

Article

SEEING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS OF BORDERLANDS (DIS)ORDER

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Abstract

The charged geopolitical region of the US–Mexico border has provided a rich source of material for theorists, artists, and filmmakers invested in documenting the material and discursive effects of transnational capitalism in everyday life. The infamous maquila industry, the alarming rate of embodied and structural gendered violence in border cities such as Juárez, and the para-militarization of the border are just a few of the factors that make the border region germane to an analysis of the complex and dynamic relationship between global economic processes and violent transformations in cultural formations. As “Seeing Through Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)Order” illustrates, however, many of the efforts to document that relationship as it plays out on the border are uncritically framed by a discursive narrative of order and disorder, such that contemporary capitalism is seen as wreaking havoc on tradition, community, a liberal notion of “freedom,” and gender relations – all of which are putatively positioned outside of or before capitalism. What are the political implications of this rhetorical strategy, particularly when it is punctuated by the realist tools of documentary evidence, as it is, for instance, in the central text engaged in my essay, Charles Bowden’s Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future? “Seeing Through Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)Order” is centrally concerned to show that while the visual documentation of suffering on the border to tell this story of order and disorder might bring into sharper (and more affective) relief the tangibly devastating effects of uneven processes of globalization, it also lends itself to a reification of the culture of poverty narrative.

Keywords

Charles Bowden; US/Mexico border (or borderlands); documentary strategies; Ciudad Juárez; *Americanos: Latino Life in the United States* (Olmos, Edward James); Ursula Biemann



In 1987, the creative writer and social theorist Gloria Anzaldúa altered the terrain of Chicana/o Studies with her landmark collection of essays and poetry *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which vividly figured the US–Mexico border as “*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 3). It would not be a stretch of the imagination to suggest that this powerful metaphor of the border as a permanently raw bodily wound is the most widely cited piece of prose penned by any Chicana or Chicano author.¹ That this metaphor has traveled far and wide, gaining currency as time goes by, testifies not only to Anzaldúa’s brilliance with language, but to the relentlessly violent effects of transnational capitalism on the US–Mexico border, particularly once NAFTA made that region even more enticing for foreign-owned corporations.² As many critics of transnational capitalism have argued, the *maquila* industry brutally exploits its female light-assembly workers and wrecks havoc on the social fabric of border towns more broadly.³ The unsolved murders and disappearances over the last 15 years of some 400 women in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, a third to a half of whom were employed by *maquilas*, has only made Anzaldúa’s metaphor more apposite.

In this essay, I consider some of the ways in which the US–Mexico border features in projects that, like Anzaldúa’s, are created with the best of intentions, but that, unlike hers, deploy the tools of documentary realism to expose violence and suffering. At face value, these tools – photography and documentary filmmaking, for instance – would seem to yield especially tangible counter-evidence against the discourse of development which continues to insist that transnational capitalism is economically and socially liberating for manufacturing workers (especially women). Where Anzaldúa’s image of the border is created from an imaginative metaphor – and thus calls upon the reader to do some important work of mental translation – the projects discussed in this essay seek to more immediately represent violence and suffering by capturing it (at its rawest) on film, rendering it visible, visceral, immediate, affective, incontrovertible.

If the agents of transnational capitalism make a scramble to the border to increase their profits by cutting labor costs, that scramble is, in a sense, followed by a second race as a host of concerned Americans head south, driven by a passionate commitment to ring a shrill wake-up call about the murders and disappearances of women in Juárez, sex trafficking, drug trafficking and narco-executions, gangs out of control, corrupt politicians, and the brutality of the paramilitary border apparatus. The resulting visual archive (many of its pieces macabre) can make the border seem like a social space saturated through and through with misery, hostility, broken families, hopelessness, and abject poverty – the prime features constituting what Cornel West in another context calls “the threat of nihilism.” The concerns about this archive elaborated in the discussion to follow do not rest entirely with

1 A search on the google search engine with the string “una herida abierta” Anzaldúa” turns up 831 sites (03/07/06).

2 The *maquila* industry has exploded from the “12.5 mile stretch of the border” when it was created in 1965 through the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), to “include all of Mexico, opening up the entire country to a new form of colonization in which labor, not raw materials, was the main prize” (Fuentes and Ehrenreich, 1983, 28).

3 In addition to the material covered in this essay, see also, for instance, “Notes on NAFTA: The Masters of Mankind,” Noam Chomsky’s preface to Charles Bowden’s *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future*; Evelyn Nieves, “To Work and Die in Juarez,” *Mother Jones*, June 2002, 50–55; Leslie Salzinger’s “From High Heels to

Swathed Bodies: Gendered Meanings Under Production in Mexico's Export Processing Industry," *Feminist Studies* 23, no. 3 (Fall 1997); Melissa Wright's "The Dialectics of Still Life: Murder, Women, and Maquiladoras," *Public Culture* 11 (1999); "Capitalism and Anti-Woman Terror," in the *Women and Revolution* pages of *Workers Vanguard* No. 812, 24 (October 2003); and the film *Maquila: A Tale of Two Mexicos*, Directed by Saul Landau and Sonia Angulo (2000). See also Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba's book *Border Women: Writing from la Frontera*, for an excellent discussion of representations of the border in writings from Gloria Anzaldúa to Walter Mignolo. Rosa Linda Fregoso's *meXicana encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* opens with a compelling chapter engaging official responses to and leftist analyses of the murders of women in Juárez. In addition to tracing and interrogating the state's shifting responses to the

the representation of border residents as victims, for as Cynthia Wood points out, drawing from Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, feminist and postcolonial theory's alternative tendency to valorize the subaltern subject by making her agentive, authentic, and "real," forgets that "subaltern speech is of necessity a postcolonial encounter" so that "missing from calls to listen to previously silenced voices, for example, is any sense of the power of (neo)colonialism to shape the imagination of the colonized" (Wood, 2001, 435). The concerns I elaborate here are not meant to unveil the strategic agency of the inhabitants of the border; rather, I question the kind of work performed when a representation's mode is documentary (the unveilings of truths that are hidden); when an implicit binary opposition of order and disorder uncritically organizes this representation; and when a return to the family ideal seems the only available recourse against the threat of nihilism.

