INTRODUCTION

FRACTURE, REFERENDUM, AND FIRE

On June 2, 2004, a statue of María Lionza (1951) by the Venezuelan artist Alejandro Colina split in two pieces, right at the waist. The statue, a representation of the Indigenous goddess holding a human female pelvis in her raised arms, stood on a narrow median strip of Francisco Fajardo highway next to University City of Caracas, where the main campus of the Universidad Central de Venezuela is located and where I was working at the time. Fajardo (1530–1564), born to a Spanish father and Indigenous mother, had been one of the region's conquistadors. After the statue fractured, María Lionza's torso tilted backward awkwardly. Her eyes, which had once overlooked the west side of the city, including the huge, modern, mixed-use complex Parque Central, saw only sky. Four months later, Caracas awoke under a gigantic plume of smoke: a fire had devastated Parque Central's East Tower. Among other things, the archives of several public ministries were destroyed. What had been—along with its

twin West Tower—the tallest building in Latin America until the Torre Mayor was built in Mexico City in 2003, now resembled a blown fuse. Between these two events, the fracturing of the statue and the tower fire, on August 15, a recall referendum allowed Venezuelans to decide whether President Hugo Chávez would finish his term or leave office immediately. They voted in his favor by nearly twenty percentage points.

The East Tower fire melted the metal structure that supported the thirty uppermost floors. The building did not collapse, however, because of the concrete structure underneath it. The incineration of this building that had symbolized the new city center since the 1970s seemed to herald the dramatic end to the decades-long project of modernizing Caracas. The statue of María Lionza, commissioned by the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, had embodied that same celebratory idealization of the modern since 1951, when the statue had held the flame for the Third Bolivarian Games. Decades later, on that morning in 2004, Parque Central's East Tower was also a massive torch, a scorched lighthouse signaling the place where Venezuelan modernity had apparently run aground. The fractured statue of María Lionza seemed to sound a similar death knell. But I want to argue that the destruction of these symbols of Venezuelan modernity did not indicate the end of modernity but rather its transformation to informal, unplanned manifestations of modernity that go beyond the control or concerns of its original architects.

Although Parque Central was heading toward crisis by 2004, the fire did not destroy it. Its residents remained in their apartments and its businesses continued to operate. Eventually, the East Tower was remodeled and repopulated. As for the statue of María Lionza, it was replaced by a replica, and the original was taken to a workshop in the University City of Caracas for repairs. It remained there until 2022, when the Institute of Cultural Heritage moved the restored monument to Sorte Mountain, some three hundred kilometers away, without permission from its owner, the Universidad Central de Venezuela. Sorte Mountain is the gathering place for worshipers of a cult to the goddess. A few years earlier, in 2020, President Nicolás Maduro had renamed the highway that borders the University City from Francisco Fajardo to Gran Cacique Guaicaipuro, after the region's most important Indigenous leader during the conquest.

Although Hugo Chávez died in 2013, his political project, bolstered by the 2004 referendum, still prevails in Venezuela in 2024. Like María Lionza and Parque Central, though, that project has transformed into something else. Parque Central's propensity for transformation first captured my attention with the 2004 fire. Now, from a different university in another country, I have completed this study of the fictions that modeled and remodeled Parque Central.

I.1. Partial view of downtown Caracas as seen from the north. Parque Central is at the center. *Caracas* (2009) © Lisbeth Salas.

FICTIONS OF MODERNITY

Parque Central is a massive mixed-use complex in central Caracas. Construction began in 1969, at the height of Venezuela's oil bonanza, and stopped in 1983, at the worst moment of the nation's debt crisis, up to that point. In this book, I study brochures, advertisements, plans, short stories, poems, short films, chronicles, and photographs that relate to or reference this complex, texts that build and rebuild or model and remodel ways of managing time and urban space. I consider all these materials fictional. I call the brochures, advertisements, development plans, promotional films, and photographs of Parque Central "modeling fictions," or those that create a first impression of Parque Central, introducing it to prospective residents, for example. This idea of the "first time" is itself a fiction, one that rhetorically fuels the Parque Central project from the very start, as a "new way of living" (*nuevo modo de vivir*) in which "nothing resembles the past" (*nada se parece al pasado*), as advertisements for it proclaimed.

I call later stories, poems, films, chronicles, films, and photographs "remodeling fictions," which I understand to be texts that take something that has already been modeled as a point of departure, texts that

I.2. At the center of this picture of Parque Central's inner spaces, "Cuerdas," an environmental aerial structure by the Venezuelan artist Gego, surrounded by the Roberto Burle Marx gardens. *Cuerdas* (1972) © Gego Caracas (ca. 1977) Unknown photographer. Courtesy: Archivo Fundación Gego.

"re-present" or take a second look. This is, of course, another fiction. Both modeling and remodeling fictions reveal an "informal modernity" that combines planned and unplanned urban interventions. Although I draw on the histories of Parque Central and Caracas, particularly in this Introduction, the book is less about the complex itself and more about the rhetorical positions of the wide variety of texts and other artifacts about and around it.

