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CAPITAL RUPTURES: ECONOMIES OF CRISIS AND URBAN SPACE IN JAVIER MORENO'S 2020

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Abstract || This essay asserts that the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis has re-focused scholarship on to capitalism’s tendency towards what David Harvey calls “creative destruction,” where space is continually destroyed and reproduced to serve the interests of capital. Following Harvey, my essay investigates the representation of space in relation to economic crisis in Javier Moreno’s novel *2020*. I contend that in *2020*, excess non-“places”—specifically, taxis, supermarkets, and airports—intrinsic to late capitalist society transform into sites of solidarity and social transformation as capital relentlessly degrades proper “places” of the urban landscape. Thus, the essay critically examines depictions of spaces, places, and non-places in *2020* to argue that Moreno “capitalizes” upon the political economy’s contradictions to represent the city’s supposedly unhistorical, asocial, excess “non-places” as sites that subvert neoliberal principles in a futuristic Madrid plagued by unfathomable crisis. This line of inquiry ultimately leads me to envision the novel in crisis as a virtual commons that encourages dialogue and cultural critique.

Keywords || Literature | Crisis | Javier Moreno | Madrid | Urban geography | Capitalism

0. Introduction

Javier Moreno's kaleidoscopic novel *2020* (2013) begins with a scene of transcendent serenity essentially antithetical to the chapters that follow. A man watches a beautiful, thin girl ice skate outdoors during a frigid Madrid at Christmastime. The narrator affirms the positive sensations this scene generates for the viewer: "Las superficies heladas le procuraban una sensación de bienestar inmediata" (Moreno "La danza de la Valkiria," 2013).¹ The materiality absent from the skater's lithe, angelic body as it glides through the cold air is quickly countered both by Jorge, the obese man who focalizes the passage, and a panorama of images that express the materialism and rampant excesses integral to late capitalism. The initial, generative tension between immateriality and materiality sets forth a series of conflicts emergent from capitalist, neoliberal operations that Moreno interrogates in his formidable novel of socioeconomic decline.

Space is a vital dimension of *2020*'s portrayal of crisis. The novel quickly moves from the pristine scene at the *Palacio del Hielo* to imagery that signals a dreadful, futuristic Madrid of the year 2020. Meaty hot dogs considered "un signo de civilización" spin on food trucks; and abandoned cars litter the street in close proximity to the newly inaugurated Eurovegas, a site that effectively enshrines the lust and greed fueling a society so immersed in the capitalist ethos that it borders on absurdity (Moreno "La danza de la Valkiria," 2013).² *2020*'s initial juxtapositions of a luminous, pure, quasi-heavenly place nearly devoid of materiality with urban landscapes that transmit the wanton materialism at the base of the political economy unleashes a physical, geographical rendering of crisis that deepens as the novel develops. My reading of *2020* uses Marxist theories of space to explore Moreno's novel and its allusions to the 2008 recession that devastated Spain's economy. It is my contention that *2020*'s depictions of space express the profound reaches of catastrophe throughout this ambitious conceptualization of 2020 Madrid and a world of acute, seemingly perpetual crisis. The text also gives its readers a possibility for social refashioning as the space of the novel ultimately operates as a virtual commons that encourages dialogue and cultural critique.

1. Space in Crisis

The Great Recession—deemed the worst global economic downturn since World War II—has shed light upon the contradictions and flaws of globalized capitalism, specifically, the incorporation of highly populated nations into the globalized market; the uneven distribution of world resources; and the dangerously speculative nature of local

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1 | The digital version of Javier Moreno's novel has no pagination, so chapter titles are provided to help orient readers.

2 | In 2012, the American business magnate Sheldon Adelson began to seek a site for an enormous project with a 2022 completion date. "Eurovegas" would be a mega entertainment complex comprised of 12 resorts with 36,000 rooms, 6 casinos, 9 theaters, and 3 golf courses. The complex would bring 15 billion euros and 260,000 jobs to the projected site. He discussed this possibility with the governments in Barcelona and Madrid. Vast problems plagued the proposal, however, as it required adapting American labor models to Spanish European ones and modifying nearly two dozen laws concerning work, migration, and tobacco.

housing markets in which people had invested their homes and attendant livelihoods.³ The crisis heavily impacted Spain. When the housing bubble burst in 2008, its economy, which had grown 3.7% yearly on average from 1999 to 2008, began to shrink 1% annually (BBC, 2012).

The downturn also revealed a desire to reconceptualize public space. While the housing bubble, evictions, and concomitant questions of belonging and homelessness illuminate the spatial dimensions of the crisis, another clear example is the 15M Movement. Journalist Pilar Velasco writes, on May 15, 2011, “la plataforma social Democracia Real Ya convocó una manifestación en 60 ciudades españolas” (2011). Denouncing the neoliberal forces that placed public space in the hands of corporations or corrupt political institutions, the 15M protestors critiqued the nation’s democratic systems with the hope of reconfiguring them. Their rooting in urban space is noteworthy, especially the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, which became an occupied space and a hub for the *indignados*’ mobilizing. In 2020, the police persecute the *indignados* and their movement seems to falter, if not absolutely fail, in the bleak future the text foresees. Bruno Gowan, one of the novel’s protagonists, likens the movement to a crack visible in a building’s structure. The *indignados*’ activism thus constitutes a spatial and social rupture that purports to break with the existing cultural landscape and reshape the sociopolitical realities of the capital.

