WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING

In Juárez, Mexico, photographers expose the violent realities of free trade

By Charles Bowden
shooter, Weegee (Arthur Fellig). A tradition of gritty, unsentimental, and loving street shooting that has all but perished in the United States was reborn in Juárez, in part because the papers offered a market but mostly because the streets could not be denied. The street shooters of Juárez are mainly young and almost always broke. Pay at the half-dozen newspapers runs from fifty to eighty dollars a week, and they must provide their own cameras. Film is rationed by their employers. “We are like firemen,” Jaime Bailleres explains, “only here we fight fires with our bare hands.”

The slide presentation clicks away. A child of seven is pinned under a massive beam. He and his father were tearing apart a building for its old bricks when the ceiling collapsed. Jaime says that the child is whimpering and saying he is afraid of death. He lasted a few minutes more. Alfredo Carrillo stares intently at the images as Jaime gives him tips on how to frame different scenes. A hand reaches out from under a blanket—a cop cut down by AK-47s in front of a mansion owned by Amado Carrillo Fuentes. Carrillo is a local businessman. U.S. authorities calculate that he moves more than 100 tons of cocaine a year across the Rio Grande and into El Paso. He is estimated to be grossing $200 million a week, and to the joy of economists, this business is hard currency and cash-and-carry. To my untrained eye the dimensions of the dope business are simple: without it the Mexican economy would totally collapse.1 A gold ring gleams on the cop’s dead hand; for Bailleres it is a study in the ways of power. Alfredo says, “All these young kids dream of being Amado Carrillo.”

The competition is rough. Yesterday, Juan Manuel Bueno Dueñas, twenty-three, got into a dispute with a drug dealer. Juan belonged to Los Harpys. Today at 4:30 P.M. he was buried in the municipal cemetery by his fellow gang members. The campo santo was crowded with people, theafterflow of the Day of the Dead observance. Carloads of guys from Barrio Chico, rivals of Los Harpys, opened fire on the procession. No one is certain how many people were wounded. The gangs of Juárez, los pandillas, kill at least 200 people a year. Accepting such realities is possible; thinking about them is not. Survival in Juárez is based on alcohol, friendships, and laughter, much laughter. But this happens in private. The streets are full of people wearing masks.

In this city of sleepwalkers, elementary facts, such as the population, are given scant attention. No one knows how many people now in Juárez, but the ballpark figure is 2 million. Since December 1994 Mexico’s currency has lost over half its value, prices have more than doubled, and jobs have disappeared wholesale. Real numbers hardly exist—for example, in Mexico you are counted as employed if you work one hour a week. In 1994, millions of poor Mexicans walked away from their dying earth and headed north. About one million managed to cross into the United States. The rest slammed up against the fence in places like Juárez. Since then this exodus has increased. Juárez is part of the Mexican gulag, the place for the people no one wants.

Adriana Avila Gress was found about a week after her disappearance in a desert tract embracing the city’s southern edge, a place called the Lote Bravo. Adriana worked six days a week in a foreign-owned factory making turn signals for cars like the one you drive. She took home about five dollars a day. In a photo of her body that I saw in the newspaper morgue, her panties were down around her ankles as the police circled her still form. At least 150 girls disappeared in the city during 1995, and the government said that most ran off with boys. When more bodies were found, the police blamed an American serial killer and handily arrested a suspect. But girls continued to disappear.

Jaime Bailleres has projected a beautiful black carved mask on the
Jaime explains that the newspaper park on both sides of the Rio Grande name. She was found in the park by a that the face is not a mask. She is a six-year-old girl with a forgotten name. She was kidnapped, raped, murdered. Jaime explains that the newspaper refused to publish this photograph. The reason for this decision is very loud. The lips of the girl pull back, revealing her clean white teeth. Sound pours forth from her mouth. She is screaming and screaming and screaming.

“We don’t give a damn about the editors,” Jaime snaps. “We can educate people. To look. To watch. We work in a jungle.”

