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Interplanetary Border Imaginaries in *Upside Down*: Divisions and Connections in the American Continent

PABLO GÓMEZ MUÑOZ

The science fiction film genre, which portrays imaginary, alternative worlds, often draws on the present environment to speculate on the future. *Upside Down* (dir. Juan Solanas, 2012) makes this premise evident by depicting a futuristic dystopian universe where borders organize space, people, and social relations. Despite the abundance of social discourses on globalization and extensive interconnectedness, Juan Solanas's film evinces that borders and boundaries still structure contemporary societies. This article focuses on Solanas's film because of its particularly complex articulation of an alternative world in powerful combination with the phenomenon of transnational love. To briefly summarize, *Upside Down* portrays two twin planets (Up Top and Down Below) that resemble the United States and Latin America respectively. While Up Top looks like a modern city full of skyscrapers, Down Below resembles a poor city in ruins. The two worlds are located on top of each other and each of them has a different gravity.[1] Even though the planets are separated, there are three points of contact: the Sage Mountains, a skyscraper that connects both worlds, and a café. Yet heavily policed borders prevent citizens on one planet from contacting people on the other. Adam (Jim Sturgess) and Eden (Kirsten Dunst), who are from Down Below and from Up Top respectively, meet at the Sage Mountains. They lose touch for a few years but eventually find each other and strive to build a relationship. My analysis of *Upside Down* revolves around the science fiction film genre, borders, and transnational interactions and relationships. This framework will draw attention to the separation between wealthy and poor spaces in the film, the inevitability of spontaneous human connections in borderlands, and the centrality of transnational love in the film and its potential in contemporary societies.

The science fiction (sf) film occupies a privileged position to interrogate borders in the current debates about transnational interactions. By developing alternative worlds, sf films often invite viewers to reflect about their societies. Throughout its history, sf cinema has reflected anxieties related to industrialization, Cold War tensions, and biotechnological developments.[2] Recent sf films like *Code 46* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2003), *Sleep Dealer* (dir. Alex Rivera, 2008), *In Time* (dir. Andrew Niccol, 2011), the remake of *Total Recall* (dir. Len Wiseman, 2012), the installments of *The Hunger Games* franchise (dir. Gary Ross, 2012; dir. Francis Lawrence, 2013, 2014, and 2015), and *Elysium* (dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2013) have reframed biotechnological and digital frontiers to accommodate contemporary human concerns about the role of physical borders in the organization of space, capital flows, and human movement. All of these films, except *Code 46* and *Total Recall*, focus on borders in the American continent. Since its inception, cinema has developed a singular relationship with space and urban environments due to its visuality.[3] More specifically, sf cinema, thanks to its potential to create alternative worlds, has constructed some of the most enthralling land-/cityscapes. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska identify science fiction as the cinema of "vertiginous high-rise landscapes," "polymorphous architectural design," "retro-futurist production style," and "teeming cityscapes."[4] King and Krzywinska's description may give the impression that sf cinema falls into spectacular—but superficial—representations easily. Nevertheless, sf cinema does not produce merely wonder. Rob Kitchin and James Kneale observe that many of the stunning images that sf produces are "spatial metaphors."[5] As metaphors, science fiction's striking, multilayered constructions encourage viewers to read into imagined and real spaces and enquire into the dynamics that govern them. Spaces in sf films, therefore, constitute rich sources to investigate the sociocultural implications of geographical organization and architectural design.

Upside Down's high concept, its prominent land-/cityscapes, and its convoluted mise-en-scène call for an analysis of the film that incorporates geographic considerations. Mark Shiel outlines a set of features to analyze the articulation of spaces in a film. He includes "the space of the shot; the space of the narrative setting; the geographical relationship of various settings in a sequence in a film; [and] the mapping of a lived environment on film."[6] Shiel's enumeration proves ideal for geographic film analysis, as it considers the particularities of the film medium (shots, setting, relationship among sequences) and favors connections between the film's diegesis and "real" spaces. People (and characters) constantly move through places, stay in them, and shape them. Therefore, it is essential to bear in mind the human dimension of spaces. In order to do so, I will pay attention to their "enunciatory operations." Michel de Certeau explains that people's movements in space, their immobility, or their presence in a specific space are all "enunciatory operations."[7] The representation of spaces through moving images and characters' "enunciatory operations" constitute key points of examination in this analysis of *Upside Down*.

1. Two Sides of a Border: Affluent Capitalism and Its Backyard

Upside Down presents two aesthetically different spaces: Up Top and Down Below. In Up Top, TransWorld's building structure and design emphasize the oppressive character of the corporation. The use of a wide-angle lens enhances the dimensions of Floor Zero, which seems to stretch for hundreds of feet. In addition, the short distance between "floor" and "ceiling" on Floor Zero, the abundance of light, and the symmetrical distribution of desks and people create an atmosphere of uniformity that encompasses every corner of the room. Such a representation ultimately reflects TransWorld's totalitarian character. Of all buildings in the film, the TransWorld tower is the most prominent. This building fills the frame in several shots that capture the imposing character of the building and its machine-like appearance. TransWorld stands out as a result of camera work (low-angle shots, wide-angle lens) that magnifies its presence and dimensions. The titanic aspect of the corporation in the film signals late financial capitalism's aspiration to ceaseless growth.

