Passing for Solitude: Incest and Ideology in the *Lone Star* State

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John Sayles’s *Lone Star*, released in 1996, repeatedly challenges traditional definitions of the nation as a strictly bounded entity through its depiction of the area that Américo Paredes described as “Greater Mexico” and Gloria Anzaldúa more recently referred to as the Borderlands; the film’s promotion of a potentially productive love affair between half-siblings further challenges the status quo. As I argue here, however, while the film undeniably underscores the fragility of the nation in an era of global trade and travel, it also suggests the difficulties of escaping nation-based ideologies and interests. As I will show, *Lone Star* in fact highlights the ongoing importance of the nation-state through its attention to the institutions and individuals that Louis Althusser associates with state apparatuses, ultimately pointing to the fraught nature of avoiding the influence of the nation as a construct.

John Sayles’s *Lone Star*, released in 1996, repeatedly depicts the border between the United States and Mexico only to then reveal its essential porosity. The film’s title suggests such permeability from the start, reminding the spectator that the “Lone Star State” of Texas once belonged to Mexico; the name of the US town in which the film is set, Frontera, further announces the porous nature of borders in the film. As *Lone Star* spins its tale of decades-old murder and rekindled desire, the lines nominally dividing Mexico from the United States continue to be destabilized: individuals of both nationalities drive, wade, and wander north and south; speak a mix of English and Spanish; and consistently breach the ranks of race and ethnicity in their relationships. Summing up the message the film appears to send about the need to reimagine the (global) nation, Mexico’s self-proclaimed “Rey de las llantas” (or “King of Tires”) pointedly draws a line on the ground with a Coke bottle, then states, “A bird flying south: you think he sees this line? Rattlesnake, *javelina*,

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whatever you got, you think halfway across that line they start thinking
different? Why should a man?”

Due to the challenges that the film undeniably presents to traditional
definitions of the nation as a coherent entity existing within fixed borders, Lone Star
is often noted for its depiction of life in the area that Américo Paredes
described as “Greater Mexico,” and Gloria Anzaldúa more recently referred to
as the Borderlands: “The U.S.–Mexican border es una herida abierta where the
Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it
hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third
country – a border culture.” Mary Helen Washington, for example, lauded
the film in her 1997 presidential address to the American Studies Association
as a “prophetic allegory” in which “‘differences of language, politics, historical
vision’ were not allowed ‘to dissolve in a soothing movement toward
consensus’”; and the film has been productively analyzed as border cinema,
third cinema, and “representative transamericanism.” In this article, however,
I would like to suggest that while Lone Star does underscore the fragility of the
nation in an era of global trade and travel, it also suggests that men – unlike
rattlesnakes and javelinas – often remain limited in their ability to escape the
confines of nation-based ideologies and interests. Offering a new focus on
ideology in Lone Star, I will argue here that Sayles’s film highlights the ongoing
importance of the nation-state through its attention to the institutions and
individuals charged with upholding national ideology, and that it ultimately
suggests the difficulties of escaping the influence of the nation as a construct.

In chronicling life in the Borderlands, Lone Star offers the spectator a series
of interrelated storylines that foreground the relationships between parents
and children, and, as such, between past and present. As US Army Colonel

2 At times, the dialogue in Lone Star differs from Sayles’s published film script, Men with Guns
and Lone Star (London: Faber and Faber, 1998). All quotes here are from the film.
3 Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 25. As
Anzaldúa states in her preface, at 19, Borderlands are not specific to the Southwest: “the
Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where
people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper
classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”
4 See, respectively, Neil Campbell, quoting Mary Helen Washington, “‘Forget the Alamo’: History, Legend and Memory in John Sayles’ Lone Star,” in Paul Grainge, ed., Memory and Popular Film (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 164; Amy Kaminsky,
“Identity at the Border: Narrative Strategies in Maria Novaro’s El jardín del Edén and John
Sayles’s Lone Star,” Studies in Twentieth Century Literature, 25, 1 (2001), 91–117; Rebecca
M. Gordon, “Psychic Borders and Legacies Left Hanging in Lone Star and Men with Guns,”
in Diane Carson and Heidi Kenaga, eds., Sayles Talk: New Perspectives on Independent
Filmmaker John Sayles (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 215–37; and Joshua
Miller, “The Transamerican Trail to Cerca del Cielo: John Sayles and the Aesthetics of
Multilingual Cinema,” in Doris Sommer, ed., Bilingual Games: Some Literary Investigations
Delmore Payne (Joe Morton) struggles to understand his father, the “Mayor of Darktown” Otis Payne (Ron Canada), high-school history teacher Pilar Cruz (Elizabeth Peña) butts heads with her mother, Councilwoman Mercedes Cruz (Miriam Colón); and, in what might be characterized as the film’s central storyline, Sheriff Sam Deeds (Chris Cooper) attempts to determine if his now-deceased father, the former sheriff Buddy Deeds (Matthew McConaughey), is somehow implicated in the murder of Buddy’s predecessor, Sheriff Charley Wade (Kris Kristofferson). Sam and the spectator alike are surprised, however, to discover evidence of another sort of transgression: Buddy has fathered a daughter out of wedlock, and this daughter, Pilar, is Sam’s high-school sweetheart and the woman with whom he has recently restarted a relationship.