A run from the border

Before I turn to explicit representations of disorder on the border, let me introduce a related visual project that actually goes out of its way to *erase* human suffering and poverty. In 1999, Edward James Olmos, with the support of the Smithsonian Institution and a number of corporate sponsors, launched the impressive five-year, multi-media project *Americanos: Latino Life in the United States*. Organized around a traveling exhibit comprised of over 100 photographs taken by 32 photojournalists and interspersed with narratives from such notable public intellectuals as Carlos Fuentes and Maya Angelou, *Americanos* also includes the Little, Brown and Company exhibit book, the Farmer's Insurance Teacher's Guide, the HBO documentary, and the Atlantic CD. In his preface to the exhibit book, Olmos describes the project as "bless[ing] our children with inestimable riches. The contributions of Latinos to the United States of America – documented in all their beauty and diversity – are gifts that will go down in the history of the United States and its art as one of a kind" (Olmos *et al.*, 1999, 9). Resonating with similar mass-produced, corporate-sponsored public narratives and exhibits that feature, on an epic scale, the importance of a specific group of immigrants to the nation-making project of the United States,⁴ *Americanos* pedagogically foregrounds Latinos as an indispensable and productive part of the US social, political, and economic fabric by showing how they have helped build America. The exhibit also suggests that despite their political, historical, ancestral, and economic diversity, Latinos are bound to each other as a powerful force through their "share[d] desire to make a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities" in the US (Olmos *et al.*, 1999, 9). It is this hopeful determination – clearly underwritten (and, the photographs suggest, well served) by faith in the American Dream – together with the exhibit's physical arrangement

according to the familiar tropes of American citizenship (family, culture, community, entertainment, work, and religion) that connects the otherwise disparate photographic subjects, ranging from the Latino members of the White House Staff posing with Bill Clinton to the *campesino* proudly and serenely posing with a bouquet of freshly picked tulips in a picturesque Oregon field of flowers.

Although Olmos and other commentators suggest that *Americanos* aims foremost to fulfill a profound internal need for Latinos to see themselves documented in positive ways, the project is also clearly meant to signal outward, to contest stereotypes of Latinos as non-productive in the economic realm, as over-productive in the reproductive realm, and as vice-prone foreigners. In short, it contests the notion that Latinos are a drain on American resources, by impressing upon non-Latino viewers an image of Latinos as hard workers and good, law-abiding, patriotic citizens with strong (perhaps unparalleled) family values.⁵ The public's association between Latina/o urban youth and gang activity and drug use is challenged, for instance, by a photograph of Latinas/os at an antiviolence rally in Pilsen, where women and children hold posters with slogans such as "No Drugs" and "No Violencia." As its title suggests, *Americanos* also strikes a careful balance between defining Latinos as a culturally and linguistically cohesive group, on the one hand, and as individually committed American citizens, on the other. In one of the essays in the exhibit book, David Hayes-Bautista writes that "The preservation of a strong Latino identity ... should not give rise to Anglo fears that there exists a disloyal group within the population. Latinos see themselves clearly as citizens of the United States and make their contributions to this country by strengthening the family, work, religion, and education" (Olmos *et al.*, 1999, 40). Indeed, Hayes-Bautista's pointed concern to address "Anglo fears" (a somewhat awkward move, given the project's efforts to steer clear of any trace of social conflict) presciently anticipates Samuel Huntington's attempts to alarm the public with his 2004 scathing essay outlining a series of supposed hazards created by Hispanic (especially Mexican) immigrants, not least of which, he claims, is that "As their numbers increase, Mexican Americans feel increasingly comfortable with their own culture and often contemptuous of American culture. They demand recognition of their culture and the historic Mexican identity of the US Southwest" (Huntington, 2004, 44). There is no contempt in the world that *Americanos* presents – neither the kind of contempt that Huntington imagines Latinos exhibiting toward American culture, nor the kind with which he himself regards Latinos. That is, if the exhibit attempts to counter negative stereotypes of Latinos, so too does it work from the other direction, erasing any hints of systemic violence directed against Latinos/as by American institutions. Far from meaning to evoke the disproportionate incarceration of Latinas/os, prevalence of racial profiling, police brutality, or border militarization, for instance, photographs depicting (Latina/o) police

murders over time, Fregoso critiques the economic-oriented analyses of "the maquiladora murders" (a term she is critical of for its monological force) prevalently found in "the discourse of globalism," by which she means progressive academic scholarship on economic globalization and neoliberalism (pp. 6–16). Fregoso borrows the term "globalism" from Michael Burawoy, "who calls the tendency to explain the local in terms of the global 'the fallacy of globalism – namely that one can characterize changes of the whole without examining changes of the parts or, to put the fallacy the other way around, that the secrets of the part can be found in the whole'" (173, no. 22). For Fregoso, because the discourse of globalism commits this fallacy in privileging the global, it can only provide "a monolithic, top-down analysis," (p. 8) getting us no closer to understanding the multi-layered nuances of the state-sanctioned misogyny underwriting femicide in Juárez: "In positioning the maquiladora industry as its unifying trope,

the discourse of globalism elides the multiple structures of oppression in the lives of women as well as providing an insular explanation for the killings” (p. 8). While Fregoso and I cover some of the same texts and share some general concerns in our respective essays, her emphasis on the local (over the global) and the state (over the economic), and my emphasis on the political uses of affect in photographic work leads us to different theoretical frameworks and arguments. See also Alicia Schmidt Camacho’s essay “Body Counts on the Mexico–US Border: Femicidio, Reification, and the Theft of Mexicana Subjectivity.” According to Schmidt Camacho, “precisely because the feminicidio [in Juárez] entails a social fantasy that certain women are made for killing, ... those invested in stopping the crimes must not collude with any depiction of vulnerable Mexican women as less than fully human, less than fully alive” (p. 24). Schmidt Camacho is especially concerned with the way that the Juárez murders – or,

officers and border patrol agents appear in the exhibit only as examples of the kinds of work that Latinos perform.

Setting aside for the moment the question of what kinds of photographic images were selected by the *Americanos* organizers to help achieve their double aim of reaching Latinos (to provide a rare occasion for positive self-recognition in a large-scale public art display) and reaching non-Latinos (to alleviate xenophobic fears and racist contempt), I want to consider the question from a slightly different angle. What can we learn from both the rhetorical strategies and the *erasures* that are necessary in an account that seeks (against incredible odds) to sustain the illusion of the American Dream and feel-good fantasy of Latino integration? Huntington’s de-contextualized statistics on Latino poverty and high-school drop-out rates are ironically instructive here.⁶ Where he fallaciously uses them as indicators of high fertility rates and a lack of a strong work-ethic among Latinos, they can be easily recuperated and contextualized contra-Huntington as evidence of the exploitation and enforced segregation of Latinos in the US, which the *Americanos* exhibit carefully elides.

