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DYSTOPIAS OF MADRID. PUBLIC SPACE
TRANSFORMATION AND REPRESENTATION
OF VIOLENCE IN RAFAEL REIG'S *SANGRE A
BORBOTONES* AND JAVIER MORENO'S *2020*

*Distopías de Madrid. Transformación del espacio
público y representación de la violencia en Sangre a
borbotones de Rafael Reig y 2020 de Javier Moreno*

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ABSTRACT: Sharp grills, uncomfortable public benches, hardly any shade... these are some of the hallmarks of new tendencies in urban design that have burst into our cities: new ways to understand public space in a much less habitable mode. Moreover, pedestrian citizens increasingly find their right to use space curtailed by the proliferation of places for consumption. Parallel to the emergence of these new urban trends, certain narratives structured as urban dystopias and based on grotesque futurisms have also appeared. In this paper I discuss this urban transformation as the trigger or condition of possibility of two recent Spanish novels: Rafael Reig's *Sangre a borbotones* and Javier Moreno's

2020. I focus on the metamorphosis of contemporary Madrid, which these two authors take as the root of their paradoxically realist approach to dystopic futurism. Building upon this sublayer, Reig and Moreno have begun to imagine (or to warn of) the possible future account of our society.

Key words: Urban planning; Contemporary Spanish Narrative; Dystopia; Public Spaces.

RESUMEN: Enrejados puntiagudos, bancos incómodos, falta de sombra..., estas son algunas de las características de las nuevas tendencias en diseño urbano que han irrumpido en nuestras ciudades: nuevas formas de entender el espacio público de una manera mucho menos habitable. Además, los peatones encuentran cada vez más restringido su derecho a estar en la calle debido a la proliferación de espacios destinados al consumo. Paralelamente a la aparición de estas nuevas tendencias urbanas, también han aparecido ciertas narrativas estructuradas como distopías urbanas y basadas en futurismos grotescos. En este artículo analizo esta transformación de la ciudad como el desencadenante o condición de posibilidad de dos novelas españolas recientes: *Sangre a borbotones* de Rafael Reig y *2020* de Javier Moreno. Me centro aquí en la metamorfosis del Madrid contemporáneo, que estos dos autores toman como la raíz de un futurismo distópico de paradójica referencialidad con lo contemporáneo. A partir de este, Reig y Moreno se han dado a imaginar (o a advertir de) el posible relato futuro de nuestra sociedad.

Palabras clave: planificación urbana; narrativa española contemporánea; distopía; espacio público.

From different perspectives, fields, and geographies, modern and contemporary critical studies have approached urbanism as a process of capitalization (Harvey 2012; Davis 1992; Lefebvre 2000; Fernández Durán 2012; Ardura 2014). Questions about inherent and circumstantial features of the city, both as abstractions and in more concrete terms, remain in this century as the link of a chain that has its historical roots precisely in the moment in which the political device of imperial cities met early capitalist systems. Since then, their powerful organic relationship has been continuously addressed. Starting in the nineteenth century¹, from Haussmann's radical transformation of Paris, attested by Walter Benjamin's vast

1. In fact, cities have been an important battlefield since early or proto capitalism. Silvia Federici, from her historical and gender axis, considers that cities and urban struggles were key zones in the transition from feudalism to capitalist modernity, as well as the

and incomplete work, *The Arcades Project* (2002b), to David Harvey and Mike Davis' investigations (2012; 1992), including many utopic theories, designs and projects such as Fourier's, Le Corbusier's, etc., the city has been considered a powerful device of control and re-orderings of citizens' lives and movements.

The metropolis has a multi-level role in our society. It is a crucial device in the organization of the State; looking inward, urban planning works as a display of power over individuals and collectives. Outwardly, the city holds central importance for national structures. Also, cities, especially capital cities, are always nodes in the representational schemes of countries in international relations. In all of this, the effect of the city engages both the political and the economic sphere, in a relationship that should be addressed as organically constituted. About the former, it is important to further underline that the aspects of the metropolis are manifold: its importance in the production of goods, its value as a good –capitalized through real estate industry–, and as a mechanism of reproduction of means and values, both material and immaterial (symbolic capital, reproduction of labor, etc.).

It is not surprising, therefore, that much recent theoretical work about the topic focuses on how, ultimately, neoliberal drifts have continued trickling down and colonizing every social area, radically transforming them by means of urban planning applied by institutions that privilege economic interests over use value for dwellers beyond consumerist purposes:

As in all the preceding phases, this most recent radical expansion of the urban process has brought with it incredible transformations in lifestyles. Quality of urban life has become a commodity for those with money, as has the city itself in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries, as well as perpetual resort to the economy of the spectacle, have become major aspects of urban political economy (Harvey 2012, 14).

In this sense, intellectuals have understood that the city-dwellers flow along urban scenarios that are mostly submitted to capital value circulation. Therefore, many scholars have developed their analyses precisely attempting to present or calling for new proposals of urban planning and social strategies of resistance. The capitalist trend to «[destroy] the autonomy and quality of places» (Debord 1995, 120) is frequently contested in academic literature by political statements that advocate, on one hand, for a more

essential territory for resistance of other ways of life tragically canceled during that period (FEDERICI 2009).

ethical disposition of professional planners, and, on the other, for the re-appropriation of space by inhabitants and the enacting of different kinds of social practices which represent non-profit occupations that privilege use value over exchange value²:

This refers to the need for creative activity, for the *œuvre* (not only of products and consumable material goods), of the need for information, symbolism, the imaginary and play. Through these specified needs lives and survives a fundamental desire of which play, sexuality, physical activities such as sport, creative activity, art and knowledge are particular expressions and moments, which can more or less overcome the fragmentary division of tasks. Finally, the need of the city and urban life can only be freely expressed within a perspective which here attempts to become clearer and to open up the horizon. Would not specific urban needs be those of qualified places, places of simultaneity and encounters, places where exchange would not go through exchange value, commerce and profit? Would there not also be the need for a time for these encounters, these exchanges? (Lefebvre 2000, 147-148).

