

NETWORKS OF PARANOIA: NARRATIVES OF CRIME AND DETECTION IN 21ST
CENTURY LATIN AMERICA

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies Latin American narratives of crime in the twenty-first century, arguing that these texts waver between the hyper-rationality of the crime fiction genre, and an affective state of paranoia. This project argues for a new understanding of crime fiction in the region, one that is not focused on urban life or a national literary history, but is grounded instead on the “networks” that organize contemporary everyday life. Throughout, I engage with the theoretical notions of paranoia and cognitive mapping found in the works of Frederic Jameson and Ricardo Piglia.

Chapters One and Two explore the presence of technological networks in crime narratives. In Chapter One, I study the appearance of cellular phones in Brazilian films arguing that the technology allegorizes the social world, producing a paranoia grounded on interconnectivity. The films analyzed in this chapter, Jose Padilha’s *Tropa de Elite 2: O inimigo agora é outro* and Sérgio Bianchi’s *Os Inquilinos*, depict the use of mobile communication by the state, in the case of Padilha’s film, and a criminalized other that threatens domestic stability, in Bianchi’s film. In Chapter Two, I turn to a seemingly anachronistic technology, the train, to study neoliberal criminality along the post-NAFTA Mexican railways, where organized crime, “legitimate” capitalism, and migrants making their way to the United States intersect. Focusing on the train known as “The Beast,” this chapter looks at how this machine concretizes neoliberal interconnectivity. In this chapter I’m especially interested in how popular narratives about the train, Cary Fukunaga’s film *Sin Nombre* and Oscar Martinez’s chronicles *Los migrantes que no importan*, represent the flows of people, goods, and money moving from Central America to the United States, and the types of criminal activities that can (or cannot) be mapped along the migrant route.

Chapters Three and Four are broadly centered on networks of finance and narco-trafficking. In Chapter Three I analyze Horacio Castellanos Moya's *La diabla en el espejo* and Patricia Lara's *Hilo de sangre azul*, two novels centered on financial crimes. Through paranoid female detectives, these novels present the post-conflict context of these countries as rife with suspicion and mistrust, where the more "legitimate" side of capitalism becomes linked to narco-trafficking. In Chapter Four I turn to Juan Villoro's *Arrecife*, a novel that explores how tourism and narco-trafficking, two of Mexico's most important links to the outside world, become linked. In this chapter I place Villoro's text in the rich literary history of the paranoid, Caribbean space present in Cold War spy fiction. Because of this, I read the novel through Ian Fleming's travel writing. I argue that Villoro critiques the consumption of these seemingly isolated, edenic spaces; a critique that can be ultimately extended to the global consumption of crime fiction.

A mis padres.

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Introduction

Paranoid Fictions

In Ricardo Piglia's *Blanco Nocturno* (2010), the writer-protagonist Renzi proposes a new kind of detective fiction, suggesting that,

Habría que inventar un nuevo género policial, la ficción paranoica. Todos son sospechosos, todos se sienten perseguidos. El criminal ya no es un individuo aislado, sino una gavilla que tiene el poder absoluto. Nadie comprende lo que está pasando; las pistas y los testimonios son contradictorios y mantienen las sospechas en el aire, como si cambiaran con cada interpretación. La víctima es el protagonista y el centro de la intriga; no ya el detective a sueldo o el asesino por contrato (284).

This dissertation takes Renzi's concept of a new detective fiction seriously, and argues that paranoia is a fundamental piece of the narrative structure of contemporary Latin American crime fiction. This project critically intervenes in the scholarship on crime fiction in Latin America by positing that crime fiction in the region today takes the network as its form, in an attempt to "cognitive map" global economic and social structures. The result of this endeavor is paranoia; an affect that I posit is immanent to the neoliberal present in Latin America, and one that crime fiction is particularly suited to capture. My focus is on the twenty-first century Latin American crime narrative (including cinema and journalism), drawing on case studies from the following countries: Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, and Mexico.

Scholarship on Latin American detective fiction has established more or less a clear genealogy that begins with Jorge Luis Borges and his tales of ratiocination, following the tradition of classical detective fiction writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and G.K. Chesterton. This strand of detective fiction soon wanes, for Latin American detective fiction becomes most

heavily influenced by the bleak outlook of the hardboiled narrative. The Spanish-American variant of this hardboiled narrative is called *neopolicíaco* and is developed by authors such as Leonardo Padura Fuentes (Cuba) and Paco Ignacio Taibo II (Mexico). Persephone Braham defines the genre along the same lines of the hard-boiled narrative, but with the key difference that in Latin America, the *neopolicíaco* evinces political engagement (xiii). Glen S. Close takes up the question of the demise of the *neopolicíaco* with the exacerbation of violence and neoliberal policies in the Latin American city. He proposes the term *post-neopolicíaco*, with the “post” signaling the waning of the figure of the detective, and consequently, the disappearance of any solution or order. He concludes that,

What is left is the sharp, hard language, the sordid and sinister audience, the plumbing of criminal underworlds, and the sensational narration of a violence no longer understood as a social transgression requiring investigation and punishment, but rather as a prevailing norm of behavior, a tool for survival, a fundamental instrument of power, and as an entertainment in itself (2006, 156).

Close’s bleak conclusions leave us at a deadlock: how are we to approach the contemporary Latin American detective novel when the very idea of detection has become impossible? Close notes that the failure of the detective is in part due to new “transnational criminal activities” that “drastically exceed the scope of the private detective’s characteristically local and urban authority” (149). Close’s incisive analysis points to a new paradigm in detective and crime fiction in Latin America, one that transcends traditional demarcations. In his analysis, Close gestures to the conspiratorial, to the paranoid feeling that marks Latin American urban centers. For example, in his analysis of Taibo, he writes that, “the master plot in Taibo’s novels is that of the Mexican state” (39). Likewise, in his analysis of crime novels centered on Bogotá, he focuses

on how the texts comment on the Colombian crisis of public security, arguing that they do so by “incorporating intense activities of urban surveillance and mapping” (64). Overlapping with Close’s temporal scope of analysis, Ezequiel de Rosso notes a paranoid structure in Latin American crime fiction in the 1990s in authors such as Edmundo Paz Soldán, Roberto Bolaño and Juan Villoro. De Rosso argues that the Latin American crime novel of the 1990s, rather than being constructed on an enigma, but on a secret that cannot be incorporated into the narrative. In a similar manner, David Kelman has studied Ricardo Piglia’s narrative construction of conspiracy, highlighting its political effect. I build on this previous scholarship to argue that the network is the form taken by the paranoid content of Latin American crime fiction today in a project of cognitive mapping.

Ricardo Piglia (whom this dissertation takes as a theoretical rather than literary figure), has proposed the transformation of detective fiction into a “ficción paranoica.” Piglia first considers this permutation in 1991, when he presents the term in a “clase magistral” in an auditorium in Buenos Aires, making the full transcript (later made available in print version) not an exhaustive theoretical disquisition, but a provocative and prescient text that suggests the narrative possibilities for detection. Piglia’s concern is mostly generic; the historical emergence of genres, the particular narrative codes that it takes at specific historical junctures, the contamination of genres. He begins by noting the defining traits of the detective genre, such as the ever-present feeling of “amenaza” (menace), and its capitalist dimension, with money always at its center. The other crucial dimension for Piglia is the detective’s paranoid consciousness, the “delirio interpretativo” that is already present in Dupin and Sherlock Holmes. In this regard, he points to how the genre’s primordial figure—the detective—has always been in a threshold position between madness and reason. Adrian Wisnicki makes a similar argument when he

considers conspiracy theorists of paranoid texts by authors such as Thomas Pynchon can be traced back to detective fiction.

Piglia makes the connection between paranoia and the contemporary moment in another essay titled “Teoría del Complot,” where he links conspiratorial thinking to literature, to the economy, and to avant-garde aesthetic practices. I am specifically interested in the first two of these elements, and how they can be applied outside of Piglia’s context. In terms of literature, Piglia proposes Argentine fiction as being rooted on conspiracy, taking his examples from writers Jorge Luis Borges, Roberto Arlt, and Macedonio Fernández. Through these authors he proposes the idea of conspiracy as a basic building block element of fiction, and one that is used as a logic to understand the social and the political. For example, in Arlt’s work he argues that conspiracy becomes a “nudo de la construcción de la complejidad de la política, y básicamente como el modo que tiene el sujeto aislado de pensar lo político” (5). Piglia’s consideration of conspiracy as a productive response to the complexity of the political realm remains crucial to my study of how cultural production in Latin America responds to complex phenomena such as illicit economies. In terms of the economic, Piglia considers, via Pierre Klossowski, the economy as a “manipulación invisible que anuda y ata los individuos y los grupos y los conjuntos a los movimientos del dinero” (12). These two notions, fiction as conspiracy and the conspiratorial dimension of the economy are crucial to my analysis. In his selection of authors, however, Piglia situates paranoia in the context of the twentieth century, a frame of reference that might be obsolete. In what follows I explain how I build on Piglia’s theorizations on the crime novel, plotting, and paranoia, and the ways in which my analysis will depart from his.

As it is often the case with Piglia, his theoretical insights are filtered into his novels, so I want to go back to the citation from *Blanco Nocturno* and pry loose the threads of the concept of

“ficción paranoica.” The first key element is an impulse toward totality, as Renzi explains, that terror is spread around the social world: “todos se sienten perseguidos.” This same totalization is ascribed to the criminal figures, who we are told, are not one, but many, and to their power, that is “absolute.” In this regard, despite the seemingly dispersal of fear, where explanations fail and accountability cannot be placed, Piglia still imagines an “absolute power” and locates it in a group (a “gavilla”). In this passage, and in the above-mentioned “Teoría del Complot,” Piglia presents a monolithic definition of power, and the possibility that it might be localizable. In “Teoría del Complot” he considers the state as supreme conspiratorial agent, subsuming the paranoid content to one entity. In the case of state power, it is evident that this might not work for places such as Colombia and Central America, where the state has been historically weak, or the Mexican spaces I investigate in the second chapter, where state power is practically nonexistent, and is replaced by organized crime. In terms of the economic realm, Piglia also ascribes to it an unified logic. In my analysis I make a clear distinction between the illicit and licit dimension of the economy, and I present it not only as totally enveloped in invisibility, but the invisibility of *certain* parts of it. While Piglia “nationalizes” conspiracy by highlighting its distinctive place in Argentine culture, this vision might preclude a deep engagement with the flows that mark life in Latin America today, movements that cut across national boundaries.¹

By taking the network as its form, the crime novel does a more radical mapping of the social world. In this regard, I use Fredric Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping and his illuminating analysis of conspiracy thrillers in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. Jameson defines cognitive mapping through the work of Louis Althusser’s work on ideology and Kevin Lynch’s

¹ The flip side to Piglia’s nationalization of conspiracy and paranoia is his own self-placement in the canon of American authors of paranoid fictions such as Philip K. Dick and Thomas Pynchon (Kelman 20). Emily Apter also performs a similar gesture when she claims paranoia as American literature’s “national allegory.” I consider this “nationalization” of paranoia a potentially paralyzing gesture in its territorial containment.

The Image of the City. In his sociological study, Lynch proposes how people's "mental maps" of urban spaces have a direct correlation to their social alienation. Jameson transposes this idea to ideology, to the way Althusser considers it as the gap between the real and the imaginary, and proposes cognitive mapping as a way to map social structures on a "global" and "multinational" scale. Considering postmodernist aesthetics, Jameson notes that works that incorporate themes of conspiracy and paranoia register attempts at figuring out one's position in the world of capital:

theme of paranoia as it expresses itself in a seemingly inexhaustible production of conspiracy plots of the most elaborate kind. Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, it is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content ("Cognitive" 357).

It is in paranoid text that the "intent to totalize" is most present, and where the deeper structures of the social world can, however fleetingly and imperfectly, be glimpsed. In the context of Latin American crime fiction, Close follows Jameson and argues that "the *novela negra* may be said to undertake a similar enterprise of cognitive mapping on a more local and urban scale" (44).

Indeed, Close focuses on particular urban centers across Latin America (Mexico City, Bogotá, Buenos Aires) to study how the crime novel grasps neoliberal projects and the violence and inequality they engender. This dissertation proposes that the Latin American crime novel today proposes a more ambitious form of cognitive mapping, one that spreads out into global processes, into the world system, incorporating elements of the conspiratorial thriller.

A compelling feature of the works described by Jameson is failure, an idea central to the Latin American crime novel. For example, in one of the first studies in English about Latin American detective fiction, Amelia S. Simpson notes the salience of mysteries without solution

in narratives by Ricardo Piglia, Vicente Leñero, and José Pablo Feinmann. Simpson argues that ultimately these works produce a “cyclical narrative structure” where “the process of investigation does not end; it is ongoing, but it is also going nowhere” (155). As mentioned above, Close has pointed out the detective failures in the Latin American novel. In my analysis of the contemporary crime novel, the network points to open-ended, ever expanding and often colliding structures. It is precisely in the infinite overlaps and connections between networks and the failure to follow that interconnectivity that the project of cognitive mapping is most forceful. As Jameson writes in the context of conspiratorial films:

But in representations like these, the operative effect is confusion rather than articulation. It is at the point where we give up and are no longer able to remember which side the characters are on, and how they have been revealed to be hooked up with other ones, that we have presumably grasped the deeper truth of the world system (16).

This project is also interested in the affective dimension of cognitive mapping, in how that “confusion” spurred by global capital is represented. Jameson argues that genres such as the spy thrillers are particularly equipped to shed light on late capitalism. In *Cartographies of the Absolute* Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle update Jameson’s concept in a contemporary context, noting that “anxiety is perhaps the dominant mood of today’s efforts at cognitive mapping” (240). In the same way, as the quote at the beginning evinces, Piglia also seems to consider both the affective and epistemological components of the production of (paranoid) knowledge within the new type of crime fiction he proposes. The hyper-rational genre of classic detective fiction elicited a variety of emotions: from the fright and disgust generated by a gruesome crime scene to awe of the detective’s skills. Both the affect I call “paranoia” and the project of “cognitive

mapping” can be located in the origins of detective fiction. Walter Benjamin traces the origins of detective fiction to alienation in the European metropolis, in the position of the individual in regard to the anonymous masses. “In times of terror,” he writes, “when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in the position of having to play detective” (72). However, the creation of detective fiction in the nineteenth century was not only enabled by the growth of urban centers in Europe, but also in the consolidation of imperial domination abroad. Since its beginnings then, detective fiction has worked on both levels, relying on a tension between the local and the global; a tension that produces a compelling affective response. For example, in the genre’s foundational text, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), the criminal is a fugitive ape brought to Paris from Borneo. It is precisely the global connection of the metropolitan center and the colonial space (and in particular, the flow of capital—human, animal, and monetary—from the colonial space and into the metropolis) that creates the crime for the detective to solve and activates paranoid thinking. Yet paranoia in the detective novel is a temporary phenomenon, as the detective restores order. This dissertation will argue that in a neoliberal context, the Latin American crime novel cannot subdue this paranoia.

Lauren Berlant has shed light on the relationship between affect, genre, and the neoliberal present. In *Cruel Optimism* she argues that neoliberalism has “burned out” fantasies of national belonging, economic prosperity, and strong, deep personal relationships— what she refers to as the “fantasies of the good life.” She elucidates her argument through what she deems the “waning” of realist genres, those forms that in the past have given shape to these fantasies in cultural production. Tracing new aesthetics and genres through older forms (as for example, the

“Cinema of Precarity” of the 1990s as a reconfiguration of neorealism), Berlant pays attention to the links between affect and genre:

Genres provide an affective expectation of the experience of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art. The waning of genre frames different kinds of potential openings within and beyond the impasse of adjustment that constant crisis creates (7).

In the emerging neoliberal genres she delineates, Berlant traces the present’s “historical sensorium” and how “it involves anxiety about how to assess various knowledges and intuitions about what’s happening and how to eke out a sense of what follows from those assessments” (4). As Toscano and Kinkle, Berlant also considers anxiety as part of an epistemological toolkit for today’s lived experience. Anxiety and similar emotions become the other side to the cartographic project of cognitive mapping. These insights are particularly useful for establishing a new framework to study narratives of crime in Latin America. As I have shown, scholars of Latin American crime fiction have considered how narrative detection has “weakened:” from the demise of the detective figure to an all-pervasive apprehension about the social order. I argue that paranoia has become a salient feature of these narratives, as they push against neoliberal processes. Furthermore, rather than seeing this paranoia as in “impasse,” I follow Berlant in the way it can be seen as a “potential opening” into the texture of neoliberal life in the region.

The case studies in this dissertation (Brazil, Central America, Colombia, Mexico) present compelling cases for the analysis of neoliberalism on cultural production, and for the limits and possibilities of crime fiction in a neoliberal context. From the 1980s onward these countries have undergone drastic social, economic, and political transformations under neoliberal doctrines. As David Harvey explains, neoliberalism has entailed destructive practices that have eroded

inequality. I provide a more detailed description of these practices in each chapter, but some of them can be briefly sketched here. For example, Colombia, El Salvador, and Mexico are today key geographic sites of the vertiginous global drug trade. In all of the countries this dissertation focuses on, industries that were previously under state control such as transportation and communications were privatized. The inequalities forged by neoliberalism have created in these nations an all-pervasive climate of insecurity that ranges in some cases from the physical to the economic to the political.

While this dissertation does not take paranoia as a pathological phenomenon, I do want to underscore a few points from Sigmund Freud's analysis of the paranoid Judge Schreber. Although Freud's concept of paranoia has been challenged (in his consideration of paranoia as a reaction against a homosexual fantasy), his remarks on the paranoid patient remind us that the paranoid's delusion of persecution and fears are constructed as an organized system. This is stressed when Freud writes that his labor consists on a labor of "translation from the paranoid form of expression into the normal" (27). Psychoanalysts are acutely aware of the challenge of thinking through paranoia. Jacques Lacan, for example writes that, "it's precisely because it's situated of understanding as an incomprehensible phenomenon, as it were, that paranoia is so difficult for us to grasp" (Lacan 21). Sianne Ngai's theorization of "ugly feelings," negative emotions such as envy and irritation proves helpful in defining "paranoia". Ngai defines these emotions as engendering a "non-cathartic aesthetic" or "art that produces and foregrounds a failure of emotional release" (9). In her discussions of anxiety and paranoia, Ngai pays attention to the gendered dynamics at play in the cultural life of these emotions, questioning for instance, the representation of paranoia as a "male form of knowledge production" (299). Ngai grounds her argument in an anxieties about subjectivity, her case study takes feminist poetry that

appropriates paranoid tropes, to show how individuals make sense of their positions in oppressive systems, and the way the “small subject’s inevitable complicity” in her own oppression “might eventually become the condition of agency rather than its destruction” (331). I am more interested in paranoia as a response to complexity, rather than its potential for agency, however. Indeed, the majority of examples this dissertation shed light on an elite sensitivity. Throughout, I am also interested less in determining whether paranoia has a real basis, than what the emotion expresses about our present moment.

The first chapter analyzes the presence of cellular phones in Brazilian films about crime in urban centers. Through a reading of *Os Inquilinos* (Sérgio Bianchi, 2009) and *Tropa de Elite 2: O inimigo agora é outro* (José Padilha, 2010) I argue that wireless technologies allow the films to graph the social world, providing a grammar for representing connectivity in the Latin American city. In *Os Inquilinos*, a lower middle class family is tormented by their neighbors, who might or might not belong to a criminal organization famous for its use of cellular phones to wreak chaos, kidnap, and kill. In the sequel to the highly popular and controversial *Tropa de Elite*, protagonist Colonel Nascimento becomes a bureaucrat, and as the Subsecretary of Intelligence of Rio de Janeiro, utilizes sophisticated wiretapping technologies to fight both the drug trade and corrupt politicians. Cellular phones have become ubiquitous in Latin American cities. Mobile communication is an industry that emerged in the wave of privatization of previously State-owned sectors in Latin America, and has enabled an interconnectivity heretofore unknown in the region. The films deal with two dimensions of the technology. *Os Inquilinos* hinges on the panic of technology at the hands of a marginalized criminal other, while *Tropa de Elite 2* shows the usage of technology by the state.

The second chapter turns to another technology, the train, to continue to trace connectivity across the Latin American landscape. The train, just like the telephone, has a recurrent presence in narratives of suspense and crime, affording the thrill and adventure of relation and enclosure. In this chapter I focus on a train radically different from those standard narratives of crime: the train known as La Bestia that traverses the Mexican territory, and moves both goods and people to the United States. This is not the cinematic train in the likes of Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* or Agatha Christie's glamorous *Midnight Express*, however. The Mexican railway system is a juncture for neoliberal networks: the post-NAFTA economy, migrants making their way to the United States, and organized, transnational crime. In this chapter I argue that representations of the Beast make sense of neoliberal connectivity through criminal narratives that waver between the affective and the rational, where narrative detection pushes again with what is unknown about the economy, in both its licit and illicit dimensions. I address these questions through two highly popular texts about "La Bestia:" the film *Sin Nombre* (Cary Fukunaga, 2009), and the journalistic account *Los migrantes que no importan* (2010) by Salvadoran journalist Oscar Martínez. In my analysis, I argue that the train concretizes neoliberal interconnectivity, acting as a narrative fulcrum with both an affective and epistemological dimension: the train's movement elicits shock and awe, but also advances the narratives' investigation. Underneath the stories of suffering and exploitation of migrants along the border, these narratives produce cognitive maps of a post-NAFTA economy. In *Sin Nombre*, a teenager migrating from Honduras to the United States encounters a young Mexican man fleeing from his transnational gang Mara Salvatrucha. In *Los migrantes que no importan*, Martínez travels along the migrant route in Mexico to uncover the dangers faced by Central American migrants, from the violence of their homelands to their exploitation by organized crime in Mexico.

While the first two chapters are grounded on technology, the next two have money at their center. Specifically, I study how two seemingly legitimate spheres of capital investment, financial ventures and tourism development, become tangled up with narco-trafficking. In the third chapter I trace the economic and social negotiations of elite networks in a neoliberal era through the novels *La diabla en el espejo* (2009) by Horacio Castellanos Moya from El Salvador and *Hilo de sangre azul* (2009) by Colombian journalist and author Patricia Lara. The crimes at the center of these novels are tied to financial elites, and are investigated by female detectives. In my analysis of these novels, the female paranoid detective acts as an index of economic turmoil, and guides readers through the shadowy dealings of capital. In Castellanos Moya's novel, a paranoid upper-class woman narrates the horrific murder of her best friend, and attempts to make sense of the insidious elite circle around her— coffee-growing elites, financiers, drug-traffickers. In *Hilo de sangre azul*, the murder of an investment banker provides a glimpse into the seedy workings of the Bogotá elite. These stories are told with a particular attention to sexuality, to the problem of reproduction of elite families, and the reproduction of money.

The last chapter continues to investigate the representation of crimes of money and narco-trafficking. Here I focus on Juan Villoro's *Arrecife* (2014), a novel that probes into the entangled economies of tourism and narco-trafficking, and ultimately links touristic consumption with that of the reader of crime fiction. Villoro sets his novel in the Mexican Caribbean, in an enclosed resort named La Pirámide where tourists engage in what manager Mario Muller calls "paranoia recreativa," staged feats such as kidnappings and guerrilla attacks. In my analysis of the novel I situate Villoro's text in the rich Western tradition of the "paranoid Caribbean," exemplified in the work of Ian Fleming, and his creation James Bond. I argue that reading Villoro through Fleming's travel writings allows us to see the resonance of Cold War paranoia

through its transformation in the twenty-first century in a Latin American context. I show how the Caribbean still articulates anxieties about globalization and crime, as Villoro highlights how the “small space” of the Caribbean island or resort, albeit seemingly disconnected from the world of capital, is a key piece in the global economy— from offshore financial centers to luxurious hotels to drug-trafficking.

Villoro’s claustrophobic setting is a constant throughout most of the corpus of this dissertation. Traditionally, Latin American crime fiction followed hard-boiled urban aesthetics. To revisit Close’s argument, the genre staged a cognitive mapping of crime and violence in Latin American urban centers. The works in this dissertation retreat from the urban, however, indicating a structural proximity to classical detective fiction. The domestic spaces where criminals or the state can enter in chapter one, or the elite dwellings in the second chapter, for example, shed light on the ideologies at work in these narratives. Berlant’s project resonates here, in the way it proposes affect as mediated by class, in her words, “a class-based positioning of sensibility” (5). In her work on affect and contemporary Latin American cinema, Laura Podalsky explores how Latin American films consider the social and economic world through private, personal stories. In particular, she notes how films such as the Mexican *Amores Perros* and the Cuban *Madagascar* tackle the present neoliberal moment through the failed leftist projects of the recent past:

[the films] address the relationship between the past and present and between the public and the private not only on the level of narrative (by juxtaposing the struggles of today’s youth with those of their parents’ generation who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s), but also through their invitations to film— that is, by encouraging the audience

members to recognize in visceral ways the affective legacies of the recent past as well as newer sensibilities emerging in the present moment (83).

While Podalsky's assessment can be applied to some extent to works in this dissertation, for example, in Villoro's commentary on the student massacre of 1968 in *Arrecife*, or in Laura's recollections about the civil war in *La diabla en el espejo*, the texts that I study do not anchor narrative action in the past in the way the films that Podalsky analyzes do—in *Amores Perros*, there is a character who is a former guerillero, for instance. Podalsky grounds her analysis on the conditions wrought by neoliberalism, but does not locate feelings on one concrete neoliberal phenomenon or delineates precisely what those emotions might be. Of *Amores Perros* for instance, she discusses "paranoia," "dread," "danger," and "uncertainty" as part of the contemporary affective experience the film registers. In my analysis, I focus on networks in order to attach "emotions" to material conditions of lived experience, and how a specific affect, paranoia, has become salient in the cultural landscape. When the works in this dissertation recall the past, it serves to shed light on the historical dimension of that paranoia (in the case of Villoro's example mentioned above, the climate created by a repressive State), and its transformations in a neoliberal context (to continue with Villoro's example, now it's not only a repressive State, but the development of narco-trafficking, and foreign finance).

Chapter One

Paranoid Acoustics in Brazilian Cinema

O celular dentro da cadeia é mais perigoso do que dez fuzis na rua.

Godofredo Bittencourt. Director of DEIC
(Departamento Estadual de Investigação Criminal)

A man shows up in a well off neighborhood in Recife to offer private security services. He explains his services as a “parceria” (partnership) between his associates and the people they will protect. For R\$20 a month, he says, he will guard the street from early evening until early morning. The man to whom he is pitching his services seems skeptical and inquires about the man’s weapons. The man evades this question, claiming he cannot answer it. Instead, he proceeds to show his “best weapon,” which turns out to be a mobile phone. This scene, taken from Kleber Mendonça Filho’s critically acclaimed film *O som ao redor* (2012), points to an insidious conflation of technology, criminality, and fear that materializes in the figure of the communication network. How is the cellular phone transformed into a weapon? What happens when we accept this transformation? If, as Fredric Jameson theorizes, technology is allegorical, what does the cell phone mean in Latin American culture? What does it stand for? Why its sudden, but now fixed presence in contemporary criminal narratives?

This chapter explores the cinematic representation of wireless communication networks in recent Brazilian cinema, and its intersections with narratives of crime and investigation.

Specifically, I'm interested in the appearance of the cellular phone in film as a paranoid device: an object that serves to probe, to investigate, to connect to others, yet at the same time becomes a conduit for uncertainty and fear. Although the representation of the cellular phone as in instrument of crime extends through many cultural artifacts², this chapter will deal with Sergio Bianchi's *Os Inquilinos, Os incomodados que se mudem* (2009), and José Padilha's *Tropa de Elite 2: O inimigo agora é outro* (2010).³ Although vastly different in style, these films are structured around the anxiety of wireless communication, in particular, about the interconnectivity they generate: where everyone might be linked. In *Tropa de Elite 2*, the plot hinges on the discovery of a vast network of police and bureaucratic corruption that is unveiled through wiretapping cellular phones in Rio de Janeiro. In *Os Inquilinos*, a family on the outskirts of São Paulo is tormented by a group of rowdy neighbors, who might or might not belong to a technologically savvy criminal organization. Through these films I argue that Latin American cinema stages an aural process of detection, one that is rendered cinematically through specific uses of sounds. The diegetic use of cellular phones creates an anxiety about the identity and location of callers, about the processes of communication and connection in the neoliberal city. The films can be constellated with a rich tradition of narratives centered on technology-induced paranoia, particularly from the American tradition of conspiracy films of the 1970s, which used the latest sound technology, Dolby, to create a sonic texture that in both form and content

² See for example the skit "Sinal" from the highly popular comedy group *Porta dos Fundos*, where poor cellular reception is parodied through a fake kidnapping attempt by an imprisoned man, whose call to ask for "ransom" money is constantly being cut.

³ In addition to the already mentioned *O som ao redor* other examples of Latin American films that thematize the collapse of criminality and communications technology include *Chamada a Cobrar* (Brazil, 2012), *Siete Cajas* (Paraguay, 2014), and to a lesser extent, *O lobo atrás da porta* (Brazil, 2013). In terms of other kinds of technologies, one can go back to consider other artifacts such as Buscapé's photographic camera in *Cidade de Deus* (Brazil, 2002).

mobilized sound as a terrifying force.⁴ In a Latin American context, the analysis of the representation and role of technology in cultural production has considered the status of the region's "modernidad periférica" (Sarlo). Rubén Gallo, for example, studies the role of technology as a modernizing tool used by Mexican avant-garde artists in the early twentieth century. J. Andrew Brown and Edward King have studied the use of technology and posthuman bodies in science fiction narratives as a way to grapple with the postdictatorial past and neoliberal present. Both Brown and King posit an ambivalent relationship toward technology, at once liberating from, and yet complicit with, neoliberal market logic. The films that I analyze here point to an anxiety about interconnection, to the collapse of technology and criminality that transforms the everyday life of citizens. I argue that these films register this fear through sound, enabling a paranoid structure of surveillance, hearsay, and auditory hallucinations. In the films that I explore, there is no ambivalence toward technology, however. The films take as point of departure the connectivity enabled by cellular phones in the Latin American city, in particular, technology used by marginalized sectors of society (*Os Inquilinos*), and technology as a tool for state surveillance and control (*Tropa de Elite 2*).