Emerging from various Spanish urban areas, the 15M Movement reflects Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s theorizing on the right to the city. He claims,

The *right to the city* is like a cry and a demand. This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities [...] The *right to the city* [...] can only be formulated as a renewed *right to urban life*. (Lefebvre, 2008:158)

Here, Lefebvre gestures toward the mappings and constructions that allocate resources unjustly and potentially alienate the city’s denizens. The 15M Movement not only reflects a collective desire to reclaim places within the city, but also to craft a place in the *polis* from where all citizens may have a voice within the representative democracy. Through their occupation of the plaza, the *indignados* do not just invoke their right to part of the city, but also to history and to politics. In this way, what the *indignados* propose is the formation of a *commons*. For academic geographer David Harvey,

To the degree that cities have been sites of vigorous class conflicts and struggles, so urban administrations have often been forced to supply public goods (such as affordable public housing, health care education,

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3 | Bob Davis reports, “this is the fourth global recession since World War II, and deepest by a long shot” (Davis, 2009). He bases his findings on the IMF’s data on global and per-capita GDP.

paved streets, sanitation, and water) to an urbanized working class. While these public spaces and public goods contribute mightily to the qualities of the commons, it takes political action on the part of the citizens and the people to appropriate them. (Harvey, 2012: 72-3)

What persistently defines a commons is conscious, horizontal mobilization in opposition to neoliberal politics governed by corporatization and hierarchy in the service of global capital. In his study *Cultures of Anyone*, Luis Moreno-Caballud affirms the importance of egalitarian, horizontal organizing to the 15M Movement. He postulates the protests effectively dismantle extant conceptualizations of the expert as the ideal social commentator and influencer in favor of a collective comprised of “fragile voices,” thereby engendering a new space of cultural critique and social participation open to “anyone” (Moreno-Caballud, 2015: 180, 204).

In pinpointing the sites wherein citizens can recover spaces under the yoke of neoliberal principles, *2020* interrogates the concept of the commons. The novel’s characters end up alienated from spaces of intimacy and comfort, such as private homes in which they live, because of global market fluctuations that generate housing bubbles. In this way, the novel represents the staggering statistic that approximately 184 evictions occurred daily in Spain from 2008-2015 (Moreno-Caballud, 2015: 1). While evictions result in empty homes, thus making it impossible for them to be sites of change, such uprooting can also produce an unprecedented solidarity that remains tethered to spatial logics of how people inhabit and relate to space in capitalist contexts. Lauren Berlant compellingly asserts that through cruel optimism, treasured attachments become safety-deposit objects that symbolize the distribution of sovereignty, “the energy of feeling relational, reciprocal, and accumulative” (2011: 42-3). Her quote relates to the unfortunate context of the housing crisis whereby individualized property rights fail to fulfill common interests in many countries. Rather, homeownership propagates a false sense of belonging and comfort within a regime that trades in and profits from economic crises. Ironically, losing the rights to a home elicits profound forms of marginalization that eventually fuel social reform (Harvey, 2012: 75).

For Lefebvre, the term *heterotopia* refers to “liminal spaces of possibility where ‘something different’ is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories” (in Harvey, 2012: 18). Indeed, while the 15M protestors acknowledged their social and political alienation through slogans like “no nos representan,” the movement produced a unique space of both liminality and solidarity, which served as the catalyst for the formation of political organizations like hartos.org, Partido X, and Podemos. These parties aim to move beyond the established rhetoric and organizing within the two-

party system—which privileges the Partido Popular and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español—and suggest the incredible depth of the crisis, arguing that Spain's social problems encompass more than its economy and can be attributed to events occurring decades before the Great Recession of 2008.⁴ Returning to *2020*, it is pivotal that the novel present the myriad urban spaces deformed by capital. Here, *heterotopia* as a conceptual tool reemerges to cultivate revolutionary possibilities despite capital's ongoing degradation of human spaces. As in the 15M Movement, zones that once signaled collective alienation become sites of solidarity and political transformation. And the novel is a privileged site able to imagine and frame this social reconfiguration.

In Marxist theory, the appropriation of space most clearly signals the contradictions of capitalism, since—in its purest form—the earth is not produced through labor yet bears a value. Furthermore, capitalism purports to obliterate spatial distinctions through the proliferation of infrastructure and systems of relation that continually allow it to extend its reach, thereby coming into contact with and arrogating all space to itself (Harvey, 2006: 379-80). Recognizing the role of space to the inner workings of capital, Harvey writes,

Capital can be regarded as 'the creator of modern landed property, of ground rent. The latter has to be understood as 'theoretical expressions of the capitalist mode of production.' (Harvey, 2012: 343)

In short, capitalist forces both monetize all land it is able to touch and naturalize the economic transformation of space.

2020 reveals the functioning of "fictitious capital," as it allocates land to specific—albeit arbitrary—uses and shapes social geographical organization (Harvey, 2006 366).⁵ For instance, rent, land values, and use values coalesce in the development of fictitious capital so that certain areas of the city are established as more valuable despite their actual ability to produce food, offer land for animals to graze, or provide some other clear benefit associated with nature. To be clear, rents do not emerge from the soil (Harvey, 2006: 335). On the contrary, as Moreno's novel, the real estate bubble, and the 15M Movement have all proven, the capitalist appropriation of space alienates people from the cities and homes in which they ought to thrive.

The aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis has re-focused scholarship on to capitalism's tendency towards what Harvey calls "creative destruction," where space—especially, urban space—is both destroyed and re-created to serve the interests of capital.⁶ Returning to the concept of the commons, Harvey postulates that urbanization coheres around a twofold process of 1) production of an urban commons and 2) its destruction by private interests (Harvey,

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4 | As Moreno-Caballud points out, the crisis "[is] not only a crisis of 'the economy,' it's not only an economic situation caused by the poor management of particular individuals. It's something deeper that has to do with the way the Spanish state has been organized since it was 'democratically' established after Franco's dictatorship" (2015: 183). Amador Fernández-Savater similarly claims that 15M marks a breach in the "Cultura de la Transición" (CT) instituted after the Franco dictatorship (Fernández-Savater, 2012: 669). For Fernández-Savater, CT focuses on creating consensus, diminishing conflict, cultivating cohesion by limiting forms of expression, and advancing neoliberal principles (2012: 667-8).

