# "*Paleto* Cinema" and the Triumph of Consumer Culture in Spain: The Case of Pedro Lazaga's *La ciudad no es para mí*

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In the late 1960s, while Spanish film critics attended to the growing œuvre of Carlos Saura and the unfulfilled promise of the *Nuevo Cine Español*, audiences flocked to a series of formulaic comedies later referred to as *paleto* films.[1] Characterized by such forgotten works as *El turismo es un gran invento* (1967), *De picos pardos a la ciudad* (1969), and *El abuelo tiene un plan* (1973); and the predictable performances of actors such as Alfredo Landa, Tony Leblanc, and especially Paco Martínez Soria, *paleto* cinema playfully reflected the plight of the hundreds of thousands of rural villagers invading Spanish cities throughout the decade. The popularity of these films seemed to rest on their gratuitous comedic broadsides of the cosmopolitan culture that confronted the unsophisticated rural immigrant (or *paleto*) and on the ultimate triumph of the films' country-bumpkin protagonists over the bewildering urban culture.

The few critics who have considered this popular subgenre read these movies as sustaining Franco-era stereotypes.[2] In them, the city and the modernization it represents are shown as corrupt, the country as a primeval idyll, and the immigrant, a hapless soul with delusions of urban grandeur. Such designations and the unlikely triumph of the rural over the modern and urban, according to María García León, provide therapy for an immigrant audience overwhelmed by the vast social changes wrought in the decade of Spain's "economic miracle" (41). Yet, it is these very changes, indeed the very rise of a culture of economic prosperity characterized by a newfound power of consumption, that demand a reconsideration of the *paleto* films.

The first and most popular film of the *paleto* subgenre, Pedro Lazaga's *La ciudad no es para mí* (1965), when read in light of these changes, reveals how such escapist cinema in fact became complicit with the very culture it supposedly critiques. Indeed, in the context of 1960s economic change the therapeutic revenge-of-the-immigrant effected in *La ciudad no es para mí* is transformed instead into a celebration of the rising commodity culture he confronts, wherein revenge is realized by way of the very capitalist formulas that the *paleto* protagonist presumes to attack. Ultimately, the positioning of the viewer in combination with the protagonist's anti-urban strategies in the film suggest a complicity of *paleto* cinema with a society bent on transforming a generation of immigrants traumatized by sudden geographic, economic, and cultural change into eager and active consumers. As the following re-reading of *La ciudad no es para mí* shows, the film's spectator-immigrants were being transformed into one of the principal commodities upon which Spanish consumer culture would be based even as they were hailed as the consumers that would consolidate that culture. In such a light, the role of *paleto* cinema is transformed from incidental to foundational in the construction of contemporary Spanish society.

## The Triumph of the *Paleto*

*La ciudad no es para mí*, the most commercially successful Spanish film of the 1960s, appears to derive its immense popularity from a rather simple storyline promising spectators an easy release of aggression against a corrupting, commodifying, and alienating urban lifestyle.[3] Its filmic therapy begins with an extensive introductory segment that establishes an early distinction between the wild world of the modern metropolis and the traditional Spanish rural idyll to come. This segment, incidental to the plot, captures spectator interest nonetheless. Its brief, fast-paced montage of life in modern-day Madrid establishes the city as the locus of frenzied workers identified more appropriately as numbers or mere images than as named individuals.

Following the opening urban scene, the film cuts to a shot of open sky, panning over to the skyline of a stereotypical Spanish village. The rock beat heard in the city sequence cedes to a light, folkloric tune. The narrator breaks from his breathless narration of urban life and states dreamily, "Menos mal que todavía quedan sitios más tranquilos donde la gente no tiene tanta prisa." He then introduces the spectator to the Zaragozan pueblo of Calacierva, a town of friendly faces, laughing children, and pure country air. A brief scene of collective celebration for the birth of a child confirms the narrator's idyllic description. The story then proceeds with an introduction of the town's principal figures, a device familiar to Spanish audiences of such *paleto*-esque precursors as *¡Bienvenido, Mr. Marshall!* (1952), *¡Aquí hay petróleo!* (1955), and *La vida en un bloc* (1956).

With the introduction to Calacierva completed the film's simple plot at last commences. The final town-member whom the spectator meets is Tío Agustín, a kind-hearted *campesino* played by *paleto*-comedy mainstay Paco Martínez Soria, who plays the role of unofficial village philanthropist.[4] A series of short scenes reveals the protagonist's pure heart and reaffirms the noble values inculcated in the daily routines of village life. In the midst of one of his typi-

