
Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

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Abstract Submission Form

1. Paper / Proposal Title: Ciudad Juárez, Mexico: The Virtual and the Real

2. Format: Written paper / verbal presentation

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6. Abstract (300 words):

As a border city, located across the Río Grande from El Paso, Texas, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico has long represented, for North Americans, the place where everything illicit is available. Since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Ciudad Juárez has also become an industrial city. The confluence of these two identities has changed the virtual and the real face of the city. While the city added new industrial parks, its workers built shantytowns on the periphery. When the world began to notice the femicides and cartel violence, Ciudad Juárez, City of the Future, became known as Murder City. Media producers quickly capitalized on the violence through video games such as *The Call of Juarez* series, the television program *The Bridge*, and the newly released movie *Sicarios*. In contrast to these representations, the Ciudad Juárez tourism board has launched several digital campaigns to lure tourists back. The Facebook page called "Oh yes, Juárez" announces the first tamal fair and shows people dressed up for the Day of the Dead celebrations in costumes reminiscent of José Guadalupe Posada's satirical *calavera* illustrations. A Vimeo campaign "Be Proud to be from Juárez" features fourteen short videos about Ciudad Juárez's greatest resource, "its people." Interestingly, there is no mention of the *maquiladoras* that have lured workers to the city from all over the country. While many of these immigrants are farmers who have lost their livelihoods due to the effects of NAFTA, one of the stories focuses on the high-quality cotton picked around Ciudad Juárez. My essay speculates

on the real effects on the cityscape the virtual representations may have. Recently a 40-foot mural of pop singer Juan Gabriel was installed on a downtown building and there are plans to reopen the Noa Noa bar where Juan Gabriel debuted. Photos of the city often feature the traditional central plaza and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Cathedral and mission. Post-NAFTA Ciudad Juárez seems to be luring people back to a more traditional pre-NAFTA city, fetishizing the “authentic” Mexico still sought by foreign tourists by building a virtual border around the central part of the city away from the *maquiladoras* zone.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Carla Olson Buck is Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. She uses a cultural studies approach to the literature and cultural production of contemporary Spain and Mexico in courses such as The Politics of Food, Gender Issues in Hispanic Studies and Immigration in Films from Mexico and Spain. Her recent publications have focused on Ciudad Juárez's Culture of Impunity and Dystopia and Utopia in Ciudad Juárez and the Lacondón Jungle of Mexico. She is currently completing a book-length manuscript entitled *Consuming Pathos: Cultural Representations of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico*, which analyzes the neo-colonialist attitude of the United States and the Global North toward Mexico.



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