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Global Mexico's Coproduction: *Babel*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Children of Men*

AMY SARA CARROLL

Since 1994, relationships among the local, the national, and the global in Mexico have undergone substantial transformation. Spurred on by the incremental implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), what many have christened a “postborder” or “post-Mexico” enjambed “timespace” might be better understood as a multi-regional predicament of a period of later (versus late) capitalism.¹ Outside the purview of the postmodern, within the zeitgeist of a socioeconomic restructuring known colloquially in Latin America as “savage neoliberalism,” the seemingly paradoxical category of global Mexicanidad emerges as a new structure of feeling, worthy of exploration.² This essay offers preliminary notes on the latter “coproduction” by way of several close readings of cinematic texts, themselves comprehensible as international coproductions in the more usual sense of that term.

In “Transnational Cinema and the Mexican State in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Y tu mamá también*,” Hester Baer and Ryan Long provide an historical overview of Mexican national-becoming-transnational cinema, identifying *Y tu mamá también* as exemplary of a globalized hybrid work that nevertheless bears the traces of a transitional Mexicanidad.³ Privileging the coincidences of *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu), *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro), and *Children of Men's* (Alfonso Cuarón) 2006 release date and status as undertakings of Mexican directors, I build upon Baer and Long’s observations to search for evidence of what might be shorthand as a post-NAFTA era induced aesthetic, albeit via an idiosyncratic methodology.⁴ Namely, I harbor no pretense of following the money, of tracking the complex, collaborative financing of each film’s production and distribution along the lines of many inquiries into the coproduction as a socioeconomic phenomenon. Rather, gauging the tension that mediates the distance between the receding horizons of national cinema and

the internationally financed coproduction, between the sovereign state and a Mexican decidedly transnational imaginary in neoliberal transition, I embrace an amplification of the conceit of “coproduction” to conceive the category as symptomatic of, and at times challenging, neoliberalism as philosophy and policy.

I simultaneously interrogate conceptualizations of contemporary aesthetic practice like those of Nicholas Bourriard that privilege postproduction.⁵ Pushing the boundaries of Teresa Hoefert de Turégano’s formulation of the international coproduction as “participat[ing] in the narration of identity at a global level [as representing] a means for individuals to situate their own identities and map themselves in a new cultural space,” I approach the coproduction as situating a flexibly accumulating collective unconscious, versus individual consciousness.⁶ More particularly, I consider this political and aesthetic unconscious through the allegorically-driven “secret history of gender” encapsulated in the three aforementioned films’ pedestaling of the archetypal figure of the child—be s/he missing, heterotopic, or messianic (all potentially revolutionary).⁷ Coupling this thematic reading with formal exegesis, I tag monumental white femininity bound to imperial melancholia in *Babel*, further accentuated in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, by way of the false binary of representation and the social real. And, I diagram how the kinship of monumental white femininity and imperial melancholia in *Children of Men*, contrasts sharply with complimentary “peripheral visions,” including those of an archetypal Mexican mestizaje writ global. In conclusion, my close readings of *Babel*, *Pan’s Labyrinth*, and *Children of Men*, like the pieces of González Iñárritu’s efforts, interlock to queer my final reflections on coproduction as a “cultural logic” of both neoliberal and alter-globalizations.⁸

Babel

González Iñárritu’s oeuvre to date yields any moment in time up as a coproduction. *Babel*, like *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams*, relies upon the random and violent intersection of individuals’ lives.⁹ If the gritty *Amores Perros*, set in Mexico City in predominantly chilango Spanish, pools around the event of a car crash, while *21 Grams* in English falls back on an eerily translated accident to demonstrate its characters’ interdependence and to pose the poetic, yet deceptively simple, question of whether a soul has weight, *Babel* presents a transhemispheric, multilingual relationality which relinquishes neither González Iñárritu’s dirty realism—his formal debts to a handheld documentary aesthetic—nor his Mexican coordinates of reference.

Against *Babel*’s panorama, *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams* seemingly represent González Iñárritu’s nascent attempts to develop a theory of capital’s relativity. Reviewers dubbed *Babel* the story of a gun; but, such a sound-bite does not do the film justice. *Babel* expands upon the triangulating or coproductive narrative structure of González Iñárritu’s prior efforts. Set in Morocco, Japan, and on the Mexico/U.S.

border, *Babel* displays all the special affects of classic tragedy, grappling with a dystopic vision of connection that finds the global North's fingerprints on four distinct, but interlocking, portraits of inequality and alienation. In its literal and symbolic economies, the archetypal "ugly American" in Morocco is bound to Moroccan children, including one who accidentally shoots her, while the undocumented worker from Mexico in the U.S., who cares for that tourist's progeny, feels the detrimental effects of both the border and the shot, which hits her employer, that's heard 'round the world. Still, as my plot summary suggests, and as soon becomes apparent visually in this film, the central figure in the storyline remains the phenotypically white woman. Moreover, affectively, her loss sutures *Babel's* plot to those of *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams*.

One could describe this tie that binds the films—content-wise and formally—in terms that emphasize *Amores Perros's* central chapter which addresses the romance of the Spanish model Valeria (Goya Toledo) and her Mexican lover Daniel (Álvaro Guerrero). Valeria is confined after the film's car crash to the apartment Daniel has purchased for her in Mexico City. There, she loses Richi, her lapdog, and eventually falls into a deep depression, which viewers are led to presume results in the amputation of her limb. What Paul Julian Smith has pointed out, however, is the omission in the story's own translation from script to film.¹⁰ In the latter, Valeria is attempting to recover from the loss of hers and Daniel's child, from her decision to terminate the pregnancy in light of the fact that Daniel is married to someone else.

In other words, Valeria's self-engrossment in *Amores Perros's* second chapter exceeds her preoccupation with her marred body or her pet's disappearance. Indeed, each of those losses stand in for another that behaves like a meta-phantom limb, which, Valeria, and by extension, *Amores Perros*, cannot name. *21 Grams* does a better job of revealing archetypal white femininity's melancholia—after all, viewers witness the before-and-after of Cristina's (Naomi Watts) loss of her husband and children; although interestingly enough, as Jonathan Romney notes, "the film's central event, the crash itself is never seen, only signaled."¹¹ Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that *Babel* likewise depends upon a white woman's melancholic inability to accept the loss of a child.