Parque Central is a city within a city, an urban intervention that deployed these modeling fictions to configure itself as futuristic, autonomous, hygienic, and closely guarded, and, above all, modern. It is the

first and largest gated community in Venezuela (other than the country's oil camps), with eight 44-story residential buildings, each with 317 apartments, and two 59-story office towers. The pamphlet *Cómo vivir mejor en una ciudad moderna* (ca. 1973) (How to Live Better in a Modern City) announced with the conviction and enthusiasm of a fait accomplit: "The goal of making Caracas a modern, humanely habitable city is fully achieved with the creation of Parque Central."[1] The brochure adds, looking to the future, that Parque Central "will be a modern city within the capital metropolis."[2] It is implicit that the capital metropolis was not modern. In this way, the modeling fictions of Parque Central construct the complex as the achievement of the ideals of modern architecture in Caracas: a radical intervention in the heart of the city, or a smaller-scale version of the grand urban renewal based on tall towers and strict planning that Le Corbusier sought for Paris in his Voisin Plan of 1925 (see fig. I. 2.).

According to Beatriz Colomina, modern architecture arose in response to fear of disease, especially tuberculosis, which was thought to spread in damp urban environments full of porous surfaces (like fabrics and wood) and lacking light or ventilation. Since then, argues Colomina, modern construction has been influenced by the sanatorium and the X-ray, that is, the institution that treated tuberculosis and the technology that diagnosed it. She writes that "the engine of modern architecture was not a heroic, shiny, functional machine working its way across the globe, but a languid, fragile body suspended outside daily life in a protective cocoon of new technologies and geometries" (*X-Ray Architecture*, 11). Indeed, this image of a protective cocoon reveals the character of Parque Central's modeling fictions better than any other symbol: a clean sanatorium, suspended in the future, where bodies are cared for and isolated from the everyday environment. This giant geometric cocoon itself houses thousands of smaller cocoons; light and air filter in through the membranes of windows and air ducts; and waste is removed through drainpipes of tankless toilets and tubes of an automated vacuum waste disposal system. While cocoons are a protected space for transformation in both nature and metaphor, the modeling fictions focus exclusively on the protection and isolation that its external shell provided. Inside was a perpetual future.

Remodeling fictions reconfigure Parque Central in the opposite way, as the past and the evils of the surrounding city—floods, ghosts, crime, vermin, and filth—return. The modeling fictions of Parque Central emerge from the inside, that is, from its layout and concepts. They issue from the Venezuelan state, specifically the Simón Bolívar Center, the public entity that managed Parque Central's construction, publicity,

and sales, as I discuss in chapter 1. Remodeling fictions, in contrast, come from the outside, from writers, filmmakers, photographers, and playwrights.

It is worth considering why publicists titled the advertising brochure *Cómo vivir mejor en una ciudad moderna*. If it was necessary to explain *how* to live in a modern city, modern city living must have been both unknown and unconsciously desired. I would argue that this brochure and others published around 1973, such as *El corazón comercial del centro de Caracas* (The Commercial Heart of Downtown Caracas) and *Su apartamento en Parque Central* (Your Apartment in Parque Central), as well as other advertisements, policy proposals, and layouts, are a sort of instruction manual for this new modern life of the seventies. Their speculative didacticism recalls Manuel Antonio Carreño's famous *Manual de urbanidad y buenas maneras para uso de la juventud de ambos sexos* (1853) (Manual of Urbanity and Good Manners for Use by Youth of Both Sexes), which assumes that young people did not behave properly, and their reform should be a pedagogical project. These etiquette manuals for Parque Central reveal the phobias that had influenced the Venezuelan state in its project of modernizing the capital. These are repeatedly expressed in the comparisons between Parque Central and a cocoon in Caracas, an island next to the past and the impoverished city. Within that clean and self-sufficient futuristic capsule, the state would cradle a new, powerful, and prospering middle class.

According to the Venezuelan architect Oscar Tenreiro, Parque Central recalled megastructures loosely inspired by the Metabolism movement in Japan, which was informed by "the conviction that a work of architecture should not be frozen once it is completed" (Kurokawa, 10). This same metabolist perspective, I believe, characterizes this modeled and remodeled urban complex as a living, changing, mutant, and, in Marjorie Garber's terms, transvestite structure. The modeling and remodeling fictions that staged it lack (and do not need) stable identities or fixed meanings. I propose that these modeling and remodeling fictions produce instability, variability, and vitality, thereby interrupting and altering the modernizing project of the Venezuelan state.

I also understand the initial modeling of Parque Central as evidence of a Venezuelan modernizing project that was driven by the high oil prices of the 1970s and the state's integration into the international market. I am particularly interested in Parque Central's function as a signifier of petroleum-fueled modernization as it relates to the economic process of extracting capital from the public sector to benefit the private sector and international market. This flow of capital was accompanied by other flows, flows of symbols, people, and merchandise—an unprece-

dented bonanza triggered by the nationalization of Venezuelan oil companies in 1975 after prices had skyrocketed the year before. After the boom, however, came the crash, a time of austerity that coincided with the end of construction on Parque Central in 1983. Black Friday, as the day the Venezuelan bolivar was devalued for the first time in some forty years has come to be known, occurred against the backdrop of the Latin American foreign debt crisis.

