

Shadows of NAFTA: Persons as Enterprises, Bodies as Spectacle, and the  
Deterritorialization of Feeling

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## Abstract

*This thesis takes as object the history of '90s globalization, in the context of neoliberal reforms by President Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) of Mexico, and extension of informal U.S. Empire through the free trade reforms of Bill Clinton's presidency, from 1992-2001. A cultural history of the North American Free Trade Agreement, passed in 1993, suggests alternative views of '90s foreign policy from a moment of optimism and "soft power," to see the hauntings of violence and labor exploitation visible across borders to subjects living in an era of unprecedented connectivity. Novels like David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) and Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004) write a critical history of US-Mexico economic relations through landscapes of hyper-consumption and dissociative, televisual politics in U.S. suburban enclaves, and in visions of violence erupting at the sites of maquiladora factories on the U.S.-Mexico border since 1993. While North American novelists reacted to the disjuncture of feeling between first world consumers and spectacles of neoliberal violence, Mexican films like Robert Rodriguez' *El Mariachi* (1992), *Desperado* (1995) and Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tú mamá también* (2001) structured political critiques through the image, to reveal the transformations of Mexican political identity and rural life with the intensification of the illegal drug trade, and tourist economies under neoliberalism.*

## Introduction

Before signing the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993, President Bill Clinton delivered the anecdote of an American citizen living in China who had watched the vote on international television. Clinton intoned, with a hushed pause, “you would have had to be *there* to understand how important this was to the rest of the world.”<sup>1</sup> No doubt, the globalization that NAFTA helped define was important to the rest of the world, if not solely in the ways Clinton had in mind. In a speech about a document which promised to connect people on the North American continent as never before, there were still apparently certain things “you would have [...] to be there to understand.” In the early 90’s, bodies on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border were connected more intimately than ever before through globalized consumption and production, at the same time that emerging network technologies like cable television and the World Wide Web transformed the distance between bodies in far away places.<sup>2</sup> The foreign policy of trade laws like NAFTA, in the wake of the Cold War, worked upon the premise of U.S. “soft power” and a deterritorialized information economy of invisible, frictionless flows of capital, ideas and goods across borders.<sup>3</sup> Yet the promise of modernization and export-led growth for Mexico through economic reform and the entry of transnational corporations already recalled the asymmetries of empire between colony and metropole, marked by resource extraction and exploitation of laboring bodies. Technological and communications revolutions which marked the optimism of the ‘90s, echoed the exclusions of the Enlightenment, as they were made possible by the transformation of supply chains, and the availability of cheap labor for electronics industries situated at the Mexican border in cities like Ciudad Juarez, under the politics of NAFTA.<sup>4</sup>

NAFTA was by far not the first economic intervention to have a profound effect on Mexico in the late 20th century; in 1982, the devaluation of the Mexican peso changed the everyday lives of Mexicans allowing for an initial influx of multinational assembly plants to take advantage of a cheapened labor supply.<sup>5</sup> The financial globalization of NAFTA was rooted in the expansion of Latin American economic dependence on foreign loans since the 1970s, leading to the debt crises of the early 1980s, and subsequently radical processes “of political and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Clinton, Bill. Remarks on the Signing of NAFTA. December 18, 1993. *William J. Clinton Presidential History Project*. Miller Center. The University of Virginia.  
<http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3927>

<sup>2</sup> Herring, George C. “The Strength of a Giant: America as Hyperpower, 1992-2007” From *Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*. Oxford University Press, USA. 2008. 918.

<sup>3</sup> Herring 918.

<sup>4</sup> Lugo, Alejandro. *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Lugo, Alejandro. *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 2008. 79.

restructuring that included [...] the privatization of hundreds of state enterprises, [...] trade liberalization” and the ever-increasing influence of U.S. interests.<sup>6</sup> By the time President Carlos Salinas de Gortari began negotiations with George H.W. Bush to form a free trade zone between Mexico and the U.S. in 1990, Salinas’ training as an economic technocrat at elite U.S. institutions was little surprise.<sup>7</sup> Salinas promised NAFTA would modernize Mexican culture,<sup>8</sup> a process he began in 1988 with the weakening and restructuring of Mexican labor, while disregarding the labor provisions guaranteed after the revolution in the Constitution of 1917.<sup>9</sup>

Though facing the radically different climate of the postindustrial United States, at the height of its power after the Cold War, Clinton also articulated NAFTA as part of a turn of the century inevitability of “an old world dying.” “Tomorrow,” he claimed, had already arrived, as nothing could “change the fact that factories or information [could] flash across the world.”<sup>10</sup> The North American Free Trade Agreement was constructed in part to deliver on Clinton’s campaign promises to resuscitate the U.S. economy and keep the nation ahead at the end of the American century. Clinton was a president famous for, on national talk shows and television prime time, telling Americans “I feel your pain.”<sup>11</sup> The late ‘80s and early ‘90s had seen the growth of anxiety for the American middle class with the stagnation of U.S. industry.<sup>12</sup> Clinton’s presidential campaign was premised on the promise to deliver economic security, which he accomplished in part through signing over three hundred trade police like NAFTA, establishing global supply chains and allowed U.S.-based and multinational industries access to cheaper labor and manufacturing prices.<sup>13</sup>

Kenichi Ohmae, a prominent Japanese management consultant, famously wrote in the early ‘90s that globalization of this kind was a sign of the inevitable erosion of the nation state:

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<sup>6</sup> Marchival, Carlos. “The Finances of Hegemony in Latin America: Debt Negotiations and the Role of the U.S. Government 1945-2005.” Ed. Fred Rosen. *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America*. Duke University Press. 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Beezley, William H. *Mexico in World History*. Oxford University Press. 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Camp, Roderic. *Mexico’s Mandarins: crafting a power elite for the twenty-first century*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Maxwell, Kenneth. “Review: Mexico: The Policy and the Politics of Modernization.” *Foreign Affairs*. September/October 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Toledo, Enrique de la Garza. “Manufacturing neoliberalism: industrial relations, trade union corporatism and politics.” *Mexico in Transition: Neoliberal Globalism, the State and Civil Society*. Ed. Gerardo Otero. London: Zed Books. 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Clinton, Bill. Remarks on the Signing of NAFTA. December 18, 1993. *William J. Clinton Presidential History Project*. Miller Center. The University of Virginia. <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3927>

<sup>11</sup> Levine, Richard M. “I feel your pain.” *Mother Jones*. July/August 1993

<sup>12</sup> Sullivan, Teresa, Elizabeth Warren and Jay Lawrence Westbrook. *The Fragile Middle Class*. Yale University Press. 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Mougayer, William. “Globalization of the Television Supply Chain.” *The History of Globalization*. YaleGlobal. 11 October, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Grandin, Greg. *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*. New York: Metropolitan Books. 2006. 193.

the necessary crumbling of a nineteenth-century artifact.<sup>14</sup> Yet the “end of the nation-state,” in favor of a liberal internationalism made up of global economic interests, belied the nationalistic rhetoric and logic that Clinton used in speaking of NAFTA’s importance for the U.S. economy.<sup>15</sup> The Clinton administration’s efforts to assuage the fears of the American middle class were meant promoting U.S. economic interests and influence abroad, through a screen of multilateralism. This was made abundantly clear with the statement, on the signing of NAFTA, while heralding a technically multilateral trade law, that the passing of the document offered an opportunity for Americans to “remake the world,” like their parents before them.<sup>16</sup>

The disjuncture between the face of liberal progressivism in the U.S. and economic liberalism abroad suggest an alternative history to popular memories of the Clinton presidency and the optimism of the 1990s. Globalization, and the spread of corporations’ reach past the bounds of national borders, furthered a rift the U.S. middle class consumer’s ability to comprehend painful realities of outsourced labor and wage exploitation that structured the comforts of their everyday lives (even as they were horrified by images of suffering abroad, and ‘90s new age televisual politics demanded displays of empathy from its president.)<sup>17</sup> The construction of imaginaries of the ‘90s as a liberal time of success and growth belied economic realities that included the dissolution of the welfare state, the outsourcing of American jobs, and the exploitation of bodies across the border through NAFTA.

In Mexico, the underbelly of neoliberal development was seen in the nightmarish violence of the maquiladora industry, and a burgeoning illegal drug trade which mirrored the increased flows of goods across the border.<sup>18</sup> Real wages and purchasing power for Mexicans in the formal economy continued to fall after NAFTA, despite the promises of the Salinas administration, while Mexican culture continued to work on a model of “aspirational consumption,” creating a widening gap between consumer expectations and political reality.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ohmae, Kenichi. *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies*. New York: Free Press. 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-present*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Clinton, Bill. Remarks on the Signing of NAFTA. December 18, 1993. *William J. Clinton Presidential History Project*. Miller Center. The University of Virginia.

**17** Berlant, Lauren. “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics.” *Cultural pluralism, identity politics, and the law*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. “Ravaged wages and ravaged bodies saturate the global marketplace,” Lauren Berlant writes, as the regular proliferation of sweatshop scandals, such as the exposure in 1996 of Kathie Lee Gifford’s Wal-Mart clothing line for drastically exploiting underage Honduran children, or Sidney Schamberg’s *Life* (June 1996) article “Six Cents an Hour” chronicling the abuse of children in Pakistan.

<sup>18</sup> Malkin, Victoria. “Narcotrafficking, Migration, and Modernity in Rural Mexico.” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 28, No. 4, Mexico in the 1990s: Economic Crisis, Social Polarization, and Class Struggle, Part 2 (Jul., 2001), pp. 101-128

<sup>19</sup> Bunker, Steven B. and Victor M. Macias-Gonzalez. “Consumption and Material Culture in the Twentieth Century.” *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, First Edition. Ed. William Beezley. Blackwell. 2011. 84.

At the end of the 20th century labor historians were faced with the challenge of having to think through the effects of globalization, and contingent movements of information and people across borders.<sup>20</sup> The transnational turn meant accounting not only for the circumstances of workers within nations, but after NAFTA, and the breakdown of legal barriers to transnational corporations, also for realities facing workers who could no longer count on the protections of national sovereignty. With NAFTA and the neoliberal *sexenio* of Salinas de Gortari from 1988-1994, Mexicans in particular could no longer count on whatever protections the revolution had offered through the labor conglomerates created by the PRI.<sup>21</sup> Modes of labor resistance would also no longer look like they had in the past, given the historically transformative forces of technological and the communications revolution to Mexico, which intensified in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup>

If the history of labor was now transnational, and troubled by globalization, which is to say Americanization,<sup>23</sup> the longer arc of U.S. labor history may require our attention in particular to understand the processes by which labor in the globalized world economy became invisible. How was it that the United States, as it stood at the passage of NAFTA at the end of the 20th century, could have “passed through the industrial revolution without the establishment of a class consciousness”?<sup>24</sup> At the moment of the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy, historians were pressed to think about the forces that precipitated the longer failure of class-consciousness around production.

David Foster Wallace’s satire of NAFTA in *Infinite Jest* reads the lack of U.S. investment in politics more generally as a result of middle class Americans’ obsession with consumption and their own pleasure. Historians like Lizabeth Cohen might not disagree, given the demise of American working class consciousness after World War II was rooted in the compromises offered by a “consumer’s republic” which guaranteed the comforts of consumption for the middle class through mass production.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the rise of Fordist production in the U.S. paralleled the development of Hollywood’s fantasy, entertainment machine.<sup>26</sup> Globalization meant a widening distance between the everyday life of the U.S. consumer—which was altered mainly by the extrapolation of shiny screens in the Internet boom—and the realities of economic production taking place across the border.

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<sup>20</sup> Fink, Leon. *Workers across the Americas: the transnational turn in labor history*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. xi.

<sup>21</sup> Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds. “Salinas Bids Adios to the Revolution.” *The Course of Mexican History*. Seventh Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 671.

