CARVING PLACE OUT OF NON-PLACE: LUIS RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ'S "LA GUAGUA AÉREA" AND POSTNATIONAL SPACE

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Introduction: A(nother) Ride on "La guagua aérea"

In April of 1983, Puerto Rican author and intellectual Luis Rafael Sánchez gave a performative lecture at Rutgers University that would later be published as the short story "La guagua aérea" in the Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, newspaper, *El nuevo día* (Ortiz 222). Since then, the story has been translated into English multiple times;[1] it has been reprinted in various anthologies, including a 1994 eponymously-titled compendium of essays, thus complicating its designation as a short story;[2] and, in 1993, the text was adapted into the feature-length film *La guagua aérea*, directed by Luis Molina Casanova.[3] The story has even been converted into installation art, as Puerto Rican artist Antonio Martorell was commissioned to make it life-sized in 1991. Martorell, whose "round-trip, frequent flyer" life between Puerto Rico and New York embodies Sánchez's story, created a multi-room piece entitled "La casa de todos nosotros" for an exhibit at *El Museo del Barrio* in New York (Roulet 18). Moreover, significant literary analysis has been dedicated to

[1] For instance, Diana L. Vélez published a translation entitled "The Airbus" in 1984, and Elpidio Laguna-Díaz published a revised translation called "The Flying Bus" in 1987.

[2] Indeed, as I discuss below, due to its difficult-to-pin-down genre, "La guagua aérea" is deemed a "postmodernist text" by scholars such as Aníbal González (103) and William Burgos (135).

[3] Sánchez is credited as creator of the "libreto original" on Molina Casanova's film, which also draws from two other short stories by Sánchez, "La maroma" and "Tiene la noche una raíz" from *En cuerpo de camisa* (1966). The film shares its Spanish-language title (the English title is *A Flight of Hope*) and general plot with Sánchez's essayistic short story, but critics have noted significant differences in the film. Débora Maldonado-DeOliveira (2011) notes that, "in contrast with the essay's content," the film "indirectly shows how th[e] logic [of coloniality] entraps and controls the passengers' subjectivity with problematic meanings of Puerto Ricanness" (166). Dania Abreu-Torres (2015) states, "el relato de Molina Casanova contrasta con la propuesta celebratoria de Sánchez y más bien subraya los discursos del trauma" (398-99). And John D. Perivolaris maintains that Molina Casanova's film promotes the "image of the nation as a family," which "contrasts with Sánchez's depiction of a kaleidoscopic nationality emerging from a sense of dispersal and belonging rooted in the Puerto Rican diaspora" (57).

"La guagua aérea," and critics have cited its polyvalent genre, linguistic potency, and cultural complexity as a counterpoint to contemporary publications that often sought to pin down *the* Puerto Rican identity.

This study revisits Sánchez's "La guagua aérea"[4] (1983) in order to consider the history of the Puerto Rican diaspora throughout the twentieth century, as well as to ask how Sánchez's short story and Puerto Rico's political status—not quite a U.S. state, not quite an independent nation[5]—can inform an increasingly globalized, postnational world. When I refer to the present epoch as postnational, I do not mean to suggest that nation-states are no longer a factor in sociopolitical relations. Rather, I seek to underscore that, in recent decades neoliberal economic forces have established an increasingly stronger hold as the principal determinant of global power relations, and the nation has lost its place as the predominant organizing force behind politics and power structures. As the sovereign mandate of the nation-state wanes and neoliberal-administered globalization intensifies, borders become increasingly porous to migration, trade, and the flow of capital. Recent Latin American scholarship has taken up the question of changing global spatial relations in order to examine the effects of neoliberal globalization on Latin America and Latin American diaspora groups. Susana Draper's *Afterlives of Confinement: Spatial Transitions in Postdictatorship Latin America* (2012) examines how the architecture of twentieth-century South American dictatorships—the prisons and detention centers that housed political prisoners and often served as torture and death chambers—were transformed into luxury malls and memorial sites to reflect new economic values of the neoliberal transition. Examining a broader context, Arlene Dávila's *Culture Works: Space, Value, and Mobility across the Neoliberal Americas* (2012) troubles the overdetermined use of culture in the neoliberal Americas, which typically packages "authentic" culture for public consumption (4). Dávila indexes the ways in which neoliberalism's appropriation of culture exacerbates racial hierarchies and social inequalities (8). And Rebecca Biron's *City/Art: The Urban Scene in Latin America* (2009) assembles a compendium of essays that approach Latin American cityscapes as sites of aesthetic creation that disclose "the spatial and temporal particularity of the Latin American urban scene" (2) in order to unveil how "cities produce the arts that in turn produce cities" (32). This is only a small sampling of recent scholarship that underscores the growing prominence of theories of space in Latin American studies. The present essay seeks to add to their insights by asking how Sánchez's "La guagua aérea" can inform the current postnational, neoliberal milieu.

To accomplish this, I first outline the critical reception of Sánchez's text, rehearsing major trends in the interpretation of the work. I then undertake my own reading of "La guagua aérea,"

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[4] Due to the many versions of the text, I want to clarify the multiple uses of the title that the reader will encounter herein. "La guagua aérea" (in quotation marks) refers to the 1983 short story of principal interest to the present study. When I (or the scholars I cite) refer to *La guagua aérea* (in italics), this is in reference to the 1994 anthology of essays (also by Sánchez) in which the short story is reprinted. And, for purposes of clarity, when I speak of "la guagua aérea" of the narrative (not the title, but rather the physical plane), I refer to it as "the flying bus," sans quotation marks, in order to avoid confusion with the title of the short story.

[5] For more on Puerto Rico's status as a commonwealth of the United States, see Carmen Theresa Whalen's introduction to *Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (2005), which discusses the U.S. acquisition of Puerto Rico as a territory following the 1898 Spanish-American War; the 1917 Jones Act, which granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and made Puerto Rico "an unincorporated territory" of the United States; the 1952 decision that made Puerto Rico an "Estado Libre Asociado" or U.S. commonwealth; and the effects of colonialism and U.S.-Puerto Rican relations on Puerto Rico's economy, social imaginary, and migration patterns.

which examines the unique spatial ramifications of Puerto Ricans' *ir-y-venir* movement between the island and the U.S. mainland by reading the story alongside anthropologist Marc Augé's theory of (non-)place. Augé's work examines the "here and now" of supermodernity—an epoch characterized by increased mobility from place to place facilitated by technological advances—as well as the altered spatial relations that accompany this epoch. His study maintains that the proliferation of "non-places"—spaces that lack identity, relationships, and history—are the hallmark of supermodernity. By highlighting the powerful temporary community formed on the flying bus of "La guagua aérea," I argue that Sánchez's text at once underscores Augé's assertion that "supermodernity produces *non-places*" (78 original italicization) and challenges his affirmation that the *non-place* cannot be relationship-forming or imbued with identity. Finally, I seek to show how Sánchez's "La guagua aérea," thirty-five years after its original publication, can still be instructive for our postnational world.

