

“These loins aren’t on fire”: Neoliberalism and the Erotic in Paul Martínez Pompa’s *My Kill Adore Him*

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ABSTRACT: In *My Kill Adore Him*, Mexican American poet Paul Martínez Pompa uses the realm of sexuality as a lens through which to explore the ideological, social, and affective shifts that have accompanied the rise of late capitalism in the U.S., thereby echoing the work of the renowned Black feminist scholar and poet Audre Lorde. In these poems, Martínez Pompa implies that our experience of neoliberalism has resulted in our affective withdrawal from politics, which he allegorizes as a decline in our libidos, as well as a distancing from what Slavoj Žižek describes as the Real of the body. He then examines the impact that neoliberalism has had in Latin America, pointing to the way in which free trade has forced many Latin American migrants to flee to the U.S., no matter the cost of the journey. In his final poem on life in the *maquiladora*, the poet depicts the suffering of workers while alluding to the ethically questionable economic ties that bind arduous Latin American labor to U.S. consumerism and consumption. In this poem, Martínez Pompa takes up the issue of Žižek’s concept of virtualization, conveying the way in which our geographically and financially remote vantage point in the U.S. keeps us largely inured to the suffering of those most impacted by the economic system of late capitalism. While he provides no answers, by drawing our attention to the fact of our own indifference, Martínez Pompa brings us one step closer to actual engagement in the events of the world.

KEYWORDS: neoliberalism, erotic, migrant, maquiladora, politics, affect

The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment (Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” 55).

An empty wallet will rise. Speak. How they exhaust systems. Despite the blurred other, the ache might be real. Something she could pick up. Across the border, nothing I can imagine (Paul Martínez Pompa, *My Kill Adore Him*, 64).

Although first published more than forty years ago, Audre Lorde’s words in “Uses of the Erotic” regarding the impact of economic systems that “[define] the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need” remain as relevant today as they were then. In *My Kill Adore Him*, his second full volume of poetry published in 2009, Mexican American poet Paul Martínez Pompa picks up where Lorde left off, exploring the impact of the economic system of neoliberalism on our intellectual, corporeal, and affective lives. In his poems, Martínez Pompa grapples with both the way in which we in the U.S. experience neoliberalism, as well as the way it is experienced

by those in Latin America—specifically by Latin American migrants and Mexican *maquiladora* workers laboring in the free-trade zones on the other side of the U.S./Mexico border. In writing of the way in which we in the “developed” world experience neoliberalism, the poet echoes Lorde, using the realm of sexuality and the libido as a lens through which to explore the ideological, social, and affective shifts that have accompanied the rise of late capitalism in the U.S. In these poems, Martínez Pompa implies that our experience of neoliberalism has resulted in our affective withdrawal from politics, which he allegorizes as a decline in our libidos, as well as a distancing from what Slavoj Žižek describes as the Real of the body and a distortion in the way that we perceive suffering in the rest of the world. By contrast, Martínez Pompa demonstrates that, among Mexican *maquiladora* workers and Latin American migrants, the experience of neoliberalism could not be more real or more centered in the body. Through the poems of *My Kill Adore Him*, Martínez Pompa encourages readers to confront our implication in the system of neoliberalism and our indifference towards its repercussions on those it impacts most. In so doing, it may be possible to cultivate a more committed relationship to politics and to “boost [our] lackluster [libidos],” not with neoliberal supplements, but with real, erotic engagement in the events of the world (Martínez Pompa 55).

The poet develops these issues most directly in the fourth and final section of his collection, pointedly titled “While Late Capital-

ism." In contrast, the poems in the first two sections of Martínez Pompa's collection, respectively titled "A Lesson in Masculinity" and "City of Broken," explore what it means to grow up and live as a Mexican American man in the United States. These poems appear to be largely autobiographical; they are narrated in the first person and depict moments of adolescence and young adulthood, including incidents of racism, police brutality, poverty, and violence. In the poems of the third section, "The War on Poets Goes On," Martínez Pompa grapples with a variety of issues confronting Latinx poets and other writers—from the maddening expectation that all Latinx writers be fluent in Spanish despite repressive English-only school programs, to the questionable ethics of writing about violence and other political subjects, to the way in which Spanish-speaking language and culture have been exoticized and appropriated by the U.S. publishing industry while social issues facing the majority of Latinx people in America are too-often left unaddressed. In this section, we are given insight into the significance of the title, "My Kill Adore Him," as the poet juxtaposes instances of psychological death with those of "adoration": contrasting discrimination against Latinx people with the way in which iconic aspects of Latinx culture are exoticized and commodified in U.S. consumer culture.

