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TITLE: Driving Toward Heterotopias: *Taxis* and *Taxistas* in Contemporary Chilean Cinema

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ABSTRACT: Throughout the history of representing the vehicle in Hollywood Cinema, the taxi and its driver stand as some of film's most enigmatic symbols of America's urban landscape and working-class characters. Within Chilean cinema specifically, experiencing during the first decade of the 21st century a revitalization called by some as *el nuevo cine chileno*, a study of the representations of taxis and taxistas, evidenced in *Taxi para tres/ Taxi for Three* (2001) by Orlando Lübbert and *El rey de los huevones/ The King of Idiots* (2006) by Boris Quercia offers opportunities to comment upon the vehicles by which city space is negotiated and to examine the socio-economic contradictions present in contemporary Chile. In this way, the presentation of the taxi and its driver in Chilean film appropriates the *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976) formula related to the failure of a capitalist system that places the driver in opposition to those who have already been disenfranchised, working as heterotopic metaphors for the growing urban consciousness of middle-class Chileans that futilely navigate the economic and social identities presented by a failed neoliberal system.

KEYWORDS: Taxi, neoliberal, heterotopia, Chile, film, middle-class

RESUMEN: Tras la historia de representar los vehículos en el cine de Hollywood, el taxi y el taxista representan algunos de los símbolos cinematográficos más enigmáticos del panorama urbano americano y de la caracterización de la clase obrera. Dentro del cine chileno, experimentando durante la primera década del nuevo milenio una revitalización llamada *el nuevo cine chileno*, un estudio de las representaciones de los taxis y los taxistas en las películas *Taxi para tres* (2001) por Orlando Lübbert y *El rey de los huevones* (2006) por Boris Quercia ofrece oportunidades para comentar sobre los vehículos en los cuales se negocia el espacio urbano y para examinar las contradicciones socio-económicas presentes en Chile hoy en día. La presentación del taxi y el taxista en el cine chileno apropia la fórmula de la película *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976) relacionada al fracaso del sistema capitalista que expone el conductor en oposición a los que ya han sido privados del derecho de representación, sirviendo como metáforas de heterotopias que encarnan la conciencia de la clase media chilena que navega en vano las identidades sociales y económicas que resultan del fracaso del sistema neoliberal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Taxi, neoliberal, heterotopia, Chile, cine, clase media

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Driving Toward Heterotopias: *Taxis* and *Taxistas* in Contemporary Chilean Cinema

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Throughout the history of representing the vehicle in Hollywood Cinema, the taxi stands as one of the most enigmatic symbols of America's urban landscape. In parallel fashion to the vehicles they drive, taxi drivers mark some of the most memorable working-class characters portrayed on film, such as Robert De Niro's iconic interpretation of Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976), or Winona Ryder as Corky in *Night on Earth* (Jarmusch, 1991). In recent Hispanic cinema, the rendering of taxis and taxi drivers has become a frequent medium employed by film directors to facilitate the presentation of the middle-class and the class conflicts that ensue in the age of neoliberalism, exemplified by Mexico's late Benito Alazraki's *Rey de los taxistas/ King of Taxi Drivers* (1989), Spain's Carlos Saura's *Taxi* (1996), and Argentina's *Taxi, un encuentro/ Taxi, an Encounter* (2001) by Gabriela David. Within Chilean cinema specifically, experiencing during the first decade of the 21st century a certain revitalization called by some as *el nuevo cine chileno*, a study of the representations of taxis and taxistas, evidenced in *Taxi para tres/ Taxi for Three* (2001) by Orlando Lübbert and *El rey de los huevones/ The King of Idiots* (2006) by Boris Quercia, offers opportunities to comment upon the vehicles by which city space is negotiated and to examine the contradictions experienced by middle-class Chileans in contemporary, urban society. Whereas the plot development portrayed in the Hispanic films mentioned above continue in the line of *Taxi Driver*, related to a "failure of a capitalist system that pits" the cab driver against those who have already "been disenfranchised according to socioeconomic class, gender, and/ or race" (Iannucci par.1), the presentation of

the taxi and its driver in Chilean films further appropriates the *Taxi Driver* formula by contextualizing the socio-economic contradictions present in Santiago's city streets at the turn of the millennium. To this end, the representations of *taxis* and *taxistas* in contemporary Chilean films work as symbolic, heterotopic metaphors for the growing urban consciousness of middle-class Chileans that futilely navigate the economic and social identities presented by a failed neoliberal system.