The face floats on the screen as music purrs through the stereo speakers. No one will ever publish this photograph, Jaime tells me. I start to argue with him but soon give up. I can’t deny one jolting quality of the image: it is deafening.

It is after midnight when Jaime’s photo show breaks up, and I head downtown. A wind whips across Juárez. The city often sprawls under moving walls of dust since so little of it is paved. The whores are out, sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds. There is no way to tell if they are full-time prostitutes or factory workers making an extra buck. The peso has lost another chunk of its value in the last day or so.

“How much?” I ask.

She leans into the car window and says the equivalent of fourteen dollars.

“How long?” I say.

“How long can you resist me?” she asks with a laugh.

There are ways to measure the deep movements of an economy that are more accurate and timely than the bond market and this girl with her mask of thick makeup is one of them.

“Juárez,” photographer Julian Cardona explains, “is a sandwich. The bread is the First World and the Third World. We are the baloney.” Julian, about thirty, is a tall, long-legged, thin man with a deep voice. On the street they call him El Compás, the compass. He laughs easily and always seems to be watching. One night at the newspaper, as I plowed through a thick stack of negatives, he watched me like a hanging judge. Finally, I plucked a negative of a cop holding up the shoe of a dead girl found in the desert. Cardona looked at it and for the first time allowed himself a small smile. “This is a good image,” he said, almost with relief.

Like all the shooters in Juárez, Julian is keenly aware of the seasons. In November and December, there is a bumper crop of drug murders as the merchandise moves north and accounts are settled. Then around Christmas and New Year’s people hang themselves. The first few months of the new year bring fires and gas explosions as the poor try to stay warm. Spring means battles between neighborhoods (or colonias) over ground for building shacks as well as outbreaks of disease in a city largely lacking sewage treatment.

Summer brings water problems to a head (Juárez will run completely out of water within five years unless something is done), more disease, and batches of murders by the street gangs. The cool days of fall open a new season of battles between colonias, and then, with the holidays, the photographers return to the drug killings and the Christmas suicides. As Manuel Saenz, the photo editor of the morning paper, puts it, “Anything can happen here at any time. It can blow at any second.” That is the inside of the sandwich.

Julian, like many of the street shooters, sees his work as a mission. Juárez is the fourth-largest city in Mexico and is historically famous for vice and violence. Since the end of World War I, it has been a place that draws Americans for women and dope. Since 1991 the homicide rate has increased by at least 100 percent (given crooked cops and crooked government, solid numbers are hard to come by). What is happening in the city is often dismissed by simply saying that many cities are violent, that gangs occur in the United States as well, that strife and dislocation are just the normal growing pains of a society industrializing, and so forth. All of these statements make a lot of sense, and all of them are lies. The photographers of Juárez know they are lies and believe body and soul that their work will state the truth. They say their cameras are more deadly than AK-47s.

Julian Cardona is on his way home at 7:00 A.M. after twelve hours of prowling for the blood of the city’s night. He glimpses of a small crowd and pulls over. A man has been stabbed thirty times, and the arms are frozen in rigor mortis. A police technician is crouched over the chest, photographing forensic evidence. Julian shoots a few frames.

Snapshots briefly make Juárez stand still. You can run from photographs but you can’t really hide. This fact seems to keep the photographers going. A shooter is desperate to get the shot of a man who has cut off his own genitals. But by the time the photographer arrives, the mutilated man is in an
ambulance and the doors are closed. So the shooter pops open the back doors and clambers in. The man lying there is in shock, his crotch a pool of gore. He raises his head just as the photographer leans forward and goes click. The photographer is no fool; he knows this picture will never be printed.

His name is Jaime Murrieta, and he is thirty-five years old. He never turns off his police scanner. He beats the cops to many crime scenes and once got a medal for rescuing someone from a blaze when he arrived ahead of the firemen. He has photographed over 500 murders. Once he crouched over the bloated body of a girl who had been raped and murdered just as it burst. He sighs when he thinks of the Pentax he used. It never worked again.

