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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American
Free Trade Agreement

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Art

by

Amy Y. Sanchez

Thesis Committee:
Professor Juli Carson, Chair
Associate Professor Rhea Anastas
Associate Professor Bridget Cooks
Professor Daniel Joseph Martinez
Assistant Professor Litia Perta

2016

DEDICATION

To

Mary Ann, Mikey and Lucy, my first friends, and
Martha T. Arteaga and Miguel Angel Sanchez for putting us all on this path.

To Martha Arteaga and Chuy Arteaga for making sure we
were all nourished along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT OF THESIS	vi
PREFACE	1
INTRODUCTION	7
PROJECT NOTES	12
TOWARD AN INTERSTITIAL PATH: BETWEEN THE SMUGGLER AND THE MANATEE	30
WORKS CITED	33

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Global Manatee Habitats	3
Figure 2: Transatlantic Slave Trade, Out of Africa 1500-1900	4

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I am also grateful to the communities of artists, teachers, students, activists, and colleagues in Los Angeles, Santa Ana, Tijuana, San Diego, the Imperial Valley, Mexicali and at UCI that have supported my thinking and research during the last three years. Special thanks to my colleagues in the Art department for their support, and to Professor Tiffany Willoughby-Herard for her generous reading of material contained within these pages.

I thank anthology contributors: Antena, Alicia Garza, Cristina Rivera-Garza, Manuel Paul Lopez, Pepe Rojo, and Ultra-red for entrusting me with their words. I also thank translators Carla Díaz Juhl and Gabriela Torres Olivares for their invaluable work.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary
of the North American Free Trade Agreement

By

Amy Y. Sanchez

Master of Fine Arts, Art with an Emphasis in Critical and Curatorial Studies

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Juli Carson, Chair

This thesis is a document about process. *Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement*, is the English title of a bilingual anthology that set the conceptual groundwork for a day-long event that meditated upon the different aesthetics of response that writers, artists and activists in Southern California and Northern Mexico (Alta and Baja California) employ their respective practices to address positions of precarity after 20 years of free-trade implementation in North America. The anthology compiles the work of Antena, Alicia Garza, Cristina Rivera-Garza, Manuel Paul Lopez, Pepe Rojo, Ultra-red and Amy Sanchez-Arteaga. The text was activated through a series of conversations that took place April 15, 2016 at UCI, during the symposium, *A Conversation in Three Parts*, also curated by Amy Sanchez-Arteaga. This document constitutes a reflection on the process and methodology of curating this text

and this gathering, and the social and political implications of that process upon the field of curatorial studies. These documents were experiments in inciting dialogue around aesthetics, politics and their embodiment in the LA/TJ megalopolis. The conversations and activities that took place during *A Conversation in Three Parts* were means to activate *Notes...* for the first time and model ways that the text could be used in the future.

This thesis considers what a curatorial practice becomes in the cleft between traditional modes of exposition (as textual document or performative discussion), circulation and anecdote: How the same theoretical and aesthetic object (in this case a book) traffics between different contexts and can potentially make space for new political and aesthetic propositions in those contexts. Or, to put it another way how poetics are always already bound up with politics.

PREFACE

Parable Of The Manatee

I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh. —But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction.¹

The manatee lives in the warm shallow waters where the sea fields grow. She floats just beneath the surface of the water and algae grow on her back. Other fish eat the algae while she eats the sea grass. She sings a song of chirps and squeaks. Her body is gray and round. She floats to the surface every twenty minutes to take a breath. When she does the sailors see her body. But, they do not see a gray manatee body. They do not see an ecosystem, and symbiosis. Instead they see an object of desire and conquest—a Mermaid. The manatee is other, and the gaze of the sailor remakes her.

I was asked to write a thesis. I sat to write it, but instead what came out was a moral tale that I called Parable of the Manatee.²

¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 190.

² I am captivated by the parable form because of its pedagogical and performative operation as moral story. It seems important that the interstitial pedagogical and curatorial practice that I intend to outline in this paper be constructed on the scaffold that rests at the cross section of considering the political (moral) implications as well as the discursive (teaching) structure of something structured like a parable.

Also known as “sea cows”, manatees are large, gentle, aquatic, mammalian herbivores. They have been one of my favorite animals since I read about them in third grade, and I learned that their presence in the West Indies accounted for the “eye witness” accounts of mermaids in the shallow waters where seafaring colonizers disembarked in the Americas. Like many children I was captivated by the magic that surrounded the mythology of these animals, and also found their smushed-in almost somber face an object of extreme, near painful cuteness. At the end of third grade the other children and I were asked to make posters of animals on the endangered species list, upon which all members of the taxonomic order Sirenia (to which all manatees belong), pertained to until 2015. So I, a dutiful eight-year-old subject, went to the stationary store with my mother and purchased all of the materials necessary to do my very first independent research project: an accurate summary of the state of the manatee in 1997. The portion I was most proud of was the bubble-letter title that I drew and colored gray to resemble the physicality of the manatee itself. The part of my poster that was least interesting to me at the time, but has remained a specter in my intellectual production, is a map that looked much like this one:³

³ Manatee Habitat Map. See: “Mapa Distribuicao Trichechus,” Wikimedia Commons, accessed May 28, 2016. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mapa_distribuicao_Tricechus.png. The term missing from this map colonies and the trade routes themselves.

