A Dialectics of Intoxication:

Addiction, Violence, and Vision in Latin American Cultural Production

By

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Abstract

As the bloodshed surrounding the narcotics industry and interdiction efforts in Mexico and elsewhere continues unabated, it is more important than ever to study the global "drug problem" from all angles, and the products of culture emerging from Latin America provide a unique perspective on a constellation of issues whose complexity resists definitive theorization. The study of "narconarratives" has largely focused on an aesthetic "sobriety" that recognizes the distance between intoxication where drugs are consumed (mostly in the global North) and survival and violence where they are produced and transported. However, this investigation is based on the premise that a broadly conceived intoxication, or psychotropy, in fact intervenes at every level of culture, calling for an approach that is interdisciplinary, global, and historical, taking into account distinct modes of psychotropy with divergent psycho-social ramifications. Specifically, a dialectical relationship is proposed between, on one hand, compulsive patterns of intoxication that are built into a rigid, exclusionary self, typified by cocaine abuse but also linked to the psychology of consumerism, and, on the other, a defamiliarizing type of intoxication—having deep roots in indigenous practices but also being a potentiality of aesthetic experience—that increases cognitive and experiential flexibility, destabilizing ossified patterns and opening the self toward the Other.

A survey of a number of moments within a genealogy of countercultural interventions in Latin America—from the travels of outsiders like Antonin Artaud and William Burroughs to the writings of the Mexican *Onda literaria*—provides a historical context for the cultural coexistence and conflict between these types of intoxication. Moving ahead to the current *narco* era, this study examines the "Zurdo" Mendieta novels of Élmer Mendoza, which illuminate complex social realities related to the narcotics industry and interdiction, simultaneously

shedding light on global patterns of intoxication and engaging reflexively with structures of addiction. Finally, *Fiesta en la madriguera*, by Juan Pablo Villalobos and *Prayers for the Stolen*, by Jennifer Clement are analyzed for the way they appropriate the perspectives of childhood for their defamiliarizing effects on the reader's perception of the violence surrounding the Drug War.

Introduction

> "Les choses les plus belles sont celles que souffle la folie et qu'écrit la raison. Il faut demeurer entre les deux, tout près de la folie quand on rêve, tout près de la raison quand on écrit."
>
> —André Gide

When we contemplate grisly acts like the decapitation and public display of corpses by criminal organizations, or mass murder and burial of "suspected gang members" by security forces, whether as represented in the news media, in government or NGO reports, or in fictionalized form in novels or film, there is an understandable tendency to focus on the "sobering" reality of this violence, and to expect it to be represented through a gritty, clear-eyed lens. The violence appears as the underside of an international economic and political reality that is fueled by far-off intoxication, a phenomenon separated from narco-violence by real or ideological barriers of nation, class, race, and the nature of experience. The intoxicated experience of the drug user is held at arm's length from the violence that rages on the ground where drugs are produced or trafficked, to reinforce the fact that the "drug problem" has been first and foremost a problem originating in the global North, and that places like Mexico become caught between the forces of economic demand and political pressure for forceful interdiction that radiate out especially from the United States.

It seems almost distasteful, for example, to place representations of such violence in dialog with the heady ruminations of those hedonistic, self-indulgent, Western thinkers and writers, whose dalliance with the *pharmakon* have inspired so many literary flights of fancy. In addition to the valid concern mentioned above, there is a resistance to considering the role of

intoxication in cultural production in the *narco* era because of persistent of attitudes about intoxication that are widespread across cultures and across the political spectrum.[1] The question, "What do we hold against the drug addict?" has been a matter of some interest for cultural critics who have looked at the role of intoxication in culture. Jacques Derrida claims that it is not the user's pleasure that we object to, but that in taking this pleasure "he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community; that he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction" ("Rhetoric" 25).[2] The world of the drug-user, according to this vision, is an empty and false one, set apart from the sufferings of the addict's community (writ large), and as such its nature is unworthy of serious scrutiny; certainly, real suffering must always take precedence over joy in emptiness.

It may be worthwhile to tease apart the threads of Derrida's formulation, which he characterizes as "a rhetoric of fantasy at the root of any prohibition of drugs" ("Rhetoric" 25): first, as Derrida implies, this rhetoric is undermined by the fact that human experience is almost always mediated in some way, including by a range of intoxications that are generally not recognized as such, without this experience being disqualified as meaningless simulacrum. But, more importantly, there is an aspect to the charge that seems at once more grave and more true, that is, the drug user's abandonment of community. Think of the heavy cocaine user, holed up in his room, blinds drawn, his consideration of other people limited to defensive, paranoid thoughts. In the depths of addiction, he is invested only in his drug, not in his friends and family, and by no

[1] I define "intoxication" very broadly, in order to include both substances and cultural practices that demonstrably change the way beings think, feel, or perceive. I use "psychotropy," a term introduced by Daniel Smail, as a synonym of intoxication. The latter admittedly has a negative connotation owing to its relation to toxicity; I discuss further my use of it for a wide range of psychotropic phenomena in the last section of this Introduction.

[2] Avital Ronell takes up Derrida's comments, exploring their relevance especially for the case of reading as a "feminine" addiction, in the context of *Madame Bovary* (*Crack Wars* 102-104).

means in the distant people that may have suffered immensely surrounding the production and transport of his drug. I believe it is important to ask questions about these users and their disavowed economic and ethical relationships with the victims of narco-violence. What are the origins of patterns of intoxication that shield the self from the Other in this way, and what are the mechanisms by which they work? What is their relationship to culture(s), and what is their geographical distribution? Are there patterns of intoxication that interact with the self in distinct ways? This investigation will attempt some tentative answers for these enormous questions, presenting diverse phenomena—from the global consumerist economy, to everyday cultural practices, to climates of fear created by narco-violence—as interpenetrated regimes of *psychotropy* that profoundly influence individual and social patterns of thought and behavior.

As work in fields from neuroscience to the Humanities continues to strengthen the case that intoxication is implicated at every level of culture, it becomes important to recognize that cultural products from Latin America not only engage some of the above questions, but also intervene very directly in cultural psychotropy. After all, one of the most frequent criticisms of "narconarratives" is that they are, essentially, narcotic, providing in themselves a shallow, addictive pleasure by consistently feeding the reader what he or she wants and expects.[3] If such cultural products are indeed narcotic or addictive, this begs the question to what degree and in what way such intoxication mirrors the effects of the drugs that form the basis of the violent industry that provides the context of these works; this is one of the ways I approach the popular "Zurdo" Mendieta novels, which in fact turn out to be highly reflexive in their engagement with

[3] See Lemus, who, while not using the word "narcotic" to describe narconarratives, asserts that their function is to "complacer" the reader (40). His critique will be discussed in some detail later in this Introduction, as well as in Chapter Two. For a definition of narconarratives, a term that seems to have been introduced by Herlinghaus, I defer to Zavala's concise formulation: "a dispersed but interrelated corpus of texts, films, music, and conceptual art focusing on the drug trade" ("Imagining" 341).

addiction. But if we have known of the narcotic properties of "culture" since Nietzsche, from Walter Benjamin we learn something about another face of intoxication, and one that remains relatively obscure.[4] Aesthetic work has the potential, like some drugs that have deep roots in indigenous traditions, to counteract addiction, to disorient habits of thought and even of self; this is the angle from which I analyze the work of Juan Pablo Villalobos and Jennifer Clement in Chapter Three.

And yes, I risk poor taste by placing the desperation and desolation of the Drug War in dialog with the grandiosity and frivolity of countercultural approaches to intoxication in Latin America, including those of foreigners like Antonin Artaud and William S. Burroughs. I do this because narco-violence has largely been about the relationships between Latin Americans and foreigners as mediated by intoxicants and intoxication, as much as these relationships may be disavowed, disguised or denied; it is the latest permutation of the (neo)colonial extraction of substances, cultural forms, and modes of experience from Latin America. The countercultural moments that preceded the *narco* era demand study because they mark the development of a tension between modes of psychotropy that support distinct interventions into relationships between the self and the Other.

On one side stand pleasures that beg repetition, developing into compulsion and addiction, enlisting intoxication into compulsive performances that inform the self, which becomes rigid, brittle, and dependent on a radical exclusion of the Other. This pattern underlies

[4] In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche exclaims, "The strongest thoughts and passions are there [in the theater] presented before those who are capable not of thought and passion—but of intoxication! And the former as a means to the latter! And theatre and music as the hashish-smoking and betel-chewing of the European! Oh, who will tell us the entire history of narcotics? –It is nearly the history of 'culture', our so-called higher culture!" (86-87) Benjamin's work on intoxication will be discussed at length later in this Introduction.

addiction to stimulants like cocaine, but exists more broadly in the context of consumer capitalism and even in discourses of purity like those that underlie Drug-Warrior, prohibitionist mentalities. On the other side stand those experiences that disorient and defamiliarize perception, destabilizing habits of thought and feeling that constitute the self, a dynamic that is native to childhood creativity and can be stimulated by certain drugs, but that is also a potentiality of aesthetic work.[5] The manifestations of these tendencies interact in a dialectical relationship, where the cognitive and emotive addictions of an overly rigid self may be destabilized by an experience of defamiliarizing intoxication, whether chemical or cultural in origin, creating an opening for infiltration by the Other that is eventually synthesized in a broadened self. However, the experience of defamiliarization must not be seen as final, definitive, or sacrosanct, because it, in turn, is always open to merging with its own antithesis, as when the medium of defamiliarization is incorporated, through repetition, into a new system of self.[6] Nor should this framework be taken for a Manichean scheme of essentially "good" versus "bad" intoxication, though it may often play out in that way in analysis due to the current global cultural valorization of one side of the dialectic (that of addiction, of accumulation, of the self). As will be discussed in more detail later in this Introduction, both modalities of intoxication seem to have a role in shaping a healthy subjectivity, while in imbalance in either direction is potentially disastrous. In

[5] The concept of defamiliarization, of course, is a familiar one in literary studies, going back to Shklovsky. As used in this study, it is related to this literary heritage, but also specifically includes an affective response along with a change in perception, constituting an instance of intoxication. To a certain extent, what I propose as defamiliarizing intoxication could be considered a phenomenology of the literary concept, though this is a connection that would require further research.

[6] A prominent example of this is business culture's appropriation, starting in the 1960's, of countercultural anti-conformism and desire for "difference"—this would be channeled into a steady stream of new products that created an addiction to novelty; in fact, Thomas Frank calls "difference," as conceived by advertising maverick Bill Bernbach, "the magic cultural formula by which the life of consumerism could be extended indefinitely, running forever on the discontent it itself had produced" (68). For a consideration of psychedelics in the service of constructing the sense of a superior self, see Saldanha.

the context of cultural production, this means that, while critics, myself included, tend to prefer works that violently challenge dominant discourses, this study will resist the prescriptive (or proscriptive) tendency to denounce, more or less *a priori*, work that engages, sometimes very directly, the dynamics of addiction. In the broadest terms, this investigation will consider how the products of culture bring the dialectics of intoxication to bear reflexively on the question of psychotropy itself; that is, the role *of* intoxication in our thinking and feeling *about* intoxication.

In developing a focus on psychotropy in the study of culture, inevitably the door is opened to biological perspectives on the latter. It is my hope that recent interest within academia in creating interdisciplinary frameworks to tackle complex problems will serve to push back against reductive approaches from any quarter, such that cultural, economic, political, and biological factors may be understood as tightly interwoven strands of systems in which none can be considered by essence the primary determinant of a given historical configuration. In this sense, while economics, for example, may be of fundamental importance in shaping the contours of the Drug War and the concomitant violence, the structures of plant alkaloids and those of human neurochemistry should not be underestimated in their role in channeling and limiting the market energies at play. In this sense, financial markets are interpenetrated with a "psychotropic economy," a concept that has been developed by historian Daniel Smail, who has issued a striking call for a *rapprochement* between evolutionary biology and history as a social science. In *On Deep History and the Brain*, Smail outlines an "economy" in which a variety of "psychotropic mechanisms" including exercise, shopping, sex, watching television, and reading novels offer to change the way we feel, measurably altering neurotransmitter activity much the ways drugs do (161). These substances and practices are often in competition with each other, in the sense that a person who wants to relax might choose between smoking marijuana and

meditating, while someone wanting a pick-me-up might go shopping, or might resort to coffee or even cocaine. These are generally mechanisms of what Smail calls “autotropy,” in that they “influence the body chemistry of the self” (174). Even more important in terms of its social implications is the phenomenon of “teletropy… a category of psychotropy embracing the various devices used in human societies to create mood changes in other people” (170). We will soon return to Smail’s formulations in an analysis of the broad social implications of the dialectics of intoxication.

Sobriety and Intoxication in the Representation of Violence

First, it will be necessary to briefly review a couple of influential approaches to narconarratives, in order to situate the current study. Works of fiction that seek to reflect a violent reality are always open to the charge of exploitation, and narconarratives from the north of Mexico and elsewhere are no exception. The best example of this kind of critique is that of Rafael Lemus, who in 2005 excoriated writers of what he considers a docile realism that packages violence in a picturesque and marketable product (“Balas de salva,” *Letras Libres* 40). He favors more experimental literary interventions that radically mimic the violence of the narcotics industry (41), which he claimed did not exist in Mexico as of a 2012 reprint of his article. As noted, Lemus’s position could be interpreted as a critique of the psychotropic properties of given narconarratives, which I clearly consider a potentially productive avenue of criticism, but it also suffers from a number of limitations. Namely, this stance is in line with a tradition that runs from Nietzsche through Adorno that categorically denounces the pleasure of consuming the products of culture (for Adorno, this meant “popular” culture, for Nietzsche even

"high" culture had this effect on "common" people). This posture reifies a boundary between popular and high culture—which the field of cultural studies has meanwhile been at pains to destabilize—that obscures the complexities of how culture functions. It erases any agency of the consumer of culture and presumes to prescribe, in very specific terms, what culture should and should not do, delegitimizing whole areas of production.[7]

More recently, Oswaldo Zavala has defended the use of both realist and non-realist approaches to narco-violence, proposing that to be a significant and ethical intervention in the cultural field, what is important is that a work challenge the "archive" of hegemonic discourses about drug trafficking, whereas much cultural production merely reaffirms these discourses ("Imagining" 356). Foremost among his concerns is the official discourse that criminal organizations represent an *external* threat to the Mexican people and state, rather than recognizing the historical *interiority* of drug trafficking to society and politics (342). This is indeed an enormously important concern, but in his reaction to this discourse, Zavala risks oversimplifying the situation in the other direction. For him, narcotraffickers "*are* in fact the police and the political elites of the region" (referring to Northern Mexico) (351), and the phenomenon of drug trafficking is "controlled and disciplined by local and federal powers" (352). Again, Zavala is right to insist on a recognition of the deep complicity between official and illicit politics and economies, but to say that local and federal authorities are in complete control of trafficking operations may severely overestimate their competence. Zavala's approach also treats the archive of drug war discourses as unitary and monolithic, composed of everything from narcocorridos to journalistic reports to government pronouncements. This ends up setting

[7] Lemus's critique will be discussed further in Chapter Two, where it bears on the work of Élmer Mendoza.

up the oppositional discourses he advocates against a monological archive, constituting just the kind of Manichean scheme he rejects in his analysis. Novels like Mendoza's, meanwhile, present us with a range of perspectives and positions on and in the drug war, including police and politicians who run the gamut from totally corrupt officials, to people who are by no means on *narco* payrolls but who are completely compliant out of fear, to a handful of individuals like Mendoza's protagonist, el Zurdo, who are essentially honest and opposed to the cartels, but do what they must to survive. To insist on the exact identity of the cartels and the state invites a cynicism that threatens to paralyze the will to call for reform or to believe that it is even possible for the government to exercise some degree of autonomy or resistance against narco-violence. It also forecloses the drive to understand the complex economic, political and psychosocial dynamics that underlie these relationships of antagonism and collusion, as this study attempts to do. In short, Zavala's analysis, by overplaying its resistance to narcotic reaffirmations of official discourses (that narcotrafficking is external to the state), risks promoting its own damaging narcotic effects.[8]

In a different vein from prescriptive critiques like those of Lemus and Zavala, Hermann Herlinghaus has registered a weighty intervention in the study of narconarratives that is particularly relevant to the current study because of its theorization of sobriety. *Narcoepics: A Global Aesthetics of Sobriety* also calls for extended comment simply because it has been the most far-reaching and theoretically sophisticated intervention into the relation between traffic in illicit *pharmaka* and cultural production in Latin America. The book's titular category is broadly

[8] Zavala also takes up Ignacio Sánchez Prado's line of critique—which holds that violence has become a kind of new Latin American brand for foreign consumption—and criticizes *Fiesta en la madriguera* along these lines. I discuss this question further in Chapter Three.

constructed, so as to include *narcocorridos*, *narconovelas*, and also works whose central theme is not the drug trade but that touch on it and that share the aesthetic—which in reality turns out to involve an ethical stance as well—that Herlinghaus elaborates throughout the study. To this end, he assembles a diverse and unique theoretical toolbox, destabilizing familiar concepts like intoxication and sobriety while enlisting Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht (the book's title is related to Brecht's concept of epic theater) and a host of other thinkers, who lend their authority on everything from drug history to philosophical, psychological, physiological and evolutionary perspectives on intoxication.

The central thrust of Herlinghaus's argument relates to the way in which the cultural products he analyzes sidestep the habitual, polarized framework for representing drug violence, in which the drug trafficker is seen as either the embodiment of evil, or else a symbol of resistance against a hypocritical dominant culture. Instead, the violence is removed altogether from the tragic paradigm and the protagonists appear in the guise of *pharmakos* (scapegoat)—not a tragic victim but a "random" one. In this configuration, irony seeps in and there is no cathartic release of pity and fear. "There is a fable without moralizing... and 'dispassionate observation'" (22). Here we see the affinity of Herlinghaus's approach with Brecht's ideas, and start to gain a sense of his notion of "sobriety," which takes as its point of departure an enigmatic phrase dropped by Benjamin in his well-known essay on Surrealism: "The dialectics of intoxication are indeed curious. Is not perhaps all ecstasy in one world humiliating sobriety in that complimentary to it?" (210). For Herlinghaus, this is the sobriety that characterizes the way the drug war can be seen from places like Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico, where economic necessity drives people to fill the raging demand for illegal drugs in the North. This configuration brings to these countries, on one hand, spiraling violence and corruption, and on

the other, the moral reprehension of the North. “Narco-narratives” leverage the sober underside of Benjamin’s dialectic to “contradict dominant discursive constructions in which ‘intoxication’ is blamed on the South as a region of contamination and multiple threats” (52). Herlinghaus points to *narcocorridos* such as those of Los Tigres del Norte as a good example of the “rejection of the curse of guilt, which mainline public opinion, often projecting fear, as well, has imposed on those outcasts who today are a growing part of the world’s informal working class” (34). Fear and guilt, then, are recast as a kind of social “intoxication” induced by toxic discourses about drugs—discourses flowing out from the centers of power. For Herlinghaus, these emotions are the “steady, proven intoxicants” of the “psychopathological, regulatory mechanisms that allow those in power to stay in power” (80).

The intent of Herlinghaus’s work is to analyze a particular, contemporary configuration of drug-related literature: works of the contemporary moment that fix a “sober” gaze on the drug *industry*, that is, from *outside* the drug experience itself, but from *inside* the intense violence concomitant with the circulation of drugs. Previous drug literature that narrates the drug experience from the inside is clearly outside of the scope of this work: contrasting his corpus of contemporary Latin American texts with writings on drugs from Europe and the U.S. from the eighteenth century onward, Herlinghaus argues that “whereas the ‘hero’ of the West’s narcotic literature is the ‘pharmakon’... the protagonists in narcoepics is the ‘pharmakos’....” (21). While the older tradition of drug literature showed “a fascination with narcotics and their potential to provide access to the diversity of consciousness,” the texts he calls “narcoepics” belong to a later historical moment (ours), and for Herlinghaus the violence visited on the sacrificial victim takes center stage, the central theme of these texts being “the heterogeneity of territories and life worlds which the war on drugs has violently affected” (21).

The difference between the two corpora is "the difference between the modern literary and artistic interest in 'ecstasy' and a new narratological and certainly paradoxical interest in 'sobriety'" (21). He asserts that among the writers of narconarratives there is "skepticism about the hypothesis that the fugitive marriage of the sensitive and reflective mind with narcotic stimuli could provide special spiritual gifts, or generate effects of liberation" (61). Intoxication is figured as a distraction or an obstacle on the path to the aesthetic sobriety that is presented as instrumental in effectively laying out panoramas of avarice, violence, and survival to represent the illicit drug industry in Latin America. Because of this, in leveraging Benjamin's thought for his conceptual framework, Herlinghaus must domesticate the well-known concept of "profane illumination," which also appears in the Surrealism essay: delinked with the experience of *Rausch*,[9] "'[p]rofane illumination,' in a more timely wording, has to do with worldly wisdom as an instrument for cultural and philosophical criticism…." (36). In his treatment of Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, he calls Benjamin's thought images "counter-narcotic," and suggests that the great cultural critic's method consisted of "dealing with intoxication in the interest of sobriety" (192). In this way, he tends to guide every instance of intoxication, whether chemical, cultural, or critical, towards a consideration of a concomitant sobriety that for him constitutes a more valuable basis for inquiry.

In *Violence without Guilt*, Herlinghaus had shown interest in Benjamin's theorization of *Rausch*, holding it to be entirely distinct from profane illumination. In this earlier text,

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[9] *Rausch*, a word Benjamin uses to describe states of intoxication, is variously translated "ecstasy," "frenzy," and "intoxication." According to John McCole, "'Rausch' is far more suggestive than the English equivalent 'intoxication': it quite naturally bears the connotations of such overwhelming feelings as exhilaration, ecstasy, euphoria, rapture, and passion; its onomatopoetic qualities have an equivalent in the slang term 'rush.' 'Intoxication' is the only real option for rendering 'Rausch' in English, but its strong associations with alcohol and toxicity can be misleading. Benjamin uses it to refer to various states of transport, providing a bridge to Klages' theories of dream consciousness and 'cosmogonic eros'" (225).

Herlinghaus expressly takes issue with the exclusive focus Benjamin critics place on profane illumination, "as though the summoning of profane spirits for conscious awakening would naturally dissolve the theoretical challenges of the dubious sphere—*Rausch*" (18). By *Narcoepics*, Herlinghaus has placed Benjamin in detox, with the latter's cultural interventions all interpreted as being oriented toward sobriety. In dealing with distinctions like *Rausch* versus profane illumination or any comparison between types of intoxication that seem to have a radically different character, I believe it is important to keep very present the origins of the word *pharmakon*, whose broad and intriguing semantic field included senses of both "poison" and "cure." While this fact and the diversity of drug effects are well-known to critics like Herlinghaus and Avital Ronell, it seems that their implications do not always filter down to every moment of analysis. The ubiquitous tags of drugs, narcotics, and narco-, with their sleepy etymology and heavy connotational baggage, are applied too often to the whole gamut of illicit *pharmaka*,[10] with little attention given to the socio-political importance of the radical multivalence of drug experiences. Discussing the "management of reality and emotion" through drug-based psychological dissociation that in the North allows people to cope with life under advanced capitalism, Herlinghaus once again cites Benjamin, from the essay on Surrealism: "dreams and hashish loosen 'individuality like a bad tooth'—it can be assumed that self-forgetting and reality 'distortion' help buffering the nervous system and 'safeguarding

[10] For Ronell, "drugs are crucially related to the question of freedom," and "questions attending drugs disclose only a moment in the history of addiction" (*Crack Wars* 59). She writes that "the chemical prosthesis, the mushroom or plant, respond to a fundamental structure, and not the other way around" (103). True enough, except that in the case of (psilocybin) mushrooms, we may be talking about different structures. The subtitle of *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania*, tips us off as to her study's approach to intoxication, but in discussing hallucination in the structure of addiction (101-106) and mentioning drugs like mushrooms, she does not seem to recognize the radically different psychotropic experience presupposed by some of these substances. What of the hallucination that pries one's eyes open, forcing unwanted visions—the drug experience you run from, not to—or at least approach with consideration, even apprehension. Here there is no structure of addiction, but rather something like its opposite.

psychological intactness' (Schumacher). In a word, 'drugs,' be they chemical, cultural, or religious—are highly 'esteemed' catalysts that help the individual function in an oppressively modernized world. However, this is at best half of the truth" (52). Presumably the other half of the truth is the inequality in the global distribution of *pharmaka* that Herlinghaus goes on to talk about, and it is difficult to want to argue with an affirmation that ends with such a vigorous disclaimer. However, I think it's important to look into what this take on Northern drug use gets right,[11] and conversely where it falls into oversimplification, conflating phenomena that may have little in common. While few would deny that there is a dynamic of "self-forgetting" in much of the industrialized world's use of psychoactive substances, and that this pattern is likely motivated by the stresses of contemporary life, this kind of use, which fits well with early senses of the word "narcotic," seems especially well-suited to drugs such as alcohol and heroin.

But it is important to respect the differences in the psycho-social utilization of distinct substances. Cocaine, for instance, far from involving an obliteration of the sense of self and related social and economic pressures, can be understood to fortify the ego and suppress self-doubt and critical questioning (Spotts and Shontz 138). In this sense, it would indeed be in the service of "psychological intactness," not through momentary oblivion but rather through bolstering the ego's continuing quest for gratification through consumption. Conversely, Benjamin's "loose tooth"—associated with dreams, cannabis and psychedelic drugs—while it may indeed involve a kind of dissociation, does not refer not to a "narcotic" self-forgetting, but rather to a frequently disquieting decentering of subjectivity that provokes new forms of vision—

[11] The idea of drugs being used to buffer the nervous system from the shocks of modern life, which as far as I know comes from Buck-Morss ("Aesthetics"), informed by her reading of Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire ("On Some Motifs"), is certainly a valuable and productive one, but as I argue below, it is not the whole story.

and potentially a broadened sense of self. Benjamin goes on to say that he is referring to "precisely the fruitful living experience that allowed these people [the Surrealists] to step out of the charmed space of intoxication" (208). This is, in short, "the Surrealist experience," which is to some degree analogous to versions of visionary experiences under the influence of drugs like cannabis, mescaline, psilocybin and LSD appearing in cultural production throughout the twentieth century, culminating in the '60s and '70s. It is important to broaden the conceptual frameworks we use to talk about intoxication, to be able to investigate whether some drugs—or, more accurately some modes of psychotropy—constitute an antithesis to others in terms of their social function; whether some insulate, strengthen and *close* the consuming ego, allowing it to proceed blind and furious, while others tend to destabilize and *open* ego or subjectivity; whether some encourage repetitive patterns of unreflexive, obsessive behavior and thought while some shine a defamiliarizing light on these patterns.

Herlinghaus asks how it is possible to "make sense" of the *pharmakon* in the face if its "boundless ambiguity" (192), and the answer he seems to give—to counter it with, it or convert it into a sobriety finally freed from intoxication—is perhaps the major limitation of his theoretical approach. I want to suggest that, when we recognize that a broadly conceived psychotropy is a central fact of human life—creating a vision of people and groups being pushed and pulled, chasing and being chased by psychotropic forces—the concept of sobriety becomes, if it was not already, highly relative and indeed dependent on an *absence* of one type of psychotropy that may be constituted by the *presence* of another. If, in profane illumination, "we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday" (Benjamin, "Surrealism" 216), then this technology constitutes an intoxicated way of *seeing*

against the kind of habituated perception that frames some things as "mysterious" and some as "everyday." But if we conceive of the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture, or more broadly the accumulated detritus of received opinions and perceptions, as a toxic cloud that obscures "seeing,"[12] profane illumination or psychedelic or surrealist experience becomes a potential path to a sober, unimpaired, unconstrained view of the world. But this account itself depends on a critical, Benjaminian view of culture; from the mainstream perspective, of course, the ravings of a person in the throes of such an experience would be considered intoxicated or mad. We have run into the border where the insane are able to verge on wisdom in failing to recognize or accept the norms of a human world that is itself profoundly open to charges of insanity; we will explore this territory further with figures like Antonin Artaud and Parménides García Saldaña in Chapter One.[13] In this sense, the perception of sobriety, as either being lucidly outside of the social system or being blindly inside, is totally dependent on perspective but in either case corresponds to one of the terms of a dialectics of intoxication radically distinct from that which Herlinghaus has adapted from Benjamin.[14] The "boundless ambiguity" of the *pharmakon* can thus perhaps be explained by the dialectical tension contained in the very concept, a tension that allows it to simultaneously encompass everything from the existential crises of psychedelic experiences to

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[12] According to Susan Buck-Morss, "unlike with drugs, the phantasmagoria assumes the position of objective fact. Whereas drug addicts confront a society that challenges the reality of their altered perception, the intoxication of phantasmagoria itself becomes the social norm." ("Aesthetics" 23).

[13] A willful failure to understand on the part of characters who play the part of "the fool" also works as a literary device in the service of social criticism (Bakhtin, Dialogic 402-405). The techniques by which children's perspectives are appropriated for defamiliarization at times overlaps with this dynamic (see Chapter Three).

[14] I have chosen to respect the ambiguity or ambivalence of Benjamin's original formulation, instead of attempting to funnel its meaning into my own conception. However, one possible point of connection may be worth noting: as this Introduction will argue, intoxication or "ecstasy" of a certain character may lead to an uncomfortable lucidity that challenges established habits of thought and perception. To suddenly come to realizations about mistaken beliefs, especially fundamental ones about the self, could certainly be construed as "humiliating sobriety"; in this connection, see the "ego death" experience of Francine at the end of *Se está hacienda tarde (final en laguna)*, as considered in Chapter One.

the powerful addictive effects of cocaine, heroin, or "narcotic" forms of culture that put us to sleep by paralyzing the faculty of decision.[15]

Herlinghaus's project of revealing sober cultural representations of narco-violence is well worthwhile, and he succeeds in identifying, grounding theoretically, and outlining a major tendency in narco-narratives. However, following this dialectic to its sober side and remaining there, we risk being blind-sided by the return swing, when sobriety becomes newly complicit with intoxication. I argue that intoxication must not be figured as a state exclusive to the global North, even if it is clear that consumption of illicit drugs in the North is indeed complementary to "sobering" violence in places like Mexico. Intoxication and sobriety both fall under the rubric of the *pharmakon*, to the extent to which the dialectical movement between them is built into the poles of the term's semantic field.[16] Paying attention to the dialectical deployment of *pharmakon* as "poison" and as "cure" within a psychotropic economy can provide us with much insight into the psychological and even biological structures that undergird both drug consumption and interdiction, as well as properly economic structures, licit and illicit, developing a vision of psychotropy as a driving force integral to, and inseparable from, human culture.[17] And if, as Benjamin held, profane illumination in its highest form is provoked not by drugs but by art, we would be well-advised to look at the way cultural production in the *narco* era may function as a psychotropic cure for *narcossistic* culture.

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[15] See Ronell's discussion of Heidegger on *Dasein* and addiction (*Crack Wars* 33-46).

[16] The "ambivalent, indeterminate space of the *pharmakon*" that Derrida identifies in his exploration of writing as *pharmakon* (*Dissemination* 115) allows, within concrete historical moments, a dialectical movement between the semantic poles of poison and cure.

[17] This approach could be understood to take one step further Oswaldo Zavala's demand that narco-trafficking and related criminal activities be seen as *internal* to the Mexican state and society ("Imagining" 342).

But before moving on to take a look at this the role of *narcossism* in culture, it is appropriate to address an important contribution to Benjaminian cultural theory that shares enough points of contact with the present study to call for a somewhat detailed treatment here. This is Susan Buck-Morss's approach, as laid out in her essay, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." There is no more compelling reader of Benjamin than Buck-Morss, and her framing of his treatment of experience in terms of aesthetics and anaesthetics is challenging and inspiring for anyone who would approach culture through psychotropy. Taking as her point of departure the closing section of Benjamin's essay—with its intriguing and somewhat cryptic affirmations about "the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of art"—Buck-Morss begins with a survey of the strange history of "aesthetics" in the West, which travelled far from its etymological roots in sensing and feeling the world to eventually describe the relationship with the world as experienced by a new subjectivity that conceived itself as the product of autogenesis, giving a "narcissistic illusion of total control" to "modern man" as an "asensual, anaesthetic protuberance" (8). This subjective construct would become the essential basis for a system of psychological defense that the modern self would be compelled to deploy against the shocks of modern life (here, she follows Benjamin from his classic essay on Baudelaire),[18] and this defense joins with chemical inputs and the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture to create an *anaesthetic* system that numbs and distracts individuals and societies to such an extent that they are capable of witnessing their own destruction as an aesthetic spectacle.

[18] Benjamin's theorization of experience under industrial capitalism will be discussed in greater depth in the section of this Introduction entitled "Into the Unconscious and Back: Anti-habitual Intoxication."

In some ways, Buck-Morss here gives a detailed and systematic account of the ideological and phenomenological structures that form the basis of what Ronell, with her preference for suggestive, Nietzschean aphorism, has called "narcossism," a concept I develop further below. After all, the end result of the Western mutation of aesthetics is "the narcissism that we have developed as adults, that functions as an anaesthetizing tactic against the shock of modern experience," which in turn makes our societies vulnerable to fascistic tendencies (41). But there are several important distinctions between Buck-Morss's approach and that of this investigation. Already in the divergent semantic fields of "psychotropic" and "(an)aesthetic," one may perceive the general contours of the differences. Buck-Morss clearly outlines the semantic genealogy of aesthetics and its development into anaesthetics as having to do with the sensorium of the human body, with feeling, and conversely with a habituation that leads to the loss of feeling, of bodily consciousness. She proposes a "synaesthetic system" that comprises a decentered subject as well as the objects of its senses, locating its center "not in the brain, but on the body's surface" (13). A psychotropic approach to culture also deprivileges the modern self and includes the body and biology, but, faithful to its prefix, it also prominently includes aspects of experience that are bodily only in the sense that all experience has biological correlates. It is concerned with the psychotropic properties of discourse itself, as experienced as divorced from the sensorium of the body. The psychotropic clashes played out in this realm, of compulsive thoughts and stories versus destabilizing ones, place at stake the discursive boundaries of subjectivity, without ever coming all the way back home to the body. And the valorization of the social implications of experiences described by the psychotropic approach may run counter to the overall direction of Buck-Morss's analysis. For example, an instance of defamiliarizing intoxication that shakes up destructive patterns of self may have a transcendental, out-of-body

character, whereas the aforementioned destructive patterns could be supported by psychotropic habits based on or including sensations and awareness of bodily pleasure.

Perhaps the most essential difference, however, is that Buck-Morss focuses on anaesthetics as the numbing or distracting of the self, such that it is made passive even in the face of existential danger (18). It is my belief—though to do this connection full justice further study would be required—that the modality of intoxication Buck-Morss describes is in consonance with the self-obliteration of opiate use, in which we see the development of a radical indifference toward both the self and the Other.[19] I believe that narcossism is a distinct offshoot from the Western, anaesthetic self, in which the self, though perhaps numbed to the outside world, is reified from within, using psychotropy to build up a strong and dominant (albeit always inflated and brittle) sense of self that will indeed preserve and promote itself against the claims of the Other at all costs. Far from passively contemplating his own destruction, the narcossist participates in the destruction of the Other while looking elsewhere. Despite these differences, given the affinity between Buck-Morss's formulations and my own, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics" will form an important point of reference both in the theorization of psychotropy to be laid out in the next section and periodically throughout this study.

Narcossism and Global Capitalist Culture

"Narcossism" is a word Avital Ronell coined to suggest that

[19] See the discussion of William S. Burroughs's use of opiates in Chapter One.

> narcissism has been recircuited through a relation to drugs…; that our relation to ourselves has now been structured, mediated, that is, by some form of addiction and urge. Which is to say, that to get off any drug, or anything which has been invested as an ideal object — something that you want to incorporate as part of you — precipitates a major narcissistic crisis. Basically I wanted to suggest that we need to study the way the self is pumped up or depleted by a chemical prosthesis. (Laurence)[20]

This study seeks to elaborate a specific form of narcossism related to using various means of psychotropy to "pump up the self" in a move that, while not without historical antecedents—see the above discussion of Buck-Morss—is intimately linked to the psychosocial dynamics of consumer capitalism.

To start at the beginning, while healthy or primary narcissism, along Freudian lines of thought, refers to the emergence of a sense of self-love as part of the normal development of the human psyche, narcissism can attain pathological dimensions when an exaggerated self-regard develops to compensate for unstable self-esteem. According to the American Psychological Association's latest *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*), in narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) the patient "Has a sense of entitlement (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations)." The individual "[l]acks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others" and "[i]s interpersonally exploitative (i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends)." In addition, there is a tendency for a pathologically "grandiose

[20] This text is from an interview in which she gives the fullest known definition. She introduces the term in *Crack Wars*: after enumerating a number of important writers who used drugs, she asks, "do these not point to the existence of a *toxic drive*? The need to ensure a temporality of addiction? The history of our culture as a problem in *narcossism*" (23).

sense of self-importance," and a preoccupation with "fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love."

Interestingly enough, NPD and a number of other personality disorders were at one time slated for deletion from the *DSM* for the fifth edition, apparently to eliminate overlapping diagnoses (Miller et al. 640). One might be excused for wondering, if only half-seriously, whether the proposed changes were influenced by a sense that narcissistic attitudes and behavior are not necessarily in conflict with societal values. In a 2013 article for Bloomberg Business in response to studies and news articles revealing a prevalence of narcissistic attitudes in business schools, Jeffrey Pfeffer asks, "Does it Matter if B-Schools Produce Narcissists?" His conclusion, "Maybe business schools are doing just what they should: selecting precisely the people who have the greatest chance of being individually successful and putting them in environments that reward self-promotion and competitive success." Indeed, there is mounting evidence that narcissism is very much compatible with financial success (Board and Fritzon, Babiak et al., Boddy, O'Reilly et al.).

Of course, narcissism does not necessarily imply narcossism, nor are all of these narcissistic CEO's and business school students raging coke-heads. In fact, one of *DSM-5*'s requirements for a clinical diagnosis of NPD is that "Narcissistic personality disorder must also be distinguished from symptoms that may develop in association with persistent substance use." But narcissistic tendencies are indeed closely associated with cocaine and similar drugs (Nuckols, Standish). In fact, high measures of narcissism on personality tests have been identified as a risk factor of cocaine addiction (Yates). McCown and Carlson point out that the reasons for the relationship between cocaine abuse and narcissism "are not fully understood" (330), and while I do not presume to definitively supply that understanding, it may be fruitful to

speculate on this connection while placing it within a larger framework that considers a broader set of values associated with an increasingly pervasive global economic culture.

That the aspiration for financial success is empirically linked with narcissism has also been noted by Tim Kasser and colleagues, in an ambitious study that examines the adverse psychological effects of what they call American Consumer Capitalism (ACC) (14).[21] Drawing on a broad range of research of diverse psychological orientations and dealing with questions relating to values and well-being, the authors conclude that ACC promotes a distinct system of values that crowds out another, incompatible set of values. Values associated with ACC promote characteristics such as self-interest, competition and consumption, and are considered to diminish the opposing tendencies of compassion toward both immediate community and far-away others, autonomy, and self-worth (6-8). In fact, the broader set of values the researchers identify with ACC are associated with extrinsic goals, "those focused on external rewards and other people's praise, and include strivings for financial success, as well as for image and status" (7). In an ideological system in which self-worth is tied to financial success and in an economic system marked by "booms" and "busts" where only a relative few reach high levels of success, people may develop "a particular form of self-esteem that researchers have called "fragile" or "contingent" (13). (*DSM-5* notes of people who suffer from NPD that "Their self-esteem is almost invariably very fragile. They may be preoccupied with how well they are doing and how favorably they are regarded by others.") This dynamic affects the poor very acutely, but no one is

[21] While Kasser et al. are careful to delimit their definition of consumer capitalist culture to that practiced in the United States, it seems reasonable to expect some of its patterns to replicate themselves with the increasing reach and dominance of global capitalism.

immune, since the premium placed on competition promotes a painful awareness that there is always someone wealthier, more popular and more successful.[22]

This is one reason that a drug like cocaine, while it may jive with tendencies toward self-interest and consumption that characterize ACC, must also be understood as the preferred mode of self-medication for precisely the subject of late capitalism who must cope with the psychological costs of this system as outlined by Kasser et al.[23] According to Spotts and Shontz's study of cocaine phenomenology, cocaine use in general "heightens the distinctiveness of the ego, making the user feel more aggressive, optimistic, and self-assured," while, heavy use "inflates his ego and produces exceptional feelings of exaltation and power" (138). Thus, when the individual living under ACC suffers a blow to his fragile self-esteem due to some inevitable setback in financial position or image, he may, as Ronell puts it, recur to chemical prosthesis to pump up the self.

Spotts and Shontz note that the data

> suggest that the persons most at risk for heavy, chronic cocaine use in the United States are not the weak, emotionally disturbed, or deprived, but are strong and resourceful persons who epitomize many of the modal values of our society. Persons most at risk are typically… strong, ambitious, intensely competitive persons who have difficulty with intimacy and whose lives are built upon opposition to dependencies of any kind…. They

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[22] See also the influential PBS documentary and book, *Affluenza*, a wide-ranging treatment of related themes that mentions Kasser's work, defining the titular term as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more" (2).

[23] Compare this kind of medical praxis with that described by Buck-Morss, in which narcotics and other psychotropic mechanisms were prescribed for ailments related to the shocks life in industrial society ("Aesthetics" 19).

> judge other people in terms of competence and self-sufficiency, and tend to be contemptuous of passive individuals or persons with strong affectional needs. They strive for perfection and are intolerant of weaknesses or frailties in themselves or others (144).

DSM-5's description of NPD parallels this portrayal: "When recognized, the needs, desires, or feelings of others are likely to be viewed disparagingly as signs of weakness or vulnerability." Continuing with Kasser and colleagues, like the typical heavy cocaine user and the narcissist, the consumer (the individual unit under ACC) may suffer a degradation of empathy for people in general (including, for example, the distant producers of the goods he consumes, including illegal drugs), and also a lack of intimacy in relationships with people he interacts with on a daily basis (9-12). These characteristics may be perceived by some as signs of personal autonomy, but in addition to obvious ethical problems, they are also associated with measurable decreases in psychological well-being (11). On some level, then, the subject feels the negative effects of his isolation, but this malaise can be mitigated by cocaine use, which functions to shore up the ego, allowing indifference to the Other and the illusion of total personal autonomy: in the words of one cocaine user, "You don't need anyone. It's just you and your best girlfriend, coke" (Spotts and Shontz 131).

The desire for autonomy is indeed identified by Spotts and Shontz as a dominant characteristic of heavy cocaine users and a reason for their use of the drug (139). Despite free-market rhetoric to the contrary, Kasser and colleagues demonstrate a number of important ways in which ACC can be seen to diminish personal autonomy through the overwhelming top-down power of the corporate entities that hold power in this system (14-8). The ultimate short-term antidote for a sense of a lack of autonomy and the periodic lows of an inflated but fragile, contingent self-esteem is, again, cocaine, a drug that lends the ego a sense of limitless power and

possibility: the user "experiences pleasurable ego expansion, increased feelings of dominance and control over self and environment"—a sense of being "complete unto himself" (Spotts and Shontz 131).

The values of ACC constitute a hegemonic ideology that allows the system to perpetuate itself through individuals' internalization and participation in competition, consumption, the pursuit of self-interest, and so on. At the same time, as we have seen, these values create a number of pressures (related to material success, possession of prestigious consumer goods, image) that constitute stressors that in turn compel consumers to find ways to relieve this stress. Conveniently, a number of such methods are built into the consumerist system itself. As Kasser et al. observe,

> individuals who internalize the ideology of ACC are likely to have frequent ups and downs in their self-assessments (Kernis, 2003), and may sometimes attempt to distract themselves or compensate for negative feelings by pursuing culturally sanctioned means of attaining success such as workaholism and retail therapy...As such, they participate more in the ideologies and institutions of ACC, and thus help maintain the system. (13-14)

This dynamic of narcossism in the absence of chemical inputs, in which the individual mediates his or her relationship to the self by forming addictive relationships with practices that amount to cultural technologies of self-medication in response to externally imposed psychic stressors, closely mirrors Daniel Smail's description of social control through psychotropy. Tipping his hat to Aldous Huxley, whose *Brave New World* constitutes an extreme formulation of this kind of power regime, he suggests the existence of "an order of power that operates not through

command-and-control, still less through surveillance, and instead directly through the nervous system" ("Neurohistory in Action" 120).[24] Smail notes that "the critical history of capitalism,"— as put forth by thinkers like those of Frankfurt School, Baudrillard and Žižek, for whom "the emergence of habits of consumption is nothing less than a trap or an addiction," is "compatible with studies in neuroeconomics suggesting that some shoppers experience a dopamine high at the thought of acquiring new things and can even form addictions to shopping" (120).[25] Indeed, "capitalism can be seen as an enormous system for stimulating the reward centers of the human brain" (121). Buck-Morss comments on the nineteenth century development of an ideology through which "[u]rban-industrial populations began to be perceived as … a 'mass'— undifferentiated, potentially dangerous, a collective body that needed to be controlled and shaped into a meaningful form" ("Aesthetics" 28). Teletropy would be the instrument of this shaping: the above dynamic of a managed narcossism driven by cycles of lack and consumption gives us a closer view of how consumer capitalism's phantasmagoric succession of new products and images make a narcotic "out of reality itself" (Buck-Morss "Aesthetics" 22).[26]

Such a regime, of course, depends on its diffuse controlling agency remaining invisible to those under its sway (all of us?), but also on the invisibility of a third term: the producers of the consumer goods, sequestered in sweatshops and *maquiladoras* in the low-wage, low-regulation capitals of the world so as to keep the consumer's intoxicants within an approachable price-point

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[24] Smail suggestively calls *Brave New World*'s regime of total and ostensibly voluntary subjugation "the end of history," implicitly linking it implicitly to Francis Fukuyama's famous declaration that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War heralded, with the triumph of Western liberal democracy (i.e. capitalism), the end of history ("An essay…" section 1).

[25] For a review of recent findings in neuroeconomics, see Zald et al. Also see articles by Hartson and Black on compulsive shopping.

[26] I would argue, however, that the pattern of consumerist narcossism I describe serves less to anaesthetize a passive self, as in Buck-Morss's formulation, than to maintain and reify an aggressive one.

and ensure profitability. Kasser's research suggests that the lack of empathy promoted by ACC creates psychic stress, but this is a necessary price of safeguarding psychotropic and economic systems that could be endangered if consumers begin to second-guess their ethical positions. The exploitation of these workers must remain distant enough to be ignored or disavowed, and there are, in fact, psychotropic solutions at hand, both built into the system and marginal to it. Buck-Morss points to the phenomenological transformation of surgery that followed the development of anesthetics in the nineteenth century: these medical advances anaesthetized not only the patient but also the surgeon, since "[a] deliberate effort to desensitize oneself to the pain of another was no longer necessary" ("Aesthetics" 27). But we can take this even further, following the cocaine findings of Spotts and Shontz cited above, which suggest that *self-administering* the anesthetic may be far more efficient for protecting the self from the emotional or ethical claims of the Other. And cocaine is not always necessary: by consuming products that the culture industry has invested with social capital, the consumer gets a rush that inflates the self, pushing it a bit higher on the social ladder, such that the subject may revel in the glossy image of the product—in which no trace of the process of its production remains—and experience this incorporation as an exercise of its own autonomy.[27]

Now, if cocaine works just as well or better than "culturally sanctioned" practices like shopping to satisfy desire and ward off capitalist malaise, why hasn't it simply been subsumed under the umbrella of the (aboveboard) market as one more highly desired consumer product to fuel the economy? David Lenson's observations are illuminating in this regard. For Lenson, the

[27] On this last point, see Sarlo, who notes that the idea that "esa reproducción pautada [de deseos] es un ejercicio de la autonomía de los sujetos" is a distinct feature of the ideology of postmodern capitalism (10). On the neurochemistry of status and consumption, Erk et al. have shown that the brain's reward centers can be activated by the mere sight of symbols of wealth and dominance (in the case of their study, sports cars).

trouble with cocaine is that it mimics the logic of consumerism all too well, entering into a relationship with money that mirrors "the way a cancer cell mimics a normal or ordinary one" (174). He continues:

> The important analogy between cocaine and cash is that both derive their value from a relationship to desire. Conventional money is a reservoir of general desire that permits the implementation of specific ones. It also spawns a reflexive metadesire: the desire for money itself…. Cocaine is also about reflexive metadesire, but it is about the eclipsing of all other desires rather than their potentiation…. Cocaine as money thus removes the consumer from the macrocosm of consumption into a one-expenditure microcosm whose laws are nonetheless the same, and whose resemblance to the larger markets make it a dangerous simulacrum. (174-76)

In this sense, the drug that would otherwise be the perfect ameliorant for the symptoms of corporate capitalist malaise has an undesirable side effect that renders it unacceptable. In Ronell's words, "Like any good parasite, drugs travel both inside and outside the boundaries of narcissistically defended politics. They double for the values with which they are at odds, thus haunting and reproducing the capital market…" (51).[28] In the psychotropic economy, cocaine enters into competition with ordinary consumerism and in this way becomes the enemy of capitalism in one of its postmodern, unending wars.[29] The desire for it continues unabated in the

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[28] One of the things I wish to show in this dissertation is that the socio-political tendencies of distinct drugs are so diverse as to make it almost impossible to theorize about them as a whole. What Ronell here affirms for drugs, I would argue to refer largely to cocaine and perhaps other stimulants.

[29] This is not to argue that there are not additional reasons for cocaine's illegal status. Cocaine abuse does considerable social damage, and this is seen to justify its prohibition, although the explanatory power of this argument is weakened upon comparing cocaine's social cost with that of alcohol, which generally remains legal. Related to this consideration is the degree of cultural integration of different drugs: alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and sugar had long become central to Western economies and psyches whereas opium, cannabis and coca, on the other hand, were relative newcomers that were not as insulated from the prohibitionist spirit of the early twentieth century

face of official prohibition, sending a deeply contradictory message southward and creating the conditions for one of the most violent and lucrative industries in world history.

From this perspective, it becomes clear that, far from being an external threat to an erstwhile pure social body, problems related to drugs like cocaine are merely symptoms of a malaise that is rooted in modernity and flowering in postmodernity. It is the disease of an overly rigid subjectivity that compulsively aggrandizes and reifies itself through psychotropic mechanisms that reinforce an exaggerated sense of autonomy and independence, holding the Other at arm's length. Part of this system consists of addictions of thought and emotion that form discourses about one's place in the world, and it is at this point that the products of culture may intervene constructively (or destructively), by leveraging another type of psychotropy to destabilize rigid and damaging discourses. The current investigation seeks to examine how such battles are played out within culture, especially in cases where strategies of defamiliarizing intoxication turn on the varied constellations psychotropy itself. The following section theorizes this latter kind of intoxication.

Into the Unconscious and Back: Anti-habitual Psychotropy

To conceptualize the antithesis of narcossist patterns of psychotropy, we have to develop a bit further an aspect of the systems of habit and self that it destabilizes. For Judith Butler, not only gender and sex but identity in general is performative in nature, and its performativity

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(Herlinghauas 9). On another note, war may be lucrative enough for some sectors that it justifies prohibition rather than the other way around (see Paley).

> cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (95)

Butler's vision of enforced performativity might be placed in productive dialog with the teletropy of fear, as outlined by Daniel Smail and adapted in Chapter Two of this study to address the climate of fear in Mexico. But there are other psychotropic patterns—whether we consider them autotropy or a teletropy based on the carrot rather than the stick—that do not rely on an external threat, and yet intervene in the performance of self. This study, while it will not address the fraught question of whether there is a performer under the performance (does it matter?), may thus have to wade tentatively into the equally fraught question of free will, given the centrality here of addiction.[30]

Despite Butler's clarification at the end of the quote above, her emphasis on "constraint" through "prohibition," "taboo," "ostracism," and "death" has understandably created some concern about the deterministic tone of her formulations. In a piece on *habitus* and technologies of the self, Ian Burkitt takes issue with Butler's insistence on the primacy of linguistic signs in

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[30] For the purposes of this study, I use straightforward definitions of habit—behaviors that may be repeated independently of conscious control—and addiction—such behaviors, especially those with demonstrable psychotropic effects, established with such rigor that the individual experiences a limited sense of control or ability to change them.

producing subjectivities, always in the service of domination (233), and in doing so moves the theory of a performativity toward ground that may be more fertile for this study's development of a psychotropic construction of self. Burkitt draws on the later Foucault, who left suggestive, unfinished work on "technologies of the self" that seem to be a potential countervailing force against subjectification for domination. For Burkitt, though, even the "training" that forms the *habitus* of human beings is not necessarily linked to domination (226). *Habitus*—for which Burkitt relies on Dewey more than Bourdieu precisely because he finds the latter's conception to be lacking ethical flexibility—simply forms the premises of our actions, which are always choices, and in healthy social circumstances different aspects of *habitus* come into conflict, causing them to become conscious and thereby the object of self-reflection and rational thought that may lead to an update in patterns of thought or behavior. However, this process may be short-circuited, and it is "where habitus and reflexive thought are separated that we find the habitual reproduction of the social system that supports current power relations" (232).

Burkitt notes that even under normal circumstances, the basic *habitus* is too deeply ingrained in individuals to be changed by rational thought; actions and thoughts closer to the "surface" may be rearranged, but the prevalent *habitus* must be altered in the long term through social change. While deep interventions in the social sphere are without a doubt called for to foster the widespread development of more desirable *habitus*, there is a certain ambiguity in Burkitt's piece that suggests a possible opening for profound individual transformations that do not rely solely on reasoned reflection. Burkitt cites an example from Dewey to support the limitations of rational reflection in dealing with *habitus*: it is "the case of an alcoholic attempting to cure their addiction through rational thinking alone, by telling themselves it is irrational to crave another drink. This, of course, is impossible, because the habitual desires soon take hold

again" (229). This example is notable from the perspective of this investigation because treatment of alcoholism was precisely one of the first and most promising clinical uses of LSD.[31] And Burkitt closes by noting that ancient spiritual practices are full of techniques (non-rational technologies of the self) for transcending normal consciousness, concluding that "humans need new techniques of the body and self in order to break the old ossified habits of action, thought, and emotional dispositions that are hindering our development or our relations with others" (236). His description of these habits is close to narcossism, where a brittle and inflated self is propped up through patterns of psychotropy like stimulant use, consumerist behavior, and discourses of purity and superiority that radically exclude the Other, and the connection to LSD and practices like meditation suggest that perhaps reason alone is not enough to break up such systems.

The English word *intoxication*, then, at first glance seems inadequate for what I would like to postulate as the antithesis of narcossist patterns of psychotropy. After all, it opposes a regime of psychotropic practices oriented toward the reification of the self through habit and addiction, constituting the subject as the compulsive and unreflexive performance of behavior, thought and emotion. Psychotropic stimuli implicated in these patterns, such as cocaine and money, engage the consumer in a cycle of desire from which escape is very difficult, if in fact it is seen as desirable. To the extent that such a situation is considered unhealthy, the word "intoxication" seems justified, in the sense of a toxic interaction of practices, substances, attitudes and behaviors leading to deleterious effects on individuals (not to speak of communities).

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[31] See Dyck for an overview of this development from a social history perspective.

It would, then, seem strange to also call the antithesis of this state of affairs "intoxication," since what we are looking for is the other face of that figure that encompasses the entire dialectic, the *pharmakon*. The task here is to identify the *pharmakon* in its role as remedy, as medicine, going beyond the modern pharmacy to seek the cure for narcossism.[32] When considering drugs, whether in conjunction with culture or in any other context, the tendency is to use the framework of addiction. Sometimes words like *drugs*, *narcotics*, and *addiction* seem to become nearly synonymous. But the associations these terms are saddled with sit ill at ease with the idea of a psychotropic agency, associated with certain drugs but also with artistic and even religious practices, that serves to rupture habit and cast addictive behavior in a harsh, defamiliarized light that allows the subject to see the frayed boundaries of a closed, rigidly scripted selfhood. If this is not intoxication, what is it? In fact, to the extent that such an experience can be understood to include an increase in reflexive awareness and autonomy, it could be associated with freedom, sobriety and health. But if the addictive structures of a rigid and homogenous self-performance are everywhere the rule, a departure from this could also resemble insanity, a departure from societal norms of seeing: is it not the madman who sees what no one else sees? As we have already considered with regard to sobriety and intoxication, madness and sanity chase each other around in circles as we shift our own perspective on them, their movement playing out historically along dialectical contours.

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[32] Clearly there is a danger here of creating an overly Manichean dichotomy between stimulants and psychedelics, vilifying one and tying it concretely to specific social psychological and economic patterns and exalting the liberating essence of the other. My intention is to suggest tendencies and dominant patterns of how drugs interact with individuals, while recognizing that precisely this variable of distinct individuals, along with differing historical and social conditions, will create many variations in which stimulants, for instance, may serve in some instance to open the self to the Other, or in which conversely psychedelics may serve an addictive self-aggrandizement at the expense of the Other. This variation is in fact built in to the dialectical nature of the relationship between these types of intoxication. See also note 4, as well as the discussion of Robin Carhart-Harris's theory of entropy below.

Let us return to the question of terminology after theorizing such "madness" in its illuminating modality by placing a number of concepts and phenomena in dialogue in order to sketch the contours of what might be provisionally called *visionary* psychotropic experiences. In collating approaches that at first glance seem to be unrelated or even opposed to each other, the aim is not to elaborate a totalizing concept that conflates these disparate notions and experiences, but rather to contribute to a process by which we may elaborate a fuller understanding of psychotropy by exploring the relationships between its different aspects, as seen from diverse theoretical and disciplinary perspectives.[33] My appropriation of Benjamin's concept of profane illumination, for instance, should not be seen as a cut-and-paste job (or even a Burroughsian cut-up), but rather as an inquiry into what value for the present may be salvaged from this historically situated abstraction. Such a rescue operation is justified because Benjamin's unfinished, persistently suggestive work involved rooting around in those twilit zones where "ordinary" thought fears to tread, where the unconscious holds sway: territory such as dreams, intoxication (or *Rausch*, to be precise), and aesthetic experiences that jolted one out of the comfortable mental ruts of bourgeois rationality. His preoccupations, in the context of a stage of industrial capitalism that may seem quaint to us now (which, he might point out, is all the more reason for us to pay attention to it), involved precisely *vision*, as suggested by the title of Susan Buck-Morss's magisterial study of Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, *The Dialectics of Seeing*. Benjamin was interested in the mechanisms that allowed one to *see through* the façade of perpetual novelty dreamed up by bourgeois culture to paper over the persistence of exploitative class relations.

[33] Just as linguistic translation can never yield an exact semantic or pragmatic correspondence to the original text, so approximations to the same subject from divergent disciplinary frameworks will never exactly line up but can—and must, if we are to reach a fuller understanding of complex problems like psychotropy—be placed in dialog.

Almost a century later, much has changed, although trends in income inequality beg the question of whether some of that apparent change might essentially be just the sort of phantasmagoria Benjamin analyzed as capitalism's dazzling and distracting window-dressing. The economic order was naturalized to ever deeper levels following the fall of global communism (and of course the "end of history"), the rhythmic oscillation of the markets taking on the soothing regularity of crashing waves. The aftermath of the 2008 recession, however, saw scandalous assertions that the calamity was caused by a particular and contingent economic system called neoliberal capitalism. Even more important for this investigation, this economic system has a lengthening shadow, an illicit capitalist economy with which it shares an ambiguous relationship. If, as Lenson maintains, cocaine addiction forms a "dangerous simulacrum" of consumerist behavior, the industry in illicit *pharmaka*, in turn, mirrors the aboveboard economy in equally disturbing ways. While official discourses from the global North paint the legal economy as white and the illegal as black, it is important to question this dichotomy, considering the ways in which the object that catches the light gives form to its shadow. In this sense, we find ourselves in territory that would not be totally unfamiliar to Benjamin, facing the projected image of a pure and healthy consumer society of constant motion and innovation, which obscures the persistent patterns of exploitation that underpin the licit economy and perpetuate the illicit one. This is one reason it makes sense to turn *Rausch* on itself, appealing to a (re)constructed Benjaminian lens to pierce through the dream of the drug warriors. While a wholesale dehistoricization of Benjamin is unthinkable, I will suggest that his methodology of seeing connects to dialectical patterns of addiction and improvisation, blindness and vision, self and Other, that play out globally today. The task of seeing clearly is made urgent by the violence that continues to rage in Mexico and elsewhere; indeed, if psychotropy is part of

our constitution as human beings, the Drug War is truly a war on people everywhere, and predictably the most vulnerable are the first casualties.

Let us start by returning to Benjamin's theorization of everyday experience in early twentieth century Europe. For him, the phantasmagoria of fleeting images and products of industrial capitalism was a dream-world of "limitless progress and continual change" projected by the bourgeoisie (Buck-Morss *Dialectics* 283). However, in general alignment with Freudian dream theory, Benjamin saw this dream-vision as a distorted form of the latent wish for "the eternalization of bourgeois class domination" (283). It had a narcotic effect on the masses through "sensory distraction," anaesthetizing by "flooding the senses" and thus keeping them atomized and politically passive (here we may recall Nietzsche's view of culture as narcotic) (Buck-Morss "Aesthetics" 22). The task of the cultural critic is to interpret this dream by rummaging like a ragpicker among its forgotten artifacts, "in order to follow out its ramifications and, finally, awaken from it" (Eiland and McLaughlin ix). This cultural scavenging was effectively a descent into a collective unconscious by which the connections between manifest and latent cultural material could be traced.

Benjamin considered it necessary to transcend the rationality of the atomized bourgeois individual in order to access the inner workings of the dream. Under industrial capitalism, humans undergo "a change in the structure of their experience" ("On Some Motifs" 314). They are alienated from their actions and their environment by factors like the massification of information (as the newspaper replaced the storyteller) and the mechanization of labor (as the factory replaced the workshop) (315-16, 327-29). Likewise, the psychic shocks of modern life are deflected by the protective action of a consciousness (here, too, Benjamin borrows from Freud) that is "trained" to deal with them as a worker is trained to perform his rote task on the

assembly line, such that everyday life becomes a composite of isolated experiences (*Erlebnis*) rather than experience "in the strict sense of the word" (*Erfahrung*) (316-18). The former is "the kind that manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses" (314), while the latter—and here Benjamin follows Bergson—"is indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life. It is the product less of facts firmly anchored in memory than of accumulated and frequently unconscious data that flow together in memory" (314). In this "true" experience, moreover, "certain contents of the individual past combine in the memory with material from the collective past" (316). On the contrary, isolated experience leads to isolated individuals and "mechanization" of behavior, as shock responses become habitual and automatic (327-29). What is more, under the influence of industrial modes of production, rationalized, technologically mediated subject-object relationships become the norm in all spheres, as capitalist seeks to dominate worker, man to dominate nature, adults to dominate children, and so on (Bolz and Reijen 57).

Benjamin was interested in "transcending the rational individual through a state of intoxication" (quoted in Bolz and Reijen 58). But it should be remembered that the alienated experience of the masses was also, "appealed to daily by the image-phantasmagoria of mass culture," whose narcotic effects are mentioned above (Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics" 41). In this sense, "one form of intoxication undoes another," in an act of "dialectical annihilation" touched with an Artaudian fury (Clej 84).[34] Benjamin conceived of intoxication (*Rausch*) as, in Bolz and

[34] Alina Clej quotes Benjamin to the effect that surrealist experience, his prototype for profane illumination, pulls apart the unitary, bourgeois psyche, separating it into a dialectical image reflecting political materialism and physical nature, "so that no limb remains unrent" (84). Clej ultimately rejects surrealist experience's political efficacy, finding it to reproduce bourgeois mystification, as well as patterns of consumption and addiction, being ultimately the passive stance of one transfixed by a hallucination (89-90). I argue that surrealist or psychedelic experiences are not necessarily addictive, and that the associated visions are just as likely to compel to action as to

Reijen's words, "an original phenomenon of experience. It is always radical and extreme: radical in its "radicalization" of the ego and its opening-up of experience to the masses, and extreme in its stretching of individual experience" (58). His work is largely an attempt "to break the fixations and the encrustations in which thinking and its object, subject and object, have been frozen under the pressure of industrial production," to bypass the mechanistic habits of the domesticated ego "to unlock a realm of experiences in which the Id still communicated mimetically and corporeally with things" (Tiedemann 269). Freed from the yolk of stereotyped patterns of action and perception, one became able to witness the "world of secret affinities [that] opens up within" a space like the Parisian Arcades (R2,3).

Benjamin considered the potential usefulness of several modalities of *Rausch* for this kind of operation. While fascinated by the possibilities of religion and drugs, he came to place most stock in approaches to the unconscious through a lived art, the experiential anti-aesthetics of the surrealists coming closest to his ideal. In the essay on surrealism—and here we are back to a passage discussed in reference to Herlinghaus's aesthetics of sobriety—he writes,

> In the world's structure, dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the charmed space of intoxication. This is not the place to give an exact definition of Surrealist experience. But anyone who has perceived that the writings of this circle are not literature but something else—demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature—will also know, for the same reason, that the writings are concerned literally with experiences,

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induce passivity, though in the case of the surrealists, Benjamin himself criticizes them in similar terms to Clej, as discussed below.

> not with theories and still less with phantasms. And these experiences are by no means limited to dreams, hours of hashish eating, or opium smoking. It is a cardinal error to believe that, of "Surrealist experiences," we know only the religious ecstasies or the ecstasies of drugs. ... [T]he true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a *profane illumination*, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson. (But a dangerous one; and the religious lesson is stricter.) (208-09, emphasis original)

The intoxicated descent into the dream-world defies both rationality and the "bad tooth" of the bourgeois sense of self, "bursting the boundaries of his individuation. No 'individual' can pass through the needle's eye of dialectical materialism" (Bolz and Reijen 56). Instead, as Benjamin's dental metaphor suggests, an ossified self is violently split into a dialectical image of a body that is at once biological and political: "a natural creature" on one hand and "a class subject" on the other (Bolz and Reijen 56).

However, Benjamin immediately qualifies his praise of the surrealists: though they were *allowed* to "step out of this charmed space of intoxication…, profane illumination did not always find the Surrealists equal to it, or to themselves" (208, 209). The problem was that the surrealists were perfectly content to revel in an experience in which the distinction between dream and reality had collapsed, while Benjamin was interested in *awakening*. According to Rolf Tiedemann, "Benjamin knew that this motif of awakening separated him from the surrealists. They had tried to abolish the line of demarcation between life and art, to shut off poetry in order to live writing or write life. For the early surrealists both dream and reality would unravel to a dreamed, unreal reality, from which no way led back to contemporary praxis and its demands"

(270). Benjamin, on the contrary, sought to “attain a synthesis of frenzy [*Rausch*] and construction. For secular enlightenment [profane illumination] is meant to provide the experience of frenzy with an intelligible structure” (Bolz and Reijen 58, bracketed terms added). Benjamin did not view surrealist practices as desirable ends in themselves. Rather, they were a “methodological arrangement, a kind of experimental set-up” for a more analytical project with pragmatic applications (Tiedemann 270). The irrational contents of the collective and individual unconscious were to be explored through *Rausch*, only to then be brought back under the light of reason for interpretation, allowing for a “unity of intoxication and discipline” that would inform collective political action (58).

It should not be surprising, then, that Benjamin took an interest in Carl Jung’s work on the collective unconscious, despite his eventual rejection of the latter due to how readily some of Jung’s ideas could be adapted for Nazi ideology.[35] Central to Jung’s thought was the figure of the “night sea journey,” a recurring mythical motif that stood in for a pattern of psychic development in which the individual (hero) must move in a regressive direction (through the night sea or a subterranean setting) to engage unconscious material (a dragon or other monstrous being). But this regression

> is not necessarily a retrograde step in the sense of a backwards development or degeneration, but rather represents a necessary phase of development. The individual is, however, not consciously aware that he is developing; he feels himself to be in a compulsive situation that resembles an early infantile state or even an embryonic

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[35] See Wolin on Benjamin’s eventual rejection of Jung (70). But Charles argues that Benjamin was able to retool Jung’s ideas in order defuse their conservative tendencies and put them to productive use.

> condition within the womb. It is only if he remains stuck in this condition that we can speak of involution or degeneration. (*CW* 8:69)

In other words, the individual should not *remain* unaware that he (or she) is engaged in a process of psychological development. The initial part of this procedure is "a state of introversion in which the unconscious content is brooded over and digested…. But so long as consciousness has not completed the process of integration it is covered by the 'blackest dead sea,' darkened by unconsciousness…." Only with this work of integration is the unconscious content "sublimated, …recognized and made an object of conscious discrimination." (*CW* 14:262). As seen above, Benjamin, too, advocates a descent into the unconscious, in the form of the collective dream-world produced by bourgeois consciousness. He, too, stresses the importance of a second phase to this exploratory process, by which the insights gained there may be applied, not to the development of the "total personality," which was Jung's goal, but to collective revolutionary consciousness and struggle.

The recurrence of this motif of access to the defamiliarizing optic of the unconscious and the necessity of a submission of the rescued contents to the light of reason has repeatedly cropped up in psychological theory. During the 1950s, thinkers like Ernst Kris and Heinz Hartmann would develop concepts like "regression in the service of the ego" and "adaptive regression" (respectively) to describe practices that involved accessing material from pre-rational states that could then be constructively integrated into conscious cognition, in therapeutic and even artistic (Kris) contexts. Ego psychologist Erika Fromm later developed the idea in terms of an "ego receptivity" that manifests in certain "altered states of consciousness" in which unconscious and preconscious material is allowed to enter cognition to aid in the resolution of problems "when conscious logic has come to an impasse" (561-62). This includes a process of

"deautomatization," which "dissolves the assumption of unproblematic familiarity with one's environment. It dissolves the cognitive and reality structure ossified by habit and brings the individual into a fresh rapport with his 'biosphere'" (561), constituting a radical opening of experience away from a rigid self and toward the Other. More recently, Danielle Knafo has updated Kris's work by bringing it beyond the field of ego psychology and broadening its scope in order to relate it to the other side of the art experience, that is, regression in the viewer's aesthetic response. But it is recognized that content retrieved from forays into the unconscious should always be submitted to the "active use of such ego functions as reality testing, formulation, and communication" (Knafo 27). Indeed, Kris's original formulation of the creative process included an inspirational phase that included regressive states and also a phase of "elaboration," where the material from these states was subjected to "purposeful organization, and the intent to solve a problem" (59-63). The absence of the latter step would lead to a problem analogous to that of the surrealists, according to Benjamin's critique, a kind of wallowing in unconscious material, disengaged from social life.

In fact, it should be noted in passing that some critiques of 1960s counterculture run along similar lines, as many youthful rebels seemed increasingly to turn their attention inward at the expense of social and political engagement. Moreover, to the extent that some of these analogous processes of regression were "privatized" in some quarters, even if there was a rational effort to "improve" the self—removing repression of desires and so on—this only became training for a hedonistic individualism that would be the red meat of a reinvigorated consumerist economy. In short, it could be argued that the failure to collate the demands of the "inner self" with social realities (i.e. the demands of the Other) was what later enabled the consumerist cooptation of countercultural individualism as discussed in Chapter One, creating a

situation in which a dizzying diversification of product styles and options are marketed toward individuals as ways of expressing their very individuality,[36] a postmodern update of Benjamin's dreamworld of capitalist phantasmagoria.

In another suggestive parallel in the psychological literature, dreams themselves amount to a kind of productive "night sea journey" according to the "functional state-shift hypothesis," a neuropsychophysiological model of dreaming proposed by Martha Koukkou and Dietrich Lehmann. Their theory states that while a dreaming individual routinely accesses lower-level cognitive states and their associated memories, cognitive "state shifts" occur during dreaming that make "the material in the short-term store available for processing in a new, higher functional state, where it activates new associations, is treated with different more advanced cognitive strategies, and is then stored in the storage appropriate to the higher state" (227). Because of such cognitive reconfigurations "the individual during sleep has a wider spectrum of 'solutions' available for tentative application to new problem material" (228). The biological function of REM sleep is proposed to be "optimizing the use and linking together of old and recent experience" (228). But, of course, this work is not immediately transparent to the dreamer. When the retrieval of potent unconscious material signals "a shift to a higher functional state tapping higher storage spaces, further processing of the signal stimulus by drawing on its entire original association material in the lower storage spaces becomes impossible…. This sequence of processes might correspond to the phenomenon of dream censorship and repression" (227). Despite the difficulties presented by such censorship, the reprocessing of past experiences

[36] See Frank on the cooptation of countercultural energies and ideology by business culture. Also see the documentary series, *The Century of the Self*, for an engaging history of the political and economic uses of the psychology of self.

through higher-level cognition during dreaming, combined with further, conscious analysis, lends dreaming the character of a "functional regression" (228).

More recently, the loosening of legal restrictions on research involving psychedelic drugs has allowed the development of a neurobiological picture of their action on the brain. Robin Carhart-Harris, noting psilocybin's inhibitive action on the default mode network, a region of the brain he associates with "ego-integrity," proposes that "psychedelics induce a primitive state of consciousness, i.e., 'primary consciousness' by relinquishing the ego's usual hold on reality" (9).[37] He proposes a spectrum of cognitive states between poles of high entropy, or "high flexibility but high disorder," and low entropy or "ordered but inflexible cognition" (13). According to Carhart-Harris, normal waking consciousness in contemporary humans tends toward low entropy, while the "primary states" evoked by psychedelics move the brain toward higher entropy, as "brain activity becomes more random and cognition becomes more flexible" (13). This brings mental activity closer to neural criticality, a desired state of equilibrium between order and chaos that affords the brain a maximum of healthy cognitive possibilities. In other words, "a broader repertoire of transient states may be visited in primary consciousness" and this lends psychedelic drugs their tendency to "disrupt stereotyped patterns of thought and behavior by disintegrating the patterns of activity upon which they rest" (12). Concretely, "Psychedelics may be therapeutic because they work to normalize pathologically sub-critical styles of thought (such as is seen in depression, OCD or addiction/craving for example) thereby returning the brain to a more critical mode of operating" (12). Carhart-Harris has begun the work of unearthing the neurochemical correlates of the phenomenology of the psychedelic experience,

[37] Subsequent research by Carhart-Harris and colleagues confirms that LSD function in a very similar way in terms of DMN destabilization and increased novelty in neural connectivity ("Neural correlates").

and his theoretical framework provides a neurological underpinning to the dialectics of intoxication as presented here.

What we seem to be seeing, from a number of different angles, are intimations of the constructive potential of putting rationality on hold temporarily in order to enlist unconscious material capable of denaturalizing an apparently reasonable and orderly conscious reality that may in fact conceal pathologically rigid patterns of thought and behavior, from automatized reactions to the shocks of industrial society to the addictions of modern consumerism. Because of the primacy of the visual in dream cognition, psychedelic experience and Benjamin's dialectical image, we might do worse than to call this broad type of experience *visionary*. But *visionary intoxication*? We may be tempted to "detoxify" our terminology here, considering the association this phenomenon has with creativity and a certain lucidity that enables one to recognize destructive social or psychological patterns that have become invisible due to their familiarity. In some ways, the visionary experience is a three-way *aesthetic* relationship between the conscious mind, the unconscious and the object of perception, a reciprocal interaction involving both inspiration and interpretation. In this sense, art becomes its paradigm, not drugs. But there remains a sense in which the visionary experience reaches back to a toxic etymology to function as *toxikon*, a poisoned arrow that pierces the rigid shell of narcossism, penetrating the closed system of self and enervating it with the introduction of novel connections and perspectives that open the self to contamination by the Other.

We might also call it *visionary intoxication* if we want to distinguish it from other types of intoxication that are constitutive and reifying of self, but also compulsive, and that stultify vision through habituation. However, despite the prominence of the visual in many manifestations of this complex of experiences, to privilege one sense over the others in our

terminology invites unnecessary and vexing theoretical difficulties, not to mention the fact that the word "visionary" has unwanted connotations of a breathlessly positive value judgment, such that the more sober and unglamorous "defamiliarizing intoxication" will have to do for now. On the subject of value judgments, it is also worth stressing that it would be overly simplistic to declare one type of intoxication desirable and another undesirable. As in Carhart-Harris's spectrum of entropy, there are dangers on both extremes. Psychotropic technologies that lend us a stable sense of self may be fundamental to being human among humans, but when they lead to overly rigid patterns of cognition and action they drastically limit the ways in which one may interact with the world of objects and Others. This is the moment to apply *pharmakon* as cure, the defamiliarizing experience that reveals the chains of unreflective habit, whether self-imposed or conditioned from without. However, to live life in the realm of visionary experiences would likely lead to psychosis as the self loses its moorings (Artaud?), and in such a situation, the *pharmakon*-cure would be precisely psychotropic mechanisms that build the self through rewarding patterns of thought and behavior. This dialectic of intoxication wil inform the cultural analysis of the following three chapters.

Chapter Summaries and Conclusion

Long before the *narco* era, people looked to Latin America for psychoactive material; first for stimulants like tobacco, coffee, and sugar, and later for new ways to think and feel that could be accessed through substances like peyote and mushrooms but also through indigenous worldviews. However, countercultural travelers—from Antonin Artaud to the Beats to the hippies—often got high on *their own ideas* about these cultures or simply saw Latin American

countries as fertile ground from which to harvest new and exciting psychic nourishment. In this way these psychonauts carried out—with varying degrees of self-awareness—appropriations that were immaterial as well as botanical and fungal. The *Onda literaria* in Mexico was at once heir and critic to this countercultural genealogy, and works like José Agustín's *Se está haciendo tarde* and Parménides García Saldaña's *Pasto Verde* were able to dramatize the tension between psychotropic technologies that enabled an opening toward the Other and historico-economic forces that promoted the enshrinement of a sovereign Self. Through an analysis of these texts and their countercultural ancestors, Chapter One examines, on one hand, the extent to which this genealogy contained the seeds of its own collapse and the triumph of the sovereign Self with advent of the *narco* era and neoliberal capitalism; and, on the other, the extent to which it contained a (self)critical apparatus capable of making it a legitimate oppositional force against these developments.

Chapter Two brings us fully into the *narco* era, in which narcossist patterns of psychotropy have seemingly won the day. As increasing attention is focused on cultural products that engage the subject matter of traffic in illicit drugs and its interdiction, much attention has been focused on the elaboration of a "sober" perspective on violence and its representation, business and politics (Herlinghaus, *Narcoepics*). However, works like Élmer Mendoza's *Balas de plata*, *La prueba del ácido*, and *Nombre de perro* point out the psychotropic contours of a modern world in which illicit drugs are but one category among the psychotropic mechanisms that move individuals and societies. In these novels, Detective Edgar "el Zurdo" Mendieta's investigations unfold in the context of ubiquitous and multivalent intoxication, and this vision allows us to look beneath the surface appearance of the War on Drugs to contemplate its psychotropic motivations and effects.

While the characters' deployment of psychotropic technologies largely follows a logic of coping or survival, the influence of the global North is alluded to in the persons of *gringo* characters who figure strong narcossist tendencies, in which mind-altering substances and practices are integrated into the self in order to support an inflated ego at the expense of relationships with the Other, a pattern associated with cocaine abuse but also with the psychology of consumerism. Moving outward from the action of the novels, the Zurdo series is also seen to participate in a cultural economy of intoxication that implicates artistic production in a contested field of the ethics and politics of representing violence.

Chapter Three shows that a "sober" aesthetic presented through a hard-edged, realist lens is only one approach taken by writers who engage themes of narcotraffic, exploring the possibilities for defamiliarizing the discourses of the Drug War that open up with the narrative deployment of a child's perspective. The two novels considered, Juan Pablo Villalobos's *Fiesta en la madriguera* and Jennifer Clement's *Prayers for the Stolen*, leverage childlike consciousness to produce a kind of narrative intoxication that constitutes a novel aesthetic response to the violence of drug trafficking and interdiction. Drawing on neuropsychological research linking childhood consciousness, dream states, and hallucinatory experiences, it is argued that a textual *pharmakon* takes effect here, not in a slippery Derridean sense but rather in a way that approximates the experience of "profane illumination" that Benjamin associated with drugs and surrealism.

These aesthetic recreations of childhood consciousness turn violence, human and non-human bodies, and nature inside out, creating disorienting visions that have the reader second-guessing her own assumptions. Seemingly mundane phenomena like shopping come into uncomfortably close contact with the consumption of bodies, and the way humans interact with

technology and reproduce knowledge and perception across generations are shown to look very different from below. These novels, through the lens of the altered state that is childhood, evoke a reality at once material and hallucinatory, enabling a unique resignification of violence, power and powerlessness, and along the way providing a decentered view of what intoxication means and what it does.

Before closing, I would like to insert a note about my own positionality in relation to the issues addressed in this investigation. In order to mitigate the effects of certain addictions of academic writing from which I suffer and which tend to efface my own presence and perspective—rather seeming to posit a disembodied and all-knowing subjectivity gazing down from above—I would like to hereby situate my historical, social, and bodily existence and briefly address some of my motivations. I write from within multiple layers of privilege, as an ostensibly heterosexual cis white male U.S. academic. These layers of identity have influenced the directions my research has taken: as an Anglo-American scholar of Latin America, I have been concerned about the potential colonial character of my intellectual endeavor, and have hoped to resist the posture of an unanchored subjectivity, self-entitled to blithely roam the world extracting meaning and value from the products of "exotic" cultures. Following Donna Haraway, I decided that the study of intoxication and culture, as well as being a topic of great intrinsic interest to me, would be conducive to the creation of an "embodied knowledge" that recognized my position in relation to my objects of study. As a member of a national community that exercises protagonism both in the consumption of illicit drugs and in the export of drug policy, narco-violence is as much "my problem" as it is anyone's. Engaging the confluence of culture and intoxication in the *narco* era, I can hope to intervene productively in an area of urgent importance, and in which I am present as an implicated body that consumes or abstains from

consuming illicit drugs; that participates politically—or abstains from doing so—in a powerful nation-state that seeks to dictate global drug policy. This line of inquiry also allows me to explore a long-standing interest in questions relating to the nature of consciousness and experience, and especially how such a "nature" is constructed and managed by contemporary cultural, political, and economic forces.

It is my hope that this investigation will help to open the study of narcoculture to psychotropic perspectives. Long before Nietzsche's provocative denunciation of the narcotic character of Western culture, Étienne de La Boétie had tipped us off that even the tyrants of the ancient world had targeted their subjects' nervous systems: the masses are

> attracted into servitude by the slightest lure, as they say, that is passed before their mouths. And it is marvelous to see how quickly they yield, as long as they are gratified. The theaters, the games, the farces, the spectacles, the gladiators, the exotic animals, the medals, the pictures, and other such drugs [*drogueries*], were for the ancient peoples the lures of servitude, the price of their liberty, the tools of tyranny. The ancient tyrants used these means, these practices, these enticements to put their subjects to sleep under the yoke. Thus the stupefied peoples, enjoying these pastimes, amused by a vain pleasure that passed before their eyes, became accustomed to serve just as simplemindedly, but more harmfully, than little children learn to read by looking at the shiny pictures in illustrated books. … The tyrants made a gift of a bushel of wheat, half a quart of wine, and a sesterce. And then it was a pity to hear them shout, "Long live the king!" The fools did not realize that they were just recovering a part of what belonged to them, and that the tyrant could not have given them that very thing they were recovering if he had not previously taken it away from them. (Schaefer 210)

La Boétie is especially scornful of "the lower classes" (209), and we might update his prescient yet elitist vision by noting that in our time, people are thus distracted not only from their own servitude, but also from the plight of those whose invisible suffering makes possible the *drogueries* that they enjoy. What I am now calling narcossism clearly has deep roots, a genealogy of cultural psychotropy covering for exploitation, and from here it becomes important to ask if drugs like cocaine, far from being an external threat to culture, are a rather simultaneously a symptom of culture and a treatment for its maladies. If so, it behooves us to try to understand the webs of intoxication we navigate every day, but even more importantly, it should be recognized that counteracting the psychotropic manipulation built into our cultures will require interventions on the same playing field: that of cultural psychotropy. This is the ultimate impetus for the project undertaken in this study: to analyze cultural products from Latin America—from the *narco* era and from earlier periods—in order to elucidate the conflicting ways intoxication intervenes in social reality at the levels of the text, the individual, the community, the nation, and the world. It is my hope that such a focus can shed some new light on the nature of the "drug problem," which—if understood as a symptom of the Western inheritance of a fantasized radical autonomy, culminating in a culture of narcossism that radiates out globally from its epicenter in U.S. consumer capitalism—could finally convince Mexicans to pay for a border wall to keep out the simultaneous demand for drugs and for prohibition that also amounts to a demand for the blood of the Mexican poor.

Chapter One

The Rise and Fall of a Genealogy of Countercultural Intoxication in Latin America

> "¿Qué hay ahí detrás? ¿Un otro mundo que se pone de frente al sol? ¿Un alud de linderos que se repiten tras una piedra en el agua? …
> Mirar y mirar y mirar y no mirar: no hay forma, sólo un amasijo hastío de sí. Una mueca soberbia, un mundo zángano.
> … ¿Qué hay detrás de los muros de las cosas?
> Así así no hay nada.
> Dar la espalda a esa yerba satisfecha y elegir un espejo propio…."
>
> —Yuri Herrera, *Los trabajos del reino*

The history of psychotropy in Latin America, like the global history of psychotropy, stretches back to moments whose only texts are the coevolved biological systems of plants and animals.[38] Human beings in particular have evolved to exploit a number of plant substances, and these plants in turn specifically target human neurochemistry (Saah, Sullivan and Hagen). This evolutionary development led to a number of indigenous cultural practices involving psychoactive plants, some of which still persist today. With the arrival of Europeans, substances native to the Americas were extracted from their millenary contexts and placed within a commercial context and, conversely, psychoactives from other world regions were imported.

Columbus brought along a sugar cane plant on his first voyage to the Americas and it was soon found that this crop thrived in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The native tobacco plant was not long in catching the fancy of the Europeans, and by the nineteenth century coffee,

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[38] Daniel Smail has argued against the concept of prehistory on the basis that work in archaeology, evolutionary biology, and other fields now allows us a window on the past of humanity before the advent of writing, a moment that too often forms an arbitrary cut-off point that unnecessarily reifies a monumental "before and after" that obfuscates historical continuities (1-11).

transplanted from its native Africa, was also a major export for many newly independent Latin American countries. These extremely lucrative commodities were seen as perfectly legitimate and soon became essential to Western economies: according to David Courtwright, "Drug taxation was the fiscal cornerstone of the modern state, and the chief financial prop of European colonial empires" (5). They were also of central importance in another sense: without these substances, "contemporary lifestyles and cosmopolitan subject positions would be virtually unimaginable" (Herlinghaus 7). Caffeine and sugar to power through a productive day and alcohol to wind down in the evening seems to have been a winning combination during the development and consolidation of capitalist modes of production.

The Europeans, however, were not equally enamored of all of the substances used by indigenous groups. The psilocybin mushroom practices witnessed by early European settlers in Tenochtitlán were viewed as threatening, Satanic rituals and prohibited.[39] We may very tentatively look to this distinction when seeking precursors for the two types of intoxication described in the introduction: stimulants that lent themselves to pleasure and compulsive use, and to the production of wealth, were the substances most valued by the Europeans, while they rejected those that caused visions and experiences that were radically at odds with the evidence of "sober" experience, or that ultimately challenged accepted habits of perception and behavior. We may perceive echoes of this reaction in the stance of U.S. Cold War figures as countercultural tendencies began to coalesce. Marcus Boon notes that

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[39] Bernardino de Sahagún, with his laudable and characteristic anthropological curiosity, described these practices in some detail (see Sahagún, Furst 21, 27, 75, 83), but the hallucinogenic effects of psilocybin mushrooms, or *teonanácatl*, and other substances were ultimately deemed incompatible with Christian doctrine and suppressed as described by Ruíz de Alarcón (See Furst 21, 52, 63-64).

> In 1960, J. Edgar Hoover declared that, along with communists and eggheads, the Beats were one of the three most dangerous groups in the world. From the point of view of Cold War culture, this was probably true. The Beats were the first writers, aside from Antonin Artaud, who actually left the cities of the first world that they lived in to search for the experience of the primitive—and then brought this experience back home with them in one form or another. (259)

The pessimism and questioning of Western civilization that followed the carnage of the First World War, exemplified by books like Oswald Spengler's *Decline and Fall of the West* and Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, and later a similar reaction to World War II, spawned the tendency that Boon speaks of, where the Western traveler seeks out an experience that from the Western perspective is fundamentally Other. This chapter considers two of these "dangerous" figures that look to Latin America, its indigenous cultures and their psychotropic traditions to find alternatives to a Western culture they increasingly rejected. Antonin Artaud and William S. Burroughs constitute progenitors in a genealogy that will include the emergence of countercultural movements across the globe, including *la Onda* in Mexico, a manifestation comprised by writers like Parménides García Saldaña and José Agustín, who would be heirs to the tendency embodied by outsiders like Artaud and Burroughs, while also developing a critical, Latin American perspective on their forebears. Crucially, these critiques highlight the impossibility of stepping completely outside of one's culture: as we will see, efforts to open a Western self to a cultural Other were consistently accompanied by the shadows of colonialist entitlement and assertions of the superiority of the self. The figures considered here, in what must necessarily be but a rough sketch of a tendency that developed over the course of fifty years or more, have been selected for the way they illustrate the tensions between self and other,

between Latin Americans and outsiders from the global North, and between types of intoxication that intervene in these relationships in distinct ways. Tracing this development, we can gain insight into the origins of the global patterns of intoxication that undergird consumer capitalism and the cocaine industry.

Antonin Artaud: The Man Who Would Suicide Society

Antonin Artaud forms the starting point for this chapter because he was a pioneer or precursor of what could be considered countercultural travel,[40] because of his overwhelming imbrication with multiple varieties of intoxication, and because of the overlap between defamiliarizing intoxication—which moves one away from individual and social habits of thought and behavior—and many definitions of madness. For Artaud was, among many other things, widely considered to be mad. The norms of a given society and the individual's deviation therefrom is inevitably an important aspect of most conceptions of madness; indeed, the provocative formulations of thinkers like Thomas Szasz and Michael Walker claim that madness can be defined in no other way.

To the extent that this is true, madness also represents access to what is beyond the experience of the wider community. Foucault, discussing the grotesque images that emerge from "the madness of dreams," affirms that

> madness fascinates because it is knowledge. It is knowledge, first, because all these absurd figures are in reality elements of a difficult, hermetic, esoteric learning. These

[40] Jannarone associates Artaud's rejection of Western culture with Spengler, Freud and other thinkers (34-35).

> strange forms are situated, from the first, in the space of the Great Secret…. This knowledge, so inaccessible, so formidable, the Fool, in his innocent idiocy, already possesses. (21-22)

Foucault sought to outline a historical shift by which madness and the mad were relegated to a social space separate from the sane, which was the domain of reason. Derrida, on the other hand, maintains that "madness looms" in the "contradiction, the opposition or the coexistence of incompatible values," that "sheer madness that begins by inverting all the senses of sense into their opposites" (*Friendship* 34, 51). In this way, madness lurks in the *aporia* of sane discourse, always haunting and undermining reason from within. Apropos of the debate between Foucault and Derrida over Foucault's treatment of Descartes in *Madness and Civilization*, Žižek writes of Derrida's position, "Madness is thus not excluded by *Cogito*: it is not that the *Cogito* is not mad, but *Cogito* is true even if I am totally mad. The extreme doubt, the hypothesis of universal madness, is not external to philosophy, but strictly internal to it. It is the hyperbolic moment, the moment of madness, which *grounds* philosophy" (29). But even if this madness is interior to reason, its truth cannot be expressed through reason's discourse, which is why, as Derrida notes, "The misfortune of the mad, the interminable misfortune of their silence, is that their best spokesmen are those who betray them best; which is to say that when one attempts to convey their silence itself, one has already passed over to the side of the enemy, the side of order, even if one fights against order from within it" (*Writing* 36).

Which leads us back to Foucault's description of the ineffable dream-knowledge hinted at in renaissance imagery, and also back to the discussion of a dream-world governed by the primary processes of consciousness, in which a Benjaminian rag-picker might gather material capable of illuminating a way through the social landscape for a revolutionary politics. To

achieve this potentiality, however, the "madness" of dreams had to be dragged into the light of reason. André Gide had already put forward a kindred formulation, albeit couched in aesthetic terms: "Les choses les plus belles sont celles que souffle la folie et qu'écrit la raison. Il faut demeurer entre les deux, tout près de la folie quand on rêve, tout près de la raison quand on écrit" (*Journal*, Sept. 1894).

Benjamin had criticized the surrealists for being content to wallow in the dream-world; Artaud seems to condemn them for the same reason, but his alternative is radical, apocalyptic, and clearly impossible: the dream-world, with all its violence, mystery and cruelty, is to be brought into the waking world. Artaud would be the earthly avatar of the destabilizing power of madness and intoxication, unleashing the powers of the unconscious, of dreams, of magic, and of instinct, enabling "a poetry in its pure state, of creation outside of language," something he sought to glimpse in the peyote rights of the Tarahumara (Le Clézio 171). He would access the explosive secrets of "primitive" cultures to intoxicate Western culture, destabilizing and destroying its discourses and structures. But Artaud carried with him the very seeds that would replicate the Western culture he wanted to eradicate, the habitual intoxications of thought and feeling, the compulsive drug habits in the service of the self, such that he became a unique node of a strikingly broad variety of intoxications, pulsating there, in his shabby quarters in Mexico City. His friend and commentator Luis Cardoza y Aragón considered him a *náufrago* who was unable to see that "no es aislándose, que no es marchándose a las islas de los mares del sur o a la sierra tarahumara, anhelando un retorno imposible a lo primitivo, que podemos escapar de lo que llevamos en nosotros" (Artaud, *México* 12).

Artaud, while held in high respect in Mexico as a prestigious French intellectual, was also the object of pity. Cardoza y Aragón remembers him "incandescente, linchado por sí mismo,

estrangulado, fértil en relámpagos y desplomes, errabundo, imposibilitado para la coherencia exterior, anárquico a fuerza de sinceridad" (Artaud, *México* 7). Other accounts of his presence during that period are less lyrical. Inés Amor, who ran the Galería de Arte Mexicano, an important hub of artistic activity founded in 1935, remembers Artaud's and her friend, the painter Federico Cantú, as a person of "hábitos bohemios" who "provocaba hechos peliagudos pero graciosos" (42). The anecdote she uses to exemplify this contains an image of Artaud striking enough to justify an extended citation:

> me llevaba a Antonin Artaud en momento de trance con heroína, y me lo sentaba en medio de la Galería… en una silla amarilla de Cuernavaca que todos habíamos pintado con pinturas de Ripolín, que nunca llegaron a secar completamente, dando por resultado que quien se sentaba y se recargaba, al levantarse quedaba rayado de la espalda. En esa silla se sentaba Artaud a esperar que transcurriera el momento de nirvana. Se amarraba la cabeza con un turbante blanco y no pronunciaba palabra en horas y horas enteras. En un principio me daba miedo, pero luego me fui acostumbrando a su presencia e inclusive muchas veces hice gestiones ante doctores amigos para conseguirle morfina. Una tarde en que Artaud salía de su estupor, dijo que tenía mucha hambre y como nadie poseía un centavo, Cantú… y otros se lo llevaron a Prendes, donde lo pidieron un verdadero banquete y ellos se fueron a esperarlo en el Café Paris. Una hora después Artaud los alcanzó muy contento, pues Prendes no tomó ninguna acción contra de él; al contrario, le regaló una botella de champaña. (42)

The image of Artaud seated, immobile, "cual momia," clearly made an impression on Amor (164), and was apparently not an isolated incident, as is suggested by her reference to becoming accustomed to it, and to "muchas veces" obtaining morphine for him. Artaud, then, during his

short stay in Mexico, seemingly became something of a "fixture" in the Mexican art scene, whose singular and frequent presence in time bred a familiarity that made him the object of gentle laughter—shown by the jest about nirvana and placing him in the chair with wet paint—without his ever losing the respect or protection of his Mexican friends. The anecdote about his being taken to Prendes, a storied downtown Mexico City restaurant, illustrates the tension well: the poor bohemian artists leave him at the restaurant, but apparently are able to leverage their, and/or his, cultural capital to pay for "un verdadero banquete" (42).

Still, the overall image that emerges is, indeed, of Artaud "aislándose," wrapping himself up in his own intoxication like a mummy, closing himself off the Other, despite his friends' apparent acceptance of his eccentricity. Beyond the demands of addiction, his apparent disinterest may also be partially explained by his conviction that Mexican elites had little to do with the vital, indigenous Mexico he had come to experience. Melanie Nicholson points out that

> in Mexico in 1936, *mestizaje* − the mix of European and indigenous races − had been elevated practically to the status of a national religion, and the truly indigenous minorities were either ignored or swept up in schemes of assimilation. Mexico's pre-Hispanic past, while appreciated on some levels, was subordinated to ideologies of progress. (31)

This was a "political and social reality" that "Artaud either misunderstood or chose to ignore" (31). Artaud relates in a letter to Jean Paulhan that "This population of Whites (Creoles) and half-breeds would be very happy to hear no more about the Indians. Culturally speaking, they are behind America and Europe" (*Selected* 365). Artaud's harsh indictment of the Mexican elites that had been putting up with his shenanigans so patiently is remarkable for revealing an internal contradiction in Artaud's thinking: on one hand, he is in Mexico because he believes Western

culture is a dead end and that alternatives must be found in “primitive” cultures like those of Mexican indigenous groups. On the other hand, Mexican elites were deemed unworthy because of their subordinate status within a teleological progression of (Western) culture. Artaud thus seems to deploy opiate intoxication to negate the self in order to also avoid an Other that fails to live up to his expectations of what it should be; an Other that is neither “Indian” enough nor Western enough.

It may be reasonable to wonder whether the prestige of the European intellectual exerted a certain intoxicating allure on some Mexican intellectuals, who came to accept Artaud’s exoticizing judgments about Mexican indigenous culture. In an article that appeared in *El nacional* during Artaud’s visit, Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, a member of the Mexican “Contemporáneos” group, noted the former’s appreciation for “un espiritualismo total de orden místico … de orden mágico panteísta de unidad con la naturaleza, genuino de las culturas indígenas de América,” adding that “[n]osotros hemos discutido mucho y con más o menos fortuna estos temas, pero necesitamos que otros ojos venidos de otros pueblos nos descubran la realidad de nuestra propia vida como lo hace Artaud, con apasionado lirismo” (cited in Nicholson 34). However, he goes on to maintain that “también creo que en México aún nos falta asimilar ciertos aspectos de la cultura europea” such as scientific developments, which he believes can form the basis of a universal humanity (35). Nicholson notes the irony that Ortiz de Montellano, in his apparent praise of Artaud, ends up urging openness to European culture where the latter calls for its rejection (35). But it may simply be that Ortiz de Montellano’s formulation is a more balanced version of Artaud’s chaotic thought processes, which, as referenced above, careens between wholesale rejection of Western culture and chauvinistic critiques of its margins. Cardoza y Aragón, who himself lapses into prose poetry upon describing Artaud’s radical

experiential aesthetics, is very explicit about Artaud's blind spots regarding his understanding of the relationships between individuals and cultures: "la concepción del mundo mestizo" inhabited by most contemporary Mexican artists "la execraba por reflejar las posiciones occidentales de las que intentaba huir, como si pudiera perder su sombra, su cuerpo mismo" (*Antología* 80).

It is worth noting that Artaud's inward nature was tempered somewhat by a copious correspondence, much of which has been preserved, with a number of members of the intelligentsia of the Western civilization he claimed to despise. This correspondence includes letters attesting close relationships with his editors at *Nouvelle Revue Française* that have been described as psychotherapeutic in character. According to René Lourau's analysis, Jacques Rivière, Artaud's first editor at *NRF*, was drawn into the latter's personal universe of anguish to such an extent that the two became mired in a web of transference and countertransference as the balance of power between them shifted, until it was no longer clear which of them was on the "divan" (174). It was Jean Paulhan, who replaced Rivière at *NRF* after the latter's death, who was able to keep Artaud at an arm's length so as not to be drawn into the latter's world, and in this way he was able to offer the kind of steady, detached but friendly perspective that, "plus 'distanciée', moins 'transférentielle'" than that of Rivière, complemented Artaud's chaotic and febrile way of being in the world (193). But Artaud was not always ready to hear Paulhan's measured criticism's, as evidenced, for example, in Artaud's petulant response to Paulhan's questions about the level of historical veracity of the former's *Heliogabalus* (*Selected* 337). Whereas the *NRF* editor cautions Artaud not to alienate his friends (Lourau 192), the *poète maudit*, like his anarchist emperor, must "demonstrate his individuality with violence" (*Selected* 323), and Paulhan's influence is ultimately too distant to much temper this violence, though he

reportedly would later help free Artaud from the asylum at Rodez (Cardoza y Aragón, *Antología* 82).

If morphine insulated him from his Mexican friends, and pride and the exaltation of his aesthetic visions imposed a distance between him and his European friends, the most potent intoxicants at play during Artaud's 1936 trip may have been his ideas about Mexican indigenous cultures. According to Uri Hertz, who quotes Artaud from letters seeking French government support for his trip, "Even before setting foot on Mexican soil, Artaud's exoticism reaches a fever pitch in anticipation: 'Are there still forests which speak and where the sorcerer with burnt fibers of Peyote and Marijuana still finds the terrible old man who teaches him the secrets of divination?'" (51). After arriving in country, he proclaims to the readership of *El Nacional* that "conozco casi todo lo que enseña la historia sobre las diversas razas de México y confieso, autorizado por mi calidad de poeta, que he soñado sobre lo que ella no enseña" (13 de julio, 1936). In the same article, he claims to have come to Mexico "con un espíritu virgen, lo que no quiere decir que sin ideas preconcebidas." This striking apparent contradiction is breezily justified by the fact that "las ideas preconcebidas pertenecen al dominio de la imaginación; así pues, me las reservo" (13 de julio, 1936).[41] But after finally reaching the Tarahumara village, he complains when the people there fail to live up to "the preconceived notions Artaud superimposes on… lived experience" (Nicholson 33). Bogged down in depression and desperation during a wait of several weeks before he could take part in the ceremony, Artaud impatiently raves, "And all of this, for what? For a dance, for a rite of lost Indians who no longer

[41] This text does not seem to have been translated into English. It can be found in Cardoza y Aragón's collection of Artaud's Mexican writings (Artaud, *México* 72-78). It will be considered later the extent to which Artaud's claim of an "espíritu virgen," or an openness to experiences of otherness, can be justified.

even know who they are or where they came from and who, when you question them, answer with tales whose connection and secret they have lost." (*Selected* 383). Nicholson points out that the language barrier Artuad faced would have made the legitimacy of such judgements highly suspect (34). For her, "the image of Mexico" presented in the texts of Artaud and Breton "is almost invariably that of a palimpsest, in which the writing visible just below the surface reveals an image not of the exotic other, but of the self" (40). In this way Artaud prefigures what has been called "beat orientalism," in which an exotic other forms the backdrop for an exploration of the self.[42]

It is also important to recognize that Artaud repeatedly recurred to Western motifs to situate (contain?) his experiences among the Tarahumara, including the peyote ritual. He uses numerological concepts from the Cabala to explain the patterned recurrence of certain signs and symbols he saw on the mountains *en route* to the Tarahumara village where he would stay (*Selected* 381). On the day the ritual is finally to begin, he experiences a vision of a Nativity painting by Hieronymus Bosch superimposed over the figures of the village (*Selected* 385). He will elsewhere interpret the sacrifice of a bull in the light of "the rite of the kings of Atlantis as Plato describes it in the pages of *Critias*," claiming the Tarahumara are "direct descendants of the Atlanteans" (*Peyote Dance* 64).