5 | Harvey observes that fictitious capital and more broadly, "the land market necessarily internalizes all the fundamental underlying contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. It thereby imposes those contradictions upon the very physical landscape of capitalism itself. Yet it is, at the same time, a vital co-ordinating device in the struggle to organize the use of land in ways that contribute to the production of surplus value and the structuring of capitalist social formations in general (2012: 372). Fictitious capital is also self-legitimizing, "automatically valorized by its own powers" (Marx in Harvey, 2006: 47). Fictitious capital thus exemplifies capitalist logics as they distort the world and naturalize their functioning.

6 | Harvey further explains, "Surplus absorption through urban transformation has, however, an even darker aspect. It has entailed repeated bouts of urban restructuring through 'creative destruction.'" (2006: 16)

2012: 80). In the spatial configurations of *2020*, the reader perceives the “modification of ‘natural forces’ by human action” (Harvey, 2006: 336). Again, this human action can facilitate the creation of a commons or appease private interests in the service of neoliberalism. The appropriation of space for economic means is a risky endeavor, especially when it involves housing (mortgages and rents), for it implies a profound alienation from the site in which humanity should feel safe and secure. Feminist geographers have argued that,

Homes are important and complex places. They provide for people’s material needs for warmth and shelter but they are also imbued with symbolic and ideological meanings. Homes have traditionally been constructed as private spaces but they are also subject to public rules and regulations. (Johnston and Longhurst, 2010: 41)

In *2020*, marginalization from the domestic realm intensifies until people are disconnected from government and politics, the worksite, and even their own bodies.

Marc Augé has theorized the ways capital transforms geography and attendant social imaginaries of how individuals occupy space. In his seminal essay *Non-places*, Augé explores what he terms “supermodernity.” One component of this historical moment of late capitalism is the proliferation of non-places, “spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure)” (Augé, 1995: 94). Non-places are also defined by the words and texts that ensure their functioning (Augé, 1995: 96). The words governing the non-place, informing those in transit of where they ought to stand or if they may or may not smoke provide a script essentially beholden to capitalist logics as non-places like supermarkets, airports, and highways, are primarily conduits for capital and secondarily, zones wherein people converge. Throughout *2020*, Moreno literally flips the script, imagining what happens when non-places that have heretofore operated in market interests are forced to broaden their functions to accommodate humanity. Hence, the novel’s critical engagement with space suggests the numerous issues capitalism engenders, specifically, an all-encompassing alienation that spurs individuals to yearn for social change.

2. Spaces of Crisis in *2020*

Set in a futuristic, dystopian Madrid, *2020* locates sites of capitalist degradation and envisions resistance within them. Real and virtual, economic and social, the places Moreno describes symbolize rupture. They gesture toward the ruptures that subvert narratives of progress and enable people to rally against the commodification of human existence. In the text, rupture serves an essential narrative concept

to depict both crisis and collective responses to it. *2020* narrates a mystery. An important executive for PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Bruno Gowan, is missing. His wife and his daughter, Josefina, attempt to find him with the help of a private investigator, Martín. A messianic figure of capitalism and *2020*'s antihero, Bruno travels aimlessly around Madrid in a taxicab. He spews a disorienting gospel that reflects the chaotic nature of the city he traverses and the world he inhabits. Serving as his doppelgänger and protégé, Nabil, a sub-Saharan activist involved in the riot that culminated in the burning of the stock exchange years before, accompanies Bruno.

Like the urban landscape immersed in conflict and violence, virtual space is equally ravaged in the novel. In *2020*, television now features an enigmatic channel, Canal 13, a mix of white noise and hypnotic imagery. For a trader involved in the search for his coworker Bruno, "Solo el Canal 13 resulta admisible. Solo el Canal 13 parece algo que ver con *la realidad*" (Moreno "Un nuevo cielo ha comenzado," 2013; emphasis in original). If television purports to project an idealized or glamorized and mimetic representation of a culture, Canal 13 offers a glimpse into the empty, hazy, repressive atmosphere of 2020.

This rendering of the conflicted city through space deepens when Josefina attends an art gallery exhibition in the "renovado Barrio de Letras" (Moreno "De Antro Nympherum," 2013). The narrator writes,

El Ayuntamiento lleva tiempo intentando rehabilitar de ese modo en que se rehabilitan los barrios de Madrid, imitando a algún *arrondissement* parisino, atrayendo a *webmasters* y diseñadores gráficos, fomentando la endogamia cultural y el parque de bicicletas. (Moreno "De Antro Nympherum," 2013)

Here, the text accentuates the distinction between the government and the people, insinuating that the former devises cities without taking into account the local flavors intrinsic to the people who enrich and live in urban centers. In their introduction to the volume *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*, Christopher Philo and Gerry Kearns explore the ways that public and private agencies collude to commodify cities, often appealing to a deliberate manipulation of *culture* targeted at attracting the well-off and well-educated (1993: 3). This process is inherently antagonistic, pitting the economic interests of capitalists and the social aspirations of the wealthy against the desires of most of the city's residents.

In Spain, the term "Guggenheim effect" or "Bilbao effect" expresses recent endeavors to redevelop urban space through private investment and elite cultural institutions (Feinberg, 2011: 15). As geographers Vicario Lorenzo and P. Manuel Martínez Monje explain, building the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao carried out a plan of

economic revitalization and urban restructuring that embraced a post-industrial, cosmopolitan vision of the Basque city without the stigma of gentrification (2003: 2385). The museum's construction exposes "the emergence of a new urban governance system," in which private industry unhinged from political accountability operates as a determining factor in city planning (Lorenzo and Martínez Monje, 2003: 2385).