<sup>22</sup> Barbero, Jesus Martin. “Between Technology and Culture: Communication and Modernity in Latin America.” *Cultural Agency in the Americas*. Ed. Doris Sommer. Duke University Press. 2006. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Monsivais, Carlos. “Would So Many Millions of People Not End Up Speaking English?: The North American Culture and Mexico.” Sarto, Ana del, Alicia Rios, and Abril Trigo, Ed. *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Fink, Leon. *Workers across the Americas: the transnational turn in labor history*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. xii.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf. 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Lipsitz, George. “Reel America: The Working Class and Hollywood.” *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1994.

NAFTA may not have visibly alter the face of the American economy at the top, but it profoundly transformed the appearance of labor at the bottom, underscoring the dissonances between the screening of U.S. economic reality and the exploitative economic conditions that undergirded “frictionless” growth.<sup>27</sup> Yet the failure of a liberal U.S. to account for the changes “at the bottom” could not have been merely a matter of oversight, or distraction in the face of constant consumption and entertainment. Rather, the blinders liberalism instead always worked more insidiously, with exclusion long having been a tenet of the face of liberalism in the context of empire.<sup>28</sup>

NAFTA was screened through the televisual, optimistic fantasy of the Clinton administration, geared towards hopeful futures for the American middle class. The liberalism of the Clinton presidency espoused optimism mostly at home on the TV, but the voice of American middle class alienation found expression in other cultural spaces. North American novelists like David Foster Wallace and Roberto Bolaño chose the form of the 19th century realist long form novel in protest of the politics of feeling produced by televisuality. Yet their critiques of the violence of late capitalism were also informed by the influence of television and entertainment, as a crux in reckoning with the problem of meaning and feeling across the abyss of media spectacle. Their realism required to them to take as object the telecommunications boom, and as it influenced the viewer’s relationship to painful realities.

Meanwhile, the spread of U.S.-style media production and consumption across the border functioned as a vector of the modernization of NAFTA,<sup>29</sup> while the telecommunications industry was also a major part of the legislation of the document. The enormity of the entertainment technology, cinema and television industries meant that these were of major concern for the agreement.<sup>30</sup> The changing face of traditional Mexican culture through the globalization of U.S. style consumption and media under NAFTA also rewrites our understanding of the postmodern consumer landscape of the ‘90s U.S. While texts like *Infinite Jest* reacted to the landscape of spectacle and consumerism, the hybrid cultural production that emerged on the other side of the border depict not only the evisceration of meaning and politics in late capitalism, but also alternative possibilities of postcolonial feeling and viewing. The televisual politics that were constitutive of the liberal disconnect between utopian fantasies of globalization, and disturbing realities of globalized economic production facing working people in Mexico and the U.S., were furthered by the telecommunications networks that came as a part of NAFTA. But the space of

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<sup>27</sup> Bacon, David. *The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border*. Berkeley. University of California Press. 2004. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Mehta, Uday. “Liberal Strategies of Exclusion.” *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. University of California Press. 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Larkin, Brian. “Circulating Empires: Colonial Authority and the Immoral, Subversive Problem of American Film.” Ed. Edwards, Brian. *Globalizing American Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Mougayer, William. “Globalization of the Television Supply Chain.” YaleGlobal. 11 October 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Balio, Tino. “A major presence in all of the world’s important markets’: the globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s.” *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Routledge. 1998.

culture, the screen and the image, also offered the possibility of new connectivities through which bodies to reach across the spectacle towards one another.

To note the divergence of a first world screened relationship to the politics of feeling is to arrive at the fact that exclusionary politics of liberal feeling have always been intrinsic to the dynamics of labor exploitation in colonialism. If, historically, “colonial authority rested on educating the proper distribution of sentiments and desires,”<sup>31</sup> then reading the way novels and films reflect the structures of feeling around globalized labor is instrumental for understanding the new imperial dynamics produced under the auspices of free trade. Colonial extraction of labor always worked by, on the one hand, making bodies disposable and cheap for labor--as NAFTA accomplished for international and U.S. corporations--and on the other by producing barriers of difference and hierarchy to the feeling of those bodies’ labors.

U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s, as articulated through the free trade doctrine of NAFTA was a part of what this thesis will consider to be imperial liberalism, which established access to cheap Mexican labor and natural resources through “soft power” and economic restructuring; tactics long familiar to informal empire.<sup>32</sup> The economic dynamics of NAFTA took place within longer trajectories of American imperialism that worked through the exertion of economic influence. This ‘new’ imperialism emerged in the wake of World War II, and in the context of global decolonization to exert national, in this case, U.S. business interests through vectors of economic policy in countries recently made ‘independent.’<sup>33</sup>

U.S. novelist David Foster Wallace satirized the hypocrisy of the liberal “experialist” politics of feeling around NAFTA and free trade in his novel, *Infinite Jest* (1996). His dystopian corporate owned political future focuses in part on the travesties of global trade law, but more importantly, upon the American viewing audience’s distance from feeling: their own, as well as those of the laboring bodies making possible their pursuit of solipsistic pleasure through consumption, and televisual entertainment. This thesis reads novels and films that have reacted against the fantasies of free trade, while also remaining inescapably part of, and shaped by an era of global exploitation. Novels like David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996) and Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* (2004) that emerged in the wake of NAFTA registered profoundly different realities across borders, as well as divergent experiences of the politics and fantasies of globalization. Yet the problem raised by these novels, and in Mexican films like Robert Rodriguez’ *Desperado* (1995) and Alfonso Cuarón’s *Y tu mamá también* (2001), and that they in part attempted to address, was as to how subjects across borders could understand and be politicized by the relations of production structuring their realities; how to comprehend structural violence in a sea of images and screens.

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<sup>31</sup> Stoler, Ann Laura. “Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen.” *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Duke University Press, 2006. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Knight, Alan. “U.S. Imperialism/Hegemony and Latin American Resistance.” Ed. Fred Rosen. *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America*. Duke University Press. 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Anderson, James. “Borders in the New Imperialism.” *Companion to Border Studies*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell. 2012.

Novelists writing globalization marked a dizzying distance between the experience of U.S. adolescents dying of boredom in front of television screens and Mexican women murdered at the maquiladora factories in cities like Ciudad Juarez. The late capitalism of the alienated U.S. viewer reflects one side of the dark mirror of the Americas, while the assault on traditional relationships of seeing and feeling marked the other. The distance between first world subjects and third world embodied realities is seen in *2666* as an American journalist drunkenly sleeping as a broadcast of the murders in the developing border city of Santa Teresa plays on TV. On the other side of the border, David Foster Wallace writes the delivery of death by other means, with an entertainment “cartridge” so pleasurable its viewer cannot sustain the will to live. The “end of history” marked by a generation of cultural critics is imagined as a mass death of feeling through televisual disassociation. The failure to locate violence beyond the structures of screens that also deliver pleasure suggests it is actually the unrestrained market, with its discrete machinery of production and consumption that cannibalizes life.

Roberto Bolaño, an exile from Chile after the CIA-backed coup upended the Allende presidency in the ‘70s, was well aware of the repercussions of U.S. neoliberalism. He was also conscious of the dynamics of Latin American culture’s paths through U.S. consumer markets; he rejected magical realism as a device outright on the basis that it was too easily appropriable by U.S. consumers who could exotify it without taking seriously its critiques of U.S. imperialism.<sup>34</sup> In his own novel, the violence of U.S. neoliberalism, in its effects on the bodies of women working in the maquiladoras at the border, and in a violent drug trade, lead back to the site of consumption of violent pornographic images on screen.

The filmmaker Bolaño writes into *2666*, as straddling the violent telecommunications industry between Hollywood and Mexico, is Mexican transplant Robert Rodriguez.<sup>35</sup> Mexican filmmakers who stood to benefit from new markets for transnational independent film after NAFTA, who made films like *Desperado* (1995) and *Y tu mamá también* (2001) also delivered scathing political critiques *through* cinema, even as their products were commodified within those markets. Bolaño’s novel takes as its object the spectacle of hundreds of women’s deaths, to reveal how the distancing of the viewer from realities of pain and exploitation elides those exploitative, violent economic relations. The violence is produced in part by the relationship to images of pain, and the stasis of the postmodern position of consumption. At the same time, resistance to the violent fantasies of neoliberalism also took place through the cultural sphere, with the melancholic refusals depressing postmodern novels, the new brutality of films like Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez, or the cinema verite critiques of independent Mexican cinema in *Y tú mamá también* (2001).

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<sup>34</sup> Deckard, Sharae. “Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and Roberto Bolano's *2666*.” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 2012, Vol.73(3)

<sup>35</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. *2666*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 320.

## I.

### NAFTA, the Neoliberal Spirit & the Textual Politics of Trade Law

In the '90s, at the same time that the specter of globalization was theorized, and dragged out in academic debates, international trade laws were being signed that were instrumental to bringing what we know as 'globalization' into being. The North American Free Trade Agreement, in the words of Bill Clinton was "basically a trade agreement between the United States, Mexico and Canada," that also, according to the President served as a symbolic struggle for the spirit of [the United States.]"<sup>36</sup> If the debate over NAFTA represented a struggle for spirit, a reading of NAFTA's dead legalistic language would suggest that spirit lost.

The United States throughout the twentieth-century had maintained economic dominance over the Western hemisphere, in a relationship that could at various times be understood as one of informal empire.<sup>37</sup> Though NAFTA had a precedent in post-Cold War European integration, the asymmetry of power between the U.S. and Mexico as trading partners was notable, even in the field of trade agreements, for opening borders "between a developed and a developing country."<sup>38</sup> The preamble to NAFTA promised to "*STRENGTHEN* the special bonds of friendship and cooperation" amongst the United States, Mexico and Canada.<sup>39</sup> The nature of that "friendship" prior to the passing of NAFTA, as regards the relationship between Mexico and the United States is not so clear, in light of the Zapatista uprising in the state of Chiapas that marked the initiation of NAFTA on January 1, 1994.<sup>40</sup> The history of Mexico-U.S. relations is fraught not only with the annexation of half of Mexican territory to create Texas in 1848, but with the

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<sup>36</sup> Clinton, Bill. Remarks on the Signing of NAFTA. December 18, 1993. *William J. Clinton Presidential History Project*. Miller Center. The University of Virginia.  
<http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3927>

<sup>37</sup> Marchival, Carlos. "The Finances of Hegemony in Latin America: Debt Negotiations and the Role of the U.S. Government 1945-2005." Ed. Fred Rosen. *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America*. Duke University Press. 2008.

<sup>38</sup> "Open Regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean: Economic Integration as a Contribution to Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity." Santiago, Chile: U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 1994.

<sup>39</sup> United States. Government Printing Office. *North American Free Trade Agreement*. [Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1994.

<sup>40</sup> Beezley, William H. *Mexico in World History*. Oxford University Press. 2011.

memory of President Lazaro Cardenas's 1938 expropriation of British and American oil companies, in an assertion of import substitution in lieu of U.S.-influenced export led development.<sup>41</sup>

NAFTA begs questions that concern not only the economic transformation of how capital and goods moved across borders, but the nature of the politics that would produce it. NAFTA as a historical document is coded in the hyper-specified mandarin language of trade law, which precluded its reading by many of the constituencies it stood to impact. For the intensity of the political debate that emerged around NAFTA, it is not always easy to ascertain what, in fact, it is, what it did, or what it does to bodies on either side of the border.