According to the general scheme traceable in studies about contemporary cities, we can establish that urban space is simultaneously produced by the often-taut synergies between the architectural planning and flexible practices of inhabitants over the «urban grille». However, it seems that the margin for creativity is being severely narrowed during the late neoliberalization and capitalization processes of metropolises. The broad placement of urban barriers³, which will be further elaborated on below, reduces possibilities for pedestrian improvisation, making their interaction much more predictable. In either case, what is clear is that urban landscape is profoundly significant for cultural structures; it determines important features of socialization and

2. According to Guy Debord and the Situationist cultural and political movement: «In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones» (KNABB 2006, 62). For situationism, the practice of walking around against consumption flows was understood as a powerful gesture for reshaping and re-appropriate the city. This is a conscious practice that «involve[s] playful-constructive behavior and awareness» opposed to normative paths and relations with space in the urban grille.

3. What, paradoxically, goes often together with the opening of wide sidewalks that makes easier the flow of pedestrians, capital and, of course, police raids.

directly affects the type of networks through which contact among people is produced. For this reason, what authors such as Lefebvre have called «the production of space» results, ultimately, of a contention between social practices and top-down impositions; from the outcome of such *engagement*, we can discern not only the nature of the territory and landscape, but more, such as the production of subjectivities and social structures, among others, since the relationship between society and the city goes far beyond:

[T]he question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization (Harvey 2012, 4).

When we talk about the cultural importance of cities' configuration in contemporary late-capitalist system, we address an issue enshrined at once in the collective possibilities and strategies of dwelt cities under this system and also in the cultural representation of what a city, an urban subject, and an urban society are (either in cultural products such as literature, cinema, etc., or in hegemonic cultural discourse). In this paper, I will offer an analysis of the dialogue between three of these manifestations in Madrid: the material organization of urban space; the city perceived and lived by their inhabitants; and two different but in many ways related representations of the city in the contemporary novels *Sangre a borbotones* (Rafael Reig, 2006) and *2020* (Javier Moreno, 2013). Using the transformation of both nature and the functions of urban public spaces as a referential substratum, these novels, depicting the Spanish capital as a dystopian landscape. I will argue that both novels, introducing grotesque and parodic futurisms in a nevertheless recognizable and contemporary framework, somehow provide an account of the current violent transformation of city. Some of the traits of contemporary Madrid, as I will prove, can be patently traced in these fictions: decay and disappearance of public spaces, use of violence by control and deprivation of common sites, nostalgic sublimation of the ruins and architectural hypertrophy, ferocious neoliberal drift that radically transforms the urban landscape, causing the ultimate destruction of non-economically-mediated spaces for social contact, and, lastly, progressive monopolization of power in the economic sphere that destroys the political-civil order. The narrative here will be highlighted through fictional over-representation of some of the main features of the urban space planned under neoliberalism as well

as the severe complications and invisible violence that affects the urban subject, embodied by the characters in their experience of the city.

1. CITY AGAINST CITIZENS. TRENCHES URBANISM AND EMPTYING OF PUBLIC SPACE

«Ciudades que pinchan» was the suggestive title of an article, published by Patricia Gosálvez, in the digital platform of *El País* newspaper on 15 June 2014. The article was triggered by an outburst of criticisms on Twitter of the installation of several thick, sharp spikes on a building's entrance in London, installed with the intention to prevent homeless people from settling there. Gosálvez develops a reflection on a common, contemporary urbanistic model, of which these spikes are a good example and one that is now also hegemonic in many Spanish cities and has changed the landscape of the capital of the nation.

The viral effect of the British policy among Spanish Twitter users along with Gosálvez's article was evidence of a moment of realization by the people of the silent but overpowering colonization of the environment by the logic of the trench: a broad proliferation of architectonic devices that limit, in a very fixed way, our interaction with and within public spaces. This «arquitectura defensiva» (Gosálvez 2014) pursues the goal of dissuading and stopping not only homeless people, but anyone attempting to use common spaces. However, the invasion of trenches in the cities' landscape is not new. Transformation of public spaces to restrict collective conduct has been a regular task for urban planning since, at least, the nineteenth century. The most famous example is George-Eugene Haussmann's megalomaniac project for the renovation of Paris, ordered by Napoleon during the Second Empire. The brutal transformation of the French capital that tore down buildings and city blocks, in order to grant space to large avenues and boulevards, imposing the hegemony of concrete, was read soon after as a strategy to avoid popular resistance by the appropriation of an intervention within the space:

The true goal of Haussmann's projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in the streets impossible for all time... Widening the streets will make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets will connect the barracks in straight lines with the workers' districts. Contemporaries christened the operation «strategic embellishment» (Benjamin 2002a, 23).

Moreover, this process evidenced the imbrication of governmental police strategies and economic goals. As Le Corbusier stated, echoed in

Benjamin, «The avenues [Haussmann] cut were entirely arbitrary: they were not based on strict deductions of the science of town planning. The measures he took were of a financial and military character» (Benjamin 2002b, 125).

If Haussmann's plan was to take steps towards the abolition of revolutionary possibilities, it also had an extraordinary effect in the ways of inhabiting the city. Obstruction of certain political practices distinctive of the working class and its struggle against oppression resulted in the eruption of the bourgeois in public spaces, which were reshaped in agreement with their interests. With Haussmann, Paris culminated its development to reach the condition of a capitalist metropolis, where the practice of public sites understood exclusively in relation to consumption occupied the central position in social uses of urban space. This consumerist tendency was completely attached to bourgeois leisure, resulting in an intensification of citizen circulation.