Parque Central is also an example of planned gentrification. The Venezuelan state and the private sector wanted to develop a new city center for Caracas—indeed, the plan was called *Desarrollo del Centro de Caracas* (Development of Downtown Caracas)—and simultaneously create a new middle class, "a demanding population [seeking a] very high level of services and amenities" (Fernández-Shaw).[3] The material and symbolic expropriation of an enormous space (16 hectares) in the middle of Caracas was both temporal and spatial. The first pages of *Cómo vivir mejor* tell readers: "In Parque Central, everything the future promises us has already been achieved."[4] The future arrived in Caracas in 1969. There was nothing more to wait for; the cocoon had evidently stopped time. Something similar happened with space. The same brochure boasts that Parque Central has no "insects, parasites, or rodents" (*insectos, parásitos ni roedores*) because its pneumatic garbage collection and central air-conditioning systems create an autonomous, hygienic bubble, a humanized and de-animalized environment, as I argue in chapter 4.

Parque Central is also a link between the local and the global, namely, between local oil production and international finance. This connection is forged by what Terry Karl calls the "Petro-State," in which the entire state, all its "technical and administrative resources, its symbolic content, its institutional separateness, and its own interest are most fundamentally shaped by its leading export activity" (46). This type of state "decreases the prospect for flexible and timely alterations to an oil-led development path" (46). The various representations of decay and decrepitude in Parque Central's remodeling fictions underscore this inflexibility as Venezuela's eventual untethering from the world of international finance left it unable to adjust to keep its modernizing projects afloat. These representations thus point to the unique and contradictory configurations underlying oil production and export and their link to the petro-state that created Parque Central.

I began writing this book in January 2018, when Venezuela was experiencing an economic and political catastrophe that continues to this day. The economist Francisco Rodríguez blames Hugo Chávez's economic policy for the fact that "at the end of 2013, despite a prolonged period of buoyant oil markets that had taken the price of Venezuelan

barrel above $100, Venezuela's international reserves were only $22 [billion], enough to pay for just 5 months of imports" (4). Notwithstanding years of positive social and political developments, especially during the commodities boom of the early 2000s, only the very privileged in Venezuela have been able to weather the crisis that came afterward. Most people living in Venezuela, as well as those who have been compelled to leave, are suffering the dire consequences of a political project that wound up contradicting its every objective, a failed project whose proponents nonetheless remain in power. Massive and increasing poverty has plagued the country in recent years. By 2018, per capita income was projected to be just half of what it was in 2013, making it "the largest five-year loss in [gross domestic product] per capita experienced in Latin America since the 1950s, and a world record for any country not involved in armed conflicts or suffering from natural disasters" (Halff, Monaldi et al., 2). Parque Central was built at the exact opposite moment, during the boom of the seventies, when economic expansion, mass immigration, a vibrant cultural sector, and rich political dialogue promised and had already revealed some fruits of a contradictory modernization. Although this modernization did not by any means embrace everyone, for a time, the chimera of development seemed within reach, "marching along" (*caminandito*), as *Cómo vivir major en una ciudad moderna* describes it. Parque Central offered the modern convenience of conducting one's daily affairs in the same place, without having to leave the complex. In this way, modeling fictions represent Caracas's various guises of development as an expansion of consumption and services. The oil bonanza of the 1970s is, in a way, comparable to the commodities boom that followed the failed 2002 coup against President Hugo Chávez, which had been led by Pedro Carmona Estanga and other members of the Venezuelan business elite. That new bonanza of economic growth and increased consumption once again seemed to suggest that development could be more than illusory. From 2002 to 2007, for example, Venezuela's gross domestic product grew by nine percentage points (Morillo, 283). After that, however, commodity prices plummeted and the economic and political crisis progressively worsened, leading to mass exodus, shortages, loss of purchasing power, and the major curtailing of the rights of Venezuelans.

In the seventies, Venezuela's rhythm was inverted or syncopated in comparison to the rest of the Americas. When the United States experienced a recession, there was an economic boom in Venezuela. When the Southern Cone was bleeding out in abhorrent dictatorships, democracy was taking hold in Venezuela. Even today, Venezuela remains out of step with the rest of Latin America, including countries that had, to an

extent and for a time, shared in the political project of *chavismo*, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, and the countries of the so-called pink tide, or the turn of "Latin America to the left seen as the response by social movements, key sectors and individuals to neoliberal policies and the practices of right-wing governments" (Zimmerman, 9), such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. In looking from one extreme (the deepest crisis) to the other (the bonanza), I seek some reciprocal features that can illuminate both moments and account for the intermediate tones, nuances, and singularities of the 1970s and 2010s.

I also argue that the remodeling fictions of Parque Central demonstrate informal modernity. This seemingly contradictory term derives from the architectural description of unplanned or self-built homes as "informal housing." The modern city is planned, usually on a large scale, and follows the principles that Le Corbusier laid out in the above-cited *Plan Voisin* (1925) and expanded on in *Ville Radieuse* (1933). James C. Scott has described the scale of Le Corbusier's plans for urban renewal as "self-consciously immodest" (104). This scope combined with formal, geometric simplicity and functional efficiency. Rather than opposing goals to balance, "formal order was a precondition of efficiency" (106). From this perspective, Caracas, the small colonial city that grew into what José Luis Romero has called a "splintered city," needed to be razed to the ground. The unplanned, inefficient city lacked formal order and had to disappear.

With informal modernity, I refer to a deregulated political program that is articulated by the amnesiac system of global capitalism, as Andreas Huyssen, following Theodor W. Adorno, has described it. Informal modernity interrupts the idea of the planned city; it "unplans" and alters it. And yet, in the remodeling fictions, Parque Central does not cease to be modern; it does not become anti-modern or exemplify the failure of modernity. To the contrary, I argue that this remodeled modernity is the peculiarly Venezuelan, Latin American, and probably subaltern, version of modernity.