Now we are in a car moving through downtown Juárez at about sixty miles an hour. The streets are clogged with people, and we miss hitting them by inches. I feel like I am in a long dolly shot from an Indiana Jones movie. It is 5:07 in the afternoon, and Murrieta has just heard of a shooting in Colonia Juárez down near the river. He is exploding with sheer joy. “I love violence,” he tells me.

The other night around eleven, two women and a twelve-year-old girl drove a Dodge Ram Charger down the streets of Juárez. Each was shot in the head with a .45, a caliber favored by the federal police. Murrieta got some nice shots of them slumped in their car seats. This morning he covered their funeral and was beaten by the women’s relatives, who were narcotraficantes. He keeps changing vehicles so that the gangs don’t recognize what he is driving. Recently, seven rounds ripped through his car and somehow missed him.

“Yes, I am afraid,” he admits. “But I love my work. I am on a mission, and everything has its risk. God helps me.” He has this dream of his death. Someone is coming at him with a gun or a knife, and there is nowhere to run. As they fire at him or shove in the blade, he raises his camera and gets the ultimate murder photograph. “I will die happy,” he insists. At the moment, he’s been warned that a contract killer is looking for him. He is not that easy to find. It has taken me days to rendezvous with him because he comes and goes from the newspaper without warning, and probably lives more in his car than under any other roof.

In Colonia Juárez, the body we have come to see sprawls in front of the doorway of a corner grocery store. Three rounds from a .38 Special went through the head, and five tore up the chest. That was twelve minutes ago. The victim, El Pelón, is also known as Francisco Javier Hernández. According to optimistic police figures, he is murder number 250 this year in Juárez. At 5:00 p.m. he was twenty years old. He was a junkie, and he also sold drugs. He belonged to the pandilla called K-13, a group noted for its arsenal of guns. A crowd of his fellow gang members stands silently in the street. Jaime Murrieta leaps out of the car and runs down the street. At first the police keep him back, but then I offer the captain a pack of Lucky Strikes and the officer’s face brightens. I light one for him—there are moments when I love Mexico. While the captain and I savor Kentucky tobacco, Murrieta scurries to the crime scene. His face is absolutely serene as he crouches over the body. Hernández wears trousers and boots, but his coat is almost off and the wound in his chest is visible in the good light that all photographers pray for. A pool of brilliant red blood frames his head like a halo. The storefront is pure white, with a painting of Mickey Mouse. A sign over the doorway says Siempre Coke. Across the street is a pink house where drugs are sold. A fat girl smiles at the body. Her T-shirt says KISS ME, I’M YOURS.

There was a killing at this very corner four months ago.

El Pelón’s mother stands a few feet from his corpse. Her hair is gray and she cradles her face in her hands. She is angry at her son. Only a week before, Los Harpies tried to kill him and still he did not take precautions. “This happened,” she says, “because he is a pendejo, a fool.”

A twelve-year-old girl strolls down the sidewalk, drawn by the possibility of excitement. She has dyed red hair and the smooth, serene face of a child. She pushes through the crowd and sees the body. It is her brother. The contours of her face disintegrate as if she
Two girls take her arms and hold her up as she slumps toward the ground. Murrieta stops shooting. He is out of rationed film, but he got what he wanted.

Murrieta is a legend among the other street shooters. They love to tell a story about him. He is in bed with a woman, and his police scanner is on. Murrieta is just about to climax when he hears a murder report crackle on the radio. He gets up and starts to dress.

"No," I answer. "I must go," he answers. "It is an obligation."

"You're not going to finish?"

"No."