Incest, of course, is generally considered to lurk at the border of not only past and present, but also civilization and savagery. As such, texts that portray incestuous relationships frequently end in disaster or death, as occurs, for instance, in William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! (1936), to which Kim Magowan cogently compares the film. In marked contrast to such texts, Lone Star’s half-siblings opt to continue their relationship without evident tragedy: sitting together in Frontera’s now-abandoned drive-in, as we will see, Sam and Pilar hold hands and decide to remain a couple. Thereby making incest potentially “desirable” in a world in which “borders cannot be properly policed, since they are already transgressed,” Sayles’s film calls into question the rules and regulations that govern society, and that most individuals accept without thinking. For, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari contend, challenges to the general prohibition of incest (and, one might add, other taboo sexual acts as well) reveal and challenge the ways in which society imposes control on its subjects. As Deleuze and Guattari state, “The law tells us: You will not marry your mother, and you will not kill your father. And we...
docile subjects say to ourselves: so that’s what I wanted!” Once “we docile subjects” believe that we harbor unrecognized desires, we are willing to relinquish our right to what Deleuze and Guattari characterize as unbridled desire, settling for restricted and regulated pleasure instead. Questioning the incest prohibition and embracing desire, Sam and Pilar thus engage in a concomitant questioning of the very foundations of capitalist society:

And if we put forth desire as a revolutionary agency, it is because we believe that capitalist society can endure many manifestations of interest, but not one manifestation of desire, which would be enough to make its fundamental strictures explode, even at the kindergarten level.10

Yet even as *Lone Star* critiques the notion of a strictly bordered nation-state, and indeed capitalist society itself, it repeatedly references the individuals and organizations charged with maintaining the status quo and patrolling the borders of the nation—individuals and organizations that Louis Althusser associates with “state apparatuses.”11 In Althusser’s well-known formulation, “ideological state apparatuses” (e.g. schools, churches, families, culture) function to achieve the continuation of the hegemonic order without recourse to violence, whereas the “repressive state apparatus” (e.g. the police, the government, the army) works toward the same goal but relies on force. *Lone Star*, as we have seen, is replete with protagonists who uphold state ideology: Sam, Buddy, and Charley Wade are sheriffs; Delmore is a colonel; Pilar is a schoolteacher; and Mercedes and Otis are, respectively, town council member and unofficial mayor of “Darktown.” Moreover, if Sam and Pilar’s incestuous relationship is key to reading the film as “revolutionary,” it is of note that each of the couple’s encounters in the filmic present occurs within a space linked to a state apparatus. As the couple chat in the sheriff’s office, meet up outside the courthouse and the school, and sit in a now-abandoned drive-in, the spectator is encouraged to recognize the ongoing importance of established ideology, and the potential difficulties inherent in challenging it through even such an act as controversial as rejecting the incest prohibition.

Sam and Pilar’s first encounter in the film occurs in the sheriff’s office, where the star-crossed lovers meet by chance after a prolonged separation. The camera shows Pilar talking to a receptionist through a smudged window, then cuts to show Sam looking at Pilar through a security-grade window. The wire-covered immigration, birth rates, and other demographic shifts all call the notion of a nation’s singular identity into question.”


