"National Allegories of Violence in Sin dejar huella and Perfume de Violeta: Nadie te Oye: Localizing Global Cinema"

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The international success of the Mexican film, Amores Perros (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000) has been acclaimed for initiating a revival in Mexican cinema which had been floundering since 1994 when the privatization of the film industry, the devaluation of the peso, another economic crisis and the sexenio change of administration put the future of Mexican filmmaking in jeopardy. In 1998, the Mexican film industry produced only eleven feature-length films; in 2001, one year after the international release of Amores Perros, that figure had more than doubled to twenty-eight. Still, while films like Antonio Serrano's comedy Sex, Shame and Tears (Sexo, pudor y lágrimas, 1998) did better at the domestic box-office than Hollywood's The Phantom Menace, only two Mexican films – Amores Perros and Alfonso Cuarón's Y Tu Mama Tambien –were financially successful in the global marketplace of cinema. Conversely, two other films—Sin dejar huella, directed by Maria Novaro and released the same year as Amores Perros, and Maryse Sistach's Perfume de Violeta: Nadie te Oye (Violet Perfume: Nobody Hears You) that came out a year later in 2001, never achieved the popular and financial success that Iñárritu and Cuarón's films did despite the fact that both films were recognized at numerous international film festivals and that Novaro and Sistach have each produced a number of critically successful films over the past two decades in an industry that has remained male-dominated.1

In Sin Dejar Huella, Aurelia, a single mother who works in one of the hundreds of maquiladoras that line the Mexican-U.S. border, flees with money she made selling the cocaine she stole from her drug-dealing boyfriend. Her dream is to find a job in a tourist hotel in Cancún in order to support her two young sons. Along the road, she joins forces with Marilú, also known as Ana, a college-educated smuggler of counterfeit Mayan artifacts who is fleeing a corrupt federále. Marilú is also heading for the Yucatán peninsula to meet with the Mayan Indian who mass produces the fake relics. Throughout the film, the two women confront various forms of socially specific violence against that permeate contemporary Mexican society. Perfume de Violeta narrates a violent coming of age story about two fifteen year old school girls, Yessica and Miriam, who live in one of the lower- class vecinidades or urban neighborhoods that ring Mexico City and who suffer daily the various forms of sexually charged emotional and physically violence that confronts Mexican women of all ages and classes. The close friendship of these two unlikely allies offer them a temporarily respite from the violent realities of life that surrounds them. While the two films do attend to the causes of social-political violence,

their attention is primarily focused on the effects of this violence on women's everyday lives.

In 2006, the year of Iñárritu's Babel, Cuarón's Children of Men, and Del Toro's Pan's Labyrinth, Mexico released fifty-three films, according to the Mexican Film Institute, the official government film agency. Yet, despite the fact that the 2006 Hollywood Oscars honored "los tres amigos" – Alejandro González Iñárritu, Guillermo Del Toro, and Alfonso Cuarón, with a total of sixteen Oscar nominations, few viewers outside of Mexico were able to see the other fifty Mexican films unless they attended one of the major international film festivals at Cannes, Berlin, or Toronto. More importantly, although the above three films are directed by Mexicans, and international critics keep referring to them as "Mexican films," unlike Sin Dejar Huella and Perfume de Violeta, none of the Oscar nominees were produced in Mexico, none are being distributed by Mexican companies, none are set in Mexico (except a short segment of Babel that takes place on the California/Baja California border), none feature central characters who are Mexican, and finally, none of the narratives are concerned with Mexico as a geographic or cultural space.

The extent to which films like Babel, Children of Men, and Pan's Labyrinth are identified as "Mexican" films even though they have little to do with Mexico in terms of subject or institutional affiliations, reveals how the term "national" functions within the rubric of what has come to be known as a borderless or global cinema. One of the more successful strategies on the part of distribution agencies operating in the global marketplace has involved marketing a category of film that can be called "national cinema" that refers to films the supposedly exhibit localized or national representations. In this practice, we understand that the label of the "national" does not disappear but instead functions as a generic marker of "foreignness," or "exoticism:" in this way the label of "national" is utilized as a marketing or branding tool. National films do especially well in the art cinema circuit that is facilitated by the proliferation of major international film festivals in which "national films" gain international recognition. At the same time, a national film cannot be "too national." If it wants to appeal to a global audience, a national film must supplement its localness with a global aesthetic that appeals to an audience educated through globalizing models of cinema practices.

