

## The Pastoral Ideal and the Neoliberal City: Production of Nature in T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain*

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### Abstract

This paper offers a spatially oriented reading of T.C. Boyle's modern classic, *The Tortilla Curtain*, through the lens of the *production of nature* concept. The novel, as the paper argues, contextualizes the pastoral ideal as an ideological mechanism in a neoliberal environment where nature is designed as an abstract and artificial notion, and produced as a fetishized commodity. The tension between nature and urban development crystallizes into several dichotomies in the narrative architecture, between human and animal, resident and squatter, private property and the right to life. The novel, in that sense, puts the classical liberal formulations of self-preservation and the right to private property into question, and traces the production of nature processes in the context of Los Angeles's neoliberal urbanization. Against forms of hegemonic spatial production and experience of nature, the narrative also stages moments of spatial resistance and maps out alternative ways of creative and spontaneous tactics towards alternative possibilities.

**Key Words:** pastoral ideal, T.C. Boyle, production of nature, urban literature, neoliberal city

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Article submission date: 30.10.2019. Article acceptance date: 21.01.2020.

# Pastoral İdeal ve Neoliberal Kent: T.C. Boyle'un *The Tortilla Curtain* Romanında Doğanın Üretimi

## Öz

Bu makale, T.C. Boyle'un modern klasiği *The Tortilla Curtain*'ın, *doğanın üretimi* kavramı aracılığıyla, mekan odaklı bir yakın okumasını önermektedir. Roman, makalenin öne sürdüğü üzere, neoliberal ortamda doğanın soyut ve yapay bir kavram olarak tasarlanıp fetiş haline getirilmiş bir meta olarak üretilme sürecini, ideolojik bir mekanizma olarak pastoral ideali bağlamına oturtur. Doğa ve kentsel gelişim arasındaki gerilim, anlatının yapısı içerisinde, insan ve hayvan, ev sahibi ve işgalci, özel mülkiyet ve yaşam hakkı arasındaki çatallaşmalar üzerine inşa edilir. Bu bağlamda roman, insanın öncelikli olarak kendini koruma ve özel mülkiyet hakları gibi klasik liberal düşünce öğelerini sorgular ve Los Angeles'ın neoliberal kentleşmesinde doğanın üretimi sürecinin izini sürer. Anlatı, aynı zamanda, hegemonik mekan üretimi ve doğa deneyimi biçimlerine karşı, çeşitli mekansal direniş anları kurgular ve alternatif olanaklara açılan yaratıcı ve spontan taktikler ortaya koyar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** pastoral ideal, T.C. Boyle, doğanın üretimi, kent edebiyatı, neoliberal kent

T.C. Boyle's modern classic, *The Tortilla Curtain*, is a Los Angeles city novel that thematically intertwines the issue of unjust urbanization with the process of production of nature in an era of rising neoliberalism. The narrative topology is formed upon a socio-spatial criticism towards neoliberal urbanization of the 1990s, which has been increasingly exclusionary on the urban level, alongside the constant flow of immigration to the United States from South America. The novel, as the paper argues, contextualizes the pastoral ideal as an ideological mechanism in a neoliberal environment where nature is designed as an abstract and artificial notion, and produced as a fetishized commodity. The pastoral ideal, here, rests upon a universal concept of nature that is bereft of human dimension and operates for the interests of real estate market in neoliberal capitalism.

This ideological process, first of all, cultivates forms of race and class hatred that is reflected in the novel with the relationship between immigrant day laborers and upper class gated community residents. The experience of nature in the gated community environment requires the alienation of concrete labor from the sterilized everyday life of community members. Therefore, the visibility of immigrant working class in the area sparks the outrage against immigrants, subjecting them to spatial marginalization. The fact that the immigrants sharing the canyon with the gated community residents are wetbacks, or as in the Steinbeck epigram given in the novel, that they are not human at all, mainly underlies the hate discourse of gated community residents.

The tension between nature and urban development in the novel stands for the dichotomies between human and animal, and between universal human rights and private property rights. Liberal formulations of human rights represented by gated community residents in the novel come to serve as a synecdoche for private property rights that overrule the right to life. Against forms of hegemonic spatial production and experience of nature, however, the narrative stages moments of resistance through the figure of the coyote, both an animal that unexpectedly appears within the borders of the estates and disrupts the everyday life, and an extended metaphor for the immigrant/s who defy boundaries. In this framework, *The Tortilla Curtain* illustrates the enduring spatial asymmetries as a source of urban conflict in the US city and also searches for creative and spontaneous tactics for a path towards alternative possibilities.

*The Tortilla Curtain* opens with a crash on a Los Angeles freeway, “an accident in a world of accidents, the collision of opposing forces” (Boyle, 2003, p.3). When Delaney Mossbacher, a self-proclaimed “liberal humanist with an unblemished driving record and a freshly waxed Japanese car with personalized plates” (p.3) hits Cándido Rincón, the undocumented Mexican immigrant on the freeway the liberal beliefs of the gated community, and specifically of Delaney, begin to transform into increasing hatred towards the immigrants living nearby. The immigrant population is represented in the novel as day laborers at the labor exchange market that provides

cheap labor for the gated community. Several of them are undocumented and homeless Mexicans squatting in the canyon area where the estates are located in. After Delaney hits one of these people, the “dark little man with a wild look in his eye,” his sense of security within the borders of his affluent community diminishes and he begins to see through “a window on another reality” (p.3). The representation of these two “sharply-delineated asymmetrical worlds” (Schafer-Wünsche, 2005, p.405) carves the narrative into two halves, which materializes in the text the divide among urban residents from different socio-economic backgrounds. Ironically enough, it is right after the car crash in the novel that the protagonist, Delaney begins to realize the existence of this other world of immigrant laborers, some of whom also happen to be squatting in his backyard:

He'd been in Los Angeles nearly two years now, and he'd never really thought about it before, but they were everywhere, these men, ubiquitous, silently going about their business, whether it be mopping up the floors at McDonald's, inverting trash cans in the alley out back of Emilio's or moving purposefully behind the rakes and blowers that combed the pristine lawns of Arroyo Blanco Estates twice a week. Where had they all come from? What did they want? And why did they have to throw themselves under the wheels of his car? (p.12)

In this framework, the labor market that is located on a parking lot on the road to the gated community has symbolic significance in the novel's excavation of spatial cleavages. The labor market provides the cheap labor for Arroyo Blanco, and no one complains as long as the laborers remain invisible in the area. The immigrants are allowed to dwell in the labor exchange market as long as it is temporary and they stick to regulated hours: “they might have been liberal and motivated by a spirit of common humanity and charity, but they didn't want a perpetual encampment of the unemployed, out of luck and foreign in their midst” (p.58). Once the encounters between community members and day laborers become frequent in the canyon area, the pastoral ideal promoted by neoliberal urbanization loses its validity. The wetbacks are now there in the canyon, using their labor to produce nature as shelter. From then on, the gated community residents are caught in a dilemma, whether or not to close the labor

market and build a wall around the whole place, and in the end the rule of the private property overcomes the liberal guilt.

The spatial conflict that frames the narrative is set at the edge of the city but within city limits, the Topanga Canyon of Santa Monica area of West Los Angeles, inhabited by both the residents of Arroyo Blanco Estates and squatter immigrants. The estates are “placed in the wilderness of a Californian semi-desert encroached upon by urban sprawl” (Sesnic, 2011, p.3). Having gained popularity in the 1990s, gated community phenomenon represents the “new class war” that started “at the level of built environment” in that very decade (Davis, 2006, p.228). Residential areas with luxury lifestyles safeguarded by fences or walls and controlled by private security forces in Los Angeles have been “translated into a proliferation of the new repressions in space and movement” by means of “architectural policing of social boundaries” (p.224). Standing for “the ideal community that Americans have sought since the landing of pilgrims” (Blakely and Syndner, 1999, p.2), the gated community concept symbolizes the US city as an “increasingly unequal place,” with “broader social forces unleashed in an unstable metropolitan system” (p.28).

The residents of the estates in the novel are cosmopolitan urbanites living a suburban dream within the protective borders of gated community. Here, urban sprawl blurs the boundaries between city and countryside, and nature becomes a source of profit and plays a thematic setting in the novel in its representation of uneven spatiality. Arroyo Blanco, with both its architecture and everyday life, embodies the pastoral ideal that is defined in contemporary urbanization by “a new consumerist approach to the relation to nature” (Harvey, 2012, p. xv). The gated community has its connections with the rest of the city through a network of freeways, but the architectural concept is based on the idea of living in the heart of nature, away from the chaotic city. It is a homogeneous environment, with the majority of the community being white upper-middle class Angelenos, and the houses are replicas of one another, which signifies the homogeneity of Arroyo Blanco population:

The houses were all of the Spanish Mission style, painted in one of three prescribed shades of white, with orange tile roofs. If you wanted to paint your house sky-blue or Provençal-pink with lime-green shutters, you were perfectly welcome to move into San Fernando Valley or to Santa Monica or anywhere else you chose, but if you bought into Arroyo Blanco Estates, your house would be white and your roof orange (p.30).

Delaney Mossbacher lives here, and he daily observes the ecology of the Topanga Canyon for his column in a nature magazine, *Wide Open Spaces*. His wife, Kyra, works as a real estate agent in the Santa Monica Valley area, as “the undisputed volume leader at Mike Bender Realty, Inc.” (p.31). The Mossbacher couple represents the typical Californian upper-middle class lifestyle: “They were joggers, nonsmokers, social drinkers, and if not full-blown vegetarians, people who were conscious of their intake of animal fats” (p.34). They define themselves as liberal humanists, with their memberships of “Sierra Club, Save the Children, the National Wildlife Federation and the Democratic Party” (p.34). For the interiors of their suburban house, “[t]hey preferred the contemporary look to Early American or kitsch,” and “[i]n religious matters, they were agnostic” (p.34).

On the other hand, the Rincón couple, Cándido and América, camping down by the ravine serve as a foil to the Mossbachers living high up in the canyon, and their sharing the canyon geography is given in consecutive chapters. These juxtapositions map out the extreme fragmentations found in urban spaces. Nature plays a thematic role here, as the narrative emphasizes these fragmentations through the portrayal of diametrically opposite experiences of nature. Delaney’s abstract view of nature is contradicted with Cándido’s struggle to survive in the canyon, which exposes the ideologically produced dichotomy between nature and human.

