

NO PLACE LIKE HOME: VIRTUAL SPACE, LOCAL PLACES AND NOCILLA
FICTIONS

by

JESSE BARKER

B.A., Ithaca College, 1995

M.A., Tulane University, 1997

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Hispanic Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

March 2011

© Jesse Barker, 2011

Abstract

This thesis is the first sustained study of a new wave of Spanish writers. Known in the press as the “Nocilla Generation”, after Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Project* trilogy, the work of these authors responds to changing relations between urban subjects, virtual spaces and local places. This study portrays a broad group of writers, but it focuses on four texts: Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Dream*, Javier Calvo’s “Una belleza rusa” [“A Russian Beauty”], Gabi Martínez’s *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*] and Esther García Llovet’s *Coda*. The new wave authors have been described as belonging to a new digital consciousness wholly shaped by audiovisual media and the Internet. I argue instead that their narrative represents an effort to assimilate global and virtual space with local and physical places. Their varied texts converge around the theme of how subjects locate themselves within a fragmented and interconnected world. They create hybrid fictional spaces where social practices and meaning are produced through a continuous negotiation of the physical and virtual realms.

Within this overall theme I delineate two general tendencies. The first emphasizes the subject’s immersion in a global sphere of networked relations, portraying what Roland Robertson defines as a world space where “the local is merely a ‘micro’ manifestation of the global”. The second focuses on the subject’s relation to the particular places where this global space is manifested. However, while each text can be placed closer to one or the other conceptions, both these ideas are present to some degree in all of these narratives. This creates a persistent dialectic tension and shows the difficulty of reconciling the superimposed physical and cultural contexts that shape subjectivity in the contemporary world.

What drives these narratives, I conclude, is the search for new subjectivities, open to the plurality of today's interconnected and fluctuating spaces. However, the hypothetical or metaphorical character of the new fluid subjectivities presented in these fictions underlines the ambiguities involved in seeking this new way of inhabiting the world. These fictions do not present or reflect new subjectivities but rather participate in an ongoing societal dialogue about how to confront a changing cultural environment.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Dedication.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Nocilla, Mutants and Afterpop	2
Virtual/Global Flows and Local/Physical Places.....	11
The Texts	13
No Place Like Home.....	15
Chapter One – Wish We Were Here: the Subject and Space in Post-Franco Spanish Fiction.....	19
The Generation Question	21
The Discursive Self in Post-Franco Fiction	24
Generation X and Hyperreality.....	30
The New Wave.....	35
From Individual Realities to Hybrid Spaces.....	43
Chapter Two – Agustín Fernández Mallo’s <i>Nocilla Dream</i> : Imagining a World Space Subject.	48
A World Space.....	55
<i>Nocilla Dream</i> ’s Characters: Between the Avant-Garde and the Everyday.....	64
<i>Nocilla Dream</i> ’s Narrator.....	76

Nocilla and Spain	86
Chapter Three – Gabi Martínez’s <i>Ático</i> [<i>Top Floor Apartment</i>]: Virtuality and Its Discontents.	90
Tall Buildings and the Space of Flows	93
Global and Local Fissures.....	100
Ático the Game: Splitting Time, Space and Subjects	110
The Writer as Programmer.....	119
Chapter Four – Javier Calvo’s <i>Russian Beauty and the Beasts Within</i>	124
Disjunctive Spaces	131
From Boundaries to Networks	133
Multiple Realities.....	135
Isolation vs. Soul.....	145
Adaptation.....	152
A Sublime Multiplicity	156
Chapter Five – Esther García Llovet’s <i>Coda: There’s No Place Like Home</i>	163
Fragmented Spaces	167
Virtual Patterns	175
The Intimacy of Others	182
A Shared Trauma	197
Conclusion	205
Works Cited	214

Acknowledgements

First of all I want to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor María Soledad Fernández Utrera, for her essential guidance on this research project. Her tireless dedication, insightful critiques and remarkable foresight have been instrumental every step of the way. I also want to express my gratitude to the other committee members, Professors Raúl Álvarez-Moreno and Jon Beasley-Murray. Raúl joined the process only a year ago but the importance of his constructive critiques and suggestions for theoretical readings cannot be overstated. Jon's advice and suggestions provided enormous help in framing my theoretical approaches to the texts studied.

While not involved in this project, Professor Rodrigo Cacho deserves my utmost thanks for his moral support, intellectual guidance and most importantly his friendship.

I am extremely grateful to the Tina and Morris Wagner Foundation and the University of British Columbia for the generous support of their Graduate Fellowships. I also wish to thank the French, Hispanic and Italian Studies department for a Graduate Entrance Scholarship, numerous assistantships and conference funding over these years. Additionally, the department staff, especially Carole Schoenfeld, has been incredibly helpful in taking care of so many important details while I was doing research in Spain.

The time spent in Spain, and the work carried out there, was made so much more enjoyable with the company and support of friends like Jose, Patricia, Ignacio, Frank, Amaia and Álvaro. And the same is true of those friends in Vancouver like Hilda, Fernando, Joel, Kim, Frederick, Robert and many more.

I am ever grateful to my mother Judith Barker, my father Richard Barker and other family members for their unwavering support and confidence in this and all my endeavors. I

feel the same gratitude to my eternal friend John Klinghammer. I am also humbly grateful to some generous López's for some timely rescues.

I could not begin to express my gratitude to Itziar, who somehow survived these years with a doctoral husband and helped me survive too.

To Itziar and Naia

Introduction

This study deals with a new wave of Spanish fiction writers whose work responds to changing relations between urban subjects, virtual spaces and physical places. Many of them have been grouped together in the press as the *Generación Nocilla* (Nocilla Generation), *mutantes* (mutants) or *afterpop*.¹ These authors belong to the same globalized cultural context as the Spanish “Generation X” of the 1990s. Nevertheless, as opposed to what occurs in the X authors and film makers, the mediascapes that dominate the new wave narratives are not presented as empty simulacra. Characters are not condemned to inauthenticity or trapped in a pop culture that makes them passive viewers.² On the contrary, they inhabit spaces where social practices and meaning are produced through a continuous negotiation of material and virtual realms. In this sense the new wave’s varied narratives converge around the theme of how subjects locate themselves within a fragmented and interconnected world.

These authors first began to make noise in the early years of the last decade with novels and short story collections like Javier Calvo’s *Risas enlatadas* [*Canned Laughter*] and *El dios reflectante* [*The Reflecting God*], Mercedes Cebrián’s *El malestar al alcance de todos* [*Ill-Being Accessible to All*] and Juan Francisco Ferré’s *La fiesta del asno* [*The Feast of the Ass*].³ While representing different influences and aesthetics, these and other texts published around the same time signaled a resurgence of experimental language and narrative forms: non-linear and symbolic structures; an emphasis on spatial rather than temporal organization;

¹ Nocilla is a cocoa based spread, similar to Nutella, commonly given to children in Spain for a late afternoon snack. The association with this group of writers comes from Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Project* trilogy. Mutants and afterpop are theoretical categories which will be discussed further down.

² The term “mediascape” is borrowed from Arjun Appadurai, who uses it to describe the part media play in the global flows of contemporary culture (46-50).

³ These translations, and those that follow throughout this study, are my own. Of the new wave texts discussed here, the only one available in English as of yet is Javier Calvo’s *Mundo maravilloso* [*Wonderful World*].

events that are fantastic or at least never clearly explained; opaque language that calls attention to itself rather than acting as a mere vehicle for story. They also embrace technology and mass media as an integral part of personal consciousness and contemporary culture. Other writers whose fiction could be broadly described in these terms include Kiko Amat, Jorge Carrión, Mario Cuenca Sandoval, Javier Fernández, Agustín Fernández Mallo, Eloy Fernández Porta, Esther García Llovet, Robert Juan-Cantavella, Gabi Martínez, Vicente Luis Mora, Julián Rodríguez, Germán Sierra or Manuel Vilas.⁴

Nocilla, Mutants and Afterpop

Many of these writers have coincided in various forums for the promotion and discussion of recent fiction. They have organized conferences on ‘the new’, ‘the latest’ or ‘mutant’ narrative in different locations around the Peninsula and worked together on the literary magazines *Lateral*, *The Barcelona Review* and *Quimera*.⁵ Independent presses like

⁴ Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, there has been a corresponding surge of experimental poetry, a movement that includes Cebrián, Fernández Mallo, Mora and Vilas along with other writers like Patricia Esteban, Ariadna G. García, Pablo García Casado, Elena Medel, Javier Montero, Javier Moreno, Vicente Muñoz Álvarez, Antonio Portela, Belén Reyes, Miriam Reyes, Alberto Santamaría or Sandra Santana. Two book-length essays have been published on their work: Vicente Luis Mora’s *Singularidades: Ética y poética de la literatura española actual* [*Singularities: Ethics and Poetics of Contemporary Spanish Literature*] and Martín Rodríguez-Gaona’s *Mejorando lo presente. Poesía española última: Posmodernidad, humanismo y redes* [*Improving the Present. The Latest Spanish Poetry: Postmodernity, Humanism and Networks*].

⁵ The first conference organized was the *I Encuentro de Nuevos Narradores* [*First Meeting of New Narrators*] hosted by Germán Sierra in Santiago de Compostela, 20-23 April 2004. This meeting brought together Calvo, Ferré, Cebrián, and Fernández Porta along with writers that emerged in the 1990s like Antonio Orejudo, Luisa Castro or Lucía Etxebarria and the veteran experimentalist Julián Ríos (Sierra). In February 2006 Ríos and Juan Goytisolo presided a formal presentation of Fernández Porta, Juan-Cantavella, Sierra and Vilas in the Instituto Cervantes París (Instituto Cervantes 34). Since 2008, there has been an explosion of conferences, cycles and workshops that go beyond the general idea of ‘new narrators’ and promote a renovation of Spanish literature from outside the mainstream. Most prominent of these have been *Mutaciones, Tendencias y Efectivos de la Narrativa Contemporánea* [*Mutations, Tendencies and Contingents in Contemporary Narrative*] in Málaga, 21-23 May 2008 (Vilas); *Congreso de Narrativa Última Neo3* [*The Neo3 Conference on the Latest Narrative*] in Barcelona, 9-11 October 2008 (“Neo3”); and *Ctrl+Alt+Del. Reiniciando el Monstruo* [*Ctrl+Alt+Del. Restarting the Monster*] in Madrid, 27-28 November 2009 (Mora “Mutantes”). Almost all the new wave writers have participated in one or more of these events, along with other new authors like Lolita

Berenice, Candaya and DVD have been instrumental in distributing their work. Three books published by Berenice have also had a great influence on discussion about the new authors: Vicente Luis Mora's *La luz nueva: Singularidades en la narrativa española actual* [*The New Light: Singularities in Contemporary Spanish Narrative*]; Eloy Fernández Porta's *Afterpop: La literatura de la implosión de los medios* [*Afterpop: the Literature of the Media Implosion*]; and the anthology *Mutantes: Narrativa española de última generación* [*Mutants: Late Model Spanish Narrative*], edited by Juan Francisco Ferré and Julio Ortega. Additionally, numerous blogs have provided “un espacio virtual de encuentro, expresión y discusión” (“a virtual space of encounter, expression and discussion”) which has been compared to the *tertulias* (“discussion groups”) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gil González 74). In fact Mora’s website *Diario de Lecturas* [*Diary of Readings*] has acted as a central node in the formation of this movement.

These discussions gained visibility with the surprising commercial success of Agustín Fernández Mallo’s novel *Nocilla Dream* in 2006 and were thrust into the spotlight of the Spanish literary world in 2007 with Nuria Azancot’s article for the national daily *El Mundo* “La generación Nocilla y el afterpop piden paso” [“The Nocilla Generation and the Afterpops Demand Their Turn”].⁶ Azancot highlights the influence of technology and mass media, the blending of genres and the blurring of the division between high and low cultures as defining characteristics of the new “generation” and makes bold statements such as “tienen claro que hay una nueva manera de narrar, fragmentaria” (“they are sure that there is a new way to write fiction, fragmentary”). The flood of media exposure resulting from her

Bosch, Ricardo Menéndez Salmón or Isaac Rosa. For a complete list of speakers and the titles of their talks see the web pages provided in the bibliography.

⁶ That same year similar articles had already appeared in the Catalan newspapers *La Vanguardia* (Carrión) and *El Periódico de Catalunya* (Hevia “Escritores pop” and “Autores”).

article has been a blessing for these authors, many of whom have since moved to major publishing houses.

As is usually the case when a new generation or literary wave is proclaimed, the ensuing debates have often been divisive and tendentious. While none of the new wave writers has publicly supported the generation moniker, Azancot's piece reflects the presumptions of radical newness and technological determinism underlying much of the theoretical discourse that the movement has produced about itself. Frequently, promotion of the new authors rests upon the premise that contemporary Spanish narrative consists of mostly linear structures and hardly acknowledges the existence of new technologies and mass media. As a counterpoint the new wave's writings are said to be entirely fragmentary, reflecting a social reality that is structured by films, television, music recordings and the Internet. These premises reveal a clear generational framework, defining cultural history as a series of fundamental breaks and emphasizing difference over continuity (Soufas 256).

This dichotomization is evident in Ferré's prologue to the *Mutantes* anthology, where he states that Spanish narrative is stuck in a feedback loop of past traumas and histories, unable to confront anything like a contemporary Spain (15-16). The "mutants", on the other hand, are connected to the "gran matriz computerizada de la realidad" ("great computerized matrix of reality") that characterizes contemporary Spain and that has refashioned "por entero sus circuitos neuronales y sus procesos mentales" ("entirely its neural circuits and mental processes"; 17). Any attempt to define a group of authors within such polarizing terms inevitably exaggerates the prevalence of certain characteristics in their work and

ignores the existence of those same qualities in other texts.⁷ Mora's official defection from the mutants in a recent web entry suggests just how stifling the discourse surrounding the group has become: "De un tiempo a esta parte tengo la sensación de llevar puesto un uniforme muy ajustado, un traje que me aprieta en exceso" ("For some time now I have had the feeling that I'm wearing a very rigid uniform, a suit that it too tight on me"). Mora is often presented in the press as the intellectual leader of the new authors, and here he objects to being pigeonholed within a narrow set of interests: "de pronto advertí en 2008 cómo algunas personas comenzaban a extrañarse de que pudiese hablar de literatura mutante y acto seguido publicar un largo ensayo sobre Mallarmé" ("suddenly I noticed in 2008 that some people began to act surprised that I might talk about mutant literature and immediately afterwards publish a long essay on Mallarmé"; "Distancia").⁸

Ironically, Mora's writings have played an important role in shaping the polarizing discourse about the new wave. His book *La luz nueva* [*The New Light*] divides present-day Spanish authors into three separate "direcciones culturales y estéticas" ("cultural and aesthetic directions"): "tardomodernidad" ("late modernity"), "posmodernidad" ("postmodernity") and "pangea" ("Pangea"), categories that are said to represent absolutely dissimilar visions of the world (21). Mora claims that his description, based on contemporary authors and texts, goes beyond the linear conception of successive epochs. He argues that modernity, postmodernity and the 'no-modernity' of Pangea exist simultaneously in the

⁷ Robert C. Spires makes this same argument with reference to the polarizing definitions of the Spanish Generation X (485-87).

⁸ The divisive effect of generational definitions is also evident in the polemical exchange between Javier Calvo and Agustín Fernández Mallo in two opinion pieces published by *La Vanguardia* in the wake of Azancot's article. Calvo objects to his inclusion in the group and questions their supposed experimentation, pointing out that none of the characteristics named by Azancot are new to Spanish narrative ("Historia"). In a heated rebuttal Fernández Mallo argues that the Nocilla authors are breathing fresh air into the Spanish novel, which has become formulaic and out of touch with contemporary society. He ascribes Calvo's opinions to a reactionary view of artistic creation ("La 'otra' historia").

present era (22-23). Nevertheless, Mora's explanation of the three directions has all the markings of progression in time. These cultural orientations indicate the degree to which authors are engaged with the present or alternatively stuck in the past. Late moderns write as if they lived in the late 1970s, in a country that is just emerging from the Franco dictatorship and a world that has not yet been revolutionized by the new technologies of our era (7-8). Their narratives reproduce the linear time and plot structures of the nineteenth-century realist novel and depend upon central unquestioned truths, engaged in the "retorsión agonística de un proyecto que ya no contiene nada nuevo" ("agonistic repetition of a project that no longer contains anything new"; 26). Mora opposes this backwardness to the postmodern mutants, who have partially or fully 'metamorphosed' to contemporary society (30-31). Their narratives feature fragmented time, protean subjects and a profound questioning of essential truths (29). The third group, the "pangeics", is planting the seeds of a future territory beyond the duality of modernity/ postmodernity. This new zone is entirely determined by the virtual space of the Internet and other digital technologies. Accordingly, time is a continuous absolute present, subjects are avatars and truth is not questioned but rather inexistent in this supposedly non-material reign.⁹

Since these three orientations are associated with the past, the present and the future, it is not surprising that age is a determining factor in Mora's taxonomy of contemporary Spanish narrative. He argues that those born after 1960 have a completely different perception of reality, as "*la ubicua cultura audiovisual ha forjado su modo de comunicación con el mundo*" ("*the ubiquitous audiovisual culture has forged their mode of communicating with the world*"; 36). Consequently, all writers born before this dividing line are late

⁹ Further down I question this idea of virtual space, time and subjectivity being detached from any material contextualization.

moderns. While most authors born after 1960 are also labeled late modern, this designation merely indicates that their writing is out of step with the postmodern realities they inhabit. Only those select few mutants and pangeics, the ‘new light’ of the book’s title (28), express the spirit of the times in their texts. Mora also argues that older literary critics, whose “sistemas de referencias están desfasados” (“systems of reference are outdated”), are unable to comprehend this groundbreaking narrative, concluding that every 15-20 years there should be a “relevo generacional” (“generational changing of the guard”) in the field in order to properly analyze the latest tendencies (16).

While claiming to offer a purely synchronic description of today’s narrative, then, Mora follows a classic generational framework.¹⁰ His conviction that mutant and pangeic texts have nothing in common with those of other writers working in the same geographical context eliminates the possibility of establishing historical and cultural connections to the varied field of Spanish narrative. It is true that the most renowned authors to have emerged in democratic Spain— writers like Javier Cercas, Javier Marías, Juan José Millás, Antonio Muñoz Molina or Rosa Montero— represent a return to story with respect to the fleeting or non-existent plots that dominated the last years of the dictatorship (Gracia 182-83). However, these and other prominent writers that Mora labels late moderns are not tethered to purely realist forms or disengaged from the problems of the present. They repeatedly question the existence of ontological truth, regularly employ metafictional strategies and often stray from

¹⁰ Mora’s repeated emphasis on discrete time periods defined by radical breaks reflects the continuing influence of Julius Petersen’s theory of literary generations in Peninsular criticism, which Christopher Soufas traces in a recent article. According to Petersen, whose ideas were used by Pedro Salinas to define the Generation of 98, every era is characterized by great changes that lead to the “anquilosamiento” (“stagnation” or “outmoding”) of previous artistic idioms. Older generations are thus rendered obsolete, as are younger artists who reproduce their styles and themes. An elite group of creators, like Mora’s mutants and pangeics, arises to shape their cohort and its specific historical mission, forging a language so sweepingly innovative that it will not even be understood by their elders (Soufas 247-56).

linear structures. In other words they fashion particular narrative styles using both realist and experimental elements, contributing to a complex field whose diversity is belied by Mora's broad categories.¹¹

However, Mora does mention some qualities that ring true to the particularities of the new wave and the general Spanish narrative context. He describes a progressive breakdown of the individuality of characters: from the split subjects of late modern fiction (26), defined by internal struggles, to the mosaic subjectivities of the mutants (29) or the avatar identities of the pangeics (72). He also defines the spatial context of mutant narrative as "lugares locales y globales a la vez" ("places that are both local and global"; 29). Lost in his otherwise blanket descriptions, these points deserve greater attention, as taken together they define the preoccupations underlying the new wave. Many critics have commented on the rather solipsistic nature of post-Franco narrative, which tends to confront the disorienting postmodern context of democratic Spain with a focus on individual perception and personalized historical revisions (Gracia 188-89; Navajas 110-12). In the new authors this focus on individual experience and the creation of a unique expressive language (Gracia 205) gives way to protean characters and narrators whose thoughts are interwoven with the hybrid "glocal" spaces they inhabit.¹²

Fernández Porta's book *Afterpop: La literatura de la implosión de los medios* [*Afterpop: The Literature of the Media Implosion*] attributes this multiple subjectivity to the splintering of the formerly homogenous mass media into a constellation of inter-related

¹¹ A wide range of writers could be invoked here, including but not limited to Rafael Chirbes, Paloma Díaz Mas, Belen Gopegui, Almudena Grandes, Eduardo Mendoza, Lourdes Ortiz, Álvaro Pombo, Manuel Rivas, Manuel Vazquez Montalbán or Enrique Vila-Matas.

¹² In his article "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity" Roland Robertson uses the term glocalization to refer to the "interpenetration of particularism and universalism". He points out that today local sites are increasingly defined within a global context and likewise the discourses of globalization itself are generally centered on local manifestations (34).

subcultures that purvey all social practices. His theory of an “afterpop” mode of cultural production and reception has been as influential in the discussion of the new wave as Mora’s ideas, although the book refers only briefly to the new writers and instead emphasizes a broader generational consciousness. In fact Fernández Porta introduces his key theoretical concepts through a reading of Ray Loriga’s collection of short stories *El hombre que inventó Manhattan* [*The Man Who Invented Manhattan*]. Loriga (b. 1967) is one of the most cited members of the Spanish “Generation X” that rose to prominence in the 1990s. However, Fernández Porta’s use of this particular text, published in 2004 long after the Generation X hype had faded, emphasizes the continuity of a Spanish generation (those born in the 1960s and 70s) beyond particular groupings like “X” and “Nocilla”.

Moreover, he defines an age-specific relation to pop culture by comparing Loriga’s fiction to Javier Marías’s (b. 1951) decidedly non-afterpop stories in *Cuando fui mortal* [*When I Was Mortal*]. While these texts contain a similar range and quantity of pop references as Loriga’s, they are filtered through a “*conciencia integrada pero culta que juzgue y vehicule esos referentes*” (“*conscience that is integrated with pop culture but also cultured which judges and broadcasts those references*”). In other words, Marías’s narrators participate in pop culture from a certain distance that allows for reflection and individualized identity. This “tranquilizador personaje-guía” (“reassuring character-guide”) is absent from Loriga’s stories, where subjects are no more than “instancias de contemplación que entran y salen de sus referentes” (“instances of contemplation that enter and exit their referents”; 21). Marías’s characters reflect a liberal conception of the autonomous subject that consumes the products of postmodern spectacle from a position of amused detachment, while Loriga’s are immersed in the virtual discourses and images that make up contemporary society.

In summary, critics like Ferré, Mora, Fernández Porta and Antonio J. Gil González have pointed to the importance of mass media and technology in the new wave texts.¹³ Mora and Fernández Porta, in particular, have elaborated innovative theoretical concepts that signal the way these new modes of communication are interwoven into the texts and the characters' experiences of the world. Mora's concepts of mutant and pangeic narrative show the profound questioning of modern rationalist subjectivity, space and time occurring in the new wave fictions. His insistence on technological determinism and a radical break with previous generations, however, leads him to conclude that these three elements of human existence are inevitably bound towards a wholly virtual realm, rating texts as more or less contemporary according to their level of integration in this non-material field. Fernández Mora's afterpop theory demonstrates how a wide range of cultural manifestations today (not only the new wave and not only literature) respond to a mass media system that is increasingly diversified and imbricated in all aspects of experience and expression. In narrative, he points to a new subjective relation to these media that moves from outside spectator to inseparable participant. However, more concerned with demonstrating a broad range of cultural manifestations across genres, media and geographical zones, he pays scant attention to how afterpop relates to the physical spaces subjects inhabit in Spain or elsewhere.

The present study focuses on the constant struggle in new wave narrative to integrate the ubiquitous presence of audiovisual media with surrounding physical reality. Rather than a clean break from past forms and themes, I argue that it engages in a dialogical relation between new technologies of remote communication and pre-existing social constructions of

¹³ Gil González cautiously accepts the premise that the new wave texts are distinguished from other Spanish narrative by the centrality of technology and media in their thematics and poetics (82). However, he qualifies this assertion with the recognition that this preoccupation with audiovisual technologies has clear precedents within the context of Spanish literature (77-79).

reality. Moreover, I contend that these fictions constantly mediate between two mutually dependent and often conflictive social geographies, which Manuel Castells defines as the “space of places” and the “space of flows”. While places are established by physical contiguity, with boundaries that contain the “*form, function and meaning*” of social practices (*Network Society* 453), flows are dependent on their channeling through global electronic networks by way of “purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions” (442). I ask what sort of cultural and physical emplacement subjects can achieve within so much fluctuation and crisscrossing social dynamics. Or, alternatively, is a new subjective relation to space— less dependent on the stability symbolized by ideas of home and place— needed for individuals and collectives to make sense of their trajectories through the world?

Virtual/Global Flows and Local/Physical Places

The new wave texts, then, wrestle with a social context where cultural relations and individual experience are shaped as much by remote communication and mediated images as they are by tangible objects and people found in the subject’s surrounding space. This dynamic brings about a complex hybridization of the physical and the virtual and of the local and the global, processes that are related to recent transformations in cultural perceptions of these different kinds of space.

Marie-Laure Ryan points out how the association of the term virtual with computer technologies plays on the word’s two historical meanings: the modern implication of falsehood, as opposed to reality, and the classical connotation of potentialities that exist within reality. While the idea of digitally produced virtuality originally referred to immaterial

environments created by graphic projections, Ryan argues that its meaning shifted during the 1990's to describe virtual navigation through the Internet. Under this new conception, virtuality links and transforms relations among already existing places. This overlaid dimension breaks with cartographical space in several ways: the Internet is infinite, equidistant to all parts and traveled through by jumps and instant transport (83-6). In other words, virtual space no longer principally denotes non-existent or simulated environments but rather the abstract web of physical spaces linked and modified by remote digital communications. The new wave texts reflect this changing view of the world. Unlike the Generation X narratives, where the virtual sphere of mass media and remote communications is separate from the concrete spaces surrounding characters, here it is integrated with material reality.

The combining of cartographical and virtual spaces leads to the increasingly vivid perception of a globally interconnected and locally fragmented environment. The new wave narratives ask how (or whether) subjects can truly inhabit these hybrid spaces, in the sense that Gaston Bachelard gives the term *inhabitation*. The space where we dwell, he argues, is a felicitous or loved space that reverberates on the psyche, transcending the indifferent geometric space of the surveyor (xxxix-xxxii). However, these fictions present a world where, as W.J.T. Mitchell argues, older social geographies of concentric circles that seat intimate spaces within a larger order (the bedroom, the home, the rural or urban community, the region, the nation) give way to structures of networks, intersections and nodes (7-18).

Castells's opposition of the space of *places* to the space of *flows* speaks to the disorientation one may feel in an environment where physical emplacement competes with immaterial flows. Michel de Certeau argues that "*space is a practiced place*" (217). Places

are arrangements of contiguous inert objects; spaces are produced by the trajectories and encounters that activate and link different places. If we carry this conceptualization to the virtual terrain, the subject's interaction with the electronically powered networks that so heavily influence contemporary society produces "practiced" flows. However, while places provide stability, a sense of "*being-there*" (Certeau 118), flows are more like space itself. They are already in motion and defined by interaction. The idea that today's places are integrally connected to these continuous flows complicates their status as an anchor through which the subject relates to the world.

The Texts

Like the so-called Generation X authors of the 1990s, the ongoing work of the writers making up the Nocilla movement will quickly transform and grow into divergent artistic projects. However, a critical interpretation of the way certain themes and narrative strategies manifest in different texts can shed light on the historical moment to which these authors are responding. Moreover, through a careful reading of the codes and symbolism composing their fictional worlds we can devise the common social and artistic ground from which their distinct projects part.

For this reason, rather than a survey of the varied authors who could be grouped in the new wave I have chosen to carry out an in-depth analysis of four selected texts: Agustín Fernández Mallo's *Nocilla Dream*, Gabi Martínez's *Ático* [*Top-Floor Apartment*], Javier Calvo's "Una belleza rusa" ("A Russian Beauty") and Esther García Llovet's *Coda*. These writers are not necessarily the most representative and in the last two cases are certainly not the names most mentioned in discussions of the "Nocilla Generation". Fernández Mallo, of

course, is the central figure who propelled the new wave into the mainstream of the Spanish literary world. Calvo is also an important figure whose first two books, *Risas enlatadas* [*Canned Laughter*] and *El dios reflectante* [*The Reflecting God*], have been highly influential, but he has publicly distanced himself from the arguments of Fernández Mallo, Mora and other vocal proponents of “mutant” narrative. Martínez’s name has been mentioned as a member of the new cohort, and *Ático*’s exploration of virtual reality has aroused interest, but the reliance on realist structures in most of his work breaks with the notion of a radically experimental generation. García Llovet’s two books, *Coda* and *Submáquina* [*Submachine*], have gone mostly unnoticed in general and as far as I know they have never been connected to the new wave movement, perhaps because they do not place new technologies at the center of the narrative.

The selection of texts for this study, however, is not based on formal experimentalism or the number of media references they contain but rather their symbolic reactions to— or interventions in— a world shaped by the conjunction of virtual and physical space. Each of these fictions takes a representative approach to the issue. Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Dream* and Martínez’s *Ático* map the fluid connections between their characters’ surrounding spaces and remote locations or global networks. *Nocilla Dream* constructs a world space context and subjectivity that transcend particular localized dynamics, while *Ático* focuses on a localized space that continuously interacts with global flows through the feedback loop of virtual communications. Calvo’s “Una belleza rusa” and García Llovet’s *Coda* are less concerned with mapping out spatial configurations and more centered on the subjective experience of these chaotic social geographies. Both strive for a pluralized conception of subjectivity that is open to the multiple and often incongruent cultural forces at work in their hybrid spaces. The

former portrays the symbolic breakdown of the protagonist's individualist identity and the latter suggests a collective subjective experience that integrates the book's scattered spaces and characters.

Taken together, these four texts reveal the new wave's common concern with new forms of spatial relations and subjective identity evolving within the context of an increasingly mediated and splintered social environment. They also show the dialectic tensions involved in the representation of this reality, with shifting configurations of today's hybrid geographies and necessarily ambiguous portrayals of the subjectivities formed within them. They ultimately point to the continuing importance of narrative, as literary imaginings that fill in the gap between what the subject directly experiences and the social structures that it knows, feels or intuitively to be there.

No Place Like Home

The five chapters of this study can be roughly divided into two parts. The first three are more guided by the first question mentioned above: what sort of homelike spaces subjects can find, if any, within today's hybrid social geography. The final two deal more closely with the second question: new and more fluid subjective relations to these chaotic surroundings.

The first chapter, "Wish We Were Here: the Subject and Space in Post-Franco Spanish Fiction", contends that the new wave emerges within a literary and cultural context where the subject's connection to surrounding spaces and collectivities is highly questioned. Here I compare the new wave both to the dominant trend towards a solipsist and realist narrative that took shape with the transition to democracy and also to the nihilistic media saturated "Generation X" novels of the 1990s. I do not analyze these groups as successive

generations establishing radically new forms but as distinct aesthetic responses to the context of a postmodern and globalized Spain.

The second and third chapters investigate the dialectic tension between the global/virtual and the local/physical in novels that are representative of two distinct approaches to their hybridization. The second chapter, “Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Dream: Imagining a World Space Subject*”, analyzes this novel’s construction of a subject whose home is the global space of networked transportation and communications. I argue that the novel aims for what Fredric Jameson has called an “aesthetic of cognitive mapping”, reclaiming subjectivity by apprehending the impossible complexity of the “world space of multinational capital” that is present in all our local places (92). However, I question how the local and national fit into this view of a decentered, rhizomic reality, investigating a certain dissonance suggested by the use of *Nocilla* in the title and also manifested in key passages.

In chapter three, “Gabi Martínez’s *Ático [Top Floor Apartment]: Virtuality and its Discontents*”, I analyze how this novel places its protagonist in a localized space that is then connected to the flows of virtual networks. The narrative chronicles the protagonist’s three-month self-imposed seclusion in a top floor Barcelona apartment during the fall of 2001, where he designs a virtual reality videogame also called *Ático* and at the same time establishes relations with his Moroccan neighbors. Set in a specific time and place within Castells’s “network society”, the novel exposes the blends, clashes and fissures that characterize this social-geographical paradigm. At the same time a parallel narrative of a player’s passage through the game’s virtual spaces disrupts this focus on a single localized place, emphasizing its connection to floating virtualized experiences and subjectivities that are actualized in different times and locations.

The final two chapters analyze symbolic representations of pluralized or collective subjectivities that could assimilate today's superimposed contexts. Chapter four, "Javier Calvo's Russian Beauty and the Beasts Within", examines the story "Una belleza rusa" ["A Russian Beauty"]. I focus on its representation of the conflicts between individualistic/nationalist identities and the "translocal" places that for Jan Neverdeen Pieterse make up the contemporary world. The Russian fashion model in Calvo's story attempts to maintain her fixed identity at all costs within the translocal spaces of London, New York and the Catalan coast. Meanwhile, in her environment social relations form and evaporate more in line with Mitchell's dynamic networks than older geographies based on boundaries and concentric circles, calling for a more fluid and less individualized identity.

Chapter five, "Esther García Llovet's *Coda*: There's No Place Like Home", investigates this text's construction of pluralized subjectivities. While Calvo's story focuses on one character's relation to her surroundings, *Coda* tracks the crisscrossing routes of different characters through its largely incomprehensible landscape. The book's six stories are set on the outskirts of an unnamed coastal city, where various characters move about the highways that connect isolated and impersonal places. The book suggests a fragmented collective subjectivity within these landscapes. I investigate this implication in light of recent theories of a pluralized *multitude* that replaces the singularized *people* as the dominant form of collectivity in a post-national world (Hardt and Negri; Virno).

As this cursory introduction to the texts analyzed in this study shows, the new wave narratives focus on the conjunction of virtual/global and physical/local spaces in today's society. Characters are defined by their conflictive relations to these blended spaces. The first two novels search for the stability and psychic reverberation of Bachelard's homelike spaces

in two different spatial configurations: a world space in *Nocilla Dream* and a localized place connected to global networks in *Ático*. The last two narratives imply that Bachelard's felicitous spaces can no longer be found in the stability of home but must be sought at the crossroads where different cultures, spaces and subjective perspectives meet in the present world. These texts call on us to question how contemporary subjects can locate themselves with respect to their splintered geographies and the others who inhabit those geographies.

Chapter One – Wish We Were Here: the Subject and Space in Post-Franco Spanish Fiction

The title of this chapter refers to what I argue is the dominant theme of post-Franco literature: the confrontation between the individual and a chaotic, incomprehensible and often hostile reality. Critics like Cristina Moreiras Menor and Teresa Vilarós have connected this generalized disorientation to a ‘wounded culture’ that repressed the trauma of the Franco era during a hasty transition to democracy and which suffers from the ideological uncertainty that followed the dictatorship’s disappearance.¹⁴ On the other hand, Jo Labanyi links the confusion reigning in Spain’s political and social context to an international phenomenon:

If, as has been said, postmodernism is an expression of political impotence resulting from loss of belief in the master narratives of liberalism and marxism, and from the media’s monopoly control of the images of reality available to us, then Spain is suffering from a bad attack: not now of a mythical ‘national disease’ ...but of the latest international fashion. (397)

Spain is now assimilated economically, politically and culturally into the European Community and global capitalism. Its social structures and cultural production clearly reflect the postmodern episteme that has also taken hold elsewhere. In his study of “post-totalitarian” Spanish fiction Robert C. Spires integrates democratic Spain’s national and international contexts, arguing that the years between 1975 (the death of Franco) and 1989 (the fall of the Berlin Wall) marked a movement away from totalitarianisms on a worldwide level, spawning more fragmented and individualistic cultures. Accordingly the Spanish novel

¹⁴ As expressed in the title of an article by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, which became an ironic slogan of the left despite the fact that the content of the article argued quite the opposite: “Contra Franco estábamos mejor” (“We were better off against Franco”; Qtd in Vilarós 65-66)

of the period shifts from holding the central regime as a reference point of collective opposition to personalized struggles against more diffuse power structures like patriarchy. Taken together these critics describe a multiple attack on the subject's connection to its surroundings: the estrangement from (or repression of) a past context that has suddenly evaporated; the ubiquitous simulacra and ideological uncertainty of postmodern society; the splintering of collective social movements.

It is not surprising, then, that the construction of the self becomes the novel's main enterprise. Much of Spanish narrative under democracy deals with solipsistic characters that practice various forms of escapism: nostalgic reconstructions of the past, fanciful interpretations of their surrounding environments or a youthful media saturated nihilism. These characters are unable to see themselves as a part of the spaces they inhabit. However, the novels themselves collect the various strands of fragmented subjectivity into a textual process of self-affirmation. Within a varied field the overall tendency is towards a realist fiction that does not attempt to view society on a global scale but rather sends up snapshots of contemporary life seen through the partial lens of one character's rather solitary experience. Many narratives reveal nostalgia for a fuller experience of the present moment. While the new wave texts I analyze in this thesis also often feature isolated and lonely individuals, the solipsistic view that the self is the only reality gives way to an intimate and essential relationship between the self and the spaces he or she inhabits.

In this chapter I contextualize the new wave within post-Franco narrative in general. In the first section I consider the tendency to define literary history as discrete periods separated by clear generational gaps, arguing instead for Fernand Braudel's model of overlapping dimensions and rhythms. Secondly, I analyze how Spanish narrative since the

end of the Franco regime has incorporated realist and experimental tendencies from the Modern literary field into a novel that confronts questions pertaining to its specific historical and social context. Thirdly, I discuss the clearest precedent to the new wave within Spanish literature: the so-called “Generation X” of the 1990s. In many ways they reflect the solipsism that prevails in Spanish narrative but they also stand out for their emphasis on a cultural context dominated by foreign references and mass media. In the final two sections, I argue that the new wave emerges from the same interwoven fields (Modern narrative, postmodern Spain, a globalized and virtualized culture) but reconfigures them to reflect recent changes in cultural attitudes and practices. The mediascapes characters move through are not portrayed as empty simulacra but rather jumbled reflections of real spaces and people. The hybrid spaces they encounter are linked to inner coordinates, composing a sense of self that is both individual and dependent upon cultural and geographical location. This process not only affects narrative form, with a notable shift towards more experimental language and structures, but also reconfigures the connotations of realism and experimentalism.

The Generation Question

There are two notions of history lurking at or near the surface whenever we speak about new generations of writers in Spain. The first is Julius Petersen’s definition of the concept, popularized by Pedro Salinas and others in order to analyze the Generation of 98. Ortega y Gasset had conceived of a generation as a pluralistic group minimally associated by age and geography, made up of individuals who gradually become aware of their circumstances and their role in history. Petersen was unsatisfied by this loose definition and elaborated the idea of an elite group of individuals that shape their generation and its

historical mission. As Christopher Soufas points out in his article tracking the history and implications of Petersen's influence in Spain, this has led to an approach where the part defines the whole, creating rigid and exclusive definitions of literary periods and movements (256). Petersen's catch phrase "anquilosamiento" ("stagnation" or "outmoding") is especially persistent in Spanish criticism, emphasizing the expiration and vanquishing of previous authors as a necessary step for the establishment of a new generation. According to the German critic, a new cohort arises to correct the mistakes of the past and is so radically different that the language they forge will not even be understood by their elders. This creates monumental expectations for the recognition of new tendencies in Spanish narrative: in order to establish that a group of writers represents a fresh direction they must be innovative in a way that is both absolute and destructive with respect to their predecessors.

The other related notion encountered when speaking about new authors is the categorization of texts into one of two narrative modes: transparent realism or experimental modernism. While realist and modernist are not always the labels used, they are the terms that Nil Santiáñez-Tió applies to the two categories in his attempt to reformulate this discussion (279-81). He argues that they should not be seen strictly as schools of literary thought but rather ideals, magnetic poles that condition the writing and reading of all texts. The spectrum organized by the two poles is a structural element of the modern literary field, formed in the case of Spain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the discussions and practices surrounding the development of realism and the later questioning of this form.¹⁵ Santiáñez-Tió argues that while most narrative can be placed closer to one of the

¹⁵ Santiáñez-Tió defines realism with the following characteristics: representative language; transparency of the linguistic code; metonymical writing; unity of the subject, who is defined by social and biographical context; temporal organization; emphasis on story over discourse; tendency towards unity,

two tendencies, all modern narrative is determined by this underlying structure and reflects the preoccupations of both sides of the debate.

Santiáñez-Tió's analysis is based on Fernand Braudel's concept that history is not a single straight line but rather consists of multiple overlapping dimensions and rhythms. Braudel analyzes history through three lenses or *durées* ("durations"): long-term durations show ingrained structures, which are durable but also dynamic and subject to change or even disappearance; medium-term durations of half a century or shorter reveal the transformations of social groups; finally, short-term durations cover rapid changes and events that act within the conditions created by these longer range phenomena. The study of the complex interplay between these dimensions reveals how societal structures create both possibilities realized by individuals or collectives and obstacles to knowledge and inventiveness. Santiáñez-Tió proposes the realist-modernist spectrum as one of the long range structures in Spanish narrative (272-4). For the analysis carried out here, I consider post-Franco narrative as a whole to be a medium-term structure and the new wave of writers as a short-term eruption that will have unforeseeable consequences on future durations.