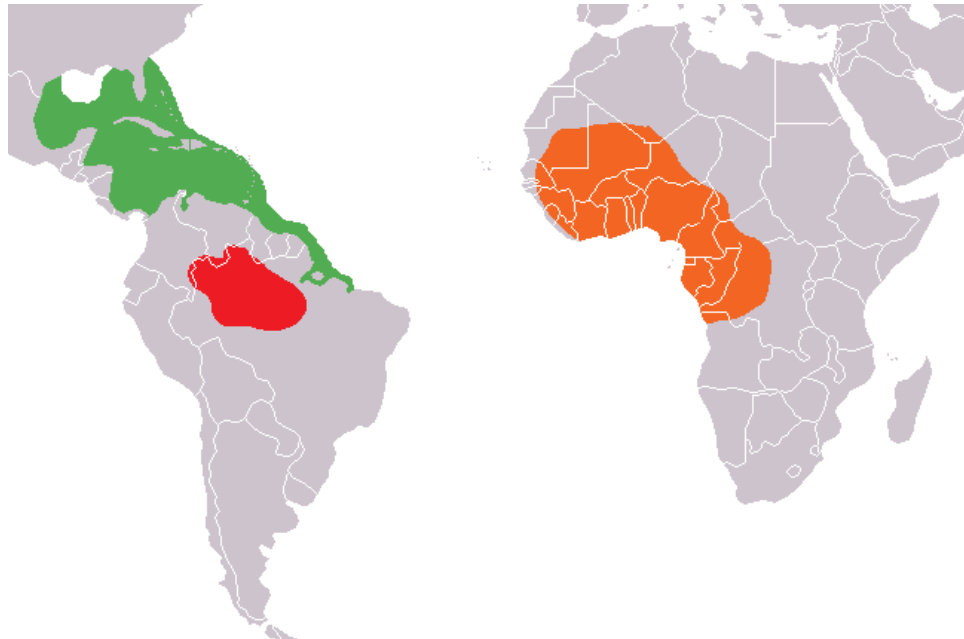


Figure 1: Global Manatee Habitats

I traced this map indicating the global habitats of the manatee on butcher paper with crayons. Unknowingly, in that moment, I had also rendered a partial cartography of the slave trade between approximately 1500 and the late 1800s. I noticed this relationship while researching M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*—a poetic telling of the 1781 massacre of 150 people who were thrown overboard an off course slaver ship during the middle passage— when I came upon this map:⁴

⁴ Paula Wasley, "Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database," National Endowment for the Humanities, accessed May 28, 2016, <http://www.neh.gov/news/voyages-the-transatlantic-slave-trade-database>. The term missing from this map colonies and the trade routes themselves.

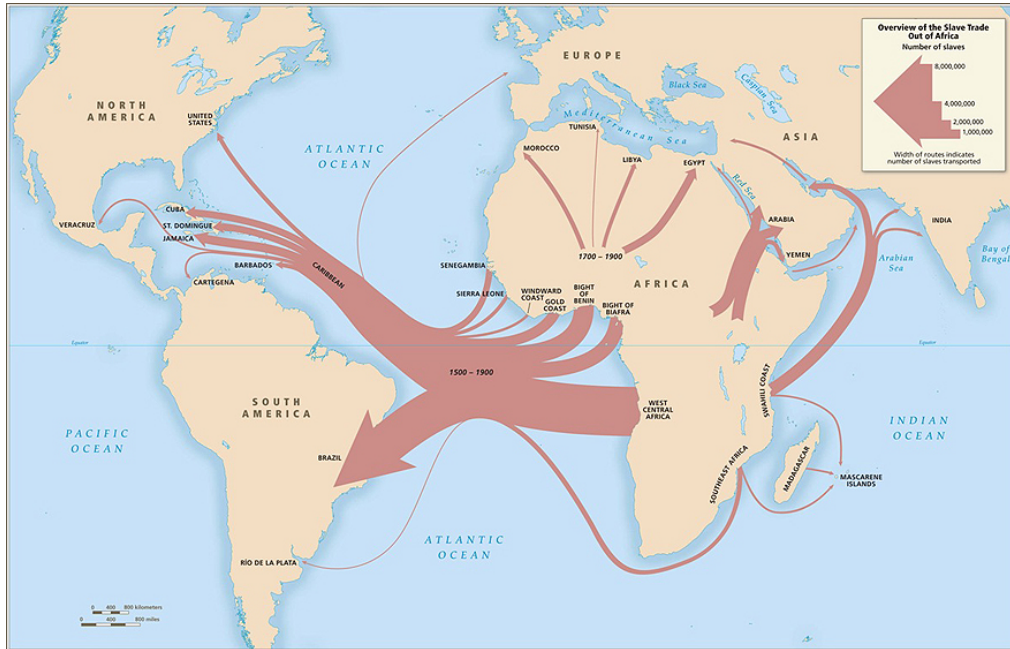


Figure 2: Transatlantic Slave Trade, Out of Africa 1500-1900

Philip's account of the Zong is composed of language taken from insurance documentation of the tragedy as well as West African and Caribbean languages.⁵ I am moved by how deeply invested her work is in research and poetics, and in abstracting bureaucratic language to render pain and loss.

In the parable the manatee is a melancholic creature. She knows that her gray body is a screen for desire, that her observant demeanor is taken as passivity. She is a survivor and a witness to enslavement and genocide. The manatee has always been the Shepherd of the sea fields. She swims in the shallows in company of her calf; sometimes with other companions, sometimes alone. She eats sea grass and prefers warm water. I think about being submerged like a manatee, being able to hold my breath for 20 minutes. I wonder how the manatee felt, what it knew about the boats that came into the sea fields, what

⁵ See: Philip, M. Nourbese. *Zong!* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

vibrations, what screams it might have heard and felt in the water. I wonder if it might have been a comfort to the enslaved people led to and from the boats to see the same creatures that had bid them a sad farewell greet them on the shores of another continent, a prison. I wonder if they saw each other at all?

I wonder what motivates me as a scholar-thinker to want to collapse the western coast of Africa with the eastern coasts of the Americas, as if the Atlantic were a wound to be sutured by sea cows. I reflect upon a conversation that I had in seminar with Jennifer Terry and think about decentering the Human as it is constructed by the project of the enlightenment. Is tracing out the relations in these sites a way of knowing in another way? What is produced by encounters of memory and history? Do I even have the right to speak in the voice of the slave, the colonized subject, and the manatee?