⁴ These American conspiracy films incorporated the latest sound technology, but also played with the political scandals of the era such as Watergate. Despite the deep investment of the films as a national genre (the tagline for *Parallax View* (Alan J Pakula, 1974) reads "As American than Apple Pie") as Frederick Luciani notes there is a Latin American source in the development of the genre, Julio Cortázar's short story "Las babas del diablo" ("Blow-up"). Luciani places Michelangelo Antonioni's adaptation of Cortázar's story, *Blow-Up* (1966) as a bridge between a Latin American text and a European aesthetic self-reflexivity that directors such as Francis Ford Coppola and Oliver Stone would exploit in an American context. For these American directors, Luciani writes, "Cortázar's themes of surveillance and privacy, conspiracy, technological anxiety, criminality, the moral obligation of the observer, and so on, had by necessity strong political connotations in an America that, following the Kennedy assassination emerged into a troubled middle age. Phenomena like the 'Zapruder film,' which in its very nature was an illustration of Cortázar's exploration of the ontology of the photographic medium, also inevitably politicized and nationalized the 'Blow-Up' tradition" (202). Luciani cites Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) as a beginning point for the texts and films of the genealogy he traces (184).

Paranoia, Sound, Detection

Both *Os Inquilinos* and *Tropa de E*

lite 2 dramatize an aural anxiety grounded in the urban experience, an uneasiness that stems from the technological soundscape of the city: televisions, gossips, gunshots, cellular phones, noise. Since my analysis proposes an auditory process of detection, I first want to outline some key ideas about sound in narratives of detection, which have been mostly considered in terms of a visual epistemology. Interpretations of detective fiction emphasize, for example, the privileged position of the detective as someone who “sees” reality in a different way, who has special “insight”; to detect is an optical activity where both clues and guilt are rendered apprehensible by the detective vision.⁵ For example, Andrea Goulet notes the influence of positivist sciences of vision on the development of what the *roman policier* would present as the process of detection.

Sound is an important feature of detective fiction, as clue and as another way in the detective apprehends bodies and their movement. To give an example from the genre’s foundational text, in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the orangutan’s speech unleashes a variety of possibilities for the identity of the killer, all based on the unintelligible utterances coming from the scene of the crime. The killer is ascribed a foreign identity due to the incomprehensible language the witnesses believe they have heard (so for example, the French witness thinks he’s heard a Spaniard, the Dutch, a Frenchman, and so on.) In his study of technology, detective fiction, and nation-building project, Ronald Thomas calls attention to the voice in Poe’s text, reading the national ideology at work in the story (the fear of the other as savage) against the social and political debates of Poe’s time, such as slavery and the political status of Native American populations. For Thomas, the voice of the animal represents

⁵ See also Walter Benjamin’s treatment of the figure of the flâneur as detective. (Tom Gunning’s essay “The Exterior as Intérieur: Benjamin’s Optical Detective”)

the collapse of science and politics: “It unifies the nation’s discord by identifying as a non-person the alien voice of the beast within the nation that threatens the nation’s conception of itself” (48). Poe’s story structures paranoia about national contamination and belonging through the aural, frightening in its ineffability. Matching voice with animal deactivates that anxiety. Thomas also considers voice in hardboiled narratives, specifically the language present in Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest* where American English denotes pervasive corruption, lies and alienation (101). In Thomas’ reading of the novel, the detective,

moves from a kind of faith in the “sense” of language (making contacts, seeking out information by asking questions, interrogating witnesses), to a deep suspicion about it (not believing any of the answers he is getting, lying and bluffing to get what he wants), to a general dismissal of its value (abandoning the quest for information in favor of “stirring things up”) (97).

Although Thomas engages with the voice and the circulation of language, his focus is the transformation of the vocal into evidence, the figure of the detective as a lie-detector mechanism.

My examples have been drawn from literature, but visual embodiments of investigations have also paid attention to sound. Robert Miklitsch decries the centrality of visual approaches to the film noir, arguing for the importance of the films’ sonic texture: from sound-reproducing artifacts to music numbers. In his chapter on what he calls “audio-technologies,” for example, he focuses on a variety of voice technologies— intercoms, Dictaphones, radios, telephones, — noting their centrality as objects of domination and surveillance (85). The American conspiracy thrillers of the 1970s that I mentioned before also present technology as a sinister presence, where “communication networks are integral to plot development [...] are simultaneously and anxiously open to manipulation, putting an intense focus on the activity of listening and

interpretation” (Hanson 47). Of course, the use of sound as a source of anxiety is not precisely new in cinema. Films such as Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931) and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) present sound (as voice, as music, as noise) as a terrifying force. While sound is key in these films, it is not tied to conspiracy, to a project of cognitive mapping that seeks to untangle the forces that structure political, social, and economics systems.

Os Inquilinos

Sérgio Bianchi’s 2009 film, *Os Inquilinos: Os incomodados que se mudem* (The Tenants: Don’t Like It, Leave It) is set during the May 2006 attacks on the city and the state of São Paulo by the criminal organization Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC). Formed in the prisons of São Paulo in the early 1990s, the PCC relies on a “sophisticated communications networks” made up by cellular phones and lawyers (Bailey and Taylor 13). Through these technological means in May 2006 the PCC organized 373 attacks, which included burning buses, detonating bombs in banks and government buildings, and the murder of policemen (Souza 286).⁶ *Os Inquilinos* tells this story from a peripheral perspective. The film does not follow policemen fighting crime, or provide a glimpse into the underworld of organized crime. Instead, the film focuses on a family in the outskirts (periferia) of São Paulo.

⁶ The attacks came as the culmination of a cat and mouse game between government authorities and the PCC. On May 10th, the PCC obtained a copy of a transcript of a closed session between members of the DEIC (Departamento Estadual de Investigação Criminal) giving testimony on the activities of the group. The PCC decided to surprise the authorities and ordered attacks to start on May 12th (Bailey and Taylor 15). The recording obtained by the organization contains fascinating testimony as to how the state understands the double threat of technology and crime. Godofredo Bittencourt (working with the DEIC) explains that the weapon that most concerns the police is the cell phone: “O celular dentro da cadeia é mais perigoso do que dez fuzis na rua,” (qtd. in de Souza 42). Bittencourt considers the possibility of breaking down the communication systems of the criminal organization. If it can manage to control mobile communication, he believes the government will be able to “quebrar a perna de todo criminoso” (42). Quite poignantly, he states that “a tecnologia avança para nós e para eles” (44). The crucial element here is communication, in particular the mobility afforded to the criminal by mobile technologies.

The film follows the family life of Iara and Valter, and their children, Fernanda and Diogo. When new neighbors move in next door, Iara begins to be suspicious: they are rowdy, they don't appear to have jobs, and they bring women to the house. Valter is kept away from most of the drama that occurs next door since he works all day and attends night school. A dynamic is thus established: Iara spies on the neighbors during the day (voyeurism) and later reports to Valter what she has seen (ecouterism). As the situation spirals out of control, and the neighbors disrupt the family's life more and more, Valter appears trapped, unable to figure out a solution. Iara then is left to produce language around violent events while Valter remains in a position of both blindness and muteness. Since the film is organized around Valter's point of view, the spectator is also placed on the same uncertain terrain.

Aural pleasure is at the center of the film. Mary Ann Doane notes the relationship between spectator and film, in which the use of certain sound techniques places the spectator as a figure who overhears (342). She likens this aural activity to voyeurism, to a "desire to hear" (342). The film explicitly thematizes this desire through Iara. In addition to Iara's aural prying, the film also stages other scenes/characters of aural pleasure. For example, Valter's literature teacher at the night school revels in reading poetry out loud, from Carlos Drummond de Andrade to Ferrez, in scenes that quite obviously stand as spoken commentaries on the conflict occurring in the city. This pleasure does not only originate in human sources, however. The film also focuses on the technological side of this pleasure, placing narrative attention on television and cellular phones. Both sources of sound, human and technological, are combined in a hysterical proliferation of linguistic production, placing Valter in the middle: a passive, helpless male character.

The film's opening sequence establishes the particular uses of sound as the mechanisms through which paranoia is (re)produced. The film opens up after dark, with kids playing in the street. In what is a direct reference to Lang's *M*, the kids are playing a game that turns a gruesome event into play. The camera then pans to a house as the sound of an emotionally-charged and potentially violent, dialogue between a man and a woman is overheard:

Male voice: Já são meia-noite?

Female voice: Como foi que você entrou aqui?

Male voice: Com quem você estava até essa hora, Cristina?

Female voice: Sai daqui, Hugo.

Male voice: Eu sou o teu marido, Cristina.

Female voice: Você não é mais nada, entendeu? Mais nada.

Male voice: Hoje, você vai apanhar.

Female voice: Me solta.

Male voice: Is it midnight?

Female voice: How did you get in?

Male voice: Cristina, who were you with at this hour?

Female voice: Hugo, get out.

Male voice: Cristina, I'm yours husband.

Female voice: You're not anything anymore, got it?

Male voice: You'll get it today.

Female voice: Let go of me.

The film then cuts to the source of the dialogue, but reveals that it comes from a television in the house. The conversation between the man and the woman deals with breaking and entering. "Sai daqui" (Get out of here) implores the woman, moments before the camera gets inside the house. The violence of the break-in only matches the violence of the spectator/listener to see more, yet this desire is held in check when the camera cuts to the inside of the house, only to present a television set. The camera does not hide the illusion of the television, showing us the frame of the television screen and a bit more, alluding to the rest of the diegetic space that is not shown to use. The camera cuts to reveal that the spectator is a little girl (Fernanda). The camera briefly fixes on her, as a woman's voice comes in (this time from the "real" diegetic space of the house,

and not from the television), and then cuts to this speaker. It is a woman (Iara) telling a story of domestic violence to her uninterested husband (Valter). Iara's retelling of her neighbors' quarrel includes her impersonation of those involved. Fernanda is called to dinner and the father asks her to talk about her schoolwork, specifically, a story she has read for class. Already, the film draws attention to a variety of modes and mediums of storytelling. It also highlights a frenzied production of narratives: Iara's neighborhood gossip, for example, resembles the television show her daughter is watching. Fernanda's story, about men who come into a town and terrorize its inhabitants, will resemble the plot of the film, the story the film will tell. The slippage between the real and the fictional presents a kind of paralysis as fake stories of violence the characters watch, see, and hear, resemble their reality. With this, the film presents the act of transmission of information and knowledge as empty and manic. This is evident in Valter's tautological exchange with his daughter: "Why are the people in the book bad?" he asks. "Because they were not good, because the book wanted them to be bad," answers Fernanda.

This opening sequence establishes the particular uses of sound the film will employ to convey the paranoia and fear around the experience of violence. In his many studies on sound in cinema, Michel Chion reminds us of the fundamental qualities of cinematic sound: its elusive character, its far-reaching expanse, and the particular relationship between sound and image. Chion draws our attention to the separation between the voice and the body in cinema through what he calls acousmatization. Sound in cinema is usually synchronized; we hear sound and then see its source:

In a film an acousmatic situation can develop along two different scenarios: either a sound is visualized first, and subsequently acousmatized, or it is acousmatic to start with, and is visualized only afterward. The first case is associated a sound with a precise image

from the outset. This image can then reappear with greater or lesser distinctness in the spectator's mind each time the sound is heard acousmatically. It will be an "embodied" sound, demythologized, classified (Audio-vision 72).

Horror films often make use of the first situation described by Chion, attaching a sound to a killer (in the aforementioned *M*, for example, the killer is linked to a particular whistle, that will signal his subsequent presence to the audience). In both instances, there is an anxiety about what we hear, about its location. As Chion explains: "The ear attempts to analyze the sound in order to extract meaning from it—as one peels and squeezes a fruit—and always try to *localize* and if possible *identify* the voice" (Chion 1999, emphasis original). In the case of *Os Inquilinos*, "de-acousmatization," the process of visualizing sounds, always results in frustration. The opening sequence I have described above presents a series of "acousmatic situations" of the second kind. First, both the television and Iara are introduced to the spectator as acousmatic beings. Against the background of the house, the spectator hears only the voices of the characters in the television program: the female voice in distress, and the aggressive male voice. When the spectator hears the foreboding conversation between the man and the woman, the camera then frustrates this by not giving us the "real" in the diegetic space, but showing instead a television set, an everyday ordinary artifact. Iara is first introduced through her voice as the sound from the television is silenced to give way to her acoustic presence. Lastly, the portents of danger, the neighbors, are also introduced in the diegesis through the noise they make as they arrive at their new house. The moment of the neighbors' arrival is punctuated by the family turning momentarily off-screen in an attempt to locate the source of the sound. The spectator is, albeit briefly, startled as well, since we are also invited to reflect on what lies beyond the diegetic frame. The act of gazing off-screen in an attempt to track a sound stands as the film's structuring

gesture: Where are these sounds coming from? How do they get inside the house of Iara and Valter?

The film stages a sonic invasion through the interaction of these three elements, in the way in which they echo each other. Here the transmittable structure of what Teresa Caldeira calls “the talk of crime” becomes apparent. In her anthropological survey of São Paulo’s residents’ relationship to crime, Caldeira explores the discursive and material processes of the experience of crime in the megalopolis. The “talk of crime” she explains, is “contagious” and consists of the constant repetitions of criminal incidents: “The repetition of histories, however, only serves to reinforce people’s feelings of danger, insecurity, and turmoil. Thus the talk of crime feeds a circle in which fear is both dealt with and reproduced, and violence is both counteracted and magnified” (19). These narratives, she explains, are used to restore order from chaos, in a process that she posits through a spatial metaphor: “These narrative and practices impose partitions, build up walls, delineate and enclose spaces, establish distances, segregate, differentiate, impose prohibitions, multiply rules of avoidance and exclusion, and restrict movements” (20). This containment is not only ideological (as seen in the criminalization of certain groups) but also material, as in the infrastructure of security in place in the city: from gated communities to private security companies (91). In the film, the neighbors, harbingers of doom, are reduced to their sonic emissions: their curses, their shouts, and their loud music. And this sonic invasion becomes even more terrifying precisely because sound is able to penetrate the “walls” set up to contain the dangerous other that Caldeira describes. Iara’s only recourse is discursive: the constant production of language about the danger the neighbors pose, and the stories of violence going on her neighborhood.

That it is a woman's voice that repeats and spreads the signs of danger points to the sexual dynamics of the film. Here it is important to highlight that through her name, Iara is inscribed in a long tradition of myth-making around gender and sound. According to Brazilian folklore, Iara is a legendary creature, a mermaid who lures men into the sea with her songs. The tale is marked by an anxiety about gender: the legend goes that Iara was a great warrior; her brothers grow jealous and they plot her murder. Iara overhears them and proceeds to kill them and is then thrown into the seas by her father. In the film, Iara's voice is again linked to danger and entrapment of the male figure. Although Iara's menacing voice seems to conjure up danger, she is at the same time, rooted in the domestic space (she remains at home for most of the film), static. In *The Acoustic Mirror*, Kaja Silverman explores the connection between gender and cinematic voice in what she describes as the fantasy of the maternal voice. This fantasy takes the maternal voice as a sonorous, protective membrane that can be interpreted in a wide spectrum of ways, from joyful shield to a paranoid fear of containment and entrapment (73). Something similar to this fantasy is at work in *Os Inquilinos*, in which Iara vocalizes, and thus invokes, the danger the neighbors pose, in the same way as the prisoner's voice from the PCC summons and unleashes violence. As the mythical siren she references, Iara also "blinds" Valter, enveloping him in her constant discursive production of crime.

Another important element of Iara's voice is her confinement to the fictive world: her vocal impersonations of her neighbors, and the way she repeats what she hears on the television, places her in a separate realm, in what Silverman explains as an extra level of interiority in the diegesis where the female voice is doubly contained, "obliging it to speak a particular psychic 'reality' on command, and imparting to it the texture of the female body, Hollywood places woman definitely 'on stage,' at a dramatic remove from the cinematic apparatus" (63). This

mechanism becomes clear the moment Iara is yet again talking about a little girl that has been raped and murdered, and she mispronounces the word “estuprada” (raped), in an uncanny repetition of a news report that both she and the spectator have watched at the beginning of the film.

Technology, Paranoia, Invasion

The interruption of family life by an outsider figure is a well-known story (a famous cinematic example would be the work of Michael Haneke) and it is present in Brazilian culture, as well. In Brazilian literature, for example, critic Regina Dalcastagne has identified narratives that stage socio-economic confrontation through a character from a marginalized class who imposes his/her presence in a middle and upper class. Dalcastagne argues that the bodies of these marginalized characters concretize the space from which they come; the social conditions that mark them as undesirables (137). *Os Inquilinos* modifies this by its use of sound, where class antagonisms are presented through ungraspable sounds. In the way sound works to texturize the fear and anxieties of the social world, the film follows a series of recent Brazilian films that critics note use conventions of the horror genre to stage middle class fears.⁷ In this way, the film tells a story about the breach of domestic tranquility by the “favelado.” The disturbance of domestic life is signaled from the very beginning; in the opening sequence discussed above, the television set and Iara’s neighborhood gossip suggest household disputes that are omnipresent, that cannot be

⁷ In a insightful article, film critic Laura Canepa considers *Os Inquilinos* alongside *O som ao redor* and *Trabalhar Cansa* (Juliana Rojas and Marcos Dutra, 2011) to propose how contemporary Brazilian cinema presents class relations and the legacy of slavery through terror, not in the sense of the supernatural or of genre (as in the horror film), but a more quotidian experience of fear. She writes: “ainda que haja poucas cenas explicitamente violentas, o espectador se identifica com a percepção dos personagens de que a qualquer momento algo terrível pode acontecer” (n.b.). What Canepa points to is the feeling of paranoia that I locate specifically in sound. Marians Suoto’s reading of *Trabalhar Cansa* continues this analysis of horror and class relations, making a cursory mention of the film’s attention to sound (46).

contained. The house the neighbors move to is also a divided home, where the ex-wife, Dona Consuelo, is in control of the back of the property (the part the menacing neighbors move to), and Seu Dimas, the ex-husband, lives on the front. Valter and Iara's marriage is also threatened by the presence of Iara's brother, who attempts to step in multiple times to protect Iara and the children. Despite all these domestic ruptures, the film does not present any "physical" or "material" breach. Instead, sound is the only element that trespasses the domestic space. The marital bedroom, for example, is shown multiple times as a space reached by the neighbors' noise, an ineffable presence that signals the possible rupture of the family.

In the same way, the house is imbued by neighbors' acoustic presence, the noise of the television also "envelops" the characters. For example, after the arrival of the neighbors, Valter is shown locking up doors and securing windows, while the television is heard again, this time acousmatically reporting the gruesome rape and murder of an eight year old. Only later does the camera cut to the television screen. In this scene, as Valter closes up doors and fastens bolts, the sound emanating from the television envelops him. This is not the only scene where Valter's surroundings are imbued with sound coming from unseen technological sources. He is presented twice amidst the sound of a television from preceding or following in sound bridges where his body seems to carry over the sound acousmatically. I will expand more on the device of the sound bridge and its ideological connotations, in my reading of *Tropa de Elite 2*.

Valter's precarious position in regards to what occurs next door finds its technical counterpoint in the film's use of non-simultaneous and off-screen sound. To counteract the frustration of being without first-hand knowledge of the neighbors' doings, Valter begins to fantasize, and we get to see the images he envisions. These fantasies revolve around the drama next door, touching on Valter's fear, anxiety, and powerlessness in the situation. These fantasies

are rendered in soft-focus, and are also punctuated with classical music without any dialogue. There is only one significant instance where the voice erupts. This corresponds to a visit by Seu Dimas to Valter. The old man comes for help, and in desperation tells Valter about an altercation he had with his tenants, where they broke a television. Valter imagines the scene, the neighbors shown striking Seu Dimas, their voices sounding monstrous in slow motion.

The other side to Valter's inability to see what happens is his silence. Unlike his wife, condemned to maddening elocution, Valter is mostly confined to hearing. In a poignant scene in the shower at his workplace, a man tells him a story about an invasion: a drug trafficker who begins to invade the house of a man, and demands to sleep with his wife. Valter remains quiet during the entire conversation, and we only realize the speech's recipient is Valter midway through the conversation when the camera moves to reveal that he is there. The male co-worker's narration stands in stark contrast to those of Iara's and the television. His voice is calm, and unlike Iara, he does not impersonate voices in retelling events. Following Silverman's work on the cinematic voice that I mentioned before, the male voice in this scene is never removed from its body. In this way, the film presents a gendered division in the articulation of class relations and the anxieties it engenders, for Iara's hysterical cries and incessant concerns about the dangers around her family ventriloquize fears about the "favelado," the criminal "other" that destabilizes and destroys honest, hardworking families.

Cellular phones

The PCC's technological, wireless connections across the city and the state of São Paulo haunt the film. To go back to the film's opening sequence, the use of sound in these scenes highlights an anxiety about source and location that mimics that behind mobile communication. The cell

phone as a device first appears in the film as the false embodiment of a gun — when Iara’s brother wants to stand up to the terrorizing neighbors, one of them signals that he has a gun under his shirt, only to reveal it later as a cellular phone. Of course, the point here is that the cellular phone, as the São Paulo government authorities state, really is a weapon. The phone is also a potentially frightening device; inherently acousmatic, in its mobile embodiment the phone does not only separate voice from body, but allows those voices to go anywhere. In the film, the sinister dimension of the phone comes to the fore when Iara tells Valter that she has seen Seu Dimas rummaging in the place where the “neighbors hide their things.” The special intonation she gives to the word “things” conveys a menace (it cannot be named), and reveals at the same time a shared knowledge with her husband. Valter, as usual, imagines the scene, and the spectator finds out that by “things,” Iara is referring to a collection of cell phones stored in a box, that Seu Dimas is portrayed searching through. When a cell phone is actually presented as such, communication fails. On two occasions, Valter receives two phone calls, but he is unable to hear anything. That these moments of technological breakdown occur to Valter is not surprising. It is an ominous sign; since Valter, who is always on the receiving end, and always seemingly an “ear,” does not “connect.”

The film’s climactic scene brings to the fore technology as an overwhelming force. The neighbors are having a party and Iara cannot stand the noise anymore. When Valter arrives, she confronts him with complaints about the noise, urging him to do something. As with previous moments, Valter seems to not register his wife’s complaints. As his wife goes on talking, he becomes visibly disturbed, and he brings his hands to his temples. A sound that resembles audio feedback becomes audible. This sound, or perhaps more accurately, this distortion of sound, conjures up the idea of technology, and a collapse of machine and human. Iara continues

seemingly unaware of the noise. Iara continues seemingly unaware of the noise. Is this sound in Valter's head? Does it work as a continuation of Valter's interiority? Is it a diegetic or non-diegetic sound? The scene ends with Valter finally confronting his neighbors. Outside his house, he sees that Iara's brother and his friends stand ready to fight the rowdy neighbors. Valter tries to intervene to prevent any skirmishes when a neighborhood boy playing outside strikes him with a rock. When the neighbors finally come out, the dialogue remains in the tautological realm that marks most of the film's dialogue: "A confusão é o barulho. A confusão é a confusão. A rua não é de vocês. Não é só de vocês não." (The mess is the noise. The mess is the mess. The street is not yours. It's not only yours.) The word "confusão" can mean both a mental and material "confusion," "mess," and "clutter." In this scene, Valter's inability to articulate, his linguistic precariousness works as yet another indication of the

But it is through this "confusion" that a confession of sorts is extracted from the neighbors. Once, as they arrive at the house late at night, they bicker about a robbing gone wrong that ends in murder. The camera then cuts to show Valter and Iara peering out of the window, furtive aural witnesses to the neighbors' crimes. The men will later murder Seu Dimas, and are arrested and taken by the police. The spectator can only comprehend the degree of interconnection between Valter and Iara's house to the neighbors' when her friends come over to gossip and look out at the murder scene, noting how "it seems that we are over there." Yet the film does not end in the closure of the neighbors' arrest. In the last scene, Valter is shown leaving his house for work, and he stops to see Dona Consuelo cleaning the house, the blood of Seu Dimas being washed away for the new tenants. In this scene, the links between the "partido" and Dona Consuelo's house are made explicit: there is a car outside with the organization's slogan, and an armed man stands next to her. This man turns out to be one of the previous

tenants, now dressed in more formal clothes. Valter immediately recognizes him and walks away in shock. The ending also introduces paranoia into the structure of everyday life: Valter is shown walking to his workplace, as he has been shown throughout the film. At the end of the film, the camera dwarfs the characters in a shot that shows Valter alongside neighbors walking as they begin their morning commute. As the camera moves, telephone wires appear in the frame, an intrusive element that signals interconnection in its raw materiality.

Tropa de Elite 2

The wires at the end of *Os Inquilinos* concretize the social connections that have been rendered as sound throughout the film. I now turn to *Tropa de Elite 2: O inimigo agora é outro* (*Elite Squad 2: The Enemy Within*) precisely because the film hinges on a premise quite different from *Os Inquilinos*: the total visibility through audio-technological means of how power functions in Rio de Janeiro. These technologies are not purveyors of anxiety; quite the contrary, they make manifest, and construct visibility. Through technology the film makes visual what is protagonist vaguely, but forcefully, refers to “o sistema” (the system)—a concept understood to be the structure of power in Rio, and one the film depicts at the intersection of personal, political, and technological networks.

Technology is not only at the center of the plot of *Tropa de Elite 2*, but is present in the mechanisms of reception and production of the film. The national census institute, IBGE, estimated that more than 11 million Brazilians watched the film’s first installment illegally on pirate DVDs (Heise 122). The audience’s technological command was also deployed for marketing purposes. Claro, the mobile communication transnational group, was the official sponsor of the film, and marketing of the film relied heavily on audiences’ relationship with

cellular technology.⁸ Within the diegesis, Claro advertisements are seen throughout Rio de Janeiro and the characters are portrayed using Claro services such as the (now nonexistent) online video calling. The technological emphasis within the film stands in stark contrast with the franchise's first installment. Released in 2007 and set in 1997, *Tropa de Elite: Missão dada é missão cumprida* deals with the elite squad of the military police of the state of Rio de Janeiro (BOPE). The film is centered on Captain Nascimento, played by Wagner Moura, and his fight against drug trafficking in anticipation of the Pope's visit to Brazil. As a captain of BOPE, Nascimento tortures and murders; "bandido bom é bandido morto," he proclaims. The international motive of the plot is never fully developed as the Pope's visit never materializes in the film, which remains confined to the extermination of drug dealers in the crime-ridden area where the Pope is set to stay during his visit. In this first film, Nascimento is about to become a father and begins to question the danger and the ethics of his profession. The constant victim of panic attacks, Nascimento tries to find a way out of BOPE, a man who can occupy his place in the squad. He ultimately finds one in André Matias, played by André Ramiro, an honest policeman pursuing studies in Law at the local private university in Rio. The film notoriously critiqued white, middle-class faux social consciousness, and presented it as a crucial element to the drug trade. In addition to being a box office hit, *Tropa de Elite* opened a significant debate about violence and its representation in Brazilian culture, including state-sponsored violence.⁹

⁸ For example, in a marketing campaign contest, Claro asked its customers to provide text messages (torpedos) to the protagonist. The top five responses won a trip to the filming of the sequel. Claro customers also had access via their cellular phone to exclusive film content.

⁹ Yet this is not a new debate in Brazilian cinema. Cinema Novo's auteur Glauber Rocha's manifesto "Uma estética da fome" (1965) already points to a concern about the praxis of Latin American art in the global stage. Rocha prescribes cinematic violence, the "hunger" he refers to. He writes: "while Latin America laments its general misery, the foreign onlooker cultivates the taste of that misery not as tragic symptom, but merely as an esthetic object within his field of interest" (59). Of course Cinema Novo films circulated only in intellectual elite circles and did not have the reach of films such *Tropa de Elite*. With the release of *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002), Ivana Bentes referred to the film and the widespread circulation of images about poverty and

Tropa de Elite 2's attempt to technologically graph the various networks that structure life in Rio de Janeiro, from the drug dealers to the state governor, points to a more complex representation of systemic violence. The film begins in 2006, the same year of the PCC attacks in São Paulo. As in *Os Inquilinos*, prison violence acts as a pivot, setting the narrative in motion when Nascimento, now a Colonel, and the BOPE squad are called to control a prison rebellion in the Bangu penitentiary complex in the state of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁰ Nascimento's protégé, Matias, kills the head of the Comando Vermelho gang and successfully represses the rebellion. Nascimento in turn, gains popular notoriety, and is transferred to the upper ranks of Carioca bureaucracy. This promotion allows the sequel to explore the political side of Rio de Janeiro's social problems, an aspect that had not been considered in the first film. The other crucial change for Nascimento comes on the personal front. In the sequel, Nascimento is divorced, and his ex-wife is now married to Fraga, his antagonist in the film, who is a history teacher, human rights activist, and aspiring politician. That Fraga works as a foil to Nascimento is an understatement, and highlights the totalizing fantasy at work in the film. In what follows I will show how this totality is constructed and sustained through audio technologies.

Voice, Sound, Paranoia

As in *Os Inquilinos*, sound in the film is a paranoid force that both spreads and assuages fear.

The most salient feature of the film's "paranoid acoustics" is Nascimento's voice-over narration.

Although there has not been a thorough critical examination of Nascimento's voice as a narrative

violence as "cosmética da fome" — a type of international cinema that takes a local theme with an international aesthetic making it appealing to a global, cosmopolitan audience (2007, 245).

¹⁰ Prison violence, and in particular, the 1992 Carandiru massacre represents in both films a Freudian return of the repressed of state violence. "Não quero outro Carandiru," says Rio's Governor when Nascimento calls him from the prison. For a cinematic treatment of the massacre itself, see the film, *Carandiru*

device, critics have made cursory mentions of the protagonist's voice as a powerful means of spectator identification. Ivana Bentes, for example, writes:

Told in the first person, the film aims for an immediate identification between spectator and a character-narrator, which is triggered by elements of catharsis. The Captain Nascimento appeals to our own becoming-fascist, with his “expertise,” his commonplace verdicts, his black shirt and apologies of torture and extermination, and his celebration of death, in a frenetic and urgent narrative that captivates the audience. State terror, in other words, is being legitimized cinematographically and socially (113).