In recent efforts of defensive urbanism, this process is, nevertheless, reversed. Many new architectonic trenches have the opposite effect; they empty the public space of people and push them to privately managed sites, rebuilding the symbolic barrier between both public and private while, at the same time, culminating the process of enlistment for lower classes without access to consumption. This is the main argument of Gosálvez's article, which underlines the progressive exclusion of people from these places that affects, gradually and in different but related ways, every social class. These examples demonstrate that the goal of contemporary urban planning is geared towards the control of pedestrian flow as well as the privileging of consumption over any other kind of socializing practice. This trend is now perfectly visible in the center of Madrid, as is the now hegemonic «antiriot urbanism». Evidence of this may be found in the outer sections of the main center (like Alcalá, Montera, Princesa...) and squares (like Luna, Callao, Sol...).

According to Ardura, this urban form displays «grandes superficies duras y homogéneas, fácilmente limpiables, de uso comercial "versátil", sin objetos (bancos, árboles, etc.) que impidan la instalación de actividades lucrativas y permitan la rápida intervención de la policía» (Ardura 2014, 15). By the same token, Mike Davis described the common elements of the neoliberal project and systemic violence through space since the beginning of the 1990s. He calls it the «fortress effect»: the successful strategy of deactivation of social interaction attending market interests and their beneficiary elites (Davis 1992, 229). This is in addition to the imposition of solid and symbolic barriers on those spaces that are still used in common and non-commercial ways: absurd individual seats, substitution of nooks

by unobstructed esplanades, reinforced sharp rods in plant stands, tree removal (with the consequent loss of necessary shade during the summer), and the installation of concrete ramps where homeless people could sleep (and where others could rest).

The main idea consists of granting privilege to private interests. The organic relationship between urban politics and the neoliberal system, as per Gaja i Díaz, aims to foster capital accumulation to the detriment of all other social interests such as equality, civil rights or sustainability among others: «Los valores tradicionales del urbanismo social (redistribución de la riqueza, dotación de equipamientos públicos, previsión de escenarios de futuro...) son así sustituidos por los nuevos de la competitividad, el crecimiento...» (Gaja i Díaz 2015, 108).

Broad management of urban territory at the service of economic requirements fits within the transformation of the few public strongholds in which use is yet to be capitalized. Such spaces have been subjected to fierce social control through direct governmental supervision and indirect architectural intervention, ultimately becoming uninhabitable. Harvey and Davis read these planning policies as a successful strategy to deactivate spaces of non-capitalist social interaction, always in favor of market interests with the upper-class as the direct beneficiary. Harvey explicitly points out the class issue and sheds light on the gentrification phenomenon as a product of the need for contemporary metropolises to generate surplus value by dispossession of urban centers, which were traditionally occupied by proletariats and lumpen and are today at the service of capital accumulation: «A process of displacement and dispossession, in short, also lies at the core of the urban process under capitalism. This is the mirror image of capital absorption through urban redevelopment» (Harvey 2012, 18). Germán Labrador reads this phenomenon as catalyzed by economic crisis in Spain through a cultural paradigm in which the aesthetic of the ruin results from the metamorphosis of former accumulation of real estate wealth, without a current purpose, into a symbol of poverty and emptiness in cities that become deserts (2016). Paradoxically, an exclusionary relation between inhabitants and real estate bubble is established as the ending point of capitalist processes.

2. MADRID IN TODAY'S FUTURE. CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATION OF DYSTOPIA IN TWO NOVELS ABOUT MADRID

I will now analyze two novels, which organize their plots around crime as literary device. In *Sangre a borbotones*, detective Carlos Clot is

investigating a series of cases that eventually connect to each other under the shadow of the wicked company Chopeitia Genomics. These cases consist of a pair of disappearances (a young addict woman and a Western writer's female character, who surprisingly decides to run away from her creator and fictional universe), as well as an investigation regarding a certain public worker's suspicions about his wife's infidelity. Moreno's novel, *2020*, tells the story of another detective, Lázaro, who is hired by a young woman to follow in the footsteps of her disappeared father, Bruno Gowan, a mysterious and rich businessman.

As I will argue below, the storylines in both novels revolve around the figure of the tycoon that exerts a profound and uncanny power over the space and argumentative networks among the characters. Andrew Pepper, who studies the relation between crime fiction and modern states, analyses how many of these novels:

tend to produce a contradictory account of the state as both necessary for the creation and maintenance of collective life and central to the reproduction of entrenched socio-economic inequalities, to the point that this tension becomes the constitutive and foundational feature of the emerging genre (Pepper 2016, 1).

As an organic matter in crime fiction, these tensions between social concerns, private interests and the problematic role of governmental institutions, allow us to observe connections between the hegemony of private spaces and devices (such as the privatization of justice in the figure of the detective) and the extinction of public frames, ranging from justice itself up to what is our object of study, public space. According to Juan Carlos Rodríguez, detective fiction arose when the «police force came into being as the servant of the bourgeois state» (Rodríguez 2008, 298), situating the detective protagonist in a strange place, as the police institution is not pursuing the common good but rather a partial class interest. Moreover, there is an ideological basis at the origin of crime fiction as «police are a mediation between the state and society, but belong to the public domain. As what is public always fails, there appears the private detective, who is rich and therefore, clever» (2008, 299). Even though it is obvious that the evolution of the genre has privileged other kind of main character (usually, and in both novels here analyzed, with precarious living conditions) the struggle between private and public can be seen as the principal issue in political analyses of these kind of narratives. My aim here is to follow this same path to highlight this tension, focusing on the representation of urban spaces. As David Knutson explains (only referring to Reig's novel but applicable to Moreno's), both fictions depict a Madrid in which «se han cumplido las

peores pesadillas sobre los peligros de la globalización [the worst fears about the dangers of globalization have been realized]» (Knutson 2006, 57). I contend that the starting point that triggers both novels is precisely this reference to the new city model, appropriated by and for the private sector. Both fictional pieces present a Madrid perfectly identifiable by some contemporary features and, from there, the authors take fiction to future dystopias in which representation makes the effects of this contemporary tendency to neoliberal dehumanization morbidly visible.