"La guagua aérea:" Major Themes and Literary Reception

Sánchez begins his polyphonic short story "*a treinta y un mil pies sobre el nivel del mar*" (16)[6]—in midair and *in media res* on a commuter flight from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to New York City, New York. The story opens with the terrified scream of "la azafata rubia" (12), due to which the passengers and crew of the flying bus are fearful of a possible hijacker on board their flight. Their panic proves unfounded when the potential terrorist turns out to be "una saludable pareja de jueyes" (12) that was snuck onto the plane by one of the passengers. The tense situation dissolves when "de pronto, una carcajada corrompe, pareadamente el silencio" (12). This theatrical opening sets up a cyclical narrative in which the Puerto Ricans of the economy class laugh and exchange banter—oblivious or impervious or willfully both—to the critical eye of the crew and the first-class passengers. An unnamed narrator[7] observes and participates in these interactions alongside his "compatriotas que subieron, alelados y pioneros, a las catorce horas de aflictivo encierro" (21). Apart from the crew, "uniformemente gringa esta noche" (12), the flight consists of two groups of Puerto Ricans that are divided by comportment, language, and class—literally first versus economy class, but also social class, at least in the estimation of the Puerto Ricans "guarecidos en la *First-class*," who loudly complain to "el vecino yanqui de asiento—*They are my people but.* [...] *Wish they learn soon how to behave.* [...] *They will never make it because they are trash*" (17). In contrast to the ostentatiously reserved first-class Puerto Ricans, who speak only English "entre sorbo y sorbo de champaña californiana" (17), the economy class "gentío mestizo" (12) is gregarious and speaks a mixture of Spanish, English, and Spanglish.

While the passengers converse, references are made to popular culture—René Farrait of the Puerto Rican boy band *Menudo* must leave the group because of a disastrous voice change (14)—and to politics—President Ronald Reagan, the butcher of Central America, is destroying El Salvador (17)—which locate the story in the 1980s.[8] In fact, the story's orality is one of the

[6] Sánchez employs a significant quantity of italicized words in the story, which principally denote dialogue, use of English, or the repetition of phrases. Here and throughout this paper, all italics cited in quotations are the original emphasis of Sánchez unless I note otherwise.

[7] As critics such as Gabriel Ignacio Barreneche, Jane Lombardi, and Héctor Ramos-Flores have argued, this narrator is presumably, or at least potentially, Luis Rafael Sánchez himself.

[8] Farrait left Menudo in 1982 (*El nuevo día*); Ronald Reagan became the U.S. President in 1981.

principal focal points of literary criticism on the text to date. On a cultural level, critics have written about the rich Puerto Rican social and linguistic particularities of the story's language. In an early review of the above-mentioned anthology of essays, *La guagua aérea* (1994), Rafael Castro Pereda notes, "en esta obra de ingenioso apalabramiento ética y estética, hay radiografías del país puertorriqueño de hondo significado social y político" (8). Likewise, in her study on the postmodern condition of Puerto Rican texts, Myrna García Calderón surmises that "el detallismo lingüístico de [*La guagua aérea*] ha de servir de ejemplo a muchos escritores posteriores" (300).

In part, this focus on the linguistic register of the text is due to the fact that language has been a contentious point in Puerto Rico's national imaginary,[9] given that the importation of English to the island has been one of the principal ways in which the United States has sought to culturally colonize Puerto Rico. In their introduction to *Writing Off the Hyphen* (2008), José L. Torres-Padilla and Carmen Haydée Rivera note that literature written by Puerto Ricans on the mainland, particularly work in English, wasn't commonly considered part of the Puerto Rican canon until the mid 1970s (6). Similarly, Jorge Duany examines how, as recently as the late 1990s, "Spanish as the sole indicator of [Puerto Rican] national identity" was still a prevailing trend in some academic and political circles ("Imagining" 261-62). Considering these facts, it is noteworthy that the Puerto Rican-born Sánchez, who has lived and worked on the island for most of his life, would pen a story that incorporates Spanish-, Spanglish-, and English-speaking Puerto Ricans in his mobile community. Likewise, María Acosta Cruz's *Dream Nation* (2014) examines the *independentista* tendency of many Puerto Rican authors and intellectuals and rehearses the decades-old conflict between nationalist and annexationist Puerto Ricans surrounding the "Spanish-only" policy on island. Despite identifying Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (1976) as an overtly pro-independence novel, Acosta Cruz observes that, regardless of its author's political leanings, the later "La guagua aérea" embraces the reality of the floating nation (65-66). Finally, regarding this airborne community, Diana Aramburu's "The Migrant Nation in *La guagua aérea*" reads the text as a rewriting of the migrant experience, whose "performance of orality" unleashes the carnivalesque (as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin) to "tell the story of a migrating community searching for permanence whether it be here or there" (48).

In addition to examining orality, a second critical trend has been to credit Sánchez's story with negating precisely this notion of "here or there" and replacing it with "here *and* there." To wit, many critics point to "La guagua aérea" as having a significant role in countering the "authentic-islander" versus "colonized-mainlander" dichotomy that became a frequent motif in Puerto Rican literature, principally from the island (Burgos 134). Torres-Padilla and Rivera discuss the pervasiveness, even during the most recent "third wave" of Puerto Rican migration to the mainland,[10] of the belief that Puerto Rican literature takes up a "nationalizing agenda," typically signifying *either* a Puerto Rican *or* a U.S. American national identity (13). In "Nation on the

[9] I use the term "national" in the way for which Jorge Duany advocates when referring to Puerto Rico, which is to bear in mind that Puerto Rico's unique political status (see footnote five) means that it is a "stateless nation" due to its commonwealth relationship with the United States. Duany's "Nation on the Move" (2000) discusses this "stateless nationhood" at length.

[10] Clara E. Rodríguez undertakes a historical analysis of Puerto Rican migration to explain the causes and motivations behind three principal periods of migration to the U.S. mainland. These periods, widely accepted throughout critical studies, are: "los pioneros" of 1900-1945, "the Great Migration" of 1946-1964, and "the revolving door migration" of 1965 to the present (104-05). For a comprehensive reading that considers literary and critical trends of the diaspora in relation to these waves of migrants, see "The Literature of the Puerto Rican Diaspora and Its Critical Practice," in the above-mentioned *Writing Off the Hyphen* by Torres-Padilla and Rivera.