The growing anti-immigrant hysteria in the US makes the largely conservative aims of *Americanos* both understandable and perplexing. It also makes those aims incredibly difficult to fulfill. Significantly, the vision of social order sponsored by *Americanos* leans heavily on the medium through which it is, to use Olmos’s term, “documented.” Had Olmos chosen to display not photographs but paintings, the pedagogical force he wishes to create would be much less persuasive. As I will be discussing throughout this essay, documentary realism – particularly the still photograph – is an extremely powerful tool in argumentation, precisely because it appears to reveal objective truths. I want to take this somewhat commonplace observation a (queer) step further, however, in order to suggest that the reliance on documentary truth telling (as a highly *ordered* form of evidence) can make it difficult to avoid reduplicating (or, depending on one’s politics, can make it easy to reduplicate) a *heteronormative* view of social order. If, as Michael Warner persuasively argued when he coined this term, heteronormativity results from “heterosexual culture’s exclusive ability to interpret itself *as society* ... as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist” (p. xxi, my emphasis), then that interpretation can become particularly seductive when there is an obvious breakdown in social and communal relations. As I will show later in this essay, in the case of *Americanos* this order is finally congealed through an insistence on the heteronormative family.

I also want to bring these questions of rhetorical strategy to bear on the larger question of what does not, or cannot, be displayed in *Americanos*. *Americanos*’s measured omission of social conflict and bodies in pain largely depends, I want

to now argue, on the erasure of the US–Mexican border. Given the border’s salience (if only at the symbolic level) for the kind of Latino determination and faith in the American Dream that the exhibit so clearly wants to evoke, not to mention the current cachet of borderlands studies, it might seem surprising that there is only one photograph (other than those of the Latina/o border patrol agents mentioned above) that depicts the actual border, a photo in which we see the backs of a man and a woman, identified in the caption as “a young couple,” as they wade together, unharassed, across the Río Grande in broad daylight (Olmos *et al.*, 1999, 60). The discussion to follow will explain why the border marks the representational limits of *Americanos*.

Seeing bodies in pain

Two years before *Americanos* was launched, *Harper’s* published Charles Bowden’s jarring essay “While You Were Sleeping,” an expose of the failures of transnational capitalism south of the border and a compelling argument that street photography can effectively and evidentially bring into view the human casualties of these failures in Juárez. For Bowden, the only way to interrupt the social and economic degradation of Juárez is to finally make Americans *see* the suffering in its most embodied forms, a kind of vision, he claims, that no social science indicators or academic theories of globalization afford. As he tracks the routines of several local street photographers in Juárez, Bowden enacts multiple layers of representation with the express purpose of visually illuminating things that are hidden from view: the extraordinary and precarious experiences that the guerilla photographers go through in a day’s work; the mutilated corpses and alarming poverty that the photographers document; the controversial photographs themselves, many of which have been censored in other forums; and Bowden’s participant-observer commentary, which includes his own visual process (“I finally began to see” [Bowden, 1998, 41]).⁷ What all of this unveiling means is that street photography is not just the subject of the essay; it is its guiding principle. Further, that the street photographers unsurprisingly have difficulty exhibiting their work, and that Bowden’s mission is to make their work seen, makes him in a sense a street photographer of street photography. And, thus, when the high-brow photography publisher Aperture released the glossy *Juárez: The Laboratory of our Future* (1998), an expanded version of “While You Were Sleeping” now accompanied by nearly 100 of the photographs, the conflation of the street photograph with Bowden’s voice was complete.

The objects of this gritty photographic realism – both the photographs and Bowden’s essay itself – construct a Juárez that is inherently and unrelentingly violent: “part of the Mexican gulag” (p. 64), “an entire city woven out of violence” (p. 98), and a place where the rule not the exception is gang warfare,

more precisely, the cadavers of the dead women – feature as inevitable evidence of “wasted humanity” in anti-globalization discourse (p. 23), unethically duplicating, she argues, the violent “theft of mexicana subjectivity” (p. 25).

4 See the PBS series “Irish in America” and “Becoming American: The Chinese Experience,” to name two of the many educational projects elaborating the positive role of individual immigrant groups in the US (<http://www.pbs.org>).

5 According to the editors, over 50,000 photographs were reviewed for the exhibit by a panel of photo editors.

6 Huntington cites statistics from a number of sources including Rodolfo O. De la Garza, Angelo Falcón, P. Chris García’s “Mexican Immigrants, Mexican Americans, and American Political Culture,” in Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passell’s (eds.) *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of America’s Newest Arrivals* (Washington: Urban Institute Press, 1994); “Census of Population: Census of Population: Persons

of Hispanic Origin in the United States," (Washington: US Census Bureau, 1990); and Dianne Schmidley, US Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2001. According to this material, for the years 1989–1990, whereas 45.1% of "All Americans" (excluding Mexican Americans) had a post high school degree, only 5.4% of first-generation – and 9.6% of fourth-generation – Mexican Americans had one. And the percentages of people who had no high school degree were 23.5% for "All Americans" and 69.9% for first-generation – and 41.0% for fourth-generation – Mexican Americans (Huntington, 2004, 37). The data on economic status, which are included in pie charts for "Managerial/ Professional Positions as a Percentage of Employed Members of Immigrant Groups," show that in the year 2000, only 6.3% of Mexican immigrants held these positions, compared to 46.3% of

narco executions, and the ongoing and unsolved rape, mutilation, and killing of young female *maquila* workers. The civic calendar is inscribed by fatality:

In November and December, there is a bumper crop of drug murders as the merchandise moves north and accounts are settled. Then around Christmas and New Year's people hang themselves. The first few months of the new year bring fires and gas explosions as the poor try to stay warm. Spring means battles between neighborhoods (or colonias) over ground for building shacks as well as outbreaks of disease in a city largely lacking sewage treatment. Summer brings water problems to a head (Juárez will run completely out of water within five years unless something is done), more disease, and batches of murders by the street gangs. The cool days of fall open a new season of battles between colonias, and then, with the holidays, the photographers return to the drug killings and the Christmas suicides. (p. 4)

Quite simply, fatality does not happen in Bowden's Juárez; it *is* Juárez. How can you think anything different when the photos are staring you in the face?