Through allusions to the renovated Barrio de Letras and Eurovegas, *2020* enters into dialogue with Spain's recent history of urbanization as alienation, showing that legislators bend to global neoliberal pressures—which falsely claim to serve "universal" interests—instead of supporting local autonomy. Moreover, in *2020*, the *indignados* continue to clash with authorities, as in 2011 when protestors complicated business as usual within a Madrid square habitually reserved for "turistas, compradores de ensaimadas en la Mallorquina, y productos *fake* del top manta," or when los mossos d'Esquadra violently removed activists in Barcelona prior to the Barça Champions League game (Velasco, 2011). These examples affirm that the right to the city inheres in more than just space, but broader social concepts of belonging in a society increasingly beholden to global capital.

The gallery exhibition exemplifies both the commodification of the city through alienating urban planning and the proliferation of what urban geographer Matthew Rofe terms "consumptionscapes"—zones with cafés, boutiques, art galleries, restaurants—that lure elites with their promises of conspicuous consumption and leisure (Rofe, 2003: 2521). As Lefebvre suggests, leisure's "naturalness" is "destroyed by commercialized, industrialized and institutionally organized leisure pursuits" (2000: 158). These zones also provide insight into class conflicts that emerge in the gentrifying city. Consumptionscapes "provide a locus for the articulation and display of an affluent gentrification-derived identity" and echo the notion that "spatially congruent and spatially extensive social networks and imaginaries are implicated in processes producing and reproducing classes" (Rofe, 2003: 2521; Dowling, 2009: 836). Like her Lamborghini and her designer apparel, the scene in the gallery consolidate's Josefina's status as a transnational elite who benefits from gentrifying measures and is distanced from the urban middle-classes and the poor.

At the art gallery, Josefina buys a video-installation *2020: Una odisea del espacio*, which is a loop reel of a ham bone floating through outer space. The narrator writes, "La videoinstalación podría hacerse pasar por una metáfora del vacío y del sinsentido de la historia y, en particular, de la historia de España" (Moreno "De Antro Nympherum," 2013). The text's explicit theme articulated through the metaphor of the installation encourages the reader to envision the

contemporary cultural landscape through deep space. In his essay “Terrestrial Geographies in and of Outer Space,” geographer Jason Beery observes,

Even though it is only 100 kilometers above sea level according to the generally accepted view, outer space often seems light years away from the earth in both popular conceptions and academic orthodoxies [...] In common conceptions, outer space remains separate, detached, and distanced from society and activity on Earth. (Beery, 2016)

Indeed, the flawed dynamics of proximity and distance apparent in theories of outer space reflect the geographic and economic distinctions animating the tensions that abound in *2020*. Those deemed far away because they belong to a different class or neighborhood are actually close; and there is tremendous interdependence and connection among these ostensibly disparate categories.

Geographies of outer space also impact capitalist logics and operations. Humans socialize outer space through satellite-based technologies—used in phones, television, GPS devices, surveillance, and other electronic devices—and space travel. As Harvey notes, “Innovations dedicated to the removal of spatial barriers [...] have been of immense significance in the history of capitalism, turning history into a very geographical affair” (1989: 232). Drawing upon the work of Marx and Harvey, Peter Dickens compellingly argues that the increasing rapidity of technology and the steady expansion of capitalism into the cosmos will result in more crises and have an adverse effect on profitability (2016). Outer space thus plays an important role in current conceptualizations of crisis as it represents social and geographical transformation and, thus, exemplifies the spatial nature of both capitalism and the hierarchies and inequalities it generates.

After purchasing the video-installation *2020: Una odisea del espacio*, Josefina returns home and demands that Felicia, her maid, acknowledge the artwork’s value. While Felicia is excluded from the elite consumptionscapes Josefina accesses, the home unites the rich and poor. Felicia’s humble origins, working class job, and frankness enable her to function as an unexpected voice of reason and a voice of the people in *2020* as she dialogues with Josefina, an elegant sybarite detached from the masses. Perplexed by her employer’s purchase, Felicia insists that she only sees a ham bone. Josefina insists that she would not have paid “two million” for the artwork if it were just a ham bone; on the contrary, what stands before them is “un símbolo [...] algo verdadero” (Moreno “Huesos,” 2013). The divergences between Felicia and Josefina illustrate the dynamics of proximity and distance important to capitalist appropriation of space and relationships among people of different social classes.

Felicia's reaction to the installation also highlights the importance of valorizing and meaning-making, issues that continually arise in *2020*. While Josefina has spent an excessive amount of money on the artwork, Felicia cannot comprehend why. Indeed, the piece's richness lies in abstraction, what it is able to signify, rather than the monetary value society—specifically, Josefina and those who follow her—ascribes it. The video-installation metaphor begins a spatial configuration of crisis rooted in emptiness and the jarring presence of a ham bone. The visual allegory also advances the text's initial conflictive juxtaposition of transcendent ethereality and excessive materiality. Specifically, the ham bone floating through outer space evinces the penetration of what is frequently—perhaps erroneously—considered the deepest darkest recesses of nothingness with human materials. Such is the case with capitalist spaces that analogously succumb to human forces and reshaping. This process recalls Lefebvre's theory of heterotopia, which is rooted in the revolutionary potential of liminal spaces.

