



HISPANIC URBAN STUDIES

EDITED BY
JOSÉ EDUARDO GONZÁLEZ
AND TIMOTHY R. ROBBINS

**URBAN SPACES IN
CONTEMPORARY LATIN
AMERICAN LITERATURE**



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Urban Spaces in
Contemporary Latin
American Literature

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CHAPTER 1

The Spatial Turn and Twenty-First Century Latin American Fiction

José Eduardo González

The project of compiling a volume focusing on studying the representation of the city in contemporary Latin American fiction originated as an upshot of a previous attempt by Timothy R. Robbins and I to contribute to the periodization of the most recent literary production in the region.¹ The main assumption driving our initial impulse was simple: not only has fictional representation of the city always been a popular motif in literature, it has been employed, more often than one would like to admit it, to contrast literary styles, even literary periods. Even in the most sophisticated analyses, James Joyce's literary experiments never fail to be associated to the modern urban life at the turn of the twentieth century. I am aware, of course, of how problematic this could be as it postulates the existence of a mimetic relationship between writers and the urban spaces (in both their historical and literary periods) that negates the authors' artistic idiosyncrasies. Because of this critical tradition, it became evident to me that it was equally important to pay attention in this introduction to the way critics have read that relationship between literature and the city—and, obviously, how that

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relationship has changed in the last couple of decades. As it often happens, it is difficult to distinguish between how the literature of a period represents an object—the city, in this case—and how critics have interpreted that representation. While the original question was essentially a problem about literary history, it also became a problem about *how* to write literary history. This is a long way of saying that this volume about urban spaces in twenty-first century fiction exists not only because the cities we inhabit now are different from the ones in twentieth century Latin America, but also because of the influence of the so-called “Spatial Turn” in contemporary literary criticism.

The Spatial Turn refers to the current awareness of the need to study the impact of space as a social construction in many aspects of our lives, including the creation of cultural products.² In the last couple of decades, the discipline of geography, especially human geography, has become one of the most influential fields for both the humanities and social sciences, while “recent works in the fields of literary and cultural studies, sociology, political science, anthropology, history, and art history have become increasingly spatial in their orientation” (Warf and Arias 2008, p. 1). Although both Foucault and Lefebvre theorized in the 1970s about the connection of space to the development of capitalism, the current rise in spatial scholarship began during the 1990s and owes a great deal to the work of David Harvey and Edward Soja.³ The latter must also receive credit for bringing back the work of Lefebvre to the attention of scholars when he devoted a large section of his seminal study *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) to the encounter between modern geography and Western Marxism. For the topic of the relationship between literature and space, which is the focus of our attention, one could say that there are at least two conceptualizations of space that originated during the postmodern/poststructuralist period. One of them—strongly associated to the views of Lefebvre and Foucault—defines space in terms of domination. For the thinkers who adhere to this idea, explains Eric Prieto, “space is not a neutral featureless void within which objects and events are situated but a dimension that has been produced by social forces that in turn constrain future possibilities” (2011, p. 17). This view of space has led literary critics to look for traces of the constraining social forces in their studies of literary geographies. The other one, which has been repeatedly described by Bertrand Westphal in his work of geocriticism, was best “summed up in Jacques Derrida’s laconic formula: *Il n’y pas de hors-texte*. There is nothing outside the text” (2011, p. xii), thus severing the link between reality and representation, and blocking the

possibility of analyzing the fictional depiction of space as referring to a real world.⁴

Of these two ideas, it was the notion of space as produced or constructed that informed a group of studies that in the late 1990s joined the Spatial Turn wave and began to change the literary analysis of urban space in Latin America. For example, Marcy E. Schwartz's *Writing Paris* (1999), to mention one of the key texts from this period in the American academia, researched the image of Paris in Latin American literature as it changed throughout historical and artistic periods.⁵ "From Sarmiento through the *modernistas* and regional writers," explains Schwartz, "Latin American writing has manipulated a cluster of conflicting desires associated with Paris" (1999, p. 11). Sometimes seen as the source of prestige and refinement, other times associated with "orgiastic decadence," the Paris described in these texts "is an imagined space that is repository for cultural yearnings" (Schwartz 1999, p. 25). Both images of Paris remained significant until early twentieth century and even later in some cases. While most of Schwartz's book studies the perception of Paris in several canonical (male) figures, the last chapter is devoted to Luisa Futoransky's fiction and its innovative way of challenging the conventional image of Paris produced by the Latin American literary tradition.

