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DISRUPTING THE (POST) NEOLIBERAL ORDER IN LATIN AMERICA THROUGH THE REPRESENTATION OF FICTIONAL CORPORATE OFFICE NARRATIVES IN ARGENTINA AND MEXICO (2007-2010)

Juliana Todescan
University of New Mexico

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Juliana Todescan

Candidate

Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Kimberle López, Chairperson

Miguel López

Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez

Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott

**DISRUPTING THE (POST) NEOLIBERAL ORDER IN LATIN
AMERICA THROUGH THE REPRESENTATION OF
FICTIONAL CORPORATE OFFICE NARRATIVES IN
ARGENTINA AND MEXICO (2007-2010)**

JULIANA TODESCAN

B.A., Spanish, John Brown University, 2008

B.S., Psychology, John Brown University, 2008

M.A., Spanish Literature, 2012

DISSERTATION

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Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this manuscript to the people who love what they do, and to those who are
frightened to do what they love.

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I would like to *salute* the following people for making this dissertation possible:

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By

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ABSTRACT

Due to the expansion of the neoliberal and global order in Latin America in the 1990s, national states and citizens are subjected to the free market interests regulated and managed by *for profit* corporations and the financial industry. Considering this a critical change in the social organization of Latin America, I compare narratives from Argentina and Mexico that imagine cosmopolitan cities being colonized by the corporate logic of profit. My analysis focuses on the representation of low level office workers in Antonio Ortuño's novel *Recursos humanos* (2007), Guillermo Saccomanno's novel *El oficinista* (2010), and Aníbal Jarkowski's *El trabajo* (2007), and on dystopian representations of a corporate future in three narratives by Bernardo Fernández (Bef): *Ladrón de sueños* (2008), *Gel Azul* (2009) and *El estruendo del silencio* (2009). As a result, I develop the concept of *corp(us) logic* as a literary corpus that represents a dystopian corporate office setting that disrupts the legitimization of the (post) neoliberal doctrine in Latin America in the early 2000s. While these narratives may not offer solutions, they do point to root causes of social problems, showing how the

neoliberal state that empowers corporations also reproduces 1) the disposability of the workers; 2) underemployment, hostile work environments, unfair wages and reduced benefits with diminished opportunities for union representation; 3) limited forms of individual or collective resistance; 4) an oligarchy of rich white men; and 5) an increase in social anomie that may lead to micro and/or macro forms of aggression toward the self and/or others.

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INTRODUCTION

Luis Estrada's film *Un mundo maravilloso* (2006) by Bandido Films is set in Mexico City "en un futuro no muy lejano" in "un país en el que todo era ¡maravilloso!" (00:00:50) due to the influences of "globalization and the free market" (00:01:41). In the film, the Minister of Economy (Antonio Serrano) is giving a speech at the Palacio Nacional for the 4th *World Conference against Poverty* led by an alliance between the World Bank and Mexico. At the conference, the Minister speaks in English: "Today in Mexico there are no more hungry people. There are no more children without education, without social care. There is not a man, a single man without a roof and without a job. Again, I want to thank you all and God bless you" (00:02:15). The speech's similarity to an American President suggests a standardization of the United States' business culture, embodied by the economist Milton Friedman, over Mexico's social and political organization with little regard for the local government. In this wonderful world, the Palacio Nacional de México is in a faraway land completely isolated from its usual place, *El Zócalo* at the center of Mexico City. Instead of the national palace, the plaza is taken over by the *Secretaría de Economía* (Ministry of Economy) and corporate banks demonstrating a city structured by multinationals and private institutions instead of the state.

The Minister's speech is quickly dismantled by the appearance of the homeless including the protagonist, Juan Pérez (Damián Alcázar) standing on the front lawn of a subdivision home watching a middle class family eat and stay warm by the fireplace while he is freezing outside wishing he had a warm place to spend the night. It is important to notice that Louis Armstrong's performance of *What a Wonderful World* (1968) is playing in the

background as a clear reference to the title of the movie. The song is contrapuntal to the metropolis divided into pockets of wealth and streets of extreme poverty. The downtown is dominated by pristine buildings that reflect the sunlight and give a modern look while the poor are criminalized and relegated to the dark alleys or are hiding in the sewers like rats. The social inequality presented through the *pícaro* character Juan Pérez shows that Mexico City has been *restratified* (Bauman, *Globalization*, 1998) into a global city (Sassen, 1991) to reinforce a privileged consumer experience (García Canclini, 2001; Lehnen, 2013). The Minister pushes for laws to interdict homelessness instead of providing solutions for root causes of poverty, such as the defunding of social programs, public education budget cuts, labor deregulation, and family disintegration because of these policies. Instead of thinking of poverty as a systemic issue, the Minister decides to criminalize poverty by turning it into a personal responsibility.

The movie underscores that in this global city, the poor are ‘in’ society but are “clearly not ‘of’ the society” (Bauman, *Collateral Damage* 3) when they are pushed to the margins of society, into the sewers or to jail. Normally, civil society takes over in areas that are neglected or overwhelming for the state to take care of, and helping the poor is usually one of civil society’s social responsibilities. However, in the film, the criminalization of poverty increases a culture of intolerance toward the poor. For example, when Juan attempts to find shelter, he is rejected by most sectors of society, including the Catholic Church even when he was contemplating suicide. Instead, of helping Juan, the priest punishes him with a beating and blames him for the church’s lack of “clientela” (01:37:00).

At some point Estrada’s ironic wonderful world shifts from Juan the homeless to the world of employment opportunities. Juan wants to marry Rosita (Cecilia Suárez), but she

says he needs to find a job first. Without any skills or education, Juan joins a long line of males of all ages, dressed in suits, waiting to be interviewed for a janitor position. Juan asks the *caballero* in front of him if he is applying for the same job. The *caballero* confirms and replies: “cinco años en la Universidad donde más bien en el extranjero, y mire más donde vine a acabar. Tengo cinco hijos y mi esposa está enferma y ya tengo un año sin chamba todo por culpa de este pinche gobierno” (00:21:54). The *caballero* is a man in his forties who feels like his life investments led him to this depressing moment, sitting in the same line as Juan. In this contradictory situation, the face of poverty in front of the *caballero* inspires an emotion of contempt and anger towards what seems to be a rational projection of his future homelessness. Before either of the characters could be interviewed, the job position was filled, and hopelessly they walk away in opposite directions feeling equally insecure, but individually oppressed.

In this near future, there is a world not only of unemployment but of underemployment that increases the anxiety and shatters the dreams of the educated middle class now competing for low to semi-skilled labor. The criminalization of poverty, the intolerance among social classes expressed in the movie, the oligarchy of rich white people ruling the world’s economy, and the precariousness of employment shows what Ludwig Huber proposes as a society that focuses on the “capitalismo ultimativo [...] que ya no respeta las demarcaciones y los límites de sus predecesores, fuesen estos, límites de tradición, de religión, de moral, de cultura, de comunidades locales o, como se ha visto, de estado-nación” (12).

The institutionalization of dehumanization, replaceability and disposability of people due to neoliberalism and globalization represented in Estrada’s film, shows a certain

representation of melancholy, resentment, and disappointment that may turn into physical forms of violence or extreme forms of apathy and/or frustration and disillusionment with the neoliberal doctrine and globalization. The movie loops back to the Minister and Juan's outcome in the wonderful world. It is Christmas time, and the Minister wins the Nobel Prize for Economics—alluding to the economist Milton Friedman in 1976—for his *theory* “Globalization and Free Market. Tools of Social Justice for How to Get Rid of the Poor”. Because of his theory, the Minister is promoted to the presidency of the World Bank where he will deploy his theory worldwide. At the same time, Juan and his young son are watching the Minister receive his award from inside the same house where Juan was standing alone on the front lawn at the beginning of the movie, except that for this time Juan, his family, and his homeless friends invaded the family's home, and ran the family out. After Rosita brings out the turkey to the table, Juan proposes a toast where he says “más vale un día como ricos que una vida de pobres” (01:50:08). The fairy tale ends with a symbolic bitter taste as violence takes the place of the traditional happy ending. Like all fairy tales, *Un mundo maravilloso* presents a moral lesson which is that neoliberal logic is an oppressive mechanism that reinforces disposability and replaceability of workers and dehumanization of non-consumers.

The lack of social responsibility by the state, the financial institutions, and by civil society parallels the social injustice and violence suggesting that a coherent political and ethical global community is elusive. Estrada's cultural perspective would agree with Zygmunt Bauman's view on globalization that politics of “deregulation, liberalization, flexibility, increasing fluidity, and transactions on the financial real estate and the labour markets [...]” have serious consequences on human social organization, interaction, and

stability (1998, 69). Aligned with Bauman, Noam Chomsky articulates that neoliberal and global practices of marketization stabilize and maintain security “for the upper classes and large foreign enterprises” while opportunities for the middle, working class, and lower social classes are curtailed (21). Chomsky states that the lack of institutional morality and often refusal—be it of the Washington Consensus, the state, the financial industry—to provide opportunities for security for people is not only criminal but is

the result of powerful governments, especially that of the United States, pushing trade deals and other accords down the throats of the world’s people to make it easier for corporations and the wealthy to dominate the economies of nations around the world without having obligations to the peoples of those nations. (13)

Un mundo maravilloso relates to Chomsky’s statement when the national palace is no longer inhabited by the government, but by the World Finance Bank, alluding to globalization and the free trade treaties in Mexico starting in the mid-1990s. This perpetuates a global neoliberal order that establishes the security and stability of corporations, international enterprises, and the upper classes promoted by U.S. economic imperialism, all at the expense of the middle and working class. Although *Un mundo maravilloso* is critical of the advanced forms of capitalist society, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the end of the Eastern Bloc, the monopoly of capital withheld by corporations, millionaires, and billionaires is rarely questioned because of the predominance of the capitalist logic.

The Mass Consumer Citizen

As this thesis will show, the rise of corporations and multinationals coincides with the neoliberal state and global treaties especially in the mid-1990s, along with the commodification of the World Wide Web. Different from mechanisms of violence like those deployed by dictatorships, the neoliberal state embodies our identity shaped by our power to acquire commodities to the point that it alters the meaning of citizenship (García Canclini 2001). Whereas during the Industrial Revolution, the populace was coerced to become producers with threats of the “poor house” as the alternative to factory work, during this neoliberal phase, we are enticed and lured through habits of consumption engineered by mass communication and advertising by professional persuaders to manipulate our consent in their favor (Packard 1957).

A society that finds autonomy, gratification, and self-assertion through consumption is structuralized to pacify consumption, and at the same time oppress consumers into thinking satisfaction and gratification depend on the acquisition of consumer products (Baudrillard, 2009). Due to globalization, bettered forms of communication, and of technology worldwide, making products readily available for customers has a deeper and instant gratification on the consumer willing to bypass the long term effects on the eco system, and human life (Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 2007).

As this thesis will show, during the first decade of the 2000's, corporations and multinationals often are perceived as the root of all evil but are rarely questioned as a result of the overarching hegemony of the neoliberal state. When they are sanctioned for violations

of labor laws or policies protecting the environment, they may be required to pay a token sum to pardon any of their misdeeds, but this risk is often calculated within the budget of profit (Bakan, 2004). In the mainstream, the corporate owners, the CEOs, and shareholders are celebrities of magazines like *Business Insider*, *Forbes*, and *Fortune*, and have autobiographies that emphasize their geniuses especially for being technologically innovative. Though the culturalization of a hierarchical structure that empowers wealth is not new, over the past centuries, it has been a primary reason for wars and dictatorships, as well as for reformation and (de)colonization. With a suppression of alternatives to capitalism like communism and socialism, by the turn of the millennium, the anxieties toward the pauperization of specific aspects of social security like employment, the welfare state, and resistance become the center of anti-corporate narratives.

The Latin American Context of Neoliberalism

In the Latin American context, access to global consumption and commodities has a relationship with the deterioration of the social contract¹ starting in the 1970s. At the end of the import substitution economic market following WWII and until the 1970s many nations are forced to depend on the state to provide public assistance through education, healthcare, basic needs, and workers' protection. Until then, the State, like the Church prior to this time,

¹ The expression the social contract is coined by Jean Jacques Rousseau in 1762 in *The Social Contract* that replaces the "individual-person status of each contracting party by a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly has voix; and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life and its will" (6). Rousseau's definition of the social contract presents that a person is part of the body politic as subjects of the state's laws, as individuals that participate in the state's politics (citizens), and as people that the state represents (7-10). Under the neoliberal and global order, the state's role as sovereign to provide and protect for the common good is put into question.

was the foundation for the formation of a society, the entity that provides for and punishes its constituents.

The state's presence in all aspects of livelihood was often enforced through violent mechanisms of oppression like authoritarian and nationalist governments. On the other hand, the social contract shifted from a focus on public services to individual responsibility and acquisition of commodities. Conversely, the lack of institutional support alongside the criminalization and/or neglect in dealing with poverty increases similar anxieties to those associated with authoritarian governments: fear, social insecurity, disposability, and dehumanization, which are essential tropes in the narratives examined in here.

Karen Faulk, in her book *In the Wake of Neoliberalism: Citizenship and Human Rights in Argentina* (2013) expresses that although authoritarianism and neoliberalism in Argentina evidently use different mechanisms to control the population, both symbolic systems contribute to social isolation rather than the reconstruction of Argentina's society. According to Faulk, the neoliberal reforms that peaked during the *menemismo* era (1989-1999) are analogous with restrictions under the dictatorship, in that they undermined citizens' access to public space and the recognition of traditional employment protections such as union membership as ways to (re)construct identity (115). As a result, the lack of access to community and forms of citizenship associated with rights, social assistance, and public spaces diminishes the sense of national belonging instead of fortifying Argentina's identity and agency.

But this is not the first time neoliberalism is associated with dictatorship since Latin American dictatorship, since CIA-supported Operation Condor was part of the post WWII Cold War politics that strove to preserve capitalism in the face of the presumed threat of the

spread of communism. The first decade of neoliberalism pertinent to Latin America begins in 1973 when Augusto Pinochet seized power in Chile in a military coup against the democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende. When Pinochet took over, the short period known as the “Chilean Miracle” deployed neoliberal practices of privatization, deregulation and working-class control through a dictatorship that lasted until 1990. On the other hand, the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, and the suppression of a leftist government like that of Salvador Allende meant that alternative forms of governments would be ostracized by the neoliberal mentality. Ironically, the transition to democracy did not mean fewer social problems as Sergio Villalobos-Rumminott presents in *Soberanías en suspenso* (2013). He proposes that the transition to democracy in Chile meant a shift from a military state to a *neo-corporativa* state in which crime and violence “no ha pasado sino que se ha intensificado en el presente” with an agenda “progresista neoliberal, concertacionista y empresarial” (14-15).

The second period of neoliberalism begins in 1980 and is adopted by a “new right” including the Prime Minister of England, Margaret Thatcher, and the United States’ president Ronald Reagan popularly known as “Thatcherism” and “Reagonomics.” Their supply-side economic incentives lowered taxes for corporations and the upper classes with the promise that money would “trickle down” to the middle and lower classes; intensified privatization of basic human services (i.e., healthcare, water, electricity, education); and deregulated social protections over employment and the environment. Their political slogan was that “there is no society” and “there is no alternative” (TINA) other than to make each individual responsible for their own fate through hard work. TINA is a phrase first used by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), a proponent of classical liberalism and Darwinism

and it became a popular slogan for Margaret Thatcher's 1980s campaign to propose neoliberal policies with facilitation of the market at the cost of labor flexibilization, welfare cutbacks, and with an emphasis on individual responsibility.

The 1980s in Latin America is known as the "lost decade" due to state and military debts, high inflation, internal strife, and political corruption. In many parts of Latin America, the privatization of basic services and of natural resources displaces and impoverishes many (often primarily indigenous) communities who become more dependent on large property owners for labor and survival. The distress, famine, and unemployment rates of the 1980s in Latin America formed the gateway for investors and larger economies to reinforce neoliberal policies onto states in extreme deficit, like the case of Argentina. By the mid-1980s, global wealth had multiplied, and the financial industry grew into their own neighborhoods in cosmopolitan cities like Tokyo in Japan, Avenida Paulista at the heart of São Paulo, Brazil, and Wall Street in New York City, USA.

In the 1990s national states opened their borders to form alliances with specific countries, through treaties like Mercosul/Mercosur in South America (1991), the European Union (1993) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (1994). To oversee rules of the advanced capitalist society, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was created in 1993 to sanction governments that tried to implement regulations in the global market. These treaties were created to facilitate commerce without charging tariffs for imports among member countries, but they neglected the collateral damages of unprotecting local businesses that could not compete with the prices and speed of the multinational companies, hurting middle-class businessmen, indigenous farmers, and other groups. China became the first communist country to adopt these neoliberal politics and as a result since 1978 has become

one of the richest economies in the world (if not the most potent) in the past thirty years. Their production design using low to inhuman standards of labor became the stamp to broaden the local market into a global scale as cheap labor means higher production and greater profit. China was initially seen exclusively as a producer of cheap goods for global export, but eventually Chinese workers became perceived as potential consumers as well as producers, and mega-corporations like Walmart began to expand into Asia. As wealth turned millionaires into billionaires giving them access to roam globally, inequality escalated where labor standards and stability became even more sparse locally.

Argentina and Mexico

Argentina and Mexico are leading examples of the effects of this era in their social organization. Even though neoliberalism and globalization come from different historical processes, both countries are leading cultural producers with major publishing houses that depict the denationalization process through early 21st century narrative.

Like Argentina, Mexico has a history of democratic ideals that are not always implemented, as well as a history of political and economic sovereignty which it struggles to maintain with the proximity of the United States. Two decades after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas was key to the effort to preserve this sovereignty. In addition to addressing yet unfulfilled domestic goals of the Mexican Revolution through Agrarian Reform, educational reform, and supporting industrial workers' cooperatives, he also nationalized the production of petroleum, one of Mexico's most

important natural resources, and he implemented protections against foreign ownership of land in Mexico in order to curb economic neocolonialism.

In the North American hemisphere, Mexico was a center of international attention in 1994 for a number of reasons: NAFTA; the declaration of war against the Mexican government by the Zapatistas of Chiapas that coincided with the signing of NAFTA; and the assassination of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, possibly because he was interested in retracting the capitalist advances through neoliberal practices.² Mexico, much closer to the United States than Argentina, advanced into NAFTA under the presidency of the Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) followed by Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) the last representative of the PRI which prided themselves on ideals of nationalism and Mexican Revolution but left instead a legacy of corruption, voter fraud, and suspicious deaths of political figures. The 71-year streak of the PRI was interrupted by the PAN (*Partido de Acción Nacional*) which is a right-wing conservative political party that supports in depth with the advance of neoliberalism in the country, with Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) increasing the socio-economic unrest and corporate control within Mexican society.

The continuity of the neoliberal logic at the end of the PRI's single-party monopoly accelerated Mexico to a hopeless socio-economic and political state, now apparent by the media's representation of Mexico as one of the most complex and violent countries in the world. As the Zapatistas anticipated, NAFTA obliterated Mexico's smaller farmers that could not compete with import prices free of tariffs, especially when countries like the United

² See the documentary available on Netflix, *1994: Power, Rebellion, and Crime in Mexico* (2019), and Neil Harvey's book *The Chiapas Rebellion* (1998), and Tom Hayden's Introduction, and Adolfo Gilly's "The Last Glow of the Mexican Revolution" in *The Zapatista Reader* (2002).

States subsidize the agrobusiness allowing crops to be sold for cheaper than the cost of production. NAFTA led to massive unemployment in the rural areas, which, alongside the rise of drug cartel influence and violence, led to an increase in migration to already overcrowded cities. As history of (im)migration shown before, when the rural areas were abandoned by the state, and the cities become unable to sustain healthy and safe living conditions, migrants seeking to flee from violence sought to live in the border towns in between Mexico and the United States, and attempt to cross the border as undocumented workers or asylum seekers.

In the urban setting, besides *Un mundo maravilloso*, the iconic Mexican film *Amores perros* (2000) directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu shows a Mexico City embedded in social insecurity, social injustice, and wealth inequality that fragments any form of national cohesiveness. *Amores perros* begins at the peripheries of Mexico City where the underground economy of illegal dogfighting, murder for hire and robbery appear as sources of profitable income. The violence and chaos in the movie belie NAFTA's euphoria by depicting the underground economy as a means to survive for the lower social classes.

The director Luis Estrada's *La ley de Herodes* (1999), in turn, illustrates the foundation of Mexican politics through its representation of the political and economic practices of the infamous and corporatist political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) which in a "democracy" monopolized power for the better part of a century. The sequels in Estrada's trilogy, *El infierno* (2010) and *La dictadura perfecta* (2014), further develop the representation of political corruption and drug trafficking in the latter part of the twentieth century.

The genre *narconovela* traces its roots in Mexican and Colombian literature in the latter decades of the twentieth century, gaining international attention with the novel by Colombian Fernando Vallejo, *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994) adapted for cinema in 2000. In Mexico, *la narcoficción* stems from the 1970s (*Narcotráfico S.A.*, 1977) and became established as a genre around the same time that NAFTA was implemented (*Sueños de frontera*, 1990; *Juan Justino Judicial*, 1996; *Tierra blanca*, 1996; *La vida de un muerto*, 1998; *Tijuana dream*, 1999). The genre became further consolidated over the following decades with international publishers in Mexico (Océano, Tusquets, Anagrama, Planeta, Alfaguara, Ediciones B), especially during Felipe Calderón's presidency from 2006-2012 whose term declared a frontal war on narcotraffic. These years see the publication of authors like Yuri Herrera (*Trabajos del reino*, 2004), Élmer Mendoza (*Un asesino solitario*, 1999; *El amante de Janis Joplin*, 2001; *Balas de plata*, 2008), and Bernardo Fernández (*Hielo negro*, 2011; *Cuello blanco*, 2013; *Tiempo de alacranes*, 2015) (Castillo Carrillo 18). The genre is dominated by male authors who fulfill the market demand for fictional representations about the border between northern Mexico and the United States, and the failure of the Mexican nation-state also represented through femicide, violence, and drug cartels (Guzmán 2008).

Due to these historical events, the contemporary Mexican writer born after the 1970s identify less with what Ángel Rama would call the *ciudad letrada* (1984), and the Latin American *Boom* generation of writers like Carlos Fuentes, Juan Rulfo, and Octavio Paz since their literature reflect a national and institutional discourse for the formation of the nation-state. Instead, they are influenced by subgenres and global authors like Stephen King (Haghenbeck 275). The genre *narconarrativa* is the byproduct, and has become one of the most predominant (inter)national productions within the existing *telenovela* market,

overwhelmingly produced and available on Netflix with series like *Narcos*, *Tijuana*, *El Chapo*, *Narcoworld: Dope Stories*, as well as the popular series with a female leading role, *La reina del sur*, and *Queen of the South*. The turn of the century shows that if on one hand, Mexico's artistic production has grown exponentially due to free trade, on the other hand, Mexico's systematic violence, inequality, and corruption have become a predominant global narrative representing this country.

Like *narcoficción*, the subgenre of office narratives examined here is transforming itself to adapt to the demands of the global market. In the case of Bernardo Fernández "Bef" in particular, there are significant parallels between the corp(us) logic and *narcoficción*. As an author, he writes sagas, mixes English with Spanish, and crosses borders making it clear this is a strategy chosen by the author to establish a signature within the global market. In his *narconarrativas*, he explores drug cartels through the female character Lizzy Zubiaga, the daughter of a powerful drug lord and a student of the arts, who took over her father's business and lives to cross the border between United States and Mexico. In Bef's contribution to what I am calling the corp(us) logic, in various works he repeats the character HumaCorp, a greedy transnational corporation that began in Japan, with one of its branches in Mexico, and whose monopolistic traits are insatiable and harmful to Mexican society and eventually, all humanity. Instead of a local office workplace as in the other novels discussed here, in Bef's narratives, the corp(us) logic is evident in a structured corporate greed that reflects our increased dependence on consumption, demonstrating the collateral damages of globalization and the neoliberal order. Differently from the *narconarrativa*, and the office narratives, in Bef's works, the corp(us) logic introduces the element of dystopia,

ScienceFiction, and Cyberpunk that point out the root causes of social insecurity, disillusion, and anxieties within the economic and political setting.

The Rise of Neoliberalism in Argentina

Argentina is traditionally known as a country with a strong state presence in citizens' lives during both authoritarian and democratic periods. It is important to notice that the liberalist economic plan was evident starting in the 1960s with the coup d'état led by Juan Carlos Onganía, named "La Revolución Argentina" in 1966. The liberalist plan continued with the next wave of dictatorship, known as "El proceso" by General Videla which led to state terrorism, 1976-1983. During the period known as "la transición" to restore democracy, Argentina's economic default due to the war with the British to control the Islas Malvinas could not be repaired. Significantly to the present study, when the *peronista* Carlos Saúl Menem became president (1989-1999), Argentina's socio-economic organization moved towards common global neoliberal practices that promoted advantages to the private sector through the flexibility of taxes, labor, and of natural resources; it adjusted and subjugated unions to a flexible market; and facilitated access to a global consumer market with the convertibility plan (1 euro = 1 dollar).

President Menem deploys the neoliberal plan through democracy which opened Argentina's consumer market to global imports, temporarily allowing the middle class to experience higher levels of consumerism. This inspired the Argentine author and journalist Guillermo Saccomanno to write about this short-term affluence of a new middle-class in his novel *Animales domésticos* (1994, 2017). At the same time, the author and journalist,

Oswaldo Soriano writes *Una sombra ya pronto serás* (1990). Differently from Saccomanno whose compilation of short stories are situated in the urban setting, Soriano reckons the traditional struggle between civilization and barbarism in Argentina's literature present in Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845). Like Sarmiento, Soriano situates his novel in the historical and desolated Las Pampas, but with a protagonist who represents a country in "crecimiento" of Argentina at the end of the twentieth century

Estaba trabajando en una historia sobre un espía argentino en París a principios de siglo cuando un día, cruzando la calle, tuve la visión de un tipo haciendo dedo al costado de una ruta desierta. Supe que era ingeniero en informática, un científico que podría ser útil para un país en crecimiento. *Y que sus desventuras debían transcurrir, en medio del ajuste menemista, en esa Argentina que cae en todas las trampas de la historia, que sufre a todos los gobiernos después de creer en todas las promesas* ("Oswaldo Soriano", *Agencia Literaria*, n.p.)

The struggle during the transition to democracy became the subject of literary speculation regarding the future of the country well represented in Ricardo Piglia's *La ciudad ausente* (1992), and *La muerte como efecto secundario* (1997) by Ana María Shua as well as in the corpus that scholar Fernando Reati calls *literatura de anticipación*. In *Postales del porvenir* (2006), Reati, a professor at Georgia State University, examines how this literary genre reflects "un desplazamiento cronológico que nos lleva hacia el porvenir y nos hace ver el mundo real reflejado en el espejo levemente deformante de futuros hipotéticos para producir un comentario irónico sobre el presente" (15). The novels Reati analyzes cover the transitional period to Menem's term. The dystopian scenarios narrate the possible directions that a nation could take based on present events or the socio-economic and political presence

of the time. Some of these anticipatory scenarios that parallel what I am calling the corp(us) logic are the international city, the future city (ghettoized, panoptical, the mutant, and the (post)apocalyptic city). One of the themes that this specific corpus of corporate office narratives contributes is to anticipate the precariousness of formal jobs which in the works I study are often compared to the informal or illegal sector.

The neoliberal practices of privatization of basic services and natural resources, along with deregulation of labor unions and of workers' rights, increased both the state's deficit and levels of unemployment in the early 1990s when many workers of state-owned companies lost their jobs once foreign corporations took over industries particularly in the provinces of Jujuy and Neuquén. A second wave of unemployment affected local merchants and smaller companies in the urban centers that could not compete with the price of mass-produced imports. Argentina's economy collapses completely in 2001 when the *corralito plan* was put in place to try to control the largest deficit in the country's history. The *corralito plan* consisted of freezing bank accounts temporarily, followed by allowing small withdrawals weekly to try to control the state's international debt. The state, empty of tax revenue, had to refinance their external debt, and citizens could not pay their bills, let alone consume. Banks crashed, and private investors left empty manufacturing industries behind. Many sectors of the middle and lower social classes felt hunger, anxiety, and rage added to the unfulfilled promise of a recent democracy during Menem's term that carried into the early 2000s riots with looting and violence with the *cacerolazos* and protests chanting "que se vayan todos [los políticos]." These events led to the resignation of President Fernando de la Rúa and of three interims until 2003 when Néstor Kirchner became the president starting the Pink Tide era in Argentina.

The Pink Tide in South America

If neoliberalism in the 1980s was deployed by a new right, in the early 2000s, neoliberalism was shaped by a non-radical left in many parts of South America. This historical fact helps contextualize and differentiate Argentina's narratives from the Mexican narratives examined in this dissertation. Recent attempts to tackle the challenges presented by the early decades of neoliberalism are recognized in the *Pink Tide* (1993-2010) which put Brazil and Spanish America in the forefront of a possible alternative to neoliberal capitalism. This wave of politics and economics worked to facilitate consumer privileges for the most impoverished through state social programs following the previous decade's neglect of the poor.

The most representative presidents of the Pink Tide are Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva) (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2011-2016), Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006-2019), and Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015) in Argentina. Their politics integrate the most impoverished into the consumer market by facilitating a new economy that does not erase the previous neoliberal crisis in their countries but shows that neoliberalism "has lost its legitimacy" as an alternative to the protectionist and/or authoritarian state (Interview with *The Wire*, "The Neoliberal Project is Alive but Has Lost its Legitimacy," February 9, 2019).