Babel's level of circumstantial disclosure hovers somewhere between that of *Amores Perros* and that of *21 Grams*. Viewers know something besides landscape impels Susan (Cate Blanchett) and her husband, Richard (Brad Pitt), to sight-see Morocco. Susan's blanched almond whiteness threatens to eclipse the screen as she asks, "What are we doing here?" Her petty resignation for a regular versus diet Coke in this exchange both becomes and exceeds larger existential questions about neocolonial entitlement. Additionally, there's more to meet the eye in *Babel's* travel narrative—a technique that the viewer can track backwards. Formally, Rodrigo Prieto, the director of photography for all three films, turns up the glare in *Babel's* Moroccan middle. Using what's known as a bypass or skip-bleach method or its digital equivalent to search for "a very specific grain structure," Prieto brushes the

film's grain up against the scenario's contents, blinding spectators with a literalization of the allegorical figuration of white femininity's melancholia, itself a kind of stand-in for distances between haves and have nots.¹²

Figure 1. Film capture from *Babel* (2006)



In his treatment of *Amores Perros*, Smith also considers Prieto's fixation on the skip-bleach process, quoting Prieto: "The contrast in general is enhanced with skip-bleach, but so is the contrast of the grain . . . [The process] desaturates certain hues and colours, such as skin tones, but the reds and blues [are] even enhance[d] . . . We wanted the film to feel realistic, but with an edge. We were after the power of imperfection [and wanted to] use 'mistakes' to enhance the urgency and unpredictability of life in a place like Mexico City."¹³ In turn, Smith underscores the connection between skip-bleaching and white femininity in his own "skip-bleaching" of *Amores Perros*'s plot, not making a connection between the literal process and his observations that Valeria's face was "bleached white by the light."¹⁴

We, on the other hand, could contend that in the triptych of films directed by González Iñárritu, the documentary or realist effects of various skipped bleach methods overdetermine the projects' distinct fixations on archetypal white femininity's relationship to children as vanishing multi-mediators. Exaggeration in *Babel*, at the very least, is echolalic. Susan's loss shape-shifts into something else, which bears a striking resemblance to British colonialisms' and the U.S. South's "burden of the white woman."¹⁵ Shot in the shoulder, a victim of cascading

circumstance, Susan, languishes in a Moroccan village, begging Richard to remain by her side. The pair suffers abandonment at the hands of their fellow travelers—who, restless to continue, cannot tolerate the “inconvenience” of waiting for either the death or the rescue of iconic white femininity. As such, the stock characters of Susan and Richard are transformed into two-tiered survivors and victims in light of their peers’ “survival of the fittest” mentality toward intersections of the public and the private, contemporary tourism (a revamped “Grand Tour”) and history.

Meanwhile, tragedy proves once again to function best as a ripple affect qua effect. As the U.S. government cries terrorism, viewers find themselves cognizant of having witnessed two young brothers, Yussef (Boubker Ait Al Caid) and Ahmed (Said Tarchani), morph a game of target practice into an international incident. Trying to fill the existential and literal shoes of masculinity, Yussef and Ahmed inadvertently bring down the weight of the police-state on the heads of their family and community. Moroccan officials, desperate to stave off the U.S.’s wrath, corner the brothers and their father in a shoot-out. Yussef remains resistant, firing back at police volleys until Ahmed is shot dead. Then, as Susan glows luminescent as phosphorous in a quintessentially all-American happy ending—her arrival in an urban Moroccan hospital where it’s announced that she’ll recover completely—viewers are deprived of a comparable level of narrative resolution, forced instead to grapple with the magnitude of the tragically “anonymous,” that which pools around *Babel*’s ironic rescue-and-recovery mission of white femininity: (1) the surrender of Yussef to Moroccan authorities, his profession of his brother’s innocence and plea for the latter’s impossible resurrection, (2) the plight of Amelia (Adriana Barraza), a border-crossed care-giver, and (3) the deafening alienation of Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi), a Japanese teenager.

One could argue Morocco and Japan add global dimensions to the otherwise local tragedy of Mexican-U.S. border politics, itself a stand-in for Mexico’s location, in *Babel* (a formula, which, while perhaps present in *Pan’s Labyrinth* and *Children of Men*, is not rehearsed in such explicit terms). In such an analytic universe, *Babel*’s conclusion orchestrates the U.S.-Mexico border’s post-haste reinforcement, highlighting the paradoxically transitional category of the so-called “postborder” in relation to globalized cultures of violence. After caring for her employers’ children at the expense of nearly missing her own son’s wedding while her employers inadvertently explore both sides of the global North’s safety net, Amelia unceremoniously is ejected out of San Diego, returned to Tijuana’s curb in a reenactment of the border’s perennial inscription. More specifically, Amelia’s angry, felonious nephew, Santiago (Gael García Bernal), recklessly abandons her and the children in the desert in an attempt to outrun the U.S. border patrol. When Santiago does not return for them at daybreak as promised, Amelia sets out to save the children, but finds herself detained instead. Her pleas for news of her wards fall on perhaps predictably deaf ears. Yet, by the time viewers recognize Amelia’s plight, the border’s reinscription is assigned a deeper legibility, resonating as the

indistinguishable cause-or-consequence of grander New World borderizations—parallel universes—relentlessly tracked in and through *Babel*'s focal ranges, made intelligible against the paradigmatic backdrop of the Mexico-U.S. border.

Closing in on borders and panning back on global civil society, *Babel*'s camera itself roams as restless as Susan and Richard's traveling companions, trying to wrest sense out of the senseless, but also establishing the shot of the film's primary audience as that of the global North, if not that of the haves versus the have-nots. Exemplary of this scansion, Chieko, the daughter of the infamous gun's previous owner, filters *Babel*'s international incident through the lens of her mother's recent suicide, both refusing a privileging of Mexico as Border and literalizing deafness as a sensibility of the moneyed and intellectually elite.

Figure 2. Film capture from *Babel* (2006)



At first glance, her story wafts an effervescent Orientalism, where even the rebellious Asian woman is best understood as deaf and dumb, in stark contrast to archetypal languishing white femininity, aggressively passive in its domination of the screen. Alternately, though, her narrative's signing signage is infused with the phermonic scent of the join of an adolescent longing for touch and the unfulfilled, but insatiable wish for post-_____ (fill-in-the-blank) trauma-sex. Seemingly desperate in her quest for socio-sexual initiation, Chieko acts as a parallel figure to the general viewer of both *Babel* and González Iñárritu's contribution to *11'09''01 – September 11*.¹⁶ Consisting of an almost blank screen (equally bleached out) with the

looping background sound of 9/11 media coverage, that short piece by González Iñárritu literalizes loss as the loss of sense—in this crisis (of representation), the visual (with the exception of momentary flashes of a falling, failing vision, the now equally iconic figure of a person, plummeting from one of the twin towers). Yet, as the slippage between the daughter and viewer in my argument regarding González Iñárritu’s political, if not aesthetic, unconscious makes apparent, the figure of Chieko bespeaks the more general question of inheritance or legacy, which González Iñárritu globally prioritizes in *Babel*’s contrasting articulations of post-traumatic twenty-first century childhood.

