



Mapping Space And Power: Discipline, Spatial Allegory And Masculinity In Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Time Of The Hero*

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between space and power in Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Time of the Hero* through a Foucauldian framework of discipline and control. Focusing on spatial allegory and constructions of masculinity, the paper analyzes how institutional environments such as the military academy function as sites of surveillance, normalization, and resistance. It argues that space operates not merely as a physical setting but as a dynamic force that structures power relations and shapes subjectivity within the narrative.

Keywords: Spatial Allegory, Discipline, Masculinity, Power, Foucault, Latin American Literature

Introduction

Mario Vargas Llosa anchors Latin American literature's Boom generation alongside García Márquez, Cortázar, Fuentes, and Carpentier, consistently probing power, authority, and subject formation under authoritarian modernity. His work uniquely dissects how Latin America's uneven modernization—sold as universal progress—actually entrenched violence through state institutions that disciplined bodies, silenced

dissent, and naturalized hierarchy as developmental necessity. In twentieth-century Peru, this modernity arrived not as rational progress but through coercive military-civilian regimes enforcing order and development via disciplinary institutions that normalized violence and impunity. Manuel A. Odría's dictatorship (1948–1956) exemplifies this pattern, pairing economic modernization—railway expansion, industrial growth—with brutal repression: suspension of civil liberties, censorship, and torture chambers disguised as national security measures. The 1958–59 Leoncio Prado Military Academy scandals shattered this façade, transforming a supposed crucible of national virtue into national disgrace. Abusive hazing rituals escalated to deadly violence, culminating in Ricardo "El Esclavo" Arana's 1959 death—officially a "suicide," widely suspected as murder by upperclassmen. Concurrently, cadet-poet Alberto Fernández "El Poeta" Gamboa faced expulsion and institutional silencing after documenting academy abuses in verse that circulated clandestinely. These events exposed hierarchical authority's triumph over justice, igniting national outrage that Vargas Llosa witnessed firsthand. In *The Time of the Hero*, the academy becomes power's anatomy: dormitories enable constant surveillance; parade grounds theatricalize obedience; offices bureaucratize control; latrines host illicit exchange; and off-campus brothels test militarized masculinity. Here, bureaucratic files render behavior legible, militarized drills enforce hierarchy, and developmentalist violence masquerades as character formation. These dynamics reveal the inseparability of obedient subject production, fragile performative masculinity, and spatial-institutional control. This study employs three interrelated theoretical frameworks to map the spatial dynamics of power in *The Time of the Hero*: Foucault's concept of disciplinary power as articulated through Lefebvre's spatial triad, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and spatial allegory. Far from mere historical reflection, the novel enacts power's spatialized, embodied, discursive mechanisms, illuminating institutional subject formation and latent resistance that destabilize authoritarian modernity from within.

Methodology

This study develops a tripartite theoretical approach to conceptualize the military academy as a dynamic site of authoritarian formation, drawing on Foucault's notion of disciplinary power as articulated through Lefebvre's spatial triad and extending the analysis through discourse and spatial allegory. Foucault's discipline—surveillance, normalization, bodily regulation—offers the primary analytic for institutional practices. Lefebvre's spatial theory reveals how power materializes architecturally, structuring movement, perception, and interaction through spatial organization. Discourse analysis uncovers language's regulatory role, determining what can be said, by whom, and under what conditions within spatialized authority. Spatial allegory then scales these mechanisms macro-politically, demonstrating how architecture, routine, and discourse render authority tangible. Through this synthesis, the institution emerges as control's active apparatus: discipline, spatial design, and discourse interweaving to structure everyday life, generating compliance alongside resistance. Far from abstract ideology, authority becomes enacted, materialized, and embodied through bodies, spaces, and language.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault establishes the analytic foundation for understanding modern power as a diffuse network that operates through surveillance, discipline, and regulation of bodies within spatial arrangements, rather than through overt displays of sovereign force. Whereas sovereign authority relied on public spectacle and exemplary punishment, disciplinary power acts through its minute, continuous regulations, emphasizing fragmentation and optimization of behavior (137). Its aim is the production of docile bodies—subjects who are analytically knowable, spatially organized, temporally disciplined, and optimized for institutional purposes, yet deprived of autonomous agency (138–39). Disciplinary power operates through three parallel mechanisms—surveillance, normalization, and temporal-spatial regulation—forming an explicit triad: surveillance via the Panopticon's asymmetrical visibility, where subjects remain observable while observers stay concealed (187–88); normalization through measurable standards that