10 Ibid., 175.

panes serve as a tangible representation of a repressive state apparatus, and foreshadow the flashbacks that reveal Buddy’s forcible separation of the pair as teens; the smudge on the glass hints at the couple’s obscured knowledge of their origins, an open secret for Frontera residents. Reinforcing the characterization of the office as a repressive space, the spectator knows that Pilar has come to the office to find her son, Amado (Gonzalo Castillo), who has been taken in for questioning about stolen electronics; the spectator also knows that Sam is the sheriff who is in charge of the office overseeing his case. Yet as Magowan notes, the use of a largely transparent, albeit barred, window signals the porous nature of the boundary separating the two: “The ‘invisible line’ of glass, introduced here, is repeatedly erected between these lovers as a border whose transparency indicates a potential for crossing.” Sam soon enters the reception area to talk to Pilar, and, after learning of her predicament, arranges for Amado (whose name means “beloved”) to be released. Thus implying that borders can be breached, the scene nonetheless hints at the difficulty of overcoming them completely in its final shot: as Pilar and Amado leave for home, Sam stands to the left of a row of sheriffs’ portraits, reinforcing his position as representative and enforcer of the law.

Sam and Pilar next meet at the dedication of the Buddy Deeds Memorial Courthouse, in a scene that again signals the important place occupied by the institutions that promote and protect the public order. In his comments during the dedication ceremony, Sam reminds viewers of the law’s omnipresence, stating, “I used to think there wasn’t a place in this town you could hide from my old man, and now I’m sure of it.” Sam’s characterization of the law as inescapable is reinforced in the writing on the plaque honoring his father: “Buddy Deeds 1930–1991, Beloved Sheriff and Community Leader, The eyes of Texas are upon you.” Revealing that the maintenance of the public facade requires an erasure of undesirable elements, or at the very least a strategic ignorance, the plaque features an image of Buddy resting his arm protectively around an androgynous child, described as a “Mexican kid” by an onlooker, and a “Chicano-looking boy” in the movie script. Yet Buddy looks not toward the child, but away. He thereby establishes a physical connection with the unnamed child, at the same time as he turns his gaze elsewhere. As Pilar’s mother, introduced as council member “Mrs. Mercedes Cruz,” first holds a smile for the cameras, then cuts the ribbon releasing the fabric that has covered the plaque, many of Frontera’s residents are likely to contemplate the rich, polyvalent possibilities of the scene unfolding before them. Had a Y been substituted for an X in the genetic code of Mercedes’s progeny, the child pictured could be Pilar, whom Buddy similarly embraced (paying the hospital

12 Magowan, 24.
13 Sayles, Men with Guns and Lone Star, 175.
bills when she was born, reading of her progress in letters penned by Mercedes) even as his circumstances compelled him to turn his public gaze elsewhere, in the direction of his wife and son.

Sam and Pilar’s third meeting, in the parking lot of the school where Pilar works as a history teacher, occurs in the space of the ideological state apparatus (ISA) – a space in which Pilar, for one, hopes that tradition and history might be reworked to foreground what she describes as the “complexity of our situation down here.” Sam sits in his car and watches Pilar longingly through dual (and once again transparent) barriers: his car windshield and the windows of the school. As occurred in the sheriff’s office, such divisions are overcome as Pilar exits the building, sees Sam, and tells him, “follow me.” After leading Sam to her mother’s restaurant, the Santa Barbara Café (now closed for the night), Pilar puts on the jukebox music that she remembers from her childhood. Explicitly linking past to present, Chicano country and western singer Freddy Fender croons “Desde que conosco [sic]” (Since I Know) as the couple dance together. In this Spanish-language remake of Ivory Joe Hunter’s “Since I Met You Baby,” featured earlier in the film, Fender both voices Sam’s “knowledge” that his life has changed since discovering that his beloved is true to him, and hints at the difficulties of accurate translations: not only does Fender’s version differ from the English original in key respects, the couple also lack the knowledge (of their origins) that they need most, as they inaccurately interpret their parents’ earlier decision to prohibit their relationship.

Pointing once more to the intersection of past and present, the camera travels back in the scene’s final shot to show the couple through the café’s front window, which is emblazoned with “Santa Barbara.” The café’s name reminds the spectator that Pilar was sent away to Catholic school to prevent her from continuing her relationship with Sam, as the café’s patron Santa Barbara was said to have been imprisoned by her father for disobedience.

