

AUTOPSY OF A RAT

Sundry Parables of Warner Brothers Studios, Jewish American Animators, Speedy Gonzales, Freddy López, and Other Chicano/Latino Marionettes Prancing about Our First World Visual Emporium; Parable Cameos by Jacques Derrida; and, a Dirty Joke

Once Upon a Time

We need, right now, a time tunnel, some high-tech, envaginated corridor, to enter the next dimension of our Tex[t]-Mex—something to transport us back to the 1960s, when your gentle author's synapses were being filled with vast arrays of delicious and decadent animated "Mexicans." What's more, we'll need to use this enabling portal to move forward again, something to hurtle us back to 1990 and a signature holiday special.

I loved Irwin Allen's Time Tunnel as a kid growing up—yes, that Irwin Allen, the schlockmeister producer of Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, The Towering Inferno, and The Poseidon Adventure. In the 1960s and 1970s, when I was not reading DC Comics or channeling MAD Magazine, I was watching TV all the time with my sister Josie—she's a sound editor, a postproduction ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement) specialist, in Hollywood of all places! My sister, Tejana, Chicana, and a true agent of the silver screen monsters, the motion picture engines, that vomit the Tex[t]-Mex fertilized ova from screen to television, from the Internet to your local magazine stands. But I forgive her!

Time Tunnel was one of disaster maven Irwin Allen's television triumphs: the chance to move through time using a supercool tunnel—it pre-saged my love for the slippery, cloaked corridors of Borges, Pynchon, Varo, and Derrida. So let's pretend. It is crucial that we do—dynamically pretend, play with the glee and rigor of a premad Nietzsche, pretend and remember. . . .



A photograph of Time Tunnel memorabilia buttons that I purchased on eBay in late summer 2005, when this book was in its final preparation for press.

Mexicans move as naturally and comfortably in the dark as cats or wolves or owls do. . . . Mexicans get drunk and sing like cats beneath the moon.¹

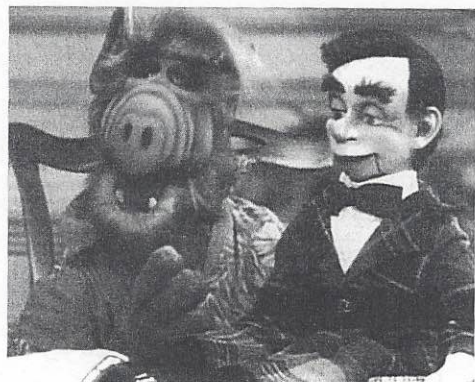
Richard Rodriguez takes a stab at ethnography in *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*.

There was something about him, Harry, that amused me. He was such a monster.

Oscar Wilde's vain, sexually adept protagonist anticipates Richard Rodriguez's anthropological acuity in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.²

I am not prejudiced, but I think he is part troll.

A somewhat tolerant elf holds forth from Santa Claus's North Pole enclave in Paul Fusco and Bernie Brillstein's *A Very Retail Christmas*.³



Tanquam in speculum/as in a mirror: A screen grab from *Alf* episode 49, wherein Alf gets a ventriloquist's dummy—the marionette gets a dummy! Again, the shade of Borges smiles at this televised revision of his "Circular Ruins" and we have to smile through our tears.

Incision One | Skeletons in the [Refrigerated Coroner's] Closet; or, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer Is Not the Only One with a Manifestly Odd Genetic Fingerprint

It is Christmas 1990 and U.S. citizens, resident aliens, and immigrant visitors from Peoria to Cotulla, from Ithaca to Oxnard, and from Laredo to Panama City are in the mood for mindless holiday entertainment, some colorful and delectable mélange of the predictable served up in heaping doses.

Enter television. Those not quaffing eggnog, caroling off-key holiday melodies, or covetously seeking mistletoe are likely to be watching TV. The lucky ones are tuned to NBC on December 24, 1990, and are watching a yuletide special called *A Very Retail Christmas*, a clever updating of the Santa Claus story produced by Paul Fusco and Bernard ("Bernie") Brillstein—the cinematography was by David Callaway, with Fusco doing most if not all of the puppet designs.⁴

An augural aside: Fusco and Brillstein are the Hollywood dynamic duo best remembered for an exotic, somewhat popular situation comedy called *Alf*, which played several years in the eighties.

If you have chanced to wash the memory of this program from your overtaxed synapses, it is enough to recall that *Alf* featured a loud-mouthed, furry, outer-space "alien" who invades the life of a typically pale, TV sitcom family—picture a testosterone-enhanced, cynical ET with Brooklyn attitude and you get the picture.⁵

Back to our story. *A Very Retail Christmas* chronicles a corporate struggle, a mercantile war, between Santa Claus, with his merry group of look-alike elves, and a rapacious multinational toy corporation CEO, with his den of "suits," lackeys, and trolls (yes, *trolls!*). Producers Fusco and Brillstein should be commended for producing their Christmas parable, applauded for their adroit revision of Santa—the classic tale of Old Saint Nick reimagined as an ironic parody of the mercenary go-go 1980s.

For this Christmas epic is more a tale of mergers and acquisitions than a chronicle of a cheery fat man's altruism, more like a Dickensian (*Hard Times*) allegory of "filthy lucre" set in the frosty North Pole. A portly, benevolent feudal despot (Santa Claus) squares off against the evil embodiment of late capital (the CEO). Ironically enough, even as we live, breathe, and are sustained by global capital, it is expected that we viewers will nostalgically ally our sensibilities with the besieged, jolly, fat, feudal chieftain, and we thoughtlessly do so.

I know I did.

The CEO is played with William Shatner-like restraint (that is, no restraint) by Ed O'Neill, who played the "funny" misogynist-cum-shoe-salesman named Al Bundy (one part Willy Loman, one part Norman Mailer, one part Larry Flynt) from the Fox Network's late, lamented, vulgar comedy *Married . . . with Children*.

O'Neill is one of the few live actors on the program, as the rest of the players are marionettes (as was Alf): intricately designed, Muppet-like animatrons made of felt, rubber, control wires, and synthetic hair, with a group of skilled puppeteers somewhere above and beneath the scenes moving them about. Here, let us pause. Momentarily allow an image of the cave from Plato's *Republic* (Book VII) to play upon the viewscreen of your consciousness: shadows, fire, puppets, and clueless chained voyeurs—all figure in the arguments that follow.

And as the recollection of that peculiar platonic precursor to motion pictures dances across your synapses, let us span a couple millennia so as to append this caution culled from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *On the Line*: "[As with] rhizome[s], puppet strings . . . do not run back to the assumed will of an artist or puppeteer, but to the multiplicity of nerve fibers that form in their turn another puppet following other dimensions connected to the first."⁶ Somewhat chastened (*verbum sapienti sat est*), let us put Deleuze and Guattari's enigmatic emendation to one side and return to *A Very Retail Christmas*.

Our aforementioned CEO wants to monopolize the production of toys, profiting handsomely while dictating the entertainment consumption of



Unctuous Al Bundy, played by Ed O'Neill, one of the main actors in *A Very Retail Christmas*, seen here in a screen grab from a Swiss fan Web site. This grab, I might add, is from an episode of *Married . . . with Children* entitled "Wabbit Season," episode 508, wherein Bundy apes Bugs Bunny—not unimportant to what will unfold in the present chapter.

children. So he cooks up a scheme to get Santa out of the way, palming off his company's line of ultraviolent wares (mostly military-theme war toys) in the process. Fusco and Brillstein's satiric allegorization of corporate development (with no little attention paid to the influence of the military-industrial complex) is to be applauded by progressive critics everywhere—and on NBC no less!



The world's largest arms manufacturer flexes its ironic muscle in this circa 1995 Web advertisement banner.

When not packaging excellent sitcoms (*Seinfeld*, *Frazier*) and insipid news broadcasts (*NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, which—some would argue—itself featured, until his recent retirement, a state-of-the-art animatron), the “Pea-

cock” Network is nothing more and nothing less than a public relations front for its parent company, General Electric, one of the United States's largest military contractors: “We bring good things to life,” indeed!—the irony of their corporate self-presentation is almost too much to stomach.⁷

But let us not chase after another aside, as it is not the corporate/military-industrial allegory that concerns us here in this chapter—or, better put, taking Jane Gallop's words out of her lovely mouth, that particular allegory *aborde* (come[s] to, enter[s] upon, approach[es], accost[s]) the main events of this chapter.⁸

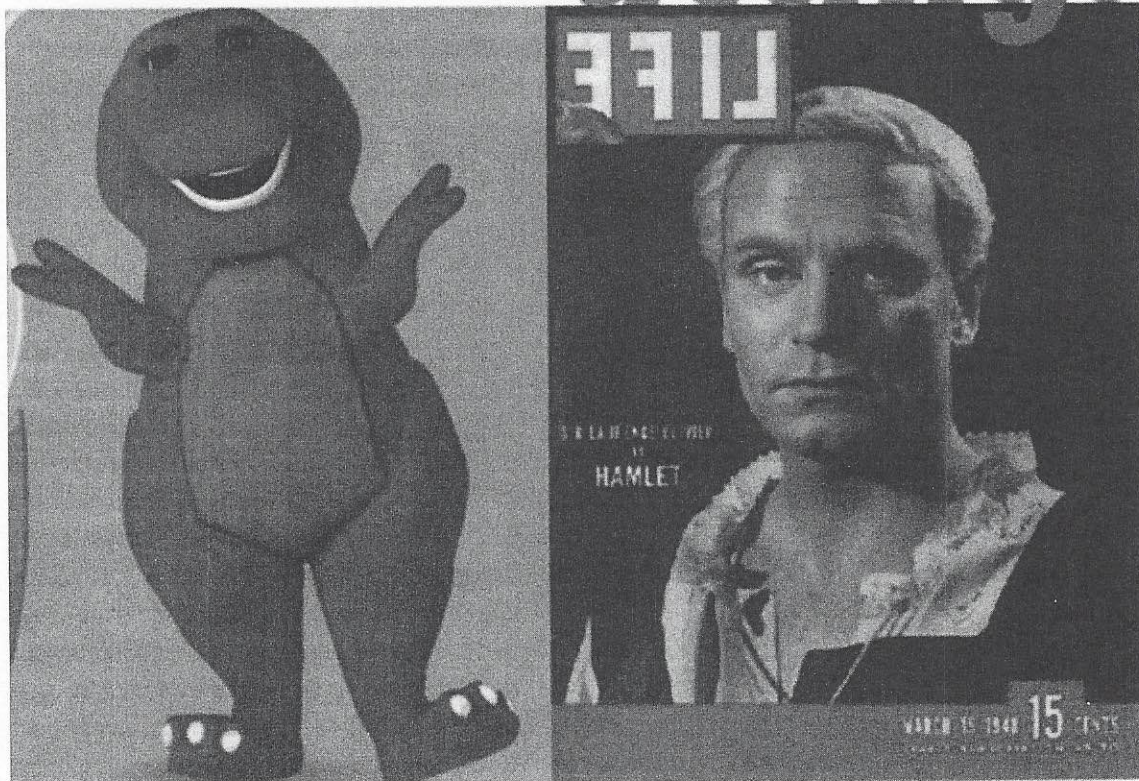
It is another allegory toward which we now move, one plainly visible in what Cuban theorist Severo Sarduy called “the oscillating frontier of the flickering screen.”⁹ For in order to get rid of Santa, our scheming CEO (one part Adam Smith, one part Hobbes, one part Donald Trump, and one part Leona Helmsley) looks around for a mole to penetrate Santa's North Pole estate—a cagey, spy/saboteur whose mission will be to gum up the works *chez Santa central*.

It is all very 1980s; one half expects Ivan Boesky and Ronald Reagan to make cameos.

Santa's North Pole enclave is a hard nut to crack. Taxed by the challenge of identifying a capable infiltrator, our barbarous CEO comes upon a *swarthy* “troll” who is able to mix in unnoticed amongst the lot of cheery, singing elves at Santa's toy shop. The plot turns on a coincidence of *appearance*: the same size and build of his fantasy-tale cousins, our as-yet-unnamed troll *passes* for an elf. This troll, however, is not *pure* troll. He is only “*half-troll*”: one part elf, one part troll to be exact. A singularly shaped puppet on the screen, our miscegenated protagonist has features that are quite clearly exaggerated: a half-breed puppet.¹⁰ Of course, this ought not to shock us too much; nothing is ever very subtle in the physiognomy of puppets: Barney is no Olivier.

Our soon-to-be-named elf/troll has a huge nose, an ugly scary scowl,

acting!



a low brow, a scraggly beard, and a funny accent—perhaps “funny” isn’t quite the word; “placeable,” “identifiable,” or “symptomatic” are closer to the sense I want to convey. He is, in short, to paraphrase Wilde’s beautiful *bon vivant* Dorian Gray, “[an] amus[ing] monster.”¹¹

Were this not the late-twentieth-century United States of America but 1930–1940 Central Europe, we would not be surprised to see the likes of Dr. Joseph Goebbels authorizing the use of similar puppets for Third Reich anti-Semitic children’s shows.