Reading/viewing this book in one sitting is not easy. Taken at close range with color film, the photographs depict in detail – among other horrific scenes – the remains of badly tortured and often-decomposed bodies moments after they have been discovered, and thus still lying where they were killed or hidden. One of the more gruesome photographs, the only one reproduced in black and white, depicts what appears to be a patch of an external wall of a building, stained with clouds of dark spots and uneven where its top coat of paint has chipped off in large pieces. Suspended against this wall are two unlikely objects. On the left, we see a large cardboard cutout of Donald Duck wearing a sailor shirt and cap, a huge grin from his bill, the kind of decorative object you would expect to find hanging on a child's bedroom wall or in a baby's nursery. Just inches to the right of this happy image is a cleanly severed adult's hand hanging from a small hook. The fingers point downward almost gracefully, and the veins on the hand are still well defined, as though blood were still flowing through them. The photo's caption dryly notes the irony: "The sense of violence, of loss of innocence, permeates Cd. Juárez" (pp. 74–75).⁸ The photographs of people who are (still) alive are in many ways more haunting than those of corpses; images of living people are images of people who are not yet dead. The photographs of young women on their way to work at *maquila* plants are framed and underwritten by those depicting corpses of their co-workers. Children stand, sleep, or play amid piles of trash, emphasizing not only the "loss of innocence" referred to in the Donald Duck caption but the cyclical and claustrophobic nature of poverty in Juárez.

Bowden's portrait of life and death in Juárez is so stunning, the photos/evidence so incontrovertible, and the stakes of bearing witness so high that it is difficult to apprehend his *Juárez* as anything other than at face value (which is

to say that it is easy to lose track of his representational strategies and his particular way of understanding what has caused the suffering and how to intervene against it). The use of street photography as the content and organizing principle for his arguments is particularly effective because, first, its documentary features invoke *truth* telling; second, it provides *visual* access to human suffering; and, finally, by documenting this suffering as it exists “on the street,” the photographers/Bowden are able to frame it as a public problem. As Ann Cvetkovich points out, however, in her work on sensationalism and affect, while “the presentation of brute facts or empirical evidence can serve enormously useful purposes...the lessons of poststructuralism have also made it necessary to question documentary’s presumptions to transparency” (Cvetkovich, 1992, 167). Presenting and consuming visual/visceral representations as accurate and unmediated reflections of reality at once denies the politics and limitations of representations and leaves intact the epistemological and ideological frameworks that define reality in the first place. In his study of the history and social functions of photography, Pierre Bourdieu argues that

only in the name of a naive realism can one see as realistic a representation of the real which owes its objective appearance not to its agreement with the very reality of things (since this is only ever conveyed through socially conditioned forms of perception) but rather to conformity with rules which define its syntax within its social use, to the social definition of the objective vision of the world; in conferring upon photography a guarantee of realism, society is merely confirming itself in the tautological certainty that an image of the real which is true to its representation of objectivity is really objective. (Bourdieu, 1990, 77)

Bourdieu helps us to remember that vision is socially conditioned (we see what we have learned to see), rather than a pure and unmediated tool for accessing objective truth. Importantly, his point is not to widen the distance between visual representation and reality by suggesting that the latter is simply too large or too multidimensional to ever represent in an accurate way. Much the opposite, he means to bring “objective truth” into the same frame as socially conditioned vision, and note their shared features. The objective appearance of the photograph is enabled precisely through the social rules and definitions that enable objectivity. Like the photograph, “objective truth” is itself a representation of socially conditioned vision.

If we consume photographs as transparent representations of reality, then “street” photography would seem particularly evidentiary, given its central feature of moving through public, open spaces to photograph anonymous people on the street, people who are often unaware of the camera’s gaze, and thus unposed. To make this more clear, we can plug these photographs into Bourdieu’s tautology: we see the photograph of the corpse on the street as

Canadian immigrants, 38.1% of European immigrants, 30.9% of Native-born Americans, and 38.7% of Asian immigrants (Huntington, 2004, 37). Finally, whereas in 1989–1990 24.8% of “All Americans” (excluding Mexican Americans) had a household income of \$50,000 or more, only 10.7% of fourth-generation Mexican Americans did (Huntington, 2004, 37). In those same years, where 64.1% of “All Americans” were homeowners, only 40.3% of fourth-generation Mexican Americans were (Huntington, 2004, 37).

7 All page numbers refer to the version of the essay that appears in *Juárez: The Laboratory of our Future* (1998).

8 I had hoped to include reproductions of this and other photographs in this essay. After many months of attempts, however, I was finally unable to secure permissions to include photographs from *Juarez* or from *Americanos*.

objective because it fulfills the rules of objectivity according to which what we “see” on the street is understood to be reality. If Bowden’s street photographers are simply documenting what they find on any Juárez street on any given day, and if what their photographs depict are dead bodies and bodies in pain, then by definition, the streets are permeated with violence, as Bowden insists they are. But even without recourse to Bourdieu, we can easily call into question the streetness of the street photographers by keeping in mind that they utilize police scanners for immediate crime-scene information, that they are employed by local newspapers, and that their expressed desire is to document violence. This is neither to suggest that the violence photographed is unreal or that photographs produced by photojournalism (which is how I would classify Bowden’s photographs) are less “real” than those of *actual* street photography. Rather, it is to call attention to Bowden’s and the photographers’ representational strategies in order to begin unpacking the norms that provide the glue in Bourdieu’s tautology and that are even more salient in Bowden’s macabre portrait of Juárez. For the *force* of Bowden’s argument, his privileging of documentary realism and concomitant visual knowledge is precisely, I want to now argue, that which *limits* his project. His own process of Enlightenment (“I began to see”) is enabled by the most insidious dominant frameworks that have created the very suffering he wants to interrupt.

Bowden’s representational strategies, his documentary claims and visual unveilings, are the very same strategies – although obviously for different ends – used in the discourse of development. As Spivak argues, the recourse to representationalist realism that can often be seen in intellectual “resistance-talk” on behalf of the oppressed subject “has helped positivist empiricism – the justifying foundation of advanced capitalist neocolonialism – to define its own arena as ‘concrete experience,’ ‘what actually happens.’ (As in the case of capitalist colonialism, and *mutatis mutandis*, of exploitation-as-‘Development.’ Evidence is daily produced by computing the national subject of the global South in this unproblematic way. And an alibi for globalization is produced by calling on the testimony of the credit-baited female)” (Spivak, 1999, 255). Just as easily as Bowden’s photographers can move through the streets to depict human suffering, the agents of the *maquila* industry can (and *do*) move through those same streets and collect testimony from women who express sheer gratitude for the availability of work in the *maquila* industry. And, of course, just as *Americanos* relies on photographs to convey non-threatening Latinos pursuing the American dream, so does Huntington rely on “real” statistics to convey threatening Latinos draining American resources. So too could Bowden’s photographs of disorder be used as perfect evidence for the need to bring Juárez into the ordered fold of development. Meanwhile, anti-immigrant hysteria in the US has a new readily available batch of fuel in the form of photographs that do not lie.