quantify deviations (184–85); and temporal-spatial regulation via drills and timetables training rhythmic obedience (150–51). These standards render deviations visible as quantifiable deficiencies. Temporal and spatial regulation further organizes daily life (150–51), ensuring that drills, timetables, and repetition train bodies into obedience. Foucault emphasizes that discipline is most effective when it becomes internalized, as individuals begin to regulate their own behavior and follow institutional norms almost automatically (202–03). Dominique Moran and Jennifer Turner further highlight how these routines cultivate instrumental efficiency within institutional settings (457–58). Surveillance and normalization coalesce to produce individualized cases—documented, organized, and legible for administration (184–85). Institutional files convert behavioral uncertainty into standardized knowledge, shaping evaluation and control. Disciplinary power materializes architecturally through cells, corridors, visibility fields, and dormitories, creating a micro-physics of power that structures routines and conduct within spatial practice (26–28, 172–73). For such discipline to function effectively, it requires material spatial organization—clinics, hospitals, academies—that stabilizes control systems. Building on this, David Armstrong's "The Rise of Surveillance Medicine" reveals how modern medical systems extend disciplinary monitoring across institutions, embedding it within everyday routines (832–34). Here, surveillance medicine shifts from treating illness to continuously observing and managing risks and behaviors, naturalizing disciplinary practices within ordinary care.

Henri Lefebvre asserts social space as a social product, linking discipline to material environments (26). Space constructs social relations, which it reproduces through his spatial triad (33): representations of space (conceived), spatial practice (perceived), and representational spaces (lived). Representations of space encode institutional logic in plans, rules, hierarchies, and official designs. Spatial practice governs bodily circulation through routinized movement, coordinated drills, and regulated pathways. Representational spaces capture lived experience, where inhabitants accept, resist, or reinterpret these systems. Through this triad, surveillance manifests as organized visibility, normalization as hierarchical arrangement, and temporal discipline as repetitive routines built into space. Architecture shapes behavior: walls enclose, partitions divide, open grounds make subjects visible, thresholds regulate entry, and peripheral areas allow flexibility. Lefebvre's broader socio-political critique demonstrates how built environments both encode and enforce authority (Stanek 45). Similarly, Kanishka Goonewardena and colleagues argue that architecture contains layers of historical contradictions, revealing how social conflicts become inscribed in material space (7). Extending Lefebvre, Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* reveals how lived experience exceeds conceived orders, generating hybrid zones of negotiation (6, 10). Robert T. Tally Jr.'s concept of spatiality emphasizes cognitive mapping, where narrative structures render socio-political relations intelligible in spatial terms (38). Together, these perspectives highlight space as an active medium through which power, experience, and social relations are organized and negotiated. In this framework, architectural environments become material manifestations of spatial dynamics, making authority visible while structuring how subjects experience control.

Extending spatial-material analysis to the operations of authority requires equal attention to discourse. Michel Foucault argues that discourses form structured systems governed by implicit rules determining what can be said, by whom, and under what conditions (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 80). Discursive formations authorize certain enunciative positions while excluding alternatives (85, 114), constituting discourse objects that discourse itself produces as legitimate knowledge (87). These systems establish enunciative modalities—the institutional conditions authorizing specific subjects to speak with authority (117)—while Foucault's principle of rarity underscores the limited and regulated nature of statements within any discursive formation, "not everything said circulates equally" within disciplinary frameworks (118). The discursive formation functions as "the law that limits, orders and authorizes statements" (117), providing epistemology's invisible structure for institutional knowledge production. In disciplinary institutions, bureaucratic documentation

converts uncertain statements into official facts (131), presenting interpretive observations as objective truth through classification procedures. Carol Smart shows institutional language gradually aligns expression with expected roles (52–53). John Rajchman emphasizes discourse's deeper function: delimiting thought's permissible boundaries within power structures (142–43). Jill Pickett demonstrates even resistance operates within discursive constraints—counter-statements must employ authority's linguistic rules (455–56).