But we *are* in the United States, not in Nazi Germany. Specifically, we are in California, where *A Very Retail Christmas* was produced and staged.

Many Mexicans are in evidence: some documented, others not.

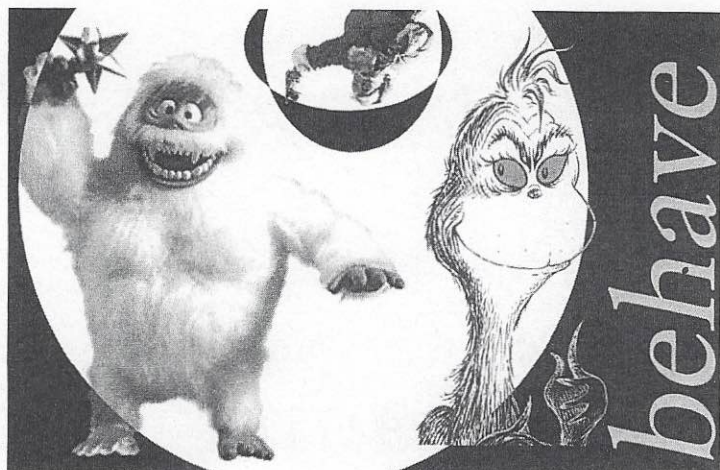
And by now you must have a sense of where all this is going. The name of this philandering, two-faced, two-skinned (both elf and troll) operative? The imp with the temerity to threaten Santa Claus? The mestizo who would depose our benevolent, bearded, white-haired yuletide benefactor? His name is Freddy López.

Freddy López.

“Olivier’s Nightmare,”

Guillermo Nericcio García.

Latino name, Latino physiognomy: unshaved, accented, and duplicitous—Iago is his spiritual godfather, Caliban his great-uncle; Othello is somewhere there, too, given the López puppet's "skin" color. This mixed-blooded creature's shrewd, greasy evilness is palpable; he is nothing more and nothing less than a shadowy *bandido* running amok in the pristine, white, snowy confines of the North Pole.



"Villains in Rehab," Guillermo Nericcio García.

I argued above in the *Touch of Evil* chapter that in the late twentieth century, Latino and Latina bodies in the U.S. mass media serve as vivid synecdoches for a particular and peculiar sensually charged form of evil potentiality—Freddy López adds his body (courtesy of Fusco and Brillstein) to this growing roster.

Happily for all save the diminutive Mr. López, it is not long before the nefarious miscreant's plot is uncovered. In the well-rehearsed logic of the holi-

day-Christmas-show genre, evil can only survive till the end of the last station break: Dr. Seuss's "Grinch" undergoes a transformation that gives new meaning to the term "bipolar." An ugly Abominable Snowman, once a deformed deer's nemesis, turns a new leaf in the closing reel of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, and so on.

And so it is with *A Very Retail Christmas*, where the ugly, cruel Santa-hating troll with a heavy Spanish accent is rather quickly sniffed out by a coterie of pale, miscegenation-fearing elves. One elf is plainly pained by the encounter with his putative mirror other; confronting this genetic anomaly, he declares with measured disdain: "I am not prejudiced, but I think he is part troll."

I am not prejudiced, but I think he is part troll.

The phrase is slightly haunting.

Really perturbing and curious.

Slowly, carefully, let us allow the shadow of this Latino-esque mannequin named Freddy López to follow us throughout this chapter as we review the status of animated Latina/o bodies in U.S. mass culture. It will take

The archetype of Santa Claus is overdue for semiotic analysis. My own interests lean toward a chronicle wherein we ponder Santa's odd resemblance in classic Western iconography to Moses, God, and (surely the oddest doppelgänger of them all) Karl Marx.

time for some clear thought, some focused, quiet meditation to think through the implications of Fusco and Brillstein's production. We will need all the critical imagination possible to reconcile the bifurcated, yet somehow also mediated, contours of Freddy López's body, to conclude our autopsy of this particular mestizo puppet, this jarring offspring of the Brothers Grimm and Pancho Villa, of Pinocchio and Topo Gigo, so as to move on, somehow, to the next body patiently waiting in our hermeneutic morgue.¹²

Incision Two | An Amalgamated Inquest; or, How Ethnicity and Gender Share a Common Ancestor

Ethnicity as Genre, Genre as Gender, Gender as Genus, Genus as Genital, Genital as . . .

The great subplot lurking within this chapter is tension filled. How does a comparativist trained somewhat to grapple with the complexities of ethnicity in the Americas rhetorically also convey his suspicions about the dynamics of gender politics? I need first to lay some exegetic instruments on the table.¹³

ethnic adj [ME, fr. LL *ethnicus*, fr. Gk *ethnikos* national, gentile, fr. *ethnos* nation, people] 1: neither Christian nor Jewish: HEATHEN 2: of or relating to races or large groups of people classed according to common traits and customs.

genre n [F, fr. MF, *genre* kind, gender—more at GENDER] 1: KIND, SORT 2a: paintings that depict scenes or events from everyday life . . . 2b: a distinctive type or category of literary composition. RELATED to *genus*.

genus n [L *genus* birth, race, kind—more at KIN *genera* pl] 1: a class, kind, or group marked by common characteristics or by one common characteristic; a category of biological classification ranking between the family and the species, comprising structurally or phylogenetically related species or an isolated species exhibiting unusual differentiation.

gender n [ME *gendre*, fr. MF *genre*, *gendre*, fr. L *gener*, *genus* birth, race, kind, gender—more at KIN] 1: SEX 2a: any of two or more subclasses within a grammatical class of a language (as noun, pronoun, adjective, verb) that are partly arbitrary but also partly based on distinguishable characteristics such as shape, social rank, manner of existence, or sex.

gender vb [ME *gendren*, fr. MF *gendrer*, fr. L *generare*—more at GENERATE] 1. Engender.

genital adj [ME, fr. L *genitalis*, fr. *genitus*, pp. of *gignere* to beget, more at KIN 1: Generative 2: of, relating to, or being a sexual organ.

My none-too-subtle juxtaposition of loaded terms here no doubt tips my hand. I want to read the "ethnic" as a close semantic cousin of "gender"—skeletons coming out of the closet to venture a telling chiasmic pun.

The word "genre" figures as an antagonistic wild card in this Faulkner-like etymological blood allegory, establishing a genetic link between the term "gender" and the term "ethnic" while also moonlighting as a metonymic emblem for literature in particular and textuality in general. I do not have the space here to play at nomography, to author that set of laws that would sanction the methodological intersection of ethnic American theory and gender theory—we do, after all, have some cartoons to screen.

But what I do have the time and space to suggest is that it would take a feat of imagination worthy of Disney to imagine a critical context in which one would not in some way underwrite the other. Let me give you an example.

In my just-related saga of miscegenated, animatronic automaton Freddy López, an ostensibly trifling network television Christmas special leads to a heady matrix incorporating Latino stereotyping and enigmatic whispers concerning pathological anti-Semitism and the dynamics of Nazi ethnic scapegoating. This knotty nexus was revealed with the assistance of an epigraph culled from the works of no less a stand-up savant than Oscar Wilde, and it did not come easily.

It will help some to disclose that my inquiry into stereotypes has been guided by Sander Gilman's compelling work on the figuration of ethnic types—it seems reasonable to agree with Gilman that "where and how a society defines the body reflects how those in society define themselves."¹⁴ Needless to say, a comparative analysis of Jewish stereotypes is not so far afield from those with a decidedly "Latina/o" flavor. Gilman's *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* also represents a compelling, influential trove of expository findings—the chapters "The Hottentot and the Prostitute: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality" and "Black Sexuality and Modern Consciousness" especially figured in the development of the present study.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, many provocative meditations on representation are themselves filled with scandalously racist representations. For instance, some of the best theorizations of image manipulation in the twentieth

century are to be found in the insidious machinations of the Nazi war machine—both Paul Virilio and Klaus Theweleit have mined this contentious vein of history.¹⁶

Additionally, I believe it perfectly reasonable to read Hitler's, Mengele's, and others' obsession with Jewish physiognomy and anatomy as a subset of mid-twentieth-century German art history—an *aesthetics of difference* must always be read as a subset of a general concern for forms and symmetry, or aesthetics proper.

But our reliable, predictably vile Nazi fiends are not the only culprits.

Consider this: as much as any other theoretical source consulted in the production of this study, including Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Rosario Castellanos, and Severo Sarduy, it was Oscar Wilde and, in particular, his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that provided me with the rhetorical/critical means of intervening on the site of Latina/o representation.

Even so, I believe it crucial to broach genial decorum and intellectual generosity to add that Wilde's glance is downright primitive when it comes to Jews in England—our modernist poster child for queer theory is also at once an anti-Semite as well as a wry, charming misogynist.

Some select examples: Dorian: "A hideous Jew, in the most amazing waistcoat I ever beheld in my life, was standing at the entrance, smoking a vile cigar. He had greasy ringlets, and an enormous diamond blazed in the centre of a soiled shirt . . . There was something about him, Harry, that amused me. He was such a monster."¹⁷

A few chapters later, the same redoubtable manager is described by Wilde's narrator as "beaming from ear to ear with an oily tremulous smile . . . [Dorian Gray] felt as if he had come to look for Miranda and had been met by Caliban" (95; emphasis added).¹⁸

Given that Wilde's Jewish theater owner stands barring a portal that might give access to Dorian's heterosexual desire (Sibyl Vane) in a book by and large sustained by a gay male economics of desire, there seems to be space here to open up a critique of the dynamics of gendered desire



A leaf from a young-adult edition of Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*.

that would not drop out issues of race and ethnicity.¹⁹ I have only mustered an egregiously preliminary sketch of this in my juxtaposition of ethnicity, genre, genus, gender, and genitals at the head of this, the second incision. Sadly, compatriot coroner, we must move on. Our exquisite Mexicanesque corpse awaits us.

Incision Three | An Additional Delay in the Postmortem as We Examine More Instruments

Autopsies

autopsy n [Gk. *autopsia* act of seeing with one's own eyes, *aut-* + *opsis* sight, to be going to see] 1: a postmôrtem [L. *post mortem* after death 1: Occurring after death. Examination].

What, then, are we going to see?

An autopsy is an examination of a dead body. A true *etiological* science, it seeks to determine the origin(s) of death via empirical observation. But etymologically, "autopsy" refers also—as odd and as counterlogical as it may seem—to the act of "seeing with one's own eyes." And we must attend to this peculiar duality, for what if how we see, how we see ourselves with our "own eyes," has been affected by how others have seen "us?" What happens when our eyes consume and our psyche is tattooed by technologically sophisticated and ubiquitous versions of "us" as others have imagined or, more to the point, theatrically suggested we appear? Furthermore, imagine that these representations; these othered, othering visions; these popular because familiar, and familiar because popular images; these familiar and popular as they are profitable and caustic hallucinations spring from the minds and pens of adversaries, individuals, or descendants of individuals with whom we have been or still are at war. Plato's cave, surely, provides the setting, but with Hollywood and the Pentagon as set designers and dressers.

What, in the end, are "we" "going to see?" This would seem the best time for a visual vivisection of select, salient video—in short, it's time for an expository *autopsy*.

While other critical studies have addressed the impact of what Adorno called the "culture industry" on ethnic Americans, few have focused on Latinas/os in the United States. Those that do, with a few notable exceptions (Allen L. Woll, Arthur Pettit, Chon "not the son of Manuel" Noriega, Rosa Linda Fregoso, and Alfred Charles Richard, Jr.), have been of the coffee table variety, aiming primarily at cataloguing the glitz and glamour of Hollywood *estilo latino* (Hadley-García).²⁰

I ought to confess that our exegetical enterprise is more than just a wee bit colored by psychoanalysis, especially in the way these jottings

aspire to diagnose the impact of stereotypes on the collective psyche of U.S. residents of Latin American descent.²¹ If I venture to use “psychoanalytic” as an adjective to define my project, I also ought to point out that it is a Lacan-inflected version of the psychoanalytic dais that I here picture: *analysand*, *analyst*, and methodology are caught up in a vortex of suspicious intrigue and interaction.²²

Said disclosure brings me to a second confession with a telling caveat: your Chicano analyst is heavily invested in the subject(s) he has and will soon annotate. That having been said, let me assure you also that the intellectual desires financing this exercise have been aroused by something more, something other than the “rage of Caliban seeing his own face in the glass.”²³

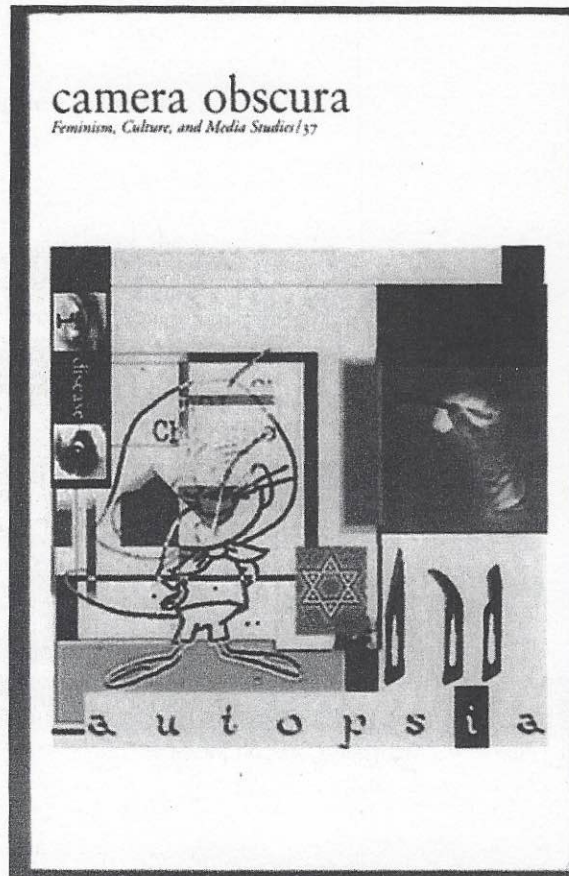
Speaking of glass—here is a plate, or, at any rate, a plate of art; the journal that published the first version of this chapter allowed it to festoon the cover of the issue it appeared in. It is a gloss of all that precedes and follows in its wake.