Given the more immediate nature of the topics in these earlier sections, it would be easy to dismiss the poet's reflections on political economy in "While Late Capitalism" as an unrelated albeit intriguing detour, a minor foray into a distant reality that is admittedly "nothing [he] can imagine" (64). However, Martínez Pompa has left us subtle textual clues to the contrary—from the last line of the final poem which echoes the last line of the first, (the collection's first and last poems, "Film Strip" and "MyKillAdoreHer," end with the words "anything we could imagine" / "nothing I can imagine" respectively), to the volume's title "My Kill Adore Him," which is a variation on the title of the final poem "MyKillAdoreHer," and its chilling play on words, ("MyKillAdoreHer" is close to the English pronunciation of *maquiladora*, which is the Spanish term for the labor-intensive factories located in the free-trade zones). Even the cover art, a painting of a bomb-pop popsicle melting sticky red, white, and blue onto a linoleum floor, alludes to the poem "The Physics of Crime"—in which Martínez Pompa reflects upon the disproportionately high mortality rate among Latinx youth—while also gesturing to the unstable and at times nefarious significance of the American flag here and throughout the world. Through these textual clues, Martínez Pompa urges his readers to make the connection between the impact of neoliberalism in Mexico and the social issues facing Latinx people in the U.S., implying that many of these issues are themselves reflections of larger geopolitical structures of inequality functioning on a hemispheric, if not a global, scale. In addition, the poems of gender-identity formation in "A Lesson on Masculinity," in which Martínez Pompa illustrates the competitiveness, cruelty, homophobia, false bravado, and shame often involved in becoming a man in the United States, prepare the reader for his sardonic treatment of sexuality in "While Late Capitalism." This textual struc-

ture enables readers to understand the hyper-masculine rhetoric of neoliberal consumerism and consumption that the poet depicts in "While Late Capitalism" as merely the latest, most commodified chapter in his education in U.S. masculinity.

In "While Late Capitalism" Martínez Pompa deals directly with the infiltration of neoliberal consumer ideology into the realms of sexuality and subjectivity, as well as the way in which this consumer ideology ends up distancing us from what Hardt and Negri refer to as the "sense of life and the desire for creativity" (23). In order to address this notion of the "sense of life and the desire for creativity," Martínez Pompa draws on the concept of the erotic: the conflation of sexual energy and creativity seen in Freud's concepts of sublimation and the libido, as well as in the philosophies of thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse and Audre Lorde. In her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Lorde defines the erotic as "an assertion of the life-force of women" and "creative energy empowered," as well as "depth of feeling," and the "sense of satisfaction and completion" that we may experience in relation to "our various life endeavors" (55, 54, 57). For Lorde, "the erotic is not a question of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing" (54-5). Here, as in Martínez Pompa's poetry, the erotic transcends its limited associations with sex and sexuality to stand as the creative, life-affirming instinct that is the basis for all our ideals and actions, of which sex and sexuality are an integral and particularly intimate part.

Another way of conceptualizing the erotic as it appears in relation to the political in Martínez Pompa's poetry is as "affective investment," which, as Lawrence Grossberg defines it in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, largely resembles Lorde's theorization of the erotic (Grossberg 83). According to Grossberg,

affect identifies the strength of the investment which anchors people in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings and pleasures, but also determines how invigorated people feel at any moment of their lives, their level of energy or passion.... [I]t is in their affective lives that people constantly struggle to care about something, and to find the energy to survive, to find the passion necessary to enact their own projects and possibilities. (82-3)

Affective investment is analogous to this iteration of the erotic in that it is not inherently linked to any particular system of thought or ideology; like the erotic "is not a question of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing" (Lorde 54-5). The erotic as affective investment can be understood as the level of personal conviction people allow themselves to feel for their chosen beliefs, which then directly impacts the amount of energy and attention people are willing to give to the fulfillment of those beliefs. Moreover, according to Grossberg, "the relationship between the planes of ideology and affect is itself historically articulated" (86). In

other words, although it reveals itself through the ideas and actions of individuals, in its relation to particular beliefs and/or systems of thought, affective investment has a historical shape that can be mapped and studied.³ I read the presence of the erotic in the poems of "While Late Capitalism," as Martínez Pompa's depiction of this historical shape—as his attempt to convey the extent to which consumerism and market culture have taken the place of the affective investment in contemporary U.S. society, effectively obscuring our ability to bring passion and enthusiasm to our "various life endeavors" (Lorde 57).