cal civic deeds, Tío Agustín announces his intentions of abandoning the town to live out his final years with his son's family in Madrid. On the day of departure, Tío Agustín bequeaths all he has to his fellow villagers and sets off for the city, leaving a parade of reluctant well-wishers in his dust. His arrival in the city by train carrying an old wooden suitcase, a basket with two hens, and a portrait of his wife presents a familiar *paleto* image, dating back at least to the Franco era's first cinematic study of immigration, José Antonio Nieves Conde's *Surcos* (1951). As in *Surcos*, Tío Agustín is accosted on arrival at Atocha station by the stereotypical signs of urban chaos. Yet, unlike his neorealist precursors, the comedic Tío Agustín emerges unscathed and in fact meets out some scathing of his own on a con man, a traffic cop, and a tour guide who mistake him for any average country bumpkin. His domination of the city continues upon arrival at his son's luxurious high-rise flat. Initially rejected by son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter, Tío Agustín soon exposes the naiveté of their supposed urban sophistication. The process provides plenty of opportunity for a gratuitous critique of cosmopolitan lifestyles. His son works too much. His daughter-in-law seeks happiness in perpetual shopping, social-climbing, and illicit affairs. His granddaughter merely has her head in the proverbial clouds, speaking an incoherent cosmopolitan slang with friends, falling for older men, and above all, failing to appreciate her rural heritage. The family rarely dines together; when they do, dinner comes either canned or frozen. Lazaga's predilect symbol of this confusion is the family's prized Picasso, which they prefer to Tío Agustín's portrait of his late wife.

The protagonist appears undaunted by his wayward posterity. He teaches his son to be more free with his money and his time. He helps his daughter-in-law find renewed appreciation for her husband and her rural origins. He shows his granddaughter the value of her youth and of his maligned countryside. The kindly *paleto* even finds time to rescue the family servant from moral depravity. With order reestablished, the end comes quickly in *deus ex machina* fashion when, on the very evening that he reestablishes order, Tío Agustín receives a letter from Calacierva inviting him to return to the *pueblo* for a ceremony in his honor. During the festivities, Tío Agustín acquiesces to the wishes of the townspeople by deciding not to return to the city. The film concludes with a celebration in front of the *paleto*-(re)turned-patriarch's home where traditional Spanish musicians sing the praises of Tío Agustín.

The *paleto*'s smiling face at the scene's conclusion seems to confirm the film's exorcism of corrupting urban lifestyles on its immigrant-spectators and to reaffirm the bliss of country living that these subjects believe they desire. According to García de León the film unequivocally affirms that:

> La modernidad es libertinaje.
> La ciudad es desorden, caos.
> El pueblo es lo recto, lo justo.
> El hombre urbano es hombre errado.
> El hombre rural es hombre sabio. (36)

García de León argues that this purportedly anti-city message is in fact only carried out through the detrimental stereotyping of the *paleto* figure and the peripheral regions from which he or she comes.[5]

## The Triumph of the Consumer

In fact, a reconsideration of the film when placed in the consumer-frenzied con-

text of 1960s Spain suggests that this stereotyping of the *paleto* is a rather incidental product of a greater process. Within this process, the distinctions that García de León identifies between city and country disappear—or at least appear as superficial moral differences. The designations of the city as chaotic and the countryside as proper no longer read as oppositions but as confirmations of a homogenizing totalization within Lazaga's film. Such extreme oppositions derive from a common presentation of both sites as lifeless objects better suited to possession and exchange than to living. Indeed, rereading *La ciudad no es para mí* within its historical context reveals not only city and country, but protagonist, and ultimately audience/consumer as succumbing by way of the film's processes to a common fate of commodification.

Such commodification plays on a precinematic positioning of the film audience as consumers who understand consumption as the key to happiness. In the Spain of the 1960s, immigration and modernization had undone relatively stable premodern distinctions between the Spanish urban and rural, producing rather high and often violent anxieties among those who lived these experiences (as recorded in films such as *Surcos* (1951) as well as in the social realist narrative of Jesús Fernández Santos, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, and Ignacio Aldecoa). However, Lazaga's presentation of these changes in terms of a reified relation between commodities masks the social exchanges and values that actually comprise cities, countrysides, and their interface through the actions of the flesh-and-blood immigrant. Such reification creates the illusion that urban and rural spaces and the relations between them can be bought, sold, and handily controlled. Consequently, as will be shown, Tío Agustín's triumph in *La ciudad no es para mí* is not so much the triumph of the premodern *paleto* but rather the victory of the modern capitalist. That is, if the *paleto* figure *is* stereotyped as García de León insists, and if he is subsequently "murdered" in a collective act of psychosocial patricide, he is resurrected as a capitalist messiah bringing a message of easy felicity to his audience.

Numbers surrounding urban-bound migration and economic opportunity during these years suggest an audience ready for such an appealing message. The mid-1960s spectator most likely had much direct experience with the migratory wave that moved 3.8 million Spaniards to the cities between 1951 and 1970 (Schubert 210). Many spectators would have been recent immigrants. The "locals" who welcomed them to the city were in turn most likely second- or third-generation immigrants themselves, having contributed to an earlier urban growth spurt between 1900 and 1930, when the populations of Madrid and Barcelona had doubled (Álvarez-Junco 86). In short, the *paleto*'s audience was itself composed of *paletos*. Still, this new *paleto* audience was in many ways very different from the landless and defeated immigrants watching movies in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Unlike the audience of the neorealist film, *Surcos*, for example, the mid-1960s spectator enjoyed a socio-economic position that encouraged far more favorable attitudes toward the consumer society supposedly critiqued in Lazaga's film.[6] Living the high years of Spain's "economic miracle," audience members, if not already well-established in the city (in most cases thanks to earlier immigration), at least saw the promise of a much-improved future, filled with television sets, refrigerators, automobiles,

