Project Space

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Anahí González

Hacia Arriba / Upwards

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Anahí González walks through towns marked by industrial and agricultural labour. Walking as a method for research and observation allows her to uncover the visual culture of movement—whether it is the movement of objects or human beings. González's hometown, known as a place of industry, is in Mexico, about three hours from the American border. Many who live there work in factories, creating objects or parts that are then exported to the U.S. or Canada. She explains that red trucks pick up the goods and drives them to the border. The trucks' trailers are passed through the border and loaded on American trucks. As the objects pass through, human beings stay behind.

Canadian Tuxedo was photographed in the parking lot of a trucking company in Northern Mexico, with the worker posed wearing a Canadian tuxedo. As González explored this space while speaking with the workers, she photographed the inside of a truck trailer with sleeping quarters set up for drivers to sleep while alternating driving duties. The image of the red truck lies on the pillow cover of the worker, marking, as the title suggests, their dreams of movement while their body is resting inside the red truck itself. Walking through these towns creates serendipitous moments of connection and close looking for González. In a different parking lot in the same town, she finds a red

truck piñata—the object symbolic of transnational movement made into a toy to be destroyed during a child's birthday party.

International agreements like NAFTA, and its updated version USMCA, have facilitated the movement of goods between Canada, Mexico, and the United States since the mid-1990s. However, the movement of people between these borders has increasingly been regulated and controlled. Recently, American pandemic policies forced migrants, even those seeking asylum, to wait in Mexico until their hearings. Two months ago, Justin Trudeau closed the loophole that allowed migrants and asylum seekers to bypass the Third Safe Country Agreement (which dictates you must seek asylum in the first "safe" country you land in, which includes all three countries in North America) if you crossed into Canada using unofficial border crossings. As migration into the U.S. and Canada becomes more and more inaccessible, many choose to come to Canada undocumented to work in factories, restaurants, and grocery stores, while others come in through the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program, which allows employers to hire foreign workers to fill temporary jobs when qualified Canadians are not available.

González's work moves from Northern Mexico to Southern Ontario, now documenting the presence of migrant labourers who work in Leamington and other nearby towns through the TFW program. In one photograph, the word "IMMIGRATION" stands alone on a large advertisement board, its purpose unknown. Is it exclaiming "immigration!" so as to warn Canadians of foreigners? Is it offering help for migrants? Its bizarre nature perhaps stands simply as a statement of fact: immigration and Leamington are tied together. González, however, tells me that the other side of the board advertised security cameras: another chance encounter, this time connecting the movement of human beings to the inhuman practices of surveillance, control, and power imbalance that mark the TFW Program. Another image taken in Leamington features the unstaged front yard of a family home. The house, framed by a white truck and the Canadian flag, showcases a scene of wooden figurines: a person wearing a sombrero

while pulling a donkey, with the donkey's cart pulling two Canadian geese. Behind the scene is a bald eagle. In González's photographs of Southern Ontario, she brings together the visual evidence of Canadiana and a white Canada with the visual space of migrants, both existing in the same place. She says that Canadians only think of agriculture when they think of Mexicans. Still, her photographs insist that there is more beyond these stereotypes.

González's work deals with the simultaneous invisibility of migrant labour and the hypervisibility of the stereotypes of Mexicans that portray them as happy workers. In the middle of the room is a vending machine with an image of a loonie instructing viewers to insert a $1 coin. The coin portrays the scene from the Leamington front yard and refers to the hourly wages set by the Canadian government for Temporary Foreign Workers, all set at or close to the minimum wage. When you insert a loonie, the machine puts out *Mapa de Norte America Invertida*, a small screen-printed map created by González drawing from two of the most famous artist-made maps of the 20th century. London-born Canadian artist Greg Curnoe's *Map of North America* (1972) is brought together with Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García's 1943 map *América Invertida (Inverted America)*. Curnoe's map famously portrays his anti-American sentiments as he leaves out the U.S. from a map of North America, while Torres-García's map shows an inverted view of South America, automatically forcing a change of perspective—a critical view from the South.

González's map draws from both in their composition and style, and adds symbols of extraction, profits, pollution, and movement. She adds train tracks to visualize this movement, noting that the formation of the three North American states is built on the expansion of railways that facilitated the foundation of settler-colonialism, slavery, Indigenous dispossession, and capitalism. The Canadian Pacific Railway was established in 1881 as a dream of John A. Macdonald, and only a couple of months ago, Canadian

Pacific bought Kansas City Southern. Now named CPKC, it is the only single-line railway connecting Canada, the U.S., and Mexico.

In González's work, this circulatory movement between the North and South is a cycle of extraction and inequity: humans and products are always in transit—never permanent, always temporary, expandable, and replaceable. Here, the American Dream and the myth of Canada as a benevolent and peaceful country, and the darker side of these states as colonial powers with national and international labour and human rights violations, are on full display, all while trying to give the migrants a voice, a hint of existence, a presence.

- Maya Wilson-Sánchez