectáculo perverso de la pasión: Cristo azotado, Cristo caído, Cristo crucificado. Entre la multitud anodina de viejos y viejas busqué a los muchachos, los sicarios, y en efecto pululaban. Esa devoción repentina de la juventud me causa asombro. Y yo pensando que la iglesia andaba en más bancarrota que el comunismo. (*La virgen de los sicarios* 15)

The outside world infiltrates the church space like the light through the stained-glass windows. This light demonstrates the violence of the Catholic faith as akin to the violence plaguing Medellín: both are perverse spectacles that can be seen in multicolor images, be they those on the windows or those on television. This world also enters the church in the form of the young assassins who go there to pray, a new group whose new kind of devotion is far more compelling to Fernando than that of the now dull and insubstantial faith of the old order, the “viejos y viejas.” Fernando’s attraction to this new faith makes sense in light of its inclusivity of those who the traditional Church would consider to be immoral. Margarita Jacomé asserts that this youth culture of religion is one in which, “el sicario ve la religión como algo que lo protege, mas no como una forma de regulación moral” (35). Thus, the space of the church is in transition

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<sup>34</sup> Francisco Villena Garrido argues that, due to its connection to the space of Fernando’s nostalgia, the church in Sabaneta is the only one that remains untouched by the present dystopia of the city and continues in its “elevación moral.” For Villena Garrido, this places it in stark contrast to the Cathedral that “no se representa como un entorno de paz y recogimiento sino como un microuniverso en el que se reproducen los conflictos de la sociedad” (86). The presence of *sicarios* praying for a sure shot in the church of María Auxiliadora, however, belies the breakdown of any traditional religious morality in this space. Additionally, while I agree that the social conflicts of Medellín have invaded the space of the city’s cathedral, I will later argue that this is precisely what instills a sense of devotion into the narrator.

from the old morally prescriptive, controlling, and therefore marginalizing space into a space that, while certainly beleaguered by its own hypocrisy and conflicts, is one more positively viewed by those with non-conventional identities, such as the narrator.

When in this new church space, Fernando is able to embrace his spirituality and seeks to form true bonds of love with others. Gaston Alzate notes, “ante la María Auxiliadora de los sicarios colombianos es como si todo el catolicismo se hubiera vaciado de sus impurezas y adquiriera un nuevo sentido, es como si los íconos de la religiosidad popular estuvieran investidos de una nueva y auténtica mitología” (9). The religious culture of the *sicario*, the very emblem of the violent degradation of Medellín, through its rejection of traditional religious values in favor of popular ideology, has managed to imbue the corrupt Church with an authentic identity, and this identity inspires communion. When in front of the Virgin, Fernando asks her to ensure that Alexis is and remains his true love, and that they stay faithful to each other. Thus, despite Fernando’s expressed hatred for the culture of the *comunas*, a culture that he sees as invading the nostalgic space of his childhood Medellín, he embraces this culture’s religious practices and through them is desirous of a true bond of love with another human being, also a member of this counter culture. While it is possible to question the depth of Fernando’s feelings for Alexis due to their extremely unequal power dynamic, Fernando’s longing to have a deep and real relationship with the adolescent appears genuine. Alexis and his popular faith cleanse Fernando himself as well as the church. The narrator admits, “ver a mi niño desnudo con sus tres escapularios me ponía en delirium tremens. Ese angelito tenía la propiedad de desencadenarme todos mis demonios” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 26). While both the churches he frequents and his own self are losing the vestiges of traditional religious faith and morality, both find a new, perhaps more genuine type of communion in what the old order would consider degradation.

This trend continues into the space of the Cathedral in the center of Medellín. Fernando makes the full intrusion of street life into this public space clear from the outset. He states, “Ha de saber Dios que todo lo ve, lo oye y lo entiende, que en su Basílica Mayor, nuestra Catedral Metropolitana, en las bancas de atrás se venden muchachos y los travestis, se comercia en armas y en drogas y se fuma marihuana” (*La virgen de los sicarios* 53). Here, Fernando pokes fun at the concept of an omniscient God while informing the reader that this, the most impressive and important of his churches in Medellín, is now a place of sex, commerce, drug usage and violence instead of a place of worship. The image is of an all-powerful figure that has somehow lost control. The same could be said for the space of the cathedral itself, for as we have seen, this space dominates the city from the height of its cupola while the institution of the Church no longer controls the morality of its parishioners.

Here also does the central contradiction marking the dirty realist space reassert itself. The space of the Catedral Metropolitana is a landmark very clearly linked to, and representative of, Medellín. Nevertheless, this space simultaneously represents the specificity of the urban space of Medellín and the manner in which this space succumbs to the pressures of global consumer culture that tends to erase all local distinction, in this instance trafficking in sex, weapons and drugs, three of the most problematic aspects of illegal global commerce and consumption. Jameson argues that the dirty realist space is contradictory in that it demonstrates the “persistence of a distinctive regional or urban social life about which everything else in our experience testifies that it has already long since disappeared” (*Seeds of Time* 148-9). Vallejo, in his construction of spaces that are quintessentially antioquian while still suffering the effects of postmodern consumer culture and its associated violence, displays a similar tension or ambiguity in his works.

Nevertheless, when Fernando visits the cathedral he experiences a form of transcendence. He admits,

años hace que no venía a esta catedral al Oficio de Difuntos, a rezar por Medellín y su muerte, pero ahora Alexis, mi niño, me acompaña. He dejado de ser uno y somos dos: uno solo inseparable en dos personas distintas. Es mi nueva teología de la Dualidad opuesta a la Trinidad: dos personas que son las que se necesitan para el amor; tres ya empieza a ser orgía. (*La virgen de los sicarios* 54)

While the narrator continues to criticize and denigrate Catholic doctrine by comparing the holy Trinity to an orgy, this does not negate the fact that he returned to the space to pray after a long absence. Additionally, it is in this space that Fernando feels he is building a common identity with Alexis through his romantic and sexual relationship with him. Thus, it is through the disavowal of orthodox Catholicism and through homosexual love with a murderer, that Fernando has a religious experience: the transcendence of himself through love. While Fernando's love for Alexis may be less than the romantic ideal, seeing as their relationship starts as sex for hire and ends in Fernando replacing Alexis with the young man's murderer, in this moment, in this space, Fernando believes or at least wants to believe that it is a true sentiment that unites them. Once again, the evacuation of the traditional religious sanctity and metaphoric meanings imbued in the space of the church opens room for a new spatial identity to develop. While this new space is afflicted with drugs, sex, and violence, it is also a more socially inclusive space allowing real and significant bonds to develop between marginalized residents of the *comunas* such as Alexis, and members (perhaps estranged ones, but members nonetheless) of the old aristocracy such as Fernando.

There is no question that the narrator sees his city of Medellín as degraded, chaotic, and dying, and that he mourns this loss through his memories of the Medellín of his childhood. Nevertheless, Fernando is aware that the comparatively utopic space of his youth is a false utopia incubating the very problems that face the city in the present. With playful irony, the narrator mocks his own nostalgia by longing for the days when Pablo Escobar was alive and well. He bemoans the drug lord's death stating that after his assassination, those who worked for him were left without a job. "Y sicario que trabaja solo por su cuenta y riesgo ya no es sicario: es libre empresa, la iniciativa privada. Otra institución nuestra que se nos va. En el naufragio de Colombia, en esta pérdida de nuestra identidad ya no nos va quedando nada" (*La virgen de los sicarios* 34). Fernando makes it apparent that the things he treasures as part of Colombia's previous identity were not pure and ideal but tainted by institutional violence. This holds true for the narrator's distant past as well as the heyday of the great drug lords. Accepting this premise, it becomes evident that the loss of the traditional meanings and identity of the spaces of the city, both private and public, is not entirely negative. Despite the rise of the postmodern consumer economy, of "libre empresa," that tends to erase these spatial significances and contribute to the preeminence of the non-place, this destruction allows for the possibility, however small, of a new and more inclusive identity to rise from the ashes.

#### IV. Non-place and the Public Private Inversion: Havana in the Works of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez

In this chapter, I will analyze the works of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, demonstrating that the Cuban author's use of space falls in line with that of the other dirty realists studied here in that the non-place emerges as a positive alternative to more traditional spaces imbued with the official discourse of what the author portrays as a failed revolutionary society. Gutiérrez's characters demonstrate far less nostalgia for the past than those found in the works of Fadanelli or Vallejo, making the negative portrayal of traditionally or revolutionarily sanctioned spaces of individual, communal and national identity formation even more prominent. After situating Gutiérrez within the dirty realist genre and the Cuban literary scene of the 1990's, I will explore how the non-place serves to evacuate meanings associated with the marginalization, hardship, and disillusion brought forth by the values of the Cuban Revolution, allowing for the possibility of these spaces taking on new, perhaps more inclusive and authentic significance. I will then contend that the reimagining of the private/public divide characteristic of the dirty realist space acts as one of the chief devices by which the creation or reformation of these spaces occurs.

##### 1. Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, *El Realista Sucio del Caribe*

Of the authors studied here, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez is the one most consistently labeled as a dirty realist. The author himself firmly places his work in the dirty realist tradition. In an interview with Stephen Clark, Gutiérrez remarks of his *Trilogía sucia de La Habana (Trilogía)*,

“yo creo que ese libro esta dentro de una línea muy fuerte de realismo sucio” (*El Rey de Centro Habana*). While the author may state that comparisons between himself, Raymond Carver and Charles Bukowski were born purely of an act of marketing on the part of his editors,<sup>35</sup> he also admits that Carver, “Es fenomenal, es importantísimo. Me ha influenciado mucho” (*Literatura* 152). Regardless of Gutiérrez’s complicated relationship with the classification of dirty realist, he is generally seen as the father of the dirty realist movement in Cuba. And there is a movement.

In April of 2007, *El Cuentero*, the literary magazine published by the Centro de Formación Literaria Onelio José Cardoso in Havana, devoted the entire issue to dirty realism. Director Eduardo Heras León writes in the introduction to this edition of the journal that, “influidos por los textos de los más importantes fundadores del realismo sucio norteamericano, Raymond Carver y, particularmente, Charles Bukowski, algunos jóvenes narradores cubanos hicieron suyos los postulados de esta tendencia” (1). Included among these Cuban dirty realists would be more well-known authors such as Amir Valle as well as younger authors like Ana Lidia Vega Serova, Yordanka Almaquer, David Mitriani and Jorge Aguiar. Nevertheless, as Heras León notes,

el reinado del realismo sucio sobre la más joven narrativa cubana fue intenso y devastador, sobre todo en los primeros años de la década de los 90, pero rápidamente se agotó cuando los temas, personajes e inmersiones en la cruda realidad del llamado Período Especial, alimentaron, sobredimensionándolo, un nuevo costumbrismo: proliferaron los textos sobre el <<jineterismo>>, las drogas, el homosexualismo, las

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<sup>35</sup> In an interview with me at the UNEAC in Havana on February 5, 2011, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez stated, “Anagrama que es quien publica mis libros en Barcelona publica a Bukowski, publica a Raymond Carver, y publica a Richard Ford. Entonces todo es un truco comercial del editorial. El realismo sucio de Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. El realista sucio del caribe, el Bukowski del caribe o que se yo del trópico, el Henry Miller tropical. Es más bien un reclamo de tipo comercial.”



zonas marginales de la sociedad cubana con su sobrecarga de alcohol y sexo, el mundo de los perdedores, que tuvieron como paradigma, en el plano nacional, la obra narrativa de Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. (1)

The proliferation, and in Heras León's opinion the saturation, of the dirty realist aesthetic in Cuba therefore was directly tied to the period of economic crisis of the nineties brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the archetype of this brand of "Special Period" dirty realism is the work of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez.

Thus, the space of Gutiérrez's Havana abounds with what Brian Jarvis recognizes as a key characteristic of the dirty realist genre: abjection. As previously noted, Jarvis links the dirty realism of North American author Jayne Anne Phillips to Julia Kristeva's theorization of the abject when he states that the "fascination with dirt and waste, both geographical and corporeal, represents a recognition of drives that constantly threaten to disturb identity, system and order" (193), and that this fascination is highly present in the dirty realists' work. Moreover, like Phillips, and as noted by Heras León, Gutiérrez is, "drawn to those defined in social terms by the dominant culture as 'dirty' or 'trash,' to the lives of the rural and urban poor, hookers and drunks," or in other terms the socially abject (Jarvis 194). The ruinous and decadent nature of a Havana devastated by the withdrawal of economic aid from the former Soviet Union and struggling in the face of the complete breakdown of public infrastructure and extreme shortages of basic necessities thus plays perfectly into the nature of the dirty realist space here defined.

Nevertheless, the irony of Gutiérrez's adopting and becoming representative of a genre known for its focus on the prevalence and pitfalls of consumer culture while depicting an

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<sup>36</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba felt the calamitous loss of its primary source of foreign aid and trade. The result was extreme scarcities of goods, foodstuffs, and petroleum products. In response, the government implemented the "Periodo Especial en Tiempos de Paz" or "Special Period in Peacetime," a program of austerity measures and rationing.

environment of extreme scarcity isn't lost on critics of his work (De Ferrari 197). Moreover, in addition to the unavailability of consumer goods, that the society Gutiérrez describes is ostensibly socialist would seem to preclude it from pertaining to the world of postmodern "late-capitalism" and consumerism that originally marked the North American dirty realist movement as defined by Buford. However, the strong presence of the black market, acting as essentially rampant and unfettered capitalism, coupled with the influx of foreign tourists demonstrates that Gutiérrez's Havana is not isolated from global consumer culture. Additionally, the aforementioned abject and marginalized nature of Gutiérrez's characters often forces them into the market relations of late capitalism, albeit in the form of human commerce rather than as consumers. David Harvey asserts that in embracing the consumer culture of late capitalism interpersonal relationships cede to market relations, causing a high degree of dehumanization (123). While in some cases these market relations may take the form of the purchase of identity markers, in the case of Gutiérrez's works as well as those of many other dirty realists, they manifest themselves more literally in the commodification of self, and in the specific context of "Special Period" Cuba this means *jineterismo* and prostitution.<sup>37</sup>

Global postmodern culture's influence through tourism and *jineterismo* permeates Gutiérrez's Havana. One example of the reach of this influence is in the characters' language itself. The narrator of *Trilogía*, Pedro Juan,<sup>38</sup> remarks that the words he chooses to use are changing. "Se me ha pegado de las jineteras que vienen aquí. Son tan imbéciles que hablan como los españoles que andan con ellas...estoy hablando igual que todos esos gallegos y sus

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<sup>37</sup> *Jineterismo*, literally translated as "horseback riding" or "jockeying," has come to signify the exchange of sex, company, or other goods or services to foreign tourists in exchange for money (in particular dollars or other foreign currency), meals, or otherwise unattainable consumer goods and services. While *jineterismo* may include acts of prostitution, it is not limited to the simple exchange of sex for payment.

<sup>38</sup> Like works of Fernando Vallejo, *Trilogía* can be considered an *autoficción*. To avoid confusion between the author and his eponymous narrator, I will refer to the former as Gutiérrez and to the later as Pedro Juan.

negras putas” (18). In their role as prostitutes, these women are acting as objects of consumption in the global market for sexual tourism. Their contact with these foreigners highlights not only the prominence of illegal capitalistic forms of consumerism in Cuba, but also that this form of globalism is having far reaching effects on the regional and national culture beyond a simple influx of capital. Thus, such *jineterismo* in the texts underscores not only the appropriateness of the adaptation of the postmodern consumerist nature of dirty realism to the Cuban context, but also the presence in these fictions of another hallmark of dirty realism and the dirty realist space: the intent to assert a regional identity while still demonstrating the overpowering and homogenizing nature of postmodern consumer culture (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 148). This key trait of the dirty realist text belies Heras León’s assertion that these works are nothing more than a new brand of *costumbrismo*, complicating notions of regional and global characteristics.