While I agree with Bentes’ reading of the film’s politics, Nascimento’s narration is marked by uncertainty. While the film, as Bentes notes, is told in the first person, there is more nuance in the interplay between the narrating voice and the body to which it belongs, a body who narrates omnisciently, but who also appears within the diegesis. This is a body, after all, that in the first film indexes the violence of the system it champions in the form of panic attacks. I do not wish to mount a defense of Nascimento’s character, but to consider the fact that in cinematic terms, the most important feature of Nascimento’s voice is that it becomes embodied, it never remains completely offscreen: we see the body to which it belongs. Chion’s theorization of embodiment of the voice as a mark of vulnerability makes us reconsider the meaning of this voice that speaks authority, but that is nonetheless tied down to corporeality. While Nascimento narrates the action of the film, he does not remain an omniscient figure completely outside the diegesis nor always inside of it, either. Beatriz Jaguaribe considers the constant shift between Nascimento as an omniscient narrator and a subjective presence as a paralyzing ambiguity. “This dialogical multiplicity,” she posits, “is markedly ambiguous, since the spectator cannot entirely rely on or deconstruct Nascimento’s subjective perspective” (224). Nascimento’s voice, tied to the hyper-

realist aesthetics of the films, becomes a site for the critic's anxiety. To Jaguaribe, the film's realist aesthetic seizes hold of the spectator; likewise, Bentes argues that the "the spectator is taken hostage" by the film's narrative (114). Another critic argues that Nascimento's narration "intensifies" the relationship between the spectator and the character, noting that the spectator is "thrown" and forcefully moved into Nascimento's inner turmoil (da Silva 62). The anxiety over Nascimento's narrative, read as entrapment by critics, is a crucial part of the film's "paranoid style."¹¹

Continuity and Interconnection

At the center of the *Tropa de Elite* franchise, critics find a didactic impulse, where the spectator comes to learn how the power structure of Rio de Janeiro intersects in diverse ways with a variety of institutions and social actors. Jaguaribe notes a "pedagogy of reality" of "causal connections" that favors an appealing hyperdramatic, glossy presentation (226). While the "pedagogical connecting" endeavor of *Tropa de Elite* is often considered a part of its facile politics, the ways in which the film constructs these connections remains unexplored.

Tropa de Elite 2 structures interconnections through technology, and in particular, audio technologies. At the level of form, several techniques are used to attach and connect characters and situations across various socio-economic contexts. The film repeatedly makes use of sound bridges to convey this interconnection, presenting technological sound as the kernel of the film's social world. Sound bridges are a key component of continuity editing, allowing smooth transitions between scenes. A sound bridge refers to moments of non-simultaneous sound; we hear sound, but its source cannot be located within the cinematic image, instead, the sound that

¹¹ Amy Villarejo argues that the film's POV adopts first and third person shooter games to enable a perception of space that enables state intervention.

we hear comes from a forthcoming or preceding scene (Bordwell and Thompson 198). The first sequence I want to discuss establishes the family dynamics in the film, the relationship between Nascimento, his ex-wife, their son, and his ex-wife's new husband, Fraga. After the prison killing that opens the film, Nascimento is shown entering his apartment and turning on the television.¹² The camera moves around the apartment to show the television screen as we hear Fraga's impassioned, scathing critique of the violence generated by BOPE and the city government on the prison population. Fraga has been called in to negotiate with the inmates. Nascimento turns off the television, sound stops briefly, and the camera cuts to Nascimento's son against the sound of Fraga's interview, the same one Nascimento was watching moments before. The camera slowly moves into the room to show the television screen, and as Nascimento's voiceover intervenes to inform us of his former wife's marriage with his public opponent, we see Fraga and Nascimento's ex-wife.

Another revealing use of sound bridge in the film points to the links between politics and the media. This sequence begins with Nascimento discussing with Matias possible avenues for damage control for BOPE after the prison killings. Nascimento leaves to try to locate the Secretary of Security, Comandante Araújo, at a restaurant and find out whether or not he is in danger of losing his position. As Nascimento exits the office, we hear non-diegetic sound; it is a newscast that reports on the actions taken by the government against BOPE officials. The film cuts to a television screen in a restaurant where voice and image are joined, and we see the news report. Immediately, we are shown Araújo with other government officials eating and discussing Nascimento's fate. As Nascimento enters the restaurant, he comments in voice-over on his position as a political pawn—he knows the government will get rid of him to quell public

¹² To note the technological inflection of the sequel, it's perhaps worth nothing that this scene "quotes" the first film: the late arrival of a tired Nascimento in the same apartment, but with the key difference that a television is not turned on.

outrage. The camera then cuts to a man who points to the television and recognizes Nascimento from the report, and initiates a round of cheers for the Colonel. The officials witness the display of public acceptance of Nascimento's actions and greet him as well. Moments later, the music from the next scene begins to play, the introductory music to Mira Geral, a television show hosted by a brash personality, Fortunato, who will become an elected public official later in the film. The television show ensues, taking up the entire space of the diegesis (and praising Nascimento's actions, once again) until the camera cuts to the next scene, which presents city government officials watching the show. This sequence contains multiple shots where the camera pulls back from the space of the television and the diegesis in an unsteady, disorienting motion. Sound takes us over to the next scene, in particular, sound coming from television screens through which we seamlessly cross spaces and move through the power structure of the city: the police, the politicians, the media. And what this creates is a sense of constant surveillance and paranoia where screens seem to be everywhere.

Hearsay and Surveillance

The blend of the real and the virtual is demarcated most forcefully in the film by the presentation of a surveillance apparatus. Nascimento's public admiration gets him a position in the higher echelons of Carioca bureaucracy, as he is promoted to Subsecretary of Security of the city of Rio de Janeiro. In his new position, Nascimento is in charge of the intelligence work in the city: wiretapping, surveillance cameras, etc. The film here touches on real developments on crime enforcement in Rio de Janeiro. Starting in 2005, state officials in Rio implemented surveillance systems in public spaces which are controlled in operating rooms in the police battalions, and then a bigger control center where the work of the battalions is supervised (Cardoso 53-54). A

recent article in the newspaper *O Globo* warns Cariocas that their city is quickly approaching São Paulo in terms of security devices, a city, where, the article states, there is a security camera for every eight citizens. Rio de Janeiro is approaching this state of affairs: 700 thousand private cameras monitor the city, in addition to the thousand cameras controlled by the Secretary of Security (Alencar). Both scholars and popular news outlets predict that this surveillance apparatus will only expand in preparation for the mega-events that Rio will host.

The cinematic focus on the work of intelligence, as Hollywood's conspiracy thriller shows us, is connected to a self-reflexivity toward the filmic apparatus. In the film's opening sequence in the prison rebellion, Nascimento remains at a distance from the action, staying in a security room where he can see all the surveillance cameras in the prison. Nascimento communicates with his agents via walkie-talkie, and with his superiors through his mobile phone. As he watches what is occurring through the screens, Nascimento constantly orders the guard controlling the surveillance system to "zoom in." Nascimento is not the only character who requests a "zoom in" in the film's diegesis. Television personality Fortunato is often shown framed by television cameras; at other times the frame includes the extra-diegetic space of the set of the television show, displaying the taping of the show. In the latter scenes Fortunato constantly calls out to his camera controllers to zoom in or zoom out, drawing attention, as Nascimento before him, to the apparatus and its manipulation.

The crux of the film is the exacerbation of the power of police militias stemming from the city's military police. Police militias allegedly work to protect the communities affected by the drug trade and its violence, but after processes of pacification, they take over the community and exploit every kind of business opportunity available there, from pirate cable television and internet to the water supply. The camera draws attention to the material infrastructure of these

services, fixating on wires, power lines, and their haphazard positioning in the communities. In the film, the militias work in tandem with politicians, so that control of the communities also guarantees votes and political support. While Nascimento is oblivious to the militia's rampant violence and exploitation, Fraga (now an elected official) and journalist Clara, investigate the links between the militias and politicians. The specific event that triggers awareness of the militia problem is the theft of a gun armory in the Tanque neighborhood, the last area of the western side of Rio still dominated by drug lords. The assault on the armory is orchestrated by the militia to create an excuse for the intervention of the military police in the neighborhood, thus assuring future control of the area.

Continuing with the insistence on the aural, the clue that solidifies Clara and Fraga's suspicions is information given to Clara by a policeman present during the armory theft, who tells her that the assault was not the doing of gang members, but of policemen. The key here is speech: the men who storm in and take the guns, Clara is told, speak as policemen, too. Sound here again reveals itself as an important element in the plot, one that points to truth. This vital piece of information is given off-record, which means that Clara is asked to not record that part of the conversation. Parallel to this investigation, Nascimento is pressured to invade Tanque to find the stolen guns. Before allowing any action, Nascimento listens to the drug dealers' conversations that have been taped by his office, and finds no evidence, that they in fact, have the stolen guns. The drug lord's conversations cannot be clearer as to their innocence as Nascimento listens to a conversation where the head drug leader clearly states that he does not know the whereabouts of the weapons. Intelligence in *Tropa de Elite* is always efficient. As opposed to other representations of the work of wiretapping, such as the American television show *The Wire*, technology always works in the film. There is no secret language or code that

prevents Nascimento from understanding the conversations.

The militias get what they want and enter Tanque. In a scene that repeats Nascimento's actions in the prison rebellion, he is shown again conjuring up visual content, as a BOPE officer calls him and he requests to see the guns through video-call. The spectator and the characters in the film watch through a computer, whose service is provided by Claro, the film's sponsor. The multiple screens highlight again the dizzying competing levels of realities and their mediations. Here, the film's investment of technology as an all-seeing power is manifest: the proof that the operation is a failure goes beyond the aural as it is visually produced. Yet despite this investment with the technology that listens and sees, it is not what ultimately leads to truth. Nascimento becomes aware of the militia's connection to the armory assault through his son, who works with Fraga in his office. Hearsay and gossip prove to be important devices that supplement the work of technology.

Nascimento then decides to wiretap Fraga's phone line and the camera shows us Nascimento's men, tapping into Fraga's line, and the van (a staple of paranoid films from Coppola's *The Conversation* to the television show *The Wire*) where the sound recording takes place. Nascimento gets to listen to the conversation between Clara and Fraga when the former is able to get into a militia safe house and discovers the connection between the militia and current government officials seeking re-election. Clara calls Fraga and informs him that she has seen proof that the militia is connected to the assault in Tanque, and to political campaigns. The film cuts between Clara, Fraga, and Nascimento's men overhearing and recording the conversation. When Clara is on the phone, the militias come in and Rocha (the head of the entire operation) asks not why she is there, but who she is talking to on the phone.

Nascimento listens to the conversation between Clara and Fraga later, discovers the corruption, and is able to connect the politicians with the militia, and his precarious position in the chain of power: “Eu estava cercado de inimigos. Os inimigos verdadeiros. A Secretaria de Segurança era o coração do sistema. A Segurança Pública do Estado do Rio de Janeiro estava nas mãos de bandidos. Eu não podia confiar em ninguém.” Immediately after Nascimento’s discovery, his superiors are informed that Fraga knows of their involvement with the militias. Both discoveries —Nascimento’s and his superiors’— unleash the climax in the film, as Nascimento attempts to prevent an attack on Fraga that results in his son getting hit.

Totality, Cellular Phones, Latin America

I want to return to a discussion of “o sistema,” the core of which Nascimento localizes in the security apparatus of the city. Never truly defined by Nascimento, “the system” is understood to be the structure of power in Rio de Janeiro, an edifice sustained in the film by the interaction of various social actors through technology. Toward the end of the film, the action briefly moves to Brasília, the capital city. There Fraga conducts a congressional hearing on the unrestrained actions of the militias, and Nascimento is called to testify. Nascimento’s voice-over intervenes as the film shows the repercussions of his testimony: the various murders, the retaliation, but most importantly, the re-election of the same corrupt officials. In this closing voice-over, the didactic impulse comes back, as Nascimento expands his understanding of “o sistema.” Because of this, it is worth quoting it in its entirety:

Eu fui pra CPI do Fraga pra detonar o sistema. Eu fui lá pra falar a verdade, pra dizer o que eu estava sentindo. Conteí tudo que eu sabia, reconheci meus erros e falei por mais de três horas. E dei porrada em muita gente. Botei muito político na cadeia. Por causa do

meu discurso, teve filho da puta que foi pra vala muito antes do que esperava. Foi a maior queima de arquivos da história do Rio de Janeiro. E mesmo assim o sistema continuava de pé. O sistema entrega a mão pra salvar o braço. O sistema se reorganiza, articula novos interesses, cria novas lideranças. Enquanto as condições de existência do sistema estiverem aí, ele vai resistir. Agora me responde uma coisa, quem você acha que sustenta tudo isso? É... E custa caro. Muito caro. O sistema é muito maior do que eu pensava. Não é à toa que os traficantes, os policiais e os milicianos matam tanta gente nas favelas. Não é à toa que existem as favelas. Não é à toa que acontece tanto escândalo em Brasília e que entra Governo, sai Governo, a corrupção continua. Pra mudar as coisas vai demorar muito tempo. O sistema é foda.¹³

Nascimento's discussion on the system is articulated in voice-over as an aerial tracking shot sweeps over the modernist architecture of Brasilia, a modernist, planned city that epitomizes state power. With this visual, the scene then concretizes the structure Nascimento discusses, the "sistema" is the state power being corroded from within and sustained by the unsuspecting citizens. Yet despite this condemnation, the protagonist cannot help but also praise that same system. "O sistema é foda," declares Nascimento. The polysemantic colloquial term "foda" is important here—meaning at once something screwed up, ruined, rotten, hard to decode, but also

¹³ "I testified at Fraga's hearing to screw the system. I went there to state the truth. To express my feelings. I told everything I knew, I admitted my mistakes and testified for over 3 hours. I screwed a lot of people, sent a lot of corrupt politicians to prison. Because of my speech, many assholes were killed way before they expected. It was Rio de Janeiro's biggest witness elimination ever. But, still, the system resisted. The system will give a hand to save an arm. It reorganizes itself, it articulates new interests and creates new leaders. When conditions are favorable the system will persist. Just answer me one thing. Who do you think pays for all of this? Exactly. And it's quite expensive. Very expensive. The system is much more comprehensive than I expected. No wonder drug dealers, cops and militiamen kill so many people at the slums. No wonder slums exist. No wonder so many scandals occur in Brasilia, and despite the successive administrations, corruption persists. To change the way things are, it will take a lot of time. The system is resilient."

impressive and awe-inspiring¹⁴. Despite its shortcomings and dishonorable nature, the system remains a staggering structure, a quality the sweeping aerial shots help solidify.

Os Inquilinos closes with a similar gesture. At the end of the film, the camera dwarfs the characters, in a crane shot that shows Valter alongside neighbors walking as they begin their morning commute. As the camera moves, telephone wires appear in the frame, an intrusive element that signals interconnection in its raw materialness. While *Tropa de Elite 2* conveys mastery through the elimination of any human element in the shot, *Os Inquilinos* transmits a sense of despair as the workers in the *periferia* start their day. This is where the films' treatment of paranoia moves in different directions. In *Tropa de Elite 2* the conspiratorial element is clear from the film's title: "O inimigo agora é outro," and is solidified by Nascimento's own revelation about the corrupt political system. Yet, while the ending seems intended for the audience's reflection on the system's ungraspable evil, the role of technology throughout the film belies this sentiment of panic and despair. Despite the opacity and insidiousness of Nascimento's construction of "the system," the film's investment in technologies of visibility, of recording, of aural "truth" quells any type of anxiety. Detection in *Tropa de Elite 2* is formulated as the fantasy of complete power. In his ethnographic research on state security camera controllers in Rio de Janeiro, Bruno Cardoso notes the "boredom factor" (a term from Gavin Smith's work on surveillance in England) of surveillance work (59). The film does away with the tediousness of the labor of surveillance. Moreover, fault or malfunction is never placed on the machines, but on the human element that controls them. In this way, the film seeks to reassure the audience of

¹⁴ In turn, the word "sistema" became exploited through internet memes that dealt with everyday frustrations of Brazilians with "systems" (gaming, banking, internet, etc). For example, in one a man goes to the bank, makes a line only to reach the teller and be told that the system is down. Nascimento's image then declares: "O sistema é foda."

technology's infallibility. It is not that technology does not work, but that it is in the hands of a corrupt system, of weak-willed public servants that succumb all-too easily to greed and power.

To close I want to consider, following Jameson, how technology works as an allegory of the social world. What do cellular phones mean in a Latin American setting? In his groundbreaking study of Cinema Novo, Ismail Xavier calls the films of the movement as "allegories of underdevelopment," ways of aesthetically representing national history. Through technology the Brazilian films that I analyzed in this chapter stage a totality. The frightening interconnection is made possible by neoliberal processes, specifically the privatization of the telecommunication industry in Latin America. As Manuel Castells and other researchers of the "mobile network society" explain, "mobile telephony has moved from being the technology of a privileged few to an essentially mainstream technology" (Castells et al 7). In the context of developing economy, they point to the replacement of fixed lines for cellular phones, a more efficient and economic alternative. Brazil is one of the biggest markets for cellular phones in Latin America, with cost-efficient popular programs such as pre-paid subscriptions (17). They conclude that "it has become obvious that the availability of prepaid systems has made it possible for the global telephone divide to be narrowed more rapidly than the Internet divide" (32). Indeed, in a recording of a government meeting about the PCC's methods, an official bluntly states: "a tecnologia avança para eles e nós" (qtd. de Souza 44). I do not want to paint an image of techno-democratization, however. Quite the contrary, while in Latin America cellular phones have enabled connectivity and socioeconomic opportunities for more citizens, the privatization of the telecommunication industry was one of the many neoliberal policies that fostered inequality in the region. This introduces another dimension to the paranoia of social

connectivity, for the ownership and control of these networks become increasingly hard to follow. This does not mean a complete obliteration of the State, however. Nascimento and his team are seen using the services of *Claro*, in a visual that presents the links between the neoliberal state and a transnational corporation.

In an essay titled “Ways of Listening in a Visual Medium: the Documentary Movement in Brazil,” Xavier discusses the rich production of documentary film in Brazil, referring to them as “listening” documentaries on account of the pervasive use of subject interviews as voiceover narrations and other techniques that give voice to socially marginalized groups. Xavier writes that “a vital concern for Brazilian documentary makers, then, has been to explore ways of listening, in a visual medium” (98). Xavier discusses documentaries that focus on social struggle, state violence, poverty, noting how these same themes make up Brazil’s international blockbusters—films such as *Tropa de Elite* and *Cidade de Deus*. Xavier posits that despite the thematic convergence, “their modes of representation are melodramatic, deploying the fast cutting of the music video or TV advertising, and the mechanical violence of the action thriller” (114). It is in the documentary form, Xavier finds the way to critically engage with reality — and a way back to Cinema Novo’s political commitment. Yet *Tropa de Elite 2* just as *Os Inquilinos*, constantly asks us to listen: to Nascimento’s pronouncements, to wiretaps, to gossip.¹⁵ This invitation to sonic engagement in the films is localized in wireless communication networks where the figure of the cellular phone enables the paranoid realization of frightening interconnection: the criminal other or the state might be on the line. But while *Os Inquilinos* thematizes the closing gap that technology engenders, acousmatizing social difference to sustain

¹⁵ My analysis is restricted to Brazilian cinema, but Gonzalo Aguilar also points to the special role of sound in films of New Argentine Cinema movement begun in the 1990s (94-96).

paranoia, *Tropa de Elite 2* seeks to reassure that anxiety about interconnection by presenting a powerful technology, that always works, and that is able to untangle criminal networks.

Chapter Two

Fear, Marginality, and Mobility along the Post-NAFTA Railways

From the contemporary technology of the cellular phone I now turn to one seemingly anachronistic object, the train, to argue that it has become an icon of the flows that mark neoliberal reality, specifically the movement of commodities, the circulation of people, and organized crime. Trains have been a standard of crime fiction; from Agatha Christie to Alfred Hitchcock, the enclosed space of the train provides an ideal setting for murder and paranoia. David F. Bell posits that railway travel modified the content and form of the crime novel, from new temporal considerations of alibis to its transnational scope.¹⁶

The train that I discuss in this chapter is quite different, however. My focus here is the Mexican railway system, a network that transports freight and stretches for 24,000 kilometers throughout Mexico. Operated by private companies since its privatization in the late 1990s, the Mexican railway system connects the Mexican export economy to the outside world. In the southeastern states of Campeche, Chiapas, Tabasco, Oaxaca and Veracruz, the train not only transports cargo — namely, agricultural products and cement— but also Central American migrants making their way to the United States. The train is the cheapest form of transportation for migrants, although it is also riddled with many dangers, from mutilations to death to kidnappings (Dominguez Villegas). In its most dangerous sections in the southeast, migrants call

¹⁶ Laura Marcus has also considered the intersection of railway travel and reading for notions of modernity in an European context. Like Bell, she notes the emergence of crime fiction alongside the train technologies and considers a short untranslated text by Walter Benjamin on railway reading in which he notes the link between the two. Walter Benjamin describes the activity as a sublimation, as a covering up of the anxieties that plague the travel journey from accidents to missed trains. Of the train reader he writes: “The anaesthetising of one fear by the other is his salvation. Between the freshly separated pages of the detective novel he seeks the leisured, almost virginal anxieties which can help him over the archaic anxieties of the journey” (qtd. in Marcus 60). In chapter four, I explore the structural alliance between travel and crime fiction, and its commodification as tourism in the neoliberal era.

the train “La Bestia,” a name that alludes to the horrors they endure in their journey atop the machine. In this chapter I explore how the scenes of criminality and death around La Bestia reveal a network of economic, geographic, and criminal relationships. As with the other texts of interconnection in this dissertation, I’m interested in how connections are made, and what these connections illuminate or obscure about the social world. Although the Beast and the migrant journey through Mexico has been explored recently in a variety of works, my analysis deals with the 2009 film *Sin Nombre*, written and directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, and the collection of chronicles *Los migrantes que no importan* (2010) by Salvadoran journalist Oscar Martínez, two of the recent and most popular texts about migration to the United States that focus on the Mexican part of the journey to the north.

Sin Nombre follows Sayra, a Honduran teenager migrating alongside her estranged father and uncle, and Willy, a young Mexican member of the transnational gang Mara Salvatrucha. Willy and Sayra meet on top of the train in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, as Willy and his gang rob the train she is riding with her family. On the train, Willy prevents Sayra’s rape by his gang leader, Lil Mago, murdering him and earning Sayra’s allegiance, who will abandon her family to follow Willy. A multi-layered chase ensues: Willy has to flee from gang members trying to avenge the death of their leader and Sayra attempts to make her way to the United States. The Beast features prominently in the narrative, as a place of encounters and redemption, and as a space for narrative progression.

Los migrantes que no importan documents the atrocities suffered by migrants as they cross Mexico. The chronicles were first published serially in the Salvadoran digital newspaper *elfaro.net*, where Martínez also edits the online space *Sala Negra*, devoted to narrating the postwar violence in Central American nations, from the drug trade to police corruption. For the

publication of the book, the chronicles were arranged from south to north, tracing the Central American migrant's route, following the crossing from the border towns of Guatemala, through the south of Mexico, until arriving at the Río Bravo. The geographic breadth is coupled with an exploration of the different spaces and actors that structure the migrant's journey. Martínez interviews smugglers, migrants, police officials, and United States border patrollers. My analysis will be confined to four chronicles: "En el camino," "La Bestia," "Los secuestros que no importan," and "Morir en el Río Bravo." With the exception of the last one, the chronicles that I examine cover some of the most dangerous sections of the migrant route, documenting the encroachment of organized crime on the migrant route. Through the film and the chronicles I argue that the train concretizes neoliberal interconnectivity linking different forms of neoliberal mobility: labor, capital, and criminal organizations. As the other works in this dissertation, the film and the chronicles move between the affective and the rational, between the paranoia of the no man's land migrants traverse, and the detective work of revealing how organized crime works in relation to the migration market in a post-NAFTA world.

Neoliberal Sensations and the Network Imaginary

In its use of fortuitous encounters (Sayra meeting Willy), and its multi-protagonist structure (Sayra and her family, the group of gang members who chase Willy), *Sin Nombre* resembles what David Bordwell calls "network films."¹⁷ In her reading of network cinema, Amanda Ciafone historicizes network films, arguing that they work as "melodramas of globalization constructing sensational interconnection to imagine contemporary systems, relations, and identities" (2279). These works, Ciafone posits, borrow from genres such as telenovelas in their narrative structures, and rely on a moralistic questioning of characters' fates

¹⁷ Other names for this genre include "hyperlink cinema," "social problem film," "multiprotagonist film."

without any explanation of systemic power (2280). Although *Sin nombre* is not the standard “network film” in the vein of *Amores Perros* or *Syriana*, it shares an aesthetic of cognitive mapping and interconnectivity in the neoliberal context.¹⁸ Scholars have noted how the film relies on an affective representation of the migrant’s journey. Yajaira Padilla places the film in a larger body of work on the Central American diaspora that “reactivates” emotions attached to migration and displacement to “inspire a transnational and transregional sense of community among Central Americans” (154). Deborah Shaw discusses the film in relation to migration films and argues that *Sin Nombre*’s commercial success hinges on its Hollywoodesque stylistic treatment of the subject matter, where the “emotional narrative had to take precedence over representing the difficulty of the journey” (236).

My argument places the train at the center of this affective work and as a grounding mechanism for interconnection in the film and the chronicles. Both Fukunaga and Martínez have first-hand knowledge of the migrant’s ordeal, extensively researching and traveling through Mexico atop the Beast. During the film’s promotion, Fukunaga’s travels and experiences on the train were consistently highlighted. In an interview, he provides yet one more story about the fabled machine:

We were somewhere in the pitch-black regions of the Chiapan country side. In the alcove of the next train car I heard the distinct pops of gunshots, always louder than they seem in the movies, then the screams of immigrants passing the word: "Pandillas! Pandillas!" (gangsters). Everyone scattered, I could hear them running in past our tanker car. Not having any where to run to, I stayed on, waiting for there to be a sign the gangs or bandits were approaching us. After a tense pause, the train rocked and continued on again north,

¹⁸ The network film is also present in the film’s production and promotion; posters and the film’s DVD announce that it comes from the same studio as other network film such as *21 Grams* and *Traffic*.

the immigrant who had ran clamored aboard anew. Nothing happened the rest of the night, but everyone was up and vigilant. The next day I talked to two Hondurans who were next to the attack. They told me a Guatemalan immigrant didn't want to give two bandits his money so they shot him and throw him under the train [...]. That was my first trip, but the reality of the event stuck with me. Nothing could have driven home the sensation of fear and impotence than what I had felt first hand with those immigrants.

There is a clear emphasis on sensation in Fukunaga's account: the darkness of the Chiapan night, the gunshots and cries that are more vivid than their fictional counterparts, the swaying train car. This all culminates in the impossibility of conveying the complete impact of the affective charge contained by the experience of migration, the "sensation of fear and impotence." This impossibility is tellingly expressed in a metaphor of understanding and knowledge as mobility: to drive home, to make a point, to make clear. In the same way, Martínez places emotions, in this case, anger ("la rabia"), as the starting point of his narrative (15). He writes: "Como quien se succiona el labio cuando tiene una herida, aunque sabe que eso arde y hasta provoca algo de rabia. Y solo espero poder regalarles algo de eso" (18).¹⁹ His investigative work becomes tangled up in a language of outrage and despair; a reviewer, for example, wrote that one reads the book with "mounting fear and disgust" (Barron). Through the machine the film and the chronicles stage a process of turning the migrant from an invisible figure into a human being, a process of uncovering (what's sin nombre, nameless?) and care.

In the case of the film, "the Beast" shares the rich history of trains and cinema. Scholars describe the Lumière brothers *L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1895) as a founding myth of cinema. Legend goes that during the film's screening, the terrified audience screamed in panic

¹⁹ "As one sucks one's lips when it's gashed, even though one knows it burns and it even provokes anger. I only hope I can give you some of that." This preface is not included in the book's English translation.

upon seeing the moving train, fleeing under the fear of the machine. Tom Gunning has offered a nuanced take on the myth, considering its possible apocryphal nature, but instead, reading the audience's response not as a reaction to the train itself, but to the marvel of the cinematic apparatus. He writes:

The on-rushing train did not simply produce the negative experience of fear but the particularly modern entertainment form of the thrill, embodied elsewhere in the recently appearing attractions of the amusement parks (such as the roller coaster), which combined sensations of acceleration and falling with a security guaranteed by modern industrial technology (122).

The “thrill” is reminiscent of another contemporaneous creation: the detective and crime novel, which, not unlike the cinema and the rollercoaster, provided a contained, safe experience of violence. *Sin Nombre* evokes many of the thrills afforded by the cinematic train, as for example, the train as a site of connectivity, a space where strangers become linked in often comedic, often terrifying ways.²⁰ The film reconfigures the typical image of the cinematic train, however. This is not the typical train of American genre films of noir or westerns.²¹ The Beast (and the overwhelming majority of Latin American trains) are not a passenger trains; they are freight trains in the service of an export economy. What kind of sensations and thrills would this seemingly anachronistic, neoliberal train afford? The neoliberal context of the train stages a different type of contained violence that is developed through a particular logic of speed, shock, and abjection.

²⁰ For a transnational study of the relationship between early cinema and trains, see Kirby, Lynne.

²¹ In an interview, Fukunaga links the train and the overall thematic of the film to the Western (Macaulay).

Deciphering the Beast

The film and the chronicles begin their narratives in the southeast of Mexico. *Sin Nombre* begins in the city of Tapachula, Chiapas, a mid-size city near the Guatemalan border. This is the entry point into Mexico for many migrants, but the film first introduces Willy — or Casper to his fellow gang members— in his everyday life in Tapachula. In the opening sequence, we see Willy collecting “taxes” throughout Tapachula: he receives money from a bus driver and a storefront. Willy is in charge of mentoring a much younger recruit named Benito (Krystian Ferrer), whom he shows around; both have to set up guard in the train yard, La Bombilla, making sure members from the rival gang (MS-18) are not riding the train and stepping on their territory. Willy usually leaves his post on the train yard to go visit his girlfriend, Marta Marlen, whom he hides from the gang. From the beginning of the film the train is present, but from a non-itinerant perspective, as only train tracks and abandoned wagons are seen. In these establishing sequences of Tapachula and Willy’s life, migrants appear in the background: we see them resting on the tracks in La Bombilla, waiting for the train to arrive. Juxtaposed with Willy’s life is Sayra’s reunion in Honduras with her father, who has been deported from the United States; and will attempt to cross the border again, this time with his brother and Sayra. The fraught dynamics of the family are established in these scenes and we can gather that Sayra’s father has been absent for most of her life. We will later see the three making their way from Honduras into Guatemala, and then into Tapachula.

In the Chiapan sections of the film, the derelict train station of La Bombilla serves as a migrant hub, a place where migrants sleep, rest, and wait for the train. As I mentioned above, this is also the place of Willy’s work for the mara. The train, as Wolfgang Schivelbush notes, normally works as a universal symbol of progress. In the case of Latin America the train

embodied the liberal dream of modernity. In late nineteenth century Mexico, the authoritarian regime of Porfirio Díaz vigorously promoted the train as an icon of progress and modernity. To provide a brief illustration: when Díaz comes into power in 1876, Mexico possesses only 640 kilometers of tracks that used mules to move trains. When he leaves office in 1910, the country has 19,280 kilometers of tracks (Matthews 4), built by foreign companies that were given concessions to operate the railways. Ronald E. Robinson considers foreign intervention in countries through the railway industry as “railway imperialism,” writing that “the railroad, up to 1914, was thus a main generator of those insidious partnerships of imperial, financial, and commercial interests that go into the making of ‘informal empires’” (4).

