BIOPOLITICAL ITINERARIES:
MEXICO IN CONTEMPORARY TOURIST LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an investigation of representations of Mexico in twentieth century American and British literature. Drawing on various conceptions of biopolitics and biopower (from Foucault, Agamben and other theorists), I argue that the development of American pleasure tourism post-World War II has definitively transformed the biopolitical climate of Mexico for hosts and guests. Exploring the consolidation in Mexico of various forms of American pleasure tourism (my first chapter); cultures of vice and narco-tourism (my second chapter); and the erotic mixtures of sex and health that mark the beach resort (my third chapter), I posit an uncanny and perverse homology between the biopolitics of American tourists and Mexican labourers and qualify the neocolonial armature that links them together. Writers (from Jack Kerouac to Tennessee Williams) and intellectuals (from ethnobotanist R. Gordon Wasson to second-wave feminist Maryse Holder) have uniquely written contemporary “spaces of exception” in Mexico, have “founded” places where the normalizing discourses, performances of apparatuses of social control (in the U.S.) are made to have little consonance. I contrast the kinds of “lawlessness” and liminality white bodies at leisure and brown bodies at labour encounter and compel in their bare flesh, and investigate the various aesthetic discourses that underwrite the sovereignty and mobility of these bodies in late capitalism.
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Introduction: *The Other Side of Paradise*

Alone, unemployed and disillusioned by love, academia and the great war, overwhelmed by his own role as a burgeoning artist in the wake of the jazz age, Amory Blaine contemplates his place in the world over the course of a long, dark night of the soul, trespassing in the Hudson River Sporting and Yacht Club (260). He meditates on the nature of originality, his own genius and vanity. He questions his intellectual heroes, dismissing or dismantling them along with the doctrinaires, messiahs of all guises and former lovers that have nurtured or admonished his “romantic egotism” and shaped, each in their own way, the dimensions of this existential crisis. He feels himself caught in that great labyrinth that few seek out and that becomes for him the emblem of modern(ist) progress itself; “He was where Goethe was when he began ‘Faust;’ he was where Conrad was when he wrote ‘Almayer’s Folly’” (264-65). And though Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* will soon conclude with Amory’s affirmation of self-gnosis (in the novel’s final line, he declares “I know myself … but that is all”), he falters for a moment, tempted to abandon the journey altogether:

Suddenly he felt an overwhelming desire to let himself go to the devil—
not to go violently as a gentleman should, but to sink safely and sensuously out of sight. He pictured himself in an adobe house in Mexico, half-reclining on a rug-covered couch, his slender, artistic fingers closed on a cigarette while he listened to guitars strumming melancholy undertones to an age-old dirge of Castile and an olive-skinned, carmine-lipped girl caressed his hair. Here he might live a strange litany, delivered from right and wrong and from the hound of heaven and from every God
(except the exotic Mexican one who was pretty slack himself and rather addicted to Oriental scents)—delivered from success and hope and poverty into that long chute of indulgence which led, after all, only to the artificial lake of death.

There were so many places where one might deteriorate pleasantly: Port Said, Shanghai, parts of Turkestan, Constantinople, the South Seas—all lands of sad, haunting music and many odors, where lust could be a mode and expression of life, where the shades of night skies and sunsets would seem to reflect only moods of passion: the colors of lips and poppies.

(262)

In many ways, Amory’s digressive desire to abandon rather than fully adopt the responsibilities he is forming for himself, intermingling with transgressive desires for simplicity, exotic indulgence, the wish to live with slackened ethics and even to make degeneracy an ambition, are symptomatic of more potent collective fantasies that have frequently informed twentieth century discursive constructions of Mexico in European and North American cultural production.

Amory’s Mexico is not strictly timeless, but it is certainly out of sync with the accelerating momentum of modernity as he encounters it in early 1920s New York City. He explains on behalf of a generation of young, upwardly mobile, half-disillusioned, half-idealistic white men to a successful businessman of the old guard: “Modern life … changes no longer century by century, but year by year, ten times faster than it ever has before—populations doubling, civilizations unified more closely with other civilizations, economic interdependence, racial questions, and—we’re dawdling along. My idea is that
we’ve got to move much faster” (272). Yet, his Mexico remains outside this incipient globalization—it is not only seemingly pre-industrial, but the language of his digressive paragraphs clocks Mexico at another speed: the pace of the guitar strumming “an age-old dirge of Castile,” the languid stasis of the harem where a God “rather addicted to Oriental scents” remains “slack” and the sky’s palette is limited to “the colors of lips and poppies” as the opium-infused European fantasies of the Orient manifest themselves south of the U.S. border, but temporally worlds apart (262). And the vague “racial questions” that somehow characterize modern urban (which might be to say here New York City exclusively or uniquely) life do not seem to apply in Amory’s Mexico, where his ethnicity and class automatically secure his superiority and an entitlement to lavish hospitality. Indeed, Amory’s Mexico in many ways resonates much more with post-war pleasure tourism than the cultural explorations undertaken by his contemporaries (who I will discuss in a moment).

The devil who tempts him to abandon self-knowledge seems placated by this “exotic Mexican [God]”¹ (an interesting qualification from the scion of a Catholic family) who, loose in his judgments, absolves Amory from moral dilemmas—he could be “delivered from right and wrong”—and from the pressures he feels as an artist struggling with tradition and self-definition and the threats of failure—“delivered from success and hope and poverty” (262). Thus, beyond the obvious romantic and exotic stereotypes, perhaps heightened just beyond the peripheries of satire, we find a striking moral laxity endemic to Mexican society. The landscape itself is conducive to laziness (and antithetical to modernity) and therefore threatens to clot his creative ambitions; “[sinking]

¹On a superficial level, the anxious fusion of good and evil in Mexico anticipates Lowry’s famous “infernal paradise” trope, first articulated in a letter to his editor twenty-six years after the Fitzgerald text appeared. I discuss this trope at length later in this introduction.
safely and sensuously out of sight” (the serpentine alliteration underscoring the devil’s role in all this), Amory will learn that “lust could be a mode and expression of life” (262). The Mexican fantasy poses a dangerous challenge to the ideation of literature and the acceleration of modern progress, both so crucial to Amory’s very sense of self. And this is certainly not unique to this novel. Deborah Root explains that depictions of post-conquest Mexico by Euro/American writers tropologically romanticize failure: “The failure is the Westerner’s, but one that is mirrored by the Mexican backdrop. Mexico is the place the Westerner goes to fall apart, escape the law, or come to terms with his or her own degradation … [T]he true message is that Mexico is identical with the degeneracy and dissolution of the North American or European” (52-53). It is crucial in this final stage of the education of his “personage” that Amory reject transcendence and instead embrace an imminent progress: to put his best foot northward.

Unlike in other Western writing about Mexico, the Mexican woman in his fantasy, the “olive-skinned, carmine-lipped girl [caressing] his hair,” is not a human object of desire, ambivalent or otherwise, but as much a prop in his stylized hyperbole as the guitar, the adobe house or the rug (262). Unlike the “all-American” debutantes and socialites that have loved, rejected and scarred him in tragic and transitory fashion, the Mexican woman is incapable of affecting him in any genuine capacity and thus promulgating his self-gnosis; rather she is another aspect of the dangerous landscape that will lull him into complacency with bodily pleasure.

It may seem strange to begin a project that deals mostly with post-World War II Anglophone writing about Mexico with a passage from a novel that appeared in 1920. Yet Amory’s desire for a specific sort of imaginary Mexico—the exotic, pre- or a-modern
pleasure land that offers excessive hospitality and degeneracy for the privileged, most often white, tourist—resonates in contemporary discourses about Mexico in the First World. Moreover, the appearance of This Side of Paradise marks the early stages of a newly conceived “touristic” Mexico; Amory’s digression must be understood in a larger context about the commercialization of Mexican culture for First World consumption through the creation of the modern travel industry. I will be dealing with specific types of tourism and travel writing that appear after the Second World War throughout my dissertation, so I would first like to consider in my introduction the earlier stages of tourism in Mexico in the twentieth century to provide context for this key shift from cultural to pleasure tourism.

With the end of the military phase of the Mexican Revolution in 1920, travellers, mostly from the U.S., began migrating south of the border for a variety of reasons. Political pilgrims expatriated to avoid the draft and to consolidate alliances with leftist politicians in the post-revolutionary Mexican government, though their attempts were

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2 I am aware of the Eurocentric implications of this term and of its underlying supremacist logic. Throughout my dissertation, I will be employing the terms “First World,” “Third World,” “developed” and “developing” not with the intention of naturalizing the geopolitical hierarchy they represent, but to explicate how such a hierarchy operates in the texts I examine and how these texts in turn produce or challenge existing spatio-cultural knowledges and power bases within transnational milieu. I anticipate the charge that distinguishing such binaries is simplistic, and dangerously so. However, I do not use “First” and “Third World” as permanent categories—indeed, this dissertation deals with bodies and populations that move between both “Worlds” in a number of registers, and with the biopolitical effects and allegiances of such mobile, interstitial ontologies. Ramón Saldívar’s reading of Américo Paredes explains that the transnational “is … an experience of transit, transition, and transitoriness from one lived experience in a particular historical place into the experience of a different geosocial structure and its altered social and emotional space” (435). The traffic of bodies, ideas, services, commodities, symbols and the way they constantly reposition our lived realities makes the border (between nations just as “Worlds”) less the foreclosure of subjective or collective identity than “… an associative field of transactions in human capital across enormous domains of social, economic, and semantic value” (401). While recognizing that all types of “migrancy,” including tourism, erase and re-script borders to some degree, distinguishing “First” and “Third World” may be a generality, but, far from an arbitrary one, it is politically and factually substantive. Ramón Eduardo Ruiz asks us in 2010, “[o]f the more than 100 million Mexicans, why do over half live in poverty, some 20 million of them enduring daily hunger, barely able to keep body and soul together?” (xiii). “Whatever pundits might argue, whatever macroeconomic mumbo jumbo might say,” he explains, “Mexico is a peripheral country, part of the ubiquitous Third World” (xiii). I thus use this distinction with a critical awareness of its limitations and a general acceptance of its socio-economic validity.
met with mixed results (Delpar 15-23). Many of these pilgrims celebrated what they found to be a collective spirit rooted in Indigenous notions of community akin to their own European ideas about communism (25). Thus, the conception of Indigenous Mexico, thoroughly aestheticized and nationalized by the great artists of Mexican modernity, came to symbolize, for some foreigners, opposition to the capitalist individualism of the U.S. and the First World at large (a conception that resurfaces with beat and other countercultural writers I explore in chapters one and two) [25-30].

Other artists, writers and ideologues continued to travel south between the wars and came to form an expatriate community connected to the important figures of the Mexican intelligentsia. Concurrently in the U.S., Mexican art (pre-Columbian, contemporary folk and modern muralism) became increasingly fashionable between 1920 and 1935, the period of what Helen Delpar terms “the enormous vogue of things Mexican” in the U.S. (125-29). The hegemonic logic that fuelled this vogue by attempting to partition a pan-American cultural history (by moving away from an European legacy) also consolidated larger cultural stereotypes about “exotic” and "primitive” Mexico and thus secured an implicit hierarchy within this “pan-Americanism” (9). Many European and U.S. artists were attracted to Mexico based on preconceived myths of the country’s premodernity; indeed, these artists also often willingly ignored signs of modernity in their artistic depictions of Mexico (Oles and Ferragut 5).

Many of these expatriates became critical of other foreign tourists who encroached on their cosmopolitanism and imported ignorant behaviour, as well as of other less-bohemian expatriates, largely for the same reasons. As Carleton Beals says of
the latter group, “[c]lass-pride, race-hatred, and provincial backwardness mark their narrow minds. They despise the Mexican and his ways of living” (qtd. in Delpar 40). D.H. Lawrence would satirize the ideological drift between the old guard and the new generation of expatriates in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). The new tourist class proved to be as problematic for the expatriates. Katherine Anne Porter, the most important canonical writer of the foreign community, was already lamenting in 1931,

> Mexico is not really a place to visit any more, or to live in. The land has fallen prey to its friends, organized and unorganized; its arts and customs are in dreadful convulsions of being saved, preserved, advertised and exploited by a horde of appreciators, amateur or professional. They swarm over the place and eat the heart out of it like a plague of locusts. Tourist busses go roaring over the beautiful mountain roads, loaded with persons carrying note books and cameras, and you may be certain that one in five of them is writing a study, or an interpretation, or a survey; hardly one of them will admit he is a simple traveller taking the air and viewing scenery and buying harmless little knickknacks by way of proving to himself he is really travelling. (997)

These “cultural pilgrims,” “self-appointed prophets, trying to squeeze themselves into the esoteric skin of the Indian” are guilty of a gross cultural consumption that has sufficiently depleted its resources (997). Porter points in this essay to the artificiality of pre-packaged, “authentic” Mexican culture for foreign tourists that is, in fact, destroying what she implies is the very thing it seeks. Like many literary travellers to Mexico in the twentieth century, Porter sees the consignment of Mexican (and more often Indigenous Mexican)
culture into capitalist modes of production and transaction as part of a global pathology of modernity that she and other writers frequently wish was contained at/by the border. Of course, the problem with Porter’s invective is its pretense to objectivity. Unlike some of her contemporaries, Porter gets around her own authenticity-mongering by attempting to demystify the aura of a personalized Mexico while exposing the “superiorities” and “ignorances” tourists import in their search for the same. She advises fellow travellers/writers:

You would do well to visit Mexico quite as you visit other countries, without meddling, without presuming that you are a natural candidate for official favor, and without that condescending kindness which is so infuriating to intelligent Mexicans. If you really love the way of life here, keep your hands off it. All this uproar of publicity helps to change, commercialize, falsify it. Do not apologize for Mexican political corruption, any more than you would for your own rotten politicians … The Indian arts are very beautiful, but so are the folk arts of other countries, and there is no special occult value to them … The nature of the Indian is as complicated and mysterious as human nature is, and if one of you would take the time and trouble to be well acquainted with even one of them, I think you might be ashamed to talk of him always as a problem, a spectacle, a kind of picturesque social monstrosity to be approached always in this arty-scientific-sociological manner … (999)

Discussing how Porter’s own writing about Mexico stands or fails to stand up to her ideals would require extended exegetical treatment. What is important, for my
purpose here, is her stress on a shared humanity that should necessarily provoke guilt from spectators who make Indigenous difference a metaphysical and material commodity and how the nature of tourism as an industry foregrounds this difference as a source of capitalist production. Porter’s condemnation of tourism resonates with the work of Mexican modernists, as well. Below, an Orozco lithograph entitled *Tourists and Aztecs* (1934) and a Rivera panel, *Folkloric and Touristic Mexico* (1936), highlight the voyeuristic nature of what John Urry calls “the tourist gaze” (1-15). Orozco draws attention to the colour contrast between the blank whiteness of the tourists and the darkened natives, whose grotesque appearance further enfreaks them as spectacle. Both the corporeal size of the “cultural pilgrims” (or perhaps “cultural pillagers”) and their numbers succeed in driving the natives into the bottom right corner of the work, positioning them as disempowered specimens. Some of the tourists, with their guidebooks and binoculars give affirmative stares while the rest look at each other, perhaps awaiting an “official” interpretation from one of their compatriots.

Fig. 1. José Clemente Orozco, *Tourists and Aztecs*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.
In the Rivera work, as well, the blond woman assumes a privileged view of the actions on the canvass; just like Orozco’s tourists, she takes in the scene, as Porter says, as “a kind of picturesque social monstrosity to be approached always in this arty-scientific-sociological manner” (999). Jeffrey Belnap reads the donkeys and the blond woman as “[representing] the alliance between academic and touristic interests, an alliance that has led to the commodification of the villagers’ traditions” (272). Here, it is
Tepoztlán’s carnival that has been assessed by the academics and descended on by the tourist (272). The swine-faced man attempting to trade a chicken for money, Bentley argues, is President Calles; Rivera is not only critiquing the consumptive behaviour of foreign tourists, he is also responding to the government’s promotion of tourism and its corresponding commodification of Mexican culture (272). He is challenging the claim put forth by the government that tourism is an essential component of modern Mexico, that it will promote the cultural image of the nation to foreign visitors while creating an opportunity to secure the capital necessary for the materialist phase of the Revolution (Berger, Development 1-2).

In spite of U.S. interest in Mexico in the twenties and thirties, and in spite of the concerns about tourism’s effect on Mexican culture (as relayed by Porter, Orozco, Rivera and others), not many tourists actually visited Mexico before the Second World War (7). Records show, for example, that in 1930, only 24,000 foreign travellers entered the country, compared to the 390,000 that would enter in 1950 (Berger, “A Drink” 28). Numbers would only increase from here: 1950-1970 would see a 9.1% annual growth rate in tourism (Clancy 44). Negative impressions of a violent and dangerous Mexico generated by the sensationalist press in the U.S., the bureaucratic difficulties of border-crossing, as well as the unsatisfactory road conditions for long-distance travel and lack of lodging were all challenges that Mexico would work with when the government began making attempts to first develop tourism in the late twenties (Berger, Development 7-32).

The ultimate success of Mexico’s industrial hospitality did not come during the “enormous vogue,” which, as Dina Berger points out, was largely an upper-class phenomenon; it came when tourism became conventional for middle-class U.S. citizens.
The rise of leisure time and economic prosperity in the U.S. and the new affordability and accessibility of air travel allowed U.S. citizens to take advantage of the newly developed tourist industry in Mexico (Clancy 44).

I discuss this transition in more detail in chapter one, but for now it is enough to say that, following the war, the circuits and modes of tourism in Mexico shift, as do First World travellers’ rationales and expectations; unlike Porter’s parasites trying to capitalize on Mexican culture, tourists were less drawn to museums or pre-Columbian archaeological sites than they were to the burgeoning beach/resort culture now being touted by the Mexican government as the primary incentive to travel south (Schreiber 35). As Rebecca M. Schreiber explains, “[i]n contrast to the tourist literature of the 1920s and 1930s, postwar Mexican tourism presented Mexican locales not as extraordinary or unusual places but as familiar ones … Mexico had come to function as a backdrop to a form of tourism that accented pleasure (for white Americans) through being served (by Mexicans)” (39).

Throughout my dissertation, I explore how various concepts, technologies, sites and subjects of pleasure are presented in travel literature about Mexico. As Amory fears that the excesses of Mexican pleasure would overwhelm his “American” will to progress, I will examine how First World writing seeks to territorialize transgression in Mexico, a maneuver that depends on as it perpetuates ethnic subordination and ethical hypocrisy. To ground this further, I would like to consider what is discursively constructed as the carnivalesque, liminal nature of travel to Mexico and the biopolitical logic coding such constructions.
Biopolitics Across Abyssal Lines

Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intercultural split will heal.

--Borderlands/La Frontera (108)

Boaventura de Sousa proposes that modern western thinking is abyssal thinking. On our side of the line, socio-political conflicts, issues and procedures are structured by a dialectic of regulation and emancipation; on the other side, relations between forgotten populations exist within a dichotomy of appropriation and violence (1-3). In the twentieth century, with greater migration from the developing world to the developed, abyssal lines are constantly effaced, redrawn and multiplied. The migrant worker or the refugee, for example, does not simply cross an abyssal line reducible to a pure marker of national conscription and enter ipso facto into a new ontology; he or she is forced juridically and epistemologically, if not always physically, back to the other side (de Sousa Santos 5-7). So too, I argue the Western tourist is able to sustain the emancipation/regulation dialectic in othered spaces through practices that also re-draw abyssal lines; that is, tourist spaces allow for subjective and temporary emancipation from one’s quotidian relation to biopower and therefore become necessary to sustain regulation at (and the biopolitical order of) home. I am not exclusively talking about the tourist with a vacation package whose cultural activities are organized by a resort. Indeed, many of the writers I consider

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3 Forgetting can be understood as a collective strategy whose efficiency lies in its dis-articulation. Zygmunt Bauman argues that “[k]nowledge can be had thanks to laying out the blank spots of lack of interest, and the precision, exactitude, pragmatic utility of knowledge grows with the size of those spots. For all practical intents and purposes, things excluded—thrown out of focus, cast in the shadow, forced into the vague or invisible background—no longer belong to ‘what is’” (18). Thus, we need to recognize ignorance, and not simply knowledge, in the circular production of truth and power (Stoler 247).
who go “off the beaten path” (in search of that ever-illusive, typically modernist desire for authenticity in othered spaces) stay within their side of the line because of their ethnicity, nationality and capital, which, in turn, inform their acculturated preconceptions, expectations and forms of behaviour.

Crossing abyssal lines provokes numerous material and affective changes to subjectivity and one’s relation to power. But which direction one is crossing, which side constitutes home (legally or intimately) and one’s cultural and ethnic relationship to either side (especially as perceived by one’s “hosts”) makes all the difference. While my work focuses on the biopolitics of tourism as embedded in discourses about Mexico by citizens of the developed world, it also seeks to analyze the larger cultural impact of these works on the biopolitics of Mexicans and people of Mexican heritage in the developed world. To be more precise, I am interested in the perverse doubling that determines subjective liminality not in an efficient and universal capacity, but through a general form whose motor and objective is neoliberal capitalism and whose essential technologies are the mobile body and the migrant population. There are multiple liminalities at work in the service of global capital, and thus in the transnational tourist industry, but the mechanisms of imposition or adoption of subjective liminality seem, through lenses of literature, less homologous than spectral in their mimesis. While tourists celebrate or decry the “lawlessness” of the country, Mexicans themselves are rendered “lawless,” for crossing borders to pursue livelihoods. While tourists come to Mexico to escape restrictive behavioural and sexual mores and take drugs with self-declared impunity, Mexicans are endowed with a primitive eroticism and essential sexual promiscuity and, especially right now, viewed with suspicion as potential drug users or traffickers.
It is essential then to foreground the inverse symbiosis between the First World’s tourist and his/her uncanny other, the Mexican migrant. One travels to the other’s country for pleasure (corporeal or “existential”) and to spend “disposable income;” the other comes to work and earn sustenance wages. The tourist enjoys hospitality, the migrant, if he/she survives the deadly conditions of passage and makes it past the migra, is under constant threat of deportation and violence. If there is an element of danger for the tourist, due to the proximity of the other side, this merely authenticates the adventure (except in some cases where the uncanny lawlessness returns as a terrifying hyper- legality). With such drastic difference encoded into seemingly divergent modes of subjectification, how can we conceive of notions of biopower and the biopolitical in a contemporary hemispheric or global milieu?

Situating a Foucauldian notion of biopower and biopolitics in twentieth century transnational contexts is indeed problematic as Foucault more concretely developed and deployed the terms in work dealing with earlier stages of European modernity. Foucault explains that biopower is “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species become the objective of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (Security 1). Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose summarize the term in regard to Foucault’s oeuvre: “‘biopower’ [at its most general … brings] into view a field comprised of more or less rationalized attempts to intervene upon the vital characteristics of human existence” at the level of the subject or the socius (though the socius or “population” is Foucault’s primary concern in his analyses) (Rabinow and Rose 196-97; Foucault, History 141; Security 79; 367). How such attempts are “rationalized” in service of existing power relations is crucial and, in this regard, it is not so surprising that
Foucault devoted his 1978-79 Collège de France seminar “The Birth of Biopolitics” almost never to the titular topic, but to the impact of economic liberalism on modern governmentality and State power. “[B]io-power was without question an indispensible element in the development of capitalism,” he writes, “the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (History 140-41).

Further, biopower “also needed the growth of these factors [i.e. producing bodies and populations], their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern” (141). Biopower is thus, for Foucault, a governing correlative of liberalism, an interrelational system of power that is not static, but that develops and modifies essentially in conjunction with transformations (and an increasing authority) of the market economy (and thus with the global turn to neoliberalism) (Birth 22; 83).

Biopolitics, more of a pharmakon here, “[embraces] all the specific strategies and contestations over problematizations of collective human vitality, morbidity and mortality; over the forms of knowledge, regimes of authority and practices of intervention that are desirable, legitimate and efficacious” (Rabinow and Rose 196-97). Thus, as Hardt and Negri will argue, biopolitics immanently carries the potential to deterritorialize the subject/socius from governing agents and networks and locate new modes of sovereignty internally (as transcendence from the grasp of these agents is no longer possible) (344-46). Biopolitics are dynamic, multiplicitous and heterogeneous, subsuming forces and actions that are no longer always simply localizable in certain loci.
of authority (nation States, religions, juridical codes, for example) and their various apparatuses; as Maurizio Lazzarto explains, “[the] fundamental political problem of modernity is not that of a single source of sovereign power, but that of a multitude of forces that act and react amongst each other according to relations of command and obedience” (103). Or more appropriately for Foucault, like economic subjects, according to their “tangled relationships with … economic processes” (Birth 22).

If we perceive the acceleration of contemporary globalization as paradigmatic of our current stage of late (or hyper-)modernity, it is difficult to satisfactorily locate the agents of subjectification with a universalizing summary gesture. This is essentially the problem that Rabinow and Rose find in Hardt and Negri’s conception of bio-power and – politics—these theorists have constructed an outmoded “grand narrative” that expands biopolitics into all political realms while reducing negative sovereignty to “a mysterious global Empire” (198-99). Rabinow and Rose are also quick to challenge Agamben for positing a biopolitics of the twentieth century that, among other faults, becomes inseparable from a thanatopolitics (201). Both [Hardt and] Negri and Agamben, according to Rabinow and Rose, “… suggest that contemporary biopower takes the form of a politics that is fundamentally dependent on the domination, exploitation, expropriation and, in some cases, elimination of the vital existence of some or all subjects over whom it is exercised” (198). In contrast, they propose “that the economy of contemporary biopolitics operates according to logics of vitality, not mortality: while it has its circuits of exclusion, letting die is not making die” (211). Following the thematics

4 I dwell on the problematics of this distinction in a moment as it perversely privileges an idealized and accessible “intent” in constituting a biopolitics (as a subject of critical thought). Capitalism posits racial and national value differentials on human life and death, so a biopolitics should not exclude mortality in favour
of Foucault’s biopolitics, their work focuses primarily on scientific conceptions of race (and their various political and social utilities), reproduction and genomic sciences.

As ambitious as Hardt and Negri’s project may be, it offers a concept of twentieth century biopolitics that should not be so easily dismissed, that at points dovetails sharply with Foucault’s work on biopower and neoliberalism, and that could provide an important archival-theoretical framework for more nuanced analyses of particular biopolitical praxes in the second half of the twentieth century. Drawing on Deleuze, Hardt and Negri posit that we have historically moved (following the Second World War) from Foucault’s “disciplinary society to the society of control,” which they define by its radical inclusivity and its intensity in its ability to govern not only more subjects with the economic integration of world markets, but to govern the subject more thoroughly; they explain that

… when power becomes entirely biopolitical, the whole social body is compromised by power’s machine and developed in its virtuality. This relationship is open, qualitative, and affective. Society, subsumed within a power that reaches down to the ganglia of the social structure and its processes of development, reacts like a single body. Power is thus expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population—and at the same time across the entirety of social relations (24).

Of course, this government of bodies and minds can not affect everyone in the same capacity—with the economic and political asymmetries that mark twentieth century
transnationalism, positing a universal citizen is as fallacious as it is potentially hypocritical (given especially that Empire draws heavily on a legacy of continental philosophy, it risks promulgating its own kind of neo-imperial epistemology in a different register). It would appear that subject here is on this side of de Sousa Santos’s abyssal line. Thus, applying Hardt and Negri’s notion of biopower to tourism and migrancy yields oppositional biopolitical ontologies, both products of the same global biopower in different regional, national, ethnic, economic and cultural contexts. To say, for instance, that contemporary disciplinary dispositifs “… directly organize the brains … and bodies … toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity” smacks loudly of modern western entzauberung, coupled, of course, with the traditional theory of Marxist labour alienation (23).

The tourist of the developed world, affected in such a way by the society of control, may attribute to travel a type of transcendence, however fabricated and temporary. Mass tourism itself can be approached as a strategy of power to manage populations post-World War II through a collective practice of mobility that, as a corollary, must manufacture the uniqueness of subjective experience with a foreign climate (which can mean anything from writing a postcard to taking psilocybin). In the literature I examine, Mexico typically presents an opportunity to escape the society of control by offering a new relation to subjectivity and subsequently, an alternative relation to biopower for the tourist. In a recent anthology of North American and European fiction about Mexico, fittingly here titled Escape to Mexico (2002), the editor claims

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5 Though mass tourism itself provides its own structures of “control,” segregating bodies, desires and activities according to desires to minimize and prescript the parameters of transcultural engagement. What is more important for the success of the industry is how the tourist perceives and feels a type of transcendence from routine demands placed on the body at home while reiterating a biopower of typically white bodies by allowing them to practice fabricated transcendence in othered territories.
“Mexico has long been viewed not only as a place but also as a state of mind. It is a land of possibilities and extremes, of passion and intrigue, a land where you can find yourself or lose yourself, depending on what you desire” (1). While summarizing, albeit very simplistically, conventions of foreign writing about Mexico (and/or borrowing from contemporary Mexican tourist advertising⁶), the editor suggests that Mexico passively offers more than mere “passion and intrigue,” but a new form of self-gnosis, in which the traveller/writer is given fantastic agency (“depending on what you desire”) to reposition him/herself in relation not just to a different environment, but to an environment of self-transforming difference. While biopolitical transcendence is impossible for Hardt and Negri, this does not mean that the privileged subject is unequipped with the means and desires to experience the illusion. At the same time, we must recognize that the illusion is not innocuous, but rather that it perpetuates site-specific schematics of biopolitical production particular to the developed and developing worlds.

Hardt and Negri’s notion of imperial sovereignty privileges, or at least highlights, the role of transnational corporations in securing contemporary modes of biopower. “The activities of corporations,” they argue, “are no longer defined by the imposition of abstract command and the organization of simple theft and unequal exchange. Rather they directly structure and articulate territories and populations … [They] directly distribute labor power over various markets, functionally allocate resources, and organize hierarchically the various sectors of world production” (31-32). This appraisal of non-State agents in the market economy over the State itself (or the State in earlier iterations)

⁶ As Alarcón shows, contemporary Mexican tourist promotion rearticulates conventional ideas about Mexicanness found in Anglo literature and other cultural sources that will be familiar to their addressees (151-87). Similarly, Dina Berger explores how urban-planning in Mexico City earlier in the century was influenced by what were believed to be the tourist’s desires for a mix between a nostalgic, folkloric past and modern cosmopolitan luxury (Development 56; 92-93).
certainly fits with Foucault’s genealogy of neoliberalism; post-World War II, Foucault argues, “the overall exercise of political power … [is] modeled on the principle of a market economy” (*Birth* 131). More precisely, the market itself comes to “… serve as the principle, form and model for a State” and thus “the institution of economic freedom will be able to function as a siphon … as a point of attraction for the formation of a political sovereignty” (117; 83). If one is to accept this sort of counter-Agambenian biopolitics in which the State is a frequently disempowered and/or irrelevant institution, what still needs to be elucidated then is the spatialization of biopolitical praxes in a precise global hierarchy, however given to fluctuations in its power structure. Techniques of biopower, Foucault reminds us, “[act] as factors of segregation and social hierarchization … guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony” (*History* 141). And further, “[i]t is indeed the emergence of … biopower that inscribes [racism] in the mechanisms of the State … as the basic mechanism of power” (*Society* 254). Rather than critically isolate power into either the State or corporations, however, the enabling allegiances between them must be understood in neocolonial contexts wherein laws (and the obfuscation of laws in dense legal quagmires like the NAFTA treaty, for instance) benefit the global expansion of First World companies who in turn lend their capital to support political policies and neoliberal agendas throughout the developed and developing worlds.

Looking to the *other* side of the abyssal line that separates, in one general sense, the developing world from the developed through epistemological apartheid, we can understand that biopolitics, in the service of transnational capital, can become more perverse and extreme in certain sections of the globe. In mapping these sections, it is
crucial to foreground the matrices of *othered* ethnicities, constructions of cultural differences, (neo)colonial histories, and modern logics of progress and development to understand how biopower, below the abyssal lines, (re)produces subaltern subjectivities and, according to Walter Mignolo, renders “‘Latin’ America [generally] … a place for the exploitation resources and human labor” (49).

de Sousa Santos agrees with Agamben that the state of exception is becoming the new state form. He explains,

… it appears that Western modernity can only spread globally to the extent that it violates all the principles upon which it has historically grounded the legitimacy of the regulation/emancipation paradigm on this side of the line. Human rights are thus violated in order to be defended, democracy is destroyed to safeguard democracy, life is eliminated to preserve life. Abyssal lines are being drawn both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. In the literal sense, these are the lines that define borders as fences and killing fields, divide the cities between civilized zones (more and more, gated communities) and savage zones, and prisons between legal confinement sites and sites of brutal and lawless destruction of life. (7)

Imperial sovereignty, as envisioned by Hardt and Negri, generates more powerful material effects on the other sides of the lines, even as these lines may in some cases be virtual and not limited to national borders. De Sousa Santos comes closest to Hardt and Negri’s Empire in his presentation of “the new indirect rule” which finds actors and agents beyond national sovereignty assuming control over the production of life (through the “… control of healthcare, land, potable water, seeds, forests, or the quality of the
environment”) and re-ordering subjective relations to power (7). He claims that “[the] political obligation binding the legal subject to the Rechstaat, the modern constitutional state, that has prevailed on this side of the line, is being replaced by privatized, depoliticized contractual obligations under which the weaker party is more or less at the mercy of the stronger one” (7). As with Agamben’s biopolitics, where zoë and bios, bare life and political life become indistinguishable, the very lives of subjects and their means of survival are here controlled by global neoliberal forces and organizations, making the object of sovereignty strategically elusive and difficult, if not impossible to identify, let alone appeal to (Homo Sacer 1-4).

To give an example of biopolitics below the abyssal line (that is, for the people who live and die below these lines, not for the itinerant tourist to whom I will return in a moment), an appropriate subject should be the lives of Mexicans in post-NAFTA Ciudad Juárez, a space of biopower at its most extreme perversion (and/or iteration). It is possible to posit the city’s female maquiladora workers as one of many homines sacri groups of the new world order. Spending the majority of their waking lives in factories owned by transnational corporations (centred in the developed world), their bodies, like Harraway’s cyborgs, become part-machine in the service of global capital while they themselves may earn as little as forty cents an hour. Many other women in the city (and some of the factory workers, as well) are also forced into subsistence prostitution (Bowden, Juárez 81). In one factory Charles Bowden discusses, female workers must provide used tampons to show their employers that they are not pregnant (80); illness, taking legally

7 Foucault corroborates this in a sense through his analysis of how the rule of law has been co-opted by the market economy and has thus rendered justice “an omnipresent public service,” the law an arbiter of economic interests (Birth 172-76).
8 Based on a Council in Hemispheric Affairs study from 2007 (Contreras 95).
required breaks or attempting to assert workers’ rights have also been grounds for
termination (Contreras 95). In their late twenties and thirties, when they are unable to
operate at desired speeds, the women are frequently “junked” and replaced by more able
bodies (Bowden, Juárez 80). In an industrial city where the ghettoized in colonias
experience the worst effects of progressively worsening environmental degradation,
where gangs and transnational corporations often have authority over politicians and
police (and the division between these four groups is frequently unclear), these women
must also live in constant threat of rape and murder; for almost twenty years now,
thousands⁹ of women have been “disappeared” in Juárez, “a city of poverty that has
become a kind of killing machine,” where the biopolitical and thanatopolitical are
indistinguishable and “letting die” and “making die” signify the same process (57; 82; 91;
101).

Rosa Linda Fregoso confronts academics who read a responsibility for the
feminicides in neoliberal capitalism: they confuse “exploitation with the extermination of
gendered bodies” (40) and ignore the fact that only a small number of those found dead
had worked for maquiladoras (though the figures she cites reflect studies done in the
1990s, a decade with a less significant murder rate overall) (42). It is the patriarchal State,
she argues, that deserves critical attention, as it “negates” and “disaggregates” its
culpability in the feminicides and institutes, in her reading, an Agambenian state of
exception for female citizens (37-40; 50-52). Yet, what the State and transnational
corporations have in common is their violent “utilization” of female bodies—when they
do not re-produce hegemonically-recognized gendered behaviour or prove “productive”

⁹ Four hundred bodies have been discovered as of 2010, though this figure represents ten to twelve percent
of the actual number of murdered women (Bowden, Murder City 13). Rates have only increased, from 301
in 2007 to 1607 in 2008 (233-34). In October 2009, 324 women alone were murdered (234).
enough in Fordist labour, they may be abandoned or destroyed without reprisal.

Moreover, it is the logic of abandon that sees narco-power overrun State sovereignty, that transplants factories to China and, with its multiplicity of institutions and effects, undermines the centrality of the State, or any single source, in an apprehension of the murders.

Agamben claims that capitalism’s developmentalist logic “…transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare life” (Homo Sacer 180). Ciudad Juárez could possibly become a contemporary manifestation of the concentration camp which, for him, serves as “… the very paradigm of political space at the point of which politics becomes biopolitics and homo sacer is virtually confused with citizen” (171). The camp is where “… human beings [are] so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime” (171). And just as Bowden locates in Juárez a dangerous but possible model for the future of the world, Agamben warns that “the camp … is the new nomos of the planet” (Juárez 48-49; Homo Sacer 176).10

While it is imperative to recognize the territorial manifestations of capitalism’s

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10 Responding not of course to Agamben, but to contemporary neoliberal economists, Foucault dismisses this sort of “state phobia” that invests in the State model “an inflationary critical currency” and that tends to read all forms of the state as enabling each other (Birth 187). “For example,” Foucault offers, “an analysis of social security and the administrative apparatus on which it rests ends up, via some slippages and thanks to some plays on words [refers] us to the analysis of concentration camps” (187-88). Elsewhere, he insists on the absolute singularity of the Nazi State: “Nazism alone took the play between the sovereign right to kill and the mechanisms of biopower to [its] paroxysmal point” (Society 260). Is “… this play … in fact inscribed in the workings of all States [?] In all modern States, in all capitalist States?” he poses. “Perhaps not.” (260-61). The greater point, I think, is that for Foucault, the fundamental subject of neoliberal governmentality is not the homo sacer of State sovereignty, but homo oeconomicus, who “strips the sovereign of power” by exposing the sovereign’s inadequacy with regard to his/her relation to the free market economy (Birth 292). My point, again, is not to champion one theoretical conception for a central subject of biopolitics, but in this case, to show how homo sacer and homo oeconomicus produce each other; as de Sousa Santos explains, “social fascism … a social regime of extremely unequal power relations which grant to the stronger party a veto power over the life and livelihood of the weaker party” is not isolated from, but operates through liberal economics (7-8).
economic and political hierarchies, as de Sousa Santos shows, again, abyssal lines are constantly being redrawn, creating “a messy cartography” —while the migrant traverses national borders between the developed and developing worlds, s/he remains fixed in a juridical (and thus, for Agamben, a biopolitical) state of exception, excluded in her/his inclusion on this side of the line (6). The “illegal” migrant worker then becomes another figure par excellence of globalization’s homo sacer.\footnote{See Kathleen Arnold and Charles T. Lee who also read the Mexican migrant as homo sacer.} In many cases, her/his means of livelihood have been rendered obsolete in a transnational economy and so s/he is forced to put her/his life at risk through the real dangers of physical border crossing, only to be criminalized by her/his very presence on this side of the line. The very exigencies of national and global economics necessitate that migrants put their lives in jeopardy while at the same time, securing their subaltern status. That is, “securing” their status under the conditions of a market security that deals with “the reality of fluctuations between abundance/scarcity” and which can give the State the legitimacy to utilize or expel migrant labourers in accordance with the demands of the “naturally” changing market (Foucault, \textit{Security} 37; 353). Indeed, migrant labourers constitute a major facet of neoliberalism’s “liminal population … a constant reserve of manpower which can be drawn on if need be,” but just as easily abandoned (Foucault, \textit{Birth} 140; 206). To say as Hardt and Negri do, that victims of this global, imperial sovereignty experience “… autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity” is misleading (23); this particular affective experience of governance seems more suited to workers in developed countries (especially, as I will argue, those feeling the need for a vacation) as migrant existence does not desire, but depends on creativity for basic survival. It is not solipsism, but bravery, Richard Rodriguez states, that characterizes the migrant (qtd. in
Urrea n. pag.). Furthermore, at the level of knowledge, the migrant is not disengaged or “alienated” from her/his conflicting loci of sovereignty, but is “[t]he most modern among us. The prophet. . . . The peasant knows the reality of our world decades before the California suburbanite will ever get the point” (n. pag.).

Jason Adams argues “that the border is the most visible instantiation of ‘exceptional space,’ those primarily temporal zones that exist both inside and outside of the official territory simultaneously, and within which sovereign power may reign totally, violently and without question” (‘Redrawing’). While Rabinow and Rose argue that in the economy of biopolitics, “letting die is not making die,” the value differential between these two acts is ambiguous at the level of juridical responsibility (211). Further, it positively inflates social abandonment by comparison and in its own right exemplifies an abyssal thinking that separates the denial of material, legal and social resources necessary for the survival of individuals and groups from a State-directed genocide proper. Juárez may not be a concentration camp in that it lacks a monological narrative, a face, a rooted ethos to its devastation. But is it less nefarious because it obscures procedures (encoded in NAFTA) that allow for disproportionate speeds and statistics for “letting die” while de-centralizing culpability and deflecting accountability? It seems much easier, and keeping within Euro-American generic limits, to scapegoat “Tyrants” than to connect tyrannical constellations of political and economic power that unequally evaluate human lives.

Exposing and progressively forcing migrants to deadly conditions of passage should then necessarily be considered a thanatopolitics. Gilberto Rosas takes this further by showing how not only thanatopolitics, but a repressive biopolitics are imposed on
migrants in terms of the border. That is the border “… not only enforces the power to
torture or ‘let die’ but also disproportionately involves the deployment of biopower to
discipline the vitality of laboring bodies. Many do die at the border. But many, many
more struggle to live and work” (89). It is “[r]acism [that] constitutes the fissure between
those subject to optimized life [or life conscripted into forms of optimization] and
merciless disposability,” Rosas argues (83). Foucault says much the same: in a
“normalizing society … racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to
be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the State functions in the biopower mode,
racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State” (Society 256).12

Moreover, the border’s exceptional differentiation impacts the biopolitical
existence of non-white First World citizens. Devon W. Carbado’s work explains that
ethnic minorities, even if they fall under the category of legal citizenship, occupy a kind
of bare life in which “inclusion can be a social vehicle for exclusion and that inclusive
exclusion can have constitutive power” (638). Particularly in terms of the border,
Chicana/os (and other Latina/os), Rosas shows, are also made “subject to militarized
policing or vigilante actions, or to daily forms of surveillance” because of their biological
resemblance to immigrant populations (95). Of course, the biopolitical liminality imposed
upon Chicana/os cannot be understood as a recent phenomenon, but has its origins in
nineteenth-century U.S. expansionism13, what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “Anglo terrorism,”

12 Importantly, Foucault clarifies that he is not talking about “… simply murder as such, but also every
form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people,
or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on” (Society 256).
13 Achille Mbembe also makes the connection between biopolitics and colonialism, arguing that colonial
power operates by producing states of exceptions and creating conditions for “the generalised
instrumentalisation of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations”
(154). We could locate, for example, the implementation of this “necropolitics” in the practice of
“rangering,” “the summary execution [with impunity] of Mexican Americans suspected in participating in
or even sympathizing with the [Plan of San Diego]” during the Mexican Revolution (Saldivar 293).
and has consistently been re-activated and re-produced in accordance with a multiplicity of hegemonic contingencies (for example, to deny or obfuscate legal and national sovereignty, expropriate land, consolidate cheap labour).

Facing south, the border becomes both a limit and an excess: a limit that preserves nations, epistemologies, social practices and of course, the biopolitics of white First World citizens by signifying the containment of otherness (and the ability to incorporate otherness on the border’s terms); an excess, the ideological remainder of nationalism in a neoliberal, transnational word that can be militarized, “defended” (essentially hyper-inflated with surges of signification for various hegemonic reasons) and of course, crossed over. For the tourist, the border, a fantastically saturated abyssal line, prohibits and permits certain kinds of biopolitical relations and actions. Crossing the border, entering the borderlands, effects tourist subjectivity in relation to the normalizing expectations and experiences of home. It does not erase permanently, but reserves a normative biopolitics necessary to the social dominion of the West. The border is “an abjection machine,” a “system [that] attempts to disarticulate people from the signs of their subjectivity, to deprive them of memory and identity” (Brady 52-53). A machine of violent subjugation or of transgressive liberation, one’s position in its system is far from arbitrary.

What I am essentially arguing is that it is impossible to examine biopower without considering its spatial deployment—that biopolitics are always geopolitics and vice versa (Minca 394).14 States of exception are necessarily “spaces of exception” (Minca 387-88). Or to be more precise, I am dealing with in this project a geopolitics of territory and

14 In fact, both “geopolitics” and “biopolitics” were coined by Rudolph Kjellén at the beginning of the twentieth century (Esposito 16).
mobility and thus the accommodations, implications, aggravations and accelerations of
the movement of bodies across borders in a larger neoliberal grid and a biopolitics
conditioned by these movements—how specific kinds of movements effect subjectivity,
produce liminal bodies which circularly inscribe and are inscribed by a territorial
liminality that is geopolitical. If this is clear from my examination of biopower’s role in
subaltern subjectification, how do we analyze the biopolitical experiences of the First
World tourist in the Third World? If the migrant goes north to work, subject to an intense
bio/thanatopolitical control, does the tourist (frequently) go south for pleasure and
experience a weakened relation to a regional and routine biopower (and in what
registers)?

Some of the theoretical ideas and subject matter I deal with in this dissertation are
connected in *The Culture of Exception* by Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen.
While their analysis of “party tourism” focuses on young British tourists in Ibiza, one
could easily substitute North American college students on spring break in Cancún or
other similarly-marketed Mexican destinations. Diken and Laustsen argue that tourist
zones, in which excessive drinking, drug experimentation and sexual promiscuity become
normalized by and for the transitory community of foreign visitors, exist as places
without laws or prohibitions for the privileged visitor—these zones thus become here
models of Agamben’s camps, the tourists *hominés sacri* (109-112). “Having left the
social origin, stripped of former identities, the tourist occupies, or fantasies to occupy, a
sort of state of nature … a threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, [public and
private, human and animal], civilization and state of nature become indistinct” (111).
Agamben himself explains that the carnival, with its “unbridled license and the

suspension and overturning of normal and legal social hierarchies” exposes the essential “indifference between anomie and law,” thus parodying, a state of exception that is permanent (if tactfully and selectively dormant) (State of Exception 71-73).

At the same time, Bataille’s festival, Bakhtin’s carnival, offer another crucial social function—allowing a kind of biopolitical transgression necessary for the governing order to continue: escaping from “everyday routine familiar social/moral contexts” will only stabilize the righteousness of the routine and the normalcy of the contexts upon return (Diken and Laustsen 112-14). The tourist’s transitory experience of biopolitical laxity, measured in terms of sovereignty to the biopower of home, does not challenge the authority of the prevailing biopolitical nomos, even in some partial manner, but further strengthens its authority. As Diken and Laustsen explain, “The freedom of the tourist opens up for the inscription of life within power, founding the very power from which the tourist tries to liberate himself, hence extending the range of the biopolitical paradigm” (119).

Yet, unlike Bakhtin’s carnival, in which the space of transgression and reconciliation is the same, each phase here occupies a different site. The transgressive space is displaced further from the stable home and frequently in regions where the inhabitants earn lower incomes and thus become dependent on foreign hedonists to make livings, allowing, though obviously not without ambivalence, kinds of transgressive behaviour otherwise deemed unacceptable. Of course, as I have been suggesting, the process of locating sites of transgression is also not an arbitrary process and needs to be discussed in larger historical contexts.

Though Diken and Laustsen note a “colonial legacy,” in the epistemological and
geographical divisions between the “eroticized, corporeal, ‘animal’ world experienced as freedom from the ‘city’: the dark, routinized, disciplinary ‘iron cage’ of the citizen” (119), I argue that extrapolating the logic of (neo)coloniality coding these encounters should be at the forefront of any analyses. While their argument is original and ambitious, by qualifying the tourist as *homo sacer*, the resort as camp, they point to the limiting ambiguity of Agamben’s terms; if the tourist and the migrant are both *homines sacri*, this obfuscates the affects of biopower in a contemporary global cartography by implying that all subjects are potentially governed equally, exposed to the violence of the same antinomies with shared frequency and intensity. While they do parallel positive and negative camps (the libratory party camp is twinned with the Bosnian rape camp), in arguing that the logic of the camp structures all social relations (even the melancholic Westerner is *homo sacer* by virtue of his/her ennui), they miss the opportunity to sufficiently qualify the types of camps in a relevant geopolitics or to provide a sufficient historiography of such qualifications; briefly, they do not politicize what they see is a post-political issue (2-3; 109; 163).

Yet at the risk of slackening my rhetorical (let alone political) directive by not abandoning the term *homo sacer* to its overdetermination, I accept provisionally Diken and Laustsen’s thesis that the tourist is one of many *sacri*. Agamben informs us that “every interpretation of *homo sacer* is complicated by virtue of having to concentrate on traits that … seem to be contradictory” (*Homo Sacer* 71); perhaps this complication invites greater malpractice when we deal not only with contradictory traits, but bodies as well (bodies divided and fixed by the racial and national legends of our abyssal cartographies). “If today there is no longer any one clear figure of the sacred man,”
Agamben writes, “it is perhaps because we are all virtually *hominæ sacri*” (115).

My proviso is not merely that we distinguish this virtuality from the reality of the femicides in Juárez (as one example of a regionally articulated but transnational thanatopolitics, a “camp” proper) or that we absolutely qualify various *sacri* according to levels of abjection (in relation to state or free-market sovereignty). Rather, I am interested in how privileged, temporary and synthetic *adoptions* of bare life stimulate more permanent and violent *impositions* of bare life according to and within the biopolitics of a global ecology. I am interested in how a sense of entitled license on behalf of First World visitors in tourist activity mirrors as it justifies larger neoliberal economic policies, political hierarchies, equally inseparable from racialized discourses and imperial histories. In this regard, by perpetuating binaries between liminal Mexico and the stable First World home (through dominant and alternative genres of tourism that produce neocolonial and neoliberal forms of transculturation), the tourist is complicit in reinstating the *otherness* of the migrant and the borderlands subject. And as this performance of transgression seems acting well in accordance with earlier nineteenth- and twentieth century discourses about Mexico in North America and Europe, I would now like to consider these discourses in greater depth.

**The Infernal Paradise**

Mexico is often presented in modern Euro/American literature as land of extreme contrasts and alterity; it is positioned against the supposed stability and refinement of the home nation (although qualities of the home nation can be deemed undesirable at the same time), even if it does this unconsciously and in spite of other more cosmopolitan textual ideologies at work. Of the few scholarly works that deal extensively or
exclusively with British and U.S. literary representations of Mexico, Daniel Cooper Alarcón’s *The Aztec Palimpsest* is most effective in tracing a genealogy of the “infernal paradise” myth that Western writers have consistently drawn on and added to throughout the twentieth century.