A further connection can be made between abjection and consumer culture, two key facets of the dirty realist genre, when we look at Gutiérrez’s books themselves as objects of consumption in the global marketplace. Esther Whitfield argues in regard to *Trilogía*, “the reader’s relationship to the book will be constructed as a commercial transaction” (*Autobiografía* 335), highlighting the role of the reader as a consumer in the global marketplace. While Gutiérrez’s works, originally published by Anagrama in Spain, are not readily available in Cuba, they have been quite successful abroad and in translation. Thus, to some extent, these works market Cuba to a foreign audience. As critic Francisco Leal notes, “la abyección aparece en casi cada crónica de *Trilogía* como un estímulo narrativo que ostenta lo terrible como zona de atracción” (55). Moreover, “desplazar la abyección de su borde impensable hacia un centro espectacular es uno de los mecanismos a los que recurre Gutiérrez, disponiendo de la abyección como un lugar que se precipita para su consumo” (57). Thus, the space of abjection that

Gutiérrez constructs in his fictions becomes, in essence, a marketable product in the global publishing economy.

The notion of Gutiérrez's works as participating in a globalized consumer society in such a fashion leads us to consider ties between the author's brand of dirty realism and the non-place as theorized by Marc Augé. Augé posits that these spaces "which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (63) proliferate in what he terms "supermodernity." As I argue that Gutiérrez's Havana is a part of this "supermodernity," I will also argue that non-places emerge in his texts as well. Moreover, the texts themselves form a type of non-place. Augé puts forth the idea that,

In the non-places of supermodernity, there is always a specific position (in the window, on a poster, to the right of the aircraft, on the left of the motorway) for 'curiosities' presented as such: pineapples from the Ivory Coast; Venice – city of the Doges; the Tangier Kasbah; the site of Alésia. But they play no part in any synthesis, they are not integrated with anything; they simply bear witness, during a journey, to the coexistence of distinct individualities, perceived as equivalent and unconnected. (89)

Gutiérrez's fictions thus display Havana- city of economic and sexual abjection and last remnant of socialism- to an audience traveling via the page. As such, the category of the non-place becomes of even greater interest to the study of these texts. Furthermore, seeing as Kristeva's theorization of the abject references a possible failure in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object, self and other, the abject and the non-place are much aligned in their emphasis on meaninglessness and the negation of the formation of identity.

It is thus that I will employ the concept of the non-place in my analysis of space in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's fictions *Trilogía Sucia de la Habana* (1998) and *El Rey de la Habana* (1999).

This collection of short stories<sup>39</sup> and novel chronicle the lives of Pedro Juan and Reynaldo respectively in their quests for survival in the decaying, poverty-stricken urban landscape of “Special Period” Havana. Pedro Juan is a middle-aged divorced man. Reynaldo is an adolescent whose entire family dies in a freak accident for which he is falsely blamed and imprisoned. Despite these marked differences, however, both characters engage in similar wanderings through the streets of Havana in search of distraction and economic opportunity, acting as what Alexis Candía Cáceres calls an *antiflanneur* (107). Candía Cáceres here plays with Walter Benjamin’s notion of the *flâneur* as someone who wanders down the grand boulevards of the city, seeking out the masses while not belonging to them, enjoying the contemplation of the urban sphere, and paying particular attention to the merchandise for sale in this space. Pedro Juan and Reynaldo, thus, while still roaming through the spaces of the city as would the traditional *flâneur*, are part of the marginalized masses observed by the *flâneur*, and “deambula por la ciudad con el objeto de encontrar los medios necesarios de sobrevivir” rather than immersing themselves in the joys of the urban consumer space (Candía Cáceres 107). These characters construct a distinct vision of decadent and marginal urban spaces in their constant movement through the streets of Havana.

In his analysis of masculinity in *El Rey de la Habana*, Matthew Edwards posits that, when faced with the brutal economic situation of the nineties, Gutiérrez’s characters demonstrate a desire to re-conceptualize the space of the Cuban nation as once distinct from that of official discourse. He remarks,

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<sup>39</sup> While some critics refer to *Trilogía sucia de La Habana* as a novel due to the general coherence of the narrative voice, secondary characters, and themes in the text, the lack of a unified story demonstrates that the book is, in fact, the combination of three collections of short stories. Additionally, in an interview with Lori Oxford in 2007, the author refers to *Trilogía* as being comprised of short stories. He states, “Entonces de esa manera empiezo a escribir la *Trilogía sucia* que en realidad no era una trilogía. Era un libro de cuentos” (148).

Incapaz de identificarse con la sociedad que quiere gobernar, el discurso oficial se separa de lo que articula y representa a la gente a un nivel social. Condenada a sentir los efectos de esta incoherencia sin tener fuerza ni la capacidad de expresar sus deseos, quejas o dudas, la sociedad empieza a vivir por sí misma y a definirse dentro del contexto nacional, fuera de la utopía creada por su gobierno. (*A la sombra del macho*)

Echoing this sentiment, Cuban author Ena Lucía Portela attributes this sanctioned but imaginary space of false utopia to, “el hecho de que la televisión, la radio y los periódicos reflejan un país que en nada se parece al verdadero; nos muestran la mejor de las patrias posibles, la más segura, culta y democrática, algo semejante a un paraíso donde todo marcha a pedir de boca, pura ciencia ficción” (*Con hambre y sin dinero*). I contend that Gutiérrez’s efforts to contest this official Cuban, and more specifically Havanan, space and to recast it in a more authentic light along the lines theorized by Edwards are marked by several spatial processes: the recognition of the falsity of the official discourse and the negative portrayal of traditionally sanctioned spaces of individual, communal and national identity formation, the evacuation of meaning from these spaces and their transformation into non-places, and their subsequent reformation as spaces where distinct and more authentic communal identities may develop. I will further argue that the reformation of these spaces in large part occurs via one of the primary mechanisms behind the formation of the dirty realist space: the reconceptualization and blurring of the boundary between private and public.

## 2. Negative Space: The Decay of the Cuban Socialist Utopia

Gutiérrez very explicitly explores the disconnect between the older, official vision of Cuba as socialist utopia and the misery experienced by Cubans in the Special Period. Both *El Rey de la Habana* and *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* explore the lives of characters facing the daily realities of this economic crisis which came to a head in the 1990's. *El Rey de la Habana* tells the story of the adolescent Reynaldo. During an argument, Reynaldo's brother accidentally kills their abusive mother and then, overwhelmed with guilt, commits suicide. Upon witnessing this violence, Reynaldo's grandmother has a heart attack and dies as well, leaving Reynaldo alone. Traumatized and unable to communicate with the authorities about what has happened to his family, Reynaldo is accused of their murders and imprisoned in a juvenile facility. After managing to escape, Reynaldo then proceeds to wander through the streets of Havana surviving however possible. In his wanderings he has various sexual affairs, the most significant of which is with Magda, with whom he sometimes shares a home. In the end, Reynaldo kills Magda in a fit of jealous rage and then dies after being bitten by diseased rats while disposing of her body in a trash yard. *Trilogía de la Habana* also explores the daily struggle for survival of the residents of Centro Habana in the 1990's. In particular, it explores the sexual conquests and black market, fully illegal, or semi-licit dealings of Pedro Juan, a middle aged divorced man trying to earn enough money to survive.

In *El Rey de la Habana*, a scene in the street market places the extreme marginalization and hardship faced by the majority of the residents of Havana in direct contrast to the governmentally propagated vision of life on the island. When Rey looks to the owner of a butchery for work or a hand-out, the man completely ignores him, discounting him as, “un piojo

infeliz, un limosnero de mierda” (155). Yet Rey’s situation is more representative of that of the majority of those at the market than that of the butcher.

El público circulaba por los pasillos, preguntaba precios, compraba muy poco o nada, y seguían mirando y asombrándose por los precios, y pasando hambre. Algún que otro viejo murmuraba: <<Se están haciendo millonarios y el gobierno no hace nada. Es contra el pueblo, todo contra el pueblo.>> Nadie le hacía caso. Algunos viejos seguían esperando que el gobierno solucionara algo de vez en cuando. Les habían machacado esa idea y ya la tenían impregnada genéticamente. (156)

The older generation has been thoroughly indoctrinated with the concept of a socialist state that ensures all of its citizens’ basic needs are provided. This is the utopic vision of socialist Cuba that the government is continuing to propagate. Nevertheless, the majority of the public is experiencing hunger and unable to buy basic foodstuffs due to the spike in prices resulting from the extreme scarcity of, and high demand for, such products.

Rey, like much of the rest of the population, is more able to discount the official vision of the nation because he has thus far avoided many of the spaces of indoctrination. Due to his family’s poverty, he has had little access to mass media in the form of radio, television, newspapers or magazines. Moreover, he and his peers rarely attend school, one of the principal sites of the propagation of the official national discourse. “Las muchachitas con trece años ya estaban jineteando a todo trapo sobre los turistas en el Malecón. Los muchachos, batidos con marijuana y con los negocitos, para hacerse algún fula cada día...A nadie le interesaba aprender matemáticas ni cosas complicadas e inútiles” (*El Rey de la Habana* 11). More concerned with their daily quest for survival, school and the governmental ideology inscribed and reproduced in this space become useless and completely disconnected from reality. As Edwards notes, “sin



siquiera el interés de aprender lo ofrecido por los intimidados maestros de las escuelas del barrio, los chicos se dedican a vivir su vida, educados solo por sus necesidades más urgentes” (*A la sombra del macho*). In this context, the Malecón, a space that, while very intimately tied to the national imaginary and to the cityscape of Havana, is more marked by transience and the global influence of tourism (particularly sex tourism) than by government rhetoric, replaces the school as a site of identity formation. Thus, this generation of Cubans is more apt to see the Cuban space with negativity, disillusionment, or at best indifference.

The collapse of the collective nationalist spirit of the revolution during the Special Period is also apparent in the fiercely individualistic nature of *Trilogía*'s narrator and secondary characters. In her article, “Autobiografía sucia: The Body Impolitic of *Trilogía sucia de la Habana*,” Esther Whitfield remarks that, “*Trilogía* breaks brutally with collectivity and with cause. Its first-person speaker is resolutely singular; it is self-obsessed, self-sufficient and, if we can allow a less delicate turn of phrase, smugly masturbatory” (332). The narrator, Pedro Juan, analyzes this individualist shattering of the communal socialist ideal in the story “Dudas, muchas dudas.”<sup>40</sup> He states, “la pobreza tiene muchas caras. Quizás la más visible es que te despoja de la grandeza de espíritu. Te convierte en un tipo ruin, miserable, calculador. La necesidad única es sobrevivir. Y al carajo la generosidad, la solidaridad, la amabilidad y el pacifismo” (*Trilogía* 153). Thus, the narrator here supports Edward's observation as to the wide gap between the official discourse of the revolution and the day to day experience of the Cuban people, a break that the narrator in part attributes to the difficult economic situation that Cubans experienced in the 1990's.

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<sup>40</sup> Titles presented in quotation marks refer to stories that form part of *Trilogía sucia de la Habana*.

Similarly, Gutiérrez admits that right before he began to write *Trilogía*, he was getting a divorce, “y al mismo tiempo se desploma el socialismo... Yo me quedo sin asideros, me quedo en una situación económica difícilísima, muy deprimido. De pronto veo que la ideología, a lo que había dedicado toda mi vida, defendiendo con las uñas, era falsedad que no funcionaba, sencillamente” (*Literatura* 146). Here, Gutiérrez’s insistent use of the first person (“yo me quedo,” “mi vida,” etc.) once again demonstrates a move from accepting the values of socialism to denying these values, as well as a shifting of focus onto the self after experiencing sharp disillusionment with the socialist ideal. Given that Gutiérrez describes *Trilogía* as “excesivamente autobiográfico” (*Literatura* 148), the relationship between his personal cynicism and the narrator Pedro Juan’s abandonment of “la solidaridad” becomes even clearer. It is thus that Gutiérrez’s works fall in line with José Fornet’s theorization of a “generación del desencanto” consisting of authors making their mark on the Cuban literary scene in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Fornet argues that these authors, “sustentan su desencanto en las insuficiencias y contradicciones de una Revolución en la que creyeron o creen” (*La narrativa cubana* 11). Gutiérrez admits his former faith in the Revolution and his current belief that it has become a non-functioning lie. This attitude is strongly reflected in his fictions, making these works representative of Fornet’s categorization.<sup>41</sup>

The breakdown of government services, one of the most visible aspects of the previous socialist state, abounds in both *Trilogía* and *El Rey de la Habana*. Perhaps the most scathing

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<sup>41</sup> Some critics such as Alejandro Zamora and Mélissa Gélinas argue that, more than *desencanto*, the works of many of the members of Fornet’s grouping display an, “overwhelming malaise due to the loss of, and subsequent yearning for, an ideal, an absolute; a postmodern void of meaning, purpose and direction; a profound melancholy and a desperate quest for making sense of existence; and an ever increasing alienation” (6). These sentiments are not, however, mutually exclusive, and, I would argue, both are present in the fictions of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez.

critique of the government's inability to care for its people comes in "Locos y Mendigos." In this story, instead of providing the homeless with social aid, the government hires Pedro Juan to secretly trick hundreds of vagrants into entering a van with no windows. Despite the government's assertions that these people would be taken care of, after entering the van, they are never heard from again: "a lo mejor los inyectaban" (*Trilogía* 252). That hundreds of people were in the position to be taken away in this manner shows the government's inability to provide adequate help to its people in the first place. Their covert kidnapping and possible drugging, however, make the government seem fully sinister rather than simply incompetent or incapable.

In "Ratas de Cloaca," Pedro Juan exposes not only the failings of the state-run healthcare system, but the burgeoning power of capitalism in what is supposed to be a socialist state as well. After being bitten by a rat, Pedro Juan goes to a clinic to get treatment. Not only is the clinic completely overburdened with "viejos y viejas melancólicos, esperando" (*Trilogía* 245), but the nurse also informs Pedro Juan that there is no anti-rabies vaccine available with which to treat him. She claims that this shortage is affecting not just the clinic, but all of the hospitals in the city as well. However, after he bribes the nurse with bottles of rum and the promise of sex, she tells him that he can buy some of the clinic director's stash of emergency vaccine for forty pesos. The governmentally run clinic fails the general public, but an individual with capital is able to get the services he needs. As this incident demonstrates, in the post-soviet Cuba of the "Special Period," the values of individualism and capitalism are overwhelming the communitarian values of a failing socialism.

The narrator of *Trilogía* explains the complete disconnect between the surge of black market capitalism and the Castro regime's official rationalization of the nation's economy in "¡Oh, el arte!" After commenting on the manner in which the mass of black-market street

vendors swarm San Rafael Boulevard while still attempting to avoid the rapacious eyes of corrupt police officers, Pedro Juan analyzes the economic situation:

La crisis era violenta y se metía hasta en el rinconcito más pequeño del alma de cada uno. El hambre y la miseria es como un iceberg: la parte más importante no se ve a simple vista. <<Pero hay que ir pausadamente, compañero, sin perder el control. Poco a poco nos insertamos en este mundo complejo y en la economía del mercado, pero sin abandonar los principios, etc.>> ¡Ah cojones! (118)

The mention here of the hidden nature of extreme economic marginalization references not only the emotional and psychological effects of such poverty, the effects on the “alma de cada uno,” but also the hidden nature of such misery behind official propaganda and rhetoric. The vision of a government still in control and carefully guiding the country into the global economy without abandoning socialist principals to the whims of capitalism, however, is obviously disdained as a complete farce.

