

# Aliens and Urbanization in Eduardo Mendoza's *Sin noticias de Gurb*: Resistance is Futile

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In 1975—a pivotal year in Spain—Eduardo Mendoza published his first novel, *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta*, and embarked on a literary career characterized by remarkable critical acclaim and commercial success. Mendoza's broad appeal is in part due to his masterful ability to parody numerous subgenres of narrative, including historical novels, detective fiction, picaresque works, romance novels and science fiction. While Mendoza has resisted being pigeon-holed as a certain type of writer, there is a common theme that characterizes the majority of his novelistic production: namely the protagonism of his native city of Barcelona. In fact, eleven of his novels published to date treat the urban experience of Barcelona in a meaningful way.<sup>1</sup> Such is the case with *Sin noticias de Gurb*, an adroit parody of several narrative genres (science fiction, travel narrative, explorer's chronicles, diary fiction and the picaresque), which provides meaningful insights into the urban experience of pre-Olympic Barcelona and the process of urbanization under capitalism that continues to shape the city today.

Mendoza originally wrote *Sin noticias de Gurb* in August of 1990 as a daily serial column in the newspaper *El País*. The next year he revised and compiled it into a short novel that has surprised the author with its commercial success (Mendoza, "Nota" 10), and that constitutes "one of the most amusing social commentaries of recent vintage" (Sacks DaSilva 351). The work consists of the diary of an extra-terrestrial explorer assigned by his superiors to study humanity in Barcelona with his partner, Gurb. The narrator never finds it necessary to mention his name since, as David Knutson points out, the alien "es su propio *narratee*; [quien] escribe sobre sí mismo para sí mismo" (101). In order to facilitate references to this nameless

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<sup>1</sup> *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* (1975), *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* (1979), *El laberinto de las aceitunas* (1982), *La ciudad de los prodigios* (1986), *Sin noticias de Gurb* (1991), *Una comedia ligera* (1996), *La aventura del tocador de señoras* (2001), *Mauricio o las elecciones primarias* (2006), *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida* (2012), *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (2015) and *El rey recibe* (2018).

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protagonist, I will refer to him as T, as other critics have done.<sup>2</sup> These aliens possess a vastly superior knowledge of physics which enables them to manipulate matter and change their appearance at will. After they land their space vessel in the outskirts of Barcelona—in Sardanyola—T sends Gurb out undercover as the Spanish singer and sex symbol Marta Sánchez to begin their study of humanity. Nevertheless, Gurb does not return or report to T after being picked up by a middle-aged college professor, leaving T alone and wondering what happened to Gurb. Each day T logs his activities as he searches for Gurb while doing his best to blend in with the Barcelonans and learn about humanity. Eventually T and Gurb reunite and they are called to go on another mission to a different planet. Instead of following their orders, the extraterrestrial duo sends their space ship on to the next planet with an auto-piloting mechanism in order to stay on Earth permanently.

Many critics have examined *Sin noticias* from a variety of perspectives, such as parody and satire (Barrios Grela; Gómez L-Quñones; Knutson; Moix, “Eduardo”; Oxford; Ruiz Tosaus), humor (Ferriol; Sacks DsSilva), and issues related to translation (Arregui Barragán; Garr). Several authors have even focused their examination of this novel on the image of the city (Carrillo; Fraser; García; Schwarzbürger; Steinbach Drees). Regardless of their specific focus, most critics agree that *Sin noticias* functions to “call attention to a number of social problems in contemporary Spain” (Knutson, “Exploring” 235). Patricia García explains: “La mirada alienígena sirve para poner de manifiesto la contaminación, el ruido, la anonimidad, las ineficiencias del transporte público, el gasto público sin fundamento, la especulación inmobiliaria y la corrupción de política y cultural” (1190). While I agree with these assessments, I also maintain that there is an even deeper message embedded in the fabric of this work. In the light of contemporary urban theories by David Harvey and other scholars, *Sin noticias* permits an interpretation critical of contemporary Barcelona, and of the urban process under capitalism, the mechanism by which this city has evolved over time and continues to develop in the present.