In Down Below, the film presents a chaotic urban environment threatened by Up Top's relentless expansion. Down Below features façades that brim with dirt, walls made out of patches of different materials, and an accumulation of old appliances and tools. Vivian Sobchack's term "inflated" space and Giuliana Bruno's "excess of scenography" best define this mise-en-scène.[8] Sobchack explains that inflated spaces are detail-crammed and feature "an abundance of things."[9] A similar kind of material excess to Down Below's also appears in cyberpunk classics like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) or William Gibson's short stories. In Gibson's "Johnny Mnemonic," the narrator observes that the Lo Tek area—like Down Below—is "jury-rigged and jerry-built from scraps" that the richer city does not want.[10] Down Below—through its profuse appearance—registers the consequences of TransWorld's corporate expansion: waste. Most of the junk, both from Up Top and Down Below, remains in Down Below. TransWorld's machine-like building constantly expels fumes from its walls. Its pipelines leak onto Down Below, forcing Down Below's inhabitants to use protective gear to cross some areas. The worn "pavement" in the streets is also full of clutter and waste from Up Top. Sobchack and Bruno argue that the proliferation of waste in a film's mise-en-scène indicates that the (postindustrial, capitalist) system is working according to plan.[11] Likewise, *Upside Down* reflects that, in order to sell more, the system constantly needs to produce and waste more. The abundance of waste in *Upside Down* evinces that TransWorld is exploiting Down Below up to the limit.

Several details in *Upside Down* indicate that Down Below corresponds to Latin America and Up Top to the United States. Up Top's high-rise modern architecture resembles New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or San Francisco's skylines. In addition, both the United States and Up Top are havens of corporate financial capitalism. As far as Latin America is concerned, Down Below resembles some of the Argentinian neighborhoods filmed in Solanas's *Nordeste* (2005). In addition, the restaurant where Adam and Eden eat is called Café Dos Mundos (Two Worlds Café), and people dance

to an Argentinian tango song in this place. One of Adam's friends is called Pablo (Nicholas Rose) and, when people get fired at TransWorld, the executives call out several Spanish names. Moreover, Adam gives Bob (Timothy Spall) a box from Down Below with an "El Pesado" sticker, which sounds like a Latin American brand name. TransWorld also mirrors the organization of the maquiladora business: it makes profit from Down Below's resources and cheap labor while Down Below bears the environmental and social impacts of TransWorld's activities. In this manner, TransWorld further strengthens Up Top's resemblance to the United States and Down Below's similarity to Latin America.

Frida Kahlo's painting *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States* (1932) also captures the similarity between Up Top–Down Below and US–Mexico border interactions. In this painting, Kahlo presents an industrial and technological United States powered by the resources that it draws from Mexico, a rural country in ruins. TransWorld, then, reflects the structures at work in Kahlo's painting and in maquiladoras. Despite TransWorld's resemblance to a maquiladora company, I refrain from identifying Down Below as Mexico because there is no evidence in the film that points to such a specific correspondence. While maquiladoras proliferate in Mexico and Mexicans are the largest migrant group in the US, many non-Mexican citizens migrate from Latin American countries—through Mexico—to the United States.[12] The dystopian film *Sleep Dealer* presents a similar expansion of the border southwards through two scenes in which US drones protect US-owned dams in Oaxaca (southern Mexico) and Vaupés (Colombia) from so-called "aqua-terrorists." *Upside Down*, in line with films such as *Sleep Dealer*, hints that inequalities produced by US corporate capital affect all Latin American countries, from Mexico to Argentina.

Upside Down also expresses differences between Up Top and Down Below by introducing a modification of the shot/reverse shot convention in continuity editing. Instead, Solanas's film employs a shot/reverse *and* inverted-shot pattern. The film uses this technique in the mountains, when Adam signs a contract to work at TransWorld, when he chats in the lounge with his colleague Bob, and when he presents his work to TransWorld executives. This editing practice emphasizes the distance between people from the two worlds and their disparate economic situations. The short animated film *Head Over Heels* (dir. Timothy Reckart, 2012) also relies on a shot/reverse and inverted-shot pattern to present a similar situation. *Head Over Heels* depicts how an old couple lives separated in the same house. The woman lives on the floor and the man on the ceiling, or vice versa, depending on the point of view the film employs. As in *Upside Down*, each character has a different gravity. *Head Over Heels* alternates between perspectives to show the characters' deteriorated relationship. Shot/reverse and inverted shots highlight differences and put an alternative narrative technique into practice. By using this kind of shots, *Upside Down* exercises one of the key qualities of transnational films: "a becoming-*unheimlich* [uncanny]."[13] Inverted shots present a literally opposite, unfamiliar perspective to viewers, who are used to upright shots. In this way, *Upside Down* echoes the "clash of voices" and "opposing messages" that

Gloria Anzaldúa ascribes to the US–Mexico borderlands and presents viewers with a "clash" of perspectives and "opposing" images.[14] This kind of editing reflects the different realities and points of view that coexist in the borderlands.