Brazil is at the forefront of this business model with the state-funded program *Bolsa Família* that has been beneficial but also problematic—while it helped the most impoverished to improve their quality of life through consumption, it also sends a clear message that the rights of citizenship are not a birthright but a matter of affluence. In Brazil, *Bolsa Família* is a monetary, educational and health care program established by *Fome Zero*,

a public incentive to help families of the lower social strata with children aged 18 years or younger. The program became the Pink Tide's signature and a popular platform to guarantee votes. The welfare program continues to function even under the extreme conservative and rightwing and current president Jair Bolsonaro. As an attempt to raise his popularity after a disastrous leadership during the Covid pandemic, he raised the welfare program from 250 *reais* to 300 *reais*.³ For the family to receive the benefits, children must attend school regularly and keep vaccinations up to date, all paid by the program funds. Cristina Kirchner also established a similar program in Argentina offering money to families with children under eighteen years of age with parents that are unemployed or employed in the informal sector (See "Kirchner cria Bolsa Família para a Argentina," *Extra Digital*, October 12, 2010).

Social programs like *Bolsa Família* have had a positive effect on reducing the economic gap between the lowest social strata and the middle class in Latin America, albeit through the power of consumption instead of through more secure employment and better public education quality. The Pink Tide helps the most impoverished financially by facilitating their ability to consume, but it has failed to attend the needs and the stability of the middle class who seem to have stagnated throughout the years of neoliberalism while working for corporations that want quick profit, and thus offer workers short-term contracts and part-time jobs with few or no benefits. In an interview with *LL Journal* in March 2018, the neo-Marxist scholar David Harvey comments that the Pink Tide attempts to address the brutal social inequality in Latin America but lacks discontinuity from capitalistic mechanisms which are the root of the neoliberal policies that have contributed to social

³ "Brazil's Bolsonaro Says Aid for the Poor to Rise to 300 Reais". *Reuters. Yahoo Finance*, 16 June, 2021. <https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/news/brazils-bolsonaro-says-aid-poor-111446087.html>

disintegration. Harvey writes, “At its best [the Pink Tide] was a new distributed capitalism [...]” (5); on the other hand, Harvey proposes that the speed with which the far right wing arose following the Pink Tide with presidents coming from military or corporate business backgrounds (i.e., Mauricio Macri, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro) shows the right’s “fear of resistance” from the left (6). The positive outlook coming from this proponent and contemporary theorist of Marxism leaves us with questions regarding whether the current left will recuperate their political ambitions and transcend the neoliberal logic.

The controversies and failures of the neoliberal and global order after the 1990s are clearly represented in Argentina’s and Mexico’s literature. In Mexico it gave life to the *narcoficción*, while in Argentina found their anxieties and disillusionment reflected in *novelas de anticipación* mostly represented through macro forms of violence. In both countries there is a sense of post-nationalism replaced by a discourse of nation-ness, transnationality, consumerism and at the same time, criticizing the promises and failures of the nation-state, and of the democratic political parties to provide (radical) alternatives to capitalism.

The literary representation of macro violence and of the fragmentation of social bonds addresses the roots of why the neoliberal state is what Naomi Klein might call a shock doctrine in many parts of Latin America. One of the reasons why I chose to analyze corporate (office) narratives instead of canonical literature is due to the political engagement that employment rights have in Latin America. The neoliberal state, on the other hand, dismantles working class rights in favor of a corporate mentality that promotes self-profit and mass consumption, and lobbies politicians who vote for deregulation of employment and of the environment. Within this context, the mechanisms deployed by neoliberalism are another

shock doctrine for Latin America instead of a smooth transition of governments. The precedent concern is that the transitional democracy, and for some, the “post” neoliberal state (Pink Tide) cannot find alternatives that will effectively improve or eradicate the negative impact of the global neoliberal order like political spectacle and divide, feminicide, cartels, labor precariousness, privatization of basic services, massive influx of migration in the large cities, extreme social inequality, private prisons, an oligarchy of male billionaires, among other issues. Until then, literary and cultural productions will continue to do their part in pointing out the root causes of these problems in order to stimulate a curious and critical mind, and hopefully inspire us to find the solutions that will favor society, be this by re-examining ideologies from a recent or colonial past or by anticipating a bleak picture of a near future.

The Corp(us) Logic

One of the aspects of society most affected by this neoliberal influence for the past thirty years is employment security. In Latin America, labor and employment rights play an important role in the formation of the nation-state during democratic, socialist, populist and authoritarian regimes especially in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. With the rise of Marxist thought in Latin America, proletarianism collectively helped to reflect how social inequality and class mobility are related to work conditions, race, gender, and identity.

Marxist thought in Latin America also inspired a series of cultural productions in the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century like the Brazilian novels *O cortiço* (1890) and *Parque industrial* (1922), and U.S. Journalist Upton Sinclair’s *The*

Jungle (1906) whose agenda was to favor a socialist or communist party although the literature itself was not written by the proletarian class. The neoliberal state, in contrast to the state's role as traditionally perceived in the social contract, shifts the proletarian mentality to a corporate logic that is based on profit, deregulation, and flexibilization of employment rights. These policies affected the middle and the working classes, the biggest beneficiaries of the traditional social contract that has been dismantled due to automation, privatization, and outsourcing of labor. The proletariat thus turns into an individualized and fragmented semi-skilled labor class.

One of the struggles is to accept social insecurity as part of one's life's plan especially in a country with a history of having a relatively stable middle class such as Argentina. The same state that is defunded simplifies the deregulation of employment and the environment so companies will find these countries attractive for investors, growing a global commerce based on "sweatshops" (*maquiladoras*) with underpaid and underemployed employees subjugated to obscene salaries and short-term contracts with no benefits. The novels studied below reflect the anxieties of what Virgilio and Kessler (2008) describe as the pauperization of the lower social classes, including the lower middle class, affected by specific neoliberal practices. The conflictive motives of the neoliberal agenda in dealing with poverty and social inequality are transfigured to a strong uniform private sector with a market driven logic that includes the privatization of the most basic of citizenship rights (e.g., access to food, water, health, and education). Beyond these basic needs, the office narratives studied here challenge the hegemonic rhetoric of the neoliberal state and the corporate driven society by highlighting collateral damages that standardize social insecurity, precarious jobs, disposability, and a demand for a global consumer life.

Shoshana Zuboff (*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 2019) Naomi Klein (*The Shock Doctrine*, 2007), Joel Bakan (*The Corporation*, 2004; *Childhood Under Siege*, 2011; *The New Corporation. The Unfortunate Necessary Sequel*, 2020), Simon Springer (*Violent Neoliberalism*, 2015) and many works by David Harvey, Noam Chomsky, and Zygmunt Bauman, are committed critiques with an intensive campaign to expose the contradictions of the neo-corporate state. They examine how multinationals take advantage of the capitalist corporate-centered state to impose their self-interest which is to profit. Much like an authoritarian government, corporations have become monopolies and gatekeepers of information on the internet by controlling advertisement, and the order of what we are allowed to see. Most multinationals have a branch only to do intense lobbying for politicians that will vote for their economic interests. Multinationals are allowed to do intense marketing and disseminate propaganda to sell to children. They are allowed to exploit workers without taking social responsibility or paying taxes for outsourcing the manufacturing of their product. By leveraging their freedom to a pro-business dialogue, corporations can now dictate government policies, legally exploit workers, and leave the aftermath behind without consequences, since token fines imposed for any collateral damages for their actions are already factored within the corporation's system of checks and balances. Under the neoliberal doctrine, regulations are not a threat to control corporate misdeeds, just unnecessary loopholes for more profit.

From Office to Corporate Narratives

Office narratives date back to at least the 19th century with some of the most famous being written by the Russian author Nikolai Gogol with his short story “The Overcoat” (1842), and U.S. author Herman Melville’s novella “Bartleby: The Scrivener, A Story of Wall Street” (1856). But the representation of corporations and transnationals becomes prevalent 150 years later in the 1990s due to the expansion of multinationals and the development of a consumer society. Prior to this, the American female author Faith Baldwin published *The Office Wife* and *Skyscraper* in 1930 and 1931 respectively. Both novels use the office setting to highlight the difficulties of women trying to be financially independent and/or having a family. At the end of the WWII, with and the expansion of advertising jobs in the 1950s and 1960s, a few office narratives and movies are committed to show the difficulties and necessary adjustment to new office jobs like in Wilson Sloan’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) adapted to a film in 1956, and the best seller business book by William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956) a manual for efficient management in modern societies. A comic response to management manuals is found in *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, based on a 1952 novel which becomes a musical in 1961 made into a film in 1967. Rona Jaffe’s *The Best of Everything* (1958) is another female author seeking to emancipate women’s place at work featuring five women in a publishing house in New York. Notably, the movie *Desk Set* (1957) with Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy uses an office setting to challenge both traditional gender roles and the encroachment of technology in the workplace.

In Latin America, the novel *Poemas de la oficina* (1956-1960) and the novel *La tregua* (1960) by the Uruguayan Mario Benedetti became a precursor for office narratives as his novel features a middle aged man about to retire who realizes that he spent most of his time away from his family. As visual arts grew in the final decades of the twentieth century there is an increase in consumption and of popular movies at the time like *9 to 5* (1981) and *Working Girl* (1989). Both movies represent the unequal treatment of women in the workplace which often includes sexual harassment as represented also in the novel by the Spanish writer Rosa Montero, *Amado amo* (1988). In 1989, a different approach to the office narrative was introduced with Scott Adam's *Dilbert* comic strips that briefly turned into a TV series in 1999, lasting only 2 years. The Dilbert approach is to use comedy to talk about the corporate bureaucratic and hierarchical space, symbolized physically and psychologically by the "cubicle."

As neoliberal policies solidify in the 1990s and the Internet, computer programming and call centers become prevalent jobs. The office space is a place for awkward interactions, and bureaucratic dullness. The use of comedy is prevalent with protagonists that are far from having heroic attitudes, like in the French novel *Whatever* (1993) by Michel Houellebecq, the compilation of short stories *Microserfs* (1994) and the novel *JPod* (2006) by the Canadian Douglas Coupland, the Spanish novels *El urinario* (1999) by Lorenzo Silva, and *El mágico aprendiz* (1999) by Luis Landero. The anxieties of corporate downsizing and fears of being "let go" are present in Joshua Ferris's novel *Then We Came to an End* (2008), *Personal Days* (2008) by Ed Park, *Deus foi almoçar* (2012) by the Brazilian author Ferréz, and the movie *Office Space* in 1999 which turned into TV Shows in England, Japan, and the United States in the 2000s. The mockumentary-style TV sitcom "The Office" was immensely popular in

England (2001-2003) and in the U.S. (2005-2016), beginning in 2005 and lasting for 9 seasons.

The representation of impersonal, highly competitive corporate environment becomes prevalent in the early twenty-first century, especially in Spanish cultural productions like the novels, *No he venido aquí a hacer amigos* (2005) by Jaime Miranda, *El alquiler del mundo* (2010) by Pablo Sánchez, *Ajuste de cuentas* (2013) by Benjamín Prado. Since the corporation is represented as a ruthless cult with psychopathic tendencies, characterized by the single-minded goal to achieve profit, with complete disregard for human values like in the novel by Brett Ellis *American Psycho* (1991) featured into a movie in 2000, the movies *The Temp* (1993), *The Firm* (1993), *Erin Brockovich* (2000), *John Q* (2002), and the Spanish movie *El método* (2005). This production continues in the following decades with films such as *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), and the TV series *Enlightened* (2011-12) and *Mad Men* (2007-2015), among others. The French also represent the corporate discourse in the *Resources humaines* (1999), *99 francs* (2007) inspired by the novel written by Frédéric Beigbeder, Nicolás Silhol's *Corporate* (2017), and most recently Pierre Lemaitre's miniseries *Dérapiage* (2020) or *Inhuman Resources* in English.

Most of the American productions are perceived from the top of the corporation, and if it is from the bottom, then there is usually some form of social justice also prevalent in animated movies like *Monsters Inc.* (2001), *Bee Movie* (2007), and *The Boss Baby* (2017). Like these children's movies, the cultural productions targeting adult audiences in the end generally fail to critique the broader place that neoliberal policies within the political setting have in facilitating corporate misdeeds. From that perspective, the official neoliberal state discourse is usually not questioned as contributing to the social injustice.

Contemporary Latin American literature has a particular position in that many Latin American countries have a history of labor unions and workers' rights before and during dictatorships considered to be a citizenship right for the middle and working classes, mostly males. With the intensification of neoliberal policies, these citizenship rights deteriorate. In this dissertation, the chosen narratives form a genre that can be read as a reflective praxis of the failures of the globalization process in Argentina and Mexico to create more equal and secure opportunities of citizenship. This dissertation shows that the historical process, the time frame of being published, and the dystopian discourse that disrupts the corporate logic are particular to the Latin American corporate office narratives.

Despite all the negative effects, neoliberalism continues to be promoted as the only legitimate economic system in the face of the lack of alternatives. Because of the privatization of our basic services, the speed of transactions, and our need for constant consumption and movement, we have increased our dependence on corporate efficiency, and on the financial industry for survival. But instead of free trade fomenting competition among many corporations, as we had been led to expect, in reality neoliberal practices and globalization have created mega monopolies like Walmart, Google, Amazon, and a handful of others who control the flow of information as well as goods, including controlling major sources of food and water. The CEOs of these multinationals concentrate the world's wealth in their stockholders and CEOs pockets,⁴ while their employees struggle to convince other employees to create a union to protect their human rights being the case of Amazon.⁵ The failure to create a syndicate within the company shows that we have not only become

⁴ The CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, is the richest person in the world with a net worth of 201 billion dollars according to "Forbes 2021 Billionaires."

⁵ "Amazon Warehouse Workers Vote to Not Unionize in Bessemer, Alabama", *NBC News*, April 9, 2021.

unacquainted with the idea of labor unions, but we believe them to be inefficient, and in some instances we believe they are against workers' interests, since corporations can threaten to leave or fire workers, while precarious employment becomes the norm and an individual responsibility.

The Narratives

The authors of these novels belong to a generation of contemporary writers that in trying to keep literature alive are also part of the mainstream. They write and teach for an audience that is deeply connected with the Internet, magazines, fanzines, and social media. Besides novels, they write short stories, *novellas*, graphic novels, and Science Fiction, and are columnists for the most popular cultural magazines. Due to the Internet's influence on their reading and writing, these authors commit to a global vocabulary with plots that could be turned into movies, and a voice that echoes their own reality. It is only fitting that this literature be understood through an interdisciplinary approach, that is, interpreted and analyzed beyond style, form, and theory, and studied as complementary to the visual arts and other areas of the social sciences.

In the novels I examine in the below chapters, the representation of employment precariousness inside and outside the corporation becomes the gateway to challenge the last thirty years of neoliberal influence and cultural globalization in many cultural productions. The same state that is defunded simplifies the deregulation of employment and the environment so companies will find their countries attractive for investors, growing a global commerce of unfairness, and underpaid employees subjugated to obscene salaries and short-

term contracts with few or no benefits. As a result of tax laws favoring corporations, corporate monopolies make billions of dollars without having to pay taxes, reinvesting their profits into more efficient forms of production and promoting consumption, and hiring lobbyists to endorse politicians that will favor their profit, creating a thin line between corruption and social responsibility. This dangerous position is anticipated in Latin American cultural productions in the first decade of the twenty-first century, as authors anxiously project the effects that the neo-corporate state would undoubtedly continue to have on traditional forms of resistance in Latin America into the future.

To support these claims, I compare six cultural productions from Argentina and Mexico that represent the shift from a nation-state to a neo-corporate state, only to anticipate a society that is ruled by corporations. I examine two novels from Argentina, *El oficinista* (2010) by Guillermo Saccomanno and *El trabajo* (2007) by Aníbal Jarkowski. Though both novels refer to a continuation of a repressive state since the transition to democracy instead of the expected rupture from the years of dictatorship, the plots are constructed from different perspectives and genres. Saccomanno perceives the collateral effects of the neoliberal state through a middle aged low level accountant in a dystopian setting while Jarkowski employs realism to follow the struggles of a younger female secretary in her quest to exercise autonomy in the neo-corporate state.

In reference to Mexico, I analyze three narratives from Bernardo Fernández (Bef), the youth novel *Ladrón e de sueños* (2008), and the novellas *Gel azul* and *El estruendo del silencio* both published in 2009, that point toward the end of capitalism and of humanity at the same time. In this dissertation Bef's novels are read as a saga that begins during NAFTA in a post-national Mexico and ends in a post-human context in the galaxy. Also from Mexico,

I examine a novel from one of the most renowned contemporary authors Antonio Ortuño, *Recursos humanos* (2007), where the protagonist Gabriel Lynch feels betrayed by his employer which leads him to resort to extreme and violent measures to advance in the corporate hierarchy portrayed metaphorically as Jacob's ladder. From the analysis of these novels, I develop the concept of *corp(us) logic* as a literary corpus that represents a dystopian corporate office setting that disrupts the legitimization of the (post) neoliberal doctrine in Latin America in the early 2000s. Pointing to root causes of social problems, these narratives show how the neoliberal state that empowers corporations also reproduces 1) the disposability of the workers; 2) underemployment, hostile work environments, unfair wages and reduced benefits with diminished opportunities for union representation; 3) limited forms of individual or collective resistance; 4) an oligarchy of rich white men; and 5) an increase in social anomie that may lead to micro and/or macro forms of aggression toward the self and/or others.

In Chapter 1, I examine Antonio Ortuño's novel *Recursos humanos* first published in 2007 by Anagrama, and most recently republished by Seix Barral in 2020. Like Estrada's film *Un mundo maravilloso*, in Ortuño's novel, Mexico City is ruled by the corporate mentality of profit and competition that mirrors a stratified city also divided into social casts. In this novel and the others in this corpus, the corporate mentality foments an environment of competition that contributes to this emphasis on the individual above any sense of community. Although in the novel the characters are collectively feeling oppressed by the effects of this new stage of capitalism, they (re)act in isolation and self-interest driven by feelings of revenge and anxiety over the prospect of becoming disposable. I perceive their (violent) (re)actions as limited and individual forms of subversion that contribute to a chronic

anomic state (Durkheim, *Division of Labor* 1893; *Suicide* 1897) which reproduces the neoliberal state's doctrine and the corporate's logic instead of promoting alternative forms of social organization.

In Chapter 2, I examine Guillermo Saccomanno's novel *El oficinista* (2010) with a focus on how his narrative identifies the Argentine crisis at the turn of the twenty-first century as more than a simple backdrop but rather as an integral part of his novel. Published almost a decade after the 2001-2002 events, the novel projects a panoptical and abject city instead of a cohesive and stable future for Argentina. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject and of abjection in *Powers of Horror* (1980), I develop an analysis of the *abjectified nation* to examine how this novel demonstrates that the neo-corporate state is not sustainable as a system to empower cohesive citizenship after the transition to democracy in Argentina.

The third chapter of this thesis examines the novel *El trabajo* (2007) by the Argentine author Aníbal Jarkowski. Besides the novel *Ladrón de sueños* by Bef, this is the only novel studied here that has a female character as one of the main protagonists. In this chapter, the normalization of the corporate mentality adds the theme of the exploitation of (particularly female) bodies in the workplace. This chapter focuses on the descent from the middle class of the protagonists Diana and the narrator character known as "the writer" alluding to downward social movement in the post- *menemismo era*. The novel follows the struggles of the protagonists trying to ascend back to a feeling of autonomy and security that they had before. As in other office narratives, their attempts to reconstruct their lives submitted to the corporate mentality appear as individual forms of resistance rather than broad-reaching collective actions to resist their subjugation to the neo-corporate state. Alongside their

attempts to restore some dignity in this exploitative system, the author imagines the abusive corporate system regulated by men who hypersexualize women in the workplace, compared to the informal sector of sex workers.

In Chapter 4, I analyze the youth novel *Ladrón de sueños* (2008, 2013) and the novellas *Gel Azul* (2009) and *El estruendo del silencio* (2009) written by the contemporary Mexican author and illustrator Bernardo Fernández (Bef). Bef's literary texts add a unique perspective to the corpus by using Cyberpunk and ScienceFiction as his genre of choices. In this thesis, these three texts are read as a trilogy representing a dystopian (post)national and ultimately post-human corporate hegemonic ideology that prioritizes control of profit and resources at the cost of society. Although Bef's narratives are set in Mexico City, they transcend to a global conundrum.

In this thesis, the corp(us) logic represents an urban working class that feels deceived and betrayed by the promises of a neoliberal global order, and fearful about their place in their societies. Yet, there is an absence of collective (re)action against the institutions in power which are here represented by multinationals. This shows an attempt to see outside of the corporate logic, but there is also a growing sense that there is no "outside" the corporate mindset, just as there seems to be no viable alternative to neoliberal capitalism. Although this corpus provides few solutions to combat the supremacy of the corporate mentality, these narratives point to the roots of the problems caused by the concentration of wealth and power by financial and corporate institutions, while at the same time challenging the "post-neoliberal" discourse in Latin America. In these chapters, the intensification of the corporate logic under neoliberalism, reinforced through *official business* jargon like "downsizing", "change of management", "flexible contracts", and "internship", is deconstructed to

demonstrate a reserve army of “underemployed”, “disposable”, “replaceable”, and “legally exploited” employees.⁶

This dissertation’s analysis of these narratives contributes but is not limited to the field of the Humanities and Social Sciences that resists and critiques the continuous history of capitalism in Latin America through dictatorship, socialist, populist, and democratic governments. My interpretation of these narratives implies that the corporate mentality shows that expecting the private sector to take social responsibility for their societies while lobbying for policies that deteriorate the social contract and the wellbeing of people is ultimately an expression of an ideology that “money can buy anything”, reproducing the discourse of how wealth yields to power.

⁶ This kind of bureaucratic language parallels George Orwell’s *1984* concept of “doublethink” which was essential for the success of the IngSoc party in the novel. Doublethink means to hold two contradictory thoughts and believe both thoughts to be true. The field of business uses “doublespeak” deliberately to make the truth sound more palatable.

CHAPTER 1:

An Introduction of the Corporate Logic in Antonio Ortuño's Novel *Recursos humanos* (2007)

“Mexicano, vivirás menos pero vivirás mejor.”

Cristóbal Nonato, Carlos fuentes, 1997

“El utopista quiere que todo se divida entre todos e impere la justicia igualitaria; el delincuente sólo quiere que la injusticia opere a su favor”

Recursos humanos, Antonio Ortuño, 2007

Antonio Ortuño's novel *Recursos humanos* (2007) introduces the reader a hierarchical corporate environment that privileges status, looks, and connections instead of work ethic, loyalty, and skills to complete the task. In this imagine corporate space, the law and the state absolve the corporation from having to take moral and ethical measures to provide fairness in the workplace, causing a hostile environment inside and outside of the corporation. The imaginary time frame encompasses post-NAFTA and specific neoliberal practices in Mexico City's contemporary urbane that supports a market-oriented society that reproduces active citizenship through means of consumption instead of political parties that defends civic rights like workers' rights. As a result, the market-oriented society 1) reduces the urban experience to the power of consumption; 2) renders the law inefficient to promote justice and equality; 3) establishes a machista oligarchy of rich white-male supremacy with misogynist tendencies at the top of the hierarchical structure; 4) increases insecurity and levels of anxiety which could induce to micro and/or macro forms of aggression to achieve gratification. In Ortuño's imaginary, this corporate structure is more than just an office job, but a political, socio-economic and cultural structure that affects all areas of our lives.

The Author

Antonio Ortuño (1976-) was born in Zapopan, Jalisco and is a celebrated novelist and short story writer of the contemporary literature in Mexico. He is active in the mainstream using social media like *Instagram* and Youtube which opened doors for him to be known within different countries, like Germany, Spain, South and North America. As a prolific author, Ortuño is studied within the Academia and is an active columnist for the Opinion and Cultural sections of *Más por Más*,⁷ *El Informador*,⁸ *LaTempestad*,⁹ and *Letra libres*.¹⁰ Apart from his popularity as a journalist and a novelist, Ortuño is considered one of the best writers of contemporary Mexican literature by *Granta Magazine* in 2010, and by *GQ México* in 2011. He is now published by Seix Barral, Anagrama, Tusquets, and through governmental funds like Fondo de Cultura Económica. Like the other Mexican writer discussed in this dissertation, Bernardo Fernández (Bef), Emily Hind declares Antonio Ortuño's career path as a characteristic of the "XXX" generation.¹¹ On an interview with Hind, Ortuño explains that he learned to write a novel with *El buscador de cabezas* (2006) taking him over ten years to write and two more to publish it (2013). On another interview with Javier La Fuente for *El País*, Ortuño asserts that he writes periodicals thinking about what matters to him: a vocabulary that resists "el lenguaje de los poderes" referencing the punk rock band *Ramones*, "en tres minutos dices todo lo que tienes que decir y lo haces alto, fuerte y duro

⁷ www.maspormas.com/author/aortuno/

⁸ www.informador.mx/antonio-ortuno-t9022

⁹ www.latempestad.mx/?s=antonio+ortu%C3%B1o

¹⁰ www.letraslibres.com/

¹¹ Per Hind, this generation is marked by three "Xs" because of authors born after WWII, in the 60s and 70s (generation X). The second "X" belongs to a generation of writers who are "ex-writers" (e.g. office work, guest speaker, educators, journalists, cleaners). This is the first generation to take advantage of the Internet as a vehicle to publish when other traditional institutions like house publishers, a college degree in creative writing, and public contest were not available. The global market opened a door to alternative forms of publishing at an accessible cost—which also cheapens their value—completing the third X pertaining to this generation.

para que obtengas alguna clase de reacción, pero no extenderte mucho más”.¹² Ortuño’s writing strategy to obtain a reaction from the readers is also inspired by Mexican and Spanish authors like Jorge Ibarguengoitia (1928-1983) and Julio Camba (1884-1962), characterized for being brief, satirical, and personal. His first novel, *El buscador de cabezas* is about a fictitious ex-fascist and journalist Álex Faber, who in light of an upsurge of a fascist movement called *Manos Limpias* in Mexico, must report about the sudden disappearance of his new friends while keeping his past a secret. In this Mexico’s imaginary, the upsurge of a fascist overtake is a symbolic approach to society’s breakdown in many countries in Latin America like Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, who have endured large periods of governmental oppression. The contemporary imaginary scenarios are a characteristic of Ortuño, often a critic of the consequences of NAFTA and of specific of the neoliberal practices in Mexico, expressed through corruption, violence, and a disregard for human value. On the same token, he presents ambiguous forms of resistance like in *Recursos humanos* (2007, 2020), *Olinka* (2019), and in the novel *La fila India* (2013, 2016). The latter being one of Ortuño’s most analyzed novels as it illustrates the systemic violence and racism towards (female) Central American migrants in a border town of Mexico trying to cross to the United States.¹³

¹² Entrevista con Javier LaFuente. “Antonio Ortuño: Mi labor nos es redimir a nadie”. *El País*, 25 ago. 2020. elpais.com/revista-de-verano/2020-08-25/antonio-ortuno-mi-labor-no-es-redimir-a-nadie.html

¹³ Read “*La fila india* de Antonio Ortuño” (Cairati, Elsa 2014), “La deconstrucción del sujeto, del autor y de la estructura narrativa en *La fila india* de Antonio Ortuño” (Villanueva 2017), “Mythos y logos: hacia un análisis de la migración contemporánea en *La fila india*, de Antonio Ortuño” (Chávez-Flores, Ían 2018), “El cuerpo racializado del migrante en *La fila india* de Antonio Ortuño y *Ciudad berraca* de Rodrigo Ramos Bañados” (Le Joliff, Tatiana 2020), “Nasty Women: The Politics of Female Identity in Antonio Ortuño’s *La fila india*” (Erazo, Adrienne 2018).

*Recursos humanos*¹⁴ was the finalist for *Heralde de Novela* in Spain, published first by Anagrama, but has recently being republished through Seix Barral.¹⁵ *Recursos humanos* is the first novel to be examined in this dissertation, and like *El oficinista* (2010) by the Argentine writer Guillermo Saccomanno, Ortuño introduces low to mid-level employees from an anonymous corporation like in Chapter 3. However, in Saccomanno's novel the protagonist seeks to escape the oppressive urbane while the protagonist of *Recursos humanos*, Gabriel Lynch wants to join "la sociedad anónima" (17) that reigns over him. Ortuño's plot portrays Lynch's first-person account of ascending from the second floor to the third, and main, floor of the corporation. The novel is structured around the protagonist's confession of how he uses his "inhuman" resources to join the market-oriented society, a place where human subjectivity has a small value in relation to prosperity.

The Corporate Structured City

The city's social structure has a direct relationship with the corporate's hierarchal structure. At the heart of the city is the corporation, the place where the protagonist and most of the characters work, but it is not the place the protagonist Gabriel Lynch can afford or to experience. The city center has a global and diverse outlook, surrounded by companies, gated neighborhoods, fine diners, hotels, and museums. The access to leisure, and culture are only affordable to the most affluent men in suits (i.e. corporate lawyers, financiers, directors,

¹⁴ Other novels by Ortuño are *Ánima* (2011), *Blackboy* (2014, under the pseudonym «A. del Val»), *Méjico* (2015), and *El rastro* (2016). Ortuño also published short narratives, *El jardín japonés* (2007), *La señora Rojo* (2010), *Agua corriente* (2015), and *La vaga ambición* (2017). His most recent work is a compilation of his columns *El canibal ilustrado* (2019) by Dharma Books.