Setting aside for the moment the possible *misuses* of Bowden's evidence, we are still left with the problem that, although clearly motivated by the desire to move his American audience to examine its complicity in transnational capitalism (as consumers, if nothing else), Bowden's unveilings risk overwhelming the reader/viewer with her own sense of hopelessness, for "the hazards of a strategy that depends on the affective force of the finality of death are that it can produce helpless outrage and a sense that nothing can be done" (Cvetkovich, 1992, 170). Perhaps this is why Bowden himself falters when it comes to explaining how the shock value from the photographs might be leveraged for social change. The upshot of Bowden's belief in a simple one-to-one correspondence between the photographs and what they depict is that what he proposes is (necessarily) just as simple and reductive: "It is a very old story. We must treat people as we wish to be treated. Forget the theology of free trade, forget the theology of foreign policy, forget the theology of immigration reform, forget the theology of the military. They will not answer to the task. Look into the faces, stare at the huts, wince at the murders, think of the numbers. Then the choices will be simple. And the price of a bad choice will be obvious" (p. 114). There is much to be said for Bowden's faith in the pathos of (American) human compassion (itself a "theology"). The visuals *in and of themselves* – devoid of any systemic critical analysis of the immensely complex set of power relations installed under global capitalism – can, however, only fail when we expect them to provide us with "obvious" choices and "simple" answers.

Giving human compassion the same quality of simple and unmediated purity that he grants the "street photographs," Bowden once again places commonly privileged and naturalized systems of knowledge outside of power and discursivity. The photographs are able to access true suffering, and the human compassion true answers because somehow they have been uncorrupted by capitalism, standing outside of it, and are able therefore to heal its wounds. Opposing his unadulterated humanism to "the deep idiotic belief in the sanctity of communism, socialism, capitalism, and state corporatism," Bowden "simply demand[s] that any belief system or power system meet my standards of sustenance, shelter, and moments of joy" (p. 59). An overlay of liberalism, individualism, and universalism in this statement makes Bowden's demand seem "simple," apolitical, pure, and natural – as though Bowden himself (and his desires themselves) were not necessarily shaped by the social norms of US subject formation. In a sense, Bowden's visual acumen renders him "blind" to the ways in which his very ability not only to live a good life but to demand that all other humans enjoy his own standards of living are indelibly tied to his privileged subject position as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, male citizen of the US. These axes of "privilege" depend, of course, on the marginalization, exploitation, and impoverishment of Others. This is not to say that embodying "privilege" precludes speaking out against social injustice. Rather, what I mean to highlight here is Bowden's lack of systemic critique, his uncritical acceptance

of social norms and the binaries that lend them their traction (privilege/impoverishment, order/disorder, hope/nihilism, freedom/abjection, and, public/private). In short, Bowden exemplifies what the feminist political philosopher Wendy Brown describes as a pattern in which “Western leftists have largely forsaken analyses of the liberal state and capitalism as sites of *domination* and have focused instead on their implication in political and economic *inequalities*” (Brown, 1995, 10, emphasis in original).

A run for the family

As mentioned earlier, Bowden’s narrative of social degradation contains the tropes of what Cornel West calls “the nihilistic threat” in his work on spiritual impoverishment in Black America. “Nihilism is to be understood here,” writes West, “not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards of authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaningless, hopelessness, and (most important) loneliness” (West, 1994, 22–23). And, like Bowden, who asks us to forget the “theologies” of political reform and adopt instead the simple answers provided by human compassion, West calls for a “politics of conversion” because “nihilism is not overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one’s soul” (West, 1994, 29). As is often the case with stories of nihilism – particularly those that evoke the infamous culture of poverty narrative, to which I will (turn) shortly – Bowden’s notion of compassion and West’s politics of conversion hinge on a return to the family, an institution equated (in the past tense) with the simple things in life: social harmony, community, compassionate values, order, sacrifice, morality, and love, the very concepts, not incidentally, displayed in the *Americanos* exhibit. Significantly, these concepts are also seen as “free” in that they cannot be bought or sold, in contrast to the commodities of consumer culture that West identifies as one of the two major causes of nihilism (the other is the crisis in black leadership).

The promise of the family is always anachronistic; it is framed both as something deferred (something we need to get to) and as something past (something to return to). It is before and after capitalism, but never a part of it; or, rather, in its damaged present tense, the family figures symbolically as the quintessential problem with capitalism, even as it eclipses the critique of capitalism. All of Bowden’s critical efforts toward unveiling the failures of capitalism finally point less to the exploitation of the *maquila* worker and more to the destruction of the family:

The mutilation of the main bulwark of Mexican culture, the family, created a need [filled by gang belonging]. For the women, the assembly plants are sometimes liberating since they are able to leave their homes and for the first

time in their lives have their own money. But there is a price. The collapse of marriages and of families increases.

... And most important, the fabled pull of the border brought hordes of almost neolithic peasant families to a city where their past skills were worthless. In Juárez you find Stone Age parents staring helplessly at Computer Age children. Nothing the adults know or can provide has much value here, and the fabric that has held families and México together tears right before your eyes. You can actually hear the tearing. I'll be standing at a murder scene, the shooters will be feeding on a fresh corpse, and as I make notes I can hear the gang kids murmuring about me. When I look up I see very hard eyes, and I know everyone but me is packing. There is nothing to be done about this. I am like everyone else here, I simply go about my business as if death were not a few feet away disguised as some twelve- or thirteen-year-old with a gun and eyes older than I can ever hope to be. (pp. 91–92)

In many ways this passage is typical of the essay: Bowden builds an argument, often using hyperbole (Neolithic families; Stone Age parents) for punctuation, and then seals it with the indisputable story of yet another corpse being photographed. Here, however, the image of the fresh corpse – this time, significantly, generic – is superseded by the nihilistic imagery of the (generic) kids' "hard eyes," that which is the sound of the social fabric tearing. As both the victims and the perpetrators of violence, these kids (representing, of course, the future of Juárez) are locked into a system of abjection, seamlessly framed here as the consequence of another "mutilation" – the violation of the Mexican family. The forces of transnational capitalism wreck havoc on the family by luring it to the city (disrupting intergenerational harmony) and hiring its daughters (disrupting gendered divisions of labor).