In a simple sense the photographs come from cameras, but there is a deeper point of origin. The floor under the gorge of Juárez is an economy of factories owned by foreigners, mainly Americans. I keep having the same experience when I talk with Americans about the foreign-owned factories in Mexico. I'll tell them the wages—three, four, or five dollars a day—and they'll nod knowingly, and then a few minutes later I will realize that they have unconsciously translated this daily rate into an hourly rate. When I practically drill the actual wages into someone's head, he or she will counter by saying that the cost of living is much cheaper in Mexico. This is not true. Along the border, Mexican prices on average run at 90 percent of U.S. prices. Basically, the only cheap thing in Mexico is flesh, human bodies you can fornicate with or work to death. What is happening in Mexico betrays our notion of progress, and for that reason we insist that each ugly little statistic is an exception or temporary or untrue. For example, in the past two years wages in the maquiladoras have risen 50 percent. Fine and good. But inflation in that period is well over 100 percent.

Juárez is an exhibit of the fabled New World Order in which capital moves easily and labor is trapped by borders. There are a total of 350 foreign-owned factories in Juárez, the highest concentration in all of Mexico, and they employ 150,000 workers. The twin plant system—in Spanish, maquiladoras—was created by the United States and Mexico in 1965 so that Americans could exploit cheap Mexican labor and yet not pay high Mexican tariffs. Although the products that come from the factories are counted as exports (and thus figured into GDP), economists figure that only 2 percent of material inputs used in maquila production come from Mexican suppliers. All the parts are shipped to Mexico from the United States and other countries, then the Mexicans assemble them and ship them back. Two or three thousand American managers commute back and forth from El Paso every day. Juárez is in your home when you turn on the microwave, watch television, take in an old film on the VCR, slide into a new pair of blue jeans, make toast in the kitchen, enjoy your kid playing with that new toy truck on Christmas morning.

Politicians and economists speculate about a global economy fueled by free trade. Their speculations are not necessary. In Juárez the future is thirty years old, and there are no questions about its nature that cannot be answered here. The maquilas have caused millions of poor people to move to the border. Most of the workers are women and most of the women are young. By the late twenties or early thirties the body slows and cannot keep up the pace of the work. Then, like any used-up thing, the people are junked. Turnover in the maquilas runs anywhere from 50 to 150 percent a year. It is common for workers to leave for work at 4:00 A.M. and spend one or two hours navigating the dark city to their jobs. Sometimes they wind up in the Lote Bravo. The companies carefully screen the girls to make sure they are not pregnant. Workers at one plant complain of a company rule requiring new female hires to present bloody tampons for three consecutive months. The workweek is six days. After work some of the girls go downtown to sell their bodies for money or food. At least 40 percent of Mexicans now live off the underground economy, which means they stand in the street and try to sell things, including themselves.

Workers who lose their jobs receive
essentially no benefits beyond severance pay. Mexico has no safety net. Independent, worker-controlled unions barely exist, and anyone trying to organize one is fired, or murdered.\(^3\) It is almost impossible to get ahead working in the maquilas. Real wages have been falling since the 1970s. And since wages are just a hair above starvation level, maquilas contribute practically nothing toward forging a consumer society. Of course, as maquiladora owners and managers point out, if wages are raised, the factories will move to other countries with a cheaper labor force.

And so industry is thriving. Half a million cargo-laden trucks move from Juárez to El Paso each year. Boxcars rumble over the railroad bridge. New industrial parks are opening up. Labor is virtually limitless, as tens of thousands of poverty-stricken people pour into the city each year. There are few environmental controls and little enforcement of those that do exist. El Paso/Juárez is one of the most polluted spots in North America. And yet it is a success story. In Juárez the economic growth in 1994 it was 6 percent, and last year it registered 12 percent. According to Lucinda Vargas, the Federal Reserve economist who tracks Mexico’s economy, Juárez is a “mature” economy. This is as good as it gets. With the passage of NAFTA, narcotraficantes began buying maquiladoras in Juárez. They didn’t want to miss out on the advantages of free trade.