Most revolutionary in what NAFTA did to the legal definition of sovereignty in the context of deterritorialized national borders was to blur the definition of the 'person' to extend its privileges to the 'enterprise.'<sup>42</sup> This was instrumental to the embodied reality it created for labor on the North American continent: advancing the deindustrialization of the U.S., steepening the distance between the working class in the U.S. and corporate CEOs, and exploiting the cheap labor of Mexicans, whose lives were being transformed by emigration from a traditional Mexico and rural areas to factory cities like Ciudad Juarez. NAFTA signified a globalization that moved around the physical production of goods, using cheap bodies for labor, while staking out less developed countries to become part of a global modernity of hyper consumption, to partake in the same products and distractions enjoyed by the post-industrial West. The bureaucratic modernity evident through the document's legalistic language also makes visible the distance between traditional Mexico, through the bodies and families of laborers sent to work in factories producing TVs, stereos, clothing, sneakers, cars, refined oil--as well as through the lifestyle now available to be consumed with the wages of those factories, so that families barely able to afford roofs over their heads, can have a television, to be heard and seen through windows on the street of any Mexican puebla, or shantytown urban sprawl.<sup>43</sup>

*Where a good is imported into the territory of a Party pursuant to a duty deferral program and is subsequently exported to the territory of another Party, or is used as a material in the production of another good that is subsequently exported to the territory of another Party, or is substituted by an identical or similar good used as a material in the production of another good that is subsequently exported to the territory of another Party, the Party from whose territory the good is exported.*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Rosen, Fred. Ed. *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America*. Duke University Press. 2008. and Kopinak, Kathryn. "Globalization in Tijuana Maquiladoras: Using Historical Antecedents to Test Globalization Models." *Tijuana Dreaming: Life and Art at the Global Border*. Kun, Josh, and Fiamma Montezemolo. Ed. Durham: Duke University Press. 2012.

<sup>42</sup> United States. Government Printing Office. *North American Free Trade Agreement*. [Washington, D.C: U.S. G.P.O., 1994. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Barbero, Jesus Martin. "Between Technology and Culture: Communication and Modernity in Latin America." Sommer, Doris. Ed. *Cultural Agency in the Americas*. Duke University Press. 2006. 47.

<sup>44</sup> Article 1. United States. Government Printing Office. *North American Free Trade Agreement*. [Washington, D.C: U.S. G.P.O., 1994.

NAFTA reflected the information technology that produced it. It was intended to work mechanistically; to produce the eased deterritorialized movement of capital and corporations across realities screen in itself, is to also suggest that it wrote a fantasy or a desired imaginary onto reality, producing it in its image. As well as being made possible by a systematic abstraction from the human, NAFTA also perpetuated an indifference towards embodied spatial realities, which is to say the necessary bodily labor it would delimitate. It reads like a corporate memo--which is indicative of its intended audience. As a document it works like information technology for the legitimation and governance of capital and corporations that 'international trade law' emerged as a field to circumscribe. Within its text NAFTA situates states and citizens as answerable to corporations--but given its formulation as a kind of corporate legal document it would be surprising for it to be otherwise. categorically states or national citizens, it made this a reality, corporation can sue a state for limiting its profit for any reason.

Critiques of globalization that foretold the erosion of traditional and local culture did not explicitly make their target the (post)modern legal discourse of a document like NAFTA, but they may as well have. The linguistic screens of power and knowledge that made it difficult for NAFTA to even be debated, or for its meaning as a document to be clear before its passing--for its politics to be legible--also constitute its erasure of the embodied cultural realities that stood to be affected by it. There was no place within the informatic semiotic plane of NAFTA for anything resembling the traditional, the local, or even the human. It blurred the category of human feeling, of the person vs. the corporation, through the coded language of informatics.

The nation state developed in the context of the enormous influx of resources, bullion and capital extracted from the New World in early modernity--it was never separate from the processes of empire. In that sense globalization's undoing of the nation state could almost be imagined as a continuation of 20th century decolonization--except when considering that it is precisely at the moment that decolonized nations appeared to have achieved sovereign control, that the corporation, and "development" as an abstract value, come to replace the power of state governance. Whatever benefits of sovereignty the nation state historically conferred on its citizens, promising (if not always delivering) agency and protection, under neoliberal trade law was cast aside in favor of the sovereignty of the corporation capable of delivering industrial growth, and the arbitrary whim of market demand for natural resources and labor.

The impartiality of official documents like NAFTA create a veneer of being apolitical through a language that is devoid of affect, such that actual meanings are effaced. NAFTA makes it look like, all things being equal, that the U.S. and Mexico could enter freely on equal footing onto a global stage, or that Mexican and U.S. bodies occupy the same position, to be able create enterprises, or have agency in development, rather than Mexican bodies frequently having a place at one side of production and U.S. bodies on the other. NAFTA works to make invisible its own politics, and those informing its seemingly objective, rational legal and numerical language. The uneven cultural and economic landscape between the U.S. and Mexico is made invisible. Capital accumulation does not require this information. Capital in the world of NAFTA, in the moment of the tech boom, also becomes invisible, easily connected between far

off places, moving freely across borders, obscuring the embodied, physical spaces through which bodies must move, the limitations and inefficiencies of bodies and the environment. NAFTA constitutes this contradiction in that it works on an alienated, technocratic, inhuman plane, but also intensified connectivity across borders. These shifts altered the way bodies reach out to each other and could conceive of each other's existence in far off places--but also left gaping disconnects.

The bureaucracy, and discourse of rationality, which arose alongside the nation state in the 18th and 19th century age of empire remain omnipresent in the NAFTA document. Though the sovereign power of U.S. empire may have been obscured or compromised through globalization and trade agreements like NAFTA, the shadow of colonialism and resource/labor extraction can be seen through the cracks of its language. Certain facts--the training of Mexican presidents and state bureaucrats in the economics departments of U.S. institutions, the 1995 U.S. bailout of the Mexican peso after the passing of NAFTA--suggest less the bilateral relationship NAFTA was intended to solidify, and more the kind of imperialism of colonies dependent on metropolises, administered by a ruling class of bureaucratic elites trained in the seat of empire.

Narratives of "development" meant the spread literally and figuratively of American fantasies of the good life, via the machinery, and technology of the image, which the modernizing Mexican state would soon be in a position to consume. An entire chapter of NAFTA is devoted to "telecommunications," suggesting the historical moment of postmodern bureaucratic institutions, and the intensification of flows of information through technology. NAFTA's text hints at late capitalist economy's dependence on, and production of culture. It acted as a machine to produce and export culture, and the U.S. late capitalist consumer logic that mechanized the desires and resistances of consumers through culture. As well as producing sites for factories that would produce televisions, and computers, it also produced the economy of cultural production, and of fantasy, with trade in tourism.

*"cultural industries means persons engaged in any of the following activities:*

*(a) the publication, distribution, or sale of books, magazines, periodicals or newspapers in print or machine readable form but not including the sole activity of printing or typesetting any of the foregoing;*

*(b) the production, distribution, sale or exhibition of film or video recordings;*

*(c) the production, distribution, sale or exhibition of audio or video music recordings;*

*(d) the publication, distribution or sale of music in print or machine readable form; or*

*(e) radiocommunications in which the transmissions are intended for direct reception by the general public, and all radio, television and cable broadcasting undertakings and all satellite programming and broadcast network services;" (391)*

*relationships of consumption*

*consumed means:*

*a) actually consumed; or*

*b) further processed or manufactured so as to result in a substantial change in value, form or use of the good or in the production of another good;<sup>45</sup>*

Like global mass media, NAFTA delimited certain bodies as visible while others are obscured. *Chapter Sixteen: Temporary Entry of Business Persons* suggests the emergence of a transnational middle class, who become the actors and the appendages of the corporations given rights beyond the individual or the state in NAFTA. Thus the redefinition of personhood and sovereignty also came unevenly, where certain bodies could move freely, as seamlessly as the capital and corporations of which they were agents, and others laboring bodies south of the border were effaced altogether.

Ultimately, the modifier “free” in the question of free trade does not refer to human beings at all, but to goods, capital and inanimate objects freed to move across sovereign borders. NAFTA placed human beings subject to products, ‘goods’ on either side of the border. The rearrangement of space and populations at an unprecedented rate through NAFTA functioned on the same premise as the same automated mechanisms that left Americans in their technological postmodernity hyper-individuated and alienated. Trade law operated in the negative, invisible space of capital flows. Given NAFTA’s emergence in the midst of the tech boom, when people were increasingly expected to produce objects of intellectual labor through the machinery of computers, it’s little surprise to find that NAFTA itself reads like a kind of informatics code. Through it can be read the economic, legal and bureaucratic forces subjugating bodies to capital.

The possibility for a document like NAFTA to exist in all its ungainly legal bulk points out the discursive politics between trade law and the televisual fantasy that allowed the American middle class to believe in their own sovereign control--both of which worked to obscure embodied realities of exploitation. Bodies and experiences that could not translate on screen were also those that could not function the idealized rational plane of the market instrument, or of American middle class sovereign fantasy.

## II.

### Infinite Jest & the “Experialist” Irony of U.S. (Neo)liberalism

*“I’d grown up inside vectors, lines and lines athwart lines, grids--and, on the scale of horizons, broad curving lines of geographic force, the weird topographical drain-swirl of a whole lot of ice-ironed land that sits and spins atop plates”*

- David Foster Wallace *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (1997)

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<sup>45</sup> United States. Government Printing Office. *North American Free Trade Agreement*. [Washington, D.C: U.S. G.P.O., 1994. 16.

Though he is referring technically to tennis, it is clear David Foster Wallace has in mind the relationship between his own rearing on the tennis court to U.S. late 20th century geopolitical power, and a foreign policy that meant movement across national borders. U.S. 20th century liberalism as enacted abroad was experienced as the ability to “carve and articulate the land in a multiplicity of borders and confines [...] to mold, modify and morph a territory,” and to claim those modifications as “technical, neutral, or ‘scientific.’”<sup>46</sup> The American “experialist” subject, as David Foster Wallace imagines him or her, is trapped within that terrain, between informed critic, and the ubiquity of corporate power and the instrumentalization of meaning, feeling and desire in advertising and consumption for American subjects. NAFTA established in its legal structure the kind of dystopic political reality, and disguised liberal tactics of empire, that David Foster Wallace writes an ardent critique of in his descriptions of U.S. consumption and competition, as the interplay of spectacle and televisual performance prevented Americans from being able to see realities beyond their screens. Mass production, modernization and labor are not always overtly visible through the feast of consumption and televisuality in *Infinite Jest* (1996), but the industrializing landscape of the border is felt through the pathetic fallacy of a sky “erased of stars [by] the fumes from the exhaust’s wastes of the moving autos’ pretty lights that rose and hid stars from the city.”<sup>47</sup> This “blankness” mirrors the novel’s landscape of feeling, where the constant desire for pleasure alludes to the dissociation of living in an spectatorial relationship to painful realities.<sup>48</sup>

Writing an imagined geopolitics of NAFTA and U.S. secret agents, meeting with Quebecois revolutionary separatists, DFW renders the space of the border as also a space of mirage:

*Heat began to shimmer, as well, off the lionhide floor of a desert. The mesquite and cactus wobbled and Tucson AZ resumed once more the appearance of the mirage, as it had appeared when Marathe had first arrived and found his shadow so entrancing in its size and reach. The sun [...] appeared brutal and businesslike and harmful to look upon.*<sup>49</sup>

1,079 pages of *Infinite Jest* chronicles the anxious, “brutal and businesslike” upper-middle class consciousness of “oglers,” DFW’s own term for the television-addicted “average American household,” though admittedly, an “average American household” which may only exist on TV.<sup>50</sup> The U.S. politics at the turn of the century that Wallace articulates took place on a

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<sup>46</sup> Chambers, Iain. “A Line in the Sand.” *Tijuana Dreaming: Life and Art at the Global Border*. Ed. Kun, Josh, and Fiamma Montezemolo. Durham: Duke University Press. 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. 320.

<sup>48</sup> Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. 647.

<sup>50</sup> Wallace, David Foster, E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction, Review of Contemporary Fiction, 13:2 (1993:Summer) p.151

televisual plane, with politics were screened alongside entertainment.<sup>51</sup> In 1996 the Telecommunications Act allowed television owners an unlimited number of stations, created loopholes in monopoly law to allow for networks to purchase cable companies, and for those networks to broadcast unlimited content on Prime Time.<sup>52</sup> In the mid-1990s, cable had entered two-thirds of all TV owning households in the United States, which allowed for niche programming that expanded channels to allow viewers to have complete choice of their viewing reality.<sup>53</sup> The increasingly structured landscape of televisual preference meant a ubiquity of the image in American life, to an extent only dreamed of by theorists of consumption and the image in the early 20th century. What Americans saw, even on broadcast news, and the politics that took place through trade laws like NAFTA, were not necessarily translatable. Clinton's remarks about the document at its signing on national television revealed little but comforting sound bites.