and the very high-rise flats that director Pedro Almodóvar would mock two decades later in *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* (1984). Economic numbers from the era confirm that by 1966 Spanish audiences had become a true modern consumer class (Riquer I Permanyer 265; Hooper 19; Biescas 518; Schubert 258).[7] Finally, the 1960s immigrant was typically no longer a starving rural laborer seeking subsistence, but a former member of a rural middle class who would have enjoyed a lifetime of experience with a relative degree of economic purchasing power (Hooper 22). So while the audience of *La ciudad no es para mí* was responding to a film that told its own story as had earlier generations watching Florián Rey's *La aldea maldita* (1930, 1942) or Nieves Conde's *Surcos* (1951), its response was no longer shaped by the effects of prohibitive pre-filmic narratives. The 1960s public was for the first time ripe for a confirmation rather than a critique of their consumer lifestyle.

Of course, these relatively prosperous immigrant spectators still pined for the rural world that the propaganda machines of the regime had so long championed as essential to their identity. Even if the regime had recently recanted its earlier anti-urban attitudes, a celebration of the new could not be a bald-faced denial of the old. The countryside had to be at least superficially redeemed for the spectators in the process of fulfilling the patricidal Oedipal longings of these would-be urban consumers. This duplicitous redemption was to be fulfilled by extending the process of commodification beyond that of representing pueblos and metropoli as products for exchange. The triumph of *La ciudad no es para mí* derives from its ability to portray the entire redemptive process of the triumph of the rural over the urban as itself a commodity. Such a move ultimately exalted a more profoundly urban socio-economic order. Spectators learned that only in accepting this latter urban system could they save rural Spain.

## The Triumph of the *Paleto* as Consumer

The production of the consumer-subject commences as early as the film's apparently innocent opening credits, superimposed onto a montage of images of hurried and harried city life. From the first shot of the film the spectator is placed so as to view the Madrid skyline from the surrounding countryside, and understand the city as a unified, comprehensible "good." The credits begin to roll as the camera cuts to a rapid-fire montage of a fast-motion ultra-modern Madrid cityscape set to the heavy beat of 1960s-era rock music. At the completion of the credits another melody raised to an even higher pitch, volume, and tempo, accompanies an equally fast-paced sequence of speeding cars and neon signs advertising TWA, Telefunken, Schweppes, and other foreign brands. Spectators next find themselves in the driver's seat of a highly revved automobile speeding along Madrid's newest roads at a break-neck pace. A high-strung voice-in-off reports on a sequence of changing city-scapes:

> Madrid, Capital de España. 2,647,253 habitantes. Crecimiento vegetativo 129 personas cada día; población flotante, 360,580 personas. 472,527 vehículos; 110,853 baches y socavones. Un nacimiento cada 45 segundos. Dos bodas y media por hora. Y una difunción cada minuto y medio; Y bancos, muchos bancos... Y super-

> mercados, muchísimos supermercados. Y casas, casas en construcción, montañas de casas en construcción. Y farmacias, toneladas de farmacias. Y zona azul, kilómetros de zona azul; y multas, demasiadas multas. Esta es una ciudad donde todo hay que hacerlo muy de prisa.

As the monologue concludes, the narrator stops a man on the street whom the mock-neorealist camera has supposedly been following at random as he frantically (and literally) runs his errands. The narrative voice-in-off interrupts the man's activities to ask the reason for his hurry. The man, obviously pressed for time, explains that he has five jobs, all necessary in order to pay for the television, the refrigerator, the summer vacation, his children's schooling, and his car, after which he speeds off in his SEAT 600. The narration, on the one hand, mocks the statistical nature of city-life; on the other, such supposed mockery transforms the city into a commodity, dividing and objectifying its parts as if a factory manual of Taylor-ist inspiration. It dissects an organic city into a conglomeration of reified objects for the spectator to consume. This consumption is not only encouraged by the fast-paced montage of shots, but is foregrounded by the positioning of the spectator in the seat of the sports car speeding along as if devouring the city beneath it. The narration criticizes a society in which citizens rush out of the metro on their way to fulfilling their frenzied objectives, but in fact, cinematography, sound, and editing combine to produce the same frenzied effect on the spectator. Even as it criticizes, it trains its spectator in that which it censures. The scene with the frazzled consumer-patriarch finally brings this early interpellation into a practical focus. The scene, similar to most comedy, relies on the humor inherent in the juxtaposition of implausible behavior (the man's excesses) with plausible actions (the man's basic patriarchal responsibilities).[8] While comedy typically relies on an excess of the implausible, in this case the division between the implausible and the plausible is strained; the consumer-patriarch may serve as a comedic whipping boy, but he also stands as a model post-traditional consumer to the spectator. He may be frazzled, but he also comes across as well-mannered, likeable, and dedicated to fulfilling his family's basic needs. His situation, though presented as absurd, is ultimately all too real.