Notwithstanding the international success of Iñárritu, Del Toro, and Cuarón's films, it is an undeniable fact that no matter how well a Mexican film does domestically, it will only realize a significant profit if it can find an international audience.2 Independent filmmakers must compete for IMCINE support which generally covers about sixty percent of a film's budget (generally around $1 million dollars). Producers with higher budget requirements must make up the shortfall through co-production investments from foreign investors.3 In order to attract both IMCINE support and co-production funding, directors need to convince funders that their film projects will attract a globally situated audience, thus limiting the kinds of films that will eventually be supported. The combination of national with a successful global box-office aesthetic is one of the things that will guarantee this return. Such a policy productively captures the essential definition of contemporary global cinema as a cinema practice that marries the global with the local.

The success of films like Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000) and Amores Perros indicate that in the global economy of film production, the moniker of,

"national" has become a marketing tool. In an age in which most non-Hollywood films can only find commercial success in the global market, these films often rely on the exoticism of the national to sell themselves. The international success of Amores Perros, for example, was based in part on the fact that the global aesthetic of violence was situated in the streets of Mexico City. It combined the exotic, in the form of the "national," with the familiar or transnational in the form of a popular and easily recognizable set of aesthetic cinematic practices. In fact, many critics have identified Amores Perros as a "Latino" Pulp Fiction. Despite the fact that many national filmmakers, including, I would argue, Iñárritu and Cuarón, have adopted the moniker of "national filmmaker" as part of their star text, and have used images of the nation—in this case Mexico—to mark their films as "national films."

Other filmmakers, such as Novaro and Sistach, while not rejecting transnational audiences, remain committed to producing films that primarily address their Mexican audiences by focusing on the representation of local identities. Both films have garnered national and international acclaim: Sin Dejar Huella received two "Ariels" (Mexico's version of the Oscar) and won the Latin American Cinema Award at the Sundance film festival in 2001. Perfume de Violeta was awarded three "Ariels," won over twenty prizes on the international film festival circuit, and was Mexico's official selection for the Academy Awards (instead of Y Tu Mama Tambien). While some critics might argue that Amores Perros was simply "better" than Sin dejar huella and Perfume de Violeta, I suggest that Iñárritu's film was more successful at the international box office because of its appropriation of a global aesthetics of violence that appeals directly to a globally identified audience. Consider the following reviews: Michael Wilmington of the Chicago Tribune hails it as "a fiercely brilliant film of such wrenching impact, nonstop drive and unpredictability that watching it becomes an exhilarating ride" (CITATION). Mark Savlov, writing in the Austin Chronicle, asserts that the film **"**packs a complex emotional wallop that rivals the recent Traffic or Tarantino's Pulp Fiction…its dark, almost surrealist tone escalates it high above the usual gory gunfare and marks it as a film to be reckoned with." (4/13/2001). On the other hand, the following review of Perfume de Violeta notes that "director Maryse Sistach eschews rabble-rousing melodramatics in favour of a more restrained, observational approach, filling her frames with subtle images of entrapment, and there's a brace of fine performances from the female leads.…Admittedly it's not as cinematic as the best Latino movies – the scale seems more suited to TV – but there's an intimacy here that makes up for any lack of scope (Tom Dawson, on-line film site, "Total Film."). The above reviews demonstrate the ascendancy and popularity of a global cinematic aesthetic that favors "wrenching impact, nonstop drive, and unpredictability" over films that exhibit a "restrained, observational approach."