In an explicit challenge to the racial prejudice that the protagonists believe motivated their parents’ decision to forbid their relationship, the shot of the couple dancing in the Santa Barbara Café dissolves into a shot of the two in bed together, discovering that sex “feels the same,” “good,” after their long

As Margaret E. Montoya details, the two versions of the songs have different meanings, offering “a contrast between the carnal and sexual love between Sam and Pilar and the familial love between Otis and his grandson” that is highlighted in the scene featuring “Since I Met You Baby.” I would add that the repetition of the song also hints at the convergence of family and romance in Pilar and Sam’s relationship, a fact that they do not yet “know.” Margaret E. Montoya, “Lines of Demarcation in a Town called Frontera: A Review of John Sayles’ Movie Lone Star,” New Mexico Law Review, 27 (1997), 234.

In much the same way, Pilar’s own name reminds the spectator of the tower in which Santa Barbara was locked away. For further discussion of names and their significance in Lone Star, see Campbell, “Forget the Alamo,” 170.
separation. In the private space of his apartment, Sam is for the first time shown without his sheriff’s uniform, momentarily liberated from his official role as guarantor of order. Pilar comments on the blankness of the walls of the apartment, where Sam has lived since separating from his wife, Bunny (Frances McDormand), and Sam replies, “Don’t have kids. The other pictures – I don’t know – it’s nothing that I want to look back on.” Pilar comments, “Like your story is over,” then hastens to reassure Sam, “It isn’t. Uh-uh. Not by a long shot.” In her remarks, Pilar both references and refutes Sam’s lack of the traditional, family-based narrative of identity in which the future is encapsulated in the offspring borne. While blank walls could signal loss, Pilar’s statement, in conjunction with the scene’s apparent lack of an institutional framework, suggests that they also indicate the possibility of a blank slate on which the two might write a new and more compelling “story.”

_Lone Star_’s final scene, in which Sam sits with Pilar on the hood of his car in Frontera’s abandoned drive-in, cements the importance of cinema as an ISA in the film and suggests both loss and potential gain. As Sam tells Pilar of their shared blood, knowledge he has stumbled across during his investigation into Charley Wade’s death, the photograph that Sam offers Pilar as proof of Mercedes’s liaison with Buddy rectifies Sam’s lack of a pictorial genealogical narrative; on the other hand, however, the photographic evidence he presents threatens to undermine the future vision of his life with Pilar that he wishes to project on the walls of his house and, by extension, on the blank drive-in screen facing him.¹⁶ Sam, who has forsaken his uniform in favor of more casual attire, indicates the possibility of rejecting societal bias against incest in a measured statement that nonetheless reveals the ongoing influence of prevailing ideology: “If I met you for the first time today, I’d still want to be with you.” Pilar then offers a more decisive declaration of her desire to continue their relationship, establishing an explicit break with past history in the film’s final lines: “We start from scratch . . . all that other stuff, and all that history – the hell with it, right? Forget the Alamo.”

In telling Sam to forget the Alamo, Pilar offers the possibility of starting anew in response to Sam’s revelation of shared genes. As she jettisons an emblematic moment in regional history and its contemporary influence on local identities, she “rejects not the past per se but what the Alamo represents: artificial and reinforced lines drawn between official histories, each contending

¹⁶ While Partha Chatterjee differentiates between public and private space in _The Nation and Its Fragments_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), arguing that the Indian nation is conceptualized in the realm of the private, _Lone Star_ demonstrates that there is no such division; the walls of the home will ultimately reflect the same flickering images as the public screen. As Althusser states, “It is unimportant whether the institutions . . . are ‘public’ or ‘private.’ What matters is how they function.” Althusser, 111.
for the right to establish exclusive rootedness in the land.”

Indicating her refusal to be limited by a highly symbolic and divisive clash in which individuals must adjust their identities to rigidly fixed, nationally based constraints, she expands upon her earlier comments, delivered during a contentious school meeting, in which she argues for the need to portray “part of the complexity of our situation down here: cultures coming together in both positive and negative ways.”

Pilar’s comments in public and private fora alike point to the nuances of nation and identity in the present moment, while her revisionist approach to history also signals the productive and labile power of individuals living in the Borderlands, and their ability to choose their personal and national histories. For if Homi Bhabha correctly asserts that the colonial subject is asked to mimic his master in full knowledge of his necessary failure to do so, and is thus relegated to a perpetual state of “not quite/not white,” Pilar demonstrates a subversive ability to employ her “not quite”-ness to achieve her own ends, turning such formulations on their head. In offering to “start from scratch,” presumably in a new place, she implicitly affirms the advantages of metaphorically darkening her skin, foregoing her claim to Anglo paternity and thus whitewashing the historical record, with the specific goal of permitting an incestuous relationship.