This conception of history allows us to take into account the fact that several generations of writers are currently active in Spain. It would not be true to say that age is the only determining factor or that the language of all members of any generation has become stagnant. The new writers I study in this thesis were all born in the late 1960's and early 1970's and their work reveals their perspective as children of Spain's consumer boom during

consistency and global visions. Modernism is defined as the other side of these various coins: experimental and dislocated language, opaque linguistic codes and metaphorical structures; the dissolution of personal identity; spatial organization; emphasis on discourse over story; parody and metafiction, symbolism and polysemous linguistic codes; distance from the communicative function; epistemological questioning and reticence towards global visions.

that period and as adults who came of age in a democratic Spain quickly incorporating itself into the European Community and global capitalism. Yet emblematic Generation X writers like Ray Loriga, Lucía Etxebarria and José Ángel Mañas were born in the same period and their texts clearly reflect the same historical viewpoint. Moreover, others in the same age group produce a fiction more in line with the “return to story” tendency that emerged in the years of the transition. Rather than consigning other literary forms to the waste bin of the 1980’s or 1990’s or defining the new wave of writers as a complete reversal of past forms, I study them within a broad literary and social context, both Spanish and global, that has been evolving over the last thirty some years.

The Discursive Self in Post-Franco Fiction

After a period characterized by multiple perspectives and storylines that were fleeting or almost non-existent, there was a revival of realism in the era of Spain’s transition to democracy, marked by a stable narrative voice and an emphasis on the entertaining and well-told story. Writers like Juan José Millás, Rosa Montero or Eduardo Mendoza came to be known as the *nueva narrativa* (“new narrative”). This was not a return to nineteenth-century realism where characters and plots are molded according to the novelist’s totalizing vision of society or to the neo-realism of the 1950’s where the author offers a testimony of social ills. The narrative that began to take shape in this era shares with more modernist forms the idea that language is not just a vehicle to represent the world but also a creator of realities and an end in itself. Furthermore, the emphasis is not on collectives but rather on individual experience, and accordingly the imagination and fantasy are at least as important as the environment surrounding characters. The first person narrator is rather common here as

characters self-consciously recreate their personal histories, shaping the chaos of their experience into a form that is pleasing to read.

Santos Alonso is certainly right in considering Mendoza's *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* [*The Truth about the Savolta Case*], published in 1975, a symbolic starting point for post-Franco fiction (67-68). This novel begins with a blend of court documents, newspaper articles and both first and third-person narration, all presented in fragments that the reader must sort out in order to construct a semi-coherent version of the events. In contrast the second part of the novel is a linear narrative of one character's attempts to reconstruct and come to terms with these events years later. This stabilizing effect makes the second part easier to follow and establishes a definitive point of view, but still leaves the text open to different interpretations and makes clear that the story is not about what happened as much as it is about the character's present illusions, desires and ambitions. If realism emphasizes story over discourse and modernism discourse over story, here we have a combination of the two that is difficult to categorize. The story is primordial but it is essentially the story of a discursive process of self-reflection, and this has been one of the dominant themes of Spanish fiction in the last thirty years.

In fact, Spires shows the connections between Mendoza's novel and more experimental texts published in the period following Franco's death, which also use narrative as a platform for defining or questioning subjective agency. In Juan Goytisolo's *Juan sin tierra* [*Juan the Landless*], one of the classic texts of 1970s Spanish experimentalism, the narrator is the creator of the text but also a creation of the writing process (Spires 55). The speaker in the novel undergoes a transformational process, viewing himself from multiple perspectives through shifts between first, second and third-person narration. In the end he is

constituted as a “new writer with a whole new ensemble of socio-artistic values” (78). Carmen Martín Gaité’s *El cuarto de atrás* [*The Back Room*], which stakes out a middle ground between Mendoza’s emphasis on story and Goytisolo’s self-referential novel, also narrates a process of self-definition. Here the protagonist carries out a dialogue about her life with a mysterious stranger, waking up the following morning to find a manuscript of the novel on her nightstand. According to Spires this metafictional textual strategy “allows the narrator to position herself as both speaker and spoken subject”. She recognizes herself as the “product of gendered discursive practices” but also becomes the “producer of a resisting discourse” against this internalized oppression (78). In the light of these other two novels, *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* [*The Truth about the Savolta Case*] can be positioned along a spectrum of more realist or more experimental manifestations that provide different perspectives on the construction of the self through remembering, ordering and writing. Within this literary field, Mendoza “brings back the story” but “refuses to let his readers become too comfortable with it”, displaying a “postmodern distrust for the totalizing picture” (Spires 86-87).

In many novels this distrust undermines the very process of self-construction represented (or enacted) in the narrative. Gonzalo Navajas argues that the act of remembering often envelops the character in a nostalgic environment that is pleasant, gratifying and entirely unreal: a comforting falsification of the past is contrasted with a hostile present where the subject is unable to define the world in a coherent fashion (110-12). Even in texts not centered on a character reminiscing about a past era the theme of illusory reality is a constant. In *El desorden de tu nombre* [*The Disorder of Your Name*] by Juan José Millás, for example, the protagonist Julio appears to be immersed in an endless circle of meaningless

frenetic activity to avoid the feeling of exhaustion and desolation that lies at the base of his existence. Everything about Julio is spectacle and empty imitation of others. A successful editor who is also a frustrated writer, he uses his power to suppress the publication of a book of short stories by a young writer out of envy for his obvious talent, then passes as the author of one of the stories in order to impress his lover Laura. His attraction to Laura responds both to the fact that she looks like his ex-lover that was killed in a car accident and to a desire to supplant his psychoanalyst who happens to be her husband. In the end he accomplishes this goal through the replica of a murder carried out in the story he read to her, and he advances in his career by borrowing the jacket of a dying friend in order to impress his superiors with a new modern look. The self is an amalgam of false appearances in a culture dominated by inauthenticity and empty reflections.

This existential malaise, however, is packaged in novels that are pleasurable to read, appealing to a new broadly educated public. The work of Javier Marías is an illustrative example of this novelistic practice. The stories in his novels generally involve mysterious deaths, often suicides or murders. Yet these dramatic events are shrouded in the first person narrator's circular and obsessive thoughts, filled with vague anxieties and guilt, and this rhetorical play rather than the revelation of the crime is the motor that moves the narrative. Details of a character's biography or daily life that would normally figure prominently in a realist novel are left out in favor of seemingly insignificant musings. The narrator's idea of self is rather expansive, as he identifies with the experiences of others that he hears about or meets to the point where he entertains notions of being a reincarnation or repetition of these people, absorbing this outside information into his self-image. Many passages or motifs are also repeated in different contexts, taking on various meanings, as if groups of words or faces

from photographs had their own protean lives. All of these characteristics might suggest a dense modernist prose, but in fact the texts are rather easy to follow, and the aim is not to challenge the readers but to take them on a journey through the peculiar thoughts of the narrator. Despite the blurry edges of the main character's identity it is clear that we are inside one person's head, following his interpretation of his surroundings. Reality is open to multiple perspectives that are never definitive, but rather than subjecting the reader to this labyrinth and thereby implicating him or her in the process of the text's construction, the characters are the ones that must suffer uncertainty and confusion.

This emphasis on readability is partly due to the changing role of the writer in the post-Franco era. No longer was the novel a necessary mode of resistance to an authoritarian regime, either as a testimonial of unofficial realities in the social realism of the 1950's or as the process of psychological and ideological purging that took place in experimental works by Juan Goytisolo or Juan Benet. Jordi Gracia argues that the intellectual is no longer a guide or guru for the reader, just an educated civilian member of society. Writers speak to readers as equals: both come from a heterogeneous and diverse background of knowledge and cultural influences (34). Novels are above all cultural products and most writers are concerned with marketing and making their narratives attractive to a large number of consumers. This is not a happy state of affairs for all, revealing a crisis of the position of the intellectual in Spanish society. Alonso complains about the formulaic nature of much narrative and bemoans the shift in writers like Millás, Montero or Antonio Muñoz Molina from early experimental or critical texts to more transparent and commercial forms (15). Constantino Bértolo blames the logic of the publishing market for stimulating a narrative

aimed at instant gratification of reader's desires rather than delayed gratification that requires some effort (58-59).

Although there is certainly truth to these critiques, it is no less true that post-Franco Spanish fiction has represented in a critical way the disorientation of a Spain that underwent a quick transition into the global economy and the postmodern era. With the coming of democracy many political activists who expected a more egalitarian society were not only disillusioned but found themselves to be beneficiaries of the new liberal economy, thereby creating a gap between their ideologies and their actions. This situation is explored through texts as diverse as *Un día volveré* [*One Day I Will Return*] by Juan Marsé, *Antes de la batalla* [*Before the Battle*] by Lourdes Ortiz, *El metro de platino irridiado* [*The Iridized Platinum Rule*] by Álvaro Pombo, *La conquista del aire* [*Conquest of Air*] by Belén Gopegui and *Atlas de la geografía humana* [*Atlas of Human Geography*] by Almudena Grandes, among many others. The youthful ideals of these characters are depicted as grand narratives that, as Lyotard argues, are no longer credible in the present era, leaving them paralyzed by feelings of impotence and guilt. The end of grand narratives is also evident in the emphasis discussed above on the first person narrator's discursive process. With no universal truths or beliefs to guide them, characters are conscious of the fact that their histories are a construction and therefore the process of interpreting and recounting is often the major theme of the novel. These narratives describe an atomized society where both history and present reality are mirages created by each individual. Characters are alone and isolated, facing a past and a present that are essentially unknowable, incapable of feeling solidarity with others and often guided, as Ana María Spitzmesser argues, by disconnected and illogical desires (4). Their

discursive self-constructions are completely cut off from their surrounding environments and the others that inhabit those spaces.

Generation X and Hyperreality

In the 1990's a new recognizable group burst onto the Spanish literary scene with writers like José Ángel Mañas, Ray Loriga and Lucía Etxebarria, known collectively as Generation X.¹⁶ José María Izquierdo observes that these authors did not recognize themselves in the set of references and the cultural imaginary configured around Francoism and they introduced a new cultural field consisting of foreign films, television and music, which provides the context for youth lifestyles based on parties and drugs (304). They certainly represent a Spain that is fully integrated into the European Union and the global capitalist market, where local history and identity is just as much a spectacle as the foreign pop cultural references that dominate the characters' worldviews. It is not difficult to see parallels between these texts and what Helen Graham and Antonio Sánchez call the "politics of 1992", where the media celebrations of the Barcelona Olympics and Seville's world fair sought to present on the international stage an unproblematic image of a modernized Spain, brushing both historical tensions and the present symptoms of an uneven and accelerated economic development under the carpet (407-08).

The Generation X authors can be seen alternatively as participating in or critiquing the "present-centredness" (Graham and Sánchez 418) that defined the cultural and political

¹⁶ Other authors commonly cited as part of the Generation X include Gabriela Bustelo, Francisco Casavella, Pedro Maestre, Benjamín Prado or Roger Wolfe. As Luis Martín-Estudillo points out, this classification is generally based on coincidences in their first works, which were followed by divergent literary trajectories in later texts.

environment where they came of age. Their fiction constantly underlines the moral and existential vacuum of the characters' families and cities, which drives them to seek out a sense of self and belonging in global youth culture. Generation X portrays the consumerist hyperreality that Jean Baudrillard describes as inherent to postmodern society. He attributes this loss of the real to an omnipresent media bombarding us with narratives that interpret our private selves for us to such an extent that we approach each other and the world through the lens of these images, acquiring products because of invented desires rather than real needs. Consumer culture thus liquidates referents in any origin or reality and substitutes them with a system of empty signs (*Simulacra and Simulation* 9-10).

The protagonist of Loriga's *Héroes* [*Heroes*] lives in such a reality, populated by his favorite rock heroes. He has quit his job and isolated himself in his room where singers like David Bowie, Lou Reed and Bob Dylan offer him an escape from the monotony of everyday existence. The music of these rock legends is more meaningful to him than his daily life, providing a space where he can feel a part of something. Nevertheless this identification is in constant tension with the appearance of falseness that these references generate. He transcends reality through the emulation of pop icons, but this process creates an anxiety that the bubble he lives in will eventually burst. In one chapter he describes his unhealthy addiction to the rock and roll lifestyle, constantly struggling to make the party/drugs/music last because at the end of the song there is a base of sadness (37). In another passage he speaks about storing sensations in videotapes that can be brought out at whim, so that when he leaves his house he can go out on the street with a “sensación Jim Morrison o Dennis Hopper” (“Jim Morrison or Dennis Hopper sensation”; 69). Here a virtual force enters into the narrator's reality through an electronic medium. It does not form a part of his

environment but is rather juxtaposed, giving the narrator a pleasurable feeling that separates him from the space where he is, much like a narcotic. The virtual force is entirely illusory, as the narrator implies when he defines celebrities as people you don't know enclosed in the words of other people you don't know (journalists and promoters). This nagging doubt becomes a feeling of rejection when he dreams about Lou Reed and the singer tells him that he would prefer not to be in this dream of another adoring fan but back at home in New York (82-3). While a virtual Lou Reed may reach out and touch his reality, the narrator knows there is a flesh and blood Lou Reed somewhere that has absolutely no interest in him. Such personalization of individual heroes highlights the ultimately empty spectacle that has made them famous. These virtual elements are not integrated into the narrator's life. He uses them like a drug to escape his surroundings, leaving himself stuck between an ugly reality and an attractive illusion.

While other Generation X novels like José Ángel Mañas's *Historias del Kronen* [*Kronen Stories*], or Lucía Etxebarria's *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* [*Beatriz and the Heavenly Bodies*] are more focused on the parties and dance clubs that bring youth together than the hero-worshipping of media icons, these nocturnal rites of music and drug consumption are just as empty. Although the youths in X narrative feel strongly identified with the culture of their peers, de Urioste points out that this dynamic does not create continuous attachments but rather a series of rock concerts, parties and films promoting "pequeñas células de interrelación que se suspenden al acabar el espectáculo" ("small cells of interrelation that are discontinued when the show ends"; 468). In both novels cited above characters are drawn into underworlds by attractive role models that are ultimately acting out elaborate deceptions. The spaces that provide temporary refuge from the uninviting worlds of

their parents are dominated by figures whose rebellious images, like those of Loriga's heroes, are pure spectacle. These narratives portray a youth culture of simulacra and ephemeral spaces that is constantly threatened by the encroachment of an alienating reality.

As with the *nueva narrativa*, the work of Generation X writers tends to focus exclusively on the perspective of individual characters, underlining their isolation from their families, physical environments and ultimately even their own peers. Elizabeth Scarlett points out that the difference between the two groups does not consist in the introduction of foreign pop references but rather in how they are viewed. Novels like Muñoz Molina's *El jinete polaco* [*The Polish Horseman*] or Millás's *La soledad era esto* [*This Was Loneliness*] interweave classic rock songs from British and North American groups into their narrative, giving rock and roll a presence in 1990s Spanish fiction across the board. In these novels they are treated as "forms of high art", a "source of enlightenment and self-fulfillment". X narratives, in contrast, portray the rock world as part of the "hedonistic entertainment of postmodern spectacle", a "hyperreal world of ideals that the reader cannot help but perceive as an illusion and an escape" (109).¹⁷

Scarlett's distinction gets at the core difference between the *nueva narrativa* and Generation X. In the first group rock references are assimilated into the overall project of self-discovery through writing. Even when that self has a tenuous connection to reality, the novels of Muñoz Molina, Millás, Marías and others stand as sophisticated testaments of thoughtful introspection. With minimal plots and unbalanced structures, Mañas, Loriga or Pedro Maestre rebel against the emphasis on the well structured and well told story. Rejecting this tendency to wrap reality in stylized frames, they reach out to a generation of

¹⁷ For further analysis of this generational difference in attitudes towards pop references, see the discussion of Eloy Fernández Porta's "afterpop" theory in the introduction.

readers who recognize their parade of mass-media references and are able to see their own lives reflected in this constellation of simulacra. Their texts even subvert the possibility that what they tell could be meaningful. Nathan E. Richardson argues that the narrator of Loriga's *Lo peor de todo* [*The Worst of All*] contradicts himself to the point that none of the information he provides can be trusted, and the story he tells aspires to be completely forgettable. All that is left after reading the text is the market image of its author (210-14). The reader is thus drawn into a world of illusion, of empty references to a shared pop culture that are forgotten as soon as the book is finished, destined to blend in seamlessly with the fragmentary spectacle that makes up the lives of contemporary youth.¹⁸

In conclusion, the crisis of the subject is a major theme in Post-Franco narrative. This can be seen as part of the postmodern era, characterized by the saturation of media communications at all levels of social interaction along with the loss of master narratives that connect existential experience to an overall view of the world. It is also related to the specific context of Spain with its rapid transition to a neo-liberal economic and political structure fully integrated into global capitalism. The *nueva narrativa* focuses on feelings of inauthenticity and disconnectedness within an alienating social context, often making the discursive process of the narrative the only refuge of the characters' subjectivity and thereby isolating the individual within his or her self-conscious constructions of the past and the present. Generation X, on the other hand, simplifies the narrative and places its characters within an unadorned direct transmission of media images, youthful language and city streets.

¹⁸ In Loriga's later book, *Tokio ya no nos quiere* [*Tokyo Doesn't Love Us Anymore*], this theme is even more evident, as the protagonist works for an international pharmaceutical company that sells a drug enabling consumers to erase unpleasant or embarrassing memories. This futuristic novel is a slightly modified version of the present world, representing the destructive effects of global capitalism on local collective memory and identity.

In both cases, the subject is unable to establish any set of individual or collective coordinates, any location to call its own, within this continuous flow.

The New Wave

As I mentioned above the new wave writers were born in the same years as most of the Generation X authors. They belong to the same basic cultural universe of media references but there is a different attitude towards these pop icons and the communications technologies associated with them. Rather than offering an illusory escape from a barren reality, mass media culture is seen as an essential part of the spaces characters inhabit. The terrain they occupy is a hybrid of material and virtual realities, blending the local with distant or dislocated bits of information and images that arrive through the mediascapes of a globalized world. Subjectivity is grounded in a combination of material and virtual space, breaking with the notion that media saturation and consumer oriented social structures have destroyed the real.

These fictions come at a time when there is an increasing awareness of both the world's interconnection brought about by globalization and the real cultural relations developing through communication technologies. While in the 1990's from the perspective of Europe and North America globalization could have seemed to be mainly a financial phenomenon, whose most noticeable social effects were cheaper goods and factory closings, other aspects came to the forefront around the turn of the century with the anti-globalization protests in Seattle and Genoa, the Argentine economic crisis and finally the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 and their multiple repercussions. Spain was directly implicated in all of these events: large anti-globalization protests also occurred in Barcelona and there was an influx of Argentines into the country after the collapse of their economy. Most dramatically,

Spain's participation in the Iraq war motivated both mass demonstrations and the March 11th 2004 bombings in Madrid, which apart from the tragic loss of many lives may have reversed the results of national elections. Spain has also recently become a major receptor of immigrants from Latin America, Africa and Asia. According to estimates by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* [*National Statistics Institute*] between 2000 and 2008 the number of foreign born residents in Spain went from 923,879 to 5,220,600- jumping from 2.28% to 11.3% of the total population ("Demografía"). If in 1998 the country was made up almost entirely of native born citizens and was in the process of liberalizing its economic structures to reap the benefits of participating in a global economy, ten years later it has residents from all corners of the world and is acutely aware of the local effects, both adverse and beneficial, of distant events.¹⁹

The increasing penetration of the Internet and other digital technologies into daily life, both in Spain and worldwide, is also changing the way that space and social relations are viewed. Despite cyberspace fantasies of escaping the flesh as envisioned in William Gibson's 1984 science fiction novel *Neuromancer*, the uses of these technologies that have prevailed are generally integrated with what occurs in the material world in applications like email, Facebook, Myspace and Youtube. All of these build on existing interpersonal relations but also transform them in two substantial ways: users are able to communicate quickly and efficiently without the need to coincide in either space or time and they can easily create, collect and exchange audiovisual media. These two innovations lead to the emergence of what Mark Poster calls the "digital subject", conceived of not just as a consumer but also as a

¹⁹ While these events and changes are central to only one text, Gabi Martínez's *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*], they are part of the social landscape in novels as varied as *Mundo maravilloso* [*Wonderful World*] by Javier Calvo, *Nocilla Dream* and *Nocilla Experience* by Agustín Fernández Mallo, *Coda* by Esther García Llovet or *Magia* [*Magic*] by Manuel Vilas.

producer of cultural objects (41). Digital subjects are not invited “to stabilize territorial identity with birth and social position” but rather “to invent and construct themselves in relations with others” (43). This deterritorialization of subjectivity takes place in a social geography that combines physical space and the virtual space of the Internet. The creation, splicing and posting of our words, images and sounds in this medium that is both everywhere and nowhere plays with traditional notions of materiality. N. Katherine Hayles has written that objects now appear to be “interpenetrated by information patterns” (13-4). The technological, political and social developments described in these last two paragraphs foment collective consciousness of a “network society” where globally dispersed locations, persons and institutions are connected through virtual networks that provide the basis for social experience and identities (Castells), replacing visions of a hyperreality where individual experience is disconnected from any material base.

In the new wave of Spanish writers this shift in the subject’s relations to its surrounding environment runs parallel to a shift in narrative form. What immediately stands out when reading their texts together is the recurrence of experimental strategies like non-linear structures, opaque language, fantastic events, diffuse character identities and the organization of the narrative along spatial (not temporal) lines. As I discussed above, much of Spain’s post-Franco narrative has incorporated experimental techniques but privileged above all a return to story, packaging metafictional devices and epistemological questioning into a fiction aimed at being enjoyable to read. Generation X writers constructed a crude brand of realism that rebelled against the adornments of literary style, reproducing the colloquial language of urban middle-class youth and their media heroes in what was portrayed as a direct transmission of live reality. In both cases, the texts themselves

emphasize the isolation of their fictional universes, which represent the particular realities of individual characters created by their own discourse or by the media they consume.

The new wave, which attempts to establish a correspondence between the internal discourse of characters and a complex external reality, returns to more baroque structures. These narratives reflect the modernist idea that reality is better represented as multi-form than through realism's artificial creation of uniform worlds and literary languages. Indeed the influences that they name and that are evident in their work tend to lie on the experimental side of the spectrum discussed at the beginning of this chapter.²⁰

However, it is important to note that authors like Gabi Martínez and Javier Calvo have publicly vindicated realist narrative structures, which are evident in their fiction along with more experimental aspects. The noticeable but highly variable shift towards more modernist or avant-garde forms is part of a larger reconfiguration of the realist-modernist spectrum and in the meaning of these two poles. Within the range of authors making up the new wave, those who employ more modernist elements also tend to emphasize the abstract technologically produced global networks that Castells calls the space of flows, while those closer to the realist side of the spectrum privilege the particular places and bodies where this mediated space manifests itself. In what follows I analyze this dialectic in three different texts: Juan Francisco Ferré's *La fiesta del asno* [*The Feast of the Ass*], Robert Juan-Cantavella's *Proust Fiction* and Javier Calvo's *Mundo maravilloso* [*Wonderful World*].

²⁰ Within Spanish language narrative these vary from Valle-Inclán's *esperpentos* ("theatre of the grotesque") to later innovators like Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Juan Benet or Juan Goytisolo and more recent models such as Julián Ríos, Enrique Vila-Matas, Roberto Bolaño or Rodrigo Fresán. English language writers like J.G. Ballard, Thomas Pynchon or David Foster Wallace are also frequently mentioned, along with a broad range of twentieth century avant-garde literary and art movements.

La fiesta del asno locates itself on the experimental side with allusions to figures like Franz Kafka and Juan Goytisolo, pointing to the protean character of the subject in a space marked by omnipresent visual media. Goytisolo writes an enthusiastic prologue to the novel and his imprint can be seen in Ferré's use of multiple registers as well as the frequent sexual references that overlay discourses of national identity onto the body. The chronological relations between the novel's different chapters is also highly unclear. The protagonist Gorka K. (presumably named after Josef K. from Kafka's *The Trial*) lives in a futuristic media saturated world that satirizes the horror of the contemporary Basque conflict. Gorka is a terrorist operative who receives spiritual guidance from an unseen woman named Loyola in the restrooms of a shopping mall (27-30),²¹ engages in all sorts of sexual activities with partners of both genders, tunes into CNN to enjoy the media spectacularization of his murders and in an overtly Kafkaesque moment metamorphoses into a *guardia civil* ("national policeman" (83-90)).²²

In a twist reminiscent of the Jim Carrey film *The Truman Show*, Gorka's life is also televised as part of a reality show that creates great polemics among the viewing public both nationally and abroad. As opposed to Carrey's unsuspecting character in the movie, however, Gorka is aware of being filmed and he does not exist in an invented television world separate from an unreachable real world; rather, the media spectacle is in fact integrated within reality (111-19). His home is simultaneously a domestic arena of private habits, an advertising space where companies fight to have their products displayed and a theatre where the uncanny persistence of Spain's violent past is staged for the viewing public. Kafka's vision of the

²¹ Ignacio de Loyola is the sixteenth-century Basque priest who founded the Jesuit order.

²² The Spanish *guardia civil* is the police corps most directly responsible for the fight against ETA and also the group's most frequent targets, as well as being historically associated with Francoist repression.

individual's body being subjected to incomprehensible rules and transformations and Goytisolo's use of polysemous narrative voices are thus evoked in the novel to represent the subject's peregrination within a multi-dimensional space that contains many layers of technological mediation. Gorka inhabits both sides of the supposed gulf separating physical reality from television reality, charting an interstitial space that weaves individuals and groups into a common culture.²³

In contrast to the nihilism of Generation X, the new wave texts attempt to construct an integrated reality out of the contradictions of a postmodern, globalized Spain. Their frequent references to mass media figures also contextualize characters within the flows of an ever-present spectacle, but they feature more of a mixed bag of cultural idioms and icons, charting a wider social context.

A case in point is Juan-Cantavella's short story collection *Proust Fiction*, whose title story invokes in equal parts the Modernist writer's process of self-analysis and the postmodern film director Quentin Tarantino's constant recycling of media images. Within the stories citations vary from a rewriting of the *Quijote* windmill scene in "El deslumbrado" ("The Dazzled One") and a depiction of Plato in a modern department store in "Escalera mecánica" ("Escalator") to the appearance of the characters from the *Famous Five* British children's stories, who then metamorphose into the members of the highly commercial pop-rock band New Kids on the Block in "Los cuatro ladrillos" ("The Four Bores"). While the

²³ The novel's title is taken from The Feast of the Asses, a medieval festival of religious origin that was incorporated in the carnivalesque Feast of Fools. The spirit of these popular festivities is reflected in the novel's bodily excesses and Gorka's continual transformations. A quote from Voltaire that precedes the novel implies that such carnivalesque representations provide insight into the human spirit: "*Nous avons des livres sur la fête de l'âne et sure cell des fous; ils peruvent servir à l'histoire universelle de l'esprit humain*" ("We have books on The Feast of the Asses and on that of the Fools; they could aid the universal history of the human spirit"; 13). A chapter titled "La fiesta del asno" ["The Feast of the Asses"], where Gorka rides into a village on a donkey, invokes some of the tradition's concrete practices (63-74).

Generation X writers assert their identities by aligning themselves with hip icons from the worlds of film and rock, this text brings out a whole range of symbols: from stuffy intellectual (Plato and Proust) to popular classics (*The Quijote*), from stylish pop (Tarantino) to adolescent kitsch (*Famous Five* and the New Kids). This constant referencing is undoubtedly an act of cultural positioning just as much as Loriga's citing of figures like Dennis Hopper or Sid Vicious. However, while Loriga's character builds a reductive self-image based on the idolization of certain figures that is burst when coming into contact with reality, Juan-Cantavella's narrative taps into more varied coordinates of a common generational background, implying the "structure of feeling" that Raymond Williams saw as existing in the complex interrelation of lived experiences in a particular place and time and operating "in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity" (61).

These stories invoke a wide database of references and affective codes that are brought out and recombined unexpectedly, intermingling with the physical landscape and determining what characters do and how they view their surroundings. "Badajoz", for example, reproduces the American counter-cultural journalist Hunter S. Thompson's novel *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in the context of the Extremadura town named in the title, transplanting this foreign narrative to a local setting. Finally "Proust Fiction" rewrites the French Modernist's tale of self-investigation in an environment where the individual is constituted not through inner exploration but rather externally through the technologically wired database of contemporary culture. The protagonist of this story is Giacomo Marinetti, fictitious grandson of the founder of Italian futurism and heir to some of his artistic preoccupations. Giacomo is afflicted by a poetic impulse but is also aware that all artistic creations are essentially plagiarism. His grandfather's obsession with machines is repeated in

his use of a laptop computer as an essential component of his poetic practice, which consists in passing classic texts through automated online translating programs: Proust's famous madeleine passage is translated first into English then into Spanish, creating a new Dadaist poem. Rather than recovering lost time in a journey through the internal reservoir of memory his self-expression is based on an outer journey through the collective brain represented by computer networks.

Javier Calvo's novel *Mundo maravilloso* [*Wonderful World*] offers a different take on the hybrid social landscapes of the new wave, employing experimental language and metafictional techniques within an overall realist structure. Chapters from an invented Stephen King novel also called *Mundo maravilloso* are inserted into the text, just as one of the characters in the story stitches passages from the King novel into Calvo's previous book *Los ríos perdidos de Londres* [*The Lost Rivers of London*] in order to sneak them into Valentina, a twelve year-old psychiatric patient who is barred from reading the popular American writer. These metafictional devices are part of a strategy to infiltrate the novel's Barcelona setting with Valentina's paranoid gothic vision, which appears to derive in equal parts from her precarious family situation and her obsessive reading of Stephen King. As seen in Ferré's text, the physical landscape is inseparable from cultural discourses connected to global mediascapes.

However, Calvo's claim to have summoned the spirit of Charles Dickens to write *Mundo maravilloso* could not be further from Ferré's citing of Kafka, and the narrative is indeed structured like a nineteenth-century realist novel, progressing chronologically and jumping around among characters proceeding from diverse backgrounds and using their distinct points of view to construct an overall social panorama. Valentina is just one voice in

a city as rampant with varied cultural references as Juan-Cantavella's Spain. In contrast to the protean metamorphosing of the protagonist in Ferré's *La fiesta del asno*, Calvo's novel presents an array of individuals each shaped by their appropriation of different cultural products such as Pink Floyd, Bob Marley, the television series *Friends*, comic books or pornography films. The polyphony that Bakhtin observes in Dostoyevsky's fiction, where characters are sharply defined as individuals but also dependent on the points of view and influence of others, is seen here not only in a heteroglossia of speech registers but also in the interchange of cultural codes taken from the great reservoir of available media iconography.

The contrast between these two novels illustrates distinct viewpoints within the new wave's mapping of hybrid cultural spaces. Calvo concentrates on particular places and bodies, which are connected to distant or abstract elements, while Ferré begins from an abstract cultural geography that is then manifested in the particular, which is in a state of continual metamorphosis. These different tendencies reconfigure the realist-modernist spectrum.

From Individual Realities to Hybrid Spaces

The new wave's shift in focus from individualized realities to hybrid spatial configurations is evident in the polemics sparked by two recent Vicente Verdú columns in the Spanish daily *El País*. While belonging to the transition generation like Javier Marías or Eduardo Mendoza, Verdú has long railed against the dominance of realism and advocated fragmentary narrative. Questioning the relevance of story-based narrative in the new century's social and technological context, these two articles revived the classic debates between transparent realism and modernist or avant-garde forms.

The first piece, from 2001, set Verdú against Javier Cercas in arguments that centered on the novel as a separate domain from the real world. Cercas is a highly considered novelist whose blend of transparent prose and metafictional techniques in novels like *Soldados de Salamina* [*Soldiers of Salamis*] follow the tendencies of the *nueva narrativa*. The second one, written in 2007, provoked a debate between two writers from the new wave, Gabi Martínez and Agustín Fernández Mallo, whose positions on opposing sides reveal a common underlying concern for how narrative can integrate itself within the spaces of contemporary culture.

In both articles Verdú argues that the story telling function of written narrative is obsolete in “modern” societies (meaning wealthy post-industrialist countries), where contemporary publics prefer non-fiction because “la existencia de la realidad es de lo que cada vez carece más la cultura capitalista” (“the existence of reality is what capitalist culture increasingly lacks”; “Vivir” 30). He calls for a narrative that imitates the fragmentary character of blogs and SMS in order to capture the “belleza de lo instantáneo” (“beauty of the instantaneous”), because life today takes on the form of accidental occurrences outside of any overall transcendental process. The novel he prescribes is also an inner journey necessarily told in the first person in order to establish direct contact between the author and the reader: “La transmisión de lo personal da sentido, carácter y contenido a la comunicación” (“The transmission of the personal gives meaning, character and content to communication”; “Reglas”).

In response to Verdú’s first article Cercas defends plot driven narrative, but what is interesting is where their definitions of the novel’s purpose coincide. For Cercas it lies in the construction of an alternative world as persuasive as the real world but defying its “ultrajes,

estrecheces y deficiencias” (“offenses, limitations and deficiencies”) and constituting an act of “rebelión contra la realidad misma” (“rebellion against reality itself”), thus echoing Verdú’s idea of the text as a separate domain from reality bearing the personal seal of its creator. Both writers, then, depict the novel as a sort of refuge and subversion of real life. Cercas’s ideal of revolt against reality’s inadequacies is comparable to Verdú’s insistence that the text should communicate a precious aesthetic beauty to be savored paragraph by paragraph “a la manera de la *slow food*” (“in the style of slow food”), in sharp contrast to the dizzying pace of the modern world (“Reglas”). These prescriptions for the role of the writer reflect the recurrent theme in post-Franco literature discussed above of individuals defined by their own discursive constructions of themselves and the world.

The debate between Martínez and Fernández Mallo in response to Verdú’s 2007 article reveals a new set of concerns. Martínez criticizes Verdú’s emphasis on the writer’s inner journey, arguing instead that most great novelists “han sabido dar vida a un ‘paisaje’ más allá de sí mismos” (“have been able to give life to a landscape beyond themselves”). Like Cercas he believes that the key to the novel’s survival lies in “una poderosa historia...que ayude a comprender mejor el tiempo del autor” (“a powerful story...that helps us better understand the author’s times”) but rather than the construction of alternative realities he focuses on the representation of physical place and in particular the city. Martínez refers to a Barcelona that has been absorbed by non-place and institutional promotion, presenting special problems for narrators: “El monstruo es tan grande que nadie sabe encararlo. Todo suena a artificial” (“The monster is so big that nobody knows how to

approach it. Everything sounds artificial”).²⁴ This, he argues, is the challenge facing contemporary novelists (“Aviadores”).

Fernández Mallo responds directly to Martínez’s call for the investigation of the city saying that place no longer exists in a Heideggerian sense. He invokes Baudrillard’s ‘perfect crime’ idea that nothing exists outside the market (*Perfect Crime*), affirming that local places have been converted into non-places like airports and shopping malls. Locality now only exists in an abstracted form as advertising images that use nostalgia to sell products.

While ostensibly defending Verdú, however, Fernández Mallo also contradicts his idea of the writer transmitting the personal, stating that artistic creation no longer derives from experience and knowledge but it is now a recombining of external information: “Ahora el artista...recibe un desorden de información desde el ámbito público, y ésa es la materia prima que reelabora o subvierte en su laboratorio para impulsarla” (“Today the artist...receives disordered information from the public sphere, and that is the prime material that he or she reworks or subverts in his or her laboratory in order to set it in motion”).

Whereas Verdú implies that the writer’s aesthetic seal is what gives meaning to the chaos of contemporary life Fernández Mallo believes that the fragments in the public sphere are themselves full of knowledge that can be revealed by studying them through an interdisciplinary network model: “cada fragmento emitido –incluida la injustamente llamada telebasura– es un producto ya en sí muy complejo, compacto y evolucionado, que acumula miles de años de conocimiento” (“each fragment broadcasted –including the unfairly

²⁴ Without naming him, Fernández Mallo refers to the anthropologist Marc Augé’s theory of non-places discussed in the introduction. Non-place substitutes traditional cultural interactions between subjects in fixed roles with a new social dynamic based on the interactions of anonymous consumers with signs, machines, checkpoints or checkout counters. Airport lounges, highways and chain restaurants are classic examples of this phenomenon, which the anthropologist claims is in fact spreading to all spaces, especially within post-industrial nations.

designated trash tv –represents a product that is already complex, compact and evolved, that accumulates thousands of years of knowledge”; “Luis XIV”).

These various arguments reveal a shift in the central preoccupations of the debate. While for Verdú and Cercas the question is how the writer can express a unique vision of reality from an outside and separate domain, now the concern is with engaging the world directly through spatial configurations. The point of contention is whether place is as Heidegger believed a gathering point and the focus of energies (Malpas) or whether particular places are no longer important, as they are subordinated to the abstract space of networks that contain all of human knowledge and meaning.

In the next two chapters I will analyze Fernández Mallo’s fragmentary novel *Nocilla Dream* and Martínez’s realist *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*]. The more modernist strategies in the former correspond to its conception of a world space where subjects inhabit the flows of global networks while the latter’s unity of space and time shows a contrasting emphasis on the local places that are connected to these networks. While in the debate seen here Fernández Mallo and Martínez take opposing positions, a close reading of their novels reveals that both ideas of space are present to varying degrees in each text, creating an intrinsic friction.

Chapter Two – Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Dream*: Imagining a World Space Subject

“Desde finales de 1960, Nocilla es la marca preferida para la merienda...Ha sido la titular de uno de los eslóganes más conocidos en España; ‘Nocilla, que merendilla’, que sirvió incluso de título para una canción de un grupo de rock español”

“Since the end of the 1960s, Nocilla is the most popular brand for snacks...It created one of Spain’s best known slogans; ‘Nocilla, what a snack’, which also became the title of a song by a Spanish rock band”

-From the web of the Asociación de Marcas Renombradas Españolas [Association of Renowned Spanish Brands]

“El vaso de Nocilla es el vaso insignia de la familia española, es el adalid del reciclaje...son eternos, abres el armario en casa de tus padres y están allí como trofeos, sabes exactamente todos los botes de Nocilla que te has tomado en tu infancia. Deberíamos quererlos como a una madre.”

“The Nocilla jar is the banner jar of the Spanish family, it is the champion of recycling...they are eternal, you open the cupboard in your parents’ home and there they are like trophies, you know exactly all the jars of Nocilla you ate in your childhood. We should love them like a mother.”

-Luis Piedrahita, comic monologue from the popular television show *El Hormiguero* [The Anthill]

In chapter one I defined a common theme that ties together the new wave texts: the subject's relations to two mutually dependent but conflicting spatial structures, local places and global flows. I also argued that the more experimental narratives privilege global flows as the source of social relations and subjective experience while the more realist ones highlighted local places as the gathering point and focus of energies. In the next two chapters I will illustrate this dialectic through a study of Agustín Fernández Mallo's fragmented collage-like novel *Nocilla Dream* and Gabi Martínez's more linear *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*].

The reader may recall that Fernández Mallo and Martínez are the authors who debated the role of fiction in representing contemporary space in the newspaper articles cited in chapter one. Their novels reflect their positions on opposing sides of the spectrum, both featuring symbolic locations that characterize their particular approaches: the desert highway in the first case and the rooftop of tall buildings in the second. In *Nocilla Dream* a barren stretch of US50 in Nevada is a meeting ground of decontextualized objects and lonely travelers that represents the novel's world space terrain of roads, airports and electronic communications interconnected like branches in an 'arborescent' web. In *Ático*, by contrast, the protagonist's rooftop apartment locates him in a single place and time that is contextualized within the flows of electronically powered networks, not only as a receiver of distant realities but also as a transmitter of its own virtualized realities. However, while *Nocilla Dream* conceives a world space subjectivity that manifests itself in different places and times and *Ático* constructs localized subjectivities which then interact with global flows, both of these mapping processes are ultimately deconstructed at the complex nodes where the local and the global are joined. This undoing points to the difficulty of reconciling the

multitude of superimposed physical and cultural contexts that shape subjectivity in the contemporary world.

Each one of the texts analyzed in this thesis seeks to place its characters within the disorienting and fragmented spaces they inhabit, establishing a Bachelardian connection between the intimate domains of their thoughts and dreams and the outer realms of physical and virtual geographies. In *Nocilla Dream* these geographies make up a post-national space of deserts and telecommunications linked together like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomic networks where "any point...can be connected to anything other, and must be" (7).²⁵ The narration moves unpredictably around the places its multiple characters inhabit on the margins and borders of a global society, such as airports, highways, freight trucks, gas stations, science labs, factories, warehouses, budget motels, luxurious hotels, tourist markets or an underground nuclear storage site.

The novel's 113 brief chapters also intersperse these disconnected narratives with extended quotes from texts on computer technology, punk rock history, scientific theories, cyberculture and many other diverse subjects. The structure of the novel conveys a vision of a globalized world reminiscent of what can be glimpsed in decontextualized pieces by flipping through satellite television channels or by surfing the Internet. *Nocilla Dream's* context is a world space in the sense that Roland Robertson gives the term: "The general idea of world space suggests that we should consider the local as a 'micro' manifestation of the global" (39). The location of characters in the novel seems to be of little importance, as each place is merely a specific materialization of global dynamics.

²⁵ In his prologue to the novel, Juan Bonilla also compares *Nocilla Dream's* structure to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes.

The novel's structure also puts into practice the ideas Fernández Mallo has expressed in his articles on "post-poetic poetry", where he asserts that literature must open itself up to other areas of culture like advertising, the visual arts, cuisine and the hard sciences in order to get back in touch with contemporary society. He compares this procedure of linking different compartments of cultural production to the Situationist practice of the *dérive* ("drift"), which consisted in roaming around different zones of a city as a form of spatial and conceptual investigation ("Un diagnóstico" 93). Described by Guy Debord in his classic essay "Theory of the Dérive", this technique was used by the Situationists in order to elaborate "psychogeographies" of the aspects of urban areas that escaped the control of rationalist planning. They denounced Modernist urbanism's fragmentation of the city into discrete administrative districts organized according to supreme functionalist categories like circulation and communication. This static top-down control of the city was countered with a more dynamic conception of space as knowledge and action related to new forms of anti-bourgeois habitation that emerged from the ground level (Andreotti 14). Like avant-garde movements before them Situationists considered the urban street a space of real life and it served as a vital source of inspiration and materials for their revolutionary practices (Sadler 52-53).