I question my motivations around calling this sort of investigation curatorial practice—why not call this history, or cultural studies? I think though, that this narrative and the many questions it produces literally reconfigure and make, what I think could be called counter-hegemonic space. This space could manifest a film, an installation, or a talk; it is the textual space of this paper, it is many things, but it must by necessity make new categories for itself in order to be able to exist.

This is the work of my practice at this moment. To seek out manatees, not mermaids—a practice that wishes to honor the opacity of the other, and our inability to ever know what it means to live in the body of another. For this reason I am interested in

making work at this moment that enters into profound dialogue, and hopes to fill the gap between histories, subjectivity and erasure with new discursive formations.

How might we inhabit these terrains together?

INTRODUCTION

As I exit the program in Critical and Curatorial Studies at UCI, I am interested in thinking about the ways in which curating not only takes up space, but makes it—the ways that curation can build discursive space. I also think about the ways that my work has allowed me to traffic knowledge between disciplines and sites within and outside of the university; the way that my production inhabits spaces between and at the margins of Art, theory and nation. My position as curator and researcher has allowed me to smuggle my production between spheres that are so often unnecessarily held apart. I begin this paper by contemplating two metaphors around my practice: parable the manatee and the methodology of the smuggler, and what the operation of these praxes mean for my practice at this moment, as a student, a scholar and a subject of this historical moment, where on every continent we are witnessing exoduses of refugees and mass migrations driven by increasing economic instability, conflict and borderization, all while borders are being erased for goods and capital through transnational neoliberal trade agreements. This political context necessitates that the work become that of the smuggler: interstitial, nomadic, and always negotiating the delimitations of public and private/self and other. It also necessitates the solidarity through proximity that the Manatee might have had with enslaved subjects.

My time at UC Irvine has culminated in a publication and event that reflect upon my research on the last twenty years of cultural production and social history of the US /

Mexico Border. *Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Notas Escritas en la Ocasión de la Celebración del 20 Aniversario de la Implementación del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte)* is a bilingual anthology around which a symposium was held.⁶ The project culls the work of Antena, a language justice collective committed to creating bilingual (English/Spanish) spaces in Southern California; Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter; bilingual poet and essayist Cristina Rivera-Garza, Manuel Paul Lopez poet and writer who writes about the rural border between the US and Mexico; Pepe Rojo artist and theorist from Tijuana, BC; Ultra-red a collective of artists and activists that sites itself in Southern California and NYC, and produces instructions for radical pedagogy and sound investigation; and myself. While the form of each of these texts is quite different, they all respond to the same conditions of subjugation and marginalization within subjugating framework of late capital and neoliberalism. It is my feeling that independently, each of these texts allows us access to what it means, in an analytic and embodied way, to live under the conditions of capital, but because of the diverse embodied and collective formations of each of the authors (three of which are written from the perspective of the collective), their forms are radically different.

The symposium took place over a day. *A Conversation in Three Parts*, invited students, artists, and researchers to consider the propositions put forth by the texts during

⁶ Amy Sanchez-Arteaga, ed., *Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement /Notas En La Ocasión De La Celebración Del 20 Aniversario De La Implementación Del Tratado De Libre Comercio De América Del Norte*, (Taller Ajonjoli: Tijuana 2016).

three different portions which comprised the event: A reading and conversation with three contributors (Manuel Paul Lopez, Pepe Rojo, and myself—Amy Sanchez-Arteaga), a film screening and discussion with Filmmaker Adriana Trujillo who screened the films “Skin Destination” and a work in progress, “1821: The Era of Good Feelings”, and the first ever, UCI People of Color Tour.⁷ The event sought to open a space for thinking about both the specificity of greater LA/TJ region and within that, the UCI campus as structured by free trade. My hope is that this text will reflect on these projects to help future scholars, activists, and artists craft texts and events that reproduce critical pedagogical spaces, and invite interdisciplinary collaboration, between students in the university, as well as those working outside of the academy.

My intention in coming to the program in Critical and Curatorial Studies was to begin to find ways to articulate and manifest a research praxis that sited academic work in Critical Theory, Feminist Studies, Pedagogy and Art History within the border territories, in order to begin to interrogate the way that politics played out in/through Art in these liminal zones. It is important to frame this discursive and pedagogical work within a curatorial framework in order to begin to redefine the traditional role of the curator. Traditionally, curatorial labor has been gendered female, and thus has existed in a

⁷ A Conversation in Three Parts took place on April 15th 2016, in Moss Cove Room A in the UCI Student Center, and culminated with a celebration in Aldrich Park. The event convened 5 speakers in during the three events, and hosted group of around 80 undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and community members. The POC Tour was facilitated in part by undergraduate student, Katie Romo.

hierarchic relationship under the subordinating singular male genius Artist. At it's worst curating is the management and coordination of white cube exhibition spaces for white people where objects in a space are used to prove some theoretical premise, instead of allowing works of Art to speak for themselves, and highlighting the ways that they make theory. I am not interested in a practice that grafts theory onto objects as if they are vacant receptacles; instead I seek to make a practice that looks to objects to deploy theory. In this scenario the curator becomes an instigator or a smuggler that juxtaposes ideas as they are performed by art works in order to demonstrate the potency of those objects. This sort of curator works from the ideas that play out in an object (or other text) toward what might be a conceptual finality, but often, is more of a provocation.

Instigator, provocateur, smuggler, are synonyms for the roles that I hope to play as a curator. In this paper I intend to give a schema of this curatorial and research methodology and propose the ways that this mode of thinking and making can be applied and mobilized pedagogically and politically within Art and the academy.⁸

I am intrigued by how curating might link interdisciplinary research methodologies with aesthetic propositions, in order to make the subject of this research and knowledge available more widely, as part of larger social/political/cultural discourse, and to more

⁸ I see leaving this methodology as a written document for others to access and read as an intervention in the form of the thesis document itself. Therefore, I should recommend that any readers interested in this text refer to, documentation of *A Conversation in Three Parts*, and the book, *Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement*, which should be available in the UCI Special Collections Archive, or through the UCI University Art Gallery.

people. Put more simply, I am interested in “curating” as a research praxis that manifests in texts and exhibitions, certainly, but also as relational dynamics. Within Art, the fields that most closely resemble these propositions are socially engaged forms of Art practice, public pedagogical platforms, and other forms that think of Art and the spaces in which Art happens as sites of instigation, dialogue, and knowledge production. I am interested particularly in the fact that these works have etymologies in critical Latin American pedagogies, feminist consciousness raising practices, happenings, performance and other forms of collective actions.