Neil Smith (2008), who expands Henri Lefebvre’s idea of the production of space and nature, associates the ideological backbone of the process with the universal notions of nature in Western philosophical thought. From the Hegelian division of the concept of nature as ‘first nature,’ which is entirely abstract and outside of both itself and the self, and ‘second nature,’ which is formed by society and its

institutions, to Kantian dualism of internal/external nature as contradiction between human passions and the physical environment, there always remains a conceptual dichotomy between nature and society. Concurrently, nature as an abstract space is stripped from history and human experience (Descola and Palsson, 1996). Murray Bookchin (1982), in his philosophy of social ecology, also emphasizes this dualistic designation of nature and society and its role of creating hierarchies in social classes (p.43). For Bookchin, “human domination of human” is inseparably related “to the very idea of dominating nature” in the history of humanity (Bookchin, 1990, p.44). Nature is confined to binaries, universal or material, but in each case it is positioned as external to human experience. Placing human at the center by externalizing nature is the basic and foremost tenet of nature/society dichotomy, which enables the production of nature as abstraction in capitalist economy. The atemporal aspect of this view of nature in Western philosophy alienates human labor from nature as well, thus “denying working class its history” (Smith, 2008, p.30). For this reason, the very sight of work in everyday public spaces poses a threat to the pastoral ideal of the bourgeoisie.

In a more specific context, the pastoral ideal reproduced at the time of urban sprawl in the 1990s sets an example for the notion of universal nature in Western philosophy. The idea of human domination over external nature provides the ideological support for the dynamics of capitalist spatial production and brings out “the transformation of rural America into a playground for the cities (p.21). From the first settlements to the nineteenth century, “Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden,” as Annette Kolodny states in *Lay of the Land*, “were subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship, as opposed to the grinding poverty of previous European existence” (Kolodny, 1975, p.6). In modern everyday life, human relationship with nature is produced with “a similar journey to the universality of nature in which we endeavor to immerse ourselves,” through the “experience of national parks, mountain retreats and weekend vacations in the country” (Smith, 2008, p.69). These processes create enclosures, borders and fortified spaces, because when “capital extends its sway,

the entire globe is partitioned into legally distinct parcels, divided by great white fences, real or imaginary” (p.116). Gated community urbanization blended with the age-old pastoral ideal is therefore a typical neoliberal phenomenon that maintains a spatial apartheid in contemporary urban America. *The Tortilla Curtain* unravels this historical conjecture in the case of Los Angeles, a city that is famous for its urban sprawl and lack of a city center, as well as one that “cradles and embodies the most potent version of the great bourgeois vision of good life in a tamed countryside” (Banham, 2009, p.220).

“The master image of the garden” in American cultural history, as described in *The Virgin Land* (Smith, H. 1978, p.123), is perfectly illustrated with the Arroyo Blanco environment, where the concept of a tamed nature keeps the estates in demand for the urban bourgeoisie. While the increasingly militarized architecture of the settlement provides the residents with security, the whole area should maintain an agrarian feel. There are no streetlights within the borders of the community, which is one of the attractions, “the rural feel, the sense that you were somehow separated from the city and wedded to the mountains” (p.62). Delaney and Kyrá’s house is the most attractive of all the estates in the community, as theirs is located “in a cul-de-sac that marked the last frontier of urban development, and the chirring of the crickets seemed louder here, the darkness more complete” (p.64). The canyon area is Delaney’s private Eden, a space for fresh new beginnings, discoveries, and opportunities. As a columnist of *Wide Open Spaces*, Delaney writes his “observations on nature blooming around him day by day, season by season” (p.32). The name of the new-age nature magazine hints at the frontier ideology, which is deeply entrenched within traditional cultural imaginings of the American West. Delaney’s pseudonym, “Pilgrim at Topanga Creek,” also connotes the puritan’s battle with nature, the pilgrim on a colonial expedition into the wilderness: “Who am I,” writes Delaney, in one of his column pieces, “Manzanita stick in hand and nylon pack clinging to my shoulders like a furled set of wings, out abroad in the wide world?” (p.76, emphasis in original<sup>1</sup>). Delaney’s writings pro-

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from the protagonist’s columns will be italicized, as in their original.

mote the universal dichotomy of nature and society: nature is devoid of any social-historical background; it is rather an open and empty space, a transcendental realm that offers happiness and spirituality for the urbanite. He writes his columns in an Emersonian style, asserting himself as “a recent transplant, seeing the flora and fauna of the Pacific Coast with the eye of a neophyte” (p.109). Nature provides him with “a primeval sense of liberation, of release” (p.76) and his spiritual connection with nature sets him “apart from his fellow men and women, that he saw more deeply and felt more passionately – particularly about nature” (p.32). As a liberal environmentalist, Delaney is worried about the extinction of certain species, “overpopulation, desertification, the depletion of the seas and the forests, global warming and loss of habitat” (p.32). He blames human beings for “chewing up the resources of the planet like locusts” (p.32), but not the corporations or real estate companies cutting deep into nature by building high-price estates for the privileged and several lanes of highways for their mobility. Delaney’s concerns about nature fit well with the liberal environmentalism promoted by neoliberal ideology, as it is much easier for him to criticize every single human being on the planet for consuming resources, rather than capitalist economy that subdues the whole earth for the sake of profit. To put it in Neil Smith’s (1996) words, this is rather an ideological commitment “to the conventional assumption of an external nature, albeit a damaged but fixable nature,” which actually equals “to reproducing the very social conditions of production, consumption and ‘development’ that have given rise to environmental concerns in the first place” (p.40).

The Rincón couple, Cándido and América, appropriate the canyon area for their basic human needs, and they trespass the private property in the canyon in moments of survival. In this sense, their struggle to survive sharply contradicts with Delaney’s transcendental experience with nature. While Delaney perceives nature as an abstract space, a spiritual self-help resource, Cándido and América claim the canyon area as lived space. When the teenagers from Arroyo Blanco estates destroy the immigrant couple’s camp, leaving “a message emblazoned on the rocks in paint that dripped like blood ...