In *Infinite Jest*, rule of law and corporations have fused to end an economic recession with the institution of "Subsidized Time;" swathes of the Roman calendar are devoted to product placement. The Year of the Whopper, and the Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad, are consecutively marked by the Statue of Liberty holding products in her open palm instead of her customary torch. The first scenes of the novel take place in the Year of Glad--a play on words between "glad," as human sentiment, and "Glad," trash bag and food storage container conglomerate. The millennial generation inhabiting Wallace's tennis academy are left, like his readers, laughing passively where words like "glad" that ought to refer to a state of affective interiority are reappropriated for corporate, institutional purposes. In the novel, the structure of feeling of U.S. corporatism is inseparable from the forces breaking down traditional geopolitical boundaries.

The novel's satire of '90s political economy and the North American Free Trade Agreement imagines a "post-Soviet and post-Jihad era" capitalist dystopia, inhabited by elite, pharmaceutically dependent, media-saturated New England proteges of the Enfield Tennis Academy. Though hyper-aware of political and social reality, the children of the Incandenza family have trouble relating to their own feelings, or those outside their immediate circumstances without the mediation of ironic humor. *Infinite Jest* knows that it is a part of that social logic: where humor is the inadequate but sole answer to traumatic political reality, always returning to a cycle of disillusionment, apathy, and empty pursuit of pleasure.

Geopolitical realities are continually enacted as entertainment, through film or sports, in part of a more general "dismissive-reenactment frisson and a complete disassociation from the

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<sup>51</sup> Barnouw, Erik. "Questions for a New Millenium." *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*. Oxford University Press, 1990.

<sup>52</sup> Allen, Steve and Robert J. Thompson. Conglomerates and codes. "Television in the United States." Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition. Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. 2014. Web. 21 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1513870/television-in-the-United-States>>.

<sup>53</sup> Edgerton, Gary. "The Business of America is Show Business: U.S. TV in Global Context--1992-Present." *The Columbia History of American Television*. New York. Columbia University Press. 2007.

realities of the present.”<sup>54</sup> Pubescent players navigate “airfields, bridges, satellite-linked monitoring facilities, carrier groups, conventional power plants, important rail convergences,”<sup>55</sup> and learn to act based on the assumption that “Infliction of Death, Destruction and Incapacitation of response” are all part of pseudo-imperialist liberal game. Life in the game is systematized as “ethnic, sociologic, economic, and even religious demographics for each Combatant,”<sup>56</sup> underscoring the spectatorial, speculative American relationship to political realities elsewhere. This maps onto an inability to access death, or the possibility of mourning, echoed again in the “Year of the Adult Depend Undergarment,” when Hal and his brother Orin discuss their father’s suicide (writ as farce, with his placing his head in a microwave) while Hal clips his toenails and makes shots into his trashcan. At every point feeling must not only be produced for consumption, but is narrated for entertainment value. DFW is indebted to Kafka and a long running tradition hearkening of the absurd as answer to the evisceration of meaning in late capitalism.<sup>57</sup>

Yet the darker possibility Wallace uncovers is the reality of a U.S. psyche that can only function in that mode, ceasing to take seriously bodies, narrative, or politics as anything but farce. Drafted during the early years of the ‘90s that saw the signing and initial forays of NAFTA’s corporate globalization, Wallace recalls a televisual self-awareness where humor always circumscribes political realities of loss and pain.

#### *U.S. Irony, Media, and the Disassociated Spectator of Global Politics*

Every year on “Continental Interdependence Day” the Enfield Tennis Academy screens a satire film made by student and amateur filmmaker, Mario Incandenza, to mock the U.S. “Experialism” of the Organization of North American Nations, Wallace’s stand-in for NAFTA. President Johnny Gentle of O.N.A.N. is a shallow, entertainer turned politician; famed, like Clinton, for his mastery of the television medium to enter the hearts and living rooms of the American people. Committed to assuaging all potentially unpleasant feelings, President Gentle promises to never force Americans to “make [...] tough choices,” when they should instead be able to just “sit back and enjoy the show.”<sup>58</sup> The object of Mario’s filmic critique is the same as Wallace’s: the immobility of the viewer, in the face of political realities that appear only as spectacle, and can only be taken as irony.

The infinite recursion of irony towards the specter of what the viewer cannot make sense of is not a unique experience to the late 20th century viewer from the seat of American empire. It was in the same globalizing moment of 1994, the year NAFTA was passed, and David Foster Wallace was preoccupied writing *Infinite Jest*, that Homi Bhaba published *The Location of Culture*, arguing that techniques of irony and farce had always been the language of empire’s

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<sup>54</sup> Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. 322.

<sup>55</sup> Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. 323.

<sup>56</sup> Wallace 324.

<sup>57</sup> Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.

<sup>58</sup> Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. 323.

“civilizing mission.”<sup>59</sup>The ironic satire of ironic satire (e.g. “Infinite Jest”) taken up by David Foster Wallace, although successfully mocking the politics of NAFTA and the Clinton administration, only confirmed the limitations of liberal critique, as well as the exclusions of feeling, on which empire can only be premised, that erased the experiences of bodies across the border.<sup>60</sup>

Mario’s satire film goes on to reveal a darker vision of the American failure to relate to the image of pain, and the violence of neoliberal politics—a painful dissociation that is mirrored in *Infinite Jest* as a text. When O.N.A.N. cabinet members gather to address the imminent humanitarian crisis that is a result of the waste dumping made possible by North American integration, their first task is how to go about spinning the news to the American public. They imagine a slapstick farce of desperate escapes to Mexico by hang glider, snowmobile and moped. The Press secretary suggests:

*“the term refugee can be plausibly denied if. no homemade wagons piled high with worldly goods are pulled by slow bovine animals with curvy horns, and, b, if the percentage of children under six who are either, a, naked, or b, squalling at the top of their lungs, or c, both, is under 20% of the total number of children under six in transit.”*

Published in 1996, after the Rwandan genocide, and refugee crises in Afghanistan and the Balkans, IJ could also only be making reference to refugee populations well known to contemporary foreign policy, and indeed produced by NAFTA itself.<sup>61</sup> Another secretary suggests it best to avoid using “a downer-association rife term like *refugee*” in case of causing a scandal. The image of squalling, naked children, and wagons on the page suggests the televisual impression of the kind of places, and the kind of people to whom the word “refugee” would be applicable. Visions of apocalyptic chaos can be morbidly funny given the distance of the postmodern subjectivity, which is also the distance of empire towards its casualties.

As the film ends Mario’s brother Hal Incandenza sits stoned, and dissociated as a political spectator, unable to gain catharsis or relief from the satire. He becomes further depressed and alienated at the thought that “just about the only more depressing thing to pay attention to or think about would be advertising and the repercussions of O.N.A.N.ite reconfiguration for the U.S. advertising industry.”<sup>62</sup> Hal knows “the fall and rise of millennial U.S. advertising exceptionally well,” but is inextricably in the position of a passive consumer living in the seat of U.S. hyper-power at the end of the 20th century. Wallace does not much dwell upon the politics of the drug trade and consumption beyond the Boston metro area, but it is

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<sup>59</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” *The Location of Culture*. London; New York. Routledge. 1994. 85.

<sup>60</sup> Stoler, Ann Laura. “Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen.” Stoler, Ann. Ed. *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Duke University Press, 2006. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Boyd, Monica. *International Migration, Refugee Flows and Human Rights in North America: the Impact of Free Trade and Restructuring*. New York: Center for Migration Studies. 1996.

<sup>62</sup> Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996. 412.

clear Hal's weed is coming from somewhere, a place potentially implicated in the patterns of consumption and production of the North American integration which causes him such anomie.

Perhaps the greatest historical irony of the era of NAFTA was that though the U.S. could influence Mexican policing of the drug trade more freely, the intensification of production and consumption across the border also meant the rise of Mexican exports of illegal drugs-- potentially the only success of the neoliberal logic of export led growth.<sup>63</sup> The violence of American consumption is made all the more painfully transparent when considering the role of U.S. demand, historically, in creating the Mexican drug war. Hal is aware of his participation in violent consumption, but cannot account for the particularity of the exploitation and violence produced by the nexus of North American economic integration, and the reduction of the Mexican state under neoliberalism,<sup>64</sup> jokingly referenced in Mario's satire.

Though *Infinite Jest* primarily makes its object the alienation of hyper-consumption in a late capitalist U.S., the Other, in the form of the laboring bodies of people of color make themselves momentarily visible through his critique of the dissociated affect of television spectacle and international political economy. In the context of the American hemisphere, American fiction like Wallace's at the end of the 20th century is constantly revealing the ways in which its postmodern alienation is "playing in the dark," as Toni Morrison would suggest, of the exploited labor that instrumental to the landscape of postmodern consumer alienation.<sup>65</sup> David Foster Wallace's imagined subjects of U.S. informal empire are ensnared by their own pleasure but trapped also in the space of imperial irony and mimicry that does not allow their hyper critical liberal awareness any course of action, or means of relating to bodies across borders.

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<sup>63</sup> Knight, Alan. "Narco-Violence and the State in Modern Mexico." *Violence, Coercion and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Camin, Hector Aguilar. "On Mexican Violence." *Rethinking the "War on Drugs" Through the U.S. - Mexico Prism*. Ed. Ernesto Zedillo, Haynie Wheeler. Yale Center for the Study of Globalization. 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

### III.

#### Spectacle & Silence at the Borders of Pain in Bolaño's 2666

Roberto Bolaño's novel, *2666*, renders the spectacle of the deaths of hundreds of women working in maquiladora factories on the U.S.-Mexico border, whose lives "disappear.. vanish[ing] into thin air."<sup>66</sup> David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* wrote bodies trying and failing to connect across ever-proliferating mediums for connection, while in Bolaño's *2666* the mysterious murders of women working at the border reaches the airwaves of television networks in the United States only to fall on deaf ears. In contrast to the moment in the novel when a journalist lies asleep listening to a report on the deaths of the women in Santa Teresa, a fictional stand-in for Ciudad Juarez, Bolaño wrote the women's deaths in long form fiction.. In a moment of proliferating entertainment media, and infinite information online, Bolaño and Wallace, perhaps the novelists best known for critiquing the globalization of NAFTA, chose to write the lives of those living under corporate logic in variations on the American realist novel, a form originated in the spasms of modernity and labor exploitation of the 19th century Industrial Revolution.<sup>67</sup>

The recurrence of images of alienating mass media emerge in *2666* as a signifier and indictment of Mexico's modernization; of a secular wound created in the Mexican psyche by the influx of modernizing forces that marked the death knell of the revolution.<sup>68</sup> The communications revolution is felt in the image of globe trotting critics emailing, calling each other's cell phones, leaving voicemails, all the while profoundly alone.<sup>69</sup> Television provides the means of accessing information about the deaths of the women of Santa Teresa but it does not offer any answers, except in the violence of the medium itself. The opening three novels which make up *2666* focus on the experience of first world subjects of informal empire, distanced from labor, and disturbing realities of exploitation, that underlie their reality. In a context of hyper-commodification, through which bodies and subjectivities are written by entertainment and consumption, Bolaño writes of tragically meaningless position of the Mexican academics and news media, vis a vis, neoliberal economy and politics:

*[Y]ou arrive on a kind of stage [...] and you start to translate reality or reinterpret it or sing it. The stage is really a proscenium and upstage, there's an enormous tube, something like a mine shaft or the gigantic opening of a mine. Let's call it a cave. But a mine works, too. From the opening of the mine come unintelligible noises. Onomatopoeic noises [...] murmurs and whispers and moans. The point is no one sees, really sees, the*

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<sup>66</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. *2666*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 287.

<sup>67</sup> Sundquist, Eric J. *American Realism: New Essays*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

<sup>68</sup> Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds. *The Course of Mexican History*. Seventh Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>69</sup> For an analysis of the loneliness of the middle class psyche defined by consumption, but disconnected from traditional relationships and structures of meaning, see David Riesman's 1950 sociological study of a conservative, capitalist U.S. in *The Lonely Crowd*.

