Border Images and Imaginaries: Spectral Aesthetics and Visual Medias of Americanity at the U.S.-Mexico Border

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Literature in the Graduate School of Duke University

2014
ABSTRACT

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*Border Images and Imaginaries: Spectral Aesthetics and Visual Media of Americanity at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, proposes an emerging aesthetic of spectrality in visual media about the U.S.-Mexico border that challenges the power of militarized and racialized visibility. The visual media projects I work with, including cinema, electronic performance art, site specific video installation, and photography generate an aesthetic of spectrality as they try to conjure and express the socially invisible through sensual elements like affect, sound, kinaesthetics, and full embodiment. This aesthetic elicits the perceptions of our other senses beyond only the visual and makes visible the social flesh of the movements and socialities of migration rather than racialized, migrant bodies. The border, I claim, is an important site for understanding the continued deployment of visibility in the neoliberal legacies of what Quijano and Wallerstein call, Americanity, a term denoting the development of the modern capitalist system in the Americas which relied upon the imbricate logics of colonialism, racism, and the deification the modern. Images of spectrality are intermediaries between what Diana Taylor calls, archive and repertoire, being both documents and sites of embodied engagement that produce both certain and uncertain knowledges of race and migration at the border. The visual media projects in my dissertation cultivate spectral aesthetics to theorize an alternative visibility and the changing production of public memory. By making visible the social flesh of heterogeneous encounters with media, spectral aesthetics reforms collective memory
making it a process of democratic editorialization that privileges experience as the site of a multivocal history. This project reclaims the image as a terrain for the multitude’s inquiry and imagination about the US-Mexico border, and puts the imaginaries generated by these images in dialog with activist projects happening in relation to immigration.
List of Figures

Figure 1. Heatseeking, Jordan Crandall, 2000.

Figure 2. Transborder Immigrant Tool, “Transition,” The Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g.lab, 2009.

Figure 3. Impression in the Grass, Susan Harbage Page, The U.S.-Mexico Border Project, 2007-ongoing.

Figure 4. Argyle Sock, Susan Harbage Page, The U.S.-Mexico Border Project, 2007-ongoing.

Figure 5. T-Shirt in the Grass, Susan Harbage Page, The U.S.-Mexico Border Project, 2007-ongoing.


Figure 7. *Children of Men*, Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, 2006.

Figure 8. Skin of True Node, *Sleep Dealer*, Directed by Alex Rivera 2008.

Figure 9. Digital Flesh, *Sleep Dealer*, Directed by Alex Rivera 2008.
# Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................ iv

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................ vi

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................ ix

Introduction: Looking At the Border ................................................................................................. 1

Frames of Americanity .......................................................................................................................... 13

Images and Imaginaries .......................................................................................................................... 20

The Media and Mediums of Bodies and Embodiments ........................................................................ 24

Chapter One: Embodiment, Poetics, and Fugitiviy: Militarization and Alternative Visibilities at the US-Mexico Border ........................................................................................................... 33

Colonialism and Visibility ...................................................................................................................... 38

The Militarization of the Racial Epidermal Schema at the Border ....................................................... 45

Heatseeking and the Transitivity of Seeing ............................................................................................ 53

Racial Visibility and Performing the Global Positioning System .......................................................... 68

Bodies Becoming Flesh, or The Poetics of Transitivity ....................................................................... 71

The Fugitivity of Re-Purposing ............................................................................................................ 79

Images of Flesh and Spectral Visibility ............................................................................................... 83

Coda: Undocubus, A Movement on the Run ....................................................................................... 86

Chapter Two: Found Object Photography and Spectral Traces of the Flesh at the U.S.-Mexico Border ........................................................................................................................................ 90

Spectral Aesthetics of the Photographic Haptics of Objects ............................................................... 101

Spectral Aesthetics and Second Visibility ............................................................................................ 110

vii
Death and the Ghosts of Photography ................................................................. 115
The Aesthetics of the Archive and the Discarded........................................... 123
Conclusion: Spectrality and the Departures from Racialized Visibility ............ 134
Coda: No Más Muertes/No More Deaths, Becoming a Presence in the Desert ...... 140

Chapter Three: Sounds of Americanity and Scenarios of Borderization in Alfonso Cuarón’s Children of Men .............................................................................. 144
Sounding the Scenarios of Borderlands and Deportations .............................. 152
The Border as Camp and Scenarios of Americanity ....................................... 167
Voices of Mourning and Movement ............................................................... 180
Conclusion: Speculative Histories and Spectral Aesthetics ............................. 190
Coda: Sonic Cartographies of the Border ......................................................... 193

Chapter Four: The Ghost in the Machine: Spectral Bodies, the Biopolitics of Memory, and the Imagination of Futurity in Alex Rivera’s Sleep Dealer ................................................................. 199
Biopolitics of Memory and “American Hi-Def” .............................................. 207
True Node and Insurrection in the Flesh ........................................................ 216
Spectral Images and The Imaginary ............................................................... 229
Spectral Aesthetics and Transnational Solidarities ......................................... 235
Conclusion: The Commons of the Image ......................................................... 241
Coda: On the ground and in the ether ............................................................. 246

Conclusion: The Futurity of Three Movements ............................................... 251

References ........................................................................................................ 260
Filmography ..................................................................................................... 268
Biography ......................................................................................................... 279
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Introduction: Looking At the Border

In Marcos William’s 2010 documentary *The Undocumented/Los indocumentales*, the filmmaker first introduces us to the space of the borderlands of southern Arizona through the eyes of a border patrol agent. In a patrol vehicle the cameraman sits next to the agent who describes an aspect of his job, finding people who have crossed the border, many of whom are severely dehydrated, with desperately injured feet, or sick from drinking bad water. We listen to this man talk about his job with a tone of exhaustion and compassion, describing the agony and suffering undertaken by folks crossing the U.S.- Mexico border in the Sonoran desert. The patrol vehicle makes a stop and the agent follows a tip that people are hiding nearby. He starts walking along a path but then breaks into a run, the cameraman also begins running. Soon we hear the panting and gasps of the cameraman as he struggles to keep up with the agent as he runs through the rugged terrain. The camera jostles along, surprisingly steady despite the pace, and we’re soon identifying with the gaze and the movements of a team of men, a border patrol agent and a cameraman, silent except for his huffing and puffing. Through the gaze of the camera we are brought into a particular looking relation with the border and the people clandestinely crossing it. Through the camera we take on the gaze of a border patrol agent pursuing, capturing, and detaining migrants.

While clearly a project that positions itself as compassionate towards the suffering of undocumented migrants and desperate to find a solution to the crisis at the U.S.-
Mexico border, Williams’ film nonetheless participates in a certain aesthetic and arrangement of looking that reproduces a militarized and abjecting mode of visibility of the border. Williams is a filmmaker known for his documentaries that unflinchingly probe sites of racialized violence in the U.S.¹ His films are known for seeking redress and justice for the stories of racialized violence in the U.S., and his work on *The Undocumented/Los indocumentales* suggests that loss of life at the border is a part of this history. The film contains long sequences of funeral rites for border crossers in Mexico, memorials and actions in Tucson, and the unending work of human rights advocates, family members, Mexican consulate workers, and coroners, presenting several ways in which people are responding to the loss of life at the border. Yet, these images are also paired with prolonged close-ups of bodies in various states of decomposition, enormous blisters, and an extended shot of a man in agony, dry heaving and choking after drinking contaminated water. Closely profiling the work of the Pima county coroner’s office the film displays set after set of human remains that coroners and consulates painstakingly examine, searching for clues as to who this person was. The networks of mourning and solidarity at the border and beyond are overshadowed by the sheer quantity of images of abjection, human decomposition, physical suffering, and injury. What Mary Pat Brady calls the “abjection machine” of the border functions at multiple levels in this film: the

proliferation of images of broken and decomposing bodies are moreover presented through a militarized visuality of pursuit and capture that furthers distances us from the objectified and abject migrant bodies.

In her investigation into representations of the border, *Extinct Lands and Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space*, Mary Pat Brady describes the political and aesthetic system of the U.S.-Mexico border as an abjection machine, “transforming people into ‘aliens,’ ‘illegals,’ ‘wetbacks,’ or ‘undocumented,’ and thereby rendering them unintelligible and (unintelligent), ontologically impossible, outside the real and the human” (50). This abjection machine produces a certain aesthetic of the border that shapes our ways of *looking at* the border and those who live at, cross, and are crossed by it. This is an aesthetic system; a productive arrangement of different technologies and mediums of representation that “produces abjection by simultaneously focusing on the very subjects, the ‘aliens,’ who the system would master and dismiss, even though they are supposedly outside and beyond it” (Brady 53). Drawing on Julia Kristeva, Brady shows that abjection works to distance us even as it draws us close. Marco William’s film draws us close to the sites of border policing and the suffering that it wreaks and yet the images of abject, suffering bodies do nothing to give those bodies voice or humanity but instead, despite its moral stance, contribute to an aesthetic of “disremembering and dismembering” (Brady 53). The abject, dismembered bodies of
migrants and the hegemony of militarized vision disremembers the histories that have brought the border of *The Undocumented* into being.

*The Undocumented/Los indocumentales* is an example of the aesthetic system of the U.S.-Mexico border and the conventional system of looking relations that governs its representation. The fact of the film’s moral stance, that something must be done to end suffering at the border, illustrates the effectiveness of the aesthetic system of the border. Even a film with a humanitarian imperative reproduces the abjection machine of the border. Unlike Brady who takes up Chicana literature that *looks from* the border, in this project I am concerned with texts that are *looking at* the border and moreover, are concerned with the role of technology, media, and aesthetics in producing that vision.²

Unlike the dozens of films and photography projects like, to name only a few well-known examples, *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *Traffic* (2001), *Bordertown* (2006), the paradigmatic *Touch of Evil* (1958), or *The Border Film Project* (2007), that take images of violence and suffering at the border and code it alongside narratives of contamination, infiltration, and crises of national (in)security that perform the work of the abjection machine of the border, the films and media projects in this dissertation are attempting to find another way to represent the violence of the border without reproducing states of

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² I borrow this opposition of “looking at” and “seeing from” from Esther Gabara’s article tracing the insights of fields analogous to visual studies and performance studies in Latin America. She locates a critique of Western epistemologies grounded in “looking at” in Latin American cultural studies, particularly in the work of Beatriz Sarlo and
abjection or militarized modes of vision. To borrow Brady’s phrasing, they are trying to remember by way of re-membering.

Films like the documentaries, *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) and *Maquilápolis* (2006), are doing similar ethical work as Williams’ film, yet they do this work through what I call spectral aesthetics of embodied spectatorship and multi-sensual vision that haunts the visibility of the image. They provide a different way of looking at the border. It is one that brings us close through the multitude of our senses and embodiment, and through that proximity catalyze us towards affective structures of solidarity, rather than abjection. Spectral aesthetics work to re-member at the border, bringing viewing bodies into full contact with the images of the border and the process of looking at the border. Films that look at the culture of gendered and environmental violence in maquiladora labor in the border cities of Juárez and Tijuana, Mexico, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Maquilápolis* do not shrink from the violence of borderization, or what Brady describes as “the constant reenactment of historical divisions, conquest, and control… that further stratify all kinds of relationships, including those understood in terms of labor and ethnicity” (56). They explicitly take up the lived experiences of borderization and its concomitant violences deployed along the lines of race, gender, labor, and ethnicity without abjecting their subjects.

*Maquilápolis* tells the story of NAFTA, gendered labor, and environmental racism through the personal stories of a collective of women’s lawsuit against a maquiladora for
severance wages and environmental rehabilitation. The filmmakers put the cameras in the hands of the collective, who maintained autonomy over the representation of their bodies, their homes, and communities. The violences of maquila labor on the body and psyche are conjured in several sequences in which the women mime the movements of their labor. Haunting images that trace the effects of maquila labor on their bodies, these sequences honor the knowledges of these women’s bodies while also critiquing the effects of industrial manufacture and social control. Lourdes Portillo’s documentary film, *Señorita Extraviada*, investigates the feminicides of Juárez, Mexico by “looking for ghosts.” The filmmaker lovingly conjures the presences of the dead women through the depiction of their artifacts, dresses, shoes, photographs, and the memories of their loved ones. A woman tells a story of her daughter’s pet bird, who signals to her that her daughter is gone. The film relies on the spiritual knowledge of the mother rather than the knowledge contained in police documents and evidence to understand the circumstances of disappearance.

These documentaries fit neatly within Bill Nichol’s category of “performative documentary,” that he suggests dialectically negotiate “this kind of richly and fully evoked specificity and overarching conceptual categories such as exile, racism, sexism, and homophobia…” and yet do not reduce one to the other (104). As Amy Sara Carroll points out in her discussion of *Señorita Extraviada* through Nichol’s category, the film’s performativity allows it to “shelter the hope that it might be possible both to honor the
deceased and to avoid the symbolic appropriation of ‘the pain of others’ (Sontag quoted in Carroll, 284). Put differently, these films bring the site-specificity of performance to bear on media in the project of “remembering and re-membering,” telling stories of structures of social violence without abjecting the actors of those stories. Unspecified in these considerations of performative films, is performativity’s “embroiled,” as Diana Taylor puts it, relationship to performance and thus to the role of bodies and embodiment, both socially constructed and socially excessive, in the act of being performative (8).

In her work on performance and cultural memory in the Americas, Taylor describes performance as “embodied praxis and episteme” (17). It forces us to consider bodies and embodiments both as a sites of regulatory, normative discourse, or socially constructed bodies that act out scenarios, and as excessive, irreducible sites of sensation and affectation that witness, respond, and engage them. Film and media like *Maquilápolis* and *Señorita Extraviada* and those discussed in this dissertation can be approached through frameworks of performance in order to see how they performatively approach bodies and embodiments that are both socially constructed and socially excessive, bodies that are both captured by visibility and the embodiment and flesh that exceeds capture. As described earlier, *Maquilápolis* features sequences of the workers spectrally performing the movements of their industrial labor- they mime these movements together, in sync, absent of the scene of the factory. The movements of their bodies signal both the learned movements of their particular labor and also suggest that
their embodiments could never be reduced to these movements, are always more than these movements.

To return to my original problematic, these films change the images of the border through a performativity that is cultivated by spectral aesthetics of embodiment, movement, and multi-sensuality that exceed the visual. These images thereby offer a new mode of looking at the border; that is, a new form of spectatorship of the hypervisible and overwrought space of national and transnational drama. Spectral aesthetics work to bring us close to the images of the border, and undo the distancing effects of abjection by bringing the flesh of our embodiments into direct engagement with the image, re-membering our bodies in the act of engagement. As spectators we are not disembodied eyes, objects of pure vision, but rather multisensual and multitudinous fields of potential sensations and encounters and memorial repertoires. Changing the dynamics of spectatorship in the act of looking at the border, these works change how we “remember” the border, the dynamics that brought it into being, and the lives lost, traumatized, captured, produced, and immobilized by it.

The multitudinous and multisensual field of potential sensations and encounters that spectral aesthetics allow us to re-member intentionally echoes the concept of the flesh from the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His theories of

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3 For discussions of the histories of the U.S.-Mexico border as a site staging nation and transnational dramas between U.S. and Mexico see, José Limón’s American Encounters (1999), Roberto Tejada’s National Camera (2009), and José Saldívar’s Border Matters (1997).
reversible perception and the chiasmatic, or intertwined, structure of the flesh deeply influence the way in which I view the interventions that these artists and filmmakers are making. His work provides a framework for thinking about perception as a relational process that is inter-objective and employs all the senses. For Merleau-Ponty, the flesh functioned as a figure to describe the shared field of relational, perceptive encounters that makes up the phenomenal world. Flesh is not a body, as his later interlocutors Hardt and Negri point out, but rather, a shared texture of “unformed life force, and in this sense an element of social being, aimed constantly at the fullness of life” (192). Our bodies are but mere nodes within a continuous field of social flesh that underpins all perceived and perceiving bodies, “a tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency…” (132). It is both the tissues of our bodies and what also exceeds it and surrounds it, the “zero degree of social conceptualization” (Spillers 67). It is instead the relational contacts between all nodes of a phenomenal world. Flesh becomes important for thinking about the border because it is this precise thing that the border attempts to manage and contain: the movements and energies of vital, social flesh.

Much border theory of the last ten years conceptualizes the border, its increasing militarization, and the Prevention Through Deterrence strategy, through a framework of
power called the state of exception. A fundamentally spatializing logic of power, the state of exception works to produce a zone of indistinction between exclusion and inclusion within the law that renders those within its boundaries as bare life. A state of exception occurs when one is brought into the power of law through their exclusion from the law: undocumented migrants at the border are included in the U.S.’s state power by virtue of their exclusion as non-citizens. As Giorgio Agamben, theorist of the state of exception, shows, the ability to produce the state of exception is ultimately a sovereign political power that originates in the sovereign’s own status as also both included and excluded from the law (Homo Sacer 15). As a sovereign power the state of exception marks sites (temporal and spatial) that determine who is included and who is excluded from the law, and who is included by virtue of their exclusion. Those who fall in the zone of indistinction between inclusion and exclusion become what Agamben calls “homo sacer,” he who can be put to death but not sacrificed (Homo Sacer 73). Homo sacer is captured by virtue of its abandonment by sovereign power (Homo Sacer 83). Undocumented migrants are homo sacer in just this sense: they are abandoned to the power of death and killed but not sacrificed as a result of the abandonment that their

undocumented status allows for. In the Prevention Through Deterrence zones of the border they become bare life as a byproduct of their simultaneous exclusion and inclusion from the law. The power of death becomes an acceptable mode of punishment because of the simultaneous breaking of the law (inclusion) and non-citizen status (exclusion). Those who become “homo sacer” have been reduced to bare life, to politically non-qualified and legally excluded life, to the fact of naked, animal life in all of its vulnerability.

As Nicholas De Genova points out, the fact of human movement that is migration is “a figure par excellence of life, indeed, life in its barest essential condition” echoing the formulations of both bare life and social flesh, or transitive “unformed life force” (Hardt and Negri 192). Thinking life in terms of movement requires that we distinguish between freedom of movement as an ontological condition and freedom of movement as a “right,” something ordained within a juridical framework (De Genova 39). For De Genova, the fact of human movement is an ontological condition and becomes the site at which the power of the state of exception produces bare life, by inhibiting movement through borderization and incarceration, or enforcing movement by means of deportation. Migration is an expression of life “at its barest essential condition” as movement and transition (De Genova 39). In its status as the capacity, or lack thereof, for movement, bare life becomes a kind of negative corollary for social flesh. The film and media works in this dissertation explore migration at the U.S.-Mexico border as it is a formation of both bare life and social flesh.
The state of exception at the U.S.-Mexico that produces bare life at its zone of indistinction relies on regimes of visuality and relations of looking as one of its productive technologies of power. As Nicholas Mirzeoff has shown in his “counter history of visuality” the U.S.-Mexico border is a perfect example of the workings of what he calls “counterinsurgent visuality,” that works to enforce and produce the state of crisis and exception at the border through a militarization of vision that, “visualizes its tasks as ‘to clear’ and ‘to hold,’ which is to say classify residents (as insurgent/illegal or ‘legitimate’ resident) and separate them by physical means” (280). The U.S.-Mexico border becomes a site of potential insurgency, what Joseph Nevins points out in *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond* (2010) has been ideologically construed as an insurgent invasion thus necessitating a “war on illegals.” The abjection machine of the border dehumanizes border dwellers and crossers by rendering them military targets, invasive bodies, and enemies.

In *The Undocumented/Los indocumentales*, the introductory identification of spectator gaze with the pursuit of undocumented migrants enacts the aesthetics and relations of looking of counterinsurgent visuality: the camera gaze was trained on the migrants in an effort to make visible and separate their insurgent bodies from the legitimate population. Spectators are constituted as safely included within the milieu of watchers and the legitimate population. The implication of our gazes in that project are made even more compelling by the pairing of our embodiments with the movement of the
running cameraman. The structure of counterinsurgent visuality enforces the war-like structure of race in biopolitics that Foucault proposes in *Society Must Be Defended*, “(racism) is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (254). At the U.S.-Mexico border this break is made visible as a boundary between insurgent/illegal and counterinsurgent/legitimate resident, and works to enforce a racialized boundary that is imbricate with the delimitations of nation, ethnicity, and modernity.

**Frames of Americanity**

The overlapping and interdependent frames of race, ethnicity, nation, and modernity, or what has been coded as development at the U.S.-Mexico border, has been referred to as “Americanity” and is theorized as the product of the invention of the Americas in the world system by theorists, Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein. At once a theory of the Americas and a theory of globalization, their concept of Americanity provides the theoretical scaffolding for my comparative methodology that brings hemispheric performance theory, Black Studies, Latin American art practice, and other epistemologies of the Americas to bear on film and media about the U.S.-Mexico border. If, as José David Saldivar shows in *Trans-Americanity*, the Americas in the global south share a history of a racialized colonality of power the subaltern literatures that resist and persist in its shadows can tell us a lot about that shared history and its modes of resistance from below. In this dissertation my itineraries to other sites of art and media practice in
the Americas see these practices as modes of theorizing and producing knowledge that fall outside and are disavowed by a Eurocentric, western epistemology.\footnote{For discussions of art practice as knowledge formation disavowed by western epistemologies see Laura Pérez’s \textit{Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities} (2007) and Diana Taylor, \textit{The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas} (2003).}

The U.S.-Mexico border negotiates the four technologies of Americanity and provides an important site for thinking about their persistence and re-articulation within the frame of neoliberalism. As Jane Juffer puts it, “the border has now become central—indeed, the model site of neoliberal governance” (664). Quijano and Wallerstein name four technologies of social and epistemological organization developed during the colonization of the Americas that became globally hegemonic: coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and new-ness. For Quijano and Wallerstein, the colonization of the Americas is the first moment in the production of globalization and global thinking. Of the four technologies innovated in the Americas, the first Quijano and Wallerstein elaborate is that of coloniality. Their model of coloniality is fundamentally a state-generating model, “Coloniality was an essential element in the integration of the inter-state system, creating not only rank order but sets of rules for the interactions of states with each other” (25).

The logic of coloniality delimited and bordered spaces, and boundaries were drawn that would set the stage for the formation of modern nation-states. Coloniality offered the model for statehood that would come into effect in the wake of independence
movements, “Independence did not undo coloniality; it merely transformed its outer form” (26).

At its inception, boundaries and borders are integral to the functioning of Americanity, performing the first organizing technology, coloniality, that went on to imply and require the work of other technologies of ethnicity, race, and the deification of the new. The bounding of space occasions the production of one of the technologies of visuality in the Americas that Mirzeoff shows in his history of visuality is linked to the ordering of bodies on the plantations (58).

Coloniality instilled a hierarchical logic of European metropole and American colony that underpinned the partitioning of space, and which also infiltrated economic, cultural, and political registers (25). It is important to note that coloniality names a logic of colonialism that persists even after independence and the end of formal colonization. Quijano and Wallerstein point out, “Even where formal colonial status would end, coloniality would not” (25). The transition from formal colonial status to independent nation required the production of structures of ethnicity and racialization in order to manage different internal hierarchies and to enforce a division of labor. These categories were bound up in the formation of ‘nationhood’. Ethnicity, according to the theorists, “is the set of communal boundaries into which in part we are put by others in part we impose upon ourselves, serving to locate our identity and our rank within the state. Ethnic groups claim their history, but first of all create their history” (26). The ethnic categories of
‘Indians’, ‘Blacks’, ‘Whites’, ‘Creoles’ came into existence with Americanity, according to Quijano and Wallerstein, “all these categories did not exist prior to Americanity. They are part of what make up Americanity. They have become the cultural staple of what make up the modern world system” (26). The processes of what are now the global structures of coloniality, borderization, and ethnicity were innovated in the foundation of the Americas.

Ethnicity was “an inevitable consequence of coloniality. It delineated social boundaries to enforce a division of labor” (Quijano and Wallerstein 27). Yet it eventually required the work of racialization to stabilize the power structures and maintain the hierarchies at work in coloniality. The theorists point out that race was always implicit in ethnicity, but full-fledged racism was a creation of the 19th century and was a means of firming up social hierarchies in the post 1789 era of popular sovereignty (27-28). The U.S. becomes for Quijano and Wallerstein a prime example of the power of racism to stabilize and enforce the hierarchies implicit in ethnicity and nationality. With the ending of slavery, the U.S.’s social system and economic hierarchy required the creation of the

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6 Quijano and Wallerstein point out that, ethnic identities were enforced both from above and from below, being identities that are passed on within the family and community, and that have also served as bond for social revolt (27).

7 They take as example the effect of ideologies of popular sovereignty in the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). One could locate the beginning of modern, full-fledged, racism in a reaction to the Haitian Revolution and a need to re-stabilize the social order and division of labor in the Americas in the wake of popular sovereignty struggle of Haiti (28). The role of Haiti here is important in considering its status as Glissant puts it in Caribbean Discourse, as “the estuary of the Americas,” what happens in the Caribbean establishes the currents of the Americas (139).
spatial boundaries of racist Jim Crow segregation and Native American reservations in order to limit the access to citizenship (28). Ethnicity was no longer enough to limit access to the discourses of popular sovereignty and its concomitant ideology of citizenship, instead it had to be bolstered and enforced through a ‘scientific’ and humanist-universal racism (28). After de-segregation in the U.S., the locus of racial thinking switched to legal and illegal migrants and continues to re-articulate the spatialized ethnic and racialized entity of the nation-state (29). It is the precarious status of ethnicity that the US-Mexico border enforces, requiring the logics of racial thinking and visualization to police it. The continued debates and “crises” of the U.S.-Mexico border and undocumented migration show that racism continues to change its parameters and objects throughout the history of the Americas in order to respond to changing social structures.

Thinking through the way in which the U.S.-Mexico border negotiates multiple categories of nation, ethnicity, and race helps to illuminate the troubled status of the “Chicano/a” or “Mexican-American” identity categories in the U.S., let alone the even more capacious and ambiguous “Latina/o.” In the neo-liberal rhetoric of a post-racial society where do these categories sit within a matrix of identity categories and power if the U.S. has drawn the color line decidedly at a boundary between black and white?
Where do Latina/o, Indigenous, Asian, accented, and other “brown” folks sit? Or even more problematically, where do white-seeming folks of brown, Latino/a origin sit? Does “Latino/a” fall under a racial or ethnic category on your census form? In this way, Chicano/a, Latino/a, and Hispanic communities become a prime example of the interworkings of these three technologies of racialization in Americanity. The border, as one site among many that articulates a boundary of Latino/a ethnic identity, becomes a site for glimpsing the continual flattening and re-affirming of racial and ethnic identities in the neoliberal moment. If the border has always been a site for the workings of transnationalism, and between-ness of culture and identity, what Gloria Anzaldúa termed “mestiza consciousness” that lives and thinks in a state of “nepantlism” or in-between-ness of language, culture, nation, race, and ethnicity, then we must take an approach that views the workings of the race/ethnicity/nation nexus at the border within the ideological overlay of a transnational and interwoven Americanity.

The production of race thinking as a biological construct signals another key technology of Americanity that predates it and allows it to come into being: the deification of new-ness (29). The deification of newness propagated a faith in scientific ideology, which Quijano and Wallerstein describe as a ‘pillar of modernity’ (29). The

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8 Here I am referencing José Esteban Muñóz’s concept of “brown-ness” that he invokes to describe the simultaneous, common, but differentiated experiences of being a problematic and often racialized Other in dominant U.S. culture.

9 See Sandra Soto and Miranda Joseph’s article on the state of ethnic studies in Arizona, “Neoliberalism and the Battle Over Ethnic Studies in Arizona” (2010).
concept of newness created an investment in a future-oriented temporality and also became a way of justifying social, economic, and political inequalities and domination. Development was pitted against underdevelopment, and ‘weaker’ nations slipped into underdevelopment, while ‘stronger’ nations progressed steadily toward modernity, “Modernity became the justification of economic success, but also its proof.” (30).

Investment in the past became a ‘primitive’ undertaking, while investment in the ‘modern’, the ‘new’, the ‘future’ was the desired temporality. Americanity became the crucible for a certain brand of utopian thinking that regards modernity as the site in which to invest in liberation or development projects.

The deification of new-ness can even be seen in the liberation visions of Chicana feminists, like Anzaldúa’s future-oriented border mestiza epistemology of “towards a new consciousness.” But Anzaldúa brings the histories of indigenous knowledges to bear on radical, feminist, queer politic and infuses the future-oriented momentum with an investment in the past. The deification of new-ness, Quijano and Wallerstein, noted was also taking the shape of south to north migration carried with it a path to offering “an all-American utopia” (40). The film and media projects in this dissertation similarly

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10 The Americas embodied newness, “The New-World was new, that is, not old, not tied down to tradition, to a feudal past, to privilege, to antiquated ways of doing things” (Quijano and Wallerstein (29). It also became, ideologically, a space in which ‘newness’ could be created- new states, new wealth, new citizens, new subjects of the Church, and where popularly, European immigrants could create themselves anew. This made a clean slate of the Americas, devoid of history, in which the colonizing peoples could re-invent themselves, nations could found themselves in the creation of their present and futurity without the baggage of the past, and they could instill within it the imbrications of liberalism and capitalism as the co-conspiratorial assertion of individual power with its capacity for generating personal wealth as a means of futurity.
approach the border and migration as a site of new-ness. Their production of spectral aesthetics becomes a mode of resisting the technologies of visuality of Americanity that confines by means of ethnicity, race, and nation. Instead these artists and filmmakers make the movement of migration visible and set the stage for glimpses of that “all-American utopia.”

Images and Imaginaries

By way of example, the frame of development and underdevelopment that I invoke are cultural imaginaries that have been attached to, acted out through, and re-enacted upon cultural representations of the border between the U.S. and Mexico, that have been part and parcel of the abjection machine.11 This dissertation plays upon two different meanings and intellectual traditions of the concept of the imaginary, as a collective projection and a creative mental faculty. On one hand I draw from the concept of imaginary as it is used to describe a kind of collective projection, or misrecognition, of various modes of belonging and citizenship. Ideological at heart, imaginaries in this sense are the frames and images used to describe different modes of community identification, such as the imagined community of the nation, or ways of understanding and describing the desires underpinning social forces or historical periods, such as what Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo calls “the revolutionary imagination” of Latin American cultural

11 For a discussion of the border as a site of development and underdevelopment see Clare F. Fox’s The Fence and the River (1999).
production in the 20th century. One the other hand, however, I also draw upon an existential phenomenological tradition in the work of Jean Paul Sartre to think about the imaginary as a particular, human mental faculty of creativity and invention that Sartre iconically described as “the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom” (184). The phenomenological concept of the imaginary describes the functioning of consciousness and memory that is multisensual. Coming from two different philosophical standpoints, these two notions of the imaginary converge in a concern for the image, mental and physical, in its production. In the theorizing the work of spectral aesthetics I propose that a change in spectatorship could engender a change in the production of collective imaginaries by making them a site of radical, creative process in the collective that is bound to the restitution and re-membering of memory.

In addition to being a theory of nationalism, Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* also provides a theory of imaginaries. Claiming up front that the nation as a coherent base of people was not a given and that the feeling of “horizontal comradeship” that is nationalism had to be invented, Anderson explores the role of popular and vernacular culture in producing the feeling of collectivity (7). For Anderson the popular literary forms of the novel and the newspaper offered “modes of apprehending the world” that made it possible to imagine the nation (22). Anderson considers the newspaper an extreme form of the book that moreover “continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (34-36). In Anderson’s analysis, vernacular media takes
the central position in producing the sense of “horizontal comradeship” of shared identity; the newspaper and the novel worked to produce mental images of simultaneity within national space. Armando Silva’s examination of urban imaginaries echoes a similar project to that of Anderson, but more explicitly explores the concept of ‘imaginary’ through a psychoanalytic framework, in which the imaginary entails a kind of mis-recognition, or mirror stage, that describes an unconscious desire for integrity and autonomy. In Silva’s 21st century frame of the Latin American city the imaginary describes the way in which our navigation of cities and city-citizenship are products of an ultimately aesthetic practice of making the city a reflection of our own desires. Silva’s model looks at the imaginary as existing in the intersection of collective/public space and individual desire, and becomes a creative process of negotiating and weaving those experiences, physical and psychic, together (24). As Silva points out, imaginaries are at once intensely individual and public, making up a kind of shared tissue of “perceptive schemas” (16).

Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis Silva understands imaginaries as phantoms, being a “mental image or imaginary representation that designates the product of an inner activity” (37). Imaginaries are phantasmatic to external reality, haunting it with the images and inventions of mental work. This notion of the imaginary resonates with

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12 The newspaper and novel according to Anderson occupied the space evacuated by other structures for producing the world like religion, common language, and cosmology.
Sartre’s cognitive model as well, which understands the imaginary as a form of image consciousness. The imaginary for Sartre is image based. It describes a mode of image consciousness that creates and invents from the information and sensations of memories that posit a shared world (185). The imaginary both produces the world and also gestures outside of it. It is a creative act that negates the totality of the visible.

In this dissertation I will shuttle between the two different uses, thinking about the imaginaries that produce our perceptive and representational schemas of the border, such as the abjection machine and what Joseph Nevins calls the “war on illegals.” I will also consider how the multisensual and memorial qualities of the Sartrean version of the imaginary describes the creative intersection of embodied, idiosyncratic, and mental experience intersecting with forms of memory that is an aesthetic production of the world or new worlds. The image stands in both of these frameworks as a ground and a product of the imaginary. The image is both the space that generates the work of imaginary projections, and it is the shape by which consciousness performs its inventions. Between these two models of ‘the imaginary’ is a fertile ground made up of image culture and memory that allows for collective and individual creative processes that reach beyond the given when thinking about the border. The image allows for a kind of mapping between interior and exterior, subjective and social, memory and futurity. The multisensual work of the imaginary allows us an intimacy with images of the border that undoes the effects
of the abjection machine. This dissertation suggests that the way in which we approach images can ultimately affect the creative, collective processes that emerge from them.

The imaginary in this project names the activity of spectral aesthetics, to gesture outside the visual confines of the image through affective and multisensory perceptive schemas. The spectral aesthetics of the image in this project work under the assumption that, if I may play on words, there is always more to the visible than meets the eye. Instead spectral aesthetics work on the multisensual, fully embodied, socially situated sensoriums that we bring to what Roberto Tejada calls our “shared image environments.” In this project the encounters with images and the visibilities they produce will move between the image as a site of social inscription and totalizing visibility that I show is bound up with the production of colonized space and racialized bodies, and the image as a site of radical difference. The image and the body both occupy tenuous positions between social signification and sensory excess, or as Jacques Ranciérè puts it, “between opaque presence and discourse encoding history” (11). Spectral aesthetics intervenes on this continuum, asking us to see what may not be visible in the visual image.

The Media and Mediums of Bodies and Embodiments

The changing frameworks of image and media culture that this dissertation moves among, from museum photography, to mainstream and independent cinema, to network based digital performance, and site-specific video art signal a concern for the ways in which changing image cultures require changing theoretical apparatuses and modes of
engagement that allow for considerations of the multiple and multiplying forms of embodied viewing we engage in. Gone are the days of the paradigmatic cinema spectator immobilized in their theater seat, chained to the subject effects of spectacle. In an effort to approximate, that is to become proximate to, these film and media projects and to understand the ways in which they produce bodies and elicit embodiments, I have drawn on a variety of theoretical and practice-based reckonings with media spectatorship and engagement. While not main actors in the theoretical explorations in this dissertation, the work of cinema scholars Laura Marks and Vivian Sobchack are always in the background of my methodology and theoretical concerns. Marking two divergent but intersecting interventions into theories of cinematic spectatorship and aesthetics both of these thinkers’ work on embodiment, sensoriality, and the reversibility of cinematic spectatorship form a jumping off place for my own interventions into modes of looking at the visual productions of the U.S.-Mexico border. Mark’s frameworks of haptics, texture, and intimacy with images have set a precedent for how I engage these projects. Sobchack’s marshalling of existential phenomenological approaches show paths towards the thought of Merleau Ponty and Sartre for considering the reversibility of perception with images and media, allowing me to recognize the ways in which images look back at us and the image’s capacity for de-stabilizing centralized perspective. As I show in the photography of Susan Harbage Page, the equalization of perspective and the inter-objectivity that it engenders is a functioning of spectral aesthetic in her work. These
images ground the spectator as part of, rather than master of, the continuous and variegated texture of social flesh. Grounded in the cinematic experience Marks and Sobchack bring embodiment to bear on moving image culture and propose new modes of ethical spectatorship that influence the intervention of this project about the border.\textsuperscript{13} In the frame of these methodologies of film studies, my work on spectral aesthetics of the U.S.-Mexico border becomes a kind of case study for the chances and forms of both an ethical spectatorship as well as an ethical image production.

But it is instead the insights of performance theory from Diana Taylor, Fred Moten, Josh Kun, José Esteban Muñoz, the Brazilian Neo-Concrete movement, Electronic Disturbance Theater, and even tangentially, Édouard Glissant, that have been the most motivating, in the sense of forward movement, for this project, as they address embodiment in visual culture as both a site of social production and a site of excess and social transitivity. It also marks where the methodological interventions into image culture and spectatorship intersects with the frame of Americanity and the production of the visuality of the U.S.-Mexico border. The performance theories that I engage with address the visual and embodiment, or sensoriality, in ways that attend to the role of visuality in producing visibilities that have capture-effects, what Foucault understood as the coming into the frame of power’s recognition. They also address the sensual and

\textsuperscript{13} For a discussion of phenomenology and ethical spectatorship see Sobchack’s essays, “Inscribing Ethical Space” and “The Passion of the Material” from the book \textit{Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture} (2004).
affective as contingencies of sensoriums that cannot be captured, which as sensoriums are excessive and transitive.\textsuperscript{14} To these thinkers, the sensual and embodied elements of performance enact and re-enact modes of resistance to the capture-effects of visuality and the production of visibility. Responding to frames of managing and controlling bodies and spaces that emerged as technologies of the colonization of the Americas, frames that privileged the written over the oral, the optical over the tactile, the empirical over the spiritual, and the mental over the embodied, these projects of performance in the Americas show the ways in which multi-sensoriality and experiences and practices of embodiment have offered sites of resistance, opacity, fugitivity, and alternative mappings and navigations of space. Performance’s engagement of the opacity and contingencies of embodiment become modes of proposing an alternative epistemology in the Americas that Ricardo Dominguez describes best as “a politics of the question rather than a politics of the answer” (Nadir and Dominguez).

The chapters all engage with visual media projects. Each chapter explores the sensory modality of its media project, with particular attention to its spectral aesthetics and its relationship to the visuality of the U.S.-Mexico border. All of these projects (and the chapters devoted to them) are united around a central concern with visualizing and making visible the border without reproducing the visibility of the brown and racialized

\textsuperscript{14} The other thinker in this project who address the immobilizing effects of visibility, specifically that of racialized visibility, is Frantz Fanon.
body that works as a technology of capture at the border. The projects, by interrogating racialized and militarized visibility, work to broaden the visual to include the multisensory and affective registers of spectral aesthetics, to approximate what gets left out of the racialized schema of visuality. These projects explore the U.S.-Mexico border as a racialized division, but ultimately work to generate a visibility of the border that theorizes migration as the movement of social flesh, or the “zero degree of social signification” that is the vitality and transitivity of human movement, communication, affectivity, and life (Spiller 67). The movements of social flesh, these projects show, are best glimpsed through fully-embodied modes of vision and engagement.

Chapter One looks at Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g.lab’s project The Transborder Immigrant Tool (2008) and Jordan Crandall’s piece, Heatseeking, commissioned for InSite 2000 in San Diego and Tijuana. This chapter explores the role of counterinsurgent visuality in enforcing the racialized distinction and production of racialized bodies at the U.S.-Mexico border. It shows the way in which the visibility of racialized bodies undergo a reduction of the corporeal schema. The artists both re-purpose military vision technologies to kinesthetically explore the vitality of human bodies outside the visual registers of race. The kinesthetic elements and commentary in these projects work to produce a visibility of flesh rather than racialized bodies at the U.S.-Mexico border. They provide a theory of migration and flesh as transitive manifestations of each other.
Chapter Two takes up the found object photography of Susan Harbage Page who photographs the material culture of migration at the U.S.-Mexico border in the Brownsville/Matamoros area of Texas and Tamaulipas. Her photographs help us understand the alternative visibility that is spectral visibility by presenting migration through the absence of migrants. The visuality of her photographs intervene both in the visuality of the border as well as a tradition of thinking about the relationship between photography and memory. By bringing our senses of tactility to bear on our image encounter and allow us to see movement at the border rather than immobilized time. Her images reframe a visuality of garbage at the border as a sign of life, rather than abject contamination and refuse.

Chapter Three discusses the role of the border in the theoretical concept of Americanity through the film *Children of Men* by Mexican director, Alfonso Cuarón. Thinking through the ways in which performance can help us understand an allegorical film, sound in this film re-locates a de-localized border by gesturing outside the image. I propose that the film offers a “speculative history,” that according to José David Saldivar is part of a larger tradition in subaltern literature of the Americas that tells the unspeakable histories of Americanity and the ways in which folks make legible that which is unspeakable and navigate pathways towards new forms of sociality out of it (114). Sound in *Children of Men* tells the unspoken histories of Americanity in the film.
and the ways in which it envisions a future that necessitates the freedom of human movement.

Chapter Four explores the film *Sleep Dealer* by Latino director, Alex Rivera. This film theorizes the role of embodiment in image culture and the way in which it can allow us to produce public memory in a differential mode. A speculative film about the present and future of transnational labor at the border, the film also explores network image culture as a site for resistance to dominant modes of visibility. Bringing the memories, sensations, and excesses of our physical embodiments to engagement with memory technologies is a fundamentally creative and collective act of the imaginary. This chapter functions as the future oriented imaginary of the dissertation, asking what if film and media were not just a site of passive reception but a site for experimenting with images and our bodies’ active roles in producing memory.

An important component of this dissertation are the short codas that complete each chapter. These codas address an immigrant justice or other activist projects happening in the U.S. in relation to migration. These codas do the important work of exploring the ways in which the theoretical inquiries of art and theory (with a capital T) are also at work in the boots-on-ground work of activists, organizers, and folks dedicating their everyday lives to struggles for immigrant dignity, justice, and practices of living based on solidarity. While these codas are exploring the terrains of commonality between activism, art, and theory, it is not in an effort to reduce one to the other, or to explore
activism as another site at which we might project theory’s more important insights, but rather, the ways in which activism is itself productive of theory. How are everyday practices and political strategies themselves enacting and thinking through abstractions, critiques, and propositions of new forms of political and social life? While this dissertation spends most of its time exploring the virtualities of image and media culture, it is fundamentally concerned with the materialities of life and living. These codas help to re-center within the project the bodies, practices, and relationships of those affected by border and immigration policy.