Mexico was such a place where the ruling elite seized on the promise of the railroad, while submitting to foreign capital. In his work on the cultural history of the Mexican railroad, Michael Matthews considers the train not only as an icon for material progress in the Porfiriato, but also a metaphor for the regime itself: “the uninterrupted, relentless, and at times violent drive forward into the future, a future denoted by technological sophistication, social order, material progress, and above all, cosmopolitan civilization” (19). Railroads were crucial during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), and were subsequently nationalized with the creation of Ferrocarriles de México. At first glance, the tracks portrayed in the film, with migrants sleeping on them, provide a different image of “progress” and “modernity,” but they are nonetheless tied to these ideals. In 1992, at the end of Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s government, the World Bank recommended the privatization of Mexican railways. Salinas de Gortari’s government (1988-1994) championed neoliberal policies, signing the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and the United States, and privatizing the telecommunications and the banking systems. In 1996 his successor Ernesto Zedillo, opened the railway industry for foreign

investment for the first time in fifty years (Campos 90). One of the companies that won the concession for the coveted Northern rail referred to the line as “NAFTA Railroad.”

The companies might have referred to it as the “NAFTA Railroad,” but migrants now know it by other names. This is how Martínez presents the machine in the chronicles:

Esta es la Bestia, la serpiente, la máquina, el monstruo. El tren. Rodeado de leyendas y de historias de sangre. Algunos, supersticiosos, cuentan que es un invento del diablo. Otros dicen que los chirridos que desparrama al avanzar son voces de niños, mujeres y hombres que perdieron la vida bajo sus ruedas (68).²²

Animal, object, supernatural being. The common denominator of all this semantic multiplicity is death, and yet, it is a narrative machine that concretizes the horror of migration: Martínez describes it also as a code to decipher (68). The book’s opening chronicle, titled “En el camino,” begins in a migrant shelter in Oaxaca where the journalist meets the Alfaro brothers, El Chele, Pitbull, and Auner, from El Salvador. This opening narrative illustrates one of the book’s fundamental takes on Central American migration to the United States: people don’t migrate, they flee. But the Alfaro brothers do not know from what or whom they run, or perhaps they do not want to tell Martínez. The train tracks provide a framework for the brothers’ story and concretize the diffuse violence that propels the brothers’ movement to “el norte.”

The Alfaro brothers are inexperienced in the workings of migration: they are travelling without a smuggler and seem ill at ease in the shelter. In a private conversation with Auner, the oldest brother, Martínez probes into the reasons for their trip. Auner confesses that he’s fleeing

²² “This is The Beast, the snake, the machine, the monster. These trains are full of legends and their history is soaked with blood. Some of the more superstitious migrants say that The Beast is the devil’s invention. Others say that the train’s squeaks and creaks are the cries of those who lost their lives under its wheels. Steel against steel” (73).

(“huyo”) because he’s afraid he might get killed. The journalist asks about what he is leaving behind and the possibility of return:

¿No volverías nunca?
No... Bueno... Solo si tocan a mi mujer o a mi hija.
Y entonces, ¿a qué volverías?
A matarlos.
A quiénes?
No sé (23).²³

This “no sé” becomes a refrain that captures the corruption, the impunity, and the helplessness in the face of a pervasive climate of violence. It’s a refrain that necessitates a going back, an investigation. It begins with another brother, Pitbull, in the town of Chalchuapa, El Salvador. Pitbull witnesses the murder of his friend Juan Carlos, a gang member. Pitbull, unafraid and full of anger, runs after his friend’s murderers and with his help the police catch the murderers. When the journalist asks if these men are the ones threatening them he replies: “Ahí sí que no sé. No tengo idea de quiénes putas son” (27). The mystery is not reserved to enemies, as Pitbull himself admits to not even knowing if his friend’s real name is Juan Carlos. From Juan Carlos’ murder there are other murders that propel the brothers to go to “el norte.” Gang members are shot in their mother’s storefront, and she forces them to leave, first to the Salvadoran countryside, later to Tapachula in the Mexico-Guatemala border. The turning point in the brother’s story is their mother’s murder, an unresolved event that illustrates how violence works in Central America: appearing without a warning, and leaving without an explanation. If “the corpse is the message,” as Salvadoran author Horacio Castellanos Moya writes, the message remains illegible to the brothers and the rest of the family. Anonymous threats force them to leave, this time to the

²³ “You’ll never return?”
“No... Only if anything happens to my wife or daughter.”
“And then you’ll come back?”
“Just to kill them.”
“Just to kill who?”
“I don’t even know” (24).

United States. Bodies inexplicably accumulate in the narrative: Juan Carlos, the gang members, the mother.

The train might give form to these stories of murder, but it does not make them more legible. The conversations with each of the brothers occur in private, and always next to the train tracks. It is next to the tracks that Auner can admit to Martínez that he flees because he is afraid for his life: “ahora a la par de las vías del tren con un cigarro en los labios, que él acepta que su verbo es huir, no migrar (23).²⁴ Later, Martínez has a private conversation with Pitbull, which also takes place near the tracks: “Lo escondo entre los matorrales de las vías, para que se sienta tranquilo y recuerde” (27).²⁵ The man, described as the toughest of the brothers, opens up about his friend’s murder and his life in Tapachula: “Continúa respondiendo preguntas echado en los rieles, con una roca como almohada y la vista fija en el cielo. Parece paciente de psicoanalista”(28).²⁶ This is an occurrence throughout the entire collection of chronicles, in candid interviews and retellings of horrific violence, the train tracks are always there, near Martínez and his interviewee. This comparison underscores what Arturo Arias calls “the trauma of the crossing,” or how Central American migration is marked by the experience of war. Importantly, it also recalls the often-noted relationship between detection and psychoanalysis, the journalist prying into his subjects’ inner lives and making them speak. The train tracks give a material support to the “no sé” that permeates the brothers’ existence. In these moments the train

²⁴ “with the train tracks next to us and a cigarette resting between his lips [...] he admits that the better word to describe his journey is not migration, but escape” (24).

²⁵ Translation erases the “vías” (tracks): “Silently we slipped out of the commotion of Father Solalindes’ migrant shelter and sat down among towering shrubs. I wanted a shielded place, so he’d feel safe enough to remember” (29).

²⁶ He takes a drag of his cigarette, then sinks back, lying down beside the rails and propping his head on a rock. He looks up at the sky and takes another drag. His posture makes him look like he could be a patient talking to a shrink” (30).

becomes linked to trauma, recalling Schivelbusch's exploration of how train accidents spurred the development of psychoanalytic definitions of modern shock and trauma.

Maras and Migrants

As seen in both the film and the chronicles, many networks intersect in the migrant trail. In the case of the film, two networks are central to its narrative structure: the community of migrants and the Mara Salvatrucha, the gang Willy belongs to. These two networks are interconnected and come together in Sayra and Willy's encounter and subsequent journey. The origins of Mara Salvatrucha are traced back to Los Angeles in the 1980s, the result of the displacement and exclusion of Central American youth during the civil wars that afflicted the region. Due to deportations back to their home countries, the gang acquired a strong presence in Central America and Mexico. This presence only grew with the recent aggressive, militarized response of "Mano Dura" policies that Central American countries adopted to combat the organization. The film does not present this historical referent, a point that I will return to later, but presents the gang's transnationality in more subtle ways. In the establishing sequence of Willy's life in Tapachula that I mentioned above, the transnational dimension of the gang is expressed through the physical circulation of its members. In the first few minutes of the film, Willy is shown getting on a bus, collecting taxes from the bus driver, getting off the bus, and then taking a bicycle to collect money from a storefront. Later, he will move to his post at the train yard, becoming linked in the entire sequence to the circulation of people and money.

The film provides insight into how the maras work through the initiation of Willy's protégé, Benito. We see, for example, how Benito is given a beating by his future gang members for thirteen seconds, one of the steps into his admittance into the mara. Once Benito

(subsequently renamed “Smiley” by the gang leader, Lil’ Mago) is accepted into the gang, he enters “el Destroyer” the communal house of the mara. This particular scene doubles as the audience’s introduction into the underworld of the gangs. In a tracking shot, Willy guides his protégé through the maze-like interior of the house, introducing him to other members and explaining their roles. They greet two men and Willy explains that “they come and go handling business between clicas. They’re Salvadorans.” The greetings and introductions serve to also give knowledge to the audience about how the network of the mara works, in particular its language and rituals. In another moment, a member stops them and grabs Smiley’s face and asks if he has murdered a “chavala,” alluding to the tear gang members tattoo on their face once they murder a member of the rival gang. The term “chavala” will become clear soon after, when Lil’ Mago takes Willy and Smiley to see a “chavala,” from the rival Mara 18, as his tattoos shown by Lil Mago to the others attest, whom they had found riding the train. In these scenes of communal living, the mara’s adoption of the language of care of the family becomes clear. After Smiley assists Willy in killing the migrant “chavala,” Lil’ Mago comforts him, welcoming him to a new family: “ahora perteneces a una familia con miles de hermanos, donde quiera que vaya siempre habrá alguien que se encargue de usted.” Lil’ Mago redefines the traditional family network, in the globalized world, the gang survives as traditional family structures are weakened. Evidence of this is Sayra’s broken family; the family never explains what happened to her mother, but we know that her father has a new wife and daughters in New Jersey.²⁷

Sonja Wolf offers a nuanced take on the Mara Salvatrucha’s perceived transnational threat and connections to organized crime. Rather than a real material network, Wolf argues that the gang works on a logic of “symbolic and normative affiliation” that makes it harder to

²⁷ Karen Ritzenhoff considers the film as a narrative of coming of age in a global setting, where lineage and family are replaced with other forms of transnational alliance.

distinguish between the violence perpetrated by the group and the activities of individual members (94). Wolf also notes governments' overestimation of the gang's role in drug trafficking; she argues that they remain middlemen to organized crime as dealers or drug-smugglers across borders (88). The gang activity in the film remains localized; the criminal activity portrayed remains confined to the trains, as gang members are seen robbing and attacking migrants on the train. However, once Lil' Mago is murdered, gang members mention contacts in Los Angeles.

The maras throughout the film remain fascinating to the camera. Lil' Mago, for example, has the mara's initials tattooed across his face, which the camera shows in close-ups.²⁸ Yet, this primer remains confined to the present, and many questions about the gang's history and its transnational dimension are not explored. In one review articles on the film, Joseph Nevins notes that the film "presents no context to help the viewer understand who the gang members are, and how and why they—and the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) itself—came to be." Indeed, there are many matters left untouched: Why do the gang members contain members of many nationalities? (To a Spanish speaker, the variety of Spanish spoken by the members is evident.) Why do they mention connections in Los Angeles? Why do the members, as Willy notes, come and go? Why do they seem to speak English? The historical referent behind the mara's existence is never explained; and instead the maras become naturally linked to transnational circulation and criminality. Through these artifacts of mobility (the train, the bus, their "coming and going," to repeat Willy's words again) the film conveys the position of the

Above and beyond questions of identity, what we have before us here is the emergence of the migrant, who, moving swiftly between the figures of the emigrant and the immigrant

²⁸ Given the extreme punitive measures on youth belonging or thought to belong to maras, this practice is not as common today. "De los maras lo que en verdad más se sabe o conoce, la esencia de su registro en la sociedad, es su aspecto," writes Carlos Monsiváis.

builds a life project of translocal nomadism. In its current phase, the novelty that the mara performs is its ability to carry the territory with it and to settle itself with relative stability in the localities where it lands (350).

The gang's transnationality intersects with other migratory flows. The repressive neoliberal policies of *Mano Dura* are symptomatic of the larger climate of fear and criminality in present-day Central America. When the film briefly takes us to Honduras, to Sayra's house, she is portrayed against a landscape of shantytowns and misery. "There's nothing here for you, Sayra. Nothing," her uncle says, as he tries to convince her to go on the trip. The bond between Sayra and Willy can be read as the youths' recognition of each other in their nomadism, in their shared past of migrations and expulsions. Through details in conversations with Sayra and Marta Marlen, Willy makes it known that he has been in the United States. In a heartfelt conversation with Sayra, Willy shows her the marks in his body. Pointing to a scar in his stomach, he talks about a time when he was taking migrants to the border for his "clica" and police shot him. When he mentions Marta Marlen's death, Sayra appeals to a shared history: "Lo dos sabemos lo que es una pérdida," she says. Willy just replies: "Yo lo único que sé es que toda mi vida ha sido una mierda y que se me hace que ahora hice un envergue en tu vida también." Later the camera shows him peeling off the tear tattoo on his face (the mark that, as I've mentioned, indicates a murder).

In Martínez the collapse of these two subject positions, migrant and gang member, is captured in another story told in the chronicle "En el camino." There he recounts the story of Saúl, a nineteen year old from Guatemala whom he meets on the train. Saúl has lived in Los Angeles since the age of four and was a member of the MS-18 (18th Street) gang. Saúl is deported and goes back to Guatemala, a country he does not know, managing to find only the

address of his father. He ventures into the neighborhood looking for the house, only to be attacked by members of the rival Mara Salvatrucha, who control their neighborhood. He is saved by yelling his father's name, who turns out to be a leader of the gang, and who spares his son's life on the condition of his "destierro" (banishment, exile). "No vamos a matar a este culero, pero le vamos a aplicar el destierro" says Saúl's father. "Y si te vuelvo a ver hijueputa, créeme que yo mismo te voy a matar," he adds (40)²⁹. When Martínez meets him he is on his fifth attempt to cross the border.

Neoliberal Speed

If the train works as "plot engine," then speed would be an integral part of how the narratives are not only advanced, but also structured. Both Martínez and Fukunaga (in the audio commentary for the film), mention the idea of speed and representation as a paradox in the depiction of the migrant's journey. If the train, as Schivelbusch explains, entails the "annihilation of time and space" through speed, the film and the chronicles stage a different logic by slowing down the machines and focusing on the space they traverse (41). This "annihilation of time and space," David Harvey reminds us, is key to capital accumulation and is a process that hinges on speed, the velocity of production and consumption (100). The texts then grapple with what Harvey calls the "time-space compression" produced by capital accumulation, the problem of a neoliberal temporal logic of speeding up and covering space.

Speed is crucial to the deciphering of the Beast. For example, when migrants teach Martínez how to climb aboard the train, they stress that the train has to be "felt" to gauge how fast the machine is going (67). Multiple velocities are at work in the chronicles, as the speed of

²⁹ "We're not going to kill this punk," Guerrero announced in front of Saúl and a few of his gang members. "We're just going to give him the boot. And then he turned to Saúl. "If I ever see you in this neighborhood again, you better believe me, I'm going to kill you myself" (43).

capital (in the form of companies moving commodities in the trains) intersects with the speed of organized crime colliding with and determining the migrant's movement. In the chronicle "Los secuestros que no importan," Martínez describes a train ride in Tenosique, Tabasco, in which the drama of the systematic kidnapping of the migrants on the train by organized crime plays out. The rationale behind this lies in the human capital that migrants represent; their own lack of worth and expendability makes them valuable to organized crime. Kidnapping a group of migrants who will pay up to fifteen hundred dollars each for release is a better alternative to a high profile kidnapping which will bring attention (104). In this business, the Zetas merge their own functioning in the migration market with that of the machine, that is, with the licit economy. The kidnapped migrants' ransom comes through with companies such as Western Union, the same wire service that migrants use to send remittances back to their home countries. Martínez mentions Western Union, linking it explicitly with criminal networks; the complicity of a seemingly legitimate financial services company is not pursued, however. Instead, the narrative centers on the illicit market created around the train.

The chronicle begins with Zetas members collecting taxes to get on the train and paying the train conductor a share of the business. The following three pages detail a harrowing train ride in which the Zetas murder and kidnap on the train. The movements of the criminals are all punctuated with the movement of the train: when the machine stops, members of the Zetas get on the train. The narrative has a particular momentum created by the intermittent nature of danger. In the story, once the train gets moving, the Zetas assault and kidnap two women. A shootout ensues between smugglers and bandits, the former trying to rescue the women. There are deaths, until the Zetas leave the train. They come back later, this time in cars:

Los asaltantes se movían rápido. Lograban adelantar en vehículos a un tren que va a unos 70 kilómetros por hora en los tramos deshabitados. Pero la marcha del ferrocarril no ayudó. Los motores se pararon en una zona conocida como La Aceitera, media hora después del segundo tiroteo. La oscuridad de la noche se interrumpía por la luz amarilla de los faroles del pueblo. La locomotora juntaba la nueva carga y el sonido de herrumbre completaba el ambiente. Todos los migrantes estaban de pie, volteando la cabeza, mirando hacia todas partes (103).³⁰

This short passage of the story presents a race of sorts between organized crime and the machine. Echoes of Fukunaga's anecdote on the train are also present in the sensorial appeal of the narrative; the darkness, and the metal sounds deliver the affective charge of the chase, of the fear. I will expand later on the concealment of the legitimate side of business that goes on the migrant route, but in this passage, the activity of the railroad is briefly mentioned (they're loading the wagons), but it remains secondary to the scene, which remains focused on the criminals' activities.

Speed also envelops the journalist's experience of the migrant's journey: "Allá arriba solo hay marginación y velocidad. Y todos somos iguales, porque el suelo está al mismo palmo de nuestros pies y porque las sacudidas sacuden a todos por igual" (39). Speed equalizes the journalists and the migrants, and it is precisely in the whirling sensation, the jolts—the "sacudidas"—that narrative emerges, "mientras todo se contonea, es el mayor momento para conversar con un migrante. Te reconoce como igual" (69).³¹ Speaking becomes a buffer of sorts

³⁰ "They moved quickly, speeding ahead of the train that, a half hour after the second shooting, stopped in an area known as La Aceitera. The dark of night was interrupted by the glow of town lights. The train picked up its new cargo. The sound of steel piercing into the windy night. All the migrants stood, looking every which way" (109).

³¹ "The best place to chat with a migrant is on top of the hurtling train. You're considered an equal there" (73).

that keeps the threat of death at bay: “Conversar es la mejor forma de no dormirse y no convertirse en un personaje más de las anécdotas del camino que hablan de mutilados tirados en campos oscuros y solitarios a la espera de auxilio mientras se desangran de los muñones” (69).³² Through narratives that range from the horrific conditions in the Central American homelands of the migrants to the many stories of those who have braved their journey multiple times, the time-space of capital accumulation is disrupted to give way to the migrants’ voices, to their testimony.

In her reading of the film, Deborah Shaw considers the film’s paratexts such as the DVD audio commentary feature to argue that the film adheres to a Hollywood “rhythm” that provides emotion, rather than the arduous journey (236). Shaw considers Fukunaga’s insistence on the film’s pacing as an indication of the director’s yielding to an American aesthetics. Yet, Fukunaga’s commentary reveals a tension between the speed of the narrative and the space it should cover. “Pacing was always an issue,” he remarks, noting the challenges of plot advancement while keeping the realism of the journey. “We just skipped about eighteen hours of crossing Chiapas which is incredibly difficult and tiring, but how do you convey that in a film while telling the story and moving forward?” he asks. It’s important to highlight how the film depicts numerous scenes of migrants waiting for the train, and that the train begins to move only after forty minutes of the film’s beginning. And even then, the first train that Sayra and her family get on, presented in all its terrifying magnitude, ends up not leaving due to a fatal derailment further along the line.

In these stoppages and decelerations, the logic of capital is evinced: the death of migrants and loading merchandise. Speed was also one of the solutions proposed by the Mexican government in conjunction with private companies operating the rail lines to the problem of

³² “Talking is the best way to stay awake, to keep yourself from becoming another one of the legends, another victim mutilated in the darkness, bleeding to death by the side of the tracks” (74).

migration. In 2014, under pressure from the United States, the government announced a hefty investment designed to improve the infrastructure of the railways, increasing the trains' speed so as to deter the migrants from getting on it. This measure is, of course, tied to economic profit through the strengthening of transportation efficiency (Dominguez Villegas). If as Jameson notes, conspiracy thrillers most forcefully encapsulate cognitive mapping, is important to highlight how the thriller always works by moving forward—as opposed to detective fiction—this logic then becomes disrupted in these narratives as a way to negotiate the fault lines of neoliberal processes.

Cognitive Mapping Post-NAFTA Trails

The tension between the journey and its representation underscores a problem far more difficult than whether or not to follow a Hollywood aesthetic. The problem of speed, of covering space in time, also bears on the process of cognitive mapping. The texts work through a shifting landscape of crime, from urban centers to the small towns traversed by migrants. The defining feature of the criminality along the migrant journey is its constant transformation. As Martínez explains at each stage of the trip, the murderer changes: “En una los asesinos son unos hombres, en otras una organización de hombres, en otra un río, un muro, un desierto, un Estado haragán y displiciente en todas” (17).³³ How is this violence to be represented?

The film opens with a scene of disorientation. After opening credits appear, we see a lush fall landscape of bright green and orange colors. The camera moves forward into this landscape. The camera then cuts to Willy, and with the same motion, moves toward him. There is one last cut to the landscape again, and then a cut where the spectator sees that the landscape is a print, a

³³ “In one the killers are men, in another, an organization of men, in another, a river, a wall, a desert, a lazy and apathetic State in all of them.”

curtain hanging on Willy's house that he has been contemplating. The motion of the camera conveys a sense of unsteadiness, the zooming reminiscent of the "dolly zoom effect," or the "Vertigo effect" due to Hitchcock's creation of the technique in his 1958 film. The dizzying sensation produced by this opening sequence suggests the shaky terrain that the characters will navigate through on their journey to the United States. The contrast between the image of nature, with the self-conscious movement of the camera also establishes the dichotomy that will be staged again and again in the film between nature and technology (in the figure of the train).

But the film tempers the disorientation through other techniques. The film relies on the use of intertitles to mark geographic locations, providing very specific information, for example: Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico. When it follows Sayra and her family crossing the Guatemala-Mexico border, the camera shows the porous boundary as it moves over the Suchiate River, the dividing line, as intertitles mark "Mexico" and then, as the camera moves to show us the other side, "Guatemala." Within the film, attention is also given to maps and road signage. Sayra's father carries a map, which he shows her throughout the trip, and that allows both characters and audience a geographical grounding, and direction. The map is minimally marked, but it does indicate the network of the railroad in dotted lines. The focus of it remains on Mexico and its means of transportation. Central America and the United States are included, but barely, not in their totality. When Sayra first sees it, she asks where New Jersey is located on the map, to which her father answers that it's not on the map, as his finger traces the route until it has to go beyond the paper. In the director's audio commentary for the film, producer Amy Kaufman explains how the map is intended for the American audience, "just to make sure that we all know the geography of Mexico." The second time the map appears she exclaims: "bring the map again just so all the Americans know where they're going." Fukunaga adds, "geography is always a

challenge.” This map, however, could also extend to a global Latin American audience who can imagine the contours of the geographic landscape of the migrant, for whom the migrant route is also uncharted.

The collection of chronicles also contains two important cartographic objects. In the last chronicle, “Morir en el Río Bravo,” Martínez makes a distinction between knowing and not knowing the border, between Roberto and Julio César, two migrants with different approaches to crossing the river. Roberto is inexperienced and almost drowns in his attempt to cross the river. “Yo no tenía ningún plan,” he admits, explaining that he’s tired of waiting in the shelter and he just threw himself into the river with a group of other migrants. While understandable, Roberto’s plan of “rezar y nadar” (praying and swimming) is ill advised and obviously leads to failure (261). Martínez counterposes Roberto’s strategy to that of Julio César, another migrant, but a much more methodic man who has learned to be patient when crossing. Roberto is on his third attempt, so he is being very cautious this time around. The first time he was caught and deported by the Border Patrol; on his second try, he was successful and was able to stay in the United States for a year (262). Part of Julio César’s strategy for success in his second attempt involved acquiring first-hand knowledge of the river by working with a man known as “El Veracruzano,” whose business is smuggling migrants across rivers in tires. Through work with “El Veracruzano,” Julio César saves money to pay a smuggler and finds out about another, less transited spot to cross. This is the spot where Julio César takes Martínez in his survey of the area. Traveling to the spot takes time: the men board a bus and walk for a considerable time through a militarized zone that the men quickly gathered is narco territory. Julio César knows how to navigate the environment and is thorough with instructions on how to proceed. His approach is

encompassed in a map he carries, a map he made of the route, through which he reveals his exhaustive knowledge of the journey.

The chronicles also come with a map. This map details the rail lines taken to the north by migrants, as well as the cities and towns through which they pass. It takes up two pages of the book and is similar to the one in the film covering mostly only Mexico, and most importantly, the train route of the Beast. Central America and the United States also figure, albeit barely, and constitute the negative space of the image covered up in white (in the case of the film) and black (in the case of the book of chronicles). Ostensibly, a map of the route to the United States, the maps also doubles as a chart of capital; these are the “NAFTA railways” that work to move commodities and migrants to the north. What strikes me about all these cartographic objects is how much they differ from the traditional iconography of “cognitive mapping” films. Unlike the cell phones and surveillance technology that I explored in the first chapter, the maps in these texts are anachronistic. They are, nonetheless, representations of the flows and connections that shape global markets today.

These flows are tragically presented in the migrants’ move to integrate to the labor market in the United States, in their dramatic location *on top* of the train. But what is inside the wagons? And what story does this “inside” tell about interconnectivity in the NAFTA trails? Joseph Nevins’ critique of the film focused on the absence of its historical referents in regards to the mara and the United States militarization of the border. In her reading of the film’s paratexts, Shaw considers the film’s website, which contains a slideshow presentation titled “*Sin Nombre*’s Terrifying Political Reality,” with information about the historical conditions behind Central American migration to the United States. To Shaw, these paratexts articulate a political message absent from the film (237). But an element unacknowledged by both Nevins and Shaw is the

film's lack of representation of private companies' involvement in the migrant route. The aforementioned presentation contains a slide with very brief information about the train, mentioning a company, but foregoes any specification of the products transported by the train. In their remarkable reassessment of Jameson's cognitive mapping theory today, Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle examine "network films" as a twenty-first century representations of commodity chains. Toscano and Kinkle note that despite their investment in the human drama, sensational connections and didactic impulse, these films, such as *Syriana* and *Blood Diamond* attempt to map the movements of a commodity across the globe. This risk for them is the narrative's slippage into a docile ethics of consumption. Similar to this genre, they delineate what they term "container lit" as another type of commodity chain narrative. Drawing from widely popular narratives such as Roberto Saviano's *Gomorrah* and season two of *The Wire*, they read the container in these texts as a "narrative emblem and device, as well as an allegory of sorts for the condition of disorientation, and lacking knowledge" (197). In these texts, Toscano and Kinkle note how "networks of crime and violence" serve to open an investigation of capital. In this way, the dead Chinese workers found in a container in Naples in Saviano's text or the Eastern European women in the containers in Baltimore in *The Wire* are springboards through which the flows of capital of capital are glimpsed. In this way they propose a "poetics of containerisation," marked by a certain fixation on the "box" as refractory to feeling and cognition, but also as the possible source, when cracked open, of an insight into the freight of bodily suffering that the seamlessness of circulation renders invisible. But there is also a sense that the tale of secrecy, mystery, and revelation pales in front of the narratively refractory function of the box (whatever its contexts, mainly unexceptional) as the atomic support of

a globe-spanning system, one whose consequences are much more momentous than any single intrigue, and for which the bodies in a can are but a strained allegory (200).

They ultimately note an “impasse” in these narratives in their alternation of opacity (the box), revelation (the bodies), and then an opacity again about economic process and the world system (201). In the cultural products that I explore in this chapter, mapping the post-NAFTA railways works differently. As I’ve mentioned before, one of the reasons that migrants ride on top of the trains is that the cars are full with merchandise. What Toscano and Kinkle refer to as the “bodily suffering” contained in the box, is on display, hypervisible. In this way, the commodity of labor power becomes visible, but the ones inside the “box” are not. The absence of any type of information or representation of “licit” economies stands in stark contrast with the film and the chronicles’ spectacular presentation of illicit economies. In the chronicles, the encroachment of organized crime on the migration market is rendered less opaque through candid interviews and the “open secrets” of organized criminality that circulate in the towns along the migrant route. For example, when Martínez gets information about Los Zetas and their operations, he gets the name of a man in the north — the shadowy figure known only as “El Abuelo”—— linked to drug trafficking and whom the smugglers in the southeast of Mexico have to pay in order to move their migrants up north. In the same way, the film confines its investigation of the migrant route to the criminal activities of the maras. While the workings and organizational structure of the maras and Los Zetas are rendered clear throughout, the companies that operate the lines are shrouded in mystery. In the chronicle, “La Bestia,” after Martínez narrates the dangers faced by the migrants aboard the train, he considers the role of the private companies who operate the lines. He explains how in some places along the route, the companies’ private guards prevent migrants from boarding the train while it is stopped, forcing them to do it while it is in motion,

and making it potentially fatal. “¿Por qué, si se sabe que de todas formas subirán, obligarlos a abordar en movimiento?” he asks (68). The seven private companies he reaches do not want to talk to him, especially when he states his interest in discussing migrants’ use of the trains (68). At one point in the text, the train stops in a distribution center for the cement company Cruz Azul. This is the only instance in the book when a commodity and a company linked to the railway system are named, but this soon becomes irrelevant. As I have shown in a previous section, the complicity of the companies with organized crime is explored in the chronicles, but never fully addressed. Martínez does not even provide the names of the companies or any of their distinguishing features (Who controls them? What do they carry?).

In the same way, the train in the film remains closed off from its corporate context. The film never acknowledges the other licit transportation along the railways; it never shows what the trains carry or who conducts them. From this portrayal, the train appears almost supernatural or otherworldly, without any human in command. Beneath this, however, lies a perverse neoliberal reality: the train exists not only to serve the market of commodities, but also to “deliver” the migrants into the American labor market. In the summer of 2014, when the train garnered more attention due to what was called a “migration humanitarian crisis,” television channel Univision ran an investigative report on La Bestia’s owners, trying to trace the money to a varied group, from American congressmen to Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim (Reyes).

The film ends with Willy and Sayra getting to the banks of the Río Bravo. While a rafter takes Sayra to the other side of the river, Willy is ambushed by Smiley. “La mara por vida, homie,” declares Smiley before shooting. Other members join in as Sayra watches Willy’s body be struck multiple times. The film closes with Sayra making it to the other side. As Sayra arrives in the United States, we see images of her uncle undertaking the journey again, we see him in the

same crossing between Guatemala and Mexico. We also see Smiley being tattooed with Mara Salvatrucha's initials on the inside of his mouth, surrounded by the gang. The camera then shows us Sayra, who is first framed in a close-up as she walks along a border fence; a police car passes by and jolts her out of her uneasiness. The camera pans out to reveal Sayra walking in a shopping mall parking lot, her figure gradually becoming smaller. Similar to the Brazilian films that I discussed in the previous chapter, *Sin Nombre* ends in a landscape of an open, seemingly endless vastness, in this case of asphalt and consumerism. In the shopping mall, the camera shows a Sam's Club. The film closes with Sayra in a pay phone in a parking lot calling her father's wife. That Sayra ends up in a shopping mall parking lot gestures to her future incorporation in the undocumented labor force in the United States. As Yajaira Padilla notes in her reading of the film, Sayra's journey also means her possible incorporation into a system of exploitation (162).