Ultimately, *Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement* was curated to incite dialogue around aesthetics, politics and their embodiment in the LA/TJ megalopolis, and the conversations and activities that took place during *A Conversation in Three Parts*, were meant activate the anthology for the first time, modeling ways the text could be used in the future.

PROJECT NOTES

The smuggler is produced by conditions of surveillance. The smuggler conceals the necessary connections that she makes between the sites within which she traffics. She is an interstitial being. In Jennifer Doyle's *Campus Sex/Campus Security* she provides a schema of the conditions that lead to the production of the smuggler in the academy.⁹ Doyle's book is a catalogue of violences enacted upon the student body politic in the name of security and safety, and the kinds of resistance that these acts of violence have solicited.¹⁰ Doyle's work is a reminder of the importance of naming and of mapping constellations of injustice that allows us to better identify the structural conditions operating to produce said injustices, while developing practices of opposition, confrontation, and/or elusion. Naming hegemony makes a roadmap for the smuggler.

Doyle's work returns me to the fear I felt in 2010 when arriving in Tijuana. It returns me to the turf war unleashed by the Mexican Federal government's military operation

⁹ See: Jennifer Doyle, *Campus Sex, Campus Security* (Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015).

¹⁰ Here too, I think of the space of the undercommons, the site of resistance within the academy described by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, who write, "The student graduates. But not all of them. Some still stay, committed to black study in the university's undercommon rooms. They study without an end, plan without a pause, rebel without a policy, conserve without a patrimony. They study in the university and the university forces them under, relegates them to the state of those without interests, without credit, without debt that bears interests, that earns credits. They never graduate. They just ain't ready..." The undercommons is the site of the hold, the place of hapticality that made itself a vessel for the enslaved bodies that endured through feeling, and a site made by the conditions of subjugation in the contemporary American university. See: Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013, 67.

against drug-trafficking cartels in the name of safety, which caused even more violence, and a collective withdrawal from civil society. In this moment the citizen was re-defined by their ability to adapt, to learn to read the city in another way, to make new associations with space and time as a mechanism of self-preservation. In both Baja California and the university borders are sealed to prevent “spillover” of violence: the bureaucratic and legislative boundaries that are drawn police the kind of language and space that can be made. So, migrants, newly forged by the rhetoric of administrative language, must seek new routes to bypass the foreclosure of ready trodden soil. The smuggler makes these routes, and surreptitiously brings literal, theoretical, and affective bodies into contact to mark out new spaces of legibility. The smuggler is a citizen of spaces between and around formal zones. As such the smuggler is also a migrant, who is a citizen of no place and every place. The smuggler challenges the rote definitions of what it means to be documented, and of what it means to be sited/cited/sighted.

The more I considered the borders of enforcement around the increasingly privatized public university, the more it seemed important to speak about zones of enforcement beyond the arbitrary lines drawn by the nation-state in *Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement* (*Notas Escritas en la Ocasión de la Celebración del 20 Aniversario de la Implementación del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte*). The *Notes/Notas* project is constructed in such a way that the dissonances and resonances between the pieces can allow the reader to forge their own analytic and affective ties with and across the texts

compiled in the book. The intention is not that the book will make a single argument, but that it will detonate new relationships, ideas feelings and complexities in the spaces between the texts; that it will leave space for the reader to complicate, revise, and make meaning in the interstices of the works.

Additionally, the text seeks to treat poetics in the same way one would traditionally frame more “academic” forms of writing; it embraces theorizing that comes into being conterminously with poetic aesthetics, and builds argumentation not as I have here in this text, where my words are supported and given validity by the writing of others who are legible to the institution, but through proximity and intimacy that may not be documentable by the traditional forms of citation given to us by the university.¹¹

The book is bilingual so that it might serve as a platform for engagement in bilingual spaces across Southern California and Northern Mexico. It also has the potential to foster bi-national or transnational discussions of what living under the conditions of the free trade zone means, as we are all implicated within neoliberal economic systems of free trade. Perhaps it can be a tool to open space for counterhegemonic discourse, and for speaking about the conditions and economies that come to bear on communities, families, bodies.

The title of the anthology is an assisted readymade. In 2013, when I was just beginning research for what would become this project, I received an email from the UC

¹¹ Documentation is one of the mechanisms that the nation state and the university have in common for regulating which subjects are deemed legal (legible) or illegal (illegible).

San Diego Institute of the Americas inviting me and other members of the binational community to attend an award ceremony “on the occasion of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Institute of the Americas”(whose interests are not coincidentally bound up with NAFTA).¹² I was troubled to read that former Mexican President, Felipe Calderon would be given a prize for “Leadership in the Americas” by the institute, since it was under his leadership that the Mexican war on drugs was orchestrated and over 90,000 Mexicans were murdered or disappeared. In 2011, Human Rights Watch issued a report, called “Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico’s ‘War on Drugs,’” that detailed the human rights violations under and Calderon administration.¹³ Since Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) Calderon’s successor took office, it has become evident that Calderon’s foreign policy paved a path for the privatization of oil and expanded neoliberal de-regulation under EPN.