In his book *The Urban Experience*, Harvey outlines the process of “urbanization of consciousness” (229-55, 321-22) and specifies five loci of consciousness formation that perpetuate the urban process under capitalism: individualism, family, community, class and State.<sup>3</sup> He also examines how the process of urbanization

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<sup>2</sup> See David Knutson (“Exploring” 228-36, *Las novelas* 99-121) and Jeffrey Oxford (78-86).

<sup>3</sup> Harvey has received criticism for failing to consider other possible aspects of urban consciousness formation, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and religion (see Hartsock 169-73). In *Justice, Nature*

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shapes and is shaped by each of these five components of consciousness formation: “Through our daily experiences of these bases we generate a matrix of conceptions, understandings and predispositions for action which in turn serve to construct the conditions which prevail in each domain” (*Urban* 240). Harvey continues by explaining how many of the daily experiences associated with these five loci of consciousness formation are connected to material and discursive spatial practices, both of which emerge from and influence the process of urbanization of consciousness.

There is, however, another side to this process. Since by nature the urbanization of consciousness is linked to capital, class relations will be involved which will always lead to an element of resistance of some sort. Harvey states the following concerning this resistance: “The cynical leveling of all human activities and experiences to the heartless and colorless qualities of money has always proved hard to accept.... Most of the vivacity and color of modern life, in fact, arises precisely out of the spirit of revulsion and revolt against the dull, colorless, but seemingly transcendental powers of money in abstract and universal space and time” (180-84). The contradictions of capitalism and its subsequent urbanization—creative destruction, conspicuous consumption, exploitation of the labor force, the increasing difficulties for labor workers due to the continuously accelerating space/time compression, etc.—also form a part of the urbanized consciousness, leading to “resistance to or rejection of any simple capitalist (or modernist) logic of place construction” (*Justice* 302). The urban experience thereby becomes both complicit with and resistant to capital accumulation (302). Susan Larson states: “A resistance (however fleeting) to hegemonic cultural forms and concepts makes up a vital part of the urban environment” (41). This resistance can manifest itself in many ways. Individuals might express discontentment; attempt to create spaces (large or small) meant to remain unaffected by the capitalist notions of space, place, time and money; contribute to revolutionary political discourse; or they might refocus their efforts to manipulate space in the realm of the imagined or discursive urban space. When individuals, groups or classes are denied the power to form consciousness through direct material spatial practices—as they frequently are—they can attempt to form consciousness through discursive spaces that “have the

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and the *Geography of Difference* he addresses some of these concerns, clarifying the need to consider these issues in terms of urban identity and social justice, but remaining stalwart in his opinion that, with relation to the urbanization of consciousness, class is adequately equipped to encompass most of these differences. He expresses concern that to give equal attention to all possible differences that he links to class for the purposes of his analysis, would simply enable an excess of “militant particularisms” which would undermine any program of resistance to capitalist urban consciousness (32, 305, 335).

potential not only to affect representation of space but also to act as a material productive force with respect to spatial practices” (Harvey, *Condition* 219). In his rereading of Harvey, Malcolm Compitello stresses “the acutely important role of cultural creation in acts of resistance to capital’s attempts to remake space, and by extension social relationships, in its own image and for its own benefit” (21). Nevertheless, capital still has the obvious advantage in the politics of spatial practices because it has more resources available to affect the built environment and the discourses that shape urban consciousness and place construction. Furthermore, even though culture of resistance has an impact on consciousness formation, its effect often finds itself mitigated by capitalism’s uncanny ability to assimilate and commodify culture—even culture of resistance—and use it to make profits (Harvey, “New Imperialism” 75).

Through the optic of the five loci of urban consciousness formation, *Sin noticias* becomes a discursive spatial practice that critically responds to—but is ultimately assimilated by—the process of urbanization of consciousness.

### **Individualism and Family**

In order to properly interpret the portrayal of urban space in this novel, it is crucial to better understand the nature of the narrator that observes Barcelona. The fact that T hails from a different planet provides a fresh perspective regarding the city, and his observations of the urban experience under capitalism—most of them critical—take on added significance in consideration of the fact that he is a superior being, made of pure intellect (81), whose individual consciousness is not urbanized. He views the city through unique and entirely new eyes, which allows the author great leeway in presenting an interesting and ironical portrayal of the issues that address urban space. Ester Carrillo asserts: “no main character can possibly cast a more independent view on Barcelona than an alien just arrived from outer space, as it happens, a year before the Olympic Games” (127).

