Relocating Cities and Dissident Sexualities: Queer Urban Geographies in Recent Latin American Cinema

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ABSTRACT

RELOCATING CITIES AND DISSIDENT SEXUALITIES: QUEER URBAN GEOGRAPHIES IN RECENT LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

By Benedict Charles Hoff

This thesis explores how the relationship between urban space and dissident sexualities has been represented in recent Latin American cinema. More specifically, it considers how this representation disturbs, remaps and relocates broader (hegemonic) imagined geographies of sexuality and the problematic sets of binaries around which they have been constructed. The study argues that the films in question are characterised by overtly *queer* urban geographies, in which sexual identity, transgression and liberation appear as highly contingent phenomena that can never wholly assume a position of exteriority in relation to hegemonic power structures.

The General Introduction begins by outlining the broad conceptual framework in which my discussion is situated, tracing the relationship between cities, cinema and dissident sexuality. It then outlines the scope of the thesis as a specifically critical intervention, proposing a queer methodology with regards to the analysis of the films which follows. The chapters comprising Part One examine metropolitan spaces of dissident sexuality pertaining to the cities of Buenos Aires and Medellín as they are imagined in *Un año sin amor* (Anahí Berneri, 2005) and *La virgen de los sicarios* (Barbet Schroder, 2000) respectively. It explores how these cities are (de)constructed as centres of (de)regulation with regards to dissident sexualities, bodies and desires. In this respect, Chapter One argues S/M as it appears in Berneri's film to be both antithetical to and yet also highly reliant on local/global economic structures. Chapter Two, in turn, suggests that the economy of violence envisaged in Schroeder's film is both conducive and detrimental to the construction of gay identity and political consciousness. The chapters comprising Part Two progress to focus on the representation of marginal sexualised spaces in filmic depictions of Recife and Rio de Janeiro in Cláudio Assis's *Amarelo Manga* (2002) and Karim Aïnouz's *Madame Satã* (2002), respectively, investigating how they appear both as peripheral to and yet also highly integrated into the wider urban/global fabric. Chapter Three, in this respect, proposes the misogyny and homophobia present amongst the male characters of Assis's film to be products of 'modern' Brazil as opposed to a 'sexual hinterland' still steeped in tradition. Chapter Four, takes this discussion forward in relation to Aïnouz's rendering of 1920s/30s Lapa, considering how the queer discourse I associate with the protagonist disrupts understandings of sexual emancipation as an entirely contemporary and 'foreign' phenomenon issuing solely from North Atlantic domains.

Diverse in approach, the films selected, unlike the frequently polarised debates occurring in the academe, do not assume inflexible subjective positions or seek to provide coherent, fully-legible accounts of highly complex issues which defy totalising explanations. In this respect, by offering a specifically *queer* perspective on the way in which urban space and dissident sexualities (re)produce each other in these films, this thesis seeks to decentre current debates occurring within the domain of film studies, cultural geography, sexuality politics and urban studies, and relocate them into a Latin American context.

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PREFACE

'A BEAUTIFUL, SINISTER FAIRYLAND'?[1]

By way of a short preface I wish to begin with a brief discussion of an image from the little-known Bolivian-U.S. co-production entitled *Dependencia sexual* (Rodrigo Bellott, 2003), shot almost in its entirety in split-screen and which, despite some critical acclaim evidenced by its winning of the FRIPRESCI prize at the Locarno film festival in 2003, has largely been ignored within recent film criticism. The image concerned corresponds to an advertisement for a fictional underwear label named RIGO BoSD. Here a suitably attractive, blond and blue-eyed boy named Tyler (Matthew Guida) takes centre stage (naked, of course, save his underpants) framed by two equally attractive, blond and blue-eyed girls who drape themselves deferentially over the muscular demi-God in their midst. It is an image that we are probably all too familiar with, the embodiment of a 'Western', 'metrosexual' form of masculinity where fashion, male grooming and beauty – whether natural or that achieved courtesy of the surgeon's knife – become markers of success and power at the expense of more traditional forms of male self-assertion. Buy RIGO BoSD underwear, suggests the persuasive look in Tyler's eyes, and you too might be afforded the possibility of the white, privileged, heterosexual lifestyle and the concomitant status, respect and success with the opposite sex that I enjoy.

One of the central postulates of *Dependencia sexual* is that the ideals embodied by the simulacrum of Tyler's (airbrushed) image are largely unattainable and a stark disparity is constructed between the imagined world envisaged by RIGO BoSD and the flesh and blood reality of the characters themselves. This is particularly true of the Bolivian section of the film, set in Santa Cruz, the country's third-largest city. In the opening sequence, for example, we meet Jessica (Alexandra Aponte), a teenage girl from one of the poor working-class areas of the city as she returns home from school, passing by the advertisement which is located next to a busy traffic intersection. With a *quinceañera* party looming and the prospect of interaction with a male admirer this will offer, Jessica, like the girls in the advertisement is also on a mission to 'get her man'. Yet as the left-hand screen reveals her looking up to consider the image which

[1] This quotation is taken from E. A. Lacey's essay 'Latin America: Myths and Realities' (1993) discussed on the following page.

we see in close-up in the right-hand screen, the juxtaposition between her conservative school-girl attire and the configuration of virtually naked bodies against which she appears virtually dwarfed, raises the question as to what extent such lascivious demonstrations of sexuality will be tolerated in her own particular social milieu. This question is answered in the scene which follows when she gets home and is accused by her brother Marco of associating with 'sluts' at school. Her father's reaction to the news is less than forgiving, telling her he would 'kill' her if she were to end up pregnant. Significantly, her mother remains mute throughout the whole episode, relegated to the kitchen through a much-reduced right-hand screen.

The location of the underwear advertisement is revisited in the second story of the film, although its nocturnal appropriation is somewhat contrasting, revealing itself as the locus of the city's cross-dressing prostitutes who tout for trade from passing traffic. Here the disjuncture between the RIGO BoSD image and those who stand before it is, again, palpable, with the two scantily-clad men on the street both failing to fulfil the model of masculinity embodied by Tyler whilst providing little more than a parody of the supposedly 'liberated' feminine sexuality espoused by his female cohorts. And it is a deficiency which is duly punished by a group of male teenagers who drive past them in their SUV, pelting them with rotten eggs. '¡Qué se puyen los hijo de puta eso!' hisses one of the boys, 'no se debe permitirles ni andar'. It is, we assume, a well-rehearsed ritual, which on this particular occasion is rounded off with a trip to the local brothel where one of the boys, Sebastian, is unceremoniously taken to lose his virginity.

Thus whilst the protected space of the SUV clearly differentiates the boys from the cross-dressing male prostitutes by way of its status as a potent symbol of wealth, class and social mobility, the boys' recourse to verbal/physical homophobic abuse and paid sex with a prostitute as a means of masculine assertion similarly distances them from the supposedly 'modern', 'progressive' form of male heterosexuality that we might associate with Tyler. Rather, what we see, both here and in the previous scene involving Jessica, conforms to what from a 'Western' perspective might be regarded as 'standard-issue' representations of Latin American gender and sexuality. Here, beneath a particularly rampant form of sexual proclivity lurks a triple menace of machismo, misogyny and homophobia, corresponding to the 'cartographical dark continent' which, argues José Quiroga, has often been drawn by lesbian and gay 'missionaries' (2000: 13). In this respect, E. A. Lacey proclaimed rather sensationally in his essay

'Latin America: Myths and Realities', originally published by the tabloid journal *Gay Sunshine* in 1979, that

> Latin America was seen as being – with that exasperating quality of paradox that inevitably creeps into our perception of the alien and the unfamiliar – both magical and menacing, a beautiful, sinister fairyland where the usual rules of logic were suspended and anything good or bad might happen, and usually did (1993: 481).

Certainly some of the 'beautiful' and/or 'sinister' moments that occur in the Bolivian section of the film are brought into stark relief, via the split-screen, with the highly institutionalised form of identity politics which we come to associate with the university campus at Ithaca College, State of New York, where the two stories relating to the U.S. section of the film unfold. It is not that discrimination does not exist here, but the film implies that the characters, unlike those living in Santa Cruz, have developed the emancipatory tools with which to negotiate this discrimination. Adina, for example, like Jessica, similarly had to endure the misogynistic impulses of her father when she was growing up, the appearance of Jessica in the left-hand screen at several points in the fourth story directly aligning the two girls' experiences. In turn, Jeremiah's overt homosexuality, like that pertaining to the cross-dressing prostitutes encountered in the second story, similarly incurs the wrath of (supposedly) heterosexual, sexually insecure young men who subject him to a torrent of homophobic abuse in the gymnasium locker-room. It is difficult to imagine Jessica, however, joining a women's theatre group or being given the opportunity to study African women's literature and develop the sort of militant (black) feminist consciousness we associate with Adina. Nor is it likely, that the two male prostitutes would have the luxury of exchanging an evening's work on the streets in order to attend one of the 'sexuality workshops' that Jeremiah leads at the university's LGBT society and developing a defiant strategy for self-betterment.[2]

In this sense, the split-screen which so characterises *Dependencia sexual* embodies a broad set of oppositions that have informed our ('Western') imagination of the world – most obviously between centre and periphery, but, concomitantly, between 'us and them', rich and poor, modern and traditional, included and excluded, empowered and marginalised, the West and the Rest. More specifically, the dividing line between the two screens can be said to represent a dividing line between what are often perceived, as Richard Parker puts it, to be 'two discrete moral universes, north

[2] LGBT is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.

and south of the equator' (1999: 1), each corresponding to two apparently very different sexual cultures.[3] One is predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon, 'civilised' and tolerant but where 'development' has been achieved with the inevitable loss of a certain degree of libidinal vitality. The other is predominantly mestizo, Latino, inherently 'uncivilised', but whose underdevelopment allows it to retain something inherently 'primal' rendering it both 'sinister' and 'beautiful' to evoke the rather tawdry allure of Lacey's phraseology.

On a broad general level, this thesis seeks to destabalise this dividing line, disrupt such oppositions and render them less presumably indestructible. More concretely, it asks how specifically *urban* cinematic imaginaries might unsettle these global geographies of sexuality. How, for example, does the representation of metropolitan spaces of dissident sexuality relocate the centres of regulation with regards to bodies and same-sex desire? How does this representation disturb our understanding of global cultural flows in terms of their direction and mediation? How do films 'look back' at the 'centre' and destabilise the foundations on which this designation is constructed? Are the metropolitan margins envisaged simply as having been 'left behind' or might they function as alternative sexualised spaces of resistance and empowerment? How does the representation of dissident sexual cultures in these spaces force us to reevalute our perception of exactly where and when the 'globalisation of sexuality', as Binnie terms it (2004), began? By posing these questions, this thesis seeks to decentre broader debates occurring within the domain of film studies, cultural geography, sexuality politics and urban studies, and relocate them into a Latin American context.

The aim of the General Introduction which follows is therefore two-fold. The following section outlines the broad conceptual framework in which my discussion will be articulated. It discusses the relationship between cinema and the city in a general sense before situating it more firmly within a specifically Latin American context. It then introduces the third concept into this relationship – that of sexuality, in particular its dissident forms – one that is all too often excluded from dedicated accounts of cinematic urbanism. I propose that by examining cinema, city and dissident sexualities through a bi-directional lens, a more nuanced account of each of these three concepts might be achieved. The remaining sections subsequently trace the

[3] 'Sexual cultures' is defined here as a system of sexual meanings and practices that emerges from historically specific social and psychological conditions.

scope of this thesis as a specifically critical intervention, mapping the terrain of recent debates and how they might be negotiated on a theoretical level.

In this respect, building on some of the points made in this section relating to *Dependencia sexual,* I begin by examining how Latin American sexualities have been represented within the social sciences and cultural studies and consider how they disrupt both traditional and contemporary imagined geographies of sexuality and the rather problematic sets of binaries and/or universalisms these imply, before then mapping this discussion onto recent theory and criticism of Latin American queer-marked film.[4] Whilst, in this respect, I suggest a link between Latin America's much maligned experience of capitalist modernity, the apparently limited proliferation of gay identity and culture in the region, and the consequent reluctance of some critics to situate queer-marked literature and cinema in an international canon, I nevertheless argue against oversubscribing to discourses of dependency and subalternity and the sense of passivity and victimhood they tend to imply. My discussion here subsequently turns to more postmodern perspectives on the Latin American urban condition to consider how these might be mobilised in the articulation of a more nuanced and productive account of Latin American celluloid cities and dissident sexualities. Again, however, my discussion remains cognisant of the limits of these perspectives and ultimately proposes an approach which treads *between* these often conflicting theoretical stances, advocating a specifically *queer* methodology for the subsequent analysis of the films in question.

[4] Queer-marked cinema' is a term used by Foster in *Queer Issues in Contemporary Latin American Cinema* (2003) and is mobilised here to refer to films featuring issues and/or representations of same-sex desire and practices but which do not necessarily purport to have any commitment to queer politics or involvement from members of the LGBT community where one exists. This stands in contrast to the terms 'queer cinema' or 'new queer cinema' which generally refer to a body of independent North American (and, to a lesser extent, European) films often equated with queer activism of the 1980s and 1990s.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Geographies of Sexuality: Mapping and Negotiating the Terrain

CINEMA, CITY AND (DISSIDENT) SEXUALITIES

The relationship between the cinema and the city is a well established one. It is symbiotic in nature, with the genesis, development and fortunes of each intricately linked to the other. Ever since the Lumière brothers' first ever celluloid depiction of urban life as it unfolded outside a factory in Lyon (*La sortie des usines*, 1895), cities have provided immense inspiration for filmmakers, their plethora of physical and social spaces, diverse populations and the pluralities and contradictions these inevitably produce, all providing fertile subject matter. As cinema developed as a profit-making industry, filmmakers also became increasingly reliant on the city as a primary source of spectatorship for their films, whilst the cinema theatres themselves, with the rise of more privatised forms of entertainment such as radio, television and computer games, played an important role in the maintenance and/or reinvigoration of city centres as (profitable) spaces of leisure and entertainment. Film-going was, as writes James Donald, in the context of 1960s America, 'a way of "going out" that blended seamlessly with this new culture of "staying in"' (2010: 323).

Indeed, as Donald goes on to note, cinema has also played a fundamental role in consolidating urban suburbs, with the need to expand the basis for profit ensuring the spread of cinemas throughout the city so that as much of the population as possible was in striking distance of a theatre, a model which has been repeated throughout much of the industrialised world (ibid.). As such, the suburbs, albeit in a highly commodified and generic form, have become centres of entertainment in themselves, subsuming another function of the city traditionally the domain of 'downtown'. In this sense, it is not just the genesis of the shopping mall which, as Beatriz Sarlo suggests in *Scenes from Postmodern Life* (2001), has contributed to the rapid decentring of our urban landscapes, but also the cinema complexes which are almost always now contained within them. Like branded clothing, pop music, i-pods or food items, the films projected onto the big screen are also products through which civic identity and our individual and collective relationships with the rest of the world are increasingly negotiated.

On a formal level too, parallels between the city and the cinema cannot be underestimated. Of all cultural forms, cinema undoubtedly has developed the shrewdest ability to express the nuances of urban life, with cinematography, mise-en-scène, location filming, lighting and editing coalescing to express the pace and spatial complexity of cities in a manner to which the written word and static painted or photographic images can only allude. Our respective experiences of cinema and the city also bear striking similarities. Distraction and anonymity are both sensations we have come to associate with urban life *and* film viewing, whilst the city's sense of speed and our rapid-fire experience of a rollercoaster of different emotions – fear, anticipation, elation, dread and so on – when traversing its spaces have also become stock features of the cinema-going experience which we now require and expect when visiting our local multiplex. From one perspective, as Georg Simmel in the 'Metropolis and Mental Life' (2010)[5] suggests, this endless assault on the human senses is perhaps having the overall effect of producing ever more 'blasé' city inhabitants, and by extension, we might proffer, cinema goers too. And yet from another, our fascination with the city and our hunger for its experience – whether that be in 'reality' or in front of the cinema screen – shows no sign of abating. Indeed we might suggest that, as our urban fabric becomes ever more dislocated, the material relationship between the city and this most fragmented form of story-telling is set to grow ever more intricate.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the Western-centric gaze that has traditionally marked film theory and history,[6] dedicated accounts of cinematic urbanism such as Shiel and Fitzmaurice's *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in Global Context* (2001) or Al Sayyad's *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from the Reel to the Real* (2006) have focussed heavily on the depiction of European and American cities with little or no mention given to the celluloid metropolises of the majority world.[7] It is a puzzling omission[8] (and one this thesis seeks to correct) bearing

[5] This text was originally published in 1903.

[6] 'Western-centric gaze' refers here not only to the way in which US film industries and, to a lesser extent, European cinemas, have dominated both popular and academic film criticism, but also the way in which the former, in particular, have been positioned at the centre of the global film map whilst all other cinemas are placed in a peripheral position, apparently existing only in opposition or in differentiation to Hollywood 'norms' (see, for example, the accounts of Nowell-Smith, 1996 or Hill and Gibson, 2000). Lúcia Nagib argues, in this respect, that whilst the designation 'World Cinema' and accompanying scholarship represents a positive attempt to 'decentre' film theory and criticism, the often 'restrictive and negative' understanding of the term as simply 'non-Hollywood' has, somewhat unwittingly, only served to reinscribe this 'binary' vision of the world (2006: 30).

[7] The terms 'minority world' and 'majority world' (see Massey, 2007) are favoured in this thesis in that they remove a set of untenable geographic distinctions and oppositions embodied by the terms 'Western' and 'non-Western'. 'Majority world' and 'minority world', in this respect, acknowledge the

in mind the exponential growth of cities such as Shanghai, Mumbai, Tokyo, Delhi, Beijing and Dubai, and the increasing presence that they now assert within the global urban imagination. Latin American cities are no exception, with the region now containing four of the world's most populous – Mexico City, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. Filmic depictions of these cities, of course, both within Latin American cinema and beyond, are nothing new. The mesmerising topography of Rio de Janeiro, in particular, has been used time and time again by foreign filmmakers and studios as a backdrop for their films, often to index a particularly exoticised brand of 'Latin Americaness' from Pathe's *Below the Equator* (1927) and MGM's *Rio the Magnificent* (1934) to Lewis Gilbert's *Moonraker* (1979), Zalman King's *Wild Orchid* (1990) and Carlos Saldanha's recent 3D animation *Rio* (2011).

Beyond these rather idealised images of the Latin American metropolis, however, lies a tradition of more critical accounts of the region's urban condition. Luís Buñuel's critically acclaimed *Los olvidados* (winner of Best Director at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival), for example, provided a stark counterpoint to the optimism of the 'golden years' pertaining to Mexico's rapid industrialisation and modernisation between the 1950s and 1970s with its powerfully unsentimental portrayal of the misfortunes of a group of children in a Mexico City slum. Meanwhile in Brazil, following a brief flirtation with the studio system which ended abruptly in 1954 with the collapse of the São Paulo-based Vera Cruz studios, *cinema novo* directors such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos were beginning their own social realist cinematic inquiry into urban Brazil, of which dos Santos's *Rio, 40 Graus* (1955) and *Rio, Zona Norte* (1957) serve as two pertinent examples. Lautaro Murúa's *Alias Gardelito* (1961) and Leonardo Favio's *Crónica de un niño solo* (1964), both providing stark depictions of Buenos Aires's underbelly, in turn, signalled the mood of change present at the time in Argentina, where calls for an alternative 'national cinema' that was 'realist, critical and popular' in nature (Martin 1997: 96) would later coalesce into the formation of the *Grupo Cine Liberación* by directors such as Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, responsible for the seminal *La hora de los hornos* (1970).

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earth's vast economic, social and cultural disparities but recognise that these disparities co-exist as much *within* as *either side* of any given national or regional boundary.

[8] Of a total of twenty two chapters, Shiel and Fitzmaurice's edited volume contains just four relating to cinematic mediations of the city beyond the minority world – in this case as they appear in the cinema of Vietnam, Nigeria, South Africa and the Philippines. Al Sayyad's book focuses mainly on North American cinema with some reference to European cinema; celluloid cities of the majority world are conspicuous through their absence.

More recently, critical cinematic mediations of the urban have typically corresponded to the region's much maligned experience of neo-liberalism and insertion into a globalised economy. In this respect, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros* (Mexico, 2000), Fernando Meirelles's *Cidade de Deus* (Brazil, 2003) or Fabián Bielinski's *Nueve reinas* (2000) immediately come to mind as three of the most highly-acclaimed and/or commercially successful Latin American films made in the first decade of the twenty first Century, though less internationally reknowned productions such as Veronica Chen's *Vagón fumador* (Argentina, 2001) or Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro's *Pizza, birra, faso* (Argentina, 1998) also provide highly apposite accounts of the contradictions believed to be inherent in Latin American city living. Such representations, have, in turn, prompted a new wave of academic inquiry into cinematic and other cultural mediations of the city, of which Joanna Page's *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (2009), Lúcia Sá's *Life in the Megalopolis: Mexico City and São Paulo* (2004), David William Foster's *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* (2002) and Lúcia Nagib's *Brazil On Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (2007) all serve as pertinent examples.

To return momentarily to *Dependencia sexual*, this particular film can be situated within this contemporary body of urban cinema and arguably takes its cues from González Iñárritu's rather better-known and critically/commercially successful aforementioned *Amores perros*. Like *Amores perros*, Bellot's film is similarly fragmented into distinct, but overlapping narrative segments, protagonised by characters from highly contrasting social backgrounds whose distant worlds periodically collide. The fictional RIGO BosD underwear advertisement which forms the central and braiding motif for these seemingly disparate stories, similarly recalls the Enchant perfume advertisement that asserts such a presence in the lives of the Mexico City inhabitants González Iñárritu's film seeks to depict.[9] Indeed, Tyler, the American underwear model in Bellot's film, like Enchant model Valeria, also appears in the film as one of the principal protagonists. But whilst, in these respects, *Dependencia sexual*, despite its innovative use of split-screen, might ultimately be deemed as being somewhat derivative, the advertisement itself is used to differing effect. In *Amores perros*, Valeria's image – both as it is manufactured by Enchant for

[9] In May 2001, as an 'artistic experiment', Bellot launched the RIGO BoSD underwear ad campaign, comprising the RIGO BoSD website and, for a month during principal photography, a 10 meter x 4 meter high billboard on Banzer Avenue in downtown Santa Cruz (Press Pack, 2003: n.p). According to the director, within a month, the website became 'one of the most visited websites in Upstate New York' and Bolivian manufacturers of American clothing apparently began 'inquiring about the manufacturing rights' (ibid.: 3).

consumption by the characters of the diegetic world and how it is later presented to us – the viewer – after her horrific accident, is mobilised as a cipher for the destructive nature of consumer society in a general sense, which is positioned as a contributing factor to the syndromes of crime and violence with which Mexico City is afflicted. Here, the pleasure derived from consumerism seemingly has less to do with the state of owning a given product, or enriching a collecting of pre-existing of items, rather those 'incandescent and glorious moments' (as Sarlo terms them) of sale and purchase (ibid.: 21).[10] It is significant in this respect that, Octavio, for example, does not steal the car in which he plans to escape Mexico City with Ramiro's wife, but purchases it with money earned in the city's parallel criminal economy, specifically that relating to dog fighting. Similarly, Ramiro does not shop-lift the Sony Walkman he proudly gives to his wife in one scene, but rather purchases it with the proceeds of an armed raid on a local pharmacy he was involved in.

Dependencia sexual's enquiry into the repercussions of the advertising image present within its own story, differs in the sense that it is articulated specifically in relation to the sexualised nature of this image, which according to the film's press pack, is concerned with 'a political economy of beauty – a beauty which is still only white, skinny, blond and blue-eyed' and which Tyler so aptly embodies (2003: n.p.). In contrast to *Amores perros*, however, membership of the world envisaged by RIGO BosD appears to be less contingent on the purchasing or owning of material goods (although some of the characters do buy into the brand) and more related to participation in the sexual act itself, of which there are multiple images through the course of the film's narrative. Each of these acts, however, wholeheartedly fails to prove what it sets out to, exposing this world as little more than a simulacrum whose ideals, for the characters concerned, are largely unattainable. And yet, of course, this unattainability is, in many respects, the key to successful advertising, for as Lefebvre writes: 'the body as represented by images of advertising [...] serves to fragment desire and doom it to anxious frustration, to the non-satisfaction of local needs' (1991: 310), which, in turn, stimulates a constant craving in the consumer for more. In *Dependencia sexual*, with the full relevance of the film's title perhaps now a little clearer, the consequences are far reaching – a damaging sense of personal malaise and self-

[10] In this respect, Sarlo argues that because consumer items lose value from the moment they come into our hands, we have become 'collectors in reverse', who instead of collecting things themselves, 'collect[s] the acts of acquiring things' (ibid.: 21).

loathing amongst its protagonists, manifested through repeated episodes of homophobic, misogynistic and racial abuse.

The above discussion is important in that it introduces a third party into this cinema-city relationship – that of sexuality – something which is all too often excluded from accounts of cinematic urbanism but which is nevertheless tangentially located between the concepts concerned. For if, as Foucault proposed in his seminal work *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978), we might conceive of sexuality not as an essential, pre-given characteristic of the self but rather a 'technology of power' that has been produced and 'deployed' since the nineteenth century, then we must also recognise the importance of the city in the process. The original 'need' for sexuality, can, in the first instance, arguably be traced back to the development of cities as major centres of industry, for it was here where the human body now required its closest supervision in order to maintain industrial productivity and ensure the continued expansion of labour power. This came in the form of what Foucault terms 'bio-power' – a set of diverse techniques and strategies elaborated in order to achieve 'the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' of which the deployment of sexuality itself, he argues, would become one of the most important (140).[11] It would, in turn, be within cities where sexualities would be produced and from where sexual discourses would ultimately be disseminated. For, as Richard Phillips and Diane Watts write in *Decentring Sexualities*, Foucault's account contains a 'hidden geography' corresponding to the religious, legal, medical and political institutions who oversaw these processes (and continue to do so) and which are generally located in metropolitan urban centres (2000: 1). Dissident sexualities and cultures have also historically thrived within cities, not only due to the anonymity of cities and the corresponding ability they afford for evading surveillance but also, in the post-Stonewall époque, by way of their liberatory potential, for it is here, as Phillips and Watts subsequently note, where the emancipatory movements which shadow those institutions which discursively constitute and regulate sexualities are also broadly located (ibid.).

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[11] According to Foucault, from the seventeenth century, 'power over life' subsequently evolved in two basic forms. The first, he writes, was concerned with an 'anatomo-politics of the human body', a disciplinary procedure which sought to optimise its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility and consolidate its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, resulting in what he terms the notion of 'the body as a machine' (139). The second, which evolved later, relates to 'a bio-politics of the population', a series of interventions and regulatory controls which supervised the 'species body' – that is, the human body as the basis of biological processes: birth-rate, mortality, life expectancy, the level of health and so on, and all the conditions that may cause these to vary (ibid.). The deployment of sexuality would become, he writes, one of the most important 'arrangements'.

And it is amidst this issue of visibility where cinema, in turn, reinserts itself into the equation. For one of the central foundations on which Foucault's *History of Sexuality* was written was that the 'deployment' of sexuality was, contrary to popular belief, concerned less with the repression of sex but more with a modern compulsion to speak incessantly about it:

> for many years, we have all been living in the realm of Prince Mangogul: under the spell of an immense curiosity about sex, bent on questioning it, with an insatiable desire to hear it speak and be spoken about, quick to invent all sorts of magical rings that might force it to abandon its indiscretion (Foucault 1979: 77).

If this is the case then, as Linda Williams argues in *Hardcore: Power Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (1989) in reference to this invocation on the part of Foucault of Diderot's 1748 fable *Les bijoux indiscrets*, amidst this modern compulsion to find the 'magic that will speak sex', the motion picture, has surely been the most recent manifestation of such 'magic' (ibid.:2). This is because cinema, in addition to its deft ability to capture the complexities of urban life, also constitutes – and much more so than painting or even photography – a particularly apposite method of representing the human body and the cadences of its movement through space either as an individual entity or in interaction with other bodies. Films essentially 'tell' through 'showing' which, as Williams continues, means that we are now able to satisfy our curiosity about sex directly, to locate ourselves as 'invisible voyeurs positioned to view the sex "act" itself rather than only hearing about it' (ibid.). In this sense, she conjectures, it has become possible to satisfy – and further incite – 'the desire not only for pleasure' but also 'the pleasure of knowing pleasure' (ibid.: 3).

Whilst Williams' discussion is articulated in the specific context of pornography, the 'speaking sex phenomenon' has not only been fundamental to the circulation and entrenchment of hegemonic sexual discourses (pornography, she argues, despite its seemingly 'deviant' and 'abnormal' status is, in actual fact, characteristically defined by the 'typical' or 'normal' behaviour associated with heterosexual male sexuality), but also their critical, non-heteronormative counter-discourses too. These have recognised the need to address the longstanding silence and/or negativity surrounding same-sex desire and announce this desire not only as existent but also as valid and legitimate. It comes as no surprise, then, that within the more general context of sexual liberation in the United States, as David William Foster notes, the public display of homoerotic gestures, acts, rituals and practices became, in

the 1970s, central to the conquest of gay rights in order to confirm 'not only the erotic liaison between individuals but the centrality those liaisons have in their lives' (2003: 82). Cinema again (in both its fictional and pornographic forms), for the reasons stated in the previous paragraph, would become synonymous with this 'display imperative' (ibid.).

And although, as will be discussed in due course, critics such as Foster have traditionally been reluctant to read Latin American cinematic mediations of same-sex desire as 'entries into an international homoerotic/queer canon' (ibid.: xviii), many such films released in the last twenty years or so have evidenced their own 'display imperative' even if this cannot always be neatly aligned with the identity issues or 'coming out' narratives of a self-consciously 'queer' or 'lesbian and gay' brand of cinema. Some pertinent examples would be Hector Babenco's *O beijo da mulher aranha* (Brazil, 1986), Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* (Mexico, 1985), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Fresa y chocolate* (Cuba, 1993) or more recently, Rodrigo Bellottt's aforementioned *Dependencia sexual,* Karim Aïnouz's *Madame Satã* (Brazil, 2002 – see Chapter Four), Anahí Berneri's *Un año sin amor* (Argentina, 2005 - see Chapter One), and Julián Hernández's *El cielo dividido* (Mexico, 2006), films which, without exception, all feature urban settings and whose representations are intricately bound up with the city.

It is at the intersection of cinema, dissident sexuality and the city therefore where this thesis locates itself, assuming not a mutual exclusivity on the part of these three concepts but an intimate interaction between them. It proposes that by examining through a bi-directional lens how urban space produces dissident sexualities in Latin American cinema and, in turn, how dissident sexualities themselves (re)produce the celluloid urban landscape, the dividing line between 'two moral universes' might be dissolved, thus destabilising these aforementioned oppositions between 'us and them', rich and poor, modern and traditional, included and excluded, empowered and marginalised, centre and periphery, the West and the Rest. In this respect, this thesis assumes cinematic landscapes not to be 'mere representations' but cultural and ideological creations 'in which the meanings of place and society are formed, legitimated, contested and forgotten' (Hopkins 1994: 94). They are in this sense working landscapes, which, as Chris Lukinbeal writes, 'extend far behind the silver screen to intersect how we narrate our identities in our landscapes and how we define the extent of ourselves within a global cinematic community' (2005: 24).

(UNFULFILLED?) HISTORIES OF SEXUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Having established the broad conceptual framework within which my discussion will be articulated, as previously stated, my discussion now turns to tracing the scope of this thesis as a specifically critical intervention, mapping the terrain of recent debates and how they might be negotiated on a theoretical level. In this respect it may be useful to return momentarily to the image(s) discussed in the opening of this introduction, where the dividing line between the two screens represented, I argued, '"two discrete moral universes, north and south of the equator" (Parker 1999: 1), each corresponding to two apparently very different sexual cultures. Such a bifurcated vision of the world is certainly not a new one. Edward Said, in *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (1978), one of the first and most influential discussions of the geographical imagination, for example, makes the cogent point that people have always established 'boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call "the land of the barbarians"' (1978: 54).[12] As Said's account suggests, the process which informed the 'staging' of 'The Orient' by the British and the French and which firmly consolidated the other two poles on the global geo-cultural compass – east and west – was, however, rather more subtle. Here 'strangeness' and 'difference' were embraced and celebrated, and The Orient's 'prodigious cultural repertoire' and 'exotic sensuousness' (ibid.: 72) provided the inspiration for countless artists, writers, commentators and historians. 'L'Orient s'avance, invincible, fatal aux dieux de la lumière, par le charme du rêve, par la magie du clair-obscur', proclaimed Jules Michelet (1798-1874) in this respect, in his rather flamboyant imagining of this mysterious and exuberant land (quoted in Baudet, 1965: xiii). Such representations were invoked symmetrically to their European equivalents, but, as Said goes on to argue, the culture to which they related was always simultaneously construed as being diametrically inferior (ibid.: 72). Yet even before the era of high Victorian imperialism, as Anne McClintock reminds us in *Imperial Leather* (1995), Asia, Africa and the Americas had long figured as a 'porno-tropics' for the European imagination – 'a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desire and fears' (ibid.: 22). Renaissance writers

[12] Derek Gregory defines the 'geographical imagination' quite openely as a 'sensitivity towards the significance of place and space, landscape and nature, in the constitution and conduct of life' (1994: 217). More specifically, continues Phillips, the geographical imagination is most often believed to correspond to the metaphorical spaces and places contained within cultural and mental representations (2006: 9).

found an 'eager and lascivious audience for their spicy tales', she explains, which abounded with

> visions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminised men's breasts flowed with milk and militarised women lopped theirs off (ibid.).

And as much as Quiroga lambasts Lacey for being a 'foreign voyeur' who replicates this long tradition of invented licentious 'reality', the latter can perhaps take comfort in the fact that in the same year, the rather better-known Michel Foucault was still subscribing to the same rather rudimentary erotic compass one year after Said published his seminal account. Peter A. Jackson points out in this respect that although Foucault fulfilled the literal promise of his book, the history he provided was sweeping in its conception of broad global regions (in Phillips 2006: 7). In this respect, it distinguished between societies in which erotic art (*ars* erotica) produced the 'truth' about sex – Rome, Japan, India and the Arabo-Moslem societies – and those where this production is the domain of legal, medical, educational and other types of confession (*sciencia sexualis*), namely, 'our civilisation' or 'the West' (Phillips: ibid.).

One of the central contentions of thesis is that these 'moral universes' have never been quite as discrete as we have been led to believe, for such infamous claims as 'beneath the equator sin does not exist' (or so suggested Dutch historian Gaspar Von Barleus on his return from Brazil in 1660 – see Barleus, 1980), did not arise from simple 'observation' of life in these foreign lands. Rather, the long tradition of European colonial male travel constituted what McClintock aptly terms 'an erotics of ravishment' (ibid.: 22) where the forbidden fruits of the tropics were unabashedly consumed. The colonisation of the Americas was no exception. As Ilán Stavans writes in his illuminating essay entitled *The Latin Phallus* (1996), the Iberian knights that crossed the Atlantic 'were fortune-driven bachelors [who] did not come to settle down' (1996: 145). Territorial expansion and exercising the symbolic powers of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns instead became intimately bound up with the pursuit of pleasure, the conquest of local populations achieved through a 'violent eroticism' in which 'the phallus, as well as gunpowder, was a crucial weapon used to subdue' (ibid.: 146).[13]

[13] The respective colonial experiences under the Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas have traditionally been perceived as somewhat contrasting. Gilberto Freyre, for example, claimed that the Portuguese colonizer of Brazil was a somewhat hybrid figure, 'an Englishman without the harsh lineaments of the Puritan' and also 'a Spaniard without the warlike flame' who had 'no absolute ideas, with no unyielding prejudices' (1956: 185). The sexual conquest of the territory now known as Brazil, reflected the apparently docile nature of the Portuguese and, is envisaged by Freyre, in terms of a

As Stavans points out, the way in which the language of conquest is embodied in the sexual lexicon of contemporary Spanish (and by extension, Portuguese too) is, in this respect, telling. *Cacete* (Portuguese), *pistola* (Portuguese/Spanish), *lanza, rifle, ametralladora* (Spanish) are amongst the plethora of weaponry-associated nouns used to refer to the male member, for example, whilst some of those relating to the vagina – *xavasca, racha, fenda* (Portuguese), *hueco* or *raja* (Spanish) for example – distinctly evoke the image of wounding or injury. The verbs used to describe the sexual act itself correspondingly carry similar connotations of battle or combat, with *descargar* (Spanish) or *descarregar* (Portuguese) sometimes used to refer to ejaculation, whilst a woman might *rendirse* (Spanish) or *dar-se* (Portuguese), namely 'surrender', to a man's sexual advances.

For Stavans, this linguistic spectre of violence and the gender messages encoded within it, are symptomatic of the fact that the 'primal scene' of the clash with colonial power is still 'unhealed rape' in contemporary Latin America (ibid.). Machismo, as a cultural style, he argues, is something which 'endlessly rehearses this humiliating episode [of conquest] in the history of the Americas' (ibid.). The verb *Chingar* (particularly prevalent in Mexican slang), in particular, serves for Stavans as the absolute verbal embodiment of all that is 'ambiguous' and 'excessive' about macho sexuality:

> *Chingar* is what a macho does to a women, what the Iberian soldiers did to the native Indian population, what corrupt politicians do to their electorate (ibid. : 151).

Read from Stavans's perspective then, the representations of gender and sexuality we encounter within the two opening stories of *Dependencia sexual* are arguably less concerned with some sort of timeless Latin American 'essence', but rather with behavioural codes which emanate, at least in part, from foreign (and

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tranquil 'mingling' of the Portuguese, indigenous and African races. Consequently, he argues, Brazilian society, 'of all those in the Americas, is the one most harmoniously constituted so far as racial relations are concerned' (ibid.: 83). In recent decades, however, Freyre's rather idealised account has largely been discredited and the evidence suggests that the Portuguese treatment of indigenous populations was no less brutal than that of the Spanish. The disciplinary actions of governor general Mem de Sá, between 1557 and 1572 in Bahia and areas further north, were particularly forceful, especially with regards to the Caeté tribe, on whom the former declared a general war of punishment following their capture in 1556 of the first bishop of Brazil (Bakewell 1997: 304). According to Bakewell, anybody was authorised to attack them, and any captured indians could be enslaved, with the fifty or so *engenhos* [sugar mills] in Bahia estimated to possess some 9000 indian slaves by 1589 (ibid, : 305). Although literature on the subject is scarce, it would seem less than contentious to suggest that as with African male and female slaves (see, for example, Higgs, 2003) sexual exploitation of indigenous slaves on the part of their masters would have been fairly widespread.

specifically European) shores. This, in turn, begins to open up a more nuanced consideration of the RIGO BosD advertisement which alludes to the fact that the discursive production and material enactment of gender and sexuality has never taken place in isolation but has always been caught up in the transnational flow of ideas, cultures and ideologies. As Benigno Sanchéz-Eppler and Cindy Patton write, sexuality (and by extension, gender too) is 'intimately and immediately felt but publically described and internationally mediated' (2000: 2).

In the sexual realm, during the nineteenth century, discourses relating to gender and sexuality would be concerned with the latest ideas emanating from the European medical establishment which, according to Foucault, announced homosexuality 'as one of the first forms of sexuality' (1978: 43). Here sodomy – a sinful, deviant sexual act which previously anybody was potentially capable of committing – now became viewed as a 'condition', something that was 'innate', and thus the realm of a specific individual with an accompanying identity.[14] Whereas 'the sodomite had been a temporary aberration', he writes, 'the homosexual was now a species [...] nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality' (ibid.). In light of the 'culture of barbarity' supposedly carried across the Atlantic by the Iberian knights several centuries earlier, that these newly emancipated Latin American nations of the nineteenth century should turn back so readily to Europe for inspiration with regards to the renewal of sexual culture might seem surprising. However, as Quiroga writes, the taxonomisation of sectors, behaviours and practices with which these ideas were concerned would play a fundamental role in consolidating and regulating the 'shape' of these newly independent 'national bodies' (2000: 13).

> If modernisation entailed taxonomy and the goal of the nation was modernity then it follows that those practices that were 'pre-modern' remnants of an atavistic past and threatened a presumably 'pure' national body would be seen unfavourably (2000: ibid.).[15]

This process, he continues, would, however occur rather differently in Latin America when compared to Europe. In Latin America, announcing the homosexual

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[14] The boundaries of the term sodomy have varied from place to place, and it has been used both as an umbrella term to refer to 'crimes against nature' (non-procreative sex that might take place between two men or women, or between a woman and a man) or, more specifically, as a way of indexing specifically anal sexual relations between two men.

[15] Substantive historical research on this process is scarce but James Green's *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth Century Brazil* (1999) and Jorge Salessi's *Médicos, maleantes y maricas: Higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación Argentina, Buenos Aires, 1871-1914* (1995) provide enlightening accounts of its occurrence in the Brazilian and Argentinian contexts, respectively, and suggest the presence of a similar phenomenon in other Latin American countries in one form or another at the time.

meant 'pointing at the "invert" or passive partner while the active partner remained '"somewhat" invisible, the remnant of a nonhygienic past' (ibid.). Although he does not elaborate on which period of the region's past he is referring to, the visibility and/or denigration directed towards the passive partner in penetrative male same-sex relations and the relative invisibility, condoning or even prestige enjoyed by the active partner does indeed appear to have a long history. As evidenced in Pete Sigal's edited volume *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America* (2003), many colonial observers such as Cieza de León, chronicler of the conquest in Peru, consistently drew attention in his writings to the widespread practice of (ritualised) sodomy in indigenous societies in which transvestism was cited as being a central element (2). Cieza's account was, to a large extent, politically motivated and brought with it 'much ideological baggage from Europe' (ibid.). For not only did it serve to symbolically feminise the native population and bolster within the colonial imagination a sensation of invincibility and domination,[16] but it also contributed to the sense of justification for imperial expansion into the Americas itself. This reflected the distinctly developmental discourse relating to sexual deviancy present within conquest ideology, writes Sigal, whereby it was argued that sodomy was most extensive in the least civilised societies – a marker of backwardness and degeneracy. The imposition of European civilisation would destroy such activity, it was argued, just one way in which colonialism was regarded as a force for betterment (ibid.: 122).

In fact, as Richard Trexler suggests in *Sex and Conquest* (1995), in many pre-Conquest societies passivity amongst males was loathed, with effeminate boys and men often the subject of humiliation (ibid.: 67). For him, the mythical figure of the 'berdach' served less as an indicator of tolerance with regards to non-normative gender identities and sexual behaviours as opposed to the expression of specifically gendered forms of power relations. In a society where masculinity was prized, the transvestiting and/or raping of another boy or man by a noble was a means of limiting the former's ability to wield power. The attainment of prestige, and the assertion of superiority, could, in turn, be achieved by forcing another noble to hand over his transvestited boys and thus increasing the number of dependent males directly answerable to him (ibid.: 74). The behaviour of the conquistadores was not altogether dissimilar, and concurrent to the widely acknowledged rape of Indian women that took place, it is likely that male

[16] In this respect Richard Trexler suggests that 'it is a widespread characteristic of patriarchal conceptions of political order that power in politics is said to belong to males or those perceived to be male, while dependency is said to be the fate of the female' (2003: 70).

rape also featured as part of their 'violent eroticism'. Here the symbolic feminisation of indigenous cultures evident in colonial literature would incorporate a physical aspect, with the act of anal penetration serving as 'proof' of the inherent effeminacy, weakness and degeneracy of those men in charge of indian society whilst simultaneously confirming the masculinity of the conquistadores and legitimacy of their 'civilising' mission.

Stavans again traces the 'excessive masculinity' often associated with Latin(o) American men back to the region's history of conquest claiming them as 'machos, dominating figures, rulers, conquistadores' but also 'closeted homosexuals' (ibid.: 148). According to his account, 'the lawless path of male eroticism' embodied in the colonial experience dictates that 'sooner or later the macho's glorious masculinity will be shared in bed with another man' (ibid.). According to this logic and returning to *Dependencia sexual*, it is quite conceivable that Joaquin and his friends might have once procured the services of the transvestite prostitutes they verbally and physically abuse, without this erotic interaction necessarily impinging on their status as heterosexual men within the peer group. Indeed, in a more extreme scenario this abuse might not merely have been limited to the throwing of rotten eggs, but rather taken the form of *non-consensual* intercourse with the said prostitutes, viewed by the participants not as an aberration but as a legitimate form of heteronormative masculine assertion.

Although in the realm of the social sciences the likes of Roger Lancaster (1992) and Ana Maria Alonso and Maria Koreck (1988) partially support the idea that male honour and prestige can be enhanced through penetrating another man, other critics such as Steven O. Murray find this highly problematic and more 'a *maricón* fantasy than a plausible empirical explanation' (1995: 52). Nevertheless, even if Murray is right, the above discussion of Latin America's indigenous past and its subsequent (sexual) conquest is nevertheless useful in shedding light on the roots of this 'traditional' gender-identified model whereby male homosexuality is determined by role as opposed to sexual object choice and which has served as one of the primary themes in work on homosexuality in the region (see, for example, Lancaster, 1992 (Nicaragua), Salessi, 1995 (Argentina), Carrier, 1995 (Mexico), Schifter, 1998 (Costa Rica), Fry, 1982 and Parker, 1999 (Brazil), Almaguer, 1998 (Latino North America)). It also explains why, after the supposed introduction of Western medical sexual discourses in the nineteenth century, 'naming the homosexual' might have meant

pointing at the 'invert' or the passive partner, whilst the active partner, if not exalted, lauded or admired by his contemporaries, as Lancaster, Alonso and Koreck imply, then has at least continued to remain 'somewhat invisible' as many of the socio-anthropological studies referenced above indeed suggest.

COUNTERING GLOBALISING DISCOURSES OF SEXUALITY

Thus far, the above discussion disrupts somewhat the rather unitary discourse which has informed minority-world perspectives on the globalisation of sexuality whereby the influence of European medico-legal discourses between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the subsequent dissemination of critical, counter-hegemonic discourses and the concept of 'gay identity' in the twentieth century is presumed to be a universal given. In this sense, it reflects the concern embodied in this thesis with responding to calls for studies more attuned to the specificity of non-Western cultural forms (see, for example, Ong, 1999) and providing an account of how recent cinematic mediations of the Latin American city speak back to the Western/ethno-centrism for which much scholarship relating to lesbian, gay and queer studies, indeed LGBT cultural production itself, has been criticised (see, for example, Binnie, 2003).

Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* is a case in point, which in addition to its rather problematic division of the world into 'discrete moral universes' cross-hatches this rather rudimentary imagined geography with an equally questionable tension between centre and periphery. 'The nineteenth century witnessed a generalisation of the deployment of sexuality', he writes, 'starting from a hegemonic centre' with 'eventually the entire social body provided with a sexual body' (1978: 127). The words 'from' and 'eventually' are telling, implying a developmental understanding of sexuality whereby the production of sexual discourses occurs from a fixed point (i.e. metropolitan Europe) through a gradual process of diffusion over space and time. His words also contain a latent sense of inevitability, implying that those lying on the periphery of this radius of influence – the metropolitan margins, provincial towns and villages and former or current overseas colonies, for example – would take longer to be 'reached' by these discourses but reached they would be. Resistance, it seems, was futile. The previous section refutes somewhat this sense of inevitability. For whilst, as previously argued 'the discursive production and material enactment of gender and sexuality has never taken place in isolation but has always been caught up in the translation flow of ideas, cultures and ideologies', my discussion

shows that in the Latin American context, the reception, dissemination and effectiveness of these ideas, cultures and ideologies has been somewhat partial, uneven and incomplete.

The diffusion of a globalised form of gay identity and culture embodied in what Denis Altman describes as the 'Global Gay', a figure pertaining to a 'definable group of self-identified homosexuals [....] who see themselves as part of a global community, whose commonalities override but do not deny those of race and nationality' (1997: 424) is frequently spoken about with the same sense of inevitability and often subscribes to a similar geographical imagination of things. The opening sequence of John Scagliotti's documentary *Dangerous Lives: Coming Out in the Developing World* (2003) is, in this respect, telling. Overlaid with images of 'gay pride' marches, footage from the hit British television series *Queer As Folk* (1999/2000) and a proud lesbian couple cradling what we presume to be their new born baby, a voiceover reads:

> Homosexuality has been part of our world since the time of the ancients. But in the mid-twentieth century, homosexuals in Western societies created something new: a public identity and a visible culture. In the last decade of the twentieth century, this heightened visibility began spreading throughout the developing world. In the West very few people knew about this historic upheaval until fifty-two men on a Nile riverboat in Cairo were arrested for crimes of debauchery.

The voiceover then moves towards the discussion of Cairo's status in the 1990s as the Middle East's 'gayest' city, declaring that what was happening there 'had its antecedents in San Francisco's Castro, New York's Greenwich Village, Amsterdam's Warmoesstraat and the Marais in Paris', places which it posits as 'gay meccas' in the post-war period. From this viewpoint, then, the production of globalised gay identity and culture begins at a Euro-American centre, and through a process of 'global queering', as Altman terms it (ibid.), spreads stealthily across the planet reaching even the most 'peripheral' and 'unlikely' destinations – in this case Egypt. Here the emergence of a dissident sexual subculture constructed around the notion of gay identity is not viewed as something that has occurred organically in this land of the 'ancients', merely a copy of an original cultural model produced in the 'West' which sets the tone and leads the way for the rest.

For Doreen Massey, space and how it is conceived is fundamental to the way in which the minority world has traditionally viewed itself as being at the centre of things – all seeing, all conquering – while the rest of the world lies passively 'in wait'. To

deflect our attention briefly back to the conquest of the Americas, the recounting of such 'voyages of discovery', for example, typically imagines space as 'an expanse we travel across', she writes. '[Hernan] Cortés voyaged across space, found Tenochtitlán, and took it' (2000: 4). The conception of space as something that can be crossed and maybe conquered 'has particular ramifications', she continues. Implicitly it equates space with the land and the sea and makes space 'seem like a surface; continuous and given' and, in this sense, she argues, it 'differentiates' (ibid.). 'Hernán, active maker of history, journeys across this surface and finds Tenochtitlán upon it' whilst other places, peoples, cultures are relegated merely to the status phenomena 'on' this surface. It is not an innocent manoeuvre, she argues, since it means they are deprived of their own histories. Immobilised, 'they lie there, on space, in place [and] await Cortés (or our, or global capital's) arrival' (ibid.), she concludes. The narrative of 'inevitability' which inflects accounts of neoliberal capitalist globalisation similarly subscribes to a similar imagination of things, she continues. Here, in a crafty 'sleight of hand', the conceptualisation of space and time is manipulated – geography is turned into history and space into time. According to this logic, different 'places' are interpreted as different stages in a single temporal development – Western Europe is 'advanced', other parts of the world, 'some way behind'. Countries like Nicaragua or Mozambique are not then conceived as being any different from 'us', rather, just at an earlier stage 'on the path along which the capitalist West has led' (ibid.: 5).

Within the realm of academic theory, the correlation between capitalist development, the resultant genesis of the modern 'metropolis' and the emergence of gay identity and associated spaces, is certainly now well rehearsed. Indeed by 1983, John D'Emilio's seminal article *Capitalism and Gay Identity* had already put to bed the notion of the 'eternal homosexual' (101), or 'the idea that gayness was always there, waiting to be uncovered' (Sinfield 2000: 21). According to D'Emilio (but see also Knopp, 1992) the consolidation of a system of free labour in the mid-1800s and the advent of the factory system, whereby production was split into public and private forms, separating the home from the workplace and production from reproduction, created a separate 'domestic sphere' relating to the home. For men, this would become a refuge from and independent of the 'cruel' 'economic' world of work, given over to the nurturing of happiness and emotional wellbeing. For women, engaged in unwaged domestic labour (the running of the family home, cooking, sewing/mending, child bearing/rearing and so forth) and now dependent on male wages for their economic

survival, the experience of home was rather different – not as something distinct from the workplace (there was no separation) but as a space marked by the absence (at least during working hours) of men.

As Knopp argues, these new experiences of separate, gendered public and private spaces (characterised, of course, by very unequal power relationships) had the consequence of creating new forms of subjectivity in people's lives and (now quoting Zarestsky, 1976) the modern notion of a 'personal' or 'private life' (ibid.: 658). For women, he continues, generally relegated to the private, domestic sphere, this was defined by creating relationships of working cooperation with other women, building woman-centred networks and other supportive cultural institutions (ibid.: 659). Whilst these afforded the possibility of same-sex erotic encounters, Knopp makes the point that lesbianism could only exist if it did not fundamentally threaten the unequal power relationship between men and women; as an exclusive alternative to women's sexual bonds with men, it simply was not economically feasible for most women. The situation, however, was quite different for men who were afforded greater possibilities for constructing a personal life *outside* the family unit (or, more radically, rejecting it completely) due to their relative physical detachment from the family home, engagement in waged labour and the resultant ability to exist independently of its structures. In this sense, a 'gay lifestyle' (at least as we understand it today), was for men, in theory at least, considerably more feasible. These differences aside, however, both these gendered experiences highlight, according to Knopp

> [the] profound contradiction between industrial capital's need for disciplined and conformist gender-divided labour forces and its creation at the same time of real and imagined spaces of 'personal life' that enabled women and men (albeit in very different ways and to different extents) to explore personal identities based on nonconformist gender roles and sexual practices (ibid.: 660).

Ultimately, however, as the above author notes in previous work on gay involvement in gentrification in New Orleans (1990, 1995), it would be the eventual *decline* of manufacturing employment in many North American cities that would consolidate such spaces as firm territorial and economic bases through which to assert political power and foster a material sense of community. On the one hand, he argues, the concomitant rise in white-collar administrative, managerial and service-sector jobs drew a disproportionate number of gay people into the previously industrialised city-centres where these sectors were now based. On the other hand, confronted with the

relative heterosexism and homophobia supposedly virulent in (suburban) 'family' neighbourhoods and the latent availability of inexpensive, renovatable housing stock in these often depressed downtown areas, gay people were simultaneously given the opportunity not only to reside in such areas but also invest in their regeneration. Here they began to take their own alternative codings of space 'out of the closet' and into the public sphere, resulting in 'the proliferation of visible [...] lesbian and gay commercial, residential and leisure spaces' (1995: 158). As such, 'the gentrified gay neighbourhood', became, he writes, 'a defining characteristic of both the "new" inner-city and the "new" gay identity' (1992: 665).