[42] In some ways, Artaud's attitude towards Mexican indigeneity corresponds with the conception of Orientalism as put forward by Edward Said, as he uses it "to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1), although Mexico does not fall within the concept's geographical parameters; Artaud's take on Balinese theater would certainly fall more squarely under this rubric. However, Artaud and the surrealists tended to deploy Orientalist discourse as a weapon *against* Western culture, leading Denis Hollier to characterize their posture as "reverse-Orientalist" (4); this clearly does not render the practice unproblematic but is a worthwhile distinction. Fazzino uses the term "beat orientalism" (195), referring to Martinez for its definition (3-19).

Furthermore, Artaud's approach to the peyote ritual often exhibits a colonial character, as seen in his impatience above, and in his insistent desire to gain knowledge of a "secret" that he thought must be at the heart of the ritual. In "The Peyote Dance," his account of the Tarahumara ritual, Artaud describes the disorienting effects of the peyote, saying that he was placed "[o]n the ground, so that the rite would fall on me, so that the fire, the chants, the cries, the dance, and the night itself, like a living, human vault, would turn over me. There was this rolling vault, this physical arrangement of cries, tones, steps, chants" (*Selected* 391). But this was not the essence of the experience, because "above everything, beyond everything, the impression that kept recurring that behind all this, greater than all this and beyond it, there was concealed something else: *the Principal*" (391, emphasis original). This hidden mystery is the ultimate object of Artaud's quest, and is to be extracted and placed at the service of his peculiar, masochistic, quasi-religious project: "It was now necessary that what lay hidden behind this heavy grinding which reduces dawn to darkness, that this thing be pulled out, and that it *serve*, that it serve precisely by *my crucifixion"* (391).

In another moment, when Artaud describes significant numbered groups of participants and objects, he includes last "*myself*, for whom the rite was being performed" (*Selected* 387). Nicholson questions "whether Artaud was aware of himself as an ethnographic observer–participant, a kind of cultural tourist for whom the Tarahumara were staging a performance, or whether he narcissistically presumes a greater role in the ritual than that which his hosts had intended" (33). The fact that he placed himself (in italics) as the final and unique element among a number of significant groups of persons and objects strongly suggests the latter possibility. The "singular word, the lost word which the Master of Peyote communicates" to the Tarahumara "sorcerers" (*Selected* 390), was an obsession that Nicholson points out is in

consonance with the "surrealist concern for the revelation of hidden… realities" (34), but in Artaud's case this secret was destined to be appropriated for his own messianic sacrifice. The peyote ritual involved a substance, an experience, and a knowledge to which Artaud believed he had a right, apparently echoing centuries of colonial attitudes.

For all of Artaud's preconceived notions and colonial undertones, however, it is important to consider the degree to which he also proved willing to purge himself in order to arrive prostrate and empty among the Tarahumara, enabling a radical openness to the peyote experience, which was undoubtedly one of fundamental otherness. Artaud was able to give up the opiates he relied on to inoculate himself against the anguish of living in a world he could not accept.[43] To the extent that this could be true in Artaud's case, as well, his abandonment of the drug implies a real effort to confront the Other in Norogachic, the Tarahumara village he visits. Artaud also deserves some credit for recognizing his problematic status as an outsider—and indeed one from the world of the colonizers—in the ceremony. In "The Peyote Dance," he narrates a seemingly schizotypal perception of a certain antagonism on the part of "a young Indian" who, during a long night in which Artaud was suffering spasms,

> scratch[ed] himself in a dream with a kind of hostile frenzy in exactly the places where these spasms seized me—and he said, he who scarcely knew me from the day before, 'Ah, let him suffer all the evil that may befall him.'
>
> Peyote, as I knew, was not made for Whites. It was necessary at all costs to prevent me from obtaining a cure by this rite which was created to act on the very nature of the

[43] John Barrell has convincingly analyzed De Quincey's opium use as an attempt to inoculate the self against otherness (e.g. 14).

> spirits. And a White, for these Red men, is one whom the spirits have abandoned. If it was I who benefitted from the rite, it meant so much lost for themselves, with their intelligent sheathing of spirit.
>
> So much lost for the spirits. So many spirits that could not be utilized again. (*Selected* 384)

This fascinating recognition of the fragility of religious practices compares favorably to the attitudes and behavior of the psychonauts who followed Gordon Wasson to Oaxaca to try psilocybin mushrooms, as we will see. In this moment, Artaud seems to take note of his position as a colonial interloper and to understand why some of the Tarahumara might reject his presence.

He also seems to rebel against his own superimposition of Western motifs onto his experiences in the Sierra Tarahumara. Upon introducing his vision of Bosch's Nativity painting, already mentioned, he notes with some annoyance, "I had not come to the heart of the mountain of these Tarahumara Indians to look for memories of a painting. I had suffered enough, it seems to me, to be rewarded with a little reality" (*Selected* 385). Even in his feverish quest to uncover the "secret" of the priests, he is wary against the appropriation of a simulacrum of this knowledge which, in a more concrete gesture of cultural colonialism, would "bring back a collection of outworn imageries from which the Age, true to its own system, would at most derive ideas for advertisements and models for clothing designers" (391). At some level then, Artaud understands the impossible quandary in which he finds himself, trying to erase the cultural material that has constituted his very self, trying to outrun his shadow or shake off his very body (Cardoza y Aragón, *Antología* 80).

Nor was the poet totally insensible to the role of the peculiarities of his own perception in the things he saw. Typically, Artaud's writing conveys a sense of fervent belief in everything he describes. There is a telling moment in "The Mountain of Signs," however, when he blurs the boundaries of the interior and the exterior, in a tacit acknowledgement that he carried more with him on his trip to the Sierra than was immediately apparent. After describing a vision among the rocks of a human form being tortured, he pauses to note, "*Between the mountain and myself I cannot say which was haunted*, but in my periplus across the mountain I saw an optical miracle of this kind occur at least once a day" (*Selected* 380, emphasis added). Elsewhere, Artaud seems to emphasize the deliberateness of the visions he recounts (381), but with the above recognition, he opens up the possibility that his own psyche is complicit in the conspiracy to create these grisly images. He makes the curious claim that he was "born with a tormented body, as much a fake as the immense mountain" (380), suggesting indirectly that the unreality of a vision does not negate the suffering associated with it. Artaud's nightmarish description of the landscape he saw during his journey on horseback to Norogachic resembles nothing more closely than reports of "bad trips" suffered under the effects of psychedelic drugs, when the patient's state of mind and the drug's disconcerting effects combine to send the user down a path of distressing mentation and imagery.[44] The irony in this case is that Artaud was *on his way* precisely to experience such a substance, and his hellish hallucinations were likely caused by the *absence* of opium, not the presence of peyote.

Indeed, the signs that Artaud saw everywhere in the sierra could also have been a product of mental illness. In a theoretical article on schizophrenia, Louis Sass writes that Artaud's

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[44] For an example of this phenomenon, see Masters and Houston (8-12).

"uncannily precise" writings may be "the most valuable of all autobiographical accounts of schizophrenia" (164). This condition has long been the subject of fraught debates over its ontology, diagnosis, and the terminology that most accurately and productively names it. One recent development in the latter question is the development of "salience syndrome" as an umbrella term to include groups of symptoms stemming from phenomena in which objects of perception are attributed a significance beyond what would be typical and expected. "Salience is about how internal or external stimuli can become attention-grabbing and how this, if it is not willed, can lead to perplexing experiences that result in a search for an explanation that are subsequently recognized as delusions" (Van Os 370). Aberrant salience creates an overwhelming superabundance of meaning and significance, precisely the feeling that your environment is full of important "signs" that must be deciphered. But investigating this phenomenology, we loop back around to intoxication: Aldous Huxley theorized that psychedelics (*The Doors of Perception* relates his experience with mescaline, precisely the alkaloid contained by peyote) partially remove filters that are normally imposed by the human mind to limit the overwhelming amount of sensory information and potential meaning it comes in contact with at every moment. He calls the unfiltered experience of reality Mind At Large, and likens it to various religious and mystical ideas of unmediated experience. Anticipating the development of the salience paradigm, Huxley notes that the schizophrenic is essentially a person trapped in this experience:

> His sickness consists in the inability to take refuge from inner and outer reality (as the sane person habitually does) in the homemade universe of common sense–the strictly human world of useful notions, shared symbols and socially acceptable conventions. The schizophrenic is like a man permanently under the influence of mescaline, and therefore unable to shut off the experience of a reality which he is not holy enough to live with,

> which he cannot explain away because it is the most stubborn of primary facts, and which, because it never permits him to look at the world with merely human eyes, scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance, as the manifestations of human or even cosmic malevolence, calling for the most desperate countermeasures. (53)

Indeed, Huxley's insights can be compared with a notion that emerged from early psychiatric research with LSD that suggested that the drug produced a temporary "model psychosis" and thus had great potential for aiding the understanding and treatment of conditions like schizophrenia. This idea has subsequently been shown to be overly simplistic, but the commonalities between the drug experience and the mental illness are certainly salient enough to suggest that each may have something to reveal about the other (Grof, *LSD* 20-2).

The experience of an uncontrollable excess of salience constitutes, among other things, a radical opening of the self to the otherness of one's environment. In the text, "The Peyote Rite among the Tarahumara," Artaud claims that an adept of the peyote ceremony explained to him "the way in which Peyote revives throughout the nervous system the memory of certain supreme truths by means of which human consciousness does not lose but on the contrary regains its perception of the Infinite" (*Peyote Dance* 21). But when he discusses an occult, biological corollary of this process, a knowledge he says he gleaned from the priests and from the peyote itself, he puts it in terms of the selection of the constitutive elements of the self:

> in the human liver there occurs that secret alchemy and that process by which the self of each individual chooses what suits it from among the sensations, emotions, and desires which the unconscious shapes and which make up its appetites, its conceptions, its true

> beliefs, and its *ideas*. It is here that the I becomes conscious and that its power of deliberation, of extreme organic discrimination, is deployed, Because it is here that *Ciguri* works to separate what exists from what does not exist, The liver seems, therefore, to be the organic filter of the unconscious. (*Peyote Dance* 40)

While Robin Carhart-Harris might argue that the "I" exercises self-consciousness and introspection based in the default mode network of the brain, not in the liver,[45] Artaud's claim that *Ciguri*, the spirit or god embodied by peyote, works precisely on (inhibiting?) the action of "filtering" the influence of the unconscious on our perception of reality, is striking for its consonance with ideas like Carhart-Harris's, Huxley's, and indeed Van Os's regarding salience.[46] But whereas we normally think of the schizophrenic as someone who believes things that are not true, the person under the influence of peyote, according to Artaud, has a "desire for the real," and is bestowed "the strength to surrender to it while automatically rejecting the rest" (42). He relates that a Tarahumara priest told him that "[t]hings are not as we see them and experience them most of the time, but they are as *Ciguri* teaches them to us" (34). The things of the world "were true" in the beginning, but habitual perception has been "taken over by Evil" (34). The text resonates with themes of absolute truth, Good and Evil, and it should be noted that "The Peyote Rite among the Tarahumara" was written, as Artaud himself states in a post-script, after years of confinement in mental institutions, suffering "estrangement and total castration," by a "*convert* whom the magical spells of the priestly rabble, taking advantage of his momentary weakness, were keeping in a state of enslavement" (43). In a sense the text reflects the Christian

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[45] See Introduction.

[46] If Carhart-Harris is right that psychedelics unleash unconscious material and Huxley is right about the connections between psychedelia and schizophrenia, then aberrant salience would be explained by uncontrolled eruption of unconscious material into everyday consciousness.

vision of a fallen, ultimately evil world that must be seen for what it is. However, in a text from the same year as the post-script (1947), "Et c'est en Mexique," he gives what seems to be a corrective or a clarification:

> No buscaba el peyotl como curioso, sino, por el contrario, como un desesperado que quiere quitarse aun la última piltrafa de esperanza, separar la última fibrilla roja de la esperanza espiritual de la carne.
>
> El peyotl no da lo real, pero nos decepciona de la inteligencia y nos envía de nuevo a la vida, como purgados después de una fase indecible de trance en donde…
>
> Yo no quería entrar con el peyotl en un mundo nuevo sino salir de un mundo falso. [47]

In this later appraisal of the experience, Artaud backs off from the idea of the revelation of "supreme truths," instead pointing to a distinct negative quality of the perceptual phenomena promoted by peyote.

This lines up with both Artaud's artistic and vital project and with the concept of defamiliarizing psychedelic or aesthetic intoxication outlined in the present study. When habitual patterns of neural connectivity are temporarily disrupted and replaced by novel linkages due to psilocybin or LSD (or, we might venture to suppose, mescaline) use, or when a disorienting aesthetic vision disrupts familiar and comfortable patterns of thought and feeling, one does not come away a privileged guardian of a sacred truth but, rather, one may simply be unburdened of limited or destructive cognitive-emotive patterns. Benjamin develops a figure that Bolz and

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[47] This text, from a 1947 Paris conference, does not seem to have been translated into English or Spanish, other than the passage Cardoza y Aragón translates in his collection of Artaud's Mexican writings (Artaud, *México* 22). The passage cited here is from that translation. The original text may be found in *Les Tarahumaras* (119-34)

Reijen call "the destructive character," one who says, simply, "make room" and "clears away… cheerfully" (64-65). One is reminded of children's joy upon knocking down a tower of blocks or some similar act of simulated (or real) destruction. Artaud, perhaps, has long since lost such a capacity for joy, but certainly is given to the exaltation of *seeing through*, exposing, and destroying what he considers to be false appearances. What is visible beyond them? The euphoria of such moments may steer one toward a belief that one has seen "ultimate truths"—and many claim to have mystical experiences of "oneness" under the influence of psychedelic drugs—but such experiences invariably have the quality of the ineffable. There will be no "secret" to "bring back" intact from the depths of the experience, as Artaud seems to have expected. He laments that he "did not succeed in penetrating" the mystery of the "singular word" passed on to the Tarahumara "sorcerers" at the end of their training (*Selected* 390). If one sees through "false truths," anything that is glimpsed beyond that can be described later will be contingent material to be analyzed later under the light of reason, as Benjamin insisted.

But Artaud had little use for reason. He peered into an individual and a collective unconscious and screamed out what he saw in lacerating poetry. For Silvère Lotringer, Artaud's project was akin to Dada in its explosive, anarchic reaction to an increasingly destructive Western rationalism. He calls Artaud a "source of resonance" with this rupture, a position that gave him "a certain perspective on things" (69-70). Artaud was thus in tune with the fault-lines within a time of madness disguised as reason. Lotringer contrasts him with Stalin, "a perfectly reasonable man" who "adjusted to fit the circumstances…. Artaud was incapable of staging a play. Stalin turned the world into a big theatre," with Hitler's help. "The two of them succeeded. Artaud failed. But Artaud was crazy" (108). Artaud saw or felt the world from the space of the irrational: the space of intoxicating or intoxicated ideas, of shattering withdrawal, of delusional

mentation, and of ritual vision. If he experienced a secret, perhaps it was only a glimpse of the madness that Derrida insists is lodged in the heart of reason itself. His atypical perception allowed him to see through the façade of rational civilization, revealing within it a "craze for worldwide annihilation," and his scream is that of history, as the rational West prepared to rend itself and the rest of the world apart (Lotringer 69, 112). Lotringer compares the scream of Artaud and that of Hitler, noting that the latter was heard and followed as a head of government while Artaud was institutionalized. In his fictionalized conversation with Dr. Lautremolière, one of Artaud's psychiatrists at the Rodez clinic, Lotringer asks of the bloodshed of the Second World War, "[i]s that something to scream about? Even with narcissistic and paranoid cries? When a world is in the process of annihilating forty million people, a scream is significant" (81). Its significance is to "express all the horror, the madness of the world," of an "order that has become criminal, abnormal," a century that "had become murderous" (74).

Lotringer tells Lautremolière that

> For me literature is like putting on glasses. I see the world differently. And when I put on Artaud's glasses—which aren't my own—I'm able to see things that would otherwise remain invisible. And the fact that the world I see through his glasses is fragmented—full of twists, treacheries and denials—doesn't surprise me. I see these same characteristics in the newspapers every day. (82)

Artaud's "glasses" were capable of defamiliarizing the early twentieth century, shearing off its guise of reason, but what he glanced beneath was not an ultimate truth but an unutterable and chaotic violence, which could only be dealt with through aesthetic practice: "In the anguished, catastrophic period we live in, we feel an urgent need for a theater which events do not exceed,

whose resonance is deep within us, dominating the instability of the times" (*Theater* 84). The "Great Secret" that Foucault notes is possessed by the fool is tied up in their silence and is betrayed and corrupted as soon as one would utter it (21-22, Derrida 42). Artaud's scream is his desperate attempt to break this deadlock and, to the extent that it can even be interpreted as such, perhaps it could be considered a success.

But as much as Artaud hated Western civilization and saw through its orderly façade to its murderous interiority, he embodied it in many ways, as previously discussed: in the forceful imposition of his preconceived ideas and his judgments of mestizo and indigenous Mexicans based on these ideas; in the superimposition of Western concepts onto his experiences in Mexico; in his colonial appropriation of substances, experiences, and knowledge; and in his overestimation of his role in the peyote rite of the Tarahumara, we see a profound, intoxicated narcissism and self-importance that places him in the center of things, where his sacrifice would redeem the world.[48] For Susan Sontag, "Whatever Artaud's wishes for 'culture,' his thinking ultimately shuts out all but the private self. Like the Gnostics, he is a radical individualist. From his earliest writings, his concern is with a metamorphosis of the 'inner' state of the soul" (Artaud, *Selected* xlvii). And yet this obsessive dynamic was fueled by his relentless destruction of pattern and order in discourse and perception, such that in Artaud, both poles of the dialectic of intoxication come into precarious union before finally shattering apart. He constructed an ideal, messianic self through the exaltation of his writing and his thinking, which in turn exposed and disfigured the world. As a proto-narcossist who wanted to destroy the Western culture that would give birth to narcossism; Artaud would be the man who suicided society.

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[48] See Lotringer for a discussion (between Lotringer and Lauremolière) of Artaud's identification with Christ (70-71, 109).

The Ugly Spirit and the Final Fix: William Burroughs in Latin America

The Beats shared with Artaud a Spenglerian belief in the decline of Western culture, something that was pushed by their respected elder member, William S. Burroughs (Martinez 62). What is more, it seems Artaud exercised something of a direct influence on these countercultural poets; in a collection of essays for the fiftieth anniversary of *Naked Lunch*, Jean-Jacques Lebel brags about turning the Beats on to Artaud, in a colorful passage that merits an extended citation:

> Way back in the days of the Beat Hotel—I think it was in 1958—I had the honor of introducing Burroughs, Ginsberg, Gysin, Corso, and Somerville to the sound and the fury of Artaud. R.C. Richards' English translation of *Theatre and Its Double* was not yet a must, and all they knew of Artaud was his legend, which Carl Solomon—who had witnessed Artaud's historic public breakdown at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, in 1947—had brought back from Paris and shared with Ginsberg at the New York psychiatric hospital where they met. Burroughs as well as Ginsberg was eager to find out more about Artaud, his struggles with opiates, and reinventing of language. I had put my hands on a fresh copy of the original tape of Artaud's *To End the Judgment of God*—which had been "liberated" by an anarchist friend of mine from a locked metal cupboard at the ORTF (the French National Radio Station, which had banned it and never aired it until after May 1968). So I invited them to my home to hear it.
>
> We got stoned, sat on the floor, and huddled around a cumbersome tape recorder. We placed the reel on it and pushed the buttons. The result was a flow of high-pitched beastly blasts, in languages (plural) unknown to us, which we listened to in stupefied awe. When

the tape came to an end, we were transfixed and puzzled, knowing that Artaud had indeed been fluent in idioms current only inside his own mind. Then Ginsberg, always the practical one, said, “Let’s hear it again,” and, as we struggled with the tape recorder, we discovered we had put the reel on upside down. Stoned as we were, we had not listened to the radio-play as recorded by Artaud—with Roger Blin, Maria Casares, and Paule Thévenin—but to an accidentally reversed version of it….

At last, we got the tape on right and were able to catch Artaud’s magnetic mix of schizo-sound poetry and sublime antireligious, antimilitaristic and anticapitalist imprecatory hollering in classical French. Burroughs was visibly impressed. As for Ginsberg, he borrowed the tape from me, made several copies, and mailed them in the United States to Judith Malina and Julian Beck, to LeRoi Jones (later named Amiri Baraka), and to Michael McClure…. On several other occasions, in Paris, London, or New York, Burroughs and I discussed the hallucinatory substance of Artaud’s aural language that he seemed to have put together from fragmented audio snippets heard by him in many “foreign” tongues all mingled together and retransmitted by him through his singular ultrasound mental radio system…. Burroughs once told me that, when sitting completely stoned on a Paris street bench near Saint-Michel, he had absorbed unrelated pieces of conversations spoken in French, Italian, English, German, Greek, and other lingoes, by people walking by him, all adding up to a transcultural sound collage of phrases chopped up and put together again by the listener in a transformational way

> resembling the cut-up method. To this day, I wonder if Artaud and Burroughs weren't pursuing a similar goal. (Harris 85-86)[49]

Jimmy Fazzino, in his recent study of the global aspirations, resonance, and repercussions of the Beats, calls Artaud "a major reference point in worlded beat writing" (153). Apparently Amiri Baraka was impressed by the recording sent to him by Ginsberg and with Artaud in general: he channels the profound anti-colonial sentiment and "cruelty" of Artaud's *Conquest of Mexico* for his own Revolutionary Theatre project: "Even as Artaud designed *The Conquest of Mexico*, so we must design *The Conquest of the White Eye*, and show the missionaries and wiggly Liberals dying under blasts of concrete" (quoted in Fazzino 80). Fazzino goes even further in stating Artaud's influence on Burroughs, claiming that *The Yage Letters*, the novel based on correspondence between Burroughs and Ginsberg during their respective South American sojourns, "is a rewriting of Artaud's *Voyage au pays des Tarahumara*" (154). Whether or not this is true, Burroughs certainly mirrors Artaud in a number of striking ways, from his opiate addiction to his interest in indigenous psychedelics, to his seemingly contradictory position via à vis the inevitable colonialist undertones of his undertaking, and *Yage* and the experiences it is based on can be considered foundational to Burroughs's vital and textual interventions.[50]

His observations on the difference between "junk" and psychedelics provide a compelling starting point for an analysis of competing tendencies of intoxication in these interventions. For Burroughs, "junk narrows consciousness" (*Burroughs Live* 66), "dims down

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[49] It is worth noting that in a 1970 interview with Jean-François Bizot, discussing surrealist influence on his own work, Burroughs expressed his view of Artaud as more faithful than Breton and others to the Surrealist spirit of aesthetic innovation (*Burroughs Live* 136).

[50] Oliver Harris claims that "far from being marginal, his slight epistolary travelogue is of the essence for his future writing—his writing *of* the future" (Burroughs and Ginsberg xxiv, emphasis original).

the whole creative process physiologically" (49). On the other hand, he considers "cannabis, mescaline, LSD, Psylocybin [*sic*]" to be "consciousness-expanding drugs" that "open psychic areas that would otherwise not be available to the writer," and therefore "useful… up to a certain point" (93). Burroughs offers a vivid portrayal of the junkie's relationship to the self and the Other upon hitting rock bottom, in reference to his personal experience in Tangier:

> It had been more than a year since I'd taken a bath or changed my clothes…. The water and electricity had long ago been cut off…. When a friend came to visit me (but rarely did someone visit me, what was left of me to address), I remained prostrate. I was indifferent, … paying attention to neither his presence nor his departure. If this friend had been knocked down, I wouldn't have moved, just stared at my boots, waiting for him to die so I could pick his pockets. (138)

This is the apparent end-point of the narrowing of consciousness enacted by junk. The Other, and even the aspects of the self that are irrelevant to the junkie's need, are totally negated or instrumentalized. Burroughs claims that this pattern of psychotropy is ultimately not even "interesting" (138), and his rejection of a withdrawal into a hollowed-out self is set against his valorization of psychotropic "expansion," in a way that parallels his disinterest in the aesthetic goal of "going inward"; instead, he is "aimed in the other direction—outward" (66).

The end of his early novel, *Junky*, signals this shift: "I am ready to move south and look for the uncut kick that opens out instead of narrowing down like junk" (152). Anticipating our question, the narrator of *Junky* continues, "Kick is seeing things from a special angle. Kick is momentary freedom from the claims of aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh. Maybe I will find in yage what I was looking for in junk and weed and coke. Yage may be the final fix" (152).

In addition to signaling for us to "stay tuned," this passage is a remarkable condensation of the different aspects of Burroughs's complex relationship with psychotropy. On one hand, "kick" is an escape from reality, a view of drugs no less valid for its ubiquity, but on the other, Burroughs identifies "kick" with a dishabituation of perception. If Artaud hallucinated in the throes of opiate withdrawal, Burroughs also notes a defamiliarizing effect stemming from the *absence* of junk, albeit a more subtle one: "Like a man who has been away for a long time, you see things differently when you return from junk" (*Junky* 151). But this is not "the final fix," so Burroughs will look to get his kicks from mysterious substances like *yagé*, but also to push his own product through aesthetic work.

Burroughs recognizes the psychotropy of advertising and compares it with that of his own creative production: "I'm concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image to create an action, not to go out and buy a Coca Cola, but to create an alteration in the reader's consciousness" (*Collected* 81), as well as in his own, alongside an attempt "to discover 'what words really are, and exactly what is the relationship to the human nervous system'" (55-56). This alteration and expansion of consciousness is set against, and designed to expose, an "addicted world" in which relationships always boil down to "addict and agent or pusher—who is himself and addict—where addiction is the compulsive consumption not only of heroin but also of aspirin, tobacco, alcohol, religion, TV, sex, and the rest" (56). Addicts, he emphasizes, "consume whatever they are trained to consume" (59). Those who exercise or enable control in these relationships, including "policemen and narcotics agents," are themselves caught in the psychotropic web as they are "addicted to power, to exercising a certain nasty kind of power over people who are helpless" (64). This high, which Burroughs calls "white junk," also derives from "rightness; they're right, right, right—and if they lost that power, they would suffer

excruciating withdrawal symptoms" (64). Here we can see some of the roots of narcossist patterns in which the psychotropy of superiority elevates and inflates the self, glorying in the belittlement of the Other. Both aspects of Burroughs's "kick" as cited above can be seen as reactions to the dynamics of the intoxication of power and righteousness: this intoxication is the target of Burroughs's consciousness-altering aesthetic experiments that seek to expose and liberate, but it also clearly constitutes its own "kick" that hooks into the flesh of the addict to keep him or her "cautious" and "frightened" (*Junky* 152), such that "kick," to the extent that it is understood as an intersection between biology and (cultural) pharmacology, may simultaneously and paradoxically be the hook, the flesh, and the freedom from both.

On one hand, Burroughs's aesthetic project seems resolutely anti-authoritarian, as does one aspect of his "kick"-as-freedom, in service of human beings acting and relating as they see fit. But there is also a sense in which freedom from the flesh, more broadly, aligns with Western, rationalist domination of nature, and with a colonialist transhumanism that seeks freedom from work and ageing, the pleasures of the flesh without the pains, and finally the privilege of being invulnerable, requisitioned for the individual with apparent indifference toward the Other. This tension is on display in correspondence Oliver Harris digs up for his introduction to *The Yage Letters Redux*, where Burroughs notes the "mystery" surrounding *yagé* and proclaims, "No doubt about it. Yage is a deal of tremendous implications, and I'm the man who can dig it" (xiii). On one hand, the substance is rumored to involve the mysteries of telepathy, and if we are to take Burroughs at his word at the end of *Junky*, "What I look for in any relationship is contact on the nonverbal level of intuition and feeling, that is, telepathic contact" (152). Fazzino claims that "for Burroughs *yagé* (like writing, like traveling) is about making connections, making contact," and telepathy has the potential to "short-circuit the usual relations of power" (152). At the same

time, Burroughs's own language betrays an extractive undertone: yes, "deal" can mean "issue," as in "big deal," and "dig it" is clear enough as countercultural slang, but it is well to remember that during his quest for ayahuasca, he teams up with the Anglo-Colombian Cacao Expedition, which sought to increase the exploitation of another psychoactive agricultural product. In fact, the group Burroughs travels with is striking: between the "Cocoa Commission," the eminent ethnobotanist Richard Schultes, U.S. officials he refers to as "Point Four" people, and Burroughs himself, who seeks to uproot and appropriate a cultural tradition, they represent, in the words of Manuel Luis Martinez, "a concerted effort by the West to interfere in Latin America's politics, economy, and culture" (63). Harris points out that even the name of *The Yage Letters* (without the accent mark where it would be correct, helpful, and respectful) betrays a certain "willed ignorance" characteristic of the narrative voice, who forcefully plays the part of William Lee, the Ugly American (xi-xii). Burroughs is angling to extract not only *yagé*, a substance, but also, like Artaud, cultural content and experiences. Burroughs further seeks new abilities (telepathy), and (at least ended up with) raw material for his writing,[51] and maintains a "constant search for child prostitutes to exploit" (Martinez 65).

For Brian Musgrove, *Yage* is concerned with an "economic survey of the abundantly consumable South America and the compulsive quest for yage [sic]" (144). It is a racially charged work that "pays homage to *homo occidentalis* as a visionary, all-consuming species" (145). Manuel Luis Martinez argues along these same lines in a more thoroughgoing critique of the Beats' ideology in *Countering the Counterculture*, positing for the Beats an "approximation to those reactionary, nativist, and racist ideologies to which they have conventionally been

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[51] Fazzino also points out the centrality of Burroughs's South American experiences to his aesthetic project as a whole (129).

contrasted" (25), and that their promotion of extreme individualism played into the hands of dominant political and economic forces, derailing much of the oppositional potential later countercultural movements could have had. Burroughs, in particular, "carries the radical individualism of Kerouac and Ginsberg… to an authoritarian end" (53), producing "both a worldview and an ethos that is illiberal, racist, undemocratic, and which fairly reflects the beat-inflected beliefs that partly crippled many of the strains of 1960s American countercultures" (62). In *The Yage Letters*, "[t]he status of the Americans in the jungle, in his ethnographic letters to Ginsberg, assumes and insinuates the inferiority of South Americans" (62), in resonance with historical discourses of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority going back to the eighteenth century (59-63). The makeup of the company he keeps on his South American travels, Schultes, the "Cocoa Commission," and the U.S. officials, mentioned above, is an irony "lost on Burroughs" (63), as he blithely plays the "ugly American" across the continent (59).

Martinez points out that Latin America was attractive to Burroughs as a place of freedom from social restraints that still allowed him to retain "the bourgeois privileges allotted to him in the West" (65). Like Tangier, Mexico and South America would later be figured by the peculiarly Burroughsian utopia of Interzone, described by Martinez as follows:

> the liminal space the colonizer desires, free of the laws and debilitation of the colonizer's homeland. Paradoxically, the colonizer retains privilege while he or she explores. In it all are subjected to a mysterious set of laws and practices that seem more anarchic than systematic. Only the white subject walks through this wasteland untouched, the only reflexive subject in the midst of a land populated by a mish-mash of Arabs, Indians, Latinos, and tribal peoples. The central trope of this of this fictionalized Tangier/Interzone, as Burroughs makes clear, is exemption…. (58)

Martinez supports this interpretation with a quote from Burroughs on Tangier: “The special attraction of Tangier can be put in one word: exemption. Exemption from interference, legal or otherwise…. No legal pressure or pressure of public opinion will curtail your behavior” (*Interzone* 59). Clearly, this characterization of utopia has troubling implications: an exemption implies the existence of a norm that applies broadly, with the exceptional, the privileged, Martinez’s white subject, being above law and social expectations, and invulnerable to “interference.” But if such freedom is not applied universally, it merely becomes a privilege to shut out the collective and individual Other, an empowerment of a sovereign self to consume without regard to the Other, or even to consume the Other, as in Burroughs’s habit of frequenting teenage sex workers. In this sense, Martinez’s condemnation supports the idea that Burroughs’s ideology (and that of the Beats more broadly) contained a vital seed for the later blossoming of narcossism in Western culture and beyond.

It should be remembered that Martinez is forcefully rejecting the weight of decades of celebratory critical treatment of the Beats’ political and social legacy. Perhaps due to this fact, his needed intervention is at times out of balance. Martinez ultimately does not account for Burroughs’s insistent antipathy towards Western instrumental rationality and its drive to colonize and control, even if this antipathy at times appears hypocritical. In fact, the exaggerated “ugly American” posture taken by Burroughs’s protagonist in *Yage* and elsewhere signals his recognition of his own problematic position. For Jimmy Fazzino, *Yage* “is full of barely concealed political content, taking every opportunity to criticize U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. But he makes that critique all the more trenchant by recognizing and refusing to disavow his own complicity” (156). This statement touches on several of the problems both with Martinez’s critique and with the laudatory treatment he is reacting against. First, Fazzino gives

Burroughs a bit too much credit in assessing the latter's critique of U.S. foreign policy. As Oliver Harris notes, "Burroughs played the ugly American ambiguously, at times blind to its operation, at others holding the identity up for coruscating critique" (xxx). In Colombia, he reacts strongly to seeing Conservative propaganda: "It's your duty to turn in the guerrillas and work and know your place and listen to the priest. What an old con! ... Not many people are buying it" (13). But, as Harris notes, he misses an important U.S. connection:

> Passing through Tolima in January, Burroughs describes an unpleasant, American-loving "nacional law who had fought in Korea." Although the detail is lost in Burroughs's general antipathy towards what he calls "the Palace Guard" of the Conservative Party, the fact of his fighting in Korea is far from incidental. For the neo-fascist Lauréano Gómez, who came to power in 1950, exploited the anti-communist climate set by Washington to justify internal repression while serving America's national interests abroad. (xxvii)

This included being the only Latin American country to send troops to Korea in support of the U.S. war effort, and Harris notes the perpetuation of this relationship since then in the context of wars on "drugs" or "terror" (xxvii).

But there is nothing ambiguous about Burroughs's protagonist's general political sympathies when he states of Colombia, "What we need is a new Bolivar who will really get the job done. This I think is what the Colombian Civil War is basically about—the fundamental split between the South American Potential and the Repressive Spanish life-fearing character armadillos" (38). Harris also cites a letter to Ginsberg in which Burroughs is even more explicit: "it is *impossible* to remain neutral": "wouldn't surprise me if I ended up with the liberal guerrillas" (xxviii). What is more, in later fiction, "Agent Lee" appears as a character who joins

up with rebel forces in a struggle that shares many of the trappings of what Burroughs describes in Colombia (Harris xxviii, Fazzino 159-60). These indications support the vision of a Burroughs who maintains "a singular concern with imperialism and control in all its forms" (Fazzino 161).

However, this concern it self-consciously problematic in Burroughs, and part of the elder Beat's aesthetic and ethical strategy is to signal at every turn that he himself is implicated in what he criticizes. Questions of genre here are unusually important for evaluation of the ethical positions staked out in *Yage.* In his *Yage Letters Redux*, Harris refers to his extensive research to show that *Yage* is not a collection of historical letters between Burroughs and Ginsberg, as it is presented and as it often has been received, but rather it is a novel crafted with such letters as one of several raw materials (xxxi-xxxiv).[52] Indeed, Lindsey Banco's refutation of Musgrove's critique (cited above) could be applied to Martinez as well:

> critics continue to make problematic biographical assumptions about the text. In apparently overlooking the literary persona created in the fictional letters, Musgrove, for instance, assumes that *The Yage Letters* are actual letters sent by William Burroughs which transparently express his real opinions. In giving precedence to the biographical components of Burroughs's writing, Musgrove elides an important satirical dimension of Burroughs's work that complicates the neo-imperialist sentiments the text appears to convey. (48)

[52] It should be noted that even in letters there may be literary devices at work, for instance the creation of characters that the letter writer places between him or herself and the recipient. And conversely, to be fair, in highly biographical fiction a character may sometimes be a thinly veiled version of the author. Both these considerations are potentially applicable to an author like Burroughs.

We will come back to the question of whether Burroughs can completely get off the hook for the chauvinism of "Willy Lee" and other similar slightly varying signatories of these "letters," but it is undoubtedly important to recognize that this is indeed a work of fiction and that we therefore must be alert to a submerged discourse contradicting or complicating what a character says at any given time.[53]

This is what justifies Fazzino's statement that Burroughs's writing harbors a complexity that stems from his "ambivalence toward the relations of power" that allow educated, white males like himself the privilege of freely crossing borders and exploring other lands and cultures. "At times," he continues, Burroughs "(often in the guise of doppelganger William Lee) clearly relished playing the role of 'Ugly American,' but the crucial point is that he sees it precisely as a *role*. Burroughs is performing the ugly American routine, exaggerating it to grotesque proportions to expose its ideological underpinnings" (136). Harris agrees that "Burroughs traveled through the region always aware of the exile's ironic power to still exercise the master race's privileges—his class identity projected here as a dark side of William Lee, the Ugly American" (xxvi). The contradiction between this aspect and Burroughs's anticolonial sympathies "give his writing its unsettling power" (xxviii).

Indeed, the tension that seems to exist between Burroughs the author and the part of himself that he projects onto the page as Lee, a tension that is largely absent in the earnest, visionary ravings of Artaud, speaks to the diverse character of the "kicks" he is chasing. He hopes *yagé* will allow him to see things "from a special angle," and it does, as we will see, but he also wants to nullify the "frightened flesh" when necessary, while continuing to enjoy the

[53] See Bakhtin for a discussion of such "double-voiced" discourse (324-27).

privilege his identity affords him, as critics like Musgrove and Martinez fairly point out. And this latter escape from the flesh lines up to a large degree with Burroughs's concept of "white junk," getting high on superiority and righteousness and a position of power over others. Burroughs chooses not to disavow this but to revel in it even as he criticizes it. To dissimulate would be the more expected but more hypocritical move. By calling attention to it, he is signaling to critics like Martinez, who would inevitably come down the pike to do the important work of demythifying and problematizing figures like Burroughs. Refusing to take the hypocritical posture of the moralist, which would constitute a double hypocrisy for him due to his opposition to moralistic rhetoric, he at least has the peculiar integrity to throw himself in with the object of his critique.

Another limitation of Martinez's critique is that the apparently "hedonistic" pleasure that Burroughs seeks in Latin America is, to some degree, taken for granted by those whose desires follow the norms of the time and place they live in. Harris points out of Burroughs and Ginsberg that they were "internal exiles—aliens in their own land, even in their own bodies" (xii). He says of the former,

> Demonized as an addict and homosexual, Burroughs simply could not have written his first two titles, *Junkie* and *Queer*, inside the disciplinary straightjacket of Cold War America. And so he moved south through the Americas half in flight and half in quest, trying to outrun his addict identity… and the fixations of desire (xii).

As Harris indicates, the motivation for Burroughs's travels was complex; he himself told interviewers that he had gone to Mexico because "things were getting quite difficult with the drug situation in America" (*Collected* 62), which could support Harris's claim, until he

continues, “Getting drugs in Mexico was quite easy” (*Burroughs Live* 62). Nor does this invalidate Harris’s thesis, since Burroughs seemed never to want to appear to be whining indignantly about his social situation. He was also, of course, fleeing drug charges in the United States—in the words of García-Robles, “He had no other recourse than to leave the country via the shortest route possible and flee…. There was no other way” (23)—and the legal repercussions of his reckless homicide of his wife, Joan Vollmer, in Mexico.[54]

But Harris’s judgment resonates in a passage that comes in for criticism by Martinez: “South America does not force people to be deviants. You can be queer or a drug addict and still maintain position. Especially if you are educated and well-mannered. There is deep respect here for education” (Burroughs and Ginsberg 38). Clearly, “Lee” is here leveraging his privilege here, but he is doing so to assert his right to be who he is, something that is denied him in the U.S. Certainly, there is a fundamental difference between using overall privilege to solidify one’s sense of dominance and superiority over others and using partial privilege to make up for a disadvantage stemming from repressive social reactions to another aspect of an intersectional identity. If so, two distinct strains to Burroughs’s travels may be identified, namely the intrepid neo-colonial venture and the defensive exile that allows freedom from an intolerable restraint that exists in the home country. Martinez fails to take this into account when he states that “Burroughs’s greatest attraction to South America was the ability to experience such ‘freedom’ while retaining the bourgeois privileges allotted to him in the West” (65). Similarly, in his discussion of Burroughs’s *yagé* visions, in which, among other things, the latter reports, “complete bisexuality is attained. You are a man or a woman alternately or at will” (Martinez

[54] For a discussion of this latter flight, see Fazzino (134-35).

64), Martinez speaks of "an alternate existence in which the white male can experience difference and its liberating side effects, without having to give up the privilege of whiteness" (64-65). This statement is true in terms of race, but it elides the brutal sexual politics faced by homosexuals at the time and since. Burroughs (and Ginsberg) would not have needed a *yagé* trip to experience the sense of "difference" of being forced into dehumanizing sexual categories, and the sense of liberation offered by an experience of increased gender fluidity should not be the object of scorn.

And now that we have arrived at the *yagé* experience, we can examine a moment of intoxication that was central to Burroughs's subsequent creative output, and that also reverberates in the countercultural history of defamiliarizing psychotropy I am sketching. As much as Burroughs plays the ugly American role with relish, when it comes down to it, his desire to experience telepathy—an intimate encounter with the Other in which communication occurs in the absence of any physical mediation—leads him to submit himself, body and mind, to the fundamental otherness of the *yagé* experience, a commitment that should not be underestimated. And the content of the experience, as related in a letter dated July 10, 1953, speaks to a profound dissolution of the self. The Lee who had habitually held himself superior to the "natives" of several South American countries now sits spellbound as "the blood and substance of many races, Negro, Polynesian, Mountain Mongol, Desert Nomad, Polyglot Near East, Indian—new races as yet unconceived and unborn, combinations not yet realized passes through [his] body" (Burroughs and Ginsberg 50). The compulsive traveler given to "stasis horror" experiences "stasis and death in closed mountain valleys where plants sprout out of your cock and vast crustaceans hatch inside and break the shell of the body" (50). Clearly, this vision, which would in time serve to inform the Composite City/Interzone "utopia," is characteristically

violent and sordid, and the Other never loses its threatening characteristics, but the act of taking *yagé*, as Burroughs/Lee does repeatedly, is the act of inviting this threatening otherness into the self, come what may, and in the process inevitably shaking up the sense of what the self is.

The passage continues, "Migrations, incredible journeys through deserts and jungles and mountains…, across the pacific in an outrigger canoe to Easter Island. The Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market" (50). Musgrove and Martinez justifiably point to the problematic nature of the white Westerner contemplating the earth's ethnicities in a "vast silent market," but analyzing the image in terms of its psychotropic implications for the individual psyche leads us to other important social considerations. If *yagé*'s effects are at all similar to those of psilocybin and LSD, we may surmise that the default mode network of the brain has here suffered a decrease in connectivity, disrupting habitual patterns of introspection. Simultaneously, novel neural connections form between areas that do not typically interact (Carhart-Harris 9, 12), and these phenomena are associated with opening the self to the experience of being Other, of feeling the "blood and substance of many races… passing through your body." The description of the *yagé* experience also became an important part of *Naked Lunch*, where we read the following impressions, purportedly from "Notes from Yage state": "Images fall slow and silent like snow…. Serenity… All defenses fall… everything is free to enter or to go out…. Fear is simply impossible…. A beautiful blue substance flows into me…." (109). And the otherness of the peoples that appear in the vision, as Burroughs has been experiencing in Latin America, is not only ethnic but also cultural, social and individual, and so when they inhabit him, he would gain a sense of an infinity of alternate ways of being in the world. In this sense, what is spread before him in the market is not human bodies but, as he writes, "human potentials," and such a vision of the unlimited possibility of being human would

seem to be a natural opposite of the regimes of control of which Burroughs declares himself a lifelong enemy.

Now, the sense that "you can be anything you want" is very much compatible with the "radical individualism" which for Martinez criticizes the Beats, and we will examine how, in a subsequent dialectical movement, this moment of defamiliarization may feed into (or be coopted into) the development and habituation of a sovereign self-as-consumer. But Martinez's claim that "Burroughs maintains his 'American' perspective throughout," citing Lee's later reversion to the ugly American routine (65), is dubious considering the apparent profundity of the *yagé* experience, which is consistent with reports of a dissolution of self in the phenomenology of such drugs (Masters and Houston 71-98). Martinez considers the *yagé* trip a kind of entertainment, a psychotropic tourism by which the white man may experience otherness as a temporary thrill, "without threatening permanent change to the taker's actual privileged status and class" (64-65). While it is true that the phenomenon of "ayahuasca tourism" supports this critique, and that the taker maintains his material privilege, it should not be assumed that the experience can be forgotten like a movie seen long ago, that the novel neural connections permanently disappear with the end of the drug effects, and that the experience is not incorporated into the self in any way. On the contrary, these experiences seem to have long-lasting psychological effects.[55]

The notion that *yagé* breaks down the self is supported by Harris's appraisal of Ginsberg's use of the drug, which had "shattering effects on his ego," when he followed in Burroughs's footsteps years later (xix). When Ginsberg appeals to Burroughs, as the "old

[55] See, for example Griffiths et al.

Master," for help, Burroughs sends him a cryptic letter with instructions and material for a "cut-up" (70-72). According to Harris, Burroughs intended for Ginsberg to "use his new cut-up method as a way to complete the drug's 'derangement of the senses' (the phrase of Rimbaud's that Burroughs used to describe both *yagé* intoxication *and* the cut-ups' goals of deconstructing the illusion of reality)" (xx). These are technologies, one cultural-pharmacological and one avant-garde aesthetic, of defamiliarizing intoxication. Whereas Martinez equates the cut-up with junk as a way to defensively isolate the self against both "control" and community (55-56), a "colonizing act" that takes over the sense of an existing text,[56] Burroughs saw it as an attack against Western, Aristotelian logic itself, "either/or thinking" (*Burroughs Live* 68), and in this sense the cut-up indeed shares more of an affinity with the pluralized self of the *yagé* experience than with junk's "narrowing of consciousness."[57]

If I have returned repeatedly to Martinez's critique, it is because, while I disagree with many of his more categorical condemnations, I agree with Robert Bennett that "future Beat scholars will have to engage more directly the kinds of theoretical issues that Martinez raises about the complexity and viability of countercultural dissent" (182). A weakness of otherwise valuable recent work like that of Fazzino is that it echoes some of the overly celebratory tradition of Beat criticism. Furthermore, Martinez successfully challenges the simplistic narrative that it was the (white) Beats and the (white) hippies alone who saved the day from repressive fifties culture. Finally, he does an excellent job analyzing the connection between the extreme

[56] In fact, Martinez seems to struggle to characterize the political significance of the cut-up, calling it both "Burroughs's most apolitical technique" and one which is "authoritarian in its politics" (54).

[57] In his introduction to Burroughs's *Latin American Notebook*, Harris points to the same as evidence of "a *yagé* poetics, which affirms creative correspondence across decades between the visionary drug and cut-up methods" (xiii).

individualism promoted by the countercultures and the forces that neutralized any political potential they had, a point that is extremely important in understanding the historical role of these movements.

But I want to step back and consider ways of approaching Burroughs work as a whole. In the review cited above, which also considered Jennie Skerl's collection, *Reconstructing the Beats*, Bennett notes that some of the critics in the latter volume acknowledge "the irrefutable examples of Beat colonialism and racism pointed out by critics like Martinez and Panish only to assert that Beat literature still promotes a countercultural ethos that somehow overrides its other flaws,… tend[ing] simply to assert that Beat culture is genuinely, and relatively unproblematically, countercultural." He then calls for critics to "carefully [clarify] and [resolve] the tension between… competing theories of Beat culture" (181). For his part, Martinez seems determined to interpret every aspect of Burroughs and the other canonical Beats in the light of his thesis. The same could be said for Fazzino; in fact it is interesting to see them analyze the same passages and arrive at totally diametrically opposed interpretations, as in the case of their readings of the *yagé* experience. To a certain extent, of course, this is what scholars and human beings in general have to do, but there is also a time to follow Burroughs's own lead and reject the either/or dichotomy in favor of an apparently contradictory truth. Martinez points out that a "true" counterculture is impossible, since any new formation rises out of the old and shares its DNA (25). Just as we reject the dichotomy of culture and counterculture, however, me might also reject the characterization of a cultural figure *either* as a force for liberation *or* for oppression; more likely there are contradictory forces at work inside any given figure, a tension that cannot, perhaps, be resolved. And this, in turn, may lead to the possibility of a sector of a

culture turning *against itself*, such that we could speak of a counterculture, albeit not as something totally distinct from the culture it places itself in opposition to.

For Martinez, Burroughs's fear of invasion is a central concern, and he figures it as a fear of the racialized other (23-72). Without denying this possibility, which is certainly suggested by disturbing passages like the talking asshole routine (see Martinez 34-35), there is also a very important sense in which the invader is the "Ugly Spirit" that Burroughs connects with his shooting of Joan Vollmer (*Queer* 135). He later identified this spirit as "very much related to the American tycoon, to William Randolph Hearst, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, that whole stratum of American acquisitive evil—monopolistic evil. Ugly evil. The Ugly American" (*Burroughs Live* 813). William Lee, as a kind of half-rate tycoon, less successful but just as acquisitive, was this Ugly Spirit exorcised onto the page. Whether or not Burroughs was in fact terrified of the racial Other, the *yagé* experience constitutes an invitation for that Other to "invade" his body and displace the Ugly Spirit. If *yagé* was indeed "the uncut kick that opens out instead of narrowing down like junk" (*Junky* 152), Burroughs is indeed here following "the countercultural mission of escaping restraint" (Martinez 64), but in this case not simply the social or legal restraints on the hedonistic exercise of individuality, but he is potentially defamiliarizing and shaking off the addictions of thought and feeling that determine rigid cultural and individual identities.

However, his forceful projection of this Ugly American onto the page combined with the apparent epistolary nature of *The Yage Letters* makes the critique somewhat ambiguous. Harris notes the influence of Burroughs's text in introducing ayahuasca to Western culture (xvii), and it should be noted that Lee's scorn for the ritual trappings of the *yagé* experience and its practitioners is to some degree replicated by the next wave of psychotropic tourists who flood into Oaxaca during the next decade, determined to appropriate for themselves the psilocybin

mushrooms that were the “niños santos” of Zapotec ritual practice, as discussed in the following section. If generations of PhDs failed to catch the irony built in to Lee’s behavior, how were hordes of wild hippies to do so? What is more, Burroughs’s overall focus on invasion and individualism, though likely a reaction to the invasion of privacy he suffered as a result of legal and social constructions of drug addiction and homosexuality, as well as his fixation on commerce and markets, helped set up the counterculture in formation for its eventual cooptation by the forces of consumer capitalism, for which the sovereign individual was easily turned into the ideal consumer and thereby the ground was laid for the rise of narcossism. Ultimately, however, even if Martinez is right that the Beats threw out the baby of community with the bathwater of conformity, the bathwater did indeed need to be changed.