It was important to think about this kind of insidious absurdity in this project, and to understand absurdity as necessary in capturing the nuance and lived experience of a region structured by unregulated desire, capital, and hyper-regulated movement. The title points to both anthropological discourses that frame narratives of marginality (field note models), and also the performance of decorum for formal celebrations (formal dinner

¹² Institute of the Americas, Email to the author, October 13, 2013. For event documentation see: <https://www.iamericas.org/en/events/past-events/1992-anniversary>

¹³ Human Rights Watch, *Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico’s “War on Drugs”*, (Human Rights Watch, 2011), accessed May 28, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/mexico1111webwcover_0.pdf.

invitation etc.) couched within bureaucratic language that covers over the brutality of free trade agreements.¹⁴

“Swallow and Belch (Including Notes),” opens the anthology.¹⁵ This absurdist prose poem by Pepe Rojo, is a very bodily account of what it means to move across border. The text invokes scatological and visceral imagery of barbed wire massing through the body of the transborder subject. These accounts are footnoted with macro-political and historical content that point to a kind of imbrication of the individual subject within matrices of power. The final note in the text is “Fuck crossing borders.”¹⁶ It was important to sequence the text in this way, to begin by thinking about the site of the body and its interaction with the site of the crossing between nations. Often, the body of the individual crosser and the implications of the border’s permeability or lack there of is lost within abstracted narratives that frame bodies as tiny building blocks within a greater discourse around the sovereignty of the US and Mexico, which are framed in contemporary political debate as separate body politics. Rojo’s poetics meditates on this and deconstructs this notion by authoring a text that binds these two notions irrevocably.

Keeping with this theme of the body politic, the following text, “Las Tres Dianas: Representations of Subjection and the Dissolution of the Mexican Body Politic” considers

¹⁴ “Free Trade” is far more palatable phrase to read than “Exploitation of Mexican Laborers.”

¹⁵ Pepe Rojo, “Swallow and Belch (Including Notes)” in Amy Sanchez-Arteaga ed. *Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement* (Taller Ajonjoli: Tijuana, 2016), 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid* 18.

two historical moments, that of the 1938 nationalization of Mexican oil reserves, and the present-day privatization of Mexican oil as mediated by the figure of Diana, the Roman mythological huntress. This is an essay that I wrote for the text over the course of two and a half years, while reading and thinking about several of the other texts that became part of the anthology. I shared drafts of the text with some of these contributors, so it seemed that if I were to make a contribution, this would be the most appropriate. Particularly, because of the ways that it provides a critique of the US complicity with the violence that has occurred in Mexico in the last 20 years, and reveals the project of national sovereignty that has been touted in Mexico since the 1930s as one that was still-born if it was born at all. I felt an obligation as a border citizen who has the privilege of studying and writing in the US to use the figure of Diana the Huntress as an entry point for discussing the dissolution of the nation state at this very moment in the Americas. Especially, because Mexico has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists and writers who attempt to print any news that is threatening to the narco-regimes of organized crime and state.

Furthermore, the text highlights the tenuous notion of national sovereignty that has been wielded as a rhetorical tool by governments on both sides of the border in order to justify the implementation of trade agreements such as NAFTA under the auspices of collaboration and binationality. In fact, it is by design that these agreements dissolve the sovereignty of the nation state. So, in an attempt to regain the autonomy ostensibly lost

with these agreements, the state is legislated at the level of the body: The nation is closed to bodies, *because* it is open to goods.

"The Afterlife of Cotton: Los Algodones," by Cristina Rivera-Garza, traces out a journey to find the remnants of the cotton fields that allowed for the industrialization of Northern Mexico in the 1930s. She follows clues left by novelist Jose Revueltas, who in early 1934 sought to join a communist agrarian settlement that had formed around cotton farming in the north. In an implicit way this text gives a kind of genealogy of the transformation of industries in the north of Mexico from agriculture production, to mass agricultural production, to the maquiladora production we see now. Rivera-Garza's contribution is also important because in it we see the ways that cotton links the North of Mexico with the South of the United States. Cotton is tied to histories of exploitation throughout the Americas. The utopian experiment in collectivity that Revueltas sought fails, and what we are left with are ruins and traces of cotton on the landscape, narrated by Rivera-Garza.

"The Afterlife of Cotton: Los Algodones," is followed by "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement" by Alicia Garza, co-founder of Black Lives Matter, in order to exist in direct juxtaposition to Cristina Rivera-Garza's account of Jose Revueltas' activism. The text gives an account of the inception and guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement. Black Lives Matter began as a hashtag created by Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi after the killing of 17-year old Trayvon Martin. Central to this text is a call to humanize all Black lives, including those of Black women and queer Black

people—whose voices and contributions have often been covered over in struggles for Black and/or queer liberation. The affirmative “Black Lives Matter” becomes the mantra of a movement against the violence and erasure committed against Black bodies by law enforcement, the media, and as the text points out, even other marginalized groups who are fighting against oppression. Because of the position that Black subjectivity inhabits in the Americas the text argues that, “When Black people get free, everybody gets free.”¹⁷ It was vital to include this piece of writing in this anthology because of the parallel movements for Black liberation that have been happening throughout the Americas at this historical moment. In December of 2015 after years of advocacy an alliance of activists called Mexico Negro (Black Mexico), was able to achieve the recognition of Black people in Mexico as an ethnic category. This resonance between the activist voices in the Americas is a powerful and palpable transgression of the border and language that separates the two nations. The publication of this text in Spanish is the first translation and publication of “A Herstory of the #Blacklivesmatter Movement.”¹⁸

Ultra-red’s “10 Preliminary Theses on Militant Sound Investigation,” is both a series of premises around radical listening techniques and a pedagogical map for how to establish kinds of listening that can elicit political participation that exists as practice not just symbolically as rhetoric. The members of Ultra-red inhabit many roles, as artists, activists, musicians and teachers. In Los Angeles, the Militant Sound Investigation that they

¹⁷ Sanchez-Arteaga, 53

¹⁸ “A Herstory of the #Blacklivesmatter Movement” was translated by Gabriela Torres Olivares. Carla Díaz Juhl also worked on translation in the book.