*mouth of the mine. Stage machinery [...] hides the real shape of the opening from the gaze of the audience. In fact, only the spectators who are closest to the stage, right up against the orchestra pit, can see the shape of something behind the dense veil of camouflage, not the real shape, but at any rate it's the shape of something. The other spectators can't see anything beyond the proscenium, and it's fair to say they'd rather not. Meanwhile, the shadowless intellectuals are always facing the audience, so [...] they can't see anything. They only hear the sounds that come from deep in the mine.*<sup>70</sup>

Amalfitano's fellow critics don't have much to say. Instead they are in the position he describes, critiquing but ultimately confirming the logic of the neoliberal state, and unable, as has been the position of the intellectual class in Mexico with regards to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* more or less since the revolution.<sup>71</sup> The reality Bolano's critics cannot account for is the proliferating violence towards women in Santa Teresa following the rapid industrial growth delivered by the opening of border. The women whose mutilated bodies pile up between the maquiladora factories of multinational corporations, work at "Multizone-West," "K&T," "File-Sis," "EastWest," assembly plants that manufacture televisions, cables, electronics, and apparel for U.S. and Mexican consumer markets.

The maquiladora industry Bolaño recreates in his novel originated officially as the U.S. Customs 806/807 program, or the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), a minor policy move in 1965 towards providing jobs in a border region that had been traditionally impoverished and neglected.<sup>72</sup> The devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1982 cheapened costs of labor and intensified the draw for corporations to move production to border cities Juarez, which NAFTA further facilitated.<sup>73</sup> Between 1983 and 1994, labor at the border went from 151,000 to 581,000, and doubled again after NAFTA to 1.3 million workers in total by 2000.<sup>74</sup> The website for "Women on the Border," a non-profit organization that advocates for women working in the maquiladoras, describes the workers of the maquiladoras as frequently migrants from rural areas, where neoliberal economic policies of the Salinas administrations eliminated traditional forms of work on *ejidos* or communally owned land.<sup>75</sup>

While borderlands have historically been sites for the fractures and rapid transformations of industrial modernity, even on the European continent,<sup>76</sup> Ciudad Juarez, referred to as Santa

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<sup>70</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. 2666. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 122.

<sup>71</sup> Camp, Roderic. *Mexico's Mandarins: Crafting a Power Elite for the Twenty-First century*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Cypher, James M. and Raúl Delgado Wise. "The Maquiladora Sector: Building Block of Mexico's Export-Led Model." *Mexico's Economic Dilemma: The Developmental Failure of Neoliberalism*. Rowman and Littlefield. 2010. 79.

<sup>73</sup> Cypher 79.

<sup>74</sup> Cypher 79.

<sup>75</sup> Women on the Border. "Women and NAFTA: Why Care About Women in the Maquiladoras?" <http://womenontheborder.org/research-and-commentary/nafta-and-the-global-economy/>

<sup>76</sup> For relevant parallels see Michel DeCerteau's *The Possession at Loudun*. University of Chicago Press. 2000. or Ruth Harris' "Possession on the Borders: The "Mal de Morzine" in Nineteenth Century France.

Teresa in 2666, experienced the trauma of modernization through gender violence enacted upon the bodies of women employed in maquiladora factories, beginning in 1993.<sup>77</sup> Ciudad Juarez, the site of thousands of murders have taken place since then, is elsewhere described as a success of the industrial development brought by NAFTA.

Bolaño's 2004 novel narrates the deaths of the women in "The Part About the Crimes," beginning with the discovery of the body of a thirteen year old girl in a vacant lot. When local police arrive at the scene they come across a pair of women kneeling in prayer over the body. "From then on," Bolaño writes, "the killings began to be counted." The body of Esperanza Gómez Saldaña, first on the ever-expanding list of the dead, is transported to the Santa Teresa police station where she is "*seen [...] examined* by more policemen and photographed," and examined once more by the chief of police, before being removed to the morgue for an autopsy. The systematic viewing and examination of her body renders it as spectacle through the apparatus of the neoliberal modern state, rather than a subject for mourning. For Bolaño, the ease of viewing "tears and abrasions" around a thirteen year old's orifices marks a pathology of modernization implicated in the forces that produced her wounds. "The Part About the Crimes" embodies the cold, disturbing efficiency of first world information systems, leaving the women's lives visible only as numerical statistics and bureaucratic facts. From the view of the North American hemispheric system, the women's bodies are cheap, and intentionally rendered so through international law created to allow transnational corporations make use of their labor.

The pain of women dying at the globalizing U.S.-Mexico is situated within longer histories of the hauntings of colonialism, development and modernization, in which globalization rearticulated historical imperial systems of bodily exploitation, labor extraction, and the modern state's erasure of colonial subjects in the din of industrial growth and development. The litany of death in Bolaño's novel mirrors the bureaucratic tone of official documents like NAFTA, in which the referent of laboring bodies is lost to depersonalized legalistic language devoid of emotion.

Meanwhile the international, cosmopolitan class traveling in Santa Teresa in Bolano's novel, cannot view the reality before them except as spectacle. Riding around the city in a taxi, they maintain a dissociation familiar from David Foster Wallace's 'born oglers':

*It made them laugh it seemed so chaotic. Until then they hadn't been in good spirits. They had looked at things and listened to the people who could help them, but only as part of a grander scheme. On the ride back to the hotel, they lost the sense of being in a hostile environment, although hostile wasn't the word, an environment whose language they refused to recognize, an environment that existed on some parallel plane where they couldn't make their presence felt, imprint themselves<sup>78</sup>*

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The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp. 451-478 both of which highlight the uncanny emergence of inexplicable violence in the context of industrial modernization.

<sup>77</sup> Burnett, John. "Who's Killing the Women of Juarez? Mexican City Haunted by Decade of Vicious Sex Crimes. NPR. February 22, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. 2666. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 112.

Likewise, Oscar Fate, upon arrival in Santa Teresa is surprised to encounter an outpouring of feeling at the desolation of the physical space of the border, where he slowly comes to recognize the extent of his disassociation from his mother's death, which he could previously only view as spectacle. Once in Mexico he is continually revisited by haunting memories, often of the image of his mother watching television. The postcolonial space of the border, though quickly becoming modernized and industrial, offers a space of mourning partially separated from the ubiquity of consumptive entertainments and distractions in the postmodern United States.

Fate first hears of the murders while asleep alone in a hotel room with only the noise of the television for company. After a quick search for porn, he finds a talk show with a fat man yelling while his "hugely fat wife [...] [stands] quiet, gazing at the audience until, without a word, she started to cry."<sup>79</sup> When the fat man tells the camera, "I'm unemployed now, but I used to be a security guard," Fate changes the channel and reaches for a bottle of bourbon. After he falls asleep, a desert, the highway, assembly plants, pick up trucks, appear on screen. Bolaño interrogates both the loneliness of the American viewer, and the disturbing distance from the reality of the bodies they view from elsewhere. The deaths are made visible only as "a name. The name of a girl. Then there was a shot of the streets of an Arizona town where the girl was from. Houses with scorched yards and dirty silver-colored chicken-wire fences. The sad face of the mother. Exhausted with crying. The face of the father [staring] into the camera saying nothing."<sup>80</sup> The face of grief is silence--the impossibility of translation, or representation on the screen. The other daughters of the family flee the news camera altogether, "running into the dark of the house" as if the camera itself were an extension of the forces murdered their sister. The news report which speaks of "unemployment [being] almost nonexistent along that stretch of the border" reflects a further violence, of the statistic death, that is exceptional to the logic of growth and progress.

The last decade of the 20th century Bolaño's novel spans marked the intensification of flows of production, consumption and global connectivity crisscrossing the planet; bringing worlds together, and breaking them apart. Transnational corporations, unrestrained by borders or trade barriers, moved production wherever laboring bodies ran cheapest. Invisible flows of capital which promised the seamless integration of a decolonized, global supply and demand, but the 'global,' rational, economic order, reiterated the physical punishment and bodily exploitation of colonialism. The empty industrial lots, sheds, and highways that constitute the landscape of the border, and of the women's lives; the mass consumer goods they produce, also form the conditions for the mass grave of the women toiling in them.

In the context of the actual deaths of the women of Juarez, death on the page, its representation for the liberal U.S. subject is that of spectacle:

*In the nineteenth century, toward the middle or the end of the nineteenth century, [...] society tended to filter death through a fabric of words. Reading news stories from back*

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<sup>79</sup> Bolaño 257.

<sup>80</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. 2666. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 324.

*then you might get the idea that there was hardly any crime [...] We didn't want death in the home, or in our dreams and fantasies, and yet it was a fact that terrible crimes were committed, mutilations, all kinds of rape, even serial killings. Of course most of the serial killers were never caught. Take the most famous case of the day. No one knew who Jack the Ripper was. Everything was passed through a filter of words, everything trimmed to fit our fear. What does a child do when he's afraid? He closes his eyes. [...] Words served that purpose.*

The rise of the nation state meant the delimitation of sovereign bodies, in systems of legal rational language that differentiated which bodies mattered and which did not.<sup>81</sup> The scientific, bureaucratic language, the endless series of autopsy reports, which mark the mutilated bodies of the women of Santa Teresa function as an extension of this historical logic. The modernity and colonialism that profoundly altered the ways bodies were processed, understood, seen and heard are reenacted within the “postmodern” landscape of the U.S.-Mexico border at the turn of the 21st century.

The narrative distance from the women’s bodies at the moment of pain continually structuring “The Part About the Crimes” mirrors the bureaucratic abstracted legal language of NAFTA that cannot account for their deaths. The absence of cries, and the suppression of feeling leave the women’s deaths a foregone conclusion as the body count rises. A body count is after another language of information processing: the statistic. At one point, a policeman assigned to count a woman’s “arms, chest and legs [...] covered with bruises and stab wounds [...] g(ets) bored when he reached thirty-five.” The counting of wounds, the sheer number, and scale of their deaths, reflects the logic of mass production, and the way spectacle obviates the possibility of feeling for the victim. That the corpse of a woman covered in stabs and bruises could produce only boredom indicates the insidious structures through which the women’s deaths are one more thing to be counted, and simultaneously cease to count. The bureaucratic rationally instrumental logic of the investigation bleeds into the spectacle of the women’s deaths as *fiction*, and the violence produced by the industrial growth of Santa Teresa. The legal, corporate discourse of NAFTA that structures the women’s reality are suggestive of some schism of feeling that would allow for the serial murders.

Santa Teresa is representative of the shifts taking place between the developed world, and a periphery which until this point had remained more or less outside the modern imperial state. The fractures in faith, knowledge and traditional relationships between bodies that racked Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries are visible in the ‘development’ of the Mexican border through the reach of neoliberal trade law, and governmentality. Police investigators like Juan ‘de Dios’ Martinez become the agents of a secular, industrial modernity thrust upon Mexicans by President Salinas under NAFTA. Detectives, forensic experts, and journalists, as actors of the modern state

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<sup>81</sup> Hansen, Thomas Blom, and Finn Stepputat. Ed. *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in a Postcolonial World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005.

and its public sphere share a speculative relationship towards the deaths, and the women's bodies, with the factories that view the women's bodies only as labor to instrumentally extract.

This crisis of secular, specular feeling produces the cold, rationalistic distance from the deaths, that lodges in the psyches of the officers as trauma. In rendering the narrative silence of their pain is also to open a question for the reader: as to whether the inability to feel the pain of the women at their deaths can be separated from the numbness of the serial killer.