The following scene, in which the *campo* initially seems an idyllic opposite of the city, in fact serves to further the construction of the world-as-commodity. In contradistinction to the information-laden shots of the city, the rural sky appears clean and open. This openness, however, is deceiving; the camera, in fact, has focused on a set of powerlines. The pan across to the townscape is equally deceptive, appearing to offer an expansive view of the country while in fact following the same powerlines into the village, implicitly connecting the town to its industrialized "sister city," and specifically, to the recently visited modern metropolis. The metropolis and the village, it suggests, are in fact not so different or disconnected.

The narrator's initial description of the village, as with that of the city, focuses on facts and figures: "su principal riqueza son el melocotón y los higos y el clima, sanísima." Even the birth of its newest child is introduced through the humorous adjustment of town population statistics: "Tiene 926 habitantes"—(cries in-off of a newborn)—"perdone, 927." The narrator's subsequent introduction of the town's princi-

pal figures is more a *costumbrista*-inspired commodification of the stereotypical *aldea*'s folkloric figures than a vision of the organic social relations of rural life: the mayor spends his days with ear to the ground hoping to discover oil (a behavior that recalls *¡Aquí hay petróleo!*); the postman approaches his job more as a chance to ride a bike than as serious work (*à la* the French comedian Tati in *Jour de fête*); best of all, in spite of the necessary quips about rural poverty, everyone has time to play cards and sip wine. The first sustained narrative scene of the film, in which Tío Agustín defends his fellow peasant's hard-earned money against a reluctant government official in a game of poker occurs in a typical rural bar surrounded by wine-sipping Spaniards. In spite of this apparent rural relaxation, such leisure, like the original pan of the town, is implicitly linked to the modern metropolis through the all-seeing eye of a television set placed prominently in the upper right-hand corner of the shot. Beneath the gaze of modern technology, Tío Agustín wins back the receipts of the townspeople from a flustered tax collector as if the people's labor were chips to be bought, sold, and gambled. Tío Agustín's victory allows him to sustain himself as the village's noble philanthropist. His philanthropy, however, comes only through a reduction of fellow villagers to mere units of capital.

Throughout the film, in fact, Tío Agustín's value is repeatedly wound up in the representation of social relations in terms of hard cold cash. In the scene following the victory in the bar the philanthropist bestows on the crippled Belén an odd looking gadget supposedly designed for weaving sweaters. In the young woman's delight she identifies for the audience the real reason to admire her benefactor, exclaiming, "¿Cuánto habrá costado?" Tío Agustín ignores her query and instead tells her to forget such matters. In a move typical of the logic of commodity culture that must efface the material relations upon which it is established, Tío Agustín works to position himself as if beyond the tug of capital. Already adept at the games of the commodity culture with which he will soon enter into false combat in the city, Tío Agustín replaces human interaction with exchange values and then denies the eminence of the latter. Curiously, the one character who does not appreciate the gift is Belén's aged grandmother. However, her age, her deafness, and its humorous presentation label those who do not understand the value of the commodity as antiquated or even spiritually inept—lacking, as they do, "ears to hear" the proverbial ring of cash registers.

Tío Agustín's activities in the village, however, are mere precursors to the true interpellation of the subject-as-consumer that occurs once the villager arrives in Madrid. The moral and aesthetic criticisms historically endemic to city life provide the perfect smokescreen for the material inequities and contradictions of the consumer culture that hails the 1960s-era spectator. From the moment of his arrival at his children's flat, Tío Agustín's principal mission appears to be the resolution of his son and daughter-in-law's waning romance and the threat of infidelity that hangs over it. The recently arrived *paleto* openly blames his family's moral failure on the city. The protagonist focuses still further attention on urban moral corruption in the letters that he sends to his friends in the village wherin he underlines the remarkable "mujerío" of the city. The village priest consistently censors these lines, keeping alive the spectator's interest in the city's corrupting capacity. The

one significant subplot of the film, the servant Filo's unplanned pregnancy, though replete with its own connections to consumer culture, initially suggests moral crisis as again the most significant challenge offered by life in the metropolis.

This moral crisis finds symbolic utterance in the aesthetic failure of post-traditional modernity. Tío Agustín's country values do battle with his family's urban lack-thereof in an ongoing contest for wall space between the portrait of the father's "Agustinica" and the son's "Picasso" forming one of the principle *leit-motifs* of the film. The protagonist and his rural side-kick, Filo, repeatedly become physically sick at the sight of the Picasso, implying that the aesthetic, whether manifest in a painting, in Sara's rock music, or in her friend Gogo's foreign-laced city-speak, is more than a mere symptom of some collective social psychosis but its very cause. Consequently, if moral and aesthetic decay lay at the heart of the city's ills, as the film suggests, then the solutions, also according to the film, lie in a bit of old fashioned country drinking, tale telling, and luck—the very methods employed by the *paleto* to redeem his granddaughter, the servant, and his son's marriage respectively.