This dissertation functions ultimately to suggest that spectral aesthetics are an active moment in re-framing how we visualize the U.S.-Mexico border, undocumented migration in the U.S., and its histories. These aesthetics gesture towards the invisible margins of the image and actively elicit the engagement of our other senses to “see” what the image shows. They work to help us look at the border in a way that does reproduce the effects of an abjection machine that would dis-member and dis-remember the bodies and lives of those crossing and being crossed by the border. By re-engaging our multisensory and socially embedded corporeal schemas in relation to the image we engage our powers of imagination to see more than the abjection machine provides, to see more than the brutalized, captured, racialized bodies, or the walls and fences that mark a racialized distinction. Instead, these spectral aesthetics allow us to re-member our
bodies and remember migration; to see migration as an act and expression of social flesh, and our own transitive bodies as continuous with it.
Chapter One: Embodiment, Poetics, and Fugitiviy: Militarization and Alternative Visibilities at the US-Mexico Border

"From the point of view of method, this discussion will perhaps be marked by passion and subjectivity, which I feel can be considered as part of the problem. It could end up being obscure, which would perhaps not make me unhappy, if you were willing to be my accomplices in obscurity." – (Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, page 159.)

In the mid-to late 1990s, during the first flushes of NAFTA and the consolidation of the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border with the deployment of two different border enforcement strategies, Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego/Tijuana and Operation Hold the Line, in El Paso/Juárez, a series of art events, called InSite, were held in the San Diego/Tijuana area. These site-specific art events took up issues surrounding transnationalism through the lens of the U.S.-Mexico border at San Ysidrio and Tijuana. They addressed the contradictions circulating within transnational rhetoric, looking at the dematerialization of borders by commodities, capital, and the rhetoric that we were entering an age of globalized citizenship. The project’s works addressed how this rhetoric of dematerialization was compounded by the simultaneous materialization and hardening of borders for actual migrating bodies. In order to address these contradictions, InSite re-centered the imperative of site, of specificity of location, within a discourse of movement and flow. Working with the San Diego-Tijuana section of the U.S.-Mexico border, the artists and their projects problematized the rhetoric of flow, and made visible the contractions and forms of power at work within discourses and practices of globalization.
Looking at the rhetorics of transnational capital and globalization through the lens of a highly militarized border zone, the InSite projects ask us to consider how the neoliberal desire for producing the universal market through an obsolescence of the national entails other means of re-enforcing differentiation. The InSite projects theorized globalization through borderization.

One of these artists, Jordan Crandall, a moving image media artist interested in the erotics, pleasures, and desires generated by surveillance and new forms of militarized perception, was commissioned to produce a piece for the 2000 InSite convergence. This piece, *Heatseeking*, was a multichannel video installation that re-purposed border surveillance technologies to capture images that played upon the violence and erotics of military surveillance, and theorized the penetration of militarized modes of seeing into the everyday. Re-purposing surveillance technologies, Crandall’s project interrogated the desires embedded within the workings of visuality at the border that produce regimes of visibility that aimed to capture, categorize, and control. Looking at its use at the border to police what Nicholas Mirzoeff points out is ultimately, “a racialized distinction,” functions as a space to distill the racial orders in the Americas and the technologies required to enforce them in an age of empire (280). Crandall’s work theorizes the confluence of cinematic aesthetics and militarized visibility at the border that operates to produce and enforce a racialized order.
Meanwhile, nearly ten years later, Operation Gatekeeper and Operation Hold The Line have worked with brutal effectiveness. Closing off the urban crossing zones these new militarized border enforcement strategies have pushed unauthorized migration to the remote and dangerous desert regions of Arizona, California, and Texas, creating a “landscape of death,” at the border (Nevins 174). Around 350 bodies are found yearly (Nevins, 173). And these are only the ones that are found. Within this landscape of death, artist and hacktivist Ricardo Dominguez of The Electronic Disturbance Theater, an electronic performance group that blurs the lines between activism and art with their electronic civil disobedience, presented their newest project: *The Transborder Immigrant Tool (TBT)*. For the project Dominguez and members of EDT 2.0 re-purposed cell phones as GPS devices, using code that led undocumented migrants crossing the border to water caches left by humanitarian aid organizations in the deadly desert-crossing routes east of the San Diego-Tijuana border wall. While re-purposing GPS technology, TBT not only gave directions to water, but also broadcast bilingual poetry to migrants, again, blurring the lines between activism and art by providing migrants with two different forms of sustenance.

Like InSite before them, EDT responded to the conditions of transnationalism at the U.S.-Mexico border focusing on the changing spatial relations of neoliberalism. EDT responds to the culture of death produced by the increased militarization by offering safer modes of navigating the space and performing an affirmation of migrant life. Re-
purposing the military, locational technology of GPS, EDT “disturbs” as they say, the protocols of military surveillance, responding to a human rights crisis while they also aestheticize and theorize movement. Both EDT and Crandall re-purpose military technologies of the visible, mapping and surveillance tools, using them instead to offer fugitive modes of becoming visible in a space that routinely deploys the violent captures of militarized visuality.

In his “counter history of visuality,” Nicholas Mirzeoff proposes a model of visuality that functions as a cultural logic of vision and visualization. It establishes access to history-making by determining what becomes visible to history through an economy of looking and being looked at that originates in the colonization of the Americas. The right to look shifts paradigms throughout history, asserting power and submission through an economy of the look emerging in structuring formations such as plantation oversight and colonial mapping, revolutionary heroism, imperial strategizing, and biopolitical risk management. The epoch of visuality we currently inhabit is one of “counter-insurgent visuality,” characterized by militarized modes of seeing and distributing visibility.

Mirzeoff writes of counter insurgent visuality:

Expressed in today’s military format, this becomes the mantra of counterinsurgency: ‘clear, hold, and build,’ meaning remove insurgents from a locality using lethal force, sustain that expulsion by physical mean such as separation walls, and then build neoliberal governance in the resulting space of circulation. Counterinsurgency
classifies and separates by force to produce an imperial governance that is self-justifying because it is held to be ‘right’ a priori and hence aesthetic (278).

Counterinsurgent visuality works to classify and name a threat, contain it, and eliminate it in order to establish territorial control. Mirzeoff goes to the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border to illustrate the tactics and effects of counterinsurgent visuality. As Mirzeoff and others, including Joseph Nevins and Peter Andreas, point out, the border functions as rhetorical space producing and enforcing a racialized distinction between white-ness and brown-ness (280).¹ The brown-ness of migration becomes the insurgent enemy that must be contained and eliminated in order to protect the white-ness of the U.S. Counterinsurgent, or militarized, visuality works to enforce boundaries between inside and outside, host and contagion, self and threat, making brown bodies visible as a condition of their illegality. The U.S.-Mexico border has been a crucible for the development of visual technologies and systems to perform the work of racial visualization within a counter insurgent paradigm, enforcing the racialized distinction of the border as though it is a war zone. Jordan Crandall's *Heatseeking* and EDT’s *Transborder Immigrant Tool* interrogate the logics of counter insurgent visuality and the distinctions they enforce by turning the technologies of the visible to counter purposes.

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Colonialism and Visibility

In his uncannily prophetic essay from the early nineties, “Towards a Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation State,” Masao Miyoshi discussed the dawning hegemony of transnational capitalism as the new formation of colonial power, articulating the contradictions that artists in InSite would also go on to address almost ten years later. He argued that the current neoliberal trends in capitalism and governance were betting on the obsolescence of the nation state in a way that, rather than carving out a post-colonial futurity by abolishing the colonial formation of the nation, re-invented colonial power as the production of a open, un-regulated global market. But colonialism requires borders, the demarcations of inside and outside, in order to establish the division of labor and spaces of exploitation.

Dematerializing borders for the flow of capital risks the coherence of colonial, spatial divisions of labor, wealth, and race. Those borders have to be maintained in other ways, while still allowing for the flow of capital. Maintaining the racialized distinction embedded within the national border of the U.S. and Mexico became a way to spatially produce and enforce a global division of labor and wealth for transnational capitalism’s global reach. Rather than doing away with borders, neoliberalism requires them to police a racialized division of labor. The universal market can only be achieved through an ordering of differentiation. Globalization becomes borderization.
Such ordering and differentiation requires the work of visualization, which Mirzoeff shows originates within one of the defining features of colonialism in the Americas: plantation slavery. The oversight regime of visuality “created a regime of taxonomy, observation, and enforcement to sustain a visualized domain of the social and the political…It maintained a delineated space in which all life and labor were directed from its central viewpoint…” (Mirzeoff 50). The plantations instituted a specific arrangement of power and authority constituted through relations of looking and being looked at that enforced a racialized division of labor; overseers policed the black, African slaves, creating a one-way relation of looking (50). The emergent technology of mapping during this same period similarly allows for territory to become visible and to enter the frame of recognition. Visualizations of space and race emerge together (58). The institution of the right to look as the means of authority persists today in the modern paradigm of counter-insurgent visuality, performed by the technologies re-purposed by Crandall and EDT, such as surveillance cameras, infrared night vision, and GPS, which all operate under a de-centralized but omniscient and invisible observer.

Visibilities works through a logic of capture, imprisonment, confinement within the categories and arrangements produced by the colonial technology of visuality. Visuality itself originates in a scene of capture, of African slaves, and confinement, upon a plantation. In becoming visible one has been visualized, or made perceptible and recognizable by authority, which bears the right to look and visualize, and so make
history and public memory. In her reading of Michel Foucault, Rey Chow points out that visibility and confinement are closely related, “the negative experience of being captured and segregated…was associated by Foucault not with darkness but rather with light— that is, with being turned into a site of institutional and social visibility” (152). Coming into visibility was coming into recognition and inscription within certain categories of recognition, a placement within an ‘order of things.’ In his work on the prison, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes about the co-incidence of visibility and the penal system that produced disciplined bodies through nineteenth century European architectural design and spatial logic. Like counterinsurgent visuality, penal visibility originated with the threat of contagion, specifically the plague and the leper, that required containment and exclusion for public safety,

> The exile of the leper and the arrest of the plague do not bring with them the same political dream. The first is that of a pure community, the second is that of a disciplined society. Two ways of exercising power over men, of controlling their relations, of separating out their dangerous mixtures (198).

The need to contain, control, and eventually discipline through social categorization emerged from the threat of contagion. Moving from the practice of simple containment to that of discipline, or self-containment, required visibility. It required being turned into a site of institution observation and knowledge, or being made available and know-able to oversight’s power at all times.
In his description of the panopticon, the ideal, disciplinary prison of the nineteenth century, Foucault describes the architectural design of perfect visibility:

In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions- to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide- it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap (200).

The prison produced a model for social control, shifting tactics from darkness and enclosure, to light and exposure. Confinement and capture became about coming fully into the light of the seen, into a state of visibility, open to observation, classification, and organization. The panoptic prison functioned under the promise of continual and total oversight. As Mirzeoff points out, the technique of oversight can be traced to colonial plantations, in which the management and enforcement of slave labor required observation, classification, and organization, and became the organizing logic underpinning colonial modernity: “Empire thus claims objectivity. What we need to insist on here, at the risk of seeming blunt, is that the primary ‘thing’ being ordered was the ‘slave’” (49). The same logic drove the colonial project at large; to produce a new “order of things,” that originated in the ordering and mapping of slave bodies and colonial territory. In their theory of Americanity, Quijano and Wallerstein point out that the colonization of the Americas set the conditions for the modern capitalist system.

Visuality was the technology for establishing the racialized division of labor and territory
that was so elemental to the dynamics of Americanity. Oversight in both Mirzeoff and Foucault conditions the appearance of bodies and space and produces visibility as a means of social control. This capture entails not only capture within an image, as in the surveillance cameras of modern day border patrol, but capture within a frame of social recognition and classification, such as white, brown, legal, illegal, man, woman, etc. The plantations were crucibles for using oversight to produce racial visibility as a form of social organization in the Americas, and the US-Mexico border is now the laboratory.

Visuality’s use of oversight was at work in producing the racial typologies of the Mexican casta paintings. Moving from the plantation to the more heterogeneous and open colonial urban spaces, the Mexican casta paintings also mobilized aesthetics of oversight and surveillance to produce social order through a mutual determination of map-able space and racial categories. Operating under the Bourbon government’s assumption that the bodies of New Spain could be contained and ordered, the government commissioned the paintings to visualize different categories and social types generated by racial mixing between people of Spanish, Indigenous, and African origin (Carrera 122). The casta paintings visualized the organization of colonial society, creating complex but rigidly ordered possibilities of racial mixing such as mestizo (mix of Indigenous and Spanish), castizo (Spanish and Mestiza), morisco (Spanish and mulatto) and so on, emphasizing a biologically linear but potentially reversible evolution of race. Bodies were produced and ordered by a hierarchical and taxonomic gaze that, being diagnostic, regulatory, and
aiming for social control, corresponded with the surveillance function of colonial
documents (Carrera 133-134). But as Magali M. Carrera has pointed out, while the casta
paintings primarily did the work of producing racial visibility as a form of social
recognition within the chaotic mixture of colonial Mexico City, these paintings asserted
not only one’s racial category but their calidad, a social category made up of a complex
of class, race, filiation, and intellectual and spiritual potentiality (6).

The casta paintings performed the fantasy of a colonial gaze and oversight able to
penetrate any space and produced racial types and their calidad through specific spatial
arrangements and relationships (Carrera 85). Domestic privacy correlated with a higher
and whiter calidad, while placement in public spaces, like markets, indicated a lower,
darker calidad. (101). Through spatial relationship and context, the paintings produced
not just racial categories, but socially embedded figures arranged and captured within
particular kinds of environments that indicated corollary behaviors, relationships, and
dress. The casta paintings did not merely produce race as a 20th century biological
category of blood and lineage, but rather captured the entirety of a social body within the
production of racial typology.

Capture is a social process that takes place both at the level of the physical body
captured in the hold of a ship, the plantation, the prison, the ICE detention center, as well
as at the level of visibility, or capture within discourse, institutional legibility, or what
Hortense Spillers calls, “the national treasury of rhetorical wealth” (65). These co-
determinate processes of capture condition the production of racialized bodies, visualizing them into being. Racialization developed as a technology of coloniality, making bodies visible as a form of social categorization and control. With the reformation of colonial power in the shape of neoliberal capitalism counter insurgent and militarized visuality enforces these shifting and flexible spatial arrangements of bodies, adapting its technologies of capture and categorization to the flows of transnational migrant labor. As the nation withers in the name of transnational corporations the national border becomes a space to produce a global, racialized division of labor, and to perform the nation’s efficacy: its monopoly on legitimate violence and its racialized distinction. As we shift from different deployments of oversight in the casta paintings to the medical gaze to infrared, heatseeking technologies and drone surveillance racial visibility is produced in new ways, changing perceptive registers and relations to the right to look. Visuality becomes militarized in order to make visible “illegal” migrant bodies in order to perform the state’s efficacy and enforce the racial distinction necessary for neoliberal capitalism’s growth.

Re-purposing the technologies through which racialized bodies are made visible and captured, Jordan Crandall and The Electronic Disturbance Theater’s projects produce a social visibility at the border that is not about the practice of capture and categorization, but rather the opposite: transitivity and movement. The projects make visible without categorizing, they bring to light without trapping. They ask: how can we become visible
while remaining invisible, while eluding the capture of racial inscription? Their projects become a fugitive theory of visibility that visualizes the vital movement of flesh rather than the immobilization of racial and social typology of the body by embedding the technologies’ aesthetic capacities within the experimental and transgressive practices of performance and poetics.

The Militarization of the Racial Epidermal Schema at the Border

In the last few years we have seen an inflammation and a simultaneous domestication of militarized visuality at the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2010 Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed into effect the controversial Arizona State Bill 1070 (known as Arizona SB 1070), a piece of anti-immigrant legislation criminalizing undocumented immigrants in Arizona, and which has now spawned two copycat bills in Alabama and Georgia, stretching the militarized border zone throughout the U.S. sunbelt. The bill included several provisions, including a requirement that migrants carry their immigration papers with them at all time or else face misdemeanor charges. However, most alarming of the bill’s provisions was that of racial profiling. It allowed law enforcement to require the papers of anyone reasonably suspected of undocumented immigration. Put bluntly, anyone looking like a Mexican. While racial profiling had long been an unofficial border patrol tactic, this was the first instance in which such tactics were codified into state legislation and extended to state and local police. Officially becoming a sanctioned technique of state and local policing, ratified at a state
constitutional level, racial profiling seemed to cease being a condition, of what Joseph Nevins calls a “war on illegals.” The “war on illegals” was instead established as the everyday structure of civil life on the border. Racial profiling became a domesticated technology of war as a condition of the everyday.  

The conditions of war at the border allows for the sanctioned use of policing by skin color. Like the calidad produced from the casta paintings, racial profiling produces social bodies and derives states of legality from a visual legibility of skin. Becoming visible at the border is a process of becoming racialized. Racial profiling operates upon a process of visualization Franz Fanon called “the racial epidermal schema” in an essay, “The Fact of Blackness” from Black Skins, White Masks. Being recognized as a “negro,” Fanon experiences the “crushing objecthood,” of racial typology, which he consistently describes as a form of capture and immobilization, “the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by dye” (109). Undergoing visualization by the other, becoming subject to their right to look, which establishes the authority to visualize him as a racialized body, Fanon becomes captured and immobilized within the category. He proclaims, “I am fixed!” (116, italics original). Reduced to his skin, Fanon becomes “slave” to his own appearances. While reduced to the visual register

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2 Meanwhile, drone surveillance of the border has become a quotidian non-issue. While we rightfully protest the use of military drone air strikes, drones are also being used to patrol the U.S.-Mexico border. The military arm of the U.S. freely crosses the national border. A recent exhibition curated by Jordan Crandall and Ricardo Dominguez at UCSD, titled “Drones at Home” examined the “domestication” of drones. Jordan Crandall’s performance piece for the exhibition “Unmanned” looked at the intersections of drone policing with deployments of masculinity.
of skin, the racial epidermal schema contains a wealth of meaning that produces the rhetorical density of his social body. (116). Skin is a semantic surface on which the density of one’s social body is made legible.

The experience of racial visibility is a full and complex reduction that produces the social body through the surface of skin, a simultaneously material, living, breathing body and taxonomic category. “Where am I to be classified?” Fanon asks (113). Classification is a process of capture and containment. Becoming visible, he becomes knowable, occupying his position in the ‘order of things’. While capturing the density of his social body, becoming visible carries with it a destruction of corporeal knowledge and self-making:

Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by ‘residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character,’ but by the other, the white man, who had woven out of me a thousand details, anecdotes, stories (111).

Fanon’s body is reduced to appearances that simultaneously produce and reduce his body, but with an excess of detail. Becoming visible organizes his social being through an epidermal schema that attributes a “thousand details” to describe him. The corporeal schema, Fanon points out, is difficult for the black man to construct and withers in the moment of visibility as it is captured and contained by the racial epidermal schema (112).
While a reduction to appearances, the racial epidermal schema does not reside only on the skin, but rather goes bone deep and has deleterious effects on his physical self. It inhibits the production of Fanon’s corporeal schema, simultaneously reducing his self to skin, while also producing the spatio-temporality of his body. Rather than his self being based upon relational, sensual, spatial awareness of embodiment in a co-extensive world, what he describes as the “‘residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character,’” quoted from neuropsychiatrist Jean Lhermitte, his body is produced through “anecdotes and stories woven by a white man” (110-111). Rather than sensual, kinesthetic, and embodied experience functioning as the vestibule on to the social world and subjectivity, it is the social meanings of race. His corporeal schema, his flesh and embodiment, is conditioned first by a historico-racial schema, and *he becomes a body* fixed by social meaning.

At the border the racially profiled subject becomes a legal or illegal body through the visualization of the racial epidermal schema. Arizona SB 1070 brings into public view the mobilization of racial profiling in the borderlands to criminalize migrants. This bill forces us to see that being a brown person is a state of always potential criminality in the borderlands, indicating the ways in which visible categories of race designate states of legality and illegality. This state bill literalized what has long been a practice of visuality at the border. Exploring the U.S. border patrol’s tactics of tracking, called “cutting sign,” historian Kelley Lytle Hernández uncovers the practices of reading for race, gender, and
its implicit illegality in the traces of migration. Going back to the 1920s, officers commonly read tracks for signs of gender, complexion, and national origin, determining which tracks belonged to Mexican migrants and which did not, “According to Border Patrol tracking lore, therefore, undocumented immigrants fit a specific profile that could be tracked north from the border by following the particular imprints that Mexicans made upon the land” (49). Even in the case of an invisible body it was read for signs of race to determine its legality. Tracks become ciphers that are read through the racial epidermal schema into a racialized and “illegal” body.

But the tracks are what Hortense Spillers calls “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” a zero degree of social signification that is made into a legible body through racialization. Distinguishing between the body and the flesh in her discussion of the system of racialization produced in plantation slavery Spillers echoes Fanon, describing flesh as a “cultural vestibularity”, a “degree zero of social conceptualization” (67 italics original). The flesh is the entryway, the original passage into the social world, “before there is body, there is flesh” (67). The body meanwhile is a discursive form, “a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements,” a captive subject position produced through relations of power, violence, containment, and the right to look (Spillers 66). The flesh meanwhile indicates a “liberated subject position,” the degree zero of social conceptualization, the sensations, kinesthetics, affects, and perceptions that ground the relationality of social being-together that becomes hidden and obscured
beneath “the brush of discourse,” and the workings of racial visibility (67). As Fanon also eerily points out, in the moment of being visualized through a racial epidermal schema it is the “stories and anecdotes woven by the white man,” rather than the flesh, the pulsations and perceptions of a relational, tactile, and vulnerable becoming that are the vestibule onto the social world. Flesh exists as what Spillers terms a “hieroglyphics,” an opaque illegibility, existing in the shadows and margins of the visible, racialized, social body (67). If the body is an experience of legibility and classification, then flesh is the illegible and the fugitive.

The racial epidermal schema is employed as a form of legal classification at the border that still can never fully contain the flesh; as Hernández points out, racial categorization at the border is nonetheless a slippery space of flexible categories and ambivalent visibilities (45). These ambivalent visibilities and shifting, flexible categories are attempts to contain the “chaos” of racial mixing and spatial distribution of transnational migration. According to Hernández, the border patrol relies on, enforces, and protects whiteness as criteria of U.S. national belonging, and through that enforcement became a tool in “remapping the boundaries of whiteness,” that could flexibly change over time including those previously excluded (43). Racial visibility was the technology protecting and producing the white identity of the nation. Despite the mutability and ambiguity of racial categories at the border, or “the ambivalent system of racialization” that “failed to clearly mark the difference” it still remained a fundamentally
visual category (Hernández 45). With the continued intensification of militarization at the border came a shifting in technologies through which race could be made visible. Tracking is still commonly used but these techniques are also accompanied by new and changing technologies of seeing, taking the shape of infrared night vision, heat sensors, and drone surveillance, that more and more effectively capture the fugitive, hieroglyphics of the flesh, transforming it into a visible, social body. These new forms take visibility inward to the heat pulsations of flesh or outward to the trace of movement and opaque figuration. But like the reading of difference in tracking, difference continues to be epidermalized through these technologies, even without the visual screen of skin. Reproducing the racial epidermal schema at the border through the technologies and aesthetics of militarization becomes an effort to control the movement of flesh or as Joseph Nevins puts it, “to contain the uncontainable, life itself” (14).

Militarized, counter insurgent visuality’s deployment of racial profiling at the border seeks to make the nation and its insurgent visible, to render it data to be classified through the racial epidermal schema. As Mirzeoff points out in his theory of counter-insurgent visuality, the surveillance paradigms of contemporary visuality displace and obscure the source of the look, distributing it and hiding it both within and apart from the populace (279). The look becomes disembodied, and yet, embodied within all who live within the militarized culture. Quoting anthropologist Josiah Heyman on militarized border culture, Joseph Nevins writes: “more and more people either work for the
watchers, or are watched by the state,” and the border zone becomes a space of “police and thieves” (172). Militarization at the border splits society into categories of those who are looked at for their illegality, and those performing their legality through the right to the look. As Peter Andreas and Joseph Nevins contend, the heightened militarization of the border zone beginning in the 1990s with Operation Gatekeeper and Operation Hold the Line largely makes of the border a stage on which the U.S. performs its power, its control of the borders, its efficacy in the war on the drugs, and its protection of the whiteness of U.S. national identity (Nevins 114-115, Andreas 8-9).

The visual technologies of militarized surveillance at the border assist in this performance by rendering visual information into a kind of database that aims to, like the colonial system originating in plantation slavery, to organize, categorize and control. But it elicits participation in militarized surveillance through the syntaxes and seductions of cinematic pleasure. The projects Heatseeking and The Transborder Immigrant Tool re-purpose those visual and visualizing technologies in order to disrupt and disturb the military technologies and to create fugitive modes of visibility within the militarized borderlands. Taking these technologies’ unique abilities to transmit the hieroglyphics of the flesh, these artists work to escape the categorizing and controlling logics written into the purposes of these technologies by using them to explore states of visibility that are not predicated on the racial epidermal schema. Rather than categorization and immobilization these projects think visibility as transitivity, transition, and movement.
These projects generate and theorize a spectral visibility, a flickering and unstable visibility of transitive flesh that resists categorization and control but nonetheless allow themselves to be seen and felt. Working through the styles of militarization and the poetics of migration, these artists offer a unique form of vision both at, and of, the border.

*Heatseeking and the Transitivity of Seeing*

Jordan Crandall’s *Heatseeking* offers us many ways of visualizing bodies. The six channel video installation shows us shadowy, infrared vision bodies, x-ray bodies, bodies in medical examination, idealized, athletic bodies, homoerotic bodies, bodies of cinematic spectacle, angry bodies, distant, figural bodies, and extremely close, haptic bodies. The video installation re-purposes military visualization technologies to critique and reverse relations between visible bodies and visualizing bodies, between the watchers and the watched. The installation focuses on bodies as they are differently produced and captured by the military technologies that are used at the U.S.-Mexico border, and yet not a single one of those bodies is brown.

One of the more surprising things about Crandall’s project within the scope of InSite’s oeuvre is the seeming distance of these images from the usual images of the border. One might ask, if Crandall is re-purposing border surveillance footage and technology, then where are the typical objects of that vision? Throughout *Heatseeking* we see many different bodies in many different ways, and they all appear to be white, young, fit, and attractive. Whose bodies, then, are being made visible?
Heatseeking turns the watchers into the watched, as Susan Buck-Morss, one of the theorists involved in the InSite 2000 catalog, says in an epigraph on Crandall’s website for the project, “Art that turns the camera on the surveillers. Cameras that unravel the boundary between the border patrol and the body patrol, (con)fusing voyeurism and police protection, mothering and the law. Resisting arrest.”

Heatseeking turns the technologies of militarized visibility at the border back on “the watchers,” but rather than making the border patrol or policy makers visible, the project visualizes the idealized, white subject of the U.S., the identity of the nation protected by increased militarization. He performs a radical act in an age of counter-insurgent visuality, which is predicated on the invisibility and decentralization of power and visualization: Crandall’s project visualizes the visualizer. Re-purposing the visualization technologies designed to “penetrate deep within the image, in order to divulge what may lie hidden…” in order to “conquer, protect, and help define individual, group, and territorial bodies,” Crandall makes visible the territorial bodies meant to be protected by a militarized border (Crandall quoted in Sánchez 48). Heatseeking takes up the erotics and desires of the militarized “technology/image/movement cluster,” and looks at how the “conditions of war” at the U.S.-Mexico border enable the erotic intersections of technology, visual images, and bodies (Crandall quoted in Sánchez 50). They become tools in disciplining and databasing the racialized and gendered bodies in militarized visuality. [See Figure 1]

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In his artist statement in the *InSite* catalog Crandall describes the erotics of the culture of visualization addressed by *Heatseeking*: “An erotic imaginary of technology-body-artillery fusion, fueled under the conditions of war” (Sánchez, 49). The militarized visuality that frames the U.S.-Mexico border emerges from an imaginary, as Crandall puts it, of a fusion or bone-deep intimacy of body, technology, and militarization, touching on erotic fantasies of cyborg intimacy. This eroticism underlies an intimacy with technology as well as the experience of surveillance; images couple with our flesh and produce our social bodies through a process of image capture and rendering. *Heatseeking* addresses the what Peter Weibl calls the, “cinematographic imaginary,” the aesthetic sources of legibility that open up the ways in which we plug into the erotics of surveillance in the technology-body-artillery fusion (Crandall 1).

Images are, for *Heatseeking*, spaces for the social production and databasing of bodies, and under a militarized visuality these bodies take on roles of watchers and the watched. Cinematographic aesthetics become the docks, the sites at which we plug into and transmit information, for our erotic participation in this process. It seeps beneath intellectual acknowledgement and into a bone deep complicity. As Laura Mulvey points out in her classic theory of cinematic pleasure, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” enjoyment in watching films derives from an erotic, scopophilic drive to look. Moreover that which we are driven to look at is the spectacle of the woman’s body, whose representation of the threat of castration we neutralize through sadistic forms of
fetishization and narrative punishment. These scopophilic image relations allow spectators to turn an occasion of psychic threat into an opportunity for pleasure in exerting power and dominance. The image becomes a mode of producing an erotics of dominance through looking, both through the fragmented and spectacle image of fetishization, as well as narrative revelation. As Peter Weibl points out in his introduction to Crandall’s book, Drive, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and narcissism take new shapes in relation to our contemporary social identities and power structures. He claims that the new conditions of image rendering under transformed social identities and power structures, like the ‘war on illegals’ at the border, have transformative effects on the kinds of pleasure in dominance. Crandall’s work “views the new erotic worlds that open up within a structure that could otherwise only be described as the observation technique employed by hunters and their prey” (Crandall 3). Within militarized visuality these erotic encounters train the dominance eye of cinema into a weapon eye of counter insurgent surveillance. This weapon takes on a new egoistic power as it becomes a cog in the machine of counter insurgent national security. In turning the camera back on the surveillers, Heatseeking, exposes the transformed cinematographic erotics that take place in the militarized looking, turning a seeing eye into an all-seeing weapon.

While Heatseeking aims to capture the ways in which cinematographically erotic cultures of surveillance enlist our complicity in the production of colonial databases of legible bodies it does so while also generating the kinesthetics of bodily experience.
Through an improvisation and disturbance of cinematographic aesthetics, namely narrative and sound, Crandall’s project generates a kinesthetic and rhythmic engagement with the images that upsets the hegemony of the optical in the process of visualization. It, instead, makes something else visible. Mirroring the abilities of infrared technology with its own modified cinematic aesthetics, *Heatseeking* traces, in hieroglyphs of heat and vitality, the silhouettes of flesh in movement.

*Heatseeking* takes up the relationship between these militarized imaging systems and cinematic aesthetic in order to, in Peter Weibl’s words, “disarm an increasingly militarized society, by using information technology, to re-civilize society” (Crandall, 1). Interrogating the cinematic imaginary, *Heatseeking* plays with narrative through the multichannel projection. The project was made available on hand held video devices that offered a sense of portability and individuality, allowing viewers to isolate themselves within the act of viewing. The individualized technology encourages viewers to fully immerse themselves in the pleasures of scopophilia. The six-minute video project opens with one image, a close up of a brightly lit bullet in deep and warm hues. Right as we grow into awareness of the content of that image, it is replaced with another image, this one a moving image: a rapidly moving black and white aerial surveillance image. The project immediately orients us into an oscillation between surface and depth, haptic proximity and optical distance. Even as we move between close and distant perspective,
the content of these opening images is unclear, a mess of texture, contrast, and shadowy figures. We watch these introductory images in silence.

Opening with the changing image occupying only the upper left hand corner on the frame, over time other images and image sequences take their places within the frame. Both the multichannel aspect, and the surface-to-depth oscillation actively disrupt the voyeuristic absorption and immersion. Instead, the object of focus is fractured, disrupted, and split between the many images, which moreover move between different segments of the frame. Even if one focuses on one image sequence within the frame, it will eventually move to another frame, and be replaced by another image sequence. The object of vision is always on the move.

*Heatseeking* draws us in to the cinematographic imaginary of watching events unfold, taking pleasure in the cause and effect build and denouement of images. In offering the promise of a plot, a narrative, *Heatseeking* invites us to enjoy a sense of impending revelation; if we only watch long enough something will be revealed. Crandall links the pleasures and intentions of the cinematic aesthetics to the technologies and uses of surveillance, prompting us towards a recognition of the cinematic erotics of surveillance. But this pleasure is interrupted, fragmented, never culminated. This practice disrupts our visual pleasure, the spectacle of images are never condensed or collated into legible narrative of cause and effect sequences or associative syntax. The images seduce the viewer with the potential to see, but that visual pleasure of spectacle is continually
thwarted. The image sequences refuse immersion, distracting and scattering our attention as our awareness darts and fragments across the screen between the different image sequences. The images become not so much of something, but in something, they shift from a capture function to a performative function. They become images in movement, oscillating between surface and depth, interrupting one another, manically changing locations, remaining always on the move. They create the experience of movement and oscillation. These images perform, enact, and embody movement giving it temporal and spatial presence, rather than only capturing and representing it on screen.

As an entire generation of film theorists have shown, filmic perception and representation are rooted in the innovation of Quattrocento perspective, the centralized perspective that revolutionized representation during the Renaissance. One of the key insights of 1960s and 1970s Marxist and apparatus film theory was the claim that the centralized perspective of Quattrocento and cinematic representation produced subject effects that hailed the spectator as subject based on their mastery of their visual environment. By seeing, the spectator could constitute themselves as an agent, a master of their experience. The visual syntax of images in cinema, the function of continuity editing and the careful production of spatial coherence, all work to bolster up and protect the spectator from the fractures of de-subjectification. Suture and narrative continuity in

cinema work to prevent the spectator from losing ground in their visual experience and entering the unmoored drift and uncertainty of non-I camera perception.

As Mirzeoff has shown, Quattrocento innovation and its subject effects were born in the colonization of the Americas, and are rooted themselves in changing arrangements of power and visuality made possible by Americanity. Centralized perspective was necessitated by the structure of plantation production that required, not just a centralized observer to see all, but the subjectifying effects of mastery, power, and domination needed to manage racialized social relations. The subject effects produced through optical mastery were rooted in the production of a racialized order of things. This paradigm enables the gendering of looking that Mulvey outlines. Heatseeking disturbs this process and thwarts the visual certainty of Quattrocento perspective and narrative coherence through the performance of movement enacted by the oscillation of images. Spectators are never tied to a perspective, not even to a sequence of images, or a viewing location, but rather drift and dart from image to image. Heatseeking refuses immersion and centralization, becoming not a collection of images of bodies in movement, but rather, an image of movement itself.

The movement we witness is not limited to the screen, but rather is expressed in our own, spectating bodies. Heatseeking displaces the erotics of the dominance that take place in cinema’s scopophilic techniques of fetishization and narrative revelation and that centers on the eye’s ability to see. In disrupting the channels of visual and
cinematographic pleasure, *Heatseeking* cultivates other, less normative modes. *Heatseeking* generates an erotics of visuality that grows out of the cultivation of embodied awareness and kinesthetic heat of our own spectatorial flesh. Inspired by the ability of infrared technology to make visible the temperature registers of moving, vital flesh *Heatseeking* seeks, rather than racially classified targets, the heat of flesh in movement and response.

The presence of sound and rhythm further complicate the visual pleasure of the film. Initially silent, sound interrupts into the film suddenly around a minute and a half into the single channel film. Until this point the image has allowed us to partially immerse, to focus eye and attention on the single channel film in the upper left hand corner, even as the images within that channel change.5 Suddenly the counterintuitive sound of water and rushing air interrupts our complicated visual immersion. The sound appears to have no source in the image, contradicting and complicating our optical input. The intrusion of elemental sounds correspond with a change in image, to a black and white still shot of the side of a jet, the numbers 3508 dominating the frame. Moments later a second image sequence takes its place in the upper right hand corner of the screen.

The multisensoriality of sound challenges our ocularocentric experience and also ushers in the presence of multiple sequences in the installation. Not only is our attention

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5 These changes in the initial, single channel of image in *Heatseeking*, I would argue, is not disruptive. Thanks to the cinematic syntax of montage our senses are accustomed to the change in images within a single frame.
fragmented by the multisensory and discontinuous pairing of sound and image, but also by the projection of multiple image sequences. And like the inconstancy of images on the move, sound in *Heatseeking* does not remain constant. The rushing air and water end as abruptly as they began and we once again sink into silence. Sound interrupts suddenly again into response with the images, and corresponds with a loud, crack of impact when the young man filmed in infrared thermal visioning swings the golf club. This crack sets into motion the projection of other image sequences, aside from the two that were projected, and immediately diverts our attention away from the source of the sound. The interaction between moving images and sound then take on a rhythm; they stop and start suddenly and repetitiously, echoing, and rhyming in syncopation with the shuffle of images in the different image sequences. This consistent but irregular rhythm is supported by the accompaniment of the rhythmic clatter of a film reel running. This accompaniment paces us through the rest of the film, giving skeletal structure to the irregular rhythm of sound, and sound and image.

In his book, *Drive*, Crandall writes of pacing as “a way of mapping one medium or realm upon another” (95). Ultimately a physical, kinesthetic, energy of movement, pacing functions as a kind of re-purposing of mapping and spatial navigation and transmutes the self-containment of spatial organization. Making other spaces within or on top of another, these spaces and motions remain “unresolved,” in contact but also in tension. Pacing and its re-purposing of mapping correspond with the contact and tension
between different sensory modalities that transmute the distinction between them. Both pacing and intersensoriality de-privilege the presumed objectivity of vision and the centralization of perspective. He writes:

At the same time, it de-emphasizes the visual, because pacing suggests a rhythm, a beat, which underlies and undercuts the optical- as when one suddenly jumps to one’s feet to pace about a room, generating a rhythm that upholds and informs thought… Boundaries of space and body are abstracted through this movement, while at the same time reinforced, because pacing generates a map-able pattern and reinforces physical presence. It is highly carnal. Through its rhythm, bodies, spaces, and representations are converted into one another (95).

Ultimately, pacing produces rhythm and a kinesthetic sense of movement that appeals to multiple sensory modalities, producing within itself an experience of movement, sound, vision, spatiality, tactility and proprioception. In Heatseeking this pacing produces a sense of movement in the viewing body by “reinforcing physical presence.” It operates from a simultaneously optical, aural, and kinesthetic modality and displaces vision’s centrality by mapping other mediums and realms onto the image. Heatseeking cultivates both visual and aural rhythm, generating kinesthetic energies and senses within the act of watching and listening. Crandall points out that rhythm and pacing, by cultivating awareness of physical presence, is “highly carnal,” and disrupts the boundaries between vestibular, corporeal schemas and representational schemas, as well as bodies and spaces
(95). It is as though Fanon’s flesh, his corporeal schema, was recuperated, and his experience as visible image body was undercut and complicated by the multiplicity and mutability of corporeal experience.

*Heatseeking* rhythmically disrupts the organization of vision and visibility by mapping a kinesthetics of sound, rhythm, and movement over the image. This installation becomes not so much about the content of the images and the story they tell, but the experience of watching them, even down to the handheld video devices that allowed one to both “handle” and create a physical connection to the object, even as it also stimulates the individualized perspective of the scopophilic, cinematic drive. Drawing on theories and projects of Brazilian Neo-Concrete artists of the 1960s like Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Helio Oiticica, Crandall reflects on the transmutation the Neo-Concrete artists posed between what they called “the eye body” and “the eye machine” in an essay in *Drive*. As Crandall points out Neo-Concrete artists posed a form of visibility that, unlike the centralized, totalizing perspective of Renaissance and plantation vision, was “not covetous and controlling, not oriented to ocular possession…” but instead operated from a place of transitivity, creating a series of transactions between multiple locations, bodies, senses that all hinged on audience interaction and engagement with the object (109). Crandall engages specifically with Oiticica’s interactive and performative *Parangolés*. These pieces posited and produced a kind of reversibility and transmutation between self and other, individual and communal through their interactivity. The *Parangolés*
transmuted social spaces as the wearer danced from favélas to high-class galleries. They transformed spectator into performer, body into technology, and ultimately transformed an object into art only through its wearing and performance. According to critic Renato Rodrigues da Silva,

Parangolé’s process of signification is organized around reversible functions. To use Oiticica’s own terminology, this process depicts a kind of ‘two-wayness’ or ‘bidirectionality’…the artist was concerned with neither the creation of new identities nor with the definition of specific types of ‘spectator’ and ‘participant’. The proposition evolved ‘in between’ opposite terms. For Oiticica, ‘transformation’ was more important than resolution… (220).

Unlike the capture function of racialized visibility that aims to precisely to produce “new identities” and define “specific types of spectator and participant,” Oiticica’s project, Rodrigues da Silva points out, works to unleash bodies and open spaces for their capacity for transformation and transmutation. It is the action of ‘trans,’ of between-ness and process, that the Parangolés and Brazilian Neo-Concrete art offers to Crandall’s theory of the body-image-technology nexus. Crandall writes about the reversibility of body and machine that the Neo-Concrete movement offers a theory of vision and visibility:

It thus escapes the totalizations of the eye and its binary, vector relationships, and instead results in a kind of circuitous, interstitial seeing. Such a seeing opens the channels between body and environment such that ‘sight’ is not originary,
Cartesian, and linear, but rather a phenomenon arising within a transactional network: a decentralized, configative site of ongoing negotiation where bodies, bodies of codes, and environments are actively interlinked (109).

While militarized, counter-insurgent visuality works to condition bodies to erotically comply with positions of watcher and watched Crandall explores how the erotic intimacies with technologies can be re-purposed to different forms of seeing. It is within the “transactional network,” the transitive and transmutational spaces that allows for an interdeterminancy of body or identity that refuses the categorizing effects of visibility.

Drawing from the Neo Concrete movement’s interest in what happens in the physical and sensory interaction with the object, Crandall’s project re-purposes the technologies of capture and disrupts cinematographic aesthetics to explore potentials for the “hieroglyphics of flesh” to emerge from our transactional relationships to technology, media, and image.