The search to locate individual culprits of the crimes reflects a cinematic logic, of entertainment and the possibility of the clean resolution, which elides the structural relations that constitute the violence towards the women. Though it is the detective's job is to contain that violence, which presents a disturbing fissure in the smooth surface of development and industrial growth, the pathological distance from the women's suffering bears upon their psyches. Days after investigating one woman's death, Juan De Dios Martínez cannot stop imagining the "four heart attacks [she] had suffered [...] Sometimes he thought about it while he was eating or while he was urinating in the men's room in a coffee shop [...] or just before he went to sleep." Awake from bouts of insomnia, Martínez "covered his face with his hands and a faint and precise sob escaped his lips, as if he were weeping or trying to weep, but when he removed his hands, all that appeared lit by the TV screen was his old face.. and not the slightest trace of a tear." It is the job of the state, and of the police, to return things to a state of normalcy, as do the consumer items provided by the newly burgeoning economy. However that state of normalcy, which normalizes the women's extracted labor and thus their violent deaths, is the foundational logic of neoliberal governmentality. At the same time, the consumer items like televisions create help numb even those working in the factories from the painful realities of labor, or of the women's deaths, constitute a further distance from their pain.

When police arrive to investigate shots fired in a local neighborhood, neighbors deny hearing the sound at all, instead claiming a "sudden deafness [that] might have something to do with the volume of their TV sets, turned up so loud they could be heard from the street. "The turning up of the television allegorizes a further vector through which modernity at the border helps obscure the women's pain, leaving the neighborhoods of Santa Teresa frozen as spectators.

By contrast, it is precisely those who can articulate their pain most clearly in 2666, who appear to be "inside" society in ways that would make their pain legible, who most markedly fail to comprehend and access realities of suffering. European academic critics traveling near the border in the novel's first section hear of the crimes in passing at a cocktail party. Members of society with full access to the public sphere, and all the poetic expression global literature has to offer, experience an exclusionary structure of globalized feeling mostly through the inaccessibility of their own feelings, barely visible like "the movement of something like subterranean tanks of pain," beneath the surface of reality. Only from afar comes the evidence of their own pain, filtered through a haze of alcohol, email, and cab rides, and farther away still are the "unintelligible noises" of women working and dying in the *maquiladoras*.

Perfunctory descriptions of the details of the women's mutilation as spectacle creates only an aporia of feeling, rather than any meaningful space through which to mourn their deaths.

As the Mexican police detectives come to view their bodies as spectacle, and as matters to be officiated, the women's brief informational narratives point to a fissure in the fabric through which suffering can be made visible at the scale of globalized corporate production, or through mass media. The violence enacted on the women's bodies in the exploitation of their labor, bleeds into the failure of feeling at the spectacle of their violent deaths.

Bolaño's violent fictional spectacle in the wake of NAFTA serves as a stage on which to make visible a reality of U.S. imperial power, where U.S. "experts" in computers, informatics are sent to help seek out the serial killer. The American investigative criminologist Albert Kessler suggests the distance between the U.S. middle class and the girl found lying "naked except for a white bra and a white blouse covered with smudges of dirt and bloodstains."<sup>82</sup> Her body is inert, her life frozen in the image of her corpse while his passage begins, "Nineteen ninety-seven was a good year for Albert Kessler"<sup>83</sup>In the world economy, the dead women of Santa Teresa's are incidental, and cannot hold the same weight as a distinguished first world body. Prof. Kessler is an expert in his line of work for using computers to draw up psychological profiles of serial killers. The violence of the modernization brought about by NAFTA is not only in the mysterious proliferation of these dead women's bodies, but also in the diminishing capacity to see and feel horror at their deaths, through the screen. Bolaño's narration in 'The Part About the Crimes' is as much a portrait of the disassociation from the women's bodily vulnerability, as a painstaking view of bodies in states of pain and death. The policing of the crime only further renders the bodies as a spectacle, which inures viewers, and perhaps readers, from the capacity to feel their pain. Their screening, or the spectacle of their death subjects them to a different kind of violence, although related to the same modernization that produces their deaths.

Bolano's novel is preoccupied with the violence of televisual modernity, in the disjuncture it creates between fantasy and embodied pain lived by those working and dying in the maquiladoras. As an American journalist, Oscar Fate is in Mexico to write an article about a televised boxing match. Though he hears of the crimes against the women periodically, he is drawn into the locus of violence not through investigative reporting, but by following a group of potential narcos through a McDonald's-like fast food restaurant, to a bar where they begin to talk about DVDs. The realism Bolaño takes up in *2666* is steeped in popular culture, taking note of the technological shifts, the relationships to screens, that increasingly structured Mexican reality in the 1990s.<sup>84</sup> *2666* consciously draws upon the image of narco-violence in films like Robert Rodriguez' *El Mariachi* (1992) which depict the effects of modernization and narcotrafficking on traditional Mexican culture. The explosion of middle class spending in the wake of NAFTA<sup>85</sup> mirrored the rise of a narcoculture that looked like capitalism on steroids,

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<sup>82</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. *2666*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 580.

<sup>83</sup> Bolano 580.

<sup>84</sup> Barbero, Jesus Martin. "Between Technology and Culture: Communication and Modernity in Latin America." Sommer, Doris. Ed. *Cultural Agency in the Americas*. Duke University Press. 2006.

<sup>85</sup> Orme, Jr. William A. *Understanding NAFTA: Mexico, Free Trade and the New North America*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. xxi.

“characterized by breathtaking conspicuous consumption.”<sup>86</sup>In 2666 the lair of the narco’s misogynist violence reveals to journalist Oscar Fate not the visceral violence narcotraficantes, but a Hollywood-made pornography rumored to be directed by Rodriguez himself.

At the same time that Bolaño’s narrative situates the foundation of the violence of the women’s deaths in a televisual and legal/bureaucratic modernity, these structural conditions are not definitive or determinative in the way they are for the born oglers in *Infinite Jest*. Instead, Bolaño imagines the possibilities of resistance through a postcolonial relationship to the image in which television acts also as a platform for collective mourning and response. In November 1994, in the midst of the murders “a seer appear(s) on Sonora TV,” an old woman nicknamed *La Santa* who could see things “no one else saw.”<sup>87</sup>Her vision is connected to the fact she is able to find “a meaningful explanation for everything.”<sup>88</sup>Her role as talk show hosts offers an alternative reading of Mexican televisual modernity, as also a platform for a politics to answer the violent industrialization of the maquiladoras:

*“sometimes like anybody she saw things and the things she saw weren’t necessarily visions but things she imagined, like anybody, things that sprang into her head, which was supposedly the price you paid living in a modern society, although she believed that anybody, no matter where they lived, at certain moments saw or pictured things, and all she could picture recently as it happened were the killings of women”*<sup>89</sup>

The Chilean academic-cum-writerly stand-in for Bolaño in the novel, Amalfitano, critiques himself for not being able to take seriously the indigenous relationship to meaning and the magic of the image.<sup>90</sup>If there is a revolutionary impulse in the novel it is most fundamentally through the possibility of radical belief in the image, and in the suffering it represents. Though there is cynical musing on the nature of viewing in globalization, that “People see what they want to see and what people want to see never has anything to do with truth,”<sup>91</sup> it is clear these are the stakes of the invisibility of the bodies at the border, that not to see those bodies becomes the extenuating circumstances of the foregone conclusion of globalization, and the death, spiritual and literal, it bears.

#### IV.

#### A Mariachi, The Death of a Revolution & the Screening of Neoliberal Violence

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<sup>86</sup> Bunker, Steven B. and Victor M. Macias-Gonzalez. “Consumption and Material Culture in the Twentieth Century.” *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, First Edition. Ed. William Beezley. Blackwell. 2011. 111.

<sup>87</sup> Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. 2666. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 427.

<sup>88</sup> Bolano 427.

<sup>89</sup> Bolano 571.

<sup>90</sup> Bolaño 280.

<sup>91</sup> Bolano 219.

With NAFTA Salinas promised to modernize Mexico, in what amounted to a departure, with little apology, from the agrarian, populist ideals of the revolution.<sup>92</sup> In a letter to the *New Yorker* in 1992, journalist Alma Guillermoprieto mourns the assault on traditional Mexican culture by NAFTA, using the symbol of the Mariachi to present the Mexican ideal of true, communal, revolutionary feeling, who demonstrates the possibility of “weeping and the free, luxurious expression of pain.”<sup>93</sup> The “drunk who begins to whimper without the benefit of a song [...] cries out of self-pity,” she argues, while the Mexican who weeps at the ranchera melody of the Mariachi, “weeps for the tragedy of the world.”<sup>94</sup> Guillermoprieto contrasts the possibility for shared national emotion to the consumer modernity NAFTA was to deliver, shifting Mexican culture towards bourgeois concerns like “beating the traffic, making the mortgage payment, punching the clock.”<sup>95</sup>

The selling of NAFTA was indeed partly premised on the idea of Mexicans being able to have jobs, and punch the clock within Mexico, to limit migration across the border.<sup>96</sup> Yet the intensification of flows of capital and production freed from national barriers and tariffs under NAFTA only increased the desire for opportunities northward.<sup>97</sup> Hollywood, like California more generally, saw an influx of Mexican migrants produced by NAFTA, in the form of “indie” Mexican filmmakers like Robert Rodriguez. Rodriguez, known best for having broken into Hollywood with *El Mariachi* (1992), filmed the picture for \$7,000 in the city of Acuña at the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>98</sup> Alongside cities like Ciudad Juarez, the site of the crimes against the maquiladora workers in Roberto Bolaño’s *2666*, Acuña served as an entry point for assembly plants and transnational corporations in the wake of NAFTA. Hollywood had long history of using the proximity of the border as a cheap filming location<sup>99</sup> to its advantage, for similar reasons to the transnational corporations, but it was Rodriguez’ methods to gather the necessary capital for the project, by serving as a subject for a month long study at a clinical drug testing facility in Texas, that were perhaps less orthodox.<sup>100</sup> Though *El Mariachi* was originally intended for the Mexican home video market, Columbia Pictures executives picked up the film, and production quickly began on a Hollywood remake.

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<sup>92</sup> Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds. “Mexico since 1988: The Post-Revolutionary Era.” *The Course of Mexican History*. Seventh Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>93</sup> Guillermoprieto, Alma. “Mexico City 1992.” *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press. 41.

<sup>94</sup> Guillermoprieto 42.

<sup>95</sup> Guillermoprieto 42.

<sup>96</sup> Hing, Bill. “The NAFTA Effect.” *Ethical Borders: NAFTA, Globalization and Mexican Migration*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 9.

<sup>97</sup> Hing 10.

<sup>98</sup> *El Mariachi*. Dir. Robert Rodriguez. Columbia Pictures, 1993. DVD.

<sup>99</sup> Rubenstein, Anne. “Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era.” Ed. Michael C. Meyer, and William H. Beezley. *The Oxford History of Mexico*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2000. 648.

<sup>100</sup> Rodriguez, Robert. *Rebel Without a Crew*. New York: Dutton. 1995.

Rodriguez' script begins as a "patrol car drives up an unpaved road and parks next to a gutted police car," the officer of which steps out carrying "a greasy bag of fast food."<sup>101</sup> Mexico's rotting infrastructure, covered in dust and rust evokes a land of despotic corruption, with modernization only visible in the presence of fast food. The camera pans to a Mexican officer entering a dilapidated jailhouse, as he strolls past a series of holding cells filled with drunks and drug dealers. Azul, a local drug lord, occupies the final cell on the block, outfitted mysteriously with desk and refrigerator, where he appears to be conducting business transactions on a large rectangular chunk of plastic serving as a "cellular phone." Scribbling furiously in a ledger, he takes a long foreboding look at the newfangled technology before answering a call. On the other end of the line is El Moco, a rival narcotraficante, lounging on the porch of a ranch house in full white regalia, leisurely sipping tequila while a "gorgeous, bikini-clad BABE" dives into "a house-side moat."<sup>102</sup> Azul and El Moco have not yet hung up when two armed men sent by Moco enter the prison, pay off the guard, and turn towards Azul's cell. In the aftermath of the ensuing bloodbath Azul holds up his cell phone to allow Moco hear the dying screams of his men. As Azul drives away and the scene fades into the opening credits, a prison guard is left lying prone, twitching in his own blood, hand clutching a wad of cash. In a few brief scenes, Rodriguez outlines an argument about the Mexican drug war stated elsewhere by political scientists: that narcotrafficking serves as the most lucrative, and often the only viable economic option for rural Mexicans in the context of a corrupt neoliberal state.<sup>103</sup>

Rodriguez' breakthrough film further distills the ethos of political feeling under NAFTA and the Salinas administration, which appeared to mark the death knell of the spirit of the revolution in word and deed.<sup>104</sup> His hero is the Mariachi: bearer of the revolutionary spirit of sorrow and shared cultural expression described by Guillermoprieto. The dark political reality Rodriguez created his film in reference to was this neoliberal landscape, made up of a burgeoning drug trade at the border, and the assault on traditional culture as Azul and competing drug lords threaten El Mariachi's traditional values, his *novia*, and all he holds dear. The film speaks to a moment of transition, with the Mariachi at the end of the film announcing he is "prepared for the future,"<sup>105</sup> as drug deals and apocalyptic futurism recall the landscape of *Infinite Jest*, and an unknown future after the political restructuring of NAFTA.