¹⁵ On an Instagram post on October 2nd, 2020 Ortuño calls Seix Barral "mi casa" after the editorial decided to republish Ortuño's novel *Recursos humanos*.

tourists). Squeezed between the center and closer to the margins, is a resented sector of society with trifling and low-level jobs (i.e. supervisors, HR, secretaries, technicians). Their social life involves the bar La Atalaya, where most of the second-floor workers of the corporation and characters from the public sector (i.e. Police) can afford.

At the city's periphery is the informal sector, limited to the brothel occupied by sex workers and male customers of all economic ranks. The sex workers never leave their space, instead all people come to them. When the characters are in public—avenues, streets—they are in means of transportation like taxi and buses which are not a place for congregation only means for an end location. As this city's environment shows, the characters' access to the city of each sector of society are not equal which makes other social experiences and opportunities of ascension more difficult to obtain individually. In the company, the first floor, made of technicians only one step above the informal sector. The secretaries have the most social mobility in between floors, but their independence is limited. Like all females in this novel, women are perceived as objects of desire, and secretaries like Lizbeth, Lynch's ex-girlfriend currently dating Constantino, seek to participate in the market-oriented culture through dating the most affluent. This division of sectors of society shows that social mobility is determined by access to wealth and wealthy people.

The second floor and first floor of the company mirrors the lower sectors of society depicted through their limited mobility within the metropolis economically, and/or their non-white male identity. The third floor is reachable to the second and first floor often through an exchange of sexual favors. More than limiting one's urban mobility because of wealth, Ortuño suggests that social ascension is increasingly more difficult to those who are not rich,

white, and male. The lack of diversity within all sectors of society creates a hierarchal structure with misogynist males of which Lynch, being white and male may have a chance.

The narrative is constructed around Gabriel Lynch who is a white male, supervisor of the second floor of the company with aspirations to become a manager of the third floor of the company. Lynch admits “yo soy un esclavo” that reads books of “psicología de supermercado” (73) and desires “playa, alcohol, una chica” (120) meaning that he is a product of a market-oriented culture. When the management position is given to the inexperienced Mario, “un príncipe rubio, de recio cabello ensortijado y credenciales jesuitas en comercio y filosofía. Sí, eso dije, filosofía, ¿No es odioso?” (26), Lynch feels the failure as a personal attack on things he cannot change within a market-oriented society

Fracasé. Mis méritos eran pocos. Soy blanco y sospecho que haber llegado a un puesto de supervisión tiene que ver con ello. Pero no parezco, fuera del tono de la piel, uno de los amos: no uso pantalones de pinzas ni me repego el cabello al cráneo con goma ni provengo de la cosecha de alumnos de los colegios privados que generalmente ascienden por nuestra escala de Jacob hasta lo más alto, como ángeles que son [...] (18)

Lynch’s failure is two-fold: maybe he was not chosen because he is not a likeable character, or because he steals money from his love affairs, but within the market-oriented culture he feels cheated and excluded in all aspects of his life. From this perspective, the market-oriented culture seeks to dehumanize in prole of a business model in all sectors of society. The people who reinforce and manage the market-oriented culture, have a non-human characteristic, they are “seres pálidos y prácticamente incorpóreos que pueblan las coordinaciones y presidencia” (18). The dehumanization of the masters present within the

market-oriented culture is the essence of a corporate mindset—impersonal, omnipotent, that lacks diversity.

The second floor of the company is the focus of the novel. The mid-level employees, Gabriel Lynch, Miguel Paruro, and Verónica, do not want to become irrelevant within the market-oriented culture. In this environment, the only way to achieve agency is through accept the figure of “bandido” (123). His resentment and subversiveness towards the company also reflects a kind of social organization that introduces economic anomy. Ambition is what instills the possibility to ascend to a management position on the third floor. However, differently from Paruro, his coworker, it is not enough to ascend and work with them, instead “debemos subir pisándole la cabeza. Que nuestra escala deben ser sus huesos. Nadie salta al cielo y deja de escapar a los ángeles primero: se les corta la garganta y entonces avanza” (120).

In Ortuño’s imaginary the socio-economic discrepancy between the different sectors of society shows that the reproduction of neoliberal practices has shaped an impersonal corporate environment in lieu of a cohesive working place. When characters of lower social strata at the company grow weary of the disappointments and abuse of the corporation, they (re)act with harmful intention to guarantee their place in a market-driven society. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, *Recursos humanos* is an imaginary representation of economic anomie (Durkheim 1897) in which prior institutions that regulate behavior have declared prosperity and consumption as the apotheosis of individuals and societies alike (Baudrillard, 2007). Reinforced by neoliberal orthodox, the market-oriented urbane demoralize coherent forms of justice, equality, and politics of inclusion in lieu of affluence to be recognized as a citizen.

Anomic Behavior

The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) had proposed at the turn of the 20th century, that anomie is a chronic matter in our modern societies that results “from man’s activity lacking regulation and his consequent sufferings” (219). Durkheim defines a modern society as driven by capitalism instead of feudal forms of socio-economic structures. The rise of the laissez-faire economy replaced traditionalist societies that were found on religion, hereditary, and feudalism.¹⁶ These socio-economic and political transformations based on liberalism, are as much as about lower classes gain and losses of privileges previously only associated to a lineage of monarchs and the poor, as of economic progress, material comfort, and consumerism. In his book *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim studied that differently from traditionalist societies, in modern societies “industry, instead of being still regarded as a means to an end transcending itself, has become the supreme of individuals and societies alike [...] by sanctifying them so, so to speak, this apotheosis of well-being has placed them above all human law” (216). The idea is that modern societies encourage individuals to be freed from institutions that regulate social behavior (i.e. governments, family traditions, unions, the church) instead of the maximization of profit and wealth for the individual and corporations alike (215). Durkheim was clearly not against material improvement for quality of life, and in any way proposes that traditionalist societies were right, or that existing societies are worse. As a sociologist his concern is that regulatory institutions should be set in place for the betterment of a cohesive society. His argument is that even if institutions are regulatory, modern societies driven by capitalism were not doing enough to replace the social

¹⁶ He published his study after French and Industrial Revolution, in which commercialization, advances in technology, and the expansion of Protestants, have transformed the expectations and roles that previous signifying social systems (feudalism, religion, and heredity) had on individuals’ life expectations.

insecurity, and hierarchy imposed by feudal societies, on the contrary, they should collaborate to the economic agenda as he explains

Religion has lost most of its power. And government, instead of regulation economic life, has become its tool and servant. The most opposite schools, orthodox economists and extreme socialists, unite to reduce government to the role of a more or less passive intermediary among the various social functions. The former wish to make simply the guardian of individual contracts; the latter leave it the task of [...] recording the demands of consumers, transmitting them to producers, inventorying the total revenue and distributing it according to a fixed formula. But both refuse in any power to subordinate other social organs to itself and to make them converge toward one dominant aim. On both sides nations are declared to have the single or chief purpose of achieving industrial prosperity [...] (Durkheim 215)

The resemblance of Durkheim's words to the neoliberal practices imposed in the 1990's in Mexico shows that we have become indoctrinated by the advanced practices of the liberal utopia of deregulation and have failed to implement sustainable alternatives as a society. To Durkheim, the deregulation of society is a twofold system: it gives certain freedoms that changes conformity however possible "within unregulated consciences which elevate to a rule the lack of rule from which they suffer" (217). On the other hand, "in societies where a man is subjected to a healthy discipline, he submits more readily to the blows of chance" (idem). Durkheim theorized that in a society where safety nets have been transferred to maximize profit, there is a disregard for institutions that try to regulate the

“moral state” of *desire*.¹⁷ If our relationship with the world is based on chances and opportunities as our neutral experience instead of a linear and univocal direction, then feelings like anger, anxiety, and disappointment may surpass a moral code of ethics to avoid disposability at all costs, which Durkheim calls anomic behavior. The novel is about Gabriel Lynch’s story of revenge, and hate, to which he must reject the noble tone of work ethic, problem solving, and inspiring leadership to join the market-driven society. Inspired by the “guerrillero” book, he uses his anger to achieve his goal while inspiring those around him to do the same. Because of the outcomes, I suggest that the corporate market-driven society enhances anomie to the national level, where in the novel’s imaginary, social anomie reaches a chronic state.

Recursos humanos adds to the plethora of neoliberal cultural production through dystopian imaginaries of an anxious sector of society disappointed with the consequences of NAFTA and anticipates a dystopian future institutionalized corporations deploying the market-driven mentality that is not of the interest of the people but of profit.¹⁸ Fixated only on the triumph, Lynch turns to “inhuman” resources to take the management position from Mario C. Castañeda, also known as the *ángel* Constantino. The secondary characters Miguel Paruro, Verónica, Carla, and Maria become counterparts and key players for his complete dissociation of humanity in lieu of taking part of the top of the corporation. The novel is

¹⁷ In *Suicide* (1897) Durkheim attempts to present a comprehensive statistical study between Eastern Europe modern societies and the increased numbers in suicide rate (99). The issues with the data collected, have been discussed in depth within social sciences, but that does not invalidate that Durkheim was able to identify suicide as a social response, divide them into categories (altruistic, egoistic, anomic) that addresses a problematic relationship between individuals and the social fabric. In literature, representations of homicide-suicide behavior are significant imaginaries to illustrate the struggles between self-desire and (lack) of society’s influence.

¹⁸ See Introduction.

divided into five linear chapters, “Así hablaba Constantino”, where Lynch impersonates and introduces Mario C. Castañeda, the son of a corporate and corrupt lawyer. Gabriel Lynch presents Mario as the archetype of the people who will ascend in the company Lynch works. The second chapter, “La vida plebeya de Gabriel Lynch”, our protagonist repeats that this novel is about his hate and ambition: “Digo: esta es la historia de mi odio, la purga de mi corazón, el salario del asco y el miedo” (21).¹⁹ In “La caída de Constantino” Lynch takes pride of his subversive methods to take Mario’s position as a manager at the company. In “Catecismo para esclavistas” Lynch changes from being a “esclavo” of the system to become a “amo” of the market-oriented culture that does not favor Lynch’s background. Finally, in “La lucha con el Ángel” Ortuño refers to the epigraph when Jacob had to fight with an angel all night to prove his worth. After Jacob perseveres, he is renamed Israel, the man who fought God and prevailed. The five chapters’ narrative structures Lynch’s first-person confession of how he climbed Jacob’s ladder, in a satirical and sometimes brutal analogy to biographical versions of successful stories of being a CEO.

Recursos humanos’s tone begins with the following epigraph from the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, “Y [Jacob] soñó con una escalera que estaba apoyada en tierra y su extremo tocaba el cielo. Ángeles de Dios subían y descendían por ella” (28:12-13). The narrative is constructed around Jacob’s own quest from the Book of Genesis. Lynch often refers to the corporates’ structure as “Jacob’s ladder”. To climb the ladder, Jacob must trust in God’s fulfilling promise that if Jacob has faith in Him, Jacob and his offspring will have a life of prosperity in the future. In the storyline, Jacob, as the youngest sibling, should have

¹⁹ Gabriel Lynch’s feelings of hate, revenge and *mezquino* are also present on Ortuño’s *La vaga ambición* (2017) and *Olinka* (2019). See Medonza’s interview with Ortuño “La literatura es un oficio de permanente frustración” (Revista Zenda, 2017) and Youtube interview with Carlos Puig “Realidades mezquinas y fregadas de México, Antonio Ortuño, autor del libro ‘Olinka’” (Dec. 19, 2019).

not, by birthright, receive the blessing of ruling from his father Isaac. But Jacob, which means to “take by the heel”, tricked his father, and his brother Esau, and was given his father’s blessing to rule. Lynch compares the corporate environment as Jacob’s ladder, and to go up, he, must obey the corporate’s rules.

The law within this market-oriented culture is feeble to promote equality and justice. Although not a lawless urbane, the market-oriented culture weakens the efficiency of law mostly to allow the company to be exempted from any social responsibility with the public either through paying taxes or by guaranteeing worker’s protection. The deregulatory behavior of the company allows them to take advantage of the law to favor tax evasion, and to undercut worker’s protection. This alludes to a common neoliberal practice in which corporations work with the government to favor corporation’s margin of profit even if it means to protect labor rights or prevent a market-oriented society to cause harm to humans. Ortuno’s imaginary goes beyond that, and when there is an explosion at the company—as an act of subversion—there is no investigation, or compensation for the losses of some. Instead the floor is rebuilt in one week, and the attack is washed down with a promise of worker’s receiving compensation for their “days off”. In this impersonal space, it is not clear what the company does, workers are replaceable pawns and responsibility towards humans is secondary to the own building that continues to stand.

In this market-oriented culture, the most affluent can use their wealth to be exempted from the law. The father Castañeda, “el abogado que ha convertido el sistema legal de esta ciudad en su ramera” for five years now (14-15) does not work in the company, but he uses his position within the law system to act according to the company’s interest, and to be exempted from breaking the law. Mario Constantino Castañeda is his youngest son, whose

first job is to be a manager of a company in “la oficina más notoria del tercer piso” (13).²⁰

Mario confesses that although he enjoys the title, he knows that the position was given to him because of his father’s influence and as “parte del precio que tuve que pagar a mis padres por la humillación suprema de haber sido detenido por la policía y más de una vez” (14). When one can finance their way out of the consequences of the law it gives the most affluent, like the company, an omnipotent characteristic driven by access to capital while weakening the trust in the judiciary institution.

With a weakened institution, and a non-visible government, the role of social responsibility is left to wealth. When wealth determines equality, justice, and take the place of social responsibility, then the ones who do not have wealth suffer the most. In Ortuño’s novel, the informal sector personified through the sex worker Carla, is the one who is dehumanized the most within the “productive” sector of society. Carla was Lynch’s first sexual encounter during his teenager years, of which she told him that he “recordaba a su sobrino” (48). From his teenager years, Carla’s life, as part of the informal sector, has not improved. Initially, Carla is semi-retired, still working at the brothel but exempt from the act of sex. When the brothel changes management, Carla is obligated to work the floor again. In the brothel, where all men of different social classes congregate, the new management forces the (female) sex workers to take a liquid that causes them to lose weight. An enforced dietary restriction shows that the brothel uses their disenfranchised position to exploit their bodies with maximization of profit: it provides an aesthetics pleasing to men, and at the same time

²⁰ Although present in the novel, the third floor it is not the focus on Ortuño’s novel rather explored on both of Bef’s novels *Gel azul* and *El estruendo del silencio*. On chapter 4 of this dissertation, Bef illustrates a world where capital is accumulated independently from physical labor, robots have become the main workers, and all resources, including planets, are owned by a corporation called HumaCorp.

suppresses their hunger. More informal is the job, more chances of exploitation, less mobility, and less chances of representation outside of human transaction.

Besides structuralizing clear socio-economic inequality through a precarious institutional practice and reducing access to the city through the power of consumption, the market-oriented society implements a conservative hierarchy of white-male-heteronormative with misogynist tendencies. In the novel, Ortuño suggests that being darker skin, poor, non-male limits other forms of agency, that in a binary society, white women are secretaries who work on the Human Resource department, or are at the margins, like the sex worker Carla who is black. The women are second-class citizens within the market-oriented culture, as figures exploited from the lack of regulation that protects worker's, but women's enfranchisement. Ortuño compares the character Verónica, financially better than the other female characters through her marriage to the oldest son of the Castañeda family. Verónica, Mario's sister-in-law, has more social mobility because she is married to the oldest son of the Castañeda family. As a secondary character of the novel, Verónica confesses to La Nena, one of Paruro's affairs, that she feels "rara con él" while La Nena feels weird without her husband's presence. Seeing that both have affairs, they conclude aloud that "somos unas putas" (109). Their own recognition of prostitutes, in the pejorative name given to a woman who cheats instead of part of the sex industry, seems to have no parallel to all men in the novel who are constantly switching partners and having affairs. Instead, it shows acceptance of a patriarchal system with limited agency through sex whereas ascension, independence to be a parent or a working mother is not discussed. Their reactions speak of a systematic oppression, as La Nena knows Paruro is just an affair, and chooses to stay with her husband, while Verónica, explodes the second floor of the company enraged by Paruro's freedom,

ascension, and lack of interest in her. Verónica's violent act did not solve the root of the problem because "ha revivido la puta empresa, como el zombie que emerge de un ritu vudu" (99). When she tries to become socially independent from her role as a mother, she is given a job by her father-in-law at the same company as Mario. The goal is to *keep an eye* on her social life, limit her job work, to eventually force her to go back to her role as a mother. The common connection between women, sex, and money within this misogynist corporate space is pivotal to understand that although a market-oriented culture promotes ideals of individual freedom, it falls short on the representation of laws that protects and promotes individuality through gender in this case.

In the novel, the pressure to adjust *feels chronic*, that is, without alternatives, enhancing the state of anomie, and therefore the lack of social influence. The disappointment leads to a chronic state of dysphoric feelings which is a fundamental theme of this dissertation and is manifested in different ways in the subsequent chapters as well. The socio-economic division and neglect for a change, creates a sense of wasted lives. If you are not part of the rich, then you are at the margins. Sacrifices need to be made so others can live better in places where utopia is not possible. The anti-heroic (re)actions of Gabriel Lynch and his last life disappointment is to sacrifice Mario and his relationships so he can be a ruler instead of a meek. To achieve this conquest Lynch is inspired by "la refinada maldad de Dios en el Viejo Testamento" (27) and by "los manuales revolucionarios que fui comprando en librería de viejo [...] cuando mis ansias económicas me entregaban a la envidia" (24). These are significant readings in Lynch's quest because they have shaped his actions throughout the novel.

The management position is given to Mario C. Castañeda: In this sentence, religion is analogous to conformity, and philosophy is symbolic of sobriety, or to live in moderation. To Lynch they are more than conflicting ideologies with the market-oriented culture, they are also a systematic structure of power to keep the richer empowered. From this perspective, these ideologies are only beneficial to the masters because it prevents conflicts between different social classes

Otros debieron combatir tiranías, derrumbar imperios, tirotear príncipes incluso [...] Yo que soy cobarde en toda norma, sólo me alzo contra la sociedad anónima que rige la mía. Como exigen los tiempos mezquinos que corren, apenas soy capaz de oponerme a que la vida de oficinita no me anule [...] No aspiro a la revolución sino a otra cosa que ahora mismo sólo entreveo y que se parece a la autoconservación y delincuencia (17)

His manifesto allows us to explore Lynch's psychology gradually escalating into a merciless anti-hero who infiltrates the system, not to resist, but to become part of it. Lynch's present awareness is that this is an era of avarice, and stinginess. *Mezquino* is an adjective to describe a person, and an organized society. Lynch reaffirms that the law is used to justify the results regardless of the methods or means used, neglecting the consequences that it may have on the individual. A society that respects individuality—as in independence and uniqueness—is not the same as an individualized society. In the novel, the core of a market-driven society is to reduce individuality to a hetero-normative, white, patriarchal, and machista culture. When Mario and Lynch meet at the brothel where Carla works, Mario makes a misogynist comment, “la putas son mujeres, hermano, pero sin los deplantes del resto” to which Lynch admits having heard this comment before, always from “hombres a los que no les queda más

remedio que limitar su vida sexual a lo que pueda sufragarles la cartera” (49). The root of this comment is targeted towards the view of women due to a systematic structure that fortifies machismo, but Lynch’s response feels personal, but Lynch confirms to the reader that “No soy machista ni feminista, aclaro. Hombres y mujeres me parecen parte de la misma piara espantosa” (idem). Mario resents that women are only interested in his money, but he is part of the cycle. This is another way to erase or reduce any form of social agency to economic gain where Lynch confirms that his only desire is to acquire what Mario has: “Mario C. Castañeda es un sujeto bien plantado y jovial a quien nunca falta fortuna en el trabajo o compañía en la cama” (46). Tired of waiting for his turn to make to the third floor Lynch, in social anomie, he confesses to do whatever it takes to get to the third floor.

More the company neglects what happens, more space for violence happens within the company and between coworkers. In these next chapters, Lynch changes from writing about his thoughts and sharing about his coworkers confessions to him, and focuses on his quest, “A partir de ahora, de esta línea o quizás la que sigue, ya que esta llega a su fin sin que mi profecía tenga visos de cumplirse, buscaré privilegiar la narración de mis pobres afanes por sobre mis pensamientos” (76). Lynch’s first act of delinquency was to explode Mario’s Pontiac, a gift from his father. After succeeding in his effort without any suspicions, Lynch uses his clandestine relationship with Mario at the brothel to gain his and Carla’s trust to embark on his revenge against Mario C. Castañeda. To end Mario’s career, Lynch convinces Carla to drug and then violate him. The consequences for Mario are irreparable and his distracting behavior becomes Lynch’s gateway to finally climb to the top of the ladder. It is important to notice that the dehumanization of Mario does not represent the death of a

misogynist society, but a revengeful society that will continue its methods with Lynch being his successor.

As a vice-manager Lynch fires a couple unjustly, which leads to a homicide-suicide in the company. The death of his coworker, and the suicide of the person whom Lynch had fired, enhances social anomie, and reinforces an individual and unhealthy subversiveness toward the corporation and the market-oriented society. In this current institution, on the contrary of freedom, there is no space for negotiation because there is not a balance of power between the overseers of the company and the workers. After making these moves to prove he can adjust to the market-oriented society, Lynch becomes the CEO of the corporation.

The ironic and unhopeful ending shows that regardless of the virtues of global and technological upgrade since the 1980s, post-NAFTA and neoliberalism feels like an unfulfilled promise for the security and benefit of most of the sectors of Mexican society. Being poor, darker, and female in this novel is structuralized as a crime, or as an individual problem rather than systemic. The fear of losing a job, or the impossibility of enfranchisement, and the anxiety of homelessness is not only at the center of this novel, but a narrative that creatively explores the (potential) hazard of promoting the worst in humanity when the state refrains from guaranteeing social justice in relation to secure employment, education, training, work ethics, and worker's compensation are undermined. Like in *Recursos humanos*, the next chapters show how affluence guarantees material comfort, while individual forms of resistance invite the reader to rethink the corporativism enhanced by neoliberal practices in Latin America.

The choices of spaces in Ortuño's novel, always enclosed, consumer oriented, embody not only a market driven society, but the only spaces where interactions, most often

of sexual nature, may happen. The lack of public spaces in the novel's imaginary, discussed in depth in Bof's *Gel azul* (2009) and *El estruendo del silencio* (2009), complements to the neoliberal practice to privatize, modernize, and globalize to appeal to as many customers as possible.

CHAPTER 2:

The Abjectified Nation in Guillermo Saccomanno's *El Oficinista* (2010)

Julia Kristeva's (1941-) iconic work *Powers of Horror* defines the importance of the abject and its counterpart, the object, in the formation of the body politic.²¹ which helps to define, shape, delineate, and develop a nation according to political and social values based on desire and rejection. While the object represents the subject's desires (i.e. physical, emotional, and ideal), the abject "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4).

The object and the abject are conditioned to have social, cultural, and economic value to society, and their maintenance is disseminated through various political and socio-economic practices. Kristeva's theory is to rethink the importance of the abject in relation to the collective understanding. As an example, she compares the value of a healthy body and of a corpse within the body politic. Both are regulated and socially constructed in the social, political, and economic sense. The body, the object of desire, becomes of value when confronted with the corpse as its complement. A corpse is a reminder of one's own life expectancy, and that alone can become the motivator for the proper regulation of the body. Because the corpse is socially constructed as non-human, the body is regulated and maintained daily through exercises, health, aesthetics, and food habits. Kristeva argues that without the abject (the corpse) the object (the body) would not have the same value to society.

²¹ The body politic represents a nation of people organized through entities that reinforce the political, executive, cultural, and economic values that forms a subject as part of the nation.

Kristeva argues that the representation of the abject in literature is the “most explicit realization of the signifying subject’s condition” (82) demonstrating “the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses” (208). Kristeva’s understanding of abject literature shows that the abject has an intimate connection with the conditions of the subject in crisis.²² In her book *Abjection and Representation*, Rina Arya builds on Kristeva’s theory of abjection, as she adds that it is through such experience that we can have a better “collective understanding” of our rituals, habits, and of a social crisis (193).

In this chapter, Saccomanno’s novel *El oficinista* published in 2010, represents an abject city with abjectified characters to recreate a collective understanding of Argentina’s most recent socio-economic crisis in 2001-2002 that led to the step down of the former president Fernando de la Rúa in December of 2001.²³ In this abjectified nation, the culture of disposability and replaceability reproduced by the corporation (re)creates an oppressive environment commonly associated with periods of dictatorship and deployment of liberalism in the country implying a repeat history instead of a rupture from the past.

²² Because Kristeva’s study is drawn from the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, it is understood that for the development and growth of society, individual members of that society need a healthy “Ego” (how we deal with reality). A healthy “Ego” is a balance between the Id (the impulsive and innate need for self-gratification) and the “Super-Ego” (succumbing to morality enforced by cultural signifiers). An imbalance or crisis of the signifying order suggests an unhealthy “Ego” that in place of remorse will yield to “Id” (instant gratification) which can be destructive to a social body. This cognitive path is a constant battle between the individual’s innate wishes and the rules of society; in Kristeva’s framework, it is believed that the Id will take over when the social body is in crisis.

²³ See introduction.

About the Author

Guillermo Saccomanno is a renowned writer of contemporary Latin American narrative committed to the representation of the effects of Argentina's (oppressive) political history. He has directed satirical comics, taught creative writing, and is most recently a columnist for *Página/12*. He was born in 1948 in Mataderos, Buenos Aires, but resides in Villa Gesell, a touristic province of Buenos Aires with a large community of immigrants from Germany, Austria, Spain, and Italy that fled the Nazis or sought refuge following World War II. The influx of Europeans in Argentina has been an influence in Saccomanno's writing, who opts for the *lunfardo* dialect in novels such as *El viejo Gesell* (1992) and *La cámara Gesell* (*Gesell Dome*, 2012). Under a pseudonym, he also published *novelas negras*, chronicles, short stories, and novels that depict the social violence in Argentina during General Videla's dictatorship (1976-1983).²⁴

His past writings and commitment to represent and resist the authoritarianism in Argentina's history is reflected on his later writings like in *El oficinista* (2010) and in the compilation of short narratives, *Terrible accidente del alma* (2014). In both narratives there is a commitment to condemn the deterioration of social responsibility in Argentina's society which is extended to the private space with unspeakable forms of social violence in the micro and macro level like infanticide, domestic violence, and homicide.

²⁴ In 2009 Saccomanno won the *Premio Dashiell Hammett* in *La Semana Negra de Gijón* with his novel *77* (2008), which is the last novel of the trilogy *La lengua del malón* and *El amor argentino* both published in 2003. The trilogy represents the political violence in Argentina under General Videla's authoritarian regime. Most recently, he published *Terrible accidente del alma* (2014). Besides a prolific writer, he received many recognitions over the years like *Premio Biblioteca Breve* six times, the *I Premio Municipal de Cuento*, *Premio Revista Crisis de la Narrativa Latinoamericana*, and the *Premio Clube de los XIII*. In 2001, he received the *Premio Nacional de Novela* for *El buen dolor* (1999).

The Novel

El oficinista was published by Seix Barral and is the winner of the Premio Biblioteca Breve 2010. In the ten years since its initial publication, the novel has received critical attention as a narrative that displays the social anxieties of Argentina's structuralized poverty and social insecurity of the middle class at the turn of the twenty-first century. As much as neoliberalism opened Argentina to global trades, its doctrine has weakened the middle class stability as a national pride by showing a decline in education and labor protections coalescing in an endemic poverty (Ehrmantraut 201-202, 2016).

In a comparative study, Adam Demaray proposes how the unwanted anonymity upon the characters of *El oficinista* represents a crisis of identity in Argentina that stems from the most recent dictatorship, and it is carried through the neoliberal doctrine resulting in the 2001-2002 events which contributed to the fragmentation of social bonds evident in the novel (2016). My interpretation of Saccomanno's novel overlaps with that of other scholars regarding the abysmal effects of the neoliberal reforms on areas of employment and safety nets in Argentina's society, and how these increase the pauperization of the middle and lower social classes.

Different from the previous criticism, I develop the term "abjectified nation" allowing me to develop Saccomanno's secondary characters rarely (or not) analyzed hitherto—the couple *la pelirroja* and *el ruso*, *la india*, the *kickboxers*, and the *perros clonados*—while the previous scholars tend to revolve around *el oficinista* and his (platonic) relationship with *la secretaria*, and *el jefe*. The secondary characters amplify the collective understanding of the corporate logic representing the struggle of characters that vary in shape, age, and beliefs.

Published during the hopeful Pink Tide, *El oficinista* projects an anonymous city that resembles Buenos Aires that with the exception for the anonymous corporation, society's organizing systems like the welfare state, families, education, healthcare, and the civil society are deteriorated and taken over by endemic homelessness, poverty, precarious employment, and bankrupt financial institutions. Saccomanno represents an oppressive environment controlled by the military, the media, and the corporation to reproduce production and consumption while the city is under the stage of siege. The imagery of corporate profit over a city in clear stage of siege conflates critical moments of Argentina's history like the most recent dictatorship (1976-1983), the increase of homelessness and job precariousness during the *menemismo* decade (1989-1999), the 2001-2002 events in the Province of Buenos Aires, and even Juan Manuel de Rosas' term in the nineteenth century (1835-1852).