From Flower Power to *Les fleurs du mal*: *la Onda literaria*

Before discussing the Mexican countercultural writers tasked with sorting out the complex past, present, and future of the global counterculture, we should take a short detour to 1957. In that year, R. Gordon Wasson published an article in *Life Magazine* called “Seeking the Magic Mushroom” in which he described the religious practices in Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca, led by the *curandera*, María Sabina. This eventually caused a countercultural sensation during the 1960s and 1970s that saw scores of hippies, mostly from the United States, descend on Huautla in search of a psychedelic, indigenous experience. In some cases they did have transformative experiences, opening their identities to the influence of the Other, albeit to varying degrees of depth. According to historian Eric Zolov, “The entire modern notion of bounded wholes and delineated identities was thus directly challenged by the hippies, in a

process that involved techniques of reappropriation and cultural fusion" (109). However, the hippies took the *niños santos* (the psilocybin mushrooms) out of their traditional contexts, often with little regard to the effects of their actions on their host community, recalling Burroughs's William Lee. According to Sabina, "Never, as far as I can remember, were the niños santos eaten with such a lack of respect. It made no difference to the [the hippies] if they chewed on them in the shade of coffee trees, on top of a boulder, or on a mountain trail" (cited in Zolov 109). Ironically, then, even while elements of the Other were symbolically incorporated into the self, its concrete manifestation (i.e. other people) was largely disavowed, its autonomy sacrificed for the fashioning of a new postmodern self.

Wasson himself evades responsibility for his own role, citing Sabina's grave assessment of the effects of the "invasion":

> "Desde el momento en que llegaron los extranjeros… los *niños santos* perdieron su pureza. Perdieron su fuerza. Fueron profanados…. De ahora en adelante ya no servirán. No tiene remedio. Antes de Wasson, yo sentía que los niños santos me elevaban. Ya no lo siento así."
>
> These words make me wince, but I was merely the precursor of the New Day. I arrived in the same decade with the highway, the airplane, the alphabet. The Old Order was in danger of passing with no one to record its passing. The Old Order does not mix with the New. (222)

While it may be true that these forces ultimately would have weakened or destroyed Huautla's mushroom tradition without Wasson's intervention, his teleological vision all too conveniently pronounces this tradition moribund and thus relieves him of any responsibility for

their destruction. The Other in this case is seen as an anachronistic intellectual curiosity to be catalogued with reverence and left to decay.

The Huautla invasion was one of the harbingers of the Mexican manifestation of the global countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Though the influence of the U.S. counterculture on Mexican *jipis* is undeniable, in fact complex circuits of influence developed in which "mestizo youth began to copy Anglo hippies who were copying indigenous Mexicans" (Zolov 111). While the great cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis initially rejected the rebellion of the *jipis,* pointing out that since they did not emerge from the same socio-political context as the U.S. hippies (wealth, materialism, and rapid technological progress) they could not legitimately incorporate the same critical reaction into their vital protest ("México 1967" 7), Zolov argues that *jipismo*, by borrowing from U.S. counterculture and Mexican indigeneity, "allowed youth to invent new ways of *being* Mexican, ways that ran counter to the dominant ideology of state-sponsored nationalism" (111).

This Mexican countercultural rebellion was broadly known as *la Onda*, and a number of talented writers that were associated with it became known as *escritores de la Onda*. Though this label is much contested and it is clear that what might be called *la Onda literaria* was never a movement with manifestos or other major attempts at self-definition and cohesion,[58] this literary tendency certainly gave voice to the attitudes, ideas and language of Mexican countercultural youth. The novelist and *ondero* Parménides García Saldaña defines *la Onda* broadly as "[v]ivir la vida en exceso," associating it universally with youth and with intoxicating substances and

[58] The label was most definitively affixed to this group of authors with Margo Glantz's *Onda y escritura*, but authors like José Agustín have forcefully rejected it (see Lange 183-84). There have been definitions of *la Onda* by *Onda* writers (see Parménides García Saldaña, *En la ruta de la onda* 14-15), but they refer more to the counterculture in general, and less to the literary tendency.

cultural practices that lead to a transcendence of mundane existence and an ecstatic proximity to God, the Devil and death (*En la ruta* 14). In its "dimensión terrenal," *la Onda* is characterized in largely negative terms: "la desaprobación del modo de vida de la sociedad," and "el desprecio a las normas que ésta impone al individuo" (15). As a result of this broad rejection of mainstream society,

> estar en onda es estar al margen. Convertirse en outsider, forajido, disidente, rebelde; en un ser humano fuera de las leyes que rigen el orden de la Sociedad; es oponer la imaginación a la no-imaginación; es parodiar la disipación que se oculta detrás de la solemnidad del mundo square, cuadrado, chato, plano y fresa. Wow! (15)

But the term *Onda literaria* is apropos, because writers like García Saldaña and José Agustín were not only channeling the "desgaste anormal de energía" of the youth counterculture (García Saldaña, *En la ruta* 14), they also were very self-consciously inserting that cultural formation, along with themselves, into traditions of Mexican, Latin American, and world literature. That García Saldaña curiously locates the prehistory of *la Onda* in the upper-class dissipation of the "Roaring Twenties" in the U.S. speaks not only of his universalizing of *la Onda* as an experience of excess, but also of his highly individual set of literary influences, which prominently included F. Scott Fitzgerald.[59] Less controversial is his inclusion of the "beat generation" in his genealogy of *la Onda*, as these writers were very much on the minds of literarily inclined countercultural youth around the world. As enthusiastic as the Mexican *onderos*'s appropriation of U.S. countercultural forms may have initially been, however, by the early 1970s figures like Agustín and García Saldaña were questioning the origins, the present, and the future of the

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[59] See Gunia (220).

(counter)cultural manifestations they had participated in. As a group of writers who, as Elena Poniatowska, put it, "compartieron su vida… con el lumpen" and felt "apego por los jodidos" (174-75), the *Onda* writers could not but be aware of the contradictions and tensions rife in a youth and drug culture emerging from the respective middle classes of distinct national contexts and seeking nothing less than escape from constraint, personal gratification and expression, but also political liberation and social transformation, goals that often seemed at odds and were differently prioritized depending on one's background. While sharing with the beats and Artaud a sense of anguish at being a fish out of water in a society that you reject and that rejects you, they also deal with (and live, in the case of "el Par") the hedonism that is in part the legacy of the Beats' elevation of individualism, simultaneously pointing to the bleak future of this tendency when it is decoupled from socio-political awareness and engagement.

Onda culture became synonymous with rock culture, and the role of music in the *Onda* was complex. Anglo rock represented a model and an archetype for the lifestyles, attitudes and ideologies that characterized the *Onda* tendency, and this naturally caused much alarm among Mexicans of a more nationalist inclination, right and left. In *Refried Elvis*, Eric Zolov expertly traces the historical waves of rock music that reached Mexico from outside, and the autochthonous repercussions from within, showing that at each point the music had its own class associations. Rock music, then, played a varying role in the processes of social distinction as described by Pierre Bourdieu. For the *Onda*, notes Carlos Monsiváis, "[e]l rock ha sido escuela, Universidad. Y ahora están en su tercer o cuarto año de rock ácido y hablan Jimi Hendrix o Rolling Stones (*Días* 102)." For this group of largely middle-class malcontents, "Rock is the mode of educating or enculturating a member into the social group, outlining the expectations and common base of knowledge necessary to be part of the *Onda* culture" (Robbins 95). Some

onderos in turn used this countercultural capital to destabilize the systems that attributed prestige to the higher classes: García Saldaña rages in his classic *Onda* novel, *Pasto verde*, that "[l]a gente fresa cuando platica lo quiere hacer de mucho estilo pero en nada les quita que sea pura pinche gente analfabeta," immediately segueing into a Rolling Stones song (20). Alongside this assault on categories of cultural prestige, "[w]riters who listened to the Dug Dugs and the Rolling Stones sought to break down the barriers between the concept of high (canonical) literature and mass culture and to incorporate elements of the culture that they saw and experienced into their art" (Robbins 93). Thus, while there were certainly troubling aspects to the reality of Mexican youth neglecting the products of their own culture in favor of those of their aggressively dominant neighbor and England, the resulting identifications could subsequently be used to resist class domination domestically.

While we will keep these themes in mind, the focus on music in this chapter will also, perhaps predictably, focus on its psychotropic properties.[60] Among the many reasons *la Onda* is significant is that it marks a moment of reversal in the South/North flow of intoxicants: instead of U.S. youth getting high on marijuana or heroin from Mexico, Mexican youth was tripping on Jimi Hendrix and company. This was of great symbolic importance for writers like el Par, who forged ideological linkages between the African American pioneers of blues, jazz and rock—who he considered the "jodidos" of a corrupt mainstream U.S. society—the Mexican *lumpen*, and the *chavos de la Onda*. In his imaginative account of the origins of these musical styles in

[60] A Bourdieusian, social aesthetics approach to music might seem completely incompatible with the biological implications of a consideration of music as psychotropy, but I believe neither Bourdieu's work nor the neurochemical work on aesthetic responses refute each other, and thus must be understood to reflect different aspects of aesthetic judgments and responses. Something I hope to make clear throughout this investigation is that, whether we are talking about aesthetic experience or more "traditional" forms of psychotropy, social, economic, and biological considerations are by no means mutually exclusive and should all consistently be borne in mind to the extent possible.

his unique collection of essays, *En la ruta de la onda*, Garcia Saldaña envisions musical innovation emerging from the brothels of New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit and New York:

> En la nación más próspera de la tierra, los negros seguían vilipendiados, destruidos, mantenidos en la pobreza, la sordidez, la miseria espiritual. En tales condiciones, el negro sólo podía tolerar la vida viviendo el presente en paroxismo. *Jazz, sex* y *drugs* para alcanzar el éxtasis individual y llegar a la cima del reto a la muerte (¿a la vida?). En el jazz, en el blues: fascinación por los terrenos prohibidos. (126)

Clearly, García Saldaña is here creating a model for the *ondero* lifestyle that adds to his individual countercultural genealogy. Though one would be wise to take his sweeping generalizations with a grain of salt, García Saldaña did have some experience with African American culture and music. In Poniatowska's telling, "Cuando… enloquecido de música va a los dieciocho años a Nueva Orleans a estudiar a la Universidad de Bâton Rouge, escoge los barrios bajos y los negros, no por su condición de negros sino de hacedores del 'blues'" (178).

Going beyond their perceived kinship to *la onda*, el Par traces a broader comparison between African Americans and Mexicans in general: as opposed to the privilege of whiteness, U.S. black people are "hijos de puta" and Mexicans, of course, "hijos de la chingada" (126). Being at the bottom of social structures was what allowed these fateful musical styles to emerge as a psychotropic means of coping with a difficult existence, and to spread to those who could somewhat relate, such as Mexicans and poor whites (19). The children of the U.S. middle class, in turn, turned to the mind-altering properties of rock and roll as an alternative to a stultifying life of conformity and alienation: "ante la nada y/o el relajo, la chaviza escogió el relajo" (139).

García Saldaña maintains that the intoxication of music synergized with that of sexuality in the deployment or rock and roll as a weapon of resistance against the established order, delineating distinct modalities by which this was done, as well as ways in which this energy was consistently the object of attempts at cooptation. For him, North American mainstream adult culture is a predatory "Humbert Humbert," stalking nymphets; that is, appropriating the energies of youthful sexuality to perpetuate the socio-economic system (156). The "pure" white woman had been wrapped into the ultimate consumer and the ultimate commodity in one. Domestic products were pushed as part of her identity, and man was to mount the treadmill of work to enable her consumption so as to in turn possess her. The young girl's virginity was protected at all costs until a sensible marriage could be arranged for the sake of social and material reproduction (139-41). The sexual energies unleashed by rock and roll posed a threat to this arrangement in a number of ways. García Saldaña identifies the early Beatles with a *rebelión blanca*, which involved a gentle and idyllic rapprochement, a "búsqueda de comunión" between the *chava* and the *chavo*, long obliged to dance at arm's length (154). Through the direct, honest and respectful expression of desire, sexuality is delinked from middle class morality and materialism:

> Hacer sencillo el sexo se vuelve atentado: se rompe la seguridad que se obtiene a través de seguir paso a paso las normas de la clase media: coche, hogar, matrimonio, etc…. Con los Beatles en el escenario y las chavas en el butaquerío una onda está en el aire: el sexo no es una cosa, sino una energía interior que ha sido reprimida, desviada, ensuciada por los Forjadores del Sueño Americano…. [L]a corporación… ha querido destruir a los hijos, *volverlos idiotas* para seguir protegiendo la transa; los ha proscrito de la vida para entregarlos a la Sensualidad Barata…. (155).

Parménides García Saldaña thus calls out an economic system that channels the psychotropy of sexuality into its structure and signals a mechanism by which it has been resisted: "La chaviza gabacha quería dejar de ser instrumento. Entre los gritos y los desmayos [of youthful fans at rock concerts] luchaba contra la manipulación" (156).

But this type of rebellion, as admirable as it was, seems to have been too wholesome for el Par. What really gets him fired up is "el lado negro" of rock and roll, associated with its African-American origins in the blues, and later with the Rolling Stones (157). This music was directed to a male audience and constituted an assault on "La Mujer," the construct that straight society used to control the youth of both sexes (138). This was also an "atentado contra la clase media" that aggressively sought the "satisfaction" (to quote the Stones) of desire through the physical intimacy of sex, in "un pacto de soledades" (162). This more radical flavor of rock rebellion constituted nothing less than "subversión, rebeldía, desobediencia, sedición, terrorismo" (157), coming into consonance with García Saldaña's conceptualization of his own work: he calls *Pasto verde* "una bomba peligrosa, terrorista" (cited in Gunia 217).

This version of events, of course, is not without its problems. García Saldaña's use of the word "nigger" in *En la ruta de la onda* is jarring and, as mentioned before, his generalizations about U.S. black culture are too broad, though it becomes clear that he uses the word not to denigrate but due to his preference for slang terms in both English and Spanish. One wonders if he picked it up from black friends in Louisiana, but in any case, he also uses the word "honky" for white people, and his account of learning from Bobby Seale to refer to the U.S. as "Amerikkka" leaves no question where his general sympathies lie (153). However, to equate blackness and sexual aggression, as he seems to do, is certainly a major problem, and the only

way out of it—pointing out that he himself highly valorizes this approach—leads to another limitation of the rebellion he describes.

This comes out in his discussion of "Satisfaction," by the Rolling Stones, a song that "epitomiza la actitud rebelde del joven en contra de la sociedad de consumo que ha fetichizado—entre otras cosas—a la mujer" (163). After referring to the song's lyrics, he continues, "En 'Satisfacción' estriba el meollo del patín, the kick, man. La conducta de los seres humanos está regida por ese Monstruo que se llama Mass Media Inc." (163). He astutely includes the very purveyors of rock and roll in his definition of this monster, but in defining the freedom to be gained by shaking off its control, he mentions the right to consume mind-altering substances and then embarks on an amorous harangue similar to many passages of *Pasto verde*:

> ¡Ven torta! ¡Ai boi torta, sobre de ti! ¡Quiero coger! ¿Por qué la chava no puede coger conmigo? Digo, la onda sería: Señora, buenas tardes, vengo por su hija porque vamos a coger, se la traigo mañana, sólo vamos a coger. Sí, voy a tratar de que ahora no te pierdas en las pendejadas, voy a tratar de que no seas idiota, de que no estés jodida, voy a tratar de hacer el amor bien, voy a tratar de estar siempre contigo, vooy a traataaar. Simón que sí, hacer amor es hacer la revolución. Nena, ¿vamos a coger? (164)

Within the framework of his favored "lado negro" of rock rebellion, in taking the side of the *chavo* against the patriarchy that commodifies its daughters, he takes part in a fight between old men and young men that situates young women as the prize. The passage shows a patronizing intention to "liberate" the *nena* from idiocy, from "pendejadas," almost against her will (or at least her "better judgment"), and it comes off as a justification for the physical urge to *coger*, like the thin claim that "hacer el amor es hacer la revolución."

It becomes clear, then, that el Par was a partisan of unbridled desire and pleasure, even to a fault, and virulently opposed to powers that would harness them for the purposes of commerce or social control. He was acutely aware of the commodity value of rock and roll, pointing to the Beach Boys and their ilk as an effort to convert the psychotropic capital of sexuality and rock into economic capital, both through the sale of records and through promoting the sublimation of sexual desire into material consumption: The Beach Boys can be recognized by their "playeras, pantalones de lino blanco, tablas de surfin', coches deportivos, etc." (149), and North American society

> aplaudía la "onda" de sus jóvenes, que corrían a altas velocidades en los Mustangs, los GTO's, los Little Cobra's [sic], por las supercarreteras más supergrubis del mundo. En las canciones de los Beach Boys—antes de que fueran a la India en busca de la lux, claro—se reflejaban esos jóvenes que gracias a la bonanza familiar habían alcanzado la vida universitaria.
>
> The Beach Boys eran esos Niños Bien—The Juniors—que en sus ratos de ocio bebían cerveza en compañía de Wendy, Barbara, Jennifer, para luego rendir homenaje al automóvil—regalo de papá—con un buen escarceo erótico…. (149)

This attempt to institutionalize rock and roll by bringing it in line with patterns of conspicuous consumption, reestablishing the pairing of sexuality and commerce, would not be the end of the story but would indeed be a harbinger of things to come.

Even García Saldaña's beloved Rolling Stones would falls from grace in the end. *En la ruta de la onda* begins with a quote from Marx on the superficiality of bourgeois revolutions and then affirms that the "Revolución Hippie… fue una revolución burguesa más" (7). El Par, like

many, was profoundly disenchanted by the events of the Altamont Speedway Free Festival in 1969, where violence ran rampant and four people died, one being stabbed to death at the hands of a member of the Hell's Angels gang, who were inadvisably hired for security. It was this stabbing that deeply affected García Saldaña: "los Hell's Angels—contratados por los Stones para cuidar el Orden—asesinaron a un negro" (8). He seems to have attached a heavy symbolism to the identity of the victim, coming away with the feeling that rock and roll had become so corrupted that it would devour its own origins in black America. He sees Mick Jagger and the organizers of the concert as responsible for the killing, through the poor decision to hire the Hell's Angels, in their desire to put on a spectacle (11).

Altamont is widely seen (in hindsight) as a kind of death knell of the counterculture, although the year 1973 is often considered the proper end of the era. García Saldaña saw the end coming. He lampoons the overblown hippie rhetoric that exaggerated the transformative potential of the movement, as if by merely tripping and listening to *Sergeant Pepper's* they could radically change the world: "¡Los Beatles, maestros de una generación vidente! ¡La Tierra está a punto de resolver sus conflictos, en espera del advenimiento de un mundo floral!" (165). Quoting Baudelaire, he turns flower power into *Les fleurs du mal* (165-66). García Saldaña presents the synergy of psychedelics and music decoupled from its rebellious potential:

> Paz y Amor, hermanos. Deja que El Sistema siga jugando a la guerra, tú estás lleno de amor. Deja que los idiotas vayan a morir a Vietnam, deja que los negros provoquen su muerte por violentos, deja que los generales de Brasil se sigan enriqueciendo a costa de la miseria de millones de campesinos; Paz y Amor, hermanos. ¿Otra vez Dejar Hacer, Dejar Pasar? Otra vez sigue tu onda. (160)

This passage is a remarkable testament to el Par's foresight: the counterculture was indeed winding down, and the geo-political scene on the cusp of great changes, and García Saldaña did not need to wait to see the Chile coup in 1973, when Brazil had already paved the way, nor to see the long-term results of the cooptation of countercultural individualism by consumer capitalism; marrying free market dictums to the "live and let live" spirit of the counterculture, he seems to gesture toward the eventual triumph of neoliberal capitalism.[61] Rock and drugs are coopted into "el Modo de Vida Norteamericano," and actually turned against the social goals of the counterculture: "Para el Tiburón [a personification of the "Establishment"] el problema se resolvió cuando el adolescente y el joven salieron del Establishment. El estanquillo de Tiburón no corría peligro de ser destruido por la violencia" (33-34). Concluding *En la ruta de la onda* with a shrug, the die-hard *ondero* writes, "Los Chavos siguen en el camino…. Aún no encuentran la ruta que los llevará a la Nación de la Coincidencia…. Aún siguen muchos viviendo en el Mundo Fresa. Porque entre la onda y lo fresa, es mejor vivir la onda entre los fresas" (168). That is, with the fading of communitarian impulses, *Onda* hedonism and individualism will find accommodation in the consumerist culture of the middle class, as el Par seems to predict "cars that violate convention and shoes that let us be us" (Frank 5).

If Parménides García Saldaña was a disciple of the Beats, he was by no means an uncritical one. In *Pasto verde* there appears a curious list of "los grandes iniciados," laid out typographically with a few select names centered at the top, with the lower lines being more

[61] Nor did he have to wait to see the controversial Avándaro festival that provoked a backlash against the counterculture so fierce and widespread that it effectively suppressed it (see Zolov 201-233). It should also be mentioned that Mexican youth and left culture had also early on suffered shock and disillusionment following the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre of hundreds of students.

heavily populated, forming a kind of pyramid of influence (57-58).[62] Figures from Plato to Marx to Chuck Berry have their place of honor, "The Beat Generation" occupies the second to last line, alone, and below that and to the right, seeming to spill out of it, "Ginsberg" wraps up the list. For Inke Gunia,

> Las relaciones intertextuales que mantiene la novela de García Saldaña con algunos textos de la literatura de los *beat poets* destacan muy claramente…. [E]l problema social especial de los *beats*… esto es, la determinación individual de su posición dentro de una sociedad cuyas inhumanas condiciones de vida rechazan, en *Pasto verde* se halla traducido al contexto mexicano. (232-33)

However, in *En la ruta de la onda*, García Saldaña savages Jack Kerouac for his later rightward turn and generalizes his racist tendencies to the North American counterculture: "Jack Kerouac, que amó el jazz, Leadbelly y a Charlie Parker, acabó declarando que por negros los Blacks tienden al comunismo; acabó leyendo *National Review*…. Como la mayoría de los onderos Jack Kerouac siempre pensó que los negros eran inferiores a los blancos…." (18). He also downplays the role of what he calls "la intelligentzia beatnik," attributing the spirit of the tendency to "El Rebelde Sin Causa," gangsters and other ne'er-do-wells who had mellowed out with "el jazz, el sexo, y la mota" (16-17). The relationship García Saldaña describes between countercultural whites and African-Americans is essentially a colonial one. Whites appreciate black styles of music, breaking "la barrera racial," and "[a]maron a los negros," but only "como payasos, como diversión. Cuando los negros dejaron de ser diversión, show, se convirtieron de vuelta en animales" (18), and finally the whites appropriate music that "provenía—en un 90%—de los

[62] Inke Gunia lists and comments on this roster of influential figures (220-21).

negros" (19). In this way, he shows himself keenly aware of many of the problems we have discussed regarding Artaud and Burroughs, and similarly indicts much of the contemporary counterculture as escapist or as serving the interests of the very system it was supposed to challenge. The school of politically engaged youth culture associated with folk music and represented by Bob Dylan is virtually the only social player that escapes García Saldaña's critique (8).

His own vital and discursive position is that of a "locura" that would resist every attempt at institutionalization, commodification and control, giving free rein to the Id to the greatest extent possible. His rebellion being essentially an attack on the Western rationalism that undergirds the categories and norms of social control, García Saldaña is in some ways an Artaud *alivianado*. He praises young North American rock and rollers for using "el nihilismo como arma en contra de la opresión. Otra vez los hijos que *tenían todo*, mandando todo a la chingada…. Otra vez *la locura* naciendo entre los jóvenes para no idiotizarse en el mundo "cuerdo" de sus padres. Esa *locura* se refugia en el rocanrol" (original emphasis, 156). The madness of rock euphoria was an antidote to the "sanity" of sober conformity that was expected of young people.

The narrator of *Pasto verde* is named Epicuro and he makes clear his association with a whole range of ancient Greek philosophers of hedonism (103). Since "mientras existimos la muerte no existe, y cuando la muerte existe ya no existimos nosotros" (*Pasto* 104), life must be lived "en el paroxismo" (*Ruta* 126), and this practice is transcribed in the frenzied narration of *Pasto verde*, which could be argued to be very directly composed of sex drugs and rock and roll, written under the influence, shot through with lyrics, not exactly narrating but more like transcribing real or imagined sexual encounters

> estoy contigo Claudia, estoy haciendo el amor contigo, besando tus mejillas, tus labios, acariciando tu cara, apretándote fuerte, abrazándote fuerte. She makes me feel so good alright alright alright… tus ojos abiertos, tu corazón palpitando intensa, intensamente, tus manos recorriendo mi cara ... I feel alright come on baby I feel alright ... Sí, me siento bien, así, haciendo el amor contigo Claudia, no falta nada, mi vida no está vacía, te estoy amando bien Claudia, estoy tratando de amarte bien Claudia, estamos haciendo el amor suave, suavemente, mi interior está lleno de blandura Claudia, siento la suavidad de tu cuerpo, el relajamiento de tu cuerpo, veo la ternura en tus ojos… Estoy contento Claudia, eufórico de amarte, de quererte así, así Claudia, me estas abrazando fuerte Claudia, nos estamos amando, amando, amando…. Amoración excitación comunión carnación interacción comunicación amoración…. (157)

Permeated by the rhythm and repetition shared by sex and rock and roll, the text is intoxicating to the extent that the reader identifies with the protagonist.[63] In other moments, like an ADHD-stricken Rabelais he embarks on absurd and extended list-poems that effect a disorienting emptying of meaning after the manner of Huidobro's *Altazor* (47-53). States of ecstasy or of agitation seemed to be the norm for both García Saldaña and his alter ego. Their actions emerge from "la desesperación, el delirio, la destrucción de la droga" (Poniatowska 191). It is easy to see how such states would be completely incompatible with the values of the previous generations, the hard work, patience, sacrifice that were held up as a path leading to the reward of middle class comfort. If, at Beatles concerts, U.S. youth "[e]ntre los gritos y los desmayos luchaba contra la manipulación" (*Ruta* 156), in Mexico el Par did it every day.

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[63] Gunia posits García Saldaña as a rock writer in comparison with considerations of Kerouac as a Jazz writer (238). López Mora notes the orgasmic qualities of Garciá Saldaña's prose, through a reading of another passage.

Poniatowska is right to note that García Saldaña's "locura" was self-destructive: that "se usó a sí mismo como combustible y se achicharó. Su obra es una pira" (191). But this seems to have been only part of a larger tendency for a certain liberatory destruction that is, in a strange way, also life-affirming, and in this we see how his destructiveness differs from that of Artaud, embodying more fully Benjamin's "destructive character," who

> knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears away the traces of our own old age; it cheers, because every clearing of the path signifies to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication, of his own condition…. No vision guides the destructive character. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what has been destroyed. (cited in Bolz and Reijen 65)

In his ecstatic assaults against authority and conformity, García Saldaña's *locura* functions not only as a provocative, hedonistic counterexample, but also as a powerful negative force that unmasks and destroys *cordura* as an oppressive mirage. It should be remembered that while the protagonist of *Pasto verde* bears the name of the great hedonist, Epicurus, the author's own name is also that of one of the earliest and most profound theorists of the difference between appearance and reality, and it is in this light that his great appreciation for Quevedo may be understood. Though the author of the *Sueños* was in many ways deeply conservative in the context of his time, the nearly universal scorn with which he ravages false appearances, pretense and hypocrisy—often with Lucianesque irreverence and oneiric imagery—would have been delicious to the young *ondero* who had his own means of seeing and describing *el mundo al revés*. García Saldaña asserts the intoxicated body as protagonist of a quest for the kind of direct

experience that constitutes a destructive *locura* in a world papered over by false appearances and oppressive narratives.

However, he himself is unable to completely escape the damaging undercurrents he had inherited from his countercultural forebears. In his focus on "satisfaction" of bodily desire, Epicuro consistently objectifies the "nenas" he pursues, interpreting their resistance as a backward attachment to conservative middle-class values. He berates them as *estúpidas*, but when he comes across a young woman who wants to talk to him about books he gets impatient and propositions her (81). One could easily read an ironic distance between author and character, but, as in the case of Burroughs, nothing very obvious separates Parménides from this hypocritical stance by a highly biographical Epicuro. What is more, like many of these rebels, he seems to underestimate the power of consumer capitalism to coopt extreme individualism and hedonistic nihilism. While rigid social arrangements and ideologies were vulnerable to the chaotic negativity of García Saldaña's adrift, Id-driven revolt, this revolt itself was open to a power that was capable of opportunistically adapting and adopting new ideologies and appeals to the self in order to strengthen itself economically. But before sketching out briefly how this happened, we will look at the work of another *Onda* great who cast a keen eye onto the role of intoxication in the counterculture and its demise.

Like *Pasto verde*, José Agustín's 1973 novel, *Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna)*, captures thematically, verbally, and graphically the intoxication of youth culture. The novel follows naïve and uptight Rafael, who travels to Acapulco to broaden his horizons under the tutelage of groovy Virgilio, and there they meet up with two mature Canadian women—domineering Francine and brooding Gladys—and a kindly and wise young Belgian man, Paulhan. After a meandering plot that consists largely of requisitioning and consuming diverse

intoxicants and of conversations full of clever insults and wordplay, near the end of the book the five friends—after fleeing the police in a drug-fueled high-speed chase—abandon their car, each drop a dose of synthetic psilocybin, and proceed on foot to a secluded lagoon where the drug takes dramatic effect as night falls.

On the textual level, whereas García Saldaña's novel primarily uses the absence of punctuation, run-on words, and bizarre neologisms to disorient the reader, Agustín carries this process further, achieving a notable level of formal experimentation that belies Glantz's estimation of *Onda* writers as doing little more than expressing the concerns and of youth culture through its own language (13).[64] The focus on the visual effects of typographical innovation is pronounced enough to lead one critic to consider the novel to function in a similar way to a poster one might see walking down the street (Williams). The interplay of text, areas of solid blackness and areas of blank space reproduce the drug-fueled visual experiences of the characters (Agustín 268-69).[65] In fact, the intoxicating effect of the text largely relies on precisely the strategy of blurring "the traditionally clear line that delineates narrator, character, and reader" (Williams 76), thus exposing the reader to the altered states of the characters. In an excellent analysis of the descriptions and recreations of the drug experiences of the characters, Susan Schaffer carefully traces the mechanisms by which Agustín brings the reader into the trip. She notes that "the author employs numerous innovative literary techniques to throw the reader off balance… [u]sing lyrics from a Beatles song as a model" (137-138). The song is

[64] To be fair, Glantz's *Onda y escritura* was published in 1971, two years before the release of *Se está hacienda tarde*. Though the latter bears the distinctive imprint of influences like Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres,* he puts similar techniques to distinct purposes, with an especial focus on intoxication. Charlotte Lange discusses Agustín's innovations and his debt to Cabrera Infante in her *Modos de parodia* (179-219).

[65] Williams also comments on this passage (72-73).

"Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey," and the lyrics used "Your outside is in / Your inside is out / The higher you fly / The deeper you go," pointing to the radical alterations of perception being experienced by the characters and threatening to infect the reader.[66] These moments come with increasing frequency and intensity after the characters ingest psilocybin at the *laguna* near the end of the novel. Long dashes and large gaps in the text represent alterations in the characters' experience of time (Schaffer 138), and these affect the reader who, immersed in the novel's psychedelic chronotope, experiences a slowdown or stoppage in the flow of linguistic input that reproduces these temporal anomalies.[67]

Another important aspect of the textual intoxication at play in *Se está hacienda tarde* is a fundamental destabilization of the boundaries of subjectivity, as suggested in the lyrical citation above, lines of which, it is worth noting, appear at intervals set apart from the main text like signposts.[68] Conventional signals of dialog are often absent, and the indirect discourse is very free indeed, giddily gliding from one perspective to another. For Schaffer, "[w]e experience the character' loss of ego through the way in which the narrative point of view changes unannounced. No markers signal the shift between narrators, so that often, within a given piece of text, the monologues of several characters mesh together into one garbled voice" (139).

It is in relation to this question of the boundary between the self and the Other, in the context of intoxication and cultural outsiders, that I want to look deeper into the distinct significance of the characters, their experiences and their relationships. Rafael, the naïve,

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[66] Music also has a direct psychotropic effect on characters in Agustín's novel, as when Rafael is consoled by Joe Cocker's cover of Bob Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" (96); this passage is analyzed by Hernández (218-19).

[67]Alterations of the perception of time is a common phenomenological effect of psilocybin intoxication. See, for example Schartner et al. (5, 8).

[68] See Williams for more on the use of such "signposts" in *Se está haciendo tarde* (72).

inexperienced tarot reader, is the ostensible protagonist of the novel. Sensitive and self-conscious, he enters, with Virgilio as his Dantesque guide, into a numinous yet sensual realm of pleasure and tension, euphoria and doubt. César Othón Hernández has analyzed in depth the novel's parallels with the "monomyth" or "hero's journey" as described by Joseph Campbell. In some ways he is an anguished searcher, like Artaud, but on a reduced scale: his level of pretense and grandiosity is more garden-variety; instead of a radical rejection of Western culture, he simply has doubts and uncertainty about who he is. Here we may note a parallel with the life of the author, for whom imprisonment in the notorious Palacio de Lecumberri constituted a set of "very decisive experiences in my life that infused me with the impression that I had no idea of who I was, that all the ideas I had about myself were false" (quoted in Délano 65). What extended, imposed solitude may have done for Agustín seems to be fast-tracked for Rafael during the course of an evening at the *laguna*. The character's attachment to being perceived a certain way by others, to being taken seriously as a tarot-reader and so on, begins to dissolve painfully through the action of the psilocybin. This process climaxes in a memorable scatological scene that condenses the psychedelic experience of death and rebirth:

> Sin darse cuenta caminó hasta unos matorrales, bajo una pequeña pared de arena. Allí advirtió que su estómago se agitaba. Aflojó el lazo de su traje de baño y lo dejó caer sobre sus pies (grotescos). Y se agachó, azorado…. El vientre de Rafael retumbó. Las piernas bien abiertas, el ano distendido, expulsando, mediante contracciones del vientre, un líquido verdeviscoso, donde varias personas pequeñísimas ¡y todas con su cara!, se estaban ahogando y braceando desesperadamente, y a Rafael le daba mucha risa, pues oía con claridad que gritaban y maldecían y eres un hijo de puta ¡sucio! ¡sucio! ... Buscó a su alrededor y después llevó su mano a la bolsa de la camisa. Tomó los billetes, todo el

> dinero que había llevado, y con ellos se limpió cuidadosamente en ano y las nalgas y los muslos, desechando los billetes sucios tras los matorrales. (253)

Here we see Rafael expelling aspects of his personality that held him in a rigid pose of spiritual "purity" that he thought necessary to his identity. Liberated, he now only laughs when they call him "sucio." Interestingly, this scene seems to pit psychedelic experience against the overblown pretentions (many of which were related to psychedelics themselves) that were threatening to negate the contestatory potential of the counterculture, as criticized by both García Saldaña and Agustín.[69]

Rafael thus seems to work through the difficult psilocybin experience, processing the blows to his ego in order to reevaluate his sense of self, but crucially, he does not do this alone. His "guide," Virgilio, and especially Paulhan, the young Belgian friend of Francine and Gladys, support him throughout the experience. For Hernandez, the effeminate Paulhan plays the dual role of priest and goddess in Rafael's initiatory journey (215). Paulhan's response when Rafael, firmly in the grip of the psilocybin trip, accuses him of being a devil who is creating a world of false appearances in order to confuse him, serves well to illustrate their relationship: calmly and with a smile he tells him, "Es mejor no hablar, Rafael. Nada más se vuelve más grotesca la confusión. Cuando el viaje está muy fuerte las palabras tienen miles de significados" (235). The sense of persecution Rafael experiences, exacerbated by the excessive salience promoted by the psilocybin, is not unlike that felt by Artaud or Burroughs, and the *cofradía* formed by Virgilio,

[69] In Agustín's *Luz externa*, one of the characters exclaims, "the psychedelic thing was to get to know yourself, not to turn into a hypocritical fanatic" (cited in Schaffer 135).

Paulhan and Rafael, characterized as it is by sexual tension, mutual support and humor, recalls the relationships between beat writers like Burroughs and Ginsberg.

The link with Artaud seems more distant or more submerged, but the use of the name Paulhan is notable. Aside from a French town and a World War I aviator, the name is most associated with Jean Paulhan, former editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, and Artaud's friend and confidant; it is virtually unknown as a first name. In a strange way, Agustín's novel anachronistically restores to Artaud a firm and steady intimacy that could have calmed his rage and helped him to integrate the visions of mescaline and madness, something that might have even kept him from internment and electroshock. At the time, Jean Paulhan was too far away and too far removed from what Artaud was experiencing, but in 1955, seven years after Artaud's death, Paulhan would take mescaline with Henri Michaux and Swiss poet Edith Boissonnas. His brief "Rapport sur une expérience" shows that, like Artaud, he had experiences that felt profound at the time, but that he ultimately judged to be disappointing. Artaud had precipitously and impatiently plunged into an intense experience without any close support network (he had not taken the time to integrate himself into the Tarahumara community—learn their language, for example). Agustín's Paulhan supplies that support for Rafael, forming along with Virgilio "una comunidad espiritual a partir de la fusión de los cuerpos" allowed by the physical closeness of the friends (Hernández 215). The body, so important for Artaud but always alone in its suffering, here enjoys company in the form of a Paulhan who is now a psychedelic initiate, restored to spatial, temporal, and experiential proximity to his friend in need. But following the analogy, that friend is himself transformed: the intransigent, delirious Frenchman having become a self-doubting, ultimately humble Mexican *ondero*. This humility is what allows Rafael to (seemingly) succeed where Artaud had failed: with the support of his friends, Rafael sees the limitations of

his ego and his pretentions and will presumably integrate this knowledge into his daily life. Artaud, on the other hand, mentally ill and isolated, goes off the deep end and ends up detained and institutionalized in Ireland after returning to Europe.

The comparison between a great literary figure and a fictional *jipi* can, of course, only take us so far—nor must we enter into the question of whether we would go back in time and help Artaud if it meant depriving ourselves of his brilliant, anguish-driven work. There is a more immediate comparison in *Se está hacienda tarde* that demands attention: the divergent psychedelic journeys of Rafael and Francine. The latter's trip gives us a glimpse of the psychological processes behind the cultural shifts that would mark the global decline of the countercultures. At the lagoon, as each character begins to feel the intensity of the psilocybin in various ways, their experiences tending to teeter on the sublime border between beauty and terror, Francine suffers a progressive dethronement of the self that eventually culminates in an excruciating "ego death" experience (258, 269-71).[70] Throughout the novel she has acted out of an evident sense of superiority, denigrating and manipulating her long-time friend, Gladys, berating and ordering around the young Paulhan, and mocking and sexually toying with the two young Mexicans.

In addition to the psychedelic trappings and the detailed descriptions of drug experiences, the economic aspect of the relationship between Mexicans and foreigners is on display everywhere in the novel (billboards along the highways in English invite Northerners to come and partake of Acapulco's sun, sex and favorable exchange rate) (134-36), and this dynamic feeds into Francine's sense of superiority. For example, she insists that the group of friends eat at

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[70] On ego death see Grof, *The Adventure of Self-Discovery* 30-34.

restaurants where Rafael and Virgilio, who are broke, must go hungry while pretending to be full (144). Ultimately, the young Mexicans serve her as providers of drugs and as sexual playthings, while she at every moment occupies a position of power in the relationship: "¡Vean todos! ¡El acapulqueño perfecto! ¡Pura verga y nada de cerebro!, proclamó Francine, señalando a Virgilio, … nada más para eso sirven los beach boys, para que se les pare. They're good for nothing, just for screwing" (57).

However, the perceptual experiences brought on by the psilocybin—a psychedelic drug synthesized from the same mushrooms used traditionally by indigenous Mexicans in Huautla de Jiménez—will turn an intolerable mirror to her tightly constructed self. "…el galope de ruidos, en crescendo, del ambiente la iba a enloquecer. Ya no soportaba a los *grillos*, a las olas, al viento en las palmeras y en los plátanos, porque producían esos sonidos tan dolorosos, tan distorsionados y agudos, tan agresivos" (258). Notably, the adjectives used to describe these sounds aptly describe Francine's typical mode of interaction with other people: her discourse is characterized by harsh, strident criticism. Indeed, Francine ascribes intentionality to this effect of the drug: "para *perderla*, para enloquecerla, para hacer que ella, ¡Francine!, perdiera la on-da, no supiese qué sucedía, ¡y eso no podía ser! Ella era *superior* a los demás" (258, italics original). In the end, she is indeed lost, broken and humiliated. "Por último, del caos de su mente emergió la idea de que todo eso ocurría porque ya no comprendía nada; no sabía quién era, dónde se hallaba,… cayó en el suelo y se revolcó, tragó tierra húmeda y yerbas frescas" (270).

Hernández notes that Rafael and Francine are both faced with a "disolución del yo" incited by the psilocybin (217), citing a passage in which the latter fights off a sensation of losing control to the incursions of an invasive Other (Agustín, *Se está…* 106). The mechanisms Francine uses regain control of the situation are telling: she turns to the indiscriminate

consumption of more substances as a "competencia por estatus" in which "[q]uien soporta de mejor manera el abuso de sustancias ocupa la cima. La más mínima muestra de ebriedad, de contemplación o complicidad es símbolo de la flaqueza" (218). She also places herself in competition with Gladys for Rafael's attention, ruthlessly belittling her friend for her own aggrandizement (Agustín, *Se está…* 106). Here we can see the development of a clearly narcossist relationship to the self: when the ego is under threat, psychotropic mechanisms are enlisted in its defense, here consisting of actual chemical intoxicants but more importantly the kick of superiority—"white junk," as Burroughs might call it—of setting yourself up as dominant vis a vis others, here in terms of level of consumption, status, success, desirability. This tendency was already consolidating with the spread of consumer capitalism, and it becomes evident that the kind of destabilization of the self figured by acute psychedelic intoxication was capable of forming an antithesis to this process, an assault on the ego's ultimately fragile house of cards. In this sense, the "deep end" of the counterculture and the emerging global economy were radically incompatible. Something had to give and Francine's moment of crisis is a striking portrayal of this turning point. Hernández observes that "el texto escenifica dos maneras de entender la contracultural," one based on the figure of Rafael, who represents "aquellos informados sobre la esotérica, lo psicodélico, etc., quienes además manifiestan un deseo de aprender y de crecer espiritualmente a través de las prácticas disidentes," and the other based on Francine, who uses drugs for entertainment and to "ensanchar su ego a partir de la humillación de los demás" (227).

This is essentially true, but to some degree, Rafael's journey of self-discovery is a red herring that distracts from the real story: after all, by the time of Agustín's stay in Lecumberri, he was increasingly ambivalent about the prospects of psychedelic liberation. Francine, in fact, "es

la figura doninante" (Chiu-Olivares 60), in terms of both personality and importance. Francine demands our attention again and again, just when something else is starting to develop; when the other characters start to look inward, when focus drifts and becomes reflective, like the jarring buzzer of an old alarm clock the ego reasserts itself, time and time again. Why was it that *se estaba haciendo tarde*? Hernández continues, "[e]l mercado se ha encargado de difundir y degradar la categoría identitaria. Como Francine, se puede ir de paseo hacia lo hippie para después regresar a tiempo para enjaibolarse en los clubs nocturnos de playa Condesa" (228). But for people like Francine to be able to casually enjoy *lo hippie* a fundamental shift has to occur, an abandonment of the patterns of psychotropy that had fueled much of the counterculture. The definitive quality of Francine's psilocybin experience should not be downplayed: such an ordeal is enough to make one run screaming from psychedelic culture and all its trappings. It represents a watershed moment in which the self chooses its own preservation over the radical unknown represented by psychedelics.

Emerging patterns of narcossist psychotropy and the defamiliarizing psychedelic regime had come face to face, and it was already clear which would carry the day. The outward signs and symbols of the countercultures could be used, but only after being emptied of challenging critical social or political content. In this light, *Se está hacienda tarde* begins to read like an elegy to the counterculture, or a post-mortem. Indeed, it is surprising that more has not been made of the similarities between Agustín's novel and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which was published in *Rolling Stone* in 1971, the same year Agustín wrote his opus in Lecumberri prison (Agustín, *Rock de la cárcel* 93, 121). Complete with grotesque scenes of furious drug consumption, speeding vehicles, and sexual degradation set against a highly commercialized backdrop (Las Vegas or Acapulco), both novels signal the limits where countercultural energy

would dissipate, be diverted, or self-destruct. Thompson spoke of the "grim, meat-hook realities" (178) that awaited those who bought into the "sense of inevitable victory" that had prevailed in hippie circles (68). Economic forces were at work that would render diffuse and vague countercultural utopianism irrelevant while profiting from it through "the state's co-option of ecstasy" (Stephenson 62). Agustín, on the other hand, zooms in on these processes at the level of the phenomenology of the self, exposing the point of contact between economic, social, psychological, and bio-chemical, forces, and the frail and mysterious human will. Part of the reality that faced the countercultures as the 1970s dawned was the increasing stubbornness of the addiction to self, or the addictions *of* self, as narcossism could be conceived, a pattern that subverted the radical communitarian potentiality of the counterculture.

Conclusion

This addiction of self was not something external to the counterculture, but was always carried within it, perhaps proving right those theories that claim that a totally contestatory counterculture is impossible, that it always bears the epistemic DNA of its cultural progenitor. We can see the ferocious individualism of Artaud and of Burroughs, their ability to shut out the Other, in the 1960s counterculture and in the capitalist celebration of the consumer as individual that grew from it. Thomas Frank details the cooptation of the counterculture by business culture in *The Conquest of Cool*. Even as the 1960s countercultures raged, the advertising industry had shifted its ideological posturing so that its central goal was "not to encourage conformity but a never-ending rebellion against whatever it is that everyone else is doing, a forced and exaggerated individualism" (90). The ideologues of marketing were trumpeting pseudo-

countercultural manifestos of personal freedom, with one hailing the new marketing as "an emancipator. It should unlock locks and cut bonds by suggesting and implying, by hinting and beckoning, not by defining. It should be the agent that frees, not the agent that imprisons" (cited in Frank 93). Frank claims that this was not purely cynical posturing on the part of advertising executives, but rather that creative types in business who were rebelling against outdated practices saw in the counterculture "a comrade in their own struggles to revitalize American business and the consumer order generally" (9). Indeed, a big part of the counterculture and its prehistory was individualism, pleasure, and creativity, and American capitalism was astute enough to realize that these things could be very good for business. Businesses would rapidly figure out how to address not only the satisfaction but the "construction of consumer subjectivities" out of "inchoate feelings and common responses to pollsters' questions" that were associated with youth and rebellious attitudes (Frank 24). By interposing a product within the formation of a sense of self, such business practices participate in the narcissistic formation of self, and to the extent to which countercultural figures had exalted the self through psychotropy, they had primed rebellious youth for this kind of co-optation.

It is also worth noting that the exclusion and objectification of women that crops up in some of these texts may be related to the dominant social construction of masculinity as self-sufficiency and autonomy. Burroughs famously claimed women to be "a biological mistake" and his propensity for all-male groups in his life and writing may have influenced Agustín's vision of the three male friends in *Se está hacienda tarde*, who are frequently engaged in a defensive solidarity against the shrill criticisms of Francine, or the unwelcome advances of Gladys. Though we cannot infer an author's overall attitude toward women from one novel, it certainly is noteworthy that the character that sounds the symbolic death-knell for the counterculture, as

discussed above, should be a woman. García Saldaña's previously mentioned use of young women as the site of a struggle for dominance between generations of males is a vivid illustration of the way countercultures were not always up to "countering" all aspects of dominant culture, and indeed at times seemed to strengthen its patriarchal tendencies.

In fact, the relationship that García Saldaña's protagonist, Epicuro, has with women recalls Jameson's point that the value of pleasure as a political rallying point depends on the class (or gender) identity of the groups making the appeal and that of the targets of such an appeal (66-67). That is, pleasure in the form of sexual liberation was a slogan and may have been a worthy value of the counterculture, but the extent to which it was promoted by class or gender antagonists made it less effective. A young woman would be keenly aware of who was making such an appeal, and would not have to be a feminist to resist frothy advances, like those of Epicuro, that were cloaked in the language of liberation. Though feminism would ultimately be able to channel countercultural energy for significant social advances in the area of sexual morality, the elevation of pleasure at the service of a masculine, hedonist individualism would limit this progress and further weaken the liberatory, communitarian potential of the counterculture by broadly alienating women. Nor was this unwelcome to business culture, which enthusiastically adopted sexist imagery aimed toward men, albeit sometimes thinly veiled in the ideology of sexual liberation.

But Frank's account is not concerned with something that is of central importance when considering the places of intoxication in culture: that other intoxication that disrupts the habits of self and society, the urge that brought Artaud to Norogachic prostrate and desperate, that saw Burroughs taking the extraordinary step of consuming ayahuasca to blast himself open and exorcise the "Ugly Spirit," and that had Parménides García Saldaña attempting to destroy every

structure he encountered, including himself. As the latter's unlikely love for Quevedo attests, this negativity has roots not only in indigenous psychedelic traditions but in the history of literature and story-telling, and it has leaves and branches there as well. As neuroscience makes breakthroughs pertaining to the neural action and therapeutic potential of psychedelics, so we in the study of culture might give a thought to the pharmacological profile of what we read, watch and listen to. These are, of course, generally products of a culture industry and subject to economic forces. In fact, part of the co-optation of the counterculture was channeling the impulse for something new, for "difference," which may stem from a deep-seated dissatisfaction with societal values, into a perpetual stream of new objects of consumer desire, as advertising executives sought to create campaigns that were "interruptive, disquieting, challenging, surprising, and unsettling" (cited in Frank 94). In a dialectical transformation, the psychotropy of defamiliarization gives way to an incessant and superficial novelty that becomes the base of a new addiction of self, but this is not altogether new. We would do well to remember García Saldaña's invocation of Marx on the rapidity and superficiality of the "ecstasy" of bourgeois revolutions, and the depression that underlies it, as well as Benjamin's analysis of the phantasmagoria with which capitalism seeks to paper over the realities of class domination.

But the examples of the counterculture remain valuable as cultural bomb recipes uniquely suited to exploding patterns of thought, emotion and behavior around questions of intoxication itself. While their formulations of extreme individualism may have helped to usher in the narcossist patterns on which consumer capitalism and the narcotics economy are based, they also had the courage to investigate means of intoxication, both chemical and cultural, that were radically opposed to the kind of constructs of self upon which the whole contemporary economic edifice rests. And perhaps most importantly, they provide us with invaluable insights into the

interaction of these two distinct forms of psychotropy within individuals and groups. These insights, in turn, arm us to analyze the intersections of culture and intoxication we have inherited in the *narco* age.