Rodriguez' transition to Hollywood with the remaking of *El Mariachi* as a big budget film, suggests that *El Mariachi*'s future is in fact *Desperado* (1995), with the original Spanish language script translated into English, and the Mexican bodies of the actors in the original film whitened in favor of a half-Lebanese Salma Hayek and Spanish-national, Antonio Banderas. *Desperado* like *El Mariachi* plays upon a fantasy of a heroic, gun-wielding peasant with ideals.

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<sup>101</sup> *El Mariachi*. Dir. Robert Rodriguez. Columbia Pictures, 1993. DVD.

<sup>102</sup> *El Mariachi*. Dir. Robert Rodriguez. Columbia Pictures, 1993. DVD.

<sup>103</sup> Knight, Alan. "Narco-Violence and the State in Modern Mexico." *Violence, Coercion and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. 2012.

<sup>104</sup> Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds. *The Course of Mexican History*. Seventh Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>105</sup> *El Mariachi*. Dir. Robert Rodriguez. Columbia Pictures, 1993. DVD.

This fantasy on North American movie screens looked not unlike a hero of the revolution--while in Mexico since 1992, the Salinas administration had been systemically discounting revolutionary ideals through assaults on labor, in which workers threatening to strike against thirty three U.S.-owned maquiladora factories realized they could no longer count on being protected under Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the president's modernization rhetoric disparaged the ejido system of communally owned land that had been the revolution's most meaningful gesture towards the redistribution of wealth, culminating in the overturning of Article 27 of the Constitution, opening ejido lands to privatization.<sup>107</sup>

While the transformations of Mexican life at the border remained far from the daily reality of American viewers (except via networks of consumption) *El Mariachi* and its Hollywood, English-language sequel, *Desperado* mirror the actual violence of the drug trade, and offer a cosmology in which it is the centrifugal pull of American consumer demand that is instrumental in the creation of that violence for entertainment. *Desperado* made the violence of drug barons and turf wars difficult to miss, like a prosthetic for the violence NAFTA enacted on Mexican laboring bodies, through the maquiladoras, the drug war and emigration. Rodriguez' work with director Quentin Tarantino suggests a reading of the extreme violence of *El Mariachi* and *Desperado* as part of a 'new brutality' aesthetic in '90s Hollywood cinema, in which morbid imaginaries reflect a societal unconscious of real racial tensions.<sup>108</sup> The figure of Mexican violence onscreen acts out American fears which speak to their own implication in systems of global violence, like a colonial haunting of the laboring 'Other' across the border.<sup>109</sup>

As a lone mariachi arrives in a dusty village looking for work, he is mistaken for a local drug lord, and unwittingly caught in a web of narco-violence. Before long his guitar case is transformed into a vehicle for machine guns. The U.S. cinematic appetites for Mexican violence stand as a disturbing parallel to the modes by which U.S. drug consumption fueled the narco-trafficking business.<sup>110</sup> With scenes luxuriating in sex, violence and ostentatious displays of wealth, Rodriguez' films begin to look something like a narco's wet dream. Like a poor man's *Wall Street* (1987) the narco-economy in Rodriguez' films functions like a self-correcting, neoliberal market instrument, arbitrated by guns and drugs. The modernization promised by President Salinas appears as *narcotraficante* cell phones and grade-A weapons, in the midst of dirt roads and dusty saloons. In these films it is the narcos who are the bearers of modernization, with their cell phones, enterprising spirit, and pornographic bikini-clad babes.

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<sup>106</sup> Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds. "Salinas Bids Adios to the Revolution." *The Course of Mexican History*. Seventh Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 671.

<sup>107</sup> Meyer 672.

<sup>108</sup> Gormley, Paul. *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Bristol, UK: Intellect. 2005.

<sup>109</sup> See Ann Stoler's *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Duke University Press. 2006.

<sup>110</sup> Camin, Hector Aguilar. "On Mexican Violence." *Rethinking the "War on Drugs" Through the U.S. - Mexico Prism*. Ed. Ernesto Zedillo, Haynie Wheeler. Yale Center for the Study of Globalization. 2011.

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Rodriguez' films capitalize on the popular imagination of Mexico as a site of despotic, romantic violence, beyond the rule of law. As it happened, a sizeable portion of the U.S. population seemed willing to pay to watch Mexican bodies explode into pieces. The Mexico Rodriguez offered was a site of a Hobbesian state of unmoderated human violence, which was also fantasy: a state of nature where leather clad highwaymen produce guns from dark corners, and bodies fly superhumanly across the screen, dripping with sensuality. This is a caricature of Mexico as Wild West dystopia, overflowing with romance and *pasión*. Rodriguez provides his gringo viewers with a fantasy of legendary Mexico filled with swarthy, gun-wielding machistas, to reveal at once how the gringo is implicated in that violence by consuming it, but also what is behind the appeal of such a violent myth.

For *Desperado* the conflict between local drug lords and a wayward mariachi begins with Steve Buscemi, as a paranoid gringo, gesticulating wildly about a "huge" "dark" Mexican, to a field of blank stares from Mexican patrons at a local dive bar. Looking around, he nods, cocks his forefinger into an imaginary gun at the hardened face of a fellow customer, and slaps a hand on the bar to demand service. Commenting loudly on the cerveza with what he believes to be charm, he shouts, "That's my brand..damn good. This is the best beer I've ever had!" Having confirmed his brand loyalty, he continues, "Actually I'm just glad to be alive right now" in an ironic foreshadowing of the bodies--that is, Mexican bodies--soon to be sprawled in the dirt, bleeding out from gunshot wounds on screen. His bartender is Cheech Marin, of Cheech & Chong fame, a Chicano laden with self-evident significance for the visibility of marijuana in American pop culture since the '60s. Glaring and silent, he and the rest of the bar serve as reluctant audience to Buscemi's ravings about a nearby town, a bar "filled with real low lives, not like this place here."<sup>111</sup>

The American viewing audience is faced with an on screen view of their own fears and assumptions of Mexican violence. Buscemi continues, "Anyway, I'm all by myself--I like it that way. Meanwhile things are going on, under the table kinds of things. Not too obvious, but not too secret either," with Rodriguez simultaneously skewering the U.S.' post industrial loneliness and a somewhat hazy awareness of what happens South of the Border--something to do with 'bad' Mexicans, "I mean bad, up to no good, you know what I'm saying?" What Rodriguez offers in the shape of the shadowy, romantic figure of the Antonio Banderas' mariachi, is also a legendary manhood, of a Mexican soul, which who in the American audience could know quite what to make of, "quite what to think." Hollywood's fantasy of wild West shoot outs are also racialized: "cutthroat scumbags were coming out of the woodwork and dying much deserved deaths." Buscemi tells his Mexican bar compadres

*"And in he walked. He was dark, too. And I don't mean dark-skinned. No, this was different. It was as if he was always walking in a shadow. I mean every step he took*

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<sup>111</sup> *Desperado*. Dir. Rodriguez Robert. Perf. Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek. Columbia Pictures, 1995.

*towards the light, just when you thought his face was about to be revealed, it wasn't. It was as if the lights dimmed, just for him.*"<sup>112</sup>

Rodriguez' violence provides precisely the glorified, if brutal, mythology absent from late capitalist post-industrial life. The fantasy is defined by the embodiment of strong, laboring bodies. Rodriguez' hyperbolically mythological, romantic characters, offer a disguised defense of the ideals of a dying revolution to the late 20th century capitalist U.S. Antonio Banderas serves ironically, as a tragic revolutionary, through whom can be read the transformed lives of rural Mexicans in the context of industrial modernization and the proliferation violence of the neoliberal drug war.

The Mexico of *Desperado* is at once the fantasy of Mexico seen through American eyes, and Rodriguez' critique of that fantasy. Like the brutality seen in the '90s in Quentin Tarantino's films, the extremity of the violence pushes upon the limits of cinema as fantasy, to force the viewer to question their relationship to the violence being screened. *Desperado* continually screens the looking relations between the U.S. citizen as Steve Buscemi and the Mexican 'Other,' or in the image of a group of American teenagers entering a bar to find corpses strewn across the bar. We may find something of David Foster Wallace's brand of postmodern pastiche, but there is a bite to the critique, and a sincere, virulent anger about the painful changes taking place as a result of economic neoliberalism that are not visible in *Infinite Jest*. The figure of the mariachi critically plays upon U.S. imaginaries of Mexico as a place of violence and death, but also fears upon fears of an unruly postcolonial subject unafraid of *acts*. Mexico is after all one of the only countries to have achieved an actual Revolution--a fact not lost on Mexicans looking at the entry of transnational corporations.

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<sup>112</sup> *Desperado*. Dir. Rodriguez Robert. Perf. Antonio Banderas and Salma Hayek. Columbia Pictures, 1995.

#### IV.

##### *Y Tú Mamá También, Globalization & the Postcolonial Image*

While rising stars of the Mexican film industry like Rodriguez or Salma Hayek emigrated to Hollywood, the view from Mexico saw the effects of NAFTA in the undermining of the state's role in film production and distribution, leaving the industry open to market forces.<sup>113</sup> Directors like Alfonso Cuarón emerged in the early 1990s with a Mexican cinema that refused the limitations of nationalism<sup>114</sup> but brought to bear critiques on the administrations of Salinas de Gortari, and his successors, Ernesto Zedillo and Vicente Fox.

The Mexican film industry was a historically contentious issue in Mexican politics, given cinema as a medium tended to reflect tensions between modernization, an urban consumer middle class, and the populism of the Revolution.<sup>115</sup> President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-194) hero of land reform and redistribution in the Depression, rejected cinema point blank as an unrevolutionary form.<sup>116</sup> The revolutionary state refused to support the film industry at all, on the basis that other mediums like murals were less subject to “cultural contamination.”<sup>117</sup> The national film industry witnessed a resurgence later, after 1968, when President Echeverría sought to reassert his own revolutionary credentials by supporting a Mexican cinema that opposed Hollywood.<sup>118</sup>

In 1994, in the context of NAFTA, Mexican visual culture took up again a polemic resistance to the dominance of U.S. media industries, with a photography exhibit in the capital defining a Mexican politics of the image as part of a “La Mirada inquieta,”<sup>119</sup> (translated may be correlate to something like bell hooks’ theory of the “oppositional gaze” of the oppressed.) But while the New Latin American Cinema of the ‘70s had articulated a low-budget nationalism of social change, films like *Y Tu Mama tambien* went further to explore dissonances within Mexican culture in the age of globalization, through the lens of a new transnational middle class

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<sup>113</sup> King, John. “Cinema in Latin America.” *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Latin American Culture*. Cambridge University Press. 2004.

<sup>114</sup> Podalsky, Laura. *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Rubenstein, Anne. “Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era.” Ed. Michael C. Meyer, and William H. Beezley. *The Oxford History of Mexico*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2000. 666.

<sup>116</sup> Mraz, John. *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2009. 206.

<sup>117</sup> Rubenstein, Anne. “Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era.” Ed. Michael C. Meyer, and William H. Beezley. *The Oxford History of Mexico*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2000. 648.

<sup>118</sup> Mraz, John. *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2009. 206.