This familiar construction of the always already existing, functional, intact, and peaceful family coming undone by prolonged exposure to the external dysfunctions of alienating industrial city life depends on a problematic positioning of the family as standing outside of (and before) not only political economy but history (thus the telling use of "neolithic" in relation to the traditional and harmonious Mexican family).⁹ This elides an array of feminist critiques of the family, some of which note capitalism's *dependence* on the family, specifically, and others of which point to the number of ways that the supposedly ideal hetero-patriarchal family is in fact the site of the reproduction of sexism. The burdens of timelessness and maintenance of tradition (which are also the burdens of women's affective labor) are particularly acute for "the" *Mexican* family, as it routinely provides the romantic and exotic substance for American writers and anthropologists (from J. Frank Dobie to Oscar Lewis).¹⁰ Most troubling in the above passage is the ominous warning ("But there will be a price") in relation to Mexican women's entry into the *maquila* work force.

⁹ As Ann Cvetkovich points out, "Marxist notions of 'alienation' suggest that industrialization produces the waning of affective relations between employer and employees, which then leads to a corresponding *intensification* of

affective relations within the family” (Cvetkovich, 1992, 195, emphasis added). Raymond Williams’s entry for “family” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* traces the historical variations of the term from its first known appearance in the late 14th C, all of which are informed precisely by political economy. Williams concludes that the history of the term “is a history worth remembering when we hear that ‘the family, as an institution, is breaking up’ or that, in times gone by and still hopefully today, ‘the family is the necessary foundation of all order and morality.’ In these and similar contemporary uses it can be useful to remember the major historical variations, with some of their surviving complexities, and the sense, through these, of radically changing definitions of primary relationships” (Williams, 1983, 133–134).

10 See José E. Limón’s *Dancing with the Devil* for an incisive critique of, for instance, J. Frank Dobie’s pastoral

Bowden’s ahistorical and romanticized fantasy of the harmonious pastoral family is such is that he can only blame the “collapse” of families and marriages on change, that he can only see change as negative, and that the most threatening kind of change involves women’s agency.

The Chihuahua government’s classic blame-the-victim framework in its initial response to the killings in Juárez hinged on a similar move as parents were faulted for allowing their daughters out of the house at night, curfews were mandated, and women were urged to cut their hair short and dress modestly.¹¹ Bowden’s warning of marital discord and the local government’s indictment of young women’s agency occlude the family’s role in the perpetuation of sexism and misogyny. The journalist Debbie Nathan has written several articles elaborating the effects of such occlusions. In “Missing the Story,” for instance, Nathan worries that accounts of gendered violence in Juárez that focus on the more sensational murders of women who have been raped, murdered, and left in the desert eclipse the equally pressing need to acknowledge the less visible and, she argues, more pervasive reality of quotidian domestic violence. The main thrust of Nathan’s essay is to

make you think about the girl who had the heart attacks while being tortured by someone she knew well. To make you recall the young mother who was killed not in the desert by strangers, but by her lover in her father’s house. ... I believe that stopping femicide in Juárez is not just about catching a serial killer or a group of homicidal bus drivers or a coven of corrupt cops. To solve the murders and keep more from happening, the public first needs to know that the vast majority of the dead did not simply vanish from sight one day. (Nathan, 2002, 2)¹²

Nathan’s essay is a helpful reminder that most violence against women is committed not by strangers on the street, but by family members in the home. Enforcing a public curfew to protect women from assault by keeping them safe in the “private” realm of their homes makes about as much sense as applying liberalism as a salve for the wounds of capitalism. Or, rather, it makes the same sense.

Ursula Biemann’s 1999 experimental documentary film, *Performing the Border*, also about Juárez, comes closer to providing the poststructuralist feminist critique missing in Bowden’s project. As its title suggests, and echoing Anzaldúa, the film presents the border as a discursive space that only becomes cemented as real in our imaginations through the repetition of the things we do in relation to it and the things we say about it. Likewise, the film’s implicit rejection of the repressive hypothesis suggests that the border creates subjects, rather than represses identities; the female *maquila* worker becomes a new gendered subject through the particular working conditions that structure her movements and the specific effects of “organic/mechanic border fusion.” While Biemann’s discussion of this and other fusions resonates with the work of

Donna Haraway, she does not suggest that these boundary breakdowns interpellate the third-world female factory worker as a cyborg, at least not in Haraway's positive sense. Rather, Biemann's illumination of boundary breakdowns is meant to expose the *maquila* industry's negative impact on the lives of its female employees and in the gendered social relations of Juárez.

The dramatic force of Biemann's argument is in the film's denouement wherein the boundary breakdowns negatively depicted in the earlier parts of the film culminate finally with the murders of women in Juárez, which Biemann understands as the acts of a singular serial killer. As a segue into this final piece of the film, the voice-over narration links this violence to the technology associated with the transnational factory: "There is a connection between repetitive sexual violence and a form of production of a high-tech culture, between the technologies of identification, reduplication, simulation, and the psychological disposition of a serial-killer." Although Biemann's careful attention to the historicity of gender and the discursive production of subjectivity allows her to question the apparent reality of things in ways that Bowden cannot, she nonetheless uncritically invokes dominant definitions of order/disorder, pastoral harmony/technological alienation, public/private, and humanism/capitalism. As the camera portentously pans the desert landscape in slow motion, the voice-over narration goes on to explain that the "serial killer's" pathology stems from his inability to comprehend and obey the various boundaries that order social life, such that "going to the border becomes the physical expression of his mental extremity, merging his physical body with the national body, confusing the inside and the outside, the public and private. There is little distinction between habitat and environment."