The key reference in *Sangre a borbotones* is primarily carried by the constant use of toponyms. Reig alludes strategically to the names of the streets within which characters circulate. He builds a Madrid brutally transformed, while still attached to its referent by means of nominal allusion:

Acodado en el alféizar, veía los veleros amarrados en el puerto y el transbordador de bicicletas que unía Génova con Goya. El Canal Castellana atravesaba la ciudad de norte a sur y ya se había convertido en la principal vía de comunicación entre el centro y el resto de la península. También era un lugar apropiado para depositar a los sabihondos, los entrometidos, los deudores y los bocazas, todos con sus correspondientes zapatos de cemento. La policía lo dragaba cada pocos meses, lo que resolvía aproximadamente la mitad de los casos de desaparecidos que teníamos pendientes.

Aguas arriba se encontraban los puertos deportivos de los chaletos de los Recintos; Aravaca, Pozuelo, Puerta de Hierro: viviendas blindadas y jardines con estanque [...].

Hacia el sur la ciudad latía como una herida infectada. Casi podía sentir la inflamación, la fiebre, el olor a pus, dulce y deletéreo, brutal y embriagador como el de las orquídeas o el de la carne que se descompone.

Los días claros columbraba el muelle de carga de Puerto Atocha, las esqueléticas grúas y la sombra de la alambrada del primer Precinto, donde los adictos esperaban la muerte y trataban de entrar en calor quemando neumáticos (Reig 2006, 13).

Cristina Jiménez-Landi Crick has argued that Reig establishes a clear correspondence between his fictional representation and the material reference, stressing the socioeconomic differences and gaps «en su línea de poner de manifiesto aspectos reales en forma de exageración irónica con referencias al espacio real que apelan a la ciudad que el lector conoce» (Jiménez-Landi Crick 2017, 116). The author transports the reader to a Madrid subject to a planned flood, converted into a sea port crossed by canals alludes to a traditional symbolic constellation that associates bogged down

locations and cities directly with a necropolis⁴. As we can see in the quotes above, the canal itself works as an improvised cemetery. Moreover, death finds its own representational place on many levels: smell of pus, sickness, hygienic failure, etc.: «la ciudad latía como una herida infectada»

The sense of insalubrity here connected with urban planning and, more explicitly, with the places called «precintos» (detention centers or concentration camps for drug addicts), which reminds us of the theoretical universe of biopolitics, in the Foucauldian sense (2002), as the existence of formal powers controlling social existence by space management and arrangement of bodies⁵. In the fictional piece, Madrid is situated within a necropolitical scheme: a biopolitical system where factual powers hold the ultimate capacity to impose death and, consequently, exert total control over bodies (Mbembe 2003, 11)⁶.

The issue of dystopia rests in the plot by introducing two fundamental axes that pierce the configuration of the plot and determines its political criticism: neocolonialism and urban planning:

Antes debía querer decir antes de que muriera Franco y de que el Partido Comunista ganara las elecciones, antes de la invasión y de que se acabara el petróleo, antes del anglo obligatorio y de las alteraciones genéticas, de

4. Two examples of this in the Western tradition would be Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. On the other hand, as one of the reviewers of this article made me see, this image can be also easily associated with Francoist water policy, but here projected onto the capital city rather than rural areas. This important echo between fiction and recent past strengthen the critical referentiality of the dystopic frame. In a similar direction, JIMÉNEZ LANDI-CRICK points out the importance of Castellana street, main canal in the fictional Madrid, for Francoist projects of modernization and, also, reads this kind of flooded spaces as occluded *places of memory* (2017, 115), which links again with canceled transitional justice during the Spanish Transition to democracy.

5. According to JIMÉNEZ-LANDI CRICK (2017, 116), «Simbolizando la separación física fuera de los márgenes de la ciudad de aquellas personas que no son “deseables” o “productivas”, se llama la atención sobre los llamados “poblados de la droga” reales, y su carácter de “heterotopía” foucaultiana, como espacio apartado donde se sitúa a aquellas personas que actúan fuera de la norma».

6. Although it is beyond the scope of this analysis, it is interesting point out the continuities that this fictional universe and the flooded Madrid have in REIG's production (2004; 2011). It is clear in the whole series of novels that Reig perceived his under-water metropolis as a perfect scenario to represent the contemporary Spanish social situation. In the last novel, *Todo está perdonado*, the writer will come back to his thriller-dystopic urban fiction to analyze the period of transition to democracy after Francoism. Here again, the decay of urban life and vertical production of death due to architectural processes will be a central matter as a symbolic device for both the plot and the historical topic.

que inundaran la Castellana para construir el canal y de que mi padre se quedara ciego (Reig 2006, 20).

This is one of the only paragraphs that betrays the novel's temporality. We discover here that this is not a future of our present, but a counterfactual in which, after Franco's death, the radical left wins the elections causing an intervention of the country by the United States. After that, for unexplained reasons, but implicitly related to oil exhaustion, the colonial power decides to transform a main street (la Castellana) into an aqueduct, turning the city into a hybrid space, solid and liquid. The flood, as Guedán Vidal argues, is a chronotope, maintained as backdrop of the plot, that transmits the idea of a naturalized landscape and symbolizes a clear hyperbole of U.S. global influence and its capitalist system (2015, 252).

Furthermore, this brutal intervention of *de facto* powers through social and urban planning does not end with the creation of the canal. The confinement of drug addicts goes together with other methods of ghettoization regarding class and professional differences:

Llamaba «casa» a dos habitaciones en uno de los seis sotabancos de un edificio de la calle San Marcos. Era un estudio-mansarda de los que el *Plan Urbanístico* destinaba a artistas-escritores inéditos. Varias generaciones de plumíferos sin suerte habían soñado su gloria entre aquellas paredes. Se notaba. Quedaban por todas partes las manchas indelebles de tanto esfuerzo inútil. El parqué crujía, agotado de soportar el peso de la vanidad. En cuanto apagabas la luz, por el sumidero del baño comenzaban a salir obstinados insectos: metáforas brillantes que se arrastraban por las baldosas, hemistiquios de ojos compuestos, fragmentos de prosa con caparazones opacos, endecasílabos de once patas contadas con los dedos (Reig 2006, 18; emphasis added).