More recently these materialist accounts have, in turn, become cross-hatched by debates examining the impact of globalisation and the growth of supra-territorial space on the production of globalised forms of dissident sexuality, identity and culture discussed briefly above. For Altman, as well as other critics such as Bob Cant (1997) and John Champagne (1999), 'global queering' again appears overwhelmingly to be driven by the expansion of the free market and consumer society with American cultural references, in particular, supposedly defining 'contemporary gay and lesbian meanings for most of the world' (1996: 2). And, for all these above critics, transnational commodities are cited as the primary carriers through which these cultural references are disseminated. For Champagne, these take the form of 'rainbow flag pins and stickers, circuit party fashion, depilatories for men, sex toys and pornography' amongst others (ibid.: 146), whilst Altman stresses the importance of books, films, magazines and fashion (1996: n.p.), though music too arguably merits acknowledgement.

The logic of capitalist modernity, in particular its more recent neoliberal, globalised forms, however, has been played out rather differently in Latin American contexts. As Nestor García Canclini writes in *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1995) 'the most-reiterated hypothesis in the literature on Latin American modernity may be summarised as follows: we have had an exuberant modernism with a deficient modernisation' (ibid.: 41). What García Canclini is referring to here is the perceived disparity between the utopian ideals of modernism as a cultural project centred on the renewal of symbolic practices (art, literature, architecture and so on) in an experimental or critical sense, and what modernisation as a socio-economic process has actually achieved in its (re)construction of modernity (ibid.: 11).

It was not, for instance, until the 1940s that mass industrialisation and urbanisation actually occurred in Latin America. Until the onset of the debt crisis in the 1970s, most Latin American countries did indeed achieve impressive records of economic growth in these years due to ISI (import-substitution industrialisation), based on the development of a strong manufacturing sector, stimulated by aggressive national investment and the imposition of high tariff walls to discourage manufactured imports (Hershberg and Rosen 2006: 5). These years saw, in turn, the genesis of a sizeable working class who were able to organise themselves strategically in order to secure greater equality in wealth distribution, income and political participation (ibid.).

However, whilst Hershberg and Rosen argue that 'ISI afforded noteworthy opportunities for upward mobility and [...] the sustenance of social solidarities', they also recognise that 'these achievements were woefully partial' (ibid.: 4). Exclusion, they write, was particularly widespread in the countryside where agrarian reform remained an elusive promise with the traditional dominant oligarchies resisting any efforts to modernise land-tenure regimes (ibid.: 5). With cities therefore serving as the focal point for industrialisation, the 1950s and 1960s, in turn, saw the mass exodus of these rural populations to the region's metropolitan areas, which struggled to integrate these new populations into their burgeoning urban fabrics. It was, in that period, write Koonings and Krujit, when 'de facto second-class citizenship' began to acquire the distinctly urban face it is often associated with today (2007: 8).

Although this lack of integration was seen as a mere 'delay' in modernisation that would be overcome (import substitution industrialisation was ideologically bound up with ideas of national integration), the shift from protectionism towards free-trade neoliberalisation in the 1980s, propelled increasingly in the 1990s by globalisation and the advent of (globalised) service-based economies (see, for example, Sassen, 2001) has only served to further exacerbate this phenomenon of social splintering. As such, much of the urban population in Latin America and other regions of the majority world find themselves increasingly 'separated, spatially, socially and culturally' from the (lower and upper) middle-class city of law enforcement, public services and formal employment (Portes in Koonings and Krujit, 2006: 7) and instead belonging to a permanent informal sector engaged in a parallel economy often of criminal proportions (see, for example, Castells, 2000).

Thus whilst, as Shohat and Stam argue, minority-world 'modernisation' theories have blamed majority world underdevelopment on cultural traditions and

assumed that it 'need only follow in the footsteps of the West to achieve economic "take off"' (1994: 17), the brief account provided above shows this to be somewhat misguided. As Koonings and Krujit conclude pessimistically:

> Two decades of neo-liberal reforms, formal democratisation and globalising urban modernity, however, have produced nothing but disillusion for the 50-70 percent of urban denizens estimated to live on the wrong side of the breach of poverty, insecurity and exclusion (ibid.: 1).

With this is mind, the assumption that minority-world logics relating to the production of sexually dissident identities, cultures and spaces (and which correlate this process with (neoliberal, globalised) capitalist development) will automatically be fulfilled in majority-world contexts must also therefore be called into question. For whereas, in the minority world, as John D'Emilio writes, capitalism 'has gradually undermined the material basis of the nuclear family by taking away the economic functions that cemented the ties between family members' (ibid.: 108), in areas of the majority world such as Latin America, lack of stable employment opportunities, the still limited reach of the welfare state and the resultant precarity of existence this engenders for much of the population means that for many, the family (in conjunction with wider social networks) continues to fulfil a highly important role as an economic support structure for offspring long after the age at which many young people in countries such as the UK would have left home.

On a purely practical level, this necessarily inhibits the construction of an erotic life regardless of one's sexuality. However, it is especially true of those attracted to members of their own sex where the repercussions of being discovered in a same-sex erotic liaison may be more far-reaching. In this respect, Quiroga makes the point that whilst the issuing of masks to participants of the first ever gay march in Buenos Aires in 1993 may have conflicted with the discourse of unproblematised visibility peddled by North American identity politics, in doing so, it raised the very important point that declaring one's sexuality 'whatever the cost' becomes rather more problematic in contexts where this involves relinquishing something as basic as the food on one's plate or the roof over one's head (ibid.: 2). He continues that even for those who held their sexuality as a kind of 'open secret', whereby their families had come, albeit tacitly, to accept their partners, the mask was still of significance, for the social fabric such families depended on would have been destroyed 'had the very notion of homosexuality as *identity* been put on the dinner table' (ibid.). 'To expect men and

women to choose family exile as the price of a homosexual identity', he continues, 'was certainly too much to ask in such a tightly knit context of relations' (ibid.).

Of course, this is not to say that a 'gay identity' cannot be adopted and lived strategically in more protected, tolerant and temporary contexts whether they pertain to the virtual spaces of online networking sites, for example, or the material spaces of the gay world such as bars, clubs, saunas or motels. The latter, in particular, have become somewhat of a Latin American institution, allowing young couples (gay or straight) still resident in their respective family homes to construct a personal erotic life for themselves (albeit one played out in a time-allotted fashion in surroundings of varying salubrity). However, as will be discussed in Chapter One, accessing such material spaces is still nevertheless contingent on financial solvency, as is the ability to buy into the consumer culture around which the likes of Altman, Cant and Champagne argue gay identity is increasingly constructed. This ability, as the previous discussion demonstrates, is for many social sectors, highly compromised. Even the virtual gay world which, in theory, can be accessed relatively cheaply by low-income groups through local internet cafes may be similarly off-limits for those men or women worried about who may be looking over their shoulder or monitoring their browsing activity remotely.

The result is that the proliferation of the global metropolitan gay model has not been as presumably indestructible as critics such as Altman would have us believe. Rather, the evidence seems to suggest that it has been restricted to those (minority) sectors of the population most able to participate in the market, buy into consumer culture, take part in the political process and access educational and social institutions. The sexual culture that consequently emerges is one inflected not only according to highly dichotomised (racialised) class differences but also, an accompanying geography structured around metropolitan centres and non-metropolitan urban and rural margins.

In 1982, for example, Peter Fry noted that whilst the 'so-called "homosexual", "entendido" or "gay"' could be found within certain sectors of the middle-classes in the large Brazilian metropolises, the 'traditional model' nevertheless remained 'dominant in poor and working-class neighbourhoods of the Amazon region and also in the north and northeast regions of Brazil in rural areas and among the poor in the large conurbations' (1982: 82). Nearly twenty years later, David Higgs in the specific context of Rio de Janeiro, would argue that co-resident gay couples were still 'virtually

unknown' in the *favelas* and the city remained in a '1950s holding pattern where discreet, mostly white, prosperous gays could survive on the margins of bourgeois propriety by avoiding any challenge to the heterosexist ascendency' (1999: 162).

In Colombia (specifically the city of Cali) the organisation of same-sex desire according to active/passive binaries is noted again by Giraldo, Arias and Reyes as being prevalent in poorer areas of the cities (particularly the eastern sector, populated mainly by blacks). At the same time, they refer to a parallel study undertaken within organisations representing sexual minorities which appeared almost exclusively as the domain of middle-class, self-assumedly gay, white or mestizo men with almost a complete lack of young black men due to their 'socio-spatial' exclusion (2006: n.p.). In the Bolivian context, Paulson notes a similar phenomenon in relation to the establishment of a gay centre in the city of Santa Cruz in the 1990s in which only a small portion of men who had sex with men participated in project activities, 'such that this chapter of gay genesis left out many men who were too poor, too rich, too white, too indigenous. too masculine, too feminine' (2006: 14).

Whilst David William Foster's account of 'contested space and homoeroticism' in Buenos Aires is generally more positive in outlook, it suggests that the city's reputation as a locus of queer visibility and gay activism in the post-dictatorship era can similarly be aligned with 'urban privilege' whilst 'Argentine machismo' and the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality these imply continue, within the national imagination at least, to be the domain of the urban margins and 'mythical countryside' as embodied by the figure of the Gaucho, the suburban *compadrito* and the Peronista/unionised labourer (1998: 87). On a more general level, according to Foster, 'the homogenisation among [queer] demographic concentrations in the United States has yet to become the norm in Latin America' (ibid. : 84).

BEYOND DEPENDENCY AND SUBALTERNITY

Perhaps unsurprisingly given this seemingly ambivalent position assumed by gay culture and identity politics in the region, in the specific arena of cultural production, certain cultural critics have been reluctant to read representations of same-sex desire as they appear in poetry, literature or film as pertaining to some sort of 'international/homoerotic/queer canon', as Foster puts it (2993: xviii). Daniel Balderston and José Quiroga, for example, are particularly critical of two anthologies entitled *Now the Volcano* (1979) and *My Deep Dark Pain is Love* (1983) published by

the San Francisco-based Gay Sunshine Press. Bringing together, under the banner of 'Latin American Gay Literature', excerpts from the work of Salvador Novo (Mexico), Adolfo Caminha (Brazil), Luis Cernuda (Mexico), Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba), Luis Zapata (Mexico), Jorge Marchant Lozano (Chile) and Tulio Carella (Argentina) amongst others. Editor Winston Leyland and translator E. A. Lacey (mentioned above) are accused of being 'bent' on creating the illusion of an 'imagined community' in which these writers apparently 'speak to each other' when, in reality, it is only within the space enabled by the said volumes that any such dialogue actually exists (2003: 102). According to Balderston and Quiroga, many of the later 'internationalist gestures' of the U.S. gay and lesbian movement can be seen in these 'consumer objects', which spawned, they claim

> a belief in the 'universality' of the gay experience, spilling off into a process by means of which identity categories create new pan-national subjects (gay male writers), deracinated from their context and always in a position of literary and political subservience to their First World 'brethren' (2003: 87).

It is somewhat ironic therefore that Balderton's own writing should succumb to the same unitary discourse for which he so criticises the purveyors of this mythical 'Latin American Gay Fiction'. His essay on the famous Mexican film *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* (Jaime Humberto, 1985) is a case in point. Here, questioning the apparent 'transparency' of the protagonist's (Rodolfo) bisexuality which he had unquestioningly endorsed at a queer studies conference in Iowa back in 1994, Balderstone seeks to get to the bottom of the desire which drives the relationship between Rodolfo and Ramón. His conclusions are not, in themselves, problematic, writing that precisely due to Doña Herlinda's refusal to define the relationship taking place under her roof, what flourishes is a 'polymorphous perversity' amongst the characters (196). In this sense, he argues, the film is not a 'coming out' film but a 'bringing back in film' which 'transgresses gay cultural expectations'. What *is* unsettling, however, is the way the 'coming out narrative' is used in the first place as a yardstick against which to articulate his discussion. He writes:

> although gay subtexts were present in this and several others of Hermosillo's 1970s films, *Doña Herlinda* looks in retrospect like a response to the 'coming-out' narratives of the post-Stonewall period which strongly impacted upon Mexico as elsewhere (191).

Not only does he presuppose that such narratives are a fact of queer-marked films outside the majority world (there are plenty where there is not the slightest utterance of

the word 'gay'), the words 'impacted *upon* [my stress]' posit events in countries such as Mexico not as transformative practices but again, as mere 'copies', or at best, 'developments', of those occurring in North America or Europe. And this is not to mention his rather clumsy use of terms such as 'gay', 'butch' and 'fag-hag', which are used without any qualification as to what he actually means by them and what (differing) significance, if any, they might have in the country in question. Certainly to classify Rodolfo and Ramón as a 'gay couple' whilst arguing that their relationship is defined by 'polymorphous perversity' would seem a contradiction in terms. Indeed, one might argue that structuring one's argument around questions of whether a character 'is' or 'is not' straight, gay, bisexual or otherwise serves only to consolidate such categories, rather, as John Binnie writes, 'than challenging the power relations that lead to their production in the first place' (2004: 69).

Foster himself, the author of currently the only region-wide survey of queer-marked film, certainly seems at pains to avoid any such criticism, claiming that the essays contained within his volumes (and in which Humberto's film is discussed) 'are not specifically interested in lesbigay lives, at least those lived on the level of lesbian or gay or bisexual or any other non- or anti-patriarchal identity'. Instead, he writes that the films are read 'as texts firmly grounded in specific issues of Latin American national societies and a continental (although primarily urban) understanding of sexuality' (ibid: xviii). 'These are Latin American cultural productions', he declares firmly, 'and I wish them to be understood primarily as such' (ibid.). And yet this perspective brings with it its own limitations. In this respect, putting to one side the fact that of the fourteen film analysed in his study eight are co-productions with non-Latin American countries, three contain dialogue in French, English and Bambara respectively, four are directed by non-Latin American directors and two feature non-Latin American actors in their lead roles, in the realm of sexuality, Foster's insistence on Latin American 'essence' is problematic not least because it succumbs (somewhat involuntarily) to the very process of 'othering' we presume the said critic would be keen to avoid.

As Dennison and Lim warn in the introduction to *Remapping World Cinema* (2006) 'where there is Orientalism there is also Occidentalism' (4). On one level, Occidentalism can be said to overestimate the hegemony of the minority world, seeing it, to borrow Stam and Shohat's phraseology, 'as an all-powerful mover and shaker' (1994: 17). This is something for which dependency theory more generally has been

criticised. It tends to imagine a 'hierarchical global system controlled by metropolitan capitalist countries and their multinational corporations' in which 'First World' prosperity is achieved at the expense of the 'Third World' poverty and a whole host of other social ills (ibid.). This seems to be the point that Bellot's aptly named *Dependencia sexual* is trying to make, the RIGO BosD advertisement apparently symbolising a North American-managed 'economy of beauty' from which the negative bi-products of its ruthless pursuit of profit, namely 'marginalisation and abuse', are presented as being particularly virulent in the brand's more distant markets, in this case, Bolivia.

Yet as Manuel Castells (2000), J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996) and others have argued, capitalism has been as uneven and diverse in the minority world as anywhere else and its neo-liberal forms similarly exclusionary and prone to exacerbating pre-existing social cleavages. In this respect, one of García Canclini's opening propositions in *Hybrid Cultures* is that the traditional view of a 'repressed and postponed' Latin American modernity, that is but a 'belated and deficient echo', is erroneously premised on 'measuring our modernity with [overly] optimised images of how that process happened in the countries of the centre' (ibid.: 44). This logic can be extended to Latin American dissident sexual cultures, whose perception, to borrow García Canclini's phraseology, merely as 'belated and deficient echo[s]' of those in the majority world, similarly subscribes to the misguided presumption that here they are already homogeneous, fully-formed entities with which all sexual dissidents identify and include themselves. In this respect, Phillips, Watts and Shuttleton's aforementioned edited volume *Decentring Sexualities* constitutes an important intervention. Focussing on 'core countries' but not 'core positions within those countries', but rather on such 'liminal' or 'inbetween' spaces in the margins of sexual geography such as the suburbs, small towns or rural areas, the essays contained within highlight that there are many men and women who 'dis-identify' with identity politics or the commercial gay scene and for whom a gay bar or LGBT centre may be equally as 'foreign' for them as it would be for a Bolivian, Colombian or any other Latin American national. In this respect, Jarod Hayes argues, 'it is important for us to render less presumably indestructible homosexuality (and heterosexuality for that matter) as we know it in the west' (ibid.: 84).

On another level, Occidentalism, as Dennison and Lim write, has had the concomitant effect of 'confining non-Western cultures only to ghettos' (ibid.: 4) or, as

Stam and Shohat argue, to a 'a homogenous block, passively accepting the economic and ideological imprint of the First World' (ibid.: 18). *Dependencia sexual*, for example, assumes that the world's most successful fashion labels (in this case RIGO BosD) are located in the global 'north', presumably because a comparable product in South America is either inferior or unable to compete with its American or European counterparts. In fact, it is quite feasible that the advertised underwear could have come, for example, from Brazil, another 'dominant' global player in the fashion industry, and home to brands such as Osklen or Melissa which can be found in shops from São Paulo to Santa Cruz, New York to New Delhi.[17] Similarly, whilst Bellot attributes the disturbing representations contained within his film to a 'media-centred culture' that is similarly associated with the global north, this ignores the fact, as Shohat and Stam argue, that 'media imperialism' is currently being subjected to 'powerful reverse currents' (ibid.: 31) whereby audiovisual products of Brazil's RedeGlobo or Mexico's Televisa, for example, compete with North American fare across Latin(o) America and further afield in countries such as Russia or Portugal.

Postcolonial theory, something which the presspack to *Dependency sexual* cites explicitly as having influenced the film (ibid.) has been similarly criticised for its 'metrocentrism'. In this respect, Aihwa Ong argues it to be a

> metropolitan theory of third-world subalternity [which] tend[s] to collapse all non-Western countries into the same model of analysis in which primacy is given to racial, class and national dominations stemming from the European colonial era (1999: 32).

Privileging a narrative of 'domination' is particularly problematic in the sense that it implies victimhood whilst denying possible agency and resistance on the part of the individual. This is an issue which has been raised in relation to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?* (1988). Here, Spivak, engaging with the discourse of *sati* (widow sacrifice) in which the Hindu patriarchal code converged with colonial accounts of Indian culture to eradicate any suggestion of a woman's voice, proposes that 'no scene of speaking' can arise for the subaltern woman and no discursive space can emerge from which she can form an 'utterance'. 'For the "true" subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself', she writes (285). Critics such as Benita Parry take issue with this model of the 'silent subaltern' because it assigns 'an absolute

[17] Brazil's textile and clothing sector exported $1.4 billion in 2010 – up twenty percent from 2009 figures (Bevins, 2011: n.p.).

power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native' whilst showing a 'deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard' (1987: 34-35). Parry argues, for instance, that Spivak's reading of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is deficient because it ignores the 'traces and testimony of women's voice on those sites where women inscribe themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists' (ibid.: 35).

Such criticism might similarly be directed at Scagliotti's aforementioned documentary, *Coming Out in the Developing World.* Despite the initial optimism attributed by the opening sequence to the arrival of 'heightened [gay] visibility' in the majority world, the film ultimately seems more concerned with focussing on the cost of such visibility for queer citizens living in countries where cultural norms and local laws have yet to 'catch up' with the values of globalised gay culture concurrently in circulation. Taking the arrest of fifty-two men on a Nile riverboat in Cairo for 'crimes of debauchery' in 1991 as its point of departure, the film then takes the viewer on a predictably bleak whistle-stop tour of the 'developing world', providing a range of suitably harrowing accounts of human rights abuses against LGBT citizens in countries as far afield as Pakistan, Namibia and Honduras. This is not to belittle the ordeals which are recounted by the documentary's participants – some of them are indeed shocking and the documentary in this respect fulfils an important expository and educative role. What *is* problematic, however, is that virtually all these participants turn out to be emigrants speaking from the United States or Canada, with the narrator stating:

> For those few who glimpsed the possibility of living an honest gay life only to have it taken away, there was no turning back [...] exile in the West was the only option.

This may well be true, but one cannot help but wonder what became of those who did not have the privilege of that 'option', with the discussion of gay and lesbian activism and sexuality politics in the countries in question disappointingly brief. Rather, the very fact that the final words in the documentary, 'I will fight for my rights', are then followed by a post-script informing us that Ashraf Zanati, the speaker of the words, emigrated to Western Canada in 2003, seems to suggest that gay 'liberation' in fact, begins and ends in North America. In this sense, the 'ordinary' queer citizens of Pakistan, Namibia and Honduras are deprived of a voice in this film, spoken for by their more fortunate, and in many cases, more wealthy, brethren residing in countries

on the other side of the world. In turn, the more 'discreet' and 'elliptical' paths to liberation that those 'left behind' might be forging, go wholly unmentioned (Phillips 2006: 19). As Phillips reminds us, these may be less easily recognisable than those associated with gay and lesbian politics and thus provide more conceptual and empirical challenges (ibid.) but nevertheless they are no less productive or legitimate.

What emerges from this discussion is that merely disputing the 'inevitability' of what are assumed to be 'Western-driven' phenomena and/or simplistically dismissing them as being either inherently defective in a majority-world context (democracy, human rights and capitalism) and/or detrimental to economic and social wellbeing (neoliberalism and globalisation) *at the expense* of any consideration of agency and localised transformative practices only serves to further deprive these societies, as Massey puts it, 'of their own trajectories, their own histories and the potential for their own, perhaps different, futures' (ibid.: 5). Within the geographical imagination, in turn, the centre-periphery dichotomy is not challenged but rather remains ever more firmly entrenched both on the level of the global and the local, 'obliterating the multiplicities [and] contemporaneous heterogeneities of space' (ibid.). This rings particularly true for imagined geographies of dissident sexuality whereby the large metropolises of the minority world – London, New York, Los Angeles and other (perceived) centres of global capital – are regarded as the harbingers of the 'modern' metropolitan gay model which is then replicated (always deficiently) amongst the moneyed elites pertaining to 'local versions of the metropolis' (Sinfield ibid.: 21) such as São Paulo, Bangkok, Cape Town, Buenos Aires and so on. Poorer (and often darker) queer citizens residing in the urban margins and rural spaces merely have to 'make do' with their own 'traditional' model, according to which non-metropolitan urban sexualities and rural sexualities are rather problematically elided.

Such an imagination of things obfuscates more reflexive and nuanced readings of the above phenomena, particularly globalisation and neoliberalism. As John Binnie reminds us, it has long been a touchstone of contemporary cultural studies that globalisation wields 'diverse, spatially uneven effects' (even if, he continues, this is often overlooked in studies of sexual geographies) (ibid.: 36). In this respect, and to redirect our discussion more concretely back to the city, García Canclini argues that traditional models of conceptualising space, through oppositions such as urban and rural, centre and periphery, are being made increasingly redundant. He writes that 'megalopolises' such as Mexico City, for example, now contain at least four cities,

superimposed onto one another: the historical-territorial city (the historic centre), the industrial city (marked by expansion into the urban periphery), the informational-communicational city (the domain of financial and informational networks) and a fourth city, composed of diverse but coexisting temporalities – 'un montaje efervescente de culturas de distintas épocas' (ibid.: 88). This contradictory and chaotic 'video clip' city, as García Canclini terms it, is symbolic of what he perceives to be the ungraspable nature of a city which is no longer experienced as a totality by its inhabitants who 'transita, conoce, experimenta pequeños enclaves' (ibid.: 82).

And yet rather than capitulating to the idea of a fractured city characterised *solely* by gaping social chasms exacerbated by imposed segregation, surveillance of populations and the disintegration of democratic uses of public space, as imaged in Teresa Caldeira's *City of Walls* (2000), García Canclini suggests that globalisation's transformation of contemporary cities into communication hubs offers the possibility to bridge these chasms and 'recomponer esa totalidad'. Televisa's daily deployment of a helicopter to map Mexico City's traffic jams and the transposition of these images onto the television screen is one such example which he provides. It is, he argues, an extremely effective 'simulacra', one which, 'nos permite orientarnos en el tránsito y ayuda a desarrollar imaginarios sobre aquello que desconocemos' (ibid.: 83). For García Canclini, communications technology and the renewed participatory possibilities it affords has created 'nuevos actors sociales' who

> Parecen saber mas que el intendente de la ciudad, más que los políticos, mas que los movimientos populares, porque cada uno de estos actores tradicionales parece ocuparse de pequeños fragmentos' (ibid. : 81).

His view is echoed by José Joaquín Brunner who speaks of a 'new class' of 'receiver-consumers' who 'process, interpret, appropriate and live this mass of produced and transmitted signs [of a decentred and deterritorialised culture] in their own way, individually or, at times, collectively' (2002: 22-23). These accounts would appear to reflect the 'optimism' with which some postmodern thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard have viewed the now highly dislocated communicative structure of post-industrial society. For Lytoard, the collapse of 'grand narratives' in the wake of the new relationships between science and technology has given way to what he terms 'little narratives'. Irreducibly local in nature and eschewing the unifying pretence of modern Reason in favour of a heterogeneous field of exploration and possibility, these 'little narratives' embody new forms of knowledge, 'no longer transmitted *en block*, once and for all' but 'served', he writes, 'à la carte' (1983: 48).

And yet many Latin American thinkers remain deeply suspicious of this postmodern celebration of new communication technologies and the potential they might offer for new conditions of knowledge and existence. In the Colombian context, for example, Jesús Martín Barbero opines that 'some of the most perverse expressions and instrumentalisations of the crisis of coexistence are, precisely in the communications domain' (2004: 42). For him, the media has deliberately instilled a latent sense of distrust within Colombians, forcing them to retreat to the secure, privatised space of the home, allowing television 'to absorb the communication which is impossible in public squares and in the street theatre of politics' (ibid.). In this sense, he argues,

> In this divided and torn country, television has become not only the sacrificial lamb responsible for the violence and demoralisation that accosts us, but is also the one strange and only place where Colombians vicariously and perversely arrange to meet (ibid.).

Beatriz Sarlo's account in *Scenes From Postmodern Life* betrays similar ambivalence. She writes, 'on the roofs of houses, on the muddy slopes occupied by slums, along village alleyways and on deteriorating apartment blocks, television antennae extend imaginary lines making for a new cultural cartography' (ibid.: 88). This pertains not to the school, public library, political committee or neighbourhood club – the traditional domains of social interaction – rather spaces 'more in tune with media culture' – shopping malls, nightclubs, video games arcades and so on (ibid.: 92). She is quick to point out that schools could perhaps benefit and increase their efficiently by making new use of the skills their pupils have learned in these domains, 'skills such as the feeling for speed acquired by playing video games; the ability to take things in and respond when faced with a set of superimposed messages; or they could make new use of the content, both familiar and exotic provided by the media' (ibid.: 99). Yet ultimately, she questions to what extent these 'skills' really equip students with the intellectual capacities that are required in the worlds of work, technology and politics. For her, media culture may indeed have undermined 'old powers', but they nevertheless lack 'the will or ability to lay the foundations upon which to construct new, autonomous powers' (ibid.: 92).

TOWARDS A QUEER URBAN GEOGRAPHY OF LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

The terrain of these debates is, then, complex and confusing, characterised by divergent and often contradictory discursive trajectories along which it is easy to lose oneself or reach a dead-end. This thesis negotiates a cautious path between these opposing perspectives, with the process of 'relocating cities and dissident sexualities', as a critical intervention, incorporating various dimensions. Broadly speaking, as previously stated, this means challenging the predominance of minority-world accounts of cinematic urbanism by relocating 'the city' to a majority-world context pertaining to Latin America. Incorporating dissident sexualities into the cinema-city relationship, in turn, not only corrects the heterocentrism of these accounts, but precisely through their relocation simultaneously speaks back to the homogenising, globalising discourses often associated with North American and European sexuality politics, and with lesbian and gay studies. In this instance, 'speaking back' means disrupting the view of capitalist modernity, in particular its neo-liberal, globalised forms, as a universal, homogenous experience according to which the production of dissident sexualities and cultures will follow the same universal logic no matter where one resides in the world. On one level, this implies drawing attention to the unequal power relations inherent in a hierarchical global system which produces the wealth of the minority world at the expense of the poverty of the majority world and thus in effect prohibits, rather than encourages, the production of 'modern' metropolitan models of sexuality in these countries. And yet, in this sense, whilst betraying a postcolonial perspective, the chapters which follow nevertheless refuse to capitulate to a solely 'subaltern' discourse which sees the minority world as an 'all powerful mover and shaker' and which simultaneously relegates the sexual citizens of the majority world to victimhood and passive acceptance. Rather, the 'relocation of cities and dissident sexualities' seeks to disrupt centre-periphery dichotomies, proposing the urban margins as potential spaces of productive possibility capable of infiltrating and critically transforming the 'centre', ultimately rendering such oppositions untenable. Whilst this dual process of (de/re)centring – remaining wary of 'grand narratives', but embracing the fragmentary and 'little narratives' as Lyotard terms them – may appear unambiguously 'postmodern' in its intent, my analysis is always cognisant of the limits of 'productive possibility' and consistently suspicious of terms such as 'transgression',

'freedom' and 'liberation'. In this sense, what ultimately predominates here might most readily be described as a *queer* perspective. According to David Halperin,

> Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative. [Queer] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance (1995: 62).

Like other poststructuralist accounts of subjectivity and social relations 'queer', then, remains inherently 'open' and rejects totalising and universalising discourses on the grounds that they leave little room for difference, complexity and ambiguity, one of the main criticisms aimed at the unitary notion of identity espoused by the lesbian and gay lobby during the 1970s. And yet by refusing the notion of objective, universal truths, 'queer' necessarily negates the idea of a 'true (sexual) self' constructed around an 'innate' sexuality. Rather, it understands sexuality as a form of power and knowledge which has been discursively produced, and deployed, to borrow Foucault's phraseology, in order naturalise or denaturalise ways of (sexual) being in culturally and historically specific ways. According to the logic contained within the *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, power might then be conceived of not as inherently repressive, but as productive, flowing through networks of interconnected relations as opposed to one particular individual or group. This implies the potential for deconstructing, challenging and destabilising heteronormativity as a dominant organising trope for human desire and sexual behaviour but simultaneously negates the emancipatory aspirations of a liberationist agenda on the basis that

> Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. The existence [of power relationships] depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance [which] play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances [which] by definition can only exist in the strategic field of power relations (1979: 95-96).

Thus while I regard the geography implicit within Foucault's *History of Sexuality,* as being problematic, I consider his discussion of power and knowledge to be rather more useful and it is this interdependent relationship between dissident sexualities and modes of resistance, on the one hand, and existing, hegemonic power networks, on the other, which largely informs my reading of the films in this thesis.

The above account, in turn, invites brief reflection on the understanding of space and place that informs the resultantly *queer* urban geography that emerges through the course of this thesis. Viewed through a postmodernist lens, urban space in the contemporary era might, in its crudest form, most readily be conceived of in terms of the 'fragment', coexistent with a multiplicity of other fragments which together transmogrify into the highly decentred place of the contemporary city. It is a moderately visual and thus graspable conception of space and place and, in this sense, useful when dealing with the cinematic representations of the city which gives primacy to making urban space 'perceivable' to the viewer but often, in order to reflect the *experience* of the modern city, in an intentionally fragmented form. At the same time, however, the implication that each 'fragment' corresponds to a 'portion' of geographic space not only tends to replicate the notion of 'space as surface' but its concurrent connotations of fracture and rupture simultaneously imply disconnection and separation. This is problematic in the sense that it mitigates against the sort of inter-relational conception of space and place required when, for example, discussing 'power networks' or a 'multiplicity of points of resistance'.[18]

In this respect, Doreen Massey's conception of space-time provides a constructive counterpoint to this view of 'space as [fragmented] surface'. This still subscribes to the notion of relativity, 'space as the product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions' (ibid.: 5), but endows it with a temporal aspect, 'space as the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories [...] a simultaneity of stories so far' (ibid.:130). In this way, places are conceived of not as 'portions' of geographic space but in terms of 'spatio-temporal *events* [...] weavings together of trajectories of 'stories so far' or '*moments* within power-geometries' (ibid.). To travel through space is not to travel across a surface but to travel 'across trajectories' (ibid.). In turn, to travel between places is to move between collections of trajectories and to 'reinsert' oneself into the ones to which one relates. Through this account place is disassociated from fixed location. This is perhaps more easily imagined in an urban context – (multicultural) cities such as London, for example, as constituted through their inhabitants and a vast patchwork of cultures with overlapping histories and multiple

[18] The idea of space 'as an arena within which objects interact under the watchful eye of the scientist' (McDowell & Sharpe 1999: 257) has, in recent years, been largely replaced with an (inter)relational conception of space bound up with Marxist theories of 'historical materialism' which emphasise the symbiosis existent between the spatial organisation of society and the functioning of capitalism (McDowell & Sharpe 1999: 259). Put another way, space has increasing been viewed as being 'folded into' social relations (see, for example Harvey, 1996), what Soja termed the 'socio-spatial dialectic' (1989: 7).

connections/ interfaces to/with other parts of the world. Yet as Massey points out, some of our strongest evocations of 'place' are bound up with notions of nature and wilderness. In this context, how can we conceive of place as an 'event'? Massey uses the example of Skiddaw, a mountain in the Lake District, which despite its apparent 'timelessness' has, she points out, its own long and turbulent history, a history which has a geography too. She writes:

> For *when* the rocks of Skiddaw were laid down, about 500 million years ago, they were not 'here' at all. That sea was in the southern hemisphere, about a third of the way south from the equator towards the south pole. (Rude shock this, for Skiddaw is a mountain which, in English imaginations, is inextricably of the 'The North') (ibid: 133).

Massey's account is relevant here because it allows us to 'face up to the challenges of space', as she puts it, to reject the notion of space as a container 'for always-already constituted identities' and instead recognise its 'coeval multiplicities [...] its radical contemporaneity [and] its constitutive complexity' (ibid.: 8). From this perspective, space is an interactional space, in which there are always connections to be made – it is 'a space of missing links and loose ends' (ibid.: 12). And when space is 'open', as Massey writes, the 'future is open' too (ibid.: 11). Space as a simultaneity of 'stories so far' discounts the possibility of 'one' world which waits in 'the same historic queue', as Western accounts of capitalist modernity would have us believe. Instead it allows us to acknowledge the existence of other peoples, travelling along their own specific trajectories, making their own histories and their own futures and – to insert this into the realm of sexuality – with their own distinct interpretations and specific means of achieving sexual 'liberation' or 'freedom'. This coincides with one of the fundamental poststructuralist cornerstones to have influenced queer theory – that is, the prioritisation of the local and the specific over universalisms and ahistoricisms of 'grand' narratives.

In this respect, the appearance of the term 'Latin American' in the title of this thesis might appear somewhat contradictory and certainly one should acknowledge that a 'regional' study of this nature runs the risk of reproducing the same binary geographical imagination it wishes to destabilise. Nevertheless, 'national' frameworks cannot be necessarily held up as being any more representative of the fullness of human experience. For precisely one of Massey's aims in drawing attention to 'the relational constructedness of things' and conceiving of 'place' as an 'event' is to problematise the concept of the national and the claims to unitary identity and culture it implies. Certainly, if everything is, and always was, 'thrown together', as Massey's

account suggests, identities, cultures and even the ground on which we stand, cannot be thought to embody any notion of authenticity or pre-given coherence. Rather, what makes something 'distinct' and 'specific' is almost invariably in flux and comes from 'elsewhere', as her account of Skiddaw, this supposedly emblematic 'symbol of the North', aptly demonstrates.

Thus in the context of this thesis, the term 'Latin America' is not deployed as a homogenising concept which obliterates difference and collapses it into a nebulous, globalised 'stew'. Rather its deployment acknowledges the diversity that exists between specifically *localised* dissident sexualities and urban spaces as they are imagined in cinematic mediations of Buenos Aires, Medellín, Recife and Rio de Janeiro. This does not imply that the 'national' should necessarily be ignored, indeed care is taken to situate each of the four films firmly within their own diverse national cinematic cultures. However, my analysis acknowledges that localised productions of sexuality and urban space may equally take place in dialogue with wider cultural or economic flows which cannot be neatly aligned with any one particular nation state. In this sense, it does not presume the local and the global to be monolithic, mutually exclusive formations, but rather, as Massey suggests, mutually dependent categories, thus pointing to the need for what might be termed, a 'trans-local' perspective.

STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The methodology which informs this study is therefore necessarily syncretic in nature, wandering between diverse disciplines and fusing a queer perspective with a number of other theoretical approaches. The chapters which follow do not claim to provide an exhaustive account of the cinema-city-sexuality relationship in the Latin American context but rather can be considered as four separate but interlinked interventions mapping four diverse cinematic queer urban geographies which together might contribute to a much broader interdisciplinary process of critically relocating cities and dissident sexualities.

Part One, entitled *Metropolitan Centres* begins by examining metropolitan spaces of dissident sexuality pertaining to the cities of Buenos Aires and Medellín as they are imagined in Anahí Berneri's *Un año sin amor* (Argentina, 2005) and Barbet Schroeder's *La virgen de los sicarios* (Colombia, 2000) respectively. Building on the discussion of the relationship between capitalism and sexual identity provided in this introduction, in a broad general sense, the comprising chapters explore how these cities

are (de)constructed as centres of regulation with regards to dissident sexualities, bodies and desires.

Chapter One, 'Untying the Global Gay: Exclusion, Submission and (Possible) Transcendence in Anahí Berneri's *Un año sin amor* (2005)' focuses, in particular, on the tension established between spaces of commercial, 'homonormative' gay culture and those pertaining to the practice of S/M in the film. Engaging with Michael Brown's notion of 'closet space' it asks to what extent the latter might be considered 'alternative' spaces of dissident sexuality in which the protagonist is able to disqualify and negate the disciplinary technologies by which he feels so constrained. In this respect, I seek to 'untie' the figure of the 'Global Gay' from what I argue to be a dual conceptual bind according to which (s)he appears either as an unwitting accomplice in global capitalism's ruthless pursuit of profit or the doppelganger to a marginalised, excluded 'other'.

Chapter Two entitled, 'Beyond Pornomiseria: Reclaiming Metropolitan Models of Sexuality in Barbet Schroeder's *La virgen de los sicarios* (2000)' takes this discussion forward, shifting from the globalised neoliberal urban cinematic landscape of Buenos Aires to that of the 'alternative' global city that emergences in Schroeder's film, considering what kind of impact Medellín's globally-integrated criminal economy is imagined to have in the film on the production of dissident sexualities in urban space. Redeploying D'Emlio and Knopp's theories of capitalism and gay identity, I attempt a re-reading of the relationship between protagonists Fernando and Alexis that goes beyond 'pornomiseria' to consider how the (metropolitan) dynamic between them is indicative of wider processes of urban socio-spatial realignment imaged in the film.

Part Two, entitled *Metropolitan Margins*, progresses to consider 'marginal' sexualised spaces, which although near to the 'centre' of things, have traditionally been positioned 'on the edge' of cultural systems of space due to their status as social, if not physical, peripheries. Focussing on filmic depictions of Recife and Rio de Janeiro as they appear in Cláudio Assis's *Amarelo Manga* (2002) and Karim Aïnouz's *Madame Satã* (2002) respectively, the two comprising chapters consider the correlations established in these films between the physical or metaphorical distance of their respective settings from the 'centre' and their accompanying representations of gender and sexuality.

Chapter Three, entitled 'Excluded Middle? Marginality, Liminality and the Limits of Transgression in Cláudio Assis's *Amarelo manga* (2003)' engages with Roberto Da Matta's account of the Brazilian spatial imagination, considering to what extent the setting of *Amarelo Manga* can be regarded as a carnivalesque space of liminality where the boundaries between *rua* and *casa* dissolve into a chaotic site of 'imprevistos, acidentes e paixões'. Deploying Cresswell and Kristeva's respective accounts of 'dirt', I explore, in particular, how Recife's decaying historic centre is constructed as a space which, morally, has 'pushed beyond a boundary to its other side, its margin' (Kristeva in Cresswell, 1996: 39). My discussion, however, subsequently goes on to problematise this conjecture, questioning the extent to which the representations of gender and sexuality correspond to 'transgressive' behaviour. And yet my analysis resists reading the latent corresponding presence of misogyny and homophobia as, to draw on Quiroga's phraseology, 'remnants of an atavistic past' (ibid.). Rather it seeks to reveal them to be just as much a product (albeit an unwanted one) of 'modern' Latin America as the more progressive spaces and identities discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Chapter Four moves back in time to consider the representation of another 'in-between' space as it is imagined in a 1930s context in *Madame Satã*. Engaging, in particular, with Homi Bhaba's (re)conceptualisation of the interstices, my discussion here considers how this particular space is produced in the film as a porous and productive domain of 'overlap' between diverse urban social groups, and asks to what extent the 'in-between' is resultantly produced as a space of empowerment for the protagonist in light of his exclusion from the 'legitimate' culture of the majority. Although, as in previous chapters, my analysis remains suspicious of such emancipatory potential, I suggest that by viewing the overtly carnivalesque discourse which informs João Francisco's cabaret performances through a queer lens, the liberatory potential of the film's narrative might indeed be reclaimed.

CHOICE OF FILMS

In a final matter for consideration, it would seem pertinent to explain my choice of films examined in the chapters which follow and what kind of decisions informed these choices. Nationality, inevitably played a role, in so far as Brazil, Argentina and, to a lesser, extent, Colombia, are the Latin American countries with which I am most familiar and possess the firmest grounding regarding their respective histories, culture

and cinematic production, hence the presence of films from these countries. In this respect, I therefore do not claim to provide a *geographically* balanced account of the cinema-city-sexuality relationship in the Latin American context, and the reader will notice, in particular, the absence of films from Central America and Mexico in the main body of my discussion. I do acknowledge this is as a potential deficiency, one which could have been remedied by including a greater number of films in the main body of my discussion. I chose not to, however, because I felt this would leave less room for what I believe to be the valuable contextual discussion contained within each chapter, which ensures that each production is firmly grounded not only within its national context but also that pertaining to the localised urban space(s) in which it is set. This reflects my aforementioned intention that 'Latin America' should be deployed in this thesis not as a homogenising concept but one which attests to the diversity and difference existent within the region to which it refers.

Another influencing factor relates to the date of production. As the title of this thesis states, I am chiefly examining *recent* examples of Latin American cinema which in this context means from the year 2000 and beyond. This reflects my desire to avoid replicating the already sizeable bibliography relating to queer-marked Latin American films such as *Fresa y chocolate* (Cuba, 1993), *Yo la peor de todas* (Mexico, 1990), *O beijo da mulher aranhã* (Brazil, 1985) and *Dona Herlinda y su hijo* (Mexico, 1985). Such films are important cultural interventions and will no doubt merit further academic attention for many years to come. However, a critical lacuna is emerging amongst a more recent body of critically-acclaimed films produced in the opening decade of the twenty-first century, a lacuna which this thesis seeks to bridge. *Un año sin amor*, *La virgen de los sicarios*, *Amarelo manga* and *Madame Satã* stand out amongst these, not only due to the strong presence asserted by both the city and dissident sexualities within their respective narrative worlds, but more importantly, the rigorous cinematic inquiry they each devote to the interplay *between* these two concepts, which, of course, forms the thematic foundation of this thesis.

In this respect, the reader will notice that discussion of urban male dissident sexualities predominates in the chapters which follow. This I acknowledge as another potential weakness and which runs the risk of replicating a more general trend within the academe by which female same-sex desire continues to be ignored. Certainly within the realm of the social sciences this would appear to be increasing unjustifiable. Stephen O. Murray, for example, correlates the lack of empirical research on

lesbianism in a Latin American context on the 'unwillingness' of female ethnographers to undertake research on Latina lesbians, implying that male ethnographers are apparently exempt of responsibility in this domain since female ethnographers 'are the only ones who can gain entry to Latinas at home' (1995: xiii). Interestingly this has not stopped the likes of Mara Viveros Vigoya researching on *male* homosexualities, nor for that matter, filmmakers such as Anahí Berneri documenting the underground world of *male* sadomasochism, a sphere, one would presume, was particularly closed off to female observers. However, in the context of Latin American fictional feature film, overt representations of female same-sex desire whose function goes beyond the titillation of the male spectator are still few and far between, which partially explains the accompanying lack of criticism in the domain of cultural studies. A notable exception is Diego Lermán's *Tan de repente* (Argentina, 2003) which focuses on a road trip of sexual self-discovery undertaken by three young women from Buenos Aires to Rosário. However, the representations contained within the film are very much premised on *non-metropolitan* constructions of female sexuality and for this reason, the film was not included in this thesis. Chapter Three, relating to *Amarelo manga*, however, does seek to balance the predominance of discussion relating to male same-sex desire in the other three chapters with that relating to non-normative manifestations of heterosexual desire thereby also broadening the scope of 'queer' to include, as David Halperin suggests, '*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' (ibid.).

And it is precisely amidst the issue of openness and ambiguity whereby the final motivation behind the inclusion of these films lies. For in contrast to the frequently polarised debates occurring in the academe, the films in question do not assume inflexible subjective positions or seek to provide coherent, fully-legible accounts of highly complex issues which often defy totalising explanations. In this sense, they lend themselves readily to the sort of queer methodology which I mobilise in my analysis, one which arguably precludes the formation of a singularised, definitive hypothesis. Rather, I read the accounts provided by these four examples of Latin American cinema of the relationship between urban space and dissident sexualities as being plural, multi-faceted, ambivalent and frequently contradictory. In this sense, it is true to say that the reader of this thesis who searches for 'answers' will often be frustrated. And yet arguably, in order to 'avoid doing violence to the multiple expressions of "sex" in "space"' (Bell and Valentine 1995: 2), we need to assume such

multiple subjective positions and consider the cinema-city-sexuality relationship from multiple points of view through a plethora of approaches and perspective. These might necessarily disqualify any concrete and graspable 'conclusion'.

PART ONE:
METROPOLITAN CENTRES

CHAPTER ONE

Untying the 'Global Gay': Exclusion, Submission and (Possible) Transcendence in Anahí Berneri's *Un año sin amor* (Argentina, 2005).

UNTYING THE 'GLOBAL GAY'

The introduction discussed materialist academic perspectives used to examine the relationship between capitalism, the city and gay identity and how these have fed into more recent debates examining the impact of globalisation and the growth of supra-territorial space on the production of globalised forms of dissident sexuality. On a broad general level, this chapter builds on this discussion to consider how such themes have been mediated in a Latin American cinematic context. For if, as Altman, Cant and Champagne all suggest, 'global queering' is driven by the expansion of a globalised free market and consumer society, then transnational commodities, of which films serve as quintessential examples, must be regarded as important vehicles through which associated cultural references are disseminated. Although Foster, rightly or wrongly, argues that the films included in his study defy inclusion within an international gay, lesbian or queer film canon, the same certainly cannot be said of more recent productions in which the spaces of globalised gay culture form an explicit backdrop to their narratives. By way of a prologue, I wish briefly to reflect on one such film – Julián Hernández's *El cielo dividido* (Mexico, 2006) – as it raises some important questions which will be later explored in the discussion of *Un año sin amor* which follows.

Recounting the love triangle that unfolds between three male university students in Mexico City, this highly stylised production with aesthetic nods to the films of Pedro Almódovar or Won Kar Wai but more readily corresponding to an ambiguous brand of internationally queer cinema crossing the genres of 'art-house' and soft-porn, arguably embodies what Champagne terms as a 'fictive gay sensibility' (1999: 146).[19] This he defines as a 'distinct political, artistic and social identity' characterised (now quoting Field, 1995) by a 'shared consumer taste, a predilection for certain forms of art, décor, clothing, food and drink' (ibid.: 145). In this respect, within the film,

[19] Cristophe Honoré's *Homme au bain* (2010) and Gaël Morel's *Le Clan* (2004) serve as two further examples, films which are marketed in such a way that they satisfy both the consumer demands of independent distributers such as Pecadillo Pictures and gay high-street sex shops such as Prowler or Clone Zone. The participation of the famous French gay porn actor François Sagat in a lead role in *Homme au bain* aptly embodies this cross-over of genres.

national referents in terms of location and mise-en-scène are lacking, with Mexico City's iconic architectural landmarks ignored in favour of what Augé might term the 'non-places'[20] of the *Zona Rosa* (bars, clubs, restaurants saunas and so on) which lie at the centre of Mexican gay life, or so the film would have us believe. Within these spaces cultural references are distinctly transnational in nature – Sol is apparently the beer of choice, drunk by impeccably styled young men gyrating to techno and house music, the place names emblazoned upon their impossibly tight t-shirts such as 'Amsterdam', leaving the viewer in no doubt as to their cosmopolitan credentials. Specifically Mexican national issues are, in turn, subordinated to the (supposedly) internationally-legible theme of young gay love, which is negotiated in a highly stylised form by way of a diverse colour palette, a predominance of long drawn-out scenes and a preference for silence or music in place of dialogue. Here, the 'display imperative' previously discussed in the context of Linda Williams's *Hardcore* is clearly on show, the erotic interactions of the queer body celebrated and brought to the fore through lingering long-takes which are always reluctant to cut away. In this respect, whilst the film's concern with the 'corporal' is developed at the expense of its narrative elements which, arguably, come off as rather inconsequential, the film's representation of the sexual act – unapologetic, explicit and yet simultaneously tender and erotic – arguably marks a welcome departure from the stereotypes of sordidness and anonymity typically associated with gay sex.

As optimistic as *El cielo dividido*'s portrayal of a more open gay culture may be (in notable contrast, for example, to the more sombre representations of (repressed) same-sex desire present in earlier Mexican films such as Arturo Ripstein's *El lugar sin limites* (1978)), the protagonists' daily regime of house music and *haute couture* can hardly be upheld as representative of the realities experienced by the majority of Mexico's young queer citizens. Press reception of the film was accordingly somewhat ambivalent. According to Carlos Bonfil, for example, writing in the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*, the 'edén de tolerancia' imaged in the film, seemingly free from homophobia, discrimination and, we might add, poverty and social exclusion too, 'contrasta con la realidad'. In this respect, he continues, whilst the director has previously claimed a debt in his work to the films and novels of Pier Pablo Pasolini, no

[20] In an essay and book of the same title, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), Marc Augé coined the phrase 'non-place' in reference to spaces – motorways, airports, hotels and so on – whose transient and generic nature impinge on one's ability to construct a sense of place within them. Beatriz Sarlo's account of the 'shopping mall' as a globalised space in *Scenes from Postmodern Life* (2001) echoes on many levels Augé's conjecture.

such claim can be upheld in the case of *El cielo dividido.* For whilst the characters of Pasolini's novel *Una vita violenta* (originally published in 1959), for example, were certainly unapologetic in their attitude towards their sexuality, this attitude was premised precisely on their status as marginalised social pariahs as opposed to members of the sort of (imagined) gay community solaced in social acceptance that we see in *El cielo dividido.* For Bonfil, what was once transgressive in Hernández's films thus appears in *El cielo dividido* merely as a bland and 'reiterative' form of homoeroticism communicated through a succession of 'Benetton-style' kisses.

In this respect, he implies, the film falls foul to the very 'bourgeois stupidity' that Pasolini so virulently condemned in his famous essay *Abiura dalla trilogia della vita* (1975), where he argued that the fight for democratic expression and sexual liberation had become supplanted by the powers of consumerism and the false illusion of tolerance this conceded. Certainly *El cielo dividido* makes no secret of its indebtedness to the commercial Mexican gay scene, the end credits proudly paying homage to local gay business sponsors such as the Fun-Fit Gym and Furor Products, whilst reminding us the film was shot on location in the popular gay bars of *La estación* and *Caberalito V.I.P.*, all against the backdrop of black and white film stills showing the film's protagonists in various states of erotic embrace.

The above discussion is important in that it highlights the essential ambivalence surrounding Altman's figure of the 'Global Gay' who appears so aptly embodied here by the protagonists of *El cielo dividido.* On one level, the film's representation of a highly commodified gay culture affirms the relationship between capitalism and gay identity discussed in the introduction. And yet the way in which membership of these commercial spaces and the consumption/mobilisation of associated brands of music, fashion and alcohol is positioned as a *sine qua non* for this identity, makes it difficult to regard gay consumer culture, at least as it is imagined here, as being in any way affirmative or liberatory. In this respect, Champagne argues for the need to be cognisant of the fact that whilst capitalism is one of the preconditions of a modern gay identity, 'it also works to "manage" that identity in its own interests and often in opposition to those of real human beings' (1999: 150). From this perspective, then, the desire of many sexual dissidents to embrace a 'Global Gay' identity, might more readily be understood as little more than a trivialised form of 'false consciousness', at least this is what Binnie infers from Altman's account which regards 'global queering', he argues, as a form of Western imperialism (ibid.).

On another level, the fact that the protagonists of *El cielo dividido* uniformly possess the ability to buy into this culture (whether or not we regard such an act as 'affirmative' or 'liberatory') simultaneously reproduces the myth that gay men and women somehow constitute an economically privileged class. As discussed in the General Introduction, gay and lesbians may occupy a certain relationship to capitalism but this is simultaneously 'fractured' by class, race, gender and other factors, something particularly relevant to Latin American countries, argued to be sites of long-standing social cleavages which only seem to have been exacerbated by global capitalism, in particular, its neoliberal forms. This 'fracturing', in turn, has served as an explanation for the apparently limited presence of the metropolitan gay model in Latin American countries, often correlated, particularly in the social sciences, with white, middle-class men residing in the affluent areas of the region's major metropolitan centres (see pages 22-23). Whilst they may possess the economic means to indulge what Field terms the 'mythical gay sensibility' centred around a 'shared consumer taste and a predilection for certain forms of art, décor, clothing, food, drink and international travel' (in Champagne, ibid.: 145), as recent political economic perspectives have revealed, not everybody is invited to the party.