The Neo-Concrete artists’ insights become particularly important for Crandall’s engagement with the technologies of militarized visuality as they themselves produced art under the eye, as it were, of a military dictatorship for whom censorship was a common practice. The military regime came to power in March of 1964, and while the Neo-Concrete Manifesto by poetic and critic Fernando Gullar was written in 1959, artists like Oiticica and Clark were at the peak of their practice and notoriety in the mid to late 1960s. Both Clark and Oiticica left Brazil in 1968 and 1969, though not for political
reasons. But, according to Claudia Calirman, their interests in sensoriality and
interactivity influenced the Brazilian artists who were practicing during the most
repressive years in Brazil (14-15). Oiticica was an important mentor and colleague of
controversial body and performance artist, Antonio Manuel, who produced art during the
dictatorship that continually pushed up against the limits of articulation under the
dictatorship’s censorship. After Oiticica left Brazil, he corresponded with Manuel about
how to represent the situation in Brazil to the international community, and suggested
that Manuel keep “playing the game,” in order to continue to communicate within a
frame of silence (Calirman 59). Manuel went on to ‘play the game’ of dissenting through
a coded and opaque process, producing body and media art in which he infiltrated and re-
purposed mass media to question and subvert the dictatorship. Drawing on the opacity
and situational contingency of Neo-Concretism’s focus on the primacy of the sensory and
the interaction of the audience, Manuel was able to produce from within the channels and
protocols of militarized repression the glimpses of what Calirman has describes as “his
individual freedom” (78). Manuel took the methodological insights of Neo-Concretism
but politicized them. His project Urnas quentes (Hot Ballot Boxes), in which different
boxes “each required a rather brutal act: the public had to crack them open with a
hammer in order to view the contents,” directly engaged individual, human, kinesthetic
energies while also functioning as coded “metaphors for the harsh, hostile actions of the
regime” (Calirman 56-57). Embodied interaction and kinesthetic stimuli become ways of
engaging an audience directly, channeling that transitive energy of the flesh, while also remaining coded, hidden, and fugitive. Like *Heatseeking*, Manuel cultivated these energies to produce fugitive modes of visibility that escape militarized visuality’s desire for legibility, and remaining on the edges of expression.

**Racial Visibility and Performing the Global Positioning System**

The militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border requires the advanced capture technologies that *Heatseeking* undertakes in order to produce an order of racial visibility out of the “chaos” of transnational migration. Counter insurgent visuality adopts the aesthetics and tactics of militarization and becomes the means by which the racialized visibility of the nation is captured and fixed, in order to produce a solidity and stability of U.S. national identity. Nicholas Mirzoeff writes, “Counterinsurgency classifies and separates by force to produce an imperial governance that is self-justifying because it is held to be “right” a priori and hence aesthetic” (278-279). Mirzoeff goes on to show that counterinsurgent visuality requires “chaos” in order to justify its authorization to intervene and restore the order of imperial governance. It is a biopolitical condition of war, a condition of “they must die so we may live,” that allows for the mobilization of counter insurgent visuality and its militarization of technologies of the visible. The “war on illegals” produces visuality’s militarization of capture technologies and its *a priori* and aesthetic “right” to eradicate the threat. As a physical and ideological zone establishing the ‘racialized distinction’ necessitated by the biopolitical condition of war, the
militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border has attempted to literally and insidiously capture and immobilize life through the racial epidermal schema. The war on illegals and the militarization of the border attempts to police the border in order to, as Joseph Nevins puts it, “contain the uncontainable, life itself” (14). That is, the life-giving process and dynamic of migration, movement, and change. The Electronic Disturbance Theater’s project, *The Transborder Immigrant Tool*, however, disturbs the protocols of counterinsurgent visuality by, like *Heatseeking*, re-purposing militarized capture technologies.

Using the military technology of GPS (Global Positioning System) *TBT* performs the vitality and evanescence of affect, and the poetic chaos of transnational migration. *The Transborder Immigrant Tool* disturbs the map, the ordering and limits, of the nation through the re-purposing of a mapping technology. A product of military innovation, GPS functions under a similar notion of visibility- of capture and delimitation of position- and *The Transborder Immigrant Tool* departs from this militarized protocol through the power of what EDT calls, an “ethico-aesthetic disturbance.” According to members of Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g. lab (EDT), this disturbance functions as an aesthetic interruption into the “law,” and the regimes of separation that it encodes (Nadir and Domínguez). Ethically, *the Transborder Immigrant Tool* makes

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6 I say “attempted,” because for all of its efforts migration and movement still happen. As José Antonio Vargas prominent Dream activist and journalist says, “No wall has ever been successful in holding back human will.” (*Voice of Art: Migration is Beautiful*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWE2T8Bx5d8)
visible a human rights crisis and the necropolitical conditions of the right to let die, but aesthetically, through poetics and performance, their work provides affective intensities rather than effective solutions. The ethico-aesthetic disturbance operates through what Dominguez has called, “the politics of the question rather than the politics of the answer,” and theorizes a new form of fugitive visibility (Nadir and Dominguez). This fugitive visibility, like that produced by Heatseeking, is a transitive visibility, a form of becoming visible that draws from the movement, instability, and between-ness of the prefix “trans.”

Drawing on the meaning of “trans” as it is taken up in concepts from transnational, transgender, transcendence, to transcendentalism EDT brings “trans” to bear on the concept and practice of mapping by re-purposing the Global Positioning System as what Ricardo Dominguez calls a “Global Poetic System” (Nadir and Dominguez).

For the project, EDT re-purposed Motorola cell phones with open source code designed by EDT member, Brett Staulbaum, which uses GPS technology. The “Virtual Hiker Algorithm” provides waypoints marked for life saving resources, including water tanks, as well as Border Patrol offices, highways, and other outposts that would also, paradoxically, ensure capture. Additionally the device still functioned as a phone, allowing folks in desperate need to call for help. The phones are also programmed with spoken poetry to provide “poetic encouragement,” much of it based on the syntax of programming code, considered another form of life-giving sustenance for the migrants. The GPS technology was used purely for saving human life, operating from what
Stalbaum has related to the Hippocratic Oath of “do no harm” (quoted in Marino and Cárdenas).

On a fundamental level, the purpose of The Transborder Immigrant Tool is to value all human life, to provide sanctuary and aid to people struggling through a deadly situation regardless of citizenship status or national origin. Simultaneously, The Transborder Immigrant Tool advocates for the right to movement and self-determination within the global condition of migration. This performative act creates within itself tissues of new forms of transnational, communal life within a regime of death at the border. TBT performs poetics, what Dominguez has called a global condition of expression and experimentation. Electronic Disturbance Theater performs these acts through the conceptual gesture of TBT and the poetic expressivity of the tool. Poetics are located both in the conceptual, performative gesture as well as the actual poetry itself. The poetics become the means of actualizing the “trans-” of the Transborder Immigrant Tool and generate modes of movement and expression beyond the given categories of an ordered and racialized world.

**Bodies Becoming Flesh, or The Poetics of Transitivity**

*The Transborder Immigrant Tool* is very much a conceptual project. In 2010 various iterations of it were presented in gallery spaces such as the California Biennial at

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7 Unless otherwise noted comments from Ricardo Dominguez are from an interview I did with him at UCSD in October 2012.
the Orange County Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, and La Galería de la Raza also in San Diego. The project has also been presented as a series of video poems featuring the project’s poetry set to images of the border, navigational technology, and visionary imaginings of bodies leaping and stepping through the border, and otherwise magically rendering it irrelevant. These video poems become important components of the conceptual gesture of TBT; they allow spectators to materially engage with the performance and poetics of the tool through sound, image, and the temporality of the cinematic form. In the video poems, titled “Transition,” “Algorithm,” “Precession,” and “Dubliners” we get visually and aurally materialized glimpses of the theories of transitivity as they take poetic form at the contact between image and voice.

In the video poem “Transition,” the poet speaks first of the body, “Transition. Song of my cells,” situating the transition within the microcosmic, daily transitions of an individual body, always in a state of becoming. This transition is the expression of the biological body. The image is initially that of the Transborder Immigrant Tool in use, phone open, held, walking through the desert. A small yellow compass navigates directionally in the upper left hand corner as we walk, visually situated in the perspective of the tool’s operator. The visual movement kinesthetically situates our body within the hidden, but present, body of the image; we are holding the tool. The poem opens with an invocation of life, of becoming and vitality at the cellular level, even as it visually and kinesthetically situates us within the desert of the US-Mexico border, what has become a
“landscape of death” (Nevins 174). Situating us at the cellular level, the poem visualizes the vulnerability and the vitality of the flesh in the deadly landscape. The video poem poetically aestheticizes vitality of the flesh and ethically questions the expendability of life at the border. Quoting Gloria Anzaldúa, the poet reminds us of the history of migration in North America, “We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks…” They bring us between transition of body and cells to the transition of space performed throughout time by the peoples of the Americas. This tradition of long walks precedes the racialized distinction of the border; seasonal movement is not just a way of life, but also importantly, the material of life. The daily transitions of cellular life becomes linked to the pre-border history of transitive movement in the Americas. [See Figure 2]

In a staticy, electronic voice, the poet continues to quote Anzaldúa, “Today we are witnessing la migración de los pueblos mexicanos. The return odyssey to the historical, mythological Atzlán.” The second line is repeated in multiple layers on top of one another, ending in the re-pronouncement, “Atzlán.” They re-ground us in the physical and metaphorical space of the borderlands. These lands have long been migrational lands, as well as a visionary third space, a space between and apart, transcending binaries of inside and outside and therefore transcending the notion of

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8 I use the pronoun “they” to describe the poet, in order to avoid gendering the speaker when the poem wants to intentionally reject the categorizations that gendering requires. I find that “they” also attends to the polyvocality and transitivity between voices, bodies, species, and genders that the poem speaks from.
nation, a construct predicated on an order of exclusive belonging and membership. The repetitious, vocal sounding of “Atzlan” becomes a song, a rhythm that calls the viewing body into a pacing participation. Like Heatseeking showed us with rhythm, the song of “Atzlán” performs its function as a third space; it conjures one space within another, kinesthetically rendering in rhythm the transitivity of third space.

The poet continues, “Today is it difficult to follow the soundings of that song. Today’s borders and secrets speak at lower frequencies.” Our walking image of the TBT at work changes to a nightscape offering the cover of darkness that visually corresponds to the low frequencies of the border’s secrets. A slow motion voice re-states, “Today’s borders speak at lower frequencies,” continuing the effect of verbal rhythm. A purring, growling, machine animal’s voice follows expressing yet another layer of trans: the voices of the trans-species and the cyborg. The poets voice speaks again, distorted beyond clear recognition, as the image changes to a glowing map of the U.S.-Mexico border. The final enunciation of “time,” is repeated compulsively, like a skipping record, also forming a beat.

A new, unfamiliar, voice like the generic, electronic voice of a GPS device, comes in saying, “Mitochondria. Imagine the chip’s transliteralization, and you have arrived at the energies of a Global Positioning System. The transitivity of the Transborder Immigrant Tool.” While the concept of transitivity is at stake in all the TBT poems, this is the only point at which the dynamic is named. Again invoking the
transitionary and transitive processes of the cellular, the poet names mitochondria, the part of the cell that changes nutrition into energy. This transitive engine of the cell opens onto a call for spectators to “imagine,” to draw from the known and speculatively create, “the chip’s transliteralization.” We mirror, in our own mental capacities, the transformation of the computer chip in the act of re-purposing. Drawing from the known, from its stated purpose, the chip produces energies in excess of its purpose. Its literal purpose undergoes a transitive process and becomes the energy engine, the mitochondria, for the production of new kinds of global life. The re-purposing “transliteralization” of the TBT generates new forms of transnational solidarity and community.

In this oblique part of the poem transitivity is articulated at the site of the confluence of the biological, cybernetic, and social in order to bring us to “the transitivity of The Transborder Immigrant Tool.” In addition to its association with states and qualities of transition, drawing from a definition of transitivity from mathematics and logic, the transitive implies a relationship between three parts in which, if a relationship exists between the first and second parts, as well as the second and third, then it will also exist between the first and the third. It is a state of egalitarian inter-relationality. This facet of transitivity’s meaning becomes descriptive of the relation between the domains of the biological, cybernetic, and social. The domains are not pure and categorically separate in this state of circular inter-relationality, but instead are all sites for the potential transactional generation of new forms of life and purpose.
The electronic voice of the poet continues, refusing to allow us to sit within one conception of trans and thereby enacting the very movement and instability of its namesake, “Second. When we have outgrown that definition, try the trans of transcendentalism.” The poet reminds us of *TBT*’s place within tradition of American Transcendentalism and Henry David Thoreau’s theory of civil disobedience. Meanwhile the image changes, moving between the *TBT* in use and stills of the border fence and its militarization. “Imperfect as over wound pocket watches. Offbeat as subliminalities.” Their voice moves between different tonalities, taking on a deeper and then a lower pitch, refusing to stay at one tone. Changing to an image of a road in the desert the poet describes the transitive’s refusal of capture and categorization. It is excessive to mapping technology’s focus on fixity, “Alternative forms of energy which exceed reason’s pre-determined star maps.” The images bring the physical and political space of the border and migration into conversation with the seemingly unrelated concepts of transitivity, theorizing the excess that migration and other forms of transitivity pose to the categorizing and mapping modes of visibility.

A rapid montage of images of the border and desert roads bring us suddenly to a glass window, an institutional space, and the electronic voice says, refusing yet more categories and modes of visibility, “Neither gray, nor gray, nor black and white, *arcoirises*, a fight, a flight…” Refusing the colors, “gray,” “white,” and “black,” the poet refuses the defining categorizations of the regimes of racialized visibility, and instead
poses a rainbow, an *arcoiris*, a spectrum of colors through which the infinite possibilities of new and different colors can be generated through contact and mixing. The rainbow connotes the potential for infinite possibility latent in the creative potential of chaos and mixture. This rainbow then becomes “a fight, a flight”: a disobedience against the controlling scriptures of categorization, and then finally, a flight, a fugitivity, from the concept of categorization at all. The poet’s voice finishes, “of fancy. This bridge called my back.” They bring the refusal and fugitive re-generation back to the realm of imagination and human creativity invoked in the expression, “flight of fancy.” But it simultaneously grounds that fugitive creativity in the vicissitudes of the human body and the liberation theories of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga and their U.S.-Third World Feminist comrades when they invoke *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), the groundbreaking and multi-genre collection of U.S. women of color writers.

This verbal section of the video poem is paired with a sudden change in images, as the Calit arts space at University of California in San Diego, the institutional “home” of EDT 2.0/b.a.n.g. lab, gives way to the TBT operating at nighttime. The visual images manifest transitions between and blurring of academic spaces, activist spaces, and artistic spaces, much like the U.S.-Third World feminists blurred their scholarship and politics. A distorted male voice lists body parts, “my head, my heart, my cunt, my back...” and progressively becomes more distorted, as the itemized body becomes a blurred and indistinct expression. The itemized body becomes textural flesh. The shifting voices of
the poem cause us to ask: are there multiple speakers? Or is the single speaker transitioning between genders, species, machine? The poet recites the final phrase in a halting manner, “My television view. I’m crossing into…” The final word is distorted beyond recognition and we are left hanging in a realm of potentiality. The images then explode from within, taken over in a shower of yellow light. The television view of visibility is exploded from within, from within the transitive-ness of the biological, technological, and social body that is not “fixed,” but rather always in a state of transition, movement, becoming. In this video poem the many invocations of the body and its final denouement into indistinct vocal expressions portray a body refusing fixity and becoming the blur, the hieroglyphics of flesh.

The poem “Transition” performs the many levels and potentialities of the poetics of “trans” in The Transborder Immigrant Tool. Through the images of migration and movement, and the predominant image of the TBT in operation, the video poem positions the TBT as a conceptual tool in the movement poetics of transition. This transition takes many forms, among them transgender, trans-species, human-machine hybrids, the transference of energy in cells, transcendentalism, third space transcendence of binaries, transnationalism, and finally transitioning out of body and into flesh. The poem aligns all these transitions with the movement of migration, “We have a history of migration, a tradition of long walks…” The trans in the transnational produces similar formations of newness, new forms of community, life, citizenship, identities, and social bodies that are
not captured and fixed within categories of race, gender, and nation. Within the desire to change and experiment with forms of life and expression migration and poetics live out the same energies of transitive becoming and potentiality. These transitions generate the creative potentialities of new lives and new forms of being.

By interjecting poetics into the usage and protocols of GPS, *The Transborder Immigrant Tool* disturbs the locational, categorizing purpose of this technology of the visible, and instead use it to transcend the very purpose of those maps, both on a literal level of crossing borders, as well as on a theoretical level. In departing from the purposes the technology, this project flees the visibility of the nation and race and imagines new forms visibility that allow for new forms of collective comradeship. Where instead of visibility based on categories of race, gender, and nation, it is imagined as a constantly morphing and stretching set of conditions which we transition in and out of, forgoing any map.

**The Fugitivity of Re-Purposing**

In an interview with Leila Nadir, Ricardo Dominguez says that the TBT is not a tool aimed at offering effective solutions to the social crisis of migrant death and trauma on the border, but rather affective responses that provide an “interruption into the Law.” TBT interrupts into the social and political discourse that immobilizes migrant life by making it expendable. Taking the production of affective responses, which are ultimately uncontrollable, variable, and ephemeral, as their tactic, TBT becomes a conceptual,
gestural, performance rather than an activist solution. As Dominguez says in the interview with Nadir:

All the members of EDT 2.0/b.a.n.g. lab anchor their being and becoming as artists and every gesture that we make as an aesthetic gesture. And for us the frame of our work can be traced as an aesthetics of code switching between the Greek etymology of the word “aesthetic” (*aisthitikos*, that which is “perceptive by feeling”) and the effective poetry of code that functions, that “works.” Thus we are constantly and concurrently affective and effective.

*The Transborder Immigrant Tool*, by re-purposing the effectiveness of militarized visibility technology and programming code, provides a tool that flees its original purpose and yet also exceeds its own. *TBT* is a conceptual tool that would allow migrants to *more safely* cross the border, but within its function it generates a conceptual gesture in excess of its effective purpose. It becomes a performance of the poetics of movement and solidarity. This practice of transitively re-purposing military technology and creating out of it the circuits and energies of an aesthetic experience lives out the same energies as poetics, which re-purposes language and gesture for new forms of expression and meaning. Through aesthetic interruptions and re-purposing, the tool moves beyond the confines of an articulated reason for being, or purpose, and creates what the artists have called, “another space” (Nadir and Dominguez). From within the effective capacities of code and
mapping, \textit{TBT} becomes fugitive, fleeing the purpose of making and fixing visible bodies and space.

The project is, as Dominguez points out, dislocative, rather than locative, media (Nadir and Dominguez). It disturbs the production of visible bodies by introducing the opacity of transitivity, which is unstable, mobile, and dislocative, into mapping technologies. This transitivity is the aesthetic disturbance. The map that \textit{TBT} winds up providing is not a map of a bounded nation, a colonial territory, or fixed subjects, but rather an expression of the vitality and transitivity of global migration, the hieroglyphics of flesh that, like the tracks read by the border patrol, become racialized through a process of visualization and capture. Through poetics and aesthetic performance \textit{TBT} flees the purpose embedded in the technology that it has re-purposed. Re-purposing militarized, locative technology as an aesthetic concept produces instead, affective intensities and experiences that make a new sociality and flesh visible, rather than racialized bodies and subjects.

One of the principle researchers, Micha Cárdenas, explains in an interview that the tool drew upon the virtual sit-in work of the earlier incarnation of EDT, in which the digital performance artists and hacktivists theorized how to make a virtual, electronic embodiment possible, to cultivate presence in electronic network (Marino and Cárdenas). Through the poetics of gesture and performance EDT produced a collective presence of virtual embodiment that shut down the government of Mexico’s server in solidarity with
the Zapatistas in 1994. With The Transborder Immigrant Tool, this electronic presence comes again in form of a virtuality, or potentiality, of transnational movement and social experimentation and expression. The socialities of solidarity with migrants rendered expendable by U.S. border and immigration policy, and the other transitive forms of social life that the tool imagines becomes a spectral presence that haunts the network of discourse surrounding the tool, declared a terrorist weapon by right-wing pundits and politicians. TBT is intended to produce affective intensities, and if we consider affect to be the microflucuations of embodied awareness at the interstices of name-able emotions, then the affective presence generated by The Transborder Immigrant Tool makes visibility a form of becoming rather than being. Visibility’s frame shifts from capture, fixity, and immobilization in light, to that of fluctuation and oscillation, movement between light and dark. TBT’s fugitive visibility is a flickering visibility. This presence changes the experience of visibility, leaving behind the capture function in sake of an expressive function. It is not so much what is captured in the image, but what is felt in its glimpsing. Transnational migration, migrant bodies, and the connective tissue of solidarity become the presence conjured and made sensible by TBT; it forms a collective, virtual presence of transitive and mobile flesh, a “zero degree of social conceptualization” (Spillers 67). The material presence of TBT is the sociality it generates.
In making transitive and mobile flesh visible, flesh that by its nature exceeds the conceptual schemas that condition the production of social bodies through racial visibility, TBT makes a tool of visibility into a transitive moment. Turning visibility into a site of glimpsing and producing flesh disrupts the conceptual schema upon which visibility is based. TBT takes the systems of militarized capture technology and produces transitive possibilities, which in their non-nature “exceed reason’s predetermined star maps.” Affective intensities and responses in the experience of TBT are moments of glimpsing social flesh. Flesh refuses conceptual schemas, eludes fixity, cannot be captured in social categorization. The TBT, by making flesh momentarily available to awareness, and gathering new forms of sociality, refuses the racial visibility which produces bodies as objects with purpose, full of the “stories and anecdotes woven by a white man” (Fanon 111). TBT, as a transitive, poetic device, performs the most fugitive act it can, it flees from purpose itself.

*Images of Flesh and Spectral Visibility*

Both projects, *Heatseeking* and *The Transborder Immigrant Tool*, live at the interstices of various media and artistic practices. *Heatseeking* uses cinematic, moving image aesthetics, interactivity, new media aesthetics, and site-specific framing to produce its disrupted, surveillant scopophilia. Meanwhile *The Transborder Immigrant Tool* also works at the intersection of new media aesthetics, moving image and video art, as it interacts with poetics, performance art, and conceptualism. Both of these projects,
differently but complementarily, take up technologies and practices of militarization and visibility in border policing, and produce images, glimpses, and experiences of social flesh out of the protocols of their re-purposed tools. These projects address fixity and capture through technologies of the visible, and question the integration of social bodies into the reproductive circuits of militarized border policing. And one of the technologies they use in their practice is the ambivalence of the image.

As I have shown, Heatseeking and The Transborder Immigrant Tool have exceeded the purposes laid out for their artistic works. Crandall’s work sought to “turn the cameras back on the surveillers” and to examine the nexus of body-image-artillery that elicits erotic complicity in the militarization of the border and its bodies. Ten years later, TBT, aimed to disturb, to “interrupt into the Law,” and to provoke disruptive affects in the discourse surrounding the deadly effects of increased militarization of the border. They sought “to change the conversation theatrically” (Nadir and Dominguez). Yet, both of these projects continually exceed their own purposes, much like they re-purposed the technologies of the visible to exceed the purposes encoded within them. While working to disrupt, examine, and make visible the circuitry of power and visibility at the border, they also through their aesthetic and poetic experimentations and interventions produce glimmers, traces, and images of flesh. But as I have said, rather than attempting to capture flesh, these projects generate it to encourage it to flee, and like Oiticica’s Parangoles that only exist in the moment of the wearing, these images exist only in the
moment of their vision or appearance. They are like specters that flicker between states of visibility and invisibility. This spectral visibility can also be thought of as a translucent visibility, a diaphanous visibility, which by making aware, though not necessarily categorizing, can call something to attention without capturing it. Unlike the racial epidermal schema, it is fugitive, escaping the capture of myth. Fugitivity emerges from the protocols of visibility by cultivating the opacity of embodiment and the experiments of poetics.

How can an image be transitive? How can an image flicker between visibility and invisibility? What is an image, if not a captured and contained re-presentation? The fugitivity produced by these projects’ images of the flesh is one of fleeing purpose itself, an exhaustion of the purposive. These images of the flesh don’t stay to tell a story, to capture an event, to bear witness, they exist to materialize, albeit ephemerally, the connective tissues of affective intensity, of queer, transitive, social flesh. These are images on the run, opaque hieroglyphics, tracks through the desert before they are made to say, “a brown person was here.” These digital images meanwhile also function to materialize in a gallery, on the screen, and with the handheld device, the transitive images of the flesh that the projects generate. The digital images are not documents, but performances themselves, ephemeral iterations that produce a quality of experience from an engagement. What is made visible here, is not visualized in the digital image, cannot
be captured on the screen, it happens here, in this moment of engagement. It happens in our bodies.

**Coda: Undocubus, A Movement on the Run**

In the summer of 2012, the summer before the presidential election, a group of undocumented immigrants, students, workers, activists, artists, and elders, along with a small group of white, documented allies boarded a bright, aqua, 1972 MCI Challenger bus painted with a flurry of Monarch butterflies and drove across the U.S. sunbelt to Charlotte, NC. The bus departed from Phoenix, Arizona the epicenter of border militarization and the “laboratory” of anti-immigrant sentiment and policy. The bus bore the words “No Papers, No Fear: Journey for Justice/Sin Papeles, Sin Miedo: Una Jornada por la Justicia.”

Over several weeks the bus traveled from Phoenix, Arizona to Denver, Colorado, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Dallas, Texas, New Orleans, Louisiana, Jackson, Mississippi, Memphis, Tennessee, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Birmingham, Alabama, Atlanta, Georgia, Nashville, Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, Asheville, North Carolina, Raleigh, North Carolina, and finally ending at Charlotte, North Carolina for the Democratic National Convention. The trip was a tour through some of the hot zones of anti-immigrant policy in the U.S. sunbelt. The riders made stops in the different cities where they performed

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9 Faviana Rodriguez calls Arizona the laboratory of anti-immigrant hate in an online video project about art and the immigrant justice movement by art collective Voice of Art, *Migration is Beautiful.*
civil disobedience actions, held rallies and info sessions, created safe spaces for other undocumented migrants to participate politically, and to create intersectional relationships with other social justice movements, such as post-Katrina anti-gentrification work in New Orleans that similarly demands rights to space within a neoliberal re-articulation of space. The purpose of the trip was to materialize a trans-locale community of undocumented folks, and to visualize and enact new forms of political participation in the electoral process. As a rider, Kemi Bello, put it, “When you are shut out of the process, you have to create new forms of entry. Whether or not they lock the front door to political participation because of our legal status, we will create a window and climb through it” (quoted in Bogado). And as they moved towards the Democratic National Convention in their aqua bus emblazoned with butterflies, they experimented with new forms of political participation and visibility. They became not only a moving visibility for their struggle, but moments of affective disturbance and spotting of social flesh in their tracks across the sunbelt.

Their was a movement on the run, moving across the south, appearing, disappearing, flickering between states of visibility and invisibility. Encouraging other folks to “come out of the shadows,” knowing that knitting together a trans-locale community of the undocumented and unafraid was safer and stronger than a single person claiming their undocumented status. They became a social flesh rather than an aggregate of undocumented bodies. As they built intersectional movements with other
southern struggles, sang freedom songs, and spoke, blogged, wrote poetry, created
posters, and made videos about their many identities, forms of love, and the
heterogeneous shapes of their lives, they were always more than their undocumented
status.

The Undocubus Riders marshaled many icons of justice movements in the
Americas. The chant, “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido” composed for the anti-
Pinochet movement in Chile spoke particularly well to their project of knitting a safer a
trans-locale community of the undocumented and unafraid. The Monarch butterfly, which
decorated their bus, as well as their bodies in the form of giant, wearable wings at the
DNC in Charlotte, purposefully invokes the ‘naturalism’ of migration- Atzlán, a temporal
geography, a land of long walks. Their movement in the cloud of butterflies painted on
their bus, became a performance invoking the collective and rhythmic movement of
migration. As they took to the streets in Charlotte, wearing their beautiful butterfly wings,
flyng a giant butterfly above them in the street, they became like butterflies themselves.
Performing the transitive morph of the butterfly, they became human-insect hybrids
clouding the Wall Street of the South.

Their jornada por la justicia was not without an awareness of their place within
racial justice movement history in the Americas. Traveling through the south, performing
civil disobedience, and singing, performing, claiming their dignity, they acknowledged
their co-extension with the Freedom Riders of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Like the
riders that came before them, they fought for their rights to access the political process, but they also fundamentally fought for their dignity, their rights to movement and space, and for freedom from the capture and fixity of a racial epidermal schema that locks them within “the stories and anecdotes woven by a white man” (Fanon 111).

A rich and evocative archive of the movement exists in the many videos the group and its documentarians have posted to their website, You-Tube, Facebook, Tumbrls, and other social media. A song that continually shows up in their videos is the hip hop group, The Roots’, version of the freedom song, “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around.” Through the figure of walking, of movement and trajectory, the song claims a community’s right to space, movement, expression, in their fight against immobilization.

Ain't gonna let segregation turn me 'round,
I'm gonna keep on a-walkin', keep on a-talkin'.
Walkin' into freedom land.
Chapter Two: Found Object Photography and Spectral Traces of the Flesh at the U.S.-Mexico Border

“Memory- bound to the way the photograph holds up what it proposes, stops, keeps- is given pause because what we thought we could look at for the last time and hold us, captures us, and doesn’t let us go.” (Fred Moten, from In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition, page 199)

“Photographs are open-ended in their interpretation. I believe that is their beauty and mystery. A picture can have its meaning completely altered just by a caption. So, if photographs can’t define themselves, but are dependent upon external factors, shouldn’t we start to worry more those external factors that we have up to now?” (Pedro Meyer, from The Real and the True: The Digital Photography of Pedro Meyer, page 32)

In his “Undocumented Migration Project” anthropologist and forensic scientist, Jason de León, excavates and studies the material culture of undocumented migration in the Prevention Through Deterrence zones of the U.S-Mexico border. De León focuses a large part of his project on the archeological excavation of discarded material objects. What we might recognize as garbage or waste, the detritus left behind by migrants at different points in their journeys, become for De León archives of the practice of transnational human movement. Studying this unique, and yet quotidian, aspect of the migrant experience since 2009 has enabled De León to make important insights into an accepted culture of physical suffering at the U.S.-Mexico border, “specific forms of corporeal suffering that have become routinized and subsequently unremarked upon by migrants” (“Undocumented Migration” 9). As a result of the Prevention Through Deterrence strategy of border policing, or the expressed strategy of U.S. Department of Homeland Security to close off urban border zones and funnel migration into the deadly border regions that would prevent migration through factoring in physical suffering and
even death, has “succeeded in shaping border crossing into a well-organized, dangerous, and violent social process with a unique set of material culture and technologies” (De León “Undocumented Migration” 2). This strategy effectively weaponizes the landscape and enforces a state of exception at the border by abandoning undocumented migrants and rendering them bare life. Focusing on the left behind traces of migrant movement, discarded backpacks, shoes, food packaging, hygiene products, as well as personal items such as prayer cards, and photographs, De León’s project offers a way of looking at a hidden and clandestine social practice that requires a level of invisibility for survival.

Through the discarded material culture we are able to ‘see’ an invisible practice within a zone that polices and captures bodies through a regime of counterinsurgent, militarized visuality. The discarded, used remnants of migration contain secrets and stories of the functioning of state power, as well as the desire for life that underpins the process of undocumented migration. Calling the discarded objects a “material fingerprint,” De León’s project engages with the spectral traces of undocumented migration (“Undocumented Migration” 9). Like the footprints discussed in Chapter One, the material fingerprint traces a presence of spectral and vital movement. These traces allow a clandestine practice to be seen but not captured.

Focusing on the material remnants of the “Prevention Through Deterrence” strategy, De León brings archeology and forensics, studies of the dead, past, or disappeared, to bear on a contemporary practice, studying the spectral traces of an invisible but living movement. Addressing the “material fingerprint” of undocumented migration allows De León and his team to visualize a culture of crossing that respects the
necessity for invisibility, that recognizes the strategy implicit in the statement made by one of the migrants De León interviews, “it’s better to be hot than caught” (De León “Better Hot” 477). Yet, implicit to the project that De León pursues is a desire to make visible the invisibility of state violence and the banalizing of suffering drawn along racial lines at the border. Through the traces of undocumented migration De León’s project works at the interstices of visibility and invisibility at the border. While a project of the social sciences, De León and his collaborators have also made the aesthetic an important dimension of the project. The work has also taken the shape of an art installation and exhibit called “The State of Exception” at the University of Michigan in the spring of 2014, as part of a series titled, “Understanding Race in the Americas.” Immersive screen projections, overlapped interviews with excavators, and object oriented installations using some of the excavated artifacts offer a multisensory, multi-vocal introduction to the project. The exhibit works to sensitize audiences by bringing them into contact with the objects themselves, like a towering wall-installation of backpacks, and floor projections of a desert creek bed full of backpacks and clothing that participants of the exhibit must walk over. Through the materiality of objects and their images researchers and viewers are able to touch upon the practice of undocumented migration existing on the margins of the nation and its visibility.

North Carolina artist Susan Harbage Page has been pursuing a similar project since 2007, photographing the left over traces and material culture of migrant movement in the Brownsville/Matamoros region of the Rio Grande Valley of southern Texas and northern Tamaulipas. Her U.S.-Mexico Border Project (2007-ongoing) she claims is
simultaneously, “archival, archaeological, and aesthetic.” The artist photographs, collects, and archives at her studio the left-behind and discarded traces of undocumented migration across the border, including such things as clothing, toothbrushes, shoes, identification cards, wallets, and backpacks. Harbage Page’s project is reminiscent of work by Chicana photographer, Delilah Montoya, whose project, *Sed: Trail of Thirst* (2004), photographed the empty landscapes of the border in southern Arizona. *Sed: Trail of Thirst* was described by a critic as making “absence palpable” (quoted in González, Fox, Noriega 26). Montoya’s work represents the affective and physical experiences of migration without representing migrant bodies. By forgoing the visibility of migrant bodies to visualize the physicality of migration at the border, Montoya made the experience visible without contributing to the dominant paradigm of visuality at the border that captures and polices through the production of racialized bodies. Instead, in Montoya’s images, it is the absence of bodies and the emptiness of the images that has the physical and affective palpability. Harbage Page’s photographs of found objects also make ‘absence palpable’ and work outside the regime of counterinsurgent visuality predicated on visualizing racialized bodies at the U.S.-Mexico border. By focusing on objects and material traces of migration the photographs cultivate memorial dimensions of touch in the image, bringing viewers into a proximate, tactile relationship to the images. The images make spectrally visible the presence of the social flesh of migration.

Harbage Page re-figures the ability of photography to touch us by creating an equivalence between discarded object image and viewer. In his seminal study of photography Roland Barthes describes the photographic ability to ‘touch’ spectators as
the *punctum*, a touch that is painful, a “wounding,” or a “prick” (27). For Barthes, the affective, wounding capacity of the photograph was directly tied to its mechanical ability to capture and freeze time, producing a visibility of time that forced him to recognize the inevitability of his own death. The photograph’s unique relationship to temporality, as a mode of capture, freeze, and immobilization, has long been associated by thinkers of the photograph with death, being a way, as Andre Bazin put it, of “embalming time” (14).

Harbage Page’s images however re-work the photographic appeal to embodiment and its ability to touch us, making out of that touch an experience and recognition not of inevitable death made visible by the captured and re-presented past, but rather, through the spectral aesthetics of the image, the ephemeral and hieroglyphic presence of the social flesh of migration. The photograph becomes a way of making life visible.

In the *U.S.-Mexico Border Project* the image works as a terrain or conduit of sensory input that makes spectrally visible the social flesh of migration through the tactile and sensible opacity and reticent presence of objects. As Jacques Ranciérè points out in his work on the regimes of aesthetics that form the legibility of our image culture, images make visible objects and situations that allow for direct legibility, or utterly opaque, mute disruption (45). A sentence image is one that holds the two formations together and in tension, deriving a common measure of representational meaning at the sites of their contact and shared circulations (55). Ranciérè’s formulation of “sentence images” resonates with what Roberto Tejada describes as image environments or image spheres, evoking the sensuously complex and immersive worlds made up of image interactions. He writes, “a photograph is meaningful only insofar as it is part of an organized but
always nascent image sphere” (9). In the spectral aesthetics of Susan Harbage Page’s *US-Mexico Border Project*, the mute and hieroglyphic capacity of the image’s everyday-object oriented visibility is privileged over the representational meaning of the image. In this privileging of the mute object, Harbage Page’s images allow for an embodied and reversible form of spectatorship and image engagement to emerge. The palpable absence that figures the presence of a body in these images is enhanced by the spectral aesthetic of tactility, allowing one to touch upon and witness the spectral traces of the social flesh of migration. Harbage Page’s project re-configures the visibility of the US-Mexico border through a focus on the tactility of material culture that reframes the function of visibility at the border, making it a matter of glimpsing social flesh through the materiality of objects and the conditions of space, rather than the rhetorical abjection and capture of racialized migrant bodies.

While a medium long valued for its ability to record the real and produce history, photography has also been complicit in the production of regimes of racialization. Its complicity in this production is part of its prized position within colonial modernity, which sought to codify, arrange, categorize and control bodies through the production of categories of race, gender, ethnicity, nation, and class. Louis Agassiz’s daguerreotypes of former slaves in Columbia, South Carolina stand out as an example of the implication of the camera, as a kind of objective, scientific, witness, in the production of racialized hierarchies in the Americas. A doctor and scientist, Agassiz used the photographic apparatus to produce a series of portraits of former slaves to analyze the physical distinctions between whites and blacks. These images were used to scientifically
substantiate Agassiz’s theory of white superiority. In Agassiz’s photographic project the scientific technology of the camera captured the black bodies of the former slaves in order to produce the “white science” of Agassiz’s gaze.¹

Similarly, at the border, the emergence of photographic passport documents coincided with a need to police racialized bodies during the Chinese Exclusion Act of the early 20th century, one of the largest racialized controls put on immigration in the U.S. The first two decades of the 20th century, culminating with the institution of the U.S.-Border Patrol in 1924, mark an era of establishing the culture of surveillance and policing at the border (Pegler-Gordon 174). Passport photography was originally used at the border to control Chinese bodies, but was also extended to Mexican border crossers with the institution of the Immigration Act of 1917 (Pegler-Gordon 176). As Anna Pegler Gordon points out, the use of photography to produce racialized bodies “transformed the imaginary line” of the border “into a dividing line” (177). The camera’s ability to make visible was instrumentalized within the colonial and imperial project of visualizing and controlling bodies in an aesthetic of presumed scientific objectivity and biopolitical rationality. In fact, the camera made the racialized distinction of the U.S.-Mexico border possible through the process of visualizing bodies. Interestingly, in this moment, as Pegler-Gordon shows, the photographic document was able to both control and enable the slippage of race, as some Chinese immigrants were able to perform Mexican identity

in their photographs and enter the US with authorization (178). While mutually supportive technologies that aim at control through visualization, both the camera and race ultimately fail in their completeness.

Refusing to photograph bodies or to represent her images as evidence, Harbage Page challenges the positivistic, colonial legacy of the camera and the photograph. Her images play on the exact opacity that made passport photography a faulty technology of control. The image becomes a visual ligature that connects viewers between different temporal and spatial experiences and figures through a conduit of bodily sense registers. The photographic image is not merely an evidentiary witness, but an occasion and terrain for embodied encounter and engagement. In Harbage Page’s photographs of found objects and the material traces of migrant movement, the image is a materializing agent that brings viewers into contact with the invisible and the elusive, making an absence into presence through a tactile schema of bodily and affective awareness. They are spectral images that do not claim to know something, but to make it palpable, tangible, and sensible.

The photographic image is particularly well-attuned to the workings of spectral aesthetics that appeal to schemas of embodied engagement. The same capacity for producing a science of race and objectivity of documentation was celebrated in the mutuality of its evidentiary capacity and affective pull, and has long been associated with the ability to make ghosts visible.² Roland Barthes claimed that the photograph was best

² Here, in addition to Barthes, I am drawing thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and his interlocutor, Eduardo Cadava (who I will discuss later in the chapter), and Geoffrey Batchen’s work on photography, Burning...
understood through an analytic of feeling and affective perception. He famously distinguished between the photograph’s *studium* and *punctum* as a way of elaborating the essence of the photographic image. For Barthes, the historical, informational referentiality of the image’s *studium* ultimately offered less of the photograph’s specificity than the feeling-based, sensory “wounding” of the image’s *punctum*. The *punctum*’s ability to sensorially wound the spectator puts them in touch with the photograph’s indexicality, its attachment to a past referent that attests to the duration and passage of time. Looking at a photograph of a young man sentenced to death Barthes explains the difference between *studium* and *punctum* and the revelation of expired time:

> The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future.

> What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence (96, italics original).

The expiration of time and the inevitability of death is what the photograph’s indexicality, its “*this has been,*** makes visible. For Barthes it is only apprehend-able through a feeling-based mode of engagement. Photography, for Barthes, was specific in its ability to make a past substance re-appear in the present and to guarantee its past

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existence. It was specific, therefore, in its ability to make ghosts visible. Barthes proposes an analytic mode of phenomenologically attending to the affective and sensory feelings to allow us a deeper understanding of the photograph. It is the *punctum* of the photograph, the affective wounding of the recognition of time passed, that made these ghosts visible and that comprised the photograph’s specificity.

Sociologist Avery Gordon, like Barthes, calls for and employs an analytic of the *punctum* rather than the *studium*, asking in her theory of haunting: what wounds us but escapes representation in historical narratives and our cultures of hypervisibility? Gordon calls the method of haunting “a particular way of knowing…” and it is “one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us” (Gordon 8). Gordon’s model of haunting requires looking at what seems to not be there, what seems to be invisible, contradicting Barthes’ optically-centric model of photography. Harbage Page’s image, *Impression in the Grass*, gestures towards these margins of visibility by capturing the very emptinesses left behind by migrants. In this image she trains her camera on the ephemeral trace of migrant passage: an impression in the tall, brown grasses left by a migrant as they paused in their journey, to rest, to hide, to wait, to remain invisible and un-detained in their crossing. The impression forms a concentric swirl in the grass, and via the image our attention is drawn, pulled inwards to a darker center of the impression. We dive into the center of its emptiness. The textural depths of this image and its concentric emptiness are palpable, generating an affective experience of dissonance between what we see and what we feel. We see an emptiness but are aware of a presence.
This image of a trace of ephemeral stasis during a process of transnational movement ghosts the presence of a traveler, a migrant moving between nations, but does not make visible a body. A person who has passed on is ghosted by the physical traces left in the landscape by the weight and materiality of their flesh. The material traces presences migrant movement but do not make visible a racialized body. The absence of the body, the absence we recognize affectively, makes present the movement of migration; its traces signal a social process rather than a social body and makes visible the flesh of migration. The experience of haunting in this photograph is generated through an affective or bodily awareness of some presence in the wake of its absence; a twinge of recognition that reminds us of the incompleteness of the visible. [See Figure 3]

This ‘particular way of knowing’ that is haunting is marked by an embodied quality of recognition. Gordon writes, “being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition” (8). Haunting is an “animated state” that appeals to us through structures of feeling, affect, and the animated knowledges of our bodily repertoires (Gordon xvi). In a study that took seriously these artistic sites of collective memory that, “teach us through imaginative design what we need to know but cannot quite get access to,” Gordon’s theory of haunting and ghosts looks to the intrusion of the particularities and anti-uniformities of embodied and affective experience on rational knowledge (Gordon 25).