The ham bone is also an obvious allusion to the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1968). The bone in *2001* becomes a ham bone in *2020*, manifesting a distinctively Spanish vision of Kubrick's work. The bone in *2001* functions to disorient the viewer, casting her/him adrift in a world outside of language (Balmain, 2000). The film's bone sequence serves as an important commentary on evolution and progress. As Garry Leonard claims,

The idea of discovering, inventing, and progressing as the essence of what makes us runs strongly through *2001*, most brilliantly compressed into the famous jump-shot where the bone thrown by the ape 'becomes,' four million years later, a space shuttle station orbiting the moon. (Leonard, 2011: 45)

At the same time, Kubrick's film questions the very progress the bone purports to symbolize. For Leonard, "Discovery and progress are conflated into a general notion of progress [...] And yet much of science fiction is dystopic—showing the world of the future that has gotten into an untenable state" (Leonard: 2011, 44-5). Similarly, *2020* presents a Spanish version of dystopia hinged to progress. While *2001* uses the jump cut to travel from nothingness into the future, Moreno's text moves from the futuristic metropolis to a cold, dark realm beyond the earth, indicating a spatial rupture made possible by technological innovation.

The concept of discovery can also be articulated through space.⁷ As German philosopher Martin Heidegger posits, "'Discovery' is not the uncovering of something that is 'there,' but a particular unconcealment of our surrounding [...] thereby engendering a particular ordering of the world" (Leonard, 2011: 46). *2001* as intertext enables Moreno to reflect upon space in Spain, specifically the ways in which

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7 | It is important to note that Kubrick's films tend to have a spatial focus, like Moreno's novel: "[They] are often exceedingly sparse of dialogue, deriving their most striking effects through visual or *spatial* juxtaposition" (Poague, 1996: 73).

advances in science and modern discovery have not brought about “unconcealment” of one’s surroundings. Rather, outer space enters into the capitalist matrix of ongoing spatial appropriation as yet another potential location of alienation and crisis.

The novel moves from outer space to a closer, albeit foreign, space as it examines the ways that capitalism structures and orders the new millennium metropolis. China is metonymically reproduced through the space of *el chino El Bosque Encantado*, a variety shop that exposes the brutal underside of globalized commerce. References to China, the world’s manufacturing center, not only manifest a concern with the questionable labor practices there, but also the uncritical global acceptance of the systems that allow other nations to consume inexpensive goods. The novel suggests that the exploitative work conditions that permit the manufacture and distribution of much of the world’s products do not have to remain in China. Through capitalist logics of endless expansion, dehumanizing labor systems may end up elsewhere—specifically, Madrid. The store’s name, moreover, hearkens back to the setting *par excellence* of Western fairy tales and evinces the storytelling vital to the representation of the modern-day market, precisely, the mythologization of narratives of capitalism. Another passage similarly uses the discourse of fairy tale storytelling to describe the dystopia of *2020*, observing, “éramos como niños protagonistas de un cuento de hadas” (Moreno “Perfecto eras hasta que se halló en ti maldad,” 2013). This statement situates capitalism within the logics of myth through its allusion to a literary framework that allows a privileged few to live happily ever after.

Jorge, the obese Spanish man presented at the onset of *2020* reappears as a worker in *el chino*. He is a 40-year-old autistic person who, despite his age, suffers from cradle cap and usually carries a Ruger rifle. Undoubtedly a complex figure, Jorge possesses childlike qualities that stem from his infantile malaise and his neurodevelopmental disorder. One character says he seems like “un bebé gigante”; another passage suggests, “puede decirse que de algún modo, un modo inconsciente y desesperado, Jorge seguía siendo un bebé” (Moreno “Un tesoro oculto,” “Huesos,” 2013). *El chino*’s position within the space of Madrid, complete with a childlike Spanish worker, shows that an uncritical acceptance of abusive labor practices not only afflicts the Asian nation, but also its Western trading partners.

Berlant postulates that high incidences of obese people—like Jorge—in rich, developed nations signal “the destruction of life, bodies, imaginaries, and environments by and under regimes of capital” (Berlant, 2011: 101). Her depiction of slow death reflects the personal degradation central to Jorge’s work circumstances. Jorge describes his job in the chino accordingly,

Un occidental trabajando en una tienda de chinos también sirve como ejemplo. Son los únicos, los chinos, a los que no les importa mi costra. Basta con que te conformes con un sueldo de mierda. Lo demás no te incumbe. No buscan tu alma, se conforman con explotar tu cuerpo. (Moreno “El berserk en su guarida,” 2013)

In another passage, Bruno uses China as a symbol that affirms the death of the European middle class, “Los burgueses nos hemos convertido en los chinos de occidente” (Moreno “Un tesoro oculto,” 2013). Interestingly, the novel utilizes the “Chineseification” of Madrid and its denizens to deliberate upon the social ruptures global economic forces unleash upon the city. Through Jorge’s explanation of his work, the text returns to the contentious dichotomy between the ethereal or spiritual and material worlds already mentioned with regard to the figure skater and the video-installation. The Chinese do not seek souls, just bodies to exploit in the service of globalized capital. Indeed, as Berlant points out, capitalism inflicts its wounds on bodies, the very physical experience of everyday life (2011: 101). Here, alienating forms of work transmit the dehumanization at the center of capitalist logics in which increased profit is the sole desired end.

Jorge’s assertions about his workplace shed light upon the socioeconomic transformations underway in the twenty-first century capital. Referring to the democracy and universality of the variety shop, Jorge notes that within *el chino*, no one is superior to anyone; moreover, all the products sold there are seemingly identical in their cheapness. Unlike the luxurious consumptionscapes that characterize the posh areas of the city that Josefina frequents, *el chino* offers inexpensive consumption for all. Jorge notes, “El chino es un templo donde *el dios capital* ofrece su rostro más comunitario” (Moreno “El berserk en su guarida,” 2013; my emphasis). At first glance, it could appear that the chino’s democratization of society and consumable goods constitutes a step toward equality. Yet, the deification of capital in *el chino* belies the shop’s purportedly democratic underpinnings as capitalism reaffirms the power of the moneyed classes rather than ensuring representative equality. The reader, moreover, is aware that a “democratic *chino*” is an oxymoron with resonances beyond the ironically named variety shop *El Bosque Encantado*.