The 'Global Gay' consequently emerges from these accounts as a highly ambivalent figure who appears either as an unwitting accomplice in global capitalism's ruthless pursuit of profit and or as a doppelganger to a marginalised and excluded 'other', relegated to the status of passive victimhood. On a broad general level, then, this chapter attempts to beat an alternative path through this theoretical tug of war surrounding the 'Global Gay', seeking to untie this figure from what is a dual conceptual bind. Turning to Anahí Berneri's *Un año sin amor*, my discussion considers how this film both supports and unsettles these economic perspectives on queer globalisation. I argue that whilst the Buenos Aires of the mid-1990s – a period which constituted the apogee of Argentinean neoliberal reform – appears in the film as highly conducive to the emergence of globalised gay culture, access to and free circulation of its associated spaces is certainly highly selective and by no means universal. And yet in the case of this film, the exclusionary factor has less to do with economic disenfranchisement as opposed to the protagonist's HIV status which, as my discussion shows, opens up a less reductionist consideration of globalisation and its implications for dissident sexualities and associated cultures.

I then go on to consider to what extent the ambits associated with the practice of sadomasochism in the film function for the protagonist as an 'alternative' space in which to confront the crisis of identity engendered by his illness and mitigate his resultant sensation of corporal alienation. Engaging with Michael Brown's ideas of 'closet space' and his mobilisation of David Harvey's notion of the 'spatial [economic] fix', my analysis shifts back and forth revealing the spaces of S/M, like those pertaining to the commercial gay scene, to be similarly commodified and exclusionary and yet, at the same time, potentially threatening (in contrast to 'homonormative' gay culture) to heterosexualised gender relations underlying the industrial city. As Knopp argues, the relationship between capitalism and sexual citizens is not about a solely 'unidirectional casuality' according to which gay identity and relations emerge in urban space *only in function* to capitalism. Rather, as Knopp argues, capitalism and capital accumulation might actually serve to encourage queer consciousness and/or politics (1995: 155). His position is echoed by José Quiroga, for whom gays and lesbians may be 'cultural constructions of capitalism' but also represent modes of defiance 'that use its tools in order to undermine its repressive paradigms' (2000: 12).

UN AÑO SIN AMOR: GOING GLOBAL

Of all the Latin American national film industries, that of Argentina can perhaps be regarded as the most prolific purveyor of films definable under the banner of a self-consciously 'Queer' or 'Lesbian and Gay' branded cinema. Edgardo Cozarinsky's *Ronda nocturna* (2005), Veronika Chen's *Vagón fumador* (2000), Diego Lerman's *Tan de repente* (2003), Lucía Puenzo's *XXY* (2007) and Santiago Otheguy's *La León* (2007) constitute some notable examples, whose greater or lesser degree of success on the international festival circuit has firmly placed Argentina on the global lesbian and gay cultural map. Certainly *Un año sin amor* also takes its place amongst these other notable productions and perhaps marks more familiar territory for international audiences than the Colombian film *La virgen de los sicarios* (2000), inflected as we will see in the following chapter with issues of a more nationally-specific nature.

Set in Buenos Aires in 1996, *Un año sin amor* unfolds according to the journal of protagonist, Pablo Peréz (played by Juan Minujín), an aspiring *porteño* writer suffering from HIV.[21] Shifting constantly between the space of his imagination as it is indulged on the screen of his word-processor and that of the material world from

[21] *Porteño* refers to somebody from the city of Buenos Aires.

which he feels increasingly estranged, the film chronicles the development of his illness and subsequent search for human connection (and romance?) in the city's underground gay S/M scene. The story was originally written as a semi-autobiographical novel by the real-life Pablo Peréz, who collaborated with Berneri in writing the screenplay, and accordingly in the film, the journal of the fictional Pablo is eventually published. It is a pin-prick of hope amidst what is an otherwise sombre, and at times desperate story, which as Diego Batalle notes, eschews much of the humour and sarcasm of its written source in its quest for narrative distance (2005: n.p.).

Such a sense of malaise and detachment has become characteristic of many recent examples of Argentinean independent cinema, which as Gonzalo Aguilar notes, departs substantially from its antecedents, particularly in terms of the relationship it shares with its audience (2006: 26). In contrast to Adolfo Aristarain's *Tiempo de revancha* (1981), Luis Puenzo's *Historia oficial* (1985) or more recently Carlos Sorín's *Bombón el perro* (2004), by way of example, the current tendency, he writes, leans more towards open endings, a lack of allegories, ambiguous, self-absorbed 'zombie' characters, erratic narration, an absence of national identifiers, and a rejection of identity and political demands. He surmises that

> Todas estas decisiones que, en mayor o menor medida, se detectan en estas películas hacen la opacidad de las historias, que en vez de entregarnos todo digerido, abren el juego de la interpretación (ibid.).

In *Un año sin amor* we encounter a multi-faceted protagonist who refuses to pander to the demands of his family who, like his potentially exigent audience, oscillate between equal measures of sympathy and frustration. The film's 'conclusion', if we can call it that, is also suitably vague, producing more questions than answers – a narrative rendering one might say, of Pablo's own lingering sense of incompleteness. And in terms of its setting, references to Buenos Aires are surprisingly scant, the film's cinematic landscape (in contrast, as we will see, to that of *La virgen de los sicarios*) rendered a virtual 'non-place' of anonymous streets and interior spaces – the cuckoo-clock and chintzy artificial Christmas tree giving more of an alpine flavour to the cramped apartment Pablo shares with his aunt than anything discernibly Latin American.

The director's preference for a rough, grainy image during the developing of the negative also recalls the 'dirty realism' of earlier examples of what some have termed 'New Argentine Cinema', though the documentary feel of Trapero's *Mundo*

grúa (1999) and Caetano and Stagnaro's *Pizza, birra, faso* (1997) is most definitely mitigated by the deliberate colour saturation and mobilisation of highly controlled camera work.[22] Whilst Sergio Wolf argues that these aforementioned films 'resist globalisation' by choosing different parameters and affinities or affiliations that are less standardised and that appeal to a different kind of spectator' (quoted in Falicov 2007: 116), *Un año sin amor*'s resultantly controlled image, combined with a meticulously electronically produced soundtrack (again devoid of national referents) and other stylised elements such as the 'quirky' end credits do recall what we might term a 'global' aesthetic arguably present in productions such as *21 Grams* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2003), *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) and Tom Twyker's *Run Lola Run* (1998).[23]

This is reinforced by the frequent nods to an internationally-orientated metropolitan gay culture contained within the film. In the opening sequence, for example, we see Pablo browsing a pile of glossy gay lifestyle magazines of the *Boyz* or *Attitude* variety, the camera glimpsing a succession of attractive but ultimately interchangeable naked cover boys, their smooth, sculpted bodies drained of any national referents in apparent homage to the generic mould of the 'Global Gay'.[24] Eventually the camera pauses to reflect on the wording of Pablo's entry printed in the magazine's personals column and from which we infer him to be an openly gay man, comfortable with his sexuality:

> Edad 30. Altura 173 centimetros, peso 70 kilogramas, rapado, buen cuerpo. Busca amante o amigo varonil, activo, protector, bien dotado, para relación estable con sexo seguro.

The number of other entries in the column, in turn, establishes the existence of an associated community whose physical presence is subsequently revealed by the camera's periodic forays into the busy cafes, bars and restaurants located at the intersection of Avenida Puérredon and Santa Fé, traditionally one of the most important meeting points for gays and lesbians in the city. As Finkel and Gorbato note

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[22] See Hugo Colace and Ezequiel García's interview with director of photography Lucio Bouelli (2005) for more detailed discussion.

[23] In this respect, David Martin Jones argues that such films, on a formal level, are characterised by a 'blending' of 'various cinematic styles once associated with, or at least marketed as belonging to, different parts of the globe [...] in an attempt to cross over into different markets [...] thereby increasing the profitability of a film' (2006: 8)

[24] Both are popular British gay (male) magazines, *Boyz* being available free from gay bars, clubs and organisations whilst *Attitude*, a glossy 'lifestyle' magazine is widely available from most major newsagents.

the area would become even more of an iconic location during the 1990s as it became colonised by the infamous *tarjeteros* with their flyers, free passes and queue jumps to the new gay superclubs which had opened such as *América* and *Bunker* (1995: 192).[25] Certainly at two points in the film, Pablo and his close friend Nicolás visit an unnamed gay nightclub, its appropriately rainbow-coloured stairwell, crowded dance floor and upbeat electronic music all exuding a sense of confidence, openness and cosmopolitanism of which Nicolás himself functions as the absolute embodiment. Employed within the creative industries (specifically publishing), well-travelled, financially solvent, healthy and attractive, the latter fulfils all the pre-requisites of the modern gay man, his stylish, contemporary apartment a monument to his success. Like the gay club, this space is characterised by a similarly 'universal aesthetic', its minimalist styling and muted tones seemingly pulled straight from the interior design sections of Pablo's gay magazines. The image, in one scene, of its trendily attired owner propped against a well-stocked bookshelf nursing a large glass of red wine, completes the picture, a rather overly obvious visual shortcut to the the gay man's reputed 'predilection for certain forms of art, décor, clothing, food and drink' (Fields in Champagne 1999: 1).

Whilst this 'global' aesthetic seemingly compliments the film's supposedly 'universal' thematic – described in various press interviews by the director simply as the 'búsqueda del amor' (see, for example, Lerer 2005: 6) – her decision to explore this through the dual prisms of HIV and sadomasochism can hardly be regarded as entirely arbitrary. Aside from the (sub)narratives of films such as Víctor Saca's *En el paraíso no existe el dolor* (Mexico, 1995) and Hector Babenco's *Carandiru* (Brazil, 2003), the region's AIDS epidemic and most definitely the practice of S/M both constitute relatively uncharted territory in Latin American fictional feature film. The combination of these in a single film was no doubt intended, at least in part, to capture a degree of domestic media attention as well as to appeal thematically, as well as aesthetically, to the tastes of international audiences in regions such as North America and Europe, where cinematic mediations of such themes have asserted a greater presence both in the realm of fiction and documentary. The film was indeed undeniably successful both critically and commercially – in 2005 it won the prestigious Teddy prize at the Berlin film festival, the FIPRESCI prize at Argentina's Mar del Plata Film Festival, the Grand Jury Prize at the LA Outfest and the Best

[25] *Tarjetero* can loosely be translated as 'flyerer' in English slang.

Foreign Narrative Film at the New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, as well as subsequently securing extensive international distribution rights.

THE 'MIRROR EFFECT'

Why Argentina should have become more prolific with regards to the production of an identifiably marked 'queer' cinema than say Mexico or Brazil, both of whom have comparably-sized industries of a similar international reach, has no simple answer. Perhaps it serves as a reflection of what Jon Beasley-Murray notes is the Argentine reputation for being 'unusually attentive to fashions and trends originating elsewhere' (in Sarlo 2001: xii). Buenos Aires, in particular, has been considered by some to 'exist only to the extent that Europe looks at it' (Ortiz, quoted in Pick 1989: 64), with Dujovne Ortiz claiming 'the city was born into this play of mirrors, in this complicity of reflection' (ibid.). They are perhaps crude and well-trodden stereotypes, indeed it could be said that North America these days wields far more economic and cultural influence in Latin America than Europe. However, as Sarlo argues in her eagerness to reclaim the productivities of 'cultural mimicry on the periphery' what is significant is the accentuated and exaggerated manner this attentiveness takes. Such 'normative reproduction', as she puts it, can be regarded as 'an exercise of subjective autonomy' that actually marks Argentinean *national* identity itself. In turn, as Murray observes (referring in particular to Sarlo's account of the prevalence of (Miami-inspired) plastic surgery in Buenos Aires, which is now supposedly greater than in any other Latin American city) allows the consequences of what is initiated *elsewhere* to be 'more clearly and starkly visible' (ibid.). Perhaps it is this tendency towards the extreme which explains Berneri's decision to produce a film dealing *both* with S/M and HIV/AIDS, topics which even amongst gay and lesbian communities remain sensitive.

Certainly since the end of the country's military dictatorship (1976-1983) and the resultant *destape* both on the level of sexuality politics and lesbian and gay culture, Argentina (especially Buenos Aires) has been particularly receptive to North American trends. The decade of the 1990s was particularly effervescent in this respect, seeing not only greater parity between Argentina and the United States on the level of currency through the pegging of the peso to the dollar but also in the way in which individual liberties were conceived. As Meccia notes, the work of LGBT organisations such as the *Comunidad Homosexual de Argentina* (CHA), created in 1984, ensured that the issue of homosexuality began to be gradually politicised and its discussion brought

into the public domain, with gays and lesbians increasingly demanding, in place of 'negative' rights to tolerance and privacy, concrete legal guarantees of equality and discriminatory protection (2006: 54-55), a phenomenon similar to that documented by Sinfield in North America in his book *Gay and After* (1998). The approval of *La Ley Nacional 23.798 de Lucha contra el Sida* in 1990, which had the overarching aim of protecting the rights of HIV carriers and those suffering from AIDS, was perhaps one of the first major milestones (Meccia 2006: 64). In 1992 Buenos Aires would hold its first Gay Pride march, now an annual event second in size within Latin America only to São Paulo's yearly celebration, which itself has become one of the largest in the world along with San Francisco and Sydney.

The greater climate of openness was reflected not least in the realm of television programming, traditionally subject to more scrutiny than the big screen. The year 1992, for example, heralded the first gay (male) kiss to be shown on the Argentinean small screen in the drama *Zona de riesgo 2: atendida por sus propios dueños* and a year later the lesbians would have their turn in *Cartas de amor en cassette* (Bazán 2004: 380). By now the stipulations of the *Ley de Radiodifusión* to 'abstenerse de exaltar el desvío sexual o el erotismo' had well and truly been consigned to the political dustbin with other programmes such as *Verdad / Consecuencia* (1996) and *Como pan caliente* (1996) soon following suit with their own (positive) gay story lines (ibid.). Seven years later, drama would, in turn, become reality with the small screen televising Buenos Aires's first civil union ceremony following the promulgation of *La Ley de Unión Civil* on 17 January 2003, the first city in Latin America to take such a step. It would serve as a true mark of how far things had come since the years of the so-called *Guerra Sucia*[26] and its conflation of homosexuality with political subversion resulting in the disappearance of hundreds if not thousands of people suspected of engaging in same-sex erotic activity.[27]

Carlos Menem, himself elected to presidential office in 1989 amidst the economic crisis presided over by his predecessor Raúl Alfonsín, can hardly be

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[26] The *Guerra Sucia* refers to the State-sponsored violence in Argentina waged against thousands of (suspected) left-wing militants and sympathisers primarily by Jorge Rafael Videla's military dictatorship, which was installed on the 24 March 1976 and which continued until the return of civilian rule in 1983.

[27] Carlos Jáuregui notes in *La homosexualidad en la Argentina* that 'uno de los integrantes responsables de de la CONADEP [Comisión Nacional por la Desaparición de Personas] afirma la existencia de, por lo menos, 400 homosexuales integrado en la lista de horror' (1987: 171). For extensive analysis of cinematic mediations of the *Guerra sucia* in the context of gender and sexuality see Constanza Burucúa's *Confronting the 'Dirty War' in Argentine Cinema, 1983-199: Memory and Gender in Historical Representations* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2009).

regarded as having given much importance to lesbian and gay rights. At a talk given at Columbia University, New York, in 1991, for example, a student's demand that he explain the contradiction between his plea for 'freedom for all countries' and the continued persecution and discrimination suffered by gays and lesbians in his own, was merely greeted with the rather vacuous response: 'ese es un problema ya superado en la Argentina' (Bazan, ibid.: 374). Nevertheless his economic policies, namely a vigorous package of neo-liberalist reforms which would quickly make him the 'toast' of the neoliberal international establishment (North 2007: 147) could be argued to have allowed on some levels for the enrichment of gay life. The replacement of the 'máquina de impedir' (to use the words of then Buenos Aires governor Eduardo Duhalde) with the 'Estado mínimo', in particular, opened up a new space for the accumulation of (trans)national capital.

The genesis of Argentina's 'culture of the shopping mall' that resulted from Menem's embracing of a form of mass commercial culture sponsored primarily by the global corporate elite (Falicov 2006: 77, but see Sarlo, 2001 for more extensive discussion) would provide fertile ground for the emergence of a more visible commercial queer life of a distinctly international flavour to accompany these other aforementioned cultural and political shifts (see Sívori, 2005). As Argentine sociologists Menant and Siddig note, discussing the dynamics of neo-liberalism, along with non-intervention in the economic realm, the privileging of competition and the free market, and the consolidation of representative democracy, 'the cultural realm [also] takes on characteristics of globalised "Western" values' (quoted in Falicov 2006: 91).

Certainly a particular variety of popular literature (endowed with a quasi-sociological slant) that was being published at the time provides ample evidence of such 'global queering', at least as it was experienced in the capital and, to a lesser extent, the cities of Córdoba and Rosario.[28] Finkel and Gorbato's previously cited *Amor y sexo en la Argentina: la vida erótica en los 90* (1995), in particular the chapter entitled 'La nueva cultura gay', is one such example, the opening testimony given by a 31-year-old gay man reading:

> A los diciséis años hablé con mi familia de mi homosexualidad. Mi mama fue la primera en aceptarlo. Mi padre se abstuvo de opinar y mi hermano me

[28] For an account of gay life in Rosario during the 1990s see Horacio Federico Sívori's *Locos, chongos y gays: Sociabilidad homosexual masculina durate la década de 1990* (Buenos Aires: Antropofagia, 2005).

> rechazó abiertamente. Me enamoré con un chico de vientidos años [...] Con él conocí el gueto gay de Rosário y empecé también a viajar a Buenos Aires, a vivir la vida nocturna [...] Hoy, los cambios son brutales, abismales. Con el correr del tiempo se nos empezó a aceptar. Yo no me siento para nada discriminado (191).

The changes were so 'brutal' apparently that he then goes on to say that he began to positively avoid the city's gay clubs due to the fact that 'majority' of the clientele in these establishments were now apparently heterosexual, a perhaps unwanted, though ironic, by-product of this greater climate of acceptance in which gay locales had became fashionable amongst the more open-minded sectors of the heterosexual population (ibid.).

Raquel Orella and Osa Orella's *Guía erótica de Buenos Aires: Temas de hoy* (1994) and Gorbata's second study *Fruta prohibida* (1999) provide further accounts of the rise of gay culture in Argentina, though again with a similar focus on Buenos Aires. There is not space to provide any extensive review of these here but *Fruta prohibida*'s opening chapter entitled 'El gay cliché' gives a flavour of the camp, tongue-in-cheek and irreverent tone which seems to be characteristic of these books, the latter featuring an amusing selection of sex tips, fashion advice, guides to *porteño* gay slang, current price-lists for sexual services rendered by *taxi-boys* (rent boys), a double-page 'quiz' to enable one to determine one's 'true' sexual orientation as well as a map of gay Buenos Aires detailing the location of gay bars, clubs, porn cinemas, saunas, cruising areas, gay-friendly hotels and other services (42-72). The presence of the sexual orientation 'quiz' and the mapping of Buenos Aires' gay scene is particularly significant here in that it underscores the growing importance being attached in Argentina at the time, as elsewhere in the 'gay world', to naming, and declaring one's homosexuality as an identity and assuming one's position within an accompanying community whose existence, as the map shows, had now become a material as much as an imagined reality. Indeed, the existence of the books themselves, which were seemingly targeted at a popular gay readership, attests to what was the increasing commodification of same-sex erotic subcultures occurring in Argentina at the time amidst the production of what Duggan has termed 'a new homonormativity',[29] that is

[29] In this respect Oscar Guasche in *La crisis de la heterosexualidad* argues that homosexuality has become so heterosexualised that its status as a 'subculture' is now highly questionable. He writes, 'la progresiva normalización de la realidad gay implica su institucionalización: el Estado pasa a regular la afectividad gay a través de medidas legislativas' (2000: 91), and cites the particular example of gay marriage/civil unions, though legislation in favour of adoption rights for same-sex couples or State-

> [a] neoliberal sexual politics [...] that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (2002: 79).

DISIDENTIFICATION

We will return to Duggan in due course, but for now it would be less than controversial to suggest that *Un año sin amor* – set incidentally in the mid-1990s, a period which marked the apogee of Menem's process of reform – clearly reflects the 'spirit' of the era with this ever more open, visible and 'homonormative' manifestation of gay life. The film's aforementioned allusions to a transnational 'gay sensibility' produced through a shared set of '"devices", rituals, or practices' (Champagne, ibid.: 145) and the presence of commercialised spaces in which these are represented or enacted, in particular, would seem to confirm the logic by which capital accumulation has been seen to encourage the dismantling of the 'closet' in space during the re-development and re-branding of cityscapes by urban planners (see Knopp, 1992, or Bell and Binnie, 1995).

Certainly a clear tension is established in the film between the fashionable space of the gay club in which Nicólas prefers socialising and that of the rather decrepit porn cinema that Pablo favours. In the case of the former, as we have seen, a high-angled shot reveals the two friends entering the establishment through a crowded, rainbow-coloured stairwell thronged with enthusiastic clubbers, the thump of a bass drum luring them down towards the dance floor. In the case of the latter, however, Pablo's lonely descent to the establishment concerned is made via a completely deserted and low-lit set of stairs leading to a cinema box office, where he purchases his ticket before passing over his belongings so they can be stowed in a locker. Significantly, there is no human face to be seen, the transaction mediated via a muffled voice that emerges from behind the obscured glass which has been installed to ensure the anonymity of both customers and staff, in marked contrast with the openness of the gay club whose staff are clearly visible behind the bar. Beyond the threshold of the box office, in turn, the up-beat nature of the night club's dance floor with its energetic dance music is exchanged for the more sombre atmosphere of the sparsely populated cinema theatre, a rather sullen form of electronic music audible on the soundtrack

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funded IVF treatment for lesbian couples also serves as a pertinent example of this 'reproduction' of heternormative lifestyles, practice and values within same-sex pairings.

simultaneously interspersed with the distant grunts and moans emanating from the rather dated porn film that is being screened. Not that the 'viewers' are paying much attention, of course, for whilst in the case of the gay club the most risqué behaviour we encounter goes little beyond the intertwining of tongues on the dance floor, here they are far too busy servicing each other's needs to pay any attention to what is going on on-screen. Pablo himself does not hesitate to make advances on the man seated next to him, a medium-shot revealing his head being lowered towards the man's lap where he presumably performs falletio on the person concerned. Of course, when compared with his subsequent dalliance in a later scene, in which he penetrates another man against the cinema wall, this act of foreplay would appear remarkably discreet, though Pablo is at least courteous enough to use a condom during the second proceedings. Thus, whilst in the case of the gay club the use of generic dance music, 'clean' minimalist mise-en-scene and framing/editing techniques which underscore the fluidity of movement between its various sections (entrance, dancefloor, bar and so on), firmly established it as a safe, accessible, desexualised and 'non-threatening' space reserved primarily for socialising, the case of the porn cinema could not be more contrasting. This, quite clearly, is represented as a space of anonymous sexual pleasure, an 'unhealthy' or 'dirty' site of deviant and perhaps unsafe sex reminiscent of a bygone era in which gay life in Argentina was very much kept underground.

Yet although the film attributes a set of distinctly negative values to the space of the porn cinema, this is not to say that the more sanitised (and implicitly more 'respectable') spaces of bar and club culture we contrastingly associate with Nicolás, appear as some sort of fantasy of globalised, neoliberal queer liberation. For, as we shall see, Pablo shares a rather ambivalent and distinctly uncelebratory relationship with the brave new commercialised gay world to which they pertain. Although in 1992 the *Economist* heralded a 'golden era' of new-found prosperity in Argentina (quoted in North 2004: 147), by the mid-1990s the accompanying hangover of mass unemployment and social exclusion familiar to many countries who have followed the trajectory of neo-liberal globalised modernity was less of a cause for celebration. Nearly all sectors of society were affected but North suggests that Menem's virtually instantaneous privatisation of large swathes of the public sector was particularly detrimental to the middle classes, whose jobs were often unprotected by clientist networks, in contrast to the rich 'who looked after themselves' and the working classes who 'had their union-run social programs' (ibid.: 148, see also Saborido, 2006: 474).

Although the protagonist of *Un año sin amor* can hardly be regarded as destitute and no specific reference is made in the film to the protagonist having been made redundant from a previous job, it is difficult to imagine that the sporadic French lessons he gives to his sole client – a rather tongue-tied female cabin crew member – pay him anything approximating a working wage. His 'career' as a writer is, for the majority of the film, similarly fruitless. Beyond the Manuel Puigs of this world it seems Argentina's intellectual resources are of little interest to 'big business' and Pablo is told unceremoniously by his agent that whilst it is possible that his poems could be included in an anthology, it probably would not be this year, or even the next. 'Local' writers, he laments, have a hard time getting published here – a comment suggestive of the more general trend of underinvestment (both public and private) in the arts under the Menem administration (see Falicov, 2006 or Page, 2009).[30]

Thus we can assume that without the support of his father, who pays the mortgage on the apartment he shares with his aunt, his existence would be a good deal more precarious, as the film's conclusion eventually does indeed suggest. This contrasts markedly with Nicolás, who has forged a successful career in publishing (a more lucrative sector of this business, we presume, than that within which Pablo is attempting to establish himself) and can afford all the trappings of the 'Global Gay' lifestyle – trendy clothes, a nice apartment, trips to the city's fashionable nightspots, international travel and so on. Indeed arguably it is only through Nicolás that the protagonist is able to access the gay club they visit, in one scene the former luring a reluctant Pablo to go dancing with him with the promise that he will pay for his entrance ticket. As Judith Filc writes, the transformation of the urban landscape wrought by the erection of glittering skyscrapers, shopping malls and other spaces of commercial enterprise may have produced an attractive veneer of 'development' but frequently these have been the domains only of a privileged minority, what she terms 'espacios pseudo-públicos de circulación restringida' – spaces which straddle the public and the private to which access is granted only to the 'ganadores' (lit. the winners) of society (2003: 184).

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[30] Falicov notes that paradoxically, however, at a time when the State itself was being 'downsized', the system of State-subsidised film was not only left intact but was actually strengthened during Menem's second term in office, with legislation introduced in 1994 stipulating that new avenues of funding (taxes on home video rentals and television advertisements) in addition to the original tax on box-office receipts be directed towards the production of national cinema (2006: 88). State funding (in tandem with private support, often from the television networks), however, tended to favour more commercially-viable, 'blockbuster-style' domestic productions of which some notable examples would include *Commodines, La furia, Dibu, la pelicula* and *Cenizas del paraíso* (all 1997).

Ultimately, though, to suggest that Pablo's experience of exclusion primarily owes itself to economic reasons is problematic and would be to overlook one of the film's overarching themes. For beyond the consolidation of metropolitan gay culture within Buenos Aires, the film also documents another manifestation of globalisation – the AIDS epidemic – described by Haver as the 'first true cosmopolitan' in that it respects 'neither geographic, cultural, sexual, class nor racial boundaries' (1996: 7).[31] Whilst 'uniting' millions of people who have become infected through same-sex erotic activity, AIDS simultaneously destabilises modern 'gay identity' as a coherent banner under which homosexuals may (or may not) identify. As John O'Neill argues, 'nothing represents the postmodern moment in our history more than the transformation of our sexuality in its encounter with the HIV virus' (quoted in Binnie 2001: 181).

This 'transformation' is made apparent in the film, not least through the conflict that the presence of Pablo's body now produces within the film's spaces of sanitised metropolitan gay culture. For whilst the HIV virus does not always produce necessarily visible markings on the body, Pablo's dwindling T-cell count, and consequently, the growing inability of his immune system to fight off even the most common of viruses, means for him the illness has now attained an increasing visibility. The opening minute of the film is replete with clues to this corporal deterioration. Here cross-cuts to his inhaler and an array of tinctures and herbal medicines are intersected by a series of alternating close-ups between the computer screen and the keyboard on which he is typing, suggesting that all is not well with the body to which this otherwise young and healthy-looking pair of hands belong. This is confirmed by Pablo's self-description in the accompanying voiceover as a 'profesor en sus años otoñales', a reference to his own sense of impending mortality which necessarily negates any aspiration to 'youthfulness and the "body beautiful"' embodied by the 'gay as now model' (Simpson 1999: 213). Such negation is implicit in the subsequent transition to the following scene in which we move from close-ups of meticulously sculpted young bodies as seen on the cover of the gay magazines to a high-angled shot of the bed-ridden Pablo coughing uncontrollably before a medium shot then reveals him receiving oxygen in a dour hospital corridor.

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[31] In 1996 according to data from the *Programa Nacional de Lucha contra los Retrovirus del Humano y Sida* there existed 9,189 confirmed cases of AIDS in Argentina (putting the country in third place behind Brazil and Mexico in terms of prevalence rates in Latin America) though other estimates such as that made by EPIMODEL put the figure as high as 17,725(quoted in Kornblit 1997: 20). HIV infections were estimated to be around 150,000, 70% of which were concentrated in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area (idid.: 21).

A lingering spectre for much of the film, the cough, in turn, places an increasing burden on Pablo in his circulation around the material gay world to which these magazines pertain. For in contrast to the space of the porn cinema in which the lack of behavioural boundaries would seem to encourage 'risky' behaviour, here the metaphor of HIV as a 'polluting menace' to be contained and avoided is all pervasive. In one scene, for example, the protagonist is depicted sitting in a café-bar in the vicinity of Santa Fé and Puéyrredon shooting furtive glances at two men sitting at an adjacent table. Any flirtation, however, is quickly cut short as Pablo is suddenly overcome by a coughing fit, prompting nervous glances across the room from the men concerned. With the former unable to stifle his irritating affliction the two men eventually beat a hasty retreat, the integrity of this 'healthy', homonormatively-coded space now fractured by the perceived threat of contagion.

Even when Pablo's health has considerably improved, leaving virtually no outwardly visual markers of his illness, the protagonist, it seems, can never be totally immune both from the prejudices of those closest to him and what emerge to be his own internalised ones. In a scene marking his second visit to the gay club, Pablo is framed from Nicolás's point of view as he dances with another man, before the two eventually become locked in a passionate embrace. At this point, a reverse shot cuts back to the image of Nicolás looking on from the bar, an obvious expression of disapproval besetting his face. Whilst this might be interpreted as a sign of jealousy pointing to his 'undeclared love' for the handsome Pablo, there is little evidence elsewhere in the film that he sees him as more than a friend. Rather, although not explicitly expressed, it would perhaps seem to serve as a reflection of his own preconceptions as to the moral legitimacy of the latter's pursuit of a liaison with the man in light of his HIV status. As Mark Casey writes, developing Duggan's concept of a 'new homonormativity', amidst these commercialised, mainstreamed and non-threatening gay spaces, one's ability to claim legitimate rights of citizenship previously denied to queer folk but increasingly being extended to them 'are nevertheless limited to "non-threatening" lesbians and gay men', a category to which the HIV-positive Pablo no longer belongs (2007: 127). Certainly, as a diary entry written several days later subsequently demonstrates, the protagonist himself seems to have internalised the view that he poses a latent risk to those around him, recounting:

> Me llevó a su casa. Insistió que me quedara a dormir. Pero no quise. Si me ponía a toser y lo despertaba? Lo dejé dos mensajes pero no me respondió. Debería haberlo contagiado con mi micosis y por eso no me llama.

The emotional impact of these episodes is made clear not least through specific techniques of cinematography and editing. In particular the director privileges the use of close-ups at points where Pablo is depicted undergoing treatment or medical tests – blood being drawn into a syringe, stethoscopes pressing against his skin, oxygen masks being fitted around his mouth, his back being positioned so a chest x-ray can be taken and so on. These are often juxtaposed with subsequent long-shots framing his subsequent lone wanderings through empty city spaces in which the frame is devoid of other human activity.[32]

Pablo, it seems, is becoming increasingly alienated and disconnected from both his own body and the world around him, prompting a crisis of identity, something alluded to by the first line of his journal entry in the opening sequence, '¿Quién soy? ¿Qué busco?'. The words speak loudly of the subjective ambivalence produced by the HIV-positive body in which the 'self' as a supposedly secure, coherent entity suddenly becomes defined by the inevitability of death. Here, as Mathew Southern suggests (quoting Haraway, 1991 and Martin, 1994), the extent to which there can be a 'stable identifiable 'I' within the identity claim of a 'Person living with AIDS (PLWA)' and whether the HIV-positive body itself can be regarded as a 'stable container in which that "I" is supposed to be self-identical', is highly questionable (2007: 189). Thomas Yingling, in this respect, argues AIDS not to be merely a physical undoing of the self, but rather a producing a 'no-longer self':

> That is the *thing* of AIDS, it is the signifier through which we understand the cancer of being, the oncology of oncology – not only in its threat to our being, its announcement that we are moving towards non-being, indeed are already inscribed with it, in it [...] It is the disease that announces the end of identity (quoted in Southern, ibid.).

And it is in this context then – that of subjective and corporal decay and the inevitable experience of psychological and physical malaise that this brings – that the film's principal narrative impetuses begin to emerge: the need both for human connection and a means of coming to terms with – even transcending – his suffering in order to

[32] These episodes can perhaps be regarded as symptomatic of Casey's argument that, 'as specific gay urban sites are assimilated into the wider urban framework, one door is opening and another is being closed as to who may enter and be visible within such sites and as to what spaces and sexual identities can emerge' (in Browne et al, 2007: 127)

reclaim some tangible sense of self. 'Pablo [...] busca su lugar de pertenencia', explains the director, 'un espacio que no sea transitorio' (Monteagudo 2005: 22).

S/M: (DIS)PLEASURE AND UNBECOMING

In light of the above discussion, that Pablo's search should lead him to the shadowy basements of Buenos Aires's S/M scene might seem somewhat surprising. Since the writings of Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Freud, sadomasochism has been endowed with distinctly negative connotations and aligned with other sexually deviant behaviour such as child abuse and rape. Indeed S/M is listed within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM-IV) and the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10) as a psychiatric disorder (quoted in Langbridge and Barker 2007: 3). The *Shorter English Dictionary*, in turn, describes the practice as a 'form of sexual perversion' marked by a 'love of cruelty' (quoted in Sullivan: 151). Certainly, as Langbridge notes, bearing in mind that for many people pain is something they do their utmost to avoid, the active desire to inflict and/or experience pain, superficially at least, does indeed appear 'perverse' (2007: 95).

Cinematic mediations of S/M practice have, for the most part, done little to challenge this mode of thinking. In this respect, the predictably seedy vision of the gay S/M underworld depicted in William Friedkin's documentary *Cruising* (USA, 1980) springs to mind, though the masochistic impulses depicted in the opening sequence of Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (France, 2002) are surely amongst the most unsettling. Here we witness the protagonist entering a male S/M club and subsequently taking revenge on his girlfriend's murderer, who he bludgeons to death courtesy of a nearby fire extinguisher. Disturbingly, however, the 'punishment' appears to be a source of pleasure for the victim, each of his appreciative moans eliciting an even more forceful blow to the head from his frustrated assailant. It is only when the former's skull and jaw have been so badly pulverised that he is physically unable to make any more noise that the protagonist puts down his weapon and the unflinching long-take through which the whole episode has been represented then cuts away.

The notion of deriving pleasure from perpetrating or suffering acts of physical abuse and violence, in turn, might be regarded as doubly contentious in the context of countries whose recent political histories have been overshadowed by a tendency towards authoritarianism and the threat and/or use of torture as a means of suppressing and controlling populations, as in the case of Argentina. And yet as influential feminist

thinkers such as Susan Sontag have made clear, the festishisation of symbolism and iconography associated with repressive authoritarian regimes – most obviously Fascism – is not uncommon to (or apparently particularly taboo within) the sadomasochistic ritual. Even in Germany, she claims,

> much of the imagery of far-out sex', she writes, 'has been placed under the sign of Nazism [...] Boots, leather, chains, iron crosses on gleaming torsos, swastikas, along with meat hooks and heavy motorcycles, have become the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism' (1991: 102).

Although no Nazi imagery appears in *Un año sin amor*, the fact that Báez (Omar Nuñéz), the man who initiates Pablo into the S/M scene, performs his sadistic rituals dressed in military garb and is known by the pseudonym 'El Comisario' amongst the other men within the S/M community, cannot have failed to remind older Argentinean film viewers of their own nation's history of political repression.

Yet not in any single interview reviewed for this thesis is the director asked to comment on or make any correlation between the film's theme of S/M and some lingering, unresolved sense of malaise within the national psyche regarding *La Guerra Sucia* and the legacy of the 'disappeared', despite the fact that, as Sergio Wolf argues, 'the notion of being trapped or confined to a space' was a common theme that plagued the collective unconscious during the dictatorship period (1993: 276). In fact, I would contend quite the opposite – that the film constitutes a firm break with Argentina's past whereby the eroticisation of pain need no longer be psychoanalysed as an excisement of the country's history of State repression. As Langbridge argues, there is a clear difference between torture and pain play in S/M, pointing out that in the case of the former the notion of consent is notably absence: 'the infliction of pain is a deliberate act of cruelty without regard for the agency of the victim in their wishes to be involved or not' (2007: 90). Quoting Scarry (1985), he goes on to describe torture as an 'almost obscene conflation' of inside and outside, public and private spaces that brings (again quoting Scarry) 'all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience' (ibid.). Contrastingly, he continues, the practice of S/M is constructed precisely around the idea of consent – people enter voluntarily into its practices 'fully aware of the consequences of their contracted relationship' (ibid.). Similarly, he writes, the meanings of S/M acts are quite different to the practice of non-consensual torture since the people within S/M scenes enter into such contracts for the pleasure that they

experience, that is 'the participants themselves mutually define the meanings of the acts that are perpetrated' (ibid.). In this sense, he concludes:

> The double experience of agency, the dissolution of inside/outside and the disintegration of consciousness – crucially mediated through consent – provide a number of answers to the apparent paradox of pain play (ibid.).

Un año sin amor makes clear the centrality of these notions of consent and agency to S/M practice, most notably in Pablo's 'initiation' scene, which takes place in Baéz's apartment, the former having replied to an advertisement for a third play partner placed in the personals column of a gay magazine by Baéz and Juan. Initially the power dynamic here between the three characters is unambiguous, the camera work effectively 'belittling' Pablo through a series of high-angled shots from Baéz and Juan's point of view, which are then followed by cross-cuts onto a mirror which reveal the three characters grouped together, Pablo below in the lower section of the frame with Baéz and Juan standing above him. Pablo's 'inferiority' in relation to the other men is alluded to further in the dialogue exchanged between them when Pablo has difficulty in naming any of the Parisian leather bars he supposedly used to frequent whilst living in France and then, his subsequent failure to address Baéz as 'señor', exposing his lack of S/M experience, much to the amusement of Juan, who jokes 'no sabe'. Pablo is thus effectively posited as the submissive 'bottom' with the older and more experienced Baéz and Juan both fulfilling the role of dominant 'tops' who will mentor the young novice. This is confirmed moments later in a medium-shot from Baéz and/or Juan's point of view looking down onto the semi-naked Pablo, now dressed only in leather pants and a gimp-mask as he anticipates the crack of the sadist's whip. And yet despite the apparent appropriation and reification of normative gender/power roles so evident in this brief glimpse of Pablo's initiation, the scene is also careful to show how it is Pablo who sets the parameters for the type and scope of the activities in which they will participate. 'Quieres contar que cosas te gustan, que límites tienes,' suggests Baéz to Pablo before adding finally, 'si no te aguantas algo, grita rojo' demonstrating that ultimately the 'bottom' will be in control of the proceedings.

The representation of the acts themselves, in turn, seems keen to avoid scandalising or shocking the viewer, the movement of the camera in the scenes pertaining to the S/M club being remarkably fluid, allowing us to glimpse only an impression of what is occurring between the various groups of men without directly

implicating us in the action or forcing us to 'endure' a static image as occurs at several points in *Irréversible*. What instead becomes apparent is the latent *eroticism* of S/M practice in marked contrast to the sexual encounters which we witness within the space of the porn cinema. Characterised by anonymity, and emotional detachment the latter are reduced to little more than an impersonal exchange of bodily fluids in which oral or anal penetration is privileged as the preferred means of erotic interaction between the men concerned. Indeed the lack of intimacy established between the characters in the cinema is embodied in the very camerawork itself employed in these scenes, the camera tending to maintain a degree of cautious distance via the use of medium long-shots of the occurring action.

With regards to the space pertaining to S/M in the film, however, the dynamic could not be more different. The camera's gaze, often articulated from Pablo's point of view, is always at close quarters to the men concerned, privileging the sensual contact of skin on skin as it is conducted by a multitude of participants in what appears as a highly social and communalised activity. The use of extreme close-ups, in particular, reveals S/M to be a multi-sensory activity in which corporal stimulation is limited not merely to 'legitimate' erotic zones corresponding to the genitals, nipples, mouth and so on, but to areas of the body that within the realm of heteronormativity are deemed either to be un-erotic – the feet, back, torso, legs, ears, nose, for example – or whose arousal is considered dirty or aberrant such as the anus. Also significant is the plethora of accompanying paraphernalia – straps, ropes, toys and other instruments – used to achieve this stimulation and the simultaneous absence of conventional, phallo-centric forms of intercourse. Here, penetration, if it occurs at all, is articulated again through parts of the body which have been de-eroticised – hands and feet, for example – or objects completely extraneous to the body such as sex aids or everyday items which are erotically appropriated for use in the S/M ritual. The director notes:

> pudimos correrno s del estereotipo de lo que se piensa del sadomasoquismo, para poder ver eso como un juego sexual de mucho refinamiento. Asistir a un lugar vestido de una manera especial para llevar a cabo ese ritual tiene todo un encanto, una mística (Fontana 2005: 25).

Our discussion of notions of 'consent', 'agency' and 'eroticism' with regards to sadomasochistic acts necessarily raises the question as to what *meaning* these acts indeed have for those involved. Is S/M merely about 'pleasure', 'fun' and 'play' (however broadly these concepts need to be conceived) or, less superficially, does it

hold a more profound significance? Certainly some critics such as Taylor and Usher go further by discussing how the [perceived] 'high' some S/M practitioners claim they receive, leads them to a 'heightened state of consciousness', making them 'more astute, more enlightened or more alive' (2001: 305). This line of thinking is advanced by Andrea Beckmann, who goes as far as suggesting that S/M body practice may serve as a means of experiencing 'spirituality' or 'transcendence' in a similar manner to many religious and mystical belief systems which 'also involved the "lived body" as a whole'. She continues:

> Consensual 'SM' can therefore satisfy the longing for religious and spiritual experiences for some practitioners and further provide them with the possibility of self-actualisation (e.g. through boundary situations) [...] in many ways, re-enchanting the 'life-world' of its practitioners (2007: 111)

Certainly the representation of semi-public spaces of S/M and the bodies which occupy them in the film seems to embody this sense of liminality. The aforementioned use of extreme close-ups, for example, serves to fragment the bodies of the men concerned, their cinematic disembodiment appearing as an act of liberation in which the limits of the skin, famously argued by Butler to be 'the limits of the socially hegemonic' (1990: 106), are essentially dissolved. In turn, the limits of space during these scenes tend to be the limits of screen space giving the impression that these now dissected corporal forms are occupying an unhindered state of freefall.

This desire to feel more 'alive' or 're-enchanted', as Taylor/Usher and Beckmann respectively put it, does indeed seem to present itself as the prime motivation for Pablo's entrance into the S/M scene in *Un año sin amor*, the director stating that Pablo's role as slave serves as a metaphor for the possibility of finding love through suffering and the transformation of this suffering into pleasure, 'un placer que puede controlar, en cambio con la enfermedad en que eso no es possible' (Fontana: ibid.). And certainly Pablo's adventures in this strange new world do seem to endow him with a new lease of life, the protagonist appearing after each session both invigorated and upbeat. The now diminishing sense of alienation that Pablo begins to feel in relation to his own body, in turn, opens up possibilities for exploring new relationships, both platonic and romantic, with other men on the S/M circuit, as those he shares with his family and more established friends (with the notable exception of Nicolás) grow ever more precarious and defective.

Significant in this respect is the character of Martín, an established member of the scene with whom he develops the tentative beginnings of a relationship, obsessing over telephone calls and unanswered messages with a rather endearing sort of teenage giddiness, a sensation of which his series of previous and unsuccessful blind dates have clearly left him deprived. Ultimately, though, as we shall see, their meetings do not come to bare their initial promise, and it is with Juan with whom Pablo forms the most meaningful though platonic connection. Glimpses of them socialising are admittedly brief, but nevertheless provide an important window onto how their relationship is conducted beyond the space of the S/M circuit. In one scene, for instance, we see the two characters relaxing together one evening, all reminders, both in terms of location, dress and behaviour, of their previous encounter, conspicuous through their absence. A murky subterranean world has been replaced by the more domestic, and brightly lit, backdrop of Pablo's kitchen, whilst their leather chaps and slings have been exchanged for more casual and 'everyday' attire such as jeans and a t-shirt. As the two enjoy a bottle of wine together and tend to the stew which bubbles away in the corner, the atmosphere, in turn, is relaxed and convivial and distinctly devoid of any erotic charge. The tension between dominance and submission which structured the power games witnessed in previous scenes is also notably absent, the two most definitely presented as 'equals'. Juan and Pablo, it seems, beyond the realm of the S/M circuit, lead otherwise 'normal' lives – the enactment of their erotic games precisely that, an enactment which bears scant relation to the manner in which their day-to-day interactions are articulated.

Yet as Beckmann's account suggests, beneath this desire for the pursuit of pleasure on the part of S/M practitioners necessarily exists an element of underlying dissatisfaction with 'normal life' itself, the author in this respect referring to an 'increasing awareness of the limits of "progress" and "reason" and of the dis-enchantment of modernity and consumer culture' (Beckerman 2007: 112). This raises a more profound – and infinitely more complex – debate surrounding S/M's status as a potentially subversive practice whose enactment may serve to challenge hegemonic power structures and identities produced within modern, industrialised and patriarchal capitalist societies.

In this respect, writing in the *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1,* Foucault argues that since the seventeenth century, the State's power over the life of its population has evolved in two basic forms. The first, itself a direct product of

industrialisation, was centred on the notion of body as a machine; 'its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls' (139). The second, which occurred later, revolved around the idea of the human body as 'species', the domain of biological processes: 'propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity and all the conditions that can cause these to vary' (ibid.). The coalescence of these two forms of asserting sovereignty marked, he continues, the beginning of an era he terms 'bio-power'. This was characterised by an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations of which perhaps the most important was, as he puts it, the 'deployment of sexuality' in the nineteenth century (ibid.:140).

As John Noyes (1997) and others have suggested, the subversive force of (sado)masochism lies precisely in the *eroticisation* of this body-machine complex that Foucault identifies, a 'reduction ab absurdum of disciplinary technique' (11). Here 'transgression' pertains not merely to the transformation of submissiveness, pain and discomfort into sexual pleasure. Rather, it is the way in which this is achieved through the mobilisation of the disciplinary technologies and ready-made identities (and this might include 'gay' identity) used in dominant culture to perpetuate submissiveness, their erotic appropriation simultaneously serving to negate and disqualify them. Pat Califa, speaking on lesbian S/M writes:

> The socially sanctioned repertoire of identity is an oppressive and superficial regime of sexual control, a world of arch-conformists with their cardboard cunts and angora wienies. S/M recognises the erotic underpinnings of our systems and it seeks to reclaim them (quoted in Noyes 1997: 213).

From this perspective, then, if we are to apply a psychoanalytic reading to Pablo's participation in S/M practice, beyond the pleasurable eroticisation of pain, the masochistic impulse in Pablo's case might be regarded as a strategy to confront the subjugating mechanisms which, through medical intervention, seek to regulate, control and ultimately contain the protagonist. For whilst initially Pablo forthrightly rejects conventional treatment for his condition, he does on account of his plummeting T-Cell count eventually succumb to the wishes of his doctor and begins taking AZT. The treatment is both arduous and unpleasant as one scene indeed makes clear, the detailed hand-written timetable we see alluding to what is now a highly regimented existence on his part, structured almost entirely around the timing of his next dose of medicine.

As a close-up traces the movement of the protagonist's highlighter as it methodically crosses off the completed instalments of his daily schedule, he reflects ironically

> ¿Lo llaman cocktél para volverlo atractivo y que se imagine un delicioso nectar en una copa de cristál con dos cerezitas? Sólo la vista de un comprometido de DDI me provoca nauseas. Ayer conté quince minutos hasta que se disolvió por completo.

Physically and psychologically at the mercy not only of what, at the time, was still considered a fatal disease, but now, enslaved to a gruelling regime of drug-therapy with still unproven success, the practice of S/M for Pablo arguably serves as a (pleasurable) means of neutralising these disciplinary mechanisms which render the HIV-positive body, to quote Southern, 'a cyborg space in which flesh and biomedical technology become indistinguishable and is thus a space that is precisely not-normal, not fully human [...]' (188). Furthermore it allows for his aforementioned experience of 'un-becoming' to be lived not as a 'crisis of identity' (as it is in the 'world outside') but as a celebration of the fragmentary. Here self-reconciliation and achieving a 'tangible sense of self', as I earlier phrased it, corresponds to the parodying of hegemonic power roles, whose theatrical appropriation, as Hart argues, exposes the notion of a 'unified and abiding self' as 'fantasy'(quoted in Sullivan 1993: 166).

AN 'ALTERNATIVE' SPACE?

To bring this discussion back to the realm of space then, the S/M subculture presented to us in the film would appear to emerge as an 'alternative' space, produced in opposition not only to dominant geographies of heterosexuality but also those associated with 'homonormative' gay culture. The latter can similarly be regarded in the film as equally implicated in processes of capital accumulation and thus similarly intent on subjugating and rendering productive (or failing that, excluding) those bodies (such as those infected with HIV) who might inhibit its development and profitability. S/M subculture, on the other hand, is seemingly unconcerned with profit and operates outside imperatives of patriarchal capitalism, reflecting Califa's argument that 'S/M is so threatening to the established order because its practitioners are interested in something ephemeral, pleasure, not in economic control [...]' (quoted in Noyes 1997: 209).

And certainly on the level of cinematography the space of S/M is indeed established as one that is both hermetic and antagonistic, particularly in the manner in which the film's visual mapping is articulated. Consider, for example, the disparity

which exists in this respect between those scenes depicting Pablo in the gay club, porn cinema or cafés at Avenidas Santa Fé / Puéyreddon and those relating to his amblings on the S/M circuit. Whilst the former tend to adhere to conventional framing and editing techniques whereby Pablo is positioned in an exterior location via an establishing shot or panning long-shot before we cut to the principal (interior) space of action, this is eschewed in the case of the latter in favour of direct cuts to close-ups and extreme close-ups of a plethora of leather-clad human bodies, precluding any ability on the part of the viewer to locate these said spaces within the wider cinematic geography of the city. The subsequent transition between these scenes and those which follow them is similarly abrupt. At one moment the image candidly reveals the various activities taking place between the men, the limits of space generally corresponding to the limits of screen space, thus imbuing their location with ambiguity. The next, we tend to cut to a (daytime) scene of utter banality – a close-up of a plate of food belonging to Pablo as he has lunch with his father in a downtown restaurant, for example.

The idea of S/M pertaining to a space that is 'other' or 'beyond' is reflected too in the conversations between Pablo and his friend Nicolás, which similarly serve to underscore the distance between the respective ambits in which they socialise. In a thinly-veiled disparaging remark relating to Pablo's newfound penchant for leather, for example, Nicolás jokes that he is hardly surprised his friend is still single bearing in mind the *sorts of places* he goes to, as if for him they were a rather uncomfortable and not very respectable reminder of a more closeted era of days gone by and which are now 'out of place' amidst the more respectable, sanitised and internationalised contemporary gay culture of the 1990s.

However, a closer analysis of the film begins to unsettle such a reading of things. The rather decrepit, decaying basements in which the S/M parties are played out may lack the glamour, polish and sheen of the trendy gay club which Pablo and Nicolás attend but still nevertheless show themselves to be spaces of commercial enterprise. As with the former, entry to these spaces and participation in their associated activities does not come for free, but is granted only to those who have the means to pay. Significantly, on one occasion Pablo does not, and Juan and *El Comisario* offer to subsidise his entry as their 'treat' in exactly the same way in which Nicolás enabled Pablo's access to the gay club in an earlier scene. In this sense, access to the space of S/M in the film, like that pertaining to mainstream gay culture, appears

similarly restricted to the 'ganadores' of society as Filc terms them (ibid.). This is confirmed by the visual and aural cues to wealth and prosperity that we receive with regard to certain characters associated with the scene, in particular, Baéz and Martín – a shot of a plush apartment lobby or a nocturnally-lit swimming pool, for example, or a close-up of crystal spirit decanters or a mobile phone, the mention of holidays and periods abroad in Europe or the United States and so on.

And what the S/M venues depicted in the film lack in terms of interior design and aesthetic appeal is more than made up for by the apparent investment that has been made by the practitioners with regards to the accompanying paraphernalia which, as we see, is so crucial to the enactment of S/M ritual. In the initiation scene, for example, before cutting to the image of Pablo on all fours waiting obediently for his punishment to begin, a close-up reveals a plethora of apparatus and toys arranged on a glass table – handcuffs, ropes, chains, blades, and cigars, by way of example. As we then move from this to the scene which subsequently takes place in the S/M club, similar attention is paid to the costumes of the practitioners, the camera honing in on the men concerned, whom we see dressed in a variety of rubber and leather garb – boots, restraints, overcoats, masks and so on. Many of these objects and items of attire, of course, have their own, often more mundane, uses in the world 'outside', as demonstrated by the rather bemused reaction of Pablo's cabin crew student to the thick metal chain she finds lying on the former's desk, asking innocently 'tienes perro?'. Amidst S/M's specific spacio-temporal parameters these, however, take on wider significance, becoming theatrical props in the parodic enactment, re-appropriation and/or subversion of dominant societal power roles and identities.