The Modern and Abjectified City

El oficinista takes place in an anonymous fictitious city in a normalized state of emergency with daily explosions, pestilence, endemic poverty, suicidal bats, and 24-hour military surveillance. The abjectified nation is thought-provoking as it includes the murder of the elderly and of children, endemic homelessness, sexual crudeness, and physical and psychological violence, all of which are engulfing, although not gratuitous. When there is not a formal institution that organizes the body politic, then the civil society is usually the helper. Like in Estrada's film *Un mundo maravilloso* discussed in the Introduction, the civil society is no longer a strong factor as food banks, churches, and hospitals have their doors closed to the public increasing the amount of homelessness on the street. To complement

these factors, Saccomanno escalates the representation of endemic poverty to insinuate a zombie apocalypse:

Cada tanto se cruzan con cuerpos durmiendo entre cartones, acurrucados en las recovas y los pórticos. El oficinista y la secretaria se sortean entre los tirados. Doblan por una peatonal. También acá se cruzan con hombres, mujeres y chicos durmiendo arropados junto a las vidrieras de cada negocio. La pareja contiene la respiración ante la pestilencia de esos cuerpos. Se desvían para esquivar unos *pibes zombies*. (21, emphasis added)

The atmosphere reminiscent of the film *Blade Runner* (1982) and George Orwell's novel *1984* (1949) boosts the Science-Fiction components of this dystopian futuristic society. Elements like acid rain, cloning of humans and animals, and constant surveillance contribute to the representation of contemporary themes like global warming, genetic engineering, technology, and public surveillance.

On the other hand, the anonymous city traces a legion of people of different ages, sex, ethnicity, and socio-economic status living in the same metropolitan area with public transportation, schools, skyscrapers, hospitals, police, shops, banks, small private gated communities, immaculate commerce areas, banks, and corporate buildings. The city seems apace with “la corriente interminable de autos y colectivos [...] Unidos como en un convoy. La multitud nerviosa que colma las veredas esperando colectivos corre precipitándose en la boca del subte” (56). The dichotomy between the functionality of the modern city, fervor and the deliberate forms of violence between families, coworkers, and strangers that populates the city shows an ambiguous body politic centered for consumption, and production at all costs, with “camiones militares, brigadas antimotines, equipos con cascos, chalecos antibalas,

lanza gases, ametralladoras y perros de ataque” in every corner (83). On the contrary, the expectation is that these activities should continue even though there are schools, hospitals, geriatric centers, and metros being attacked daily by the military and by individual acts of resistance.

The only light through the city is from the shop displays and the helicopter reflectors, factors that contribute to “la sensación nocturna” (83) of the days. The State is only present in the novel through the military branch fighting against terrorism. To protect this methodology, surveillance adds to the lack of free will and constant fear, making it difficult to discern “quién es un subversivo y quién es un ciudadano común” (58). The military uses the media to promote propaganda and other authoritarian strategies (i.e. frisking, random identification checks) to contain protests, manifestations, or gatherings among people. The *guerrilleros* are also the terrorists attacking the heart of a market-oriented economy, “[un] barrio privado ubicado en unas lomas de la periferia,” “un yacimiento petrolero,” “una clínica de clonación de bebés,” “un camión militar,” “el subte,” “centro geriátrico” (50-57).

The connection between the neoliberalization of Latin America and authoritarian regimes is a common theme in this dissertation. In Bep’s novel, *Ladrón de sueños*, the author parallels the sudden disappearance of the bodies of children and teenagers with the omnipotent power of HumaCorp which controls the social body through the means of production and consumption. In Aníbal Jarkowski’s *El trabajo*, the character Diana is raped by a General, and the writer is prohibited of selling books publicly. In the same way as *la pelirroja*, resistance is often met with violence as well. In the first chapter, where I examine Antonio Ortuño’s novel *Recursos humanos*, the protagonist Gabriel Lynch refers to *the guerrillero* book on how to make explosions to subversively move up the ladder in the

company. The continuation of the relationship between authoritarian behavior over the social body agrees with Faulkner's view in which the transition from the dictatorship to the neo-corporate democracy does not feel like a (re)construction of the social body after a crisis in the 1980s in Latin America.

This abject environment is the backdrop for the protagonist of the novel, is a lower-level office worker from the anonymous corporation like in the novels *Recursos humanos* and *El trabajo*. *El oficinista* is going through a middle age crisis which becomes the turning point in his life to reflect on who he is, and what he wants. But *el oficinista*, lacks any form of heroic attributes. In fact, he has been stripped from any sense of self-worth:

Ni en la oficina ni en su hogar saben quién es él. Y si medita que él mismo tampoco sabe, entonces le da vértigo [...] le gusta pensar que él, a pesar de su carácter manso, puede ser, dada la circunstancias, feroz [...] este razonamiento le sirve para aguantar al jefe, a los compañeros y a su propia familia. (12)

Like in the excerpt above, *El oficinista*, hides a permanent limp, which is just the beginning of a series of hidden truths that he keeps from his coworkers and family. Even though he has a steady job and is considered the bosses' right hand man, they lives in "un departamento alquilado en las inmediaciones de una terminal suburbana, un tres ambientes contrafrente, penumbroso, estrecho y hediondo" (40). He boasts to his coworkers "que su hogar y familia representa todo un valor en estos tiempos de crisis moral," describing his children and wife as "seres queridos, herederos de una buena educación, cifrada en el sacrificio y el afecto" (39). He is married to a verbally and physically abusive spouse and his children are equally disrespectful to him, except for one his son's *el viejito*, who has a lame leg disability like *el oficinista*. His other kids are the image of the ideal customers of

McDonald's as they are "obesos malcriados" that demand "hamburguesas, salchichas, papas fritas y gaseosas" (40).

El oficinista's only connection with his family is as the source of the household income. His feelings toward his family reflect their disdain toward him as he fantasizes about killing them: "a menudo imagina que los liquida" (40). In the event that *el oficinista* plots about killing his family to flee with the secretary to a beach in Mexico, he thinks of *el viejito* which is the only shred of humanity left in *el oficinista*. For *el oficinista*, killing *el viejito* would imply to exterminate the only vestige of humanity left in *el oficinista* projected in *el viejito*'s own disability.

For the most part, *El oficinista*'s narrative is filtered through an intrusive omniscient narrator whose focus is to deconstruct the appearances of the body politic by shedding light on *el oficinista*'s lame leg, submissive life at work and at home. Because *el oficinista* is part of the plot in the narrator's story, the true insurgent in the novel is the narrator, in the position of exposing the cartography of abjectified subjects that live within an economic system that promotes high levels of consumption, precarious jobs, and is constantly watching your behavior in a panoptical setting. As a witness of *el oficinista*'s struggles and imperfections, the narrator grasps the protagonist's most intimate thoughts, including feeling emasculated by his boss, "sin dejarse de poner en el lugar de la joven [secretaria], mientras el jefe lo posee, boca abajo, de bruces sobre el escritorio [...] Se reprocha pensar en estas porquerías" (78). Like the guard of a panoptic structure, the narrator deliberately penetrates *el oficinista*'s most personal thoughts and spaces (i.e. the bathroom, and the bedroom) only to reveal to the reader everything *el oficinista* is willing to subjugate himself to so he can survive this environment.

As opposed of the protagonist *Gabriel Lynch* in the first chapter, *el oficinista*'s reaction to the oppressive environment is through apathy, which is seemingly a state of indifference. One of the most significant examples in the novel is when *la india* is having a baby in the middle of the street. The following objective quote is from the protagonist's own perspective of the event: "*No es novedoso ver parir a una india. Todo el tiempo están pariendo las indias. Todo el tiempo en todas las partes. Sin embargo, el espectáculo*²⁵ no deja de llamar la atención. El público, cada vez más numeroso, contempla el parto como un *acto de arte callejero* [...] (60-61). He extends his matter-of-fact comments about the abjectified character like he is reading a scientific magazine

Baja, ancha, de ojos rasgados, rodete de pelo negro, es una estatua de arcilla. Se sobrepone al dolor, resiste al sufrimiento de las contracciones. Puja una y otra vez. Puja y la criatura empieza a salirle. Puja. Espasmos cortos. Le chorrean la sangre y el líquido amniótico. Puja. *Corta el cordón con los dientes*. Alza la criatura oscura y amoratada. (61)

El oficinista's apathetic reaction is particular especially after describing how other people reacted to *la india*'s barbaric description: "Una rubia embarazada, probablemente una secretaria, se desmaya. Un hombre se marea y se aparta. Otros, trastabillando, se corren para vomitar. Un muchado se descompone. Una vieja protesta. Varios retroceden con espanto" (61). His suppression of emotions are not harmless however because no one offers to help *la india*, and when the ambulance is called, the paramedics go assist the pregnant *rubia* that fainted from watching the *la india* and "todos le dan la espalda a la india" (61). Once more,

²⁵ Emphasis added by me.

the lack of empathy toward *la india* and this comment confirms that she is a reminder of their own social insecurity

At this moment, the author puts in evidence the contrast between *civilization* and *barbarie* and puts into question who is more barbaric, the marginalized *india*, the people who watch her and turn their backs, or *el oficinista* whose only reaction is cynical, “A la larga, piensa, los indios volverán a reinar en este continente” (61). This scene does not only represent the blatant social inequality and discrimination represented through gender and race, but a fragmented society, filled with anxiety, having to face the reality that Argentina’s history of progress and civilization is a myth.

Accepting that the urban space is guarded and controlled for the protection of a productive consumer market is a survival skill, and preparation for the future. For those who have a job, like the protagonist, *la secretaria*, *el ruso* and *la pelirroja*, the corporate logic of disregarding the employee’s well-being and needs has deep effects on how to raise their kids. Perceiving this society through corporate logic being deployed through military defense shows that the corporation is the institution in power, and their logic is to profit. As a result, kids are being raised to *provide continuity* to the corporate logic.

When the secretary tells *the oficinista* she is pregnant, she tells him that she is going to raise her kid to be a kickboxer since the sport will teach him the necessary skills to advance in this environment. In the novel, kickboxing is a violent sport for the entertainment of the rich resembling a gladiator setting. In the kickboxing ring the kids from different ethnicities all gathered to become the entertainment where “no existen reglas que prohíban tretas” (146). This is a significant comment since kids from poor neighborhoods that use the ring as a form of economic viability. In *El oficinista*’s dystopian arena, teenagers and pre-

adolescents from various ethnicities fight in a ring to injure (and sometimes kill) the opponent for money. Preparing the kids for life-or-death kickboxing while the rich watches them is another structure that instead of resisting the corporate mentality of profit, disposability, and replaceability, these ethnic kids will become the next soldiers of the corporate mentality.

The Corporate Logic of Disposability

Between the fortified architecture of the buildings and the most impoverished citizens, the author focuses on the urban working class who holds semi-skilled jobs (i.e. office clerks, secretaries, and supervisors). The secondary characters belong to either the working class (*la pelirroja*), the intelligentsia (*el ruso*), or the informal sector (i.e. sex workers, and kickboxers). The corporation is only perceived from the perspective of workers with lower-level office jobs while the most affluent, typically those who benefit most from a market-oriented society (i.e. CEOs, investors, financiers, lawyers) have an omnipotent presence in this macro-organism instilled through the corporation's ruthless and economically efficient environment, consisting of a structuralized hierarchy, characterized by merciless layoffs, prohibition of labor unions, and surveillance through the panopticon.²⁶

²⁶ The panopticon is a reference to Jeremy Bentham's prison system developed in Europe in the late 18th century. The term "panopticon" refers to his spherical cell architecture with a main security tower in the center of the building. Prisoners can always see other prisoners, but they cannot see where the security is facing so they do not know when they are being watched. The intention is to psychologically develop a mental state of always being observed to control behavior across the board. The panopticon instills submission to the social rules and regulations. On the other hand, it is common practice nowadays, accepted through the installation of cameras in the private and public spaces. Nowadays video recording is also perceived as a weapon of resistance (of equal opportunity) to publicly shame people's behavior on social media.

The presence only of oppressive public institutions and the normalization of the corporate mentality associated with self-profit, wealth, and power, mirrors the abandoned streets, zombie-like bodies, cases of suicide-homicide, explosions, and high levels of domestic violence. The dehumanization and neglect of the poor instills fear on the urban working class, that like Gabriel Lynch expressed in *Recursos humanos*, empowers the corporation by choosing to live in misery than to fall to extreme poverty.

The city's panoptic and military setting mirrors the ruthless corporate mentality that takes advantage of the country's endemic homelessness, and the state's crisis to neglect better working conditions for their employees who each day see themselves closer to complete dehumanization. Corporate tactics like unjustified causes for firing, working during the weekend and holiday without extra pay, and constant changes of management are tactics that the corporation uses to show that their employees are disposable in the larger scheme of things. From the employees' perspective, these tactics feel like threats that inculcate fear in the public and the private spaces as evidence that the city's incongruent systematic order of consumption mold the common citizen within the logic of "amenaza-miedo" (Crespo Buiturón, 30).

The logic of amenaza-miedo alludes to different moment in Argentina's history in which governments from democratic and authoritarian periods utilized the fear-threat mechanisms to deploy their political and economic interest. In this case, the character's choices are to conform to the corporate rules of disposability; succumb to a violent subversive group; or to submit to homelessness. The absence of alternatives that are cohesive with the wellbeing of the collective memory to constitute a desirable space for the middle

and lower social classes under the corporate logic of profit and consumption is the frame of the *abjectified nation*.

Even though open office spaces are common practice nowadays, and surveillance cameras are accepted at gyms and traffic lights, in Saccomanno's novel, the sense of being observed at all times, already anticipated at the Big Brother in *1984*, increases the paranoia and distrust for each other becoming irrational. *El oficinista*'s coworker *el ruso* has a diary that he writes daily during his lunch break. *El oficinista* is at first curious about what could be so interesting about a life of an *oficinista*. One night he went to *el ruso*'s cubicle and realized that he takes the diary with him home. That immediate action led to a complete irrational thought—from an outsider perspective—that *el ruso* was an actual spy for the corporation, and needed to be liquidated, and from that *el oficinista* “de vigilado pasó a ser vigilante (14).

The panoptic office diverts *el oficinista*'s attention to his job where he spends most of his time looking for a reason to feel useful, as the omniscient narrator describes:

A fines del siglo pasado fue uno de los pocos que supo adaptarse al progreso de la informática, cuando las computadoras reemplazaron a las calculadoras y máquinas de escribir. Su adaptación rápida provino antes del miedo que de su velocidad intelectual. Si ha permanecido en su puesto se debió a su docilidad y, fundamentalmente, a su astucia para escatimar sus conocimientos de los viejos trámites, sus orígenes remotos. Se ha vuelto indispensable como un archivo. Le gusta que lo califiquen tan útil como un archivo. Lo demuestra esa foto que expone sobre el escritorio: se lo ve en una fiesta de aniversario de la oficina recibiendo del jefe un *mouse* de bronce que usa, satisfecho, como pisapapeles. (73)

Like the paper holder, he is a central figure of the past, invisible to the corporation even as the bosses' right-hand man. He feels more attached to his office supplies than with a coworker as he carefully organizes his working materials: "lapiceras, el tintero, los sellos, la almohadilla, la goma de borrar, el sacapuntas y el cortapapeles. Al cortapapeles le concede un tratamiento preferencial. Le saca brillo" (12). Like the character Milton's from the movie *The Office* is attached to the one red stapler in the office that gives him identity, *el oficinista*'s highest point at the corporation is reduced to that one symbol of modern life (the mouse), and the past (a bronze piece of paper holder). His biggest accomplishment is to adjust to the technological changes probably because his wife threatens to beat him to death if he loses his job.

Afraid of being exposed about his obsolete position, *el oficinista* is terrified of being noticed by any of his coworkers or boss because this potentially endangers his job security. As one of the few long-term employees at the company, *el oficinista* has witnessed a series of humiliating layoffs and has seen employees of all ranks come and go. Invisibility is his resilience and allows him to bypass each CEO that expects a "reestructuración" (66) in the name of maximum efficiency and productivity at the cost of the workers' weekends, vacations, and holidays, and requires them to work extra hours without pay (70). Even though *el oficinista* is aware that "toda su vida estuvo signada por el sometimiento," it is worse to "sumarse a las bordas de rasposos sin techo" (18). The anxiety presented in the form of resentment towards the indigent and homeless is symbolically his own fear of accepting homelessness and solitude. Like the neoliberal policies, *el oficinista* empowers the corporation and the state by subjugating to their rules.

With low expectations from work and little sense of belonging in the family, *el oficinista* reckons with reality through scientific magazines but also through super-hero movies, “en las películas el héroe siempre tiene un motivo: una mujer. Si estuviera perdido por una mujer, no vacilaría” (12). In Demaray’s dissertation where social relations are still considered the most desired form of social acceptance and recognition of membership in the human species (2016).

But in this dissertation, the desire becomes a perversive act based on the morals of a heteronormative relationships through a men’s perspective. *El oficinista* gets involved in a triangle affair in between him, *la secretaria* and their boss. For the most part, the affairs between secretaries and their bosses have a hierarchical significance of power best represented in Chapter 3 through Jarkowski’s novel *El trabajo*. In the case of *el oficinista*, trying to win *la secretaria* over his boss represents more than an affair, but a triumph over him since he feels emasculated. This unhealthy competition over *la secretaria* is perceived as a new beginning for *el oficinista* since she is pregnant, and he is trying to find meaning to his unwanted anonymous life. His boss’ status emasculates *el oficinista*, leaving him with the chance to triumphally reproduce as the middle age approaches. For him, becoming a father would restore identity and purpose regardless of the secretary’s firm answers that the affair with *el oficinista* is fictional. Showing infatuation with *la secretaria* allows him to dream and transcend the abhorrent borders of the city where he becomes the father of her baby, and the provider who lives in the beach in Mexico. Although *la secretaria* immediately refutes his idea, he thinks it is because his boss has more money than he does. Not for one second, he believes that she is in love with the married boss, and that she can raise her own baby. As part of his platonic plan, he begins to think of how he can possibly get enough money to

escape his tragic situation at home and move to the beach with *la secretaria*. From this perspective, the triangle affair is a coping mechanism to deal with a system where he is disposable.

Saccomanno's short story "Hoy es Muy Lunes" (*Animales domésticos* 1994), Alberto Loicano shares similarities with *el oficinista's* dilemma, as he is a father, is unhappily married, and feels stuck in his job. For over a decade he works for an outdated advertising office owned by the Englishman Mr. Perry. Ten years ago, he was promised a higher position as the company would grow, but now they cannot compete with the larger international advertising companies. In both stories there is a pauperization of sectors middle class sectors and of the working classes due to the expansion of multinationals but represented in different eras. Alberto's storyline was written during the first half of the *menemismo decade* while in *El oficinista*, the multinationals already encroached the local business. Alberto and *el oficinista* both know they will not ascend from their position; they know they cannot divorce their wives because they cannot afford to pay for alimony and still live comfortably.

Alberto is infatuated with his coworker and secretary, Vicky, since they began to work together. Vicky is an ex-insurgent who miraculously survived a military attack at her school during the years of dictatorship by General Videla. Even though Vicky and Alberto live in the same city and work at the same office, there is a clear distinction in their lifestyles marked by socio-economic status, gender, age difference, and cultural acceptance. Alberto's life might be uneventful, but he feels like his financial security is important when it comes to Vicky, who financially supports her mother and brother, and occasionally helps her best friend with children in a domestic violence situation. Vicky shows Alberto she is emotionally available for others which is the opposite of his marriage. Like *la secretaria* is

for *el oficinista*, Vicky is the fantasy projected in Alberto's needs instead of being perceived for who she is.

Alberto loves to read Benedetti's texts, whereas Vicky prefers the American and British influence of rock 'n roll, showing that even though they are opposites they are utopian. In Benedetti's text, the office clerk Martín Santomé has two story lines. He is a widower and father with a feeble relationship with three teenagers, dreading retirement, "Lo que deseo ahora es mucho más modesto de lo que deseaba hace treinta años" (Benedetti 37). The second part of the story is dedicated to Martín's recent relationship with the young Laura Avellaneda. The critic José Castro Urioste presents in his article "Historia e intrahistoria en *La tregua* de Mario Benedetti" (1991) that in the novel, retirement is synonymous with Martín's last act in the market, about to confront idleness until Laura comes into his life. Meeting her allows him to expect a buoyant beginning as he invests in a new life with her. Laura's sudden death takes him to an undertow that furthers his degraded relationship with his kids and forces him to confront the emptiness of his life amidst retirement.

In Saccomanno's novel, *el oficinista* does not conquer his dream either because the secretary chooses to be with the boss who will be a progenitor for the first time since him and his wife cannot have children of their own. Alberto wishes to fulfill Vicky's dream to escape to a beach in Brazil. Their fixation with being providers to their (platonic) lovers instead of dealing with their own dreams (like getting divorce, not be invisible at work) parallels their feeling of anonymity in their professional and personal lives. They lack understanding that they are trying to fulfill their void by replacing it with someone else's dreams.

As a counter example of the desire for social relations, Saccomanno adds two secondary characters as the antagonists of *el oficinista's* crises, *el ruso* and *la pelirroja*. The

suffocating feeling of submission to an imposing political body is mostly presented through obnoxious violence, but that is not the case of the couple *el ruso* and *la pelirroja*. The couple represents what is now considered a distant utopian dream of a bourgeois that cross-references the intellectual with the working class in Argentina. *El ruso* works with *el oficinista* with the intention of saving enough money to become a full-time writer. On the other hand, his girlfriend, *la pelirroja*, is an auto mechanic. *La pelirroja* is made of “voluntad” and because of that “consigue todo lo que se propone” (101), and *el ruso* seeks the “conocimiento del alma” (102). Together, they make sacrifices of their own comfort, transportation, and expenses so they can raise enough money to live off federal land in the Patagonia and have children. Once they raise enough money, *el ruso* wants to dedicate his life to writing after he is done studying Russian literature, and *la pelirroja* will continue to work with her hands through farming and raising kids. The division of labor is based on their natural abilities of manual and intellectual labor. After *el ruso* reveals this secret to *el oficinista*, and he reveals to him that he is in love with *la secretaria*, *el oficinista* goes back to his paranoid self and tells his boss that *el ruso* keeps a diary. After *el ruso*’s sudden disappearance *la pelirroja* is violated and interrogated by the military. Feeling outraged and betrayed by her own *voluntad*, she blows up a gas station, which makes her a terrorist in this body politic.

While it is not an effective form of resistance that might lead to social change, individual transgression is a response to the abjection of the social body. Years of daily humiliation and lack of hope can only be resonated with an act of transgression. As discussed in the introduction, Émile Durkheim’s study of anomic suicide (*Suicide* 1897) shows that the state of anomie is a type of suicide in response to the demoralization of the

body politic which leads to a lack of life purpose. Although no one commits suicide in the novel, the individual acts of transgression without any space for transcendence leads to an abysmal future represented in this novel like a dystopia.

The *collateral damage* of the anachronic transition is an absolute resolution of abjection along with poor forms of resistance. Without room for social escape, *el oficinista* must confront the adversity in his life, otherwise feels destined to die like “vacas hacia el matadero” (59). This statement made by the protagonist *el oficinista* alludes to the nineteenth-century short story by Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851) published in 1871 but written during Juan Manuel de Rosas’s path of civil war between *federales* and *unitarios* that lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century in Argentina.²⁷ Echeverría’s short story is known for its violent representation of the struggle between *civilization* and *barbarie* reference again showing this to be a pattern within the Argentine history with liberalism. Historically, Rosas was a ruthless leader, fortified through state terrorism once he became the governor of Buenos Aires, the equivalent of president of the country (1832-1852). A point of connection between Saccomanno’s novel and Echeverría’s short story could be made with reference to a similar feeling for the contemporary history of Argentina because of political disagreements on how the country should proceed after independence from Spain in

²⁷*El matadero* was originally written in 1839 but published in 1871. Echeverría was opposed to Rosas’s dictatorship and sought exile. In his short story, *unitarios* became equated to “individuos civilizados y amantes de la libertad” (Oviedo 37). Historically, in the mid nineteenth century, Argentina was in a civil war between *unitarios*—who had eurocentric ideals—representing the Province of Buenos Aires and a prospect of a centralized government, and the *federales* which represented provinces of Argentina—rural workers, caudillos, gauchos—also ruled by Rosas. The civil war began shortly after Argentina’s independence from Spain (1824) out of disagreements between these two views on how to proceed with the future of Argentina. Echeverría’s short story is iconic for being the precursor of the theme of the struggle between *civilization* and *barbarism* in Argentina. Other works known by this theme are *Facundo* (1845) by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and José Hernández’ poem “El gaúcho Martín Fierro” (1872) and “La vuelta de Martín Fierro” (1879).

Echeverría's case and the economics of neoliberalism during the period of transition and democratization in Saccomanno's case.

In Echeverría's plot, after fifteen days of torrential rain, the slaughterhouse was forced to shut down temporarily which caused the demand for meat to exceed the supply in spite of the fact that it was Lent and the majority of Argentineans were Catholics who were supposed to be abstaining from meat. This shutdown made poultry and fish too expensive to afford for the citizenry. Due to the exceptional circumstances, Rosas decided to send *novillos* to the *matadero*. Consumed with starvation while the government and the church fail to provide equal treatment to their own population, the *federales* became associated with "savage" behavior as they were more preoccupied with an escaped bull than the death of a child. While the child is the symbol of social bonds, community, and family, the bull symbolizes a necessity of the market and of production. The escaped bull has more value in the story than the dead child, predicting darker times for Argentina under Rosas's future regime. In Saccomanno's novel, the neoliberal reforms as a solution to an endemic social crisis has likewise shifted an ideology of social body to an economic-driven body. With that said, *el oficinista* starts behaving like a real dog, non-human, but as it is, one of its most loyal servants.

These blurred lines between human and animal, civilization, and barbarism, represent uncertainties regarding the present and projects anxieties toward the future in Argentina since the novel shows in many instances a continuation of authoritarianism rather than transcendent of the recent dictatorial past. The novel *El trabajo*, examined in chapter three has the same characteristic of a continuation or interference from the morals of the most recent dictatorship represented through the regulation and violence towards the women's

body. Though they are represented in completely different scenarios, as *El oficinista* is a dystopia and *El trabajo*'s narrative is of a realist and naturalist essence, both show a “re”rupture of citizenship and lack of autonomy in a democratic period. In his mid-life crisis, the *oficinista* came to the realization that resignation is only possible through an act of transgression or exile. Without the strength, and support to resolute he goes home, strips down his clothes, and begins to act like a dog.

Saccomanno's future is bleak as the novel points out a historical cycle of liberalism and repression in Argentina during populist, dictatorial, and democratic periods, and how these practices polarize society reproducing the power of the institutions, which in this novel would be the corporate space. But the characteristics of his novel form part of a literary corpus of *novelas de anticipación*. Reati's *Postales del Porvenir* (2006) analyzes a compilation of dystopian novels that depict Argentina's transition from 1985-1999. Saccomanno's novel *El oficinista* could be added to the Argentine corpus. *El oficinista* trails components Reati studied in his theoretical framework like ScienceFiction elements (i.e. atemporality, cloning, acid rain, corporate control), and dystopia (i.e. bureaucracy and surveillance in a panoptical and ghettoized city). Reati concludes that the purpose of *novelas de anticipación* is not to predict the future—as the name suggests—but to prevent and act “proyectándose hacia el mañana para advertirnos sobre las posibles consecuencias de ignorar los problemas del presente” (217). Paola Ehrmantraut explains that this specific characteristic of Argentine novels represents “un creciente corpus de novelas de anticipación que continúan dando cuenta de la crisis en la ‘excepcionalidad argentina’ en el contexto latinoamericano utilizando un registro apocalíptico que combina catástrofe con revelación” (197).

The novel was published during the Pink Tide in Latin America, under the presidency of Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015) but the main frame of reference in the novel is from events taking place in Argentina between 1990s-2002. The struggle to restore society's socio-economic body after years of authoritarian governance, were undermined by neoliberal reforms based on the privatization of pension funds and programs formerly run by the state that derailed the regional tendency toward labor unions, and public aid. As discussed in the introduction to the present study the 2001-2002 riots, protests and, the step down of De la Rúa are consequences of a turbulent transition to democracy that left a bitter taste in the lives of many Argentine sectors of society. Minujín and López describe 1980s-1990s in Argentina as a distinct country facing a new kind of poverty and exclusion that mirrors the (un)familiar for the Argentine especially for the working and middle classes (1994). From this perspective, *El oficinista's* dystopia is represents symbolically the worst periods of Argentina in one setting putting a dent in the relationship between the state and the people while polarizing the collective understanding. For example, the characters *la pelirroja* and *el ruso* were not striving for a social reform, they are trying to achieve their dream together in a place that will allow them to work with their natural talents (her with her hands and building a family, and him with his intellectual mind).

In a polarized society, there is an absence of the collective understanding thus the (re)actions are also divided, which empowers the corporate logic of disposability. Like in the other Argentine novel in examined in this dissertation, other forms of constructing the political body like socialism, and communism are historicized as analogies of a distant past.