The street shooters are seldom allowed to take photographs inside the factories. And yet it is impossible to take a photograph in Juárez of anything without capturing the consequences of the maquiladoras. The factory workers have created a new school of architecture that is not seriously studied by scholars. They build homes out of odd material—cardboard, old tires, pallets stolen from loading docks. The structures are held together with nails driven through bottle caps—a cheap bolt. The designs flow unhampered by building codes. No school of aesthetics scolds, no committee votes.

\(^3\) Last spring the boss of the big worker-dominated company in Mexico City was found dead. The government determined that he had committed suicide. He had shot himself in the heart. Twice.

**There is a hesitation when the street shooters of Juárez mention La Pantera, the Panther.** Once he was one of them. Then he took up the video camera and went to work for a television station. But it is his dedication to his work that gives the street shooters pause. They feel that he has gone too far, that he cannot survive living as he does.

Rafael Cota, better known as La Pantera, works twelve hours a day, seven days a week. He has not missed a tour of his appointed rounds in eight years. He works only at night, and his name comes from his eerie ability to get to murders before the police do. Sometimes he videotapes things the police do not wish to have publicized. He is thirty-two years old and has a quiet and reserved manner. His camera has stared at 800 murders. Five times the police have beaten him and destroyed his equipment. Narcotraficantes also view him with disfavor. La Pantera wears a bulletproof vest. Although his face has never appeared on television, he is said to have one of the highest-rated programs in the city.\(^4\) His day begins with darkness and ends with light, and in between he roams alone in an old black pickup truck; a police scanner always plugged into his left ear. He shoots murders, car accidents, suicides, gang fights—all the violence of the night.

For several years he rode with an assistant, and then they fell in love and married. She continued riding with him, and one night when she was nine months’ pregnant the labor pains came and La Pantera made a brief pit stop at the hospital so that their daughter could be born. For his eighty-four-hour workweek he is paid $100. He cannot live on this, so during the day he is a part-time fumigator. His daughter is now four, and sometimes she rides with him—“so she will learn reality.”

\(^4\) Over 90 percent of Mexican families have a television. In the barrios, where the houses are cardboard and the electricity is pirated, you will consistently find televisions. This part of the fabled global village actually exists.
La Pantera is convinced that if he shows people what their city is like, then they will change their city. That is why he left newspapers and still photographs: television, he believed, would reach more people with more force. He worries about being killed, but he cannot seem to stop. Being around him has the quality of visiting someone on death row. In your heart, you know he can’t possibly make it. Once he came upon Jaime Murrieta being pounded by narcoraficantes in a bar. La Pantera leapt in to help him, and they both were beaten almost to death. “I can keep doing this forever,” he insists quietly to me. “This is a mission for justice.” In his spare time, he and his wife work with the Red Cross. People come to him for help in finding the missing. He is a faceless legend. He refuses to appear on the air because he does not want his personality to get in the way of the stories, the montages of horror he constructs every night. “I like to take the tragedies,” he explains, “and make people feel them.”

He is very proud of his work, and shelf after shelf in the station sag with the results of his nocturnal labor. He plucks a cassette and insists I watch. A man is being beaten, blood coursing down his face, the soft voice of La Pantera narrating.

La Pantera silently watches his tape with the calm pleasure of a connoisseur. He fast-forwards the tape, and the people shouting and crying sound like cartoon characters. Then he slows the tape and the camera pans a suicide. The man is quite young and wearing a bulky blue sweater. By his feet is a five-gallon bucket. The rope around his neck is tied to a small tree in a city park. His neck is bent, but the rope is straight and taut. The camera frames the man and the tree, then zooms in to pursue his body, and quickly does a 180-degree pan around to his back. Then the camera zooms in again to one of his feet. It is touching the ground. During the hours he spent hanging here alone, the man’s neck stretched and now he is firmly planted on the earth again.

When I leave the station, La Pantera walks me out into the 2:00 A.M. street. He touches my shoulder and says, “Be careful. This is a very dangerous city. Do not stop at any stop signs. They will leap out and take the car.”