Figure 3. Film capture from *Babel* (2006)



Dispelling the myth of the sovereign subject in favor of performative cause-and-effect, González Iñárritu creates hyperlinked portraits of site-specific precarity—a coproduction—that focuses specifically upon “the children of men.” His is a Greek-chorus which both earmarks intersubjectivity and draws attention to the collateral damage of disaster capitalism’s planetary civil “War on Terror.” *Babel* presents a meta-triangulation, an expansion of González Iñárritu’s prior “affective mapping,” the third globalizing installation in a triptych, which skip-bleaches femininity to juxtapose it with children as living and dead, as potentially revolutionary—certainly coproductive—antidotes to the anesthetic affects of neoliberal globalization.¹⁷

Pan's Labyrinth

El laberinto del fauno/Pan's Labyrinth, Mexican writer/producer/director del Toro's three Oscar award-winning film, is both more explicit than *Babel* in its attentions to the figure of the child and less explicit in its formulations of a cascading theory of coproduction for and of the twenty-first century. Instead, opting for a post-national allegorical template, *Pan's Labyrinth* depicts childhood as the privileged site of phantasmatic and fantastic agency against the backdrop of an equally fantastic and phantasmatic fascist Spain.

Set in 1944, in a rural military outpost, *Pan's Labyrinth* opens with a literalization of what Ackbar Abbas, pace Freud, has termed cinematic "reverse hallucination"—here comprehensible as the aforementioned loss of the visual, reworked as the loss of the embodiment of the fantastic—the child as revolutionary potential.¹⁸ Ofelia's (Ivana Baquero) demise drives the film's "feeling backward"¹⁹ diegesis wherein the hour of the child's death becomes the disjunctive temporality of *Pan's Labyrinth* in its entirety, the happy ending the film extends and retracts against history as its audiences' reality check. In the narrative folds between the film's formally twinned opening and close, a climax, the viewer learns that its preadolescent protagonist, in response to the pregnant paralysis of her mother Carmen (Ariadna Gil) and the quotidian brutality of her stepfather Vidal (Sergi López), a Spanish captain in the nationalist army, retreats into, and distinguishes between, good and evil through the medium of the fairy tale. Her retreat flags the film's allegorical ambitions—depicted formally and thematically—its parallel, yet criss-crossed, tracks of representation and the social real.

Figure 4. Film capture from *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006)



The viewer is drawn into Ofelia's wondrous, yet ambiguous, interactions with the non-human figure of the faun (Doug Jones), who, recognizing her as the reincarnation of Princess Moanna, sets before her three tasks.²⁰ While these tasks are designed to aid Ofelia in navigating an ancient labyrinth on the grounds of her new home to secure her return to her father's underworld, her negotiation of them occurs contemporaneously with her growing consciousness of Vidal's—arguably more “socially dramatic”—breaks with reality. In tandem, Ofelia's compliance to the faun's demands facilitates her development of an intuitive politics of resistance that parallels the film's broader post-national allegorical claims for coproduction. Or is it the reverse? As Carmen's pregnancy-related health complications worsen, Ofelia is triangulated between her mother and stepfather (who counsels his physician to save his “son” if faced with a choice between the mother and the unborn). Ofelia, however, is also triangulated between two iterations of white femininity's melancholia insofar as she discovers that the housekeeper Mercedes (Maribel Verdú) secretly is aiding a pocket of the Spanish resistance.

The tracks of these narratives irrevocably collide, but the terms of that collision—an implosion of plot—are meditated by more minor temporal overlaps, which formally augment possible allegorical interpretations of the film's thematic contents. Chiefly, the parallel universes of fantasy and the social real in the film appear color-coded vis-à-vis elaborate recourse to other instantiations of bleach bypass technique. Skip-bleaching seemingly gives *Pan's Labyrinth's* fantastical opening-closing double-vision its “spooky blue,” while also facilitating its reddened ellipses. For instance, Ofelia and Mercedes are awash in the colors blue and green. In contrast, *Pan's Labyrinth* extends and retracts the color red as corresponding to the “social real,” a narrative that one might infer concedes that Ofelia died in order for her infant brother to live (the blood baroquely flowing backwards into Ofelia's wound). As if to flag via varying hues an affective range to rival *Babel's*, Vidal is bathed in red—an aesthetics of fascism (noticeable, e.g., in the scene in which he stitches his gaping face closed).²¹ Still, as surely as the centrifugal force of this color-coded division of diegetic labor establishes itself, it cannot hold. The film's color assignments mix; *Pan's Labyrinth's* chromatic indecision is true only to its thematic contents.

One of a threesome, the “middle child,” following *El espinazo del diablo/The Devil's Backbone* but preceding 3993 (del Toro's still unrealized film, also featuring children in fascist Spain), formally *Pan's Labyrinth* also alludes to a tradition of Spanish cinema identified by Marsha Kinder in her essay “The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema” and refutes that site-specificity of the national.²² Imbedded references to Kinder's archive in *Pan's Labyrinth* function something like James Whale's cinematic rendition of *Frankenstein* in *El Espiritu de la Colmena* (a film which del Toro incidentally cites as personally influential).²³ In a manner that reinforces the intricate contradictions of *Pan's Labyrinth's* color palette, Ofelia, the ghostly progeny of Kinder's archetypal child of Franco's Spain, formally enjoins audiences to split the

screen of representation and the social real in the service of imagining other endings for fascism both within and beyond those of her immediate surroundings. Moreover, if Vidal remains beholden to the stopped hour of his father's death, the equally fatherless Ofelia functions as both the Spanish archetypal child and the orphan of del Toro's overarching "reverse shot." Hers is another queer childhood which quickens the question: what does it mean for a Mexican director to return to the scene of fascist Spain at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

In "Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal," Lauren Berlant posits that the category of the "child" is as volatile as that of the citizen or worker.²⁴ She platforms her argument in the analysis of two, pre-9/11 Belgian films *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*, whose child-protagonists grapple with their inheritance of fantasy, specifically the fantasy of the good life and "the conditions under which [that] fantasy takes the most conservative shape on the bottom of so many class structures."²⁵ Berlant argues that it is crucial to consider the articulation of children and neoliberalism in the academy, to contemplate "the political and affective economies of normativity."²⁶ Berlant tracks her films' protagonists as they wander through the thickets of their parents' outmoded fantasies, no longer seeking upward mobility, but the ghostly remains of such a longing. While Berlant's argument is compelling, there is an underbelly to her assertions about fantasy's downsizing that unnecessarily forecloses the Otherworldly possibilities of the fantastic's revolutionary remnants, scattered as the shards of allegory. Berlant's archive cannot account for what Fredric Jameson and José Esteban Muñoz respectively term the "anti-anti-utopian."²⁷