Move," Duany affirms, "Sánchez's powerful metaphor for circular migration helps to redefine the geographic terms (here/there; Island/mainland; us/them) in which Puerto Rican identity has usually been couched" (20). This tendency is further examined in "Puerto Rican Literature in a New Clave" (2008), in which William Burgos compares "La guagua aérea" to Ana Lydia Vega's "Pollito/Chicken" (1977), concluding that, "unlike his compatriot, Sánchez's vision of Puerto Rican identity avoids the polarities of 'authentic' and 'colonized' that inform Vega" (135). Sánchez's story rejects this binary, and, as Acosta Cruz concludes in *Dream Nation*, the story's "punch line" is precisely that the island of Puerto Rico extends to the U.S. mainland, given that "New York City is just another *pueblo* [*puertorriqueño*]" (66).

The last critical trend in analyses of Sánchez's writing is the frequency with which scholars identify his work as postmodernist. There are two main factors contributing to this interpretation. First, critics such as William Burgos point to the narrative strategies employed in the text, which "draw with versatile sophistication on the full arsenal of techniques that characterize postmodernist texts: nonhierarchized juxtaposition of high and low cultural references, dizzying shifts in narrative perspective, the absence of a 'unifying' voice or perspective, and the pervasive use of parody to put all perspectives into 'free play'" (135). Alberto Sandoval Sánchez makes a similar observation, noting that Sánchez's use of parody and irony renders migration "a postmodernist spectacle and performance" (199). The second factor relates to the text's genre, as scholars like Myrna García Calderón posit that the fragmented nature of Sánchez's text, as well as its similarities to the chronicle, propitiate a postmodern reading of the work (299-300). Relatedly, Aníbal González reads "La guagua aérea," with its self-conscious deconstruction of genre (is it an essay? a lecture? a short story? a performance?),[11] alongside Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). In his 1994 review of Sánchez's text, González even affirms that the anthology goes beyond the postmodern by:

> haberle dado otra vuelta de tuerca a la tradición genérica en la cual se sitúa. Al literalizar la metáfora del viaje, Sánchez pone al desnudo en su libro la naturaleza del ensayo como proceso, pero también desbarata el afán de transparencia comunicativa, la impersonalidad u objetividad autoritaria, que es un residuo o contaminación moderna dentro de la posmodernidad del ensayo como género. Al hacer esto último, Sánchez le restituye al autor de ensayos su condición posmoderna, pues lo despoja de su invisibilidad cuasi-divina para tornarlo visible y palpable en su humanidad. (106-07)

The following analysis relates to each of these critiques, and combines them in a way that seeks to respond to the question: What can Luis Rafael Sánchez's text, "La guagua aérea," tell us—decades after its publication—about the globalized, increasingly postnational world in which we live? I contend that Puerto Rico, as a stateless nation (see footnote nine) whose community reaches far beyond its geographical borders, has much to offer on the topic. To respond to this query, my reading of "La guagua aérea" employs the theoretical concepts of *space*, *place*, and *non-place*, as well as the epochal term *supermodernity*, proposed by anthropologist Marc Augé. Now, I turn to Augé's text to explicate his anthropological usage of these terms before employing them in my analysis of Sánchez's text.

[11] The present study does not attempt to resolve the question of the text's genre, particularly since I agree with critics in that the text exhibits formal traits of multiple genres, in particular the short story and the essay. However, for consistency, I refer to the text as a "short story" throughout.

Space, Place, and Non-Place in the Epoch of Supermodernity

French anthropologist Marc Augé's 1992 study, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*,[12] takes as its object of study the "here and now" (8) of the modern world, and Augé calls this epoch "supermodernity." The goal of his study is twofold. First, he sets out to demonstrate that this historical period merits anthropological consideration, and second, he seeks to adequately define supermodernity, which, as a new object of study, must be fully understood before it may be analyzed. The text, then, serves as a first step toward a proper "anthropology of contemporaneity" (40). To achieve this, Augé enters into an extensive discussion of *space* versus *place*, and introduces the concept of *non-place*, which is uniquely prevalent in supermodernity. Augé first establishes his use of "space" as an abstract term that denotes the raw area available for human interactions. It has not yet been socially demarcated, and thus is not considered "place." He then describes how the division and organization of space is essential to any social collectivity, as it allows members to symbolize their shared identity and to designate "the *place* of the social order" (51 my emphasis). This shift from *space* to *place* is of import, and only occurs when a particular space has three characteristics: identity, relations, and history (52). A space has identity when there is a particular discourse associated with it that demarcates its boundaries and serves to express the culture of the particular social group that lives within it (52-53). Likewise, relations of co-existence within a space—whether relations of objects inside the space or people who use or live in it—render a given space unique (53-54). Finally, space becomes historical with "a minimal stability" that gives it a special quality in our memory (54). These three characteristics—identity, relations, history—work together to convert a *space* into an anthropological *place*. As in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983, 2006), Benedict Anderson's seminal work on nation formation and collective identities, Augé emphasizes that the features of anthropological place are *inventions* defined by those who shift, in their imaginations, a space into a place. These particular qualities are not inherent or autochthonous to a space, but rather are conferred upon it by inhabitants and communities (43).

This discussion of the traditional conception of anthropological place (as distinct from more general, abstract space) is important for Augé's approach to supermodernity, given that a unique feature of supermodernity is its tendency to produce and proliferate *non-places*. The remainder of Augé's study endeavors to differentiate *place*, which is defined as a space that is "relational, historical and concerned with identity" from spaces that lack these features, which Augé terms *non-places* (77-78). "Non-places" designate "spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure)" (94), as opposed to the "organically social" use of anthropological place. Some examples of these frequented but not lived in spaces are hospitals, supermarkets, highways, and casinos (78). According to Augé, spaces of travel are "the archetype of *non-place*" (86 original italicization). The interior of an airplane, a passenger ship, or an autobus, then, is emblematic of the non-place. One of Augé's central theses concerning supermodernity is that it proliferates an excess of the individual ego. As Michel de Certeau affirms in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), when individuals frequent space (as opposed to place), they temporarily lose their identity and "repeat the gleeful and silent experience of infancy: to be other" (Certeau qtd. in Augé 83). Expanding on this point, Augé comments that non-places afford

[12] First published in 1992 as *Non-Lieux, introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, the text was translated to English in 1995 by John Howe. The present study uses the 1997 reprint of the 1995 translation. The reader will note that Howe utilizes British English, and the spellings of certain words cited here (*traveller* versus *traveler*, for instance) reflect that.

a loss of identity and "solitude" (87) due to the standardized, shared identity of anyone passing through them (101), and he asserts that the "traveller's space may thus be the archetype of *non-place*" (86).