In this chapter I focused on how the train, a technology developed and enabled by the intervention of foreign capital in nineteenth century Latin America, has become a symbol for the interconnectivity of global, post-NAFTA world system. In the narratives explored in this chapter, "The Beast" concretizes neoliberal interconnectivity, showing the different networks that have been created or exacerbated by the incorporation of Latin America into a global system of labor and exploitation, such as migration and organized crime. These narratives of crime are told in a melodramatic and thrilling manner, heightening the pathos of the stories of suffering they tell, but also precluding a vision of the more "legitimate" side of capitalism, which is, in the end, the force that moves the train, and these stories, forward.

Chapter Three

Detecting Finance in El Salvador and Colombia

“...la economía es una manipulación invisible y múltiple que anuda y ata los individuos y los grupos y los conjuntos a los movimientos del dinero. Las poblaciones están tramadas en esos desplazamientos demenciales del capital.”

Ricardo Piglia, *Teoría del Complot*³⁴

In this chapter I explore how the Latin American detective novel imagines the financial world and its crimes. Can detective fiction untangle the connections between the “legitimate” and the illegitimate dimension of global capitalist networks? I address these questions through an analysis of *La diabla en el espejo* (2000) by Honduran-Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya and *Hilo de sangre azul* (2009) by Colombian writer Patricia Lara. Both texts are crime narratives that displace the detection processes from the murders they ostensibly investigate onto investigations of recent economic processes in the novel’s respective regions. I argue that the Latin American detective novel, in its relational epistemology, in its incessant connective endeavor, grapples with the complexity of global finance networks, attempting to chart what Piglia calls the “desplazamientos demenciales” of capital.³⁵

³⁴ “The economy is an invisible and multiple manipulation that ties individuals and groups to the movements of money. Populations are plotted in those maddening shifts of capital.”

³⁵ . As the epigraph to the chapter makes evident, Piglia’s thinking about money remains instrumental in my thinking about its intersection with crime and conspiracy. From his writings on Roberto Arlt to his approach to the crime genre as a capitalist product, Piglia has always called attention to the synergy between money and narrative. It should be noted that Piglia tackles some of the questions that I explore in this chapter in his 2009 crime novel *Blanco nocturno*, a novel also about a landowning family in the pampas confronting the forces of finance capital. However, Piglia presents economic processes as unassimilable within the narrative universe — the mention of economic terms and events are confined to the novel’s footnotes. As Juan Caballero notes in his analysis, the novel turns around the ungraspable and

Both *La diabla* and *Hilo* are focused on female detective figures who investigate a murder tied to the financial world, and who become increasingly suspicious of how their social world operates as their investigations progress. In the case of *La diabla en el espejo*, a paranoid upper-class woman frantically weaves conspiracies as to who might have murdered her best friend. In *Hilo de sangre azul*, the protagonist is a journalist, an “in the know” profession that affords her an assured authorial voice as she probes into the murder of her financier neighbor, but, as I will show, is nonetheless trapped in the circuit of capital. In their frantic desires to uncover murders, both women wrestle with the interconnectivity of finance, the way it links people across social spheres, and most importantly, its ties to illicit activities. The choice of these specific Latin American contexts is not incidental. The histories of armed conflict and civil warfare in El Salvador and Colombia coupled with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies have forged a distinct climate of mistrust and insecurity. In El Salvador, for instance, a twelve-year civil war (1980-1992) between the state and leftist insurgents left the country marked by rampant insecurity, financial and otherwise. Likewise, the history of violence in Colombia originates from actors both inside and outside the state. From political fighting during the period known as “La Violencia” (1946-1957) to the ongoing conflict between the state, the guerrillas and paramilitary forces created an epistemology grounded in paranoia. This paranoia becomes particularly salient as a result of the precipitous expansion of the global drug economy into these countries. Scholars of the neoliberal context in these countries and its social and political dimensions have paid critical attention to the way duping and suspicion are deployed as

hidden quality of economic processes and in particular, the role of financialization in Argentine economic history (122). Patrick Dové also calls attention to the way Piglia uses the family “as a privileged site for thinking about narrative” (29). While *Blanco nocturno* resonates with my reading of the other novels, I choose to leave it out of this analysis due to crucial differences between Argentina and the other Latin American contexts that I explore in this chapter.

epistemological tools. Anthropologist Ellen Moodie notes: “Throughout the 1990s Salvadorans were always doubting the identities of others, not wanting to be the *maje* (the duped fool)” (106).³⁶ In another Central American context worth highlighting, Diane Nelson focuses on the question of duping and its performance in post civil war Guatemala, and the ways in which it has been retrospectively used to make sense of the war (what she terms “reckoning” with the aftermath of war). She draws attention to the usage of the word “*engaño*” and tales about deceit to explain the horrors war:

When postwar Guatemalans explain the war as a result of *engaño* (being deluded, beguiled, or duped), sometimes it is other people who were fooled — by the army, the government, the guerrilla, the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or by the person telling the story. Others attribute their survival to the ability to dupe others, to live with two-faces. But often people explained their own actions as being based on *engaño*, a result less of their own will than of someone else’s will working on them (11).

In the case of Colombia, Michael Taussig has pointed to how the ravages of violence from actors inside and outside the state have turned paranoia into what he describes as a “social practice” where the boundaries between guerrilla, paramilitaries, and the state become increasingly impossible to delineate (21). The distrust and fear has a specific economic dimension. Writing about the postwar climate of uncertainty, Moodie posits the role of neoliberal economic policies: “money seemed to spring from invisible sources, from remittances sent by absent migrants’ labor elsewhere, from the investments of faceless foreign speculators, from

rumored narco-trafficking and endemic corruption” (4). In both El Salvador and Colombia, financial scandals have had unique traits from frauds in other regions.³⁷

Crime and Finance in El Salvador

I. Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *La diabla en el espejo* (2000) and the Central American Detective Novel

La diabla en el espejo begins with the murder of Olga María de Trabanino, an upper-class woman brutally shot in her living room in the presence of her two children. The novel is characterized by the frenzied monologue of Laura Rivera, Olga María’s best friend, who tries to make sense of her friend’s murder, attempting to piece together the possible motives, killers, and forces behind it. Laura’s interpretive and rhizomatic reverie unveils the anxieties and fears of the Salvadoran elites in a post civil war world, and although the perpetrator of the crime is caught, the identity of the “autor intelectual” of the crime is never determined. Because of the novel’s ultimate failure in unraveling the quagmire of Central American violence, the novel is described as an “interrupted” (Padilla 77), and “frustrated” (Kokotovic, 2006 24) mystery novel. Here I

³⁷ Both countries have recent scandals involving financial fraud, oligarchies, and narco-trafficking. In Colombia the case of David Murcia Guzmán, a young man whom in 2003 created the group DMG. Murcia Guzmán’s scheme involved prepaid debit cards and electronics stores. Although Lara claims she wrote the novel before the scandal of DMG broke out in 2008, several elements of the case are significant for understanding the workings of finance capital in the region. In her analysis of the DMG case and its connections to the Putumayo region, María Clemencia Ramírez explores the power of finance in a region dominated by the illicit drug economy and the murky lines between legality and illegality that crystallized in DMG’s scheme. Ramírez notes how by connecting sectors of the population traditionally excluded by banking, and criminalized by the state, Murcia was able to forge affective ties with his investors, referring to them as “family.” Through Michael Taussig’s concept of “public secret”, Ramírez argues that clients in DMG’s company had to disavow or pretend they didn’t know about the role of drug-trafficking in the high interest return. In the case of El Salvador, the collapse of FINSEPRO-INSEPRO in 1997 was the biggest financial fraud of the country, and showed the cracks in the oligarchic system (see González, Luis Armando).

argue that Laura's manic, paranoid investigation is the only epistemic avenue left in the neoliberal era, for it is precisely in the paranoid stoppages, intervals, and overflows of knowledge and information that the reader can glimpse a project of mapping capital flows in neoliberal El Salvador.

My argument is driven by a reconsideration of the novel's "failure" as a detective novel, and thus a brief outline of Central American detective fiction provides a framework for understanding the failure of the novel's detective.³⁸ *La diabla* is hailed by Misha Kokotovic as an example of what he terms "neoliberal noir," the subgenre that marks the emergence of the *novela negra* in Central America after the end of the civil wars in the nineties, at the moment of implementation of neoliberal policies in the region. Like other Latin American embodiments of the genre, the Central American strand of detective fiction possesses a "pervasive sense of corruption, decay, and disillusionment, in which the social order itself, and particularly the state, is the ultimate source of criminality, rather than of justice" ("Neoliberal Noir" 15). One of the crucial aspects of Central American crime fiction is its belatedness, its emergence precisely at the moment when the idea of narrative detection is waning in other parts of Latin America. As Glen S. Close argues, the detective figure in Latin American fiction has disappeared and given way to an all-pervasive climate of uncertainty and corruption of "criminal ascendancy" that the *novela negra* can only delineate, but neither escape nor to which it can find an alternative. Indeed, as Kokotovic notes, the detective in Central American crime fiction is either nonexistent or almost always fails ("Neoliberalismo y novela negra" 186). I read Laura's paranoia as part of a

³⁸ The idea of failure is important to Central American cultural production in the aftermath of the civil war. Beatriz Cortez describes postwar Central American fiction through what she calls "la estética del cinismo" — a cynic, unraveling of the failed utopic projects of the 1980s in the region. Particularly significant for my analysis is Cortez's focus on what she calls "lazo pasional con la ley y el sistema" in which narrative subjects demand recognition from others, even if it entails their own demise (229).

larger poetics of failure where non-fulfillment and defeat (the “interruptions” and “frustrations” pointed out by critics) are not the endpoint, but the very basis of an exploration into the social world under neoliberalism. Failure then is key; as Close writes, “when the detective position fails, however, we are afforded a more sobering glimpse of a contemporary social world in which capitalist and consumerist objectification and quotidian violence defy formulaic and ideological containment” (2006, 147). When critics note the “murkiness” and “opaqueness” of knowledge in the social world of the novel, consequently dismissing Laura’s detection as failure, they forego a potentially illuminating cartographic project of transnational capital. Furthermore, these critics’ insistence on subsuming Laura’s mental processes into a symbol for post civil war El Salvador provides an inadequate model for flows of capital in the neoliberal era. Laura’s mental processes should be considered both an affect and an effect of transnational economic transformations in El Salvador, processes that are fundamental to the political project of detective fiction in a global Latin America.

The novel is divided into nine short sections beginning with Olga María’s funeral and ending with Laura’s hospitalization. Although specific dates are never given, the novel is set not so far back in time from the end of the civil war in 1992. Laura addresses her monologue to an unnamed female listener, to whom she refers only as “niña” throughout. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Laura’s diatribe in fact has no listeners, that she is only talking to herself. Similar to the films I discussed in chapter one, paranoia is present through the auditory realm that works to overwhelm the reader in its conspiratorial frenzy. For example, the novel begins:

No es posible que una tragedia semejante haya sucedido, niña. Yo estuve con Olga María casi toda la mañana, en la boutique de Villas Españolas, mientras ella revisaba un pedido que acababa de llegar. Es increíble. No termino de creerlo; parece una pesadilla. No sé

por qué tardan tanto en prepararla: ya son las cinco y media y no sacan el cadáver. Es que el juez se tardó un mundo en llegar a reconocerla. Un desgraciado ese juez (11).³⁹

This technique continues for upwards of one hundred pages, during which, as Laura's investigation moves forward, she grows suspicious of everyone and everything around her. Laura's monologue then works as an overwrought and seemingly endless version of the traditional speech at the end of the classical detective story where the detective rigorously explains how he has arrived at the solution of the crime to an enthralled audience that includes the reader. Laura's monologue functions very much as the obverse. Instead of neutralizing the paranoia surrounding the crime by way of explanations and details that somehow were elided by the reader throughout the narrative, Laura's voice never subdues danger.⁴⁰ Yet the fact that Laura is the narrator of her story points also to her similarity with the hardboiled private detective, who, as Slavoj Žižek explains, as narrator of the story is symbolically attached to the investigation. We can read Laura through Žižek's elucidation of the hardboiled detective who becomes "mixed up in a course of events that he is unable to dominate" and "undergoes a kind of 'loss of reality,' who finds himself in a dreamlike world where it is never quite clear who is playing what game" (63). It is in precisely in the frustrations of that nightmarish, paranoid world in which the reader is placed that we can observe how detection pushes against neoliberal processes.

³⁹ "How could such a tragedy have happened, my dear? I just spent the whole morning with Olga María at her boutique at the Villas Españolas Mall, she had to check on a special order. It's unbelievable. I still can't believe it; it's like a nightmare. I don't know why they are taking so long to get her ready: it's already five thirty and they still haven't brought her out. It's that magistrate, he took his sweet time. He's a disgrace." (7) Translations of the novel from English edition translated by Katherine Silver.

⁴⁰ Kokotovic considers the "orality" of the narrative has been considered in terms of the genre of *testimonio*, as the cynical critique of Castellanos Moya to the Central American genre propelled by the revolutionary fights of the 1970s and 1980s that sought to give a voice to the indigenous and other subaltern groups in the region.

Affective Conditions, Nervous Economies

Laura first introduces her friend Olga María as a wholesome, devoted mother and wife, as well as a budding businesswoman— she owns a boutique— but is slowly revealed to be a hypersexualized woman. The melodramatic key allows the representation of duplicity, what lies beyond the image of the “perfect” marriage of Olga María and her entrepreneur husband.

Officially, Subcomisionado Handal and detective Villalta lead the murder investigation. On the side, Olga María’s sister in Miami hires a private detective, the ludicrously named Pepe Pindonga. Handal and Villalta open up the investigation proposing two avenues of inquiry: sex and money. These two elements have been the genre’s traditional ways of organizing investigation. In the novel, they are shown to be inadequate for a neoliberal context.

The police posit that either one of the couple’s employees did it, or that the case is a crime of passion. Handal delves further into Olga María’s extramarital relations, specifically, into her links to the presidential hopeful Gastón Berrenechea, known as El Yuca.

Olga María’s extramarital relationships branch out into a sexual cartography of power in El Salvador, tracing the flow of capital through a sexual grammar. These relationships are regulated through economic metaphor. For instance, with respect to her affair with the Spaniard business partner at her husband’s advertising company, Laura says that after Olga María shunned him, he felt “estafado” (defrauded). In regard to El Yuca, Olga María’s high school sweetheart, Laura justifies the relationship by explaining that both had an outstanding “debt” with each other (39). At the core of this connection between sex and money, lie an anxiety about unproductivity, and the disintegration of the family. It has been common lore from the nineteenth century on that the fourteen families in control of coffee production ruled El Salvador. This number has been considered an exaggeration, but only a slight one. The “catorce familias” loom large in *La diabla*

but in the opposite way: not as reproduction, but through their splitting open by global capital. Our narrator Laura comes from one of the landowning elite families, as does Olga María. Yet the key difference between both women is that Olga María's family has decided to embrace the neoliberal order, sell their lands and place their money in the financial realm. On the other hand, Laura's father remains stubbornly attached to his lands. Moreover, Laura has ended an unhappy marriage to Alberto, financial whiz to the elites in El Salvador, placing herself in an unproductive, temporal dislocation from the economic reality around her. Yet, it is ultimately because of this position that Laura can investigate the turmoil that unravels in the novel.

Is Laura then a failed symbol for the nation, the unproductive, manic female figure? Perhaps this is the case. However, when we consider the novel as detective fiction, another image of Laura emerges, one that is contingent less on her reliability, than on her ability to interpret what is occurring around her. That Laura is portrayed as unstable or dysfunctional does not distance her from the act of detection, however. Crucial to this understanding is how detective fiction always presents what Robert Rushing describes as "debilitated" or "defective" detectives. From Sherlock Holmes' cocaine addiction to Carrie's bipolar disorder in *Homeland*, detection implies aberration. To Rushing, these quirks and addictions are in fact what separate the detective from the social world, blocking "his satisfaction in ordinary life" (145). The detective's mental "instability" translates into a social weakness that constitutes precisely what keeps him or her in the business of detection, what enables separation from a "functional" normal life and allows a kind of insight not readily available to the ordinary social citizen. Laura's "defectiveness" stems from her structural position in the social world of El Salvador doubly marked by her divorce from the neoliberal "future" embodied by her financier husband, and her attachment to her landowning father. Here I build on Ericka Beckman's analysis of the

Colombian novel *De Sobremesa*, where the male psyche, “provides a metaphor for economic imbalance and crisis, creating a link between the unquiet masculine self and the wildly oscillatory fortunes of peripheral economies” (133). Laura’s instability, therefore, indexes a history of El Salvador, particularly the anxieties of the oligarchic minority. Her slandering comments about the communists and the rebellious indigenous population hide the historical fears of her class.⁴¹ Yet another force even more frightening is at work when the neoliberal economy enters the picture. In her ethnographic work on storytelling about crime in post-war El Salvador, Ellen Moodie describes the harrowing experience of what she calls “not-knowing” in the country. Moodie’s work charts the transition from the civil war, when violence was grasped through the political framework of the war: the factions, the politics, and the violence, to the post-war moment plagued by uncertainty and as such, a distressing experience. Moodie links this to an economic dimension where “money seemed to spring from invisible sources, from remittances sent by absent migrants’ labor elsewhere, from the investments of faceless foreign speculators, from rumored narco-trafficking and endemic corruption” (4). Laura registers that “not-knowing” that global capital entails. Furthermore, for her social class, the introduction of global capital means the possibility that it might come apart, the disarticulation of the oligarchic “catorce familias” in submission to the pressures of neoliberalism and its “transnationalization” (Velasquez Carillo). As Benedicte Bull explores in her work on business groups in Central America, when faced with foreign investment and globalization Salvadoran elites have had to diversify and transform the family structure into regional and transnational alliances. The family

⁴¹. In Laura’s comments one can clearly hear the echoes of the Communist revolt of 1932, and the subsequent elite response elite, who joined with the Army and killed around ten thousand indigenous peasants. In his recounting of the horrific events, Thomas P. Anderson notes the paranoia of the oligarchy crystallized in the figure of the “Indio comunista”: “Memories of the uprising account for the almost paranoiac fear of communism that has gripped the nation ever since” (204). Since that date, Anderson writes, the peasant majority has been regarded by the Ladinos with apprehension— fears of course that came back in the civil war in the 1980s, in the Mozote massacre in 1981, for example.

network has proven resilient in Central America, a region where family connections are still highly valuable and profitable. The powerful families have had to become distributors and suppliers for multinationals or investing in areas where local knowledge is required. The charts that accompany Bull's work then become not only documents of business groups, but a kind of neoliberal shorthand for the neoliberal era. If Jeffery M. Paige in his account on the role of coffee production in Central American politics provides extensive genealogies of coffee families, Bull's charts attests to those family transformations in a more globalized economy.

Detecting Financial Networks

If the family network provided a framework through which political, sexual, and economic alliances have been traditionally understood in El Salvador, what happens when finance enters the picture? How does one detect financial networks? As I mentioned before, the identity of Olga María's murderer is indeed discovered and the man is arrested. The importance of this man, a former soldier nicknamed "Robocop" after his resemblance to the Hollywood character, is for most of the narrative driven to the background, for it is clear from the outset that Olga María's death must be connected to something or someone important. Laura's theories hinge on the use of Olga María as a political tool to discredit El Yuca and ruin his political career. However, toward the end of the novel, Finapro, the financial group led by Alberto, collapses, and this event moves Laura's conspiratorial frenzy in other directions.

Laura finds out about the financial crisis when she calls Alberto to demand an explanation for his alleged affair with Olga María. Her ex-husband is in a frazzled state, embodying a fear that she regards as justifiable: "la pura paranoia; no es para menos" (144).⁴² Laura asks him about the effect the fall of Finapro will have on prominent families in El

⁴² "Total paranoia, but now with good reason" (148).

Salvador, most importantly, Olga María's, who sold their coffee lands and invested all the money in the financial group. Alberto attests that the damage is irreparable and widespread: "Y así siguió dándome nombres de gente conocida que ha perdido todos sus ahorros, y con el mismo tonito histérico que no le conocía, como si estuviera a punto de caer en un ataque de nervios," describes Laura. Alberto's nervous state mirrors that of his ex-wife, complicating the (self) reflective act alluded to in the title: who is the "diabla" in the mirror? Who is looking at whom? It is worth noting that from the beginning, Laura has detected a restlessness in the men around her. Earlier in the novel, as she recounts Olga María's affair with her husband's partner, she mentions how in their first meeting he fails to sexually perform on account of his anxiety at finally being with Olga María. Male sexual failure acquires a horrific dimension when Laura recounts both hers and Olga María's encounter with El Yuca. Laura describes meeting El Yuca to discuss his relationship with Olga María. She meets him in what she quickly realizes is a "secret office" heavily protected by guards. El Yuca is in a drug-addled state and aggressively attempts to seduce her. Laura has to subdue him, telling him to behave. As he calms down, he confesses the reason Olga María ended their relationship which he narrates to Laura in detail:

Me dijo que con Olga María había sido la misma historia, la misma ansiedad, el mismo diablo arruinándolo todo, porque él ya a esa altura no se controlaba y se atipujaba de coca cada quince minutos, y cuando Olga María le dijo lo mismo que yo, que se tranquilizara, que tuviera calma, él reaccionó de manera distinta, porque la había deseado durante tanto tiempo, porque la había estado esperando durante años como para detenerse. Y ella, te podés imaginar, niña, trató de zafarse de esa locura. Y El Yuca estúpido la forzó hasta la

cama. [...] Y después vino lo peor, lo que más atormentaba al Yuca el hecho de que con tanta droga adentro el asunto no se le parara (57).⁴³

In Laura's account, she places herself in control both in relation to her friend and to El Yuca himself, who is frantic, paranoid, and overpowered by his drug habit; unlike Olga María she has managed to appease El Yuca and avoid sexual violence. El Yuca, she explains, is possessed by a devil, in the throes of frantic consumption. The words she uses to describe his condition are highly significant, such as "anxiety" and "madness," and they allow her to divert the responsibility of what is clearly rape by presenting it as a result of something over which El Yuca has no control. Alberto's nervous condition is also translated into sexual dissatisfaction as he is presented as both boring and bored in bed. Quite significantly, his ex-wife deems Alberto's boredom as "contagious": "es como una peste, te contagia del aburrimiento en cuestión de segundos" (28).⁴⁴

Male sexual underperformance finds its counterpart in the fraudulent scheme driving Finapro. Yet these realms of excess have to be triangulated with Laura's ever-increasing conspiracy theories. Here Mark Fenster's assertion that "conspiracy is like capital" feels most prescient (111). If the women's hypersexuality can be easily juxtaposed with the financial overproduction of the men leading and investing in Finapro, men who lack the drive or fail in the

⁴³ "He told me that with Olga María the same thing has happened, the same despair, the same evil demon ruining everything, because by the time they'd met he was already out of his mind, he'd been snorting cocaine every fifteen minutes, and when Olga María said the same thing I did, that he should take it easy, slow down, he'd reacted differently, because he'd been wanting her for so long, because he'd been waiting for her for so many years, there was no way he could stop himself; and she, as you can imagine, she just tried to get away. Yuca, the idiot, forced her onto the bed. He said to me, right there, and pointed to the bedroom where he took her, practically by force, where he ripped off her clothes. [...] Then it got even worse, that's what tormented Yuca most of all: because of all the drugs he took, he couldn't even get it up." (56)

⁴⁴ "he's like the plague, he infects you with boredom in a matter of seconds." (26)

sexual act, the conspiratorial realm is also driven by the same logic of overproduction and dissatisfaction:

Conspiracy theory may not know what it ultimately wants, but it knows what it wants for the moment: to keep moving, to keep desiring. This movement, ideological and symptomatic though it may be, is productive, producing not only a circular, endless desire and a proliferation of conspiracy-related texts but also affective intensities and flows, self-generating and forever flying through space (110).

The important elements of paranoia as I explore it are the connections it establishes, what it asks us to link, and the social world it forces us to acknowledge. In the case of Laura's narrative voice, I am less concerned with her reliability or veracity than with her avenues of inquiry. From the beginning, she critiques male credibility: "¿Quién le puede creer a los hombres?" (25), she exclaims, a question that very crucially extends to the financial world.

Finapro's crash offers her a compelling rationalization for Olga María's death. The connection between both events allows her to formulate what she regards as crucial insights and hypotheses. This financial connection provokes a more profound effect than others she has considered. After the conversation with Alberto and relaying gossip and information to her dad, Laura suspects that financial fraud is the key to solving the murder, or "el hilo que permita desenredar la madeja" (147).⁴⁵ After telephone conversations with Alberto, her father, and Olga María's family, Laura ends up in a state of extreme agitation, and ultimately links her friend's murder to Finapro, positing that Olga María was murdered because she knew, through her sexual connection to Alberto, about the illicit dealings of Finapro. She describes her reaction to such a theory in highly evocative passages that zoom in on her epistemological operations:

⁴⁵ "But I have this intuition that Alberto's got something to do with our friend's death, and this might just be the connecting thread that will tie up all the loose ends." (152)

Después de colgar, después de la excitación que me produjo haber llegado a esa conclusión, me quedé helada. Fue como un luzazo. Hasta sentí gran miedo, como si ese descubrimiento, esa deducción, me pudiera costar la vida. No quise seguir pensando. (147)⁴⁶

Te quiero decir que cuando colgué, la cabeza me quedó dando vueltas a mil por hora. ¿Me entendés? La sensación de que estás a punto de descubrir algo importantísimo que las piezas comienzan a encajar. ¿Ves el trío? Alberto, Olga María y El Yuca. (148)⁴⁷

These instants of approximation of knowledge are registered in her body: the lights, the coldness, the fear. The effect of *connecting* Olga María's murder to financial fraud is a dizzying one; and it is on this process that I concentrate here. As mentioned before, this hypothesis produces an intense effect on Laura; one that she has not experienced when considering other possibilities surrounding Olga María's murder. What is it about financial fraud that gives her such a fright? I propose here that we can find the answer to this in drug trafficking and in this regard, it is equally important to consider what Laura does *not* connect. At several points in the narrative she dismisses what seem to be serious hypotheses about El Yuca, mentioning them only briefly in passing. For example, one identifies him as a narco: "personas que una creía amigas de El Yuca ahora se dedican a calumniarlo, a decir cosas espantosas, como que aquel ordenó asesinar a Olga María porque ésta amenazó con denunciarlo por narcotraficante" (104).⁴⁸ This link remains for the most part, a mystery, one that critics have not yet fully explored.

⁴⁶ "After I hung up, after all the excitement of having solved the case, I got paralyzed. It was like I saw a blinding light. I felt this terrible dread, as if my discovery, that I'd solved the case, could cost me my life. I didn't want to keep thinking." (152)

⁴⁷ "I'm telling you when I hung up, my head was racing a million miles a minute. You know what I mean? That sensation that you are on the verge of discovering something very important, the pieces are beginning to fall into place. Do you see the threesome? Alberto, Olga María, Yuca" (153).

⁴⁸ "people you thought were Yuca's friends are now out to slander him, they're saying awful things, like

Cocaine

Drugs and drug-addled states play a key role in the proliferating connections and conspiracies that Laura weaves around Olga María's body. As previously discussed, the "diabla" of the title seamlessly connects to Laura's fractured psyche manifesting itself through her maddening soliloquy. The devil image crystallizes the anxieties about control and possession that have afflicted Laura throughout her narrative: her fears of conspiracy about her friend's murder, the feeling that only she knows what is going on dovetailed with the fear that everyone is tricking her, or even worse that everyone from the police to the media are controlled by an even more powerful entity. The word "devil" appears within the text once in a telling scene that provides a different take on who the demonic being might be or represent. This is the moment that I've quoted above, where Laura encounters El Yuca reduced to frantic consumption and refers to the drug he's taking as a "diablo." That the masculine obverse of the devil appears in the text embodied as cocaine addiction opens up a new angle from which to interpret the story, one that complicates the reading of the financial networks at the center of the novel. Financial speculation has been popularly compared to a gambling addiction: the risks, the stakes, and the ups and downs. Both habits "involve an appeal to fortune, are often accompanied by delusional behavior and are dependent for success on the control of emotions" (Chancellor xii). In this way, financial speculation has also been considered an evil, taking over innocent lives (Chancellor 109). The fears about self-dispossession that Laura conveys are given shape to become the "diablo" that through the act of its consumption, in turn consumes El Yuca.

If "la diabla" is our narrator trapped in the funhouse of her social world as readings of the novel have proposed, what is to be made then of this gendering of evil? Of the *diablo* and the he ordered Olga María's murder because she was threatening to expose him as a drug trafficker." (106)

diabla that take over, denoting “bad” in such a seemingly simplistic way? If by the novel’s end, Laura’s insidious social world remains so “opaque” (Padilla, Kokotovic), why the mirror? Why the promise of reflection and correspondence? Cocaine, I believe, provides the answer to these questions, for is not the other “devil” in the mirror white powder on the smooth surface?

Cocaine remains elusive throughout the novel, with scarce references save for El Yuca’s addiction. Yet at the end, Laura discovers through rumors that Finapro’s collapse is linked to drug-trafficking. At the top of Finapro is Toñito Rathis, a man who remains outside of the picture for most of the novel. Of Rathis, Laura tells us little: he comes from one of the traditional fourteen families and because of this, he believes himself immune to the law. Laura, as she has done with other men in the novel, also ascribes madness to him: “ese tipo está loco, niña, quiere ser presidente de todo” (143).⁴⁹ Rathis’ madness is tied to a hunger for power and thus Finapro’s crash is initially assumed to be the result of his political ambitions and his many economic interests.

On the penultimate page of the novel, Pepe Pindonga visits Laura in the hospital, where she has been admitted after a paranoid breakdown. Pindonga tells her the circulating rumor that Finapro’s collapse is due to the settling of a debt between Rathis and the Cali cartel. Rathis has used the money to settle accounts after a cocaine shipment is seized in El Salvador. Suddenly, cocaine is at the top of the logic of consumption, financial fraud, and unproductive productivity that had driven the novel. The gossip with which the novel closes casts even more uncertainty over Laura’s hypotheses, but this final rumor is crucial precisely because it comes at a moment of exhaustion for Laura. She is locked in the hospital, overwhelmed by her conspiratorial mind, and in full knowledge that no one would believe or help her. Far from being a *deus ex machina*, narcotrafficking *feels* like closure to Laura, information that “termina de redondear el asunto”

⁴⁹ “another rumor that fills in the gaps” (189).

