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Taylor & Francis Group

AMORES PERROS: EXOTIC VIOLENCE AND NEOLIBERAL FEAR[1]

Let us imagine for a moment that we find ourselves in an affluent neighbourhood in Mexico City. Suddenly, a vagrant whose appearance is not-too-subtly reminiscent of Karl Marx fires two shots through the front window of a five-star restaurant into the back of a prominent businessman, killing him. In another part of the city, around the same time, an automobile accident involving a pair of youngsters fleeing from a group of criminals and a Spanish supermodel going to the store is the point of departure of a series of events that will entwine the lives of a group of urban characters. These images, from Alejandro González Iñárritu's film *Amores perros*,[2] are symptomatic of the transgression performed by crime and violence in the urban, middle-class environment – an environment whose sense of security is dissolving in tandem with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional PRI state in Mexico. Neoliberal and violent, caught between a nationalist imaginary and the desire of transnational projection, Mexican culture at the end of the century was faced with the absence of a centre of gravity that could determine its political position. In recent years, this destabilized culture has produced new images of violence that allegorize the sense of uncertainty which is a product of the fall of the paternalistic state and of the ideas attached to revolutionary nationalism. The result is a cultural repositioning of violence, which has ceased to be a marginal manifestation and has become the very centre of a newly emerging identity. This identity begins to define forms of citizenship and imaginary in the context of Mexico's political transition.

Violence is a category that has become increasingly used in Latin American cultural analysis. It has permitted the construction of a new cultural cartography whose axes are urban experience and a sense of social instability, both of these instances of the shaping of a new sense of community[3]. Susana Rotker has noted that the sense of insecurity in Latin America's capitals 'has been gradually changing the way in which people relate to urban space, their fellow citizens, the State and with the very concept of citizenship'[4]. In Mexico's case, the emergence of these 'citizenships of fear' coincides with the decay of notions of citizenship stemming from PRI discourse and, in a certain sense, resolves an identity crisis created by the radical cultural and political transformations of the 1990s. At this point, as violence and criminality occupy an increasingly prominent place in both the national imaginary and the image that Mexico projects on a transnational scale, I would like to propose an analysis of *Amores perros* in terms of a paradoxical ideological articulation. On one hand, *Amores perros* is the ultimate product of the imaginary generated by the country's urban middle classes: social groups that see their class interests affected by the new urban configurations and invent myths about the marginalized sectors as a means of conveying their fears and insecurities. On the other hand, the film appeals to a transnational market that reinterprets violence as

Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1 March 2006, pp. 39-57
ISSN 1356-9325/print 1469-9575 online © 2006 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/13569320600596991

an allegory of the new possibilities of political expression after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In this sense, *Amores perros* is the most recent version of a new form of commodification of Mexico and Latin America: the configuration of an imaginary that simultaneously appeals to the worldview held by the privileged groups that benefit from the region's neoliberalism and to the voluntaristic politics of the progressive and pseudo-progressive sectors of Western intelligentsia, desperately searching for new ways to relate to the Third World.

The interpretation of violence in *Amores perros* emerges from an ideological matrix that is far more conservative than its sophisticated formal resources would suggest. Behind the formal mask, the stories that comprise the film share the common trope of the family. Paul Julian Smith has noted that the absence of the paternal figure is a constant motif throughout the film[5]. Furthermore, it is imperative to observe that the catalyst for the actions of all three of the film's plotlines is either infidelity or family abandonment. In the first storyline, Octavio, played by Gabriel García Bernal, falls in love with Susana, his brother's battered wife. In order to free Susana from her husband's violence (and of course with the ulterior motive of 'getting the girl' for himself), Octavio enters into the underground world of dog-fighting – an adventure that leads to the car chase mentioned at the beginning of the article. The second plotline centres on the story of Daniel and Valeria. Daniel is a one-time family man who leaves his wife and daughters to live with his mistress, Valeria. Valeria, however, is involved in the same car accident as Octavio, and thus begins a process of convalescence in which Daniel's life is converted into a living hell. In the third plotline, El Chivo is a hit man at the end of a personal odyssey that began in the 1960s, when he left his family to join a group of revolutionaries.

The plot of the movie, then, is constructed upon the consequences of these actions. The surface unity of the film might seem to be given by the intertwining of these stories attendant on the car crash, but in reality the structure of the movie is constructed upon allegories (not to say parables) that reflect the consequences of a series of moral decisions. Let us use El Chivo as an example. He decides to leave his family in the name of the revolution and this triggers a series of moral decisions that include complete alienation from his family (he does not contact them after his incarceration, letting his daughter, Maru, believe him to be dead), and his subsequently becoming an assassin. El Chivo's path to redemption also begins with a moral decision. In his final job, instead of completing the hit for a man who has paid him to kill the contractor's brother (who, incidentally, is an adulterer), El Chivo decides to confront both of them when he learns about their relation to one other. In short, this narrative development, like those of the other two plotlines, suggests that people are always judged in terms of a transcendental moralism that makes no allowance for circumstances. It is irrelevant here whether El Chivo's cause is just. What is relevant is simply his abandoning of his family, which makes him equivalent to Daniel, the adulterer of the second plotline (who also leaves his family). According to the movie's moral code, there is no difference between Daniel and El Chivo. That the former leaves his family for another woman whereas the latter does so for sociopolitical reasons has no bearing on the consideration of the fact that they both leave their families. Both characters share parallel fates: as a consequence of their actions, both go through purgatory of sorts (Valeria's accident and El Chivo's descent into crime), and both are finally given the opportunity to return to their respective families: Daniel calls his

estranged wife over the phone, although does not dare to speak to her; El Chivo leaves a message on Maru's answering machine.