Contretemps, *Pan's Labyrinth* does not blink as it enters the belly of the beast of the political, of the economic, in search of the deep folds of queer temporality that enable "a backward glance that enacts a future vision."²⁸ Ofelia, unlike Berlant's adopted *Rosetta*, reigns unaware of fantasy's vincibility. Countering Carmen's admonition that she will outgrow her fairy tales, her quixotic quest, an affective politics, if not aesthetics, does and does not fulfill a viewerly wish. On the threshold of transition, not yet struck deaf and dumb, Ofelia has not come to any foregone conclusions about the incompatibility of fantasy and lifeworlds.²⁹ For this, she is an Other archetype—both heartbreaking and loveable—functioning as an uncanny anachronism, as the performative embodiment of heterotopia. Ofelia in *Pan's Labyrinth* becomes a both/and, a volatile child who recognizes, but refuses to be hailed into the archetypal melancholia of the patriarchal state or its stalwart companion, archetypal white femininity. Possessed not of a child's nostalgia for a prior generation's "outmoded fantasies" per Berlant, but of a nostalgia for the fantastic, she facilitates viewers' identification with *Pan's Labyrinth's* more modest dissidents—the so-called "weaker sex," women/children, who wield the literal and symbolic "weapons of the weak" from inside fascism's barracks—Ofelia proper, Mercedes with her paring knife that rewrites Vidal's visage with a Glasgow smile. Out of time—both "untimely" and without time—Ofelia, and to a lesser extent Mercedes, infuse the film with a politicized nostalgia for nostalgia itself (recognizable

once again in *Children of Men*'s “weak messianic” resurrection of 1968) that distinguishes its archetypal protagonists from those who populate Berlant's archive.

Figure 5. Film capture from *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006)



Pan's Labyrinth reconfigures allegory's constitutive violence as the point from which the twenty-first century revisits the corpus of a Spanish resistance. Like *Kinder's* archive, *Pan's Labyrinth* relies upon its publics' own fantastic memories of the temporal liminality of childhood as a “queer time and place,” but it also mobilizes another temporal borderlands—the brief window in time before a Spanish anarchism was betrayed.³⁰ Del Toro taps into the complications of the combined Allied and communist failure to come to the aid of the Spanish, a haunting double negative, which anchors the affective caches of *Pan's Labyrinth*. Allegorically enjoining audiences to weigh the unbearable wait of the present on this and other pasts, del Toro presents Spain as one of the twentieth century's childhood object lessons on (international) object relations. In so doing, he implicitly projects onto the wall of the present the contours of a pre/PRI “postborder Mexico,” which, in parting its borders for Spanish exiles, reconfigured its location to both the revolutionary and the global.

Concomitantly, del Toro indexes more recent Spanish cultural and economic coproductions in the realm of cinema from the 1990s to the present. If Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo independently apprehend the figure of Luisa (Maribel Verdú) in *Y tu mamá también* as “mamá España,” *Pan's Labyrinth's* treacherous child-parent transference relationships in which Verdú is recast as Mercedes are not satiated by and with the simplicity of disavowal, the too well-rehearsed dismissal of (Mexican) national allegory or national cinema.³¹ Instead, del Toro's creation becomes an experiment in transnational transference of the order of Abbas's observations on “reverse hallucination,” his insistence that “stories about

Hong Kong always turn into stories about somewhere else.”³² In *Pan’s Labyrinth*, Spain’s (Old/New Worldly/New World Borderly) archetypal white femininity, embodied in the stark opposition of Mercedes and Carmen, set against archetypal childhood, casts the allegorical shadow of a *longue durée*, enabling the film’s viewers to see through the eyes of a global Mexico, itself a remapping of literal and imaginary geographies.

Figure 6. Film capture from *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006)



No one character in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, however, corresponds to a figure of some allegorically national project—be it that of Spain or Mexico. In del Toro’s multiverse, the fragmented allegorical resides in “acts of transfer” and transference, in a comparably archetypal reverse hallucination which privileges the “failing better” revolutionary child’s forgiveness of a free-floating parental, developmentally bound to the binary logic of representation and the social real.³³ *Pan’s Labyrinth* falls back through the portals of fantasy’s mobilizations in the service of parallel universes. In and through the film’s productive ambivalences, “national allegory” or the ghost of Jameson’s tattered argument—if one could even call it that—becomes less an archetype, more an exercise in “post-” scripting cognitive dissidence.³⁴ On the one hand, *Pan’s Labyrinth* justifies Ofelia’s death as a rite and right of passage into what might be apprehended as the film’s overarching “dark conceit,” a reverse hallucination of allegory as ruin.³⁵ On the other hand, the film presents Ofelia’s pact with the faun as containing within itself a potentially revolutionary unconscious both outside and inside of state-sanctioned cultures of violence—the fantasy of a collectively better life—a queer *thanatos* or self-sacrificing drive that exceeds the

singularities of the child, of (white) femininity, and of the binary logics of center/periphery, representation/the social real, North/South, national/coproduced cinema.

Children of Men

Lee Edelman’s provocatively performative harangue against the Child, a foil for hetero-futurity, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* is mediated at multiple junctures by his readings of P. D. James’s *The Children of Men*.³⁶ Edelman points out the “secular theology” of that novel in the service of an argument against the hegemony of the repro-narrative, against the Child as anything but volatile. Cuarón has another lock to pick with James’s speculative fiction, one that does not forget Muñoz’s response to Edelman that, “It is important not to hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity.”³⁷ If *Pan’s Labyrinth* pins fantasy’s revolutionary prospects to a more malleable, if not more volatile, figure of the child than those which inhabit Berlant’s and Kinder’s archives, Cuarón’s *Children of Men*, set in Britain, in English, removing the royal “The” of James’s title, radically racializes the novel’s dystopia to present reproduction as more closely akin to coproduction as a cooperative political imperative.

Figure 7. Film capture from *Children of Men* (2006)



Cuarón's adaptation demands that we acknowledge a racialized and sexualized Woman-Child dyad, indexing the director's speculative "Mexicanization" of James's already speculative fiction, his "cosmic" theses on shared political desire, post-1968. Laying bare the aesthetics of both allegory and a boiler plate neoliberal globalization, Cuarón in *Children of Men*, like del Toro in *Pan's Labyrinth*, details a self-sacrificing drive, although the latter film buries all references to the parallel tracks of representation and the social real in a conversion narrative that underscores the work of art in the age of coproduction. Like *Babel*, *Children of Men* presents a dirty realism, performing the look of *cinéma vérité*, the trace of the hand-held documentary. Like *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Babel*, the film resorts to a bypass bleach method, most obvious in its treatment of white imperial melancholia as a museum in (and of) ruins.