As taxis constitute an important part of the transportation network of any city, offering services to specific segments of the population for a higher price than other mass transit options, the symbolic cinematographic imagery of the taxi as a representation of Chile's emerging middle-class compares quite naturally with the portrayal of the disenfranchised and/or lower socioeconomic class characterized by the desolate junkyard wasteland depicted in the first scene of *Caluga o menta/ Candy or Mint* (Justiniano, 1990) or the *micro* (bus) seen in films such as *Johnny Cien Pesos/ Johnny One Hundred Pesos* (Graef-Marino 1993). In *Johnny Cien Pesos*, a film set in 1990—the year Chile transitioned from a dictatorship to democracy—the opening scene takes place aboard a bus that the main character, seventeen year old Johnny Garcia (Armando Araiza), rides to get to the money-laundering locale that he and some acquaintances plan to rob. Scared and naively involved in a scheme clearly above his criminal abilities, Johnny accidentally fires a loaded pistol stored in his school backpack, calling attention to himself and causing the driver of the bus to chase him from the vehicle in a fit of anger; a clear indication of just how badly the impending crime will progress.

In addition to facilitating the presentation of the arid desolation of the lower-income Santiago neighborhoods through which the bus travels, kicking up even more dirt and debris in its wake, the appearance of the *micro* with its squeaky wheels and bumpy commute also allows Graef-Marino the opportunity to drive home the sense of alienation felt by disenfranchised youth and other members of the urban, lower-class during Chile's shift from dictatorship to democracy; whose transitional government continued to promote the rewards of Pinochet's neoliberal economy at the expense of recovering and/or acknowledging a national, popular memory. In an interview conducted with the director upon his return from exile, Graef-Marino states that *Johnny Cien Pesos* was developed in direct response to witnessing a generation of Chilean youth alienated from their nation:

Lo primero que percibí fue una generación adolescente desorientada y que además había sido estupidizada por la dictadura. Los habían transformado en no-lectores, no-videntes, mudos, en personas sin ideas ni pasiones. (Mouesca 400)

In this city, and on this very public system of transportation, urban bus commuters as well as their drivers are shown physically distant and emotionally alone, separate from all other occupants. Whereas the concentration of economic growth that took place in the 80s and 90s mainly occurred in or around Santiago, the city's surging population contributed to the alienation felt negotiating crowded city-space(s) as well as to the sense of marginalization experienced by the lower-class due to a disproportionate concentration of wealth (Sassen 174). For middle and upper class transportation needs, private automobiles filled the part. Small and low-cost service operations, such as bus and rideshare services (*colectivos*), proliferated to meet the rest of the population's demands.

Twelve years after the release of Graef-Marino's film, with some international response