Her novels challenge common Parisian themes in Latin American writing by revealing their gender bias and revising women's passive roles. She most critically rewrites the role of Paris in stories of sexual experimentation, traditionally presumed a male domain. Her female protagonist must reconfigure the roles assigned to her in an anachronistic script written by and for men in order to write openly about women's search for sexual fulfillment. (Schwartz 1999, p. 115)

A similar approach—to study first the tradition of spatial perception in Latin American literature and culture and then to look for the challenges to it, especially in the work of female writers—can also be perceived in Amanda Holmes's *City Fictions* (2007), which focuses on the discursive relationship between language, body and the city in texts from the last three decades of the last century. Interested in the meaning of the images of fragmented bodies, Holmes mentions that "disquieting analogies for the city in late twentieth-century Spanish American literature reflect an oppressive political and economic environment" (2007, p. 25). The relevance of space for determining genre relations is evident in Holmes's reading of Chilean writer Diamela Eltit's *Lumpérica*.

Contrasts between the male and the female responses to this urban space illustrate the multiple codification of this site, one that includes both the extremities of a centralized dominating presence and the deteriorating body of the urban inhabitant. The city's hostile oppression of the female body opposes the male ambivalence toward the space. ...Sergio's body is described as "ausente" (absent) in relation to his surroundings, contrasting dramatically with the pained presence of the female body. Sergio does not even understand the feelings of oppression aroused by the city in the female narrator. (2007, p. 138)

Without a doubt, the most significant work in the study of the city in Latin American fiction in recent times has been done by feminist readings of women writers' fictional representations of urban space in a male-dominated society like the previous two examples show. Here is where the impact of the post-structuralist rethinking of the relationship between urban space, power and the subject has yielded some of its most important results. The gendering of urban space, which as we have seen was only part of larger studies of the literary urban space in Schwartz and Holmes, became the central emphasis of *Unfolding the City*, an important collection of essays edited by Elisabeth Guerrero and Anne Lambright focusing on how women "belonging to the intellectual and professional elite, as well as to marginalized or disenfranchised groups, negotiate their dwellings and articulate their urban lives" (2007, p. xi). Collectively, the essays included in the volume, the editors assess, employ a wide variety of literary texts to study how women writers decode the "signs of the city," "interpret race, ethnic, and class dynamics" (2007, p. xii) or respond to contemporary disorder and the presence of mass media in their urban environment (2007, p. xv).

A shared theme and target of critique for many of these feminist approaches to literary geography has been the traditional relationship between literature and the city in Latin America described in Ángel Rama's *The Lettered City* (1984).⁶ Rama's well-known and influential study argues that since colonial times a Latin American lettered elite or *letrados* has existed in a relationship of dependency with the city. Latin America provided a blank canvas on which Europeans could realize their dream of creating a city from which they could control and mold reality to their liking. The city became the center of power and one of the ways it could use that power to order the surrounding environment was through writing. The early lettered elite gained its prestige from its connection to writing and to the city that validated the power of writing to

shape reality. As the original functions the city assigned to them changed, the *letrados* saw the need to continuously reinvent themselves. In order to protect their privileged position, with every major social change, intellectuals needed to prove their usefulness to the political power. Rama's book recounts the history of the transformations that the *letrados* as a social group, or the "lettered city," as he calls them, undergo in their search to protect their interests. After the book's initial comments about the connection between the foundations of the Latin American cities and the power of the written word, the city becomes a synecdoche for political power. In his historical overview of the *letrados*, Rama details the social and political changes that took place from Colonial times to the early twentieth century and how the lettered elite managed to fend off most attempts to question its connection to power. In Rama's reading, the lettered city remains unchanged as it is able to co-opt the social groups seeking to challenge it. However, for many contemporary critics, toward the end of the twentieth century begins to emerge the notion of *la ciudad posletrada*, a moment in which the Latin American writer has lost its privileged position in part due to the social and cultural changes brought about by mass media and globalization.