Opening with the freak death of the last child born eighteen years prior, Cuarón's adaptation is set in the year 2027 when the human race has become collectively infertile. While some might argue that James's original text contained the seeds of a critique of isolationist, inherently racist and classist, nationalism (white=right), Cuarón amplifies the contrast between haves and have nots, also skip-bleaching portions of the work to foreground its peripheral visions. Tied to this process, his *Children of Men* offers "frames of war"—environmental and social decay, class conflict; tableaux vivants of anti-immigration, bickering amidst a divided resistance, whereas Slavoj Žižek, seemingly impervious to the film's color contrasts, comments, "the true focus of the film is in the background."³⁸

Into this formal economy *Children of Men* thrusts its reluctant protagonist, Theo Faron (Clive Owen), a disillusioned drunkard, who is unable to stomach the limitations of the Left, the dissolution of his marriage, and the death of his child. When Theo is kidnapped by his ex-wife Julian (Julianne Moore) in the name of resistance, he becomes caught in the undertow of her messianic project, re-cast as half of a white couple saving a brown woman.³⁹ Julian exacts a promise of Theo that he will not abandon Kee (Claire-Hope Ashitey), the film's "new-ethnicities" Madonna/Mary Magdalene.⁴⁰ After Julian is assassinated brutally and immediately following Theo and her bald public rehearsal of nostalgia, Theo begins a process of grief-sublimation-becoming-coproduction to which he only will submit completely after his twofold realization of Kee's pregnancy and her precarious position as the pawn of a splintered-off faction of the resistance. One of a series of surrogate parents, Roachian "surrogates" for humanity, Theo pledges to shepherd Kee out of the disintegrating First World (a global North which cannot staunch the aforementioned bleed of its foreground and backgrounds).⁴¹ But to do so he must rely upon several horizontal collaborators, who embody an even more modest range of resistance to state cultures of terror than those presented in *Pan's Labyrinth*—a transferentially-minded midwife, a poaching detention camp guard, wizened strangers whose reverence for children takes precedence over profit.

Figure 8. Film capture from *Children of Men* (2006)



If the so-called “Spanish Question” of *Pan’s Labyrinth* indicts the inaction of an international socialism as well as that of the Allies, in Žižek’s estimation, contemporary civil society, including the remnants of a 1968 Leftism, is up for interrogation in *Children of Men*. Žižek ridicules Jaspar (Michael Caine), Julian’s aging hippie father, terming him clownishly impotent in his dancing-bear offers of pot and bunker-like utopian separatism. We might, however, ponder the possibilities of a more generous reading of this character. After all it is Jaspar who both affords viewers their first glimpse of hospitality and elicits from them comparable levels of hospitable interpretation. Transforming surface-impotence into a fantastic agency for all intents and purposes paralleling Ofelia’s in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, Cuarón’s Jaspar does not object when Theo arrives on his doorstep with Kee and her handmaiden in tow. Instead, the old Lefty provides sanctuary and safe passage for the three/foursome, becoming the key to Kee’s survival at the expense of his own and his wife’s lives. Jaspar falls back upon an unflappable idealism, which transforms reality’s loaves and fishes into a fantasy sufficient to feed the world. He believes and his unflinching optimism both refuels Theo and facilitates the latter’s connection with a prison guard, who epitomizes *Children of Men*’s metallic taste for the ironic—the three/foursome break into a British detention camp. In sum, in the figure of Jaspar (in combination with the figure of Theo in combination with the figure of Julian in combination with the figure of Kee in combination with the figure of the child . . .), we find critical sustenance in a politicized nostalgia, which in the final hour puts its politicization where its mouth is. Jaspar as catalyst fuels Theo’s complementary

repoliticization, and the film's subsequent desegregation of reproduction and coproduction.

To these varied open joins, the plot powers on: Theo still must descend into the hell-hole of the detention camp, deliver Kee's baby girl, navigate crossfire, and shuttle the two to their watery rendezvous with the progressively inflected eugenics-boat-people-project, "Tomorrow." Upon completion of these Herculean tasks—surely as daunting, if not as fantastic as those put before Ofelia in *Pan's Labyrinth*—Theo is rewarded with Kee's own flourish of generative citationality, the naming of her daughter, Dylan, after Theo and Julian's departed child. Pall-bearers of inheritance, Theo and Julian with this plot twist simultaneously role-play a once-removed, post-apocalyptic Adam-and-Eve and question the film's myopic focus on failed procreation. Still, as my somewhat tongue-in-cheek précis of *Children of Men* suggests, the racial politics of the film do not levitate above reproach; in fact, they solicit our further attention by way of another "background." Before *Children of Men*, Cuarón foregrounded his investments in the figure of the child and in backgrounds vis-à-vis *A Little Princess*, *Great Expectations*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, and *Y tu mamá también*.⁴² To the latter film, for which Cuarón is perhaps best known, we could return briefly and comparatively to ponder mestizaje as *Children of Men*'s forced perspective.

Figure 9. Film capture from *Children of Men* (2006)



Baer and Long find few kind words for *Y tu mamá también*'s contradictions. The pair proposes that the film's form (especially its omniscient male voiceover) and content (especially its final sequences) "reproduces the misogyny and homophobia that have characterized dominant representations of the nation historically."⁴³ In contrast, Saldaña-Portillo turns a psychoanalytic lens on Cuarón's creation, reading Tenoch (Diego Luna) and Julio's (Gael García Bernal) homoerotics, mediated through the figure of Luisa (Maribel Verdú, before she was Mercedes of *Pan's Labyrinth*), as allegorically dismantling one of the abiding national allegories of post-revolutionary Mexican sovereignty. Saldaña-Portillo's interpretation frames her thesis' challenges to Baer and Long's critique of the film, which include two provocative footnotes that question Baer and Long's dismissal of *Y tu mamá también*'s nostalgia and its potentially revisionary vision of a NAFTA era Mexico. Her argument simultaneously takes issue with Baer and Long's understanding of Luisa's significance, resituating "la española" as indicative of a "desire for incorporation of an ideal of imperial whiteness, [which] when read through the dynamics of *mestizaje*, circuitously stands in for a desired *independence* from the foreign investment facilitated by NAFTA."⁴⁴

Following Baer and Long's and Saldaña-Portillo's interpretations, we could read *Y tu mamá también* as disinterring and reinterring homophobia in its depiction of failed nationalism. Cuarón rehearses the repetitively compulsive, compulsory homosexual encounter of Tenoch and Julio as disastrously nonproductive to the extent that the union of two adolescents-becoming-men from different class positions cannot yield the promissory note of a *mestizaje* that post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism mandated, but failed to establish as the abiding twentieth-century "foundational fiction" of that nation-state.⁴⁵ The corpse that the film unearths, then, as Saldaña-Portillo intuits, is that which already was acquiring mythic proportions in the wake of NAFTA's resounding continental success at opening markets but blockading human movement.