and critical acclaim, the sense of urban alienation and class separation that is witnessed aboard the city bus in *Johnny Cien Pesos* continues to be underscored, as evidenced in the film *Play* (Scherson, 2005). Cristina, the young protagonist of Mapuche origin (Viviana Herrera), having immigrated to Santiago from the "South," works as a home health aid for an ill Hungarian man. In the film, Cristina is portrayed riding the micro around Santiago during her off-hours, failing to ever establish any sustained relationship, even with her charge, who dies near the film's end. Her solitary activities, first shown as simple outings to the arcade to play Japanese-style video games or walking alone through the various commercial malls, takes on exaggerated meaning when she finds a discarded briefcase in a trash can. Cristina becomes obsessed with the contents and with the owner himself, a young, recently dumped thirty-something architect named Tristán (Andrés Ulloa). Pursuing Tristán throughout the city, in addition to stalking his ex-girlfriend, the film underscores in various moments that although Cristina plays an active role in a game of chase, she misses frequent opportunities to establish contact with others due to her disempowered role in society. In the few hopeful scenes in which Cristina seemingly befriends a park gardener named Manuel (Juan Pablo Quezada), who quickly latches onto the dream of escaping city-life and returning to Cristina's "South," a place he idealizes for its fresh air and trees yet a place she refuses to consider returning to only to be poorer and further "distanced" than she is now, the connection between the two is ultimately lost. In recurring, symbolic imagery sustained throughout the film, and in reference to the title of the film itself, the oversized headphones worn while listening to a mp3 player, an item "borrowed" from Tristán's briefcase and worn throughout the city but especially aboard the bus, ultimately denotes Cristina's experiences with urban alienation and class separation.

In contrast to autonomous vehicles presented in other contemporary Chilean films,

such as the youthful source of freedom attained via the shiny, new bicycle in Andrés Wood's *Machuca* (2004), portrayed as Gonzalo's escape vehicle from his family's and nation's strife, or the Mercedes Benz driven by affluent Santiago teenagers who escape the summer's heat in Sergio Castilla's *Te amo (made in Chile)/ I Love You (Made in Chile)* (2001), both loosely emblematic of the vehicles employed in road-movies in which an individual or small group of people escape from daily life and their surrounding social environment, the taxi has rarely been considered synonymous with the road-movie genre in that it is a vehicle, that by design and functionality, circumnavigates the city rather than escapes it. Taxi drivers are not out on the road attempting to flee from their daily routine, obligation and duty. In contrast to the escape vehicle accessed by those with greater means, such as those presented in recent Hispanic road films such as *Y tú mamá, también/ And Your Mother, Too* (Cuarón, 2001), and *Diarios de motocicleta/ Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles, 2004), the taxi in Hispanic films has become an icon of the more limited and geographically restricted middle-class.

Since its earliest date of inception in the seventeenth century, the carriage-for-hire known as the hackney provided transport for rent with no fixed route or schedule, becoming emblematic of the emerging middle-class not only for its driver but also for its passenger (Gilbert 42). Like the fares they served, neither belonging to the upper-class that would surely prefer the privacy of their own coach, nor the lower-class that had no other choice but to walk, the hackney was usually maneuvered by drivers who were rarely unionized, regarded competition as a primary virtue, but seldom owned their own vehicle—instead paying a daily fee to rent a horse and coach, a system resurrected in the twentieth century as vehicle leasing (Gilbert 11).¹ During times of economic depression, however, the hackney or taxi system became too expensive for most people to afford—forcing cheating, counterfeiting, and the mandatory

payment of tips that became necessary for the driver to hold onto his socio-economic foothold, and therefore characteristic of the industry. Whereas the taxi driver earns little respect in contemporary society, in part due to its sordid history and graphic cinematographic imagery, the cab driver does reflect the entrepreneurial spirit necessary to drive most capitalist economic models by working long hours, being an independent or owner operator firm, and fiercely competing for its fares.

Emblematic of the working middle-class, contemporary Chilean films concerning cabs and their drivers work as compelling metaphors to help unpack the economic and social tensions presented by neoliberal policies at play in Chile since the 1970s. According to David Harvey, the term “neoliberalism” refers to strategies that give emphasis to the efficacy of private enterprise, such as the policies of unregulated capitalism and the privatization of state-owned companies embraced by Pinochet following the 1973 coup:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (2)

Noting that the practice of neoliberal economic theory frequently meant that prior institutional frameworks and powers were destroyed, Harvey asserts that the neoliberal state formation in Chile that occurred after 1973 resulted in a “fierce repression of all solidarities created within the labour and urban social movements which had so threatened their power” (39). For many laborers in the transportation sector, neoliberal economics meant that although they had the formal right to individual contract, they had lost their right to organize and bargain collectively.