Planning as a control policy is presented alongside death. Below this quote, the narrator explains that the former tenant of detective Clot's apartment was a writer —«la conciencia crítica del siglo» (Reig 2006, 18)— that committed suicide. Additionally, it is important to note that, similar to other chapters of the novel, a fantastic turn is activated to highlight the poisonous environment. Rhetorical and stylistic devices are represented as a plague of insects, infecting the flat strength and the general atmosphere of unhealthiness that colonize the interiors and exteriors of the fictitious Madrid.

While Reig's Madrid refers to as an unrealized future, Moreno's version prolongs and sprawls into our recent past. Published in 2013, *2020* takes us to that year, a moment in which there were plans to open Eurovegas, a tourism and leisure complex imitating the U.S. city. However, later, the project was canceled. This accidental discontinuity between narrative and

referent also creates a discursively irresolute future, here unexpected by the author, who seems to insist on extending the crisis' effects until they reach their limit:

Un día detuve mi coche junto a la valla del aeropuerto [Moreno writes about one of the Spanish symbols of real estate based welfare]. Bajé de él y accedí a la pista. Llegué hasta el pie de las escaleras que llevan a uno de esos aviones abandonados. Había oído hablar de ellos. Era como una fábula. Hombres y mujeres viviendo en su interior, zombis arrastrando sus cuerpos por la pista de la T4 (Moreno 2013, 96).

The Spanish crisis was brought about by the explosion of a real estate bubble enabled by a past of growth based on uncontrolled accumulation and speculation. According to M. Elvira Méndez Pinedo such a crisis was marked by a process of financialization in which credit for mortgages and consumption substituted the welfare state (Álvarez Blanco and Gómez L. Quiñones 2016, 304). It is important to note that in the Spanish context the financial crisis was organically attached to mortgages and real estate industry, the former being the largest by far in Europe (Fernández Durán 2006). During those years of «bonanza artificial» [artificial prosperity] (Méndez Pinedo in Álvarez Blanco and Gómez L. Quiñones 2016, 103), since the last decades of Francoism until 2008, the Spanish landscape was radically transformed. Hundreds of thousands new building projects settled in urban suburbs –800.000 just in 2005 according to Durán (2006, 10)– and changed the nature of the city as well as the cultures of its inhabitants. After the bubble burst, Spain entered what Germán Labrador calls «temporalidad de crisis». As he explains, the «historical landscape» of the crisis severely deteriorates the main features that organize symbolic representation of neoliberal-democratic Spain, «mesocracia fantástica, estado de bienestar, estabilidad política, sociedad de consumo y de servicios y legitimidad fundacional del proceso de transición a la democracia» (Labrador 2013, 356). This failure is evidenced by the phantasmagorical presence of abandoned and useless buildings found throughout the country:

Las casas están donde las dejaron, como las líneas de alta velocidad, como las autovías privadas de peaje, como los aeropuertos sin aviones, como el puerto deportivo de Valencia, las Ciudades de la Cultura, el estadio de fútbol de Norman Foster, los rascacielos, los parques temáticos... Hoy se habla de ellos como de los elefantes blancos (Harter), regalados a la población por enloquecidos marajás locales, cuyo mantenimiento aumenta la ruina de haberlos poseído. Aquellas entidades que se habían usado para expresar relaciones de valor, ilimitados sueños de progreso, marcas de la presencia de flujos del capital global en el país, ahora, duran, desprovistas de valor de cambio y repletas de valor de uso. Resultan

enigmáticas por ello. Condenadas a ruinas cuando están en muchos casos pendientes todavía de su estreno (Labrador 2013, 368).

Both the presence of hypertrophic architecture and the cult of the ruin are visible in Reig's and Moreno's dystopian representations of Madrid. In *Sangre*, we can see it in the absurd excess of the Castellana Canal, while in *2020*, the riots, destruction, and burning of the city council highlights the aesthetic transcendence of ruins, as well as the emptying of formal democratic powers. Gowan, the tycoon, who embodied economical rule in *2020* on which I will comment below, explains the cultural phenomena to his assistant, using the example of a broken brick in an unfinished construction project:

Este cascote representa la avidez, el dinero fácil, los activos tóxicos, la ruina moral y económica. Deberíamos envasarlos y distribuirlos a las grandes cadenas, por miles y millones. Cada casa debería tener uno de ellos luciendo sobre la estantería, metonimia del hogar que nos acoge. Hay algo de todos nosotros en este cascote, Nabil. Es hermoso. Es romántico. Miles de millones de euros desperdiciados en la construcción de ruinas. Una de las más hermosas obras de arte. Se recordará en el futuro a este país por esto. Hemos construido nuestra propia Roma. Una Roma de ladrillo y cemento. A la entrada de todos estos edificios habrá en un futuro taquillas y largas colas de turistas. Nosotros inventamos el arte del siglo XXI: la ruina sobrevenida (Moreno 2013, 111).