In 1978, Douglas W. Veitch identified motifs of the myth, but his exegesis never moved beyond aesthetics. His study examines the complicity of narrative and geography in the work of Lawrence, Greene and Lowry, showing how the Mexican landscape functions as a kind of literary device. Specifically, he looks at how the works of these three British writers utilize what he finds to be intense polarities particular to Mexico’s physical topography as simile, synecdoche or metaphor for larger metaphysical struggles particular to the protagonists of these novels and to an universalist humanity more broadly (178; 182). His “fictional landscape” ignores the weighty geopolitical implications in and beyond the texts that create it. He notes, for example, the influence of popular Western cultural impressions of Mexico on these writers: “The popular image of Mexico has two familiar phases in which mantillas, orange moons, roses, genteel haciendas and acquiescent somnolence alternate with fatalism, peremptory lust, periodic violence, and perpetual conflict between a ruthless bandit class and an equally ruthless class of mine and land owner” (3). Other works, he purports, “… [see] the marauding bandit as an idealistic revolutionary,” though he doesn’t account for significant political contexts that separate more idealistic portrayals of the Revolution in popular culture from other romanticized and/or thoroughly debased/debasing depictions of Mexico and Mexicans (3). Rather than examine their political underpinnings, these impressions merely confirm the polarity that the writers he explores participate in re-constructing and
extrapolating as Mexican cultural (and geographical) traits until they reveal for him “... a fundamental realization that Mexico is a land of extremes; enough for Lawrence, Greene and Lowry to find profound ambivalence in Mexico with its internal divisions of all kinds” (emphasis added) [3].

Ronald Walker’s *Infernal Paradise*, published the same year as Veitch’s study, also critically discusses this polarity discursively rendered “Mexican” in British literature from the 1920s to 1940s. The title draws on a passage from Lowry’s infamous 1946 letter to publisher Jonathan Cape defending *Under the Volcano* from editorial detractors. Lowry here explains the importance of his setting:

> The scene is Mexico, the meeting place, according to some, of mankind itself, pyre of Bierce and springboard of Hart Crane, the age-old arena of racial and political conflicts of every nature, and where a colourful native people of genius have a religion that we can roughly describe as one of death, so that it is a good place, at least as good as Lancashire or Yorkshire, to set our drama of a man’s struggle between the powers of darkness and light. Its geographical remoteness from us, as well as the closeness of its problems to our own, will assist the tragedy each in its own way. We can see it as the world itself, or the Garden of Eden, or both at once. Or we can see it as a kind of timeless symbol of the world on which we can place the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel and indeed anything else we please. It is paradisal: it is unquestionably infernal. (19)\(^\text{15}\)

This passage is worth quoting at length because the characteristics it ascribes to Mexico, as Walker testifies, resonate with other modern Western writing about the

\(^{15}\) Also qtd. in Alarcón (39).
country. Mexico here has a spectral, death-like mystique, not necessarily symptomatic of, but in line with an intensified mythic, premodern cultural character. In one regard, Lowry’s claim here sounds like amateur anthropology. As Stanley Brandes explains, *calaveras* and other death iconography (often associated with *el dia de los muertos*—not coincidentally the day that the events of *Volcano* take place) are typically consumed by tourists as desired evidence of Mexico’s alterity and induce the assumption of a widespread cultural acceptance of death through a quotidian proximity (182). This misreading and/or overdetermination of death icons textually grounds the unstable binarism of biopolitics and thanatopolitics in some foreign travellers’ accounts of their journeys to Mexico: biopolitical laxity and carnivalesque behaviour carry the threat of death, real or fantasized, to some degree. The geopolitical implications are as equally important—undermining the value of human life in Mexico by insisting that death, and by proxy, violence and disease, are innate to Mexican society and thus experienced less traumatically with generational wisdom (Lowry here makes death in Mexico a national religion) or perpetrated by Mexicans with cold cruelty justifies as much as it ignores the transnational atrocities of (post)imperial activity by deferring blame to a “violent” and “lawless” Mexico. Brandes, who delineates a history of death iconography in Mexico, from its Indigenous and European cultural roots to a contemporary role in political commentary, explains that this iconography is not reducible to “the all-too-familiar stereotype of the death-obsessed Mexican” as much as modern writers seize on this conception to develop their aesthetics (214). This is not to say that Mexican death imagery is removed from historical politics of death and dying. Claudio Lomnitz shows how *calaveras* and other *muertos* icons have spoken directly to nineteenth century
imperial loss, the violence of both Porfiriato liberalism and contemporary neoliberalism, the Juárez murders and the Chicana/o struggle to assert U.S. sovereignty (32; 377-78; 445-49; 469-75). The work of abyssal thinking, however, typically forecloses such readings in tourist culture and literature.

If the danger of death abounds in depictions of “lawless” Mexico, it gains some currency in the Western literary imaginary through the catalogue of modern literary figures who have died in Mexico. Lowry here refers to Ambrose Bierce, who supposedly travelled to Mexico in 1913 to join the Carancistas before disappearing from the archive, and Hart Crane, who committed suicide by jumping off of the boat taking him from Mexico back to the U.S. (“the springboard” evidencing Lowry’s dark humour) (Gunn 58-59; 160). Indeed, writers and literary figures I will examine here, specifically Oscar Zeta Acosta, Neal Cassady and Maryse Holder, also died (or in the case of Acosta “disappeared” like Bierce) in Mexico, though in examining their deaths I am less interested in contemporizing a romantic legacy than in spelling out the politicized and racialized legacies of such a romanticization. As Alarcón notes of the iconic “Gringo” who first came to Mexico in the twentieth century to find “euthanasia” (in his own words), “Bierce’s disappearance has come to symbolize Mexico for English readers, fusing the attraction of the country as a place of spiritual or artistic freedom with the threat of physical danger, in fusing the mystique of the writer-adventurer with the mystique of Mexico” (41). In the second half of the century, when sexual and narcotic experimentation become connected to this “spiritual or artistic freedom” in literary production, and travel is bound up in the pleasures of tourism, this mystique is equally as potent as it takes on new strains: as Drewey Wayne Gunn notes, “[Bierce] set the
archetypal pattern for the several writers who would later go to the country in order to lose themselves in drink or drugs, in saturnalia, in obscurity, or in death” (58). As for Crane, whose dipsomaniac dissipation becomes legendary among the Mexican and expatriate intelligentsia and artistic milieu of the late 30s, death in Mexico has also seemed to ring out with the pitch of fatalism (154-60).

In the letter to his British publisher, Lowry stresses the geographical distance between England and Mexico. He ascribes both a mythical and timeless quality to the latter country, as Alarcón also notes, but mentions “the closeness of its problems to our own” (40). In one regard, we could read this as evidence of the modernist literary desire to develop some kind of aggrandized universal truth about human existence, even when the protagonists are typically white Europeans or North Americans (or othered characters who seem to share their beliefs, concerns and attitudes). At the same time, he is alluding to the political binarisms of the late 1930s, with the onset of the Spanish Civil War, that are experienced with such immediacy and intensity in the novel. Though Lowry explains that his exorbitant Mexico stands in for the world itself in *Volcano*, as Luz Elena Ramirez notes in her materialist reading of the text, the deracinated subjectivity coded in the experiences of the two British protagonists is much indebted to the period’s thematic concerns as it reflects the dissolution of the British Empire and the impact of weakened Anglo-Mexican relations during Cárdenas’s presidency (126-132). In light of her reading, perhaps we can qualify a certain discursive authority in Lowry’s letter to Cape consistent with many of the works I consider in the following chapters, a discursive authority that manifests itself here as aesthetic entitlement: “We can see [Mexico] as the world itself, or the Garden of Eden, or both at once. Or we can see it as a kind of timeless symbol of the
world on which we can place the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel and indeed anything else we please” (19). Alarcón clarifies that Lowry is presenting “a mythologized Mexico, constructed to suit the author’s needs, a culture to be tampered with freely” (39). Further, Lowry can still claim an undiscovered land for literary cultivation and the passage’s imperial overtones perhaps testify to (post)imperial anxiety about the agency of the British subject in a period where this agency is being discredited. In this sense, the novel reflects both a desire to transcend modernity for the “infernal paradise” of a premodern Mexico, and discursive anxieties about the modern subject of the First World in an increasingly globalized environment (indeed, as Ramirez notes, “Lowry was writing about the complexity of globalization decades before such a concept was commonplace”) (138).

To return to Walker, *Infernal Paradise* maintains that Western writers in the twentieth century have been attracted to a potent mythopoesis particular to Mexico, attributable in no small part to its Indigenous culture; he quotes Carlos Fuentes to corroborate this claim as fact on one level, but also clarifies that British and U.S. writers incorporated this “mythopoetic Mexico” into their work based on their own subjective (mis)readings of post-revolutionary Mexico’s nationalizing project—a project that depended on a conscription of Indigeneity into the rhetoric and aesthetic of the modern nation state (12-13).16 But where the desirable aspects of Mexico, the surreal, visionary and edenic qualities were sought after, “… the foreign writers were unable to indulge in the Mexican dream without its being transformed in their eyes, sooner or later, into nightmare … at the heart [of which] lay the specter of violent death” (16-17). While he

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16 Tace Hedrick’s *Mestizo Modernism* deals specifically with how Latin American modernism utilized an Indigenous legacy to formulate concepts of national identity.
contends that the intense polarity of the “infernal paradise” is linked with the trope’s iterability over its historico-cultural reality, he insists on a perhaps weak-objectivity to its mystique, greater than mere patterns of discursive re-enactment. Alarcón correctly identifies Walker’s methodological fallacy in attributing something essential (i.e. beyond discursivity) to Mexico’s cultural character (41). He quotes Walker:

… imaginative writers, while not uninterested in ‘accurate’ information, have generally been attracted to Mexico because, perhaps more than any other country, Mexico assaults the outsider with the inscrutable, with bewildering contradictions, with the overwhelming sense of a reality beyond the world of Hard Facts. If these writers deliberately exploit the ‘mystique’ at the expense of literal verisimilitude (as has been charged), then Mexico has repeatedly participated as collaborator in the mythopoetic process (1).\(^\text{17}\)

For Walker, the Mexico that “assaults the outsider” with its mystical potency and threatens as much as encourages the attack on the Western writer’s rationality is to blame for its exonymic literature rather than the modern desire for alterity in its manifold guises throughout the twentieth century. My aim here is not, however, to do battle with obviously dated scholarship, but to show how the infernal paradise trope, as Alarcón maintains, survives in cultural production in the present; if it offers itself “objectively” in academic debate in the late 1970s, it certainly also inspires literary journeys and cannot be separated from transnational politics, economic policies and racist behaviour. Thus, when an academic like Maryse Holder travels to Mexico while Walker and Veitch are preparing their studies, we can appreciate how she carries with her the same expectations.

\(^{17}\) Also qtd. in Alarcón (42).
for mystical revelation, though tied in her work to more fully elaborated desires for uninhibited bodily pleasure, consistent with the expectations of contemporary tourists in Mexico (and other developing countries) and inflected with the same racism that overcodes the infernal paradise trope proper in the earlier half of the century.

The infernal paradise trope, as I’ve discussed it so far in the context of Walker’s, and to an extent, Veitch’s work, is according to Alarcón, unique to twentieth century literature: “the modernist Anglo writer added a new element,” he claims: “Mexico as a spiritual testing ground, a symbolic landscape through which the outsider could achieve higher consciousness and salvation, even while succumbing to a tragic end” (72). The trope itself, he explains, has roots in Spanish accounts of the conquest and became disseminated widely in various high and low cultural forums throughout the nineteenth century, including histories (he notes specifically the work of Humboldt and Prescott), travel narratives, and novels (of both the dime and “dollar” varieties) (47-57).

Utilizing the scholarship of Robert D. Aguirre, Gilbert G. Gonzáles and R. Tripp Evans, we could add to this list writing from Protestant missionaries, business classes, engineers, diplomats, journalists, self-proclaimed prophets, amateur archaeologists and cultural technologies such as the panorama, the museum exhibition and the freak show. Looking at British-Mexican relations in the nineteenth century, Aguirre proposes that patterns of “informal imperialism” governed transnational economic policies and cultural perceptions and constituted a decentred and improvisatory set of practices that bolstered British economic, ethnic and epistemological hegemony over direct military expansion (xvi-xvii). Gonzáles qualifies a similar pattern in U.S.-Mexican relations from 1880-1930 when, following a period of militaristic territorial expansion, the U.S. shifted to a policy
of “peaceful conquest” that depended on insuring economic authority in Mexico, underwritten by a logic of racial superiority that also impacted stereotypes and policy toward Mexican-Americans (2-10). Evans as well, who studies Mayan representations in the U.S. from 1820-1915, shows that cultural expropriation is inseparable from the supremacist ideology of Manifest Destiny and the military praxes of the Monroe Doctrine (3-8). Thus, the infernal paradise trope must necessarily be understood through the cultural logic of coloniality, itself inseparable from First World conceptions of modernity and economy and that, to return to biopolitics, imposes “… the devaluation of human lives and … the naturalization of human expendability” in racialized geographic discourse (Mignolo 30).

According to Alarcón, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of racial stereotypes embedded in the infernal paradise tradition had been consolidated: Mexicans were depicted as “savage, brutal, lazy, backward … cowardly … hot-blooded … vain, promiscuous and primitive” (47). Also consolidated within the trope were key conventions, such as the narrative shifts between attraction and repulsion and the tradition of the “colonial gaze into the past,” which finds the privileged Euro/American spectator willfully confronting an (often fabricated) premodern landscape, temporally distant from her/his own nation or culture (51-52). Though Alarcón lauds Robert Stone among Anglo writers for deconstructing the motifs of the infernal paradise tradition, and Sandra Cisneros among Chicana/o writers for presenting a more fluid conception of Mexicanness, he laments that “[regrettably], twentieth century writers have generally chosen to confirm and elaborate on the Infernal Paradise rather than confront it” (60). At various points, in my work here, I will return to this tradition to explore how it has been
complemented or compromised in line with contemporary travel discourses, themselves affected by particular post-war cultural desires and mediated by new patterns of tourism.

**Chapter Organization**

Since, I have argued, Mexican tourism began to resemble its contemporary incarnation post-World War II, I begin this study with an analysis of two works that recount early post-war “vacations” to Mexico: Malcolm Lowry’s manuscript *La Mordida*, a text which has received very little academic attention, and Jack Kerouac’s much more widely read *On The Road*. While the British/Canadian protagonist of Lowry’s novel condemns a new culture of mass tourism that “Americanizes” Mexico and forecloses an earlier expatriate cosmopolitanism (of the variety I earlier associated with Porter, among others), Kerouac’s novel renders the country a colony of a counter-cultural “America” by making Mexico a space to indulge in transgressive desire and social revitalization beyond the norms and expectations imposed on white, First World, masculine citizenry (marking it as an inaugural pleasure tourism narrative in this sense). The two novels, albeit according to very different evaluations, project a self-referential primitivism onto notions (culturally rooted, but aesthetically idiosyncratic) of Mexican governmentality—the Mexican State is revisited according to earlier, racialized tropes about its “lawlessness” and in ways that guarantee the governmental efficiency and neo-imperial supremacy of the U.S. by comparison (even if both texts are ambivalent about an allegiance to either side). Marking territories as stable and liminal, differentiating a fundamentally “lived” experience of the society of control and a society of mass carnival, are distinctions that these texts (just as the economics of mass tourism begin to) depend on. I qualify these distinctions in regard to more dominant theories of biopolitics—
placing Agamben’s *homo sacer* and “state of exception” in Lowry’s North America, exploring Kerouac’s discontent with Hardt and Negri’s and Foucault’s models of social discipline and control. Thus, I outline here my larger theoretical argument about biopolitical liminality “south of the border” that subsequent chapters will build on and revise in context of specific tourist markets while arguing for a historical caesura that interrupts earlier literary travels to Mexico with the beginning of pleasure tourism.

Moving forward chronologically (though its subject should necessarily rupture such a linear progression) chapter two primarily considers drug tourism from the late 1950s to early 1970s. I begin, however, by discussing the power and scope of Mexico’s position in the narcotics industry in contemporary global capitalism. I provide a historical outline of twentieth century borderlands vice tourism and show how literature and other forms of cultural production, in conjunction with tourist practices, have re-articulated a boundary between Mexico and the U.S. in relation to discursive and performative laws, norms and allowances that mitigate and stimulate forbidden excesses and indulgences. I then focus on a unique moment of drug tourism in which youthful members of counter-cultures, official State agents, ethnobotanists and pharmaceutical companies travelled to Huautla de Jiménez to “experiment” with psilocybin. As the racist underpinning of psychedelic tourism reinforce what are becoming standardized First World expectations of Mexican industrial hospitality, even in newly “discovered” regions, I explore how Chicana/o writes Oscar Acosta and Gloria Anzaldúa respectively: interrogate the racial violence of white psychedelia; and counter this violence by re-connecting psychedelics to Indigenous healing practices.
A focus on psilocybin is necessarily limiting and offers one strain, however potent, in a genealogy of what I call our global narcontology—our quotidian social relationship with drugs that secures neocolonial power relations even as our abyssal thinking renders them epistemologically hazy in the First World. I choose to examine this particular drug for two reasons: the interest in Mazateco narcotic technology, centred around *curandera* María Sabina, generated a small tourist culture with its own scribes (many of whom tend to be ignored by contemporary scholars) and which solicited a neo-primitivist discourse corroborated and complicated by new tourist vehicles and licenses; as an important biopolitical culture on its own right, psilocybin has offered a kind of human subjectification that has mobilized anxious and/or ecstatic debates about the essence and utility of the body in relation to various (counter)hegemonic institutions. While continuing to build off of earlier conceptions of biopolitics, I open the discussion to other theoretical perspectives dealing with the “immunity” of the Western subject and “bio-capitalism” in transcultural exchange. Finally, by acknowledging an Indigenous biopolitical context for psilocybin use (not as originary or eschatological) and engaging in “psychedelic thinking,” I hope that we can better apprehend the complexity of our narcontology in a way that is revelatory and overwhelming.

Drug tourism proper is a small niche market. By contrast, my final chapter considers a market that has become paradigmatic of contemporary Third World tourism. Beginning with an analysis of the 2003 film *The Real Cancun* and a historical overview of “resort borderlands,” I discuss cultures of sex tourism in relation to biopolitical liminality and epistemological apartheid in the Mexican resort. I examine how (what I am calling) “transcultural prophylaxes” code engagements and not simply render, but
evaluate the bare lives of hosts and guests in terms of ambivalent desires for othered bodies and the exigencies of neoliberal capitalism. If the resort re-produces First World subjects through a liminality that offers a temporary reprieve from routine bodily proscriptions (through an excessive “wellness,” restricted and/or immoderate sexualities), discourses about the resort are also overlaid with anxieties toward “contamination” that can manifest themselves in racialized and sexualized fears of othered bodies and geographies—fears with global implications that have been used to order non-white bodies in hegemonic semiologies. Thus, while a film like The Real Cancun celebrates the monocultural, heterosexual promiscuity of contemporary “carnival” tourism in a way that completely eradicates all meaningful traces of Mexican biopolitics (and so figures a secure prophylactic), Tennessee Williams’s The Night of the Iguana, an earlier sex tourism narrative, is incessantly preoccupied with forbidden sexuality and the devastation of the white body in the proto-resort. These concerns often collude with and mutually amplify the text’s quasi-Lowryean anxiety about the rise of the resort/the fall of modernist cosmopolitan Mexico and contamination from the local ecology (that can be unhygienic and even deadly for white foreigners).

Iguana’s anxiety stems from its First World subjects’ limited control of geo-sexual borders and from the (in)security of transcultural prophylaxis and thus warns that the promises of biopolitical renewal and sexual transgression can easily morph into a thanatopolitical devastation of the white body. This anxiety is also foregrounded in the letters of second-wave feminist academic Maryse Holder, who went to Mexico in the late 1970s predominantly to have a series of sexual encounters with young Mexican men. In her case, the border separating bio- from thanatopolitics is collapsed when she is
(allegedly) murdered. Holder’s letters articulate the fear and desire for “contagion” in the sexually-charged culture of the resort. They also present a neoliberal sexual license that celebrates risk-taking and voracious appetites for unbounded consumption. Again, what is offered to the white tourist as carnival, the loosening of gendered, classist and racialized norms, is a trope of industrial hospitality that commodifies local bodies to serve guests. I also situate Holder’s letters in context of a larger body of twentieth century texts on female sex tourism in Mexico.

There are various biopolitical itineraries that produce and (re)order bodies in relation to transmodern bases of power. Thus, as I elaborated earlier, I draw on diverse and often contradictory conceptions of biopolitics. What connects them is obviously a concern with power, knowledge and subjectivity, but also with the underlying value of human life measured in various assemblages of region and race, culture and class, as well as by, and in conjunction with, mobile and affective capacities. The theoretical project of Biopolitical Itineraries attempts to measure the biopolitical values of individuals and populations in a transnational tourist economy and to understand how these values are implemented and (re)articulated in various literary encounters from the late 1940s to the present. It is concerned with cultures of governance—the release and control of subjects—in transnational bio- and geopolitical folds that take shape with the rise of post-war industrial hospitality and consolidate in a neoliberal hegemony of transnational exchange. Finally, while I work within a contemporary period, I attempt to show throughout this project that reordering the forms and meanings, the subjects and objects of pleasure, transgression, vice and revitalization, occurs according to more traditional (neo)colonial designs. As novel as some of these scenarios might seem, they are bound to
imperial armatures and thus, bear larger transcultural implications of a modernity that is Eurocentric, but global in scope.
In their expression of historical, national, generational and even, to a large extent, class sensibilities, Malcolm Lowry’s *La Mordida* and Jack Kerouac’s *On The Road* could not be more different. Both novels present tourist encounters in Mexico after the Second World War (*La Mordida* takes place in 1945-46 and *On The Road*’s Mexican excursion occurs in 1950) and thus provide insight into a unique transition period in the history of Mexico’s industrial hospitality, an important moment with which to begin this study. Yet, they produce, as they are also products of, vastly different experiences of Mexico during the rise of pleasure tourism. Read together, the texts offer divergent evaluations of post-war tourist cultures in their infancy in ways that are fundamentally biopolitical. Lowry’s protagonist, Sigbjørn Wilderness, is a British expatriate who, returning to Mexico after several years, is outraged at what he sees as the loss of the country’s culture (the variety of *Mexicanidad* sought by earlier pilgrims in the 1920’s and 1930’s)—a loss propagated by Mexicans themselves through efforts to modernize their country and solicit U.S. consumers to the point where Wilderness himself is physically removed from the country as an undesirable and unproductive body in the tourist economy. Kerouac’s Sal Paradise is “discovering” Mexico for the first time and, indeed, his behaviour can be read, in a certain regard, as emblematic of *La Mordida*’s distasteful breed of pleasure-seeker: Paradise celebrates a cheap, exotic country that caters to his whims and expectations and offers him unrestricted bodily pleasure, while he is allowed to remain ignorant of Mexican culture except in vague and often deeply subjective terms.

Lowry’s work, on the cusp of Western high modernism and an incipient postmodernism, speaks to the cosmopolitanism of expatriate life in Mexico earlier in the
century and, in its own way, narrativizes cultural pilgrimage in its state of decline. Further, his cosmopolitanism is ultimately linked to his British mobility; in a period following Mexican oil nationalization and the devastation of the Second World War, when British imperial authority (globally and specifically in Mexico) had weakened considerably and the U.S. had become a leading world power (and strengthened ties with Mexico), Wilderness laments that Mexico itself is becoming “Americanized” and that the intellectual circum-Atlantic pilgrim in Mexico City or Cuernavaca is being replaced by the middle-class American in Acapulco. Kerouac’s work, on the other hand, is representative not of a traditionally modernist, but of a new bohemian cosmopolitanism rooted in the U.S. and that frequently manifests itself in white male writers expropriating *othered* ethnicities and spaces as desirable symbols and loci of counterculture (Holton, *Ragged Journey* 58). Mexico is placed in Beat cartography not only as a territory of the grand carnival, but as a subversive site of radical ethnic and historic difference to be at once enjoyed and utilized in criticism of U.S. biopower. Finally, as opposed to *La Mordida*’s modernist-cosmopolitan, anti-American sentiment, *On The Road*’s romantic expression of an “American” ethos, as critics have observed, makes it the literary heir to Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau and, however disjointedly, the novel assumes a place in the national canon.18 “America” or “American” can be found on almost every page of the text (Cresswell 259).

At the same time, *La Mordida* and *On The Road* are often read (critically or naively) as autobiographical. Both protagonists are self-conscious anti-tourists—they condemn or ignore altogether the existence of a tourism institution in Mexico while

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18 See, for example, Hrebeniak 80; McCampbell Grace *Literary Imagination* 80; Martinez 29-30.
ironically at times replicating contemporary tourist behaviour. Lowry’s protagonist, Sigbjørn Wilderness, returning to Mexico almost a decade after he abandoned his expatriate life in that country, condemns U.S. tourists for their cultural ignorance and financial superiority while lamenting the loss of a premodern Mexico; Kerouac’s Sal Paradise, approaching Mexico as a radically different and ultimately final destination on his bohemian road trip across the U.S., renders himself an exceptional adventurer in a completely premodern environment.\textsuperscript{19}

It is worth considering here Lowry’s literary influence on Kerouac. In 1951, Kerouac wrote to Neal Cassady, offering \textit{Under the Volcano} as “our personal meat” and advising his travel partner to “… get high on good shit and open the pages of Malcolm Lowry’s ‘Under the Volcano’ for the end of the line or at least the best (for you) since Proust & Joyce” (\textit{Letters I} 325). In defending the alleged “incoherency” of \textit{On The Road} to publisher Carl Solomon, Kerouac challenges that his novel may be “incomprehensible” on a first read, but then so is a masterpiece like \textit{Volcano} (376). Lowry’s influence is not felt in the aesthetic form of \textit{On The Road}—a novel quite easily “comprehensible” in comparison to \textit{Volcano}—but it manifests itself thematically: in that Mexican physical and social landscapes are incorporated into the existential experiences of the protagonist; and by foregrounding the essentialism of excess in Mexico, an excess dangerous or wonderful, but in either case fantastic and foreign to anything experienced at home.

\textsuperscript{19} The U.S.-born Kerouac and the English Lowry both maintain affiliations with Canada that inform their presentations of Mexico in these novels. Wilderness identifies as Canadian to Mexicans to separate himself ideologically from U.S. tourists and in attempts to receive discounts on accommodation while he fantasizes about a kind of bare life in British Columbia where he and his wife will be free from the responsibilities and intrusions of civic engagement. \textit{On The Road} makes no mention of Canada, but as Rachel Adams argues, Kerouac’s French-Canadian heritage informs his overall literary encounters with Mexico and demonstrates, culturally, a greater awareness of “America” beyond U.S. borders, though as I will argue, this is not without its own neocolonial complications (\textit{Continental Divides} 149-187).
Further, in *La Mordida* and *On The Road*, the excess experienced in Mexico is determined as transgressive. Both novels offer a liminal, uncanny space in Mexico for intense biopolitical transgression that engenders excessive punishment or excessive pleasure in comparison to the moderation and stability of the First World and thus exemplify the radical alterity of this geopolitical (as much as psychogeographic) difference. Throughout this dissertation, I will attempt to qualify how larger cultures of tourism essentially rely on and (re)structure this imposition of transgression and difference, but I begin with these texts not simply because of their authors’ canonical status or their archival appropriateness (in that they are set shortly after World War II), but because these texts are so aesthetically invested in the notion of a primitive governmentality in Mexico.

Lowry “daemonizes” Mexico by presenting its State authority as both lawless and hyper-legal in the cruel severity of its disciplinary power. His Mexico has assumed the procedures and structures of modern government without the spirit of law and praxes of justice that underwrite the legitimacy of the State. By contrast, he presents the U.S. as maintaining a stable and efficient egalitarian juridical order. A Mexican state of exception that sees cruel and incompetent officials assuming control over the life and death of the subject is rendered an endemic characteristic of Mexican governance, at odds with the rational juridicality of the U.S. and the isolated, individualistic freedom found further north in Canada. *On The Road* also presents a contemporary version of “lawless” Mexico, but instead of attacking Mexican governance as Paradise sees it, the novel celebrates a more natural (coded as primitive) and anti-repressive biopolitical order in the country; the allowance of white tourist licentiousness is read as a national sensibility
(rather than economy), racially determined by the a/anti-historical consciousness of
Mexico’s Indigenous culture, itself a part of a global, Third World epistemology that is
repressed by the oppressive biopolitics of the U.S. society of control. Both novels render
Mexico a carnival—a place where law and order, conceived utopically, break down into a
base level of grotesque barbarity or through their “natural” currency offer a permanent
permissiveness. However, both novels also end with their protagonists accepting the U.S.
as an inevitably suitable biopolitical climate, as an appropriate order for white men of the
developed world, even if they both see their homecomings ambivalently. In this sense,
both novels can be read as inaugural contemporary pleasure tourist narratives in that they
iterate contemporary geopolitics that distinguish between First and Third Worlds, liminal
and stable locations in which mobile, white protagonists realize their transgressive desires
in othered spaces and their social responsibilities and positions at home, at the same time
discursively reinforcing the normalcy and necessity such geo- and biopolitical
territorialization.

**Placing Agency in the Cultural Landscapes of *La Mordida***

Based on Malcolm Lowry’s second and final trip to Mexico in 1945-1946, the
until recently unpublished manuscript of *La Mordida* finds protagonist Sigbjørn
Wilderness confronted with an incipient “Americanized” Mexico. The widespread
“Americanization” he perceives in the rapid industrial development of Acapulco is not
merely distasteful or disappointing in its capacity to undermine his nostalgic desires for a
more “authentic” cultural character he remembers from his expatriate life in Mexico in
the 1930’s; Wilderness alleges (and elegizes) that Mexico has become increasingly
susceptible to a contagious American modernity that threatens to displace the mythic
consciousness Lowry consistently locates in his “infernal paradise.” His refusal to pay a fifty peso mordida, or a bribe, to local police is perhaps thus symbolic of his desire to separate himself from the U.S. tourists (and their capital) that Wilderness feels are complicit with the Mexican government and a burgeoning business culture in eradicating traces of premodern Mexico at a point when British economic and political imperialism are in decline. However, his refusal is more than an implicit conscientious objection: on the one hand, Wilderness decontextualizes the culture of the mordida by presenting it merely as a transaction between Mexican authorities and Euro-American tourists and thus his refusal to pay corroborates a self-declared intimacy with Mexico that distinguishes him from the less self-conscious U.S. consumer-tourists he encounters; on the other hand, his refusal is both masochistic and literary—by not paying the mordida, Wilderness invites a storm of retribution which provides him with a necessary trauma to inspire his writing, giving up complete agency to what is presented as a barbaric State and to a daemonic narrator to the point where he fears his death is imminent. What Agamben refers to as a “state of exception” is thus rendered in La Mordida as specific to the Euro-American subject in a country with an (extra)juridical order denounced as corrupt and prejudiced. The narrative redemption is presented in the text precisely as a return of a narratological agency which is inextricably linked to the return of a national agency: once Wilderness has escaped his daemon by crossing into the U.S. and, as privileged British citizen, is incorporated into what he presents here as an unprejudiced juridical order, Wilderness regains his subjectivity but loses his creativity outside of Mexico. What makes this redemption a pyrrhic victory, however, is not Wilderness’s proselytizing praise of the U.S., but his inability to conceive of a transcultural contextualization of
mordida culture beyond the limits of Euro-American legality and thus the novel signals a bitter closure in Lowry’s overall literary and personal relationship to Mexico.

Following *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*, *La Mordida* fictionalizes the second leg of Lowry’s post-war return to Mexico and recounts the ordeal of Sighbjørn and Primrose Wilderness during their belated “honeymoon” in Acapulco. Like the fictional couple, Malcolm and Marjorie Lowry, during their final months in Mexico, were solicited by local police to pay a fifty peso mordida, ostensibly to cover an outstanding immigration debt that Malcolm has accrued during his original stay in the country. When Wilderness, like Lowry, refuses to pay what he considers an unjust debt, the charges against him are presented as progressively more abstract and sinister as are the Mexican authorities who prosecute him; the couple are harassed, jailed and eventually deported to the U.S. without sufficient cause or explanation in what becomes a climate of intensifying terror.

Complicating matters further, Wilderness fears that he is merely the character in a story being written by a daemonic narrator. His paranoia only increases as he fantasizes that Mexican officials are conspiring with his daemon to reduce his ability to retaliate; his only recourse to agency is seemingly not a mode of agency at all: recording his oppression as a novel is only a manner of appeasing his daemon but allows his redemption through the promise of its completion. Throughout the novel, Wilderness consistently defers the power to act to his daemonic narrator and refuses complicity with Mexican bureaucracy; he allows himself to be pummeled through “the machinery of the mordida” in order to observe and record the uncanny inter- and meta-textual synchronicity and immanent insight such movement affords him (192). At the end of the
novel, when the Wildernesses are accepted on the American side of the border,
Sighbjørn’s daemon allows his protagonist to assume control of his own destiny while his
Texan “brothers” provide him with a newfound sense of freedom and homecoming (314).

**Americanized Mexico**

While waiting in an Immigration office in Acapulco, Wilderness is impressed by
an article in the journal *Modern Mexico* entitled “Vanishing Enchantment” (“Vanishing
Enchantment was right—in Modern Mexico” he quips [177]). Contemplating the author’s
thesis that “Prosperity and Inflation were changing beautiful Mexico into Ugly
Mexico,” Wilderness cites the conclusion: “[the] world of supreme and archaic illusion,
which man had built to be the foundation of his consciousness as history in a mythical
sense is dispelled, and poetry disappears from the world” (180). For Wilderness and the
article’s author, the incipient economic and infrastructural modernization of Mexico is
endangering the “mythic” and “archaic” cultural character that, in some respects,
stimulates tourism in Mexico (and thus perpetuates forms of economic development and
corruption) and, moreover, that furnishes forth the “poetry” of its cultural landscape. “In
the U.S.,” Wilderness quotes Rendon, “man is no longer part of the myth;” and a new
Americanized world order promises the same fate for Mexico (180). By projecting an
image of himself as a cosmopolitan world traveller and, strategically at times, as a poor
Canadian tourist, Wilderness dissociates himself from the burgeoning Americanization of
Mexico in the earlier stages of his trip. It is only after he is abused by Mexican officials
and even threatened with death that Wilderness will ultimately celebrate a familial

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20 The actual pull quote reads “Prosperity, Inflation, and Tourists are Changing Beautiful Mexico into Ugly Mexico” [emphasis added] (Rendon 27).
affinity with Texan immigration authorities and helpful locals who help him restore his sense of personal autonomy within the juridical framework of First World sovereignty.

The threat of the past underlies Wilderness’s personal trauma throughout La Mordida—the fear that past scenarios and behaviours will repeat themselves or give way to latent retributions; that The Valley of the Shadow of Death, the protagonist’s Under the Volcano, has overcoded his present Mexican excursion with cryptic and fatal tragedies which he will have to personally decipher and realize. Posing just as great a threat, however, is the idea that the past is disappearing: that “mythopoetic Mexico” is facing extinction in the wake of modern industrial hospitality.

Approaching Acapulco by bus, “… Wilderness could see, far beyond, hundreds of new white houses like California on every hill and mostly looking in stupid modern style” (52). Once inside the town, he reflects on how after 8 years [it] seemed so much changed it was as if a gang of bucket cranes had been at work simply plucking up large sections of the town and dumping them down elsewhere … Acapulco … had always been, to his mind a supremely characterless dull little town, of a quite remarkable ugliness: but not this kind of ugliness. Now its ruination, by virtue of its reconstruction, seemed complete. (52-53)

The passage continues to describe both the blandness and scale of the void consuming Acapulco. Lowry himself declared more than once on his second trip that “[the] abomination of desolation was standing in the holy place of Mexico” (Bowker 360). Ironically, the desire for a premodern stasis and underdevelopment aligns Wilderness with the privileged U.S. tourist he will soon criticize. More importantly, by
asserting his aesthetic authority, he also bolsters his discursive authority to denounce Acapulco’s infrastructural modernization as a perversion of cultural character. For Wilderness, just as for Lowry, the holiness he feels inherent to Mexico should automatically exempt Mexicans from base concerns for money and modern development.

Wilderness had earlier encountered a prophetic advertisement in the ubiquitous signs for “Alemán” he noted along the Xopilote Canyon (38). The 1946 presidential candidate would later be known as the “father of Mexican tourism” (Clancy 43). During his tenure as Interior Minister and head of Department of Tourism, he worked along with the Mexican Tourist Association to rigorously promote U.S. travel to Mexico and by 1946, had successfully inaugurated a tourism boom (Berger 76-90). Between 1945 and 1950, foreign tourism had more than doubled, not in a small part due to the expedited reconstruction and branding of Acapulco (Clancy 43). At the time of Wilderness’s visit, the State was actively engaged in restructuring the vital space of Acapulqueños in ways that prompted local resistance. Communal ejidal lands redistributed to campesinos by Cárdenas a decade earlier (a project that Lowry celebrates at the end of Dark as the Grave) were now being expropriated and sold to commercial developers and elites from Mexico City (Sackett 161-66). The puesteros who informally provided hospitality services to tourists became subject to State violence and harassment; potable water and staples of the local diet were no longer accessible or affordable (168-69; 174). Migrants surged to Acapulco to find work and exasperated territorial and economic segregation, forced to work and live, as the locals, in poorer conditions; Andrew Sackett explains, “[f]or these hundreds of thousands of poor Mexicans, their time in Acapulco was a daily struggle, a dramatic disjuncture from ideas of paradise on the Pacific” (178).
In Wilderness’s (just as Redon’s critique) in the nostalgia for an un-Americanized, premodern (and perhaps even precapitalist) Mexico, there may be an undeveloped polemic that gestures towards social justice. The State, responsible for drastically restructuring Acapulco, is ultimately the great antagonist of the text. However, its injustices are exclusively apparent in the treatment of the protagonists. In La Mordida, the strongest manifestation of the “Americanization” threat is then the increasing number of U.S. tourists seeking a burgeoning form of pleasure tourism and who have succeeded the cosmopolitan milieu of the 1920’s and 1930’s expatriate scene, abandoning cultural pilgrimage for the blandness of resort tourism. In this regard, Lowry’s critique seems more aesthetic than political. The violence of the “gang of bucket cranes” is morbid in its displacement of visual rather than social geographies.

In 1941, Mexico strengthened ties with the U.S. under the auspices of F.D.R.’s Good Neighbour Policy. With war severely limiting tourism from Europe and restricting U.S. tourism overseas, Mexico began focusing its tourist marketing specifically on U.S. consumers (Saragoza 102). The earlier expatriate interest in post-Revolution political ideology and the culture of lo mexicano was in decline and “[in] contrast to the heritage-laden publicity of the past, by the 1940s the state’s tourist effort modified its picture of Mexico, reducing the focus on culture and lore for greater attention to romantic, sensual settings and leisure … [with] modern amenities” (Saragoza 104-8).

How symbolic then is the Wilderness’s arrival into Acapulco from Yvonne’s disembarkation eight years earlier in Under The Volcano: instead of encountering “a hurricane of immense and gorgeous butterflies swooping seaward to greet [the ship],” the Wildernesses are “… besieged, swamped with boys trying to grab their shopping bag …
and jabbering, and a hundred taxi drivers shouting: ‘Hotel!’ ‘You want Hotel!’ ‘Mister O.K. what you want’? (Volcano 88; Mordida 53).

For Wilderness, it is not merely the modernization of Mexico that is troubling, but specifically the infrastructural developments that threaten a complete cultural displacement in order to solicit American consumers on the broadest horizon. Lowry writes, “… the surroundings in Wilderness’s eyes were ruined … by bad taste and stupidity, and by American bad taste in the bargain” (62). He remembers with nostalgia the Hotel Paraiso de Caleta, now permanently closed and assumes that the new hotels are being constructed further from the beach to encourage revenue for taxi drivers. The text continues,

Acapulco was but another department of the vast dairy farm that Mexico was becoming, for the purpose of milking Americans, as an unconscious revenge for which America was with her money advancing her [sic] her bad taste at such a liberal rate of interest that soon Mexico per se was vanishing. Her voice would be deafened by juke boxes, which they would fall upon much as a defeated army would fall upon opium. (62)

The criticism of the development of Acapulco’s hospitality industries anticipates the novel’s greater theme as State mechanisms, driven by economic greed, attempt to secure foreign capital with little regard to victims. But importantly here for Wilderness, development warns of an over-arching Americanization that threatens the country’s cultural mystique which may prove a crucial stimulus to his creativity.

Yet, his thoroughly personalized lament may also be symptomatic of nationalist anxieties. While Wilderness presents himself as a cosmopolitan world traveller and
austere holdout of expatriate-era Mexico, his fear of Mexico’s “Americanization” could also stem from Britain’s waxing authority in the country. Luz Elena Ramirez argues that *Volcano* is very much a cultural product of the period that saw Mexico nationalizing its key industries—mining, the railroad, and, most importantly, oil—at the expense of U.S. and British investment and the political power of these nations in a global context (135). She states that the novel’s “… theme of deracination … typifies not just the identity crisis of the modern self, but that of the British Empire in the twentieth century” (126). The theme extends into the sensibility of *La Mordida*, and not only because the events of Wilderness’s *Volcano*-esque novel threaten at all times to replay themselves. Again, Mexican-U.S. relations had strengthened in the 1940’s and helped create a new category of U.S. tourist that sought the novelty of a Mexican holiday, much to Wilderness’s chagrin. Within this economic and cultural courtship, however, Britain is no longer a suitor. While diplomacy between Britain and Mexico resumed in 1941 (the year before Mexico joined the Allies), the terms and figures of expropriation payment remained in limbo for a number of years (Meyer 163). The Mexican government continuously fought against Britain on the price of settlement, eventually reducing a demanded $257 000 000 to $81 250 000 in 1947 (167). For Britain, economically weakened by war, reaching a settlement was urgent, a fact obvious to Mexico who, by 1946, no longer viewed the country as a threat to nationalization (165). This concession of bargaining agency, compounded by the U.S.’s partnership with Mexico (and reluctance to side with Britain on the terms of a settlement) and its materialization as the super-power of the capitalist world, severely challenged Britain’s global imperial position (165-66). In this regard, the so-called “Americanization” of Mexico may very well reflect Wilderness’s anxiety about
a loss of national authority, resonating with his lack of discursive authority to retain a premodern vision of Mexico.

Yet as much as he laments tourism throughout the novel, it should be mentioned that the Wildernesses, at least earlier in the narrative, enjoy Acapulco’s recreations and frequent the same places like most typical tourists. Even if the trip is often endowed with higher (meta)physical potential—Acapulco, “the centre of every kind of vice,” paradoxically offers the dissipating Sigbjørn “moral rescue” and its sea presents “an image of health and escape”—this is still a belated honeymoon after all (32; 38; 77). With tourists’ bathos, Wilderness recalls how the hotel “… fulfilled the most roseate view of the advertisements … There was a glorious view and, reasonably cheap … [the hotel] had all the advantages of great hotels and few of the disadvantages” (85). While mosquitoes interrupt their love-making (foreshadowing the greater “bite” [i.e. the mordida] that will turn their enthusiasm into desperation), the Wildernesses are initially quite happy performing as tourists (70). At the same time, they frequently criticize “loud-mouthed” U.S. tourists (a typical trope performed here by self-styled “Canadians”) and boast of their adventures off the beaten path (102).

State of Exception and the Machinery of La Mordida

The dialectical tension between a Mexico restructured to better accommodate the exigencies of American consumerism in imitation of U.S. models of modern infrastructural organization and the premodern “mythic” and “archaic” Mexico reach a sort of synthesis in the “machinery of the mordida” which crudely exploits the foreign tourist without the refinement of a fully rationalized juridical procedure, and often here with cruel prejudice. The mythic and premodern thus resurface in La Mordida in the
barbaric treatment Wilderness describes through his encounters with Mexican authority and paradoxically, modern bureaucracy.

While not necessarily Lowry’s intention, the text insidiously at times recalls more overtly racialized nineteenth and twentieth century Euro-American discourses (literary and otherwise) that condemn Mexico’s inability to govern without an inherent irrationality perverting praxes. As Carlos Monsiváis explains, much nineteenth-century U.S. writing on Mexico consistently deploys racialized tropes of Mexicans as fanatical, politically and administratively inept whose only capitalistic ambitions result in them “[perfecting] an enterprise of looting” (55). Such depictions, always scandalizing rather than attempting an understanding, would justify U.S. annexation on ideological and moral grounds: the importation of democracy and a supreme and incorruptible notion of justice were the U.S.’s trans-American obligation (55-58). The stereotypical twentieth-century image of Mexicans as “evil banditos and hostile federales” also draws on Eurocentric fears about a violent and irrational Aztec legacy—a premodernity that contemporary Mexicans periodically embody in modern Western writing (Root 36). Perhaps it is then Wilderness’s desire for the return of the lost premodern racial and cultural construct (and creative stimulus) that unconsciously demands what is presented as irrational and cruel persecution by Mexican authorities.

Never formally charged with a crime, Wilderness is instructed to remain in Acapulco, “imprisoned in paradise,” until his case is transferred to authorities in Mexico City (168). At the national Immigration office, the couple’s case is handled by Sr. Corruna, “an absolute devil … perhaps indeed … the Devil himself,” who supplements his speech with gestures “… of reaping, of cutting throats with the thumb, of cramming
gunpowder in people’s ears, of pulling teeth, and a magician-like gesture as of one about to cause everything to disappear…” (266). In order to punish the Wildernesses for not paying the fifty peso mordida in Acapulco, Corruna and his cohorts arbitrarily charge the couple for failing to secure work visas as they are writers and accused of “working” in Mexico. Incarcerated, robbed while in a prison cell and taken to the border under custody, the couple is eventually threatened into signing deportation papers. While the charge against them suggests an eerie echo of the Consul’s fate in Volcano (Walker 317), the ironic reversal that sees a British and U.S. subject being charged and eventually deported for illegally working in Mexico is lost here and further testifies to the limited Euro-centric scope of Wilderness’s perception. When Wilderness was in fact “working” in Mexico to gather material for The Valley in the 1930’s, the U.S. government, at all levels, was passing laws and fomenting hysteria to force Mexicans and Mexican-Americans out of the country to secure jobs for “Americans” (Balderrama and Rodríguez 1-5). This of course ultimately undermines the stability of U.S. legality that Wilderness celebrates at the novel’s end.

As it functions in the text, Wilderness’s mordida constitutes a state of exception, stripped of an integrated rationale and instead overdetermined by fears which span the banal to the cosmic in the protagonist’s struggle to match their significance to his circumstances. Lowry notes that the word “antinomy” relates well to the Wilderness’s situation. He provides two definitions of the term “anti-nomos: law … 1. Opposition of one law or rule to another … 2. Metaphysical. A contradiction between two principles

21 Sherrill Grace has recently argued that the Consul in Volcano is also the victim of a state of exception when he is murdered by the fascist sinarquista police (Strange Comfort 207-9). Rather than make this unique to Mexican governmentality, however, she also discusses the Consul’s own authorization of a state of exception for German prisoners of war, rendering his murder a fatalistic repetition of an un-mourned tragedy (208-9).
each taken to be true, or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles” (185). Lowry further notes: “In [the first] usage, Sigbjørn and Primrose are caught in an antimony, because there is the law itself that is changing: also the business of civil rights. They are both in the right and the wrong” (185). Perhaps Giorgio Agamben would agree that the very aporia inherent in Lowry’s example of antinomy could constitute the originary signification of nomos itself which depends on the underlying paradox of sovereignty to ensure its translation into praxis (30). In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben explains that “the sovereign nomos is the principle that, joining law and violence, threatens them with indistinction” (31). Mexican justice is thus positioned in the other side of the abyssal line, beyond comprehensible Western dichotomies of the legal and illegal and thus banished to a realm of inherent lawlessness beyond the perimeters of an imagined Western order. As de Sousa Santos explains, “the legal and political civility on this side of the line is premised upon the existence of utter incivility on the other side of the line” (5). The indistinction between violence and law is therefore ideologically territorialized, or better, transferred or displaced, onto juridical frameworks deemed beyond the limits of modern Western epistemology. As the novel continues, but especially in its conclusion, Wilderness is complicit in corroborating the idealization of an epistemological juridical division in which sovereignty for the white Western subject can only be located within a system controlled by and which consequently privileges this subject as its ideal citizen and law-maker.

Implicated into a state of exception by the ambiguous and improvisatory decisions of various government officials, the Wildernesses are harassed, vilified, threatened with death, imprisoned and deported because they will not or cannot comply with unofficial
rules foreigners must behave by. Yet, again, while their victimization by the State demonstrates, for Agamben, the very logic of national sovereignty, exposing the ambiguity and violence in the activity of the nomos, the novel renders this experience unique to Mexico; by being allowed to enter the U.S. without hassle, the indistinction between violence and law is not provoked to surface north of the border for the Wildernesses as it might easily be for others and thus the novel implicitly distinguishes a terrifying, perverted biopolitics in Mexico with a stable and egalitarian biopolitics in the U.S.

Working primarily with *Under the Volcano*, Andrew John Miller claims that Lowry’s protagonists resist conscription to national identities and “[embrace] … fantasies of free-floating authenticity and autonomy,” pointing to the “growing irrelevance of national citizenship as a source of identity and solidarity” (1-2). “Lowry,” he asserts, “is a postnational writer for whom the nation-state no longer seems a stable principle of order” (5). In *La Mordida*, the notion of aligning oneself to a nation-state can prove to be a source of anxiety: “The feeling that you are in a country where you have no right to be … persisted in these days in almost any country, including your own …” (115). In Mexico, however, the biopolitics of the nation state model become even more extreme to the outsider: “… the feeling that you have no right to be in Mexico, is there anyway, to some extent, from the start, but it is because of the churches, the faith, particularly poignant: but the feeling that you have legally no right to be where you are is awful in the extreme …” (115). Sovereignty, perhaps a detestable concept in relation to the nation state, is thus better tolerated by Wilderness in countries with a shared Anglo-Protestant heritage. But as the novel unfolds, more than any shared religious sensibility, the apparent stability of
modern juridical frameworks make certain nation states more desirable than others. This shared Anglo-Protestant racial and national heritage cannot be dismissed however, for it marks the Wildernesses as privileged candidates for national sovereignty and thus, the juridical stability they desire.

Further, while the text strives to render Wilderness a “post-nationalist” expatriate, his British citizenship is encoded in his dealings with Mexican (and later U.S.) authorities. Again, La Mordida comes out of a historical context that finds Mexico and Britain negotiating a debt with Mexico clearly showing a more powerful hand. While Wilderness claims he has paid his own debt, the Mexican state has the authority to tell him otherwise and challenge the amount and terms of its payment. His loss of agency and harsh treatment, while presented on one level as a hazard any foreigner may arbitrarily encounter in Mexico, mirror the geopolitical relations between a waning imperial authority and a country asserting its right to modernize on its own terms, a complicated process which for Wilderness is reducible to an entirely novel U.S. neocolonialism.

His privileged mobility as a British citizen and cosmopolitan expatriate is reduced to a paranoid stasis and he remains inert, without the means of effective retaliation (though once he is out of the country, his agency returns through his ability to fictionalize his ordeal).