<sup>119</sup> Mraz 221.

in Mexico City, created in part by NAFTA.<sup>120</sup> Their experience as hip teenagers smoking dope and listening to rap music suggest the globalization of U.S. consumer culture. Indeed their malaise is not such a far cry, from the smartass sarcasm of David Foster Wallace's tennis academy. But this is part of Cuarón's intent: to show the disjunctures of globalization for Mexican culture.

The cultural production of an emergent Mexican independent film industry at the periphery U.S. power pushed upon the delimitations between "Third World" and "First World" culture. Where previously "third-worldist" film had embraced militancy, with manifestos calling for guerrilla documentaries to create a revolution in aesthetic and narrative form, to bring forth images of anti-colonial militancy and violence.<sup>121</sup>

Latin American cultural critics like Néstor García Canclini suggested that culture was a vector "for sustaining a demand when political paths are closed."<sup>122</sup> Canclini, writing in 1995, a year after NAFTA, articulates the changing relationship between politics and culture in the public sphere, as cities become less the site of protest than technology and communication; shifts that NAFTA in part created. The hybridity of *Y tu mamá también* suggests the mediatization of the Mexican people, in the vein of American consumer entertainment, but also simultaneously the possibility of political expression through the interrogation of consumer fantasy and liberatory utopias of the local, and the postcolonial.

Julio and his best friend Tenoch, the film's protagonists, are more or less apolitical, though they briefly sally through a protest in the context of 1999 political upheavals against which the film is set. Their chief activities appear to be watching television and getting stoned, not unlike their U.S. teen counterparts in *Infinite Jest*. This is the political act of the film: to question the dissonance between media-saturated urban consumer culture and the primary concerns of labor and globalization for traditional Mexican identity and feeling. In *2666*, Bolaño's description of blaring televisions masking the sound of women's screams makes overt an image of the arrival of televisual modernity altering the landscape of feeling. In *Y tú mamá también* that silencing is equally palpable as Tenoch sits on his couch in front of a flat screen TV while being waited on by a woman in uniform. Mexico City and the border have each entered into a global modernity that means the obfuscation of suffering through televisual fantasy--yet what remains significant about the rise of Mexican independent cinema is the fascination with exactly this question.

After the industrial growth the '90's trade agreements and tech booms brought to Mexico, Alfonso Cuarón brings his camera lens to Mexico City's new middle class, also the main, and perhaps only visible, beneficiaries of globalization. Tenoch, the son of a secretary of state, and his best friend Julio must say good bye to their *novias*, off to backpack around Europe. The film

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<sup>120</sup> Podalsky, Laura. *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Stam, Robert. "Beyond Third Cinema: the aesthetics of hybridity." Ed. Guneratne, Anthony and Wimal Dissanayake. *Rethinking Third Cinema*. Routledge. 2003.

<sup>122</sup> Canclini, Nestor Garcia. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1995.

opens with the staging of sex on screen as Tenoch, atop his girlfriend, makes her swear to forgo all other foreign nationals, in an allegory of the changing intimacies of globalization. Promises for the boys do not seem to mean much however, as Julio and Tenoch party their way through their heartbreak, and get high in front of Tenoch's flat screen TV. This is not the fantasy of traditional Mexico screened in *Desperado*, where true love waits, but is a film intent upon what is eroded, broken down, made irrelevant by the constant possibility of consumption and desire in late capitalism.

Tenoch and Julio's nonexistent mourning period for their girlfriends' departure seems incommensurate to the performance of their romantic feeling, and certainly far afield from the melodrama of *Desperado*'s romance. They move quickly to dissolve their girlfriends' absence in other fantasies, mainly in the immoderate consumption of pot and television. They share the postmodern position of the neoliberal sovereign body projecting fantasies of their lives, and projected futures success. Yet Cuarón's film is about the interruption of those utopic fantasies of the middle class in the aftermath of the ascent of neoliberalism. Apparently free to move through the congested highways of Mexico City, Tenoch and Julio's trajectory is broken by a traffic jam caused by the death of a migrant bricklayer from Michoacán on his way to work. The modernization and urbanization of NAFTA may have added to the opportunity and comfort of Tenoch and Julio, but also meant painful patterns of labor and migration for average Mexicans as they moved from rural spaces to the cacophony of Mexico City.<sup>123</sup>

The Mexico City country club where father's wines and dines international elites is in fact eerily reminiscent of the narco ranches onscreen in Robert Rodriguez' films. American and Mexican businessmen in white suits consume a "traditional" Mexico of mariachis and rancheros wrestling bulls for their entertainment. Mexico's modernization, even in the seat of the government, with Harvard-educated economists may as well be the Mexico of narcos—it doesn't seem to make much difference in their business practices. Tenoch and his friends laugh maniacally at the idea of his father's business ethics, recalling the widespread scandals ubiquitous in Mexican politics, particularly in the Salinas administration with rumors of a brother's drug connections and payoffs by Mexican corporations.<sup>124</sup>

Tenoch and Julio, as bonafide members of a middle class that grew in privilege with NAFTA, if not expanding to include other sectors of the population,<sup>125</sup> are preoccupied mainly with consumption of sex, alcohol, ecstasy, pot, video games and movies. They masturbate into the country club swimming pool to the thought of Robert Rodriguez' Salma Hayek. Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsivais may have had moments like this in mind when he critiqued *Y tu mamá también*, and *Amores Perros* as shallow and postmodern, in cahoots with globalized neoliberal culture.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Gillingham, Paul. "Sex, Death, and Structuralism: Alternative Views of the Twentieth Century." William Beezley Ed. *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, First Edition. Blackwell. 2011.

<sup>124</sup> Mora, Carl. "Globalization and New Paths: 1990-2004." *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society 1896-2004*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co. 2005.

<sup>125</sup> Camp, Roderic. *Mexico: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford University Press. 2011. 23.

<sup>126</sup> Monsivais, Carlos. "Lo local y lo global," *Publico*, October 21, 2001. 21.

In a sea of inebriated bureaucrats, Tenoch and Julio come across the beautiful wife of one of Tenoch's cousins, who for much of the film for them is sheerly a screen onto which to project their own desire and fantasy. In the midst of the general, painful boredom of a party full of technocrats, which makes a show of mariachis and traditional Mexican culture, they make up an imagined beach that will show her the "real Mexico." Their commodified fantasy of Mexico recalls that this is one of the products of NAFTA: a tourist industry that sells escape into a fantasy, a utopia of untouched, traditional, authentic life of exotic locales. Tourism throughout the 20th century served as an industry created by, and which helped shape the "social and cultural life of [U.S.] empire."<sup>127</sup> Mary Louise Pratt's work on the neocolony situates travel as a fundamental trope of the colonist narrative.<sup>128</sup> In rural Oaxaca Tenoch and Julio hope to find an untouched paradise to soothe their angst. It is significant that Cuarón turns to a critique of tourism, as a means by which the Mexican middle class is also implicated in the position of the colonizer towards the rural spaces of their own nation.

Yet the landscape of rural Mexico continually inserts itself back into their idealized vision of events, as does the emotional reality of Luisa. Women in the history of Mexican cinema represent an origin point of national identity, starting with la Malinche,<sup>129</sup> where the excess of feminine feeling as melodrama presents also the possibility of resistance to cultural domination.<sup>130</sup> Luisa, in her intimacy with the rural families they meet on their journey, and her intuitive sympathy with the Mexican landscape represents this resistance to the hegemony of a bourgeois extractive tourist gaze. Like the tropical space itself, she has a way of interrupting the boys' desire, what Mary Louise Pratt calls "defeating the teleology of modernity," disturbing the neocolonial effort to extract particular meaning from beautiful vistas.<sup>131</sup> *Y tu mamá*'s screening of this defeat, and the silent eviscerations of culture by globalization offer the possibility of a political challenge to the teleology of consumption.

The boys' fantasy of Luisa, and her relation as an object of their desire, mirrors their blind, self-absorbed relationship to traditional Mexico. Tenoch and Julio cannot account for her humanity, her desires, concerns, and the pain. Luisa is dying. The fact that Luisa is dying of cancer, for instance, is beyond their comprehension, as are the lives of their servants, or the local people of the villages they drive through en route to Oaxaca. The obscuring of Luisa's reality in favor of the boys' fantasy is mirrored in shots of obscured labor: of women carting food out to

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<sup>126</sup> Podalsky, Laura. *The Politics of Affect and Emotion in Contemporary Latin American Cinema*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Merrill, Dennis. "Mass Tourism, Empire and Soft Power." *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2009.

<sup>128</sup> Pratt, Mary Louise. "In the Neocolony: Destiny, Destination and the Traffic in Meaning." *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2008. 459.

<sup>129</sup> "Malinche is the violated mother of modern Mexico, la chingada" who betrayed her people to the conquerors, and placed the mother of the nation in a position of perpetual victimization, between veneration and shame. Lopez, Ana M. "Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the 'Old' Mexican Cinema." *Mediating Two Worlds*. British Film Institute. 1993. 150.

<sup>130</sup> Lopez 151.

<sup>131</sup> Pratt, Mary Louise. "In the Neocolony: Destiny, Destination and the Traffic in Meaning." *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2008. 476.

the parking lot behind the country club, or serving Tenoch on his couch. Cuarón's shots linger on Luisa in silence, as they do the brown skinned, indigenous faces of the servants who sit out back eating the leftover tortillas of the diplomats and CEOs.

On the road, Julio looks out to see indigenous peasants bearing a coffin over the dust. Recalling his nanny from childhood, who may well have been from this very village, he realizes he had never thought to ask her about her hometown, or her own childhood. The images of rural Oaxaca reassert rural realities into the globalized narrative of the boys' Mexico City lives. The film makes explicit the ravages of neoliberal globalization on the local life of those places, with the fisherman they meet, whose business will soon be destroyed by the arrival of a multinational hotel chain.

Rather than distracting from politics, the sexual conclusion of the film renders affect, intimacy and eros as the space in which to reconstruct meaningful relationships to the 'Other' and to pain, in what it is to be vulnerable. The sexual dynamic of Luisa with the boys a fundamental reconfiguration of the nexus of property rights, and the body, imagining a queer alternative to the individual, hierarchical dynamics imposed under NAFTA and the authoritarian PRI. Luisa, although a postmodern Spanish citizen, a descendant of the colonizer, transcends her relationship to the space of consumption, partially as her suffering is mutually born of the disconnects of modernity. *Y tú mamá* acts as critique of dulled politics, and the dulled affective sphere of Bolaño's endless corpses and David Foster Wallace's dystopia of the simulacra. The shallow, consumer driven neoliberal cosmopolitan lifestyle of Tenoch and Julio faces the same conundrums as David Foster Wallace's tennis academy proteges: the film ends with a capitulation to the rule of the corrupt *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, which helped bring free trade to Mexico. Facing the new millennium, culture was surely as in need of revolution as the realm of traditional politics on either side of the borders.

### Conclusion

The breakdown of meaning for the postmodern middle class in millennial texts works dialectically with the bodily suffering dealt by globalizing capitalism. Though free of the physical space of factories of Santa Teresa in *2666*, the millennial, postindustrial U.S. leaves fractured selves and bodies, devastated by media, advertising and bureaucracy, visible through the lives of David Foster Wallace's tennis proteges in *Infinite Jest*. Late capitalism as reflected by *2666* and *Infinite Jest* is always mutually constituted across the global violence of extractive production and consumption.

The inhuman face of progress and production articulated in the deadened language of NAFTA, is manifest in the factories and drug cartels of *2666* is experienced, but also as ghostly absence of meaning on the other side of the border, as bodies strive for connection in the postmodernity of global flights, cell phones, and emails. It is no longer a surprising fact in the course of modernity that bodies and products can be transported around the globe, but at the end of the 20th century globalization exhibits a further aporia of feeling left by the cogs of progress. Rather than a lessening of the violences of modernity and industrial production, it is the visibility

of tears at the fabric of life that are altered, as the postindustrial world relies on ameliorative consumption and fantasy, to distract from the pain of alienated relations of global production. The unresolved crises of imperialism, and economic exploitation, continue to be born out in the haunting of the news image, in the awareness of laboring bodies at the edges of consumptive fantasy.

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