(181) and yet it cannot be explored as the novel comes to an end. Paranoia in the novel remains, to use Ngai's formulation, part of a "non-cathartic aesthetic," where anxiety is never released through a solution, through closure.

Paranoid Totality

A panoramic view that could provide closure is precluded by the encroachment of the social world of the novel. It is highly significant that Laura's paranoid breakdown is driven by her hallucination of Robocop whom she believes is following her. Laura's breakdown is propelled by the news that he has escaped from prison in blatant collaboration with the police. Robocop's escape underscores the weak criminal system, and yet again, indicates a larger power conspiring with the police in his favor. At the end of the novel, Pindonga's investigations reveal to Laura her own connections to the murderer. Laura's father had worked with an army general who at the end of the war created a private security company, a common solution for the demobilization of soldiers and the circulation of arms. Robocop had been employed in the company, and had even provided services to Laura's family. The interconnectedness of the social world causes Laura to posit that perhaps she might also be implicated in her friend's murder.

As I've mentioned above, the novel's failure to provide a complete texture of the social world— through a detective figure or other means— points a shift from the panoramic view of the crime novel into an paranoid form of enclosed social relations. Castellanos Moya solves this impasse by producing another novel that restores the panoramic impulse. *El arma en el hombre* is narrated by Robocop, and in it the former combatant turned assassin for hire expresses the shifts of the postwar era. This choice of narrative voice again marks the demise of the detective as a reparative figure that glosses over social worlds. Although I will not provide a complete

reading of the novel, several key moments are worth mentioning, particularly as they relate to the social world of the elites presented in *La Diabla*. In *El arma en el hombre* Robocop inserts himself into various criminal networks following his demobilization. One, for example, involves work for a group that steals and resells cars, at the head of which he is told is “una red ponderosa” (28). The other criminal groups Robocop aligns himself with are reconfigurations of the army; fellow army leaders and soldiers have formed their own private business of contraband, security, and death. Robocop finds himself stuck between two rival factions. One, led by his former battalion leader, Mayor Linares, and a group known only as “La corporación del Tío Pepe”. Mayor Linares hires Robocop and two others to murder Olga María. Robocop narrates the event in his terse voice: “disparé una vez en el pecho y luego le dí el tiro de gracia” (55).

Robocop’s apprehension as the murderer leads him into Guatemala, where he hides and is ultimately set up by Linares, who plans to murder him. Robocop escapes and falls into members of “La corporación del Tío Pepe” in Guatemala who explain to him the competition between their group and the “Banda del Tío Toño” — the criminal faction that Linares works for, and therefore, Robocop, as well. Of these two competing, shadowy figures, Robocop is told that “ambos eran poderosísimos,” “controlaban gobiernos, finanzas, y compraban jefes militares” (89). The Tío Toño is then revealed to be the father of Toñito Rathis, the character who is deemed responsible for the financial collapse in *La diabla*. Robocop is told of his arrest for the financial collapse, “un golpe mortal para “La Banda de Don Toño,” la desarticulación de su red de finanzas” (90). Now that Robocop is linked to Tío Pepe, he manages to see him and Laura who immediately recognizes him from the many reports on Olga María’s murder:

Una mujer hermosa venía por el patio; con cachucha y pantaloncitos blancos, traía una raqueta en la mano. Me miró con espanto y lanzó un grito: ¡Es Robocop!”, dijo. “¿Qué hace aquí ese criminal?!”. Estaba aterrorizada; yo sorprendido: nunca la había visto en mi vida [...]Con un ataque de nervios, siguió dando alaridos: “¡Es el asesino de Olga María! ¿Qué hace aquí, Yuca?” (109).

With this moment of recognition the insidious links between the elites and criminal groups are forcefully established: El Yuca, the presidential hopeful is revealed to be a powerful figure connected to illicit businesses. Laura’s nervousness in this moment provides a continuation of her persona in *La diabla* pointing to the truth.

Yet, this is also a “frustrated” text, for in its last pages it also introduces narcotrafficking in the form of the Mexican kingpin Chato Marín (an allusion to the real life Chapo Guzmán) who is seeking refuge from American authorities in the territory of his “socios centroamericanos” (113). The nervous condition that has marked the characters in *La diabla* comes back here as one of the guards of Chato Marín in a drug addled state confesses to Robocop the “madness” of his boss: “Y quizás el terror le mezcló todas las sustancias que se había metido en el cuerpo, porque empezó a temblar, y en una especie de lloriqueo farfullaba que el Chato Marín se había vuelto loco, ya estaba pirado, lo que necesitaba era que lo internaran en una clínica de desintoxicación” (115). The madness is Marín’s undoing as his own communication devices alerts the Americans of his location.⁵⁰ The novel ends with the Americans arrest Robocop. The Americans had

⁵⁰ Although beyond the scope of this chapter, the representation of communication devices and networks in the novel deserves more consideration, for it works as a material extension of, and support to, these criminal works. For example, Robocop’s connection to Tío Pepe, a man known as “el Viejo” remains linked to the outside via a sophisticated network: “El Viejo obtenía la información gracias a una sofisticada red de comunicaciones instalada en un sótano de la cabaña de la comandancia, donde permanecía encerrado buena parte del día operando la computadora, la central de transmisiones, el controlador de sensores y otros aparatos” (90). Likewise, Chato Marín’s imprudent use of his communication devices prove his undoing: “traía su propio equipo de comunicaciones, y esa misma tarde

trained him during the Central American civil wars in the 1980s and are able to identify him in their fingerprint database, and ask for his collaboration in the war against drugs. *El arma en el espejo* proves to be complementary to the mystery of *La diabla*, but also fails to provide answers to several questions. Narcotrafficking remains again a mystery cloaked in other secrets that go beyond the nation. With these novels, the enigma of finance is never resolved, but in its seriality, in the “taking turns” of paranoid narrative voices, some truth about the entanglement of legal and illegal capitalist networks can be glimpsed. In both novels, finance and narcotrafficking are linked, presented as mirrors of each other, felt as electric currents to “nervous system” (Taussig).

Patricia Lara’s *Hilo de sangre azul*

Published in 2009, *Hilo de sangre azul* deals with the murder of investment banker Pedro Ospina in a luxury apartment building in Bogotá. Although seemingly a suicide, when neighbor and journalist Sara Yunus discovers the body, she entertains the possibility of murder, and she begins an investigation that leads her to her neighbors, all of whom, doorkeeper included, have given their money to Ospina in hopes of financial gain. As in *La diabla en el espejo*, the detective is a well-off woman entrenched in the elite milieu of her city. If Laura is presented as mentally unstable, Sara is the opposite: an investigative journalist, self-described as passionate and very engaged with her line of work. Yet, much like Laura’s gossip and unofficial investigation, Sara’s profession allows her the pleasure of “being in the know” as she probes into the lives of her neighbors, all of whom feel moved inexplicably to tell her their innermost secrets. Through Sara’s investigation into the murder, the novel tells the rise and fall of Ospina who moves

había establecido contacto en dos ocasiones con su gente, a través de una frecuencia que seguramente ya tenían detectada los satélites gringos” (113).

upward from the lower middle class into the Bogotá elite through his connections in the financial world, and through his marriage to Margarita Díaz, the only daughter of the wealthy magnate, Venustiano Díaz.

As in *La diabla en el espejo*, the novel stages a tension between two organizing structures in the novel: the family tree— through Ospina’s profitable incursion through marriage into the distinguished Diaz family, and the financial network of Ospina’s organization, sprawling, decentralized, and inclusive. At the core of this tension lies an anxiety about reproduction (of social class, of money), and legitimacy— who belongs or deserves to be connected. This anxiety about reproduction, I argue, is ultimately linked to narco-trafficking.

Containment

The paranoid dimension of the novel begins with a claustrophobic setting vis-a-vis the space of the city. Since its beginnings, flâneur has been one of the trademarks of detective fiction. At the root of detective stories, Walter Benjamin identifies the modern setting of the urban space and the menacing crowd that threatens with “the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd” (74). The flâneur here emerges as proto-detective, at ease in the mass, an observer of others. If the classical detective wanders, musing as he strolls about the urban landscape, the hardboiled investigator owns the streets in a similar way. In an essay on Raymond Chandler, Fredric Jameson speaks of the way in which the detective connects social classes: “through him we are able to see, to know, the society as a whole, but he does not really stand for any genuine close-up experience of it” (629).

What happens when the city dissolves, when it no longer sustains the narrative fabric of detection? As noted earlier, the disappearance of the Latin American detective in its formal sense

has destroyed the possibility of any type of suture that would — even in a degraded, Jamesonian key— provide the reader with a more complete experience across the urban landscape. Previous iterations of the crime novel in Colombia, and most Latin American detective fiction, usually present the widening social chasm by having a character move from elite areas to impoverished parts of the city, in a project of spatial mapping (Close). In the majority of the works discussed in this dissertation, however, the action is reduced, compressed to a paranoid space. In both *La diabla en la espejo* and *Hilo de sangre azul* what Benjamin isolates as the threatening crowd disappears. Instead of a city that opens up and spreads out to the reader’s simultaneous delight and fright, Chandler’s Los Angeles “spreading out horizontally” (Jameson 629), we have containment and stasis. We have amateur detective Laura Rivera screening the scenery of San Salvador from her air-conditioned luxury car, complaining about how everything in the city is “tan pegado”, “everything’s all squished together” (49).

Hilo de sangre azul presents this stasis in a compelling narrative, where the entire social world of Colombia is reduced to a residential building. And there is enjoyment in this arrangement, as well, for there perhaps the enigma turns more insidious: victim, criminal, investigator all under the same roof. In this way, the novel’s structure recalls not the hardboiled narrative, but the spatial arrangement of classic detective fiction reconfigured in a neoliberal context. In *La diabla*, the insidious elite world of the novel presents a “locked” form, where the criminals and victims belong to the same social sphere. *Hilo de sangre azul* concretizes this through the building Portales de la Cabrera, architecturally underscoring hierarchy and legitimacy (the higher in the building, the more money), and containing both figures of power and the social actors that have traditionally operated in their shadows. For example, the sixth floor in the penthouse belongs to the daughter of an ex-president. The former small town beauty

queen who lives on the fifth floor is now the partner of a drug kingpin. The lawyer and former Justice minister in the third floor is notorious for his defense of corrupt officials. Yet, these positions of power are tenuously held together—as the death of Ospina attests to—through a fraudulent financial scheme. As I've mentioned above, everyone in the apartment building has given Ospina their money. Notably only Sara the investigator has not, and I will return to this significant detail later.

Blood Money

The novel opens up with Sara's discovery of her neighbor's death by way of a spot of blood that she follows until she arrives at his doorstep. The bloody thread emanating from Ospina's body reifies capital, as it echoes nationalist discourses in Latin America and Marxist biological imagery. To quote David Harvey: "Capital is the lifeblood that flows through the body politic of all those societies we call capitalist, spreading out, sometimes as a trickle and other times as a flood, into every nook and cranny of the inhabited world" (vi). In the body of Pedro Ospina the promise of capital is embodied, as his blood spreads out in the building's steps so has his fictitious capital joined everyone in the building. His body also signifies the social climber, someone who has managed to get in, a foreign body from without doomed to non-reproduction, and not unlike his capital, fraudulent. Thus blood stands in as both capital and family structure. In this doubleness however lies a tension, for if blood in the latter conveys hierarchy, verticality, and lineage, in its former embodiment as capital, blood seems to spread out horizontally.⁵¹

⁵¹ In its concerns with an outsider who "contaminates" the family, the novel resembles naturalist fiction. In her study of naturalist fiction, Gabriela Nouzeilles considers them as "ficciones paranoicas" as proto-detective novels that borrow from the physiognomic policing techniques of the era. "El relato naturalista siempre supone una historia anterior que lo condiciona. Las acciones ya no solo dependen del azar o las acciones voluntarias de los personajes protagónicos sino sobre todo de la transmisión inconsciente de un capital biológico que los precede" (166). The "capital biológico" in the case of Ospina is transformed into

One of the epigraphs of the novel is taken from a famous satirical sixteenth century poem by Francisco de Quevedo: “Madre, yo al oro me humillo/ Él es mi amante y mi amado/Pues de puro enamorado/ De continuo anda amarillo.” Gold in the poem is a sexually charged substance, and it is coded as masculine as it concludes its transubstantiation into money: *Poderoso caballero es Don Dinero*, is repeated at the end of each stanza. In the poem’s narrating voice, the seduction by money is set forth through biological alchemy: the gold loves and receives love, it changes complexion not unlike a devoted lover. What I believe is significant in the short citation is the intersubjective dimension of gold: I love it and it loves me back, I recognize its value and it knows that it is prized, and being loved, it changes: it glistens, it turns into money. This affective charge directed at money works as the link to hold the network structures in the novel, both family and finance are sustained by it.

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financial capital, as well. Family networks and their reproduction are at the center of narconovels as Juan Alberto Blanco’s essay “Historia literaria del narcotráfico en la literatura colombiana” attests.

As in *La diabla en el espejo* the language of economics permeates the realm of affect to the degree that it goes beyond a simple metaphoric appropriation, the entanglement of love and money, but economic processes are themselves reified in human emotions. Take for example, Pedro Ospina's unironic statement about his mistress's older, wealthy husband:

El amor que sentía por Paola era tan grande que le había financiado la apertura de una boutique de objetos decorativos, localizada en el exclusivo sector del parque de la 93 de Bogotá, para garantizar que ella se mantuviera a su lado, pues a sus 78 años le quedaba difícil proporcionarle el fogoso sexo que ella, a sus treinta años de alborotada libido, requería para apaciguar sus ansias (54).⁵²

The old man substitutes sex for money, repeating the structure of Ospina's marriage to Margarita, where money stands in for sex. When Margarita helps him control the situation with the banks, for example, he explains that "a Margarita le pareció que el favor que le pedía era muy pequeño comparado con el amor que me tenía y se mostró dispuesta a ayudarme" (45).⁵³ It is worth highlighting that as I will explore below, Ospina's downfall is due to his marital transgression, not his financial fraud.

Finance and Male Frauds

Pedro Ospina's investment firm, Valores Ospina, Ltda. takes money at a monthly interest rate of 4 per cent to be invested in companies that need capital. Ospina presents a varied list of these companies: "negocios de finca raiz, hoteleria, industria metalmeccanica, minas, curtiembres y

⁵² "The love he felt for Paola was so great he had financed the opening of decorative objects, in the exclusive parque de la 93 area of Bogotá, to guarantee she stays by his side, because at 78 years old, he had difficulty in providing the fiery sex that was required to appease her thirty years of raucous libido."

⁵³ "Margarita thought the favor he asked very small, in comparison with her love for me and she was willing to help me"

cadena de comida rápida” (32).⁵⁴ Ospina admits that the appeal behind his scheme lies in tax evasion, as the investment returns are not declared. When economic problems hit the companies, Ospina is untouched since he still has money coming his way. But where is the money flowing from? At some point Ospina describes a situation where “abundan las ofertas de dinero para invertir en Valores Ospinas Ltda. pero se incrementaban las compañías que no podían cumplir con los pagos de los intereses de los préstamos” (44).⁵⁵ How could there be plentiful capital to invest, yet the industries are in crisis? Why would investment be an appealing option when companies are floundering? At a later point, when crisis strikes Ospina we discover the illicit nature of the money as he runs into friends who will invest money earned “under the table.”

While the companies recover, Ospina comes up with a plan: Margarita would get collateral securities backed by Don Venustiano’s corporation that he would take the banks to get financing for the interest money he had to return to investors. Don Venustiano’s corporation is also shrouded in mystery; we learn that his money comes from a variety of sources. He is the owner of a corporation, Inversiones de los Andes with businesses in assorted fields: hotels, mining, real estate. What is important is to keep a difference between the social climbing Ospina, and the venerable Díaz family. At one moment, Ospina mentions that Don Venustiano has acquired a bank in the Virgin Islands, information that, after its disclosure, is followed by a nostalgic anecdote of how Don Venustiano’s father acquired his wealth through “honest” trade.

In his analysis of contemporary Colombian crime novels, Glen S. Close notes a lack of production both in the biological and economic senses. These novels, Close writes, “project the image of a city nearly devoid of children and families and of productive labor, and in which

⁵⁴ “real estate, hotels, metal and mechanical industries, mining, tannery, and fast-food chains”

⁵⁵ “capital to invest in Valores Ospina Ltda. is plentiful, but the number of companies that could not make the payment of the loans’ interests was rising”

human reproduction is as of little interest, as are ordinary legal forms of economic production (90).” Rather than being conspicuously absent, however, reproduction in *Hilo de sangre azul* is at the center, through Ospina’s financial scheme and through his childless marriage to a wealthy woman. Yet it is a productivity driven by a logic of unproductivity: unsustainable, illusory. The novel presents masculinity as one such form of unproductive productivity through three fraudulent characters: Ospina, Juan de Dios Cleves, and Don Rafa.

Juan de Dios Cleves

From the beginning of the narrative, Cleves has been described as the womanizer in the building. Sara remarks on his numerous affairs, and remembers a moment in the past when she let herself be seduced by her neighbor to quell her curiosity about his famed sexual prowess. When crisis hits him, Ospina turns to Cleves to maneuver the judicial system for him, but he fails to consider the deceitful behavior of the lawyer who will at the same time work for some of the most powerful of Ospina’s clients. Yet much like Ospina, Cleves’ arrival at the luxury apartment building is also an upward move, as we learn that he also comes from a rural background. This personal history never truly leaves Cleves as he is presented, just as Ospina, as a foreign body in the social milieu in which he now moves. Early on in the narrative, Sara suggests his falseness:

Sara pensó que Cleves le había impuesto a su mucama esa forma alambicada de contestar el teléfono porque no sabía qué más inventarse para demostrar que había ascendido en la escala social: usaba ropa Versace, zapatos Ferragamo y corbatas Hermés. Pero combinaba los colores a la loca: la última vez que lo vió llevaba medias verdes, vestido gris, zapatos marrones, corbata morada y camisa azul (20).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ “Sara thought Cleves had imposed on his maid that overdone way of answering the phone because he didn’t know what else to do to show that he had moved up in the social ladder: he wore Versace,

What is significant in this scene is that Cleves' jarring sartorial style has to be accepted by the building's residents. Only in thought is Cleves acknowledged as a fake, as counterfeit, his "value" so to speak remains unchallenged. In the same vein, in his meetings with Cleves Ospina also describes the lawyer's gaudy wardrobe: he even dons an elephant-dotted tie (!). Another telling sign of Cleves' lack of sophistication is his culinary taste, which remain steeped in a decidedly non-urbane palate that disgusts Ospina. With Cleves we also get an origin story that reveals yet again the novel's interest in legitimacy. Cleves' story is similar to Ospina's as he recounts it to him. A boy arrives in Bogotá and is liked by the right people, in Cleves's case, a senator. From then on Cleves moves on to working for the president, even getting to be Justice minister. These stories in the novel are meant to arise suspicion in the way they destabilize notions of elite social belonging.

Cleves's character is cast under more suspicion when the landlady's son tells Sara that he has seen Cleves and Don Rafa, the narco in the building, striking a deal to put Ospina in jail. Sara expresses her shock: "¡Juan de Dios parece tan correcto, tan incapaz de salirse de las normas, que no resulta fácil pensar que acepte un soborno, o que se preste para juegos dobles, o que traicione a sus clientes o que robe! ¡El se la paso hablando de sus conquistas femeninas y su honestidad!" (174).⁵⁷ It is crucial that honesty and heterosexuality are equaled in the novel's social world as it is eventually revealed that Cleves is a "ser nefasto, doble, ruin" (248) not on account of his professional dishonesty, but his sexual preference.

Ferragamo shoes and Hermes ties. But he would match colors haphazardly: last time she saw him he wore green socks, a gray suit, brown shoes, purple tie, and blue shirt."

⁵⁷ "Juan de Dios seems so decent, so incapable of breaking rules, it's not easy to think that he accepts a bribe, or is taking part in trickery, or that he betrays his clients, or that he steals! He talks about his female conquests and his honesty all the time."

Don Rafa

As Toñito Rathi in *La diablo en el espejo*, Don Rafa's character is shrouded in mystery. Both of these characters are presented as controlling agencies linked to narco-trafficking. Don Rafa is the keeper of Karen Santa Cruz, the former small town beauty queen in the fifth floor. Up until she begins her investigations, Sara has never actually seen him; although his presence there is well established through his bodyguards. The nature of Don Rafa's business is known by all, but he tempers this image by investing in social work (81). At the level of aesthetic sense, Don Rafa is also not spared, described in quasi farcical terms as overweight and adorned with gold jewelry with religious iconography. At one moment, even Ospina remarks that Don Rafa can hide his "matón" or thug image (124). However, just with as Cleves' ludicrous wardrobe, Don Rafa's presence in the building has to be accepted. Although we don't get an "origin" story for Don Rafa as we do for other characters, his connection to Karen and her story illuminates the connection between finance and drug trafficking.

Karen's story is also one of social climbing, moving up from small town beauty pageants into the elite of Bogotá. Karen, we learn through Sara, has been married to the owner of Colombia's biggest bank, called quite appropriately, the "king of the bank," but she is forced out of the relationship by his sons in an ugly fight about her alleged interest in the banker's wealth.

Karen's dwelling is also not spared Sara's discerning eye:

El apartamento de Karen Santa Cruz era un piso de trescientos metros cuadrados, con las paredes en rojo y amarillo, decorado con tapetes de Oriente, sofás tapizados en gobelinos con hilos dorados, sillones en terciopelo vinotinto, cuadros de Grau y de Botero, broncees chinos, porcelanas Capo di Monti, colmillos de elefantes traídos del Africa, cueros de tigres cazados por Don Rafa en sus safaris por Kenia y colocados sobre los muros, y un

inmenso oso polar disecado y colgado en la principal pared de la casa. A la entrada del apartamento, enmarcado en oro, había un gran cuadro de la Virgen de la Macarena, patrona de los toreros (82).

While not explicitly invoked in the text, the presence of Don Rafa in the building and the source of his wealth reveal a key anxiety in the novel's portrayal of finance: Where does money come from? Is there a distinction between "honest" and "well-earned" money and the so-called "dirty" money? In the case of Don Rafa, this anxiety is constantly being quelled by appeals to his unrefinement, his out-of-place-ness, a not so subtle ridiculing that serves to disavow the level of connection of Don Rafa to allegedly more legal and respectable activities of making money. Don Rafa's connections to the financial network at the center of the novel are subtle. Quite significantly, he has not given his money to Ospina and thus remains seemingly at the margins of the financial collapse of building's residents. However, Karen has been affected by Ospina's scheme which causes an angered Don Rafa to pay Cleves to send the financier to jail. This moment highlights once more Cleves' duplicity, his shifting allegiances that are ruled by money. Yet, this scene hints at something much more harrowing about money: its hidden trajectory, its transformations, its linkages. Here Marx's theorization on the transformation of commodities into money proves highly insightful. "From the mere look of a piece of money," Marx writes, "we cannot tell what breed of commodity has been transformed into it. In their money-form all commodities look alike"(204). The frightful condition of money, the fact that we cannot tell what it was and where it comes from is at the core of the novel's take on the economy, for it asks us to "link" Don Rafa's "dirty" money to the financial network of Ospina's more "reputable" and "noble" social world. It is not too improbable to entertain the notion that the money Karen has invested in Ospina's scheme comes from Don Rafa himself. What is highly significant is the

power Don Rafa exerts on the financial networks and its actors. In the end, Don Rafa and narco-trafficking are the secret agency that controls everything; they even provide justice. Just as in *La diabla en el espejo*, the implications of this remain unexplored, a revelation suspended between the all-too facile truth (of course it is drug-trafficking!), and terrifying repercussions: that all the entire economy is regulated by drug money.

These three fraudulent characters, Ospina, Don Rafa and Cleves, form a threat to a traditional way of understanding financial power — an understanding crystallized in the family tree; a clear genealogy, and a bloodline from a “clean,” “legal,” “heterosexual” source. I want to return to the novel’s opening image, Ospina’s blood spreading out through the steps of the luxury building. Is this the same blood of the title? As it has become clear, the blue blood of the title does not refer to Ospina, but to the financial network woven by the elite, a web that depends on the fiction of its “legitimate,” “noble” character. Where does the detective fall into all of this? What kind of subject position does she occupy? In *La diabla en el espejo*, Laura’s class interests and position were clearly stated throughout, yet quite significantly her family had kept away from the turn to financialization. Laura was left in a position both inside and outside the flow of money that she so desperately charts in her narrative. Something similar occurs with Sara as detective and the only resident in the building who is not an investor in Ospina’s scheme. As with Laura, her lack of “connection” in the financial network does not delineate an outsider position, one that would be capable of seeing all from an outsider perspective. Instead, it marks her precarious situation: it is no surprise that while in Bogotá she lives in the first floor of the building, at the base so to speak of the financial world that she investigates; her physical location underscoring her lack of prestige in the social world.

In the second part of the novel, Sara is removed from her Bogotá social world, as she leaves the investigation and her job and moves with her partner to Paris. Here Sara appears outside the circuit of financial machinations, of Colombian pesos turned into drugs and back into pesos or dollars; indeed here Sara is tellingly shown *reading* about other financial scandals in Colombia for her new work as international correspondent. In this second section Sara finds out that Cleves and his maid are Ospina's murderers and ponders what to do, particularly in light of Cleves's acquittal and recent appointment to a government post in Brazil. The sexual and financial lives of the characters collide once again with the introduction of the son of her former boss, Don Eloy Castillo. Cleves had a relationship with young Gabriel Castillo and uses that information to prevent any incriminatory publication by Sara. In a meeting with Gabriel Castillo in London Sara discovers the double truth: Cleves is homosexual and a murderer. Cleves, confesses Gabriel, was afraid that Ospina has discovered that his homosexuality: "Le aterraba que él se hubiera percatado de su homosexualismo porque era alguien muy *conectado* con el mundo político y de la alta sociedad, y Cleves no estaba dispuesto a dejar que el jet set descubriera su secreto, ni a salir del clóset, ni a permitir que por eso se le arruinara su carrera" (246). (my emphasis) What drove Cleves to murder Ospina was not a threat to his professional dishonesty, but the fear that his homosexuality would be revealed.

This ludicrous resolution leaves Don Rafa out of the picture, his responsibility is never named, just as the plausible involvement of drug-dealing in the financial system remains unclear. The realm of fiction is insistently sustained and perpetuated as Sara ultimately decides not to write an investigative report about Ospina's case, but instead write a novel, the only way, she claims, in which she can tell the truth:

¿Y qué voy a hacer con esta información?— se preguntó la periodista una y otra vez. Yo no puedo escribir el relato periodístico del asesinato de Pedro Ospina: dejaría muy mal parado a Don Eloy Castillo — pensó—. Y no consigo nada denunciando a Cleves porque él ya fue absuelto y, además, maneja a los jueces y a los fiscales como si fueran marionetas. Pero tampoco soy capaz de guardar silencio y de no revelar semejante atrocidad”, se dijo Sara, invadida por un estado de ira mezclada con depresión (255).⁵⁸

Sara’s “ethical” dilemma is a reflection of her involvement in the network her solution is to create a fiction, to write a novel about Ospina’s case.

Dupes

Sara’s ultimate rejection of fiction over truth, her choice of the power of fantasy, underscores the ideological work that animates the novel. Throughout, Sara demonstrates that she too wants to belong and much like Ospina and the other duplicitous characters in the novel, seeks to constantly reaffirm her place by appealing to the power of commodities and taste. A sample: “Entonces se sirvió un trago de whiskey Johnnie Walker Sello Negro en las rocas, puso el Concierto para piano número 2 de Rachmaninov, se recostó en el sofá de la sala y sintió su espalda llena de nudos” (21). What results is a paranoid entrapment where it is not the “reality,” or the “functioning” of money that remains opaque, but that reality is overlaid by a realm of fiction that the characters openly acknowledge as such, but must be continually reproduced. In her newspaper article of Ospina’s death and his financial schemes included in the novel, Sara

⁵⁸ “What am I to do with this information? — the journalist asked herself over and over again. I can’t write the journalistic tale of Pedro Ospina’s murder: she would leave Don Eloy Castillo’s in a very bad position—she thought. And I don’t get anything by denouncing Cleves because he has already been acquitted and he controls the judges and prosecutors, as if they were puppets. But I’m also incapable of keeping quiet and not revealing such an atrocity” — Sara said to herself, overcome by a mix of anger and depression”

describes the consequences of the financial fraud on several affected parties. She recounts the many ministers and other officials who have invested in Ospina's organization, and have now lost their money. Their investment is now irrecoverable since they have put money into Ospina's organization using the names of their employees, and therefore cannot make judicial claims against him because their own double fraud would be exposed, and their reputations ruined (141). In their own duping, Ospina's investors have been duped.

Both *La diablo en el espejo* and *Hilo de sangre azul* end in moments of recognition of the interconnectedness of the social world, and the entanglement between licit and illicit economies. In the universe of detection that interconnectedness has a name: duping. For example, in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," one of the genre's foundational texts, various characters deceive each other in their efforts to secure the eponymous letter. In his famous seminar on the short story, Jacques Lacan proposes that the captivating power of Poe's text is perhaps due to the enjoyment the reader gleans from the "duping" staged in the narrative. "Dupe" is already in the name of the genre's putative proto-detective, M. Dupin, and "duping" structures the fiction of detection itself, the game of outwitting the criminal, and moreover, as a psychoanalytic reading of the genre demonstrates, it organizes the way readers engage with the narrative of detection itself. As Rushing explains, the readers' compulsive repetition of reading detective novel after detective novel is part of a fundamental "con" at the heart of the genre: the illusion that the reader will solve the crime (9). Likewise, the world of finance is also fraught with duping, for the distinction between fraudulent capital and the illusion created by investment is not always clear.

"To dupe" has a distinct translation in Spanish: "hacerse el loco." The phrase in Spanish conveys the murkiness of being and the play of irrationality involved in the effort to deceive others: one transforms oneself (hacerse) into a dupe, a madman. In the case of *La diablo en el*

espejo, the act of duping, of “hacerse el loco”, underscores a class gesture about the implication of the elites into the global drug trade. Returning to the epigraph that prefaces this chapter, where Piglia presents the economy as a “manipulación invisible” favoring the obscure, shadowy worlds of financial operations, my reading of *La diabla* shows that in the case of El Salvador they might not be so murky after all. In Laura’s disavowal of the possibility of Olga María’s murder being tied to drug trafficking, she evinces *some* knowledge about the economy. In the cases of Colombia and El Salvador, it is not so much what is hidden about economic processes that remains unsettling and unsettled in detective fiction, but the knowledge that is willingly ignored about those economic processes. In the context of Colombia, Michael Taussig describes this particular type of epistemology where “knowing what not to know becomes not only an art of survival but the basis of social reality” (12). That “duping” in the novel is anchored on the dead body of a beautiful, young, elite woman, and that the investigation is also led by a beautiful, young, elite woman, covers up the terrifying violence of the drug economy with a shiny veneer.