One of the issues that T struggles with at the beginning of his search for Gurb has to do with the function of money and the individualism it enables in urban space. Harvey and his materialist predecessors describe how capitalism alienates the individual in society by reducing all aspects of human life to a dollar value (Harvey, *Urban* 232). Nevertheless, individuals often tolerate this alienation because they can acquire money, which gives them influence in the consumer-oriented society, power to control private space, and limited flexibility to determine individual actions.

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Curiously, despite his vast database of knowledge about Earth, T begins his adventures completely unaware of how the capitalist system functions and thereby fails to understand the concept and power of money. After exhausting himself looking for Gurb, T sits down on the Ramblas to rest: “Descanso apoyando ambas rodillas en el suelo y doblando la pierna izquierda hacia atrás y la pierna derecha hacia delante. Al verme en esta postura, una señora me da una moneda de pesetas veinticinco, que ingiero de inmediato para no parecer descortés” (10). He quickly learns, however, the power of individualism that money provides, but unlike the Barcelonans he encounters, his special powers enable him to acquire money without subjecting himself to exploitation. He first manipulates the numbers of a lottery ticket—“por medio de fórmulas elementales” (20)—and wins a large sum of money. He later opens a savings account with 25 pesetas, then telepathically adds fourteen zeros to his balance (ie. 2,500,000,000,000,000 pesetas) (25-26).

Even when he begins to understand how money works, he is not yet ideologically bound by it. After going on a shopping spree during which he buys 94 neckties, a wide range of sporting equipment (including 30 pairs of jogging shoes), 700 hams, a few carrots, a Maseratti, an entire showroom of electronic appliances, some children’s toys (including 112 pairs of Barbie panties), thirteen bottles of wine, a gold Rolex watch and fifteen bottles of perfume, T comes to the conclusion that money cannot buy everything: “Decido que el dinero no da felicidad, desintegro todo lo que he comprado y continúo caminando con las manos en los bolsillos y el ánimo ligero” (27). Furthermore, he does not even need money to express his individualism by controlling personal space. After setting down the space ship in Sardanyoles, T changes it into an appropriate living quarters for that area: “Antes de salir oculto la nave para evitar reconocimiento e inspección de la misma por parte de la fauna autóctona. Consultado el Catálogo Astral, decido transformar la nave en cuerpo terrestre denominado vivienda unifamiliar adosada, calef. 3 dorm. 2 bñs. Terraza. Piscina comunit. 2 plzs. Pkng. Máximas facilidades” (7). Interestingly, he describes his transfigured residence as if it were a relator’s ad to sell a house, mimicking the processes of capital. On the one hand he has the ability to express individualism without relying on money power, but on the other hand framing his description in this manner shows that his consciousness is gradually being urbanized and shaped by capital.

T also learns how individualism functions for the humans he observes. On one occasion he meets an executive whose earning power enables him to purchase a very nice property (at least one), cars, a yacht and a small aircraft in which to travel around in the city. His individualism, however, has its price. His life has become a

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chaotic mess in which he must simultaneously carry out several different tasks at home, at work and even on the road between, compromising his health and safety:

*Lleva varias noches sin dormir. Meses enteros sin dormir.... El ejecutivo conduce el coche con las rodillas; con la mano derecha sostiene el auricular del teléfono del coche; con la mano izquierda sintoniza la radio del coche; con el codo izquierdo sube y baja las ventanillas del coche; con el codo derecho impide que los niños jueguen con el cambio de marchas del coche; con la barbilla pulsa sin pausa el claxon del coche.... Las aflicciones del ejecutivo: gastritis, sinusitis, jaqueca, problemas circulatorios, estreñimiento crónico. (108-09)*

In addition to compromising his mental and physical health, the executive's individualism also costs him his family stability. T perceptively surmises the executive's unorthodox family situation in the following manner:

*Los niños lavados, vestidos y peinados suben al coche del ejecutivo. Papá los llevará al cole. Anoche cenaron en casa de su madre, pero han dormido en casa de su padre. Esta noche cenarán en casa de su padre pero dormirán en casa de su madre y mañana los llevará al cole su madre y los irá a buscar él para que cenén en su casa o en casa de su madre (telefonará). Uno de los niños es suyo; al otro no lo ha visto en su vida, pero prefiere no preguntar. Desde que se separó de su mujer (amigablemente) prefiere no preguntar nada a nadie.... Otro problema: su segunda ex mujer está embarazada del ex marido de su primera ex mujer, a) ¿qué apellidos llevará el recién nacido?, b) ¿quién ha de pagar las ecografías? (108-09)*

Concerning the case of this executive Knutson writes: "Este no es un sermón acerca de la destrucción de la familia, ni una denuncia al daño psicológico que sufrirán los niños. Ni siquiera hay análisis, sino la presentación de una vida absurda, valores sin balance y un aire de 'así es la vida hoy en día'" (*Las novelas* 121). It is important to remember that in this novel family also functions as a means of perpetuating the urbanization of consciousness. The children of the executive—as well as the children of the man from China who works "de sol a sol" six days a week (91)—will learn from their parents' example how to subject themselves to exploitation in return for the individualism that money facilitates. Family also entrains a consciousness of class, which often determines how much of a return the individuals will reap from their exploitation. Surely the children of the Chinaman face a more difficult future of exploitation than the executive's children. Nevertheless, if the

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executive's lifestyle becomes mirrored in his children, it would be incorrect to assume that they will lead happier lives than the family of the man from China. After all, as T himself concludes, money cannot buy happiness (27).

T becomes aware of, and seems to criticize, how Barcelona's inhabitants accept alienation, including from family, in exchange for individualism. Knutson points out how T observes the tragic truth that there are so many Barcelonans sharing the same space who are incapable of truly relating to each other in meaningful ways: "El aislamiento entre las personas es un síntoma de la vida urbana; a través del diarista, Mendoza llama la atención a una historia triste sobre la soledad, una que se repetirá muchas veces en Barcelona" (Las novelas 101). As the novel progresses, however, T gradually subjects himself to capitalist notions of space, time and money, which begins to urbanize his consciousness. He buys an apartment (42), expresses desires to start a family (45), becomes part of a community (82) and contemplates earning a living working at a bar (84-85, 119-21). At the end of the novel it is implied that he must completely integrate himself into society, because to remain permanently he would have to adopt an immutable human genetic makeup which would do away with his special powers (87). T's evolution demonstrates the astounding power of the process of the urbanization of consciousness. A being of pure and superior intellect, who does not have to subject himself to this process, nevertheless does.

### **Class**

One of T's key observations of life in Barcelona concerns class and urban space. Much like the nameless protagonist from Mendoza's comic detective novels<sup>4</sup>, whom I call X for the sake of convenience,<sup>5</sup> Mendoza's nameless alien narrator belongs to no class and therefore does not feel bound to any particular space. His search for Gurb—and good times—takes him to virtually every general sector of the city: San Cosme, Barrio Chino, el Raval, Barrio Gótico, Las Ramblas, Barceloneta, Sants, Hospitalet, Poble Nou, the Olympic Ring, Montjuic, the Eixample, Sagrada Familia, Bonanova and Pedralbes. Unlike X, however, T does not have the experience to successfully maneuver in all these spaces. He is mugged twice (16, 72), mistaken for a beggar on the Eixample (10), arrested twice (16, 33) and ostracized by the co-occupants of his apartment building (96-111).

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<sup>4</sup> El misterio de la cripta embrujada (1979), El laberinto de las aceitunas (1982), La aventura del tocador de señoras (2001), El enredo de la bolsa y la vida (2012), and El secreto de la modelo extraviada (2015).

<sup>5</sup> David John Knutson, José María Marco and Antonia Ferriol also refer to this character as X in their studies of Mendoza's comic detective fiction.