Chapter Two

The Cocaine Industry in Mexico's Psychotropic Economy:

Élmer Mendoza's "Zurdo" Mendieta series

> Il faut être toujours ivre.
> Tout est là:
> c'est l'unique question.
> Pour ne pas sentir
> l'horrible fardeau du Temps
> qui brise vos épaules
> et vous penche vers la terre,
> il faut vous enivrer sans trêve.
> Mais de quoi?
> De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise.
>
> —Charles Baudelaire

A man walks into a bar named "El Quijote." A singer is crooning *Under the Influence of Love*, by Barry White. After the man sits down, "Le acercaron una cerveza y una tequila doble que consumió con rapidez…." A man jonesing for cocaine mutters about the divine vengeance that will be visited on the powerful and corrupt, including "los que fijan el precio del café y del tabaco." By the way, El Quijote features topless dancers, and on this particular night it is especially filled with sexual tension when an alluring quartet of three cheerleaders and a transgender woman walk in. Finally, the man stumbles out and drives away, coming under the sway of a "subyugante" Rolling Stones song (*Balas* 73-75).

This scene exemplifies well the density of references and representation of intoxication that characterizes Élmer Mendoza's *Balas de plata*, *La prueba del ácido*, and *Nombre de perro*, which present to us a world—a fictional Culiacán, Sinaloa—that largely revolves around the

cocaine business, but where cocaine rarely appears while intoxication crops up everywhere. The pieces of the puzzle of each crime only accumulate punctuated by endless cups of coffee, cigarettes, beers, and shots of tequila and whiskey, which the protagonist, Detective Edgar "el Zurdo" Mendieta, reverently downs "como Dios manda." These substances and more are consumed by many of the characters, but the internal focalization of the narrative gives us a privileged window into Mendieta's own use of them, by which we glimpse some of the psychology behind his self-medication. Largely, his use of legal drugs follows a logic of maintenance, enabling him to uphold an established norm of periodic, mostly low-level intoxication: coffee to wake up, cigarettes to provide breaks from nonstop activity and stress-relief, drinks with meals to relax, a date with a bottle to go to sleep at night. This routine management of consciousness involves a certain amount of what could be considered strategies of "coping" with the common stresses of Mendieta's profession and his personal life. Mendieta's affair with Goga Fox, for example, throws him into a torturous delirium that he treats with large amounts of alcohol.

However, it is important to realize that this delirium is itself a form of intoxication, and that the panoply of intoxicants on display in the Mendieta series is by no means limited to substances to be consumed. Goga Fox is able to intoxicate Mendieta with her body, her words, her behavior, down to her perfume and clothing, while Mendieta participates in his own intoxication as his own image of her takes on psychotropic properties. This intoxication takes the form of an extreme desire, leading to euphoria in its consummation with the sexual act, the intimacy surrounding it and the promise of its repetition, and anguish in its denial. Romantic and sexual infatuation is only one of several cultural practices that are framed in the novels in terms of management of consciousness. Listening to music, shopping, exercising violence and power,

reading, and even investigating crime all appear as addictive, intoxicating activities in their own right, and begin to map out a complex psychotropic economy at play in Mendoza's novelistic Culiacán.

Cocaine is thus but one player in this local psychotropic economy and its direct presence in the novels is scant; however, through its dominance of the region's financial life it gains indirect protagonism. Despite the ubiquity of various kinds of intoxication, Mendoza's Mendieta series could in some ways be characterized as an example of what Herlinghaus calls the aesthetics of sobriety: the narrator wryly draws complex characters who are neither heroes nor villains and events that illustrate the ethical ambiguity intrinsic to the intersection of Northern demand and prohibition. However, the *pharmakon* is never forgotten; it is never forgotten that the violent entirety of the illicit drug industry—and of the "war on drugs" that sets itself up against it—has its roots in the human desire to modify consciousness. Mendoza shows a keen awareness of the psychotropic motivations that permeate contemporary societies, so that the *pharmakon* floats along the narrative arc of each work as a constant presence and an insistent driver of the novels' action, constituting a veritable thematics of intoxication.

This insistence on the ubiquity of psychotropic practices points to the existence in Mendoza's Mexico of tendencies of compulsive consumption often associated with the global North. These novels stress the universal nature of the drive for intoxication, and the ever-expanding reach of its technologies. With that in mind however, it is true that the Mendieta series never ignores the looming shadow to the north, elaborating an associative cluster of figures, themes and attitudes that links obsessive desire with illegal drugs and the U.S. In that sense, the most destructive psychotropic tendencies are here imbued with a certain *directionality*, by which the U.S. comes to be seen as a privileged site and indeed exporter of this kind of mindset, but by

no means its exclusive domain. Here and there in the Zurdo novels, *gringos* forcefully make their presence felt, possessed and obsessed characters who figure a double pressure (demand and prohibition) from the North that shapes the psychotropic lives of Mexicans by enabling the economy of fear and greed of the cartels. This climate of fear and avarice in turn feeds a universal corruption that results in the destabilization of ethical norms that we witness even in el Zurdo, the putative hero of the novels.

In pursuing their own desire for intoxication with indifference or hostility toward the Mexicans they encounter, these *gringos* exhibit patterns of narcossism, to borrow Avital Ronell's phrase, an ethical pattern I associate with consumption of cocaine in the U.S. However, by delinking cocaine use and the obsessive behavior and solipsistic attitudes associated with it, these novels allow for a shift in our vantage point, allowing cocaine to appear as the symptom of a cultural tendency toward self-exaltation rather than the root cause of social problems, a tendency radiating out from the U.S. but increasingly taking root elsewhere as a cultural adjunct of globalizing systems of financial economy.

A Psychotropic Jungle

Throughout *Balas de plata*, *La prueba del ácido*, and *Nombre de perro*, Élmer Mendoza's narrator lavishes assiduous attention on the psychotropic lives of its characters, albeit with an emphasis on legal substances and practices. These practices are often linked to particular spaces; when a former lover returns from the United States for a visit, she asks Zurdo to take her to his favorite place, and he replies, "tengo dos: el Miró, donde puedo desayunar, tomar café y si está Bety, la dueña, me atienden mejor que si fuera el gobernador, o el Quijote, donde hay tortas de pierna y cerveza suficiente para embriagar a Culiacán entero" (*Nombre* 51). Indeed, as

exemplified above, Quijote and Miró figure as the backdrops of countless psychotropic banquets in which Zurdo, his colleagues and others get jacked up on caffeine or mellow out with alcoholic beverages and gorge themselves as they try to fit together the pieces of the crime at hand, relax or recover.

But the psychotropic practices are by no means limited to spaces like these. The narrator goes out of his way to show how caffeine, alcohol, and other substances are consumed periodically to produce or maintain desired states of consciousness. Describing Zurdo and his partner Gris Toledo starting their day in their office, a separate sentence is dedicated to enumerating what they are drinking: "ella, Coca-Cola de dieta; él, café" (*Prueba* 18). At another moment in *Nombre de perro*, every sip Gris takes of her diet Coke while interrogating a dangerous suspect is noted (170-1). For Mendieta, alcohol is an indispensable medicine for getting through the day as well as for ending it: at one point, he realizes with a sense of shock, "Uta es tardísimo y no he tomado ni una cerveza" (*Prueba* 96). His free indirect speech calls whiskey "esa brujería escocesa que lo hacía dormir lo justo" (*Nombre* 54). And of course, anyone familiar with caffeine and alcohol knows that they are often used in relation to each other, in the sense that one may be used to counter the other's excesses, as when coffee helps in overcoming a hangover.

However, caffeine and alcohol are far from being the only psychotropic mechanisms that are brought into focus in these novels. One outstanding characteristic of the "Zurdo" series is its relentless soundtrack of rock and other styles, an aspect that recalls *Onda* authors like José Agustín and Parménides García Saldaña. A chapter rarely goes by without a reference to a song, either something that the characters are listening to, or contributed by the narrator to illustrate the

situation being narrated.[71] In the latter case, these songs serve as intertexts that reinforce or enrich the meanings transmitted through the text, and potentially stimulate a certain literary pleasure in the reader, as discussed below. However, when the songs are played and heard by the characters, we get a glimpse of music's diverse psychotropic potential. According to Valorie Salimpoor and colleagues, listening to one's preferred music can engage the striatal dopaminergic system of the brain, producing euphoria and craving responses similar to the effects of some drugs (257, 260-62). In *Balas de plata*, Herman's Hermits have Zurdo "patinando," and he pronounces the Rolling Stones cover of Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" "fina y *subyugante*," (19, 75, emphasis added). But music is also capable of more subtle, soothing effects. In *Prueba del ácido*, awake too early and depressed, Zurdo puts on Simon and Garfunkel's "April Come She Will," and "se quedó quieto, con la certeza de que el amanecer redime" (66). On the other hand, when morning does come, we see music and caffeine working together in a stimulant synergy to move the apathetic detective: "intentaba reanimarse con… *My Back Pages*… de Bob Dylan" as his housekeeper serves him coffee. When he tells her that "la vida no vale nada," she warns him that "son cosas de José Alfredo, pero no siempre tiene razón, era un hombre muy atormentado, alcohólico, enamoradizo y débil," impressively linking clinical depression, depressing music and central nervous system depressants (67).

Music also repels and attracts through its emotional appeal. When Zurdo and Susana hear a narcocorrido blaring from a Hummer, she comments, "que música tan fea. Deberían prohibirla," but Zurdo saves the day by turning on his own car stereo and playing "*Angel of the Morning*, con Juice Newton," which helps facilitate the lovers' excited conversation all the way

[71] Fernández Rojas y Ramírez Gil have catalogued and commented on many of the musical references from *Balas de plata* and *La prueba del ácido* (37-40).

back to Zurdo's place (*Nombre* 158). Previously, Zurdo had helped seal Susana's emotional attachment to him with a use of music that Daniel Smail would recognize as *teletropic*: "puso Air Supply, *I'm All Out of Love*, un grupo fresa que supuso le gustaría a ella y acertó. Ay Edgar, qué linda música" (55).[72] Thus, while some music can cause fear and revulsion through its real-world referents, this response can be neutralized, here with music capable of producing bland, sentimental pleasure.

Even food takes its place in the psychotropic landscape of Mendoza's Culiacán. While the psychoactive profile of food itself is difficult to isolate to due to its constant coexistence with alcohol and other intoxicants, there are a few places where the narration is infected by the characters' culinary enthusiasm, and the sense of euphoria is palpable: *Nombre de perro* goes into detail enumerating various ways to serve *pescado zarandeado al horno* including, of course, alcohol pairings (87). Even the formidable *capo* Samantha Valdés is seen cooking with her mother, while we are privy to the mouth-watering details (129-30). While one might simply chalk this up to a realist attention to detail, this level of description is actually rare in the Zurdo novels, which focus more on dialogue, psychology, and the dynamics of investigation.[73]

The Zurdo novels also expose the psychotropic technologies characters use to deal with moments of stress or crisis. Waiting at Susana Luján's door for his long-awaited *reencuentro* with her, he thinks, frantically "¿[Q]ué pretende, que me infarte por los nervios? Se recargó en el carro y sacó un cigarrillo…. Fuego, aroma. ¿Los que prohibieron fumar pensarían en esta situación? Deben haber sido personas muy seguras de sí mismas… ¿cómo vivirían esta

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[72] I have preserved the (lack of) format of quotations used in the novel. One character's discourse simply follows another on the same line without any indication, and must be distinguished by context and characterization alone.

[73] For the psychotropic action of food, see Hoebel.

circunstancia?" (*Nombre* 48). Which leads us to perhaps the most powerful psychotropic force directly treated by these novels: the powerful, inebriating attraction of sex and love—between which I will not be foolish enough to try to distinguish here—and the devastating, maddening effects of their withdrawal: in other words, human beings as drugs.

Part of the formula that structures these novels is the inclusion of an intoxicating love interest for el Zurdo; in *Balas de plata* and *La Prueba del ácido* this takes the shape of an elusive or absent lover, over whom Mendieta pines and ruminates. In *Nombre de perro*, the variation is that things look up for Mendieta's love life, and correspondingly, the intoxication has a different character. The intoxicant in *Nombre* is Susana Luján, an old flame who, unbeknownst to el Zurdo, was pregnant with his son when she left Culiacán for Los Angeles eighteen years earlier. Now, suddenly, Zurdo has an adult son and a kind and beautiful woman has reappeared in his life. It is the kind of intoxication that has him waxing poetic, though one could not say it is a pure, metaphysical love. His rekindling with Susana awakens his body as a character with whom he periodically enters into dialogue, underlining the biological underpinning of amorous intoxication. Such a device is notable in the context of Mendoza's realism, but not unknown in his work: *El amante de Janis Joplin* features a voice inside the addled protagonist's head, his "Karma," who tries to influence his behavior. The arguments between Mendieta's body and his reasoning mind dramatize the physiological compulsion that drives many of our behaviors, and the ensuing internal conflicts: concerning the nature of Zurdo and Susana's renascent relationship, his body affirms, "¿acaso crees que es tu deslumbrante inteligencia lo que la trae loquita? No señor: reconoce que soy el artífice" (133).[74]

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[74] The inclusion of Mendieta's body as a character in Nombre de perro also suggests an interesting sense of corporeal protagonism in which the body is apparently not "simply" an object (14, 30, 49-50, 91, 133, 143). This is

But prior to Susana, *Balas de plata* introduces Goga Fox, a married woman with a "paso perturbador que mataba…. Lo aturdieron el aroma, la sonrisa, su mirada" (130). Her name alone, of course, speaks volumes. Apart from the political resonance of her last name, a connoisseur of 1960s Anglo rock like Mendoza would be well aware of the usage of "fox" to denote a beautiful woman. More importantly, though, the name Goga evokes *-agogo*, as in *pedagogo* or *demagogo*, "indicating a person or thing that leads or incites to action,"[75] from Greek -agōgos... to lead."[76] English also has "agog", meaning "full of intense interest or excitement [because of something]" reportedly from Middle French *en gogues*, "in mirth," although both etymological lines converge on the idea of an incitation or influence exercised by an agent ("Agog").

When they first, meet Goga jokingly (and evocatively, and provocatively) asks if Mendieta has tried "Gogacola… una bebida viscosa y transparente, hay dulce y ácida," and indeed she works on Édgar like a drug, its effects pleasant or harsh depending on the ups and downs (mostly downs) of their relationship (130). Goga's intoxication is often described in its physical manifestations: when Mendieta sees her or anticipates seeing her he suffers from "boca seca" and "corazón desbocado" or, in clinical terms, "taquicardia" (130-1). Physical contact with Goga intensifies these reactions: el Zurdo experiences "besos que erizaban los párpados, la piel, el vello púbico" (132). On a psychological level, *Gogacola Dulce* "[despoja del] futuro, la inteligencia," creating a powerful addiction (he is "clavado"). When they have a pleasant reunion

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important in light of the apparent objectification of women as intoxicants in the narration, which does seem to feature a male gaze that sometimes unduly focuses on physical aspects of female characters (see for example Nombre 133). In this analysis, on the other hand, the psychotropy of sex and love is understood as a complex, intersubjective interaction of teletropy (which involves agency on the part of the "intoxicant") and autotropy (which implies self-intoxication through one's own image of the object of desire).

[75] Also "denoting a substance that stimulates the secretion of something: galactagogue," lining up interestingly with the way psychotropic substances and practices affect neurotransmitter activity ("-agogue" *Collins*).

[76] "< Greek -agōgos, -ē, -on, akin to ágein to lead" ("-agogue" *dictionary.com*).

toward the end of the novel, he asks himself, "¿Qué tiene el sexo que ata con tanta determinación?, ¿qué tiene que conecta el cerebro y afecta las conductas más elementales?, ¿cómo es que genera tanta dependencia?" (202). When Goga leaves town suddenly after the first phase of their affair, Zurdo is thrown into such a state of distress that toxic memories from his past make a resurgence and he has to return to his therapist, marking an intersection of psychotropic influences that will be explored presently (132-3). When she reappears just as suddenly after a long absence, Zurdo's distress is only aggravated and he flees to a bar to self-medicate (134). In *Crack Wars*, Avital Ronell channels Poe and Baudelaire to ruminate on the function of alcohol: a drug that is capable of making phantoms appear or disappear, ideal for treating "something in you that must be encrypted" in the sense of "buried" (5). However, Mendieta goes even further in this direction. When, at the end of the novel, Goga and her husband are revealed to be the killers in the case Zurdo has been investigating, his decision to hand them over to narco-executive Samantha Valdés rather than following the legally mandated procedures—and risking them using their connections to escape prosecution—can be understood in part as a desperate attempt to annihilate his own suffering (248-54).

Passing an illicit death sentence on his murderous former lover, of course, does not cure his suffering, nor can el Zurdo seem to catch a break from his string of ill-fated loves: his psychiatrist sends him to coastal Mazatlán to recuperate, where he meets Mayra Cabral de Melo, a Brazilian exotic dancer whose subsequent murder gives impetus to the events of *La prueba del ácido*. In this case, Zurdo again struggles with the intoxicating distress of *absence*, using alcohol to attempt to "encrypt" Mayra's memory and negate the sense of emptiness that increasingly consumes him. His search for consolation and answers even leads him briefly to pursue the alleviation provided by religion, when he finds himself reluctantly praying to folk saint Jesús

Malverde for help. "Respiró hondo. El vacío que experimentaba era purulento. Es difícil saber cuánto estuvo allí sin moverse, intentando comprender la hendidura en que se encontraba. ¿Qué me pasa? Ni siquiera me había enamorado de ella ni la vi muchos días…." (46-6).

This passage hints at the fact that Mayra's death has exacerbated a more fundamental existential problem that Mendieta must now face down. "Yo, ¿para qué nací?" he ruminates at the granary where Cabral de Melo's body was found, "Sintió el impulso de que su vida no valía la pena. Para valer madre. Y el vacío se manifestó de golpe. Para ser una pinche sombra" (95). And later: "Mientras conducía sin rumbo experimentó el vacío: Al fin comprendo el significado de ser un cero a la izquierda, de vivir sin sentido, de ejercer una profesión que no me sirvió para resolver el caso que más me pegó por dentro" (236). In Ronell's intimate encounter with Heidegger's treatment of addiction and *Dasein* (being-in-the-world), she takes up his concept of *thrownness*, "an experience of nothing or nullity, an experience which Heidegger calls, 'guilt'—a radical impotence regarding the conditions of the 'there' in which one finds oneself thrown." It is an experience "of total powerlessness—powerlessness or fascination, or heady vertigo" (43-4). Mendieta's experience of an inner void and his feelings of impotence are indeed linked with a vertiginous and morbid fascination, in which his memories of Mayra, represented in the text in italicized quotations of her speech, erupt constantly into his consciousness. The state of thrownness marks a point of decision at which Dasein may resolve upon the course of "freedom" (pursuing actions that while repetitive are at least voluntary) or, maintaining a radical passivity, may compulsively reenact its own thrownness (44). In this sense, Mendieta's obsession with Mayra in itself forms part of an addictive structure that is at once countered and supplemented with liberal recourse to alcohol, which serves to alternately summon and dispel her phantom (*Prueba* 57, 62, 103-4).

This phenomenology of thrownness and addiction have observable correlates inside the brain. Neurophysiological research has corroborated the intoxicating and addictive properties of romantic attraction, indicating that intense romantic love—as well as its loss—has been shown to activate dopamine rich areas of the brain associated with motivation and reward (Fisher et al. 56). Dopamine, then, is associated with rewards but also with craving, and one study found that rejected lovers show activation in the same parts of the dopaminergic system that is implicated in both the cocaine high and craving for cocaine (57). This fact may go a long way toward explaining the lengths of depravity reached by many a spurned lover, and Fisher and colleagues' definition of romantic love as an emotional-motivational structure that evolved from a mammalian drive to "pursue preferred mates" (51) is broad enough to apply to the kind of obsessive, sexual, quasi-romantic attraction provoked by Mayra Cabral de Melo's in her clients.

Because el Zurdo is by no means the only person to be unhinged by Mayra's death. Her intoxicating allure leaves its mark on a collection of admirers who fill out Zurdo's list of suspects: from an alcoholic Spaniard named Miguel de Cervantes who turns out to be an ETA militant, to a deranged but sensitive boxer, to an indignant *narco* who competes with Mendieta to bring Mayra's killer to justice. But the one most affected by Mayra is her killer: Adán Carrasco plays the part of the scorned courtly lover, lavishing upon her gifts and favors to try to win her affection, but lacking the culture and sensitivity of a medieval lyric poet, instead of composing verses complaining of his *belle dame sans merci* he murders and mutilates her. Finally cornered, he rages, "me hechizó con su cuerpo, su maldito baile…." (242). More accurately, his own body bewitched him in response to her stimulating presence, and then intoxicated itself to such a degree in response to her rejection that he chose to kill her in a desperate attempt to overcome his state.

Ironically, this instance of a murder motivated by the withdrawal of a powerful intoxication can be related to Mendieta's own actions at the end of *Balas de plata*, when he gives Goga to Samantha Valdés, as well as to the murder of Samantha's lover, Mariana Kelly, in *Nombre de perro*. Though not all are "crimes of passion" properly speaking, they all involve a passion, an intoxication. In the case of military deep cover operative Héctor Ugarte's murder of Kelly, the passion was long past, forgotten by most. His wife, María Leyva, had, eighteen years before, suffered an "enamoramiento compulsivo de Mariana Kelly" (192). María "consoled herself" with Ugarte, but Kelly's continual disdain (and an enforced distance imposed by the Valdés family) caused Ugarte's family to suffer, to the point that he swore revenge, which was only to be carried out many years later (182). When el Zurdo finds Ugarte, he tells the detectives, "después de tantos años sólo mi odio permaneció intacto" (206). For him, more than a virtue, "[l]a paciencia es una adicción," where we might assume "patience" to be a metonym for his persistent hatred and desire for vengeance (207).

This structure of persistent intoxication emanating from a long-past event also matches the dynamics of Mendieta's history of childhood abuse at the hands of Padre Bardominos. This trauma exacerbates Mendieta's existential struggles and connects in some way to all the psychic difficulties he faces. His psychiatric treatment with Doctor Parra brings the elements of his psychotropic life into focus. On one hand, Parra counsels Mendieta to seek the intoxication of intimacy: "reactiva tu vida amorosa, ya ves cómo nos pone la sonrisa de oreja a oreja, ... haz algo, quiero ver en tu cara esa sensación de energía que te hace creer que puedes tragarte el mundo" (*Balas* 13). Parra hopes that intimacy will synergize with Zurdo's anti-anxiety medicine to ward off the effects of the "bolsa de intoxicación... que vuelve a un sujeto ajeno a su historia personal" (12). These pockets of intoxication could include mundane items like popcorn that

were associated with the traumatic event (Mendieta was molested in a movie theater), or sensory associations: in this case music intoxicates through its function as a vector of emotional memory: "Odio la música de Pedro Infante…. [Bardominos] [n]o escuchaba otra cosa…." (12).

When Doctor Parra's prescription of love backfires with Zurdo's involvement with Goga and then with Mayra's death, his anxiety becomes even worse, and even taking a double dose of his anxiolytic his sense of desperation increases: "este pinche ansiolítico me lo voy a untar en los huevos a ver si así me hace efecto" (*Prueba* 66). Of course, alcohol is the traditional self-medication for anxiety, and Parra is careful to specify that Zurdo should lay off the bottle since "te puedes cruzar con el ansiolítico, lo menos que conseguirás es quedarte dormido en cualquier parte" (*Balas* 13). Zurdo pays little mind to this warning in light of his medicine's apparent insufficiency: "Mendieta tuvo una sensación amarga, el cura Bardominos llegó a su mente como una mancha sucia y sacudió la cabeza, apuró su trago, hizo señas a Escamilla que trajera otra ronda" (*Prueba* 104) but he does value the calming effects of his therapy sessions: "Como un torbellino llegó la imagen de Bardominos…. Se recuperó con un whiskey doble. Necesito a Parra" (at this point he drinks a cup of Nescafé for good measure) (*Prueba* 235). Parra's unheeded concern about dangerous drug interactions could indeed be seen to figure a motif of the series as a whole, in which numerous psychotropic influences are exerted and combined in a variety of ways, with results that are sometimes deadly.

Mendoza's *Gringos* and Narcossism

Some of the most dangerous cases of intoxication occur in the *gringos* who intervene in the action of the novels, often aggressively and obsessively pursuing their own interests at the

expense of anyone who gets in the way. Mulling over an unidentified corpse, apparently a *gringo*, Mendieta talks himself through the possibilities: "Los gringos vienen a México a: buscar droga, lancheros, lugares de retiro, paisajes, algunos a hacer negocio," or to visit pre-Columbian ruins (*Prueba* 66). While some of these intentions seem harmless enough, the overall attitude expressed towards Mexico's neighbors to the north is one of grave mistrust. In *La prueba del ácido*, Chief Briseño notifies Mendieta that he has received an invitation from the DEA for a training course on fighting organized crime. After some consideration Zurdo concludes, "que se metieran su curso por dónde les cupiera. Con los gringos, entre más lejos mejor, mi comandante, y con los de la DEA, ni a las canicas" (20). Later, Briseño brings it up again: "Oye, los gringos insisten en que vayas, creo que te quieren enganchar", to which Mendieta responds, "Pero por la boca, como a un pez" (80). *Enganchar* is the same word Mendieta uses when he politely refuses the cocaine offered to him by Max Garcés, Samantha Valdés's chief of security, when the detective is helping her investigate Mariana Kelly's murder: "el Zurdo tomó un pequeño grano y lo puso en su lengua, lo dejó unos segundos y escupió. No vaya a ser que me enganches y me salga más caro el remedio que la enfermedad" (*Nombre* 185). In other words, *gringos*, like cocaine, will get their hooks in you if you are not careful, suggesting an instrumental approach to relations with the Other: "Is interpersonally exploitative (i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends)," to quote the diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder from *DSM-5*. The most memorable *gringos* in these novels attempt to construct an idealized self through psychotropic cultural practices; they are, in short, narcossists.

A prime example of this is the man el Zurdo refers to as "Arnold Schwarzenegger," based on his physical characteristics and unaware of his real name. Schwarzenegger is obsessed with Susana Luján, the mother of Mendieta's son, and has followed her all the way from California,

where she and Jason Mendieta have been living. He is physically imposing—"un gringo alto, fornido, con tatuajes en los brazos"—and not disposed to brook any opposition, explanation, or mitigation of his demands: his "mirada vidriosa" is a logical complement to his "aliento alcohólico", but also implies rigidity and impermeability (92). His identification with the real Schwarzenegger—who we should remember was the star of *Terminator* before he was the governor of California—combined with Zurdo's comparing him with Robocop, reinforces an image of him as an unfeeling machine. When Susana tries to talk him down, he barks ("ladra"), "Tú no explicar nada" (92). His characterization as both animal and machine underscores his lack of empathy, and his attitude toward Susana, with whom he has actually had very limited interaction, show his "sense of entitlement (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations)" (*DSM-5*).

Soon a physical altercation between el Zurdo and "Arnold" develops, both coming under the intoxication of adrenaline, masculine dominance and possession: "el Zurdo y el gringo se miraron como si fueran los primeros invasores de la luna disputándose la mano de la hija del rey" (93). We would do well to remember that Arnold's rejection by Susana may be causing a craving response in the dopaminergic system associated with cocaine use (Fisher et al. 57). He is also under the influence of an aggressive sense of superiority, "acuciado por una rabia infinita que incluía raza, posición social e invasión de territorio enemigo" (93).[77] Indeed, the fight becomes a stage on which the uneasy relationship between the strong and aggressive northerner and the underdog Mexican plays out: they take it outside to the garden and "Dos minutos después el cancel se llenó de vecinos. Hombres, mujeres, niños y perros se fueron reuniendo….

[77] See Couppis on how the dopamine reward system reinforces aggression.

Veían a Arnold que era peso pesado vapulear al Zurdo que era wélter natural. Un minuto después gritaban. […] Chíngese a ese costal de esteroides mi Zurdo, usted puede" (95).

Ultimately, the community support enjoyed by the underdog tips the balance: "Ocurrió… que los gritos de la gente lo animaron a la vez que hacían mella en el güero que supo que eso no podía terminar bien" (95). When Arnold flees, the meaning of the battle is made explicit, at the same time that the narrator de-authorizes the transcendence of this meaning, reframing the fight as merely one more intoxicating spectacle: someone shouts, "Bien hecho, que sepan con quién se meten esos maricas", and then "se largaron a sus casas a ver la tele" (95). Arnold's characterization is enhanced by his association with anabolic steroids, which are thought to cause "hostility, ... resentment and aggression," enhancing the image of an obsessive, machine-like being riding roughshod over others to satisfy his desire (Hannan et al. 339, 342). Just as steroids "pump up" the individual's musculature, external chemical inputs and endogenous psychotropic processes here allow for the provisional construction of an aggressive and supremely sovereign selfhood, but in this case narcossism is confronted and defeated by community solidarity.

Another striking case is that of Donald Simak, AKA Peter Connolly, a rabidly anti-immigrant and racist deep-cover FBI agent who is helping the Mexican military procure clandestine arms for the drug war. His position toward the Mexican *other* is extreme: "Peter Connolly odiaba México. No es fácil odiar un país entero, pero él se las ingeniaba y lo ejercía" (*Prueba* 85). He is obsessed with what he sees as a plague of illegal immigration to the United States: "todos esos latinos infestando sus campos, restaurantes y tiendas causarán la perdición de la nación más poderosa del mundo, ¿será posible exterminarlos, o cuando menos esclavizarlos? … Si no terminaremos hablando esa jerga horripilante con que se comunican" (85-6). He belongs to "un poderoso grupo cazador de indocumentados," and as such regularly murders

immigrants: "La madrugada anterior, … había aniquilado a una mujer que cuidaba niños y a un operador de trascabo cuando se dirigían a su trabajo" (86).

Simak's intoxicating hatred of Mexicans proves compatible with an extreme anti-drug stance; as a strong supporter of Mexico's drug war, he believes ardently in his mission to help the Mexican presidency design an anti-narcotics strategy and to facilitate an illicit supply-line of arms to the military. His internal dialogue leaves no question as to who has the upper hand in the development of drug control policy: "Es este un país asqueroso que no tiene remedio y no nos dejan más opción que manipularlo a nuestro favor" (86). Simak, then, is addicted to aggression and violence, and his discourse of U.S. purity threatened by Latin American "infestation" links him to prohibition and the drug war and constitutes a form of intoxication in its own right.[78] These dynamics mediate the clearly narcissistic patterns of his relationships with others (lack of empathy, manipulativeness, arrogance, belief in uniqueness, grandiosity). He has just closed a deal to supply arms for two thousand Mexican troops when he is killed by McGiver, a homegrown arms dealer from el Zurdo's neighborhood, Colonia Popular, whose past intertwines with Mendieta's own. After the hyperbolic description of the detestable Simak, it seems the reader is expected to smirk with satisfaction when Simak receives a bullet in the head upon opening the door to his hotel room (87). This instance, like the showdown between Zurdo and Schwarzenegger, can be read as a case of a local boy's victory over an arrogant and hateful *gringo*. Indeed, the figure of Simak—his intoxicated negation of the Other and his anti-drug fundamentalism—forms a condensed image of the damage done to Mexico by the combination of U.S. demand for drugs and official pressure for interdiction.

[78] See Brooks, "Virtue Tripping." This connection is discussed further at the end of this chapter.

The extreme negative characterization of Simak is mitigated slightly through Win Harrison, another FBI agent according to whom Simak was something of a rogue with an "obsecación en romper las reglas" (116). After he is killed he is disavowed by the FBI and Harrison ruminates over this fact, over Simak's life and death, and over his personality; she recognizes some of his faults, but she had been his lover and is privy to his sense of abandonment and frustration, calling him "un artista de la soledad y su amigo" (115-6). Harrison travels to Mexico on her own account to investigate the murder of her friend, enlisting Mendieta's help, and the two develop a relationship of uneasy cooperation, of limited trust. Indeed, Harrison herself is interesting for being one of the only *gringo* characters in the series who is generally capable of winning the reader's sympathy (perhaps it is not insignificant that this character is in fact not a *gringo* but a *gringa*). She could be seen to constitute a kind of counterexample to the kind of *gringo* exemplified by Schwarzenegger and Simak, but her relationship to the latter, more than mitigating our negative opinion of him, throws doubt on Harrison's own judgement, if not on her ethics.

Her warm feelings for someone whose own internal discourse has revealed him to be monstrous person, indeed a small-scale practitioner of genocide, puts her on a spectrum with another collection of *gringos* who appear briefly throughout the series: *gringos* in their naïve, oblivious, hedonistic mode. Especially in *Nombre de perro*, where the murder of Mariana Kelly takes place in the beach resort town of Mazatlán, numerous and clueless U.S. or Canadian tourists figure in the narrative. Some of these characters are innocuous but useless, as with the elderly couple that was staying in the hotel where the murder took place, on the night in question. Since they speak no Spanish, Zurdo has his son, who has grown up in California, translate for them. "Jason le informó que ella era sorda, que se recogían al atardecer, que jamás

habían escuchado disparos, que no tenían idea de un cadáver a unos cuantos metros de su cuarto y que la señora veía una película de Frank Sinatra" (117).

However, many of these figures appear in relation to desire in some way. Presumably, most of the *gringos* visiting coastal Mazatlán, even the old couple, are there for their own pleasure, soaking up sun and alcohol, at the very least. The evening before the day of Kelly's death, her and Samantha take a walk on the beach, passing "[u]nos gringos jóvenes [que] fumaban mariguana y leían a Allen Ginsberg: «I saw the best minds of my generation, destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked...», sentados en la arena con vasos de tequila con coca" (58). This passage, thick with references to psychotropy, hearkens back to psychedelic culture, but here Ginsberg's anguish seems merely a pleasure read in the context of sun, scant clothing, pot, alcohol and caffeine.

More importantly, a group of skimpily clad young *gringas* apparently plays a pivotal role in the murder. El Zurdo interviews Mocoseco, a member of Samantha Valdés's security detail who was responsible for guarding the window through which the killer entered the hotel room: "Empezó a sudar copiosamente… Había turistas muy ruidosas que tomaban cerveza como a diez metros. ¿Hombres o mujeres? La mayoría morras, oían música en inglés y bailaban. Mendieta hizo anotaciones en su libreta. ¿Qué tan cachondas? Uta, bien buenas, musitó. ¿Camisetas mojadas? Algunas ni traían calzones, menos camisetas" (144). These figures appear enjoying the classic synergy of alcohol and music, while simultaneously being the apparently indifferent objects of Mocoseco's desire, constituting a distraction that allows the murder to take place.

To return to Win Harrison, she is, of course, a far cry from these hedonistic and indifferent *gringos*. She is tough and intelligent, her own naïveté being limited to her adherence

to Simak. In this way, she stands in for well-meaning *gringos* who tacitly or otherwise support destructive U.S. intervention in Mexican drug policy. In this sense, it should not be surprising that, despite her collegial attitude, she brings mostly trouble for Mendieta. When, upon Win's request, he drives her rental vehicle to an elite hunting resort to look into an attack on the U.S. president's father, the vehicle explodes shortly after he exits it, and he is taken into custody as a suspect in a supposed second attack. Like Schwarzenegger and Simak, Harrison appears in determined pursuit of her own desire (to learn more about her friend's death), but her relationship with Zurdo is characterized by a grudging mutual respect and a willingness to collaborate, thus deviating from the pattern of indifference or hostility to the Mexican Other.

El Continente, the ranch where "el Señor B" is attacked, is central to *La prueba del ácido*. Beyond the importance of this *atentado*, its proprietor is Adán Carrasco, Mayra Cabral de Melo's murderer. On top of this it is the prime manifestation of *la caza*, which, as a theme and as a motif, permeates the novel as a whole and also appears tangentially in the *Balas de plata*, coming to be associated in general with the attitudes of the *gringos* who figure in the series. In the latter novel, Mendieta calls an Arizona weapons dealer to inquire about Mexican clients who may have purchased silver bullets of the kind that killed Bruno Canizales. At first the *gringo* refuses to cooperate, expressing a hostility toward Mexico and the Mexican police similar to that of "Arnold" or Simak. Soon, however, Mendieta shrewdly decides to appeal to the dealer's desire, and the specifics are telling: "como estoy seguro de que le gusta cazar, me comprometo a guiarlo por la sierra de las Siete Gotas donde abundan el venado, el tigrillo y la onza. He escuchado de esa zona. Pues prepárese para noviembre cuando empieza la temporada, la Policía Federal Preventiva lo invita," upon which the man's opinion of the Mexican police changes abruptly and Zurdo is soon in possession of a list of names (109-10).

Even more striking is the characterization of Señor B himself—presumably created with George Herbert Walker Bush in mind—whose obsession with killing animals seems to overshadow his concern for human life. Before the assassination attempt, he prohibits his military escort from cancelling hunting outings, even for security reasons (97). After the attack, in which the head of his security detail is killed protecting him, he remains unfazed: "Ni se te ocurre servirme esa porquería escocesa, Carrasco, más vale que tengas algo de Kentucky, y sólo dos hielos. El viejo caminaba como si nada hubiera ocurrido…. Vamos a estar bien…, nunca he sabido de dos atentados en un mismo sitio y a la misma persona, y sé que hay un centenar de patos esperándome" (99). His first act, then, is to order a drink with military precision, followed by an affirmation that the hunt will go on as planned—with the approval of the president himself—only then to be followed by a cursory recognition of his security chief's death: "Normalice todo, ya hablé con mi hijo y no hay problema, embarque al general Mitchell y que nos avisen para las honras fúnebres" (99). Similarly, when el Zurdo visits the ranch later and his vehicle explodes, Señor B refuses to let such a minor disruption come between him and his ducks (191).

The link between gringos and hunting in these novels is significant, since sport hunting has often been associated, in literature and elsewhere, with aggression for aggression's sake, and hunters are sometimes thought to take "a psychopathic pleasure in inflicting pain and death" (Cartmill 228). Even some hunters cite as a motivation for hunting the "thrill" of killing, an effect we might easily consider a form of psychotropy, and which hunters often chalk up to human instinct (Cartmill 229-30). The intoxication of the hunt is surely one of the factors underlying Señor B's patently narcissistic behavior. Moreover, Matt Cartmill's reading of hunters' accounts of their own experience reveals not only common perceptions of a link

between hunting and virility, but also an occasional confluence of the desire to kill with amorous feelings toward their prey, which he links to sexual violence (233, 240). With this in mind, the fact that the owner of El Continental turns out to be Mayra's murderer can be seen in a new light. When he is finally cornered, Carrasco lays bare his motive: "Le di más de trescientos mil dólares y no la pude conquistar (242). Unable to conquer her sexually, he switches modalities, emboldened or made desperate by the intoxication of rejection. On his ranch, one also pays money with the expectation of the experience of conquest. Having paid what he believed to be a sufficient price, he decides to exercise the definitive conquest constituted by ending another's life. He even retains a trophy: after the climactic confrontation that ends in the killer's death, Zurdo "regresó al cuerpo de Carrasco…. Buscó en sus bolsillos. De vuelta con Gris escuchó su pregunta; no respondió. En su mano cerrada apretaba una bolsa de plástico que había envuelto en un pañuelo. ¿Por qué le habría cortado el pezón?" (243). As surmised by "Miguel de Cervantes," another of Cabral de Melo's clients, "después de que la mató le cortó el pezón que le impidió chupar" (57). Impeded by the requirement for consent that limits licit sexual conquest, Carrasco is impelled to resort to murder, which, like hunting, provides an experience of domination that depends only on the exercise of physical force.

The hunting motif fits into the larger pattern of attitudes toward the Other evidenced by the majority of the *gringos* that appear in the Zurdo novels: that is, a tendency toward either indifference or hostility, two variants of a vital attitude according to which the Other is, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, an obstacle to be removed in the ego's quest for gratification. The *gringo* characters are capable of indifference even among themselves, in cases where practical considerations or personal interests trump concern for the loss of human life, as in Simak's disavowal by the FBI or Señor B's cavalier reaction to General Mitchell's death. The tendency

toward aggression best exemplified by Schwarzenegger and Simak is expressed succinctly by el Zurdo when he learns that the second corpse found in Hotel San Luis is a gringo (Simak): "ahora sí nos declaren la guerra, dicen que los gringos no son felices si no están peleando y ya se aburrieron de Medio Oriente; pues acá pueden tener su guerrita a las puertas del hogar" (*Prueba* 93).

Sport hunting, an exercise of violence stripped of practical justifications like economic need, constitutes the ultimate affirmation of the self, an expression of superiority in the barest existential terms, by the annihilation of the Other. Here we recall that Simak's death squad is referred to a "poderoso grupo *cazador* de indocumentados" (86, emphasis added). The association of the U.S. president's father and other *gringos* with this kind of hunting (and with the hunter-murderer Carrasco) corresponds to northern patterns of voracious consumption of cocaine, which constitutes another way of strengthening the ego at the expense of the Other, and both practices sit comfortably within the narcossistic framework of consumer culture, where consumer goods, animals or drugs are consumed in a dizzying cycle of desire apparently independent of the satisfaction of basic human needs, but certainly responding to psychotropic appetites of which we remain largely—and tragically—ignorant.

The Drug War and Ethical Ambiguity

While armed violence in the guise of sport hunting constitutes a thematic construct in the Zurdo novels, war forms their very context, since they take place during the Calderón *sexenio*, when the Mexican military was ordered to directly impede the cartels' operations. This endeavor is assiduously supported by the U.S. with aid for weapons and training, and in some ways the

entirety of the Drug War—that is, both the violence of the cartels and that of the state—responds to the obsessive desires flowing from the North, as figured by characters like Simak and "Arnold." The desire for cocaine and the desire for prohibition and purity, both constituting intoxicating negations of the Other, converge on Mexico, where a proxy war between consumer capitalism and its parasitic shadow is fought at the expense of the local population. Attitudes toward the war expressed throughout the novels run the gamut from dismissal to astonishment, worry and despair. On one hand, the drug war is understood to function on a rhetorical level. *Nombre de perro*, published in 2012 (the last year of Calderón's presidency), makes us privy to a high-level governmental meeting in which an unnamed, fictional president expresses his desire to project a certain image to both the international community and the cartels themselves: "deben sentir que son el enemigo, que se rompieron los acuerdos, que están enfrentando un estado fuerte y poderoso…. [E]stoy hasta la madre de oír que me quiero legitimizar, que la economía va en picada, y que somos un estado fallido" (12).

Even when the Drug War is shrugged off as political posturing, however, no one can ultimately deny that it has been deadly. The aging *narco* Turco Estrada, in conversation with his old friend Ugarte, calls it "esta tonta guerra que sólo cuenta fiambres"; as "tonta" as it may be, the fact of its staggering body count is painfully evident (*Nombre* 21). Ugarte himself struggles to reconcile the image campaign with the reality: "¿Qué ocurría? Una guerra que parecía mediática llevaba un promedio de diecinueve muertos diarios y contando" (12). An old friend of Zurdo's who is active in the underground economy, el Chapo Abitia, predicts even more intense bloodshed to come: "Qué duro está esto de la guerra, ¿no? Esos del gobierno no tienen idea del pinche alacranero que se están echando encima" (*Prueba* 171). When a splinter group meets to create a plan to break off from Valdés's Cartel del Pacífico, they discuss the war with some

degree of astonishment: “El de Tijuana tomó la palabra. Esta guerra es otra cosa, no quieren negociar, parece que ahora lo que ansían son muertos” (*Prueba* 224-5). What seems certain is that Washington could not be more pleased with Mexico’s new, more aggressive approach to organized crime, regardless of the cost in lives. At the high-level meeting Ugarte attends in *Nombre de perro*, the Mexican Cabinet member assures him, “Los acabaremos, Ugarte, esta guerra la tenemos ganada, ... los gringos están felices, su embajador lo manifiesta sin venir al caso” (13). General Alvarado, Ugarte’s patron, sums up the situation thus: “Lo que parecía un juego mediático se enmarañó; la guerra como política es un galimatías jabonoso, nadie sabe por dónde hay que ir”; the U.S., on the other hand, “celebrarán, sobre todo porque nosotros ponemos los muertos” (57).

The ethical ambiguity that is inevitably concomitant with war is faithfully recreated in the novels of the Mendieta series, which hint at the way this ambiguity is in turn a product of the climate of fear and violence created by both the cartels and government forces. Daniel Smail has pointed out that humans share with other primates a social tendency by which dominant individuals create stress in subordinates in order to solidify their advantage (164-70). This is a modality of what Smail calls “teletropy… a category of psychotropy embracing the various devices used in human societies to create mood changes in other people” (170). In Smail’s examples, female baboons and medieval castellans often used “random terror” to create a baseline pattern of stress that reaffirmed their dominance. The cartels, on the other hand, which constitute a *de facto* hegemony in Mexico, tend to deploy a violence that is at once retaliatory and admonitory. It is a gruesomely specialized semiotic violence that uses decapitations and other mutilations, particular dispositions of corpses, and brief verbal statements to transmit messages to other cartels, to the authorities, and to the public at large. These messages are highly

effective, creating a pervasive climate of stress and fear that generally prevents people from challenging cartel dominance. In *Nombre de perro*, the teenage son of feared *narco* la Tenia Solium specializes in creating signs to place on the cadavers of their victims, explaining their infraction and warning others to learn from their example (45).[79]

The universality of fear creates a phenomenon that Diana Taylor, in another context, has called “percepticide”: people willfully refuse to see or know as a means of self-preservation (119-138). After an intense street shootout between rival gangs in *Nombre de perro*, the narrator sardonically describes the aftermath: “poco a poco, vecinos atemorizados asomaron la cabeza, llamaron a la policía que vigilaba otro país, y se prepararon para decir que ellos no habían visto nada” (47). In *Balas de plata*, the body of a man related to the case Zurdo is investigating is dumped in a parking area for tractor-trailers, and although two truckers witness this, “ni locos lo dirían. Con la policía mexicana cuanto más lejos mejor y de los matones también” (20).

The intoxication of fear, however, experienced consistently in heavy doses, can be subject to the development of a “tolerance” or desensitization in people and communities. To the degree that one is not directly affected by violence in a given moment, there may be a tendency to ignore it, perhaps out of the necessity to conserve emotional energy. When el Zurdo reads the paper during *Nombre de perro*, he muses, “Cuando las novedades son las mismas, no hay novedad; eso le pareció: doce cadáveres en diversos puntos del estado, el Ejército patrullando, la policía atemorizada, los políticos declarando que no se preocuparan… y el país ardiendo. Se hará

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[79] Mendoza’s black sense of humor comes into play here, where childlike naïveté and creativity come into contact with lack of education and cold-blooded murder. The teenager’s signs invariably include spelling errors: “respeten culevras” (*Nombre* 45).

costumbre y las costumbres no inducen a reflexionar" (30-1).[80] In any case, this "costumbre" may not actually be the absence of fear but rather an acclimation to the constant nagging of anxiety.[81]

This psychotropic focus on the power of the cartels is not to imply that their domination is "merely psychological," but rather that the very real physical violence produces a powerful teletropic correlate, and indeed this is how power through violence works: you don't have to kill all of your (potential) enemies, but only enough of them to put the fear in the rest. This climate of fear not only shapes the psychotropic exigencies of the population (temporary antidotes for fear abound in both licit and illicit markets); it also means that the need for survival will impinge everywhere on ethical norms. Corruption, for instance, is driven not only by greed but also by the desire to survive in a system in which corruption is the norm and an insistence on "honesty" can look like a death-wish. Asked in an interview about his "personajes ambiguos," Mendoza himself has stated that for police,

> Ser buenos es como contravenir cierta tradición de convivir con la delincuencia y es casi como firmar una sentencia de muerte. Vivir cruzando de vez en cuando la línea de la honestidad es lo que les puede garantizar que llegan a la jubilación. De otra manera están condenados. Es lo que Mendieta comprende al final. No quiere nada con los narcos, pero está constantemente negociando con ellos. Es un policía que los narcos necesitan. (Galindo)

[80] Castro Cambrón discusses this phenomenon and suggests that the Zurdo novels combat this tendency (27-28).

[81] Also compare to Benjamin's theorization of experiece under industrial capitalism, as analyzed by Buck-Morss ("Aesthetics" 16-18).

El Zurdo's skill and general integrity make him useful to the *narcos* and thus, ironically, they seek him out and involve him in their interests. At the same time, the Cártel del Pacífico at times shows a competence and organizational flexibility that the Policía Ministerial del Estado often lacks, a fact that further seems to exacerbate el Zurdo's own ethical vacillations through which he becomes involved in the bloody world of organized crime. It is impossible to pinpoint where the cycle of fear and corruption begins or ends, but the corruption of the official law enforcement agencies forms a general backdrop to many of Mendieta's actions. El Zurdo's superior, Chief Briseño, is notoriously reverent toward political figures and powerful *capos*. When the investigation into Mayra Cabral de Melo's death points toward Luís Ángel Meraz, a well-known politician with presidential aspirations, Briseño strongly suggests that "sería bueno que no lo molestaran" since "es una fina persona y con mucho futuro" (*Prueba* 38). This judgment is reinforced by the social identity of the victims (Mayra and one of her friends): as against the prestige and power of Meraz, they are merely "teiboleras" (table dancers) (80). His attitude is similar when confronted with murders committed by feared narcos, as in the case of La Tenia Solium's darkly humorous spree of killing dentists who refuse him emergency treatment (*Nombre* 154).

In general, various law enforcement agencies are seen to be unresponsive and corrupt. During a gun battle involving La Tenia and a rival group, "[a]lejados unos quinientos metros dos policías en una patrulla escuchaban la tracatera sin preocuparse, fumaban plácidamente. ¿Es atrás o adelante, pareja? Sabe. Cabrones, qué manera de gastar balas" (*Nombre* 46). Most flagrant of all is the Division of Narcotics, headed by Moisés Pineda. Working in Narcotics is said to provide a path to "la riqueza fácil y expedita", and indeed in *Balas de plata* we witness Pineda rolling up in a new Lamborghini, flaunting his corruption to Mendieta ("a Pineda le gustaba

fastidiarlo”). He shows off his new vehicle, hinting at its provenance, and thanks Mendieta for referring to him the case of a cartel-related killing: for someone like Pineda, corpses can be currency (75, 57). However, at times fear shows through his apparent relish for his own crookedness, and he convulsively repels a dangerous case like a hot potato: discussing la Tenia Solium, he warns el Zurdo that the *narco* will be hard to capture, and when Mendieta replies that the case falls under the jurisdiction of Narcotics, Pineda replies, “Ni madres, es de ustedes, olvídate de que nosotros le vayamos a entrar. Quieres conocer a tus nietos, ¿verdad? Más o menos, a poco tú no” (*Nombre* 196). Despite or alongside the rampant corruption, then, the series makes us privy to “la policía atemorizada” (30).

At the same time, even high-level politicians are shown not to dare make a major move without the blessing of the drug-lords. In *Balas de plata*, the father of the murdered man has presidential pretensions, and when he visits Marcelo Valdés, he relates plainly his conversation with some supporters who asked him to run for president: “les hize ver que no podía tomar una decisión tan trascendente sin consultarlo usted” (124). Valdés is pleased at the solicitousness of this presidential hopeful; among his only concerns is one related to Canizales’s dead son and to Valdez’s own daughter, Samantha, who had been one of Bruno Canizales’s lovers. “Hay un punto que me inquieta, ingeniero, ahora la mirada era dura, si vamos a buscar la grande, no creo que le beneficie que su hijo esté apareciendo en los medios todos los días.” Fortunately for both parties, Canizales can assure his benefactor that “Eso tiene remedio,” since “el procurador Bracamontes sueña con un ascenso y sería capaz de cualquier cosa por obtenerlo” (125). The bereaved father later demands that el Zurdo suspend the investigation so as not to “despertar enconos,” causing Mendieta to ruminate, “Qué novedad: detesta agitar el agua; seguro le teme al Queteco Valdés; pobre tipo, pobres nuestros notables metidos hasta el cuello” (*Balas* 196).