To exemplify his theory of the non-place, Augé begins his study with an account of what might be deemed archetypical air travel. A French businessman drives himself to the airport, enjoying the light traffic afforded by his Sunday morning departure. He unburdens himself of his suitcase at the airline's check-in counter and wanders the airport to do some duty-free shopping. This unnamed traveler purchases an easy read for the plane and arrives early to the gate with "nothing to do but wait for the sequence of events" (2-3). The passenger enjoys his solitude in this crowded place of "a thousand individual itineraries" (3), and, once he has boarded the plane, with his seat reclined and the flight map consulted, the businessman settles in, "alone at last" (6). It is noteworthy that, before an individual can access the non-place to enjoy this feeling of "alone at last," identification and proof of purchase (or means of future purchase), must be established. Thus, implicit in the ability to gain entry to a non-place is a certain degree of privilege. Shopping in a supermarket, driving on a highway, gambling in a casino, traveling by plane: one needs a certain measure of wealth and a form of identification to gain entry to these locations. Debit and credit cards require a four-digit pin or signature; one must have a passport to cross national (and increasingly state and regional) borders; and insurance, a valid drivers license, and registration is required to drive a vehicle. Augé emphasizes that those who enter the non-place must have the requisite identification and economic means to prove "that the contract has been respected [...]. In a way, the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence" (102).

Once "innocence" has been proven and the "contract" has been fulfilled, the passenger, customer, or driver in the non-place "surrenders himself [...] to the passive joys of identity-loss" and is able to enjoy the solitude and anonymity of the non-place (103). The present study reads Sánchez's "La guagua aérea" alongside these observations and considers how Sánchez's story issues a challenge to Augé's conceptualization of space. This is because the flying bus of Sánchez's story, despite its designation as "the archetype of the non-place," is rendered a space of resistance to the anonymity and non-relational identity of the non-place. Certain passengers on the plane refuse or are incapable of surrendering to the above-mentioned "passive joys of identity-loss" that are central to the non-place. My reading seeks to show how the flying bus achieves the hallmarks of place as defined by Augé—to be endowed with history, relations, and identity—albeit temporarily. I explicate how this temporary *place*-within-a-*non-place* is realized, and I address the implications of this anomaly and question how the Puerto Rican context may serve as a synecdochal example for understanding spatial relations in our increasingly postnational global milieu.

Augé and Sánchez: The Flying Bus as *Place* or *Non-Place*?

Augé notes that there are two principal linguistic means of differentiating between place and non-place. First, the very act of naming a space is a clue to its designation as place or non-place. Non-places resist specificity, and their designations "are more functional than lyrical," making non-place labels easily transmutable to any similar, non-symbolized space on the planet (*Non-Places* 82). A sports arena, a hotel bar, an amusement park: the indefinite article is indexical of the non-place. In the case of Sánchez's story, with only a glance at the title, the reader will recognize that the space of the plane has been differentially marked. The flying bus of "La guagua aérea" is distinct from every other aircraft that does not "rutea[r] todas las noches entre los aeropuertos de Puerto Rico y de Nueva York" (12). The definite article *la* individualizes the plane,

and the carefully chosen noun locates it geographically. *Guagua*, "el humilde sustantivo [...], locución caribeña por *autobús*" (González 107), suggests an intrinsically Caribbean space.[13] Before entering the narration, then, the reader is aware of a distinguishing characteristic that narrows all possible aircraft down to a relatively diminished subset of planes. Additionally, the subset is not solely based on functionality, but very much on lyricism. As García Calderón notes, Sánchez employs "un discurso profundo, irreverente, hiriente, doloroso y magistralmente articulado [...] que pide a gritos ser leído en voz alta" (300). The assonance of the three-word title certainly qualifies it as poetic, consequently complicating the space of the plane as its very name endows it with a rhythmic lyricism.

The space of the flying bus is thus immediately complicated by its designation. The transition continues from non-place to place as language and interactions fill the plane's (meta)physical space. In *Non-Places*, Augé explains that each space has its norms and rules, which function to create and maintain the conventions of the space. Upon accessing a non-place, every subject enters into a social contract that he or she may observe or break, but the accepted norms of each non-place are undeniable. Augé stresses that one of the alluring features of supermodernity is precisely that, in the non-place, the subject is permitted to suspend the pressures of place, with its relationships and identity-based expectations (94-95). The traveler "is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of the passenger [...and] he tastes for a while—like anyone who is possessed—the passive joys of identity-loss, and *the more active pleasure of role-playing*" (103 my emphasis).

When Sánchez's story begins, the reader is presented with just this "pleasure of role-playing" in the form of a pastiche of a Hollywood action movie. As John Dimitri Perivolaris notes in *Puerto Rican Cultural Identity* (2000), "the *gringos* are united in their own spontaneous solidarity, [...] exemplified by the common cultural language of cinema" (63). This solidarity is based on a tacit agreement to play the role of frightened airplane hostages, with "la rubia azafata" exemplifying the clichéd nature of the script. The attractive flight attendant, "gélida blonda como fue la Kim Novak en sus días de blonda gélida" (11), dramatically performs the role of damsel in distress, summoning to mind an image of the ultimate exotic Hollywood Other: King Kong. Her movements are reminiscent of a movie script as she fearfully backs away from the object of her terror. The lights of the plane contribute to the performative nature of the scene: "Rápido se hace la luz, sopetonazo violador de la retina, sopetonazo que alumbra los latidos cardíacos de los pasajeros. La guagua aérea se convierte en un mamut autopsiado por indiscretas fluorescencias" (11). The scripted movements of the flight attendant, "a media pulgada de la consunción por el horror" (11), and her prototypically Hollywood physical description point to her role as a type rather than a nuanced individual attempting to mediate place in the story.

Such a dramatic turn of events in a non-place may seem impetus enough to provoke the creation of place, but these types of unforeseen breaks in the unfolding of travel are accounted for in Augé's philosophy. The anthropologist recognizes that variation within expected itineraries occurs, and he dubs these variations "elements of spectacle" (103). These are distinguished from place-creating content in that they represent "the urgency of the present moment" without forging relationships among the passing individuals affected (104). *In the Metro* (2002), Augé's personal account of one day as a passer-through in the ultimate French non-place—the Parisian Metro—recognizes the "collective effervescence" (24) that can momentarily emerge when a certain event,

[13] *Guagua* is a quintessentially Latin American word, as it reflects the differences and influences among its many cultures. In South America, for instance, *guagua* translates to "baby" (specifically in Chile and Ecuador) and has roots in the indigenous languages of Quechua and Mapuche ("Guagua"). As Sánchez's story exemplifies, in the Caribbean, *guagua* is a bus.

such as an election or a protest, imbues a non-place with a special force of emotion. However, these moments are brief and do not form authentic relational connections. This is because the conventions of the non-place provoke similar reactions in each of the anonymous individuals witnessing the spectacle. The traveler finds himself mirrored in those around him and experiences "the face and voice of a solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others. [...] The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude" (*Non-Places* 103).