Armando Silva employs the figure of the phantom as a spectral aesthetic form that describes the hidden, shadowy, marginal, and nonverbal dimensions of urban experiences
and identities that shape the imaginaries we produce of our cities. In Silva’s work the
phantom exists, in Gordon’s words, on the margins of the “taken for granted realities” of
our cities (Gordon 8). Silva describes the phantom’s mode of visibility as inconsistent
and ephemeral, “Phantoms, then, are invisible beings that speak to us, that allow
themselves to be seen, that appear and leave” (37). Phantoms are transitive figures that
flicker on the edges of what is seen, understood, and acknowledged in the everyday.
Shifting between states of visibility and invisibility, making present an absence, or
conversely, making present through absence, the spectral is a mode of visibility that
operates through invisibility, through what exceeds the visible. It makes itself known
through embodied and affective structures, a “seething presence” that flickers at the edge
of vision (Gordon 8). Phantoms and specters are figures of movement, flickering between
absence and presence, visibility and invisibility. Engaging with them we agree to
similarly shuttle, moving between what we know and what we feel, establishing a space
in which we both understand and do not understand what we encounter. The mode by
which hauntings produce recognition in us takes place in the riparian zone between
conclusive knowledge and the ambiguous experiences of idiosyncratic and irreducible
sensory input (Gordon 24). Spectral aesthetics are the ways of making ghosts visible even
in their absence, by making them palpable.

*Spectral Aesthetics of the Photographic Haptics of Objects*

The objects Harbage Page records form themselves ghostly traces of past
substance and passing movement at the border. As Jason de León puts its, they are
material fingerprints, the impressions left by invisible, moving bodies (9). Through her
photographic aesthetic and mode of interaction, Harbage Page’s images of the objects generate an aesthetic of spectrality at the border, allowing us to differently imagine transnational migration, moving these objects from being evidence to a kind of hieroglyphic. The artist photographs these objects in situ, as they are found, scattered and embedded in the landscape of the Rio Grande of southern Texas, creating an important linkage between object and landscape. Exhibitionally, the close-up and tightly framed images are displayed in large scale- often occupying up to 42 by 61 inches. These images become larger than life presences that immerse the viewer within the texture and detail of the object and the landscape. Many of them have a downward, or from below camera angle, asking us, what can we see, what can we approximate, what can we realized are we trained to ignore when we start looking at the forgotten ground?

In the close up image titled, “Argyle Sock” our gaze is trained at the ground, looking from above. We see only a small section of dried soil and a single blue sock compacted into the ground. The soil is hardened and dried into a repeating, mosaic pattern. A blue and white argyle sock lies in the dirt, in a crescent shape, seeming to push back against the directional current of the tile pattern. This image is full of texture: the dried, crusting earth forming a dense, raised pattern, and the solitary, cotton sock both enmeshed in and emerging from the soil. The textural detail and force of the image become like a visual Braille, making of the image a tactile hieroglyphic that can only be read through our fingers. In this image the textural surface of the image claims our attention; the feeling of sandy soil, the crust of a dried-out, cotton sock take precedence
over the where or the why of the image. A tactile sense of texture and its affective resonance foreground an understanding and engagement with this image. [See Figure 4]

The close-up image trains our eyes not upon the context that would cry “border,” but rather on the detail, both affective and tactile, of the objects and the small cut-out of landscape. The close-up entails the knowledge that the framing of this photograph visually cuts-out a small portion of a larger stretch of earth, a river bank, a trail, a geopolitical borderland, draws attention to the image-ness of the image, which according to philosopher Henri Bergson, in his work *Matter and Memory*, was ultimately a subtraction or portioning off of the visible world (28). The image was the result of a process of partition and framing. Rather than attempting a breadth of vision, a large scope that would manage as wide a space as possible, this image draws us into particulars. Like others in the project this image of a found object is focused on the ground, training our eyes on the unnoticed and ignored. What we might dismissively recognize as litter or a blemish on the landscape, becomes in this photographic project mute and opaque “reliquaries” of a person moving across the border, of life in movement and transition between nations, modes of living, and livelihoods.\(^3\) The photographic invocation of these opaque objects, by focusing on the density of the textural surfaces of the objects and the landscape, generates an “animated state” of haunting, bringing sensual awareness to the image. It is both focused on the surface of the image and yet also moves beyond it.

The images of found objects in “The U.S.-Mexico Border Project” become spectral by drawing our bodily awareneses into the image through what Hamid Naficy, 

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\(^3\) The artist herself refers to these objects as reliquaries in the artist statement on her website.
in his study of exilic filmmaking calls, tactile optics. Tactile optics are generated by a focus on an everyday sensuousness of quotidian objects that functions as a kind of peripheral vision in exilic image culture. They mediate a relationship to memory objects like film and images in a specific way that attends to the invisible and multisensory dimensions of memory. Quoting the work of Michael Taussig, Naficy thinks of everyday sensuousness as, “‘much that is not sense so much as sensuousness, an embodied and somewhat automatic ‘knowledge’ that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational’” (28).

The knowledge of ‘everyday sensuousness’ is a knowledge rooted in individual memory that then makes images intelligible and affecting. Tactile optics are “propelled” by memory (Naficy 29). In Harbage Page’s photographs the orientation of our vision towards the textural surfaces of objects in the image generates spectral aesthetics through the interaction of what Naficy, borrowing from Laura Marks, calls “sense memories,” “each spectator’s recollections of the images, sounds, smells, people, places and times” stored in their bodily repertoires (29).

The contact between sense memories and images describes the reversible structure of perception. In the image titled, “T-shirt in the Grass” our vision is at eye level with a bank of grasses leaning in the breeze. A white t-shirt or piece of cloth is caught in the grasses, seeming to flow in the same direction. The objects make up the foreground of the image, and are in sharp, detailed focus. The background behind the bank of foliage seems distant, out of focus, far away, perhaps even in another world. What matters is the bank of swaying and moving grasses is this t-shirt, caught in a poetic, expressive gesture,
moving with the grasses in the landscape. Looking at the cotton of the shirt and the texture of the grasses I, to borrow philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s words, palpate the images with my look. In the moment of handling this image, it similarly touches me, triggering my sense memories. What I know in the looking is the sense memories I have; the flesh of my own memories and corporeal awareness wrap around my contact with the image (Merleau-Ponty 131). The tactile, object-oriented optics of this image allow me to touch it with my gaze, but not necessarily to know it. Merleau-Ponty writes, pointing out that visible objects including our own bodies are never fully ascertained by our gaze but always retain within themselves an unknowable and invisible dimension:

What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them—but something to which we could be closer than by palpating it with our looks, things we could not dream of seeing, ‘all naked’ because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seem to us to come from, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being? (131, italics mine).

The palpation of our look only allows us to draw closer to the object, but not to know it “all naked,” transparently or fully. The reversible relation between seer and object involves a kind of projection, or reading through, one’s own experiences, memories, and experience of isolated unknowability. This photograph of this estranged object shows us that this is not a moment of identification with the object in the image, but rather an
awareness of bodily self within a relational schema of other objects. Merleau-Ponty does not envision an ideal spectator located outside of history but rather one laden with memories. [See Figure 5]

This palpating effect of our look is an effect of the reversible structure of perception itself, in which the act of touching necessitates a simultaneous fact of also being touched. The tableau-like effect of centralized and objective perspective technologized and further naturalized through the advent of photographic perception often obscures the reversibility with the image by distancing the spectator with a sense of visual mastery. But the close-up perspective of Harbage Page’s images brings the viewer into proximate equivalence with the object. As I will show later, the immense scale of the image further complicates and deepens the relation between viewer and image—bringing us into an even more equivalent relation with the small, insignificant object.

The reversibility of perception is a kind of transitivity, or movement and exchange, between bodies and objects, and makes up what Merleau-Ponty calls, “the flesh of the world.” Described as a texture, it is a kind of sensual quality that comprises a continuous field of relational encounters, “the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible touching upon the touching body…” (146). Flesh, for the philosopher, is a dynamic rather than static quality or behavior, it is a process of doing that leads to becoming. Hortense Spillers thinks

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through a notion of flesh that is similarly relational and dynamic, but within a historical
and semiotic frame. As explored in Chapter One, Spillers, understands flesh, as a
“cultural vestibularity” or a “zero degree of social conceptualization” that grounds entry
into a shared, social world. Situating flesh within an epistemology of race in the
Americas she describes it as a kind of hieroglyphics that is made illegible by the capture
and visualization of racial categorization (67). Before capture and individualization as a
visible body through the act of racialization, flesh comprises the corporeal, sensual, and
transitive horizons of worldiness. While similarly relational, grounding, and trans-
personal, Spillers’ conceptualization of the flesh renders the flesh social and historical.
Between the two thinkers, flesh is the dynamic of life in transitivity, in movement and
becoming. As shown in Chapter One, migration itself is a manifestation of social flesh.

Harbage Page’s photographs enhance the reversible dynamic with the object
through the close-up aesthetics and tactile optics of the image. Through the photographic
structure and manipulation she makes the textural surfaces of the object and landscape a
means of accessing the invisible margins of the image, the flesh which exceeds capture as
a singular body. What we see, through the mute opacity of the visible objects is the
invisible presence of transnational movement at the U.S.-Mexico border, but not the
visible bodies of migrants. The “zero degree of social conceptualization,” that is, the
human fact of movement and life-making transitivity is made visible in this image
through the aesthetic rendering of the traces of that movement. Encountering a t-shirt in a
bank of grasses, a sock enmeshed in a mosaic of dried mud, the photograph mediates an
encounter with the flesh of the world that is the social flesh of migration, and enhancing
reversible perception through the textural sense memories. The image’s aesthetics animate us towards the acknowledgement of that reversibility and transitivity within our modes of looking.

The everyday sensuousness of the objects are enhanced through close-up and yet also estranged through their embeddedness in the landscape. The object within the image forms the indexical trace of migrant movement by attaching onto a existential referent, but the image itself creates a material link by making available the object’s everyday sensuousness and enhancing our tactile relationship to it. Yet, by focusing on the object so out of place and dislocated within the landscape, often literally enmeshed within it and becoming a part of it, these photographs also dislocate and jar the viewer, complicating the animating effects of sense memories coiling over the object. The everyday sensuousness of the image allows for an intersection between the textural legibility of the object and the disjunction of location to become palpable. As Harbage Page says of the project, the everyday objects serve to both join and disjoin the viewer from an understanding of the border and undocumented immigration:

   My images are visual conversations about the material culture of the migrant experience that compel us to consider our own worldview… My work questions how the vanities of our own habits and the frailties of our seeing reinforce unspoken ideologies of power. It is not just what we see that matters, but how our privileged vantage points contextualize images and their content.

These photographs aim to disturb our “habits and frailties” of seeing, the reductive reliance on the visible and the seen, the commonplace reductions to, as Avery Gordon put
it, “taken for granted realities” (8). The photographs of the objects in situ both bring us close and estrange us.

Seeing these objects in their peculiar relations to the physical landscape, the image momentarily estranges us from the enveloping location of bodily awareness, forcing us to ask, “How did this get here?” In that moment the object reminds us of its indexical dimension, re-attaching to its referent, to a body moving across the border. In our encounters with these images, we as spectators become caught between the mute opacity of the objects, and the disjuncture of their location, the historicity that brought them to be here in this place. While bringing us close to shared social flesh, the image also estranges us and distances us just enough to touch upon the object’s historicity. The image hangs in that liminal space between mute presence and signifying substance. The in situ photographs allow these images to take on meaning, to make their status as migrant equipment to come into view, rather than being only rubbish, litter, or blemishes on the landscape. Yet, the image appeals to us at the level of the object’s texture and flesh, understood through a profound depth of sense memories mediated by the image.

The image’s mediation of the objects allows their visibility as traces of the social flesh of migration to come into view. However, these images also intrude on that visibility, complicating it and shrouding it with the textural focus and tactile optics of the image. The close-ness and scale of the image brings something else to visibility within the image. Focusing on the textures and their affective resonances, the wrapping of our sense memories, the reversibility of touched and touching that the aesthetics of the image enable, makes sensible the flesh of the world. In this moment of looking, the

109
representational function of the object is complicated by the reversibility of the image, the way it also makes apparent my own bodily sense within the continuous field of encounters. Like a shroud on the image, the close-up focus on texture allows us to touch upon the invisible within the image and the flesh of our own relational encounters on the margins of the strict visibility. My tactile relationship gestures towards what is not present, what is invisible, in the image. This shroud of tactile experience is the spectral aesthetics of the photographic image.

*Spectral Aesthetics and Second Visibility*

The tactile optics of Harbage Page’s images allow for the spectral’s “particular way of knowing” what the image contains. The spectral aesthetics bring us into contact with the latent texture of flesh. These images appear immediately legible in one sense and yet also reticently opaque. In the image titled, “Blue Fabric Scraps,” we are again brought into tactile proximity with the found object. On the reddish ground lie two pieces of blue and black striped cloth. The earth fills nearly half of the image with a distant, blurred, palm tree lined horizon line in the background. Shot at ground level, in eye line with the object itself, our vision enters an equivalent perspective with the object, as well as the earth on which it lies. The image’s shallow depth of field holds our gaze on the object, which is in sharp focus in the middle ground of the image. Meanwhile, the foreground and background are deeply out of focus, becoming indistinct, but figural, contextual blur. The manipulated depth of field heightens the equivalence of scale between this small, insignificant object and this typically “masterful” viewer.
The perspective of the image, shot at ground level, but with foreground and background equally out of focus, gives a unique spatial impression. While the foreground and background melt into insignificance, what becomes striking in this image is the object, the blue and black striped scraps of fabric, who knows how old or how long abandoned, forming traces like footprints in the sandy ground. While the pieces of fabric grab my attention, the out of focus foreground also hits me, like a spatial gulf between myself and the object. These remnants of clothing, seemingly so close, are also somehow untouchable, isolated, and secluded. The image retains its close-up aesthetics and the object appears close enough to render the textural, tactile optics. Yet the manipulation of the depth of field skews the spatial frame of the image, and the object simultaneously appears far enough away to be just out of reach. While the image is open to my tactile, sense memories it remains nonetheless distant and opaque, illegible, resistant to my knowing. [See Figure 6]

This opacity and resistance creates a kind of exchange in visibility between myself and the object, equalizing the terrains of visualization. The reversibility of perception, the fact of simultaneity between touching and being touched, is a concomitance of states of objecthood in the act of perception. We are simultaneously perceptive subjects and perceived objects. These images generate a visibility of the flesh through the aesthetic propulsion of this dynamic. In his engagement with Merleau-Ponty, Roberto Tejada describes the flesh as being itself photographic, it is a latent “open-ness” between the seer and the seen, a mutuality and equivalence, that takes place temporally at the site of engagement and “can be awakened in the present act of viewing” (153). The
mutuality of photographic flesh allows for the emergence of a “second visibility” (153). It comes after the initial intelligibility and recognition of the image, taking the shape of a “double take, at cross-purposes, a twofold vision - a skepticism” (154). Studying the photographic project of prostitutes and their clientele in the border town of Ciudad Juárez, Tejada offers a theory of photographic engagement and interaction that, hinging on the reversibility between image and spectator, allows for the configuration of another onlooker in which, “the logic of first sight gives way to second visibility that reverses matters as they appear” (136). In Tejada’s analysis of the Boystown archive, the second visibility of the images in his reversible encounter with them generate a more ethical spectator of the image, that by introducing reversibility and opacity into the photographic relationship reminds us that visible “bodies are an insufficient guarantee of knowledge and history” (166).

The equivalent perspective and depth of field manipulation of these images draws attention not only to the tactile optics of the image, but also to the isolation and exclusion of the object. This equivalence generates a second visibility to the image that works to bring a heightened sense of value and importance to the found objects. These images transvaluate the discarded, the left-behind, and the insignificant objects and traces into hieroglyphic presences of transnational migration. The large scale exhibition of these images in gallery spaces heighten this transvaluation, as the object joins me in size and space, seeming to dwarf me even as I look at it, or even down at it. Suddenly these objects are not just objects that I can name and categorize and know through my act of looking, but are also objects that exceed and extend beyond what I think I know of them.
The manipulation of perspective that at once draws us close and holds us at a distance confers on these objects a status of an object that is simultaneously a subject, a thing that affects me, touches me, and holds itself away from me, even as I gaze at it. We together enter a riparian zone between visibility and invisibility. The equivalence created at the site of engagement with this image is another aspect of spectral aesthetics, drawing attention to the second visibility latent within the image. The dissonances of the visible and the invisible place these objects in the margins of the “taken for granted realities” (Gordon 8).

In these images of found objects, the workings of spectral aesthetics generate a second visibility that works to “reverse matters as they appear,” causing a re-appraisal of the taken for granted visibility within the image. The emptiness and vacancy of the image, the image of merely discarded items and waste, become transformed through spectral aesthetics into the emanations of the social flesh of movement at the border. Upon initial glance at these images it is easy to see the re-inscription of the border as “abjection machine,” as a site of contamination, invasion, illegality, waste, refuse, and the non-human (Brady 53). The border as a site of migration has become a site of death, contamination, and abjection in popular imaginaries. But the spectral aesthetics that frame and hold these images, that hold us with them and to them, that bring our sense memories to bear on them through tactile optics and perspectival-equivalence, and that figure presence despite the absence of bodies, reformulate what is made visible in these

5 See Joseph Nevins, Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond (2010), Clare F. Fox, The Fence and River (1999), and May Pat Brady, Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies (2002).
images. Through the images of these objects we glimpse human movement, the desire for life, the courage and perseverance of these daily practices through the material textures of the minutia of the experience that is enmeshed in, tied to, and literally rooted within the space of its enactment. We glimpse the affective textures of the social flesh of migration. As Delilah Montoya says of her own borderlands photography project that captures the empty spaces of the border, vacant of any human figuration: the images “honor the courage of the migrant experience and those who have sought to provide the migrants with aid.” It becomes not the bodies of migration that we see but rather the emotions and affective bonds that exist at the border. These images allow us to catch glimpses of the social flesh of the migration and human movement, transnational affective bonds at the border, and the striving towards transformation made visible through the flesh of reversible photographic perception.

Spectral aesthetics make possible a second visibility that arises out of the contacts, collisions, and coiling over of bodies and embodiments with the images. Through the contacts of bodies with images, the image becomes like the body which registers the effects of force and yet also exceed it. Tejada writes, “As transitory sites on-and through- which various forces intervene, bodies can be registered, detained, or made to appear nature in representation, but equally transformed or re-framed so as to unsettle, cause disruptions, and effect change” (156-157). The image and the body have a dual natures of being both sites of the predictable legibility as well as radical contingency, it “can be a measure of our action in the world- of those already depicted and those emergent,” allowing for an understanding of past action and historicity as well as the
reformulation and generation of second visibilities and new forms of sociality (Tejada 54). The image becomes an important site of this possible transitive fluctuation, as they can increasingly travel where bodies cannot. Images become a material links to what has been seen as well as what can be seen, a space to encounter the disjunction and instability inherent within what we see and what we think we know. The spectral aesthetics that actively engage bodily knowledges in a process of reckoning with the image, make it in Tejada’s words, “an uncertain site of knowledge” (166).

**Death and the Ghosts of Photography**

The spectral aesthetics of Harbage Page’s photographs cause the material traces of transnational migration to ghost its presence during an encounter with the image; we become aware of the invisible presence of the flesh of migration. Encountering and engaging with these images we experience the haunting that Avery Gordon describes, the “particular kind of knowing” that forces us to recognize that which is not strictly visible in the image. This social flesh becomes a ghost that the photographs of these object presence for us.

Photographs have long been associated with ghosts, visible traces of a past, dead and gone, that have made them vital to the production of history. Thinking through the work of Walter Benjamin, Eduardo Cadava draws out the intertwined relationships between history and photography and the ways in which they mutually underpin and contribute to our understandings of each other. Drawing out the interrelations between these concepts, Cadava calls photography a cemetery, a space where the death of past events are entombed and preserved for future reference and knowledge:
The conjunction of death and the photographed is in fact the very principle of photographic certitude: the photograph is a cemetery. A small funerary monument, the photograph is a grave for the living dead. It tells their history—a history of ghosts and shadows—and it does so because it is this history (10, italics original).

Like history, photography functions as a monument, as a codification of time and place that acts for the guarantee of its very expiration. It aims to capture a moment to ensure against its disappearance, to keep it, not alive, but intelligible into the future. As Cadava points out, the indexicality of the photograph, the certitude that it ensures, makes it a medium that exists for, and in, death. Inherent within the very structure of the photograph is the expiration and disappearance of the thing being photographed; “There can be no photograph without the withdrawal of the photographed,” Cadava writes (10).

Cadava sees within the structure of the photograph an undeniable reference to the death of the object and the expiration of the moment, the indexicality of the image presumes duration and mortality. In the temporal halting of indexicality, the photograph inscribes the presence of death. The exchange that photography and history perform between appearance and disappearance, presence and absence gives them a spectral quality. Because it puts us in contact with spaces and times in which we are not, that opens us sites of thinking about the difference between self and world, photography generates an awareness of non-existence that, according to Cadava, means death. The photograph is a “corpse of an experience” (Cadava 128).
Cadava articulates a theory of affective engagement with the photograph that takes the shape of a kind of bereavement and mourning; an engagement that responds to the withdrawal inherent in the photographic structure, “Although what the photograph photographs is no longer present or living, its having-been-there now forms part of the referential structure of our relationship to the photograph. Nevertheless, the return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting…The possibility of the photographic image requires that there be such things as ghosts and phantoms” (11). For Cadava and Benjamin, the haunting of the photography is the work of mourning, and the opportunity for mourning that the photograph offers is a reckoning with death and with history that allows us the space to envision and make life. Summarizing the conjoinment of history and photography in his engagement with Benjamin he writes, “For Benjamin, history happens when something becomes present in passing away, when something lives in its death. ‘Living means leaving traces’…History happens with photography. After life” (128 italics original). Like Barthes, Cadava finds that Benjamin’s meditations on photography demonstrate that photography makes death visible as a result of its mechanical capture of time, “Benjamin’s ‘paper graveyard’- what I have wanted to call a photograph- tells us, if it tells us anything, that we must regard death” (Cadava 130 italics original). For Cadava regarding death is a fundamental act of historiography.

Barthes similarly understood the photograph as a ghost of the real. His meditations on a photograph of his dead mother reveal to him the “that-has-been” of his mother’s own singular existence. That experience, repeated in every engagement with photographs, visualizes time for him in a way that ultimately makes visible the
inevitability of his own death (97). In the “Winter Garden Photograph” the absence of Barthes’ mother and her singular childhood are made present; in seeing the evidence of her once having been, Barthes becomes aware of his own duration. The photograph ghosts him with the trans-temporal guarantee of a that-has-been. This guarantee of a time gone by, a past moment, a body existing in a world where he is not, or is no longer, reveals through the photograph’s indexicality the continual passage of time and the durational exhaustion of the moment. This is the reason and origin of the punctum. The punctum of the photographic image became for Barthes the specific function and appeal of the photographic image that forced a realization of finite duration of human life. The specificity of the photograph therefore resided in its mechanical qualities, its capture of light on silver halides, its freezing of time. According to these theories, the photograph contains within itself a process of capture and immobilization of life.

In Barthes’ thinking the indexical photograph offered a skin, a permeable membrane, between this moment and a past moment, “A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed” (Barthes 81). Photographs were material, visual traces of a verifiable past whose effects resided within its mechanical, indexical properties. While Barthes uses the language of skin to describe the knowledge and authenticity that the photograph offers he notes that it is still not a palpable linkage, but rather an awareness of reality. His notion of the punctum is an affective one, that wounds and has a sensory dimension but one that takes place due to an ultimately ocular and mental experience, the acknowledgement of a time dead and gone.
This is notably not, for Barthes, a tactile experience, but rather an ocular experience that causes affective response. Seeing may wound Barthes, but it is the knowledge of temporality that hurts.

While Cadava and Barthes both insist that the function of the photograph to re-animate the past within the present moment gives the photograph a ghostly quality. It attains its specificity through its mechanical capacity to freeze time. According to theories of the photographic image, the indexicality of the photograph spectralizes objects and moments and ultimately invokes death by virtue of immobilization and capture in the face of disappearance. The indexicality that it performs- the ability to promise a “that-has-been” through mechanical capture - promises a survival of the dead and the past, and offers a space and time for mourning.

However, the indexical gesture of Susan Harbage Page’s spectral photographs engages and makes visible something more vital, and that does not hinge upon the mechanical capture and immobilization of life. Her images engage in a performative act of pointing towards the already still objects that themselves index transnational movement. The indexical is itself a form of touching and pointing to, implicating the movements and knowledges of our hands. The pointing gesture of these images does not require the flash of light onto silver halides and the expiration of the moment, but rather the embodied recognition of simultaneity, coexistence and equivalence between these everyday discarded objects. The indexical in Harbage Page’s images takes place at the level of the object, which indexes migrant movement. It does not reside in the mechanical capture of the camera and film but rather in an aesthetic practice and choice of showing
these objects; multiple and yet with a predictable pattern and texture they demonstrate a
texture, the texture of the social flesh of migration.

Approximating these images through the sensory perception of touch opens up the
latency of second visibility in the image, in which we see not the static, frozen moment
but instead the coiling over of sense memories and reversibility with objects, images, and
bodies. The image aestheticizes the re-presentation of the object. The indexicality of the
found object makes of the indexical in these images an aesthetic and performative
practice, rather than mere mechanical capture. Her images become an almost anti-
photographic practice. Rather than transparency and objectivity, like that marshaled by
Louis Agassiz in his scientific positivism, the truth of her images lie in their aesthetic
rendering, showing what the practices of aesthetic intervention can bring to the study of
history, knowledge, and visibility that perhaps the document cannot. Avery Gordon’s
theory of haunting goes to the imaginative sites of memory in order to address “the dense
site where history and subjectivity make social life,” where those deep and extreme social
violences are registered and continue to live (Gordon 8). Rather than the formal sites of
knowledge, like for instance, the state sponsored archive or the quantitative knowledge of
traditional sociological methods, Gordon approaches the literary and creative as sites of
somatic and affective knowledge that have much to tell us about the persistence of social
violence that cannot be captured within the “objective” and empirical modes privileged
by sociological study. Harbage Page’s images do not privilege their temporal capture and
scientific objectivity, but rather their ability to aesthetically render. The found objects
themselves help comprise the spectral aesthetics in the images by allowing us to see the
ephemeral movement of the social flesh of migration through the traces it leaves behind. Making visible movement rather than stasis these images allow us to see and feel the spectral movement of life, rather than the haunted mourning of death.

In an essay on photography and the future of image culture Jacques Rancière points out that Barthes’ fixation on the mechanical indexicality of the image and its relationship to the dual poetics of the image, the *studium* and the *punctum*, fails to account for the aesthetic regimes that make them intelligible, “By projecting the immediacy of the latter on to the process of mechanical imprinting, he dispels all the mediations between the reality of mechanical imprinting and the reality of the affect that make this affect open to being experienced, named, expressed” (15). Barthes’ desire to isolate the affective power of images within a mechanical capacity for capture elides a history of the ways in which images are produced, disseminated, and also critiqued, or as Rancière puts, a history of relations between three fundamental modes of producing and understanding images that he describes as, image as art, image as social imagery, and theoretical procedures of criticism. Fred Moten offers a related criticism of Barthes in his discussion of mourning and sound in the photograph of the young, black man, Emmet Till, who was lynched in 1955. Moten points out that while Barthes is interested, as he himself is, in the affective dimensions of the photograph, he fails to recognize the ways in which the images he chooses elide the histories of race and racialized looking that bring these images into visibility and that contribute to the affective intelligibility that the images provide him. In Moten’s critique, it is the production of race through a set of critical operations, namely phenomenological construction of an ideal spectator who is
outside of history and through an implication within a history of empire and colonization is constituted by looking at blackness, “Blackness is situated precisely at the site of condition of possibility and impossibility of phenomenology, and for Barthes, that’s cool because the object and the spectator of photography reside there as well. This interstitial no-space is where photography lives…” (203) For both Rancière and Moten, the investment in the camera’s mechanical truth telling abilities as a form of abstracting materialization that attains its power only through a pure and simple truth of “that-has-been,” removes the photographic image from the histories of its multiple modes of circulation, reception, the histories of racialized economies of looking that brought its presumed objectivity into being. For both of these thinkers, those histories are aesthetic histories. And as Moten makes clear they are rooted within colonizing epistemologies and racialized arrangements of looking that make possible the photograph’s capture and immobilization of black and brown life.

Harbage Page’s “U.S.-Mexico Border Project” shows us the ways in which the aesthetic rendering of the photographic image means more for the visualizing potential of the image than the mechanics of indexicality. The photograph offers us a promise of material reality, but the spectral aesthetics of the image do the work of visualizing. The camera allows us to see, brings us close, and provides a material linkage to the object, but it is the aesthetic workings of the photograph that allows us to feel the spectral traces of migrant movement, rather than captured bodies and their abjection. Rather than showing us the contamination, injured bodies, security fences and border walls, the shapes that the forces of death take at the border, these images allow us to see the spectral movements of
social flesh of migration, of the will to transitivity and life making. The tactile optics and the manipulation of perspective and scale insist upon a second visibility and generate the openness towards the latent field of reversible flesh. The aesthetic renderings of these objects transform the objects from migrant waste into traces of the social flesh of transnational movement. The aesthetics of the image change our ways of seeing the border. The mechanical-indexical theories of photography and the immobilization that it hinges upon are not sufficient to constructing a reparative history and a repairing visibility of the U.S.-Mexico border, one that refuses the continual abjection and disavowal of migrant life. The aesthetic in the photographic image means more for the project of visualization than that of its mechanic specificity.

The Aesthetics of the Archive and the Discarded

Harbage Page’s, “U.S.-Mexico Border Project,” is comprised of another form of photography that helps us to understand the ways in which the affective force of images lies not in their indexical qualities, but rather within the aesthetic regimes and ways of looking that have constructed them. As the artist reminds us, her project is “simultaneously aesthetic, archeological, and archival…” and each register of her project carries with it specific aesthetic modes that determine the ways in which we engage, know, experience, and are wounded by these images.

In addition to photographing the found objects in situ, Harbage Page collects and archives the objects at her studio. As part of the archival process the artist produces photographs of the objects, separated from their found realities. The images are part of a tradition of museum photography that frames the object in medium close-up, against a
monochrome background. While Harbage Page has tweaked this form slightly, forgoing the standard black or white backgrounds favored by archival practices and instead choosing backgrounds of vibrant colors of reds, oranges, and blues, that are reminiscent of the physical landscape in which they were found, these images still conform to a certain archival style and aesthetic. This style, by removing the object from its physical location, and suspending it within a kind of anonymous any-place, or perhaps better, an anonymous no-place, aims to provide the visibility of the object unimpeded by the distractions of space and time, a kind of pure objectivity of vision. This archival practice is well articulated by Moten’s discussion of the histories that make up Barthes’ ideal spectator: the object becomes without culture. The archival aesthetics that seek to bring the object out of space and time and to offer it up in its pure object- hood is described by social anthropologist Nestor García Canclini as, “robbed of one of the keys to its value: the everyday or ceremonial function for which the original users made it” (119). This practice is a technology of colonial modernity to dishistoricize the pre-colonial cultures that it seeks to disappear as a way of ensuring its own objective gaze. This same logic has established its objectivity through the production of racialized bodies.

Harbage Page intends to challenge the archival practice of de-spatialization by evoking the physical landscape of the Rio Grande through the lively, reddish and orange colors, bringing the space of these objects into the frame. The artist understands that the objects attain their specificity, their ability to tell a story of migration only through the specificities of their location. Yet, the aesthetics of the archive inflect the modes by
which we engage these images, even if the photographic background seeks to chromatically invoke the migratory backgrounds of these objects.

In the archival image, *Bra*, we see, in close-up, a woman’s red bra. The straps are twisted and folded, the cups edged in lace, with an intricate rosetta of brocade at the joinery between the two cups. The bra is beautiful, tender, someone’s intimate and personal item, lying in the image as you might find it on a bedroom floor, but this bra is stained and marred with dirt, mud, and sweat, which seem to rise three dimensionally from the object and the image. And curiously, perhaps resisting the function of the archival image to offer unimpeded visuality, the object is cut off by the framing of the image. At the left side of the image, the frame cuts off at the cup of the bra. The knowledge that the object extends beyond its framing interrupts the spectator’s vision of the object. The lighting of the object provides a striking depth of field, giving the object distinct dimensionality from the archival background, even though the background to the image is a similar red hue to that of the object. While the object chromatically attains a similar sense of enmeshment within the background of the image, like that of *Argyle Sock*, the shadows produced by the careful lighting bring the image back to separation and distinction. It seems, still, to float above the background, dislocated from any space.

While the background and framing of the image seem to dislocate the object from the physical landscape of its retrieval, the dirt and stains on the object step out from the image and grab me. Here are the material traces, the soil and soiling, of the object’s site-specificity, the space from which it attains its various meanings as relic, sign, evidence, and flesh. Integral to De León’s project is the analytical concept of ‘use wear,’ studying
the traces left on the object as a result of use, including bodily fluids, etc, that enables him to study the practices and effects of undocumented migration (De León “Undocumented Migration” 6). The space of undocumented migration and the co-existence of both the social flesh of migration and unspeakable and daily violence stand out from the surface of this bra. Again, it is the texture of this image that draws me in, that brings me from surface to depth, and offers the conduit of intelligibility of this image. The slippery nylon is made rough by the dust, mud, and organic matter stuck to its surface; it is the texture of the traces of physical location that make this image appeal affectively, that give it specificity. The locational, textural expressions of the image push back against the typical archival aesthetics that seek to remove, suspend, and freeze the object in time and space, away from the framing of its location.

Yet, while the scratches of soil and soiling on this object bring its physical location literally to bear on its archival importance, the image performs a different form of visibility than that of the objects photographed in situ. The neutrality that the aesthetics of the archive aim to offer is predicated on removing the site specificity from the object, divorcing it from the historicity that brought it into being. This removal of the object aims to show the thing in its thing-ness without the frame that provides its linkage to a real, material, historical reality and experience, that of a militarized borderlands. As Martin Heidegger describes in his discussion of the ascertainment of the equipment status of the shoes in Van Gogh’s painting, *The Peasant Shoes*, included within an understanding of an object as equipment is an understanding of its historical use and the labor that it includes or that brings it into being. Heidegger writes of the image of the shoes: “From
Van Gogh’s painting we cannot even tell where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant show in or to which they might belong—only an undefined space… And yet— from the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth” (33). The truth of the object emerges from its lived-world relationality and use, which is then visible through the mediating ligature of the image. The archival aesthetics of the image deprives the object of the space that gives it life and that makes it a part of the textures and variegations of transnational movement. Removing the object from its context and the use-wear that its context divulges, it becomes a dead-object. The object no longer offers the indexical link to the flesh of transnational migration. It is suspended and frozen in this no-place of archival capture.

This image of a bra can be taken as an image of violence, the sexual violence and trauma that is a quotidian experience for women crossing the border with coyotes. The ability of the image to speak to this reality, to “drift” as Rancière puts it “between signification and showing,” is disturbed, and complicated through the aesthetics of archival production (15). In the frame of archival aesthetics the object’s suspension from its site-specificity makes it a “naked non-signifying presence” alone, caught at one pole of the image’s drift (Rancière 14). The traces of soil and soiling, the literal inscription of landscape and use-wear on the object, bring the reality of migration back to the image. It is somewhat ironic that the means of touching upon the object’s life and the way it makes visible its node in the social flesh of migration are also the means by which we grasp the object’s signification of sexual violence and trauma. In those traces of the soil and use-wear on the nylon fabric we also see the violence and suffering that underlie the border
and the policing of human movement. The means of an object’s life and its imaging of the life of social flesh also open onto the violence against social flesh, the production of bare life and what Spillers called the “high crimes against the flesh” (67).

Rancière writes, “what might then properly be called the fate of the image is the fate of this logical, paradoxical intertwining between the operations of art, the modes of circulation of imagery, and the critical discourse that refers the operations of the one and the forms of the other to their hidden truth” (17-18). In this archival image of a woman’s bra we witness the ways in which the discursive operations of archiving, documenting evidence, and the art operations of photography all contribute an aesthetic mode and hence engagement with the image. The affective wounding of the image takes place not at the level of its mechanical capture, but rather at the level of its aesthetic production.

The archival project, complicated in Harbage Page’s images by the intrusion of the traces of use-wear and soil, which become like indexes of the border, would deaden the object and its capacity for affective resonance. But the spectral aesthetics of the object in situ, embedded and enmeshed within their specificity, bring the images of these objects into generative interplay between the capacity of the image to offer mute presence and signification. The spectral brings the tactile, “senseless naked presence” of the object as an interruptive, ghostly presence into the image’s discursive ability (Rancière 15). That is, the textural, tactile optics, and manipulations of scale and perspective offer the object in its mute presence, haunting the discursive function of the image with the excess of sense memories of embodied engagement.
In speaking with Harbage Page she is insistent that her images do not aim to be evidence; she does not claim to be witnessing, or producing documents that witness to undocumented migration. Instead her images are material linkages, conduits that sensorially bind us to something that exceeds the conceptualization of discourse. It brings us into contact with the social flesh of migration that we then perceive at the intersection of the image as mute presence and signification. Harbage Page lucidly points out that status of the camera as “ideal witness” is flawed, that it carries with it an unavoidable blindness. Harbage Page understands this quite literally, as the shutter closing on the camera’s aperture interrupts the flow of vision onto the object and momentarily forecloses on the perfect vision of the camera and its operator. She refuses to position the camera as objective. She is not a witness she claims, but an artist. As an artist she is more interested in asking the questions about perception and representation that innovate new vectors of seeing and feeling in her artistic practice.

The camera’s ability to mechanically and “scientifically” reproduce reality positioned it as an ideal witness and spectator to the movements and eruptions of history and to police and control bodies within them. As Quijano and Wallerstein point out in their essay on Americanity, the deification of the modern and the production of race are two of the registers at which modernity and the capitalist world system were innovated within the colonization of the Americas. The U.S.-Mexico border has been and continues to be one of the laboratories at which these technologies of Americanity are exercised, innovated, and re-articulated. Photography’s ability to witness has been instrumentalized

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* For a discussion of flesh as resisting conceptualization see Chapter 1.
within a project of producing and visualizing racialized bodies. The aesthetics of archiving are part of a larger racialized project of colonial modernity in the Americas, both of which rely on the camera’s status as an ultimate, objective witness. The camera became the perfect means of documentary evidence, a guarantee of objective reality that works to produce and enforce dividing lines of race.

Harbage Page’s photographic project aims to think about and address the border, a pre-eminent dividing line of race in the Americas, while not reproducing the objectifying visualization of racialized bodies or positioning the traces of those bodies within an aesthetic tradition of evidence and archive. The artist calls the archiving aspect of her project an, “anti-archive” that seeks to challenge the prevailing methods of archivization, “This anti-archive subverts the traditional concept of the archive. Instead of saving the objects of the rich and famous it hold the objects left behind by unknown migrants heading north” (Harbage Page). Her project, by differently valuing the discarded, the forgotten, and the ignored recognizes the ways in which archives and images are implicated in the policing of the boundaries of legitimate knowledge. She seeks to undo the de-legitimation of the bodies, lives, and movements of migrants. By saving and recording these images she attempts to transvaluate the status of undocumented migration within a history of the U.S., making them an equally important and valuable component of culture. What was once trash become reliquaries in Harbage Page’s anti-archive.

Anthropologist Jason de León cautions against thinking about the material remnants of border crossing as merely waste or trash, pointing out that it simplifies the
complex roles of the left-behind and discarded material culture of border crossing (De León “Undocumented Migration” 7). However, thinking through the aesthetic possibilities of viewing these objects as garbage offers an important lens for considering the ways in which Harbage Page’s project “subverts” the aesthetics of the archive and offers alternative strategies for forming public memory and visibility of the border and migration. These images invite us to touch upon the discarded, that which is in excess to public memory and a rhetorical construction of the border. Robert Stam, in his work on Brazilian cinema, has described garbage and the discarded as being a kind of palimpsest of the social, a screen on which to see all of its contradictions, practices, and desires (75-76). Tracking the different uses and valences of garbage and the aesthetics of detritus in Brazilian cinema, Stam points out that the aesthetic renderings of garbage in Afro-diasporic art work as a kind of “negation of negation,” that speaks to the marginal positioning of Afro-diasporic knowledge and memory within the larger, Brazilian public memory and aesthetics:

The ‘negation of negation’ also has to do with a special relationship to official history. As those whose history has been destroyed and misrepresented, as those whose very history has been dispersed and diasporized, rather than lovingly memorialized, and as those whose history has often been told, danced, and sung, rather than written, furthermore, oppressed people have been obliged to re-create history out of scraps and remnants and debris. In aesthetic terms, these hand-me-down aesthetics and history-making embody an art of discontinuity… (63).
The “negation of negation” that the aesthetics of garbage create attest to the marginalization of certain bodies and forms of knowledge within the production of public memory and history. Some things are ignored, left out, discarded. They become the litter avoided on the path, produced as waste through a racialized process of valuation. The aesthetics of garbage, because it is an aesthetic of the negated and the ignored, become an important practice of re-valuing or differently valuing the discarded as the means of history and collective memory. Susan Harbage Page views the discarded objects that she photographs as reliquaries, as sacred remnants of a person’s journey and the desire that underpins it. Her photographic renderings of the objects, literally elevate and enhance these everyday objects and the discarded from the status of the thrown away to the status of the sacred; they are no longer only garbage but important components in the production of public memory of the border.

Like the stories and experiences of undocumented migration and the habitual suffering that accompanies it, these objects are ignored, rendered useless, and invisible by the visual construction of the U.S-Mexico border. Instead, in projects like this, it is precisely the everyday-ness and opacity contained within discarded objects, lost objects, personal belongings, and ephemeral details that becomes visible. Stam points out that garbage in Brazilian films become, “a critical vantage point from which to view society as a whole. It reveals the social formation as seen ‘from below’” (75). The objects in Harbage Page’s images make visible the contradictions located within undocumented migration. Through their photographic rendering it is both the banality of state violence and migrant suffering, as well as the textures of the vital pulse of migration itself that
becomes visible. These discarded items become not just signs of abject pain and brutalized bodies, but signs of presence and the act of making life that is migration.

The everyday sensuousness of the discarded objects that the tactile optics of these images make available allow for a dynamic and transitive relationship between spectator and image that enables a different form of visualizing the border. The photograph acts as a materializing agent, putting us into contact with insignificant objects that articulate an everyday-ness - a repetitious pattern that illuminates the textures of migration - both a banality of suffering produced by the state violence of border policing, as well as the desire and life-making will of migration. The spectral aesthetics in these images generates a visibility predicated on what Avery Gordon described as, "not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (8). By thinking through and touching upon at the material traces of migration at the border, rather than the material bodies of migrants in order to understand the racialized dividing line that the border enforces, these projects shift our understanding of migration and the border from a seeing/seen to a doing/making. Approaching these objects through spectral aesthetics allow us to touch upon the social flesh of practices and movements rather than the visualized, racialized bodies of migration. These objects become signs of life, “signs that meaning has been made,” rather than merely waste and detritus to be cleaned up and forgotten (Sophie Gee quoted in Harbage Page and Valdèz). Cultivating spectral aesthetics that bring the tactile and extra sensory optics that appeal to our animated states to bear on images of everyday, discarded items, the artist conjures the presence of the social flesh of undocumented
migration. Harbage Page’s photos reshape the ghosting functions of the photograph, and make the photograph a medium that generates awareness of life, rather than death.