One might ask what would happen if, for a moment, this scale of values was inverted. For instance, an alternative reading of Octavio and Susana's story might be constructed from the point of view of a moral system without absolutisms. In terms of the film's values, Octavio's tragic error (i.e. his adulterous desire for his sister-in-law), drives him to a series of poor decisions: his involvement in the criminal network of dog-fighting, his attempt to confront one of the neighbourhood's most notorious criminals, his decision to stab this man after he shoots Octavio's dog, etc. The three characters from the first story, consequently, receive 'just' punishment: Ramiro – thief, abusive husband and adulterer – dies in a gunfight during a robbery; Octavio, who attempts to steal his brother's wife and finance their escape with his illegal activities, ends up alone at a bus station, physically battered and penniless. We know little about Susana's fate; perhaps her punishment is concealed because of her final fidelity to her spouse. However, because she did succumb to temptation, she is left on her own with her child, pregnant for a second time. If adultery were removed as the driving force of the justice meted out by the plot upon its characters, the interpretation of their acts might be very different. If Octavio and Susana fell in love, and we then followed this logic against the film's plot, then we might be able to think of a possible narrative that does not conclude with Octavio's punishment. It is possible to think of a storyline in which Octavio's decision results in a 'happy ending' with Susana, or even in a narrative in which Susana makes the same final choice, but Octavio's departure would still be presented in redemptive terms. These possibilities tell us much about the film's ideological wager: it does not attempt to place the characters into a set of circumstances from which they measure their decisions, but rather creates an absolute moral compass that evaluates everyone using the same criteria. The morality outlined here is, in the end, conservative: the vindication of unquestionable family values under three very different circumstances. Therefore, Octavio and Susana's relationship is always represented in an uncomfortable manner: its ethical possibility is cancelled a priori by the moralism through which the film interprets its characters.

This counterpoint between a conservative moralism grounded in the family and an ethics founded in specific circumstances is clear precisely in the film's representation of Octavio and Susana's first sexual encounter. Paul Julian Smith establishes that, even when this encounter is emphasized by the movie itself (upon being placed in a scene with background music, after half an hour without this resource), all of their sexual encounters are interrupted by some unfortunate background noise. The first time Susana's baby is present, next to them. The second sexual encounter includes not only Octavio looking at himself in a broken mirror but also a montage that shows Ramiro having sexual relations with one of his co-workers, Ramiro being assaulted by Octavio's friends and the heavily ironic use of the rock ballad *Lucha de gigantes*[6]. In other words, the act that could lead Susana and Octavio's love to be seen in another light and that would, consequently, lead to a more empathetic interpretation of their story is always interrupted by images that induce guilt: the baby reminds us of the illegality of the relationship; the montage of images links the couple to Ramiro's errors and also with a criminal act linked to Octavio's attempt to win Susana's love. Any possibility of transforming the characters' situation is annulled by the film's own narrative.

Precisely because this master narrative of adultery is at the film's core, all of the manifestations of violence in the film, fortuitous (like the car crash) or not, are direct consequences of moral actions and are never interpreted from a social point of view. As Laura Podalsky has observed, the movie uses an emotional register stemming from soap operas as a way to obscure or question the social and political register of the characters' actions. This, continues Podalsky, manifests 'an epistemological crisis that has destabilized the subject's understanding of contemporary society and, perhaps, more importantly, his/her ability to make substantive proposals for a better future'.[7] Carlos Monsiváis has emphasized this point in his analysis of the melodramatic structure of the *thriller*, and he makes an observation particularly pertinent to the reading of *Amores perros*: 'Cinema retains melodrama and brings it up to date, giving it an appropriate context: social decomposition.' In this dimension, the cinema of violence 'is constituted in the distorting fairground mirror where characters live out previously inconceivable roles with grotesque energy'.[8] This narrative structure has profound consequences in terms of the manner in which violence is understood by Mexico's conservative middle class, whose frames of reference are represented by this movie. Ultimately, in the history of the use of melodrama in Mexican culture, from the liberal novelists of the nineteenth century through the cinema of the 1930s up to Televisa, it has been consistently utilized by the dominant classes to generate imaginaries and political consensus eventually naturalized by viewers. The resort to melodrama in *Amores perros* is the latest instance of this process.

The conservative ideology of *Amores perros*, then, cannot be reduced to the story of three assaults on morality. El Chivo's story not only transmits the failure of the utopian and revolutionary discourse of the generation of the 1960s but also, in several ways, allegorizes the interpretations of this event that the 'citizenship of fear' constructed by Mexico City bourgeoisie has incorporated into its imaginary. The figure of the assassin embodies the culminating point of the process of moral decay responsible, according to this imaginary, for the emergence of urban violence. In the first place, all violence is unleashed, as I mentioned earlier, by a series of personal decisions: abandoning the family, participation in a clandestine movement, the decision to become a hit man on being released from prison, etc. Furthermore, in so far as one follows the trajectory of this character, it must be emphasized that, within the movie's code, the return to the family offers the only possibility of redemption. Hence, El Chivo's final assignment (which once more involves an adulterer and his treacherous brother) is not resolved by murder but rather by a sort of the angel-of-death ethics, in which El Chivo turns into an agent of Solomonic justice. Finally, when El Chivo decides to make amends to his daughter Maru, he cuts his hair and shaves off his beard, transforming his Marx-esque appearance into a somewhat grotesque image of a 'good citizen'. In this sense, the film's presentation of El Chivo's evolution is not surprising: his journey from revolutionary, to prisoner, to criminal natural and profoundly undermines the dissident quality of the narrative. El Chivo is imprisoned because of a bombing (note here how the revolutionary is reduced to a terrorist, and this in a country where leftist movements are not particularly characterized by revolutionary violence), imprisoned and later incorporated into the world of crime via a corrupt police agent. Is this not the way in which the conservative middle class characterizes the figure of the revolutionary? From their perspective, any threat to the status quo of Mexico City's affluent zones becomes a manifestation of criminality: the dissident who places a bomb

in the middle of a shopping centre to further the cause of social justice and the hit man who kills for money in broad daylight are the same person, since both actions attack the protective bubble that surrounds the middle and upper classes. From the perspective of the movie, the ethical, political or ideological motivation that lies behind the act is rendered irrelevant.