THE BONANZA

The first visions for Parque Central were those of a complex integrated into Caracas. The objective of the original plan was to "re-create the city center's attractions with its characteristic original functions" (Fernández-Shaw).[5] This gesture was quickly set aside, however, and brochures, advertisements, and photographs instead depict a totally and boastfully novel space in which the past is disconnected, interrupted, and without present referents. In this sense, there is a parallel between Parque Cen-

tral and Venezuelan geometric abstraction and kinetic art, which was the official art of the Venezuelan state from the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952–1958) through the democratic period and up to Hugo Chávez's rise to power. This "retinal" art, which in principle makes no reference to the past or its surroundings, implies a rupture, a tabula rasa, or a repression that ends up being a common denominator between the periods and projects. As Luis Enrique Pérez Oramas has explained: "Its public function, during the 1960s and 1970s, as the official art of the democratic and developmentalist regime, was merely the program outlined during the dictatorship to achieve the appearance of a modern country" (34).

As I have stated, modeling fictions about Parque Central sought to suspend the past and its surroundings and to install a radically new, encapsulated future that followed Le Corbusier's principles. Later, remodeling fictions reverse these tendencies and restore the past and the surroundings. To account for this reversal, this return, I turn to the Freudian concept of the uncanny, which describes the return of something both familiar and strange, something repressed (in the past) that returns (in the present). According to Anneleen Masschelein, "The uncanny is not just explained as affect-transformation, rather the uncanny reveals the process of repression—which produces anxiety—in reverse, as the return of the repressed" (42). Germán García would translate "disturbing strangeness" as "disturbing familiarity," emphasizing that what truly disturbs is the familiarity (11). From theft and murder to insects and anacondas, the remodeling fictions use a wide variety of textual forms and themes to convey that something the modeling fictions had repressed is returning to Parque Central.

To understand Freud's notion of repression, I follow Simon Boag, who in turn draws on Matthew H. Erdelyi. Canonical readings of Freud usually view repression as the unconscious elimination of certain content. But Freud himself wrote that repression *may* be unconscious, but not necessarily. According to Boag, this ambiguity causes the distinction between repression and suppression (generally associated with consciousness) to blur, or at least become more nuanced: "There is no reason to believe that the repressive act cannot be known as it occurs" (176). Regardless, these interpretations of repression agree that it "involves the turning away of attention from a threatening target" (Boag, 166). In the case of repression in Parque Central, I argue that the forgetting or rejection occurs consciously.

In his analysis of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center, W. J. T. Mitchell writes that "the Twin Towers were not merely abstract signs of world capital, but what Coleridge called 'living symbols'

that have an organic 'connection' with their referents" (15). Similarly, the modeling fictions of Parque Central are not merely representations of state-sponsored middle-class modernity. They have a direct, tangible connection to state-sponsored middle-class modernity, invested with its own meaning. That connection interests me because it expresses urban modernization as "a powerful displacement of previous narrative paradigms," as Fredric Jameson has described it (*Singular Modernity*, 35). The agent of this "powerful displacement" is the Venezuelan state, along with local and transnational private capital. This connection between symbol and referent not only dislodges the narrative paradigm but also displaces people in space and time. Parque Central is a living symbol of this displacement, the gentrification that occurs in the city and in the modeling and remodeling fictions.

Because Parque Central was financed by international banks, rather than state money, congressional approval was not required. President Rafael Caldera thus denied a congress dominated by the opposition, the social-democratic Acción Democrática, the ability to refuse to fund the project.[6] In fact, there was no state supervision of its financing at all. Projects like Parque Central became vehicles for the global financial system to manage the "excess" capital of the late 1970s through low-interest loans owned by private entities in private banks. Throughout the seventies, many profits of the oil boom were kept in international banks that sought to place this money in apparently solvent countries like Venezuela that could guarantee payment on their debts. With the 1983 currency devaluation, however, the nation could no longer make these payments at the agreed-upon interest rates.

Modernity in Caracas is a public affair. Directed by the state as a political project, this "powerful displacement of previous paradigms" meant that private capital drained and accumulated state funds. Parque Central exemplifies this alliance between the state and private capital. Such a policy, however, is inherently uncontrolled; it is driven by market trends in tension with premodern traditions. The state's modernizing plans often result in projects that are unfinished or "paper architectures" (6), as Svetlana Boym has called them. This nonrealization is a key factor in the configuration of modernity in Caracas, not only in its planning or construction but also in urban destruction.

To analyze the architectural form that modernity took in 1970 Caracas, I also use Sandra Pinardi's concept of "monstrous modernity" and Fernando Coronil's of the "magical state." Pinardi proposes that Venezuelan modernity is "a monstrous modernity that dedicated itself solely to the elaboration of infrastructures and scenarios, to the construction of façades and models, to the ideation of plans and purposes" (60). Pinar-

I.3. Parque Central, seen from La torre de David. "Torres." © Ángela Bonadies. From the series *La Torre de David*, by Ángela Bonadies and Juan José Olavarría (2012).

di rightly emphasizes that modernity is much more than that, a deeper renovation that considers both "body and experience." In Venezuela, in contrast, modernity can be understood as "purely representational" (61). Coronil explains his notion of the magical state: "The deification of the State occurred as part of Venezuela's transformation into an oil-producing nation, which, as such, was perceived as a nation with two bodies, a political body comprised of its citizens and a natural body composed of its rich subsoil. By condensing within itself the multiple powers deployed among these two bodies, the State came onto the scene as a single agent endowed with the magical power to remake the nation" (4).