**Conclusion: Spectrality and the Departures from Racialized Visibility**

Contemplating the future and the present of image cultures Rancière writes:

Today, the photographic sequences, the video monitors or projections, the installations of familiar or strange objects that fill the spaces of our museums and galleries seek less to create the sense of a gap between two orders- between everyday appearances and the laws of domination- than to increase a new sensitivity to the signs and traces that testify to a common history and a common world (66-67).

As Rancière points out, the images of art spheres that we tread through do not function in binary ways, do not serve to either expose power and ideology, or only sensory shock. Like Tejada, Rancière recognizes that images circulate always in relation to one another and are only intelligible within the frames of our image environments or spheres. As he points out, the textures of our contemporary image environments serve less to control the functioning of the image to either see or show, but rather to increase our sensitivity to the textures of the common world. The tactile optics of Harbage Page’s images increase that sensitivity by pulling the knowledges and sense memories of our bodies into engagement with the image.

In Harbage Page’s project we see the images of found object in a generative drift between their capacities as speaking and showing images. In focusing on the tactile optics and everyday sensuousness of the objects, Harbage Page’s images seek to be images of
“everyday appearances,” and to offer an opaque presence, at once transparently legible and utterly silent and opaque. Simultaneously, within the very functioning of the same image, the disjunction brought on by the out of place relationship to landscape, or skewing and manipulation of space and scale, can make the image a signifying object, a “discourse encoding history” (11). These images make the hieroglyph of the object, a mode of signification that is simultaneously opaque. The hieroglyphics of Harbage Page’s images allow something else to come into view; something new that still resists legibility through its utter transparency. Or put differently, a visibility emerges that is simultaneously an invisibility. It is a spectrality that opens onto the possibilities for a second visibility.

The second visibility enabled by spectral aesthetics has implications for the re-formulation of the modes of political visibility of race and ethnicity. Spectral aesthetics allow difference to remain visible by drawing attention to conditions and politics of marginality rather than the capture and immobilization embedded in the visibility of racialized bodies. In the 2008 exhibition *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement*, curators Rita N. Gonzalez, Howard N. Fox, and Chon Noriega conjure the figure of the phantom to describe the new relations to ethnicity and visibility generated by the contemporary Chicano artists featured in the exhibit. Opening the exhibition catalog I’m greeted by a series of introductory images that ground the ghostly tenor of the exhibit. The cover features a photograph of an empty Laundromat, a graffiti tag on the window of the Laundromat is cut-off, leaving only a partial word visible. Opening the cover, a comic strip mash-up of the Minute Men Project in endless reproduction lines the
inside of the book cover. Uncle Sam hails me as “Unwanted” from within a spool of razor wire. The next page pairs a brightly colored border town kitsch serape with an abstract and stripped down weaving on a loom that resists the recognizable coherency of the iconic tourist souvenir. Turning the next page I encounter a two-page panoramic photograph in blue tones of an empty desert road framed by mesquite trees, a wooden power pole bisects the image in the foreground, a water jug sits glowing to the right of the road dotted with mud puddles. The image is empty and sparse, even the natural light is indirect, filtered, and quiet. The image contains nothing, no movement, no bodies, no gesture, and yet, I am touched. The absence is palpable (González, Fox, Noriega 26).

This photograph, “Powerline Trail, Ironwood, AZ 2004” from Delilah Montoya’s project, *Sed: Trail of Thirst*, becomes demonstrative of the new aesthetic and political gestures that the curators of *Phantom Sightings* claim that artists are making in the post-Chicano Movement moment. Departing from the art affiliated with the work of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 70s, these artists, as the curators point out, “privilege conceptual over representative approaches, and articulate social absence rather than cultural essence” (Gonzalez, Fox, and Noriega 13). The artists featured in the exhibition preoccupy themselves with location and position, the spatial and affective dimensions of Chicano communities, identities, and politics within a globalized North American frame.

The visibility they generate departs from the *raza* inflected iconography of Atzlán that sought to make visible the coherency, history, and integrity of the Chicano people. Focusing on the image and affects of social absence such as, an empty migrant trail, a
deserted urban Laundromat, a serape under de-figuration, the artists featured in *Phantom Sightings* work to make visible the experiences and conditions of social invisibility and marginalization. The art of *Phantom Sightings* creates a spectral visibility, one that is simultaneously visible and invisible. Refusing the racialized and ethnicized visibility of Chicana/o bodies, this visibility takes the form of what Avery G. Gordan refers to as a “seething presence” at the margins of visibility (17). Instead these artists gesture towards the conditions and reasons for marginality and dispossession, these economic, social, and political realities become the seething presences of their images.

The spectral visibility generated by “Phantom Sightings,” as curator Howard N. Fox says, emerges as an alternate tradition from that of school of art associated with the Chicano Movement that asserted “a distinct Mexico American identity and sensibility.” Rather, Fox points out that, “most artists in this alternate tradition are apt to question the very basis of personal and group identity…” (78). José Esteban Muñoz calls this “feeling brown and feeling down,” wherein a shared affective response to being outside the matrices of normative feelings of whiteness establishes the basis of collectivity (68). Fox calls the an aesthetic an “aesthetic of trespass” that produces a visibility of marginality, the ignored, and the fugitive, the escaped and resistant. It is a visibility that refuses the categorizing capture of coherent and self-contained racial and ethnic categorization that functions as a form of capture and immobilization. Like Montoya’s photograph from *Sed: Trail of Thirst*, and the other images that open the book, this aesthetic makes visible a condition of marginality through the space of its enactment and experience, while refusing the mode of social and political visibility par excellence, that of racialized
bodies. Instead this aesthetic directs attention to conditions of marginality, invisibility, and fugitivity, and the objects and spaces through which it takes place. Like Harbage Page’s images these artist shift the understanding of identity from a being/seeing to a doing/making by focusing on the conditions of Chicano and Mexicano life in the U.S. through their conceptual approaches. The visibility cultivated in these spectrally inflected works is a visibility of a shared but differential world and the practices of movement, transitivity, and creation that comprise social flesh, rather than individualized social bodies.

In his critique of Barthes’ theory of the punctum, Fred Moten notes that while the punctum is a wounding that implies a kind of sensory engagement, it is an engagement that is absolutely visual, that forecloses on the work of the other senses in “loving” the photograph, “And this is a prescriptive assumption- photography ought to be sensually unary, ought not to shout so that it can prick. Wounding photography is absolutely visual; that’s the only way you can love it” (205). As Moten points out, not unlike Rancière, the photograph has a voice, it says something. In Moten’s analysis, this voice does not always speak in language, but it acquires a moan, an affective expression that precedes verbal language. It is a textural, phonic substance that is part and apart from the image and wounds us as deeply. It requires attention to the multisensory, not just the visual. Barthes’ rooting of the photograph’s wounding capacity in its ability to capture time reduces its power to the strictly visual. Spectral aesthetics of the image bring the body back to bear on the image, to listen for the moan or the shout, to touch the textures, to
wrap our sense memories around the object, to experience the image as multisensory and multitudinous, not unary.

While these images enhance the tactile intimacy with objects over the background and foreground of the U.S.-Mexico border, we nonetheless encounter them within the field of image networks. As Tejada points out, we understand images through their embeddedness within our transnational image spheres, their contextualization within repertoires of other images (9). And in this interplay and contingency, spectral aesthetics and the engagement that they demand produce the ground for a second visibility, for a reversal that allows new forms of visibility to come into being. The discourses that encode history are open to reformulations and re-assessments through the mutality of opaque objects, images, and the bodies that we bring to engage them. What becomes visible in these images is not merely evidence of migrating bodies, but the social flesh of migration that remains opaque and hieroglyphic due to the focus on the object’s muteness and the presence these images generate through absence. They are both visible traces and invisible presences of migration. Instead of seeing migrant bodies as the visible depiction of migration and its practices, we spectrally see and feel the hieroglyphics of the flesh through the opaque remnants of migration itself. In Harbage Page’s images we encounter the contradictions running through the experiences and states of migration in the U.S. Yet, through the spectral aesthetics of the photographs we also glimpse and touch upon the flesh of migration, the movement and transitivity of it. These images show us the ways in which migration is an expression of life striving to change itself, to
express the movements of transition and transformation that are the flesh of our common worlds.

**Coda: No Más Muertes/No More Deaths, Becoming a Presence in the Desert**

In the late 1990s and early 2000s people started dying in the wild spaces of the Sonoran Desert surrounding Nogales, Arizona, south of Tucson. Border militarization projects like Operation Gatekeeper and Operation Hold the Line in the 1990s, had begun to work to the extent that the majority of undocumented migration had been funneled in more remote and less-patrolled regions outside of the urban zones. Bodies were being found all the time, people were wandering up to houses, delirious and seriously ill. Prevention Through Deterrence was not deterring, it will killing, traumatizing, and badly wounding.

In 2004 a network of activists and organizers well-versed in the work of civil disobedience, civil initiative, and solidarity decided to take action. Faith-based organizers from the Tucson area drew on their experiences in the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s that aided Guatemalan and Salvadorian folks taking refuge in the U.S. from the raging civil wars and genocidal regimes in their home countries. They drew on their faith based moral stance that no human life is expendable or disposable. The formed a humanitarian aid organization, No Más Muertes/No More Deaths, with the mission to end suffering at the U.S.-Mexico border. Their practice: leaving food, water, and supplies along known migrant trails. They went to the sites of the highest mortality and left life-saving resources of food, water, and clothing in the desert. They made traces of life in the desert. They mapped and walked the migrant trails searching for people in
need and providing medical aid. They mapped the areas with the highest traffic and focused their efforts to become presence in these areas in order to provide food, water, and medical aid and to recognize the dignity of all life outside of designations of legality. Walking the trails you learn to read for ghosts, which are not the dead and gone, but the spectral traces of migrant life and the flesh of migration. An empty water jug becomes a good sign; someone has been here, drank this water and moved on.

In order to increase their tangible presence in the desert the organization worked with a local resident in a small town thirteen miles north of the border, Arivaca, to set up a permanent camp. The camp would serve as a base of operations for what had come to be known as ‘desert aid’ (doing water and food drops and hiking migrant trails to look for people in distress), house volunteers, as well as serve as an outpost, first aid facility, and refuge for migrants moving through the area. Folks in distress could come to the camp for food, medical aid, water, and safety. This practice of providing refuge became known in the camp as “hospitality,” making a welcoming space that asserts the dignity of migrant life.

Setting up a camp, known as Byrd Camp, worked to establish a more permanent presence in the desert that could be accessed by the ever-moving currents of people crossing the border. Migration was a spectral presence, hidden but visible, and the camp aimed to become not a mirage that would drop out of sight, but rather a concrete presence that could be there when people needed it. They became a visible outpost, flag waving in the sky, and located on the weaving ranch roads of the desert. Situating the camp on privately owned land that afforded the camp a modicum of privacy from the
incursions of border patrol who had to produce the equivalent of a warrant to enter private property, the camp was hidden by its utter visibility. The organization governed itself through the protocol of what one of the founders, Jim Corbett, called “Civil Initiative,” a corollary to Civil Disobedience, in which, “Our responsibility for protecting the persecuted must be balanced by out accountability to the legal order” (Corbett). The protocols of Civil Initiative proposed a certain relationship to the powers of visibility, allowing their work to be seen and to remain transparent to the legal order, they do so in the name of protecting those that fall in the zone of indistinction within the legal order, that come under its power and yet remain outside of its protections. No Más Muertes by becoming transparent became a mode of visibility for undocumented migration that called attention to the violence enacted on migrating bodies and the borderlands while also not endangering and putting those bodies at risk of capture. The transparency of solidarity became a means of spectrality, a simultaneity of visibility and invisibility, making visible the affective and physical experiences of border crossing while not making visible migrant bodies.

Setting up a camp in the midst of the Prevention Through Deterrence space the organization answered a state of exception with a state of exception, the abandonment of life in the logic of a camp was answered with a positive formulation of a camp. This camp works to affirm life, to fight for human dignity, and resist the effects of border militarization, through both the practices of direct action humanitarian aid as well as through the practices of daily life in the camp, of living, working, organizing, and caring together. While responding to a daily environment of emergency and crisis, the networks
and relationships of mutual care and solidarity formed between volunteers, organizers, and community members, as well as volunteers and migrants, creates a social flesh of affective bond. The water jugs scattered and piled, “littering” the landscape are the traces of that social flesh. They are signs that life has been here.
Chapter Three: Sounds of Americanity and Scenarios of Borderization in Alfonso Cuarón’s Children of Men

“‘Will you wait?’ Shreve said. ‘------- that with the son he went to all that trouble to get lying right there behind him in the cabin, he would have to taunt the grandfather into killing him and then the child too?’
---What?’ Quentin said. ‘It wasn’t a son. It was a girl.’” (William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, page 234)

“...[they] had begun to view Faulkner’s great imaginary South and that larger Global South as a kind of mirror in which they saw their own imperialized and racialized and partitioned American Global South reflected, distorted, and bent awry.” (José David Saldívar, Trans-Americanity, page 191)

The spring of 2006 in the US saw the mass mobilization of undocumented, Latino, students and workers in protest of impending U.S. immigration policy, and demanding justice and dignity. They came out against a proposed anti-immigration bill introduced to U.S. congress that would criminalize undocumented immigration, speed up deportation processes, criminalize those aiding undocumented immigrants, and contribute towards building a security wall along the border (Watanabe and Becerra). Starting in Los Angeles with a march of 500,000 people, these mobilizations spread throughout California and ignited similar protests for immigrant justice throughout other major U.S. cities like Phoenix, Atlanta, and Denver. The mass mobilization of these nation wide protests mark the beginning of what have now become highly visible and largely youth run immigrant justice campaigns such as The Dreamers, Not1More/Ni1Más, Undocubus, and Bring Them Home; campaigns that have struggled to affect policy change through both direct action, as well as intervening in and changing the conversation about the role of undocumented Latina/os in the U.S. These campaigns have challenged and articulated
what exactly justice and liberation looks like for immigrants. Through the protests of spring 2006 and their aftermath a conversation began to emerge about dignity for undocumented people as the right to live without fear and has taken shape in recent months as a demand to halt deportations.¹ Spring 2006 marks a moment when undocumented people began coming out and demanding the right to dignity and life in the US.

The year 2006 also saw the release of Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón’s dystopic science fiction film, *Children of Men*, that seems inspired by the stories of the subaltern, immigrant led movement to demand recognition and the ability to live without fear.² Taking on the novel by English novelist, P.D. James, Cuarón’s film re-imagines the story of human infertility and the struggle against totalitarian government as a story about immigration and borders. The film explores, as one character puts it, “what happens in a world without children’s voices,” which is also a world without the newness and futurity made possible by human movement and migration. In this futureless world, disposable life has become quotidian and unremarkable - the countryside is dotted with smoldering piles of burning animal carcasses and blackened, fuming, toxic waterways and estuaries, the government hands out suicide kits with rations, and bombs coffee shops, blaming it on activists. The nation’s borders are closed, and “illegal

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² Along with several other mainstream, big budget films about undocumented immigration and violence towards immigrants including, Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel*, and Tommy Lee Jones’s *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, both written by Guillermo Arriaga, a long time collaborator with González Iñárritu. These films signal a turning point in North American political consciousness towards the humanitarian crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border.
immigrants” are hunted down, held in public cages and deported to a lawless refugee camp on the outskirts of the nation. The ubiquitous broadcasts of televisual media are everywhere reminding people of the crime of harboring or aiding illegal immigrants. It has become as society of “the watchers and the watched,” the entire country effectively becoming a borderland ruled by surveillance and structured around a military state of exception that normalizes state violence for the sake security (Nevins 172). This, the film answers, is what happens to a world without children’s voices, to a world without a future. Caurón’s re-staging of *Children of Men* changes the story of the first mother and human baby born in eighteen years into the story of an immigrant, black woman, living undocumented, hidden on the edges of the law. The story of fertility and futurity is bound up with a story about immigration, borders, and a culture of expendable migrant life.

Cuarón’s film provides a distorted mirror to portray the contemporary situation of borderization and immigration in the 21st century. While taking place on the isle of Britain Cuarón’s film comments on the contemporary state of immigration rights, border policies, and discourses of immigration in the U.S. Looking at the film through the lens of a larger, hemispheric history and dynamic of what decolonial theorists, Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein call, Americanity, helps unpack the role of borders in the film. A world’s system model, Quijano and Wallerstein’s Americanity describes the development and origin of the modern capitalist world system as taking place with the colonization of the Americas. Claiming that Americanity saw the development of four primary modes of social and epistemological organization, colonialism, race, ethnicity, and the deification of the modern, the theorists describe the ways in which the inter-
dependence of these formations allowed for development of modern world system based on the hegemony of global capitalism. This model takes North and South Americas as sites of divergent colonial models that were also ultimately driven by the same social formations and modes of organization. Quijano and Wallerstein’s theory provided an articulation of “the gigantic ideological overlay” of the Americas whose technologies and arrangements of power can be seen at the border (quoted in Saldívar xiii). While a theory of the emergence of certain technologies of power in the Americas, Quijano and Wallerstein’s theory was ultimately a theory of globalization that, eschewing a nation-state model to map the production of coloniality, also offers a theory of the centrality of borderization to the production of global capitalism through the technologies of race, ethnicity, and coloniality.

As José David Saldívar points out in his encounter with Quijano and Wallerstein’s theory, the Americas continue to live out their shared histories of being the crucible for global capitalism in a dynamic of ongoing cultural and political transitivity that seeks to find modes of expression to articulate the experiences and histories of subalternity in the Americas (Trans-Americanity xix). In Children of Men Cuarón brings the cultural and political transitivity of the Americas to bear on his critique of global borderization and anti-immigrant sentiment. The film’s staging ground of Britain is tied to the U.S.-Mexico border and embedded within a global process of borderization through the aural production of the film’s background. Back grounding sound is tied to the critical operations of space in the film as a form of spectral aesthetics that gestures to other spaces that are not made visible in the image. Sound allows us to hear the ways in
which borderization is not about the margins of the nation but is rather central to the production of the nation itself.

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the discourses of south to north immigration in the U.S. are conjured through the framing structures of race and gender as sites of social policing and stratification that depart in notable ways from the novel’s own deployments of race and gender. The film’s specific deployments of race and gender echo the centrality of these deployments to theories of the Americas. The prolific anxieties about racialized immigration that permeate the film, post-9/11 political institutions like the Department of Homeland Security, and inter-textual references to the great author of the trans-Americas, William Faulkner, gesture towards the subaltern epistemological site(s) of the Americas. This film is part of the cultural transitivity of Americanity that, as Saldívar points out show us, “the various ways in which their stories of global coloniality of power seek to create an epistemological ground on which coherent versions of the world may be produced” out of the “unspeakable” and traumatically incoherent functioning of racialized coloniality of power in Americas (Trans-Americanity 194).

3 While Quijano and Wallerstein do not take up gender as a technology with any bearing on Americanity, like Spillers, the film sees race and gender as densely interwoven technologies whose discursive operations cannot always be separated. The entire plot-line concerning immigration is new to the story, whereas the book focused on the elderly’s disposability. The site of infertility in the book is male and in the film it seems to be female. In the film the mother of first human child in eighteen years is transformed from the white, British, activist, Julian into a new character, Kee, a black, African immigrant woman. The child born in the book is a boy and it is a girl in the film, situating women as the site of hopeful futurity. Similarly Theo’s child who dies is a girl in the novel and in the film it is a boy. At the end of the film Kee names the baby after Theo’s dead son, Dylan, figuring the two babies as omega and alpha figures to one another. These modifications and reversals of raced and gendered characters reflects a re-imagination of the novel through the lexicon on a kind of “American Grammar Book,” to borrow Hortense Spiller’s words, that demonstrates a convergence of power and signification at the nexus of race and gender in the Americas.

4 Saldívar’s reading of Beloved as using the slave ship sequences to “expand the number and variety of historical actors surrounding Beloved, the dead child, on the multiethnic slave ship” in order to imagine “a
Like its fellow trans-American producers of narratives of Americanity, such as Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Sandra Cisneros, José Martí, Américo Paredes, Gabriel García Márquez, and others that Saldívar explores, Cuarón’s film works through the “unspeakable” and the fringes of expression through particular uses of sound, voice, and space in his film to theorize a dynamic of Americanity at the U.S.-Mexico border. Sound has two roles in *Children of Men*. One produces the background of the film that is visually closed but aurally open, gesturing towards other spaces that are unseen in the image. The other function takes the shape of voice, giving expression to the unexpressable of a captive social flesh. Sound produces the background of borderization in the film that captures the screaming and moaning body of the immigrant. Through these two different operations of sound our spectating bodies are brought into a mode of making sense of the film, bringing the knowledges of both our socially embedded bodies and our sensually excessive bodies.

As explored in Chapter One, one of the technologies of the coloniality of Americanity has been the deployment of visuality as an arrangement of racialized looking arrangements and its increased militarization. Nicholas Mirzeoff’s work on visuality shows that our modern regime of “counter insurgent visuality” originates in the production of racialized arrangements of looking innovated within the plantation systems of the colonial Americas, especially the greater Caribbean, including Faulkner’s U.S.

*life affirming politics of the abysmal event* (Trans-Americanity 121). This is a speculative history of the unspeakable histories of Americanity.
South. Visuality developed in a particular relation to space, working to offer the widest scope of dominance and control through the production of oversight, objective vision, mapping, segregation of social spaces, and other visual-spatial technologies. In the film visuality continues to function hegemonically at the level of both narrative allegory and formal visual work. Noted for its long takes (one in particular lasting for six minutes) and visual realism, sight does the work of establishing the coherency of space and world. Sound meanwhile does the work of complicating the coherency of the film’s space, gesturing towards aberrant and unseen spaces and manifesting them within the film’s coherent space. Through its spatial complications sound in the film does the work of mapping between the Britain of Children of Men and border of the U.S. and Mexico, and of further mapping this border scene within a global frame, originating in the hemispheric history of Americanity. Sound speaks to other spaces, exceeding and gesturing beyond the parameters of the image, intertwines space and body, and makes audible what cannot be made visible. Sound performs the work of spectral aesthetics in Children of Men, making audible what cannot, but nonetheless needs to be, made visible.

Often in excess to the image, sound is a spectral aesthetic that gestures towards other presences to the image. It asks that we acknowledge what may be exceeding the frame of visibility in the film. Sound, to borrow Saldívar’s words, bends the image awry, and diagonalizes our modes of cinematic seeing. The formations of sound in the film diagonalize the process of cinematic seeing, cutting across states of visibility and invisibility, allowing us to see while retaining opacity. Diagonal seeing through sound mobilizes a politics of recognition while also fleeing the capture effects of racialized
visibility. The scenic sounds of the background makes audible what cannot be seen, while the voice of the captive body remains excessive to semiosis, a “materiality that moves in excess of meaning” (Moten 197). In his examination of collective mourning and the photograph of Emmet Till, Fred Moten discusses the emanation of moaning in the photograph. Pointing out that the image is considered by many to be the catalyzing moment for the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, Moten explores what role the sonic dimension of this photograph played in generating the collective will that backed the movement. The sounds of moaning were an irreducible sensory expression of social flesh. Citing Nathaniel Mackey’s phrase “new word, new world,” Moten claims that the inarticulate and non-verbal expressions of collective mourning, the moaning of the photograph, affectively generated the energy necessary to become a movement, to move forward. Sound in *Children of Men* underpins a visibility that allows us to recognize and feel the unspeakable while also allowing us the energy to imagine alternative modes of political collectivity.

In subaltern knowledges in the Americas voice has been a form expression that acts as a mode of political resistance. Edouard Glissant theorizes the role of voice and orality to a legacy of resistance in the Caribbean, responding to and making Creolized speech a form of opacity and obscurity. As Glissant shows the denigration of the oral in modernity has allowed orality to remain a site of resistance and fugitivity that privileges the diversity inherent in orality over the sameness that writing encourages (*Caribbean Discourse* 100). The diversity inherent in orality is key to the creation of an ethics and politics of solidarity in sites like the Caribbean, the “estuary of the Americas” (*Caribbean
Discourse 139). *Children of Men* mobilizes the power of voice, especially voice at the edges of expression, to stage the politics of solidarity and futurity in the film.

The soundscapes of the film, background noise that bridges spaces, and the expressions of voice perform a mode of sonic mapping in the film that ties together different spaces of borderization and also gestures towards fugitive ways out. Thinking sound and voice as it relates to performance and the re-enactment of scenarios of space and race in the Americas, thinkers like Moten, Glissant, and Josh Kun have pointed out the ways in which sound and music have been instrumental in generating new cartographies and transnational bonds of solidarity and relation, what Kun calls, audiotopias, or “sonic spaces of utopian longing where several sites deemed incompatible are brought together” (6). The transnational and translocal work that sound and music perform, by bringing sites together through a network of sensory listening and/or performing bodies allow for different types of collective work of imagination and solidarities to coalesce. Thinking the performativity of sound as emanations of a captive body, helps us to grasp the resistance that those sounds often express and helps us approximate the way in which sound performs an imaginative mapping of other possible spaces.

**Sounding the Scenarios of Borderlands and Deportations**

Britain 2027. Humanity has not produced a child in 20 years. Worldwide social collapse has prompted mass migration and immigrants and refugees, known as “fugees” in the film, are hunted down, rounded up into cages on the streets, and deported to a refugee camp in a coastal, borderized town of Bexhill. Theo Faron is a disillusioned
drunk working a dismal bureaucratic job in London. Formerly a passionate activist with a partner and child, we learn he lost his faith when he lost his child. He is approached by his former partner, Julian, the leader of a radical fugee liberation organization, The Fishes, asking for help securing transit papers for a young fugee woman who mysteriously needs to get to the coast. Reluctantly Theo secures the papers in hopes of re-connecting with his ex. En route to the coast with Julian, the young, African, fugee woman, Kee, and two of their comrades, their car is ambushed and Julian is killed. The group takes refuge. Meanwhile Kee reveals to Theo that she is pregnant and appeals to him for help in getting her to a rendezvous with The Human Project, a spectral organization that works on human infertility. Astounded and shocked, Theo agrees to help her. After learning that The Fishes orchestrated Julian’s murder to use Kee’s baby to their own political purposes, Kee, Theo, and her midwife, Miriam, flee the Fishes. Theo’s friend Jasper, a former political cartoonist, gives them refuge and arranges their infiltration into nearby Bexhill, the nearby refugee camp to which illegal immigrants and fugees are deported so that Kee can meet up with The Human Project. As they enter the camp Kee goes into labor and Miriam is captured. Kee has the baby girl in secret upon arriving in the camp with the help of Theo. The next day she and Theo must navigate an armed insurgency in Bexhill with the help of a woman, Marika, with whom they do not share language. Captured by The Fishes who try once again to kidnap Kee and the baby for their own uses, Theo and Kee narrowly escape with their lives. They make it to the

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5 I use spectral here to describe the particular kind of presence The Human Project has throughout the film. They come up in conversation and are always disputed, asking if they’re real or not. The name is also featured in graffiti all over London, tags that say, “The Human Project is Real.”
rendezvous point out at sea just in time to see fighter jets destroy Bexhill and all the people inside. Theo dies from a gunshot wound while they wait in the boat, and from out of the mists comes The Human Project’s ship, named Tomorrow.

The allegorical mode in *Children of Men* comments on the dynamic of borderization within a global rhetoric of security and imminent crisis, or what Nicholas Mirzeoff has called a counterinsurgent visuality. *Children of Men* sheds light on the functioning of borderization within a frame of globalization and the ways in which these dynamics are rooted in the technologies of racial thinking and hierarchizing of coloniality. As Zahid Chaudhury points out, the allegorical mode in *Children of Men* is so prolific that it appears to work on overdrive, every image becomes a script and the film tends towards allegorical slippage where everything is referencing something else. I suggest however, that looking towards the intersection of sound and space in the film rescues the film from this downward slope into de-specificity and overwhelm of meaning. Through sound *Children of Men*’s allegorical mode is skewed slightly, resisting what Craig Owens notes is the “static, ritualistic, repetitive” and sequential effects of allegory that projects metaphor onto metonymy allowing, “words to be treated as visual phenomena while images are a script to be deciphered” (72-73). The role of sound re-situates this film as a commentary on Americanity and borderization through a process of re-staging. The film does this through the aural construction of the background of film that invokes a sense of critical location that re-spatializes the film in the wake of allegorical slippage. The role of sound in producing the film’s commentary function can better be described through the concept of scenario rather than allegory.
In Diana Taylor’s work on hemispheric performance of the Americas “scenario” becomes an essential term that describes the “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” (*The Archive and The Repertoire* 28). By its very nature, a scenario is a form with a certain kind of continuity or attachment to the social world within which it is enacted. Scenarios exist on stage, on screen, and in the streets, they are not sequences, but rather arrangements that accommodate the pressures and tensions of the historical, political, and locational specificity of their re-enactments. Ideas of space and location are central to the concept of scenario and integral to understanding its pertinence to *Children of Men*. The critical mode in *Children of Men* is not so much sequentially metaphoric, but rather scenic. It is the scene and situation of the film that carries the weight of its critical commentary. The film concerns itself almost obsessively with space, with its articulation, its possibilities, its continuities and discontinuities, its borders, its liminal zones, outsides, and insides, its histories, and its alterities. Taylor points out that when it comes to scenarios it’s first important to “conjure up the physical location…” (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 29). Scenario brings to mind scene, and the certain kind of work scene does for performance, giving it a material location in terms of the stage, the physical environment of time and place. It “denotes intentionality, artistic or otherwise (the scene of a crime), and signals conscious display…The two, scene and scenario, stand in metonymic relationship: the place allows us to think about the possibilities of the action. But action also defines place” (Taylor *The Archive and The Repertoire* 29). In *Children of Men*, the action of the film revolves around the pregnant immigrant woman, Kee getting transit papers and
making a clandestine journey to the border of Britain where she then must also pass through the liminal zone of indistinction at Bexhill. This action enacting the precarities and hidden movements of undocumented migration and defines the borderized space of the film.

As both Zahid Chaudhury and Slavoj Zizek point out, the film does the bulk of its commentary work less at the level of narrative, and instead through the careful construction of the background world of the film (Chaudhury 80 and Zizek). In other words, it is through building the scene and the spatial staging of a scenario that gives this film its critical weight. Zizek describes the backgrounding effect in the film as performing through anamorphosis, only allowing us to see the real in the image if we take a diagonal approach. Cuarón brings the background of the image-world of 2027 Britain to the foreground in a visual way, with shots of Jasper and Theo’s car moving through the landscape with piles of smoking animal bodies in the foreground of the frame, or as Theo walks through the city the camera detours slightly from his path, taking the time to capture a group of Repenters kneeling to acknowledge the punishment of infertility, only to rejoin with him on the same street, seconds later, with no cut.

Much of the scenic and situating work that comments on the borderization of the film’s version of globalization takes place through the ambient noise of media, echoing Derrida’s thoughts on spectrality. The politico-economic hegemony distributes its power through “spectral effects, the new speed of apparition (we understand this word in a ghostly sense) of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, and the virtual event, cyberspace and surveillance, the control, appropriations and speculations that today
deploy unheard of powers,” through the techno-media environments that “both condition and endanger” democracy (67). The sounds of spectral media work within the film to produce and disseminate propagandistic ideologies of anti-immigrant sentiment and national exceptionalism. But sound also further diagonalizes spectatorial modes of seeing the scenario of this film, conjuring other spaces, deepening the global dimensions of the background, making them spectrally present. The prominence of the film’s background is produced through the soundscapes of the film that serves to complicate and gesture towards spectral dimensions of the film’s narrative and scene. What is taking place behind, or on the margins of the film’s story of hope and saving humanity?

Sound diagonalizes the frame of Children of Men in the very first, opening sequence of the film, bending awry the space of the film, making it not just Britain but the Americas and the globe. The film opens with a black, image-less screen. A voice, in the tone and rhetoric of a newscaster reading headlines says, “Day 1000 of the Siege of Seattle.” A woman’s voice adds, “The Muslim community demands an end to the military’s occupation of mosques.” The male voice continues, “The Homeland Security Bill is Ratified. After eight years British borders will remain closed. The deportation of illegal immigrants will continue.” The woman’s voice finishes, “Good morning, now for our lead story. The world is stunned today by the death of Diego Ricardo, the world’s youngest person.” Suddenly the film’s first image appears, looking down into a crowded coffee shop from the perspective of a wall-mounted television screen. The customers stare, rapt, stunned, and serious, mourning the death the world famous last human born, the reminder of their futureless-ness. The announcements of spectral media do the work
of setting up the political background of the film, introducing us first and foremost to the scenario’s global dimensions. Rhetorically it bears uncanny resemblances to the U.S. in 2006, as the effects of the Homeland Security Bill have the same effects (we later learn) as the immigration legislation that inspired the marches of Spring 2006. Sound sets the stage, to invoke the spatiality of performance, of the film. It spectrally brings the outside world to bear on the imminent images. Sound both sets up the scenario within the coffee shop, as well as exceeds it and gestures outside of it and makes visible the global frame of the film and its story of borderization that cannot be contained in the image. Sound makes audible the invisible frame of global Americanity. Staging the scenario of *Children of Men*, sound comes before image.

In this film we have establishing sounds, sounds that Josh Kun suggests in his work on music and border performance, “build the critical ground necessary” to understanding how we perceive the U.S.-Mexico border, asking: “How do sounds establish for the listener what the border is, how it gets crossed, how it gets desired, how it gets feared, and ultimately, how as a place and a state of being it produces its own subjectivities? How do ‘establishing sounds’ locate the listener within the border’s larger geopolitical space?” (5). Establishing sounds in Cuarón’s film work to set the scene, to produce a space through an invisible invocation that necessitates a hearing body to put it to use. Sound in the film becomes like a gesture, “produced when language, image, and social norms intersect with the individual uses and habitations of the body” (Gabara). Sound in this moment is a coalescing of the body’s relationship to the image, the way in
which the film requires the spectating body’s position at an intersection of what can be seen and what can be heard, and what is known through their social embeddedness.

In this first as yet invisible newscast, the film gestures towards a markedly borderized space caught in a constellation of other crisis zones. It simultaneously connected to Seattle, Britain, and this coffee shop, and metaphorically, the U.S.-Mexico border conjured through the rhetoric of “Homeland Security,” “illegal immigrants,” and “deportations.” These geopolitical spaces are both textual and lived, referential and metaphorical. In the first twenty minutes of the film, sound, especially the sounds of media apparatuses work to bring the outside world into the film’s world, to create a simultaneity of diverse spaces in which the hermetic containment of the closed British borders are drawn in distinct relationship to the crises abounding elsewhere, the Siege of Seattle, the military-occupied Muslim mosques. Drawing attention to the background of the film, setting up a space that is an analog to our own, sound works to spatialize the film in multiple, simultaneous, and congruous ways. We attain information not only about the world of Britain in 2027, but the world outside it, positioning the borderized nation of the film within a larger global phenomenon. The nation of Britain in *Children of Men* becomes a kind speculative-global city, like that which Iain Chambers describes in an essay on Tijuana and global conditions of borderization, “In the montage of the metropolis yet to come, sounds and signs betray simple mapping” (xviii).

Through the establishing sounds that create overlapping and simultaneous relationships between different spaces, the film performs a “montage of the metropolis” of the counterinsurgent, borderized global city. While Theo rides the train to visit his
friend, Jasper, after the traumatic coffee shop bombing that opened the film, we are brought into the space of the train car through the sounds of another spectral mediascape. Theo in his workplace and then in the train car are connected by loud, ominous, prolonged minor chords that strike a calamitous vibe and that overlap between the two spaces. An image appears: New York in flames. We see a rapid succession of still images of burning buildings, distraught, dispossessed, injured, and terrified people and names of cities: Paris, Moscow, Washington D.C., Rio de Janiero, Mexico City, Kuala Lumpur, Johannesburg, the list goes on. They shuffle by in an increasingly fast sequence. We soon realize that the calamitous chords are the soundtrack to the propaganda images. At the end of the advertisement a final text states, with a thundering crescendo evocative of British imperial and World War II era propaganda, “Only Britain Soldiers On.” The sounds of dystopic propaganda soundtrack continue, bridging the two narrative spaces, as the camera slowly reverses out revealing the train car and Theo leaning against the window.

The soundscape of this scene does not end with that advertisement. Another commercial/propaganda voice comes in, as the camera stays focused on Theo’s far away, blank face. “He’s my dentist. She’s my housekeeper. He’s the waiter,” say a group of concerned citizens in the commercial. They’re interrupted by an authoritarian voice, “And they’re all illegal immigrants. To hire, feed, or shelter illegal immigrants is a crime.” The criminalization of aiding or sheltering immigrants echoes the very legislation brought to the US congress earlier in the year of the film’s release, drawing the space of Britain into mirror relationship with the contemporary moment of the U.S. in 2006. The
media apparatuses in the film and the sounds they work through gesture towards the larger frame in which this film is contained. This is not just a film about one nation’s borderization, but a film about globalization through borderization. The practice of borders takes place both at the level of global mapping as well as the social mapping of illegal and legal immigrants. The mediascapes in the film bridge the global spaces of the film while also bridging the different narrative spaces of the action, performing a complex cartography that takes place through the establishing sounds that make prominent the background of the film by positioning the spectating body in an interpretive position to the film.

As the commercial ends, the camera zooms in towards Theo’s blank face, resting against the window of the train car traveling past derelict and gloomy city suburbs. The film image performs a movement between background and foreground, moving between the mediascapes of Theo’s world, the larger context it references, the decaying ambient scenery, and the man, the hero’s journey. Suddenly, a sound of thumping impact interrupts the relative calm of the image. Theo jerks back from the window and we hear a succession of more impacts. We suddenly see young people storming towards the trains, throwing bottles. Sound once again has announced the image, the interruption of the outside world into the private. As the train cruises in careful containment, walled off from the dangerous and wild city fringes and past the angry mob of young people, it becomes a kind of moving borderized space.

Bound up with location, scenario forces us to consider the role of social bodies and embodiments (Archive and Repertoire Taylor 29). The centrality of bodies and
spaces in scenarios require attention to the social production of bodies, as “social actors assuming regulated patterns of appropriate behavior” can appear through scenarios to reproduce those patterns of behavior or transgress them, which acknowledges that the regulation exists in the first place (*Archive and Repertoire* Taylor 30). The casting and conceptualization of the social bodies in the film are integral to the scenario. Making the character, Kee, the first human mother in eighteen years a black, African immigrant woman, racialized visual and aural signifiers, including her accent positions the story of borderization and migration as also a story about race. I claim that the signifying work of Kee’s racialized, gendered, immigrant character is part of the staging of this film as a scenario of the U.S.-Mexico border and the dynamics of Americanity. The signifying power of her social body demonstrates the racialized division that the border enforces. The categories of subalternity that her character signals work together to show the way in which those different modes are intertwined in the process of borderization.

In *Children of Men* the backgrounding work of sound also comments on the body’s social and spatial contingency. These bodies exist both on screen and off. In the first scene in the film, Theo exits the crowded coffee shop full of spectators grieving the death of Baby Diego. He steps out into the busy Fleet Street and walks to a newspaper box to pour booze into his coffee. The camera follows him in an elaborate seemingly uncut shot, taking in Theo’s movement, but also once again exceeding it. The camera takes the opportunity to give a 180 degree panning shot of the busy street, including the massive advertisement for Niagra, the film’s re-branding of Viagra, and the cavalcade of aging, fuming buses, rickshaw riders, and motorcycle drivers with their faces protected.
from the permeating black soot of exhaust fumes. We appear to have left the mourning scene of the coffee shop behind and entered the world where life surges on. The camera tracks backwards, taking position behind Theo at the newspaper box while showing in the scene of the busy street behind him when suddenly an explosion occurs in the coffee shop, blowing the front of the building off, sending glass, smoke, and dust out into the street. Theo lurches backwards, throwing his coffee, and the camera seems to sort of stumble forward closer to the scene of destruction. An immersive aural environment takes hold; the piercing and a-tonal ring of an alarm system triggered by the explosion becomes louder and louder and is augmented and blended with the high-pitched screaming of a young woman who has stumbled out of the coffee shop holding the dismembered arm of her partner who she was shown gripping moments earlier. The inside and outside of the coffee shop are linked by this woman’s traumatized body and its sonic emanations, holding her partner’s arm. The sounds of her screams and its intertwining the ringing of the alarm become emanations of a traumatize body violently produced by its context. This scene sets up the ways in which bodies and their embodiments, their excessive corporeal movements and sensual densities, are hanging at their limits in this imagined sociopolitical context through the violent sonic enmeshment of the alarm system ringing and the woman’s terrified screaming. In this scene sound indexes and locates the violence of the scene on the body, bridging the violence inflicted on the bodies in the coffee shop through the woman’s scream and melding it with the scenic noise of the alarm going off. Sound and space are intimately, violently linked, and link us to the bodies on-screen as they are produced by and welded into their
environments. The woman’s scream mediates between and includes both site and the excessive.

This is not without pain. The high-pitched ringing continues through the first cut since leaving the coffee shop brings us to a new space in the film. As Theo enters his bureaucratic workplace, the ringing continues, and we realize that it is not just the sounds of the explosion itself, but rather a residual ringing in his ears from the bombing. In these moments we are uniquely placed in the confines and flesh of Theo’s body. The violence of the scene is written into the flesh of Theo’s body as he moves into other spaces. Sound positions us here in him, even as it bears an aural linkage to the previous scene. Like the spectators of the scenario- we deal both with Theo’s socially produced and affected body as well as our own positions as spectators through our sudden aural identification with the character. He walks past the desks where his co-workers, weep and sniffle in front of their computer screens watching news reports of Baby Diego’s death. The sounds of their weeping are barely audible under the ringing in Theo’s ears that fill the narrative space that we, Theo, and the camera move through. This sound links the narrative spaces of the film through the soft tissues and vulnerabilities of Theo’s ears that are also linked to the bodies in the coffee shop. His body, impinged upon and pained by the social world he lives in, bridges these spaces through the traces of bodily harm made audible to him as sound.

We as spectators recognize the persistence of this violence in other spaces, connected to these two different spaces by the ringing in his and our ears. The sounds of the violence of the bombing seem to shift sources as we shift spaces, but remain
nonetheless rooted in the listening apparatus of our bodies. The sound rooted in socially embedded bodies gathers the multiplicity of these spaces. As Rey Chow and James A. Steintrager put it:

Even when we attend to a sound’s source, we sense sound as an emanation and as filling the space around us. Objects as sonic phenomena are points of diffusion that in listening we attempt to gather. This work of gathering- as effort to unify and make cohere- implies that subjectivity is involved whenever we try to draw some boundary in the sonic domain (Chow and Steintrager 2 italics mine).