Back to glasses—this glass is not *my* glass—the “glass” is someone else’s, less a *reflecting* mirror than a *projecting* lens, or, perhaps better said, a projection that walks about in the guise of a mirror.

Are we being too careful? I think not: the detective story paradigm within which psychoanalysis flourishes mandates that even the couch is suspect.

Stereotypes

Forgive me an indulgence with the dictionary—it seems such a pat move, but then again, etymological speculation seems one of the best ways of displacing accreted layers of murky sludge that make words seem self-evident. I will now excuse myself to the “sedilia,” those special comfy chairs high priests in cavernous cathedrals use when not officiating, and give the proceedings over to my friend the dictionary—in this case, a different dictionary, that fecund, etymological trough called the *Oxford English Dictionary*. There, as we can plainly read, a stereotype is “a one-piece printing plate cast in type metal from a mold (matrix) taken of a printing



“Mexicanesque Maus or Autopsy of a Rat”: the cover I designed for *Camera Obscura* 37 (1998), wherein the first incarnation of this chapter on Speedy appeared.

surface." The term had its origin in the domain of publishing, itself an industry charged with the manufacture and dissemination of words and images.

Dissemination, semen—rising from the sedilia and leaning forward, I say: "Does it take such a stretch of the imagination to see publishing as a subset of reproduction, that is, to read stereotypes as being governed by genetic laws of reproduction?"

I return to the chair.

Pursuing etymological inquiry further, the *OED* continues: "Stereo" comes from the Greek "*stereos*": "hard," "solid," "firm," "stiff." Our eyebrows lift as we notice how "stereo" is also linked, via alleged Indo-European primogenitors, to the English verb "to stare." Publishing, engendering, hard, stiff, staring: hmmm. Which brings us to the second half of the word "stereotype": the suffix "-type." "Type" derives from the Greek word "*typos*," which means a "model," a "symbol," or, more to the point, "an archetype." Like a tease, the *OED* then quietly drops that the word is thought to derive from another Greek word, "*typtein*."

Now the inquiry reaches heights of intrigue usually only associated with pulp fiction, for that word "*typtein*," offered as an afterthought or as nonchalant speculation, has the idea of a blow, of a violent impact, of a "mark made by a blow," resonating within its semantic ancestry. In the past, this term described the physical force artisans used to craft raw materials at hand into *artifacts*. The sedilia is no longer needed, as we are now in a position to further our understanding of "stereotypes."

Look closely.



We . . . stare . . . -type.



We *stare*, and then we *type*, that is, we "write" or, better put, overwrite that which has been seen in terms of other scenes that have been received previously. Confronted by individuals or communities different from that which has already been encountered, we resort to our ready treasure trove of stereotypes.



Before I shake your hand, and say *¡hola!* or hello, others have come before me, paving the way as it were for our introduction—imagine that you and I had never met a Mexican national or a Latino, but creatures like Freddy López and his clan *color* our rendezvous with the dynamics of the palimpsest; the Mexican is suffused by his or her animated Mexicanesque predecessor. As we saw above in the introduction, it is Menelaus greeting Telemachus in reverse, a stain on our blood that enters all spaces we enter before us.

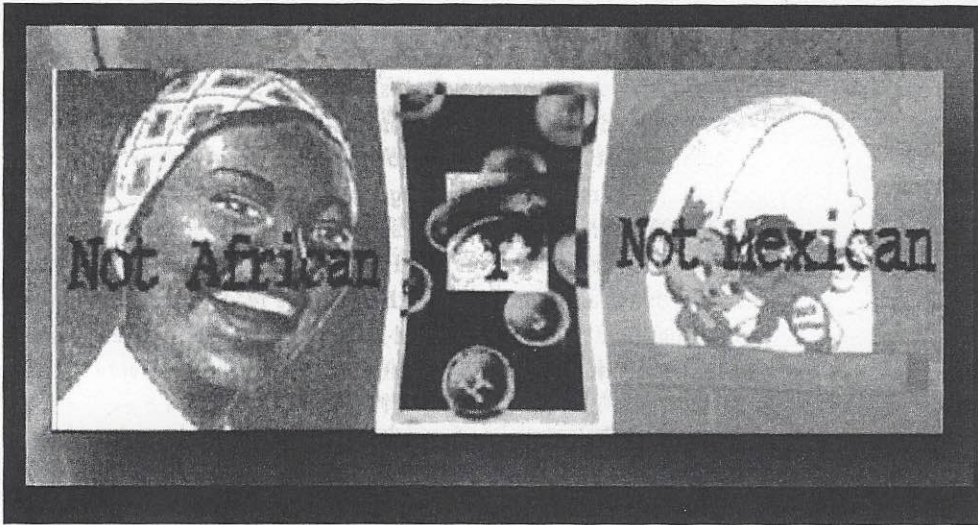
Through this circuitous (cynics might say *dubious*) route, we have rediscovered how the hierarchy of meaning that sustains the term "stereotype" includes *physical* and *figural* violence: blows on metal (*typtein*), blows on paper (typewriting), *blows on flesh* (stereotyping).²⁴

So that violence is not only an implicit result of the use of stereotypes—the emotional violence that, say, we associate with individuals who are the butt of a stereotype's *joke*.

No, *violence* is a fundamental component of this noun's genealogy.

Violence is in its blood.

If you will forgive me the license of reading these accumulated definitions and etymologies like poems, several items come to the fore: *staring*, *printing*, *repetition*, *blows*. In these words and between the lines, we come to see how "stereotype" conceals a muddled, muddled history—a



constellation of nouns and verbs, acts and processes that provide a backdrop for our inquiry into the relative status of Latino and Latina figures in the mass cultural emporium of the United States. Having sullied our hands with the knotty, "rhizome"-like roots of the term, we are at last prepared to think through the lasting control they exert on the popular imagination.²⁵

What is more easily distributable, reproducible, and recognizable than a stereotype, and what does more violence to the possibility of dialogue between diverse communities than these grotesque caricatures, carried within the mass cultural collective imaginary, so easy to deploy when one is threatened or surprised? We have uncovered an insidiously short path between "stereotype's" material printing press origins and the vulgar ethnocentric/slur-hurling dimensions of the word in our day-to-day life in the Americas. I will end this incision with a graphic scalpel of my own making—I call it "The Typed Subject."

Strikethrough, elide, render, rend—but still the law of the palimpsest rules, hence my take here, "The Typed Subject."

Incision Four | Throwing a Little Light on the Subject

Whether or not we ever reveal the “real,” our animated inquest must move forward—the cause of death must be ascertained, seen with our “own eyes.” And we must do so if only to attune ourselves to the dynamics of disinformation in the television age. Things are getting faster, hundreds of channels looming ominously on the horizon—as I have written in another place, “image, image everywhere, and not a thought to think.”²⁶ We need to improve our ability to critically engage with visual ideology, or we will fall victim to its logic.

There is no choice really.

In short, our critical project tags us as *ocular linguists of the syntax of visual despotism*—and I agree with the Italian American writer Robert Viscusi, who holds that “the dialect of dominance has never been, and one suspects, never can be—fully naturalized.”²⁷ One dominating influence on this dialect is the heft (the weight and spatial density) of the symbiotic relationship our organism shares with images we foster.

In another decade, in another context, Michel Foucault chanced upon the logic of this tyranny when he spoke of “the ultimate language of madness [as] that of reason, but the language of reason enveloped in *the prestige of the image*.”²⁸ One villain in all this intrigue is quite clear: motion pictures. Without doubt, film’s rapid growth in the first part of the twentieth century changes irrevocably the way one reads the world—in particular, that part of the world called Mexico. And while this development heralded “a technical invention that gave rise to the discovery and the perfection of a new art,” as Erwin Panofsky pointedly notes,²⁹ it also brought about a watershed moment in what might be called the History of Visual Textuality as new storytelling technologies were married to older, more traditional forms of entertainment, and older, more traditional forms of prejudice.

At the same time, these changes increased the ability of various institutions and individuals to shape the attitudes and expectations of millions, those willingly and voyeuristically surveying reality from the comfort of their seats in dark, crowded picture palaces. Velocity-sensitive French cultural cartographer Paul Virilio has seen through this particular ruse. Noting a futurist innovator by the name of Pastrone, Virilio concludes that “the [motion picture] camera’s function was less to produce images (as painters and photographers had long been doing) than to manipulate and falsify dimensions.”³⁰

The postmortem has waited long enough, so let us turn now to the rat who sets the standard for the manipulation and falsification of *mejicanidad* on the planet.

They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.

—Edward Said's epigraph
in *Orientalism* quoting
Karl Marx from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*



Speedy Gonzales: from the fifties and early sixties and on to the present day, this ubiquitous Latino mouse has mesmerized cinema devotees and television viewers the world over. Witty, savvy, and fast, Gonzales (whose business card proclaims him "the fastest mouse in all Mexico"³¹) served as a comic celebrity in legions of Warner Brothers animated adventures with a supporting cast of (by turns silly, by turns pathetic and filthy) furry and feathered friends.

Until quite recently (the Cartoon Network embargoed Speedy shorts in 2001), Speedy's vignettes were still popular on Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons via syndication in both the United States and Mexico.³² These cartoon masterpieces, directed by Robert McKimson and Isadore "I" "Friz" Freleng, epitomize show business's "acme" in terms of return on investments, having reaped critical acclaim in the form of Academy Award nominations as well as the material rewards that they continue to garner through home video and corporate merchandising opportunities. Where is anyone to put this remarkable creature, this crowning achievement of mainstream U.S. ethnic stereotyping?

As an English-speaking child of Mexican descent living in Laredo, Texas, I laughed convulsively at the devil-may-care exploits of Speedy and his retinue of lazy, shiftless cohorts, who are, in the words of the "gringo pussygato" Sylvester, nothing but "miserable little sneakin' crooked cheese thieves" (*Here Today, Gone Tamale*, dir. Friz Freleng, 1959).

In *The Pied Piper of Guadalupe* (dir. Friz Freleng, 1956), Sylvester adds more predictable abuse: "That's all you can do is run, run, run; you cowardly little cheese thieves."

"Predictable?"

Predictable in that it did not take a terrible stretch of the imagination, by the mid-1950s, for U.S. moviegoers to conjure the image of a Mexican as a thief—decades-long territorial disputes and wars with our southern neighbor helped ensure that this was the case.

This classic Speedy montage (circa 1970) is digitally adapted from Maurice Horn's *World Encyclopedia of Comics*; on the right is the latest (1996) incarnation of Speedy as celebrity front man for the Frito-Lay corporation. Given Frito-Lay's prior history of developing the infamous Frito Bandito ad campaign of the 1970s, it is not surprising to see their recent schmoozing with Warner Brothers and their family of Tex[t]-Mex mannequins. For more on the Frito Bandito, see Chon A. Noriega's *Shot in America*.

The mise-en-scènes in Warner Brothers' wonderfully animated and scored productions are noteworthy: the perennially lazy (save for Speedy; he is an *industrious* thief) Mexican mice live in trash and frequent rowdy, boisterous *cantinas*. Here the assorted swarthy throngs sing the delights of marijuana and alcohol (not that we should, *estilo puritano*, malign said indulgences).

Mired in sullied refuse, intoxicated, and loud when not silently engaging in various petty larcenies, the mice (Mexican rogues, pestilent Don Juans) compulsively and serially lust after by turns helpless and delighted *señoritas*. Sometimes they are successful, sometimes they are not—here, Speedy appears quite often as knave exemplar, usually getting his way with “the ladies.”