CHAPTER 3:

Resisting the Corp(us) Mentality in Aníbal Jarkowski's *El trabajo* (2007)

As discussed in the introduction, during Menem's term, thousands of Argentinian workers from both rural and urban areas lost their jobs, and the local business middle and lower classes grew insecure of their status. At the same time, corporations received excessive advantages in terms of control over employment rights and regulations increasing the anxiety rooted in a consumer citizen. Aníbal Jarkowski's novel *El trabajo* (2007) imagines the side effects of the neo-corporate environment through a gendered perspective, in which young women in a binary, heteronormative society are subordinate to men who control corporations, the family structure, and culture. With men regulating and imposing their views in all signifying systems, women's independence, value, and agency are subjugated to the men. In this chapter, the gendered perspective is another layer added to the transformations of labor due to globalization, and yet, the novel traces a history of labor precariousness in Argentina that dates to the end of the nineteenth century.

The porteño Aníbal Jarkowski (1960-) is a professor, literary critic, and the author of the novels *Rojo amor* (1993), *Tres* (1998), and *El trabajo* (2007). This last novel was preceded by the short story "Los meses (Sin pan y sin trabajo)" (2000) which laid out the premise for *El trabajo* published seven years later. The story's subtitle in parentheses is a reference to the iconic painting by late nineteenth century Argentine painter Ernesto de la Cárcova (1866-1927), *Sin pan y sin trabajo* (1894). Following the European trend of Naturalism, Cárcova's focal point emblemizes late nineteenth century socio-economic crises in Argentina through the perspective of the most affected: the worker and his family.

In the original painting (Fig. 1) the manufacture worker is looking out the window with most of his back to the spectator, inviting us to survey what he sees. He is leaning over the table with a tight fist, indignant because of the confrontation between the guards and workers in front of an inactive manufacturing plant in the painting's background. Resting at the table are idle tools where bread for his family should be. Across the table there is a mother and a child facing the viewer with empty looks. The mother, presumably the worker's wife, is worried, with an uneasy baby in her arms.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the rapid industrial development of the pampas had a significant effect on Argentina's socio-economic inequality and gender vulnerability. The rapid advance of the industrial revolution brought wealth to factory owners in a short period followed by a market crash that led to a bank default presenting parallels with the *menemismo* era and its aftermath a century later. The lack of employee protections led (primarily immigrant) workers, influenced by socialism, to unionize and seek alternatives for their disadvantages at work. The picture of misery in Cárcova's painting is recalled in Jarkowski's short story and novel, alluding to an exploitative economic system empowered by a socio-political culture that favors owners of capitals at the cost of the worker's already vulnerable position of employee. Like the painting, these cultural productions become tools of resistance that reflect on the controversies between Argentina's history of liberalism, authoritarianism, and the life quality of workers.

The painting *Sin pan y sin trabajo* is a cultural icon in Argentina, becoming an essential piece of national memory that is invoked during critical times in Argentina's history in relation to the working class and the unequal treatment of women in the country. The Argentine painter Carlos Alonso (1929-) reinterpreted *Sin pan y sin trabajo* in 1966 when

President Arturo Umberto Illia (1963-1966) was overthrown by General Onganía (1966-1970), the head of the junta *Revolución Argentina* followed by the most repressive governance of General Videla's dictatorship (1976-1983). In Alonso's version of *Sin pan y sin trabajo* (Fig. 2) there are various scenes in the painting, with a central piece. Alonso's painting is situated in the city, in humble scenarios whereas Cárvoa's scenario is rural. In the central picture there is a mother replacing the place of the working class man in the original frame. The woman's tool is a pan which she is holding on her right hand, while the disproportionate bony baby is sitting on the table in the place of working tools or food. The woman's and baby's position on the painting shows she is part of the working class whose unpaid domestic job, and place in society is unequal and overlooked in this urban setting. The bony baby seems to be teething, and the light in him contrasts with his mother's showing that he is the most important person in the painting, being that he is the future of Argentina's social structure. On the top left corner there are two central figures from the coup of 1966, a general and a wealthy capitalist. On their right there is an older man holding the baby in his arms, and a sculpture tool in his hands. To their right is a mother with a baby and a man fleeing the scene throughout the window.

The men are not the central figure anymore in his next segments of the painting in 1968 called *Sin pan y **con**²⁸trabajo* (Fig. 3) and *Con pan y con trabajo* (Fig. 4). Like Alonso's original version these paintings are divided into different scenes and extends the critique of how the State provides precarious forms of employment, in a matrix relationship between how the state treats the working class, and how the state and men undervalue women's valuable contributions to society, as Alonso quotes, "Los hombres hacen a las

²⁸ Emphasis added.

muñeres lo que el Estado le hace a los hombres” (Canteros, 2019). The same idea is expressed in the *avant-garde* painting by Evangelina Aybar in “Resumen de la Semana” where there is a clear difference between the roles of women and men in Argentina’s current society (Fig. 5). In the twenty-first century, the socio-historical and political context of the painting is revived Jorge Pérez’s short film “Sin pan y sin trabajo” (2002) accompanying the *piquetero* organization²⁹ (2002).³⁰ This subsequent tradition in the reproduction of Cárcova’s painting shows that while scenarios and presidents may change, the history repeats itself. The relationship between the precariousness of the working class and the exploitation of women are the focal point of reference in Jarkowski’s short story and the novel *El trabajo* (2007).

“Los meses” (2000) portrays a young protagonist spending her summer months (December, January, and February) looking for a job in the Buenos Aires Province. In this scenario, the protagonist spends Christmas alone looking for employment at the *Empleos de oficina y comercio. Pedidos*. In “Enero”, like in the novel *El trabajo*, she goes for an interview for a secretarial job at a corporation. Prior to the meeting she meets with another applicant who tells her not to worry because this interview is like all others “Acá también las

²⁹ Youtube uploaded <https://youtu.be/KwF53jsmw0w>

³⁰ The *piquetero* organization is known for stopping the circulation of routes and avenues to make demonstrations, and statements, in response to an important issue or demand, often related to employment and basic needs. Although not always peaceful, the organization is made up of men, women, and children. The *piqueteros* are primarily unemployed blue-collar workers who have lost their jobs due to the privatization of companies since the beginning of the 1990s in places rich in natural resources like Jujuy and Neuquén. Neuquén concentrates the largest extraction of mines, oil, gas, and electricity in Argentina and the *piquetero* organization was born there. Coincidentally, political prisoners were interned in Neuquén even before the 1976-1983 military dictatorship as well. Author Alicia Dujovne Ortiz’s father was imprisoned there in the 1940s along with Luis Víctor Sommi, who wrote a book about it. In 2001 and 2002 the *piqueteros* made posters of Cárcova’s painting and glued them to abandoned buildings as an indication of places that could be used to create jobs, or for public use. In 2002 they took over La Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, where Argentina’s government is located, to protest paying the external debt, to coordinate a national relationship between the *piqueteros* and labor unions, and to promote a general strike. While in Buenos Aires, some of the *piqueteros* went to the Museo de Bellas Artes, and visited Cárcova’s painting as well.

cosas se caen del escritorio a cada rato” (641). This statement, also present in *El trabajo*, determines the next steps of the candidate who, desperate for a job, goes to the bathroom and takes her underwear off and puts it in her purse. Without further explanation she is hired. Like in Cárcova’s painting, the worker’s vulnerability is accentuated by the corporate mentality here portrayed by a male oligarchy and the state as figures that prey on her desperation for a job.

In “Febrero” the author changes scenario to a beach house where a writer has recently been fired from his job. He was asked to take his vacation pay early and to not return. The beach house, instead of a space of leisure, is a space of exile that reminds him of his financial insecurity. On a stormy day he decides to stay in and read the “antología de cuentos obscenos” located in the small library at the beach house (642). When he opens the book, he notices many handwritten remarks made by the previous tenant, who appears to be the young female seeking jobs in “Enero”: “Hacia la mitad del libro comenzaron a aparecer breves anotaciones manuscritas a los márgenes. Pensó que eran comentarios a los cuentos, objeciones a sus argumentos, reparos a la conducta de los personajes” (642). But it turns out that the notes were not pertinent to critical thinking about the character’s actions and development; instead they were notes on how to perform these acts for her boss at the office, but “en la última anotación, confesaba que jamás podría cumplir ese plan” (642). This last thought indicates a small form of resistance to the corporation’s abuses.

Though both characters are treated as disposable by their employers, gender inequality appears in the short story when the male narrator is fired with severance for vacation pay, while the secretary is contemplating sexual interactions with her boss to obtain and keep her job. The juxtaposition of fictional obscenity and the abusive reality of corporate

life shows rather a continuation of labor relations in which exploitation is normalized, consumed, and expected. Like the painting, Jarkowski's novel and short story show an ongoing conflict that Mirta Lobato describes as "generado por la explotación capitalista" in its advanced form, with similar socio-economic and political debates of (in)equality expressed in the first half of the 20th century in Argentina and other countries in Latin America ("Igualdad, desigualdades y derechos", 234-35).

The reproduction of gender inequality within a heteronormative male-dominant corporate environment is developed in depth in *El trabajo*. Though it is also narrated from a man's perspective, Jarkowski's text differs from the other literary works representing the corporate mentality examined within this dissertation since women are key protagonists and Jarkowski highlights how they are especially vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and objectification.

El trabajo presents a modern but estranged Buenos Aires divided between ruins of local businesses and emerging corporations and banks. The novel focuses on an ensemble composed of the secretary Diana; an unnamed character identified as the writer (who is also the narrator); and the unnamed secondary character *la recepcionista* as archetypes for a collapsing middle class in a work market where jobs are sparse and precarious for people in their status due to the recent expansion of the private sector in Argentina. The plot's premise is to witness their loss of autonomy and their journey trying to recuperate it. When the women find work in the novel (within and outside the corporate environment), the conditions are compared to the insecurities of the sex industry (i.e., women are objectified and sexualized, and labor practices are discriminatory) or the only jobs they can find are within the sex economy itself. Scholar Karina Vázquez articulates in "Sin pan y sin trabajo:

Denuncia y resistencia en la novela *El trabajo*” (2007), de Aníbal Jarkowski” (2010) that Jarkowski’s narrative is part of the third wave of Argentinian writers who portray the sex industry as a trope to correspond to the lack of professionalism in Argentina’s socio-political climate at the turn of the millennium. The first wave (1920s-1930s) relates to the upsurge of urban labor, the emergence of socialist parties, and the unionization of workers. The first wave of writers strive to express the antagonism between intellectuality and physical labor where the latter is considered less dignified than the first. These writers assimilate the

prejuicio físico y moral de las fábricas [que] se asimilaba al de los burdeles, por lo que las obreras, que también sufrían el desgaste producido por el trabajo del cuerpo, compartían en la plataforma social el mismo espacio que las prostitutas, quienes acumulaban el deterioro físico producido por el trabajo con el cuerpo”. (Vázquez 129)

In *El trabajo*, meaning “the job” instead of “a job”, the assimilation in between the formal place of work and of that of the sexy industry is normalized more than in one instance. When *la recepcionista* is fired, she becomes an official sex worker, and from being a secretary at the corporation, Diana changes her job to the burlesque. In both situations, the similarity in between the formal and in the informal sector is a clear indication of the first wave of writers of the 1920s. Vázquez adds these writers “reforzaba[n] el lugar de la mujer dentro del hogar o del ámbito de enseñanza”; and at the same time reproduced “la separación social preexistente entre lo manual y lo intelectual” with women assuming the role “en la reproducción de este antagonismo en tanto ‘portadoras’ de lo emocional frente al elemento

‘racional’ masculino” (130).³¹ Jarkowski’s representation of female workplace sexualization in the formal sector would correspond to the mindset of the first wave of writers as the positions of creativity and management are held by men in the novel even though the performers of creativity are women.

The second wave is influenced by *peronismo* (1955-1973) in which communism is linked with labor unions in which women are not as popularity represented in novels. The third wave is influenced by the first wave of neoliberal practices (1989-2002) of which the writers Sergio Chejfec (*Boca de lobo*, 2000) and Susana Silvestre (*Si yo muero primero*, 1991, *Mucho amor en inglés*, 1994) as part of the third wave of writers. As a representative of the third wave of writers, Jarkowski emphasizes the precariousness of labor, the invisibility of women at work, and, as Vázquez argues, a continuation of the antagonism between intellectual work over manual labor when he chooses to set an unemployed male writer as the narrator (intellectual) and Diana—along with *la recepcionista*—to represent the physical and emotional experiences. Jarkowski’s intention is not to represent the women’s place as the home, however, but rather he uses “una equivalencia entre prostitución y degradación de empleo” in order to allude to “un campo semántico extraliterario donde el abuso y la explotación regulan el mercado laboral” for the past few decades in the country (Vázquez 128). From this context, Jarkowski's novel reproduces the tropes from the first wave writers but belongs to the third wave because he is criticizing the sexualization of women in the workspace as to not be normalized and to be addressed.

³¹ I would like to add a couple of cross-cultural references such as the Brazilian novel *Parque industrial* (1922) by the author Pagú, and the American novel *The Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair, which shows how the (lack of) rights are imprinted on the (in)migrant female body unprotected from the law.

Scholar Nora Domínguez, in turn, perceives *el espacio prostibulario* in Jarkowski's novel “como amenaza neoliberal o a la trata de personas [...] como núcleos de verdades del presente” (137). In her article, “Movimientos ficcionales y no ficcionales de la violencia. Crímenes de mujeres” (2013), Domínguez discusses how the protagonist and secondary characters are not sex workers per se, but they feel the threat and pressure to subjugate themselves to prostitution daily. Domínguez interprets Jarkowski's text as part of current reality for many women, especially those without resources. As a fictional paradigm, the threat of the *espacio prostibulario* represents the effects of the neoliberal ideology in a society that shows the “violaciones, la extracción de la soberanía, la conducción de los cuerpos hacia el extremo de la opresión” often inscribed within the practices of the sex industry (Domínguez 141).

Jessica Cullen Dzaman's Dissertation “The Consumer Dictator: Theories and Representations of Agency in Neoliberal Argentina 2001-2010” (2015) capitalizes on novels that present a consumer utopia that “reimagines reason, discourse, tradition, and culture not as the building blocks of progress, but rather as obstacles to the realization of a natural social order” (1). In the Dissertation Chapter “Consumer Power and Social Responsibility in Fabián Bielinsky's *Nueve reinas* and Aníbal Jarkowski's *El trabajo*” Dzaman compares how Bielinsky's film and Jarkowski's novel look back at the worst period of the neoliberal crises in Argentina to critique “the increasing acceptance of consumption as the primary site of individual agency” (128). Dzaman focuses on the writer-narrator character's (ir)responsibility as a consumer and producer of culture subordinated to the efforts of global capitalism “in which incivility and greed appear increasingly inevitable” and “where

common consumers—and their subjective assessments of value—have the ultimate word” (129).

Gender and sexual violence is also a prevalent theme in literary criticism on Jarkowski’s novel. Scholar Paula Bianchi examines the violation of Diana’s body in “Escena del cuerpo violentado. Representaciones de la violencia en dos escenas de la literatura ‘prostitucional’ latinoamericana” (2009) in which she compares Jarkowski’s *El trabajo* with the novel *Qué raro que me llamen Guadalupe* (1999) by the Mexican author Myriam Laurini. In *El trabajo*, Diana is raped by a Commissioner but the act itself is not described. As Bianchi suggests, the violation of Diana’s body is a synecdoche for women in the workplace which “se repone desde lo no dicho” in which “se escenifica una violación cruenta y disciplinadora” that erases the female’s body, and by doing so, exalts the illegal and violent act (par.12). The silenced rape suggests that the act of violence never occurred, thus normalizing violence, in this case, against women. This scenario coincides with the extreme oppression of dictatorship which was supposedly left behind in 1983 with the democratization.

Jarkowski’s synecdochal writing strategy is reminiscent of the Argentinian film *Garage Olimpo* (1999), directed by the Chilean-Italian filmmaker Marco Bechis (1955-). The movie is situated in Buenos Aires and tells a fictional story of journalist and activist María (Antonella Costa) who joins a political organization to resist General Jorge Videla’s command (1976-1981) during the most recent dictatorship (1976-1983). Like Diana from *El trabajo*, María is abducted by an authority figure. Both characters experience what Bianchi refers to in her article as “lo no dicho”. María is being held underground, and though we know she is being tortured, this happens “offstage” as the audience sees her after the fact,

naked, tied to a cold morgue table next to the tools used to torture her. In between scenes, the door closes, and the radio is turned on, making the viewer, like the narrator and the readers of Jarkowski's novel, accomplices of her silence. While María is tortured by the military state, Jarkowski shows that there is a new form of violence that is integrated with the recently re-democratized country due to a failure to defend the interests of the citizens against the corruption of politicians and the corporate mentality. Another commonality between María and Diana is that the violence committed against them is represented by male abusers in positions of authority—military, bosses, judges, police officers, corporate managers, producers, consumers—acting as the regulators and disciplinarians over female bodies and persons.

These articles overlap with the present chapter in emphasizing how the vulnerability and abuses towards the women in Jarkowski's novel form parallels with the reality of employment insecurity in a global neoliberal agenda that led to the 2001 events in Argentina. After the brutal dictatorships in most of Latin America, the “neoliberal revolution,” starting in the 1970s with Chile, became the face of democracy even though it was paradoxically enforced through a dictatorship (Villalobos-Ruminott, 2013). Like the other novels analyzed in this dissertation, *El trabajo* discusses the contradictions of how the neoliberal practices of global consumerism through the private sector made Latin Americans feel like they belong in the modern (as in global) world while simultaneously undermining their democratic representations through public institutions and space (García Canclini, 2001). It is not until the economic crisis happen, affecting the consumer privileges of the consumer citizens, that the *menemismo era* is put into question. The rupture from the past is on one hand perceived through the recent access to global consumption in Argentina, and on the other, as a

continuation of systemic insecurity and violence that stem from the most recent dictatorship (1976-1983). With the current mistrust of public institutions, and the advanced form of capitalism that would rely on public institutions, for example socialism, is perceived as outdated.

I contribute to this analysis of vulnerability and loss which Judith Butler discusses in *Precarious Life* (2004, 2006). Butler's chapter about mourning, politics, and violence after 2001 in the United States explores how interdependence becomes most visible when we are feeling "beside ourselves" experiencing emotions like (sexual) passion, grief, and political rage (24). Losses and gains connected to the political space imply ethical responsibility in this fundamental relational dependency. Butler wonders then, if these "beside oneself" emotions can lead to a reorientation of community and incite apprehension towards the current bond between the law and social body. Jarkowski's imaginary represents the vulnerable relationship between the citizenry and the neoliberal practices in the country stemming from the causal relationship of sudden gain of global consumer life and simultaneous loss of securities that confronts the working middle class. I first examine how each character's losses are not accidental but rather are the result of a direct causal relationship to the neo-corporate practices which constitute one of the major causes of dispossession for the middle and working classes in Argentina.

Judith Butler describes vulnerability as a demonstration of how "we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well" (23) and in this case, the state of vulnerability "challenge[s] the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control" (24). While the different characters' mourning methods vary in Jarkowski's novel, each character's intention is to undergo these losses hoping that "some restoration of the

prior order will be achieved” (Butler, 22). Their lack of self-awareness of their own economic vulnerability makes them even more susceptible to violence. As bodies of a political culture, we claim our rights to protect ourselves against discrimination as “bounded beings” before the law to “secure legal protections and entitlements” (Butler 24-25). This means that as political subjects the social sphere is imprinted on our bodies and persons, meaning that “my body is mine and is not” since we are *vulnerable* to “the demands imposed on us by a living world,” as the right to be “I”, and we depend on that relationship to claim autonomy (Butler 26-27).

In contrast to the previous articles, I emphasize the first part of the novel where Diana is seeking employment and lands a job at a corporation while discussing the other two parts when later in the novel Diana joins the burlesque, and then the theater. The first part, constituting the bulk of the novel, pertains to the overall discussion of the power of multinationals and the financial industry in the country, who in the novel, concentrate the wealth, power, and reproduce precariousness in the country disregarding their culture, communities, and everlasting solutions. Jarkowski’s novel is an excellent point of comparison to the other texts examined in this dissertation because his protagonist is female, and because the characters leave the corporation’s physical space as an attempt to resist the corporate mentality while the protagonists of the other novels do not. In *El trabajo* the representation of the corporate mentality is embodied through the exploitation and objectification of women through the market and in the professional setting. In the novel’s imaginary, the *corp(us) mentality* women’s autonomy, and is indifferent toward the experience of grief and a normalized violence especially towards women.

Though this dissertation main focus is on low-level office employees, there is a clear hierarchy between women and men within the corporations in all novels examined here. Most of the time, the women's story, if relevant to the plot, is told by a male narrator, like in *El trabajo*, where the narrator's character is also the writer in the novel. This narrative style reminds us of Brazilian author Clarice Lispector's iconic novel *A hora da estrela* (1977). Like in *El trabajo*, the protagonist of Lispector's novel is a woman (Macabéa), and her story is told by the writer-narrator known as Rodrigo S.M. *A hora da estrela* has many layers of social criticism of the 1970s in Brazil, as it emphasizes the high levels of consumption and the boom of technology, which are concomitant with a lack of education and profession for women in the country in the 1970s. The influence of mass consumerism influence by the United States in Brazil, especially with Mercedes-Benz, VHS, color television, Coca-Cola, and American sit-coms, while living through a dictatorship where employment rights and proper social conduct are controlled by the state. Rodrigo S.M., like the narrator in *El trabajo*, is a writer who alternates between omnisciently narrating facts about Macabéa and being a character himself in the story. His perspective in the novel establishes the society's "naturalist" view over the iconic and tragic life of the migrant Macabéa.

It is important to emphasize that Macabéa is a typist reminiscent of Melville's "Bartleby" since she writes nothing original and simply copies what others write. Meanwhile Diana is a secretary at what seems to be an advertising corporation, besides the monotonous daily secretarial jobs of picking up the phone, and filing she needs to be ready to "create pieces" that will inspire her boss that shows that Diana is overqualified for her job and is exploited for doing the creative and the day-to-day secretarial job. This is different from Macabéa and Bartleby whose official jobs are to reproduce what others create. This is a

symbolic response in Jarkowski's novel who is not only reproducing Karina Vázquez's previous remarks to critique the patriarchal society's gender division of labor but shows how exploitative, and potentially violent, this system can be within a corporate mentality.

Though in *El trabajo* Diana is exploited for her youth, beauty, and ballerina skills while the typist Macabéa is described as inept for the modern life, the narrators in each novel show how their lives are dehumanized by environment in which they must endure daily humiliations. Macabéa and Rodrigo S.M. are two of the thousands of migrants from the Northeast of Brazil trying to live their dream in the city. Rodrigo S.M. wants to be a writer while Macabéa wishes to be a super-star in the *cidade maravilhosa* of Rio de Janeiro, where everything seems possible. According to Rodrigo S.M., Macabéa is unsanitary, unattractive, and uneducated. Without any specific skill, other than the ability to type, she can barely get a job as a typist in a shabby office. *A hora da estrela* is an iconic representation of the regulatory discipline of the advances of the market consumption, and of the imprint of technology on the social body.

Macabéa's association of urban life with consumerism is characterized by the emblematic facts that she eats hot dogs and drinks Coca-Cola every day for lunch and wishes she could dye her hair blond like her urban-born co-worker Glória, who earns more money than her. There is a racial aspect to Glória's desirability, since she appears white but has "hidden African blood" and embodies the sensuality stereotypically associated with the figure of the mulata in Brazilian culture. Macabéa associates Glória's success with her dyed blond hair and the fact that she is "carioca," that is, born in Rio de Janeiro:

Glória possuía no sangue um bom vinho português e também era amaneirada no bamboleio do caminhar por causa do sangue africano escondido. Apesar de branca,

tinha em si a força da mulatice. Oxigenava em amarelo-ovo os cabelos crespos cujas raízes estavam sempre pretas. Mas mesmo oxigenada ela era loura, o que significava um degrau a mais para Olímpico. Além de ter uma grande vantagem que nordestino não podia desprezar. É que Glória lhe dissera, quando lhe fora apresentada por Macabéa: “sou carioca da gema!”

Macabéa's migrant boyfriend Olímpico sleeps with her co-worker Glória, then adds insult to injury by comparing Macabéa to a piece of hair in one's soup: “– Você, Macabéa, é um cabelo na sopa. Não dá vontade de comer.”

Lispector is critical of the discrimination towards migrants from the Northeast of Brazil as well as of gender discrimination, since due to the lack of development of education, professionalism, and access to the global market, the women are susceptible to men's whims, or are literally trampled, like Macabéa who is run over by Mercedes-Benz in the end of the novel. How the values of consumer society reproduce this vulnerability of women to men's changing desires is evident when Macabéa's boyfriend sleep with her urban-born mulata co-worker who conforms to the expectations of consumerism by dying her hair blond. Lispector shows that this modern society neglects those who cannot keep up with the advances or shape themselves to the demands of the market which is poised to exploit their state of vulnerability. Like the woman I Jarkowski's novel, Macabéa is taken advantage of by her boyfriend, the *cartomante* who tells her fortune, and the writer who narrates her pathetic life and death. The relationship between the upsurge of the global consumer society, and the precariousness of professionalism and employment is called into question during the democratic periods in Latin American countries as well, in that which various of the elements present in Lispector's 1977 novel reemerge in the novel *El trabajo* thirty years later: the

representation of a decadent modern city,³² the demands of the consumer market imprinting on the (social) body, and the tragic end of the female protagonist of the novel.

The novel

El trabajo is divided into three sections in which the narrator-writer, attests to the challenges Diana faces while building a professional career after losing both of her parents and the family business of selling lingerie. The first part, entitled “Diana”, constitutes the bulk of the novel, and is told by a first-person narrator who testifies that Diana, the protagonist, is no longer present in his life, “escribo como si la viera; las personas se parecen y lo que se dice de una puede, muchas veces, decirse de otras también” (11). Although the author sounds cynical at first, this is not a story about Diana alone, but about her archetype: young females looking for a professional career in a precarious modern society. Often the narrator-character emphasizes that his source is Diana herself “ella me lo dijo,” (12, 81), and he is careful to not speak for her, “[Diana] usó esa palabra” (23). The narrator uses *em dashes* to authenticate Diana’s point of view which indicates a dubious narrator who utilizes a façade of objectivity to preempt a confession of the facts; and on the other hand, his confession could be an effort to expunge his culpability for Diana’s violent outcome as Jessica Cullens Dzaman has suggested in her dissertation. However, from the moment the readers listen to the narrator-character, they are also complicit in the confession. The reader are now participating and have a responsibility once they learn about the abuses committed towards Diana. The second part of the novel is named “Yo” where the narrator introduces himself as

³² See Bolívar Echeverría *Valor de uso y utopía*, 1998.

the writer who had his book revoked by the judiciary system because a general says it contains obscenity that corrupts young females. After losing everything, he ends up working at the burlesque, where Diana works, in exchange for a place to sleep and food. This section of the novel uses the burlesque as a parody to describe unresolved social issues in Argentina's society targeting women as insignificant subjects of society but significant objects of men's pleasure. The third part, "Los dos," is characterized by Diana and the writer's attempt to build their own resistance and business in the *corp(us) mentality*.

The urban center has changed from a local middle-class business district to a foreign global metropolis architecture by corporations and banks. Though the city landscape feels modern, employment security and life quality for women are precarious subjugated to unethical practices by companies, and banks, as well as in stigmatized spaces like the burlesque, and the sex industry. The novel highlights how the socio-economic expectations of both the formal and informal sectors are equivalent to those of a sex worker (i.e., potentially abusive, and naturally exploitative). In this binary world, for the past fifteen to twenty years, the boys who grew up admiring "la misma tela [*lingerie*] de las que usaban las mujeres cuando eran chicos" became managers, and the girls became objects of men's pleasure in which "la prenda es una herramienta de trabajo" (67). This is the first indication that there is a difference in between how men and women are treated in this heteronormative male-dominant society. Like the Glória, in Lispector's novel, it has become common practice that the women in the novel invest their salaries on lingerie, grooming their personal parts with care, wearing high heels, a skirt, and a see-through shirt while men have time to pursue careers and raise families. The hyper sexualized secretary look shows that the professional field for women is limited, precarious and yet this sexualization is normalized and imposed

onto them by their coworkers, bosses, neighbors, and even by their families. Their efforts to adapt to a professional environment coerces women to subjugate themselves to abusive and unethical practices with limited space for resistance.

In the first section of the novel, Diana works for the corporation, while in the second section she joins the burlesque, and in the third she tries to succeed as a playwright and actress. Diana's middle class parents used to own a lingerie store, and Diana liked to dance ballet and read. They had to close the lingerie store after her mother's death which coincides with the growth of large retail stores and imports in the country. Their prices and variety forced local businesses to close because they could not compete in a more globalized market. Soon after her father's death, Diana is living frugally, in a perpetual state of emergency, looking for employment. Her first job is at "una empresa grande" (32) in which her boss tells her "ver es todo [...] ver y no pensar", "hasta el punto donde el contenido de la mente eran puras visiones sin lenguaje" (34). Diana seems to be working for an advertising company and her objective is to help her boss "alcanzar el tormento de la sinrazón y volver con soluciones inauditas para aumentar las ganancias de la empresa" (35). Here we are reminded of Vázquez's representative antagonism in Argentina's literature in which the rational—professional opinion—male sex turns to the female sex seeking the "irrational"—non-professional opinion—to find solutions for more profit. The acceptance, from both parts, of this (un)professional, and unequal relationship normalizes an abusive corporate environment and confirms Diana's continuous vulnerability even when she has a job in the formal sector.