Capitalist, communist China—a reality antithetical to the notion of “a democratic *chino*”—illuminates the failings of modern economic “fairy tales.” Ronald Coase and Nina Wang point out that “a persisting feature of China’s market transition is the lack of political liberalization” (Coase and Wang, 2013).⁸ Communist in name only, China’s recent transformations reveal the depths of the capitalist base, as it shapes space and even conflicting ideologies to its purposes. Hence, the Chinese nation and the Madrid shop both represent the ways that an

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8 | Chinese politicians continue to use repression to maintain one-party rule. Frank Langfitt reports, “Since coming to power in 2012, President Xi has cracked down on Internet speech and jailed all sorts of critics. Last month, an 81-year-old writer known by the pen name Tie Liu was charged with “creating a disturbance.” Among his apparent offenses: publishing the accounts of some of the political victims of Mao Zedong, who died in 1976” (2014). At the same time, he notes, “Shen Dingli, a professor of international relations at Fudan University in Shanghai, knows China’s political failings, but says the party has made improvements for which it doesn’t receive credit” (Langfitt, 2014).

aggressive form of capitalism linked to China subverts the democratic principles Jorge sarcastically mentions. Space again emerges in *2020* to create metaphors whereby the reader perceives capitalism's "creative destruction," which builds and rebuilds to naturalize—and even mythologize—its artificiality and guarantee its perpetuity.

The novel's first reference to Asia serves to evoke the interconnectedness of today's globalized socioeconomic milieu through the logics of Augé's "non-places." Bruno Gowan inspects the lamp in his hotel room, attempting to uncover its history. The narrator writes,

La historia de la lámpara comienza en el condado de Changua, Taiwan. El siguiente rastro es el puerto de Xiamen. De ahí pasa a manos de la compañía de cargueros Röhlings. La pista se pierde en El Bosque Encantado, una tienda de artículos de ocasión situada a dos manzanas del hotel. Usa GoogleEarth para visitar el condado de Changua. (Moreno "El corazón de la luz," 2013)

A nation marked by rapid economic growth, industrialization, and high population density, Taiwan gestures toward the "progress" *2020* scrutinizes through its futuristic setting and allusions to *2001: A Space Odyssey*.⁹ Taiwan also represents the problematic extent of China's influence as the two countries currently have a contentious relationship that stems from China's ongoing attempts to retain legal and political sovereignty over the island nation. Unfettered geographical expansion tethered to capitalism thus reemerges within the novel's critiques.

2020 contemplates the porosity of borders as a byproduct of business development. Bruno is able to visit Asia in cyberspace through Google's technologies; yet, this world is also able to seep into Madrid owing to capitalist expansion that brings Chinese products and Chinese migrant laborers to Europe. During one of his speeches to Nabil in the taxi, Bruno remarks, "Todos tenemos algo que ver con los chinos" (Moreno "Un tesoro oculto," 2013). Indeed, everyone touches products manufactured through questionable labor practices occurring far away. The novel foregrounds this blind spot, compelling the reader to question the processes that permit the cheap goods Europe and the West enjoy. It is important to note that the lamp's trajectory involves *el chino* where Jorge works, *El Bosque Encantado*. In addition to symbolizing capitalist expansion and exploited labor, China and its products are also integral to Madrid's "non-places"—specifically, hotel rooms and markets—, ostensibly sites where human contact is subordinated to the interests of capital.

2020's references to outer space and China are explicit metaphors that affirm the novel's concern with space. Space exemplifies the flaws of the capitalist system; and space is hollowed out throughout

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9 | Along with Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea, Taiwan is one of "The Four Asian Tigers," countries of tremendous economic growth, specifically, annual growth rates of output that exceed six per cent.

the text to emphasize this point. The creative destruction integral to capitalist operations not only alienates city-dwellers through the spread of consumptionscapes, but also globalized worksites that privilege profits over people. At the same time, the proliferation of non-places in the novel and their functioning constitutes a subtler foray into the inner-workings of capitalism in twenty-first century Madrid. Returning to Augé, non-places serve the interests of both commerce and transit. Transit figures in the novel in the numerous references to modes of transportation, albeit outside of their intended use. For instance, homeless city-dwellers live in abandoned planes in Terminal 3 at the Barajas airport. The missing financier Bruno spends his days in a taxi with Nabil on the streets of Madrid. The non-place is intended to facilitate economic exchange; people, therefore, visit them briefly, only long enough to engage in economic exchanges. In 2020, however, non-places that allow the market to function efficiently become places that individuals in crisis must inhabit for extended, even indefinite periods of time. These spaces of transit reflect the transient, unstable nature of life caught in the trappings of capitalist precepts. The characters reside in a socioeconomic oblivion situated on the periphery of the frightful, futuristic capital—Madrid itself and a global economic system afflicted by crisis.

When Nabil returns to his airplane dwelling after a day out with Bruno, he describes a sad, decisively *human* scene. He says,

Dentro del avión encuentro el mismo espectáculo de siempre: un puñado de cuerpos adormilados, arrebujados bajo mantas corporativas, como si se tratase de un grupo de supervivientes de una catástrofe aérea. Huele a aglomeración de cuerpos sucios. Huele a pobreza. Alguien eructa al fondo como saludo de bienvenida. El lenguaje de la miseria está hecho de gruñidos y monosílabos. La pobreza empieza por la precariedad de la sintáxis.