### 3. *Azotea*: Panorama, Heterotopia, Non-place

Gutiérrez’s rejection of the utopic socialist vision of the nation is paralleled by a recasting of traditional spatial constructs and the spaces of the identity formation of its citizenry as ambiguous, conflictive, and often extremely violent. In this way the author’s use of high spaces and the panoramic vista develops in spatial terms the transitional period in which Havana finds itself. In a manner akin to that of Fernando Vallejo’s use of the panorama to twist the spatial tropes of nineteenth-century realist fiction to reflect a warped sense of nostalgia and

control, Gutiérrez too plays with the concepts of spatial dominance and control and a lack thereof through conflicting depictions of the urban landscape from on high. María Teresa Zubiaurre asserts that, in the context of the nineteenth-century realist novel, in some instances, “la visión panorámica funciona a modo de evocación nostálgica de un espacio ‘espiritual’ – el de la infancia, el de la inocencia – antes poseído pero ahora ya perdido para siempre” (140). A further layer of meaning can be added to this interpretation of the panorama when it is placed in the context of Gutiérrez’s disillusionment with the Revolution. The Revolution acted in and of itself as a type of Panorama, giving a total vision of society and how it was to move into the future. The loss of this vision apparent in Gutiérrez’s fictions is accompanied by the complicating of the panoramic vista. In *El Rey de la Habana*, the space of the panorama acts as a pivotal transitional space between an evocation of childhood nostalgia and the acceptance of its loss, while still underscoring the violence and lack of control that the protagonist feels both in his past and his present.

After escaping from prison and before returning to his old neighborhood in Centro Habana, Rey looks out on the city from the viewpoint of the Cristo de Casablanca statue. At first, this position of physical height gives Rey the traditional sense of power and dominion characteristic of the realist panorama. “Desde allí divisaba muy bien toda la bahía. Era una buena altura. Le gustó dominar todo, al menos de aquel modo. Estaba solo allí y era el gran observador. Se sintió poderoso” (36). Nevertheless, even in this instance, the reality of Rey’s marginalized position is still evident beneath a façade of control when the narrator qualifies the protagonist’s ability to dominate everything by adding, “al menos de aquel modo.” This sense of power, however false or unjustified it may be, is fleeting. Rey’s attempt to take in the entirety of the city fails. “La inmensa ciudad que se perdía de vista entre la bruma de la humedad y el

resplandor de la luz solar cegadora” (36). A few mere lines after Rey establishes a sense of power through his ability to possess the landscape with his gaze, becoming “el gran observador,” his ability to see Havana, the object of his visual conquest, is questioned, as the cityscape becomes lost to his vision by means of humidity and blinding sunlight.

This loss of power and control becomes even more prominent when Rey’s gaze seeks out his childhood home. Whereas in the nineteenth-century realist novel the panorama may have served to, in a sense, recapture a space of childhood innocence now gone, in this twentieth century dirty realist text, the evocation of the space of childhood experienced through this vista, while not entirely devoid of nostalgia, brings back memories of pain and violence rather than those of innocence, and exhibits a loss of control rather than the exercise of it. When Rey’s gaze finds his old rooftop apartment, the memories of the violent deaths of his entire family, deaths that occurred on that rooftop, overwhelm him. “Allí se quedó horas, deprimido, sin fuerzas, pensando en su familia destruida de un golpe... Por primera vez en su vida se sintió desamparado, abandonado, solitario. Y le dio mucha rabia. Se le acabaron las lágrimas. Y se entró a golpes por la cabeza y la cara. Autoagresivo. No quiere recordar nada... Le duele mucho, pierde el control” (37). Rather than gain a sense of power over a changing world by nostalgically recapturing a simpler past through a controlling gaze, here Rey flees the memories of a painful past, and, recognizing his lack of power both over the spaces of his past and over those of his present, he turns his rage at this powerlessness on the only thing he can: himself. In this process, however, he only further loses control.

The concept of height and the panoramic vista as conflictive and contradictory, occupying both a space of privilege and of violent marginalization, becomes even more pronounced in Gutiérrez’s treatment of the quintessential Havanan space of the *azotea*. Critic

Lori Oxford highlights this heterotopic<sup>42</sup> quality of Gutiérrez's Havana, citing the "countless coexisting spaces that make up the city, its characteristic simultaneity of varied realities, and their juxtaposition (rather than separation)" (*Utopia/Distopia*). In *Los nuevos paradigmas*, Jorge Fornet further argues for the spaces of *azoteas* in particular as heterotopias that "llevan marcada su condición de espacios-otros que las distinguiría" (121), and that "representan un micromundo que escapa o burla de las leyes del suelo" (122). Fornet, however, never clearly defines the multitude of spaces or places reflected and inverted in the *azotea* as heterotopia, and even he questions the role of the *azotea* as a strictly defined heterotopia as denominated by Foucault.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Fornet's assertion that the *azotea* possesses the heterotopic qualities of being both a contradictory space and a space apart certainly apply in the case Gutiérrez's fictions. It is in such a space that his characters can feel both powerless and powerful, free and trapped, alone and overwhelmed. The coexistence of these conflicting feelings arises when, from an even higher position of the Cristo de Casablanca viewpoint, Rey looks down on the *azotea* where he grew up. "Allí estaba su azotea. Aún no se había derrumbado. El corazón le latió con más fuerza y casi se le salió del pecho. Todos los recuerdos llegaron juntos: su madre estúpida; pero era su madre y la quiso a pesar de todo. Su hermano, que se arrebató y se lanzó a la calle sin pensar" (36-7). Rey feels some nostalgia for a space for which he shares the same feelings that he has towards his mother: disdain, horror, and love simultaneously.

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<sup>42</sup> The allusion here is to the concept of heterotopia as presented by Michel Foucault. He theorizes spaces that are "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias" (*Of Other Spaces*).

<sup>43</sup> Fornet admits that he uses "con cierta libertad el término acuñado por Foucault." Moreover, he states in regard to the *azotea* that "ellas no siempre funcionan como el opuesto especular de los sótanos y submundos que aparecen en estos y otros textos," and further adds that "la heterotopía por excelencia de la narrativa cubana contemporánea, al menos de esa que Foucault denomina <<heterotopía de desviación>>. . . no aparece en ninguno de los textos mencionados" (*Los nuevos paradigmas* 121-122).

That his brother commits suicide by throwing himself off of the *azotea* further demonstrates the incongruous nature of this space of height. This theme of suicide by jumping from the *azotea* is oft repeated in *El Rey de la Habana* as well as in *Trilogía* in stories such as “La Navidad del 94.” Suicide is an extreme extension of the juxtaposition of powerlessness and power; the characters take their own lives out of a sense of hopelessness and horror at their own marginalized circumstances, yet at the same time the ability to end one’s own life is the ultimate act of control and power over oneself. Thus, the use of the *azotea* as an instrument of suicide reflects the ambiguous nature of this space as both the traditional one of dominance and its opposite.

Throughout *Trilogía*, the narrator Pedro Juan continues to develop this contradictory nature of the panoramic vista from the *azotea*. The rooftop becomes a site from which to see both the beauty and the horrors of the city. In “El recuerdo de la ternura,” for example, he remarks,

Yo vivía en el mejor sitio posible del mundo: un apartamento en la azotea de un viejo edificio de ocho pisos en Centro Habana... a esa hora todo se pone dorado y yo miraba mis alrededores. Al norte el Caribe azul, imprevisible, como si el agua fuera de oro y cielo. Al sur y al este la ciudad vieja, arrasada por el tiempo, el salitre y los vientos y el maltrato. Al oeste la ciudad moderna, los edificios altos. (15)

A few lines later he admits that these afternoons spent looking out from the *azotea*, “me hacían ganar seguridad en mi mismo” (15). Here Gutiérrez presents a more traditional panorama, a viewpoint that is both poetic and grants the viewer a certain dominance that spurs self-confidence. This description of the city could be found in tourism propaganda brochures. Despite the mention of “maltrato,” the ruinous nature of the city which elsewhere Gutiérrez so



harshly describes as a quintessentially dirty realist abject space marked by destruction and literal defecation, is here softened and romanticized. Furthermore, the lack of architectural and infrastructural modernization by international standards is erased by the mention of the comparatively tall buildings of the “ciudad moderna.”

Nevertheless, the position of height provided by the *azotea* also allows Pedro Juan to gaze upon far less appetizing images of Havana. In “Un día yo estaba agotado,” the narrator describes an incident in which a woman is stabbed to death on the street below his apartment building. “Estuve una hora en la azotea viendo a la policía y a la gente alrededor del cadáver. Yo vivo en una azotea, a cuarenta metros sobre la calle, pero la vecina me prestó unos prismáticos y estuve allí, en primera fila, tan morbosos y vampiresco como todos los demás, con visión privilegiada” (*Trilogía* 86). While the narrator references his privileged viewpoint from on high, this vista does not afford him the sense of security and control present in the previous quotation. From the space of his *azotea*, he can only see more clearly the exceedingly violent nature of the city that surrounds him. The distance and separation from that violence that height would seemingly provide is at least partially erased through the use of binoculars. Thus, Pedro Juan becomes like “todos los demás,” participating in the morbid culture of spectacular violence that permeates Guitérrez’s Havana through his privileged position of height even while maintaining his physical separation from it.<sup>44</sup>

This contradictory nature of the *azotea* as a space allowing one to be present and participative in society while still remaining in a sense detached from it allows for the characterization of the space as a “non-place” as theorized by Marc Augé. Augé remarks on the

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<sup>44</sup> The conception of violence as spectacle present in this vignette parallels manner in which the author himself turns urban violence into a spectacle to be consumed by the reader. For more on the spectacular nature of *Trilogía* see Esther Whitfield’s article “Autobiografía sucia: The Body Impolitic of *Trilogía sucia de la Habana*.”

possibility of the coexistence of place and non-place in the same physical space when he comments, “place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased and the second never totally completed” (64). The *azotea* is a traditional space in that it is linked to the characters’ identities as evidenced by both Rey and Pedro Juan’s constant use of the possessive when referring to *their azoteas* as well as the fact that these spaces are linked to the communities living in the buildings to which these spaces pertain, the members of which have access to the rooftop space even if their apartments lie below. However, the *azotea* also implies a certain literal and metaphoric distance from these communities. The site of the *azotea* thus provides a supreme example of the phenomenon of the coexistence of the opposite polarities of place and non-place.

Whereas, for the narrator of *Trilogía*, the *azotea* can often function as a space from which to contemplate the entirety of the city, and thus his position in it and in relation to his neighbors and the other denizens of the urban sphere, it can also function as a non-place of solitude and isolation. He comments, “Entonces estoy aquí. Sin nada que hacer. Tranquilo en mi azotea...Ya no quise buscar más relaciones íntimas con nadie” (146). Here, the *azotea* is marked as a non-place by its lack of relation-forming elements. In fact, the space’s defining characteristic is a void. In this space there is both nothing to do and no one with whom to interact or form “relaciones íntimas.” While Pedro Juan may be directly referring to sexual relationships, his emphasis on solitude a few lines later when he states, “decidí vivir en solitario” (146) lends itself to the expansion of the definition of intimate relationships to include those that go beyond the merely physical. The emptiness of this space with regard to any relational identity here acts as a relief. The narrator finds peace and tranquility in this non-place, actively seeking out this escape from the pressures and pains of interpersonal and community relationships.

The story “Plenilunio en la azotea” provides a conspicuous example of how the *azotea* can both reproduce traditional spatial constructs of identity, relationships, and power while also providing a non-place unrestrained by these conventions and acting as a welcome alternative space. Toward the beginning of this episode of Pedro Juan’s life, he recounts how he seeks out the non-place of the *azotea*;

Yo vivía en la azotea de un edificio en el Malecón. En el piso doce. Tal vez sesenta metros sobre la calle. Y me aficioné a sentarme en el alero, con los pies colgando en el vacío. Era fácil. Sólo saltaba de la azotea al alero. Un hermoso alero reforzado con gárgolas labradas en piedra. Tenía formas de grifos y de aves de paraíso. Era un viejo edificio cada vez más derruido con tanta gente metida dentro intentando sobrevivir.

Pues así. Para mí era sencillo... Ahora por las noches saltaba al alero y me sentaba allí, al fresco, y veía todo allá abajo, en la penumbra de la noche. Me apetecía. Siempre me ilusionaba saltar y salir volando y sentirme el tipo más libre del mundo. (168)

In this instance, the *azotea* reflects the power and height of the panoramic gaze, the marginalized, abject and ruinous space of dirty realism, and the relative ease of the vacuous non-place. The narrator mentions the height of his viewpoint and that he is able to see everything, yet this seemingly all powerful gaze is diminished by the half-light of the hour. Moreover, despite the narrator’s claims, the height of a mere twelve stories in the densely populated Centro Habana neighborhood would not likely afford him the wide panoramic view that he claims to have. The *azotea* and its ledge are open outdoor spaces, yet they remain spaces linked to the inside of the mostly-destroyed building teeming with a mass of marginalized individuals. Nevertheless, on the ledge of the *azotea*, this abjection turns into ease as Pedro Juan embraces nothingness, “colgando en el vacío.”

This non-place, this void of people, objects, responsibilities and cares, where literally all that exists is air, becomes a liberation for the narrator. In this space he fantasizes about leaving behind both the past and the present. The beauty of the past is as intangible and imaginary as the gargoyles: griffins amongst birds of paradise. The present is an abject struggle as an anonymous one of “*tanta gente metido dentro intentando sobrevivir.*” The non-place, the void of both past and present individual and communal identities is thus appealing to Pedro Juan. While completely embracing this nothingness and jumping into the void would make the narrator one of the many characters in Gutiérrez’s fictions who commit suicide by *azotea*, it would be a manner to break free of the constraints of identity, and is thus profoundly appealing.

#### 4. The Domestic Space: From Place to Non-place

In *El Rey de la Habana*, the treatment of Rey’s childhood home in a Centro Habana apartment elucidates the role of the non-place in the (pseudo)heterotopic space of the *azotea* while simultaneously demonstrating the appeal of the non-place as an escape from the past and present physical and institutionalized violence imbued in all the spaces of the city and the domestic space in particular. Well after the incident at the Cristo de Casablanca, when upon viewing his childhood home Rey is flooded with memories of the violent deaths of his family members and where, in an attempt to erase these memories, he commits acts of violence against himself, Rey returns to his old *azotea* apartment. This time however, he traverses the rooftop without any feelings of nostalgia emerging. “Rey atravesó la azotea hasta la habitación de Frede y ni se acordó de que su infancia transcurrió en la azotea de al lado. Ni miró hacia allí. La había

borrado” (81). This space ceases to be significant to Rey. His identity is no longer attached to this site, and thus it transforms into a non-place, for it is a space that, in this moment, cannot be “defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (Augé 63). Rather it becomes interchangeable with any of the other multiple impoverished and dilapidated apartments that abound in the neighborhood. While much of Augé’s theorization of the non-place is concerned with the material trappings of post-modern consumer culture, he also includes such ruinous spaces in his analysis. He notes that the production of non-places abounds in a world where “temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shanty towns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity)” (63). Rey’s childhood home becomes one such “temporary abode” without any bonds of identification, just one site amongst his wanderings through a Havana that is disintegrating into “squats” and “shanty towns.”