The mock pity that marks el Zurdo's comment is characteristic of his ironic attitude toward the heady cocktail of greed and fear that seems to motivate Mexican officials at all levels, who are to greater or lesser degrees both victims and collaborators of the cartels. At a meeting of *capos* after Marcelo Valdés's death, Samantha instructs her subordinates in dealing with the increased pressure involved with the drug war: "debemos cuidar nuestras relaciones con el estado, sobre todo ahora que el presidente ha declarado la guerra…. [T]al vez aumentemos la nómina, lo mismo que con los poderes que están en la Ciudad de México. De la DEA te encargas tú. Señaló a uno de los gringos" (*Prueba* 182). The ambiguity of the last part of the quote leaves open the question of whether dealing with the DEA in this case involves a purely antagonistic relationship or whether they have corrupt contacts in that agency, suggesting that official complicity transcends national borders. In any case, it is indeed in *La prueba del ácido* that Mendoza succeeds most fully in elucidating the complex trans-legal and transnational relationships that mark the drug industry and the drug war. This is exemplified by Donald Simak, the FBI agent who sought to combat the criminality of drug traffic through the criminality of arms smuggling (home-grown alternative McGiver, in contrast, after killing Simak, happily supplies arms both to the army and to the cartels). Nor is the Valdés's criminal organization a strictly Mexican one: "El Cártel del Pacífico se apoyaba en seis jefes mexicanos, un colombiano y cuatro norteamericanos" (182). In fact, according to McGiver, the *gringos* "son los que se llevan la tajada del león" (*Prueba* 75).

The element of complicity between the cartels and the institutions of the state, as well as the competition between them to claim political representation of the people, continually works to destabilize the typical dichotomy that would define the forces of law and order as good and the criminal organizations as evil. On a number of occasions in the Zurdo series, the *narcos*

appear in a positive light, either as heroes or as community leaders capable of considerable benevolence. Marcelo Valdés, the patriarch of the Cartel del Pacífico who dies during the action of *La prueba del ácido*, is characterized in highly ambivalent terms. One of the first time the reader encounters him, he is fielding two requests for financial backing. First, a high government official whose career he has supported asks him to invest in a soft-drink company, an "imposition" that leaves him highly indignant, and he threatens to withdraw his money from Mexican investments and place it elsewhere, "a ver quién pierde más." Immediately thereafter, Valdés's doting wife mentions that two women from "un pueblo cercano de la tierra de mi madre" had visited requesting financial support for their community; specifically, "Si les puedes meter la luz eléctrica y si los apoyamos para restaurar la iglesia que se está cayendo." In this case, the *capo* does not even hesitate: "Encárgate, que de una vez les pongan alumbrado público y remocen la escuela" (*Balas* 48). In this passage, Valdés appears as an important pillar of the Mexican economy who is proud and capable of economic ruthlessness, but also community-minded and loyal to family connections and the requests of the humble.[82]

Later we are privy to his own appraisal of his role in Culiacán's economic growth: "Necios, se la pasan criticándonos, pero bien que viven de nosotros; hice crecer este lupanar, levanté barrios enteros y creé más fuentes de trabajo que cualquier gobierno; no permitiré que lo olviden; era un rancho polvoriento cuando empecé y miren hasta dónde llega" (*Balas* 178). This view, moreover, is seen to be widely held: after Marcelo Valdés's death, el Zurdo's and his friend el Chapo Abitia discuss the *capo*'s legacy. When Mendieta notes that Valdés "[M]ató un chingo de gente," Abitia counters that "también ayudó a pueblos enteros y ya ves lo que dicen,

[82] See Hobsbawm for the concept of the social bandit, and see Acosta Morales on the idea of political representation of the marginalized by criminal organizations, in relation to Herrera's *Trabajos del reino*.

que si él no le mete lana a esta ciudad, fuera un corral de vacas" (*Prueba* 201). While alive, he even expresses interest, perhaps only half seriously, in proposing the legalization of drug traffic, presumably to head off the increased violence that will come with the Mexican Drug War (*Balas* 123).

Although Samantha Valdés's capacity for ruthlessness turns out to be no less than her father's, upon inheriting the business after her his death she largely continues in his tradition of cultivating a family-based organization that prizes loyalty, community-building, level-headed business sense and strategic alliances. In dealing with the mounting Drug War, she insists that the cartel operate as a business instead of letting itself be dragged into bloody, open conflict, a concern that is the central focus of the meeting she convenes with her group the day Mariana Kelly is killed (*Nombre* 67, 113). She expresses a desire to protect the people from the consequences of war: "Evitemos que la gente sea afectada, de seguro se vendrá una ola de asaltos, secuestros y muertes inocentes, tratemos de que no ocurran en el territorio donde tenemos control" (*Prueba* 182), and to provide jobs, legitimate or otherwise (*Nombre* 68). Summing up the position of her organization, she declares, "somos traficantes, no asesinos" (*Nombre* 128). Her romantic partner Mariana Kelly, for her part, keeps charitable causes on Samantha's radar. After her death, Samantha laments, "quería servir, hacer un hospital para niños con cáncer y dispensarios en los barrios pobres" (*Nombre* 112). They discuss the plan for the hospital just before Mariana's death, and "Samantha le dijo que sí, de regreso a Culiacán buscarían un terreno para edificarlo y en un año lo tendrían funcionando." In an added twist of irony, Samantha proposes that McGiver, the arms smuggler, can arrange the importation of medical equipment from the United States (59).

Samantha's men, acting on her behalf, save el Zurdo's skin or otherwise help him on numerous occasions. El Diablo Urquídez, who is the fiancé of the daughter of one of Mendieta's closest friends, places a call to Samantha to intervene when Richie Bernal wants to kill him (*Prueba* 61-62). In *Nombre de perro*, el Diablo, who has been assigned by Samantha Valdés to assist Mendieta in the investigation of Mariana's murder, comes to the rescue again. In a street confrontation with the fearsome Tenia Solium and his men, Zurdo and Gris, barricaded behind Zurdo's Toyota, run out of options, and decide to charge the narcos, resigned to dying honorably. Just then, "un tremendo bazucazo hizo saltar la Hummer que se incendió y una descarga de Barret trajo el sosiego absoluto" (198). From a truck that was trailing behind La Tenia's men's vehicle, and that Zurdo and Gris had assumed was part of the assault they were facing, "bajaron el Diablo Urquídez y el Chóper Tarriba alborozados, pinches cabrones, comiendo papitas con cerveza. ¿Todo bien, mi Zurdo? Nunca había sonreído con tanto gusto…. Órdenes de la jefa, mi Zurdo, ya sabe cómo es" (198). To the extent that the reader identifies with the detectives here, the surprise reversal and the perverse pleasure of strange bedfellows has us smiling with the *sicarios* and the *placas*. As we feel the murderous extralegal power of the cartels on "our" side, we can experience a hint of why disenfranchised people might choose to identify with a power that feels much more immediate and real to them than a neglectful state.

The climax of *La prueba del ácido* features a striking joint operation between Mendieta's team and Samantha's sicarios: an assault on the ranch of Adán Carrasco, Mayra Cabral de Melo's killer, and it illustrates further the blurring of boundaries between "good guys" and "bad guys." As discussed previously, the Valdés family comes to respect Mendieta for his integrity and Samantha insists that, despite conventional wisdom, the cartel maintains its own ethical norms.

> No soy tu hombre, Samantha, soy demasiado pendejo y todavía un poco honesto. Precisamente por eso me interesas, Zurdo Mendieta, ¿crees que no necesitamos gente honrada en nuestras filas? Aunque no lo creas o no lo hayas pensado, este negocio no funcionaría sin grandes dosis de fidelidad y honradez; el grupo que se resquebraja, si no aplica correctivos con urgencia, desaparece. (239)

The mention of "correctivos" is a reference to Valdés's massacre of a group of subordinates that rejected her leadership and was attempting to splinter the cartel, and while Mendieta registers his disapproval of her ferocity, that does not stop him from accepting her offer to help him apprehend Adán Carrasco (239-40). The enlistment of cartel forces in the confrontation with a murderer and the declared ethical integrity of the Cártel del Pacífico involves a pair of reciprocal operations of legitimation and delegitimation. The cartel is legitimized by its support for the punishment of a powerful social actor who has preyed upon a vulnerable member of society, in the culmination of an investigation that el Zurdo has carried out practically in spite of his own chain of command, which at every point seems motivated by the relative social significance of the victim and the suspects in her murder. The ethical authority of the federal police is thus delegitimized to the extent that it is seen as so bogged down in bureaucracy and clientelism as to be generally ineffective. Samantha Valdés's statement about honor and loyalty in her organization begs a comparison with the law enforcement agencies that appear in the novels, which tend to be marked, as already discussed, by an ethic of "estar dónde calienta el sol," their functionaries being under the constant influence of some mixture of fear and greed.

In the midst of this ethical morass, the reader may look to "el Zurdo" Mendieta, respected by colleagues and enemies alike, to be a reliable source of upright conduct (*Prueba* 197-8).

However, Mendieta's own actions often deviate from widely accepted ethical norms that underlie legal concepts like due process and human rights. Often, this deviation is related to the institutional weakness referred to above. When he hands Goga Fox and René Villegas over to Samantha Valdés, essentially sanctioning an extra-judicial execution, Mendieta is under the influence of his relationship with Goga, but he has also run up against institutional barriers that have already caused the case to be closed. Pursuing it only through his own obstinacy (or addiction, as we will discuss later), he realizes when he attempts to apprehend them that their boasts of impunity are probably well-founded, since the same elements that forced the closure of the case in the first place would presumably still be in effect to prevent its successful prosecution. Cartel power in this instance is split between Samantha, who seeks her version of justice, and her father Marcelo, who wants the story to be buried to protect his presidential candidate (the victim's father), and is thus backing the official inaction on the case. Zurdo's apparently unethical actions then become seen as a desperate move to sidestep the institutional paralysis that guarantee impunity for the killers.

In *Nombre de perro*, el Zurdo's association with Samantha places him in additional ethically problematic situations—to his apparent indifference—as when the *capo* has the *gringo* who attacked el Zurdo killed as a Christmas present to show her appreciation for his efforts on her behalf. When Max Garcés informs him, Mendieta, still bruised from the encounter, "se tocó el pecho dolorido para no sentirse culpable," seemingly accepting the bloody gift without raising an eyebrow. He merely goes on to give Garcés instructions for the type of truck he needs to carry out the investigation for Samantha (115).

Zurdo's healthy disrespect for institutional restraints on his actions also seem to lead him to take a highly questionable stance on the use of torture. In *Nombre de perro*, a suspect in the

murder of a dentist, beyond being simply disagreeable, proves to be highly uncooperative and dangerous. When their "especialista en confesiones difíciles" fails to overpower this suspect using conventional police brutality and as a result becomes depressed, Mendieta proposes a controlled torture session with a cattle prod, which eventually takes place and is effective in breaking through the suspect's silence, which turns out to be motivated by a need to conceal his relationship with a cartel member (40, 171). In a context of near-universal institutional corruption, el Zurdo seems to become so accustomed to flouting official objections to his actions that he fails to differentiate those originating in the protection of private interests and those stemming from legitimate human rights concerns.

Literary Pleasures and the Intoxication of Discovery

The perception of ethical ambiguity that permeates human interactions within the sphere of the illicit drug industry can also extend into *representations* of this industry's violence. It has been known since Aristotle that "we delight in contemplating the most accurately made images of the very things that are painful for us to see, such as the forms of the most contemptible insects and of dead bodies," and the Zurdo novels do not necessarily shy away from this kind of "delight" (22-3; 1448b). This dynamic opens out onto an array of intra-, inter- and extra-textual questions, including a common critique of the prevailing currents of "narcoliterature," of which Mendoza is considered a prime representative. Authors like Mendoza are sometimes excoriated for producing work that is opportunistic and exploitative, giving the public what they crave: a supposedly realistic, voyeuristic look into the violent world of drug traffic. Rafael Lemus, for example, wrote in 2005 that literature about narco-traffic from northern Mexico in general, and

Mendoza's work in particular, betrays a violent and chaotic reality by simplifying it, creating, "con ánimo turístico… una postal del México más reciente" and that, like other sub-genres, "se explota un tema y se hace comercio." The representation of the violence of the illicit drug industry, in his view, "[n]o está allí para sacudir al lector, sino, como lo demás, para complacerlo" (40).[83] While I disagree with Lemus's conclusions, instead of refuting his affirmation about what Mendoza's work does for or to the reader, I'd like to expand on just that question and explore its implications in different directions.

Lemus argues that the realism he is referring to, a "docile" narco-*costumbrismo*, falsely imposes logic and order onto a reality that is ruled by irrationality and chaos. Formulaic novels propose tidy causes and effects that provide a satisfactory explanatory framework for the violence. What he proposes instead are "antinovelas" that mimic the illogic of drug violence with "[u]na prosa brutal, destazada, incoherente…. Una narrativa homocida, con vocación de suicidio" (41). The fundaments of Lemus's critique of realism are at least as old as the Frankfurt School, but not for that invalid, and his aesthetic proposal is indeed interesting; the only novel it really brings to mind is indeed not Mexican. Lemus mentions Fernando Vallejo later in his essay as the kind of furious writer Mexico needs, in opposition to so many sober domesticators of chaos, and *La virgen de los sicarios*, for example, is certainly "Una narrativa homocida, con vocación de suicidio," if ever there has been one (Lemus 41).[84]

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[83] While the original publication of this essay preceded that of the novels of the Zurdo series and thus referred to Mendoza's previous work, its reprint in a 2012 book suggests that the author's fundamental assessment of Mendoza has not changed.

[84] While I agree that such an approach may be very compelling, I am wary of prescriptive ideas about what literature must be or do, and think it wise to reserve a place for a number of varying approaches to an urgent subject matter.

However, Lemus's indictment of work like Mendoza's reeks of the stubborn distinction between high and popular literature, an old dichotomy whose usefulness today is questionable at best.[85] A novel may do many things, and I would make two points about those of the Zurdo series. First, novels that can be read as "popular" and "realist," like Mendoza's, may be valuable for elucidating a complex reality, a purpose Lemus dismisses (41). Do such narconovels simplify reality? Of course, as do all cultural products that attempt to represent reality in some way. Is there a danger in giving the illusion of a transparent, faithful and comprehensive portrait of reality? Certainly, but there may be a complementary danger in falling into the nihilism that Lemus identifies as the ethic of narco-culture but which also inheres in a critical stance that condemns any attempt to explain overwhelming violence. In Eduardo Antonio Parra's sharp response to Lemus's article, he reasonably points out that *norteños* live with the reality of the narcotics industry to a greater degree than most and do indeed understand something of its functioning and, yes, its system of ethics. In contrast, he identifies Lemus's perspective with "la visión histérica y superficial de la clase media cuya información proviene de la prensa y la televisión," concluding that, from a distance, the narco-industry may indeed appear to be, as Lemus affirms, merely "el puto caos" (61). However, while Thanatos may have a solid foothold in the violence of the narcotics industry, neither the death drive nor any other type of irrationality operate independent of factors that are in fact within the grasp of our understanding, even if this grasp is at times tenuous. Novels like Mendoza's are "didactic," says Lemus, and perhaps they

[85] Also see Prados, who quotes novelist Emiliano Monge: "Hay dos narcoliteraturas: la policiaca y la literaria" ("Más allá"). Gabriela Polit Dueñas, for her part, sees the Zurdo series as a retreat from the accurate and challenging representation of local culture achieved in his previous work and a concession to the demands and expectations of transnational publishing (essentially a shift from the "literary" toward the "popular") (77-8). To the extent that I refer in this dissertation to a distinction between "popular" and "literary" fiction, my intention is to refer to common perceptions rather than to accept the legitimacy of these as aesthetic categories.

are, in the sense that they are social novels that are, much to Lemus's chagrin, interested in showing causes and effects, and even in highlighting the shared responsibility of powerful social actors. This kind of "populist" novel, as Lemus characterizes it, may be out of style in some academic circles, but is not for that without social value or interest.[86]

Second, as we have already seen, Mendoza's Zurdo novels have a deep relationship with psychotropy. While they may not heed Lemus's call to create a prose as violent as the *narcos* themselves, they do bring about a seemingly self-conscious mirroring—thematically and at the level of reading itself—of structures of addiction and desire associated with the psychotropic effect of the substances whose commerce underlies every aspect of the novels' action. These novels may indeed be formulaic and meant for relatively easy and pleasurable consumption by the public, as suggested by some of the slightly lurid covers. *Prueba del ácido* boasts an extreme close up of a beautiful female mouth, slightly open, with glistening, full, pink lips, on the lower of which fresh blood is welling. *Nombre de perro* features the torso of a seated female with exposed cleavage who languidly dangles a pistol from a finger hooked through the trigger guard. These books satisfy the desires of the reader for a tough detective, a titillating love interest, plenty of clever banter and *norteño* slang, gun battles and explosions, plot twists that highlight the criminal underworld and official corruption, and a last-minute revelation of the killer, leading to a violent confrontation. Mendoza seems pretty comfortable pushing this kind of product; the

[86] This judgment is in resonance with Mendoza's own assessment of his work's relevance, as relayed by Prados: they are "novelas que restituyen la verdad en toda su complejidad social" ("Élmer Mendoza"). In the estimation of Meza García and Arizmendi Domínguez, "La obra de Élmer Mendoza transforma y rehace la realidad de manera indirecta cuando pone en alerta a los lectores en asuntos que se refieren a la cotidianidad y que despiertan su sensibilidad social"; "nos despierta los reflejos críticos a la hora de enfrentar la realidad" (95).

Zurdo novels in some ways seem to revel in their identity as genre fiction, their prose informed by the confidence that comes with skillful adherence to a well-crafted formula.

However, textual intoxication is by no means the exclusive domain of "popular" fiction; let us first consider how the Zurdo novels also offer pleasures often considered to be associated with the rarefied realms of "high" literature. Through numerous references to prominent literary works, authors, and to the study of literature itself, and through several intertexts woven into the series to varying degrees of depth, the novels give the impression that they are products self-consciously inserted into a cultural field still largely defined by the poles of high and popular literature. They come across as works that are proudly "popular" but also aware of, and interested in, the world of canonical literature.[87]

In this regard, the fact that Mendoza's detective studied literature at the university is important both as an explanatory device for the literary touches interspersed into his internal discourse and as part of the conversation that the novels sustain with literary traditions and the cultural field (*Balas* 86). In a moment of desperation el Zurdo considers leaving his police career to "dar clases de literatura en una prepa" (*Balas* 237). He even consults one of his old literature professors, who at one point he finds reading Ricardo Piglia, on the cultural significance of the

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[87] It should be noted that Mendoza's own statements on the question of labels and genres within fiction are somewhat contradictory. On one hand, according to Gabriela Polit Dueñas, Mendoza does not believe his work to adhere to a "formula" defined by the literature of narco trafficking, nor does he see such literature as a distinct sub-genre: "Literature… is simply literature" (11). Later, however, she quotes him saying that he essentially plays along with the categorization undertaken by the public or critics (64-5). Finally, in a 2012 interview with Luis Prados, he seems to take ownership of the "narcoliteratura" label: "Es una estética de la violencia que se está dando en el cine y la música pero también en la ópera, la danza, las artes plásticas y el teatro. Es todo un movimiento, no es oportunismo. Es como descubrir una veta de metales: habrá quien saque las mejores pepitas y quienes solo rasquen. Me gusta la palabra narcoliteratura porque los que estamos comprometidos con este registro estético de novela social tenemos las pelotas para escribir sobre ello porque crecimos allí y sabemos de qué hablamos" ("Élmer Mendoza").

titular *balas de plata*, in a small way vindicating the importance of the study of culture for "real world" concerns (173, 204).

Literary icons from the global (Spanish Golden Age figures like Cervantes and Quevedo) to the national (Juán Rulfo), to the local (Sinaloan poet Jaime Labastida) are enlisted for everything from incidental mentions and names of characters, to poetry quotations that comment on the situations in which the characters find themselves, to minor plotlines. Both Quevedo and Labastida are called in to help el Zurdo deal with his feelings for Susana Luján, the mother of his teenage son. When he sees her for the first time in many years, he attributes the sense of intoxication he feels to the poet: "Quevedo ebrio, brindaría y musitaría: 'y eres así a la espada parecida / que matas más desnuda que vestida' (*Nombre* 50-1). Later, when el Zurdo realizes he has fallen in love with Susana he again recurs to poetry: "sólo recordó: *Creyente sólo en lo que toco, yo te toco mujer hasta la entraña*. Atentamente, Jaime Labastida" (191, italics original). However, it is Rulfo's work that appears most often, perhaps not surprisingly given the debt owed to Rulfo by Mendoza and every writer that attempts a literary transposition of colloquial Mexican speech. To cite only two instances, in *Balas de plata*, Ortega's son, Memo, borrows *Pedro Páramo* from el Zurdo, who is seen as something of an expert on the subject (107, 243), and at one point Susana is compared to Susana San Juan (*Nombre* 92).

Nombre de perro ventures a more intricate intertextual dialogue with the repeated appearance of *El conde de Montecristo*, which Zurdo's interrogation specialist buys him as a Christmas gift, and which Zurdo had read as a student. When the detectives capture Ugarte, Mariana Kelly's killer, the dialogue between him and Zurdo makes patent the thematic parallel: "Tus razones tendrías para hacer ese jale, capitán Ugarte. Poca cosa, después de tantos años sólo mi odio permaneció intacto. Como Edmund Dantes. Con la diferencia de que yo no pude

perdonar" (206). Long-simmering resentment, satisfied at last by dint of patience and carefully calculated vengeance brings together Dumas's story of the young victim of a conspiracy to ruin him and Mendoza's story of a military contractor whose family life is disrupted due to his wife's relationship with Mariana Kelly. However, whereas the story of Dantès includes an aspect of redemptive forgiveness, as previously mentioned Ugarte is finally unable to kick the habit of an intoxicating hatred: "la paciencia es una adicción" (207).

Not all of the intertexts that appear in the Zurdo novels are from the canons of high literature. We have already briefly considered the intoxicating effects of the music highlighted in the series, but musical texts are also quoted or referenced in order to enhance the action or themes present at a given moment. The narcocorridos mentioned in the texts ("El regreso del Chapo" ["No hay chapo que no sea bravo"], "La Banda del Carro Rojo"), real songs glorifying real narcotraffickers, serve to underline the social power and legitimacy enjoyed by the cartels in both the fictional and the real world. Still, the subtle inclusion of these songs as intertexts also pushes the Zurdo series in the direction of what is thought of as "literary," as do ludic experiments like the moment when two sicarios walk into a restaurant to take someone into custody, and the text pauses to give us a few bars of musical notation. They turn out to be from the theme from the film *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, subsequently used in international popular culture for introducing a showdown in a comical way, as is the case here, where Mendoza's playful formal innovation accompanies the kidnapping of a troublesome person of interest by el Zurdo's jovial *narco* assistants in *Nombre de perro* (164). The recognition of intertextual connections and the appreciation of narrative innovation affords its own kind of literary pleasure; Mendoza seems to relish deploying these devices and with them seems to angle for causing pleasure in the reader. For Roland Barthes, the intertext allows one to "savor the

sway of formulas, the reversal of origins," the invocation of a "*circular memory*" that supposes "the impossibility of living outside the infinite text" (36, original italics).

However, the presence of these more subtle literary intoxications is minor relative to the multi-level involvement of these books with structures of addiction. When the popularity of leisure reading exploded in Europe during the eighteenth century, it was recognized widely—and with a great deal of alarm—as an addictive psychotropic practice capable of dangerously "inflaming the passions," especially those of young women (Smail 181-3). Still, even someone as tough as el Zurdo was subject to getting drawn into the romance of a classic like *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which "me traía clavado" when he was a young student (*Nombre* 132), and he finds himself "atrapado" in the historical novel *Noticias del imperio* (*Nombre* 244). There are a number of ways literature may be intoxicating; Roland Barthes cites *The Count of Monte Cristo* as an example of a text that brings him pleasure, as opposed to *jouissance* (roughly translated as "bliss"), an anarchic relationship that is for him the highest calling of literature (40). Despite its association with literary classics, for Barthes "pleasure" exists on a spectrum with that of the striptease, the gradual and pleasurable revelation (10). This pleasure accounts for much of the addictive quality of literature, as well as that of investigation, whether criminal or, I daresay, academic. The high we are chasing here is the addictive rush of discovery, of finding out answers to vexing questions; this is the domain of mystery, suspense, and police fiction, where a good author can stimulate desire by creating a knowledge gap in a compelling story, and then string the reader along with crumbs of information that eventually lead to a (temporarily) satisfying resolution.

The desire the reader feels mirrors that of the investigator or the character trying to solve the mystery. In this economy of intoxication, we, with Mendieta, are fed small "fixes" of

information, spaced out enough for us to always be jonesing. Often, he and the reader are left waiting like junkies for the next hit while he pursues a dead end, or we overdose with him when he barks up the wrong tree and the *narcos* try to kill him. The intoxication of investigation is thematized in *Balas de plata*, when the powers that be demand that the case be suspended. Mendieta and his colleagues, though deprived of professional and economic motivations to continue, seem unable to stop investigating, el Zurdo finding himself "clavado" (242). The psychotropic and addictive effects of investigation are suggested in a conversation between Zurdo and Goga: "Cuando resuelves un caso, ¿Qué sientes? ... Una profunda paz… Quiere decir que ahora estás impaciente. Como perro rabioso" (202-3). As the team continues to come across new information pertaining to the closed case, he has the sensation that "el muy cabrón se está resolviendo solo" (202). Through this kind of personification, the case itself is imputed agency as an addicting force or, alternately, that agency is ascribed to the victim or perpetrator of the murder: Zurdo feels himself to be in extreme proximity to the killer, even that "me anda buscando" (204, 205, 227). This can only partially be explained by the incaution of *one* of the killers, the grieving, alcoholic father of suicide victim Paola Rodríguez; it also points to the way the object of addiction is always very close to the addict and in fact interacts with him, often being experienced as a willing entity: "pinche caso, no quiere dejarme" (235).

For his part, Zurdo, like a struggling junky, resists the call of the case, repeatedly making remarks to the effect that "Qué bueno que suspendieron la investigación. Me hubiera vuelto loco" (201). At one point he tells Gris that he has lost interest: "estoy harto de navegar entre intocables que infringen las leyes a su antojo. Hubo otra larga pausa. Me dejé llevar por la inercia" (233). Only a page later, however, he has to recognize that the case is still dominating his thoughts. In addition to himself, he tries weakly to convince Gris and Ortega, his forensic

specialist that they should move on (238, 242). Ortega, too, mentions the influence of inertia, a concept that might be fruitfully interrogated regarding the nature of addiction. Inertia is a type of movement neither impelled internally nor externally. In human terms, inertia is synonymous with habit, through which behaviors that become automatic, independent of conscious control, and habit in turn forms part of the structure of addiction (Wehrenberg 31). The investigators, however, seem to locate inertia outside of human subjectivity: Zurdo lets himself be *carried along* by it, and according to Ortega "cuando un caso no se termina hay una inercia, simplemente estamos en ella" (242). In this sense the case, as addictive agent, is an object with its own directionality and velocity and the investigators are "atrapado en él" (195).

The automatic action of habit draws one into the inertial field of the object of desire and addiction holds one there, "in the place where the distinction between interiority and exteriority is radically suspended" (Ronell 72). This position implies an interminable chase for something that is close but unattainable, since the lead is just a fix, always wearing off too soon, only the means to another lead. Ultimate satisfaction is always deferred because the difference between a lead and the resolution of a case is only a matter of degree: a resolved case is soon replaced by a new one, and the investigator is again left chasing a phantom, "elaborating [an] Other as absence" (Ronell 75). As Mendieta ruminates on the case, on Goga, and on a number of other stressors, a confluence that has brought him to "el límite," a state of overwhelmed "indefensión," he concludes, "Realmente es la búsqueda de un otro que no existe, y que sin embargo nos tiene arteramente contaminada la identidad" (244, 248). This is the addict "devouring, or drinking up the toxic spill of the Other" (Ronell 63). A state of *thrownness* exacerbated by the extreme violence of a particular social reality, a helpless and desperate pursuit of a phantasmic other, this kind of intoxication is distinct from my appropriation of Ronell's concept of narcossism, where

the Other is held at bay through chemical prosthesis. Here we glimpse a dialectics of intoxication in which the term of ecstasy and self-exaltation is opposed not by "humiliating sobriety" but by something more like a humiliating intoxication. Here, too, the mimetic desire of the reader ceases and she remembers herself to be but a voyeur—and a privileged one to the extent of the distance from which she reads—with a window on the underside of this grave dialectic.

Conclusion

The variety of ways in which the Zurdo series manages psychotropy not only thematically but also directly and actively ensures their place among the most significant narco-literature being produced. By laying bare the psychotropic motives behind its characters' actions, the novels do not relegate the drive to intoxication to the status of an exotic force exclusively inherent to *gringos*, instead sketching a psychotropic map that contextualizes narco-violence in Mexico as an important node in a vast web of intoxication. However, reading them one may sense a *directionality* to the movement of psychotropic influence, in line with the United States' overwhelming geopolitical power: the violence of the narcotics industry inculcates widespread fear, greed and corruption in Mexico, but it, in turn, is fed by obsessive desires largely but not exclusively flowing from the North (here we remember the collection of feverish *gringos* that appear in the novels). The desires that feed the cocaine industry take the form not only of the desire to feel the self as powerful and autonomous as against a world full of *others* through the consumption of cocaine, but also a xenophobic, puritanical desire for prohibition, figured in *La prueba del ácido* by FBI agent Donald Simak.

As Herlinghaus puts it, "the 'North' programmatically disavows its own need for intoxication by keeping the 'economy of the scapegoat' alive" (*Narcoepics* 35). On the flipside

of this is a kind of intoxication Peter Brooks has analyzed in a very different but not incompatible context. He uses the term "virtue tripping" to denote the inebriating effects of the renunciation of desire, "employed to the dramatization and glorification of the ego," in an assertion of "the irreducibility of the self in the face of the destructive pressures of society and the seductions of the Other" (150). In repressing desire for the solipsistic euphoria of illegal drugs like cocaine, the prohibitionist may reach a state in which "'Virtue' has ceased to be a moral imperative and has become rather a 'sentiment,' a feeling" that allows self-exaltation to the point of an "almost hysterical sublimity" (152). Brooks calls such "virtues" "ruses of the ego claiming victories where in fact it is seeking to pleasure itself with the latent content of its repressions" (153). This is the hypocritical intoxication of prohibition, a reveling in the autonomous self in the face of the "seductions" of the foreign, racial other.[88]

Thus, the seemingly contradictory tendencies of demand for cocaine and demand for prohibition share a basis in the negation of the Other, whether personal, racial or national, and they all but guarantee the existence of a lucrative and deadly illicit drug industry in Latin America, a fact plainly recognized by fictional *capo* Samantha Valdés. In discussing Calderón's Drug War with her subordinates, she notes its limitations: "[Q]ue los políticos declaren es inevitable, pero que no pase de ahí; en Estados Unidos no van a regular el consumo aunque su presidente proclame que están en eso…, y mientras eso no ocurra, tenemos asegurado el mercado y el mercado manda" (*Nombre* 67). The money launderer Gandhi Olmedo recognizes this as well: "nadie va a abandonar un negocio tan jugoso y con un mercado cautivo" (*Prueba* 75). Here, the respective logics of the above-board economy and its illicit simulacrum are seen to line up disturbingly well, as they also do when large financial institutions profit from illicit drug

[88] See Lusane for a broad consideration of the relationship between race and drug prohibition.

money. When asked whether he wants his profits deposited in Swiss banks or in the Cayman Islands, he responds, "Estados Unidos, allí están más seguros" (*Balas* 123).[89]

All the players with some kind of stake in the intoxication associated with the cocaine industry are implicated here, and virtually no one comes out clean. It is noteworthy when Mendoza's son, Jason, proclaims himself to be "el único de mi clase que este año no consumió drogas." Mendieta comments that "Es muy grave eso allá, ¿verdad?" and Jason confirms that he has not always avoided drugs: his original claim was already qualified by the clause "este año," and he admits, "cuesta dejarla" (*Nombre* 18). But the status of being "limpio de adicciones," more than being something celebrated for its own sake, appears both times it is mentioned as an angle Jason uses to try to convince his father to buy him a Christmas present (18, 159). Even abstention becomes a strategy of indulgence, as one kind of consumption substitutes another. By taking a psychotropic view of the Mexican Drug War and the broader, U.S.-led War on Drugs, the Zurdo novels are able to delve into some of the psychic structures driving the violence and being driven by it. Narcossism, in particular, though epitomized by cocaine use, is seen to be a more fundamental psychic structure that is ominously independent of any given chemical stimulus, from which we may surmise that it will prove definitively elusive to the crosshairs of militarized interdiction.

[89] For examples of alleged nonfiction money laundering by major banks, see articles by Fitzpatrick, Smith and Silver-Greenberg.

Chapter 3

Disturbing Innocence: Defamiliarizing *Narco* Violence through Child Protagonists in *Fiesta en la Madriguera* and *Prayers for the Stolen*

> "A generation's experience of youth has much in common with the experience of dreams. Its historical configuration is a dream configuration. Every epoch has such a side turned toward dreams, the child's side."
>
> —Walter Benjamin

In Luís Buñuel's classic 1974 film, *Le fantôme de la liberté*, one of the loosely connected vignettes centers on a young girl who is said to have disappeared without a trace from school. The parents first question the school authorities and then take up the matter with the police. All in all, it is a rather subdued portrayal of a presumably traumatic event, other than the odd fact that the girl is present throughout, first at the school, then at the police station as they fill out the missing person report. When young Aliette points out her presence to her mother as the headmistress explains her disappearance, she is reprimanded for interrupting the school official. At the police station, she is again brusquely silenced by the commissioner, although he then enlists her help to fill out the report for her disappearance.

In their inability to see Aliette and their refusal to hear her, three central disciplinary social institutions—the family, the school and the police—are seen to constitute the child as a radical Other that is denied subjectivity and agency, being necessarily and exclusively the object of rational adulthood and the raw material out of which it replicates itself. A child's truth, if it is

at odds with truth of adult authority, must be rejected as pertaining to an alien and unknown epistemology. Aliette herself, on the other hand, recognizing her own presence and the absurdity of the situation, fulfils the role of the child in the story of the emperor's new clothes, the only one to recognize or admit the obvious. In one sense, she is simply invisible, but in another she is the only person who can see properly among others whose vision is peculiarly impaired.[90]

This discrepancy between adult and child perception will inform the direction of this chapter, as I consider how juvenile perspectives are strategically deployed to narrate two striking Mexican novels that deal with narcotraffic and the associated violence, *Fiesta en la madriguera* and *Prayers for the Stolen*. It falls upon Jennifer Clement's Ladydi and Juan Pablo Villalobos's Tochtli to relate the violence of the industry in illicit drugs—a phenomenon known for defying representation—and through the authors' remarkable aesthetic evocation of childhood consciousness (or something like it), the reader comes away with a decentered view of things capable of disrupting habitual patterns of thought about drugs and drug violence.

Children's perspectives are not typically sought as useful sources of information or valid points of view. According to sociologist Chris Jenks, "in the public world children themselves may still have little opportunity to have their voices listened to. Children's words may continue to be viewed with suspicion, or indifference" (135). This is because childhood is not some essential state of being, but rather "is assembled intentionally to serve the purposes of supporting and perpetuating the fundamental grounds of and versions of humankind, action, order, language and rationality within particular theories." (29). Today, the dominant construction of childhood is

[90] For Reynold Humphries, the parents' refusal to see the girl represents a disavowal that allows them to accede to the demands of discourses of authority that support "a belief that comes to represent knowledge," effecting "the repudiation of the visual senses as a form of defense on the ego's part" (195).

still that of Piaget, one which considers the childish or childlike in children to be simply a chaotic background noise against which adult reason gradually asserts itself. For Jenks, Piaget's theory of childhood constitutes

> the analytic device by and through which the child is wrenched from the possibility of difference within the realm of value and integrated into the consensus that comprises the tyrannical realm of fact. Scientific rationality or adult intelligence is thus the recognition of difference grounded in unquestioned collectivity…. Real historically located children are subjected to the violence of a contemporary mode of scientific rationality which reproduces itself, at the expense of their difference, beyond the context of situated social life. (25)

The cognition of children in Piaget is defined by a universal, teleological orientation towards adult mentation, and children are considered healthy to the extent that they are becoming less like children and more like adults. In the words of Susan Buck-Morss, "Piaget was content enough to see childhood thinking disappear. The values in his epistemological system were tipped toward the adult end of the spectrum" (263).

Walter Benjamin, on the other hand, was more interested in "what was lost along the way" (263). Buck-Morss finds that "imagery of the child's world appears so persistently throughout Benjamin's opus" that the lack of scholarship on this question is likely symptomatic of "precisely the repression of childhood and its cognitive modes which he considered a problem of the utmost political significance" (263). For Benjamin, children possessed an ability to unify perception and action in a spontaneous, improvised appropriation of the objects they inherit from the adult world. Educational institutions, normally seen as supporting children's development as

they leave behind their outmoded, childish ways of thinking, were considered to suppress a creative faculty that Benjamin related to revolutionary consciousness in adults. An "active, creative form of mimesis, involving the ability to make correspondences by means of spontaneous fantasy," was "badgered out of existence by bourgeois education" (Buck-Morss 263).

Whereas adults practice established modes of constructing reality, children, fascinated by these processes, fixate upon their detritus and put it to improvised use. "In waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things they do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together, in the artifact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship" (Benjamin, *One-Way Street* 31). In this sense, children possess a faculty that is anti-habitual and defamiliarizing from an adult perspective. Children, largely through tactile interaction with the objects of the world, "[release] from them new possibilities of meaning" rather than accepting their meanings as given (Buck-Morss 264).

Children were thus privileged stewards of a cognitive mode that was highly prized by Benjamin for its political potential. According to Buck-Morss, his own "approach to the discarded, overlooked phenomena of the nineteenth century was not different" (262). Children are, in short, considered to be more in tune with dream-consciousness or primary processes than adults. According to Koukkou and Lehman's hypothesis, dreaming involves regression to earlier developmental cognitive states, with the premise that childhood consciousness is related to dream-consciousness: "Mentation during sleep is very frequently imagistic, and often characterized by perceptual fantasies, by reality-remoteness (Cartwright, 1981), and nonreflectiveness (Rechtschaffen, 1980); it has been said to have similarities with the reality-

remote fantasy play of children (e.g. Piaget, 1962).” In a broad overview of the clinical occurrence of visual hallucination and its relevance for diagnosis, Cummings and Miller list “childhood” as one of the “causes” of this perceptual phenomenon.

Danielle Knafo has discussed the artist’s use of intoxicants as a way to access a lost sensibility that includes “the ability to look at the world with awe and wonder,” enabled in the child by her “dynamic sense of physical and emotional involvement” with the world, where “knowing and feeling are not yet differentiated, and even inanimate objects are experienced as vital and alive (“Creativity” 577). Knafo invokes Gestalt psychoanalyst Anton Ehrenzweig’s notion of the synchretistic, “undifferentiated perception” of a young child, “in which an object is perceived in all its forms” (577). Such perception, brought back into the light of adult analytical thought, is perhaps the basis of Benjamin’s dialectical image, which draws “dream images into an awakened state” in that they are then understood in the light of historical knowledge (Buck-Morss 261). Drugs, then, may serve to “reduce blocks and censors” of habituated adult mentation and “uncover buried—childlike—aspects of the mind (Knafo, “The Senses” 580).[91] But in this view, it is childhood consciousness, not drugs, that serves as the model and source of inspiration for unbound, spontaneous cognition.

The connection between childhood, dreams and drugs and art is elegantly condensed in a drawing Benjamin made under the influence of mescaline, in which the German words for “sheep” and “sleep” wind around to form the shape of an embryo (*On Hashish* 91). The lens of drug-colored creative expression reveals the hidden collusion between dreams and the animal non-rationality of beings innocent of adult habits and able to subvert them through a profound

[91] To be clear, drugs may alternately serve the processes by which adult consciousness is numbed by the phantasmagoria of modern life.

fluidity of association. This subversive ability is what allows children (or adults who remember how to think like children) to reinvest objects with new, utopian meanings, wrenching technology from its role of social reproduction toward an orientation of human liberation (Buck-Morss 274-75).

A Child's-Eye-View of Violence

It might be argued that the daily violence faced in twenty-first-century Mexico is about as far away from a "dream-world" as you can get. Before long, someone will probably complain in these terms about Jennifer Clement's *Prayers for the Stolen*, which is in fact peculiar in its unique, oneiric grittiness, a magical realism without the magic, a real nightmare narrated with carefully crafted naïveté. Like *Fiesta en la madriguera*, it is written with a great deal of humor, in Clement the kind that provokes a gentle, rueful smile, compared to Villalobos's more biting wit, but in both cases, it is the humor of adults.[92] In this sense the deployment of childhood perspectives is instrumental, ironically deployed at the service of humor, but in fact this humor is often based on the very tendency of defamiliarization I wish to elucidate. Thus, children here are not reverently presented as the bearers of a transcendent truth, but rather their ways of thinking and being are appropriated for their corrosive effect on conventional wisdom. In fact, the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and values is foregrounded in both novels, and while both child narrators are profoundly influenced by their parents, their improvised use or understanding of these inherited concepts casts them in a harsh new light, as will be seen.

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[92] See Adriaensen on the ethics of black humor in the context of *Fiesta en la madriguera* and of narcoviolence in general (157-59).

In many ways, it is their desensitization toward violence that strikes us about the child narrators we are examining, to the extent that we have the luxury of still expecting naïveté from children. In this sense, the very concept of childhood may be *defamiliarized* for the reader facing the prospect of children to whom violence is totally *familiarized*. Indeed, can childhood be the same thing in a gated community in a U.S. suburb, in rural Guerrero, or in a narco-palace in northern Mexico? I would argue that, while there is no *essential* childhood, there is a time when a relatively new human being has not fully integrated the mental and emotional schemata she is receiving from the adult world, allowing a certain cognitive and emotive freedom which always looks rather chaotic from an adult perspective. But this freedom is typically coupled with an externally imposed containment, which is culturally and situationally imposed according to each context. For Ladydi and her friends, childhood is figured tidily by the holes their mothers dig to hide them from raiding *narcos*: a protective device of limited usefulness, and one so restrictive that Ladydi longs for a school diploma as a "ticket out of childhood" and into the dubious freedom of an even more uncertain and dangerous adulthood. For Tochtli, childhood does in fact have some things in common with that of the privileged children of the global North, but this lifestyle imposes its own type of isolation, of which Tochtli's gilded prison becomes a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, and *Fiesta en la madriguera* is among other things a story of social reproduction through the ultimate defeat of his childlike thinking as he is initiated into the extreme narcossism of the *narco-rey*.[93]

[93] Adapting the term from Avital Ronell, I define narcossism as the dynamic by which mind-altering substances and practices are integrated into the Self in order to support an inflated ego at the expense of relationships with the Other—allowing the Self to adjust to the demands of consumer capitalism. This is discussed in depth in the Introduction.

Tochtli's version of childhood is remarkable for the extent to which he tries to take on the violent adult norms of behavior and thought to which he is exposed. Violent death is clearly a fact of life for him, and he readily develops systems to classify and enumerate this violence according to the norms of rational thought. But much like Borges's famous inventory of types of animals supposedly found in "cierta enciclopedia china," Tochtli's creative, Benjaminian appropriation of the raw materials of rationality results in bizarre systems of classification that only throw our habitual ones into relief, exposing the fact that "no hay clasificación del universo que no sea arbitraria y conjetural" (Borges 142-43). Underlying most of his categories, in an interesting twist on the traditional dichotomy of life and death, consistent exposure to violent death leads Tochtli to accept the abrupt cancellation of someone's very personhood at any time: for him, "los muertos no son personas, los muertos son cadáveres" (20). He is furthermore fascinated by the many ways of "hacer cadáveres" (20). Here an extended quotation is justified:

> En realidad hay muchas maneras de hacer cadáveres, pero las que más se usan son con los orificios. Los orificios son agujeros que haces en las personas para que se les escape la sangre. Las balas de las pistolas hacen orificios y los cuchillos también…. Otra manera de hacer cadáveres es con los cortes, que se hacen también con los cuchillos o con los machetes y las guillotinas…. Lo más normal es cortar la cabeza. (20)

Nor does his scientific but disorienting appropriation of adult thought stop there. He notes the preferential national methods of corpse production, lingering on the finer points of the guillotine, which he qualifies as "fulminante" for its ability to make "cortes pulcros" (53).[94] This compares unfavorably with the sloppiness of the machetes used by "nosotros," which could refer to those

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[94] An advanced, if repetitive, vocabulary is one of Tochtli's eccentricities.

in the illicit drug industry or to Mexicans in general, since the discussion is couched in one of Tochtli's many expressions of a rather unlikely Francophilia, another appropriation from the adult world, this time picked up from his learned tutor, Mazatzin (53). The Japanese Samurais, on the other hand, use "los sables, que son unas espadas especiales que tienen el filo fulminante de las guillotinas," but which are much more versatile (79). Tochtli's interest in the French and guillotines is related to his general fascination with kings and other powerful male figures like his father, Yolcaut. When Mazatzin explains to him who John F. Kennedy was and how he died, Tochtli reasons that "las guillotinas son para los reyes y los balazos son para los presidentes" (59).[95] And as for "los ingleses y los gringos," under anti-imperialist leftist Mazatzin's tutelage he learns that "en realidad prefieren hacer cadáveres con las bombas" (70).

This taxonomy of violence is only one aspect of a broader tendency of Tochtli's personality: a childlike curiosity and creativity that appropriates and reconfigures the drive to classify and intellectually master nature associated with rational adulthood. He fancies himself a detective (donning the appropriate hat) when there is a mystery to solve.[96] He readily classifies his palace menagerie into "las aves y los felinos," but a desire for a more exotic animal brings him and Yolcaut to Africa, where he undertakes "investigaciones, pero especializadas en animales" (60). One could easily imagine him becoming a biologist, but his family context channels all of his inquiries toward disaster: when his curiosity brings him to a supposedly vacant room in the palace, he discovers an arsenal from which he takes a small pistol with which he later kills one of his birds. And his safari, of course, ends in tragedy, especially in light of the

[95] These political distinctions are also very present to him, as evidenced by his constant usage of the words, "país", "reino," or "imperio" preceding the name of the country he is discussing (e.g., 102).

[96] Tochtli's affinity for hats will be discussed later.

endangered status of the hippopotami they capture, which is lost on Yolcaut's indifference and Tochtli's youth: "Lo bueno del borde de la extinción es que todavía no es la extinción" (64).

In reality, there is no fixed distinction between Tochtli's rational, investigative activity and much of what passes for play or, indeed, "getting into trouble." When he shoots the bird, it is because "quería ver qué hacían las aves con el ruido de los balazos" (87). In other moments, the contents of the adult world are imported into games, the ostensible province of children, all the while retaining a certain quantitative character, as in a game of questions and answers that Tochtli and his father play:

> Uno dice una cantidad de balazos en una parte del cuerpo y el otro contesta: vivo, cadáver, o pronóstico reservado.
>
> —Un balazo en el corazón.
>
> —Cadáver.
>
> —Treinta balazos en la uña del dedo chiquito del pie izquierdo.
>
> —Vivo.
>
> —Tres balazos en el páncreas.
>
> —Pronóstico reservado. (18)

Upon finding his father's arsenal, Tochtli realizes the game needs an update that allows a variable for the caliber of ammunition (45). After their successful capture of two Liberian pygmy hippopotami, Tochtli, his father and Mazatzin (under their "Honduran" pseudonyms) kill time by playing a game in which they compete to find the building with the most bullet holes in it. This

callous form of amusement goes too far for the socially conscious Mazatzin when Yolcaut wins by finding ninety-eight bullet holes in the side of a school (69-70).

Here the reader may get a similar bad taste in her mouth on realizing how much she has been enjoying reading "narconovels" like *Fiesta en la madriguera*. In a sense, she, too, has been merrily counting bullet-holes, enjoying violence as an unreal spectacle until confronted with a distorted mirror that returns a less than flattering image of the self. Similarly, Tochtli's categories sound strange and comical, but bring up challenging questions. *Is* a cadaver a person? For example, when we hear the news echoing a government report that all the people killed in the latest bloodbath in Mexico were members of rival cartels in a turf dispute, do we think of those cadavers as people? Indeed, could we be deploying a non-person category constructed so as to encompass anyone killed in a violent episode involving cartel members?[97]

For Ladydi, not only are cadavers still people—killers are as well. Clement does not downplay the horror of figures like the *capo* McClane, who is, significantly, an ex-police officer (75). However, she also paints violence as something that emerges from the most intimate spheres of human interaction. Ladydi's own mother and her best friend's brother, Mike, become perpetrators of violence, and during Ladydi's time in jail she is adopted by a new "family" composed nearly entirely of murderers. In fact, violence becomes so universal that *Prayers for the Stolen* at some moments seems to come dangerously close to suggesting that violence is simply endemic to Mexico. When Mike, a smooth-talking, iPod-listening teenager, murders McClane and his young daughter, we are left to wonder how the young boy who used to walk

[97] See Watt and Zepeda (185), Park and Gómez-Michel. Turati refers to this as the process of "fabricar culpables" (*Fuego* 94).

around with a pet iguana on a leash became a cold-blooded killer (71). He seems to treat the killing as a fairly banal task, never letting it interrupt his frenetic hip-hop soundtrack (112-116). But Ladydi speculates that he could have undergone harrowing "training" sessions at the hands of the Zetas and, indeed, the picture seems to emerge that it is the ubiquity of the stressors of criminal commercial activity, government repression, and economic insecurity that creates the impression that violence comes "naturally" to Mexicans (115).

Similarly, *Fiesta en la madriguera* has been interpreted as a dehistoricization of violence, as per Oswaldo Zavala's critique in a 2014 article. He writes that the novel portrays an "imaginary cult of violence for violence's sake" operating outside of state and society, in which "[a]ll of the characters bear names of indigenous origin, as if referring to a sort of trans-historic, non-Western ancestral source of their violence" (348).[98] A similar interpretation, however, was effectively considered and refuted by Brigitte Adriaensen, who analyzes whether the novel falls under Ignacio Sánchez Prado's indictment of the exoticization of violence in works like the film *Amores Perros*, as the new face of Latin American culture for foreign consumption. Adriaensen finds that *Fiesta* in fact challenges the pattern of exoticization through Tochtli's comparative approach to thinking about violence, exemplified by his preference for the French mode of decapitation: "Por medio de esta referencia explícita a la forma institucional de matar durante la [R]evolución francesa, la novela sitúa el origen de la violencia en la modernidad occidental realizando una inversión del estereotipo exotizante de la violencia como fenómeno mexicano"

[98] Zavala's article's premises are compelling, especially that narconarratives should challenge dominant discourses about narcotrafficking that place it as exterior to state and society. However, in my opinion his analysis of works like Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del reino* and *Fiesta en la madriguera*—the latter admittedly only receives a tangential mention—often focuses on superficial aspects of these works' aesthetic strategies and thus ends up condemning them unfairly, as I hope to exemplify here. I would argue that, regarding the function of violence in cultural production, the line of critique put forth by Sánchez Prado and taken up by Zavala is very valuable but should be applied with discrimination and sensitivity to other dynamics that may be in play in representations of violence.