BEANERS DIE” (p.61), Cándido has to search and find a new place to build a new shelter. From Delaney’s perspective, anybody out there in the canyon disturbing his solitary adventures is “transients, bums, criminals” (p.113). From Cándido’s standpoint, however, teenagers attacking their camp are also “dangerous and crazy and the parents who’d raised them must have been even worse” (p.84). Delaney’s sense of protection against the unknown dwelling in nature derives from a self-absorbed mentality and evolves into racism towards the end of the novel. Cándido, on the other hand, adapts and melts away, fades even more into the heart of nature for both shelter and safety, whenever it is necessary. Because Cándido cannot work after the car accident, he searches the ravine for a new temporary home; he goes into the current of the water, carrying their belongings above his head: “if he could make it to the far side and set up camp there, then no one could get to them, unless they were part fish” (p.85). He moves farther upstream, “where the canyon walls steepened till they were like the walls of a room” (p.85). At a dead end, he finds a good spot where he can build a new home away from danger:

He found what he was looking for at the rear of the pool, just behind the wreckage of the car. There was the spit of sand there, a private beach just wide enough for a blanket and some sort of shelter ... and then the canyon closed up like a fist ... what Cándido saw wasn’t stone and leaf and grain of sand, but a sitting room with a big shaded lamp dangling from the ceiling, with sofas and chairs and a polished wooden floor that gleamed beneath a burden of wax. It was a revelation. A vision. The sort of thing that might have inspired a pilgrim to build a shrine (p.86).

Cándido appropriates this spot into a real home using both his imagination and certain materials from his natural environment, as well as the endless waste coming from Arroyo Blanco, which he manages to recycle in creative ways. For the roof of this new shelter, he uses “some twine – or was it fishing line? – and two black plastic bags that he was able to work into the thatch of the roof” (p.87). Nature, in this sense, forms “the material stratum of daily life” (Smith, 2008, p.49), as a physical landscape in contact with human labor. In those moments, Cándido’s experience with nature is set, side by side, with

Delaney's, as two antipodes: For Cándido, nature provides shelter, which he reshapes with lived experience, with spontaneity and creativity. For Delaney, however, nature is a private space of personal improvement, a product of modern urban everyday life.

In one of his pieces in *Wide Open Spaces*, Delaney writes about one of his adventures into the deeper parts of mountains, describing himself as a pilgrim at the shrine, in a way, ironically, similar to what Cándido imagines his camp to be, as given in the above quotation. Delaney writes, "I'm a pilgrim, that's all, a seer, a worshiper at the shrine. No different from you, really" (p.76). The hills in the broad daylight all belong to him, because he has tasted them "as you might taste an exotic fruit" (p.76). An experience out there at night, "[his] first sojourn here under the stars," nevertheless, is something new that he is excited to possess (pp.76-77). What makes his experience different from other naturalists or hikers is that he will not stay at a "prescribed campground" at night, but choose his own "solitary place" (p.77). In his column, Delaney presents his experience as a tour package that advertises "not only the fixed joys and certitudes of Nature but the contingencies too" (p.78). Here, for the privileged Californian, the experience of contingency is also something to be bought as part of nature, while it is an inevitable part of Cándido's everyday experience in the canyon.

Cándido's interaction with nature is more unique as he appropriates and transforms the canyon area into "a work he could be proud of" (p.87). Unlike prescribed campgrounds, as Delaney would prefer it to be, this is "a real camp" that would surprise América and provide them with safety: "Something solid and substantial, a place they would call home – at least till he got back on his feet and found work" (p.87). The juxtapositions between Delaney's and Cándido's spatial experiences present nature as appropriated/dominated space, as 'work' or as 'product.' The canyon geography is at first the abstract space that is parceled out and sold for the gated community. The abstract space of capitalism, in Henri Lefebvre's (1991) formulation of spatial production, is "the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (p.39). Every one of Arroyo Blanco estates is produced

as a replica of one another, as well as the everyday life routine of residents, and nature as abstract space serves as a one-dimensional background image. Human labor, on the other hand, reclaims nature and appropriates it through imagination and spontaneity. In certain moments this becomes a subversive act that is blended with the unconscious materials, memory and desire.

He knelt in the sand, feeding sticks into the grasping greedy fingers of the flame, the smell of woodsmoke pricking his memory through the nostalgia of a thousand mornings at home, and he saw his mother burning a handful of twigs to get the stove going, corn gruel and toast and hot coffee smothered in sugar, and then he turned his head from the fire and watched his wife's limbs and hips and breasts fill with light" (p.126).

"Nature," Lefebvre states, "creates and does not produce; it provides resources for a creative and productive activity on the part of social humanity (Lefebvre, 1991, p.71). From this perspective, Cándido's spatial experience becomes "a work," which "has something irreplaceable and unique about it" (p.70), as it is created out of the level of space that is filled with "childhood memories, dreams, uterine images and symbols" and it speaks the untold (p.42). The camp here is made of what solely belongs to Cándido, his past and present, and it stands in contrast to a "product" that "can be reproduced exactly, and is in fact the result of repetitive acts and gestures" (p.70). Delaney's experience of nature is subject to a contract of homogeneity that erases distinctions. "Camping. Dwelling. Living" (p.11) is what he thinks the squatters are doing in the canyon.