Likewise, in her essay also entitled "Performing the Border" (2002), Biemann reduces the impact of transnational capitalism to a problem of social disorder, to things come undone: "speedy industrialization has imposed rather violent transformations in the contradictory registers of public and private spaces, of work and plant, on the one hand, and of home and family, on the other, or more generally, of the economic and the sexual realms" (Biemann, 2002, 107). The problem here is not that the documentary/essay points to transformations or considers them violent. Rather, in getting so thoroughly caught up in its own presentism, as many documentaries do, it precludes any nuanced contextualization for the transformations it seeks to document. The careful poststructuralist analysis that guides Biemann's earlier descriptions of the female *maquila* workers' new gendered subjectivity falls away when she later contrasts it to a putative earlier innocence. That is, like Bowden, Biemann finally suggests that the only way we can grasp the *disorder* in Juárez is through a fantasy of and nostalgia for a humanist order. But once again this leads to hopelessness, for, Biemann writes, "any humanist claim is out of order in a place like this" (Biemann, 2002, 100).

representations of Mexico. According to Limón, "Dobie had to have a way of coming to terms both with his clear admiration for the folklore of the Mexicans of south Texas and with his certain knowledge that *his* people were largely responsible for their social misfortune. Dobie reconciles this tension in an earlier setting – innocent Mexico" (Limón, 1994, 58). While Dobie and Bowden clearly have different motivations for invoking an earlier, innocent Mexico (Dobie for the sake of erasure of Anglo American complicity in the South Texas social conflict; Bowden, to force American consumers to recognize their complicities as direct beneficiaries of sweatshop labor on the border), their invocations of an innocent Mexico are problematic in the same ways.

11 Arturo González Rascón, former Attorney General of Chihuahua, had this to say about the murders: "Unfortunately, there are women who are in danger because of their lifestyles. After all, it's very hard to go out on the street

when it's raining and not get wet" (quoted in Nathan, 2003).

12 "Missing the Story" engages principally with *Señorita Extraviada*, Lourdes Portillo's documentary film on the Juárez murders. While Portillo claims that the number of women killed and left in the desert in this linked pattern is 270, Nathan claims that the number is closer to 80. I footnote this information, rather than include it in the body of the essay, because the force of Nathan's article does not rest on her critique of Portillo, a critique that I find much less compelling than Nathan's more general concerns. While I do not engage with Portillo's film in this essay (largely because Rosa Linda Fregoso has already published excellent commentary on the film), I consider it one of the most effective treatments of the violence in Juárez.

Even the best-intentioned uses of such narratives of gendered/familial disorder for explaining a nihilistic threat produce a cyclical loop that precludes any effective critique of capitalism or sexism. While Biemann and Bowden exemplify contemporary versions of this problem, it has a longer history that bears remembering as we think about what counts as evidence and how to provide useful and imaginative political interventions that do not rely on universalist notions of order against which the (inevitable) failures can so easily be rendered pathological, rather than symptomatic of the very problems with normalcy. The best historical example of this problem is, of course, Oscar Lewis's well-intentioned culture of poverty framework that grew out of his long-term research beginning in the 1940s with the urban poor in Mexico City, San Juan, and the Puerto Rican "slums" of New York. Lewis argued that the urban poor tend to develop a discrete culture that is both positive in the sense that it helps them survive against all odds, and negative in the sense that among its 70 traits is, for instance, a "high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts" (Lewis, 1968, 11). The well-rehearsed critique of Lewis's work is that his thick descriptions of the culture of poverty outlined in the many books and essays he devoted to the topic at best assume a life of their own and foreclose a radical critique of the social conditions that led to the poverty in the first place. At worst, the culture of poverty is seen as directly, if not solely, responsible for sustaining its own abjection, for Lewis adamantly pointed to the cyclical perpetuation of the culture: "by the time slum children are age six or seven they have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of the changing conditions or increased opportunities that may occur in their lifetime" (Lewis, 1968, 6).

Many of the cultural traits that Lewis identified are unsurprisingly related to the (dysfunctional) family:

the absence of childhood as a specially prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle; early initiation into sex; free unions or consensual marriages; a relatively high incidence of the abandonment of wives and children; a trend toward female- or mother-centered families ...; feelings of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence, and of inferiority; ...high incidence of maternal deprivation, of orality, and of weak ego structure; confusion of sexual identification; ...sense of resignation and fatalism; widespread belief in male superiority; and high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts. (pp. 9-11)

As much as Lewis objected to his critics who charged him with pathologizing the poor – what he considered to be a misreading of his framework – his descriptions of the "culture" can only be seen as degenerate when they are so clearly based on their sheer difference from what is privileged as normal, namely the middle-class heterosexual nuclear family headed by two parents with Dr. Spock at their disposal.

By bringing the culture of poverty into the same frame in which I read the work of Bowden and Biemann, I mean not only to contextualize the ways in which theories of social disorder necessarily reinforce and privilege what counts as order, but to underline the ease with which such theories can be appropriated by right-wing pundits, not to mention consumed for pleasure by mainstream Americans. The culture of poverty continues today to provide the very substance for the neoconservative right's attack on federal economic redistribution programs, just as it was earlier used by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his to urge the Nixon administration to adopt a policy of "benign neglect" in relation to poor African Americans. Citing as measures of dysfunction the culture of poverty traits – particularly the prevalence of female-headed African-American households – Moynihan argued that the welfare system actually contributes to the degradation of poor families, keeping them locked into the culture of poverty.¹³ As Roderick A. Ferguson points out, "African Americans' fitness for citizenship was measured in terms of how much their sexual, familial, and gender relations deviated from a bourgeois nuclear family model historically embodied by whites" (Ferguson, 2004, 20).

***Americanos* redux**

With aims in stark opposition to Bowden's, the *Americanos* exhibit makes every effort to steer clear of the culture of poverty traits, which entails not just making a run *from* the border – saturated as it is with evocations of disorder – but rendering even the farmworker's labor picturesque, as in the photograph of the tulip picker mentioned earlier. Countering the familiar image of the pained body of the *campesino* stooping over crops with a short-handled hoe, the worker in Timothy González's photograph poses stoically and nobly for the camera. The profile of his handsome and serene face rises above the huge bouquet of fresh tulips that he holds possessively against his chest as he looks off into the distance. And, if the *campesino* in this picture is not working, nor are there any other workers depicted in this scene. Rather, the expansive frame behind him is taken up by yellow, red, and orange tulips that trail off into the background until they meet the cool Oregon sky. It is no surprise that this is one of the few photographs in the exhibit book that has been given a full two pages. This photograph manages at once to beautify one of the most exploited forms of manual labor in the US, and to announce a new and more gentle form of Chicano/Latino masculinity, one in which stoicism and flowers go hand in hand.