Our role in the spectating of this scenario is built into the gathering of sonic diffusion that spectrally appears in the film. Perhaps most importantly of scenarios is that their spatialized qualities force us to “situate ourselves in relationship to it, as participants, spectators, or witnesses, we need to ‘be there,’ part of the transfer” (Archive and Repertoire Taylor 32). Thinking a film through the concept of scenario requires that we acknowledge ourselves as participants in its performance and its articulation. It requires a mapping of relation between the ‘there’ of the scene and the ‘here’ of our engagement. The moment of our spectatorial engagement becomes part of the scenario that is re-enacted, forcing us to ask what its relationship is to the here and now of our viewing. The spectral aesthetics of sound in the film bring us into the transfer with the film’s scenario, by eliciting the engagement of own social embodiments that help translate between the audible and the visual of the film, helping to produce the scenario of borderization. Our hearing bodies are positioned between awarenesses of social and political context and sonic impingement, sound is both pure sensation and a socially embedded site of
interpreting the film’s critical work. Sound writes the violences of borderization into the bodies both onscreen and off-screen.

The film’s mapping of multiple spaces through sound and image offer a way into thinking about the functioning of Americanity which operated on the condition of partitioning, of borderization, of colonial mapping and nation building, producing ethnicities that were then bolstered by the powers of racial thinking. Sound fleshes out the scenario of *Children of Men*, through locational multiplicity and simultaneity that brings the Britain of the film, contemporary global cities, the bodies of the characters, and the world of the U.S.-Mexico border in 2006 into one cinematic experience. The coherency of space is produced and mapped the visual image and its long takes, but it is continually exceeded by the soundscapes which gestures towards the spectral sites surrounding it. Sound has functioned as a mode of alternative mapping in the Americas, as Josh Kun points out, riffing on Arjun Appadurai that, “Audioscapes direct our ears to the migratory flow of sound and sound-objects…across disparate geopolitical and pop cultural spaces, the text to which music and sound can serve as vectors of connection and affiliation between distanced and displaced communities” (14). Thinking the ‘scapes’ produced by sound allow us to consider the ways in which sound produces and emerges in space and also exceeds it, moves between different ‘scapes’ and different sites. Sound’s spatializing dimension creates different cartographies of social relation; it “enables, constructs, and imagines the mapping of new places and cartographies of possibility; it draws maps that otherwise might not be possible in the real time of political realities” (Kun 6). Kun’s thinking of the self-consciousness of music performance allows
us to consider the ways in which the intentionality of sound in this film also works to create counter-cartographies, to generate relations between different registers of location, textual and non-textual, making of this story of Britain a scenario of the U.S.-Mexico border and Americanity, with global dimensions.

**The Border as Camp and Scenarios of Americanity**

Scenarios reproduce modes of seeing and telling that nonetheless undergo reinvention through the sites and stagings of their re-enactments and provide a means of commenting on the present. Taylor understands this as a kind of “haunting.” She writes:

The scenario structures our understanding. It also haunts our present, a form of hauntology… that resuscitates and reactivates old dramas. We’ve seen it all before. The frameworks allows for occlusions; by positioning our perspective it promotes certain views while helping to disappear others…This partial blinding is what I have previously called percepticide (*Archive and Repertoire* 28).

A scenario often includes blind spots, blind spots that I claim the dynamics of sound in *Children of Men* work to make visible by gesturing towards the multiple and connected sites in the film. Sound becomes a spectral dimension to the film, by structuring and complicating the scenario and the staging of the film. The scenario that the film acts out is that of borderization: the racial partitioning of space via the articulation of nation. In the film Britain embodies the logics of counterinsurgent visuality, to “clear, hold, and build” by closing its borders, and hunting immigrants down, and deporting them to a camp on the edge of the nation. The blindspot the film makes visible is the way in which the scenario of borderization entails and enforces the production of racial difference.
As Foucault discusses in *Society Must Be Defended*, race and racial thinking take the form of a relation of war: some must die so that others may live (255). *Children of Men* acts out that scenario during a time of a global crisis of infertility, entailing a structure of the state of exception that includes bodies into the frame of the state power to “ban,” or to allow to die, by virtue of their exclusion from the state. The film plays upon the scenario of racial segregation as borderization and the relation of war from which it operates. The use of sound in the film allows us to see is that this is already the state in which we’re living. We see the blindspot of our own particular racialized moment through a kind of parallax that draws us into the present and its historicity. Through sound in the film we are able to see the ways in which *Children of Men* does not reflect only a worst-case-scenario (an incidental but appropriate synchronicity of wording), but rather the very dynamics that exist at the border; the logics that already underpin its functioning. The film illuminates this blindspot through the functioning of sound that disrupts the spatial logics of background and foreground in the film, making the background of the film more audible and affective. Sound is a form of spectral aesthetics in *Children of Men* that allows us to see diagonally through and to other spaces invoked by the film. Through the sonic and aural staging of the film we see the blindspots haunting our everyday and the background rhetoric of border security.

As Saldívar points out in the prologue to his “unfinished encounter” with Quijano and Wallerstein’s “Americanity as a Concept” essay, Americanity is particularly useful to thinking the persistence and intersections of forms of power and epistemological modes of organization that developed in the Americas. He writes:
The histories of coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and newness in the Américas were foundational for Quijano and Wallerstein for managing ‘the gigantic ideological overlay’ of the Américas and for explaining the uneven histories of dystopia and utopia. Americanity has had to grapple with over the past five centuries. In other words, Wallerstein’s and Quijano’s notion or theory (as a system of concepts aimed to give global explanation to an area of knowledge) of Americanity emerged together with what they called the ‘modern world system and ‘coloniality of power’” (xiii).

Quijano and Wallerstein’s collaboration between conceptualizations of North and South America allowed the thinkers to derive a framework that stretches between two different kinds of colonial histories—those of Iberian dominated South America and those of British dominated North America. While the two spaces have developed through different and “uneven histories” of dystopia, utopia, development, underdevelopment, modernities, and subaltern modernities, there has also been an ideological uniformity to it; a grid of possibilities bounded by a similar set of ideologies and technologies on which their different expressions have been plotted.

Quijano and Wallerstein’s model was decidedly non-national, taking the hemispheric, and even the global as their units of analysis, but Saldívar interjects here noting the importance of the micro and the locational, and the “systems, economies, and world empires that are a world,” but perhaps can only be ascertained in their minutiae (xvi). The non-national frameworks that Quijano and Wallerstein’s model of Americanity offers, Saldívar points out that their analyses stop short of “locating a coherent
explanation of the Southwestern U.S.-Mexico borderlands within their gazes of Americanity and the coloniality-power couplet” (xiii). Cuarón’s film provides a theory of Americanity in which borderization functions as a technology of ongoing coloniality to police and suppress the social flesh of migration. The film posits that the border of the U.S. and Mexico can be explored as a contemporary crucible for the processes and re-articulations of Americanity as a global formation.

In their essay, “Americanity as a Concept, Or Americanity in the Modern World-System” (1992) Quijano and Wallerstein describe the shared conditions of the colonization of the Americas that made possible the modern capitalist world system. According to their theory, the realization of the concept of the “Americas” or the “new world” created the conditions necessary for the development of capitalism as we know it through the production of four technologies: coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and the deification of newness. The creation of these hierarchical logics and structures of power and knowledge allowed for and bolstered its development, growth, and attendant hegemony. These four social hierarchies and organizing principles are mutually constitutive, providing each other with the necessary support and boundaries to stay effective.

Quijano and Wallerstein point out that unlike marginalized regions of Europe the Americas were construed as a space lacking historicity. Certain conditions allowed for this construal, namely the decimation of the indigenous culture of the Americas, hand in

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Quijano and Wallerstein show that the Americas were produced through conditions different from those of other subordinated European regions. They compare the Americas to such as remote areas of the Mediterranean and the Balkans, that maintained resistance to imperial rule through claims of historicity (24).
hand with that importation of African slave labor that separated people from the spaces, kinship networks, and histories and resulted in a de-historicization (24). For this reason the Americas have invested in modernity as a liberatory horizon, “from the beginning, the mode of cultural resistance to oppressive conditions was less in the claims of historicity than in the flight toward ‘modernity.’ Americanity has always been and remains to this day, an essential element in what we mean by ‘modernity’” (24). The Americas have been, since their inception, associated with a sense of new-ness that has taken on both dystopian and utopian dimensions. The new-ness generated and exploited in the Americas has resulted in the dystopian destruction and decimation of indigenous cultures and the subjection and dehumanization of African peoples, as well as utopian horizons of “reinvention” that take the shape of North American fantasies of social equality and individual liberty and Latin American indigenous traditions of reciprocity, solidarity, and direct democracy (Quijano and Wallerstein 39). At the end of the essay the writers describe their contemporary moment of 1992 as marking the beginning of a maturation of a social process unique the Americas, “the presence of a process of reinvention of culture in the Americas. This is what we are calling the Americanization of the Americas…” (39). They point to migration and decolonization of knowledge as sites of this reinvention.

In the film the flight to modernity underpins the crisis of futurity in the film. The scientific anomaly of infertility stymies the movement toward modernity and futurity. There is no future. There is no modernity. This lack signals a crisis of historicity in the film, asking: what is the past to a world with no future? This is made eerily evident in a
scene in which, in an effort to obtain transit papers Theo approaches a cousin who manages “The Ark of the Arts,” a loft/museum in which great art works of western civilization are housed. The David towers over the entryway, updated with a missing leg. Picasso’s “Guernica” occupies the dining room, a bizarre dining companion. Incarnations of western history, these artworks we recognize are relics of a dying culture. Theo asks his cousin, “Why do you do it? In thirty years no one will even be around to see it.”

In absence of either futurity or historicity, humanity has been frozen into a permanent and precarious present. Modernity and futurity becomes a hysterical obsessions and ultimate failures in the film, the thing that cannot but must be strived towards. Britain in the film figures as a site of the desire to bind off and secure the nation in order to secure a history that might not survive. As a former metropole to North America, the scenario of borders and boundaries in the film ostensibly about Britain becomes even more prescient, enacting the process of closing off the metropole from the colonies, and locking itself within its own sense of historicity, closing itself off from the futurity of migration. Desperate attempts at securing their historicity becomes the means by which Britain coheres itself and the boundaries of its ethnic category in the wake of global collapse. Britain is caught in a double bind, anxious to secure their ethnic category as the means of historicity, they close themselves off to the futurity of migration.

*Children of Men’s* formal, visual style echoes the function of visuality in the production of space in coloniality. Its signature long takes and realist style provide a seamless and natural presentation of the space of the film. Characters move in and out of the camera’s field of vision, which seems more intent on the spatial surroundings and
background than on the movement of characters, as during the opening scene when Theo exits the coffeeshop. In its first uncut long take, the camera exits behind Theo follows him a few steps up the street but then pans in the other direction and tracks backwards to take in the backgrounding world of the film before returning to capture Theo doctoring his coffee with booze at a newspaper box. It is a coherent and seemingly natural world, with strict boundaries that the camera produces through its seeming autonomy, it becomes akin to the invisible and omniscient observer of the post-Panoptic counterinsurgent visuality that Nicholas Mirzeoff shows is fundamental to how we see and are see at the border. The counterinsurgent must be able to “place oneself in the map at any time” (295). At the level of camera movement the film performs its own scenario of borderization by producing a visuality that “correspond to the countinsurgent’s experience of space in a grid accessible only to the ‘commander’ (296). This mode of visuality is associated with insurgent violence as moments later a bomb explodes in the coffeeshop.

_Children of Men_’s focus on the nation of Britain stages the mutuality of nation, ethnicity, and race, by figuring the immigrants in the film at the nexus of those intersecting vectors of power. As Theo exits his apartment one morning, the camera tracks alongside him as he passes the site of a raid on an immigrant housing complex. Police line the street and manage wire cages full of people. The soundscape of the scene combine the hysterical sounds of alarms, automated warnings, police shouts, with the barking of police dogs, and amidst it all the unintelligible, multilingual swirl of voices in distress and resistance. In the style typical to the film the camera follows alongside Theo
as he watches the scene in awe, but then veers away from Theo’s course and tracks inward towards the middle of the pandemonium of the raid. It passes cages of immigrants, pressed to the wire, gesturing, calling out, weeping. In the foreground of the frame is a cage full of African and black fuguees, and lined up across from them are Anglo, South Asian immigrants, and Hasidic Jews. The glimpse of the immigrant population is a multiracial and multinational conglomeration, that is both differentiated and yet also homogenized into one teeming mass of distressed affect and caged, bare life. Here the immigrant is not reduced to one single race or ethnicity, it is not coded in one visual category, but rather spans through multiple categories of otherness: race, nation, ethnicity, religion. The sound of the multilingual swirl however functions as the key signifier of the alterity of immigrant and becomes an important component of the figuring of the immigrant fuguee in the film that will arise in other scenes as well. Voice becomes the signifier of difference that ultimately racializes the fuguees in the film by marking them as those “who must die so that we live,” demonstrating the race-war structure of biopolitics (Society Must Be Defended Foucault 255). The biopolitical and scientific rationality that underpins race thinking reflects another organizational contribution of Americanity to the modern world system, the deification of newness, that became re-manifested in the “science” of racial thinking (Quijano and Wallerstein 29).

The deification of newness propagated a faith in scientific ideology, which Quijano and Wallerstein describe as a ‘pillar of modernity’ (29). The concept of newness created an investment in a future-oriented temporality and also became a way of
justifying social, economic, and political inequalities and domination. Investment in the past became a ‘primitive’ undertaking, while investment in the ‘modern’, the ‘new’, the ‘future’ was the desired temporality. Americanity became the crucible for a certain brand of utopian thinking that regards modernity as the site in which to invest in liberation or development projects. While Quijano and Wallerstein work through their theory of Americanity to address the productive power structures that have emerged out of the ideological overlay of the Americas, the technologies and epistemological organizing principles often carry within them ambivalences and fugitive usages. The new-ness of the Americas can be seen as both the dystopian new-ness of the slave ship that forged new social identities through a violent severing from tradition, as well as the new-ness of north to south that migration that Quijano and Wallerstein view more utopically, and that also simultaneously carries within it dystopian realities (38-39). When writing about the trend in south to north migration Quijano and Wallerstein say that the “Americanization of the Americas is coming into full bloom” (39). The new-ness of Americanity is embodied in the new-ness generated by the inter-cultural sites and socialities of migration. Referencing contemporary dynamics of migration from south to north, internal articulation within Latin America, and the growing decolonization of culture, arts, and scientific knowledge, they point out the way in which the Americas continue to serve as a

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7 The Americas embodied newness, “The New-World was new, that is, not old, not tied down to tradition, to a feudal past, to privilege, to antiquated ways of doing things” (Quijano and Wallerstein (29). It also became, ideologically, a space in which ‘newness’ could be created- new states, new wealth, new citizens, new subjects of the Church, and where popularly, European immigrants could create themselves anew. This made a clean slate of the Americas, devoid of history, in which the colonizing peoples could re-invent themselves, nations could found themselves in the creation of their present and futurity without the baggage of the past, and they could instill within it the imbrications of liberalism and capitalism as the co-conspiratorial assertion of individual power with its capacity for generating personal wealth as a means of futurity.
ground for the blooming of the new, and the reinvention and articulation of social and political patterns. They continue to be, as the authors say, “an original creation” (39). While these original creations take on different shapes and qualities in North versus South America, they nonetheless continue to be grounds for the cultivation of new forms of political being, belonging, and modes of modernity. The movements of people and migration will continue to make new-ness the central facet of Americanity.

In his engagement with the cultural sites and spaces of Americanity, Saldívar confronts the critical race theory of legal scholars Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (2002), that looks at the way in which race and minoritized communities in the U.S. can be seen as miner’s canaries of a kind; looking at the problems that minoritized communities undergo in the U.S. can alert us to the underlying structures of power that render us all precarious. As Saldívar discusses the way in which the critical race theorists invest in “lo real maravilloso” to imagine “the destabilization of the limits of the real in the global north” (*Trans-Americanity* 91).

Its literary manifestations have functioned as modes of diagonally seeing the histories, workings, and distributions of power in the global south. Saldívar points out through his reading of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, that “lo real maravilloso” bends awry and diagonalizes the history of slavery in the U.S. because the trauma is too immense to be looked at directly. He writes:

Morrison conveys the spectral history of reversal and loss in the catastrophic Middle Passage through the very logic of a life-affirming unity in lo real
maravilloso, where the black Atlantic is both submarine history and unity. If there is any American realism left in *Beloved*, it is an expanded, thick, and outsized realism (like García Márquez’s)… (120).

These literary manifestations become what Saldívar calls, “speculative histories,” that substituted for the “real kind” of history and that offer new politics of possibility emerging out of diagonal modes of conjuring and representing history (*Trans-Americanity* 114). Speculative histories provide re-workings and re-visionings of the histories of coloniality and race in the global south of the Americas so that we might not only recuperate histories of agency and community in those histories, but also carve out paths towards future modes. Saldívar’s discussion of the literary global south is helpful for thinking through modes by which *Children of Men* as a speculative, fictional work provides a diagonal approach to the histories of Americanity that allow us to see its consistency, its transnational itineraries, and the ways in which fictional works envision history.

*Children of Men* embodies the new-ness of Americanity and its migrational manifestations in the figure of Kee and her baby, whose bodies as Chaudhury points out performs a wealth of symbolic labor, “Cryptic, her body remains resolutely opaque and untranslatable into a stable set of meanings. It is not that she does not signify, but rather that her body signifies too much” (96). In the scenario staged by the film, the re-writing of the first mother as a fugee helps to generate a speculative history of Americanity in which migration becomes the means to new-ness, futurity, and life. Tied directly to the figure of the migrant the film asks: what kinds of life are disowned by the process of
borderization? How does borderization cut-off the means of life, the movement and transitivity implicit in the act of migration? As Nicholas De Genova puts it, “the freedom of movement is inseparable from that still more basic human power which is generative of the very possibility of social life, namely, our capacity to creatively transform our objective circumstances” (39). Migrational movement becomes an expression of social flesh and the material of vitality itself. Focusing on migration through a racialized migrant body the film works to reinvent the historicity and futurity of Americas as a subaltern movement that is contained and controlled by the border.

Borderization and its attendant technology of deportation are modes by which access to this form of life making are severed by restricting movement. The four structuring aspects of Americanity, coloniality, ethnicity, race, and new-ness are all at work in the process of borderization which the film stages through an interweaving of a dystopian, future-less society and a scenario of borderization. The Britain of the film is a nation re-articulating itself through the technology of deportation and borderization, which De Genova points out is a fundamentally spatial operation that establishes the “physical territories (nation-state jurisdictions) across which migratory movement- along with deportation, as its coercive reversal- is enacted” (50). The tools of racialized coloniality are executed through the production of a border-space in the film, the refugee camp Bexhill, an Agambean zone of indistinction that is the spatialized frontier of political life in which deportees, aliens, and fugees are reduced to bare life under the sovereignty of state power.
That Bexhill is figured as a camp is no coincidence, as Agamben showed, the fundamental spatialization of biopolitics’ production of bare life is the structure of a camp, referring pointedly to the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, “Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation” (Homo Sacer 171). Tracking the history of the formation of the camp Agamben shows that they were originally devised as a tool of colonial states in suppressing insurrection, “What matters here is that in both cases, a state of emergency linked to a colonial war is extended to an entire civil population. The camps are thus born not out of ordinary law… but out of a state of exception and martial law” (Homo Sacer 166-167). In Agamben’s examples we see, despite his final thesis that we are all homo sacer, that the camp has largely been a tool of segmenting and segregating a racialized population. The camp and the border meet in one spatializing logic and this is figured in Children of Men as the refugee camp Bexhill is a liminal zone of indistinction in which the bare life of the migrant fuguee comes under the power of a state anxious to enforce and perform its ethnic and racialized purity.

When Theo and Kee arrive they are pushed through a turnstile that funnels them into another world. From the scenes of subjection and bare life before the gates, naked bodies being deloused, hosed off, humiliated and exposed, they move into the riotous and thriving underground economy of the bordertown. Visually the camp of Bexhill evokes the border towns of Mexico and the U.S., hawkers pitching room and board, food, drugs,
and other commodities. It evokes the delirium of the inter-cultural space. And while the entrance to Bexhill is characterized by scenes of subjection and bare life, the camp itself figures itself as a space of resistance, causing us to question the complete reduction with which we view the subjection of the camp. Like the speculative histories in Beloved that replace images of dystopian terror “with utopian images of promise and solidarity and what Ian Baucom…calls the ‘the politics of the abysmal event,’” Children of Men imagines alternative forms of community and solidarity in the shadows of a border fence (Saldívar Trans-Americanity 120).

Looking at the way in which Children of Men navigates a network of spatial relationships that make up its scenario of borderization, can help us consider the U.S.-Mexico border as a crucial site in understanding the technology of borderization in global Americanity. If the border is a scenario that gets re-enacted to reaffirm, reformulate, and reinvent the four technologies of Americanity through a visualization of space that enforces and performs a process of racial segregation then how do the scaffoldings and cartographies of sound differently map the ways in which human movement is integral to the utopianism of the Americanization of the Americas? By bringing the materiality of affect to bear on the counterinsurgent image sound pushes on the boundaries of the image and can be a means of creating a speculative history of resistance from within the sites of bare life.

Voices of Mourning and Movement

The role of sound in racialized politics of resistance and alternative spatialities in the Americas has a long tradition, reminding us of the utopian as well as dystopian
dimensions of the cultural cartographies of Americanity. Voice is another sonic, spectral aesthetic of that tradition of speculative history. The world of *Children of Men* is framed and permeated by the sounds and silences of mourning, staging the scene of loss, death, and futureless-ness that is the world of the film, including the swan song of Theo’s ear drums. The opening shot of the crowded coffee shop is held by the silent shock of the grieving observers. After Jasper’s murder, Theo is silent with rage and grief as he drives away from the scene. As Theo walks into his office the sounds of weeping are audible despite the ringing in his ears. Walking through the streets of London outside his apartment building, the swirl of multilingual immigrant voices crying and screaming in rage and desperation. A Muslim woman shrieks and wails with anger and despair over the body of a young man as Theo makes his way through the climatic cacophony of the uprising in Bexhill. The sounds in this scene of mourning and all those throughout the film become a kind of music, a soundtrack of affect to the film of loss and futureless-ness that is complemented at times by John Taverner’s score. Indeed by the time Theo enters the refugee camp all he has ever loved he has lost, his child, Julian, and Jasper. He struggles onward only out of a newfound fidelity to the perseverance of human life. Creating a space of global loss and mourning the film asks, what comes after that and in that? What do the sounds of mourning tell us? What role do the sounds of mourning play in the film’s speculative history, what account do they give of the “unspeakable” experiences of Americanity?

The ringing in Theo’s ears makes another appearance by allusion in the film, after Theo has been kidnapped by The Fishes and brought to speak with Julian, their leader.
and Theo’s former partner. The scene comments on sound and the body and relates the connection to the scenario of borderization in the film. After a combative exchange between Theo and The Fishes, in which he accuses them of bombing the coffee shop saying, “my ears are still ringing from a coffee shop you just bombed,” Julian invites Theo to walk with her in the larger, warehouse in which the holding cell is located. They come to a stand-off and as Theo is pulled away by Julian’s henchmen she says, “You know that ringing in your ears, that EEEEEEEEEEEE?,” making the high pitched noise, “That’s the sound of the ear cells dying. Like their swan song. That’s the last time you’ll ever hear that frequency. Enjoy it while it lasts.” As Theo is dragged away, the camera watches Julian from his perspective. In the acoustic space of the building, Julian’s words carry while they nonetheless become almost imperceptibly quieter. The aurality of her voice as she preaches to Theo mimics the moral of the story she tells. She gets quieter, farther away. The story of humanity’s demise, as well as Theo and Julian’s connection, are both told through the metaphor of dying ear cells, located within the landscapes and vicissitudes of a human body.

If, as Joseph Nevins says, borders attempt “to contain the uncontainable, life itself,” then the story of borders in the film is also told through the swan song of Theo’s cells (14). As discussed in Chapter One, Electronic Disturbance Theater reminded us in their Transborder Immigrant Tool poem, “Transition, song of my cells,” the transitivity of migration and the transitivity of bodily transition are part of the same flesh of social becoming. This story is told through the ringing in Theo’s ears. The piercing keen of his damaged ears re-emerge at site of traumatic impact at other sites of the film, when Julian
is shot and amidst the noise of the ensuing havoc, Theo’s ears ring again, and his ears begin ringing again when a bomb goes off in the building where Luke and The Fishes have hidden Kee and her baby during the film’s climatic scene. The sounds of dying ear cells and trauma embedded in Theo’s body are triggered during moments of violence and death. The swan song of his cells mirrors the mourning sounds of a dying culture that further cuts off its relationship to futurity by closing its borders and refusing migrant life. The death of ear cells and the extinction of certain frequencies of sound are associated in the film with the death, social violence. The keening noise of Theo’s ringing ears bridges the narrative action and the image with the texture of its affective intensity. The mourning sounds, or swan song, of the dying ear sounds make visible the social extinction of the war on migration.

The sounds of mourning that enfold and punctuate this film make audible the affective textures and the political outcries of the film. They become akin to what Nathaniel Mackey described as the imaginative power of the falsetto in African-American music:

What is it in the falsetto that thins and threatens to abolish the voice by the wear of so much reaching for heaven? At some point you’ll have to follow up this excellent essay of yours with a treatment of the familial ties between the falsetto, the moan, and the shout. There’s a book by a fellow named Heilbut called The Gospel Sound you might look into it. At one point, for example, he writes: “The essence of the gospel style is a wordless moan. Always these sounds render the
indescribable, implying, “Words can’t begin to tell you, but maybe moaning will” (52).

The sounds of mourning and moaning that fill this film become the expressions of wordless-ness, of a loss so great it takes place at the edges of articulation, becomes a moan, a silence, a ringing, or a screaming that “thins and threatens to abolish the voice,” through its “reaching for heaven,” its striving towards utopia, to life. Bringing Mackey’s discussion of the wordless moan to thinking the sounds emanated and necessary to understanding the effect of the image of Emmet Till to a burgeoning U.S. Civil Rights Movement, Fred Moten describes the effect of the falsetto’s moan to alchemize in a way “that seems to fetishize or figure on the literal, on the absolute fact and reality of so many deaths while, at the same time, continually opening the possibility of redemption in our sensuality” (197). For Moten the power of the moan, of the sonic and aural alchemizing of the literal event, the loss, into a wordless affective expression offers a chance at repurposing that affect into a site of redemption, of relational and social bonds through the voice, as vibration, irreducible sensuality, of flesh.

What do the mourning sounds of *Children of Men* do for the film and for its scenario of borderization and Americanity? The sounds help frame the process of borderization as a site of the immobilization of social flesh, of possessed bodies. Against the background produced through the spectral sound and mediascape of the film, the screams, shouts, and moans of the body become the expressions of captured and possessed bodies, of immobilized social flesh. The sounds of voice and background together tell a story of borderization and Americanity that the film image alone cannot;
they express what Saldivar describes as the “unspeakable” histories of Americanity. As Nathaniel Mackey so evocatively words it, “words can’t begin to tell you, but maybe moaning will” (52).

The sounds of mourning in this film work to complicate or compound the images of loss, providing us with a layer of phonic substance that tells us more about the image than vision itself can. As Moten points out, the sonic in the photograph brings the socio-affective out of the image. It is something that is always already there in the image, but cannot be registered when we reduce the image to an ocularocentric mode of engagement. This reduction is for Moten a “semiotic objectification and inquiry that privileges the analytic-interpretive reduction of phonic material and/or non-meaning over something like mimetic improvisation of and with that materiality that moves in excess of meaning” (197). Sound for Moten already resides in the image, it is the affective excess of signification. It brings with it a worldliness that cannot be trapped in the semiotic or analytic function of the image and instead emerges as the residual expressions of the spaces, situations, proprioceptive relationalities, and embodiments of excessive and unruly social flesh. The flesh that is shared, and flesh that is cut, and flesh that is captured and yet also exceeds, is the social flesh of movement and difference in becoming (205). The sounds of mourning tap into a shared affective texture that nonetheless, because it is socially contingent and generated, that takes on the variegation of social difference. The sounds of moaning are the excess of meaning, an unending process of articulating and expressing difference, they become emanations of the textures of shared social flesh. The
sounds of the scream, the shout, and the moan are the spectral aesthetics that make visible the social flesh of the immobilized captive body.

In *Children of Men*, the sounds of mourning permeate the space of the film, expressing the literal loss of children, of human freedom of movement and dignity, of solidarity and love; it mourns the effects of borderization. In Bexhill, the zone of indistinction of the deportation camp, the sounds of mourning are all around, but there are also the sounds of life, struggling up from the mourning, “all that reaching for heaven” (Mackey 52). When Theo and Kee arrive in the camp Kee is struggling through the second stages of labor, her waters having broken on the bus ride into the camp. As they make their way through the camp Theo and Kee pass by a funeral pyre that frames the foreground, while Theo, Kee, and Marika pass in the background. Whereas the space of the film outside the camp was often framed by piles of burning disposable animal carcasses, in the camp it is the mourning expressions funeral pyres that frame the image. The sounds of mourning mix with the sounds of life. These lives refuse disposability even in death. Above it all, are the sounds of Kee moaning and fighting through her labor. When Kee announces her pregnancy to Theo in the barn at The Fishes safehouse all is silent, except for the Taverner score. The sound of labor and birth however, are loud, riotous, almost angry.

Although society has forgotten what babies look like, as Theo and Kee slowly make their way through the apartment building after escaping her capture by the fishes with the unmistakable sound of a squalling baby, it becomes clear that people have not, cannot, forget what they sound like. An Afro-Caribbean woman sings a quiet lullaby and
the Taverner score increases intensity. As they pick their way through the hallways and
down the stairs, people line it, watching them, reaching out, praying, crossing themselves,
singing lullabies, in rapt devotion to the first baby born in eighteen years. Theo and Kee
cross paths with armed insurgents, and even soldiers, who appear to first aurally
recognize the baby and then visually checking, yell orders to “Cease fire!,” so the new
life may pass. The screams of the infant quiet the din and destruction around her so that
they may exit the battle. During this scene, the original score by Taverner, haunts the
image, as soldiers on a mission to kill, stop, stare, cross themselves, pray, and let life
pass. [See Figure 7]

The sounds of the baby’s cries are sonic textures of social flesh disavowed and
abandoned in the border zone of indistinction of the refugee camp. The effects and affects
of her cries become manifestations of Édouard Glissant’s descriptions of the role of oral
discourse in post-plantation Caribbean culture. Glissant’s theories of the plantation
economy and its effects on Caribbean culture and language provide profound insights for
our contemporary zones of indistinction of the border, in which human life becomes bare
life. Searching to express the experiences of modernity in the wake of the trauma of the
trans-Atlantic slave trade and the violence of the plantation system the scream and the cry
become for Glissant paradigmatic of Caribbean speech, “A Caribbean discourse finds its
expression as much in the explosion of the original cry, as in the patience of the
landscape when it is recognized, as in the imposition of lived rhythms” (Caribbean
Discourse 109). The collective expressions of Caribbean discourse are marked by “an
original cry,” what he later describes as “screamed speech” that produces affective
response of pure vitality and ultimate refusal that has not confined or refined itself within the signifiers of language. Screamed speech is a technique of obscurity and fugitivity for Glissant, as that which cannot be translated and exists as pure sonic texture and affectivity, it was a tactic for slaves to communicate but remain outside of the overseer’s capture.

Oral culture is a defining aspect of Caribbean discourse that for Glissant is indicative of an alternative modernity. Rather than the modernity produced by western coloniality than reproduced the borderizing technologies of ethnicity, race, and nation through the “sameness” and capture of the written world, orality, according to Glissant, because of its attachment to the contingencies of site and body, allow for the expression from and of the multiple and multitudinous. He writes, “The written requires non-movement: the body does not move with the flow of what is said. The body must remain still; therefore the hand wielding the pen (or using the typewriter) does not reflect the movement of the body, but is linked to (an appendage) of the page” (Caribbean Discourse 122). Orality becomes associated with movement, the freedom to movement. It responds to the capture of a slave ship, a refugee camp, a detention center, “To move from the oral to the written is to immobilize the body, to take control (to possess it)” (Caribbean Discourse 123). In Children of Men, the mourning sounds and the screams of the baby are expressions of the desire for movement, within a scenario of borderization that entails capture and immobilization that we experience on an irreducibly sensual level, and as a sonic texture of social flesh in an “ongoing universality of their absolute singularity” (Moten 202). The sounds of screams and shouts were the foundations of
Caribbean discourse for Glissant, the expressions of a body in capture and striving for movement, “For Caribbean man, the word is first and foremost sound. Noise is essential to speech. Din is discourse. This must be understood” (*Caribbean Discourse* 123). Voice is the expression of movement, not capture.

The freedom accessed in the body via the discursive din of shouts and screams risks immobilization when it takes the shape of written language. The baby’s screams in the film are expressions of pure vitality before being trapped into the shape of a written sign. Pre-discursive shouts that bring the body back into communion with others. They mark the moment of solidarity rather than solitude in the film as hearing and sound “perform the utopian function for desire for proximity and connection” (Erlmann 8). With the screams of the baby a new world becomes momentarily possible, signaled symbolically by the new child, and sensually by the screams, which as Mackey suggests, “explores a redemptive, unworded realm- a meta-word, if you will- where the implied critique or the momentary eclipse of the word curiously rescues, restores and renews it: new word, new world” (52). The screams of the baby enact a moment of expression in the film of pure affective resistance that generates a moment of solidarity by halting the violence around her. Her screams express resistance and from that resistance comes a critique that allows for the generation of new worlds. The “new word” can give path and movement toward a “new world.” In the film’s scenario of borderization the affective textures of the screaming, shouting, moan voice brings the irreducibility of that vocal texture into contact with the sonic gathering that our socially embedded bodies do in the
act of aural spectating. The shouting voice brings the opacity of social flesh into the “mythical speech” and re-enactments of the scenario (Taylor 28).

**Conclusion: Speculative Histories and Spectral Aesthetics**

Through his literary itineraries and the trans-hemispheric approach to Quijano and Wallerstein, Saldívar illuminates the ways in which literature of the Americas has imaginatively addressed its shared conditions of Americanity. The “speculative histories,” that open up onto future-oriented structures of utopian longing become the “new words” that make “new worlds,” that perform the “new-ness” of the Americas. In *Children of Men* this “new-ness” is figured by the immigrant fugitives, signaling the processes of north to south migration in the Americas. As Quijano and Wallerstein describe it, “Sooner or later, these American utopias will be joined together to create and offer to the world a specifically All-American utopia. The movements of people and culture among the Americas and their gradual integration into one single power framework is or may become one of its most efficacious underpinnings” (40). Through the de-nationalized mapping of literary imagination Saldivar charts the speculative histories they draw out about the conditions of Americanity, illuminating the utopian impulses generated by these works, the conditions of new-ness that is both product of and reason for being of their Americanity.

After Kee has been captured by The Fishes in Bexhill Theo eventually finds her in a bombed out former apartment building under attack. Dodging bullets and making his way past injured and broken people, Theo finds Kee, lodged with her baby near a window, Luke, newly elected leader of The Fishes and architect of Julian’s murder,
shoots from the nearby window. He says to Theo, “I carried the baby up the stairs. I had forgotten what they look like. They are so beautiful…” As Theo and Kee try to creep away, Luke yells at them, “Leave the baby, Theo, we need him!” Theo pauses and says “It’s a girl, Luke.” The symbolic importance of the baby to Luke supersedes any concern for its actual embodiment or self. He sees it as a body reduced to symbolic and fetishistic value, not life. Her signification becomes more important than her flesh. This moment in the film echoes the epigraph from William Faulkner’s plantation novel, *Absalom, Absalom!* in which the northerner, Shreve, assumes the child born and then summarily killed was a boy because of its importance to the story of patriarchal filiation and coloniality that Quentin is narrating. Both of these moments position the revelation of the infant baby’s gender as female as a moment in which the symbolic value of the baby outweighed its value as human life. The echoing of this moment of resistance in *Children of Men* ties the two texts together in a cultural mapping of Americanity in which the figure of the plantation economy of the Americas makes a spectral appearance in the border-camp scenario of counterinsurgent logic. Quentin and Theo’s statements, “It’s a girl,” perform an act of speculative history, re-situating the life of the baby within a matrix of race and gender that positions their lives as valuable, not disposable.

The film ends in the same way it began. After Human Project’s ship “Tomorrow” sails through the frame the scene cuts to black. The black screen lingers for a second before the words *Children of Men* appear and the sounds of a riotous and inarticulate playground erupt. The laughter, noise, and playful screams of children close the film. The final image of the film is an aural image. The sounds of a boisterous playground makes
visible a futurity that is only made possible in the film through the validation, resistance, and freedom-seeking movement of migrant life. Capturing and immobilizing migrant life results in a world without a future, without the access to future-making. Through the spectral mapping of soundscapes and the excessive textures of voices of mourning and life making the film tell a speculative history of the borderization of Americanity, histories of differentiation, loss, enforcement through death, and also resistance and movement even in the context of capture. The film generates a speculative history of the “unspeakable” experiences of borderization and deportation in the global history of Americanity that mobilizes soundscapes and voice to express the unspeakable. These sounds and soundscapes become spectral aesthetics that make visible the histories of violent racialization by diagonalizing our modes of cinematic vision, we see the story of borderization, but we feel the resistance of social flesh.

The spectral aesthetics of the soundscapes of *Children of Men* become a form of what Glissant termed “ethnopoetics,” that melds the screamed speech of slavery (the unspeakable spoken) with the structures of language in a way that makes visible a new image of humanity:

In the world of cross-cultural relationship, which takes over from the homogeneity of the single culture, to accept this opaqueness- that is, the irreducible density of the other-is to truly accomplish, through diversity, a human objective. Humanity is perhaps not the ‘image of man’ but today the evergrowing network of recognized opaque structures (*Caribbean Discourse* 133).
The work of ethnopoetics is diagonalizing our modes of seeing. It makes visible the opacity of social flesh, the network of “irreducible densities” which cleaves to diagonal modes of expression that are both fugitive and untranslatable, as well as sayable and visible. These ethnopoetics make the unspeakable speakable, telling the speculative histories of the cross-cultural contacts and collisions of Americanity, and they “belong to the future” (Glissant *Caribbean Discourse* 134). In *Children of Men*, these ethnopoetics take the shape of spectral aesthetics that tell these speculative histories through the diagonalized modes of seeing through sounding. If, as theorists of sound have pointed out, sound is omnidirectional and central to envisioning and experiencing continuous space, we can think the functioning of sound in the speculative history of this film as theorizing a new, migratory cartography of the Americas. If visuality was a technology of history innovated in the plantations of the greater Caribbean that relied upon the production of partitioned space and captured bodies then perhaps sound in spectral aesthetics is a particularly trans-American mode that works to provide a new means of conceptualizing space, one based on the movement of liberated bodies and the solidarity of shared spaces.

**Coda: Sonic Cartographies of the Border**

*In October of 2012 a group calling themselves the Cognate Collective embarked on a project they called BorderBlaster, a civic action, performance project, oral history, and sound installation that took that shape of a series of radio transmissions at the U.S.-Mexico border crossing at Tijuana, Mexico and San Ysidrio, California. It was conceived as a reinvention of the border blaster radio stations that broadcast at high frequency to*
reach audiences in other nations. The original border blasters were largely Mexican stations that broadcast music and news to Spanish-speaking audiences north of the border, in spaces as far away as Los Angeles, and according to New York Times journalist, Larry Rohter, even Chicago and Canada. These older border blaster radio stations imagined a continuous cartography of the Americas and through the use of sound frequencies, rendered the border non-existent. The Cognate Collective took these border blaster radio stations as their inspiration for a project that would address “microenvironments shaped by migration.” By focusing on the small, localized spaces of migration, at the U.S.-Mexico border at Tijuana and San Ysidro, the binational artist collective blasted the border in a different way.

The project took on several iterations that related to the spaces, movements, and people of migration through poetry, storytelling, performance, and conversation. The first iteration, BorderBlaster TJ/SD, was commissioned by “Living as Form (The Nomadic Version)” held at UCSD in October 2013. Rather than using high powered radio frequency to travel long distances, the project blasted from a mobile listening station that took the shape of a red wagon outfitted with a boom box surrounded by wooden crates with a ceramic piggy bank on top that traveled throughout different spaces, such as the Mercado de Artesanias de la Linea in Tijuana and the University Art Gallery at UCSD. They also broadcast their transmissions in a traditional radio format from the Port of Entry in Tijuana at a low frequency that traveled only a short distance. This BorderBlaster remained rooted in the experiences and movements of the border itself. Rather than skirting the border it addressed its reality as a site-specific location
that has everything to do with the real lives and lived processes of being a migrant and living in a bordered city.

Transmission One titled “About Crossing” compiled migrants’ stories of crossing the desert that the collective had collected while interviewing and working with migrants. The transmission featured folks reading these stories while waiting to cross at the Port of Entry in Tijuana. Transmission One performs the important act of recording and preserving the stories of undocumented migration and uses them at the Port of Entry to occasion public and personal reflection on privilege and mobility. Mapping between clandestine and sanctioned border crossing the artists rendered the border a multiple and experiential space that enacts power on different lives and bodies in different ways (Sanchez October 9, 2012). Simultaneous and concomitant, this border is also multiple and variegated. It takes place at different sites and spaces and through different bodies.

Transmission Two documented the lives and experiences of vendors at the Mercado de Artesanías de la Linea in Tijuana who have witnessed first hand the effects the changing border policy and the processes of transnational movement. The transmission sought to, “engage vendors and shop owners beyond the typical conversation had in the space regarding the price of the their products, to understand how the commercial and personal dimension of their labor intersects and shapes their experience of the site” (Diaz October 16, 2012). At the heart of this transmission is a consideration of the spatiality of the border through the site of a border market. It considered the ways in which the border shapes (and is shaped by) commerce and economics and the ways in which those economics are played out at the level of
individual lives. Their interviews and conversations touched upon the ways in which vendors and shop owners garnered some forms of autonomy through access to space in one of the “most regulated, patrolled and limiting sites on the planet” (Diaz October 16, 2012).