The production of S/M space, in turn, appears in the film as necessarily dependent on its successful integration into the very 'network society' that, as Manuel Castells argues, has now come to define late capitalist development and modernity, something we might initially presume it would strive to resist.[33] In this respect, references to communications technology abound. The initial encounter between Pablo, Juan and Baéz, for example, is contingent on the telephone messaging service which accompanies the gay magazine's personals section and which we presume has been previously used by the latter as a means of finding new S/M partners. Later on in

[33] When interviewed by Harry Kreisler from the University of California Berkeley, Castells defined network society as 'a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks. So it's not just about networks or social networks because social networks have been very old forms of social organization. It's about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies' (2001: n.p).

the film, it is the internet which comes into play with Pablo, having set eyes on Martín in the S/M club, using email to subsequently pursue his love interest, who is registered with an ISP aptly known by the name of 'Top.com'. Their mutual attraction then established, Pablo is subsequently invited by Martín to speak with him, their first conversation, significantly, realised not in person but again, via a telephone line. Here cross-cuts of Pablo anxiously dialling Martín's number and the latter emerging from a swimming pool to answer his mobile phone subsequently merge into a split-screen format, the two sharing the frame as they converse, a fitting visual metaphor, we might argue, for the phenomenon of time-space compression which Harvey claims in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1990) is so characteristic of the information age.[34] The notion of S/M culture as being most definitely connected to and interactive with the 'outside' world is further alluded to by Baéz's tales of his travels abroad, in which he fondly recalls his trips to the leather bars of Paris, San Francisco and Berlin. 'Me gusta ir y venir', he explains to Pablo before stating that Juan 'también conoce el territorio' a remark which clearly establishes S/M culture as constituting a transnational space that is firmly assimilated into the 'global village'.

These subtle but crucial details have significant implications for the way in which the space of S/M must be conceived. One cannot deny that gay male S/M culture in the film does indeed pertain to a space in which hegemonic codings of gender and sexuality are suspended or subverted. Nevertheless, whilst, in this respect, it appears to resist patriarchal capitalism, it still appears highly dependent on its structures for its production and survival. Indeed one might go as far as to say that the space of S/M functions precisely as a material production of heteronormativity itself thus firmly calling into question its status as 'alternative'. As Brown reminds us in his enlightened study *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor from the Body to the Globe* (2000), such 'closet' spaces may, due to their invisibility, certainly *appear* antithetical to the more explicit and visual production of sexualised heterosexual urban spaces (strip clubs, massage parlours or simple 'pick-up' bars, for example) or indeed those relating to mainstream 'homonormative' gay culture. Yet, he writes, in a world where the increasing dissection, categorisation and commodification of sexual experience

[34] Harvey's notion of 'time-space compression' refers to the technologies that have collapsed spatial and temporal scales into a culture of instaneity in which he argues 'space is annihilated by time'. These technologies might include those pertaining to communications (internet, telephone, fax), travel (cars, trains, aeroplanes) and economics (the need to penetrate trade barriers, speed up commodity production and make the turn-over of capital more time-efficient).

offers endless possibilities for new sexual activities to be profitably exploited (even if these are socially disruptive) their objectives are ultimately the same – the achievement of material gain from the stimulation and satisfaction of desire. As the author notes, 'spaces of sex are commodified regardless of their orientation' (2000: 83). Their invisibility and concealment therefore pertains to capitalism's strategy to achieve what Harvey (1996) has termed 'a spatial fix', a production of space that functionally enables the commodification of (homo)sexual relations to occur whilst efficiently maintaining the traditional heterosexual coding of the urban landscape (quoted in Brown, 2000: 56). This reading can be regarded as particularly applicable to S/M, arguably (as the film makes clear) one of the most highly commodified sexual subcultures, with Bienvenu in this respect noting that initial American S/M practitioner networks originally formed precisely around the producers of S/M-related products (quoted in Langbridge and Barker 2007: 15).[35]

With all this in mind, the question necessarily begs, can Pablo's descent into the S/M world ultimately ever hope to bear its initial promise? For whilst the director states that the protagonist is looking for 'su lugar de pertenencia, un espacio que no sea transitorio', S/M practice would, by its very nature, appear less than conducive to fostering any sense of 'belonging'. This is because, firstly, as we saw in the last section, the discourses of parody and performance at the heart of its practice necessarily negate any aspirations to an essential identity around which a concept of community maybe constructed – it is, to quote Noyes, 'a celebration without synthesis' (1997: 200). And secondly, as discussed directly above, it shows itself to function around the same exclusionary practices that we see in Buenos Aires's 'homonormative' gay world, with material wealth serving as a necessary prerequisite to access to and participation in its associated activities.

Even S/M's supposed embracement embracing of the HIV-positive body in the face of its rejection from hegemonic spaces of (homo)sexuality ultimately proves to be

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[35] By the 1930s, he continues, practitioners' range of behaviours had expanded to such an extent that it now began to incorporate 'elaborate restraints, specialised equipment, highly stylised fashion and electrical and medical technology' (ibid.). The 1960s, in turn, would herald the genesis of mass-produced fetish clothes and equipment with the opening of 'House of Milan' in the USA (ibid.: 18), products whose availability has undoubtedly expanded beyond all recognition with the advent of online retailers in the age of internet and the scope for anonymous transactions that this affords. And beyond the domain of S/M products, big business, of course, has found other ways of profiting from S/M culture – the holding of mass S/M events, for example, at leisure resorts and hotels, which, despite frequent protests from local residents go ahead regardless, profit, of course, taking precedence over the concerns of the 'moral majority' (in Langbridge and Barker 2007: 15).

far from unconditional. In this respect, one hitherto undiscussed detail in the film relates to the fact that Pablo's immersion into the S/M world occurs at roughly the same point in the film in which he begins taking AZT. Although, as we saw, the treatment is initially regarded with considerable ambivalence on the part of the protagonist, ultimately he appears to embrace it, admitting in one scene that he 'loves' the design of one of the capsules, describing it as 'una obra del arte de los años 90, un unicornio que me llama'. As we cut from an extreme close-up of the capsule in question, to a close-up of Pablo's chess board and the image of him manoeuvring a knight (aptly laden with an empty drug-capsule), knocking over his opponent, we then see Pablo in the following scene power-walking in sports attire in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, now apparently in rude health. In this sense, regardless of whether Pablo owes his rejuvenation of mind, body and spirit primarily to the multi-national drug company Welkome or the punishing crack of the sadist's whip (something that remains ambiguous), ultimately it is only *through* his submission to the three-drug cocktail that the protagonist is actually able to garner the physical strength to pursue his regime of 'pleasure through suffering' in the first place. Here, therefore, as in the ambit of the 'homonormative' gay world, a healthy, functioning body holds equal importance, it seems, albeit for different ends.

The film's dénouement, in this respect, is therefore perhaps unsurprising, for S/M proves itself to pertain precisely to the sort of space that the director states Pablo seeks to avoid, one that is indeed 'transitory' and in which the search for (lasting) human connection ultimately appears as a futile quest. Accordingly, after two encounters, Martín quickly forgets Pablo and melts away into obscurity. Then, when Pablo is thrown out of the apartment by his father his telephone calls to Juan prove similarly fruitless, the latter apparently also having disappeared, an absent friend, it would seem, in the protagonist's time of need. As Pablo, in the final scene, trudges down the steps to the porn cinema we saw him frequenting in earlier scenes, the significance of the film's title thus becomes apparent. This literally has been a 'un año sin amor', with Pablo ending his sad story as he began it, 'solo con lo solo'.

CONCLUSION: DECENTRING THE 'GLOBAL GAY'

To conclude then, the above discussion, in its discursive 'untying' of the 'Global Gay', somewhat paradoxically frustrates any attempt to dismiss 'global queering' merely as a form of 'Western' homogenising imperialism. Certainly the emergence of a

commercialised and visible gay scene in the Argentine capital during the period of the 1990s, as it is evidenced in Berneri's film, would appear to confirm the logics proposed by the likes of D'Emilio and Knopp outlined in the General Introduction. However, the tensions displayed in the film between mainstream 'homonormative' gay culture and the sexually dissident spaces pertaining to a similarly internationalised S/M culture are symptomatic of the fact that the globalisation of sexuality itself is multi-layered in nature, resulting in the simultaneous dismantling *and* production of the closet in space and the proliferation of a range of sexual practices and accompanying (non)identities which vary across space and time. These are indeed products of capitalism yet share a highly ambivalent relationship with it. On one level, as we have seen, S/M, for example, strives to subvert society's machinery of domination and shatter the hegemonic constructs of sexuality and identity it produces, so we might imagine alternative modes of articulating desire and subjectivity. And yet by rendering this machinery harmless and profitable, which, as a space of commodification it indeed does, S/M ends up replicating and entrenching the founding dynamics of the very system it seeks to sabotage. And as Noyes aptly reminds us, 'once the technologies of control become the object of erotic attachment, who is to say whether control is subverted by eroticism or whether eroticism is reintegrated into control?' (ibid.: 14). In this respect, perhaps José Quiroga is right, when, somewhat resignedly, he states that 'the translocalised body of the homosexual does not stand at this point so much for personal liberation as for the liberation of global capital to pursue its aims' (2000: 11).

However, as Buenos Aires's status in the film as a host to the HIV virus – the world's 'first true cosmopolitan' (Haver: ibid.) – implies, 'globalisation' and the questions of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' it raises, are not, to put it all too crudely, always about money. Despite the fact that Pablo appears as what some sociological accounts of Latin American homosexualities have constructed as the paradigmatic Latin American privileged 'gay' man – white, educated, middle-class, an inhabitant of a major metropolitan centre – none of these factors in the end mitigate his sensation of exclusion. For what is significant about the HIV virus is that it has collapsed spatial scales precisely *without* discriminating. As Binnie writes, 'the cosmopolitan does not respect boundaries and difference – but annihilates them' (2004: 121). And it is here, amidst the film's allusions to this alternative metaphor of globalisation where we might conceive of a more nuanced understanding of Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires. These arguably correspond less to what Sinfield terms 'localised

versions' of the queer metropolis (2000: 21) and the notions of cooptation and slavish replication this implies, but rather represent constituent elements of a highly de-centred supra-territorial space produced and sustained through a plethora of multi-directional and sometimes antagonistic flows. These most often are understood in terms of capital, but they may also be cultural and, in this case, biological, wielding equally transformative effects.

CHAPTER TWO

Beyond *Pornomiseria:* Reclaiming Metropolitan Spaces and Dissident Sexualities in Barbet Schroeder's *La virgen de los sicarios* (2000).

UNOFFICIAL GLOBAL CITIES

The preceding chapter considered to what extent the ambits of S/M practice were proposed as an 'alternative' space in Berneri's film, produced in tension to those of 'homonormative' gay culture in Buenos Aires. I argued that although S/M practice is antithetical to the heterosexual gender relations underlying the industrialised city, the way in which it emerges as a highly commodified dissident sexual practice dependent precisely on the sort of transnational communication networks that have been produced and facilitated by the expansion of global capitalism necessarily problematises such a reading of things. In this respect I concluded that despite initial appearances, this sexually dissident subculture appears in *Un año sin amor* as firmly integrated into the 'global village'.

Taking forward this discussion, we might, in turn, argue that the terms on which cities are qualified as being 'global' perhaps need to be re-evaluated, expanded and diversified. According to Sassen, 'global cities' can be defined as 'centres for servicing and financing international trade, investment and headquarter operations' (2007: 171). In this respect she acknowledges the fact that beyond familiar first-tier cities such as Tokyo, London and New York, an increasing number of second tier cities beyond the core (many in the majority world) are now assuming such functions, resulting in a 'new geography of centrality [...] that cuts across national borders and the old North-South divide' (ibid. : 169).[36] She also acknowledges that concurrent to the 'explosion' of wealth and power now concentrated in these cities, other localised economic spaces are simultaneously being produced through increasing informalisation, a process she regards as 'the equivalent of deregulation at the top of the system' (ibid.: 172). In these respects , her account does indeed appear to reflect aforementioned calls made by the likes of J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996) for greater recognition of the plurality of capitalism as a concept, but also seems to imply that 'other' spaces of capital accumulation only function in a localised, micro-level

[36] Joseph Gugler makes a distinction between 'first tier' cities 'at the core of the world cities' – namely the 'triumvirate' of New York, London and Tokyo – and 'second tier' cities 'beyond the core' which 'play major regional and global roles' such as Mumbai, Shanghai, São Paulo, Johannesburg, Bangkok and Seoul (2004: 1).

capacity. As Manuel Castells's account in *End of Millennium* (2004) demonstrates, there exist many 'unofficial' global cities the world over – cities whose strategic positions as centres of drug smuggling, arms dealing, money laundering or people trafficking position them as highly important drivers of *macro-level* global capitalist economic processes, even if this role is played out illicitly and not officially acknowledged.

Medellín might be invoked as one such example of an 'unofficial' global city. Colombia's second-largest conurbation, it is perhaps the city which has experienced the most profound penetration of the drugs trade into its economic, civic, political and cultural life, symptomatic of the consolidation of the Medellín drug cartel (headed by the infamous Pablo Escobar) towards the end of the 1970s as one of the world's richest, most powerful and far-reaching trafficking networks, of which the country's Cali cartel and the Tamaulipas and Ciudad Juárez cartels in Mexico also feature as prominent examples. As Castells writes, these cartels were internationalised from the outset, exporting initially to the United States, then to Europe and then, the rest of the world:

> Their strategies were, in fact, a peculiar adaptation of IMF-inspired export-orientated, growth policies towards the actual ability of some Latin American regions to compete in the high-technology environment of the new global economy. They linked up the national/local crime organisations in America and Europe to distribute their merchandise. And they set up a vast financial and commercial empire of money-laundering operations that, more than any other criminal organisation, deeply penetrated the global financial system (ibid.: 177).

This chapter builds on my discussion in Chapter One, shifting from the globalised neoliberal urban cinematic landscape of Buenos Aires to that of the 'alternative' global city that emergences in Barbet Schroeder's *La virgen de los sicarios*, considering what kind of impact Medellín's globally-integrated criminal economy is imagined to have on the production of dissident sexualities in the film. Here I attempt a re-reading of the relationship between protagonists Fernando and Alexis, arguing it to go beyond *pornomiseria*, the rather evocative label sometimes applied to the films of Víctor Gaviria with which *La virgen de los sicarios* has sometimes been argued to share a certain dialogue. In this respect, I consider how the dynamic between the two protagonists, rather than pointing to a 'traditional' (and assumedly exploitative) model of sexuality as their class and generational differences suggest, might be indicative of a metropolitan, and more egalitarian understanding of

things. Of particular importance to my discussion here are the processes of urban socio-spatial realignment imaged in the film, whereby organised crime and illegal transnational flows of capital appear to collapse the once peripheral *comunas* into the centre, dehermeticising previously distinct social groupings and accompanying cultural models.[37] And yet whilst this realignment sees Alexis assume the status of professional hitman or *sicario*, thus providing him, I argue, with the economic independence with which to reclaim his sexuality as a lived identity, as in Chapter One, my discussion continues to question to what extent the imbrication of the body with the urban economy can be regarded as liberatory or affirmative.

MEDELLÍN, VIOLENCE AND CINEMA

Before discussing these aspects, however, it first might be pertinent to return to the initial contextual discussion above in order to further situate *La virgen de los sicarios* within both its local and national, social and cinematic contexts. As previously mentioned, the power, influence and wealth of the Medellín drugs cartel at its peak in the 1970s was virtually unrivalled both within Colombia and beyond, with Escobar and colleague Jorge Luis Ochoa controlling a significant portion of the world's global market and ranking amongst the twenty richest men in the world (Simons 2004: 61).[38] That the rise of the Medellín cartel should coincide with the decline of the city's manufacturing industries in this period, the major basis of its prosperity for the previous seven decades, is perhaps no coincidence. Large-scale unemployment and economic insecurity created a pool of excluded and disenchanted young men who would swell the ranks of Escobar's criminal network, working, in particular, as hired assassins or *sicarios*, whose culture was first and most famously documented by sociologist Alonso Salazar in his book *Born to Die in Medellín* (1992). Although the Medellín cartel fell in 1992 (which by no means quelled the drug trade – rival cartels such as the Cali cartel simply usurped its place), youth gang culture continued to define life in the city's poor *comunas*, their members simply diversifying their

[37] The term *comuna* in Colombia literally corresponds to an administrative unit of a given city composed, in turn, of *sectores* or *barrios*. In popular parlance, however, particularly in Medellín, the plural, *comunas*, is used to refer (sometime pejoratively) to peripheral working-class neighbourhoods such as La América, San Javier, Popular and Villa Hermoso, often situated on the surrounding hillsides of the Antioquia Valley. Many of these are now established neighbourhoods with access to electricity and running water; some such as Santo Domingo Savio and El Popular have also been integrated into the wider urban infrastructure through a cable-car extension to the city's metro system. Others, however, may lack basic services in their newer, more peripheral *sectores*.

[38] By 1980 it was estimated that 75 percent of all US cocaine was transported from Colombia, largely through the Medellín cartel (Simons ibid.: 67).

activities into small-scale drug-trafficking, organised crime and delinquency networks (Riaño 2006: 3). As a result, writes Riaño, 'the city underwent new territorial divisions and territorial infighting, spawning an increasing variety of armed actors' (ibid.). By 2001 levels of violence had begun to rise towards the levels of the early 1990s, when they had peaked at 444 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants per year, the highest of any urban centre in Latin America (ibid.).

Of course, these were merely new constellations within what Safford and Palacios term a pre-existing 'galaxy of conflicts' (2002: 346) whose major foundations were laid in the period known as *La Violencia* which spanned the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. Symptomatic of intense partisan rivalry between the unionist *Conservadores* and the federalist *Liberales,* and whose major flashpoints included the assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948 and the resultant *Bogatazo,* one of bloodiest riots in Latin American history, this period saw more than 200,000 Colombians lose their lives. By the 1960s Colombia began to see the emergence of a new type of political violence pertaining to years of insurrectional struggle by leftist guerrilla organisations, principally FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, created in 1964) and the lesser known ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, created 1962), whose primary aim was the transformation of the social order, with land reform, for both groups top of the agenda. Their activities, unsurprisingly, prompted harsh military responses, not only from the State itself, but also from emerging paramilitary groups. By the mid-1970s, these conflicts would, in turn, become intersected with the emerging violence relating to the narcotics trade discussed above, translating in the 1980s into a bewildering convergence of 'violences' pertaining to drug mafias, guerrillas, paramilitaries and hit-men, 'intermixed, in alliance or in conflict with clientelistic politicians, cattle-owners, the military and the police' (ibid: 356).

Historically, Medellín has always held a strategic importance in terms of these armed struggles and it is perhaps unsurprising in this respect that amidst the frequent mediations of violence so characteristic of Colombian national cinema, the city itself has come to occupy a privileged position within its celluloid landscape. The films of Gaviria – notably his Medellín triptych consisting of *Rodrigo D, No futuro* (1990), *Don Isa* (1992), and *La vendedora de rosas* (1998) – are, in this sense, iconic, making frequent allusions to the intersection of the city's marginalised communities with the dynamics of the narcotics trade. Certainly *La virgen de los sicarios* can be said to share

certain similarities with Gaviria's oeuvre by way of its 'hyper-realist' aesthetic (Montoya, 2001: 95). The film, widely regarded as a fairly faithful adaptation of the original novel written by Fernando Vallejo (1994), also betrays heavy reliance on non-professional actors, most significantly, Anderson Ballesteros who plays co-lead Alexis, himself a former gang member. A similar concern with presenting the 'brutality of the facts' is also embodied by the somewhat jarring image created by what at the time was the unorthodox use of HD-digital video and which, as Desson Howe aptly puts it, 'rubs our noses in the grimness of Colombia's second city' (2001: n.p.). Most significantly perhaps, like Gaviria's films, as Geoffrey Kantaris notes, the film can also be juxtaposed with mass, globally marketed cultural forms (Hollywood-style cinema, for example) in the way it works against the 'well-nigh Pavlovian association between violence and spectacle' (2002: n.p.). Here, instead of veiling or disavowing the symptoms of violence as occurs in films which peddle violence as spectacle, it is precisely the symptoms which are of concern, acts of urban violence depicted as 'the aftershocks of cataclysmic geopolitical displacements' (ibid). And whilst the constant repetition of violence in itself might be argued as being somewhat indulgent, the director's aim here, it would seem is, to *desensitise* the viewer to violence, inspiring within her or him a 'moral panic' at their growing indifference to the murders taking place (ibid.). The director notes in the DVD commentary: 'I wanted the viewers to feel, like the characters, a kind of progressive anaesthesia towards violence, like anyone who wants to continue living in Medellín' (2002). In these respects the film perhaps superficially appears as another example of *pornomiseria*, this aforementioned epithet applied to Gaviria's films on the basis that they export 'una imágen deteriorada del país' through 'un deleite morboso de la camera en la abyección [...] la indigencia y la basura' (Suárez & Jáuregui 2002: 373). Yet in terms of perspective, the films could not be more contrasting. If Gaviria's work is characterised by a 'mirada émica o "interior"' (ibid.: 370) from the city's social periphery, the dystopic world of *La virgen de los sicarios* is viewed from a more privileged point of view, that of Fernando, Vallejo's alter-ego, whose return to Colombia after a thirty-year hiatus abroad marks the film's narrative point of departure.[39] As we learn somewhat bleakly, Fernando, who we presume to be in his late fifties or early sixties, has come back to his native Medellín 'para morir' only to discover that the city he remembers no longer exists. The idyllic farm of his childhood memories, replete, he recounts, with a bishop

[39] The real-life author himself moved to Mexico in 1971, where he continues to live, but in contrast to his fictionalised self in the film, he has returned regularly to his native Colombia.

and a herd of mooing cows, has been replaced by a sprawling metropolis of four million souls fractured by gaping social inequalities and riddled with seemingly endless cycles of violence that appear to be spiralling out of all control. Simultaneously appalled and fascinated in equal measure by the new city before him – now affectionately known as *Metrallo* by its armed gangs[40] – Fernando, however, is not quite ready (as he literally does in the film's closing sequence) to draw the curtains on this distinctly Dantesque incarnation of twentyfirst-century Latin American urban society and instead embarks on two relationships with young *sicarios*, around which the intervening narrative is structured.

IN THE 'SALA DE LAS MARIPOSAS': DIFFERING SEXUAL DYNAMICS

In light of the brief contextualisation provided above with regards to the film, the urban backdrop of *La virgin de los sicarios* clearly constitutes a very different proposition from that which we encounter in *Un año sin amor*. Indeed one might perhaps struggle to see exactly where Schroeder's film could possibly begin to image 'a more enriched consideration of gay life in Colombia and Latin America', as David William Foster puts it (2003: 76), with Medellín's recent history of industrial decline, high levels of unemployment, increasing socio-spatial exclusion and spiralling incidence of homicide all seemingly appearing less than conducive to the genesis of a more open gay culture if we are to subscribe to the logics supposedly underpinning the 'production of gay' discussed in the General Introduction. This remains doubly true for those with any residual knowledge of *paisa* culture[41], for even during the city's industrial heyday it had always remained remarkably 'provincial' in its outlook, with political conservatism, religious devotion, family values, thrift and frugality often proudly evoked as the key tenets of this culture upon which the success of Colombia's economic powerhouse was built. Amidst this highly patriarchal Antioquian society prevailed what Sarabia describes as:

> El 'mito paisa' del hombre luchador y emprendedor [...] el héroe incansable, patriarca fecundador de las montañas que más tarde impulsa la modernización e industrialización de departamento y la nación (2007: 34).

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[40] *Metrallo* is an adaptation of Medallo – the informal name by which Medellín is often known – which incorporates the world 'metralleta' [machine gun] in reference to its reputation for armed violence.

[41] *Paisa* is the name given to inhabitants of a region in northwest Colombia comprising of the departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda and Quindío. The administrative capital of Antioquia, Medellín, is also sometimes referred to as the 'capital' of the *paisas*.

From this perspective, the film's opening sequence is perhaps unremarkable, the general impression we receive being that gay life in Medellín is still forced very much to be played out behind closed doors, something apparently confirmed by the slew of homophobic insults the protagonist and his lovers are subjected to from members of the public through the course of the film. Certainly the construction of cinematic space that we see in the film's opening sequence alludes to Brown's aforementioned notion of a 'closet' space, which, as previously mentioned in Chapter One, can be said to be a secret, hidden and concealed space which enables same-sex desire to be successfully (and spatially) commodified for profit whilst simultaneously maintaining the traditional heterosexual coding of the urban landscape (Brown 2000: 56). After the passing of the initial credits, for example, a tracking shot frames Fernando walking down a busy city street before pausing outside a residential building and buzzing the intercom. The lock is released and the front door slams firmly shut behind Fernando, who ascends the stairs towards an upstairs apartment, the muffled sounds of gramophone music and excited chitchat becoming gradually audible as he approaches the white door. Eventually the latter is opened and Fernando is welcomed in by his friend, the former's intervening journey between the street and the apartment itself thus having firmly delineated the separation of public and private spheres.

In turn, the opulent mise-en-scène pertaining to the low-lit room we see beyond the threshold of the doorway – antique furniture, red drapes, classical nude male statues and other items of 'flamboyant' paraphernalia – contrasts with the austerity of the preceding whitewashed lobby and stairwell, further establishing this as a 'safe', almost cocoon-like space protected from the surveillance of the world outside. Here, an informal gathering of generally older gay men appears to be in full swing as they chatter excitedly amongst themselves whilst proffering furtive glances and witty one-liners to the selection of (ephebically) handsome adolescent males strewn amongst them. 'Esto es el mejor regalo que te puedieron haber traido' beams his host, as he leads Fernando over to Alexis, apparently the evening's 'prize', who seems to be little beyond his early to mid-teens. The three exchange complimentary niceties, before Fernando and Alexis quickly take their leave for the more intimate surroundings of the 'Sala de las mariposas', where the latter is then paid for his sexual services.

Within this protective space of the apartment the dynamics between the guests do not substantially depart, it would seem, from the 'traditional', 'non-metropolitan' model typically associated with Latin America, inflected, as mentioned in the General

Introduction, by differences in age, gender (identification), class and race. Although this implies the idea of a younger, feminised, socially inferior and resultantly stigmatised (read homosexualised) insertee, as Sinfield rightly points out, if the crucial point here is power difference, the social categories through which this is articulated may therefore be interchangeable, reinforcing or significantly complicating each other (2000: 30). For example, if youth co-occurs with femininity, he explains, it may do the *opposite* when it is inflected by class, referring in this respect to admiration of middle-class 'effete' gentleman towards the alleged masculinity of working-class boys between the era of Oscar Wilde and Stonewall (ibid.).

This inversion has born a striking presence in the realm of male prostitution where, as the geographically diverse selection of essays in Peter Aggleton's edited volume *Men Who Sell Sex: International Perspectives on Male Prostitution and AIDS* (1999) demonstrates, the 'macho', heterosexually-identified sex-worker has functioned in many parts of the world as an erotic doppelganger to his 'transvestite' female (or sometimes gay-identified) counterpart. Certainly, in this particular scene, the *sicarios*' 'butch' demeanour, caustic use of slang and baggy street-wear function as markers of 'authentic' masculinity (and thus presumably their heterosexuality) which clash visually and aurally with the 'delicate' nature of the older guests. With regards to the latter, a rather obvious set of visual cues – limp wrists, tightly crossed legs, exaggerated mannerisms and so on – in turn clearly evoke the image of the effeminate 'queen', the correlation between effeminacy and homosexuality implicit through the host's jovial revelation to Alexis that he and Fernando have known each other 'practicamente desde que nos volvimos maricas'.[42] According to this paradigm, the sexual role of the *sicarios* would remain strictly prescribed, their masculinity (and therefore heterosexuality) contingent on their rejection of receptive anal or oral sex and fulfilment of the active penetrating role during the sexual act.

Amidst what Philip Larvai terms the 'erotics of the closet' the boundaries of age, class, race and sexuality between client and sex-worker and the (supposed) rigidity of accompanying behavioural codes function as a source of erotic investment, thus heightening the sexual appeal of the encounter (1999: 162-63). 'El angelito tiene en su consciencia tres o cuatro muertos' recounts the host at one point in reference to Alexis, eliciting a theatrical gasp from his friend, underlining the social distance between the older men and the killers in their midst as well as the (sexual) titillation

[42] 'Marica' is often translated into English as 'fag' or 'queer' but these translations fail to capture the distinctly feminine connotations of the word which, of course, is derivative of the name 'María' [Mary].

such a 'dangerous' encounter with the 'other' might provide. Of course, as many of the essays in Aggleton's book go on to note, behind closed doors the 'rules' are often (quite literally) bent, something which rings particularly true in the Latin American-themed papers pertaining to Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Peru and Mexico respectively. This, I would suggest, is almost inevitable: if we follow Larvai's logic that cross-class and cross-race sexual contact marked as unacceptable in the public domain 'charges up' (my phraseology) sexual relations in highly stratified societies, then it would seem almost inevitable that so too would the transgression of the rules of acceptable sexual conduct that these accompanying social categories imply.

And yet whilst, as Sinfield suggests, power and hierarchy may be 'sexy' (and through implication, their subversion too), the notion of transaction in sex work always implies a degree of control on the part of the client due to his or her financial solvency. In this sense, whatever 'transgressions' take place during the sexual act itself, these are still often enacted within a framework of existing social hierarchies. 'Era de la banda de no sé que, de la comuna nororiental que ya están muertos. Fue el único que quedó' imparts the host in continued reference to Alexis, before turning to La Plaga and enquiring 'o fueron más?', the question's vapid delivery implying the question was purely rhetorical. His position of privilege will always ensure the grim realities of gang culture and life in the *comunas* remain detached and ultimately inconsequential, the 'danger' of the *sicarios* invoked merely as an evening 'show' that indulges sexual fantasy but which, within the space of the host's apartment, will always remain on the latter's terms.

Significant amidst this, however, is the rather more contrasting dynamic existent between Fernando and Alexis. Fernando, as he indeed reminds his host on entering the apartment, has been abroad for nearly thirty years, a fact underlined through his rather bemused facial expression on surveying the scene which greets him, suggesting that such impromptu get-togethers between older men and gun-toting adolescents were not exactly *de rigueur* in his previous country of residence. His subsequent conversation with his host, in turn, implies that his time away has led to a certain shift in the way in which he regards his sexuality, and he resists the latter's suggestion that he should define himself under the traditional epithet of 'marica', replying sarcastically to his host '¡Qué va! ¿Marica yo? Marica vos y el presidente'. And although his subsequent question, 'como se hace marica un tipo que ha acostado

con mil muchachos?', might suggest that Fernando's rejection of the term 'marica' is a reflection of a denial of his own homosexuality justified through self-identification as an older 'active' male, in reality I would suggest the underlying implication is that this latter 'observation' is merely a tongue-in-cheek jibe at his host's more 'outdated' conception of homosexuality. Alexis, in turn, corresponds tenuously to the mould of the 'macho', heterosexually-identified male prostitute. With the sexual act transacted, Fernando hands over to Alexis the money he is due, and says, apparently in accordance to what he believes etiquette dictates, 'para que te vayas de paranda con tu novia'. Yet Alexis's candid response conflicts with this presumption. '¿Cuál novia?', he demands, 'no me gustan las mujeres' much to the pleasure of Fernando, who replies, 'eso si está pero muy bien'.

The dynamics of the sexual act itself would also appear similarly conflictive. On entering the 'Sala de las Mariposas' it is Fernando who takes control of proceedings and immediately instructs Alexis to strip, the boy objectified by the camera's gaze which is articulated from the point of view of Fernando, who watches whilst seated on a chair. After conversing briefly over the gun which has now fallen to the floor and Alexis's gunshot wound, the latter then walks naked towards the bed, with only his *tote* ('gun', though literally 'heater') covering his modesty. He then switches off the bedside light and reclines obediently on his back in wait of Fernando, who takes his turn to undress, the implication being that it will be Alexis who assumes the passive role in the proceedings which will follow.

This, however, always remains an implication since the sexual act itself is left largely unrepresented. The only glimpse we receive of their shared intimacy is via a momentary reflection in a mirror in which, as if to mark the passing of time, we see two bodies morphing fluidly in and out of various positions, though lighting is absent and the image so ghostly, it is all but impossible to determine who is Alexis and who is Fernando. This affords plenty of room for speculation as to who, in fact, penetrates whom in the 'Sala de las mariposas', something in which Foster's account does indeed indulge. He suggests that Fernando's gesture of transaction in fact *confirms* 'the formula of the passive male paying the active male for sex', arguing that if Alexis were, in reality, the passive male, the film's narrative conventions would be very different:

> Alexis would either be the transvestite prostitute paid for her services as any female prostitute, no matter what penetrative role might take place between

> prostitute and client, or he would be the passive male grateful for the attentions of the macho. (ibid.: 77)

And yet the reflection we see in the mirror is so brief – the camera cuts within a few seconds to the post-coital image of the two characters dressing again – that to clearly discern what it is we are actually seeing requires rewinding the film and viewing it several times. In this sense, one cannot help wondering if the question of sexual role was something the audience is really intended to agonise over in the first place. Rather, from another perspective, I would contend, the muteness of the scene in this respect is symptomatic of the way in which the relationship between Fernando and Alexis operates *outside* the ideological parameters to which Foster refers.

The initial exchange between the two characters on entering the 'Sala de las mariposas', in this sense, is telling. '¿Dónde están las mariposas?' Fernando asks Alexis, prompting a response of similar candour to that which he receives in relation to his suggestion that Alexis might have a girlfriend. 'Aqui no hay mariposas', he replies with a measure of indignation, 'nosotros somos las mariposas'. A euphemism for 'gay' in the Spanish language, the irony in Alexis's use of the word 'mariposa' is hardly subtle – nevertheless it is indicative of his experience of homoerotic desire not merely as practice but as an identity and more importantly, one which he believes he *shares* with Fernando.[43] This is something effectively confirmed by the latter's reply. 'Lo importante no es el nombre sino la substancia de las cosas', he says, insinuating that *regardless* of what name, if any, is given to those who participate in same-sex erotic practice, and whatever acts they may or may not perform according to their gender identification, age, class, race or otherwise, their 'essence' is still the same and ultimately inescapable. It is this sense of reciprocity produced through Fernando and Alexis's shared idea of same-sex erotic practice as an expression of something 'innate' that, I wish to argue, sets their relationship apart from that shared by the other older guests and *sicarios* such as La Plaga and, in turn, opens up the narrative possibility of its extension beyond the realm of mere transaction to incorporate an emotional (loving?) element which transcends the standard hierarchies around which the erotics of this 'closet space' are structured.

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[43] The indication of 'identity' is particularly explicit in the use of the verb 'ser' ['to be'] which in the Spanish language implies a degree of permanence in contrast to 'estar' [also 'to be'] which is indicative of a temporary state.

OUT OF THE CLOSET: RE-SPATIALISING SAME-SEX DESIRE

One of the most immediately noticeable features of Schroeder's film, particularly when contrasted with *Un año sin amor*, in which Buenos Aires as a setting was largely invisible, is the overbearing presence that Medellín itself asserts over the viewer in almost every scene. As the director himself states, 'I wanted the city to be one of the characters' (in Foster 2002: n.p.), something that is effectively achieved through his use of HD video, whose extreme depth of field affords penetrating views both across the city and to the opposite side of the Abrurrá valley itself. Indeed the opening sequence discussed in the previous section is something of an anomaly with regards to the overall construction of cinematic space in the film, its nocturnal interiority then 'opened out' in subsequent scenes via the frequent use of panoramic long-shots of the city and the surrounding mountains articulated either from exterior locations or interior ones which afford similar views. A notable example would be Fernando's high-rise apartment, a space to which the camera returns time and time again to gaze through its wrap-around windows, the crisp HD image revealing a brash, modern, high-rise city bursting unapologetically from the verdant hills of the surrounding valley, which gives little superficial evidence of the staid conservatism for which Medellin has traditionally been known.

And it is against the backdrop of these windows, and thus the city itself, which sweeps across the front-aspect of the living room like a gigantic film reel, that Fernando and Alexis, coincidentally (or not, as the case may be), share their two most intimate moments in the film. In one scene, having thrown a hi-fi out of the apartment window in apparent emulation of Fernando's actions in a previous scene, where the din of Alexis's music prompted him to do the same, Alexis proudly celebrates his recklessness with a swig of what we presume to be *aguardiente*. The chuckling Fernando meanwhile, checking that no one has been 'killed' by the falling object, lingers by the windows before sitting down on a chair, the cityscape clearly visible behind. 'Abre la boca,' demands Alexis, approaching him. '¿Para qué?,' enquires Fernando suspiciously before leaning his head back and allowing Alexis to answer the question with a mouthful of *aguardiente*, which he dribbles slowly from his mouth into Fernando's, the camera swooning in such a manner that the only thing separating the couple from the city outside at this moment are the two vertical bars of the window frame traversing the screen.

Later on in the film, after Alexis has committed one his many shootings, the couple are framed again in front of the windows mimicking, amidst fits of laughter, what they believe to be the rather overdramatic response to the murder from a bystander. Quickly, however, a more reflective tone besets the scene and, as some rather emotive extra-diegetic piano music becomes audible on the soundtrack, we cut to a close-up taken perpendicular to Fernando which frames the couple looking into each other's eyes, their hands laid on each other's shoulders. As we revert to a reverse shot from Alexis's point of view, Fernando declares, 'Alexis, niño, tu eres lo más hermoso que me ha dado la vida' before the two then kiss, the camera panning slowly round to reveal Medellín's high-rise skyline through the gaps in their embracing bodies, beautifully bathed in orange light from the setting sun. As the array of ticking clocks present within the 'Sala de las mariposas' in the opening scene might, on a metaphorical level, imply, Fernando and Alexis's relationship seems to be one that embodies disjuncture, change and something new, the shift in outlook palpable in the 'exteriority' of cinematic space pertaining to these scenes, which clearly contrasts with the oppressive, closet-like milieu in which the party at which they first met was conducted.

Of course, if we are to subscribe to the De Certeaurian opinion that the 'panorama-city' seen from above is little more than a fictional visual 'simulacrum' which totalises and immobilises the 'most immoderate of human texts' – that is, street life as it is lived below (1984: 92) – then the unlikely relationship that we see budding between Fernando and Alexis might similarly be regarded as highly idealised, one that whilst *appearing* to be conducted in full view of the city, is, in fact, highly removed from it, lifted, to use De Certeau's phraseology 'out of the city's grasp' (ibid.). Yet the couple do indeed bring their romance to the streets below, any sense of 'detachment' embodied by the apartment relieved through their frequent flaneurial wanderings through the city. These weave their way through the chaotic downtown area, taking in Medellín's decaying relics of colonial architecture and monuments to liberation now dwarfed by the glittering towers of the central business district in a fitting visual metaphor for the apparent demise of the city's traditional institutions and their accompanying values, which are so vehemently rejected in the scathing commentaries that characterise Fernando's rather unusual form of 'guided tour'. 'Sin sexo la humanidad se enloquece' declares the latter on one such occasion as they approach one of the city's churches, before continuing:

> Si no, mira este papa lo loquito que anda. Habla de huévonadas....besando pisos. Que los homosexuales que eso es pecado. ¿Qué pecado es huévon? El pecado es seguir pariendo. Si no acabemos el planeta va a explotar.

Barely has he finished this rather provocative dismissal of heterosexuality as a valid or productive sexual orientation or institution (and concomitantly an endorsement of same-sex desires and unions) before his ire becomes re-directed to one of the city's most iconic role models of 'triumphant masculinity', Simón Bolívar, whose statue presents itself in their path:[44]

> [...] el libertador! Cobardón! Maricón! La única vez que pudiste lutar con alguien saliste huyendo [...] Pero quítate, le van a cagar las palomas! Anda, métate bajo la falda de tu mujer, ¡pirobo!

At this point, a pigeon then duly defecates onto Bolivar's head, prompting Fernando to conclude caustically, 'la gloria es una estátua que cagan las palomas!'. It is difficult to decide which of the two tirades would be considered more blasphemous by the Colombian establishment, with Simón Bólivar, of course, arguably enjoying quasi-saintly status in South American historical memory. Regardless, though, both serve to further underscore Fernando's refusal to define both his sexuality and gender identity according to the dominant system of values, his application of the slur 'maricón' to the continent's 'Great Liberator', in particular, functioning as another challenge to the notion that sexuality and gender identity are somehow contingent on one another and mutually implicating.

And once inside the cathedral the 'profanities' continue as Fernando points out three of the saintly statues which look down upon him and the mesmerised Alexis – Santo Ignacio de Ayollo, El Emperato de la Colombiére and Santo António, with the latter, according to the former, serving as the 'patrón de los novios'. Alexis subsequently turns to him, claiming the saint as 'de nosotros', grinning in a suitably saccharine manner as if recalling his earlier comment to La Plaga at the beginning of the scene that the purpose of their visit to the cathedral was to 'casarse'. Not, of course, that there is much in the way of religious ceremony occurring, the pious congregations of yesteryear now most definitely dispersed in place of a throng of drug-dealers, pimps, prostitutes and beggars who have now also apparently claimed this once sacred space as their own.

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[44] Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) was a Venezuelan political leader and together with José de San Martín he played a key role in Spanish-speaking Latin America's successful struggle for independence from Spain.

The examples cited above are certainly not exhaustive, but they are nevertheless indicative of how Fernando and Alexis's dissident same-sex union crosses the threshold of the private sphere into public space in a way in which the 'sexual contracts' maintained between the other *sicarios* and Fernando's middle-class friends certainly do not. As previously argued, these, hidden and concealed within the vacuum of a 'closet space', ultimately do not disturb the heterosexual coding of the wider urban landscape. The same, however, cannot be said for Fernando and Alexis's city wanderings in the 'city below'. For if we are to subscribe to De Certeau's argument that the act of walking itself, as a spatial practice, produces 'meaning', then the circulation of the homosexual body through heterosexually-coded spaces arguably constitutes a process of 'rewriting'. Here, heterocentrism, as the dominant narrative of Medellín's 'urban text' is deconstructed and destabilised in what ultimately is a queering of public space reflecting the manner in which walking, as De Certeau argues, 'suspects, tries out, transgresses [...] the trajectories it "speaks"' (ibid.: 99). And it is a queering that only serves to be embellished by the verbal commentary which accompanies Fernando and Alexis's ambulant traversing of the city, an apt allusion to the idea of walking as a space of enunciation, a 'statement' that the above critic terms a 'pedestrian speech act' (ibid.: 96).[45]

CLASS, SOCIO-SPATIAL REALIGNMENT AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

The question necessarily poses itself, however, as to how we read this re-presentation of same-sex desire in the film as manifested in Fernando and Alexis's relationship. In Fernando's case, his enlightened attitude towards his sexuality would appear to confirm socio-anthropological accounts of sexual identity in Latin America as referred to in the General Introduction to this thesis, and by extension the underlying logic which informs John D'Emilio and Larry Knopps's arguments. Educated and well-travelled, Fernando arguably constitutes the paradigmatic 'modern' white, male, middle-class Latin American 'gay', easily able to 'import' his experience of homoerotic life abroad back into his native Colombia due to his relative financial

[45] In this respect De Certeau claims the act of walking fulfils three enuciative functions. Firstly, he writes, it is a process of 'appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian', in the same way that a speaker appropriates language. Secondly, he continues, walking can be regarded as a 'spatial acting-out of the place' just as the speech act is an [acoustic] acting out of language. And thirdly, he proposes that walking implies '*relations* among differentiated positions', that is, 'pragmatic "contracts" in the form of movements', in the same way that verbal encunciation is an '"allocution", "posits another opposite" the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors in action' (ibid.: 98).

solvency and accompanying ability to exist independently, both materially and spatially, of potentially unaccommodating family structures. Arguably this is further facilitated by his place within a cultural elite that is perhaps more tolerant of alternative lifestyles than other sectors of society and an accompanying socio-economic status, which, to a degree, mediates the stigma attached to his same-sex erotic preferences.

As for Alexis, however, his distinctly candid attitude towards his sexuality and experience of this as a personal identity appears perhaps more surprising given his (working-class) social background. Or is it? As Colin Hardy reminds us in the introduction to the English translation of Salazar's book, Medellín's violence in the 1980s and 1990s was not the violence of decline, rather, that of a city which was 'booming economically, even as the murder rate spirals' (in Salazar, 1992: 10). For where Medellín's industry had gone into decline, the burgeoning narcotics trade had soon taken over, representing, as Castells notes more generally in relation to Latin America, 'a sizeable and most dynamic sector' of the city's economy, 'with proven global competiveness' (2000: 201). Consequently, concurrent to the exclusion of Medellín's poorer inhabitants from the official employment market, new openings simultaneously began to emerge within this burgeoning criminal economy of which drug 'couriering' to the United States and contract-killing within the city's sub-market of violence both constitute notable examples. These soon became a standard mode of employment, not merely as a means for 'getting by' but more importantly, as a lucrative source of income with the potential to facilitate access to a status and lifestyle which had previously been beyond the reach of Medellín's traditionally lower-income sectors (Safford & Palacios 1992: 362, Salazar 1992: 114). The respective accounts of Salazar, Riaño and Castells, in this respect, all make reference to this rise of the 'narco-bourgoisie' and a phenomenon of 'conspicuous consumerism' attesting to the manner in which, as Mary Roldán puts it, 'the aura of privilege, the sense that political and economic entitlement was limited to a select few, was breached' (1999: 174).

Certainly *La virgen de los sicarios* itself features ample reference to this process of economic destratification and social realignment, the *sicarios* themselves appearing as an embodiment of social and economic mobility. In terms of appearance, for example, Alexis, La Plaga, El Difunto and the other unnamed *sicarios* we meet, are clean, apparently well-nourished and clothed in fashionable sports clothes and visually contrasted with the hotch-potch of unwashed beggars sometimes seen in their midst,

whose 'ragged' appearance is so meticulously attended to by the film's costume artist that it verges on the parodic. Indeed the apparent social distance between these two groups of marginalised characters is made explicit in one scene when La Plaga decides to share out a box of cakes with the local beggars. '¡En fila desechables!' he shouts to an unfortunate rag-tag selection of vagabonds, who obediently arrange themselves in a line and proceed to kneel, mouths open in hungry anticipation of their 'communion', to the obvious delight of the on-looking Alexis and Fernando. An act of charity this clearly is not, rather an opportunity for La Plaga to assert his own authority over these other errant characters who he clearly believes are inferior to him, something implied by his reference to them as 'desechables'.

And this increased sense of social status is not something the *sicarios* merely claim for themselves but is, in turn, something bestowed on them by certain members of the moneyed elite as represented by Fernando. On one occasion, in a disturbingly Fascist-style oratory, the latter reflects to Alexis:

> Juntan una pareja de pobres y verás que en los quince minutos se cruzan y producen diez pobres. Odio la pobreza. La única manera de acabar con esta plaga maldita es terminar con los que la transmiten.

Significant here is the question of positionality, since the use of the verb 'verás' essentially aligns Alexis with Fernando, thus not only excluding him from the category of 'pobre' but also valorising his profession as a potential 'solution' to the spread of poverty, which he imagines as a form of contagion which must be contained. The frequent use of the word 'ellos' (in reference to the city's poor) in Fernando's other musings perform a similar function – repudiating Alexis as a subject of his tirades whilst also implicating him verbally as a passive accomplice in their deliverance.

A shifting positionality is reflected too – and perhaps more noticeably – in the film's (re)mapping of the cinematic landscape and which, as we have seen, marks one of the film's major points of divergence from those corresponding to Gaviria's oeuvre. Whilst in the latter, the *comunas* strike an overbearing presence within the film's topography as the primary space of narrative action, in *La virgin de los sicarios* they constitute an overwhelmingly absent space or one that is viewed from afar. At one point in the film, Alexis and Fernando admire the view across the valley from a local body dumping ground, the former reciprocating the latter's tours of the city's historic centre with his own unique lesson in geography. 'Las comunas de La Salle, El Popular, La Francia, Villa Socorro, Santo Domingo Savio', he recounts, pointing into the distance, the camera shifting with each name to another location on the horizon before

eventually arriving at the farthest and highest point constituted by Santo Domingo Savio, Alexis's *barrio*. Clearly, this is not a moment of nostalgia, however, with Fernando's subsequent suggestion that one day they visit his home patch eliciting a negative response from Alexis, pointing to his increasingly weak connection with the latter. '¿No a qué? Por allá está muy caliente', he replies, moments later fixating on a metro train as it snakes through the densely populated valley *away* from the *comunas* to which they have just been referring.

This process of 'distancing' and reversal of perspective is continued at other points in the film, particularly in those scenes occurring in Fernando's living room. Here Alexis is afforded the same spectacular vista across the city to the opposing mountains and *comunas* that he might have enjoyed when living in Santo Domingo Savio, though this is, of course, mediated by a series of panoramic windows, suggesting a certain detachment on his part, as if the scene beyond the glass were no more real than those which he views on the nearby television screen. The nature of the space from which this view is articulated is also significant – a plush, high-rise centrally located apartment that is the absolute antithesis of the ramshackle, red-brick building in which he was raised. The latter Fernando visits at one point in the film to inform Alexis's mother of his death – one of the film's rare forays into the warren-like space pertaining to these terraced hillside neighbourhoods.

Accompanying this general absence of the *comunas* as a principal space of action in the film comes, in turn, a privileging of the city's central district, a part of the city where, as the protagonist of *Rodrigo D No futuro* demonstrates, the experience of many *comuneros* has traditionally been one of exclusion and alienation. In one of the most iconic scenes of Gaviria's film, we see the protagonist taking an elevator to the top of an empty office tower in the business district from which he contemplates the opposing towers and city below. Beset by increasing despair he begins to bang his head repeatedly against the glass of the window before a jump-cut glimpses his body in a suicidal freefall towards the ground. As in the testimonies found within Salazar's book, the centre of Medellín is envisioned here as a 'cannibal, a living organism ready to consume slum dwellers on the hillside above' (Roldán 1999: 173).

In *La virgen* the relationship of young *sicarios* with the downtown area, however, could not be more contrasting, the camera, for example, returning on several occasions to the setting of the cake scene to reveal Alexis's friends such as La Plaga and El Difunto, relaxing and socialising in a busy pedestrian shopping street, giving

little hint of feeling 'out of place'. At other points in the film, the assertion of their presence is a good deal less congenial. In this respect, the sound of the *sicarios*' motorcycles freely traversing the city's otherwise traffic-clogged arteries bears an increasing audial presence through the course of the film and one which Fernando finds progressively unnerving, particularly after Alexis is gunned down in front of him from a black Kawa motorcycle. For the former, its piercing high-pitched whine serves as a constant reminder of the latent threat of violence which now pervades this once secure area of the city – a sonoral re-coding of urban space symptomatic of what Roldán describes as the dissolving of the 'last of the cultural barriers between sectors of the city amidst the deployment of armed youths into the heart of what had once been off-limits to the poor' (ibid.: 174).

Thus the film quite clearly alludes to the fact that despite the apparent social distance which exists between them, the circumstances through which their sexualities are produced are perhaps not so different after all. For concurrent to the existence of the *comunas* in the film as an absent space, that pertaining to the family home is similarly invisible, the existence of the *sicarios* presented as overwhelmingly rootless and nomadic. Of course on one occasion, as previously mentioned, we do indeed visit the house in Santo Domingo Savio where Alexis's mother lives, but it hardly gives the impression of having provided a stable adolescence for the boy. This, as her testimony to Fernando confirms, has developed against a backdrop of domestic violence courtesy of her second partner, an alcoholic with whom Alexis appears to have shared a particularly dysfunctional relationship and which prompted his exit from the rather precariously constructed dwelling they call 'home'. Certainly, now having been apparently abandoned by the man in question, Alexis's mother has been far too busy single-handedly bringing up her two younger children to ponder the whereabouts of her errant older teenage son, who at this point is, of course, already dead. The point is here, though, that it appears that Alexis does not apparently *need* the support – material, emotional or otherwise – of his family (or what is left of it), the implication being that as a now waged individual employed in the albeit illicit profession of contract killing he is able to exist independently of its structures. In this sense, he too, just like Fernando, as the cinematic mapping described above implies, quite literally

possesses the 'space' in which to organise a personal life around his erotic/emotional attraction to members of his own sex.[46]

RECLAIMING METROPOLITAN DISSIDENT SEXUALITIES

The above account is significant in the sense that it allows for a rather less restrictive (and reactionary) interpretation of Alexis and Fernando's relationship than that provided by the likes of critics such César Alzate Vargas and Lucia Sarabia. The latter both focus their analysis on the power differential existent between Fernando and Alexis, arguing it to be generally exploitative in nature. However, in the case of *La virgen de los sicarios* this is undertaken at the expense of any serious consideration of the convergence that is established by the film between the two characters on the level of their respective (homo)sexual identities and its narrative and cinematographic bridging of the socio-spatial gap existent between them. For as my discussion clearly demonstrates, Fernando and Alexis's relationship goes beyond a simply 'reconstrucción del antiguo paradigma: artista maduro se enamora de hermoso efebo', as Vargas puts it (2001: 159). Neither can it rather simplistically be explained away as being one that is 'escandalosa, típicamente carnavalesca (que) expone la pederastia y la explotación sexual del pobre' (2007: 37) as Sarabia, in turn, proposes. Rather – and here I return necessarily briskly to the matter in hand – I would suggest that the film does indeed begin to image a *metropolitan* reading of things, despite the highly contrasting socio-cultural backdrop against which its narrative unfolds when compared to *Un año sin amor*, discussed in the previous chapter. Admittedly such a conjecture is not entirely uncontroversial. As Sinfield writes, it is a defiantly *egalitarian* rhetoric that has underpinned 'modern' hegemonic understandings of metropolitan sexualities in which '(gay) identity' is so compelling that it makes *difference* irrelevant and inappropriate – at best invisible, at worst undesirable' (ibid.: 25). And no matter how much one attempts to align the two characters, to put it all too crudely perhaps, Alexis

[46] Alexis's 'broken' home would appear symptomatic of what Jurado argues to be the demise of the traditional extended *paisa* family as an organising unit amongst the city's working classes, the once pivotal father figure bearing only transitory presence or a complete absence in family life, with the mother instead often fulfilling the dual roles of chief care provider *and* breadwinner. In contrast, amongst the supposedly 'liberal' middle classes, the nuclear family model has increasingly reasserted itself as 'un esfera intocable que todos resguardan y defienden en medio de las inclemencias del ambiente social' (2004: 134). This would appear to further destabilise the notion that social background constitutes a reliable indicator of one's freedom to declare and live one's sexuality without interference or repercussions from one's family.

ultimately needs Fernando much more than Fernando needs him.[47] As Sarabia herself writes of the latter: 'Su edad, posición económica y educación lo sitúan en una posición privilegiada que de ninguna manera es compartida por sus amantes' (ibid.: 37). However, as Sinfield goes on to argue, the dominant ideology that posits differentials as something that can and must be 'avoided or overcome', is at best misguided and worst, purely hypocritical.