lay out in this text has manifested as the School of Echoes, sited in Echo Park and central Los Angeles, where the pedagogy of the ear that they describe in the text is practiced with community members, other artists and activists. If Garza's text is a supplication that her voice and the voice of Black people be heard as a human one, it seemed imperative that some sort of pedagogical document be included as part of this text for what listening could be. If the intention of the *Notes* project is to instigate dialogue (which necessitates listening), and in so much of our political discourse that seems to be lacking, perhaps this text could model a way forward. The ten theses are framed by a prelude, interlude and epilogue, which performatively describe the contents of the theses. In an afterward the collective provides a Lacanian theoretical frame for this practice of listening as a means of countering an academic tendency toward the "co-optation of grass-roots participation where in the contribution of base communities has only a symbolic value."¹⁹ It is only by uncoupling the symbolic from value that the subject can come to understand *inter-subjectivity*, and discourse. Pedagogy of the ear, Militant Sound Investigation and the radical acknowledgement of inter-subjectivity might be ways that we can begin to participate in the politics of collectivity without the legibility of the institution—without being co-opted. To listen and do the work of analysis that Ultra-red proposes is to become a translator of desires.

"A Manifesto for Interpretation as Instigation," is also written with the collective in mind. Antena, which was founded by John Pluecker and Jen Hofer, is a collective of writers

¹⁹ Sanchez, 65.

and artists whose work revolves around helping foster bilingual spaces and language justice.²⁰ Their manifesto illustrates the politics of being an interpreter, and the kinds of exchange that they by necessity must broker and perform:

Resources available to an elite high Art context must be put to the service of actual living people. The intellectual discourse that exists in these contexts must critically engage with language dominance. There are crucial things being said elsewhere and otherwise: interpretation is a tool to make those things heard.²¹

The *Notes* project answers this call in its bilingualism, acknowledges that the publics that may want to use and evaluate it, may not be English speakers, and even if they are, may want to come to learn these words in Spanish, because after all this is the dominant (mostly widely spoken) tongue in the Americas. This manifesto around language is also a manifesto around the law of language, which can be one of the most potent lines of division in the TJ/LA Megalopolis, but also one of the strongest linkages between diasporic subjects that inhabit either side of the border. Antena's text manifests the ways in which the interpreter embodies the performance of the counter-hegemonic listening/evaluating subject who functions to make collectivity in opposition to the law of language: a subject whose desire is structured by a constant crossing of the line between languages.

The anthology closes, as it began, with poetry. The last in a suite of four poems by Manuel Paul Lopez, "Blue Print For An American Allegory: Event For Ten Actors And Two

²⁰ Antena defines language justice as the right of each individual to speak the language that they feel most comfortable speaking in. Most often this is people's first language or the language in which they feel best understood.

²¹ Sanchez, 76.

Audience Members,” sites us not at the scale of the body as we saw in Rojo’s work, but at the level of the sky from the perspective of the drone. Lopez, whose work is often sited at the border between the Imperial Valley and Mexicali, BC, a rural desert border that has more in common with the landscapes described by Cristina Rivera-Garza than Rojo’s urbanized barbed-wire labyrinth (Tijuana). The protagonist of the poem is an eight-year-old boy who flies a drone across the border-region. In this text a piece of machinery that is used for surveillance, an object for the fortification and implementation of border policy, becomes the way that the boy can see, it is his primary scopic resource for experiencing that which lies around him. The text ends with a detournement of the border and the mechanisms of surveillance that exist to enforce it. The final image we are given in the poem is of the boy’s drone being transferred to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault (A vault that holds a sample of all the seeds on earth in case of an extinction event) by a team of scientists to rest there until it is needed for the world to save itself.²²

While these texts are invested in cataloging different kinds of historical and contemporary violence that either led up to, are compounded by or are contemporary manifestations of free trade and NAFTA, they are also invested in interpolating the reader, in making a hail to the subject that holds this text in their hands to provoke first dialogue, and second—hopefully—action.²³ These texts were selected for inclusion in the book

²² Ibid 88.

²³ A note on interpolation and interpellation: This project hopes to constitute future texts through the potential interpolation, or addition of new texts and ideas to the body of

because of the kind of aesthetic manifestation of the work, as well as the long-term engagement that each of the contributors has had with the border region—since living and working in the borderlands makes us inherently complicit or at the very least implicated within the precarious machinations of our free-trade-zoned home.²⁴ *Notes* also assembles these specific texts because of the kinds of theoretical encounters that they may produce in proximity to one another. In what ways can these texts bolster or counter each other, and how might these narratives produce another volume or conversation in the conceptual

knowledge constituted by the book as well as it seeks to constitute (or interpellate) an audience, in the Althusserian sense.

²⁴ During my defense of this project, some members of my committee questioned whether my opinion of NAFTA might be a bit over-determined or essentializing, as free trade has arguably also allowed for the exchange of ideas across the border that have been beneficial to cultural exchange and dialogue across North America. Since my theoretical position takes a deconstructive posture, and this (specifically Derridian) posture is applied to the notion of curatorial practice, performativity and literature, I was asked to think about how this kind of analysis or production of a third term might be applied to NAFTA itself. I do not feel that I am imposing an overly dialectical reading of NAFTA because in its very construction it is a treaty that is designed to benefit one part of North America (US/Canada) over another (Mexico), to cement the existence of an arbitrary line between the nations in more arbitrary ways than ever before. NAFTA has dismantled agrarian reform in Mexico to take advantage of the labor produced through the fallout. It has marked a period of violence that has extended the exploitation of workers by multinational corporations from the border into the rest of the Mexican nation-state. The only deconstructive reconciliation of this binary that I can come to is that NAFTA has given a name to these dynamics that allows us to critique it from both sides of the border. In future projects my intention is to interrogate this further, to seek out and find shared language for critiquing and deconstructing exploitation. I feel it is naïve to think that we can escape the expansion of capital, or to be outside of it—we are all implicated in it. The intention of my project is to find a space of being within capital and document how others are within it. The committee offered Derrida's notion of the "autoimmune crisis" that he unfolds in dialogue with Habermas and Borradori (2003) in relation to the way that the Enlightenment creates as much it opposes terrorism. This left-identified position was offered as another mode of interrogating free trade politics like NAFTA, and is something I am interested in pursuing in future research. See: Habermas, Jürgen, Jacques Derrida, and Giovanna Borradori. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

space that these works make together? The compilation of these texts into a volume of work is a curatorial act because it seeks not just to assemble work around a theme, but also to make space. This space is the conceptual realm of encounter between the different texts in this volume, but it is also the physical discursive arena of encounter between the reader(s) and the body of work with each other around the book.