The film levels one final gratuitous, but again smoke-screening, critique at the once sacred authority of patriarchy. The village mayor, a city traffic cop, and the doorman of the family's high-rise apartment all suffer a bit of light-hearted authority-bashing in the film's opening scenes. The mayor fails in his attempts to keep Tío Agustín from leaving the village and is left instead as the reluctant caretaker of his property. In the city, the police officer cannot keep the *paleto* from tying up traffic and for his efforts finds himself bearing the *paleto*'s telltale basket of chickens as he tries to maintain order in the street. The doorman, likewise, fails in his duty to keep the ill-dressed protagonist out of the luxury apartments he presumably protects. While the humor poked at the mayor may be merely a quotation from earlier comedic depictions of rural *alcaldes* (*¡Bienvenido Mr. Marshall!* and *¡Aquí hay petróleo!*), the attacks on the officer and the doorman are, in spite of their humor, conspicuous for the obvious connections to official authority that these offices hold. The doorman in particular is dressed in full mock military attire and bears a resemblance to the very *caudillo* himself. Furthermore, the longevity of the very profession of *portero* was openly associated during these years with the endurance of the regime, or in other words, the longevity of Franco (Preston 19). Just in case the spectator still misses the connection, Tío Agustín quips at the conclusion of his encounter with the guard: "¿Qué se habrá creído el general éste?"[9]

Such apparent attacks on authority appear to be yet another critique of traditional pre-consumer culture in the film. These jokes at the expense of patriarchy function similarly to the practice of telling *chistes de léperos* that Joan Barril has compared to the Freudian act of patricide by which millions of *paletos* free themselves of systems of authority through humor (García de León 41). In their study of film comedy, Frank Krutnick and Steve Neale confirm this patricidal relation in their use of Freud's identification of the threat of castration as the repressed butt of all humor. That is, as Freud explained, the target of humor is reality itself and specifically, the reality of castration. As a result, the usual targets of comedy "are fathers or father figures—avatars, precisely, of an oedipalized threat of castration" (76). Accordingly, Tío Agustín's dress-

ing-down of authority may seem a bold attack on the official patriarchal power structure convergent in the modern metropolis—the *paleto* ridding himself of the debilitating threat of urban authority. And yet, such temerity within so popular a film calls into question the very significance of traditional patriarchal authority to the new mainstream. Anti-patriarchal sentiment may be so explicit in Lazaga's film precisely because, by the time of the triumph of commodity culture and modernity in the mid-1960s, traditional patriarchy had ceased to be so vital to the national power structure.[10] Like the aesthetic or moral decay that Tío Agustín uncovers in the city, patriarchal authoritarianism is not so much a cause of social distress in 1960s Spain as it is one of its symptoms. While ironically acting in the movie as one of its key smokescreens, patriarchal authority is just another victim of the radical changes brought about by the all-absorbing triumph of consumer capitalism.

While morality, aesthetics, and patriarchy are critiqued, commodity culture is actually confirmed in the less interesting, but ultimately more fundamental main storyline, centered on the protagonist's struggle with his son's purse-strings. At the same time that Tío Agustín works to save his family from urban immorality, he has also been repeatedly squeezing money out of them to buy gifts for the people back in Calacierva. The film implies that Tío Agustín is engaged in a moral crusade that implicitly critiques the consumer culture in which his family is enmeshed. But in fact, as a mid-film cut back to life in Calacierva reveals, the protagonist affirms his nobility most convincingly in the commodities he sends to the townspeople. And while the *campesinos* proclaim disinterested love for their former neighbor, they shower him with requests and feel betrayed when the desired goods fail to appear.

The central importance of capital and the commodities it makes available comes into focus in a watershed scene centered around Tío Agustín's son's study. Significantly, this segment includes the film's only shot of the entire homestead together at the same time. The scene begins as Tío Agustín catches his son during one of his infrequent evenings at home. The father engages his son in conversation hoping to procure a few more *pesetas* for the folks back home. Tío Agustín's daughter-in-law, Luchi, soon interrupts with the news that the servant Filo has robbed her of 3,000 *pesetas*. The ensuing commotion brings the accused and daughter Sara to the study. Filo denies the charges. The already stingy son intervenes, reminding Filo of the "obvious": "has visto los billetes encima y has pensado, con esto me compro un abrigo y un vestido y un bolso y unos zapatos y unos...." The implication of this list (ended only by interruption as if to suggest the endless possibilities) is that no one can resist the material temptations of commodity culture. Tío Agustín, placed prominently before the camera, displays initial shock at his son's materialistic enumeration. But as his son continues—and as the value of the goods has time to sink in for both the characters and the spectators—Tío Agustín's startled expression vanishes and his head begins to nod in affirmation, until finally he wears the face of a thoroughly-interpellated consumer-subject. Tío Agustín, the spectators' principal point of identification and the model for their own actions, ultimately succumbs to the seduction of so many "things."