The gendering of space has been a long-time concern of feminist criticism and, as we have seen, recent readings of women writers' fictional representations of urban space have brought a necessary corrective view of the city in Latin American fiction. In some of these readings, the notion of the lettered city plays a central role as it obviously designated a group of (overwhelmingly male) scholars defending a patriarchal system.⁷ Guerrero and Anne Lambright explain that "a careful reading of Rama's work reveals the masculine nature of his model of the lettered city, to the exclusion of women intellectuals, who were still rare during the periods that Rama studies (first the colonial era, and then the years of literary expansion following independence, particularly from 1880 to 1920)" (2007, p. xix). Hence, as Schwartz has noticed, the notion of the post-lettered city, so essential to the relationship between twenty-first century writers and their fictional representation of the urban space, needs to take into account the impact of women rewriting the city: "The concept of a post-lettered city, a social space not just vaguely 'beyond' but more critically *after* the earlier functioning of the written, stretches Rama's work on urban elite cultural space in the broadest contemporary perspective, where women's *writing*, not only their resistance, their orality, or their sexuality, can play

a role... The feminine and feminist voice is an essential avenue of this expansion, serving to reassess the power dynamic where earlier considerations of urban hegemony ignored women's experience and inscription" (2007, p. 14).⁸ As Eduard Arriaga's chapter in our book shows, moving away from the old theories of the Latin American city created by Rama and Romero, is one of the steps that marks this generation of critics interested in urban space. But also contemporary Latin American authors, one must conclude, find themselves with a greater awareness of the historical and problematic relationship between their creative medium and social power, between writing and the gendering of space. The "post-lettered city" is, therefore, one of the first factors that needs to be mentioned in the fictional depiction of Latin American urban space in the twenty-first century.

However, it is important to remember that, for a book that is often invoked in discussions about urban space and literature, Rama's analysis of the relationship between city and the act of writing (i.e., the prestige that traditionally comes from being associated with being an intellectual) is *not* about artistic representations of the city; in other words, it is not a study about how the city is depicted in artistic writing. Reading Rama will not give us an idea of how the Latin American city has physically (or spatially) changed throughout history—an important aspect, if not the most important, if we are going to look for the social construction of space—but how the justification for the privileging of writing has changed. *The Lettered City* is less about the urban landscape than about the city as metaphor for a center of power whose rules are always changing. Thus the adjectives attached to city in Rama's chapter titles (*la ciudad ordenada, modernizada, revolucionada, and so on*) do not describe stages of the urban but the status of lettered elite's relationship to power. While the notion of *la ciudad posletrada* helps us understand the current self-perception of the Latin American writers as intellectuals, which is clearly different than how twentieth century authors saw themselves, it does not help when it comes to differentiating how the actual Latin American city and/or its representation appears in the fiction of the twenty-first century. For that, in addition to post-lettered, one must investigate two other adjectives usually employed to describe the cities depicted in contemporary Latin American fiction: postmodern and neoliberal.

One of the previously mentioned main sources of influence for the Spatial Turn, Soja's study of the late twentieth century urban space in the United States, also contained one of the first comprehensive descriptions of the postmodern city. The last section of his book famously focused on Los Angeles as the paradigmatic postmodern city. For Soja, Los Angeles is a city with a post-Fordist (as in shifting away from mass production) landscape, composed of many centers, some of them resembling small technopolises with high-technology industries and amalgamated around them "the new silicon landscapes: high-income and expensively-packaged residential developments; huge regional shopping centers reputed among the largest in the world; created and programmed environments for leisure and entertainment (epitomized by Disneyland in Anaheim) ...several enclaves of cheap and manipulable labour constantly replenished by immigration of both foreign workers and those deindustrialized out of higher paying jobs" (1989, p. 212). While it is a "global city" with a heterogeneous population, it is also a space in which cultural and ethnic differences are compartmentalized, a city that has become increasingly more difficult to govern. In the postmodern city, Varma has commented, the idea of public spaces has disappeared as the neo-liberal order "has engulfed and privatized the entire globe in one form or another" (2011, p. 6).

Many descriptions of contemporary Latin American cities, especially megalopolises like Buenos Aires, Mexico, or Lima share aspects with Los Angeles. Latin American cultural critics tend to emphasize an apocalyptic tone in their views of the contemporary cityscape. Take for example well-known intellectual Beatriz Sarlo's comments about present-day Buenos Aires. Her 2008 description of the effect of neoliberalism, even if tinged with a certain dangerous nostalgia for the past, is emblematic of the current perception of the Latin American city: spaces now in "ruins" as a result of the impact of globalization.