Alexis Candía Cáceres comments on such an erasure of distinct spatial identity in *Trilogía*, stating that Gutiérrez writes, “soslayando todas y cada una de las marcas textuales que podrían identificar a la ciudad caribeña. Pese a que la acción de los relatos transcurre mayoritariamente en Centro Habana, no aparecen ninguno de los elementos característicos de esa zona” (106).<sup>45</sup> Such a lack of distinction between spaces within this neighborhood of Havana, between neighborhoods in Havana, and between Havana and other cities speaks not only to the emergence of the non-place as a preeminent space within the text, but also to the challenging of the nation as a preeminent institution of subject formation and identification. Candía Cáceres describes this rejection of the grand modern narrative of the nation in her statement that Gutiérrez’s Havana is a fragmented city, “cuyas pequeñas historias, en especial aquellas que

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<sup>45</sup> This lack of overwhelmingly specific detail as posited by Candía Cáceres would appear to contradict Heras León’s designation of dirty realism as a new brand of *costumbrismo*.

narran las tragedias y las fiestas de los habaneros, son expuestos por sobre la búsqueda de símbolos trascendentes de la identidad nacional” (106). Nevertheless, Gutiérrez’s insistence on explicitly situating his fictions in Havana and naming its neighborhoods, streets, and other features, an insistence present in the very titles of the works here studied, points to a more complicated relationship with this particular urban space.

Soon after his encounter with the space of his childhood, the transience of Rey’s identity in this *azotea*/domestic space becomes apparent when Rey receives a new identity of “El Rey de la Habana,” a moniker that Frede bestows upon him as a comment on his sexual prowess. Rather than distinguish the character as a unique individual, however, the nickname acts as a highly ironic comment on Rey’s place as but one of the mass of powerless and marginalized Cubans in a daily quest for survival.<sup>46</sup> The linkage between character and city denotes a complete loss of individuality within this space. In the non-place of the *azotea*, a space no longer involved in identity formation, such changes in, and erasures of, identity can occur with ease. This nullification of a historical, cultural, and relational individual identity coupled with the preeminence of the distinctive regional space of Havana provides an interesting twist on Jameson’s observation about the inherent contradiction in dirty realist fiction. Jameson contends in *The Seeds of Time* that dirty realist authors attempt to portray the reality of a contemporary space in which common mass culture has wiped out regional difference while still fleeing from the reality that is late capitalism or postmodernism through the maintenance of a now non-existent distinct regional or urban social life (142-3). Gutiérrez’s Havana is a space that, while still participating in global consumer culture as both a media product and a site of global tourism, emerges as a dirty realist space in a more abject sense. Rey, Pedro Juan, and the other

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<sup>46</sup> Author Ena Lucía Portela further explores the irony of Rey’s nickname in her article *Con hambre y sin dinero*.

inhabitants of this urban landscape are not so much “drifters in a world cluttered with junk food and the oppressive details of modern consumerism” (4), as Buford defines the characters of North American dirty realism, but rather drifters in a world cluttered with the literal waste, both human and consumer, that forms the basis of a ruthlessly capitalist black market economy and the oppressive details of extreme poverty. The abject non-place of the *azotea* connotes a breakdown in meaning and identity along the lines posited by Kristeva, for the division between subject and object is threatened as the characters face the marginalizing and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty in a space that no longer acts as one of individual or community identity formation. This fact is further reinforced when Sandra, another of Rey’s lovers, is able to purchase him yet another new identity in the form of forged official identity papers, demonstrating the link between a loss of a spatially grounded and constructed authentic identity and the rise of the non-place inherent in consumer culture. Nevertheless, this space, too, embodies the contradiction of suffering from the effects of in essence having its unique identity abolished by the pressures of the postmodern global economy while at the same time constantly asserting its distinct identity as Havana. Even when losing his innate identity, an identity based in his past and his family, Rey cannot escape his being “de la Habana.”

For Rey, however, the transformation of the quintessential Havanan space of the *azotea* into a non-place is also a conscious decision. This is in part due to the overlapping of the space of the *azotea* with the domestic space. Rey actively erases the site of his family and its demise from his memory and personal history: “Ni miró hacía allí. La había borrado” (81). Given the extreme misery, violence and trauma associated with this space, Rey prefers to evacuate it of all meaning rather than continually relive and reproduce the pain attached to it. In his analysis of

what he denominates as *literatura de desviación*,<sup>47</sup> Francisco Villena Garrido argues that these emergent writings seek to create new individual and collective identities through the “superación de la nación, la familia y la iglesia como instituciones tradicionales de la demarcación subjetual” (30). Just as the emergence of the non-place in the texts questions national identity, so too does Gutiérrez’s depiction of the domestic space as violent and dehumanizing question the institution of the family and familial identity. Rey’s desire to transform the domestic space into a non-place is an attempt, albeit a rather fruitless one, to avoid being defined by such a space, and thus falls in line with Villena Garrido’s observation.

Even before the eradication of Rey’s family, his home was a less than ideal environment. The very first lines of the novel stress the abject and dehumanizing nature of this domestic space:

Aquel pedazo de azotea era el más puerco de todo el edificio. Cuando comenzó la crisis en 1990 ella perdió su trabajo de limpiapisos. Entonces hizo como muchos: buscó pollos, un cerdo y unas palomas. Hizo jaulas con tablas podridas, pedazos de latas, trozos de cabillas de acero, alambras. Comían algunos y vendían otros. Sobrevivía en medio de la mierda y la peste de los animales. (9)

The domestic space is thus defined by both filth and waste in the form of discarded objects used to build cages, in the form of excrement, and by the presence of animals. The adjective “puerco” here even manages to combine these varied elements of dehumanization (filth and animals) into one. In this space, Rey and his family are themselves transformed into nothing more than caged animals.<sup>48</sup> The dehumanization that they suffer living amongst animals is a form of identity loss

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<sup>47</sup> Given that Villena Garrido includes both Guillermo Fadanelli and Fernando Vallejo as members of this group of so-called “deviant” authors, the inclusion of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez as another dirty realist member seems warranted.

<sup>48</sup> This tie to the animal world further reinforces the link between the dirty realist text and the space of abjection. Kristeva notes, “by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to



that begins the transformation of the domestic space into a non-place, a transformation that is solidified by Rey's negation of his past memories and ties to the apartment.

It is important here to note that, while the complete degradation of this domestic space, a space intimately tied to the notion of subject formation through the institution of the family, occurs after the onset of "la crisis," of the "Special Period," this family was marginalized well before 1990. While Rey's mother previously had a job, it was washing floors. Moreover, despite allegations that prostitution only reappeared as an epidemic during the "Special Period," Rey's mother was engaged in the sex trade well before the economic crisis. "De joven tuvo decenas de hombres. . . Algunos le decían <<Oye, boba, ven y dame una mamaíta. Te voy a dar dos pesos si me la mamas>>, y allí iba: a chupar" (10). Thus, as a "boba," "limpiapisos" and sometime whore, Rey's mother was both socially and economically marginalized well before the 1990's.

Additionally, Rey's father, Adalberto, "nunca quiso vivir con ellos en la azotea, y cuando la vio embarazada por segunda vez desapareció para siempre" (10). Critic Matthew Edwards asserts that the Revolution promoted a very orthodox moral vision for the Cuban nation with regard to gender roles and the family structure, but that the economic collapse of the nineties led many women to re-enter the labor market in the sexual economy and, due to the relative lack of gainful employment options for men, thus occupy patriarchal positions in the family and "cuestionar la validez y presencia de la hegemonía machista" (*A la sombra del macho*). Nevertheless, Adalberto's abandonment of the family and the domestic space occurred before the onset of the nineties, as did Rey's mother's integration into the sexual economy and assumption of a more traditionally patriarchal role within the family structure. Thus, Gutiérrez posits that

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remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder" (12-13).

the values traditionally associated with the institution of the family and the family space in the *azotea* apartment, a type of morality supposedly upheld by the Revolution, also fell to the wayside previous to the onset of the “Special Period.”

The undoing of the conception of the traditional family unit and its space as presented by Gutiérrez, while beginning before the Cuban economic crisis of the 1990’s, is, however, certainly exacerbated in this tumultuous period, and this destruction or degradation of one of the accepted hallmarks of identity continues to be expressed in spatial terms. When describing the life that Rey and his brother led in the apartment before the fatal accidents that brought about the family’s demise, the narrator comments, “la azotea cada día estaba más puerca, con más peste a mierda de animales... También tenían que controlar a su madre porque cada día era más estúpida. Ya ni atinaba a bajar las escaleras. La empujaban y le gritaban para que se callara, pero ella berreaba más aún, agarraba un palo y les entraba a palo limpio, intentando defender su territorio” (13). Within this domestic space, traditional family roles are inverted as the children feel the need to control their bawling mother rather than the other way around.<sup>49</sup> The inversion of familial roles in this domestic space is carried even further, as the whole concept of domesticity is challenged by the ceding of this space to the animal world. Not only is the *azotea* taken over by the presence of actual animals, but the inhabitants of this space also act more and more like wild animals themselves. The double significance of the verb “berrear” to mean both to bawl like a child and to bellow like a barnyard animal underscores this dual questioning of traditional notions of domesticity. The conception of territoriality here highlights the spatial

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<sup>49</sup> Kristeva posits that the abject marks the moment when we separate ourselves from the mother and thus recognize a boundary between ourselves and other. She described the experience of abjection as a confrontation with “our earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity, even before ex-isting outside her, thanks to the autonomy of language” (11). Rey’s constant confrontation with his mother and his attempts to distance himself from her thus reinforce the abject nature of his domestic space. His mother’s animal or infantile cries create a perceived inability to produce language, a fact that once again highlights the link between this maternal figure and the abjection of the domestic space.

dimension of this dehumanizing inversion of domestic values. Like a wild animal, Rey's mother defends her territory. That this area is no longer viewed as the communal space of the family, but rather seen as solely hers, speaks to the complete disintegration of the family structure rather than simply the rigidly machista values traditionally ascribed to it and to its defining space of the domestic home.

For Rey and his brother, in fact, the domestic space was more often than not one of abuse. As small children, their mother “los encerraba en un closet oscuro y pequeño durante días. Desde muy pequeños hasta que tuvieron siete años, los metía en aquel lugar húmedo, lleno de tuberías y cucarachas” (10-11). Like the animals caged in the *azotea*, the boys themselves are deprived of their liberty through enclosure in a smaller space within the greater one of the apartment, and thus the dehumanization of the characters in the domestic space continues. Moreover, the domestic space of the *azotea* bears a strong resemblance to a prison cell. When Rey is mistakenly imprisoned for the deaths of his family members, he is once again exposed to enclosure as a form of punishment. The guards at the juvenile detention center would take those who they believed were misbehaving to “los calabozos de castigo. Oscuridad absoluta, casi sin espacio para moverse, humedad permanente, ratones y cucarachas” (17-18). The description of the closet in the *azotea* apartment and the cell in the jail are almost identical. Thus, Gutiérrez further draws direct parallels between the domestic space governed by the notions of family and family values, and the space of the prison governed by the state and national standards of morality. In both cases, these traditional spaces and conceptions of identity formation are, in essence, torturous. It is thus that, while the devastating blow of Rey's brother killing his mother and then committing suicide himself certainly taints the domestic space with violence and loss, the family's space of the *azotea* apartment was consistently marked by personal and institutional

violence and marginalization well before both the financial collapse of the 1990's and the fatal end of Rey's family's lives. This space further reflects Gutiérrez's expressed belief that the Revolution was a failure and a lie, for the trauma faced by Rey and his family was born of systemic problems that were present even before they were so clearly exposed during the Special Period. Therefore, Rey's desire to eradicate any meaning present in this domestic space, his need to treat it as a non-place, is an attempt to avoid further ties to this type of trauma.

The link that Gutiérrez makes between the domestic space and the space of imprisonment in *El Rey de la Habana* is also strongly present in *Trilogía*. While the confinement that the narrator Pedro Juan feels is not as consistently or as clearly forced on him by others, he too experiences the sensation of the repression of spatial liberty that Rey faces both in his childhood home and in prison. After being trapped in the elevator in his building, the narrator suffers greatly from claustrophobia: "cualquier lugar un poquito encerrado y ya me axfixiaba y me disparaba aullando como un loco" (30). This fear of enclosure carries over into the space of his apartment. "No podía estar en la casa. La casa era un infierno" (31). Once again, the household space is a torturous one.

The supposed morality of the family inscribed into the traditional domestic space adds to the negative value ascribed to it. When Pedro Juan visits Hayda at her home with her husband Jorge Luis, he is overcome with sexual desire for her and questions traditional familial values, the supposed sanctity of marriage, and the role of the masculine figure in the household. Knowing that Hayda is married and that Jorge Luis is a stereotypically jealous and "macho" husband, Pedro Juan knows that a sexual encounter between Hayda and himself will end badly, but he still tries to convince her to have intercourse with him. He admits that he is weak, but recognizes that everyone suffers the weakness of the flesh, "pero a la gente le molesta enterarse y

hasta han inventado los conceptos de *decencia e indecencia*. Sólo que nadie sabe precisar dónde están las fronteras que separan a *decentes e indecentes*” (55). Pedro Juan then pushes the boundaries of “*decente e indecente*,” as they apply to both the institution of marriage and the notion of heterosexuality when he attempts to convince Hayda to let him have a threesome with her and her husband Jorge Luis as a solution to their sexual frustration. Despite her desire for Pedro Juan, Hayda rejects his proposition out of fear that her jealous husband would respond violently to her even mentioning the idea. She forces Pedro Juan out of the house where he listens in on Hayda and her husband’s sexual activities inside. “Escuché la cama chirriando, y ella susurrando alto, para que yo la escuchara...Y después gemía y tenía orgasmos, y le pedía que mordiera, hasta que terminaron junto conmigo” (55). Outside of the domestic space, through Hayda’s exhibitionistic performance and his own voyeurism, Pedro Juan is able to attach himself in a safe way to their sexual encounter. All three parties climax at the same time, indicating that they have created a sexual bond that overpowers the physical distance between them. Yet, after Hayda and Jorge Luis have fallen asleep, Pedro Juan re-enters their domestic space and dozes off himself, only to suddenly awaken with “una terrible sensación de encierro, de claustrofobia, en aquel cuarto minúsculo, sin aire fresco. Igual que si estuviera en una jaula pequeña, tras los barrotes” (55). While he is outside of the house and its limits of decency, both Pedro Juan and the couple are able to enjoy their sexual activities and create some sort of bond, yet when occupying a place within this spatial and moral structure the narrator only feels trapped.