This entire framework leads us to think that, far from being a progressive film, *Amores perros* simply deals with a catalogue of urban bourgeois fears. The film interprets these fears using precisely the same conservative moral measure that considers violence to be a product not of profound social and economic differences but of the decline of family values that accompanied the fall of the strong state after 1968. For this reason, in spite of the fact that González Iñárritu has expressed in various interviews the idea that crime is the poor people's way to make a living,[9] the movie makes no effort to problematize the ethical position of its characters and everything functions as some sort of divine justice in which each person reaps what he/she sows in terms of a black-and-white moral scale: the adulterers come to grief, the beautiful woman is left mutilated, and those who abandon their families live in the purgatory of nostalgia. This imaginary permits one to infer that this particular 'citizenship of fear' does not lead to, as Rotker suggests at the end of her famous text, the emergence of movements that recognize 'difference as the space in which to deepen democracy and self-management'[10] but rather to the rise of images that deepen the social, economic and cultural abyss in which violence is grounded.

In order to better understand this problem, we can set *Amores perros* against other representations of violence emerging from the era of neoliberalism: *Todo el poder*, a film by Fernando Sariñana that appeared shortly before the González Iñárritu work, and *Nostalgia de la sombra*, a novel by Eduardo Antonio Parra.[11] *Todo el poder* tells the story of an unemployed documentary director who, after several encounters with Mexico City crime, loses his ex-wife's SUV (sports utility vehicle) to a band of thieves and decides to take action. Along with a group of friends, he begins to track down the criminals in an investigation that brings in a police commander (a carnivalesque character named Elvis Quijano, after his conceit that he looks like the King of Rock) and Julián Luna, head of public security in Mexico City. The film has much in common with *Amores perros*: it is a commercial film, privately financed, distributed on the back of a publicity campaign that was unprecedented for its time (*Amores perros* became the high point of this strategy).[12] Likewise, it is ultimately a film made exclusively for the urban middle class. It speaks to the same fear and the same sense of insecurity. In addition, the film is more literally based in the idea of a 'citizenship of fear' since it actually portrays a network of social solidarity that allows the criminal group to be confronted. In spite of the fact that *Todo el poder* lacks the formal pretensions of *Amores perros* and that poverty is simply invisible in the film[13] it still offers a more political interpretation of crime. The most crucial point here is the fact that violence and crime in *Todo el poder* are intimately linked to the neoliberal state's institutional network of corruption. Instead of falling into the temptation of parodying the ineptitude of the authorities, the film is interested in a much more profound problem: the collusion between crime and political power. In this way, the political system presented to us in *Todo el poder* is a combination of a profoundly inept bureaucracy (in one scene we see a secretary who is ignoring people reporting crime because she is eating at her desk) and the presence of criminals throughout the police force (certain members of a criminal gang have offices

in the police station, and we eventually find out that Elvis Quijano is the gang's leader). This system shows up during a scene of simulated justice, meant to create the appearance of a crime investigation (it represents a confrontation between a group of assault victims and a series of randomly selected criminals, organized by Quijano to investigate a robbery that he himself committed). Corruption reaches to the highest ranks of political power. The movie's critique is so harsh that Luna, in his television appearances, speaks with a tone and prosody that is an almost perfect imitation of the political rhetoric used by both Carlos Salinas and Ernesto Zedillo, the two most prominent presidents during the PRI's neoliberal phase. Luna, then, represents the two faces of a neoliberal institutionalism that, in real life, manifested itself in the fall of Carlos Salinas: a political system that seeks to maintain a front of efficiency and modernization (as shown in the scene where Luna commissions a publicity campaign that emphasizes the statistical reduction in crime), even as it continues to be a direct participant in the problems that it is supposed to resolve.

In spite of its virtues, *Todo el poder* is a film that ultimately trivializes crime by dissolving it into a comedy of errors. However, a comparison with *Amores perros* nevertheless raises a very significant point: in *Amores perros,* political institutions are completely invisible. The only representative of the law in the film, the federal agent who organizes El Chivo's contracts, appears completely isolated and void of any relationship to the rest of the police body. He is, simply, just another (im)moral character in the film. This void not only allows for the reduction of crime and violence to the moralism that I have previously described, but also results in a profound inability to articulate a truly political criticism of neoliberalism and its violence. Of course, the literal appearance of the institutions of the state is not an indispensable condition for a political critique. Rather, the point is that there is not a single manifestation of crime or violence in the film that cannot, ultimately, be reduced to a moral decision. Both the film's critical commentators and González Iñárritu himself have over-emphasized the historical context of *Amores perros*, pointing to its relationship to the Mexican transition. Claudia Schaefer, for example, has pointed out that 'the film places individual characters' despair within an undeniably political setting'.[14] It seems to me, however, that this 'undeniably political setting' exists more in the film's sociohistorical context than in the film itself. Ultimately, this interpretation follows a somewhat imprecise formula: Mexico City represents, in Carlos Bonfil's words, 'a modernity that only offers the proliferation of social injustice, political corruption and ... neo-liberal dogma'.[15] Consequently, situating a movie in this city and showing these contradictions represents in itself a political *mise-en-scène*. Regardless of how valid this reading might be in other contexts, when it comes to *Amores perros* it results in an imprecise interpretation given that neither injustice, nor corruption, nor neoliberalism has anything to do with the film's plot. In the film's narrative structure, there is no causal relationship of any kind between these factors and the narrated events. Actually, the 'political dimension' of *Amores perros* seems to be situated in the will of its audience, which, during one of the country's moments of political unrest, imposed upon the movie a critical intention that is simply not there.