Political and social economies of this project are rooted in the corporeal experience of the everyday. Thus, the *Notes* project calls for being in space with other bodies to talk and exchange and hear and see and feel one another; it calls for the assembling and disassembling of ideology. It calls for gesticulation and sighs and the ineffable joy and pain that can only be conveyed through the oral tradition. But, this has been the problem with my project: How does one convey the political potentialities that are produced when one body encounters another as a text? How can one (me specifically) model a kind of curatorial practice that makes for itself a blueprint for social reproduction? A kind of reproduction that forges subjects who wish to enter into dialogue, and through this discursive praxis become able to model for their students and interlocutors new definitions discourse and exchange. This kind of pedagogy, and critical being-together might afford a methodology for informing political praxis that does not consider itself an end, but always a beginning—an opening toward other ways of knowing, through feeling, through solidarity, through being in space with others which can continue to re-make itself as the exigencies of a practice's context shift. The text by necessity comes to embody an interrogative entity more than explicatory one. This extends to the design of the book.

Notes on the Occasion of the Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the North American Free Trade Agreement/ *Notas en la Ocasión de la Celebración del 20 Aniversario de la Implementación del Tratado del Libre Comercio de América del Norte*, was published by Taller Ajonjolí a small press in Tijuana, BC.²⁵ The book was published in two formats: paperback and a special edition of 25 hard back library copies. All of the books were assembled in Tijuana, BC.

The publishing team and I looked forward to April 10th in a fiendish way. We were all so excited to hold the book as an object, not just as a dream. But then a printing accident occurred and the date was pushed back to April 13th (two days before *A Conversation in Three Parts*), and instead of the bilingual text that we had carefully designed together, we were left with only pages printed in English. First, there was panic. But then, we decided that this mistake could actually work very nicely with the conceptual design of the publication. We found a printer that could print the Spanish text on a shorter timeline within our budget in San Diego.²⁶ My partner drove to San Diego to print 15 copies of the text in Spanish, and drive them to Tijuana to be bound in time for *A Conversation in Three Parts*, the following day.

²⁵ Taller Ajonjolí is run by René Castillo. The press is also committed to issues of literacy and social justice (printing books inexpensively to make them available to students and educators), hosts readings with local writers and poets, and operates a reading room and café which fund used book fairs in Tijuana.

²⁶ This anecdote is also an important example of the dominance of English on both sides of the border, as even the Mexican-owned Spanish-speaking printers gave so much priority to the English text that the Spanish was left until the end and was mis/re-printed.

The accident yielded a bilingual book that is also bi-nationally printed. This also allowed us to represent materiality and process more closely, since the English text was printed on gray bond paper in offset, an indexical printing process that is more analog and historical, and the Spanish version of the text is printed digitally. These two material printing procedures embody the shift from more analogue manufacturing processes to more digitalized processes in the twenty years since NAFTA. The original texts (all drafted in English) are printed on grey paper, and the Spanish translations are printed white paper, so the different colors render a line between the two languages on the fore-spine of the book when it is closed. These texts are inverse bound so that there is no hierarchic relationship between the languages, the reader, not the formatting of the text, determines which language is privileged. The two fonts used in the text are Avenir, a sans-serif font that was designed in the late 1980s—during that time that NAFTA was being drafted—and Caslon a serif typeface that was created in the 17th century, modeled after handwriting so that it is easy to read. It was revived in the early 1990s for use in digital printing.²⁷ The book was designed to be an appealing object that is comfortable to read, and that bears of trace of the different readers that handle it and the environment of those readers. For this reason, the cover of the book, which is a very light parchment-pink color, has been left unsealed. The cover is meant to index its environment and those who have held, read, and marked it. It is an object that invites interaction. The title is justified to the top margin of the book, pointing just outside itself—the words within it just about to spill over.

²⁷ Avenir is used in this thesis.

A Conversation in Three Parts, served as an initial attempt to activate the space around the text, to illustrate how this object might be able to detonate some of the ideas that reside within it, and how other voices might be introduced.

During *A Conversation in Three Parts*, only Manuel Paul Lopez and Pepe Rojo were able to attend (although all contributors were invited), so the daylong symposium opened with their readings and discussion of text. Each read a selection of the text he contributed to the anthology. What followed were conversations on the nature of how the border is embodied, the kinds of infrastructure that shape the border, and how border subjects construct themselves in and through this bifurcated cartography.²⁸

Lopez and Rojo's reading was followed by a presentation of *Skin Destination* a film by Adriana Trujillo.²⁹ *Skin Destination* sources the home movies of various families from Baja California in order to create a portrait of the region and filmmaker, reflecting on how the environment and the subject, the public and private, are co-constituted. Trujillo also shared documentation from her forthcoming project, *1821: The Era of Good Feelings*, a project that documents sites in the US and the former US/Mexico border (in 1821) by following the path of sites noted in Alexander von Humboldt's travel diaries—including correspondence between von Humboldt and President Thomas Jefferson, which laid foundations for westward expansion and manifest destiny. The historical and geographical

²⁸ A complete audio recording of the event is available through the University Archives and University Art Gallery.