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T initially believes that division of classes has to do with genetics, associating the classes with different subspecies of humans. On day 11 (his third day in Barcelona) he consults his “Catálogo Astral” before deciding to look for Gurb in San Cosme:

*Después de un examen detenido del plano de la ciudad... decido proseguir la búsqueda de Gurb en una zona periférica de la misma habitada por una variante humana denominada pobres. Como el Catálogo Astral les atribuye un índice de mansedumbre algo inferior al de la variante denominada ricos y muy inferior al de la variante denominada clase media, opto por la apariencia del ente individualizado denominado Gary Cooper. (15)*

Within one minute of materializing in San Cosme a band of knife-wielding youths robs T of all he has (16), reaffirming the Astral Catalogue’s association of poverty with a lack of meekness. When he continues his search in Pedralbes he makes the following observations:

*Concluyo el recorrido del barrio de Pedralbes sin haber encontrado a Gurb, pero muy gratamente impresionado por lo elegante de sus casas, lo recoleto de sus calles, lo lozano de su césped y lo lleno de sus piscinas. No sé por qué algunas personas prefieren habitar en barrios como San Cosme, de triste recuerdo, pudiendo hacerlo en barrios como Pedralbes. (20)*

He follows this reflection with a comment indicative of T’s waxing comprehension of how class, money and space function in Barcelona: “Es posible que no se trate tanto de una cuestión de preferencias como de dinero” (20).

In addition to noticing the urban spatial segregation due to class, he also observes how these divisions become continuously reinforced through the day-to-day activities of the city’s inhabitants and the services rendered them:

*Según parece, los seres humanos se dividen, entre otras categorías, en ricos y pobres. Es ésta una división a la que ellos conceden gran importancia, sin que se sepa por qué. La diferencia fundamental entre los ricos y los pobres, parece ser ésta: que los ricos, allí donde van, no pagan, por más que adquieran o consuman lo que se les antoje. Los pobres, en cambio, pagan hasta por sudar.... Desde el punto de vista estadístico, parece demostrado que los ricos viven más y mejor que los pobres, que son más altos, más sanos y más guapos, que se divierten más, viajan a lugares más exóticos, reciben mejor educación, trabajan menos, se rodean de mayores comodidades, tienen más ropa, sobre todo de entretiempo, son mejor atendidos en la enfermedad, son enterrados*



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*con más boato y son recordados por más tiempo. También tienen más probabilidades de salir retratados en periódicos, revistas y almanaques. (20-21)*

These factors function to maintain the division of classes, which directly affects the configuration of urban space. The class bound urban space, in turn, reinforces a consciousness of class. T's diary depicts a Barcelona that is deeply influenced by this aspect of the process of the urbanization of consciousness.

### Community and the State

T's chronicle distinguishes two distinct ways in which community functions. The residents of the building where he buys an apartment constitute one example. These individuals meet together frequently to discuss the well-being of their community and they pay a fee each trimester to cover common costs and building upkeep (82). They also seem helpful and pleasant to one another. When T repeatedly interrupts his neighbor—with whom he has become infatuated—under the pretext of borrowing cooking ingredients, she pleasantly obliges until his seventh interruption when she gives him some money to go out and eat so he will stop bothering her. Nevertheless, when Gurb ruins T's reputation with his neighbors and they perceive him as a threat to the harmony of their community, they react quickly and militantly:

*En el portal me aguarda la portera con el ceño fruncido. Intento esquivarla, pero se interpone. Me dice que esto no puede seguir así; que ella es muy liberal, pero con el buen nombre del edificio no transige, que a ver qué escándalo es éste. Si quiero arruinar mi salud, dilapidar mi hacienda y pisotear mi buen nombre, es asunto mío, añade, pero lo otro es algo que atañe a todo el vecindario, y eso sí que no. Acto seguido me rompe la escoba (nueva) en la cabeza. (96)*

Curiously, the text never specifies exactly what Gurb does to discredit T. Even T himself does not know what social crime he has allegedly committed to merit such infamy throughout the entire neighborhood. He later explains: “La hostilidad del vecindario va en aumento. La portera se ha hecho una cerbatana con el mango de la escoba y me lanza dardos impregnados en curare. Un vecino arroja aceite hirviendo por el hueco de la escalera cuando me ve pasar. Otro ha metido tarántulas en mi piso” (111). The hostility continues until T moves out. This brand of solidarity

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shows how community can affect space by placing common priorities ahead of the expression of individualism.