Even though *Upside Down* projects a critical perspective on socioeconomic interactions between Latin America and the US, its lack of attention towards racial issues hinders its critical power. The film presents two almost exclusively white planets. The most glaring absence is that of Latino characters, given the analogies that the film draws to the US–Mexico borderlands. Even though the film includes a black character, Albert (Blu Mankuma), some scattered black extras (e.g., in the first lobby scene, in the TV show), and some Spanish names in the scene in which some TransWorld workers are fired, it is not possible to infer what the role of race is in the film from these anecdotal details. Adilifu Nama identifies a "structured absence of blackness" in sf cinema (although his examples indicate an absence of racial diversity in general).[15] He also notes that when black/nonwhite characters are part of the story, their appearance rarely works as more than a "token presence" (13). *Upside Down* participates in the "structured absence" of racial diversity in science fiction and employs its nonwhite characters as tokens. The film thus misleadingly imagines a white postracial future. In *Upside Down*, stratification, hierarchies, and exploitation are not related to race, but to the lottery of being born on one planet/nation or the other. In this way, the film effaces the central role of race in the structure of contemporary social relations.

Other recent science fiction films that deal with borders, such as the aforementioned *In Time*, *Code 46*, *Total Recall*, *Elysium*, and *The Hunger Games* installments, also present variations of the "structured absence" of racial diversity typical of the genre and commercial cinema in general. An exception to this group of films is *Sleep Dealer*, which imagines a world where Latinos no longer migrate to the US because they send their labor there by plugging their bodies into a computer and working via a virtual reality program. On US soil, robots receive the information sent by the workers in Mexico and perform the job for them. As an "infomaquila" manager explains, the United States benefits from having "todo el trabajo sin los trabajadores [latinos]" ("all the work without the [Latino] workers"). At first sight, *Sleep Dealer* may appear to imagine an overwhelmingly white US. Yet the film focuses almost exclusively on the Mexican side of the border. The only US inhabitants who have a relevant role in the film are a Latino drone pilot and, to a lesser extent, his parents. In this manner, *Sleep Dealer* subverts the structured whiteness that is common in the sf genre. Even though most sf border films do not expose and rework racial hierarchies like *Sleep Dealer* does, close analysis of the aforementioned films can give valuable insight into transnational interactions. The "structured absence of blackness" and racial diversity in sf cinema that Nama notes often works towards the affirmation of "racial fantasies" of white dominance and survival in films such as *When Worlds Collide* (dir. Rudolph Maté, 1951), *The Time Machine* (dir. George Pal, 1960), and *Logan's Run* (dir. Michael Anderson, 1976).[16] In *Upside Down*—and in the border films mentioned above—the

absence of racial diversity contrasts with the main discourses in the film. Yet, as the following paragraphs show, *Upside Down*, despite its structural whiteness, questions Western economic and geopolitical dominance.

2. The Uglier Face of Borders: Discrimination, Arbitrary Violence, and Death

Division and difference are not simply a coincidence in the film's narrative setting. As David Sibley notes, "the representation of social categories either side of a boundary defined by notions of purity and defilement and the mapping of this boundary onto particular places are not solely a question of fantasy. They translate into exclusionary practice."[17] In *Upside Down*, TransWorld discriminates between "pure" and "defiled" workers and distributes them in space according to a pure/defiled categorization. Lagavullan (James Kidnie), a TransWorld executive, tells Adam, "Company policy doesn't normally allow for someone from Down Below to hold such an important position, but we're making an exception in your case." Paradoxically, the place where Adam works, Floor Zero, is the highest position any worker from Down Below can achieve and the lowest for a worker from Up Top. The allocation of Up Top offices to the floors with positive numbers (e.g., +10) and of Down Below workspaces to the floors with negative numbers (e.g., -10) recalls the popular perception of the US/El Norte as a privileged space and Latin America/south of the border as a marginal, defiled space. In the same conversation with Adam, Lagavullan remarks, "we [TransWorld] scrupulously observe a full separation between worlds here. That means there's not to be any unnecessary contact with those Up Top." Lagavullan's comment encapsulates the aim behind the creation of a boundary: differentiation. Sibley argues that classified or compartmentalized spaces favor discrimination and abjection.[18] Bob, who works above Adam on Floor Zero, observes, "anything or anyone different is . . . frowned upon [in TransWorld]." Bob's and Lagavullan's comments reveal that divisions and inequality in the film are the result of a pure/defiled "logic" and its mapping.