Coronil drew inspiration from the playwright José Ignacio Cabrujas, who described the Venezuelan state of the late eighties in an interview as "a magnanimous sorcerer, a titan full of hopes in that bag of lies that are government programs" (17).[7] Coronil expanded on Cabrujas's depiction: "Like a 'magnanimous sorcerer' the State takes control of its subjects by inducing conditions or situations of receptiveness for its sleight of hand" (5). Parque Central is one of those magic tricks, an urban complex pulled from a top hat.

I propose that, in the case of Parque Central, the Venezuelan state's intense effort to suspend the past and the surrounding city to focus on a

future, middle-class space went far beyond mere representation, staging, or trickery. The modernity that arises in the fictions I study encompasses much more than a building. It is characterized by the substitution or displacement of one narrative by another. It is therefore neither strictly monstrous nor magical. A bubble or cocoon is not merely a façade; it exists. Its fictions envelop, captivate, protect, and shelter bodies. And everything excluded from the bubble exists, too. It does not disappear, but rather follows a parallel path (invisible or "invisibilized" by the modernity that refuses to see it) and eventually returns to burst that bubble.

"The Simón Bolívar Center Humanizes Caracas" (*El Centro Simón Bolívar humaniza a Caracas*) was the slogan of the government agency responsible for the urban renewal of Caracas from 1947 to 2013. Over time, that slogan attached itself to both Parque Central—appearing in its brochures and advertisements—and the urban imaginary. This is illustrated by "Parque Central," a 1975 piece by the experimental musical group Un pie, un ojo.[8] The piece begins with a series of industrial noises, percussion that sounds like a drill press, and a delirious, tuneless piano. Halfway through, though, a Venezuelan folk song begins to play. Its chorus is the same slogan: "Humanize Caracas" (*Humaniza a Caracas*). Like that slogan, which comes back to haunt the modeling of modernity, this book is also about returning.

RETURNS

The brochure *Cómo vivir mejor en una ciudad moderna* describes shopping in Parque Central:

> In Parque Central, to go shopping is to go for a walk, to enjoy a stimulating diversion that relaxes the nerves and oxygenates the blood. There is no vehicular traffic, no pollution, no irritating noises. There is no danger to you and yours; you walk, pleasantly relaxed, along shady corridors or flower-lined paths. Looking in the shop windows that offer you the most varied merchandise, enjoying the sound of the waterfall, or having a cocktail in the open-air café in the grand plaza. It is like being on vacation in the perfect place. No hassles, no wasting time or taking out the car, walking right along, you go to the movies, to the theater, to the social club, to church.[9]

The association between shopping and taking a walk is a peculiar view of commercial activity, at least in Venezuela. Shopping becomes entertainment, pleasure, and meditative exercise "that relaxes the nerves and oxygenates the blood." But the modeling fictions imagine Parque Central as a gigantic mall that also happens to include apartments and

offices. It is, according to the brochure, a space without traffic, pollution, or noise: an oasis within a city teeming with all three. Safe, quiet, pleasant, shady, and flower-lined, this tropical island paradise has artificial waterfalls, store windows that display spectacular merchandise, and cocktails. Life in the bubble is a perpetual vacation. There is no need to drive or take public transportation because everything is within walking distance. Another brochure, *El corazón comercial del centro de Caracas* (ca. 1973), emphasizes aspects of Parque Central that are not mentioned in *Como vivir mejor en una ciudad moderna*: workspaces, the two 59-story office towers, the garages with 8,000 parking spaces, and the connections to the "outside world." This brochure does not target potential residents, but rather the investor who might open a store in Parque Central in order to reach "3,500 middle-income families who will provide an important captive market on a pedestrian scale, supplemented by the 16,000 employees who will visit the center daily."[10] In this view, Parque Central is a consumption-based arcade. It is a village in the middle of the city, where "everything can be done on foot," but with all the advantages—and none of the disadvantages—of the city. A peculiar village, to be sure, with a movie theater, theater, social club, and church (Catholic, dedicated to Saint Ignatius of Loyola). Parque Central is a kind of suburb in the center of the same city that suburbanites had escaped. This isolated, conditioned, and enclosed suburb is suspended right in downtown Caracas.

In Venezuelan history, 1983 was an important year for many reasons, including the currency devaluation, the Pan American Games in Caracas, the bicentennial of Simón Bolívar's birth, and the opening of the Caracas Metro, the Teresa Carreño Theater, new facilities for the Ateneo de Caracas cultural center, and Parque Central's East Tower, the last piece of the complex to be built. The year 1983 can also be considered the last year of the so-called Gran Venezuela, the ambition of the first government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974–1979), a time when the state was still working its "sleight of hand" (as coined by Cabrujas and taken up by Coronil). The Latin American foreign debt crisis had taken hold the year before, when Mexico defaulted on its loan payments. Referring to the developmentalist state, Gareth Williams has written that this crisis "delegitimized this state model of societal organization and development and created the conditions for the current neoliberal model of market-based economic and social organization" (130). In this light, Parque Central is also a swan song for the Venezuelan developmentalist state.[11] During its first years, Parque Central's residents and visitors enjoyed "a new way of living," but after 1983 and increasingly throughout the 1990s and the two following decades, the complex deteriorated into

I.4. Partial view of Caracas as seen by Nelson Garrido from the south. Rivers of blood flow from the peaks of El Ávila mountain, as well as from the city's buildings. *Caracas sangrante* (1993) © Nelson Garrido.

a dangerous and uncanny space, as the remodeling fictions that I analyze demonstrate.

