

A TOUCH OF EVIL

Quinlan: Come on, read my future for me.

Tanya: You haven't got any.

Quinlan: What do you mean?

*Tanya: Your future is all used up.**

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I have never thought more about the experience of displacement, or better, the differences between the experience of forced and voluntary displacement, than over the last few days traveling back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico, crossing the border between San Diego and Tijuana. What people here simply call "The Line" or "La Linea," depending on which side of the border we are, reminded me of what Homi Bhabha once meant when he stated that the world is a global village for those who can afford it, but for those who are refugees no walk is longer than the one across a border. The border here seems to be a frontier that not only separates two countries, but divides two worlds, establishing a set of distressing social and political conditions and relations between them.

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It was in the early 1990s when I, and people around me, began to travel extensively mainly for our profession, whether as an artist, writer, or curator. Travel undertaken to meet artists in other countries, to see shows on the other side of the world, to curate exhibitions on other continents, or just to give lectures in far-away places. This was not necessarily a new condition for me. I had experienced migration or what I

* *Touch of Evil* directed by Orson Wells (1958). Quinlan: Orson Wells; Tanya: Marlene Dietrich.

think of as a form of nomadic lifestyle, since my childhood. From the age of six months I moved around the world, being taken by my parents from one place to another as often as every six months. By the time I was about four years old, I had seen it all: every ocean, the two poles, the Amazon and the Nile, and set my feet on every continent. I remember my parents joking about this, saying that even the gypsies were calling us gypsies. Even those who live in a culture and tradition of permanent re-location could not match the frequency of our various moves. I suppose for a child this form of upbringing has its advantages and disadvantages and at this point in my life I can clearly see the benefits of it as well as the problematic consequences. Today I clearly feel the lack of a place I can call home, understood as a particular geographic location with its own culture and history. Home is simply where I am living at a particular moment in my life and where my parents are, which is now again Costa Rica. The constant experience of moving during my childhood was something that inscribed itself deeply in me, and I have continued this form of nomadic life ever since. It has created in me an intense curiosity for cultures, countries, narratives outside of the sphere in which I grew up, which was, despite living in Latin America or the Middle East always a form of hyper modernity shaped by the globalizing force of US popular culture. This way of growing up maybe did not allow me to develop a sense of self as other people could do through a notion of place, but it allowed me to accumulate an extraordinary amount of knowledge and experiences about other cultures that always put things into a larger, more meaningful perspective.

When I started to travel and move on my own more and more in the early and mid-1990s, I even recall a momentary fascination for cultural homogenization. I thought it was extraordinary that I could talk to my cousins in Costa Rica about the same kind of music, the same kind of films, and other aspects of globalized life. I thought it was remarkable that I could for example travel to a far away place in Chile and be in a hotel room that looked identical to one in Amsterdam, Chicago, or Kyoto. In addition, I could eat the same club sandwich, see the same pay-per-view movies, and drink the same Coke from the hotel room's mini-bar. But there was a point at which this first amazement disappeared. I began to desire the cultural particularities and narratives of the places I visited and began to resist this tendency towards homogenization. Gradually I became more and more aware of my own position in this process of globalization, an undeniably privileged position, accompanied thus by responsibility.

This brings me back to the beginning of this short text. The way I experienced the inequality of how people move from one side of a border to the other in Tijuana and San Diego was for me without precedent. What made it particularly shocking was simply the intimidation that the fortress-like US border checkpoint evoked in me when crossing "La Linea" from Tijuana to the US. Even though I now also hold a passport from a European Union member country, I feared I would not be allowed back into the US, especially since the US border patrol is always suspicious about why someone so obviously Latin-looking is holding a German passport. Moving from Tijuana to San Diego was like crossing the border between the East and West in times of the Iron Curtain (including barbed

wire, a sequence of walls, armed guards with patrol dogs, etc.). Two systems, one in total domination of the other, touch each other and collide exactly at this point. This tension represents the inequalities, contradictions, and consequent brutality of our global society, as well as the irrational system of globalization in a form that is nowhere more intense and concentrated.

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