Such consistent questioning of so-called family values in Gutiérrez’s works is directly in line with the author’s role as a dirty realist. Brian Jarvis notes that in the North American context, many critics have interpreted dirty realist fiction as a “critique of the dominant discourses of Reagan’s America, especially in relation to hegemonic definitions of gender and

family” (192). While the similarities between Reagan’s America and Castro’s Cuba are certainly few and far between, both regimes propagated national visions of morality that included such “hegemonic definitions.” Despite the Marxist-Leninist critique of religion, Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s conception of the Revolution’s *hombre nuevo* is heavily grounded in a Judeo-Christian morality emphasizing sacrifice and love. This morality extends to a conception of the traditional family. In *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, Guevara couches his vision for the formation of the model socialist man and country in the metaphor of the family. He states, “nuestros hijos deben tener y carecer de lo que tienen y de lo que carecen los hijos del hombre común; y nuestra familia debe comprenderlo y luchar por ello. La revolución se hace a través del hombre, pero el hombre tiene que forjar día a día su espíritu revolucionario” (*Socialismo*). This “hombre” who forms the very basis of the Revolution is truly a male, not mankind in general. This supposedly revolutionary vision is clearly of a male head of household, or state, charged with supporting his subordinate family within the confines of a traditional family structure.<sup>50</sup> Through his direct challenging of this hegemonic patriarchal family structure by way of his negative portrayal of the domestic space charged with reproducing this structure as confining, violent, abject, dirty, and overtly sexual, Gutiérrez is thus utilizing the dirty realist genre to critique the dominant socialist moral discourse of the Revolution in Cuba in the same manner that the North American dirty realists critiqued the dominant moral discourses of Reagan’s America.

Given the cynicism with which Gutiérrez paints the domestic space and the values associated with it, the partial transformation of this space into non-place is often met with relief

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<sup>50</sup> For a more thorough analysis of the heteronormative morality of the Revolution and how it is questioned in *El Rey de la Habana*, see Matthew Edwards article “A la sombra del macho: Pedro Juan Gutiérrez y el desencuentro con la masculinidad en *El rey de la Habana*.”

on the part of his characters. We have already seen how the narrator of *Trilogía sucia de la Habana*, Pedro Juan, actively seeks to rid his *azotea* apartment of any “relaciones íntimas con nadie” (196). This sentiment is carried on throughout the majority of stories in the work. In “Sálvese quien pueda,” for example, Pedro Juan is relieved to escape back to the solitude of his apartment after a conversation with Tony, a former colleague. In this space, he remarks, “me quedé en silencio. Cada día disfruto más el silencio y la soledad y no espero demasiado. No puedo explicar cómo es. Si me rodea el silencio yo soy yo. Y esto me basta” (215). Rather than cultivate relationships within the walls of his home, Pedro Juan embraces silence, detachment, and emptiness. In this way he feels he can be himself, but this identity as self is inexplicable and emptied of meaning, for this sense of self is defined in terms of a lack of hope or expectation. Pedro Juan’s attitude in this episode thus underscores that the domestic space is here acting as a non-place, “in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality” (Augé 70).<sup>51</sup> Thus, the narrator seeks to keep his home as a non-place, finding this type of space more and more enjoyable in comparison to more traditional spaces of historical and relational significance.

Similarly, in *El Rey de la Habana*, Rey not only seeks to transform the once meaningful space of his childhood home into a non-place, but also continues the cycle of recreating negative and violent “orthodox” domestic spaces and finding something akin to peace in domestic spaces which are emptied of these traditional cultural associations and relationships. All of Rey’s attempts to create a more traditional, relational domestic space fail completely. Perhaps the most striking example of the utter futility of attempting to sustain such an impossible space within the Havana of the novel is the fact that the apartment that Rey shares with his sometime girlfriend

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<sup>51</sup> While in this specific citation Augé is referencing the space of travel and movement as a non-place, the phenomena can be more broadly expanded to all non-places.

Magda literally falls to pieces as the dilapidated building it is in collapses during a torrential rainstorm. After they flee the scene of the collapse, Rey and Magda relocate to the outskirts of a city dump. There, Rey “pensó que debía buscar unas tablas y unos pedazos de polietileno para armar una casita... Tal vez él podría vender maní también. O buscarse otro trabajo. Y controlar a Magda. Hacerla que respetara y se dejara de puterías” (210). The narrator and Rey thus directly link the construction of the domestic space to the conception of the patriarchal household with a male provider controlling his woman. However, when Magda questions his role as the male figurehead of the house, claiming that she is pregnant by another, more macho, man, Rey feels robbed of his traditional masculine role and reasserts his power in the most violent and aggressive way imaginable.<sup>52</sup> Inside of their “casita,” Rey slashes Magda’s throat and then proceeds to rape her corpse multiple times over the course of several days. He patronizingly lectures the dead body, stating, “así es como tienes que estar. Tranquilita. Sin moverse. En silencio. Respetando a su marido” (215). This grotesque parody of the Revolutionary regime’s moral orthodoxy with respect to gender roles and the family is thus directly connected to the domestic space. When Rey leaves this space (and Magda’s body behind), however, “se sentía bien, libre, independiente, tranquilo. Y hasta alegre. Casi eufórico” (214). His unstable relationship with Magda, his feelings of inadequacy as an orthodox patriarch and his need to play the role of degraded macho all negatively define him in the domestic space, and thus, upon leaving this space and the relationships and identity associated with it, Rey feels comparatively free, calm and happy.

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<sup>52</sup> As Edwards notes, the questioning of traditional gender roles in this new domestic environment builds up to this climax, as, previous to Rey and Magda’s argument, Magda once again leaves Rey to attend to the house while she leaves to earn the money necessary for their survival (*Sombra del macho*).



Rey experiences this same feeling of elation when he resides in a non-place. The only “home” that he is consistently happy in is an empty shipping container that he shares with no one and that has no ties to the rest of his life, but rather only acts as a way station. He finds this container when he escapes from prison, stays in it a few days, and then moves on. He later returns to the container when he is again fleeing from the police. Thus, this space acts as an escape from the rules governing society, an isolated refuge exempt from law. Additionally, Rey experiences only solitude in this space, never sharing it with anyone else. In fact, he originally elects to make his temporary residence there because of its complete seclusion. The space is “todo abandonado y desolado. Sin un alma” (25). While the comment “sin un alma” makes reference to the isolation of the site, it also demonstrates that the container is, in essence, soulless. It is a non-place devoid of any cultural, relational, or historical ties to identity. On his second trip to the container, “Rey lo miró con amor: <<Ah, mi casita, qué felicidad aquí tranquilito>>, se dijo a sí mismo. Se sentía bien allí. Muy bien. Y se tiró a dormir encima de unos cartones medio podridos. Estaba como un cachorro en su nido” (102). Rey fully embraces this non-place. His residence there is one of the very few times in his existence that he feels happy and tranquil. Whereas in the domestic space of his childhood home he was dehumanized and took on the symbolic role of caged animal, in the non-place of this his “casita,” while he is still marginalized and taking on the role of an animal in an abject space, this time he is not trapped, but serene, like a cub in its den. The peace he experiences in this site is in large part due to the absence of relational ties to the space. After the collapse of his and Magda’s apartment, he tries to take her to this container to live, but is unable to find it again. It is as if this peaceful home environment can only exist in the form of a non-place in which no relationships are formed.

## 5. Movement and the Embracing of Non-places

The emergent presence of the non-place in the site of the domestic space and the embracing of this non-place as a relief from the relational identities previously produced and reproduced in such spaces is echoed in the presence of yet another type of non-place: that of movement through the city streets. Augé theorizes that the space of travel may be the “archetype of *non-place*” (70). In his explanation of this idea, he builds upon De Certeau’s theorization of the manner in which the proper names conferred to different spaces coupled with movement through these spaces creates non-places. Augé cites De Certeau’s observation that “these names create non-place in the places; they turn them into passages,” but then elaborates by adding that “the movement that ‘shifts lines’ and traverses places is, by definition, creative of itineraries: that is words and non-places” (69). While Augé is here speaking most directly of tourism and the way that it turns the object of the spectator’s gaze back to himself as spectator rather than to the places that he is seeing in his travels, the concept of movement and circulation between multiple sites without stopping to connect with those sites in any meaningful way is not limited to tourists alone.

While Gutiérrez certainly presents the reader with images of tourists enjoying an exoticized and highly sexualized version of Havana, and while the reader herself acts in a similar manner to these tourists, the main characters of Gutiérrez’s works also embody this idea of constant wanderings without true attachment to place. Both Rey and Pedro Juan are constantly in motion throughout the streets of Havana. This movement is more often than not purposeless, without destination, and unlikely to forge any communal bonds with those encountered along the

way. Nonetheless, these characters welcome this non-place of urban movement as a necessary relief.

The lack of connection to place associated with constant movement becomes apparent in Rey's circulation through the city in *El Rey de la Habana*. In one exemplary passage, Rey wanders around the city selling cigarettes given to him by his transvestite lover Sandra.

Rey salió caminando sin prisa por Reina, Carlos Tercero, Zapata. Cuando llegó a la puerta del cementerio Colón aún la quedaban dos cajetillas. Se detuvo un rato. Entraron varios entierros. Con pocos dolientes. La gente cada día va menos a los mortuorios. Es normal, la vida es más interesante que la muerte. Bastante jodío es todo para agregar aún más lágrimas. Rey jamás había entrado a un cementerio. Ni se imaginaba cómo era la cuestión adentro. Ofreció a todos sus cajas de cigarrillos. Las vendió. (69-70)

The beginning of the passage highlights the idea of wandering through named places. As the focus lies on the movement rather than the space being moved through, these streets become passages rather than places, and thus they are transformed into non-places as theorized by De Certeau. This apparent contradiction of naming sites highly specific to one urban location, in this instance Havana, while simultaneously emptying these sites of specific regional historical or cultural value is once again indicative of the inconsistent treatment of space in the dirty realist text and the desire to portray the dirty realist space as a homogenous space of global consumerism or of postmodernity while still maintaining regional difference. The commercial aspect of this creation of the non-space of circulation and consumption rises to the fore as Rey is selling cigarettes as he moves through the city space. There is no mention of the interactions with other city residents necessary to sell these cigarettes, no dialogue between Rey and his customers. His circulation through the streets is not measured by the relational identities formed

in this space, but rather by his commerce, the amount of product remaining to sell. The cigarettes he is selling will go for “siete pesos cada una. En fulas son más caras” (68-69). In this mention of an economic benefit to selling in dollars or *fulas* rather than the national currency this space of the circulation of commerce is further removed from any national or communal identity, reaffirming the conception of this space as non-place.

When Rey does finally stop at the cemetery, a site generally considered to be what Augé would call a true anthropological place in its connection to local and personal history and relationships, and that Foucault denominates as a quintessential heterotopia, his own relationship with and attitude towards this space empties it of meaning. Foucault posits the cemetery as a clear cut example of a heterotopia due to the space’s function as separate from but connected to all other spaces of a culture. He states, “the cemetery is certainly a place unlike ordinary cultural spaces. It is a space that is however connected with all the sites of the city, state or society or village, etc., since each individual, each family has relatives in the cemetery” (*Of Other Spaces*). Foucault underscores the nature of this heterotopic space as a true place, to use Augé’s terminology, through the evocation of this space as both relational and historical. For Rey, however, the cemetery has no ties to his identity in relation to a familial or cultural history, for he has never entered a cemetery and has no real concept of the space. Moreover, Rey asserts that the space of the cemetery is becoming less and less frequented and less and less meaningful to the other inhabitants of Havana. Thus, while the Cementerio de Colón maintains the heterotopic quality of otherness, of being a space apart, it no longer holds the connection to the rest of society necessary for it to fully function as a heterotopia within Gutiérrez’s Havana.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Foucault’s analysis of the heterotopia includes the following assertion as to the quality of “otherness” inscribed in such a space: “Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous

Rather, the evacuation of this relational quality and culturally grounded meaning from the cemetery indicates that it too acts as a non-place. While Rey, previously in constant movement through the city streets, does pause at the cemetery, it acts as nothing but another point along his journey. Like the named streets that are transformed into passages for the circulation of commerce rather than true places, so too is the cemetery a named site of commercial activity along a trajectory of movement. Rey stops his motion here only to sell the rest of his cigarettes. The linkage between the graveyard and the previous sentences describing his walking path further cements it as part of the overall space of movement, as does the fact that Rey's time at the cemetery is not conferred any sense of permanency, as he is only detained for "un rato."

Furthermore, the use of the Cementerio de Colón, a site so unique to Havana that it has become a tourist attraction, further highlights both this space's role as non-place and the role of the non-place in the dirty realist spatial schema. While Gutiérrez does not directly depict the cemetery as a site for tourism, the foreign audience reading the novel would likely be aware of the necropolis in this capacity if they had any familiarity with the city. As previously noted, Augé theorizes the space of travel and tourism as the quintessential non-place. It is true that Rey is certainly not a tourist, yet, like a tourist, he does stop at the cemetery as a site along a trajectory of movement and there engage in commercial transactions. Thus, the cemetery's position as a non-place is further emphasized. It is an object of consumption by the viewer concerned primarily with his solitary act of viewing. In its designation as a site of tourism, the cemetery becomes an exemplar of a space that is representative of Havana as a distinct spatial

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brothels of which we are now deprived). Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation" (*Of Other Spaces*).

entity, yet still a space homogenized by the postmodern culture of globalization and consumerism. Thus, once again, this space is also indicative of the dirty realist contradiction of attempting to portray such a culture and its spaces while still maintaining the distinct qualities of certain regions or cities.

That Rey views the non-place of circulation in a positive light is apparent in his feelings about remaining tied to any one space. After spending several days in the building where both Magda and Sandra live, Rey begins to feel restless. He passes the time “sentado en la esquina. Esperando por sí caía algo. Por supuesto, nada caía. Se sentía incómodo. Le gustaba moverse” (80). Rather than view his ties to this one building and the people in it with positivity, he feels his relationship to this space to be one of stagnation and discomfort. In comparison, the idea of motion is appealing. Rey plainly prefers the non-place of movement to his residence in a space of his relational and identity forming interactions with others.

In *Trilogía sucia de la Habana*, the narrator Pedro Juan shares Rey’s fondness for the non-space of circulation. As we have already seen, when faced with the torturous domestic space, Pedro Juan opts to flee; “caminaba mucho por todas partes. Por ahí. Siempre estaba huyendo. No podía estar en la casa” (31). Here, the emphasis is once again on the relief of the space of movement as non-place in juxtaposition to the perceived difficulty of stagnation in the domestic space. In Pedro Juan’s movement, there is no consideration whatsoever of a destination, as only a nebulous “por ahí” is mentioned as the space of this movement. Therefore, the relative emptiness and anonymity of this non-place of movement becomes increasingly apparent.

When the sites of Pedro Juan’s movement are named, as in the case of Rey’s wanderings through Havana, these sites are transformed into passages or tourist attractions, are bereft of

relational or identity forming meanings, and thus become non-places. Nevertheless, the narrator's affection for these spaces as non-places continues. He remarks, "lo mejor del mundo es pasear por el Malecón sin rumbo, bajo un ciclón furioso" (102). While the Malecón here is mentioned by name, Pedro Juan describes it as a space for aimless wanderings and passing through. The benefit of the poor weather is that, under these circumstances, "no hay un alma en todo el Malecón" (102). Thus, the space becomes one lacking in relational ties as well, and it is this deficiency that Pedro Juan seeks out. Additionally, as we have already seen, the choice to equate the lack of people in this space with a lack of soul, while a common enough turn of phrase, highlights the absence of character and meaning in such a non-place. Like the Cementerio de Colón, the Malecón is a tourist attraction in Havana. In this instance, however, this aspect of the space is explicitly developed, as the only person that the narrator encounters in his wandering is a Mexican tourist, whom he proceeds to ignore completely. Thus, once again, the site of the Malecón contributes to the overarching contradictory space of dirty realism while acting as a non-place of movement and tourism, and it is also embraced by the narrator for precisely these qualities.