Inserting her comments within a specifically national framework (“Forget the Alamo”) and recasting incest as potentially unproblematic, Pilar seeks to articulate not only a personal, but also a (post-)national modus operandi. Speaking to Sam in front of one screen, even as her words are carried through time and space to the spectator who watches her on another, Pilar hints at the possibility of using culture to encourage change. Advocating the unregulated desire that Deleuze and Guattari maintain can cause capitalist society’s “fundamental strictures [to] explode,” Pilar (and Lone Star more generally) thereby offers viewers what Alison Landsberg has termed a “prosthetic memory”:

“Prosthetic memories” are indeed “personal” memories, as they derive from engaged and experientially-oriented encounters with the mass media’s various technologies of

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18 Campbell notes that Lone Star refers to the debate over multiculturalism that occurred during the US “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s, reminding his reader of Lynne Cheney’s 1988 argument that “history textbooks needed to be like those of the ‘early decades of the century… filled with stories – the magic of myths, fables, and tales of heroes, providing symbols to share… help[ing] us all, no matter how diverse our backgrounds, feel part of a common undertaking.” Campbell, 163 (ellipses in original). See also on this point Miller, “Transamerican Trail,” and Sugg, “Multicultural Masculinities.”
20 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 175.
memory. But because prosthetic memories are not natural, not the possession of a single individual, let alone a particular family or ethnic group, they conjure up a more public past, a past that is not at all privatized. The pasts that prosthetic memories open up are available to individuals across racial and ethnic lines.\(^{\text{21}}\)

From this vantage point, the blank movie screen represents the possibility of a new narrative for siblings and spectator alike. When Sam finds out the true history of his family, a past prosthetic memory is seemingly displaced, potentially permitting a rewriting of the narratives foisted upon the siblings in their youth, as well as the traditional incest narrative in which the sin of sex between brother and sister is best punished by death.

ISAs such as cinema, however, only allow for the possibility of limited contestation and change within the prevailing ideological system, and *Lone Star* in fact establishes an explicit connection between cinema, ideology, and the repressive state apparatus that uses force to uphold the status quo. For one, many of *Lone Star*’s multiple cinematic intertexts foreground the law:\(^{\text{22}}\) Sayles himself cites as influences Orson Welles’s *Touch of Evil* (1958), Robert M. Young’s *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) (and the song of the same title), and Américo Paredes’s *With a Pistol in His Hand*;\(^{\text{23}}\) *Lone Star* again foregrounds the connection between ISA and repressive state apparatus in a flashback in which Sam remembers making out with Pilar at the drive-in as a teenager. The scene begins with a shot of the drive-in screen, which shows two women who are running through a field, their progress slowed by the fact that they are chained together. Linking ideology to repression, the women are in fact attempting to escape the law in Eddie Romero’s *Black Mama, White Mama* (1972).\(^{\text{24}}\) Further tracing a line between the ideological power of cinema and the repressive force of the law, Sheriff Buddy Deeds soon arrives to separate the young lovers. The camera pans down to show Buddy’s silhouette against the screen: as Buddy shines his flashlight into the parked cars in search of his son, he embodies ideology’s repressive counterpart, mimicking the


\(^{\text{24}}\) A drive-in movie featuring Pam Grier, *Black Mama, White Mama* is also known as *Chained Women, Chains of Hate, Hat, Hard, and Mean*, and *Women in Chains*. In the film, two women prisoners (one black, one white) are chained together for transfer. They escape, and must work together to achieve their separate goals.
mechanical projector that passes light through film to put larger-than-life images (and ideology) on the screen.

Once more highlighting cinema’s links to state ideology, *Lone Star* also employs its signature pans to erase the distinction between one moment in time and another, amplifying what Jean-Louis Baudry characterizes as the rendering of cinema’s ideological effects through its sequential integration of still shots into time:

The meaning effect produced does not depend only on the content of the images but also on the material procedures by which an illusion of continuity, dependent on the persistence of vision, is restored from discontinuous elements. These separate frames have between them differences that are indispensable for the creation of an illusion of continuity, of a continuous passage (movement, time). But only on one condition can these differences create this illusion: they must be effaced as differences.²⁵