While forced to appeal to British and American consulates for legal advice, Sigbjørn and Primrose adopt other forms of strategic nationalism in order to establish their difference in a climate where “… the amount of money a gringo has is perhaps the sole criterion of his merit” (102). Their constant refrain, “Nosotros no somos americanos ricos—pobres—canadianos [sic],” is at once an innocent (and even playful) strategy to
conserve money and an implicit rejection of the commodification of a Mexico transformed in part by and to serve American wealth (53). While Wilderness will later foster a kinship with his American “brothers” in Texas after maneuvering through “the machinery of the Mordida,” at the start of the novel he refuses to be conceived of as an American tourist and utilizes a Canadian, rather than British, citizenship when it serves his interests. The supposed liminality of a Canadian identity and the claims of a shared poverty will not, however, garnish sympathy from Mexicans. The economic asymmetries and (neo)imperial histories that structure Mexican-U.S. relations render him American here, just as his status as a white British citizen will allow for an untroubled incorporation into the U.S. and thus force an allegiance between the two countries at the novel’s end. In this stage of his trip, however, Wilderness rejects a U.S. affiliation. Perhaps the most symbolic act of this refusal to perform as tourist is his resistance to doing what most tourists in his situation would likely succumb to doing: paying the mordida.

In Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, Wilderness is overall less hostile to the “swarming” American tourists he finds in Cuernavaca, envying their “looks of wonder” as presumably more innocent or naive reaction to the city than his own fraught response (105). For these kinds of (perhaps less informed) tourists, Mexico’s culture of the mordida is innocuous and routine. Cuernavaca police chief and former acquaintance Eduardo Kent explains to Wilderness the ubiquity of “put-up jobs” to exact money from “Americans [who] come here [and] … lose their heads”: “There’s no mystery about that part of my job—it comes straight from the Governor. They want the tourist trade and they don’t want Americans to get in trouble. If it comes to that [i.e.
bailing an American out of jail] it’s all a matter of dollars” (148-49). This banality of the
*mordida* is of course challenged when Wilderness himself is incorporated into its system.

If *La Mordida* is a machine, it functions for Wilderness in a literary manner and is
determined less as social form of extra-juridical culture than as a wider narrative structure
with his experiences at the centre. As a textual machine, *La Mordida* differs from
*Volcano*. It is less an abstract machine in a Deleuzean sense: its transversal dimensions
are limited and its lines of flight are always tightly reeled back onto the central narrative
spool and, despite some digressions, Wilderness is a constant focalizer. “[The] machinery
of La Mordida,” as it operates in the novel comprises three mechanisms: those of the
State, the self and the text.

From Wilderness’s perspective, the State becomes a totalizing Mexican
bureaucracy in which juridical procedure and an extra-juridical culture of bribery and
pay-offs enter into a zone of indistinction. As State power manifests itself on multiple
levels, regional and national, official and civilian, Wilderness is never free from its
biopolitical control through its surveillance and the threat of its policing. Indeed, the
Mexican State becomes an inhuman(e) and predatory force:

… an invisible enemy … like Hudson’s fabled fox biting the air,
struggling, yet becoming more and more exhausted, [Wilderness was]
being sucked from a distance into the maw of a lampalagua, that serpent
which so resembled the Mexican immigration in that also while extremely
sluggish in its motions … captures its victims by following them into their
burrows. (108)

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22 That is, *Volcano* is machinic in its assemblage of perspectives, “… passing from one to the other,
opening one onto the other, outside any fixed order or determined sequence” (Deleuze and Guttari, *A
Thousand 347*).
Here the chaos that he, at some stages, ascribes to his experience with Mexican authorities is replaced by a sinister order of surveillance and his fantasies of persecution are legitimized as he becomes a real target of sinister forces. Depicting Mexican Immigration as a snake suggests both its irrationality in its inhumanity and its cunning in devilish capacities. Wilderness also trades on Western fears of the Mexican other as a dangerous, tropical and natural (which is to say uncivilized) adversary.

What is presented as an intense perversion of a corrupt and, on the surface, arbitrary process for some tourists, becomes then the projection of psychological self-persecution; Wilderness’s personal anxiety surrounding his alcoholic excess and literary production is made more extreme when his drinking and writing are conflated with legal and ethical transgressions by Mexican authorities (McCarthy 147). It is not simply that Wilderness failed to pay for a visa extension on his previous trip (he had presumably paid for the extension as Lowry himself had), but that the officials have textual proof that he is “borracho … siempre ebriedad”; they warn him, “[y]ou say bad things about Mexico and wrote—we know—we have it all” (178; 287). Wilderness laments that “Mexico is … a land of stool pigeons” that encourages foreigners to drink only to demand some punitive pay-off to cover the indulgence (174). “To get a man on a drunk charge is the ambition of every petty official.” The text continues: “It should be stressed that a man does not have to be drunk. He can be writing at a pub and merely having a few beers but the stool pigeons will carry that report … and it will not be very long before that person is robbed or put in gaol or … even murdered” (175). This sort of state of exception in which the unofficial laws that govern tourists are abstract, personal, selectively enforced and to extreme ends may even signal a dangerous transnational model for Wilderness; one
version of the novel ends suggesting that “the world has now entered the Great Era of the Stool Pigeon” (323). This proposition, however, does not engender any specific analysis of how the “Great Era of the Stool Pigeon” manifests itself in cultural behaviours and juridical systems beyond Mexico’s borders. Further, the threat of the “stool pigeon” suggests a larger (inter)national totalitarian threat of hyper-governance, but it is only his personal experiences here that seem to warrant surveillance. Wilderness also seems to imply a puritanical conception of Mexican culture that testifies further to his paranoia.

By presenting the *mordida* as mode of exchange between tourists and Mexican authorities, and by making his *mordida* a unique and troubling manifestation of his own fatalism, he forecloses not only a financial, but a transcultural negotiation with his Mexican *other*. Gabriela Coronado explains that the rhetoric used by members of developed nations to criticize Mexico’s *mordida* system solidifies the ideological hierarchal asymmetries of economic globalization: “… the Anglo/Protestant/Western behaviour, ‘our way,’ is naturalized as the ‘right’ behaviour, while alternative practices from other nations, ‘the other’s way,’ are implicitly assumed to be wrong: inefficient and immoral” (7). While rejecting a totalizing ethical reading of *mordida* culture as solely positive or negative, she asserts that to reduce the *mordida* to corruption is misguided and, moreover, informed by First World ideologies and political discourses; the system rather functions in an informal and improvisatory capacity, allowing for approaches that “… demonstrate creativity, innovation, or merely a struggle to survive” (2). As de Sousa Santos argues, modern Western thinking eradicates the notion that other concepts of legality can be legitimate if they exist beyond the rigid binaries of the legal and illegal in modern, Eurocentric codified law (3). “This central dichotomy [i.e. between the legal and
illegal],” he argues, “leaves out a whole social territory where the dichotomy would be unthinkable as an organizing principle, that is, the territory of the lawless, the a-legal, the non-legal, and even the legal or illegal according to non-officially recognized law” (3).

Further, Coronado argues that the notion that corruption is somehow endemic to Mexico or an inherent trait to Mexicans, displaces the economic exigencies of globalization into a strictly national and racial context (7). She explains that practices that manipulate legal frameworks are deemed corrupt in developing nations but are hypocritically lauded when utilized by transnational corporations centred in the developed world (9). Rather than reduce the problem to a national or racial trope, “… practices [like the mordida], irrespective of whether they are called culture, folklore, cancer, creativity, flexibility or corruption, seem [to ordinary Mexicans] the only way to deal with a State bureaucracy economically and politically complicit with the interests of the Neoliberal global economy” (19).

In a similar analysis, Fernanda Duarte explains that Brazil’s jeitinho system, which, from a Eurocentric perspective may seem nepotistic and prejudiced, is rather a complex process in which “… an essentially personalist society copes with the impersonality of its bureaucratic system” to secure favours (1). Though the jeitinho is not always, or even often, monetary (she claims it is akin to “social capital, not monetary capital”), she draws parallels with Mexico’s mordida and similar practices in the developing world while claiming that “the jeitinho works in Brazilian society as a mechanism of social survival that enables a culture that values personal relations to sustain traditional patterns of behaviour emphasizing warmth and cordiality” (4; 7). The personalization of this system thus combats the “functionalist” or “pragmatic”
organization she aligns with Anglo North American social and business structures and allows one to combat, in language that echoes Lowry, the “maquina burocrática infernal [infernal bureaucratic machine]” (11; 14).

It is of course incorrect to imply that political corruption did not exist in Mexico during Lowry’s trip (as it did in the developed world). In fact, the year of Lowry’s deportation marked the beginning of unprecedented bureaucratic corruption with the inauguration of Miguel Alemán (who ironically here used his political power to ensure a high share in the tourist industry) [Krauze 556-57]. Many Mexicans also felt powerless and outraged by the extent of bribery in the governmental apparatus that they would encounter in their everyday lives (557). In his historical study of Mexican culture, Earl Shorris distinguishes between: a general sort of corruption (of which the mordida is representative) that began with Aztec tribute, became systematized by the colonial government and epitomized by the Alemán regime, and the corrupción salvaje that would begin later in the century with fewer figures amassing great wealth, a larger gap between the rich and the poor, and more pervasive human rights abuses in the country (480-81). Thus, in a historical, economic and social context, the personalist cultural institution of the mordida does not make an exception of Wilderness.

Yet it is precisely this personalization of the extra-juridical culture of the mordida that terrifies Wilderness as he believes that he is being targeted specifically for some larger and cosmic retribution. While his anxieties prompt literary production, his failure to conceive of the mordida in a larger geopolitical context ultimately limits his transcultural understanding of Mexico. Thus as Agamben says of Kafka’s The Trial, “[the] existence and the very body of Joseph K. ultimately coincide with the Trial; they
become the Trial,” the same can be said of Wilderness and the *mordida* (53). The protagonist is marked by self-schism between Wilderness, acting and more often failing to act in the economy of the text (and of the country), and the daemon\(^\text{23}\) who reduces Wilderness to his bare life—a mere character “in an unimaginable novel, not of this world, that did not, indeed, exist” (49). As “an external force,” the daemon denies Wilderness agency and propels him through the “machinery of La Mordida” and as an internal force, asserts his (absent) presence by affecting Wilderness’s suspicion that he himself is somehow unconsciously to blame for the couple’s trouble (McCarthy 147). The guilt and horror he experiences stem from this uncanny crisis of a narcissism that exceeds the subject and shapes the contours of an objective reality as his daemon is complicit with the Mexican bureaucracy and his inner torments are embodied in the State’s actions against him. Writing and drinking come to articulate a self-fulfilling prophecy and diminish Wilderness’s agency by placing him as an inactive observer, addicted to fate and bound to dutifully bear witness to and record its realization.

Just as Wilderness’s Mexico is incapable of concealing the lawlessness that pervades the juridical order, life and art are uncannily indistinguishable so that every experience is overdetermined by connections to Wilderness’s earlier novel (McCarthy 143). Wilderness’s daemon, the author of his present tragedies, may thus be situated in the realm of Freud’s uncanny where “… the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own” (940). Wilderness’s “double” assumes a “special agency” and is consequently “… able to

\(^{23}\) While somehow mysteriously linked to Mexico and Mexican authorities, the daemon is never presented in a way to imply a connection to Indigenous culture. McCarthy suggests he is a Yeatsian Daimon linked to self-gnosis, though his actions are more often those of a tormenter rather than a mentor (148). In any case, the daemon remains a product of Wilderness’s European pathologies.
treat the rest of the ego like an object” (940). The daemon becomes “the harbinger of death,” pushing Wilderness further towards self-destruction (940). It is only after the daemonic double has accrued a sufficient supply of literary material in Wilderness’s Mexican experiences that he will leave his character in the U.S.

The text itself comprises the very code of Wilderness’s machine. The text is *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*; the “forest of symbols” around him, at once local and universal, that betrays an uncanny dialogical relationship with his fiction; and his present work which he fears is orchestrating his circumstances. Yet, in deferring agency to his daemon, he has no choice but to continue developing his text even with the imminent risk of a tragic conclusion.

The lack of Wilderness’s agency is felt both in his abject dismissal as an undesirable foreign presence in Mexico (as a Briton, a drunk, a spy, a drug fiend, a writer—also as someone who won’t play by what he considers to be the unofficial rules for tourists) and in his inability to act against the narrative set out by his daemon (297). By not paying the *mordida*, Wilderness refuses to perform as tourist and, as he sees it, resists expectations reduced to national behavioural tropes. However the notion of will is complicated: it is not simply that Wilderness chooses not to pay, but on another level, his daemonic narrator refuses to let him exploit an easy option. Like the constant shakes he suffers every time he has to sign his name, the decision is beyond rational control “… as something within him seemed inextricably bound, impossible of disengagement from, the machine” (60). As McCarthy asserts, any desire that Wilderness has to pay the *mordida* is overwhelmed by his Prufrockian fear: “whatever action he takes could upset the balance
of the universe and make him responsible for the result” (160). Again, it is Wilderness’s neuroses and narcissism that heighten his experience with grander narrative signification.

The novel’s conclusion offers Wilderness a return of a lost or repressed control over his own life, a narratological agency, which, in the manner and context of its return cannot be separated from national configurations. Earlier in the novel, during the initial stages of the couple’s ordeal with the Immigration authorities, the text promises “[life] … has a happy beginning beyond the border … a rebirth, hence an assent to the realization of [Sigbjørn’s] true purpose, which was to write it” (176). By assuming an archival responsibility to bare witness to his trauma, Wilderness believes he will be released from Mexico and his daemon’s control.

In the final chapter, the Wildernesses arrive at the border, under the custody of an Immigration officer nicknamed “Fatty” who implies that he will murder Sigbjørn instead of deporting him (297). Seizing an opportunity to escape, the couple cross the border and encounter “bronzed tall Texans,” “the courteous Texan,” “another polite Texan.” (313-15). “‘They are my brothers,’ Sigbjørn almost purred, for the situation was causing him the most benign joy he had ever experienced” (314). Contrasting the Kafkaesque organization of Mexican Immigration, the American border officials escort the Wildernesses into their country without hassle, but with sensitivity and civility. Any fears that Sigbjørn will be denied entry into the U.S. and be separated from Primrose immediately dissolve. “If the Texans like to think they are the best people in the world … so far as I’m concerned they are,” Sigbjørn confirms (316). When the couple repeat their refrain in their typically poor Spanish “Nosotros no somos ricos Americanos” to a Mexican hotel owner on the northern side of the border, the text points out that “[the
Wildernesses] don’t really care” (316). They are not worried about saving money and what earlier may have been the desire to distance themselves from Americans has been replaced with the joys of a homecoming.

It is precisely at this moment, finally alone in their hotel room, that the daemon relinquishes his control over Wilderness and the catharsis is complete. Across the border, Wilderness has found liberation, released from the “machinery of the mordida”: the daemon’s control, the Mexican authorities and from the text itself as the novel will conclude two pages later.

**Agency Outside of La Mordida**

Discussing specifically Lowry’s alcoholism, Deleuze explains that the author’s desire for drink warps his perception of time so that “every future is experienced as a *future perfect (futur antérieur)*, with an extraordinary precipitation of this compound future (an effect of the effect which goes on until death);” while desired outcomes and objects may be temporarily qualified, their substance proves as chimerical as their catalyst, constantly exposed to the opening up of différance (159; 349). Thus, the promised triumph\(^{24}\) of *La Mordida* does not remain territorialized in the American homecoming, but is deferred to “Eridanus”; if the U.S. represents collective liberation, the isolation of the Canadian cabin may even signify individual freedom. The essential goodness that the text is after, ostensibly missing now in Mexico and only glimpsed momentarily in the figures of “good Mexicans” and other “potential saviours,” comes to be territorialized two borders north in “[the] glory of a blue morning in Canada at home” where the Wildernesses will be eventually domesticated (319). At the same time, by

\(^{24}\) Lowry had at one point planned that the novel would conclude his cycle of works *The Voyage That Never Ends* in a triumphant manner (Bowker 490).
foregrounding a type of isolation in their vision of Dollarton, the Wildernesses have foreclosed a transcultural relationship with Mexico; the sadness of this realization is not lost to Wilderness as he gazes across the river to a paradise lost at the novel’s end: “And there, separated from them by the Rio Grande, by centuries, by eternity, was ancient Mexico, great dark Catholic mysterious Mexico, to which perhaps [the Wildernesses] could never return. What was Mexico? What did Mexico mean? Why was the thought that one could not return so terrible?” (317-18).

A genuine belief in transnational humanity surfaces in La Mordida, even if it is ultimately broken by the vicious segmentarity of the nation state. For example, the Wildernesses encounter “the good Mexican” who offers to lend them fifty pesos to cover the mordida. Having overstayed his visa in the U.S. and dealt with his own bureaucratic problems, he extends empathy to the couple (194-95). The second-in-command at the Immigration office in Nuevo Laredo risked his position by assisting the couple in getting across the border before the agent “Fatty” could inflict further humiliation, terror and possibly even violence before a formal deportation (312). Ultimately, however, it is this sense of transnational humanity that fails to serve the couple in La Mordida’s Mexico; Wilderness presents such virtue as most often trumped by the desire for foreign capital and perverted by the State.

This transnational humanity is one-directional and does not generate a critical consideration of the State’s violence beyond the level of the self. What is missing is a meaningful extension of political concern to those other victims of the State and U.S.-inspired/motivated development. The year after Wilderness’s expulsion, ejiditarios in Acapulco held demonstrations to protect their homes in the face of large-scale
expropriation, demanding “The People of El Progresso [the name of an ejidal territory] have the right to live like people and among people” (Sackett 170). If the bare life of the native inhabitants is foregrounded in the State’s project to modernize and industrialize hospitality, it is unfortunate that Lowry never develops a larger critique of subjugation that extends beyond Wilderness’s personal experiences. The abstract insights Wilderness offers connecting development and oppression only become general through reflections on his own victimhood.

Yet unlike in the U.S. where the “bronzed tall Texans” embody the State itself in his reception (and thus, in some ways, may represent a more terrifying and totalizing form of biopolitics), Wilderness distinguishes Mexicans as separate from, even in opposition to the Mexican government. In this regard, is Wilderness’s entry into the country really indicative of a revitalized agency? Is he not merely selected by the U.S. immigration authorities and the locals he encounters as a desired candidate for sovereignty based on his own race and British heritage? Is he not passively pushed through the border just as through “the machinery of the mordida”? Does this undermine the juridical stability he assumes in the U.S. as somehow always-already unprejudiced and democratic, even for its more desired subjects?

Mary Pat Brady argues that the spatial-temporal disjunctions that the border (as both discursive and material) strives to signify render the border-crosser “… [transmogrified] … into someone either more or less advanced, more or less modern, more or less sophisticated” (50; 59). The border functions as an “abjection machine,” making certain subjects intelligible, “human,” and legal and others “ontologically impossible” and “alien” while at once presenting its work as natural, “[erasing] the signs
of its labor” (50). Rendering Lowry “legal,” forces an alignment that corroborates the notion that his experiences in Mexico were barbarous and “unintelligible.” At the same time, the newly celebrated agency he assumes is not the result of some personal accomplishment, but is granted by the nation State which can just as easily take it away.

While this kind of agency can therefore never be stable, the idea of belonging makes Wilderness vulnerable here as well, for the border “… may keep people in as well as keep people out” (72). Further, Brady explains that “… the border system’s economy of memory encourages a violent amnesia, erasing cultures, identities, and differences while simultaneously producing subjectivities, differences and cultures in terms of itself” (60). Wilderness asks in his final gaze across the border, “Why was the thought that one could not return so terrible?” (317-18).25 It is not simply his deportation or the perceived “Americanization” of Mexico that forecloses the possibility of return, but crossing the border has forced him to choose between the U.S. and Mexico. His passive incorporation into the U.S. not only betrays the instability of the agency he believes he is reclaiming, but forces national difference into his very sense of self. While coded as a triumph in one register, Wilderness realizes that something important has been irrecoverably lost and thus his final vision of Mexico can only be read as ambivalent, a further qualification of the text’s nostalgia, rather than merely victorious.

The Society of Control and its Discontents: "On the Road to Utopia"

If La Mordida condemns a terrifying biopolitics in Mexico by counter-presenting an attractive juridical order in the U.S., Jack Kerouac’s On the Road, in a general reading, attempts to reverse these binaries, even though the novel also poses similar problems.

25 The sentiments are later echoed in Lowry’s novel Through the Panama where his deportation is seen as nothing less than “[an] excommunication … [an infringement] of spiritual rights of man” (69).
surrounding its protagonist’s neat re-conscription into the U.S. in its conclusion. If, as I suggested earlier, Lowry’s impressions of his final journey to Mexico, in some ways, testify to a waxing high modernist, Eurocentric cosmopolitanism, underwritten by a post-imperial British anxiety, *On the Road* can be read, perhaps much to Kerouac’s chagrin, as an inaugural post-war American pleasure tourist narrative, even as the novel maligns the conformist, middle-class U.S. citizen who would be holidaying in Mexico and locating what to the Beats would conceivably be aseptic, bourgeoisie and mass-produced sources of pleasure (in this sense, the Beats are similar to Lowry). As I will explore in my next two chapters, the novel’s celebration of sex and drug tourism also anticipates other patterns of travelling to Mexico in following decades and should not be separated from earlier vice tourism.

Sal Paradise, Kerouac’s protagonist, assumes an agency in his Mexican journey that grants him desired hospitality and through his travels, a discursive authority to mythologize a countercultural Mexico (in an American bohemian context)—an agency and authority that are products of his whiteness, his nationality and his finances. The novel’s critique of U.S. biopolitics, Hardt and Negri’s society of control in its infancy, proposes an oppositional framework of social and State governance in Mexico. Thus, the uncanny biopolitics of “lawless” Mexico, rendered violently unstable and repulsive in *La Mordida*, become a desired alternative to the totalizing and coercive biopolitics of Cold War consensus society in the U.S. Yet, crucially, at the end of the novel, Sal chooses to retire from his subversive road life (which, not coincidently, ends in Mexico City) and thus the novel narratologically situates Mexico as the most intense and potent manifestation of Sal’s liminal, carnivalesque journey. Sal, like Wilderness, ends up
pledging a tacit allegiance to the U.S. and (re)entering its biopolitical order and, in this respect, both novels are emblematic of post-war travel patterns and travel writing that construct binaries between carnivalesque Mexico and the stable First World home.

The novel recounts the exploits of Kerouac’s fictional persona Sal Paradise on several trips across the U.S. and finally into Mexico. He is often accompanied by the charismatic Dean Moriarty (based on Beat icon and muse Neal Cassady).26 Dean, “a young jailkid shrouded in mystery” and “a youth tremendously excited with life” from the U.S. borderlands, becomes associated with class marginalization and legal subversion, but more positively, with passionate curiosity and intuition (as opposed to the cloistered academicism of Sal’s New England college milieu) and the promise (for Sal) of “ecstatic release from conformity into overwhelming pleasure” (On the Road 5; 8; Hrebeniak 26; McCampbell Grace, Literary 82). As a Dionysian figure virtually immune to the anxiety and ennui of the modern condition, Dean’s appearance signals not only a rupture in the biopolitical fabric of U.S. consensus society, but a novel celebration of a spiritualized bare life that rejects the responsibilities of white masculine citizenship; Nancy McCampbell Grace explains that “[as] a hero and savior, Dean appears to be an antinomian libertine who has achieved freedom from human moral laws by removing the locus of moral suasion from institutional authority and relocating it within the immediacy of the body itself” (Literary 82-83; Hrebeniak 26-31). Dean’s charisma comes from his projection of a seemingly pure and unabashed ontology of zoē, “the simple fact of living common to all living beings,” that has no critical consciousness of the coercion of bios, “the form or way of living proper to an individual or group” (Agamben, Homo Sacer 1).

26 Cassady, later “Cowboy Neal,” would play psychopomp for Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters, leading them towards a spiritual essence of “weird America,” and later, into Mexico in efforts to avoid criminal prosecution in the U.S. and to further their pursuit of an existential “trip.”
When Sal and Dean reach Mexico, their homosocial27 friendship/apprenticeship peaks, as Sal is fully able to indulge in the excessive carnival that Dean represents for him.

As discussed above, *On the Road* may be read as an early post-war pleasure tourist narrative in Mexico. Again, coming out of Good Neighbor Policy relations between the two countries, Mexico saw an increase in U.S. tourism and, following oil expropriation, more positive international relations with the northern country. The almost complete Pan-American highway that Sal and Dean take to Mexico City is, for Eric Zolov, “…an apt metaphor for [this] new U.S.-Mexican relationship and of the material and political advances Mexico was making” (“Discovering” 238). And while Sal stresses the uniqueness of his experience in a thoroughly premodern Mexico, this in itself is tropologically symptomatic of U.S. tourist desires for Mexico in this period. One year before *On The Road*’s publication, *American Magazine* printed an article entitled “On the Road to Utopia.” Unlike Kerouac’s novel, the article celebrates the modern amenities of Mexico’s industrial hospitality. Like Kerouac’s work, however, the article stresses “excitingly ‘foreign’” aspects of this south of the border “Never-Never Land”—there are still places “most tourists have not yet discovered” and “a few are literally out of this world” (qtd. in Zolov, “Discovering” 246). Like with Lowry and Kerouac, the author’s desire for untouched spaces corroborates the pleasure tourist’s desire for personalized fantasy through the temporary and manufactured transcendence, physical and affective, from his everyday social environment.

Mexico City, like Denver, New York City, San Francisco, Paris and Tangiers, would serve as a nodal point of Beat cosmopolitanism. As writers have traded on the

27 For more on the homosocial nature of their relationship, see Larson.
deaths of several canonical figures to fabricate the country’s “death-like” mystique, Beat
cultists will be quick to point out that icons Joan Burroughs and Neal Cassady also died
in Mexico—Burroughs was shot in a misadventure by her famous husband and Cassady
died of exposure after leaving a wedding party and lapsing into a comma in Celaya
(Adams, *Continental* 158). Kerouac’s first journey to Mexico, fictionalized in the fourth
section of *On the Road*, took place in the summer of 1950 (four years after Lowry’s
exile). For the next decade, Kerouac would return on several occasions, often for months
at a time, until his final trip in 1961 (Belgrad 28). Like his Beat compatriots, Kerouac
seized Mexico, “the nearest alien culture” to provide an escape from growing U.S.
conservatism (Gunn 217-18). Indeed, his celebrated marginality of Mexico placed the
country and its inhabitants outside North American history and politics. Mexico was
seemingly immune to the anxieties surrounding nuclear annihilation and was not affected
by the paranoia of a national McCarthyism, that, in the U.S., “[attempted] to eradicate
dissent [by emphasizing] … normality … conformism … and standardization” and
honoring in any “abnormalities” as evidence of exorbitant social subversiveness
(Holton, *Ragged* 5). There is little that can be considered “normal” or “standard” in
Kerouac’s Mexico and social paranoia is superseded by a national-bohemian exaltation of
life, not strangely, in line with the Beat ethos. Mexico was also attractive for apparently
lacking economic prosperity, consumer infrastructure (and impulses) and a culture of
suburbanization that served, for the Beats, as mere veneer on the society of control and
was thus complicit with the cultural stagnation and panoptic infiltration that they found in
the post-war U.S. (4).
While the Beats imagined a unique, alternative community of peers to come, critics are apt to stress the egocentric nature of their literature. If, as Michael Hrebeniak asserts, “[at] the core of Kerouac’s work is a romantic test of experience for the creative man against the narrowing horizons of public [and corporate] America,” the Promethean element in his writing that characterizes the aims and actions of his protagonists is crucial (2). As Michael Skau explains,

The Beat Generation … was the first generation to experience a relentless threat of global nuclear destruction, to be spoon-fed on the jargon and theories of psychology and psychiatry, and to witness such organized violations of free will as brainwashing, cybernetics, and motivational research. The result was a conviction that the personal identity was besieged; therefore, the integrity of that identity must be preserved at all costs (155).

When Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty encounter Mexico, it is thus no surprise that their interpretation of their Mexican other is deeply personal and that both characters willingly ignore the existence of Mexican tourism as a larger cultural trend in order to support the uniqueness of their discovery. This is ironic considering that *On the Road* is a product of 1950’s U.S. prosperity and, even in its defiant sensibility, archives a period when more U.S. citizens are driving automobiles and making excursions into Mexico (Holton, *Ragged 4*; Adams, *Continental* 159). The car and the highway, in the context of Paradise’s final trip to Mexico, serve as technologies of a post-war pleasure tourism gaining mainstream popularity despite how Sal’s journey is presented in the novel.28

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28 Berger explains that highways were constructed in Mexico during the 1930’s in a large part due to the country’s initial attempts to market itself to U.S. tourists (*Development* 45-69).
Again, antithetical to Lowry, a sort of national state of exception is most often, in Beat consciousness, territorialized in the U.S. where the military-industrial complex becomes inseparable from a totalitarian consensus model of social governance. As poet Michael McLure explains, “The country had the feeling of martial law. An undeclared military state had leaped out of Daddy Warbucks’ tanks and sprawled across the landscape. As artists we were oppressed and indeed the people of the nation were oppressed” (qtd. in Hrebeniak 12). In the final chapter of his 1960 memoir *Lonesome Traveler*, Kerouac reluctantly bids a nostalgic adieu to what he sees as a great American and even global tradition of hoboism in the face of intensive social control. He laments, “[t]he American hobo has a hard time hoboing nowadays due to the increase in police surveillance of highways, railroad yards, sea shores, river bottoms, embankments and the thousand-and-one hiding holes of the industrial night” (172). The hobo’s “idealistic lope to freedom and the hills of holy silence and holy privacy” are threatened by the constant patrol of “[g]reat sinister tax-paid police cars” (172-73). In a Deleuzean sense, the hobo threatens capitalism’s essential recoding process, not simply because he embraces poverty as a joyous and sacred ontology, but also because his (and for Kerouac, the hobo represents a gendered mobility) deterritorializing flows cannot be drawn back into the service of global capital: “[the police] in those five-thousand-dollar police cars with the two-way Dick Tracy radios … pick on anything that moves in the night and in the daytime on anything that seems to be moving independently of gasoline, power, Army or police” (181). In a biopolitical context, the hobo’s bare life is foregrounded to such a

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29 Unlike his other works, the protagonist here is Jack Kerouac and not one of his personas, though the style and content differs little from Kerouac’s “fictional” works.

30 His archetypal hobos include figures like Johnny Appleseed, Jim Bridger, Benjamin Franklin, Teddy Roosevelt, Uncle Remus, Charlie Chaplin, but also the Pied Piper, Virgil, Beethoven, Li Po, Jesus and Buddha, to name a few (173-76).
degree that it dangerously eclipses the “docility-utility” relation of disciplinary power; his uninhibited (coded as unsocial) movement and the activity of his physical expenditure cannot be subsumed in established modes of production (Foucault, Discipline 137).

Foucault argues that disciplinary power, with its deployment of such “hierarchized surveillance,” is fundamentally machinic: “it is the apparatus as a whole that produces ‘power’ and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field” (177). Although a culture of silence allows discretion in its maintenance, “disciplinary power [is simultaneously] … absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising” (177).31 Controlling hoboism is not merely a function of the police as State apparatus, but is taken up by the nation’s white, heterosexual, middle-class citizenry. As single men who choose (at least in Kerouac’s utopic vision) to roam alone rather than settle with a family and who embrace poverty over the responsibilities of a career, their defiance opens them to scrutiny for more condemnable types of criminal deviancy. The internal utilization of dominant forces within the system of power to scrutinize projected abnormalities comprises a fundamental biopolitical ontology of the modern West; what makes such a diagram unique to the society of control is its more complete inclusiveness and the

31 From an archival perspective, drawing on Foucault’s discussion of the disciplinary may seem inappropriate given that he more fully develops the term in work on earlier historical periods. To further complicate things, in his 1978 lecture series, Foucault admits that he may have over-estimated the role of disciplinary mechanisms (which take the individual as subject) to apparatuses of security (which manage populations) (Security 48). He revises this position however to claim that “discipline was never more important or more valued when the attempt was made to manage the population: managing the population does not mean just managing them simply at the level of their overall results; managing the population means managing it in depth, in all its fine points and details” (167). Furthermore, he notes “an inflation in disciplinary techniques” in the contemporary West (9). Deleuze’s “control societies” (the term itself is indebted to the work of beat William S. Burroughs) may have moved beyond a reliance on traditional techniques and institutions of discipline (“Postscript” 178), but I don’t think that this undermines On The Road’s aesthetic investment in discipline or render it somehow belated or separate from more thorough models of social control.
dynamism and far-reaching determination of its dispositifs (Hardt and Negri 330-31). Mechanisms of control are mutable, shifting, interchanging: in the society of control, “[t]he various forms of control … are inseparable variations, forming systems of varying geometry whose language is digital” (Deleuze, “Postscript” 178). Importantly, it is the television here, not the police, that becomes the key mechanism of disciplinary coercion. Kerouac admits that he had to stop hoboing “around 1956 because of increasing television stories about the abominableness of strangers with packs passing through by themselves independently” (181). Within “the uninterrupted play of calculated gazes,” the television provides a hegemonic line of vision to identify the normalcy and utility of the subject (Foucault, Discipline 177). The ideological role of media in scripting who belongs and who does not demonizes hoboism to the point at which Kerouac affirms “… the only thing to do is sit in a room and get drunk and give up your hoboing” (182). In a general sense, this is what Kerouac did, trading nomadic marginality for (often suburban) stasis. The hobo’s deviance and independence from the homogenous nation are evidence of an abnormality that must constantly be observed and contained; the society of control poses strict ethical, behavioral, and epistemological confines on subjectivity—norms that continually recode a biopolitical relation of utility-docility in postwar capitalism—that the Beats will ultimately challenge by romantically and/or practically surrogating marginal biopolitical positions of identification (specifically, ethnic and sexual) for dominant ones as a means of personal liberation.32

32 A good deal of contemporary On The Road scholarship discusses Sal’s appropriation of marginal ethnicities, a process that allows him to manufacture a transcendence from the blandness of and cultural responsibilities imposed by white hegemony and enjoy a romanticized otherness according to his individuated desire. See especially Adams, Halsam, Holton, Liagari, Martinez, McCampbell Grace and Nicholls.
There are several scenes that spell out the oppressive capacity of U.S. governance in the novel—a governance that delimits subjective potential at the same time that its experienced hostility accelerates Beat counter-conduct\(^\text{33}\) as a strategy of defiance. Early in the novel, Sal takes a job as a security guard in a California shipping barracks, “sworn in by the local police chief, given a badge, a club …” (53). Tellingly, his uniform is too large for his body so that he “went flapping around like Charlie Chaplin” (54). Unlike Sal, the other guards, “men with cop-souls,” thrive in their position of authority by, at times violently, securing subservient behaviour from the sailors stationed in their barracks; “they were proud of their jobs. They handled their guns and talked about them. They were itching to shoot somebody” (54; 56). Sal clarifies “I’d never had a gun in my life. It scared me even to load one” (57).

Rachel Ligairi argues that Sal’s temporary position as a guard helps confirm for him “as penal the social conformity and cold war anxiety of the late 1940’s and early-to-mid 1950’s” (144). Yet, this idea requires further elaboration as I believe this passage is crucial to a reading of the novel’s transnationalism in that it literally serves as Sal’s first borderlands experience. “A port,” according to Foucault, “with its circulation of goods, men signed up willingly or by force, sailors embarking and disembarking, diseases and epidemics [is] a place of desertion, smuggling, contagion: it is the crossroads for dangerous mixtures, a meeting-place for forbidden circulations” (Discipline 144). Sal is here entrusted by the State to police the border and border-crossers, securing a functional site of power (143). His job is essentially to maintain the compliance of circulating bodies (those of the sailors who figure a kind of loosely-ordered hoboism) with their

\(^{33}\) Foucault uses this term to define “… the sense of struggle against processes implemented for conducting others” (Security 201).
regulated subjectivities in a productive context. When he is called in to discipline a group of drunk sailors, Sal instead joins them in an alcoholic binge and is almost fired for hanging the U.S. flag upside down at dawn—a mistake, but certainly symbolic of his uneasy allegiance to the contemporary U.S. (55). By abandoning a responsibility to secure the border (as a limit of behavioural obligation), Sal early on makes an important identification with the deterritorializing, excessive figure of the travelling sailor whose sense of sovereignty is conceived of as being beyond the disciplinary order of the nation and its normalizing model of subjectivity.

Sal thus locates State repression in his co-workers and reserves his disgust for two guards specifically: “a youngster who wanted to be a Texas Ranger” confined to exercising his authority over the transient sailors; and a former Alcatraz guard who reminisces about the efficiency of carceral organization—“We used to march ‘em [i.e. the prisoners in Alcatraz] like an Army platoon to breakfast. Wasn’t one man out of step. Everything went like clockwork” (56). Sal finds the disciplinary order of the prison akin to his regimented work schedule: the same guard, Sal proclaims, “[was] … unable to keep away from the atmospheres that had nourished his dry soul all his life. Every night he drove to work in his ‘35 Ford, punched the clock exactly on time, and sat down at the rolltop desk” (56). Sal finds the routinized machinery of the working world as offensive as the authoritative pleasure the guards take in disciplining the mobile sailors and indeed, they are homologous in their biopolitical control of the subject. The job then offers Sal a more general lesson about the biopolitical order of the U.S. that naturalizes regimes of obedience in everyday social behaviour; forced to discipline others, which itself becomes a manifestation of his own subservience to the demands of capitalist production, he
confirms, “This is the story of America. Everybody’s doing what they think they’re supposed to do” (57).

Sal’s projected identity as vagabond, due in part to a sort of mimetic delinquency he cultivates through his relationship to Dean, is articulated in an official context when he himself becomes the target of police discipline. On a later road trip Sal takes with Dean, Dean’s first wife Marylou and friend Ed Dunkel, the group’s car is stopped by police after observing Dean’s reckless driving and everyone is brought to the police station for questioning. After failing to charge Dean under the Mann Act because of Marylou’s age, the police, searching for a way to incarcerate Dean, threaten to arrest him on “a special charge” (113). “What charge?” Dean asks the officer who snaps back, much in the spirit of Lowry’s Mexican immigration authorities, “[n]ever mind what charge. Don’t worry about that, wise guy” (113). Bilking the majority of the group’s travel funds on a traffic ticket is seen by Sal ultimately as a punitive charge on the group’s alleged abnormality. He testifies “The American police are involved in psychological warfare … It’s a Victorian police force; it peers out of musty windows and wants to inquire about everything, and can make crimes if the crimes don’t exist to its satisfaction” (113). According to Sal, it is not so much the law in violation (exceeding the speed limit) but the norm—not the crime itself but “… the criminal’s affinity with his crime” within a biopolitical milieu where modes of surveillance are exorbitant and militarized (Foucault, Discipline 253). The police apply tactics over laws and the laws themselves become tactics that allow them to punish the delinquents (Foucault, Security 99). In contemporary “normalizing society … the law operates more and more as a norm” (Foucault, History 34)

34 It is important to note that it is Dean the police are concerned with—the “mean cop … could smell jail all over him” (112). While Sal faces his own interrogation, he defends his normalcy by claiming to be a college student.
144) and here the group’s suspected deviancy from the norm proscribes the force of punitive law.

Importantly, this incident occurs in Washington on the same day that Truman is entering his second term as president (112). Almost prophesying their encounter with the police, the group observes Truman’s inaugural parade: “Great displays of war might were lined along Pennsylvania Avenue as we rolled by in our battered boat. There were B-29’s, PT boats, artillery, all kinds of war material that looked murderous in the snowy grass; the last thing was a regular small ordinary lifeboat that looked pitiful and foolish” (112). The show of military prowess as a national symbol is made at once violent and ridiculous, just as the group’s police interrogation. Furthermore, the parade fabricates at the same time it solicits still potent and immediate cultural memories of war to mobilize affect surrounding the conscription of bodies within the U.S. military-industrial complex; the interrogation corroborates Sal’s stylized difference in material terms and thus grounds his overall belief that the State’s radical authoritarianism has created a biopolitical climate not only detestable for, but hostile towards “a ‘white man’ disillusioned” (148). Yet, rather than trying to reform the society of control by assuming a political stance, Sal is, like Kerouac, more interested in finding ways to escape it altogether (Holton, *Ragged 56*). Of course, Mexico would provide a convenient escape route with a purportedly alternative model of biopolitics.

35 The normalizing gaze of disciplinary power also manifests itself at various times in explicitly racial contexts when Sal attempts to appropriate a marginal ethnic identity on his own terms. For example, his attempts at sexual miscegenation with his Chicana lover Terry are frequently anxious when outside forces observe them; Terry’s young son and a tarantula are not exactly ideal symbols of disciplinary power, but the anxiety they cause him testifies to Sal’s fear of surveillance (80; 84-85). On other occasions, it is the gaze of an oppressive white culture that accelerates Sal’s allegiance to ethnic difference (75; 82).
Part of Mexico’s appeal to Kerouac was its poverty which is lauded in his novels not simply because Kerouac’s money went further in Mexico than it would at home, but because it naively marks Mexico as outside a corporate and consumer system and thus, the country and its inhabitants radiate with spiritual purity (perhaps problematically in a Catholic context). In Mexico, Kerouac could reconceive enterprise, “the basic economic agent [of neoliberalism]” no longer in its materialist manifestations, but as a spiritual and literary pursuit (Foucault, *Birth* 176; 147-48). As John Lardas explains, Kerouac believed that Mexicans “… had not been corrupted by the authoritative claims of Faustian civilization … [and] were untouched by industry and consumer capitalism, technology, and the social institutions that eliminated contact with the ordinary and everyday” (184). Before his original journey to the country, William Burroughs advised Kerouac “… if you want to save some of the money you are making, Mexico is undoubtedly the place for you. A single man lives high here including all the liquor he can drink for $100 a month” (qtd. in Kerouac, *Letters I* 225). Kerouac himself reiterated the same to Cassady, promising that they could live in Texcoco on an annual sum of four or five hundred U.S. dollars; if need be, almost as a parody of Mexican migrancy (important here as economic exchange in Mexico is seen in *On The Road* through the lens of parody), they could cross the border and work in Texas for a few months (244-45). Even as “cheap Americans” they would still be able to indulge in “exotic kicks and regular old honest Indian kicks” (245). His letters also at times discuss the availability and affordability of marijuana and prostitutes. In a letter from 1952, for example, he brags to Cassady and his wife Carolyn of paying just one peso for a seventeen-year-old prostitute and receiving a five-ounce bag
of pot as a gift from a friend (359). He later wrote to Carolyn, “One good thing about Mexico, you just get high and dig eternity everyday” (364).

As Erik R. Mortenson argues, the Mexico of *On the Road* challenges post-war U.S. conceptions of temporality as imposed on the nation’s subjects: in the novel, Mexicans live with a holistic, rather than subservient relationship to time (62-63). Or according to Jason Haslam, the novel offers “chronotopic resistance to dominant visions of the United States” manifesting in Sal’s desire for transcendence (446). Rejecting a nine-to-five existence, Kerouac’s only routine south of the border becomes “… the monotony of the continual high ecstasy of Mexico (I mean t) & coolness of surroundings which makes kicks guilt-less and work a pleasure” (*Letters 1* 365). And while Kerouac wrote extensively during his excursions in Mexico, by “work” he is literally referring here to grocery shopping (365).

It is clear that Kerouac’s financial means—the savings he accrued while working in the U.S.—provided him with the ability to manufacture a transcendence from the nation’s economic machinery and afforded him an opportunity to escape from moral and legal restrictions on prostitution and narcotic consumption, restrictions implicitly interpreted as cultural symptoms of U.S. conservatism. Kerouac presents his excesses as consistent with Mexican social behaviour rather than as the embodied performances of the pleasure tourist. While he does concede in a 1957 letter to Gary Snyder that in Mexico “… you have to worry about thieves (least of my worries tho) … about tourist cards and going to border [sic] and general loneliness of being outside America …” these seem minor issues when compared with “a Total Police Control creeping up on America”
(Letters 2 44-45). He chides Snyder, “naturally, you yearn to ‘come home’ but what kinda HOME you think this is going to be [?]” (44).

Disciplinary power and its complicit systems of knowledges, structures and activities, configured here as capitalist ability and acumen, the assignation of subjectivity to codes of economic utility, police surveillance and Protestant moral righteousness, are thus naively territorialized in the U.S.; Mexico remains a place of sexual and narcotic license, where fiscal restraints on subjectivity may be temporarily forgotten to pursue artistic inspiration and, more importantly, to enjoy a bare life in which the subject is only sovereign to individuated spiritual preoccupations and bodily desires. Like Lowry’s, Kerouac’s Mexico reconstructs “… the radical difference that, on this side of the line, separates … legal and illegal,” the lawful and the lawless, but in terms of the subject’s (rather than the State’s) prohibitions and desires (de Sousa Santos 3). Sal finds the divergent coercive biopolitical machinery of the State replaced in Mexico by a fantastically humane sense of toleration and a “natural” (i.e. almost akin to a state of nature) order of collectivity.

Unlike the U.S. police, their Mexican counterparts in On the Road are not concerned with controlling “abnormal” behaviour. When a Mexican officer discovers Sal and Dean asleep at the side of the road—hoboing—he quietly passes them by. “Such lovely policeman God hath never wrought in America,” Sal proclaims. “No suspicions, no fuss, no bother” (242). And while locals stare intently at the foreign travelers, their gazes do not betray a sinister, panoptic inquest that scrutinizes sameness and difference. On the contrary, their gazes demonstrate a tender intuition. Dean exclaims, “There’s no suspicion here, nothing like that. Everybody’s cool, everybody looks at you with such
straight brown eyes and they don’t say anything, just *look*, and in that look all of the human qualities are soft and subdued and still there” (228). This revelation that so amazes Dean challenges the U.S. stereotypes about Mexicans he has grown up with and inspires the creation of new ones. He tells Sal that “… all those foolish stories you read about Mexico … all that is crap—and crap about greasers and so on—and all it is, people here are straight and kind and don’t put down any bull” (228). There are no affectations, compromised behaviours, or hierarchal “hang-ups” that limit intra-human connection in Dean’s (and Sal’s) vision of Mexico. Furthermore, the panopticism Dean celebrates here becomes a means of social communication beyond a structure of disciplinary power. It does not produce subjectivity (as the Mexicans they encounter seem interchangeable and uniform in their sensibility)\(^3\) but promises the collectivity of carnival, the suspension of order and judgment (Foucault, *Discipline* 200).

**Scenographic Otherness and the Technology of the Gaze**

The Mexico of *On the Road* becomes an “authentic” outside to modernity (not a space on the threshold of becoming modern); Sal believes the natives he encounters “… never identified with (or were excluded from) the narratives of white dominance that traditionally legitimized white versions of reality” which Sal apprehends as mere cultural simulacra in the consumerist First World (Holton, “Fellahin” 273). The natives are rather Spenglarian Fellahin, the contemporary residue of primitive culture who have remained outside civilization and who will survive its eventual collapse (270-71). As Kerouac wrote elsewhere, “Fellaheen is Antifaust Unanglosaxon Original World Apocalypse … an Indian Thing, like the earth … Unsquare, Ungothic” (qtd. in Hrebeniak 17).

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36. Though it does corroborate Beat chic and subversiveness. Mexico seems thus to produce subjectivity only outside of its borders.
As with Lowry’s critique about the Americanization of Mexico, it would be unfair to outright dismiss Kerouac’s celebration of the Fellahin as simply exotic and self-serving without acknowledging a level of political insight. Kerouac’s Fellahin sound remarkably like Latin-American liberation theologian Enrique Dussel’s cultures of “Exterioridad,” “[las] culturas … que son anteriores, que se han desarrollada junto a la Modernidad europea, que han sobrevivido hasta el presente, y que tienen todavía un potencial de humanidad suficiente para hacer aportes significados en la construcción de una Cultura humana future posterior al término de la Modernidad y el capitalism” (405). At the same time, the messianic potentiality Paradise here distils from their mere appearance removes them from any particular political reality in the present.

In On the Road, the Fellahin world offers Sal a site of self-gnosis, a space “where we would finally learn ourselves” through physical and social transaction with the global south (229). And as mobility becomes an ontology in the novel, this transaction is necessarily a transitory, but intensely compulsive engagement with an exorbitant, but always unfolding desired difference; Sal seeks in Mexico

… the essential strain of the basic primitive, wailing humanity that stretches in a belt around the equatorial belly of the world from Malaya (the long fingernail of China) to India the great subcontinent to Arabia to Morroco to the selfsame deserts and jungles of Mexico and over the ways to Polynesia to mystic Siam of the Yellow Robe and on around, on around, so that you hear the same mournful wail by the rotted walls of

37 “… those cultures that are behind, that have developed in conjunction with European modernity, that have survived to the present, that still have sufficient potential to humanity, to make significant contributions to a subsequent future of human culture at the end of modernity and capitalism” [translation mine].
Cádiz, Spain, that you hear 12,000 miles around the depths of Benares the Capital of the World. (230)

The spatialization of otherness becomes here an arbitrary process (excluding of course, the First World) and diverse cultures become accessible through a generalized subjective apprehension of difference. The sidewalks of Monterrey, for example, are “cramped with Hongkong-like humanity” and Mexican villages observable beyond the highway contain “thatched huts with African-like bamboo walls” (228-29). Much like in the opening of Lowry’s *Volcano*, we see here a decadence of synonomy, an aesthetic of (neo)colonial boldness that allows sweeping geo-social pronouncements and connections as much in the spirit of travel as in the accumulation of knowledge.

Martinez notes the imperialist and colonialist underpinnings in Sal’s conception of “Fellahin” Mexico (80-81). The Mexicans he encounters are deemed ontologically other to consensus model white U.S. citizens and thus their historical, social and political lives have no meaningful context in the aesthetic economy of the novel: these are “Fellahins,” not *campesinos*. As Adams argues, Sal and Dean’s desire to “learn [themselves]” in a purely existential capacity distinguishes them from historical modernists seeking new social models in Indigenous Mexico (*Continental* 162). As a result, the Mexican excursion inspires no practical political understanding while “the Mexican landscape and people are incorporated into [Dean’s and, I would add Sal’s] increasingly grandiose subjectivity” (162). This further entrenches the novel’s status as a pleasure tourist narrative in its desire for historically and politically decontextualized Mexican otherness that satisfies consumer impulses and expectations and thus bears with it a certain logic of (neo)coloniality.
More optimistically, Raj Chandarlapaty argues that Kerouac presents “… Mexico as an active modern agent” and that the author utilizes its “sociopolitical alterity” in constructing a transnational countercultural discourse (160-61). He sees Dean’s character, as opposed to the more “studious” Sal, as “expressing an anti-imperialist tone, to signify a new brand of cultural messenger that wanted to learn rather than coerce” (162). In an “unracist” manner, the novel “[invites the reader] to recognize the collective body of humanity in the Third World setting, to see one’s soul and identity as common with that of the Other” (163). Furthermore, he argues that “Sal and Dean meant to overthrow the hierarchy of reasoning that had enshrined institutions of power and influence, to return agency to the disenfranchised” (164). Yet, as I believe, the Catholic logic implicit in such a return, compounded with the novel’s appraisal of aesthetics over politics (indeed, an important hierarchy of its own) make such a reading too idealistic, as original as it is.

Daniel Belgrad is also more sympathetic to Kerouac’s overall literary engagement with Mexico, suggesting that Martinez’s neo-imperialist analysis is reductive and flawed; he instead proposes, rather oddly and unconvincingly, reading Beat literature as part of a “locus of opposition” shared by Latin American magical realists (29-34). Rachel Ligairi, while more balanced in her analysis, argues against María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo’s necolonial reading of the text: she confirms “… the novel lacks evidence that Sal is interested in governing anyone, including himself” (146-47).