In Fernández Mallo's "post-poetic" theory instead of the city the objects of spatial and conceptual investigation are the different sectors of knowledge and expression that make up today's global culture. He also rejects the compartmentalization of life into segregated areas and his narrative is a subjective exercise in cultural mapping that links science, art and everyday existence. Just as the Situationists romanticized bohemian and poor neighborhoods, privileging them as sites of investigation over the mass spectacles of the grand boulevards

(Sadler 55-56), *Nocilla Dream* also concentrates on marginal spaces, which are explored less for their real conditions than for their poetic power and their possibilities as building blocks in the construction of a subjective “psycho geography” of the present moment. Fernández Mallo looks here for interconnection and modes of expression within the fragmented, media saturated spaces of postmodern society.

The novel’s composite of mediascapes and physical landscapes make up Fredric Jameson’s “world space of multinational capital”, which for him underpins the postmodern crisis of the subject (92). He argues that late capitalism’s system of transnational finance and total commoditization has conquered both nature and the unconscious (78). The bodies and minds of subjects no longer operate as closed containers of thought and perception that can generate individual expression (63). Furthermore, the objects they use and observe are no longer part of a reality that exists outside the mediated world of reified images (59-60). This loss of the self and of the object world as entities existing across time leads to an essentially fragmented experience of “pure material Signifiers” within a “series of unrelated presents”. While Jameson compares this to the “breakdown of the signifying chain” that Lacan puts forth as a clinical definition of schizophrenia (71-72), he also points to an exhilarating intensity connected to this fragmentation, signaling the emergence of a new sublime. The object of this sublime is not a vast and overpowering nature but rather the infinite extension of a “whole new decentred global network” in contemporary capitalist society, whose impossible complexity is equally terrifying and fascinating (80).

For Jameson this “hysterical sublime” (79) may offer the possibility of filling the void left by the loss of ideologies that formerly articulated existential experience and scientific knowledge into a coherent all encompassing view of the world. While criticizing examples of

postmodern art and theory that merely celebrate radical difference, he praises those that push the consciousness towards an apprehension of the impossible complexity of the world space that is present in all of our local spaces. In this way subjectivity may be reclaimed through an “aesthetic of cognitive mapping” that achieves “a breakthrough to a new mode of representing where we regain our positioning as individual and collective subjects” (92). My argument in this chapter is that *Nocilla Dream* attempts to formulate an aesthetic of subjective cognitive mapping within a media saturated culture that has only become more globally interconnected and locally fragmented since Jameson wrote those lines over twenty years ago. However, the Marxist concerns that underlie Jameson’s project are absent here, and the novel simply seeks to define a subjective identity connected to surrounding space.

This mapping process has three components that I will analyze in corresponding sections. First, a series of images represent the novel’s world space setting, an environment characterized by loneliness and isolation but also endowed with possibilities of connection and solidarity. Secondly, *Nocilla Dream*’s characters engage in a series of behaviors that are inspired in Situationist, avant-garde and conceptual art interventions but that for these characters are not revolutionary or artistic but rather constitute “everyday practices”. With this term I am referring to the French theorist Michel de Certeau’s concept of hidden tactics that individual consumers use to temporarily appropriate places dominated by rationalist planning through activities such as walking, reading and cooking. These tactics leave no permanent mark but assert choice and subjectivity. In the absence of a stable social context that characterizes *Nocilla Dream*’s world space (the lack of local synergies of economic and cultural activity organized by the city, the small town, the rural community) there is a thin

line between such everyday practices and the kind of deliberate and provocative actions advocated by the Situationists and other radical movements.

Thirdly, the glue that holds this fragmented novel together is the construction of the narrator's subjectivity within the cultural geography he is describing. *Nocilla Dream* gradually develops a set of tastes, interests and attitudes that are identified with a single subject that has chosen ideas and images from the public sphere to place alongside his own thoughts. The critic José María Pozuelo Yvancos maintains that what holds the reader's attention in this novel, in the absence of a plot, is a "constante intertextualidad cultural" ("constant cultural intertextuality") which brings to the reader's mind not only movies, pop songs and made-for-tv films but also "realidades interculturales y mezcla que la globalización ha convertido en cotidianas" ("intercultural realities and mixtures that globalization has made routine").

I agree with this assertion in part but it is important to note that many situations in the novel are hypothetical (and somewhat preposterous) and cannot be considered part of everyday life under globalization. Therefore, while the novel's stories definitely bring to mind films seen, songs heard and situations experienced in our times, they are integrated within a cultural mapping that from the outset flaunts its subjectivity. As opposed to the *nueva narrativa* novels described in chapter one that use introspective discourse to construct subjectivities isolated from a confusing world, here the narrator never speaks in the first person but insinuates himself through the composite of external descriptions and interpretations making up the novel.

However, the local constitutes an uneasy absence in this process of cultural mapping, as I argue in a fourth and final section. Here I consider the significance of the reference to

Nocilla in the title of this novel and the other two volumes of Fernández Mallo's Nocilla Project trilogy.²⁶ The association of this cocoa-hazelnut spread with mass consumer culture is consistent with the narrative's emphasis on a global mediated reality. Nevertheless, the two quotes cited at the top of this chapter suggest Nocilla's connection to a well of affective memories contained within a national space, especially among those generations that have grown up since the late 1960's. This ambiguous allusion to a particular Spanish experience brings up questions related to the local and the concrete that haunt the construction of a global subjectivity in this novel and that will play out in different ways in all of the texts analyzed in this thesis.

A World Space

The novel's principal setting, the Nevada desert, is a metaphor for a world space that replaces the city street as a meeting ground of different social classes and cultural practices. While the stories occur in several parts of the world, almost all of them are related to this location either because the characters live in or pass through the desert at some point in their lives or through more thematic links. In this sense the persons, objects and ideas found in the barren terrain open up doorways and windows to any other point of contemporary reality. The narrator describes the desert as a phenomenological laboratory whose very emptiness allows us to observe closely how objects meet in space, causing unexpected events and new combinations, which lead to further unpredictable reactions (*Nocilla Dream* 57). The same kind of process can be observed in the novel in the multitude of interactions and hybrids that occur through the interconnection of spaces brought about by global communications,

²⁶ Nocilla Experience and Nocilla Lab.

demonstrating the fusing of disparate cultural elements that contemporary speed of movement brings together to create new and bizarre realities. Like the desert this meeting ground is a barren terrain, where displaced objects and ideas interact in a process of mutual transformation. At the same time this space functions like the Aleph from Borges's well known story, a compendium of all places and times.

The novel's central image is a cottonwood tree in the most desolate part of the desert covered by hundreds of pairs of shoes that travelers take and leave as they please. This tree exists in real life and was the subject of a New York Times article that Fernández Mallo cites at the end of the book as one of the elements involved in the novel's conception. According to a local bartender interviewed by Times reporter Charlie LeDuff, the tradition of hanging shoes in the tree's branches began when a newlywed couple stopped there to rest after she had blown most of their savings gambling in Las Vegas. The angry husband threw her shoes into the branches and drove away, but after a couple beers at the nearest bar he came back to apologize and in a symbolic gesture threw his own shoes into the tree. LeDuff presents the shoe collection that began with this simple act as a symbol of solidarity in the middle of the lonely terrain.

Fernández Mallo transposes this idea to *Nocilla Dream's* desert as a representation of the links that tie all places and people together within a global space. The tree is cited as an example of the desert's condition as a phenomenological laboratory where we can observe the process of small movements that combine to cause large chain reactions: by a series of coincidences it finds water, is able to grow and receives the first pair of shoes which acts as a "punto atractor, al que se le irán sumando otros cientos" ("point of attraction, to which hundreds more will be drawn"; 57). The branches that hold these shoes connect the stories,

lives and roads traveled of the people that left them there, just as the highways and the Internet communications appearing frequently in the novel participate in a dynamic system of networks. The shoes dangling in the wind on the cottonwood's branches compose an image of this interconnection:

Visto a cierta distancia es, en efecto, un baile caótico en el cual, pese a todo, se intuyen ciertas reglas. Se dan fuertes golpes los unos contra los otros, y súbitamente cambian de velocidad o trayectoria para finalmente regresar a los puntos atractores, al equilibrio. Lo más parecido a un maremoto de zapatos.

(23)

Seen from a certain distance it is a chaotic dance in which, nevertheless, certain rules can be intuited. They hit against each other and suddenly change velocity or trajectory, then finally come back to the points of attraction to an equilibrium. The closest thing to a tidal wave of shoes.

Like the force of tidal waves, the violent and apparently random movement of the shoes is nevertheless subject to rules of universal attraction and equilibrium. The same is true for all the inhabitants of separate but interrelated territories that make up the novel: their isolated actions are incorporated into harmonious systems too large to be contemplated but whose existence can be intuited by observing the movement, a 'chaotic dance' that nevertheless reveals patterns and hints at a hidden order.

In both the article and the novel, the tree is contrasted with a man found hitchhiking along the highway, appearing in *Nocilla Dream* as Falconetti,²⁷ who is quoted in the Times

²⁷ This uncommon name would seem to be a reference to Falconetti the evil villain from the 1970s tv series Rich Man, Poor Man, very popular in Spain. Although there are no similarities between the characters,

saying he has “no hometown, no family, no place to go, no place to be, no love”, and is described by the reporter as “not wholly convinced of anything more than his own existence”. This condition and attitude can be seen in the novel in Falconetti and in many other characters, loners who inhabit self created environments, convinced of little more than their own being. Most of them seem unaware of being connected to broad systems of flows and currents by the contemporary cultural geography described above, although many intuit these connections and some glimpse the overall system in visionary moments. Their ground level views of their environments act as pieces of the narrator’s larger vision, which is expressed not only in his own commentary and in the texts from other sources that he pastes into the novel but also through the thoughts and actions of the different characters.

The ideas of two characters in particular are key elements in the novel’s depiction of a hybrid world space: the Argentine poet Jorge and micronation founder Ted. Jorge believes to have found the desert ruins from the Borges story “Del rigor de la ciencia” (“On exactitude in science”) in a budget motel located on the outskirts of Las Vegas. Each morning he recites this fable about an empire where the cartographers create a true scale map that covers the entire kingdom. Future generations allow the map to decay and become part of the landscape: “En los desiertos del Oeste perduran despazadas ruinas del mapa, habitadas por animales y por mendigos” (“In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars”; qtd. in *ND* 48; Borges “On Exactitude”). Jorge sees this as a description of the motel lot where he lives, inhabited by impoverished residents who decorate their rooms with leftover kitsch objects found in garbage dumpsters and abandoned theme parks. Significantly, Jean Baudrillard uses the same Borges tale as a metaphor for

the use of the name, like the use of *Nocilla* in the title, invokes pop culture associated with the childhood of Fernández Mallo’s generation.

contemporary society in his classic essay on postmodernity *Simulacra and Simulation*, describing a situation where media images create a domain of empty signifiers disconnected from the real. Baudrillard compares the simulacra of our media saturated societies to this true scale map of reality, but says that what has disappeared is not the map but the kingdom itself, broken down into vestiges of reality that make up a “desert of the real” (10). The “tinglados inútiles y objetos de plástico y colores” (“useless junk and plastic colored objects”) that Jorge’s neighbors collect are, like Baudrillard’s broken pieces of reality, referents disconnected from any origin, pieces of the map with which postmodern consumer society has covered the real. However, the way that these marginal figures recycle and rearrange discarded consumer objects creates a new reality, one that Jorge contemplates with fascination: “A través de la ventana puede ver las caravanas y furgonetas en el aparcamiento, que dibujan una especie de crucigrama cromático de magia y miseria, piensa” (“Through the window he can see the RVs and vans in the parking lot, which trace a kind of chromatic crossword of magic and misery, he thinks”; 47).

Jorge’s view of the parking lot and his neighbors reflects the narrator’s earlier description of this motel as part of a growing network connected to the city and the desert: “Todo un ramal de autovías parte de Las Vegas Boulevard, para desarrollarse por el desierto en busca del horizonte con una estructura arborescente mientras como frutos extraños le van creciendo multitud de lugares mágicos en forma de apartahoteles” (“A whole branch of highways splits off from Las Vegas Boulevard, unfolding into the desert in search of the horizon in an arborescent structure while, like strange fruit, a multitude of magical places grow out in the form of apartment hotels; 35). The fragments of the postmodern world described in the novel grow into a new structure, one that is made out of elements like

vehicles, parking lots and plastic items but that develops in an organic fashion and in this case incorporates the aspirations of the migrants that occupy this marginal place, whose dreams according to the narrator make it a magical space. Reality in *Nocilla Dream* is composed of mediated fragments disconnected from their material origins, reflecting Baudrillard's description of the postmodern world. Yet the novel envisions a new magical materiality that is a hybrid of the physical and the virtual, product of the increased movement of objects, people, ideas and images through the same capitalist structures and technologies that have created these simulacra.

This theme is further developed through Ted's micronation and his vision of these small autonomous communities operating independently but linked together in a worldwide network through the Internet into a larger living organism. Several chapters in the novel discuss micronations, entities formed by artists or others looking for alternative lifestyles in the cracks and empty spaces outside of government controlled territories, and two real ones are discussed in detail: Sealand, created physically on an abandoned offshore oil rig, and Ergaland-Vargaland, created virtually by two German artists who have staked a claim on all frontier spaces including national borders, the state between sleeping and waking and the digital area of their website (109-11). Not surprisingly, the narrator considers the latter to be one of the most intriguing micronations, as it is based on the idea of a spatial territory that rather than occupying separate quadrants of land runs in straight lines encompassing all parts of the Earth. Furthermore, this physical space is linked to conceptual spaces of the mind like half-sleeping consciousness and creative "ensimismamiento" ("lost in thought") which the

narrator calls hybrid zones (110).²⁸ These in-between areas realized in both physical and mental territories can offer autonomy from what is described in another chapter as the excessively standardized reality created by twenty-first century capitalism (159).

Ted's fictional micronation Isotope occupies an abandoned underground nuclear storage facility in Nevada purchased from the US government (79-81). Isotope's 178 inhabitants occupy a marginal space like the Las Vegas motel residents, but here they have deliberately isolated themselves in order to develop their own norms and lifestyles. Ted maintains a website about micronations and dreams of all these entities being interconnected into a hybrid network: "ha soñado con una red de información que hibridaba lo orgánico y lo inorgánico, a la que, como si fuera un árbol, se le iban colgando las historias de cada habitante de todas las micronaciones del planeta; la HiperRed micronación" ("he has dreamt about an information network that was a hybrid of the organic and the inorganic, on which, as if it were a tree, each inhabitant of all the planet's micronations hung stories; the micronation HyperNet"; 100). This vision refers back to the desert tree and the 'arborescent' network of budget motels but adds a utopian dimension as subjects consciously participate in the construction of an interconnected social system that allows for both individual autonomy and collectivity. This hypothetical web is as global as global capitalism and uses the same combination of technologically transmitted information and organic material form. Ted's vision finds hope in *Nocilla Dream*'s alienating context: a world of human built environments mostly designed for the transport or disposal of the materials and people that fuel global economic and political orders.

²⁸ The state of enhanced creativity occurring between sleeping and waking may remind the reader of the Romantic artist. In the third section of this chapter I will discuss how Romantic visions of the artistic process relate to *Nocilla Dream*.

Nocilla Dream conceives a new subject evolving within the most emblematic spaces of contemporary global society (a Vietnam tourist market, the Singapore airport, New York's Twin Towers and various hotels and highways are examples that figure prominently in the novel) and beyond them to creative uses of more unexpected sites like the Isotope micronation. The question is whether these spaces are truly *inhabitable* in the sense that Gaston Bachelard gives the word when he writes that "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (5). Home for Bachelard is a site that integrates "the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (6), in other words both a physical manifestation and a container of intimacy. While in Bachelard's study habitation is related to the form of the French suburban house, the characters in *Nocilla Dream* seek it out within the confines of a world space composed of non-places that cannot be connected to any kind of stable identity or local history, linked together by the movements and flows of a global capitalist society. As mentioned above the narrator says that this social order has created an excessively standardized reality: "una auténtica realidad paralela que se erige en única a través de los medios de comunicación" ("an authentic parallel reality built up by communications media as the only reality"; 159). If subjects are to truly inhabit the spaces they occupy, their intimate exteriors must unfold along the same transportation and telecommunication routes used by financial and media powers, occupying not only localized quadrants but also (like the Ergaland-Vargaland micronation) lines that encompass the entire globe. In this way the flows of world capital would carry more than merchandise, cheap labor and decontextualized images, and the emerging global reality could be filled with the interwoven individual textures and affective content that make up living culture.

The shoe tree in the desert, then, stands for a new hybrid object world that exists within the commoditization and the global routes of transnational capitalism. Interestingly, Jameson also uses two rather different representations of shoes to illustrate the transition from modernism to this postmodern context of late capitalism: Van Gogh's famous painting of peasant shoes and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* series. The first offers itself up to hermeneutical interpretations that imply a depth underlying the visual display: "the work in its inert, objectal form, is taken as a clue or a symptom for some vaster reality which replaces it as its ultimate truth" (59). The second, on the other hand, presents its shoes as "a random collection of dead objects...shorn of their earlier life world..." (60). Warhol's series of paintings reveals an aesthetic of flatness, with no deeper material reality behind its striking images, emphasized through the visual effect created by the use of photographic negatives. The shoes on *Nocilla Dream*'s desert tree are not inert objects, as they speak to the itineraries of those who wore them and the possible future journeys of travelers who may take them down and continue on their way. However, they lack the depth of Van Gogh's shoes which evoke an entire peasant world of toil and rural spaces as well as the artist's vision that transforms this world into a brilliantly colored landscape. They do not belong to such a unified reality either of rooted social structures or autonomous artistic imagination, with its vertical depths, but rather to an emerging paradigm of horizontal depth realized through rhizomic networks. The meaning of the shoes does not depend on their individual histories and uses but rather lies in their juxtaposition along the growing branches of the cottonwood tree, representing the multitudinous interrelations of subjects and objects that unfold along the routes and spaces of global capitalism.

***Nocilla Dream's* Characters: Between the Avant-Garde and the Everyday**

The novel's response to the question of whether these spaces are truly inhabitable is a series of behaviors that are inspired in different avant-garde traditions of breaking down the divisions between art and life, relying on chance as a determining element and placing objects in new contexts where they take on surprising functions and meanings. Deeck, a Danish factory worker, makes pictures out of used chewing gum and posts them on a website (27-9); Sokolov, a Polish immigrant in the United States, records street sounds and mixes them to produce records (39-40); Jorge, the Argentine poet, enlists his neighbors to build a shrine to Borges out of scrap metal in the parking lot of the budget motel where he lives on the outskirts of Las Vegas (176-8); Fernando, a gas station attendant in the Murcian desert and ambassador of the Ergaland-Vargaland micronation to Spain, crumples up newspapers and sends them into the desert where they become part of the landscape, imitating the tumbleweed from American Western films (105-6); Pat Garret, an ex-bank clerk from San Francisco collects portraits he finds of people he doesn't know in a briefcase and throws them into the Nevada desert (21-2, 138-40); Hannah decides against publishing her first book of poetry and instead distributes the 2,000 copies randomly in public places; one of these is found by Ted who falls in love with her words and her image on the jacket cover, and eventually they meet and found the Isotope micronation together (118-20). These are just a few of the characters in *Nocilla Dream* who act upon their surroundings in ways that are reminiscent of surrealist and Dadaist movements, as well as more recent conceptual artists.

However, most do not consider themselves to be artists at all. Their actions are merely instinctive ways of engaging the hybrid environments they inhabit. Jameson argues that the conversion of the formerly subversive aesthetics of Modernists like Joyce or Picasso into

palatable and “rather ‘realistic’” representations of reality is a symptom of postmodern culture (56). *Nocilla Dream*, then, envisions a progressively ingrained postmodern environment where everyday people act spontaneously along the lines of avant-garde artists. Not only have principles of aesthetic innovation been incorporated into a media saturated culture that continuously seeks novelty but the blending of disparate perspectives and images exploited by early twentieth-century artists has become a mundane fact of daily life.

This use of avant-garde inspired concepts and acts to envision how the subject can intervene in a space dominated by capitalism brings to mind not only the Situationists, who Fernández Mallo acknowledges in his articles as discussed above, but also the work of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. These three theoretical orientations emerging in post-World War II France share a common enemy in rationalized technocratic space and culture but combat this enemy in different ways. For Lefebvre the consciousness that can grow out of everyday uses of lived space allows for passion to flourish and overstep imposed boundaries (41-42). The Situationists criticized Lefebvre’s emphasis on experiencing *moments* (epiphanies occurring within everyday practices like rest and love) and favored instead the creation of *situations* that would destabilize the homogenization of official representations of modern urban culture, which they termed the “spectacle” (Sadler 45). They called on a revolutionary vanguard to carry out a series of radical interventions which would lead to a new unitary city (Debord, “Theses” 69-70). Finally, for Certeau we intellectuals need to open our critical minds and see how this unitary city already exists in the hidden traces of everyday practices (xi-xxiv).

All three of these modes operate in the thoughts and actions of *Nocilla Dream*’s characters. The novel suggests that even as the society of spectacle has expanded through

new technologies and an ever more sophisticated global capitalism there is still room for that “elusive yet fundamental subject” whose movements interact with the “plurality of determinations” pulsing through its environment, its senses and its body (Certeau, xi). Moreover, the barren cultural terrain created by a homogenizing globalization, as opposed to the mid twentieth century urban areas in which all of these theories evolved, breaks down to some extent the division between Situationist revolutionary techniques, Lefebvre’s heightened consciousness and Certeau’s hidden tactics. In *Nocilla Dream*’s world space context a large number of consumer activities and everyday practices come to resemble avant-garde interventions.

The origin of the Nevada shoe tree, fictionalized in the novel, illustrates well how discrete acts of anonymous individuals leave traces on the landscape (or at times on the Internet) reminiscent of conceptual art pieces, which then shape the thoughts and behaviors of other characters. This unplanned monument could be considered a work of land art.²⁹ However, as opposed to artists that actively seek out striking contexts where they can consciously shape both temporary and lasting art pieces out of the earth, John and Linda who initiate the tradition are spontaneously drawn to this natural landmark (the only tree along 418 kilometers of highway) during their financial and marital crisis. Through their symbolic resolution, leaving their shoes together on the branches, they unknowingly reshape the tree’s significance and convert it into a monument to solidarity that incites the participation of other anonymous passer-bys in what becomes a communal artwork. The narration emphasizes the fact that their actions are only aimed at satisfying their own desires and needs, “John y Linda

²⁹ The term land art refers to a series of movements originating in the 1960’s, centered to a large extent on the great expanses of the American southwest, where practitioners took advantage of the stark impressions they could create by sculpting designs out of the earth or introducing foreign objects into the deserts.

fundaron la felicidad de su relación en ritos simples pero duraderos” (“John and Linda founded the happiness of their relationship over simple but lasting rituals”), as well as their stupor when they return two years later to leave their first child’s shoes in the branches and see what they have initiated: “A medida que se acercan ven multitudes de pares colgando. Se quedan sin habla” (“As they approach they see multitudes of pairs hanging. They are speechless”; 212).

These speechless characters express themselves through concrete and spontaneous actions that nevertheless have unpredictable effects, shaping the spaces through which they pass. In this sense they are like the city walkers Certeau describes whose paths around the rationalized and compartmentalized space of the city assert subjectivity and choice, leaving anonymous traces over the landscape that subsequently affect how it is perceived and used by others. The routes taken by these subjects compose “unrecognized poems” that “elude legibility...a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragmentations of trajectories and alterations of spaces” (93). While the poems that Certeau’s subjects compose are rendered invisible within the crowded city, *Nocilla Dream*’s characters’ movements often leave indelible traces on the barren highways and virtual spaces that communicate global economic and cultural networks. They carry objects through these routes, taking or leaving them on whim, sometimes producing the visible results that the narrator describes in his discussion of the desert as a phenomenological laboratory. These dynamics and their world space context transform anonymous activities into unsigned pieces of avant-garde art. In this sense the shoe tree could also be a reference to the urban practice known as “shoefiti”, where shoes are hung from telephone wires, sometimes as a territorial claim by urban gangs and drug vendors, other times as a decorative act with no specific

function. Like shoefiti artists, *Nocilla Dream*'s characters appropriate their spaces through small marks that have many possible meanings.

The quality that most seems to define these characters is a sort of spiritual quietness. They contemplate their surroundings and sometimes intervene in creative ways but without impressing any sort of individuality into their actions or their words. In his review of the novel Vicente Luis Mora describes these characters as mere “avatares o sombras sin personalidad” (“avatars or shadows without personality”; 64). It is true that they are lacking the complexity of sentiment and history generally associated with personality and that from a viewpoint of literary realism most of them are hardly believable, but this very absence makes them idealized inhabitants of the novel's context. Their subjectivity is seen in their interactions with (and interpretations of) their hybrid environments, not over a broad sweep of time but in momentary snapshots. These idealized individuals and groups occupy zones that are culturally hybrid and to varying degrees post-national, overcoming the identities and categories that traditionally separate different peoples and territories and seeking to understand and commune with the flows and rhythms that connect all things and places.

A rather comic example of this dynamic is a group of elderly Asian surfers, whose hybridization of local and imported practices leads to a heightened awareness of universal interconnection. The narrator prefaces their story with an enthusiastic description of the way that the Chinese ‘customize’ cultural elements from abroad to create hybrid skyscrapers, rock albums or comic books that subvert the standardization of twenty-first century capitalism. He then goes on to relate the strange customs of this tribe of unlikely surfers that comes together as a consequence of the migrations occurring in a global marketplace. They are from a region of the Chinese coast where older men traditionally climb tall local trees and walk over a

complicated network of ropes joining the tops to pick their fruit. When a number of American executives located in China are given early retirement by their companies and move to the seaside to found a community called Little America they introduce Western habits like surfing into the area. The elderly tree walkers turn out to be especially adept at the new sport and quickly become champions on the international circuit. They customize their boards with sculpted Chinese motifs and modify their 1971 Volkswagen vans to look like Pekinese tuck-tucks. This blending goes even further with haikus they recite at a competition in Asturias while sipping Coca Colas.

This story begins with everyday practices: the Chinese who appropriate Western cultural elements to fit in with their own contexts and habits, leading to unforeseeable results when the local elders use the movements and agility developed in their traditional customs to excel at the art of surfing. Adopting Certeau's vocabulary, we can see both the Chinese fruit picking work and the foreign sport as proper places, defined by a set of norms and integrated within a social-economic order that dominates spaces and the subjects who inhabit them. The elderly surfers, as users of these places which are suddenly located alongside each other by the flows of globalization, trace their own paths of consumption and produce a new reading of established cultural fields. As Certeau says of pedestrians who walk about the urban places created by city planners, "Their intertwined paths give shape to their spaces. They weave places together" (97). The paths of the old men from ropes tied between treetops to surfboards riding the tops of waves weave together different cultural and physical places.

This, however, leads to bizarre combinations that are more directly avant-garde: traditional Chinese motifs decorating surfboards, the Pekinese tuck-tuck design lifted from its original context and applied to Volkswagen vans, haikus used to celebrate victories in surfing

competitions. In these cases cultural objects and practices from different contexts are deliberately combined to create something new. The Chinese surfers form a new tribe of hybrid subjects who truly inhabit the blended globalized spaces that surround them.

Their tactical weaving of different cultural customs breaks down the divisions between different areas of knowledge and skills, leading to a heightened consciousness of the fluidity of all things, which is expressed in a haiku recited by the winner of the Asturias competition. The narrator explains that the Chinese surfers have combined this Japanese poetic tradition with algebraic formulas to create a new literary artifact, exemplified in the following bilingual haiku recited in English and then ‘translated’ into Spanish:

Wave is a tree,
light particles hanging
 $x \text{ infinity} = \text{matter} \dots$
La ola, hay un
punto, ahí el cuerpo
 $x0 = \text{nada (160)}$
The wave, there is a
point, there the body
 $x0 = \text{nothing}$

The poem reflects on the transition from tree walking to surfing (“Wave is a tree”), asserting that materiality is created by the patterns of movement that link trees, waves and light particles. It also describes the breakdown of the material body at a certain point of the ocean’s movement, an idea that is reminiscent of the quantum theory principle that all energy and matter behave as both particles and waves. This fluidity is amplified by the blending of

the haiku form— expressed in both English and Spanish— with the syntax of mathematical language: in addition to the fact that the verses are composed of formulas we are told that the correct reading of the poem is in the “media aritmética” (“arithmetic average”) of the two versions (160). If Ted and his organic network of micronations speak to the virtual interconnection of physically remote spaces these elderly men represent a new collective subject that rides the currents and flows of such hybrid global networks. Their fluid passages between tree walking and surfing or between algebra, haikus and different Western languages suggest that they occupy a ‘rhizomic’ cultural space which “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles” (Deleuze and Guattari 7).

The new subjects *Nocilla Dream* imagines not only inhabit the interconnected spaces and areas of cultural knowledge that make up today’s society but they also seek out links between their interior selves and this outer order, often achieved through technological means. A case in point is Sokolov, an underground avant-garde musician born in Poland and orphaned at the age of ten when his parents died in a gas explosion and he moved to Chicago to live with his grandmother. Following a childhood obsession with recording sounds, Sokolov roams the city streets with microphones taping and re-mixing urban noises to give them a symphonic form. Eventually his art leads him to use special equipment in office buildings in order to recover sounds blocked out by the insulation: exterior noises as well as the rumors of pipes and other inner vibrations. While his grandmother attributes this practice to his traumatic childhood experience, buried under the rubble of his home in the explosion that killed his parents, he associates it with the womb where the most developed of the senses

is the auditory. Both interpretations connect his activity to the technological recuperation of a lost home-like environment.

On the one hand Sokolov's artistic process can be compared to Situationist techniques like *détournement*, which consisted in the reutilization and creative reorganization of elements that are decontextualized, losing their original meaning or utility, and are placed alongside foreign elements in a new context. He 'détourns' sounds from his urban surroundings, taking them out of their original spaces and pasting them together to create a new and entirely different object. His restoring of the outside noises to the artificially isolated office in the World Trade Center, like the *dérive*, seeks to reinstate continuity in a city space (which is part of a world space) that has been rationalized and fragmented into distinct places serving separate purposes, analyzing the effect that these different sounds have on his psyche.

This is Sokolov the avant-garde musician, but there is another anonymous Sokolov (the narrator tells us that artist's real name has never been revealed to the public), the Polish boy traumatized by his childhood accident whose actions are tactics, poaching on the noises and places of the city in order to create his own routes. While these lead to edited records, signed and finished, what Certeau would call 'proper places', the process of recording is an unsigned illegible activity, for Sokolov an everyday practice. The description of the noises he captures in the World Trade Center is full of sensual details that refer to the routine and common: "el vuelo de un pájaro al ras de la ventana...el silbido de un limpiacristales o el viento...el rodar de las ruedas de los coches del parking del sótano, el ring de las cajas registradoras de las tiendas de las plantas bajas..." ("the flight of the bird along the window...the whistle of the window cleaner or the wind...the rolling of the car wheels in the

basement parking lot, the ring of the cash registers in the shops on the first floor...”; 142).

These combine with the vibrations of the building’s structure, the noises of the pipes and the swaying of the antennas to create a poetic reverberation of everyday unnoticed or imperceptible background activity.

The combination of the avant-garde and the everyday in Sokolov’s actions leads to a subject whose intimate places (whose home) are found in a communing with external spaces and times. The moment when Sokolov activates the recording process is described with a sensuality that connects his body to the building’s structure. He places microphones on the windows, inside the pipes and electrical outlets, exploring the eyes and orifices of the building as if it were a living organism. The sounds rise through this steel body “como cuando la savia de un árbol sube de las raíces a las hojas” (“like when the sap in the tree rises from the roots to the leaves”; 142). The tree metaphor returns here to once again signal a hybrid of the organic and the inorganic: Sokolov “escucha los latidos de lo inerte, vive una experiencia íntima con el edificio, devuelve a la habitación los sonidos que son suyos” (“listens to the heartbeats of the inert, he lives an intimate experience with the building, he gives the room back the sounds that belong to it”); 142).

Thus the elimination of the sound barriers has multiple effects: the various parts of the building’s body (the office, the stores, the basement) are reunited and integrated within their surrounding city space; Sokolov’s ears, mind and body are also intimately linked to this lived experience; finally, both participants (building and listener) are connected to a past history: “hoy le ha parecido distinguir entre la maraña de ruidos del World Trade Center las últimas voces de sus padres” (“today he believes he heard among the tangle of noises in the World Trade Center the last voices of his parents”; 142).

Through technological means Sokolov breaks down the walls established by the rationalist fragmentation of space and time. His subjectivity manifests itself not as an enclosed individual but rather in conjunction with the times (past, present and future³⁰) and spaces (nearby and distant) that compose his trajectory through the world. On the one hand this is a breaking down of the self to let the exterior noises flow through his senses. Like the avant-garde composer John Cage who relied on chance and the environmental noise present at performances, Sokolov prefers to let sounds exist on their own rather than to speak through sounds.³¹ However, while Cage's reliance on the random occurrences of the unrepeatable musical performance sought a disappearance of the self as the source of expression, Sokolov's process is based on his own mixing of spliced up environmental noises. He brings together sounds from different places and times to produce an original musical artifact and in this sense the self is reinstated, but it is a self made up of the selection and fitting together of different pieces of the outside world, happened onto by chance and combined to take on new meanings.

These various characters are idealized subjects that open their senses to the hidden voices and connections residing within the impersonal places and blended spaces of the contemporary world. They carry out spontaneous or deliberate actions which, as is the case with the shoe tree, sometimes influence later uses of the spaces through which they pass, overcoming the standardization of twenty-first century reality.

³⁰ As I discuss below, the focus on the World Trade Center in this passage inevitably evokes the September 11th 2001 attacks that occurred there. Sokolov's recording is not given a specific date but it must take place in the years leading up to this event.

³¹ Cage, speaking in Miroslav Sebestik's documentary *Listen*: "When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking...But when I hear traffic, the sound of traffic...I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking...I don't need sound to talk to me".

This communing with the flows and objects of their globally connected environments has an almost spiritual quality that is epitomized in the story of Kenny, a Canadian fleeing the law who becomes a permanent inhabitant of the Singapore airport. Like Tom Hanks's character in the Stephen Spielberg film *The Terminal* he takes refuge in the international zone in order to live outside of any country's jurisdiction. Kenny lives off the leftovers of the airport stores and restaurants, effectively erasing his participation in contemporary society as a passport-carrying citizen and a money-carrying consumer. In contrast to the protagonist of *The Terminal*, unable to use his passport due to a revolution occurring in his country, Kenny is content to inhabit the interstitial space of the airport. He dedicates himself to a silent ascetic contemplation of his artificial and immutable home:

Lo que más le sorprende es que la cantidad de razas y culturas que pasan y se cruzan a diario por un aeropuerto no logren modificar en absoluto la fisonomía estética ni humana del propio aeropuerto; ha llegado a compararlo con un ente atemporal e incorpóreo; una divinidad. (183)

What most surprises him is that the great quantity of races and cultures that pass through and pass by each other in an airport every day do not modify at all the aesthetic or human features of the airport; he has even compared it to a timeless and incorporeal entity; a divinity.

Kenny's existence takes on a mythical quality, outside of time and the dynamics of normal spaces, absorbed in the observation of this unchanging divinity. Kenny himself seems to have an aura of divine tranquility amidst the rush of airport traffic, a quality that is highlighted when he rejects the Singapore government's offer of nationality: "El asceta ascendió a místico en la imparables agitación que le rodeaba y pronunció estas palabras ante el

funcionario que se llevó la noticia, *seré luz en esta carabela* (“the ascetic ascended to mystic in the unstoppable agitation surrounding him and spoke these words to the bureaucrat who brought the news, *I will be light in this caravel*”; 171).³² In his silent contemplation of the motion around him Kenny is a mystical figure, his very absence of desire and action providing a contrast with the worldly activity he observes. His image of himself as a light in a caravel (a small sailing ship) is symbolic of the way that the quiet activity of *Nocilla Dream*’s characters illuminates the transitory, fragmented spaces of a global society.

Nocilla Dream’s Narrator

However, these actions would remain small pieces of a mismatched puzzle if there were not something to tie them together. As I argued above the text’s glue is a set of attitudes, tastes and ideas that the reader comes to associate with *Nocilla Dream*’s narrator, who has assembled the quotes from articles and books and the often fanciful tales of his own invention that compose this meandering but cohesive novel. He represents a loose set of assumptions and positions that seem to purvey the thoughts and actions of the novel’s characters. The construction of the narrator through these characters and other elements—assorted pieces taken from a hybrid landscape— is a reflection of the way that subjectivity operates in a world space society.

The narrator asserts himself at the end of the book both in a description of the chance occurrences that inspired the novel and in a conceptual map connecting the different ideas,

³² Here the novel seems to refer to the real case that inspired Spielberg’s film: Mehran Karimi Nasseri, an Iranian national who lost his refugee papers when traveling from Belgium to England via Paris and ended up living in the Charles De Gaulle airport for eighteen years. When eventually offered papers to reside in France with permission to travel, Nasseri refused and chose to remain in the terminal (Gilsdorf). The press converted Nasseri’s story into an urban legend and the very different re-elaborations in Spielberg’s film and Fernández Mallo’s novel, neither of which reproduces either the hardships or the subtext of Western-Middle East relations in the original story, attests to its multivalent power as a metaphor for our times.

objects, persons and cities appearing in its pages. These two apparent afterthoughts to the main body of the narrative in fact make explicit what occurs throughout its pages: texts are pasted, references are invoked and ideas are reproduced that taken together gradually give the reader a sense of the narrator's positioning within contemporary culture. The beginning of the novel's creative process is portrayed here in a way that is reminiscent of how the characters discussed above contemplate their surroundings and recombine elements they find within them to form something new:

Nocilla Dream, cuyo arranque surge de la conjunción de la lectura del artículo *El árbol generoso*, con el fortuito hallazgo, en un sobre de un azucarillo de un restaurante chino, del verso de Yeats, *Todo ha cambiado, cambió por completo/ una belleza terrible ha nacido*, y la también fortuita reaudición ese mismo día de la canción *¡Nocilla, qué merendilla!* de Siniestro Total, fue escrito entre los días... (“CRÉDITOS”, n.pag.)

Nocilla Dream, which was born of the conjunction of the reading of the article *The Generous Tree*, with the fortuitous find, on a sugar packet at a Chinese restaurant, of Yeats's verse *All changed, changed utterly:/ A terrible beauty is born* and the equally fortuitous hearing that same day of the song *Nocilla, What a Snack!* by Siniestro Total, was written between the dates of...

The description here emphasizes the 'fortuitous' circumstances by which these elements came together over the course of a single day, presenting the novel as a product of the surrealist practice of introducing found objects happened onto by chance into a new context where they take on different meanings.

However, all of these elements had already been placed in transformative frames: the rural shoe tree written about in the pages of a sophisticated urban newspaper; the Yeats poem “Easter 1916” about the squashed uprising of the Irish Republican Brotherhood reproduced on a sugar packet at a Chinese restaurant in Spain; the popular snack food for children praised in a punk rock song. These found objects, especially the last two, reveal an already surreal landscape rooted not so much in deep psychological connections as in the continuous blending of experiences, ideas and images within an infinite mediascape that is superimposed onto the physical world. The dream of the novel’s title is not a journey through an internal structure of subconscious associations but rather through an external panorama that often appears dreamlike in its juxtaposition of seemingly incompatible objects.

Like the sound of the proverbial tree falling in the woods, however, the evocative ‘conjunction’ of these three elements described in this passage would not have occurred without the narrator there to experience it and to carry out the subsequent novelistic investigation of the contemporary world. This subject, like *Nocilla Dream*’s characters, is construed as a site of contemplation, a node within the flows of global images and discourses that receives, processes and emits information. The objects named are also connected to everyday activities he carries out in physical spaces: reading the newspaper, eating in a restaurant, hearing an old pop song by chance. Once again there is a fluid relation between an artistic practice and the simple traces of the everyday routes taken by the anonymous consumer.

At the same time these activities are bound to specific interests and habits associated with certain tastes, cultural affiliations and age groups. The reading of the New York Times in Spain requires either going online or to a kiosk that specializes in international press,

eating in Chinese restaurants implies a certain lifestyle and possibly age range and the Siniestro Total song, as well as the radio station that might play it, is linked to certain generations. These details construct a specific cultural positioning, elaborated from materials of everyday life that are happened onto randomly but that are also indicative of choices, habits and attitudes.

The same positioning occurs throughout *Nocilla Dream* both in the texts pasted and the locales and people (the desert, surfers, micronations, marginal spaces and populations) that compose the novel's particular cross sectioning of references. Figures from real life like Che Guevara or Michael Landon as well as invented characters like the Chinese surfers, micronation inhabitants, truckers and prostitutes are called upon to embody a set of perspectives and interests that build an image of the narrator's subjectivity for the reader. He recombines elements from what appears to be an infinite database of films, pop songs and the Internet.

This virtual database homogenizes culture and fragments places, individuals and groups, but the construction of the narrator's particular perspective represents an effort to establish both exterior connection between the disparate elements and coherent personal expression, to localize his own subjectivity within a mediated world. Like the creation of online blogs, where "random observations, selected links, extended diatribes... resolve into a mosaic revealing a personality, a self" (Blood 30), *Nocilla Dream* responds to the saturated informational space of our times, in which according to theorists like Lev Manovich and Mark Poster the database is becoming the dominant conceptual paradigm.³³

³³ Pozuelo Yvancos refers to the novel as the arrival of "la estética del blog" ("blog aesthetic").

A map printed on the book's last page acts as a graphic representation of this cultural positioning, connecting interior modes of perception to a notion of space that takes into account more than physical geography. Elements from the novel are placed in this "Cartografia Universo Nocilla" ("Nocilla Universe Cartography") not according to relative distances but rather cognitive and existential relations, with the parameters emotional-rational and analog-digital as guiding principles. On the one hand these elements are abstracted from physical space into purely conceptual terms based on the narrator's view of them.