In Hollywood cinema, cuts mark the transition between one scene and the next, even as they more generally promote an “illusion of continuity.” *Lone Star* furthers this illusion—and highlights cinema’s ideological effects—through pans that remove the distinction between past and present, moving effortlessly from one moment in time to another and back again through flashbacks.²⁶

As Sayles asserts of scenes that might begin in the present, then, via a pan over a tabletop, or a river, move neatly to the past,

there’s not even the separation of a dissolve, which is a soft cut. The purpose of a cut or a dissolve is to say this is a border ... and I wanted to erase that border and show that these people are still reacting to things in the past.²⁷

Preparing to eat lunch with friends, for example, Mayor Hollis Pogue (Clifton James) finds himself interrupted by Sam, who encourages him to tell how then-deputy Buddy displaced his boss to become sheriff. Hollis begins his story by linking his present location to that of the night in question: “It was in here ... Started over a basket of tortillas.” The camera pans slowly from the mayor’s hand to the basket of tortillas on the table in front of him. Another hand reaches into the basket from the opposite side of the table and lifts up a tortilla to uncover a folded ten-dollar bill. Tracking up, the camera reveals then-Sheriff Wade, moving the spectator into the past and allowing him to see (rather than hear, in Hollis’s voice) how Buddy confronts his boss the night

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²⁷ Quoted in West and West, 15.
before Wade mysteriously disappears, telling him that he refuses to participate in various bribery and extortion schemes. Panning from Buddy’s satisfied face to Sam’s frowning countenance after Wade leaves the restaurant, the film then brings the viewer back to the filmic present, as Hollis echoes Buddy in requesting more beer: “Más cerveza, por favor.” In this way, the film highlights cinema’s ability to “efface” the difference between one moment (or shot) and another, pointing to cinema’s ideological effects.

Underscoring cinema’s links to nation-based ideologies through pans and plot, Lone Star reifies the very borders it challenges, demonstrating, as George B. Handley writes, that a transnational paradigm does not mean the end of nation-based interests and limitations: “The desire to resituate ‘America’ in a broader and more plural hemispheric context has much to recommend it, but such generosity of vision is no guarantee that we can avoid replicating a U.S. entrapment within itself.” While I agree with Handley on this point, I do not concur with his argument in its entirety, questioning in particular his assertion that Lone Star nonetheless signals a certain hope:

It is the agency of the reader, like the agency of Sam and Pilar turning away from the photograph of Pilar’s parents and facing an empty screen, that creates new possibilities that are free from the prescriptions of history . . . History is not owned by the past, by our fathers, or by official powers, but by our imagination.

As in the tragedies to which Handley and others compare the film, I would suggest instead that Lone Star might more accurately be considered to reveal such claims as among what Gabriela Basterra terms the “necessary” fictions that we assume to justify our ability to exert the power of choice and retain our subjectivity:

They are fictions, we have constructed them, but we cannot do without them because they constitute what we are . . . In fact, as Sloterdijk and Žižek convincingly argue, ideology achieves more support, proves more influential, and thus works at its best precisely when its constructedness or “falsity” is revealed.

Paradoxically, then, Lone Star supports prevailing ideology even as it unmasks it, holding out the quintessential “American” dream of imagining new histories and living (a)lone at the same time as it unravels the possibility of doing so. In suggesting that she and Sam, for example, “Forget the Alamo,” and in advocating an alternate rendering of history, Pilar proves one of “those teachers who . . . attempt to turn the few weapons they can find in the history

and learning they ‘teach’ against the ideology, the system, and the practices in which they are trapped,” but whose “own devotion contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School.” In much the same way, while Pilar attempts to operate outside the confines of established ideology in advocating a relationship with Sam, the couple will in all likelihood only pass for solitary: it is probable that they will leave Frontera, where their parents’ affair is well known by the community, to maintain a facade of exogamic normality. The couple’s decision to pursue a relationship that will never lead to reproduction also provides a convenient escape from the incest taboo, even as it also signals a rejection of the societal value placed on this outcome. For, pointing to what Sayles describes as an “individual accommodation” and Magowan characterizes as a “loophole,” Pilar indicates, “I can’t get pregnant any more, if that’s what the rule is about.”