In context of this scholarly debate, I turn to Kerouac’s Catholic French-Canadian identification and examine Sal’s Mexican encounter as a contemporary reworking of

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38 Adams provides numerous examples from Kerouac’s oeuvre that show how the author’s working-class, French-Canadian and possibly Métis identity is connected culturally, economically, linguistically and epistemologically to Mexico, and often particularly to Indigenous Mexico (Continental 163-65). See also McCampbell Grace, “White Man” and Nicholls.
Mary Louise Pratt’s “anti-conquest narrative” that seeks to critique historical colonialism while replicating imperialist logic or behaviour (38; 53). Or more appropriately, Sal’s encounter with Indigenous Mexicans, because it privileges visual over discursive communication, functions as what Diana Taylor terms a “scenario of discovery” in which “… indigenous bodies perform a ‘truth’ factor; they ‘prove’ the material facticity of an Other and authenticate the discoverer/missionary/anthropologist’s perspective, in terms of both geographic and ideological positioning” (55; 63).

While Sal’s use of Spengler as a referent of universal truth obviously grounds him in Western epistemology, it is also important to consider the Catholic sensibility that codes his encounter with Indigenous Mexicans in a kind of spiritual projection (rather than through a physically violent coercion): simply stated, Sal approaches the natives as a Las Casas rather than a Cortés. In Sal’s description, the natives lack the ability of “literal locution” (according to Las Casas’s specific classification of Mexican barbarism) and thus Sal’s spiritual-politico interpretation comes to subsume centuries and continents of unarchived wisdom through what is presented as holistic induction (Mignolo 18-21). As Dean explains to Sal, the plan is to “understand the world [in Mexico] as, really and genuinely speaking, other Americans haven’t done before us” (226). Dean is referring here to the “Mexican War” and the violence of Manifest Destiny. Thus like Wilderness, who fantasizes about an abstract spiritual purity corrupted by “Americanization,” Sal and Dean declare a mode of apprehension that testifies to their touristic difference and cosmopolitan authority.

Leaving a brothel in Gregoria (which I discuss below), Sal and Dean encounter “vast and Biblical areas” off of the highway (246). Sal instructs Dean to “wake up and
see the shepherds, wake up and see the golden world that Jesus came from, with your own eyes you can tell!” (246). It is in these “Biblical areas” that they encounter a group of young Indigenous girls trying to sell them small pieces of rock crystal. The excessive debauchery Sal and Dean otherwise locate in female Mexican bodies is replaced by Christian pathos; in “[their] great brown, innocent eyes,” Sal sees “the eyes of the Virgin Mother when she was a child. We saw in them the tender and forgiving gaze of Jesus” (245). Kerouac is here closer to Graham Greene than he perhaps realizes in his universal Catholicism that locates pure spirituality in impoverished Mexican Indigenous communities. When Dean gives the girls his wristwatch in a gesture of compassion, he “… seemed like the Prophet that had come to them” (245). McCampbell Grace argues that Dean becomes here a Christ-like figure for Sal, but the gesture is ambiguous: Dean is also introducing a corrupting, pathologizing modernity to his group, despairingly already ‘partially civilized’ by the “Pan-American Highway” (Literary 97; On the Road 244). Sal laments that the girls

… had come down from the back mountains and higher places to hold forth their hands for something they thought civilization could offer, and they never dreamed the sadness and the poor broken delusion of it. They didn’t know that a bomb had come that could crack all our bridges and roads and reduce them to jumbles, and we would be as poor as they someday, and stretching out our hands in the same, same way. (246)

For Sal, it is in not realizing the tragedy of Western civilization that secures for them a biopolitical freedom (desubjected and unplaced within a schismatic global militarization, sovereign only to an abstract and premodern socius) and affirms for him a vision of
humanity’s resilience and innocence just as it promises the righteousness of final judgment. By juxtaposing the natives with the atomic bomb, the nadir of State bipower, the totality of a power “… to suppress [life] insofar as it is the power to guarantee life,” (Foucault, Society 253), Sal affirms “… the possibility of an eschatology, of a final time, of a suspension or completion of historical and political time when … the indefinite governmentality of the state will be brought to an end and halted … by the consequence of something that will be society itself” (Foucault, Security 356). Earlier, Sal had prophesized the end of the West, “… when destruction to the world of ‘history’ and the Apocalypse of the Fellahin returns once more as so many times before” (230). Saved by their very lack of “history,” the Fellahin “… will stare with the same eyes from the caves of Mexico as well as from the caves of Bali, where it all began and where Adam was suckled and taught to know” when the West has destroyed itself (230). By projecting such Christian fantasies of judgment and redemption (in line with larger anxieties surrounding his own subjectivity within the society of control) onto Indigenous Mexico, Sal ideologically re-performs the scenario of the conquest in context of contemporary biopolitics, a performance that depends on the authority of his own discursive agency as much as a muted, purely aesthetic incorporation of Indigenous cultures on his own transcendentalizing terms. In fact, it is through their silence that they offer Sal the authenticity (and escape) he believes he has finally found in Mexico (Ligairi 153). The Indigenous girls “[penetrate Sal and Dean] with sorrowful and hypnotic gleam. [But when] they talked they suddenly became frantic and almost silly” (245). Of course, when they are talking they are attempting to enter an economic transaction with the tourists. Thus, preferably, Sal states, “[i]n their silence they were themselves” (245).
The natives are deprived of a voice, but they are not deprived of a gaze. On the contrary, they are typically identified through the act of looking at Dean and Sal so that transcultural encounters are presented as scenes of mutual voyeurism—Mexicans “[stop] to watch [Sal and Dean] without expression;” “Old men with handlebar mustaches [stare] at [them]” (229; 227). Sal and Dean are always quick to reciprocate. Yet, the Mexican gaze, as I discussed earlier, does not betray the coercive utility of disciplinary power in the biopolitical production of subjectivity; and it does not instill a fearful awareness of the foreign self as spectacle as it often does within the “infernal paradise” trope (Alarcón 51). The Mexican gaze here represents an invitation beyond logocentric parameters of communication that captures the wisdom of the “Fellahin,” a wisdom beyond stuffy intellectualism and a wisdom that On the Road otherwise attributes to Dean. The reciprocity of gazing qualifies the gaze itself as novel, and in its unreserved and positive circulation, it counters the disciplinary gaze of the U.S. We are perhaps dealing here with what Karen Jacobs calls the “haptic gaze,” a “… gaze based on mutuality and immersion rather than the detached, distanced, objectifying gaze associated with … the instrumentalist projections of surveillance, commodification, classification, voyeurism and consumption” (308). In the novel’s Mexican section, Dean mimics the native’s gaze in an attempt to inhabit epistemologically his cultural other. Rather than studying anthropologically, he “digs” them ocularly just as the natives “dig” him (227). Yet, this of course is less a great transcultural insight than it is Sal’s projection of Dean’s bohemianism onto the natives. Sal claims that “[Dean] had found people like himself” in Mexico—perhaps like Dean, people who had “come into the world to see it” (229; 228 emphasis added).
Yet, the white gaze here is not so easily separable from the consumption and voyeurism that the haptic gaze in principle opposes and is focused as much by pastoral spiritualism and dissident impulses as by tourist desires. The “voyeurism” of the natives justifies the tourist gaze for Sal and Dean by presenting it as a higher form of “Fellahin” understanding rather than as a performative act of pleasure tourism. After all, the tourist gaze, by its very nature, seeks new foreign and “authentic” stimuli outside or at odds with one’s routine social milieu (Urry 2-3; 9). By affirming that they are not “the usual well-dressed tourists” and assuming that the natives intuitively understand them on a higher level of consciousness, Sal and Dean guiltlessly stare back with the same anticipated/projected understanding and this then becomes a crucial aspect to the self-gnosis (rather than genuine understanding of the other) so important in the novel (227). 39

“All Mexico Was One Vast Bohemian Camp”

By rendering the Mexican gaze an intuitive mode of apprehension rather than a dispositif of biopolitical control, Sal and Dean are free to engage in the liminality of a carnivalesque Mexico as self-fashioned, intrepid bohemian travellers seeking a homecoming. If self-understanding is an essential component of their journey, so is the transgressive excess they celebrate as a means of liberation from the society of control. In

39 It needs to be mentioned, however, that Sal’s intuitive gaze is not quite equal to Dean’s. His role as amanuensis which situates him in the world of supplemental communication (i.e. writing) distances him from the immediacy of a primary visual awareness. After consuming more marijuana than ever before in the novel with Victor, the group’s adopted local guide in Gregoria and his friends, Sal speculates at Dean’s capacity for non-linguistic awareness purely by his affective intensity. He states, “For a mad moment I thought Dean was understanding everything [Victor] said [in Spanish] by sheer wild insight and sudden revelatory genius inconceivably inspired by his glowing happiness” (233). For Sal in this moment, the insightful pleasures of looking both inward and outward at Mexico become so potent that “[for] a long time [he] lost consciousness in [his] lower mind” (234). Importantly however, this is also the moment when language fails in a practical manner and segments transcultural communication between the Mexican hosts and U.S. guests. Dean asks Victor several questions in English which he misunderstands and in the absence of a “common language … everybody grew quiet and cool and high again and just enjoyed the breeze from the desert and mused separate national and racial and personal high-eternity thoughts” (233).
fact, sacrilizing the natives as “Fellahin” allows profane transgression according to the logic of local custom. Further, because of the country’s perceived biopolitical laxities, everything in Mexico is experienced with an, at times stupefying, intensity unknown or repressed in the U.S.: sex becomes orgiastic, marijuana makes them higher than ever before, heat, volume and mobility are pushed beyond stabilizing limits. Like Agamben’s camp in context of pleasure tourism, that, is, as Diken and Laustsen argue, where the bare life of the holiday-maker becomes the essential ontological signifier over public life, the entire country seems to provide a cathartic space that offers the First World consumer “… the promise of an eroticized, corporeal, ‘animal’ world” that is both sacred and profane and where the duties and markers of citizenship are temporarily absolved (114). If the U.S. as “camp” conflates zoë and bios in terms of repression and coercion, Mexico as “camp” does the same here in terms of liberation for the privileged Western subject (114). In the U.S. bare life is utilized to serve the military industrial complex according to the praxes of disciplinary power, but in Mexico bare life becomes the very signification of “Fellahin” bios and discipline just another “hang-up” of an anxious, hyper-civilization left behind. Thus, like La Mordida, On The Road shapes a cartography of segregation, distinguishing a civilized U.S. and a lawless Mexico that mirrors the geopolitical division of global power.

From the moment they reach "the magic border" that will give them access to “magic south,” “the magic land at the end of the road,” Sal and Dean feel that they are abandoning the disciplinary behavioural structure of the U.S. and encountering instead what they desire as “… a space free of all authority, where every individual can become his own sovereign” (224; 217; 225; Martinez 99). The border guards “… weren’t like
officials at all. They were lazy and tender,” notes Sal (225). If anything, the guards become friendly tour guides dispensing practical advice and symbols of a national hospitality. One official tells them “Go ahead. Welcome Mehico. Have good time. Watch you money. Watch you driving. I say this to you personal, I’m Red, everybody call me Red. Ask for Red. Eat good. Don’t worry. Everything fine. Is not hard enjoin yourself in Mehico” (225). Unlike for Lowry, the interpersonal character of bureaucratic exchange in Mexico was desirable for the Beats as an alternative to “the corporate-liberal state apparatus in the United States … [and its] … regulations of bureaucratic management” (Belgrad 32). Moreover, the permissiveness seemingly encouraged here by state authority allows Sal and Dean to regress to the state of excited children so that Mexico becomes a “playground … beyond the parental borders of the nation” (Larson 46). “Whee” Dean whispers as he passes through immigration (225). Mexican currency seems to Sal a “toy” (Adams, "Hipsters" 61). Trading a much smaller amount of U.S. dollars for “big rolls” of pesos, Sal marvels at the price of beer and cigarettes (225). Furthermore, in a more practical sense, Dean is in Mexico to get a divorce. After suffering harsh criticism from his wife and her friends for his lack of familial responsibility in the novel’s third section, Dean wants an opportunity to absolve his relationship with a woman who insists on loyalty and restricts his mobility. In this regard, the confines of the nuclear family’s social structure and the responsibilities of adulthood are absolved across the border.

When the group reaches Gregoria, a fictional name for Ciudad Victoria, they befriend a local man named Victor (whose name perhaps hints at the town’s real identity) who, after procuring marijuana for the group from his mother, “… proceeded to role the biggest bomber anybody ever saw … a tremendous Corona cigar of tea" (232). Victor
leads Sal, Dean and Stan (who accompanies them on the Mexican excursion but is
notably absent in Sal’s overall description) to a local brothel. The three foreigners spend
the day sleeping with and exchanging women, and drinking to such excess that Sal
forgets that they were “… in Mexico after all and not in a pornographic hasheesh
daydream in heaven” (238). The brothel scene serves as a kind of climax of the novel’s
biopolitical transgression and pleasure tourist consumption while at the same time,
merely offering an introduction to Sal’s Mexican experience and its potential capacity to
fulfill his desires. “Dean thrust money at [Victor],” encouraging him to partake in their
abandonment while Sal “[throws] money” at a prostitute—“I didn’t know the value of
Mexican money,” he explains, “for all I knew I had a million pesos” (236-37). Holton
argues that, in the brothel, “[the] necessity of restrained behavior that accompanies white
middle-class respectability is transformed into its opposite, a carnivalesque indulgence in
transgressive sexuality, alcohol, and drug consumption—behavior that Sal associates
with the freedom of ... the ‘fellahin’” (Ragged 118). While Sal notes the “awful grief” of
one alcoholic prostitute in particular here, “his (un)critical analysis of the situation stops
there, leaving her grief as an aesthetic or existential effect rather than placing it in a
political or cultural context” (118).

Further, the brothel scene exemplifies the state of exception, just as for Lowry, in
its parodic distribution of sovereignty and juridical order (Agamben, State 72). In La
Mordida, an abusive hyperlegality is implicitly inherent to Mexican governmentality and
exempt from the more “rational” legal order of the First World. On The Road depicts an
a-legal licentiousness in a global Third World where institutionalized law lacks
substantive force or signification. In Sal’s Mexico, “… life’s maximum subjection to the
law is reversed into freedom and license, and the most unbridled anomie shows its parodic connection to the nomos” (72). Sal’s Mexico “point[s] toward the real state of exception as the threshold of indifference between anomie and law” (72-73). Sal has no qualms about paying the two police officers standing guard outside the brothel “twenty-four cents each, for the sake of form,” a pure form without meaning (235). At the same time, the transaction of the mordida justifies his licentiousness in capitalist logic—he has purchased the right to transgress, a right protected by the compliance of governing officials even if the gesture is parodic of capitalist exchange. While “[a] good twenty men leaned in [the] window, watching” as the foreigners engage in orgiastic revelry, they observe “… with indifference and casualness,” and are thus deemed curious rather than judgmental (235-36). The brothel is not a taboo space in the community; its infectious fiesta spirit spreads throughout the city through the volume of its soundtrack, with mambo blasting over the loudspeaker so that “… all the city of Gregoria could hear the good times going on at the Sala de Baile” (235). In the U.S., where “quietude” is conflated with law, family and limitation (Hrebreniak 43), the laudatory volume of the sound system in the brothel is another aspect of its carnivalesque character. The decibel level leads the group to “… the realization that we had never dared to play music as loud as we wanted, and this was how loud we wanted” (235). Unlike the jazz they enjoy at clubs in the U.S., segregated in non-white spaces, the mambo spreads out throughout the city which, for Sal and Dean, is as liberating as its volume and the rest of the afternoon’s pleasures.

Again, the type of transgressive, subjective liberation is not seen by Sal as indebted to his status as a white male tourist from the U.S., but is rather symptomatic of
Mexico’s fiesta sensibility that manifests itself in its zeitgeist and even synecdochally in the country’s geography. Leaving the brothel and continuing along the highway to Mexico City, the group begin to absorb the intense heat of a jungle wilderness, further pushing a biopolitical transformation in which the subjects seem to occupy a state of nature, or primal primitiveness that, in some ways, renders their brothel experiences initiatory in a greater ontological rebirth (Diken and Laustsen 111). The group abandons civilization altogether as they drive further south: “No towns, nothing, lost jungle, miles and miles, and down-going, getting hotter, the insects screaming louder, the vegetation growing higher, the smell ranker and hotter until we began to get used to it and like it” (241). The group’s odors, their bodily secretions are dissociated so that the men’s own physical processes are subsumed by the radical geographical alterity. The men then abandon the car and enter into the wilderness itself. Sal explains, “I realized the jungle takes you over and you become it … For the first time in my life the weather was not something that touched me, that caressed me, froze or sweated me, but became me. The atmosphere and I became the same” (241; emphasis added). Sal is no longer imagining himself becoming-Mexican as he did with his Chicana lover Terry, but that he is becoming-Mexico itself, the chaotic, wild, lawless and spiritual, prelapsarian Mexico he believes in and this, in effect, becomes the most intense moment of his biopolitical transformation: Mexico becomes “Paradise” and Paradise “Mexico”. His bare life has been liberated from his political life (Diken and Laustsen 114). As Stan later tells the group, “I’m beginning to like this smell … I can't smell myself anymore” (243).
Reintegration

At the end of the novel’s fourth section, Sal and Dean reach Mexico City, “the great and final wild uninhibited Fellahin-childlike city that we knew we would find at the end of the road” (248). Sal here celebrates the reckless expertise of the city’s motorists, akin to Dean’s driving style, and the city’s “thousands of hipsters” who make “all Mexico … one vast Bohemian camp” (248). At the end of the road, however, the text provides no further description of the city or its inhabitants. Within paragraphs of their arrival, Sal gets violently ill—his physical body finally reacting to his excesses “… [having opened to a foreign culture”—and Dean, having ensured his divorce, abandons him for the road heading north (Adams, Continental 163). The novel’s illustrious mobility thus comes to a crashing halt at the conclusion of its fourth section and offers no more detail on Mexico.

By contrast, Kerouac’s later work Desolation Angels elaborates on the routine of its protagonist’s life in Mexico and consequently, offers a portrayal of the country less burdened, at least at times, by the determinations of Jack Duluoz’s imagination. He concedes, for example, that “… unlike American hipsters [their Mexican equivalents] all have to go to work in the morning” and observes that poor Mexicans do in fact suffer from police repression (276). On The Road offers no such insight because it continually resists stasis in its exclusive appraisal of a wisdom acquired through constant, spontaneous movement. Developing a more thoughtful account of social life in Mexico beyond the level of Sal’s fantasy would curb narrative momentum and oppose the very spirit of the novel. However, the fifth section of On The Road, comprising only a few

40 As above, where Dean’s driving solicits punishment in the U.S., it is seen as normal in Mexico.
41 He also acknowledges the country’s contemporaneity in a transnational context—he discusses his weekly routine of buying “News Report and Time Magazine” at the Sears Roebuck in Mexico City (252).
pages, provides Sal with a restorative stasis conditioned by his rejection of Dean and his own road life. He here displays an acquired wisdom that comes from reflection rather than the immediacy of constantly spontaneous experience. Sal is back in New York and his homosocial relationship with Dean is replaced by a heterosexual coupling, part of the novel’s final overall “… reassertion of traditional normative relationships and stable social structures” (Larson 53-54; McCampbell Grace, Literary 98). When Sal meets Dean again, his character is made infantile and selfish, his promiscuity an object of Sal’s derision (251-52). This side of Dean was always partially exposed by Sal throughout the novel, but Sal’s newfound maturity, by contrast, finally makes Dean ridiculous, “a psychological impasse, a fabulous reminder of how warped the male identity can become when it fails to grow up” (Barbarese 592).

It is not only his abandonment by Dean that catalyzes a new maturity in Sal, but also the extreme liminality experienced in Mexico that satiated his desires and thus allowed him to re-enroll in the biopolitical order of the U.S. The sickness he experiences is thus analogous to Wilderness’s *mordida* for with its appearance, the biopolitical threatens to become thanatopolitical and the bare life Sal had been leading threatens his subjectivity with the possibility of annihilation. It is thus not simply his abandonment but the disease, “transmitted when bodies are mixed together” that demands an analytical power of ordering (Foucault, *Discipline* 197). Foucault proposes that the threat of “contagion,” of the “plague” underlies disciplinary power “… which was exactly its reverse: not the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life … not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his ‘true’ name, his
‘true’ place, his ‘true’ body …" (198). In crossing the border, both Sal and Wilderness assume a stabilizing subjectivity that again places them within a more totalizing biopolitical order. While Sal is finally ambivalent about the act of giving up the road, Dean (and one would assume Mexico) just as Wilderness is ambivalent toward his own exile, in Sal’s case, there is a stronger, though still implicit understanding that he has made the “right” choice—he has chosen the normal(izing) path that mature white, heterosexual men are supposed to take. The greatest dispositif of disciplinary coercion becomes in the novel the body itself and subjective indulgence is repositioned as both a threshold and a mechanism of social control. And thus narratologically, that is, in accordance with the novel’s bildungsroman structure, and in a larger context, following a more general teleology of post-war tourism, Mexico remains a space of permissive fantasy and liminal transgression, a nostalgic reflection conflated with the past behaviour of prodigal selves and their fantastic indulgences.

Over the course the subsequent two chapters, I explore the “Americanized” resort culture Lowry maligns and the subgenres of narco- and vice-tourism Kerouac celebrates as they developed throughout the twentieth-century and more recognizably following World War II. La Mordida and On The Road speak to the historical transformation in Mexican tourism (in literature and beyond) from cultures of cosmopolitan expatriotism to industrial hospitality. Further, both texts are concerned not only with the economics of this transition, but a consumer ergonomics that structures how bodies behave in a new, liminal borderlands space, in part by suspending norms and social tropes indebted to First World biopower.
Roberto Esposito finds evidence of the Agambenian collapse of the political and biological in “… the enormous growth in migratory flows of men and women who have been deprived of every juridical identity …” (146-7). Though they apprehend it in opposed philosophies (based on coercion or freedom), Wilderness and Paradise embody this new biopolitical relation and monopolize it so that mobility of white leisure, rather than of Mexican labour, distinguishes its essence. In this way, they re-consolidate a colonial hegemony within a larger, global biopower by making Mexican bodies prehensile to the services of white foreigners, whose pleasures and anxieties, theses and musings, exploit transcultural literary landscapes just as they coerce Mexican labour to stimulate, de- and re-stabilize the white body at leisure through a range of tourist capacities. The following chapter narrows this range to consider the sub-genre of narco-tourism and the wider biopolitical impact of a global “narcontology.”
Mexican Drug Tourism and Global Narcontology

A cursory internet search for information on drug tourism in Mexico will yield numerous articles from various North American journals and newspapers about the negative effects that “the drug war” is inflicting on Mexico’s tourist industry (a lauded Third World economy). A good number of the remaining articles will offer quasi- and outright sensationalist testaments to an inevitable rise in vice tourism following the Calderón administration’s 2009 decision to decriminalize small amounts of marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin. Both kinds of article will more often imply or state directly the national uniqueness of these problems, though some may offer the well-worn and simplified argument that First World (often specifically U.S.) demand drives the Mexican production and retail of illegal substances (in a kind of watershed moment, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton acknowledged the same in 2009) (Ghatak).

Since the advent of colonialism, the Third World has been materially connected to drug cultivation while the First World has been associated with drug consumption. Narcotics were not initially different from the other colonially trafficked commodities (including tobacco, coffee, tea, spice and sugar) that helped define modern national cultures, institutions and attitudes by making patterns of specific kinds of material labour and commodity consumption and production “central” or “peripheral” in daily lives (Gootenberg 16-18). Even with, or in large part because of, contemporary global prohibitions on the narcotics trade, drug cultivation remains to a large extent an outsourced industry that offers revenues otherwise impossible for Third World manufacturers. This is not to imply that the First World has a monopoly on drug
consumption, but that the absence of Western markets would make drug cultivation considerably less lucrative.

The First World association of Mexico with illegal drugs seems logically indebted to the rise of cartel syndicates and the escalation of the U.S.’s “war on drugs” during the 1980’s. Indeed, cartels attained unprecedented power during this period, due in part to the U.S.’s Operation Condor that inadvertently re-centralized trafficking; to the Mexican cartels amassing control over the cocaine and heroin industries; and to the peso devaluation of 1982 which devastated the Mexican economy and made the narcotics industry, in some cases, the only viable source of employment (Bowden, *Down* 136-37; 145; 158). At the same time, Republican administrations in the 1970s and 1980s increased anti-narcotic departmental funding, advanced the hypocritical morality of Nixon’s “silent majority” rhetoric and further criminalized drug use while militarizing the U.S.-Mexico border (Bowden, *Down* 132; Gootenberg 22). The reactionary behaviour from U.S. demagogues and narco-traffickers fused a powerful association between Mexico and illegal drugs that would only gain currency in future decades as Mexican cartels became more powerful than other Latin American syndicates. And perhaps this association, exploited in Steven Soderberg’s Oscar-winning film *Traffic* (2000) and Don Winslow’s spy-thriller *The Power of the Dog* (2005), is the most potent cultural signifier of Mexican narcotics in contemporary white Western culture.

Yet, a synecdochal relationship between Mexico/Mexicans and narcotics had been planted early in the twentieth century and continues to be cultivated in a dense harvest of discourses comprising the work of journalists, politicians and other state authorities, priests, anthropologists, scientists, musicians, literary writers, (proto) New Agers and
tourists. Frequently supporting the ideological labour of this metonymy are, as I have argued, perennial anxieties and desires surrounding the il- or a-legal character prevalent in Mexican culture and often embodied in Mexican people (whether in Mexico or in other countries).

What entices both the hysterical critic and the celebrator is the notion of a cultural permissivity in Mexico that, at its most extreme, seems to stand contrary to (illusory and selective) U.S. notions of legality, morality, democracy and, in context of my work, biopolitical order: the prevalence of the black market becomes a mockery of capitalism and the ability of cartels to penetrate even the uppermost echelons of governing power undermines the rule of law and civil service. An inherent corruptibility of Mexican politics of course comprises the main theme of La Mordida; the act of paying a mordida in On The Road grants (for the protagonist) State permission to consume marijuana, to drink excessively and to engage in prostitution (essentially “deviant” behaviour in the novel’s version of the U.S.). As I argued in the previous chapter, post-war tourist Mexico comes to offer “states of exception” to the white foreigner in that it allows him/her to experience “… unbridled license and the suspension and overturning of normal legal and social hierarchies” (Agamben, State 71). The pleasures and/or anxieties felt by this breakdown support a bifurcated understanding of a “state of exception” that can be premised on, produced by, or condemned because of Western desires for biopolitical transgression activated through border-crossing.

Agamben argues that “the suspension of law … [is the state of exception’s] original means of referring to and encompassing life” (1). If tourism acts as a state of exception by removing the promises and responsibilities of civil subjectivity, the duties
set forth by norms (more often than by laws proper), it also frequently confuses bios and zoë, political and animal life, forcing them “into a zone of indiscernibility” (Agamebn, *Homo Sacer* 9) and thus works in a related register as a conceptual framework for understanding narcotic effects on the body. Tourism and drug use re-produce biopolitical subjectivity through an affective and epistemological disruption of the subject “… at the threshold of passage between nature and politics, animal world and human world …” (107). Momentarily substituting zoë for bios, the privileged tourist and narcotic user transgress normative impositions on the body and become both the objects of intensive State biopower and emancipated from State sovereignty (9).

Furthermore, the tourist and narcotic experiences of subjective liminality work through manipulating the biopolitical realities of hosts/suppliers as well as guests/users, in tangential, but more immediately experienced and permanent economic, social and juridical ways. While re-evaluating what life means, discovering a precise collation of bios and zoë with regard to individual subjectivity, is a trope of tourism in legally liminal zones (and one that I explore later in relation to psychedelic drug tourism), the work of white self-gnosis through narcotic experimentation is typically only (and vaguely) made isomorphic to the “permanent state of emergency” (*State* 2) that justifies extra-legal power and naturalizes violence as product of and alleged end to the “drug war.” The project of this chapter will be to follow the connections that determine a racial and national hierarchal value of bare life, a measure of human utility that tourism and the drug industry incarnate through the traffic of illicit bodies and substances along more concrete economic schematics.
Despite the claims of politicians and other concerned individuals, the narcotics market is not simply some perversion of global capitalism, but it comprises its essential ontology. In context here, it “becomes elemental and part of the fabric of [the U.S. and Mexico]” (Bowden, Down 65). The narcotics market, like any transnational that renders citizens of the Third World disposable vessels of bare life, “[attracts] businessmen as voracious or heroic as any multinational CEO … [supports] tens of thousands of employees [and produces] dynamic spin-off effects” (Gootenberg 15). Gootenberg explains, “illicit drugs were among the first global goods to supersede borders and regulatory states in the quest for profit;” neoliberal capitalism in turn creates conditions for cheap drug production “… by accelerating Third World state collapse” (15; 24). And yet the reality of the drug trade, a four hundred billion dollar industry (surpassing the global oil market) is most often relegated to the other side of the abyssal line, rendered ontologically unintelligible when it threatens to expose the scale of its global incorporation (Bowden, Down 410; de Sousa Santos 1-3).

Charles Bowden maintains “that the drug industry is buried alive in a secret history and that this hidden history is demanded by the political needs of the United States and Mexico” (399). On this side of the line, it is easy for many to accept the transparency of the Mexican government’s involvement in the drug industry as part of a larger culture of corruption, or more intelligibly, as part of the economic necessities of the Third World on its slow path to modernity (310). What seems easier to forget is the U.S.’s complicity with cartels to fund Nicaraguan contras; that thirty percent of U.S. customs officials and a number of F.B.I. agents have proved receptive to taking mordidas; that U.S. and European banks have laundered literally trillions of dollars of
“dirty money” and subsequently, that the U.S. and Mexican economies would fall drastically with the loss of the drug trade (just as they would if they were deprived of Mexican migration) (3; 146; 267; 378; 413). The enabling presence of transnational networks here necessarily undermines rhetoric that would have an isolated Mexican “State” of exception.

Yet, the reality of the drug market remains necessarily inconceivable to ensure the illusion of First World political stability and righteousness. Gootenberg argues, “[b]orders, for political reasons … seem to mask the end of any visibility of murky trafficking organizations. We rarely will see how the borderland Arrellano Félix or García Abrego gangs operated on ‘the other side’ of the Mexican–United States divide, even when the profits are astronomical in domestic distribution” (25). Or as Bowden summarizes,

Drugs may be the major American story of our era, the thing that did more to alter behavior and law, that redistributed income to the poor far more dramatically than any tinkering with tax codes, that jailed more people and killed more people than any U.S. foreign policy initiative since the Vietnam War. But this vital force, this full-tilt-boogie economic activity, is absent from our daily consciousness and only surfaces when discussed as a problem. And this problem is always placed on the other side of town or the other side of a line or the other side of the river. (4)

A global narcontology insists on geo-epistemological partitioning that accepts/excepts the violence of so-called Third World development and corruption and monopolizes what, for Agamben, is the universal “secret solidarity between anomie and law” (Agamben,
State 71). Western democratic and juridical stability depend on the absence of such aporias, on expelling the contradictions that underlie and mobilize State sovereignty, displacing them onto othered States.

What role has literature performed in corroborating or combating this necessary obfuscation of our narcontology, our repressed yet essential dependence on the material production and consumption of narcotic substances, as well as the ideological and legal classifications and territorializations that maintain the geopolitical dominance of the First World? We know that marijuana played some undetermined role in the expatriate scene from the 1920’s to 1940’s. Katherine Anne Porter and Paul Bowles experimented with the drug in Mexico (Boon 164; Delpar 33). In Dark as the Grave, Lowry’s Sigbjørn Wilderness accidentally smuggles cannabis to the U.S., an odd mistake for a character so terrified of borders (52). Yet, with some exceptions (notably Antonin Artaud), we rarely see foreign literature invested in the subject of Mexican narcotics in a substantial way until the arrival of the beats, unless it reinforces the “normative” daemonization of drugs and the ethnic drug user.

In the following section, I locate various literary texts and tourist scenarios throughout the twentieth century that reveal their complicity with the incorporation of Mexican borderlands narco and vice culture. We again see the transfers and effects of biopolitical liminality that Western tourism desires and displaces onto frontier subjects—processes and responses that not only modernized and naturalized the border as a national as much as biopolitical division, but that set an important precedent for the “borderlandization” of Mexican tourism later in the century. My focus then settles on one specific drug and explores discourses on psilocybin tourism in the 1950’s and 1960’s. In
this period, we find the development of a counter-culture drug tourism that, like mainstream tourism generally, re-distributes an ecology of biopower between tourists and locals in the service of industrial hospitality. As I move from white to Chicana/o “psychedelic” literature, I will try to show the dangers of psychedelics, but also how the gnosis these drugs are capable of providing can be utilized not to reveal some divine truth for individualistic fulfillment, but the profane truth of our narcontology and its enabling legacy of coloniality. If the drug world remains on the hidden side of capitalism, it is crucial that we expose the lived realities of its uncanny schematics and overcome our First World amnesia.

Building on the theories I laid out in my first chapter, I here consider other conceptions of biopolitics in relation to capitalism, medicine and ethnicity and explore the neocolonial dimensions of a contemporary subgenre of tourism (vice tourism) that is not all that removed in its biopolitical production from mainstream tourism. However, when examining not merely the biopolitical effects, but affects of drug consumption on individuals and populations, positing a phenomenology of narcotics is a tricky subject. In one sense it asks that we challenge a division of zoë and bios as a state of exception beyond a historico-juridical qualification and as one that disrupts and transcends the division between nature and culture that Western modernity at large believes it has separated (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 109; Boon 11). Yet any focus on the metaphysical here attempts to understand it through its enabling material premises; as hazy as they appear, I point to the biopolitical assemblages between altered states and States, the spatial/temporal and ethnic/national codes that incarnate liminality and evaluate bodies according to powerful neocolonial measures.
The Enormous Vogue For All Things Illegal: Vice Tourism and the Borderlands

A largely forgotten memoir, John Houghton Allen’s *Southwest* (1952) is an extended and particularly bitter condemnation of the modern borderlands filled with longing for a nostalgic *ranchero* culture. It is emblematic of many of the texts I deal with in this chapter in that it connects racial discourse surrounding drug use with the act of literary creation. Further, Allen’s Mexico itself assaults white rationality in a manner akin to a drug experience: “… don’t ask me what makes the gringo go haywire on the Mexican border,” the author contests, “… all I can say is that something seems to get into the gringo’s blood down here, strange and gorgeous and exotic like marihuana and men do inexplicable things” (55).

Allen presents the tale of “a dope addict,” a grotesque minstrel he meets one night at a campfire (86). He recounts the strange story of this mestizo marijuana addict’s visit to an uncanny pre-Columbian land of “living dead” Toltecs, a “city lost in the dimensions of Time” in which the natives have enslaved a harem of white European women (91; 100). The minstrel is unable to rescue the women because the narcotic that stimulates this very fantasy has taken his resolve to patriarchal and ethnic duty and thus sapped him of any social productivity, except, of course, for his ability to tell stories. The “lovely weed … has been my degradation, my loss of caste,” he explains, “[but] it was worth the while … I have found even the Fountain of Gold … I have been king for a day with a whiff of the weed … I am a greater poet … than Calderón de la Barca, and I have the marihuana” (92). The moral of his tale is clear and spelled out in racist terms: “… you smoke the marihuana, and you take a long siesta with life, a long pleasant siesta, free from care. It is the dream and the smoking that count, and not the living. Ambition fades to nothingness”
Moreover, the drug experience is narrativized and fabulated; through the production of narco-literature, Mexico becomes the narcotic and geographical “Other Side,” the “forbidden city” that threatens the subject’s social utility, ethical boundaries, and fantastically weakens the gains of colonial power (88; 98).

Of course, the cultural logic of displacement that places narcotics beyond abyssal lines, but dangerously close to home, depends on maintaining the false, but ideologically potent idea of drugs being a foreign problem (or pleasure)—essentially an issue of the border. As in Carlos Castaneda’s work (from the late 1960’s to the 1990’s), which self-consciously straddles fiction and anthropology, border-crossing symbolizes an existential transition from a Western rationalism to the “nonordinary reality,” the “inconceivable worlds” associated in Castaneda’s texts with psychedelic drugs, the brujo Don Juan who literally lives in a “border town” and his narcotic pilgrimages south of the border (Teachings 13; 21-22; 70). Castaneda initially stops taking drugs when “nonordinary reality” persists and threatens the sphere of his rational, academic life (177).

The origins of Mexican drug tourism and trafficking are concomitant with the rise of a larger culture of twentieth century borderlands vice tourism which in turn performed a crucial role in Mexico’s integration into global capitalism. Thoroughly modern ideas about travelling to Mexico to escape from the pressures of First World biopolitical regulation (specifically laws, mores and moral standards) not only helped to spawn the creation of a drug empire in Mexico, but demanded the northing pull of (il)legal migrants and the modernization (and abyssal obfuscation) of border-towns like Ciudad Juárez, Mexicali and Tijuana (St. John 112).
From the turn of the century until the mid-1930’s, Progressive Era reforms and temperance movements made it difficult under moral and legal auspices to consume alcohol and narcotics on U.S. soil, as well as to engage in prostitution, gambling and gaming. Some U.S. states banned alcohol as early as 1900, but the Volstead Act of 1919 made the prohibition of alcohol a federal policy. In the same period, the 1914 Harrison Act effectively criminalized the proscription and usage of narcotics (Recio 25-26; Schantz, "Owl" 93). Taking advantage of the less-centralized political climate and consequent legal tolerance and/or ambiguity during and immediately following the Mexican Revolution, narcotic black markets, saloons, brothels and casinos emerged in the Mexican borderlands to satisfy a staggering U.S. consumer demand. Ninety-five percent of vice tourism’s revenue in the Mexican border cities came from U.S. citizens, ensuring, against the racist views of detractors, that this was hardly a “problem” inherent to Mexican culture (St. John 130). While promoters played up existing stereotypes of romantic and exotic Mexicanidad in marketing vice tourism and in spite of a seductive and dangerous allure associated with border commodities and the Hollywood-Mafioso culture of the borderlands (especially Tijuana), Schantz argues that vice tourist locations were essentially “white space”; local governments and police were keen to protect U.S. visitors from crime (or at least crime they weren’t wilfully engaging in) (“Owl” 99). At the same time, by way of cultural displacement, vice tourism’s acts of capital served to naturalize an ontological divide between Mexico and the U.S. in legal and moral terms (St. John 124).

42 The infamous Owl cabaret/saloon/brothel, for example was drawing 2,500 mostly white, middle-class tourists every weekend to Mexicali by 1909; ironically, 65,000 U.S. citizens in 1920 chose to celebrate their fourth of July in Tijuana, causing San Diego gas stations to run out of fuel (O. Martinez 58; Schantz, "Owl" 96).
In this respect, the Fitzgerald passage I begin this study with (from 1920) takes on a more specific historical valence. Amory Blaine, a New England dandy with deep, but often ambivalently acknowledged southern roots, is, like Allen’s minstrel, less interested in “the enormous vogue of things Mexican” than in accessing, as many of his contemporaries did, a sexual and narcotic intoxication in a climate of biopolitical laxity. The “exotic Mexican [God] who was pretty slack himself and rather addicted to Oriental scents” and who passively views his subjects without passing judgement is emblematic of this vice and a potent exonymic symbol of Mexico; his passions are as his night skies, “the colors of lips and poppies;” his scents are pleasant or intoxicating, aesthetic or narcotic, depending on the depth of inhalation (Fitzgerald 262).

The displacement of U.S. vice onto the borderlands is, according to Alexis McCrossen, “[the] way the border became modern, for it offered a safety valve for people unwilling to adhere to vice regulations promising tradition and stability” (31). The materialist aspects of this modernization are clear enough—Mexican border towns developed into commercial centres with large populations. It must be remembered, however, that while sensationalists and so-called moralists of various guises were condemning border tourism and Mexico and Mexicans which they saw as abstract emblems of the vice marketplace, vice tourism was largely a U.S. enterprise in its inception and throughout its heyday (St. John 119; 124). Like the Tivoli in Tijuana, Mexicali’s Owl was owned by U.S. citizens as were the majority of the women it employed as prostitutes (only six percent of these women were Mexican) (Schantz, “Owl” 96; 107; St. John 126). Many beer breweries and saloons were U.S. transplants forced to relocate with the advent of prohibition (O. Martínez 59). At the same time,
formal and informal taxes levied on the vice industry allowed the development of various public works projects which benefited local communities, while the opportunity for personal graft forged an enduring alliance between politicians, police and contraband markets (60). The urban infrastructural development of border towns, compounded by a surge of immigration from the interior (many of these migrants planned to work in the U.S. but found themselves the victims of new border requirements and racial quotas, exploitative work recruiters and proto-coyotes) resulted in the consolidation of modern cities with critical dependence on U.S. dollars (62-63; 75).

While opium remained illegal to cultivate and sell without State permission, opium dens continued to function because of the high tax revenues they, like other vice institutions, offered (Recio 36; Schantz, “Owl” 101). What was originally a drug trade global in scope would become aggressively local after the U.S. passed the Harrison Act; during the 1920’s, drugs began to be harvested throughout Mexico’s north west, the decade that prochronistically saw the use of the airplane as a transborder smuggling technology, an early testament to an always evolving narco-capitalist ingenuity (Recio 35-41). Following the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, Mexico would become the world’s centre of opium and marijuana production (W. Walker 120). Thus, the modernization of the border depended on the conscription of Mexican labour into asymmetrical economic relationships with the U.S. and generated a prevalence of discourses about the moral ambiguity or perversity of these kinds of labour —arguments that persist today surrounding Mexican migration and the drug industry. At the same time, Western liberalism, the economic system that not only supported but demanded China’s opium trade in the nineteenth century, fundamentally necessitates that the narcotics market
thrive as long as the “moral” arguments can be so easily displaced, re-centred that is, on othered producing cultures and laboring populations rather than on its own free market ideology (Ralston Saul 44; 104).

McCrossen argues that the border was also modernized by “offering a safety valve” for U.S. citizens (31), or what I have been presenting as a form of biopolitical escapism from the governing conditions of the white, capitalist, hetero-normative and hegemonic social body and its various assemblages of moral, legal and political codes, enacted or performed at transnational, national, local and individual levels. Arguments for and against vice tourism utilized this rhetoric of escapism in their respective promotions and detractions. Rachel St. John, in her study of border tourism from 1900-1934, cites a 1922 Californian newspaper advertisement which seductively and conspiratorially invites the reader to cross the forbidden boundary: “Would you escape the conventionalities which limit one’s enjoyment in this country?”; St. John contends that “promoters [such as the one responsible for this tag] lured Americans across the line with promises not just of drinks and diversions, but of temporary reprieves from the restrictions of American society” (129). And yet the advertisement is clearly U.S. American in its addresser and addressee, in its ideology of individual liberty and frontierism; engaging in vice tourism is an “American” right, it supports U.S. entrepreneurs, but its location “abroad” garnishes a kind of confidentiality, an exotic flavour, an unsustainable allowance of excess.43

43 Later in the twentieth century, this appeal would not be limited to U.S. visitors. In the words of Jeremy Sandford, an English psychedelic tourist in the early 70’s I consider later in this chapter, “British rulers … dictate about [the] substances we take into our bodies” in such a way as to deny “the possibility of ecstasy … our Bacchic birthright” (149). Mexico, with its “absence of restrictions” is a place where “the abnormal is normal,” and thus the normalizing mechanisms of social control cease to threaten the individual at a praxiological level, or even to maintain a coherent relevance (25; 1).
This psychogeographical territorialization of vice (and the epistemic violence that accompany it) are at the same time, as I have been arguing, necessary for the continuation and development of capitalism and First World authority. One Episcopal minister declared, “Tijuana is not so much a place as a condition … It represents a step over the line which means to many the temporary breaking from accepted standards and the letting down of moral conduct” (qtd. in Brégent-Heald 190). As Schantz argues, the crossing back into the U.S. after a vice tourism excursion was frequently (and I would add necessarily) felt “as a begrudging step out of the desacralized play of Mexico and back into the normative calendar of production that awaited … at home” (“Behind” 150).44 Even when faced with border curfews in state and federal efforts to curb vice, U.S. citizens illegally cut holes in the eight mile fence between Tijuana and San Diego to ensure their illicit satiation (Cabeza de Baca 169); “stepping over the line” was clearly becoming more of an addiction than a pastime.

Foundational U.S. narcotic laws, from 1914-35, just as literary texts and newspaper articles, presented drugs as threats to the moral behaviour of white citizens and that would in effect render all subjects unproductive in capitalist contexts (Ghatak). Saran Ghatak argues that these laws are fundamentally biopolitical on social and subjective levels: “At the collective level, the drug problem was framed as a threat of epidemic proportion to social health and national prosperity. Thus narcotic control policy emerged as a regulatory mechanism to secure the national population from the spread of

44 The moral critique was not one-sided. A 1944 Mexico City newspaper article condemned the resurgence in Juárez: “… [t]he güeros [‘blondies’], the bolillos [‘whites’], the gabachos [‘foreigners’], as Americans are known in Juárez slang, behave not as people who are visiting a city, but as persons who hold the impression that they have crossed a threshold of an entertainment center in which anything goes, from yelling and frolicking to caressing and kissing women impulsively on the street” (qtd. in O. Martínez 104-5).
addictive substances through an elaborate system of surveillance and control” (Ghatak). The individual drug user came to be “a deviant subject” that must be “normalized,” that is until penal incarceration become the more dominant mode for controlling him/her (Ghatak). Equating marginalized cultures with drug use and accessibility, specifically during this period, Mexican, Black and Chinese communities received more extensive and disproportionate surveillance and disciplinary action (Ghatak). In this respect, the persecution of Mexicans for their association with drug use is homologous in its biopolitics to the mass deportation of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans during the 1930’s: Mexican bodies are criminalized as threats to white employment, sexuality and social stability. Linked ethnically to this uncanny drug-induced/inducing Mexico, Mexican immigrants (and one should add the original Mexican inhabitants of border states), as Marcus Boon argues, became criminal “‘doubles’ of Americans, with their mysterious vices,” just as cannabis, with its medical and aesthetic legacy, became “‘marijuana’ … its own sinister double,” a term with obvious racial connections. (156; 168). As Mary Pat Brady explains, the “narcospatiality” of our transnational drug culture, through its production of spaces and subjectivities, hypercriminalizes othered ethnicities and communities through its exhaustive micro- and macro-geopolitics (172-74; 197).

The popularity of vice tourism waned during the 1930’s, but gained back its momentum a decade later with Tijuana and Juárez receiving flocks of U.S. soldiers after the usual sorts of saturnalia (Cabeza de Baca 171; O. Martinez 103-5). While eight million U.S. citizens visited Mexico in 1940, the country’s popularity as a tourist

45 The economic impact of the Great Depression on middle-class disposable income was not the only reason for the decline. Prohibition was repealed in the U.S. in 1933, which forced many Mexican black market merchants to enter the marijuana and opium/heroin trades (Campbell 41). In 1935, the Cárdenas administration closed or expropriated popular U.S. casinos and spas under U.S. ownership (Schantz, “Owl” 125-26).
destination continued to grow in the following decades; in 1960, the number of tourists from the U.S. rose to thirty-nine million, with vice tourist spots still a popular itinerary along the border (Brégent-Heald 199). In addition to offering narcotics, alcohol and prostitution, a visit to the borderlands became a popular means to procure a quick and legal divorce (Kearney and Knopp 228); remember that On The Road’s Dean Moriarty had primarily come to Mexico to end his marriage—the “kicks” were secondary. Thus, besides offering the commodities and institutions of vice tourism, the border seemed to further undermine the biopolitical order of the U.S. by affording citizens the opportunity to divorce and consequently rupture the agency of the nuclear family, a fundamental aggregate of social order and governance.

Associations between the border and narcotic consumption gained greater currency during the 1950’s and 1960’s. The post-war period saw a number of films that not only repeated the same cultural tropes about permissively carnivalesque behaviour inherent to the Mexican borderlands, but others that played up the sensationalist fear of white U.S. teenagers engaging in promiscuous sex and experimenting with narcotics in Tijuana, morally contaminated by their encounter with a dangerous and exotic other (Brégent-Heald 199-200). The beats responded to this sensationalism by reappropriating it in into their own oppositional politics, offering a messianic dimension to vice tourism that we have already seen in On The Road.

William S. Burroughs’s Junky (1953), which explores the refugee-hipster milieu of Mexico City perhaps most strongly elaborates the ethico-juridical binaries between the

46 It was precisely this fear of contagion and contamination, particularly when narcotics were involved, that ideologically justified the mass deportations of 1954’s Operation Wetback, just as similar rhetoric about borderlands vice had helped push for large scale forced repatriation during the 1930’s (Brégent-Heald 200). I explore the rhetoric of contagion more substantially in the final chapter.
U.S. and Mexico’s drug cultures. To be a heroin addict in the U.S., according to the novel’s polemic, is to be *homo sacer*. The body’s overwhelming desire for illegal substances and and its consequent physical deterioration expel the junky from the larger biopolitical community with the same force that mobilizes his/her State scrutiny and punishment (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 181). It is not simply that the junky becomes a criminal by choice, but that his/her very liberty to take heroin is guaranteed through an excessive biopolitical abandonment by and incorporation into the State (106-7).

In the U.S., the novel explains, narcotic laws are unstable, constantly redefined in harsher capacities in proportion to a more vigilant, but paranoid social control; like all laws they are “situational” and their applicability to all subjects can be suspended to secure and enforce power (16). Thus a medico-legal signification of addiction is strategically incorporated into a disciplinary biopolitics of the State so that “biopolitical borders … [are redefined in ways that indicate] that the exercise of sovereign power … cuts across the medical and biological sciences” (159; 164). “…[T]he term ‘addict’ is not clearly defined [and] no proof is necessary or even relevant under a law so formulated [i.e. making it a crime to be an addict]. No proof, and consequently, no trial” (Burroughs 142). Protagonist William Lee testifies, “This is police-state legislation penalizing a state of being” (142). In New Orleans, the bare life of the subject, the body itself removed from any coherent politics, becomes an object of police scrutiny: “The cops began stopping addicts on the street and examining their arms for needle marks … If the law could find no marks on a man they usually let him go. If they found marks they would hold him for seventy-two hours and try to make him sign a statement” (79-80).
In Mexico, the state of exception *ipso facto* abandons subjects of narco culture but guarantees them the opportunity to “remain abandoned.” Drug dealers are able to pay off police (115); doctors are either more sympathetic to the junky’s needs or are bound to selling morphine without asking questions of their customers because of their own poverty (118). Where U.S. drug laws are repressive and utilize a number of biopolitical apparatuses in their application, Mexico’s political relation to narcotics is holistic and transparent (or at least for an expatriate with an income). One politician even sells William Lee an ounce of heroin at a reasonable price because, as the politician claims, “I don’t know anything about this stuff … All I use is cocaine” (149). Lee is surprised at the apparent banality (and normalcy) of sampling the drug in the politician’s office: “People … were walking in and out … Nobody paid us any mind sitting there on the couch with our sleeves rolled up, probing for veins with the needle. Anything can happen in the office of a Mexican politician” (150). While various implicit or explicit racist arguments have historically sought to explain this localized perversion of liberal-democratic ideals and market behaviour in the crudest terms, they have also played a role (like beat literature) in initiating patterns of drug tourism.