To be fair to *Amores perros*, it is indeed possible to argue that the plotline of Valeria and Daniel offers a critique of the immorality of the emerging neoliberal classes.[16] In effect, Daniel and Valeria are part of the media industry (he is an editor of a prominent magazine and she is a successful model participating in a renowned publicity campaign),

a sector that enjoyed a particular ascent during the neoliberal years. In other words, Daniel and Valeria are part of this new urban bourgeoisie whose wealth comes from the emerging economic sectors. The same can be said about the brothers involved in El Chivo's contract. They are two young businessmen, part of the same emerging business class. Immorality, then, is not only a sin of the poor who opt for crime: the bourgeoisie is also responsible for adulteries, abandonment and fratricide. This emerging class, in the eyes of the film, is also an active part of moral decline and social decomposition. This, however, does not change the fact that the critique of this social class is also moralistic and apolitical: they are simply additional performers of the same immoral symphony.[17]

Before addressing the question of why, in spite of everything I have said up until this point, the interpretation of the movie as a progressive and political film persists, I would like to make a detour in order to illustrate an alternative to these narrations of violence that avoids both the moralism of *Amores perros* and the literalism of *Todo el poder*. *Nostalgia de la sombra* is a text that profoundly problematizes the moralistic interpretations of violence by tracing the trajectory that transforms the everyday man into a murderer, by way of a journey through a series of distinct territorialities in the map of urban violence. In her article, '¿Guerreros o ciudadanos?', Rossana Reguillo classifies the way in which urban imaginaries represent violence in three fields of meaning: 'a territory inhabited by poverty; night as a time of exception; and an environment characterized by moral laxity and vice'.[18] If I had to describe the importance of Parra's novel for Mexican representations of violence, I would say that it is perhaps the text that best puts these three fields of meaning into question. The novel tells the story of Ramiro Mendoza Elizondo, a family man who is attacked in the streets of Monterrey. During the attack, he kills his aggressors and, instead of returning to his family, he embarks on an odyssey that takes him to the border, to the rubbish dumps, to prison, and ends ups with his transformation into a hit man. It is important to emphasize that, unlike El Chivo, Ramiro's turn to crime is a product of crime itself, and not the result of a moral (like Octavio's) or political (like El Chivo's) decision. The novel is structured by two intersecting time-lines: on the one hand, the process by which Ramiro is transformed from citizen to murderer and on the other Ramiro's reservations regarding his most recent contract, which targets a woman.

The world of Ramiro's journey is complex because violence is not a product of moral choices but rather something that happens, a consistent presence that becomes a constitutive part of the social tapestry in the distinct environments he navigates. In other words, violence does not function as a flat continuum that as in *Amores perros* equates political violence with crime or family violence. Actually, poverty, violence and other social factors become polyvalent indicators whose consequences manifest themselves in terms of their relationship with other components of the social tapestry.[19] Thus, on the border, violence is an instrument of control exercised by those holding the power to cross it; in the rubbish tips, it is a mechanism related to a particular code of honour and survival; in the territories of organized crime it always functions in relation to the political and economic interests of society's most privileged strata. Following this line of thought and returning to Reguillo's categories, in *Nostalgia de la sombra* we encounter not only a narrative of violence far removed from the idea of 'moral laxity' but also a portrayal that puts into question any deterministic relationship between poverty and violence. The novel's characters are not violent because they are

poor. Violence is, rather, a social code that enters the urban environment as a strategy of social relationships and as a component of subjectivity. Far from the 'citizenship of fear' that presents violence as an otherness seeking to maintain itself outside of the boundaries of the individual, *Nostalgia de la sombra* is the narrative of a 'citizenship through violence', in which violence is not an enemy to conquer but rather a component that passes through subjectivities and communities, and is, irrevocably, part of both.

Through the dual structure of the novel it is possible to discern two functions of violence: first, as the instrument that allows Ramiro to both link to and separate himself from the two distinct territories that he passes through; second, as a constituent element of his personality, completely normalized within the narrative. The act of violence that leads to the emergence of Ramiro's self (when he kills three men who are trying to kill him) becomes a mark that radically transforms his subjectivity. Symptomatically, this transformation is described by the phrase 'the fear had gone for good'.[20] Here, then, it can be understood that a 'citizenship of fear' such as the one represented in *Amores perros* or *Todo el poder* dissipates when an act of violence displaces the urban, middle-class bourgeoisie to the margins. This new formation of the urban subject, in the novel, opens precisely in the moment in which fear stops being the element that grounds citizenship and violence integrates itself into the realm of daily life. For this reason, Parra's book does not narrate an anxiety drawn by the fears of the privileged groups, but rather a world with diverse social and ideological layers that cannot be approached from the point of view of a strict or fixed moral code. Thus, classic citizenship and family life in this text are not conceived as the origin of a moral scale or even a secure environment. Both function, rather, as shadows – ghosts that haunt the 'citizen through violence', who has always inhabited his complex social space, in the light of their loss. As Miguel Rodríguez Lozano has already pointed out, these shadows articulate in a single image the nostalgia for what is lost and the presence of the night as an allegory of violence.[21] In this way, the night is not conceived of as the time or space of violence but as an allegory for a state of mourning that in a certain sense reflects the fall of identitarian certainties in a violent and neoliberal Mexico.