Although unions under previous federal policy had formerly protected many small and medium-size businesses, these budding entrepreneurs originally supported Pinochet's neoliberal economic practices in its bid for stabilizing rampant inflation and offering greater opportunities for prosperity. As recounted in "Empresarios, neoliberalismo y transición democrática en Chile" by sociologist Patricio Silva, their initial support waned one decade later under a severe recession that caused slow growth, widespread inflation and huge unemployment numbers. To a certain degree, businesses such as those represented by small or individual taxi companies were excluded from the profits of the neoliberal model due to their "localized" nature. As Silva describes:

La política económica favoreció en cambio al sector de la burguesía que operaba en la órbita financiera y que se encontraba estrechamente vinculado con los círculos financieros internacionales y con los grupos que realizaban actividades mercantiles y de exportación. (5)

Pinochet's reformed neoliberal plan that attempted to control the economic crisis of the 1980s worked for some. As economist James Cypher notes, Chile's average per capita income doubled between 1987 and 1998. Nevertheless, as fallout from the neoliberal policies in place over the past four decades, Chile's income distribution today is among the third most unequal in Latin America.

The top 20% received 57.5% of the national income in 2000; the top 10% received 42.5% [...]. The skewed distribution of income, more unequal than it was in the 1960s, is a deliberate result of government policy. (Cypher par. 9)

To this end, the fallout of Chile's neoliberal plan experienced by small and medium size businesses is seen through the metaphor of the taxi and its driver negotiating

incongruent spaces born in the wake of its shortcomings—the failed promises of a prosperous utopia.

The images of the *taxi* and *taxista* as presented in contemporary Chilean film, as sites for the anxious, marginalized, duped and deceived, can be seen as working symbols of what Michel Foucault referred to as "heterotopias." Coined to describe spaces that work in opposition to utopias, which Foucault called sites with fundamentally no real place, heterotopias represent the anxiety of the contemporary era in regards to simultaneous, juxtaposed, dispersed and displaced spaces of otherness:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (24)

To this end, the space within the taxi and through which the vehicle travels holds a layered meaning. The possibility of access to the promised utopia is presented every day (that he gets up and gets out on the road) but remains just out of reach: a few pesos away, a petty crime, a lucky fare. But like the circular route he drives, never leaving the city nor escaping his surrounding social environs, the neoliberal model fails the *taxista* time and time again.

In the film *Taxi para tres*, a cab driver named Ulises (Alejandro Trejo)—down on his luck, working long hours but not being able to afford his bills—is brought into the life

of crime when two small-time crooks from a rough Santiago neighborhood overtake him and turn his vehicle into their get-away car.² The question posed to Ulises, whether he choose to ride “volante o maleta,” quickly becomes the tag line of the film; to continue to drive for them as their hostage/accomplice or be put into the trunk of the car with an uncertain future (Ruffinelli 242). Expressing at various times in the film that there should be a more equitable distribution of the country’s wealth, Ulises is also an entrepreneur vested in the ideology that life will be easier and that he will be able to emerge from the stifling economic situation to which he is now beholden once he owns his cab. To this end, Ulises and his taxi work in the film as metaphors for Chile’s incongruous neoliberal model. In this sense, it comes as no surprise that Ulises chooses “el volante.” Although Ulises may have access to the vehicle that he believes separates him from the lower-class, epitomized by the petty thieves Chavelo and Coto (Daniel Muñoz and Fernando Gómez-Rovira) who have no options available to them for their future other than through the life of crime, the irony that Ulises merely leases his vehicle and must consistently descend from it in order to adjust the car’s carburetor—exposing himself as a man and business vulnerable to the dangers of marginalized city spaces—is not lost upon the viewer. In an interview with film critic Mónica Villarroel, Lübbert comments upon the personal observations he made regarding the social and economic differences witnessed upon his return to Chile. After a lengthy stay in exile and the pursuit of studies abroad, Lübbert found inspiration for the film in the struggles he witnessed in the Chilean people:

Creo que hay gente que está dando una lucha silenciosa, una lucha terrible. Un ejemplo es el taxista: la gente endeudada, la gran lucha de los barrios, la gran lucha de las madres que viven en los barrios, la lucha por la dignidad de los hijos, la lucha de las

hijas por ser decentes [...] son una infinidad de luchas las que se llevan a cabo todos los días. (68)

In this way, Ulises and his taxi work as metaphors for the hopes, contradictions and inherent shortcomings present in the neoliberal policies that continued to be promoted by the Concertación governments from 1988 into the new century, by which ascension is continuously sought after yet never fully attained.

Rewarded for choosing to ride “volante” and for his solidarity shown by protecting the two young men from the approaching police, Chavelo and Coto end their first day’s crime spree by including Ulises in the division of the loot. Ulises reaffirms his decision to drive, smitten by the possibilities a partnership with the young men will provide. He joins their team, in part out of camaraderie and also as a simple way to keep up with the demands of his family and get ahead by paying off his leased cab. In contrast to the dark family quarters captured in backlight, dinner conversations from which he remains aloof and distant, the city streets, loud music and bright glimmering buildings shown through the windshield of Ulises’s speeding car capture the expressions of Coto’s wonderment as well as Ulises’s hope for freedom. Ulises refuses to be a passive hostage and lays claim to a more engaged approach, ironically suggesting to Chavelo and Coto that they use a more proletarian-sensitive approach towards choosing the victims of their crimes. Claiming to get more bang-for-their-buck, Ulises convinces them to rob from the rich rather than from their own. Neighborhoods previously inaccessible to Chavelo and Coto can now be penetrated and sacked with the use of Ulises’s cab. In this way, the taxi transforms into a symbol of the neoliberal contradiction in that a better life for all clearly could never be attained without some initial means; in this case access to a vehicle. The irony remains, however, in that Ulises’s vehicle is leased.

Similar to Ulises’s belief that transitioning from lessee to owner of the Lada

will significantly change his socio-economic situation, Ulises too transitions from the victim portrayed at the beginning of the film to victimizer—a man obsessed with his own advancement. As stated by Ruffinelli, “la historia pasa a incursionar implícitamente en el tema de la lenta corrupción del hombre bueno y justo” (242). Ulises wants to reap the rewards of the trio’s activities, conning Chavelo into writing a hostage note that he believes will exonerate him from their crimes. Not only does Ulises betray Chavelo and Coto by convincing them to take more risks with their thievery, exposing them to greater danger by targeting more affluent locales, ones that are also better armed, he deceives his family by beginning an extramarital affair with the clerk of a sandwich shop. To this end, rather than decrease the tensions on the home front, Ulises’s capitalistic activities have drastic counter-effects. The purpose of the money “earned” by the young men, to pay Coto’s university tuition and Ulises’s looming bills, is ultimately rendered a futile dream by the revelation that Coto is illiterate and Ulises’s defense of being a innocent hostage collapses when he mistakenly leaves a trail of his crimes by making advanced payments on the lease of his cab.

Despite an early demonstration of paternal tenderness, teaching Coto how to drive (in the same desolate space seen at the beginning of *Caluga o menta*) and visiting him when he becomes ill, the partnership between the men deteriorates. When the police close in upon Chavelo and Coto’s neighborhood and the two seek refuge in Ulises’s home, where they manage to endear themselves to Ulises’s wife and kids and symbolically bring in light and rejuvenation by painting the house green, Ulises’s anxiety and absence is further stressed. When Coto demonstrates romantic interest in Ulises’s daughter, and the pressure from a crafty police detective threatens to reveal his extramarital affair, Ulises expels Chavelo and Coto from his home in classist anger and terminates their partnership for the risks have begun to outweigh the

gains. Introduced by a long shot of a man carrying a pair of rugs that twist under the weight of the load to form the image of a cross, the two criminals return with evangelical fervor, claiming to Ulises and his family that they have changed their ways and discovered God.³ Disregarding Christian charity and worker’s solidarity, the looming pressure from the policeman dominates Ulises’s actions. Exclaiming that “no todo lo mío es tuyo,” Ulises seeks to disband the trio in a final heist that will assuredly pay off his cab, although the plan goes terribly wrong.