Pedro Juan further analyzes his compulsion for movement in the story in *Trilogía* entitled "Estrellas y pendejos." He states, "Me gusta caminar despacio, pero no puedo. Siempre camino aprisa. Y es absurdo. Si tengo el rumbo perdido ¿para qué me apuro? Bueno, seguramente por eso mismo: estoy tan aterrado que corro sin cesar. Me da miedo detenerme un instante y descubrir que no sé dónde coño estoy" (134). The emphasis on movement for movement's sake and movement at a speed that precludes any real relationship to the areas being passed through solidifies this manner of experiencing the urban space as non-place. As Havana is experiencing such drastic changes in the "Special Period," changes which include the

degradation of the physical spaces of the city combined with the equally present degradation of the utopic socialist vision propagated by the Castro regime when faced with the unmediated economic pressures of postmodern global capitalist culture, the city space may become unfamiliar and terrifying to the narrator. Thus, the non-places of movement are preferable.

#### 6. The Private/Public Divide and the Space of Dirty Realism

In addition to embracing non-places in the texts, Gutiérrez's characters also respond to the degradation of the traditional spaces of identity formation through the evacuation of such accepted meanings and their replacement with more functional or inclusive means of community identity formation. One of the primary manners in which this is achieved is through the reconceptualization of private and public space. The division between the private and the public becomes almost non-existent in these texts. This is partially due to the physical decadence of the urban space. In the story "Anclado en la tierra de nadie," Gutiérrez presents the reader with an image that perfectly captures this reframing of the notion of private and public space. When half of a building in the Centro Habana neighborhood in which the narrator lives crumbles due to disrepair, "el edificio quedó como esas casitas de muñecas que les falta una pared y se ven los muebles y todo el interior" (70). The interior space of the apartment building becomes public, on display for all to see. This previously private space now acts as a type of stage for play, as in the simile of the dollhouse, or for the previously private dramas of the relationships developed in this space.



The metaphoric conception of the dollhouse, where the supposedly private lives of the inhabitants of a space are put on display for others, is characteristic of the dirty realist genre. Frederic Jameson's theorization of the dirty realist space highlights the reconceptualization of private and public as intrinsic to the production of this new type of space. He states, "we must think of the space of dirty realism as a collective built space in which the opposition between inside and outside is annulled" (*Seeds of Time* 155). Inherent in this re-envisioning of public and private space is a drastic change to the notion of privacy. In reference to this idea, Jameson notes, "dirty here means the collective as such, the traces of mass living and using. The traditional values of privacy have disappeared" (*Seeds of Time* 158). In its focus on the minutia of quotidian life, dirty realist writing does not afford its characters any privacy at all, exposing even scatological and sexual activities. The space of the dirty realist text is an ambiguous in-between space, where private acts occur in a public arena, and where the public eye has access to what was previously considered private. Dirty realism is thus, in essence, a literature of voyeurism.

The opening of the private to the public that marks both dirty realism and the voyeuristic act is also one of the hallmarks of socialism. From the Marxian perspective, the private sphere is a "bourgeois invention to oppress the working class and to limit women" (Mandanipour 97). Thus, the abolition of private property, and by extension the opening up of the private realm to the public, is one of the fundamental tenets of the *Communist Manifesto*. José Quiroga explores this idea in the context of a Sergio Romero photograph taken of a woman making a phone call in Havana in 1984. Gareth Jenkins' text accompanying the photograph explains that those in line to make free phone calls would listen in and comment on each other's conversations. Quiroga remarks that this act of eavesdropping presents an image where, "not only are Cubans oblivious

to a northern sense of decorum, but the private act of having a telephone conversation is turned into a public example of how the revolution demolished bourgeois notions of privacy” (106). If the act of listening in on a phone call is representative of the socialist recasting of the distinction between public and private, then the act of voyeurism, of looking in on a sexual encounter, would push this boundary even further, stretching what would appear to be the socialist ethos to its limit.

The transgression of sexual norms apparent in the act of voyeurism, does, however, violate the general morality of the revolution, as does the stark crudeness of Gutiérrez’s text. Guillermina De Ferrari claims that a large percentage of the relatively few Cuban readers of *Trilogía* see this vulgarity as a violation of their social order. Additionally, Cuban intellectuals fear to be identified with the social order that Gutiérrez does depict, begging the question, “are they the Cuban Revolution’s bourgeoisie?” (205). Like any voyeuristic reader, these intellectuals must overcome their disgust and question the “structure of good manners, good behavior, and good taste by which Western bourgeois culture has measured its own civilization” (De Ferrari 209). In this way, the acts of voyeurism in *Trilogía* and those in *El Rey de la Habana* indicate a continued adherence to and promotion of the communitarian anti-bourgeois, anti-privacy notions of socialism even as they criticize the crumbling Cuban socialist regime for inefficacy and hypocrisy. It is thus that the abolition of the division between private and public present in Gutiérrez’s Havana further marks it as a dirty realist space conceived by Jameson as a space “in which neither private property nor public law exists” (*Seeds of Time* 157). It is in such a space where the traditional markers of identity inscribed into public (national and governmental) and private (familial and domestic) spaces are questioned and erased in the

destruction of this binary division that new conceptions of individual and community identity can emerge.

“Plenilunio en la azotea” provides a concrete example of how an act of voyeurism, an act demonstrating the breakdown of the private/public spatial division, can question and criticize the socialist regime while insisting on the creation of a new type of community formed in opposition to the previous state-run model. Immediately after having sex with one of his neighbors, Carmita, Pedro Juan wanders naked out onto the terrace,

y allí estaban dos tipos, en la claridad azul del plenilunio. Lo vieron todo por una persiana entreabierta, y se guardaron las pingas. Muy sorprendidos. Asustados.

Estuvieron mirando y rallándose pajas a cuentas de nosotros. . . Eran dos muchachos muy jóvenes y cogieron piñazos de todos los colores, pero uno dio unos pasos atrás, sacó una pistola y me apuntó. Entonces comprendí. Estaban uniformados. (*Trilogía* 171)

This is a case of classic voyeurism in that the men are Peeping Toms, looking through the blinds at a private sexual act for their own sexual pleasure. That these men are policemen, however, complicates the issue.

As policemen, they are representatives of the government, of the collapsing socialist order. Loss and Whitfield relate the important presence of the voyeur in recent Cuban fiction to the “Cuban Revolution’s relation to vigilance. The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), the Neighborhood-Watch-like committees throughout the country whose job it is to ensure that in each neighborhood individuals are making their contribution to the revolution” (xii), form part of an overall system of vigilance that, as Whitfield remarks, also includes the “ubiquitous police” (*Autobiografía* 339). That Gutiérrez has the police act as literal voyeurs underscores this interpretation of voyeurism as representative of the vigilance that

formed part and parcel of the socialist revolution. The policemen, however, in addition to spying on the private lives of citizens, react to be being caught in this position with surprise and fear; they are “asustados.” The actions and reactions of these supposed representatives of state authority form more of a critique of the now rapidly dissolving socialist regime than an assertion of solidarity with it.

The response of Pedro Juan and his neighbors to the actions of these policemen, however, is indicative of a new type of camaraderie in the face of the degradation of the socialist revolutionary ideal that they represent. The neighbors, acting with a somewhat voyeuristic intent of their own, come to watch the spectacle on the terrace. Pedro Juan assaults the police officers, who then accuse him of causing “escándolo en la vía pública. Además de que anda desnudo en la vía publica.” They then try to handcuff him and take him away, presumably to the police station. The neighbors, however, band together to help defend Pedro Juan from the police, shouting, “‘Esto no es vía pública, no sean descaraos. Y ustedes, ¿qué hacen aquí arriba a esta hora? ¿Mirando huecos por las persianas? ¡Lo que son unos descaraos!’ En un minuto se reunieron más de veinte vecinos y los acosaron” (171-72). The neighbors protect their individual privacy, proclaiming their building as separate from the “vía pública” and thus not under the jurisdiction of state vigilance. This defense of the private sphere contradicts the socialist antipathy to the “bourgeois notion of privacy” discussed earlier. Additionally, that the population no longer expects to have the government interfere in their private affairs demonstrates a weakening of the state’s repressive regime and a rejection of or lack of confidence in its ability to monitor its citizens. Yet, at the very same time that the neighbors are rejecting their relationship to the state, they band together; they “reunir” as a new community in the face of an invasion of privacy by the policemen. They accept the building as a space “in which neither private property nor public

law exists” (*Seeds of Time* 157). This new communal force eclipses the old socialist vigilance, as the policemen are forced to flee the building by the mob of angry neighbors. Thus, while the old revolutionary sense of community is threatened by the very acts of voyeurism that have become characteristic of it, such an act of voyeurism inadvertently helps to bond the individual residents of central Havana in a new way.

Nevertheless, the incident in “Plenilunio en la azotea” is the only act of voyeurism in *Trilogía* considered by the characters to be an invasion of privacy. Unlike the policemen voyeurs of “Plenilunio en la azotea,” civilian voyeurs across the collection of stories are more often watching a public display than spying on an intimate moment. Even when a civilian voyeur is not watching an explicitly public display, the narrator does not portray his actions as an invasion of privacy. When describing Hayda and Jorge Luis in, “Yo, hombre de negocios,” Pedro Juan comments, “Eran unos negros hermosos, altos, de unos treinta y cinco años cada uno. Hacían una buena pareja y por las noches un mirahuecos del barrio les rondaba por el patio para escucharlos gimiendo y gozando” (*Trilogía* 54). In this instance, although Hayda and Jorge Luis’s sexual activities take place behind closed doors, that the “mirahuecos” becomes party to them is not considered to be a violation of their privacy, but rather a testament to their attractiveness and the quality of their sexual encounters. If Pedro Juan is aware of this voyeur’s activities, it seems logical that the rest of the neighborhood would be as well. In fact, the voyeur is considered to be, “del barrio,” to be from and form part of the neighborhood. Yet, no one is disturbed by his actions as they are by the actions of the policemen in “Plenilunio en la azotea.” It follows that neither Pedro Juan, nor Hayda, nor Jorge Luis, nor their neighbors are bothered by such an act of voyeurism unless it is perpetrated by an agent of the state. Pedro Juan and his

newly forming community are not so much opposed to the opening up of the private space associated with socialism, but rather to the invasion of this space by the state and public law.

Most often, the characters in the book actively open their private lives up to public display on their own terms. In his daily travels, Pedro Juan frequently watches and/or directly participates in sexual acts taking place in public spaces. One such incident can be found in the story “Las puertas de Dios.” As Pedro Juan takes a walk, he comes across “un negro y una negra templaban sentados de frente sobre el muro del Malecón. Desde lo alto, Maceo los observaba a bordo de su caballo de bronce. . . No resistí la tentación, y me puse a mirarlos” (178). Having sex on the Malecón, one of the most recognizable landmarks in Havana, under the monument of Maceo, a hero of the Cuban independence movement from Spain, is about as public of a display as possible. Even if there were no people around, Maceo is observing the couple, which places their action under the voyeuristic gaze of a figure representative of Cuban history itself. Pedro Juan joins Maceo in his watching and joins the couple in their arousal; “Desvainé y también me masturbé” (178). Thus, on this as on many other occasions, Pedro Juan acts both as voyeur and as exhibitionist. He masturbates in a public setting as he watches a couple engage in sexual activity in the same public setting, and through this disintegration of the spatialized public/private divide, these three individuals manage to engage in a pleasurable interaction that creates a bond between them, if only for a few minutes.

The figure of Maceo is also present in a similar act of bonding through public sexuality in *El Rey de la Habana*. Rey and Magda decide to have sex on the Malecón. “Cruzaron el parque Maceo. Se sentaron sobre el muro. Ella se recostó a una columna y abrió las piernas. Tenía una falda amplia que le llegaba a los tobillos. Rey se acomodó de frente, sacó su animal, que se endureció apenas olfateó el bollo apestoso y ácido de Magda, y allí mismo copularon

frenéticamente” (59). Rey and Magda’s sexual activities take place in the same highly visible and public locale as those of the couple in “Las puertas de Dios.” And, as in that vignette, soon they are met by the presence of “los voyeurs consuetudinarios del parque Maceo” (60). Magda’s sexual experience is heightened by the presence of the voyeurs, as she is “loca a los pajeros.” Nevertheless, in the midst of her passion (as well as that of her audience of onlookers) she does not stop trying to sell her peanuts;

En ningún momento ella soltó el manojito de cucuruchos de maní. Se vinieron muchas veces, como siempre. Ella quedó medio dormida, extenuada, pero siguió pregonando, sin cesar: <<Maní, lleva tu maní, manicito pa’l niño, vamo a vel..., maní.>> Los pajeros también concluyeron, se sacudieron bien y se alejaron sin dar el frente, caminando de lado, como los cangrejos. Ninguno compró maní. (60)

We have already seen the Malecón characterized as a non-place of both circulation and (sexual) tourism. Here, however, through the erasure of the public/private divide implicit in this sexual act, Magda, Rey, and the voyeurs come together for a type of communion, albeit brief. While in this scene sex and commerce are temporally linked and form a part of this ambiguous space, the sex is fulfilling and successful for all of the parties involved, whereas the commerce is not. The depiction of Magda’s sexual organs as dirty reminds the reader of her abject economic condition, a condition attributable in large part to the failings of the Cuban socialist state. At the same time, however, the absurdity of Magda’s salesmanship coupled with its inefficacy underscore the failure inherent consumerism as well. It is only the union of public and private into one ambiguous space through exhibitionism and voyeurism, not for profit but for personal pleasure, that momentarily gives a relational meaning to this non-place.

The presence of Maceo in name and in the form of the statue in these episodes highlights not only the very public nature of these sexual acts, and thus the blurred boundary between private and public present throughout Gutiérrez's work, but also the appropriation of a space of official national history. Despite Candía Cáceres' claim that, within the context of *Trilogía*, the daily struggles of the citizens of Havana "son expuestos por sobre la búsqueda de símbolos trascendentes de la identidad nacional" (106), here is just such a symbol of national identity. Nevertheless, the focus of this passage is the sexual acts of exhibitionism and voyeurism occurring in front of this symbol, indicating their preeminence over any conception of nation. While some may consider such an act an irreverent degradation of a space of national history, the utilization of this public space and monument for the expressed purpose of deriving personal pleasure can also be viewed as a re-appropriation of this space as one that reflects the lives of Havana's residents rather than a mythic and heroic past removed from the context of their daily lives.