Spatial allegory synthesizes these spatial-material and discursive dynamics, transforming built environments into legible power maps. Through this mechanism, narratives, rules, and power relations link across institutional sites, revealing authority's rhizomatic nature. Enclosures, corridors, visibility fields, and thresholds become readable signifiers—simultaneously manifesting control while exposing resistance possibilities (485–90). Rob Shields shows how spatial organization and discourse jointly maintain social order: built environments shape communication while language supports spatial hierarchies (162–63). Foucault's capillary mechanisms show power working through daily practices. Combined with Lefebvre's spatial triad, they reveal institutional authority's embedding in physical layouts (*Discipline and Punish* 40; *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 110). Office locations, corridors, and doorways direct movement, shaping perception, structuring communication, and justifying spatial order—making power material, discursive, and lived (Tally 68). Institutional spaces stay unstable: Shields notes micro-resistances from daily deviations (163), while Elden shows buildings reflect territorial and bureaucratic goals (86). This combined framework—spatial allegory, capillary mechanisms, produced space—offers strong tools to trace institutional power's material-discursive workings, positioning spatial practice centrally.

Analysis

In *The Time of the Hero*, the Leoncio Prado Military Academy functions as a disciplinary institution exemplifying Michel Foucault's "micro-physics of power," where authority operates through surveillance, regulation, and routine control over the body (Foucault 200–201). The academy's everyday life is organized through spatial arrangements that reflect Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad. The official design—the parade grounds, classrooms, and dormitories—corresponds to representations of space, encoding hierarchy and visibility (Lefebvre 33). These spaces are not neutral; they shape cadets' movement, behavior, and interactions. Simultaneously, daily drills, inspections, and routines form spatial practice, training the cadets' bodies through repetition. The cadets' personal experiences within these spaces create representational space, "the space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols," where they respond emotionally, strategically, and sometimes resist the imposed order (Lefebvre 39). Morning inspections exemplify this disciplinary structure. "Every gesture, every posture was examined, measured, and judged" (Vargas Llosa 46). Cadets remain constantly observable while those in authority monitor from elevated or centralized positions, reflecting Foucault's notion of asymmetrical visibility (187–188).

The architecture of the academy amplifies this effect. Open parade grounds expose cadets' bodies, while segmented dormitories isolate them into hierarchically ranked spaces. As Alberto Fernández, "El Poeta," observes, "the seniors could watch everything we did; there was no place to hide" (Vargas Llosa 48). This constant visibility ensures that discipline is internalized: cadets regulate their own behavior, anticipating scrutiny even in moments of privacy. Surveillance extends beyond physical oversight to the control of language and records. Conversations, letters, and institutional reports become "cases" for evaluation (Foucault 184–185). Alberto's poetry and critical remarks attract institutional attention: "They read my verses... and frowned at what I wrote. I knew I had to be careful" (Vargas Llosa 102). By suppressing his writing, the academy regulates discourse, demonstrating that power shapes not only actions but also expression (Foucault 85). Discipline is reinforced through constant comparison and competition. Drills, rankings, and evaluations expose cadets to peer scrutiny. One reflects, "to fail was not only to lose honor but

to invite the scrutiny of everyone" (Vargas Llosa 50). Over time, such practices produce "docile bodies" (Foucault 138–139), whose movements, habits, and identities conform to institutional expectations. Moran and Turner note that repetitive routines gradually shape bodies, transforming discipline into habit and preparing individuals for hierarchical systems (457–458).

Masculinity in the academy builds directly on this disciplinary foundation, emerging as a fragile performance continuously monitored and tested. Cadets must display strength and resilience or risk humiliation. Ricardo Arana, the Slave, experiences this vulnerability directly: "They laughed at him... his weakness was their amusement" (Vargas Llosa 72). Masculinity becomes a fragile, performative authoritarian status, subject to constant observation and correction (Foucault 177–178). Armstrong observes that "systems of observation make bodies comparable" by standardizing postures and gestures, embedding institutional values directly into physical behavior (832–34). Yet building on the established disciplinary structure, small acts of defiance and negotiation emerge. Cadets whisper, glance, or converse secretly: "We talk in corners... hoping no one notices" (Vargas Llosa 49). Such actions reveal cracks in the authority's panoptic logic (Foucault 202–203).

