

Loredana Comparone
Cornell University
lc274@cornell.edu
(607) 793-3988

From Supercity to “Smart” Trap: Urban Visions in Sergi Belbel’s *Después de la lluvia*

Remarking on the debate concerning the status and future of the modern city waged in the pages of the Italian journal *La Fiera Letteraria*, Antonio Gramsci noted in his *Prison Notebooks* that “the ‘literary’ polemic between ‘supercountry’ and ‘supercity’ was nothing but the froth on top of the polemic between parasitic conservatism and the innovating tendencies of Italian society”. On the one hand, those who claimed that “The city does not create, but consumes” (Papini) sought in the telluric notion of the supercountry the defense of autochthonous, traditional values. The supercity, as Gramsci suggested, meant embracing modernity and civilization, recognizing that, especially in the case of the Italian nation, unity had also been the outcome of the agglutinant power of its cities in the face of the disarray and municipalism fostered by the “Supercountrymanism.”

Taking this debate as its point of departure, and Gramsci’s idea that cities unite, this paper begins by tracing the fate of the Supercity from the capitalist to a late-capitalist society in order to examine which, if any, of its features continue to inform the way we envision the city today. In particular, I focus on a play by Catalan playwright Sergi Belbel, *Después de la lluvia*, as a witty critique of the extent to which our progressively globalized and networked urban life is turning into a “domotic system,”¹ one in which everything—from work to pastimes and private vices—is legislated in order to maximize efficiency. In a sort of playful apocalyptic vision, Belbel explores through the eyes of a group of ‘unlawful’ employers of a firm—who secretly meet to smoke on the roof of their ‘smart’ skyscrapers looking down at a city that has not seen a drop of water in two years—the social and cultural implications that these ‘smart buildings’ entail for our way of envisioning urban dwelling in a not so far future.

¹ The term “domotics” refers to the integration of technology in the design of ‘smart’ buildings, with the objective of maximizing savings, security, communication and accessibility, and remote visual managing.