Up Top establishes geographical discrimination through a physical borderline and by designating "purified" spaces. Apart from gravity, fences also prevent people from Up Top and Down Below from interacting. Fences surround natural areas like mountains that potentially enable people from both planets to come into contact or exchange goods. The film originally presents these spaces as "quarry site[s]" through a sign on the fence, underlining the authorities' intentions to disguise the bounded area as something different than a borderland. The fence appears again briefly during a chase scene in the Sage Mountains at the end of the film. Similarly, Café Dos Mundos features an almost-invisible line of barbwire that splits the dance floor in two halves. Despite the possibility that some of these borders may go unnoticed for people who see the film for the first time, *Upside Down* calls attention to the impact they make on people's lives. When Adam thinks that he is not going to see Eden anymore, the frame's composition indicates that boundaries entrap people Down Below. A close

shot of Adam frames the setting in a way in which the fence behind him covers most of the frame. Such a frame composition highlights Adam's entrapment, as he appears to be inside a cage. This shot is preceded by a low-angle shot in which the camera tilts towards the floor, further enhancing Adam's powerlessness. Even though fences or borders are not always clearly visible in *Upside Down*, the film stresses the devastating effects that rigid boundaries have in people's lives.

Despite the prohibition against crossing borders, characters in *Upside Down* keep accessing restricted areas. Worn stretches of fence allow Adam to venture into the mountains, where he gets to know Eden. Given the permeability of fences, Up Top also enforces a pure/defiled rationale by constituting purified corporate spaces and automated discrimination systems. Up Top uses several procedures to guarantee that no "alien" from Down Below gets into Up Top. The entrance to TransWorld from Down Below features several "security" measures including scanning and weighing workers' bodies and belongings, checking names on a workers' list, and enforcing the wearing of identification tags at all times. In Up Top, different "security" measures apply: workers only have to swipe their company card to get through controls. *Upside Down* also evinces disparities by not showing Bob and Eden, who are from Up Top, crossing any border or "security" checkpoints when they go Down Below. On the contrary, Adam features in every checkpoint-crossing scene. Similar protocols and practices apply at real-world airports, corporate buildings, and gated communities. The pure/defiled logic is most evident when Adam sneaks into the Up Top part of the TransWorld tower and goes to the restroom. As Adam pees, his urine, instead of going down into the urinal, goes up to the ceiling because of gravity. His urine runs across the ceiling and finally touches a sensor. This sensor goes off and security personnel instantly arrive at the restroom. By detecting "intruders" through their bodily waste, the film mockingly juxtaposes abjection and the purity of the corporate space.

Border-control mechanisms also feature in *In Time*. In this film, bankers and police follow the transnational flow of time/money (people use time as currency) through their computers, and video surveillance allows them to track any unwanted border crosser. These monitoring systems help them make sure that large amounts of time/money do not fall into poor people's hands. Despite the variety of control mechanisms that *Upside Down* and *In Time* include, they capture the same reality of a discriminatory system that seeks to maintain, if not reinforce, the status quo.

Upside Down's depiction of border surveillance highlights the escalation of violence at the US–Mexico border and the abuse of power by the US Border Patrol. In the film, border police squads carry shotguns and chase anyone who ventures into the bounded area of the Sage Mountains. Border officials shoot Adam in the shoulder during the first chase in the film, and they also aim at him and Eden several times as they run away at the end of the movie. These scenes recall the widely covered death in 2012 of sixteen-year-old José Antonio Elena Rodríguez after border agent Lonnie Swartz shot him ten times across the border.[19] This was not an isolated incident: According to an investigation by the *Arizona Republic*, the US Border Patrol killed 42

people in cross-border shootings from 2005 to 2013.[20] Although people on the Mexican side of the border often throw rocks at border agents, the use of lethal force as a response seems an unnecessary, disproportionate, and inhumane measure. Apart from some border agents' use of gunfire against border crossers, "security" forces in *Upside Down* take reprisals that are common in authoritarian regimes. The media inform the public of the hanging of three border-crossers. In addition, the police arbitrarily punish Adam's aunt, Becky (Kate Trotter), for letting her nephew go to the mountains. They set her house on fire and arrest her. Later on, the police also abduct Adam and take him on a car ride to warn him that, if he contacts Eden again, the authorities will sentence him to death. Some of these fictional police operations recall the real-life procedures of Sheriff Joe Arpaio's office in Maricopa County, Arizona. Arpaio's office has been under public scrutiny because of practices such as racial profiling, unauthorized house searches, and arbitrary arrests directed at Latinos mostly.[21] The resemblance between the violent actions of some border agents in *Upside Down* and real-life events suggests that a law-enforcement body that violates human rights and dignity brings its society closer to dystopia.

Death is both a part of *Upside Down*'s diegesis and a prevalent reality of the US–Mexico borderlands. Apart from border patrol abuses and violence, *Upside Down* hints that corporate practices, working conditions, and unauthorized border-traversing are causes of death in the borderlands. Adam's parents died in "the big blast," an explosion that resulted from TransWorld oil-pumping activities. Pablo tells Adam that his brother went Up Top and never came back. Other border films also revolve around the pervasiveness of death in the borderlands as a result of unequal relations among different local, regional, and global parties. Films present not only the use of lethal ammunition at the border (*The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, dir. Tommy Lee Jones, 2005) but also bureaucratic deportation procedures that split a mother from her son and eventually lead to her death (*Crossing Over*, dir. Wayne Kramer, 2009), exploitation and lack of resources (*In Time*, *Elysium*), feminicide (*Bordertown*, dir. Gregory Nava, 2006; *Sin Nombre*, dir. Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2009), and gang violence (*Sin Nombre*). The extreme climate of the desert by the border also exposes a Mexican woman and two US American kids to death in *Babel* (dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006). Border films then identify multiple factors behind the death drama of the US–Mexico/Latin America borderlands. Alejandro Lugo's "Photo Essay: Cruces" elucidates the connection between death and the US–Mexico borderlands. In Spanish, "cruces" means both crossroads and burial crosses. Lugo juxtaposes photographs of the actual (cross)roads that connect the two sides of the border and of the crosses that evidence the pervasiveness of death in the borderlands.[22] Ultimately, the deaths of people who are part of *Upside Down*'s diegesis illustrate the looming presence of death in the imaginary and the reality of the US–Mexico/Latin America borderlands.