²⁹ *Skin Destination*, directed by Adriana Trujillo, produced by Jose Inerzia (Tijuana: FONCA, POLEN, 2012) 10' 34."

referents that Trujillo introduced to the conversation allowed us to meditate upon the ways NAFTA can be read as an extension of the historical processes of colonization and empire, a project that functions within a historical network of other subjugating forces and not in isolation.

This note allowed us to segue into the first ever People of Color Tour at UCI, which was led by Amy Sanchez-Arteaga (the author of this text) and Kathryn Romo, an undergraduate student in Latino Chicano Studies and Political Science. The tour highlights sites that are significant to people of color at UCI. The tour compiles an initial list of sites where the contributions of POC are visible and palpable, but also narrates less visible histories in order to create a spatial map of the experience of marginalized communities at this university.³⁰ The day culminated in a picnic and conversation around how the university is implicated within the dynamics of oppression and inequality that perform themselves at the border, and how those dynamics of free trade and privatization are transposed on the increasingly privatized public university setting. In this way, the tour becomes a means to reflect on how this borderization of the university comes to bare on the bodies of the most underrepresented and marginalized populations here.

Since this text cannot capture the breath and nuance of our conversation that day, and because this text is not meant to be a re-performance of the conversations and

³⁰ The UCI People of Color Tour was developed with the guidance of library archivist Steve MacLeod, help from students and staff at the UCI Cross Cultural Center and guidance from professors Ana Rosas, Vicki Ruiz and Bridget Cooks. The tour is available as a google map here: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/viewer?hl=en&authuser=1&mid=1sjdxXLsyRfi4cCBZXegB9bnUGKE>

conceptual and discursive formations that became manifest throughout the course of the day, these descriptive notes of what took place during the conference and around the book's production are as deep as this paper will delve. What I wish to articulate further here, are the ways in which the experience of staging ideas, performativity and dialogue in this project have allowed me to begin conceiving of a praxis around curating that privileges the way that ideas can expand interstitial spaces. I end this paper as it began by positioning my practice as existing somewhere between the parable of the manatee and position of the smuggler.

TOWARD AN INTERSTITIAL PATH: BETWEEN THE SMUGGLER AND THE MANATEE

Smuggle, *v*, To convey (goods) clandestinely into (or out of) a country or district, in order to avoid payment of legal duties, or in contravention of some enactment; to bring *in, over, etc.*, in this way.³¹

Over the last three years of graduate school I have found myself having to work between communities spaces that are often held apart conceptually: The university, immigrant and anti-displacement activist communities, Art spaces and spaces of labor on both sides of the border. The shifting between the different registers of cultural signification and the roles that I play in each of those spaces has made translation a requirement in my work—frequently within the same language. Often however, this translation must be done stealthily in order to retain the institutional and cultural legibility that allows for dialogue and the propagation of exchange across these cultural registers. These are the moments when I feel like a smuggler.

An example: One day, during the production of the book, the designer at the publisher asked if I would be willing to receive a package with paper for the cover in the US and cross it into Mexico because it would be less expensive to ship it to a US address. I agree. I receive the package in Santa Ana I open a box it contains pink paper, just larger than legal size, wrapped in layers of other paper and plastic. I repackage it before we get in the car to drive to Tijuana because I don't want to draw suspicion around a rectangular package wrapped in paper in the back seat of the car when we cross the border. We cross

³¹ "Smuggle," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed May 29, 2016. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/182852?rskey=D4Rhm6&result=1#eid>.

the border into Mexico and are selected for random inspection. We pass inspection and drive to the center of the city where the press has their workshop. There are 4 gates and a staircase that I pass. The building is made of brick, concrete and steel. René, the designer, opens the package, he asks me if we had any trouble getting it across, I tell him that it was fine, that we didn't have to pay a tariff and that nothing was confiscated.

Weeks later I am driving back from Tijuana with a trunk full of books. I think of an artwork that my friend Omar Pimenta made in grad school, where he checked out books from the library at UCSD and wrapped them like bricks of drugs and crossed the border with them as a performance.³² The immigration officer at the checkpoint, a young Latino man that looks the age of many of my students at UCI asks me where I am going, and what I am bringing across the border when I get to the checkpoint. I tell him that I am going to Chula Vista, a suburb near the border and that I have some books in the back. I do not say that there are 150 of them. He gives me back my documents and I get on the freeway.

When I get back to Irvine I speak to a friend who has never crossed into Mexico on land. I explain the process that I've just undergone; he is confused about the half-truths that I told the officer. Asks me why I didn't brag to the young government agent about the fact that I was driving back across with a book that I put together as my MFA thesis, why I didn't tell him that I was headed to Irvine. I explain to him that I wanted to get through quickly and that if I had shared these details I would have probably appeared suspicious or

³² Omar Pimenta. 2008. *Bookleggers*. Tijuana, BC

drawn out the exchange/inspection. This makes my friend sad, and upset. I try to entertain what it is that he might be feeling, and feel perplexed that I have no access to that sadness or righteous anger. He says something about the border not allowing for transborder subjects to exist "authentically." I feel othered, and uncomfortable I tell him that there are many forms of authenticity, and wonder why he has such an investment in my being "authentic." I care far less about authenticity than I do about survival.

I am moved to include this anecdote in these pages because the anecdote is how I have trafficked as a smuggler. Bringing reportage between borders within the territory of Baja and Alta, and disciplines in the university. While I strive to be honest in the ways I translate and represent the un-representable, something is always lost (and often gained) in translation, something that alters the way that my work manifests. Such mis-tellings and mis-understandings accumulate to make roads for inquiry and space for critique.

As I move forward in my scholarship I would like to look to hidden spaces where meaning accumulates and treat it as opaque matter. To look from the margins to the center for paths between and around linking discourses in ways that complicate and enrich them. I seek to do this however, from a space that builds (often, upon) relation, from a space that does not assume transparency of those discourses.

As I have written before in these pages: the work seeks out manatees and not mermaids. The work will be smuggled.

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