Like Situationist psychogeographies of Paris and other urban areas, the map represents the drift through different areas of contemporary culture that makes up *Nocilla Dream*'s narrative experiment. At the heart we find some of the main elements I have analyzed as defining the novel's vision: micronations, the shoe tree, the desert and highway US50. Their central location in the middle of both parameters and the dense build-up of lines circling this area suggests that they are organizing elements playing an essential role in many of the novel's dynamics.

The map also illustrates the book's stories as journeys between different aspects of a virtual geography. Sokolov, for example, appears in the extreme rational-digital quadrant, which is not surprising as this character manipulates electronic recordings in a non-passionate manner, moved by pure intellectual curiosity. A line runs from him to the World Trade Center, located in the digital-emotional corner of the map. This location is also appropriate for the building in the novel, as it contains spliced-up and remixed sounds from near and afar and is the site where Sokolov encounters voices from a traumatic past. Additionally, these characteristics could be applied to the World Trade Center outside of the

novel: first as a center of global financial transactions that convert the value of physical labor and objects into abstract numbers and secondly through its association with the tragic events of September 11th, 2001. By placing all these elements onto a graphic spatial representation, the map shows the novel to be a document of a subjective interaction with a global environment, composed of traces of the narrator's movement through different zones of culture and experience. Each reference taken from the outside world and placed in Nocilla Dream's desert in order to be combined with other found objects, each story invented with resonances of songs heard, films seen and situations lived under globalization: all of these contribute to the construction of the narrator's subjectivity.

On the other hand this chart also describes movements and attractions that are supposed to exist in the outside world, implying that the novel is a 'phenomenological laboratory' like the Nevada desert. The geometrical quadrants, black background and color coded figures liken the graph to radars or similar scientific instruments used for measuring energies. In this way the map's design suggests the cartography of invisible dynamics akin to relativist or quantum physics, which postulate existence as an interconnected web of patterns and fields. The ontological mapping along a sliding scale of analog and digital being also invokes a spatial logic not grounded in physical proximity but rather in a combination of material and information-based existence. As many cultural critics have pointed out, the digital transforms the material into information patterns or computer algorithms, whereby an image, sound or text can be detached from its physical form, converted into bits and endlessly reproduced (Rabinovitz and Geil; Carrillo; Hayles). In this sense the graph is conceived as a technical representation of a hybrid 'territory', combining the mechanical

interactions of concrete objects with the presence of information passed through electronic bits that can manifest itself anywhere at any time.

These digital/analog objects, cities, persons and ideas come into being through the rational/emotional eyes of the observer (the narrator) whose perspective is part of the territory's formation. The cartography represented here thus joins the internal psyche to the external spaces and places of a mediated reality, envisioning the interaction between the two as a movement through different zones of an overall dynamic order that can only be glimpsed in bits and pieces. Through this process the subject gains a foothold in an environment that blends seemingly incompatible fragments: where Yeats's feelings about the Irish struggle for independence are found on a sugar packet in a Chinese restaurant, where advertising slogans for a commercial snack food are placed in a punk rock anthem. The charting of a space that is both interior and exterior is also akin to Jameson's call for an aesthetic of cognitive mapping that would reinstate subjectivity within the world space of multinational capital.

The novel's search for order and interconnection within a chaotic global space is evident in the story of a fictional Ernesto "Che" Guevara who faked his death in Bolivia and visits Vietnam in the present as a seventy-eight year old man under the pseudonym J.J. Wilson. Ernesto witnesses the transformation of communist Vietnam into a budding tourist destination where ancient temples are spectacle for a vacationing multitude and markets sell globally distributed merchandise, such as tee-shirts with the famous photo of him as a beret-clad revolutionary soldier. Just as Vietnam's temples and other spaces that people fought to maintain outside of capitalist domination have been taken over by the tourist industry, the battles of his youth have been converted into an image commercialized in every corner of the planet. These transformations are matched by Ernesto's new persona as J.J. Wilson, a

professional Las Vegas card player living off the cash generated by the hyperreal gambling town in the middle of the Nevada desert, indicative of a world where everything is absorbed into– and neutralized within– the homogenizing reality of consumer culture. Ernesto enjoys himself in the manufactured environments he encounters on holiday in Vietnam, buying a pink Playboy tee-shirt and Ray Ban sunglasses in a market and posing for a photograph that mocks the heroic symbolism of his famous image, which has become meaningless kitsch.

However, when he is run over by a motorcycle shortly after having the picture taken the narration describes an overall system that connects the separate pieces not into a uniform blend where they become indistinguishable but into dynamic networks of cosmic interconnection:

todo lo que existe, colabora a cada instante...para que cada planeta, cada fluido, cada objeto y cada persona tienda al equilibrio gravitatorio, al cero absoluto de la suma de fuerzas. Cuando una moto te arrolla y sales por los aires, en ese instante rompes esa inercia cósmica, y constituyes la parte infinitesimal del universo más violenta que existe oponiéndote al giro de la tierra, de los planetas, de los fluidos, de las personas y las cosas. Y sin embargo, en el punto más álgido de ese vuelo estás en suspensión, careces de velocidad, flotas; eres nada. Esa nada es la que te mata. (169)

everything that exists, collaborates in each instant...so that each planet, each fluid, each object and each person tends towards a gravitational balance, towards an absolute zero sum of forces. When a motorcycle runs you over and you fly through the air, in that instant you break that cosmic inertia, and you constitute the most violent tiny part of the universe that exists, going against

the spinning of the Earth, the planets, fluids, people and things. However, at the culminating point of that flight you are suspended in air, lacking velocity, floating; you are nothing. That nothing is what kills you.

Suddenly the narrative frame changes from a ground level view of Ernesto within his environment, where identity and culture dissolve in the pleasures, ironies and anonymity of consumer society, to a scientific view of him as a tiny part of a larger interconnected universe. His violent collision with a moving object reveals the real physical connections that underlie being even within the simulacra that make up many of the spaces where different cultures and people meet in today's global society.

The homogenization of this non-place logic is countered not with the force of strong individuality but with the notion of being as a cosmic inertia that links all people and things, as opposed to the nothingness portrayed here as not participating in the all-encompassing equilibrium. This mystical interconnection provides an ontological base for the constitution of subjectivity through the contemplation and appropriation of elements taken from the same virtual and physical routes used by global capitalism.

The "Cartografía Universo Nocilla" ("Nocilla Universe Cartography"), a visual representation of the process, shows the novel's collection of virtual and physical routes as the sublime object of the narrator's gaze. Like the Romantic artist who stared into an infinite nature and whose imagination intuited the unity of all things, the narrator peers into this technoscape, finding both himself and an infinite cosmic order within it. As in Romantic art and literature, the creative process is aimed at reconciling the subject and the object, the individual and his or her surroundings.

However, *Nocilla Dream*'s vision is not realized through the unique and inimitable creation that is the ideal of Romanticism but rather through the pursuit of varied inter-related interests, which evolve into different characters who carry out experimental interactions within the novel's laboratory. In contrast to the subjects of many Romantic paintings who stand alone before an immense and powerful natural scenery, on this map the narrator's perspective manifests itself in the white dots that stand for the novel's characters, mere 'avatars' who together compose a subjectivity immersed in a dynamic field of objects, ideas and cities. The idealized uncontaminated natural world that spoke through the Romantic artist is replaced here by a phenomenological view of the interactions among objects, patterns and currents that does not separate the artificial from the natural.

While I have compared this process to the database subjectivity of blogs, *Nocilla Dream* is of course lacking both the temporal dynamism and the hyperlinking of this online genre. There is no feedback from readers provoking further commentary from the author and affecting later entries. One does not enter the novel at any random point, arriving through search engines or links from other websites, and while the novel pastes texts from varied sources it does not send the reader on an unforeseeable path through the Internet. Whereas blogging inscribes the subjectivity of its participants in the same open ended space it represents, *Nocilla Dream* effects a closing and a distancing through the novel form. Rather than establishing itself as a part of the virtual networks it becomes a reading of that immense database, a narrative of the construction of subjectivity in the twenty-first century. Finally, while in a blog hyperlinking and cross-referencing are not seen as a theme or innovation but rather belong to the medium (which itself is the message, as Marshall McLuhan would say) when it appears in novel form it creates the excitement that has surrounded *Nocilla Dream*.

The Venezuelan critic Nelson Rivera, for example, defines the narrator as “una permeable sensibilidad inscrita en las ondas, las fugas, las oscilaciones de nuestro tiempo” (“a permeable sensibility inscribed into the waves, leaks, the oscillations of our times”).

The closing of this open-ended cultural mode in the novel form could also provide a certain comfort. In reading a blog or other Internet writing one can feel a sense of dizziness that comes from not knowing when to stop, as links and search engines make any session potentially infinite. Fernández Mallo’s novel explores our database reality but provides the ultimate satisfaction of reading the last page of a novel, working in subtle ways to give the reader a sense of conclusion. The origin of the desert tree tradition in a marital spat is revealed towards the end, rounding out the novel’s central metaphor, and despite the constant jumping to and fro many of the other narratives also come to their own resolutions through consequences or actions that respond to situations introduced in earlier chapters.

This act of crafting the text into a finished work is parallel to the novel’s images of global interconnection, which link the narrator’s internal cohesion to a corresponding sense of external order. The subject strives not just to assert personal choice within the myriad of mediated discourses and images running through it and its environment but also to envision this self in harmony with a cosmic order, stretched across the global network of networks.

Nocilla and Spain

While a comparison with the blog form may reveal this act of closing, the novel’s wandering structure and the enigmatic nature of many passages do make it a rather open-ended text, particularly ambiguous with regards to the role of regional and national identity in its construction of subjectivity. On the one hand the novel’s depiction of a world space

seemingly shuns anything local: scenes where the Chinese surfer recites a haiku in Asturias or the Michael Knight character from the North American television series *Knight Rider* pulls into a Murcian gas station are not connected to any specifically Iberian context.

However, the very title of this book, like those of its sequels *Nocilla Experience* and *Nocilla Lab*, is based on a reference that only a Spanish readership would recognize. The fact that the snack food appears nowhere in the narrative only underlines its use as an emblem that conjures up both private and collective memories in those who share a national space. Connected especially to the childhood of Fernández Mallo's generation, this symbol sidesteps politicized issues like the transition to democracy or Spain's incorporation into global capitalism that marked the national agenda during the years of their youth, instead touching on everyday practices of consumption.³⁴ This uncertain allusion to a national background is in keeping with the novel's overall vision of space and subjectivity, invoking a shared reference that loosely ties different individuals together without imposing any concrete interpretation.

In the last chapter, however, the Iberian context surfaces unexpectedly within the distinctly non-place environment of the Singapore airport. Here Kenny, the idealized post-national subject discussed above, is befriended by Josep, a Catalanian businessman on layover. Josep tells him a story from his childhood in a small village that takes place during the 1969 moon landing. The emergence here of a specific Iberian setting provides stark contrasts with *Nocilla Dream's* world space context. The rural location during the dictatorship could not be further from Kenny's post-national airport home. Josep's narration

³⁴ This use of consumer products to invoke local affective history within a homogenized global environment can also be seen in the East German *ostalgie* trend of "remaking" past history through now extinct products from the GDR (Blum) or in Douglas Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* project where he blends private memories with still life photos of Canadian products.

in colloquial Spanish (although he is presumably speaking in English) breaks with the neutral language that characterizes the rest of the novel. Josep himself, extremely talkative and overtly proud of both his Catalanian background and his rise to the top of his field, seems out of place in this novel filled with characters that prefer to express themselves with actions rather than words and never tie their identity to local origins or personal accomplishments. His boasting is particularly striking in comparison to Kenny, who listens to him with impenetrable neutrality, replicating the unchanging 'features' of the airport lounge (213-17).

Josep's anecdote is vaguely reminiscent of Luis G. Berlanga's film *Bienvenido Mr. Marshall* [*Welcome Mr. Marshall*]: an important looking stranger arrives and cons the locals into believing he is a government agent conducting crucial tests related to the upcoming moon landing, causing great commotion in the town and being treated with reverent hospitality. Details of the traditional setting (the mayor sleeping in his office when the stranger arrives, the chorizo and fried eggs that the man eats for dinner every night in the hotel dining room, the townsfolk gathered in the central square to hear the emission of the landing played over loudspeakers) are contrasted with the modernity not only of the space shuttle mission but of a bag of mysterious colored objects that Josep's friend sees when they spy on the man's hotel room one evening and which turn out to be Sugus candies. This reference to yet another mass produced snack food is repeated when the fraud is exposed and the children chase the man out of town throwing rocks at his car "mientras él nos lanzaba por la ventanilla caramelos Sugus que extraía a puñados de una gran bolsa" ("as he threw Sugus candies out the window at us, pulling them out of a large bag in fistfuls"; 217). This last image shows an eight year-old Josep and his friends pursuing the stranger down a road that he litters with the colored objects of postmodernity, prefiguring the radical transformation

from his Spanish/Catalonian origins to his present life in a global space of airports and office buildings.

Ostensibly this passage parodies Josep's antiquated conceptions of individual and collective identity, out of place in the airport setting where all such markers are neutralized. However, this last chapter's incongruence with the rest of the novel and the exceptional length of the two chapters where Josep appears (nine and five pages while the other sections never top three) suggest the emergence of a latent friction. The local surfaces here as another filmic image within a landscape of reproductions and reflections, but it also evokes particular histories that are incompatible with the novel's transnational cultural space. This scene leaves the reader with questions about how the novel's global sensibility congeals in a particular body tied to concrete locations. It asks where contemporary subjects may locate themselves between the two poles of Kenny's silent contemplation and Josep's desperate attempts to impress his individuality onto the timeless space of the airport lounge. This tension is the subject of the next chapter on Gabi Martínez's novel *Ático*.

Chapter Three – Gabi Martínez’s *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*]: Virtuality and Its Discontents

In *Nocilla Dream* I analyzed the construction of an idealized world space subject, able to inhabit the flows and currents of global capitalist society. However, I also pointed out the uneasy absence of the local in this representation of contemporary subjectivity, which manifests itself in the title and especially in the novel’s last chapter. This problematic runs throughout the texts of the new wave. It is as if characters were faced with two mirrors: one shows them in their geographical location and particular time; the other within a timeless, conceptual space composed of a multitude of virtual networks. While these two contexts seem incompatible they are actually intermeshed, playing with rational notions of subjectivity, space and time. The difficulty of representing the hybrid spaces of today’s world reveals itself not only as an aesthetic problem, then, but one that reaches to the core of contemporary subjects, who are defined by their relations to virtualized environments.

Ático’s protagonist Eduard Montes, like many of *Nocilla Dream*’s characters, shows great enthusiasm for the deterritorialization of virtual geographies. The novel chronicles his three-month self-imposed seclusion in a top floor Barcelona apartment during the fall of 2001, where he designs a virtual reality videogame also called *Ático*. Eduard inhabits a self-created environment that is physically isolated but communicated to points around the world through his telephone, television and computer. This location allows him to abstract himself from a chaotic urban environment and create a personalized space in the highly successful videogame, which reverberates throughout the networks of a technologically interconnected world. Nevertheless, in this novel *Nocilla Dream*’s embrace of virtual landscapes is replaced by an ambivalent exploration of where local physical reality intersects with global networks.

Images of the September 11th terrorist attacks, along with the war and international tensions that followed, flash repeatedly on Eduard's computer and television screens, providing at first an unsettling but seemingly distant backdrop to his solitary activities. They come to the forefront when his cocoon home is penetrated by his neighbor Faridza, a Moroccan university student with whom he flirts across the gap separating their two terraces. His determination to remain in the apartment until finishing the game imposes an uncomfortable distance between them, a space that is taken up by the hostilities beamed in over airwaves and the Internet, which eventually bring about Faridza's early return to Morocco before Eduard can meet with her. Set in a specific time and place within Manuel Castells's "network society", the novel exposes the clashes and fissures that characterize this social, economic and political paradigm. The juxtaposition of Eduard's apartment and his immigrant neighbors' home in their separate high rise buildings describes an emerging cultural topography where the public sphere is broken up into small pieces of domestic life physically disconnected from each other, often more tuned into virtual networks than their surrounding spaces.

These global flows not only lure Eduard away from the direct affective connections he may establish within his surroundings but also tear at the seams of the novel's realist-oriented spatial and temporal unity. Eduard's story is combined with a parallel narrative of a Japanese player's passage through the virtual spaces he designs, encountering many elements and situations from his period of seclusion. Not only do elements from global mediascapes define Eduard's immediate surroundings, then, but his affective experience of this hybrid space is virtualized and joins with the flows of these same technologically powered networks. The videogame's dreamlike representation of Eduard's three months in the Barcelona

apartment travels around the world, becoming actualized in different times and places. It becomes a separate space that other subjects may occupy, their histories and sentiments merging with those of the game's creator.

These dynamics in the novel shed light on the subject's relations with two mutually dependent and often conflictive social geographies, which Castells has labeled the space of places and the space of flows. Places are defined by "physical contiguity", establishing boundaries that contain the "*form, function and meaning*" of social practices (*Network Society* 453). Flows, on the other hand, are dependent on their channeling through global electronic based networks by way of "purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions" (442). In the network society formed through these flows, power is not wielded by individuals or institutions but rather by flexible "networks of instrumental exchanges [that] selectively switch on and off individuals, groups, regions and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions" (3).

Eduard is certainly an insider in the dynamic circuits of this social order as the game he designs makes him rich and famous. However, the novel emphasizes what he sacrifices along the way to this dream and raises questions about whether the social and technological tools used to realize his goal actually exclude parts of his self, repressed elements that are also absorbed by the network and then emerge uncannily in the videogame. The instrumental logic of "the Net" seems to have penetrated within the subject, holding back the realization of personal desires and virtualizing them in order to give the game emotional impact, suggesting what Castells calls a "bipolar opposition between the Net and the self" (3).

In this chapter I explore how the relations between the Net, the self and physical space play out in *Ático*. The first two sections analyze Eduard's three months of seclusion in his apartment overlooking Barcelona. Distanced from the chaotic city he is able to create a cultural product that exteriorizes his subjective experience of his surroundings, which circulates around the world and communicates with others. However, his isolated existence during these months is also characteristic of a fragmented city composed of different cultures and domestic spaces living separate realities. Faridza, in contrast, represents the promise of direct affective connection and intercultural understanding.

The third section deals with the narrative of the videogame, which brings about a powerful fusion of identities within deterritorialized space and time, as the Japanese player merges with Eduard's subjective position. While questioning the kind of database subjectivity this process implies, the narrative also deconstructs the game's goal of a return to the lush interaction of the street, suggesting that contemporary subjects cannot turn their back on either the space of places or the space of flows.

In the fourth and final section I investigate how the novel likens Eduard's videogame programming to the act of writing. This comparison has interesting implications concerning the role of the artist in contemporary society and the construction of subjectivity in general.

Tall Buildings and the Space of Flows

If *Nocilla Dream* centers its exploration of virtual geographies on the desert, a barren terrain where diverse elements meet outside of any fixed social structure, *Ático* focuses on Eduard's rooftop apartment, which is highly localized in a specific place and time. However, Eduard is more connected to global networks through his telephone, television and computer

than to his immediate surroundings. He has intentionally placed himself at a comfortable distance from the city among the virtual landscapes of his screens.

For him this is a pioneering project, as he tells his friends: “ahora yo necesito mis máquinas y creo que poco más. Quiero demostrar algo, dar un paso hacia el futuro. Y probar la soledad” (“right now I need my machines and little more. I want to prove something, take a step towards the future. And try solitude”; 11). He alludes to a future where subjects will be progressively isolated into separate and solitary spaces with machines as their companions, an emerging social configuration represented by the apartment’s rooftop location, where the messy and complex details of urban life are abstracted into neat and broad brushstrokes. If as Michel de Certeau argues the bird’s eye perspective from tall buildings removes subjects from the “murky intertwining daily behaviors” of the city, making them readers of the urban text (92), Eduard becomes a solitary reader not only of the space below but also of the global space he views through his computer and television.

Unlike *Nocilla Dream*’s world space where characters are able to glimpse a cosmic order and often find consolation for their loneliness, *Ático*’s global networks are characterized most notably by a lack of affective connection. Faridza, concerned about Eduard’s self-imposed isolation, emails him biographies of writers who also sought solitude, which he pores over for subtle personal messages to no avail. He calls his sister in the United States and they have vague conversations where neither one reveals the details of the emotional crises they are both experiencing, punctuated by an unsettling background noise that may be the Illinois wind or may just be static. His most fluid contact is with his computer genius friend Rashid whom he incorporates into the project when he realizes that he needs help. This is an instrumental exchange, however, and Eduard winces at his own

hypocrisy when he sends a first friendly email to him, before all his friends whose messages he hasn't answered, casually mentioning that his computer lacks the memory required to finish his project. These remote communications between mobile subjects (a Moroccan and an Indian living in Barcelona, a Catalanian living in Illinois) take place in a context of war and mounting tensions echoed repeatedly on the television screen that also connects Eduard to the outside world. The resulting landscape of mediated images and communications suggests the new social topography shaped by Castells's space of flows.

Even prior to his seclusion Eduard's habits and attitudes clearly belong to this new social and spatial configuration. He works long hours surfing the Internet for "informaciones útiles para su empresa, que era, decían, global" ("useful information for his company, which was, they said, global"). His tendency to form frequent and short lasting romantic attachments also leads him to look for answers online, where search engine queries for the terms *Amor* ("Love") and *Soledad* ("Loneliness" or "Solitude") take him to pages in which he reads "cientos, quizás miles de pequeñas historias y opiniones al respecto" ("hundreds, maybe thousands of little stories and opinions on the subjects"; 13). Eduard sees the Internet as a great database containing vast human knowledge and experience, which not only provides his company with a competitive advantage in world markets but can also aid in questions of a personal and philosophical nature. In this sense he embodies Mark Poster's description of an emerging technologically embedded knowledge paradigm where "information increasingly appears in complex couplings of humans and machines" (9). Eduard's comfort in interacting with machines and discomfort with intimate relationships is behind his self-imposed isolation, shut off from surrounding physical space but virtually

communicated to the flows of computer networks, television transmissions and telephone lines.

This should not be confused with the Generation X malaise I described in the first chapter, where subjects' immersion in a global consumer society distances them from reality. The difference is evident in a comparison between Eduard's situation and two popular Spanish films from the 1990's that also place their characters on tall buildings: Álex de la Iglesia's *El día de la bestia* [*The Day of the Beast*] and Alejandro Amenábar's *Abre los ojos* [*Open Your Eyes*]. Cristina Moreiras Menor groups these two directors along with Generation X writers José Ángel Mañas and Ray Loriga as representative of a new era where the camera constantly mediates between the subject and reality (205-14). In these two films the progressive isolation of individuals in false media realities is implied through contrasting urban localizations. While early scenes filmed on Madrid's central thoroughfare La Gran Vía show characters amidst the bustling crowds of Spanish urban life, both movies end on the top of skyscrapers in the city's northern financial district that were built in the 1980's and 90's and are symbolic of the country's embrace of global capitalism in those years.

In *El día de la bestia* the final scene shows the devil throwing young heavy metal rocker José Mari to his death from atop the Torres KIO, a building project infamously mired in the corrupt webs of international finance (Compitello 208-12). The LSD-popping José Mari has been led there by a Quixotic priest and a fraudulent television occultist to prevent the birth of the Beast's son, and neither he nor the audience can know for sure whether Satan's appearance is real or a collective hallucination. This sequence culminates the film's condemnation of both an urban planning where the interests of citizens are squeezed out by globalized financial speculation and a media saturated environment where real violence is

confused with its spectacularization on television (Moreiras Menor 264). *Abre los ojos* ends on top of the Torre Picasso, where the wealthy *pijo* (“preppie”) César discovers that the Madrid he inhabits and the people he knows are all part of a virtual illusion, which he himself purchased in order to live out a fantasy life after a car crash disfigured his handsome face and made his previously charmed existence a living hell. Standing atop the towering office building he stares out at an empty city that he now knows is merely a product of his computer enhanced imagination.

These highly popular films show children of Spain’s young democracy suspended above the city, converted into passive viewers of empty simulacra. They portray two members of recognizable 1990’s Spanish youth cultures faced with the increasing presence of media technologies and contrived space in their environments, revealing a concern for these issues in a generation often considered to be lacking social and political consciousness. This concern is coupled with a sense of total impotence as both characters meet their end among the Castellana skyscrapers, which from viewing these movies would appear to be the final resting place of Spanish community and subjectivity, unable to survive in a globalized and virtualized world.³⁵

As I have been emphasizing the novels in this thesis represent a shift in the way these phenomena are viewed, owing to the increasing awareness of the real connections brought about by globalization and to the penetration of the Internet and digital technologies into daily life, which make the subject a producer of cultural objects as well as a consumer. Eduard is not a passive viewer of media spectacle or virtual illusion but is rather an active

³⁵ Of course, the most famous 1990s film on virtual reality is *The Matrix*, which also connects virtuality to falseness. As Boris Groys writes with respect to the broad appeal of this movie, we love being told that all is illusion and the information society is a great lie (Qtd. in Molinuevo 63).

participant in the social geography the novel describes. He wishes to have an impact on the global space he views from his apartment:

In his rooftop apartment he creates a simulated space that travels all over the world and affects others, who during their 36 hours within the game also inhabit self-enclosed environments. His apartment is a cocoon that receives stimuli from the exterior which he reshapes to formulate a groundbreaking game that becomes a worldwide social phenomenon. By inhabiting a space abstracted from the city he is able to create something that will reverberate throughout the hybrid landscapes of the contemporary world.

The novel contrasts the quiet appeal of this location with the incomprehensible chaos of the city below. On the advice of his sister Eduard walks the streets of Barcelona for a week straight before moving into the apartment, his impressions summarized in a lyrical paragraph that portrays the urban space as a continual assault on the senses:

Se fijó singularmente en las casas modernistas, las vidrieras con libélulas y murciélagos, en los ancianos de la mano, la gente de colores y en los comercios simples y exóticos de la zona antigua. En la noche encontró a putas rusas, africanas y también a caribeñas, taxis velocísimos, hedores de orín y alcohol, vahos de tabaco, marihuana, neones que parpadeaban al ritmo de la música, avenidas desiertas, gárgolas remedando míticos animales y, al amanecer, sombrías nubes de palomas. (16)

He observed closely the Modernist homes, the stained glass windows with dragonflies and bats, the older couples holding hands, the people of color and the simple and exotic businesses in the old part of the city. At night he encountered Russian, African and Caribbean hookers, speeding taxis, the stink

of urine and alcohol, the vapor of tobacco and marijuana, neon lights that blinked to the rhythm of the music, deserted avenues, gargoyles imitating mythical animals and, at dawn, somber clouds of pigeons.

This description combines references to Barcelona's striking architecture with images of the immigrants and nightclubs populating the older neighborhoods, who give the city an equally picturesque appearance. The exotic display, however, dissolves into a seedy nighttime atmosphere with prostitutes from poor countries and the smell of urine and alcohol. The flashing lights, smoke and clouds of pigeons present an image of the city as an unreal spectacle or an impenetrable blend of sensual details where Eduard only glimpses the tail of passing taxis and the trail of tobacco and marijuana smoke. He is not able to make any sense out of these sights and sounds and afterwards wonders why he followed his sister's recommendation.

Immediately after this passage the novel describes the view from his terrace where he can "otear un límpido horizonte de coladas y parabólicas entre las que despuntaba la cúpula de la catedral, antes del mar" ("scan a clear horizon of clotheslines and antennas in which the cathedral dome stood out, over the sea"; 18). This clean panorama, distanced from the messy details below, sets the context for Eduard's pleasant first days in his new home, where he plays videogames, navigates the web, watches television and works on his project. Rather than being subject to an unruly environment here he controls the stimuli and his activities. As the turbulent events following 9/11 flicker across his television screen and his Moroccan neighbors go about their daily routines he becomes engrossed in the mechanics of the game he is designing, unperturbed by his surroundings: "asistía ajeno y contento al discurrir del tiempo" ("contented and detached, he witnessed the passing of time; 23). This attitude is

somewhat reminiscent of *Nocilla Dream* characters like Kenny, whose calm contemplation of his chaotic airport home makes him a beacon of light within the transitory spaces of the contemporary world. In both novels, then, a certain abstraction from surrounding space provides characters with footholds where they can make their mark within the space of flows.

Global and Local Fissures

However, *Nocilla Dream*'s fluid and timeless world space linked to a cosmic order is transformed here into an integrated global arena wrought with crashes and conflicts. The difference is evident in the two novels' contrasting references to the World Trade Center. For their repercussions as well as their pure visual impact, the terrorist attacks that occurred there in 2001 marked one of the defining historical moments of the last decade. As Jean Baudrillard has argued the event's long reaching effects owe to its multivalent symbolic power, which was amplified by video images that circulated instantaneously and repeatedly all over the planet ("L'Esprit" 13-18). Nevertheless, the fascination felt by global television viewers was also due to the awareness that they represented actual material destruction. Now the familiar simulacra were connected to flesh and blood people and constructions of biblical proportions being toppled to the ground.

Written in 2004, *Nocilla Dream*'s scene in the Twin Towers discussed in the last chapter is inevitably associated with the attacks, and it subtly alludes to the effect 9/11 had of revealing material interconnections underneath the mediascapes and global commerce routes that dominate contemporary societies.³⁶ Strangely, the tragic aspects of this reference are converted into a moment of epiphany as Sokolov uses recording equipment to reconnect an

³⁶ In *Nocilla Dream* Sokolov, the avant-garde musician, sets up his recording equipment in an office and records sounds that are normally silenced by the building's insulation.

insulated office room to its surrounding space, leading to the uncanny return of his lost parents' voices. In this sense the tragedy is turned inside out, making the World Trade Center a site of recovery rather than loss. The implicit allusion to 9/11 is thus abstracted and incorporated into the novel's timeless sublime technoscape, where subjects like Sokolov navigate the collages of different places and times that make up a virtual geography, which is ultimately underlain with a hidden order.

This image of harmony is in sharp contrast with *Ático*'s highly specific time period and frequent references to the turbulent events of that fall. The historical context is introduced on the very first page:

Nueve días antes, pilotos suicidas habían derribado las Torres Gemelas de Nueva York y reventado una porción del Pentágono en Washington. El denominado mundo occidente estaba en alerta Delta. Se hablaba de guerra inminente, de armas químicas, los ejércitos se desplegaban mientras los alrededores de Battery Park, al sur de Manhattan, aún humeaban. (9)

Nine days earlier, suicide pilots had knocked down New York's Twin Towers and destroyed a part of the Pentagon in Washington. The so-called Western world was on Delta alert. Talk was of imminent war, chemical arms, armies were being deployed while the area around Battery Park, in South Manhattan, was still smoking.

This paragraph emphasizes the sudden and violent destruction of the act, as well as the immediate panic and military mobilization throughout the “denominado mundo occidente” (so-called Western world”). The tightly integrated Western world participates in a mass of instantaneous rumors and reports, creating an ominous environment where more violent

actions are imminent. The physical events not only manifest global conflicts in a particular physical place but are also elevated to a virtually interconnected space where their echoes and reflections circulate, having immediate consequences in other local places. From the beginning, then, *Ático* represents the globally networked society as a place of abrupt clashes: the airplanes that demolish buildings, the fear and hostility that reverberate throughout the electronically intermeshed Western world, the armies deployed even before the smoke has cleared.

Eduard's relations with his neighbors are inseparable from the battles seen on his television and computer screens. The war is present in the space of their terraces both symbolically through a red light on a distant rooftop patio that looks disturbingly like a fire and concretely in the hostile shouts of an unseen neighbor during the Muslim family's prayers. The tensions come to a head when the anonymous neighbor shoots the family's pet hawk down from the sky: the violence and rage floating around global networks suddenly materializes here and then quickly disappears behind the closed windows that Eduard scans for the culprit. This incident leads Faridza's concerned family to call her back to Morocco, foiling Eduard's plan to meet with her when he finishes programming his game. Of course, the real culprit of Eduard's losing Faridza is his stubborn refusal to leave his apartment and meet with her face-to-face. The distance he imposes manifests itself in the gap between their terraces, filled with the hostility of the anonymous neighbor. His virtual position in his rooftop home therefore sweeps him up in the crossfire of global flows, causing him to lose the possibility of intimate contact he had perceived in Faridza.

At the same time these relations are inscribed into the long history of conflicts, prejudice and mutual influence connecting the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Africa,

activated both by the terrorist attacks and the recent wave of immigration to Spain. In fact, the gap between their two terraces reproduces the Strait of Gibraltar that separates Spain and Morocco. As Daniela Flasher and Adrián Pérez Melgosa have argued, the recent media coverage of *cayucos* (“rafts”) crossing the strait with illegal immigrants resonate with memories of military invasions from the African continent and have revived both positive and negative elements of the “Spanish national imaginary of the figure of the ‘Moor’” (“Battles of Identity” 151).

Moroccans are the most numerous group in the recent influx of immigrants to Spain and also the collective that often receives the worst treatment (Izquierdo 174). Flesler and Melgosa attribute this prejudice to Spain’s efforts since the transition to establish a clear European identity, forged in part out of the suppression of historical and cultural links to its African neighbors. This emphasis on difference leads to the belief that Moroccan and other Muslim immigrants’ religious convictions will make it impossible for them to integrate within Spanish society, which is said to have embraced democratic, secular and other ‘modern’ values (104-05). In another article Flesler shows that this notion underlies the intercultural romance plots of many recent Spanish films, even those aimed at advocating better treatment of immigrants. She connects the repeated failures of these fictional relationships to widespread assumptions of cultural incompatibility (“New Racism” 106-12).

Ático also features a failed romance between a Spaniard and a Moroccan immigrant but the context and implications are rather different from those in the films Flesler studies. First of all, while in movies like *Tomándote* [*Taking You*]³⁷ and *Susanna* liberated Spanish women are faced with the choice of either abandoning their traditional Muslim lovers or

³⁷ This title also sounds like the phrase *tomando té* (“drinking tea”).

losing their modern identities in order to adapt to the foreigners' conservative values (112), in *Ático* it is Eduard's intransigence and a generalized Spanish prejudice against Muslims that derails intercultural understanding. Secondly, the novel does not work to reinforce Spain's European status and location as is the case with these films but rather portrays a new Barcelona characterized not only by the presence of multiple cultures but also the aforementioned global mobility of subjects and their communications.

The city's geography is made up of multiple levels and dimensions exemplified by Eduard's rooftop home, which is more connected to distant places through electronic communications than to his immediate surroundings. The threat here is not that outsiders may encroach upon Spain's hard won modernity. Instead, *Ático* reveals an anxiety that urban communities will be fragmented by these multiple dimensions, eventually disintegrating and giving way to a society where people are more connected to international networks brought into their homes by technology than to local cultural gatherings, living alongside neighbors who are often participating in entirely different sets of practices and traditions.³⁸

In this context Faridza represents a cultural hybridity and openness that overcomes fissures through mutual interest and direct communication, destabilizing Eduard's comfortable isolation within his cocoon apartment. At home she wears traditional Moroccan clothes and practices her religion but outside she wears jeans, sees Western films and studies European literature. In describing movies she has seen to Eduard, she shows great enthusiasm for surreal images that combine seemingly incompatible elements: an elephant in a rooftop apartment in *Moulin Rouge*, documentary footage of a horse that jumps over a wall to join a bicycle race in *Amélie*. These festive images of animals out of their element are

³⁸ For García Canclini, this urban structure brings about a shift from the civic model of citizenship to a new model of consumer identities.

symbolic of a positive vision of cultural blending, which counteracts Faridza's negative experiences in Barcelona, such as the insults from the anonymous neighbor during family prayers or the harassment by two fellow students on her way home that Eduard witnesses from his terrace.

Faridza's contact with Eduard across the empty space between their terraces enacts both a crossing of cultural boundaries and a gradual penetration of his self-enclosed virtual environment. At first the Moroccans' apartment is merely an exotic backdrop for Eduard's work on his videogame. He observes the terrace full of fragrant plants, men weaving rugs and treating leather, a tapestry representing galloping horseback riders holding up thin rifles and Ahmed, a blind man in a wheelchair who keeps a pet hawk. These images of a lush garden, elaborate rugs and horseback warriors, along with the Muslim prayers Eduard hears, compose a mosaic of traditional Spanish visions of Morocco. They are as strange to their surroundings as the horse and elephant in the films Faridza describes. It is as if pieces of the country have been transplanted to this small space within Barcelona, existing here alongside other disparate small spaces like Eduard's own computerized domain.

The novel emphasizes moments when the gap between their terraces is physically bridged, beginning with the mint aroma that enters into Eduard's apartment when Faridza waters the plants. This daily ritual alerts him to her arrival from school and inevitably brings him outside to speak to her for a few moments before a wary Ahmed calls her into the house. To escape her grandfather's vigilance Eduard gives Faridza his email address on a piece of paper that he throws to her. The paper's crossing between their terraces is related through a slow motion description of how it rolls in the air:

la lanzó de modo que la bola rodó sobre si misma, no mucho porque era leve, pero rodó un poco al surcar los cuatro pasos de vacío. Eduard pensó que brillaba, blanca, como una luna imprevista, porque a veces pensaba cosas así.

Faridza la apresó en el aire, dijo:

–Altair...

–¿Altair? –casi susurró Eduard.

–Significa la que vuela –respondió ella, también muy bajito. (68-69)

he threw it in such a way that the ball spun in the air, not much because it was light, but it spun as it plowed the four steps over the vacuum. It looked to Eduard like it was glowing, white, like an unforeseen moon, because sometimes he had these kinds of thoughts.

Faridza caught it in the air, she said:

–Altair...

–¿Altair? –Eduard said in a near whisper.

–It means the one that flies– she responded, also rather quietly.

Mentioning the four steps that separate their terraces, this passage underlines the physical proximity of these would-be lovers who never actually meet up close. The paper ball's traversing of the short distance, light and glowing like an unexpected moon, offers a poetic vision of a non-existent physical contact. While Eduard describes this movement to himself with a lyrical phrase that he does not say aloud to Faridza, she does voice her thoughts in a single word, which initiates a moment of quiet, intimate communication. This underlines the contrast between Eduard's tendency towards solitary reflection and Faridza's ethic of communication. The word is also enticing as it comes from her language, unknown to

Eduard, inviting him to cross not only the four steps of empty space but also the cultural boundaries between them.

The third and final time their domestic spaces are bridged is framed over the global conflicts that intervene in their lives. Thinking to himself about the memory he needs to program his game, Eduard mentions to Faridza that he believes memory is important because it helps in finding answers, to which she responds “Yo prefiero bailar, la verdad” (“I prefer to dance, to tell the truth; 102). His engrossment in large projects of great impact is opposed to her emphasis on communication within the here and now. This conversation initiates their most intimate moment when she throws him a tape of Algerian Raï music and they dance together at a distance. The small space of reciprocal interest and understanding created momentarily is placed against both a placid physical background and a larger global context of confrontation:

Era una tarde sin viento. Las coladas pendían muy quietas, al fondo se veía mar plana y, según los telediarios, miles de pakistaníes estaban atravesando la frontera de Afganistán para combatir junto a los talibanes cuando la mujer de la chamira grana empezó a contornear los hombros y la cintura entre Eduard y los jinetes armados...El sol lánguido del otoño incipiente y un rumor de películas tras las ventanas acompañaron la suave danza de la pareja, que parecía abrazada pese a la distancia. (103)

There was no wind that afternoon. The clothes hung rather still on the clotheslines, the sea in the distance looked flat and, according to the news, thousands of Pakistanis were crossing the Afghan border to fight with the Taliban when the woman with the scarlet *chamira* wiggled her shoulders and

waist between Eduard and the armed horsemen...the languid early autumn sun and the sound of movies from windows accompanied the soft dance of the couple, who seemed to be holding each other despite the distance.

The couple is framed within a cityscape that seems to harmonize with their dance, providing a quiet backdrop composed of the fall sun and the peaceful sea as well as familiar sights and sounds from urban life: clothes hanging to dry and televisions heard through open windows. Here the city is not the overwhelming and incomprehensible place seen in Eduard's seven day walk or the hostile place that Faridza sometimes experiences. The intimate proximity that emerges between the two reconciles them with their urban surroundings. However, it is also framed by the war beamed into their local space through television news reports and other virtual technologies, a violence that will eventually surge from one of those tranquil windows, also virtual in its invisibility and its connection to the televised hostilities but material in its effects.

The horseback riders looking over the couple allude to this violence as well, but they are also connected in a later passage to the fantasy world that envelops Eduard and distances him from Faridza. His obsession with the video game is compared to Ahmed's exclusive dedication, as a young man, to Laab el baroud, a Berber mock war game using horses and rifles filled with blanks. Ahmed calls the game "fantasía" ("fantasy"), after Eugene de la Croix who was captivated by the practice during his travels in Morocco and whose painting is reproduced in the ever present tapestry. Ahmed relates this period of his life to Eduard as a cautionary tale, telling him how he also submerged himself in a private fantasy world, fed by his games and the rich literary tradition of knight tales: "soñando vidas extraordinarias, llegando a creer que yo era otros...La imaginación es de lo más voraz, nunca queda satisfecha

pero uno tira de cualquier hilo con tal de alimentarla” (“dreaming of extraordinary lives, coming to believe that I was other people...the imagination is incredibly greedy, it is never satisfied and one goes to great lengths to feed it”; 221-22). His seclusion from his surroundings culminates in an accident while riding that takes away both his sight and mobility.

While Eduard sees Ahmed as the Other– old, Moroccan, traditional, something of an adversary as he disapproves of Faridza speaking to him– they are more alike than he cares to admit. By refusing to meet with Faridza he withdraws into the fantasy world that he too is creating in his cocoon environment. The elements of his surroundings he observes from his apartment like the galloping horseback riders or the silhouette of the hawk in the window blend with the emails Faridza sends him and the images of war on his television to build a customized world of symbols. All of these images go into the virtual space of the video game he constructs, allowing players to enter intimate areas of the creator’s private world. This virtual communication is undercut by the lack of human warmth in Eduard’s home, where the initial pleasant solitude gives way to sleepless nights thinking about Faridza.