(Moreno “La humildad del Profeta,” 2013)

The airplane imagery could represent a crash, an unexpected real and physical tragedy with atrocious consequences. Indeed, the scene does reflect a crash, a ghostly, immaterial economic one with dire material outcomes. The passage thus unveils the senseless nature of capital as it creates scenarios akin to those of a plane crash through market speculation.

As a non-place now used to shelter the homeless and, hence, reverted back into a place, the plane reeks of sheer humanity. The plane as home expresses excess: Too many people are occupying the plane for too long. The plane’s new *pasajeros* do not abide by the grammar integral to its typical usage as a non-place for flights. Nabil’s invoking of syntax is thus crucial. The plane’s script is one of temporary transportation, not permanence. Nevertheless, 2020’s homeless *pasajeros* are “passing through” in a sense: they drift

through a historical moment and a society from which they are alienated despite their undeniable presence. Capital thus not only degrades space, removing people from their homes and marginalizing them within their cities, it also degrades humans.

The novel expresses these frictions in the aforementioned depiction of Jorge as a childlike worker in *el chino* and through the *pasajeros*. The upper echelon is not free from this degradation. Anorexic Josefina believes her worth is derived from her body and its attractiveness showing that even the rich and powerful are subjugated to personal abasement. *2020* thus reminds the reader of Berlant's theories of corporeal debasement. Propagandistic media and advertisement regimes, global-processed food regimes, gentrifying regimes of conspicuous consumption and concomitant forms of economic visibility, and work regimes all coalesce to weave the body into the forces of global capitalism. Moreno himself admits during a passage he narrates,

El capital no solo estuvo interesado en la burbuja inmobiliaria. La estrategia inflacionaria no se contentó con *el suelo y la propiedad* sino que se extendió a todos los aspectos de lo cultural y lo psicológico. (Moreno "Perfecto eras hasta que se halló en ti maldad," 2013)

Space, as symbol of the logics of capitalism, is the ideal point of departure for interrogating the ways the political economy seeks to infiltrate every recess of human existence, even the body. The narrator also writes, "El cuerpo es la cicatriz de una herida que el mundo se inflige a sí mismo" (Moreno "El corazón de la luz," 2013). Returning to the idea of a rupture, the body is a scar, a visible symbol of a healed wound. The body as wound-scar appears on the surface of the earth and thus symbolizes a discernible transformation on the landscape on which it is located.

While capital and its attendant theories of value are omnipresent in the current world, so is humanity. As Augé reminds us, "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (1995: 78). In *2020*, the non-place of the plane, in contrast, assumes a function that is decidedly relational, historical, and identity-based. The *pasajeros* share in their marginalization from society. Furthermore, in the liminal space of the plane, numerous characters coincide as social actors capable of transforming a repressive, unjust society. In the plane, we find Nabil, the sub-Saharan activist; Jorge, the child-worker who will eventually murder Bruno, capital's messiah; and even *2020*'s author Javier Moreno. Hence, what *2020* captures most compellingly is the primacy of *the novel* as a tool for social critique and a harbinger of cultural transformation.

3. The place of the novel in crisis Spain

The *indignados* of 15M asserted the importance of the appropriation of space as a tool for social, political and economic transformation. Reclaiming their right to the city, the *indignados* advocate for a critical commons with resonances beyond the conceptualization of public space. As geographers Liette Gilbert and Mustafa Dikeç point out,

For Lefebvre, the right to the city represents the right to participate in society through everyday practices (e.g., work, housing, education, leisure). For him, everyday life and the urban were inextricably connected. The realization of urban life becomes possible only through the capacity to assert the social in the political and the economic realms in a way that allows residents to participate fully in society (Gilbert and Dikeç, 2008: 259).

Placing Moreno's novel in dialogue with rich sources in social geography and Marxist theory, I contend that *2020* reflects the notion that space tends to symbolize capitalist rationalities. Assuming all geographical space unto itself, capitalism also reshapes labor, ideology, and even human bodies, affixing value to the most basic elements of daily existence. Crisis inevitably ensues from an economic system that ravages human space, as the novel shows. The astuteness of *2020* lies in its critical engagement with space and its virtual formation of a commons. Indeed, *2020* proposes the novel as commons—a site for cultural commentary and the circulation of critical ideas about the present and possible futures.

Intertextuality lies at the crux of *2020*. While explicit references to artistic and literary productions abound in Moreno's work, the novel could be interpreted as a twenty-first century evocation of Nobel laureate Camilo José Cela's postwar masterpiece *La colmena* (1950).¹⁰ In terms of structure, both texts use numerous characters and vantage points to construct a multilayered vision of the Spanish capital. The novels also share in their setting and attendant tone: they present the chilling, frigid realities of Madrid during the Christmas holidays to intensify their portrayals of hypocrisy and injustice. Indeed, at the onset of *2020*, the declaration—or quasi-warning—of “Bienvenido al frío” unveils the direct relationship between the weather and the sensations the novel will stir in its reader. Economic and social crises, missing men, destitution, alienation, and human debasement also characterize both works. The novels powerfully prove that fictions reflect, order, and perturb everyday life.

In the prologue to *Compro oro* (2013), a collection of short stories that takes post-2008 crisis and precariousness as the point of departure for narration, Isaac Rosa analyzes the relationship between fiction, storytelling, and society. *Compro oro* begins,

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10 | The text contains references to Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, Michel Houellebecq, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, Karl Marx's *Capital*, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book*, Cervantes's *Quijote*, William Blake's painting *Cave of nymphs*, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, Tomas Tranströmer's *17 Poems*, Zeami Motokiyo's *Sekidera Komachi*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, James Joyce, Michel Houellebecq, Stieg Larsson, Enrique Vila-Matas.