In the final scenes of the film, the three honor their agreement to disband once Ulises’s car is paid up and plan another crime—to rob an upscale gas station. Once there, Ulises runs the men over with the cab as they flee from the site of their crime. Although Ulises believes that he has succeeded in eliminating Chavelo and Coto’s integration into his life, freeing society from the ills of “los delincuentes” and liberating his family from their ties to the lower class, Ulises also recognizes his ultimate undoing. Allowing the mass media to falsely showcase his ascension from middle class-victim to national hero by risking his life in order to protect the interests and assets of a private enterprise, the complicit look captured in the close-up image of Ulises’s face contrarily tells his family, and consequently the viewer, that the “arribista” propaganda fore-fronted in the televised news program is contrived (Estévez Baeza 159). The concluding images reveal that although he may have fooled the media, back at home, watching the broadcast of the live-television feed, Ulises’s wife and children witness the extent of his lies and the place that money has gained above all other matters in—including the lives of the two young men. The chance at compassion and solidarity, to recover a popular memory metaphorically represented by the incorporation of Chavelo and Coto into Ulises’s home, is discarded for material goods. To this end, the concluding scenes can be read as signs that the neoliberal model promoted in Chile has come with great sacrifice.

The dark, tragic character portrayed by cab driver Ulises in *Taxi para tres* contrasts perceptibly with the lighthearted, comedic characterization of the protagonist of *El rey de los huevones* (Boris Quercia)—played by the film's director himself.⁴ Despite their tragic and comedic differences, and the filmic divergence expressed through an upbeat soundtrack and Anselmo's more harmless daytime activities, the metaphor for the growing urban consciousness of middle-class Chileans and the pitfalls of neoliberal economic policies sustained through the symbolic use of the taxicab and its driver remain present in this more recent film. As developed in *Taxi para tres*, *El rey de los huevones* shows the taxi and its driver negotiating both city-space and contemporary, urban issues highlighted by the expansive freeway system and towering skyscrapers that contrast with dirt roads and broken-down cars, reflecting the incongruent spaces that parallel the disjointed identity quest of the protagonist. Anselmo, a cabbie at the international airport of Chile, portrayed as a bustling tourist destination and modernized facility represented through a succession of cuts, finds himself in the same boat as Ulises in that he is burdened by seemingly insurmountable debts. However, unlike Ulises who becomes famous via the news reporter's interview at the film's end, Anselmo is famous throughout Chile from the start for being "el rey de los huevones."

The king, a name he is both embarrassed and proud to call himself, became famous for turning into the police the sum of twenty-four million pesos found abandoned in his cab; a find Ulises would have undoubtedly kept. Whereas *Taxi para tres* tagline reads "¿volante o maleta?" Quercia's interpretation speaks more to the tune: "¿qué conviene más ser honrado o avispado?" (Hasbún par. 3). One cannot help but wonder here if director Quercia is intentionally playing off the associated characteristics of Lübbert's Ulises—reworking the characterization of the struggling middle-class as portrayed by the taxi driver for the value of underscoring

just how foolish and honest Anselmo really is, and how impracticable his actions seem in the socio-economic realities present in contemporary Chile. Regardless of the director's intentions, Anselmo can be seen as the antithesis of Ulises. He is man who believes in the promise of the neoliberal model but is unable and unwilling to compromise his morals and intentionally break the law. Despite his need for getting ahead of his insurmountable bills and advancing his own personal gain, he is trapped by his concern for playing by the rules and his own naïveté, similarly demonstrated by doing anything for Sandra (Tamara Acosta), the fiancé of his best-friend Mario (Rhandy Piñango).