Building on the mechanisms of surveillance and normalization established above, the physical layout of the Leoncio Prado Military Academy functions not merely as a backdrop for events but as an active instrument of power. The organization of space within the academy translates institutional authority into everyday discipline. In this sense, the academy reflects Henri Lefebvre's argument that space is socially produced rather than neutral. Lefebvre explains that social space operates through the interaction of representations of space, spatial practice, and representational spaces (26–27). These dimensions help explain how the academy's architecture shapes both behavior and experience. The academy's design reflects what Lefebvre calls representations of space, where institutional planners encode hierarchy and authority into physical structures. Dormitories provide a clear example of this spatial hierarchy established earlier. Sleeping arrangements reflect rank and seniority among the cadets: "the lower bunks belonged to the new cadets, who could be watched from above" (Vargas Llosa 48). This vertical arrangement establishes a constant sense of observation, encouraging cadets to regulate their own actions. The power exercised in these spaces extends beyond official authority. Senior cadets also reinforce the hierarchy through intimidation, reminding newcomers of their subordinate position. As one cadet warns, "Here you're told, or you'll regret it" (50). Through such interactions, spatial organization transforms institutional authority into everyday social practice. The regulation of movement throughout the academy further reinforces this disciplinary environment. Corridors, stairways, and entry points guide cadets along predetermined routes and reduce opportunities for unsupervised interaction. Instructors and senior students maintain constant oversight as cadets move between classrooms, dormitories, and training areas. This arrangement ensures that movement remains orderly and visible, reinforcing the academy's hierarchical structure. The parade ground represents the most public expression of spatial discipline. It functions as a stage where order and obedience are repeatedly performed before the eyes of instructors and fellow cadets. Vargas Llosa describes how "every step, every salute was timed and corrected by the instructors" (47). When cadets fail to meet expectations, they are sharply reprimanded: "You move like civilians," an officer shouts, demanding stricter coordination (48). These drills illustrate Lefebvre's concept of spatial practice, in which repeated routines reproduce institutional order (40). Through constant repetition, cadets learn to embody discipline in their movements and gestures. Spatial organization also influences how cadets communicate with one another. Private interaction is limited, and even peripheral spaces such as bathrooms or latrines offer only partial privacy. Cadets remain aware that they may be overheard, which encourages caution in conversation. As one cadet remarks quietly, "Keep your voice down—someone might hear us" (49). In this way, architecture indirectly regulates discourse, reinforcing what Michel Foucault describes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as the institutional control of knowledge and speech (85).

The Time of the Hero demonstrates that surveillance operates not only through the production of docile bodies and controlled spaces but also through language and discourse. Within the Leoncio Prado Military Academy, authority regulates communication, influencing how events are narrated, interpreted, and understood. Michel Foucault's ideas on discourse are particularly relevant here: power functions through systems of knowledge that regulate what can be said, who may speak, and which statements count as truth (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 80). Language thus becomes a mechanism through which institutions exercise and maintain control. Within the academy, speech and narrative face constant monitoring. Cadets quickly learn that their words may be overheard, reported, or reinterpreted by those in authority, fostering a climate of caution and self-restraint. Institutional power dictates which accounts gain official recognition, while dissenting perspectives face suppression. Alberto Fernández, "El Poeta," exemplifies this tension. His writing offers a space for personal expression, yet discovery risks institutional discipline. He composes poems critiquing hazing and informal hierarchies: "he wrote in secret, knowing that discovery could bring punishment" (Vargas Llosa 120). Through Alberto, the novel reveals how the academy seeks to control interpretation itself, privileging official explanations in public circulation. Administrative documentation reinforces this system. Reports, disciplinary records, and evaluations transform cadets' actions into permanent institutional knowledge. Foucault describes this process as creating "cases," where individuals are documented, analyzed, and classified (184–85). Vargas Llosa captures the atmosphere: "every mistake was noted, every hesitation recorded; there was no escape from the invisible eye of the academy" (52). Such records make behavior measurable and enduring, shaping cadets' institutional status. Yet power never achieves total control. Small resistances emerge in everyday cadet life. Michel de Certeau's theory of tactics explains these responses to institutional structures—subtle reinterpretations of imposed rules. Cadets exchange whispered jokes, pass hidden notes, or gather briefly in less-supervised areas. In one episode, they quietly rearrange sleeping positions to evade oversight: "even in the dormitory, some found ways to escape the eyes of the instructors" (Vargas Llosa 73). As lived space diverges from designed intentions, corridors, dormitories, and hidden corners become sites of negotiation. Language itself turns into resistance. While official reports frame violence as legitimate discipline, cadets foster informal narratives via jokes, private talk, and personal writings. Alberto's concealed poems and letters generate counter-accounts challenging the academy's reality: "He wrote feverishly in his notebook trying to make sense of everything he had experienced," transforming literature into his refuge against the "daily hell" of institutional control (Vargas Llosa 156). Alberto's concealed poems and letters generate counter-accounts challenging the academy's reality. These narratives expose institutional authority's fragility: the academy regulates records and public speech but cannot fully govern individual interpretation.