During the first part of the twentieth century, government and civil society strove to create a city where the urban infrastructure, the parks, schools, hospitals, and banks, the transportation and commercial centers, would be evenly distributed around its territory. As a result, Buenos Aires was a relatively successful and democratic city. Things have changed in the last three decades and especially in the last few years. Buenos Aires is now a broken city: radiant in the northern neighborhoods, where tourists find a replica

of globalized services and shops in an environment beautified by parks built in the early twentieth century; filthy and deteriorated in the southern areas, where no important public investments have compensated for the indifference of global capitalism toward the city as a social and urban totality... The concept of public space is losing its grip on the collective imaginary. Developers are redesigning the city against a republican tradition that ascribed positive values to public spaces ... dividing great extensions of land into private neighborhoods, country clubs surrounded by electrified fences, and massive shopping malls. (2008, pp. 43–47)

Geographical and sociological approaches to the urban space in Latin America offer a similar view of the situation. Emphasizing the impact that neoliberalism has had on the social formations in the region, these studies also concur on the present-day fragmentation and privatization of the urban space. “Many forms of public space have become undesirable or ‘residual,’ as privatization processes create new spaces of exclusion,” explain Jaffe and Aguiar, “with residential, work and consumption facilities ordered by class and ethnicity. Elites and the middle-class, sometimes even the poor, retreat into gated communities and fortified enclaves, resulting in increased socio-spatial fragmentation” (2012, p. 155). Seeing the cities as the space where the effect of global neoliberal policies becomes visible, especially in relation to issues of governance, these researchers tend to point out the feelings of insecurity of the citizens and the increasing crime rate and acts of violence, on the one hand, and the extreme, repressive measures to which the state is resorting as a solution to controlling crime, on the other (Humphrey 2012, p. 101). This is a different type of violence than what was experienced in the pre-neoliberal era. “During the decades of the civil war and dictatorships, from the 1960s to the 1980s,” write Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, “violence was mostly political, instigated on behalf of the state by military forces, paramilitary units, and police forces and policing extensions” (2015, p. 3). The new, mainly urban violence is the result of crimes, of gang activity and of repressive policing targeting the poor to protect the urban rich in the name of citizen security (Humphrey 2012, p. 102). For Koonings and Kruijt the origin of the region’s urban violence and insecurity is to be found in “persistent social exclusion and possibilities for alternative extra-legal sources of income and power, combined with an absent, corrupt or failing state” (2015, p. 5). One of the defining characteristics of the city in this period is what Humphrey calls the lack of “public confidence in democratic governance, the rule of law and justice” (2012, p. 101).

One could then summarize the overall image of the Latin American postmodern-neoliberal city as resulting from: a sociospatial fragmentation based on class and racial status, an increasing income gap generated by the new economy, the presence of a new type of violence, lack of confidence in the nation-state, and a general sense of decay and loss of control. The characteristics just described, though not all of them present in all the texts, find an echo in the fictions and topics studied in our volume. They suggest a pessimistic view about the urban scene in which the characters of these fictions navigate. For example, Eduard Arriaga's reading of Antonio José Ponte's representation of Havana's urban ruins connects it to the situation of the Cuban capital as a "globalized colonial city" and explains how for the author "citizens become part of those ruins" as a result of the global capitalist market. Both Regalado-López and François interpret the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic images of Mexico so common in turn of the century literature as reflecting the growing concern for the overpopulation, violence, poverty, and all the aspects that make the megalopolis uninhabitable. Evaluating the apocalyptic representation of the city in novels published by Crack writers, Regalado-López situates them within "the atmosphere of skepticism, deception, and hopelessness associated with the burial of utopias and with the Mexican crisis in the mid-nineties." Juan Pablo Melo's studies Bolaño's fragmentation of space and time as resulting from his attitude toward global capitalism, which "ultimately tend[s] to disorder, chaos, and destruction." Perkowska emphasizes the civil war, the inability of the local political situation to improve the conditions of living, and the rampant corruption as some of the factors creating the sense of destruction that permeates Franz Galich's depiction of Managua.