The poet addresses this contemporary deficit in an especially striking way in the second poem of "While Late Capitalism," titled "Erectile Miss," in which he utilizes the concept of the erotic in presenting sexual dysfunction as a metaphor for writer's block. But not just any writer's block—the writer's block that Martínez Pompa portrays in "Erectile Miss" is the particular creative paralysis that afflicts artists and intellectuals operating within the hegemony of the neoliberal marketplace. The poem begins as follows: "How dare you dis my erectile / dysfunction. / It's much too hard / to maintain/ this cheap word play / -er when Donald's trumped / up the entire cityscape" (50). Martínez Pompa's clever use of word-play—with near constant references to the penis and erections—make this poem's meaning feel almost overdetermined, thus bringing home the irony and hopelessness of the contemporary artist's situation. We even see this word-play around the term "word play-er" itself. On the one hand, the streetwise voice of "Erectile Miss" is the voice of a player—a man known for his sexual prowess and one who should, theoretically, have no difficulty getting "hard." But our speaker is not just any player—he is instead a "word play/-er," or a poet, lacking in inspiration. As the poetic voice himself tells us, "the problem is / my head, ya prick, / these loins aren't on / fire" (50). Within the poem, the term "word play/-er" somehow also refers to the speaker's penis/erections, which Donald Trump's overdevelopment has made it "too hard / to maintain." As such, in lamenting the dysfunction of his word play-er, the poetic voice fuses the decline in his sexuality with that of his creative drive, both of which he has been unable to sustain within the context of neoliberalism.

The potential reasons for the poet's writer's block within neoliberalism's corporate climate are varied. As many scholars of neoliberalism have observed, one of the hallmarks of late capitalism is the emphasis that it places on the individual as the sole arbiter and manufacturer of her own destiny. In studying depression as a public structure of feeling within neoliberal society, scholars Christine Ross and Ann Cvetkovich each identify neoliberalism's extreme emphasis on individualism as one of the social phenomena contributing to the prevalence of depression in our contemporary affective landscape. Drawing on the work of sociologist Alain Ehrenberg, Cvetkovich argues that "the discourse of [clinical vs. political] depression emerges in response to the demand that the self become a sovereign individual defined by the ability to create distinctive projects and agendas" and that "those who fail to measure up to this demand through lack

of will, energy, or imagination are pathologized as depressed" (12). As Ross asserts, the over-emphasis on individualism has negative impacts on the concept of creativity itself, which, in the neoliberal context, becomes "the display of *required creativity* (the rule of self-creation), which is endemic to neoliberal contemporary subjectivity and may well be one of the reasons for its depressiveness" (92-3; my emphasis). Within this social and ideological climate of "required creativity," the role of the poet becomes almost mechanistic—that of a "cheap word play/-er," or a jukebox, made to spit out rhyme and meter upon request. In this context, when the poet/word-play machine fails to produce, it inevitably appears broken or dysfunctional.

However, the creative paralysis that Martínez Pompa depicts in "Erectile Miss" has additional, more culturally-specific reasons for being. As scholars of neoliberalism have also observed, another hallmark of this economic and political paradigm is the way that it has managed to integrate any and all social and cultural production into its market logic and used this cultural production to further its own ends. This has been particularly true for Latinx culture, which, as Kristy Ulibarri points out, marketers have found a way to transform into a kind of brand—thus enabling them to sell aspects of Latinx culture, including Latinx literature, as so many exotic, new commodities (156). Martínez Pompa speaks to this phenomenon in his collection's third section, "The War on Poets Goes On"—in a poem appropriately titled "Commercial Break." The poem reads as an ad campaign for "Pretty White Poetry," an agency that specializes in selling meaningless Latinx-sounding vocabulary to white writers hoping to make their poems sound more exotic. It begins as follows:

Are your images insufficient? Is your diction bland? Are you tired of writing poetry that simply does not work? If you answered yes to any of these questions, consider what a Mexican can do for you....Here at Pretty White Poetry, we have an inventory of Mexicans in all shades of brown. Need an authentic-indigenous tone? Try our mud-brown, Indian Mexican. Your audience will taste the lust in Montezuma's loins as they devour your lines. (44)

Within this market-driven climate, there is great pressure to conform to pre-set, market-based conceptions of *Latinidad*, and, as such, the role of the Latinx writer becomes less that of expressing personal and cultural truths than that of meeting consumers' expectations for cultural spice—as the poetic voice of "Commercial Break" asserts, "even Hispanic poets sprinkle our Latin Lingo into their writing" (44). In addition, this commodification enables the mainstream market to coopt and thus contain the threat of difference that Latinx and other minority cultures might otherwise represent. As the poem promises, "Pretty White Poetry deals exclusively with docile, safe language. Our words are edgy, but never make liberal white readers uncomfortable—that means more publishing opportunities for you!" (45).