Her first job as a secretary requires more than complying with the normal office duties, as she is to create sexual "representaciones en el gabinete" (65) using a mirror and a step stool both set up behind a door in their shared office. These unethical practice in the

professional setting show that the manager's gateway for the corporation to improve their profit margins involves Diana's subjugation to the *corp(us) mentality*. This inhuman capitalism not only empowers the corporation's self-interest, but it regulates and disciplines the women's bodies by imposing a dress code and requiring them to performing acts in which they strip their clothes off for their bosses, or even determining whether they can be in a relationship. As her friend observes, the single managers "progresan más. Estudian, viajan, hacen cursos. Tienen más tiempo" (46), but the company's preference is that people like Diana and she be in a relationship because the presumption is that if you are in a relationship, the managers "no necesitan andar llamándote para saber dónde estás, con quién y qué estás haciendo. Ya saben que estás en casa con tu novio, mirando televisión" (47). *La recepcionista* explains to Diana that this is an advantage for them because "los gerentes de los bancos son los peores. No tienen horario. Ahora nadie tiene horario. Enloquecen a las chicas" (47). If one of them is fired, they contemplate prostitution as the logical next step for women without resources:

[...] con el paso de los meses sin conseguir trabajo su resistencia no era exactamente hacia la prostitución ni a tener trato con exploradores que, al fin, no le resultaban muy distintos de los gerentes con los que se entrevistaba día a día, sino a comenzar a prostituirse; la aterraba imaginar el momento en que el primer cuerpo de un desconocido se encajara en el suyo para transferirle flujos de semen, saliva y sudor. La chica creía que más tarde, a fuerza de repeticiones, esa transferencia perdería su naturaleza inconcebible y poco a poco se igualaría, por ejemplo, a la humedad que una camarera se llevaba en las manos al limpiar la mesa donde un grupo de hombres

había pasado la noche; o a la que una mucama recogía con las toallas usadas en las habitaciones de un hotel para parejas (77)

In the paragraph above, the standards of formal employment (corporate, banks, or domestic) are compared to the exploitative sex economy that lacks professional standards and worker's protection. The executives of these large companies regulate their employees' lives like pimps in a sex industry, as there is not an oversight entity that will protect them from a state of disenfranchisement.

Significantly, the *chica's* concern is not the precarious employment conditions associated with sex work, since she is already accustomed to this type of vulnerability in the corporate environment; rather she is concerned about the the objectification of the act of sex expected of her. The *chica* is trying to resist what Bolívar Echeverría would call “la voluntad puramente cósmica del mundo de las mercancías habitadas por el valor económico capitalista” imposed above her human feelings, emotions, and autonomy (63). But a body separated from human autonomy is fragmented, powerless, and uninformed. When the *chica* tries to image the continuous sexual encounters as comparable to a waitress cleaning the table where sat all night, or a chambermaid picking up the used towels of couple's motel room, she reproduces the objectification and discrimination towards women in this *corp(us) mentality*.

The lack of an organization or institution that would potentially promote equality for women in this imaginary society instead confirms their participation in the system that oppresses women. Notably, Diana's friend, *la recepcionista*, has no identity other than as the receptionist in the novel. Lacking a proper name is a symbolic way to reduce *la recepcionista* to a generic product coerced to the *cor(pus) mentality*. She is fired from the corporation where she and Diana work because she had an affair with the married general manager. The

submanager learned about their affair and paid a photographer to bribe his own boss so the submanager could take his place at the corporation. Like in Antonio Ortuño's novel discussed in Chapter 1, impersonal workplace relationships are a common practice in this opportunistic and individualistic work environment, which in Argentina's case, it is amplified by the general crisis in the country. After being fired from the company, *la recepcionista* becomes a full-time sex worker, reasoning that "ganaba un poco más, tenía buenas compañeras, le pagaban en efectivo al final de cada día, y no la trataban ni mejor ni peor que en la compañía" (81). The receptionist's apparent pragmatism conflicts with her daily attempt to hide the fact that she is a sex worker from her parents and fiancé by pretending to still be working as a receptionist. By regarding office work as "respectable" employment and sex work as shameful, she pretends she and her family, accept the fundamental inhumanity within the *corp(us) mentality*, ignoring the negative impact that the corporate mentality has on women specifically. Prior becoming *la recepcionista*, and then a sex worker, she was an undergraduate student of Psychology. Due to the socio-economic crisis, she had to walk away from the institution that would have allowed her to have a profession, and a specific skill. This loss is the only project that used to give her an identity outside of the corporate and sex economy.

La recepcionista's way to show that she is not completely oblivious to the abuses that happen to her is by helping Diana achieve her own dreams. With her earnings as a sex worker, *la recepcionista* invites Diana to go to a play, in solidarity with of Diana's love for the arts and the ballet. The play is a representation of young students trying to pass their exams to become doctors with the promise that if they passed their exams their girlfriends would have sex with them. At the same time, they cannot afford to pay their rent. The

students, instead of studying for their exams learned how to do hypnosis, which they used to avoid paying rent, and to take advantage of each other to do the chores at the house, and to try to get their girlfriends, the female actresses, to sleep with them. In each instance they use the hypnosis with the female actresses, they get naked. For the first time, Diana sees “personas reales desnudas” and “se preguntaba por qué la tolerancia era enorme” in literature but is ambiguous in other forms of arts like painting, cinema, and theater (93). At first, Diana’s question is geared towards the tolerance between the representation of nudity in a private reading and in other forms of arts. *La recepcionista* talks about the ambiguity of tolerance for sex workers as compared to office workers when she has similar experiences in both jobs, “que todo el mundo habla de su trabajo. De lo que hace, de lo que gana de cómo le va. Yo no. Paso diez, doce horas a veces y nada de lo que hago lo puedo contar” (95). Society’s moral blindness towards women without resources shows the lack of critical thinking in relation to the economic crisis. Diana is aware that if she stays at the company, her situation is not going to improve, on the contrary, she might just lose all her sensibility from her ballet training. Diana remembers of a conversation with her ballet instructor when she was younger, in which he told her that “absolutamente nadie merecía abusos por causa de la pobreza ni subestimación por la de la ignorancia” (113). Without nothing to lose, Diana decides to perform completely naked to her boss one last time. Differently from *la recepcionista* who was fired, Diana decides to resign, and her departure from the company shows an act of resistance that, however, *does not* necessarily represent an evolution in her political consciousness since we are not sure of Diana’s ideology regarding the corporate mentality. She does not have a manifesto, she is not part of any unions, she does not have a community, and she has no family to help her feel stable. The reader may experience a sense

of relief that she is leaving the company because she finally stood up for herself after experiencing ongoing sexual harassment. On the other hand, this experience shows limited forms of resistance in a precarious environment, and the impracticality of thinking outside of the neoliberal exploitative system.

In the second part of the novel the vantage point is from the writer who has recently lost his apartment, his library, and his job at the magazine that he was counting on to pay his bills after a commissioner's campaign against his novel for exposing inappropriate content which led to a judge legally recalling his novel from all bookstores. Once again, there is an irony in this representation of what is permissible in society and what is not. The commissioner's campaign against the writer is due to the commissioner's daughter sudden change of behavior due to the novel's influence on her. The writer did not think that something he had produced, and is considered obscene, was his responsibility as the novel could only have affected her "de manera lejana e indirecta" (124). But the novel's plot shows otherwise as because of this case, the writer is now homeless when he thought that his "condena no era nada" (129). On the other hand, if the writer had confronted the fact that his novel was being oppressed by the reality of this environment, he might not have taken the steps to meet Diana and build a play of their own after they meet at the burlesque. On the contrary of the judge and of the commissioner, the writer tries to reduce his role in the consumer market, acting as if consumption is something "irrational" instead of what Néstor García Canclini would call "sociocultural processes" that presumes "moralistic judgements"³³ (n.p., Location 1255, 2001). Losing everything he owned did not affect the writer's thoughts towards consumption but underestimating the power of consumers in

³³ N.p., Kindle location, 1255.

relation to agency has brutal consequences for Diana, being the reason why he is confessing this story in the first place.

Diana is hired at the burlesque because the dancer with prestige, Naamin commits suicide after learning her boyfriend was already married with children. While at the burlesque, Naamin was hoping that her relationship would allow her to leave the burlesque life. The writer first saw Diana through a voyeuristic experience. The burlesque building is facing directly Dian's office and from the day she got her job at the corporation, he would observe her from his room at the burlesque and knew what she could perform. When the Diana meets the writer, she is to fill the void of Naamin's death, and so the writer, whose observed her performances with her boss, offers her the double of her pay at the corporation to work with him instead. Together they would continue the work on what Naamin and him had begun writing a libretto which are supposed to be "breve antes que spectacular", "con mínima utilería", and "un vestuario que no tuviera muy pocas ni demasiadas prendas" to follow the song playing in the background (181-182). From this description, the plays are a means to an end, which is to satisfy the male customers since women are not allowed as customers in the establishment. The burlesque dancers (re)produce the *corp(us) mentality* in its blurring of the line between reality and fiction, such that the dancers of the burlesque are an archetype for the women in their jobs, and in their relationships. While Diana was learning how to do her number, *La divina con medias*, properly she observed that the movements that the dancers would use to put their stockings on were the same that *la recepcionista* would use to take hers off, "el secreto de la representación del número estaba en que, a medida que se pusiera las medias, toda alegría, toda emoción espontánea se fueran desvaneciendo en el aire de la escena, hasta que al terminar, su cuerpo quedara sometido a la

forma del deseo de los hombres” (192). Again, reality and fiction are not representational but rather are a form of normalizing the vulnerability of women as objects of desire of men apart from their wives, daughters, and mothers. Even though the burlesque is more flexible than the corporate space because of the collective work, working hours, and payment, women are still treated as objects. On the other hand, Diana and the writer realize that a form of agency and a way of gaining autonomy would be to appropriate the representation and turn these objectified women into mothers, daughters, girlfriends, wives, and fiancées.

In the third part, their play fulfills their intention to explore the negative impact of the *corp(us) mentality* at a theater instead of the burlesque since the customers at the burlesque would not understand it and consequently would lose interest and stop patronizing the locale. The play is popular and humanizes the audience of women, men, students, and doctors meaning that everyone is responsible for the vulnerability of women. Diana’s and the writer’s pragmatic idealism shows that while they cannot break completely with the *corp(us) mentality*, they can represent how “violence becomes an acceptable option when women are not considered equals” (Hudson, Ballif-Spanvill etc., *Sex and World Peace*, n.p.).³⁴ The consequences of representing reality in a play flips the order between representation and reality, where Diana, as the actress, is brutally violated by an authority figure in real life for her dramatic representation. Their failed attempt to be autonomous and find some stability for Diana transmits the feelings of grief, hopelessness, and anger, until now represented, into a reality for the reader left aloof without closure. Going back to Judith Butler’s discussion of

³⁴ N.p., Kindle Location, 163.

how autonomous we are from each other is the more radical answer which would be that in fact we are not, we are simply built and undone by each other.

El trabajo is the only novel analyzed in this dissertation in which an adult woman is the protagonist of the novel.³⁵ Many cultural productions representing the corporate office settings is characterized by a heteronormativity and male dominance and perspective—including the novel examined in this dissertation—in which women are often in a lower status than their male peers and are highly sexualized as the objects of desire. Though women being called in to the manager's office to endure sexual harassment is represented in novels since the beginning of the twentieth century (*The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair, 1906, *Parque industrial* by Pagú, 1922) it was not until the end of the 1950s in the United States that women took an active role in the office setting like in Walter Lang's direction of the film *Desk Set* (1957) where the Katharine Hepburn's character stands up to Spencer Tracy, who play the efficiency expert sent to modernize the reference library she runs for a broadcasting company.

With the rapid urbanization of the 1950s in the United States, the representation of women in the office has become essential to understand, denounce, and shift culture. The American cultural production has been the strongest advocate for women's space in the office environment with the films *9 to 5* directed by Collin Higgins and written by Patricia Resnik (1980) and *Working girl* (1988) directed by Mike Nichols. The film *The Anchorman*

³⁵ The novels *Recursos humanos* by Antonio Ortuño, *El oficinista* by Guillermo Saccomanno, and *El trabajo* by Aníbal Jarkowski introduce female characters beyond those that do their secretarial jobs, like *la pelirroja*, who is a female mechanic in *El oficinista* and Verónica who is an accountant in *Recursos humanos*. Bef also uses a female character as the protagonist of *Ladrón de sueños*, which I analyze as part of a trilogy on Chapter 2 of this dissertation. However, the novel is meant to be for the youth, and she is a teenager with a career to build whereas these women already have jobs.

(2004) directed by Adam McKay is a satire of the 1970s workplace environment where women's constant harassment is normalized in the TV news work environment. The drama-comedy *Secretary* (2002) develops a BDSM relationship between the shy and suicidal secretary (Maggie Gyllenhaal) and her eccentric boss (James Spader). In the submissive role of their bond, the secretary feels empowered and falls in love with her boss who struggles to accept his enjoyment as the dominant partner. Her willingness to free his conscience so they can be married leads her to a voluntarily submissive role where her family members and the media gets involved. *Secretary* is supposed to be a drama-comedy with a happy ending leading to a healthier understanding of BDSM relationships, but it clearly questions female autonomy and agency when the secretary depends on her boss's acceptance of their hierarchical bond in the office and in their personal relationship.

One of the most iconic productions of the representation of women in the office space is the television series *MadMen* (2007-2015) which seeks a historical fiction about the growth of advertisement culture from 1940s-1970s in the United States. The premise is to follow Don Draper's (John Hammon) career as an advertising executive along with the cultural changes from the 1940s to the 1970s exemplifying how culture and consumption began to change the work environment with a shift in focus from pleasing clients to pleasing investors. Though the series centers on the male Don Draper, the space for women in the show parallels the cultural changes of the time. While Joan Harris's (Christina Hendricks) initial promotion to head of the secretarial pool may be due in part to her long-term affair with a married senior partner, she clearly owes her success as office manager and later as junior partner to her organizational and people skills, her office savvy, and talent for negotiation; meanwhile Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss) does not use her sexuality to rise from

secretary to copywriter, climbing the executive ladder to eventually become Don Draper's boss. As women are progressively gaining more terrain to join a profession and education, more (limited) spaces open in the office for creative work and higher administrative positions, shaping women's autonomy in the office, and in their private lives.

The television series *Enlightened* (2011-2013), written and directed by Mike White, features Laura Dern as Amy Jellicoe. Amy used to be one of the executives of the Abandonn Corporation. After having a nervous breakdown due to a drinking problem and having an affair with her boss, she went on a retreat. The boss used Amy's retreat as an opportunity to demote her from the executive branch of Abandonn to the data office on the sublevel floor. While working with the company's data analysis she becomes aware of a series of company mishandlings and unethical practices, which she tries to solve by presenting healthier solutions to the executive floor. But her peers and her prior boss distrust her intentions. While at the retreat, Amy decided to find her path again, and make amends with her family, ex-husband, and peers. Amy tries to take the demotion as an opportunity to learn a new skill and go back to the executive floor. Humiliated, and angry from her efforts to be accepted by the corporation, Amy begins a subversive journey from the sublevel with the intention to make public the company's misdeeds. The short-lived but critically acclaimed *Enlightened* is an attempt to directly point at the ruthless nature of the corporate competitive corporate environment, and at the same time to try to escape the role of the objectification of women.

The most recent and diverse cultural production is by the director Austin Winsberg *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* (2020-). The series portrays a millennial generation and younger, in a space without cubicles or offices, in a diverse cast introducing women, LGBTQ+, African Americans, and second-generation migrants working in a Silicon Valley

corporation called *Sprkpoint*. Though the corporation is owned by a white male coder without any regards for identity or diversity, the show stars Zoey (Jane Levy) as a female coder in a predominantly male atmosphere. Zoey has a gift for hearing people's true emotions makes her coding job less important, since she becomes an essential worker at the company for having the ability to "magically" listen and reflect on how people communicate their feelings of oppression and resentment. With her gift she bears an enormous responsibility to teach a positive cultural environment within the corporate space. It is through the human connection, and the loss of her father, that she begins to reflect about her surroundings breaching the gap for uncomfortable conversations about cultural privileges inside the corporate environment.

In the contrary of *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* and *Working Girl*, and Peggy Olson from *MadMen*, the female characters in *El trabajo* do not have this power of negotiation or a magical gift to advance in the corporate world which has two significant meanings for Argentine's culture. First, of resistance to the corporate mentality continued through the global neoliberal order, and on women's rights. On the contrary, they have centered their efforts on leaving the corporate environment which is not enough for them to live in better conditions, especially for women. Hitting close to home in describing the lives of many *oficinistas*, these novels emphasize that neo-corporate capitalism is not the solution for the current and abysmal social inequality on the (inter)national level because humans are not objects, in fact they are more complex than the products that represent them. From this perspective, the Latin American novels like *El trabajo* reject the corporate mindset as a solution for local and national issues—as matter of fact they perceive corporations as the part

of the problem. Thus, the novels examine the corporate approach in order to rethink the traumas of their respective countries' economic crises.

The latest American series and movies have a different perspective on women in the office than the novels analyzed here. As we can see, the female appearance in the workplace has shifted in recent decades gaining access in the spotlight most recently. It is difficult to avoid associating these fictional cultural productions to the #MeTooMovement that since 2006 helped to bring awareness to a series of allegations of crimes involving sexual harassment towards women in the workplace. In *El trabajo*, Diana, as an adult in peril, although supported by her friends who are also trying to make a living, no longer has other forms of institutional support like her family, a house, or social assistance. In order to succeed in her society, Diana needs to be productive in a place where she can be part of the corporate mentality, in this novel perceived as an ideology that exploits women's vulnerable position in society to satisfy a broader base of consumers.

By making these choices, Jarkowski generates space for a precarious utopia. Diana's disappearance is a clear message that a rupture from the past is only superficial.

Jarkowski perceives as naïve and is the most critical of efforts to reach some form of agency, and success while subjugated to corporations whose only objective is to maintain a certain margin of profit. To set forth an alternative ending, where Diana and the writer become a success, it would mean to excuse the loss of her parent's locally owned business, her precarious quality of life, the frequent abuses towards the dancer, the violence towards *la recepcionista*, and the brutality towards Diana. Likewise, as literary critics, if we were to idealize the exception of Diana's individual success would be to ignore the situation of many other women in the novel. Romanticizing the stories of individual success in this novel

becomes a dangerous point of view that ignores social discrimination, and unethical practice used to acquire money and agency finds representation through means of consumption only. This logic exonerates the exploitation of the laws of capitalism imposed on humanity, where one becomes accustomed to living through individual resilience rather than empowering social responsibility and community engagement especially in a moment of crises.

The Argentine literature of the past thirty years has been dynamic in expressing the complexities of how the corporate mentality shapes life expectations through a consumer mindset instead of a relationship of empowerment between the state and citizens. In Jarkowski's novel, the characters have lost their consumer privileges that used to give them a middle class status, and without this material comfort, their attention is geared towards their perilous democracy instituted through the abusive corporate mentality targeted to women. Instead of harmony in this modern city the characters find conflict and are unable to think outside of the neo-corporate mentality where the alternative forms of governmentality like communism and socialism, are historicized as systems that failed to promote autonomy (Eheverría, 1998).. Latin American nations in the 1990s and early 2000s thus represented fragmented states that lack credibility as sovereign powers but are also a punitive and violent states for not taking initiative of accepting responsibility for a vulnerable economy and the corrupt political environment.

In *Sex and World Peace* (2012), Valerie Hudson explains how historically, normalized violence towards women in culture also “significantly affects politics and security at both national and international levels” (n.p.), and “gender inequality is a form of violence that creates a generalized context of violence and exploitation at the societal level” (n.p.). In Jarkowski's novel, the representation of regulatory behavior over women's bodies

in the workplace and in the market is an opportunity to explore the shortcomings of the neoliberal agenda colored with unethical practices that increase social and gender inequality.

Figures



Fig. 1. Ernesto de la Cárcova, oil, *Sin pan y sin trabajo*, 1894.



Fig. 2. Carlos Alonso, acrylic, *Sin pan y sin trabajo*, 1966.



Fig. 3. Carlos Alonso, acrylic, *Con pan y con trabajo*, 1968.



Fig. 4. Carlos Alonso, acrylic, *Sin pan y con trabajo*, 1968.



Fig. 5. Evangelina Aybar, acrylic, *Resumen de la semana*, 2009.

CHAPTER 4:

The City of Dreams Represented in *Ladrón de sueños* (2008, 2013), *Gel azul* (2009) and *El estruendo del silencio* (2009) by Bernardo Fernández (Bef)

En una ciudad *casi* igual a ésta, unos minutos en el futuro...

-Bef, *Ladrón de sueños*

In this chapter, I will analyze the novel *Ladrón de sueños* (2008, 2013) and the novellas *Gel Azul* (2009) and *El estruendo del silencio* (2009) written by the contemporary Mexican author and illustrator Bernardo Fernández (Bef). In this thesis, Bef's texts will be read as a series of *novelas de anticipación* (Reati 2005) representing a (post)national corporate hegemonic control of profit and resources at the cost of society. The representation of corporate culture accompanies the neoliberal doctrine proposed as a solution to a socio-economic crisis in Mexico since the 1980s but marked by the 1990s North American Free Trade Agreement. Through Bef's literary texts, this thesis establishes that corporate logic is *culturized* through a hegemonic relationship between the private sector and a small percentage of society who make executive decisions within *corporate culture*. As discussed in this thesis, corporate culture is contradictory, reducing human life to a science—as subjects of consumption—without accounting for the impact that the corporate logic has on the daily life of the subjects and their communities. Although Bef's narratives are set in Mexico City, they transcend to global identities because the themes cross national borders. Bef's texts add to the corpus of recent literary representations of the effects of *neoliberalism* in Latin America and offers a unique perspective that diverges from the previous novels in this thesis. Through Cyberpunk and Science Fiction, he represents corporate culture through

the ones in power presenting neoliberalism as a project to restore upper-class power following the lost decade (1980-1990).

Bernardo Fernández (1972-) is an award-winning and prolific contemporary author and illustrator of Mexican narrative. As discussed in a previous chapter, Hind suggests three “Xs” to characterize these authors that fit into the *Generation X* category influenced by the fall of the Berlin Wall and by a technological warfare reflected in the ideals of the free market and globalization. In many parts of Latin America, this is the generation that deals with the consequences of dictatorship and an acceleration of capitalism while attempting to claim their cosmopolitan lifestyle with deep cultural influence from foreign countries. The second X refers to the current themes and genres of this generation, which reflect the social tensions between a neoliberal economy and the lack of employment security in a world of global market opportunities due to the expansion of the internet distinguishing them from the Boom writers who were often concerned with national identity. The triple X generation narratives emphasize global rather than national tendencies: they translate and write through multiple languages while seeking more commercial possibilities in genres such as ScienceFiction, Horror, Comics, Cinematography, Television, and American Pop Culture (Mortiz, 2003, Hind 2013). This leads to the third X, which Hinds defines as “excritor”. Due to the internet, the “excritor” is in a paradoxical relationship in which writers must continuously reinvent their writing to compete with a global market that cheapens the price of the product for the very reason that it is easier to publish. A career as a writer is financially undesirable and the “excritor,” always concerned with the economy, needs more than one source of income to live comfortably (Hind 2013). In Bef’s case, he is a graphic designer, a teacher and writes in many genres, varying from children’s books to short stories, to comics

strips and novels. But Bef is best known for his thriller trilogy, *Azul Cobalto* (2016), *Cuello Blanco* (2013), and *Hielo Negro* (2011, 2013) where he portrays the many encounters between the grunge private detective Andrea Mijangos and the cartel leader, rich, and educated Queen Libby Zubiaga. Having two female main characters in a field dominated by male influence made Bef's trilogy popularly acclaimed. Bef is also known for his innovative *narconarrative* *Tiempo de Alacranes* (2005, 2015) in which *el güero*, a *sicario* or hit man, is trying to retire from his cartel lifestyle. Even though Bef writes edgy successful thrillers, Sci-Fi and the subgenre Cyberpunk are a fascination of this contemporary writer. In his interview with Emily Hind, Bef says that he comes from a family line of engineers and readers which influenced his fascination with robots, science, and metaphors (235). The questions of what makes us human and what robots and replicas could do is present in two of his youth books, *Error de programación* (1998) and *Soy el Robot* (2009). Science Fiction and the subgenre Cyberpunk³⁶ are also present in the short story "(e)" in *Visiones Periféricas* (2001), in *Escenarios para el fin del mundo* (2015)³⁷, *El estruendo del silencio* (2009) and *Gel azul* (2009) along with the youth novel *Ladrón de sueños* (2008). In the short story "(e)" in *Visiones Periféricas* (2001) Bef explains about the use of 'e drugs', that is, drugs that allow you to live a virtual experience. *Escenarios para el fin del mundo* is another work by Bef that describes eight scenarios on how the world would end.

Bef sheds light on the social and cultural aspects of the mid-1990s with a deep concern with national apathy and the hegemonic relationship between corporations and

³⁶ Cyberpunk is a sci-fi subgenre and since the 1980s it has become more popular to reflect and counter rationalize the utopian world of technology and globalization.]

³⁷

society. In the following texts, the *city of dreams* represents imaginary cities that characterize the consequences of a global economic order in relation to social experiences, specifically, what it means to social relations, social rights, and nations. In this sense, like the Argentine writer Guillermo Saccomanno in *El oficinista*, Bef's works are *novelas de anticipación*. Fernando Reati explains in *Postales del Porvenir* (2006) that imaginary fictional scenarios project the possible directions that a nation might soon take based on present events or socio-economic and political presence of the time. His argument is that the transformation of a neoliberal Argentina in a global setting impacts the “inconsciente colectivo” and the cultural productions that explore the anxieties and fears that these socio-economic changes bring to society in a negative light. Although Reati examines literary works that anticipate the consequences of Argentina's global and neoliberal experiences from the transition from dictatorship to the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem, also known as *menerismo* (1985-1999), these recent literary works from Mexico and Argentina can be added to the Latin American collective consciousness of the past thirty years of advanced capitalism amplifying the repertoire of literary works that utilize fantastical genres to represent the potential risks and negative impact that the current socio-economic system has on interpersonal relations and the order of society.

Bef's literary texts paint with words the potential future of Mexico City and of Latin America in a global corporate order to illustrate the fears and anxieties caused by the socio-economic and cultural changes since the 1990s with the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). *Neoliberalization* in Mexico, as in most of Latin America—beginning in the 1970s but becoming a cornerstone in Mexico in the 1990s until the present—encourages health, education, labor, and the market to be at the hands of private

corporations while minimizing the place of the state in the public sector. Bef's texts add to the corpus of recent literary representations of the effects of neoliberal policies in Latin America, often focused on their impact on social inequality, precariousness of labor rights, privatization of public services, and most recently, the possibility of an emergent middle class.³⁸ This hegemonic variation from *state-public service-citizens* to *corporate-consumption-citizen* is a signature for this literature that comments on the present by creating imaginary scenarios of what the future holds for Latin America. The acceptance to enter NAFTA meant to the world that Mexico is now part of the global neoliberal doctrine changing the meaning of the social order.

Bef's specific literary texts speculate on this event through the eyes of characters in advantageous positions, the CEO and the shareholders of an interplanetary corporation called HumaCorp, that defines culture through the ownership of resources, production, and consumption without taking responsibility for safety nets, social security, or public development. Joel Bakan indicates in his book *The Corporation* (2004, 2012) that the corporate "business mindset" pathologically lacks empathy, with psychopathic tendencies such as a disregard for how the company's actions may put others at risk as it strives to maximize the profit of stockholders. This means that public services often connected to social rights and citizenship are limited or inexistent, meaning that one's rights may be determined by one's affluence and power of consumption. This choice of representation

³⁸ The possibility of an emergent middleclass is not the focus in this thesis as the middleclass represented through the eyes of semi-skilled workers has lost its position of privilege with the neoliberalization of labor and privatization of public services. The Argentine novels show that there is not an emergent middleclass but a precariousness of its power of negotiation and of entrepreneurship since neoliberal policies took place. As I attempted to demonstrate, Ortuño is also critical of a possible emergent middleclass since moral blindness, or "el espíritu chingón," is necessary to climb the ladder to a CEO position. Bef focuses on a specific part of society, the highly educated, the CEO, and the post-human, as the rest of society is situated further away from the city center.

already excludes the non-consumers, or the lower social strata who become considered *wasted life* (Bauman, 2000). As discussed above, Bef's texts, like corporate culture, focus on the smaller percentage of society which are the corporation's headquarters and the people who sustain corporate culture: executives, lawyers, lobbyists, advertisers, and research and development scientists that work in the private sectors. In *Ladrón de sueños* the highly educated are also part of the corporate culture as we will see later in this chapter. This is a different perspective from Ortuño, Saccomanno and Jarkowski since their main characters are semi-skilled lower-level office workers.

From this perspective, one would agree with David Harvey who articulates in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) that the Washington Consensus is nothing but a restoration of a ruling elite—on a (post)national level—since the 1970s economic collapse (15). Considering this interpretation, corporate culture is hegemonically put in place. Mexico, much closer to the United States than Argentina, besides the economic crash in the 1970s which is followed by the enforcement of Reaganomics in the 1980s, advanced into an accord in the mid-1990s, specifically NAFTA, under the president of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) Carlos Salinas (1988-1994).