His isolation within a space that exists as little more than a node on a map of virtually networked relations leads to a burning frustration which then inflames assumptions of cultural incompatibility. Reading all sorts of intentions into the emails Faridza sends him Eduard concludes: “Era mora a fin de cuentas, y si ya es difícil desentrañar lo que piensa una mujer, la complicación religiosa convertía a aquella preciosidad en un misterio singularmente inescrutable” (“After all she was a Moor, and if it’s hard enough to figure out what a woman is thinking, the religious complication made this beautiful girl an especially impenetrable mystery”; 98). Rather than recognizing that their possibilities for sincere interchange are

severely limited by the physical distance he imposes, Eduard attributes their lack of communication to gender and religious differences. In this way the narrative links old prejudices and misunderstandings to a new spatial configuration created by virtual networks that divide the multicultural city into separate niches.

Like the war, *Ático* the game eventually becomes a global phenomenon involving multiple social and corporate agents, an entity much bigger than Eduard himself, who in the little the novel relates after his success appears to be still feeling “la ácida angustia por su Faridza perdida” (“an acid anguish for his lost Faridza”; 241). Now it is part of the global networks that wield power in the contemporary world, and everything seems to be absorbed by its magnetic force. The emergence of Eduard’s longings within the game’s virtual confines gives the impression that *Ático* has absorbed his subjective experiences and emotions as part of its process of becoming a social phenomenon that galvanizes mass followings and produces huge profits.

***Ático* the Game: Splitting Time, Space and Subjects**

The videogame Eduard designs exteriorizes the anxieties he feels about his personal seclusion within virtual landscapes and, in a broader sense, about the expansion of technologies like the one he himself is creating. The player is “atrapado en una red de áticos” (“trapped in a network of top-floor apartments”; 26): five different apartments inhabited by characters that seem imprisoned there, stuck with their private obsessions and past failures, often looking to the player to resolve them in some way. In order to pass to the next screen the player must listen carefully to these individuals, apprehending their emotional deficiencies and reacting accordingly. The game’s challenge, then, is to restore face-to-face

communication and understanding in a world of disjointed domestic spaces, in order to reach the final goal of escaping this network of suspended spaces and returning to the lush interaction of the street.

Along with the spatial fissures of the network society, the narrative of the game also highlights its disruptions to the flow of time and the stability of subject positions. The novel's localization in a highly specific time period and its chronological relating of events is disjointed by the virtualization of Eduard's experience that the game produces, converting his thoughts and emotions into a floating simulated space actualized in a different time and place each time someone plays the game. While in one sense the novel does preserve its precise time sequencing by placing the narration of each screen in separate chapters at the moments in the story when Eduard programs them, this dreamlike representation of his reality is also detached from its particular context, serving as a medium for the realities that others experience in 36-hour time periods.

The novel relates this dynamic through Kazuo, one of only three players to have reached the last screen in *Ático*'s history and the only one to have discovered the way out, but he ran out of time and was unable to finish the game. We find him commenting on a video of his now legendary effort during an interactive workshop for aspiring competitors. At many points in the game it is apparent that he has become completely immersed in the virtual environment, losing himself in a temporary hybrid subjectivity that combines Eduard's experiences and attitudes with his own. While this suggests a powerful form of communication across different times and spaces through virtual technologies, the novel also connects it to an emerging database subjectivity, exemplified literally in Eduard's worldview

and symbolically in the game's characters, who are compendiums of dialogues taken from thousands of novels.

As opposed to *Nocilla Dream*, where this sort of hybrid subjectivity is linked to a harmonic cosmic order, here it is identified with a basic lack of the affective connection that Faridza represents in the novel. The game's captivating exteriorization of one subject's affective experience into a space that others can occupy, however, manifests the novel's ultimate ambivalence regarding these issues. Kazuo's journey through this space also ends on an ambiguous note that reveals the unfathomable complexity of the subject's participation in a global and virtualized cultural order.

The game reflects many of the elements and situations from Eduard's months of seclusion, playing out both his anxieties and his fantasies from that time. It begins with the view of the exotic environment across the street from Eduard's terrace and expresses his desire to cross over: "Desde la terraza se tiende un puente hacia un ático frondoso, poblado de plantas exuberantes" ("From the patio a bridge extends out towards a luxuriant rooftop, full of exuberant plants"; 27). This idyllic location is inhabited by a nude couple that projects an image of ideal intimacy, but the small utopia abruptly transforms into dystopia with the sudden appearance of helicopters firing machine guns when Kazuo takes out a cigarette. Programmed during the first days of Eduard's seclusion, this scenario combines the stimuli around him— the attractive view of his neighbors' home, the war replayed continuously on his television screen— with his deep seeded but conflicted desire for intimacy.

In the second screen Kazuo must negotiate with a bitter old man vaguely reminiscent of Ahmed, who blocked Eduard's contact with Faridza. In the third he meets a young gay man tormented by a missing lover, whose emotional volatility is reminiscent of the

progressive desperation and self-doubt that overcame Eduard after negating his own desire to meet with Faridza in person. The fourth screen features a future version of Faridza, who calls the player Eduard, reproaches him for turning away from her long ago and finally seduces him. The scene ends with them making love, Kazuo in effect living out Eduard's fantasy. As in *Abre los ojos* [*Open Your Eyes*], the Amenábar film discussed above, virtual reality is portrayed here as a dreamlike compendium of subjective experiences alternating between wish fulfillment and the replaying of trauma.

However, while César from *Abre los ojos* was stuck in a feedback loop of his own thoughts Eduard's dreams are combined with the body and thoughts of Kazuo. At various points Kazuo remarks that he is so engrossed in the virtual spaces he forgets that he is playing a game and even that his surroundings are mere digital simulations. This shows physically as he sweats from non-existent heat, feels the pain when the old man on the second screen hits him with a bottle and finds himself on the verge of tears when talking to Faridza. He has merged with Eduard's fantasy world, physically feeling the sting of its violence and emotionally feeling the programmer's profound frustration.

The viewing of Kazuo's experience also provokes strong reactions and arguments among the audience members, who often react to situations and characters as if they were real. When Kazuo makes love to Faridza, the narrator describes their physiological responses: "Numerosos espectadores tienen las venas de las sienes hinchadas, sorben, se suenan o se pasan las manos por la cara" ("The veins on the temples of several audience members are swollen, they inhale, blow their noses, rub their faces; 195). The empathy, excitement and antagonism they express at various moments suggest that they are watching actual events, sharing in Kazuo's experience of those 36 hours. The game, then, not only

virtualizes Eduard's subjective experience into an environment that Kazuo can inhabit but also virtualizes Kazuo's journey through these simulated spaces, creating a visual product that can be screened to audiences and enter into their lives like any film, television program or music recording.

Nevertheless, the videogame encompasses more than just Eduard's narrow field of thought and emotion. The characters' utterances are drawn from a database containing the plots and dialogues from 40,000 'classics' of world literature, encapsulating an incredibly wide range of human experience. In this sense the videogame is emblematic of the "new cultural expressions" that Castells sees emerging in the space of flows, which have the "ideological and technological freedom to scan the planet and the whole history of humankind, and to integrate, and mix, in the supertext any sign from anywhere" (*Network Society* 493). Virtual technologies enable Eduard as cultural producer and Kazuo as consumer to incorporate ideas and discourses from any moment or place in human history into a timeless and placeless dimension that erases their original contextualization.

At the same time it creates a present defined connected to a concrete time frame, emphasized by the constant reminders that the player has 36 hours to pass all five screens. Just as the novel's virtual geography threatens to segregate local places into disparate self-enclosed private spaces, this virtual chronology creates separate and floating time blocks that disrupt the ordered sequencing of clock time, manifested in the narrative by the time jumps between Eduard's designing of the screens and Kazuo's workshop where his passage through these screens is replayed.

This dual effect of blending and segregating that communications technologies have on both space and time creates a context where subjectivity draws not only on immediate

social structures but also on a potentially infinite database of information and human expression. This is embodied in Eduard's continuous connection to global computer powered networks both before and during his seclusion. His repeated queries for the terms *Amor* ("Love") and *Soledad* ("Loneliness" or "Solitude") that bring him thousands of stories and opinions represent a new temporal paradigm: all of these ideas and experiences submitted at various times are placed on a level plane, instantly accessible to Eduard through a simple click.

Of course, there is nothing new about his investigation of the subject nor about the virtualizing conceptual process by which a multitude of personal appreciations are placed under the rubric of these queries, allowing for a collective organizing and sharing of worldviews. In fact Faridza has carried out a similar process in collecting thousands of "citas, pasajes, diálogos en los que grandes escritores abordaban la soledad" ("quotes, passages, dialogues where great writers discussed solitude"; 74). However, Eduard's sources are not the great writers selected through the establishment of cultural canons but rather direct links to other anonymous individuals. His quotes are not embedded within the framework of famous authors or literary styles which are inevitably connected to chronological time periods but are placed instead in the order of a network determined relevance to his query term. He does not consider this a branch of a wider humanities education, like Faridza, but rather pursues a specific preoccupation. The Internet gives him the means to access what people say about it without wading through their comments on other matters that have no interest for him.

This reflects Castells's description of the dual eternal and ephemeral natures of time within the space of flows: on the one hand cultural producers and consumers draw

indifferently from a database of the entire range of human history creating a “flat horizon, with no beginning, no end, no sequence”; but on the other “each arrangement, each specific sequencing, depends on the context and purpose under which any given cultural construct is solicited” (*Network Society* 492). Therefore, subjects increasingly view themselves not within concrete spatial and temporal parameters but rather as composites of specific queries within a potentially infinite database. This new subject is represented symbolically by the characters in the videogame. Moved by Faridza’s biographies, Eduard appropriates her database of ‘great writers’ to supply his characters’ dialogues, motivations and histories. The language of the thousands of source texts is adapted “al vocabulario y la jerga contemporáneos” (“to contemporary vocabulary and slang”; 25-26), erasing the original contexts of these quotes, which are called upon to supply the backbone to Eduard’s simulated spaces, virtualized fantasies and incarnated anxieties.

The novel expresses a deep ambivalence towards the cultural processes of database subjectivity and global networks. On the one hand, as I have argued, in delivering himself wholeheartedly to these networks Eduard turns his back on Faridza and the affective connection she represents. Database subjectivity is also condemned by Kazuo when he confronts Diego in the second screen. The old man makes him build a wall on his terrace in order to earn passage to the next level and spends his time philosophizing aloud while Kazuo works. Finally one of his statements provokes a reaction from Kazuo: “Eso me suena, viejo asqueroso y replicante. No tiene ideas propias, sólo sabe repetir párrafos de otras cabezas más lúcidas...Usted no vive. Es una máquina, un ingenio virtual. Usted es mentira...Todo su entorno es pura fantasía” (“That sounds familiar, you old and disgusting replicant. You have no ideas of your own, you only know how to repeat paragraphs from other more lucid

minds... You are not alive. You're a machine, a virtual device. You are a lie... Your whole environment is pure fantasy"; 79-81). While this statement is directed at a character who literally does not exist, it can be understood in a broader sense as a critique of the virtual existence that Eduard seeks: reorganizing and regurgitating ideas and images he receives from others, living only through his machines, inhabiting an environment made up of fantasy.

On the other hand there is something magical about the game in its material virtualization of Eduard's sentiments and the hybrid subjectivity formed by the combining of these sentiments with whatever baggage players bring to the virtual journey. The novel quotes players who describe the game as a transformative experience: "te aseguro que despierta los sentidos, estimula. Yo creo que es de ese tipo de cosas que te ayudan a ser mejor" ("believe me, it really wakes up your senses, it's stimulating. I think it's the kind of thing that helps you become a better person"). They are faced with what the narrator calls a "desafío virtual al ser humano" ("virtual challenge to the human being"; 25), the challenge of interpersonal communication within a virtualized environment, driven by the final goal of returning to the lush interaction represented by the street. The videogame, then, represents Castells's "new culture" of "eternal/ephemeral time" which "does fit with the logic of flexible capitalism and with the dynamics of the network society, but it adds its own, powerful layer, installing individual dreams and collective representations in a no-time mental landscape" (*Network Society* 493). While Eduard and his project are absorbed by the logic of the Net, they also have an impact on other subjects within its flows and currents, adding a new layer to the hybrid spaces of the contemporary world.

The near impossibility of finishing *Ático* the game also suggests that the goal of returning to the street may be unviable or no longer desirable. The character in the fifth and

final scene is a child who appears lonely and eager for the player's company. When Kazuo finds a parachute with only seconds remaining and gets ready to jump, the boy demands to come with him. Kazuo pushes him out of the way, knocking over a lamp and starting a fire, which brings to mind the distant red light visible throughout the novel from Eduard's terrace and the videogame's various apartments. This light represents the ever-present violence of a virtually integrated world and here it threatens to burn up the child just as Kazuo is nearing the edge of the terrace. The boy catches his attention by shouting out his real name and instead of jumping Kazuo turns around and rushes to his aid, thereby losing the game. When an audience member asks him why he decided to sacrifice everything and save the boy who was merely a character in a game, Kazuo's only response is "¿Estás seguro?" ("Are you sure?"; 235). The ambiguity exhibited in this statement is rooted in a world where virtual fires reflect actual tensions and conflicts. In a society structured by deterritorialized electronic flows the street is only half the story and can no longer provide the only ground of subjectivity.

This final scene in the videogame in fact turns Eduard's dilemma around. While the novel confronts him with the choice of engaging with the Other in his direct surroundings or withdrawing into the space of virtual communications, his game eventually presents players with the dilemma of engaging with the Other in this virtual space or escaping to the world of face-to-face communication. These characters are constantly torn between two different social geographies. Eduard is incomplete without the direct communication that Faridza represents, which also represents the promise of mending a city fractured by the violence of fires rooted both in distant events and local historical conflicts. Kazuo, although he desires to

escape from the network of top floor apartments back down to the street, cannot turn his back on the virtual fire in this last screen or the virtual character that needs his help.

This presents an entirely different context than Generation X's representations of virtuality. At the end of *Abre los ojos* [*Open Your Eyes*] César realizes that the people in his machine powered reality are mere figments of his imagination. In contrast Kazuo is uncertain who the boy in his electronically simulated space is and while César jumps from the building to rejoin the physical world Kazuo is unable to leave him behind. In another sense, Kazuo repeats Eduard's decision to remain in the global flows rather than agreeing to meet with Faridza in the local place below. While César's virtual fantasy world no longer makes sense when he discovers it is all a product of his own imagination, *Ático's* videogame space, infused with the imaginations of multiple subjects, holds appeal for players who are perfectly aware that it is a virtual reproduction.

The Writer as Programmer

As I argued at the beginning of the chapter these novels relate the aesthetic problem of representing the hybrid spaces of today's world to the subject's problem of living within them. In *Nocilla Dream* the narrator is constructed as the idealized subject of the very realities he is describing, able to position himself within the virtual geographies of a media saturated world. However, the reference to *Nocilla* in the title and Josep's story in the last chapter both express a certain insecurity regarding this global space. The striking title and awkwardly local anecdote are not integrated with the rest of the novel. They are placed there without explanation, as if to transfer a certain amount of ambivalence to the reader, as if to leave us wondering where they fit in with the narrative's overall context.

In *Ático* this ambivalence explodes. Just as the characters waiver between the two mutually interdependent but conflictive types of space that make up their environments, the novel's anchoring in a specific time and place is undermined by the narrative of the videogame, which tears at the seams of these unities. Eduard's apartment and the three months he spends there are converted into a timeless floating space, and his identity is transformed into a protean subject position, continually adapting to its fusion with the histories and sentiments of players from around the world.

Ático also reflects on the role of the writer in contemporary society. Eduard's ivory tower seclusion in his top floor apartment is likened to writers like Fernando Pessoa, Friedrich Nietzsche or Henry David Thoreau, whose lives Faridza describes in her emails. Like Eduard these authors sought solitude and lived outside of society in a world of ideas. While this does imply a certain level of disengagement, which Eduard certainly practices, it is also related to the ability to achieve a healthy distance from one's immediate reality. Faridza's biography of the Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi who grew up in the claustrophobic social environment of a harem tells of Mernissi's childhood game that "consistía en contemplar el territorio familiar como si fuera extraño a uno" ("consisted in contemplating a familiar territory as if it were new and strange"; 164). This "conquista de la intimidad" ("conquest of intimacy") seems to be what allowed her to interpret the world "de un modo inusual entre los suyos" ("in a way that was unusual among her companions") and to later write about the harem and her experiences there (165). As we saw above the intimacy of Eduard's seclusion is also crucial for his creation of a videogame that provides players with transformative experiences.

However, the line between these private worlds and outside reality is blurred by the hybrid global space that the novel portrays, where local places constantly actualize situations and tensions that arrive through virtual communications and where the private world to which Eduard retires is mainly composed of these same electronic flows. In this context Eduard as a programmer of virtual realities sheds light on the role of the cotemporary writer. He collects various elements from his experience, combines them with the database of world literature and programs a narrative that incarnates his fantasies and anxieties. It also faces players with the profound dilemmas in which these sentiments are rooted.

The narrator of *Ático* the novel does the same in a text that represents a complex reaction to recent social, spatial and technological tendencies. The story is accompanied by short chapters with information on subjects like videogame culture, Faridza's hometown, rooftop apartments in Barcelona, the history of the mock war game that Ahmed used to play or little known aspects of the war in Afghanistan. These brief summaries are reminiscent not only of *Nocilla Dream* but also of the kind of information one can find on the Internet through Wikipedia or search engines, as are the biographies of famous writers that Faridza writes for Eduard. These elements appear to be lifted from some immense database of human knowledge and experience. They combine with the narrative and confront the reader with an interconnected web of contemporary issues like virtual reality, the multicultural city and the various faces of solitude.

In a much different context Castells also speaks of “programmers” as important social actors in the network society. These figures (composed of groups organized around interests and projects rather than individuals) wield power through their capacity to program or reprogram networks around specific goals. They act upon existing webs of relations like

global finance, military power, scientific research or organized crime, providing the “ideas, visions, projects [that] generate the programs” (“Informationalism” 32). In portraying the writer as a programmer, *Ático* suggests that the narrative text also acts upon existing collective webs of sentiments, images and ideas, reconfiguring them to explore a particular set of concerns. In this sense the quiet seclusion of the artist into a private world of ideas is transformed here into a search within the infinite database of human history and culture to find elements that can be shaped, or programmed, into a compelling and provocative narrative.

Both *Nocilla Dream* and *Ático*, then, express new visions of the role novels play in postmodern society, related to how the relations between individuals and their contexts are conceived in general. As I discussed in the first chapter the mode of narrative that emerged with the transition to democracy tends to emphasize personalized worlds that express unique visions of reality from an outside and separate domain. Characters in these fictions delve through their memories or their private obsessions to reinvent themselves within a social context where the structures that give individuals and collectives meaning are rapidly changing. The Generation X writers that emerged in the 1990s introduced a new youth culture into Spanish narrative composed of discotheques, drugs, music and films. Their repeated references to the media that provide the substance of this culture led Germán Gullón to remark “Es un poco como si el escritor en vez de estar escribiendo con un substrato de ideas tuviera puesta una antena parabólica que nunca deja de transmitir lo presente” (32). This self-definition through the media one consumes constructs subjects whose relations to their immediate environments are intermittent and nebulous.

Like in other new wave texts, characters in *Nocilla Dream* and *Ático* are defined by their multiple, entangled relations to the outside world. This revived engagement with the outside world is reflected in *Nocilla Dream*'s image of the artist creating a map that merges the interior and the exterior and *Ático*'s vision of the programmer-artist. In these conceptions writing is not the creation of alternative worlds but rather a direct participation in the complexities of the artist's virtual and physical surroundings.

As seen in *Nocilla Dream*'s uneasy absence of the local and *Ático*'s ambivalence regarding the deterritorialization of subjectivity and affective connection, this process is rather problematic. Both novels allude to the difficulty of representing the amalgam of continuities and clashes that make up the network society. The texts I analyze in the next two chapters attempt to overcome this problematic through perspectives that can incorporate the blending of seemingly incompatible elements.

Chapter Four – Javier Calvo’s Russian Beauty and the Beasts Within

In the first three chapters I have been defining the dialectic of local places and global flows that runs throughout the new wave of Spanish narrative. Subjects are constructed through their relations to these mutually dependent but conflicting spatial structures. Both *Nocilla Dream* and *Ático* feature symbolic locations that characterize their particular approaches to this continuous interplay: the desert highway and the rooftop of tall buildings.

In *Nocilla Dream* a barren stretch of US50 in Nevada is a meeting ground of decontextualized objects and lonely travelers that represents the novel’s world space terrain of roads, airports and electronic communications interconnected like branches in an ‘arborescent’ web. In the most optimistic passages this ‘phenomenological laboratory’ provides a fertile dual ground– both digital and analog– for the construction of an idealized hybrid subjectivity, which overcomes local fragmentation and participates in a harmonious universal order. While *Nocilla Dream*’s characters sometimes enter into an almost spiritual communion with their virtualized surroundings, the novel also underlines the social isolation most of them experience and ultimately suggests the incompatibility of local histories and particularities with its representation of a transnational cultural space.

By contrast Eduard’s rooftop apartment in *Ático* locates him in a single place and time that is contextualized within the flows of electronically powered networks, not only as a receiver of distant realities but also as a transmitter of its own virtualized realities that will play a role in events occurring in other spaces and times. However, these global flows lure Eduard away from the direct affective connections he may establish within his surroundings, providing him a comfortable refuge from the difficulties of face-to-face interaction. On

another level, the presence of these global flows also undermines the novel's realist-oriented portrayal of space and time. Both texts, then, manifest the difficulty of reconciling the superimposed physical and cultural contexts that shape subjectivity in the contemporary world.

The stories in Javier Calvo's *Los ríos perdidos de Londres* [*The Lost Rivers of London*] confront a similar social geography, but here the process of mapping characters' subjectivities does not center on direct connections to distant places or to a world space but rather on multi-layered local realities. As opposed to the desert highway or tall buildings, the sites that define these narrative architectures are often subterranean spaces like basements or swimming pools that harbor hidden meanings, activities and connections. In fact the book's title refers to a map of underground rivers buried beneath the successive layers of London's history which a character in the story "Mary Poppins: Los ríos perdidos" ["Mary Poppins: The Lost Rivers"] claims is the true map of the city and also a matrix of the world (218-19).

This statement is indicative of the mythical relations the narratives posit between characters, their immediate surroundings and the larger world. The breakdown of rational space and time as a viable frame for their fragmented contexts gives way to a more esoteric view of reality. Most of the stories end with cathartic visions of the protagonists immersed in the juxtaposed layers that define the spaces they inhabit. I argue that these scenes culminate a narrative process aimed at overcoming the impasse I have discussed in previous chapters, conveying a vision of the intertwined global and local spaces of contemporary society as a chaotic but legible whole. However, it is only made legible through an embracing of the irrational, of the impossible complexity that defines the spaces represented. In other words

these narratives do not overcome the impasse but rather allow it to become the governing principle.

In this chapter I analyze the book's first story "Una belleza rusa" ["A Russian Beauty"], where the cathartic final scene is linked to the loss of the national state as a privileged source of identity and the related breakdown of individualistic subjectivity. The story follows Olga, a young model and the daughter of a Soviet general, in her drug-related downward spiral through the splintered spaces inhabited by Russian expatriates in London, New York and the Catalonian coast. Abandoned by her mother and neglected by her father Olga has trouble establishing affective connections with others and depends entirely on her beauty and wealth in social interactions, creating an aggressive and attractive shell that hides a confused interior.

When she moves to London at the age of eighteen to pursue a modeling career the resulting culture shock leads her further inside, isolating herself socially within the decadent parties of a group of moneyed Russian émigrés and psychologically within the numbing sensation of alcohol and cocaine. The party scene that Olga frequents dissolves and her physical and mental condition deteriorates, culminating in an epileptic seizure in a New York discotheque where the ligaments connecting space and time evaporate before her eyes. After the breakdown she moves in with her childhood friend Vera, who lives in an idyllic setting on the Catalonian Costa Brava. Here Olga adopts a healthy lifestyle but her disconnection from the outside world only grows. Vera convinces her to marry a wealthy but unattractive widower and a year later Olga dies in the back of his Mercedes-Benz in the throes of another epileptic fit. As the remains of her unborn child spill out onto the car seat the monsters from Olga's favorite television program *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* emerge from the basement of

Vera's home and invade the coastal town, a cathartic ending which according to the narrator marks "el inicio de una Nueva Era" ("the beginning of a New Age"; 56).³⁹

The text is an extended adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's brief story "Krasavitzia" ("A Russian Beauty") about a young aristocrat exiled, displaced and eventually impoverished by the Bolshevik revolution. If Nabokov's version refers to the Soviet dismantling of the Russian upper class, part of the broader historical phasing out of Europe's landed gentry, "Una belleza rusa" takes place during the break-up of the empire the Soviets created, a significant event within the changing status and meaning of nation states under a new transnational order. Here Olga's loss of a cohesive social milieu occurs within the disjointed cultural landscapes of contemporary London and New York, characterized by the juxtaposition of incompatible cultural objects, practices and beliefs.

Despite her insularity within Russian communities, the idea of Russia itself has lost any meaning to Olga except as a shelter from an incomprehensible environment. Her nationality is an empty concept that forms a protective wall of identity around an interior threatened by the chaos outside. With her death the wall comes down and her inner beasts mingle with the exterior world. Her shell of beauty and singular identity gives way to a hidden ugliness and multiplicity. In this sense the story of a drug addict's progressive disconnection from reality reflects a broader crisis of subjectivity within a shifting paradigm:

³⁹ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ran on a cable network from 1996 to 2003, becoming a cult classic with a relatively large and very devoted following. The protagonist Buffy is an ordinary American high school girl saddled with the enormous responsibility of saving the world from vampires and other evildoers, which she shares with her two best friends. The trio is socially marginalized within their peer group and largely misunderstood by the show's adult figures, who are unaware of their heroic activities or in many cases turn out to be evil themselves. The program is an ironic take on horror genres and on the tribulations faced by middle-class adolescents, deriving humor from the situation of "postmodern teens dealing with premodern monsters" (Owen 24-25).

from national communities to hybrid cultural sites, from fixed individual identities to shifting pluralistic selves.

The first half of the chapter examines the story's portrayal of the spatial, temporal and cultural fragmentation brought about by this sea change in social structures. The 'Russian beauty' is immersed in the "global *mélange*" (45) that Jan Neverdeen Pieterse attributes to the loss of the nation-state as the "dominant organizational option" (52). According to Pieterse the "territorial" conception of cultures as whole and separate entities gives way to "translocal" places that bring together distinct blends of varied cultural influences (61). Individuals are able to "avail themselves of several organizational options at the same time", leading to "the amplification and diversification of 'sources of the self'" (52). Just as Nabokov's Olga is unable to survive the transformation of her social context, Calvo's Olga cannot adapt to the hybrid environments she inhabits. Tied to a logic of separation that invokes territorial culture's "*inward looking* sense of place" and individual identity (61), she sees the *mélange* as a hodge-podge of mismatched pieces.

Similarly, Olga's dependence on the walls that protect identity comes into conflict with a social geography organized around dynamic intertwined networks. She inhabits global cities made up of scattered neighborhoods, where local communities and social gatherings appear and fade without warning, not built over rooted organic structures but rather what the narrator describes as 'multi-directional currents of complicity' (40). The determinacy of causal relations and ordered space-time coordinates gives way to a nebulous environment ruled by chance or 'quantum dispersion' (39). The spaces Olga inhabits are characterized by the superimposition of incompatible dimensions, much like the multiple universes that quantum mechanics proposes to explain the mysterious behavior of subatomic matter. The

narrator's allusions to the problems posed by modern physics raise similar questions regarding subjectivity within hybrid sites that blend different spaces, times and cultural worldviews.

The second half of the chapter focuses on how Olga confronts her environment and how the narrative itself deals with the representation of the contemporary world. The Russian model's aversion to foreign languages relegates her to ever smaller social enclaves detached from her broader surroundings. The focus on her beauty as the dominant aspect of relations with others encloses a vulnerable interior within an attractive outer shell. Her drug use is a means of sealing this inner space from outside influence. These manifestations of individualism and nationalism serve as a protective layer from a reality that she perceives as chaotic and unruly.

However, the text sets up an alternative to Olga's disconnection when she dreams of her home country but the streets and buildings are taken from movies and populated by the monsters from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The dream's television and film images constitute a language that allows Olga to reflect on her life. Details of her trajectory through the world are filtered through this hybrid third space, leading her to a rare moment of profound self-awareness. While this comprehension does not help her overcome the rift between her inner and outer worlds, the two spheres are symbolically bridged when the *Buffy* monsters break out of the underground and take over the coastal town. This scene culminates a series of arguments the narrator has advanced against any possibility of a rational comprehension of the world. The perfect self-enclosed beauty of Olga's exterior is ruptured by the ugliness and multiplicity of the monsters inside. The local reveals the multitude of layered spaces it contains, suggesting a violent symbiosis of the disjunctive beliefs and desires of the

contemporary world. In this sublime vision the subject is annihilated as an individual and simultaneously brought into being as a burgeoning multiplicity.

These undead monsters, then, represent a crude life force that transcends and destroys individualization, recalling Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian reading of *Alien* and other horror films. Their appearance in Olga's dream about Russia and their emergence with her death signal the return of a repressed undifferentiated "Real", visible only in the cracks or the void behind the symbolic system through which Olga relates to her surroundings. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis such terrifying or joyful intimations of the self's essential lack are inevitable as a basic irrepressible and undivided libido always struggles to break through our divided individualized identities. However, "Una belleza rusa" confronts us with a social context where constructions of individual identity— epitomized in Olga's self-image as a Russian beauty— appear ever more vacuous and the void constantly haunts subjects.

A parallel process of monstrous fusion occurs on an extra-diegetic level. Not only does Calvo adapt a Nabokov story to a new context but the narration also makes frequent references to films and television programs in order to describe characters. This foregrounding of intertextuality not only acknowledges the dependence on prior texts and codes as a meaning-giving function but more importantly presents the text as a crossbreed formation of incongruous images and ideas, reflecting Robert Stam's definition of adaptation as a "meeting ground of different species" (2). In this sense Olga's self-enclosure is opposed to literary and cultural practices of adaptation, which are better able to assimilate the chaos of the contemporary world. At the same time the text itself, like the creatures that emerge from the basement at Olga's death, is a monstrous conjunction of different bits and pieces, suggesting the basic indefiniteness and heterogeneity of the world it represents.

Disjunctive Spaces

From Olga's arrival in London her surroundings grow progressively incoherent. Her disorientation is somewhat particular to her circumstances but is also linked to the fractured global cities she inhabits, made up of scattered neighborhoods and continually shifting social networks. Olga perceives Pieterse's dynamic *mélange* as a plurality of incongruous elements that cannot be articulated into a meaningful whole. She seeks out isolated comfort zones through drug use, the cultivation of her outer beauty and ties to her homeland, but these artificial boundaries are constantly threatened by the chaos outside.

In the London airport Olga experiences the space she encounters as a disturbing reconfiguration of familiar stimuli:

En el aeropuerto, rodeada por una multitud extrañamente multirracial, Olga se detiene y deja caer sus bolsas. Se convierte en una isla perdida en el flujo incontenible de gente que cruza las puertas de la terminal de llegadas. Las cosas que la rodean la desconciertan un poco. Los colores, formas y olores le parecen alternativamente copias sin gracia de los originales que hay en Moscú y originales infinitamente superiores a las copias ramplonas de cosas extranjeras que hay en su ciudad. (32)

In the airport, surrounded by a strangely multiracial multitude, Olga pauses and drops her bags. She becomes a lost island within the uncontainable flow of people crossing the gates of the arrivals terminal. The things surrounding her slightly disorient her. The colors, shapes and smells strike her alternatively

as clumsy copies of the originals in Moscow and infinitely superior originals of the coarse copies of foreign things in her city.

The people and objects Olga observes, originating from different parts of the world, compose a strangely heterogeneous mass. At a basic level of primary senses— colors, shapes and smells— she perceives the things around her as a mix of superior originals and vulgar imitations. They do not combine into a new hybrid formation but remain separate. Some of them belong but others are debased copies of originals rooted in other places. They constitute a deteriorated and amorphous reality that flows around a disconcerted Olga, who becomes a ‘lost island’ in the sea of the airport space. This sense of disorientation does not only pertain to multicultural London. Her idea of Moscow itself has been transformed rather suddenly by the awareness of its own mix of copies and originals. Olga’s point of origin has become part of the uncontainable flow rather than a reassuring anchor of identity.

It is useful to contrast this depiction with *Nocilla Dream*’s portrayal of the non-place environment in the Singapore airport discussed in chapter two. In Fernández Mallo’s novel *Kenny*, a Canadian outlaw fleeing justice, takes up residence in the international wing outside the jurisdiction of any nation. Kenny is fascinated by the unchanging quality of his home, immune to the ravages of time and the passage of people of different ethnicities and cultures. He compares the impersonal space to a divine entity that transcends time and materiality (183). In Olga’s view, on the other hand, the multitude of different peoples does leave an imprint on the terminal space, and the objects contained within are not some abstracted formation but a hodge-podge of materials rooted in distinct origins.

Inasmuch as airports are emblematic of today's interconnected world,⁴⁰ the contrasting depictions in *Nocilla Dream* and "Una belleza rusa" reveal two different conceptions of place in contemporary society. *Nocilla Dream*'s airport belongs to the world space paradigm described by Roland Robertson, where the local is considered to be merely a "micro" manifestation of the global" (39). Different cultures and peoples are flattened out and assimilated into a homogenized global environment, where their backgrounds and places of origin have no enduring effects on the space's contours. The airport in Calvo's story is more in line with Pieterse's description of translocal sites formed by distinct combinations of interpenetrated cultural influences. Here the composition of people and objects found at any single moment gives the space a particular character, not a rooted identity but rather a crossroads formation of different roots and reproductions. The passage above poses the issue of the subject's participation in such dynamically modulating environments. For Olga the pieces around her do not fit together into any recognizable order and she has the reactionary response that Pieterse ascribes to carryovers of nineteenth-century discourse, which interpret hybridity as a "loss of purity, wholeness, authenticity" (55).

From Boundaries to Networks

Olga's arrival in the British capital, then, inaugurates her into the sea change in social geography that William J. Mitchell describes as a transition from boundaries to networks. While walls and other layers of protection used to be the hegemonic controllers of power and information, Mitchell argues that increasingly access points, links, switches and flow patterns

⁴⁰ The anthropologist Marc Augé identifies them, along with superhighways and shopping malls, as prime examples of the non-place interactions between anonymous consumers and servicers that are replacing traditional relations between social subjects with fixed roles.

regulate what comes inside and what stays outside: “The archetypal structure of the network...is now repeated at every scale from that of neural networks to digital circuitry to that of global transportation networks” (9). As opposed to the layers of enclosure that characterize Olga’s efforts to maintain her individuality, the contemporary world appears more as a bundle of interconnected networks ranging from the synapses that produce thoughts to the global routes that direct commerce and people.

In the story’s representation of this cultural geography, neighborhoods and social scenes appear and fade without warning, occupying space-time bubbles that are separate from the city or superimposed onto the cityscape through shifting affective alliances. In London Olga becomes a part of one of these groups through her lover Eglitis, a Lithuanian drug trafficker that she meets through her father. For Eglitis and his friends London is a playground where they spend their abundant wealth on nightclubs and 500 pound bottles of wine, handing out 50 pound tips and throwing four figure art pieces off balconies in festive exuberance (25). Not only do they live outside any integrated dynamic of social and economic relations with regards to the rest of the city but according to the narrator they inhabit a mythical time called the “Edad de Oro” (“Golden Age”), where everything is much larger and more beautiful than in ordinary times, where it is always spring, music is always playing and nobody has to work (23). The narrator advances two theories about what occurs when “la gente feliz de la Edad de Oro ha agotado su tiempo” (“happy people of the Golden Age have used up their time”): either they fall asleep and vanish or they wander the Earth as tired spirits only visible to dogs and babies (26).

Just as London is made up of jumbled spaces and peoples whose relations to each other are nebulous, these Russian émigrés occupy their own mythical time where normal

economic and meteorological conditions do not apply. When their parties are finished they do not blend in with the rest of the population but disappear or create unsettling ghost energies, as if they were part of a semi-independent dimension within London's layered spaces.

These Russian elites— military generals, drug traffickers, nightclub owners— evoke the explosion of shady capitalist enterprises that occurred with the break-up of the Soviet empire, combining the quasi-legal ransacking of State properties with directly illegal activities (Stiglitz 133-65). Also, in a broader sense they represent the ethic of flexible accumulation that globalizes money and detaches economic activities from local projects that could benefit the public (Harvey). Parallel to these processes of postmodern urbanism, the story describes a social dynamic of continually shifting networks. Subjects like Olga are often more dependent on such evanescent cultural formations than any rooted sense of community. The seamless inclusion of Eglitis in the group of Russian Londoners, Lithuania having been the first Soviet Republic to declare independence, suggests the tenuous relation of these micro imagined communities to any stable political and social geography.

Multiple Realities

The story presents certain ideas of quantum physics as metaphors for the superimposition of different spaces, times and worldviews that occurs in its hybrid sites. Quantum theory attempts to account for the strange behavior of the atomic realm, which disrupts the ordered functioning of Newtonian classical mechanics. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, physics was able to explain the universe through the locations and velocities of particles, describing reality as a series of causes and effects occurring within a

linear time scheme (Tegmark 46). This comfortable order was torn apart by the observation of highly counterintuitive phenomena, such as particles that act as waves or skip from one orbit to another without passing through the intermediate space (Tegmark and Wheeler 69-70). On a quantum level, the universe appears to be guided by a fundamental randomness and imprecision that has troubled generations of scientists (71).

An alternative explanation that has gained some currency in the last decades is Hugh Everett's "many-worlds interpretation", which conceptualizes a "multiverse" of superimposed classical universes. According to this theory all possibilities of what may occur at any given moment come into being simultaneously in parallel universes. An infinite number of alternative versions of our selves exist in universes that realize different possible outcomes. We can only observe quantum behavior in tiny matter that is separated from the environment in experimental conditions, but our classical universe (or the separate classical universes that we inhabit with each passing moment) functions as part of a larger quantum multiverse (Tegmark 46-48).

"Una belleza rusa" does not propose a fictional representation of theoretical physics but rather adapts some of its vocabulary and ideas to the story's themes. In different sections Olga experiences the passage of time or the space of her immediate surroundings as quantum dispersion. The narrator contextualizes these effects within globalization's juxtaposition of incompatible worldviews, which forms a 'multiverse' of randomly interrelated and superimposed pathways. While in quantum theory the subject always inhabits a singular reality, unaware of the interferences of parallel universes, here the subject experiences the hybrid sites of the contemporary world as a quantum blending of multiple realities. In this

way the text poses the problem of what occurs when distinct spaces, times and knowledge systems are placed side by side in front of the observer's eyes.

While the depiction of Olga's social scene in Nabokov's original story stressed the ephemeral nature of time, Calvo's version lends it a more evanescent quality. Nabokov's Olga experiences a rather sudden change of circumstances when her father's death leaves her poor and she stops seeing her friends: "But presently her life darkened. Something was finished, people were getting up to leave. How quickly!" (6). The rapid transformation of her lifestyle reflects the grandiose changes of the period like the Russian revolution. The corresponding passage in Calvo's story suggests more diffuse relations among events, spaces and social groups. Nabokov's image of people hurriedly leaving a party is replaced by a description of the party itself dissolving:

La noche, en el momento de tocar a su fin, se funde con el resto de las noches de la historia. Como coordenadas temblorosas de un mapa cuántico, los instantes de la fiesta empiezan a disgregarse incluso antes de cobrar existencia, uno tras uno, de forma que ninguno de ellos llega a realizarse en el clímax clásico del fin de fiesta: nadie ha bailado, nadie se ha tirado vestido a la piscina, nadie se ha quitado la ropa en medio de los aplausos burlones de la concurrencia y nadie ha vomitado entre las plantas. (26)

The night, at the moment it comes to an end, melds with the rest of the story's nights. Like flickering coordinates on a quantum map, the party's instants begin to disintegrate even before coming into being, one by one, so that none of them come to realize the classic climax of the party's ending: nobody has danced, nobody has jumped into the pool fully clothed, nobody has taken off

their clothes to the sarcastic applause of the audience and nobody has thrown up between the plants.

On the one hand this passage suggests the way that memory blurs different moments and events into an indistinguishable continuum, in this case aided by excessive drug consumption. On the other hand the different instants are said to disintegrate even before coming into being, suggesting that the very experience of reality anticipates the hazing effect of later memories. Time behaves like a set of ‘flickering coordinates on a quantum map’ rather than unfolding as successive dots on a straight line. It is impossible to establish the before and after relations between individual moments and, moreover, their very existence is elusive to the observer. Not only do Olga’s Russian friends live outside any rooted relation to the rest of the city, then, but their continual celebrations occur as a series of indistinguishable moments that dissolve just as they are coming into being.

When the space-time bubble of the London party scene evaporates, Olga appears to be left open to the surrounding chaos, leading to her collapse at a Russian discotheque in Manhattan. The narrator underlines the symbolic significance of this decisive moment’s location in a dance club, as according to certain theories the universe is a “baile global” (“global dance”): from atoms dancing around their nuclei to the celestial orbits of planets and stars, “con todos los elementos intermedios bailando cada uno bajo su propia bola de espejos” (“with each of the intermediate elements dancing around its own mirrored ball”; 39). This harmonic image is contradicted by Olga’s experience of the dance floor as a flood of disjunctive stimuli that cannot be pieced together into an ordered whole. Olga is on the outside of the “corrientes multidireccionales de complicidad” (“multidirectional currents of complicity”) that define this environment (40). Not only is she invisible to those around her,

but the currents forming the social space are hidden from her eyes. She is first described at the bar desperately trying to get a glass of water:

Hay problemas para llamar la atención de la gente, esta noche, aquí y ahora, y nuevamente la atmósfera del club de baile parece sugerir una especie de dispersión cuántica: nadie parece vivir en el mismo instante, nadie parece estar bailando la misma canción. La navegación por los distintos intervalos de postergación y antelación resulta difícil. Olga frunce los ojos y vuelve a adentrarse en la pista de baile, en busca de algo o de alguien, pero en su intento descubre algo inesperado: una serie de dimensiones inesperadas, ensamblándose y desensamblándose. Emergiendo como hongos sobre el cadáver de la causalidad. Así, no existen dos momentos en que se produzca la misma disposición de bailarines sobre la pista, y *simultáneamente*, existen ilimitados momentos en los que la disposición permanece estable. (40)

It is hard to get anyone's attention, tonight, here and now, and the atmosphere of the dance club once again suggests a sort of quantum dispersion: nobody seems to be living in the same moment, nobody seems to be dancing to the same song. Navigation between the distinct intervals of deferment and anticipation is rather difficult. Olga squints her eyes and sinks back into the dance floor, in search of something or someone, but in her attempt she discovers something unexpected: a series of unexpected dimensions, joining together and splitting apart. Emerging like mushrooms over the corpse of causality. As such, there do not exist any two moments that produce the same

arrangement of dancers on the dance floor, and *simultaneously*, there exist an unlimited number of moments in which the arrangement remains the same.