3. Contact Zones, Multifarious Imaginations, and Border Cracks

The inhabitants of Up Top and Down Below are part of what Benedict Anderson terms "imagined communities." Anderson explains that a nation is a group of people (a community) that imagines itself as limited.[23] Up Top and Down Below, as nations, have a clear sense of the limits and lines that separate them. Some scholars, such as Arjun Appadurai, David Newman, and Anssi Paasi, have noted the impact of media and other cultural materials in shaping boundaries.[24] Down Below receives most "images" from Up Top through television. At the beginning of the film, a television channel broadcasts a contest program that draws lots for a job at TransWorld. In a different scene, the same television set displays the news, which reports on the hanging of three border-crossers from Down Below. Both television programs reflect Up Top's point of view, presenting a job at TransWorld as a valuable prize and condemning Down Below citizens who cross the border. In Up Top's streets, loudspeakers spread slogans like "TransWorld: energy for a better life; we're building your future." In this manner, TransWorld attempts to look like a welcoming, efficient, green planet for Up Top citizens. These examples show Up Top's efforts to define its identity as superior to Down Below and, at the same time, combat any attempt to connect planets in any other way than through corporate business. US media also have a remarkable presence in *Sleep Dealer*'s Mexico. As the protagonist's brother, David (Tenoch Huerta), surfs TV channels, only US programs in English appear. David is mesmerized by the program *Drones!*, which shows how private US water companies fight "water terrorists" with drones. This program, like those in *Upside Down*, disseminates US American views abroad to limit opposition to US economic expansion and resource extraction. Yet *Upside Down* also hints that the media may not be as influential as it seems. When two kids and Adam discuss whether everyone is rich Up Top, their opinions differ. Adam concludes, "They may be rich, yes, but it's definitely not paradise." This scene evinces that, apart from media-constructed images, other sociocultural and geographical factors contribute to shaping how Up Top and Down Below are imagined.

Upside Down's distinctive narrative setting and the spatial (co)relation between the two worlds create the conditions for characters to produce their own images of the other world. The perpetual presence of the two worlds on top of each other leads characters to wonder and speculate about the other planet. The film uses several low-angle shots to show Adam looking up to the sky/Up Top from Down Below's streets. He also appears looking at Up Top's streets through the glass ceiling above his bed. In addition, Eden imagines both worlds in her dreams and shows Adam her perception of the Sage Mountains in a paper model. Bob also expresses his interest in Down Below by asking Adam for some stamps to complete his collection. The film's emphasis on the characters' imaginations and their interests in the other planet indicate their desire to get to know it and interact with its inhabitants. Fascination with other worlds is a major element of the sf film genre. Georges Méliès's *Le Voyage dans la Lune*/*A Trip to*

the Moon (1902) reflects the curiosity that the moon produces in human beings. Méliès's film illustrates humans' ability to imagine other worlds. The allure that visible distant places produce is also evident in *Elysium*. Neill Blomkamp's film begins with the story of a child, Max (Maxwell Cotton), who dreams of going to Elysium. He is mesmerized by the silhouette of the wheel-shaped residential spaceship that floats above Earth. The universes that these films project echo human attitudes towards the places they are kept away from by borders. Elena dell'Agnese notes that, in many US American films, south of the US–Mexico border is an "exotic" place for US citizens.[25] Looking from the other side, many migrants also see the US as a land of opportunities. In both cases, people (even if they do not live in the borderlands) tend to share an interest about the other side of the border. Of course, many people cross borders in an attempt to survive or find a better life. Yet, in these sf films, characters' initiative to cross boundaries results from negotiating their mediated imagination and their local perceptions of a distant "other." Despite the dissemination of Up Top's political agenda through the media, Down Below and Up Top's spatial specificity, that is, the planets' constant presence on top of each other, encourages their inhabitants to construct their own images.