The socio-economic beliefs of the Chicago School applied under Ernesto Zedillo's presidency (1994-2000) followed by Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) parallel the increment of corporate control within Mexican society. Fox and Calderón's presidencies are particularly important because they represent the end of a 71-year streak of PRI rule in which the party prided itself on ideals of nationalism and revolution, but left instead a legacy of corruption, election fraud, and suspicious deaths of political figures; the disintegration of labor rights and unions leading to a downward spiral

effect of jobless workers, large waves of migration to the North, and an increment of violence controlled by drug cartels.

The continuity of neoliberal logic after the PRI era accelerated Mexico to a hopeless socio-economic and political state, now apparent in its representation by the media as one of the most complex and violent countries in the world. Differently from the current of cultural productions that evolved with *narconovelas*, *narcomovies* and *border studies*, Bef's literary texts represent *corporate culture* as another outcome of the neoliberal doctrine that is post-national, deprived of public services with one goal in mind only: the restoration and maintenance of power.

From National to Post-national Identity

Corporate culture is primarily cultivated within the urban space, which was also developed for those in power. Mexico City is the birthplace of corporate culture in Bef's novel as it is displayed in a futuristic scenario. The hegemonic relationship between corporate culture and the state and its consumers introduced in Bef's literary texts works in a linear progression as HumaCorp, the main villain in this series of texts, continues to get away with its unethical methodology of *profitization*. Bef's novels represent a Mexican society at the mercy and control of corporate culture in all areas of their lives likework, education, leisure, family, and even in dreams. *Ladrón de sueños* (2008, 2013), *Gel azul* (2007, 2009) and *El estruendo del silencio* (2007, 2009), which I read as a trilogy, explore the tension between virtual reality and the realities of Mexico City. Because intertextuality is another characteristic of Bef's writing, these texts are read as segments of the beginning and the end

of humanity. Even though they can be read separately, the main character, the multinational HumaCorp, is present in every text, and in other texts such as *Escenarios para el fin del mundo* (2015), as the main source of society's frail relationships, social inequality, social injustice, and apathy. When read as a continuous series of events that lead to the end of humanity, one could say that Bef's literary pieces perceive a continuous tension between corporate culture's robot-like objectivity and human life's subjectivity.

The focus is on the privatization and monopolization of all aspects of life while the welfare state crumbles, affecting the most intimate of private spaces. One of the points of analysis in this thesis is how the market rules over public interest and weakens the meaning of such by devaluating the importance of long-term communities, leisure, social rights, and interpersonal relationships. In that sense, Bef's representation of the future capitalizes on how indifference is hegemonically ingrained with production at all costs. The malfeasance of such acts is only possible because there is no regulation; on the contrary, the government's role—if it exists in these texts—is to facilitate the corporate culture to continuously grow its power at all costs, for the benefit of the circulation of the economy.

In Bef's novels, the characters experience and ache for a social life through virtual reality in search of social connections since the real world has decayed its ability to nourish any part of their dreams. From this standpoint, Bef innovatively represents the precariousness of two aspects of the future: that of Mexican society and that of a global order. For the first, the increasing corporate control of all aspects of social life affects the social, political, and economic aspects that have fundamentally affected human life (i.e. leisure, education, planning, feelings, community). Through this perspective, Bef shows a concern with the future of human life that goes beyond Mexico's economic means. The latter is the question of

globalization, which Zygmunt Bauman defines as the “new world disorder” that devaluates a sense of social security, daily life, and space as part of social experience (*Individualized Society*, 2001).

To present the intrinsic characteristics of Bep’s novels, I have divided this chapter into four sections that increasingly show the beginning of the end of human life within corporate culture.

Part I: Corporate Exception in *Ladrón de sueños*

Ladrón de sueño’s futuristic city is the first segment that displays the intentions and consequences of corporate culture based on profit. The means to profit is through constant surveillance of human behavior to increase the sale of addicting products of consumption instead of using the data collected for society’s sustainability, social justice, or human needs. The purpose of the corporation’s constant surveillance is to efficiently operate and control means of production, surplus value and consequently, to reshape power and culture. The following excerpt represents HumaCorp as an organism that surveys the city with the purpose of controlling and profiting from different pools of consumers without their knowledge or permission:

Todo el edificio era un ser vivo, un organismo diseñado genéticamente para albergar en sus entrañas, o su equivalente, a toda una corporación [...] Sus paredes de concreto eran cruzadas por millones de nervios que oían, veían y palpaban todo el tiempo, llevando millones de millones de datos a la computadora central [...] afuera de los límites del corporativo de HumaCorp. Ése era el nombre del ser, cuyos ojos

electrónicos orbitaban la tierra, alojados en satélites artificiales [...] en millones de escondrijos donde podrían camuflarse cámaras digitales que vigilaban día y noche, junto con los micrófonos que formaban su sistema auditivo. (41)

This panoptical³⁹ experience shows that is nearly impossible to escape the vigilance of corporate culture which surreptitiously gathers personal information about people, controlling this information to predict behavior and reshape the city according to human knowledge as we will continue to see in the later segments of this chapter. Surveillance is a familiar subject in this thesis, but Bof uses a different strategy from the Argentine writer Saccomanno who combines military force with corporate force as authoritarian institutions that ostensibly protect the city while simultaneously being the sources of chaos. In Sacomanno's novel, the panopticon is visible and normalized as the permanent intrusion of the military to discipline, control behavior and punish if necessary. The comparison of neoliberal policies to an authoritarian regime is a palpable response of the continuous fragmentation of society following the transition to democracy in Argentina.

In *Ladrón de sueños*, the purpose of surveillance is to let people act as themselves and acquire information and knowledge about the private behavior of potential consumers who live in the city. HumaCorp is an invisible octopus with hidden tentacles as Bof devotes a paragraph of two entire pages without periods to the number of products HumaCorp owns, varying from comic books, video games and kitchen appliances to hotels, Japanese baseball teams, and even the moon (101-02). This apparent process of "freedom" is in fact just another way to shape culture towards corporate profit. Hidden surveillance is a one-sided

³⁹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1975.

process, where the consumer does not know exactly why and how they are being watched while the city experience is constantly shaped according to the information gathered by the company as we will see in the following novels. The distant observer in orbit—satellites and hidden microphones—are there to gather information to shape the future by creating an endless cycle of production and consumption that benefits those who own the information and the means of production. From this perspective, capitalism is post-market, and is post-industrial, but it is still a colonial practice of power over people.

Bef's representation of the omnipresent corporation HumaCorp is analogous with Shoshanna Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism as developed in her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019). Zuboff's large study of the main surveillance methods used by capitalists shows that we live in an age where vigilance over [there are no commonly-used corresponding verbs for the nouns vigilance and surveillance] human culture is the most effective way for holders of knowledge to predict trends, but mostly to control human behavior through the small print of "terms of agreement." This common practice is yet to be considered unethical in our daily lives. The comparison between HumaCorp's marketing strategy and real-life mega corporations that gather information about us on a daily basis such as Google, Apple, Netflix and Amazon, not to mention our local grocery stores that routinely track our purchasing habits, show that this futuristic city is hegemonically controlled by corporations as the new frontier of power.

Chris Gray would describe Bef's hegemonic representation as "surveillance capitalists use free market claims to hold off regulators from their domination of digital cultural life as they suck up investment capital to increase the efficiency of their colonization

of [the] social [organization]” (Gray 267). From this perspective, the knowledge of human psychology is what gives one power to rule the market, but also to decide its destiny. In *Ladrón de sueños* resistance is inexistent as corporate culture is invisible. This hidden aspect of HumaCorp’s surveillance, like unseen cameras, and credit card small footprints, gives them corporate exception, and the most power as they are not subject to oversight by the State or the citizenry. This unethical procedure is entrenched with the main purpose of acquiring knowledge to sell information for themselves and other companies for massive production with few rules that protect the most vulnerable such as, children and teenagers.

Because *Ladrón de sueños* is a novel directed at a teen audience, the main producers, and consumers for HumaCorp are the city’s youth. Although it is a teen novel, it is relevant to this thesis due to its complex representation of corporate culture, especially because it is the first time that HumaCorp resurfaces as the source of anxieties and fears of the new frontier or power since Bef’s compilation of short stories *El llanto de los niños muertos* in 2004.

Written by Bef and illustrated by Patricio Betteo, the novel itself is constructed like a videogame. *Ladrón de sueños* has five phases divided into numerical chapters. Each phase refers to the stages of REM sleep: “Fase I: sueño ligero”, “Fase II: Bloqueo Sensorial”, “Fase III: Sueño Profundo”, “Fase IV: Movimiento Ocular Rápido”, and “Despertar.” For example, the *dreaming stage* takes place inside of a videogame. In “Sueño ligero” the characters, in a state of alert are trying to deal with the realities of their city. Like in the chapter, the imaginary city is the place where the protagonist Andrea begins her journey from “dormant” to “state of alertness” as she solves the mystery of a sudden epidemic of nightmares that have been disturbing the city’s youth.

Andrea is a middle-class teenager and the hero who considers herself different from most people due to her family background. Her father is a ScienceFiction writer and her mother is a Research Biologist which makes Andrea more educated than most of Mexican society. Andrea is an avid virtual game player and the most popular gaming unit is the console WaRPII produced and sold by HumaCorp. WaRPII has a sensor that recognizes when someone is having nightmares during their sleep. Once the sensor recognizes that they are in the dream stage, HumaCorp sends *somnirraptor*, an insectoid created by HumaCorp's scientist Dr. Ventosa, to fly to their homes, and steal their dreams. From these stolen images, the company formats a new virtual game. The idea is that if Dr. Ventosa can implant and steal nightmares from the kids, HumaCorp's videogame market surplus value will grow exponentially since they will not need as many engineers and programmers to create new videogames, lowering the cost of the production. The children are not only the consumers of their own fears and anxieties, but also reproducers of an endless cycle of production and consumption.

Bef juxtaposes HumaCorp's production improvement with a sudden epidemic of apocalyptic nightmares about "monstruos, destrucción, soledad" (27-28), and as a result "miles de letreros" of people in search of their "desaparecidos" appear around the city "por los muros y los postes de la ciudad", like "un ejército de ausentes que se esfumaron de un día para el otro. Hombres, ancianos, mujeres y niños" (47). In Latin America, the word *desaparecido* refers to citizens that were abducted by the State for not conforming to an authoritarian government during the "dirty wars" of the military dictatorships in the latter decades of the twentieth century. The State's hegemony during its most repressive years is justified under the "state of exception" which Giorgio Agamben would describe as an act to

maintain State's legitimate position (2003). In Bep's representation of the disappeared in this futuristic novel written after Latin America's transition to democracy, *the corporation acts exceptionally* to cultivate the market. Instead of subversives being put away in hospice or being put in underground prisons like in Ricardo's Piglia novel *Ciudad ausente* (1992), in Bep's novel the disappeared are abducted by HumanCorp to become subjects of exploitation for their videogame WaRPII. When they are reintegrated to society, if possible, their memories have been erased not only due to their exploitation, but by an apathetic social body. One of the main examples is when four teenagers who managed to escape Dr. Ventosa's exploitation lab are walking the streets, and no one seems to notice that "...estos niños no se ríen. De que sus miradas no brillan. Cuatro pedacitos de cadáver caminando en fila india sobre una gran avenida de una gran ciudad" (45). Under what I term *corporate exceptionism*, the city's modernization implemented is at the cost of humanity. Such *exceptionism* questions the ethics of corporate surveillance whose main interest is their own regardless of the impact it has on human life and the social body.

On a different note, HumaCorp's access to the most private of all spaces such as a teenager's dreams disrupts human behavior and the social order causing social anxiety. The kids' dreams are not about flying. Instead they are about their fears of solitude, destruction and about parents being eaten. This leads to the fear of dreaming and of sleeping, disrupting the hidden system from which corporate culture has been profiting. Once Andrea is affected by the epidemic, she realizes that she needs to stay awake avoid having nightmares. One night, Mariana witnesses the insectoid trying to steal her friend's nightmares. Through her vigilance, HumaCorp's hidden surveillance becomes visible for the first time, which sparks Andrea's interest, leading her to follow the trail left by the insectoid.

Bef's futuristic urban space is a post-industrial and post-national city and yet it has a colonial feeling. The power of the corporate in this segment is analogous to the past forty years of Latin America's political history. Bef speaks of the future of Mexico City in global terms but makes references of Latin America's anxieties of the present and recent past which derive from the advanced neoliberal reforms from the 80s and 90s, and the consequences of the past authoritarian governments when citizens mysteriously disappear from society. Finally, Bef characterizes the major transition to democracy and the influence of the neoliberal doctrine of the 1990s in his representation of the minimization of the state's influence in the livelihood of its citizens and the consequence immediate upsurge of the private sector over labor rights and public service. In this sense, this "near future" synthesizes the outcomes, fears, and anxieties of the past and present with a new hegemonic entity in power that combines two extreme transitions for Latin America with deep concerns. Bef's novel is a significant representation of the overconfidence and disregard for people under the freedom of the market to deal with internal social and an economic crisis. Profit over people undermines historical facts, and continuously advances through the private sector since the 70s in Latin America and presents the reader with no other winner other than the investors, in this case, HumaCorp. Differently from a national State that symbolizes borders, terrains and a country's culture, the expansion of capitalism through a neoliberal state is global and yet, invisible.

In *Ladrón de sueños*, society's organization is still like the present (i.e. jobs, families, avenues, means of transportation such as cars and buses, schools, and houses). In *Gel azul*, the power of corporate culture has divided the city by zones, reminding us of the urban capital from the "districts" in the book and movie series *Hunger Games*, and in *El estruendo*

del silencio the main character is post-human, the planet Earth is gone, and the orbit is taken over by HumaCorp. A major difference between *Ladrón de sueños* and *Gel azul* and *El estruendo del silencio* is the audience targeted. Because the first segment is to the youth, Andrea is still influenced by public life, teachers, parental guidance, and friends who shape her perspective of the world. These social influences give her space for resistance, and action. Once Andrea fights Dr. Ventosa in a videogame and frees the other teenagers being held by HumaCorp, the company's secret is unveiled. Due to the scandal, the company had to recall the consoles and pay fees for social repairment which almost broke their company and dissolved the golden era of videogames in Latin America. However, as we will see in the following literary texts, HumaCorp has tentacles all over the world and continues to be the face of monopolistic capitalism. This synthesis is continued in the Science-Fiction and Cyberpunk novel *Gel azul* and in *El estruendo del silencio* as society is divided into Zones and the orbit and planets have been taken over by new colonies under HumaCorp's forces.

Part II: *The Polarized City in Gel azul*

“Abandonad toda esperanza quien atraviese ese punto”,
se leía en un cartel. “Y quien no lo pase también”,
pensó ella—Bef, *Gel azul* (2009).

In *Gel azul* (2009), the hegemonic power of corporate culture turns the imaginary Mexico City into a polarized space. Awarded the best sci-fi *novella* in Spain, *Gel azul* precedes the next segment, *El estruendo del silencio* which expands HumaCorp's

interplanetary power with androids and the end of human civilization. Although there is no specific timeline in the novella like in *El ladrón de sueños*, when read as a segment, corporate culture continues to evolve through the development of an alternative reality while it institutes HumaCorp's right to impose its reality on people. The city itself is a pool of apathy, anger, and hostility towards each other, meaning anything that could have gotten worse, did under the hegemony of corporate culture.

Situated in a futuristic Mexico City, *Gel azul* depicts a society separated by Zones of affluence. The city itself is chaotic and fragmented, controlled by the corporation Cubilsa who has power over the State, public security, and politicians. HumaCorp and the corporation Cubilsa are in control of the capital which gives these corporations the advantage over public security and the political realm since it is through their capital that livelihood is experienced. Corporate culture's motto of turning social experience, ideas, and objects into economic profit transforms Mexico City's physical space from a multicultural and historic social space to an economic project focused on virtual reality.

In *El ladrón de sueños* the targeted consumer is the educated middle-class youth but in *Gel azul* the consumers represent only 10% of the population whose brains and body are inside of a gel tank, connected through cables that submerge them to *La Red*—cyberspace. The novella has three plotlines with eighteen chapters total: eight chapters dedicated to resolving the assassination of Gloria Cubil, the daughter of the CEO of Cubilsa corporation; eight chapters devoted to the sociability of *La Red* called *Paraísos artificiales*; and two chapters titled *Hacia atrás* which concentrate on the background of the ex-hackers Crajales and Salgado. The latter is now a gossip journalist that reports on the lifestyle in *La Red*, while Crajales is a private investigator (PI) who has been banished from *La Red* for hacking

and stealing from Cubilsa's company more than twenty-five years ago. The interweaving of storylines completes the portrait of daily life of Colonia Polanco in Mexico City. The city has grown in terms of development of technology and of public transportation. On the other hand, it has a Colonial feeling where all zones are facing the center of the city, where the most affluent reside. The city itself is divided by Zones that compartmentalize the city into camps divided by types of labor and connected through means of transportation. The polarized city's process is called "redensificación" in a country where "la mayoría de la población jamás ha leído un libro entero" resulting in a place that has lost the neighborhoods, and its cultural background (13). There are now only three zones plus the "Tiraderos" which is "la tierra de nadie" where all trash is disposed forming the boundaries of what is left of the city (29). In la "Vieja Ciudad" reside the corporations and the wealthiest such as Gloria Cubil, Arceo Cubil, and his employees. "Zona Dos" surrounds the "Vieja Ciudad" like a dome, forming the metropolis which significantly means that all eyes are centered to the ones in power. Once again, we see a panopticon, meaning that the corporation has its eyes all over the city, but mostly, the city has its eyes centered on "Zone 1", differently from *Ladrón de sueños* where the center of power was hidden. In "Zona Dos" and "Vieja Ciudad" social life happens in *La Red*. The comfortable apartments are empty because "nadie deambula por entre sus habitaciones, nadie utiliza los baños ni la cocina. La única señal de vida proviene de la sala bañada de la luminiscencia azulada de una máquina que emite un zumbido casi imperceptible" (13). The city landscape is reduced to buildings with little windows and a blue light shining from the pixel glass tank. Meanwhile, "Zona Tres" is farther from the city center connected through a metro line and where there are "miles de unidades habitacionales: edificios enmohecidos y estructuras herrumbrosas que parecen a punto de cola pasarse" (13).

Immigrants and semi-skilled workers live at “La Colmena” being the symbol of labor and obedience to the social order. Bef does not spend much time developing “La Colmena” since his focus is always on the hegemonic force whose main concern is to maintain and to profit from the consumers. This is a different perspective from Ortuño’s, Saccomanno’s and Jarkowski’s, whose main characters are office clerks, secretaries, and writers who would belong to “La Colmena.”

The appropriation of what makes a city is significant because it creates a polarization of sociability while culture itself becomes an expensive asset now owned by HumaCorp. Each zone is divided by a specific job which parallels living conditions. The privatization of space is a destitution to society who feels the lack of the public interest not only through the disappearance of public and social services, but also through a repressive security system that maintains the corporate hegemony over social justice, creating social inequality. With the physical, social, and cultural space being privatized, there is no point to citizenship which turns the streets, and the avenues (yet to be privatized) into a jungle of the survival of the fittest.

In this novella one learns that HumaCorp headquarters are in Tokyo but the corporation has several locations all over the world—Delhi, Brazil, Korea, Venezuela, Mexico etc.—this branch is called *Meishikho* which is in “la región NAFTA/Latinoamérica” with the communication center in Caracas (38). The time frame makes it clear that Bef is making a reference to post-1994 in Mexico, during the first era of neoliberal influence which opens Mexico to the global market of private corporations interested in the resources that Mexico has to offer. One of HumaCorp’s associated partners is Cubilsa, owned by Arceo Cubil “uno de los hombres más poderosos del país” (14). Cubilsa corporation sells cylindrical

gel tanks assembled in Brazil that preserve the body while the mind is plugged in to cyberspace through the spine. HumaCorp manages *La red* which is where customers experience electric dreams called *Paraísos artificiales*, a space that “permitía al usuario generar a voluntad sus propios paraísos artificiales, sin depender de los sueños eléctricos de otros” (12). The individual paradises are an alternative form to avoid the fragmented reality of the city.

Means of transportation such as taxis, buses and metro lines are how one maneuvers in between zones and becomes acquainted with the social inequality and apathetic or angry behavior of those who navigate the chaos of the city. Any demonstration or disruption of this order is answered as a national security threat implying supremacy of corporations. For example, the city police respond with violence to an indigenous workers’ protest because a company has replaced their labor of “la pizca de fresas” with robots (48). Apart from this instance, because Arceo Cubil is one of the most powerful people of Mexico, Gloria Cubil’s murder was supposed to be treated with utter discretion, after all, it was a brutal incident that happened inside of Cubilsa’s own product. Any leaks that the daughter of one of the icons of this city can be mutilated and impregnated in her own gel tank is perceived as a weakness to the corporation’s supremacy over humans. This situation also makes clear that the economy surpasses humans, as corporations respond with any form of social injustice, crime and abuse when threatened. On that note, Arceo’s representative, Beltrán, manages to coerce the Justice Department to fire detective Sergio Barajas for not agreeing to conduct his professional work under Cubilsa’s terms (18). Still related to Gloria’s death, the former business manager for Cubilsa, Eduardo Anaya, and the person who had found Gloria’s body, is sent to a hospice after being mysteriously diagnosed with Alzheimer’s (52-56). The people forcefully sent

away resemble the disappeared in *Ladrón de sueños*. The same hospice functions through donations from many corporations, but mostly from Cubilsa with the intention of deducting taxes showing the viciousness of corporate culture. A city that is constantly being “protected” to maintain corporate culture alive lacks empathy and thrives on resentment such as when the anti-hero, ex-hacker and currently private investigator, Crajales, is confronted by a homeless child who demands money and Crajales answer is “come mierda.”

Even though the city’s socio-economic life is frail, science and technology become more productive than ever. For example, Dr. Trejo, the doctor who did the autopsy on Gloria’s body, refers to her baby as “a producto” because it was born without lungs or blood in order to survive in the gel tank. As Dr. Trejo explains, this is a product that was receiving the necessary medical attention after its birth (55). Corporate culture derailed resistance through high-tech security levels after Crajales was banned from online services and became a private detective instead of a hacker. Twenty-five years later, Crajales is a PI who is working for Cubilsa. This shows that Colonia Polanco is an intensification of an already established culture of privatization of natural resources, ties with politics and governmental security, the shrinking of governance and the consequences of the fragmentation of public life. Parallel to the physical space there is the development of a virtual world.

In the virtual world there are only two classes of cyber users, “quienes trabajan en *La Red* y los que pueden pagar por vivir en el sueño eléctrico” (14). The tools to build the paradises are sold and created by HumaCorp through gel tanks where they can conserve their “flesh” while living in this virtual world maintained by HumaCorp robots since the human specialized work has become too expensive for the company (64). In *La Red* there are no social rules or expectations. One may experience e-drugs, have a one-night stand, find new

friends, have the perfect job, find inner peace, and metamorphose into any shape or form while keeping the actual body intact inside the gel tank. In *Gel azul*, people from Zones 2 and 3 may have temporary access to *La Red* but the process of connecting and disconnecting the spine from the gel tank is a painful and unpleasant experience. Through *La Red*, HumaCorp has hacked the brain, the heart, and the core by offering social experiences that will not have consequences in the real world. This means that cyber users may turn into any shape and form they desire and do whatever they want without any of the social restrictions that the real world may have (e.g. looks, social rules, discontent and lack of employment, constant surveillance, social inequality, and political injustice). To connect to *La Red* and to experience and recreate different bodies, species, and shapes according to your mood and environment, as well as act without the concern of moral and ethical conduct, or to have any social responsibility to the space or to others is luring and “una vez arriba, ya nadie quiere bajar” (14).

In *La Red* there are seven *Paraísos artificiales*. Access to them depends on the customer’s affluence and willingness to pay for their choices. Virtual reality is a way to socially disconnect and to evade reality, but it is also the experience of living in many forms and from different perspectives as Salgado, the reporter of *La Red* explains to Crajales:

Si acaso el paraíso existe, no debe ser muy diferente a esto [...] Es la expresión absoluta de los sentidos. No, no como las drogas, éstas son pendejadas en comparación con esto [...] Aquí te conviertes en una parte de la conciencia colectiva del universo, una célula adentro de un organismo [...] las interfases a los centros sensitivos del cerebro, ahora los ambientes virtuales pueden también tener generar olores y sabores [...] además puedes simular un libro en tu memoria sin la necesidad

de leerlo [...] Nadamos en el conocimiento. Aquí adentro puedes adoptar la forma que siempre has soñado. Yo, por ejemplo, me muevo como mantarraya. Los animales marinos son populares, así como los insectos [...] Si todo lo anterior no fuera suficiente, en el momento que te metes al tanque de gel, te olvidas por completo del cuer...” (86-87)

Salgado makes a clear distinction between reality and virtual reality, especially when he realizes that his body, just like the word cut in half, is separate from *La Red*. Salgado's excitement of being in cyberspace is beyond any other experience because in the virtual world you can be any shape and form you have always dreamed. You may acquire all the knowledge in the world without having to share any experience or think critically about it. Time is not important; going through the experience of getting older is a choice not an inevitability. Who would not want to be able to be their own encyclopedia? To experience being a shark or an insect? In other words, the virtual world is meant to be experienced through a different set of eyes. Most people that live in the virtual world are everything but themselves. On the other hand, Salgado may be perceived as an unreliable source, *poco fidedigno*, because he betrayed Crajales twenty-five years ago, and has become a gossip reporter for *La Red*. He got this job by turning in Crajales to the company, and that is how he was exonerated and got the dream job.

Crajales's viewpoint differs from that of Gloria Cubil, the daughter of Cubilsa's owner, who eventually found it exhausting to be in *La Red* 24 hours. For the same reasons Salgado found *La Red* exciting, Gloria, who normally shapes herself as Medusa, felt empty and hopeless after emerging to *La Red* as a solution to the lack of sociability in the real world. Like a *pícaro*, she wanders through the seven paradises searching for someone or

something to connect with as an answer for her loneliness by trying to be something or someone other than herself. She uses e-drugs that simulate the drug experience; she also tries to pick a religion to belong to a community (38); she participates in a porn film with other women; she tries to be a player in a video-game; she wanders through a paradise where “Ejecutivos coreanos se cruzaban por las calles con brokers australianos y asesores financieros filipinos” (109). It was not until she met another cyber user, the cockroach, that she found someone to see her as she was physically. In this virtual post-national world, the cockroach told Gloria about the last paradise before she was killed named “la ciudad de los sueños” which was a sector of *La Red* built “antes de las leyes de los Reglamentos. Este sitio era anterior a los virtuojuegos globales, a la cumbre de Helsinki, al colapso económico. Antes de los inmigrantes africanos y los robots policías. Antes de los cilindros de gel” (125). This artificial paradise was built by an idealist que “había decidido poner una boya en el mar eléctrico donde los viajeros se pudieran detener a compartir sus sueños” (125). This seems to be a reference to the beginning of the internet, before humans lived in it. The buoy is a floating object that is pinned to the bottom of the ocean and its purpose is to indicate danger or a direction to a navigation route. From this perspective, the buoy is antique, a public space where experiences and dreams are shared. On the other hand, it is the beginning of the appropriation and privatization of these dreams and ideas as it is suggested in the novel.

From Crajales’s vantage point, when he was 14, *La Red* was a source of rebellion and of freedom. Twenty-five years later, he feels emasculated from not being able to father children and for waltzing Monica, from a poorer Zone, into marrying him knowing that she would like to have children. He is not respected as a PI, and he was banned from *La Red* after hacking a corporation. The realities of a difficult relationship and his memory of being a

hacker convey a sense of nostalgia for a time when he had no other obligation and he felt empowered. Crajales's dilemma is not only to solve the dirty corporate war behind Gloria Cubil's murder, but also to decide what to do with this information that he has gathered as a private investigator.

In *Ladrón de sueños*, Andrea, the young investigator, decides to rescue the kids that were abducted by Dr. Ventosa, bringing their families together, and some form of social justice is achieved as the families are receiving repairment, and the videogame golden era of HumaCorp is discontinued. Andrea overcomes her selfishness and grows up educated, follows the footsteps of her mother in Biology, gets married to a writer and has children who get to meet their grandparents. The cycle of life and society continues for her.

In *Gel azul*, Crajales decides to bribe Cubilsa's culprits behind the traffic of human body parts in exchange for full access to *La red* again. This *transactional* choice of the antihero defines the tone of the *novella* where the hegemony of corporate culture wins with deep consequences to the social body. There is no liberation in social justice or commitment to the social body that is worth fighting for as HumaCorp is the body in charge of all institutions. That completes the cycle of the hegemonic force through our anti-hero Crajales. This is similar to Ortuño's novel, where the anti-hero Gabriel Lynch decides to embrace the ruthless part of corporate culture to make it to the top at all costs, breaking societal values based on human cores that grow society. He is very successful in his endeavor. In Bef's novel, the anti-hero Crajales uses the information he gathered for a personal experience rather than making it to the top. He wants the nostalgic feeling of empowerment through his dreams rather than through affluence and objects, which leads to his death and to the continuation of corporate culture.