Not quite the reinscription of national cinema, but that of a so-called nationalized cultural imaginary, *Children of Men* perhaps unsurprisingly stakes out a wider territory of non-alignment, of mismatch and failure, in the service of a promotion of the literal and metaphoric conflation of *mestizaje* and coproduction (in the face of competing prior reproduction/nonproduction dialectics). Moreover, it literalizes this "deterritorialization" vis-à-vis its aforementioned queer bleed of foreground and backgrounds. Like *Y tu mamá también* and *Babel*, *Children of Men* represents an exercise in cognitive meets affective mapping. Its foregrounded background calibrates the landscape of a contaminated, washed up and out, white imperialism, caught in the crossfire of warring factions. The undocumented, which *Children of Men* obligates its viewers to witness, are the new geographies of a United Kingdom. Simultaneously, Cuarón redeems James's Sedgwickian "paranoid reading practices" in the service of globalizing the "enabling violation" of the Mexican national-allegorical fragment known as *mestizaje*.⁴⁶

Put differently, read against the backgrounds of *Y tu mamá también* and James's novel, Cuarón's *Children of Men* turns a magical trick. In James's *The Children of Men*, everyone is white, melancholic, and anxious. In Cuarón's *Children of Men* the invisible becomes visible, the unspoken shouts out at viewers via the film's relentless contrast of asylum-seekers and those who withhold welcome. If Cuarón remains true to James's portrait of the refugee—the newborn what-child-is-this—he does so with a twofold twist, which perhaps is truer to James's logic than her actual text. In what ungenerously could be comprehended as a fictive morality-play-meets-eugenics-project, James refuses to circumcise the phallus, oversharing with readers the miraculous penis of her story's conclusion, "Julian had been wrong about the sex. The child was male. Its sex, seeming so dominant, so disproportionate to the plump, small body, was like a proclamation."⁴⁷ James's annunciation leads to a predictable final showdown "between men," Theo versus his cousin Xan for the sapphire ring (the transitional object of the Warden of England)—that which resignifies masculinity's repetition-compulsion despite its bouts with global impotence (James makes herself clear—it's the men who've botched procreation here).

Cuarón's *Children of Men* doesn't buy James's argument (just as it doesn't find purchase in *Y tu mamá también*'s impasse with postrevolutionary Mexican allegorical templates), respectfully insinuating that the author had been wrong about both the sex and the race of the child. And, just as Julian only can be a minor key to the maternal Kee (nowhere apparent in James's text) as Cuarón disavows the recycled solidification of the "foundational fiction" of heterosexual union, which James's novel threatens to reinter; Kee's mistaken identification of her child's sex must be rectified in Cuarón's cinematic adaptation. Restaging Julian's misrecognition, Kee realizes post-partum that she's delivered the planet's daughter. Thus, like the son of James's *Children of Men*, her child's significance cannot be completely quantified or qualified, but for altogether different reasons: Kee's progeny is the re-origin, the mestiza non-citizen-subject writ global. Her mother is of African descent, her father, unknown—a universal "hija de la chingada," this child embodies the unrealized idealism of José Vasconcelos's postrevolutionary formulations of "la raza cósmica"—a quintessentially Mexican, if not Latin American, vexed vision of the post/racial.⁴⁸ Inheriting the origin myth of mestizaje—that which Saldaña-Portillo finds failing in *Y tu mamá también*—this daughter emerges out of the allegorical ruins of the security state, resistance movements, informal and formal economies.

Children of Men imagines the collective loss of children and the miracle of that loss's reversal through a "reverse hallucination" as momentarily fantastic as that of *Pan's Labyrinth*. Mestizaje, tonally dark, is juxtaposed with, if not substituted for, skip-bleaching as sociocultural practice in the film. Via the synecdoche of the Child, her birth—a climax—but also a performance of hyphenated coproduction-reproduction, the film interjects Mexico as an idea or concept over which the local, the national, and the global intersect. Literal and symbolic, Dylan's "second coming" remediates

relationships between the political, the personal, the economic, the social, the empathic, and the unthinkable in *Children of Men*.

Providing viewers with another vision of global Mexicanidad's political, as well as aesthetic, unconscious, an outlying theory of praxis that defies the present's New World Borderization, *Children of Men* negotiates degrees of "the shock of the real," prescribing a contrapuntal shock treatment for "disaster capitalisms."⁴⁹ Small wonder that Cuarón created Naomi Klein's book-trailer, a short video eponymously titled *The Shock Doctrine*, which sound-bites the author's hypothesis, "I call . . . orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities, 'disaster capitalism.'"⁵⁰

Coproduction, or, a Cultural Logic of Neoliberal and Alter-Globalizations

Neorealism, or structural realism, a survival-of-the-fittest theory of international relations, largely has fallen out of favor. Viewing international structure as constraining state behavior, neorealism imagines "a war of the worlds" in which the impossibility of trust between states generates "a security dilemma" of the order of that portrayed in *Children of Men*.⁵¹ Yet, in a jarring parallel universe seldom commented upon, neorealism, like some "purloined letter," also references a school of Italian cinema, attentive to the socioeconomic conditions of post-World War II Italy. This school deeply influenced the development of new Latin American cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, routinely posited as the first autonomous cinematic movements to come from the region, which like economic neorealism, advocated an isolationism, albeit of the aesthetic.

Neoliberalism's ostensibly tidier holistic doctrine took neorealism's inherent pessimism as the starting point for its economic opportunism. Proposing that neorealism exaggerates the anarchic nature of the international system, neoliberalism has sought to broaden neorealism's conceptualization of state interests by imagining transnational cooperation—even roomier definitions of "coproduction." In such a scenario, the shock of the real, associated with such events as natural disaster or a military coup, becomes a necessary mind-field for economic and cultural revision à la Milton Friedman. Recalling the *Pan's Labyrinth*-like doubling of neorealism on the level of the word, we might wonder: Where are neoliberalism's cinematic or aesthetic homonyms, uncanny doppelgängers, or fortuitous slips? How could we begin to search for articulations of the latter's so-called cultural logic (distinct, but not entirely disconnected, from a more diffuse later capitalism)? Perhaps the cinematic phenomenon of the coproduction offers a preliminary model for thinking neoliberal (and alter-) globalization's complex trafficking of literal and cultural capital, of conscious and unconscious collective affects and fantasies.⁵² In this essay, I have diagrammed coproductive kinships between what might be termed the "sovereignty of gender"—a secret history—and a global Mexicanidad.

Representing a period whose presentation is tied to the archetypal figure of the child, *Babel*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Children of Men* have facilitated my thinking beyond too-literal treatments of coproduction as a phenomenon.