> If metropolitan lesbians and gay men in fact succeeded in wiping out power relationships, all we would have to do is enjoy our egalitarian practice and let everyone else in on the secret. But that is far from the case. The prevailing sex-gender system, we have every reason to know, is geared to the production of hierarchy and, as part of that, to the production of anxious, unhappy and violent people. It produces us and our psychic lives – straights and gays – and it is not going to leave us alone [...] it cannot be realistic to suppose that we can simply, through good intentions sidestep hierarchies of capitalism and patriarchy. It is a liberal-bourgeois delusion to suppose that 'private' space can be somehow innocent of and protected from the real world (ibid.: 33-34).

Instead he urges a recognition of the realities and, more importantly, the *productivities* of power in sexual relations and an exploration of the 'ways to assess and recombine power, sexiness, responsibility and love' (ibid.: 35). Refracted through Sinfield's prism of reasoning, Alexis and Fernando's relationship in this sense, I wish to suggest, can be said to hint at how power differentials in metropolitan same-sex relationships might be 'refigured as potentially rewarding' (ibid.).

Most obviously, Fernando has the financial means to support Alexis and possesses at least the *potential* to assist his young lover in changing his status quo by providing a place to live, and access to education, thus offering him a way out of the gang culture in which he has become involved. Indeed, in one scene he even mentions perhaps helping Alexis to establish his own business, though it is an idea he then quickly rejects on the grounds of the excessive bureaucratic impediments which he believes would stand in his way. Nevertheless, the domestic set-up that Fernando establishes in his apartment with his young lover does provide the latter with a degree of stability, a point of reference, and even a tentative feeling of 'home'. This contrasts markedly with the more transient presence that the other *sicarios* bear in the lives of Fernando's friends who we encounter in the opening sequence. Whilst for a few brief hours the likes of La Plaga and his friends might enjoy the comforts and protection of their host's showy apartment, it is anybody's guess what the night will bring for them

[47] The same here can be said for Wilmar, who tells Fernando that he has not eaten for 'two weeks' during the restaurant meal they enjoy in their first encounter.

once the party is over and they are roaming the streets again. Fernando's dwelling, in counterpoint, is constructed in the film as a 'safe' space for Alexis, in which the latter is able to circulate freely, its position on the top floor of the apartment block, intercom system and security gate covering the front door establishing it as a secure refuge from the violence of the city which lies below.

Alexis himself, of course, possesses little on the material front that Fernando does not already have, but nevertheless brings light and albeit short-term purpose to an existence which until such time as Fernando takes leave of the living world (whether that be via suicide, natural causes or murder) we assume would otherwise be one characterised by sombre monotony. For Fernando's life is now as empty as the fortified abode he has inherited from his sister and which serves as a poor substitute for a writing career (which for one reason or another has now reached its conclusion) and family members who are either dead or estranged. Set in relief against the austere backdrop of the apartment, with its meticulously attended to scarcity of mise-en-scène, the figure of Alexis glows with a youth and vitality that functions as a source of fascination for the ageing Fernando, the latter proclaiming in one scene, as previously mentioned, that 'usted es el mejor regalo que me ha dado la vida'.

Admittedly, the rather mechanical way in which the couple then proceed to kiss hardly serves as much of an endorsement of Fernando's words.[48] Indeed cynics (Sarabia here included) would no doubt propose that they are pure rhetoric, his interest in the boy going little beyond the 'satisfacción de sus deseos sexuales' (ibid.). As Foster rightly points out, there is, in fact, little in the way of sexual communion occurring in the world of *La virgen de los sicarios*, with sexual acts, in both Fernando's relationship with Alexis and Wílmar, infrequent, brief and utterly devoid of passion (ibid.: 84). It is, he argues, a rather 'bland form of homoeroticism', so lacklustre, in fact, that he goes as far as describing it as a 'virtual retreat into asexuality' (ibid.). Foster's point here is that 'life' in Medellín has become so overwhelmingly synonymous with the experience of death that even sexuality itself has become 'drained' of its 'presumed renovating vitalism' to the extent that even same-sex erotic acts appear wholly unremarkable (ibid.). It is an interesting line of enquiry and one that will be returned to in due course, but for now it would seem not wholly uncontroversial to suggest that with this in mind, Fernando's attraction to the boy is not purely sexual. There does indeed seem to be something more than his

[48] The awkwardness of the scene arguably owes itself more to Ballastero's [limited] acting abilities here than any deliberate intention in the script or from the director to evacuate the scene of any eroticism.

libidinal urges which draw him to Alexis, who, in turn, seems to profit from Fernando's presence in his life in a manner that cannot simply be read in terms of material gain.

As the director himself states, 'the movie became a *dialogue* [my emphasis] rather than a monologue' (in Foster 2001: n.p.), a reference to what is in fact a clear process of mutual intellectual reciprocity existent between the two characters, which far from being stunted by a generational lacuna and two highly diverging respective social backgrounds is, in fact, nourished by them. For whilst Fernando's attention to grammatical correctness, his love of literature and classical music and fondness for the city's historic centre and colonial architecture may position him as a relic of 'old' Medellín, the nostalgic languishing which characterises his flaneurial wanderings through the city arguably provides Alexis with a bridge to the past and a way of *contextualising* the present.

As Salazar suggests, it is all too easy to regard the demographic which Alexis represents simply as an expression of a purely 'new' culture, when in fact the evidence suggests that a form of 'cultural intermixing' has taken place whereby both modernisation *and* longstanding, specifically Antioquian, social traditions have coalesced into the phenomenon of contract killing (ibid.: 115). Medellín's value system, he writes, has always been constructed around the idea of entrepreneurism and making money, with the pursuit of profit traditionally prioritised over social integration. It is 'an urban conglomerate that has never gelled into a city' (ibid.: 116), he continues, one in which, like the rest of Colombia, there have developed dual systems of education and personal ethical development. The formal one includes school, church, catechism and civic education, where ethical norms dictate proper behaviour, and love of one's neighbour, whilst the other, which he claims is 'far more effective', is that of daily life in which actions that go against the Christian catechism are both 'possible and accepted' (ibid. :117).

It is perhaps no surprise then that the narcotics trade and associated sub-markets such as contract killing should collectively constitute one of the most dynamic sectors of the country's economy – it is, writes Salazar, indicative of a culture in which the popular saying goes 'son, make money honestly, but if you can't, make it anyway' (ibid.). Here, God's pardon for killing someone is something that has, throughout Colombia's long tradition of violence, been taken for granted. Alexis in *La virgen de los sicarios* is no exception, his devotion to the Virgen Mary, regular pilgrimages to

Sabaneta and bizarre ritual of having his bullets blessed with holy water all respectively ensuring the successful execution of his crimes and their eventual absolution in the Kingdom of Heaven. We can, then, perhaps regard it in Salazar's terms as 'the culture of the rosary and the machete which nowadays has become the religious medallion and the mini-Uzi' (ibid).

In turn, Fernando, whilst scorning Alexis's constant transgression of the conventions of the Spanish language, his utter indifference to 'high culture' and the iniquitous logic through which his newly found religious devotion is sustained, nevertheless finds himself far from immune to the cultural influences of his young lover. Already in the opening sequence, for example, whilst reacting with surprise at Alexis's use of the word *Metrallo* in reference to his home city, he nevertheless quickly acknowledges that the official name, Medellín, was, some time ago, already 'muy gastado'. Similarly, in a later scene as the couple survey the nocturnal city from the apartment terrace, Fernando waxes lyrical about the city of his childhood, recalling how it was merely 'un potrero grande con obsipo' only to then admit that in fact he prefers it as it is now, 'repleto de gente'. Even his aversion towards the heavy metal music which Alexis insists on blasting through the apartment on his newly acquired Aiwa sound system, and whose beat is echoed by the incessant nocturnal drumming of the *punkero* who lives in the adjacent apartment, too gradually dissolves into indifference. Indeed, once the *punkero* has been killed by Alexis, himself acting on Fernando's complaint that the latter's constant percussional pursuits are preventing him from sleeping, Fernando discovers that, in fact, he has started to miss the rhythmic drum rolls which before were such a source of frustration for him, the 'deafening' silence which now ensues serving only to prolong his insomnia.

Most significant, though, is the shift that we encounter with regards to Fernando's attitude towards religion. For whilst Fernando tells Alexis that he told God to 'fuck off' some years ago, the city's religious spaces somewhat bizarrely serve as an increasing source of attraction for Fernando as the film progresses. '¿Otra vez a la iglesia?' inquires Alexis confusedly in one scene as Fernando takes leave of the apartment once again for the street. As we then cut to the image of Fernando inside the church kneeling with his hands clasped in pious reflection, the implication is that he is not merely engaged in architectural appreciation but rather, a more profound spiritual dialogue with God and one which reaches its apogee in the scenes immediately preceding and following Alexis's death. Perhaps religion, after all, might constitute a

viable antidote to the grim realities of daily life in modern Medellín and of which the loss of his lover serves as a stark reminder.

Thus the unlikely union that exists between Fernando and Alexis does indeed establish in the film both an inter-class and inter-generational dialogue between the characters who, despite their divergences, also share a mutually implicit understanding of each other. Whilst Fernando can be deemed representative of the 'old guard', as the director himself states, from another perspective, he also assumes the status of a 'rebel who speaks against the world as an adolescent would' and is thus someone Alexis can 'connect and laugh with easily' (Schroeder in Foster 2001: n.p.). Fernando, in turn, continues Schroeder, connects with the boy 'because he's learning from him – about the new realities of Medellín and the vernacular now spoken in the town of his childhood' (ibid.) This sense of reciprocity and dissolving of difference is aptly embodied in a verbal exchange that takes place between the two characters as they walk back from Sabaneta at the beginning of the film having witnessed a shooting outside the church there. Here Fernando reflects on the event, musing philosophically that before disagreements were settled with a machete and that now gunpowder is used. Alexis interjects, arguing that 'a la final, viene a ser lo mismo plomo o machete' with Fernando quick to pick up on his grammatical mistake. In this respect, he informs him that the correct expression is, in fact, 'al final' or 'al fin de cuentas'. Fernando, however, quickly reminds himself that such corrections are futile and perhaps even unnecessary 'porque a la final da lo mismo', his replication of Alexis's incorrect use of the Spanish language insinuating that whichever way they express themselves, they are still nevertheless speaking from the same page, as it were.

From this perspective, then, Alexis and Fernando's relationship can be regarded as an embodiment of Medellín's curious blending of old and new, symptomatic of the fact that as Riaño argues, the cultural proposal whereby the drug trafficking lifestyle and its conspicuous consumerism became simultaneously anchored in a 'return to tradition' regarding values, musical styles and religious practices, was one that ultimately 'blurred generational differences' (2006: 160). Indeed the grandiose fireworks display that erupts one night over Medellín as Fernando and Alexis survey the city from the apartment terrace can be invoked as a fitting metaphorical endorsement of this uneasy union, the classical tones of an opera from Fernando's beloved Callas and which plays on the living-room stereo serving as an audial

backdrop to what Alexis enthusiastically reveals to be in fact a celebration marking another successful shipment of cocaine to the United States.

(TRIGGER) HAPPY: TIL DEATH DO US PART

In theory, then, Fernando and Alexis's relationship does at least possess the potential, it would seem, to flourish as a productive, metropolitan (though not strictly 'egalitarian') form of same-sex union. The operative word here though, of course, is 'potential' since Fernando's ability to steer Alexis onto a different life trajectory, and a destiny other than an almost certain early grave, is ultimately dependent on his ability to remain sufficiently affected by Medellín's culture of violence and the 'career' which Alexis has forged within it to feel any motivation to do this in the first place. In a city where murder is so commonplace that it has come to constitute an 'everyday' expression of Medellín's street life, this ability is necessarily limited. As the director implies, indifference itself is perhaps the only survival strategy left for 'anyone who wants to carry on living in Medellín' (2002: n.p.). The world of *La virgen de los sicarios* is, in short, characterised by a sheer *banalisation* of violence. This is achieved most obviously through repetition (we witness countless murders through the film's ninety-minute course) but also specific representational strategies with regards to the acts themselves. The shootings, for example, are devoid of any build-up, the *sicarios*' appearance and subsequent departure always abrupt. Any sensationalisation of the event, in turn, is mitigated by a distinct lack of slow-motion footage,[49] the whine of the motorcycle engine constituting only a momentary fracture in the otherwise normal urban soundscape present on the audio-track. Indeed, at certain points the latter actively works to trivialise the moment of death itself, most notably that pertaining to Alexis. Here any emotional impact wielded by the image of the glassy-eyed Fernando clutching his dead lover is neutralised by the upbeat rhythm of the salsa tune emerging from the taxi's radio, the inclusion of any heart-wrenching extra-diegetic music conspicuous through its absence.

The direction of the film's secondary characters and extras, too, reinforces the prosaic nature of the murders being committed in their midst, their reaction often deadpan and nonchalant, whilst the extreme depth of field offered by HD-digital

[49] The shooting which takes place on the steps of the church in Sabaneta is an exception to this. Here the image of the approaching *sicarios* is indeed slowed down, though only momentarily, before real-time footage is resumed. It seems the director of photography's intention here was to accentuate what is the first actual shooting we witness in the film, a strategy which is subsequently abandoned from thereonin in his effort to evoke cumulative desensitisation.

camera, in turn, tends to reveal an otherwise ordinary street scene in the background. 'Estamos rompiendo records', a pharmacy owner declares to Fernando cynically in reference to the car-owner who has been shot following his refusal to hand over his keys to an armed robber, the otherwise normal flow of pedestrians and traffic visible behind him as if nothing has occurred. Indeed the only character who expresses any tangible reaction to the murder in this particular scene is a nearby street child who witnesses the crime from the curbside. '¡Mira el muñeco, mira el muñeco!', he shouts excitedly to his friend, the sense of titillation and delight in the young boy's voice so palpable that one might more readily expect him to have glimpsed a squashed bird or rabbit on the road than a lifeless human body.

Superficially Fernando does indeed express the sort of emotions – shock, distress, disapproval – towards Alexis's profession and the murders being committed in his midst that the film's presumably educated, middle-class audience would expect. 'Estoy contra toda violencia', he declares on one occasion before continuing, 'simplemente no hay que andar armado', the sentiment confirmed in his subsequent reaction to Alexis's aforementioned murdering of the *punkero* who lives in the adjacent apartment. Here, having delivered what he clearly believes to be a far more efficient solution to his lover's insomnia than the rather ineffectual earplugs previously purchased in a nearby drugstore, Alexis runs off into the crowd leaving Fernando standing next to the *punkero*'s body as it bleeds onto the sidewalk, passersby apparently oblivious to the fact that Fernando had, only moments before, been engaged in friendly conversation with the perpetrator of the crime. His measured and serene demeanour soon melts into oblivion, however, once reunited with Alexis back at the apartment, where a heated exchange between the couple then ensues:

FERNANDO: Ay, niño, por Dios, ¿qué hiciste? ¿Matar aquel muchacho por nada?'

ALEXIS: ¿Cuál muchacho? Una cara de chichipato, hijo de puta por gonorea lo cascaron. Tu me dijiste que lo querías cascar.

FERNANDO: Sí, lo dije, pero era sólo un mal pensamiento. Si lo mataron en la realidad los que mataron en la cabeza...Niño es que no distingues entre el pensamiento y la acción...lo que va del uno a la otra es esto que se llama la civilización.

So apparently affected is Fernando by the boy's actions, in fact, that as previously mentioned during the night, somewhat ironically, the sleep he has been craving so much becomes even more elusive than it was before, the guilt-ridden silence which has now descended upon the apartment now almost as deafening as the *punkero*'s incessant drumming which had kept him awake before. '¿Es el zumbeo de la consciencia o están cantando las cigarras?' he asks rhetorically one night as he lies awake before admitting to the perplexed Alexis, 'siento culpable, niño'. The latter, of course, fails to recall who it is he is talking about, the previous week's misdemeanour now apparently forgotten amidst the melee of killings which has presumably taken place in the city in the intervening period.

The following day Fernando embarks on another pacifist sermon as the two again wander around the city centre – 'simplemente no hay que andar armado' declares Fernando, '¿Para qué sirve un revólver si no es para matar?' His observation is effectively confirmed in the scene which follows when Alexis shoots dead a taxi driver in response to a homophobic tirade he unleashes on the couple following the latter's request that he turn down the volume of the car stereo. Two scenes later the pair are again subjected to verbal abuse, this time as they travel on the city's metro system. Here, spotting a child standing with dirty feet on one of the carriage seats, Fernando takes it upon himself to lecture the mother on her duties as a respectful citizen, prompting the scorn of two (male) fellow passengers who have no hesitation in yelling the now all too familiar insults of 'pirobo' and 'gonorea' at the former. Again, the response is the same, Alexis discreetly pulling his *tote* from beneath his trousers and efficiently delivering two bullets which leave both men dead on the carriage floor. 'Dos chichipatos menos', he declares triumphantly to the perturbed Fernando as they descend the steps from the metro station, the latter complaining in reply that the killings are starting to encourage his own 'tendencias naturales de desintegración'. Turning to Alexis and blocking his path, he demands exasperatedly, 'antes de disparar recapacita [y] cuenta hasta diez'.

However, beneath Fernando's self-righteous indignation lies a latent hypocrisy that makes any claim he may have to holding the moral high ground extremely tenuous. Despite his 'surprise' at the boy's shooting of the *punkero*, for example, he certainly cannot claim to be any stranger to Alexis's impulsive tendencies or his supposed inability to distinguish between 'el pensamiento y la acción'. For only several scenes earlier after Alexis has threatened to 'kill' the president as he watches

him giving a national televised address, Fernando looks on in amusement as the boy then fetches his gun from the bedroom and aims at the image of their national leader before obliterating their newly acquired television set. Indeed, as Fernando himself admits at one point in the film, 'si no se aparece en la televisión, no se existe', a comment which attests precisely to his awareness of the fact that amidst the increasingly scopic regime around which 'civilisation', as he calls it, is constructed, distinguishing between the tangible and the intangible can no longer serve as a legitimate means of discerning what is 'real' and what is not, that is, of course, if we are to believe in the objectivity of such a concept in the first place.

Even more significantly, Fernando's self-positioning as an innocent onlooker to the crimes which Alexis commits is, on closer examination, also highly questionable. His complaints about the *punkero*, for instance, and subsequent threat that 'una de estas noches le pego un tiro así hijo de puta' may initially only be a 'mal pensamiento' as he claims, but it is one that he subsequently transforms into an action at the moment in which he raises Alexis's gun, and pretends to shoot the boy as an accompaniment to this verbal threat and which precipitates the actual murder itself several scenes later. Similarly, when Alexis rushes over to the window of the apartment to mentally photograph the *punkero* so he may be easily identifiable when the time comes to shoot him, Fernando too rushes over to join him in what from the boy's perspective can only be regarded as an act of encouragement.

The aforementioned scene which takes place in the metro train similarly problematises Fernando's status as somehow being exterior to the murders being committed by his young lover. Apparently attempting to lead by example by avoiding recourse to verbal or physical abuse, the erudite Fernando instead asserts his authority over his two critics by shaming them through the exposure of their own stupidity and lack of education. 'Si supieron con quien están hablando', he says, before clarifying 'soy el último gramático de Colombia, el que descubrió el proverbio....¿Qué saben que es? Es la palabra que está en lugar del verbo'. As intended, his brief grammar lesson is clearly lost on the two men, who gormlessly stare back at him in utter confusion, much to the satisfaction of Fernando, who may as well, from their point of view, be speaking a foreign language. In homage to the conventions of language teaching, Fernando then attempts to clarify the knowledge he has just imparted by using a spoken illustration. 'Os doy un ejemplo', he says, 'le dijo que lo iba a matar, y lo hizo' and it is at

precisely this point in which Alexis's gun emerges from behind Fernando and delivers its lethal payload into the two men.

The scene is symptomatic of the fact that it is not just that Fernando becomes passively implicated in the murders through his physical presence at the scene of the crime and his relationship with the perpetrator. Rather, he assumes the status of a positive actor, the example he gives of the grammatical rule in the aforementioned scene is quite literally in and of itself a generative act of violence to which Alexis's taking aim and pulling of the trigger serves as the natural conclusion. Similarly, the former may erroneously believe that responding to Alexis's request for more bullets following the shooting on the metro may somehow prevent or at least delay his lover's expiry, but in reality it only serves to suck Alexis further into a vortex of violence in which his chances of also becoming a victim increase the deeper he travels.

From this perspective then, despite the initial promise born by the power differentials existent between Alexis and Fernando, it would ultimately appear difficult to reclaim their union as the sort of 'productive' metropolitan gay relationship proposed by Sinfield. For it is precisely the supposedly 'rewarding' imbrication of Alexis and Fernando's respective lives which serves as the Achilles heel that ultimately tears them apart. Here Fernando finds himself receptive not only to the culture of Alexis and his contemporaries in terms of their cultural references and vernacular but, most crucially, to their understanding of killing not only as a valid method of social interaction and conflict resolution but one which remains their only method of social advancement. His resultant implication in the acts of murder from which he tries to distance himself, far from altering the course of his lover's passage to the grave, only serves to consolidate it and propel it forward. And yet the insidious manner in which this occurs arguably mitigates a reading of their relationship in terms of pure 'exploitation' as per Sarabia's account. This is because the role he effectively assumes in Alexis death has less to do with a conscious abuse of power as opposed to these dehumanising effects of violence. Here, just like the viewer, Fernando too becomes 'anaesthetised' to violence and experiences a similar 'emptying out' of his 'stock moral responses' (Kantaris: ibid.) Staring numbly into the lifeless eyes of his now dead lover as his body bleeds onto the seats of their hospital-bound taxi, the shell-shocked Fernando like us, it seems, has also been 'caught in a very devilish situation' without having 'the normal time to protest' (Schroeder in Foster, 2001: n.p.) .

And it is here amidst the film's dehumanisation of violence where the logics proposed by D'Emilio and Knopp discussed in the General Introduction of the thesis begin to 'shortcircuit' and implode. Certainly, as I previously argued, the coalescence of Alexis's homosexual desires into an assumed, lived identity would, as per D'Emilio's account, seem contingent on his ability to construct a personal life outside the family unit and live independently of its structures as a waged individual. Similarly, the dismantling of the 'closet' that characterises the construction of cinematic space, in turn, could be possibly read as symptomatic of processes relating to capital accumulation and their accompanying (queer) reappropriation of urban space mentioned by Knopp. Here the landscape's dominant narrative of heterocentrism embodied by Medellín's civic and religious colonial architecture and monuments to the country's wars of independence is rewritten by new constructions such as the towering buildings of glass and steel. These, whilst they can be psychoanalysed as monumental phallic symbols of patriarchal capitalism (see, for example, Pile 1996) simultaneously attest to the alternative (albeit commoditised) lifestyles that have proliferated under this economic system and of which Alexis and Fernando's union, played out sexually in the latter's high-rise apartment, serves as the most poignant example.[50]

Yet in spite of the film's visual references to Medellín's narco-induced makeover,[51] significantly, and in marked contrast to *Un año sin amor*, there are no tangible references whatsoever to an emergent commercialised gay culture, nor an associated community, at least not one of which Fernando and his lovers are a part. They frequent bars on several occasions but none of them are perceivably 'gay' spaces. Similarly, the establishment to which Fernando takes Wilmar towards the end of the film appears, judging by the pornography playing on the TV above their bed, to cater

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[50] Steve Pile in *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* writes that monuments are phallic because they are 'erect, tall and associated with power' whilst high buildings such as skyscrapers exhibit corporate power by being 'erect, tall and associated with wealth' (221). In this sense, he argues, that from a Lefebvrian or psychoanalytic perspective, the Manhattan skyline, by way of example, is concerned with a phallic 'formant of space' produced through three intersecting, aligned lines of power: masculinity, the bourgeois family and capitalism' (ibid.).

[51] Castells in this respect remarks how the Colombian economy appropriated a much larger share of the profits from *narcotrafico* than, for example, its Bolivian counterpart. He argues that although it is difficult to rigorously link this appropriation with the significant boom of construction and real estate development in the 1980s, the 'prudent distance' of regular foreign capital from Colombia at the time would suggest that some of this investment can be related to a recycling of drug traffic profits into legitimate business (ibid.: 201-202). In the specific context of Medellín, Mary Roldán makes a similar correlation between drug trafficking and the transformation of the city's urban landscape in the 1980s , in particular manifestations of conspicuous consumerism such as shopping malls and imported car-dealerships (ibid.: 169).

to a primarily heterosexual clientele. Indeed as the couple leave the building, a medium long-shot confirms it to be a run-of-the-mill sex motel as opposed to any sort of gay 'sauna' with private rooms for more intimate male same-sex encounters. Also absent are any material signs of gay culture in Fernando's apartment – books, magazines, films, posters, pornography, for example - or evidence of a connection to a 'virtual' gay community that we see in Berneri's film as something which might perhaps not be entirely antithetical to Alexis's character given his voracious appetite for popular culture and technology. Nor does the film hint at any engagement on the part of Fernando and Alexis with the rhetoric of minority group politics. Both, as we have seen, are remarkably forthright about their sexuality and reject the values and institutions associated with heterosexuality, marriage and the nuclear family. However, this fails overwhelmingly to translate into any form of social consciousness. Indeed, Fernando's scorning of the presidential television address and Alexis's subsequent metaphorical assassination of the man in question, are representative of their mutual contempt for, and in Alexis's case, exclusion from, the political process, with its rather shallow promises of inclusivity and rights for all.

Of course, from one perspective this perhaps has more to say about Alexis and Fernando's individual tastes than anything else – being 'gay' after all certainly does not necessarily imply an interest either in the commercial gay world itself or in politicising one's sexuality. Yet from another perspective and perhaps more importantly, I would suggest that it speaks loudly of how the supposed inevitability of minority world narratives surrounding the 'production of gay' and 'gay liberation' itself becomes radically *destabilised* in contexts such as that pertaining to Medellín. A booming, 'free-market' economy it may indeed be, but ultimately it is one whose growth owes itself largely to the successful cultivation, processing and exportation of Colombia's primary cash crop – coca. In this sense, as Foster rightly points out, the city we see in *La virgen de los sicarios* functions as a 'grotesque parody of economic success', one that 'can only be sustained through high-tech violence' (2003: 80), violence which has developed into an entire industry in itself and has become self-sustaining. Here, 'efficiency' is determined by the sheer trivialisation of death whereby it becomes normal to kill and to be killed, so much so that the shooting of a lame dog is likely to elicit more of an emotional response than that of a fellow member of one's own species. In turn, life itself assumes the status of material product that can be bought and sold at whatever price the market dictates. It is reduced, as Salazar

remarks, 'to an instant' (ibid.: 120), something embodied by *sicario* slang in the verb 'to shoot' –'tomar un foto'. Thus whilst superficially Medellín would, like the Buenos Aires featured in Berneri's film, *appear* to offer fertile ground for 'men and women to organise a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex' and the 'formation of urban communities of lesbians and gay men, and more recently, of a politics based on a sexual identity' (D'Emilio, 1983: 104), in fact, it does quite the opposite. For existence has become so ephemeral, and death so inevitable that the very ideas of preserving human rights, raising political consciousness, building communities, celebrating shared identity and even investing in one's own personal relationships become increasingly redundant. As Koonings and Krujit note more generally of the city's *comunas*, 'people tend not to make plans for the immediate future, let alone for a lifetime' (2007: 64).

The status of the queer body as a potential space of transgression, in turn, emerges as necessarily ambivalent. In many ways, as director Karim Aïnouz says of João Francisco, the protagonist of *Madame Satã* discussed in Chapter Four, Alexis's body is similarly 'a única coisa, objetivamente, que ele tem' (2003: 181) – the sole possession through which he might define himself against and transcend the dominant order and its system of values, which have relegated him sexually and socially to a status of marginality. For it is precisely *through* its insertion into the city's economy of violence, which as we have seen permits Alexis to reclaim his sexuality as something positive that may be lived, enjoyed and ultimately used to his advantage, its erotic enmeshing of youth, danger and status constituting an alluring aphrodisiac for older middle-class men such as Fernando, that might further advance the boy's path to social betterment. And yet it is difficult to see how this insertion might be regarded as in any way liberatory or affirmative since the price he must pay for this willing submission to Medellín's sub-market of contract killing is ultimately his own life. Alexis and his contemporaries become, to use Riaño's phraseology, 'factors of production in and of themselves whose value is determined by markets of supply and demand' (2006: 46). It is via this rather perverse form of corporal commodification where arguably the film becomes most disturbing, with the body of the *sicario* gradually reduced to the status of a disposable object which, like the detritus we see littering Fernando's apartment following Alexis's death, is wholly *desechable*.

And it is Fernando's subsequent relationship with Wílmar which serves as the ultimate testament to this cheapness of life in Medellín. Certainly Alexis's death has

affected Fernando, of that there is no doubt. Following his trip to the hospital, which proved fruitless in reviving the boy, Fernando is plunged into a profound existential crisis, returning in a rather surreal scene to the church, where he is plagued by the demons which now inhabit this once sacred building and encounters the sight of his very own tomb ensconced somewhere amidst the shadows. The scene, we presume, corresponds to a nightmare, with the sight of Fernando sobbing on the tiled floor between the pews quickly transitioning to a high-angled shot of him slumped over his dinner table back in the apartment. The next time we see the protagonist he is sporting several weeks beard growth, dark rings around his eyes, and struggles to remember the date and recognise the image of the new national president as he appears on the television set of the bar in which he is sitting, asking on both counts for clarification from the owner. Fernando, it seems, has been in mourning, and for quite some time. The apparent sight, in one scene, of his deceased lover contemplating the window display of a city centre shop one day is then naturally arresting for him. Staring in disbelief at the spectre before him, Fernando gingerly approaches the boy, identifiable by the much cherished blue and yellow sports jacket worn in other scenes, most notably that in which Alexis eventually loses his life.

Of course, when he eventually turns around to face Fernando, he in fact reveals himself to be Wílmar – these supposedly 'prized' blue and yellow jackets are two a penny in Medellín it would appear. And so too, as Fernando discovers, are boys like Alexis. The two spend the afternoon together, first having lunch (paid for, of course, by Fernando) before visiting a local church and then returning to the privacy of Fernando's apartment, where the dynamic becomes altogether more intimate, Fernando wasting little time in leading him to the bedroom. It is Fernando who then initiates proceedings but Wílmar needs little persuasion to take off his clothes and the two then begin to have sex, the camera, as before, discretely cutting away. Again, a cynical view might question whether the boy's motivations go much beyond the need to fill his belly, having revealed to Fernando whilst ravenously wolfing down his lunch that he has not eaten for days. But there are moments where he clearly expresses genuine affection for the man. Following Fernando's discovery that Wílmar was responsible for Alexis's murder and his subsequent fleeting desire to shoot him as the boy sleeps one night in a sex motel, he informs the boy 'estaba con Alexis la noche en que lo mataste [...] entonces desde la primera noche pasaste comigo en mi apartamento me podrías haber matado [...]'. The observation elicits a hurt response from Wílmar, who

declares 'yo no te podría matar, a usted le quiero'. Like Alexis, Wílmar, it would appear, seems interested in what Fernando may have to offer, not only on the level of the material but the sexual and emotional too.

What is significant, though, is the interchangeability established between Alexis and Wílmar as characters in these and later scenes. Beyond the obvious use of identical jackets in Fernando's first liaison with Wílmar, the former's invitation to visit the church with him after lunch mirrors Alexis's suggestion that Fernando accompany him on his weekly pilgrimage to Sabaneta in their first encounter. And once they have returned to the apartment, the sexual proceedings are initiated with exactly the same request that he made to Alexis – 'quítate la ropa, niño', the words eerily articulated in an identical tone of voice. Even Fernando himself seems to have trouble at times distinguishing between the two, awaking in the night and futilely attempting to arouse the attention of the boy sleeping next to him by calling out Alexis's name, then remembering that it is, in fact, Wílmar.

Despite Fernando's claim that he is 'la cosa más bonita' he has ever known, Alexis, like the television set which he unceremoniously destroys, is apparently wholly replaceable, a fact alluded to by the film's association of the body of the *sicario* with purchasable material goods and the equivalency that is established between them. In the scene in which Alexis and Fernando visit the seminary-turned-shopping mall to purchase items for the latter's empty apartment, for example, the two are framed travelling down an escalator with the afternoon's 'prize' – the Aiwa sound system – in hand. Here, Alexis is depicted carrying the item in question, his torso substituted by a large cardboard box emblazoned with the Aiwa logo, with only his head and shoulders remaining visible. In what is also another indication of the interchangeability of Fernando's two lovers, this particular scene is later recalled following one of Wílmar's spending sprees (made courtesy of Fernando), where the former is depicted arriving back at the apartment laden with branded shopping bags that hang from him as if they were appendages of his own body. And later, when the couple have decided to escape Medellín together, it is a Whirlpool refrigerator, bought as a parting gift for Wílmar's mother, against which the young *sicario* is juxtaposed. Here, having decided for security reasons that he should accompany the delivery men on their journey to the *comuna* where his mother resides, we see Wílmar also being 'loaded' into the back of the van along with the white goods Fernando has just purchased for him.

It will, of course, be the last time Fernando will ever see Wílmar. For the boy, just like Alexis, also meets his death, leaving the older man to wait in vain for his lover back at the apartment, thus necessarily precluding the 'happy ending' implied by their plan to leave the city. All Fernando can hope for as he checks in desperation for any sign of his lover outside the front door is an empty plastic bag, which blows in through the open doorway, and a subsequent telephone call from the city mortuary requesting him to come to identify the deceased boy. And it is here where the notion of the 'body as commodity' becomes most macabre, the following scene revealing the scale of the facility to be so huge that it is more akin to a processing plant than a mortuary, the final destination on the city's industrial conveyor belt of violence. On arrival Fernando quite literally has to fight his way through the crowd of people gathering at the perimeter fence apparently in search of missing loved ones. Once inside, a crane shot from above reveals him entering the reception area where a family can be seen trying to identify their child. This will be no mean feat, for it is one image amongst thousands that can be found in the mortuary's 'catalogue of death', a file several hundreds of pages long containing photograph after photograph of murdered adolescents identifiable only by a serial number laid across their chests. They might as well be browsing a mail-order directory, it seems, so detached and impersonal has the claiming of a deceased loved one become, the face of their son eventually revealing itself amidst sobs and cries from the family concerned. The camera then moves across the next room, a large administrational office where several officials can be seen at their typewriters efficiently processing the latest batch of corpses to have arrived, before entering the clinical area of the mortuary where we presume the autopsies are performed. As the camera pans slowly across the room, a dozen or so naked dead bodies are revealed, each lying illuminated by harsh overhead lighting against a backdrop of white tiles and stainless steel, their clothes and possessions tied in a bundle at their feet. So obviously artificial are the 'corpses' that whilst one might regard this scene as somewhat risible, their mannequin-like forms and waxy, artificial complexions arguably only serve to embellish their status as (now damaged) 'goods'. Eventually we arrive at Wílmar's body, which has been graced with only the most rudimentary of 'window dressing', his traumatised chest having been stitched crudely back together by the duty doctor, who we see explaining matter of factly to Fernando the cause of death, namely cardio-respiratory failure from excessive blood loss.

It is a disturbing scene and one which appears as a highly perverse rendering of the Foucauldian idea of 'bio-power' or to quote the latter once more, 'the notion of the body as a machine; its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls' (1979: 139). Superficially Alexis and Wilmar may indeed appear to use 'capitalism's tools to undermine its repressive paradigms' (Quiroga 2000: 12), yet in doing so, they submit body and soul to the full control of the market into which they become subsumed, necessarily negating any claims to transgression, liberation or transcendence. In this sense, we might identify clear similarities between the fate of the *sicarios* and that of Pablo in *Un año sin amor*, whose body, as I argued in Chapter One, appeared similarly to be 'reintegrated back into control' (Noyes 1997: 14). However, in contrast to Berneri's film, no psychoanalytic reading of events here is required, for the entire existence of the *sicario* is quite literally, in and of itself, an act of masochism. Unlike the 'games' played out by Pablo and his companions in the safety of the S/M club or Baez's apartment, it has nothing to with 'theatrical (re)appropriation', rather, it is what defines their everyday reality, a reality whose only certainty is the inevitability of an early grave. *La virgen de los sicarios* thus firmly puts to bed the vision of the 'market' as the harbinger of social change – whether that be the promotion and acceptance of gay rights, racial equality, distribution of wealth or otherwise. Instead it provides a highly dystopian take on late capitalist society in which, as Hylton concludes in relation to Medellín, 'the pursuit of individual freedom is no longer tied to the dreams of human liberation or social transformation that animated earlier struggles' (2007: 163). Rather, he continues, it is 'channelled into privatised consumption' resulting in a rather dangerous situation in which the individual ultimately becomes 'severed from collective solidarity [and] individual security divorced from social protections' (idid.).

CONCLUSION: BENT LOGICS

By way of conclusion, then, the 'unofficial' global city that is Medellín emerges in *La virgen de los sicarios* as a highly ambivalent site with regards to the production of homosexualities and same-sex erotic subcultures. Superficially the socio-economic backdrop in which the film's narrative is articulated would appear limited in its ability to foster the emergence of the 'modern' metropolitan gay model. High levels of social inequality, the endless syndrome of violence which resultantly ensues, and a cityscape

that is consequently evermore fractured and confused with regards the distribution and organisation of urban space, would hardly appear conducive to the accumulation of national and transnational capital witnessed in 1990s Buenos Aires, and to which the development of the Buenos Aires's gay scene discussed in Chapter One, would, at least in part, appear to owe itself. Paradoxically, however, as I argued, contrary to conventional wisdom, the violence we see in *La virgen de los sicarios*, as Hardy puts it, 'is not the violence of decline' (ibid.: 10), rather that of a prosperity born from a city that is, in fact, just like Buenos Aires, highly integrated into the world economy courtesy of its position at the leading axis of Latin America's narcotics trade. In this sense, I continued, the resultant process of socio-spatial realignment alluded to in the film, produces, as we see, a *decoupling* of the longstanding (perceived) correlation between class, financial solvency and family reliance in Latin America, and as a result, entertains a more nuanced, metropolitan reading of Fernando and Alexis's relationship. As Castells points out, 'globalisation and identity interact in the criminal economy of Latin America [and] organise the perverse connection that redefines development and dependency in historically unforeseen ways' (2000: 206). Nevertheless, whilst the application of minority world logics surrounding the 'production of gay' allows us to deconstruct and take forward socio-anthropological accounts of Latin American homosexualities, as the final two sections of this chapter demonstrated, these ultimately become 'bent', with the supposed inevitability of (market-driven) 'liberation' severely curtailed in the specific context of Medellín's economy of violence.

However, as a final thought, it is perhaps worth noting that in no way does capitalism win out in the film. Indeed it is ultimately shown to sow the seeds of its own destruction. To come back to Foucault again, 'bio-power', as he terms it, has been undoubtedly an 'indispensable element' in the development of capitalism. The latter, he writes, 'would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena to economic processes' (1970: 141). However, as mentioned in relation to *Un año sin amor* 'it also needed the growth of both these factors [...] their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimising forces, aptitudes and life in general' (ibid.). This, he continues, has been achieved through a 'bio-politics of the population', a careful regime of supervision, interventions and regulatory controls in the domain of public health and social policy which have been

mobilised in the 'calculated management of life' (ibid.: 139). Indeed this perhaps explains why, until relatively recently suicide itself was considered a criminal offence in many countries – since it usurped the sovereignty of the State, which had assigned itself the role of primary 'administrator' of life (ibid.). And yet in the Dantesque world of *La virgen de los sicarios*, somewhat paradoxically, economic growth is, to a large extent, dependent on precisely the opposite process – an investment in death and the complete *devaluation* of life. Here Medellín's economy of violence can only be nourished through the extermination of the living human bodies from which it feeds, and in this sense, is quite literally an economy that is 'growing itself to death'. The city therefore may indeed be the proud purveyor of skyscrapers, shopping malls and light-rail systems but, having been built on a foundation far less stable than sand, that is, the blood of its citizens, one has to question for how long they might stand.

PART TWO:
METROPOLITAN MARGINS

CHAPTER THREE

Excluded Middle? Marginality, Liminality and the Limits of Transgression in Cláudio Assis's *Amarelo manga* (2002)

'IN-BETWEEN' SPACES

The chapters comprising Part One focussed on films depicting spaces located both physically and socially at the 'centre' with regards to the respective metropolises, Buenos Aires and Medellín, to which they relate. But what of the spaces within these spaces – the fissures or cracks which have opened up within what was argued in the General Introduction to be a highly fragmented and dislocated Latin American urban fabric? Within the abstract and obfuscatory space of maps and plans, a space Lefebvre describes as one of 'authoritative rationality', (1991: 50) these may go unacknowledged, simply appearing as voids or gaps. However, as also discussed briefly in the General Introduction, in contrast, the representational space of cinema has, in Latin America, played an important role in making visible such spaces and giving voice to those who speak from within them. These spaces are often ones of ambivalence, what we might term interstitial or 'in-between' spaces. Often physically located at or near to the 'centre' of things, their status as what Rob Shields terms 'social peripheries' nevertheless inscribes them with a degree of marginality which means that within the geographical imagination at least, they are still often imagined as being 'out-of-the-way' and 'on the edge', having been placed on the periphery of 'cultural systems of space' (1991: 3). Within the general economy of sexuality, as Phillips and Watt argue, this metaphorical distance from the 'centre' – the locus of the medical, legal and political institutions responsible for the production and regulation of sexualities and sexual discourses – suggests that such spaces may be sites where sexual subjects may be least stable and hegemonic sexualities most open to challenge (ibid.: 1-2). They are, in this sense, what we might term 'liminal' spaces where, to quote Shields, one might experience, due to their interstitial nature, 'a liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performance codes of mundane life' and 'moments of discontinuity in the social fabric [and] in social space' (ibid.: 83-84). Indeed, Victor Turner goes as far as to argue, 'in this gap between ordered worlds, almost anything may happen [...]' (quoted in Shields: ibid.).

The perceived liminality of such 'in-between' spaces might be regarded as being especially pronounced in the case of Brazil, where according to anthropologist

Roberto Da Matta, the national spatial imaginary has been structured around highly dichotomised divisions between centre and periphery, the space of the *rua* (street) and that of the *casa* (home), and between interior and exterior spaces (1991: 33-35). According to Da Matta, the *casa* might be regarded as a microcosm of Brazilian society, a 'universo controlado' constructed around strict hierarchies of sex, age and lineage, with men and elders at the pinnacle, a static space where 'as coisas estão nos seus devidos lugares' and protection is provided from the disputes and hostilities of the world 'outside' (1979: 70). Indeed the sanctity of the *casa* and its status as a 'safe-haven', as Richard Parker argues, has its roots firmly in Brazil's colonial past and legacy of slavery. Here the *casa-grande* (lit. big-house) of the *engenho* (sugarmill) served as a type of 'prison and fortress' for a mill-owner's wife and, more importantly, his daughters, who were kept under the constant surveillance of a *mucama* (female house servant) in order to protect their virginity (and by extension, the honour of their father) from outside 'threats', in particular those posed by male slaves (2009: 38).[52]

Contrastingly the public space of the *rua*, in addition to the *engenho*, *cidade* and *praça* was produced most definitely as a male domain, a world of economic, political and social interactions which was 'sharply opposed to the relatively inactive [and] guarded and bounded society of his [the mill-owner's] women' (ibid. : 37). The *rua* has, in this sense, emerged according to Da Matta as a 'Hobbesian' universe of 'imprevistos, acidentes e paixões', the domain of linear time and individualism where, in contrast to the *casa,* hierarchal distinctions, at least between men, are less perceivable (1978: 70). And whilst such strict delineations might appear incongruous in an age of post-modern spatial fragmentation, the continued importance attached to the country's annual celebration of *carnaval* (carnival) would suggest otherwise. Here, in a celebration lasting five days and nights, according to Da Matta, the *casa* and the *rua* dissolve into a space of anarchic liminality where sexual transgression, homoeroticism and gender-bending are unashamedly encouraged, attesting to the symbolic currency these spaces (and their dissolution) continue to hold in everyday life with regards to the production of hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality and the behavioural codes these imply. 'Não se pode misturar o espaço da rua com o da casa sem criar alguma forma de grave confusão ou até mesmo conflito', writes Da Matta (1985: 54).

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[52] Gilberto Freyre in *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1956) goes into further detail surrounding the white daughters of plantation owners, noting: 'a small room or bedroom was reserved for her in the centre of the house, and she was surrounded on all four sides by her elders. It was more of a prison than the apartment of a free being. A kind of sick-room where everyone had to keep watch' (353).

This chapter builds on the discussion of the previous two by now considering how the 'metropolitan'– both on the level of the spatial and the sexual – has been reimagined in Latin American cinema through marginal perspectives articulated from inside the 'gaps' within the region's urban fabric. Focussing on the specific case of the northeastern Brazilian city of Recife as it appears in Claúdio Assis's *Amarelo manga* (2002), it explores the relationship between the 'in-betweenness' of the film's setting – the city's historic centre – and the film's treatment and representation of gender and sexuality. More specifically, it assesses to what extent the apparent 'sexual anarchy' which characterises this particular space in the film can be said to evidence a liminal space of sexual transgression which exists in counterpoint to the 'regulation' of the (new) 'centre[s]'. In particular, I ask how then, if this is a space in which the characters are supposedly 'liberated in their desires', are we to interpret the cycles of misogyny, homophobia and domestic violence which propel the film's narrative? Are they symptomatic of the exclusion of this social sphere from 'progressive' Brazil and its emancipatory discourses of feminism and gay liberation? And if they are, can they merely be read as traits of a 'sexual hinterland' which continues to articulate gender and sexuality according to supposedly 'traditional' models or do we require a more nuanced reading of things? Through the collective consideration of these questions my principal aim here, and one which will inflect my discussion in the fourth and final chapter, is to challenge the perception that these spaces have been 'left behind in the modern race for progress' (Shields ibid.: 3). Rather I seek to reveal them to be just as much of a product, albeit perhaps an unwanted one, of 'modern' Latin America as the spaces and identities discussed in Chapters One and Two.

VOICES FROM THE EDGE

Amarelo manga constitutes Cláudio Assis's feature-length directorial debut, with his short film, *Texas Hotel* (1999) representing the precursor or calling card for the film in question. *Amarelo manga* was critically acclaimed both at home and abroad, winning over twentyeight awards and thirteen nominations on the festival circuit, including the audience and critics awards at the Brasília film festival in 2002, the Best Cinematography and Best Newcomer awards in Havana in 2002, the Grand Prix at the Tolouse Latin American film festival also in 2003. The film even received endorsement from the then Brazilian president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who deemed it 'necessary' (Mendonça Filho, 2003b: n.p.).

Opening a rare window on Brazil's northeastern raw urban underbelly, the film recounts twentyfour hours in the lives of a hotchpotch of colourful yet marginalised personalities who orbit the worlds of the dilapidated Texas Hotel and Bar Avenida, including a hotel cook, Dunga (Matheus Nachtergaele); his love interest and local butcher, Wellington (Chico Díaz); Kika (Dira Paes), Wellington's evangelical wife; Isaac (Jonas Bloch), the hotel's resident necrophiliac: Lígia (Leona Cavalli), the jaded owner of Bar Avenida and love interest of Isaac; and Dona Aurora (Conceição Camaroti), a retired prostitute. The plot is driven principally by Dunga's obsession with Wellington, on the one hand, and Kika's plan to avenge her husband's infidelity on the other, though clashes between the other characters, particularly Lígia and Isaac, also constitute narrative strands.

To some degree, the film's marginal discourse and Assis's self-confessed concern to 'filmar o povo' might be argued to give nods to the films of Brazil's *cinema novo* movement. The inclusion of real footage of the city's street life to complement the dramatic performances of its professional actors, in particular, points to the neo-realist-inspired ethos of 'uma idéia na cabeça, uma câmera na mão... o povo na frente, mas não em festa' so evident in films such as *Cinco vezes favela* (Miguel Borges & Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, 1962), *Vidas secas* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1964) and *Os fuzis* (Ruy Guerra, 1964).[53] And yet this is given an ironic twist by director of photography, Walter Carvalho, who actually shot the film in Panavision,[54] thus endowing the film with a panoramic grandiosity normally only seen in popular Hollywood cinema and which, of course, *cinema novo* reacted so virulently against (Mendonça Filho 2003a: n.p.). However, far from compromising its status as a piece of social filmmaking, the use of Panavision arguably serves, albeit in an unconventional

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[53] The Brazilian *cinema novo* movement was partly born out of the collapse of the Vera Cruz studios in São Paulo in 1954 and frustration at the continued dominance of what Glauber Rocha (1938-1981) dubbed 'digestive' cinema with purely 'industrial aims' such as the home-grown musical comedy or *chanchada* and of, course, Hollywood movies, which constituted the lion's share of box office returns (Stam 1995: 68). Directors such as Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos (b.1928), Carlos Diegues (b.1940), Joaquim Pedro de Andrade (1932-88) and Ruy Guerra (b. 1931) proposed instead a 'new, critical and modernist vision of the nation' and a new cinematic language (what Glauber Rocha dubbed an 'aesthetic of hunger') that better reflected Brazilian reality (Shaw & Dennison: 2007: 82). Influenced by Italian neo-realist directors such as Roberto Rosellini and Vittorio de Sica, an emphasis was placed on location shooting, the use of non-professional actors and the use of hand-held cameras. This 'aesthetic of hunger' is aptly embodied in the composite slogan, begun by Glauber Rocha's famous phrase *uma idéia na cabeça e um câmera na mão* added to by Nelson Pereira dos Santos with the words *o povo na frente* (and the people in front) and later qualified by Rui Guerra with the phrase *mas não em festa* (Johnson & Stam, 1995).

[54] Panavision is an anamorphic format originally initiated by the CinemaScope anamorphic lens series used between 1953 to 1967 for shooting widescreen movies. Panavision continues to be used today though it is often referred to as 'Scope' to refer to any 2.35:1 and 2.39:1 presentation.

sense, to reinforce it, quite literally on a representational level giving these downtrodden characters a greater aesthetic presence and voice.

Similarly, if *cinema novo* was sometimes accused of 'paternalism' (ibid.) in its representation of the *povo*, no such criticisms can be directed at Assis. Instead, in the sections of the film enacted by professional actors, the viewer is presented with a richly constructed cast, whose sordidness and despair mingles with a palpable sense of defiance, thus erasing any sense of victimisation and inspiring both sympathy and repulsion in equal measure. Certainly the film, in terms of its aesthetic, is unmistakably a type of grotesque and distinctly off-kilter social realism which Kleber Mendonça Filho aptly described as decorating the Brazilian multiplexes 'like an enormous vagina in close-up, its pubic hairs dangling next to the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegeer, Bruce Willis and Renee Zellwegger' (2003b: n.p.). In this respect *Amarelo manga* might perhaps be regarded as owing a bigger debt to the films of *cinema marginal* with their depiction of what Salles Gomes describes as a 'degraded sub-world, traversed by grotesque processions, condemned to the absurd, mutilated by crime, sex and exploitation' (in Martin, 1997: 252-3).[55]

Although Assis wanted the film to speak to an international audience, the decision for it to be set in Recife, the director's city of birth, is significant. The country's fourth-largest city, traditionally Recife's appearances at the cinema have been conspicuous by their absence. Rio de Janeiro and, more recently, São Paulo have dominated in this respect, and those few films which have been made in the northeast have tended to be set in the 'mythical' rural backlands or *sertão*, such as Paulo Caldas's *Baile perfumado* (1997), Walter Salles's *Central do Brasil* (1999) or, more recently, *Cinema, aspirinas e urubus* (Marcelo Gomes, 2005) and *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo* (Karim Aïouz and Marcelo Gomes, 2009). The director laments ironically in this respect: 'O Recife está sempre na vanguarda...na vanguarda da fudição' (Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2003a: n.p.).

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[55] *Cinema marginal* followed *cinema novo* and was defined amongst other things by its 'trashy' aesthetic and inquiry into themes of drug abuse, promiscuity and thwarting of traditional values, along with an empathy with traditionally marginalised groups such as blacks, homosexuals, indigenous populations and women (Shaw and Dennison 2007: 89). Robert Stam aptly distinguishes between *cinema novo* and *cinema marginal* in the following terms: 'just as *cinema novo* decided to reach out for a popular audience, the Underground [*cinema marginal*] opted to slap that audience it its face' (1995: 311). The movement is cited by Fernão Ramos as dating from around 1968 to 1973 (quoted in Shaw and Dennison: ibid).

INFORMALITY, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND DECAY IN RECIFE'S HISTORIC CENTRE

Whilst the above statement by Assis serves as a fitting metaphor for the city's marginalised status within Brazilian cultural representation, it also attests to its economically chequered history. During the colonial era Recife's position as the world centre of sugar cane production saw it emerge as a wealthy city characterised by the baroque architecture of its many monasteries and churches (Zancheti, 2005: 16). By the nineteenth century, however, the southeastern region had consolidated its dominance in the Brazilian economy due to the gold boom in Minas Gerais, which had begun in 1695, resulting in large numbers of northeastern dwellers emigrating to the interior regions and in turn, labour shortages and agricultural decline in the traditional 'motherland' of Bahia and Pernambuco (Burns, 1970: 61-63).[56]

Efforts to modernise sugar production in the state of Pernambuco, coupled with the expansion of cotton production in the interior did prompt, however, another period of 'accentuated growth' which was followed by decades of 'explosive growth' from the 1940s due to further modernisation of the sugar industry and the emergence of modern forms of cattle ranching, as the cattle-cotton complexes of the interior disintegrated (Assies 1991: 43). The benefits, though, were tempered by massive migration from rural areas to Recife itself, which the city struggled to accommodate either in production terms (employment), or in reproduction terms (housing) (de Sousa Santos, 1992: 236). Indeed even before 1940, thirty percent of the population of 350,000 already inhabited *mocambos*, the notorious shantytowns which traditionally lay at the edges of the city's waterways and marshes, though which nowadays are more commonly found on the hills of the city's periphery (Andrade, quoted in Cabral and Sobreira de Moura, 1996: 58). Recife, therefore, has evolved as a divided city characterised by stark dichotomies between formal/informal, legal/illegal, planned and substandard, the result, according to Cabral and Sobreira de Moura 'of extreme income, social, cultural and political disparities and inequalities that exist within the metropolis' (ibid: 54).