More specifically, the aesthetics of violence that Amores Perros presents and that both Sin dejar huella and Perfume de Violeta reject is an aesthetic that the cultural critic, Henry A. Giroux calls "hyper real violence." For Giroux, there are three roads filmmakers can take in their imagining of cinematic violence. First, there is "ritualistic violence" that is featured in such films as the Die-Hard and Lethal Weapon series. This type of representational violence is dominated by the demands of the genre, is "pure spectacle in form and superficial in content," and makes no pretence to social reality. Hyper real violence also relies on spectacle but, according to Giroux, the difference

between this category and ritualistic violence is that hyper-real violence supersedes the aesthetic realm and has political effects. It a form of "ultra violence" that reduces everyday violence to a representational aesthetic and subordinates it to an "aesthetic of realism." Hyper real violence is "banal," to use Hannah Arendt's terminology; while visually stunning, it translates everyday forms of violence into mundane events, functioning to isolate audiences from the wider social context of violence in the real world. Giroux's concern is that this aesthetic of violence allows audiences to comfortably refuse any complicity or involvement for engaging the relationship between symbolic and real violence.4 It is this particular cinematic aesthetic that has currency in the international film market and is exemplified by films such as Reservoir Dogs, Pulp Fiction, Natural Born Killers, and Amores Perros.

The central subject of both Sin dejar huella and Perfume de Violeta is violence; specifically, the films address head-on the problem of aggressive, brutal violent acts against women that are linked to larger socio- political forces in Mexico such as drug dealing, neo-liberal economic policies, and a pervasive and enduring institutionalized form of patriarchy.5 However, the violence portrayed in Perfume de Violeta and Sin Dejar Huella is articulated through a third category that Giroux calls "symbolic violence," a cinematic strategy that manipulates images of violence in order to evoke an intellectual engagement on the part of the spectator. According to Giroux, symbolic violence has a determining role that functions both inside and outside of the film in that actions and consequences portrayed in the film only make sense in relation to viewers' experience of the historical real.6 In other words, whereas hyper real violence refuses viewer identification, symbolic violence insists on it. While the aesthetic of hyper real violence is recognizably part of a global concept of cinema, symbolic violence is culturally specific and thus its allegorical meanings are accessible only to particularly situated audiences.

As Robert Stam and Ismail Xavier put it, filmic allegories function to "encode cultural-political messages about the larger society." Although allegorical strategies can be found in many films and film practices, Stam and Xavier see the allegorical tendency especially pronounced in the work of filmmakers concerned with the question of "the national." This question mediates a number of linked concerns on the part of some filmmakers that include "the desire for personal expression, a preoccupation with certain themes, an engagement with film language, an attitude toward the spectator" (296-97). At a moment when the concept of national cinema within the context of the global film producing machine is being critically interrogated, I argue that we need to retain the specificity of national cinema in order to identify the way in which national and diasporic audiences engage with films they identify as culturally significant The importance of acknowledging a national cinematic practice is not the same as privileging an authentic national-cultural specificity. According to Stephen Crofts, a nationally specific cinema may be marked by a specific cultural context without recourse to the "homogenizing myths" of nationalism and national identity (388). Instead, we might recognize national cinema as a set of aesthetic and narrative practices that speak to audiences at the level of cultural identity.

While there is no question that violence against women is a global epidemic, Sin dejar huella and Perfume de Violeta stage representations of sexual violence that operate at the level of the national, reflecting a desire to speak to an audience through a locally

recognizable set of discourses. In this sense, they respond to what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call the “historical particularity” of women’s relationship to local and global patriarchal structures (17). In an earlier essay, I situated a number of contemporary Mexican films directed by women within the contexts of Mexican women's material relation to reality and to gendered identities complicated by race and class divisions.7 Although I rejected the notion that we could define a woman's or feminist cinema by a set of aesthetic criteria based on form or content, at the same time, I was interested in exploring the ways in which women's films constitute what Lucy Fischer calls a "counter heritage" and what Elissa J. Rashkin has referred to as an “other cinema” in the particular case of Mexican cinema. This other cinema can be identified primarily by a set of cinematic practices that evidence a concern with particular narrativizations and representations of women’s everyday experience and are especially relevant to a global, commercial cinema that is constrained by powerful institutional and economic controls.

Cinematic violence

Representations of violence have been central to motion pictures since its inception with films like Edison’s Electrocuting an Elephant, made in 1903. Early documentary films recorded military battles and the effects of horrific natural disasters such as fires and floods. Later Hollywood genres such as the western, the war film, and the gangster film are replete with graphic, visceral representations of violence. Other national cinemas also have histories of film genres whose formulas relied on the depiction of human and natural acts of violence. More recently, a cinema of violent attractions that many argue is fundamentally different from earlier representations of violence, has achieved widespread popularity in the global film market. This cinema can be traced to the transformation of classical film genres that occurred in Hollywood during the 1960s and 70s as exemplified by films such as Arthur Penn’s Bonnie and Clyde (1967) and Sam Peckinpah’s The Wild Bunch (1969).