Jameson comments on this rebellious aspect to dirty realist fiction, stating that the authors cited in Buford's analysis of the North American genre

certify that the microscopic and the inconsequential – or rather what the state and the dominant institutions pronounce to be trivial and insignificant – as the space of real life, or of what used to be authentic. Indeed it is because hegemonic thought and institutional value is thus understood as valorizing what in the previous paragraph Buford characterizes as 'the large historical statement' (what is 'heroic or grand' ...) it is because such large or megastatements are thought to be institutionalized and hegemonic, and to



wear the stamp of the approval of the State that the new microfiction can be packaged as protest, revolt, subversion, and the like. (*Seeds of Time* 149)<sup>54</sup>

Thus, in their taking over of a public space of official history and national heroism with everyday private sexual acts, Gutiérrez's characters are similarly challenging the state's spatial and ideological hegemony in true dirty realist fashion, and are attempting "definirse dentro del contexto nacional, fuera de la utopía creada por su gobierno" (Edwards *A la sombra del macho*). Jameson goes on to argue that the rebelliousness of this focus on the quotidian in the face of the officially sanctioned and hegemonic can be called into question as rather being part of the postmodern "war on totality" that couches what he considers a somewhat naïve "Utopian intent to continue to imagine radical alternatives" to late capitalism (149). However, given the emphasis on creating a bond of communion through the disintegration of the private/public spatial division and the clear focus on the carnally human in the face of the non-functionality of both the socialist regime and the ruthless black market connected to global capitalism, Gutiérrez's dirty realist space seems anything but Utopian in its intent. Nevertheless, Jorge Fornet remarks of the attitude that the *autores del desencanto* take in the face of contemporary revolutionary society, "ven una utopía agotada, y quizá sin saberlo ni proponérselo, están abogando por otra de signo diferente. Ya no del Hombre Nuevo, sino la de ese no-lugar invisible entre los periódicos del día, los libros de texto, los augurios de las cartománticas, y las guías turistas despistados" (*La narrativa cubana* 20). To say that Gutiérrez advocates for a new utopia through his use of the non-place, or the "no-lugar" would be an overstatement. Yet, in their rejection of the Revolutionary utopian ideology and its spatial constructs, his texts do open up a

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<sup>54</sup> Here Jameson is analyzing the following description of dirty realism posited by Bill Buford in *Granta*: "It is not heroic or grand: the epic ambitions of Norman Mailer or Saul Bellow seem, in contrast, inflated, strange, or even false...It is not a fiction devoted to making the large historical statement" (4).

space for the creation of a new type of society, even if this society does not reach utopian heights.

The story “Solitario, Resistiendo” provides another concrete example of how the erasure of the public/private division through voyeurism can lead to a sexual union and thus a connection between previously isolated and anonymous individuals. Walking along the Malecón one night, Pedro Juan comes across a lesbian couple engaged in a sexual act and pauses briefly to watch. He then notices, “a cinco metros escasos un negro las miraba y se hacía una paja . . . y unos metros más allá una mujer blanca, bonita, bastante aceptable, vacilaba al negro y ardía en deseos. Sentada sobre el muro, daba pequeños saltos para acercarse. Iban a gozar los dos cuando ella terminara su maniobra de abordaje” (84). Pedro Juan, “el negro” and the “mujer blanca” are all linked by the act of voyeurism. Both Pedro Juan and “el negro” watch the lesbian couple, and both Pedro Juan and the “mujer blanca” watch “el negro.” This chain of voyeurism does more than link these characters through their voyeuristic association. The act of watching causes the woman to “acercarse,” to literally move closer to this masturbating man. These two previously unconnected individuals will later move beyond the voyeuristic act to engage in a physical union through sex. A heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman come together by peering at a lesbian couple. Thus in this scene the normally divisive category of sexual orientation becomes less rigid through the unchecked libidinous drive, and a new sort of unity is forged through the cycle of exhibitionism and voyeurism.

The recasting of private and public spaces into one more nebulous and ambiguous space through exhibitionism and voyeurism creates psychological as well as physical ties between the citizens of Havana depicted in *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* and *El Rey de la Habana*. In “Yo, Revolcador de mierda,” Pedro Juan proposes that the exhibitionist plays an important role in

society; “Así que un exhibicionista (y cada día hay más en los parques, en las guaguas, en los portales) cumple con una hermosa función social: erotizar a los transeúntes, sacarlos de su stress rutinario, y recordarles que a pesar de todo, apenas somos unos animalitos primarios, simples, y frágiles” (101-2). Here, the narrator remarks that the number of exhibitionists invading the spaces of everyday life is getting larger every day. These individuals are no longer isolated by their actions, but, as their presence becomes more and more commonplace, they begin to form a social group or community with a social purpose. They fulfill “una hermosa función social.” These exhibitionists serve those who look on at them, those who through this act of looking take on the role of the voyeur. The burgeoning community of exhibitionists forces these onlookers to transcend their individual routines and remember that they form part of a larger group. The narrator’s use of the first person plural in “somos” underlines this emphasis on the communal. The reader, looking on at Pedro Juan, the exhibitionist, the self-denominated “revolcador de mierda” (104) is included in this “we,” but the “we” is not limited to the reader. By gazing voyeuristically at these literal or literary acts of exhibitionism, the citizens of Pedro Juan’s Havana, as well as the reader, are reminded of what they have in common with their fellow man, namely simplicity and fragility.

In the dirty realist space marked by the voyeurism produced by the disintegration of the division between public and private space, Gutiérrez’s characters are able to recognize the baseness and fragility of the human animal that are apparent in the overtly sexual and otherwise abject themes and elements characteristic of his works. These qualities also mark the isolation and alienation that the characters face in their dog-eat-dog quest for survival as the Havana of the “Special Period” crumbles around them, as they reject previous forms of communal identity formation through the traditional institutions such as the family and the nation, and as they

consequently embrace the proliferation of the non-place. Yet as the non-place provides a space devoid of traditional identity markers and thus possibly a space that can be later assigned new value, and as the boundaries between public and private space become blurred, they are able to recognize their commonalities and reconnect in new, often sexual, ways that embrace these human traits. Pedro Juan comments that the people around him have been too often marginalized. Society may say

que debes eludir a aquel tipo porque es un loco, o un maricón, o un gusano, un vago, el otro será pajero y mirahuecos . . . y si se pasan treinta y cinco años martillándote eso en el cerebro, después que estás aislado te crees el mejor y te empobreces mucho porque pierdes algo hermoso de la vida que es disfrutar de la diversidad. (15-16)

The narrator alludes to the idea that thirty-five years of a revolutionary regime led to a type of community that excluded many. Rather than criticize the whole notion of community, however, in this new, transitional period, he calls for the embracing of diversity, and thus the formation of a new type of community, forged from the marginalized, from the “pajero” and the “mirahuecos,” the abject that were excluded from revolutionary society but populate and characterize the dirty realist space.

## V. Conclusion

While the Hispano-American dirty realist space is often classified as post-apocalyptic or dystopic, and while the “dirty” nature of this space lends credence to this classification, upon further analysis of the use of space in the works of three of the most renowned authors representative of this genre, an element of hope or possibility arises, lessening the overtly negative tone of these texts. Many of the places in the texts are emptied of their previous meanings and converted into non-places, yet this may act as but one step in the possible reconstruction of these places in the future, and thus the generation of a more positive or inclusive space becomes conceivable. Therefore, through an exploration of the works of Guillermo Fadanelli, Fernando Vallejo, and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, the dirty realist space emerges as an ambiguous space of transition. In the case of all three authors the development of, and inclusion in, postmodern global consumer society marks this transition. Nevertheless, other elements are at play. In Fadanelli’s texts, the cultural change inherent in the rapid adoption of neoliberal economic policies takes to the fore, whereas in the case of Vallejo, rapid urbanization due to internal migration and the violence associated with drug trafficking mark the dissolution of an outdated moral order based in nationalistic and religious doctrine. Gutiérrez explores the decadence of the ideology and society instituted with the Cuban Revolution. Thus, the dirty realist space marks a point in between old and new economic, cultural, social, moral, and/or political systems.

Due to this transitional nature, the dirty realist space exhibits and defines itself through somewhat ambiguous or contradictory characteristics. The division between public and private becomes blurred and uncertain. Notions of privacy disappear or are re-conceptualized while

communal relationships and civil society cannot function as they previously did, for the spaces of their production and reproduction no longer exist as they did in the past, many having become non-places. The simultaneous assertion of a distinct regionalism with its corresponding places grounded in local history, culture, and identity, along with a homogenous postmodern consumer culture in which the indistinct non-place flourishes, further heightens the incongruous nature of a space in upheaval. Likewise, a focus on abjection and the abject which translates as the “dirty” in the dirty realist space also underscores the ambiguous and transitional nature of this space.

Kristeva theorizes the abject as a liminal space between subject and object, self and other. As the abject draws attention to the invented borders between these positions, it acts as a threat to our identity system and to the notion of order, and thus the abject is primarily concerned with a state of transition or transformation. Kristeva notes, “The place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not. The abject threatens life, it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self” (1). The dirty realist space is therefore a space of abjection not only in its insistence on the marginal and marginalized, violence and death, sex and bodily functions, but also in its capacity to demonstrate the uncertain and volatile nature of societies and identities in flux.

The notion of the abject as where “meaning collapses” and where identity is challenged further links abjection as a characteristic of the transitional dirty realist space to the concept of the non-place that I contend to be prevalent in this space. The non-place is a space that no longer maintains its ties to its previous historic and cultural significances nor acts as a space where communal or individual identity is constructed along traditional lines. This emptying of meaning and identification thus echoes certain qualities of the abject despite the fact that the abject is

generally met with fear, horror, or disgust, whereas, in the context of these dirty realist texts, the non-place is more often than not embraced as a relief or a positive development on the path toward societal change.

The aesthetic experience of the abject in the dirty realist text leads to the discussion of these works as non-places in and of themselves. Akin to poetic catharsis, exposure to the abject via literature is, "an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it" (Kristeva 29). The reader gains a type of pleasure from the literary version of the abject precisely because it is safe and contained. The non-place, and particularly the non-place of travel, similarly relegates difference to self-contained objects and positions that are easily consumed. Augé states that supermodernity, the fertile ground in which the non-place proliferates,

makes the old (history) into a specific spectacle, as it does with all exoticism and all local particularity. History and exoticism play the same role in it as the 'quotations' in a written text: a status superbly expressed in travel agency catalogues. In the non-places of supermodernity, there is always a specific position (in the window, on a poster, to the right of the aircraft, on the left of the motorway) for 'curiosities' presented as such: pineapples from the Ivory Coast; Venice, city of the Doges, the Tangier Kasbah; the site of Alésia. But they play no part in any synthesis, they are not integrated with anything; they simply bear witness, during a journey to the coexistence of distinct individualities, perceived as equivalent and unconnected. (89)

To conceive of the non-place in this way allows for both the reconciliation of the inherent contradiction of the dirty realist space as well as the categorization of the Hispano-American dirty realist texts studied here as non-places. If the coexistence of the seemingly contradictory

elements of regional distinction and homogenous global consumer culture mark the dirty realist space (Jameson, *Seeds of Time* 148), and if the presence of the non-place also marks this dirty realist space, then it follows that, within this spatial construct, the non-place turns the “local particularity” into another “curiosity” no longer grounded in the culture and society from which it sprang and thus easily consumed by the reader. Like the reading of the abject, this reading of regional difference is enjoyable in that it allows a type of interaction with the other that still maintains a degree of disconnectedness. Thus, in its role as an object of consumption for the reader, this “local particularity” is part and parcel of global postmodern consumer culture. Moreover, due to the manner in which they are able to “position” the cities in which they are set (as well as the characters residing in these cities) as “curiosities,” the texts themselves act as non-places in this regard.

In that Pedro Juan Gutiérrez first published *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* and *El Rey de la Habana* with Anagrama in Barcelona,<sup>55</sup> and in that they are not easily accessible to the Cuban audience, these texts provide the clearest example of how these fictions act as non-places that position Havana and its residents (or at least Centro Habana and its residents) as “curiosities” or tourist attractions for the reader. Gutiérrez, however, is not alone in his ability to capture an international audience. Fadanelli’s works have reached foreign readers in Spain, France, Israel and Germany. Vallejo’s texts have been published in Spain, Mexico, Argentina, the United States, England, Israel, Poland, Germany, and France. In her discussion of *Trilogía*, Esther Whitfield argues, “we might think of reading from one cultural context to another as a form of armchair tourism” (*Autobiografía* 336). Seeing as Augé posits the space of travel and tourism as the ultimate non-place (70), Whitfield’s comment further solidifies the notion of this text as non-

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<sup>55</sup> Pedro Juan Gutiérrez has since become an international phenomenon published in Hungarian, Slovenian, English, Finnish, Polish, German and French.



place. The link between the non-place and the tourist attraction becomes even clearer in Dean MacCannell's description of these sites of tourism as "elements dislodged from their original, natural, historical and cultural contexts" (13), a definition almost exactly aligned with Augé's conception of the non-place.

While more nuanced and complex in the case of domestic readership, this association between reader and tourist does not completely dissolve in the case of readers residing in the texts' countries of origin. After all, domestic tourism is most certainly a viable industry. In general, it seems unlikely that the domestic readership of these dirty realist texts would wholly pertain to the marginalized groups depicted therein. The young *sicario* residents of Medellín's *comunas* about whom Vallejo writes are not likely the author's target audience. The readers of his texts are more apt to be wealthier and better educated like his narrator, Fernando, who is very clearly not a part of the economically marginalized class that he treats with a mix of disdain and admiration. In much the same manner, those residents of Mexico City occupying the social positions of Fadanelli's characters (Johnny, the unnamed adolescent narrator of *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, Cristina and her brother in *¿Te veré en el desayuno?*, and Eduarda in *Lodo*) would not likely have access to and choose to read the Mexican author's works. However, given Fadanelli's increasing acceptance and popularity, there is the distinct possibility that real people akin to his more middle class characters (*¿Te veré en el desayuno?*'s Ulises, Adolfo, and Olivia, and *Lodo*'s narrator, Benito Torrentera) could be included amongst his readership. In the case of Gutiérrez, given as there is little access to his texts within Cuba, a discussion of his domestic readership seems a moot point. Whitfield, however, notes that "*Trilogía* has now been read in Cuba enough to place Pedro Juan Gutiérrez on Havana's intellectual circuit; for his work to have been compared, in a divergently reported statement, to that of the early Carpentier, and, most

importantly, for a book of his short stories to have been published in Cuba last year” (*Autobiografía* 33).<sup>56</sup> Even so, the Reynaldos of Centro Habana whose time is fully devoted to mere survival seem an unlikely audience for the author’s works. As such, in all three cases, it is not unreasonable to think of the domestic and international reader alike as “reading from one cultural context to another” even if the domestic reader’s cultural context more closely approaches that of the text.

Whitfield draws an even stronger parallel between the reading of *Trilogía* and tourism. While her comments are centered on this work and its Cuban milieu, they have a broader application for all the works of dirty realism studied here. She observes in the audience and their reception of Gutiérrez’s works the existence of

a market not in the planned products of Cuba’s tourist industry but in realities on the periphery, in what is left out of the guided tour and left behind as time takes its toll on the Revolution. This is a market not merely in official tourist attractions but in place–and time-specific Cuban identity; and whether this identity is packaged as a vacation or as a book, its movement in international circuits defined *Trilogía* and its readers. (337)

Cuba and Cuban identity in this non-place of “armchair tourism” that is the text thus become little more than packaged items for foreign consumption. Vallejo and Fadanelli similarly present Medellín and Mexico City respectively.

The wish on the part of the tourist/reader to go beyond the officially sanctioned to see the reality of the “periphery” strengthens the link between these texts and the space of postmodern tourism. Ian Munt argues that one of the defining characteristics of the “other” postmodern tourism is “a desire for authenticity, for ‘honesty’, however circumscribed that may be in reality”

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<sup>56</sup> Here, Whitfield is referring to *Melancolía de los leones*, published in 2000 by Editorial Unión in Havana.