[56] The transfer of the colonial capital from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro in 1763 can be regarded as significant proof of the northeast's declining economic and political importance in favour of the southeast.

Interestingly, though, it is not the city's infamous *mocambos* which constitute the principal spaces of narrative action in *Amarelo manga*, rather its historic centre.[57] As Zancheti writes, until the 1980s its status as the most important economic area in the metropolitan region had gone unchallenged, and the area featured a concentration of the most important companies and prestigious jobs with a multitude of services aimed at high-income earners (ibid: 17). However, between the early 1980s and early 1990s the city's economy suffered a major process of de-industrialisation due to the repealing of federal industrial subsidies, particularly those channelled towards the sugar-cane industry (ibid: 19). In its place emerged a service-based economy, a shift which, as businesses were closed or transferred, meant the loss of many ancillary activities and the emergence of new economic centralities within the city (ibid: 19).

The migration of commercial and economic activities, and consequently the middle and upper classes themselves, occurred to the detriment of the city centre, which was afflicted with a shrinking population and saw the arrival of informal, predominantly stall-holder-type businesses targeted at low-income groups (ibid: 19). Zancheti continues that the over-occupation of spaces by street vendors and (permanent) illegal stalls impeded circulation and the maintenance of sanitation in the area, accelerating the deterioration of public spaces, including its listed buildings (ibid: 20). Thus, from being one of the city's most vibrant areas, the historic centre was transformed into one of its most dirty, run-down and depressed, symptomatic of the way in which, concurrent to its appropriation of formerly rural land, the city, according to Lapa, 'se mutilou por dentro' (1987: 5)

As we will see in the discussion which follows, the notion of Recife's historic centre being somehow 'dirty', or to put it rather less crudely, a space of both physical

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[57] 'Historic centre' in this discussion refers to the island *bairros* of Recife Antigo (Ilha de Recife), São José and Santo Antônio (Ilha de Antônio Vaz), and the *bairro* of Boa Vista, situated on a mainland peninsular where the majority of the city's downtown area can be found. According to Lumbambo, the two islands were the first parts of the city to be founded by the Dutch in the seventeeth century, constituting the *Mauritzstadt* or capital of Dutch Brazil (1991: 26). Two bridges (Recife and Boa Vista) were soon constructed to connect these islands to the mainland and by the 1820s the original nucleus of the city represented by the *bairros* of Recife Antigo, São José and Santo Antônio respectively, begun to expand with the emergence of the *bairro* of Boa Vista, which fulfilled both commercial and residential functions (ibid.: 28 – see also Lapa, ibid.). In *Amarelo Manga*, exterior establishing shots of the real-life Texas Hotel (the inspiration for the preceding short film known by the same name) located on Rua Rosário da Boa Vista near to the Largo de Santa Cruz, suggests the film's principal setting to be the *bairro* of Boa Vista. However, the inclusion of exterior shots of the Rua do Sol, located in the island neighbourhood of Santo Antônio, contradicts this somewhat, thus prohibiting our ability to locate its setting in one particular neighbourhood.

and social 'impurity' is certainly all-pervasive in *Amarelo manga*'s imaginings of this particular part of the city. For despite the fact that since the 1990s parts of Recife's historic centre such as Recife Antigo have, in actual fact, undergone a vigorous process of regeneration (Zancheti 2005: 22) resulting in the emergence of leisure and recreation services, design, fashion and information technology outlets and a partial return of higher-income earners to some of its restored residential buildings (ibid.), any reference to this gentrification is distinctly absent from the world of *Amarelo manga*, with the film's representation of the area articulated overwhelmingly through a predominance of medium shots and close-ups which reveal the area's squat, decaying colonial architecture and fetid, pot-holed sidewalks in all their faded glory. The Texas Hotel, in particular, appears as particularly 'run-down' not just in terms of its physical state of repair, but also through its status as an alternative and highly peripheral social space produced to accommodate those now unable to maintain their position in 'respectable' mainstream society.

As Tim Cresswell states, 'dirt', at its most basic level, is simply something 'in the wrong place or wrong time' and therefore is entirely relative (1996: 38). It is 'a mismatch of meanings', 'meanings that are erroneously positioned in relation to each other'. Thus 'dirt' can be indicative not just of the spoiling of a material surface but of 'a problem which lies much deeper' – poor health/hygiene, social and sexual depravity, and other phenomena which are 'out of place' in the 'civilised' and ordered environment modern societies seek to produce. And because 'dirt appears where it shouldn't be', he continues, it is almost always placed 'at the bottom of a hierarchical scale of values' and is 'valued by very few people'. In this sense, as something that is to be avoided, as Julia Kristeva observes, dirt is often 'pushed beyond a boundary to its other side, its margin' (quoted in Cresswell, 1996: 39), whether that be in a physical sense or within the social ordering of space that takes place within the geographical imagination.

Certainly the cinematic mapping of principal space(s) of narrative action within the wider geography of the city evokes a sensation of detachedness and disconnection. In the scene immediately following the opening sequence, for example, we follow Isaac as he drives through Recife in his old yellow Mercedes, with a prolonged shot lasting well over a minute which tracks the high-rise skyline through the car windscreen from his point of view. The shot is interrupted, however, by a reverse long-shot framing his car travelling across Ponte de Boa Vista before it cuts abruptly to his

arrival at the hotel (from the latter's point of view), the resultant 'ellipsis' in his journey firmly disconnecting the principal space of narrative action from the cityscape previously framed in the tracking shot. The 'distancing' effect produced by the windscreen is replicated in further images of the city's glittering towers which are consistently shot from 'afar' through a series of long-shots and extreme long-shots. This again diminishes the viewer's association of the film's characters with the city's new upwardly mobile economic centres constituted by areas such as Boa Viagem and its environs. And yet, of course, whilst on one level this contributes to the viewer's perception that physically as much as socially the city's historic centre is now 'living on the edge', at the same time, the mere fact that Recife's historic centre is privileged as the centre of the action in the film means that as an imagined space, this area of the city simultaneously redefines its position at the periphery of cultural systems of space, returning, albeit temporarily, to a position at the centre of things once more.

RECIFE'S HISTORIC CENTRE AS A SPACE OF LIMINALITY

Particularly symbolic of the setting's 'impure' nature is the colour yellow, which aside from being central to the film's title reoccurs as a constant leitmotif throughout the film with which to index downtown Recife's affliction of physical and social decay. As body-trafficker Rabecão recounts wistfully in one scene as the camera cuts between the Bar Avenida and the image of Issac's old, mango yellow Mercedes:

> Amarelo é a cor das mesas, dos bancos, dos tamboretes, dos cabos de peixeira, da enxada e da estrovenga [...] Amarelo das doenças: das remelas nos olhos dos meninos, das feridas purulentas, dos escarros, das verminosas, das hepatites, das diarréias, dos dentes apodrecidos.

The words are taken from Renato Carneiro Campos's essay 'Tempo Amarelo' (1980) in which the Brazilian sociologist ponders the significance of this particular colour in the Brazilian context, writing that in contrast to the positive evocations of 'happiness and life' it prompts in (colder) European countries, in Brazil it holds distinctly dystopic associations:

> É a cor do desespero, da miséria, do medo, como resultado, talvez, das doenças tropicais que se manifestam com intenso amarecelecimento da pele, da ausência d riqueza num país subdesenvolvido [...] da lembrança para o nordestino dos raios [...], ficando, portanto, associado às terríveis secas e, finalmente, das nossas raízes ibéricas, do fato de ser o amarelo a cor de luto para o povo árabe (66)

Yellow, he continues, is particularly indicative of the condition of the northeastern worker, and he quotes in this respect verses from a poem written by poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (quoted in Campos 1980: 68-69):

– Mesmo contra o amarelo
Palha, do canavial
Ainda é mais amarelo
O seu, porque moral

- O cassaco de engenho
- É amarelo de corpo
É o amarelo tipo
E de estado de espírito

The words, according to Campos, speak of a 'tempo amarelo interior' that is 'velho, desbotado, doente, de água estagnante, rasa' and which 'domina o pálido das inciativas, das organizações, do rendimento de trabalho, das relações sociais' (ibid: 69). And although João Cabral's poem is written in the specific context of the rural northeastern worker, it is the 'drone' of 'interior yellow time' which would appear to drive the degraded and specifically urban world of *Amarelo manga*, something made apparent in the film's opening sequence. Here, a dolly shot frames Lígia from above as she wakes up in bed, the murmur of street traffic audible in the background. The camera then follows her as she sleepily pulls on a dress over her naked body and trudges into a large, adjacent room, the Bar Avenida. Shot from behind, we then see her resignedly opening the bar to the street outside via a series of large ceiling-to-floor shutters to reveal a man, lying facedown, sleeping off the previous night's festivities on the pavement. As she sets about removing the chairs from the table tops, a mango-yellow tea-towel slung over her shoulder, we hear her voice speaking in a weary monologue on the extra-diegetic soundtrack:

> Às vezes eu fico imaginando em que forma as coisas acontecem. Primeiro vem o dia, tudo acontece naquele dia. Depois chega a noite, que é a melhor parte. Mas logo depois vem o dia outra vez. E vai, vai, vai, e é sem parar! A única coisa que não tem mudado ultimamente é o Santa Cruz, nunca mais tem ganho nada, nem título de honra! E eu, não tenho encontrado ninguém que me mereça. Só se ama errado. Eu quero que tudo o mundo vá tomar no cú!

The same sense of lethargic monotony that characterises this idea of 'yellow time' is evident too in our first glimpse of the Texas Hotel. Beginning with an extreme close-up of a pair of feet and the image of a broom being passed around a dirty floor, the camera then cuts to a medium shot of the hotel's reception (aptly painted yellow) to reveal Dunga singing jadedly to the rhythm of his brush strokes,

> Mangō de mim, amarelô, não vai ficar de graça, mango de mim, amarelô, não vai ficar de graça, dentro desta caixa um corpo indigente, um corpo que não fala, um corpo que não sente, dentro desta caixa, um corpo indigente.

His memory of the song, though, extends little further than the set of lyrics cited above, which he repeats ad infinitum, pausing only to request that Dona Aurora, the retired prostitute, lift her feet so he can clean under the rather shabby sofa on which she is reclined. Behind the reception desk, a frail old man, Seu Bianor, can be seen rummaging for a key in a cupboard behind him, the drone of a crackly radio audible in the background. Although his demeanour suggests otherwise, he turns out to be the manager of the hotel, though it is increasingly apparent that he would be lost without Dunga. The latter directs him to the location of the said key, joking, 'Seu Bianor, você tá ficando meio cega. A chave tá na lugar de sempre mas não acha não!'

What is significant in these scenes is the lack of distinction between the space of the *rua* and that of the *casa*, which, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, have traditionally served as strong structuring elements in the Brazilian spatial imagination according to Da Matta (1991: 33-35). The supposedly public space of the bar (an interior extension, we might argue, of the *rua*) simultaneously has connotations of *casa* due not only to its storage room doubling as Lígia's bedroom but also to its daily occupation by the same set of male characters. If the *rua* has literal or metaphorical connotations of a space to which those who lose their social footing are physically or metaphorically relegated in Brazil,[58] then within the Texas Hotel, with its disparate population of down and outs, any sense of *casa* is, in turn, severely diminished. The confusion of the *rua/casa* dichotomy is reflected not least in the film's

[58] One might point, in this respect, to the use of the word '*rueira*' [lit. woman of the street] as a negative way of referring to a woman with 'lax' sexual morals. Of course, it is worth noting that this is a Brazilian variant of a more general gendered construction of space found both north and south of the equator in which traditionally the presence of women in public, masculine-coded spheres, such as that pertaining to the street, has often been demonised and understood in terms of sexual deviance. Indeed Judith Walkowitz, in her book *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (1980) notes how the State itself has frequently been implicit in the production of this system of values, with the British Contagious Diseases Acts and the opportunities they offered for intervention in the lives of registered prostitutes succeeding in producing a distinction between the unrespectable and respectable poor, 'forcing prostitutes to accept their status as public women [of the street] by destroying their private associations with poor working-class community' (192).

set-design, with both the Bar Avenida and the Texas Hotel opened to the world outside through open doorways, verandas and ample, glassless window spaces, rupturing any clear division between public and private space. This confusion is further enhanced by the fluidity of the mobile camera used to track the passage of characters between interior and exterior spaces at various points in the film, in place of more static framing devices which would otherwise consolidate the demarcation of public and private space.

Gendered divisions of space and the resultant hierarchies of sex and age they imply, would, subsequently, also appear to be confused. Seu Bianor's position as the white heterosexual male patriarch of what might be described as his 'alternative family' within the Texas Hotel is precarious and increasingly undercut by Dunga. Confronted by the old man's increasing frailty (as demonstrated by the lost key incident), Dunga effectively assumes day-to-day running of the hotel whilst also presiding over the emotional well-being of the hotel's motley selection of residents, such as Dona Aurora. This control essentially becomes *de jure* two-thirds of the way through the film when Seu Bianor passes away. Here, Dunga's discovery that the hotel's assets are, in fact, hidden in a package wrapped around the deceased's now most definitely flaccid penis, serves as a fitting metaphor for patriarchy's apparent demise.

Bar Avenida, in turn, is characterised by the glaring absence of any patriarch and instead the establishment is managed by a young woman, Lígia, who, through her assumption of authority over what is both a 'household' and an interior extension of the *rua*, would definitely appear 'out of place'. Significantly, she is assisted only by an elderly lady, the latter remaining nameless and frequently relegated to the background of the set, underscoring an inversion of *both* hierarchies of sex and age within this particular space. The situation is perhaps symptomatic of the changing nature of gendered participation in the northeastern labour market noted by Linda-Anne Rebhun in her book, *The Heart is Unknown Country: Love in the Changing Economy of Northeast Brazil* (1999). Here she writes that during her fieldwork the majority of men either appeared to be without work or were employed in the *economia paralela* (parallel economy) relating to the unregulated activities of the poor – construction work, street selling and so on (ibid: 119). Opportunities here for men, though, she continues, were generally sporadic, with women taking the lion's share of positions, the market dominated by a demand for domestic maids and female factory workers,

who she remarks, were more likely to arrive sober than men and who would be more likely to tolerate lower salaries (ibid.). The result was a significantly reduced male participation in the labour market, and an increased financial independence amongst lower-class women, 'despite the cultural ideal of female economic dependency' (ibid: 121). Judging by the clutch of empty beer bottles which seem to eternally populate the various tables of Lígia's establishment, her almost exclusively male clientele certainly seem to have time, though perhaps not money, to burn.

To return then to Cresswell's account of 'dirt', what we begin to see here is how the status of Recife's historic centre as a space of impurity is inscribed through what is essentially a 'mismatch' of spatial meanings in which the 'controlled universe' of the *casa* and the 'Hobbesian' world of the *rua* come together. Here, not only do we see a dissolution and/or inversion of gendered hierarchies but concurrently, the production of an apparently liminal and sexually transgressive space in which the characters are seemingly free to express and pursue their own libidinal urges. Lígia, for example, appears not the least bit inhibited in terms of her sexuality, at one point in the film standing on a bar table and exposing her vagina to a group of highly appreciative male customers. In turn Wellington's lover, Daysey, who runs a stall/shop and thus like Lígia retains her economic independence, seems similarly in control of her emotional affairs. In our first encounter with her, Wellington enters the frame and tries to kiss her, to which she responds by shrugging him off, complaining 'tá fedendo porra!' Apparently sick of being the 'other woman', Daysey continues, 'Já enchi o saco, tá? [...] você vai ter que escolher. Eu não vou levando o nome de puta por aqui, tá?' Attempting to pacify her, Wellington whispers sweet nothings before muttering the name of his wife under his breath as if to draw her attention to his painful dilemma. The ploy, however, inspires little sympathy from the furious Daysey, who spits back in a typically no-nonsense fashion, 'Kika caralho, porra!' For Dona Aurora, contrastingly, sexual satisfaction is an altogether more personal affair, and comes in the form of an oxygen mask, which as well as providing moments of welcome oblivion from her chronic lung condition, doubles at one point in the film as a rather bizarre form of sex aid.

Dunga's audacious pursuit of Wellington and the subsequent transformation that this inspires in Kika, Wellington's wife, is also significant. Positioned clearly as a very one-sided attraction, the first interaction we witness between Dunga and Wellington occurs in the kitchen of the Texas Hotel where the former waits

impatiently for a delivery from the abattoir where Wellington works. 'Bota a carne perto de mim, bota!', he requests suggestively, as the ever irascible Wellington arrives before setting about removing the skin from the said piece of meat. Wellington, obviously accustomed to Dunga's advances, shoots a glance towards him and growls: 'Eu te vejo...a qualquer hora tu pode dar o bote, né? before Dunga playfully throws flour over him. Failing to see the funny side, Wellington then brandishes the carving knife in Dunga's face, rasping, 'Merda! Caralho! Cada dia esse bicha joga esta porra encima de mim' before wielding his knife at him and vowing, 'um dia eu te fodo, te fodo!' Wellington's 'threat', somewhat unsurprisingly, proves to be more of a source of delight than dissuasion and Dunga quips back without hesitation, 'com certeza'.

The apparent resistance to Dunga's attractions which Wellington displays in this scene forces the former to consider more drastic measures in order to win over the object of his affection. Inspiration strikes during a phone call from Daysey, who informs Dunga that she has decided to end her affair with Wellington and asks if he can pass on her apologies to Padre Adão, whose *Umbanda*[59] ceremony she will accordingly not be attending. Erroneously believing that if deserted by both his women, Wellington will somehow direct his affections towards him, Dunga decides to write a letter to Kika informing her of her husband's infidelity and the time and place of his next furtive liaison, details of which he is now privy thanks to Daysey's phone call. A young boy chosen as the messenger duly delivers the said letter under Kika's door before reporting back to the expectant Dunga. 'Olha, fique com isso', says the latter handing him a coin, 'Mais tarde te dou outra coisa porque já tá na idade para tirar o queijo!' to which the boy concerned replies, 'sai pra lá viado safado!'. Again, Dunga's response is typically nonchalant and comes this time in the form of a mere shrug, insinuating that he is more disappointed with the boy's lack of sexual interest in him than the blatantly homophobic insult which was directed towards him. The incident serves to highlight that it is not just Dunga's pursuit of Wellington which is remarkable, but the distinctly unapologetic attitude the former has to his own homosexuality, which he flaunts ostentatiously with little or no regard for the (disapproving) reactions of those around him.

But it is the dramatic shift in Kika's character which perhaps most obviously attests to the supposed liminality of the film's setting and underscores its presumed

[59] *Umbanda* (or *macumba*) is an Afro-Brazilian syncretic religion that blends elements of European Spiritism (founded by Allan Kardec, 1804-1869) and Catholicism with Afro-Brazilian and Amerindian religious beliefs. It is often practiced to cure illnesses and solve personal problems and for this reason has been called 'a form of psychotherapy for the poor' (Shaw and Dennison 2005: 297).

status as a space of transgression in which the characters really are 'liberad[os] em seus desejos' as Luiz Fernando Carvalho, writing in the *Journal do Brasil* puts it (2004: n.p.).[60] Significantly, for most of the film's proceedings, Kika, on a spatial level, remains sealed off from the ambit occupied by the other characters and is established as being most definitely 'apart'. In one scene, having left the evangelical church, for example, Kika is framed amidst the hustle and bustle of Recife's downtown area before a bus pulls up beside her, suggesting clearly that she lives 'beyond' the film's principal space of action. This is confirmed several scenes later when she arrives home. As the camera cuts to a high-angled extreme long-shot of the city's skyline, Kika's head slowly enters the frame from below as she climbs the steps towards her house, her previous location established as both distant, and someway physically (and morally) 'beneath'. Her eventual arrival home, in turn, reveals a small, well-maintained, single-story, white-washed dwelling (somewhat at odds with the other properties which surround it), which contrasts with the ramshackle Texas Hotel with its crumbling façade and peeling, garishly coloured interior walls. Combined with window grills, tightly closed shutters, a locked front door and a strict demarcation between the immaculate interior spaces of the entrance hall, living room, kitchen and so on, Kika's world is thus firmly established as *casa* in a way that is rendered impossible in the case of the Texas Hotel, with its confusion of interior/exterior and private/public spaces.

Indeed the sense of 'order' which pervades the marital home serves as a reflection of Kika herself. First encountered piously repeating the proclamations of the minister at the evangelical church which she attends, we then see her dutifully preparing dinner before her husband's imminent return from work, her scraped-back hair, crisply ironed blouse and stiff, below-the-knee skirt alluding to an unyielding and ultimately repressed young woman. These suppositions are confirmed during the dinner scene, a dour affair in which Kika seizes on the opportunity to self-righteously lecture her husband about his bad language before reminding him of her attitude towards adultery, of which he is clearly under suspicion:

> Baixo este teto exigo respeito! No nome de Jesus! Uma coisa Wellington, uma coisa que não tolero que não tolero não, traição. Assasinato, violencia, roubo, tudo isso perdõo, [mas] traição não.

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[60] In this respect Carvalho writes that 'amarelo-manga é a cor da tina que usa outra personagem, liberada em seus desejos, com os olhos faiscando ao final do filme, nos revelando assim a tríplice face, trágica, lúdica e revoltosa da alma nordestina' (ibid.).

Her meticulously scripted existence, however, is quickly thrown into freefall on receiving confirmation of her husband's infidelity through Dunga's letter, triggering, it would seem, a crisis of faith and consequently, a rapid reassessment of the value of her own carefully maintained monogamy and a blood-thirsty desire to avenge her husband's betrayal. Accordingly, Kika quite literally descends into the den of iniquity occupied by the other characters and, privy to the time and location of Wellington and Daysey's (final) amorous encounter in Campo de Euclides, she succeeds in ambushing the proceedings just as they enter full swing. Significant in these scenes are the changes in her appearance, outward signs of an internal transformation triggered by her presence in this unfamiliar space and which is manifested in her now free-flowing hair, and considered application of red lipstick, which is soon complemented by the blood pouring from Daysey's ear lobe, the result of Kika's savage (and successful) attempt to bite off the former's earring in her act of revenge.[61]

Several scenes later, apparently now having lost control of all her senses, the frenzied Kika is framed walking down a darkened street, presumably near the Texas Hotel, before Isaac's Mercedes draws up beside her, the driver demanding that she gets in. Kika does not hesitate in complying with the command, her subsequent presence in the passenger seat of the luridly coloured mango-yellow vehicle symbolic of the manner in which she too has now been marked as 'impure'. Turning to Isaac she proclaims, laughing hysterically: 'Arranquei a orelha da amante do meu marido!...Era uma mulher morta por dentro'. The two then return to the Texas Hotel for sex, where amongst other things, we witness Kika roughly flipping the latter onto his front before penetrating him with a hairbrush, something performed with a surprising degree of ease, suggesting that Isaac is rather well-rehearsed in this particular activity. As Cresswell argues, 'transgression' itself is concerned with the 'questioning of boundaries', in this case that which, metaphorically as much as physically, demarcates the dual domains of the *casa* and *rua* and the contrasting values and behavioural codes that these imply and which Kika herself has now violated. And as the above critic continues, things that transgress are therefore in the wrong place, and through implication, become 'dirt' (1996: 38).

In this sense, the manner in which Kika's transformation eventually concludes is perhaps of little surprise. In what marks the final scene of the film and with all

[61] Significantly, in previous scenes Kika keeps her makeup hidden down the side of her wardrobe, implying that she regards it as sinful, deviant and a symbol of sexual proclivity, as a consequence of her evangelical faith.

vestiges of the prudish evangelical protestant now having been consigned to oblivion, a tracking shot reveals the now wild-looking woman striding through the streets of the historic centre. Removing her wedding ring, she throws it decisively into the gutter before making her way into a hairdressing salon. The predictably camp male hair stylist runs his hands through her hair before asking what she would like done, to which Kika responds decisively, 'Arranca tudo e pinta'. Predictably the colour of choice, we discover, is yellow. 'Uma coisa ferrugem, assim barro, não é isso?' the stylist inquires, hopefully. 'Não, não,' she replies, clearly not in the mood for compromise, 'uma coisa mais manga. Amarelo manga,' at which point we cut to the film's title and end credits.

THE LIMITS OF TRANSGRESSION

Amidst this litany of seemingly transgressive behaviour (at points, as the sex scene between Kika and Isaac demonstrates, of clearly queer proportions) *Amarelo manga* might arguably subscribe to a distinctly carnivalesque discourse, which, according to Robert Stam and others has informed a whole tradition of Brazilian cinematic culture (see, for example, Stam, 1997). The aforementioned spatial confusion which inflects the film's centre of action and its subsequent dissolution and/or inversion of hierarchies, for example, is synonymous with Da Matta's account of the carnival ritual. During its enactment, he writes, it is as if society has managed finally to create a 'special space' in which the space of the *rua* and the space of the *casa* come together (1979: 107). Here, all beings, types, personalities, categories and groups may coexist, forming what he calls 'um campo social aberto, situado fora da hierarquia – talvez limite na estrutura social brasileira, tão preocupada com suas *entradas* e *saídas*' (ibid.: 49).

The film's recourse to the grotesque, if read through a Bakhtinian lens, might also be regarded as indicative of a carnivalesque tendency. Originally the domain of pre-Renaissance folk cultures, Grotesque Realism, Bakhtin writes, which would later define the aesthetics of carnival celebration in the Middle Ages, was principally concerned with what he terms 'the material body principle' that is, 'images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation and sexual life' which were always offered 'in an extremely exaggerated form' (1984: 18). Accordingly, in contrast to that of 'modern canons', the Grotesque Body was not closed off from the world, with an emphasis instead placed on those parts of the body – most notably the open mouth, the

genital organs, the breasts, the nose and so on – 'where the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world' (ibid: 26).[62] In this respect the concepts of 'degradation and debasement' were fundamental, and defined by Bakhtin as, 'the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract [...] a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity' (ibid: 20). And whilst, he notes, the implied processes of defecation and copulation endowed the concept of 'degradation' with negative connotations, those relating to conception, pregnancy and birth, with which the lower stratum of the body, in particular, has also been associated, simultaneously implied a regenerational aspect in which degradation 'digs a bodily grave for a new birth' (ibid: 21).

Allusions to the 'material body principle' and the opening of bodily orifices to the world, are indeed numerous in *Amarelo manga*, with Lígia's flaunting of her pubic hair, the cladding of Dona Aurora's vagina with an oxygen mask, Kika's severing of Daysey's earlobe and her subsequent penetration of Isaac's anus with a hairbrush serving as just a few examples. The way in which these instances are presented to us also clearly subscribes to this discourse of exaggeration. In the case of Lígia, for example, the character is framed performing the episode of self-exposure standing on a table, the incident thus clearly visible to the entire bar. Cutting to a close-up of the lower portion of her body, we then see her teasing her onlookers with the hem of her skirt which she slowly inches up towards her nether regions. Rather than cutting away modestly at this point, however, and reverting perhaps to a reverse shot of Isaac's facial expression, the camera lingers tantalisingly on her now bare crotch. Significantly, we see that her pubic hair, in keeping with the film's colour motif, is dyed a brash yellowy blond, invoking rounds of rapturous applause from her appreciative audience. In this respect, whilst in his introduction to the film on its World Initiative DVD release (2005) Richard Peña's discussion of the film's carnivalesque discourse somewhat problematically is articulated solely in the context of its melodramatic elements, a sense of the 'grandiose', 'overblown' and the 'operatic' is certainly pervasive within *Amarelo manga*'s manner of corporal representation.

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[62] The 'modern canons' of the Renaissance period, he continues, saw the body in quite a different light than the Middle Ages, representing it as a completed, finished product that was 'isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies'. Any manifestations of its incompleteness were eliminated, and 'its protuberances and off shoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed' (29).

In spite of this, however, it is difficult, on closer examination of the film, to find anything that is utopian or transcendental about the world of *Amarelo manga*. For whilst according to Donna Goldstein, Da Matta's account posits carnival as a 'moment *out* of time' (2003: 32), life in the forgotten centre of Recife is defined overwhelmingly, as previously touched upon, by its drudgerous circularity. This is embodied in the cyclical nature of the film, set over a period of twentyfour hours, to which Lígia's aforementioned monologue marks both the beginning and the end. In this light, Cilaine Alves Cunha's application of a naturalist reading to the film would perhaps appear more accurate, with the dual settings of the Texas Hotel and Bar Avenida recalling the collectivised spaces of the proletariat found in the novels of nineteenth-century naturalist writers such as Émile Zola and Aluísio de Azevedo.[63] The latter, she writes (in reference to his seminal novel *O Cortiço* (1890)), alluded to the metaphor of collective space as an 'organismo em que a massa de trabalhadores nasce, cresce e prolifera como vermes que apodrecem a carne de dentro' (2003: n.p.), something to which the words of Renato Carneiro Campos's previously mentioned essay do indeed allude. The actual image of 'meat' itself in Assis's film is certainly all-pervasive, with one of the film's opening scenes depicting Wellington, through a high-angled shot, stripping down a carcass at the abattoir where he is employed. In another scene, against the backdrop of extra-diegetic heavy metal music, the audience is then subjected to the image of a cow being slaughtered in the same location, a spike inserted into its neck, before its body is then hauled unceremoniously onto the concrete floor as a tide of blood gradually fills the screen. Kika, too, comes to be directly associated with the produce of the abattoir, and on returning from her evangelical church service, is framed retrieving a slab of meat from the refrigerator before placing it in a ceramic dish and cutting it into pieces for dinner. Barely has she started, however, before she begins to retch, and dashes to the open back door to vomit, the family cat then appreciatively lapping up the results. Kika's repulsion, however, is replaced by positive attraction in the case of Dunga, who as we have seen, enthusiastically requests that Wellington, as he makes his delivery from the abattoir,

[63] Naturalism can be described as a branch of Realism which originated in France during the mid-nineteenth century as a response to the excesses of Romanticism. In this respect, the collectivised spaces of the working classes featured as a reoccurring narrative backdrop, constructed through what Claude Hulet describes as a 'deterministic' view of the world in which 'man is moulded and conditioned by his environment' (1974: 2). Naturalist writers were particularly inspired by positivist ideology and Darwinist theories of evolution, and sought to apply a scientific method to their writing based on observation and 'field work' whereby the author assumed the position of the objective, neutral observer.

put his meat 'really near' him, before later on sniffing and then furtively performing fellatio on the meat cleaver.

As Goldstein writes, within Brazilian popular culture as a whole, metaphors about food and eating are often used to express ideas about sexuality, with the verb *comer* meaning both 'to eat' and actively consume somebody sexually (ibid: 236). Masculinity, she argues, hinges on a man's ability to consume, whilst conventional or socially-sanctioned femininity is contingent on being able to *dar* (literally 'give' (oneself)) for consumption (ibid.) In this sense, although Wellington explains his nickname, Cannibal, as something he earned from killing another man, it perhaps more readily points to his sexually predatory nature, somebody who 'devours' his women as Cunha notes (2003: n.p.). Kika, herself, seems to be constantly reminded of his status as 'devourer' by the local children, who at one point in the film shout 'Kika Cannibal' as she walks past them on the steps leading up to her house. The incident is raised at dinner that evening, when Kika expresses her disgust at the new nickname, leading to the aforementioned lecture on adultery. The latter implies that she knows he is 'eating' somebody else (Daysey), hence her earlier revulsion towards the meat which now lies steaming on the plates before them. Isaac, too, is also depicted as an 'eater' in his advances towards Lígia at the Bar Avenida. Following the exposure of her vagina, in a later scene she is grabbed by Isaac as she walks past him to serve another customer, the former muttering ambiguously to her, 'Seus cabelos dão idéias, puras idéias'. His advances towards her are repeated towards the end of the film when he arrives to collect his ID card. Staring coldly straight into her eyes, he demands, 'Eu quero minha identidade, e quero você – você todinha. E todas suas idéias'.

And although Cunha goes little further in developing the significance of 'eating' metaphors in the film (reference is made just to Wellington), these metaphors also inform a subtler set of distinctions between the sexes in the film, where, to use Parker's phraseology,

> *homem* (man) and *mulher* (woman) are not defined only with reference to one another but a range of other figures embodying a complex array of both positive and negative male and [in particular] female possibilities (ibid: 49)

Kika's vomiting incident, for example, points not only to her aversion to her husband's infidelity, but also underscores the absolute importance she attaches to 'non-consumption' (read sexual passivity and monogamy within marriage) in order to preserve her status as respectable housewife and bastion of a particular brand of

evangelical modesty.[64] Yet this status is inevitably defined against the negative characteristics of sexually predatory women (*galinhas* or *piranhas* in Brazilian Portuguese), such as Daysey. Her failure to adhere to the norms of female inferiority and submission endows her with the reputation of being a 'loose' woman, leading her to complain in one scene to Wellington:

> Ontem, meu pai, que nem consegue andar direito, olhou para mim e falou assim na cara, vagabunda! [...] Sabe porquê? Sabe né? Por tua causa.

This can be regarded as symptomatic of the virgin/whore dichotomy which, as Pitt Rivers (1971) and others have noted, has supposedly been so prevalent in the structuring of femininity in Mediterranean and other 'Latin' societies. However, according to Parker (quoting Antônio Cândido (1951) and Gilberto Freyre (1956)), the virgin/whore dichotomy in the Brazilian context has its own particular significance stemming from the country's colonial past and legacy of slavery, in particular the structuring of life in the *engenho.* Here there existed a strict delineation between the legal, procreative functions of the Christian, monogamous family of the plantation owner, and the sexual and affectual realm constructed around a 'de facto set of polygamous relationships with any number of his female slaves' (ibid.: 37). This, in turn, resulted in coexisting but conflicting visions of the legal wife and mother on the one hand, and the concubine on the other (ibid: 39).

Lígia, of course, would appear to be the exception to the rule, appearing as sexually liberated, financially independent and respected by the majority of the customers at the Bar Avenida, thus apparently resisting these dualistic strictures within which the other female characters are constructed and which points to what Parker terms the 'lingering vision of [colonial] patriarchal life' in contemporary Brazilian gender ideology (ibid.: 40). Yet soon after exposing her vagina to her clientele, we learn that such respect hinges, in actual fact, on her own carefully maintained chastity, with Rabecão warning the interested Isaac:

> Parece puta, mas ninguém aqui comeu ela [...] Se tu come essa daí eu te devolvo a parada e pode comer meu cú!

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[64] Evangelical Protestantism, as in other Latin American countries such as Mexico and Guatemala, has grown rapidly in popularity over the last few decades in Brazil, particularly in poor areas from where the Catholic Church has begun to retreat. Whilst there are a plethora of protestant churches represented in Brazil – including the Baptist Church, the Assembly of God, the Foursquare Gospel Church – Shaw writes that it is the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God which, for many Brazilians, 'epitomises the new brand of Pentecostalism', with its televised 'services' (the church purchased its own TV channel in 1990) and emphasis on financial contributions from its congregations (Shaw & Dennison 2005: 309).

In turn, Wellington and Isaac's reputations as 'real men' or *machões* are similarly defined not just in relation to members of the opposite sex, but against the negative characteristics of the *viado* or *bicha* ('queer', 'faggot' or 'queen'), a figure that constitutes a contrasting vision of masculinity but one which nevertheless complements (albeit negatively) the figure of the *homem*. Again the nuances of language here are significant, with *viado* allegedly deriving from *veado* – the Portuguese word for 'deer', and *bicha* referring to a variety of intestinal pests whilst also constituting the feminine form of *bicho*, a type of 'unspecified animal' (insect, mammal or otherwise) (Parker 2009: 51). Thus collectively they refer not only to an 'animal-like femininity' but, having abandoned the true *homem*'s identity through the adoption of the passive sexual role, a pest-like inferiority due to the *viado* or *bicha*'s position 'betwixt and between the accepted categories of normal human life' (ibid.).

In the case of *Amarelo manga*, the *viado* or *bicha* in question is Dunga, whose apparent identification with the female of the species on the level of social role, dress and mannerisms is rather tiresomely spelled out for us in our initial encounter with him. Beginning with an extreme close-up of the character's small feet and lower portion of his shaved legs, Dunga is revealed sweeping the entrance hall of the Texas Hotel cheerily singing a song to ease the tedium of his 'female' domestic chores. The camera then pulls back to reveal a small, slightly-built young man squeezed into an impossibly tight pair of denim shorts – barely extending below the base of his buttocks – with a cropped, close-fitting vest covering his upper torso. After helping Seu Bianor locate a missing key, the telephone then rings with a call from Rabecão for Isaac, the mobile camera tracking Dunga as he scampers effeminately upstairs to fetch him. Isaac, however, is asleep, and on being rudely awoken, responds angrily with a tirade of homophobic abuse. Little room for doubt is similarly left for the viewer with regards to Dunga's sexual passivity, something made evident in his obvious delight at Wellington's aforementioned threat of a 'foda' in a later scene and his subsequent performance of fellatio on the meat cleaver, suggesting a desire for both anal *and* oral penetration.

Dunga's status as foil for the assertion of Wellington and Isaac's masculinities is made apparent in the litany of homophobic verbal insults to which he is subjected, of which the above is just one example. These serve as a constant reminder to Dunga of his dual failings as a *viado*, that is, his inability to live up to the expected norms of masculinity, on the one hand, and the sheer impossibility of him fulfilling the

requirements of biological femininity on the other, thus simultaneously underscoring the 'normality' of the other two men. Wellington's threat of penetration, too, is symptomatic of the way in which symbolically the male characters are able to (verbally) exercise their consuming male prerogative, whilst simultaneously feminising those men to whom this is directed (in this case Dunga) and bolstering their own sense of masculinity, with no threat, of course, posed to their own heterosexual credentials (see, for example, Fry, 1982 and Parker, 2009). As Parker notes, 'the threat of anal penetration whether symbolic or real [...] defines the underlying structure of masculine relationships' (ibid.: 53).

What is significant is the distinctly exaggerated and retrograde proportions this form of machismo reaches in the film. With regards to Wellington, this manifests itself in the latent misogyny which characterises his (mis)treatment of Daysey, which apparently is deemed both inevitable and socially acceptable, due to her status as a 'loose woman'. Following the initial showdown described above, Daysey, still enraged by Wellington's attitude towards her, calls him at the abattoir and apparently hurls yet more abuse at him. Wellington replies:

> Tu es uma fodinha! Caralho Daysey! Não, não, não falo comigo assim...olha! [pause] Tu não seria capaz, eu te encho de porrada, eu te encho de porrada, viu Daysey!

And although Wellington's boss apparently seems to express concern towards his employee's violent misogynistic tendencies once the receiver has been slammed down to terminate the unfortunate exchange, we realise such suppositions are premature as the boss complains, 'tu briga com tuas raparigas, e vem descontar no meu telefone, porra!'

In Isaac's case, most significant is the bizarre and rather disturbing turn his blatant homophobia begins to take. Following his telephone call with Rabecão, which we assume relates to some sort of clandestine business transaction, Isaac goes to await the latter in the 'lugar de sempre' for delivery of the 'mercadorias'. These, it transpires, come in the form of dead bodies, which he purchases in exchange for hashish from Rabecão, who ironically, from the *Defesa Social de Pernambuco* insignia on the side of his Volkswagen van, we presume to be a local government employee. Although the body is a bit 'perfurado', Rabecão assures Isaac that today's delivery is nevertheless 'picolé' and the camera then cuts to a medium shot, from Isaac's point of view, revealing the blood-stained body of a naked, muscular young man, propped up in the corner of a make-shift shed. Retrieving a revolver from his pocket, Isaac then proceeds

to take aim, his face framed through a series of reverse-close ups as he unloads a round of bullets into the lifeless corpse. On completing the perverse ritual, there is a cut to a lingering extreme close-up of him biting his bottom lip, an apparent expression of ecstasy now etched on his face. Masculine assertion in this case, therefore, corresponds to a literal, but detached act of penetration via the bullet of a gun, a rather ambivalent form of necrophilia which also, it would appear, allows Isaac to simultaneously satisfy and deaden his own homosexual impulses.

In light of the above account, one might treat the aforementioned suggestions that the world of *Amarelo manga* is characterised by 'patriarchal demise' with a degree of caution. However, as Goldstein notes, 'eating' metaphors are not only indicative of gendered sexual power relations but also 'the intimate ways in which economic and sexual aspects of normative gender relations are intertwined' (ibid: 237). This gives wider significance to Assis's claim that one of the film's central postulates relates to the idea of human beings constituting little more than 'estomago e sexo' (Caetano 2003: n.p.). In Brazil, a man's ability to *comer*, writes Goldstein, has become synonymous with virility and sexual prowess, but also with his potential, quite literally, to provide food, something she argues is 'a key element in a woman's recognition of a partner's good qualities' (ibid.). This ties in with Parker's account of the dual figures through which the Brazilian *homem* has been construed – that of the *pai* (father) on the one hand, and the *machão* (literally, 'big macho') on the other. These complementary aspects of the *homem* can, he writes (quoting Freyre, 1956) be again traced back to the colonial *engenho*, where the patriarch was characterised by his status as father and provider, but also by his absolute right to invoke violence (often of fatal proportions) not only towards the slave population under his control, but also his own offspring (Parker 2009: 50). In this sense, the apparent over-identification with the figure of the *machão* amongst the male characters in *Amarelo manga* can be read simply as being inversely symmetrical to their inability to exercise the prerogatives of the *pai*, resulting in a distinctly lop-sided and ultimately flawed version of Brazilian masculinity.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Isaac's interaction with Lígia. As previously discussed, he condescendingly asks Lígia whether she can afford to dye 'all' her hair blonde, to which she lifts her skirt to show him that indeed she can. Unable to match Lígia economically, Isaac then embarks on consuming her sexually, though his attempts, of course, are continually rebuffed. Now rendered doubly

impotent, Isaac's rage reaches fever pitch in the closing minutes of the film, when he eventually resorts to pulling a gun on Lígia. Superficially, this rather extreme act is posited as an attempt to retrieve his ID card, left there after their last altercation. However, the incident would also appear indicative of the absolute state of despair that Isaac has reached in light of his dwindling sense of masculinity, which, it would seem, can now only be exercised through recourse to a loaded firearm.

What is significant is the extent to which this *machão* version of masculinity becomes internalised and ultimately replicated by the female (identified) characters of *Amarelo manga* such as Lígia, Kika and Dunga. In the case of Lígia, her subjection to constant incidents of sexual goading on the part of the exclusively male clientele of the Bar Avenida manifests itself in her eventual explosion and loss of all self-control. In the face of Isaac's predatory advances, she viciously cracks a beer bottle over his head before running hysterically around the bar screaming repeatedly, 'Não aguento mais esta merda!' The violent tendencies which simmered beneath Wellington's now defunct relationship with Daysey, in turn, reappear in Kika's rampage following her personal transformation. Here, apparently driven to a similar state of dementia as Lígia, she not only succeeds in hospitalising her husband's former lover through the aforementioned ear-biting incident but then decides to eschew foreplay in favour of a punch in the face, which she delivers to Isaac during her subsequent sexual domination and sodomisation of the man. Even Dunga's behaviour, at certain points in the film, seems to betray the very discourse of misogyny and homophobia to which we would assume he would be averse. In a scene following the meat delivery which Wellington makes to the Texas Hotel, framed by the serving hatch of the kitchen, we hear via a monologue Dunga plotting his conquest of Wellington, announcing defiantly: 'Eu vou dar uma rasteira nas duas, vai chover racha [...] Meu filho, bicha quer, bicha faz'. Moving on to the subject of Daysey, he reflects: '[Ela] é só escrotice, rala coxa, mulher viciada em macho casado'. After spitting on the floor in apparent disgust, he continues his verbal onslaught claiming, 'até sapoeira mamou naqueles peitos [...] safada do jeito que é, deve ser verdade mesmo'. Then grabbing the knife and brandishing it towards the camera in exactly the same way that Wellington does to him several scenes before, he hisses: 'mas eu arranjo as coisas [...] jogo verde para colher maduro. Tá de brincadeira mais porra!'

The plan, of course, functions to an extent and Wellington duly arrives at the Texas Hotel seeking consolation from Dunga. Ironically, though, so distraught is

Wellington at the dual disappearance of Kika and Daysey from his life that Dunga's 'real man' is subsequently reduced to a tearful and effeminised shadow of his former self, and on spotting Seu Bianor's dead body in the living room of the Texas Hotel hastily beats a retreat. Exasperated, Dunga shouts after him, 'tu é bunda mole mesmo, né cagão!', thus subjecting Wellington to the same iniquitous gender expectations which for the entire film have relegated him so firmly to the status of *viado.* Thus despite the allusions to a liminal space of 'sexual anarchy' discussed earlier in this chapter, the performance of gender and enactment of desire, like other facets of life in *Amarelo manga,* are ultimately driven by the same drudgerous circularity. Kika and Dunga, especially, might appear to commit 'transgressive' acts of sexual 'subversion' which are 'exceptions' to the norm, but they do this according to a simple inversion of an already firmly established hierarchy in which human beings are divided, to repeat Goldstein's phraseology, into 'eaters' and 'those who are eaten' (ibid: 122).

CONCLUSION: EXCLUDED MIDDLE?

By way of conclusion, then, Recife's historic centre as it is (re)imagined in *Amarelo Manga* is inscribed most definitely as the sort of highly ambivalent space of 'in-betweeness' discussed in the introduction to this chapter, not solely through the disjuncture inherent in its status as a social periphery physically located at the very heart of a major metropolitan centre but also the manner in which this ambiguous position impacts upon the production of gender and sexuality and the physical and affective relationships shared between its characters. The metaphorical distance which separates the film's setting from the regulation of the 'centre' in this respect and its resultant 'loss of social coordinates' does, on one level, endow this space with a degree of liminality, allowing for 'moments of discontinuity in the social fabric [and] in social space' (Shields 1991: 83). But, if, as Shields goes on to state, liminality also 'represents a liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performance codes of mundane life' (ibid.), then, as the previous section makes clear, any promise the world of *Amarelo Manga* may offer in this respect ultimately remains unfulfilled. For as Cunha (ibid.) and others have argued, the characters fail to translate their anomalous position in society into any form of political consciousness, reflecting one of the central paradoxes of such in-between spaces. These may indeed be sites where 'sexual subjects may be least stable and hegemonic sexualities most open to challenge', but as Phillips and Watts remind us, they may also be concurrently removed from the critical

discourses and emancipatory movements also located at this 'centre', meaning 'they may be less able to speak for or defend themselves and/or participate in liberatory politics' (2000: 1-2). Thus whilst Dunga, Lígia and eventually Kika on one level all reject the societal expectations imposed upon their respective gender identities and sexualities, their search for alternative constructions of self is necessarily limited to the same ideological field. Here Dunga pursues his same-sex desires according to the conventional subjective mould of the *bicha*, Kika assumes the identity of the sexually-predatory *puta* or *piranha* she so resisted, and Lígia asserts her independence through the emulation of the very *machão* behaviour with which she herself is threatened. In this sense, one might argue that 'yellow', as an omnipresent symbolic colour in the film, serves as a particularly Brazilian shade of the colour pink, indexing, alongside all the other elements of decay in the film, a breakdown of patriarchal heteronormativity in the film, but also the all-pervasive inertia that prevents this translating into any form of feminist or queer consciousness on the part of the characters and the assertion of positive emancipatory rights to non-discrimination. Amidst the endless 'work-a-day' existence the most oppressed characters in the film have to endure, 'freedom', it seems, is an entirely relative phenomenon, with the notion of 'liberation' itself appearing as a luxury on a laundry-list of other, more basic needs such as food, shelter and human connection.

The question necessarily poses itself then, does the setting of *Amarelo manga* constitute some sort of 'sexual hinterland' that lies on the margins of supposedly 'progressive' Brazil? Certainly the highly dichotomised framework within which gender is performed – its divisions between activity and passivity and the manner in which this is subsequently mapped on to constructions of sexuality – would *appear* symptomatic of those 'traditional' models discussed in the General Introduction to this thesis and which are supposedly still prevalent in rural areas and amongst the urban 'popular' classes. This, however, cannot function as an absolute certainty, for as previously noted, referring to Rebhun's aforementioned study of gender relations in the northeastern Brazil, the highly exaggerated form of machismo exercised by certain male characters such as Isaac, Wellington and Rabecão, and their subsequent demands for female submission, far from being 'traditional', can be linked to the rather more modern phenomenon of increased feminine participation in both the formal and informal labour markets. As Rebhun argues:

> [...] the economic opportunities now available to women seem like an attack on masculine roles, masculine prerogatives, and, in some ways, masculinity itself.

> With increasingly divergent interests, men and women find it even more difficult than it used to be to achieve the consonance of understanding and interests necessary for affectionate co-operation (1999: 126).

These shifts, in turn, point to the way way in which such inner-city neighbourhoods, often perceived, to borrow Shield's phraseology, as having been 'left behind in the modern race for progress' (ibid.) have become increasingly imbricated in both national and global modes of production and consumption. In this respect, Saskia Sassen argues that the growth in demand for both formal and informal low-wage labour brought about by global economic restructuring has seen a *reassertion* of specifically localised spaces pertaining to the neighbourhood and the household as sites of increased economic activity (2004: 172). As the representations in *Amarelo manga* imply, in terms of gender relations and sexuality, they are, however, consequently rendered highly ambivalent sites, in which the dividing line between 'liberation' and oppression can be difficult to determine.

CHAPTER FOUR

On the edge of liberation: Queer transcendence and the Carnivalesque in *Madame Satã*'s 'anti-Lapa'.

REIMAGINING THE INTERSTICES

Thus far, through the course of this thesis, the term 'liberation' has appeared as one of particular ambivalence, affirming, it would seem, Foucault's aforementioned argument that there is 'no single locus of great Refusal or law of the revolutionary' (1980: 95). The imbrication of non-heteronormative sexualities (both mainstream and dissident) with capitalism as it appears in *Un año sin amor* and *La virgen de los sicarios*, in particular, attests to the fact, as he puts it, that although 'where there is power, there is resistance [...] consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (1980: 95-6). As my discussion of *Amarelo manga* demonstrated, even within interstitial, 'in-between' spaces at some distance from the power and reach of legal, medical, religious and political institutions which discursively constitute and regulate gender ideology and sexualities, 'transgression' often may only occur as an inversion within these existing (hegemonic) discourses. These may frequently remain untouched by the transformative potential of critical emancipatory politics from which sexual subjects on the periphery may also remain excluded.

And yet arguably 'exclusion' itself does not necessarily have to be construed as an entirely negative phenomenon. Judith Filc, cited in Chapter One in relation to her discussion of the privatisation of public space in Buenos Aires, goes on in the same article to consider how the interstitial space of 'dislocation' produced between the house and the city by the errant characters of the novel *Vivir afuera* by Argentine writer Rodolfo Fogwill (1999) might be reclaimed simultaneously as one of 'absoluta sujección y de la libertad' (2003: 196). Her argument hinges on Giorgio Agamben's assertion that juridical historiography has been characterised by longstanding tensions between 'those who conceive exile to be a punishment and those who instead understand it to be a right and a refuge' (1998: 110). This, he continues, stems from the highly ambiguous meaning held by the word 'banned' in Romance languages, which originally signified both 'at the mercy of' and 'out of free will, freely', both 'excluded, banned' and 'open to all, free' (ibid.).

In *The Location of Culture* (2004), Homi Bhabha does not go as far as suggesting that those who 'live in the minority' (and there are multiple ways this might be experienced, from being an immigrant in a foreign country to publicly declaring and living one's sexuality in the open) always do so out of free choice. Yet he does suggest, like Filc, that the interstices, despite their exclusionary associations, might also constitute a space of productive possibility,

> [a] terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defininining the idea of society itself (2).

This relies, however, on a rather more nuanced conception of the interstices that goes beyond the idea of the 'in-between' simply as an empty space or 'no-man's land' separating two diverse ambits, which Filc's distinction between the house and the city in *Vivir afuera* seems to imply. Rather, he defines the interstices as 'the overlap and displacement of domains of difference' – highly fluid and porous 'border zones' whose limits are constantly being breached and redefined, prompting a cultural cross-fertilisation resulting in the production of new and ever increasingly complex identities:

> The interstitial passage from fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (5).

And it is the inhabitants of such zones – those excluded from these 'domains of difference' and forbidden to exist legitimately within them due to their nationality, gender, ethnicity, or otherwise – who frequently mediate this process. In this sense, it *is* possible, argues Bhabha, to 'signify from the periphery of authorised power and privilege' though, he suggests, the transcendental possibilities of the 'in-between' are bound up not with the persistence of tradition, rather with the way in which traditions are *reinscribed* through the 'contingencies and contradictions which shape the lives of those who live in the minority' (3).

In this context, this fourth and final chapter focusses on a more positive representation of the urban interstices as they are imagined in Karim Aïnouz's film *Madame Satã* (2002, Brazil), specifically the *bairro* of Lapa, perceived as one of Rio de Janeiro's longstanding 'bohemian' neighbourhoods, located on the immediate periphery of the city's central downtown area. In particular, my discussion considers how this particular space is produced in the film as a porous and productive domain of

'overlap' between diverse urban social groups, and asks to what extent the 'in-between' is resultantly produced as a space of empowerment for the protagonist in light of his exclusion from the 'legitimate' culture of the majority. Can 'resistance' ever be achieved here in complete opposition to the circuits of power which sustain this culture? Or, as in the other spaces discussed in this thesis, as well as being an 'adversary', does this resistance simultaneously fulfil the role, as Foucault puts it, of 'support or handle' in their production (1980: 95-6)? If resistance is shown never to be in a position of exteriority in relation to systems of power and knowledge, as the latter's account suggests, then how might the film be said to reconfigure the understanding of 'liberation' as a singular path towards universally applicable political goals, in favour of a more nuanced conception based on the idea of a heterogeneity of strategies and practices that do not necessarily culminate with a declaration of a 'true self', whether that be concerned with an identity constructed around one's sexuality, ethnicity or otherwise?