Caracas Sangrante (1993) by Nelson Garrido is a particularly expressive or graphic introduction to Parque Central's remodeling fictions (see fig. I.4). This hand-colored photograph was first shown in a collective exhibition celebrating the city and was later reproduced as a postcard (1995). *Caracas Sangrante* evokes the Christian iconography of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, often depicted as the Gospel of John describes it, bleeding from a wound made by the lance of a Roman soldier during the Crucifixion. It also captures the imported tradition of bloody, violent gore cinema. In the photograph, rivers of blood flow from the city's buildings and the peaks of El Ávila, the mountain that overlooks Caracas. The bright, flat, red-colored blood runs through the streets, pooling in vacant lots and finally reaching the Gran Cacique Guaicaipuro highway and the Guaire River, which diagonally intersect at the bottom of the photograph. Caracas bleeds profusely, like a fatally wounded person or animal. At the center of the photograph stands Parque Central, "the commercial heart of the city," as a brochure calls it.

As noted above, Parque Central was the Venezuelan state's attempt to establish a new center of Caracas that could, in turn, "grow and occupy new spaces in the city." Its architects and promoters "saw in some very tall buildings the possibility of having an urban symbol entwined with the tradition of commemorating important places in the city" (Daniel Fernández-Shaw, quoted in Hernández de Lasala, 175). Because of its location and size, the massive complex can be seen from anywhere in the city. To the technocratic proponents of developmentalism, Parque Central represented a new Caracas and even a new country. The Venezuelan state sought to realize a modern utopia: the construction of a planned city, within a city that—in the seventies, at the height of economic growth and immigration—was outgrowing urban planning.

Although it shares some features with similar complexes, such as Las Torres del Parque in Bogotá (architect Rogelio Salmona, 1964), Nonoalco-Tlatelolco in Mexico City (architect Mario Pani, 1960), and the 23 de enero housing project in Caracas (architects Carlos Raúl Villanueva, José Hoffmann, and José Mijares, 1955), Parque Central is unique in its style. Designed for the middle class, it exemplifies what Rem Koolhass has called "XL" urban design. Typical of Gran Venezuela, Parque Central embodies the financial bonanza the nation experienced in the 1970s. Its 8 residential towers are each 120 meters high and contain 317 apartments. It also has 2 office towers that are 221 meters high; 1,700 commercial spaces; 8,000 parking spots; restaurants, nightclubs, bakeries, soda fountains, movie theaters, a natatorium, 8 conference halls, a heliport, and 3 museums, including the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (Museum of Contemporary Art) of Caracas. Its gross area is 1,123,533 square meters, with 100,000 square meters of open spaces. The architectural firm Siso, Shaw & Asociados S.A. was entrusted with its design.[12] Landscaping was overseen by Roberto Burle Marx, who was known for the undulating design of the Copacabana Promenade in Rio de Janeiro, as well as his work in other Brazilian cities, Parque del Este in Caracas, and private gardens and other projects in Caracas, where he had an office for several years.

DESIGNING THE DREAM OF MODERNITY

Caracas occupies the uneven gullies of the Guaire River basin in a valley of the Venezuelan coastal mountain range. Even the earliest European settlers in the area envisioned an orderly urbanization. The first map of the city, made by Juan de Pimentel in 1577, shows 25 blocks, some of them unoccupied. His map illustrates a planned, imagined, modeled city, hand-drawn into being before it was built, like many in the so-

called New World. Notwithstanding internal and international migration, Caracas remained relatively small until the 1940s (González Casas, 30). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Caracas had some 50,000 inhabitants; in 1926, it had 135,253 (57). Rapid growth ensued, and the city had 1 million inhabitants by 1955—just 40 percent of whom had been born there—and 1.5 million in 1961 (57). Spontaneous, self-built settlements began to climb the city's precarious hillsides to accommodate this massive influx.

In 1936, following the death of the dictator Juan Vicente Gómez, who had ruled Venezuela from 1908 to 1935, the Venezuelan state followed the advice of the local urban planner Luis Roche and hired the French urban planner Maurice Rotival to renovate Caracas. Rotival's plan involved an ambitious series of interventions and developments that, for the most part, never materialized. One piece of the plan that did happen, though, was the demolition of an eight-block row of housing. This line of city blocks spanned the historic city center to the twentieth-century expansions San Agustín and El Conde. It connected El Calvario, a French-style park built in the late nineteenth century, with Parque Los Caobos, opened in 1920 as Parque Sucre. Rotival planned for all of this to be replaced by Avenida Bolívar, lined with housing, stores, parking, a new congressional building, and a mausoleum for Simón Bolívar. Construction of the avenue began in 1945. The plan was modified along the way to include the building complex El Silencio and the Towers of Simón Bolívar Center. For all the planning, and although it cut the city in two, Avenida Bolívar never became a proper avenue. The rows of empty half blocks on either side of the avenue were occupied by various and contradictory "disorderly interventions by the State," as Juan Pedro Posani has called them: markets, bus terminals, housing, parks, universities, and museums (Posani and Gasparini, 500). By the end of the nineteenth century, the haciendas surrounding the city were slowly being urbanized, turning into middle- and upper-class housing developments. Meanwhile, the "zones that had been discarded by the urbanization developments, which are the zones bordering the ravines," as well as the hills around the city, continued to turn into *barrios populares* or informal neighborhoods (Larrañaga in *Tramas de una ciudad: Caracas*, min. 25).