Burroughs’s *Junky* concludes by transforming the protagonist’s need for heroin into a curiosity about the psychedelic *yage*, a maneuver that is oddly symbolic (and symptomatic) of a coming generational iteration of vice tourism. Counter-cultural travel from the late 1950’s to the early 1970’s, more so than any other period in the twentieth century, openly addresses the social utility of particular kinds of Mexican narcotics. The transgressive movement of tourists into forbidden zones, while still open to normative scrutiny and its sensationalist hyperbole, is to an extent exposed by participants eager to
engage with each other to produce a new knowledge of psychedelic drugs in terms of spiritual, anthropological, oppositional and communitarian potentials. Indeed, the beat trope of liberation and biopolitical transgression in Mexico would reach its apotheosis in the 60’s when, for Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, going south of the border was at once fleeing U.S. drug laws, experimenting with forbidden substances and “seeking satori” (Wolfe 4). Wanted on drug charges, Kesey declared, “[i]f society wants to make me an outlaw … then I’ll be an outlaw, and a damned good one … People at all times need outlaws” (264). It is in Mexico, “the land of all competent outlaws,” Kesey reaches his psychedelic epiphany (Wolfe 365; 323).

It would not be a hasty generalization to suggest that, with the demise of the counter-culture, vice tourism reappeared in its earlier form, strategically partitioned and marked by a necessary obfuscation of our narcontology. The same sensationalist arguments, racist policies and covert and temporary operations of biopolitical escapism mandate an epistemological refusal of our transnational narcotic relationship. The stereotypes today about vice in the borderlands are persistent in the North American cultural imaginary as is the vice market, perhaps now most heavily dominated by the drug trade. As a popular independent magazine, fittingly entitled Vice, proclaims on their website’s travel page,

Restaurants, taco stands, pharmacies, bars, dance clubs, drinks, drugs, shops, stalls, Mexican crafts, surgery, dentists, souvenirs, sex, fun, anonymity, notorious bootleg brand-name clothing, timepieces, and games are all in walking distance from the border. And it’s a whole lot cheaper; especially since the peso was thrashed by the financial crisis … Everything
that is considered dangerous or overlegislated in the US has a place in “Tijuas,” as the locals lovingly call it. It could easily be named one of the ugliest tourist cities in the world, but it grows on you for one simple reason: Tijuana is an escape from the rigid constraints on the other side of the border. It is as far away from the sterilized feel of the American mall as can be; it feels alive and real in all its seductive unbeauty. (Gómez-Mont)

At present, studies suggest that there are more than twenty thousand illegal drug retail sources in Tijuana and even more in Juárez, though local consumers are more prominent and exporting narcotics is more profitable with tourists more likely to avoid the quotidian violence in Juárez especially (Bowden, Murder 45). The Mexican tourism ministry states that tourism to border cities increased eleven percent in 2008, though figures from 2009 mark a downturn in national tourism overall (Collins). During the 1960s, the Mexican government attempted to gentrify the border cities, dampening associations with vice and developing infrastructure for family-oriented and cultural tourism (Ward 196-201). The results were unsuccessful: the concurrent development of maquiladoras muted the urban aesthetics of a pre-fabricated Mexican experience (203-4). The tourists who continued to visit, most often from bordering U.S. cities, were still pursuing the same forms of vice as they had before and throughout the twentieth century, while new coastal megaresorts, as Evan R. Ward argues, created new “borderlands” for leisure tourists more likely to fly than drive to a vacation destination (203-7). The 1980s neoliberal turn in Mexican economics allowed heavy European and North American investment in these new resort-centred, manufactured cities drawing greater numbers of European and Canadian tourists
to spend holidays in Mexico and ensuring a new standard of the megaresort in Mexican tourism (210).

Yet, it is not enough to say that resorts have become borderlands. As I will attempt to show here, collective acts of tourism in Mexico, regardless of their geographical destinations, participate in a general borderlandization of Mexico: they reconfigure the space and lived experience of the colonial *choque,* "[the] coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 100). While the languages, market drives, desires and ideologies may be different, the entitlement and imposition of liminality remain consistent. Gloria Anzaldúa, who I discuss later in this chapter, writes, "[a] borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants" (25).

Acts of drug tourism, backed by financial power, instantiate the liminality of spaces and of the people occupying them. The geographic borderlands at once offer the tourist an experience of bare life (beyond governing social and legal codes), and force bare life into the subjectivity of its inhabitants (allowing them to be killed and/or raped without punishment as drug war casualties, controlling and “junking” their bodies in maquiladoras). The forbidden transgressions of the First World tourist condition the “transgressive” operation of *othered* spaces of exception with this uncanny doubling of bare life.

If, as I have been suggesting, we live a global narcontology, any specific discussion of how modern literature approaches this subject will need to be limited. To retain my focus on Mexican tourism, the next section of this chapter will consider
psychedelic tourism in the 1950s and 1960s. I make this choice in part because the counter cultural interest in a small town in Oaxaca generated a distinct moment of tourism that produced its own literary accounts, many of which have remained forgotten in academic discourse. The Huautla pilgrims rearticulate the biopolitical determination of modern borderlands tourism discussed above, though the challenge they offer to the governing order and its expectations of them is more messianic in its transgression. Further, the search for a “psychedelic Mexico,” a consumable geography that self-reflexively expropriates Indigenous knowledges further consolidates the exonymic illicit mystique of Mexico discussed in my introduction—the Huxlean “heaven and hell” of psychedelia resonates with the “infernal paradise” motif in writing about Mexico. Finally, I focus on psychedelic drugs here because in some ways they come closest to affecting the transdeterminacy of the borderlands, to supplementing the violent ruptures that take place in the unequal encounters between human and plan(e)t, “new” and “old” worlds, colonizer and colonized, the material and the spiritual, centre and periphery, archive and repertoire. To say that the borderlands are psychedelic risks promulgating the rhetoric of drug tourism itself, but to say that the psychedelic world is a borderlands calls for its historiography, for an account of how its anxieties and ecstasies are embodied transculturally and how the power of its ruptures—its biopolitical synaesthesia—can be utilized to alter our geopolitics.

“Trafficking with the Spirit World”:47 Tripping Psychedelic Mexico

On one level it seems as erroneous to highlight psilocybin’s importance in a genealogy of global narcontology as it is to suggest that “magic mushroom” consumption in the 1950’s and 60’s shaped contemporary travel discourse about Mexico. The drug

47 (Anzaldúa, Borderlands 59).
itself is not comparatively popular nor is it addictive (Letcher 21), making it a less than likely catalyst to stimulate the violent exchanges that come with large-scale traffic and consumption. Earlier cult(ural) pilgrimages to Huautla de Jiménez to find the legendary María Sabina and consume her *niños santos* have now been replaced by more isolated and less momentous excursions undertaken most often by urban Mexican and European tourists (Feinberg 133). At the same time, the transnational interest in and knowledge about psilocybin in the present are definitively shaped by two decades of travel writing (ethnographic and literary) that encounter Huautla in various ways (Letcher 225). The excitement surrounding mushroom use and often María Sabina specifically generated a distinct cultural moment that extended the physical and ideological limits of tourist expropriation and enhanced the intensity of biopolitical transgression in an *othered* geography (while consolidating the utility of this cultural performance). People, beliefs and objects coded as premodern were “discovered” and entered the commodity market in visible ways⁴⁸ and the product most novelized offered not merely a re-normalizing respite from the biopolitical regulations and controls of home: for some users, it promised an escape not only from subjectification, but from subjectivity itself.

Psilocybin tourism thus shares with a larger vice tourism the impetus to suspend norms and laws (imposed internally as well as externally) and to re-produce subjectivity in transcendental terms. My interest here is how mycological knowledge and pleasure (and assemblages of both) have been utilized to challenge and support the biopower of racial and national subjects and communities and how psychedelic discourses about the

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⁴⁸ The town’s coffee market established during the Porfirato (Feinberg 44-46) certainly placed the community within a larger pre-existing system of capitalist exchange, though this does not garner attention in narco-travelogues predisposed to seeing the community's premodernity. Albert Hoffmann, recounting a 1962 trip to Huautla with Gordon Wasson, mentions that the town’s president had been recently murdered for trying to institute a fair trade coffee program, but the matter is left as an aside (121).
radical recoding of the subject that otherwise challenge normative conceptions of the natural and social body—of zoē and bios—come to stabilize their terms to interpellate populations in neocolonial contexts precisely through defining the value of Western knowledge and affirming the rights of tourist pleasure.

I explore first how quasi-academic and literary texts discursively (and self-referentially) spored a culture of knowledge surrounding psilocybin. In 60’s counterculture, this knowledge would activate a series of pleasures that depended on sexualizing, segregating and intensifying a transnational narco-culture in Huautla that reconceived the drug as a technology of self-care and escapist pleasure. While their tourist performance is framed as a (partial) critique of First World biopower, the hippies mimic more dominant practices of biopower through their neocolonial behaviour.

“Tripping,” Lindsay Michael Banco’s term for a generic “mutually determining relationship between [narcotics and travel]” can sometimes evoke “neo- or quasi-imperial conceptions of travel … [to assuage the] disturbing risk to stable identity” (3). The transitory quality of the “Trip” presupposes a return to the familiar, the revocation of social laws, normative cognition. The conflation of “exotic” travel and psychedelic consumption often presents a liberatory vulnerability to the otherwise impermeable Western (and typically white) body through a mediated incorporation of otherness, a process that challenges what Ed Cohen sees as the "self-interiorizing and defensive" modern body with its “ceaseless … boundary maintenance” (8). Cohen argues that the historically contingent significance of the subject’s “immunity” to the outside—the scientific and medical apotheosis of modern legal and political theory—“[inaugurates] a new political economy of modern personhood” by naturalizing the “immanent human
body [as] a temporal and spatial locus for biopolitical agency” (8-9). The modern Western body is “a proprietary body, a body whose well-bounded property grounds the legal and political rights of ‘possessive individualism’” and thus stands opposed to (and, as I will argue, desirous for) that “icon for a nonmodern or premodern body … Bakhtin’s ‘grotesque body’—a body radically open to the world both temporally and spatially, simultaneously eating, shitting, fucking, dancing, laughing, groaning, giving birth. falling ill, and dying” (7). Taking psychedelics may then serve as an act of what Cohen identifies as "troubling the bounded body[’s] … self consonance, sometimes fearfully, sometimes pleasurably, sometimes pleasurably because fearfully, sometimes fearfully because pleasurably" (75). Through an Agambenian lens, “Tripping” challenges bios by breaking down the rational ontology that mitigates the subject’s civil status, instead overwhelming with the concentrated intensity of zoē, bare life. But when the ambivalent act of resigning biopolitical agency, the power of immunity, the coherency of bios and the ‘bordered’ body, comprises a general model of white catharsis, the pleasures and fears of narco-pilgrimage do not seem all that removed from the desires and repulsions of historical colonialism (or for that matter, modern tourism). Rather they construct a transnational and contemporary dimension to the criollo attraction to shamanism. As Michael Taussig argues in his groundbreaking Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man, the “evil magic invested into colonized people and so useful in creating colonial hegemony [can be] pictured into the world to serve as the means by which the colonizer gains release from the civilization that so assails him” (327).

Exploring Western discourses surrounding mushroom use in Huautla therefore elucidates the mutable but symbiotic relationship between tourist biopolitics and a global
geopolitics bound up in the deterritorializing schematics of colonial teleology. What is so fascinating here and what I will attempt to explicate is how species of Mexican fungus assumed a radiant nodal point in a matrix of power that is deterministically illusive yet precisely labyrinthine—indeed, a psychedelic network—that involved an Indigenous community and various official- and counter-cultural figures from Mexico, the U.S., England and beyond. All of these actors complexly competed and negotiated in apprehending applications and affects of psilocybin in a biopolitical context—its potential to cure, control, corrupt or liberate the body in ways that undermine or reinforce (and sometimes both) the shifting social structures of power in global capitalism. We can therefore understand psychedelic tourism and the discourses it produces not as historical novelty or anomaly, but precisely through its relation to other domains, practices and effects of power: scholarship, cold war experiments with rogue population control, and most importantly for this study, technologies and schematics of pleasure tourism (Foucault, Security 119).

Before turning to Huautla, however, it is important to situate its tourist heyday in a twentieth-century discourse about “psychedelic” Mexico. The literary groundwork for this psychotropic-geography was laid in D.H. Lawrence’s The Plumed Serpent (1926) in which the Mexican countryside and its Indigenous inhabitants disrupt the “historic humanity … the mental-spiritual life of white people” and thus allow his protagonist to experience “the old mode of consciousness … the subtle, dark consciousness, non-cerebral, but vertebrate” (413). In Lawrence’s Mexico, “[c]oncrete, jarring, exasperating reality had melted away, and a soft world of potency stood in its place, the velvety dark flux from the earth, the delicate yet supreme life-breath in the inner air” (105). The idea
of exchanging cerebral consciousness for a pure bodily awareness (that becomes an excessive subjectivity, connecting the body to the outside world in order to understand itself; again, becoming-subject through a primary relation to zoë rather than bios) is taken up a decade later by Antonin Artaud who, this time, is actually writing about his peyote experiences with the Tarahumara. As Derrida explains, “[Artaud] hoped that Mexican drugs would allow the emancipation of the subject; provide an end to that subjection which from birth had somehow expropriated the subject; and most of all, provide an end to the very concept of the subject” (26). I discuss the 1950’s and 1960’s (counter)cultural appeal of psilocybin below, and though this represents the most significant collective narco-spiritual investment in Mexico from outsiders, a fringe interest, often part of the New Age movement, exists to this day. Carlos Castaneda's decades-long engagement with the borderlands brujo “don Juan” (since the mid-1970’s, academia has discredited these encounters' claims to anthropological validity) takes him into northern Mexico several times to experiment with an assortment of psychedelic substances in his quest for an othered or othering power and knowledge. His popular works have inspired Westerners to make their own pilgrimages to Mexico and experience “authentic” peyote rituals. Not surprisingly, this has caused many problems for Huichols particularly, mirroring the effects of psychedelic tourism on Mazatecas I discuss in a moment (Schaefer and Furst 507-12). Perhaps the most influential figure of today’s narcotic New Age movement is Daniel Pinchbeck who, exactly like Lawrence almost a century before, envisions (read: hallucinates) Quetzalcoatl returning to earth to save the West from its destructive modernity. While truly contemporary in his anxieties (the ecological crisis, Jihad, the corporatization of the world) and in his mobility (he consumes psychedelics in
the U.S., Mexico, Gabon, Ecuador and Brazil), Pinchbeck's exorbitant collocation of seemingly every New Age interest and subjective readings of Third World knowledges and traditions shows his work to be the product of more than the cure for a modern Western pathology (1; 34-35; 43; 253; 334; 367-70).

The Western fascination with psilocybin largely began in May 1957 (four months before the debut of On The Road) with the publication of “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” in Life Magazine. The article’s hook intriguingly promised the reader a nostalgic tale of the gentleman-adventurer in primitive lands: “A New York banker goes to Mexico's mountains to participate in the age-old rituals of Indians who chew strange growths that produce visions” (“Seeking”). Robert Gordon Wasson, the article’s author, was the vice president of J.P. Morgan & Co. and an amateur ethnobotanist. Along with his wife Valentina, a Russian immigrant and paediatrician, Wasson wrote Mushrooms, Russia and History (the Life article is essentially an advertisement for the book), inaugurating a new scholarship termed “ethnomycology” that examines “the influence of fungi, especially mushrooms, on the historical, cultural, social and religious development of civilizations” (Evans Schultes 13). In 1953, Wasson began the first of ten extended excursions to Huautla to study the use of psilocybin and other psychotropic substances among the town’s Indigenous community (Letcher 82). His most important encounter occurred in 1955 when he met María Sabina, the curandera who would become key protagonist of and muse to his pseudo-scholarly oeuvre (82). Sabina allowed him and his photographer Allan Richardson to consume the mushrooms during her all-night velada. Soldering the uniqueness of this, Wasson explains, “Richardson and I were

49 He also coined the term “entheogen” which means “generating the idea of god” or “god generated within.” The term, he decided, was preferable to “hallucinogen” and, judging by their adoption of it, New Age narco-celebrants like Pinchbeck agreed with him (Evans Schultes 16; Riedlinger 9).
the first white men in recorded history to eat the divine mushrooms, which for centuries have been a secret of certain Indian peoples living far from the great world in southern Mexico” (“Seeking”). To claim the originality and thus the utility of his scholarship, Wasson affirms, “[n]o anthropologists had ever described the scene that we witnessed” (“Seeking”). Until his death in 1986, Wasson continued to write about cultures of psilocybin, though he believed his most prized contribution to ethnomycology to be María Sabina and her Mazatec Mushroom Velada (1974), a trilingual transcription and audio recording of one of Sabina's ceremonies (Brown 22).

The Life article presents the thesis that essentially comprises Wasson’s life work: “In man's evolutionary past, as he groped his way out from his lowly past, there must have come a moment in time when he discovered the secret of the hallucinatory mushrooms,” a secret, for Wasson, that “… planted in primitive man the very idea of god … [through the] beatific sense of awe and ecstasy and caritas engendered by the divine mushrooms” (“Seeking”). In the “remote” and pre-Hispanic space of Huautla, just as in the colonial hinterlands of Borneo, New Guinea and Siberia (where “there are six primitive peoples⎯so primitive that anthropologists regard them as precious museum pieces for cultural study”), Wasson claims to find contemporary residue of the origins, that “lowly past” of 'European and Asian civilization uncontaminated by modernity (“Seeking”). Like that of Lawrence and the narco-New Agers, Wasson’s project (and later the work of his circle) attempts to harness the affective power (“the awe and ecstasy and caritas”) of a “lost” Indigenous knowledge on Western subjectivity through a discursive incorporation that formulaically hierarchizes white expertise. As Louis Owens says of Whitmanian imperialism, but seems applicable to Wasson’s thesis, the text “…
claims possession of the womb of humanity in a great universalizing narcissism that subsumes everything in its tireless, inquiring quest after its own image” (216).

Wasson never spoke Mazateca and even when he employed a translator, he was fascinated by Sabina’s body (her movements, her intonations), a trope consistent with many accounts of hippy tourism to Huautla. It is not enough to say that Wasson maintained an authoritative power by reducing his other to the determinations of his own discourse, but that Sabina's own power comes only to reside in her bare life: she is removed from the bios, from any system of intelligible politics and like psilocybin itself must be classified with the intervention of a global idiom. Furthermore, the exhaustion of the other’s body as a repository of cultural practice is justified in the service of Western knowledge and utility. Wasson defends his self-declared leadership in cultural genocide: when the counter-culture seized on his writing and “contaminated” his isolated, premodern Huautla through tourism, his nostalgia for the “vanishing native” was only tempered by the self-declared righteousness of his white burden (Owens 218; Wasson, “Retrospective” 20).50

The mushrooms gave Wasson—and with his hubris, “the world”—more than an “academic” knowledge (“Retrospective” 20). Though the Life article markets Wasson’s research under strict scholarly auspices and the author’s own experience consuming the mushrooms is considered secondarily, perhaps this occlusion made his experience more tantalizing to the magazine’s audience. Following Sabina's velada under the influence of

50 As Benjamin Feinberg shows, Mazatec mushroom use continues in Huautla, as it did in the past, in polysemic ways that bring together “insider” and “outsider” knowledge: “the mimetic play of [the] representation [of mushrooms] … pass[es] back and forth between all sorts of individuals, plaguing any effort at systemic categorization” and opening up a multiplicity of fungivorous signification (134). Moreover, Feinberg’s reading of Sabina’s veladas demonstrates that, perhaps self-evidently, but antithetical to Wasson’s claims, “the Mazatec world [was not] rigidly separated from the historical world of the capitalist world system”; rather, he shows how Sabina draws on and manipulates spatio-temporal assemblages of power that include the modern nation state and the archive (187).
psilocybin, Wasson recounts that his visions “reached a plateau of intensity” that, consistent with much psychedelic literature, disrupted the privileged position of the body as the locus of identification (“Seeking”). He experienced “… a split in the person, a kind of schizophrenia, with the rational side continuing to reason and to observe the sensations that the other side is enjoying” (“Seeking”). This inherently felt dialectic of reason and sensation produces then an existential pleasure that promises both (dis)corporeal enjoyment in addition to a larger messianic (here in an academic context) utility. While deemed less important by the comparative brevity it is given, his own account of “Tripping” gives him an authoritative credibility; much to Wasson’s chagrin, within a few years, his article would begin the launch of a thousand Volkswagens with the promise of radical and personal narcotic stimulation in Mexico.

The hippy tourist interestingly finds an important precursor in Valentina Wasson who published her own account of her first experience with the mushrooms a few days after the Life article in This Week magazine. Unlike her husband, Valentina foregrounds not only her personal experience ingesting the drug as the theme of her writing, but a recreational aspect of psilocybin becomes the primary cause for its consumption. Her overtly sensationalized “I Ate the Magic Mushroom,” juxtaposed with Gordon’s article, plays on and shifts gender assumptions about narcotic experimentation. Moreover, her purpose here is not to posit a universalist theory of cultural development, but to have a “weird and wonderful experience” (186). She thus refuses to acknowledge her own hand in the co-authorship of Mushrooms, Russia and History, accrediting the rigors of research to her husband, while playing up stereotypes about narcotics, ethnicity and femininity to stimulate her audience. The confessional quality of the title exemplifies the article’s
initial theme of female subordination (almost to a point of terrorism) to a dangerous foreign force that penetrates the borders of her body. The article begins with Wasson paralyzed, “lying in my sleeping bag on the damp earthen floor … struggling to keep control of myself but I knew full well that with every minute I was being pulled deeper into another completely unknown world” (183). Unlike Gordon who tries to broach the subject with a scholarly distance, Valentina fears “I was going to experience a self-induced bout of schizophrenia” that threatens to overtake any semblance of rational control (183). After taking the mushrooms out of boredom with her eighteen year old daughter, Valentina initially resolves to resist the foreign substance in her body: “I had made up my mind not to give in easily to this seductive alien drug” (184).

Yet, when she does “give in,” the sensation of disembodiment (“It was as if my very soul had been scooped out … leaving my physical husk behind in the mud hut”) is “blissful” (185). The drug experience becomes both metaphor and direct experience of tourism. Among her discorporate journeys, she visits an eighteenth century court at Versailles, attends an opera at the MET, and, according to her desire, returns to the nostalgic and pre-revolutionary Russia of her childhood (185). Her account thus affirms the pleasures of narcotic usage in terms of tourist mobility and consumption. Unlike her husband, and like many of the hippies to come, she refuses to follow the cultural regulations of mushroom use imposed by the curandera and transgresses the limitations and expectations that specifically code female drug consumption by affirming the primary use value of psilocybin as a technology of pleasure (rather than of knowledge).

Further, in transgressing the limits placed on subjectivity by transcending the body itself,

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51 According to Brady, “[in] cultural production especially, drug experimentation is gendered masculine, brave and defiant. Drug addiction is gendered feminine, hysterical and dependant” (194).
and its position in a coherent space and time, Valentina Wasson’s account establishes an important precedence of narco-tourist performance that will assume more nuanced countercultural utility in the 1960’s with the height of drug tourism in Huautla.

If the idea of a Russian-born doctor writing about her experiments with mind-altering drugs might have been unsettling for some of This Week’s readership in 1957, it could have been reassuring to know that by the time of the article’s publication, the U.S. government had already begun investigating the potential uses of psilocybin in a military context. While the Wassons promoted the drug for its ability to constellate archival knowledge or induce subjective pleasure, the C.I.A. was interested in the drug as a dispositif of social control; from its very emergence in a Western context, the mushroom embodied the polyvalency of biopolitical technology. While Gordon had noted the capabilities of the drug to induce extrasensory perception in the Life article, he later claims to have been cautious about elaborating on the subject for fear of the drug’s cooptation by “undesirables” (Wasson Britten 39-40). The C.I.A. was initially interested in psilocybin and other psychoactive drugs to induce information from or to manipulate the minds of subjects, ostensibly captured communists. This interest was so dominant that, as John Marks claims, in 1950, “[nearly] every C.I.A. document stressed goals like ‘controlling an individual to the point where he will do our bidding against his will and even against such fundamental laws of nature as self-preservation’” (23). After conducting various experiments with other narcotic substances, frequently with disempowered subjects (“mental patients, prostitutes, foreigners, drug addicts, and prisoners, often from minority ethnic groups”) the department became curious about the existence of Mexican psilocybin, though they were unable to locate samples on a state-
sponsored expedition in 1953 (10; 111). It was only after discovering Wasson’s research that the C.I.A. was able to obtain a sizeable quantity of the drug; unbeknownst to Wasson, the miserable “complainer” John Moore who funded and accompanied him on his 1956 trip to Huautla was an undercover agent (111-15). When the C.I.A. eventually purchased a synthesized version of the drug from the Swiss chemical corporation Sandoz, developed by Wasson's friend and colleague Albert Hoffman, they first tested the drug on African-American prison inmates (116).

This State-sponsored project of human experimentation with marginalized citizens signals, for Agamben, “… that in the biopolitical horizon that characterizes modernity, the physician and the scientist move into the no-man’s-land into which at one point the sovereign alone could penetrate” (*Homo Sacer* 159). Reduced to bare life and “[definitively excluded] from the political community,” the bodies of subaltern individuals cease to retain political agency and become here “human guinea pigs” (159). As one former C.I.A. veteran claimed, “his former colleagues reasoned that if they had to violate the civil rights of anyone, they might as well choose a group of marginal people” (Marks 89). The Wassons’s expropriation of Indigenous culture for the sake of Western knowledge and pleasure thus feeds back into and enhances state assemblages of discipline and control that further codify the power of subjectification in racist capacities—the natives come to embody a bare life outside of any relevant legal or social structure that ties to them to modern States and systems. Like the prison inmates, their value lies in their utility to a race-based hegemonic conception of a biopolitical community. With the advent of hippy tourism in Huautla, the role of Indigenous bodies and mushrooms assumed an intensified utility in white, tourist transgression that
prompted resistance to State sovereignty in ways that ultimately corroborated the legal and social liminality of Mexican (tourist) space until the Mexican State intervened and deported the foreign upsetters.\textsuperscript{52}

Like the Wassons, the Huautla pilgrims of the 1960’s prized originality and authenticity in narcotourism. They too conceived of the town’s Indigenous community in terms of personal utility—the natives at times serve an aesthetic function, adding to the exoticism of the landscape and of the mushroom experience; they become personal guides for white psychogeographic explorers bound to “know thyself”; or they inhibit tourist desire as hostile or insignificant annoyances.\textsuperscript{53} Further, the attraction of premodern knowledge and modern tourist pleasure that the Wassons had separated and gendered become conflated in the Huautla tourist’s rationale. The search for “a particular kind of otherness that could literally be consumed” (Feinberg 130) appears as a novelty, but, as I have argued, the coupling of self-exploration and sensual pleasure are consistent with twentieth century tourist and literary tropes about Mexico more broadly. Writing about Huautla in the 1960’s generally becomes less ethnographic and more autobiographical—the self’s experience dominates and personal desire becomes the primary reason for tourism and its archivization. Through an examination of accounts of travel to Huautla, we can see how the town is activated into the schematics of a post-war pleasure tourism that satisfies the desire for First World transgression. Of course, the idea of pleasure is complicated—the beach resort in Acapulco, the brothel in Tijuana and the

\textsuperscript{52} It would be tempting to draw Lowry into this movement from excessive impunity to intensive State persecution, but the literary accounts of Huautla tourism I have been able to locate all deal with periods before or after the purge.

\textsuperscript{53} Some pretended the natives did not exist (Feinberg 131), a strategy used by many white tourists to ignore poverty in the Third World.
curandera's hut do not produce the same affect or exist within the same institutional spheres. Yet, Huautla tourism indicates an extension of (most often in this period) U.S. consumer impulses that continue to create new markets in Mexico for social respite. The acceleration of U.S. mobility and capital, coupled with a countercultural sensibility of dissent and the lure of otherness, ensure a cathexis of Western desire in Mexican cultural geography, recoding the biopolitical significance of newly “discovered” space in manoeuvres that further underscore the borderlandization of Mexico.

As there are only two novels in English that deal with the peak of Huautla tourism, and even then barely, I will consider these novels and two other journalist accounts together rather than offer an extended exegetical treatment of a specific work. Read together, these accounts evoke each other as they identify and anticipate racial segregation between the white hippy community and Indigenous Mexicans. They illustrate what Arun Saldanha, in his study of drug tourism in Goa, India, identifies as the viscosity of psychedelic whiteness: “whites use the pleasure of drugs, art, ritual, travel, the risky, and the exotic to alter their minds and position in the world as whites” while “sticking together … in relative impermeability” (5-6). Countercultural whiteness “isn't antithetical to white modernity,” but, drawing on Stuart Hall, Saldanha argues that psychedelics is a kind of “unravelling from within’ of the ‘moral cement’ that defines the privileged position of the white bourgeoisie” (8; 12); or in terms of this project, a biopolitical transgression that only bolsters the structure and deployment of biopower by allowing a momentary and manufactured reprieve of its control. As opposed to Timothy

54 These accounts by white foreign authors never acknowledge urban Mexican hippy tourists either in common with themselves or even as distinct from Huautecos. Álvaro Estrada's memoir notes transcultural points of friction and solidarity between the two groups. For more on La Onda's appropriation of Sabina, see Yépez and Zolov (Refried).
Leary’s dictum “Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out,”\textsuperscript{55} dropping out is not permanent, nor is it strongly determinate: “Pschedelics is an ethical practice, a relationship to oneself, one’s body, one’s place in society and the world which seeks not to destroy the culture from which it sprang but to explore its fringe possibilities to the advantages of one’s individuality” (12). Of course, how a “fringe possibility” is placed is indebted to larger dominant cultural patterns of (neo)colonial behaviour deeply rooted in the materiality of economic exchange.

While it often presents concomitant ideas about revolutionary potential or spiritual rebirth, the emphasis on individual experience and escape from the stagnating normalization and subjectification of First World biopower demonstrates that Huautla tourism is formulaically inseparable from vice tourism. Perhaps this is clearest in the conflation of sex and drugs as homologous means of liberation. The hippies’ indulgence in public nudity, along with their use of marijuana, unregulated mushroom consumption (i.e. taking mushrooms in the day, without a \textit{curandera/o}, without abstaining from food or sex) and their reluctance to spend money offended their increasingly angry hosts\textsuperscript{56} and later invited police repression (Feinberg 131). For the hippies, however, the lauded liberation of the individual ego entitles a narcotic and sexual licentiousness that codes \textit{othered} spaces and people as desirable and tolerant agents of stimulation. In her post-beat

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\textsuperscript{55} Incidentally, the academic Leary became the countercultural Leary after taking psilocybin in Cuernavaca (Estrada 99).

\textsuperscript{56} As Estrada writes in his memoir, “Pocos entendieron, aprendieron, respetaron y se atrevieron a practicar la sabiduría ancestral del lugar. La mayoría no tenía otro objetivo que expandir la conciencia a través de los sacros honguitos [Few understood, learned or were concerned with the ancient wisdom of Huautla that they dared to practice. The majority had no other objective than to ‘expand their awareness’ through the sacred mushrooms]” (\textit{Huautla} 12-13; Translation Mine). Many Mazatecos were also angry at the hippies for coding mushrooms as “drugs,” a term loaded with recreational and criminal overtones: “… al decir que el \textit{nanacatl}, la divina carne, era no más que una droga, se lanzaba una blasfemia, un agravio a los oídos de los nativos [To say that \textit{nanacatl}, the divine flesh, was no more than a drug was blasphemous and offensive to the locals’ ears]” (63; Translation Mine).

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memoir *Troia* (1969), Bonnie Bremser recounts her self-imposed exile in Mexico. Hiding in Vera Cruz and Mexico City with her husband to escape his prison sentence, Bremser became a prostitute to support her family. Sex in the novel is both celebrated as a means of economic and individualizing freedom (reclaiming the utility of the female body outside of normative expectations) and maligned as a victimizing act (an ambivalent reading that I will discuss in the following chapter with regard to Maryse Holder’s letters). In either case, sex becomes a defining element of her Mexican life; she recounts, “most of the time I think about fucking or about doing something that will excite my senses” (145). The capitalist and repressive U.S. makes this “total revolutionary” immobile and threatens to constrain her “… in the triviality of American physical day-to-day nothing” (125; 208). Like her hero Jack Kerouac, Mexico offers her biopolitical liberation most often through sensual pleasure; she praises, “Mexico, Mexico, your sun crashes me in the head obliterating all bodily care, all shame” (13). Accordingly, taking mushrooms in Huautla promises to substantiate her entitled emancipation; through a familiar pattern of capitalist exchange that paradoxically places her in an imaginary, Indigenous pre-capitalist world, she is “overawed” that the natives have “no shame” (as she ideally sees herself) and uses the mushrooms to fully give herself over to this "whole other conception of living” (130; 132).

Similarly, in Jeremy Sandford’s *In Search of the Magic Mushroom* (1972), the British author’s quest for psilocybin is most often waylaid by sexually charged encounters or given over to rumination on the hedonistic nature of Mexican tourism. A friend early on in his voyage tells him that Mexico is “… like a magical land, you can do anything here that you want to if you have a will to do it” (6). Indeed, “the freedom of the
Mexicans, their absence of restrictions” justifies in terms of cultural sensibility a market for prepubescent prostitution, strip shows and a licensed indulgence in alcoholic and narcotic excess, public sex and nudity (25). Yet, like his compatriot Lowry, Sandford also at times attributes this ethical and legal liminality to U.S. pathologization; the “Coca-Colarization of Mexico,” linked to “a blazing sexuality,” “stretches into the farthest areas of Mexico that I penetrated” (109). While Mexicans “hate many gringos for using Mexico as a gigantic bedroom,” his nationality makes him more attractive to locals as compared to the “unstylish” and uncritical gringo (108-10). His status as a double-outsider foregrounds his role as voyeur in tourist debauchery until he is finally able to transcend the limits of his supplemental existence by consuming mushrooms. The community he joins is not Indigenous however, as the experience merely brings him closer to his U.S. girlfriend and thus, positions him as a member of the tourist fold.

Voyeurism is also key in Nat Finkelstein’s new journalistic “Hongi, Meester?” (1969) Experiencing a shared “orgasm of glee” during a velada with María Sabina’s “alluring” and “sensuous” daughter, the author frantically takes photographs of Sabina’s face, trying to capture the strange experience in a familiar tourist act (60).

These accounts not only demonstrate the conflation of narco and sex tourism in counter-cultural travel, but they also suggest that Mexico itself, the land and its inhabitants, are homogenous in their metonymic connection to transgressive/liberating behaviour. Like On The Road with its “Fellahin” Mexico, these texts render the entire country outside of any coherent or relevant system of biopolitical control but instead

57 The more recent British travelogue Sliced Iguana (2001) also concludes with the author’s participation in a peyote ritual which signals, in the text’s own terms, a more “genuine” transcultural encounter and one that reinscribes the intensity of Indigenous Mexican difference in terms of bodily affect.
seize on a conception of bare life that seeks out sources of animalistic pleasure with the promise of a liberated ontology. This idealized bare life is again also connected to fantastic preconceptions about a premodern Indigenous culture that can be freely and partially expropriated according to personal desires and counter-cultural chic (Zolov, *Refried* 108-9). Frederick Swain discussing his 1963 mushroom experience with Sabina, describes being inspired by the drug “to do the eagle dance” and “chant in Mazateca” (227). “[If] someone did the eagle dance on Tremont St. in Boston, it would be psychopathic,” he clarifies (228). “But to do the eagle dance in the dead of night in Huautla de Jimenez is the most normal thing in the world” (228). This spatialization of subjective normality on cultural as much as narcotic grounds supports a new biopolitical allegiance: after his mushroom experience, he concludes, “I don't feel a moral obligation to remain true to the social structure of New England. I much prefer to identify myself with the Mazatecas” (228-29). Bremser believes that the “Indian mushroom people live each day as if their lives were gifts which they in turn dedicate to the mountain and the mushroom” (92). Her expropriation, as always, is selective and she wants to experience the “religious … organic high” of psilocybin on her own terms (128). She does not “speak Indian” and “figured [it] was more hip” to buy mushrooms on the street and consume them herself instead of attending a ceremony (128-29; 131). Rather than attempt to make any meaningful connection with locals, according to the logic of the viscosity of race, she and her husband only bond with Italian narcotourists (138). She sees her experience as a complete commodity; leaving the town, she fantasizes, “I want to clutch Huautla and take it … in my hand” (137).
Finkelstein also bonds with the other white narcotourists; even the rudest hippies seem more suitable companions than the “idiotic” and “hostile” locals (55-56). Only the ageless “wise witch or holy demon” Sabina and her family are worthy of his attention, but only in context of their service (56). One of his fellow hippies explains, “that curandero shit … [is] not my bag. I don’t need an old hag mumbling in Mazatecan to turn me on. I don’t dig this Indian doctor jazz. I turn myself on. It’s not my culture” (55). The same hippy later calls Sabina “a whore” for charging money for her services (63). While Finkelstein is perhaps writing hyperbolically to demonstrate his comparative cultural sensitivity, the article leaves ample evidence of the author’s own destructive and selfish behaviour.

Finally, these accounts all involve a type of transcendence that represents a more extreme version of biopolitical transgression. As in the Wasson articles, the body itself loses its identifying agency or is dissipated into what Avital Ronell terms “fractal interiorities” (15). Sandford, for instance, loses his conception of time and his sense of self blends with the earth “in a wonderful organic and vegetable unity” overlaid with feelings of love (158; 161). Finkelstein experiences much the same thing: “… time no longer had any existence. Waves of energy coming from all of us were mingling and merging until we had no earthly forms. We were composed of energy waves of pure love” (59). Swain goes through patterns of becoming-Indigenous to becoming-god to becoming-child (227). Though he reckons that “the loss of identity caused by mushrooms” may be “terrifying” for some, this thanatopolitical potentiality reconstitutes life and vitality; he ends his article with the affirmative, “[m]an, that's really living” (228-29). This disruption of the civil life of the subject, the affective experience of feeling
one’s indistinction between human and animal (or the earth), between nature and culture, becomes emblematic of “… the dissolutio civitatis inaugurated by the state of exception” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 106-9). But if the mushroom threatens the limits of subjectivity, the borders of the body, with the excessive and vital otherness of pure *zōē*, an irrational and animalistic ontology, there is always an insurance that this liminality is temporary. The white body on mushrooms lives a synthetic thanatopolitics that poses no lasting threat, but rather through a kind of pleasure of liminality and radical difference, suggests a model of contemporary tourist desire. Indeed, the cultural and racial narcissism of hippy tourist expropriation, the widespread ignorance of cultural rules and mores and the premium placed on individual experience show that Huautla tourism is not all that unique from the genre of tourism overall. Thus, while gnosis depends on exempting the self from grounded forms of biopower (the State, the workplace, the home community) as well as from the norms and rules of Huauteocos, it reinforces a more expansive transnational biopower. The hippies’ ability to suspend laws and norms not only positions them in relation to, but incarnates First World sovereign power on a global scale—it allows them to assume a totalizing knowledge of psilocybin and Mazateco culture to be deployed in the service of a monocultural pleasure industry.

Further, the tourist’s promotion (through discourse and performance) of a selective fluidity in which otherness is made to permeate the borders of the white body in efforts to pleasure or guide that body though a process of self-directed subjectification directly impacts the biopolitical community of the Mazatecos. Again, if the hippies embody biopower, they perform “[t]he fundamental activity of sovereign power … the production of bare life as originary political element [for themselves and their hosts] and
as a threshold of articulation between nature and culture, zoë and bios” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 181). The desire for liminality codes Huautla's cultural landscape narcospatially, categorizing and criminalizing ethnic subjectivity in geographic terms (Brady 172-74) but also narcotemporally, placing it outside modern linear time and progression ideally, but accelerating its material incorporation into the folds of national and transnational sovereignty, heightening its significance in global capitalism in a way that is strategically forgotten (on both counts, placing it beyond the abyssal line). In a national context, as Heriberto Yépez argues, Sabina was daemonized as a Malinche figure “… because she appeared to call into question the deep premises of *mestizo* society.” Mexican intellectuals and media outlets played up fears of a new generation’s excessive allegiance to an Indigenous Mexico that in itself was inseparable from a U.S. (counter)cultural conquest; Sabina assisted the new colonizer and thus engendered Carlos Monsivais’s “chicanization of Mexico” (Yépez). Like the hippies, the Mexican State demanded a thorough biopolitical and excrescent assignation of Indigenous bodies to enact its own biopower. Perhaps Huautla more thoroughly becomes a kind of borderlands space of exception not because it impinges on an authentic *Mexicanidad* supposed to be carried forth unsullied by a new generation, but through the systemic ascription of bare life onto *othered* bodies in line with Western desires and further, in ways that secure a sense of unreality surrounding this process. We must also remember that hippy tourism literally made Huautla a borderlands—the military blocked entry to the town and set up checkpoints (that lasted until 1976), deported and jailed foreigners and thus controlled Huautescos’ engagement with the outside (Feinberg 131). Officials at the U.S.-Mexican

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58 Eric Zolov discusses at length the role of Sabina in *La Onda* (*Refried*).
border were also told not to allow foreign hippies to enter the country for fear that they, like Sabina, would further contaminate Mexican youth (Zolov, *Refried* 110).

Writing about Sabina’s experiences is difficult. As Indigenous story-teller/theorist Gerald Vizenor’s work shows us, it is important not to romanticize Sabina’s life or an Indigenous use of mushrooms in terms of white narrative desire, “as an absence, as a tragic, nostalgic closure of the enlightenment … straitened by victimry” (*Native* 10). Indeed, Feinberg implies that narco-tourism had no real negative impact on the community; many locals viewed the hippies simply as “curiosities” and while many Mazatecos are critical today about their 1960’s legacy, they are equally proud that their community achieved such a global stature (149-50). If travel represents power for Mazatecos, then the arrival of the hippies brought an active power from the outside that could be appropriated in terms of local identity (152-54). Feinberg’s analysis could prove that the curandera/o’s practice is an act of Vizenor’s “survivance” through its investment in “natural reason”; it manifests “a consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experience in the natural world” (Vizenor, *Native* 88). Thus, Mazateco mushroom use is a continuing cultural activity that opens a multiplicity of cultural meanings within a Mazateco context and is thus “… not a mere romance of nature, not the overnight pleasures of pristine simulations, or the obscure notions of transcendence [as it was for the hippies] and signatures of nature in museums [as it was for Wasson]” (88).

At the same time, Feinberg’s analysis, like hippy tourist performance, runs the risk of naturalizing geopolitical power dynamics in terms of a mutually beneficial, or at least post-political cultural transaction. He mentions that since the late 1980’s, “most
young [male Huautecos] have turned to [urban] migration as their only escape from starvation” and that as of 2000, many have moved on to the U.S. but he never addresses this further (56-58). If Mazatecos conceive of travel as a type of power, is it inconceivable that it might also be a source of exploitation that finds an important precedent in the community’s first and monumental encounter with the U.S.? Does not the promise and projection of a pure zoē for white narco-tourists predicate, in terms of Western desire and utility, the bare life of the migrant with no coherent legal or political existence? If the geographical Mexican borderlands became at once a frontier territory for transnational vice and exploitative labour, do we not see similar patterns of neocolonial intervention in the history of the West’s engagement with Huautla and Mexico more broadly?

While Feinberg dismisses Sabina's criticism of the hippy invasion as “a familiar romantic image of a doomed, feminized Indian culture” (148), by discounting her he is complicit in Wasson's project of silencing an opposition because it troubles his own hypotheses. Sabina explained that the hippies “… didn't respect our customs. Never, as far as I can remember, were the saint children eaten with such a lack of respect … The improper use that the young people made of the little things was scandalous” (Estrada, María Sabina 86). She continuously had “… to explain to them that the vigils weren’t done from the simple desire to find God, but were done with the sole purpose of curing the sickness that our people suffer from” (86). Moreover, the arrival of the hippies made “the saint children [lose] their purity … and their power” (90-91). By 1967, the federal government ordered the military into Huautla to deport the undesirable foreign tourists and maintained a presence until the mid 1970’s (204). In 1971, the traffic and
consumption of mushrooms was officially criminalized in Mexico (204). Sabina herself was arrested under a false charge of selling cannabis and though she wasn’t incarcerated, she became a target of state surveillance years after (88–89). Angry or envious Huautecos burned down her house in response to her infamy among the disrespectful foreigners (Letcher 98). Examining these aspects of her life makes it difficult to decide which is a bigger fallacy: dismissing the situation imposed on her because it seems tragic in our terms (and thus absolving narco-tourists from their role in “criminalizing” and alienating her) or accounting for its particulars at the risk of placing her within the confines of Euroamerican genre, indeed, making her a work of literature itself.

A culture of appropriation surrounds her in which her bare life itself becomes objectified, essentialized, utilizable. As Andy Letcher notes, she has become the subject of literature of various genres from different countries and cultures, the protagonist in a contemporary opera, her image appears on t-shirts, in comic strips, her name promotes bars, rock bands and even an anti-drug campaign (108). And as she transforms “from icon to brand” her own voice grows more distant (108). Her autobiography itself was recorded and translated by fellow Huauteco Álvaro Estrada who, on the advice of Octavio Paz, edited her work “to make it sound more ‘primitive’ and more ‘in keeping’ with Sabina’s personality” (107). This act of primitivization, as with the many other acts of a selective appropriation of her figure, foregrounds her bare life as ontological—she occupies “a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between [wo]man and beast, nature and culture” (Agamben, Homo Sacer 109). Like the white body on mushrooms, she becomes “unbordered” and flows into a multiplicity of signs and meanings. The “branding” of María Sabina makes her into a free-floating cultural and economic value, it
renders her an empty signifier to be pitied or lauded, worshipped or sacrificed. This epistemic violence that forces her into the “strange dance of repulsion and desire … in which the colonizer attempts to empty out and reoccupy not merely the geographic terrain but the constructed space of the Indigenous other …” cannot be separated from the physical genocide of colonialism (Owens 216-17).

Returning to ecology, Sabina’s fate, her branding and ambivalent and exonymic utilization, mirrors the cultural fate of psilocybin itself. I do not want to say that hippy tourism neatly transformed the understanding of the magic mushroom as a tool of medicine to a technology of ecstasy—the mushroom retained a medical aura in Western terms through its presumed corrective capacities: its mystico-spiritual determination links the drug to modern psychiatry in its ability to activate individuality in a self-fulfilling manner; the State used it as a means of extracting hidden truth from subjects which resonates with the Euro-American twentieth century project of psychoanalysis; in prisons it was used in attempts to correct the deviancy of the criminal and to normalize him/her. For a time, psilocybin had a clandestine “biocapitalist” value as what Nikolas Rose calls “a technology of optimization,” a consumer drug that has a utility beyond health and illness, one that can productively improve the subject (6-7; 16-20). If our conception of bios “… has become intrinsically a matter of the vital process of … zoē,” psilocybin champions share with pharmaceutical companies the rhetoric that drugs effect the body to necessarily provide “… a return to the real self, or a realization of the true

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59 These functions were not limited to psilocybin, but to psychedelics in particular. In Castaneda’s first work, for example, Mescalito, made manifest by taking peyote, reveals the Oedipal roots of Castaneda’s anxiety (Teaching 147).

60 Swain’s account of his visit to Sabina considered above is situated with three other psilocybin testimonials, the final of which comes from a prison inmate who claims the drug made him see the error of his ways (242).
self” (83; 100). It is not surprising that psilocybin was patented for the Swiss pharmaceutical firm Sandoz by Wasson’s friend Albert Hoffman—Wasson himself profited significantly from this as he did from all of his encounters with Sabina (Letcher 99). Before the State had decided that ecstasy was the primary affect of the drug and that it coerced more than controlled deviant behaviour, the C.I.A.’s own supply of psilocybin came from Sandoz; the agency’s cultivation of a larger social interest in the drug no doubt influenced some Huautla tourists as much as Wasson’s work (Marks 116-20).

As Gabriela Soto Laveaga notes in her historiography of the birth control pill, another controversial biopolitical technology that has a vexed propriety legacy between campesinos, governments and transnational firms, “biorespecting,” with its emphasis on the economic value of biodiversity and its imperative to patent local knowledges, is often indistinct from “biopiracy” (10). Perhaps then one of the most important Western encounters with María Sabina was Wasson and Hoffman’s 1962 trip in which they convinced Sabina to conduct her velada using only synthesized psilocybin pills. Like Wasson and the hippies, Hoffman was pleased that Sabina could authenticate his project: “She radiantly explained to our interpreter … that she could now give consultations even in the season when no mushrooms grow” (123). And perhaps he feels that the gift of test batch of his new product is due compensation for her services. After all, as one British narco-tourist observed, “protection of propriety or experience would be far from the thoughts of my hosts” (Nada 7).

The act of psilocybin tourism is a scenario of neocolonial white expropriation that leaves permanent biopolitical effects on Mazatecas. How then might discourses in non-white psychedelia reinforce or challenge this? Specifically, how do Chicana/o texts both
understand and feel the radical phenomenological difference of psychedelics in relation to an Indigenous heritage? I turn now to an examination of two Chicana/o writers who utilize narcotic experiences in ambivalent self-reconciliations that actively critique the violence of white expropriation.

**Unbordering Bodies and The Psychedelics of Race**

If the “radically open body” can be thought of as a projection of the dominant socius in its metabolization of *othered* cultural epistemologies and ecologies, Oscar Zeta Acosta’s *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* reclaims its own conception of the unbordered body to critique its victimization but in a manner fraught with anxiety. The novel begins with the protagonist tropologically gazing into the mirror, performing the porousness of his body (vomiting, belching, farting, shitting, masturbating) and attempting to create a sustainable subjectivity by assuming control over his quotidian fluidity: he tries to regulate excremental flows, silences the discursive flow demanded by his psychoanalyst, consumes “booze and Mexican food” against the orders of “six doctors” which increases the pain of the ulcers in his stomach, exacerbating his vomiting to the point where he is throwing up blood (11-15; 25). The “unbordered body” that Cohen equates with radical openness and the premodern is in conflict with the “proprietary body” whose flows must be regulated to assert the protagonist’s subjectivity (Cohen 7). Acosta’s controlled negotiation between the inside and outside will define his sense of self, though, as I will argue, the idea of control is always challenged by his narcotic consumption, a complicated facet of his desire. While recent criticism has drawn on Bakhtin’s theories of carnival and the grotesque to qualify the “body” of the text or to characterize the novel’s style and politics (Aldama; Bracher; Hames-Garcia), the affective incongruities of the
lived carnivalesque must be foregrounded here as they make any conclusive reading of an embodied ideology redundant while they succeed in embellishing the strategically polarizing textual affinities that necessarily remain irreconcilable within Acosta’s personal assessment of Chicano subjectivity.

More optimistic readings have argued that this embodied carnivalesque openness: offers a new, dialogic subjectivity with Chicana/o communitarian potential (Bracher 170-82); satirizes the essentialism of el movimiento (Hames-Garcia, “Dr. Gonzo” 464); challenges racist stereotypes and “disciplinary power structures” with humour and parody (Aldama 72-73). Yet surprisingly, these analyses that focus on the novel’s and the protagonist’s relation to the carnivalesque never acknowledge the role that drugs play in inducing or even supplementing the discursive and embodied carnival otherwise deemed so relevant. The fundamental problem with drug culture in the novel is that it insists on the “unbordering” of the body in predetermined racialized terms and thus makes Acosta’s carnivalesque embodiment signify more often a loss of biopolitical agency than it positions a site of social resistance.