Unable to get the bartender's attention, Olga is lost in an environment that once again echoes the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics. Not only is time sequencing broken up into flickering moments but the relations among the elements observed together are shifting and contradictory. The central nucleus of the disco ball does not tie the dancers to a unified reality: they inhabit different times and are dancing to different songs. Olga penetrates the confusion attempting to find something or someone concrete but is assaulted by the spectacle of multiple unrealities unfolding with no cause and effect links between them.

This passage describes both the sensation of unreality that often precedes an epileptic attack, which Olga suffers in the following paragraph, and the visual impression of unreality created by discontinuous lighting and mind-altering drugs in dance clubs. As part of Olga's progressive disconnection from her surroundings, these aesthetic effects are representative of the contemporary subject's fractured experience of space and time. She does not belong to the ordered reality represented by the "teoría del universo como pista de baile" ("theory of the universe as a dance floor"; 39). Her spaces are a disconcerting blend of local originals and vulgar imported copies, scattered about cityscapes made up of separate bubbles of neighborhoods and social gatherings that appear and disappear without warning or logical explanation. Olga's collapse epitomizes the subjective experience of this urban space where the idea of cause and effect is a lifeless body upon which the rapid movement of a fractured culture sprouts in unpredictable formations like mushrooms.

However, the narrator asserts that a sense of direction may reemerge with the death of causality. As with quantum mechanics, he explains the unraveling of a singular deterministic

reality as an effect of interference among multiple universes— not the distinct physical universes of quantum theory but rather the competing realms of different spiritual worldviews. Their juxtaposition is presented as the “visión del universo como un jardín ruso” (“vision of the universe as a Russian garden”; 29), alluding to a chapter where an eight-year-old Olga wanders around her family’s overgrown and labyrinthine estate. As opposed to the dance floor theory discussed above the Russian garden is a disorganized and incomprehensible place where different realities are blended:

El conocimiento esotérico de las distintas partes del universo no implica en absoluto un conocimiento esotérico del conjunto del universo...en el mundo existen un número ilimitado de demonios, procedentes de ámbitos espirituales a menudo incompatibles, carentes de elementos comunes que hagan de ellos una categoría única.

An esoteric knowledge of the different parts of the universe does not mean at all an esoteric knowledge of the universe as a whole...in the world there exist an unlimited number of demons, proceeding from frequently incompatible spiritual realms, lacking the common elements that would make them a sole category.

The ‘esoteric knowledge’ belonging to different cultures cannot be reconciled and combined to offer an overall vision of the world, as each one constructs an exclusive set of demons that precludes the existence of demons from other spiritual realms. The phrase ‘esoteric knowledge’ emphasizes both the confinement of these separate worldviews to reduced groups and their connection to concrete knowledge, not just abstract beliefs. Like the self-contained single classical universes that the quantum multiverse superimposes, then, this

passage portrays different ‘spiritual realms’ as systems grounded in self-contained realities that cannot admit the existence of alternative possibilities.

The idea of simultaneity expressed here is reminiscent of the Aleph in Borges’s story of the same name, which I also compared to *Nocilla Dream*’s desert in chapter two. The Aleph is a small space in a cellar “donde están, sin confundirse, todos los lugares del orbe, vistos desde todos los ángulos” (“where all places are -- seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending”; “El Aleph” 163; “The Aleph” 23). However, the Aleph is a microcosm of an ordered world, and the difficulty in describing it, according to the narrator, is that language cannot express the unprecedented experience of occupying everywhere at once (168). In the blended spaces of “Una belleza rusa” the problem is not representation but rather a basic ontological indeterminacy, similar to that described by quantum physics: “no existen dos momentos del multiverso en los que haya el mismo número de demonios. Y por la misma razón existen ilimitados momentos en que ese número permanece constante. Esta paradoja aparente no lo es. Es un rasgo inherente a la misma naturaleza del conocimiento esotérico” (“there do not exist any two moments of the multiverse in which there are the same number of demons. And for the same reason there exist an unlimited number of moments in which that number remains constant. This apparent paradox is really not. It is an inherent quality of the nature of esoteric knowledge”; 30).

Just as quantum physics posits that all possible outcomes of any action are realized in parallel universes, the narrator describes a multiverse of esoteric knowledge that includes an infinite and conflicting array of demon scenarios. Interestingly, it is phrased the same way as Olga’s experience of the quantum dispersion in the dance club a few pages later, as quoted above: “no existen dos momentos en que se produzcan la misma disposición de bailarines

sobre la pista, y *simultáneamente*, existen ilimitados momentos en los que la disposición permanece estable” (“there do not exist any two moments that produce the same arrangement of dancers on the dance floor, and *simultaneously*, there exist an unlimited number of moments in which the arrangement remains the same”; 40). While her seizure appears to be a distortion caused by drug use or disease (and Olga’s problematic relation to her globalized surroundings), the narrator claims that the indeterminacy of demons is actually inherent to esoteric knowledge.

As with quantum physics, then, the idea that these demons operate in separate spheres which function independently is an illusion of the observing subject who inhabits a singular spiritual universe. In reality, the demons that inhabit each esoteric structure exist in a continuum with all the demons that esoteric thought could possibly conceive. The subtle allusion to Olga’s breakdown hints at an alternative to her disorientation and disconnection, grounded in a departure from the rational determinism of Newtonian physics and Cartesian philosophy. While the fragmented spaces and times of the contemporary world may be difficult to apprehend, from a spiritual standpoint the blending of different formerly rooted cultures does not cancel out the validity of their separate realms. The demons of all cultures belong to a multiverse of esoteric knowledge where each universe is only the realization of specific possibilities.

The presentation of the Russian garden theory is followed by a description of Olga’s chance encounter with Vera in New York, where the narrator suggests that the breakdown of rational causality can lead to a new sense of direction. The two friends have not seen each other since leaving Russia and their chance meeting leads to Vera taking Olga under her wings and guiding her recovery. The scene is portrayed as a series of flows: Vera emerges

from a phone booth with a terrier and several shopping bags under her arms, crashes into her old friend who keeps moving “buscando perderse entre la multitud” (“trying to lose herself in the crowd”) but is stopped by the timbre of Vera’s voice calling her name, which awakens “ecos en las circunvoluciones de su cerebro” (“echoes in the circumvolutions of her brain”; 31). The overlapping currents on the city street (Vera struggling to carry her load, the crowd moving down the sidewalk, the circumvolutions of Olga’s brain) are interrupted and change course due to the abrupt crash of two bodies, a random event which is said to exemplify the functioning of the Russian garden:

Y es así como las distintas partes del jardín se relacionan entre ellas:
ensamblándose y desensamblándose, suplementándose y superponiéndose. Y una vez desaparecidas las normas de la causalidad, el sentido de dirección emerge de nuevo. Poderoso. Rotundo. Ineluctable. Por encima de todo, ineluctable. Porque no puede no existir. La imposibilidad se ha vuelto material. (32)

And that is how the different parts of the garden relate to each other: joining together and splitting apart, replacing and superimposing each other. And once the norms of causality vanish, a sense of direction emerges again.

Powerful. Emphatic. Inexorable. Above all, inexorable. Because it cannot not exist. Impossibility has become material.

The serendipitous crash of the two friends’ bodies exemplifies the chance workings of the Russian garden. The chaos is portrayed in this passage as a dynamic movement of different spaces that join together, split apart, blend or envelop each other. Far from the haziness that Olga perceives in her surroundings those mushrooms sprouting on top of the carcass of

causality lead to a ‘powerful’, ‘emphatic’ and ‘inexorable’ force. The juxtaposition and merging of different cultural spaces and worldviews leads to an impossible complexity– the infinity of the quantum multiverse– which materializes in a new multiple reality.

Mitchell argues that the local coherence of space and time is being dismantled in contemporary society as social and economic practices are increasingly distributed through electronic networks that instantaneously cross great distances and multiple time zones. The “logical endpoint” of this “networked parallelism”, he affirms, is that the “notoriously strange spatial and temporal logic of quantum mechanics (rather than the familiar logic of the everyday world) takes over” (14). While Mitchell and similar theories of networked cyborg selves focus on a global geography of interconnections, much like *Nocilla Dream* and *Ático*, “Una belleza rusa” concentrates exclusively on the subjective experience of the concrete places and times that are shaped by these dynamics. Olga perceives quantum dispersion both in the composition of these local particular moments and in their relations to preceding and successive moments. Her self-enclosed isolation and difficulty establishing affective bonds point to the disconnectivity that can occur in contemporary global cities– where time, space and subjects are often divided and dispersed by the unwieldy flows of hybrid sites.

Isolation vs. Soul

Olga continually isolates herself from the outside world, enclosing a vulnerable interior within an aggressive and attractive outer shell. She seeks out Russian speaking communities wherever she goes and even smaller secluded spaces within these reduced social arenas. A high school friend tells Olga that her aversion to foreign languages indicates a lack of soul, and this idea becomes a metaphor for her unwillingness or inability to expose

inner weakness and establish affective connections with others. The concept of soul as an openness to the outside world is opposed to Olga's basic identity as a Russian beauty. She comes to realize that Russia is an empty idea meant to protect her from the chaos of the hybrid sites she inhabits, which would penetrate an inner core that is ultimately a "nodo de vacío" ("node of emptiness"; 44).

This emptiness stems from a personal history of parental neglect, but as she carries it through the world the narrative characterizes Olga's inner absence as emblematic of her times. Olga does not know her mother and this situation was apparently never discussed in her household, as at the age of fifteen it dawned on her for the first time that she did have a mother who was likely alive somewhere in Russia (44-45). Her clearest memory of her father is speaking on the phone on a balcony with a sad smile (38, 44, 54). These sparse details suggest a lack of communication and affection during her childhood, which leads her to develop an aggressive outer shell. When a high school classmate tells her that according to all major religions it is the soul that learns languages and the fact that she is unable to pass her English exams therefore indicates a lack of soul, Olga replies: "*Yo no necesito alma...Podría entrar en el Chanel de Kutuzovskaya, bajarme los pantalones y mearme encima de la ropa. ¿Y creéis que me pasaría algo?*" ("I *do not need a soul*...I could go into the Kutuzovskaya Chanel, lower my pants and piss all over the clothes. And do you think anything would happen to me?"; 21). The power and privilege that come with her class position and beauty, she implies, make it unnecessary to communicate her inside with the exterior environment.

During the first weeks in London she hides a frightened interior behind a mask of hostility. She addresses taxi drivers "casi con furia" ("with near fury"; 34) and insults the

sales attendants at Covent Garden and Harrods in Russian (33-34). Meanwhile at home she nurses vodka bottles and dedicates herself to a routine of dozing on the sofa and intermittently spreading the contents of her suitcases about the empty rooms: “Un delicado ritual de colonización. La quemazón del vodka le resulta al mismo tiempo dolorosa y agradablemente familiar” (“A delicate ritual of colonization. The burning sensation of the vodka is both painful and pleasantly familiar”; 35). While showing the world an antagonistic face, Olga simultaneously ‘colonizes’ a delicate interior space that is permeated by the burning sensation of vodka, which is painful but also provides her a much needed sensation of familiarity. Her drug abuse begins through a ritual meant to shut out the surrounding world and take control of a reduced personalized area. This colonized home space is not like Bachelard’s felicitous spaces discussed in the introduction and chapter two. They do not organize her psychic world in different levels of intimacy through closets, drawers and rooms with clearly differentiated purposes. Her apartment is mostly empty and she moves her possessions about aimlessly. Olga’s intimate world is vacuous and lacking in purpose, a series of provisional arrangements.

The main boundary that Olga erects between her interior and the outside chaos is her physical beauty, which is at the core of her self-image. Another of her vivid childhood memories is an unknown woman telling her “eres preciosa” (“you are gorgeous”) and looking down to admire herself in a gesture that will become a habit for the rest of her life (54-55). At the Russian party in London her interactions with others seem to be based mainly on the attraction she exercises. She tells her older lover Eglitis that she cannot marry him, due to her ailing father and her modeling career, in an overtly flirtatious manner: “Le acerca los labios al oído. El viejo juego aprendido en susurros. La oscilación de las oportunidades.

La dramaturgia del deseo desnaturalizado” (“She puts her lips to his ear. The old game learned in whispers. The oscillation of chances. The staging of denaturalized desire”; 25). With this playful performance of desire, Olga places her beauty at the center of the social interchange.

This dynamic is linked to her overall tendency towards self-isolation when she stands over the pool at the top of the diving board, observed by Eglitis and an English woman who marvels at her sexual allure: “Permanece así un momento, magnífica, dominando el jardín desde sus alturas olímpicas, encerrada en una burbuja de tiempo y espacio. No hay nada a su alrededor, no hay nadie, la fiesta no existe...Perfecta en su belleza, pues han dejado de existir otras bellezas. Perfecta en su unicidad” (“She lingers there a moment, magnificent, dominating the garden from her Olympic heights, enclosed in a bubble of time and space. There is nothing around her, there is nobody, the party does not exist...Perfect in her beauty, as other beauties have ceased to exist. Perfect in her oneness”; 24). In this moment of pause she is separated from her surroundings, looming in a ‘time-space bubble’ of Olympic heights. Her resplendence blocks out the party and the guests, severing her connections to others and making her unique. Just as Olga sought a controlled comfort zone in her apartment, now amongst her friends she ‘colonizes’ a detached space through her physical appeal. Within the bubble of Russian émigrés she resides in an even smaller bubble.

As opposed to the lost island in the London airport, stranded in a sea of multiple flows, here Olga is at the center of a system of successive circles. She is enclosed in the bubble of beauty that her perfect body composes on top of the diving board, the focus of attention in the space that the party circumscribes within the city. The identity she seeks is

tioned to the social geography of boundaries that Mitchell argues is being replaced by systems of networks.

In a key passage Olga comes to terms with the core emptiness that has resulted both from her efforts at self-isolation (her lack of soul) and the elusiveness of Russia as a concept. Here the narrative symbolically pairs the lost nation-state with individualization, as the two “vehicles of modernity” that unravel in hybrid globalized spaces (Pieterse 46). After seven years of living abroad Olga has a dream which is about Russia, but the streets and plazas she encounters are nothing like her homeland, taken instead from various films and television programs. The dream meshes events from her life with these visuals, especially drawing on her favorite television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Later, Olga reflects both on the intangibility of her homeland and on her intense identification with one of the vampires from *Buffy*. Russia is an essentially elusive idea that cannot be reduced to either traditional representations of its culture or to her personal memories. Strangely, she senses a similar “nodo de vacío” (“node of emptiness”; 44) in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, centered on the character of Angel, a powerful vampire cursed by a group of gypsies with the affliction of having a soul, which makes him repent for all his bloody deeds.⁴¹ Olga is struck by the fact that having a soul would make him “aquella sombra estólida de un hombre...Débil y apesadumbrado” (“that dull shadow of a man...Weak and pitiful”) and that when he loses his soul he once again becomes “aquel ser repentinamente cargado de energía, sensual y atrevido, inteligente y voraz” (“that being suddenly charged with energy, sensual and daring, intelligent and voracious”; 44).

⁴¹ In the program *Buffy* finds a lone sympathetic adult and vampire in Angel, who helps her defeat other vampires. However, as part of the gypsy’s spell he will lose his soul again if he experiences a moment of true happiness, which occurs when he initiates a romantic relationship with *Buffy*. He then becomes an evil character whom *Buffy* must kill.

Olga relates the emptiness of both Russia and Angel to herself and “el foco de su propia ausencia” (45). If she is essentially a Russian beauty, Olga wonders, what then is Russia? She concludes that it is a house designed to shelter her from the outer chaos:

Y el mundo está encerrado fuera de esa casa. Y ella está dentro de la casa, rompiendo muebles a hachazos y usando los tablones para apuntalar puertas y ventanas, o bien tapando rendijas de las paredes, o cegando ventanas con cortinas de tela opaca. La razón de esta actividad no es otra que los rayos cósmicos. Los rayos cósmicos no se ven ni tampoco se notan en la piel. Sin embargo, existen, y están por todas partes, allí donde llega la luz del sol. La casa es la única protección posible. Una casa impermeable a la luz natural.
(45)

And the world is shut outside that house. And she is inside the house, breaking furniture with an axe and using boards to shore up doors and windows, or covering cracks in the walls, or blinding windows with opaque cloth curtains. The reason for this activity is no other than the cosmic rays. The cosmic rays cannot be seen or felt on the skin. However, they exist, and they are all over, wherever the sun reaches. The house is the only possible protection. A house that is impermeable to natural light.

The concept of Russia for her, as a homeland or a store of identity, is nothing more than a protective seal from outside influences, or what she calls the cosmic rays. The world is full of these invisible rays and therefore she must close herself off from the light of day, like a vampire, in order to avoid them. She is nostalgic for an imagined lost order that has disappeared with the end of the nation-state as the dominant organizing principle, holding

onto a territorial view of identity within a world of interpenetrating crossflows (cosmic rays) that tear apart the oneness she desires.

Olga's confrontation with the void underlying her identity as a Russian beauty is like Žižek's analysis of the emptiness the subject discovers when its symbolic identifications with the world are pierced. He discusses a passage from Shakespeare's *Richard II* where Richard is forced to give up the crown and philosophizes about the hollowness of this royal symbol and the even greater hollowness that he finds when relinquishing its power. Žižek observes: "getting rid of this unsubstantial specter does not leave us with the simple reality of what we effectively are...all reality is an effect of anamorphosis, a 'shadow of nothing,' and what we get if we look at it 'straight on' is a chaotic nothing" (70). Olga's identifications with Russia and her role as a beautiful model place her within a symbolic structure. Coming to terms with their emptiness does not face her with reality as it is but rather exiles her, like Angel when he becomes mortal, to the chaos and uncertainty of life outside the symbolic structure. She remains inside the isolated house of her identity even when she understands its vacuity, fighting off those cosmic rays that are like the cracks in the symbolic created by the Real.

While Olga's existential crises are particular to her inability to create affective connections with others and her related propensity to drug addiction, they are also contextualized within the changing social landscape of today's world. As the narrator tells us, translating and modifying line from Nabokov: "La vida de nuestra heroína ha transcurrido según el estilo de su época" ("The life of our heroine happened in full accord with the style of the period"; 43).⁴² Nabokov's story refers to the typhoid that killed her mother and the revolution that killed her brother, but here the narrator sets her up as representative of the

⁴² "Everything happened in full accord with the style of the period" (Nabokov 3).

contemporary subject. In a space where social structures no longer reflect the stable symbolic identifications that order the subject's view of the world, these are rather hard to maintain. Their emptiness becomes evident and the subject is faced with the quantum dispersion of existence.

Adaptation

In stark contrast to Olga's ethic of separation and individualization, the text itself is a fusion of various outside sources, providing a model of interconnection and multiplicity that comes to fruition in the scene of Olga's death. The most obvious example, of course, is the Nabokov story which provides the plotline and many phrases that are translated and directly inserted into Calvo's version. As I have discussed above, elements from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and quantum theory are also appropriated and make substantial contributions to the story. These strange bedfellows are further complemented by one-time references to visual media, composing all together a fusion of apparently discordant codes and sources. The story, like the multi-layered spaces it represents, is shaped from a seemingly random assortment of materials. As Robert Stam says of film adaptation, different species meet within the text and mutate together into a new form (2).

At the same time these appropriations open up a dialogue between narrator and reader around external cultural objects and discourses. The story begins with the enigmatic last lines of Nabokov's English version: "¿Cuál es la flecha que vuela para siempre? La flecha que ha alcanzado su objetivo. ¿Qué significan estas palabras?" ("Which arrow flies forever? The

arrow that has hit its mark. What do these words mean?; 13).⁴³ The narrator adds the rhetorical question ‘what do these words mean?’, establishing his role as a third party pasting, combining and interpreting pieces from different sources. Throughout the story he intervenes with metafictional commentary, labeling certain passages as important and others as extraneous, discouraging the reader from making certain interpretations and pointing to alternative connections and metaphorical possibilities. The fact that essential components are taken from named previous texts contributes to the feeling that he is somebody sitting at our side while we are watching a film, anxiously giving us enigmatic and sometimes contradictory indications as to how we should feel about what we are viewing.

These dynamics highlight the dual processes that Linda Hutcheon identifies in textual adaptation: the creative process of “appropriation, or taking possession of another’s story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one’s own sensibility, interests and talents” (18); and the communicative process of reception whereby “we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (3).

These dual processes are aimed at representing the narrative’s hybrid sites, composed of a multiplicity of mediated and material elements. The English woman watching Olga’s dive at the Russian party, for example, is herself practicing a form of cultural adaptation that draws on a rich media iconography: “lleva un peinado masculino y un traje de hombre que le dan aspecto de actriz de película americana interpretando a una poetisa imaginista en un cóctel de Gertrude Stein” (“she has a masculine haircut and wears a man’s suit, which together make her look like an actress from an American movie playing an imagist poet at a

⁴³ “In such cases, instead of getting bogged down in guesswork, I repeat the words of the merry king in my favorite fairy tale: Which arrow flies forever? The arrow that has hit its mark” (Nabokov 8).

cocktail party hosted by Gertrude Stein; 24). This description does not imply that the character actually strove to create such a specific effect with her clothing and hair but rather that she reflects a multitude of intertwined and largely unconscious influences: general Hollywood aesthetics; the styles of the early twentieth century and especially its artistic circles; Hollywood representations of that particular era and those particular social groups. By the same token the narrator creates an image for the reader not by referring to a concrete film but by evoking the appearance of the hypothetical actress in an invented motion picture. The passage draws on general film tropes, part of a broad cultural imaginary, rather than a single movie. While underlining the crucial influence of audiovisual media in the way contemporary subjects view the world, the text also takes an explicitly active role in shaping these references towards its own ends. It employs a mode of multiple crisscrossed literary adaptations suited to a culture also characterized by such practices.

Of course, then, the narrative faces the same question that Olga confronts in her surrounding spaces: do these blended objects amount to something new and meaningful or do they remain separate and disjointed? This issue is a persistent undercurrent that surfaces in many of the narrator's asides and is embedded in the narrative structure. Olga's story is related out of order in short scenes with no immediately apparent connecting elements between them, as if they were arranged haphazardly. Moreover, the narrator insists that the story has no allegorical or representational significance, that the answers to questions like Nabokov's cannot be found within the story and that the story has no soul (21-22). Like Olga, then, the narrative supposedly lacks any communicative value. The narrator even locates one scene in the basement of Olga's high school in order to assure that it has no relation to the other parts of the story or to real situations (18-21). These statements present

the hybrid blend of source texts that make up “Una belleza rusa” as a haphazard collection of images and discourses which cannot be brought together in a logical fashion to produce any broader meaning.

Yet towards the end the narrator increasingly suggests that the story may indeed have meaning and even broad metaphorical significance. Here the reader is encouraged to make a second reading of the story’s blended fragments. The scene from Olga’s childhood where she wanders around her labyrinthine family estate defines the story as a Russian garden: “La historia es un jardín. Este tendría que haber sido el comienzo. Un jardín ruso, imponente y caótico y cubierto de hojas secas. Así tendría que haber empezado todo” (“The story is a garden. This should have been the beginning. A Russian garden, imposing and chaotic and covered with dry leaves. That’s how it all should have begun”; 36). The narrative is not an incoherent jumble but is rather structured like the Russian garden universe analyzed above, as a random assembly of superimposed dimensions building the foundation for a powerful sense of direction, suggested here through the statement that this scene is the true beginning of the story.

Olga is said to be looking for answers in her family’s garden, but she will find no answers here: “Porque la historia es un jardín, y un jardín no es ninguna pregunta. Un jardín es un jardín. Tiene recovecos y setos y pérgolas y sitios donde esconderse y sitios donde olvidarse un periódico, pero no tiene respuestas” (“Because the story is a garden, and a garden is no question. A garden is a garden. It has nooks and crannies and arbors and hiding places and places to forget a newspaper, but it has no answers”; 37). Once again the narrator insists that the story has no answers, but he describes it as a reflection of both the garden where Olga plays and the multilayered hybrid sites of contemporary culture. The significance

is in the structural and thematic layout of the narrative, a quantum blending of distinct discourses that models the subject's relation to today's *mélange* environments.

A Sublime Multiplicity

If Olga represents the individualistic subject attempting to maintain singularity at all costs within an environment of hybridity, her attraction to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the character Angel derives from the unsettling revelation of this identity's emptiness. In the last scene when the vampires emerge her fear comes to the surface and her individuality is annihilated by a monstrous multiplicity. The birth of the plural selves that reside within the individual invokes a Burkean sublime, where the subject comes into being through the intimation of its own destruction.

Olga's terror of the "nodo de vacío" ("node of emptiness") gives her a sublime pleasure. She recalls watching the series in a weekly bulimic ritual with other models in London, ingesting large doses of junk food: "las tardes orgiásticas de televisión y carbohidratos, esperando el momento crucial, la sintonía familiar, la Hora de la Serie Favorita" ("the orgiastic afternoons of television and carbohydrates, waiting for the crucial moment, the familiar theme song, the Time of her Favorite Program"; 43). These sensual binges are a deviation from the strict regimen they undergo in order to maintain the well proportioned forms of their outer beauty.

For Olga, the ritual culminates in the dark fascination of Angel's eyes, which are a reflection of her own vulnerability. When Angel gains a soul he becomes human and mortal; he is constituted as an affective subject and simultaneously opened up to annihilation. His mortality and affectivity give him a debilitating empathy for those whom he himself has

destroyed, and here Olga must see her own terror of dissolution within the chaotic otherness that surrounds her. Like Burke's concept of the sublime, then, these afternoon escapes are an eroticized antidote to measured and civilized beauty, which provides Olga with a pleasurable glimmering of the terror that lies at the core of her existence.

This terror manifests itself in the 'Dream of Russia' and comes to fruition at the scene of her death, when Olga's shell of perfect beauty and oneness is broken down and the monsters from within emerge to invade the Catalan coastal town. Olga rides in the back of Forstmann's Mercedes while he frantically drives towards a hospital and the remains of her unborn child are expelled from her body: "de entre sus piernas mana sangre y también algo más. Algo viscoso y lleno de cosas sólidas" ("blood flows out from between her legs along with something else. Something slimy and full of solid things"; 55). The monsters that break out of the basement of Vera's home are compared to this child and also to the vampires from Olga's dream:

La trampilla del sótano estalla en pedazos y por el hueco asoma una maraña de brazos ansiosos. Brazos acabados en garras y brazos sin piel y brazos con la piel del color del moho. Los brazos se agitan y forcejean con la furia voraz de un recién nacido...Varios cuerpos emergen a la superficie, algunos incompletos, con mordeduras sanguinolentas y con llagas abiertas de las que rezuma limo amarillo...A algunos les han cosido los ojos o las orejas o la boca...Otros tienen los ojos amarillos y hocicos lobunos como los vampiros de *Buffy*...Las criaturas del sótano avanzan por la casa, destruyendo todo lo que encuentran a su paso...Cuando el primero de ellos abre la puerta del jardín, sus gargantas llenas de limo emiten un aullido colectivo de miedo. Los rayos

cósmicos. Luego el que ha abierto la puerta mira por entre los dedos y por fin se aparta las manos de la cara. Contempla el jardín. Hay un mundo ahí fuera, un mundo nuevo. Sale al jardín, seguido por sus hermanos y hermanas. (55-56)

The basement's trapdoor explodes into pieces and a tangle of anxious arms appear in the opening. Arms ending in hooks and arms without skin and mold-colored arms. The arms toss and struggle with the voracious fury of a newborn... Various bodies emerge onto the surface, some of them incomplete, with bloody bite marks and open wounds that ooze a yellow slime... some of them have had their eyes or ears or mouths sewn shut... Others have yellow eyes and wolf-like snouts like the *Buffy* vampires... The creatures from the basement march through the house, destroying everything in their path... When the first one opens the door to the garden, their slime-covered throats let out a collective frightened howl. The cosmic rays. Then the one who has opened the door looks between his fingers and finally takes his hands off his face. He takes in the garden. There is a world out there, a new world. He goes out to the garden, followed by his brothers and sisters.

With Olga's death the walls between her interior and exterior are broken. The beauty and oneness of her body is ruptured, giving way to this monstrous multiplicity of incomplete or unusable body parts. The monsters that she kept hidden within come out into the world and face the cosmic rays. They destroy the ordered home and break down the walls separating the basement, the house and the garden. Symbolically, this scene annihilates Olga's careful

separation of inside and outside aimed at maintaining an empty individual identity. This identity is broken up into a multitude of ‘brothers and sisters’ who discover a new world.

The space they discover is defined by a breaking down of narrative planes, beginning with their emergence from the basement which the narrator had formerly described as the location of isolated scenes with no relation to the rest of the text. The chapter is also dominated by a blimp floating above the sea advertising the Superlanguage academy that supposedly sponsors the story, an image that imposes itself on all the characters. Forstmann sees it repeatedly as he looks for a road sign indicating how far he is from the hospital, and the narrator suggests that it is “probablemente la última imagen memorable que su mujer va a ver en su vida” (“probably the last memorable image that his wife is going to see in her life”; 53). For Vera the blimp is a revelation when Forstmann calls her and she looks out the window as she listens to him: “se tapa la boca y comprende que la historia ha estado patrocinada desde el principio” (“she covers her mouth and comprehends that the story has been sponsored since the beginning”; 54). Here the character realizes she is playing a role in a fiction and even sees the advertisement that is ostensibly directed at the audience outside the frame of the story.

On many different levels, then, the symbolic walls are broken down in this scene, evoking a generalized chaos and loss of meaning. Paradoxically, the narrator claims that here everything is becoming clear: “Ahora estamos por fin preparados para entender la importancia de todo esto. Ahora sabemos lo de los jardines rusos y lo del teléfono en la mano del padre y muchas cosas más” (“Now we are at last ready to understand the importance of all of this. Now we know about the Russian gardens and the telephone in the father’s hand and many more things”; 53-54). In this sense, when the monsters burst out of the basement

they are like Lacan's "lamella", the pure libido life force which is repressed through the subject's entry into a symbolic order. For Žižek the living corpses and body parts from horror films represent this force: "A lamella is indivisible, indestructible, and immortal - more precisely, undead in the sense this term has in horror fiction...the obscene immortality of the 'living dead' which, after every annihilation, re-composes themselves and clumsily goes on" (62). Like the 'powerful sense of direction' sprouting over the 'corpse of causality' that I discussed above, these creatures symbolize Olga's repressed multiplicity, ready to emerge and discover 'a new world'.

Now I have been arguing that this scene is a sublime moment where Olga's terror of dissolving within the fragmentation of her surroundings comes to fruition, leading to a new multiple subjectivity. However, there is obviously no terror for the reader in this passage. Any emotional reaction that Olga's death could provoke is undercut by the ironic use of the advertising motif, such as in the following sentence: "nuestro patrocinador les invita a que disfruten abundantemente de las muertes conjuntas de nuestra heroína y de su descendiente nonato" ("our sponsor invites you to abundantly enjoy the joint deaths of our heroine and her unborn descendant"; 53). The monsters that emerge from the basement appear to be creatures from a low budget horror movie, an impression that is reaffirmed when the narrator suggests that if this were a film it would end with one of them seeing the camera and approaching it in a grainy and poorly-lit image. Like Olga watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the reader is put in the position of a viewer of an ironic horror narrative that nevertheless symbolically manifests the problem of subjectivity in the contemporary world. This comic gesture encapsulates the sublime destruction of dividing walls and an embrace of the irrationality that defines the contemporary world.

This anti-rationality is a common element in the four stories of *Los ríos perdidos de Londres* [*The Lost Rivers of London*], part of a narrative mapping process that charts a mythical relation between subjects, surrounding spaces and the world in general. I analyzed in *Nocilla Dream* the influence of Situationist psychogeographies that describe the synchronic relations between urban layouts, patterns of movement and subjects. Applied to contemporary virtual geographies this leads to a timeless space of networked relations that move between digital and analog planes. The mapping process in *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*], on the other hand, reveals a concern with the clashes that occur between local places and the global space of flows. In Calvo's stories these two fields are inseparable, composing a dense, stratified and always local space that defies rational coordinates. While "Mary Poppins: Los ríos perdidos" ["Mary Poppins": The Lost Rivers] follows a group of nineteenth-century English intellectuals who adopt pagan mystical practices, the present day protagonists of the book's other three stories experience occult dimensions of reality through their contact with media images and discourses. The focus is not on how these media connect users to a virtual geography but rather on the hybrid ground established in the encounter between subjects, the spaces they occupy and the spaces they imagine through the media they consume.

In the next chapter I analyze a similar mythification of space and subjectivity in *Coda* by Esther García Llovet. The barren suburban highways and peripheral spaces that make up the novel are reminiscent of *Nocilla Dream*'s context, but these stories are localized within the area surrounding an unnamed small city. They return again and again to the same places through the eyes of different characters and through transformative frames like camera lenses and architectural models. These places within the impersonal landscape are like nodes or

hotspots on a web of collective dreams and vague traumas that connect all of the subjects. They are also the site of crossings both material (travelers, immigrants, the ruins of an airplane crash) and virtual (photographic images, models, affective memories and associations). These two texts, then, move away from the definition of space as physical presence and towards a view of patterns that integrate the physical and the virtual, where individual subjectivity gives way to a diffuse multitude.

Significantly, given the title of this thesis and the ongoing discussion of Bachelard's intimate spaces, the major metaphor for Olga's self-enclosure is the home. Her nationalist identity is compared to a house attacked from the outside. The monsters emerge from the basement, the hidden zone of houses where inconvenient or unseemly objects are stored. In *Coda* the rupture or invasion of homes also serves as a metaphor for reduced subjectivities that are unable to survive direct contact with the outside world. These narratives imply that what Bachelard calls felicitous spaces can no longer be found in the intimacy of home but must be sought at the crossroads where different cultures, spaces and individual perspectives meet in contemporary social geographies.

Chapter Five – Esther García Llovet’s *Coda: There’s No Place Like Home*

Gaston Bachelard argues that the human psyche is structured through its relation to home spaces that are both intimate and connected to the immensity of the surrounding world. Throughout this thesis I have been investigating how such notions of inhabited space play out within the splintered cultural geography portrayed in new wave texts. Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Dream* and Gabi Martínez’s *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*] seek out the ‘psychic reverberation’ of Bachelard’s ‘felicitous’ spaces within the global/local networks of social relations that define the present context. *Nocilla Dream* imagines an idealized world space subjectivity that dwells within these virtual spaces, structured like the novel itself as a rhizomic jumping between different places, forms and ideas. *Ático* on the other hand portrays a localized place and time that is connected to the “space of flows” and “timeless time” (Castells) of electronically based networks. Nevertheless, both processes are undone by the persistent tensions between local place and global space.

As seen in the last chapter, “Una belleza rusa” [“A Russian Beauty”] not only intermeshes the global/virtual with the local/physical but these different elements are largely indistinguishable. Here the search for a home for subjectivity is portrayed as a hopelessly individualistic and nationalistic enterprise, continually undermined by Olga’s pluralistic surroundings. Her desire to maintain a fixed identity isolates her within a self-enclosed bubble. The story’s conclusion symbolically breaks down the walls that have left her incommunicated, and a monstrous multiple subjectivity emerges to confront the chaos of the contemporary world. This encounter is cathartic but also terrifying, as the individualized territory-based self is annihilated to make way for a new uncharted subjectivity.

Esther García Llovet's *Coda* also conceives a plural subjectivity within an environment that defies the logical ordering of rational space and time. While Calvo's story focuses on one character's relation to her surroundings, though, *Coda* tracks the crisscrossing routes of different characters through its largely incomprehensible landscape. The book's six stories are set on the outskirts of an unnamed coastal city, where various characters move about the highways that connect isolated and impersonal spaces: a gas station, an airport, a hospital, residential communities, supermarket parking lots. Strange and often ghostlike apparitions also emerge from the cornfields and forests that surround the roads: a pack of Great Danes imported from Holland, the disembodied voice of a child killed in a car accident, a *Corredor de Fondo* ("Long Distance Runner") who offers large sums of cash in exchange for photos of crime scenes. These locations and improbable elements tie together *Coda*'s different narratives. The recurrence of certain events, objects and numbers and the intertwining of different characters' paths give the text the air of a choral novel.

However, the exact nature of the relations between these different characters is obscured, the meaning of repeated patterns of numbers is never revealed and there is no chronology that would allow the reader to place the separate stories within a coherent frame of reference. Unlike many choral novels, the different characters do not together represent an amalgamated image of the city, the region or the nation. Their experiences do not combine into a synthetic image or come together as components of an organic whole. Yet these characters do inhabit a common environment and appear to share certain affective responses to their surroundings. Taken together, the various stories construct a scattered but markedly collective experience of the urban area. *Coda* seeks out connections between different individuals who come to compose a plural subjectivity.

Coda's collective subjectivity is reminiscent of recent theoretical interest in Spinoza's idea of *the multitude*, which is opposed to Hobbes's singular collective body *the people*. The concept of the people envelops the inhabitants of an administrative territory and enables the democratic state to claim to represent the sum of its constituents. The will of the multitude, on the other hand, cannot be absorbed by an institution. This social entity manifests itself in unpredictable moments and ever-changing formations, always retaining its character as a plurality and preserving the autonomy of its component parts (Hardt and Negri).⁴⁴ This political context is not directly reflected in *Coda*, but the stories share the interest of multitude theory in how subjects can be conceived collectively in the absence of a singular framework such as the city, the region or the nation.

These centralized spatial entities may have always been imagined communities, to use Benedict Anderson's term, but they do stand as symbolic representations or ideal models of the subject's integration within a larger social unity. Like the multitude described by Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri or Paolo Virno, the characters in *Coda* compose an ambiguous collectivity that can never be captured within a single image or idea but can only be conceptualized through plural overlapping frames of reference. Just as the multitude surges unexpectedly around a concrete action and then disappears in equally rapid fashion, the commonalities linking *Coda*'s different characters come into sharp focus at certain moments but are ultimately shrouded in mystery.

⁴⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri use the concept of the multitude as a model for understanding recent events where a spontaneous and informal coalition has risen to override the power of national or international institutions. Well known examples are the internationalization of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, the protests at the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle or the Bolivian protests over the privatization of water. Given the widespread loss of faith in the ability of democratic or revolutionary actions to create new and improved institutions, these temporary strategic alliances between diverse social actors now appear to be more effective at vindicating human rights and denouncing injustice.

As in “Una belleza rusa”, the invasion of houses from the outside functions in *Coda* as a key metaphor for the breakdown of isolated subjectivities. While in Calvo’s story the house is a symbol of individual and national identity, *Coda* presents the home as a space where common objects and habits allow families to participate in a collective intimacy. In the story “Kilómetro 9” [“Kilometer 9”] a photographer hired to take pictures of burglarized homes learns that the removal of those objects leaves the inhabitants disconnected from each other and frequently breaks up marriages. Families are highly fragile in a world where their domestic order finds no corresponding order on the outside. In fact, most of *Coda*’s protagonists are exiles from a lost domestic intimacy, left to fend for themselves in a splintered social geography. As Virno says of the multitude, they “share the feeling of ‘not feeling at home’” (35). Within this context, *Coda* explores how the characters’ individual experiences may fit into the uneven collective experience that frequently insinuates itself in the fragmented spaces they inhabit. The book also asks how they can bridge their intimate selves to the intimacy of the other in the absence of any stable common frame of reference.

In this chapter I explore these questions in four sections. First I analyze *Coda*’s symbolic portrayal of contemporary space, characterized by fleeting and fragmented social relations. Secondly I explore the intricate patterning of codes and interrelations that traverse this space through dreamlike elements that suggest something of a collective experience. Thirdly I investigate the repeated use of mirrors, lenses and other displays of objects as symbols both of the gaps between different characters’ intimate selves and of the possibility of bridging these gaps. At the end of the photographer’s story in “Kilómetro 9”, she and another character come together to form a hybrid view of the surrounding world and their place within it, hinting at an emergent multitude subjectivity. In the final section I analyze

the theme of traumas that tie different characters into a generalized collective trauma, Virno's feeling of not feeling at home, which is also expressed in the form of the text.

Fragmented Spaces

Coda's highways and suburban spaces are zones of transit where relations between different characters are generally ephemeral. Most of them appear to be exiled in this chaotic environment, suffering from the traumatic loss of a loved one or the disintegration of a family home. In "Kilómetro 17" ["Kilometer 17"] a bus driver is emotionally paralyzed by the loss of his son, which also caused his wife to go insane. In "Kilómetro 27" ["Kilometer 27"] Pablo still grieves the death of his younger brother Julio years earlier in a car accident. In "Kilómetro 0. Un Ford negro" ["Kilometer 0. A Black Ford"] two adult brothers, Lobo and Casio Soubiron, yearn for the domestic stability their alcoholic father never provided them. Deprived of these family anchors, *Coda's* characters spend much of their time along the highway whose kilometer markers give the stories their names. This space composes a fractured social geography, and the breakdown of families in the stories alludes to a generalized lack of stable community within the fragmented landscape.