The Sage Mountains in *Upside Down* show the strength of people's perceptions of spaces in contrast to the stubborn divisions that governments and forces aim to impose. When Adam and Eden meet on the mountains, their mediated and speculative imaginaries come into contact at a local level. While Arjun Appadurai emphasizes the influence of media(scapes) in locality,[26] *Upside Down* reminds its viewers that personal (local) experiences of space are also crucial in shaping their own sense of place. This is most evident at the end of the film when both planets develop more "contact" spaces. A priori, people can only cross to the other side temporarily, as gravity pulls people back to their planets. Even so, authorities Up Top and Down Below establish and police the fence that prevents people from accessing this area. Although the mountains are a natural "contact zone," they are also a contact zone in the sense of Mary Louise Pratt's definition of the term, that is, governed by "radically asymmetrical relations of power."[27] Since Eden and Adam cannot visit each other's worlds, and the mountains are the only place where they can meet each other, they turn this inhospitable space of clashing into their own romantic space. The two peaks where Eden and Adam meet are fascinating spaces for them. There, they get to know each other and share information about their lives, societies, and planets. Eventually, they fall in love with "the other" Up Top or Down Below. David Newman and Anssi Paasi explain that "local populations do not necessarily perceive social and spatial boundaries, as determined by transboundary interaction and/or shared or separate identities, according to the same categories that are determined by government officials."[28] In effect, the couple does not recognize the "social and spatial boundaries" that their planetary authorities attempt to enforce. At the beginning of the film, Eden asks Adam, "[Can you] imagine we could go anywhere we wanted to?" and he replies, "we can." In the end, people's feelings and needs prove stronger than authorities' impositions.

TransWorld's anxiety about cross-border communication and boundary enforcement is not as efficient as it pretends to be. In fact, Café Dos Mundos and the TransWorld tower are both fortresses and cracks at the same time. David Newman observes that partially open borders benefit the authorities and corporate managers who—hypocritically—demand their closing.[29] A partially open border (like the US–Mexico border) allows for the circulation of resources, goods, money, and workers, but often only in the measure that the more powerful side deems appropriate (capital moves freely, people do not). Café Dos Mundos is the only social space that both planets share. Surprisingly, this café is the only place where people from both planets wear suits. This kind of clothing suggests that Café Dos Mundos is a place where the elites from Down Below go. The film invites us to speculate that the Down Below elites collaborate with Up Top in preserving the separation between their societies. *Elysium* and *In Time* also depict elites from impoverished territories who collaborate with those in wealthy areas. Nonetheless, the partial opening of the border in *Upside Down* also facilitates contacts between inhabitants from both worlds. Workers from both planets interact in the office on Floor Zero and its lounge. Adam and Bob become friends and collaborate with each other, exchanging information, objects, and favors. Working at TransWorld allows Adam to access the materials (inverse matter, an ID card, a blazer) that make it possible for him to access Up Top. In short, the partial opening of the border in Solanas's film benefits the elites but also creates opportunities for citizens to challenge the status quo.

4. Transnational Love: Kneading Hybrid Worlds

The fascination with the presence of the other, local experiences in contact zones, and border cracks allow Eden and Adam to start a relationship in spite of media propaganda and legal restrictions. Living on different planets and in separate nations, the couple has a long-distance trans-American relationship, which is characterized by their inability to contact and meet each other as much as they wish. Several scenes reflect the unstable condition of the couple's relationship. Eden and Adam first come close to each other through a rope that Adam uses to pull Eden from her planet to his. When the border police burst into Café Dos Mundos, Adam risks his life by jumping onto the top of a cable car that bounces as he lands on it. At the end of the film, Eden and Adam run away from the border police by advancing through a line of concrete blocks hanging from an old metal structure. An agent hits one of the steel cords that supports the concrete block where the couple stands and they struggle not to fall, but Adam eventually loses hold and the police capture Eden. At first sight, this "chase" scene just seems to offer thrills for the audience. Yet it also reflects the instability of the couple, who are torn apart at the end of the scene. Later on, a shot of Adam looking at Up Top through the glass ceiling over his bed and imagining Eden emphasizes the uncertain situation of the couple and their desperation to be together. In *Fernliebe* (or Distant Love), Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim point to the

"invasive" character of national legislation and its inability to keep up with sociological changes regarding "world families" and love relationships.[30] Likewise, *Upside Down* denounces the alienation that Eden and Adam experience as a consequence of the obstacles that authorities set in their way. Yet, in spite of the "illegality" of the couple's cross-border relationship and the instability they have to endure, they make every effort to overcome adversities.

The instability that contact zones and transnational relationships generate leads characters to draw from myriad sources. *Upside Down* emphasizes not only local encounters but also local knowledge and traditions. At the beginning of the film, Adam's aunt, Becky, makes "flying pancakes" with honey from pink bees. Becky gives Adam a book with the recipe for flying pancakes and explains that pink bees make their honey with pollen from both worlds. Before giving Adam the recipe book, Becky mentions that it has been passed on from generation to generation. Later on in the film, Adam uses pink honey in his experiments to create a face-lifting product. Initially, his tests at a workshop Down Below prove unsuccessful. Yet, once he starts working for TransWorld, he has enough materials and resources not only to develop the product but also to save part of the inverse matter and use it to temporarily reverse his body's gravity and go Up Top. Even though Adam complains, "we've nothing [Down Below]," it is the combination of knowledge, traditions, and opportunities that both planets offer that allows him to realize his plans. In addition, Bob takes over the final stage of the product development and registers its patent. Bob and Adam put the possibilities that both cultures offer them to the best use. *Upside Down*, thus, reflects transcultural practices. Mary Louise Pratt defines transculturation as a phenomenon of the contact zone by which "subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture."[31] In *Upside Down*, transculturation processes allow characters to draw from multiple sources, subvert the system, and, subsequently, create a new (trans-American) space.