In 1951 the National Urbanism Commission produced the Caracas Regulatory Plan. The work of Maurice Rotival, along with the urban planners Francis Violich and José Lluis Sert, the plan sought to ensure "an urban structure of linear growth and suburban development of the city, mainly towards the east" (Dembo, Rosas, and González, 78). Its program of planned interventions was built on Rotival's first design.

And like that plan, only some parts of the Caracas Regulatory Plan were ever carried out. One project that was constructed, located at the eastern end of the avenue that was the backbone of Rotival's design, was Parque Central.

As mentioned above, the Parque Central project was managed by the Simón Bolívar Center, a state agency responsible for urban renewal. Semiotically, the Simón Bolívar Center can be understood as the emitter of the modeling fictions: advertisements, brochures, promotional films, and magazines publicize Parque Central on behalf of the center, that is, on behalf of the Venezuelan state. Its slogan, "Humanize Caracas," was at times carried out quite radically. In 1961, for example, the state expropriated and demolished sixteen hectares of urbanized land in El Conde, a neighborhood established in 1926. According to Posani, the resulting displacement of an entire low- and middle-income community can be considered a case of massive gentrification in Caracas (27–28). And yet for the almost ten years until construction began on Parque Central, the land remained vacant, only temporarily occupied by fairground attractions and parks.

Silvia Hernández de Lasala has written about Parque Central that "the project was able to be carried out to a large extent because, in the 1970s, the country was in a good economic position, which made it easier to obtain financing abroad for a project of this nature" (173). The oil boom would begin with the Arab–Israeli War of late 1973. From then on, "the nation was flooded with money in the midst of the Saudi bonanza. And Caracas became an amazing center of consumption, overflowing with imported goods," according to the historian Jesús Sanoja Hernández (190). Oil was nationalized two years later, on December 31, 1975, and the economic abundance continued its vertiginous growth, as did the middle and lower classes.

When this bonanza came to an end, so did everything that the modeling fictions had planned. The remodeling fictions of Parque Central feature a striking number of references to murders, dismembered bodies, missing persons, diabolical rituals with human sacrifices, kidnappings, giant anacondas in the underground parking lots, looted and burned cars, and insect infestations. These references can be found in stories, plays, photographs, songs, and poems, especially after the 1983 economic crisis, and with even greater emphasis after the 1989 Caracazo erupted in Caracas and other cities. As the protests quickly turned into a wave of widespread riots and looting, amplified by the media, it exposed the limits of the Venezuelan democratic experiment. The state responded with repressive force, killing an estimated three hundred to one thousand people and wounding thousands more.

What happened to Parque Central? What happened to its new and better way of living? How did a Venezuelan state developmentalist project end up returning to the very informality that it had wanted to minimize, overcome, and deny? How did it return to the same past and urban surroundings it had pledged to leave behind?

Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* offers one way to understand the remodeling fictions of Parque Central. Sommer reads late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latin American romance novels as allegories or mutually sustaining forms of connection between the political and the erotic. Mutatis mutandis, the forms of representation of Parque Central after 1983 can be read as allegories of the Venezuelan state's failure to solve the economic crisis of the eighties and provide the full middle-class citizenship that it had promised. In this vein, Parque Central can be understood, in the words of Eduardo Kairuz, as "one of the symbols of Caracas' continuously unfulfilled promise of modernity" (104). This unfulfillment can be seen in the informality of the remodeling fictions, the transformation of Parque Central into a space on the margins of the state, abandoned to its fate, to the market, and to premodernity. As I stated above, I disagree with this perspective. Rather than an unfulfilled promise of modernity, Venezuela's modeling and remodeling fictions give rise to what I call an *informal modernity* that breaks with both the formal–informal binary typically applied to cities and the separation between tradition and modernity.

GARBAGE

The Greater Caracas suburb Valles del Tuy is home to the city's landfill, called La Bonanza. This is, of course, a peculiar name for a landfill. Carlos Castillo's 1977 film *Hecho en Venezuela* uses garbage to make a "critique of the consumerism that characterized the country during the years of the oil boom" (Arredondo et al., 28). One segment, filmed while Parque Central was under construction, shows a blindfolded woman dressed in white who throws a rag doll dressed in the Venezuelan flag from the top of a mountain of garbage in a dump that could be La Bonanza. Accustomed to the anglicism "boom" (as in oil boom and narrative boom), Spanish speakers tend to forget that it can also mean the same as "bonanza": prosperity and abundance. That the Caracas dump has the same name—La Bonanza, the boom—underscores how the Venezuelan bonanza of the 1970s that fueled the modeling fictions of Parque Central is also that huge landfill in a Caracas suburb. It is the other side of the coin. It is what remains of the Venezuelan state's modernizing project after so many cycles of economic crisis: a mountain of garbage.