Importantly, even though the tulip-picker photograph appears in the "Work" section of the exhibit, it – like all of the photographs comprising *Americanos* – lends credence to the "Family/*La Familia*" section. For, the tulip picker implicitly typifies the kind of masculinity that is featured in the introductory essay to the "Family/*La Familia*" section: "in *Americanos* many Latino men are portrayed who exemplify the positive definition of a macho as one who works

13 For an important listing of such arguments, and of the use of the culture of poverty framework therein, see the National Center for Policy Studies' "Why Not Abolish the Welfare State?".

hard, values his family, and has valor, dignity, and honor. This is the definition we must embrace and provide for our young men” (Olmos *et al.*, 1999, 84). Where Bowden considers violence to be the *modus operandi* of Juárez, the makers of *Americanos* consider the family to be the “very soul of the Latino experience. *La Familia* defines our experience at the moment of conception and throughout our lives, and also shapes our identity” (Olmos *et al.*, 1999, 84). As the leitmotif of *Americanos*, the family doubles as the ordering curatorial glue of the entire exhibit and as the comforting vision of order depicted in the photographs. In a sense, the “Family/*La Familia*” section is as redundant to *Americanos* as a section devoted to violence would be to Bowden’s Juárez. What sets the “Family/*La Familia*” photographs apart from the others, however, is that each of its photographs includes at least one (but not too many!) baby or child in the frame. Thus, for instance, the photograph mentioned earlier of the “young couple” wading through the Río Grande on their way to the US appears not in the “Family” section but in the “Work” section.

Here we have the visions of order that Bowden, Biemann, and Lewis implicitly use as yardsticks for measuring and articulating the threat of nihilism. It is a vision that is crafted from beginning to end with what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner call “heteronormativity,” an insidious system of social norms in which

...the love plot of intimacy and familialism...signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way. Community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness – embedded in things and not just in sex – is what we call heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life; nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture. It is hard to see these fields as heteronormative because the sexual culture straight people inhabit is so diffuse, a mix of languages they are just developing with premodern notions of sexuality so ancient that their material conditions feel hardwired into personality. (Berlant and Warner, 1998, 554–555). As Berlant and Warner make clear, it is not enough to notice that heteronormativity is indexed by the heterosexual, procreative, monogamous couple (although this is a major piece of its definition). Heteronormativity also organizes our sense of public and private, of citizenship, of belonging, of intimacy, and of politics.

Although Bourdieu does not use the term “heteronormativity” (uncoined in 1965) as he navigates his way through the hard-to-see social norms that lend photographs their indelible truth-telling power, his analysis definitely resonates with more recent queer theoretical work on heteronormativity. As mentioned earlier, Bourdieu seeks to untangle photography from the social norms that give its objects the appearance of objective truth (and vice versa). Bourdieu’s aim – like Berlant and Warner’s, and my own – is not to stage a clever drama of exposure (of complicity or naiveté). Rather, it is to call upon us all to proactively consider the incredible reach of social norms and their power to influence, if not steer, our everyday behavior (from snapping a photograph, to viewing a photograph, to writing an analysis of that photo). For Bourdieu, one of the upshots of taking photography at face value is that we fail to notice one of its most significant functions – the production of the family:

if we bear in mind the fact that there is a very close correlation between the presence of children in the household and the possession of a camera, and that the camera is often the common property of the family group, it becomes clear that photographic practice only exists and subsists for most of the time by virtue of its *family function* or rather by the function conferred upon it by the family group, namely that of solemnizing and immortalizing the high points of family life, in short, of reinforcing the integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has both of itself and of its unity. (Bourdieu, 1990, 19, emphasis in original)

For Bourdieu, then, the notion that photo making and photo collecting is a psychological process of self-fulfillment mistakes the effect for the cause. Photographs do not *document* family unity; they create it. This is why there can be no wedding, for instance, without the wedding photographs (Bourdieu, 1990, 20–21). The wedding photographs sanctify the ritual of family making just as we believe that “there is nothing more decent, reassuring and edifying than a family photo album” (Bourdieu, 1990, 31).

Likewise, the highly accessible and affordable book version of *Americanos* functions for Olmos as “bless[ing] our children with inestimable riches. The contributions of Latinos to the United States of America – documented in all their beauty and diversity – are gifts that will go down in the history of the United States and its art as one of a kind” (Olmos *et al.*, 1999, 9). The makers of *Americanos* could not have chosen a more ideal and idealized medium for managing their admirable double aim of easing xenophobic views of Latinos and offering Latinos a positive, uplifting self-portrait. Although Olmos and Bowden each situate their project as objectively unveiling and documenting hidden truths by using visual documentary tools, the results of their projects are ironically diametrically opposed: *Americanos* insists that Latinos fulfill the heteronormative criteria of social order, and *Juárez* suggests that border

inhabitants necessarily fail them. Although the *Americanos* exhibit as a family photo album would seem to have little to do with Bowden's exhibit as death count, however, I would now situate them as complementary, if not mutually dependent, enacting as they do the same normative standards of family values and liberal humanism to tell their stories. Consequently, as each project implicitly works to challenge the images created by the other, they remain locked into tautological representational modes and a traditional politics of order that preclude the imaginative critiques needed to contest both the pervasiveness of exploitation under neocolonialism *and* the pathologies *created by* normative definitions of family.

Finally, the relative lack (outside of Chicano studies and Borderlands studies) of interest in the pre-NAFTA and pre-femicide border brings into sharper relief the cumulative effect of images of the border as disorder, and suggests (however intentionally) that what make the border and its inhabitants interesting and worthy of study are violence and abjection, making it difficult for even the ambitious *Americanos* organizers to recuperate the border in the positive ways that they attempt to beautify other forms of social problems. Moreover, because a presentist one-dimensional approach to the border necessarily lacks the kind of sustained engagement necessary to a nuanced understanding of not only pre-NAFTA life, but other dimensions of life on the border, it becomes difficult to read the uneven effects of globalization as anything other than disordering some form of pre-existing social order. Although it is crucial that we continue to think about and contest the contemporary forms of social injustice that concern Bowden and Biemann, and to a less explicit degree, Olmos, those projects underscore the need for sustained and multi-faceted engagement that does not rely solely on documentary truth-telling. Reading/viewing those projects against each other also emphasizes the need not only to adamantly refuse the heteronormative vision of social order that shapes them, but to turn the critical lens in that direction. In this way, we might come closer to achieving a radical and queer critique of transnational capitalism and the family's place in it than what is allowed for through a liberal critique of capitalism that can only express nostalgia for a presumed (and highly gendered) social order.

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