Transmission 3 perhaps inspired by the creative autonomous practices of the shop owners in the Mercado de Artesanias created a space within the Mercado to host a “civic dialog” that would incorporate the voices, stories, and concerns of a diverse group of people living and working in the San Diego/Tijuana area. These civic dialogs are designed to “engage the public” by addressing the “very topic of public and civic engagement in the city of Tijuana” (Sanchez, October 23, 2013). The collective brought together the voices of other artists and activists working on social practice projects that directly engage community, a historian who works on the Jewish community in Tijuana and indigenous language histories and struggles in Mexico. This dialog focused on “the challenges of constructing models that respect and maintain cultural difference in collective formations,” negotiating between a similar sameness and diversity that Glissant describes (Sanchez, October 23, 2012). The sound practices of dialog, broadcast, and voice created a site that could be multiple but local and that could gesture towards the challenges and possibilities of generating solidarity.

Transmission Four brought poets together to differently map the neighborhoods and colonias surrounding the border in Tijuana. This transmission was conceived as a “psycho-geographic journey” that could address the lived experiences of the border on the communities and lives of Tijuana residents. They called the Transmission “Poetic
Dérive,” paying “homage to the technique developed by Guy Debord and the Situationist International to traverse and map urban spaces...by breaking with the logic of streamlined mobility of goods and bodies- instead calling for a drifting of sorts through spaces” (Diaz, October 30, 2012). With the help of poets, their own experiences “drifting towards the border wall,” local residents, and historians the collective created a sonic map of the colonias and their histories (Diaz, October 30, 2012).

The fifth transmission of the BorderBlaster TJ/SD iteration was titled, “Open Mic/Discurso Abierto.” Taking the shape of an open mic event, they invited any one who wanted to “declare something” at the border in the Mercado Artesanías (Sánchez, November 6, 2013). These declarations took the shapes of songs, screams, musical accompaniments, speeches, and incorporated multivocal and multimedia performances. The collective opened the space by broadcasting a compilation of short interviews performed at the Port of Entry where crossers were asked to complete the phrase, “La frontera es...” (Sánchez, November 6, 2013).

The project’s finale was a transmission titled, “Mixtape for Crossing” in which the collective interviewed folks at the border to ask what song they associated with the border. The final transmission was a compilation of those answers, creating a public archive of songs that describe the multiple and divergent experiences of the border. Cognate Collective member Amy Sánchez writes, “We wanted to produce a playlist that would capture various relationships individuals have to the border, relationships defined by nostalgia, frustration, melancholy, optimism, fondness and/or happiness. The mixtape documents how these relations are forged and constantly relived through music”
(November 13, 2013). The final transmission of the collective goes to the medium of music and sound to capture and express that which cannot always be described and located in everyday speech, but can only find expression in the irreducibly idiosyncratic experience of hearing a song. Using low frequency radio transmission and localized broadcasts the Cognate Collective tried to address the spatial and lived dynamics of borderization in one small place that addressed the effects of geopolitics on locality. Moving from story to performance to conversation, song, screams, and poetics the project used the immateriality of sound and voice to not just move through a wall, but address the lived histories of that wall.
Chapter Four: The Ghost in the Machine: Spectral Bodies, the Biopolitics of Memory, and the Imagination of Futurity in Alex Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer*

“There is a certain moment in each of those lives when they come to the U.S. and some people stay behind. But those relationships are not about nostalgia. They are about the future” (Alex Rivera, interview with Carlos Ulises and Margaret Gray, 2006).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Latino filmmaker, Alex Rivera, was making films about the US-Mexico border and the experiences of Latino immigrants to the US in a world of transnational labor flows. He brought his love for science fiction to bear on the Latino migrant experience in a project called, “Cybraceros,” a story about the darker future of transnational labor. In 1997 Rivera received a grant to produce the short film, a re-visioning of the mid-century U.S. bracero program in which migrant bodies were replaced by machines. Rivera’s concept became *Sleep Dealer* (2007), an independent, feature length, Spanish language film, workshopped and released at the Sundance Film Festival. *Sleep Dealer* allegorizes the ghostly conditions of Mexican, migrant, labor within the machine of global capitalism. Transnational corporations use networked virtual reality technologies to extract migrant labor without migrants crossing the closed, highly militarized border, policed by a private, for-profit security corporation. Plugging their cyborg bodies into a digital labor network in maquila-style plug-in stations, the migrant workforce pilot machine avatars in the first world, “Providing all of the work and none of the workers” (*Sleep Dealer* 2007).

*Sleep Dealer* takes its name from the exploitative maquila-plug-in stations that enable the nightmare-ish transnationalization of labor. Sleep dealers allow labor to flow across borders while immobilizing and controlling the ‘dangerous’ bodies of the workers.
Migrant bodies become invisible, but sensible, presences in the first world, like ghosts in the neoliberal machine. In this world, not so unlike our own, ruled by a neoliberal logic of privatization, water resources are owned and tightly controlled by corporations, who patrol the dams and rivers with military drones piloted by soldiers in the United States. In a digital world overrun with reality T.V. and social media, verifiable truth becomes the most prized cultural commodity and “memory markets” traffic in the buying and selling of personal memories. Cybernetic nodes implanted into the human body enable all these labors, material and immaterial. Rather than crossing the border with a coyote, a cybracero now hires a “coyotech” to implant the nodes, a process called a ‘node job.’ The body of the cybracero and the “node worker” has become the borderland; a hybrid and indeterminate zone between categories of nations and corporations, body and machine, public knowledge and private memory, dream and experience, inside and outside.

Rivera’s science fiction film allegorizes the spectralization, or the conditions of simultaneous visibility and invisibility, of labor and bodies through the development of a digital network literally plugged into the tissue and nervous system of the human body. Through the trope of a hero’s journey Rivera explores the dematerialization of migrant bodies and its very material and violent effects, as well as the ambivalent results of a global world connected through digital media technologies. As both an activist and a filmmaker Rivera is invested in the power of visibility, of coming to into social and political recognition, for social change, despite the entrapping effects of a disciplinary, biopolitical regime of visibility that produces racialized, gendered, and nationalized subjects for the sake of social control. His film explores how media image environments
work to both disciplinary and immobilizing, as well as fugitive and liberatory ends. His film thinks about the ways in which those results emerge from the same technologies of vision.

In their work, *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri discuss the ways in which the negative movement of biopolitics is also accompanied by the potentiality for a positive movement of biopolitics. Possibility for insurrection occurs in the flesh of the multitude, in the affective and sensible relationships, modes of communication, networks, and communities that make up the social density of our world (69). The cyborg body of labor and communication in *Sleep Dealer* becomes a figure for the positive and negative movements of visibility in biopolitics. The nodes that enable the violent immaterialization of labor and the reduction of the body to labor power also enable another kind of social crossing. The digital labor network of the sleep dealers extract what Nicholas De Genova shows is ultimately the bare life of the migrant, “The ‘illegal’ migrant is conscripted, after all, for the raw productive capacity of her human life as living labor (commodifiable, Marx’s telling formulation, as labor-power). This sheer productive and generative capacity of human life…becomes politically apprehensible, in Agamben’s terms, as bare life” (47). The nodes have allowed the neoliberal regime to extract labor while containing the social relation that those bodies make possible by restricting the movement of the ‘dangerous’ migrant bodies, and enforcing a racialized division of labor. However, the nodes also provide for a deeply embodied form of screen culture in the social network and memory market called True Node in which spectators

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1 I discuss Roberto Tejada’s notion of “image environments” in Chapter 2.
are able to plug into and experience another person’s memories. While the nodes work to produce and extract the bare life of the migrant through a kind of immobilization, they also offer the means by which the flesh of affective social relationships and embodied experiences can travel and come into contact nonetheless. The cyborg body in Sleep Dealer is positioned at an ambivalent zone between bare life and social flesh, producing a leakage of excess within the commodification of memory and the social relation. The embodied screen relation enabled by True Node generates a changing ground for the production public memory, inadvertently allowing a space for the work of imagination and access to futurity.

While the sleep dealers’ extraction of bare life and True Node’s making visible the social flesh function as corollaries in this film that speak to the conditions of borderization at the U.S.-Mexico border, this chapter will focus on the role of visual, image based media in the film as it theorizes the power of spectral aesthetics. Sleep Dealer invests in the politics of the image within the context of transnationalism by imagining the power of media to move and touch our bodies and bring them into contact with others, offering spaces of glimpsing and producing social flesh. Transnational solidarity in the film is made possible by the new, evolving forms of media. While it is embedded within the privatizing logic of the neoliberal economy (True Node is, after all, a market where memories are bought and sold), it also offers a mode of relation in which the embodied and idiosyncratic qualities of memory become public and communal. Through True Node, the memory image becomes democratic, an open space for the construction of public memory as it allows for the input and editorialization of anyone
who plugs in. *Sleep Dealer*, re-invests in the power of the image as a terrain for the formation of transnational solidarity by inserting the heterogeneity and specificity of embodied memory and embodied spectatorship into relation with the image and making visible the textures and movements of social flesh. It imagines what happens to public memory when repertoires of social bodies and the movements of social flesh come into contact with archives of public images.

Through the critical and visionary apparatus of science fiction Rivera’s film invests in visibility as a political strategy, while re-imagining the process of visualization and the production of public memory. In an interview Rivera writes that part of the story he’s trying to tell in his work on transnational, Latino communities is about the dynamic of becoming powerful in the context of “being told to disappear” (Decena and Gray 132). His many film projects make visible the invisibilities of migrant life: the exploitation of migrant labor, the experiences of border crossing, the precarity of living undocumented, as well as the affective social and political bonds that survive and are generated in that process. As communities on the margins of political visibility in the U.S., transnational Latino communities have become spectralized within U.S. national narratives and public memory; they are both absent and present, visible and invisible. *Sleep Dealer* generates a spectral aesthetic of what is unseen but felt, what exceeds the visible, because it is an aesthetic of “being told to disappear.” In his films, Rivera addresses the image as a terrain for generating political power through the reformation of visibility and reshaping public memory. It is within the textures, temporalities, and expressions of image environments that public memory is generated and new forms of political life can be produced. French
media theorist, Bernard Stiegler, refers to this process “a biopolitics of memory,” in which media cultures become technologies in the political production and management of life and forms of living (70). Producing and contesting the shared spheres of public memory is not about nostalgia, it’s about the future.

Rivera takes up the cinematic form in *Sleep Dealer* to theorize a new way in which becoming visible takes place. The film theorizes the embodied relation to image cultures that spectral aesthetics make possible and that change the effect of visibility, of becoming legible, based on a proliferation of difference within the social flesh rather than the sameness scripted on the social body. As discussed in Chapter One, an optical technology of power, visibility flattens the frame of social recognition and captures and immobilizes complex social bodies within reductive categories such as race and gender. This formation of visibility limits the sensible to that of the visual and actively disavows the other senses and complexities of embodied experience. *Sleep Dealer* addresses the biopolitics of memory that militarizes visuality as a means of enforcing consensus and disavows embodiment and heterogeneity within the process of making public memory.

Diana Taylor, in her work on performance and memory in the Americas, has come to understand this disavowal as privilege of the archive over the repertoire. That is, the archival, written knowledges of colonial power continually deny and discipline indigenous, marginalized, and embodied knowledges. But the body articulates on sensual registers through practice, performance, relation, and gesture. These expressions exceed the optical and blur the distinction between external and internal locations of memory and knowledge. The epistemological form of the repertoire produces a fuller visibility, a more
properly named ‘sensibility’, by engaging senses that are not limited strictly to the optical, the written, and the objective. Memory does not maintain only within the archiving capacities of memory technologies, or pass away within the duration of a singular body’s life. The body can pass this knowledge on through its repertoire of movements, gestures, relations and intimacies, spatial relations, affects, styles, and their grammars.

_Sleep Dealer_ brings an epistemology of the repertoire to bear on the media image both within its own spectral aesthetics of the cinematic image, as well as its speculative theory of ideal image relations in the figure of True Node. By asking what the continuum of embodiment and memory in the Americas can contribute to our understanding of visibility, this film theorizes a new form of image engagement and production that offers a potentially democratic mode of making public memory and forming solidarity. The film theorizes how introducing embodiment into our relationship with the image and the production of memory could change the terms of visibility and our capacities for future-oriented imagination. The image becomes an important ground for the collective work of imagination that Arjun Appadurai describes as a tool for producing an empowering structure of feeling that he calls locality.

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3 Appadurai describes his usage of locality as, “a spatial, a scalar dimension, a material dimension, and a kind of embodied dimension” of place that nonetheless reaches into other and virtual spaces, and that becomes for him an important way of describing life, community, and empowerment in globalization. He distinguishes his conceptualization of locality from more confining senses of locality, as a specifically liberatory structure of feeling, and an expanding horizon of possibility (2002, 34).
…in a world of migration and mass mediation, everybody is living in a world of image flows, such that it’s not simply and straightforwardly possible to separate their everyday life from this other set of spaces that they engage with through the media, either as receivers, or as workers in call centers, or on interactive websites, etc. The work of the imagination allows people to inhabit either multiple localities or a kind of single and complex sense of locality, in which many different empirical spaces coexist (Appadurai 43).

For anthropologist Appadurai and filmmaker Rivera the image and image networks offer spaces for the collective and productive work of the imaginary as they allow people to situate themselves in relation to others and their environments, both virtual and real. The experience of situation, of location, is a profoundly embodied experience that relies upon the body’s proprioception, the sensual and durational awareness of one’s body within an ambient space. Image environments and media technologies become spaces for collective imagination and potential, experimental re-formation through the creative negotiation of physical space and virtual space. Without access to the terrains of visibility and public memory we have no access to the future-making capacity of the imaginary.

Sleep Dealer theorizes a new form of screen culture that enables transnational solidarity and new forms of social life through the creative work of the imaginary. In Sleep Dealer’s theory, bodies and images work in dynamic relation, and public memory exists in the borderlands of the digital network that produces a memory archive both deeply embodied and internal, as well as external and image-based. This hybridization allows memory to become a collective and yet individual resource of knowledge and
imagination. By making this resource a seemingly paradoxical combination of the individual and communal, the power of the imaginary latent within our relationships to images produces and makes visible the social flesh of human movement and affective relation rather than normalization or consensus produced by the counterinsurgent visuality of the border. Rivera goes to the visibility producing media technology of the twentieth century, narrative cinema, and uses its own technologies and forms of articulation to theorize a space for counter purposes, for the flourishing of a democratic biopolitics of memory.

**Biopolitics of Memory and “American Hi-Def”**

The film follows a typical hero’s journey, following Memo Cruz, a young man from rural Oaxaca who travels to the northern border to work in the Tijuana sleep dealers after his father is killed and his home destroyed by a drone for being a suspected “water terrorist.” En route to Tijuana, Memo bonds with a writer, Luz, who installs Memo’s nodes for him so that he can work in the sleep dealers. Meanwhile Luz sells her memories of him on True Node. While they forge a relationship, and Memo comes to realize the brutalities of the sleep dealer labor that drains his vitality. Rudy Ramírez, the guilt stricken U.S. drone pilot who killed Memo’s father, and who is also a “node-worker,” buys Luz’s memories in an effort to contact Memo and atone for the murder. Eventually the three cyborg-bodied characters forge an alliance against the privatized and militarized water corporation. Re-purposing their cyborg bodies and the digital networks of True Node, the sleep dealers, and the corporate military, Luz, Memo and Rudy
perform an act of transnational solidarity and destroy the water corporation’s dam which has a strangle hold on Memo’s home community in Oaxaca.

Visual media technologies are a space where Rivera’s film theorizes the positive and negative biopolitics of memory and futurity. As I’ve shown in earlier chapters of this project, visuality has functioned as a disciplinary and coercive technology of capture and immobilization in the hemispheric history of Americanity. What Nicholas Mirzeoff terms our contemporary era of “counter insurgent visuality” has militarized vision at the U.S.-Mexico border, working to capture and make visible bodies within categories of race, gender, and ethnicity. The U.S.-Mexico border has been a site for counterinsurgent visuality’s development and continued deployment, managing the racialized distinction that the border enforces. The militarized vision of counter insurgent visuality strives to be unambiguous, transparent, immediate, and limitless in order to make visible insurgent threats to be eradicated. Militarized vision is a total vision, with penetrative capacities, extensive abilities, and unencumbered by a vulnerable and locational body in order to obscure and render the site of surveillance and command “not just invisible, but unknown, what one might call its undisclosed location” (294). It is a mechanical, automatic, and disciplined vision that sees without being affected; the ubiquity of drone surveillance at the border is one of its most efficacious manifestations. *Sleep Dealer* addresses the regime of counterinsurgent visuality at the level of the televisual image. The militarization of vision frames the aesthetics and logics of image environments in

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4 Mirzeoff refers to counterinsurgent visuality as post-panoptic, in that it de-centralizes and hides the commander's body (294).
Sleep Dealer, celebrating the new and advanced technologies of vision and eliciting spectator identification with it. The televisual image becomes the mode of visibility and memory to resist, opposing it with the multisensual, dissensus building, memory archive of True Node.

Not unlike our own, the world of Sleep Dealer is a media-image saturated environment, permeated and punctuated by screen cultures and image spheres. Throughout the film, domestic and public spaces feature digital image screens, even the simple, peasant home of Memo’s family in rural Oaxaca, where as Memo points out, his brother is addicted to “American Hi-Def,” particularly the TV show “Drones,” which makes a coercive and disciplinary spectacle of the militarization of water sources in the global south. His brother stares at the TV over breakfast and during parties, fist pumping in celebration when the announcer on “Drones” asks that viewers make sure their children watch as the drones “blow the hell out of the bad guys!” The T.V. show advises that it contains graphic violence so, “you won’t want them to miss it!”

A reality T.V. show embodying counterinsurgent visuality, “Drones” profiles a drone pilot and follows them on a mission to protect a corporate water company’s property from “legions of aqua-terrorists,” insurgents who wear masks and resemble the Zapatistas. The show celebrates the technology and prowess of the military drones, making the visualizing technologies the focus of spectator pleasure and identification. The fly-eyes, surrogate visualizing bodies that patrol with the drones, allow the pilot to, “See every angle of the action.” The drone pilot is also a node worker, like the workers in the sleep dealers, his body welded into the informatic infrastructure of the private army.
His movements and body become weaponized, but safe, contained and disciplined, but with seemingly limitless capacity. But he is merely a tool, an extension of the corporation that meanwhile remains invisible. Though we hear the voice of central command, it is clear that it is just another node in a chain of command, further obscuring the observing, visualizing body. Moreover, it is never given a visual presence. The audibility of its presence gives it a sense of being in a no-place, or an everywhere all at once. Through the inter-penetration of the military technologies into the human body, the senses, movements, and vulnerability of its embodiment remain safe and controlled within the armature of the military media network.

The drone pilot’s ability to see and act at many locations at once, while also remaining plugged into the central nervous system of the corporation’s information system, becomes the ideal form of vision and violence. It can see and produce information with seemingly total capacity, with all angles and points of view accounted for. It can exert power and violence while remaining safe and un-affected. All the while it feeds that information directly back into the corporation’s apparatus, while allowing the visualizing body to remain invisible and unaffected.

The “Hi-Def” aesthetics show every minute detail of every explosion, all the impossible movements of the aircraft, the expressions and gestures of the pilots, announcers, and the victims. The fly-eyes, seeing “every angel of the action” function as surrogate vision for the television spectators, and reduces perception to the seemingly limitless visual. The television show’s militarized aesthetics brings the spectators into a proximate relation to the apparatus of vision, while simultaneously distancing the bodies
of both of the pilots and the viewers, whose tissues, vulnerabilities, viscera, and responses are armored by the televisual-military apparatus. In this identification of spectator vision with drone vision, spectators take on a weaponized military surveillance role, like couch surfing members of the Minute Men. Through its “Hi-Def,” fly eye, and weaponized spectacle, the apparatus of “Drones” produces an enforced consensus of the visible, reducing it to visual material and capturing all points of view.

Memo’s brother, David’s, enthusiasm for ”Drones” embodies the contradictions at work in the consensus producing effects of spectacle, as he celebrates and affirms the power that has a strangle hold on his community and their water supply and will eventually kill his father. In a catalyzing scene early in the film, Memo and David gravitate to the television screen to watch “Drones” during their uncle’s party. As they laugh and enjoy the show, which introduces the Mexican-American drone pilot, Rudy Ramírez, the brothers realize that the house targeted for suspected water terrorism in this real-time episode is their own. They immediately run for their home, arriving only to find it destroyed by the drone.

Memo and his brother first experience their father’s murder through the medium of television and the mediation of the drone vision distances them from the information of their own embodied experiences. The memory technology of the reality T.V. show functions to mediate not only their relationship to the memory of the violence, but also their in-time recognition of it. They are physically distanced but they are also brought into a temporal and optical proximity that promises that the allure of the real time and immediate vision without the dangers and vulnerabilities of physical proximity. The
optical proximity of militarized vision in “Drones” privileges the seen above of all other modes of experience and remembering. It works to pre-empt memory, to codify and externalize it in the very act of the event taking place, fully shaping the experience and archiving it without the complexities of individual experience, memory, and response. The T.V. show distances memory from the body and offers instead, through its “Hi-Def” aesthetics and live-action temporality, a promise of the proximity of total, in-depth vision. They become dis-embodied, “perfect” spectators of their own tragedy. Their vision, experiences, and memory become uniform, standardized, homogenized and “safe” within the corporate production of public memory. The hyperindustrialization of memory networks itself with the aesthetics of militarization and the pleasures of entertainment, allowing media to “control behavior” (Stieglar 76).

In a world shaped by these militarized image environments vision and memory are property of the corporate-televisual-military complex, which reduces people to disembodied spectators of pure vision and collapses all sense perception into the consensus driven flatness of militarized spectacle. David’s relationship to “Drones” embodies the systematic dis-empowering of individuals and communities in relation to the construction of public memory. It produces a dis-embodied logic of memory by reducing sensory input to the optical. Memo refers to the television show as, “American Hi-Def,” invoking the origins of counterinsurgent visuality within a history of Americanity and the colonization of the Americas that produces power through racialized arrangements of looking. “American Hi-Def” externalizes and captures memory for the
purpose of control, the fetishization and militarization of the technologies of vision reduces the visible to a hyper optical state.

The televisual apparatus functions as a technology through which the corporation in *Sleep Dealer* produces and controls political life by aesthetically determining memory. As Diana Taylor has discussed in her work on the image and military spectacle during Argentina’s Dirty War, the military junta solidified their political authority through a careful construction and restriction of public memory that immobilized and captured the public as spectators, rather than actors, of their own history. It was through an unequal visual economy between the junta and the public that the junta commandeered the rights to make history:

History, as invoked by the junta, was idealized as a founding myth and placed outside, or at the beginning of, what is traditionally called the historical process. All opposing representations or interpretations of Argentina’s national drama were prohibited by the military leaders. Theirs, after all, was the ultimate performance… ‘History’ junta leader Eduardo Massera proclaimed, “belongs to me” (“Damnable Iteration” 196).

The junta externalized history from the internal dynamics of the moment and its continuity with the public, and the experiences of the present, thereby excluding the public from participation in history and memory. Images were a medium through which their performance of authority took place. Through a careful tailoring of the seen and policing the positions of viewing, the junta established a visual economy with the public that allowed them to “disappear their audience.” The junta rendered them passive, inert
spectators to their vision, both of Argentina’s history and their own disciplinary gaze. Through an aestheticization of the image, the junta became the masters or dictators of vision, being both the seers and the seen. This technique enabled them to ‘disappear the audience,’ or make them inconsequential bystanders of the junta’s construction of history. The presence of the public becomes invisible to the production of memory.

“Drones” disappears its audience through spectacle that operates on an aesthetics of real-time immediacy, celebration of the military technologies of vision, and spectator identification with military vision. However, unlike the junta and their reliance on the power of a founding myth of history to externalize the public from the production of memory, “Drones” externalizes spectators from history and memory by freezing and immobilizing them within a thin and precarious present of real-time representation, divorced from continuity with past and future.

Military vision and its market-driven economics becomes the aesthetic that shapes public memory. “Drones” functions as a technology of counterinsurgent visuality to codify the visible as a primarily visual entity, reducing it from a multi-sensual, embodied and affective experience to a strict plane of visual appearances that work to identify a threat and eradicate it (Mirzeoff 278). “Drones” functions as a disciplinary and seductive spectacle of counterinsurgent visuality. As Guy Debord theorized in the late sixties, “spectacle is an affirmation of appearances and an identification of all human life with appearances” (9). In “Drones” the aesthetics of military vision reduce the schema of appearances to that of the visual, to “all the angles of the action” that the fly eyes enable (9). For Debord, spectacle negates life by reducing it to representation. Reducing life to
representation and spectacle codifies it within a certain aesthetic framework, restricting the ways in which it can be lived, remembered, and imagined. The image in Debord’s analysis was a medium of codification, a space that makes the field of the social something ‘to be looked at.’ The television culture in Sleep Dealer makes of a multivalent experience a simply visual representation, to be consumed rather than generated. By emptying out the multiplicity and fullness of memory and reducing life to the visual, the spectacle of “Drones” homogenizes and disciplines public memory. The disappearance of the audience removes them from the process of making memory, conferring authority to know onto the visualizing body of the decentralized corporate apparatus. While the audience is disappeared, deprived of, in Mirzeoff’s formulation, the right to look, the aesthetics of the televisual image continues to produce a visible world through its ‘to-be-looked-at-ness,’ that reduces memory to surface of optical information. Producing relations of simultaneous distance and immediacy, the spectator identification with drone vision and the real time relay of the drone’s mission promises the proximity of the present, privileging it over past or future. The aesthetic ‘disappearance of the audience’ deprives the public the ability to make public memory, and by immobilizing them to the immediate present cuts off access to the imaginary and modes of futurity. It functions as a tool of a biopolitical regime of hyperindustrialized memory, producing an aesthetic of capture in memory in order to control the past and withhold the future.
**True Node and Insurrection in the Flesh**

In their work, *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri propose that the negative movement of biopolitics is also accompanied by the potentiality for a positive movement of biopolitics. Possibility for insurrection occurs in the flesh of the multitude, in the affective and sensible relationships, modes of communication, networks, and communities that make up the social density of our world (69). In *Sleep Dealer*, the nodes that allow the neoliberal economy to restrict the movement of the ‘dangerous’ bodies of the migrants in order to extract labor while containing the risky social relations those bodies make possible also enable another mode of social relation and movement. The memory market, True Node, is a terrain on which embodiment and social relation can travel and come into contact despite physical immobilization. The archive of personal memories functions as an ambivalent space of the digital in the film. It is a market that renders memory, truth, and intimacy commodities, but also allows for the work of the imagination, the positive biopolitical labor of creating new forms of life. Among these labors, is the affective labor of solidarity.

In the closed, highly stratified, spectacle-constructed, neoliberal world of *Sleep Dealer*, True Node controls the sale and consumption of memory. The network service allows users to upload and sell their personal memories, compiling a digital, online archive of embodied, affective, and emotional experience by downloading and transmitting memories into the flesh of another person’s nervous system. A digital screen plugged into the body provides an immersive moving image experience that is also fully embodied. Through the figure of a cyborg body, the film envisions a body put into
intimate and inter-penetrative relation with technology of memory. The film imagines a way in which the cyborg relationship between bodies and technology might be applied to the domain of memory technologies, allowing us to see and produce the social “flesh of the multitude” (Hardt and Negri 69). On the edges of True Node’s commodification of memory are leakages of the social in which contributors generate transnational networks of relation and intimacy despite a closed border. Inspired by the ways in which migrant kinship networks already do produce alternative modes of intimacy, the film envisions possibilities for new, transnational socialities and forms of political relation within a changing milieu of media, images environments, and technologies.5

Thinking about the history of racial visibility as capture and immobilization within colonial contexts, Rey Chow points out that visibility is shifting value for post-colonial actors due to the possibilities for self-representation within our changing media environments. Visibility, as Chow points out, has been a slippery slope for post-colonial liberation projects, one that tends towards reproducing the entrapping power of capture and creating once again the static confinements of norms and typologies (160-161). However, as Chow points out, the changing technologies of visibility and image environments, such as Flickr and YouTube, have changed the media spaces in which visibility is produced and recognized, making images more “points of departure” for an active, engaged, and heterogeneously distributed production of the memory, rather than the hyperindustrialized spectacle representations like that of “Drones” (166). *Sleep*

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5 Alex Rivera’s other projects including, *Borders* (2003), *The Sixth Section* (2003), *Papapapá* (1995), as well as his most recent music video for Aloe Blacc’s *Wake Me Up* (2013), all engage with the ways in which migrant communities re-shape and sustain kinship, intimacy, and community despite distance and long-term separation. *Sleep Dealer* takes this formation and re-imagines it within the speculative genre.
Dealer addresses such “points of departure” within our transnational image environments. The speculative figure of the cyborg in the film asks what kinds of relationships between screen images and political bodies can emerge from image environments when engaged with our senses besides only the visual? What is being made visible, and how does this new form of visibility establish the terms on which we recognize difference and create alliances?

I understand this film gesturing towards a political possibility latent in the image that comes with relating to the image with one’s entire, embodied, sensorial, and memorial schema. The image becomes relational; a dynamic and contingent space transformed by encounters with bodies and their own accumulated histories and memories. The extra-visual, multi-sensual, and affective dimensions of the screen image reframes the image’s visibility beyond the purely visual, touching on the specters of embodiment and memory within a counterinsurgent visuality. The internal, embodied, and yet communal, memory image of True Node figures as a speculative possibility for spectral aesthetics, being a site of the transitive contingency of embodied engagement that makes visible glimpses of the flesh of the social. This transitive contingency produces a function of the image quite different from representation and capture, becoming generative, rather than representative. The screen culture Sleep Dealer envisions offers images as points of departure for other kinds of images and imaginaries. It becomes a terrain for the generative workings of the imaginary.

The writer, Luz, sees in her use of True Node the possibilities for what Édouard Glissant understood as the endless potentiality of contact, connection, and modification.
of relation. Like Glissant she believes in the ability of relation to make for a more connected and visionary world that goes “beyond judgments into the dark of art’s upsurgings” and that forgoes static categories of being in favor of transitive experiences of relation or becoming (138). She uses True Node for this purpose, even as it also participates in a commodification of memory, and therefore feedback loops her memories within the routes of privatization. After embarking on a romantic relationship with Memo, but having kept her writerly activities a secret, she decides to confess what they actually mean. Explaining that she uploads her memories onto the network, allowing others to experience what she has experienced, Luz and Memo are shot in medium close up sitting at her transparent computer screen. The screen of the computer produces a frame within a frame calling attention to the image and screen as a ligature between multiple spaces. The portion of the image within the computer screen is wavy, crystalline, shot through with rainbows, and whorls of spectral light. The memory images are projected onto Memo and Luz’s bodies, figuratively enacting the intimacy of body and screen image that True Node enables. The bodies on-screen are projected onto the off-screen bodies, which provide the necessary opacity for the images to reflect back. The sequence cuts between framings of the couple at the computer, and the memory images broadcast on the computer itself. The memory images are shot through with the same spectral light and cut between close-ups of faces in expressive intimacy, body parts in which skin, tattoos, and clothing are deeply textured and tactile, and figurative shadows or impressionistic cascades of pure light and vague movements. These memory images flicker and waver, as though threatening to disappear. [See Figure 8]
After Memo balks at Luz’s confession saying, “It’s strange, that’s all,” Luz explains her intention behind using True Node. As she compares the process to crossing an invisible border and says, “I hate that there’s so much distance between people…” the sequence cuts from the scene of the couple talking to a long shot of the border wall, overlaid with the spectral light of the True Node computer screen. Luz’s mental image when thinking about social division and distance is the iconic border wall. The sequence cuts back to the couple talking in a close-up of Luz’s fingers running down Memo’s arm. The sequence’s syntax associates the work of social relation and public memory to the tactile act of touching. The memory archive that Luz contributes to allows people to “touch” and to pass through the border wall keeping them apart. Cutting to a medium shot of Luz and Memo speaking, while she continues to run her fingers up his arm and over his nodes, she say, “The only thing nodes are good for is to destroy that distance. To connect us. To let us see.”

The medium shot of the couple talking is shot through the warm spectral light of the computer screen. The focus of the image, as Luz talks about bridging distances by showing people what she’s seen, is on the subtle movement within the frame of her stroking Memo’s arm. The movement of her hand is a bridge in the sequence, connecting the two shots. In echo of the gentle stroking of her hand, the camera moves across the scene, gently, casually, in medium shot. The camera movement’s texture mimics the tactile activity of Luz running her fingertips along Memo’s arm. The shot calls our attention to the experiences of skin and the tactile act of touching. The subtlety of
movement of the camera, and Luz’s fingers brings us into a tender contact with and awareness of the image’s multisensual fullness.

The image in this sequence has an overall spectral texture and sense of skin, from the fleshy warmth of the light and the digital texture of the screen through which we see the couple, to the heightened evocation of Luz’s fingers delicately moving over Memo’s skin. The sensory perceptions of skin are invoked in this sequence through the movement of Luz’s own hand and the skin of the digital screen. The True Node screen through which the sequence is shot figures the screen of sense memories through which we watch the images. In her work on haptics and intercultural cinema Laura Marks discusses what she terms “haptic visuality” as an important mode for exilic and inter-cultural filmmakers. In her theory skin functions as a metaphor for the ways in which film signifies materially. The experience of cultural dis-belonging, exile, and migration, often exceed the semiotic and language based registers of cinematic expression. Taking the form of sense memories, they require other modes of expression that are expressed in haptic, impressionistic, and sensual aesthetics. In Mark’s work, skin becomes a figure for describing the way in which films appeal and express across the time and distance of memory and location that frame migrational experience, “when verbal and visual representation is saturated, meanings seep into other dense, seemingly silent registers” (5). The digital screen of True Node through which the scene is shot produces a texture in the ripples and whorls of light, a texture of liquid movement. As Luz talks about letting people connect across and despite borders the spectral aesthetics of the image ask us to see haptically through skin. Skin, our largest organ of perception, brings us into relation
with the world and with others. An inversion of Fanon’s racial epidermal schema that reduces skin to a visual screen to be read, in *Sleep Dealer’s* True Node, skin becomes a screen we see through. It is the screen through which we come into contact and perceive. The image here both elicits the knowledges of our skin, while also itself, functioning as a kind of skin, an organ of perception, through which we perceive, understand, and wonder.

*Sleep Dealer* evokes texture within the image, and of images generally, asking us to consider the role of skin, texture and sensation in the relational encounter with images. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick has discussed in her work on affect, texture is an analytic that speaks from embodied experience and helps describes the qualities of affective experience. Texture causes two kinds of investigative questions about the object at hand: “‘How did it get that way?’ and ‘What could I do with it?’” (13). Seeing through skin and perceiving the textures of the image and the sense memories they evoke is not a blunt and obtuse kind of sensationalism that one might associate with practices of spectacle, but rather in its appeal to our embodiments and memories causes us to think deeply and wonderingly about the causes, effects, and beings of objects, including images. This relational, object-oriented questioning leads to a speculative horizon of knowledge. By asking “how,” “why,” and “what,” in the ways that texture asks us to, we actively engage in an imaginative, while also grounded, speculation. Speculative horizons are dynamic

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6 Phenomenologist Jan Patochka has discussed horizons of speculation as emerging from intellectual as well as embodied engagements that also span and incorporate memorial, present tense, and future temporalities: “These horizons are not storehouses of memories as much as living fields which grasp us and lead us from experience to experience.” (34-35) *Body, Community, Language, World*. Trans. Erazim Kohák. Chicago: Open Court. 1998.
interplays between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown, engaging our faculties of imagination.

After we are drawn so sensually into reflecting on the political vision Luz has invested in True Node, the very next scene in the film reveals yet another layer of intimacy enabled by the nodes. In a love-scene between Luz and Memo darkness is punctuated by pools of deep, richly colored light counteracting the light-filled airy-ness of the previous scene. Unlike the previous scene in which we seemed to be asked to see through a screen of skin, this scene asks us to see through the density and opacity of flesh. In close-up Luz plugs a cable into a node on Memo’s arm, and the film cuts to another close-up of their faces in lovers’ proximity. She says, bringing us into the dense internal realm of flesh, “I want you to see me, inside.” The couple’s bodies are dark densities framed in halos of blue light and strung together by the glowing cords of their node cables. They kiss and a red light flares upon their faces. The close-up of their faces cuts to a momentary and indistinct movement of dark flesh and then cuts to another shot of them making love. As in the skin sequences, the visibility of the image is complicated by light, red light blooms across and obscures the image. In the following montage the images blur and shift between the characters’ flesh and hands moving and touching, to the wavering and impressionistic memory images as the characters experience each other’s internal, psychic, image-consciousness depths.

Skin and flesh mediate relationships between the internal and the external. Here the transition between the transparent aesthetics of skin and the opaque aesthetics of flesh visually express a similar movement within the narrative arrangement of the film as it
transitions between the public versus private sharing of memory images. The love scene is interspersed with a montage of mental images from their memories: Luz as a child playing at a border fence, Memo’s fragmented and almost abstract images of the land and space of Santa Ana del Rio. Again, close-ups of hands re-occur through the montage, connecting the intimacy of sharing mental images with the physical act of touching. Bringing embodiment and the multisensual into contact with the narrative arrangement and syntax of the film, as we move from external screen of skin to internal density of flesh, *Sleep Dealer* reminds us of the conjoining of flesh and mind in the making of meaning, both at the level of its representation of memory, and at the level of its own narrative syntax.

All the images are connected by a kind of visual musculature that I’ve come to call the film’s digital flesh. These computer generated graphics work throughout the film to conjure the presence of pure sensation that occur at moments of intense pain or pleasure, such as when Memo is knocked out, or when Luz installs his nodes. This digital flesh visually conjures the nervous system, being purely animated images of light and color, punctuated by intensifications and thicknesses of depth and texture, and accompanied by a staticy, viscous sound. Resisting reduction to either sight or sound, the animated digital flesh of the film recalls the full embodiment of True Node as we become enfolded in the irreducibly sensual images. The visibility of the film, that is the meaning of what it wants to show us, is comprised of elements that are not reducible to the visual, but rather require the perceptions and the knowledges of our fully embodied, corporeal schemas. These corporeal knowledges mediate the relationship between internal memory
and external image, making a dynamic and generative relationship between image and memory. The digital flesh erupts at moments of pure sensation, while also acting as a kind of ligature in memory based montage sequences. *Sleep Dealer* invokes the juncture of thought and embodied sensation, both at the level of its representation of meaning-making and memory, and at the level of its own narrative meaning-making. Bringing embodiment and the multisensual into contact with the narrative through the digital flesh, Rivera’s film reminds us of the conjoining of flesh and mind in the making of meaning, and asks what it can do for the production of visibility.  

Shortly following this scene, Luz uploads her final memory of Memo in which he tells the story of his father’s death. The sequence opens with Luz plugging in to her computer. It is followed by a medium shot in the wavering, spectral aesthetic of memory images, of Rudy Ramírez, the drone pilot, with his back to the camera. The two characters, separated by a border, are connected by the memory market. The familiar stylized montage of memory images ensues. The brief montage contains two dominant images, an explosion and a close-up of Memo’s face. The visual stuttering expression of the explosion’s resonance carries over into a similar stuttering of Memo’s face. The memory sequence is framed by two different perspectives of Rudy’s immersion in the memory: one a memory image of him watching the explosion, and the final is a close up of his face wearing the True Node mask in the current moment. Through the textures of

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7 As phenomenologist and theorist of embodiment, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, reminds us, being is not apprehended only through thought, or only through sensation, but rather at the juncture of the two. He described this juncture as a kind of ‘nervure,’ and like the veins of a leaf, it is both a structure and a growing, dynamic system. (119) *The Visible and the Invisible.* Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969.
Luz’s memories translated and transferred into the bodily senses and tissues of his own, Rudy’s memories of flying the drone are generated in his own memory images. The past intrudes on the present.

At work in this short but meaningful sequence is a dynamic relationship between the different layers of memory that are brokered by the contact between images and embodiment. The image has a generative power here; the embodied reception of an image elicits the production of more mental images in the viewer. Luz has heard Memo’s memory, but she has not experienced it in the fully embodied way that the nodes would enable. The memory she posts to True Node is her memory of another’s story, the story is therefore told in the images she has of its telling. Memo’s face stands out as the most prominent image, along with Luz’s own sense of herself at the True Node screen. The insertion of the cables into the nodes echoes the connection between body and memory image. Meanwhile those images are connected to Rudy’s own internal memory images of the explosion, and his own position connected to and immersed in the screen image of True Node. The embodied relation Rudy has to the screen allows for the generative relationship between external image and internal memory to occur.

As this sequence makes clear, memory is not contained within a single aesthetic of homogenous vision, but is rather negotiated through the relation and coincidence of multiple forms of seeing and experiencing that the lived body registers and remembers. Rudy’s embodied engagement with Luz’s memory images catalyzes a dynamic of speculation within him that leads him to feel and act in solidarity with Memo and his community, later collaborating with Luz and Memo to blow up the dam he was hired to
protect in Santa Ana del Rio. The generative public memory archive allows Rudy access to the social flesh of memory that enables him to reframe his knowledge of the event. In this moment, the social flesh of a transnational bond of solidarity is enabled by access to the variegated social flesh of public memory.

In *Sleep Dealer* memory images make visible the heterogeneity of social flesh. True Node offers a space that postulates not the sameness of bodies, but the radical differences of bodies and embodiments, spaces and times, memories and experiences. Making the passions of our bodies not a ground of same-ness from which our identification with each other emerges, but rather, the foundation and predication of our differences from one another. The affective and haptic dimensions of the images in True Node call attention not to the sameness that inheres in the collective flesh of the world, but rather the radical heterogeneity of it. As new media theorist, Mark Hansen, has written, affect and affectation are preobjective, interstitial micromovements that broker a relationship between mind and body, the personal and the social. Affect indicates the vitality and becoming of life.\(^8\) This life in becoming is like a ligature of the social draws together the isolate and the common. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s theories of flesh as common, Hardt and Negri point out that it is a “queer social flesh,” an irreducible, non-static, non-normative flesh always exceeding its boundaries and conceptualizations. It is the density and texture of the multitude in its vitality. In both Hansen’s and Hardt and Negri’s formulations, the body and the affective pulses of embodiment that indicate the

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\(^8\) Hansen contends that new media grammers offer new ways of making this vitality visible, which is echoed in the futuristic image of the cyborg body. See, Hansen, Mark. “The Time of Affect, or Bearing Witness to Life”. *Critical Inquiry*. Spring, 2004. 30.3. pgs 584-626.
fluctuations and becoming of life reveal both the commonality of the flesh, of life, while also its variegated texture (Hardt and Negri 192-200). In *Sleep Dealer*, the figure of True Node allegorizes the ways in which embodied relations to screen images offer spaces for envisioning and engaging in acts of solidarity precisely because it is predicated on the anti-uniformity of the flesh. True Node, as a figure for spectral aesthetics that bring the sense memories and sensory input that are excessive to the image to bear on our engagements, creates a particular form of visibility that enables solidarity because it dislocates difference from the visual register of body as racialized or gendered object to be seen, and instead predicates it on the heterogeneous and experiential register of embodied memories. The production of public memory is not “an affirmation of appearances” but rather that which is churned within the heterogeneous memory images and embodiments of the multitude (Debord 9).