On one level, Acosta’s fictionalized autobiography recapitulates the escapist fantasies of some of the previous writers I have looked at. Hounded by responsibilities as a legal aid lawyer and the psychopathologies apparently augmented by his psychoanalytic treatment, he abandons his restricted and unfulfilling life to seek the catharsis of travel. As far as his job is concerned, the rejuvenation of his own health becomes his priority and necessitates his release from larger social responsibilities. His analyst is both an internalized figure constantly judging and chiding him (“… you're just a little brown Mexican boy”) and in reality, a doctor who mediates him to the point of impotency. (25;
33; 64). Thus while his analyst saps his biopolitical agency through mental and physical control, his job coerces him into a life of immobility and creative stasis. “The road” then becomes a means of regaining agency. Even if he rejects the beats—“those purple faced winos”—he echoes Kerouac in his desire to experience “the joy of madness” by becoming “[a]nother wild Indian” gone amok (18; 42). However, his utilization of narcotic stimulants as a means of transgression or liberation is more problematic. Following Marcial González’s thesis that “[t]he novel is … driven by [the] contradictory predicament [of] forced racialization versus a self-fashioned racial identity” (80-81), the act of taking drugs or being drugged coerces Acosta’s persona into ethnic stereotypes about Mexican drug consumption while ironically jarring him into a white countercultural sensibility and thereby obfuscating his Chicano identity. Even if at times unwillingly, he fosters a connection to white counter- and narco-culture and its generic conventions of the self-discovery narrative. While the hippies mostly serve as obstacles to the politicized self-gnosis he hastily presents at the novel’s conclusion, the white counter-culture serves as his community for most of the novel’s present tense and the self-awareness that drugs offer him comes to be understood negatively through the lenses of that culture.

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61 His relation to the beats has been debated recently. A. Robert Lee claims Acosta for a heterogeneous and transcultural beat movement (165-67); Manuel Luis Martínez calls him the “anti-Kerouac” with his “antiessentialist critique of modern America” (162). Mari L. Carraquillo perhaps reconciles these arguments by claiming a Bloomian “anxiety of influence” that explains Acosta’s ambivalent literary relationship to Kerouac (81).

62 It seems obvious that Acosta would be more entitled to use this term even if we accept Kerouac’s alleged Métis roots. Unlike Anzaldúa who I discuss below, Acosta never fully defines the role of his Indigenous heritage within his Chicano identity.

63 The one exception may be Karl King, a fictionalized Hunter S. Thompson who tells an uninterested Acosta about Corky Gonzales and the Chicano movement. Acosta quips, “all I got to protest about is my present physical condition” (179).
In Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), the new journalistic investigation of the Merry Pranksters and the fringe appropriation of LSD, the author presents a clear paradox of white psychedelia that is equally true in Acosta’s testimonial: part of the lauded experience of “mutual consciousness” and “intersubjectivity” constitutes clarifying and intensifying one’s own individuality (“doing your own thing without apologizing for it”) (60; 73). Within this counter-cultural paradigm of collective individuality, Acosta’s subjectivity is always racially interpellated—his relation to the group is always made manifest in terms of his ethnicity, a process he accounts for by emphasizing the stress that others place on his *otherness* and thus exposing the hegemonic tendencies of the hippy movement. Playing up/with his Mexican heritage becomes a way of qualifying his individuality in a way that is both resistant and conformist. At times he performs an Indigenous heritage (often Aztec), at once playing on the desires of his white audience, confirming his own authenticity in contrast to white Indigenous appropriation and perhaps even anticipating a rhetorical allegiance to *la Raza* (160-61). With his “Plymouth … decked out to look like a narco’s car,” he trades on Anglo fears about a criminalized Mexican and Chicana/o culture to fashion his own identity in defiant terms (18). Yet, like the Chicana “Black Maria” among the Merry Pranksters, he is never quite one with the counter-culture (Wolfe 295). Nor, in his case, is such an allegiance desirable. The lumpens and artists he drinks with in San Francisco are “foreigners that don’t understand [him]”; they prompt his journey as much as his job and his analyst (67). The Alpine hippy circle in Colorado who constantly ply him with drugs become “fucking Okies,” just like those who physically and sexually abused him as a child (165; 88). His resistance to dominant white culture can never be reducible to the
style or ideology of white counter-culture for both elide his political subjectivity and centre his ethnic difference in terms of their own cultural fears and desires.

This is not to say that his role is merely tragic. His various encounters with drugs in some respects constitute a parody of white drug culture and tourism: instead of the white hippy travelling to Mexico to experience the neocolonial fantasy of self-liberation in “primitive” space, a Mexican-American travels across the U.S. and, often against his will, is given psychedelic drugs by hippies and self-styled gurus that have a monopoly on narcological meaning and utility. The drugs and the hippies are everywhere he goes (in the U.S.) and like the ominous song “Whiter Shade of Pale” that follows him, they are mysterious, spiritual, annoying and terrifying (35-36; 51; 54; 64; 98; 101; 168). Just as the diagnoses and proscriptions of his analyst, the white narcos limit his biopolitical agency by mandating control over his physical body through narcotic administration and shape the parameters of his self-gnosis to the point where his tantalizing “[s]alvation [turns] into damnation under the spell of those wicked drugs they’ve compelled [him] to take” (164). One of the most significant examples of this directed satire comes when Acosta is fed and taught about peyote by a white woman in Sun Valley, Idaho (122-25). A presumed authority on the drug, all the Mexican-American can offer her is a lesson on how to pronounce “guacamole” (123). When the seemingly “straight … mums” interrupts their psychedelic Fourth of July party, Karin, the “rich, hippie chick” who had procured

64 Other critics have read the novel as a satire, though not in relation to drugs. Michael Hames-Garcia claims that the work “is not an existential search for an essential identity but a satirical critique of the standards of authenticity assumed by such a search and required by juridical norms and procedures” (Fugitive 59). Frederick Luis Aldama’s assessment could speak to the novel’s consideration of drugs when it claims that “Acosta employs parody to work within and against ideological structures that normalize whiteness and abnormalize brownness” (71-72).
65 The song’s title is obviously a humorous allusion to the racial homogeneity of the hippies. Listening to “Cream” at the mescaline party and the song “White Rabbit” in Alpine further play out the joke (126; 136). To his disparagement, “White Rabbit” even finds him in Ciudad Juárez (189).
the peyote on a trip to Acapulco, fingers the “foreign” Acosta for supplying the drug (97; 125). He quickly goes from being an accepted participant in white psychedelia to its criminal scapegoat.

Throughout the novel, alcohol is presented as a more authentic Chicana/o drug while psychedelic substances belong to the white world (36; 107). As a teenager growing up in California, Acosta asserts, “I didn’t know or even hear of one single dope user” (107). His introduction to both marijuana and LSD occurs in 1964 when he is given the former and coerced (in questioning his bravado) into taking the latter by the rich daughter of a Republican banker (37-38). His regression to infancy and his transformation into “the Wolfman” under the influence of LSD prove to be less than liberating or empowering experiences (38-39). The fact that he is suffering from mononucleosis underscores the biopolitical threat of the “trip” as he is literally immobile after the experience and vows never to take the drug again (40). More importantly, his appearance as “the Wolfman” signals an abhorrent difference with explicit racial overtones: he encounters, as “the Wolfman,” “Teddy Roosevelt riding his horse up San Juan Hill” who addresses him with a non sequitur (39). As surreal as the image is, the confrontation between Acosta reduced to an animalistic bare life at a crucial moment of the U.S. imperial conquest of Latin America is to be read perhaps as more terrifying than ridiculous; immediately following the hallucination, Acosta is overwhelmed with paranoia, fearing that the knock on the door will bring a barrage of police or doctors ready to pre-emptively punish his sexual desire for the rich white woman (39). Similar

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66 Most of the narco-enthusiasts he encounters are all significantly wealthy which questions the drug’s fringe status.
67 Ironically, Agamben uses the wolf-man as an historical example of the homo sacer (Homo Sacer 104-111).
fears of hypersurveillance arrest him years later in Colorado when, after mistakenly taking two LSD tablets he assumed to be aspirin, he morphs into a gorilla (158-59). This time, he is convinced that police “with Texas Ranger outfits and guns bigger than their arms” are out to get him, while children flee or spit on him (158-59). Again, a historical image of white imperial violence, in this case, directly levelled against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, targets a grotesquely abnormal and again, animalistic body made manifest by the influence of “white drugs.”

This is not to suggest that fears of surveillance or paranoia one may encounter on LSD are dependent on race. Drawing on Banco, it is tropologic that “the bodily manifestation of [narcotic] effects, [may] reflect the instability of the subject under the influence of alterity” (109). As Acosta’s instability is frequently coded in ethnic terms (by himself and his white acquaintances), the deprivation of biopolitical agency, intensified beyond rational understanding by the substance, registers the source of the self’s instability in his encounters with white culture more generally. The physical, institutional and epistemic violence of a white U.S., of which his bildungsroman provides numerous examples, finds a novel manifestation in the terror of psychedelia. It is no coincidence that his resolve “… to get out away from those senseless drugs, those lifeless hippies …” is concomitant with his decision to go to Mexico and foster an ethnic connection to his parents’ birth country (184).

Furthermore, it is the unbordered body that others see in Acosta that makes him a desirable attaché and even a symbol of the psychedelic disruption of the immune, bordered body. In hallucinogenic passages of the novel, where the literal and metaphoric collapse, white hippies play with his embodied fluidity as a source of fascination. Geri,
his Idaho peyote guide, shoves the drug in his mouth and later “desperately [tries] to stuff a cherry bomb in [his] ear” (124). In San Francisco, a white hippy spikes his champagne with mescaline and gives him cocaine (in the text’s explicitly colonial terms, the “white devil” goes into his “Indian nose”) (62). The dinner party dissolves into a grotesque orgy with his body assuming a spectacular role: one man “carves a hole in [his] … chest” and fills it with other white substances (mayonnaise and more cocaine), another woman “[stuffs] raspberry sherbet into the yellow lard under [his] belly button” while another sucks the mucous from his nose until his face shrivels (63). The scene climaxes with his immobile body splayed on the floor as “[b]lack boots kick at [him] and the blood pours red carpets” (64). Rather than offer some answer or cure, his experiences with white narcotic excess further compel his embodied fluidity in playful, but more often violent terms that echo his own self-destruction.

Mexico thus promises at once an ethnic affinity and bodily healing; he suspects that he can find “a giant Rolaid, a mysterious Pepto Bismal for my hurts” (189). As opposed to the white women who have mistreated him, the women of Ciudad Juárez, Acosta believes, “… had the answer to my pain … I was certain they’d give me the cure for my ailing stomach, my ulcers and the blood in the toilet” (189). Other critics have discussed his disenchantment with the “Americanization” of the town (Adams, "Hippies" 70; Carrasquillo 91). Unlike Lowry who professed a similar malaise, Acosta’s disappointment is not indebted to an infringement on his cosmopolitan authority or to his neocolonial spatial entitlement, but comes to reflect his inability to establish an ontological reconciliation with his heritage. Yet, the narrative fate of both fictional

68 His stomach problems actually begin the night that the parents of his high school girlfriend involve the police when they discover that their daughter is out with the “Mexican” youth (119-20).
 personas is similar. Refusing to pay a *mordida* on politico-ethical grounds (Acosta does not want to “… become a partner to the corruption of justice in [his] very own father’s country”), he is beaten (unlike Lowry), given a cavity search (again, violently opening the body), jailed and deported (191-95). And yet where as the white, British Wilderness smoothly enters the U.S., Acosta, a U.S. citizen, is hassled by the Texan border guards—“You don't *look* like an American,” they inform him (195). As I have argued, Lowry’s state of exception is ideologically a State of exception while for Acosta the State model itself denies him a civic body and drives ethnic division into his sense of self. His search for identity concludes back in front of the mirror where he stands naked, “lonely and afraid in a world I never made” (195). He tells his brother, “[I] have failed to find the answer to my search. One sonofabitch tells me I'm not a Mexican and the other one says I'm not an American. I got no roots anywhere” (196).

Denied *bios*, an embodied political existence, his primary relationship to the state model is one of abandon (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 182). The act of trying to establish “roots” is met with violent opposition, reasserts the primacy of his bare life and renders the liminal sphere of the borderlands as the only space of subjective signification. The relation of the ban articulates in legal terms the unstable, porousness of his body destroying itself in a literal dissolutive fluidity. Furthermore, the abandoned body is also the drugged body that is forced into an epistemology of white, recreational gnosis that disallows Acosta’s goal of achieving a stabilizing political identity. Yet the final pages of the novel find Acosta assuming more than an allegiance, but a leadership role within the Chicano movement he at this point knows little about. He takes pride in rejecting the confines of a “Mexican” or an “American” identity, becoming “a Chicano by ancestry
and a Brown Buffalo by choice” (199). It is as if the collective individuality he found himself a part of within the white counterculture has shuffled its terms: rather than being an ethnic individual within the fringe collective, he fosters a unique individuality within a Chicana/o nationalism. As other critics argue, it is unclear whether we are meant to read this as the decisive climax of his bildungsroman or another target of an over-arching satire (Bracher 172-77; Hames-Garcia, “Dr. Gonzo” 463-66; *Fugitive* 51-61).

Indeed, the text blends genres in such polarizing ways that to read his drug experiences as comic seems ignorant and to read them as tragic seems clueless. Of course, there is a great deal of humour in his constant deferral of blame for his substance abuse. Mentioning his penchant for causing car accidents, for example, he declares “… I was drunk. Surely no man would blame me personally for what a foreign substance does to my body” (18). Acosta elsewhere praises psychedelics for the creativity they have helped realize in a professional capacity (i.e. as a lawyer) and points towards their communal utility (“I think the acid experience is part and parcel of the radical Chicano Movement”) (“Autobiographical Essay,” 14-15). This certainly suggests that his autobiographical persona is not entirely genuine in his critique of drug use, but I do not think this takes away from his satire of white drug culture or dampens its political overtones. For Acosta, the hippies demonstrate an unconcerned insensitivity at best and at worst, they continue propagating a historical racial narcissism; like María Sabina’s pilgrims, they remain ignorant to the scale of their expropriation and its real material and epistemological effects in their personal(izing) pursuits of self-gnosis and existential pleasure. Moreover, Acosta’s discriminate denial of biopolitical agency throughout the novel is made manifest as much through his experience with official State actors as it is
through his dealings with the so-called counter-culture and its plant, chemical and human (ab)normalizing agents.

Perhaps because Acosta’s coming political existence is only discussed in the final four pages of the text, his physical body, otherwise such a salient image in the novel, is forgotten here. One may postulate that the unbordered body may take on political valences in line with his new ethos, but the text never presents this. Gloria Anzaldúa’s \textit{Borderlands/ La Frontera}, on the other hand, does this exactly. The image of the porous, “protean” (63) mestiza body transforms from the target of hegemonic violence to an empowered and spiritualized subjectivity whose biopolitical agency is engendered through a creative negotiation between the inside and outside: “La mestiza has gone from being the sacrificial goat to the officiating priestess at the crossroads” (102). Unlike Acosta who (even if satirically) rejects narcotics as a white technology, Anzaldúa engages with an Indigenous history of psychedelics. Part of her reclamation of the unbordered body is the reappropriation of “drugs” from their criminal, anthropological and recreational contexts—a biopolitical reappropriation that restores the signification and utility of Indigenous knowledges and gives agency to a global ecology of which the human body is only a part.

There are apparent rhetorical connections between \textit{Borderlands} and psychedelic literature. Anzaldúa explains that “‘sensing’ …without conscious reasoning,” developing “\textit{la facultad}” “… tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and … thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality” (60-61). It would not be surprising to find these lines verbatim in the work of Huxley, Castaneda or Pinchbeck. The most intense experience of this “other mode of consciousness” (59) is presented in the text’s
fourth chapter, “La herencia de Coatlicue/ The Coatlicue State.” What she locates in the
goddess, “the dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine
movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life” (57), resonates in
some ways with what the Huautla pilgrims frequently desired of/in María Sabina, but
even more explicitly with Lawrence’s Indigenous Mexico. Furthermore, the Coatlicue
state, like psychedelics, is fundamentally a confrontation with a power that overwhelms
individuality. It even becomes a state of exception in its indistinction between the
biopolitical and thanatopolitical. She describes the feeling of disembodiment and the loss
of ego by highlighting its terror: “She has this fear/ that if she takes off her clothes/
shoves her brain aside/ peels off her skin/ that if she drains/ the blood vessels/ strips the
flesh from the bone/ flushes out the marrow … /that when she does reach herself … /she
won't find anyone … /that when she gets ‘there’/ … she won't find her way back” (65).
Yet, by submitting to Coatlicue, giving over her bodily agency to the goddess, she
becomes centred and “Completa” (73).

The power of the Coatlicue state threatens individuality by forcing the
embodiment of an excess of subjectivity—it opens the self up to a multiplicity of selves
through a revelation that, in its spiritual determination, distinguishes it from the otherwise
analogous founding violence of colonial mestizaje (72-73). The loss of biopolitical
agency, becoming “out of control, not on patrol … [in] opening [herself] to the alien
other” (70) challenges the process of internalizing social norms and expected behaviours
that limit subjectivity. Unlike the beats and the hippies, however, internalized discipline
is not simply a barrier to the individual’s creative potential and transgressive desire, nor
is it a historically contingent biopolitical response to a culture of Cold War militarism.
Rather, it is a systemic, abjectifying occupation of the host body that processes a history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. imperialism and extends back to the originary rupture of colonialism. *La facultad* can thus never be a product of tourist consumption, but in an inherent ability of the abjected: “Those who are pounced on have it the strongest—the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign” (60). Accessing the *Coatlicue* state is not an act of Indigenous expropriation premised on financial, ethnic or national privilege, but an act of recovery that confronts the “shame” and abnormality imposed from the outside by engaging with a repressed ontology (65). Finally, “psychedelic” disembodiment is not a counter-cultural rite of gnostic passage, but partly the violence of the hegemonic gaze that participates in such expropriations: “Their eyes penetrate her; they slit her from head to belly. *Rajada*. She is at their mercy, she can do nothing to defend herself” (65). Like in Acosta’s account, being an unbordered body is a racist imposition and one she lacks the biopolitical agency to resist; she attests, “*Quiero contenerme, no puedo y desbordo*” (66).

It is perhaps not surprising given Anzaldúa’s interdisciplinary longevity and the recent interest in Agamben that others have attempted to link their work. Maita A. Sayo, for example, suggests that a more praxis-driven theory will attempt to re-centre the body in and beyond Agamben’s discourse; she implies that Anzaldúa’s presentation of an embodied bare life enacts a form of resistance by “remembering herself” (72; 97). In his similarly ambivalent engagement with Agamben, Charles T. Lee references Anzaldúa in his elaboration of a “third space” of citizenship through which the “interstitiality of sovereign power [can become] the corresponding, interstitial agency of the abject that sidesteps the binaries of bare life and citizenship life” (58). His “third space,” influenced
by Anzaldúa among others, “points to a realm of the lived practices by the abject … that, by interrupting the stagnant ‘life cycle’ of liberal citizenship, extends and reanimates the life of citizenship from the very margins of abjection” (78).

Working from and as exception, a threshold between embodied knowledges and practices—“a struggle of flesh”—la mestiza has been historically included in the U.S. State by her very exclusion—denied the benefits and rights of social citizenship on racial grounds (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 100; Agamben, *State* 22; *Homo Sacer* 181). Anzaldúa is also homo sacer here in that her beliefs grate against the Western mythologeme that makes the sacred ambivalent: she is targeted (and targets herself) for embodying multiple taboos—her early menstruation, queer sexuality, chthonic energy—and living in intimacy with an othered divinity (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 75; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 57; 65). Her divisive ontologies work against each other and in this way, synecdochally draw her to the antinomy of Coatlicue, the “symbol of the fusion of opposites” (Anzaldúa 69)

By reducing her to bare life, the Coatlicue State, just as the institutions and apparatuses of patriarchal, racial and heteronormative hegemonies, figure her as sacer—both “sacred and damned” (Agamben 78). One aspect of her challenge is then reconceiving the sacred outside of Western epistemology—it forces herself to assuage the violence of internalized antinomies be reconnecting with knowledge she has been taught to disregard. In this way Anzaldúa confronts power not by denying zoë, but “assimilat[ing] the animal body, the animal soul” within herself (48). Not denying the “sacred,” but understanding it in terms of a repressed inner knowledge that speaks to/for a missing collective.
Returning to Cohen’s conception of biopolitics, we can read Anzaldúa’s presentation of the unbordered body as a challenge to the immune, modern (white) body and its dependent “juridico-political legacy” (14). Part of the enabling fallacy of Western allopathic thinking, according to Cohen, is that “… we unreflectively believe that as embodied beings we are essentially and necessarily—i.e., ‘naturally’—distinct from the lifeworlds within which we materially arise and on which we materially depend for our existence” (26). The Coatlicue state challenges the bordering of the body not only by dismantling its protective barriers in an initiatory passage, but by forcing us to understand this “cosmic process,” and our position within it, as the natural cycle of death and regeneration that the goddess herself incarnates (Anzaldúa 68). Drawing on alternative Western science and Okanogan epistemology, Cohen argues (as I believe Anzaldúa shows), “… that organisms evolve not just by competition … but also by cooperation and symbiosis”; in a “cosmological ontology, we are, literally and materially, pieces of the earth. ‘Body’ names a capacity, not an object” (72). By engaging with a repressed chthonic energy, Anzaldúa accesses “the me that has something in common with the wind and the trees and the rocks, that possesses a demon determination and ruthlessness beyond the human” (72). She thus evokes a primary ecological (over juridical) biopolitical relation daemonized by an allopathic modernity at the same time exposing the epistemic and material violence coding this larger culture of daemonization.

What role do psychedelics play in both Anzaldúa’s theory and praxis? Borderlands’s condemnation of certain narcotics is explicit. Anzaldúa states that “drinking, smoking [and] popping pills” are defensive compulsions that “prevent … ‘seeing,’” from experiencing the pain and self-realization of the Coatlicue state (68).
Chicanos, she explains, use “the bottle, the snort, the needle” to hide from the destructive reality of machismo (105). Yet, if psychedelics sprout up in the text, they remain outside of a Western scientific or legal taxonomy, though on one occasion, she directly cites Gordon Wasson’s *The Wondrous Mushroom* to reference the pre-Columbian use of the hallucinogenic morning glory seeds (88; 119). The speaker of the poem “La curandera,” for example, experiences a possession by the “healing spirit guides” that grants her a holistic awareness of (non-hallucinogenic) botanical life (199-201). If there are psychedelic overtones on the *Coatlicue* State, they are not explicitly charted, making a link between psychedelic thinking, rather than consumption, more appropriate.

However, the sublimity of the *Coatlicue* State—the cognitive disruption that accompanies the incarnation of the goddess who herself is the larger “incarnation of cosmic processes;” (68) the physical implosion, the reconfiguring of body (74)—becomes an act of healing a divided self and the greater “herida abierta” (25) of the borderlands. In this sense, her work is shamanic. Anzaldúa has been more candid in interviews about the role psychedelics have played in her writing and spiritual development. In 1982, for example, she attested that she had been “… using [drugs] to gain access to other realities” (*Interviews* 19). Psilocybin in particular, she claims, had allowed her to “… put the ego—the customary glasses that you see the world through—down, and you see the world through eyes that aren’t censored by the mind, by rationality” (106). A particular revelation she experienced while “stoned out of [her] mind [on mushrooms]” sounds very much like the *Coatlicue* state: “… I was tripping on mushrooms and I looked in the mirror and saw my face. And I’m all eyes and nose.
Behind that there were other faces … I realized that I was multiple, that I wasn’t this one self—you know, the conscious self” (36).

In suggesting a connection that is not directly articulated in *Borderlands*, there is a risk of racializing the “narcotic” user in my own academic discourse. I certainly do not want to suggest that psychedelics were a singular or dominant source of Anzaldúa’s creativity or spirituality. At the same time, by overlooking the role that psilocybin specifically has played in her work, one risks participating in a stigmatization (and implicit criminalization) of Indigenous knowledges that seems antithetical to her project. Anzaldúa implies that her editors were influential in censoring one of her works that dealt with drug use (19). And she takes issue with academics who ignore the “unsafe” dimensions of *Borderlands* in their selective appropriation of its theories (Keating, “Risking” 7). In 1991, Anzaldúa proposed reclaiming “… the unaccepted, illegitimate knowledges and ways of knowing used by those outside the inner circle of dominant ways” (178). Further, she states, employing legal terminology, “I use the idea of outlawed knowledge to encourage Chicanas and other women and people of color to produce our own forms, to originate our own theories for how the world works. I think those who produce new conocimientos have to shift the frame of reference” (178). Are Indigenous hallucinogenic plants then a source of “outlawed knowledge”?

Unlike the hippies, the New Agers and their modernist antecedents, Anzaldúa challenges the recreational expropriation of the sacred by centring and empowering its ethnic and cultural context and utilizing this context to generate an elastic minoritarian discourse. *Borderlands* is not a work of travel literature like the more generically conventional texts I consider, but the semiology of travel informs this text in a way that is
more conscious of the politics of its signs. The circulation of bodies, goods (legal and illegal), desires, policies and ideologies across borders exists here not within a paradigm of escape, but of imposition. While all acts of border crossing I have considered in this chapter have been both physical and metaphysical, the *Coatlicue* state involves not only transcending, but recognizing and challenging the spatial and temporal limits of a more qualified society of control while it offers an ethical model of transcultural engagement.

*Borderlands* advises that “[b]y taking up *curanderismo*, Santeria, shamanism, Taoism, Zen and otherwise delving into the spiritual life and ceremonies of multi-colored people, Anglos would perhaps lose … white sterility” (91). How would Anzaldúa feel then about white mushroom use? Unlike peyote, it is a renewable resource that can be cultivated beyond temperate borders (it is a rhizome after all) and due to its relative lack of popularity, it does not seem like an appropriate symbol for the hidden and violent life of our narcontology. Yet, as I have argued, its twentieth century history has played a significant role in criminalizing and popularizing Indigenous Mexican knowledges, stimulating markets, fashioning schematics of vice tourism and consolidating spaces of liminality for white transgression in ways that circularly produce liminal, *othered* subjectivities in terms of global biopower. It is thus difficult to accept her suggestion as advisable given how the West’s uncritical expropriation of *othered* knowledges and practices as novelties places these knowledges and practices in an imperialistic exonymy, re-signifying their utility not simply for the First World, but in the West’s universalist hubris, for all of humanity. As Vandana Shiva explains, Western power/knowledge mandates that “… diversity must be weeded out, and the uniform monocultures - of plants and people - must now be externally managed because they are no longer self-
regulated or self-governed. Those that do not fit into the uniformity must be declared unfit” (19). Mushroom tourism fits in with a history of “[w]hite America … [attending] to the body of the earth in order to exploit it, never to succor it or to be nurtured in it” (Anzaldúa, Borderlands 90). If whites continue to draw energy from Indigenous sources, Anzaldúa says, “I’d like them to be aware of what they are doing and to go about doing it the right way” (90). What constitutes the “right way” is illusive, however, and it is difficult to locate suitable precedents.

De Sousa Santos argues that we need to “[confront] the monoculture of modern science with the ecology of knowledges … an ecology because it is based on the recognition of the plurality of heterogeneous knowledges … and on the sustained and dynamic interconnection between them without compromising their autonomy” (11). It is fundamental then that psychedelics be understood in Indigenous contexts and not simply (pseudo)scientific approximations of these contexts in archival isolation. We could begin understanding psychedelics perhaps through native stories that are performative and exuberant (rather than rhetorical and authoritative); stories that emphasize cooperation over hierarchy, collective balance over individualism; stories that, as Tom King explains, are entertainment but also a form of survival (22-25; 89). The Western trope of the intrepid psychonaut who ventures into “mysterious” geographies and unconscious realms to achieve higher self-understanding should be recognized as a conceptual aggregate of free-market capitalism. King wonders “Why we relish stories that lionize individuals who start at the bottom and fight their way to the top, rather than stories that frame these forms of competition as varying degrees of insanity” (26). By the same token, why are the intensities and liminalities of white psychedelia so often ultimately internalized and
fabulated into stories of self-gnosis or channeled into the Western-serving universalisms of the New Age?

Perhaps we can begin coming to terms with the reality of our narcontology by understanding the global history of narcotic consumption in a “psychedelic” capacity—in a way that decentres subjectivity to force an intensified recognition of the drug war’s injustices, its hidden economics and bloodshed, its quotidian thanatopolitical reality and the hypocrisy of its abyssal lines. Like Carlos Castaneda’s hallucinogenically-amplified gnat—“A truly monstrous thing! Never in the wildest fantasies of fiction had I encountered anything like it” (Separate 117)—something routinely inconsequential in our daily lives should, occasionally (which is not to say “recreationally”) and absolutely, overwhelm us, make us conscious of how large it is and how small we are. This is an epistemic step in approaching justice in our narcontology. A post-abyssal thinking depends on spontaneity, defamiliarization and “a destabilizing epistemology” that could, in a critical sense, be psychedelic (de Sousa Santos 17). The liminality of psychedelics should mirror less the transgressive biopolitics of tourism, but the gnosis these substances offer should reveal the painful liminality of the borderlands and the user’s transdimensional complicity in maintaining this liminality. By changing a personal relation of psychedelics from one of recreation and expropriation to one of “spiritual activism” and transcultural respect, the user affectively decriminalizes these “narcotics” and disrupts the ontological privilege of an allopathic modernity and the fundamental

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69 I take this term from AnaLouise Keating’s analysis of Borderlands. She defines “spiritual activism” as a “[synthesis] of social activism with spiritual vision” (“Shifting” 242). It “is a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics … that posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs relational modes of thinking [and] … includes specific actions designed to challenge individual and systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social injustice” (242).
locus of individuality. But perhaps this in itself is too messianic. As Anzaldúa writes of the *Coatlicue* state, “Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The *Coatlicue* state can be a way station or it can be a way of life” (68).
Sex, Health and The Beach Resort: Transcultural Desire and Prophylaxis

In the previous chapter, I examined the twentieth-century history of vice tourism on the borderlands and following Evan R. Ward, proposed that various Mexican geographies have become kinds of “borderlands” through acts of collective tourism and their discursive codification (196-97). Ward’s new “borderlands” are properly the coastal resort cities—the spaces where, more and more, Mexican and North American (and European) bodies encounter each other (197). Sex tourism has a transcultural legacy with the geographical borderlands which I have already considered in regard to a larger vice tourism and thus, I do not want to elaborate a more precise account of sex work within this convention. Rather, this chapter will consider sex tourism and “sex in tourism” in literature about resorts and the larger cultures of sexuality in resort-borderlands in a biopolitical context.

I begin with an analysis of the 2003 film The Real Cancun and consider the codification of Mexican resort tourism as a sexually-charged spectacle that functions by cultural segregation; white desires for physical rejuvenation and sexual stimulation typically operate within an erotic apartheid that renders the biopolitical realities of hosts irrelevant beyond their immediate utility to guests. I then move backwards to the 1940’s to early 1960’s when this transcultural prophylaxis is not yet secure and preoccupies Tennessee Williams’s The Night of the Iguana (both the play and film) in a number of (un)conscious ways. Iguana’s anxious desire for illegitimate or “peripheral sexualities” manifests itself in fear of “contamination” that may destroy the white body through sexual and geographic engagement with a “primitive” cultural landscape and its erotic inhabitants. In the play and film, these fears become partially assuaged by constructing
hygienic as well as sexual “borders” within the resort while at once limiting but stimulating desires to cross them.

Finally, I consider female sex tourist literature, drawing on Ana Castillo and Anaïs Nin but focusing on 1970’s academic Maryse Holder’s posthumous letters from Mexico which detail her neoliberal sexual appetite. I explore how her liberated sexual consumption incorporates second-wave feminism into capitalist modes of production and thus reiterates the Mexican resort as space for transgression and excess. Her writing and her sexual encounters produce mestizo and Indigenous sexualities in terms of tourist desire. By breaking down tourist prophylaxis sexually (but also maintaining an epistemological apartheid between her tourist milieu and host culture), her experience mandates a fantastic collusion of the biopolitical and thanatopolitical. She and her editors write Mexican masculine sexuality as the cause of her desire and her ultimate death, as a capacity that empowers and destroys her according to tourist and tourist literature’s expectations.

As a dominant trope of contemporary travel in Mexico, sex tourism in the resort distributes a form and meaning of transcultural biopolitical relations that carry lasting and global effects. In order to understand the geopolitics of the resort, it is necessary to look at how sex in resort literature, understood as network of discursive iterations, embodied acts with affective radiance, is valued as a transcultural libidinal and economic investment in Mexico that must be contained, managed as much as it should be allowed to transgress its own rules; the sexuality of the resort is indeed a neoliberal sexuality. This chapter will discuss literature’s ambivalence about sexual limitations and acts of overcoming them in the spirit of authenticity and originality (literary as well as economic
“profit”)—an ambivalence surrounding ways of instantiating and breaking, accepting and excepting, various discursive and performative transcultural prophylaxes in the resort borderlands.

**Segregating Saturnalia: Spring Break in the Resort**

The most popular resort destination in Mexico for almost four decades has been Cancún, which draws three million foreign visitors every year who constitute 75-80 percent of Quintana Roo’s gross domestic product (Torres and Momsen 59; 63). While the tourist industry has diversified the city’s attractions to encourage family-, eco-, and archeological-tourism, Cancún is largely known for its beach-centred and youth-oriented “party” culture that has been in place since the city was essentially created in 1971 (Saragoza, “Golfing” 305-7; Castellanos 244). Attracted by this legacy (in part spawned by Mexico’s lower drinking age) and the variety of Western cultural promotions that continue to make it relevant, 100,000 American teenagers head to the city every year for spring break, what Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan call “… a contemporary form of carnival … a liminal transient space based on a morality of sexual and substance excess and spectacle” (134).

In some respects, and if one removes the beat ideology, this youthful cultural pilgrimage is very much an intensely commodified (Ryan and Hall 9) and beach-centred version of Sal Paradise’s “escape” to Mexico in *On The Road*: Cancún becomes “… an enclosed, exceptional and ‘duty-free’ … zone ‘taken outside’ home, everyday routine and familiar social/moral contexts” (Diken and Laustsen 112) and the “resort beach [offers] a range of opportunities for display, performance and transgressive behaviour” (Pritchard and Morgan 127). Wright Morris’s *Love Among the Cannibals* (1957), which appeared
the same year as *On The Road*, sketches one setting for this burgeoning resort culture in late-50’s Acapulco. The narrator ironically takes in a panorama of Acapulco’s bay, not by looking out of his hotel window, but from a mural on the wall: “All around it the gleaming air-conditioned pleasure palaces. On the white sand of the beach what you would find on beaches everywhere. Shells, oil smears, prophylactics, and human flesh served up according to taste” (82). The only missing ingredients that the artist “forgot” were Mexican bodies (82). The protagonist tellingly reflects on how his journeys to Mexico have changed with the rise of resort tourism—“… in the past I had run off with books, rather than women, to Mexico” (76).

The voyeuristic/exhibitionist culture of Mexican beach tourism that began in Acapulco reached a new market plateau when in 2000, MTV in the U.S. began broadcasting spring break in Cancún (Geddes Gonzales 54). The 2003 film *The Real Cancun*, a cinematic re-working of the reality television genre, further reiterates Western desires for the city’s hedonistic image; it captures the typically excessive experiences of sixteen young Americans (most of whom are white, with the exception of three Black youth) over the course a week-long saturnalia. The ubiquity of archival apparatuses at spring break—“official” lenses of film and television productions and those of the tourists themselves, many perhaps likely to record and circulate photos and videos for the multitudes of youtube and facebook—seems to principally challenge the anonymity and amnesia of spring break’s transitory transgressions; that statement of abyssal confusion, “what happens in Mexico stays in Mexico” (or Las Vegas or any other “sin” destination) is perhaps partially redundant in our on-line world. At the same time, a film like *The Real Cancun*, and the voyeuristic desire the film depends on, embellishes the a-personal and
collective aspects of spring break tourism (while reiterating weak individualism by recognizing U.S. popular cultural archetypes in the virgin, the stud, etc…).

Pritchard and Morgan, in their analysis of the television show *Wild On!*, a series that documents spring break and other pleasure tourist practices, explain that the program manufactures the tourist experience, in sexual terms, as sensual and hedonistic (128-29). The program’s success lies in its ability to relay the image of beach tourist performance, “the outpouring of excess and the challenging of norms … which reflects the increasingly overt and explicit emphasis on sexuality in many forms of Western popular culture, [and] which has disguised a more ambiguous and open-ended search for pleasure and self-expression focusing on the [often naked] body” (127-28). Likewise, the casting and editing of *The Real Cancun* leave the audience with a group of mostly shallow characters in various states of undress and hormonal frenzy, engaging in the kinds of frivolity sometimes allowed to or excused by prodigal youth. With the exception of sumptuous pans of the “Riviera Maya” and momentary glimpses of the cast seizing on Cancún’s “family-oriented” exotica (horseback riding on the beach, collecting starfish, swimming with dolphins) the film is a continuous display of sex: characters “hook up” with one or multiple partners and on multiple levels (sometimes emotionally, but just as often physically). The cast is almost always drinking, taking “body shots” (licking salt off of women’s breasts and passing limes by way of teeth and lips), grinding against each other (“dance-fucking” as one character calls it), and high-fiving while exchanging truisms and mantras (“There’s no such thing as too drunk”; “Everybody’s down here for the same reason”; “I just want to see some boobies”). A commercial pop-punk band wails “I don’t

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70 The Playa del Carmen Hotel Association gave the Quintana Roo coast this name in the 1990’s. See Gaddes Gonzales for an analysis of the imperialist nature undercoding this act of naming (51-52).
want to be told to grow up!” to a crowd of bouncing flesh. “I love Mexico!” the lead singer announces when the song concludes.

As Pritchard and Morgan say of *Wild On!*, bodies that do not fit certain sexual aesthetics are ignored or mocked in *The Real Cancun*—the overweight male and the non-drinking and abstinent female describe feeling like outsiders (132). And while spring break “experimentation” typically conjures lesbian fantasies in popular culture (135), scenes of the young women kissing in the film do not seem to sincerely challenge the otherwise hyper-hetero-normativity as jocks scrutinize “manly” behaviour and the gossipy cast haughtily and constantly evaluates the heterosexual prowess of each character. Regardless of whether or not certain characters moralize about promiscuity and monogamy, the larger “moral” investment in the film is its implicit heterosexual pedagogy—shots of women stripping in a “wet t-shirt” contest are interspersed with the appropriate howls of men; women equally scream and cheer when the men denude and dance in a “hot body” contest. In this respect, the film shows and tells the limits of sexual transgression on spring break.

Otherwise, however, and much like the Mediterranean Ibiza, Cancún is here “… a post-oedipal social space in which there is no law (and thus no ‘misbehaviour’) and in which the only prohibition is the ‘prohibition to prohibit’” (Diken and Laustsen 109-10). The body’s primary biopolitical relation is in its nudity,71 “… metamorphosed into pure enjoyment and excess … the body [is] an object of fascination (e.g. the tourist having sex

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71 Chris Ryan and C. Michael Hall link the tourist and sex-worker in terms of their scanty attire which signals “that they have no status, property, or insignia” (3). Together they also share a liminal existence as both “… possess dangerous forces; forces that, while subordinate to the mainstream of society, by their very presence challenge the norms of the dominant” (2). At the same time, their so-called marginalities work through satisfying consumer desires and exploiting women which testifies to a patriarchal-capitalist governmentality underlying this liminality (2).
in public) and the body [is] abject (e.g. the tourist vomiting in public)” (111). “In this regard”, Diken and Laustsen argue, “the ‘naked’ tourist borders on homo sacer … [The tourists] can ‘exempt’ themselves from their usual identities and territories—a process which promises a paradoxical form of belonging in the shape of abandonment and which is experienced as ‘freedom’” (111; 113). The “reality” stars of The Real Cancun are only identified by their first names and the audience is given few details about their lives outside of spring break while being privy to their most intimate sexual practices. Their lives become as inconsequential beyond spring break as they are amidst its carnival. Naked life overwhelms their civic ontologies and “the private and public enter into a zone of indiscernibility in the serenity of the metamorphosis from the citizen into ‘almost animal’” (113).

Agamben argues that “nudity is not actually a state but rather an event … [It] belongs to time and history, not to being and form” (Nudit ies 65). On spring break in Cancún, nudity belongs to place as much as to time, an ahistorical, timeless place that is also the postmodern space of excessive consumerism—a “Gringolandia” with “pyramid-shaped hotels stuccoed with fake Mayan hieroglyphics, Jet Ski ‘jungle’ tours in the lagoon mangroves, Mayan waiters dressed in ‘authentic’ Mexican garb, and caged jaguars on display outside tourist restaurants” (Torres and Momsen 58). Some scholars have drawn on Baudrillard to describe the simulated character of a Cancún that is real only in its representation of reality (Re Cruz 489; Geddes Gonzales 50; Torres and Momsen 58). Thus, the title The Real Cancun is remarkably appropriate in this sense—the film, as much as the city’s hospitality industry, produces a tantalizing psychogeography, an urban eden in a perpetual metaphysical striptease, revealing and
“… concealing the fact that the real is no longer real” (Baudrillard 25). For the audience and the cast (and the two are blurred by the “reality” genre of the film), the “real” Cancún teases “that law and order themselves might really be nothing more than a simulation” (38). Spring break hedonism depends on a manufactured “state of nature:” racialized sexual primitivism (Diken and Laustsen 111; 113) codes this “Mexican” landscape as much as an uninhibited contemporary consumerism in which human bodies become just another commodity fetish.

Gerald Vizenor, drawing on Baudrillard, explains that “bankable simulations of the savage as an impediment to developmental civilization … [protract] the extermination of tribal cultures” (Manifest 6). The “real” Cancún is mapped by intersecting abyssal lines that simulate the luxuries of neocolonial dominance while interrupting cognizance of its transcultural “reality”-effects. At the level of epistemology, nothing seems immediately relevant outside of the physical and/or cultural tourist zone. Independent film director Michael Tully recently proposed to salon.com that The Real Cancun is “one of the more unintentionally brilliant statements of hypocrisy of the decade” in that its events run concurrent with the U.S. invasion of Iraq and somehow mirror its futility and idiotism. More to the point here, the film represents the transcultural prophylaxis that renders Cancún and similar destinations marketable as tourist sites. The city was planned to segregate the hotel strip along the beach, the interior commercial area and the colonias or regiones (what some locals call the “Zona de Peligro [Danger Zone]”) (Castellanos 241; 256). Urban designers specifically tried to prevent an “Acapulquización” that sees the life of ghettos sometimes overflowing resort space (Torres and Momsen 59). The colonias are littered with garbage and controlled by gangs: Mayan seasonal workers who
occupy these areas live in constant fear of violent robbery (Castellanos 256). If, as Diken and Laustsen argue, the tourist is a post-political *homo sacer* in a “voluntary camp,” “[t]he camp as a (non)place of consumerism [that] works as a catharsis of *homo sacer*’s desires and fantasies” (9; 112-14), it seems as if an attempt at a comparative analysis of globalization’s camps and *homines sacri* is itself a political perversion in its attempt to bridge abyssal separations by way of conceptual analogy.

M. Bianet Castellanos’s work explores “the native gaze” of the migrant Mayans who constitute the majority of Cancún tourism’s labour force (242). She argues that Mayans from the community of Kuchmil (the name is fictional to ensure privacy), most of whom are between the ages of thirteen and sixteen when they begin working in Cancún, understand their work as a form of the colonial “slave labour” that their grandparents were forced into (247; 254). Since the mid-1980’s, hotels have no longer offered long-term contracts to their employees, required that they work for longer hours and sometimes under dangerous conditions (253-54). Just as the Mexican government abandoned its policy of environmental and cultural protection when Cancún’s popularity surged, the city’s business sector has balked on promises of agricultural and industrial development (Torres and Momsen 63) while expropriating local Maya’s natural resources (Castellanos 245). Contrary to the government’s racist rhetoric, which explained the creation of Cancún in 1971 as “a civilizing mission” to “modernize” the natives economically and encourage them to assume the feelings and responsibilities of national citizenship, the economic benefits of tourism have yet to be felt by most area residents (244-46).
Moreover, many local Maya fear that Cancún migrancy is disrupting their cultural practices: young people are no longer able to work on the milpa (altering the communal system of labour) and are criticized by elders for their susceptibility to what is seen as individualistic behaviour and even Protestant ideology (Re Cruz 498-500; Castellanos 256). While I consider predominantly U.S. literature’s ambivalence about transcultural “contamination” in the resort later in this chapter, it is important to clarify that this is not monological. Some young Maya have taken the excessive behaviour of pleasure tourists as a negative ontology that has encouraged them to restrict their spending and reaffirm cultural and communal ties even as their borderlands experiences have in complicated ways “influenced their ideas about their bodies, their culture, their country, and themselves” (Castellanos 255-56; 247). Mayan stories from Chan Kom depict the city as monstrous in narratives about “stolen children, murder, people being run over by cars, rapes” (Re Cruz 499). The Maya of “Kuchmil” tell stories that equate Cancún with “the legendary staab’ay, a beautiful, seductive woman who attracts men away from their community … [and who] represents the downfall or social death of man” (Castellanos 254). The Maya believe that the staab’ay’s influence is not limited to locals, as The Real Cancun demonstrates (254).

The manufactured transcultural prophylaxis that the idea of Cancún presupposes is based on the limitation of engagements between foreign guests and local hosts. Mexicans in The Real Cancun appear only as hotel staff, bartenders, a mariachi band (ordered as a gimmick by the producers to surprise the hung-over cast with a novel wake-up call) and as paramedics treating a jellyfish sting; they provide services to the tourists, offering kitsch, food, alcohol and minor medical attention. Fencing off tourists and locals,
play and work, this border model of human segregation in Cancún has become a contemporary model in Mexico (and elsewhere in the developing world) to market “protected” tourist space.

The zoning policy of the borderlands resort is thus influenced by, and in turn, re-supports the contemporary abyssal division of the U.S.-Mexico border. John Xavier Inda calls the border “a prophylactic technology” that “seeks to shape the conduct of individuals and populations as a way to prevent social risk and danger … through preemptive means … It is to prevent undocumented migrants from becoming ‘problems’ in the social body through preventing their entry into the country” (“Border” 117). In borderlands resorts, the “border” scripts the ways that Mexican bodies are to engage and interact with typically white bodies, ways which are in turn mediated by statistically deducible, but also inconsistent and subjective types of tourist desire while this very script provides insurance against unwanted crosscultural contamination for the holiday-maker. The Real Cancun itself serves as an ideological prophylactic: it supplements the Western image of Cancún hedonism in a comparatively benign way by promoting a culture of sex in tourism which altogether stands in for a culture of sex tourism. In journalist Lydia Cacho has exposed the city’s hidden industry (controlled by a business magnet with political protection) of underage prostitution and pornography in her Los Demonios del Edén. At a wider level, Cancún’s more mainstream sex-work industry functions as another service of the tourist industry itself (Hawley). The power dynamics

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72 Simon Carter and Stephen Clift reverse this distinction and show how “sex tourism” is one market in a larger culture of “sex in tourism” (12). Ryan and Hall explain that sex tourism is formulaically heterogeneous and that students who go to resorts and engage in sexual activity can be understood as “sex tourists” (50; 60).
of Euro-American tourist and Mexican sex-worker miscegenation are thus elided in this pop-culture film even as they play out every day in “the real Cancún.”

Sexuality and Well-Being in Western Literature’s Mexico

Foucault writes that “… at the juncture of the ‘body’ and the ‘population,’ sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life …” (History 147). The possibility of sex in tourism (and not only sex-work) may be just another aspect of a more central paradigm of rejuvenation that the resort markets itself on. Tourists come to the beach to replenish themselves physically and mentally, absorbing vitamin D, releasing various bodily tensions and generally enjoying the other benefits of what current scholarship is calling “wellness tourism,” a pattern of travel in which the goal is “to achieve higher levels of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellness” (Bushell and Sheldon 4) as a kind of preventive medicine that ensures social productivity (Sönmez and Apostolopoulos 38-43). In late capitalism, Western subjects, revitalized by their break from routine—a meteorological (and sometimes moral) caesura and cultural novelty—can resume their own positions in the global economy until the next scheduled vacation. This should be understood as a biopolitical practice. As Anaïs Nin wrote in 1951, “[t]o me Acapulco is the detoxicating cure for all the evils of the city: ambition, vanity, quest for success in money, the continuous contagious presence of power-driven, obsessed individuals …” (Diary V 73). In the resort, “You exist by your smile and your presence. You exist for your joy and your relaxations”; “washed of all the excrescences of so-called civilization … [t]he body comes to life” (74).

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73 Like Lowry’s Wilderness, she is upset when Mexicans prove interested in such modern “toxins.” She notes, “[t]he disillusionment of finding a charming Mexican reading How to Win Friends and Influence People” (Diary V 20), which seems a rather appropriate text for someone presumably in the hospitality industry.
While the National Wellness Institute stresses the “spiritual” dimension of wellness tourism, “extending it from purely hedonistic escapism into more meaningful recreation,” (Bushell and Sheldon 7), much like sex work, its niche in the tourist industry demands that othered bodies release the tensions and assist in re-charging the vital energy of tourist bodies. This uncanny dichotomy also seems to more frequently structure traditional “health tourism” in the developing world; various border cities have become popular places for medical treatment and Ciudad Juárez alone annually receives hundreds of thousands of U.S. medical tourists (healthbase.com). The perversity of U.S. citizens travelling to a war zone to heal themselves or alter their bodies with plastic surgery demonstrates the relative value of tourist and borderland bodies in a neoliberal biopolitical economy.

We could postulate that Kathy Acker, who died in a cancer hospice in Tijuana in 1997, might offer a future model for literary biopolitical relations between Euro-American writers and Mexican tourism. As opposed to Hart Crane’s suicide or Ambrose Bierce’s “euthanasia,” Acker’s attempt to cure her body may eventually resonate more strongly with tourist depictions of Mexico. Yet, in Western literature about Mexican resorts, we often find an anxiety about Mexican sexuality, in conjunction with microbiological fears, that is presented as a threat of contamination, a thrill of the forbidden foreign to the white body with destructive implications. Sexual desire may be linked to Mexico and its twentieth-century “cult of death” that reappears so often and in many guises in the country’s exonymic literature, but in ways that necessarily, and sometimes self-consciously, feel belated. An erotic, death-infused Mexico retains a

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74 For all of its rhetorical largess, wellness tourism lacks sufficient evidence that its so-called holistic model constitutes sustainable tourism or improves the wellbeing of locals (Bushell 35).
commercial belatedness and seems a remainder of an older generation’s politically-charged aesthetic preoccupation with a Mexico now commodified (and sanitized) by resort culture, but seized upon to assert literary authenticity. Mexico is no longer a place for “euthanasia” as it was for the old gringo Bierce, less the country where “everything … seems poisonous,” as Conrad Aiken wrote in *A Heart for the Gods of Mexico* (1939). Rather as *Love Among the Cannibals* (1957), that early sex tourism novel, advises, “… we’ll have to pick you up a smallpox vaccination. Acapulco, as you know, is not a pasteurized sort of place” (68).