(163). Further, as I will develop later, Yolcaut's organization is not a "cult of violence" but rather an exaggerated and condensed portrayal of the instrumental violence and consumption that undergird contemporary capitalism, and the elements of indigenous culture included in the novel have more to do with the development of themes of animality, consumption, and the degradation of *lo nacional* than with promoting an essentially Mexican culture of violence.

To return to *Prayers for the Stolen*, according to Ladydi's mother, Rita, everyone is a *narco*, "including the police, of course, the mayor, guaranteed, and even the damn president of the country was a narco" (15). This perception, which unfortunately is not a total exaggeration, suggests a correspondingly universal economy of fear at work in Mexico. When Rita shoots Maria, Ladydi's best friend, it is the evident result of a chain of psychotropic influences. The women and girls living in Ladydi's mountain community in Guerrero live in constant fear of *narco* raids in which girls are stolen to become sex slaves, and Ladydi's father (who is also Maria's father) has abandoned his family for a better life in the U.S. Rita treats the fear, resentment and insecurity with excessive amounts of alcohol, which leads to her shooting Maria upon misidentifying her as her absent husband.

After she is jailed in connection with Mike's crime, Ladydi becomes privy to the crimes of her fellow prisoners, which are often the murders of family members, and invariably related to previous crimes committed by men. Violeta killed her father, who had been physically abusive toward her mother (173, 180). Aurora, who was kidnapped like Ladydi's friend Paula, killed her captors by putting rat poison in their coffee, an "act of justice," as could be argued for Violeta's crime (194). On the other hand, Luna, a Guatemalan refugee, killed her own young children, and it is clear that she is totally disconnected from the horror of her actions, which is inexplicable until we learn more about Luna's history (178). Being abused by her husband was only the

beginning of her suffering (171): she considers the drafty, filthy jail "the best place I've ever been. In my village the government massacred everyone…. I walked around thinking a cold bullet was going to pierce my body at any moment" (188).

The ubiquity of "intimate" violence in *Prayers for the Stolen* disturbingly defies the expectation that violence be portrayed as emanating directly from the cartels or the state, but these cases suggest a dynamic by which politically and economically motivated violence creates an intoxicating sense of fear and desperation that unhinges people and causes seemingly random or isolated incidents of violence.[99] Rita, Mike and Luna are all introduced and positively characterized well before the reader learns of their violent actions, resulting in the disorienting sensation that no one is immune to becoming perpetrator of a violence that seems to permeate everything like the herbicide that periodically rains down on poppies and children alike.

Paraquat, which is toxic to mammals as well as to plants, is central to a motif of airborne poison that also includes the insistent presence of Aurora's pesticide fumigant in the jail. These toxic substances are linked to the violence of the cartels and, in particular, with their abduction of girls. Paula's contamination by Paraquat precedes and foretells her abduction by *narcos*, as we will see, and Aurora's beloved chemical fumes help her cope with her past as a sex slave, all the while slowly killing her. For her, the insecticide spray is not a threat to be avoided, but rather the last desperate option of the wreckage of a human being. Luna fills Ladydi in on Aurora's lifestyle: "She sleeps because she prefers dreams, not because she's tired. Aurora opens the spout on the fumigation canister and smells the poison…. She takes the fumes deep into her body and

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[99] The overlap between the victims and perpetrators of violence in *Prayers for the Stolen* also responds to Tarica's call for nuanced evaluations that reject "simplistic version[s] of events," i.e. classifying the fallen in the Drug War as either *a priori* guilty *or a priori* innocent, in the interest of enabling an analysis of "deeper patterns of social complicity with the violence and more complex accounts of belonging and identity."

this makes her sleepy" (191). Aurora, traumatized by a history of sex slavery similar to Paula's but more extensive, turns herself into a jaundiced, "white-yellow centipede" (166-67). Not even the constant headaches deter her from delivering herself to a deadly, chemical sleep every day (160). This truly narcotic practice figures the most abject extremes of drug abuse intended to annihilate the self. Like the cigarette burns stolen girls give themselves, it is a self-inflicted violence caused by the strain of living in fear.

Paraquat, in particular, can be seen as an agent of "slow violence," which Rob Nixon defines as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Discussing a young boy who was born with an extra thumb, Ladydi states, "The truth was we knew the cause behind the deformities on our mountain. Everyone knew that the spraying of poisons to kill the crops of marijuana and poppies was harming our people" (23).[100] There is also a sense in which the toxic clouds figure an even more subtle form of slow violence; one driven by the diffuse but ever-present fear mentioned above. This is a psychic slow violence that conforms to Daniel Smail's definition of teletropy, as discussed in the previous chapter.[101] Every severed head left in a public place, every corpse hung from a bridge is a threat, perhaps to rival groups, yes, but more broadly to the general populace.[102] The resultant intoxication of fear results in desperate acts of violence like those seen above, collaboration and

[100] While the US EPA maintains that approved agricultural uses are safe for humans, and no link has been proven between Paraquat exposure and birth defects, the herbicide has caused a number of deaths and serious injuries through accidental exposure or ingestion (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), and has been linked to incidence of Parkinson's disease among agricultural workers (Tanner et al.).

[101] Smail defines teletropy as "a category of psychotropy embracing the various devices used in human societies to create mood changes in other people" (Smail, *Deep History* 170).

[102] For Sergio González Rodríguez, the act and ostentation of beheading signals the desire to terrify through an apocalyptic message to the world, a radical rejection of any kind of social or moral norm (60).

complicity, and most importantly a reticence to challenge the narco-official webs of power that rule much of Mexico.

But Paraquat also plays a direct role in the plot of *Prayers for the Stolen*, according to the magical thinking of Ladydi and her mother.[103] One day, while the children are on their way to school, the crop eradication helicopter is heard in the distance and after the others run to the schoolhouse for cover, they realize Paula is not there. Soon she appears drenched in poison, hysterical, her eyes and mouth shut tight, and the children strip her naked and do their best to wash the Paraquat off of her. “We tried to clean her with tap water, but it came out much too slowly, so we also scooped water out from the toilet bowl. We washed her eyes and mouth over and over again” (56). Then they walk her home to her mother, but “We knew she would not be able to reach a sponge into Paula’s body, as if she were a bottle, and wash the poison out” (57). When Ladydi returns home, her mother gravely warns, “Daughter, my child, this is, of course, an omen. We have been distinguished. The worm will turn” (57). And Ladydi concludes that “She was right. Later, when Paula was stolen, I knew this day had been an omen. She was the first to be chosen” (58).[104]

Paraquat, blamed by the residents of the mountain for deformities in children, is now linked to Paula’s transformation into a sex slave and ultimately, through this emotional trauma,

[103] It should be noted that Rita herself retains a defamiliarizing way of looking at the world, although she is also saddling with debilitating emotional and cognitive addictions. This will be addressed further later in this study.

[104] That night the four friends, Ladydi, Maria, Paula and Estefani, also menstruate for the first time. This is variously attributed to the full moon, the Paraquat, or their teacher seeing Paula naked when they stripped her to wash off the poison, but it is a significant symbolic transition to womanhood at a moment coinciding with Paula’s abduction into sexual slavery.

into a helpless, infantile state (71). The "deformation" of Paula's life is thus laid at the door of the U.S.-Mexico drug war. Ladydi relates that

> Those army helicopters had to go back to their bases and report that they had dropped the herbicide so they dropped it anywhere they could. They did not want to get near the fields where they could get shot down for sure. When the helicopters came by and got rid of the stuff over our houses we could smell the ammonia scent in everything and our eyes burnt for days. My mother said this was the reason she could never stop coughing.
>
> My body, she said, is the army's damn poppy field. (39)

The conflicting demands emanating from the U.S.—demand for drugs and demand for interdiction—have predictably created lucrative and dangerous industry in the midst of widespread poverty and desperation in Mexico. When interdiction measures confront criminal organizations empowered by demand and prohibition, feckless or collusive official agents "dump" the problem on the poor, and, increasingly, criminal actors enjoy the impunity to literally rape and pillage, as exemplified fictionally by Paula's abduction. Ladydi's "childish," magical association of crop eradication and cartel violence thus elegantly establishes a causal linkage often missed by more rational minds.

Decentered Bodies, Denaturalized Nature

The unconventional light that the child narrators of *Fiesta en la Madriguera* and *Prayers for the Stolen* throw onto violence is due in no small part to their singular ways of conceiving of the bodies of human and non-human animals. In their discourse, the distinction between human

and animal often becomes blurred, and the human body, often constructed in adult discourse as a closed, finished, autonomous container of the self, suffers peculiar disintegrations, multiplications, fusions and inversions. Some of this appreciation of corporal plasticity no doubt is a symptom of the children's exposure to the rampant violence of contemporary Mexico. After all, Tochtli can turn on the television to find that a recently intact zoo director is now divided between a severed left leg and the rest of her "hecha papilla" in the stomach of a tiger, after *narcos* "la suicidaron" (34-35). He notes that she will soon undergo another transformation into "caca de tigre," a process with which he is familiar due to his *pandilla*'s similar use of their own animals (34). However, their vision of the body as something that can be taken apart, turned inside out, seen through, that could fall apart, be reconfigured or change species at any moment, is worth examining for its defamiliarizing potential in the context of intoxication and narco-violence.

One of the most fascinating motifs of *Prayers for the Stolen* surrounds birth and infants, maintaining a complex dialog with the overarching theme of violence against girls and women. In addition to the stories of young sex slaves like Paula and Aurora, the book relates the murders of very young girls like McClane's daughter (who tragically turns out to be Paula's) and Luna's children. At the same time, the *narcos*' abduction of Paula leads to her infantilization, effectively making her another infant victim (71, 77-79). When she returns home with a tattoo reading "Cannibal's Baby," this aspect of her fate becomes clear.[105] Ladydi is able to hear Paula's story when she comes upon her sitting upon the bare ground, which is "something we never did," for reasons that soon become apparent: "Paula's dress was already covered with black ants

[105] The Spanish version renders the tattoo "La morra del caníbal," losing the infantilizing connotation.

swarming all over. A few had already migrated up her clothes; crawled around her neck and behind her ears. She did not flick them off" (72-73). Ladydi warns her that "The ants are going to eat you alive if you sit here any longer," invoking the cataclysmic finale of *Cien años de soledad*, in which ants devour the baby who is the last progeny of the storied Buendía clan. This connection underscores the apocalyptic ramifications of a state of affairs in which violence is increasingly directed toward the most vulnerable members of society, to the point that even infants are subject to violent attacks. The motif of infanticide aligns with the pattern of exploitation of innocence that takes place with the abduction of young girls for sex slavery.[106]

Not only is the world Ladydi inhabits one where danger awaits from the moment of birth, but the very womb, which is often figured as a site of primordial security to be contrasted with the perils of the world, here becomes contaminated by worldly danger. In Ladydi's community, the mothers of girls dig holes in their yards in which the girls may hide when the *narcos* come on kidnapping raids. These earthen wombs are capable of providing security: both Ladydi and Maria are reborn from them after the kidnappers visit their houses (206). But the circumstances in each case make the rebirth a painful affair, the wombs becoming contaminated with poison and death. When Ladydi emerges from the hole after the *narcos* leave, her mother notices that she had been lying in the hole with four deadly scorpions (65), but she is spared their poison while she is contaminated by that of the kidnappers. When the SUV carrying them arrives, it

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[106] For Cavarero, infants and small children constitute a paradigmatic confluence of "vulnerability," which is a permanent state of human beings, and "helplessness," which in adults is situational. This dynamic is central to her concept of "horrorism": "The infant, the small child— and here lies Hannah Arendt's great intuition concerning the ontological and political centrality of the category of birth—actually proclaims relationship as a human condition not just fundamental but structurally necessary. This means that, as a creature totally consigned to relationship, a child is the vulnerable being par excellence and constitutes the primary paradigm of any discourse on vulnerability. And at the same time and even more so, the primary paradigm of any discourse on helplessness" (30). Violence visited on those who embody the confluence of these states is part of what creates the repugnance at the nullification of the human that defines "horrorism" (29-32).

essentially mounts the opening of the protective earth-womb, parking directly over it: "Through the leaves I could see the SUV's underbelly, a web of tubes and metal" (64). When the kidnapper's boot emerges from the vehicle, it is metonymically characterized as a masculine element that is foreign to that part of the country but also, implicitly, to the female enclave of the mountain community, Rita's matriarchal household and Ladydi's womb-hiding place (64). After an armed standoff with Rita, the *narcos* drive off, but the moment is described in such a way that it is impossible to conceive of this event as a victory for the girl and her mother: "The driver turned the key and started the motor. When he placed his boot on the accelerator above me, my hole was filled with the vehicle's exhaust fumes. I opened my mouth and breathed in the noxious smoke…. I breathed deeply" (64).

Thus, the men's poison is able to penetrate and contaminate the child hidden in the protective womb, which from the beginning is also characterized as a grave: the hole is so small Ladydi must lie in a position characteristic of fetuses but also "like skeletal remains of ancient burials I'd seen on television" (63). Later, Ladydi finds out that after another raid Maria was saved by the hole outside of her house while her mother was killed by the kidnappers. Maria's rebirth, then, is marked by complications that claim her mother's life, and the protective hole hovers between womb and grave as Maria languishes there, unable to face her mother's body: "The trees and grass were covered in her blood…. I knew if I looked up, the sky would be covered in her blood…. I didn't dare come out of the hole for days, she said. I would look up at the sky from the hole and see the vultures…. I could hear the ants moving…." (206). Paula's family's hole actually becomes a grave after she is kidnapped. The empty womb becomes the burial place of her mother's dogs after they, too, fail to save Paula, having been killed by the kidnappers (66-67).

The condensation of womb and grave accentuates the fragility of human life under such violent conditions while underscoring the grim fact that there is no point in the human life cycle at which a female is safe from male aggression. It also connects to a striking critical vision, developed at certain points in the novel, of female bodies as a disposable commodity, born of and destined for the trash heap.[107] This theme emerges with the introduction of Ruth, whose beauty parlor is a kind of safe space within the community, but Ruth "was a garbage baby… born from a black plastic garbage bag that was filled with dirty diapers, rotten orange peels, three empty beer bottles, a can of Coke, and a dead parrot wrapped in newspapers. Someone at the garbage dump heard cries coming out of the bag" (24-25). A hallucinatory, nightmare vision nonetheless based, we can assume, on real and quotidian desperation, this image places the "purity" of the infant in adjacency to death, excrement, putrescence. The series of objects that accompany Ruth reads like Julia Kristeva's enumeration of things we experience as abject, but also includes simple discards of consumption (Kristeva 2-4).[108] But here, presumably, it is the mother who abjects the baby under the strain of economic desperation and ubiquitous violence.

In this way, an associative link is established between female bodies and trash: if a baby girl can be born from the trash, certainly it should be no surprise that her life and death also be

[107] Here it is important to note the connections between the notion of female disposability and the global economy. In *Disposable Women and other Myths of Global Capitalism*, Melissa Wright analyzes how the ideological production of female maquiladora workers as "waste-in-the-making" is promoted by transnational corporate interests, but that they are not the only ones who benefit from it. "The perpetrators of serial murders, domestic violence, and random violence against women can count on a lack of public outrage and on official insouciance with regard to their capture. And the city and state officials in Chihuahua [Chihuahua is one of the contexts of Wright's study] who are concerned about their political careers under the public scrutiny of their effectiveness in curbing crime can defer responsibility." To the list of those who benefit from the production of females-as-waste, we could add those who perpetrate kidnapping and sex slavery. This is another instance of criminal organizations taking the logic of above-board capitalism to its most extreme consequences.

[108] The connection between the disposability of (especially female) human bodies and consumerism will be discussed further in a later section.

defined by trash. This link is further developed through the character of Aurora, who was a sex slave of the *narcos* and then bravely escaped after killing her captors, but now languishes in jail huffing pesticide fumes, throwing herself away after having been thrown away by society. On her bed, "pushed up against the wall, were dozens of plastic supermarket bags… filled with clothes and objects prisoners had given her.… Through the transparent plastic of one bag I could see a collection of hairbrushes and spoons…. Aurora's bed was a garbage dump," (190-92). Relating what is was like to be a slave of the *narcos*, Aurora states, "We all knew that when we gave ourselves to these men it was like washing dishes or taking out the garbage…. It was like being a urinal" (192). Sex slavery is thus cast both as forced labor, more sanitary than sexual, but ultimately as being a receptacle for waste products.[109]

There is, of course, a disturbing sense of mundanity to these descriptions, a sense that also emerges when Ruth disappears, presumably kidnapped. Ladydi narrates how Estefani's grandmother, Sofia, reacts to the news: "A missing woman is just another leaf that goes down the gutter in a rainstorm" (61). With this statement, Ruth has completed a discursive circuit that starts and ends with refuse: discarded at birth, she is finally naturalized as a leaf in a gutter, a development that jars the sensibilities of the distant reader, while simultaneously begging the question of whether "we" are implicated in a similar acceptance of the exploitation of female bodies as a distant, inevitable or "natural" phenomenon.[110] Despite all this, the potential for

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[109] The vision of a sex slave who is avidly bought and sold but ultimately identified with waste aligns with Wright's treatment of the *maquiladora* worker who paradoxically is desirable precisely because of her constructed disposability: "this internal contradiction means that this disposable third world woman is, in fact, quite valuable since she, like so many other characters of mythic lore, generates widespread prosperity through her own destruction" (2).

[110] The myth that naturalizes the idea of the disposability of female workers in the third world is the central focus of Wright's *Disposable Women*.

renewal inherent in human reproduction receives a tenuous nod in the uncertain ending, when we learn of Ladydi's own pregnancy, the result of her relatively idyllic affair with Julio, the gardener at the house where she worked briefly as a domestic employee (212). While their dangerous planned escape across the U.S. border could well end in more of the same violence, other possibilities remain open.

But the fate of human bodies does not unfold in isolation from the rest of the biosphere; in general, human beings, plants and animals in these two novels often find themselves in intimate contact, rhetorically and physically. In *Fiesta en la madriguera*, the characters are named with the Nahuatl words for various animals (Tochtli is "rabbit," Yolcaut, "rattlesnake"). For Cecilia López Badano, the equation of the human and the animal undermines the division between the two categories, as part of an anti-humanism set against the traditional structure of the *Bildungsroman* (71). Tochtli undergoes a process of "(de-formación) intelecto-emocional" (56), the animal names figuring a "deslizamiento hacia lo animal que pone en duda los límites de lo humano" (64). The elements of indigenous language and folklore also signal the parallel fate of *lo nacional*, as these symbols degrade into the murderous culture of predatory narco-capitalism (64-65). But the names of the characters also point to a biological reality that does indeed span historical epochs and different cultures: subtly tucked into the meanings of these animal names, which the average Mexican would not know off-hand, is the suggestion that ancient and contemporary Nahuatl-speaking people, Mexican mestizos, (and clearly North American *gringos*), are all animals who respond to biological imperatives, including psychotropic ones.

Meanwhile, human domination of nature on Ladydi's mountain is, to say the least, incomplete. "In Guerrero the heat, iguanas, spiders, and scorpions ruled. Life was not worth

anything. My mother used to say that all the time" (20). As in the case of Zurdo Mendieta, José Alfredo Jiménez's lyrics may be invoked out of a sense of desperation, but according to Ladydi, Guerrerenses are not prone to despair: "everyone around here is fierce. In fact, all over Mexico it is known that the people who come from the state of Guerrero are full of anger and as dangerous as a white, transparent scorpion that's hidden in bed, under a pillow" (19). In this way, the Ladydi's narrative voice sets up a complicity or indeed a competition between human beings and other animals as to which is more ferocious.

Maria is special in this regard because having been born with a harelip immunizes her from the fear of death. When the friends see a deadly coral snake in a tree,

> Maria leaned over, picked it up, and held it between her thumb and index finger.
>
> She looked at the snake and said, So you think you have an ugly face, well, look at my face!
>
> Stop it, stop it, Paula said. It's going to bite you!
>
> Idiot, that's what I want, Maria said and dropped the snake on the ground.
>
> She called everyone an idiot. It was her favorite word. (18)

Maria's harelip is considered "an example of God's wrath" (for her mother's and Ladydi's father's adultery, as Ladydi learns later), and "she had become mythical like a drought or a flood," thus being placed on a level with the nonhuman world (17).

Nonhuman Guerrero is seen as a ubiquitous, threatening, knowing entity. When Ladydi walks her teacher, José Rosa, to the highway after he visits her house, "I watched him as he moved trying to avoid stepping on the big red ants in his black leather lace-up city shoes. He

looked down at his feet and up to the trees, back and forth. As the day turned to dusk dozens of mosquitos lit on his neck and arms. He tried to wave them away. The jungle knew this city man was among us" (53). Guerrerenses are uniquely prepared to do battle with the jungle, but their relationship with it is also complex: the nonhuman world does not seem to be bounded by physical laws: the humidity is capable of reaching such levels that "spiders could weave their webs in the very air and we had to walk wiping the webs and long, loose threads from our faces and hope no spider had fallen into our hair or down our blouses" (19). The ubiquitous ants seem to threaten to eat Paula, as we have seen, but their determined retreat march also announces the approach of the crop-eradication helicopter (55).

The closeness of humans and non-human animals allows for implicit and explicit comparisons between the two groups, in terms of appearance, behavior, ethical status; even their respective positions within the food chain is contested. Ladydi's fellow prisoner and friend Aurora, in particular, is the subject of many animal comparisons: she is variously a "human centipede" (183), a "malnourished dog lost on the highway" (196), or a turtle with a fumigation canister shell (201), and her eyes evoke "dead jellyfish on the beach of Acapulco" (193). After Jacaranda, an elderly domestic employee, is killed by police who are raiding the house where she works, her eyes "were open and fixed in a stare like the glass eyes of the stuffed animals from Africa" displayed by her employer, a prominent narco-trafficker (142).[111]

Beyond these destabilizing comparisons, in both novels the human body suffers a radical demotion in ecological terms when it becomes actual or potential food for other organisms. The threat of being eaten, like being compared to an animal in life or in death, points to a

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[111] We will return to this moment in more detail later.

fundamental, vital vulnerability. As we have seen, the infantilized Paula faces the danger of being devoured by ants, an image paralleled by the documentary footage that haunts Ladydi of flies "drinking the water from children's eyes" in Africa (134). However, some of the gravest threats of predation are linked to fellow humans. The scorpions in the hole where Ladydi hides from the *narcos* compare favorably to human beings in moral terms, according to Rita: "Those scorpions showed you more mercy than any human being ever will" (65). As if to underscore the point, "She took off one of her flip-flops and killed all four" (66). McClane himself is figured as a cannibal: according to Aurora, "Of course one of McClane's nicknames was Cannibal. They called him that because he was always making jokes about eating people, especially women. …. He'd say things like, You're so pretty, I want to eat your arm. I'll shake some salt on you and roll you up in a tortilla" (192). McClane is also rumored to feed "human meat" to his big cats, like Yolcaut does in *Fiesta en la madriguera* (34). Since the excrement of McClane's lions and tigers is used to wrap drug shipments in order to deter the drug-sniffing dogs (75), the ingestion and subsequent excretion of human bodies by non-human animals thus sends the phenomenon of human materiality on strange circuits including enlistment in drug smuggling operations that contend with other teams of human and non-human animals (border agents and their dogs), and the themes of human permeability and transfiguration at play form striking parallels with the action of the substances to be smuggled.[112]

In reality, of course, human bodies are always destined to consumption by worms, insects, fungi and other decomposers after death, but Ladydi's perspective even upends this commonplace recognition. When she and her mother come across the body of a teenage boy near

[112] López Badano notes the historical precedent for this use of animal excrement at Pablo Escobar's "Hacienda Nápoles" (71). The idea of human beings as consumer goods will be discussed further in the next section.

their house, they struggle to bury him before the vultures can claim him, opening up the ground to reveal “transparent worms, green beetles, and pink stones” (32). But Ladydi notes that “His hands had been cut off and white and blue veins threaded out from his bloody wrists into the dirt like bloated worms” (32). Instead of entering the body from the dirt, the “worms” here originate in the body itself, only returning to the earth after the death of the body. This vision of death and decay as a constituent part of human life links with the vision of the condensed womb-grave discussed above, but instead of acting as a pessimistic *memento mori* warning against the vanity of human affairs, these visions batter the integrity of the boundary between life and death. Similarly, placing human and non-human animals on a level playing field in the struggle for survival upends the notion of a fundamental superiority and exceptionality that exempts human beings from the violence of the “natural” world.[113] If death is born within life and humans are fully susceptible to both “animal” vulnerability and “animal” aggression, there can hardly be a basis for the closed and autonomous self that underpins the rhetoric of drug prohibition as well as the psychology of consumerism. Instead of a closed system that must be defended from foreign contaminants, or one whose pursuit of narrow self-interest and gratification is encouraged by global consumer culture, what emerges is an open and vulnerable self always already interpenetrated with the Other and materially impregnated with death, with animality, and with intoxication.

Another aspect that links the experiences of characters in these novels with those of animals is the theme of captivity: from the animals in the menageries of drug *capos* to the girls and women they enslave, from the jail where Ladydi spends several days to Tochtli’s gilded

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[113] In a similar vein, López Badano notes that such “proximidad del mundo animal que ‘engulle’ al mundo humano anula los límites… entre naturaleza y cultura” (71).

prison, real and figurative imprisonment informs the plot contours of both novels. The phenomenon of enclosure is multifaceted here. On one hand, the drug kingpins keep exotic animals for their pleasure and amusement, and that of their families, friends and associates, and the enslavement of girls and women appears to largely follow the same logic. Here, forced captivity is simply the exercise of raw power over other living creatures, transforming them into instruments for the creation of pleasure, something commonly accepted in the case of non-human animals but appalling when human beings are submitted to the same logic. However, Aurora's previously cited comments, that sex slavery is like "washing dishes or taking out the garbage" or "being a urinal," equate it with labor in a way that brutally defamiliarizes the latter, demanding a recognition that extreme but widespread economic conditions may effectively constitute bodily confinement and gendered exploitation. Both the extreme masculinity of the drug *capos* and the more "refined" rationality of economic interests therefore commodify women as products that may be used, exchanged, or discarded as needed.

On the other hand, many of the enclosed spaces carry out a protective function, often in response to the violence that has become part of life in the narco-state. The people of Ladydi's mountain community, for instance, live under a de facto state of siege, constantly ready for *narco* raids that seek to kidnap girls and young women. The holes in the earth previously discussed are perhaps the epitome of this defensive enclosure, a state no less limiting for being self-imposed and protective. Even the jail in which Ladydi spends a few days can be understood in this light. Although the women there insist that they are the forgotten of the world, there is also a sense that the women's jail is a safe space compared to the world of male-perpetrated violence outside. Luna expresses this contradiction succinctly: "You might ask how the world can forget about a human being, but it happens all the time," she says, but then adds, "I'd rather be here than

anywhere else… this is the best place I've ever been," before relating the government violence in Guatemala she had fled from (188). In a sense, then, the fate of all of these people parallels that of the imprisoned animals kept by the *capos* and their allies who have, one way or another, placed a whole country behind figurative bars.

In a strange way, Tochtli's situation mirrors that of the defensive confinement of victims of the Drug War in *Prayers for the Stolen*. Though he is the protected loved one of a *capo* who is contributing to the very climate of terror and violence that causes people to confine themselves in fear, Tochtli is effectively imprisoned in his father's "palace": "vivimos en el medio de la nada… para la protección" (16). The security measures around the property accentuate the sense of imprisonment: it is under armed guard twenty-four hours a day, "y eso que tenemos una barda altísima. Y eso que encima de la barda hay vidrios y alambre de púas y una alarma de rayos láser que a veces hace ruido cuando pasa un pájaro cerca" (22). Another security feature in place at the palace is the employment of people who are mute: "Lo que pasa es que con el silencio no se puede dar explicaciones" (23). In time, Tochtli begins to internalize the security culture imposed by his father, which plays into his own ideas and imaginations about Samurai culture. After he discovers that certain rooms of the palace—which his father had told him were vacant and unused—actually house a large and varied arsenal, he begins to resent his father for withholding the truth from him: "Lo que pasa es que me convertí en mudo…. Ahora me llamo Usagi y soy un mudo japonés" (49). In this way, he withdraws yet further into himself, intensifying his own imprisonment. This is the cost and correlate of the extreme privatization that narco-culture borrows from neoliberal capitalism and intensifies. Novelist Juan Villoro has noted that

> el narco depende de eliminar el afuera y asimilar todo a su vida privada: comprar el fraccionamiento entero, el country, el estadio de fútbol, la delegación de policía, la

> burbuja que puede habitar Sandra Ávila. En este Second Life de la vida real no hay que fingir ni que ocultarse porque los espectadores ya han sido comprados. (35-36)

This expansion of the self nevertheless continues to be counterpoised to an exteriority with which it becomes increasingly hostile, any incursion being a threat capable of bursting the "bubble." In this sense, this pattern also mirrors the comportment of the heavy cocaine addict, who physically walls himself off in his bedroom as long as his supply holds out, and in general that of the narcossist, who psychically walls himself off from the Other to defend his brittle sense of self.

The process of Tochtli's withdrawal constitutes his training and his passage to adulthood under the guidance of his father, as will be discussed later. He transforms from a coddled "conejito" safe in his "madriguera" into someone who is completely withdrawn emotionally but capable of venturing out into the world to take over Yolcaut's business, with all the violence that entails. The strain of the transformation is evident: after Tochtli discovers the arsenal room and absconds with a small pistol, he seems to teeter on the border between infant and man, as the scatological blurs with the munitive: "Los conejos hacemos caca en bolitas. Unas bolitas perfectas y redondas, como las municiones de las pistolas. Con las pistolas los conejos tiramos balas de caquita" (50). Here the identification with a small animal figures childhood as weakness, as potential victim, whereas the adoption of violence and aggression brings on adulthood as humanity, or at least a more dominant animality. Silence and self-containment finally lead to the suppression of childish exuberance and the adoption of adult values, as well as the stealth of a predator; after all, "a las pistolas puedes ponerles un silenciador, que es para convertirlas en mudas" (102).

While Tochtli seems to be preparing to emerge from the rabbit-hole of his childhood, Ladydi and those like her can only trade one hiding-place for another. From her own hole in the ground she graduates to an abandoned mansion and then to jail, continuing to live on the same vital plane as prey animals or cuts of meat at the butcher shop. It is important to remember that in Ladydi's (and in Tochtli's) Mexico, dead human bodies do appear hung or dismembered like beef or pork, but in their subjective world *living bodies* also undergo strange transformations that provide access to their interior. Ladydi's friend Maria is said to have been born inside-out (a reference to her hare-lip) (19). Rita, on the other hand, actually experiences this: Ladydi asks Rita why she drank herself unconscious during José Rosa's visit to their home, and Rita explains, agitated,

> I was just turning inside out, turning inside out so that my bones were on the outside and my heart was hanging here in the middle of my chest like a medallion. It was just too much and so I had to lie down. Ladydi, I knew that man could see my liver and my spleen. He could've just leaned over and plucked my eye off my face like a grape. (54)

In the context of ubiquitous male violence, even Ladydi's teacher's relatively benign inquiries are experienced as threatening incursions into the female self. Later, Ladydi comes under the spell of the pesticide fumes while dozing in Aurora's jail cell and dreams of Julio, the gardener with whom she had a romantic affair while living in the Acapulco mansion. In the dream, "I could see inside of his body. Under his flesh I saw the stars and the moon and I knew he was born from space" (196). Afterward she tells Luna "that the universe was inside of Julio" (198). The idea of girls and women turned inside-out reaffirms their perpetual endangerment in contemporary Mexico. Rita's image is worthy of Frida Kahlo, the sense of vulnerability palpable

and expressed in gendered terms.[114] The cosmic image of Julio, on the other hand, suggests a certain freedom and expansiveness. The U.S. Border Patrol believe Julio drowned in the Río Grande after killing an agent, but he narrowly escaped and now walks the world "drowned" and invisible (134). While women live inside out, their internal organs exposed to injury at all times, a man like Julio, though he must live outside the law, may have the opposite relationship with the world. Instead of his insides being projected out into a dangerous world, he expands to encompass that world within him, his presumed death launching him into a liberating limbo state underwritten by the privilege of a maleness that to some extent shields him from fear. But in both cases the boundaries between the outside and the inside of the human body have been sundered, the interior coming into contact or even identity with the exterior.[115] The selves Ladydi describes are quite far from the isolated, "egotistical, almost solipsistic" bourgeois idea of self that Benjamin sought to shatter (Gardiner 19), instead casting the human body as a dialectical image that exposes its dual nature as "natural creature and class subject" (Bolz and Reijen 56). The destabilization of the inside-outside boundary means that fear and other intoxicants are not foreign contaminants but rather members of social and biological economies that link, motivate and constrain bodies, and the death of narcossist subjectivity leaves space for the animal body that suffers and perceives, and the collective political body that is the object of illuminated vision and the agent of collective action.

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[114] In the words of Hayden Herrera, Kahlo tried "to find wholeness by painting self-portraits in which she turns her body inside out..." (38).

[115] Julio's state of expansion should not be confused with the absorption of exteriority into the *narco*'s private world as discussed by Villoro above. The latter is a predatory colonization of the Other, "invading reality like a wild vegetation that absorbs or breaks or pushes back everything around it," while avoiding the visage of the Other (Levinas 9).

Consuming Passions: Technology, Information, and Life on the Plate

As we have seen, one of the ways human and nonhuman bodies undergo startling transformations in these novels is through being consumed by another. In this way, human beings join other living creatures and inanimate objects as products to be bought, sold and traded, physically devoured and excreted, or simply used up and thrown away. For those with ears to hear, Tochtli and Ladydi have much to say about consumption, whether of living creatures, luxury goods, drugs, or information, and their ways of understanding such consumption are notable for their capacity to unsettle and illuminate.

At times, it is almost possible to forget that, underwriting the consumption on display throughout these novels is another kind of consumption that largely takes place far away. This aspect is brought home, however, in the hilarious passage in *Fiesta en la madriguera* in which one of Yolcaut's *gringo* clients, Paul Smith, comes to visit. This curious figure presents Tochtli with a contradiction that he finds nothing less than "enigmático." According to his tutor, Mazatzin, *gringos* "se creen los dueños del mundo," dropping bombs to enforce their global imperialism (81, 83). The "cowboy" Paul Smith is difficult to collate with this image of omnipotence; he is, in fact, "la persona más absurda que conozco" (82). Smith uses outlandish hair implants and during his visits to the palace uses the bathroom with unnatural frequency. When Miztli, a palace guard and Tochtli's friend and confidant, explains that Paul Smith goes to the bathroom to use cocaine, Tochtli casually notes the link between cocaine's illicit status and its high commodity value: "por eso es un negocio muy bueno, por ser secreto" (83). With his Trumpesque hair and his cocaine addiction, Paul Smith is, in the last analysis, "un pendejo" (84).

As an exemplar of *gringo* imperialism, this emperor has no clothes, as Tochtli sees through to the vain absurdity of the prostheses—whether chemical or pilary—used to construct the self. But this of course is only a minor comparative instance of the narcossism on display in *Fiesta en la madriguera*. Here, we have a front-row see to witness its formation in Tochtli, as he develops in the direction of his father. Though this novel is obviously a work of freely imaginative fiction, it can provide very serious insights into the suppression of childhood consciousness and the formation of a pattern of narcossism that takes mainstream consumer culture as the starting point but grows out of control, becoming largely unhinged from any remaining social or ethical restraints.[116]

Fiesta en la madriguera contains a funny and deadly parody of consumerism, an unnerving *reductio ad absurdum* in which the absurdity is not nearly as far from reality as is should be and every laugh induces a guilty glance over the shoulder to ensure that the reader is not in fact the object of scorn here. With Tochtli as our guide, we receive a tour of the narco-palace in which he, his father, and their employees live.

> Yolcaut y yo somos dueños de un palacio, y eso que no somos reyes. Lo que pasa es que tenemos mucho dinero…. [N]uestro palacio tiene diez habitaciones…. Y además están la cocina, la sala de los sillones, la sala de la tele, la sala de las películas, mi sala de los juegos, la sala de los juegos de Yolcaut, la oficina de Yolcaut, el comedor de adentro, el comedor de la terraza, el comedor chiquito, cinco baños que usamos, dos baños que no usamos, el gimnasio, el sauna y la alberca" (19, 21).

[116] See Sayak Valencia, who uses the term *necroempoderamiento* to describe the process through which people turn explicit violence into "una herramienta para cumplir con las exigencias de la sociedad hiperconsumista y sus procesos de subjetivación capitalista" (147-49, 192).

Yolcaut's fingers are festooned with ostentatious diamond rings (28, 32) and Tochtli maintains a running "lista de las cosas que quiero," which are bought by Miztli when he goes to town: a kind of Christmas list with no holiday and no waiting (13-14).

Similarly, in *Prayers for the Stolen* Ladydi's stay at the Domingos' house provides another window onto the luxurious lifestyles afforded by to high-level executives of the illicit narcotics industry. The Domingo family seems to simply be part of the Acapulco upper crust until they disappear without a trace, later turning up dead on a highway, and police raid the house to find a huge cache of weapons and ammunition. But while they are missing, Ladydi, Julio, and Jacaranda, the family's long-time servant, are able to briefly enjoy a luxury that has always belonged to someone else. The immaculate house features "white leather sofas with matching white leather throw pillows," bronze statues, marble floors, jacuzzi, massage table, a swimming pool, servants' quarters, and so on (117, 121). The Domingos' son, Alexis, lived among a multitude of toys "piled on every surface and all over the floor" (122). The house features a television room with a "wall-to-wall television screen so it was like a movie theater. In front of the screen were two sofas, three armchairs, and two large beanbag chairs. One wall was covered from floor to ceiling with a collection of DVDs" (122). McClane's children are similarly spoiled, according to Paula, with "over two hundred Barbie dolls," including one that "had been dipped in gold and had real green emeralds for eyes," and miniature cars "that ran on gasoline. The ranch had a miniature gas station and a miniature OXXO store beside it" (76). McClane's very name comes from U.S. popular culture: the movie *Die Hard* (74), and his wish is to be buried in his car, which Ladydi notes is not uncommon (195).

As mentioned in the previous section, however, the lifestyle of powerful *narcos* in these novels involves consumption not only of goods but of living beings:

> en el jardín... están las jaulas con nuestros animales, que se dividen en dos: las aves y los felinos. De aves tenemos águilas, halcones, y una jaula llena de periquitos y pájaros de colores. Guacamayas y esas cosas. Felinos tenemos un león en una jaula y dos tigres en otra. Al lado de los tigres hay un espacio donde vamos a poner la jaula para nuestro hipopótamo enano de Liberia. (*Fiesta* 22-23)

The zoo responds to the motif of extreme privatization that permeates *Fiesta en la madriguera*. Commenting the function of animality in the novel, López Badano quotes Gabriel Giorgi: "el cuerpo animal hace visible las operaciones desde las cuales la vida se vuelve apropiable y privatizable, factible de ser constituida como propiedad y mercancía" (75). Security concerns prevent Tochtli from visiting the Guadalajara Zoo, but Yolcaut tells him a story about "un señor que no podia ir a una montaña y entonces la montaña caminaba" (33), and creates a zoo within his gilded prison. The zoo is wrested from the public sphere and shorn of its pedagogical, humanistic pretentions, to serve the "ostentación fetichista del capital … inscripto metafóricamente en el orden capitalista deprededora que "devora" al oponente" (López Badano 72).

Tochtli's coveted hippos will be the object of an African safari that occupies the middle section of the book, and no exterior concerns seem to interfere with their drive to acquire animals as items of amusement: when they go to Liberia they learn that Liberian pygmy hippopotami are on the verge of extinction (56-57). However, as Tochtli breezily notes when they finally capture one, "Lo bueno del borde de la extinción es que todavía no es la extinción" (64). The disappearance of species is a concern only insofar as it could prevent them from procuring the desired animal. The safari trip and acquisition of two hippopotami, as well as allowing for an opportune "vacation" from Mexico at a time of increased danger for their *pandilla*, follow a

pattern by which Yolcaut seeks to maintain his relationship with Tochtli through gifts. When Tochtli later goes mute, Yolcaut will try to "quitarme lo mudo" through gifts including "una jaula con tres hámsters; una pecera con dos tortugas; comida para los hámsters y comida para las tortugas; una rueda de la fortuna para los hámsters; unas piedras y una palmera de plástico para la pecera de las tortugas" (85). This latter use of animals connects the previous excesses with behavior that might be recognizable to many readers, placing them on a spectrum of consumerist behavior that shares basic characteristics. Similarly, the spectacle of narco-tourism in Liberia, though outlandish at first blush, is brought into comparison with the consumerist habits of the global middle class when Tochtli notes with the flippant disdain of the privileged tourist that "en todas partes apestaba a pescado frito y a aceite quemado" and that "Monrovia no es una ciudad pulcra como Orlando, adonde una vez fuimos de vacaciones" (69). They even leave with safari hats and other souvenirs (70). "Franklin Gómez" (Mazatzin), instead of leaving with trinkets, opts for an alternative "souvenir" geared toward the socially conscious: "dos años de escuela para cuatro niñas liberianas, diez vacunas para bebés liberianos y veinte libros para la biblioteca de la ciudad de Monrovia" (71). According to the narcossist orientation of "Winston López" (Yolcaut), this only makes Franklin "muy pero muy pendejo" (71). Similarly, safaris that are focused on merely seeing animals rather than killing or capturing them—thus protecting species from endangerment or extinction—are judged "mariconadas" by Winston (60). According to this psychological pattern, consumption should gratify the Self without leaving it open to the claims of the Other. Frustrated by their initial failure to find pygmy hippopotami, Yolcaut opens fire on a pack of wild dogs to inflate his sense of self through the exercise of raw power over life and death (62). Their African safari is a symbolic reenactment of colonialism that cements the *capo*'s

place as a usurper of the heritage of global capitalism, at odds with the established rules of the game, but faithful to its spirit of unlimited profit and ruthlessness.

Trophy or sport hunting is indeed a motif that emerges insistently in these texts, figuring a total and definitive dominance over the Other, as it does in Élmer Mendoza's *La prueba del ácido*, as discussed in the previous chapter. When the game is deemed to be worth showing off, the heads are stuffed and mounted in the narco-palaces. This is seen in *Fiesta en la madriguera* in the fate of Tochtli's hippopotami and in *Prayers for the Stolen* in the case of the *narco*, Mr. Domingo, in whose house Ladydi works for a time (129-30), but the implications of this pattern of predation also bleed into a variety of disparate moments in both books as well as into real phenomena; after all, a severed head demonstrates the virility of the "hunter" equally well whether it is tastefully mounted on the wall or left in the middle of the highway, and regardless of the species of the prey. Mr. Domingo owns a ranch in Coahuila that caters to "rich people from the United States" (129), grouping together the wealthy within both the licit and the illicit economies into a kind of hunting class, while the poor inevitably fill the role of the hunted. Elderly Jacaranda is responsible for cleaning the eyes of Mr. Domingo's trophy animals, which are shipped to the house in trunks in which they "lay flat like clothes" before being stuffed (129). These are consumer products, in which death is displayed as a simulacrum of life, violence is covered over. Jacaranda must use soap and bleach so that the eyes "shine with life" (130), and even the bullet holes are sewn up perfectly in order to erase the traces of violence. But Ladydi's childish perception, respecting no boundaries of taste or decorum, will compare Jacaranda's eyes, as she lay murdered by the police officers who raid the Domingos' house, to the eyes of the trophy animals, as mentioned previously (142). Whereas the latter are immaculate, *pulcro*, as Tochtli would say, Jacaranda's blood stains her white hair and the marble floor of the house as it

flows from her head. Ladydi's comparison breaks the spell that clothes death as life, and intuitively groups the victims of drug *capos* with those of security forces.

Fiesta en la madriguera, like *Prayers for the Stolen*, also places the consumption of women on display. Quecholli, a woman who is frequently brought to the palace, only to mysteriously and repeatedly disappear and reappear with Yolcaut, is "La persona más muda que conozco" (30). What is more, "parecería que Quecholli está ciega, porque casi nunca sabes hacia dónde está mirando" (31). She glides through the house behind Yolcaut like a ghost, reminding one of the dazed state of Paula and Aurora, the stolen girls from Clement's novel. Yolcaut's possession of her is asserted in a passage in which Yolcaut, Tochtli, Mazatzin, and Quecholli are eating together and Mazatzin casually asks where she is from, and Yolcaut screams that she is "del rancho de la chingada" (31). His outburst makes it clear that interaction between Mazatzin and Quecholli is to be strictly limited, but could also be interpreted as to hint at Quecholli's violent path to Yolcaut's palace. The reference to "la chingada," apart from its obvious humorous intent (Tochtli maintains that this ranch is a real place, "cerca de San Juan…. Hay una reja en la entrada con un letrero que dice, *La Chingada*" (31)), is evocative in light of the literal meanings and Octavio Paz's well-known analysis of the cultural meanings attached to this word. For the poet, *la chingada* is associated with La Malinche, the indigenous woman who served Cortés as translator and mistress during the conquest of Mexico, and who bore him a son who is symbolically considered "the first mestizo." Irrespective of the mythical overtones of the figure of la Malinche, it is well to remember that she was one of twenty women given to Cortés as property, at which point she essentially became a sex slave. As Frances Karttunen explains, "Once in Spanish hands, the women were summarily baptised and distributed to provide the men with sexual services. The juxtaposition of a Christian sacrament with rape is jarring to our

sensibilities, but the sixteenth-century Spaniards were quite frank about it" (301-02). We should also note that in *Prayers for the Stolen*, Paula and the other "stolen" girls refer to themselves as "slave-mistresses," and the title is not fanciful: when she, along with thirty other women and girls, is presented for sale to McClane and other *capos* (74-76). McClane "looked at the women and asked them to smile. He wanted to see their teeth," begging a comparison to the enslavement of Africans in North America and elsewhere (76). The experiences of these women link them to la Malinche/*la chingada*, who is for Paz the "Madre violada" of all Mexicans, who in turn are cast as orphaned children of the violence of the conquest (77).[117]

All this must be kept in mind when thinking about Quecholli. Though Tochtli does not seem to feel any maternal connection to Quecholli, it is notable that he himself is the product of an absent mother and a violent father.[118] Later, it is hinted at that Quecholli is killed, and Yolcaut subsequently and apparently indifferently replaces her with Alotl (98). This pattern of shopping for women fits a pattern of consumption aimed at satisfying Yolcaut's desires and compensating for the absence of Tochtli's mother and other meaningful social relationships.

Tochtli's narcossist training begins with the gifts showered upon him by his father to make up for the yawning gaps in his emotional life. The hats he is obsessed with serve the purpose of "distinción" as Tochtli so eloquently puts it. Without a hat to make you stand out, "terminas siendo un don nadie" (12). In this sense, these consumer products are a guarantee of personhood, which for Tochtli is at risk of being cancelled not only by "los orificios" and "los

[117] Though Paz's sweeping conclusion about Mexican psychology are highly contested, the maternal chingada/Malinche figure continues to constitute a powerful symbolic nexus.

[118] Cf. Paz (72). We may also assume that Tochtli's mother came to a bad end. In an interview with *Granta*, Villalobos hints at her fate, while insisting on not making it explicit.

cortes" (20), but also by a lack of the appropriate attire. But his hats also fill in for the friends he is not allowed to have; wearing them, he transforms himself into new personalities to simulate the social interaction that is denied him (61). Here, Tochtli's childlike thinking resists the isolation into which he is being (anti)socialized, but already this is only possible through the acquisition of consumer goods. When Yolcaut's cook and his maid bring two boys to the palace to play with Tochtli, he is impeded from connecting to them by a sense of superiority, and he is unable to accept the simple gifts they bring him (86-87). Accepting the generosity of others undermines the self's autonomy and so is intolerable to the budding narcossist. Tochtli's father's gifts to him, on the other hand, are a transaction, a payment for the deprivations Tochtli suffers, and a parenting method by which Yolcaut presents material consumption as the best way to overcome any difficulty (85).

Tochtli's persistent stomach aches are another indicator of the fundamental lack that he must learn to bear "como los machos" (47, 13). After their doctor suggests that this chronic problem is a psychosomatic response to Tochtli's distress at his mother's absence, he is never called to the house again (48), and this interpretation is supported in *Granta*'s interview with Villalobos. But the symptom flares up when Tochtli is unable to fulfill his consumer desires (14), from which it may be surmised that his desire for his mother is cathected onto these products, and thus when they are denied him the original lack makes itself felt in the stomach pains.[119] Or, put another way, Tochtli's sense of self is structured through an addiction to consumer goods that stands in for a relationship with his mother, in a psychic structure that temporarily accommodates both his residual childish creativity and desire for sociality (as he actually

[119] His pains sometimes reach the point of feeling like "un vacío que va creciendo y creciendo" (47).

imagines himself transforming upon donning a new hat) and his budding patterns of narcossism. His hats and other goods, to quote Ronell, are "invested as an ideal object — something that you want to incorporate as part of you," and when his "drug" is unavailable, this "precipitates a major narcissistic crisis" ("Avital Ronell Interview"). In this way, he may not be entirely different from "privileged" children whose parents work constantly to maintain a high level of consumer comfort and prestige that must then supplement their absence in the lives of the children.

The tension between Tochtli's whimsicality and desire for companionship on one hand and his training as a domineering *macho* moves definitively toward a resolution with the conclusion of the incident involving his hippopotami. He had explicitly rejected the idea of killing these animals for trophies as he knew was common practice (57), instead seeking them for the companionship for which he was starved. But the failure of this enterprise is long foretold with subtle gestures throughout the text. From the simile Tochtli chooses to describe the beasts' diminutive ears, "minúsculas como las balas de una pistola pequeñita" (65), to the regal but ill-fated names he chooses for them, Luis XVI and María Antonieta de Austria (73-75), all signs point to disaster. But when his grandiose yet innocent plan to have these animals as pets runs up against external factors, instead of having to face failure and continue his psychic development according to the reality principle, Yolcaut offers him an alternative: he has the dead animals stuffed and shipped to the palace (103), showing Tochtli the superiority of satisfying desire through domination, death, and consumption; the closure and fortification of the self and the reduction of the Other to a decorative head on the wall. We will return to this moment in the next section, which explores in more depth the relationship between childish perception and adult "wisdom."

Prayers for the Stolen, though it shines some light on the material excesses of narco-executives like McClane, is most assiduous in its development of a theme related to another kind of consumption—that of information. Ladydi dwells on the mechanics of its transmission and reception, the layers of technological and human mediation through which it is filtered, and its effects on the receptor, in the simple but incisive terms of a perceptive child. Ladydi's mountainside community is characterized by its isolation from the rest of Mexico and the world, so the channels by which outside information filters in are of great interest to her. But information never seems to be just information but rather it is always manipulated, controlled or adulterated. Discussing her father, who left his family to find work in the United States, sending them money for a time before apparently abandoning them altogether, Ladydi describes the flow of rumor by which she and her mother learned news of her father.

> Of course the USA-Mexico rumor road was the most powerful rumor road in the whole world. If you did not know the truth, you knew the rumor and the rumor was always a lot, lot more than the truth.
>
> I'll take a rumor over the truth, my mother said.
>
> The rumor that came from a Mexican restaurant in New York to a slaughterhouse in Nebraska, to a Wendy's restaurant in Ohio, to an orange field in Florida, to a hotel in San Diego, then crossed the river, in an act of resurrection, to a bar in Tijuana, to a marijuana field outside of Morelia, to a glass-bottom boat in Acapulco, to a canteen in Chilpancingo and up our dirt road to the shade of our orange tree was that my father had another family "over there." (12-13)

The information that finally arrives under their orange tree is adulterated and distorted by the mediation of many heads and lips, becoming "more than the truth," not less, nor is the truth necessarily more desirable than the rumor, according to Rita. This relatively random and contingent mediation of information becomes a point of comparison with more organized and systematic interventions that shape or restrain information flowing through other media, especially through commercial, technological channels.