The fascination with an excessive and unnecessary architectural project, as well as its unraveling, shows the recent history of the country occupying its literary representations. Labrador pointed out that it is now easy to «reconocer en el espacio urbano las marcas físicas de un proceso de desintegración, en el que se disolvían en el aire aquellos elementos que caracterizaron el periodo anterior de expansión y crecimiento, dejando la nada en su lugar» (Labrador 2013, 371)⁷. As the colossal building invasion schemed

7. It is important to note that the year of publication of both novels correspond to different temporalities according to Labrador's scheme. *Sangre a borbotones* arrives to Spanish bookshops in 2003, during the years of welfare state, rise under the economic and real estate bubbles. *2020*, on the other hand, was published in 2013, well into the crisis and after the period of big social mobilizations known as Indignados movement that fought against the austerity policies and cutbacks. This difference among historical contexts can be the reason, in my opinion, of the contrast between the tone of the narratives. Reig appeals to humor and parody but Moreno use a lyric prose defined by pessimism, close to nihilism, that even destroys the utopic projections birth during the Spanish revolution that, in the novel, leads to pure violence.

by ferocious neoliberalism, based on bricks and speculation in Spanish case, turns the building into a monument, the break of that system turns these symbols, in turn, into memorials of failure and emptiness. Moreno is writing under the cultural framework of the Spanish crisis and seems to be affected by the nihilism produced by the wide circulation of public discourses based on catastrophism. The pessimistic ideological frame in the novel seems striking if we note that it was written after the rise of the massive movement known as «Indignados». However, utopic projection during the mobilizations cohabited with and struggled against catastrophic discourses that occupied public discourse in mass media and mainstream cultural productions. This catastrophism leads to the idea of apocalyptic imaginaries as a whole cultural logic that assumes crisis as a theological event activating dystopic narratives as disciplinary mechanism seeking austerity policies. Moreno's fictions, whether consciously or not, is aligned with this sort of dystopic reading of the crisis. Sublimation of absurd accumulation and its associated waste of capital and labor, in words on the lips of the tycoon, impinges on a pessimism built through the cynic shaping of the main character that, as we will see, is structurally central to the plot.

3. MADRILENIANS IN AUGMENTED NEOLIBERALISM

As I have been pointing out, dystopia in Reig's and Moreno's novels functions precisely for its referential closeness to our contemporaneity. In the same way that other dystopian fictions, the goal is to get as close as possible to the material environment and situation of the readers, generating a strong *effect of possibility* that suggests that what is read, at some point, is or could become true. In this sense, it isn't surprising that both have chosen the figure of the tycoon, a representation of the autocracy of capital personified in a male character, as the neuralgic crux of their plots. As I've mentioned, centrality of economic powers in the transformation of the spaces we inhabit is one aspects of the discourses emphasized by intellectuals; likewise, displacement of people from public spaces in urban areas, often physical or symbolical violence, was the trend that triggered a broad outrage in network and, as pointed out by Gosálvez in her article, referring to what David Harvey has call «accumulation by dispossession» (2012) as the main strategy of late capitalist extraction value from urban spaces and their communities.

Consumerist relations occupy all social spheres and determine the rhythm of the forced flow that hinders or impedes any social interaction. This aspect of the plot is also linked with the fragmented structure of the

narratives, which include many different points of view. Fractal structure and space dispossession alienate subjective contact and, by the same token, makes a single and coherent perspective impossible.

Public space annulation turns the city into a constant flow in which dead and hollow subjectivities run relentlessly; the water canals in the place of avenues in Reig's Madrid is the perfect metaphor regarding this point. These authors symbolize, within fiction, transformation of an urban space that is not unfamiliar to us because it addresses us to our contemporary reality:

Currently, social injustice and personal isolation combine to induce alienated violence. So, the new culture of urban integration is not the culture of assimilation into the values of a single dominant culture, but the culture of communication between an irreversibly diverse local society connected/disconnected to global flows of wealth, power, and information (Castells 2004, 92).

Both *Sangre a borbotones* and *2020* represent the same trend of urban integration and personal isolation by their dystopian plots, through the structure of narratives and the contact networks developed among the characters by the central figure of the businessman.

In *Sangre a borbotones*, Chopeitia Genomics, a company dedicated to genetic modification, has a patent monopoly of power over space that also determines the movement and social interaction of every character. This corporation has a brutally sprawled agency (overflowed like the water that has flooded the city) and exerts total biopolitical power through different means. The corporation's agency empties every other agency in the novel.

Aquel año había empezado con prodigios que vaticinaban acontecimientos decisivos. En enero el agua del Canal se tiñó de rojo [...], Chopeitia Genomics patentó las nuevas técnicas de modificación genética, hubo desbordamientos que anegaron Legazpi y Vallecas, además de una *disminución del número total de magistrados* (Reig 2006, 14).

As we can see here, Chopeitia Genomics curtails power of juridical agency of the magistrates, bound with the flooding of public space, also challenging the modern universal assumption of individual subjectivity in the sense of people as juridical subjects. In addition, formal police power has been dissolved. This is represented by the main character himself; Clot was an officer who was forced to leave the institution because he and his wife decided to continue a pregnancy that would result in a brain-damaged child; he was also forced to get a vasectomy. After this clearly biopolitical punishment, he decides to work for himself, privatizing his own subjectivity

in the commercial use of his labor force. Moreover, this case breaks down, although not for the first time, the assumption –in ideological readings– of fiction about detectives as a liberal outcome caused by social detachment from public administration (Rodríguez 2008, 298). In *Sangre a borbotones* space every social institution topples, which puts crime fiction and its ideological framework based on individual justice (juridical responsibility) in a fragile situation breaking political community and its space.

From there, it is interesting to analyze the type of subject that is produced within fiction by this kind urban space, under such conditions of violence and over-control. Reig's characters reproduce archetypes of many subgenres that are parodied in this novel: an immoral and omnipotent villain, a western cowboy, a bloodthirsty killer, a run-down police officer, and a tormented and alcoholic private detective. These are the main characters of a fiction that is full of lumpen, marginalized people, junkies, and other miserable people that barely succeed in accommodating themselves in the environment of systemic violence in which they inhabit. They are, at the end of the day, simply alienated characters in a space that they do not belong, an obstacle that is also marked linguistically. They all speak a foreign language imposed by the colonizer: English. However, Reig's characters do not respect this normative imposition; rather, they resist colonial authority by hybridizing their linguistic uses transforming English into several jargons among «castizo» uses and other strange tongues, called *parole*.