According to Marsha Kinder, these films are differentiated by their formal tactics that work to achieve a “narrative orchestration of violence.” This orchestration is achieved through an organization of narrative structure, editing strategies, the manipulation of the gaze through shot construction, as well as mise-en-scene design and the use of music. The management of these elements aims to elicit particular emotional and physiological responses (64-64). More recently, films such as Quentin Tarantino’s Reservoir Dogs and Pulp Fiction and Oliver Stone’s Natural Born Killers modernized Penn and Peckinpah’s aesthetic to construct what some call a “postmodern” or ironic cinema of violence that is marked by a relentless onslaught of effects-ridden and graphic spectacles, bloody corpses, a high-decibel sound design, and a kind of hyperkinetic editing style.

Giroux points out, however, that in a culture in which “violence has become a source of pleasure,” cinematic violence is never innocent or accidental or merely aesthetic; it has political implications and effects. On one hand, filmed representations of violence “can be used to probe the depths of everyday life in ways that expand one's understanding of tyranny and domination.” On the other hand, they “can also be used to maximize the sleazy side of pleasure, reinforce demeaning stereotypes, or provoke cheap voyeurism.” Giroux’s intent is not to wholeheartedly condemn representational violence; in fact, he argues that there is a pedagogical role for it, one that could participate in

educating young audiences about the social effects of violence. But he is concerned about the way in which representational violence has been commercialized as a kind of hip avant garde that is interested primarily in activating emotional and visceral responses while ignoring the fact that all forms of violence emerge from and are sustained by hierarchical structures of difference and inequalities.

Cinematic allegories portray situations and events as well as abstract ideas through symbolic material objects, persons, and actions. While allegories are often understood to symbolize generalizations about human experience, allegory may also refer to a way of reading a film in which the viewer understands the story as a metaphor that refers to a historical or contemporary event or process. At the level of representation, Sin Dejar Huella and Perfume de Violeta generalize the pervasive practice of violence against women that permeates most societies across the globe. However, it is at the interpretive level that the violence in Sin Dejar Huella and Perfume de Violeta makes particular sense to Mexican audiences in that both films work to produce a specific cultural allegory through explicit social references by locating characters and actions within recognizable locations and social moments. As Angus Fletcher notes, "the whole point of allegory is that it does not need to be read exegetically; it often has a literal level that makes good enough sense all by itself. But somehow this literal surface suggests a peculiar doubleness of intention, and while it can, as it were, get along without interpretation, it becomes much richer and more interesting if given interpretation" (7).

As noted above, Sin Dejar Huella is often referred to as a "Mexican Thelma and Louise," because its narrative is structured through the generic device of the "buddy road movie." These reviews ignore what I see as a central thematic of the film indicated by its title, Sin Dejar Huella or "Without a trace." The two women first meet at a truck stop in Cuidad Juarez, the Mexican border town where over 4,000 women have disappeared, "without a trace," and 400 women have been brutally murdered after being sexually abused. On February 18, 2004, Mexican officials released a white-washed report, the result of a two-year inquiry into the murder of women in Ciudad Juarez over the past decade.8 According to the state's report, "of the 4,456 women reported missing, 47 of them really vanished. Of those 47, 10 have been found," it said.9 As if to explain the fact that no perpetrator had been found, the report concluded that Ciudad Juarez "never occupied first place in the country in terms of the number of women violently killed."10

While Sin dejar huella deals with the general issue of violence against women, it only obliquely addresses the specific case of the Cuidad Juarez murders. In an early scene, Marilú is being interrogated by Mendizábel, the corrupt federalé who is out to bust her illegal operation of selling fake Mayan artifacts and to sleep with her at the same time. Mendizábel's interrogation is blatant sexual harassment: hovering threateningly above her, he repeatedly thrusts his groin into her shoulder. He then leans over her, sniffing her hair and asks, suggestively, "How did you know I was so hot on your trail?" Marilú replies, purposively mispronouncing his name "you're always hot on my trail, Mendízabel." The federalé corrects her pronunciation: "You make my name sound so pretty. Maybe that's why I get wet dreams. It's your fucking little accent. You know how I follow your trail? By your smell alone!" While, in general, it's easy to read the emotional sexual abuse that riddles the scene, there is a brief interchange that specifically localizes the abuse: Marilú reprimands her interrogator by suggesting that he should "solve the murders of the women Juarez and leave me in piece." The narrative makes no

obvious connection between this scene and the political fact of the Cuidad Juarez murders; the meaning is only available to those Mexican audiences familiar with its history.