This collective solitude is present in Sánchez's story until the revelation that "una pareja de jueyes" is the source of the flight attendant's fear. Until that revelation, the reaction of the entire flight is singular, and this initial scene is the only moment in the text when the narrator refers to everyone on board—*gringo* and *mestizo*, first- and economy class passengers—as "los viajeros" without distinguishing among the groups (11). As one, all passengers imagine the worst. As one, their heads turn in search of the terrorist. As one, all passengers feel a growing sense of hysteria (11). Although no interaction takes place and no relationships are formed, there is a unified reaction to the tense situation and an embodiment of the solitary similitude of Augé's non-place. Throughout "La guagua aérea," there is a struggle over the interior space of the plane: the first-class passengers and the flight crew seek to maintain the plane's classification as non-place while the economy class moves that classification toward place. The role-playing, collective solitude of the initial scene is the only moment in which the balance of that struggle favors the plane as non-place.

Once the passengers become aware of the hilarious source of the panic (los jueyes), the economy class travelers[14] break script and reject the role-playing that is unfolding. From this moment on, the narrator explicitly differentiates between the excitable, vivacious Puerto Ricans and the *gringos* and first-class passengers who constantly attempt to calm them down. Tellingly, this is the first time that the aircraft is referred to as the flying bus. In the action-movie sequence that opens the story, harsh lights transform the plane into an "autopsied mammoth" (11), as if the spectacular[15] nature of the situation thrusts the space firmly under the classification of non-place. It is laughter that dissipates the unnecessarily dramatic tension, allowing the economy class Puerto Ricans to reject the typified scene and reclaim the space of the aircraft.

When the role-playing has ended and the plane has regained its status as a mode of transportation rather than a Hollywood movie set, the first-class passengers and flight crew attempt to revive their roles as solitary travelers passing through a non-place. However, the behavior and discourse that follow the release of tension indicate that the hilarity caused by "los jueyes" has rendered null and void the non-place social contract for the economy class Puerto Ricans. Their refusal to permit "the relative anonymity that goes with the temporary identity" of the non-place (*Non-Places* 101) creates tension among the passengers, and the English speakers on board begin a series of unsuccessful attempts to recuperate spatial control. First, the Captain demands to know the identity of the owner of the escaped crabs, but his histrionics fail to intimidate a confession out of the passengers. His "parodiables gestos hitlerianos" seem ridiculous in comparison to the "llamativas habilidades manuales" of an economy class passenger who easily controls the situation by simply picking up the crabs (13). Later, after increased communal fervor, the flight crew attempts to quash the euphoria in the economy class with "sándwiches de pavo desabrido, saquitos

[14] It is important to note that there are Puerto Rican travelers in both the economy and first class.

[15] Which is in line with the abovementioned elements of spectacle that endow the non-place with "urgency in the present moment" without forging relationships (104).

de maní, coca cola por un tubo y siete llaves, juegos de barajas" (16), futilely resorting to stale food and in-flight distractions to subdue the lively *boricuas*.

Reflective of their desire to perform the role of identity-less, anonymous travelers, the English speakers on board *la guagua aérea* are subject to an insistently repetitive characterization. Every reference to the *gringos* aboard the plane is a form of purposeful repetition; they are mere carbon copies of themselves. Three times "el capitán o chófer de la guagua aérea" addresses the passengers (13, 16), each time failing in his attempt to contain the effervescent laughter that spreads through the cabin. Twice the crewmembers' lack of sense of humor is its only salient feature, as "la tripulación, uniformemente gringa esta noche, parece inmune a la risa" (12, 16). Finally, the *gringo* passengers, annoyed in their ignorance, are ironically described on two occasions as "unos ángeles de vuelo bajo y tendencia fisgonera [que] sacrificarían el oropel sagrado de los bucles por saber de qué demonios se ríe ese gentío mestizo que vuela, campechano, por sus lados" (12, 15). The stock nature of these characters and their utter failure to understand and control the energetic exchanges among the *boricuas* lends a farcical tone to their presence in the story. As Perivolaris reiterates, the language that surrounds them is extracted from a Hollywood script—but it is a tired, clichéd script. In the poem "Crowds" (1864), Charles Baudelaire reflects on the writing process, revealing how he interacts with and observes those around him:

> The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or someone else, as he chooses. Like those wandering souls who go looking for a body, he enters as he likes into each man's personality. For him alone everything is vacant; and if certain places seem closed to him, it is only because in his eyes they are not worth visiting.

The crew and gringo passengers are a bland cast that does not warrant Sánchez's rhetorical attention.

What does merit Sánchez's attention, however, are his compatriots' "carcajadas llamativas por el placer y la ferocidad que las transportan" (12). The fearful silence caused by the flight attendant's scream is broken by laughter so powerful that it forces the narrator to record its violence on paper: "De pronto, una carcajada corrompe, pareadamente [...]. *Pura en su ofensa, tan nítido el paréntesis por ella recortado que cabría pegada en una página*" (12 my emphasis). This identification of the need to record is precisely why Aníbal González deems the text to be exemplary of the postmodern work. In summarizing Jean-François Lyotard's definition of the postmodern genre, González states, "la posmodernidad del ensayo como género consiste en su dramatización de la búsqueda de las reglas que definen su propia actividad. Al tratar de autodefinirse, el ensayo intenta hablar de lo que habrá hecho (de ahí su perspectiva postrera, *post*) aunque siempre está condenado a permanecer en el presente (en el latín, *modo*)" (103). The narrator of "La guagua aérea" cannot help but write, which becomes evident as he records time and again the utterances of his fellow Puerto Rican travelers. These powerful exchanges challenge the spatial designation of the flying bus, and they fill the space with Puerto Rican identity in such a way that place is carved out of non-place. Just as the title conjures *lo caribeño* with the simple invocation of the term "guagua," the richness of the Puerto Rican discourse—"el ingenioso apalabramiento puertorriqueño" (Castro Pereda 8)—transforms the plane's interior.

Juxtaposed against the colorless characterizations and relative silence of the *gringo* crew and first-class passengers, it is no surprise that the depth of the economy class Puerto Ricans' orality has been the focus of the above-mentioned literary criticism. *Mascullar, carcajadas llamativas, oraciones del Padre Nuestro, la risa, el desternillamiento general, la plaga de risa, las burlas, los comentarios ágiles, vivaces novelerías, el verbo agitado, el barullo* (12-13): in just the first two of eleven pages Sánchez finds nearly a dozen ways for the economy class to interrupt the silence following the flight attendant's scream. Unlike the caricatured "grito de espanto" of the

flight attendant, the utterances of the Puerto Ricans are markers of identity. Some display their Catholic heritage; others discuss their political opinions or tell off-color jokes. Men flirt with women and the women turn them down. Meanwhile, an oral map of both Puerto Rico and New York is drawn as passengers compare where they were born, what cities they have visited, and where friends and family reside. The atmosphere immediately following the emergence of *los jueyes* is raucous and jubilant and more reminiscent of a party or neighborhood get-together than a plane ride, which establishes "el amistar repentista y sin cuidado" (13).