It is this commodification of Latinx literature that Martínez Pompa speaks to through the concluding metaphor of "Erectile Miss": "The problem is / my head, ya prick, / these loins aren't on / fire. My boners / ship from Canada / in a child-resistant / vial but have you seen / what happens / to chorizo / once it's cooked?" (50). As with his earlier reference to Donald Trump, by declaring that his "boners ship from Canada in a child-resistant vial," the word player situates his own writing—his boners—within the context of neoliberalism—or, more specifically, within the context of NAFTA—and amidst the consumer culture that this context implies (50). Moreover, the poet's suggestion here that he can still get hard with the help of Canadian Viagra but that the results of this medically-induced arousal just aren't the same alludes to what is lost through the commodification of Latinx literature. By conforming to the neoliberal market's demand for marketable Latinx culture, the poet's writing—his metaphorical penis—has completely disintegrated—it has lost its potential to challenge or stir his readers and become devoid of any real passion or vitality.² Through the poem's conclusion, Martínez Pompa thus implies that both sexuality and creativity under neoliberalism can only be pathetic simulations of erotic passion.

The idea of simulation as a central facet of neoliberal existence is one that Martínez Pompa takes up in other poems of "While Late Capitalism" as well, most particularly in the poem "Political Plasma," in which he explores how the entertainment industry functions as a cultural stand-in for the erotic in neoliberal society—that is, as a source of simulated stimulation that eclipses our desire for political engagement and creativity. In "Political Plasma" Martínez Pompa addresses the effects of the mass media on both political conviction and eroticism. Here it is useful to consider again the following reflection from Lawrence Grossberg's *We Gotta Get Outta This Place* on the role of affect in politics:

Affect identifies the strength of the investment which anchors people in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings, and pleasures....it is in their affective lives that people constantly struggle to care about something, and to find the energy to survive, to find the passion necessary to imagine and enact their own projects and possibilities. (82)

In "Political Plasma," Martínez Pompa suggests that part of the effect of media bombardment is to destroy a person's affective resolve to take political action. Thus, for the poetic voice, it is "convenient to forget my political shtick / with a 63-inch plasma hung over / my head an empty space on the wall / plugged with what you wish you had" (55). Martínez Pompa uses enjambment so that, here, the plasma TV hung over the poetic voice's head makes him feel as though he is hung over, his head ostensibly "plugged" (55). For the poetic voice, the TV represents "a gargantuan / shindig of channels a distraction in / surround sound" which "speaks so I don't have to waive my right to rent appliance art" (55). Channeling distraction

rather than political focus, the TV speaks so that the speaker does not have to, and the distraction that the TV represents causes the poetic voice to unwittingly "waive [his] right[s]" (55).³ In the poem's last lines: "I boost / my lackluster libido with a dream / machine that is always turned on," the poet suggests that in the absence of political conviction, eroticism is also lacking, or "lackluster" (55). Like the "boners / [shipped] from Canada" in *Erectile Miss*, this TV "dream machine" works to "boost" the poetic voice's libido to produce the virtual effect of political conviction "deprived of its substance" (Žižek 11).

In this sense Martínez Pompa's poetry resonates with Slavoj Žižek's assessment of contemporary society as one defined by the phenomena of virtualization. Among other instances of virtualization in contemporary culture, Žižek cites "virtual sex as sex without sex, the doctrine of warfare with no casualties (on our side, of course) as warfare without warfare, [and] the contemporary redefinition of politics as the art of expert administration, that is, as politics without politics" (11). According to Žižek, this phenomenon of virtualization has the tendency to result in a kind of "ideological numbness" (9), as well as in a sense of distancing from the "Real of the body," both of which appear as central preoccupations in Martínez Pompa's poetry and which I have identified as an absence of the erotic (10). However, the effects of virtualization do not stop there; rather, as Žižek explains, "what happens at the end of this process of virtualization... is that we begin to experience 'real reality' itself as a virtual entity" (11). It is this even more insidious consequence of virtualization that Martínez Pompa takes up in his final poem of neoliberalism, "MyKillAdoreHer," which I will explore last (60).

Having addressed the way in which neoliberalism is experienced by upper-middle class Americans in the U.S., in "Manifesto" and "While Late Capitalism," the poet focuses on one of the byproducts of this economic trend: the massive arrival of Latin Americans fleeing economic crises in their countries of origin.⁴ As Juan Gonzalez explains in *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, free trade, one of neoliberalism's principal mechanisms, rather than uniformly improving Latin American livelihoods, instead produced gaping disparities in wealth and resulted in a veritable surge of Latin American migration to the United States:

Free trade... deeply distorted many Latin American economies. It became a key pillar during the 1980s and 1990s for a new 'neoliberal' economic strategy[,] sometimes dubbed the Washington Consensus... While foreign investors and a domestic elite prospered from the boom in expanded trade, the Latin American nations that rushed to adopt the neoliberal model soon discovered it did not produce the miracle progress for ordinary people its proponents had promised. By the late 1990s, wealth disparity had grown so rapidly that the region was reporting the biggest income gaps in the world between rich and poor.