According to Michel de Certeau, urban and linguistic structures function in the same way. On one hand, collectives are submitted to a strong normativity (urban planning and grammar correction); on the other hand, the *speech act* and the *use* of space is what, in effect, produces speech and places, that is to say, the material presence and existence of both (Certeau 1988, 97). In a certain way, Rafael Reig seems to echo similar ideas in his presentation of the capital city as a location experiencing same kind deeply-rooted tension in both spatial and linguistic practices.

Nevertheless, at least from the outside, the outcome of the competition between normativity and procedures of resistance is the victory of the formal and factual powers that allow movement and communication only under the exerting of strong violence through standardizing its rule: imposing English or flooding the city. Marginalized characters, understandably unable to fit under normative canons, will develop eclectic varieties of languages. Through hybridization, characteristic of every figure and symbolically represented by fragments of this *parole* in the dialogues, along with individual isolation under a common and planned context of oppression, readers are witnesses to a fake sense of autarchy. After all, supposed autarchy is revealed as a violent mechanism of overloaded control by the

characters that embody power. Not only that, representation of subjects through stereotypes is also sprawled: individuals can barely be defined in any complex way, it is rather an archetype incrustated in a dystopian scenario (something such as «augmented dystopian neoliberalism»), with complete representational structures of space appropriated by a monopolized power, offering a landscape that is objectified, which is to say empty of subjectivities. As Guedán Vidal points out, Reig establishes a frame in which «el poder financiero posee los recursos y las herramientas para arrinconar a los sujetos y someterlos al esquema que más le conviene, de manera que sea en sus términos en los que el individuo alcanza a ser definido, negándole una ontología propia» (2005, 253-254).

An absolute power, personified in a sociopathic tycoon without any ethical sense, is a feature that *Sangre a borbotones* shares with *2020*. Here, the storyline begins with Bruno Gowan, the wealthy and eccentric director of a finance company, who imposes his own laws. There are many parallels between the novels: both antagonists are built through mystery discourses, both are also marked with a halo of seduction, almost erotic. Likewise, both businessmen have an ineluctable patriarchal power, exerted directly over the characters, or indirectly by the control of spaces and flows. Where Chopeitia has the bio-power to determine death, Gowan has control over economic flows, also regulating the material and sensible universe of the story. Both businessmen are attractive and scary at the same time, two feelings produced by their absolute power, following Freud's thesis (2004). Monopoly and omnipresence elevate these character's images discursively to the category of Gods: «Nabil piensa en el desierto. Imagina a Bruno como a un dios fundador de una nueva religión. Piensa en la humildad del Profeta» (Moreno 2013, 112).

The centrality of capital represented in the businessmen characters spreads to the structural level. Every subplot, multiple in both texts, revolves around these tycoon figures, who work as the storyline's central core. The tycoons are the narrative lines that, as backbone, give solid sense to these eclectic and fragmented novels, providing consistency to multiple narrative lines full of non-connected characters. Gowan and Chopeitia represent the annulation of social space in the cities, the cancellation of Madrid as a space of encounter and social network, caused by neoliberal processes, transplanted into a fictional level in which the agency and interactional skills of all other characters are diffused: «Desert is the future» (Moreno 2013, 99), Javier Moreno writes. The *capital city* becomes literal in its economic sense, and it is interesting to note that this is the only landscape represented in both novels, besides its own margins marked by the increase of oppression, violence and, ultimately, death (e.

g. T4 terminal in *2020* or the *precintos* [concentration camps] in *Sangre a borbotones*).

Symbolic representation of the city as a space of violence, danger, and under necropolitic control will affect in both texts the ways in which characters use and inhabit the space. In the same way that it entrenches urban planning, as criticized by Gosálvez, and prevents pedestrians from stopping and occupying public spaces, the characters in these novels wander hectically, never settling down anywhere but interior spaces (houses, bars, projects under construction, etc.). Walter Benjamin was already warning us in 1939 of the growing importance of the interior as a place of ownership in a broad sense for the universalized bourgeoisie individual, «private individual», during deconsolidation of urban capitalist:

For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of allowing his commercial considerations to impinge on social ones. In the formation of his private environment, both are kept out. From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior-which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago. His living room is a box in the theater of the world (Benjamin 2002a, 38).

Benjamin read the anesthetization of interiors as the ultimate signal of the victory of the domain of labor. In this context, reality is displaced to production spheres while private life becomes the empire of dreamed fictions. This scheme is transportable to Moreno's novel in a number of levels. Bruno Gowan sweeps the streets covered by the safety of his vehicle; Lázaro, the detective looking for him, also marauds in a car. From these mobile interiors, both men witness the disaster that is discursively built throughout the novel, precisely, by interior monologue. Therefore, both the progress of the plot and the course of the subjective development of the discourse rely on the privacy of interiors, strengthening the worth of isolated dreaming as an intersection between metaphysical and metafictional in the aesthetics of fiction, confronted to the desert-like urban landscape as a figuration of contemporary crisis.

Michelle Murray has analyzed *2020* in relation to the mortgage crisis and the increase in eviction orders that has left thousands of families homeless. According to her, the relationship between subjects and homes in this representation is built in terms of alienation (2016, 75). From my perspective, this break down between domestic interior and the social sense of safety may be developed and also criticized. The social configuration of

private spaces is modified by crisis temporality and its effect on spatial structures. Certainly, the conflictive imbrication of public and private, in a context of the ubiquitous financialization of life, labor and property, creates a broad sense of insecurity and weakness that challenges the common understand of domestic spaces. However, it is important to note that public spaces are becoming so strongly disqualified and biopolitically controlled that represent an even worse menace for pedestrians. With that backdrop, it is not surprising that spaces in between public and private, such as cars (as an interior that circulates around public areas) or bars and other open business (in which public intercourse is mediated by consumerism) represent the ideal sites for plot development and the enunciation of subjects.