The accumulation of orality creates a collective polyphony throughout the story, and it is not the nameless, referentially devoid chatter of the non-place "that will help to consume and pass the time" (*In the Metro* xviii), but rather the profound, relationship-forging, identity-based discourse of place. This directly contradicts the typical space of the non-place, which "creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude" (*Non-Places* 103). On the contrary, the very atmosphere of the flying bus is affected by the new relationships being forged: "La cordialidad fertiliza, ahora, la guagua aérea" (17). Revealed in these conversations are intimate details. For instance, the narrator exposes personal motivations behind various travelers' journeys: "Palique con un tal Cayo Díaz de Cayey que viene a abrazar los dos nietos que no ve desde septiembre. [...] Aparte con una tal Gloria Fragoso que viene a Nueva York a impedir que se muera Vitín, el hijo moribundo" (18). People are identified with names and places of origin, and it is clear that these relationships are not the prototypical fleeting connections associated with an anonymity-inducing non-place. The narrator states explicitly, though, that this exchange of intimate details is restricted to the economy class passengers: "Quede claro que la cordialidad dicharachera y ruidosa, confianzuda y que efervesce, se consagra en la cabina económica" (17). For these specific transatlantic travelers, place is created. Or, in the very least, non-place is negated.

Los hispanohablantes[16] are the only passengers aboard the aircraft whose discourse challenges the designation of non-place. As shown above, the interactions among the *boricuas* in the economy class form a community: "la euforia triunfa, se colectiviza" (14). Similar to the important role of language in the formation of nation in Anderson's *Imagined Communities*,[17] Augé affirms that language is precisely where place is created:

> Behind the cycle of hours and the outstanding features of the landscape, what we find are words and languages, [...the words] of all who speak the same language, and thus recognize that they belong to the same world. Place is completed through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are conniving in private complicity. (*Non-Places* 77)

Intentionally or not, the Puerto Ricans are privy to "passwords" that exclude the non-Spanish speaking passengers. This is clear in the curiosity shown by the English-speaking passengers, or "los ángeles de vuelo bajo y tendencia fisgonera [que] sacrificarían el oropel sagrado de los bucles por saber de qué demonios se ríe ese gentío mestizo" (12, 15). The reverse also proves true when "la vecina de asiento" asks the narrator to translate the Captain's announcement into English. This language barrier gives rise to an invisible boundary between some Puerto Ricans of the economy cabin and "los puertorriqueños guarecidos en la *First-class*" (17). The only explicit "conniving in private complicity" (*Non-Places* 77), however, occurs on the English-speaking side of this

[16] Although the first-class Puerto Ricans almost certainly speak Spanish, they only speak English throughout the story, and thus they are not included in this designation, *los hispanohablantes*.

[17] Anderson dedicates much of the chapter "Cultural Roots" to explaining how shared language, and particularly shared print language, proliferated the formation of national consciousness.

invisible line. The first-class Puerto Ricans ostentatiously criticize the noisiness of their compatriots "entre sorbo y sorbo de champaña californiana, para consumo del vecino yanqui de asiento" (17). Their criticism is made in English, and they firmly place themselves apart from the community that is forming in the economy class cabin.

The attitude of observation and isolation goes hand-in-hand with playing the role of traveler in a non-place. Each of the first-class Puerto Ricans, as well as the gringo crew and passengers, is merely a "spectator without paying much attention to the spectacle" (Augé 86). They are witness to the hubbub; they demonstrate dismay at the renunciation of the terms of the tacit non-place contract; they even prove curious as to what their Spanish-speaking flight companions find so humorous; but they show no interest in passing from spectator to participant in the place-making exchanges that are happening in economy class. These "ángeles de vuelo bajo" are appropriately holier than thou in their compliance with the expectations of the aerial social contract, which acts to underscore *lo puertorriqueño* of the interior space of the flying bus, given that no other identity is formed aboard the airplane.

Returning to Augé's criteria of place as those spaces which can be "defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity" (*Non-Places* 77-78), I hope to have sufficiently problematized the interior space of the flying bus in order to refute its designation as non-place. As has been demonstrated, the discourse exchanged and experiences shared among the economy class passengers aboard the Pan American flight clearly lend themselves to forming relationships and establishing identity. However, unlike such discourse and experiences shared in space designated as place, these exchanges are indisputably temporary and short-lived. Despite the thousands of flights between San Juan and New York City each year, it is highly unlikely that the same passenger manifest will ever be repeated. As such, due to the question of relational history in Augé's philosophy, the flying bus cannot be deemed place.

To reconcile this contradiction of not-(non)-place, I deploy the terms "diachrony" and "synchrony" from structural linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure's "Course in General Linguistics" (1916) defines synchrony as the cultural and relational facts of a particular historical moment. Conversely, diachrony is historical and relates to events occurring over time. Synchrony describes a singular state at a precise moment whereas diachrony describes the evolution of a chain of synchronic facts (64). In these terms, the flying bus of Sánchez's story is one synchronic event in a long diachronic history of transatlantic flights between San Juan and New York City. Due to this synchronic individuality, each flight between San Juan and New York City should not contain the requisite traits—relationships, identity, and history—to qualify it as place. However, I argue that, albeit with different passengers, such singular communities are repeated multiple times on a daily basis, every day of every year, which creates a "diachronic stability" (different from Augé's "historical stability") of singular communities of commuting Puerto Ricans. Given that each of these flights has elements of both place and non-place, I have chosen the term "placeholder" to characterize the ambiguous nature of the space. The term "placeholder" is briefly discussed in Joan Ramon Resina's "The Concept of the After-Image and the Scopic Apprehension of the City" (2003), however, my use of the term differs from his theorization.[18] In the context of the Puerto

[18] Resina's inquires into how knowledge and perceptions of urban spaces are intrinsically unstable over time. In the above-referenced chapter, Resina describes the after-image as "a visual sensation that lingers after the stimulus that provoked it has disappeared" (3), and emphasizes how the hyphenated form of the term encourages an examination of a city's image in terms of the history of its production and its temporal displacement in relation to our post-perceptual memory and processing of it. While elucidating his use of the term "after-image," Resina explains, "[m]ore a semantic placeholder than a place, the hyphen also expresses the gap in the after-image, itself a

Rican diaspora, the term placeholder acknowledges the unique dynamic that is facilitated by the diachronic stability of a space that is neither place nor non-place. Similar to the non-place, there is a social contract that will be executed in the space of the placeholder, but contrary to the non-place, the shared backgrounds and similar future trajectories of the individuals (in this case, passengers) facilitate immediate connections, empathy, and lowered inhibitions, especially in terms of discourse. This dynamic emerges when a non-place is frequented by a specific demographic that imbues it with temporary place in its role as placeholder. "Los puertorriqueños de la cabina económica" are the demographic in Sánchez's story that facilitates the emergence of the placeholder. In the below analysis, I will demonstrate the diachronic stability of "La guagua aérea" by pointing to the story's linguistic and thematic repetition. As such, the flying bus becomes the synecdoche of all transatlantic flights that shuttle Puerto Rican migrants between their mainland and island homes.