In another brief scene that operates outside of the central narrative of the film, Aurelia and her son watch a news story about a recent murder while sharing a pizza. Aurelia's son's eyes are glued to the TV set as he watches a news report about the finding of yet another nude female body in Ciudad Juarez. Although Aurelia works in a maquilladora located at the border, she appears to be unaware of the murders and asks her son, "what are you watching?" He doesn't answer, and after a brief pause, while she, too stares at the screen, she says to him, "The pizza's cold; if you want, I'll heat it up," a statement that reflects the state's refusal to acknowledge the obvious pattern of linked homicides. Because the news story is not part of the film's central story, it doesn't address itself to Aurelia. Instead, it operates as a kind of aside to Sin dejar huella's Mexican audience. It is the only time that Novaro breaks from her trademark aesthetic by presenting the news story through seemingly real, grainy news footage. This narratively insignificant scene is particularly revealing in that it powerfully demonstrates that way in which violence has become "ordinary" in contemporary culture.

One of the most powerful symbolic motifs of violence in this film is the recurring image of a menacing red car with darkened windows that keeps trying to run Aurelia and Marilú off the road as they drive east across Mexico. What is particularly frightening about this menace is its namelessness, its anonymity. The two women can't be sure if their pursuers are agents hired by Marilú's sadistic federalé or gang members associated with Aurelia's drug-dealing boy friend. Similarly, in the twenty-three years since the first woman's body was "disappeared" in Ciudad Juarez, neither state nor federal officials have managed to come up with the perpetrator or perpetrators who are killing the women in Cuidad Juarez.

Perfume de Violeta relies on a documentary aesthetic determined, in part, by the fact that the director had to shoot the film on Super-16 due to budgetary restrictions. The hand-held camera technique and the grainy quality enhanced by the Super-16 blow-up to 35 mm, provide this film with a gritty realism that is reminiscent of the New Latin American cinema of the 1960s and 70s. It might also be seen as an heir to the legacy of films that link modernization, urban violence, and children such as the Italian neo-Realist film Bicycle Thief (V. De Sicca, 1948), Luis Bunuel's Los olvidados, produced in Mexico in 1952, and Pixote, directed by Hector Babenco and shot in the slums of Rio de Janiero, Brazil, in 1981. Ultimately, what is does share with these earlier films, besides its documentary aesthetic, is its specific reference to socio-political concerns.

Like Sin Dejar Huella, Sistach's film also explores the problem of violence against women but situates this problem within the context of urban poverty and class antagonisms. While both Yessica and Miriam live in the same lower-class neighborhood on the outskirts of Mexico City, their place in the complex social strata of Mexican economic classes is significantly different. Yessica's family survives at subsistent level—her mother takes in washing to support the family and her stepfather is unemployed. Miriam' single mother, on the other hand, has a relatively well-paid job. The difference in their class standing is presented symbolically: Yessica has to climb down a make-shift ladder in order to reach her home, a nondescript, one room cement hovel that she shares with her mother, stepfather, step-brother and her mother's new baby. Miriam, on the

other hand, has her own bedroom in a small, clean apartment situated upstairs behind the safety of a locked gate.

The central violent motif in Perfume de violetas is rape, a brutal fact of life that threatens all Mexican women physically and emotionally. Recent statistics suggest that a woman or girl is raped every four minutes on average in Mexico.11 Government officials have reported an estimated incidence of about 120,000 to 130,000 rapes per year; but the real number is probably closer to one million according to Human Rights Watch. Rape is unquestionably a widespread and systemic practice that crosses class and regional lines in Mexico and is socially and legally institutionalized. Young boys are indoctrinated into the culture of male power that authorizes rape at a young age. The opening credits of the film highlight the pervasiveness of sexual violence in Mexico by featuring headlines from newspapers that proclaim "la violencia latente" and document ubiquitous incidents of "violada" (rape).