The gated community lifestyle envisions a notion of nature that is free from any particularity, adversity or peril, which fits well with the American myth of nature that offers individual fulfillment and progress. From the first settlers to the nineteenth century Romantic Movement, the pastoral ideal was a recurring motif in the making of American identity. What distinguished the "back to nature" movement of the urban middle class in the nineteenth century was the dissatisfaction with urbanization and "the daily experience of living in a dull, gray place far from any contact with nature" (Hou, 2013,

p.14). As a “response not of frontier pioneers but of urbanites,” this was a spiritual movement catalyzed by nature writings that “brought nature into suburban drawing rooms” (Smith, 2008, p.21). For these urban pioneers, however, a tamed version of nature was preferable. “Domesticized, sanitized, and sprawled out on coffee tables” in the nineteenth century imagination, “nature belonged just like the family cat” (p.21). The promise of a better life at the edge of the city in *The Tortilla Curtain* is a re-illustration of this pastoral ideal as it requires taming of the wild. The back to nature movement of the 1990s, first of all, derives from the desire to flee a city that draws massive floods of immigration, although job opportunities and housing conditions are not sufficient. To settle in nature means, however, that nature has to be brought under total control, which is a recurring “attempt to smooth the corners of nature into a more harmonious unity” (Smith, 2008, p.24). In this framework, Arroyo Blanco estates and the lifestyle of residents exemplify the back to nature movement of the 1990s, and therefore, the existence of an unpredictable animal and/or an undocumented immigrant living in the canyon typically ruins Delaney’s “back to nature” lifestyle, as they both trespass the boundaries. In other words, Delaney’s liberal humanism and environmentalism are shaken, first by the immigrant figure as a metaphorical coyote, and then by the animal itself. Both of them are harmless from the perspective of Delaney, so long as they are invisible and they surrender to the rules of homogeneous nature, the gated community environment in this case. However, the coyote unexpectedly jumps over the six-foot chain link fence and seizes one of their domestic dogs, which suddenly makes Delaney feel helpless in the face of nature: “there it was, wild nature, up and over the fence as if this were some sort of circus act” (p.37). Along with the car crash, this coyote incident disrupts Delaney’s self-help relationship with nature and becomes a catalyst for his growing intolerance towards the unknown dwelling in nature. The notion of nature in American cultural imagination as “a source of redemptive knowledge” (Weinstein, 1996, p.25) is reflected in Delaney’s columns in *Wide Open Spaces*, where the coyote, before the trespassing incident, is a pastoral element singing in the forest just for the sake of Delaney’s individual fulfillment:

The song of the survivor, the Trickster, the four-legged wonder who can find water where there is none and eat hearty among the rocks and the waste places. He is out there now, ringing-in the night, gathering in his powers and dominions, hunting, gamboling, stealing like a shadow through the scrub around me, and singing, singing for my benefit alone on this balmy seamless night. And I? I lie back and listen ... The waterfall trick-les. The coyotes sing. I have a handful of raisins and a blanket: what more could I want? All the world knows I am content (p.79).

Here, nature is external to human being, an exotic realm populated with wild species, existing solely for human's benefit. In this formulation, there are only two alternatives: human being either tames this unknown territory or destroys it. Delaney's liberal stance contradicts with the idea of destruction, so there remains only one option, to bring it under control. In a column piece he writes after the coyote trespasses onto his private property, he warns the reader against the unexpected interventions of the other. In his scientific contemplations on natural life, he criticizes the urban encroachment into the coyote's wild territory, which results in the coyote's hunting a three-year-old girl –an anecdote he tells in his piece - and domestic animals of the estates. This can also be read as a metaphor in the novel, because the immigrant providing cheap labor for the gated community also trespasses into the estates and steals food when gated community residents terminate the labor exchange market. Delaney is relatively more understanding of the survival mechanisms of animals but still he cannot put his human-centric position aside: The coyotes will not stop coming and transgressing the civilized order in the wilderness, “breeding up to fill in the haps, moving in where the living is easy. They are cunning, versatile, hungry and unstoppable” (p.215). The coyote, fortunately, gives the pilgrim “the thrill of the wild,” but he “can't help thinking too of the missing pets, the trail of suspicion, the next baby left unattended on the patio” (p. 214-15). He criticizes human intervention in the balance of nature, but he cannot come to terms with the idea that those singing coyotes are acting in a way that is beyond his control:

After all, my pilgrimage is for the attainment of wonder, of involving myself in the infinite, and not for the purpose of limiting or attempting to control the uncontrollable, the unknowable and the hidden. Who can say what revolutionary purpose the coyote has in mind ... And yet something must be done, clearly, if we are to have any hope of coexisting harmoniously with this supple suburban raider (p.213).

Both the coyote and the illegal immigrants meddle with "Delaney's "experience of nature," leaving him no "adventure here, no privacy" anymore (p.117). Out of the fear towards the other –both the animal and the human- rises a wall, but that makes the whole attractiveness of Arroyo Blanco fade away because Delaney now has to walk all the way out to the gate, rather than directly stepping out into the chapparal from his own private garden. With the arrival of fall, the whole purpose of moving to Arroyo Blanco becomes meaningless, because nature in this season does not look anything like the Emersonian landscape of the East. The materiality of the place falls far short of the pastoral ideal that has brought him to the estates in the very beginning. In other words, the contract between the pilgrim and the nature has expired:

...in the bleached hills above Los Angeles, fall was just another aspect of the eternal summer, hotter, drier ... What was there to recommend in hundred-degree temperatures, zero-percent humidity and winds that forced fine grains of degraded sandstone up your nostrils every time you stepped out the door? Where was the charm in that? Other writers could celebrate the autumnal rituals of New England or the Great Smoky Mountains – watching the birds flock overhead, cutting wood for the stove, cracking up the cider press or stalking somnolent bears through the leafless woods with the first wet scent of snow in the air? –but what could Delaney do to color the dismal reality of the season here? (p.241).