Sánchez uses a variety of linguistic devices to demonstrate that the Puerto Rican experience is unifying and goes beyond one individual flight. Among these, anaphora is one of the most pronounced:

> Anécdotas deleitosas por el inteligente montaje narrativo. Anécdotas de asuntos que enternecen. Anécdotas aliñadas con un palabrón usado al punto. Anécdotas telurizadas por el estilo arroz y habichuelas. Anécdotas protagonizadas por un jíbaro que no habla dócil. Anécdotas de puertorriqueños a quienes visitaron un día, juntamente, el desempleo, la hambre y las ganas de comer. Anécdotas desgraciadas de puertorriqueños, colonizados hasta el meollo, que se disculpan por el error de ser puertorriqueños. Anécdotas felices de puertorriqueños que se enfogonan y maldicen si se duda que son puertorriqueños. Anécdotas que chispean, como centellas, en el idioma español puertorriqueño. ("La guagua" 15)

This powerful linguistic moment demonstrates the resistance that can be found in orality. These "anécdotas, por millar, de boricuas que viajan, a diario" (15), are in response to "las afrentas," "los prejuicios a cara pelá," and "los prejuicios disfrazados" that the economy class experiences on the plane, on the island, and in New York City (15), and the list of anecdotes does not restrict itself to provocations that occur during this fourteen-hour plane ride, as the *boricuas* that speak are those that travel "a diario"—on a daily basis. The anaphora of the word "anécdota" universalizes the power of this verbal resistance. Any Puerto Rican can take up linguistic arms against prejudice by simply speaking. But this resistance is particular to those that resist in "el idioma español." Excluded are the first-class Puerto Ricans who, opting to speak only English, refuse to utter "[a]nécdotas telurizadas por el estilo arroz y habichuelas" (15).

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non-place, but one that re-places the image, restores it to place by infusing it with time and change" (22). The "placeholder" of the present essay differs from Resina's hyphen in that the flying bus of Sánchez's text is, of course, a literal space. Likewise, while Resina's placeholder is concerned with the sociocultural sphere's impact on place (the modern proliferation of tourism and the concomitant branding of places), this study is concerned with the sociopolitical domain and how non-place may be temporarily rendered place in a particular situation. However, our projects coincide in the prominence of temporality to both placeholders. Resina's hyphenated "after-image" denotes the "temporal dislocation of place," and he refers to Augé's *Non-Places* to explain how the "cultural tourist" of modernity expects an authentic experience when visiting one of History's iconic "places" (Nuremberg, Paris, etc.), but is frequently disappointed when "a gap is opened up between the landscape's present and the past to which it alludes" (Augé qtd. in Resina 22). This relates nicely to my use of placeholder as a non-place made temporary place by diachronic stability.

Similar to anaphora, repetition in general is omnipresent throughout the text. Particularly ubiquitous is the refrain "a treinta y un mil pies sobre el nivel del mar" (16, 18, 19) which adds to the frequent-flyer nature of the transatlantic flights. Hyperbole is used in a similar way. According to the narrator, the "carcajada [que] corrompe" the silence at the beginning of the story does not simply affect the passengers of this particular flying bus. Instead "la carcajada contagia *los cientos de viajeros* de la guagua aérea que *rutea todas las noches* entre los aeropuertos de Puerto Rico y de Nueva York" (12 my emphasis). Sánchez ends his story in a similar manner, emphasizing the many singular communities of migrating Puerto Ricans that share the experience of traversing great distances together: "Es la reivindicación de *los miles de compatriotas* que subieron, alelados y pioneros, a las catorce horas de aflictivo encierro en las antiguas y tembluzcas máquinas de volar" (21-22, my emphasis). The narrator accentuates the communal nature of the journey both via hyperbole, thus invoking the many Puerto Ricans who are not on his particular flight, and by selecting the word "compatriotas" to describe the members of this community.

The thousands of *compatriotas pioneros* speak the same "español puertorriqueño," and Sánchez constantly employs turns of speech that are specific to Puerto Rico. *A cara pelá*, *arroz y habichuelas*, *enfogonar*: Like the use of city and family names to illustrate the personal relationships that are formed between the passengers, these colloquial phrases infuse the text with a sense of locality. Even though the passengers on each of the flights change, the places they refer to and the expressions that they utter facilitate the unique social relations particular to the flying bus placeholder. Beyond forming relationships, the references are endowed with the power of synesthesia: "a treinta y un mil pies sobre el nivel del mar los puertorriqueños se enamoran de las fragancias pueblerinas" (19), and the narrator grants his compatriots supernatural powers over space: "¡Cuántas promesas transporta la guagua aérea al elevarse sobre el charco azul a que los puertorriqueños reducen el Atlántico!" (19). Through discourse, the Puerto Ricans effectively erase distance by reducing an entire ocean to the size of a puddle, and the flying bus placeholder serves as the bridge for the hundreds of Puerto Rican *compatriotas* that cross that expanse.

In addition to tropic devices that establish a cyclical linguistic litany in the text, thematic repetition also serves to underscore the recurrent nature of the transatlantic flights. The pair of crabs "con caminares de hampón tofete y buscabullas, jaquetona, indiferente a los escándalos y los miedos que su presencia convoca" (12), serves as a foreshadowing of the resentment toward the economy class travelers. Explicitly, this scene repeats itself time and again in the story as "la bayoya puertorriqueña" (16) disturbs the first-class passengers, but, just like the indifferent crabs, the economy class pays no mind to multiple requests for control by the Captain and crew. Implicitly, this is a scene that repeats itself on the dozens of flights every day and thousands of flights every year that make the trip between San Juan and New York City.[19]

Importantly, this repetitive scene of tense transatlantic commute also creates diachronic depth in the narrative, given that the stowaway crabs and the hundreds of nightly travelers have precursors of their own, which are alluded to throughout the story. The most overt historical reference lies in Sánchez's allusion to "los compatriotas pioneros" (21), which calls to mind the first wave of Puerto Rican migrants to the United States. Dubbed "pioneros," these Puerto Ricans came between 1900-1945 in search of industrial and agricultural opportunities on the mainland (Rodríguez 104-05). More subtly, in the final paragraph of the story, the narrator refers to "los miles de compatriotas que vieron la isla desaparecer, para siempre, desde la borda del vapor *Coamo* y la borda del vapor *Marine Tiger*" (21). This reference to the steamship travel between Puerto Rico and New York establishes the historical longevity of the journey. As Félix Matos Rodríguez

[19] According to TripAdvisor, more than 5,600 flights leave San Juan for New York City each year, and more than 6,700 flights make the journey from New York City to San Juan.

and Pedro Juan Hernández establish in *Pioneros: Puerto Ricans in New York City 1896-1948*, steamship travel between San Juan and New York City has occurred for over a century (9). *Pioneros* also indexes the relationship-based nature of early migration, as "acquaintances made during the trip were often important in finding employment and lodging upon arrival" (9). Such use of space is clearly more akin to place than non-place, and this level of confidence is repeated aboard the flying bus of Sánchez's story in the form of "el amistar repentista y sin cuidado" (13). According to *Pioneros*, the steamship journey from San Juan to New York City lasted four to five days, but even in the relatively short *encierro de catorce horas*, the Puerto Ricans of the flying bus exchange autobiographies and forge friendships.