In some animated short features, Speedy is the hero of his Veracruz-like communities, but he can also be the “enemy” when it comes to the

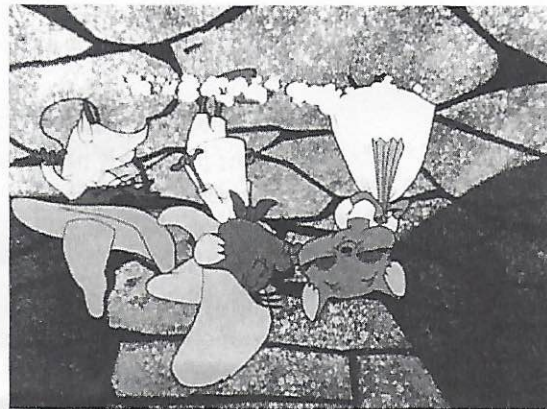
issue of sexual desire and coupling—in fact, in *Gonzales Tamales* (dir. Friz Freleng, 1957), it is Speedy’s “friends,” the mice, who hire Sylvester the Cat to capture the masher/interloper, girlfriend-stealing, would-be Romeo, Señor Rat Gonzales.

The titles of these short films are noteworthy for the way they tie archetypes and stereotypes (that are to be anticipated if not totally forgiven in animated films) to mainstream American literature: three particular titles here seem to offer most in the way of thematic overlap: *Tabasco Road*, *Tortilla Flaps*, and *Cannery Woe*—clever titular parodies of two novels by John Stein-

beck (*Tortilla Flat*, 1935, and *Cannery Row*, 1945) and one by Erskine Caldwell (*Tobacco Road*, 1940).

Here, as with most parodies, there is more to these matters than meets the eye: a careful perusal of Steinbeck’s oeuvre reveals more than a trivial problematic with regard to the characterization of Californian Mexicans. Let’s recall what was happening in and around Mexico from 1910 to 1920, as well as the greaser films, the lurid postcards, and the popular obsession with Mexico experienced by the United States at that time. Picture postcards explode, burst out about the same time greaser features are making their way across the country, with the movie series reaching its peak of popularity as conflicts between the United States and Mexico reach a climax of their own.

Across the United States, relatives and friends receive garish, violent, and gaudy “visions” of U.S. servicemen in Mexico (marines at Veracruz and military cavalry along the U.S.-Mexican border).



1957.
Freleng's *Gonzales Tamales*,
intercepts a kiss in Friz
Juanny-on-the-spot Speedy

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Juanny-on-the-spot Speedy intercepts a kiss in Friz Freleng’s *Gonzales Tamales*, 1957.

Mexico at war and the United States at war with Mexico become the reality TV of their age, with throngs of gawking American audiences throwing their eyes and, sadly for some, their bodies into the mix.

The violent melodrama of U.S. soldiers and marines at war with Mexicans staged amid the rustic primitivism of Mexico "itself": the visualized legacy of armed national conflict found in these postal remnants is quite striking. We saw above that some cards feature mutilated, "comically" staged scenes of U.S. Army regulars posed with Mexican corpses.

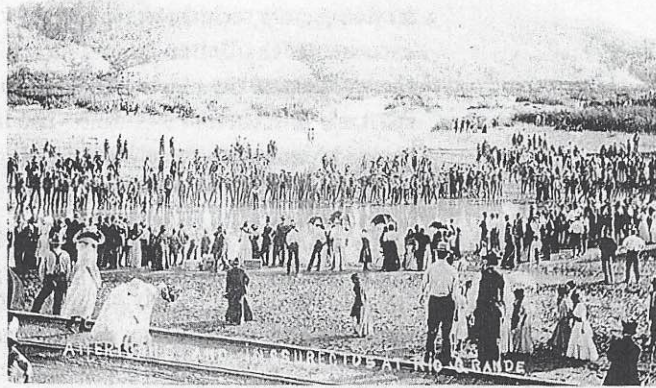
How does this information reflect upon the exploits of our garrulous Mexican mouse? Can we really track the impact of these military/cultural/technological developments in an innocent animated cartoon?

Well, let us start with this: the Speedy Gonzales one runs across in Warner Brothers cartoons is not derived from a generic vision of a Mexican rural laborer, or *campesino*. If one looks closely at Speedy and his ilk, one sees that they are garbed in the clothing of Mexicans from the port city of Veracruz.

"And . . . ?" some more impudent readers might silently intone with the hint of a *Gilligan's Island* Thurston Howell cadence!³³

Veracruz happens to be a major east coast Mexican city and, as such, has served as a critical port of entry for past and present would-be invaders of Mexico—conquering armies under the tutelage of luminaries from conquistador Hernán Cortés onward have known this all too well. U.S. military regulars *visited* Mexico in this fashion both in 1846 and 1914.

I like the way historian Paul Vanderwood speaks of the most recent of these "visits," lamenting U.S. activities in this regard as an "affair of substantial dishonor." Vanderwood's text goes on to recount that day in



A participant remembers: "A lot of people would go alongside the river and watch the fighting. They would stand and watch like damn fools. They killed a little boy who was standing right close to me. He got hit and started crying, and I knew goddamn well he got hit! Deader than hell, a little boy about six or seven years old, standing there and watching them. And them goddamn people wouldn't get out of the way . . ." (Courtesy Andreas Brown Collection.)



The traditional garb of *veracruzanos* cross-cut with the fastest mouse in all Mexico.

"April 1914 [when] United States sailors seized Veracruz and its revenue-producing customhouse, effectively quarantining the [Mexican leadership] so that internal disorder could eat it away."³⁴ As I suggested above, these international military interventions coincide with the rise of motion picture technology, the fall of vaudeville, and the opening of cinemas across the United States. As U.S. citizens are being introduced to the wonders of the movies, they do so through the visually memorable spectacle of scoundrel Mexicans—bandits, greasers, revolutionaries; hot-blooded, passionate, fiery women and men.

No surprise, then, that Warner Brothers animators, faced with the challenge of crafting a decidedly Mexican space, for a decidedly Mexican animal hero, call on the collective memory of American adventurism in Mexico. Not for nothing are Speedy and his crew often found hanging out around the docks—as in *Here Today, Gone Tamale* (dir. Friz Freleng, 1959)—lolling

about in the trash sporting the garb of Mexican *veracruzanos*. And this coincidence of film, photography, border conflicts, and stereotypes is no accident. What are stereotypes but "bloodstains," the socially conserved oral and textual remnants of communities in conflict?

The promotional image for the "Diamond Post Card Gun," borrowed from the pages of Vanderwood and Samponaro's *Border Fury* (13) and dating to the time of the conflict along the U.S.-Mexican border, tells the tale better than I can.

The postcard camera as gun—we could not make up a better logo for the thesis of *Tex[t]-Mex*, given not only that the history of the representation of "Mexicans" in the

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Neither Andy Warhol nor René Magritte could have dreamed up such a perfect icon for a kind of violence implicit in the act of taking a picture; the Diamond Post Card Gun is not a bullet-laden agent of *direct* violence, but its womb or matrix of visual reproduction has a palpable, violent agency all its own.

cultural space of the United States is filled with acts of violent semantic and semiotic intrigue, but also that this violence continues as ethnocentrism and racism abound owing to the continued proliferation of seeds spitting out of "guns" like that imaged here.

Students of early-twentieth-century U.S. history understand that the image of Mexicans as dirty rogues and rapacious bandits was broadcast round the nation via photographs, newsreels, postcards, and newspapers. That Speedy should tap that contentious vein of moist prejudice is anything but a surprise, as the best, most immediate comedies often derive from collective perceptions that date to earlier moments of conflict. The image Speedy Gonzales broadcasts of rodents of a decidedly Mexican persuasion cries out for critical scrutiny.³⁵

Lest one question the appropriateness of these sustained inquiries regarding the ethnic niceties of a rather silly, albeit nimble, mouse, then one ought to read again the words of Michel Foucault:

A culture forges, sustains and transmits itself in an adventure with a double face: sometimes brutality, struggle, turmoil; sometimes meditation, nonviolence, silence. Whatever form the adventure may take—the most surprising is not always the noisiest, but the noisiest is not irremediably the most superficial—it is useless to ignore it, and still more useless to sequester it.³⁶

Speedy Gonzales is neither the most insidious nor the most virulent source of anti-Latina/o racism in the United States, and yet it seems worth the bother to ask questions about his origins, to try to identify (resisting here Deleuze and Guattari's altogether salient admonitions to the contrary in *On the Line*) *the puppeteers fueling the soul of this fast mouse*. But it is not just Gallic pomo theorists who must guide us on our tour.³⁷

American popular critics of the media have much to share as well. In their view, Speedy is no Mickey Mouse, Mighty Mouse, Jerry, or even, for that matter, Bugs Bunny. Leonard Maltin, he of *Entertainment Tonight* fame and author/impresario of those invaluable movie guide annuals, speaks of Speedy in his debut film (*Cat-Tails for Two*) as "a caricature of a Mexican peon." Assessing the "Mexican[s]" place in the Warner Brothers animation pantheon, Maltin concludes: "Speedy, like the Roadrunner, is an ever-smiling, ever-confident character who always comes out on top of a situation. His primary asset is his speed . . . but he has little else going for him. He is a one-note personality, and the success of his films depends entirely on strong gags."³⁸ I must say that Maltin's aesthetic judgment actually fits in nicely with our initial postmortem findings on the logic of the stereotype.

* * *

A brief gloss here of several Speedy Gonzales animated short features, along with the given Latina/o stereotype they profit from/reinforce, will suffice to give you a taste of what I am going on about.

Cannery Woe (1961)

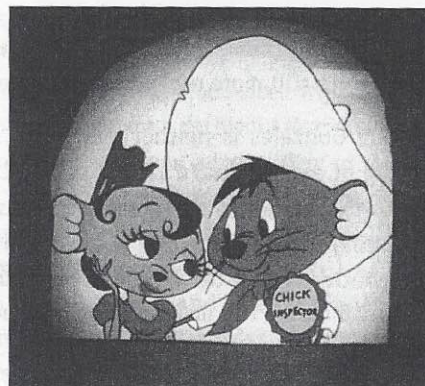
Director: Robert McKimson



A peek at the opening credits from Warner Bros.'s *Cannery Woe* (1961), directed by Robert McKimson and written by Ted Pierce.

Cannery Woe introduces viewers to a community of Sylvester the Cat-plagued starving mice who live in a trash dump outside a sleepy sea-

port. One funny pair of comically lazy mice lives in the tin can pictured here with the label "el steenko sardinas." No, that's not *déjà vu* you are feeling—we stumbled over this outrageous scene earlier in the introduction.³⁹ I imagine that one might read this representation as a sign of Mexican ingenuity—that these resourceful *veracruzano* mice had gainfully turned rags to riches, tin can into cherished castle.



While one might be moved to imagine this tableau as a sign of Mexican industry (with nimble vermin combo recycling detritus as domicile—an example of MacGyver-like DIY cleverness), more likely than not, the reaction to this representation will be "Mexicans" *in/are/as* trash.

"Chick Inspector" Speedy ogle a dreamy, equally smitten señorita in the denouement of *Cannery Woe*. "Mexican" as synecdoche for roguish, swarthy sexuality meets its acme—pardon me for being dirty-minded, but trace the shape of Speedy in this image for a Rorschach-like erotic experience.

But it is a bit of a stretch, don't you think?

"Mexicans live in shanty structures made of trash" seems the easier read.

Cannery Woe is also interesting for the way it captures the political economic order of small northern Mexican and Southwest American Latino communities, as its storyline features a light-skinned *patrón/político* mayoral candidate who manipulates his darker-skinned impoverished mouse constituents via *pachanga* parties and free cheese.⁴⁰ Speedy appears in *Cannery Woe* as a hero, taking cheese from bumbling cat Sylvester so as to aid our aforementioned politician. Speedy's reward from the generous politician for having wrested the cheese from a hapless Sylvester? He is appointed "Chick Inspector." The frame shown here from the close of McKimson's short feature speaks for itself.

We cannot or ought not to overlook the overloaded gender implication of this highly sexualized "reward." Needless to say, when female characters appear at all in Speedy features, it is as the target or prize of male saviors/benefactors. Speedy's view of this fortuitous turn of events in this particular feature is more predictable, his only gloss the succinct yet joyous disclosure that he has received the "best job of all."

So *Cannery Woe* ends with Speedy's acquisition of a lovely, obliging señorita. Lechery, as it was in the early Hollywood greaser movies, is never, ever very far from the minds of Hollywood-forged Latinos, certainly never far from the mind of our philandering Mexican rodent.

Not for nothing does historian Ralph Stevenson speak of Speedy as a

"formidable mouse, a rather rakish man about town."⁴¹

Stereotype reinforced: Mexicans are dirty, never far from trash; "Mexicans" are politically illiterate, impoverished, if clever, thieves out for large volumes of free food and booze in the never-ending search for libidinal recompense.

Tortilla Flaps (1958)

Director: Robert McKimson

(*Dialogue: For full impact, read aloud with painfully strong Spanish-language accent.*)

Mangy, lazy mouse: You know this Speedy Gonzales? He go steady weeth mah seeester.

Other mangy, lazy mouse: Speedy Gonzales? . . . He go steady weeth everybody seeester.