In spite of the seduction—though not contrary to it—Tío Agustín musters the energy to interject in defense of Filo. He

claims that he has in fact stolen the money and offers his own bills as evidence. Before he can be scolded, however, Sara enters with the purportedly stolen cash, exonerating both Filo and her erstwhile defender. On the surface Tío Agustín's actions suggest the *paleto*'s rejection of the material and offer another lesson in noble rural values. But the real message of the film concerning the protection of the downtrodden and the action that leads to the final resolution of the scene yet await. Luchi and Filo leave the room and the father-son conversation recommences. This time Tío Agustín's benevolence has softened his son's heart and his grip on his wallet. The son offers his father "whatever he wants." Tío Agustín happily counts out several 1,000 *peseta* bills, displaying them prominently for the spectator while praising their attractive appearance. As he counts he wonders aloud at the luxuries of modern life: "Parece imposible que un hombre pueda llevarle dinero en el bolsillo así." With the fetishized bills sorted out, the world suddenly seems a better place. The once distant Sara is now delighted with her grandfather. She symbolically displays her redemption by at last willingly kissing his whiskered face. She proves her change of heart in material fashion, however, by following her father's example in offering her own money to help the *paleto*'s cause. When Tío Agustín responds to these changes with the banal phrase, "Qué Dios te bendiga," his son reassures Agustín and spectator alike that he already has. The connection between heavenly blessings and excess capital is unmistakable, confirming the capitalist assumption of paper money as the most natural of divine gifts.

Resolution in *paleto* films, as García de León points out, typically proceeds from the achievement of a certain equality based on physical comforts (38). Hence, with paper money now freely circulating between city and country, Lazaga can wrap things up. This requires the quick resolution of the two remaining "moral" dilemmas. First, Luchi's accusation of Filo leads Tío Agustín to discover the servant's unplanned pregnancy and to arrange her marriage with *el huevero*, thereby resolving the problem of the unhappy house servant. From Tío Agustín's arrival in the city, Filo and the protagonist are as rural soul mates, frequently reminiscing about life in the country and raging against city-life. Salvation for Filo would appear to demand her return to the idealized rural state. But as Tío Agustín's solution exposes, happiness is in fact to be found in the city. First, the *paleto* saves Filo from the stigma of unwed motherhood by arranging her marriage. Filo only discovers true bliss, however, some time later when her new husband determines to move his bride to their own flat, away from both the family she serves and her new mother-in-law. Though saved from the social stigma of unwed pregnancy, Filo is only contented when her marriage promises entrance into what Martyn Lee describes as a new domestic order organized around commodity consumption (93). In place of the traditional premodern domesticity of self-sufficient homes and extended familial relations, Filo will enjoy the independence of her own commodity-demanding urban home. Filo's switch, according to Lee's description, comprises one of the crucial ingredients for the reproduction of commodity capitalism (93).

Following his arrangement of Filo's situation, Tío Agustín needs only restore his children's marital bliss to conclude his project of urban redemption. Like Filo's marriage, the culmination of this second project stems from the exchange of capital

in the doctor's study, wherein Tío Agustín finally gained the upper hand in his relationship with his daughter-in-law. First, a series of provident interruptions and some accidental eavesdropping allow Tío Agustín to get in the way of Luchi's attempt at infidelity. In the process, the protagonist takes some time to offer his daughter-in-law (as well as the spectator) a passionate moral defense of rural life. Finally, Tío Agustín convinces his son of the need for some marriage enhancement. This triumphant dish of old-fashioned *paleto* good fortune and honest emotion again suggest that the city's problems are merely of a moral or aesthetic tenor. Luck and passion combine once more to obscure the deeper reasons for Tío Agustín's power over his daughter-in-law: a newfound power with his son's pocketbook and a knowledge of Luchi's own origins in rural poverty.

With urban-crises shored up, Lazaga returns his spectators to the rural idyll for the final and perhaps most insidious production of the spectator-as-consumer. Fortuitously, as soon as Tío Agustín has guaranteed his children's future marital bliss he receives his invitation back to Calacierva. The subsequent scene shows Tío Agustín joined by his happily united family in the town of their birth. The explicit message of this return is that the city was indeed "not for Tío Agustín." The rural traveler has apparently repented of his cosmopolitan dreams.

Yet, though Tío Agustín may have physically forsaken the city, his lifestyle remains symbolically connected thereto. Indeed, his return bears all the markings of a tourist stop-over. Tío Agustín's return, unlike the shamed family of *Surcos* fifteen years earlier, is wholly triumphant. The scene upon arrival is reminiscent of magazine ads of the era that appeal to ex-*paleto* consumers with images of drivers in late model cars parked on cobblestone streets enjoying the admiration of curious villagers. Tío Agustín returns to his pueblo in luxury, displaying his purchasing power before his fellow villagers in the form of his well-dressed family—themselves now commodified for *paleto*-spectators as well as their flesh-and-blood former neighbors.