Ironically, Latin America, which historically had been a major destination for millions of immigrants from around the world, was transformed into a giant exporter of its own people—and the bulk of those migrants headed for the United States. (249-50)

In these poems of "While Late Capitalism," Martínez Pompa addresses the causal relationship between neoliberalism and Latin American migration. First, in the poem "Manifiesto," Martínez Pompa offers readers a tongue-in-cheek migrant manifesto—a statement of Latin American migrants' presumed intentions in coming to the United States. This satirical remake of Marx and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* reads as a confirmation of the U.S. Republican Party's worst fears regarding Latin American migration and the United States' soon-to-be majority-minority status, foretelling an era of Latinx domination.⁵ The poem begins by describing the presence of Latin American migrants in the U.S. as it is conceived of by those on the right—as a shadow or stain threatening 'our' way of life, a menacing "spectre haunting the suburbs" (56). The poetic voice explains that the tireless opponents of Latin American migration, what he describes as the "powers of suburbia— including Republican jingoists, village trustees, and a few Hispanics suffering an identity crisis," have banded together to defeat this threat and, as such, it is time that the "spectre" make its claims known, "[meeting] this nursery tale of the spectre of illegal aliens with a manifesto of the party itself" (56). The poetic voice asserts that, in comparison with the true threat the migrants pose, the fears and predictions of Republican jingoists are a mere "nursery tale"—suggesting that what is to come is so much worse than what Republicans and other opponents of immigration have imagined (56). By referring to Latin American migrants as their own "party," the poetic voice implies that these migrants are not merely a random array of individuals brought here by chance and circumstance, but are, in fact, an organized movement with a set of clear objectives intent on transforming the U.S. as we know it. Moreover, in the manifesto's opening line, Latin American migrants are portrayed as not only a "party" but an army: "Illegals of all nationalities have *stormed the border* to sketch the following," emphasizing the level of danger that these migrants are perceived to represent (56; my emphasis).

The manifesto itself is divided into three sections. Each of these sections validates the GOP's claims regarding the impact of migrants on the U.S. and then moves beyond the extremism of even those claims into true, gleeful hyperbole. The first section begins with the assertion, "Yes, it is true—cuando hablamos español we are talking about you" (56). This pronouncement conveys to the manifesto's intended white, Anglo audience that we are being watched—that there are Spanish-speaking spies inside enemy lines calculating our movements and conspiring against us.⁶ Among these conspirations are "how to lower [our] property values" by taking over our neighborhoods; "how to raise [our] car insurance

premiums;" and "how to steal [our] children, drag them across the border and sniff them," presumably as one would a delicacy (56). In these pronouncements, readers will immediately recognize concerns that Republicans have articulated regarding the arrival of Latin Americans migrants. Martínez Pompa points to the ludicrous nature of these Republican fears by gradually escalating these intentions, making each declaration more outrageous than the next. In the last lines of this section, "We're tired of arroz con pollo. We want arroz con Anglo," Martínez Pompa gets at the true anxiety at the heart of the Republicans' anti-immigrant stance (56). In figuring Latin Americans as cannibals, the poet paints the dynamic between the U.S. and Latin Americans migrants as Republicans perceive it—as the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. By implying that Latin American migrants actually want to eat white children—"the blonder the better"—Martínez Pompa suggests that the arrival of Latin American migrants presents a threat, not only to a particular language or culture, but to the very foundations of civil society.

In the manifesto's second section, its migrant authors 'own up' to other impacts its constituents have had on the U.S., writing that "traffic jams, drug addiction, gingivitis" are "all [their] doing" (56). This 'confession' to being the source of health conditions brings to mind the Nazis' claims that Jews were carriers of disease and thus needed to be exterminated. However, unlike the Nazis, who compared the Jews to rats, the authors of this manifesto provide no explanation as to how Latin American migrants could have possibly produced gingivitis, leaving this sequence of causation up to our imaginations. Even more radical is their claim to having been the agents of climate change. They write, "Do you really think it's fertilizer we spread over your lawns? No it's ozone killer. That's right, the hole in the ozone layer can be traced directly back to us" (56). In this assertion, the issue of Latin American migration is depicted as more than a societal ill. Instead, here the poet insinuates that Latin American migrants are directly responsible for the ultimate demise of our species. (The irony, of course, is that many Latin American migrants do, in fact, spread fertilizer, or ozone killer, on our lawns, but it is at our own behest.) The last lines of this section speak to a common GOP assertion: that migrants are exploiting American tax dollars through government assistance programs like food stamps and Medicare. The manifesto's authors write, "We've conspired with the federal government to divert your taxes into our coffers. FICA now stands for Frijole Ingestion Cash Advance" (56).⁷ In addition to the derogatory suggestion that all Latin Americans eat only beans, this statement addresses the claim that Latin American migrants are colluding with the U.S. federal government (which, at the time of the poem's publication, would have meant the Obama administration and the Democrats).