Stereotype reinforced (among others): Mexican males are sexual rogues, thoughtless rakes, likely to penetrate willing and unwilling targets at the drop of a sombrero. I will here ignore the slyly Freudian sibling-lust, incest-taboo-breaching subtext.

Here Today, Gone Tamale (1959)

Director: Friz Freleng

Here Today, Gone Tamale is one of the few animated features in which the Mexican mice actually speak a sort of standard Spanish language; in most of the other films, the furry Latino vermin speak a novel form of Spanglish patois made up mostly of heavily accented English mutations, as in the confession of Speedy's amorous intentions noted above in *Tortilla Flaps*: "He likes mah seestaaahrrr."⁴² *Here Today, Gone Tamale* revolves about the tale of a general cheese shortage. Enter a cheese-laden vessel into port—yet another Speedy short that features a Veracruz-like locale. The name of the ship? The SS *Pancho Cucaracha*.

*Stereotype reinforced: No heavy duty semiotics needed here: the cucaracha, or "cockroach," being the domestic predator/scavenger most often associated with Mexicans in U.S. mass culture. Cockroaches are not clean beasts, or at least one does not immediately associate cockroaches with sanitary conditions.*⁴³

Sylvester eyes his "Mexican" nemesis in this movie house lobby card for *Here Today, Gone Tamale* (1959), directed by Friz Freleng and written by Michael Maltese.



"Mexicans" and cockroaches—a common "happy" couple in this establishing-exterior shot from *Here Today, Gone Tamale* (1959).

Tabasco Road (1957)

Director: Robert McKimson

In a year that saw Albert Camus win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Jack Kerouac publish *On the Road*, and Theodor Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss) issue the now-legendary opus *The Cat in the Hat*, Warner Brothers' animation crew was also quite busy. One of their progeny, *Tabasco Road*, released July 20, 1957, and another Academy Award nominee, introduces us to a sustained Hollywood studio cine-ethnography documenting the outrageous drinking habits of "Mexicans." One does not have to think long and hard to conjure images of Mexicanesque types in the vicinity of mass quantities of alcohol—tequila companies (U.S. and Mexican, I might add) do a handsome job of popularizing and profiting from this vision. In *Tabasco Road*, we meet up



Speedy tries to hold back his cantina-obsessed cohorts in this lobby card for *Tabasco Road* (1957), directed by Robert McKimson and written by Tedd Pierce.

Like some mad fusion of Carry A. Nation, Bill Wilson, and Cantinflas, Speedy Gonzales interrupts the boozy delights of his "Mexican" *borrachos* buddies in *Tabasco Road*.

with the redoubtable Pablo and his bosom drinking buddy Fernando having a good old time at the El Tío Pepe Cantina. Boozy bandit revelry is the order for the day, and this goal is nicely summed up in the lyrics of one song sung to the melody of "La cucaracha": to end up "muy plenty steenko borracho." Quite shortly into the feature, Speedy appears as a teetotaling "savior" of sorts.

The frame below shows Speedy intervening, cutting off Pablo and Fernando, ostensibly saving them from the inanities of their debauchery.

Stereotype reinforced: Mexicans eschew labor for the more basic allure of serialized intoxication. Fin.

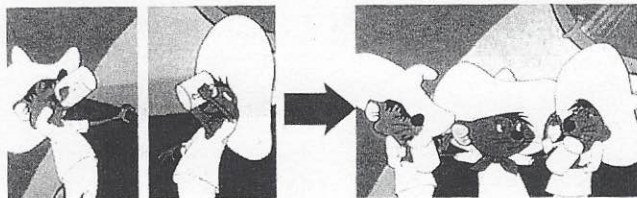
Let this brief gallery of culled images suffice to make our point: the next time you encounter Speedy Gonzales in an animated short, in a TV special, or on a bag of salsa potato chips, and find yourself smiling or laughing, ask yourself what the hell is so funny.

Oh, and Speedy is funny, or, at least, he *can* be.

And the more I learned about his origins and his creators, piecing together his sordid history, I found

myself at one with Judy Garland as Dorothy in Victor Fleming's 1939 version of *The Wizard of Oz*, shaking the hand of that old charlatan Oz and liking him very much in spite of his ersatz omniscience.

Do please know that I am not, or at least not usually, one of those frowning old farts, one of those sanctimonious curmudgeons, who would



deny the unwashed masses, or even the ostensibly washed cultural-studies academic masses, the simplest of pleasures.

But such humor must be checked by a curiosity about the dense, transparent cultural syntax that enables this laughter to spread. Speedy is funny because he and his cohorts are familiar; he is familiar because of the history of exchange (cultural, military, linguistic, semiotic) between the United States and Mexico. The logic from which Warner Brothers profits and which it helps to sustain is basic: we have seen Mexicans as simple, lazy thieves before; we see them again, we laugh. Serious business this "funny" stuff.

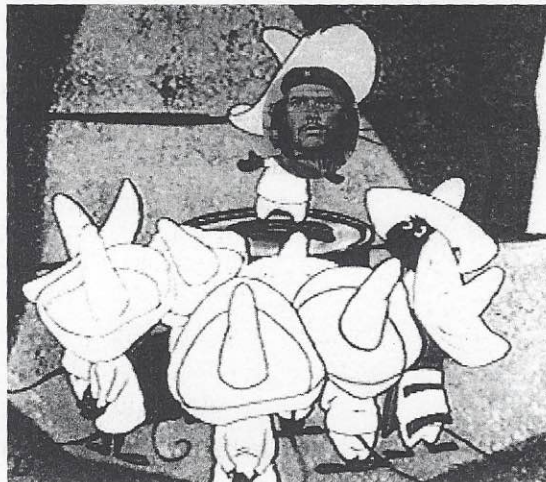
I must admit that as I was delivering earlier versions of this chapter at lectures across the country, I ran into some, including a fair number of politically active young Chicano university students, who resisted my reading of Speedy as pariah, offering in its place a reading of Speedy as hero or Speedy as subaltern with alacrity or Speedy as Latino social justice advocate, etc. As the argument goes, Speedy is a neo-Zapata or a proto-Zapatista, resisting the gringo domination of sly Sylvester and pathetic Daffy Duck. A "good" Mexican, Speedy is, in this view, a positive role model: fast, clever, erotically able, and so on. In short, he is nothing more and nothing less than a leader of his people. I offer here a slightly Photoshopped still frame as an emblem of the foregoing revisionist Speedy take.

I wish I had the means to ally myself with this hopeful interpretation of our "Mexican" friend, but I feel it sidesteps the crucial problematic Speedy literally embodies.

Merely doing revisionist readings of Speedy Gonzales cartoons might make the revisioner and her/his audience feel good, but it does nothing to efface the legacy of Mexican representation on U.S. soil—a fertile soil, I might add, from which much prejudice and disdain is harvested.

After all, our role is not to say Speedy Gonzales is "bad" or that our smiling Speedy is all "good"; our goal here is not to merely maledict a somewhat affable animated entity. Rather, I have set myself another task: to understand exactly just how this popular animated star comes to function; moreover, how he comes to function in a way that reinforces politically charged visions/versions of the "Mexican" on "American" soil.

And it is to this task that this postmortem now moves.



A fit of counter-hallucinatory insurgency, as imagined by the author and his Macintosh computer.

Incision Six | More Surrogate "Mexicans," More Surrogate "Jews"

Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul.

—Basil Hallward, painter, addresses Henry Wotton
in Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*.⁴⁴

I just draw somebody I know. I think of these [animated figures] as living characters.

—Isadore Freleng, aka I. Freleng, aka Friz Freleng,
on the animator's craft⁴⁵

I have never known how to tell a story. And since I love nothing better than remembering and memory itself . . . I have always felt this inability a sad infirmity. Why am I denied narration? Why have I not received this gift? The gift (doron) of Mnemosyne, Socrates insists, is like the wax in which all that we wish to guard in our memory is engraved in relief so that it may leave a mark.

—Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs for Paul de Man*⁴⁶

"Isadore," "I.," "Friz" Freleng never suffered from Jacques Derrida's declared narratological debility, his stated impotence when it comes to telling a story—yet he and the storied guru of our poststructural moment do share some curious overlaps that it might be beneficial to consider; we will deal with Freleng and his *fictional* "living characters" at length below.

Yet we should not hurry too much here, lest we ignore the mother/father/inventor of deconstruction's salient confession of an inexplicable, congenital condition, a pathology that leaves the afflicted philosopher "not knowing how to tell a story."

We will dawdle here a moment, as said confession regarding narrative and memory relates to our concern with stereotypes. As it were, Derrida's parable (paradoxically, a parable about *not* being able to weave parables), which appears at the head of his lyrical dirge to the late Paul de Man, may be read as a bildungsroman of deconstruction, and by extension, of poststructuralist theory in general.⁴⁷

In this microtale, presented cannily in the guise of a confession of an inability to tell a tale, deconstruction reveals its other self, beneath

a mask of sorts—it is nothing more and nothing less than a surrogate or, tellingly, a *prosthesis* for storytelling. Prolific Derrida unable to tell a story?

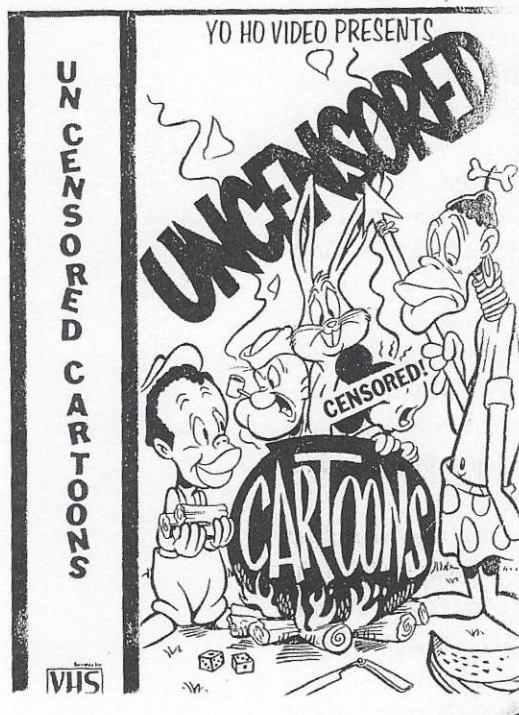
What then of his umpteen books—what are they? What is he going on about? Deconstruction is not a story? What, then, is it? To tell the tale another way, Derrida scripts a saga wherein deconstruction, the philosophical travails of Jacques Derrida, Esq., emerges as a special species of storytelling charged forever with telling a tale of *prostheses*—of substitutions, of supplementations, and of paradoxes—in short, of *narrating* “why I am denied narration.” Deconstruction as Not Story—or, in practical terms, as the branch of storytelling that spends much of its time confessing, that is, narrating, its inability to tell a story. Paradox city. All the foregoing speculations relate directly to our main inquest, my main interest, the autopsy of a rat: for Derrida’s confession of narrative impotence is merely a ruse, an entrance to his rereading of Socrates’s memory of Mnemosyne, which is itself a dramatic, poignant confession that this memory *of/for*, this memorial *to*, Paul de Man will force the gallant thinker to confront the enormity of his personal and intellectual loss. “Engraved in relief” so that they may “leave a mark,” stereotypes (*hard, stiff blows*) reveal their debt to memory.

Five years later, in “Circumfession,” the running footnote repartee with/for/against Geoffrey Bennington in *Jacques Derrida*, Derrida will fulfill the promise of this failed story, this would-be-paeon-to-de Man-cum-autobiography-of-Jacques by revealing the extent to which his exile to a Jews-only school in Vichy-governed Algeria shaped his obsessions with margins, not to mention his circumcised penis.

Nightmares of circumcision, the cut that marks, the blow that signs your self for all (?) to see are a good segue, a good crosscut (indulge the pun, it is necessary) back to Speedy and Isadore/I./Friz/Yitzak (to find the hermeneutic key to Yitzak, you will have to spelunk some gnarly footnotes shortly—*ojo*).

For what if “the gift of Mnemosyne,” the bequest of memory, so like “the wax in which . . . our memory is engraved,” is a nightmare? What if one cannot forget a trip to the movies, where marionettes of projected light elucidate the pathetic contours of Mexican-like bodies, which then find entry into the warm, comfy confines of your psyche or your soul?⁴⁸

The cameo appearance here by Jacques Derrida is neither gratuitous nor rhetorically vaudevillian—the expository equivalent of pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Curiously, Derrida shares some remarkable biographical overlaps with Friz Freleng: an interest in the relation of memory to the production of stories; an intellectual/aesthetic interest in names and naming, with a corresponding, not to say determining, personal experience with the same; and, lastly, but not unimportantly, a Judaic biogra-



The accurate, if not progressive, cover of Yo Ho Video's *Uncensored Cartoons* collection (1989).

phical trace—not for nothing does Derrida's auto/biographical collaboration with Bennington include Derrida's portrait of himself as "a little black and very Arab Jew."⁴⁹ He can't tell a story, but he paints one hell of a picture.