In a sense, one could argue that our analyses continue a critical tradition that sees narrative writing from a specific literary period—in this case, twenty-first century Latin American fiction—as responding in their structure to the social and material evolution of the city, while perhaps announcing the end of such tradition. An excellent example of this classical way of reading the city is Richard Lehan's *The City in Literature* (1998). This critic sees in the emergence of the capitalist system the most important force in creating the modern urban world, explaining that it transformed the medieval-renaissance world, moving it "from a feudal to an urban base, as the cities of Europe became the money capitals under the influence of the new middle-class merchant, traders,

and speculators” (1998, p. 32). Strangely, he uses *Robinson Crusoe*, a tale of a man isolated from civilization, to argue that Defoe anticipates the rise of the commercial city and “the Enlightenment mentality that became the basis for the modern city” (1998, p. 30). In Lehan’s view, the Enlightenment’s important role came from an emphasis on reason that “eventually led to a system of laws that explained nature and was suited to the commercial and later an industrial exploitation that created new forms of wealth” (1998, p. 30). From that moment on, Lehan’s critical narrative reads the history of literature in conjunction with an increasing use of technology and maximization of profit that has changed the modern urban space: In Dickens’ works, he sees a movement from the human to the inhuman as technology transforms the cityscape (“the city as using up the land and creating a wasteland, a system of physical debris and human dereliction” [Lehan 1998, p. 41]); In Zola’s fictions, a double view that is, on the one hand, pessimistic about the fate of the urban individual and, on the other, optimistic about the evolutionary march toward perfection; in Balzac’s novels, the creation of new “human types” and a questioning of the Enlightenment legacy. And, of course, there is also modernism. If there is a movement that bolsters the case for juxtaposing literary history and urban change is Anglo-European modernism. No definition of the movement appears to be complete without taking into consideration the connection between modern literary techniques and the representation of the city. Is it possible to talk about modernism and not mention how Joyce’s innovative literary techniques enhance his depiction of Dublin?—Lehan devotes an entire chapter to it, titled “Joycity.” The city of modernism is usually described as complex, fragmented, constantly changing; a place where the individual gets lost in a mass society. In a very traditional reading of modernism, Lehan argues that during this period the urban world and its commercial and industrial reality became hostile: “Under such pressure the city as a physical place gave way to the city as a state of mind... As the modern city became more complex, reading it became more difficult. Part of the problem stemmed from the modernist belief that the self was anchored only in consciousness ... The self became a bundle of sensory impressions precariously grouped together, its reality constantly threatened with dissolution” (1998, p. 77). The modernist inward turn made possible the use of myths and symbols to understand the city, whose complexity made it impossible for modern subjects to create an image of it.

From the standpoint of Latin American literary history, the assumption of literary styles changing according or in reaction to the social and technological changes brought about by a linear urban development is obviously problematic (What is the function of nineteenth century naturalism in less developed capitalist urban spaces?). But to understand the strong impact that this conception of literary history had in shaping the modern Latin American novel, let us briefly take a look at Alejo Carpentier's early reflections on urban space in "Problemática actual de la novela latinoamericana." Written around 1963, the essay seeks to promote the art of depicting the city as a response to the problem of creating original literature in Latin America. Complaining that Latin American novelists wishing to faithfully portray the region's culture have been unable to write but "novelas nativistas [que] eran ecos de otras cosas que ya habían sonado en el Viejo Continente" (1987, p. 9), and influenced by the apparent correlation between modernist style and the urban landscape in Anglo-European novels, Carpentier asserts that "la gran tarea del novelista americano está en inscribir la fisonomía de sus ciudades en la literatura universal, olvidándose de tipicismos y costumbrismos ... Hay que fijar la fisonomía de las ciudades como fijó Joyce la de Dublín" (1987, p. 11). The only problem with his own proposal, the Cuban author complains, is that while cities such as Venice, Paris or Rome have a "style" fixed in time, "La gran dificultad de utilizar nuestras ciudades como escenarios de novelas está en que nuestras ciudades no tienen estilo. Más o menos extensas, más o menos gratas, son un amasijo, un arlequín de cosas buenas y cosas detestables—remedos horrendos, a veces, de ocurrencias arquitectónicas ... En el Vedado de La Habana... se entremezclan todos los estilos imaginables: falso helénico, falso romano, falso Renacimiento" (1987, p. 12). Carpentier then makes an original argument: having no style is the style of Latin American cities. Eventually, he says, things that are initially thought to have no style or that challenge classical notions of style, are recognized as having their own unique style: "No estilos serenos o clásicos [sino] una nueva disposición de elementos, de texturas, de fealdades embellecidas por acercamientos fortuitos, de encrespamientos y metáforas, de alusiones de cosas a 'otras cosas,' que son, en suma, la fuente de todos los barroquismos conocidos" (1987, p. 14). Carpentier is going to famously explain later on in this essay that Latin American art has always been baroque, "[un] barroquismo creado por la necesidad de *nombrar las cosas* [latinoamericanas] aunque con ello nos alejemos de las técnicas en boga" (1987, p. 26), and he declares that the only legitimate