Of course, from one perspective, the inclusion of *Madame Satã* in this thesis, particularly its final chapter, might appear somewhat anomalous, its narrative unfolding not in the contemporary era as in the case of the other films discussed, but rather Rio of the 1920s and 1930s. And yet this is a necessary and deliberate strategy since it allows for a retrospective questioning of some of the assumptions and certainties relating to the production of dissident sexualities and urban spaces in Latin America that previous chapters have already been at pains to destabilise. As will be discussed below, the film is inflected with what might be perceived as a surprisingly 'modern' discourse which rigorously *decouples* gender and sexuality, in defiance of 'traditional' constructions of male homosexuality which we might expect to shape the representations we see in the film, given its temporal setting. The latent eroticism which informs the protagonist's sexual encounters with other men, and in particular the film's celebration of the black body in these and other scenes, similarly defies the reification of the heterosexual, white European male understood to have been so prevalent within official Brazilian nationalist discourse at the time. And although my analysis eventually rejects a reading of *Madame Satã* as some sort of pre-Stonewall tale of 'gay liberation' in the tropics, I do identify the presence of an arguably more radical (and perhaps more contemporary) queer discourse in the film linked to its recourse to the carnivalesque. In this sense, as in Chapter Three, my analysis further challenges the notion of such inner-city neighbourhoods being 'left behind', as Shields

puts it (1991: 3), whilst also disturbing the assumption that critical sexual discourses (however widely this concept needs to be conceived) necessarily flow either in a uni-directional fashion from minority to majority worlds, or via the metropolitan elites at the centre of these worlds, as Castells's account of the 'dual city' would imply (1989: 227-8).[65]

MADAME SATÃ: DIVINE INSPIRATION

Madame Satã was Aïnouz's feature-length debut, and alongside films such as *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles, 2002), *Central do Brasil* (Walter Salles, 1998) and *O Invasor* (Beto Brant, 2002) can be perhaps regarded as one of the most critically successful Brazilian films of the last decade, picking up over twentyone awards on the festival circuit, most notably the Gold Hugo for best film at the 38th Chicago Film Festival (2002) and the Audience Award at the Toronto Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival (2003). Perhaps before progressing any further with this discussion, it is worth outlining the socio-historical context in which the narrative is couched (in particular, the significance of its protagonist) and considering briefly why the film inspired such positive responses from international lesbian and gay audiences.

As previously mentioned, the film is set in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s and 1930s, and was inspired by the story of João Francisco dos Santos, a real-life figure who lived between 1900 and 1974. A contradictory personality, remembered simultaneously as one of Rio's most feared *malandros* (streetwise hustler and petty criminal), but also as a cabaret artist and carnival performer who was defiantly open about his sexuality, João Francisco has acquired an almost mythical status within *carioca* cultural and historical memory. His childhood years and early adulthood reflected the experience of many Afro-Brazilians at the beginning of the twentieth century. Of all the countries in the Americas, the slave trade had been most active in Brazil, with over three and a half million Africans sequestered to the country in total (Sheriff 2001: 13). Pressured by abolitionists such as statesman Joaquim Nabuco, it was also the last country in the Americas to abolish the trade – in 1888 – just one year before the demise of Brazil's monarchy and the inauguration of the First Republic

[65] Castells's 'dual city' refers to what he argues is a stark social division between two varieties of community. On the one hand, there are the elites, whose advantaged position in society allows them to forge connections with the wider world. On the other, there are the poor and the marginalised, who are excluded from these transnational networks and whose very survival depends on the production and maintenance of contrasting *internal* networks (ibid.: 227-28).

(1889-1930) (Davis 1999: 44). The immediate result was mass migration from rural plantations and interior mining areas to coastal areas (Shaw 2007: 89), in particular to Rio de Janeiro, the then capital, which even before abolition already featured one of the highest concentrations of black inhabitants in the country, peaking at over 300,000 by the early 1870s (Sheriff: ibid.).

Although the director ultimately decided not to include previously-filmed scenes depicting moments from João Francisco's childhood,[66] we know from his memoirs that having been sold by his mother as an apprentice to a horse-seller, he himself ran away to Rio aged eight from his native northeastern state of Pernambuco with a lady known as Dona Felicidade to work in a *pensão* (small hotel or guesthouse) that she was establishing in the city (Paezzo 1972: 8-9). In 1913, he then moved to the Lapa neighbourhood of the city, sleeping rough for most of his teenage years whilst undertaking odd jobs here and there, and later, working as a waiter/cook in various brothels, hotels and restaurants (ibid.: 9). This precarious existence on the fringes of society was symptomatic of the fact that the concept of 'freedom' in post-abolition Brazil remained a largely rhetorical phenomenon, with little actual practical meaning for the average Afro-Brazilian, whose existence was often still defined by the same, back-breaking daily work as before. In relation to his employment with Dona Felicidade, the real-life João Francisco recalls: 'não tinha folga. E não ganhava nada. E não tinha estudo e nem carinho. E era escravo do mesmo jeito' (ibid.).

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the lifestyle of the neighbourhood's legendary *malandro* figures such as Saturnino, Beto-Batuqueiro, Gavião and Sete-Coroa, who subsequently took him under their wing, seemed like an attractive option to the young João Francisco (Durst 2007: 22). Rejecting continued 'enslavement' in the form of domestic work or manual labour, idleness and pleasure-seeking were instead, for these men, the order of the day,[67] the *malandro*'s 'toil', according to Shaw, revolving around an exploration of 'all the hedonistic avenues open to him' (ibid.: 91). Of course, from another perspective one might regard João Francisco as being in the fortunate minority of Afro-Brazilians who were actually given the opportunity to spurn

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[66] In the film's DVD commentary, Aïnouz remarks that 'there are things that were important to leave out [...] It was almost as if you can spend two hours of your life with this man – feel him, smell him, share his daily life – it's more valuable than knowing his life history' (2004).

[67] The samba composer or *sambista* Moreira da Silva, in his book *Último Malandro*, writes in this respect. 'malandro é aquele que não pega no pesado. Malandro é o gato, que come peixe sem ir à praia' (quoted in Durst, 2005: 14). *Sambistas* were synonymous with the lifestyle of *malandragem* pursued by the *malandro* in the first decades of the twentieth century in Rio, and often composed sambas about this character and his ethos.

such jobs, with many having been excluded from the labour market due to the policy of *embranquecimento* (whitening) favoured by successive post-abolition governments. Here, white European immigrants were encouraged to settle in Brazil (and favoured in the sphere of employment) not only because they were deemed to be better workers than Afro-Brazilians, but also because it was hoped that through miscegenation they would gradually 'lighten' the country's gene pool (Butler 1998: 36).[68] Illegal activities such as pimping, drug-dealing, gambling and protection racketeering became a popular means of many black men scraping together a living, and, in this sense, unsurprisingly are all activities which have been also associated with the *malandro* lifestyle.

This correlation between Brazil's 'continued aversion to blackness' (Davis ibid.: 8) and the socially and economically marginalised status of its Afro-Brazilian population at the time is made explicit not least in the film's opening sequence. Here, the face of João Francisco (played by Lázaro Ramos) is framed in a close-up akin to a mug shot as he is incarcerated in prison, the desired effect, according to the director, being 'to strip the character of everything' (2004). A voiceover, taken from an original transcript of one of the many court cases in which he was a defendant, can be heard, informing us that:

> O sindicado [...] é conhecido na juridição deste distrito policial como desordeiro, sendo freqüentador da Lapa e sua mediações. É pederasta passivo, usa as sobrancelhas raspadas e adopta atitudes femininas até alterando sua própria voz. Não tem religião alguma. Fuma, joga, e é dado ao vício de embriaguez. Sua instrução é rudimentar. Exprime-se com dificuldade, intercale sua conversa com palavras da gíria do desambiente. É de pouca inteligência. Não gosta do convivio da sociedade por ver que esta o repele dado ao seus vícios. É visto sempre entre pederastas, prostitutas, proxenetas e outras pessoas do mais baixo nível social. Ufana-se de possuir economias mas como não aufere provendas e trabalho digno só podem ser essas economias produtos de atos repulsivos ou criminosos. Pode-se diantar que o sindicato já respondeu ao vários processos e sempre agradece os funcionários da polícia. É um indivíduo de temperamento calculado, propenso ao crime. E por todas as razões, é inteiramente nocivo à sociedade. Rio de Janeiro, Distrito Federal, May 12, 1932.

[68] This policy of *embranquecimento* reflected deeply entrenched Positivist attitudes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the belief that the greatest impediment to modernisation was the 'barbarous paganism' of Brazil's black population (Butler 2001: 36-40). João Batista Lacerda, director of the National Museum, was one of the first members of the scientific community to endorse this strategy of 'constructive miscegenation', calculating in 1912 that by 2012 the black population would be reduced to zero, while mulattoes would make up merely 3 percent of the total population (ibid.: 36). The debate would contribute to the growing popularity of the international eugenics movement in Brazil during the late 1910s with at least seventy-four major publications on eugenics being released between 1897 and 1933 in the country (ibid.).

Spoken against the backdrop of his bruised and battered face, the statement that João Francisco is a 'passive pederast', in particular, is symptomatic of the way in which homosexuality became cross-hatched onto the correlation eugenics made between dark-skinned people and criminal deviance. Referring to Leonídio Ribeiro's 1938 study entitled *Homosexualismo e endocrinologia*, Green argues, for example, that the latter's studies into the racial makeup of homosexuals in 1930s Rio may have been subjected to a possible process of '*de-whitening*' (my emphasis), that is, a conscious or unconscious distortion that involved classifying men as coming from a mixed racial background when they themselves may have identified as white (1999: 75).[69] Green also suggests that the under-representation of white men amongst those classified as 'homosexual' might also have been due to the fact that middle- and upper-class men could more easily avoid arrest (due, presumably, to connections and/or their ability to buy their way out of problematic situations), attesting to the role played by class in the process by which homosexuality was conceptualised and classified in Brazil at the time (ibid.: 74). Certainly the director, in a self-authored piece on the film appearing in Brazilian film journal *Cinemais* in 2003, was keen to underline how class, race and sexuality were all mutually implicating in the film, arguing that 'em nenhum momento a questão racial, sexual ou de classe é a questão central do filme' (181). The protagonist is, in this respect according to Aïnouz, *triply* stigmatised – poor, black and homosexual (ibid.).

In spite of this, however, the film vehemently refuses any discourse of victimisation. Instead, as the narrative unfolds to recount the details leading up to his incarceration in this opening sequence, we witness João Francisco consistently 'imploding' (ibid.) the stereotypes constructed through hegemonic use to relegate him to this position of inferiority alluded to by the voiceover. As the director writes, 'como abordar esse homem tripalmente estigmatizado? Desestigmatizando' (ibid.). On the level of class and race, fundamental here would appear the protagonist's clear identification with the *malandro* figure who, although seemingly 'self-obsessed and concerned, above all, for his own well-being' (Shaw 1999: 8), embodied a transgressive edge that went beyond simple hedonism. Shaw writes:

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[69] The presumption that darker-skinned people were somehow more 'naturally' pre-disposed to sexually deviant behaviour was widespread not just in the medical profession but the legal profession too. Sueann Caulfied, for example, notes in her study of legal disputes between young couples over cases of lost virginity which took place between 1918-40 that, 'a white man had [...] a 20 percent greater chance of escaping indictment for rape if the victim was black, or a 10 percent greater chance if she was *parda* [mixed race], than if she was white' (2000: 179).

> The *malandro* is [...] vehemently opposed to the exploitation of his social class. He challenges any form of manipulation by the state and is thus worshipped by the rest of his community (ibid.: 8).

João Francisco's adoption of a *malandro* identity is underscored not only through his proud proclamation to his friend Laurita (played by Marcélia Cartaxo) that 'nasci pra ter vida do malandro e vou levar rascada!' but also the diegetic use of the famous samba 'Se Você Jurar' (Francisco Alves, Ismael Silva and Nilton Bastos, 1931) at various points in the film, whose lyrics provide a defiant endorsement of the *malandro* lifestyle. In one early scene, João Francisco and Laurita are framed in a medium close-up dancing to the tune as the cross-dressing Tabú (Flávio Buaraqui) looks on from beside the bar. Their mutual repetition of the lyrics 'A mulher é um jogo, difícil de acertar, e o homem como um bobo, não se cansa de jogar', however, is clearly tongue-in-cheek, a fact to which João Francisco's subsequent pursuit of the handsome Renatinho, who enters the rear of the frame, indeed attests. Cutting to the toilets, we then witness João Francisco flirting with the young sailor before stealthily removing the latter's stash of cocaine from his pocket, suggestively licking a small pile off the back of his hand and then blowing the rest in his face. Unsurprisingly, Renatinho is unimpressed by this rather bizarre form of seduction, and after a brief scuffle, João Francisco is forced to return to the bar only to discover Laurita being dragged outside by a drunk, lecherous man demanding her services. Rushing to her assistance, João Francisco quickly restores order and brings the overweight man to the ground with the deft delivery of a spinning *capoeira*[70] kick before turning to Renatinho and purring, 'Tu sabe que foi por você e não por mais ninguém que eu quebrei a cara daquele porco. Foi por esses olhos de madre pérola que eu dei aqueles golpes'.

The way in which João Francisco, here, is somehow able to reconcile the nature of his sexuality alongside poverty and blackness, as a source of pride, might appear somewhat surprising, especially given that he was a self-declared *bicha*. Green writes of the real-life João Francisco:

> Satã was proud of his ability to wield a knife and win a fight, two marks of a *malandro*'s bravery and virility. Yet he openly admitted that he liked to be anally penetrated, a sexual desire that was socially stigmatised and the antithesis of manliness represented by the penetrating knife blade [of the *malandro*] (ibid.: 91).

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[70] *Capoeira* is a mixture of dance and martial art developed by Angolan slaves on Brazil's colonial plantations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where it was performed as clandestine training for slave rebellion and self-defence, and which remains a popular sport/performance art in Brazil today (Shaw 1999: 188).

However, in this respect, João Francisco makes no apology, nor sees any contradiction between these two aspects of his personality, answering defiantly when challenged on the subject by a drunk bar patron in a later scene, 'eu sou bicha e não sou menos de um homem por causa disso não'.[71] Given the longstanding conflation within dominant Brazilian gender ideology (discussed in relation to *Amarelo manga* in Chapter Three) of sexual passivity with effeminacy and concurrently the conception of homosexuality as something contingent on sexual role as opposed to sexual object choice, João Francisco's admission here might be regarded as particularly transgressive in its decoupling of gender and sexuality. So too is the way in which he claims an identity from and takes pride in a term (*bicha* but, more commonly, in his memoirs, *viado*) that continues to have pejorative connotations in Brazilian popular parlance. In this respect, it is easy to see why certain critics (see, for example, Green, ibid.) have drawn parallels between Francisco's story and a discourse of gay liberation, the protagonist, as we learn in the film's epilogue, eventually transcending the social barriers in his path to realise his long-standing dream to become a recognised *artiste* through winning a prize in the 1942 Rio carnival procession. This, of course, renders *Madame Satã* a markedly different proposition from *Amarelo manga*, characterised as it was by an overwhelmingly inability on the part of its protagonists to transcend the status quo and free themselves from the dichotomous straightjackets within which their respective performances of gender and enactments of desire were articulated. As the director informs us, in a statement which sheds light on the source of the film's transnational appeal (despite the specificity of the socio-historical context in which it is set):

> ele é nada típico, porque sempre se fez respeitar. Além de exercitar a liberdade, encontrar prazer e realizar o seu sonho, apesar de todas as adversidades, ele sempre se afirmou como ser humano. E um testemunho bacana de resistência. É um exercício de liberdade não passivo (ibid.: 182).

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[71] The words are taken from his memoirs, in which he elaborates further on the anxiety generated by the adoption of this *bicha* identity and his simultaneous refusal to behave according to the gender norms this implied: 'Eles não se conformavam com a minha valentia porque eu era homosexual conhecido [...] Mas o que devia fazer? Tornar-me um covarde só para satisfazer as pessoas deles? [...] Não, eu não podia me conformar com a situação vexatória que era aquela. E achava que ser bicha era uma coisa que não tinha nada demais (Paezzo 1972: 142).

LAPA: THE 'MONTMARTRE OF THE TROPICS'?

The question necessarily poses itself, however, as to why the specific period of the 1920s and 1930s – a time when same-sex erotic activity was attracting increasing surveillance from the State (see, for example, Green, 1999 or Higgs, 1999) and blacks still struggled for inclusion into the 'Brazilian national family' despite the nascent discourse of 'racial democracy' – should figure as the backdrop for such a story. In answering this question, it is perhaps natural that our attention should first be directed to the film's setting, the neighbourhood of Lapa. Like the principal setting of *Amarelo manga,* Lapa can be regarded as a similarly 'in-between' space and one, which in the era in question, was also produced as a space of exclusion. Located on the immediate periphery of Rio's downtown area, its emergence as one of the city's main red-light districts was perhaps inevitable. As Reckless notes, such edge-of-centre locations lend themselves well to prostitution due to a fruitful source of passing trade and cheap property rentals (quoted in Ribeiro 2002: 45). Lapa's narrow streets and absence of public lighting would have further limited surveillance from the authorities and naturally aided hustling and other illicit activities. It was no surprise, then, that it was here where many *malandros* such as João Francisco could be found. Not only frequently excluded from the workforce but subject also to anti-vagrancy laws which potentially could have had them arrested simply for being on the streets, many Afro-Brazilians, writes Shaw, were literally forced to 'retreat to the shadows' (2007: 89).

Male same-sex prostitution, too, had also always flourished in Lapa for the same reasons as its heterosexual counterpart. Furthermore, the neighbourhood's relative anonymity and abundance of guesthouses and pay-per-hour rooms aided the pursuit of more romatic same-sex (as well as heterosexual) relations which could not be accommodated within mainstream Brazilian life (Green, ibid.: 84). Men who had sex with men were also attracted to the area due to the employment opportunities as cooks and cleaners offered by its many brothels, whose owners deemed them less likely to interfere with the girls working inside than a heterosexual man (ibid: 86). In this sense, the neighbourhood's marginality was also inscribed by its status as the major centre of the city's homoerotic topography, in addition to those areas surrounding Praça Floriano Peixoto, the Passeio Público in Cinelândia and Praça Tiradentes.

With regards to the construction of space in the film and its establishment of Lapa as a space of exclusion, clear parallels can be drawn with *Amarelo manga.* Like

the area of the city of Recife in which Assis's film is set, the neighbourhood is represented as being somehow 'apart' from the rest of the city, despite its relatively central location, with panoramic establishing shots of the city itself (notably those iconic Rio short-cuts such as Pão de Açúcar and Cristo Redentor on Corcovado mountain) largely excluded from the film's cinematic landscape. This has the effect of preventing the viewer from situating the main space of action within the city's wider geography and, in turn, contributes to the impression of a separate, hermetically-sealed 'universe', as the director describes it on the DVD commentary – 'the Republic of Lapa [...] with its own laws, codes and rituals' (ibid.).

The dilapidated house and the alternative domestic setup we see established within it by João Francisco and his two friends, Laurita and the cross-dressing Tabú, both prostitutes, similarly recalls the marginal space of the Texas Hotel in the way that it straddles the *casa/rua* divide discussed by Da Matta (see Chapter Three). In *Madame Satã*, this has less to do with any physical, architectural fluidity established between these two spaces as opposed to the metaphorical infiltration of the *rua* in those moments where the house serves as a site of prostitution. Despite this, however, the director firmly establishes the ensemble as a 'family', with João Francisco effectively fulfilling the roles of surrogate husband and father to Laurita and her illegitimate baby, who also resides with them, and arguably also to Tabú, who is responsible for domestic chores in the house. This impression of domesticity is reinforced in two particular scenes when the characters are depicted on 'family' outings, firstly to the beach and then to the park, the hand-held camera and grainy footage in the case of the latter evoking the feeling that we are watching a 'home movie' (Shaw ibid.: 91). Aïnouz states on the DVD commentary: 'it's a family of choice, not a blood family [...] it's important for people to understand that there are other ways to construct a family' (ibid.). And yet this claim would appear to be undermined by the fact that João Francisco, in typical *malandro* style, also acts as a pimp to Laurita and Tabú, firmly inscribing their 'family home', like the Texas Hotel, as space of enterprise, in turn further undermining its status as *casa*.

As was argued in Chapter Three, if a state of liminality, as Shields indeed suggests, is partly concerned with the production of 'discontinuity in the social fabric [and] in social space' (1991: 83-84), then as well as being a space of exclusion, Lapa resultantly also would appear to take on aspects of the liminal too. Indeed the film's temporality and its visual composition all embody such a sensation of 'discontinuity'.

The story, for example, is recounted through a series of vignettes, depicting moments of the protagonist's life as opposed to submitting to a standard linear narrative. The editing, in turn, tends to cut on many occasions indiscriminately between different locales, often eschewing standard framing devices (exterior establishing shot – medium shot – interior shot). This has the result of further confusing those boundaries between centre/periphery, public/private, interior/exterior which serve as 'ordering' elements within the spatial imagination.

And yet traditionally the perception of Lapa as a liminal space has not merely been concerned with its status as a space of exclusion but, as previously mentioned, for being the centre of 'bohemian' Rio. The period between 1910 and the late 1930s, in particular, are often regarded as the neighbourhood's 'golden age', a time when, as Gasparino Damata writes, 'a Lapa tinha o sabor de um Montmartre caboclo, mistura de Paris requintada e Bahia afro-luso-brasileira' (2007: 22). These words can be found in his volume, *Antologia da Lapa* (2007) which comprises of a selection of poems, essays, short stories and memoirs relating to Lapa whose contributors include a range of cultural producers and commentators such as the journalist Millôr Fernandes, artist Di Cavalcanti, writers Almeida Fischer and Carlos Drummond de Andrade and, of course, Damata himself. Collectively they reveal the extent to which Lapa has burnished itself into the *carioca* cultural and historical memory as a socially eclectic neighbourhood synonymous with music, dancing, drinking, gambling, drug-taking, prostitution and a whole gamut of other 'pleasure seeking' (and illicit) activities. Di Cavalcanti's poem *A mocidade com Jayme Ovalle*, in particular, sums up well the spirit with which the neighbourhood was viewed at the time in which *Madame Satã* is set, aptly evoking this rather schizophrenic combination of high-life and low-life (in Damata, 2007: 52-53).

Nosso tempo! Nosso tempo!
As meninas eram tristes,
As meninas e os rapazes
Pertencíamos à boêmia artística
E não compreendíamos os malefícios que nos cercavam.

Noites cheias de flores mortas
Envolvendo velhos espelhos
Como borboletas de seda
Almofadas de cetim
Alcalóides.

Na Rua do Lavradio

O bar cabaré Passatempo Internacional
Lá se iam os homossexuais assustados
Galgando as escadas intermináveis
Dos grandes sobrados verdes
E as palavras não podem definir
A beleza de Iracema
Cantando a Cumparcita

Aqui na Lapa vive o mundo!

Ó Lapa, o que tu és a grande ópera
Pequim, Chicago e Macau
A Lapa é também tu, Graziela
Que és moça e bela
E tens um riso de rapaz

The comparisons made in the final verse between Lapa and Peking, Chicago and Macau are particularly symptomatic of Rio's internationalist aspirations at the time and the desire amonst the city's progressive classes to transform the city from provincial backwater to global metropole. As Luiz Noronho writes:

> O deslumbramento geral criou uma onda ufanista segundo o qual acreditava-se que era possível construir uma Paris nos trópicos, um núcleo urbano moderno, civilizado, que mira o futuro [...] combinando todos os confortos da vida do século XX com uma paisagem única no mundo (2003: 58).

This manifested itself in a rapid process of modernisation which swept the city, and which partly explains why Lapa was to become more than just another down-at-heel, inner-city neighbourhood. The first of these urban reforms led by the city's mayoral administration under Pereira Passos between 1903-06 and which were born under the slogan 'Rio civiliza-se' (literally, 'Rio is civilising itself') was the *bota-abaixo* (literally 'knocking down'). Here, large areas of downtown Rio were demolished and rebuilt, with many of the city's poor forced into the periphery (ibid.). As Noronho notes, the sanitation of urban space, the construction of wider, more accessible streets, and the widespread introduction of electric lighting, encouraged the development of the city's 'street-life' and nocturnal entertainment (ibid.: 56).

Although the film's art director, Marcos Pedroso, claims that the reforms left much of Lapa in a 'grande processo de deteriorização' (Almeida, 2001: no page) there is evidence to suggest that some parts of the neighbourhood were transformed, particularly through the building of new roads in areas where previously there had only existed slums, junk stores and brothels (de Mattos 2002: 77). Alongside these and the shadier entertainment venues which had always existed in Lapa, in turn opened more

refined establishments. Small business holders, businessmen and politicians, in particular, were attracted to new casinos and cabarets such as the Assírio, the Apollo, the Royal Pigalle and the Casino High-Life (see, for example, Durst, 2005 and Damata, 2007), the latter, incidentally, a feature of *Madame Satã*'s cinematic landscape. Gasparino Damata suggests in this respect, 'a Lapa teve, nessa época, papel de grande importância na vida política nacional [...] o destino da nação palpitava no coração da Lapa' (ibid.: 23). Thus at the time, the terms of Lapa's interstitiality when compared to those of Recife's historic centre were somewhat contrasting. For whilst Recife's historic centre has traditionally been characterised by its neglect and relegation to the periphery of social hierarchies of space in the city, quite the reverse was true in the case of Lapa, which began, in first two decades of the twentieth Century, to re-establish itself as an alternative centre of the city.

With the formalising of prostitution in 1906 and the issuing of *carteiras de meretriz* or prostitution licences, which not only fiscalised the activities of prostitutes but required them to submit to periodic medical examinations (Costa in de Mattos 2002: 78), many of these establishments also functioned as sites for the practice of 'closed' prostitution, consolidating Lapa's reputation as a domain of '*zona*' *meretrício* or 'mid-level' hustling, in contrast to the '*baixo*' *meretrício* or 'low-level' hustling relating to the less salubrious male and female trade found in the city's immediate downtown area (ibid.: 79). In turn, creative types, intellectuals and influential figures from *carioca* (Rio) high society soon added to the *geleia geral* or melting pot, attracted by the opening of 'ateliers' by some of the city's most influential artists from around 1910 (ibid: 78).[72] Noronho writes:

> Na malha desordenada de cabarés, prostíbulos e antros de jogos, a Lapa desta época reunia os dois mundos de uma cidade que começava a se partir. Nas mesas das casas noturnas, já chamadas de cabarés, encontravam-se lado-a-lado intelectuais, artistas em ascensão, artistas em decadência, sambistas, desordeiros de variados graus, jornalistas, policiais, militares, funcionários públicos, comerciantes de variados tamanhos, burgueses, dandies, mocinhas espevitadas vindas dos bairros chiques em busca de aventuras, prostitutas, taxi-girls (...) garconetes e a nata da malandragem (ibid.: 82).

These two divergent sides of the city are starkly reflected in the transition between the film's opening sequence and the scene which follows: cutting from his

[72] The diversity of artists and musicians attracted to Lapa during the 1920s is reflected well in Lúcio Rangel's essay *A Lapa e a música popular* (in Damata, 2007: 80-81), in which he notes having encountered, amongst others, José Barbosa da Silva, Sinhô, Pixinguinha, Bexiguinha, João Mangabeira, Vírgilio Marício, Francisco Alves, Ismael Silva and Nilton Bastos in the district.

bruised and battered face, a close-up subsequently reveals the mesmerised João Francisco peeping through an opulent glass-beaded curtain as he mouths the lyrics of Josephine Baker's iconic song, 'Nuit d'Algers', being performed off-screen. A reverse shot then reveals the singer of the words, the white female cabaret performer, Vitória dos Anjos (Renata Sorrah), performing to an audience in the chic surroundings of the Cabaret Lux, where João Francisco works as her valet.[73] On a metaphorical level, the curtain, in particular, would appear to allude to the social distance that exists between the two characters, with João Francisco here literally relegated to the sidelines. At the same time, however, the porous nature of the curtain, which allows the latter not only to look through, but also be seen and heard, makes nods to Lapa's status at the time, in contrast to Recife's historic centre in *Amarelo Mango*, as a space of potential social mobility, not simply with regards to the influx of a higher-status demographic into the area, but also the empowerment of previously disenfranchised populations. And it is here wherein lies the other aspect of the neighbourhood's liminality and its potential to provide, quoting Shields once again, 'liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performance codes of mundane life' (ibid.: 83-84).[74]

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this 'mobility' was the increased access black samba[75] musicians were being given to the nascent music and radio-broadcasting industries (Medeiros de Carvalho 1980: 25-26), something which this

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[73] It should be noted that the Cabaret Lux is subsequently revealed in a later scene (in which the police attempt to arrest João Francisco for supposedly robbing the establishment) as being located in the area surrounding Praça Onze, and therefore outside the environs commonly understood as pertaining to Lapa. The inclusion of this detail is somewhat puzzling bearing in mind that previous to that, on the level of narrative and/or cinematography, no attempt is made to isolate the nightclub from the principal space of action. Furthermore, Praça Onze had, for much of the 1920s, been the centre of social life for Rio's poor black inhabitants (Shaw 1999: 4) and whilst the *bota abaixo* may have altered the area's demographic, the presence of an upscale club such as the Cabaret Lux might be argued as somewhat incongruous. With regards to the other 'glitzy' venue depicted in the film (the Casino Highlife), João Francisco, Tabú and Laurita's return home from the establishment by the *bondinho* (little tram) across the aquaduct-come-tramway known as the Arcos da Lapa, might, in contrast, be regarded precisely *as* an attempt at creating a certain distance between there and the character's normal space of existence. However, this is negated by the fact that the Casino Highlife is widely cited as being a landmark Lapa institution at the time, whilst it is the highly recognisable atrium of Democraticus, one of the area's most famous samba clubs of recent times, that is used in the preceding scene as the entrance to the fictitious Casino Highlife. This ambiguity perhaps reflects the fact that what does and does not constitute Lapa has always been both highly fluid and subjective, and as Luis Martín's admission implies, less a geographical reality as opposed to a state of mind. In this sense, I have chosen to interpret, along with the majority of critics who have written on the film, both the Cabaret Lux and the Casino Highlife as being Lapa institutions which, bearing in mind my argument which follows, would seem to be a necessary clarification

[74] Speaking about this scene in the 'making of' documentary, Renata Sorrah notes: 'É aquela relação da diva e do camareiro, do fan. Ele acha tudo do universo dela maravilhoso, é o feminino, é a sensibilidade, é a fantasia, é a viagem, as coisas bonitas...ela canta em francês, ela tem perfume, ela tem joias [...] acho isso tudo no imagário do João, é enlouquecedor' (2004).

[75] Nestor de Holanda notes the importance of Lapa in this respect in his book *Memórias do Café Nice: Subterrâneos da Música Popular e da Vida Boêmia do Rio de Janeiro* (1970), writing: 'a Lapa como não podia deixar de ser, está ligada à música popular' (163).

contact between the city's lower and upper echelons afforded within the social microcosm of Lapa and other 'bohemian' neighbourhoods such as Vila Isabel, appears to have facilitated. Bryan McCann writes:

> To a degree unimaginable in earlier decades, intellectuals and popular musicians began to move in the same circles. They did not necessarily see themselves as equals, but parties from each camp knew that they had something to say to each other, across the dividing lines of class and education (2004: 8, but see also Vianna, 1999: 77-92).

The musical partnership between Ismael Silva, a black musician come *malandro* who hailed from the Rio *bairro* of Estácio de Sá, and Francisco (Chico) Alves, one of the most popular light-skinned singers of the era, was one such example, with Alves recording virtually all of Silva's compositions until around 1935 (Shaw 1999: 46). Both are documented to have been regular frequenters of Lapa's cafes and bars, as Nestor Holanda's account of Rio's bohemian underworld in *Memorias do Café Nice* indeed attests (1970: 152-174).[76] Luiz Fernando Medeiros de Carvalho goes as far as saying that Ismael Silva was 'o próprio ser da *mobilidade*: seu comportamento revela uma tentativa de escapar às qualificações desabonadoras sobre o negro' (1980: 37).[77]

Interestingly, both Ismael Silva and Chico Alves are widely regarded to have had a preference for men with regards to affairs of the heart, with the latter indeed being a close friend of dos Santos, something he states in his interview with *O Pasquim* (in Noronho ibid.: 23). Whilst Silva's penchant for gay sex seems to have remained shrouded in silence,[78] Alves, according to Green, seems to have been less discreet and 'didn't even bother to hide the fact that he had had sexual escapades with men in public places,' symptomatic of what he terms the 'lax social environment of

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[76] Other 'white patrons' included Gilberto Freyre, who played an important role in exposing the talents of Sinhô (José Barbosa da Silva, 1888-1930) (Vianna 1999: 79), and Carmen Miranda, who diffused many of the melodies and compositions of Assis Valente and Dorival Caymi (Davis 1999: 140).

[77] This period of Afro-Brazilian cultural effervescence must be placed within the context of President Vargas's nationalising project (1930-1945) which sought to forge economic, cultural, political and racial unity in the country under the rhetoric of *brasilidade* or 'Brazilianess', in particular, the idea of a racially harmonious 'national family'(Davis: 1999). Whilst expressions of black culture had traditionally been repressed in Brazil, the coopting of samba, Afro-Brazilian religions such as *candomblé* and *umbanda*, and *capoeira* into the national cultural repertoire was a powerful tool in Vargas's quest for national and racial integration. Of course, this move was not innocent - by transforming these from ethnically-marked practices to ones which were supposedly 'Brazilian' and symbolic of the whole nation effectively removed what potentially could have been some of the major cultural foundations for the forging of ethnic separatism.

[78] As Shaw notes, there is no mention of homosexuality whatsoever in Maria Thereza Mello Soares's biography of the famous samba composer (2007: 101). However, Ricardo Van Stein's film *Noel: Poeta da Vila* (2007), set around the same time as *Madame Satã*, does make a veiled reference to his (homo)sexual preferences in one scene towards the end of the film. Here, Silva (played by Flavio Buaraquí [Tabú, in *Madame Satã*]) challenges a man who is paying for sex with his sister, the former responding with a [mock?] attempt at seduction. Just as he leans in to kiss Silva, however, the latter shoots him in the crotch, thus endowing the scene with an ambiguous conclusion.

Rio de Janeiro's bohemian quarter' (1999: 85). This is hinted at in an early (aforementioned) scene depicting João Franciso's brazen pursuit of Renatinho, which seems to raise few eyebrows amongst the onlookers in the Danúbio Azul bar. Similarly, a later scene relating to João Francisco's amateur cabaret performance (to be duly discussed below) reveals a pair of male extras comfortably showing affection towards each other in the background and the presence of two women dressed in 'gentlemen's attire', again implying a relative acceptance of homoerotic practices and behaviour which might depart from the dictates of hegemonic gender ideology in this particular social milieu.

In this respect, the particular song which João Francisco performs to in this scene, 'Mulato Bamba' ('Cool Mulatto'), written by Noel Rosa in 1931, is significant. Like 'Se Você Jurar', the thematics of the samba are again centred on the figure of the *malandro*, as the opening lines of the song suggest: 'Esse mulato forte é do Salgueiro, passear no tintureiro é o seu esporte, já nasceu com sorte e desde pirralho, vive às custas do baralho, nunca viu trabalho'. However, as Shaw notes (2007: 96), the song is given an 'ironic twist' when we learn that 'as morenas do lugar vivem a se lamentar por saber que ele não quer se apaixonar por mulher'. 'It seems like this song was written for João Francisco', notes the director in the DVD commentary (ibid.) and certainly Noel Rosa's biographers, João Máximo and Carlos Didier do indeed suggest that he was a source of inspiration for Rosa in the writing of this song (quoted in Shaw ibid.: 98). This is not to say, however, that João Francisco, in terms of his same-sex preferences was in any way an anomaly amongst his fellow *malandros*. Journalist Sérgio Cabral, for example, was left positively stunned when dos Santos revealed to him that two of Rio's other well-known *malandros* at the time – Meia-Noite and Tinguá – were not only *bichas* but also long-term lovers (in Noronho ibid: 29).

DECONSTRUCTING THE MYTH: KARIM AÏZOUZ'S 'ANTI-LAPA'

Superficially, then, *Madame Satã*'s 'liberatory' narrative might appear legible to Lapa's reputation at the time as a 'Tropicalised Montmartre', a notion which the film's title, with its simultaneous connotations of both Parisian chic and sub-equatorial sin, serves as an apt embodiment. Yet, in reality, these aforementioned allusions to Lapa as a sophisticated, 'anything-goes' space of opportunity characterised by some permanently euphoric state of social conviviality are, in fact, cursory and/or frequently debunked in the film. This is symptomatic of the fact that Aïnouz's attempt to

'desmistificar o mito' behind Madame Satã, as he puts it (2003: 181) would necessarily require a similar demystification of the space in which this myth evolved. For as Luis Martíns's reflections make clear, Lapa's 'bohemian' age existed as much as an imagined as a material reality:

> Eu não hesito em afirmar que o prestígio da Lapa na década de 1930 foi, um pouco, promoção nossa, os jovens escritores e artistas que a freqüentávamos. Nós escrevíamos sobre ela artigos, crônicas e reportagens; criávamos assim, a sua tradição, o seu mito e a sua lenda (ibid.: 100).

On an aesthetic level, cinematography, set design and lighting are all fundamental to this process of de-bunking, reflecting the director's concern that the film should feature not as period drama, rather, a 'genealogy' in which Lapa was transformed into a 'personality' in itself (Werneck 2002: 2).[79] As previously mentioned, panoramic establishing shots of the city itself and its most iconic landmarks are, with the notable exception of the Santa Teresa *bondinho* (tram), all excluded from the film's cinematic landscape, diminishing the viewer's ability to situate the main space of action within the city's wider geography. In their place, we see a predominance of medium shots and close-ups in the construction of cinematic space, itself largely corresponding to interior locations – most notably the Danúbio Azul and Cabaret Lux, but more often grubby, low-lit bedrooms, murky stairwells, ominous doorways, fetid bathrooms and other undesirable corners of the neighbourhood. Here, as Garcia notes, the frequent exclusion of the laterals of set space from the image – left, right, front, back, ceiling and floor – has the effect of negating a sense of three dimensionality and diminishing depth of field, often allowing the human body, he continues, to emerge as the principal feature of mise-en-scène (2004: 238-44).

At these points, the director's desire to transform Lapa into a character in itself would appear to be literally fulfilled – skin, hair, sweat and grime almost thrust into the viewer's face, transforming the neighbourhood from a static, purely architectural phenomenon into a living, breathing organism. This is reflected too in director of photography, Walter Carvalho's use of filters – a dirty yellow for scenes of daylight, as if one were 'de ressaca', and a 'suffocating' red for night-time scenes (Carvalho in

[79] An example of a film with such a 'period drama' aesthetic might be Ricardo Van Stein's aforementioned film, *Noel: Poeta da Vila* (2007). Here, a preoccupation with creating an 'authentic' image of the 1920s and 30s Rio is reflected, for example, in the use of old motorcars, faithful reproduction of shop/business facades and the interiors of iconic Rio landmarks and a meticulous attention to detail with regards to fashion and costume. Despite this, however, whether or not the film is as successful as *Madame Satã* in evoking the *spirit* of Rio in this period is, I would argue, debatable.

Werneck, ibid.). The result is what Carvalho has termed an 'anti-Lapa' (ibid.) at odds with the rather more rosy image constructed by the likes of Martíns or Damata.

And it is an anti-Lapa which extends well beyond the aesthetic realm to inform a whole side of the film's narrative. For beneath its mythical façade of *boêmia desenfreada*, cultural intermingling and celebration of all things Afro-Brazilian, the film has no hesitation in revealing racial discrimination and the segregation of blacks and whites to be just as prevalent in the Lapa of that particular era as it was in other parts of Rio. The court transcript which constitutes the aforementioned voiceover in the film's opening sequence, for instance, relates to an incident which actually took place in the 1940s (and not 1932, as the film suggests) in which dos Santos was arrested for disorderly conduct after having been refused entrance to the Cabaret Brasil due to being 'improperly' dressed (Green ibid.: 90). The claim seems unlikely bearing in mind that *malandros* like dos Santos prided themselves on being impeccably turned out. As Moreira da Silva writes, the standard attire consisted of a silk shirt with rhinestones buttons, a white tie, Mexican-heeled shoes, a Panama hat and a fistful of rings, supposedly worn in parody of the middle-classes and posing thus another affront to the established order (quoted in Durst 2007: 13).

A more probable reason for his refused entry was the colour of his skin, the first line of the original report written by the police commissioner reading: 'He is a person of above average height, rather robust and black' (Green, ibid.). Certainly this is the implication in the film, the incident transposed to an earlier period of his life against the backdrop of the Casino Highlife, which João Francisco decides to visit with Laurita and Tabú one evening. A tracking shot follows the smartly-dressed ensemble as they approach the entrance to the Casino Highlife, before we cut to a high-angled shot framing their approach towards the reception area and the waiting doorman. Immediately they are told entry is not permitted, with the doorman stating unapologetically when pressed on the matter by João Francisco that it is 'porque aqui não entra nem puta nem vagabundo'. A fight then ensues (the latter again putting to use his capoeira skills) in which the three are unceremoniously ejected from the establishment onto the street. Significantly, of all the other guests who *do* enter the casino whilst the altercation is taking place, not a single one is black or mulatto, suggesting that João Francisco and Tabú are most definitely 'out of place' in what appears to be an exclusively white establishment.

Yet even before this episode occurs, the film has already firmly dismissed any idea of Lapa being a space of social mobility in which João Francisco's contact with the city's elite via his job at the Cabaret Lux might somehow afford him the prospect of respect, let alone career progression. In one scene, we encounter João Francisco in Vitória dos Anjos's dressing room, enrobed in one of her costumes and mimicking the performance she is concluding on stage. The stunt, however, proves to be a source of incensement rather than flattery and on arriving back at her dressing room, Vitória demands furiously: 'Tu acha que tu é quem? Chega atrasado, fica me imitando desse jeito, vestindo minha roupa. [...] Bem que me avisaram não confia nesse preto. É mais doido que cachorro raivoso'. João Francisco's response to the verbal attack again consists of a physical confrontation, slapping the now shrieking cabaret artiste and shouting at her: 'Nunca mais me trata desse jeito, tá ouvindo? Eu vou fazer uma avenida da tua cara'.

Although Vitória's initial question would appear to be prompted by João Francisco's furtive use of her outfit, the clearly racist overtones which inflect the rest of the tirade suggest that for Vitória the incident goes beyond simple interference with her personal property. For her, João Francisco, if only symbolically, has attempted to cross a line – a line which clearly separates her world from his, and whose transgression constitutes a threat to the privileges she feels she rightfully enjoys due to the colour of her skin. João Francisco, it seems, has neither the right to *aspire* to a better life nor to expect any rewards for his subservience, as the conclusion of the scene suggests. Here, storming out of Vitória's dressing room, the protagonist confronts the owner of the cabaret and demands his wages, which, it would appear, are long overdue. The owner pulls a gun on João Francisco and orders him out of the club, and it is only when the latter deftly produces a knife and holds it to the man's crotch that he eventually gives him the money he is owed.

Both incidents are symptomatic of the ambivalent relationship blacks shared with the Vargas regime's nationalising project. Certainly the government's co-optation of elements of Afro-Brazilian culture, most notably samba but also *capoeira* and *candomblé*[80] and *umbanda*, created the illusion of black inclusion in the Brazilian 'national family' whilst garnering a new sense of Afro-Brazilian pride with regards to

[80] *Candomblé* is another Afro-Brazilian religion (for *Umbanda* see footnote on page 136) that originated amongst slaves taken from the Dahomey and Yoruba regions of what is today south-west Nigeria. It is a syncretic belief system that combines elements of Catholicism and African religions practices, reflecting the associations made by slaves between their own religious figures and the Catholic God and Saints in order to preserve their beliefs in the context of forced conversion to Christianity (Shaw and Dennison 2005: 295).

increased (but still limited) black participation in arenas such music and football. At the same time, however, it also glossed over the historical inequalities which had led to the pauperisation and marginalisation of Afro-Brazilians in the first place (Davis, ibid: 92). In turn, the prevailing discourse of *brasilidade* ensured the maintenance of the status-quo since any attempt to contest the asymmetrical power relations that continued to exist between blacks and white could be dismissed as anti-nationalistic. Significantly, by 1938, the Frente Negra Brasileira had already been banned by the government (Stam 1997: 79), reflecting the more hard-line nationalist stance taken by the regime during the *Estado Novo* (New State) between 1937-1945 (see, for example, Hentschke, 2006: 11-19).[81]

Amidst the film's rather candid and unfavourable representation of race relations in the Lapa of the 1920s and 30s, claims that the neighbourhood might also have figured as some sort of an enclave of tolerance vis-a-vis same-sex erotic practices are, simultaneously seen to be rather tenuous. As Green suggests, despite its 'lax social environment', there was no guarantee that men who sexually desired other men would be immune from hostility or that they automatically felt comfortable in openly expressing their homoerotic preferences whilst circulating the neighbourhood or its environs (ibid.: 84). Indeed there only seems to be evidence of one bar that explicitly catered to Rio's queer population at the time – the Passatempo Internacional on Rua do Lavradio – as cited in Di Calvicanti's aforementioned poem, 'A mocidade com Jayme Ovalle' (ibid.). Discretion, it seems, appears to have been the order the day – with Chico Alves's homoerotic escapades, for example, common knowledge amongst his particular social milieu but *not* a wider audience (Green, ibid.: 85), whilst those pertaining to Ismael Silva were most definitely kept under wraps (Shaw 2007: 103).[82] Dos Santos, of course, refused any such censorship of his behaviour, recalling in his memoirs:

> Mas o que devia fazer? Tornar-me um covarde só para satisfazer as pessoas deles? Deixar que fizessem comigo o que faziam com as outras bichas que viviam apanhando e eram presas todas as semanas só porque os policiais achavam que as bichas deviam apanhar e fazer a limpeza de todos os distritos? E de graça. Não, eu não podia me conformar com a situação vexatória que era

[81] Robert Stam provides a particularly insightful observation into the mechanics behind the ideology of the *democracia racial* in Brazil, writing that: 'the apparent inclusionism of "racial democracy" masks fundamental exclusions from social power. Indeed the phrase "racial democracy" itself encodes a blame-the-victim strategy. If Brazil is democratic, then blacks have only themselves to blame if they do not succeed' (1997: 50).

[82] In this respect Shaw writes that his biography, written by Maria Thereza Lacerda, makes no reference to his sexual orientation 'concentrating instead on his encounter with his alleged illegitimate daughter' (ibid.).

> aquela. E achava que ser bicha era uma coisa que não tinha nada demais [...] (in Paezzo, ibid.: 142).

His fierce repudiation of the abuse routinely meted out to the city's *bichas* is epitomised by his unremorseful shooting dead of a policeman who dared to pass judgement on his sexual orientation, which according to the interview in *O Pasquim*, earned him a prison sentence of twentysix years and sealed his fate of becoming one of the city's most renowned *malandros* (Noronho, ibid.: 18). And it is precisely this crime for which we see João Francisco being incarcerated in the opening sequence, the incident itself recounted in the film's denouement. Here, a medium shot frames João Francisco relaxing after a cabaret performance at the Danúbio Azul, before being confronted by an inebriated man slumped at the bar. In reference to João Francisco's costume the latter inquires, 'Tu tá fantasiado de homem o de mulher?' João Francisco's lack of response prompts a vicious verbal onslaught from the man, who demands:

> Fala, fala? Viado, bicha, sola de merda [...] Tem mais merda na cara do que qualquer meretriz daqui da Lapa! [...] É por causa de um crioulo como você que esse lugar está essa merda.

His retort, 'Eu sou bicha porque eu quero. E não deixo de ser homem por causa disso não' is symptomatic of the fearless manner in which the real-life João Francisco defended his sexual orientation, in particular his refusal to let his preference for passive anal sex be used to question his virility. However, the ultimate outcome of this particular encounter – João Francisco's decision to return to his house, retrieve a loaded gun and shoot the man dead, and which subsequently earns him three decades in jail, can hardly be regarded as entirely 'liberatory'.

Indeed, in a similar manner to the characters of Dunga, Lígia and Kika in *Amarelo Manga*, João Francisco also ultimately seems to wind up internalising the very attitudes he seems to react against. His treatment of Tabú is particularly telling in this respect, at one moment expressing what appears to be a warm, almost sibling-like affection for his transvestite friend, and the next, a deep-seated repulsion manifested in outbursts of physical or verbal abuse towards the latter. In one scene, in what appears to be a well-practiced scam, we see Tabú removing the wallet from the trousers of a man João Francisco has lured back to the house under the pretence of having sex. Just as proceedings are entering full swing, however, the shrieking Tabú bursts into the room alerting them that a police raid is taking place. The man having fled (amidst the

commotion, failing to notice, of course, that he has been pick-pocketed), the two characters reel back in fits of laughter, in apparent mutual appreciation of their ingenuity. The jovial atmosphere, however, is quickly cut short when João Francisco inquires how much money was contained inside the wallet, to which Tabú answers one thousand reais. The former, however, appears not to be in the mood for charity and despite having been short-changed himself by Gregório at the Cabaret Lux, hands Tabú a paltry two hundred reais for his efforts, this now the second occasion in which the latter apparently fails to receive what (s)he is due. Tabú, somewhat understandably, begins to protest, prompting a drastic change of mood in João Francisco, who rasps, 'Essa tua voz miada está me dando um enfado, enjôo, se tu não está satisfeito com meus trato puto, evapora! Toma desenxabida'. Thus whilst João Francisco is apparently self-affirming about his *bicha* identity, his 'pride', it seems, can only be exercised (and, concomitantly, respect received) via a consistent defiance of the principal characteristics associated with this identity – frailty and weakness – and a denigration of those who *do* conform to the stereotype. In the 'Making of' documentary, the director explains the ambivalent relationship between the two characters in the following terms:

> Ele tem uma admiração pela Tabu e tem uma abjeção pela Tabu. Porque Tabu é uma pessoa que tem uma coragem gigantesca de se assumir sexualmente, de se assumir femininamente [...] É uma pessoa que tem corpo biológico de homem e que tem papel social de mulher. Ele admira mas também odeia ela porque ele se vê um pouco no espelho dele meio torto. Porque ela precisa ser tão frágil? Quer dizer ele admira nela a coragem, o que ele detesta nela é a fragilidade (2004).

'BLACK AS BODY'

Of course, internalised homophobia is neither new or unique (and certainly not specific to Brazil) and in many ways these contradictions all contribute to the polyvalent character which the director wished to create, somebody who 'refuses to fall into the trap of being evil or a good guy' (Aïnouz, 2004). And although from one perspective João Francisco's construction of this 'macho *bicha*' identity is, in many respects, fuelled by the same homophobic discourse it would appear to resist, the protagonist's decoupling of sexuality from an albeit still problematic gender identity can itself still be regarded as transgressive. Indeed one might argue that the protagonist's resistance to conform to the behavioural stereotypes of the *bicha* (notably we only see João Francisco fulfilling the penetrative, active role in his sexual encounters witnessed in

the film) despite self-identifying as such, mirrors to some degree the rejection during the 1970s in countries such as the United States and the UK of effeminancy amongst gay man in favour of a highly exaggerated form of masculinity whose valorisation of stocky or muscular builds, facial hair and 'butch' attire (leather, construction boots, military-style clothing, lumber-jack shirts and so on) at times verged on the parodic.[83] Yet, as Foster notes in his discussion of *La virgen de los sicarios*, it was not merely a hyper-masculine corporal aesthetic which was reclaimed by the early (pre-AIDS) gay movement in the US and its international variants but also the physical expression of one's sexuality through an 'unbridled promiscuity of abundant sexual experience' which celebrated the erotic possibilities of male same-sex activities and, in clear difference to the past, their enjoyment in an open and guilt-free manner (2003: 71). For Foster, this eroticisation of the (queer) body is symptomatic of what he terms one of the 'clichés' that defined the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s – 'Eros or Death'. This implied that to live without Eros – that is the combination of love and sexuality understood to constitute a complete and fulfilling erotic life – was akin to death, if not literally, then metaphorically through an 'emotional starvation' of the soul (ibid.). And it is a formula, he continues, that is customarily attributed to Herbert Marcuse and his 1955 *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, which itself echoes Freud's 1930 essay *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Both essays regard the modernist project of civilisation as one which has been intimately bound up with an inversely proportional process of de-eroticisation with regards to human relations (ibid.) Foster writes:

> For Freud it meant recognising that civilisation was necessarily going to produce malcontents, who in turn would then not have any reason to support the project of civilisation, resulting in suffering for them and a problem for society. For Marcuse it meant being able to turn away from the stifling effects of civilisation, to overcome the death threat inherent in civilisation, and to reinvest in an erotic life that could allow one to live a fully human life, overcoming the deadly consequences of dehumanising civilisation (ibid.)