Upside Down relies on the hybrid symbolism of the pink honey and the pink formula to underline the constitution of an alternative space to Up Top and Down Below's confined territories. The sexual connotations of the honey foreshadow Adam and Eden's world-changing romantic relationship. Spots and rays of pink light appear almost every time that Eden and Adam are together at the top of the mountains, in Eden's office, at Café Dos Mundos, or when they talk on the phone. The use of this pink light signals a connection between the two characters and their worlds. Moreover, a fish, the first being in the film that belongs to both worlds, appears within a pink floating bubble. Similarly, a dot of pink light appears in the lower part of the frame as Eden tells Adam that she is pregnant. Eden and Adam's baby is different from any other human being: the baby physically belongs to both planets. In fact, Eden can stay on Down Below while she carries the baby. Scholars often use terms such as "in-betweenness," "third space," "contact zone," "hybrid[ity]," or "intercultural world" to refer to borderland realities.[32] These terms *define* the state of a space or the nature of a cultural process. Gloria Anzaldúa's term "kneading" or "amasamiento" seems

more appropriate to *describe* the process of cultural, human, and spatial blending that takes place in *Upside Down*.[33] Kneading is a process of "uniting and joining" that shapes not only "both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings" (103). Anzaldúa's concept of kneading is further informed by the process of becoming a "mestiza." She explains, "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be a Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—*nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned*. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (101, emphasis mine). In short, kneading—and becoming a mestiza—consists of drawing from all available sources. The pink honey, the pink face-lifting product, the fish, Bob's gravity-reversal potion, and pink light direct attention to a kneading process that culminates with Adam and Eden's baby and the eventual reorganization of barriers between Up Top and Down Below. At this point in the film, the significance of Adam and Eden's names becomes fully evident: Their names do not just recall the Adam and Eve passage in the Bible to hint that they become a couple or that they break the rules of Eden/TransWorld. The film suggests that Eden and Adam are the original ancestors of a new kind of hybrid—albeit predominantly white—humanity.

Following the birth of a human "race" that belongs to both planets, Up Top and Down Below become similar spaces. *Upside Down*'s final scene leaps a few years forward and implies that inequalities between both planets decrease or even vanish. The film depicts a similar modern cityscape in both worlds. Most notably, Down Below now has high-rise skyscrapers, and children from both planets play sports just a couple of feet away from each other. This shot suggests that Adam and Eden's efforts to abolish demarcations eventually lead to pan-American integration at social, political, and economic levels. However, the film also hints that, in the process of achieving equality between the two planets, Down Below has adapted to the features of Up Top's modern corporate architecture. Whether *Upside Down*'s final scene depicts trans-American collaboration and development, the corporate homogenization of the Americas, or both, does not seem to be the film's main concern. As Adam as narrator recognizes, "that's another story." Instead *Upside Down*'s ending raises questions. Solanas's film uses a shot that director Alejandro González Iñárritu calls "el abandonador"—literally, the one that leaves.[34] Iñárritu employs this shot in the last scene of *Babel*. He explains that it is a shot "in which we go from being very close to the characters, almost able to smell their skin, to giving them some space to breathe and look at them from a distance" (135). In *Upside Down*, the camera pulls back from Adam and Eden kissing—viewers leave the couple gradually and start witnessing the development that both planets have undergone. "El abandonador" creates a cinematic time of reflection: the slow detachment from the characters and their environment encourages viewers to think about the new society that the film presents

at the end. Viewers may then wonder about the nature of borders, the conditions that create poverty and wealth, and the opportunities that transnational/trans-American interactions governed by principles of equality and respect offer. Without considering the kind of social model that *Upside Down* depicts at the end of the film, the film clearly leaves a nondeterministic image, reflecting the development of the poorer area (Down Below/Latin America) and subverting assumptions about the "defiled" nature of people and places.

5. Conclusion

Upside Down captures authorities' efforts to enforce boundaries and citizens' opposition to the limitations that borders impose. The film offers insight into American borderland aesthetics, differentiation mechanisms and practices, the human consequences of maintaining rigidly divided areas, and people's tendencies to act according to their needs and to overcome "legal" restrictions. Science fiction's ability to allude to real situations by imagining alternative worlds is evident in *Upside Down*. Just as sf films reflected Cold War tensions in the 1950s and anxieties about digital and biotechnological development in the 1980s, *Upside Down*—along with other films such as *Sleep Dealer*, *In Time*, or *Elysium*—now points to the central role of borders and legal provisions in organizing movements in highly connected societies. In general, *Upside Down* reflects the paradox that, as media, capital, and resources circulate more and more easily between the US and Latin America, authorities hamper people's attempts to find jobs or come together with their loved ones. This dynamic summarizes with great accuracy the social consequences of the NAFTA agreements of the 1990s. Yet, as the film progresses, it also reflects how characters' liminal positions allow them to draw from the most convenient sources, "knead" what both worlds offer, and create a new space where people from both worlds live side by side. In addition, *Upside Down* points to the potential of transnational love to advance understanding and collaboration between the US and Latin American countries. Adam and Eden's love story serves Solanas's film to speculate on the possibilities of an American continent (and a world) where borders do not divide the "pure" and the "defiled." *Upside Down* then proposes that cross-border personal contact, bonds, and feelings can be more powerful and have a more positive socioeconomic impact than rationalistic economic measures and exclusively business-oriented agreements.