Every morning at 7:45 A.M. La Pantera’s program runs as a special eight- to ten-minute part of the morning news. The segment is called “While You Were Sleeping.”

In 1991, Nicholas Scheele, the head of the Ford Motor Company in Mexico, said in admiration of the government’s control, “But is there any other country in the world where the working class ... took a hit in their purchasing power of in excess of 50 percent over an eight-year period and you didn’t have a social revolution?” Maybe you get something you don’t have to define as a revolution. There are over 200 gangs in Juárez. They, not the police, define the borders in the city. They, not the government, represent authority to the human beings in the colonias. They provide work selling narcotics. And they kill and steal all the time to protect their spheres of power. They are not a progressive force; they are simply the force that grows when a society offers no progress. They have erected massive sliding doors on the Mexican side. American officials have erected massive sliding doors on the bridge to block people from crossing, and the pandilleros have painted these doors in the style of the old masters from the revolution. Peasants are marching along the bottom of the mural. Above them are the girders and machines of modern industrial life, and blood is spilling from this future.

In the photograph taken by Jaime
Bailleres, the doors are opening as two U.S. Customs officials push them apart to permit a train to enter Mexico. The locomotive is blue and huge and with its white beam stares out like a Cyclops. It looks like the train will move forward and kill the peasants any second. Cardona stabs at the photograph and tells me, "This is a great image. The hands that can make this painting, those hands kill 200 people in this city every year."

After several months, things in Juarez begin to haunt me. I try to put my finger on what exactly is bothering me. I tell myself it is not simply the poverty—I remember being in delta shacks in the segregated Mississippi of the 1960s and people living almost like animals deep within the bosom of my own country. When I lived with these people for weeks and weeks, I ate what they ate—wild greens picked by the road and fried in grease, bootleg liquor made in the thickets by the river. Also, I can remember working on the west side of Chicago in districts that had the look and feel of Berlin in, say, the summer of 1945. But Juarez is different in a way that tables of wages and economic studies cannot capture: in Juarez you cannot sustain hope.

In the shadow of a maquiladora sprawls a Community for Public Defense barrio, one of at least twenty-six in Juarez. The police are afraid to enter CDP settlements. The residents work in maquilas and sell drugs, guns, and cars stolen from the United States. They also make bricks. It is dusk, and they have fired up their kilns using tires for fuel. Black tongues of smoke lick the shacks. The main dirt lane of the colonia is blocked by a circle of people sitting on buckets. They are having a community meeting. This is the order in the new world.

There are other hints of the emerging order. Jaime Bailleres is in a nightclub and at his editor's insistence takes a picture of a beautiful woman for the newspaper's lifestyle section. A man at another table is accidentally included in the frame. Suddenly two bodyguards lay their hands on Bailleres. They do not want this picture published, understand? He wonders: Is this man now stored somewhere in his camera Amado Carrillo? But this thought is dangerous. Later, when I mention the name out loud at a bar, he looks around quickly to see if anyone has overheard. His eyes for a few seconds show true panic. Jaime is hardly a coward, but he is certainly not a fool like me.

We all have a deep need to ignore Juarez. We write off what is going on by saying that it is something our grandparents or great-grandparents went through. We tell ourselves that there are gangs and murders in American cities. This is true, but it does not deal with the reality of Juarez. We are not talking about darkness on the edge of town or a bad neighborhood. We are talking about an entire city woven out of violence. We tell ourselves that jobs in the maquiladoras are better than nothing. But we ignore the low wages, high turnover, and shacks. Then there is the silent thought: after all, they are Mexicans, not U.S. citizens. This kind of shrug brings to mind Rene Descartes nailing his family dog to a board alive and cutting it up to determine if it had a soul.