The 'Eros or Death' formula can therefore be regarded as being of some relevance to *Madame Satã* bearing in mind the aforementioned modernising fervour that was gripping Rio during the early twentieth century and which was attempting to design 'order' back into Rio's central zone which, as Higgs puts it, had traditionally been perceived as 'crowded, promiscuous and other' (ibid.: 147). The civilising project, as

[83] For cinematic accounts of gay life in the UK during the 1970s see Ron Peck's *Nigh Hawks* (1981) and his later documentary on the making of the film *Strip Jack Naked (Night Hawks 2)* released in 1991.

previously mentioned, had only partially affected Lapa and a clear tension is established in the film between the gentrified but more regulated spaces pertaining to the Casino Highlife and the Cabaret Lux and the defiantly down-at-heal Danúbio Azul bar, where the protagonists often socialise. The latter is produced most definitely as a sexualised space not just of prostitution (Laurita appears to use the place to find potential clients) but more romantic intimate encounters, and it is here, of course, where João Francisco first audaciously pursues Renatinho before inviting him back to the (relative) privacy of his apartment, the location of further trysts between the two characters as the film progresses. One of the remarkable features of *Madame Satã* is the latent eroticism which pervades the representation of these encounters, which in clear contrast to those which take place between Fernando and his lovers in *La virgen de los sicarios,* crackle with sexual energy, desire and, most importantly enjoyment, a representation which defies shame or censure and is highly affirming of their same-sex erotic preferences. The fluid, mobile camera work, in particular, is reminiscent of the sort employed in *Un año sin amor* and embodies the sensuality of the encounters. The use of close-ups and extreme close-ups, in turn, visually embraces the contact of male body on male body, their interlocking mouths, in particular, often occupying the frame to clearly convey the sensation of intimacy between the two men. This can be juxtaposed with the relative discomfort and self-revulsion expressed by some of the partners in João Francisco's other liaisons, in one scene the protagonist having to farsically adopt the fictional persona of a black woman called 'Josefa' before the man in question yields to his advances.

To come back to the sex scenes involving Renatinho and João Francisco, however, what is particularly significant here is the nuanced depiction of black skin. Carvalho's intimate style of cinematography not only conveys to the viewer a real sense of skin texture, but more importantly skin colour, with João Francisco's body positively glowing amidst the murky shadows of his dimly-lit room, despite the natural reflectivity of Renatinho's white skin. This was enhanced by the use of the bleach by-pass technique in the processing of the negative, allowing the tonal spectrum of the image to be broadened thus revealing, according to Aïnouz, not only different shades of 'browness' but also the 'goldness of browness' (2004). In this sense not only does the film reclaim same-sex erotic practice as a gratifying expression of what is presented as a legitimate desire between two men but also, in defiance of its traditional perception as being ugly, dirty and something to be avoided or hidden from view,

celebrates 'blackness' as something beautiful that might (as in Renatinho's case) be enjoyed from the other side of the racial divide.

Indeed the manner of corporal representation adopted in these scenes is symptomatic of the privileged place the image of the 'black body' enjoys within the wider film text with the conventional establishing and re-establishing shot, normally used to situate and resituate the body within space, frequently replaced with direct cuts to extreme close-ups of parts or surfaces of João Francisco's body. On these occasions the protagonist effectively *becomes* the landscaping or establishing shot, something epitomised in one scene depicting one of their 'family outings' to the beach, identifiable as *praia vermelha* in Urca. Here we cut from the water where they have been swimming to a close-up of João Francisco's upper torso, which fills the screen, the outline of his shoulder and arm exactly matching that relating to the lower section of Sugar Loaf Mountain visible in the background. Beyond its establishment as an object of beauty, then, the black body is also quite literally foregrounded as an integral part of the *carioca* landscape, thus simultaneously reversing its traditional exclusion from the official Brazilian national imagery, of which the prevalent policy at the time of *embranquecimento*, of course, was so representative.

And yet despite being reclaimed as a source of pride and self-expression in the film, the black body still nevertheless remains a highly ambivalent site which can never quite disentangle itself from the prevailing ideologies which traditionally have relegated it to such a marginalised position in the first place. Certainly its looming presence in the film is symptomatic, as the director explains, of it being 'a única coisa, objectivamente, que ele tem' (2003: 181), and in the absence of official politicised emancipatory discourses relating to gender, sexuality and race, his primary instrument of self-assertion. Thus, unsurprisingly, beyond the erotic realm where the sexual encounter of the black body with other (in particular, lighter-skinned male bodies) constitutes a potent act of sexual defiance, it also offers the protagonist his most effective means of resistance with regards to the societal discrimination and prejudice which surrounds him. And certainly those instances of physical resistance to which we are privy in the film would seem indicative of somebody who was 'sempre se afirmando e nunca se deixou abater' (ibid.: 179). However, this (over)emphasis on João Francisco's physicality in the film is arguably problematic in so far as it necessarily subscribes to what Charles Johnson has termed the notion of 'black-as-body' that is, the way blacks, when subjected to the white person's gaze, are drained of

a physical interiority and instead reduced to a solely bodily existence (1994: 123, 129). Here, he writes, the problem is not diminished by the customary strategies for escaping it, rather 'the black body [...] is still susceptible to whatever meanings the white gaze assigns to it' (ibid: 132). Recalling his unease when entering a predominantly white bar in Manhattan, he elaborates in the following terms:

> I am *seen*. But, as a black, seen as stained body, as physicality, basically opaque to others [...] Their look, an intending beam focusing my way, suddenly realises something larval in me. My world is epidermalised, collapsed like a house of cards into the stained encasement of my skin. My subjectivity is turned inside out like a shirtcuff (ibid: 122).

Johnson's account echoes that of Frantz Fanon, who in *Black Skin, White Masks* (originally published in 1952) wrote one of the most influential accounts of black subjectivity, mobilising psychoanalytic theory to explain this heightened sense of physical self-awareness and/or inferiority engendered through the presence of the black body in a white world. For Fanon, 'the Negro symbolises the biological', with muscular strength and/or latent sexual potency cited by the white man as redeeming features in the face of his supposedly limited intellectual capacities. The black body, in this sense, is invoked as a space onto which the white man projects his own insecurities – physical frailty and a lack of sexual potency – symbolising 'an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license [and] orgiastic excess' (1968: 167). And yet, as Fanon continues, the expression 'a handsome Negro' is simultaneously enveloped by 'the imaginary reek of rape and pillage' reflecting its concurrent status as a symbol of biological danger, 'a phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety' (ibid.: 151, 165). He writes: '*Negro* brought forth biology, penis, strong, athletic, potent, boxer, Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Senegalese troops, savage, animal, devil, sin' (ibid.: 66).

The eventual outcomes of João Francisco's acts of resistance in the film, beyond the preservation of his personal honour, can only tenuously be cited as 'personal victories' over barriers of class, race or sexuality. The first act of defiance, for example, fails to secure either João Francisco or his friends' entry to the Casino Highlife, instead resulting in their rather humiliating ejection from the establishment. The second two, in turn, whilst they do indeed illicit some degree of temporary justice for João Francisco – at the Cabaret Lux he is able to extract the wages he is due, whilst the patron at the Danúbio Azul pays for his insolence with his life – ultimately both are punished by the authorities with lengthy jail sentences. Here, blackness and criminal deviance, it would seem, can be regarded as mutually fulfilling prophecies. Afflicted

with the 'stain of blackness', the expression of physical and libidinal potency remains João Francisco's only means of self-affirmation, yet without a 'reasoning' mind to control such 'animal' instincts, this expression necessarily requires greater regulation and control than that pertaining to a white person, with his eventual punishment, in turn, serving as convenient 'proof' of the 'inherent' nature of his degeneracy. As Fanon laments, 'it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me' (ibid: 134).

QUEER TRANSCENDENCE AND THE CARNIVALESQUE

In the context of the above discussion, the question necessarily begs as to where the force of the film's 'liberatory' narrative really lies. The shackles of poverty, race and sexuality on many levels would appear to weigh as heavily on João Francisco's shoulders in 'bohemian' Lapa as anywhere else, the neighbourhood offering little protection from the punishing hand of the State. Similarly whilst the director suggests that João Francisco's body is his 'fortress' (2003: 181), something clearly celebrated in the film's manner of corporal representation, it is a fortress in which ultimately he appears to be imprisoned. Blackness, as Fanon reminds us, is a 'fact' which exists in the world of the white man (ibid.: 134). Yet, João Francisco, of course, does indeed fulfil his dream of becoming a recognised *artiste*, with the film's epilogue, in this sense, offering the protagonist a final reprieve from the injustices suffered in the preceding narrative. Here, we see the exuberantly costumed João Francisco, framed in an out-of-focus shot, dancing frenetically on a carnival float against the backdrop of diegetic samba music, a postscript informing us:

> Em janeiro de 1942, após cumprir pena de dez anos, João Francisco dos Santos é posto em liberdade. No carnaval do mesmo ano, ganha o concurso do bloco caçadores de veados com a fantasia Madame Satã, inspirada no filme 'Madam Satan' de Cecil B. De Mille.

And it is precisely here, amidst this discourse of the carnivalesque where the answer to the above question arguably can be found. Although the pre-Lenten Brazilian celebration of *carnaval* has had a long line of scholarly observers, Da Matta perhaps remains as one of the most influential, himself greatly influenced by Bakhtin's account of carnival celebration in medieval Europe (previously discussed in relation to *Amarelo Manga*'s 'grotesque' elements on pages 131-22). For Da Matta, *carnaval* is essentially a festival of the 'periphery', enacted by and for the destitute of society, a ritual of 'forgetting' in which everyday reality – with its hierarchies, restrictions and

obligations – are inverted or dissolved to create a 'special' space *outside* the space of the *casa* and *above* the space of the *rua* (1979: 94). Here the sufferings of the real world are banished and instead sexual transgression, tomfoolery, parody, the grotesque, the absurd, the high and the low all merge to project 'multiple visions of social reality' (ibid: 95). It is a moment *out of time*, the arduous passage of everyday life replaced by a 'cronologia cósmica' in which the earth and not official institutions (government, army, church and so on) reigns supreme (ibid: 43). As Nancy Scheper-Hughes writes, for Da Matta, 'the ideology of *carnaval* hints at a brave new world, a world of pleasures and many different freedoms' (1992: 481). And whilst, as my previous discussion has underscored, João Francisco is, for the majority of the film, constantly *reminded* of his socially marginalised status, there are moments of 'rupture' in the film's narrative, where the *dia-a-dia* implodes into a temporary space of carnivalesque liminality in which João Francisco is permitted to forget and, if only temporarily, construct his own reality, his own vision of this 'brave new world'.

His cabaret performances, which he organises at the Danúbio Azul are, in this respect, perhaps most significant. These arguably constitute a last-ditch attempt to salvage his dream and finally secure applause from his public, the possibility of career progression in Lapa's professional cabaret circuit having been effectively curtailed through his altercation at the Cabaret Lux and resultant prison sentence. Perhaps the first remarkable feature of these performances is the way in which they are depicted on screen. Whilst the cinematic gaze in other scenes, as we have seen, might be argued to have objectified, or to use Johnson's phraseology, 'epidermalised' its subject, quite the opposite is true here. Cross-cutting between successions of extreme close-ups revealing his mouth, eyes, shoulder, torso, arms, legs and so on, and reverse shots of the crowded bar's jostling clientele, the protagonist's body is effectively deconstructed and fragmented in cinematic space in these scenes, suggesting (temporary) reprieve from his corporal incarceration and the pursuit of alternative identities.

The first of these manifests itself in the form of Jamaci, 'a formosa feiticeira da floresta', whose costume, in clear defiance of the boundaries erected between valet and star at the Cabaret Lux, recalls the costume worn by Vitória in her Arabian Nights routine, a classic case of carnivalesque inversion one might argue. The name of the personality, and the song to which he performs, endow this latest incarnation, however, with a distinctly Brazilian twist, symptomatic of his anthropophagous consumption of new ideas. The notion of hybridity is further reinforced by specific wardrobe decisions,

with the director choosing to leave the actor's bare torso on show, so its toned, muscular contours contrast with the delicacy of the beads and fabric of which his costume is composed (see DVD commentary, 2004). As Da Matta writes, the carnivalesque body is one which simultaneously exhibits male and female aspects, 'é um corpo que "chama" o outro' (ibid: 109).

The performance, though, ultimately proves to be a rather sombre and nostalgic affair, a necessary process of 'looking back' – a mourning not only of Renatinho's death but also of opportunities lost, for which Vitória's stage personality serves as such an emphatic reminder. João Francisco's subsequent metamorphosis into the 'Mulata de Balagoché' in his second stage appearance is an altogether contrasting proposition, eschewing this discourse of inversion for a distinctly upbeat, intra-subjective dialogue. In this respect, the combination of sequined headdress, sarong-style skirt and frenetic, 'tribal' dancing in this performance seems clearly inspired, as Shaw notes, by Josephine Baker's 'mix of flapper girl and African tribal princess' (2007: 96) encountered in one scene by João Francisco at the cinema to see *Princess Tam-Tam* (T. Gréville, 1935).[84] Here Baker plays Aouina, a Bedouine beggar girl, who is 'discovered' by French novelist Max de Mirecourt (played by Albert Préjean) on his travels through North Africa. Enchanted by the young girl, he decides to bring her back to the *métropole* to be 'tamed and civilised' (Jules-Rosette, ibid.), introducing her to Parisian high society as Princess Parador. Aouina performs the role with admirable aplomb until one night, however, when 'instinct' gets the better of her, prompting a spontaneous performance of tribal dancing at a high-society soirée. The diegetic inclusion of this particular scene in *Madame Satã* is fleeting, yet the series of cross-cuts between Baker's frantic performance of the Charleston and the Conga and the image of João Francisco's mesmerised face are enough to clearly cement the latter's identification with the actress before him. Here, in what perhaps might be described, to borrow Williams' terminology, as 'an intra-diasporic gaze of recognition' (2006: 8), João Francisco's idealisation of Vitória finally appears to melt away with the sight of this inspiring emblem of black mobility celebrating so unapologetically her African

[84] Aside from Vitória's rendition of Baker's 'Nuit d'Algers' in the scene immediately preceding the film's opening sequence, there are also several other references to Baker in the film. Renatinho, for instance, remarks on the presence of a poster depicting the star in João Francisco's room asking if he is a 'fan'. In another scene the latter, whilst seducing the policeman in the wallet-robbing incident, asks if the man concerned has heard of Josephine Baker before leading his hand towards 'Josefa's' thighs, which, of course, are his own.

roots.[85] Of course, this 'celebration', as Sharpley-Whiting notes, was articulated often via a clear exploitation of French exoticist fantasies (1999: 107), which arguably did little to challenge colonial roles, resulting often in their reinforcement. Writing of *Princess Tam-Tam* (1935), Jules-Rosette remarks: 'It is a perfect example of Bhabha's notion of doubling [...] all stereotypes are intact, and order is imposed on the chaos of primal dreams and drives' (2007: 102).[86]

Yet this is something of which João Francisco seems perfectly aware, his second cabaret appearance, with its wildly overemphatic body movements,[87] perilous oscillations between the high and low melodic octaves of Noel Rosa's song 'Mulato Bamba' and incorporation of spinning dance moves evocative of the rituals of the Afro-Brazilian religion *candomblé*, simultaneously parodying, domesticating and queering Baker's performance of blackness. As Bhabha argues (quoted in the introduction to this chapter):

> The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorised power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be *reinscribed* [my emphasis] through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority' (ibid.).

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[85] Williams uses this term in reference to Baker's stage-managed encounter with the mixed-race *teatro de revista* star, Cortes, on the former's visit to Rio 1929. This she situates within the context of Brazil's participation in the transnational flows of people and ideas that has characterised the shared culture of the Black Atlantic .

[86] It is easy to see why Baker would have served as such a powerful icon for João Francisco. One of the great symbols of the Harlem Renaissance, Baker (1906-75), like João Francisco, was similarly of African origin and from a predictably humble background; she also began her career as a valet, tending to the costumes of the blues singer Clara Smith between 1920-21 (Wintz & Finkleman 2004: 91). And although early career breaks came in the form of chorus line singing with vaudeville troops and Broadway appearances, it was really in Paris, where she emigrated in 1925, where she made her name. Her appearance in the *Dance Sauvage* with Alex Joe as part of the revue show *La Revue Nègre*, in particular, is widely regarded as her 'catapult' to fame (ibid: 93). As well as her stage career, she also starred in a series of films in the 1920s and 1930s (though these did not garner as much critical recognition as her theatrical appearances), was a published novelist and, somewhat curiously, fought for the French resistance during the Second World War, being rewarded for her efforts by General Charles de Gaulle with a Croix de Lorraine in 1945 (ibid.). In addition, Baker dedicated much of her life to promoting social justice, racial equality and human rights, clinging tirelessly to a utopian ideal of a multicultural society, despite often being dubbed a 'political reactionary' (Jules-Rosette 2007: 92). In Brazil, she became a household name first appearing on stage at the Teatro Cassino in 1929, and returning on numerous occasions, most notably in 1939 for her performance of 'O que é que a baiana tem?' at the Casino da Urca and appearing alongside the Afro-Brazilian comic performer Grande Otelo (Shaw 2011: 94).

[86] In this respect, as well Baker's style of dancing in *Princesse Tam-Tam*, a clear dialogue also exists between his performance and the ceremony which accompanies the ordination of religious leaders of Candomblé (*pais-de-santo or mães de santo*) whereby existing priestesses dance frenetically to the sound of *atabuque* drums and chanting in African languages until the new *pai / mãe de santo* falls into a trance (Shaw and Dennison, ibid.: 296).

And it is precisely the idea of 'contradictoriness' that I wish to argue is key here in João Francisco's passage of carnivalesque transcendence to 'um outro lugar' (Aïnouz 2003: 182) at these moments in the film. For whilst one might regard, as previously suggested, the aforementioned diegetic inclusion of Noel Rosa's samba 'Mulato Bamba' in this particular sequence as pointing to a *reconciliation* of João Francisco's *malandro* and *bicha* identities, the cinematic dismembering and subsequent reassembling of João Francisco's body in these scenes, in fact, alludes to hybridity not as the sum of fixed parts, rather a constant state of ephemerality produced through a continual slippage of competing and contrasting identities. As the director writes, one of his most fascinating characteristics is his constant capacity for 'self-reinvention' and the way in which he

> sempre criava curtos-circuitos nas definições: quando diziam que era preto aparecia como viado, quando diziam que era viado aparecia como pobre – era sempre outra coisa (ibid.).

From this account, therefore, resistance in the case of João Francisco appears overwhelmingly as a strategy of discursive avoidance, *the inability* to be defined. And it is here, in this overtly queer discourse, where the force of *Madame Satã*'s liberatory narrative can be found. For what is significant about João Francisco's deconstructive performances is how they reject the notion of the 'true self' as a singular unified force and, subsequently, any pretentions to a personal oppositional politics that attempts to replace supposedly false ideologies with non-normative truths, or as Foucault puts it 'a single locus of great Refusal...or pure law of the Revolutionary' (1979: 95-6). Rather, by mobilising a performative strategy that operates outside the symbiotic dyads of oppression and emancipation, João Francisco, if only temporarily, escapes the strategic field of power relations that shapes our society, creating as Garcia puts it, 'um novo/outro' discurso, diferente do sistema [que] ultrapassa a dimensão estabelecida pelo cânone' (ibid: 241).

CONCLUSION: ON THE EDGE OF LIBERATION

Like *Amarelo manga, Madame Satã* demonstrates, then, albeit in somewhat contrasting ways to the former, the highly ambiguous nature of 'in-between' or interstitial spaces with regards to the production of non-heternormative sexualities and the opportunities they may or may not afford for the construction of accompanying cultures and identities. As we have seen, the Lapa constructed in Aïnouz's film, on a superficial level, might appear broadly legible to its mythical status at the time as 'The

Montmatre of the Tropics' – a bohemian, 'anything-goes' space of liminality and potential empowerment in which João Francisco might be able to achieve social mobility whilst reconciling both with himself and those around him his multiple and often conflicting identies – *bicha,* father, artiste, *malandro* and so on. However, as my analysis demonstrates, amidst the anti-Lapa which subsequently emerges in the film, the obstacles in João Francisco's path appear almost as insurmountable here as in any other part of the city. In this respect, as argued above, it is within the film's carnivalesque elements and the subsequent emergence from these of an overtly queer discourse where the force of the film's liberatory narrative is to be found.

This latter conjecture is, of course, not entirely uncontroversial. Carnival has certainly had its fair share of detractors, with a number of critics submitting the ritual to a rather less sanguine reading than that afforded to it by Da Matta, whose account is privileged in my reading of the film here. Goldstein and Scheper-Hughes both, for example, find the claims of liberatory and transgressive possibility – carnival as 'utopia social', as Da Matta himself puts it (1991: 232), inherently problematic. Goldstein in this respect states:

> Carnival is only four days and five nights out of an entire year, and one's place in society is more likely to be determined by one's gender, class, race and sexuality than it is by one's experience of Carnival. This latter perspective does not place much political hope in the liberatory aspects of Carnival, instead perceiving it as more politically ambiguous (2003: 32-33).

Indeed Scheper-Hughes, rather more pointedly, suggests that the ritual abandon and process of forgetting by which carnival is defined would not be needed 'if there were not monstrous things that needed to be banished and forgotten' in the first place (ibid.: 480). Her argument is important because it suggests that carnival, as one of Brazil's most resonant expressions of national identity, far from being in any way exterior to systems of power and privilege is an accomplice to them, always relying on the maintenance of the status quo to ensure its continued enactment. During the celebrations societal roles and expectations are turned on their head, but only temporarily and always in jest, never posing any serious challenge to existing hierarchies, which soon return to their normal, everyday alignment. Thus whilst the protagonist's eventual achievement of his dream to become a recognised *artiste* recounted in the film's epilogue constitutes a 'sweetener' in the face of a multitude of previously disclosed misfortunes, his 'triumphant' crowning as 'carnival queen' is also indicative of simultaneous embracing of a hegemonic system that continues to oppress

and exploit him. And yet it is precisely through these limitations that the film, albeit inadvertently, makes a very valid point: that the 'racial democracy' and Brazil's supposedly licentious attitude towards sexuality are still today little more than fleeting realities for the majority of blacks and queers whose often centre-stage position in these pre-Lenten festivities is quickly exchanged on their conclusion for what is an ongoing and daily struggle against racism and homophobia. The director in this respect recalls:

> Durante a pesquisa, encontrei uma foto de 1928 de uma mulher negra, com filhos, sentada em uma calçada do centro da cidade. A foto poderia ter sido tirada no ano 2000. Muita coisa mudou de lá para cá, mas muita coisa não mudou, e a exclusão social [...] é uma delas [...] uma maneira de falar do contemporâneo é lembrar a história (ibid.: 183).[88]

Queer theory too has come under fire for failing to live up to its claims of transgressivity. Its rejection of a liberationist agenda driven by a universal goal of sexual 'freedom' and focus on the ephemeral, unstable and contingent nature of subjectivity, social relations, power and knowledge may on one level appear radical. But as Steven Seidman points out, this is accompanied by a conspicuous silence from theorists about exactly what kinds of politics and/or ethics it is promoting (quoted in Sullivan 2003: 47). Enigmatic calls for fluidity, ambiguity, indefinability are all very well, he argues, but if this is *all* Queer theory is then the question remains as to whether it can ever exist as anything but an 'anarchistic social ideal' (ibid.). Certainly the necessarily transient and ephemeral nature of João Francisco's transcendence renders problematic the director's aforementioned objective to 'de-mystify' the protagonist. For the construction of what the director of photography Walter Carvalho terms a 'uma realidade desfocada' (in Werneck, ibid.), causes João Francisco to melt once again back into mythical oblivion, the queer fragmentation of narrative and (body) image, in particular, arguably precluding the translation of the legend surrounding *Madame Satã* into a palpable historical reality. Again, however, from another perspective, it is precisely this vaguearity on which the film's claimed universality depends, the protagonist's tale sufficiently grounded in its socio-historical context to be legible to and resonant with Brazilians, yet malleable enough for international audiences to adapt the film's narratives to their own personal experiences.

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[88] For sociological discussion of racism and homophobia in Brazil see, for example, France Winndance Twine's *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* (1998) and Luiz Mott's *Violação dos direitos humanos e assassinatos de homossexuais no Brasil* (2000), respectively.

Of course, it is not just the nature of its production, distribution and reception that makes this a transnational film *par excellence* – for as we have seen, music and performance amidst its (re)presentation of the 'Montmartre of the Tropics' clearly display a wealth of foreign cultural influences. However, as my analysis has shown, the valorisation of what is white and European which, prior to the 1930s, had informed the national discourses produced by Brazil's metropolitan political elite, is conspicuous through its absence in *Madame Satã*. Rather the dialogue established between João Francisco and Josephine Baker and their shared 'intradiasporic gaze of recognition' (Williams, ibid.) underlines the fact that as Rio orientated itself towards Paris in its quest to join the 'civilised world', marginalised groups in Lapa, Harlem and Montmartre were establishing their own dialogues and disrupting and diverting supposedly uni-directional flows of modernising ideologies and ideas from 'centre' to 'periphery'. In this sense, even before the postmodern era and the much discussed growth of supraterritorial space, *Madame Satã* shows the notion of the 'metropolitan centre' was already somewhat precarious and significantly destabilised by the productive potential of in-between spaces.

Certainly from the perspective of (homo)sexuality, the film would seem to endorse the opinion of some historians, sociologists and anthropologists that a homoerotic subculture of men who transcended the active/passive binary to enjoy multiple sexual experiences and whilst also being rather self-affirming about their sexual preferences, has been a longstanding phenomenon in Brazil and one which existed *prior* to the introduction of Western European medical ideas of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century. Luiz Mott, for example, takes particular issue with the social constructionist perspective pursued by Foucault, and formulating the essentialist side of the debate, argues that as far back as the sixteenth century, 'we can notice the emergence of a gay subculture in the New World' with colonial Brazil being no exception (2003: 168). Writing in the context of Pernambuco, he points, for example, to the existence of two types of homosexual existence in this period pertaining to the 'explicit' *fanchonos* and *tibiras*, and the 'closeted' sodomites. Both categories, he writes, 'behaved with a clear code of conduct, engaged in intra-group communication and used distinctive signs of external identification and specific strategies of social survival', which he regards as the necessary elements 'for the anthropological characterisation of the concept of a sub-culture' (ibid.: 192). From this perspective, then, whilst the 'Global Gay' has often been understood as an entirely contemporary

(and 'foreign') phenomenon issuing from North Atlantic domains, João Francisco's experience of homosexual identity and community might more readily be attributed to a specifically Brazilian history of sexuality. This seems to be the opinion of James Green, who broadly concurring with Mott's perspective, suggests that the post-Stonewall cultural changes of the late 1960s and 1970s merely provided a social context for multiple representations to coexist and even to develop *new* space or values in what was, in fact, a *pre-existing* subculture (ibid.).

CONCLUSION

Queer Urban Geographies: A Polycentric View

This thesis begins as an investigation into the relationship between urban space and dissident sexuality as represented in recent examples of Latin American cinema. The General Introduction suggested that viewed through a bi-directional lens, an account of the cinema/city/sexuality relationship might serve to disrupt the binary divisions through which the world, in particular geographies of sexuality, has often been viewed, and render them less presumably indestructible. It also suggested that such an account might aid in the decentring of recent accounts of cinematic urbanism by challenging their heterocentrism and relocating them into a majority-world domain, as well as critically intervening into debates taking place within the spheres of film studies, cultural geography, sexuality politics and urban studies. I argued the terrain of these debates to be complex and confusing, characterised by divergent and often contradictory discursive trajectories. From a theoretical point of view, I stated my discussion would negotiate a cautious path between these opposing perspectives. This implied countering the universalisms of globalising sexual discourses without capitulating to a solely subaltern discourse whereby urban dissident sexualities became equated merely with victimhood and passivity whilst also remaining cognisant of the limits of 'productive possibility' and consistently suspicious of terms such as 'transgression', 'freedom' and 'liberation'. In this sense, in terms of my methodological approach, I argued that what would predominate might most readily be described as a *queer*, Foucauldian perspective, which understood sexuality as a form of power and knowledge, and resistance as a plural phenomenon that always exists in relation, and never in a position of exteriority to, hegemonic power structures. The question necessarily arises, then, as to how the intervening discussion and its subsequent development might be surmised and related back to these broad general aims, something to which this concluding discussion will now turn.

METROPOLITAN CENTRES: SPACES OF (DE)REGULATION

The main body of my discussion began in Part One, entitled 'Metropolitan Centres'. This focussed on cinematic mediations of two diverse metropolitan centres, namely Buenos Aires and Medellín as they were imagined in *Un año sin amor* and *La virgen de los sicarios* respectively, exploring, in particular, how these cities were

(de)constructed as centres of regulation with regards to dissident sexualities, bodies and desires. Chapter One began by suggesting that *Un año sin amor*'s representation of spaces pertaining to a globally-orientated gay culture affirmed the relationship between capitalism and gay identity discussed in the General Introduction, in particular, the logic by which capital accumulation in the urban land market is seen as encouraging the dismantling of the 'closet' in space (see Knopp, 1992, or Bell and Binnie, 1995). This highly commodified form of gay culture and its construction of what Duggan terms 'a new homonormativity' (2002: 79) I read as being particularly symbolic of Argentina's flexible, no-barriers approach to investment during the 1990s and a 'neoliberal sexual politics'

> that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (Duggan, ibid.).

Interestingly, whilst political economic perspectives have been at pains to emphasise the relationship between capitalism and gay identity and accompanying issues of economic disenfranchisement in order to challenge the assumption that the discrimination of gay men and lesbians is merely 'cultural' (see, for example, Binnie, 2003), the narrative of 'exclusion' in *Un año sin amor* relates more readily, I suggested, to the protagonist's HIV-positive status and the sense of alienation this engenders within the sanitised, 'non-threatening' spaces pertaining to this homonormative gay culture. In this respect, the film opens up an alternative perspective on the globalisation of dissident sexualities by exploring how the production of global gay identity is simultaneously destabilised in its encounter with the 'first true cosmopolitan' (Haver 1996: 7).

And yet I argued that if capitalism seeks, as Champagne suggests, to 'manage gay identity in its own interests' (1999: 150), then *Un año sin amor* shows how the same can be said for the HIV-positive identity which replaces it. In this respect, society's disciplinary mechanisms which appear so diffuse amidst the spaces of metropolitan gay culture, reassert themselves once again, this time through medical intervention. Here the queer body is once again subjected to regulation and control through the '[profitable] optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls' (Foucault 1979: 139). Attempting, however, to overcome a reductionist account of the 'Global Gay' which viewed commodified

homosexual experience and its manifestation in urban space as emerging only in function to capitalism, I then considered to what extent the practice of S/M pertains in Berneri's film to an 'alternative' space in which the erotic appropriation of these subjugating mechanisms on the part of the protagonist emerges as a strategy to negate and disqualify them. In this respect, whilst the cinematic mapping of S/M space along with costume and mise-en-scène establishes it, on one level, as being 'other', this is mitigated in the film, I argued, by its highly commodified nature, which renders it, those of mainstream culture, as an 'espacio[s] restringido[s] para los ganadores de la sociedad' (Filc 2003: 184). The production of S/M space, in turn, appears in the film as necessarily dependent on its successful integration into the very global 'network society' that, as Manuel Castells argues, has now come to define late capitalist development and modernity (2010) something we might initially presume it would strive to resist. In this sense, engaging with Michael Brown's (queer) mobilisation of Harvey's notion of the 'spatial fix' I argued it to be a 'closet space' which although *appearing* antithetical to the more explicit and visual productions of homonormative gay spaces, emerged in the film as a material production of heteronormativity which functionally enables the commodification of homosexual relations to occur whilst efficiently maintaining the traditional heterosexual coding of the urban landscape (Brown 2000: 56). To quote Noyes again, 'once the technologies of control become the object of erotic attachment, who is to say whether control is subverted by eroticism or whether eroticism is reintegrated into control?' (1997: 14).

Chapter Two took this discussion forward, shifting from the globalised neoliberal urban cinematic landscape of Buenos Aires to that of the 'alternative' global city that emergences in Barbet Schroeder's *La virgen de los sicarios*, considering what kind of impact Medellín's globally-integrated criminal economy is imagined to have in the film on the production of dissident sexualities in urban space. Drawing again on Brown's notion of 'closet space', I began by considering the party which marks the opening sequence of the film, arguing that the apartment in which it unfolds pertains to a secret, hidden and concealed space which enables same-sex desire to be successfully (and spatially) commodified for profit. Here the dynamic between the *sicarios* and their older guests seemingly corresponds to the 'traditional', 'non-metropolitan' model typically associated with Latin America, the heterosexuality of the former essentially remaining unquestioned due to their (supposed) fulfilment of the active role in the sexual act and the fact they are paid for their services. I contrasted this with the

dynamic informing Fernando and Alexis's relationship, arguing that in spite of their class and generational differences, their mutual perception of same-sex erotic practice as the expression of a distinct identity and indicative of a more metropolitan and egalitarian understanding of things.

In this respect, I argued the spatial mapping of their relationship within the urban landscape to be significant, the oppressive 'closet-like' space of their initial encounter subsequently 'opened out' through the use of (public) exterior settings where formerly their romance might have appeared, quite literally, 'out of place'. I read this as indicative of a wider process of urban socio-spatial realignment imaged in the film whereby previously distinct social groupings and accompanying cultural models are dehermeticised through illegal transnational flows of capital pertaining to the global narcotics trade and submarkets of contract killing. Redeploying D'Emilio and Knopps's theories relating to capitalism and gay identity, I argued that it is Alexis's profession as a *sicario* which allows him to reclaim his sexuality as a lived identity and construct a personal life around his erotic/emotional attraction to members of his own sex due to increased financial independence and subsequently, increased ability to exist independently of family structures.

My analysis of Schroeder's film also revealed the limits of these perspectives in a majority world context, in particular, suggestions such as those made by Knopp, that capital accumulation might serve to 'encourage queer consciousness and/or politics' (Knopp 1995: 155). In this respect, amidst the economy of urban violence imaged by the film whereby life itself is reduced to the status of a mere commodity, I argued existence to be so ephemeral and death so inevitable that the issues of preserving human rights, raising political consciousness, building communities, celebrating shared identity and even investing in one's own personal relationships were largely redundant. And yet, in counterpoint to my reading of *Un año sin amor*, I stated that in no way does capitalism win out in Schroeder's film. For whereas the rise of capitalism and the industrialised city have largely, according to Foucault, been contingent on 'the calculated management of life' in the form of 'bio-power' (1979: 141), the growth of Medellín's economy appears in this film as being contingent on precisely the opposite process – an investment in death and the complete *devaluation* of life. In this sense, I argued, it is a city which is literally 'growing itself to death'.

Collectively then, the chapters comprising Part One, suggest that the metropolitan centres imagined in these particular films are sites of both regulation and

deregulation with regards to the production of dissident sexualities and associated spaces. In this respect, both films certainly affirm the relationship between urban capital accumulation (both in its legitimate and illicit forms) and metropolitan models of sexuality according to which the queer body appears firmly integrated into 'systems of efficient and economic controls', as Foucault terms it (1979: 139). Of course, *Un año sin amor* suggests, in this respect, that the practice of S/M might serve as a means of challenging this regulation, by using, to borrow Quiroga's phraseology, 'the tools of capitalism to undermine its repressive paradigms' (2000: 12). However, as we have seen, any such potential appears mitigated by the highly commodified nature of this sexual subculture and its (over)reliance on capitalist dynamics for its production and survival. And yet, the film's allusions to the trans-local/national dimensions of both S/M and homonormative gay culture simultaneously draw our attention to the way in which the whole notion of the metropolis as a *centre* of capital has become increasingly problematic in the contemporary era. As David Harvey has famously argued, the phenomenon of 'time-space compression' and the highly mobile flows of capital this has facilitated means that the supposedly 'solid values' implanted under Fordism have become increasingly supplanted by 'more flexible modes of accumulation' which tend to emphasise the 'fleeing, the ephemeral [and] the fugitive' over regulation (171). As *La virgen de los sicarios* demonstrates, this is no less true of the global narcotics economy, with the strategies of cartels such as the Medellín cartel, according to Castells, constituting: 'a peculiar adaptation of IMF-inspired export-orientated growth policies toward the actual ability of some Latin American economies to compete in the high-technology environment of the new global economy' (2000: 176).

METROPOLITAN MARGINS: SPACES OF (DIS)INTEGRATION

Having explored the (de)construction of metropolitan spaces of dissident sexuality in these two particular films, Part Three progressed to consider 'marginal' sexualised spaces, which although near to the 'centre' of things, have traditionally been positioned 'on the edge' of cultural systems of space due to their status as social, if not physical, peripheries. Focussing on filmic depictions of Recife and Rio de Janeiro as they appear in Cláudio Assis's *Amarelo Manga* (2003) and Karim Aïnouz's *Madame Satã* (2002), respectively, the two comprising chapters considered the correlations established in these films between the physical or metaphorical distance of their

respective settings from the 'centre' and their accompanying representations of gender and sexuality. Seemingly removed from the influence of the medical, legal and political institutions responsible for the production and regulation of sexualities and sexual discourse, I reflected, in particular, on the suggestion that such spaces, to quote Phillips and Watts, may be sites where 'sexual subjects may be least stable and hegemonic sexualities most open to challenge' (2000: 1-2). I also sought to reveal how these films challenge the perception that the sexual 'margins' exist solely as sexual hinterlands that have been 'left behind' by the more presumably 'modern' and progressive metropolitan centre.

Mobilising Roberto Da Matta's account of the Brazilian spatial imagination, Chapter Three began by considering how the setting of *Amarelo Manga* is (superficially) constructed as a carnivalesque space of liminality where the boundaries between *rua* and *casa* dissolve into chaotic site of 'imprevistos, acidentes e paixões' (Da Matta 1979: 70). In this respect, the constant visual and verbal allusions made to Renato Carneiro Campos's poem *Tempo amarelo* pointed, I argued, not only to the physical and social decay of Recife's historic centre but also the erosion and breakdown of patriarchal heteronormativity. On one level, this is reflected by the film's representation of shifting gender roles, with female (identified) characters such as Dunga, Lígia and Daysey assuming the management of local businesses, in particular those pertaining to the film's two principal spaces of narrative action: the Bar Avenida and Texas Hotel respectively. This, I suggested, was symptomatic of the changing nature of gendered participation in the northeastern labour market discussed by Linda-Anne Rebhun, whereby the upwards trend in female employment and financial independence emerged as being inversely symmetrical to the phenomenon of increased male underemployment (1999: 119). On another level, this erosion and breakdown manifests itself in the latent culture of sexual proclivity present within these settings. Deploying Cresswell and Kristeva's respective notions of 'dirt', I explored, in particular, how Recife's decaying historic centre is constructed as a space which, morally, has been 'pushed beyond a boundary to its other side, its margin' (Kristeva in Cresswell, 1996: 39). In this respect, having been distanced, on a spatial level, from the film's principal settings for much of the film, I suggested the subsequent (sexual) transformation we see in Kika in the final scenes to be symbolic of a space in which the characters are seemingly 'liberado em seus desejos' (Carvalho 2004: n.p.).

My discussion, however, subsequently went on to problematise this conjecture. In this respect I argued that despite these allusions to a liminal space of 'sexual anarchy', the performance of gender and enactment of desire, like other facets of life in *Amarelo manga*, are ultimately driven by the same drudgerous circularity. Lígia, Kika and Dunga might appear to commit 'transgressive' acts of sexual 'subversion' which are 'exceptions' to the norm, but they do this according to a simple inversion of an already firmly established hierarchy in which human beings are divided, to repeat Goldstein's phraseology, into 'eaters' and 'those who are eaten' (ibid: 122). And yet my analysis resisted reading the latent corresponding presence of misogyny and homophobia as, to draw on Quiroga's phraseology, 'remnants of an atavistic past' (2000: 13). Rather, I argued that the highly exaggerated form of machismo exercised by characters such as Isaac, Wellington and Rabecão, far from being 'traditional', can, in actual fact, be linked to the rather more modern phenomenon of increased feminine participation in both the formal and informal labour markets.

Chapter Four moved back in time to consider the representation of another 'in-between' space pertaining to the neighbourhood of Lapa as it is imagined in a 1930s context in *Madame Satã*. Engaging, in particular, with Homi Bhabha's (re)conceptualisation of the interstices, my discussion here considered how this particular space is produced in the film as a porous and productive domain of 'overlap' between diverse urban social groups, and asked to what extent the 'in-between' is resultantly produced as a space of empowerment for the protagonist in light of his exclusion from the 'legitimate' culture of the majority. As in the preceding chapters, my analysis remained suspicious of such emancipatory potential, arguing that the 'anti-Lapa' constructed by the director in the film firmly deconstructs the neighbourhood's reputation within *carioca* historical and cultural memory as a supposedly bohemian space of tolerance with regards to ethnic and sexual minorities. Engaging with the ideas of Charles Johnson and Franz Fanon, I took this conjecture forward, suggesting that whilst the black body is reclaimed as a source of pride and (sexual) self-expression in the film, the constant emphasis placed on João Francisco's physicality nevertheless renders it a highly ambivalent site which can never quite disentangle itself from the prevailing ideologies which have traditionally relegated it to such a marginalised position in the first place. Afflicted with the 'stain of blackness', the expression of physical and libidinal potency apparently remain João Francisco's only means of self-affirmation, meaning that whilst his body is celebrated as his 'fortress', 'a única coisa

que ele objetivamente tem' (Aïnouz 2003: 181), it is ultimately, I argued, one in which he is imprisoned.

However, I suggested that by viewing the overtly carnivalesque discourse which informs João Francisco's cabaret performances through a queer lens the liberatory potential of the film's narrative might indeed be reclaimed. Focussing, in particular, on his rather unorthodox performance of Noel Rosa's song 'Mulato Bamba', I argued the cinematic dismembering and subsequent reassembling of his body in these scenes to allude to hybridity not as the sum of fixed parts, but rather a constant state of ephemerality produced through a constant slippage of competing and contrasting identities. From this account, therefore, resistance in the case of João Francisco appears overwhelmingly as a strategy of discursive avoidance, *the inability* to be defined in which, to quote Aïnouz, 'sempre criava curtos-circuitos nas definições' (ibid.: 183).

Although the temporal setting of this particular film perhaps appeared somewhat anomalous to those of the other three films whose narratives all unfold in the contemporary era, the inclusion of *Madame Satã* and its location in the final chapter of the thesis was a deliberate strategy which allowed for a retrospective questioning of the assumptions and certainties relating to the production of dissident sexualities and urban spaces in Latin America that the preceding chapters had already been at pains to destabilise. In this respect, I argued that whilst the 'Global Gay' has often been understood as an entirely contemporary (and 'foreign') phenomenon issuing from North Atlantic domains, the protagonist's experience of homosexual identity and community might more readily be attributed to a specifically Brazilian history of sexuality envisaged by the likes of James Green and Luiz Mott, according to which gay subcultures in Brazil have been a long-standing phenomenon that existed prior to the introduction of Western medical ideas of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century.

The respective settings of *Amarelo manga* and *Madame Satã,* then, might most readily be described as spaces of both desintegration and integration. Both, as previously stated, pertain to 'marginal' sexualised spaces, which although near to the 'centre' of things, have traditionally been positioned 'on the edge' of cultural systems of space due to their status as social, if not physical, peripheries. This marginality is alluded to through the sense of 'separation' engendered by the spatial mapping of such spaces within their wider celluloid landscapes as well as the visual overtures made on

the level of mise-en-scène to physical disintegration and decay. And yet we can also attribute to these marginal spaces a simultaneous process of *reintegration.* With regards to *Amarelo manga*, for example, the inversion of gender hierarchies and resultant expressions of misogyny and homophobia may indeed be read as symptomatic of shifts in the local labour market. However, such shifts cannot be divorced from wider, globalised processes of economic restructuring and deregulation, which as Sassen argues, have been responsible for the increasingly informal nature of these local markets (2004: 172). Similarly, the representations we see in *Madame Satã* may be related to localised productions of dissident sexualities and Brazil's own 'history of sexuality', as I indeed suggest. However, the 'intradiasporic gaze of recognition' (Williams: ibid.) existent between João Francisco and Josephine Baker, this enigmatic figure who provides such inspiration for the protagonist in his queer cabaret performances, also alludes to the *trans*-local dimension of these productions, caught up in the dialogues being established between marginalised groups in Lapa, Harlem and Montmartre at the time.

RECLAIMING QUEER

My reading of these four films, then, as suggested in the General Introduction, argues their respective cinematic landscapes to be marked by what are specifically *queer* urban geographies, in the Foucauldian sense of the word. Here, power emerges not as an inherently repressive force, rather productive in nature, flowing through networks of interconnected relations as opposed to one particular individual or group. In this respect, my analysis proposes the metropolitan centres envisaged in *Un año sin amor* and *La virgen de los sicarios* as sites where dissident sexualities are *enabled*, though largely *in function* to a highly decentred globalised capitalist economy characterised by a multiplicity of actors and benefactors. In turn, by showing the extent to which, despite their appearance of 'exclusion', metropolitan margins are caught up in wider political, economic and cultural flows, my readings of *Amarelo manga* and *Madame Satã* problematise the conception of such spaces as 'alternative' sites of sexual empowerment and self-expression. Here acts of 'subversion' or 'resistance' appear as relative phenomena that, as Foucault suggests, exist *within* the strategic field of power relations to which they play the role both of 'adversary' *and* 'target and support' (1980: 95-86). From this perspective, the whole notion of 'dissident' sexualities

becomes problematic, for no matter where they are located, they can never entirely assume an exterior position to these relations them.

The question necessarily poses itself, then, as to how far this perspective really takes us. The conclusion to Chapter Four touched upon some of the perceived limits of queer theory and criticisms that its focus on the ephemeral, unstable and contingent nature of subjectivity, social relations, power and knowledge is accompanied by a distinct lack of clarity as to what kinds of politics and/or ethics it is attempting, if at all, to promote (Seidman in Sullivan 2003: 47). Denis Altman, in this respect, argues that in its 'desire to deconstruct all fixed points in the interest of "destabilising" and "decentring" our preconceptions', queer theory winds up having little relevance 'to the vast majority of people whose lives it purports to describe' (1996: n.p.). I would wholly challenge this conjecture. Queer theory and politics emerged precisely as a response to the sense of dissatisfaction felt by 'real' people towards the unitary visions of gay liberation espoused from the late 1970s, constructed around a utopian (but hardly realistic) vision of 'liberated bodies and unrepressed psychic drives' (Reynolds 2002: 70), from which women, people of colour, the disabled and those suffering from AIDS, amongst others, were frequently excluded. As we have seen, the films examined in this thesis certainly resist subscribing to any such ideals but neither do they construct an entirely dystopian vision of the relationship between cities and dissident sexualities. Rather, the queer urban geographies which emerge are characterised simultaneously by pleasure and pain, empowerment and submission, fulfilment and disappointment, affection and violence, community and estrangement, and all the other ambiguous and contradictory experiences that constitute 'real life', not just as it is played out within cities, but within all domains.

In this respect, Altman is perhaps rather more forgiving, suggesting that 'queer' is 'an enormously useful term for aesthetic criticism' in that it may 'unsettle assumptions and preconceptions about sexuality and gender and their interrelationship' (ibid.: n.p.). And yet implicitly here, he seems to position representation and accompanying criticism *merely* as an issue of aesthetics as opposed to politics or ethics. It is here where my discussion returns to one of the founding propositions made in the General Introduction – that is, that the spatial imagination matters and has far-reaching effects. I argued that imagined geographies of sexuality have, in particular, often been conceived of through highly problematic distinctions between broad global regions. Whilst in the past, Latin America, Africa and Asia had featured as 'porno-

tropics for the European imagination' (McClintock 1995: 22), more recently, I suggested, they have been drawn as 'cartographically dark continent[s]', to borrow Quiroga's phraseology (2000: 13), in need of 'liberation' from the international gay and lesbian lobby. I argued John Scagliotti's *Coming Out in the Developing World* (2003) to be, in this respect, a particularly patronising documentary which simplistically reads events in the 'developing world' merely as developments of those occurring in the 'West' and which largely ignores the more 'discrete', 'elliptical' but no less effective, forms of *local* activism and politics occurring in these domains. In this sense the film's insistence on the 'spread' of a universal globalised form of gay identity and culture only serves to reinforce, rather than challenge, oppositions between centre and periphery, us and them, rich and poor, modern and traditional, included and excluded, empowered and marginalised, the West and the Rest. My analysis of the films in question through the course of this thesis, and the process of *relocation* in which it has engaged, shows that such oppositions are, and always have been, largely untenable. Without exception, urban dissident sexualities emerge in these films not as self-contained phenomena produced in isolation to each other and the world outside, but ones firmly imbricated into the trans-local and/or national flows of capital, cultures and ideologies for which cities have always constituted primary disseminative nodes. Furthermore, my analysis draws attention to the fact that these flows have never issued solely from one domain and been uni-directional in nature.

POSTSCRIPT: ABOVE, BELOW AND BEYOND THE EQUATOR

With this in mind, the original point of departure for this thesis – that is, the use of the split-screen in *Dependencia Sexual* which I suggested embodied the dividing line between, to quote Parker once more, 'two discrete moral universes, north and south of the equator' (Parker 1999: 1) – might now be revisited with more clarity. For one of the twists in Bellott's tale is that Tyler, the supposed embodiment of the progressive form of heterosexual masculinity promoted by the RIGO BoSD advertising campaign, turns out, in fact, to be gay, though not openly so. Whilst other students such as Jeremiah live out their sexuality in the open, 'coming out of the closet' is a luxury which, bearing in mind his professional and extra-curricular pursuits (he is also a college football player) Tyler feels he can ill afford. Homosexual experience, for him, is limited at best to swift, anonymous encounters around the university campus or, more frequently, furtive glances at other men through the steam of the locker room. He

finds himself constantly torn between his sexual urges on the one hand, and the demands placed on his masculinity by his profession and the sport he so enjoys on the other. It is the latter which normally wins out, life reduced to a tiring performance in which the façade of heterosexuality must be maintained. And for all its pretence of inclusivity, campus LGBT activism is something from which Tyler feels wholly estranged, cutting short his one brief attendance at the sexuality 'workshop' led by Jeremiah, which he views from the back of the room. Here the politics of unproblematised visibility peddled by Jeremiah and his happy helpers with their simplistic calls to 'come out, come out, wherever you are' fail wholeheartedly to engage with Tyler's predicament, only serving to reinforce as opposed to mitigate his sense of alienation. And so life continues for Tyler with his overwhelming day-to-day experience being one of repression in which feelings must be kept in check.

The consequences, as we discover in the film's harrowing final scene, ultimately are far-reaching. After an alcohol-fuelled night on the town, a group of young male students are seen walking home through a university car-park. On their way they meet Choco, a Bolivian exchange student, whose story forms the narrative bridge between the film's two respective settings. 'Who's this bitch?' we hear one of the men demanding. 'Do you want to dance with a white boy?' he continues, the only response from Choco coming in the form of his desperate panting as he attempts to walk away through the endless rows of parked cars. He is, however, eventually surrounded and quickly finds himself being unceremoniously slammed onto the bonnet of a nearby car. His trousers are then pulled down before he is systematically gang-raped by the some of the men concerned, each taking turns in penetrating him. Significantly, one of his principle assailants turns out to be Tyler, the blond, blue-eyed demi-God who appeared as the absolute antithesis of the transvestite-abusing young men encountered in the Bolivian section of the film but who here is rendered virtually inseparable. And so, as the two screens begin to cut between images of these events unfolding in the U.S. and those occurring back in Bolivia, the discriminatory violence so overt in Santa Cruz is revealed as being equally present within the confines of Ithaca College. Here, perhaps, it is better suppressed, its expression limited to the highly codified rituals of the American football game, yet the consequences of this suppression, as we see in this particular scene, are equally as destructive.

Ultimately then, the dividing line between the two screens that is so characteristic of this particular film, alludes not so much, as previously suggested, to

contradictions, but, as the director states, the '*dualities* [my emphasis] inherent within contemporary social experience' (2003: n.p.). In this respect, this thesis does indeed respond to Altman's call for queer theory and criticism to be more attuned to processes of 'economic and cultural globalisation' with regards to the proliferation of gay identity and lifestyle (1996: n.p.), though perhaps not in the way in which he envisages. For whilst Altman seems to understand 'global queering' as a (imperialistic) process of homogenisation issuing principally from North American domains, my analysis not only draws attention to the diversity of urban dissident sexual cultures as they are emerging in regions such as Latin America, but also, through this framing discussion of *Dependencia sexual*, in the 'core' countries in which, supposedly, they first began. Here, commercial gay culture and identity politics may serve as attractive propositions for many men and women, but others may wholly disidentify with them, feeling equally 'foreign' within a gay bar of a LGBT centre as a Bolivian, Colombian or any other Latin American national. As Richard Parker suggests, in order to avoid operating in a simplistic, bi-polar framework, we need to recognise 'the complexities and inconsistencies of an *overarching* model [my emphasis]' (1999: 8). This highlights not only the value of the polycentric form of queer analysis embodied in this thesis on the level of aesthetics, but also as a critical device capable of intervening in, and taking forward, explicitly political debates.

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Princesse Tam Tam (Edmond T Gréville, France, 1935).

Rio (Carlos Saldanha, USA, 2011).

Rio, 40 Graus (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Brazil, 1955).

Rio the Magnificent (MGM, USA, 1934).

Rio, Zona Norte (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Brazil, 1957).

Ronda nocturna (Edgardo Cozarinsky, Argentina/France, 2005).

Run Lola Run (Tom Twyker, Germany, 1998).

La sortie des usines (Louis Lumière, France, 1895).

Strip Jack Naked (Night Hawks 2) (Ron Peck, United Kingdom, 1991).

Tan de repente (Diego Lerman, Argentina/Netherlands, 2002)

Texas Hotel (Cláudio Assis, Brazil, 1999).

Tiempo de revancha (Adolfo Aristarain, Argentina, 1981).

Vagón fumador (Veronika Chen, Argentina, 2001).

Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo (Karim Aïnouz & Marcelo Gomes, Brazil, 2009)

Vidas secas (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Brazil, 1964).

La virgen de los sicarios (Barbet Schroeder, Colombia/France/Spain, 2000).

Wild Orchid (Zalman King, USA, 1990).

XXY (Lucía Puenzo, Argentina/Spain/France, 2005).

Television Series

Cartas de amor en cassette (Claudio Ferrari / Gabriel Fullone, Argentina, 1993).

Como pan caliente (Jorge Maestro / Gastón Pesacq, Argentina, 1996).

Queer As Folk (Sarah Harding / Charles McDougall, UK, 1999/2000).

Verdad / Consecuencia (Daniel Barone, Argentina, 1996).

Zona de riesgo 2: Atendida por sus propios dueños (Alberto Ure / Guillermo Íbalo, Argentina, 1992).