In the manifesto's final section, its authors paint a picture of what the United States might look like as this army of Latin American migrants takes over—again, building on Republican claims and surpassing them. They first suggest that Latin American migrants will reclaim the land that was lost during the Mexican Cession

(1848), as well as other states that were never part of Mexico. They declare, "We don't want your wives, we want Califas, Arizona, and just for the hell of it, Iowa" (57). This assertion figures Latin American migration as an imperial project and the U.S. as a nation it seeks to colonize. By including Iowa in the mix, the manifesto's authors imply that their dominion over the U.S. territory will soon stretch far beyond the original borders of Mexico, into land that is now predominately red and white. In the manifesto's alliterative last lines, its authors write:

Soon you will wake to the ruckus of reggaeton, the boom of banda, the clatter of millions of little brown feet invading your schools, wherein anyone caught learning English will be charged with treason and deported. (57)

Here the manifesto's authors suggest that Latin American migrants' conquest of the United States will be all-encompassing—that soon whites will be unable to escape the deafening sounds of these raucous people of color. Lastly, the manifesto touches on the issue of language—perhaps Anglo Americans' greatest concern. Just as Latinx children were once corporally punished for speaking Spanish in schools, the manifesto promises that, in the future, anyone found studying English will not only be punished but removed from the country. The manifesto's implication—that Spanish will soon become both the dominant and the official language of the U.S.—would make Latin American migrants' colonial takeover of the United States complete. Like the well-known manifesto on which it is based, the poem ends with a rousing call to action: "Illegals of all countries, Unite!" (57).

In the section's next poem, also titled "While Late Capitalism," Martínez Pompa abandons the satirical approach of "Manifiesto" and instead gives us a shadowy glimpse into the experience of Latin American migrants as they attempt to cross the U.S./Mexico border. The poem's title again emphasizes the causal link between the economic policies of neoliberalism and this attempt at migration, which, as we see from this poem, is not always successful. Amidst the hazardous options available to them, the figures in this poem have elected to make the journey locked inside a metal container—what Martínez Pompa describes as a "dark-aluminum-box" (58). The poet puts the reader inside this container by placing the entire poem in brackets: the poem literally takes place inside a box. The brackets Martínez Pompa uses here also convey the sense that that which occurs inside them is of little import—that the terrible tragedies that befall Latin American migrants while crossing the border are like words in parentheses that can be skimmed or skipped over entirely. Once inside the box, Martínez Pompa conveys the stifling sense of confinement that presides therein by connecting all the words with dashes—thus leaving no space between them—and by omitting any unnecessary letters—the words, like the bodies inside the container, are literally crushed against each other: "[crammed-&-bangin-against-each-other-in-a-dark-aluminum-box-they-drop-

like-fleas-or-croak-standin" (58). Like the migrants' endless journey, the poem is one run-on sentence with no line breaks or periods, and the sickening and tragic events that the poet describes bleed into each other, giving the reader the contradictory dual sense of monotony and horror: "6-hrs-into-th-trip-a-mothr-drapes-her-limp-babys-serape-over-th-mans-head-it-nods-back-&-frth-with-each-bump-in-th-road-thank-god-th-corpse-doesnt-smell-warm-piss-&-shit-make-bodies-vomit-on-bodies" (58). At one point in the trip—presumably upon their arrival—the real moment of truth occurs when the migrants' confinement turns into entrapment, as "th-coyote-cant-unlock-the-trailr-door" (58). The fact that the migrants are trapped inside the metal container and will likely suffocate to death is totally understated and easily overlooked if one reads the poem too quickly. In this way, the poem simulates our disregard for the hundreds of migrant deaths that occur each year. In the last lines of the poem, a woman "tries-to-scratch-a-hole-thru-th-wall" and "prays-some-phrase-or-word-some-idea-that-resists-translation-into-English]" (58). This word, phrase, or idea could "[resist translation]" because it is in Spanish or in an indigenous language, and/or because it is too horrifying to put into words. Either way, through these lines the poet conveys that the plight of these migrants is not only not on our radar, but is also, to a certain extent, beyond our comprehension.