The generative power of images allegorized by True Node calls on a notion of the body as the storehouse of memory. Rather than espousing a rhetoric of the digital that abandons the body, it instead requires the body’s engagement and vital presence. By allowing the image to be more than just visual, and more than just representative and objective, this image exceeds the spectacle function of hyper-visibility in “American Hi-Def.” Like the destroyed dam at the end of the film, the True Node memory image floods and ruptures the containment of public memory with an effluence of the multitude’s memory and its queer social flesh. The film imagines the potent, generative, creative

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power that exists in our image technologies when put in relation with the memorial body, and which, triggered by textures and sensations that appeal to both our intellectual and embodied modes of engagement open ways into creative, speculative horizons. The film invests in both the body as memory archive and image environments as modes of visibility by envisioning the dynamic interplay between the two, the way they make each other sensible and communal.

*Spectral Images and The Imaginary*

This allegory imagines a different kind of relationship to the screen image. In this relationship the image is a forum in which personal memory intersects with collective memory, where our bodies become part of the process of archiving, that memory. The image becomes the technology of memory, which through its fully embodied nature, being not merely optical but multi-sensual, opens up dimensions of an event that are felt, rather than seen, in a multitude of ways. The image functions as a terrain for the activity of the imagination because of its opacity, its simultaneous literality and ambiguity, the way that it elicits the input of the other senses.\(^\text{10}\) This full image, full of extra sensual data, informed by the many different, paradoxical, and particular perceptions of the other senses, animated by affective and emotional knowledges, situated by proprioceptive awareness of space and relation, and in dialog with repertoires of inherited, socially constructed formations of movement and space, upsets the hierarchy of the senses created by modernity’s privilege of the optical. *Sleep Dealer’s* vision of the future of the screen

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\(^{10}\) As Ranciere has written of the image, it exists in a state of tension between pure ability to show and fundamental incompleteness (*The Future of the Image*. New York: Verso, 2009). I explore this opacity in Chapter Two on Susan Harbage Page’s photography project “The US-Mexico Border Project”.
image allows for the interactivity of memory with the faculty of the imaginary; the image becomes the generator of more, personal, specific, and embodied images within the viewer. By drawing the many embodied modes through which we make memory into the process of making collective and public memory through images, *Sleep Dealer* envisions a kind of memory technology that is deeply democratic- an interactive and open forum for the editorialization of any participating being.

The fluid relationship between visible and invisible in spectral aesthetics produces a fertile ground for this potential democratization of memory and imaginary. Spectral aesthetics gesture towards the margins of what the image makes visible and require a diagonalized engagement that relies upon the input of our different sensory modes. The force of spectral aesthetics in cinema are most readily available when the narrative falls briefly away, when we are more open to the force of the image. The moments of digital flesh are among these, occurring at moments of pure sensation, and often right before catalyzing, interior, character moments. Or, when Memo goes to the Tijuana beach border fence and pressing his face to the bars, gazes northward. Our sensory modes are more open to the spray of sea and the kinesthetic, proprioceptive emptiness of the beach. For those short moments, the why of his having gone to the border fence falls away. Instead, we are confronted with the pure force of the image, of this opaque, affective state that requires the input of our memories and embodied knowledges. These knowledges gather on the edges of what is visible in the image, requiring our imaginations to fill in the blanks, to reach beyond the given in the visual.
In his phenomenological work on imagination, which eventually positioned human imagination as the “whole of consciousness as it exercises freedom,” Sartre analyzes the inventive and positing capacity of imagination (186). Unlike dreaming, which emerged from pure and unintentional invention, imagination exists in a careful symbiosis with memory, knowledge, and affectivity. In an act of imagination, knowledge and affectivity work together to allow consciousness to draw from its experiences and perceptions, as well as the affective movement of desire and intention towards something. Imagination is the power of consciousness to invent an image of a wanted object, to create an elsewhere and an otherwise, to surpass the real. In that way, imagination remains tied to and engaged with the material, lived, historical world, but also invents from it, an invention often emerging from desire. Imagination is not necessarily, and certainly not always escapism, but it is a powerful faculty of envisioning and invention.

Drawing from memory, the imaginary takes on a fully embodied quality, deriving its information from sources in addition to the visual. As Sartre points out, affectivity, the fullness of sensation, and sense of kinaesthetic movement, play important roles in the generation of mental images and the work of the imagination. He writes, “The image is not a simple content of consciousness among others, but is a psychic form. As a result, the whole body collaborates in the constitution of the image” (137). Kinaesthetics and affectivity function similarly to the movement and becoming of consciousness that makes evident the quality of lived existence, or “becoming conscious of organic modification” (68). For Sartre, the kinaesthetic and affective components of consciousness that are elemental to the workings of the imaginary, represent the more
“feeble elements” of sensory input that are dominated by vision, but supported or experienced through the retentions and protentions, the movements, of thought. Since kinaesthetics and affectivity are comprised by a lack of persistence, by a fleeting, moving, temporal quality, they are effaced by the visible, and captured in the image (76). The imaginary implicates a transitive relationship between memory and images, in which they transform and destabilize in one another. Our memories and the knowledges they contribute to the imaginary do not exist only, or purely, as visual data. They live in our minds and bodies as fully embodied, multi-sensual, often irreducible experiences. It is in this full embodiment and particularity that memory offers a ground for the imaginary, which envisions not just through vision, but through the full-ness and irreducibility of a body’s many knowledges and perceptive possibilities which are then brought into contact with the image.

The imaginary names our embodied engagements with the images of spectral aesthetics, when we draw upon our multisensual apparatuses to understand what is not necessarily visible in the image. The image is necessary to the process of imagination, being the space through which our multisensory inputs can momentarily be felt. The concept of the imaginary allows us to regard image based memory technologies as generative grounds through which we engage in creative acts of envisioning that are rooted nonetheless in a visible world. The visible exists in dynamic interplay with the imaginary, being the space in which the imaginary is generated, but also what it exceeds. As Appadurai notes, the imaginary is a fundamental faculty for navigating the mediascape and media spheres of a global reality, and becomes a form of agency for
constructing a live-able world (43). Thinking the imaginary through the way in which we engage with image based memory technologies becomes a way of producing a schema of public memory that is collective and creative. Like the speculative histories discussed in Chapter Three, public memory produced through spectral aesthetics of the image becomes a site at which we are able to, “fashion a creative, life-affirming response to the politics of the abysmal event,” to re-imagine agency within history and also can carve paths to new forms of collective life (Saldívar 121).

Glissant speaks of the imaginary as a faculty necessary to the creation of new political formations and modes of being. The imaginary, for Glissant, is a faculty that embodies humanity’s propulsion towards expansion, towards an always reaching forward and outward, groping, fingers first, into the flesh of the world, “it is only the human imaginary that cannot be contaminated by its objects. Because it alone diversifies them infinitely yet brings them back, nonetheless, to a full burst of unity. The highest point of knowledge is always a poetics” (Poetics of Relation 140). According to Glissant, this imaginary is best cultivated and exercised through poetics; breaks, ruptures, inventions, hybrids, and formations emerging out of the density and effluence of relation in a transnational space and circuitry. In Sleep Dealer True Node is a speculative figure for how the changing conditions of image production and shared image environments are offering new spaces and ways of experimenting, rupturing, and poeticizing images and image relations. New forms of engagement and poetics of the image are becoming possible, and while they are also produced by capital, they are opening spaces for the democratic making of images and public memory. This new culture reframes the image
from representational, static, and purely visual, to being generative; it becomes a space for embodied engagement, allowing for transitivity between memory and imaginary. New modes of access to the means of both production and reception of images create new spaces for collaboration and experimentation. The multiplicity that emerges from the image’s opaque nature, and the opening up of access to the means of making and disseminating these images becomes a space for the workings of the imaginary, or the reaching to creativity and the movement towards futurity.

As Glissant point out, “Relation is movement,” and the conditions of a bordered world and the racial, nationa, and ethnic typologies that enforce it impinge upon the possibilities for it (Poetics of Relation 171). Sleep Dealer considers the aesthetic possibilities of transnationalism by positioning screen culture, especially transnational screen culture, as a space through which memory is made public and multiple despite the confines of the border. Through both embodied expression and technological forms, personal and political alliances are formed, solidarities generated, and new forms of political and communal life are created. These lives are not just limited to the virtuality and the technology of the digital realm, but lives that remain rooted in soil and subsistence of agrarian tradition and knowledges, as illustrated in the final, closing image of the film in which Memo’s bordertown milpa grows in an image on a True Node screen. The image becomes a bridge between archive and repertoire, a site of embodied and fugitive knowledge and transtemporal documentation. This is not a digital utopianism that caused Third World and women of color feminists, such as Chela Sandoval, to kindly remind us that there are certain bodies that are already cyborgs, those who “knew the pain
of the union of machine and bodily tissue” (374). Alex Rivera’s film reminds us of the very real conditions of the digital, of our rapid de-materialization, especially the effects on bodies that do not just imagine through machines, but are treated as machines. His film brings into dialog the political, relational potential that the digital image provides, with the histories of embodied, memorial, and marginalized knowledges that exist in the political and epistemological borderlands.

Spectral Aesthetics and Transnational Solidarities

The transitivity that takes place between Rudy’s and Luz’s memories instigates a kind of knowledge in Rudy far different from the kinds of knowledges produced by “Drones” and American Hi-Def television culture. These images bring the past into dialog with the present, incurring in Rudy what Avery Gordon referred to as “transformative recognition” that becomes a future oriented movement of solidarity (8). The reckoning with the affective textures and sensual awareness that arise in excess of the image thicken the density of the present that was reduced by the mode of militarized and strictly optical visuality in “American Hi-Def.” Rudy stands in alliance with the people of Santa Ana del Rio against the water corporation, committing “water terrorism,” as an act of solidarity. The commons represented by the dammed river becomes the term of contention for Rudy’s act. He commits this act not because he feels for Memo and the people of Santa Ana del Rio, but because he feels with them. The model of politics that this gesture performs is that described by Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres as not asking “who you married, or what your daddy was. At its core it does not ask what you call
yourself but with whom do you link your fate. It is a fundamentally creative political project...” (quoted in Saldívar 97).

Proposing solidarity as a practice based politics for feminists Chandra Talpade Mohanty has written, “Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here- to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances” (7). Solidarity is recognition and acting because of an injustice that is not acted upon oneself, but upon an other. Rather than identification, appropriation, or homogenization, solidarity is a form of political being that builds coalitions between different identities, communities, and struggles. A relational mode of politics, it is a mode in which difference is the fundamental and given basis of action. It is a political potentiality within a proliferation of difference, within the queer flesh of the multitude.

Mohonty offers solidarity as a mode of politics suited for transnational contexts and for creating political alliances and connection between communities precisely because it is predicated on difference (7). Juliet Hooker points out that solidarity has been understood by political theorists as emerging from either affective or intellectual processes. In other words, solidarity has either been formed from senses of “fellow feeling,” or an intellectual, ethico-political rationale. In mapping this dichotomy she determines that the affective and the intellectual are both involved in the formation of solidarity (29-30). In her research into the problems of cross-racial solidarity Hooker points out that racial visibility, or what Hortense Spillers called the “cultural seeing by
skin color,” is a barrier to the production of solidarity (Spillers 67). Hooker writes, “Solidarity requires that we care about the pain and suffering of others. But embodied racial difference renders the pain and suffering of nonwhites either invisible or, when visible, less deserving of empathy and redress. Genuine solidarity would thus require that we find ways to ‘see’ beyond embodied racial difference” (6). The regimes of racial visibility discussed in Chapter One work to capture and immobilize individual bodies, as well as the social flesh of affective bonds. While not presenting racial visibility as the boundary to solidarity, instead *Sleep Dealer* presents the effects of militarized visibility at the border that I showed in Chapter One ultimately work to produce racialized bodies.

Responding to the changing production but durable hegemony of the “racial epidermal schema” that the border manages, *Sleep Dealer* suggests an alternative mode of visuality that allows for the formation of transnational solidarity: the spectral aesthetics figured by the memory image of True Node.

The online archive of repertoires of embodied and heterogeneous memory provides an image-based terrain on which the transformative recognition necessary to generate the social relation of solidarity can take place. True Node becomes an ideal, speculative formation of spectral aesthetics in which the coiling over of sense memories and the knowledges of the body on the image allow for multiple visibilities to emerge from the image, images that do not show us racialized bodies but rather the textures of social flesh. The archiving function of True Node offers a speculative model for the reformation of structures of public memory, which Hooker shows must be changed in order for networks of solidarity to emerge that thrive in difference rather than erase it.
(106-107). In *Sleep Dealer*, the image is a medium that through the work of spectral aesthetics binds the intellectual and the affective and offers paths towards affective labors of solidarity by making visible the anti-uniformity of the flesh. By touching on the lived experience of trauma and violence for Memo that was moreover expressed through Luz’s own affective relationship to it, Rudy forsakes his own safety and security to stand in solidarity with an oppressed community. Instead of an individual memory, Rudy encounters a composite arrangement of memories, including his own. In the three characters’ different relationships and memory images of the bombing of Santa Ana del Rio there emerges a variegated and differential texture of affective response. That the spectral aesthetics of the film’s digital flesh link the images in memory sequences is no coincidence, as they bring the textural opacities of pure sensation and preobjective affect to bear on the composite memories.

As Hooker puts it, “What citizens choose to remember about the past and the mode of that remembrance determine the kinds of relations of political obligation they establish with one another in the present” (Hook 107). By contesting and re-making public memory in order to make visible the variegated textures of social flesh that cannot be captured only within the visibility of a social, racialized body, the political community can reshape its conception of social justice. Collective memory is biopolitical as its management and production become the foundations upon which communal conceptions of justice, solidarity, and community are formed. *Sleep Dealer* imagines a form of screen culture in which the radical textures of difference inhering within the queer flesh and bodies of the multitude is made visible, in a way that forgoes reliance on the visibilities
of race, gender, or other social typologies. The cyborg bodies of Memo, Luz, and Rudy and the unique coalition that emerges from the connections enabled by True Node, offer glimpses into a form of political alliance based not on the sameness that they share, but rather on their radical difference. Rather than the visibility of race as a predication for political alliance, the cyborg body in *Sleep Dealer* locates difference inside the body, and the possibility for coalition within the recognition of radical difference. The cyborg in *Sleep Dealer* resonates with what Chela Sandoval posed as its ability to channel and cultivate difference and mutability:

For to enter a world where any activity is possible in order to ensure survival is also to enter a cyborg space of being and consciousness. This space is accessible to all human beings through technology… A space of boundless possibilities where meanings are only cursorily attached and thus capable of re-attaching to others depending upon the situation to be confronted (384).

The film theorizes a way in which the body can be brought into relation with the technologies of memory, and can become a space for alliance out of a multitude of differences and “bound-less possibilities” (Sandoval 384). Difference, rather than uniformity, becomes the thing made visible by public memory, allowing for a solidarity through and among differences to be formed. The cyborg body, a body in intimate entanglement with screen culture, in *Sleep Dealer* dismantles the visibility of race as the basis for solidarity, and instead poses a differential visibility as the basis for solidarity. The transitivity between imaginary and memory that takes place in spectral aesthetics
allows social flesh to become visible, making the visibility of that differential flesh the predication of solidarity and alliance.

Yet, “True Node” is a commercial, social network that allows users to share their experiences and knowledges with others, while also channeling information into networks of capital and its attendant technologies. Bernard Stiegler points out that we are in an age undergoing the de-industrialization of memory, in which everyday informational objects that serve as media and memory technologies have become interactive, suspending static positions of sender/receiver, produced/consumer. The appropriation of these technologies, while also feeding back into the apparatuses of spectacle and public memory that have stripped users of “their capacity to participate in the socialization of the world through its transformation,” are also opening up spaces for a transindividuation of memory through our media objects (Stiegler 83). *Sleep Dealer* plays upon this development in the biopolitics of memory, envisioning an interactive culture of memory existing in the margins of a corporatization of memory whose technologies enable this very subversion and transindividuation. But the film also revises this question by asking what kinds of resistance are possible within that environment if we take into account other systems and conceptions of memory that acknowledge memory as made public and communal through the repertoires of embodiment and performance as well as the archives of documents. ¹¹ Through real bodies, not just digital bodies. It is at the interface of these two bodies that transformation occurs.

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¹¹ As mentioned in the introduction, Diana Taylor’s work on memory and performance in the Americas has offered a theory of performance and embodied practices as a modes of preserving and transmitting memory
Conclusion: The Commons of the Image

Rivera’s recourse to filmic technologies and aesthetics reminds us of Hardt and Negri’s claim that the emptying of the enemy’s power and the envisioning of new socialities are one in the same movement. (69) Film technologies, especially narrative cinema, have long been implicated in the workings of spectacle, the disciplinary logics of visibility, the ideologically interpellative culture industry, and the ascent of US culture industry to global hegemony. The creation of new political modes of being and formations of community and sociality must take place as an insurrection of the flesh, the flesh of our image environments as it is coterminous and coextensive with the flesh of our bodies, the flesh of our histories. It takes place through our communicative, expressive, social apparatuses and technologies.

It seems then that our imaginaries when it comes to the image and what it makes visible are not unlike Memo’s body in the global labor market of the sleep dealer. Like the image of Memo’s body, a hybrid, a cyborg, at once technologically produced and yet exceeding the confines of that production, the force of the technologies of our oppressions often bring the means of our insurrection. If we are to nurture the insurrection within the belly of the beast, it is by staying, as Memo says at the end of the film, “on the edges of things,” by staying in the experimental, fugitive, and imaginary fringes of our ways of seeing, of looking at, and making images. Bringing our bodies into

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241
contact with the image presents a dense, thick, space of multiplicity of experience, imagination, and memory. If the image is to have any transformative effect it will have to take place through the workings of imagination that make possible the second visibilities of spectral aesthetics. When working within terms of visibility for producing network struggles of solidarity, the opaque and transnational ligature of spectral aesthetics is one space in which that insurrection can take root.

*Sleep Dealer* recuperates the image of the US-Mexico border as a space for the imagination of a transnational politics of movement, as a space which elucidates Glissant’s poetics of relation, the movement towards and creation of new political and social formations. The film also recuperates the US-Mexico border as a place for thinking about futurity and the biopolitics of memory by resisting and re-articulating the concept of visibility through spectral aesthetics within a transnational frame. It explores the possibilities of bringing the body into contact with the technological and the image in a way that ruptures the static and immobilizing concept of visibility, offering new forms of knowledge, memory, and political relation. This new formation of screen culture imagines a relationship to the image thick with the workings of the past and the future, thick with the embodied knowledges of memory and the imaginary. *Sleep Dealer* imagines a new formation of a transnational screen and image culture in which the image is a terrain for memory and a trace of the past, as well as a space for the workings of the imaginary and its movements towards futurity. By offering a dystopic allegory, Rivera’s film envisions possibilities for resistance that come out of creative, experimental, and marginal relations to reductive social and political structures.
The changing relations to screen images and memory technologies have created new forms of social relation and communication that are not dependent upon the face to face contact of bodies in order to cultivate the sense of presence and the contact of relation. In *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant shows that oral culture was a fugitive and conspiratorial mode of surviving within the world of plantation slavery. As discussed in Chapter Three, while written language possessed the body, orality was of the body, it was the body in movement, it brought presence into the work of language, “The oral, on the other hand, is inseparable from the movement of the body. There the spoken is inscribed not only in the posture of the body that makes it possible…, but in the almost semaphoric signals through which the body implies or emphasizes what is said” (122). Orality was a mode of communication that spoke through the movements of the body and that was also visual. It cultivated presence and community in the shadow of alienated and immobility of slavery. The presence of oral communication has been traded for a different kind of presence: the spectral presence of our embodied memories in the digital image network. As the performances of Electronic Disturbance Theater have shown, these new, digital media cultures have very specific and innovative modes and aesthetics of engaging embodiment and cultivating sensible presence. These presences are spectral presences, ghosts in the machine, eliciting our senses of the unseen as a way of producing visibility. However, while engaging a politics of embodiment and relation via the digital it is important to consider the “digital divide,” or the stratifications of power and privilege.

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that determine access to the means of engaging these new digital environments. As María Fernández pointed out, digital utopianism and post-colonial studies have often been at odds, one disposing of the necessity of the body, while the other was unable to escape it. Yet, as *Sleep Dealer* helps us realize, transformational forms of screen culture are not about forgetting the body, but about bringing it into tender contact with the image. We must continue to question and experiment with how our changing culture of media objects, as they move more and more into the everyday via iPhones, GPS devices and so forth, enable an intimate continuum between the individual use and communal gesture. Spectral aesthetics are one mode of bringing opaque embodiments and their heterogeneous perception back into the milieu of media images, producing the visibility of social flesh.

*Sleep Dealer* ends with two final images of the digital network in which Rivera’s film theorizes the potentiality of new image cultures. The final scene is a kind of epilogue that situates the role of the image and digital image network within the context of transnationalism in Americanity, and the positive biopolitical movement towards futurity. Memo goes to the video-phone booths through which he calls his mother and brother in Oaxaca. His family is ecstatic at the freeing of the river. His brother leans in to take the camera out of the phone booth to show Memo the river flowing through and over the ruptured dam. As he leans in to take hold of the camera, his beaming face comes closer and closer until we are in close, tender relation to his expression, his hand reaching

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out for the camera. His movements with the camera tie us to him, and the camera in his brother’s hand becomes a bridge, a ligament, to another space and another body. The image and sound of the waterfall fills the screen, and suddenly the camera zooms in, bringing us closer and closer to the cascading water. The sequence cuts to an image of Memo in the phone booth, gazing happily at the waterfall, and then pulls back, situating Memo within the phone booth in a complete 180 degree panoramic image of the waterfall cascading all around him. The image is at once democratically indexical and contingent, an open resource to anyone with access to the technology, and it is encompassing, fully-surrounding Memo’s body, not just his vision. The image is a ligature drawing different spaces together, offering a space for envisioning the futurity that the freed water can bring them.

The final sequences places the theory of screen culture within the context of Americanity, which as Quijano and Wallerstein point out, has foregone historicity and invested in modernity as the site of liberation projects. In the final image the film brings together the historicity of indigenous farming practices with the digital memory network. After bidding Rudy goodbye at the bus stop, Memo realizes that Rudy can never go home, and that he, Memo, can’t either. But as he waxes on, “But maybe there’s a future here for me. On the edge of everything…” there is a montage of images of Memo carrying water to his small, urban, border town milpa. He continues, “A future with a past.” The image cuts to a close up of the seedlings in his milpa sprouting, which then pulls back to reveal that the image is actually on a computer screen, a memory Memo has uploaded onto True Node. He goes on, “If I connect…” as the True Node image changes
to a dense, dark image of the river in Tijuana. The image expands to fill the screen, changing to an image of Memo and Luz walking next to the river, and he finishes, “and fight.” The image dissolves into one of the milpa growing in the shadow of the border fence as it rains. A drone passes overhead. The final image is of the milpa glimmering on the transparent digital screen, aligning the sustenance of food with that of digital image cultures as two forms of the means of futurity. Futurity will not be found only in flights to modernity, but rather in reforming the ways in which we make collective memory and history. The future must have a past, and Memo has stayed to tell his stories, to offer a ground for imagination and formation of transnational relation through the digital image network. The fight goes on, in the shadow of the border fence and the gaze of the militarized, neoliberal control society. The image becomes the place where Memo carries on the fight, making a future, but a future with a past.

_Coda: On the ground and in the ether_

_As I finished writing an initial draft of this chapter I saw that Time Magazine had published a cover story on The Dreamers. I was struck by the simultaneity of it, that as I tried to unpack and envision a project that strove to both deconstruct the logic of visibility while also recuperating it in a different formation, the visionary and brave young, undocumented activists known as The Dreamers had attained the pinnacle of visibility in the US. Shortly after, I heard that President Obama has granted deportation protection to all undocumented young people between the ages of 15 and 30 (DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). While a victory, that having followed the Dreamers closely for the last year or so, I recognize and feel with a tightening of emotion_
in my throat, I also can’t help but wonder: but what about the others? What about those falling outside the visibility of these Time Magazine subjects and their upwardly mobile narrative? What about my uncle? What about the family across the street from me? Or the women I tutored? What about the many, many others who do not fit in the picture perfect image of the acclimatized, educated, English speaking, and upwardly mobile Dreamer? This attainment of visibility, that I can’t stress enough makes me feel a host of emotions of joy and excitement, also opens up the ambivalence of its logic.

As this attainment of visibility works towards offering the Dreamers access to the means of their futurity, it simultaneously has the capture function of visibility, of re-enforcing certain narratives of American-ness and race. After ignoring the Dreamers for years, President Obama makes this problematic, but conciliatory, announcement the summer of an election year. Moreover DACA is not a path to citizenship, but rather the granting of work permits that problematically echoes the bracero program of the 1950s and that only applies to a fraction of the people living precariously undocumented in this country. The visibility of these young faces becomes the insurance of political power, the consolidation of American, liberal politics and the re-articulation of the meritocracy of the American, immigrant narrative. Indeed, these images want to delimit “the law of what can be said” about American immigration policy and liberal, multicultural politics. Indeed, they want to “affirm the appearances” of the political regime in power (Debord 9).

Ironically, José Antonio Vargas, the face of the Time Magazine cover of the Dreamers, is a year or two shy to qualify for DACA. He lives in the U.S. to this day
without documents. We can’t ignore the absolute bravery it took for these young people to “come out” as undocumented and unafraid. To put themselves, despite the dangers, into a zone of hyper-visibility, to chain themselves in front of INS offices, and to occupy state congressional meetings on immigration, to stand up in a courtroom full of all the embodiments of the juridical and police apparatus and announce their undocumented status took fierce and oppositional courage. To publicly stand in solidarity with their comrades and their comrades’ families taken by ICE, became an enactment of the power of visibility. They refused invisibility and the paralyzing liminality it creates. Coming into the frame of the visible, while risky, was also their one means of futurity, of escaping the poverty of a present that closed them off from the means of their futurity: threatening them with deportation, limiting access to health care and social services, barring them from the right to vote, cutting them off from a college education, the support of their communities both here and there, and the privilege of getting to be who they are in all of their fullness and contradiction.

For these young people, owning their identity was not about identifying with a mythical past as it has partially been for me as a second generation, middle class, child of a Chicano father from Southern California. It was a means of futurity. By announcing their identities, they took a risk that they hoped would be a domino falling on the road to an attainment of rights and the means to invest in a future life and world for themselves and their communities. The DREAMers are activists, who living lives restricted to the liminality of spectrality, of presences being ‘told to disappear,’ have taken the risk of becoming visible as ‘undocumented and unafraid’ for themselves and for undocumented
folks all over the US. However, what strikes me as problematic about the Dreamers’ movement towards visibility is the way in which their articulation remains situated largely within a narrative of upward mobility, assimilation, and normalization, the narrative of “the American Dream,” that not only makes them legible within a certain framework of what counts as “American,” and therefore deserving of the rights to future-making and sustainability, but that it continues to reproduce that narrative of “becoming American.” This visibility is not about difference, or the relational movement of transnationalism, but rather of normalization and assimilation. Unlike the multitude of social flesh that is gestured towards in Rivera’s film, the Time Magazine cover makes visible only one experience of being undocumented that is available for legitimation.

Unlike the complicated and spectral visibility envisioned by Sleep Dealer, that brings the opacity and difference of body and memory into the frame as the foundation of difference, this visibility relies on the codes of racialization and model immigrant narratives. It continues to reinforce a certain distribution of the sensible that pointedly leaves out and unrecognizable a world of speaking, knowing, making, and living in difference. Sleep Dealer reminds us that it’s important to look to the margins of Dreamer visibility and image culture. What are the non-dominant images that thrive in difference, that rupture the codes of assimilation and question the “American Dream”? As poet, Yosimar Reyes, and artist, Julio Salgado, of the Dreamers Adrift collective say in their recent collaborative video, “The Legalities of Being”:

“I’m thinking about words like Dreamer and Illegal, language that is stagnant, language that in no way shape or form speaks about the complexity of being and
the connections that we all have as humans beyond borders and political systems. It is like telling people who you are while building fences and telling people: This is who I am, read the sign.”

Circulating through the channels of Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube, this video offers a critique of the narrowness of the dominant visibility the Dreamer movement and narratives of undocumented status. Instead they situate that identity within a complex milieu of multiple identities and registers of difference, multiple forms of being that constantly exceed the typologies we use to describe it. All the while they embed this visibility in a political vision that extends beyond paths to citizenship and assimilation, but instead towards a future of a world without borders.
Conclusion: The Futurity of Three Movements

In her book on the visual culture of the US-Mexico border, Clare F. Fox locates two main symbols of the once “invisible line” of the border: the fence and the river. The river, Fox pointed out, was always a polluted river, and represented pathogen and invasion at the border. The fence and the river both make iconic appearances in *Sleep Dealer*, but Rivera re-purposes the river as an icon of the creative potentials of transnationalism, re-investing it with the movement of migration and relation. Memo and Luz spend time at the Tijuana river sharing stories about their lives, investing in the politics of relation, to, as Luz puts it, bridge the distances between them. The river in Tijuana is a site of and the socio-political movement towards what Glissant understood as the creative potential of relation and cultural contact. However, there are two rivers in *Sleep Dealer*: there’s the Tijuana river flowing free through the border city, and there’s the dammed river of Santa Ana del Río.

The river in Tijuana expresses movement; both the movement towards futurity that so many migrants carry with them and the movement that “is a necessary premise for the free and purposeful exercise of creative and productive powers” (De Genova 39). But the river in Santa Ana del Río is dammed, its movement is halted, stagnant in the middle of the arid desert, and privatized to the point of military surveillance. This is not a river of futurity and the movement of social flesh; it is river of bare life, the cessation of movement. A life without the temporal thickness of memory and futurity is life reduced
to the stasis of bare life. Like the restriction of temporality and visuality in the bombing of Memo’s house to the pure present and totality of spectacle, privatization of water resources functions to a similar end of biopolitical reduction. Privatization and stagnation of the river works to limit the lives of the community of Santa Ana del Rio to that of a pure present, but a thin present devoid of the thickness of memory and futurity.

Before his father’s murder, Memo and his father trek to the dam to buy water for their milpa, a traditional corn and bean field. Memo, an amateur hacker, dreams of leaving Santa Ana del Rio, dismisses his father’s attachment to the traditions and land. As they water the milpa with the water they just purchased at the reservoir, Memo asks his father in frustration, “Why are we here?” His father then asks him a question, “Is our future a thing of the past?” Memo laughs at his father’s seeming logical inconsistency, saying, “Well no, that’s impossible.” His father goes on to explain that the river and the essential sustenance it provided to their milpa used to be their future, their own form of sustenance and livelihood. However, with the dam and the controlling of water access, their future is no longer available to them. Their future has become a thing of the past.

The association with temporality is not just a metaphor. As Memo’s father points out, the dam has cut off the family’s access to a future, to the kinds of self-sustenance

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1 A reduction of life to its biological facticity, rather than its political fullness, bare life has been theorized by Giorgio Agamben as the fundamental act of sovereignty within a biopolitical regime. According to Agamben, biopolitics is constituted by the management of biological life, taking the “animal” life of the subject as the locus for the deployment of political power. In his work, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 2004), Agamben discusses the reduction of the human subject to the biopolitical subject of pure, biological life as a reduction to animal life and unpacks the tenuous border constructed between the two. The border between the two hinges largely on the experience of temporality. In an unsettling description of the tick’s experience of temporality, Agamben distinguishes the human temporal experience from the animal’s. In the world constituting continuum between animal and environment, the tick is completely separated from its environment and left in sensory deprived stasis. The tick’s experience of temporality is aligned with the temporality of bare life, as life that lacks time and world, and is, rather, reduced to the static, perpetual, and empty present.
that would allow them to “extend life beyond themselves.” Memo’s family and the community of Santa Ana del Rio are reduced to surviving within a precarious present: rather than generating and accessing the means of thriving, of producing life for the future, they are left teetering on the edge of loss. They are de-mobilized in the movement towards their futurity, living in the imperative for survival within the moment. With the privatization of their water source, their future has indeed become a thing of the past. Which also in the same move, cuts them off from the knowledges and histories of their past, embodied in the figure of the milpa, a traditional cultivation method. In this reduction to pure, precarious present, a present made thin, without the thickness of the co-presence of future and past, the community of Santa Ana del Rio is reduced to a kind of immobilized bare life.

The figure of the dammed river in *Sleep Dealer* situates the film within the context of a neoliberal world order, in which the logic of the marketplace and power of the corporation rule the political, making water, the means of life, a commodifiable product rather than a common resource. *Sleep Dealer* makes visible the ways in which privatization functions to immobilize, both at the level of general life by cutting off access to water, food, and at the level of public memory. Both work to cut off access to

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2 I have borrowed the phrasing “to extend life beyond himself” from Mai’a Williams, quoted in an article on the role of mothering and childcare in the leftist movement in *Left Turn Magazine*. The complete quote is as follows: “‘No movement,’” says Mai’a, “‘on the Left (or the Right) is going to succeed without being mamacentric.’” Put another way, the radical Left has got to become adept at mothering, not only children, but ourselves and each other. Truthfully, it is not difficult for me to get my seven-year-old to march on the streets, wave picket signs, or understand the concept of property destruction. What has been difficult is teaching him to trust his voice. To know how to listen deeply and fight courageously. To build spaces where people can unfold their pain and heal. To commit to others for their own sakes and to stay with them when they break. To extend life beyond himself.” (quoted in Okia, Cynthia. “Moving the Movement: A Multigenerational Ideal of Revolutionary Work”. *Left Turn Magazine*. June 20, 2011. http://www.leftturn.org/towards-a-multigenerational-ideal)
means of making futurity. It is within this context that *Sleep Dealer* tries to imagine a culture and a politics of transnationalism and the image, because migration and our access to memory technologies are about movements towards futurity. The river illuminates the vital properties of movement, that is it the means and the expression of life and futurity. The river comes to embody the vital movement towards futurity that inheres within three kinds of movement in this dissertation: migrational movement, media’s movement of our bodies, and social justice movement work.

In this dissertation I have worked through projects, film and media, social justice, and theoretical projects, and the practice of migration, that have converged around a shared concern with movement and its constitutive role in the flesh of the social. The migrant footprints through the desert that the border patrol see through a racial epidermal schema in Chapter One echo the kinesthetic and transitive energies that Jordan Crandall and Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g.lab draw out of the military media technologies in their projects. These artists’ exploration of the role of movement with media as a practice making visible the transitivity of embodiments and migration allowed us to see the ways in which the racial epidermal schema and the “cultural seeing by skin color” is productive of captive social bodies at the U.S.-Mexico border (Spiller 67).

Susan Harbage Page’s photographs of found objects at the border similarly has an echo structure, like sound making its return journey, to the footprints in Chapter One. Her images record traces of migration at the border, which allow us to see the social flesh of migration without the capture effects of the racial epidermal schema. Instead, through the close-up, tactile optics of her images we are able to feel and encounter the textures of
migration. The textures of objects and the physicality of land that through their consistency and patterns make visible an overall texture of migration. The photographic apparatus, rather than making visible the capture and freezing of time, allow us to catch glimpses of movement, the social flesh of transnational movement.

Chapter Three explored the world in which that movement is stopped, like the dammed river in *Sleep Dealer*. *Children of Men*’s staging of a scenario of borderization and a culture of deportation showed the logic of capture manifest in a directly immobilizing way: detention, infertility, transit papers. But the film performs its own way over and through the border walls, striving towards movement through the use of sound. The diegetic sounds work to bridge the space of the film with the referential, global space of borderization, moving and traveling to and between spaces and bodies. The voices and sounds of mourning and screaming of flesh in the film participate in a particularly trans-American aesthetic of the inarticulate and pure sensoriality of voice giving expression to the ‘unspeakable’ racialized violences of Americanity. The sounds of these voices are the sounds of pure flesh, bringing movement to communication, locating it in the structure of oral discourse that is not trapped and possessed in language, but open and contingent in a situational body. Voice gives way to movement and “all that reaching for heaven” (Mackey 52).

In *Sleep Dealer* a closed border cannot stop the movement of social flesh as it takes the shape of human labor or social relation. Exploring the way in which the digital network allows for a violent importation of labor power through an immobilization of the body and the production of bare life, it also explores the ways in which it allows for the
knitting of social flesh, of memory, sensory encounter, affect, and other “vestibular” and relational tissues and textures to become visible (Spillers 67). It is through these technologies that the social flesh moves through borders, creates community, forges solidarity, and attains the movement of transitive becoming. It is through these technologies and media spheres that we sustain the movement of social flesh, that we glimpse it and become it. Media makes for movement.

The movement of flesh that these media projects allow us to see in different ways shares the same echoing structure with the immigrant and border justice projects within social justice movements. How is the movement of social flesh the same as the movements towards social justice? The Dreamers and their various affiliates and splinters are struggling towards a futurity that would release them from the precarious present of undocumented status. Their work seeks to carve out pathways to citizenship so that they may carve out pathways towards their futures and self-realization. When thinking about The Dreamers and the post-2006 U.S. undocumented immigrant movement in general, a most basic site for thinking about the suspension and precarity of undocumented status is the debate around driving licenses, a quite literal and seemingly banal mode of movement. Not having access to a driver’s license directly limits that ways in which undocumented folks are able to move through space, safely, without fear. Lacking documents directly impinges on the movement of people. Struggles to attain driving privileges for DACA recipients has been seen as an important step towards mitigating that impingement, and DACA itself is one small step towards freedom of movement for all. Meanwhile the civil disobedience actions of the Not1More/Ni1Más campaign has
brought important visibility to the crisis of incarceration and deportation of undocumented immigrants. By focusing on the immobilization and capture of migrants within privatized detention centers this campaign has gestured towards and moved towards a shift in the rhetoric of immigration reform. No longer is reform or DACA enough, we demand a halt to deportations. We demand a halt to capture, immobilization, and punitive movement.

Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse* that modernity’s privilege of writing has “possessed” and immobilized the body (123). Voice, Glissant thought, brought the movements of the body into the spaces and times of communication and language, and he privileged orality as the medium of solidarity and community over writing, which individualized and separated. The work of CogNate Collective’s Border Blaster project mobilizes radio broadcast as a form of transnationalizing sound, allowing it to cross borders, to bring the sounds and affectations of the body into other spaces. Through the radio frequencies they enabled the contact and presence of oral culture that meanwhile addressed the regimes of separation enforced by the U.S.-Mexico border in Tijuana and San Ysidrio. Using voice to facilitate conversation, to record, archive, and perform stories of undocumented border crossing and life on the border, to scream, shout, moan, and sing their “declarations” at the border, these broadcasts aimed to inspire and engagement a movement towards justice in a site predicated on the immobilization of bodies. Voice is means of a movement, it moves through a border wall, and emanates from a moving, present body. And these stories and interventions the artists show us, are important to our movements for social justice on the border.
Meanwhile, No More Deaths/No Más Muertes daily confronts the consequences of the human will to movement within a space weaponized to prevent it. Miles upon miles of vertiginous migrant trails and seemingly impassable ranch roads are covered every day in an effort to save life and to combat the effects of a racist political structure that would abandon it. The humanitarian aid organization, leaving food and water on trails and providing medical aid and hospitality, responds to the production of bare life at the border through a life-affirming camp, a reversal of the logic of the Agambean camp. They respond to movement at the border with a combination of movement and stillness. Yet, their project is one of life saving intervention, not base building. In the textures of the micropractices of valuing all human life, through the bandaged feet and dehydration and water drops, their work imagines a future of a world without borders. And in the relationships organizers and volunteers form between each other they imagine a culture built on solidarity not solitude. But their work is response, intervention, reaction; it is not yet a matter of building a base, long-term strategy, or moving towards futurity, but rather staying here in this moment, in this camp, in a state of emergency. As one of their posters says, “de aquí no podemos salir.” And it’s true, they cannot leave, not when people are still dying. But how do you imagine futurity when you’re striving just for survival?

But leave is exactly what Undocubus did. Leaving, moving from one city to the next, building a base and a network of undocumented folks across the U.S. as they go. Their bus took them from Phoenix, Arizona to Charolotte, North Carolina to participate in the Democratic National Convention. As folks left out of the political process with direct bearing on their lives and bodies these activists and organizers innovated a new
way to become part of the political process by becoming visible, by taking on a spectral visibility of movement. They envisioned and participated in a movement of undocumented folks and their allies through the act of movement, knitting together a spectral, affective, network of undocumented people, realizing that a single visible person is either invisible or dangerously visible. But a collective visibility that made visible the social flesh of undocumented folks striving for movement… That could be powerful.

The concern with movement within each of these activist projects demonstrates the way in which relational organizing, the simple practice of building relationship within and among movement work, is the practice of futurity. These are the tissues that make up social flesh, the connections, the networks of bodies, vitalities, and relationship that make up the mass of a movement. It is not in the single bodies and their visibilities, but the visibility of a network, a flesh, a conglomerate; that may not always be in unity or singleness of vision, but it is always connected. Social flesh is not static, not captured in the typology of a single racialized body, but rather in a constant state of change and transitivity. Spectral aesthetics allow this flesh to be seen, to become visible. Instead of focusing on the visibility of a single body, spectral aesthetics allow us to see the vitality of movement, the textures of migration, the affective density of the sounds of mourning, the variegation of a multitude’s memories. Social flesh’s visibility entails spectral aesthetics, entails the morph and movement of irreducible sensorial experiences colliding with and coiling over the visibility of the image. The image might yet be a site where we can see the border and migration differently, where we see the movement of social flesh and form the flesh of relation.
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**Filmography**


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268


Figure 1: Heatseeking, Jordan Crandall, 2000.
Figure 2: Transborder Immigrant Tool, “Transition,” The Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g.lab, 2009.
Figure 3: Impression in the Grass, Susan Harbage Page, The U.S.-Mexico Border Project, 2007-ongoing.
Figure 4: Argyle Sock, Susan Harbage Page, The U.S.-Mexico Border Project, 2007-ongoing.
Figure 5: T-Shirt in the Grass, Susan Harbage Page, The U.S.-Mexico Border Project, 2007-ongoing.
Figure 6: Blue Fabric Scraps, Susan Harbage Page, The U.S.-Mexico Border Project, 2007-ongoing.
Figure 7: *Children of Men*, Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, 2006
Figure 8: Skin of True Node, *Sleep Dealer*, Directed by Alex Rivera 2008
Figure 9: Digital Flesh, *Sleep Dealer*, Directed by Alex Rivera 2008.
Biography

China R. Medel was born May 29, 1980 and raised in Pocatello, Idaho. She attended Idaho State University from 1998-2001. She completed her bachelor’s degree at Portland State University in 2006. She received the Bass Research Fellowship in 2012 and the Women’s Studies Dissertation Fellowship in 2013. She lives in Durham, North Carolina.