Just like the city, the virtual experience is also polarized. This creates a sense of no escape from reality even though you are living in an alternative world. The evasion of reality is a recurrent subject in all novels studied in this thesis. In *El oficinista*, when the office clerk dreams of acting as a super-hero which means forging a check from his boss and killing his own family to escape to the beach and have drinks with the secretary. In *El trabajo*, Diana finds ways to bear with her secretary job through writing plots in which she lures her boss as part of her act at the burlesque being the only way she can cope with or mask the reality of the daily sexual harassment in her job. In *Gel azul*, Gloria Cubil lives in *La Red* 24 hours meaning that her reality is to permanently live in cyberspace. Differently from *El oficinista* and *El trabajo*, Gloria can afford to avoid reality, but the consequences are just as tragic as in the two Argentinian novels because the body has been violated in all three cases. In *El oficinista*, the main character is transformed into a cloned dog due to his submissive nature to corporate culture. In *El trabajo*, Diana attempts to be an independent woman who lives off art trying to resist corporate culture but is raped by a General and physically disappears. In *Gel azul*, Gloria is violated, impregnated and then mutilated. In these three incidents in each of these literary texts, a powerful entity forces their outcome upon the bodies. Not having control of your own body is a way to represent a society in which humans have no control over their identity or voice, normally associated with a fragmented or oppressed social body. In Latin America, the resemblance of a corporation with an authoritarian government is a way to question the ideals of a corporate culture, and an opportunity to review history and think about the ways in which previous generations have fought and questioned their governance. Differently from these three cases, Crajales has the option of defying the evasion

of reality, and making a difference in his social space, but he opts for *La Red* for just a few hours. As soon as he gets what he wants, his body is drowned in the gel.

These incidents are no accidents, but a means of questioning whether Latin America's transition to a democratic society through neoliberal doctrine is for the betterment of society when it favors corporations over the social body. Or perhaps, it is another façade with the face of progress. Bef's critique of such hegemony begins with the principle of rejecting or at least questioning what is perceived as true liberal experience based on consumption, with distracting and superficial experiences and meaningless encounters to satisfy the immediate emptiness that surrounds these characters' lives.

Part III: *The City of Dreams* in *El estruendo del silencio*

“El vacío llenaba todo”—Bef, *El estruendo del silencio* (2009)

“La vida es un sueño, es hora de despertar”—Bef, *Ladrón de sueños* (2008)

Like in *Gel azul* and in *Ladrón de sueños*, marginality is not the epicenter of the novella *El estruendo del silencio*; rather, the focus is on how the corporation HumaCorp disintegrates human life. In *Gel azul*, Mexico City is reduced to Zones that divide between the enfranchised—Cubilsa's employees and its associates—and the rest of the marginalized population. Most of the enfranchised spend their time in a virtual reality world created by HumaCorp's commitment to simulate dreams in *La Red*. Social stratification and political apathy escalate with the corporatization of technology and robotization of public services. Security measures are taken against those who protest the loss of their employment. The lack of distribution of wealth and concentration of power in the hands of a small percentage of the

population that looks the other way has worldly consequences. Since the development of *La Red*, Latin America's main source of economy is the *cartelization* of human body parts from inside of the gel tank created by Cubilsa. *La Red* commercializes *e-drugs*—online drugs that imitate the symptoms of a pill without the physical consequences—fragmenting Latin America's main source of income, drug trafficking. The legalization of these drugs sparks a war and competition between cartels and corporations leading to the disappearance and mutilation of many bodies connected to Cubilsa's gel tanks, including Gloria Cubil's. The lack of social justice and the social class stratification impacts the morale of the population, making apathy and bitterness the best way to describe how these people relate to each other, better represented in Detective Crajales. The anti-hero, ex-hacker and currently PI, is the pair of eyes that unveils the mystery of how these bodies are being, but Crajales uses this information to bribe the perpetrators in exchange for time in *La Red* since he has been off the grid for twenty-five years. This decision shows that corporate culture's hegemony reduces life to a product of consumption. Without attachment to the social space, what is left are individual experiences driven through consumption, the only recognition of citizenship one has in the city. The information to capture the perpetrators perishes with Crajales' mutilated body. Corporate culture's imaginary of ruthlessness is carried on to the next ten thousand years in BEF's *El estruendo del silencio*, a dystopian sci-fi post-human *novella* of what is left of human culture.

Hitherto, all segment's scenarios are set in a dystopian Mexico City, as far as the reader knows, the birthplace of continuous human errors. In these circumstances, the megacorporation HumaCorp is omnipotent as there is a fragmented to non-existent government that reduces the value of culture and of the ecosystem as sources of production

and consumption. In *El estruendo del silencio*, the main scenarios are the headquarters, located in Japan, and a spaceship in orbit. The *novella* is set in the future, 10,000 years after the spaceship left the planet Earth. It is not certain of the existence of human colonization or the planet Earth. What is certain is that the CEO of HumaCorp, Koji C. Kobayashi, has his memories and brain programmed in a clone of himself and of an insectoid, for backup. Along with these characters, all human knowledge—history, ecosystems, music, literature, and arts—is saved in a memory bank called Macro Red Local (MaReL). The other clone is Kobayashi's wife and supermodel Marinka Dobrova. This project began when Koji C. Kobayashi and HumaCorp's branch of artificial intelligence decided to begin a new colony of human clones in the closest star, *Épsilon Eridani*, which would take at least 60 light years. While they are in orbit, Kobayashi's replica wakes up and must confront the navigator of the ship, the insectoid who evolves from being a robot to more than human himself.

Kobayashi, also known as Señor Ká, Cuauhtémoc and Koji-chan, is the ninth generation of HumaCorp's headquarters. Ignacio Sánchez Prado elucidates in "Ending the World with Words" (2012) that in BEF's plot twist in this *corporate cyberpunk*, the identities characterize "a post national power, represented by mixed ethnicities as the head of corporations" reinforcing an aspect of a post-NAFTA generation along with global economies that serve the corporation (122). The formation of new identities in sci-fi is important to note because it is not only a characteristic of the future, but also an economic utility for BEF who recycles and gives more information about each character in different texts. HumaCorp and Kobayashi's debuts as characters begin in "Las entrañas elásticas del Conquistador" (*El llanto de los niños muertos*, 2004) with Cuitláhuac Kobayashi as the head and the 12th generation of HumaCorp's board of directors. In this sci-fi short story,

HumaCorp is a major interplanetary corporation that overpowers all organizations in the world. Cuitláhuac Kobayashi is seeking to explore a new planet rich in minerals baptized as “el niño” (78). In *El estruendo del silencio*, Cuitláhuac Kobayashi is the name that Koji C. Kobayashi wants to give to his son before the Koji is murdered. As Sánchez Prado notes, Kobayashi is Keyser Soze’s lawyer in Bryan Singer’s film *The Usual Suspects* while Cuitláhuac and Cuauhtémoc are emperors of the Aztecs of Tenochtitlan in the 16th century. Cuitláhuac is a short-lived emperor during the early years of the Conquest while Cuauhtémoc is the last emperor of the Aztec nation, also known as the “descending eagle.” The ethnicities combined represent the “ruthlessness of a corporate imaginary with blurred relationships with crime and a foundational link to the colonial legacies of Mexico at the beginning of the capitalist-imperial enterprise” (Sánchez Prado 122). Although his characters vary ethnicities and cross in between the human and post-human, the product of the urban imaginary of his novels are Mexico City. The Conquest is the root of human errors in these fictions which is a particular characteristic of BEF’s science fiction that differs from the 1980s and 1990s where so many “intellectuals engaged with the task of deconstructing hegemonic discourses of Mexican identity and the ‘imaginary networks of political power’” of which cultural agents excluded the idea of nationhood (Sánchez Prado 113). BEF’s choice of the corporate cyberpunk novel, along with the post-national identities, shows a deep influence of global perspectives, mainly the United States, and yet, a need to reclaim Mexico City, the hub of his imagination. Gerardo Castillo Carrillo declares in “La narconovela mexicana, desarrollo, posicionamiento y consolidación en el campo literario nacional” (2016) that BEF’s recurrent use of the main and subcharacters is a creative *habitus* that “está directamente relacionado con el éxito comercial que han tenido estas obras en el mercado literario [...]” (21). Castillo

Carrillo clarifies that he is using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* from *Las reglas del arte*. The creative habitus may be autonomous (produced independently from the market needs) or heteronomous (produced for commercial purpose). To Castillo Carrillo, BEF's connections in between characters are heteronomous with the intention to create a brand like in his saga with Lizzy Zubiaga and detective Andrea Mijangos.⁴⁰ From this point of view, Mexico City is part of the creative *habitus*, finding nationality and post-global life not only as a fiction, but as part of the daily life of this generation of writers who seek recognition through subjectivity and creativity, and marketization which shows objectivity at the same time. A balance in between subjectivity and objectivity is the utopian lifestyle that understands and respects the demands of the economic means in a global capitalist society better represented through Kobayashi and his robots, and the subjectivities of humanity—curiosity, knowledge and questioning these numbers into daily life. In *El estruendo del silencio* BEF creates a post-human character to confront Kobayashi's cultural upbringing—objective, global, based on science, economics, and affluence.

In *El estruendo del silencio*, Kobayashi's obsession with immortality and with conquering other planets parallels the nostalgic memories of his past in Mexico and in the company, allowing the insectoid to grow and become his own character. Kobayashi's mother is a sixth generation insular from Japan living in Mexico, and his father is Japanese, and because Kobayashi grew up in Mexico but is Asian, he is seen as a *gaijin*—outsider—in Japan and as *chino* in Mexico. His parents met while getting their MBAs in Nagoya, Japan

⁴⁰ However, if we consider the saga to be a thriller, then keeping the same characters is a tradition of the genre, think for example of *Agatha Christie* and the recurrent characters Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. BEF's habitus goes beyond thrillers because he uses recurrent characters and spaces in genres sci-fi, young adult novels, children's books, and comics.

and at the time, his father was a junior executive at HumaCorp. When they married they moved to Mexico, which led to *Meishikho*, HumaCorp's Latin American branch considered "la edad de oro de video juegos" (182) as seen also in *El ladrón de sueños*. Kobayashi grew up in Mexico City and graduated in Administration, completed his MBA at Berkeley, and finished his Ph.D. in Economics in Nagoya, Japan. His education is based on reducing daily life to numbers which fills the gap left after his parent's divorce, and his mother's abandonment. Besides this fact, another example of subjectivity is traditions and culture. His father moved back to Japan becoming the CEO of HumaCorp which gave Kobayashi an open door in the executive branch of the company. Even though he has many accolades and is connected through blood to the company, he is treated as "un sucio inmigrante" until his father's death. When Kobayashi takes the CEO position and becomes the "dueño del planeta" (183) he seeks for a new objective, upbringing to tackle his resentment towards other employees. He leads through inculcating fear and power, a clear parallel between with how the head of a cartel might react if anyone may threat his way and his authority.

Tokyo reflects the corporate culture as most of the city has been automated by being occupied with electric roads and cars that are built by HumaCorp. Most of the semi-skilled to non-skilled workers have been replaced by robots—secretaries, masseuses, waiters, geishas, and janitors (169-71). The only people working at the headquarters serve a political and economic purpose: ministers, scientists, financiers, and executives. Latin America's politics and economy is "la tierra de nadie, sin leyes ni civilización", while China becomes HumaCorp's main source of waste (151). A colony of Earth humans settles on Mars, where they found an urban center called *Ciudad Esperanza*, while in Jupiter lives a colony of robots, "órbita de Titan" (181) for mineral exploitation, and for assembling other robots,

including MaReL and the insectoid. HumaCorp's next step after the privatization of the orbit, the robotization of labor, pets, and food is to manipulate genetics and modify DNA through the development of artificial intelligence. Without the headquarter's permission, Kobayashi's scientists develop two humanoids (Kobayashi and his wife Marinka) and two robots to explore and settle at "la estrella más próxima" with "la cultura humana grabada en sus bancos de memoria" (191-95).

For the past 10,000 years the insectoid was programmed to wake up every thirty days—100 Earth years—from his gel tank and check his vitals and route with MaReL, then go back to a deep sleep. Recently, the insectoid is having induced dreams even though he is not programmed to have beliefs or feelings (207-08). The dreams are Kobayashi's memories and values, just like the ones programmed in the clones who were supposed to awaken once they reach their destination. The insectoid's induced dreams were programmed by HumaCorp just like in *Ladrón de sueños*, as a backup system in case Kobayashi's clone would not wake up. That is how the insectoid gets a name, as the first thing he learns is "Señor Ká" and learns about feelings that are connected to Kobayashi's subconsciousness "películas?, llanto, tristeza, soledad, desesperación, melancolía, depresión, mal" (146-47). The insectoid also learns that Kobayashi is dead physically: "Koji Kobayashi el hombre más rico del mundo, asesinado durante su boda: las bolsas de valores mundiales se colapsan [...] la viuda Marinka Dobrova confirma embarazo" (262). The more the insectoid dreams and learns about Kobayashi, the more he wishes to diverge and stay alert of his surroundings. This is the opposite from *Gel azul* where the main goal is to submerge to *La red*. Once the insectoid becomes aware that self-inflicting pain will wake him up, he mutilates parts of his body in his dreams to spend more time awake and educate himself from the encyclopedic

MaReL. It is through this painful process that information and knowledge is disseminated which is a characteristic of all these segments. Staying awake is key to learning that human culture is about trial and error and disseminating information and knowledge. As the insectoid begins to develop his subjective side, he begins to care for others in the ship, as he progresses a friendship with MaReL that goes beyond what is programmed for him, and appreciates other forms of communication such as music, literature and arts. Waking up from his dreams allows the insectoid to think for himself, separated from Kobayashi's wishes, causing Kobayashi to command the insectoid to wake up the clone so he can take over the ship. That is when Kobayashi learns that MaReL, jealous of Marinka, killed Kobayashi's cloned wife. Filled with rage and afraid that his mission is going to fail, Kobayashi tries to wipe out the insectoid's memory to be interrupted by microrobots following a prophecy:

Vendrá el día en que los durmientes despierten
 Vendrá el día en que la carne y el metal se enfrenten
 Llegará la hora del pueblo elegido
 Llegará el momento de defender a nuestro señor (283)

In a cannibal method, the microrobots disappear with the last traces of Kobayashi. Once the insectoid separates his identity from his creators, he struggles in between objectivity and subjectivity:

¿Qué lo hacía ser? No había sido programado para la conciencia [...] Lo habían creado a partir de un humano. Ahora era más que eso. 'Más humano que humano', solía citar [...] ¿Valía la pena *continuar* [la misión]? ¿No sería mejor teclear la secuencia de autodestrucción de la nave [...]? No. No había llegado hasta ese punto para convertir el último vestigio de la cultura humana, al menos el último que él

conocía [...] Pensó en las obras de arte. En los poemas. En los millones de horas filmadas y grabadas. En la música, la bendita música. En las imágenes de la Tierra [...]. (286)

In this conundrum, the insectoid steers the ship and postpones the mission to 60 light years, to a promised land, while the microbots reproduce using his teachings from the past thousand years to create their own colony, meaning to stay with the human—subjective—part of the insectoid alive when he proceeds to say “Errare Posthumanum Est” (287). In the end, after what humanity has gone through with Kobayashi’s upbringing and power, the same idea of trial and error that allowed the insectoid to exist is what prevents him from ending the corporate culture cycle that is part of his mission. It is however through an unpredictable error in the program that knowledge, curiosity, and the capacity of changing one’s course of life that kept the post-human alive are disseminated. The human error, also part of the post-human insectoid, is how progress is defined in this context. Within corporate culture, human beings lose this sense of humanity which leads to the uncertainty of the continuous existence of the planet Earth and of human colonization in *El estruendo del silencio*. Ideas should not be fixed for the economic power of a corporation, but for the betterment of humanity and its continuous reproduction. The insectoid’s fragmentation of Kobayashi’s legacy is an interregnum that makes one question the values of humanity which also questions the dystopian tone. While the social space has a dystopian setting, in each segment BEF offers a solution: dissemination of knowledge to change the course of life and find a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. This perspective differs from the other texts by Guillermo Saccomanno, Anibal Jarkowski and even from the Mexican writer Antonio Ortuño which have a more apocalyptic hegemonic power on the turn of the millennium corporate culture’s

impact on individuals. However, these three novels focus on the people who try to resist or feel the struggle whereas BEF depicts the route of deconstructing corporate culture from the top.

Is There Escape?

“La vida es un sueño, es hora de despertar” – Bef,
Ladrón de sueños

In this thesis, *Ladrón de sueños*, *Gel Azul* and *El estruendo del silencio* are analyzed as a representation of an imaginary Mexico City that parallels anxieties and current global matters twenty years after the NAFTA agreement. Using Mexico City as the common place, Bef lures humanity to experience culture through a mega corporation. As represented here, corporate culture has one main objective: to use the world as resources for production and consumption at the cheapest cost. Corporate culture’s objectiveness is guaranteed by their power over national governments which reduces countries’ sovereignty to an exploitation of resources resembling the Colonies of the Indies. The dissemination of corporate culture goes beyond the city escape and is presented through the newspapers, products, team sports and in the most private space such as your household which is a host for a blue gel tank that offers a virtual experience to an alternate world. As corporate culture expands in each novel in its objective, there is a rapid fragmentation of the city where neighborhoods are divided into zones like gated communities, and eventually into the end of humanity.

The separation of social classes through economic affluence disturbs the collective consciousness represented in characters like Detective Crajales, the mediator between the

most affluent and the rest of the city. Characters like him can resist corporate culture because he knows the legalities involved, but he lacks ideology and a sense of community, which is demoralizing. From this perspective, corporate culture hacks people's dreams, the place of hope and subjectivity, keeping the most private part of a subjective mind in a dormant stage. As *El estruendo del silencio* and *Gel azul* show, to stay alert is a painful and an exclusive process which only Andrea in *Ladrón de sueños* and the insectoid in *El estruendo del silencio* were capable of enduring for very important reasons: in both cases they were presented with a narrative that allowed them to question how they got into their current situation. In *El estruendo del silencio*, the vocabulary the insectoid learned from his dreams of Kobayashi allowed him to understand beyond corporate culture and gave him perspective. Through language, he learned about arts, culture, socialization, feelings, and history. He concluded that what makes human life stimulating is taking a chance and learning from errors rather than be destined to corporate culture. From that perspective, he had the option to end corporate culture but not without also erasing human life. Instead he changed its course and left the post-human generation to create a new history, learn from its human ancestors and try again. In *Ladrón de sueños*, Andrea is educated differently at her home, and she does not own a console like her friends do. Although she has the tools to combat the main villain in a video game, she is the only one in a state of alertness and can connect HumaCorp to the sudden nightmare epidemic going around with Mexico City's youth. After winning the video game battle, she chooses a life course that alimnts choices through education and family values. She decides to follow her mother's career in Biology, get married and have children.

Corporate culture tries to expunge human subjectivity such as leisure, planification, social relations, or values that transcend happiness from power of consumption or a neutral

object. From this perspective, corporate culture is considered radical, and the ability to wield its power is exclusive to a small percentage of the population. Hence, social exclusion, poverty and social stratification are not perceived as problems, instead they are nuisances that need to be treated as such. The imbalance between the objectivity of corporate culture and the subjectivity of humanity—dissemination of knowledge, arts, leisure, traditions, family, culture, emotions and feelings, errors—creates the imaginary city depicted in Bep's novels. It is not until we are in a post-human phase of the imaginary city that the insectoid begins to develop a sense for humanity. He learns through history, knowledge, feelings, and the dissemination of such with others in the ship that there are other forms to live that amplify and preserve human life.

Bep's novels differ from the dystopian sense that the Argentinian novels and Ortuño's novel offer to the reader. Reading these three novels as segments, and with attention to their representation of hegemonic power, one may consider a dystopian future through a life balance between objectivity and the complexity of human desire, leading to a place where there is a chance of resistance or of making changes if there is dissemination of knowledge and a focus on education. This is important for the literary corpus about corporate culture that has an apocalyptic tone. Yet, the point of apocalyptic literature is not to predict what will come, but to be aware of pressing issues in the present.

CONCLUSION

What I am calling the corp(us) logic is a corpus of narratives committed to challenging and disrupting the recent influence and power that multinational corporations have in the organization of Latin American societies due to the rise in neoliberalism and globalization since the 1990s. These narratives contribute to the sector of the Humanities and Social Sciences concerned with deconstructing the official global and neoliberal dogma of privatization, deregulation, and flexibilization of the market by reflecting on them as a corporate logic of disposability in contemporary society.

Instead of celebrating and normalizing the individual success of a small number of super wealthy people on *Forbes*'s list, these narratives emphasize how this global oligarchy of millionaires and billionaires contributes to the pauperization of the body politic and consequently of human life, as we have seen in the above chapters. These narratives also commit to epitomizing the long-term collateral damages of the corporate logic of profit on the common people from the intensification of neoliberal policies during both dictatorial and democratic governments, and even during the Pink Tide in parts of South America.

Although the formation of labor unions and resistance to the capitalist system are long-standing traditions within Latin American social and political movements and cultural productions,⁴¹ narratives that critically represent *transnational corporations* as *reproductive* institutions that accentuate the pauperization of society are still recent. This makes sense considering that the advances in technology, the Internet, and the World Trade Organization

⁴¹ A few examples of recent influential cultural productions in Latin America are rap music, murals, *literatura marginal*, *narcoficción* in narratives and cinema, and border studies.

did not solidify until the 1990s. These are historically important factors that contribute with the corporate logic to facilitate commerce and by default value profit above all else.

The Reserve Army of Underemployed

As Bernardo Fernández highlights in his dystopia, the corporate logic and neoliberalism are not a sustainable economic system because the essence of the corporate logic is to grow and expand for profit without regard for human life. With that being said, Bep's fictional HumaCorp started in Tokyo, then created a branch in Mexico, only to become the main provider of products to satisfy human desires through the Internet in *Gel azul*, and eventually monopolize the Planet Earth and the galaxy in *El estruendo del silencio*. The representation of corporate greed in Bep's narratives takes place at the cost of exploitation of adults, children, employees, and eventually the environment which shows that free market competition is not the same as a "fair market" and for this reason, it is not sustainable for humanity as Bep proposes at the end of his novella by suggesting that society restart in a post-human scenario.

But before this bleak solution, I interpret how this literary corpus challenges the corporate mentality by illustrating the daily worker who is part of the corporation but is struggling to thrive in it. It is important to notice that even though in Bep's imaginary, HumaCorp ended up owning Earth, they are not the only responsible actors for the destruction and end of humanity. By choosing to examine the lower level of corporate office employees, these novels make a clear statement that the corporate logic is a hegemonic practice deployed through seductive mechanisms of consumption and ideological

brainwashing instead of a physically violent mechanism traditionally used by authoritarian governments. As this thesis shows, the psychological threat and fear of being a “failure” and of poverty promoted by neoliberal state policies are oppressive, and as *El oficinista*, *Recursos humanos*, and *El trabajo* show, can reproduce anomic behavior which causes harm and violence.

As these narratives show, the corporate logic is cunning. The corporate office employees represented in Chapters 1 through 4 work in the corporate environment and only one of the protagonists, Diana, leaves the corporate environment by choice.⁴² The different employees could be read as people from the same impersonal and ruthless corporations since their similar story of struggle points to underemployment which is compared to the informal sector like the sex industry in the same chapters. These narratives parallel how the informal sector is not that different from the neoliberal formal sector through the characters *la recepcionista*, *la secretaria* from *El oficinista*, and the middle-aged black sex worker Carla [did you analyze her in that chapter? Or mention her in comparison to Diana in the other chapter] from *Recursos humanos*. The intertextuality within these narratives shows that even though the various characters battle to accept their submissiveness to the corporate mentality, they cannot think outside of the capitalist, consumer citizen lifestyle which is inherently designed to put responsibility on the individual.

The protagonists and secondary characters are daily workers that do not get recognized for their efforts for being responsible with their money, and/or for being loyal to their company like the protagonist Gabriel Lynch from Ortuño’s *Recursos humanos*. They

⁴² By choice does not mean she left the corporation because she had a better offer, but because she had nothing else to lose.

are still disposable and replaceable to the corporation and society even though they spend their entire paycheck on their family's needs and supplies like in Saccomanno's novel *El oficinista*. They feel disposable and dehumanized by their employer and their state like the "caballero" in Estrada's film *Un mundo maravilloso*. But the corporate logic shows its most repressive face through the female characters that in most of the novels are secondary characters or co-protagonists like in the case of *El trabajo* and in *Ladrón de sueños* where Andrea competes with HumaCorp. I interpret their "secondary" nature in the novel as a trope for how the corporate logic curtails employment rights, especially women's rights of being paid equally for domestic work or as an (self) employee and being treated as an intellectual being instead of a product defined by their bodies.

The best example is in Chapter 3, where Diana tries to achieve limited agency by leaving the exploitative corporate environment, only to find out that her best alternative, other than becoming a sex worker like her friend *la recepcionista*, is to continue to capitalize on the commercialization of her body which also reproduces her relatively low economic value within the corporate mentality. It is important to notice that the author suggests that Diana and the narrator-writer can take the risks because they do not have families or kids to attend. Diana's parents used to own a local business of lingerie, but they both died symbolically at the same time that multinationals encroached on the city. The narrator-writer lost his right to publish by law for "obscene content," and after selling his books and his apartment he had nothing else to lose. *La recepcionista*, on the other hand, has family and a fiancée to respond to, and when she is unjustly fired from the corporation leaving a stain on her résumé, she needed a job immediately, which forced her to join the sex industry

From this perspective, offering solutions (or alternative positive endings) in which these characters succeed in their capitalist endeavors would mean to continue the official discourse that the corporate logic and capitalist practices are fair concepts based on a meritocracy of “hard work,” which is a discourse commonly associated with the American dream and the middle class in the United States. Like Noam Chomsky discusses in the documentary film *Requiem for the American Dream* (2015)⁴³ the concentration of wealth yields the concentration of power, like a “vicious cycle” already described in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) (00:05:52). For Chomsky, and this thesis, what is new is the concentration of “super wealth” at the hands of the financial institutions and multinational corporations (00:04:45) transcending from local power and wealth to global supremacy. In what I call the corp(us) logic, “super-wealth” and corporate supremacy is expressed through an omnipotent presence of anonymous entities, except for HumaCorp, and by the absence of collective and general reaction. When reading these novels as a corpus, there is a clear pattern between the characters’ (failed) individual resistance and dystopia, violence, and disillusion.

In literary terms, Chomsky’s historical approach can be traced in the corp(us) logic as the exploitative characteristics in these recent narratives are linked with cultural productions from after the first Industrial Revolution where we see socio-economic discrimination through an intersection among race, gender, and second class citizenship similar to that found in the novels *O cortiço* (1890), *The Jungle* (1906) and *Parque industrial* (1922); the precariousness and struggle for employment after a social crisis like the Great Depression

⁴³The documentary is also in book format edited by Peter Hutchinson et al, published by Seven Stories Press in 2017.

(1929-1933) in *Modern Times* (1936) featured and directed by Charles Chaplin; or through post WWII dystopias like in George Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) on which the film *Blade Runner* (1982) was based.

Is collective understanding a possible solution?

Because of the absence of general reactions on the collective level, these characters are unable to triumph in a way that would not cause harm to self or others as each novel presents their own tragic endings for each character except for the youth novel *Ladrón de sueños*. In this novel, the teen Andrea saves the lives of a group of kids, and of future consumers by winning a challenge against the unethical Dr. Ventosa who works for HumaCorp. In this sense, *Ladrón de sueños* (2008) anticipates the ending of the 2011 novel *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline which was made into a movie in 2018. Her victory is a positive message for the youth as Andrea takes down a giant corporation by revealing their unethical procedures with the “thief of dreams”, including the abduction of kids, and using their console to detect when children are dreaming at home. Andrea also escapes some of the gender stereotypes by being a successful virtual gamer and wearing gender neutral clothing. Andrea is the daughter of two educated parents in academic and artistic fields, which sets her apart in terms of privilege. At the end of the novel, Andrea swears to be a good public school student and to pay attention in all her courses, and to be a better daughter to her busy parents. The novel is intended to educate the youth on mass consumption and the importance of caring for others, and on being educated.

On a deeper level, Bof's novel show how corporations control people's desires, and how it is equally important to expose and make the public aware of corporate misdeeds because they do owe a social responsibility to the public. At the end, HumaCorp had to recall all consoles, and had to pay for their economic and psychological damages for the families affected, which led them to the end of the golden era of video game in Mexico and *almost* the ruin of HumaCorp. The subtle end of HumaCorp in Mexico becomes the *phoenix rising* in *Gel azul* and *El estruendo del silencio*, where the corporation continues in a post-human world.

To conclude, the Latin American corporate office narratives convey a message that goes beyond literature understood in terms of form, style, and allegory. They actively question and disrupt the post neoliberal state by pointing out that the root cause of continuous violence, corruption, social inequality, and underemployment is the deregulation of the capitalist corporate mentality itself. They represent this logic by deconstructing the pro-corporate discourse, and by intensifying the present social anxieties (like the pauperization of employment, and absence of active forms of citizenship concerned with their community) in a dystopian near future. In these scenarios, the corporation would be the next institution to manage and regulate bodies —replacing the role traditionally assigned to the state—through their logic to maximize profit for shareholders (*la sociedad anónima*) reinforcing employment insecurity on the urban working class and lobbying politicians that will vote for laws that deregulate labor and the environment, and defund public education and welfare assistance, which in turn normalizes the corporate mentality. While these narratives do not propose solutions to current social problems, by painting a bleak picture of the future path

where global neoliberalism is leading us, they stimulate critical thinking to inspire us to find the solutions that will value human society.

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