Derrida: arguably, the most influential philosopher of the late twentieth century; Freleng: one of the most influential animation directors for the very same period—how odd and unanticipated that the work of both should so smoothly ally, and how unexpected that the work of one so usefully illuminates the other. Perhaps now we are prepared to receive the memory of Speedy and the memory of a very special version of "Mexico" he embodied and reinforced for those who made him.

Friz Freleng, along with Robert McKimson and others at Warner Brothers, "remembered" Mexico in ways that are not at odds with visions of Mexico popularized during U.S. conflicts with our southern "neighbor" this century. One of Warner Brothers Studios' more prolific, inventive, and successful animated feature directors (along with Chuck Jones and Robert McKimson), Freleng helped give life to Speedy Gonzales. Long before Freleng immortalized "Mexicans," he had cut his teeth on "Africans" and "African Americans"; screen his outrageously offensive takes on the Black Subject in *Clean Pastures* (1937), *Jungle Jitters* (1938), and *Goldilocks and the Jivin' Bears* (1944).⁵⁰

Taking McKimson's character from *Cat-Tails for Two* (1953), Freleng remade Speedy into the toothy velocital fetishist we know today, garnering an Academy Award for a short animated feature with *Speedy Gonzales*, released September 17, 1955.⁵¹ In the following charged pas-

sage, we find Freleng talking about how stories and characters were created and developed on the Warner Brothers backlot. Interestingly enough, he is responding directly to a question from historian Walter Brasch, not about Speedy, but about another important animated character in the Warner canon, the rambunctious cowboy named Yosemite Sam.

One last prefatory note before the quotation: Freleng's comments are all the more valuable, since Warner Brothers' animators developed Yosemite Sam using Friz Freleng as their model.

That Freleng should share the following, spurred by the memory of a cartoon figure etched in honor of his own personality and physiognomy,

signals our own need to keep our eyes peeled, as the striking cliché has it.

Freleng: "Indirectly, you may be affected by something that may have made you think [a certain way]. *Unconsciously, you may do things that you don't even know why you do it.*"⁵² The rather pat, dogmatic accusation that would denounce Warner Brothers as a racist monster of a movie studio, an evil motion picture house disseminating callously bestial versions of "Mexicans" to the global market, must be laid to one side here, as Freleng has stumbled upon a useful truth-effect.

Animators as well as their spectators act, "obeying a law they do not . . . know, but which [they can] recite in [their] dreams"—words earlier attributed to Hitler return here in another context as an approximate paraphrase of a popular animator's confession.

Placed side by side with Freleng's disclosure, these words offer us a better view and clearer access to the enabling ether called ideology—a macro-petri dish of sorts where U.S.-nurtured strains of visually communicated Mexicanesque bacteria thrive.

All this nuance.

Too much, some would argue.

Perhaps I have let the recently deceased Friz Freleng off too easily. For, given the way animation figures in domestic and international marketing campaigns, who better than an animator to reanimate the image of the Mexican in/for an American *socius*?

Let us, then, for at least a minute or two, go after Friz Freleng. For instance, look what we find when we pause and take a sidelong glance at Friz Freleng's own name, or rather, "names." Freleng produced work under at least three related monikers: "Isadore Freleng," "I. Freleng," and "Friz Freleng."

This evolution, ostensibly tangential to our reading of Speedy Gonzales shorts, on closer inspection reveals itself as salient to our concerns. Freleng, a pioneering animation director, began his career at Walt Disney Studios, and moved on to MGM before settling at Warner Brothers. At Warner Brothers, as at Disney, MGM, and other major studios, any kind of non-Anglo naming was viewed with a close eye, especially by the "boys" in distribution and accounting who worried that particular names would hurt box office receipts and the company bottom line.⁵³

Freleng soon fell victim to this ethnic-naming conundrum. Walter Brasch tells the story of how the director came to change his on-screen credit line for the Warner studio. Apparently, the studio bosses in the distribution department asked Freleng to change his on-screen credit line, having it read "I." Freleng as opposed to "Isadore" Freleng. Freleng concludes the story in his own words: "Warner Brothers *suggested* [the change]. They didn't order it. They suggested it because down South at that time anything that's Jewish didn't go too well. We couldn't sell the

show. [Southern distributors] said that the name is *out*. Warner Brothers said, 'Why struggle with it?'"⁵⁴

Why, indeed?

Freleng's "Jewish" name, the "monstrous" (adapting somewhat Wilde's phraseology cited above) corruption of the name "Isadore" (whose repugnant aroma of East Coast Jewishness might alienate wholesome

The riddle of names is endless. A colleague of mine, the Latin American art historian Janet Esser, wrote me after hearing an earlier version of this chapter to inform me of her suspicions that Speedy may well be a "crypto-Jew," supporting her view by the overlap of the mise-en-scène of Speedy Gonzales features and her recollection of Jacob Riis's photography; moreover, she added (in what was, for me, a revelatory declaration), "Isadore was not a Jewish name." Rather, "it was the 'Anglo' name given to Jews named Yitzak who wished or whose families wished to assimilate. . . . Isadore became a 'Jewish' name when enough Jews began to use it." As I am no expert in this regard, I cannot confirm the authenticity of these suggestions, though a quick glance through Robert Singerman's Jewish and Hebrew Onomastics and Benzion C. Kaganoff's Dictionary of Jewish Names and Their History unearthed nothing to contradict Esser's intriguing and suggestive findings. I did, however, run across a short history of Saint Isidore, from Seville, a seventh-century Spanish cleric/writer whose renowned work Etymologiae contained all the known world's knowledge and history to that period—the title of his work reassured me that placing my faith in etymologies in this piece was fated from the start. From Yitzak to Isadore to I. to Friz: the evolution in Mr. Freleng's first name constitutes in and of itself a microhistory of Jewish American history. Esser's correspondence came in response to a public lecture of the materials contained in this chapter. A second letter was to prove even more outrageous.

Southern consumers of good, animated, American fun), had to go—if the bottom line is at stake, why "struggle with it" at all? Consider it a *Semitic sacrifice*, born of *semi[o]tic necessity*.

In various Warner Brothers animated features, Freleng appears both as "I. Freleng" and as "Friz Freleng"—the story of Freleng's rechristening to "Friz" is not as compelling as the shift from "Isadore," but it merits repeating here. Walter Brasch's footnotes again prove invaluable. There we learn of "pioneer cartoon producer Hugh Harman," a friend of Freleng's, who liked a cartoon character by the name of Congressman Frisby and promptly saddled Freleng with the nickname. Freleng picks up the story: "At first[,] I was called Congressman Frisby, then Congressman, and Frisby, then finally Friz."⁵⁵ This last name stuck, and Freleng used it ever after in the credits of his productions.

From the sacrifice of a Jewish cognomen on the high altar of movie profits, we now move to the matter of our animated

"Mexican" friend's name. How do we take this information and bring it to bear on the archaeology of Speedy Gonzales? Let us jump to the potentially apocryphal naming of our animated Latino cipher. Animation histo-

rian Brasch's views in this regard are again salient here: "Character naming is not a case of spontaneous generation, with names popping in and out at the whim of their creators. It is an evolutionary process with clearly defined historical classifications."⁵⁶

If we buy into the version of events to be found in Jeff Lenburg's *Great Cartoon Directors* and Walter Brasch's *Cartoon Monikers*, Friz Freleng is responsible (along with Bob McKimson) for the birth and the naming of Speedy Gonzales.⁵⁷

Our slide here into the argot of reproduction and patronymics is sanctioned by the circumstances of Speedy's "birth." Additionally, the pace moves to a different beat here, *allegro non tanto*, moderately lively, at the hint of a climax—we cannot have birth without climax.

Climax? I mean this quite literally.

What you may not know is that the famous Speedy Gonzales, our wonderful mascot of clever Mexican banditry, is named after the punch line of a "dirty joke," a joke overheard by director Bob McKimson and retold to a largely Anglo crew of animators on the Warner Brothers backlot; my research suggests that the joke, and variations thereof, was making the rounds of Southern California after 1950, the time when Speedy's name was being tossed around the Warner lot.

I did not find a direct transcript of this originary joke, but Brasch's book does allude to detailed circumstances concerning this peculiar, bawdy tale. As McKimson relates: "A friend of mine told me this joke and the name of the character was 'Speedy Gonzales.' We already had the character developed, but no name. So the next day I told Warren Foster, my storyman, the joke, and we decided that we'd name the Mexican mouse Speedy Gonzales." McKimson emphasizes that although a dirty joke spawned the name, "at no time was the name ever meant to be derogatory. We had no trouble using a Spanish name—as long as it fit the character."⁵⁸ The *dirty* joke, you ask? "Speedy Gonzales, the fastest mouse in all Mexico," was named after a lascivious bit about a Mexican man, the aforementioned Speedy, who suffers from a chronic case of premature ejaculation—hence the distinction of the by-no-means-complimentary epithet "Speedy."

Who would have thought it: speedy Speedy Gonzales? In this light, Speedy's familiar outcry "*arriba, arriba*" takes on other tragic, deliciously salacious connotations.

Naïvely, I thought my research was at an end. But there recently surfaced a curious, and no less compelling, counternarrative to contend with—a competing origin myth that can be anecdotally "carbon-dated" to the time when Speedy's character was in genesis on the Warner lots.

Let me explain: I was preparing the final draft of this chapter for *Camera Obscura* in the mid-1990s when I found myself delivering portions

of it to a gathering of colleagues for our Master of Arts in Liberal Arts lecture series *New Identities*.

There, a quiet, unassuming emeritus professor from Recreation Sciences by the name of David Malcolm took me aside and told me the variation of the Speedy joke transcribed below. I was so taken aback and, I must add, delighted that I had him send me a written transcript of the bawdy trifle, which I here share with you—I cite here at length, both the joke and Malcolm’s commentary, because of the impact each has on the subject of this study—some parts have been edited for clarity by your author.

Here is the Speedy G story as I heard it told at a party during 1953–1954 or 1954–1955 by Frank Scott (deceased), then golf coach at (then) San Diego State College: An Anglo husband and wife find themselves forced to share a hotel room with a Mexican fellow by the name of Speedy Gonzales. The worried husband notices his wife and Speedy exchanging suspicious glances. The husband decides there is only one sure way to keep anything from happening between them and that is for him to stick his finger into his wife’s vagina and keep it there all night. Sometime during the night the husband has to sneeze and brings his hand to his face as he does so. Immediately afterward, the husband returns his finger to his wife’s vagina [the narrator accompanied this with a gesture showing how quickly the husband’s hand comes up to his mouth and then returns to safeguard his wife’s pudendum]. Suddenly, Speedy Gonzales’s voice is then heard saying, “Señor . . . your feeenger . . . eeets up my ahhhsshole” [told, of course, with the exaggerated accent and long vowels].

Professor Malcolm’s appended comments are pertinent, so I will include them here as well:

No doubt “Scotty” prefaced the story with some elaborate explanation for how the three came to be stranded together[,] but I have long since forgotten what it was. I feel certain the above dates are accurate. I came to SDSU (then SDSC) in August 1953. During my first two years, five or six newcomer faculty couples, including the Malcolms and the Scotts[,] frequently met together socially. . . . Scotty was not one with whom I had developed any particular personal friendship[,] and I do not remember ever being with him in a social setting again after I left that group. Amazing the power of negative stereotyping. Although I have never retold the story myself (until now), I still remember it more than forty years later. My sense is that the extreme exaggeration of Speedy’s supposed Mexican

accent played a big part in its staying power—at least in my case. I doubt if I would have remembered it at all if Speedy had said “Sir, your finger is up my asshole” in a common middle-American accent.

Malcolm closes his testimony with the following noteworthy assertion: “I wonder about what deep level of my own racism may have been tapped into?”

Needless to say, Malcolm’s testimony brought this inquest to a crisis, as I had identified a living historical link between the alleged origins of the mute patient upon my surgical table and the surreal, not to say vulgar, dynamics of the rat’s originary patronymic.

In addition, the disagreement between the two genesis myths left me at a loss for words. Did I really have to pick between Speedy the premature ejaculator, and Speedy the wily, homoerotically penetrated agent of a *ménage à trois* miscegenation-phobia scenario? What to do with this unanticipated narrative hallucination, a gift to me from Mnemosyne via her proxy, Professor Malcolm?

I reflected on what I had discovered by returning to the epigraphs at the head of this incision: paintings tell us more about the painters that paint them than about the [S]ubjects they paint. Freleng tells stories; he also “paints,” or, more strictly, he animates. Derrida allegedly cannot tell a story, yet he tells them anyway as theories of philosophical stories that are, at once, stories about theories of philosophy—Jorge Luis Borges plied this trade to some success earlier in the twentieth century.⁵⁹

Memory is stereotype, a version of an event “engraved in relief.” Speedy is named after the memory of a “dirty” joke: he’s either prone to climax or prone to be penetrated as he penetrates, each a result of his driving Latino sexual potentiality. Freleng, who was Jewish, altered his name or, better put, allowed his name to be altered so as to dodge the would-be wrath of anti-Semitic Southern U.S. theatergoers.