Babel presents the lives of its “wards,” ironically and subversively focusing a goodly portion of its attentions on the figure of the absent child (as some wish unfulfillment only obliquely representative of unvalenced change) in what appears to be the here-and-now. In temporal contrast, *Pan's Labyrinth* finds its double focalization in “the then and there” of fascist Spain, presenting queer temporalities, themselves the occasion for revisiting the limitations of resistance to state-sponsored cultures of terror and the economics. Finally, *Children of Men* juxtaposes dystopic dioramas of the disposable in England with a miraculous reincarnation of mestizaje to mix the film's foreground and background, to hint at a residual revolutionary Mexicanidad that exceeds the bounds of the nation-state in much the same way that the new wave of Mexican cinema trades pasts, presents, and futures on a global market. Across this cinematic threesome, children (absent, heterotopic, messianic), more often than not are juxtaposed with equally archetypal white femininity/imperial melancholia through recourse to the formal technique of skip or bypass bleach method. But in an equally persuasive manner, reorienting cross-hatched centers and peripheries, *Babel*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Children of Men* render the generalized conceit of the coproduction into a paradoxical specificity—that of global Mexicanidad.

Bourriaud writes, “Since the early nineties, an ever increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products. This art of postproduction seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age.”⁵³ By way of *Babel*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Children of Men*, I counter-conceive, or at least append, that the conceit of the coproduction—be it literal or metaphoric—equally accommodates the paradoxes and possibilities of culture (cultural nationalism, public policy, the Hollywood film and other culture industries, alternative cultural production, academic labor, “new journalism” . . .) under the sign of the global. Alternately parsed, *Babel*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Children of Men* suggest in both their forms and contents that the coproduction across a spectrum of meaning points us in the direction of a theory as well as series of practices, which, in the context of twenty-first century “greater Mexican” cultural production, illuminate another aesthetic “growing sideways” into a politics—itsself so many peripheral visions—of a post-NAFTA era.⁵⁴

Notes

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¹ For instance, see Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc, eds., *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Baja California* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003); and Roger Bartra, *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

² See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³ Hester Baer and Ryan Long, "Transnational Cinema and the Mexican State in Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*," *South Central Review* 21, no. 3 (2004): 150-168 and *Y tu mamá también*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón (Anhele Producciones, et al., Mexico, 2001). Baer and Long write, "Following the decline of state subvention for national art cinemas in the 1970s and 1980s, a new era of international co-productions funded by global corporate entities emerged. . . . The international co-productions in the 1990s and 2000s are emblematic products of globalization: financed by global capital, featuring international casts, shot in several countries and often several languages, and foregrounding the hybrid status of their production contexts in both their formal construction and narrative content." Baer and Long, "Transnational Cinema and the Mexican State in Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*," 150. See also Paul Julian Smith, "Transatlantic Traffic in Recent Mexican Films," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (2003): 389-400; Luisela Alvaró, "National, Regional, and Global: New Waves of Latin American Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 48-53; and "La onda de las coproducciones internacionales y los incentivos en América Latina," accessed January 23, 2011, <http://www.latamcinema.com/entrevista.php?id=73>.

⁴ *Babel*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (Paramount Pictures, et al., France/USA/Mexico, 2006); *Children of Men*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón (Universal Pictures, et al., UK/USA, 2006); and *El laberinto del fauno/Pan's Labyrinth*, directed by Guillermo del Toro (Estudios Picasso, et al., Spain/USA/Mexico, 2006).

⁵ Nicholas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002).

⁶ Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, "The International Politics of Cinematic Coproduction: Spanish Policy in Latin America," *Film & History* 34, no. 2 (2004): 16.

⁷ Steve J. Stern, *Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico: The Secret History of Gender* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995). On the banal level of the anecdote, the filmmakers themselves express the same focus. In a televised discussion

between González Iñárritu, del Toro, Cuarón, and Charlie Rose regarding *Babel*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Children of Men*, the Mexican directors recounted their changing relationships to self and cinema vis-à-vis parenthood, each representing his most recent film as revelatory of their collective interest in the figure of the child. See "A panel discussion with Mexican filmmakers Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, Guillermo Del Toro, Alfonso Cuarón," accessed April 25, 2011, <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/81>.

⁸ As readers probably have noted, I risk forwarding Fredric Jameson's formulation of "postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism" here to speculate, like others before me, that we may be living in temporalities other than that which Jameson abstracts. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

⁹ *Amores Perros*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (Altavista Films, et al., Mexico, 2000); and *21 Grams*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (This Is That Productions, et al., USA, 2003).

¹⁰ Paul Julian Smith, *Amores Perros* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2003), 34.

¹¹ Jonathan Romney, "Enigma Variations," *Sight and Sound* 14, no. 3 (2004): 15.

¹² Prieto notes of *Babel*, "we wanted to have a bleach-bypass look on the Moroccan section, but we didn't want it to be a full bleach bypass like we did on *Amores Perros*. We wanted to go halfway, and we found we couldn't achieve a consistent look photochemically. There were variations in the lab. We had to achieve that affect digitally." See "Behind the Lens with Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC," *Film & Video*, accessed August 18, 2010, <http://www.studiodaily.com/filmandvideo/6624.html>.

¹³ Smith, *Amores Perros*, 77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵ For a discussion of (white) Woman's allegorical function in the colonial context, see Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁶ "Mexico," in *11'09"01 – September 11* (original title), directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu (CIH Shorts, et al., UK/France/Egypt/Japan/Mexico/USA/Iran, 2002).

¹⁷ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Abbas writes of the new Hong Kong cinema, "If hallucination is seeing what is not there, then reverse hallucination is not seeing what is there." The classic Lacanian example of reverse hallucination is Edgar Allan Poe's "purloined letter." See Ackbar Abbas, "The New Hong Kong cinema and the déjà disparu," in *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide*, eds. Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Gary Needham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 80.

¹⁹ Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁰ These tasks include crawling into a cavity beneath a tree to retrieve a key from a gigantic toad, entering a room, the scene of a banquet, without eating anything to procure a dagger (Ofelia “fails” this task because she eats two grapes, a mistake which sets a monster with eyes in the palms of his hands after her), and making a choice between killing her infant brother and sacrificing herself.

²¹ For an anecdotal discussion of these color schemes and the film’s skip-bleaching, see “*Pan’s Labyrinth (El Laberinto del Fauno)*,” accessed July 16, 2010, <http://frocktalk.com/?p=685>; <http://www.modul.us/color>. For informed, but distinct readings of *Pan’s Labyrinth’s* stylized color, see Mercedes Camino, “Blood of an innocent: Montxo Armendáriz’s *Silencio Roto* (2001) and Guillermo del Toro’s *El laberinto del fauno* (2006),” *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 6, no. 1 (2009): 45-64; and John Calhoun, “Fear and Fantasy,” *American Cinematographer* 88, no. 1 (January 2007): 34-45.

²² *El espinazo del diablo/The Devil’s Backbone*, directed by Guillermo del Toro (Sony Pictures Classics, Spain/USA, 2001); and Kinder, “The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8, no. 2 (1983): 57-76.