Carnival and plague have been connected in Western culture since early modernity. As “mixtures,” they enforce each other and compel similar social disruptions: “suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear” (Foucault, *Discipline* 197). The resort emerges as place to sanction disorder, deviance, abnormal biopolitical relations, but within set limits that advise and structure how tourist bodies should circulate, what they should consume, what kind of locals they encounter and how. The resort ensures that the “transcultural” is proscribed, antibiotic and that the energies of carnival can be harnessed to serve, through an ordered disorder, a series of prevailing hegemonies (racial, neocolonial, capitalist, etc…).

(A)septic Aesthetics in the “Nameless Country”: Tennessee Williams and the Resort

In Tennessee Williams’s *Night of the Iguana*, the Mexican resort is dangerously inconsistent in its biopolitical production. That is, it has the capacity to produce healthy or diseased subjects, or more specifically, to revive or diminish the vital existence of the
foreign traveller through eroticized geocultural engagement. First performed in Italy in 1959 and in the U.S. in 1961, *Iguana* is a work for the stage that would become a film by John Huston in 1964 and that shares a title with a 1946 short story by Williams. The story, the film and the play are in complimentary but unique ways interested in the sorts of biopolitical transgression I have conceptualized thus far with regard to Mexican tourism. Specifically, the texts (and I will focus on the play and the film) thematize transgression in relation to modernity, health and sexuality and in ways that reproduce ambivalent tourist desires. Characters transgress what are becoming hegemonic patterns of mass tourism (motivated by modernist nostalgia or youthful sexual experimentation); from sound physical and psychological constitutions (hosting dangerous parasites and threatening to crack up); and from “normal” sexual behaviour or practices (which again become geographically coded). These three types of transgression calcify in the texts’ isolating individualism and structure the ambivalent patterns of human and geographical relationships.

In its biopolitical economy, *Iguana*, in its last two generic iterations, echoes Lowry in that the texts’ cultural landscape is complicit in generating a narratologically warranted, but narcissistically embellished totalizing fear of persecution for Lawrence Shannon, the male lead. “[A] young man who has cracked up before and is going to crack up again,” Shannon is an attractive former minister with hebephiliac tendencies who left the Church after committing acts of “[f]ornication and heresy”; he now leads tourists across Mexico for the low-end Blake Tours (10; 58). We first encounter Shannon depositing his latest charge, a group of female Baptist schoolteachers, at the hotel Costa Verde of “Puerto Barrio” in spite of the women’s protests that he follow the itinerary and
take them to the more modern Ambos Mundos (19). Having recently slept with Charlotte, the teenager of the tour group, Shannon has come under attack from the other women, especially the vindictive Judith Fellowes who is most likely (and in the film, definitely) in love with Charlotte herself. When Shannon learns that his confidant Fred, the manager of the Costa Verde, has just died, he resolves to settle at the hotel, as its hammock is his favourite place to crack up (95). Shannon is joined on a long dark night of the soul by Maxine, Fred’s widow, the itinerant Hannah Jelkes and her grandfather, respectfully, a globetrotting painter and poet from Nantucket.

**Modern Bodies, Anxious Geographies and Tourist Desire**

Very much in the spirit of Lowry, Shannon’s madness is engendered by his “spook,” a daemonic other that tries to destroy his sanity by confusing “the fantastic level” and “the realistic level” (74). Unlike Wilderness, Shannon’s relationship to his daemon is characterized in explicitly colonial terms: “the direct descendant of two colonial governors,” Shannon is haunted by a shadow-self who is “like the Sioux Indians in the Wild West fiction … an after-sundown shadow” (90; 17). Shannon’s nocturnal battle with his double is much less complex than Wilderness’s metatextual conflict and more Conradian in its ethnic-coding, though Lowry’s and Williams’s works both overdetermine their Mexican settings in expansive psychogeographies. As Lowry has his barranca, Williams’s Mexico is filled with “gorges and chasms measureless to man” (16). In *Iguana*, the void between characters manifests itself geologically, just as the storms of the tropical rainforest surrounding them, Hannah observes, are analogous to the “inside disturbances” of emotionally fragile people (46). The secluded, tropical west coast of Mexico, with “[it’s] villages … still predominantly primitive Indian villages,” its “heavy
tropical foliage” and sublime thunder storms and threatening hurricanes, is both symbol of and stimulant to Shannon’s nervous condition (5; 44). The surrounding sea is “the cradle of life” that promises health, but at the same time, “[f]ast decay is a thing of … steamy, hot, wet climates” (71; 122). Juanita Cabello, who devotes half of a dissertation on female travellers in Mexico to an analysis of Iguana, convincingly places Williams’s work with the infernal paradise tradition, showing how Mexico here reflects “modern man’s spiritual plight” (110).

In one sense, the play’s theme of world-weary expats searching for authenticity in the vanishing peripheries of a quickly accelerating global modernity might seem redundant in the 1960’s (147). The play is set in 1940, however, or as the stage directions tell us with a tinge of regret, when “the west coast of Mexico had not yet become the Las Vegas or Miami Beach of Mexico” (5). Here too we see the Lowrean anxiety of the modernist cosmopolitan traveller who is being replaced by the ignorant and dull mass tourist—an important concern Williams shares in this play. The itinerant Shannon, Hannah and her grandfather Jonathan, roaming the globe with “a beat-up Gladstone covered with travel stickers from all over the world” or “pieces of ancient luggage fantastically plastered with hotel and travel stickers indicating a vast range of wandering” (10; 42) are being overtaken demographically by package tourists like the group Shannon is responsible for (Cabello 141). Shannon’s Mexico remains in the 20’s and 30’s, when Siqueiros painted Hart Crane, and he assumes a latent religious fervour in his job as a tour guide by “educating” young women like Charlotte who want to go “off the beaten path,” showing them the remnants of this “authentic” Mexico (Night 58). With dignity, he declares “I haven’t stuck to the schedules of the brochures and I’ve always allowed the

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75 One of Williams’s own favourite poets (Adler 114).
ones that were willing to see, *to see!*—the underworlds of all places, and if they had hearts to be touched, feelings to feel with, I gave them a priceless chance to feel and be touched …” (92; 94).

Though absent in the film version, the play’s more hyperbolic symbols of mass tourism are not the women of Blake Tours, but the Fahrenkopfs, a German family who make brief, disjunctive appearances in the narrative and who are emotionally as distant from the U.S. tourists as the Mexican characters in the play, and thus, significantly removed from the work’s pathetic investment. On one level, the Fahrenkopfs are merely ridiculous Nazi stereotypes, “animated cartoon[s]”: Herr Fahrenkopf listens to “Der Führer” over his portable radio and “performs some muscle-flexing movements of a formalized nature;” his newlywed daughter carries around an “inflated rubber horse” and with her “ecstatic smile and great winking eyes,” can often be found shouting “Horsey, horsey, giddap!” (15; 51). To highlight their physicality, the family is always “nearly nude,” wearing only “scanty swimsuits,” “dressed in the minimal concession to decency” (48; 98; 15). Reading their appearance in Williams’s play through Lowry’s oeuvre, it is tempting to see them as representing the threat of global fascism. Norma Jenckes, for example, argues that at the play’s core is the human struggle for respect and intimacy, “… the fragile, impermanent but indestructible thing that humanity erects against fascism” (12-13). The Fahrenkopfs, in her reading, represent the dangers of Nazi victory (9). If this is partially true, they do not have the same power as the fascist forces of *Volcano*. The Fahrenkopfs are childlike in their ability to be amused by violence. They take pleasure watching a tied-up Shannon suffer a nervous breakdown; reduced to bare

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76 They are connected in sadism as well—the Mexicans bate the tethered iguana like the Germans gather to laugh at a tied-up Shannon.
life, the Germans “gather about [his] captive figure as if they were looking at a funny animal in a zoo” (75; 97).

In their sensuality—they are “Rubenesque, splendidly physical”—they represent the other side of mass tourism to the Baptists’ prudery (15). Infantile sadism and grotesque sensuality, of course, can be seen as Nazi qualities in Williams’s critique. Yet I think that the comedic side of the German tourists cannot be so easily accounted for; we are meant to laugh, and often directly at their bodies, however uncomfortably. Both spectacle and spectator in an orgy of drinking, sun-worship, sadistic bathing and “Rabelasian laughter,” the Fahrenkopfs mark a new model of resort tourism in which carnival is allowed by geocultural imperialism. Their entitlement to lebensraum reflects contemporary exigencies of post-war tourism and is thus literally foreign to the constantly mobile culture of the U.S. expats (98).

Cabello shows that Iguana, as it moves from short story to play to film, speaks to historically different travel experiences and “reflect[s] the charged sexual politics of its travel scene” (125-6; 139). To expand this analysis to the present, and in a way that is remarkably relevant to this chapter, she even suggests that the images of actress Sue Lyon (Lolita, herself) frolicking drunk on the dance floor and of Ava Gardener making out simultaneously with her two Mexican “beach boys” in the evening tide anticipate the marketed image of “the young, unruly, and sexually transgressive beach of the 1990s” (167). Shannon’s libertine excess in sexual and alcoholic indulgence, which pushes him to physical self-destruction, also resonates with Sal Paradise’s Mexican experience in On The Road.
Williams’s accounts of his own World War II-era travels to Mexico place him in league with Lowry and the expatriate scene that characterized foreign travel to Mexico in the first half of the century. His first excursion, a short pilgrimage to a cantina in Tijuana in 1939, also implicates him in the more traditional borderlands vice tourism discussed in the previous chapter (Hayman 60). Williams was aware that both types of tourism were not all that distinct. He describes the tourist milieu in 1940 Acapulco: “Their life is lying about the beaches usually in a hypnosis induced by strong drink and hot sunlight and lack of any exertion … Nothing surprises or interests them particularly, not even a world that is cracking up all around them” (Letters 1, 283-84). Williams had “run away” to Mexico City and Acapulco in 1940, advising his agent, and much in the spirit of Fitzgerald’s Amory Blaine, “I would like to settle for a year in a cabin … live a completely primitive, regular life and devote myself to writing one long, careful play” (Notebook 215; Letters 1 172). In many respects, his journey fits tropologically with contemporary sex and health tourist narratives. Williams was hoping to find sexual contact with “a peacefully fiery Latin” and wanted to “… be a nice, lazy beachcomber … dozing under a big wide sombrero …” (Letters DW 46; Letters 1 269). In Acapulco he had a sexual relationship with a wealthy U.S. traveller and a much shorter affair with a veracruzano named Carlos who did not speak English, a delightful characteristic of his “little Indian” (Letters DW 16; 174).

The journey was motivated by the typical modern tourist desire for revitalization. Williams arrived in Acapulco “with chills, fever, heart palpitations, and a mental state that was like a somnambulist’s” as well as severe depression (“Summer” 139). After a few weeks, his alleged tuberculosis had cleared up “and the death wish had gone, and has
never come back to me since,” Williams declared (142). Like Shannon in *Iguana*,
Williams prognosticates his self-renewal as the result of a deep connection to a fellow
“troubled” writer and to the sublime natural aesthetics of Acapulco, with its “spectacular
storm[s] … [that] would completely eclipse our melancholy” (142-43).

Williams’s revitalization also depended on absolving himself from publicity
(“Streetcar” 19). In order to escape his burgeoning commercial success, he retreated to
that “elemental country where you can quickly forget the false dignities and conceits
imposed by success, a country where vagrants innocent as children curl up to sleep on the
pavements and human voices, especially when their language is not familiar to the ear,
are soft as birds”” (19). In Mexico, Williams asserts, “[m]y public self, that artifice of
mirrors, did not exist … and so my natural being was resumed” (19). Mexico’s poverty is
here benign and even charming. While the service industry in the U.S. makes him
uncomfortable as “[m]aids, waiters, bellhops, porters and so forth … continually remind
you of inequalities which we accept as the proper thing,” this anxiety is absent in Mexico
where his ability to exist beyond a celebrity sphere absolves him from classist guilt and
thus brings him closer to a “natural self” (19). Again, like in *Iguana*, the “natural” quality
of his beach experience and its revitalizing abilities depend on his remaining within the
traveller’s abyssal lines, following scripted patterns of intimacy and engagement.
Williams wrote his family from Acapulco and explained, “I seldom go into town except
for mail as the poverty here is depressing. The natives live under almost animal
conditions” (Letters I 280). Yet, his desire to penetrate the geographical, epistemological
and sexual borders of tourism stimulates and scares Williams, prompting a very literal
transcultural prophylaxis. In Mexico City, the male prostitutes fill him with “Such
strangeness, such poetic ‘license’” (273). However, “… because I suspected they were all rotten with disease,” he explains in a letter to a friend, “I showed more than my usual discipline and kept out of any real mischief” (273-74). Williams was able to receive sexual pleasure from the prostitutes in a guarded way; he writes that “[o]ne was so lovely that when he kissed and embraced me, I had an orgasm” (274). In the play, heightened and/or “abnormal” sexual desire and the threat of disease seem to be almost “natural” conditions the traveller encounters in Mexico. Like Williams, the characters in *Iguana* develop their own strategies to resolve competing desire and fear while confirming a premium value on white, Western subjectivity that must be protected.

**Peripheral Sexualities and Eroticized Bare Life**

In *Iguana*, the character who comes closest ontologically to achieving a “natural” relation to her environment, as Williams sees it, is Maxine. Williams advised Bette Davis, in preparation for her stage performance, that Maxine is “a living definition of nature: lusty, rapacious, guileless, unsentimental” (*Five O’Clock* 176). And at the base of Maxine’s “naturalness” is her naturalism. “[A] stout, swarthy woman in her middle forties,” she is “proud of [her] boobs,” as Shannon suggests, and usually leaves her blouse “half-unbuttoned” (9; 20). “I never dress in September,” she reminds him (10). As opposed to the androgynous Hannah, Maxine’s physiological femininity is embellished—her hips and, again, her breasts are large and solicit male attention (74). As her bawdy last name “Faulk” might suggest (Bauer-Briski 357), she counters Shannon’s Christian pattern of transgression-repentance with a consistent and shameless promiscuity, just as she is able to counter his physical and verbal abuse (*Iguana* 75). The guilty Shannon brashly sermonizes that Mexico, like himself, is “caught and destroyed in its flesh” (61).
For Maxine, there is less a geographical displacement than an identification with Mexico, or at least with her Costa Verde, which she helps develop into a location to celebrate flesh. And if for Shannon Mexico is a place to sleep with teenage girls and crack-up, for Maxine it is where she can dominate young local men as both lover and employer. The similar sexual behaviour that they engage in, at least in general, is as transgressive for Shannon as it is liberating for Maxine.

Like the brothel or the mental hospital (and the connection is stronger than simile in the play), the Costa Verde (as proto-resort) becomes here a space of what Foucault terms “illegitimate sexualities” (*History* 4). The sexually powerful female and “perverted” male play a role in constructing, just as they are relegated to, a kind of borderland for “their infernal mischief … a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit” (4). And this is essentially how we leave Shannon and Maxine at final curtain/credits—working together to develop the sexual exchange-value of Costa Verde in a growing tourist economy.

In the film version of *Iguana*, we watch Maxine passionately embracing her two Mexican lovers on the beach as the night tide rolls around them. In this scene, and in her behaviour with these “beach boys” more generally, Maxine challenges a patriarchal Western discourse of female biopolitics that dictates how the female body should qualify its utility, evaluate reproduction and protection, select its partners and solicit its pleasures (154-55). By deploying female sexuality in counter-hegemonic manoeuvres, she “… invert[s] the representation of the relationships of power to sexuality” (155). Using Foucault’s spatial metaphor, we could argue that she is performing a “peripheral sexuality” (40). The image of her body and the idea of its excessive sexuality reflects
larger cultural desires and anxieties of borderlands vice tourism and re-places them on the more exotic and mass-marketable beach locale so that new peripheries may be expropriated—both developed and “naturalized” or “primitivized”—for experiments with peripheral sexuality.

Cabello argues that Ava Gardner’s Maxine established a precedent in the Western imaginary for a new type of female traveller seeking an erotic engagement with Mexican men in Puerto Vallarta (161). The “borderland erotics” of the beach resort, its dymanic gendered cultural politics (162) inform contemporary sex tourism in Mexico and the Third World more generally. The agency that Maxine secures in her erotic encounters with the “beach boys” insures the control valued by sex tourists (O’Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 43). At the level of ideology, this agency “naturalizes” First World sex tourism in the Third World by propounding that “sex is more ‘natural’ in Third World countries, that prostitution is not really prostitution but a ‘way of life,’ that ‘They’ are ‘at it’ all of the time” (43). Yet Maxine’s agency—her ability to escape U.S. mores as limits on her individualistic desire and adopt a more sexually-driven lifestyle elsewhere—makes her a natural entrepreneur while the “beach boys” are naturally, that is to say, biologically, inclined to promiscuity and thus sex labour. Such an implication of course secures the racial supremacy of the white Westerner (43). As I will explore later with regard to Maryse Holder’s work, female sex tourism in the Third World generally has become its own unique transcultural institution in which the male sex worker “…embodies the primitive, aggressive nature of the black man,” having an animal-like quality, which is constructed as opposite to the white man, the gentleman” (Phillips, “Tourist-Oriented” 193). As “Judy,” a sex tourist in Barbados explains, “[b]lack men like

Phillips is writing about Barbados, but the trope can be extended.
fucking, black men enjoy the sex act, they don’t make love” (193). One need only look to Maxine as a literary precedent when she explains to Shannon how a relationship with him would be different than her relationship with Pedro and/or Pancho: “I know the difference between loving someone and just sleeping with someone” (88).

Maxine’s “beach boys” are Pedro and Pancho (Pedro and Pepe in the film). The alliteration of their names underscores their interchangeability. Neither is a fully developed adult character in the human drama of Iguana. Rather they occupy bare life in an eroticized capacity. As Third World sex workers, their “… racialized-sexualized bodies and energies are primary resources that local governments and the global tourist industry exploit and commodify to cater to … tourist desires and needs” (Kempadoo 27). Their bodies are reduced to basic animalistic existence in order to revitalize tourists: sexually, they care for the tourist, which in turn ensures the labour productivity of the tourist in his/her routine material environment (27). Mark Padilla, whose work explores sex work in the Dominican Republic (but whose observances are applicable here), reminds us of the colonial-historical dimensions of this industry: “[the locals] once again find themselves subsumed within a global economy in which their sexual labour functions as a cheap resource that is intimately related to patterns of work and consumption in the ‘developed’ metropolises” (6). Pedro and Pancho are foremost workers in Iguana—they are ordered about not only by Maxine, but by Shannon, Hannah and Mrs. Fellowes (31; 71; 96). Yet they serve primarily as Maxine’s “Mexican concubines” and providing sexual services to their employer is part of their job (63). Both men were former Quebrada cliff-divers who lost their jobs after sleeping with female guests at the Hotel Quebrada, a fact that endeared them to Maxine (24). Like real life
cliff-divers, both men are physical spectacles. In the play, their “slim and attractive” and sometimes “wriggling bodies” become canvases of flesh for figurative ejaculations: Shannon throws Maxine’s rum “onto the humped, wriggling posterior of PEDRO;” Pancho enters the stage “sucking a juicy peeled mango—its juice running down his chin onto his throat” (9; 64; 38).

In the film, Pedro and Pepe’s racialized hyper-sexuality is undercut by a dominant comedic quality of their performance (in their ridiculousness, they take the place of the absent Fahrenkopfs). Wearing only tight white pants, Pedro and Pepe never so much walk as they glide and dance to the maracas that they constantly shake. This may be a kind of quotidian foreplay for Maxine, but it is otherwise just silly. The characters embody pastiche in a way that disqualifies them as suitable long-term partners for Maxine and thus alleviate or mitigate at once the potential tension arising from more conservative views on female empowerment and miscegenation in the early 1960’s U.S. In the film, the sexualized bodies of Pedro and Pepe find a feminine correlative in Charlotte’s scantily-clad frame. This “precocious Jezebel,” the scandalous Lolita redux, this time seducing the defrocked clergyman, becomes another object prefabricated to market the film and correspondingly to stimulate the audience’s sexual-ethico threshold.

**Cross-Border Contamination**

In both the cinematic and stage versions of *Iguana*, there is something about the form as well as the content of the piece that highlights spatially the transgressive magnitudes of the Mexican beach resort. Without attempting to elaborate a hermeneutics

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78 And for Charlotte. After Shannon rejects her again, Charlotte, much in the spirit of a contemporary spring breaker, dances teasingly with Pedro and Pepe, offending locals with her skimpy attire, sexual initiative, and drunken state. She encourages her tour group’s U.S. bus driver to fight with Pedro and Pepe for her own amusement, a scene that would not be out of place in *The Real Cancun.*
of the gaze in cinema or its kinship with the “tourist gaze,” I do wish to point out how Williams’s writing deals with the connection between sexual “deviance” and cinema. In *Iguana* itself, after all, Hannah’s first (of two) sexual experiences occurs when she is seduced as a sixteen year old by an older man in a movie theatre (114-15). “[I]t was a Clara Bow picture,” she says in her attacker’s defense (and thus, she was watching a popular film in the 1920’s hypothetically as sensational as *Iguana* in the early 1960’s).

Moving away from *Iguana* for a moment, I would like to briefly consider “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,” an earlier short story with a thematic bricolage that combines cinema, miscegenation, forbidden sexuality and border-crossing and that may offer an illuminating insight into the larger themes of health, travel and transgressive sexuality as they appear in the biopolitical economy of *Iguana*. The story recounts the solitary life of one Mr. Gonzales, presumably a U.S. citizen who was an “illegal” migrant in his youth (99). Gonzales is able to satisfy homosexual desires in the upper floor of the “Joy Rio” movie theatre, “where practically every device and fashion of carnality had run riot in a gloom so thick that a chance partner could only be discovered by touch” (103). One must cross over the “greasy and rotting length of velvet rope” to enter the “forbidden region” of “Joy Rio” to indulge in its “venal pleasures” (102; 106-7). The spectacular site of the cinema offers Gonzales invisibility and anonymity; it directs the gaze onto a manufactured image and thus temporarily frees the body from social surveillance. The “Joy Rio” is a space like Williams’s Acapulco that exonerates one from public life while centralizing one’s “natural” or animalistic desires through liberating/ed scopophiliac and physical stimulation. At the end of the story, Gonzales, dying of an unnamed illness, finds his final liberation by defying the sealed border of “Joy Rio” and entering once
again his “earthly heaven” (107). In his last breaths, he finds a connection with his deceased mentor that is tender and paternal, but also incestuous (the strongest transgression, though it exists only in his mind here). In the story, the cinema is a country of forbidden sexual desires, a space to find liberation from social restrictions on these desires, a place of anonymity, of zoë over bios (potential partners cannot see each other which sometimes invites “mistake[s] of gender”) (103). “Joy Rio” is a space of death, but also a space for revealing the hidden self and acting on its forbidden impulses.

The film version of Iguana directs our gaze onto the tropical landscape of western Mexico, however, as metonymy of wellness. Taking the Baptist tour group to the Pacific coast, Shannon insists that they stop for “a moment of beauty.” The camera shows us a lagoon filled with local women doing laundry in the water as children splash around them to a tranquil, Oceanic score. A beautiful peasant woman kneads her laundry on a rock and smiles lazily at Shannon who sulks back. The medicinal value of the idyllic scene—its ability to ease Shannon’s shattered nerves momentarily simply by observation—is lost to the female tourists. Their desires for modern amenities and the comforts of home render them immune to this “fleeting glimpse into the lost world of innocence,” as Shannon explains it.79

Yet, the biopolitics of its primitivism make Indigenous Mexico responsible for both the Western subject’s treatment and sickness. In Iguana, as in “Joy Rio,” there is a largely eroticized culture of death that can here be focused down to its smallest microbiological level. Shannon’s Mexico, “[the] country caught and destroyed in its

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79 If there is an Eisensteinian quality to this scene’s primitivism, it is worth pointing out that Iguana’s legendary Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa worked with the Soviet director over thirty years earlier on ¡Que Viva Mexico! (1932). He would work with Huston again in 1984 on the adaption of Lowry’s Under the Volcano.
“flesh” is full of foreign bacteria that can cause the white tourist body to deteriorate. The more cosmopolitan expats can shrug off the Baptist College ladies when they complain of having dysentery (29-30). “Montezuma’s Revenge! That’s what we call it,” Maxine explains, securing her own acclimatization to the exotic surroundings at the levels of knowledge and maybe even biological immunity. What is troubling for Shannon is that his interlocutor Fred can die suddenly from a simple infection, the result of mishandling a fishhook (11). As Fred’s “uncivilized” surroundings could not support “a decent hospital,” he passed away within forty-eight hours (11-12). Ed Cohen, explaining the biopolitics of modern Western medical discourse, shows how bacteria have been militarized as “foreign invaders” (250). “If infectious diseases seem to act geopolitically as invasive events … then bacteria themselves … must constitute an invading force per se” (250-51).

The tendency to confine naturally-deterioral disease within national or racial cultures of hygiene has been a large scale practice of scapegoating whose origins can be traced to the first colonial contacts (Carter and Clift 1-4). Throughout the twentieth century, U.S. immigration policies have employed a biological rhetoric of contagion and disease to stigmatize non-white immigrants (Markel and Stern 757-58). Indeed, the militaristic consolidation of the border during the Mexican Revolution depended not only on the threat of mobile violent rebels, but of “diseased and dirty … and infectious” refugees (765). More recently, John Xavier Inda has explored how strategies to criminalize or stigmatize Mexicans in 1990’s California have relied on “… nativist rhetoric [that] implicitly figures the immigrant, the Mexican immigrant in particular, as a parasite intruding on the body of the host nation, drawing nutrients from it, while
providing nothing to its survival and even threatening its well-being” (“Foreign Bodies” 47). The larger cultural fear of mobile bodies that spread disease functions in the play when Western bodies, those allowed to migrate, attempt to negotiate or compulsively preserve their sacrosanct and ontological immunity within a foreign community (Esposito 60-61). Crossing paths with the Mexican migrant, the tourists arrive in the migrant’s home, the site of unhygienic production. Industrial hospitality is thus required to provide the infrastructure to remove the persistence of local cultures (bacterial and otherwise).

_Iguana_ feeds back to consolidate the medicalization of the national border that can interrogate race in terms of hygiene (a politicized criteria of surveillance informed by and that informs other related criteria in policing the borders in terms of nationality and race).

Unlike the Baptist teachers, for Shannon, “Montezuma’s revenge” is not a matter of preventive medicine and minimizing contact with local food, but of his Indigenous daemon “cracking him up.” The very space of Costa Verde can either assist or prevent this from happening. When Shannon cracks up, he becomes a “city with broken walls” (Huston). His immunity is compromised and _otherness_ overcomes him; his “internal defense against an actively and relentlessly _external_ world,” the paradigmatic individualism of Western biopolitics, is no longer strong enough to defend his embodied subjectivity (Cohen 133). With this rupture in the “ontology of biopolitical interiority” (177), mental and physical ailments become indistinct, just as crossing the U.S.-Mexico border is at once “crossing over … the borders of sanity” (Huston). Shannon’s nerves make him “dizzy with fever” and in the film, he compares his “panic” to “leprosy” (11). The conditions of his crack-up figure him as _homo sacer_—tied up in his hammock, he

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80 A more recent example would be anti-Mexican CNN anchor Lou Dobbs’s 2005 op-ed that brought in a “medical attorney” to chart the diseases that Mexicans were importing to the U.S. (Contreras 209).
screams out at the surrounding figures who have captured him in this moment of bare life. “I’m a citizen with inalienable rights!” (Huston). In vain, he asks to speak with his Consul.

Yet, Shannon does not completely crack-up in Iguana. He is healed by his intimacy with Hannah in the play’s final act, if even only temporarily. Laying down their defensive psychological barriers, the two characters share a verbal exchange that becomes more valuable than sex in the text’s evaluation of intimacy. Hannah bestows on Shannon her belief not in any doctrinal morality, but in “Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if its just for one night” (106). Their ultimate exchange is thus beyond “earth’s obscene coupling love” and it teaches Shannon of a meaningful humanism uninfected by his pathologized Christianity (124). The ideal purity of their relationship may testify to what one of his biographers called Williams’s “[v]estigial puritanism” (Hayman 109). In lives and spaces subsumed by carnival (by death, transgression and vice) Shannon and Hannah find solace and rejuvenation in chastity, order, in the doctrine of individual self-fulfilment rather than collective dissolution; their exchange symbolizes the anticarnivalesque and provides a moment of support to “two unstable conditions” (53).

Regardless to what degree we want to characterize Hannah’s talking cure for Shannon as essentially psychoanalytic, the play’s third act supports the uniquely Western notion that confession is a valuable technique to produce truth and define subjectivity (Foucault, History 59). Confession provides a powerful therapeutic function: “Spoken in time, to the proper party, and by the person who was both the bearer of it and the one responsible for it, the truth healed” (67). Maxine was able to diagnose the origins of
Shannon’s bouts of passionate atheism and hebephilia in God’s and the mother’s judgment of his childhood masturbation (86). It is then up to Hannah to help him articulate his problem—to incite the discourse that in itself will secure Shannon’s “endurance” (Huston). Of course, the interconnection between “broken gates” is limited to white characters here.

Most critics read Shannon and Hannah’s dialogue in the final act as a nonsexual exchange, as Williams himself did (Bauer-Briski 343-44; Hayman 185; Williams, Conversations 86-87). Yet there is a sadistic element to their encounter that should not be overlooked, especially as it casts light on Mexico’s overdetermination with illicit sexuality and disease in the text. Shannon’s sexual behaviour with young women in the Third World always partially takes the form of exposing a real, “off-the-beaten-path” character, the hidden kernel of the tourist experience. This revelation is followed by a violent and repentant reproach to the particular young woman for her role in Shannon’s carnal transgression. When he repeats this pattern with Charlotte, she is left with “fleas,” a result of the less-than hygienic conditions of this “real” Mexico (93). Her sexual relationship with Shannon has thus left her with a parasitic lice passed on through contact with Mexico itself via her partner. Further, there is obvious sadism in the way that Shannon seduces young women and delights in exposing them to shockingly unfamiliar conditions of the cultural terrain he is leading them across—the heart of darkness beating under the plasticity of the tourist veneer. He confesses his pattern to Hannah: “[a]lways seducing a lady or two, or three or four or five ladies in the party, but really ravaging her first by pointing out to her the … horrors … of the tropical country being conducted a tour through” (122). Shannon supplements this pattern with Hannah (again, at a purely
linguistic level) by telling her a story set “in a country which shall be nameless” (121). He recounts leading “a rubberneck bus along a tropical coast when [he and his tour group] saw a great mound of … well, the smell was unpleasant” (121). He and one of his female tourists “noticed … a pair of very old natives of this nameless country, practically naked except for a few old filthy rags creeping and crawling around this mound of … and … occasionally stopping to pick something out of it, and pop it in their mouths. What? Bits of undigested … food particles” (121). Hannah gags and leaves the stage, presumably to vomit. There is a sexual dimension here typical of Shannon’s “seductions:” he stimulates Hannah until her bodily constitution loses its composure precisely by showing her the darker reality of the foreign land—beyond the façade of tourist simulacra or expat romanticism.

This “nameless country” is and is not Mexico. That it, it is the Mexico of Indigenous displacement and mass poverty, the country that must remain unknown and “nameless”, obfuscated by intersecting abyssal lines, for tourism to function. It is also not exactly Mexico, but a space that stands in for the entire global south. It is not the tourist’s “south,” that placeless imaginary geography overdetermined by tourist desires and expectations (Selänniemi 20-21). Rather it is the uncanny and foreign underside, the reality masking the illusion, a profane space where human excrement must serve as nutrition for the subaltern. In its obscenity, Shannon’s “nameless country” speaks to the “underlying matrix of the tourist camp … [with its] strange double economy of desire and disgust, of object and abject, or of transgression and confirmation” (Diken and Laustsen 116-17). That is, the “nameless country” and the marketed (perhaps excessively “named”) resort must be removed through a kind of cultural prophylaxis to prevent, what
in *Iguana* are literally threats to the health of the white body when it meets its other in an unhygienic frontier. Shannon’s ability to control his “spook” tempers his unacceptable sexual desires and restrains his politico-religious outbursts. As Bauer-Briski explains, “Shannon’s search for, and exposition of, groups to appalling sites which he thinks are illustrations of God, discloses his selfishness. He disregards his customer’s needs and expectations entirely …” (341). Hannah says that he needs to be fair to tourists, a skill he must learn if he will continue working in the industry at the end.

It is likely (and in the film, the romantic ending makes it certain) that Shannon will remain at the Costa Verde to manage the hotel with Maxine. In this case, the white and age-appropriate union supplies a restorative conclusion to the sexual tensions of the text. In their partnership, it will be Maxine’s job “to make this place attractive to the male clientele, the middle-aged ones at least” (126). Shannon will “take care of the women” (126). Perhaps this implies that the couple will provide sexual services to tourists, but at the very least it assigns them a sexual capital that will help market their resort; between the two of them, their charisma can create the kind of “sexual mythology” that post-war tourism often employs in marketing destinations (Oppermann 22). Yet, the aesthetics and amenities of the Costa Verde are never completely “modernized,” its (bacterial) culture never completely sanitized (which is why the Baptist teachers refuse to stay there). The “nameless country” may at any point resurface and impinge on, crack up and kill even the savviest or most immune cosmopolitan expat. A routine fear of

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81 Cabello’s work explores at length how the play and film themselves branded Puerto Vallarta as a tourist destination: she considers how the scandals of the film’s celebrity actors incited tourist desire; how the popularity of the film accelerated the production of tourist space and the segregated, expat “Gringo Gulch” in Puerto Vallarta in the 1970’s (153; 170-74). She considers how the film offers a “borderland erotics” in a larger transcultural context “by placing provocative women traveler icons on the beaches of Puerto Vallarta” (157). Furthermore, Puerto Vallarta tourism, Cabello shows, has a homological predecessor in the United Fruit Company’s colonization of Puerto Vallarta between the World Wars (182).
contamination looms over the resort’s sensual geography and finds life in the most intimate pleasures even as it inspires embodied practices of its disavowal with larger transcultural consequences.

**Latitudinal Feminisms and “Disposable Chavos:” The Letters of Maryse Holder**

When a fellow traveller “asked why it was that women abandoned their hometown mores when they travelled,” Maryse Holder explained that this was “an impossibly naïve question … because it’s here to be done” (116). Holder, the autobiographical persona, is a self-described macho woman in the spirit and deeds of Williams’s Maxine (27). A feminist doctoral candidate at Cornell, the 36 year old scholar writes Mexico a transgressive, but self-empowering sexual landscape beyond the normative gendered deployments of contemporary Western sexuality. *Give Sorrow Words*, Holder’s posthumous novel, is a compilation of letters sent to her friend Edith Jones in New York while Holder vacationed in Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Acapulco, and other Mexican destinations following her termination from a college lectureship. The book’s major theme is Holder’s love life: most of the work recounts her numerous sexual exploits with Mexican men over the course of her 1976 and 1977 vacations to the country. The letters stop abruptly following Holder’s alleged and mysterious murder in Mexico City. A decade after her death, the Canadian film *A Winter Tan* (1988) dramatized her experiences drawing almost exclusively on the literal content of the letters to script its soliloquy-heavy narrative.

In the novel and the film, resort culture offers Holder sexual liberation through exposure, through a literal bringing to light of the body as the locus of pleasure. When she was a child, Holder suffered from mastoiditis and it left her with a facial scar (notably
absent on the body of the film’s Maryse). Unlike in the U.S., this source of bodily shame, she feels, will not affect her desireability in Mexico (23). As for Maxine and a host of other fictional and real life sex tourists and expatriates, Mexico not only lifts Western aesthetic decrees to sexual entitlement, but through this opening, enables “an intensity of feeling” that the resort particularly cultivates by design: Holder sums up that “[s]exually, Mexico has been framed moments of exquisite pleasure” (50; 56). Unlike Maxine however, Holder is not only escaping the female biopolitical constraints of a hegemonic U.S. patriarchy, but a clearly articulated feminist ideology that poses its own limiting ethics of the body. After years of celibacy in the academic milieu of New England, Holder goes to Mexico for a so-called “vacation from feminism” (94-95). 82 “[A]nd how I dug Mexican men,” she qualifies her raison de voyage (95). Particularly young Mexican men (as young as 16 in the novel and 14 in the film) constitute her love objects and she strategically subtracts years off of her own age in all of her encounters (230; 248; 104). The age difference is all the more striking in the film as Jackie Burroughs, the actor playing Holder, is eleven years her senior.

A projected “natural” promiscuity of Mexican men justifies her own liberation. Moreover, the “organized forgetfulness or aphasic gap” of the sex tourism industry allows her to reconceive “deviancy” as “naturalness of the [sexual] impulse and the values attributed to the sex worker” (Ryan and Hall 26-27; 74). She is able to adopt “an alternative set of ethics wherein [she] accord[s] to sexual acts a means of attaining a sense of renewal:” she can re-script her body, its age, the meaning of its “imperfections” and its overall governing impulses (74).

82Perhaps referencing Hannah’s description of Shannon in Iguana as “A man of God, on vacation” (71).
*Give Sorrow Words* and *A Winter Tan* are important historically to this study as they testify to the degree of integration of resort performance and epistemology I have been discussing in this chapter—her Zihuatanejo and Acapulco fit between *Iguana’s* imagined Puerto Vallarta to come and *The Real Cancun*. The fact that the novel and the film take place ten years apart is only noticeable in the stylistic differences of the Western music and fashion that fill Acapulco’s tourist zones. The spaces themselves and the people that primarily occupy them, while not necessarily or altogether “timeless,” are presumed to be unaffected by the momentum of modern life. Zihuatanejo, Holder’s first destination is “naturalized” like Cancún in the sense that Holder and her fellow travellers are not conscious of the particularities of its constructedness, of the fact that it was built on expropriated communal ejidal land only two years before her arrival (Clancy 54) and thus of its hyper-accelerated incorporation into the space of global capitalism. Its material signified (exotic, relaxed “paradise”) belies its material production. She recognizes the simulation on an abstract and literary level, as Acapulco seems to her “[a] *Brave New World* pleasure city, with programmed music produced by anonymous groups, programmed with mass-produced decors, and abstract, ‘material disposable’ chavos,” yet there is no meaningful understanding of how this resort culture impacts local lives, and she herself enjoys acting the tourist (246). Her daily activities typically include swimming, sun-tanning, shopping, eating in restaurants, drinking and dancing in discos and of course, having or pursuing sex with local young men.

Her sexual encounters become exemplary in the novel, but the reader is also made privy to a larger culture of sex tourism that the resort is marketed on. “[L]onely gringas in gangs come to ogle sadly the Mex men” in discos where Mexican men are paid in alcohol
to dance with white tourists (195; 246). Long-term, middle-aged expats brag of affairs with “twenty-year-old beach boys” and “repellent” septua- and octo-genarian men openly search for female sex workers decades younger (112; 96). To reiterate Diken and Laustsen’s reading of the resort as Agambenian camp, “the private and the public enter into a zone of indiscernibility in the serenity of the metamorphosis from the citizen into ‘almost animal’” (113). Holder herself finds “intimacy sacrificed” as “public reality has completely overwhelmed private experience” (34). Further, Diken and Laustsen argue, and which speaks to Holder’s account, “references to ‘dark skin,’ ‘simplicity,’ ‘primitive sexuality’ and other racial assumptions as to the savage and the sensual, ‘amoral’ and ‘permissive’ aspects of enjoyment ‘outside’ daily routine and so on must be recognized in the context of the liberation of zoë, bare life, from bios, the polis” (113). At the same time, the transcultural apparatuses that support this liberation must also be seen as coded by politics of U.S.-Mexican relations, of post-war Mexican tourism and of twentieth-century Western literature’s interest in Mexico.

**Female Sex Tourism in Literature**

Holder makes several references to Tennessee Williams’s work, though strangely none to *Iguana*. The other absent text that haunts her experiences is D.H Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent*, the story of a white female tourist, socially-scripted at 40 as “middle-aged,” who finds rebirth in Mexico. In his overall literary engagement with the Americas, Lawrence differentiates an ontology of zoë and bios in embodied geographies: “… beautiful suave rich skins … a sort of richness of the flesh … perhaps [accompanies] the complete absence of what we call ‘spirit;’” *(Mornings 32)* an Indigenous “consciousness” is physiologically placed “in the abdomen,” making native Americans and Mexicans
more vitally and “naturally” aware as opposed to the cerebral “white monkey” with her/his “nasty white flesh” and insistent second-guessing, rationalizing—essentially thinking—supplemental relation to the world (62; 38). His diagnosis takes greater dimensions and metonymic license when he suggests that “Mexico is only the sort of solar plexus of North America” (132). It is within this impulsive and literally embodied landscape that his protagonist Kate learns “[h]ow wonderful sex can be, when men keep it powerful and sacred, and it fills the world!” (Plumed Serpent 434). Mestizo and Indigenous male bodies emit “[a] pure sensuality … a fascination almost like a narcotic” (181). Kate assumes an ambivalent (even if primarily existential) addiction to Mexican “men with handsome legs in skin-tight trousers … most of them handsome, with dark, warm-bronze skin so smooth and living …” (71). By taking a Mexican husband and attempting to not only understand, but embody pre-Columbian cosmology, she discovers a primal sexuality (and its statutory gender archetypes), though as Jose Limón says of many Mexican/Chicana/o-Anglo miscegenation stories in the U.S., the Irish Kate is never able to love her Mexican partner without racial ambivalence (101-33).

Moving beyond female “sex tourism” in literature written by men, we find the spaces of Lawrence’s erotically spiritual Mexico reterritorialized in the contemporary resort by his celebrant Anaïs Nin. It is symbolic of the shifting patterns of post-war Mexican tourism that in 1947, Nin decided, over the course of her flight to Mexico City, to change her plans to visit the artist colony made famous by Lawrence in Lake Chapala, and instead go to Acapulco (a Life article detailing both places prompted her decision) (Diary IV 222). Like Kate, Nin finds that in Mexico “… the life force is vital and
expansive” and the country offers “[a] new territory of pleasure … [where she feels] incarnated and in full possession of [her] own body” (Diary V 10; 3).

Her novel Seduction of the Minotaur (1961), set in a fictionalized Acapulco, begins by celebrating Mexican male flesh as the index of a new biopolitical relation that the resort allows: the immigration officials at the airport are all shirtless, and this “absence of uniforms restored the dignity and importance of the body. They all looked untamed and free … They looked at her openly, intently, as children and animals do, with a physical vision, measuring only physical attributes, charm, aliveness, and not titles, possessions, or occupations” (6-7). Lillian infers that “[c]lothes seemed ponderous and superfluous” in the resort city, a space that, even at its guarded threshold, seems free from the bureaucratic trappings of modern civility (8). Nin’s description of the resort is so potently sensual that it subsumes the narrative in poetic richness, a doubled generic mimicry that shapes and is shaped by her environment. Her protagonist Lillian acknowledges the infernal paradise trope—the novel’s Acapulco “was the city of pleasure which one should be punished for visiting or for loving” because “[w]hen you choose to play in a realm far away from the eyes of parents, you court death” (72-73). Yet she rejects the gendered as much as spatial convention that dictates that “in the tropics all white men fall apart” (11). Lillian retains the modernist license, however, to recompose lived spaces into what she calls “cities of the interior,” spaces that, as for Lowry and Lawrence, occupy a subjacent level of meaning when they cannot primarily be read according to an allegorical key. While Nin’s novel is absorbed in this work of aesthetic self-gnosis, play is not diminished but becomes part of the process of subjectification. While unlike Holder, Lillian never has a sexual relationship in Golcando
(her Acapulco), the city itself is a skilled lover that awakens her repressed self so that she achieves an “[unbreakable] feeling of oneness with Golcando” and feels that “[s]he had betrayed [her husband] with all the voluptuous textures, pungent smells and with pleasure” (107).

Published two years before the debut of *A Winter Tan*, Anna Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986) is another epistolary novel with feminist themes that is largely set in Mexico. The story recounts episodes from the lives of the Chicana Teresa and Nuyorican Alicia who, among many other things, bond over *The Diaries of Anaïs Nin* (29). The two women first meet in Mexico City while taking summer courses on the Spanish language and Mexican culture—courses taught by “gringo instructors” and otherwise taken by stereotypical white students looking “… to undergo an existential summer of exotic experiences” (24-25). As is sometimes the case in Holder’s text, Mexican men constitute an invasive and often violent sexual presence that interrupts and even dangers the intimacy between Teresa and Alicia. Yet, like Holder, both women engage in a number of sexual encounters with Mexican men that authenticate their travel experiences. “Tourists know of a different Acapulco, one of skydiving, gliding through the air, water skiing, dancing to rhumba music on marble terraces, English speaking guides and colorful, bargain-filled markets” (33). Teresa contrasts such banal experiences: “Our Acapulco was of Mexicans who were black and kinky-haired with shackled history, grease-covered mechanics, people who watched us slyly with unsympathetic notions of our vagabonding, and Adáns who wondered what it would be like to make love to the infamous North American white woman …” (33). Adán, Alicia’s Indigenous lover is fragmented and multiplied, one of her countless sexual partners (60).
Alicia also takes “a slew of handsome lovers” in the Yucatán where the women are guests at the hacienda of Teresa’s temporary fiancé (67). But as for Holder, relationships with Mexican men are never permanent and Mexico comes to signify “… the country where relationships were never clear and straight-forward but a tangle of contradictions and hypocrisies” (60).83

**Feminist Agency and Primitive Masculinities**

At moments, Holder’s trip resembles the drug pilgrimages I examined in the previous chapter: Castaneda provides a New Age lens with which to view the country during periods when she is absorbed in his works. She is sometimes wont to go on spiritual tangents in her letters, overdetermined by marijuana consumption and latent high theory; through an exorbitant conflation of other worldly exoticia, she reads “Buddhist wisdom” in her own personal Sabina figure (105-6; 110; 182). Her recorded experiences of Mexico are however more determined by the infernal paradise trope (and thus by Euro-American literature more generally). She teases her interlocutor (and the reader/viewer to come) at the beginning of her first letter by promising tales of “ebullient sex … intermixed with poetic epistemological reflections on being reborn in the crater of civilization” (17). Rebirth, however, is tropologically fleeting. Deborah Root explains that modern Western literature’s Mexico is a place to experience a subjective degradation and dissolution beyond expectation (52-53). In Holder’s text, this degradation, which is not without its own perverse pleasure, is a prelude to a grand narrative-scale redemption that never arrives. She explains that she is “awaiting a rite of purification in the place of

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83 The focus of this section is on Holder’s texts, primarily because they have not received scholarly attention, but also because they fit more appropriately with the subject of this chapter (the collusion of bio- and thanatopolitics in the neoliberal sexuality of the resort). I will frequently return to Castillo, however, as there are important links between her novel and Holder’s letters and the film they inspired.
my downfall. The place that weakened me has to redeem me” (41). By the end of the text, it seems obvious to the reader that this ideological remainder, a debt to modernist literature’s Mexico, is thematically vestigial to the centralized sexual feminine body with its liberated appetites and its ultimate transgression through death.

Holder’s editors counter her claim that her travels are a “vacation from feminism.” Edith Jones suggests that Holder’s passionate and unreserved dancing at Mexican discos (symbolic of her sexual prowess) was a political act that challenged female passivity (178). Holder herself calls for the emergence of an explicit sexuality in feminist art in her academic writing (Holder, “Another Cuntree” 1). In the novel’s preface, Kate Millet claims that it was Holder’s feminism that allowed her “to march into a place like Oaxaca and dare to do it all. Do her thing. Be what she wished to be” (11). Holder’s feminist agency certainly mandates gender equality among First World tourists, granting heterosexual women the right to equally pursue sexual and social liberation, self-discovery and experimentation while exerting the neo-colonial right to claim new Mexican landscapes and participants for these performances. Holder may embody what she calls “a new feminism … [a] sluttish, heterosexual one … with pleasure and freedom … Power and Pleasure …” (280). The exercise of this power and its returns and refractions in pleasure may challenge white, First World gender divisions, but they reinforce racial and national hierarchies; Mexican men are disempowered in their exchanges with Holder and as a result, they serve as accessible targets to enact a condemnation of a desired and loathed universal masculinity. As I explore further below, Holder both celebrates and critiques a “primitive sexuality,” an unrefined, uncivilized patriarchal power that ethnic males represent for her. This situates her work in a
neocolonial sexual discourse (Phillips, “Beach Boys” 44) and, within this, a more recent
discourse of post-war consumer tourism.

Without wanting to undermine the positive political advances of second-wave
feminism by simply decrying its racial and class homogeneity, it is necessary to consider
how claims to and gains of white gender equality empowered new kinds of consumers
and stimulated consumption patterns on a global scale while disempowering others.
Holder describes her body as “polymorphous”—it experiences a range of sensual
pleasures beyond the normative and thus serves an appropriate metaphor for neoliberal
capitalism itself (292). Her body constantly stakes out subaltern bodies, natural
commodities, for the pleasures of sexual consumption. “Mexican boys” are “unlimited”
and are in as great a supply “as coconuts, which, young, are macheted open for their
plentiful sweet juice and then discarded” (18). According to Foucault, the sex act itself
“is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of
sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies, and their materiality, their forces,
energies, sensations, and pleasures” (History 155). Through sex, Holder ambivalently re-
articulates her feminism and her femininity; she makes her body analyzable to herself
through a biopolitical gnosis that emerges in sexual union (155). As in all female sex
tourism the othered partner mirrors back a desired image of femininity (Sánchez Taylor
48). This image, however, is far from stable or final. What is important is how her
sexuality, rendered discursive by the institution of resort tourism and through her letters
produces a “regime of veridiction,” the rules that measure the “truth” of her sexual
subjectivity (Foucault, Birth 35-36). The sex act becomes a measure of the subject’s
liberation/transgression, but it is not isolated within or upon her body in its effects.
The authority Holder partially assumes over her lovers by virtue of her Western academic “enlightenment” and her relative economic affluence ruptures and reinforces local Mexican gender hierarchies: machismo may be undercut by the white female tourist, but it is also naturalized and commodified for/by her. Lionel Cantú, Jr., argues that queer tourism in Mexico may adversely render machismo universal when Mexican masculinity is itself is not singular or static (78). Tourism that sexualizes Mexican males as commodities reinforces the idea that “Mexico and its men somehow seem to be locked in a spatio-temporal warp of macho desire.” Mexico seems to represent a place fixed in time, where ‘real’ men can be found” (114). Similarly, Joan L. Phillips identifies a similar sexual nostalgia in female sex tourism; she claims that “[t]ravel for the emancipated Western woman becomes an arena to test out new notions of a liberated femininity that goes in quest of the sexual Other, an Other who is endowed with a primitive masculinity that can no longer be found in the West” (“Tourist-Oriented” 189).

This is certainly not to suggest that female sex tourism or queer tourism is proportionate in numbers and in the distribution of hegemonic effects to male heterosexual tourism (in Mexico and beyond), but that as niche markets of tourism, they also manipulate the biopolitical realities of subaltern bodies in line with the market authority of late capitalism.