The situation will be quite different in *Sangre a borbotones*. In the flooded Madrid where oil is exhausted, Carlos Clot crosses from one place to another riding his bicycle. His precariousness is linked to his driving force, his own body, as well as the vulnerability of this body that is openly exposed to the violence of space. Movement through exteriors will always be perceived as a necessary risk. For that reason, he barely will settle in the streets, but instead chooses clubs and dwellings where he carries out the investigation for his cases. And in so doing, interiors will become the only places where narrative action can be developed⁸. The only exception to this trend will occur precisely near the end, during a preparation for the ultimate take down of the omnipotent corporation (Chopeitia Genomics). Rescued from being killed by the fictional cowboy Spunk, another creation of the Clot's client, the western writer, both men spent a night bivouacking in the Chueca neighborhood:

Juntó varios cartones, periódicos y ramas de acacia y encendió el fuego al resguardo de un portal, dentro de un cubo de basura [...] Tumbados sobre la acera de la calle Barbieri, bocarriba contemplábamos las estrellas [...].

El vaquero escrutó en silencio el latido del firmamento. Se incorporó y miró a la lejanía. ¿Qué era aquello? ¿Nebraska? ¿Wyoming? A simple vista, diríase la Casa de Campo, con sus árboles raquíuticos y sus cerros pelados, pero quién sabe qué lontananzas estarían mirando las pupilas de aquel cow-boy ejemplar y analfabeto [...].

8. This is one of the lines analyzed by Jiménez-Landi Crick in her close Reading of *Todo está perdonado*, one of the several novels of Reig's saga with Clot as main character in the same dystopic Madrid. However, in her reading JIMÉNEZ-LANDI CRICK conceptualizes bars and clubs as «closed public space» (2017, 120) agreeing that these are important spaces for the development of the plot, but not the only ones, since *Todo está perdonado* is quite different than *Sangre a borbotones* in this matter. Anyway, it is clear that the publicness of these entertainment venues are organically different than public open spaces in the cities.

Me advirtió que no sabía ninguna de las cosas importantes que ponían los libros. ¿Cómo iba a saber él, por consiguiente, la respuesta a las preguntas de un caballero de ciudad que podía incluso leer sin mover los labios? [...].

¿Qué podía decirle? [...] Mira, Spunk, infeliz, no seas idiota: tú eres un personaje de ficción... obra de mi amigo Luis María Peñuelas, descanse en paz, un viejo borracho, y el tío no tenía ni la más remota idea de lo que podía pasar en Oak Creek: iba improvisando. Escribía sobre la marcha. De hecho, infeliz, mira cómo has acabado: encendiendo hogueras en pleno barrio de Chueca (Reig 2006, 161-165).

This subject, dreamed up by a drunk writer following the archetype of cowboys, unaware of this fictional condition, and at the same time completely alienated from written forms of expression, carries the potency to re-appropriate urban space. Reig inverts the neoliberal condition of alienated urban spaces through the power of the imaginary –literary– topic (the same that has been parodied during the whole novel), and its associated *practiced* and *lived* customs (Certeau 1988). Spunk, with his imaginary cultural world transplanted in the neoliberal dystopic city, is who transforms the disciplinary space, producing a new one by means of occupying public space in, maybe unconsciously, but clearly disruptive forms⁹. I find this resolution to be a wishful promise; Reig's ultimate proposal is to struggle against cooptation of life and territory in reality from within literature and imagination. But, confronted by a dreamed freedom, he opposes the cynic «caballero de ciudad», apparently blind to literary utopic projections and obsessed with underlining the false condition of that dream.

4. WHO'S EMPIRE? NEOLIBERALIST DOMINATION OF TERRITORY AND UTOPIC RESISTANCES

It would be wrong of me to end this paper without explaining why it is included in a monographic with the intention of offering new alternatives to reshape the Peninsular field in the academy. What I am writing here is the product of a larger project that goes back two years in time, when

9. Strangely enough, this fictional camping could be read as foresaw of the future «Indignados» camps around Spain, in summer of 2011, against neoliberal measures during the crisis. Disruptive occupation of public spaces was also there closely related with processes of disclosing and making visible everyday life culture in the squares as a way to contests capitalization of common goods and collective life. If nothing else, the echo is beautiful.

my colleague, Isabel Domínguez Seoane, asked me to sit down and think about our tasks and goals as PhD students in a public university of the U.S. We decided to propose a panel for one of the professional conferences on literature. Together with an extraordinary group of students from different backgrounds, countries, and institutions, we had the chance to discuss current problems that the field was going through, but also the promising aspects of the paradigm as it begins to be dislocated and displaced from some of its traditional positions. Some of those colleagues are kindly sharing their words with us on these sites today, which is the result of several discussions framed between the aforementioned encounter and a second one in Europe. I think we all agreed that this issue offered a perfect occasion to display new methodologies looking for a way of doing that matches our concerns as scholars and, more importantly, that is respectful and honest in unleashing our case studies from their material conditions and historical circumstances.

In that spirit, I decided to explore the contemporary settings of a Spanish capital that is historically and substantially far from the representations of the metropolis as center of the empire. The long economic and social crisis may have been the last piece of evidence of this aristocratic chimera and I realized that the displacement must be testified in contemporary literature. Rafael Reig and Javier Moreno, among other artists, show a lucid awareness of cultural changes that have deeply altered every single aspect of living and writing from and about Madrid. In a really vivid way, the *peripherization* of Madrid with respect to the symbolic and economic value within Europe affected these authors, both with relatively long career paths in literature, though with little distribution opportunities due to the independent and precarious publishing circuit.

However, beyond the (not secondarily important) material conditions of production, both fictional pieces bear witness to the precarization of important aspects of urban, social, collective, and individual lives under neoliberalism. Opposing the maintenance of the illusion of territory centrality and social sovereignty, they brought light to the colonizing situation of our cities through false futurism that relies on current monopoly of capital value and production to determine life and sociability. Furthermore, splitting of temporalities fractal projections seems to suggest that neither nostalgia nor pessimism will be useful; on the contrary, it encourages us to believe that fiction will always insist on opening the range of potentials of an uncertain future. Here, my central goal was to infuse this power into cultural research.

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