²³ *El espíritu de la colmena/The Spirit of the Beehive*, directed by Víctor Erice (Elías Querejeta Producciones Cinematográficas S.L., Spain, 1973). Marsha Kinder examines this film, among others. See Kinder, “The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema,” 57-76.

²⁴ Lauren Berlant, “Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*,” *Public Culture* 19, no. 2 (2007): 273-305.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 285.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 278.

²⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005) and; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

²⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 4.

²⁹ Reviewing *Babel* through the lenses of Berlant’s argument and *Pan’s Labyrinth*, we might read Chieko as standing at the adolescent threshold of adulthood and its damning relationship to neoliberal affective economies of longing for longing. But, of course, she stands head and shoulders above (on the shoulders of) the working class.

³⁰ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

³¹ Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, "Sex, Class, and Mexico in Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 39-48; and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "In the Shadow of NAFTA: *Y tu mamá también* Revisits the National Allegory of Mexican Sovereignty," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005), 761.

³² Abbas, "The New Hong Kong cinema and the *déjà disparu*," 80.

³³ In this instance, I do want readers to hear the echo of Diana Taylor's thesis on "acts of transfer." See Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 1-52.

³⁴ See Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* (1986): 65-88.

³⁵ Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1959).

³⁶ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and P. D. James, *The Children of Men* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

³⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, "Cruising the Toliét: LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity," *GLQ* 13, nos. 2-3 (2007): 365.

³⁸ See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009); and "Children of Men Comments by Slavoj Žižek," *Children of Men*, DVD, directed by Alfonso Cuarón (Beverly Hills: Universal Studios, 2007).

³⁹ See especially Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313; and Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ See Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 441-449.

⁴¹ See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁴² *A Little Princess*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón (Warner Bros. Pictures et al., USA, 1995); *Great Expectations*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón (Art Linson Productions, et al., USA, 1998); *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón (Warner Bros., UK/USA, 2004); and *Y tu mamá también*, 2001. Interestingly, Jeff Menne observes of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*: "Much was made in the Harry Potter chatrooms of Cuarón's inclusion of Day of the Dead sugar skeletons and the eagle and the serpent of the Mexican flag as incidental props, as though he had signed the film with his heritage." See Menne, "A Mexican *Nouvelle Vague*: The Logic of New Waves under Globalization." *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 1 (2007): 92. Of course, per my discussion of

Children of Men, we could respond to Menne, “But, Cuarón did ‘sign’ the film, backgrounding its contributions to a more general construction of global Mexicanidad.”

⁴³ Baer and Long, “Transnational Cinema and the Mexican State in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Y tu mamá también*,” 151.

⁴⁴ Acevedo-Muñoz too disagrees with Baer and Long, suggesting that the film represents a seemingly paradoxical revision of Mexican attitudes toward gender and sexuality. He postulates of the character Luisa: “Luisa’s agency subverts classical narrative and serves as the locus for the revision and inscription of a new type of Mexican foundational fiction. With its counter-epic function in *Y tu mamá también*, the nation is rediscovered as a place of contradictions, where *machismo* is unveiled as a façade hiding homoerotic desires, where divisions of class are revealed as latent and leading to violent confrontation, and where instead of ‘treachery’ (like Malinche) the woman mediates all meaning.” To understand the full import of Acevedo-Muñoz and Saldaña-Portillo’s distinctions, and, subsequently, to import their reading to *Children of Men*, the details of the “failed union” that *Y tu mamá también* portrays is worth reviewing. If Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes in the context of the English novel that, “The scene wherein male rivals unite, refreshed in mutual support and definition, over the ruined carcass of a woman, will occur seriously again and again,” Robert McKee Irwin, citing Sedgwick’s insights, demonstrates the centrality of “between men” for Mexican foundational fictions. Cuarón, for all intents and purposes, stages the pair’s arguments in twenty-first-century Mexican cinema. With the triangulation of Julio, Tenoch, and Luisa, *Y tu mamá también* re-cites mythologies surrounding the revolutionary masculine citizen-subject that slide the rule of class. Luisa facilitates a shared *bildungsroman* between the child of a lower-class Mexican single mother and the child of a Mexican, Harvard-educated technocrat. That Tenoch and Julio’s momentary literalization of their sublimated desires destroys their friendship is only of limited consequence here—a necessary component, for instance, of and for Saldaña-Portillo’s argument regarding the dissolution of a national allegory, but also indicative of what I’d identify as the unconscious elements of an Other, more labyrinth-like grand récit of sovereignty that is also apparent in *Children of Men*. See Acevedo-Muñoz, “Sex, Class, and Mexico in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Y tu mamá también*,” 47; Saldaña-Portillo, “In the Shadow of NAFTA: *Y tu mamá también* Revisits the National Allegory of Mexican Sovereignty,” 761; Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 76; and Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ See Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed., *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); and Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, 371.

⁴⁷ James, *The Children of Men*, 228.

⁴⁸ José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica* (México: Planeta, 1948).

⁴⁹ See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2007).

⁵⁰ *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, written by Naomi Klein and Alfonso Cuarón (Renegade Pictures Limited Production, commissioned by Penguin UK, 2007), accessed December 17, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/video/2007/sep/07/naomiklein>; and Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 6.

⁵¹ See João Resende-Santos, *Neorealism, States, and the Modern Mass Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁵² Lisa Lowe, also staging the scene of neorealism and neoliberalism's parting of ways, nevertheless argues that a hybridization of the pair has happened in the U.S.'s post-9/11 War on Terror. Lowe posits, "the recent fortification of the U.S.-Mexican border appears less as a rational index of a new 'immigration crisis,' and more an expression of a gendered transformation of the meaning of U.S. state sovereignty within the context of globalization." Lowe seeks to interrogate neorealism and neoliberalism's privileging of the nation-state, pointing out that "Neither neorealist nor neoliberal approaches make visible indigenous peoples, minority groups, women and children, and poor migrant workers beneath the level of the state." While compelling, her meticulous documentation of the nation-state as neorealism and neoliberalism's "normative political unit" fails to take into account the collusion, incorporation, and cooptation of social movements into the "structures of feeling" generated by the mechanisms she details. In addition, and more importantly for my argument's purposes, Lowe only hints at an aesthetic analysis of neoliberalism in her final attentions to the documentary film *Maquilapolis*. See Lowe, "The Gender of Sovereignty," *The Scholar and Feminist Online* (published by the Barnard Center for Research on Women) 6, no 3 (2008), accessed October 25, 2009, http://sfonline.barnard.edu/immigration/lowe_01.htm; and *Maquilapolis*, directed by Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre (California Newsreel, Mexico/USA, 2006).

⁵³ Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 7.

⁵⁴ Here I amplify, implicitly globalizing and queering, prior uses of the concept "greater Mexico" put forth by scholars like Américo Paredes and José Limón. See Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958); Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); and Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or, Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

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