True to the gullible character highlighted in the newspaper story posted visibly in his cab ("O es gil, o es ¡¡¡muy pil!!!: Taxista devuelve millonaria cifra"), there is no denying that Anselmo won't get far in life or business. The deficient entrepreneurial attributes that have made Anselmo the "king of idiots" are the same ones that keep him living modestly in an aesthetically dim apartment complex, whereas immediately behind his dwelling a crane shot pans up to reveal a booming city amped-up on shiny materials and modern skyscrapers (that also recall the Arturo Merino Benítez international airport where Anselmo works). The glimmer contrasts with his dingy dwelling and the dusty lot where he must park his cab, covered from the filth for the lack of a garage. Though the images of growth and technological development are frequently shown through the long shots that track Anselmo's fares, more often than not revealing the complex freeway system he must travel, the contrast established throughout the film with the unpaved side streets and seedy roadside motels that Anselmo must also negotiate furthers the presentation of a jumbled, middle-class space. In the scenes of the taxi driver's dwelling as in the taxicab itself as portrayed in *El rey de los huevones* as in *Taxi para tres*, the spaces that indicate independence and freedom are the same spaces that are continuously invaded, questioned and

challenged for their inherent contradictions and the probability of their own success.

Anselmo is faced with the decisions that Ulises must also make in regards to playing by the rules or actually getting ahead. In *El rey de los huevones*, the seemingly impossible goal of the middle-class—symbolized by the ownership of the cab and Anselmo's dream to own his own business—is further complicated by the appearance of a woman who invades his cab and his life. After various aborted efforts at the airport, Anselmo picks up the fare of a beautiful and apparently wealthy foreigner named Eva (Angie Jibaja) and her young son, Adrian (Diego Hurtado). Reading the newspaper story posted in Anselmo's cab about the returned money, Eva convinces him into watching after her child for a few hours (which turn into a few days) while she conducts some apparent illegal business. Torn between the love and loyalty felt for Sandra, who in Anselmo's defeatist yet honest estimation will never leave her fiancé for Anselmo for the better life Mario can give her with his more secure employment as a bank security guard, he is seduced by Eva and her offer of sexual compensation for babysitting her son. Eva's presence in Anselmo's apartment the next morning provokes Sandra's jealousy, and the two friends finally discuss their mutual attraction towards each other, although they never successfully act upon their desires.

Similar to Anselmo's inability to close the deal with Sandra, he is also unable to choose a life of crime and finally get ahead in life by accepting the wad of bills Eva throws at him in order for him to drive off with her partner's stolen money left unattended in the cab. Anselmo is ultimately unwilling to betray his loyalties to his friends by leaving with Eva and unable to compromise his ethical behavior by partaking in a life of crime, revealing the inherent contradictions that impede the middle-class from accessing the neoliberal promise of social and economic utopia. In a poignant moment at the bus station, Anselmo rejects Eva's enticing offer to go with them to Brazil and *librarse de todo*. Instead,

Anselmo makes a commitment to conform to the choices he has made in life, to the work ethic he chooses to live by, and to value Sandra's companionship, albeit platonic. Sandra chooses, as anticipated, to marry Mario and Anselmo promises her that he will respect her choice. Although the film ends with a preposterous, and therefore comical, economic situation for the three due to the stolen diamond necklace Adrian purposively leaves behind in the cab, the contradictions, compromises and shortcomings in Anselmo's life remain ostensibly clear. As he places the necklace around Sandra's neck, a similar crane shot that commenced the film pans out to reveal piles of dust and debris at their feet and speeding freeway traffic racing-by behind them on the bridge above their heads. At the film's close, despite the comedic manner in which Anselmo experiences personal, urban and middle-class contradictions, the space negotiated by Anselmo, similar to the trap that ultimately ensnares Ulises, is a heterotopic space—and Anselmo will forever continue to be *un huevón*.