The concept of community in *Sin noticias* also exists on a much larger and abstract scale and relates to the portrayal of the State. At one point T jibes: “En Barcelona llueve como su Ayuntamiento actúa: pocas veces, pero a lo bestia” (23). T and Gurb happen to visit Barcelona during one of the moments of bestial Ayuntamiento activity. The role State officials from Barcelona played in securing and preparing for the 1992 Olympic Games cannot be overstated, and neither can their explicit motivation for hosting the event: to accelerate urban development and renewal. Joan Ramón Resina astutely argues that “the event itself was far less important than its long-term impact on the city’s physical configuration and public image” (200). The State also made every effort to unite Barcelona as a community of Olympic supporters, but fell woefully short in this regard (219-22). Nevertheless, *Sin noticias* clearly demonstrates that as the staging of the Games draws closer, the entire city and its inhabitants do become bound together by a common Olympic denominator. No Barcelonan could escape the effects—good and/or bad—of the urban preparation for the 1992 Olympic Games. Barcelonans paid taxes that would help finance urban reform for the Olympics, which inevitably invites scrutiny about how public money is being spent (50), and worry that the bottom would drop out of the economy after the Olympic torch leaves the stadium on Montjuic to make its way to Atlanta (87). State- and private-sponsored construction sites severely complicated everyday life. T complains that the city’s museums are all closed for renovations (113-14). In one area close to the Diagonal he falls into five different construction trenches in a matter of five minutes (11-12). Hotel guests and employees near a construction site must endure noise so loud that the clerk needs to use a megaphone to communicate. The work continues until midnight then starts again at six o’clock in the morning, and during the night the hotel guests must evacuate the building twice because of problems caused by the construction: once for a gas leak and once for a small fire (38-39). Given the quantity of construction projects and the massive scale of some of them, it is no wonder that T finds himself so fascinated and affected by the explosion of urban development in Barcelona. Llàtzer Moix gives a description of the Olympic Village project that the State began several years earlier—some days employing up to 4,000 workers—and still barely finished in time for the games:

*La complejidad de esta transformación era total. El problema a resolver, en teoría, consistía en construir viviendas para alojar a unos 15.000 atletas durante tres semanas a caballo entre julio y agosto de 1992. En la práctica, se trataba de arrasar un obsoleto barrio industrial para levantar otro*

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*residencial y, de paso, recuperar la fachada marítima de la ciudad; es decir, expropiar más de quinientos mil metros cuadrados, desmantelar un trazado ferroviario cargado de historia, soterrar otro ramal (el de Glorias), construir vías rápidas, renovar la red de colectores de la ciudad, asegurar el frente de costa, habilitar cuatro kilómetros de playas, construir un nuevo puerto y, finalmente, edificar y urbanizar el citado barrio residencial para los atletas olímpicos. (La ciudad 119)*

It is important to note that the Olympic Village was only one of many projects underway at the time T would have walked the streets of Barcelona.

The extensive construction also leads to serious problems with traffic. T describes one attempt to drive through the city in the following manner:

*21:05 La Diagonal cortada por obras. Desvío hacia la carretera de Esplugas.*

*21:10 Carretera de Esplugas cortada por obras. Desvío hacia Molins de Rey.*

*21:20 Acceso a Molins de Rey cortado por obras. (100)*

On another occasion while observing the traffic he states that sometimes the traffic jams last up to an entire week (56-57).

In some way or another all of Barcelona feels the effects of the upcoming State-sponsored spectacle. Whether or not the Barcelonans actively backed the 1992 games—and not all did (50)—everyone felt the effects of the city's Olympic preparations. *Sin noticias* portrays Barcelona as a community united by its mutual goal to survive the Olympics and the transformation necessary to stage them.

### **An Optimistic View of Barcelona?**

Concerning *Sin noticias* Mendoza writes: “es un libro alegre, como lo fueron las circunstancias en que fue escrito: una primavera llena de promesas. A diferencia de lo que ocurre con los otros relatos de humor que he publicado... en éste no hay una sola sombra de melancolía” (“Nota” 10). The absence of melancholy in this work does not preclude criticism of the city and its public services and institutions. At one point T has his head literally knocked off by a bus, and while trying frantically to recover his rolling head, he is subsequently hit by a car, a van and a taxi (7-8). Later, while he washes his recovered head in a public fountain he discovers that the chemical breakdown of the city's water consists of “hidrógeno, oxígeno y caca” (8).