Notes

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[1] At the beginning of the film, a narrator explains three basic rules to understand the Upside Down universe. First, "all matter, every single object, is pulled by the gravity of the world that it comes from and not the other." Second, "an object's weight can be offset using [attaching to it] matter from the opposite world: inverse matter." Third, "after a few hours of contact, matter in contact with inverse matter burns."

[2] See Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Berg, 2011), 70, 73, 112–13.

[3] See Barbara Mennel, *Cities and Cinema* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008), 8, 15; and Mark Shiel, "Cinema and the City in History and Theory," in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 6.

[4] Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace* (London: Wallflower, 2000), 73.

[5] Rob Kitchin and James Kneale, *Lost in Space: Geographies of Science Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2002), 9.

[6] Shiel, "Cinema and the City," 5.

[7] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 99.

[8] Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New York: Ungar, 1988), 262; and Giuliana Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and 'Blade Runner,'" *October*, no. 41 (1987): 68.

[9] Sobchack, *Screening Space*, 262.

[10] William Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic," in *Burning Chrome* (New York: Ace, 1986), 17.

[11] Sobchack, *Screening Space*, 266; and Bruno, "Ramble City," 65.

[12] See Charles Ramírez Berg, "Immigrants, Aliens, and Extraterrestrials: Science Fiction's Alien 'Other' as (Among Other Things) New Latino Imagery," in *Film Genre Reader IV*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (1989; repr., Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 423.

[13] Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, "General Introduction: What Is Transnational Cinema?" in *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (Routledge: New York, 2006), 11.

[14] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987; repr., San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 100.

[15] Adilifu Nama, *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 10.

[16] See ibid., 15, 17, 27.

[17] David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 1995), 68–69.

[18] Sibley, *Geographies*, 80; and Sibley, "Outsiders in Society and Space," in *Cultural Geographies*, ed. Kay Anderson and Fay Gale (London: Longman, 1999), 144–45.

[19] See Associated Press, "Border Patrol Agent Indicted in Fatal 2012 Shooting of Mexican Teenager," *Guardian*, September 24, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/24/border-patrol-agent-indicted-shooting-mexican-teen; and Mark Binelli, "10 Shots Across the Border," *New York Times Magazine*, March 3, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/magazine/10-shots-across-the-border.html. Lonnie Swartz's trial has been rescheduled for November 2016 after being postponed three times, evincing the system's laxity and even indifference towards this kind of crime. In light of the lack of judicial action in this case, Human Rights Watch has filed an amicus brief before the United States Court of Appeals arguing that Swartz did not respect international laws or human rights. See Rob O'Dell, "Trial for Border Patrol Agent Who Shot and Killed Mexican Teenager Moved to November," *Arizona Republic*, March 8, 2016, http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/border-issues/2016/03/08/trial-border-patrol-agent-who-shot-and-killed-mexican-teenager-moved-november/81457338/; and "Amicus Brief in the Case of Araceli Rodriguez v. Lonnie Swartz," Human Rights Watch, May 6, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/06/amicus-brief-case-araceli-rodriguez-v-lonnie-swartz.

[20] Bob Ortega and Rob O'Dell, "Deadly Border Agent Incidents Cloaked in Silence," *Arizona Republic*, December 16, 2013, http://www.azcentral.com/news/politics/articles/20131212arizona-border-patrol-deadly-force-investigation.html.

[21] Andrew Cohen, "Sheriff Joe Arpaio Allegedly Not Only Harrassed Latinos But Ignored Crime," *Atlantic*, May 11, 2012,

http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/05/sheriff-joe-arpaio-allegedly-not-only-harrassed-latinos-but-ignored-crime/257033/.

[22] Alejandro Lugo, "Photo Essay: Cruces," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105, no. 4 (2006): 744–54.

[23] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 7.

[24] See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 194; and David Newman and Anssi Paasi, "Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 2 (1998): 196.

[25] Elena dell'Agnese, "The US–Mexico Border in American Movies: A Political Geography Perspective," *Geopolitics* 10, no. 2 (2005): 207.

[26] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 197.

[27] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.

[28] Newman and Paasi, "Fences and Neighbours," 194.

[29] David Newman, "The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in Our 'Borderless' World," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 2 (2006): 149.

[30] Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Fernliebe: Lebensformen im globalen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011), 235–36.

[31] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6.

[32] See Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Recycling Colonialist Fantasies on the Texas Borderlands," in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 170–71.

[33] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 103.

[34] Celestino Deleyto and María del Mar Azcona, *Alejandro González Iñárritu* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 135.

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