In his last poem of neoliberalism, Martínez Pompa again turns to the issue of virtualization that he explored in earlier poems of "While Late Capitalism" and to the notion that "what happens at the end of [the] process of virtualization . . . is that we begin to experience 'real reality' itself as a virtual entity" (Žižek 11). It is this even more insidious consequence of virtualization that Martínez Pompa addresses in "MyKillAdoreHer" (60). As I mentioned previously, the poem's title is a chilling play on the Spanish word "*maquiladora*," which is the Spanish term for the manufacturing plants in the free trade zones, and it alludes to the exploitation and abuse that this predominantly female workforce is known to suffer at the hands of their employers. The poem consists of five sections, the first four of which capture the experiences of four different women and reveal the financialization of human life endemic to the free trade zones. The final section is a collage of phrases taken from the previous four that brings these women's experiences together and addresses the way that we tend to perceive these experiences from our geographically and financially distant vantage-point in the U.S. as no more than a virtual reality and, thus, as one that is easily ignored.

The first section of "MyKillAdoreHer" establishes the extent to which *maquiladora* workers are expected to perform as machines and in which any deviation from this mechanical performance is grounds for termination. In this section, Lucia [sic], a worker in a garment factory, is fired from her job because, "[having broken] the machine twice in one week," she is viewed as "no longer automatic" (60). The manager's implication is that, like the sewing machine, Lucia is somehow broken or dysfunctional—"her stitches are crooked and once another seamstress found Lucia's 'lost' sewing patterns

in the trash" (60). However, upon being fired, Lucia "[puts] on her best disappointed face" as the security guard escorts her to the door (60). The fact that Lucia must feign her disappointment suggests that her termination is in fact her own small act of resistance against a system rigged against her—an escape from the "rows of itchy throats [and] bowed heads" that populate the factory. The only problem with this act of resistance is that, as the manager points out, the *maquiladora* "[gives Lucia] work" and "puts money in [her] pocket" (60). By engineering her own termination, Lucia is also leaving herself without a source of income in an environment in which there are few other employment options, making her escape only a Pyrrhic victory.

In the second section, another *maquiladora* worker, Elena, grows delirious with fatigue while dressing Miss Piggy dolls, whom she imagines "spit at her" (61). Her job is to "grab Miss Piggy, pull gown over snout, fasten two tiny buttons, grab another" (61). The poem describes the severe toll that this minute, repetitive task takes on Elena's body and her consciousness: "With each doll, Elena's hands grow stiffer. Her feet grow heavy as the concrete below. Dolls spit at her, or maybe this is imagined, but the ache in her legs might be real....After standing for hours, the room begins to blur. Her mouth opens like an empty wallet as naked dolls march on" (61). Hypnotized by the repetition, Elena becomes alienated from reality and from herself. Standing with her mouth open as though in a complete stupor, she has been emptied out—robbed of her ability to think clearly and to identify with her own pain. By contrast, the dolls that she works on represent the complete opposite of strenuous labor. As cheaply-made bodies of molded plastic, these dolls represent recreation—pure fun—, as well as excess—they are frivolous items mindlessly bought and easily discarded.⁸ By documenting Elena's suffering on the assembly line, this poem reveals the sinister origins of what we in the U.S. believe to be innocent fun—showing the loss of liberty that occurs on one side of the border in order to feed the rapacious demand for diversion on the other. Moreover, the fact that this loss of liberty occurs as Elena is dressing the dolls, and thus engaging in the same behavior as the American children who will soon acquire them, showcases the true irony of the situation. What the American children will experience as an activity of enjoyment and pure pleasure for Elena constitutes its dissolution, as, "with each doll, [her] hands grow stiffer" (61).

The poem's third section features the burning "lungs of girls" who have undergone detox treatment after "[sucking] air thick with sulfuric acid" (62). Like Cherrie Moraga's play *Heroes and Saints*, this stanza presents neoliberalism as it is experienced in the body as medical symptomatology: "headaches, blurred vision, diarrhea" (Martínez Pompa 62). For these girls, as for the main character Cerezita in Moraga's play, the experience of neoliberalism is synonymous with the insidious effects of toxins—"acetone working past unfiltered exhaust systems and through their livers" (62). Moreover, like the characters in Moraga's play, these girls have no choice but to continue to subject themselves to these working conditions, and

"most return to work despite doctor's orders" (62). Even worse, the poetic voice in Martínez Pompa's poem implies that, in the end, the *maquiladora* is where they most belong, declaring that "back inside, the tin roof and their steady perspiration remind them they're still alive—together one breathing, burning machine" (62). It is as though the bodies of these girls have been coopted so that their sole purpose and function is to provide their labor—with no regard for its impact on their health or their wellbeing. In this sense, it is as though they have become a part of the factory itself—a living machine made up of imperiled human bodies. Moreover, the girls have grown so used to this status that they are unable to recognize their own existence outside of their place inside the factory. It is only having returned to work, safely inside the *maquiladora*, that "the tin roof and their steady perspiration remind them they're still alive" (62).