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The air is also polluted: “Lo peor es tener que respirar este aire inficionado de partículas succulentas. Es sabido que en algunas zonas urbanas la densidad del aire es tal, que sus habitantes lo introducen en fundas y lo exportan bajo la denominación de morcillas” (12). And it seems that the only thing more plentiful than insects and rodents are the petty thieves and criminals (16, 28-29, 72). He also complains about the pedestrian congestion (9-12) and transportation systems: “A diferencia de otros seres vivos... que siempre se desplazan del mismo modo, los seres humanos utilizan gran variedad de medios de locomoción, todos los cuales rivalizan entre sí en lentitud, incomodidad y peste, aunque en este último apartado suelen resultar vencedores los pies y algunos taxis” (37). On another occasion T sums up his impression of Barcelona in the following manner: “La ciudad es enorme; el gentío, constante; el ruido, mucho” (12).

Eduardo Ruiz Tosaus also detects the criticism of late capitalism and its effects on urbanization in Barcelona:

*La intención crítica y satírica... se hallan en esta novela, que aprovecha la índole extraterrestre de los dos personajes para denunciar el absurdo de la sociedad consumista actual, emborrachada por el poder del dinero y donde tanta calidad de vida se sacrifica en las grandes ciudades. El extraterrestre asiste asombrado al frenesí de una sociedad consumista y competitiva, arrastrada por la especulación y la insolidaridad, enloquecida por el tráfico y las prisas, asediada por las obras en las calles, asfixiada por la polución. (2)*

The portrayal of the components of the urbanization of consciousness in this novel clearly reveal significant criticism of the process, but examples of resistance to the process within this portrayal is virtually non-existent. The Barcelonans of the novel are drunken with the power of money as Ruiz Tosaus asserts, and the only characters whose consciousness has not been urbanized since youth—supreme beings whose natural state is pure intellect—also end up succumbing willingly to the process of urbanization of consciousness. After all, despite the inconveniences and problems alluded to throughout the work, and T’s insecurity about what will happen to the economy in Barcelona after the Olympics are over (87), T and Gurb decide to stay on Earth. In fact, both aliens entertain the idea of remaining on Earth at different times in the novel, even before they receive their next—and very unattractive—assignment from their Supreme Council:

*En vista del éxito de nuestra misión en la Tierra (por el que se nos felicita), debemos variar el rumbo y dirigirnos, con idéntica finalidad, al planeta BWR*

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*143, que gira (como un idiota) alrededor de Alfa Centauro. Una vez allí, deberemos adoptar, igual que hemos hecho aquí, la forma de los habitantes del planeta. Tienen cuarenta y nueve patas, de las cuales, sólo dos les llegan al suelo; también tienen un ojo, seis orejas, ocho narices y once dientecitos. Se alimentan de limo y de unas orugas peludas que atrapan con los tentáculos anteroposteriores. (138)*

T does not particularly like human physiology either, but giving up his favorite foods (churros and eggplant tortilla) for slime and caterpillars constitutes a sacrifice that he is not willing to make. Besides, there is something about the vitality of life in Barcelona that attracts the two aliens. They enjoy themselves greatly, meet many fascinating people and T even falls in love. These aliens also recognize the potential of this city “en obras.” In this respect, *Sin noticias* reflects the most optimistic urbanization of consciousness of any of Mendoza’s novels about Barcelona, despite the pointed criticisms. Furthermore, the novel itself—as a discursive spatial practice resistant to the process of urbanization of consciousness—faces the prospect of assimilation in the form of commodification of cultural artifacts. After all, Eduardo Mendoza is one of contemporary Spain’s most renowned and successful authors, by most accounts *Sin noticias* has garnered the most widespread and sustained commercial success of all his novels (Moix, “Eduardo” 65) and Barcelona uses the success of Mendoza to promote itself in the global market as a culturally sophisticated and progressive place, despite the criticism of the city that exists in his works. This novel clearly illustrates that resistance to the process of urbanization of consciousness in Barcelona can be as futile as it is entertaining.

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