The example of *Nostalgia de la sombra* indicates that a representation of violence can only be political when it is understood as part of the social network that transcends it. In other words, violence per se has no political valence and, because of this, to assume that a film or novel would be political simply because it shows urban violence or because it was made during a specific historical moment is extremely imprecise. Rather, violence is an element that is used strategically in cultural representations in order to validate specific political and social perspectives.[22] Therefore, in *Amores perros*, where violence is self-evident and problematized by its social dimension, it serves as an indicator of the consequences of the country's moral decline. Violence is the argument that the conservative discourse invokes in order to caution against the dangers of immorality. In this sense, *Amores perros* is not far from made-for-television melodrama or from nineteenth-century *costumbrismo*, which interprets crime as sickness and as the consequence of moral decadence.[23]

Everything that I have argued leads to the question of why *Amores perros* is such a successful film, in spite of its representation of violence and the profound ideological problems behind its narrative. The answer lies in its unusual ability, within the Mexican and Latin American film world, to convert violence and crime into commodities. The

reason behind this is that *Amores perros* is the most expensive film in Mexico's history, filmed exclusively with private funding.[24] Therefore, the recovery of the funds invested became a particular problem, given that no prior film in Mexican history had ever grossed an amount even equivalent to the final cost of *Amores perros*. In consequence, appealing with an unprecedented intensity to both the international market and the national middle class that generally sees only Hollywood productions was crucial for the film's success. This need forced *Amores perros* to make a fundamental decision: to avoid the bureaucratic apparatus around Mexican film production, controlled by the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía.[25] By virtue of this, *Amores perros* eschewed the traditional distribution network for Mexican cinema, which generally includes a modest commercial run, a pair of international festivals and a stint in art-houses. Upon accepting private funds, *Amores perros* took a chance on not being seen as simply another art-house film made for a pre-selected minority and set its sights on a greater audience.

A second consequence to take into consideration is that *Amores perros* was conceived in a manner distinct from the *auteur cinema* that had flourished in Mexico under the aegis of Imcine. In contrast to Arturo Ripstein or Jorge Fons, Alejandro González Iñárritu is not a 'traditional' filmmaker. His roots are in the communications industry. On one hand, he was one of the best known radio hosts of WFM, a very successful commercial radio station. On the other, he was one of the key publicists behind campaigns that redefined the market during the neoliberal years, and the owner of a major advertising company. In fact, González Iñárritu defines himself as 'self-taught' when speaking of his entrance into the world of movie-making.[26] Taking this into account, it seems that *Amores perros* should not be considered as a cinematographic work on the same level as other independent films but a product packaged and advertised in order to sell. The *Amores perros* product, then, extends far beyond the movie and its production. Part of the *Amores perros* product includes a soundtrack consisting not only of songs that appear in the movie but also a number of songs 'inspired by' the film, from figures central to the Mexican music scene (Julieta Venegas, Control Machete, etc.). With this, inside the national market, *Amores perros* perfects a strategy first used by Antonio Serrano's *Sexo, pudor y lágrimas*:[27] appealing to a public already constituted by groups of alternative rock (a public that includes the young middle class that also sees Hollywood's films) in order to generate interest in the film. This comes along with a new strategy of filmmaking, stylistically closer to the music video than to the slower rhythm of traditional Mexican cinema (for example, Ripstein's films). Therefore, *Amores perros* brings us face to face with a dynamic, vertiginous, visual aesthetic that entails a profound renovation of Mexican cinema and at the same time brings about a renovation of its public: as films start speaking MTV's language, its audience is drawn by this type of cinema. In this sense, it is crucial to understand the role that Iñárritu's advertising experience plays in the movie's aesthetic. The visual language of commercials, on one hand, and his knowledge in terms of packaging products define the positioning of *Amores perros* within Mexican cinema: the inclusion of these external discourses in the cinematographic canon lead to a renovation that would have been impossible within the prevailing aesthetic. Therefore, if the film deserves some credit, it would be precisely for its break with certain stereotypes of the Mexican cinema industry at both the national and international levels: no longer did it have to do with the 'aestheticized vision of Latin American society' and the visual nihilism of Arturo

Ripstein[28] or the idea of a folkloric Mexico full of guitars and drug traffickers, such as the one seen in Robert Rodríguez's films.[29] González Iñárritu has tirelessly declared his intention to break free from these traditions and represent 'el mundo en el que vivo'.[30] Certainly, one cannot help but share this vocation. However, this proposition is suspended both by the moralism that I have presented and by its own narrative consequence: violence. In the end, González Iñárritu breaks with the exoticism inherited just as much from magic realism (Alfonso Arau's proverbial *Like Water for Chocolate*[31]) as from the 'dirty' Mexico of the North American western (Gore Verbinski's *The Mexican*), thus establishing a new exoticism: that of a fast-paced, violent, postmodern Mexico. With this, obviously, I do not intend to say that violence does not exist within the Mexican world. Rather, my point is that *Amores perros* operates within a new cinematographic world where violence is the new trademark of Latin America.

The representation of violence seen in *Amores perros* is based on a profound contradiction between meaning and form. On one hand, the film gives the Mexican middle class audience a testimonial and almost therapeutic discourse of violence in which one can identify a system of values similar to that of Mexican neo-conservatism, represented at the time by the presidential candidacy of Vicente Fox. On the other hand, we have an audiovisual system that transmits the image of an urban subculture consisting of avant-garde musical groups and vertiginous images of city life that, in a transnational context, has brought positive appraisals that establish the film as some sort of renovatory force for progressive Mexican cinema. However, as can be seen even in the positive reviews, the movie is founded on a subculture that puts the possibility of social transformation under erasure.[32] Ultimately, this contradiction is the same contradiction of Mexican neoliberalism: the image of a modern, avant-garde country, en route to becoming part of the First World, that uses this mask for the preservation of both the deep class divisions and the conservative ideology that throughout history have obstructed the promises of change.

This contradiction flourishes if we give some thought to the specific cinematographic genealogy of *Amores perros*. The critics have pointed out three films that share both the violent aesthetic of González Iñárritu and the international success that permitted the reception of this brand of movie: David Cronenberg's *Crash*, Tom Tykwer's *Lola Rennt* and, very specifically, Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*.[33] Rather than addressing the formal and visual connections between these films and *Amores perros*, a topic that has already had its share of discussion, I would like to point out a difference crucial in comprehending one of the film's central problems. For Tarantino, Tykwer and Cronenberg, violence is never social: it is metacinematographic. Directly appealing to a postmodern discourse of simulacrum and pastiche, these directors' portrayal violence is always aesthetic and exists in their films to the extent that it exists in the genres they are revisiting. This is clear in Tarantino, who appeals to a graphic form of violence in films that belong to the *pulp* discourse (*Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*) or to minor genres such as Japanese samurai films or classic spaghetti westerns (*Kill Bill*). Meanwhile, when referring to a genre based more on plot and less on violence, such as the one revisited by *Jackie Brown*, the films are noticeably less violent. The point here is to observe that Tarantino's movies are essentially asocial: their violence has no base in social or political matters. They are based, simply, on an aesthetic simulacrum of classic movie genres.