His territorial claim rests on the notion of nature as external to human, and human nature as inherently evil, which functions as an ideological strategy to justify domination over nature. The hostility of nature, represented by the wild coyote eating domestic dogs, merges with the bestiality of the human, the illegal immigrant appropriating nature. Delaney's investigations of the species in the canyon

take on a whole new dimension now, the pilgrim's battle in nature becoming "a crusade, a vendetta" (p.318). He begins to act as a civil patrol in the canyon, "unable to focus on the natural world when the unnatural one was encroaching on everything he held sacred" (p.318). The "unnatural" one here is the unwanted immigrant, the bestial human associated with the wild coyote that stands against Delaney's spiritual fulfillment through domesticized nature.

The immigrant-coyote analogy in the novel becomes more dramatic when the labor exchange market is closed. Delaney, as a nature enthusiast, knows well about the "migratory animal species and how one population responded to being displaced by another" (p.192). Clearing up the labor exchange lot, then, means a war between diverse species, "until one group had decimated the other and reestablished its claim to the prime hunting, breeding or grazing grounds" (p.192). For the immigrant, the only option is to try to live off the land, or cross the wall into the estates. At one point Cándido cuts and bends a switch into a loop and sews it with the mesh he finds by the side of the main road. "Using a length of discarded fishing line and América's two-inch sewing needle," he makes "a net to snare some of the birds that were constantly flitting in and out of the chapparal" (p.196). In a more catastrophic moment, América gives birth in a maintenance shed in Arroyo Blanco, when the estates are all evacuated due to a bushfire in the canyon. Their former shelter by the car wreck in the ravine now destroyed by the fire, Cándido crosses the wall surrounding the community, to provide for his wife and newly-born daughter. He steals "cucumbers, tomatoes and squash, topping them off with oranges and grapefruits from the trees" (p.300), and construction materials, "a hammer, a box of three-and-a-half-inch nails, four burlap sacks hanging from a hook... a bow saw and a hatchet" promising himself to "sneak them back in the night" (p.299). Using the pallets standing in the corner of the maintenance shed, Cándido spontaneously imagines "an architecture," an instant shelter that will help them survive. And "[if] the fates were going to deny him his apartment, well then, he would have a house, a house with a view" (p.302). The shelter he builds has "a good design, especially for something he'd thrown together on the spur of the moment"

(p.302). The immigrant squatting in the canyon, which Delaney treats as his private backyard, is now very much like the coyote crossing borders. The animal's unexpected attacks on the estates as a strategy of survival are thus complemented at the end of the novel with the immigrant's act of trespassing, which puts the universal notion of nature into question once again. The universal formulation of nature is a dualistic one, which derives from the production of nature as an abstract form, alienated from the lived experience. Abstract space, as defined by Henri Lefebvre (1991), "implies a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract," and "anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act" (p.56). Here, human state of nature serves as a disruptive element to the tacit agreement between the gated community and the immigrants. In that sense, the immigrant dwelling in the canyon is brought to the level of the animal, and his transgressions are explained with the idea of bestiality of human nature. This becomes a justification for the violation of the right to life, specifically from Delaney's liberal position. The epigram of the novel, "they ain't human," therefore, emphasizes the problem with human/animal and human/nature dichotomies. The bestiality of the coyote attacking children is transferred to the human being, and thus, all immigrants, either squatting in nature or simply standing at the labor exchange, become subject to racism and exclusion. The right to life is terminated once the immigrant is basically an animal, as universal human rights are only granted to human beings, and in this case, to certain human beings only.

From the opening scene of the novel, where Delaney hits the undocumented immigrant, Cándido, on the freeway, immigrants are reduced to the level of animals from the perspective of the community residents, which becomes an excuse to deny them their right to life, the right to shelter or self-preservation. "The man must have been crouching in the bushes like some feral thing, like a stray dog or bird-mauling cat" (pp.3-4) before the accident. Because Cándido is undocumented, Delaney does not have to call the doctor or report the accident, and he lets Cándido leave with the 20 dollars he gives him, with his "limbs dangling, as loose-jointed as a doll flung in a corner by an imperious little girl" (p.7). After a short relief that the man

