Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America. By William Anthony Nericcio. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. 264 pages. 26 color and 150 black-and-white illustrations. Hardcover $60.00, paperback $22.95.

William Nericcio's *Tex[t]-Mex* probes to new emotive and cognitive depths what it means to suffocate in a stereotype-filled United States that spins us all into its hallucinatory cocoon.

We're surrounded by Latino stereotypes, one-dimensional and negative. This Nericcio assumes to be the bottom line. Rather than catalog each and every representational instance and type, he wants to dig into and chip away at the very psychological marrow that holds up and feeds a sickened U.S. cultural corpus. So he travels back in time to begin to provide a trace marker of the spinning of these grand hallucinations that enfold the postcards sold of the death and destruction along the U.S.-Mexico border during the early twentieth century, exotically packaged Maria dolls, and Duro Decal appliqués of pastoral señoritas and snoring, sombrero-toting Mexicans.

For Nericcio, the hallucination isn't a thing of the past, nor is it benign. Woven around Americans brown and white, it sets in motion cognitive scripts that straightjacket Chicano and Latino—Tex[t]-Mex—subjectivity and knowledge.

And here, we can only absorb by osmosis Nericcio's sleuthing and "spelunking" (163) into the deleterious ways this hallucination moves us and them. When he speaks of body transformations from unruly brown to controlled white, or of the violence of "delatinization" (87), we feel the pain of the process more than we store away detail. One of his examples: Margarita Carmen Dolores Cansino, who materially decomposed and refigured herself (at the request of Columbia Pictures mogul Harry Cohn) as Hollywood sex-throb Rita Hayworth. The deep alienation of Hayworth, which led to her eventual demise as her "waking world became less and less tethered to material, concrete realities" (108), can also be seen in the lives of other Latina actresses in early Hollywood. One was María Guadalupe Vélez de Villalobos. Nericcio mentions her 1934 film *Palooka*,

in which she performs for audiences a "dialectal dream of taunt, desire, and seduction" (159). For Nericcio, her deep alienation in the sense of her self as her performance (the hot-blooded Latina) led to a life lived as if a "carnival-mirror" of others (164). He reads her suicide, when she was five months pregnant, as a purging and vomiting "all out of herself" of the horror of this "self-manufactured spectacle" (164).

This is not a book from which you come away thinking that you know definitively what you've learned; it's that rare kind of book that hits you hard in the stomach and under the radar of our conscious activities. You feel changed by the force of its pulsations, but you can't put your finger on exactly how this happened.

When Nericcio goes "spelunking [in] the noxious caves of Hollywood's history with Latinos" (163), he uncovers the pain we feel in the manipulation of the ethnic film image repertoire. Sitting in the dark movie theater, for example, we encounter "a world of simulated dreams" (108) and enter a space where the "photolytic powers of the seductive Tex[t]-Mex dissolve the psyche at its weakest moment" (108). He continues: "in the dark, in a world of simulated dreams, we let our guard down and let the sexy dancing lights into the space of our Self. There it lingers, malingers, stays, puts down roots, remaking, in the process, what we speak to others of as our self" (108). The simulation that becomes collective hallucination commits violence on and off the screen; it has created a lasting legacy of brown as exotic, comical, irrational, that not only replicates itself culturally ad infinitum but also casts a "powerful shadow of Hollywood's convincing confabulations" on the lives of real, breathing people (157).

For Nericcio there are some who have dared go against this destructive hallucinatory stream. Orson Welles is one. A director sympathetic to Chicanos (he fought the injustice of the infamous Sleepy Lagoon trials), in his film *Touch of Evil* (1958) he taps into the Chicano "oft-bilingual" borderland psyche where pain and pleasure frictively rub up against each other (43). Welles captures well this sense of a borderland subjectivity that is "not 'fractured' but is *fracture* itself—a place where hyphens, bridges, border stations, and schizophrenia are the rule rather than the exception" (43). And, in this "true border text" (78), Welles does not fear to take his audience—all of us hallucinating brownness in one way or another—into that deep, dark abyss where leather-jacketed pretty boy Mexicans, butch lesbians, grotesque and bloated white bigots, as well as white virginal temptresses and brown whores interpenetrate. Welles, and Nericcio over and across Welles, opens for us that gaping wound otherwise denied that

reveals a national cultural phantasmagoria. (For Nericcio, David Lynch also taps into this racial, sexual, gender-bending collective psychic miasma, adding to it that deep-seated fear of ontologies that defy biological category like the figure of the "half-breed" in *Twin Peaks*.)

It's not so much about the race of the creative force that makes and shapes a powerfully moving Tex[t]-Mex as it is about the attitude. So while Richard Rodriguez is a Chicano, he doesn't de facto tap into the same kind of counterpsychic flow that we see in Welles's work. In an analysis of *Days of Obligation* (1993), Nericcio considers Rodriguez's narcissism "autospectatorial"; that is, it's so exaggerated that it showcases an extreme psychic rigidity—a reactionary, "Right-of-Right political dogmatism." In contrast, Nericcio considers Los Bros Hernandez's *Love & Rockets*, a multivolume collection of the artist's comics (1996–) as the breaking apart of restrictive images followed by their reconstruction through "random and measured" as well as "chaotic and strategic" techniques that make for counter-hallucinatory "other and othering images" that wake us up (191). Los Bros Hernandez's "godless and hilarious 'wetbacks'" along with their depiction of "polymorphously perverse women and men" who exist in that "metaphorical Rio Grande between decency and outrage" deliberately confuse and turn upside down social expectation (morals and ethics), freedom and containment, racism, love, and death—even such "cherished sacred cows" as Latino Catholicism (194).

Nericcio's *Tex[t]-Mex* is a visionquest of sorts that is as much about content as it is about form. Once you open to the first page of *Tex[t]-Mex* you fall deep into a brown-textured Wonderland. He uses the hybrid style of the Mexican *crónicas* that blend essay with reportage; his rapid-fire references and stream of consciousness style rush you down and around and turn you inside out. Along the way, he shakes down Freud and Lacan (classical and postclassical psychoanalysis), Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak (postcolonial theory), along with French thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, and Baudrillard (poststructuralism), all while keeping grounded in the materiality of good ol' "Karlitos Marx." He doesn't let the big names and abstruse jargon overwhelm and kill the buzz of his odyssey; he resists the Siren call to languish "in the airy heights of abstraction and pretension" (87) that lends itself to an academic complacency that only ever maintains a racist and elitist status quo. In form and content, he manages to force a vomiting up of those toxins that have been a cancer to brown subjectivities.

Nericcio's *Tex[t]-Mex* isn't the first study of the construction of a mediated brown cultural imaginary. There are important works by Arturo

Aldama, John Michael Rivera, Marta Sanchez, Gary D. Keller, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Sergio de la Mora, Chon A. Noriega, Ana Lopez, Clara E. Rodríguez, Richard T. Rodriguez, José Antonio Burciaga, Renato Rosaldo, Ellie Hernandez, and Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, to name a few. These scholars offer excellent studies on their own terms and in their own way. But Nericcio does something I have yet to see in Latino cultural/borderland studies. His prose style, coupled with his critical engagement with a massive array of mediated cultural icons, takes you to a place deeper than working consciousness; it lands you in the center of that whirlwind of qualia that configure the mind. It is here, quite possibly, that we might actually feel our world enough to change it.

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