Tarantino's filmmaking results in a stylistic revolution of contemporary cinema, with ramifications that extend far beyond the scope of the present work.[34] In the specific case of *Amores perros*, its appropriation of this discourse of violence is based on a problematic interpretation of *Pulp Fiction*: the use of an essentially metacinematographic discourse for the expression of a social problematic. In other words, Tarantino's simulacrum is put to use by González Iñárritu to produce a narrative that is, in the end, realistic. The motivation for this appropriation can be traced back to the emergence of the city as the centre of the visual discourse of Mexican cinema. Unlike the traditional nationalistic cinema or that of provincial and rural environments, both templates used by Ripstein and other directors, *Amores perros* aspired to capture Mexico City in the midst of a cinematic tradition that lacked the style for doing so. The stylistic problem faced by *Amores perros* may be defined by invoking the words of Jesús Martín-Barbero: 'seen from the heterogeneity of experience, the city challeneges our mental habits to the point of making it unthinkable'.[35] In this sense, González Iñárritu understood that the insertion of this environment into the cinematic imaginary required a new language. Finally, as Martín Barbero observes, after Benjamin there has always been a relation between emerging mediations of cinema and the transformation of the urban experience.[36] In this sense, the Tarantino discourse makes it possible for González Iñárritu to incorporate into cinema a new way to give account of this experience. Marvin D'Lugo moves in this direction when he observes that González Iñárritu's films use 'pulp fictions' in order to 'help sustain the lives of characters in the city' and that the 'decisive fiction is one of an easy modernity to which nearly all of the characters seem to subscribe'.[37]

However, this aesthetic choice brings with it the key problem of its own insufficiency. In the end, Tarantino's language is not constructed to speak of urban chaos but rather to represent cinema and its stereotypes. This generates a crucial blind spot that may also be articulated through Martín-Barbero's words: 'What is in play here is not so much the difficulty of integrally thinking the city as the possibility of perceiving it as a public matter and not just the sum of private interests.' This leads Martín-Barbero to warn of a danger: 'It is therefore indispensable to sketch out the possibility of a total view of the city, of its nostalgic complicity with the idea of unity or lost identity, leading to a culturalist pessimism that is preventing us from understanding what the fractures that are exploding are made of.'[38] If we connect this insight with the moralistic discourse that I have outlined in previous pages, *Amores perros* only creates the impression of a progressive discourse set in the urban context: underneath, its narrative is 'a culturalist pessimism' that is incapable of recognizing the profound social and political contradictions that transcend the very world that the film narrates. In this sense, what is left is the admission that, in spite of its fight to break with social stereotypes, *Amores perros*, in the end, succumbs to them. Jorge Ayala Blanco astutely names the only social classes present in the film ('the lumpen stratum or ruling class, with nothing in the middle'), a problematic ethical attitude ('Bestialism is the only idea or experience of humanity'), and a concept of the city that is, ultimately, unreal: ('An exasperated and hypothetical city which is grotesquely anti-human and is reduced to spaces without place and places without space').[39] Unconsciously, the cinematographic discourse found in *Amores perros* does not escape Tarantino's metageneric tendency. It is, partly, a simulacrum of *costumbrismo* and, partly, an aesthetization of soap-opera melodrama. It is in not

coincidental that, when asked 'What do you think of violence?' the response given by González Iñárritu was 'It is part of our nature, unfortunately. It is painful for those who deliver it or receive it, and also confusing. This being against our nature forms part of us.'[40] Not social, not political, not economic. The violence in *Amores perros* is natural. And aesthetic. In this sense we should not forget that, in the same text referred to by Martín-Barbero, Benjamin cautions of the dangers of aestheticizing politics and violence. Benjamin also observes that the course to follow is not the aestheticization of politics but rather the politicization of art.[41] In consequence, the ultimate failure of *Amores perros* stems from its essentially moralistic base and its interpretation of violence. From such a position, it is not possible to articulate the public dimension so crucial for Martín-Barbero. In its incapacity to transcend the sphere of private life, the politicization of violence is, in the end, impossible.[42]

An interpretation of *Amores perros* such as the one that I have been elaborating up to this point cannot but conclude with an interrogation of the increasing status of violence as an indicator of the Latin American experience. The other result of the Tarantinesque aesthetic adopted in *Amores perros* is the legibility of the film in the international cinema market. It is enough to point out that *Pulp Fiction* was a film that was very well received in circuits such as Cannes, Sundance and the Academy Awards, where *Amores perros* acquired its international audience, especially since it was given the Critic's Week Prize at Cannes. *Amores perros* is part of a larger group of Latin American films that have ridden a wave of success in metropolitan markets: Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund's *Cidade de Deus* and Barbet Schroeder's *La Virgin de los sicarios*, for instance, enjoyed much more box office success and critical praise than the average Latin American film. This situation, along with other cultural manifestations such as the Colombian literature of the *sicarios*,[43] or the increasingly popular Latin American 'crime fiction',[44] has changed the form in which the metropolitan discourse conceives Latin America. To use Sylvia Molloy's term, the 'magic-realist imperative' is now accompanied by a 'violent imperative'.[45] In a sort of perverse *neomacondismo*, the discourse of civilization and barbarism is rearticulated as metropolitan spectators begin to think of an otherness founded on violence. The pleasures of the tropical come spiced with the spectacle of the Other's misery. Mabel Moraña has warned of the dangers of 'the construction of the new postmodern version of Latin America, elaborated in the centers, [which] in great measure makes of Latin America a construct that confirms the centrality and the globalizing, theoretical, avant-garde status of those who interpret it and aspire to represent it discursively'.[46] Moraña attacks the 'boom del subalterno' as an attempt to 'cover all those sectors subordinated to the discourses and praxis of power'. It is necessary to articulate a critique of the 'boom of violence' that could be characterized by the same terms used by Moraña: violence is promoted as 'part of an external agenda, connected to a market where that notion is affirmed as an ideological exchange and use value and as a brand that is incorporated through various strategies of promotion and ideological reproduction into globalized cultural consumption'.[47] *Amores perros*, in this sense, appeals to an emerging conceptualization of Latin America (and of much of the Third World) as the site of violence, as the place where a vertiginous life of misery and otherness fascinates the pseudo-progressive audiences of international film festivals. Precisely because *Amores perros* required this type of success to recover the