As evidenced in *Taxi para tres* and *El rey de los huevones*, the taxi and its driver work as middle-class symbols in contemporary urban spaces, offering visible images that reflect the economic and social contradictions present in Chile at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As observed by Villarroel in regards to these conflicts as presented in Chilean film:

A partir de esta revisión de las diversas versiones de la identidad chilena, es posible señalar que existen narrativas que consideran definiciones a-históricas, tradicionalistas o esenciales que pretenden caracterizar un pueblo "único". No obstante, ellas configuran un panorama sobre la identidad nacional que todavía interpela a los chilenos. La tradición convive con lo post moderno; el éxito económico con la marginalidad. (40)

Far from depicting perfection and harmony, the material of Ulises's and Anselmo's dreams related to owning their cab and having a fulfilling

relationship, the taxi driver is shown negotiating urban zones and social situations that connote paradox and incongruity. Ulises is ultimately shown to his family and the film's spectator as a traitor: to the morals and ethics of former heroes, to the sense of solidarity and camaraderie of years past. Working in similar fashion to the image of the (anti) hero that is glorified by the media, the press betrays Anselmo and consequently the public by depicting his selfless, honorable code of conduct as one to be pitied and ridiculed. Despite the media's attempts to venerate neoliberal modes of practice, the heterogeneous realities of the Chilean taxi driver work to show the impossible promises of a neoliberal utopia. To this end, the taxi and the city it serves as portrayed in Chilean film represent social and economic heterotopias.

Notes

¹Non-unionized taxi drivers do not necessarily represent the entire case history in Chile. Assembled together under the *Confederación Nacional del Transporte*, the transportation industry of the 1970s played a significant role in the toppling Salvador Allende's government by taking part in a series of anti-Allende transportation strikes. "Mientras el gobierno materializaba las nuevas políticas, corría paralelo un proceso acelerado de organización de la derecha y de movilización de los gremios empresariales. Un nuevo paso fue dado en septiembre de 1972 al crearse un comando único de camioneros, taxistas y autobuseros, completándose una red de agrupaciones gremiales de la mediana y pequeña burguesía (Bitar 171). Partly in reaction to the shifting neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s and the loosening of restrictions, small and medium sized business unions formed the *Consejo de la Producción, el Transporte y el Comercio* in 1983 (Silva 8).

²Released in August of 2001, *Taxi para tres* received multiple accolades on the international festival circuit, such as Best Latin-American Film at the *Mar del Plata Film Festival (Argentina)*, the Golden Seashell Award at the *San Sebastián International Film Festival (Spain)*, as well as the *Goya Award (Spain)* for Best Spanish Language Foreign Film ("A Cab for Three"). *Taxi para tres* spent 22 weeks on Chilean billboards and sold approximately 337,675

tickets ("Cine en Cifras" 1), falling well short of the one-million national ticket sales record set by Cristián Galáz' *El chacotero sentimental* (1999).

³In conversation with Villarroel, Lübbert comments upon the specific and symbolic incorporation of religion in the film. "Dentro de las grandes heridas y traumas que produce la dictadura está ese desamparo y la gente busca un refugio espiritual. La gente encuentra amor, cariño, respeto y eso es muy atractivo. La religiosidad popular creció mucho durante la dictadura, el terror, el horror, alimenta la religiosidad y no es sólo un fenómeno de acá. Como dejan de existir las instituciones sociales como los sindicatos, las juntas de vecinos, los elementos donde se puede encontrar identificación popular, no queda nada, excepto el Colo-Colo, la garra blanca. (134)

⁴Similar in ticket sales to *Taxi para tres*, selling approximately 309,505 seats within an eleven week period on Chilean billboards. Quercia's fourth feature-length film fared far less than his box office success *Sexo con amor* (2003), which sold just short of one million tickets ("Cine en Cifras" 5).

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