The anecdote of the stowaway crabs in conjunction with the mention of the steamship *Marine Tiger* is a subtle reference to the latter's mid-twentieth century maiden voyage as a passenger ship between San Juan and New York City. According to genealogist Ariel Blondet, the SS Marine Tiger was a troop transport until the end of World War II. After the war, it was converted to a passenger ship, and an ancestry log compiled by Blondet reveals: "On June 24, 1946 [the SS Marine Tiger] sailed from San Juan, Puerto Rico with 929 passengers and arrived in Nueva York on June 28, 1946 with 931. The names of 2 stowaways were added to the passenger manifest. They were removed to Ellis Island" (1). Sánchez's appropriation and reconfiguration of the stowaways' journey to the United States—reimagined as the non-place-negating presence of "la saludable pareja de jueyes" (12)—emphasizes both the longevity of the *ir-y-venir* migration between the two ports and the tenacity with which Puerto Ricans make the journey. The extensive history of Puerto Rican migration to the United States in general, but New York in particular, effects a historical universalization of the experience aboard the flying bus and facilitates the existence of the spatial phenomenon of the placeholder.

Set in the archetypical non-place, Luis Rafael Sánchez's "La guagua aérea" complicates Augé's anthropological understanding of non-place. This complication can be detected in the reaction of the non-Spanish speakers to the environment in the flying bus. For the first-class passengers and crew, the interior of the plane presents a confusing, harrowing space, as their expectations of anonymity are unfulfilled. Their struggle to observe and enforce the familiar tacit rules of air travel fails given that the space of the flying bus is no longer, or never quite was, a non-place. Instead, the Puerto Ricans of the economy class enforce their own social contract by appropriating the space as a placeholder, both for the place they left behind in Puerto Rico and the place they will continue to after disembarking in New York City. The relational aspect of place is evident in the quick friendships that are made, the uninhibited nature of the discourse, and the general tone of intimate exuberance aboard the plane. Identity is reaffirmed in many ways, most explicitly in the exchange of names and personal histories, but also through local language, mention of cultural artifacts, and geographical references. Given the temporary nature of the aerial community, though, the space of the flight must be deemed a placeholder—a special designation that reflects the long, diachronic history of such singular communities. The recurrent nature of these commutes and the scale on which they occur are underscored by the literary tropes that Sánchez employs throughout "La guagua aérea." Through repetition, hyperbole, colloquial Puerto Rican language, and historical references, Sánchez unveils the enduring history of *boricua* migration that facilitates the distinctive space of placeholder.

There is a more sinister side to the existence of the placeholder, however, which emerges when we return to Augé's assertion that, before an individual may gain access to the non-place, he must produce identification and proof of purchase in order to "prove his innocence" (*Non-Places* 102). Considered under this caveat, access to the non-place is an undeniably bourgeois privilege, and the capacity to proceed anonymously—to surrender oneself "to the passive joys of identity-loss" (103), is reserved for travelers with a particular degree of wealth that form part of the

dominant social order. In this light, the inversion of the social order via carnivalesque orality and interactions on the part of the economy class in "La guagua aérea" takes on a less optimistic tone. Their disorderliness instead becomes indexical of a literal "out of order" condition, in the strong sense that they do not belong to the social order. In this way, the above description of the placeholder is lacking. We defined the placeholder as a sort of temporary place that emerges from the non-place, facilitated by the diachronic stability of a specific demographic that, despite lacking historical stability, imbues the non-place with the relational and identity-forming features of place. This definition must be supplemented by acknowledging that the "specific demographic" necessarily lacks the economic means or proper identification to comply with the implicit social contract of the non-place. Without appropriate financial means and documentation, the economy class is not able to licitly pass through the non-place in our present global configuration. In this way, the disorder and disruption serve as an unintentional or unavoidable reaffirmation of reigning social norms, and the economy class passengers open themselves up to discipline and control in the form of the captain's demands for order, the taunting of the English-speaking Puerto Ricans, and the flight crew's attempts to calm them down. To these latter entities—hegemony's representatives of the non-place—the economy class is guilty until proven innocent, and their innocence never arrives.

Despite shifts in Puerto Ricans' migration patterns—in the past three decades Florida has become the fastest-growing location for Puerto Rican settlement in the mainland U.S.[20]—Sánchez's story still serves as a valuable tool for comprehending how communities may be formed in liminal spaces, as it stages how the Puerto Rican diaspora has come to deploy a counter narrative to the spatial norms and restrictions of supermodernity. Likewise, the disorder of the economy class Puerto Ricans in "La guagua aérea" reaffirms reigning social norms that render the non-place inaccessible to them. In this way, the placeholder is at once a space of resistance and a space of vulnerability. This tension has particular relevance in the present global milieu, in which the current number of refugees seeking asylum and migrants hoping for economic stability is at an all-time high (Edwards 2016). As of 2016, almost ten percent of the world's population—65.3 million people—has been classified as displaced by the United Nations High Commission of Refugees (Edwards). Sánchez's "postmodern" text serves as a model for how a resilient community of seasoned migrants—this Puerto Rican "national community without a sovereign state" (Duany, "Imagining" 260)—is capable of eliding dominant social norms in order to form communities and relationships despite the temporary and precarious nature of a stateless people's surroundings. In turn, this skill of carving place out of non-place can serve as a survival strategy and a means of community building in refugee camps, detainment centers, and other liminal spaces that have become ubiquitous in recent decades. However, even as the text opens up a space for resisting hegemonic norms of spatial relations, it also serves to highlight the persistent nature of class distinctions and socioeconomic disparities in our increasingly globalized, postnational world.

[20] For more insight into the "Florirrican" phenomenon, see *Caribbean Migration to Western Europe and the United States*, edited by Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez, Ramon Grosfoguel, and Eric Mielants, particularly the chapter by Elizabeth Aranda, entitled "Puerto Rican Migration and Settlement in South Florida" (2008). Also see Duany's "Más allá de El Barrio" (2006). Finally, Gabriel Barreneche, Jane Lombardi, and Héctor Ramos-Flores's "A New Destination for 'The Flying Bus'?" (2012) addresses the implications of Florirrican migration for Sánchez's story.

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