capital invested, its cinematographic language and its publicity campaigns are adjusted to this 'violent imperative'. It is in no way coincidental that the movie's international success preceded its national success. Once the film's publicity campaign produced recognition at Cannes, Mexican audiences acquired a renewed sense of national pride and went to see the movie.[48] To put it even less euphemistically, once the metropolitan intelligentsia approved the film as an acceptable representative of 'Mexican cinema',[49] Mexicans were convinced that the film proudly represented them. It is hard to find a more convincing portrait of the neo-colonialism prevalent in the commercial success of many current Latin American films.

If one is consistent with an analysis critical not only of *Amores perros* but also of the semantic field of violence that begins to configure the Latin American imaginary, the only possible conclusion is to avoid falling for these representations at all costs. Carlos Monsiváis has demonstrated the role that cinema has played in the confirmation of identities in our region,[50] and, in so far as movies like *Amores perros* encounter unusual degrees of acceptance inside our countries, we begin to naturalize this vision of violence and accept it as constitutive of our identity. This, I believe, should be resisted. Since it would be absurd to postulate that violence is not a situation present in the daily life of the Latin American city, it must be stressed that this category is insufficient to describe the social sphere. Martín Hopenhayn has observed that drugs and violence are both ghosts, since there is a constitutive gap between their perception and their reality.[51] *Amores perros* is the product of these ghosts. The film conveys a profoundly erroneous cultural perception of violence in Latin American countries, constantly reproduced on both national and transnational circuits. *Amores perros* helps us see that violence as a category of analysis is a double-edged sword: in transnational terms, it contributes to the characterization of Latin America as a site of barbarism and a region incapable of articulating a truly political discourse. In national terms, it fortifies the privileged position of the neoliberal middle class as the centre of citizenship and the exclusion of marginal subjects from this realm. Rossana Reguillo describes this phenomenon as follows: 'With a relatively sedentary and enlightened middle class strengthened, the developmentalist model in place and the country being increasingly integrated into an international dynamic, the pincers are closed and an imaginary is produce that turns these actors into enemies of modernity and into potential carriers of the danger of return'.[52]

To accept violence as an identifying feature and as a representative sign of Latin American countries in the transatlantic market implies complicity with the neoliberal agenda embedded in these discourses. All references to violence should be a critique of violence, a comprehension of its profound economic, social and political roots. Above all, it is imperative to understand that what defines the Latin-American experience is a contradictory legacy of colonialism and resistance, of conflict and heterogeneity. Violence is only a by-product of these relationships: to place violence at the centre of analysis or cultural production leaves aside the central questions of our culture and leads the way to an imaginary where violence and social conflict are irrevocably naturalized. In so far as violence is converted into an increasingly popular indicator for the understanding of Latin American culture as a whole, it is also important to leave open the question of the profound depoliticization implied both within the academic context of cultural studies and in the way in which social and

communitarian identities adapt themselves to the ultimate violence of the neoliberal system. To celebrate *Amores perros* as a revolution within Mexican or Latin American cinema, in spite of the film's undeniable accolades, results in complicity with a model of comprehension that dissolves our conflicts into a cheap morality disguised as avant-garde culture. The continent is in urgent need of a sophisticated critical spirit that is not swept along with the changing tides of a perception that, in this ulterior instance, is nothing more than the most recent manifestation of a long tradition of imperialism.

Translated by Kara N. Moranski, revised by Citlali Martínez

Notes

1 The final version of this paper was possible thanks to discussions and suggestions made by various people. I want to thank Mabel Moraña, Joshua K. Lund and Hermann Herlinghaus for the initial dialogue and debate on the ideas presented here. I also want to thank Juan Poblete and Emanuelle Oliveira for their comments during the presentation of an earlier, much shorter version of this paper in the LASA conference held at Las Vegas. Roberto Fernández Retamar, John Kraniauskas and Philip Derbyshire were of great help in the publication of this text, which first appeared in Spanish in *Casa de las Américas* 240 (2005). The present translation presents some additions and modifications with respect to the Spanish publication. Finally, I want to thank Kara N. Moranski for her translation and Citlali Martínez for the revisions to this version.

2 México: Altavista Films/Zeta Films, 2000.

3 See, more specifically, the collected volumes *Ciudadanías del miedo*, edited by Susana Rotker. Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 2002 y *Espacio urbano, comunicación y violencia*, edited by Mabel Moraña. Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2002. These volumes compile an ample representative sample of this theoretical turn to violence.

4 *Ciudadanías del miedo*: 14.

5 *Amores perros.* London: British Film Institute, 2003: 14.

6 *Amores perros*: 44.

7 'Affecting legacies. historical memory and contemporary structures of feeling in *Madagascar* and *Amores perros*'. *Screen* 44(3) 2003: 284.