Again suggesting the difficulties of escaping the nation as a lived construct, shared genealogies may not be recognized even when they are made explicit. In an interview, for instance, Sayles differentiates his ending from that of Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude, referencing Pilar’s aforementioned comment in stating that “their children won’t be born with a pig’s tail because, as Pilar says, ‘I can’t get pregnant again.’” As is well known, One Hundred Years of Solitude provides a magically real account of Latin American history through a narrative of the events surrounding the incestuously inclined Buendía family; when family members at last succumb, unaware, to their endogamous desire, the birth of their monstrous, pig-tailed child marks the end of the family and its narrative. In his disavowal of the connection between his film and García Márquez’s novel, Sayles belies a connection between north and south, failing to recognize the similarity of the tension operative in One Hundred Years of Solitude and Lone Star between the protagonists’ incestuous, retrograde desire and time’s forward thrust. In García Márquez’s novel, Buendía family members seek to decode the writings on the parchments left by Melquíades; in Lone Star, Sam works to unearth the answer to a forty-year-old murder mystery. In both cases, the narratives imply an orderly sequence of events, either through the arrangement of words (and

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32 See, respectively, West and West, 16; and Magowan, 28. See also Ann duCille, “Response: The Sterile Cuckoo Racha: Debugging Lone Star,” in Arredondo et al., Chicana Feminisms, 352, who queries, “Historically, sterilization has been used to contain and control the growth of certain unpopular populations, including, if not especially, people of color. Is sterility also a containment strategy here[?]”.

33 Quoted in West and West, 16.
thereby occurrences) on the page, or by the cause-and-effect relationship between events in the distant past and the present. In both cases as well, the linear narrative, braced by time’s intransigent nature, is undermined by incest or its threat, both of which imply a doubling back on time itself, a return to the past (and one’s origins), rather than movement forward toward the future. Indeed, the image of Sam to the left of the row of sheriffs’ portraits early in the film signals his unstable, contradictory position at the beginning and the end of the temporal progression of which he forms part. Too, the loss of the written word at the end of One Hundred Years of Solitude is echoed in Lone Star’s closing image of a blank, torn movie screen.

Calling attention to the act of interpretation through its focus on permeable borders between past and present, Mexico and the United States, and one family and another, Lone Star demonstrates the existence of institutions and ideologies that complicate the chances of success: while murderers may be discovered, bloodlines and genealogies are not so easily deciphered, and all bedfellows are potentially familiar. In this regard, it is telling that the incest at the film’s end comes as a surprise, even though the writing is (quite literally) on the wall. In a pointed mixed metaphor, for instance, local bartender Cody (Leo Burmester) reminisces to Sam about how Buddy as sheriff served as "referee in this damn menudo we got down here. He understood how most folk don’t want their salt and sugar in the same jar." While Cody intends to speak of “salt and pepper,” or black and white – as he makes clear in indicating the interracial couple across the bar that has motivated his remarks – “salt and sugar” accurately sums up the supposed danger of miscegenation, signaling the crippling inability to accurately and appropriately distinguish between difference and sameness. Additionally, in the flashback in which Sam remembers being with Pilar at the drive-in the night that Buddy discovers them, it is, as we have seen, the presciently titled Black Mama, White Mama that plays in the background, a coy reference to the two mothers of Buddy Deed’s children.

The most salient example of the film’s foreshadowing, however, occurs as Sam leaves the drive-in movie theater, now abandoned, where he has been reminiscing about the long-ago night that his father forcibly separated him from Pilar. Sam believes that his father’s actions are motivated by racial prejudice. The camera, however, pans to the sign where upcoming features were once announced. Dilapidated, the sign features a jumble of letters, some of which spell “I-N-C-E-S” when rearranged. Leaving off the final letter as if to allude to the taboo nature of the referenced act – the indiscretion of which the community may whisper but does not speak aloud – the camera pans to

34 Magowan, 30 n. 14.
35 Ibid., n. 28.
show Sam’s car driving away, then pans back to the image of the sign, underscoring its importance as a (barely) scrambled message offered for the viewer to decode. Once again, the pans in this scene underscore the importance of the past in the present; moreover, the series of individual letters that the spectator must combine to restore meaning to an otherwise random mix of images mimics the way in which cinema pieces together individual shots to promote an illusion of continuity.

While clues such as these could serve to alert the perspicacious viewer to the I-N-C-E-S-t-uous nature of Sam and Pilar’s relationship, viewers are unlikely to ascertain the blood ties that join the couple in advance of the film’s final revelation of this fact. As Felleman states, the viewer suspects that he should have known that Sam and Pilar were siblings all along:

the shock we feel is both a function of the greatness of the taboo that has been breached and the disturbing suspicion that we knew this already. The lovers confirm it. Pilar says, “From the first time I saw you at school . . . all those years we were married to other people, I always felt like we were connected.”