Appropriately, the reason for the return of the prodigal is the renaming of "la antigua calle del Clavo" in his honor. A traditional Spanish street name yields to a new label that, while belonging to a long-time local, has only acquired such stature following a stay in the modern city. The spectator understands that power, notwithstanding its present site of action, ultimately resides in the metropolis. The film's explicit message to the aspiring urban youth filling the theaters in search of Lazaga's filmic therapy is similar. When Sara—the principal object of desire and/or identification for these younger spectators—expresses her grief at the loss of Tío Agustín's companionship, her grandfather responds with a message that might as well have been delivered by the Ministry of Tourism: "Tú vendrás aquí todos los veranos. Iremos a cazar, a pescar el río, a coger higos a la casa de Roque como iba tu padre cuando era pequeño." For the new urban generation, rural Spain becomes a vacation destination replete with heart-warming reminders of a lost golden age.

The film concludes appropriately with a tasty dash of this fine rural flavor. Tío Agustín's family has returned to Madrid. He sits now alone in his familiar home engrossed in thought when a knock at his door introduces yet a second celebration in his honor. The party, interestingly, begins when the town's principal citizens enter Agustín's

home, each returning the commodities that the honored prodigal had bequeathed to them at his departure. What results is a veritable tourist pitch of rural products: cheese, wine, homespun wool, fresh livestock, and of course, genuine country hospitality. The film concludes as the homecoming spills into the street where a traditional Zaragozan group of musicians and singer await to serenade the teary-eyed *paleto*:

> Bien has hecho en regresar
> Baturrico, baturrico
> bien has hecho en regresar
> La ciudad pa' quien le guste
> que como el pueblo ni hablar.

Tío Agustín, tears welling up in his eyes, watches as youth fill the street performing local dances. The final frame freezes on Tío Agustín's emotional visage—a perfect postcard image of the commodified *paleto*—while the singer affirms, just in case the spectator was dozing, that "Toda la gente del pueblo feliz y contenta está."

## The Triumph of the *Paleto* as Commodity

If the local villagers are indeed happy, such sentiment is now indelibly linked to their rediscovery by the city. Relationships between the country and the city are, of course, always symbiotic. In 1960s Spain, however, the literal abandonment of hundreds of rural villages and zero growth to compensate, placed rural value entirely in urban hands. Consequently, the value of the rural became an urban value or rather an urban commodity. Moreover, if *paleto* spectators identify with the happy villagers at the conclusion of Lazaga's film, such pleasant identification is tied to a discovery of their own urban marketability. It is more likely, however, that the spectator's identification rests with Tío Agustín and his family in a process whereby they become the consumers of their own recently vindicated past. In short, if the country has triumphed over the city, it is not by means of the "social therapy" that García de León locates in the film but by the consumer demands that the country now exercises upon urban pocketbooks. The countryside, even as it is abandoned, becomes a new economic frontier to be regained.

Of course, this new commodified countryside is a far cry from the myriad dying *pueblos perdidos* bearing the economic and social brunt of the Spanish economic miracle of the period. Indeed, during these years *paleto* cinema combined with an economic policy of abandonment that Sevilla-Guzmán describes as a "virtual assault" on the peasantry sweeping the material sufferings of rural Spain under the carpet (Schubert 221; Sevilla-Guzmán 114-15). When *paleto* cinema disappeared in the mid-1970s, rural Spain became the domain of a thoughtful, poetic cinema characterized by the films of Manuel Gutierrez Aragón, Mario Camus, and Montxo Armendáriz. These more sober approaches, while not vindicating the pueblo, nevertheless spoke movingly of Spain's backward and abandoned regions. Despite the poetic impact, much of the politics had simply been drained from the subject, making these films a part of what Jo Labanyi calls Spain's post-Franco "heritage industry" and what Ulrich Beck, speaking of a more general European condition, calls "not the renaissance of the people, but the renaissance of the staging of the people" (Labanyi 403; Beck 43). Indeed, as Pedro Almodóvar comments, "La vida provinciana sólo es interesante para aquellos ar-

tistas que, además de escribir, les gusta la caza y la pesca" (cited in García de León 49). The Spanish countryside of the post-*paleto* era was many things: mythic, poetic, nostalgic, and, as Almodóvar captures in his own tribute to a kind of post-modern *paleto*, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, even ceramic; but it was hardly political.

In short, *paleto* films were hardly innocent comedies. Rather than providing aesthetic escape from the material modernization and consumer culture that Franco-era Spaniards faced upon immigration, *La ciudad no es para mí* and its cinematic legacy tendered this illusion only so far as requisite in order to aesthetically produce such modernization and consumerism within its own spectators. The real escape that *La ciudad* offered was not an escape *from* the city and its commodity culture but an escape *into* it as capitalism's active agents. Rather than reaffirming rural values, *La ciudad no es para mí* interpellated Spanish citizens as modernization-friendly consumers who could appreciate the market value of the rural. While feigning criticism of the consumer driven metropolis and superficially celebrating a premodern rural lifestyle, Lazaga's film, in fact slew the specter of the flesh-and-blood *paleto* and the anti-consumerist ontology that he represented, positing in his stead the figure of the new consuming Spaniard. In the process, a new figure of the *paleto* and his rural idyll became the most coveted and crucial of Spanish commodities, to be reproduced, bought, and sold for decades to come.