I am standing by the Carranza sisters' cardboard shack in a part of Juarez called Anapra. They moved to the shantytown about ten months ago, when three years of drought ended their lives in a village in Durango. A half-dozen murdered, mutilated, and raped girls have been found about a hundred yards from their shack, and this frightens the teenage girls. Each morning they rise at 3:30 A.M., cook over bits of wood, and have some coffee. After a cold tortilla, they walk out into the darkness with their few possessions (a pan, a plate, knife, fork, spoon, and cooking oil) and bury them secretly in a hole; otherwise they will be stolen while they are gone. They are the lucky ones: five of them work in American-owned maquiladoras. The fifteen-year-old girl is a welder at 160 pesos a week (about $21.62 at current exchange rates). Bus fare consumes about half her salary. Today, the Carranza kids are fixing to plant eight pine seedlings. Tomorrow, they begin their six-day weeks at American factories.

The United States begins fifty yards away, where the North Americans are constructing a steel wall to keep Mexico at bay. In fact, the First World is so near that every few days a band of Anapra residents gather around 8:00 P.M. and walk the short distance to the border, where an American railroad almost brushes against the fence. Then, as the bend in the tracks slows the
train, they expertly crack open a dozen or more boxes, toss goods out to waiting hands, and rush back into Mexico—all in less than the two minutes it takes for cops to arrive. U.S. newspapers periodically print stories about these train robberies (600 in the last three years) and call the Carranzas' neighbors the new Jesse Jameses.

Jaime Bailleres says, "Sometimes I feel like I am in Bosnia." He tells me a story to make sure my feeble gringo mind grasps what he means. The paper wanted a soft feature on the lives of the rich, so one Saturday a photographer and his editor strolled through an enclaves of wealth looking for the right image. The photographer brought along his wife and two children. As a rabbit hopped across the lawn of a mansion, the camera came up. Suddenly two bodyguards appeared with AK-47s, and one said, "Give me that his head. Then, in front of his wife pavement with the automatic rifles at the end of the story.

None of this matters. It is all a de- tail or an exception or an illusion. The authorities announced back in November of 1995 that 520 people had AK-47s, and one said, "Give me that his head. Then, in front of his wife pavement with the automatic rifles at his head. Then, in front of his wife and children and editor, they beat him about his head, ribs, and genitals. Police stood nearby and watched. That is the end of the story.

I go back to the glowing screen in the dark room. I must see that blackened face again. Soft music calms me, the blackness of the room caresses me, the roar of the fan on the projector is oddly comforting. The beam of the white light defines reality now and keeps it locked up within a rectangle. Jaime Bailleres installs a slide carousel, and then I hear a click and color explodes. The photographers do not know whether this is art. It is not for them to say. Nada Que Ver. I face again the open mouth and clean white teeth.

"Why do you want this picture?" Jaime Bailleres asks me. "You know it will never be published. No one will print it."

I have never told him the truth. I have never told him that the first night I saw the girl's face I thought it was a carved wooden mask, something made by one of those quaint tribes far away in the Mexican south. Nor have I told him that I keep a copy of it in a folder right next to where I work and that from time to time I open the clean manila folder and look into her face. And then I close it like the lid of a coffin. She haunts me, and I deal with this fact by avoiding it. I have brought a pile of photography books to Jaime's house to add to the communal archive maintained by the street shooters of Juárez. They are all here at this moment, sitting in the room staring at the screen. We are amis- nos now. I have rustled up a curio—a bottle of wine called NAFTA, with the label Mexican, the wine U.S., and the bottle Canadian. Everyone smiles at this farcical vintage. The photogra- phers tell me after we have been drinking for hours, "You give us hope." It must be the wine.

I look up at Jaime Bailleres. The girl's face is still floating on the screen. "Yes," I tell him. "You are right. No one will ever print this photograph. But I want them to see it whether they print it or not."

He sighs, the way an adult sighs over the actions of a child.

I look up at the girl on the screen. I tell myself that a photograph is worth a thousand words. I tell myself pho- tographs lie. I tell myself there are lies, damned lies, and statistics. I tell myself I am still sleeping. But she stares at me. The skin is smooth, almost carved and sanded, but much too dark. And the screams are simply too deafening.