In one scene that takes place in the school yard, a group of boys snatches some photos from Miriam. She repeatedly demands that they give them back to her but the boys pass the photos around, keeping them out of her reach. As she grabs at the photos, one boy hits her in the face and pushes her away. Yessica angrily comes to Miriam's rescue and the boys gang up on her, hitting her in the face and head. She ends up in a fist fight with one of the boys that is ultimately broken up by a teacher who drags both of them away. This scene dramatically demonstrates the way in which violence against women as "practiced" by young males in the disguise of "play." Ultimately, however, this "playfulness" intensifies and becomes more violent in a later scene in which Yessica is raped by a man her stepbrother works with driving a public bus.

In its representation of violence against women, Sistach's grainy film provides us with a documentary directness that at the same time avoids any trace of sensationalism. The scene in which Yessica is raped is a model of visual restraint. The rapist grabs Yessica as she walks down the street and drags her into a secluded, empty lot where the men have stashed their bus. Yessica is hauled into the bus and out of the camera's frame. The horror for the audience lies not in the spectacle of the actual act of rape — the film, in fact, refuses that voyeuristic pleasure. Instead, we see the violent emotional and physical effects of rape. This is demonstrated as the camera — adopting the step-brother's point of view—pans slowly over the inside of the bus after the rape to reveal the innocent contents of Yessica's bag that lay strewn over the floor. As the rapist offers the stepbrother a fifty peso bill, we find out that Yessica was "sold" for just enough money to buy a new pair of running shoes. By hiding the actual act of rape from the viewer, Sistach is refusing to participate in the dominant cinematic representation of rape "that sees rape as a hyper mediated 'spectacle'" (Projansky, 18).

In her discussion of the depiction of rape in Thelma and Louise (R. Scott, 1991) Sarah Projansky reads the film as presenting "a critical and resistant relationship to rape by drawing attention to links between rape and men's control over language and the gaze" (122). A similar kind of relationship is drawn in the rape seen in Perfume de violeta. When we see Yessica walking down the street, the camera cuts back and forth from Yessica to the rapist. In both sets of shots, the point of view is neutral; in other words, articulated from the position of the spectator. Thus, the male character's control of the gaze is explicitly denied. Subsequently, while many films that include rape present the rape act as a spectacle in which the viewer is forced to be complicit, Sistach disallows

this perspective as described above. Instead, we are only allowed to see the effects of rape as we witness Yessica carefully wiping the semen off of her bruised and bloody thighs in the privacy of a secluded bathroom.

While the endings of the two films are significantly different, each suggests a possible outcome of the entrenched, relentless violence against women that is acted out on a daily basis across Mexico. Aurelia and Marilú end up in an idyllic, utopian setting on a secluded beach outside of Cancún that is absent of men. In the absence of a masculinist ideology, Aurelia's sons are offered the chance to be raised outside of the influence of machismo that determines and perpetuates the culture of violence. Perfume de violeta is less hopeful: the violence that has destroyed Yessica's life leaks into Miriam's, suggesting that unrestrained and publicly sanctioned social violence against women is irrepressible. Yessica and Miriam meet one last time in the bathroom in which we encountered Yessica removing the traces of rape. The two girls get into a fight that becomes violent; Yessica pushes Miriam, who falls, hits her head on the toilet, and dies. Sistach's film appears to suggest that there is no way out of the cycle of violence against women in Mexico.

Of course, Sin Dejar Huella and Perfume de Violeta could be interpreted by international audiences as stories about violence against women "in general." My interest, however, is the way in which the films are read as national allegories of contemporary social realities by local audiences who situate themselves as Mexican. I argue that films that address violence against women "in the abstract" lack the political awareness of particular manifestations of violence that might generate necessary and effective socio-political responses. Ultimately, the central reason that Sin Dejar Huella and Perfume de Violeta did not receive the international acclaim that films like Amores Perros did was because the symbolic violence employed in these two films could not be decoded by audiences unfamiliar with the particular context of that violence. Like Amores Perros, Sin Dejar Huella and Perfume de Violeta address the problem of violence in Mexico that is linked to larger social political forces such as drug dealing and neo-liberal economic policies. However, while these larger issues are acknowledged, the focus of Novaro's and Sistach's films is on the effect of these forces on women's everyday lives and their social location within the enduring cult of machismo, Mexico's historically situated version of patriarchy that refuses to go away.