Chapter Four

“Paranoia Recreativa:” Tourism and Narco in the Caribbean

“Does anything ever happen here?”
Miss Marple

Agatha Christie. *A Caribbean Mystery*

In the previous chapter I explored how the use of enclosed, domestic spaces in crime novels pointed to a reconfiguration of the traditional male urban space of crime fiction. In this transformation, a gendered approach to detection, embodied by paranoid feminine figures, provided a structure to grapple with financial crimes. In this chapter, I expand on the problem of neoliberal space in Latin American crime fiction, this time through a focus on another type of “neoliberal locked room”: the insular space of the Caribbean tourist resort. Islands and luxury hotels can be seen throughout the history of crime writing and its generic permutations, from the whodunits of Agatha Christie to the spy fiction of Ian Fleming to more contemporary renderings of modern and global forms of criminality.⁵⁹ In this chapter, I investigate the appearance of the locked room structure, as manifested in the form of islands and luxury resorts in a neoliberal, Latin American context. What does this form entail to a neoliberal, interconnected consciousness? What kind of fantasy about interconnectivity and isolation are staged in these narratives? What are the legal and illegal ties between centers of power and spaces crafted for touristic leisure? How does Latin American detective fiction represent this relationship?

⁵⁹To name a few examples: the crime novels of Andrea Camillieri set in Sicily and Stieg Larsson’s wildly popular *Millenium* trilogy, which features insular settings in Europe and in the Americas.

Tourism, and the luxury and leisure it entailed, played a part in the genre's construction of pleasure. Travel was another way in which the detective's indulgence was presented. For example, in the Agatha Christie novel *A Caribbean Mystery* from 1964, Miss Marple is placed in an island resort where all the foreigners enjoy the comforts of home transposed to a colonial space. Reading Christie's novel against the contemporary market of crime and detective fiction, one dramatically sees what critic Eva Erdmann calls the "internationality" of crime fiction today. In Christie's novel, the action remains confined to the space of the hotel; this is both the locus of rest and crime. Erdmann posits that whereas in the past the experience of alterity provided by crime writing lies on the fact of crime, today's readers seek a cultural kind of alterity: that of foreign spaces. Following Erdmann's argument one can claim that today's crime fiction readers would find *A Caribbean Mystery* extremely outdated, given the novel's refusal to afford readers a glimpse into the "outside" world of the island. Ultimately, Erdmann posits contemporary crime fiction as a form of travel writing and tourist guide that provides readers with insights into other cultures. The novel *Arrecife* (Reef) by Mexican author Juan Villoro parodies crime fiction's desire to move around the world, or, to use Erdmann's formulation, its "cartographic project" of vicarious consumption of foreign cultures. Villoro's novel critiques how the textual exploration of the world intersects with contemporary experiences of tourism and violence. Set in the Mexican Caribbean in a private resort called La Pirámide, the novel is narrated by Antonio Góngora, a washed-up rock musician and recovering drug addict who comes to the resort at the behest of his childhood friend and fellow band member, Mario Müller. La Pirámide is an enclosed resort, carefully orchestrated by Müller to provide guests the ultimate tourist experience, what he calls "paranoia recreativa" (recreational paranoia). This type of enjoyment involves the willful submission of guests to staged high-risk activities specifically associated

with the idea of Latin America, from kidnappings to guerrilla uprisings. The cracks of the pleasant life in Müller's maniacal paradise are exposed when two American scuba divers are killed in the resort, unveiling the connections between the resort and narco-trafficking. Villoro unveils the fantasy of the crime fiction reader as tourist, through a critique of the metaphorical and material consumption of peripheral spaces.

The selection of the Caribbean as a setting is not fortuitous, for Villoro's paranoid Caribbean is inscribed in a rich tradition of voyeuristic crime, consumption, and pleasure in the region. Because of this, before an analysis of the novel, I consider a travel essay by Ian Fleming, a Caribbean dweller himself, and the creator of James Bond. With this connection, I make explicit the resonance and reconfiguration of Cold War paranoia in the twenty-first century: the way the Caribbean space today still articulates anxieties about global crime. My focus is then grounded on the collapse of three "closed" spaces: the textual space of the crime (the locked room structure), the geographic isolation of the edenic insular space, and lastly, the economic enclosure to which the real peripheral spaces that crime fiction takes as setting are subjected.

Travel, Tourism, Crime

The novel's paranoid tropical setting alongside its exploration of the tourism industry evokes the rich tradition of crime writing in the Caribbean, in particular the Cold War spy fiction of Graham Greene (*The Comedians*, *Our Man in Havana*) and the James Bond universe of Ian Fleming. In these works, the Caribbean is in perpetual tension, placed between the danger of international conspiracies and placid holidays. Here I will focus on Ian Fleming's work, in which the experience of global consciousness is constructed through the tourism industry, and as such represents a paradigmatic moment of the mass consumption of the Caribbean space.

“Would these books have been born if I had not been living in the gorgeous vacuum of a Jamaican holiday?” (12), asks Fleming in “Ian Fleming Introduces Jamaica,” the first piece from a collection that sought to introduce British readers to the wonders of the Caribbean nation.⁶⁰ The text contains the usual colonial tropes: the temporal dislocation of the Other space, the indolence of the natives, the atavistic force of the climate, etc. The text is written post-Independence, but to the writer, “everything has changed and nothing” (11). The article underscores the symbolic and material importance of Jamaica in both his personal life and his creative endeavors. As Fleming himself admits, Bond could not have existed without Jamaica. For example, he explains how the name James Bond is the name of the author of a bird watching guide, one of his “Jamaican bibles” (12). That a “Jamaican holiday” engenders spy fiction’s most iconic figure points to the importance of travel and tourism in Fleming’s world. The Caribbean in particular, as Vivian Halloran points out, is to Fleming a particular space where racial and cultural diversity provide ample material, “an ethnoscape that accommodates tourists, travelers, and mixed race individuals while its varied geography presents physical and supernatural challenges for Bond and his adversaries to exploit or overcome (167). And yet the experience of the Caribbean for Bond is always mediated by the tourism industry. Michael Denning convincingly argues that a narrative code of tourism reorganizes imperial and racist ideologies in the Bond novels (102). Denning illustrates how by incorporating “the prose of the tourist guide,” the ultimate threat posed by the villain in a Bond novel is not to the spy, but to the tourist. Denning: “In some cases, as in *Live and Let Die*, tourist guides supplant Fleming’s prose entirely as the reader is treated to several pages about Haitian voodoo lifted directly from Patrick Leigh Fermor’s *The Travellers Tree*; a footnote tells us that this is ‘one of the great travel books’ (103). Denning— and critics in

⁶⁰ Jamaica was first under Spanish possession before coming under British rule in 1655. As a British colony, Jamaica became a crucial sugar producer (Williams). During the twentieth century, Jamaica turned to tourism and bauxite. It gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1962.

general— do not pay much attention to Fleming’s forays into travel writing. Denning, for example, argues that the Bond novels work much more as travelogues than Fleming’s own travel writings (102). However, these are interesting texts that I believe can illuminate the “internationality” of crime writing today: particularly as they provide the blueprint for a poetics of global consciousness through the narrative experience of crime. I want to isolate two key elements from “Ian Fleming Introduces Jamaica”: first, the importance placed on his Jamaican estate, Goldeneye, in the creation of Bond’s fictional universe, and second, the importance of the outdoors, of nature. The result is a delicate balance between work and play, between the space of the home, and the creation of a fictional genre that opens up to the world, where home becomes the globe.

“Jamaica has now been my home for eighteen years,” the text begins (11). Fleming started going to Jamaica every year from 1946 until his death in 1964, his Jamaica sojourns cover both pre and post Independence eras. Goldeneye works as a microcosm of the colony, a house where Fleming can escape the dreary British winter and “rough it,” endure the elements, commune with nature, and discover another part of the world. Descriptions of the house allude to a hyper-masculine colonial setting, a severe space; a biographer writes that, for Fleming, “the emphasis was on simplicity and hardiness. There was no need for a large kitchen to fit fridges or other appliances” (21). Yet Goldeneye is also the place where Fleming, the reluctant bachelor, agrees to settle down into married life and a domesticity that spurs him to the creation of James Bond:

Encouraged by marriage, or as an antidote to this dangerous transmogrification after forty-three years of bachelorhood, I sat down at the red-bullet desk where I am now typing this, and for better or for worse, wrote the first of twelve best-selling thrillers that

have sold around twenty-million copies and been translated into twenty-three languages. I wrote every one of them at this desk with the jalousies closed around me so that I would not be distracted by the birds and the flowers and the sunshine outside until I have completed my daily stint (12).

For Fleming, writing becomes a cure for the impending enclosure of marriage. Yet more than a mere distraction, Fleming presents writing as labor, precisely because it also involves the arduous task of avoiding the diversions of the Caribbean. *Goldeneye* then works as a protective membrane from the wild and pleasurable outside, a productive locus of labor against the indolence of the sunny exterior. There is a kind of tension between both spaces that is always kept in check, and that rests on an isolation that is reproduced at a larger scale: not only the jalousies closing in on the writer, but the fantasy of Jamaica itself as an isolated space.

Immediately after discussing his writing refuge, Fleming reproduces the “home” to the colony itself. “I suppose it is the peace and silence and cut-offness from the madding world that urges people to create here”, he writes (12). Jamaica provides a fantasy of isolation that hinges on the disavowal of its connections with the outside (economic, historic, cultural) that provide Fleming with the conditions to retreat there to write. Fleming needs this “small place,” to use Jamaica Kincaid’s phrase, to write, but his fiction opens up to the world, taking the entire globe as its setting.

Fleming explicitly connects the balance of labor and relaxation by the foreign writer and the tourist seeking equilibrium between danger and pleasure while abroad. In this article, Fleming also includes the first text he ever published: a travel piece written after his first trip to the island. The text, he explains, was published in December 1947 in *Horizon* magazine as part of a series titled “Where Shall John Go?” and was “aimed at readers who wished to flee the drabness

of postwar Britain” (15). The text is framed as a letter wherein Fleming provides advice to his English compatriots on travel destinations. Yet again, Jamaica symbolizes a balance, as Fleming explains to the potential traveler: “the middle way between the Lethe of the tropics and a life of fork-lunches with the District Commissioner’s wife” (15). Fleming goes on to discuss the weather, the landscape and other “pleasant particularities” (16) of the space. There is authority in Fleming’s voice as he provides advice on local women, customs, and leisure activities. Some illustrations:

One example of Jamaican ‘talk’- ‘Will you do me a rudeness’ means ‘will you sleep with me?’ To which a brazen girl will reply ‘You better hang on grass I goin’s move so much (18).

Grass-ticks will fasten on to bare skin if you walk thoughtlessly in cattle country. They will cause intensive grief. It is most unlikely that you will try much cross-country walking owing to the nature of the country and the heat. If you do, wear high boots or tuck your trousers into your socks (19).

Following Denning, this is the same prose that will seep into the Bond universe; Fleming himself admits that this short travel piece is a kind of founding text, the writing of which he admits “perhaps gave me confidence one day to write a book” (21).

The travel writer acts as a translator and interpreter and most importantly, a guide. The travel guide poetics directly influence how spy fiction constructs travel as a titillating experience. To Denning, the prose of the tourist guide is not only a fundamental part of the poetics of the Bond universe, but construct the “world system” that structure the novels (104). As Denning explains, this world system is organized around a “pleasure periphery” that relies “upon the

neocolonialism of the tourist industry; it stands for Bond as an idyllic paradise, as a more authentic culture, and as a source of threat and upheaval” (104). In the neoliberal era, contemporary crime fiction reconfigures the most salient traits of spy fiction. To revisit Eva Erdmann’s argument, crime fiction provides readers a kind of cultural fluency, providing insider knowledge into foreign spaces and cultures. Curiously, Erdmann does not mention spy fiction, which stands as the precursor to the thrills afforded by the textual experiencing the “abroad.” Generic considerations aside, it is clear that spy fiction was already providing a textual panorama of the world. Jameson, it’s important to remark, acknowledges the spy thrillers as an approximation to the “multinational global network.”

In the subsequent sections of the chapter, I will show how Villoro’s *Arrecife* stages the consumption of Caribbean insular spaces, key to the spy fiction universe of the Cold War, but in a neoliberal context. Although today it might appear anachronistic to discuss the world of spies, questions of surveillance and covert actions are central to the texture of everyday life in the neoliberal world. In a recent essay on crime fiction in a post 9/11 world, Andrew Pepper notes how transnational crime is challenging the generic spatial boundaries of crime fiction:

The difficulties facing much crime fiction and traditional accounts of sovereignty are the same: insofar as they take the bounded state as their *raison d’être* and primary points of departure, both are ill equipped to analyze how new forms of transnational mobility are transforming the related realms of illicit activity, policing, and security practices” (410). Quite significantly, Pepper labels the novels he discusses as “hybrid crime-espionage novels,” a creative response to neoliberalism that blurs the line between “policing” and “spying”. In the works that I will discuss the connection between these two types of (super)vision is heightened through the category of small space. Namely, through the exacerbation of the locked room of

classic detective fiction, these works reconfigure the paranoiac content of spy fiction where “nothing is what it seems and everything seems potentially dangerous” (Cawelti 55). In *Arrecife*, several tropes of the spy fiction’s universe are reconfigured in neoliberal, global twenty-first century, from its vicarious cosmopolitanism, the direct result of neocolonial predatory conditions, to the emphasis on the secret networks that structure everyday life.⁶¹ The novel then posits what it means to detect in an era of all-pervasive surveillance, but from a Latin American perspective, providing another glimpse of the global consciousness staged from a (post)colonial standpoint.

Juan Villoro’s *Arrecife*: Reefs, Resorts, and Resources

This dissertation proposes a new framework for understanding narrative detection in Latin American texts. Villoro hints at the transformation of the epistemological conditions faced by the crime novel in Latin America in an interview about *Arrecife*. In the interview he presents a new kind of investigation, one that goes beyond traditional notions of the impossibility of justice in the region, ultimately positing a crime novel as a contagious, never-ending structure:

Me interesaba contar una trama de deducción, donde quedara claro quién fue el culpable.

No podía hacer esto al modo de Scotland Yard porque en México la impartición de justicia

⁶¹ In an essay titled “007 and 9/11, Specters and Structures of Feeling,” Stephen Watt argues for the continuation of SPECTRE, the crime organization in Bond’s texts, and the figure of the terrorist as ghostly presence, noting that “such a metaphor might help illuminate a structure of feeling composed both of present fears and of residues of the Cold War” (241). While I share Watt’s interest in an affective response to surveillance and fear, his focus remains the metropolitan centers, or, to paraphrase Anne McClintock, to how the empire is paranoid. McClintock also refers to the spectral, hallucinatory dimension on the war on terror: “For it is only in paranoia that one finds simultaneously and in such condensed form both deliriums of absolute power and forebodings of perpetual threat. Hence the spectral and nightmarish quality of the “war on terror,” a limitless war against a limitless threat, a war vaunted by the US administration to encompass all of space and persisting without end” (61). The resonance of the Cold War era today can also be seen in the popular retellings of that time period in popular television shows such as *The Americans* (FOX) and *Deutschland 83* (Sundance).

My focus on this chapter, and this dissertation as a whole, is the texture of paranoia in a Latin American context and the meaning of terror from this vantage point.

es algo muy opaca y más del 90% de los delitos quedan impunes. Por lo tanto, quería que se supiera quién era el asesino, aunque eso no llevará, necesariamente, a detener el culpable. Pero también quería que, una vez resuelto el enigma policiaco, el lector tuviera dudas morales. ¿En qué medida la víctima precipitó su desenlace? ¿Hasta dónde podemos compartir las razones del verdugo? ¿Qué grado de complicidad tuvieron los demás? Estas interrogantes me parecen decisivas (138).⁶²

There are several key ideas in Villoro's narrative imaginary of crime as he proposes a complete subversion of the rules of the genre. Given the pervasive impunity of contemporary Latin America, the driving force behind narrative detection, the question whodunit, becomes superfluous. In this regard, however, he makes a clear distinction: it's not that the perpetrators are shadowy and opaque, but the administration of justice that remains mysterious and uncertain. Because of this state of affairs, identifying the criminal is not the endpoint; instead, Villoro posits a series of questions as a remainder, as the result of detection. These "dudas morales" (moral doubts) are posed in an affective language that stands as the opposite of narrative closure. The questions Villoro seeks to leave open invite a potentially endless, paranoid "delirio de relación" (to use the words of one of the novel's characters) where connections keep being established: the victim and the killer, the readers and the killer, the complicity of others, etc. These types of questions inform the melodrama at the heart of the novel, as it retreats from the global setting of narco-trafficking and tourism into a domestic space.

⁶² "I was interested in telling a story of deduction where the identity was clear. I could do this in a Scotland Yard style, because in Mexico the administration of justice is opaque and more than 90% of crimes remain unpunished. Because of this, I wanted the assassin to be known, even though that did not necessarily lead to catch the culprit. But I also wanted that, once the enigma is solved, the reader had moral doubts. In what way did the victim had a hand in his/her demise? Up to what point can we share the motives of the killer? What degree of complicity did others have? These questions are key to me."

The novel is set in a luxury resort located in the fictional area of Kukulcán, an area that works as a thinly veiled allusion to the Yucatán Peninsula in the southeast of Mexico. Of Kukulcán, Antonio explains that “fue puesto en el mapa por decision presidencial. La reserva biológica se transformó en campos de golf, el dinero inundó la zona, hubo trabajo para gente que mataba el hambre chupando huesos de mango, los monolitos de cristal y acero dominaron la costa” (61)⁶³. Dina Berger argues that Mexico’s investment in tourism was a crucial piece in the post-revolutionary period, and was established in the late 1920s, when Mexico sought in tourism a modernity that could still be rooted in “lo típico,” “lo mexicano” (15). She notes how Mexican elites from the ruling hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institucional vigorously engaged in “attracting the dollar”, and shedding the image of Mexico as a lawless space (12).

In a post-NAFTA context, tourism emerges, once again, as the promise of development. In the Yucatán Peninsula cities such as Cancún were part of a larger government project for developing tourism in the 1970s (García de Fuentes). The area came to be known as the “Riviera Maya” due to the cultural heritage of the Mayans in the region that still persists, and giving it an allure of prestige, and the opportunity to exploit the nation’s history and myths. Controversy surrounded the constructions of these touristic enclaves, with issues such as land dispossession and official corruption. In their work on the development of Cancún as “Gringolandia,” Rebecca Maria Torres and Janet Momsen write that,

Mexico’s commitment to neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s and 1990s reinforced tourism development as part of the state’s economic development agenda. The Mexican government also directly solicited foreign investment from prominent tourism TNCs

⁶³ “was placed on the map by presidential decree. The biological reserve was transformed in golf courses, money flooded the zone, there was work for people who killed hunger by sucking mango seeds, crystal and steel monoliths dominated the coast.”

[transnational companies] with offers of favorable franchise agreements. During the 1980s, the government offered “swaps” in which private investors were allowed to purchase national debt that could subsequently be converted into discounted tourism investment (325).

Although Cancún’s ecological and economic exhaustion have been indicated by critics⁶⁴, in the novel the fictional Yucatán Peninsula is already in the throes of perish and oblivion. Antonio notes that Kukulcán is on the verge of disappearance as the tourist industry is floundering and ecological degradation is destroying the area’s famed coral reef. Antonio refers to these economic developments as “desarrollo sucio” (dirty development), a term that does not only refer to ecological depletion, but also to the economic processes behind it. Antonio also notes the origins of La Pirámide, how the land had been “arreatada” (snatched) from a fisherman cooperative (60). Threatened by force, the locals had to give in to the sale of their land that would now be controlled by the Atrium business group located in London. The liaison between London and Kukulcán is an American man known as El Gringo Petersen, who hires Mario Müller to manage the resort and provides a green light for his alternative form of tourism.

In this setting of natural and economic exhaustion, Müller has managed to keep La Pirámide functioning through his perverse tourism schemes. Antonio explains that “la zona estaba destinada al deterioro, pero Mario encontró una solución: un trópico con adrenalina, arañas venenosas, excursiones que creaban la ilusión de sobrevivir de milagro y la necesidad de celebrar en forma tempestuosa” (43). Müller’s idea of “paranoia recreativa” reflects his understanding of the images that circulate of Mexico abroad:

⁶⁴ Marc Cooper notes Cancún’s unregulated growth, and mentions the circulation of “narcodollars” into the local economy.

En todos los periódicos hay malas noticias sobre México: cuerpos mutilados, rostros rociados de ácido, cabezas sueltas, una mujer desnuda colgada de un poste, pilas de cadáveres. Eso provoca pánico. Lo raro es que en esos lugares tranquilos hay gente que quiere sentir eso. Están cansados de un vida sin sorpresas. Si tú quieres, son unos perversos de mierda o son los mismos animales de siempre. Lo importante es que necesitan la excitación, la cacería, ser perseguidos. Si tienen miedo, eso significa que están vivos: quieren *descansar sintiendo miedo*. Lo que para nosotros es horrible para ellos es un lujo. El tercer mundo existe para salvar del aburrimiento a los europeos. Eso fue lo que entendió tu mejor amigo. Aquí me tienes, dedicado a la paranoia recreativa (63, emphasis in original)⁶⁵

Müller's notions of extreme tourism are an exacerbated version of the strategies adopted by peripheral spaces in order to sustain economies. As Stephen Royle notes in his study on small islands, the insularity of these spaces can be turned into a resource (49). But if in the past one usually thinks of peripheral spaces (particularly, the Caribbean) as exploiting images of tranquility and peacefulness, the novel shows the forced exploitation of the opposite. Today, the novel posits, the tourist wants a "real" thing, preferably in the form of danger and misery. The crucial element here is that these experiences are heavily mediated: from the newspaper reports to the simulacra offered by La Pirámide, the tourist remains separated from any type of real contact with the local reality. This separation is necessary, as Fleming showed us in his travel

⁶⁵ "All newspapers have bad news about Mexico: mutilated bodies, faces drizzled with acid, loose heads, a naked woman hung from a post, piles of corpses. That provokes panic. The weird thing is that in quiet places there are people who want to feel that. They are tired of a life without surprises. If you want, they are fucking perverts or the animals they have always been. What is important is the need for excitement, the hunt, being chased. If they're afraid that means they're alive: they want to rest feeling afraid. What is horrible for us, for them is a luxury. The Third World exists to save Europeans from boredom. Your best friend understood this. Here you have me, devoted to recreational paranoia."

piece on Jamaica, safe exposure to foreign lands rests on a delicate balance, and on a certain distance from any space that proves too extreme. Fear plays a crucial role in Müller's logic: the tourist who comes to placid, safe places needs to come into contact with danger. Here, the economy of panic becomes subverted: to feel fear stands for life, to be close to death does not imply the loss of value, but a new economy of luxury and self-indulgence.

The introduction of boredom in the passage provokes a re-examination of other ways in which the so-called Third World provides relief from boredom to the powerful centers of the world system. Although the passage focuses on tourism, one can easily extend the rationale behind *La Pirámide* to detective fiction. As a genre born in metropolitan centers at the height of colonial expansion in the 19th century, detective fiction is insidiously connected with the real material processes of exploitation. This connection is evinced in both content and form. In terms of theme, the colonial experience gave writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, and Edgar Allan Poe, a variety of situations built around the return of colonial violence. At a structural level, Robert Rushing notes how classic detective fiction functions as a "domesticated journey" (90), where the reader leaves the safety of his or her "home" in the name of detection. Detective fiction, he explains, "consistently deploys travel's unsettling possibilities, particularly the uncanny return of people or things from colonial places, in order to make to then make that unsettling vanish, to restore a "natural" order" (91). Indeed, reading detective fiction is the most pervasive form of "paranoia recreativa." Villoro carefully weaves a critique not only of the real material consequences of tourism, but also the consumption at the imaginary level. Following Slavoj Žižek's reading of classic detective fiction, Rushing takes the travel structure of detective fiction as a way to avoid the real of our desires, that is, a way to sublimate our deepest fantasies (59). In the same vein, tourism in peripheral spaces offers the tourist an edenic

place carefully crafted for the fulfillment of desires. As such, these activities of release enable everyday life to go on without trouble. In the words of Mario Müller: “El turismo siempre ha sido un modo de joderse, un castigo que aceptas como diversión. Si te quedaras en tu casa matarías a tu madre” (180)⁶⁶. The work of Ian Fleming explored in the previous section becomes particularly relevant then to the neoliberal perverse Caribbean setting that Müller has devised for his guests. If in the past the spy moves across the globe in the search of crucial intelligence, today the tourist also seeks unique experiences that have increasingly devolved into a touristic industry based on misery.⁶⁷

The conflation of detection and travel, of tourist and reader, introduces the question of mobility and access to spaces of leisure and paradise. Whether travel occurs in real or metaphorical ways, it hinges upon the stasis of certain elements. As Mimi Sheller writes in regard to the tourist experience of the Caribbean:

Thus the ability of the tourist to enjoy moving within and through the Caribbean requires limits to be placed on the mobility of “local” people, who are barred access to resort areas except in so far as they perform service work. The apparent freedom of movement and boundless travel in a “world without frontiers” is produced by techniques of binding people, places, and meanings in place. The “untouched” Caribbean of tourist fantasy must be held in place behind walls, gates, and service smiles in order to afford the tourist experience of getting close to it (30).

⁶⁶ “Tourism has always been a way to screw oneself, a punishment you accept as entertainment. If you stayed home you would kill your mother.”

⁶⁷ In reality there is an analogue, albeit in less extreme form, to La Pirámide. Favela tourism in Brazil has become an industry built on the “experience” of poverty. As Bianca Freire-Medeiros has argued the tours that have become a staple for Rio tourists hinge on a “controlled risk” (22), and were bolstered by the creation of a “cinematic favela” (in the film *City of God*) feeding a loop between representations forging a new space: “we are facing the surging of a mobile entity, a space of imagination that is traveled to while traveling around the world— what I call the traveling favela” (30).

The experience of “getting close to it,” as Sheller explains, is a heavily texturized fantasy where the veneer of paradise is sustained. The tourist experience remains one of simulacrum. In Mario Müller’s quote above, the tourists of La Pirámide come into contact with Mexico through sensational media representations to sensational tourist representations. The structure of La Pirámide conveys the superficiality of the touristic edifice built for foreign consumption. Set around Mexico’s Mayan area, the hotel uses the Maya legacy of the region to sustain the illusion of “Mexico” sought by the tourist. “El trópico y los mayas son una excelente escenografía,” says one of the overseas managers of the hotel (182)⁶⁸. The hotel reproduces many of the Mayan constructions and naturally, exploits apocalyptic hysteria attached to Mayan prophecies about the end of the world. In this end, however, the tourist’s movement, the fantasy of mobility is unveiled as illusory. To use Rushing’s wording again, this is a “domesticated journey”—one that as he explains is animated by the notion of the eventual return to safety (92).

There is also something more profound at stake in the use of the Caribbean setting, of the fantasy of the closed space for a global understanding of the intense interconnection of today. Sheller notes the fact that the discovery and colonization of the Caribbean islands by Europeans “produced the first physical confirmation that the world could be circumnavigated,” and thus became a crucial piece in the development of a global consciousness (15). The recent deployment of the insular setting in crime fiction points to a paranoid conception of globalization, one in which the Western subject finds itself at an impasse: there are no new places to “discover,” there is nowhere else *new* to go. If in the past the Caribbean region worked as a springboard for “new” worlds as it did for Fleming and his readers, Villoro shows the exhaustion of that fantasy by showing how deeply connected it is to global economies of licit and illicit commodities. As Sheller reminds us the Caribbean was a space of accumulation of

⁶⁸ “The tropics and the mayas are an excellent setting.”

knowledge, cultural practice and capital for the West (22). One important detail in which Villoro's Caribbean differs from previous depictions in mass consumption artifacts is its Mexican setting. Within Mexico, this area stands in stark with the rest of the country; the region's Mayan heritage (as opposed to Aztec) is still present today and is one of the many cultural differences that set the region apart. This part of Mexico can be exotic even for a Mexican; indeed Villoro himself (who has family roots in the Yucatán Peninsula) writes a travelogue about a trip to the area in which difference, from language to temperature to lifestyle, are highlighted.⁶⁹ In *Arrecife*, Villoro exploits the Mayan heritage of this side of Mexico, via Müller's maniacal business; the resort has reproductions of Mayan altars, for example. The geographic particularities of the area, the cenotes and reefs, are also paramount to the plot, as they will provide a cover for the illicit business.

As mentioned above, Müller bases his touristic endeavor on paranoia, on the foreigner's desire for an experience of risk. Those who work in the La Pirámide also experience a loss of control, as they are subject to foreign capital, the offices in London taking every decision about the resort's management. Even the security personnel are controlled from, and only respond to, orders from London. The workers of the resort sense this. Antonio and others remark how the place is under constant surveillance. The novel opens up with this uneasiness. When Müller calls Antonio to tell him about the dead body that has been found, Antonio wonders if there are cameras behind mirrors or if guests are spied through the television due to the efficient way in which his friend has been able to locate him. As any crime story, then, the novel opens with a dead body and an anxiety about the mystery that is extended to the bizarre environment of the resort.

⁶⁹ *Palmeras de la brisa rápida: Un viaje a Yucatán*. Mexico, D.F: Alianza Editorial Mexicana, 1989.

The first body to be discovered is that of Ginger Oldenville, an American scuba diver who works for the resort. Ginger is found on the resort's aquarium, neoprene suit and all, with a harpoon in his back. The diver's death presents a problem for Müller and his foreign bosses; a "real" death, of an American, no less, can bring unnecessary attention. When Leopoldo Támez, the hotel's security manager, begins an investigation into Ginger's death, Antonio is surprised by the hotel's swift fabrication of backstories and motives for the murder. Soon after, another body appears, another American diver, a friend of Ginger named Roger Bacon. This second body provides Támez with many storylines that readily "solve" the crime, from terrorism (a tattoo in Arabic in Bacon's arm provides the perfect "proof" of this) to a suicide pact of lovers.