## Notes

[1] María García de León, the only critic yet to have given more than passing attention to these films, refers to them as "las películas de *paletos*" (41). Casimiro Torreiro classifies these comedic takes on rural-to-urban immigration with other light-minded comedy of the era, referring to them as part of "la comedia hispánica" of the 1960s (Gubern 333). I use García de León's nomenclature to clarify my specific reference to the comedies of explicit city/country encounter and to call attention to the popular reappropriation of the otherwise pejorative term *paleto*.

[2] Histories and guides to Spanish cinema typically give only passing notice to the *paleto* genre. Augusto Torres dismisses these films as "populachera comedias [...] que a pesar de su nulo atractivo siguen dominando los índices de audiencia cuando se emiten por televisión (303). Casimiro Torreiro describes them in passing as "comedias de corte conservador-patriarcal" (Gubern 332). F. Soria writes, "[c]on las deformaciones y omisiones que se quieran, estas comedias reflejan la cotidianeidad, las apetencias y frustraciones de una sociedad retratada epidérmicamente y sin rigor" (Rubio 14). Only María García de León has dedicated a portion of an article on the *paleto* figure to *La ciudad no es para mí*. García de León concludes that *paleto* cinema offered a kind of social therapy whereby rural immigrants recently arrived in the city could "sacar los demonios afuera" (41). She also concludes that the *paleto* in these films imposes a traditional patriarchal order on the city while confirming traditional francoist pro-rural and anti-urban values (36).

[3] *La ciudad no es para mí* garnered 70 million pesetas in its first year of release, was the top grossing film of the 1960s, and until 1987 stood third on the list of the top grossing Spanish films of all time (Monterde 41; Martínez Torres 119).

[4] Martínez Soria was to use his success in *La ciudad no es para mí* as a springboard to establishing himself as the archetypical *paleto* protagonist, starring in what Casimiro Torreiro calls "una verdadera saga de comedias" (Gubern 332). Through films such as *Abuelo «made in Spain»* (1969), *¡Se armó el belén!* (1969), *Don Erre que Erre* (1970), and *Hay que educar a Papá* (1971) Martínez Soria came to define the image of the rural-to-urban immigrant for a generation of Spaniards. Prior to Martínez Soria's cinema success, he had regularly played the *paleto* role in

the theater, starring in Fernando Lázaro Carreter's popular play, *La ciudad no es para mí*.

[5] With the exception of Lina Morgan's leading role in *Un día con Sergio*, the protagonists of *paleto* cinema were male.

[6] José Antonio Nieves Conde's *Surcos* (1951) and *La ciudad no es para mí* are emblematic of the two principal approaches to representing the subject of urban immigration during the Franco years. *Surcos*, a study of the ills of immigration on a "typical" Castilian family, represented Spanish cinema's first overt attempt at neorealist cinema (Gubern 280). By the mid-1950s much of its attempts at neorealist detail (the selection of subjects at random from out of the masses; the unabashed presentation of social ills—in the Spanish case, the ill of immigration) were being appropriated by such anodyne urban-rural comedies as Luis Lucia's *Cerca de la ciudad* (1952) and *La vida en un bloc* (1956) and José Luis Saenz de Heredia's *Historias de la radio* (1955). Spectators of the later *paleto* comedies would have been familiar with this tradition. While the juxtaposition of *Surcos* and *La ciudad no es para mí* might have rendered the consumerist interpellation of the latter problematic, the pastiching carried out in these interim films diffused an otherwise abrupt shift in *paleto* storytelling from *Surcos* to *La ciudad no es para mí*, transforming Nieves Conde's otherwise controversial film into a reluctant precursor to the *paleto* tradition.

[7] In the 1960s Spain experienced the most accelerated economic development in its history, enjoying a rate of growth second only to Japan at the time (Riquer y Permanyer 259; Schubert 207). Between 1960 and 1965, for example, foreign investment grew from $40 million to $322 million (Schubert 208). Consumers especially profited from these changes. For example, between 1963 and 1965 the number of Spaniards owning a television set quadrupled (Biescas 518).

[8] Frank Krutnick and Steave Neale explain: "Comic structure is characterized specifically by its logical structure. This structure consists of two syllogisms, or systems of reasoning and deduction. One is plausible, the other implausible. They are thus in contradiction with one another, though the implausible syllogism carries greater weight" (69). Comedy consists in the combination of an action that the audience can loosely imagine as possible in the material world with another that seems absurd so that in the end the comedic event will not be taken seriously.

[9] Paul Preston includes *porteros* (doormen) and *serenos* (night-watchmen) as what could be considered "lay" members of the group of hardline conservative politicians, military officers, and Civil Guard known by the late 1960s as the "bunker" for their determination to defend the dictatorship to the end (19). Preston explains that the continued employment of this group depended on the sustenance of the Franco regime.

[10] During the 1960s power within the Spanish state shifted increasingly away from the lone patriarchal figure of the caudillo, dispersing among a growing group of technocrats promoting an oligarchic scientifism, technology, and rationalism in the stead of ideology. Biescas describes this as a shift from a charismatic to a technocratic-consumerist style of leadership in which the 1940s falange slogan of "the life of service" was replaced by the technocratic goal of "peaceful living" (500-01).

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