Within the Leoncio Prado Military Academy, physical spaces, institutional routines, and symbolic meanings collectively reproduce structures of hierarchy and obedience. Vargas Llosa depicts locations—dormitories, parade grounds, administrative offices, infirmaries, and even the external brothel—as integral to this disciplinary environment. Far from mere backdrops, these spaces actively organize social relations and reinforce authority, embodying Henri Lefebvre's insight that "social space is a social product," shaped by historical and political forces (26). Ashley Philip's analysis of spatial and spectral politics in Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Green House* contends that "allegories as forms of discourse create, plot, and define spaces imbued with power configurations, carrying complex ideas, emotions, and intentions, and shaping social interactions" (486). Philip argues these narratives map "terrains of power-invested ideological and discursive spaces which are allegories of postcolonial Peru," where linearity fractures through "hauntings of diverse perspectives" revealing violence and exclusion (485). Such views position fictional environments as symbolic terrains where authority, hierarchy, and resistance emerge visibly. While dormitories represent Lefebvre's conceived space, spatial allegory reveals them as allegorical terrains where bunk hierarchies map Peru's stratified postcolonial order and Circle rites reenact national corruption and exclusion (Philip 485):

"The lower-ranking cadets slept under the watchful gaze of the upper-classmen; their every movement was scrutinized" (Vargas Llosa 45)—seniors from upper bunks surveil juniors below, aligning with Lefebvre's representations of space (33). Parade grounds theatricalize obedience: "Each step was measured, each salute timed; deviation was immediately corrected, leaving no room for individuality" (68), echoing Foucault's regime of examination (200–01). Administrative offices embody distant authority; infirmaries mark weakness; the brothel tests militarized masculinity as cadets navigate spaces where "true men prove themselves" (Vargas Llosa 210). Thus the academy microcosmically maps Peru's authoritarian order: the commandant's speeches frame cadet training as "Peru's future" (Vargas Llosa 23) while panoptic layouts (surveillance towers, inspections) mirror state security apparatus, naturalizing military hierarchy as national progress — yet cracks haunt it through cadet resistance, as Philip notes: spaces marked by "hauntings of diverse perspectives" revealing violence and exclusion (485–86). Cadets repurpose peripheral material spaces (Vargas Llosa 49)—shadowed corridors where "we could laugh quietly, for a moment forgetting the eyes above"—exposing conceived space's fragility. Spatial allegory renders these cracks symbolic: physical margins become Peru's social margins, cadet whispers allegorically voicing subaltern resistance against official discipline. Soja's *Thirdspace* reveals these spatial contradictions (Soja 6): while conceived structures impose uniformity, cadets' lived appropriation of shadowed corners generates hybrid resistance spaces that expose disciplinary fragility (Vargas Llosa 49). Lefebvre's representational space captures how such acts reshape imposed meanings (33). This spatial order also forges masculinity: officers' offices evoke distant authority, brothels test identity, and infirmary beds signal weakness. Ricardo "El Esclavo" Arana's harassment—"They laughed at him... his weakness was their amusement" (Vargas Llosa 52, 92)—shows routines inscribing normalization onto bodies (Foucault 177–78; Moran and Turner 457–58). Schedules further regulate time and space, embedding order into daily life. Yet these temporal structures reveal inherent fragility, constituting counter-discourse sites where cadets' minor infractions become legible resistance, as Pickett demonstrates (455–56), while Stuart Elden identifies institutional "leaks" where authority falters (86)—rendering the academy a legible allegory of power's contradictions that both enforces and undermines control.

Conclusion

Synthesizing disciplinary surveillance, architectural control, performative masculinity, discursive regulation, and spatial allegory, *The Time of the Hero* casts the Leoncio Prado Military Academy as a microcosm of authoritarian Peru. Here, power permeates bodies, spaces, and discourse simultaneously—stratified dormitories, visible parade grounds, and rigid schedules compelling cadets toward Foucault's "docile bodies" through internalized surveillance (138–39) and synchronized routines regimenting time and movement (150–51). Officers' offices embody authority, inspection grounds render bodies legible, and bunks materialize hierarchy. Masculinity emerges performatively through endurance and dominance: Ricardo "El Esclavo" Arana's marginalization reveals how failing these norms invites ridicule, inscribing gendered discipline onto the body (Vargas Llosa 92; Moran and Turner 457–58). Yet cracks appear. Hidden corridors and unsupervised corners enable grievances, alliances, and subtle reinterpretations of power. Ultimately, Vargas Llosa casts the academy as spatial allegory: a forge for obedient subjects aligned with state ideology, yet haunted by everyday subversion that exposes authoritarian fragility and the enduring human impulse to resist.

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