Vivimos rodeados de ficciones . . . asediados por ficciones. Por representaciones ficticias de la realidad. No me refiero a novelas. Ni cuentos . . . Sino estas otras narrativas que detentan la hegemonía de la ficción: la política, la economía. El periodismo de los grandes medios. . . Las versiones oficiales hace tiempo que son ficciones. (Rosa, 2013: 11)

Following Rosa, if official accounts of culture and society constitute fictions, literary works can serve as counter-narratives to alienating or even repressive constructions of society. Such is the case with *2020*, which demystifies mythologizing narratives of capital through its exploration of space and social rupture. Rewriting cultural fictions to unveil their falsehoods, contradictions, and flaws, Moreno presents a hyperbolic realm of pure capital to dramatize the hardships that have defined the Global Recession.

The temporality of *2020* is also significant. Returning to my comparison of Cela's and Moreno's works, in *La colmena*, the narrator seizes the past—recounting events of 1943 in 1950—while *2020* (2013) analogously looks seven years into the future to articulate crisis. Indeed, in *2020*, the reader ought to recognize the vestiges of the present moment in the text. Nabil emphasizes this point, noting the past is merely a series of disgraces, while the present is “la intemperie [...] [y] el frío” (Moreno “La humildad del Profeta,” 2013). The cold realities of Nabil's present/the reader's future again accentuate the chilling, hostile world that could be waiting to claim humanity.

According to Louis Dupre in *Marx's Social Critique of Culture*, the artist moves beyond ordinary life to create a work of significance owing to *how* it represents, not necessarily *what* it represents (Dupre, 1983: 274). *2020* is a dense novel, saturated with violence, temporalities, characters, events, and references. Its excesses reflect those of a world order overburdened by capital. And yet, through its confinement to the city of Madrid, the novel suggests the diverse, fraught cultural elements that coalesce in the capital and the nation. Despite its dizzying structure, the novel electrifies its reader's consciousness by enabling him/her to find a point of commonality with some aspect of the myriad characters, places, and scenarios set forth in *2020*.

Moreno uses his own voice and personal history to show solidarity with his characters and readers. The author surrogate technique in *2020* consolidates the notion of omnipresent crisis and hints at the commons conceptualized within the space of the text. Javier as character interrogates his own presence in his novel, wondering, “¿qué hace el autor inmiscuyéndose en la narración? ¿Quién lo ha invitado a la fiesta? Ah, ¿pero era una fiesta?” (Moreno “Perfecto eras hasta que se halló en ti maldad,” 2013). The author moves into one of the planes in Terminal 3 after losing his job and his home. Space

and cooperation resurface in this scenario, suggesting the formation of new relationships and a critical consciousness emergent from the shared experience of crisis. As a plane-dweller, Javier dialogues with Jorge and encounters Nabil in this non-place of capitalist exchange that human beings inhabit out of sheer necessity. For Lefebvre, the right to the city is established through social relationships and makes possible new ways of life, new social relations, and possibilities for political struggles (Gilbert and Dikeç, 2008: 258). Or, as Lauren Berlant writes, everyday life theories of urbanization from have continually contemplated the relationship between strangers and intimates (2011: 68-9). In *2020*, absolute displacement results in the elision of differences along lines of class, embodiment, gender, and race. The author surrogate technique accentuates this point, flattening hierarchies of authority that tend to distance an author from his characters. In the non-place of the plane, therefore, the reader witnesses a harrowing equality that can promote cooperation.

The novel continually suggests that while capitalism provides the foundations from which crisis emerges, the dire scenarios it produces can bring about social transformation. In the novel, Canal 13 is an enigmatic propaganda machine. And yet, Canal 13's emissions serve as the point of departure for seismic shifts. Jorge watches the station and senses he is being controlled. The reader can infer that Jorge's internalization of the violence and hostility he views on Canal 13 eventually leads him to kill Bruno. Javier the character also confesses,

Probablemente esta novela tenga su origen en aquellos minutos durante los cuales asistí hipnotizado a la emisión del Canal 13. Fue así que Gowan empezó a hacerse un lugar meritorio en algún apartado de la ficción en que siempre ha consistido mi vida. (Moreno "La Eva actual," 2013)

2020 thus staunchly critiques the crisis yet also shows that in the discomfort of crisis, generative tensions can compel individuals to act. This above passage also echoes Rosa's aforementioned assertions about the ways that fictions can structure and order human life. *2020* as counter-narrative provides a glimpse into the underside of capitalist expansion. That *2020* proceeds from the empty and repressive propaganda station is also telling, for this detail affirms that the system itself provides the framework for its critique and unraveling.

Benedict Anderson has stated that literature facilitates community formation. Homi Bhabha has also noted the instability of national time in cultural representations, precisely, that cultural representations reside in the difficult temporal register of "I have heard" and "you will hear" (Bhabha, 1994: 219). Bhabha's theory inheres in a notion

of dialogue and community literally written into existence through reading cultures. *2020* effectively proves that literature does not only produce communities, but also wields the potential to galvanize those communities, particularly in times of crisis. Moreno's novel attempts to grasp its reader precisely in the moment Bhabha describes so that s/he may act to prevent the horrors *2020* portends. Envisioning authors and readers not only as characters, but also as social actors charged with creating/inhabiting ruptures or flipping the script on existing cultural narratives, *2020* offers the book as commons: a shared place of introspection and communication wherein people converge to reclaim the fictions that order and disorder everyday life. In this way, the novel's meandering through spaces degraded by capital ultimately functions to produce a surprising utopia that advances social transformation, a place of commonality and political engagement enshrined within literature.

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