I am not arguing that films like Amores Perros should be condemned because the aesthetic dimension dominates the political. Nor am I criticizing these films on the basis of a functional understanding of the relationship between popular culture and social practices. I am not suggesting, for example that media representations of violence cause social violence. My aim instead has been to first of all critically differentiate contemporary forms of global aesthetic violence from national cinema practices that often deal with localized forms of political and social violence. Secondly, I want to urge public and academic critics not to disregard the relationship between formal and social structures of meaning. Giroux reminds us that cinema is ultimately "a teaching machine." In other words, "films perform a pedagogical function in providing "a certain kind of language for conveying and understanding violence." In other words, what is at stake here is not whether cinematic violence directly causes crime. In a world demeaned by brutal and senseless violence, we must ask ourselves what responsibilities filmmakers, other cultural workers, and their respective publics have in developing a cultural policy

that addresses the limits of the use of violence in cinema. And finally, I argue that in order to address the cultural specificity of violence against women and other marginalized groups, we must retain a critical notion of national cinema in the face of the material reality of globalization and the recent tendency among cultural critics to unconditionally celebrate the end of the nation and the rise of post-nationalism. In conclusion, I suggest that successful international directors like Iñárritu, Del Toro, and Cuarón might think about participating in an "other cinema" and of adopting a female point of view in their depiction of violence by moving away from a celebration of the hyper real to the reality of the symbolic.

1. Novaro made a number of films while studying filmmaking at the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC). After graduating, she produced two short films, Una Isla Rodeada de Agua (1985) and Azul Celeste (1987). Her first feature length film was Lola (1989), followed by Danzón (1991), El Jardín del Edén (1994), and Sin dejar huella (2000). Sistach, who also studied at the CUEC, directed a number of short films and worked in television before turning to feature narratives. Her first feature, Anoche soñé contigo (1992), was followed by La línea paterna (1995), El cometa (1998), and Perfume de Violeta (2001). Her most recent film, released in 2005, La niña en la piedra, won the Golden Mayahuel in the Mexican competition at the Guadalajara Film Festival in March 2005.
2. In 2002, The Crime of Father Amaro set records for Mexican ticket sales at 5.2 million. In comparison, Babel's opening weekend generated $5,558,095 across 1,251 theaters http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/
3. See, for example, Hoefert de Turégano's "The International Politics of Cinematic Coproduction."
4. Giroux discusses, for example, the way in which in Tarantino "decelerates the violence [in Pulp Fiction] and gives it a heightened aesthetic twist as it unfolds between a homage to realism and rupturing scenes of numbing of sadism."
5. I am not suggesting that Amores Perros does not tackle socio-political issues. See Juan Poblete essay, "New National Cinemas in a Transnational Age" in which he persuasively argues that Iñárritu uses "the master's tools in combination with "more vernacular, regional forms and experiences in an effort to produce a critique of the impact of neoliberalism on the national societies of Latin America in times of globalization." (215).
6. Giroux gives the following examples of films that employ symbolic violence: "Oliver Stone's Platoon (1987), Clint Eastwood's Unforgiven (1992), Neil Jordan's The Crying Game (1992), and Steven Speilberg's Schindler's List (1993)."
7. See my essay, "Women's Pictures."
8. From an associated Press story, printed in the Austin-American Statesman on February 18, 2006.
9. Federal officials concluded that of the 379 homicides, 119 were due to revenge, gang activity, robberies, negligence or fights; 106 were the product of domestic violence; and 78 were due to sexual violence." The report stated that in the remaining 76 cases, the motives couldn't be determined, mostly because previous investigators lost evidence and made other missteps that botched the cases.
10. According to the Mexican National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information Technology (INEGI), over 6,000 girls, teenagers and women were murdered for gender-related reasons in the last six years, up to the end of 2005.
11. See for example the Seventh United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, covering the period 1998 - 2000 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Centre for International Crime Prevention).

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