(*The 'Other' Postmodern Tourism* 103). In the case of the works of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, as in the case of those authored by Guillermo Fadanelli, Fernando Vallejo, and that of dirty realism in general, this “reality on the periphery” is one of dirt, poverty, violence, sexuality, and marginalization. As such, the reading of the dirty realist text is an experience akin to that of negative tourism.<sup>57</sup>

The tourist’s appetite for the “dirty” has been apparent for some time. MacCannell argues that “‘social problems’ figure in the curiosity of tourists: dirt, disease, malnutrition” (7). In the specific context of Latin America and the Caribbean, Martin Mowforth, Clive Charlton, and Ian Munt note, “Cities often lack a technocratic ‘order’, often suffer from a certain dirtiness and compromise health in certain ways. They are often unsafe. Some would argue that it is indeed the lack of apparent order that is the attraction” (*Tourism and Responsibility* 179). MacCannell theorizes the draw of the dirty, the violent, and the unsafe for the tourist as a way of restructuring the search for moral identity in a modern system where an “us vs. them” attitude no longer functions as an effective method of dealing with difference. He remarks that “disgust” over the “negative” touristic sight in combination with admiration for the more “positive” sight provides “a moral stability to the modern touristic consciousness that extends beyond immediate social relationships to the structure and organization of a total society” (40). It is that that this attraction to the dirty acting as “a touristic form of moral involvement with diverse public representations of race, poverty, urban structures, social ills, and of course, the public “good,” the monuments, is a modern alternative to systems of in-group morality built out of binary oppositions” (40). In that this attraction to negative tourism and, as I contend, parallel attraction to the reading of the dirty realist text, deal with the breaking down of the binary opposition of

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<sup>57</sup> MacCannell provides the following examples of “negative” tourism: tours of Appalachian communities, northern inner-city cores, poor communities in West Virginia, and the top ten most polluting companies in Philadelphia.

“insider vs. outsider” (MacCannell 40) or, more broadly, self versus other, in the context of the marginalized being met with disgust, the abject once again becomes a pertinent category for the understanding of this phenomenon.

Therefore, the role of abjection in the Hispano-American dirty realist text as a tool for engaging with the “other” falls in line with what Alberto Morieras argues is one general trend in Latin Americanist production.<sup>58</sup> Moreiras notes, “through Latin Americanist representation, Latin American differences are controlled and homogenized and put at the service of global representation. This is so also in the extreme cases where homogenization of subaltern difference must go through the active production of othering or abjection” (32). The reader seeking out the negative aspects of Latin American society in these texts, texts that demonstrate the homogenizing force of global postmodern consumer society both in their depiction of the spaces in which they are set and in their role as physical objects of consumption in a global marketplace, is met with the abjection actively put forth on the page by the author.<sup>59</sup> In turn, the book acts as a non-place allowing for the smooth and controlled integration of this “other” into the totality of “homogenized” society in much the same manner as MacCannell’s negative tourist sites. An attempt to sympathize with or understand this “other” is necessarily also an attempt to define oneself. The dirty realist text, thus, in its presentation of the abject other,

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<sup>58</sup> Moreiras defines Latin Americanist reflection as “the sum total of academic discourse on Latin America, whether carried out in Latin America, in the United States, in Europe, or elsewhere” (1).

<sup>59</sup> The role of the author in this “active production of othering or abjection” is of note here, as much of Moreiras’ reflection on abjection deals with the role of the subaltern in *testimonio* writing. This focus on abjection and the *testimonio* makes Moreiras’ study particularly apt in the analysis of the dirty realist text which, especially in the case of *autoficciones* such as those written by Vallejo and Gutiérrez, has strong ties to the *testimonio* genre. Whitfield notes, “*Trilogía* bears several marks of the *testimonio*: aside from its first-person narrator, it is spoken from the social margins of one place to a listener in another... where this book departs most dramatically from testimony—namely in rejecting the collective voice and cause—it does so in defiance of one set of historical circumstances and in deference to a newer one” (332). The dirty realist text thus can be seen as an irreverent response to the critically or officially accepted *testimonio*.

provides a controlled space in which to engage with the border that separates self and other, subaltern and hegemonic dominant.

Along with a desire to fashion a moral identity, MacCannell posits that the tourist's fascination with these social ills is also in part due to his or her constant quest for "authenticity, to see if he can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity, or purity of others" (MacCannell 41). While neither "chastity" nor "purity" figure prominently in dirty realism, the poor and social problems certainly do; Guillermo Fadanelli depicts urban violence, poverty and prostitution as well as the mediocrity of the lower middle class; Fernando Vallejo explores the world of the *sicario* replete with poverty, drugs, violence and prostitution, and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez most strikingly portrays the lumpen, the extremely marginalized inhabitants of Centro Habana who will do just about anything to survive during the "Special Period." In stressing these portions or aspects of postmodern culture, on what critics of the genre have called the "belly-side of contemporary life" (Buford 4) or "darkest holes of society" (Rebein 43),<sup>60</sup> dirty realism similarly plays into this vision of the "dirty" as what makes the realism appear real.

Moreover, the simplistic style and lack of literary adornment that also characterize the genre may add to the sense of truthfulness and legitimacy conferred upon these texts. While Susan Sontag is referring to photography alone when she asserts the "less polished pictures...are welcomed as possessing a special kind of authenticity," in this instance, perhaps the same could be said of the written text. In contrasting the role of the amateur (and the authenticity ascribed to his work) in photography and literature, Sontag notes, "there is no comparable level playing field

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<sup>60</sup> While both Buford and Rebein were referring to dirty realism in the context of the United States and Canada, I contend that their characterizations hold true and become even more extreme in form within the Hispano-American version of the genre.

in literature, where nothing owes to chance or luck, and where refinement of language usually incurs no penalty” (28). However, the case of dirty realism, in which part of the artistry of the professional author lies in the lack of refinement of his or her language, complicates this distinction between image and text, and opens rooms for the reception of the text to echo that of the reception of the photograph as somehow more true or real due to its lack of refinement.

The literary phenomenon of the reader searching for authenticity in the dirty realist text is very much in line with the experience of negative tourism for the tourist. In their study, *Tourism and Sustainability* Martin Mowforth and Ian Munt note that, particularly within the Third World context, “the omnipresence of poverty makes the other side of cities an increasingly popular niche form of new tourism (known as ‘slum tourism’ and increasingly referred to as ‘reality tourism’)” (283). Elsewhere, Mowforth, Charlton, and Munt provide Deborah Dwek’s analysis of *favela* tours in Rio de Janeiro as a concrete example of the manner in which the tourist perceives a tie between the real and the marginal. For Dwek, these tours represent “the search for the ‘authentic other’ by the modern, or perhaps it should be the postmodern, tourist. The favela tour is the chance for many of the middle class tourists and backpackers to get closer to the ‘real’ Rio” (qtd. in *Tourism and Responsibility* 186). In much a similar manner the reader may turn to Fadanelli, Vallejo, or Gutiérrez to “get closer to the ‘real’” Mexico City, Medellín, or Havana respectively.

This notion of “authenticity” and of the ability to get closer to what, in essence, is the “other” presented with various degrees of exoticism is illusory in both tourism and its counterpart of reading the dirty realist text. MacCannell calls this desire in its most realized form the creation of a “utopia of difference,” and tourism’s ability to create said utopia depends on “the possibility of recognizing and attempting to enter into dialogue, on an equal footing, with

forms of intelligence absolutely different” from our own (xxi). The hitch in this process lies, thus, in the idea of “equal footing,” an idea that begs the question, “Who is the tour guide?” as much as “Who is the tourist?” With regard to negative sightseeing, MacCannell states, “this kind of tour is usually conducted by a local character who has connections outside his community” (40). Paradoxically, however, in the case of a particular community, urban neighborhood, slum, etc., these outside connections are likely a form of cultural capital unavailable to the majority of residents, and thus by definition create a type of critical distance, or an unequal footing. The more marginal the area to be explored, the more true this becomes. With regard to the previously given example of the *favela* tour, however, Mowforth, Charlton, and Munt assert, “It is commonly perceived that *favela* tours are run by residents of the *favela* and are thus an indication of local entrepreneurial spirit rising out of the hardship of life...however, Deborah Dwek’s work has shown that most of the tours are actually managed by outsiders and surprisingly few residents even act as guides” (*Tourism and Responsibility* 187). This provides a very clear example of how difference is not presented in a dialogue and on equal footing, for the tourist is not directly engaging with the residents of the community that he or she is visiting, but rather with an outsider who generally is in a substantially less marginal position than those in the area to which he or she acts as a guide.

In a parallel manner, when speaking of the Hispano-American dirty realist text we must probe the answer to the more apt question of “Who is the narrator?” as much as “Who is the reader?” It cannot be merely coincidental that, with the exception of the unnamed adolescent narrator in Fadanelli’s *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, none of the most marginalized characters in the dirty realist novels and stories here studied are empowered to narrate. Even this narrator’s anonymity, while it may be a relief to him within the world of the text, robs him of some of his

power in the greater world in which the reader resides.<sup>61</sup> While the other half of the narration of *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* and all of the narration of *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* are focalized through the point of view of the characters, they are nonetheless that of a third person narrator. Moreover, the narrator's opening remarks in *¿Te veré en el desayuno?* are, "la siguiente es la historia de cuatro personas cuyas vidas no merecían haber formado parte de novela alguna" (7). This narrative voice thus separates itself from the characters with a degree of disdain, regarding them as somehow insignificant. The only named character of Fadanelli's given the role of first person narrator is Benito Torrentera in *Lodo*. Although Benito does struggle economically, his life is fairly comfortable in comparison with that of Eduarda, whose life he also narrates. His quest is for ease not survival. As a professor of philosophy with familial connections to the government, Benito has cultural capital that renders him far less marginal.

All of Vallejo's fictions are narrated by the semi-autobiographical character of Fernando. Fernando is member of the disappearing elite class of Medellín, and thus shares none of the economic marginality of the residents of the *comunas* whose lives he also shares with the reader.<sup>62</sup> In fact, Fernando narrates as a native of Medellín who has gone to live abroad in Mexico and only comes back to his hometown to visit. He thus is a combination of insider and outsider much akin to that of both MacCannell and Dwek's tour guides. In fact, Fernando often acts as a literal guide to the culture of the *comunas* in Medellín for the reader. In *La virgen de los sicarios*, he is constantly defining and explaining the local culture for the reader's benefit, sharing that, "el basuco es cocaína impura fumada, que hoy fuman los jóvenes" and that "te voy

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<sup>61</sup> While it is not my contention that the subject of a portrait is equivalent to the narrator of a text, Susan Sontag's analysis of the unnamed in portraits may be of use in understanding the way in which anonymity can be representative of a subject's powerlessness. She states, "It is significant that the powerless are not named in the captions. A portrait that declines to name its subject becomes complicit, if inadvertently, in the cult of celebrity that has fueled an insatiable appetite for the opposite sort of photograph: to grant only the famous their names demotes the rest to representative instances of the occupations, their ethnicities, their plights" (79).

<sup>62</sup> As a gay man, however, Fernando does experience a high degree of social marginalization.



a decir qué es un sicario: un muchachito, a veces un niño, que mata por encargo” (9). Neither the *sicario*, nor the smoker of *basuco*, however ever has the equal footing of the ability to narrate his own story for himself.

Similarly, when dealing with Gutiérrez’s works, one must look to the position of the narrator in society in order to analyze the authority of that voice to speak for the, generally impoverished and marginalized, “other” within the text. Whitfield remarks that “reading *Trilogía* is not about getting lost in a book or losing a book inside oneself but, rather, about being reminded constantly who is in and who is out, who is Cuban and who is not, and just what this means in a specific time, place and economic climate” (331). The implication here is that Pedro Juan Gutiérrez as author, and Pedro Juan as narrator are “in” whereas the reader is “out.” Nonetheless, are there not different degrees of being “in” even within the context of the “time, place and economic climate” of the Cuban “Special Period?” It is of note that *El Rey de la Habana* is narrated in third person, whereas *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* has the semi-autobiographic character of Pedro Juan as its narrator. This follows the general trend of the most powerless characters in Hispano-American dirty realism lacking a narrative voice. Rey, the protagonist of *El Rey de la Habana*, is far more marginalized than Pedro Juan. The adolescent is homeless, jobless, and destitute. He has no familial support network. He lacks any marketable skill and has only had a minimal education. As an escaped prisoner, Rey is also without any official identification papers, papers necessary for any of the minimal aid made available to the public as well as to avoid problems with the police. In contrast, Pedro Juan, while certainly struggling for survival in the harsh economic reality of the Special Period, has an apartment, however meager, to call his own. This narrator also has a network of friends both in Havana and

abroad, and a mother in the countryside whom he can visit whenever he so chooses.<sup>63</sup> As an author and former journalist, he is skilled and has a modicum of earning potential as well as a deal of cultural capital that would facilitate some interactions with officials. Therefore, despite the fact that both characters live in the same neighborhood of Havana and in what is supposedly a classless socialist society, they do not hold equal positions within this society, and many of the characters with whom Pedro Juan has dealings in *Trilogía* are more aligned to Rey's position than his own. Thus, those in the most "dirty," marginal, and abject positions are not acting as the "tour guides" to their lives and the spaces that they occupy. Instead those with various degrees of separation from these spaces and lives take on the role of narrator/tour guide for the reader who is likely not Cuban and thus even farther "out" of this social context.

In questioning the tour guide/narrator and the position he occupies in the society to which he is giving the tourist/reader access, one also necessarily calls the authenticity of experience he provides into question. While verisimilitude and the veritable depiction of society has generally fallen out of fashion as a standard by which fiction is evaluated, authors of dirty realism have positioned themselves as portraying contemporary Latin America in a more authentic manner than many of their predecessors and contemporaries, opening the door to the consideration of their works in these terms. Anke Birkenmaier cites, "positioning themselves against the previous tradition of Latin American magic realism" as one of the defining characteristics of Latin American dirty realism (491). Fadanelli's rejection of "los grandes" and Vallejo's constant criticism of García Márquez in part for their manner of exoticizing Latin America and denying the global cosmopolitanism of its urban centers certainly support this

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<sup>63</sup> Access to the countryside acts as an important economic resource in *Trilogía*, for it was possible to obtain foodstuffs in the countryside that were unavailable in Havana. These food items could then be smuggled back into the city at a considerable profit, or simply used for personal consumption.

claim. Gutiérrez's purported reason for leaving journalism to write fiction was that, due to the government censorship and propaganda machine, he was unable to write the truth of the Cuban situation.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the reader is to believe that his fictions are novel in that they are indeed reflective of an authentic reality.

However, as we have seen, Fadanelli, Vallejo, and Gutiérrez, through the voice of their narrators, have no more authority to reveal the "reality" that they ascribe to their dirty realism than the outsider *favela* tour guide does to expose the foreign tourist to the "real" Río. Whereas the ability of a *favela* tour to allow the tourist to know the "real" Río is delusive in that the *favela* is no more or less "real" than any other attraction in the South American city, so is the dirty realist's depiction of the city no more or less authentic for its "dirtiness." The narrow focus of these Latin American dirty realists on the abject and the marginalized would have the reader believe that virtually all residents of Mexico City are subject to daily violence and either struggling for survival or constantly dealing with an acute awareness of their own mediocrity. Similarly, all residents of Medellín would be members of an elite class or living in a slum, and in either case they would be constantly dodging bullets and drugging themselves. Every resident of Centro Habana would be wandering around in a haze of rum and sex (be it for pleasure or pay). This vision of Latin American urban space is no more nor less authentic or exoticizing than any other. It is simply a different, perhaps previously ignored, facet to society and culture whose complexities resist totalization of any form. Thus, in quintessentially postmodern fashion, the dirty realist depiction of the urban space reveals a truth rather than "the truth."

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<sup>64</sup> This information was obtained during an interview with the author in at the UNEAC in Havana on February 5, 2011.

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