In this section I analyze the bus driver's story, where the highway is configured as an in-between zone of random crossings between anonymous subjects, and the beginning of the photographer's story in "Kilómetro 9", where her camera captures families immediately after their homes have been burglarized, showing how the violation leaves them segregated, disoriented and vulnerable to the chaos outside.

The bus driver recounts his regular journeys between a hospital maternity ward and a train station, with only three stops along the highway between them. The steady rhythm of

his back and forth trips along a quiet road is punctuated by the snapshots of others' lives that he observes in the rear view mirror. The driver describes himself as stuck in a feedback loop of endless repetition since the tragic loss of his family. While his disengagement is obviously rooted in this trauma, it is also contextualized within the book's spatial layout dominated by suburban highways. The driver tells us that he chose to cover a rather solitary route where faces rarely appear more than once. Here he avoids any engagement with his surroundings or with others. Most of his time is spent watching the road: "miro fijo a la línea amarilla sobre el asfalto y más allá, al fondo, detrás de la carretera, al punto de fuga del horizonte hacia el que fugo, invariablemente, nueve horas al día" ["I look fixedly at the yellow line over the asphalt and further down, at the end, behind the highway, at the vanishing point to which I flee, invariably, nine hours a day"; 12). The highway is a continuous evasion leading to no destination, only to a distant horizon that he never reaches. This activity conveniently requires no thought or interaction, filling up his days with the meaningless pursuance of a yellow line.

The little contact he does have with others is through his rear view mirror, with 'occasional glances' that break up his fixed gaze on the road (12). His relation of these snapshot images creates stories about the passengers but ultimately suggests an unknowable or inexpressible otherness. A man and woman get on at the hospital with a newborn baby and the man gives her a Manila paper bag containing soap, canned food and stockings: "un regalo antiguo y descolocado, como de estraperlo o de mercado negro" ("an old-fashioned and dislocated gift, like something contraband or bought in the black market"; 13). The man's face perturbs the bus driver, who speculates that he is not the child's father and that the mother is not aware of this. A second couple is characterized as one of those marriages that

need the constant company of third parties because when they are alone they fall into a state of stupor. A mother who arrives alone with her newborn is described as so young that “aún no tiene expresión en la cara para decir alegría o pavor por este hijo que lleva en brazos como un paquete de papel manila” (“she does not yet have expression on her face to speak happiness or terror for this child that she carries in her arm like a Manila paper package”;

14).

The driver invents narratives out of the portraits of others he sees in his mirror, giving them a life beyond the short bus ride. Nevertheless, he also highlights the unknown, the incommunicable or the incompleteness of what he sees: something mysterious and menacing in the man’s face, the inability of the young woman’s face to express her sentiments, the married couple’s dependence on others to fill an inner lack. The repetition of the Manila paper image highlights this unknowable otherness. The paper bag that the man gives the new mother contains gifts that are ‘dislocated’: they belong to an antiquated context and here they cannot be interpreted, like the man’s intentions which are opaque and vaguely threatening. When the narrator says the young mother carries her baby like a ‘Manila paper package’, the new life she holds in her arms takes on similar implications. The baby is a mystery that produces opposing sentiments (‘happiness’ or ‘terror’) in its mother, feelings which themselves are also inexpressible.

Taken as a whole these separate snapshots at first appear to represent isolated lives that have nothing to do with each other. The bus moves along the nowhere space of *Coda*’s highways, carrying assorted passengers whose particular realities form a patchwork of superimposed images. The man’s ‘black market’ gift, out of place within its surrounding context and seemingly belonging to some anachronic underground system of exchange and

meaning, emphasizes the general discordance that pervades this environment. On the other hand the narration sets up a poetic correspondence between different characters when the Manila paper image is transferred to the other woman, who is also taking her newborn home from the hospital. This analogy hints at vague commonalities which are not readily apparent.

Additionally, the driver's dramatic interpretations of these families are likely conditioned by his personal trauma. There is an implicit connection between the families with newborns he observes behind him and the past that he continuously flees in the road that lies ahead. The space of the bus, then, is not devoid of social or historical connections. Its fragmentation and apparent anonymity conceal a complex interplay of corresponding affective experiences and traces of the past. While the driver seeks emotional detachment in the repetitive routine of his work, the images in his mirror draw him into an affective entanglement with his surroundings.

Despite these connections the driver perceives an unknowable alterity in the passengers on his bus, at times connected to a collective energy that is out of his reach. This is especially evident in his narration of a group of eight-year-old girls dressed in school uniforms who ride the bus one afternoon:

Revolotean, secretean, se suben las falditas escosesas. Se arreglan el pelo unas a otras, largo y lustroso, en trenzas de cuento de elfos. Pelo de nutria. Esta es la estación, salta una, con los brazos en jarras en medio del pasillo. Bajan corriendo, temblorosas, felices, aterrorizadas de pura expectación, en una alegría que se les ahoga en un hipido en las gargantas. (13-14)

They flutter around, share secrets, lift their Scottish kilts. They weave each other's hair, long and lustrous, into elf story braids. Nutria hair. Here is the

station, one of them jumps, her hands raised in the middle of the aisle. They run off the bus, trembling, happy, terrorized with pure expectation, with a joy that drowns in hiccups inside their throats.

The girls move together as a pack in a sensual choreography: fluttering around, lifting their skirts, arranging each other's hair, whispering in one another's ears. They possess a vivacious quality emphasized in their frenetic movements and in the touch of their hair, thick and corpulent like the hair of nutria. However, their vitality is expressed in whispers and gushing emotions that drown in hiccups when they try to voice them.

The schoolgirls share an intimacy and a collective sensuousness from which the driver is excluded, limited to observing them through the rear view mirror. While there are connections among the various subjects that move through *Coda's* highway space, the perspective of characters like the driver highlights their distance from any sort of collective intimacy. Even that which the schoolgirls share seems to flutter about nervously, unable to find a stable grounding or voice in the book's splintered social environment.

Unlike *Coda's* other protagonists, the photographer in "Kilómetro 9" does not appear to be affected by the loss of a loved one. She is drawn by personal inclination to the anonymity of the book's suburban highways, having come to live in the coastal city precisely because she has no past or connections there (21). She is something of an outside observer, and her photographs capture both the temporariness that pervades the environment in general and the fragility of the domestic enclaves of relative permanence and order that exist within the book's landscape.

Her exploration of the city begins with nocturnal excursions into industrial zones and the streets of residential subdivisions, which she describes as "territorios de paso, nunca de

permanencia, nunca de hábito, no de costumbres” (“transit zones, never for staying, never habitual, not of customs”). There she photographs stray dogs, referred to both as *cimarrones* (“runaways”) and *expulsados* (“exiles”; 22). They travel in packs and come back to their old neighborhoods at night, unrecognized, to urinate on their former homes. One evening she happens upon a burglarized house that has been cordoned off by the police. Using a zoom lens, she discreetly takes several pictures of the ransacked living room and the disoriented victims who sit or stand in separate areas of the room:

Todo estaba revuelto, todo desordenado y preocupante, las sillas volcadas, los cuadros rajados, los libros por el suelo. De pie en una esquina un niño lloraba sin taparse la cara, contra la pared. Tenía los pantalones mojados. Tomé una foto, intentando no perder el pequeño movimiento de sus manos y el perfil desorientado de su madre sentada en el borde de una mesa. Hice varias fotos más de los policías tomando huellas y datos, de una mujer joven cruzada de brazos en medio de la habitación. (23)

Everything was in a mess, everything disordered and worrisome, the chairs turned upside down, the pictures ripped open, the books all over the floor. A child standing in the corner cried without covering his face, against the wall. His pants were wet. I snapped a picture, trying not to miss the small movement of his hands and the disoriented profile of his mother sitting on the edge of a table. I took several more photos of the police taking fingerprints and collecting information, of a young woman standing cross-armed in the middle of the room.

The family is as disordered by the robbery as their furnishings. None of them seems to know what to do: the child does not cover his face; the disoriented mother does not comfort him; the young girl stands in the middle of the room in a posture of indecision or self-enclosure. The family's segregation is emphasized by their scattered positioning and by the picture the photographer takes of the child's hands against the profile of his mother. Neither his hands nor his mother come to his aid and he stands helplessly against the wall. Like the room's objects the family members and their bodies have been torn apart and thrown out of place by the invasion.

If the nocturnal suburban spaces that the photographer frequents are temporary zones of transit, the domestic environment of the home is presumably a space of customs, habits and permanence. However, this passage suggests that the outside is constantly encroaching on the integrity of these family households. Just as the runaway dogs return to their former homes to relieve themselves on the door thieves also enter houses and rip apart their insides. These breaches apparently leave the inhabitants disunited and vulnerable to the outside.

In a later passage, when the photographer is hired by a mysterious company to take pictures of other burglarized homes, she describes them as "Casas desvalijadas que quedaban con los intestinos al aire" ("Ransacked houses with their intestines turned inside out; 26) and mentions couples who separate after a robbery "como si en el asalto al espacio común...se hubieran llevado algo que inauguraba o deletreaba la relación y al faltar no les había dejado más remedio que huir espantados de sí mismos y del otro" ("as if in the assault on the common space...something was taken that had inaugurated or spelled out their relationship and with it missing they had no other choice but to run in fear from themselves and from the other one"; 27). When the homes are turned inside out the relations constructed over this

common space often fall apart as well. Moreover, the family members' images of themselves and of the others become frightening without these self-enclosed places that cemented their relations and their collective identity.

In this sense the psyches of subjects in *Coda* are not only structured by the contours of the domestic spaces they inhabit, as Bachelard argues, but they are in fact dependent on the continued existence of this space. When it is ransacked they are left open to an invasive exterior that ruptures the relations and identities they have built together with the home's other inhabitants. Those subjectivities cannot survive on the outside because, unlike Bachelard's suburban French houses, their common grounds are not integrated within a larger order.

Coda's social-spatial relations reflect the uncertainty that Virno describes as a key characteristic of today's world of decentered production, economics, politics and culture. He argues that contemporary subjects are confronted with a vast world devoid of the "substantial communities" that formerly provided "a channel which is capable of directing our praxis and collective experience...a channel made of repetitive, and therefore comfortable, usages and customs, made of a consolidated ethos". *Coda's* characters evidently lack the comforting practices of stable communities built over shared values that filter the world's immensity into a series of ordered phenomena. Their surroundings are largely incomprehensible and full of unknowable others living separate realities. They are only able to establish collective habits and meaning within the walls of reduced domestic spaces, but the sudden loss of a family member or even of the objects that constituted a household faces them with what Virno terms the "anguish...provoked purely and simply by being exposed to the world" (32).

Virno draws on Heidegger's distinction between the concrete *fears* experienced within substantial communities and the generalized *anguish* ('not feeling at home') that the subject suffers when distanced from its community of shared habits and codes and confronted with the basic uncertainty of existence. However, he claims that today these communities no longer exist and there is no distinction between inside and outside. Therefore, concrete fears responding to specific dangers or changes are immediately "colored by an unidentifiable anguish...fused together with a more general disorientation in the presence of the world in which we live" (33). In this sense the crises *Coda's* characters experience at the rupture of their domestic units expose them to a more generalized crisis, the shared feeling of not feeling at home which according to Virno characterizes the contemporary multitude.

Virtual Patterns

As mentioned in the introduction, *Coda's* different characters and stories are interrelated through recurring figures, events and patterns of numbers. They are not, then, faced with a vast world outside of any community but are rather part of a fragmented and elusive community that does not channel individuals into a collective practice or experience. In this section I analyze the Soubiron brothers' story "Kilómetro 0. Un Ford Negro", pointing out patterns and virtual traces of other characters' stories that allude to a complex web of interconnections in *Coda's* suburban space. This story portrays *Coda's* city as a hybrid of virtual and actual dynamics, symbolic of the fragmented but interconnected spaces of today's world.

The narrative takes place over six hours, following Claudio and Lobo Soubiron through various roads and parking lots in search of a black 1975 Ford. They have been told by Fonedá— a teenage boy on a scooter who also appears in other stories— that if they steal this car and deliver it to a certain dock before six in the morning they will be given enough money to leave the city behind. Throughout the night Fonedá and various others appear intermittently and give them assistance. They do not know who has called the “apuesta” (“bet”) and sometimes suspect that these other characters are also involved and are purposely setting them off course.

At one point Fonedá informs them that their missing father Piero is ill and needs their help, after which they also look for information on his whereabouts. Everyone seems to know more about their father and their family history than the brothers themselves, and the story becomes a combined search for the key to a better future and for a reconciliation with their troubled past.⁴⁵ These two desires come into conflict as the brothers argue over whether to look for their undeserving father, an alcoholic that never provided them a stable home. However, everything seems to come together at the end when they are shown a narrow alleyway leading to a hidden warehouse where Piero and the black Ford are waiting for them.

The Soubiron brothers’ relations to their surroundings are defined by two dynamics. First everything ends up somehow connected to a hidden logic. The bet, their father, the assorted people they come upon apparently by chance and their mostly arbitrary movements around the city all converge and lead them to the coveted automobile. The other aspect is their ignorance about the past history and underlying patterns that seem to structure their

⁴⁵ It is perhaps also significant that the Ford they need to find was made in the same year as Franco’s death, 1975, which the narrator calls “año de fugas y fugópatas” (“year of escapes and escape artists”; 108).

lives. This lack of knowledge makes the city an imprisoning space that must be escaped and forgotten:

Esta es la apuesta. Ganarla y dentro de seis horas desaparecer por fin de esta ciudad y meter la primera contra quince años de semáforos en rojo, contra los años de Prohibido el Paso, de Desvío Obligatorio, de Calle Cortada; dejar atrás, dejar a la espalda la ciudad y el recuerdo de todos los nombres y del propio nombre. (108)

This is the bet. Win it and in six hours drive away at last from this city and shift into first gear against fifteen years of red lights, against the years of No Entry, of Detour, of Dead End; leave behind, leave the city behind and the memory of all its names and your own name.

The references to traffic signs in this quote are of course metaphors for obstacles presented by uncontrollable circumstances, insinuating that the last fifteen years of the two brothers' lives have been a series of frustrations. At the same time the Soubiron brothers are driving throughout the story, and their interaction with the city appears inextricably linked to its layout of streets and highways. Moreover, it is later clarified that fifteen years ago the construction of the house where they were to live with their father was abandoned (115-17).

Like other characters in *Coda*, then, the loss of a family home exiled them to the city's incomprehensible outside space. In this sense the traffic signs are no accidental metaphor but in fact indicate that their social environment and their affective experience of the world are structured by the urban grid. To leave behind the city's familiar roads is to leave behind the memory of everything and everyone they know, including their own identities. Here Bachelard's notion of the home space that forms the psyche is extended to

the contours of the entire city. In contrast to the home, it is not a felicitous space by any means but rather an incomprehensible and confining space. Bachelard's ideal of the subject seated within a comfortable intimacy that is connected to a cosmic immensity is reversed, as the Soubiron brothers are seated within a labyrinthine complexity that is also claustrophobic.⁴⁶

However, the physical space that shapes their existence is also full of virtual tracings of other peoples' stories, the Soubiron brothers' own past and possibilities of a better life. Casio and Lobo either do not see or do not understand these virtual presences, but they suggest the existence of codes and patterns which, if properly read, could heighten the subject's engagement with its hybrid surroundings. The first of these is in a parking lot where the narrator tells us that if a tracing of the same lot three hours ago were superimposed onto the present space we would see a 1975 Ford in spot C18: "Ya no está, es un fantasma su calco. Pero estuvo" ("It's not there anymore, its tracing is a ghost. But it was there";111). Similarly, they later pass through the ruins of a subdivision housing project that was never finished and the narrator remarks that, unbeknownst to them, C18 was to be their home. The narrator describes an idyllic family scene that would have occurred there (117).

These elements are virtual not in the sense of being unreal but more along the lines of Deleuze and Guattari's idea that the virtual is an integral part of reality. They describe the virtual as the energy forces that have led up to a particular moment which takes on a particular form and the potentialities of future forms or situations that may be created. While

⁴⁶ This story owes much to the North American tradition of the road movie and its themes of escape and aimless wandering. The possibilities of freedom from rigid social structures expressed in this genre are undercut here by the circular structure of *Coda's* highways, which imprison the Soubiron brothers, as well as impression that Fonedá and others are constantly watching from the shadows, implying a hidden regime of control.

Western thought generally separates the real from the merely possible, Deleuze and Guattari conceive each circumstance as a combination of the actual forms it takes and the virtual energies residing within these forms (Hardt 16-19). In the Soubiron Brothers' story, rather than merely relating what occurred three hours ago in the parking lot or fifteen years ago in the housing project the narrator inserts superimposed images that refer to past situations, alternative presents and future possibilities. These images give real presence to immaterial forces, configuring *Coda's* space as a hybrid of the physical and the virtual traces of past energies, present alternatives and future potentialities.

Virtual elements in "Kilómetro 0" also connect the Soubiron brothers to other stories and characters that have passed through the same spaces. Casio, for example, sees and hears a plane crashing in the woods that is not actually there but that echoes a plane wreck in the forest from the story "Kilómetro 27" (114-15). At another point the brothers steal a car from a lot of abandoned vehicles and find a photograph of the bus driver from "Kilómetro 17" with his wife Claudia and their son Jorge (120-21). As opposed to the Ford and the family home that was never finished, here the Soubiron brothers actually see the virtual traces of other times and other peoples' experiences: in the first case through a hallucination apparently caused by the ghost energies present in the forest and in the second through a photograph that documents the driver's ruptured bliss. Lobo and Casio have no idea what these images mean, but their presence suggests that the traumas of the characters in *Coda* leave behind trace energies, which are integrated into the labyrinthine terrain. The repetition

of the number C18, which is also important in two other stories,⁴⁷ hints at mysterious patterns that link different times, places and characters in the book's strange narratives.

The brothers are unable to read these virtual presences and patterns, only wishing to leave the city and start over with a clean slate. The story's ending, however, implies that there is no escape. Here they are miraculously shown the way to the hidden warehouse, where the car is waiting and they are reunited with their father, but as they are driving to the prearranged location four Great Danes emerge from the cornfields, causing them to swerve into an oncoming bus. Just before this accident the narrator tells us that their hopes for a way out with the Ford are misguided:

Sólo necesitan un trueque, un salvoconducto, una clave. Y no saben que no es esto. No saben que no era una pieza lo que faltaba en el dominó, que no era un objeto de menos, un Ford, una caja negra, la plaza C18, una fotografía; que lo que falta es el diseño, la trama es lo que falla, una ausencia de escala, la traducción, el código. (152)

They only need a deal, a safe-conduct, a key. And they do not know that it is not about this. They do not know that it was not a piece which was missing in the dominoes, that it was not a lost object, a Ford, a black box, seat C18, a photograph; that what is missing is the design, the pattern is what falls short, an absence of scale, the translation, the code.

The allusions to the black box from the plane crash in "Kilómetro 27" and the photographer's obsession with taking pictures in "Kilómetro 9" extends this reflection to all of *Coda's*

⁴⁷ In "Kilómetro 27" this is the seat number of a passenger from the crashed plane. In "Kilómetro 9", as discussed below, it is also the seat number of a passenger on a plane that participates in one of the story's (and the book's) crucial passages.

stories and characters. They chase after panacea objects in an attempt resolve their anguish, but it is not a problem of missing objects. The problem is rather with understanding the codes or patterns that define their hybrid environments. However, the narrator expresses doubt that these patterns are even guided by an overall design. Translation between such disparate realities is difficult, even if they are intertwined in the same web that connects the book's different characters and situations.

Coda reflects N. Katherine Hayles's assertion that today's virtualized societies are characterized by "the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns" (*How We Became Posthuman* 13-14). Hayles argues that such a view of reality breaks down the presence/absence dualism underlying much of Western thought and replaces it with a new paradigm of pattern and randomness. From this perspective, pattern is the realization of a set of possibilities and randomness is the much larger set of everything else. Here systems do not take their meaning from any origin (real or imagined) nor proceed to a known end but evolve towards an open future marked by unpredictability and contingency (285-86). Unlike the other narratives in this thesis García Llovet's book makes little reference to the telecommunications and media infrastructures to which Hayles largely attributes this new paradigm, but its allegorical space is a sprawling hybrid of actual and virtual elements run through by complex patterns. These strange patterns, which emerge unexpectedly from seemingly random associations, compose a symbolic representation of the cultural view of the world Hayles describes. It poses the problem of how subjects can locate themselves— find a place like home— within a reality defined by unpredictability and contingency.

The reader is also faced with the problem of understanding the book's mysterious patterns. On the one hand *Coda* is full of nods to the reader making us privy to information that the characters do not know, such as the photo of the bus driver in his family that the Soubiron brothers find. However, this is something of a trick as these details and interconnections do not finally add up to some greater meaning. They blend with the basic indefiniteness that characterizes the narratives, underlined in the Soubiron brothers' story by the absence of details regarding the make of the Ford and the amount of money at stake, as well as the unfamiliar and foreign names (Foneda, Soubiron, Casio, Lobo, Piero). There is no key that would allow us to unlock the book's codes, which amount to nothing more than a vision of the interpenetrations existing among diverse characters, stories and spaces.

The Intimacy of Others

Coda also constructs a symbolic representation of today's virtualized reality by emphasizing the mirrors, lenses and other mediated displays that shape the characters' views of their surrounding spaces and the others they encounter within these spaces. In the absence of stable frameworks that guide social practices and meanings, many characters conscientiously frame others within images in an attempt to achieve affective engagement with their surroundings. We have seen this process in the case of the bus driver, who constantly builds stories out of the momentary images glimpsed in his rear view mirror. However, the narration emphasizes a basic disconnection between him and the passengers he observes, who possess an unknowable otherness that cannot be captured in images.

This dynamic is reminiscent of the dialectic of contextualization and raw otherness that Roland Barthes and Jacques Rancière describe in photography and other audiovisual

media. Barthes distinguishes between the “studium” of a photograph, the general cultural field over which the image is constructed, and the “punctum”, chance elements that reach out to “puncture” the spectator. The studium contextualizes faces, gestures, scenery and actions within an overall history, politics or culture, while the punctum consists of non-codified seemingly random elements that disturb the ordered ‘silent discourse’ of the studium. These are details that escape the photographer’s framing— a texture, a piece of jewelry, a gesture— even more silent as they say nothing, they are just there, creating a direct connection between the viewer of the photograph and the place and time that has left its mark on the photo’s paper (63-66). According to Rancière, this dialectic does not only exist in photography but in fact belongs to a wider modern “regime of imageness” born in the 19th century (13), which continuously plays on the “inter-convertibility” between two “potentialities of the image”: “raw, material presence” and a “discourse encoding a history” (11).

In other words, images in modern art and literature simultaneously refer to an alterity, an irreducible otherness that can never be completely known, and encapsulate this otherness within a story or genealogy, effectively concealing its alterity. In the hypermediated context of today’s world, where images and sounds are constantly cut, pasted and rearranged, this dialectic movement “assumes a boundless store/library/museum” where all images of reality coexist and where they can all be broken up and reassembled, playing on a “triple power”: the singularity of an irreducible otherness, the contextualization of the studium and “the combinatory capacity of the sign” (30-31).

These three forces are at work in the narrative of the bus driver. Every passenger he observes in his rear view mirror suggests a story, a contextualizing discourse, but at the same time each reflected image contains a mystery, an unknowable otherness. Representative of

Coda's fragmented suburban environment, these passengers do not compose together a uniform studium but rather scattered bits of diverse realities that are placed side by side in random fashion. As argued above, the book's motif of ruptured domestic havens portrays those lost spaces as a shared common ground forming a collective intimacy. When they are broken apart, as is the case with the driver's loss of his son, characters are exiled to a fragmented urban grid where the intimate alterity of others is always out of reach. However, the juxtaposition of diverse realities creates interconnections and common meanings among them. These allude to the "combinatory capacity" of the image-signs the driver reads in his mirror and also to the existence of mysterious underlying patterns linking the different characters and stories of the book's splintered social geography.

In this sense those scattered realities do belong to an overall system of meaning but it is one that favors ambiguity and fragmentariness over clarity and order. *Coda*'s imagery is reminiscent of what Martin Jay terms the baroque scopic regime in his brief history of Western visual culture in the modern era. He opposed this current to the rationalist Cartesian scopic regime established by Renaissance perspectivalism, which implies an unmoving subjective position that dominates the field of vision. The baroque, on the other hand, is characterized by "opacity, unreadability and the indecipherability of the reality it represents...disparaging as a result any attempt to reduce the multiplicity of visual spaces into any one coherent essence" (17). *Coda*'s baroque combining of incongruent images emphasizes the diffuse lines of its characters' subjective identities, vulnerable to the chaos of their surrounding spaces.

In this section I return to the photographer's story, where she confronts her environment as a series of images and her relation to it as a question of framing. She thus

works against the multiplicity of *Coda*'s splintered spaces by creating lasting images that assert a firm subjective viewing position. In the first pages she also aims to capture the essence of others whose lives and selves have been turned inside out by a robbery, leaving them stripped of those objects that contextualize their place in the world. She creates a new frame, establishing a direct relation between the subjective eye of the camera and the eyes of the photographed other. Yet she is always distanced by the mediating lens.

She is then assigned by the mysterious company for which she works to enter homes unseen and carry out strange tasks for unknown reasons. Here she occupies something of a shadow reality and eventually quits the job for fear of losing her sanity. In her subsequent work as an industrial photographer she travels the world and begins to lose any sense of place at all. She has become a dislocated person. At the end of the story she is reunited with a fellow photographer who has gone blind, and they come together to form a hybrid view of the surrounding world and their place within it. A collective intimacy is formed within the splintered spaces and interconnecting patterns of the book's strange poetic world, offering an alternative to *Coda*'s domestic homes that exist as isolated and fragile islands in the urban grid.

I discussed above a passage where the photographer takes pictures of a disoriented woman and her two children after their home has been burglarized. In the same scene she is able to penetrate the house with her camera and capture a man's intimate self that has been laid open to the outside world by the violation of his home, suggesting that the loss of the separate sanctuaries of domestic intimacy could lead to a more direct relation to the outside world. After photographing the first three characters in the living room with her zoom lens,

she follows in the path of the thieves, sneaking around back and entering through a door whose lock has been forced open. She finds the man sitting alone on the floor:

con la cabeza en la mano y el teléfono descolgado a un lado, me miraba caminar hacia él. Alzó la cabeza sin dejar de mirarme. Me detuve frente a él. Parpadeó varias veces, con la boca entreabierta en una pregunta. Entonces me arrodillé despacio frente a él, levanté lentamente la cámara enfocando con cuidado su cara desconocida y tomé una foto resplandeciente, una foto indefensa y pálida de su sorpresa, de su infortunio, de un retorno inesperado a la inocencia, su cara asaltada. (23)

with his head in his hand and the telephone off its hook at his side, he was watching me walk towards him. He tilted his head without taking his eyes off me. I stopped in front of him. He blinked several times, with his mouth open in a question. Then I kneeled slowly in front of him, I lifted the camera carefully focusing on his unknown face and I took a radiant picture, a helpless and pale picture of his surprise, of his misfortune, of an unexpected return to innocence, of his robbed face

Throughout this passage the man is watching her, their eyes meeting in a mutual gaze, whose intensity is underlined by his blinking and the question on his open mouth. She moves slowly and carefully as if to not break the line of communication that has opened up between their eyes. The photo she takes glows with the helplessness of his 'unknown' and 'assaulted' face, the face of a stranger whose sudden return to innocence has left him exposed to the prying eyes and lens of the photographer.

In the same way that the robbers have perforated the intimacy of the house, her photo pierces the man's intimate self which has been left unprotected by his surprise and misfortune. When the photographer enters the ransacked house and captures the helpless expression on the victim's face she breaks through the walls which normally frame that individual's relation to his family and the surrounding world (what in a photograph Barthes would call the "studium"). His living breathing otherness is laid bare for her to see. His fixed stare and questioning mouth indicate that he is also contemplating her in an attitude of open curiosity.

However, she places the camera between their eyes and reframes him, taking a picture "*de su sorpresa, de su infortunio, de un retorno inesperado a la inocencia*" ("*of his surprise, of his misfortune, of an unexpected return to innocence*"; emphasis added). The image is *about* his surprise and misfortune, converting his return to innocence into a theme, concealing his alterity within a new story. While the photographer is drawn to victims whose domestic frames have been ruptured, opening up their insides to the exterior world, she always puts a camera between herself and these others. She remarks on this tendency when she tells about mothers in burglarized houses who wish to confide in her: "Querían decirme algo. Contarme algo indecible, para lo que esperaban una ocasión, una señal en mí" ("They wanted to say something to me. Tell me something untellable. She responds to their plaintive looks with small talk aimed at distracting them from their worries, but later she realizes that "mis trivialidades las apartaba del lugar de intimidad esperado...Yo sólo sé hacer fotos" ("my trivial remarks moved them away from the place of intimacy they hoped for...I only know how to take photos"; 28). She is unable to occupy and share the 'place of intimacy' opened up by the trauma of others, limited to taking pictures of it from an outside position.

Nevertheless, for the photographer this act of framing is her mode of communication with the outside world and those who inhabit it.

Her activities draw the attention of a mysterious shadow organization, called the Muratori Sociedad muy Anónima, which buys her snapshots of the helpless man and then assigns her to take pictures of other burglaries. Her contact in the organization is the “Long Distance Runner”, a character seen in many of *Coda*’s stories jogging along the highway and playing an ambiguous role in some of the book’s bizarre events. He approaches her after she leaves the scene of the first robbery and offers her a wad of cash for the photographs. Thereafter he calls her with instructions for increasingly unusual assignments, which in retrospect all seem to be part of a training that leads up to the epiphany in the story’s final scene.

The organization sends her into homes whose occupants are away or sleeping to carry out tasks whose function is unclear: she waits for a phone call at a specified time and picks up without saying anything; she tries on a piece of clothing left on a bed then leaves it in a corner of the garage; she spends a night observing a blind man sleeping after a heroin injection; she removes small objects. Only this last activity reveals a purpose as she disposes of hairpins, stockings or stained tissues that seem to indicate adultery. She observes that when we sometimes feel as if someone has been in our house and check for missing objects “nunca se nos ocurre que puedan haber llevado algo que estaba de más, que no debíamos ver, que no debía asaltarnos en nuestra propia casa...las evidencias que deben quedar fuera del margen” (“it never occurs to us that they might have taken something that did not belong, that we shouldn’t see, that should not accost us in our own house...the evidence that should remain outside the margin”; 39). This statement suggests that her work is somehow

connected to protecting and maintaining those domestic frames of intimacy that are so fragile to the outside world. She explores those parts of the houses that the occupants themselves do not see. It is a lonely zone, which she compares to the delirium of absinthe or the thrill of LSD (38). Her only occasional company is a fellow photographer named Bacca, who is something of a kindred spirit. When he appears to be going crazy she quits the job, fearing for her own sanity.

Muratori, then, deprives the artist of the camera that she uses to frame what she sees and sends her into invisible zones of reality that cannot be captured on film. If what she and Bacca do at this point can be called art, it is immersed in the baroque project of “representing the unrepresentable” (Jay 18) and experiencing “dazzling, distorting, ecstatic” visions (17). Like baroque art, their work is tinged with a foreshadowing of melancholy and madness.⁴⁸

In her subsequent work as an industrial photographer, she travels through various continents taking pictures of offshore oil platforms, bridges, hangars, highways, shipyards or railroads. These spaces are essential parts of a global infrastructure of production and transport but, like the objects she previously removed from houses, are generally unseen. In this sense she has explored the hidden areas of both private homes and a globalized world. If her grasp on reality was threatened by the strangeness she discovered at the margins of the domestic frame, here she is de-localized by the uniformity of the spaces she inhabits. She passes through different countries carrying no lasting impression of any of them and finally returns to *Coda's* city but lives in a different neighborhood and it does not seem like the same city (41-42). She has her camera now and is able to frame what she sees, but it does not

⁴⁸ The characterizations of baroque art in this paragraph are taken from Martin Jay, but he is paraphrasing Christine Buci-Glucksmann's descriptions in *La raison baroque: du Baudelaire à Benjamin* and *La folie du voir: de l'esthétique baroque*.

serve to place her surroundings or herself within a broader context. The world appears to have become one great expanse of nameless and faceless spaces for her: “No veo a nadie. No conozco a nadie. Sigo siendo fotógrafa” (“I do not see anyone. I know nobody. I am still a photographer”; 42).

Significantly, then, her reencounter with the Muratori organization begins when she spots herself in an architectural model of the city’s airport, locating herself within a virtual reflection of her surrounding space. Assigned to take photos of the terminal building, she comes across this minutely detailed seven-meter-long replica, which includes the magazines in the newsstands, tired travelers sleeping on benches and even a figure of the photographer looking at a miniature of the model itself. In the middle of a hub of global transport, this extraordinary reproduction pinpoints her exact situation in space and time, as seen from another specified position:

Una réplica minuciosa del aeropuerto tal como se vería desde cien metros o quizás ciento cincuenta metros antes del aterrizaje, sentado en el asiento C18, cuando se está pensando ya en quién nos espera al llegar a tierra y en la hora local y en si hará frío ahí fuera. Y sobre el techo de aluminio, en una esquina, he descubierto un brillante punto rojo del tamaño de una moneda. «Usted está aquí». Una circunferencia indudable. De un rojo muy vivo. Usted está aquí, en este aeropuerto de esta ciudad, no en ningún otro aeropuerto de ninguna otra ciudad. Y en este momento. Este punto rojo le contiene y le detiene con esposas a la espalda. Finalmente y después de tanto tiempo. Finalmente alguien me ha señalado con el dedo, a vista de pájaro antes de tomar tierra, desde el asiento C18, me ha señalado como un sujeto identificable en esa

marca roja y yo también contemplo esa señal que es inequívoca y sólida como mis codos sobre el cristal...observo y me observo desde el aire en ese punto que no es otra cosa que un resumen indiscutible de la propia historia: «Usted está aquí». (43)

A minute replica of the airport as it would be seen from a hundred meters or perhaps one hundred fifty before landing, seated in C18, when we are already thinking about who is waiting for us down below and what the local time is and whether it will be cold out there. And on top of the aluminum roof, in a corner, I discovered a bright red dot the size of a coin. “You are here”. An unquestionable circumference. A very vivid red. You are here, in this airport of this city, not in any other airport of any other city. And in this moment. This red dot contains you and arrests you handcuffed from behind. Finally and after so much time. Finally someone has signaled with their finger, from a bird’s eye view, before landing, from seat C18, has signaled me as an identifiable subject in that red dot and I also contemplate that sign that is unmistakable and solid like my elbows on the glass...I observe and I observe myself in that dot which is nothing more than the indisputable summary of my own history: “You are here”.

Here the photographer is able to see herself from the perspective of another, an experience that constitutes an epiphany for her because she finally feels localized within the impersonal spaces she inhabits. The model combines three different perspectives into a hybrid view of her own location with respect to her surroundings. The first is the objective layout of the airport with all the details that a single pair of eyes could never take in at one time. The

second is that of the passenger in the plane, specified by seat number, distance and the thoughts he is likely having. The third is that of the photographer herself, who is able to combine her point of view with the other two. The passenger's finger seems necessary for the photographer's revelatory experience, at last being signaled from another subjective position which she can also adopt as part of her own outlook. The views of these two strangers come together within the virtual frame of the airport replica.

Additionally, the global space of the airplane, where the passenger has been transported from a different time zone and weather system, merges with the concrete local space on the ground. The passenger and the photographer, who will never meet or interact, are conceived as occupying a shared hybrid space, their convergence along with all the others seen in the model becoming a definitive representation of their personal histories.

The fact that the model is based on the viewpoint of passenger C18 connects the scene to those mysterious patterns of numbers and ghostlike visions that run throughout *Coda's* stories. While the Soubiron brothers are unable to see the virtual tracings linked to this number, the photographer does and the vision represents a turning point in her trajectory. She has approached her surroundings through photographs that distance her from others, concealing their alterity within a frozen image. She has also entered inside the domestic frames of others, witnessing their intimate places but not their actual presence, resulting in an intoxicating and unnerving baroque experience of time and space. The model is the result of a framing, like her photographs, but here the relation of viewing subject to viewed object is broken down into a hybrid perspective that combines different subjectivities. The repetition of C18 suggests that this plural subjective positioning links her to the virtual patterns underlying the relations between different objects and subjects in *Coda*.

Significantly, the passenger's viewpoint that provides the frame for this hybrid perspective is markedly reminiscent of Cartesian perspectivalism. The passenger is an eye in the sky, detached from the visual field he is observing, which his gaze takes in wholly and reproduces with exact mathematical precision. Of course, this viewpoint is enveloped in a multiple framing that becomes more baroque in its juxtaposition of different perspectives. While the Cartesian framing of the scene asserts a definitive subject position, then, it is also placed in relation with a ground-level view, immersed within the visual field, representing a more partial and fragmented subjectivity. The former acts as an anchor for the latter, allowing for the relational self-localization discussed above.

These two viewpoints merge within the objective layout of the airport space established by the model. The real-time reproduction of passengers sleeping and current newspapers in this replica goes beyond the abstraction of architectural models and suggests the sense of 'liveness' produced by webcams or satellite imaging (Bolter and Grusin). In this sense the framing that finally connects the photographer to her surrounding space is mediated by the technologies of real-time communication that connect the local and the global.

However, the photographer's reunion with her former employers implies that besides being tuned into these virtual frames she must also create intimate connections with those in her immediate space in order to localize herself as a subject. These two imperatives are interrelated as the viewing of the model initiates the reencounter: she notices, within the replica, the Long Distance Runner observing her from a nearby bench. He takes her in a car to a beach to see Muratori, the head of the company whom she believes she has never met. To her surprise Muratori is in fact Bacca and in the time since they last saw each other he has gone blind. What appeared to be an omniscient and all-powerful organization, pulling the

strings behind the bizarre occurrences in *Coda*'s stories, is in fact made up of the Runner and this fellow photographer who shares her curiosity for the margins of normal life, but who has now lost his sight.

Standing together on the sand he gives a speech that, like the photographer's viewing of the airport replica, is configured as an act of mutual localization in space and time:

Entonces Bacca empieza a hablar, Muratori empieza a hablar, decide romper a hablar incansablemente las horas que siguen, contra el viento habla, y su hablar se despliega y crece como la marea a nuestro alrededor o como un error o una falla guardada demasiado tiempo y al nombrarse saliera a la superficie, la boya, tañendo su campana en la oscuridad del mar abierto, descendiendo en los valles de las olas y remontado la cresta de las olas, la atalaya desde la que puede señalar cada uno de los derroteros elegidos y los derroteros descartados, señalar el lugar preciso en el que ahora, en este momento, se encuentra, y nombrarlo, finalmente, como el lugar que recoge en un nudo todo lo que queda por acontecer. «Usted está aquí». (46-47)

Then Bacca begins to speak, Muratori begins to speak, he decides to start talking and he talks tirelessly through the hours that follow, he talks against the wind, and his speaking unfolds and grows like the tide around us or like an error or fault line kept hidden too long and which upon being named comes up to the surface, the buoy, ringing out its bell in the darkness of the open sea, descending into the valleys of the waves and climbing up the crest of the waves, the vantage point from which it can signal each one of the paths taken and the paths discarded, signal the exact place where right now, in this

moment, he is located and name it, finally, as the place that collects in a knot all that is yet to occur. “You are here”.

Bacca’s speech, and the communication he establishes with the photographer, appears to blend with the sea and its rhythms. It is described as something emerging from the ‘darkness of the open sea’ to explain these characters’ pasts and futures. Like the airport model, this moment is powerful both because it represents the coming together of different subjects and because it pinpoints exactly where they are. The spatial localization of the replica is supplemented here by a temporal localization. The ‘vantage point’ of Bacca’s speech shows the routes taken and the routes discarded in their pasts, as well as the futures that await them. In other words it signals the virtual presences that configure the present moment. These various strands come together in a knot that, like the red dot of the model, defines the characters by identifying their emplacement in space and time.

Throughout the story the photographer has sought off-the-grid spaces like industrial areas or vacant homes. She has looked for those elements of reality found outside the margins or in the naked expression of a man whose domestic space has been ruptured. However, she loses herself in the loneliness of these margins. In this scene she forms a deep connection with another character, establishing a reference point that metaphorically rides the line between the darkness of the sea and the light of the surface. The text presents a hybrid subjective space at the border between the physical world above the water and the symbolic zone beneath where *Coda*’s patterns and virtual presences lie.

This space is realized in the act of communication between Muratori and the photographer, as is emphasized in the story’s bizarre conclusion. The blind Muratori undresses, fixes a harness around his waist and walks into the vast sea, with first the Runner

and then the photographer holding onto him from the shore. Muratori's distant breathing is audible and the photographer tightens and loosens the rope to the movement of the tide: a rhythmic communing between different bodies. This dual subject is half immersed in the virtual patterns and half planted on the physical shore. While this is the last scene in this story, Muratori and the photographer are seen later in "Kilómetro 32" at a gas station. She observes a beautiful sunset, describes the scene to him and then places a camera in front of his eyes so he can take a picture (98-99). Muratori knew that he was going blind for years and it is now clear that he was training the photographer to become his eyes, creating a dual perspective: she sees the visible, he sees the invisible.

This notion of localization within the multiple currents and layers of a fragmented social geography replaces the idea of a stable domestic abode that shapes the subjective psyche. *Coda's* homes are not connected to the cosmic immensity of the greater world, as with Bachelard's idealized suburban French houses, but are rather isolated enclaves that cannot survive contact with their surroundings. The home-centered view of human psychology supposes that social practices and meaning are seated in concentric circles: the bedroom, the house, the metropolitan or rural area, the region, the nation, the world and the larger universe. In such a system virtuality— in Pierre Levy's sense of language, tools and other socially constructed abstractions of concrete spaces and objects (67-73)— intertwines these different levels in an ordered fashion. *Coda* (like the other texts analyzed in this study) envisions a world where the virtual and the actual are no longer wrapped together in such a neat package. The fragmentation of social relations means that the virtual is not embedded with the material, rendered invisible by ideology's naturalization of culturally constructed

meaning. Instead the virtual is sprawled out over a splintered landscape in strange patterns and ghostlike visions.