will not sue him, Delaney's sense of guilt transforms into anger. Wondering what the man might have been "doing on Topanga Boulevard at one-thirty in the afternoon, out there in the middle of nowhere," he comes up with two options: he might be "a picnicker, a bird-watcher, a fisherman... some naturalist from South of the Border studying the gnatcatcher" (p.11). In this scenario the man is his equal in a way and he might sue Delaney. In the second scenario, he has to picture *Cándido* as one of those "people like this Mexican or whatever he was who were irresponsible, thoughtless people, stupid people, people who wanted to turn the whole world into a garbage dump, a little Tijuana" (p.11). At the car dealership office after the accident, he says he hit a dog, or maybe a coyote, "but kind of big for a coyote" (p.13). From this very beginning in the novel, the immigrant figure is associated with a degraded form of human that disrupts the order of his everyday life. Now, any Spanish-speaking person he meets in the canyon while he is hiking transforms into a single enemy that contaminates nature. On one of his solidary expeditions into the canyon area, he sees "a pair of dirty sleeping bags laid out on the high sandy bank opposite ... here they were, brazen, thoughtless, camping under the nose of authorities" (p.112). This life form "degraded the better part of the planet, paved over the land and saturated the landfills till they'd created whole new cordilleras of garbage" (p.112). The problem is that "there was no law here" in the canyon, and it becomes harder to enforce the order of the abstract space out there in nature because "[t]he city was here, now, crouched in the ravine" (pp.113-4). In encounters with the residents in nature, "hiking," for example, becomes a safe word used by the squatters, hiking, not dwelling, as an acceptable form of spatial experience in nature. Here, production of nature, embodied by Arroyo Blanco estates of Topanga Canyon and promoted by "back-to-nature" commercials, leads to fragmentation and separation between city/nature, human/animal, resident/squatter.

As Hannah Arendt (1983) puts it, "[t]he idealism of the humanist tradition of enlightenment and its concept of mankind look like reckless optimism in the light of present realities" (p.83-84). Strong private property rights as the characterizing feature of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007, p.2) determine the fate of liberal humanist attitude

towards the immigrants in the novel, and Delaney's drifting into racism dramatically portrays this contradiction between universal human rights and concrete human necessities. The underlying concern is the idea of self-preservation, which is embedded in the United States' founding political texts and which also underlies the exclusionary spatial practices of the community as the microcosm of the country. "Safety. Self-protection. Prudence" is the reason to build a wall, as the president of the neighborhood association in the novel insists upon, because the country has no "control of the borders" (p.101). To protect the community against the existence of the other takes the form of a civilian action, particularly when the state is unable to sufficiently do so. Self-preservation, however, becomes a synecdoche for the protection of private property, and this encompasses nature as an extension of life and property in liberal formulations. "The right to self-preservation" in John Locke's *Second Treatise* resonates with the right to private property, which provided the source for Thomas Jefferson's formulation of the right to life (Jayne, 1998). In Declaration of Independence, Jefferson rewrote Locke's triad, "Life, Liberty, and Estate" as "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (Erlor, 1989, p.50), and the replacement of private property with the "pursuit of happiness" inscribed a long-standing tension within the country's foundation, "an unceasing struggle between persons and property" (Bassani, 2004, p.46).

Throughout the narrative in *The Tortilla Curtain*, the estates -- or the lives -- of the community residents are never violently attacked by the immigrants that occupy the canyon. Whereas, the idea of self-preservation for Arroyo Blanco residents is soon transformed into violation of the right to life of those who do not have the privilege of owning private property. When Delaney encounters Jose Navidad, one of the squatters in the canyon, face to face in the daylight within the borders of Arroyo Blanco, "right there in his own community, right there on his own street," he gets physically aggressive because the man should be "a thief, a liar, the stinking occupant of a stinking sleeping bag in the state forest, a trespasser, a polluter, a Mexican" (p.229). Jose keeps saying "I deliver these flies," and in the end it turns out he is really delivering fliers from the president of property ow-

ners' association, urging the residents to attend a meeting "on an issue vital to the security" (p.229). Another confrontation is between Kyra and Jose Navidad, who is camping with his friend in the backwoods of Kyra's favorite estate on sale. The scene again brings up the question of the priority of private property over the right to housing and the right to life. In certain moments, Kyra feels uneasy about her job at the real estate market, "[s]eeing that Mr. and Mrs. whoever found or sold or leased or rented their dream house while the world was falling to shit" (p.75). She gets over these moments of crisis, however, assuring "herself that what she did was important, vital, altruistic even – after food and love, what was more important than shelter?" (p.75) The concept of shelter has a one-dimensional meaning in Kyra's socio-economic circle, one that is defined by the concept of private property. Ironically enough, an unoccupied property is the best for Kyra; it is a space that grants her a mighty feeling, in a manner similar to that of the relationship between Delaney and nature:

A vacant house became hers in a way – it had been abandoned, deserted, left in her hands and hers alone, and sometimes the sellers were off in another state or country even – and she couldn't help feeling proprietorial about it. Sometimes, making the rounds of her houses – she had forty-six current listings, more than half of them unoccupied – she felt like the queen of some fanciful country, a land of high archways, open rooms and swimming pools that would have made and inland sea if stretched end-to-end across her domain (p.70).

Unoccupied houses waiting for the best buyers in the market dramatically illustrate the socio-spatial injustice in the novel's setting, as they are recurrently put in contradiction with the conditions of homeless immigrants. Kyra's colonial fantasy over big vacant houses is interrupted by immigrants as trespassers, the two men camping in the backyard of her favorite vacant estate. When she finds a shopping cart at the gate, her altruism as a provider of shelter directly turns into hatred: "Bums. The homeless and displaced. Crazies. Mexicans. Winos," the intruders that were covertly "camping here, squatting, living out in the bushes" (p.163). The modern myth of urban decay that paves the way for gentrification and an elite-dominated urbanism echoes with Kyra's confusion: "But no, that was a city prob-