A Promising Past is organized around fictional texts that feature Parque Central and were produced by state agencies, private interest groups, publicists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, and photographers. Each chapter focuses on an urban problem that these texts highlight. In chapter 1, I locate Parque Central within the history of Caracas by comparing it with another emblematic building, El Helicoide shopping mall, whose construction started in the mid-1950s. In both cases, fictions focus on new forms of access to consumer goods that allow buyers to amass large quantities of goods. This contextualization demonstrates that the modeling fictions of El Helicoide and Parque Central, especially advertising brochures, portray the complexes as spearheads in the city, or strange, transformative elements that empower and address neighbors as clients and consumers. Striving to inculcate and fulfill a modernizing desire, they also annul the past and suspend the surroundings. Furthermore, their respective remodeling fictions also coincide, interrupting this enthusiasm and replacing it with an imaginary of incarceration.

In chapter 2, I analyze two short stories, "El ascensor" (The Elevator) by Mercedes Franco (2015) and "Nocturno" (Nocturnal) (2009) by Lucas García, and a series of photographs, *Central Parking* (2009) by Ángela Bonadies. Each work reconfigures a promising past, a perpetual present, and a mute future by placing them in an environment that has been rewired by the uncanny. Something that was repressed in the modeling fictions returns in the remodeling fictions to cause anguish. From this standpoint, I deal with the informal violence depicted in these fictions, a diffuse, disorganized, unprogrammed form of violence that does not come from the state or a revolutionary force, but from the vacuum that results when the state abandons its functions to a deregulated and aggressively globalized society. In this context, I analyze the fictionalized despecialization of spaces where the living and the dead, criminals and victims, stripped automobiles and late-model luxury vehicles, all coexist.

Following Marjorie Garber, who has argued that the figure of the transvestite "incarnates and emblematizes the disruptive element that intervenes signaling . . . a crisis of 'category itself'" (32), in chapter 3 I analyze performances by the Florence Foster Jenkins Opera Company in Caracas and propose that they upend hegemonic notions of white, masculine, heterosexual modernity. The opera company, which was active in Caracas from 1978 to 1983, staged drag lyrical music recitals in an apartment in Parque Central. These performances, a remodeling fiction that exceeds the walls of the apartment, effectively contaminate the complex, the city, and ultimately the entire project of Venezuelan modernization. I also examine the troupe's representation in José Balza's short story "Central" (1980), which includes three parallel stories that also take place in

the complex. Together, these three stories refictionalize Parque Central as a space of changes, contradictions, and parallel worlds.

Taking Richard Ryder's term "speciesism" and its later derivations in animal studies as a starting point, in chapter 4, I study the "humanization" present in some modeling fictions of Parque Central to show its dependence on the concept of "de-animalization." I also explore the subsequent animalization and botanization of the complex in its remodeling fictions. I read the short stories "Invertebrados" (Invertebrates) (1995) by José Luis Palacios, "Intrusos" (Intruders) (2015) by Fedosy Santaella, and the chronicle "Una anaconda en Parque Central" (An Anaconda in Parque Central) (1998) by Rafael Arráiz Lucca alongside the complex's advertising brochures. I argue that the categories of human and animal are assimilated, respectively, to the masculine and the feminine, to men and women, to the middle class and the lower classes, and to white people and people of color. As a result, although the remodeling fictions deconstruct the modeling fictions, they also replicate their sexism, classism, and racism.

Finally, in chapter 5, I draw on the comparison between modern architecture and the hospital. Beatriz Colomina has argued that, for prominent architects like Alvar Aalto and Le Corbusier, "nineteenth-century architecture was demonized as unhealthy, and sun, light, ventilation, exercise, roof terraces, hygiene, and whiteness were offered as means to prevent, if not cure, tuberculosis" (*X-ray Architecture*, 18). For Colomina, the prevention and treatment of disease and the specific technologies for diagnosing tuberculosis, such as the X-ray machine, have shaped modern architecture from its beginning to give it a hospital-like character. From this perspective, I analyze six short films that make reference to Parque Central: *Un nuevo modo de vivir* (A New Way to Live) (1974) directed by Eduardo Alvarado, *El afinque de Marín* (Marín's Settlement) (1979) directed by Jacobo Penzo, *T.V.O.* (1981) directed by Carlos Castillo, *Katuche* (2007) directed by Andrea Ríos, *Parque Central* (1991) directed by Andrés Agustí, and *Un nuevo modo de vivir donde nada se parece al pasado* (A New Way to Live Where Nothing Is Like the Past) (1974) directed by Josefina Acevedo. I explore the differences between what I call *hospitalarias* and *inhospitalarias* fictions, which correspond, in principle, to modeling and remodeling fictions. I keep these terms in Spanish to preserve the double meaning of "hospitable or inhospitable" and "belonging or relating to the hospital or opposed to it" that is lost when they are rendered in English. *Hospitalarias* fictions portray the body of the inhabitant, worker, or visitor to Parque Central like that of a hospital patient to be cured of an undesirable past and protected from unhygienic surroundings. *Inhospitalarias* fictions, on the contrary, frighten patients,

interrupt treatment, prevent healing, break quarantine, and generate disgust as they persecute, imprison, and confront the body with deserts, abysses, terror, madness, and instability.

This book deals with the process of modeling Parque Central, which, from today's perspective, appeared auspicious and full of promise. It was the Caracas that "could have been" in that "promising past." Within that promise of a better future articulated in the 1970s, however, lurked all the elements that led to its deterioration and its eventual and incessant remodeling.