As he witnesses the hotel's questionable procedures of investigation, Antonio begins to investigate and it is through him that we come to learn both how the hotel works and the mechanisms behind the diver's death. Antonio's position in the hotel is important to his work of detection. As I mentioned before, he is a childhood friend of Müller and fellow band mate. A recovering drug addict, Antonio goes to La Pirámide at the behest of Müller, who entrusts him with the "musicalization" of the resort's aquarium, a macabre experience whereby the movement of the fish is transformed into sound. The result is a soothing experience for the guests, but not for the fish, which are restless and crash into the glass over and over (20). As the majority of the other "detectives" in the narratives studied in this dissertation, Antonio's position vis-à-vis the locus of crime is both inside and outside. He has a privileged insider glimpse into the workings of the hotel through his friendship with Müller and with Petersen, Müller's American boss. Yet, as it will be shown throughout the narrative, Antonio also remains an outsider, unaware of the illicit economic networks that are key to the operations of La Pirámide. Of his desire to investigate, Antonio says that "para un drogadicto que recupera la sobriedad, su propia vida

privada puede ser un enigma. Investigar lo que Ginger llevaba en el momento de morir (un nudo suave) me pareció un modo de investigar mi desconocida cotidianidad” (51).⁷⁰ I will expand on Antonio’s position as a detective later, particularly as it relates to the national context of Mexico. For now, what is important is that the carefully orchestrated reality of La Pirámide, Antonio’s “cotidianidad,” is presented as a normal situation. As the other narratives in the dissertation, crime is presented from an everyday perspective, an uncanny day-to-day experience organized by fear.

Limits of the World: Narco-economies and beyond

Through his investigation, Antonio discovers that the divers’ deaths are connected to the drug trafficking business that occurs in Kukulcán. These links are revealed to be underwater, however. As a scuba diving instructor for the hotel, Ginger is strongly connected to the sea and the geographic particularities of this part of Mexico. He has explored extensively the region’s cenotes, natural sinkholes that form subterranean pools and that were used by the Mayans for sacrificial rituals:

Ginger había explorado los cenotes de la región y los ríos subterráneos que los comunicaban. A él se debía la “línea de vida” subacuática, el cordón encajado con armellas a la piedra que los buzos usaban para desplazarse en el agua oscura. Alguna vez me contó de un viaje a las islas Galápagos, donde vio toda clase de especies y fotografió un tiburón blanco (la imagen adornaba su teléfono celular). Le gustaban los riesgos controlados: en las inmersiones profundas dejaba varios tanques atados a una cuerda para

⁷⁰ “For a drug addict who recovers sobriety, his own private life can be an enigma. I considered that investigating what Ginger was carrying when he died (a soft knot) was a way to investigate my unknown quotidian experience.”

usarlos en su ascensión a la superficie; en cada escala hacía una pausa de descompresión (38).⁷¹

Ginger's knowledge of the area, Antonio makes clear, is extensive. He has been responsible for the "línea de vida," the demarcation that serves as a guide through the cave-like cenotes. The diver is here also presented as a world-adventurer, an explorer who has recorded his voyages. In this citation, Antonio also likens Ginger's methods to those of La Pirámide, where the risk can only go so far, it is a "controlled" danger.

The "controlled" risk is no longer possible to manage once Ginger "sees" drug trafficking networks underwater. From Ceballos, another scuba diver employee of the resort, Antonio learns that Ginger had seen the movement of drugs, a route extending from Kukulcán to Miami. The description of Ginger's underwater discovery plays with notions of (in)visibility, a play that alludes to the challenges of seeing the economic flows that regulate life on land:

Sus aletas dieron con el fondo de un cenote, y levantaron una espesa nube de arena, cenizas, polvo de huesos. El agua se volvió densa. Era de día y el resplandor cobró una brillantez espantosa. Cuando las partículas se asentaron, vieron un halo de luz azul, una linterna submarina. Se escondieron tras unas rocas y pudieron distinguir a otros buzos, que tomaban uno de los túneles. Los siguieron a distancia hasta una bóveda subterránea por la que se filtraba el sol[...] Un barco había fondeado, a unos doscientos metros. Sólo entonces comprendieron que los buzos que los precedían llevaban paquetes envueltos en hule negro, del tamaño de un frigobar (Ceballos dijo "frigobar). Habían visto el camino

⁷¹ "Ginger had explored the cenotes of the region and the subterranean rivers that linked them. He placed the underwater lifeline, the rope attached with eyebolts to the stone scuba divers used to move around the dark water. One time he told me about a trip to the Galapagos, where he saw all kinds of species and photographed a white shark (the image decked his cellular phone). He liked controlled risks: in deep immersions he would leave various tanks tied to a rope to use in his ascension to the surface, in each scale he would stop for decompression."

de la droga: el cenote servía como alcantarilla rumbo al drenaje de los ríos subterráneos y una playa para embarcar la mercancía hacia Miami, con protección de la marina (118).⁷²

The diver's accidental brushing with the ground unleashes a series of movements where nature itself seems to conspire: the sand, the dust all acquire a sinister dimension under the daylight: "una brillantez espantosa." The geography of the region also provides excitement in the narrative. In particular, the cenotes, a feature of this area of Mexico, with their subterranean connections afford another layer of mystery, underneath passageways that heighten the uneasiness of the scene, the feeling that there's more. The culmination of this unveiling is the appearance of other divers transporting black packages, moving through a path unknown to Ginger. Significantly, there's an insistence of the scene on visibility and movement localized on the American diver's body. It is this body that can "see" interconnection: the drugs, the protection of the government (the "marina"), the paths the merchandise takes all within the framework of tourism.

The image of the American/foreign body visualizing economic networks underwater can be contrasted with the work of Fleming. As a biographer tells us, Fleming was quite fond of the reef around his Jamaican property, noting that "Fleming's favorite thing of all, though, was the reef, where he would spend hours floating, observing or hunting, enjoying the coolness of the water, his body's natural buoyancy and the exciting otherworldliness of it all" (Parker 40). He adds that Fleming's love and knowledge of the underwater landscape can be seen in the Bond

⁷² His flippers touched the ground of a cenote and lifted a thick cloud of sand, ashes, bone dust. The water became dense. It was daytime and the glimmer turned a frightening shimmer. When the particles settle down, they saw a halo of blue light, a submarine lantern. They hid under some rocks and could make out other divers who were taking one of the tunnels. They followed them at a distance to a subterranean cave through which sunlight shone through [...] A boat was stopped two hundred meters away. Only then did they realized that the divers carried packages wrapped in black rubber, the size of a small fridge. They had seen a drug path: the cenote was a sewer on the way to the drainage of the subterranean rivers and a beach to load the merchandise to Miami, under the protection of the marine.

novels, some of which contain thrilling scenes of underwater action that were regarded by critics among his best (6)⁷³. In the essay that I considered at the beginning of this chapter, Fleming describes just how crucial underwater exploration was to his development of a world consciousness: “I first learned about the bottom of the sea from the reefs around my property and that has added a new dimension to my view of the world” (12). Indeed, the submarine environment provides a final frontier for understanding the flows and networks that shape life on land; this is a privileged space where what would be typically experienced as invisible (the murky flows of the economy) is rendered manifest. Villoro and Fleming are writing about vastly different contexts, and yet the image remains the same: a foreigner with the ability to test the territorial limits of the globe and go underwater. More importantly, these men gain some kind of understanding from these experiences. In the case of Fleming, it provides him with a richer worldview, one that undoubtedly contributed to spy fiction’s project of showing the reader a “behind the scenes” glimpse into the working of the machinery that controls life and exerts power. In the case of *Arrecife*, Oldenville decides to go to the American consulate to denounce the illicit business (126). Oldenville also tells another American scuba diver, Roger Bacon, who searches for the narco underwater route and is killed as well. These scenes of revelation contrast with the experience of the Mexican characters in the novel, those who are not tourists. When Antonio confronts Müller with the information about the divers’ deaths, he responds: “todo

⁷³ See for example *Thunderball* where Bond battles Emilio Largo and the SPECTRE organization in their plan of taking nuclear bombs to get money from Western powers. Importantly, the cover for Largo’s operation in Nassau (where they hide the armaments) is a treasure hunt. The image of underwater money becomes poignant when read against the transformation of the Caribbean as an offshore financial center, that I explore further in the chapter. Vivian Halloran notes that “a convincing case can be made for reading the Bond novels as modern-day pirate fiction” (160). It should be noted here that during WWII Fleming served as a naval officer.

mundo está enterado del narco. ¡El país vive de eso! Es algo horrendo y normal” (X).⁷⁴ He adds: “Cualquier taxista de Kukulcán te puede decir que estamos flotando en droga” (143).⁷⁵ The word “flotando” here also conveys the overflow of capital created by the drug trade, liquid wealth that must be employed. The scenes of revelation are only for the foreigners and are enabled by the kind of mobility they possess, enabled by the tourism industry.

The novel’s introduction of narco-trafficking breaks with previous representation of the business as Villoro has his characters “see” drug trafficking networks underwater, a unique setting that allows another view into the way the “narco” functions and pushes the novel’s limits to represent illicit economic networks. Detection, and in particular, detection in a “narconovela” invariably occurs on land. But what happens when investigation moves underwater? What kind of global understanding of economic networks is the novel presenting? Here, I follow Margaret Cohen’s illuminating study, *The Novel and the Sea*, where she considers the role of sea adventure fiction in the development of the novel’s modern consciousness. Cohen details how “craft” — the mariner’s skill— becomes part of these novel’s problem-solving poetics with seafaring information and maps provided to the reader. Cohen posits that this poetics is also present in the speculative fiction that will come later, namely, detective and spy fiction (86). She writes in her epilogue: “in our time, too, we continue to glamorize the work of navigating high-risk zones at the Edge zones of flux, danger, and destruction” (225). The “Edge zone” in *Arrecife* affords the image of completeness, the totality of the drug trade. In a review of the novel, Ibsen Martínez posits that Villoro’s text is set “del lado de la demanda,” that is, as opposed to the emphasis on drug lords and beheaded men of the narco (“el lado de la oferta”), the novel probes into another side.

⁷⁴ “everyone knows about the narco. The country lives from that! It’s horrendous and normal.”

⁷⁵ “Any Kukulcán taxi driver can tell you we’re floating in drugs.”

The novel proposes a concrete connection between narco-trafficking and tourism, two of Mexico's most important links to the outside world. The novel proposes a concrete connection between narco-trafficking and tourism, two of Mexico's most important links to the outside world. Their intersection becomes troublesome for Müller's endeavor and for the foreign capital behind it. At one moment in the narrative, Müller explains to Antonio how the local drug cartel, Los Conchos, considers the resort an interference with their business. "No les gusta nuestra violencia," he says (166). Müller admits that he profits from the narco business, the symbiotic relationship between them has perhaps gone too far: "Nosotros los necesitamos a ellos para ser creíbles, pero a ellos les molesta el ruido que generamos. Alguien puede seguirles la pista" (166).⁷⁶ The discovery brought by Oldenville's death pierces the veil of the fantasy, announcing what is known, but never openly discussed.

Atrium, the business group that owns and controls La Pirámide, is aware of the narco presence in the area, and as Antonio unearths toward the end of the narrative, it plays an important role in the divers' death.⁷⁷ Antonio's investigation leads him back to el Gringo Petersen, in a heated confrontation where the American businessman reveals the chain of command that killed Oldenville, how the machinations to murder him came from London. The irruption of death in La Pirámide is presented as the intrusion of the real of the economic processes that afflict the region. "La violencia se volvió real con él," (165) says Müller of Oldenville's death. The men's death tells the administration in London that a new scheme has to

⁷⁶ We need them to be credible, but they are bothered by the noise we generate. Somebody can follow their trail.

⁷⁷ For example, Antonio is shocked when Müller tells him that Atrium is aware of the drug-trafficking situation: "Esos cabrones no se chupan el dedo. Hablan a diario con la DEA, con Interpol, con Scotland Yard, con la PGR, con Disney Latino, que algún día hará la película de todo esto. Estamos rigurosamente vigilados" (144). "These assholes are not stupid. They speak daily with the DEA, Interpol, Scotland Yard, the Attorney General of Mexico, Disney Latino, which one day will make a movie out of this. We are rigorously watched."

be created, that Müller's maniacal plan has run its course. Petersen wants the resort to become a "ghost hotel," a place to launder money, and reminds Antonio that it was the British who invented offshore islands in their former colonies (109).

The reference to the British offshore paradises is important, for it brings another crucial usage of the island imaginary in the twenty-first century: the offshore financial paradise. In the organizational schema of *La Pirámide*, with London at its command and with American oversight, the novel alludes to the other use of insular Caribbean settings as spaces through which illicit money flows between financial centers; Petersen's consideration of this option for *La Pirámide* evinces the contemporary salience of seemingly isolated spaces in today's world. This reference also takes us back to the British connection that I established early, through Ian Fleming, and his character James Bond. As Nicholas Shaxson notes in his study on tax havens, it is not a coincidence that James Bond travels to unregulated financial spaces such as Luxembourg and Nassau, since the novels are tracing new developments in international criminality (80). In his book, Shaxson presents British tax havens as a postcolonial reconfiguration of metropolitan spaces and peripheral spaces. In the British case, he considers it "a spiderweb," and "a financial replacement for Empire" (8).⁷⁸

The narco-violence of the area does not seem to disturb Petersen; it does not work as an obstacle for economic opportunity, but opens up new avenues for capital accumulation. Indeed, narco-trafficking is one of the businesses he proposes to "clean" through the resort: "El dinero de la venta de armas, de la trata de blancas, del narcotráfico no puede llegar así como así a un banco, necesita dar un rodeo: Kukulcán es perfecto para simular que las ganancias se generaron

⁷⁸ As Shaxson reminds us, offshore paradises were first used by Mafia members, particularly, Meyer Lansky's businesses in Cuba, before they became tied to "legitimate" capitalist endeavors (88). See also, Goddard.

aquí” (109).⁷⁹ At the end of the novel, a representative from London arrives in La Pirámide to clear up the cases. He speaks to Antonio of new plans for the resort, in the hopes of recruiting him for a future transformation of La Pirámide into a cultural or ecological theme park. “Llámalo colonialismo sustentable” o “imperialismo sutil,” he tells Antonio, adding that “lo único más comercial que la cultura es la ecología” (182). The end of the novel then sees La Pirámide set for another cycle of renovation and profit.

The Nation

As I’ve shown, *Arrecife* presents the ways through which Mexico becomes linked to the world via the tourism industry and narcotrafficking, by doing this, the novel also unravels the mythologies and icons of a national identity. “Mexican-ness” in the novel is represented as melodrama through the lens of Antonio’s melancholy and nostalgia for an unfractured family and nation. Antonio strikes the reader as a pathetic figure from the beginning: a failed marriage, a musical career that is over, a drug addiction. Physically, too, Villoro highlights Antonio’s imperfections: he is missing a finger (due to an accident with a firecracker) and walks with a limp (the result of a car accident). The novel’s detective is then “defective,” in a similar way to the character of Laura in *La diabla en el espejo*, which I analyzed in the previous chapter.⁸⁰ However, as opposed to Laura, Antonio carries the marks of disability in his body. These “defective” characters are marked by alienation from their families, their nations, and their communities and that isolation is precisely what allows them to investigate. As Laura, Antonio also carries the marks of state power, albeit in a different way. An only child, Antonio’s father disappears, leaving his family. The massacre, a vicious attack by the state on peaceful student

⁷⁹ The money from gun sales, sex trade, narco cannot go like that to a bank, it needs to take a detour: Kukulcán is perfect to simulate that profits were generated here.

⁸⁰ Like Holmes, Antonio was addicted to cocaine.

demonstrators, becomes an excuse, a hollow event in the novel. The involvement of Antonio's father in the massacre is questioned throughout the novel, until he learns at the end that his father did not in fact participate in the protests. Tlatelolco then becomes an empty symbol; Antonio remembers that as a youth, as the fallen students become the heroes and victims of an authoritarian regime, he feels entitled to certain rights: "cuando sonaba el timbre del apartamento, imaginaba a un mensajero del gobierno con una televisión a colores por tener un caído en Tlatelolco" (25).⁸¹ The disarticulation of the national also occurs in the resort's scheme, where the recent past does not matter or has been turned into a quaint commodity. At one moment in the narrative, Müller takes Antonio on one of the resort's activities in which guests participate in a guerrilla attack with Müller mimicking Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos (72). In the same vein, the resort recycles ancient Maya mythology and iconography to package and sell in all its apocalyptic and futuristic dimensions. The Maya setting complements the resort's construction of fear while ignoring the present-day indigenous populations, who work at the resort.

The national context is presented in an affective language of loss that extends to the American characters lost in a seedy Mexico.⁸² Sandra, the fitness instructor, arrives in Mexico with a Vietnam War veteran and ends in La Pirámide after years of sexual exploitation. Ginger also flees a war, the Gulf conflict, as it is revealed that he arrives in Mexico escaping deployment from the war, and attempts to exchange GPS information about drug routes to clean his record of desertion. These stories of expatriation are told as melodramas, with a melancholy emerging

⁸¹ "When the apartment buzzer rang I would picture a government messenger with a color television for having a fallen one in Tlatelolco."

⁸² The novel's epigraph comes from the perspective of an exile: "Algún día encontraré una tierra corrompida hasta la ignominia, donde los niños desfallezcan por falta de leche, una tierra de desdicha e inocente y gritaré: "Me quedaré aquí hasta que esté sea un buen lugar por obra mía." Malcolm Lowry

from the loss of affective and political communities that stand in stark contrast to the novel's investigation, to the "rational" side of detection.

The melodrama continues with Müller's big revelation to Antonio that he is dying from cancer. Throughout the narrative, Müller reminds his friend of their good times since childhood through their musical career. Müller pleads with his friend to adopt his daughter after his death. The daughter is the product of a relationship Müller had with a woman linked to drug trafficking, and who is killed by her partner, a local drug kingpin. The daughter lives in a center for women who have been victims of violence, mostly from their connections to the drug trade. Amidst the impending collapse of La Pirámide, Müller's disease, and the encroachment of drug cartels in the area, narco-violence is presented as a possibility. We have seen this before through the London businessmen, who do not consider narcotrafficking an impediment for their business, but see it as yet another economic opportunity. In the case of Antonio, it's a chance for personal redemption. The novel ends with this sentimental note, as Antonio flees to Mexico City with Müller's daughter and a young woman caretaker, another victim of the narco, who is presented as a love interest for Antonio. The novel's emotional storylines of friendship and loss strike a strange chord with the novel's detection. The sentimental ending, where Antonio sets out to head and repair a broken family unit that is an explicit result of narcotrafficking seems unusual. Antonio's detection becomes useless at the end; the scenes of revelation the novel has presented: Ginger "seeing" narco routes, Antonio's discovery of the intertwined relationship of the resort and the narco, become superfluous, painful in their transparency. In this retreat to the domestic, perhaps the novel performs a movement similar to classical detective fiction, repairing the domestic setting that has been perturbed by crime and creating some kind of reassurance to the reader.

And yet, the shadow cast by narcotrafficking never truly dissolves, the clarity of it paradoxically making it ungraspable.

Networks, Flows, and Spaces

Throughout this chapter, and the previous chapter as well, I've attempted to shed light on the paranoid structure of a closed room and what it might mean when it is taken as a setting in contemporary fiction. What kinds of fantasy does this enclosure enable? What's at stake in the fantasy of an isolated space? In *Arrecife* the figure of the locked space is present on three levels: geographic, textual, and economic. Geographic in the insular position of the resort, presented as an enclosed structure with its own regulating mechanisms. Textual because, as Michael Cook argues, form and content in detective fiction are inextricably connected. In the case of the novel, the crime goes back to the resort itself, to the management that controls it from abroad. Lastly, the economic structure in which La Pirámide is placed can be read as an economic enclosure of underdevelopment. As I showed throughout my reading of the novel, the novel ultimately critiques the subjection of the real peripheral spaces that detective fiction takes as setting. In this regard and particularly in the Caribbean and Latin American context, the crime novel, in its support to an outside, can be linked to other addictive commodities such as sugar and tobacco, and also, other "addictive" activities associated with the Caribbean such as gambling. Ultimately, of course, this takes us back to drugs, the center of the novel, to the flows that Ginger sees underwater. As Paul Gootenberg reminds us, we need to consider drugs in the same continuum of global commodities, in its crucial role in forging global consciousness of circulation and borders: "illicit drugs were among the first global goods to supersede borders and regulatory states in the quest for profit" (15). In what follows, I will try to elucidate through *Arrecife* the

economic questions behind these images of enclosure, specifically the flows that traverse these seemingly locked spaces.

In a provocative essay on space in crime fiction, David Schmid critiques the lack of interest of a spatial analysis in crime fiction. He proposes the possibility that “space in crime fiction is rhizomatic in the Deleuzian sense” and via Manuel Castells, offers the possibility that it works as “a series of connected nodal points forming a large network, rather than a group of mutually exclusive spaces with no connection from one to the other” (11). Schmid convincingly argues for a spatial approach to the genre that would challenge the genre’s reading as a closed system, in the case of classical detective fiction, or a heterosexual urban fantasy, in the case of hardboiled narrative. He does this through an analysis that begins with the smallest unit, the locked room in Poe, and ends with the globe, with a Latin American novel, *Muertos Incómodos*, the joint collaboration of Mexican crime writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II and former Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos. In this novel, Schmid consider the problem of scale: the way it stages the entanglement of local and global problems. In the same vein, *Arrecife* questions the problem of space in crime fiction and also makes us pay attention to the problem of scale. Significantly, instead of a simple presentation of the insular, isolated space as a microcosm of a larger context, as a metonymy for the globe at large, the novel considers this “small space” in its profound interconnectedness, through different scales, with global processes. This is crucial to the novel’s presentation of globality, to the way it stages the different flows that traverse the fictional space of Kukulcán and that connect Mexico to the world. In this way, the novel itself breaches the fantasy of containment, and demonstrates an important trait of the “locked room” structure, that has been highlighted by Schmid and other critics of the genre: the locked room is, in fact, not locked. These spaces give the illusion of enclosure, but an outside force can always

penetrate them. The consistent appearance of insular spaces as setting in contemporary crime fiction reveals an anxiety about the transnationality of crime. These enclosed settings speak to a fantasy of connection and containment in a globalized, neoliberal world.

Conclusion

Any discussion of networks and criminality would be remiss without a mention of Roberto Bolaño's monumental novel, *2666*. The text is built on the idea of connection: from the circulation of literature and writers to global wars. The network at the core of the novel is the gruesome murders of young women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Bolaño narrates murder scene after murder scene in a clinical language that mimics a forensic report. The novel exhausts the crime genre, as bodies and evidence proliferate, but the culprit is never found, where truth can never be reached. At one moment in the narrative, a journalist from Mexico City travels to Juárez, hears about the murders, and begins an investigation. In one of his trips back to Mexico City, he discusses the murders with a colleague in a telling moment that illustrates the challenges of thinking neoliberal interconnectivity:

En una ocasión, le preguntó a uno de los periodistas más viejos qué opinión tenía de los asesinatos de mujeres que ocurrían en el norte. El periodista le contestó que aquella era una zona de narcos y que seguramente nada de lo que pasaba allí era ajeno, en una u otra medida, al fenómeno del tráfico de drogas. Le pareció una respuesta obvia, que le hubiera podido dar cualquiera, y cada cierto tiempo pensaba en ella, como si pese a la obviedad de las palabras del periodista o a su simpleza la respuesta orbitara alrededor de la cabeza enviándole señales (582).

The colleague's answer appears seemingly correct; he agrees that the murders "have to" be related to the narco. The journalist admits that something is odd with this answer, however. There's too much simplicity, a transparency and readiness in the colleague's reply that seems *not* right, precisely because it is too obvious. Space plays a key role in this passage as well. The colleague's demarcation of a "norte" as a distinct "zona de narcos" creates a distance that is

replicated at the level of knowledge— as if the “zona de narcos” could be neatly labeled and apprehended, and therefore, be contained and unconnected to the capital city. This passage encapsulates the “networks of paranoia” that I have discussed in this dissertation, for while the journalist admits that surely his colleague is not wrong, the facile all-encompassing answer of a big, nefarious, over-arching network (in this case, narcotrafficking) and the image of the network confined to a bound totality, over there, *allí*, preclude a complete understanding of the exacerbation of criminality and violence in neoliberal Latin America.

This continues later on. After the narrator notes the indifference of the journalist’s colleagues to the murders in Juárez, the journalist visits a prostitute in Mexico City. After sex, he tells her about the Juárez murders he is writing about, but the woman, tired, does not react with the outrage he expects. He chides her for this, telling her that she should at least have “solidaridad gremial” (solidarity with those in her line of work) with the prostitutes being murdered in the north. To which the woman replies that, according to his story, the murdered women are not prostitutes, but workers in the city’s sweatshops. The journalist’s reaction reveals how crucial (and yet, easily escapable) is the connection between labor and gender in the murders: “Y entonces Sergio le pidió perdón y como tocado por un rayo vio un aspecto de la situación que hasta ese momento había pasado por alto” (583). As the texts I analyzed in this dissertation, *2666* is interested in the work of connection, and also presents the epistemic work of connection as mediated by affect. The prostitute’s assessment produces a “flash” or “lighting” (a literal revelation) in the journalist. This moment recalls my reading of *La diablo en el espejo* in chapter three, where Laura’s detection involves “luzazos” that give her insight into the connections between her friend, the financial world, and narcotrafficking.

Through networks, the Latin American crime novel tackles the problem of cognitive mapping through a postcolonial sensibility. As Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle note, cognitive mapping, “is inflected by the unevenness of capitalism and its geographically-differentiated formations” (20). British writer Hari Kunzru, who also takes the network as organizing structure in novels such as *Transmission* and *Gods Without Men*, has critiqued how fiction sometimes reproduces an ideologically charged representation of the free, economic individual. To him, the concept of the “network” serves to undo this: “It’s another hope I have for fiction that, by presenting people as enmeshed in networks and social structures, you can actually get past this kind of character psychology which is no longer fit for purpose” (Haiven 21). As a methodological approach, taking networks as a unit of study has proven to be a way out of the impasse that transnational illegality poses. Critics such as Persephone Braham and Glen S. Close have consistently noted the challenge of studying representations of contemporary criminality, always overflowing boundaries. The network figure bypasses national and linguistic demarcations and allows a deep engagement with global forces. In her 2004 study on the *neopoliciaco*, Braham states that “in the future, it will be impossible to limit studies of detective fiction to one country, as has habitually done in the past. In all likelihood it will be much more useful to speak simply of the detective novel in Spanish rather than the Cuban, the Mexican, or the Spanish detective novel” (108). I would argue as well that by highlighting network structures the Latin American crime novel eludes the problem of the solution, and the possible lack of satisfaction in the reader, who seeks closure. Indeed, networks open up other fantasies and desires, as for example, the contemplation of a bound totality, of an entire social or economic system. As Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle note of the cultural and ideological work behind

cognitive mapping: “Overview, especially when it comes to capital, is a fantasy—if a very effective, and often destructive, one” (242).

In chapters one and three, I presented compelling examples of the genre’s turn into the domestic sphere, more reminiscent of classical detective fiction, than its hardboiled, gritty counterpart. In the case of chapter three in particular, the exploration of insidious elite circles marks a turn away from the usual criminalized spaces of the slum, the favela, and the streets. It also indicates a noticeable trend of elite characters occupying all structural positions of the genre, victim, perpetrator, and investigator within their milieu. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the work of Claudia Piñero, whose novels waver between domestic melodrama and crime fiction in the context of Argentina after the 2001 financial crisis. In *Las viudas de los jueves* (published in 2005 and later adapted to cinema in 2009), Piñero focuses on the “countrys,” the wealthy gated communities outside Buenos Aires. The text explores the effect of the rising national tensions on the eve of the financial collapse on a group of male friends, who ultimately decide to commit suicide on the face of economic and personal pressures. The lavish “country” becomes a kind of laboratory to study the fears and anxieties of a paranoid upper class that cannibalizes itself in its quest for survival. In another novel titled *Betibú*, Piñero continues to explore the “country” and its inhabitants through another group of male, wealthy men. In the text, the death of a prominent man in his house launches an investigation into a group of friends belonging to the Buenos Aires elite, who are one by one murdered. The threat in Piñero’s texts comes from within, dealing with structures that are crumbling from the inside out (not unlike the corrupt government in *Tropa de Elite 2*). The other dimension of the paranoid trope of broken domestic bliss is the home’s invasion by an outside source, as in *Os Inquilinos*. Another example from the Argentine context

is the novel *La villa* by Alan Pauls, where a man becomes obsessed with the life and residents in the slum near his house. Rodrigo Plá in his film *La Zona* (2007) stages the drama of invasion in a Mexican context, in a gated community where neighbors have replaced the police force, killing and enforcing justice. These examples highlight not only new spatial configurations in a neoliberal context, but also, to borrow Lauren Berlant's vocabulary, a "historical sensorium" mediated by social class that contemporary crime fiction registers.

As I've argued throughout, paranoia is a key part of this "historical sensorium" of the present. The constant appearance of enclosed social spaces in the genre is a formal expression of that paranoia, indexing the anxieties of neoliberalism by showing how the smallest local unit (a home, an apartment, an island) is penetrated by capital. The fascination with elite worlds betrays a desire to see how power functions, a behind the scenes of the lives of those who control information, money, and even other lives. Here, Toscano and Kinkle's assertion about the fantasy of cognitive mapping is important, as it reminds us of the failure of pretending there is an outside of capital — for example, in Piñero's *Las viudas de los jueves* or Castellanos Moya's *La diabla en el espejo*, there is a kind of distance between the reader and the social world of the text. To Glen Close the absence of the detective figure evinces the corrupt and unequal neoliberal context of Latin America. That the detective now emerges from within the elite world, and the fascination of those elite worlds begs more theoretical consideration.

Scholars of popular culture must invariably justify their field of study. In the case of Latin American crime fiction, even its existence has been questioned again and again. In a much quoted phrase by Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis: ¿A quién le importa quién mató a Roger Ackroyd? Today, there is a present need to engage critically with paranoid discourses. Recent

famous cases in the region attest to this urgency. For example, the case of Rodrigo Rosenberg in Guatemala, a wealthy lawyer who planned his own death in order to frame the president and the coffee-growing elite. Or, in Argentina, the death of prosecutor Alberto Nisman, on the eve of his formal accusations that Argentina's president had negotiated with Iranian terrorists. The contemporary Latin American crime novel makes sense of this paranoid reality. This is not a paranoia grounded on an evil institution, or surveillance, but about the complexity behind how the social world functions: the links between people and institutions, the entanglement of legality and illegality. The Latin American crime novel, I have argued, has a special vantage point into the networks that organize life in the region, mapping new economic and social configurations, showing what can we know, or what remains hidden, about how our social and economic systems function. Crime fiction helps us visualize the epistemological conditions that engender and sustain paranoia, because it is precisely in the "paranoid" universe of crime fiction that we can begin to make sense of the complex networks that organize our life.

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