The very same artist who is the victim of business decisions fueled by anti-Semitic sensibilities produces animated trinkets that are also, simultaneously, ubiquitous and virulent carriers of anti-Mexican sentiment, obeying unknown laws that are not recited in sleep, but projected, writ large, on the shining silver screen.⁶⁰

Memory.

A stereotype is a prerecorded visual memory byte etched onto the contours of the collective psyche. Strapped for existential input as to the dynamic of Mexican subjects, we turn to stereotypes to provide us with visuo-ethnic “clues” that fill in for empirical data and satisfy the lazy desire of our collective curiosity.

Memory.

Memory itself, as is, and, somehow simultaneously, memory as the

Classic, historic, and ubiquitous representations of African Americans: a "Negro chef dressed in white coat and cap holding a steaming bowl" is the Cream of Wheat corporation's description of its trademark lackey; and Aunt Jemima, in her mid-twentieth-century incarnation—an illustration of the African American Nancy Green.

An undated newspaper clipping by the Associated Press that appeared in the *New York Times* sometime between 1989 and 1991.

apotheosis of memory via narration and, miraculously (or paradoxically), the erasure and displacement of memory via narration—in telling a story we remember that which has been forgotten or put aside, but in telling the story anew we erase or elide the event as it occurred.⁶¹

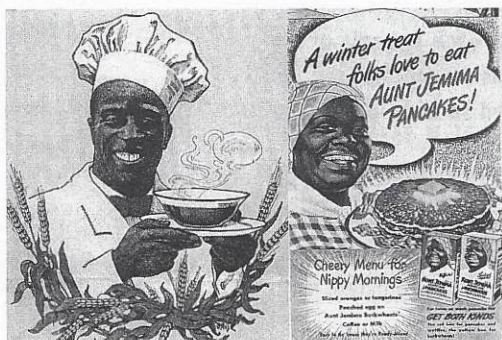
It is Plato's cave redux, only we pay to be chained by our jailers at the same time we are pleased by the enchantments we witness.

Shifting metaphors to the realm of the natural sciences, Speedy is what geologists would call a "pseudomorph," that is, an object "having the characteristic outward form of another species" . . . [and/or a] "deceptive or irregular form."

He looks as a "Mexican" would.

He speaks (owing to the nimble vocal finesse of recently deceased Mel Blanc) as a "Mexican" might: who could blame a blameless spectator for reasonably concluding, "So that's what a Mexican, a *clever* Mexican, is like"?

But Gonzales is not *Mexican*; he and his rowdy charges are "Mexicans" as imagined by Americans once at war with Mexico, at war with the specter of the otherness of Mexico. Train it to do otherwise, to be otherwise, as we might, the collective imagination of the Americas will long waste synapses on the acquisition of this nasty rat-cum-mouse—a less pleasant more effective vehicle for the introduction of visual ideological pathogens has yet to be imagined—Aunt Jemima and the Cream O' Wheat porter/bellman come to mind as virulent analogues.⁶²



At a glance here, a veritable physiognomical (d)evolution of the Jemima prototype through time presents itself to us, one akin to the permutations of the "Mexican" we have witnessed, that has suffused us, in the pages of this book.

Because of this journey, because of this visual ideological legacy, I feel safe in saying that "Isadore," "I.", "Friz" Freleng and Robert McKim-

son may be seen as both *nomenclators* and, via neologism, *imagoclaters*: beings, almost deities, whose actions lend denomination and visual contour to the creatures they form. Prometheus himself has little on Freleng.

Their animated products are *monsters* (monstrances, demonstrations, etc.) in the strict sense: Speedy as spectacle—via metonymy, Speedy animated short film images come to proxy for the specific national/ethnic community he then comes to emblemize.

Should the dueling taxonomy of geology and linguistics leave you limp or dry, consider, alternatively, how we can think of the furry body of Speedy as an agent of “zoanthropy”—here the taxonomical assist comes from psychology, where said term is used to describe “a kind of monomania in which the patient believes himself transformed into one of the lower animals.”⁶³

Now that Warner Brothers has been absorbed and reimagined as TimeWarner Inc., it will be curious to watch the future evolution of these characters, to see just how Speedy Gonzales changes in the hands of an ever more duplicitous and complex corporate culture industry. His recent appearance on a bag of spicy salsa chips suggests he will be around for the long haul.

As was stated above, stereotypes may be read as the bloodstains of cultural conflict. Like most bloodstains, they are born from some sort of violence, some form of fracture, some type of antagonism. Like bloodstains, once established, they are almost impossible to get out. They may fade, their color may change, you might be able to even hide them for a while, but they do not usually go away.

Along the U.S.-Mexican border, and culminating in the years between 1910 and 1920, one encounters a portentous set of individuals, circumstances, and events that help establish the stereotype of Latinos in U.S. mass culture. New technology (the motion picture), new industry (the postcard business), and a (re)new(ed) border conflict (General Villa’s and General Pershing’s forays onto each other’s territory) come together to form a series of major and minor spectacles that reach Americans from coast to coast.

The coincidences of novelty, territorial conflict, profit, and pride combine and etch into the collective imagination of the United States images of the Latino that continue to flourish in the bodies of Speedy Gonzales, Freddy López, and even in figures like Manuel Noriega, the notorious Latino strongman now silently festering in some federal facility somewhere, no doubt shorn of his red underwear, harem of prostitutes,

When I first went on the job market in 1988, I used to joke that my mantra was “I am a box of Tide.” Eighteen years later, Tex[t]-Mex, perhaps, proves me prescient.



icons of Hitler, and volumes of pornography, some found, some planted, on his various estates. Most striking is the way these stock-footage images take the role played by the Muses in poetry—gaining the ear of the creative writer and filling it with predictable nonsense.

Take, for instance, the following example, culled from the pages of Richard Rodriguez's collection of essays *Days of Obligation*.

For those not familiar with the diverse writings of Señor Rodriguez, it might be helpful to note here that said Latino scribe is the sometimes self-loathing, sometimes self-loving, aesthetically centrist (English literature Ph.D.)/politically right of right (sworn enemy of affirmative action and bilingual education) Bay Area Chicano humanist—Aztlán's very own paraphrase of V. S. Naipaul.

Let us listen again to Chicanodom's most heralded native informant, as quoted in one of the opening epigraphs to this autopsy: "Mexicans move as naturally and comfortably in the dark as cats or wolves or owls do. . . . Mexicans get drunk and sing like cats beneath the moon."

Although Speedy Gonzales might take offense at the bestial rendition here of Mexicans as cats, having, no doubt, some species loyalty to his own rodent clan, he would also undoubtedly smile at Rodriguez's lovely version of images that evoke the swarthy contours of the Warner Brothers animation archive.

Of course, Rodriguez is here less native informant than obliging colonial agent—proof of the view that you can never tell how watching cartoons can mess you up. Rodriguez's rant has left your otherwise verbose Mexican American assisting coroner speechless once again. I will leave you here to have a drink and, feline-like, have a go at the moon.

Incision Seven | Alternative Bodies of Ink and Light

I could have spent this entire chapter writing about the psychological damage done to legions of Americans of Latin American descent by stupid, stereotype-laced animated productions that desecrate Latina/o cultural sites, which intervene at the juncture where new apparitions of a Mexican subjectivity might inflect and infect the collective American psyche. These animated creatures, these true monsters, are the personification of the rhetorical figure called the *allonym*: the name of one body taken by another, anticipating and intercepting the figure of Mexico.

These allonymic marionettes act as visually distracting proxies, at times dooming Latino representation in the present to the role of mute spectator or, worse yet, permanent respondent charged with the Sisyphus-like task of always explaining why we are not like Speedy, always asked to explain ourselves with Warner Brothers hallucinations as our backdrop. As when my boisterous senior English Department colleague at

the University of Connecticut suggested I moonlight at the taco stand (1988), or as when another playful son of New England merrily suggested I was a wetback (1990)—my encounters with scenarios harvested from Hollywood and shared in the interest of plain old *good fun*.

It was with horror, resignation, and uncharacteristic silence that I witnessed Anglo attendants at my son Lorenzo's day-care center dub him "Speedy" as he danced and sang in Spanish one day back in 1996. Everyone was so happy: the teachers and attendants, my son, then two, bathed in the smiles of his keepers and a tad bewildered by the blank expression on my face, my silence.

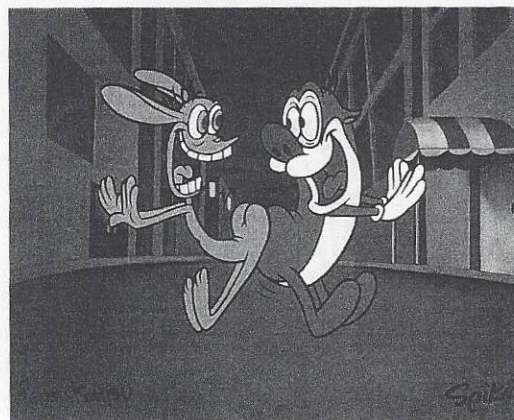
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But why linger with all that ancient history when the news afoot is rather sanguine? In the 1990s there arose a somewhat new and popular animated "Mexican," flashed across the nation's television cables and satellite dishes on MTV and Nickelodeon. His name was Ren Høøk, one half of the dynamic duo named Ren and Stimpy. Ren, pictured here on the left, was an anger-management nightmare, an excitable and irritable Chihuahua dog, the brainchild of a somewhat brilliant and neurotic animator by the name of John Kricfalusi.⁶⁴

While not quite as debauched as the Speedy origin intrigue folded into the dirty joke recounted above, this genesis, provided by Kricfalusi's own online presence at Spumco.com, is not without some interest of its own.

The two featured characters started out as separate doodles. One was a psychotic chihuahua and the other was a retarded-looking cat. . . . Kricfalusi would do these funny little drawings to amuse his co-workers. Soon he was doing a creepy Peter Lorre voice and acting out insane scenes with the chihuahua character. At first, these characters had no names. The name for the chihuahua was suggested by Joel Fajnor, an animator who worked at Calico with John. He was visiting Kricfalusi at his apartment in Van Nuys when he burst out laughing as he stared at the mailbox. Kricfalusi asked what he was laughing at and Fajnor pointed to the name on the mail box, "Ren Høøk." John explained that was his apartment manager's name.⁶⁵

The tale ends with Fajnor's suggestion: "Why don't you call your little chihuahua Ren Høøk?"



The "next-generation" animated "Mexican": the always angry and possibly queer Ren Høøk, here knocking booty with his faithful, loving roommate, Stimpson the Cat, aka Stimpy.

Like Speedy, Ren is "Mexican," a *chihuahuero* to be exact. But said *mejicanidad* is not his essence, and therein lies his difference from the annoying rodent Speedy Gonzales. Gonzales's *essence* was a strain of Mexicanicity directly derived from the eyes and cameras of invading U.S. soldiers—most of the gags profit by reinculcating some aspect of U.S. wartime manufactured views (1848, 1914—take your pick) of Mexicans and Mexico. Ren, too, is Mexican, but he lives in what appears to be an Eisenhoweresque-era U.S. suburb. His Mexicanicity is evidenced by his outrageous accent and his pedigree (he is, after all, pure *chihuahuero*), but that does not fix the dimensions of his character.

What defines Ren Høek is his temper or, more specifically, his on-again, off-again hatred for his housemate Stimpson J. Cat aka "Stimpy." In addition, Ren's bipolar, homoerotic attraction/revulsion for his intellectually challenged cohort provides the plot twists for the majority of their series of animated shorts. Ren has a temper—he loves and he hates Stimpy. That is what is "funny." Even Ren's name is different, more Northern European than "Mexican" or Latino: Høek. I must add here in all honesty that Kricfalusi reads my take on Ren with more than a grain of salt; to quote the illustrator directly from our limited correspondence: "Hi Bill, Ren is from some nameless ignorant backwards European (funny [*sic*]) nation. [signed] JK."⁶⁶

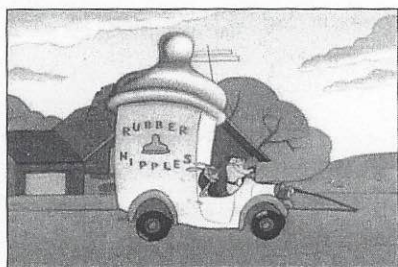
Contested etiologies aside, Kricfalusi gives us a popular, deliciously odd, and unpredictable "Mexican" anyone can love, or love to hate. In this regard, Mr. Ren Høek represents an evolutionary step forward from the retrograde theatrics of Speedy Gonzales. And where the sexual politics of Speedy Gonzales are predictable (a Mexican rakish mouse *chasin' after the ladies*), those of Ren Høek and Stimson J. Cat are unpredictable and, turning to Freud, "polymorphously perverse." The omnipresent suggestion in various episodes of the series is that Ren and Stimpy may be more than *just* roommates. So huge was the rumor to that effect, that Kricfalusi himself finally felt compelled to hold forth in a 1997 article in

the *San Francisco Examiner*:

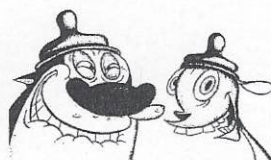
"Does this mean the rumors are true? Are Ren and Stimpy lovers?"