Emphasizing connections and questioning borders, Lone Star nonetheless encourages the spectator to disregard any “disturbing suspicions” related to Sam and Pilar, spinning a set of parallel, genealogically based narratives that seem to separate black, white, and Hispanic. Pilar may laugh at her mother’s “Spanish” pretensions, and Otis Payne, “Mayor of Darktown,” may insinuate that blood “only means what you let it,” but such assertions function and achieve their subversive power only within the well-established parameters of US racial categorizations. Buddy, for instance, was known for maintaining divisions between individuals of different races for, as sheriff, he never would have tolerated the presence of an interracial couple in a public space; Sam may thus consider him a likely suspect in the murder of Sheriff Charley Wade, but does not entertain the possibility that he is guilty of miscegenation instead.

Implicitly accepting Buddy’s paradigm in the film, we, as ideologically influenced viewers, believe until the end that Sam and Pilar represent, in Anzaldúa’s terms, “the lifeblood of two worlds,” worlds that may come together but that begin as separate spheres. The film encourages this tendency even as it debunks the pretensions on which it is based, mirroring Buddy’s paradigm both visually and thematically. In a simulation of politically correct inclusiveness, for example, Mercedes and Pilar look Hispanic; Otis and his son Delmore, black; and Buddy and Sam, white. Pilar, in particular, is strongly identified as the Chicana daughter of first-generation Mexican immigrants,

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36 Felleman, 161, original emphasis.
37 Referencing what she describes as the “ethnically correct cast,” duCille goes as far as to suggest that “all except perhaps Pilar are typecast bit players who strut and fret their seconds on the stage, sometimes full of sound and fury, but ultimately signifying nothing new.” DuCille, 351.
both through the revisionist history she promotes in the classroom and through the more palatable “food and music and all” that her mother offers diners in her restaurant. In much the same way, at the same time that the US–Mexico border is actively deconstructed by the “King of Tires,” as we have seen, there is nonetheless a marked contrast in Lone Star’s depiction of Mexico and the United States. As Sam crosses the bridge to Mexico, a commercial for the “Rey de las llantas” plays in the background, announcing “un surtido gigantesco de gomas de todas marcas” (“a huge assortment of tires of all brands”) and the camera cuts from a sign for “lonches y tacos,” to a gold bust in front of palm trees, to a street sign for “Matamoros.” These images, in conjunction with scenes demonstrating the tide of illegal immigrants crossing to Frontera, contradict the king’s statement, and encourage the viewer to recognize the existence of national entities, even in a globalized era.

Demonstrating the limitations of the “necessary fictions” that tell us otherwise, Lone Star reveals the interconnectedness of modern life, which is always already led in the Borderlands. Limning the national as necessarily transnational, Lone Star thereby reveals the fragmentation of modern media and their inability to construct an image of the nation as a modern whole, demonstrating that, as Deleuze and Guattari state, “We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers.” At the same time, Lone Star demonstrates the ongoing importance and influence of the ideology that informs our perspective, as we continue to believe in the separation of nations, states, and individuals from different cultures and races alike. If Frontera’s drive-in once featured mamas from different races, yoked together to accomplish common goals, the screen in the filmic present gazes vacantly at its lovelorn protagonists, tattered and battered by the passage of the years – and the coming, and going, of its audiences. With the drive-in largely empty, as spectators watch their films on television screens, in multiplexes, or on their laptops, Lone Star offers the spectator a tale of a series of fragmentary remains, demonstrating both the possibilities and the limitations of the global imagination.

Colón, the actress who plays Mexican immigrant Mercedes, is in fact Puerto Rican. The use of a Coca-Cola bottle in this scene is not coincidental. While Coca-Cola convinces consumers across the world that they too can share “a Coke and a smile,” first-hand access to First World goods may not be as easy as it is in the company’s shiny Atlanta headquarters. Coke holds out the promise of prosperity, constituting itself as part and parcel of the American dream, yet it also represents a transparent source of division, a shared experience that nonetheless occurs under widely varied circumstances. See Magowan, 24; and Sugg, “Multicultural Masculinities,” 122, who argues that Lone Star can thus be considered a “fiction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), one that celebrates bicultural and transnational contact yet ensures that particular economic and political structures remain intact.” Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 42.