Telephones form a vital link between the mountain community and the outside world, but in this case, the flow of information is restrained by various factors. There is only one spot in the whole community where cellular reception is possible—a clearing that Rita names "Delphi" after watching a documentary on Greek history (61). Here, "[t]he sounds of the jungle mixed with the noise from the cell phones. The sound of beeps, rings, songs, and bells that filled the humid air were accompanied by the high-pitched timbre of women's voices" (61). It is, then, a gendered space where the formidable jungle seems to resonate sympathetically with the tough women of the community who are there reduced to a sedentary passivity: "At this clearing there were always women waiting to hear from their husbands and male children. Some sat there for days that became weeks, months and years, and their cell phones never rang" (61). Thus, communication is constrained in the first place by experiential and temporal distance and a lack of will. The telephone also seems to enable dishonesty with its suppression of visual referents. After Ladydi gets a job cleaning the Domingos' house in Acapulco, her other calls her:

It's terrible there, right? she said.

Yes. It's a filthy place.

Are you serious? What's it like?

It’s fine.

But you do hate it?

Yes, I hate it.

The lies went back and forth between us. The truth was that I already loved the clean house full of sea breeze and my mother wanted me back home immediately.

Stick it out, give it a chance, and stay.

Yes, I’ll try, Mama. (118)

But Ladydi also points to the fundamental economic restraint placed on telephone communication which is, of course, operated for profit:

> The phone went dead. This always happened and meant that you had to dial back again and again. We all knew it was the reason Carlos Slim, the man who owned the phone company, was the richest man in the world. He made sure everyone in Mexico always had to call back.
>
> What are you going to do? my mother used to say. Stop calling your family? Stop calling the doctor? Stop calling whomever it might be who might, just might, help you find a stolen daughter? (119)

This somewhat fanciful assessment nonetheless points to the concerted control of the flow of information by powerful sectors of society, in the interest of profit. Telephone communication is further associated with commercial activity, albeit illicit, through Mike, who “had at least five phones spread out around his body, in all his pockets. He sounded like a music box of ringtones, vibrations, bells, rap and electronic music. He said he had a US telephone, Mexico City

telephone, Florida telephone, and several Acapulco telephones" (67-68). His activity at the Delphi clearing, unlike that of the women, is active and successful, as he coordinates drug deals using these and his Twitter and Facebook accounts, to the constant beat of his iPod.

If the medium of the telephone appears in the novel as a technology that provides a tenuous lifeline between the community and the world outside, constrained by factors of gender and commerce, television functions as a presumably unidirectional channel of information that nonetheless figures a complex intervention in the lives of the characters and ultimately threatens to domesticate Ladydi's unconventional ways of seeing. Ladydi's mother is an avid watcher of television, preferentially History Channel documentaries. Rita claims a worldliness informed by this consumption of educational television programming, and calls the information she has compiled in this way "television knowledge" (51-52). Ladydi picks up this concept, but instead of merely using it to prove herself to others, she narrates her experiences with television in such a way that television knowledge can be seen to function as an alternative epistemic system that mediates the subject's relationship to lived experience.

Television imports a global array of referents to specific localities, as we can see in the case of Ladydi's name and that of McClane— "after Bruce Willis's character in the movie *Die Hard*" (74). Further, the medium's ability to project a sense of immediacy creates strange effects like Paula's concern about Britney Spears. The survivor of sex slavery asks Ladydi, "Don't you feel so sorry for Britney Spears?" presumably in reference to the pop star's widely publicized personal struggles in preceding years (73). Given her own situation, Paula's compassion begs a comparison between the two, and her discussion of the singer's tattoos places these alongside Paula's self-inflicted cigarette burns. Paula stands in for many girls and women who have been

kidnapped into sex slavery whose stories are unknown, whereas Spears, through the global cult of celebrity is subject to the compassion or the scorn of millions.

This is possible because the immediacy of television creates a *familiarity* that can be experienced like friendship or acquaintance, and allows viewers to react in a personal way to the events of a celebrity's life. This effect is, of course, not always undesirable—Paula's attitude toward Britney Spears, though seemingly incongruous, is nonetheless a reaction of compassion toward human suffering. However, the sense of familiarity created by television has other, more problematic implications, as Ladydi realizes suddenly when Jacaranda shows her around the Domingos' house. The idea that television familiarizes through repetition is introduced when the elderly housekeeper shows Ladydi the "television room."

> It had a wall-to-wall television screen so it was like a movie theater. In front of the screen were two sofas, three armchairs, and two large beanbag chairs….
>
> This is what they love to do. … They can watch the same movie over and over again. (122)

While the description shows the opulence in which the Domingos consume television and movies for entertainment in their ample free time, the lifestyles of affluent people like them, in turn, are the subject or setting of much television programming, such that Ladydi realizes that "I had seen their house on television. I had never walked on a marble floor before, which was like walking on a piece of ice, but I had seen it" (122). She realizes that even if she went to see the Egyptian pyramids, "they'd be familiar" (122). Finally,

> I remembered some of the violence and catastrophes I'd watched on television that had helped to build my television knowledge.

> When I thought of this, I tasted sour milk in my mouth like milk that sat out on the table in the jungle heat for too long. Yes, a flood could feel familiar. Yes, a car crash could feel familiar. I thought yes, a rape could feel familiar. Yes, I could be dying and even the deathbed would be familiar. (123)

It is notable that the two types of phenomena Ladydi notes as having been familiarized by television are excessive wealth and violence/disaster. If it is true that, as I hope to have shown, narrative focalization through characters like Ladydi and Tochtli functions to defamiliarize the world as perceived by adults, here we gaze into the eyes of an agency that would subvert this ability, domesticating the child's anarchic associative faculties by deadening her affective connections to the world, and Ladydi intuits that something of value is being corrupted, suddenly tasting sour milk in her mouth. Through repetitive media representations, extreme inequality and violence lose their ability to shock, becoming naturalized to the extent that viewers undergo "a change in the structure of their experience" in which psychic defenses insulate the self from the affective jolts of extreme experiences, promoting habitual, automatic responses (Benjamin "On Some Motifs" 314, 327-29). However, a closer look reveals more at play than the mass production of subjects (though that may indeed be going on).

When Ladydi is arrested and placed before the television cameras, something strange happens: at first she avoids the camera's penetrating gaze, but then

> I remembered something. I looked up.
>
> If I looked up, and let myself be filmed, my eyes would pierce right through the camera. In two seconds the image of my face would be beamed down into the bowl of the white satellite dish antenna my father had bought. In two seconds the image of my face

> would be beamed down straight into the television screen and right into my two-bedroom home on our mountain. I knew that if I looked up into the camera, I would see my mother as she sat in front of the TV with a beer in her hand and a flyswatter across her knee. I looked into the camera and deep into my mother's eyes and she looked back. (147)

The idea of someone peering through the television at the viewer ominously recalls the "telescreens" from Orwell's *1984* and, in a sense, Ladydi is miming the interpellating gaze of the television as it affirms and shapes the viewer-as-subject. However, the nature of this reversal also points in other directions. As the familiarity between the viewer and the viewed in this instance becomes literal, we may do well to remember Raymond Williams's caution against viewing television as a "determined technology" that creates a closed, one-way system of control:

> We have to think of determination not as a single force, or a single abstraction of forces, but as a process in which real determining factors - the distribution of power or of capital, social and physical inheritance, relations of scale and size between groups - set limits and exert pressures, but neither wholly control nor wholly predict the outcome of complex activity within or at these limits, and under or against these pressures. (130)

That is, while television may indeed act as a vector of cognitive and emotional addictions that naturalize violence and inequality and bludgeon childish creativity, it does not do so in a vacuum, but rather within an entire social constellation that includes influences originating much closer to home that may either reinforce, defy or modulate what television does. When Ladydi stares into her mother's eyes through the television broadcast, the resulting sense of *mise en abyme* superimposes Rita and the television as primary agents of Ladydi's socialization. To the extent that Rita embodies adult habits and addictions—through her alcohol and television

addictions and her obsessive thought patterns—we may follow Foucault and witness power as not simply flowing directly from the media conglomerate and its political allies but as articulated "at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, … those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions," as Rita risks reinforcing the interpellation undertaken by television to constitute "subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects" (97). But just as Rita's adult rigidity threatens to infect Ladydi, Ladydi's creativity is still reflected in her mother, and their bond is an important and ultimately positive force in the novel. When Ladydi stares into the camera, Rita, like Nietzsche's abyss, stares back (69, aphorism 146). In the final section of this chapter, we will explore the generational dynamics by which children risk becoming the "monsters" they fight.

Family Values and Generational Transformation

Though they could be called narco-novels, defining that term broadly,[120] *Fiesta en la madriguera* and *Prayers for the Stolen* are also fundamentally novels about families, and especially about the relationships between children and parents as they are socialized into the worlds they've been born into. Since the theoretical framework I use in this chapter sets up an active opposition between juvenile and adult thought and behavior, the process of socialization will inevitably sometimes appear as a struggle. In light of the relative freedom and spontaneity of childhood thought and behavior and the relative predictability of adults, I think the word "domestication" is justified. Of course, this process can take many forms, and it would be

[120] It is worth noting that Villalobos has stated a strong opposition to the notion of narcoliterature, or at least to his work being identified as such (Adriaensen 159).

difficult and dubious (though probably possible and interesting) to justify a stance that ultimately opposed "growing up." In lieu of such a Peter Pan position, we may take a cue from the lexical distinction between the words "childish" and "childlike," noting that there are many ways to be a child and many ways to be an adult. In this case, the folk wisdom embedded in language recognizes a distinction between the child's sometimes tyrannical alliance between id and ego,[121] and the child's innocence, or ability to look on things without the prejudicing lenses of worldly, adult perception. We sense that the latter quality in adults is desirable or at least endearing whereas the former is not. Childishness, perhaps, forms the germ of the narcossism that takes over when the destruction of childhood cognitive creativity leads to the development of a rigid and closed self, and this seems to be Tochtli's ultimate destination after the sobering conclusion to Villalobos's novel. Ladydi, on the other hand, seems to have more of a chance of becoming a childlike adult, due in part to her mother's retention of a certain flexibility in cognition, emotion, and action.

The gender profile of the family unit in each novel could not be more starkly different, and the difference in probable outcomes should be analyzed in the light of these lopsided models of family.[122] On Ladydi's mountain, "family" primarily means children and a mother or grandmother, but the tight-knit community of women also allows strong familial bonds between friends. Ruth's beauty parlor becomes a safe, home-like space for Ladydi, her mother, and other girls and women in the community. Ruth is the only one who speaks to Rita with tenderness and

[121] In his *Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater*, Benjamin entertains the notion that "the child inhabits his world like a dictator" (204).

[122] By terming these families "lopsided" I do not mean, of course, to imply that families composed of a single gender or sex are somehow unnatural or inferior, but rather that the families in question are the products of heterosexual unions that are dismembered by factors that in each case point to the same dynamics of gender inequality.

for brief moments in her salon, girls and women can express their gender identity as is customary. But even Ruth is bitter about the limitations of this space:

> I opened this beauty parlor fifteen years ago and… I wanted to make you all pretty…. Instead of making you pretty, what happened? I have to make little girls look like boys, I have to make the older girls look plain and I have to make the pretty girls look ugly. This is an ugly parlor not a beauty parlor…. (26)

On this special occasion, Ruth had painted everyone's nails for free, but after Ladydi leaves and comes back, "everyone's nail polish had been removed. It was clear no one was going to risk going out into our world where men think they can steal you just because your nails are painted red" (27). The name of Ruth's salon, *The Illusion*, exploits the tension between the semantic fields of the Spanish word *ilusión*, which can mean hope or dream, and the English word, which always refers to a false appearance.

Here, family appears as a close group of people who care about each other but whose ability to take care of each other is curtailed by adverse circumstances, as is also the case with Ladydi's mother. In *Prayers for the Stolen*, the process of domestication is complicated by the fact that Rita herself is an eccentric woman whose way of perceiving life already has defamiliarizing tendencies, as exemplified when she takes Paula's Paraquat contamination as an omen of her kidnapping, as discussed above, and in many other instances. But a truncated existence of crushing poverty as a young single parent in rural Guerrero has inculcated in her a philosophy of radical pessimism and vengeance, and her acute alcoholism has locked her into the perpetual reenactment of her abandonment by her husband and the obsessive rehearsal of a fantasized revenge:

> I watched my mother cut the tall grass with her machete, or kill an iguana by breaking its head with a large stone, or scrape the thorns off a maguey pad, or kill a chicken by twisting its neck in her hands, and it was as if all the objects around her were my father's body. When she cut up a tomato I knew it was his heart she was slicing into thin wheels. (20)

As in the case of Captain Ugarte in Mendoza's *Nombre de perro*, this kind of obsessive desire for vengeance appears as an addiction, appearing here in synergy with alcohol abuse. Ultimately, her dedication to vengeance takes the form of a blind fury that perpetuates violence against the innocent—in a drunken misidentification, she shoots Maria, her husband's illegitimate daughter (89-90). Ladydi not only identifies her mother's obsessive rehearsal of vengeance (in the passage above) but is also able to astutely connect her mother's alcoholism, her abandonment, and her association with death: when her teacher, José Rosa, comes to her house, she shows him her mother's "beer-bottle cemetery" (53). This is after a conversation in which Rosa, who is from Mexico City, ask Ladydi's mother about the absence of men in their village. As we noted in the case of Zurdo Mendieta's use of alcohol to cope with the loss of a lover, alcohol often serves an "encrypting" function, through which dead love may be sealed off or, conversely, may be exhumed (Ronell 5). In the context of the conversation between Rita and José Rosa, the beer bottles offer a glass tombstone not only for Ladydi's father, but for every man absent from the village, with the bottle as a multivalent signifier that evokes abuse and parental irresponsibility but also signals alcohol as a faulty supplement for other absences like that of economic opportunity and that of security, all factors that lead men to absent themselves from their families, leaving behind only the consolation of alcohol.

Rita has a critical, penetrating intellect and is a caring mother, but her cognitive and emotional activity is stunted and made rigid by the pressures of her environment and her alcoholic self-medication, turning her into a dangerous nihilist for whom "la vida no vale nada" (20). However, there are hopeful signs by the end of the novel when Rita and Maria come together to the jail to pick up Ladydi. Rita's appearance with her husband's illegitimate child—who is a constant reminder of his unfaithfulness—and her demonstration that she is not too far gone to help her daughter, suggest that she may be breaking out of some of her destructive cognitive and emotional addictions.

Fiesta en la madriguera, on the other hand, is characterized by a lack of women in the family context although, as discussed previously, two women appear at different times as Yolcaut's "guests." Consequently, the meaning of family in this text is drastically altered: the biological family unit constituted by Yolcaut and Tochtli is reconceived as a *pandilla*, and its values are established on this basis. Foremost among them is "ser un macho," which Tochtli establishes very early on in the text:

> Lo que sí soy seguro es un macho. Por ejemplo: no me lo paso llorando por no tener mamá. Se supone que si no tienes mamá debes llorar mucho, litros de lágrimas, diez o doce al día. Pero yo no lloro, porque los que lloran son de los maricas. Cuando estoy triste Yolcaut me dice que no llore, me dice
>
> —Aguántate, Tochtli, aguántate como los machos. (13)

Clearly, the negative value of "no ser marica" is closely related, being grounded in a repression of emotions that imply weakness. This dichotomy is further developed an instance in which Tochtli is made to watch a man being severely beaten: "El señor tenía la cara manchada de

sangre y, la verdad, daba un poco de miedo verlo. Pero yo no dije nada, porque ser macho quiere decir que no tienes miedo y si tienes miedo eres de los maricas" (19). The macho, then, should show no sadness or fear, nor even admit physical discomfort (65).[123]

The status of macho is tightly linked in the novel with the idea of being *el rey*, which plays into the motif of cranial adornments and decapitation. The idea of kingliness is informed here by the José Alfredo Jiménez classic, *El rey*.[124] The song emphasizes the irrelevance of material wealth or comfort, pronouncing that even without them, "sigo siendo el rey" (28). Tochtli understandably does not seem to completely comprehend this: "Lo mejor de ser rey es que no tienes que trabajar" (29), but he does astutely note that the ultimate arbiter of kingliness in the song is the fact that "mi palabra es la ley." Thus, *el rey* is someone who continues to exercise power even in the face of material privations or, "la canción se trata en realidad de ser macho" (29). It should also be noted that *ser rey* also implies the projection of a radical autonomy (sovereignty) that rejects the mutual need for cooperation ("Hago lo que quiero") and human connection ("No tengo trono ni reina / Ni nadie que me comprenda").

Unlike José Alfredo, Tochtli places a great importance on the material appurtenances of royalty; as a connoisseur of headwear the crown is of especial interest.[125] For him, "Sólo tienes que ponerte la corona y ya está, las personas de tu reinado te dan dinero, millones" (29). What is

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[123] According to Edith Beltrán, in this context "[e]l ser machos" consists of being "estoicos, sin necesidades, con gran potencia sexual proyectada que legitima su poder de hacer leyes que les convengan y donde todos y todas están bajo su dominio" (128).

[124] We will remember that both Zurdo Mendieta and Ladydi's mother quote Jiménez on affirming that "la vida no vale nada." It is, perhaps, a tribute to the the cultural penetration of the singer's music that his songs seem to appear time and time again in the novels under study.

[125] Along these lines, Beltrán alludes to the fact that the masculinity in question is in fact a performative projection: "El simulacro suplanta al ser real y su legitimidad se sustenta precisamente en el acto de simulación, no en el sujeto en sí." (131).

striking is that, for all the desirability of being king and having a crown, Tochtli also has a great appreciation for guillotines and the work they do, as previously mentioned. Considering Yolcaut's association with kingliness, Tochtli already seems to understand and accept the short but intense life-cycle of the successful narcotrafficker.[126] He appreciates the French in part because "le quitan la corona a los reyes antes de cortarles la cabeza. Así la corona no se abolla y la puedes guardar en un museo en París o vendérsela a una persona que tenga mucho dinero, como nosotros" (24). They also take care with the head itself, placing it in a basket so that "no se les escape rodando" (42).[127]

This apparent ambiguity may be related to the peculiar social position Yolcaut—and every powerful *capo*—occupies.[128] On one hand, they exercise a sovereign power over life and death within their considerable spheres of influence, causing frequent portrayals of these figures as monarchs: in addition to Yolcaut, we may remember the Caballeros Templarios cartel (the image of members as knights promotes the idea of leaders as royalty) and Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del reino*, to cite just a couple of examples. However, as Jungwon Park and Gerardo Gómez-Michel have noted with reference to Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*, "la vida humana es sujeta a ser aniquilada sin ser considerado este acto como 'homicidio' ni elevarse a categoría de 'sacrificio', justo ahí donde se ha decretado la excepcionalidad (83), como es el caso del

[126] Jungwon Park and Gerardo Gómez-Michel write of "la lógica de gasto económico y humano que acentúa la tragedia inherente al 'oficio' del narco: vida intensa, derroche y muerte premature" which, as portrayed in some narconarratives, is capable of causing the reader to "cuestionar el papel del Estado y sus instituciones más elementales."

[127] Orfa Kelita Vanegas has explored the decapitation motif in *Fiesta en la madriguera*, ultimately considering the act an "expresión radical de la voluntad maligna" (89).

[128] Teresa García Díaz notes that "En el mundo de la delincuencia, la jerarquía se encuentra dominada por el hombre de más poder: el capo, el cabecilla. Ambas palabras se refieren a la parte del cuerpo encargada de dirigir los movimientos y tomar las decisiones" (paragraph 19), further asserting that "A través de la sinécdoque, la cabeza ejerce dentro de la ficción el símbolo que articula inteligencia, reino, virilidad, dominio y decisión" (paragraph 23).

espacio social (y legal) ocupado actualmente por la industria del narco, al que se declara enemigo de la soberanía nacional." When their regimes of security and networks of complicity fail, narco-executives—like the people further down the chain of command in their organizations—find themselves subject to a state of exception in which they may be killed by anyone without legal repercussion.[129] This situation corresponds to a parallel Agamben notes between the figure of the sovereign and that of *homo sacer*:

> At the two extreme limits of the order, the sovereign and homo sacer present two symmetrical figures that have the same structure and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially homines sacri, and homo sacer is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns. (*Homo Sacer* 84)

Yolcaut and Tochtli are simultaneously subject to both the dynamics of sovereignty and those of exception, and thus Tochtli seems to identify with both the beheader and the beheaded, the latter being evident in his appreciation for the delicate way the French supposedly deal with the severed heads of their victims. Ultimately, then, if in this context *ser rey* is equivalent to *ser un macho*, both essentially being described by the phrase "tu palabra es ley," the *macho*'s sovereign autonomy and power over others is quite precarious, in a way parallel to the narcossist's brittle sense of superiority.

However, *machismo* is a part of the *pandilla*'s ethic that Tochtli fully accepts and internalizes, attempting to mold himself in Yolcaut's image. In other areas of the ideology into

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[129] On cartel members as *homo sacer*, Park and Gómez-Michel write "Son sin duda estos cuerpos los que llenan consuetudinariamente las secciones de la nota roja bajo el titular ignominioso que los describe como 'ejecutados por ajuste de cuentas entre bandas de narcos'. Esa categoría de asesinato no se investiga en los casos individuales, sino que se subsume en un crimen colectivo e impersonal que ambiguamente es llamado 'ola de violencia', porque se da por sentado *quién* es el causante y *cuál* es el móvil."

which he is being initiated, on the other hand, he finds that Yolcaut's own behavior often falls short. Most importantly, "las pandillas se tratan de… no ocultarse las verdades" (46), and Tochtli takes this commandment so seriously that he suffers severe disillusion with Yolcaut's leadership when he finds out that the latter had hidden from him the fact that they keep stores of weapons and ammunition in certain spare rooms of the palace. This precipitates the crisis that threatens to see Tochtli pull away from his father definitively. As a move in this direction, he imaginatively embodies the principles his father has betrayed by turning himself into a Samurai. Tochtli takes a stand against the adult hypocrisy that says one thing and does another, that hides the truth at the expense of the childlike propensity and desire to "ver las verdades" (72). Childhood perception, an intoxicated state from the adult perspective, may allow one to see otherwise occulted truths, but seeing the truth of violence may also have a profound domesticating effect, as Tochtli finds out when he finally witnesses the death of loved ones, his Liberian pygmy hippopotami. Before reaching this state, however, he first purges his vulnerability and grief. In a line as sad as the rest of the novel is funny, Tochtli notes his reaction to witnessing the euthanasia, by multiple gunshot, of his much-dreamt-of new pets: "Entonces resultó que no soy un macho y me puse a llorar como un marica" (75). His sadness soon turns into an apocalyptic rage (and Villalobos's intransigent black humor prevents pure pathos from taking over), as he wishes "que me dieran ocho balazos en el próstata para hacerme cadáver" and "que todo el mundo se fuera a la extinción" (75).

Here, Tochtli has no choice but to abandon the intoxication of *machismo* (that is, of power, of autonomy), giving in to the debilitating intoxication of grief. But on returning to Mexico there is no support system to facilitate a permanent way out of *machismo*, so he retreats into an alter-ego—based on his ideas of Japanese Samurai—that preserves the received values of

masculinity (79-80), reconfiguring the *pandilla*'s code of ethics into a private (shared to an extent with Mazatzin, who will betray his family) and imaginary Samurai world that excludes his father. However, we also observe him beginning to reproduce Yolcaut's secrecy, as when he gives Mitzli, his friend and Yolcaut's guard, a list of things he wants, including a "Samurai" saber, that is not to be shared with his father. Here he is progressing from a faithful adherence to the supposed norms of the *pandilla* toward the adoption of adult hypocrisy. When Yolcaut takes him to see the storeroom where they keep their weapons, this gesture opens the way toward a reconciliation (102).

However, the definitive moment comes with Yolcaut's gift to Tochtli of the desiccated heads of his beloved hippos. It is at this point that he refers to Yolcaut as "mi papá" for the first time (104), signaling that he has been definitively brought into the fold. His upbringing had long inclined him to equate values like *solidaridad* with giving and receiving gifts (13), and with this final coup, Yolcaut seals Tochtli's initiation into the world of adult hypocrisy, as he accepts bribes to compensate for broken promises and compromised principles. He abandons his autonomous, Samurai world and dress and his defiant silence, once again bought into compliance. Yolcaut makes a conciliatory gesture toward Tochtli's demand for integrity by showing him the arsenal and delivering the child's long-desired hippos, but Tochtli must accept his dreams disfigured, decapitated. A simulacrum of happiness, childhood, and life, and a mockery: the heads are made to wear the hats of the safari that brought their death, and then the crowns that brought their namesakes' beheading. Similarly, Tochtli's (and Yolcaut's) wealth is a poor compensation by a life truncated by paranoia, fear, the psychic damage of violence, and a paralyzing standard of masculinity. Tochtli's desire for companionship is thwarted and he must accept possession through violence, the companionship of death. The reader is left with the

feeling that Tochtli may never again invest emotionally with comparable intensity in a living creature.

Conclusion

Prayers for the Stolen and *Fiesta en la Madriguera* represent complimentary visions of social reproduction in the troubled days of the Drug War. Clement's is a novel about survival and survivors, both in physical terms and with respect to the preservation of that childlike cognitive and emotive flexibility which can still blossom among the forgotten, and upon which all hope depends when adult norms seem to veer towards apocalyptic outcomes. In a sense, Ladydi stands in for young people around the world who find themselves under the wheel of a capitalism that promotes a broadly conceived "privatization" with increasing aggression, so that more and more individuals find themselves alone, forgotten and irrelevant. Villalobos, on the other hand brings us an "(Anti)*Bildungsroman*" where we witness "la deformación de la formación" of Tochtli as he undergoes the painful transition from wildly creative child to cold-blooded practitioner of "capitalismo *gore*" (López Badano, Valencia). There is compassion for this child hiding under the relentless irony of the narration, and Tochtli, too, can be connected to a larger group of children, namely those born into a privilege that they did not ask for, but whose price they pay with their isolation and the psychic damage associated with a system of values that revolves around status and consumption.

The forsaken people who populate *Prayers for the Stolen* already had a patron saint in la Virgen de Guadalupe, but the novel takes a cue from reality to transform her into the Virgin of

the Sea (135). She comes into the story when Ladydi's string of misfortunes is punctuated by her idyll with Julio, the gardener at the Domingos' mansion.

> Julio bought tickets for our ride across the bay to Roqueta Island in a glass-bottom boat…. Julio wanted me to see the bronze statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe that was in the water, drowned in the sea. She was called the Virgin of the Sea.
>
> Now you will see the mother of the water, he said. She protects the shipwrecked and fishermen. The drowned too.
>
> …The undersea world looked green through the boat's tinted glass. The virgin was bottle green in the green light with a crown on her head. She was surrounded by fish. There were sea snails on her shoulders. She was also a wishing well. There were coins around her on the ocean floor that glittered and gleamed silver in the sanctuary. (135)

The Virgin of Guadalupe is, in the formulation of Paz, "el consuelo de los pobres, el escudo de los débiles, el amparo de los oprimidos…. En suma, es la Madre de los huérfanos" (77). The drowned Virgin takes this association a step further by participating in the people's defeat; "drowning under the waves" (143), she experiences the sense of danger and desperation felt in contemporary Mexico. Green and immobile, she is already a corpse, drowned in a world where the great *capos* are the only ones who perform miracles, as when McClane turns a mountain in Guerrero into the North Pole for Christmas to amuse his teenage bride (164, 195). Julio, too, claims to be a drowned man, having escaped after killing a border guard and disappearing into the Río Grande (133-34). This characteristic is also extended to Aurora, through a well-developed association with the ocean and death. She says she was a "small fish" when she was first kidnapped at twelve years old (193), and her discolored skin is rough as if sandy (195). Her

light eyes remind Ladydi alternately of “dead jellyfish” (193) and of a “sea landscape” where she sees “whales and dolphins” (195), but also of “the glass in a glass-bottom boat,” through which she can see “into her body of light brown sand and shells” (194), and which recalls the undersea Virgen, who protects and commiserates with the drowned and shipwrecked. Children who have been sex slaves, like Aurora and Paula, are in a sense drowned people still walking the earth, as are, to some extent all people whose lives have been capsized by violence and powerlessness. But even drowned people like Aurora can perform acts of resistance, as when she killed five of her captors and their associates (194).[130]

Ladydi is able to appreciate the precarity of the boundaries between life and death, inside and outside, good and evil. In jail, she marvels “that someone who had shot a child in a break-and-entry robbery, killed twelve old ladies for their wedding rings, or murdered two husbands could loan me a sweater, give me a cookie, or hold my hand” (156). She notes that these “[s]mall acts of kindness could turn me inside out. …[B]eing in jail was like wearing a dress inside out, a misbuttoned sweater, or a shoe on the wrong foot. My skin was on the inside and all my veins and bones were on the outside. I thought, I better not bump into anyone” (156). The motif of human beings turned inside out, as previously discussed, points to an essential shared vulnerability, especially among women, and Ladydi astutely points to the connection between this vulnerability and a necessity for solidarity, even through small acts.

[130] Although the figure of the drowned here, as someone who has been damaged by an encounter with horror, may have something in common with Primo Levi’s concept in *The Drowned and the Saved*, it should be noted that the latter’s drowning is definitive in that it left no room for the possibility of restoration or at least salvage that *Prayers for the Stolen* seems to insist on: for Levy the drowned “no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions” (83– 84).

Nor is it coincidental that it is in jail that Ladydi finds the glimmer of a redemptive sense of community. When Ladydi asks Luna about her family and her plans to get out of jail, she replies, "Princess, I never called a lawyer, or the Guatemalan Embassy, or my family. I think everyone has forgotten that I'm here…. You might ask how can the world forget about a human being, but it happens all the time" (188). And again, this profound neglect skews along gender lines; on visitation day, Luna pithily instructs Ladydi, "No one visits the women. Everyone visits the men. What more do we need to know about the world?" (204). In the depths of this oblivion, Ladydi finds hints of humanity, of a community of shared vulnerability.[131]

She is, in effect, engaging in Benjaminian "ragpicking" among the human detritus of contemporary Mexican society, attempting to "glean what is worthwhile out of what has been discarded or forgotten," and indeed finding "signs of utopian possibility within marginalized or suppressed human experiences" (Gardiner 21). In this sense, the apparently pessimistic vision of drowned human beings walking the earth in a living death is transformed upon the realization that the further an object, person, or experience is from the main flows of phantasmagorical commodity culture, the more likely it, or she, may be able to throw a stark, defamiliarizing illumination on the familiar images that support dominant ideologies.

In the Santa Marta Jail, the victims are incarcerated, acts of bravery like Aurora's are punished, and in times ruled by privatization and self-interest, the forgotten create a cohesive community, and even the bounds of the individual come into question. When Ladydi learns that Aurora knew Paula when they were both sex slaves, Aurora tells Ladydi's story as she learned it from Paula, and Ladydi notes that "[m]y life had suddenly turned into a wishbone. Aurora had

[131] This pattern to some extent mirrors what Tarica calls "counter-victimization."

brought the pieces together. She was the joint" (183). As Aurora tells their jail community the story of Ladydi's life, "I looked at Aurora and thought I was looking into a mirror. She knew my life better than I did" (184). Ladydi's age and marginal position mean that she has not assimilated the ideology of the sovereign self-as-consumer, and instead her cognitive creativity leads her to an intuition of what Bakhtin called the "transgredient" features of an individual as an aesthetic object, which can only be supplied by the Other (*Art and Answerability* 26-27). In this way Ladydi's childlike perception enables us to glean from the jail's human wreckage a vision that defamiliarizes the self by incorporating the gaze of the Other, simultaneously consummating the inner world with a view from outside and thus constructing a jointed, multiple self, capable of observing itself from any angle, and upending the idea of the unitary subject that supports the sovereign self-as-consumer of the global economy as well as the pure and impermeable collective self of prohibitionist ideology, rejecting narcossism in favor of utopian glimpses of a community forged in pain and shared vulnerability.

Fiesta en la madriguera, on the other hand, underneath the breezy hilarity of Tochtli's tale, offers an essentially pessimistic view of the suppression of childhood perception's utopian possibilities in the service of the reproduction of a radical narcossism. Over the course of this narrative, however, we get a glimpse of this faculty before its twilight, as well as the habitus it is to be replaced with and the mechanics of its suppression. The abovementioned cranial motif plays an important role throughout the novel as Tochtli casts a stark floodlight on the world he is about to be domesticated into. Toward the end of the novel, a meditation on trends in body mutilation and disposal sends Tochtli into a striking, hallucinatory daydream. The passage, in which Tochtli passes from one ghastly topic to another with characteristically disconcerting detachment, merits an extended citation:

> Desde que volvimos de Monrovia las cabezas cortadas pasaron de moda. Ahora en la tele se usan más los restos humanos. A veces es una nariz, otras veces es una tráquea o un intestino. También las orejas. Puede ser cualquier cosa menos cabezas y manos. Por eso son restos humanos y no cadáveres. Con los cadáveres se sabe las personas que eran antes de convertirse en cadáveres. En cambio con los restos humanos no se sabe qué personas eran.
>
> Para guardar los restos humanos no se usan cestas ni cajas de brandy añejo, sino bolsas del súper, como si en el súper se pudieran comprar los restos humanos. Si acaso en el súper se pueden comprar los restos de las vacas, los puercos o las gallinas. Yo creo que si vendieran cabezas cortadas en el súper las personas las usarían para hacer el pozole. Pero primero habría que quitarles el pelo, igual que a las gallinas se les quitan las plumas. Los calvos seríamos más caros, porque ya estaríamos listos para el pozole. (84-85)

The distinction between *restos humanos* and *cabezas cortadas* or *cadáveres* clearly fascinates Tochtli. As we saw previously, he already considers personhood to be revoked upon death, at which point a person becomes a cadaver. The category of human remains takes this negation a step further, breaking even the link of identity with a former personhood, constituting a complete obliteration and erasure of identity, and the *sine qua non* of the status of *cadáver* is the presence of the hands (presumably due to the identifying capacity of fingerprints) and *the head*.

Tochtli's vision of human heads in a *pozole*, in the context of his affinity for the French and for guillotines recalls those French heads that Ti Noël imagines adorning a banquet table in the memorable opening of Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*. In Tochtli's macabre reverie the heads are placed within the banal, commercial context of the grocery store, where they become simply another commodity for sale, underlining the way the violence that surrounds

Tochtli is in effect a ubiquitous business practice. And here, again, human bodies are placed in the company of animal bodies, subject to the same routine dismemberment, emphasizing that the context of this commerce is an overarching zone of exception where human beings are reduced to *zoe*,[132] since anyone killed in Mexico is, by virtue of their violent death itself, almost automatically considered to have been involved in criminal activity and thus outside of the serious consideration of the law. López Badano notes the Aztec ritualistic origins of *pozole*, in which the meal included human flesh (69). But whereas this ritual was an important ritual in the religious life of the community, the *narco* era brings about a "desacralización del tema ritual," such that a narcotrafficker who is tasked with dissolving bodies in vats of acid is nicknamed "el pozolero" (70). Human lives in the *narco* era are consumed for personal enrichment and power, the public sacrifice replaced with the private consumption by self-proclaimed sovereigns of bare life that is not deemed worthy of sacrifice. However, as Ti Noël's severed French heads announce the impending violence of insurrection,[133] so Tochtli's heads figure the inevitable fall of the *narco-rey*—that ambivalent combination of sovereign and *homo sacer*—in an act constituting lawmaking violence within the nebulous webs of extra-official authority, and the establishment of a new order of what Rosanna Reguillo calls *paralegality*.[134] Tochtli imagines his own head destined for the *pozole* pot, conceding his own place in this violent struggle for power into which he is being initiated.

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[132] See Tarica's discussion of this idea, which Javier Sicilia and others adapt from Agamben.

[133] Jean Franco sees the head as "the place of sovereignty, of thought and identity," making beheading "a dramatic statement of the mutilation of the sovereign state" (Cruel Modernity 227).

[134] On the concept of lawmaking violence see Benjamin, "Critique of Violence." On paralegality, Reguillo writes, "es difícil afirmar que las violencias desatadas por el 'narcopoder' y el crimen organizado puedan ser inscritas en el afuera de la ilegalidad. Este análisis me parece simplista e insuficiente. Por ello propongo abrir un tercer espacio analítico: la paralegalidad, que emerge justo en la zona fronteriza abierta por las violencias, generando no un orden ilegal, sino un orden paralelo con sus propios códigos, normas y rituales que al ignorar olímpicamente las instituciones y el contrato social se constituye paradójicamente en un desafío mayor que la ilegalidad" (44).

Tochtli takes great pains, however, to stress that the hair must be removed from the heads as one plucks a chicken. And here we encounter the one thing that seems to repulse Tochtli: it is not murder, decapitation, or feeding human beings to tigers, but *human hair* that really gets under his skin. In fact, when he sees a news story about the discovery of a severed head, he is aghast—at the victim's haircut (43). While it would be a mistake to discount Villalobos's black sense of humor here in portraying Tochtli's extreme callousness, there is something more to the child's attitude towards hair. He regularly comments unfavorably on people's haircuts, as in the cases of the *gringo pendejo* Paul Smith (82), and the boys Yolcaut's domestic employees bring to the palace to play with Tochtli (86). Of the many benefits of hats, not least important is that "lo mejor es esconder el pelo siempre, hasta con peinados dizque bonitos" (43). This is because

> [e]l pelo es una parte muerta del cuerpo. Por ejemplo: cuando te cortan el pelo no duele. Y si no duele es porque está muerto.… El pelo es como un cadáver que llevas encima de la cabeza mientras estás vivo. Además es un cadáver fulminante, que crece y crece sin parar, lo cual es muy sórdido. A la mejor cuando te conviertes en cadáver el pelo ya no es sórdido, pero antes no. (43)

This is why Tochtli keeps his head shaved, obsessively asking his father to do it for him: "Yolcaut me lo rapa con una máquina en cuanto comienza a crecer. La máquina es igual a las máquinas de cortar hierbas de Azcatl [the gardener], pero pequeña. Y el pelo es como las hierbas malas que hay que combatir" (43). These comments make it clear that Tochtli has learned to cope with ever-present violence by accepting death as a fundamental change that can come about and cancel someone's personhood at any time, but that the specter of death within life, ever

encroaching on subjectivity, is intolerable to him.[135] Whereas Ladydi sees death as embedded in life, as seen above in the discussion of the scene where she and her mother find the body of a teenage boy, Tochtli has already assimilated a psychic strategy that supports his developing performance of masculinity by denying personhood to the dead and denying the presence of death or weakness within himself. The constant threat of death is manageable as long as the dead are not seen as persons who have suffered and are deserving of compassion and mourning. When the pain and loss of death manifest in the living person, as in the proliferation of nonliving hair cells, it becomes an abject threat to the system of self that must be shunned, as it opens the self to the pain and weakness that is, of course, part of that self, but that is inadmissible according to the standards of the constructed masculinity at play.[136] This dynamic of abjection will continue to serve Tochtli as a psychotropic technology in the service of the construction of a rigid, narcossist self that builds itself up through radical social and ethical isolation. It is a very "adult" operation, but the eccentric way in which it manifests signals Villalobos's keen and humorous appropriation of the defamiliarizing optics of childhood.

It is also important to remember that when Tochtli has a vision of a *pozole* made with human heads, he is experiencing a cannibalistic fantasy rooted in the fact that everything he consumes is paid for with blood money (84). But it is an insight that threatens to infect anyone

[135] It should be noted that Tochtli is also repulsed by the teeth of the pig's head Cinteotl simmers in the pozole, teeth being, like hair, composed largely of dead cells (26).

[136] On the abject threat to the system of self, see Kristeva (4). We should also admit the possibility that Tochtli's aversion to hair has a deep connection with the experience of horror itself. The word "horror" comes from the Latin *horreo*, referring to the bristling of the hair on one's head" (Cavarero 7). The hair standing on end is the signature physiological correlate of the revulsion of horror, making Medusa at the same time "hair-raising" and "hair-raised" (Cavarero 15). Her serpentine coiffure unsettles for apparently the opposite reason hair repulses Tochtli: it is alive when it should be dead. However, it may be the same reason: the boundary between life and death in both cases appears blurred. In any case, an aversion to hair could be related to a psychic defense against the experience of horror itself, which is forbidden to Tochtli by the codes of masculinity and has also presumably been worn down or suppression through repeated exposure.

whose own sense of self is permeable enough to recognize that many or all of us, whether we are buying cocaine, consumer goods or simply paying taxes that go to the Drug War, are purchasing and eating that same human head *pozole*. Far from being closed, autonomous beings, we incorporate the blood and sweat of others, and experience psychotropic effects like the dopamine rush of cocaine or shopping, a rush of righteousness or a debilitating guilt, depending on how we feel about drug interdiction efforts.

To return for a moment to this chapter's epigraph, these novels give us a glimpse of the "child's side" of Ladydi's and Tochtli's generation, where the unconscious structure of a now global society comes into view. These children show a potential to radically remake the world through a reconfiguration of discarded elements of this dreamworld. But they also show how violence reproduces itself at all levels through the suppression of this creativity and the atomization of experience. In any case, their disorienting point of view is contagious, and the defamiliarizing intoxication made possible by these novels destabilizes elements of global Drug War discourse like the purity of the Northern social body, made up of closed, autonomous selves, to be protected against contamination by drugs from the South; the radical Otherness of the narcotrafficker as opposed to the clean and proper, licit consumer; and the *a priori* guilt of all of those killed in the Mexican *Guerra contra el narcotráfico*. This perspective calls for an acceptance of psychotropy, for good or ill, as a fact of life, which in turn allows for a mental shift by which the self is no longer defended as a closed system that is vulnerable to foreign contaminants. Instead, psychotropy can be examined as a fundamental human phenomenon, and its causes and effects can be evaluated in the context of global linkages and patterns of intoxication. Gradually, it will become possible to situate novels like these within a global

network of intoxication that includes but also transcends the illegal drugs whose commerce and interdiction forms their context of violence.

Conclusion

Intoxication is a central fact of human existence, and this is something that seems to be intuitively recognized by many Latin American writers who engage in themes of narco-violence in their work. By reading through a psychotropic lens, it becomes evident that much of this production challenges fundamental assumptions about drugs and drug violence, and about the broad, global structures of cultural intoxication that support these assumptions. Approaching questions of psychotropy with the dialectics of intoxication in mind, it becomes feasible to trace the intimate connections between the mainstream economic structures and ideologies put forth proudly as clean and proper means and justifications of individual success in the contemporary world, and the sordid and violent world of the narcotics industry and the interdiction efforts carried out against it. It becomes possible to identify this entire complex of explicit and implicit violence and wealth accumulation as driven by the same patterns of psychotropic exaltation of a sovereign, superior, consuming self that can only see the Other as a threat to its dominance. Narcossism, to put it plainly, is the culture of deregulated, neoliberal, consumer capitalism, and to undo its psychotropic traps, it must be countered on the level of culture. This is where a countervailing tendency of intoxication can destabilize the ultimately fragile constructs upon which the whole edifice rests, in an attempt to reopen individual and collective subjectivities to a salutary invasion by the Other, whose demands may then finally be heard.

Examples from moments in the countercultural genealogy played out within Latin America reveal to us in dramatic close-up the interaction, whether in conflict or in uneasy coexistence, of opposing psychotropic tendencies, offering lessons about the value and limitations of madness, irony, and hedonism as psychotropic mediations of self and other. Antonin Artaud sought to defamiliarize—if not destroy—the world as we know it, but could not

but remain trapped in Western patterns of self-inflation, leaving him no choice but to consume himself in the purifying flames unleashed by a madness at once lucid and unhinged. William Burroughs maintained more distance between himself and the world, playing the ugly American through an ambiguous irony that enacted the object of its own critique. He made little effort to justify or cover his errors, such that his limitations can point to ways forward along with his razor insight. Parménides García Saldaña channeled the destructive humanity of Artaud's madness—as well as his tendency for blind spots—while updating the latter's nihilism to allow for the hedonistic inhabitation of the body and its environment, enjoying life all the way to the grave. Finally, José Agustín, seemingly sobered by his time in Lecumberri but wielding a stunning capacity to inebriate through text, sums up much of the contradictions of the counterculture with a seemingly simple story about foreigners and Mexicans tripping together. If Hunter S. Thompson pointed to the high-water mark, Agustín traced the watershed where countercultural rains came down to earth and diverged, mostly coursing down into the quaint and familiar valleys of the self and its narrow and habitual interests.

Élmer Mendoza must have read these authors, because his dedication to intercalating rock and other styles of music into his texts is otherwise singular. In the "Zurdo" novels, long gone are the mental and perceptual labyrinths of the drug experience, replaced with a relatively straightforward, realist aesthetic that seeks to lay out, with the liberty fiction allows, some of the complexities of narco-traffic and interdiction in Mexico. This includes the complicities, collusion and contradictions we expect from the *novela negra*, where the lines between criminal organizations and official bureaucracies often appears as blurred or non-existent, and even the presumed "hero" sees himself implicated in the ethical morass created by the contradictions that define international drug policy. But it also includes the play of psychotropy in its roles as

mechanism of psychological survival, medium of social control, and technology for the construction of a superior self. Along the latter lines, these novels strikingly portray narcossim in *gringo* characters that eschew cocaine for a telling variety of other methods of self-inflation. The "Zurdo" series moreover engages structures of addiction through its treatment of the process of investigation itself, linking to extratextual questions of the aesthetics and ethics of reading and addiction, and of representing violence. These intriguing interrogations of intoxication itself justify an approach to cultural psychotropy that is not Manichean nor prescriptive. That is, though these works be guilty of seeking to get their hooks into the reader's neurotransmitters—or perhaps partially because of that—they constitute a noteworthy, self-reflexive treatment of the structures of addiction.

Juan Pablo Villalobos and Jennifer Clement, however, take a very different tack in *Fiesta en la madriguera* and *Prayers for the Stolen*. They leverage a means of defamiliarization that is not normally associated with psychotropy, but which I hold may be its very prototype. The perspectives of children, as Benjamin recognized, are not yet domesticated into the encrusted thought patterns and addictions of self acquired through socialization and education, and thus are radically destabilizing to adult discourses, in the rare cases they are given attention. Through their aesthetics appropriation of these points of view, the authors are able to throw the reader's experience of narco-violence into disarray. Their framing of violence, bodies, and knowledge appears strange and disorienting, causing the comfortable grounds of previously held assumptions to tremble and crack open. Clement's Ladydi, a poor girl from Guerrero, models the value of a mode of experience that is radically open to the Other, and the tenuous possibilities for survival and redemption made possible by the solidary of the drowned, the broken and the discarded. Conversely, Villalobos's caustic humor has the creativity of young Tochtli, a drug

capo's son, disfiguring the image of narcoculture at the same time it superimposes it over mainstream consumerism, before finally succumbing to forces of social reproduction that will put his creativity at the exclusive service of a ruthless hyper-narcossism. Taken as a whole, these interventions strike at the foundations of habits of thought and feeling that set up a privileged self as a distant and unentangled observer of narco-violence, implicating the reader in the bloodshed at every moment.

While it is hoped that some light has been shed on the objects of this investigation through the elaboration of a novel theoretical framework, the scope of this project has been such that it cannot but serve as a preliminary indicator of the value of an interdisciplinary, globally and historically contextualized, psychotropic approach to the study of culture in the *narco* era. As a result, there are innumerable related aspects that require further study. One such area would be the development of a more comprehensive historical backdrop that stretches back beyond the development of a twentieth century "countercultural genealogy" to include an in-depth treatment of colonial and neocolonial extraction of stimulants like tobacco, coffee, and sugar from Latin America, and a review and theorization of pre-Colombian and persisting indigenous traditions using psychotropic substances and practices. Such work would illuminate whether, to what extent, and in what form, the dynamics and themes explored in the current investigation—addiction and defamiliarization, appropriation and exploitation, psychotropy in the relationship between Self and Other—are already present in these moments, awaiting the unfolding of history to play out their variations.

In addition, considerable study is needed to further enrich and strengthen the interdisciplinary connections that contribute to an increasingly robust understanding of psychotropy, by continuing to delve into the psychological and neurochemical literature on

intoxication, and staying abreast of rapid developments in these fields as well as new thoughts from other scholars who are developing novel, hybrid approaches to associated problems. The goal of interdisciplinarity is lauded by almost everyone, but realistically it can only be achieved to the extent that a substantial investment of time is made to build secondary areas of expertise, making possible fruitful dialog between fields at the deepest possible level. And bodies of knowledge in fields like neuroscience advance at a dizzying pace, necessitating frequent and rapid re-evaluations, a reality that constitutes a little-acknowledged challenge of interdisciplinarity for those accustomed to the more ponderous pace of the Humanities.

But in reality, even those who work with the products of contemporary culture have long been bereft of the luxury of time, and developments in the area of drugs happen quickly and demand the attention of anyone who seeks to address questions vital to the experience of living people. For this reason, phenomena like the increase in opiate use in the United States and elsewhere calls for more study. In elaborating a dialectical conception of the psychosocial significance of intoxication, I have focused largely on two poles: one exemplified by cocaine and consumer culture, which shores up the self against the influence of the Other, and one exemplified by psychedelic drugs and illumination through art, which tends rather to destabilize the constructed self. The continuing appeal of opiates may point to another tendency that amounts to the temporary(?) obliteration of the self, necessitating more research in psychology, neurochemistry and culture, in order to understand the causes and effects of this pattern, how it relates to other dynamics of intoxication, and how it is expressed in cultural production from and about Latin America. In this regard, William S. Burroughs's vital and literary interventions in Latin America, already considered in the dissertation, may merit more extensive treatment, and

Susan Buck-Morss's theorization of a cultural anesthesia that numbs the self to the point that it can enjoy the spectacle of its own destruction will become increasingly relevant.

Another change regarding drug use that should be addressed is the increasing consumption of illicit drugs in Latin America, whereas previously such consumption has been largely considered a Northern problem. While countries of the global North remain the largest markets for these products, discourses centered on a stable division between Southern production and trafficking versus Northern consumption become progressively weaker as this trend continues. One avenue of investigation that may be worth pursuing in connection to this question is whether growing income inequality within individual countries means that the North-South divide is increasingly manifesting *internally* to nation-states and thus whether patterns of usage of (and profit from) illicit drugs should be analyzed along the lines of global socio-economic classes rather than geographical regions. In light of these striking demographic changes, Latin American cultural production that directly addresses drug use, like the narrative of Julián Herbert (*Canción de tumba*, *Cocaína, manual de usuario*), becomes very important.

In conclusion, I believe, with the visionary José Martí—and even more so in our moment than in his—that "[t]here is no longer any permanent work, because works in these times of reconstruction and reshaping are by essence mutable and restless" (Ramos 306), and that this unsettled quality, instead of causing panic, should be celebrated as we take on a plasticity that allows us to constantly reshape our thinking, borrowing new ideas and paradigms across disciplines without surrendering worthy ethical and intellectual values and insights developed throughout humanity's rich cultural history. It is my hope that this study will serve as a tentative guide that invites future investigation along some of the countless threads it humbly tugs upon—many of which represent compelling lines of inquiry into the vitally important but poorly

understood interpenetration of intoxication and culture—and that in this way it may make a small contribution toward alleviating the suffering surrounding the desire for drugs and the war against that desire.

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