A Shared Trauma

Many of these virtual presences are connected to traumas that are personal in nature. Nevertheless, together they compose a landscape defined by a generalized loss of the intimate domestic spaces that bind subjects to their surroundings. In this way *Coda* reflects Virno's idea that the contemporary multitude shares a sense of not feeling at home. While for Heidegger this feeling—the origin of anguish—is an eminently private individual experience belonging to those individuals who are outside the community, Virno asserts that today “there is nothing more shared and more common, and in a certain sense more public” (34). These are not exiles from stable communities but their rootlessness rather stems from the lack of such communities. For Virno, this experience becomes the center of the multitude's “own social and political practice” (35). The question emerges, then, as to what shared social and political practices, if any, are available to *Coda*'s characters as they are exiled from their domestic havens and face the chaos of the outer world.

In this section I discuss the symbolic importance of an intersection in *Coda*'s stories nicknamed *kilómetro cero* (“kilometer zero”) because accidents occur there on a daily basis. This crossroads between two highways is a point of convergence within the splintered landscape, where the personal traumas and virtual patterns purveying the book appear to come together. I argue that this point represents the connections that can be established among different characters and the hope that a new social praxis could be built over their shared feeling of exile. Additionally, I argue that the narrative itself is shaped as the

expression of trauma, a strategy that invites the readers to participate in the shared exile the stories represent.

This intersection is introduced at the end of the bus driver's story in an oneiric vision stemming from his personal trauma. As described above, the bus driver flees the pain caused by the loss of his wife and son in the looping repetition of his back-and-forth route. However, the monotony of his routine is broken up by the appearance of a red bus inexplicably parked on the shoulder of the road, full of silent and unmoving passengers. At one point when he passes the occupants have left and instead the Great Danes move up and down the aisle of the bus. He then sees the passengers further down the road walking single file with his wife Claudia pulling up the rear, heading towards *kilómetro cero* because crashes occur there on a daily basis. The driver finally gets off the bus at the intersection and approaches Claudia from behind, the story ending with the suspended image of him reaching to touch her shoulder as she points to a group of crows flying above the fields.

The driver suspects that the bus, the highway and even the cornfields are mere figments of his imagination: “un trabajo orfebre, una encarnación...La coda de mi cuaderno de débitos” (“a silversmith work, an incarnation...The coda of my debit book”; 18). He decides that these images must be unreal apparitions, products of the trauma that still haunts his mind. Everything outside the fragmented realities of his bus– the scattered and apparently disconnected stories he witnesses in his rear view mirror– appears to be a projection of his own tortured fantasy.

However, the red bus parked along the highway shoulder, the Great Danes and the other elements of his reverie appear in other stories as well. The bus and the dogs in particular are connected to strange situations, often tied to the characters' individual traumas.

They are actual elements but are intimately linked to *Coda*'s virtual patterns. They reflect Hayles's analysis of the contemporary cultural view that "material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns", signaling a paradigm shift from presence/absence to pattern/randomness (*How We Became Posthuman* 13-14).

The *kilómetro cero* intersection appears to be a node within these complex patterns, exercising a magnetic pull on several of the book's characters. On the one hand *kilómetro cero* is the scene of deadly crashes, alluding to the violent juxtaposition of different subjects' trajectories in the highway dominated landscape. In "Kilómetro 0" when Claudio and Lobo Soubiron finally find the black Ford this is where the Great Danes emerge from the cornfields, causing them to swerve and head straight for a bus coming from the airport. In "Kilómetro 27" Pablo's brother Julio is killed at the intersection as the two are returning from the airport in the same bus after going to see the model from the photographer's story. It is not clear whether this is the same crash or another accident involving the airport bus. In any case the patterns of *Coda*'s landscape lead them all to this crossroads, where Pablo loses his brother and the Soubiron brothers are blocked from escaping the city.

The fact that the bus driver's wife Claudia and her group are drawn to *kilómetro cero* further links driver's dreamlike vision to these mysterious patterns. In contrast to the violent crashes that characterize the intersection, here the narration suggests the possibility of communion between different subjects. The place is described as a striking convergence point with religious overtones:

El cruce forma cuatro ángulos rectos perfectos, una cruz singular en el mundo.
Aquí el maíz es de dos especies, una cobriza y otra decididamente roja,
purpúrea, de un color tinto oscuro, como si hubieran salpicado las

plantaciones con baldes de vino, una bendición del pan de los domingos. (15)

The cross forms four perfect right angles, a unique cross in the world. Here there are two species of corn, one copper-colored and the other decidedly red, purple, the color of dark red wine, as if the plantations had been splashed with buckets of wine, a Sunday bread blessing.

The intersection is a space of confluence, where different roads, species of corn and colors come together. It also has marked spiritual qualities: a cross that is unique in the world, the surrounding cornfields bathed in holy wine. This Christian imagery evokes collective rites that bind religious communities together, and Claudia and her companions seem to be on a sort of pilgrimage. Virno claims that “the counterpart of anguish is the shelter provided by religious experience” (32). When the driver gets off the bus and approaches Claudia he is certainly looking for shelter from the chaotic environment he inhabits.

While for the driver that shelter would consist in recovering the collective intimacy he once shared with his family, his gravitation towards the *kilómetro cero* intersection suggests a different sort of coming together. Just as the photographer and Bacca are united in a hybrid subjective viewpoint of their location in space and time, the intersection’s spiritual imagery suggests the potential for a confluence of *Coda*’s exiles in its hybrid space. Of course, apart from the photographer’s story this potential is never realized in the book. The characters are focused on the recovery of lost objects or dreams, ignorant of how their traumas are intermeshed with the traumas of others and the virtual patterns haunting the landscapes through which they move. Yet these interlacing traumas and patterns hint at the possibility of a social praxis built over the feeling of not feeling at home, the collective trauma that touches all of the book’s characters.

This hope of subjects connecting through a shared disorientation may explain the vague and perplexing nature of *Coda*'s stories. The reader is continually assaulted with repeated symbols and ambiguous relations among different passages, characters and stories. The meaning of these tropes is often as impenetrable as the dense cornfields and forests that populate the book's suburban landscape. The text's refusal to specify could be interpreted as an avoidance of Barthes's *studium*, the framing discourse that identifies subjects within a genealogy and conceals what Rancière refers to as their intimate alterity. By not contextualizing the narrative leaves the door open for the readers to feel the collective anguish that the stories portray. In the final pages, as the Soubiron family heads towards its inevitable encounter with the Great Danes at *kilómetro cero*, the narrator addresses the readers in plural, calling on us to touch the words:

habéis hablado con vuestras manos un texto que lleva a cualquier parte, no a la vuestra, a cualquier parte, esta coda, como esta autopista desierta donde empieza a amanecer poco a poco...los Soubiron reunidos y ahora juntos y finalmente solos, solos, solos, corren sobre el asfalto como corren las yemas ciegas sobre el texto que habéis leído y no os lleva, el texto en relieve bajo los dedos ciegos que dice, que dice, que dice que las letras son como granos de maíz, las manos abiertas sobre los campos, los maizales a izquierda y derecha de la carretera, el maíz púrpura y vino bajo el terral que pasó hace horas. (152-53)

you have all spoken with your hands a text that leads to any place, not to yours, to any place, this coda, like this deserted highway where it is just beginning to dawn...the Soubirons reunited and now together and finally

alone, alone, alone, ride over the asphalt like the blind fingertips ride over the text you all have read, the text in relief under the blind fingers, that says, that says, that says that the words are like kernels of corn, the open hands over the fields, the cornfields to the left and the right of the highway, the purple and wine corn beneath the breeze that passed hours ago.

This passage emphasizes the touch of the readers' hands on the page, both speaking and reading the text. The fingers are blind, not seeing but rather feeling and participating in the succession of words that make up the narratives. They also participate in the movement of the characters, whose car rides over the road like the reader's hands over the page.

The narrator calls the book a coda, echoing the bus driver's description of the spectral visions outside his bus windows and thereby suggesting that the text itself is also a manifestation of unresolved traumas. The term coda generally refers to a brief final part of a musical piece that differs from the main part but picks up on some of its themes. The driver's visions and *Coda* itself, then, are portrayed as the transformation of traumatic experience into a haunting afterthought.

This idea is reinforced by the circularity that the ending imprints on the book: the images of the calm cornfields and highway are reminiscent of the driver's narration of the same road that begins the first story; the crash with the airport bus brings this story back to the ending of "Kilómetro 27", whose reference to the airport model in turn links back to the ending of "Kilómetro 9". This interlacing suggests a collapsing of time into circular patterns, just as the space of the city collapses in on the Soubirons as they are finally escaping. The emergence of the Great Danes from the cornfields to cause the crash, culminating their unsettling appearances throughout the book, is like the uncanny return of repressed elements.

All of this suggests the “involuntary reenactments and obsessive repetitions that typically constitute the acting out of traumatic experience” (Hayles, “Trauma” 141).

Like the other texts in this thesis, *Coda* constructs symbolic representations that imagine how contemporary subjects are related to, and a part of, the fragmented hybrid spaces they inhabit. With each of the preceding narratives I have pointed out metaphors or literary strategies that signal how a fictional text may be conceived and read within the social geography these same narratives portray. *Nocilla Dream* presented a visual map of the different characters and places in the novel that combines digital and analog realities and also assimilates interior subjectivity with the exterior world. *Ático [Top Floor Apartment]* compared the writer to a computer programmer creating virtual realities out of his or her own experience of global and local spaces to be actualized by readers in other locations and times. “Una belleza rusa” [“A Russian Beauty”] used the literary practice of adaptation as a key to understanding the way subjects process the chaotic blending of cultural influences in a hybrid globalized environment.

Similarly, *Coda* introduces the trauma trope that connects its diverse narratives and characters into the very form of the text. What is important is not the specific traumas that each of the characters suffer but a more generalized trauma, Virno’s feeling of not feeling at home. In calling upon the readers to touch and feel the words, to move down the lonely suburban highway with the characters, the narrative configures the literary text as a communication of the trauma that purveys contemporary culture. The stories rehearse different forms of trauma that are integrated within the highways, airports and audiovisual reproductions making up the physical infrastructures of our societies.

The blind fingers that read the text echo Muratori's training of the photographer to see both the visible and the invisible, as well as a passage where the Soubiron brothers remember how the Long Distance Runner taught them to run blindfolded (113). In this way the text is portrayed not only as a communication of trauma but also as training in the reading of those codas created by the contemporary experience of not feeling at home. It attempts to tune the reader into the hybrid virtual/physical patterns that connect different subjects within a fragmented social world.

Conclusion

As I discussed in the introduction, two problematic premises underlie much of the public discussion on the new wave authors: first, they are said to have nothing in common with other post-dictatorship Spanish narrative, opposing their experimentalism to the general dominance of realist forms. Secondly, this profound rupture is attributed entirely to the audiovisual media that shape present day society and the very consciousness of the new writers. The weaknesses of these arguments are well illustrated in a debate between Javier Calvo and Agustín Fernández Mallo on the pages of the Catalan daily *La Vanguardia*. This polemic took place shortly after Nuria Azancot's 2007 article "La generación Nocilla y los Afterpop piden paso" ["The Nocilla Generation and the Afterpops Demand Their Turn"] launched the new wave writers into the spotlight of the Spanish literary world.

Calvo distances himself from the new "generation" and rightly points out that their claims of experimentation and novelty with respect to preceding generations are often based on characteristics that are not at all new: "Resulta difícil creer que la GN [Generación Nocilla] esté introduciendo en la literatura española, tal como se puede leer en alguna parte, cosas como la fragmentariedad, la influencia [norte]americana, la cultura pop o la mezcla de géneros, cosas que ya hace tiempo que estaban aquí" ("It is difficult to believe that the NG [Nocilla Generation] is introducing into Spanish literature, as can be read in some places, things like fragmentariness, [North]American influence, pop culture or the mixing of genres, things that have been here for quite some time now"). The new writers cannot be grouped together solely in terms of formal experimentation, as uncomfortable precedents (Calvo names Rodrigo Fresán, Luis Magrinyá, Francisco Casavella and Ray Loriga) will always call such definitions into question.

Fernández Mallo dismisses this objection as stemming from an outdated linear view of history. He argues that newness in literature and art is a process of reconfiguration whereby recycled themes and modalities come together as organs to form a new body. Literary forms are like empty boxes “en los que cada generación va introduciendo su propia construcción del mundo” (“in which each generation goes about introducing its own conception of the world”). What distinguishes the new writers, he argues, is not merely their innovative forms but how these forms are shaped by a new context. Their work is necessarily different from that of the 1990s because they belong to a new technological milieu:

Es imposible que los narradores que hoy están innovando escriban como los que innovaron hace diez años porque en aquel tiempo no existían ni un internet generalizado ni una serie de tecnologías que configurase no sólo las obras literarias sino algo mucho más medular, la propia manera de pensar.

It is impossible that the fiction writers who are innovating today write like those who innovated ten years ago because at that time there was neither a generalized Internet nor a whole series of technologies to configure not only literary works but something much more fundamental, our very way of thinking.

In other words, the appearance of certain technologies has reformulated human consciousness to the point that writers do not write in the same way as even a decade ago. They may use the same forms but they are recombined in order to construct the world in a different manner and express this new way of thinking.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ As the critic Antonio J. Gil González points out, this exchange between the two authors represents a classic struggle for what Bourdieu termed cultural capital: “como cumpliendo el ritual inexorable de la lucha y las tomas de posición en el campo literario” (“as if they were carrying out the inexorable ritual of the struggle

The problem with this second premise is that it is difficult to pinpoint the new way of thinking in the texts without referring to fragmented forms, the inclusion of images, metafictional devices and other practices that, while not so new, can be connected to the way digital technologies are supposed to be reshaping our vision of the world.⁵⁰ The existence of all these literary strategies prior to our era makes it difficult to argue convincingly that even their increased frequency reflects a new digital consciousness.

Rather than trying to identify a ground-breaking generational consciousness that determines the new wave fictions, it is more productive to analyze how the narratives themselves represent and constitute the contemporary world. To this end I have investigated the theme that most seems to unite their varied texts: the conjunction of local/physical places and global/virtual space that shapes subjectivity in the present era. My research has been guided by the idea that the authors (as well as the readers and critics) making up the new wave phenomenon do not merely reflect new social practices. They are also actively engaged in constructing new visions of subjectivity that respond to a changing cultural environment.

I have often used Gaston Bachelard's concept of inhabitation to analyze the way characters in the new wave fictions are defined by their relations to hybrid surroundings. Bachelard's spatial phenomenology may seem anachronistic in the contemporary realities represented by new wave narratives, as it is tinged with nostalgia for a pre-industrial rural

and the positioning within the literary field; 74). Calvo, whose three books published up to the moment had earned him a reputation as an innovative narrator in tune with contemporary audiovisual culture, separates his work from that of the new arrivals and deflates their claims to timeliness and literary experimentation. Fernández Mallo, whose *Nocilla Project* trilogy is of course an essential ingredient of the Nocilla Generation hype and who has become something of an overnight literary celebrity, defends the group's innovative character and attributes Calvo's attitude to closed-mindedness.

⁵⁰ More elaborate formulations of Fernández Mallo's argument can be found in Vicente Luis Mora's *La luz nueva: Singularidades en la narrativa española actual* (*The New Light: Singularities in contemporary Spanish Narrative*), which was discussed in the introduction, or Irene Zoe Alameda's article "La era Gates y la reinención del lenguaje" ("The Gates Era and the Reinvention of Language").

world and somewhat essentialist in its fixation on this particular mode of living (Ockman 79). Nevertheless, his focus on place as the deepest embodiment of consciousness is certainly relevant to the intimate relation these fictions establish between subjects and their surrounding spaces. Moreover, the idea of a home space as a solid base for subjectivity is explored and questioned in many new wave novels and short stories, revealing the enduring desire for spaces of intimacy that are integrated within a larger cosmic order.

I have shown how many characters attempt to establish a ‘felicitous’ place— a place like home— somewhere between the global space of flows and the local places of the network society. In Agustín Fernández Mallo’s *Nocilla Dream*, for example, Kenny’s home in the Singapore airport is a material embodiment of the novel’s world space that absorbs all local particularities. In Gabi Martínez’s *Ático* [*Top Floor Apartment*] Eduard establishes a cocoon home in the top floor of a high-rise where he can observe both the city below and the global flows from a distance. Precisely in these homelike spaces, the narratives introduce ambiguities and dissonance that destabilize the subject’s relation to the outside world.

In the ‘translocal’ spaces of Javier Calvo’s “Una belleza rusa” [“A Russian Beauty”] and Esther García Llovet’s *Coda* the idea of home is associated with inflexible subjective identities that are incapable of assimilating today’s fragmented social geographies. Calvo’s story employs the house as a metaphor for Olga’s individualistic and nationalistic shell that seals her off from communications with the outside world. In the scene of her death, the birth of her child is symbolically preempted by the destruction of this shell and the sublime annihilation of her singular identity, which allows a beastly multiplicity to emerge from the basement and integrate within her multi-layered surrounding space.

In *Coda*, domestic spaces are portrayed as isolated zones of fragile collective intimacy that are constantly threatened by the chaos of the outside world. They are eventually torn apart, leaving subjects to confront alone a world of disjointed spaces and inscrutable virtual presences. These virtual visions form patterns that suggest a shared experience of trauma linking the different subjects in the book's splintered suburban environment. The ending of the photographer's story hints at a new collective subjectivity that could be emerge by tuning into these patterns.

Taken as a whole, these narratives imply that Bachelard's model for subjectivity— the subject seated within intimate spaces that are connected to a larger cosmic order— are no longer viable in the contemporary world. In a context of spaces that are interconnected, multi-faceted and fluctuating, subjects must be open to plural identities. In order to truly connect with others and form part of a collectivity, they must be able to view the world from multiple perspectives, amalgamating different viewpoints and incorporating both the virtual and the physical. However, the hypothetical or metaphorical character of the new fluid subjectivities presented in these fictions underlines the difficulties and ambiguities involved in seeking this new way of inhabiting the world. These fictions do not present or reflect new subjectivities but rather participate in an ongoing societal dialogue about how to confront a changing cultural environment.

As opposed to the arguments discussed above that these works represent a revolutionary digital consciousness, this interpretation allows us to contextualize the new wave within the postmodern and globalized context that characterizes post-Franco Spanish narrative in general. Several factors influence a fictional field that has emphasized individualized constructions of reality: the quick transition from a centralized authoritarian

government to a democratic system integrated within a globalized and postmodern world; the splintering of progressive anti-fascist opposition movements into a plethora of social vindications around regional cultures, gender, sexual orientation and other internalized forms of oppression; the linguistic turn of the 1960s and 70s in European intellectual circles, where it became widely accepted that language constitutes reality.

The *nueva narrativa* of the democratic era responds to these social and intellectual tendencies. I have proposed that it configures the text as a becoming or a creation of the self through writing, at the same time underlining the gaps between this solipsistic self and any outside reality. As a counterpoint the Generation X fiction of the 1990s constructs the self as a product of mostly foreign mediated images and discourses. Characters inhabit a hyperreality of films, rock music, drugs and parties which is ultimately revealed to be pure simulacra, leaving them stranded in a hostile local space that has no meaning for them.

However, characters in both Generation X and the more dominant forms of Spanish narrative under democracy are dislocated subjects. They are constituted by virtual discourses— language, the imagination, media— that do not reverberate with their surrounding spaces. In this sense the new wave's tendency to construct characters more through their relations to the spaces they inhabit, both local and global, is a novelty within the context of contemporary Spanish fiction. However, the highly problematical nature of this construction reveals the persistence of the crisis of subjectivity that dominates post-Franco narrative.

In addition to studying how these texts portray contemporary relations between subjects and space, I have analyzed how they portray the text itself and its function within the hybrid realities represented. Each narrative employs metaphors or analogies that conceive the text as intertwined with the complex spatial and technological configurations of

contemporary reality. *Nocilla Dream* presents itself as a map of the relations among digital and analog elements that compose today's world. "Una belleza rusa", through its multiple adaptations, also portrays the text as a fusion of outside objects that are integrated into the text. *Ático* at various times compares Eduard's designing of virtual spaces to the act of writing, implying that print narrative also virtualizes experience and information into programmed codes that travel along the routes of the network society, interpreted and transformed by different readers. Finally, *Coda*'s narrator suggests that the novel's dreamlike space is a series of encoded or virtualized sentiments that communicate to the readers on multiple levels, revealing a common subjective experience of the contemporary world.

These discourses on the text's creation and functioning can be related to Jay Bolter and Dave Grusin's theory of "remediation", where new media not only adopt elements of older media into new formats but also cause those older forms to "refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media" (15). As part of their projects to connect the text to contemporary reality, each of these print narratives assimilates— sometimes overtly, sometimes more subtly— audiovisual and digital technologies. *Nocilla Dream*'s construction of the narrator's subjectivity is reminiscent of blogs where combinations of personal statements and links to other web pages fashion the editor's identity. Moreover, the process is summed up with a map that recalls electro-magnetic imaging of energies, fusing the narrator's perspective with the kind of electronic based technologies that shape his relation to a world space. In *Ático* the narration of the virtual reality game Eduard designs is incorporated into the novel, existing on the same level as the narration of his home and physical surroundings. In "Una belleza rusa", the story takes on features of television, with advertisements from a supposed sponsor and the narrator evoking the aesthetics of low-

budget digital video productions in the final scene. *Coda*'s live-action airport replica and superimposed images of past or alternative realities are reminiscent of the constant intervention of digital reproduction in today's network society.⁵¹

In all of these narratives, the text is portrayed as a process that produces and disseminates virtualized images, sounds, ideas and experiences. Just as the stories explore the possible connections between characters in a fragmented social structure, these metaphors for the processes of writing and reading print narrative emphasize its ability to forge connections or understandings among different subjects.

The new wave narratives link themselves to the global flows that are juxtaposed or blended with local places in the stories they tell. New audiovisual and digital technologies enter into a dialogue with strategies of representation and references to older media that have long played a role in modern narrative: avant-garde and conceptual art interventions in *Nocilla Dream*; painting and autobiography in *Ático*; adaptation and metafiction in "Una belleza rusa"; photography in *Coda*. In my view these dialogues represent an effort to make print narrative pertinent to the contemporary spaces and subjects portrayed in these fictions. As opposed to the idea that these narratives emanate from a new mindset shaped by technology and mass media, this process suggests a more self-conscious confrontation with changing cultural realities. The novels and short stories of the new wave are symbolic imaginings of what subjectivity looks like in a world of increasing connectivity between the local and the global.

Given this emphasis on global interrelations, further study is needed to understand the way these authors dialogue with those from other parts of the world working in a similar

⁵¹ N. Katherine Hayles analyzes these dialogues between contemporary print media and new technologies in her book *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*.

vein. Of their contemporaries, those most cited as influences are Latin American writers like Rodrigo Fresán or Edmundo Paz Soldán and North American writers like David Foster Wallace or Jonathan Lethem. A comparative analysis of how they treat local places and virtual spaces could shed more light on how the new wave assimilates Spanish narrative traditions with foreign references. It would also be useful to seek points of convergence with other European authors such as the French novelist and essayist Camille de Toledo.

As artists in the initial stages of their literary production, the work of the different components of this new wave is bound to diverge into multiple directions. In any case, the texts published up to the moment by these authors represent both a wide variety of aesthetic approaches and a remarkable convergence around one of the major issues of the day: how subjects can locate themselves within the multiplicity and fluctuation that defines contemporary Spain and much of the contemporary world. They stand as a reflection of some of the anxieties, hopes and aspirations that pervade their society. They are also a testimony to the continued importance of written narrative in larger cultural dialogues of collective self-reflection.

Works Cited

- Abre los ojos*. Dir. Alejandro Amenábar. Perf. Eduardo Noriega, Penelope Cruz and Fele Martínez. Sogepaq, 1997. Film.
- Alameda, Irene Zoe. "La era Gates y la reinención del lenguaje." *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 688 (2007): 11-28. Print.
- Alonso, Santos. *La novela española en el fin de siglo, 1975-2001*. Madrid: Marenostum, 2003. Print.
- Andreotti, Libero, and Xavier Costa. "La política urbana de la Internacional Situacionista." Introduction. *Situacionistas: Arte, política, urbanismo = Situationists: Art, Politics, Urbanism*. Eds. Andreotti and Costa. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1996. 11-40. Print.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origen and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. Print.
- Asociación de Marcas Renombradas Españolas. "Nocilla es única". *Foro de Marcas Renombradas Españolas*. FMRE, Web. 1 Oct. 2009
- Augé, Marc. *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe. London: Verso, 1995. Print.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *Poetics of space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. New York: Orion P, 1964. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Print.

- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "L'Esprit du Terrorisme." Trans. Donovan Hohn. *Harper's Magazine* February 2002: 13-18. Print.
- . *The Perfect Crime*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 1996. Print.
- . *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994. Print.
- Beck, Ulrich. "The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies." *Theory, Culture & Society* 19.1-2 (2002): 17-44. Print.
- Bértolo, Constantino. "Introducción a la novela española actual." *Revista de Occidente* 98-99 (1989): 29-60. Print.
- Bienvenido Mister Marshall*. Dir. Luis García Berlanga. Perf. José Isbert, Lolita Sevilla and Alberto Romea. Cícosa, 1953. Film.
- Blood, Rebecca. *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog*. Cambridge: Perseus, 2002. Print.
- Blum, Martin. "Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgic Identity, and Material Culture." *Journal of Popular Culture* 34.3 (2000): 229-53. Print.
- Bolter, Jay and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2000. Print.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "El Aleph." *El Aleph*. Emecé: Buenos Aires, 1957. 157-71. Print.
- . "The Aleph". *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*. Trans. Norman Thomas Di Giovanni. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978. 15-30. Print

- . "On Exactitude in Science." *Collected Fictions*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. New York: Penguin, 1999. 325. Print
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Print.
- Braudel, Fernand. *Écrits sur l'histoire*. Paris: Flammarion, 1969. Print.
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Dir. Joss Whedon. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar and David Boreanaz. Mutant Enemy, 1997-2003. Television.
- Buci-Gluckman, Christine. *La folie du voir: De l'esthétique baroque*. Paris: Galilée, 1984. Print.
- . *La raison baroque: Du Baudelaire à Benjamin*. Paris: Galilée, 1986. Print.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. Print.
- Calvo, Javier. *El dios reflectante*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 2003. Print.
- . "La historia de la nocilla." *La Vanguardia* 12 September 2007, sec. Cultura/s: 15. Print.
- . *Los ríos perdidos de Londres*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 2005. Print.
- . *Mundo maravilloso*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 2007. Print.
- . *Risas enlatadas*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 2001. Print.
- Carrillo, Jesús. *Arte en la red*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2004. Print.
- Carrión, Jorge. "I + D, una generación para el siglo XXI." *La Vanguardia* 21 March 2007, sec. Cultura/s 6-8. Print.
- Castells, Manuel. "Informationalism, Networks and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint." Introduction. *The Network society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Castells. Cheltenham: Elgar, 2004. 3-48. Print.

---. *The Rise of the Network Society*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. Print. Vol. 1 of *The Information Age*. 3 vols.

Cebrián, Mercedes. *El malestar al alcance de todos*. Madrid: Caballo de Troya, 2004. Print.

Cercas, Javier. *Soldados de salamina*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2001. Print.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984. Print.

Compitello, Malcolm Allan. "From Planning to Design: The Culture of Flexible Accumulation in Post-Cambio Madrid." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 3 (1999): 199-220. Print.

Coupland, Douglas. *Souvenir of Canada*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002. Print.

Debord, Guy. "Theory of the Dérive." Trans. Ken Knabb, Nadine Block and Joël Cornault. *Situationist International Anthology*. Ed. Ken Knabb. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981. 62-9. Print.

---. "Theses on Traffic." Trans. Ken Knabb, Nadine Block and Joël Cornault. *Situationist International Anthology*. Ed. Knabb. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981. 69-71. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. London: Athlone, 1994. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987. Print.

"Demografía y población." *INE*. Instituto Nacional de Estadística, n.d. Web. 15 April 2009.

El día de la bestia. Dir. Alex de la Iglesia. Perf. Alex Angulo, Armando De Razza and Santiago Segura. Sogepaq, 1995. Film.

Etxebarría, Lucía. *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes: Una novela rosa*. 6th ed. Barcelona: Destino, 1998. Print.

Everly, Kathryn. *History, Violence and the Hyperreal: Representing Culture in the Contemporary Spanish Novel*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2010. Print.

Le fabeleux destin d'Amélie Poulain. Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Perf. Audrey Tatou. Claudie Ossard, 2001. Film.

Fernández Mallo, Agustín. "La 'otra' historia de la nocilla." *La Vanguardia*. La Vanguardia, 26 September 2007. Web. 21 April 2008.

---. *Nocilla Dream*. Canet de Mar: Candaya, 2006. Print.

---. *Nocilla Experience*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2008. Print.

---. *Nocilla Lab*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2009. Print.

---. "Poesía postpoética. Un diagnóstico. Una propuesta." *Quimera* Julio-Agosto 2006: 90-4. Print.

---. "Poesía postpoética: hacia un nuevo paradigma." *Lateral* Dic. 2004: 20-2. Print.

Fernández Porta, Eloy. *Afterpop: La literatura de la implosión de los medios*. Córdoba: Berenice, 2007. Print.

Ferré, Juan Francisco. *La fiesta del asno*. Barcelona: DVD, 2005. Print.

---. "Literatura del post. Instrucciones para leer narrativa española de última generación."

Foreword. *Mutantes: Narrativa española de la última generación*. Eds. Julio Ortega and Ferré, 2007. 7-21. Print.

Flesler, Daniela. "New Racism, Intercultural Romance, and the Immigration Question in Contemporary Spanish Cinema." *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 1.2 (2004): 103-18. Print.

- Flesler, Daniela and Adrián Pérez Melgosa. "Battles of Identity, or Playing 'Guest' and 'Host': The Festivals of Moors and Christians in the Context of Moroccan Immigration in Spain." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 4.2 (2003): 151-68. Print.
- García Canclini, Néstor. *Consumidores y ciudadanos: Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización*. México, D.F.: Grijalbo, 1995. Print.
- García Llovet, Esther. *Coda*. Madrid: Lengua de Trapo, 2003. Print.
- . *Submáquina*. Madrid: Salto de Página, 2009. Print.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books, 1984. Print.
- Gil González, Antonio J. "PrOsPectivas: Las culturas mediáticas en la nueva narrativa española." *Musas hermanas: Arte y literatura en el espejo del relato*. Eds. Susana Gil Albarcellos and Mercedes Rodríguez Pequeño. Valladolid: Cátedra Miguel Delibes, 2009. 71-87. Print.
- Gilsdorf, Ethan. "Behind 'The Terminal,' a True Story." *The Christian Science Monitor*. The Christian Science Monitor, 21 June 2004. Web. 15 November 2010.
- Goytisolo, Juan. *Reivindicación del conde don Julián*. 1971. Madrid: Cátedra, 1985. Print. Letras hispánicas.
- Gracia, Jordi. *Hijos de la razón: Contraluces de la libertad en las letras españolas de la democracia*. Barcelona: Edhasa, 2001. Print.
- Graham, Helen, and Antonio Sánchez. "The politics of 1992." Conclusion. *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. Eds. Graham and Jo Labanyi. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. 406-18. Print.
- Grandes, Almudena. *Atlas de geografía humana*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1998. Print.

- Gullón, German. "Cómo se lee una novela de la última generación." *Ínsula* 589-90 (1996): 31-3. Print.
- Hardt, Michael. *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. Print.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin, 2004. Print.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989. Print.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999. Print.
- . *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005. Print.
- . "Traumas of Code". *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2006): 36-57. Print.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. Print.
- Hevia, Elena. "Autores del siglo XXI: Revelo en la literatura española." *elPeriódico.com*. El Periódico, 29 June 2007. Web. 30 June 2007.
- . "Jóvenes escritores españoles se zambullen en la cultura pop." *elPeriódico.com*. El Periódico, 10 Abril 2007. Web. 20 May 2007.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Instituto Cervantes. "Jornada de estudio de la obra de Julián Ríos." *Cervantes* January-February 2006: 34. *cervantes.es*. Web. 10 June 2010.

- Izquierdo, José María. "Narradores españoles novísimos de los años noventa." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 35.2 (2001): 293-308. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*.146: 53-92. Print.
- Jay, Martin. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity." *Vision and Visuality*. Ed. Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988. 3-23. Print
- Labanyi, Jo. "Modernity and Cultural Pluralism." Conclusion. *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. Eds. Helen Graham and Labanyi. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. 396-406. Print.
- LeDuff, Charlie. "Middle Gate Journal; On Loneliest Road, a Unique Tree Thrives." *New York Times*. New York Times, 18 May 2004. Web. 11 May 2007.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. Print.
- Levy, Pierre. *¿Qué es lo virtual?* Trans. Diego Levis. Barcelona: Paidós Ibérica, 1999. Print.
- Listen*. Dir. Miroslav Sebestik. Perf. John Cage, et al. ARTE France Développement, 2003. Film.
- Loriga, Ray. *Héroes*. 9th ed. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1995. Print.
- . *El hombre que inventó Manhattan*. Barcelona: El Aleph, 2004. Print.
- . *Lo peor de todo*. Madrid: Debate, 1992. Print.
- . *Tokio ya no nos quiere*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2008. Print.
- Liotard, Jean François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984. Print.
- Macnaghten, Phil and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. Sage: London, 1998. Print.

- Malpas, J.E. *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2006. Print.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2002. Print.
- Mañas, José Angel. *Historias del Kronen*. Barcelona: Destino, 1994. Print.
- Marías, Javier. *Cuando fui mortal*. Madrid: Santillana, 1996. Print.
- Marsé, Juan. *Un día volveré*. 2nd ed. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1982. Print.
- Martín-Estudillo, Luis. "The Moment X in Spanish Narrative (and Beyond)." Afterword.
Generation X Rocks: Contemporary Peninsular Fiction, Film, and Rock Culture. Eds.
 Christine Henseler and Randolph D. Pope. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2007. 235-45.
 Print.
- Martín Gaité, Carmen. *El cuarto de atrás*. 2nd ed. Barcelona: Destino, 1979. Print.
- Martínez, Gabi. *Ático*. Barcelona: Destino, 2004. Print.
- Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze
 and Guattari*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1992. Print.
- . "Aviadores descubren enorme manada (literaria)." *El País*, 22 dic. 2007. Web. 13 March
 2008.
- The Matrix*. Dir. Wachowski, Andy Wachowski and Larry. Perf. Laurence Fishburne Keanu
 Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss. Groucho II Film Partnership. 1999. Film.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-
 Hill, 1964. Print.
- Mendoza, Eduardo. *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1975. Print.
- Millás, Juan José. "Carta." *El País.com*. *El País*, Web. 13 march 2008.
- . *El desorden de tu nombre*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1988. Print.

- Mitchell, William J. *Me++: The Cyborg Self and the Networked City*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2003. Print.
- Mora, Vicente Luis. "Distancia". *Diario de Lecturas*. N.p., 1 December 2009. Web. 13 July 2010.
- . "El realismo aumentado." Rev. of *Nocilla Dream*. *Quimera* Nov. 2006: 64-5. Print.
- . *La luz nueva: Singularidades en la narrativa española actual*. Córdoba: Berenice, 2007. Print.
- . "Mutantes en Madrid este viernes". *Diario de Lecturas*. N.p., 23 November 2009. Web. 13 July 2010
- . *Singularidades: Ética y poética de la literatura española actual*. Madrid: Bartleby, 2006. Print. Miradas.
- Molinuevo, José Luis. *Humanismo y nuevas tecnologías*. Madrid: Alianza, 2004.
- Moreiras Menor, Cristina. *Cultura herida: Literatura y cine en la España democrática*. Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 2002. Print.
- Muñoz Molina, Antonio. *El invierno en Lisboa*. 16th ed. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1989. Print.
- Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. "A Russian Beauty." *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973. 2-8. Print.
- Navajas, Gonzalo. "Una estética para después del posmodernismo." *Revista de Occidente* 143 (1993): 105-30. Print.
- Neo3. "Neo3: Nous corrents literaris". *El Web de la Ciutat de Barcelona*. Ajuntament de Barcelona, N.d. Web. 13 July 2010
- Ockman, Joan. "Review of *The Poetics of Space*". *Harvard Design Magazine* 6 (1998): 79-80. Print.

- Ortega, Julio and Juan Francisco Ferré, eds. *Mutantes: Narrativa española de última generación*. Córdoba: Berenice, 2007. Print.
- Ortiz, Lourdes. *Antes de la batalla*. Barcelona: Planeta, 1992. Print. Autores españoles e hispanoamericanos.
- Owen, Susan A. "Vampires, Postmodernity and Postfeminism: Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 27.2 (1999): 24-31. Print.
- Petersen, Julius. "Las generaciones literarias." Trans. Carlos Silva. *Filosofía de la ciencia literaria*. Ed. Emil Ermatinger. Mexico City: Fondo de cultura económica, 1946. 137-93. Print.
- Piedrahita, Luis. "Los vasos de Nocilla". *El Hormiguero*. Cuatro, *Tu.tv*. Web. 1 Oct. 2009
- Pieterse, Jan Neverdeen. "Globalization as Hybridization." *Global Modernities*. Eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995. 45-68. Print.
- Pombo, Alvaro. *El metro de platino iridiado*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1990. Print.
- Poster, Mark. *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. Print.
- . *The Second Media Age*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995. Print.
- Pozuelo Yvancos, José María. "Llega la estética del <<Blog>>." Rev. of *Nocilla Dream* (2006). *ABC.es*. ABC, 6 January 2007. Web. 15 November 2008.
- Pulp Fiction*. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Perf. John Travolta, Samuel Jackson and Uma Thurman. Miramax, 1994
- Rabinovitz, Lauren, and Abraham Geil. Introduction. *Memory Bytes: History, Technology and Digital Culture*. Eds. Rabinovitz and Geil. Durham: Duke UP, 2004. 1-22. Print.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Future of the Image*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2009.

Print.

Richardson, Nathan. "The Art of Being Forgettable: Ray Loriga's *Lo peor de todo*, the Generación X, and the New Cultural Field." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 9 (2005): 207-17. Print.

Rivera, Nelson. "Sonidos de lo irrepitible." Rev. of *La noche de la conspiración de la pólvora* (2006) and *Nocilla Dream* (2006). *El Nacional* 13 January 2007, sec. Papel Literario: 3. Print.

Robertson, Roland. "Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity." *Global Modernities*. Eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Robertson. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995. 25-45. Print.

Rodríguez-Gaona, Martín. *Mejorando lo presente. Poesía española última: Posmodernidad, humanismo y redes*. Madrid: Caballo de Troya, 2010. Print.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. "Cyberspace, Virtuality and the Text." *Cyberspace, Textuality, Computer Technology and Literary Theory*. Ed. Ryan. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999. 78-107. Print.

Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1999. Print.

Santiáñez-Tió, Nil. "Temporalidad y discurso histórico: Propuesta de una renovación metodológica de la historia de la literatura española moderna." *Hispanic Review* 65.3 (1997): 267-90. Print.

Scarlett, Elizabeth. "Not Your Father's Rock and Roll: Listening to Transitional/Eighties Writers and Generation X." *Generation X Rocks: Contemporary Peninsular Fiction*,

- Film, and Rock Culture*. Eds. Christine Henseler and Randolph D. Pope. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2007. 97-114. Print.
- Sierra, Germán. "Primer encuentro de nuevos narradores en la Fundación Gonzalo Torrente Ballester". *Germán Sierra Web*. N.p., N.d. Web. 13 July 2010.
- Soufas, C. Christopher, Jr. "Julius Petersen and the Construction of the Spanish Literary Generation." *Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal, and Latin America* 79.2-3 (2002): 247-62. Print.
- Spires, Robert C. "Depolarization and the New Spanish Fiction at the Millennium." *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea* 30.1-2 (2005): 485-512. Print.
- . *Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1996. Print.
- Spitzmesser, Ana María. *Narrativa posmoderna española: Crónica de un desengaño*. New York: Lang, 1999. Print.
- Stam, Robert. "The Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation." Introduction. *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Eds. Stam and Alessandra Raengo. Malden: Blackwell, 2005. 1-53. Print.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003. Print.
- Susanna*. Dir. Antonio Chavarrías. Perf. Álex Casanovas, Eva Santolaria and Said Amel. Oberón, 1996. Film.
- Tegmark, Max. "Parallel Universes." *Scientific American* May 2003: 41-51. Print.
- Tegmark, Max and John Archibald Wheeler. "100 Years of Quantum Mysteries." *Scientific American* February 2001: 68-75. Print.
- Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. New York: Random House, 1971. Print.

The Truman Show. Dir. Peter Weir. Perf. Jim Carrey and Laura Linney. Paramount, 1998.

Film.

Urioste, Carmen de. "La narrativa española de los noventa: ¿Existe una 'generación X'?"

Letras Peninsulares 10.3 (1997): 455-76. Print.

Vázquez Montalbán, Manuel. *Galíndez*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990. Print.

Verdú, Vicente. "Reglas para la supervivencia de la novela." *El País.com*. El País, 17 nov.

2007. Web. 13 March 2008.

---. "¿Vivir o leer novelas?" *El País* 05 julio 2001: 30. Print.

Vilarós, Teresa. *El mono del desencanto: Una crítica cultural de la transición española*

(1973-1993). Siglo XXI de España: Madrid, 1998. Print.

Vilas, Manuel. "Mutaciones, tendencias y efectivos de la narrativa contemporánea (congreso

en Málaga)". *Manuel Vilas Literatura*. N.p., 19 May 2008. Web. 13 July 2010

Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*.

Trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson. New York:

Semiotext(e), 2004. Print

Williams, Raymond. *The long revolution*. Orchard Park: Broadview Press, 2001. Print.

Yeats, W. B. *Collected poems*. London: Pan Books, in association with Macmillan, 1990.

Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. "Troubles with the Real: Lacan as a Viewer of Alien." *How to Read Lacan*.

London: Granta, 2006. 61-78. Print.