The fourth section suggests that the only thing worse than working in the *maquiladora* is when the *maquiladora* shuts down. While, the previous day, one could hear the "unsynchronized rhythm of coughing girls tethered to well-lubed motors," today, "there's nothing but... lint & dead machines" and "the sound of layoffs & profit margins" (63). Here Martínez Pompa uses the '&' symbol to emphasize the corporate nature of the closure—the fact that, as the manager tells the workers, "the decision was made across the border," and there is nothing to be done. For the corporate leaders in the United States who made the decision to close the *maquiladora*, it was no more than another nondescript production site—a factory easily relocated to another country with an even cheaper labor force. Celia, a *maquiladora* worker witnessing the closure, desperately envisions the lint-filled factory where she worked "caught inside a tiny globe. Something she could pick up. Shake" (63). In this fantasy, Celia expresses the desire to overturn the hierarchies of power that subordinate workers in Mexico to the whims of businessmen in the U.S., shaking them like a tiny snow globe and thereby rearranging them into more equitable power relations.

In the poem's final section, Martínez Pompa weaves fragments of each of these vignettes together into a jolting stanza that magnifies the violence found in each of the previous sections. Alluding to the sexualized violence of the Ciudad Juárez femicides, as well as to the impunity existing around those deaths, this stanza mimics what one would imagine it feels like to watch a snuff pornography film:

A perpetual conveyor, he patrols her mouth. The sound of unfiltered white. Breathing margins. The task: grab Elena's hands. Pull. Fasten. He also offered crooked patterns. Put money in her hair. That Lucia broke. Was evidence enough? Molded vision as a refrain. An empty wallet will rise. Speak. How they exhaust systems. *Despite the blurred other, the ache might be real. Something she could pick up. Across the border, nothing I can imagine.* (64; my emphasis)

In this last section of "MyKillAdoreHer," the decline of the erotic that we observed in the earlier poems of "While Late Capitalism" finally ends in its polar opposite: thanatos, or the death drive. In this stanza, we see that, in a context governed by financial reasoning, or the voice of "an empty wallet," "evidence" is insufficient to bring about any kind of real change. Moreover, the last two lines of the poem mark the lacuna that exists between the suffering depicted in the poem and our ability to comprehend that suffering, which we are more likely to experience as one more virtual reality on our TV screens. In these final lines, Martínez Pompa conveys how the aforementioned process of virtualization enables consumers in the developed world to be informed of the traumatic experiences of *maquiladora* workers, yet remain largely inured to the emotional toll of these experiences and to the relationship this trauma has to the material conditions of our own lives (64). In so doing, we can continue to perceive this social and historical atrocity, as Martínez

Pompa describes it here, as "nothing I can imagine" (64).

Fortunately, there is a difference between the common indifference that the poem depicts and the impact of the poem—the work that the poem does. By marking the distance between the reality—or the "ache"—of the other and our ability to comprehend and empathize with her suffering, Martínez Pompa brings us one step closer to an awareness of our own "ideological numbness" and the possibility of breaking through it (Martínez Pompa 64; Žižek 9). Upon seeing ourselves reflected in "MyKillAdoreHer" and the other poems of this collection, we are forced to come to terms with the devastating impacts of the neoliberal system of production and our own complicity in that system. While there is much that separates this basic act of recognition from real, erotic engagement in the events of the world, if we can begin to truly appreciate our own role in the story of late capitalism, we will have moved one step in the right direction.

NOTES

¹For a similar assessment of the role of emotions in politics, see Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta (13). For Grossberg, "affect is the missing term in an adequate understanding of ideology, for it offers the possibility of a 'psychology of belief' which would explain how and why ideologies are sometimes, and only sometimes, effective and always to varying degrees" (82). Nietzsche makes a similarly motivated call for a history of the passions in *The Gay Science* (81).

²Unlike other sausage, when cooked, Mexican chorizo separates into little pieces resembling ground beef.

³Moreover, as a rental, the speaker's TV represents an extreme version of temporary and fake ownership. As with buying things on credit, when renting appliances, the experience of ownership exists as an ephemeral and false illusion.

⁴One of the poems in the section "While Late Capitalism" is also titled "While Late Capitalism."

⁵The structure and some of the principle language in this poem's introductory section is taken directly from the preamble to *The Communist Manifesto*. I would like to thank my student, Tristan Donohoe, for this astute observation.

⁶As a white, Anglo reader and a member of the current U.S. majority, I am implicated in/interpellated by the poetic voice's use of the word "you" and will thus refer to the audience with the pronouns 'we' and 'our' (56).

⁷In reality, FICA stands for Federal Insurance Contributions Act, and it is a federal tax to fund Social Security and Medicare.

⁸In addition, as a true consumer, there is perhaps no more perfect symbol for the American capitalist ideology than Miss Piggy.

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