"Totally," said their dad proudly. "In Ren's case, it's not completely by choice. He'd rather have a beautiful human woman if he could get away

with it. Since he can't, Stimpy's easy. Stimpy's madly in love with Ren."⁶⁷ The images here reproduced give you a taste of their eclectic, eroticating pleasures.



A screen grab and preliminary sketch from *Rubber Hippie Salesmen*, first broadcast in 1992.



Outside the domain of animated short features, other enchorial, Southwestern Chicano graphic artists are grappling with the ugly legacy of Mexicans and Chicanas/os in film. Writer/Artists like Los Brothers Hernandez (Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez) in *Love and Rockets* are redefining the boundaries of graphic fiction in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.⁶⁸

For example, Jaime's "Flies on the Ceiling"—part of a decades-long graphic narrative/comix project that would make Dickens tired—examines the ongoing story of Chicana writer Isabel "Izzy" Ruebens, who returns to Mexico in an attempt to flee the demons of memory. While in Mexico, the displaced Chicana scribe encounters other demons, some real, some imagined, some both.⁶⁹

The panel sampled here in haunting black and white pictures Izzy's despair in those moments dividing sleep from waking life when the torturous, yet tormenting, yet irresistible allures of memory haunt Ruebens's vulnerable psyche.

Similarly, Gilbert Hernandez's "A Folk Tale" shuns the disturbing magical/psychological realism found in brother Jaime's "Flies on the Ceiling" for a no-less-provocative full-blown allegory chronicling the battle of God, Satan, and Death for the soul of Steña (pictured here with Death, sans scythe, in the headgear of a Mexican wrestler).

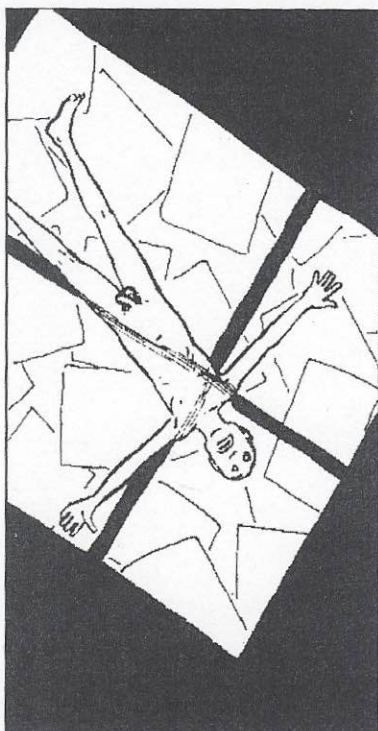
The allegory ends as it must, with Death winning out over the protests of a demystified God (figured in the garb of an old homeless man) and a comical Satan (whom Hernandez pictures in the costume of a fat superhero).

The largely wordless picture show ends with a none-too-cheery moral: "Death makes no distinctions



(top) Jaime Hernandez's brilliant and damaged heroine Izzy Ruebens. The noir-esque qualities of Hernandez's work are to be noted here: the silent cross, doubled by the shadow of a windowpane, underscores the role of a Catholic miasma, the legacy of theology, in the melancholia of Hernandez's character.

Gilbert Hernandez's comedic, erotic, sadomasochistic reveries from the pages of *Love and Rockets*. Any Chicana/o- or Latina/o-identified subjectivity seeking respite or some sort of ocular hy/eye/giene from the pollution that passes for "entertainment" on TV and the movies—George Lopez included and Salma Hayek excepted (for the moment)—should turn to the pages of *Love and Rockets*.



The silly symmetry of Speedy Gonzales's familiarity falls away from us in a careful study of the artistry of Chicano seer Gilbert Hernandez. In this masterful portrait/(self?)-portrait, Hernandez graphs for us the consequences of something he calls "human dias-trophism," the spiritual and physical catastrophe—"dias-trophism" is a geological term that refers to the movement of the earth's plates—of a young would-be artist.

between young or old, rich or poor, good or bad; he welcomes us all into his heart."

Allow me to give you one more glance at Gilbert Hernandez's work from the middle of *The Blood of Palomar*, a compilation of a series of short graphic stories that originally appeared with the title *Human Dias-trophism*.⁷⁰ Hernandez's graphic novella charts the havoc wreaked by a serial killer in the small Central American community of Palomar, but it is also (and not coincidentally) the story of Humberto, a young Latino artist coming to terms with his art at the very moment he witnesses a hideous attempted murder.

The result is an existential, aesthetic, and psychological crisis that leaves the budding artist unable to speak, and, as we see here, unable to move. Hernandez's imposition of a crucifix-like window shadow underscores the theological dimensions of psyche scarring attendant upon this particular artist. The portrait of Humberto, the artist, as a young man provides the perfect counterpoint to the story of serial killer Tomaso in the novel. The efforts of the Hernandez brothers, along with the appearance of anomalies like Ren Høæk, offer hope that the Golden Age of Mexican stereotypes may soon be at an end.

Incision Eight | Postmortem Reverie

Examining the logic of stereotypes with specific emphasis on those with a decidedly Mexican flavor, we should not imagine for a second that they have been or ever will be completely exorcised.

"Autopsy of a rat": even as I used that optimistic phrase to order this interpretive exercise, I knew only too well that it was our collective unconscious, a conceptual figure designating the psyche of all of us drowned in the fascinating and addicting charms of the First World emporium (an ideological miasma if there ever was one), that was the true body in need of an inquest.

In short, Speedy may well outlive us all. I know also that it will be quite easy to read (and, for some, to reject) the accumulated findings contained within these pages as yet another contribution to a growing number of victims' histories appearing from publishers in the humanities and social sciences. I am quite comfortable with this association: analyses of elided networks of power necessarily mandate a sensitivity to those luckless bodies whose abuse silently (offstage, as it were) sustains the hegemony of the status quo. Sander Gilman writes in *The Jew's Body* that "it is in being visible in 'the body that betrays' that the Jew is most uncomfort-

able,"⁷¹ and I have taken heart from his lines: our bodies, our faces, our particular—some would say peculiar—*mexicana/o* accent does bring with it certain associations, true or not (is truth ever the point of the story?), that a careful reading of the visual record reveals.

And Speedy is just one emblematic representative of a litany of Latino types. One might say we should all know better than to believe that the images we see have anything to do with the shapes they ostensibly embody, but do we ever really *know* better? Mexico and Mexicans in the American imagination must figure and be interpreted in *other* ways. Rosario Castellanos's ruminations on language evolution are to the point here: "Just as happens with coins, words wear out and lose that sharpness that makes them valuable, words become mistaken, polyphonic. Handled and spit upon, they must be bathed in purity in order to recover their pristine qualities."⁷² In this light, it is no stretch to suggest that the word "Mexican" awaits its turn for a long, hot, well-deserved soaking.

Suture Corpse

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.

—Lord Henry Wotton, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde⁷³

I'm just the carbon copy you read when you can't find the original.

—Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter) to Margo Channing's (Bette Davis's) future screen and real-life husband, Bill Sampson (Gary Merrill), in Joseph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* (1950)

I end these analecta with a confession.

I suffer from a condition I share with most other people I run across in my professional activities as a university professor and my day-to-day activities as a breathing, (sometimes) thinking subject taking up space on the planet.

My confession?

I am both repulsed and fascinated by stereotypes.

They are so much a part of storytelling, so much a part of all things called narrative, that you begin to wonder how you could tell a story at all without somehow making use of these readily available one-dimensional characterizations.



This collage has a history. In the 1990s, I must have done close to one hundred outreach talks to elementary, middle, and high school kids all across Southern California—this adulterated graphic was part of the handout materials for those talks.

Rosina Talamantes, a graduate student of mine at San Diego State University, took this drawing and used it to adorn a Joseph Cornell-style box within which she placed her final essay for my theory class; I believe a Ren Høek figurine, since lost, was part of the ensemble as well.

Bloodstains of cultures in conflict (often in *combat*), stereotypes fade, mutate, and evolve, but they never really go away. And they lead to particular pathological conditions, a kind of eye-borne *parakinesia*. But where the classic form of parakinesia brings on clumsy, unnatural body movements caused by the impairment of motor functions, stereotypes attack the inner ontological fibers, leaving behind an awkwardness no less real.

The subtitle of this chapter signals that I have chosen to read Freddy López and Speedy Gonzales as cinematic marionettes, and it is worth the time here to remind ourselves that "marionette" derives from the French name "Marion," itself a diminutive of the name "Marie." The prolix, if amiable, *Webster's Third International Dictionary* suggests this "probably comes from the conception that a puppet resembles an image of the Virgin Mary."⁷⁴

An odd take, wouldn't you agree? But I live for these kinds of etymological apocrypha—these tales philologists tempt us with, which give ironic flavor to our hermeneutic adventures.

Plato (no slouch himself when it comes to parables and puppets), too, might smile at the idea of the "Virgin Mary" serving as the denominating synecdoche for all of puppetry—Christ would probably be less amused, though puppets seem in and of themselves the perfect analogue for the literary genre labeled "parable," a storytelling mode the Nazarene native had down pat.

We need to take something to counteract all we see. We see too much and get used to it. Before we know it, we *are* what we see. It is as if our various and disparate communities suffered something collectively, a condition much akin to what psychological enclaves call echolalia, wherein afflicted individuals pathologically repeat what is said by other people around them.

Via neologism, we can speak now of our virulent *scopto*-echolalia, some mad fusion of a voyeuristic pathology with a Tourette's-like repetition compulsion—a drive to pathologically repeat what we see about us.

All the more, then, must we intervene diligently at the site of our seeing—see again that which we have seen too many times so as to see a way through, and imagine a space where Speedy Gonzales never figures the way he has in the past, the way he figures now in our present.

Lights. Camera. Action.

Let the rat lie open, exposed, with viscera askew, the object of a vivisectionist voyeur's delight.



Anticipating "XicanOsmosis"

A postscript to Autopsy of a Rat

Along the border, ubiquitous as all get out, as common as sin, is the piñata. But here the pirated Powerpuff Girl piñata, a well-crafted Buttercup, to be exact—the cool-cruel feisty one of the oddly conceived, test-tube-forged trio—finds herself “inhabited” by an *other*—an “illegal immigrant,” an “undocumented ‘worker,’” a “person of interest,” the scourge of Homeland Security wonks and plebes alike: a five-year-old Mexican girl.

The story, replete with mystery and happy ending, is part of the weave of a rebellious, counter-Tex[t]-Mex and warrants retelling:

Inspectors at border checkpoints have seen it all: people rolled inside carpets, sewn into car seats and stuffed into washing machines, all attempting to be smuggled into the United States.

But inspectors at the Tecate Port of Entry discovered a new twist recently when they encountered a little girl meticulously sealed inside a piñata.

The child was found just before 3 p.m. Nov. 2, when two U.S. citizens attempted to drive a 1990 Acura sedan loaded with several piñatas through the border checkpoint. Suspicious customs inspectors decided to take a closer look at their cargo.



“Autopsy of a Rat, Chapter 2,” digital media, Guillermo Nericcio García; photography, Jamie Heather Fox-Rice.

(top right) A profile of Buttercup, the belligerent and feistiest member of the *Powerpuff Girls* trio.

Like some cool twenty-first-century riff on the Trojan Horse trope, the dangling body of an undocumented Mexican girl, *influencing* the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, embodies a curious form of what I call “XicanOsmosis” in a chapter below.

"Officers began to take the piñatas out of the back seat, and one seemed to be much heavier than the others," said Vince Bond, a spokesman for U.S. Customs & Border Protection. "This one had a little girl of approximately 4 or 5 years of age inside it."

The girl's mother also was found, curled up inside the car's trunk, and the girl's brother, who is about 9 years old, was found underneath the collapsible back seat.

The large piñata carrying the little girl appeared to be a representation of a "Powerpuff Girls" cartoon character.

The girl was completely sealed inside, Bond said, but she was able to breathe and seemed to be in good physical condition. She, her mother and brother were voluntarily deported to Mexico after they were found.

The car carrying the piñatas bore California plates and was driven by a female U.S. citizen; a man in the passenger seat also is a U.S. citizen. Their names were not available.

Neither will be prosecuted, Bond said, in part because of the sheer volume of immigrant-smuggling cases.⁷⁵

The gods are in a good mood; *deus ex machina*, they provide our denouement. Staring in awe at the picture here, we confront the odd antithesis of Speedy Gonzales and Freddy López: *not* the animatronic "Mexican" inhabited by non-Mexican animators and puppeteers, but an unequivocally American, decidedly *gringa* animated telepersonality, rendered transient statue (shades of Pygmalion), but whose center, soul, and ego are the warm-blooded body of a cute five-year-old Mexican girl—a twenty-first-century Trojan horse made of paper, glue, and strips of wood carries in its womb a face and body of an American tomorrow.⁷⁶

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