style for the Latin American novelist is the Baroque. Carpentier's elegant argument is however still trapped within the logic of Anglo-European literary history. It is *because* Joyce's modern style has been frequently explained as a reflection of the modern city life that Carpentier feels that Latin American writers will only produce great novels once they start writing about their urban reality. On the one hand, in recognizing the synchronicity of diverse stylistic periods that shape the Latin American city, Carpentier appears to understand the origin of those urban characteristics in a situation of economic and cultural marginality. On the hand, however, his solution to the "problem" reinforces a specifically Anglo-European version of literary history in which styles evolve from changes in the urban landscape. Carpentier's theory about a link between style, urban space and local or regional identity was not a unique response, but probably a generational characteristic. Holmes has argued that "through experimentation in narrative structure, linguistic variation, and neologism, characteristic of Boom literature, [Boom novels] generate images of the of Spanish American urban environment as at once vertiginous, exhilarating, unfathomable, inspirational, and exemplary of Spanish American cultural identity" (2007, p. 28). The time to use descriptions of Latin American cities in an attempt to capture some kind of essence of a local cultural identity, however, is long gone. Nothing seems farther from Latin American writers' minds than to develop a style out of their desire to register an "authentic" or "essential" Latin American urban reality. It is true that in Carpentier's comments about the Latin American city there is a recognition of their marginality ("falso helénico, falso romano, falso Renacimiento"), but that gesture pales in comparison to the twenty-first Latin American author's awareness of globalization as responsible for the features and ruins of their cities, which is very palpable in the narrations studied in this volume. Under the conditions of globalization, it is hard to see the features of the Latin American cities as anything other than responses to international economic and cultural trends.

Some have interpreted features of postmodern literature within the logic of the "urban change as literary style" version of literary history that Carpentier espoused. For example, having followed, in his 1998 book, the traditional account that links the modern city and modernist literature, Lehan's view of the postmodern city, sees the postmodern representation of urban space as reflecting the complex economic system of late capitalism, "the money system has become so complex that it should be thought of as more of a self-enclosed, self-energizing system than as anything material" (1998, p. 273) and, as a consequence, a "human

imperative” that one could still detect in modernism has disappeared in the postmodern period: “As postmodernists drain consciousness from both the subject and the urban world, the self is commodified along with other objects; what is human becomes virtually refined away” (1998, p. 274). Lehan’s view, as expected, is a summary of the main characteristics that began to be associated with poststructuralism and its rejection of modernist meta-narratives: “Without a transcendental signifier, urban signs begin to float, and meaning gives way to mystery ... We are left with a sense of diminished humanity, of the anonymous and superfluous human isolation and fragility, of anxiety and great nervous tension. Lacking transcendence, the city cannot go beyond what it consumes” (1998, pp. 265–266). And more recent readings do not differ greatly in their appreciation of the literary postmodern city. In the 2014 edited collection, *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, Nick Bentley’s chapter on the postmodern city uses the opening sequences of Ridley Scott’s film, *Blade Runner*, to exemplify the new urban reality. In the film’s representation of the postmodern city, he explains, we have both the “towering and technological splendor” of late capitalism alongside street scenes that reveal an “overcrowded, Babelish populace” (2014, p. 175). While Bentley observes the negative and violent effects of global capitalism on ordinary citizens, the emphasis of his definition of the postmodern urban is on consumerism, on the “dehumanizing effects of hyper-urban living,” on rapid technological change and the culture of surveillance, among other things (2014, pp. 175–177). The actual material effect of the economic reality remains in the background, while the “psychological effects of consumer-led, metropolitan living” (2014, p. 178) take center stage in his reading of contemporary fiction.

The contrast with some of the narratives studied in our collection could not be more dramatic: Latin American representations of their postmodern, neoliberal cities do not appear to be as focused on the dehumanizing effects of consumerism and the dizzying effect of the abstract global capitalism as they are on what *Blade Runner* banishes to the background while it considers the question of the postmodern subject. This does not mean that Latin American fiction is not concerned with universal philosophical and aesthetic problems. However, as it is evident that the centers of transnational capital are located elsewhere than in the Latin American cities, these narratives cannot pretend that their cities are examples of hyper-human living in a post-human world. In some—not all—contemporary Latin American narratives the background of cyberpunk fiction becomes the foreground. But there are also other paths that can be