Holder often discussed writing a guidebook (or series of books) geared to female travelers (tentative titles included Memories of Desire and Getting a Winter Tan) (43; 73; 136). By doing so, she would be tapping into an emerging market. Sex tourism was already attracting academic interest in the 1970’s and perhaps surprisingly, the first study

84 As Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us, machismo is not at all “timeless,” but “an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem, a strategy to make up for the “excessive humility and self-effacement” imposed by white hegemony in the (here, resort) borderlands (Borderlands 105).
of any sex tourists focused on Western women and male sex workers in Barbados (Kempadoo 13). Over the last half century, female sex tourism has become a global phenomenon, an outsourced industry with popular markets in Gambia, Crete, the Caribbean and Indonesia (Phillips, “Beach Boys” 43; Carter and Clift 13). Recent sociological studies have drawn parallels between male and female sex tourism, both of which coerce subaltern bodies into sex work for economic reasons and market themselves on transitory fantasies of primitive sexuality that allow the tourist to “… transgress sexual, gendered, racialized, and age boundaries” without social stigmatization (Sánchez Taylor 45-47). Female sex tourists, however, have generally proved resistant to conceiving their experiences as prostitution, even while their sexual encounters are fuelled by economic transactions and sometimes with more than one partner per vacation (O’Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 48).

The fantasy of Mexican sex tourism here relies on a legacy of racialized depictions of Mexican bodies that has served ethnic and nationalist hegemonies since the mid-nineteenth-century. Holder’s presentation of a typified “hypersexual Latino masculinity” draws on North American-produced “greaser” and “bandido” stereotypes that exude a criminalized, “deviant sexuality” (Vargas 122). She contrasts the “suave eroticism” of her Latino partners with the “vacuity” of “boring” North American men (Holder, Give 38-39), though she is most often less interested in the light-skinned, Europeanized “Latin lover” icon than with his equally popular, racially darker and villainous cousin (Clara E. Rodríguez 81). “… [A] brown smooth body. Straight black hair, Indian features-strangeness” is what she wants (Holder, Give 33). A Conradian level of otherness, where “[b]ehind … Indian sweetness lurks this horror, this hatred, this
primitive black stupidity” (209). Her explicitly identified racial superiority affirms her power over subaltern masculine bodies. Just as for sex tourists generally, her desire for control over her lover and the sexual scenario is often stronger than the yearning for particular sexual acts (O’Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 37).

Holder’s self-affirming, empowering whiteness is also confirmed here by its economic basis in the structuring dynamics of transcultural tourist encounters. In the spirit of sexual adventure, she visits a colonia in Acapulco to find a lover who embodies the “intense sexuality of lower-class Spanish” (130). She reminisces about her exploits “[w]ith beautiful penniless scum … all these poor penniless young men of Mexico” (238). Holder also enjoys feeling intellectually superior to her lovers, frequently citing their lack of education, once instructing a boyfriend on Aztec cosmology (40; 150). Having sex with Carlos makes Holder “[feel] I was sleeping with an animal” because he is illiterate (57).

In Castillo’s novel, Teresa is critical of the sexual conquests of women like Holder, “white women who preferred Latins and Mediterraneans because of the fusion of hot and cold blood running through the very core of their erections” (49). Yet, she and Alicia sexualize Alexis and “El Gallo” their “Gypsy” lovers—“men who knew how to possess women” (105) and who, as Sandra K. Soto explains, remain undeveloped characters marked mostly by their romanticized itinerancy and sexual aptitude (76). In Lawrencian or telenovela hyperbole, Teresa explains, “[m]y first night with Alexis taught me that i was a virgin. i was a virgin and i had never given myself to a man before, nor had any man given himself to me … i was pliable clay to be molded and defined, to envelop him, suit his proportions until a pillow was placed over the mouth to stifle a cry
of insatiable hunger” (105). Teresa is consistently ambivalent about female passivity and is earlier very much aware that her behaviour in Mexico is caught up in damaging heterosexual performances (45). She is equally consistent in her indulgences in “dreams and follies of gringas and suave Latin lovers” (124). While she may condemn white female sex tourists, she realizes that her own “sex tourism” has made her a gringa in Mexico and her own racial fantasies find manifestations in Latino bodies on both sides of the border.

**Feminist Agency and Repressed Mexicanas**

Holder’s sex tourism draws on a repository of stereotypes that showcase Mexican inferiority and social deviancy and she accesses this archive as both writer and tourist. In addition to male stereotypes mentioned above, she also employs Mexicana stereotypes of a “hot-blooded, volatile, sexually promiscuous” (Fregoso, “Lupe Vélez” 51), “hypersexualized, utterly duplicitous, voraciously selfish, and relentlessly dissatisfied” femininity (Nericcio 70). Yet, rather than associate these hegemonic constructs with Mexican women, she appropriates them to define her south-of-the-border self. Myra Mendible argues that “‘the Latina body’ is a convenient fiction—a historically contingent, mass-produced combination of myth, desire, location, marketing, and political expedience” (1). The Latina body itself may also then be a kind of marketable shadow-self the white sex tourist adopts to further the fantasy of sexual otherness in liminal tourist space. While the Latina body has been used to make the Anglo superior while confirming his own powers of attraction (9)—essentially what the mestizo or Indigenous male body does for Holder—the novel strips the Latina body of any real sexual agency, making it a weak competitor to the liberated, licentious Anglo body of the
gringa tourist; Mexicana bodies are not desirable to Mexican men in the sexual economy of the novel.\(^\text{85}\) Like male sex tourists, Holder seems to believe in the fantasy that the opposite sex in the Third World will fail to satisfy its partners to the degree that the white tourist is able to (O’Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 43-4).

For Castillo’s protagonist, defining her Chicana identity involves rejecting the conservative patriarchy embodied in her male relatives and that warps her travel experiences in Mexico. Like the many locals who scrutinize her sexual propriety, her male relatives detest a woman who wears a bikini and “[gallivants] around without her man” (17-18). Felicia Lynne Fahey suggests that Teresa’s and Alicia’s independence in Mexico “[impedes] their self-actualization” and makes them less than human beings to locals they encounter (151; 161). Everywhere they go, they are harassed by racialized machismo: Teresa’s Chicano teaching colleague disrupts Teresa’s homosocial intimacy with Alicia when he selfishly positions his body between the two sleeping women; like a later suitor in Mexico City, he is drunk, selfish and a secreting bastion of antiquated gender privileges and authority (58-60). Rebell ing against Mexican sexual conservatism is not simply tourist entitlement for Teresa, but the rejection of the “law of the father” and the proscriptions of the “fatherland.” Thus, problematically, Teresa, like Holder, makes Mexican masculinity static\(^\text{86}\) even if her portrayal demonstrates a larger ethnic intimacy (Fahey 170).

\(^{85}\) Deborah R. Vargas shows how asexual Latina stereotypes also have a cultural history in “U.S. nationalist and Chicano nationalist projects [that] represent Latina sexuality as domestic, virginal and asexual” (121).

\(^{86}\) Soto contends that interstitial subjectivity and “racial hybridity” are valued in unequal gender terms: they are positive for female characters trying to negotiate an independent identity selectively connected to cultural traditions, but are negative for male characters who are self-destructive and “pathological” (74). Debra A Castillo, in a similar vein, argues that the “reality [of male Mexicans/Latinos] enters Castillo’s novel only in distanced and rejected moments of unpleasantness” (154).
Mexican women sometimes receive Holder’s pity for their “sexual repression:” they have been “socially castrated” by macho husbands and a holy trinity and thus “live solo and culturelessly” (72; 190; 264). They also receive her scorn for having an inadequate feminism: “[i]f only Latin women who call themselves feminists weren’t Marxists,” she declares, “who are anti-pleasure, or lesbians, who are anti either men, or more typically, sex” (277). For Lawrence’s Kate and Nin’s Lillian, submission to patriarchal laws is a part of the politics of gender in Mexico and a source of great ambivalence for Kate (Plumed 72) or something merely to be ignored for Lillian (“I’m an American. I don’t have to conform to their traditions,” she explains) (Minotaur 65).

Teresa in Castillo’s novel also laments that there is no relevant feminism in Mexico beyond the one she shares with Alicia: “[i]n that country, the term ‘liberated woman’ meant something other than what we had strived for back in the United States,” she explains (79). As women travelling alone, Mexican men do not afford them the respect they give to “ladies” and, moreover, she asserts in the spirit of originality, “we had abruptly appeared in Mexico as two snags in its pattern. Society could do no more than snip us out” (65).

Yet, Castillo’s novel does offer an alternative to white mainstream feminism. Teresa’s ambivalent connection to contemporary Mexico is inspired partly by her mid-70’s Chicana/o politics (her “Aztlán period”) that “formed a society of women a sacred triangle/ an unbreakable guard from a world of treason deceit and/ weakness” (44). Alicia’s art displays “traces of Frida Kahlo” and this connects her aesthetically to the cultural politics of a greater Latina feminism (127). Fatima Mujčinović argues that The

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87 She does on occasion isolate potentially powerful female figures in Mexico and once comments on the solidarity of powerful women in Oaxaca (205). These observations never change her larger conclusions about feminism and sexuality in Mexico.
Mixquiahuala Letters “underscores that feminist alliances and methods of resistance are
grounded in solidarity and unity” and is thus “a literary practice of U.S. third world
feminism … [that] promotes a methodology of resistance based on critical opposition and
differential positioning” (44; 41). Yet, this “U.S. third world feminism” makes no
productive links to the practices and beliefs of women who are contemporaneously living
in the Third World. As Debra A. Castillo argues, only typically in their dreams do Teresa
and Alicia encounter Mexican women, and even then, they are idealized provincial
mother-figures (166-67). Furthermore, many of the Mexican women they do meet in
reality—“complacent [wives]” and quiet natives—seem to embody the conservatism
Teresa and Alicia are rebelling against (35). Alicia, for example, is locked out of her
rented room in Mexico City because “[t]he lady of the house … ranted about [Alicia’s]
promiscuous behavior and how it had stained the morality of her household” (124). While
Teresa and Alicia find an asexual authenticity in Indigenous female bodies in
Mixquiahuala (Soto 72), just as On The Road’s Sal and Dean do in the native women
they encounter on the highway to Mexico City, the poverty and almost premodernity they
celebrate in the fictional village are not always positive identifications. For Teresa, poor
people trying to earn money in the tourist industry can also be despicable “urchins” (70).
And “in the ancient land where villages still remained unchanged since the sixteenth
century, two foreign women with more book knowledge than the average local official …
stood … little chance of gaining favorable odds” (92). Mexican stasis here counters U.S.
progressivism: “[w]omen in the United States could rally around government buildings,
flash placards at media cameras, write letters of complaint to their congressmen (or
congresswomen if that were the case)” (92). Such fickle territorializations cast aspersion
on Alicia’s politically saccharine claim that her vacation in Mexico with Teresa “… would be pertinent, not just to benefit our lives, but womanhood” (53).

As Holder bemoans, there were discursive alliances between Mexican feminism and Marxism contemporary with her vacation (Cano). Yet, Mexican feminism, throughout the twentieth century and beyond, has not been a unified, homogenous movement. By denying a Mexican feminism as biopolitically suppressive (and further, in Castillo’s case, as praxiologically incomplete) Holder and Castillo exercise a discursive authority as U.S.-based academics to proscribe how other bodies (should) incarnate sexuality and understand gender. Holder also perpetuates her own psychogeography by territorializing an ethical feminism in the First World (which is “anti-sex” in the novel’s libidinal economy) and leaving Mexico a convenient escape route from its polemics and prohibitions. “Feminism is a vision. And an impossible one here,” she declares from the resort (22). Her ideals and desires are flexible and can be segregated—she is “all feminist and academic” when she goes on a date with an architect “and a vulgar-sadomasochist with … gutternsnipe [i.e. poorer men]” (22).

**From Homo Oeconomicus to Homo Sacer**

It isn’t simply desire, pleasure, or self-affirmation Holder seeks with Mexican men, or at least her encounters demand that we deconstruct these concepts. A “mixture of sadism and seduction” is what attracts her; she desires “men [who] hate the sexual in women” and thus with whom she can share a mutual arousal and contempt (63; 77). Holder thus constantly views herself as victim in her sexual conquests. Like Don Juan, she is written less “a libertine [than] a victim, a slave to [a] list of ‘victories’ [or failures], who are reduced to names in a book” (Diken and Laustsen 120). Don Juan’s libertinism

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88 For a history outlining the diversity of Mexican feminisms earlier in the twentieth century, see Macías.
prevented him from enjoying meaningful social relations (120), a fact Holder frequently bemoans of her own experience and for which she seeks, as for her sexual shame, an external source of blame. “I can’t believe this country’s brutalization of me,” she declares (136). When some of her lovers prove to be as ambivalent towards her as she is to them, she feels exploited, the victim of a sadistic men (115).

On other occasions she claims to enjoy sexual contempt of her lovers (171) and even finds it “freeing” and conducive to self-love to be objectified by men (30). She is constantly seeking new lovers, she explains, in “men who force me to take new risks with my body” (68). As self-authored homo sacer, she sees sex as an agent of empowerment and abjection, both of which stimulate hostility towards her lovers—that is, a hostility that arises from engaging in sexual activity with the subaltern (which empowers her) and from the mimicry of sexual congress with the subaltern (which abjectifies her). And in regard to the latter, it is a sex tourist trope that “inherently degraded [racial others] are [made] appropriate partners for degrading sex” (Shrage qtd. in O’Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 45).

It is tempting to read her death as her editors do, as part of the travel narrative she constructs, and to see the thanatopolitics of her degrading sex life reach a kind of sexual and literary climax in her murder. “Maryse was impelled toward her death,” Jones says of Holder’s wish to return to Mexico after her initial trip, “but she wanted to transform it into art” (178). Millet reads her as “naked” in the end, a martyr, “[a] rebel put to the sword” (10) though she indirectly acknowledges her tourist agency by calling hers “a death not only imposed but sought after” (9). The film, using a language of suspicious
camera play, staging and score, points the viewer to the conclusion that her lover Miguel is also her killer.

Holder takes the bullfight, a perennial image of Mexico in non-Mexican literature, to describe her victimization—\textsuperscript{89} the thanatopolitics of her sexuality that struggle against fate to assert a biopolitical right to life: “[t]he bull kept jumping over the fence. He wanted so much to live … Finally, full of pricks, daggers spears, not believing what was happening to him, the bull collapsed on his knees” (73). She interprets this as an uneven, universal battle of the sexes but the image becomes singularized as she reads her current lover as toreador (74-75).

Teresa’s “Mexico” is like “[m]elancholy, profoundly right and wrong, it embraces as it strangulates” (65). Its violent reproaches against independent female travellers are felt most obscenely in sexual attacks. The innuendos and awkward silences that swarm the text after Teresa and Alicia take a boat trip with some sailors might suggest that they were subjected to some form of sexual violence. More obviously, Alicia is almost raped and murdered at a drag queen contest. In language that evokes Holder, Teresa describes the scenario: “[i]t happened quickly. They were anxious to have you, chew you up, one would have the legs, the other a breast, devour and throw your bones into the ocean, never to be heard of again. Another stupid desperate gringa, foreign scum” (84). Trying to establish a kinship, a homecoming, her current lover and a host of drag queens (a puzzling symbol for male violence) attack her for her foreignness and the licentiousness of tourist culture she represents to them—“[t]he legend that you were for the taking …

\textsuperscript{89} Nin also makes the bullfight a sexualized engagement; according to the larger central metaphor of her novel, it represents the erotics between hidden, inner desire and external convention (\textit{Seduction} 68). Cooper Alarcón identifies the bullfight as a common motif in the infernal paradise tradition; indeed, “the oscillation between repulsion and attraction” that the spectacle provokes speaks to the over-arching theme of the tradition as a whole (51).
sentenced you that night,” Teresa tells her (84). Crucially, Teresa recognizes “that in the lion’s den one doesn’t play by one’s own rules” and rescues Alicia from her attackers (84).

Yet, as in *Iguana*, Mexico is still a valuable biopolitical space that can heal the foreigner. In Holder’s text, this holistic-medical ability is sometimes projected onto the bodies of her lovers. Andrés is “the healthiest thing in [her] life” because he “[feeds her] body its specific craving” (37). Eduardo’s “enormous cock … kept [her] alive” as she struggled with her poor body image and the health tolls of her excesses (217-18). For Teresa and Alicia, Alexis’s and El Gallo’s heightened sexual proclivities provide emotional and physical healing: “We licked our wounds with the undersides of penises and applied semen to our tender bellies and breast like Tiger’s balm” (106). On the other hand, Teresa decides later that Alexis’s “embraces were poison” (110). Holder’s views of Mexican men are also indebted to the U.S. structural trope that renders their sexuality “dangerous” and a “contagion” (Vargas 120). At times, Holder wishes she could reject “the diseased Mexican youths” of her sex life for “something more genial and my own class” (95). “Alas, takes discipline,” she laments—something she does not seem willing to exercise or feel is required of her in the resort culture she is slowly adopting as a permanent society (95). The *bandido* icon typically “reinforces the cleanliness, sobriety, sanity, overall decency, and moral rectitude of the WASP” (Ramírez Berg 111). And as Holder refuses to “discipline” herself to find someone of her own class (and presumably race), she becomes progressively more “contaminated” by the other as her compulsive sexual encounters fuel her physical and psychological demise. The non-white skin (as she sees it) of her lovers becomes unhealthy, a “jaundiced, yellow-brown;” or unsanitary—
brown skin “resembles shit” (152; 124). In one of her vindictive moods, she tells a group of Mexican boys on the street “they’re shit … actually shocking them” (149). Mexico itself is then the “country that shits … asshole country” (110). Her encounters in Mexico are decried as unhygienic, a typical claim of disgruntled resort tourists, and given a racialized and sexualized metaphysics by Holder. “Indios [are] … elegant filth”—they infect her and give her bulimia a racial causality: “I see Indian faces and I want to vomit. It is like seeing the dark face of the stranger in some disgusting primeval archetypal unconscious” (159; 168).

Through metonymic transfer, Mexico supplements the biopolitical polarity Holder writes into the bodies of her lovers. On one level, she comes to Zihuatanejo “in pursuit of health and attractiveness” and her typical activities, suntanning, swimming, exercising, dancing and sex, all promise to rejuvenate her (18). Her Mexico is the standard locale of contemporary wellness and resort tourism. Yet she abandons her health regiment and takes to constant drinking, just as the protagonist in “Lowry’s awful Mexican novel” (153). “If the price of health is isolation, boredom, and stupidity, it is too high,” she affirms (188). Acapulco transforms into “an unhealthy city [with] a diseased stalk”—it gives her “fever” and “plague” (125; 138; 141). “This country sucks away my marrow,” she says; it pollutes her until at the end of her letters she feels “dead and old and unbodied” (235; 244; 256). Days before her murder, she writes “I am a ghost. There is nothing now between me and death” (264).

Again, Holder’s thanatopolitical narrative is not only influenced, but compelled by generations of Western texts on the “infernal paradise” and a literary history of romanticized death in Mexico, making it tempting to collapse tradition and the individual
talent, literature and life, as she and her editors do. Jones and Millet make Holder a
feminist martyr and use her life and death to confirm their own essentialist views on
gender and race even if this means compromising Holder’s own ambivalent perspectives.
Other whites tend to be seen as “unsexed” by white sex tourists, and Holder’s accounts
present the same view (O’Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 47). One of the reasons
that she resists seeing a relevant, valuable feminism existing in Mexico is because she
believes it can emasculate men (and thus damage her image of hypersexual Latinos).
“[In] N.Y. men are impossible … [because of the] discipline of feminism,” she explains
(50). It is a “paunch and fag death scene” and she wishes to never return (28). “In
America,” Jones puts forth, “the macho man (and he is the most attractive man sexually
in America) equates sensuality with sissiness or femininity” (177). In Mexico, however,
men are more sensitive to Holder’s facial disfigurement because “[in] this hot, sensual
land … ‘imperfection’ is accepted much more as a part of nature (poor people cannot
afford the luxuries of an aesthetic that demands perfectly straight teeth, a perfectly
straight nose, and a perfectly straight morality” (177). Yet, masculine “sensitivity” is
something Holder makes clear she despises (245). What is more important here is how
the body’s aesthetic “deviances” as much as Mexican poverty, frees it of “the
straightjacket of middle-class morality” (177). Both Holder’s body and the bodies of her
lovers help Jones map out a geography that naturalizes the border between the U.S. and
Mexico, between civilization and the resort, on moral, aesthetic, ethnic and sexual terms.

Millet is more overtly racist in her argument and takes further liberties reading
Holder’s body, through selectively purloined letters, to confirm her own theories.
Holder’s corpse is drained of its ambivalences, conflicts, complexities to signify an
essential violence of the mestizo male body, “the sinister Indian malice toward women lying potentially and dangerously under the layers of Spanish hauteur and contempt” (11). As baffling as Millet’s belief that Holder should have become a lesbian (given the fact that she admits to never having had a lesbian relationship, that she is attracted to hyper-male figures and her consistent homophobia [28]) is her suggestion that “[i]n abasing herself to macho Mexican youths, she is ‘making up for history’” (11). That is, by going to Mexican resorts and having a series of ambivalent sexual encounters, she is sacrificing her body to even the score, to compensate for a legacy of colonial and U.S. imperial aggression. Such acts of “generosity,” bordering on (her ultimate) selflessness, are bound to fail for Millet, because “[Mexican men] know they are her superior by virtue of their sex. Their hierarchy older than racism, older than colonialism, older than capital” (11). Millet seems to use Holder’s death to challenge “Leroi Jones and many third-world male writers” on the evaluation of oppressive hierarchies, asserting that “the white female [is] less guilty in objective fact” (11). Her antanaclasis undercuts Holder’s more complex elaboration of biopolitical victimization and her shifting sexual role as empowered/disempowered subject.

In a review of *A Winter Tan*, Kass Banning argues that the tangled quality of gender, age and racial relations in the film prevents the viewer for deducing any final power hierarchy (28). Yet, as another reviewer suggests, the film (and one could add the novel) do not compel a critical analysis of the politics of these relations; Cameron Bailey explains that “[t]his film is founded squarely upon the white rock of sexual imperialism, racism masquerading as the allure of the exotic. It doesn’t ‘deal’ with this issue; it doesn’t ‘explore’ it; it works by it … [making the] film [not only] politically incorrect, [but]
politically dangerous” (27). This signals an important difference with Castillo’s work. As readers, we are made progressively more conscious of Teresa’s monology, that Alicia’s silence paradoxically and cautiously interpellates Teresa’s discursive authority to speak for both women on love, sex, artistic creation and even tourism. Teresa’s left-handed compliments (ex. that Alicia “bore no resemblance to the ideal of any man you encountered”) implicate herself as an equally, if not more important subject and reader of her letters (50; 119). Furthermore, the novel’s structure tells us that there are many ways of reading these letters—we can be “conformist,” ‘cynical’ or “quixotic” depending on how we choose to arrange their order. The narrative asks us to consider how form conceives meaning and consequently undermines the stability or finality of one totalizing perspective. The friction between monological narrative and the structure that twists it apart leaves enough tension to suggest that Teresa’s relationship to Mexico is not foreclosed, but will continue to be re-informed in successive ways when the novel leaves off. Castillo’s novel gestures towards the limitations of its addressee, of a singular addressee, and an overall ambivalence toward textual direction is embedded in the text on multiple levels.

I want to clarify that it is not that Holder is somehow completely beyond sympathy and that she does not suffer from gender inequality, but that the distribution of inequalities is not so commensurable that even in her death (if we accept what seems a conjectural assertion that she was murdered by one of her lovers) should be able to monopolize the text’s claims to injustice. Like her editors, she sees herself as the sole victim competing in a timeless battle of the sexes rather than as a historically disenfranchised person meeting an interlocutor, with a homologous history in relation to
Western power, in a hastily manufactured commercial borderlands in which ideals and mores are embodied and collide in pleasurable and destructive sexual acts of “survival.” Holder is more interesting in forcing a mutual or deeper degradation on her partners, and Mexicans generally, when they fail to love her on her ambivalent terms. She enjoys attracting and rejecting men (137). To compensate for her facial scar and the abuse she feels it causes her, she and a female friend wander a market and “laugh at [Mexicans] and their physical flaws” (166). Yet it is her lovers and not her who are cruel, vindictive; any pain, confusion or disparity in her relationships is narcissistically internalized and then scripted to her sympathetic addressee.

In her first relationship, for example, the twenty year-old Andrés is made a crude gigolo who rejects her out of malicious cruelty. Of course, we only receive Holder’s account that they “spent days tormenting each other and playing hard to get” in between sexual liaisons (19). Holder is both repulsed and attracted (sexually and authorially) by his poverty; she explains, “I’m sure he lives in the streets. It’s out of Gide or Genet his scene, he must grub for food in garbage cans like the diseased and oddly cowardly Mexican dogs” (19). It seems absurd that she assumes he does this “[b]y choice,” and it makes her angry that “[h]e takes everything, gives nothing. Grubs cigarettes, shots of tequila, towels” (19). Their relationship ends when a drunk Holder holds him hostage at knife-point from her hotel room (24). She repeatedly slams his hand in the doorway when he tries to escape (25). “He was really scared for his life,” she recounts (28). As a result of the scene, Andrés is permanently kicked out of the hotel shed he had been sleeping in and is made homeless (25). And yet this very scenario proves to Holder that because her

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In the film, the scene is so cleaned up—an unknown Mexican youth leaving Holder in a hotel room in the daytime as she pleads that he return—that it loses any possible context for an-other side.
lover did not want to spend the night with her, “Mexico is unkind to women” (25). By the end of her first trip, during much of which she pines for an idealized lost love with Andrés, she is able to “[laugh] uproariously” at her attachment to a man who “turned out to live on a piece of cardboard in Pedro’s junk shed” (166). Holder materially produces a new level of his disempowerment and thus serves as an exemplary tourist in this regard.

Because of the bio/thanatopolitical intensity of its protagonist’s experience, the novel claims a deep level of belated modernist, cosmopolitan insight into its idea of Mexico. In spite of its focus on sexual escapades, it is much more in the vein of Lowry in its theme of victimization by the dangerous, primitive other than the kick-driven Kerouac. When Holder is arrested in Oaxaca for public intoxication with a sixteen year old boy, she is being sacrificed for Mexico’s hatred of the U.S. (231). She also refuses to pay a mordida at first, but quickly changes her mind after she is put in jail (232-34). Her own pretensions to intimacy with Mexico, however, exempt her from giving her lovers money for their services. Like Lowry’s Wilderness, the fact that she has literary ambitions places her beyond the pre-scripted economic exchanges of (sex) tourism. Her sexual, rather than just cosmopolitan connoisseurship supposedly gives her a privileged connection and discursive entitlement to her environment.91 When her lovers are forced to pay their own way, or even for her, on dates, this boosts her self-value. She theoretically understands that some of her lovers are too poor to date her, but she nevertheless berates herself and questions her beauty when they do not keep their dates, or when they expect money for their services (114). “Money, a Mexican motif,” she complains. “[A]ll those Mexicans

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91 In A Winter Tan, just as in La Mordida, Canada becomes a place to escape both Mexican and U.S. oppression, the last frontier for individual isolation. Holder speaks as if to her written addressee, “Maybe I’ll escape with you to Canada. Become a recluse, dignified writer … But then … I’d never get to be the complete slut, the complete expatriate.”
who told me don’t care about it [sic] and then rip or seek to rip me off in small ways” (153). In a fleeting and grossly simplistic way, she decides that Mexicans “hate and exploit,” “view [tourists] generically as things because “we stole their land … in some nineteenth-century civil war,” but this seems as far as she is willing to go to see the other side in a transcultural history or comparative economics (155). Some scholars argue that sex tourism can be economically empowering for sex workers who use “skill and innovation” as entrepreneurs (Phillips, “Beach Boys” 52; Ryan 34), but Holder refuses ideologically and materially to mark her interpersonal encounters, sexual and otherwise, with the stigma of economic exchange. She even goes so far as to be “stern and philosophic” to “the little girls” selling Chiclets on the street; “[l]ife is hard,” she tells them “in English” and refuses to hand over her money (242). She finds it “disgusting” when a 17 year old attempts to exchange sex for help in smuggling him to the U.S. (78).

The abyssal obfuscation of economic realities, a further transcultural prophylaxis, which absolves the notion of commensurable subjacent reality, stimulates pleasure in the tourist fantasy as it protects from sympathy or understanding. It is in the spirit of personal liberation and tourist entitlement that Holder declares, “I refuse to treat Mexico like the real world” (97). The manufactured, segregating epistemology of tourist culture allows her to experience a sense of ontological apartheid even if she feels she is transcending typical host-guest borders. She offends locals by tanning nude, challenges a simplistically conceived Mexican “puritanism” through her routine sexual activity (some locals think

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92 She does offer a further political insight later when she imagines that Mexicans must “hate the ease with which we could purchase our pleasures;” that “patronizing ignorance” has placed Mexico “as undeveloped or unevolved” (142). But again disappointingly this is presented as digression, which might tell us as much about the role of political discourse in the resort as it does about Holder’s own priorities.
she is actually a sex-worker herself) (48; 156). She is called “predatory” for the way she stares openly at people without reservation (117). She offends an impoverished family in one of Acapulco’s colonias “by offering the six-year-old niece a toke of brandy” (142). “[S]o stoned am I,” she explains, “that I must test to see if this is the real world, ready to swoon in delight if she accepts at the sheer dreaminess of it all” (142). Linguistic barriers become desirable in the tourist simulacra to distance her from the realities of her hosts (42). She does regret her lack of overall interest in Spanish and Mexican culture at the conclusion of her first trip: “to feel always that [Mexico’s] language is not worth learning, that its intellectual heritage would benefit me no way in the world intellectual community” is her way of compensating for her own “failure of incomplete mastery of intellectual content” (162). “I projected this cheapness on Mexico myself, somewhat” she decides as she leaves (162). As an object-lesson, Mexico “forced [her] to confront what [she] was evading”—that is, her own lack of academic skill or fortitude, not “Mexican intellectualism [which] seemed derivative” (162).

However, even if the infrastructure of the resort places an exchange value on abyssal thinking, economics do not vanish as an undesirable principle of reality, a paradigm of the world temporarily abandoned, but they further render discursive her sexual being and its fantastic lifestyle. Sexuality, like civil society, is a “transactional reality,” “born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them …” and which is “absolutely correlative to the form of government technology we call liberalism” (Foucault, Birth 297). Further, neoliberalism, Foucault explains, attempts to “[model] the overall exercise of political power … on the

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93 Nin also notes the collision of transcultural gender performances when a man takes her for a sex-worker because she sits alone at a restaurant (Diary V 12). “The patron of the restaurant had to explain that foreign women went about alone and it did not mean they were prostitutes” (12).
principles of a market economy” (131). We can then chart the biopolitical effects of its grip on a place like Zihuatanejo, transformed from ejido to resort with a wave of the invisible hand (among other appendages) just years before (or after with regard to the film) the 1982 peso collapse which officially opened the national economy to large-scale foreign direct investment and thus made the neoliberal turn complete (Ruiz 180-81). The First World can articulate a diverse and latent sexuality by rendering subaltern bodies in its production of the resort; neoliberalism produces subjects at work and at play through its “economic naturalness … ensuring [that these subjects’] longevity, health and ways of conducting themselves have complex and tangled relationships with the economic processes” (Foucault, *Birth* 22). Only by understanding neoliberalism, Foucault explains, can we understand biopolitics (22).

Holder’s claim that sex with men is impersonal (17) is not then a defense mechanism. On both of her trips, she selected two or three love objects to write about with an obsessive longing and the majority of her other lovers are relegated to physical descriptions, some detail of their sexual performance, sometimes they are given names. Her neoliberal sexual appetite searches out intimacy with statistics over singular beings. She agrees with a fellow sex tourist that “four days of perfect love and no more” should measure the time spent with a Mexican body; “four days. Onto new” (199). She “preferred the non-committing world of one-night stands” (199). “[W]e … want to choose among men,” she explains (278). The accumulation of sex demands a diversification of pleasure with multiple partners. This bodily investment in physical

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94 Homologous to the diversification of First World investment and tourist culture in Mexico’s hospitality industry beginning in the early 1980’s (Ward 210). As lead actor Jackie Burroughs observed when filming *A Winter Tan*, “In Mexico, people are beginning to hate Canadians,” presumably as another burgeoning culture of self-entitled tourists (Harkness 12).
stimulation, just as in mental anguish, is proportionate to the aesthetic return of her novel. Lovers become generally interchangeable as she “can’t distinguish one Mexican from another” (41). As for Kerouac, Mexicans embody all Third-World, non-white ethnicities: they are “[an] exotic Tahitian people,” and more vulgarly, Mexicans for her can have “chink cheeks” or be “nigger dark” (32; 17; 85). It is this lack of singularizable subjectivity in her lovers that produces her own sexual being.

Holder serves as a particularly important model of neoliberal sex tourist in that she is more than a “consumer,” but a self-declared “risk-taker” (68). She performs, sexually, the neoliberal ideology that “eschews the rather passive ideal of the economic subject as simply a ‘consumer’ in favor of a subject who is altogether more proactive and engaged vis-à-vis the norms of market behavior, such as prudential risk-taking and the steady accumulation of human capital” (Kiersey 69). “[A]s a person who decides to accept and act on the basis of the ‘reality’ of the market” but who is also the victim of her own enterprise, her body become the locus where *homo oeconomicus* meets *homo sacer* (72). Yet, again, if her death remains textually affiliated with First World tourism and modernist aesthetics, this does not mean that she has monopolized the “death in Mexico” motif in the 70’s and 80’s under the auspices of either camp. In this period, we could conceive of an isomorphic thanatopolitics in the Mexican aesthetic return to Posada-esque death iconography that critiqued Mexico’s neoliberal turn in 1982 and its devaluation of Mexican life; a critique of U.S. neoimperialism and “a well-healed and self-serving technocracy that has cut the popular classes loose and left them to starve and languish” (Lomnitz 451; 439; 447). Claudio Lomnitz shows how Day of the Dead has recuperated a

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95 This is why for Millet, any of her lovers can and should stand in for her murderer: they are all “Mexican toughs, hoods, gigolos” (9). “The exoticism of Miguel, Luis, Andres, etc…” all represent “the soulless neck of Mexican male indifference” (10).
(bio)political theme since the early 1980s, addressing in 2003 for instance, the feminicides of Juárez and the deaths of Mexican border-crossers (458).

**Transcultural Healing Beyond the Resort**

Holder’s resort, like Williams’s “Puerto Vallarta” and *The Real Cancun*, makes *othered* bodies useful or knowable (which may also involve making them unknowable) in terms of their service to the tourist and his/her biopolitical itineraries. As sex workers (in the Williams and Holder texts) or workers behind the curtain of the sexual spectacle (as in *The Real Cancun*), their bare lives, mingling in essence with the natural spaces they occupy, produce aesthetic and material conditions for white rejuvenation and/or destruction. And when death and disease from “the nameless country” collapse the simulation of health and vitality of the resort, this is not an unmasking of a reality, an indictment of economic inequalities and the institutionalization of poverty, but part of the fantasy itself (one with a deep literary tradition). The transcultural prophylaxes that these texts acknowledge, attempt to transcend and, in so doing, reiterate in new registers, support abyssal thinking—they depend on the echo of that abyss, the dangerous proximity, to validate their desires and fears. Further, they support a neocolonial biopolitics that conditions Western well-being on the poverty of *others*. And in this respect, they undermine the possibility for transcultural well-being. As Anzaldúa tells us, it is by acknowledging and correcting these relations that “the intercultural split will heal” (*Borderlands* 108).

Anzaldúa reminds us, as does the contemporary resurgence of *muertos* iconography, that pain can be “regenerative,” a stimulus for productive, (inter)community healing, even while it simultaneously provokes affective and memorial cognizance of its
origins and contexts (Bost 31; 79). As I suggested at the end of the previous chapters, we should think of healing beyond dominant Western institutions (the clinic, but also the resort), accepting that “[t]hroughout the world, not only are there very diverse forms of knowledge of matter, society, life and spirit, but also many and very diverse concepts of what counts as knowledge” (de Sousa Santos 12). We should consider healing beyond the apartheid of wellness tourism toward a more inclusive environmental context that considers the total ecology of regional and global biopolitical relations.

Suzanne Bost argues that

[a]s texts whose colors, shapes, scars, and diseases narrate both personal and communal histories, bodies tell us about how people are shaped by their material contexts, and vice versa. The physical pain that often accompanies these corporeal markings clarifies the violence of historical passing. Moreover, as the literal and metaphoric site of creation and destruction, birth and death, bodies have something to say about genealogy, metamorphosis, repetition, and regeneration. (51)

By studying resort tourism genealogically, we can recognize the density of its violent effects, and its underlying colonial hubris, by the way it inscribes othered bodies in terms of Euro-American anxieties and ecstasies. We can understand its institutionalized amnesia, diagnose its strategic and collective acts of forgetting as a dangerous pathology. Again, to draw on Bost, “[f]oregrounding pain, illness, and disability undermines the myth of self-reliance and demands more expansive ways of understanding individual agency” (5). Perhaps then understanding the polyvalency of pain in the production of tourist pleasure, another instance of the larger tradition of “[negating modern sub-
humanity as sacrificial in the affirmation of that other part of humanity which considers itself as universal” (de Sousa Santos 4), is the first step to action, the epistemological plateau that extends beyond the cognitive and affective limits of contemporary tourism and meets the horizon of transcultural healing.
Conclusion: Thinking Biopolitics in a Global Borderlands

I began this project by positing transnational biopolitical implications of the discursive (re)production of a “lawless” Mexico trope in post-World War II travel writing. I proposed that both Kerouac and Lowry code Mexican governmentality as unstable in comparison to the rigorous juridical control and efficiency of the U.S. A kind of biopolitical liminality that appears in excess—the freedom to transgress normal(izing) civic, consumptive and sexual limits and the subjective instability this allowance presupposes—is territorialized in the “grand carnival” of Mexico. This spatial encoding influences and is influenced by the new genre of Mexican pleasure tourism and, on a larger scale, fits within the cartographic design of modernity. I use “modernity” here keeping in mind Ramón Saldívar’s qualification that “[m]odernity … powerfully involves the manipulation of human geographies as instrumentalities of social control, productivity, and consumption” (248). In the age of industrial hospitality, biopolitical liminality must be understood in relation to geo-economic dependencies of global capitalism, not only because these dependencies influence the production of space for new markets of tourist transgression, social dissolution and renewal, but because they inversely incarnate liminality into the bodies of Mexicans who live, work eat, desire and die negotiating borderless economic flows across militarized regional borders. And because this liminality has been read in the flesh by powerful figures and institutions, it can be strategically, but also arbitrarily imposed on Latina/os in the First World regardless of national citizenship.

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored how industrial hospitality produces “freedom” by mandating consumer desires within patterns of migration while making the
Mexican holiday a right/rite of global capitalism—a sovereignty of tourism with its vertically tangled bio- and thanatopolitics. I have attempted to show the neocolonial coordinates of border-crossing reciprocity in cultures of narco- and sex-tourism and proposed that collective acts of travel instantiate borderland encounters that unsettle ontologies in ways that can be desired or imposed, privileged or disciplined, temporary or permanent, pleasurable or painful, that can renew conditions of life or abandon subjects to death. Of course, the literary tourist encounters I considered encompass both extremes from various generic (of writing and travel) and indentitarian positions.

Claudio Lomnitz’s exhaustive exhumation of “death in Mexico” counters the exonymic exoticism of the “infernal paradise” trope by showing the (trans)national and (post)colonial intertextual structure of the metonymy (connecting “death” and “Mexico” that is) by analyzing official and vernacular shifts in its iteration (26-28). For example, he explores how complex cultural associations with “death” were read to bestialize Indigenous Mexicans in ways which both alleviated European anxiety over the unprecedented genocide of the Old World’s colonial project while creating an unequal use value of human bodies in racial terms (67; 84; 182-83). While it surfaces in various literatures as an index of an Indigenous and or mestizo “savagery,” ideas and images surrounding death in pre-Conquest Mexico were heterogenous, complex and could find syncretic accord with or diverge significantly from Christian epistemology (157-77).96 His historiography concludes that “[g]lobalization … has disassociated the power of death from the power of the [Mexican] state … Death best represents sovereignty here …”

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96 Lomnitz uses the image of the skull to demonstrate such a spiritual disjunction between the Spanish, who viewed it as “… a sign of the brevity of life or its vain passions” and the Aztecs for whom it was “… a reminder of the duality and interdependence of death and birth” (166). An occasion like the Day of the Dead, however, would serve to both re-perform pre-Conquest beliefs and foster a colonial, Catholic community (137-40).
That is, the certainty and prevalence of death lends it a collective affinity: death now supersedes the Church and State as an index of human identification (493-96), a biopolitics that is indistinguishable from a thanatopolitics.

Today, U.S. and Canadian State travel warnings advising their citizens to avoid visiting Mexico (and not only border towns, but resort cities as well) perennially appear on those rare occasions when a white tourist “disappears” in Acapulco or is murdered in Cancún. U.S. and Canadian media sources will make ignorant and sweeping connections to narco-culture and remind us that we are dealing with the savage and/or undeveloped Third World, the barbarian just outside the gates of the tourist zone. While dead white tourists are given names and biographies, are known, if even through sound bites, in a kind of singularity, Mexican corpses make the news north of the border when they appear in excess—through the solidarity of mass graves, quotas and statistics of “disappeared.” Dead tourists can be vaguely, but isomorphically, connected to feminicides, for example, as a thanatopolitics displaced, a cathexis of two disparate ontologies that should not have met, of segregated subjectivities whose lives and deaths should not have crossed paths. Such a First World evaluation of death (and the borders made to surround it) is more than racial and cultural narcissism, but the enabling epistemology that obscures the meaning of globalized death by interpellating which bodies should be publically mourned, justify reprisal, rendered the stuff of political rhetoric, criminal investigation or contemporary literature.

My political aim has been pedagogical. If modern Western thinking is “abyssal,” then we must begin to overcome our strategic memory blocks by considering lived realities on the other side of the line that tourism (as other hegemonic transcultural
institutions) partitions and simulates. We need to understand how Western amnesia\textsuperscript{97} is produced by and reproduces capitalist power relations with their grounded and radiant biopolitics. “The recognition of the persistence of abyssal thinking … is the \textit{condition sine qua non} to start thinking and acting beyond it,” de Sousa Santos argues (11). It is such a recognition that I have strived for here and thus, I have not simply championed some texts and castigated others in a zero sum game of criticism. Rather, I have tried to show how a series of diverse texts about Mexican tourism have, in unique ways, demonstrated (and in some cases, attempted to move beyond) abyssal thinking in the biopolitics of their borderland encounters.

“Post-abyssal thinking,” de Sousa Santos explains, “is a non-derivative thinking … it involves a radical break with modern Western ways of thinking and acting … [and insists that we] think from the perspectives of the other side of the line, precisely because the other side of the line has been the realm of the unthinkable in Western modernity” (11). In chapter two, I advanced a “psychedelic thinking” as an alternative epistemology that should be approached in context of Indigenous technology (without New Age, white self-referentiality), a thinking that can de-centre the subject not to ultimately reach some existential truth about him/her, but to expose that enabling cognitive abyss beyond metaphoricity, to overwhelm with all that s/he has been made to forget. I argue this point in relation to our narcontology, but it applies to the apartheid culture of tourism more broadly. This kind of thinking can be painful; I imagine it as the sublime theorized as a concept of justice rather than aesthetics.

\textsuperscript{97} Again, a kind of Foucauldian knowledge in itself—a “contrived ignorance” that “saturates efforts to understand the lived inequalities of colonial relations in more profound and prosaic ways” (Stoler 247).
That being said, I do not mean to binarize aesthetics and justice. Indigenous storytelling often works through connecting them, just as it connects “... politics and poetry, history and myth, identity and community” to pose relevant questions regarding identitarian and community issues (Moore 5). Further, such a distinction may be neither necessary or possible in Indigenous literature where “fiction” operates as an instrument of both social critique and change, that allows one to understand the world and actively re-create it through the same means (5); as Tom King reminds us, changing the story can mean changing the dominating ethic (164). In this respect, a study like this one could end by celebrating socially-conscious literary journalism as an art that moves beyond the limitations of writing diagnosed in other forms of contemporary literature about Mexico. Writers like Charles Bowden, Rubén Martínez and Luis Alberto Urrea traveled to Mexico, not motivated by middle-class desires for corporeal pleasure or modernist literary desires to add their individual flourishes to the “infernal paradise” trope: they translate “death in Mexico” not into a navel-gazing motif, but into the idiom of contemporary activism by stressing the economic, material, social, and bio/thanatopolitical interconnectedness of globalization. Their work is not divisive, abyssal, but exposes the culpabilities of power relations that render such transcultural lacunas. These journalists have important precursors in people like Oscar Lewis, who connected capitalism to cultures of poverty in urban Mexico in a series of non-fiction novels that appeared throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s; or muckraker John Kenneth Turner whose *Barbarous Mexico* (1910) exposed transcultural capitalist culpability for Mexican slavery, genocide and corruption during the Porfiriato and helped spread global
support for the Mexican Revolution and awareness of the U.S. injustices imposed on Mexican activist Ricardo Flores Magón.\textsuperscript{98}

This is not to dismiss “fiction” proper. We could also conclude by promoting works that create politically potent stories that generate dialogue about ignored or under-determined political issues. Chicana Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s \textit{Desert Blood} (2005) and Chilean Roberto Bolaño’s posthumous \textit{2666} (2004), for example, employ the affective generic tools of the novel to draw pathos to the Juárez killings. Bolaño’s one-thousand-plus-page text lends the gravity of its epic form to the situation of the feminicides by providing an exhaustive catalogue of victims (and brief details of their lives and deaths), as their never-ending procession of corpses piles up and overwhelms the reader. As in the work of the above-mentioned journalists, inter-human relations become apotropaic markers in a climate of choking despair.

I returned to pain and death at the end of my third chapter to argue for their relationship in a greater transcultural healing, essentially proposing that a broadened understanding of thanatopolitics on the other side of the abyssal line (and its diverse and enabling links to this side of the line) can potentially stimulate a working economy of biopolitics that evaluates human life beyond national, ethnic, gender, and class denominators. This too involves radical and immediate cognitive shifts in the ways we conceive human life in a global context. De Sousa Santos asks us to re-position human life in a “subaltern cosmopolitanism” (9-10). Actively resisting the racial segregation power imposes on tourism and “illegal” migrancy, we need to foster a “vast set of networks, initiatives, organizations, and movements that fight against the economic,

\textsuperscript{98} Magón was an activist from Oaxaca whose critique of Porfirio Díaz regime (1876-1911) and his anarchist activity in the U.S. led to his imprisonment.
social, political and cultural exclusion generated by … neoliberal globalization” and thus re-conceive the biopolitics of human mobility (10). Such “counter-hegemonic” spaces and maneuvers will be “animated by a redistributive ethos in its broadest sense, involving redistribution of material, social, political, cultural, and symbolic resources” (10).

Saldívar speaks to such a project when he advocates locating “border knowledge from a transcultural perspective,” engendered by “subaltern modernities” and that offers new possibilities for the “emergence of subjectivities” (390-91; 394).

The redistribution of such resources and the “emergence of [new] subjectivities,” produced conjunctively, may articulate a progressive biopolitics that reevaluates the lives of subjects and populations in transnational space. Again, thinking new bio and geopolitical relations precludes and accompanies such action; “… question[ing] the epistemology of colonial difference that sustains uneven distributions of power” (Mignolo 103) must constantly endure by and for the incorporation of subaltern voices. And not only subaltern “voices;” in 2011, when many disenfranchised populations at least have some public forum to make their concerns heard, the question is no longer whether or not the subaltern can speak, but how s/he can incarnate a human agency (to migrate, to desire, to position one’s body in various social contexts) in egalitarian capacities.

For evidence of post-abyssal thinking inspired by and generating decolonial action, we could consider the work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra. Performance art as genre presents a more obviously corporeal connection between aesthetics and social justice; according to a rudimentary phenomenology, it counters the literature mentioned above by having action work to generate rhetoric and, in Gómez-Peña’s work, in a “new language” between cultures (ethno-techno 6). The (bio)politics of
Gómez-Peña’s pedagogy manifest themselves in “learning through the body,” making participants aware of sociopolitical legacies, immediacies and potentialities in their bodies (83; 24). Incorporating the bodies of artists and spectators into living dioramas or human altars, for example, not only calls out but activates (post)colonial violent a/effects of monoracial desire and fear in transcultural space while promising a “Shamanic” homeopathy (21; 26). Performances have endangered the artist physically and left their testimony in scars.

Like tourism itself, Gómez-Peña explains that his performances cross borders to produce liminal spaces for “deviant behavior” (43). Rather than reproduce exclusive freedoms and exceptions, they offer “a constant reminder of the possibilities of other artistic, political, sexual, or spiritual behaviors” while engendering “a visceral form of solidarity” with the oppressed populations of globalization (43; 27).

I conclude not with an analysis of one of La Pocha Nostra’s pieces, but with a recent national performance. Between May 5 and 8, 2011, Mexicans took to the streets in over forty cities for the “Marcha Nacional por la Justicia y contra la Impunidad” (Giordana). Inspired by the writer Javier Sicilia whose son had been killed by narco-gangs, the marchers protested army and cartel violence and demanded the legalization of all drugs and the removal of Felipe Calderón from office (Giordana). Mexicans of all social segments marched, from business classes to Zapatistas, Chicana/o activists to trade unions (Giordana). Sicilia’s twenty-first-century grito speaks for “el mundo de la proporción” and insists that revolution must thus be conceived according to the

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99 Gómez-Peña’s writing on tourism itself asks us to consider tourist “performance” from the host’s perspectives. In his ironic account of tourism in Chiapas, he is careful not to romanticize Indigenous ideology on his own terms and soon realizes that the campesinos he meets at the Ejido Zapata are his intellectual equals, if not superiors, in their understanding of globalization (and tourism) (108).
“conciencia de la proporción” which is rooted in an Indigenous understanding of human and planetary relations (Trujillo Limones).

It is the biopolitical response of Mexicans to demand justice that gives the march its force: the death of Sicilia’s son, not an exemplary casualty, but one too many, “… has brought the citizenry to mobilize anew,” Sicilia explains; “[to] speak with our bodies, with our walk, with our cry of indignation” (“Open Letter”). In the “Open Letter to Mexico’s Politicians and Criminals” that ignited the marches, Sicilia even draws on theoretical arguments surrounding biopolitics to present his case:

We have had it up to here because the corruption of the judicial institutions generates the complicity with crime and the impunity to commit it, because in the middle of that corruption that demonstrates the failure of the State, each citizen of this country has been reduced to what the philosopher Giorgio Agamben called, using a Greek word, “zoe”: an unprotected life, the life of an animal, of a being that can be violated, kidnapped, molested and assassinated with impunity. (“Open Letter”)

What is crucial now for non-Mexican writers producing literature about Mexico is that they participate in a transnational cognitive justice. By interrogating the enabling relationships between transgressive tourist desires for bare life (in literature and beyond) and the disproportionate distribution of bare life onto forgotten populations—the biopolitical itineraries of neoliberal globalization—literature may assume a new role in creating a value of life beyond modernist conventions of solipsism and tourist institutions of segregation.
Reimagining a sustainable ecology of biopolitical relations beyond “the hegemonic rhetoric of modernity and the hidden logic of coloniality working through it” (Mignolo 156) should rearticulate power relations beyond neocolonial territorializations. Sicilia concludes his letter by asking that dignity be returned to Mexico; participating in this return, in the creative production of transcultural human dignity, should be the foremost concern of an exonymic literature. Post-abyssal thinking, writing, and living, the biopolitical corollary, mutually support each other through the “decolonization of knowledge and of being” which mandates that “creative care for human beings and the celebration of life will take precedence over individual success and meritocracy” (156) and, for my purposes, beyond tourist apartheid, literary exclusions and exceptions, and the greater itineraries that stimulate, signify and evaluate human life and death in contemporary transcultural migrations.
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