lem, the sort of thing she'd expect to find out back of the 7-Eleven, in Canoga Park, Hollywood, downtown Los Angeles (p.163). In the sterile terrain of Arroyo Blanco, what she expects to see emerging out of the woods is only a deer, or a coyote, but not a human being: "But the movement didn't halt or hesitate in the way of an animal," and when she sees two men appear over the slope, she knows what they are: "They were Mexicans, she was sure of it, even at this distance" (p.164). This climactic moment when Kyra confronts the men in front of a luxury estate restages the car accident on the highway, picturing the third world encountering the first world in a landscape of produced nature. The everyday life codified by private property laws of the state is in both moments disrupted, first on the freeway and then at a real estate, both symbolizing the colonization of urban space, as well as nature. On the part of immigrants, the highway and the gated community wall both function as boundaries to transgress in twentieth century urban planning. The tactical acts of crossing make the illegal immigrant visible in a sterile environment, and in those moments, the marginalized other comes out from the clandestine and leaves a concrete mark on the produced everyday life in the estates. When Kyra asks the Mexicans to leave because they are on private property, the men have to say, again, that they are hiking and they have simply gotten lost, which should be an acceptable daily life act from the standpoint of Arroyo Blanco residents. The immigrants, in those moments, continue to disrupt the sterility of the community by pushing further for their own lived space.

The contention between Arroyo Blanco residents and the homeless takes the form of appropriation of the community's symbolic spaces. Kyra finds a message left for herself on the side-wall of her favorite estate, "pinche puta," in spray-painted letters (p.223). Covering the exclusionary architecture of Arroyo Blanco with graffiti becomes a symbolic tactic, enacted by day laborer immigrants against a socio-spatial system that is built upon their labor but that forbids their visibility in both public and private space. Another spatial tactic is performed right after the security gate is built at the entrance of Arroyo Blanco. At the property owners' meeting, one of the residents argues against the militarization of their community: "If we'd wanted a ga-

ted community we would have moved to Hidden Hills or Westlake, but we didn't. We wanted an open community, freedom to come and go – and not just for those of us privileged enough to be able to live here, but for anyone – any citizen – rich or poor” (p.43). The Arroyo Blanco community quickly transforms from a democratic space, as it is thought to be by its residents, into “a community that closes its streets to somebody just because they don't have as fancy a car ... or as big a house” (p.43). Again, the right to life, which is denied to the underprivileged, is claimed through a spatial tactic that reminds the residents of the existence of immigrants in the canyon. The entrance gate of the wall that is built by the immigrants from the labor exchange is painted by graffiti on both sides, this time in a more artistic way, “with big bold angular strokes in glittering black paint,” which “almost looks like the writing on the stale outside the Mayan temples,” as a resident says, while “tracing the jagged hieroglyphs with his fingers” (p.316). Every step the community members take to exclude the immigrants, a non-violent reaction follows. “It's like an animal reflex, isn't it?” a resident asks, “marking their territory?” And Kyra replies, “[o]nly this is our territory” (p.316). Here, the production of space and nature takes two contradictory dimensions: on one side, a sophisticated architecture of security that serves for the product, and on the other side, an artistic graffiti that serves as a tactic to rewrite over the hegemonic spaces of the city.

*The Tortilla Curtain* ends with a full-scale catastrophe, a devastating flood that razes Arroyo Blanco to the ground. The ending scene, Cándido holding Delaney's hand to save him from death in the midst of the flood, is set on the remnants of a post-office, from which Cándido was earlier expelled due to his shabby looks. The public space now becomes a shelter for both Cándido and Delaney in conditions of bare life, when there are no more fences or gates standing. The open ending of the novel does not give any hint as to whether the erasure of boundaries through a natural disaster erases class differences or not. In a sense, such ending offers a “promise of redemption” which “is personal, not systemic” (Wright, 2016, p.166). However, the liberal formulation of self-preservation that works only for the residents' right to private property, as in the case of building a wall aro-

und the community, is once again put into question here, because by offering a hand to Delaney, "Cándido exercises the only freedom left: the freedom to act in humanity towards another" (Stoneham, 2000, p.92). The homeless-laborer-immigrant is not threatening to Arroyo Blanco lifestyle as long as he is invisible, and this is why Delaney cannot put in practice his liberal belief in the good of humanity when he literally crashes into the immigrant at the very beginning of the novel. This situation is reversed at the end of the novel, when Cándido, who is left on the roadside wounded and who is subjected to hatred from then onwards, now offers hand to Delaney in the moment of destruction, at a time when the rule of private property is temporarily terminated. In that sense, while the author does not imply that the flood is human-induced, the natural disaster bringing the end of Arroyo Blanco estates has a subversive role against the production of nature/space by neoliberal urbanism that not only segregates and militarizes the city but also literally prepares the total destruction of nature. "Los Angeles has deliberately put itself in harm's way," Mike Davis says in his writings on urban ecological history of L.A: "For generations, market-driven urbanization has transgressed environmental common sense," and "as a result, Southern California has reaped flood, fire, and earthquake tragedies that were as avoidable, as unnatural, as the beating of Rodney King and the ensuing explosion in the streets" (Davis, 1999, p.9). Published three years after one of the most tumultuous events in American history, 1992 L.A. uprising, which erupted right after the jury acquitted four police officers that were recorded beating an unarmed African-American man, *The Tortilla Curtain*, in its final scene, momentarily stages what Rodney King himself suggested in his famous line during the uprising: "If we can jus' get along, maybe all our problems will go away." Whether it is a civil uprising against the injustice in the city or a natural catastrophe that erases fences, gates, and walls built in the wilderness, the promise for the common good of humanity is imagined as holding hands or simply getting along. This is symbolized by the final image of the novel, the swirling flood that Delaney, Cándido, and América find themselves surrounded by, a spatial vortex of unknown possibilities that might open up an alternative future.

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