8 'El melodrama: "No te vayas, mi amor, que es inmoral llorar a solas"'. *Narraciones anacrónicas de la modernidad. Melodrama e intermedialidad en América Latina*, edited by Hermann Herlinghaus. Santiago de Chile: Cuarto Propio, 2002: 120. It should be pointed out that here Monsiváis exemplifies this process with Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction,* a film with an enormous resonance in *Amores Perros.*

9 See Claudia Schaefer. *Bored to distraction.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003: 87.

10 *Ciudadanías del miedo*: 18.

11 Eduardo Antonio Parra. *Nostalgia de la sombra.* México: Joaquín Mortiz, 2003.

12 I will address in greater detail the production of *Amores perros* and its publicity campaign below.

13 In fact, *Todo el poder* falls far short of being a movie that could be held up as a model for Mexican cinema. Jorge Ayala Blanco quite precisely points out the film's profound

ideological problems: '[*Todo el poder*] is a phoney thriller whose success is prefabricated, classist and completely leaving out the theme of poverty . . . an ode to the trivial dilemmas of the autistic national middle class with a thievable this-year's-model Cherokee' (*La fugacidad del cine mexicano.* México: Océano, 2001: 471). In spite of the fact that I share Ayala Blanco's critique, it still seems worth mentioning that, being a film that is cynically (or honestly) commercial, it has a political dimension simply absent in a more pretentious film such as *Amores perros*

14 *Bored to distraction*: 87.

15 Cited in *Bored to distraction*: 87.

16 I owe this point to Juan Poblete, who brought it to my attention during my presentation of an earlier version of this work at the LASA conference in Las Vegas.

17 Daniel and Valeria's story has also been the object of feminist readings. Deborah Shaw's interpretation, for example, suggests that the characters represent the collapse of the discourse of 'machismo', therefore articulating a critique of patriarchy itself. Valeria is interpreted as a character that validates the social and racial structures of patriarchy (she is a European model that validates the racism of the media, oppressing people of colour). Her accident and ensuing mutilation can be seen as a sort of 'happy ending' that opens the door to the possibility of a 'post-model' life for her. (*Contemporary Cinema of Latin America: 10 Key Films.* New York: Continuum, 2003: 64–6). Even when Shaw recognizes the dimensions of *Amores perros*'s conservative discourse (such as the way El Chivo's life turns out by comparison with his revolutionary ideas), the interpretation based on a critique of patriarchy seems somewhat voluntaristic. I do not share her conclusion with respect to Valeria. While she is right in pointing out that Valeria plays a role that legitimizes patriarchy (in that she accepts that a man would leave his family for her) and racism (capitalizing on the fact that she is European in a television industry that excludes the country's racial majority), Shaw's 'happy ending' does not exist. There is, however, a moral justice that cannot be explained by the critique of patriarchy but rather demands it own logic: Valeria receives a fairly severe punishment in return for participating in an adulterous relationship, whereas Daniel simply returns to his family. There is, thus, a crucial gender difference in the punishment for the same deed.

18 ¿Guerreros o ciudadanos? Violencia(s). Una cartografía de las interacciones urbanas. *Espacio urbano, comunicación y violencia*: 56.

19 Here I do not wish that my discourse be reduced to the anachronistic argument of the novel being a genre 'superior to' or 'more complex than' cinema, nor am I interested in a nostalgic defence of the novel as the figuration of all things social. The point that I am illustrating is a conceptualization of violence as something more complex than a series of moral decisions, which is seen very clearly in *Nostalgia de la sombra*. This has much to do with the simple fact that Parra's novel has no need to meet the commercial expectations of *Amores perros* or *Todo el Poder* and, therefore, is not anchored in this middle-class vision of the world.

20 *Nostalgia de la sombre*: 55.

21 *Sin límites ficcionales*. *Nostalgia de la sombra* de Eduardo Antonio Parra. *Revista de Literatura Mexicana contemporánea* 2, 2003: 69.

22 This point is illustrated, for example, by the comparison that John Beverley established between Fernando Meirelles's and Kátia Lund's *Cidade de Deus* and Víctor Gaviria's films. Beverley observes that, even if both address analogous problematics (for example gangs, drugs, etc.), there is an important structural difference: the first is

the *Bildungsroman* of a youth who leaves the ghetto and enters the bourgeoisie (consequently supporting an ideology that is, ultimately, middle class), while Gaviria is more concerned with a project representing subalternity. 'Los últimos serán los primeros': Notas sobre el cine de Víctor Gaviria. *Osamayor* XV: 34.

23 One example is *La génesis del crimen en México* (1900) by Julio Guerrero (México: Conaculta, 1996), which condenses the positivist visions surrounding the theme. It would undoubtedly be instructive to make a comparison between the arguments of books such as this one and the stereotypes presented in many contemporary accounts of violence.

24 The overview of the production of *Amores perros* that I make here is amply based on the detailed assessment elaborated by Smith in his book about the movie.

25 A brief summary of the failure of Imcine and the emergence of commercial cinema can be found in Shaw, *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America*: 52–3.

26 Un puzzle canino. Entrevista con Iñárritu. Available at: http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/amoresperros/ perros02.htm; INTERNET.

27 *Sexo, pudor y lágrimas* is perhaps the first representative of the commercial Mexican cinema that emerged in the late 1990s. The movie is a comedy of errors that tells the story of two couples with their relationships in crisis, and of two external figures putting them in further danger. The film's logic is similar to that of a myriad of Mexican movies from the latter part of the last decade whose plotlines centre on infidelity, a logic that resounds in *Amores perros*. Fidel Moral has stated that the movies' logic is based on 'punishing the free and condemning the disfunctional to stay together' (cited in *La fugacidad del cine mexicano*: 443). This logic is not far off from that of González Iñárritu film. To address the soundtrack, its title track was recorded by pop artist Aleks Syntek; the song's success doubtlessly generated interest and contributed to the film's eventual success. Martin D'Lugo has also studied the soundtrack strategy in Quentin Tarantino's films. (Amores perros. In *The Cinema of Latin America*. London: Wallflower Press, 2003: 227.) It is fitting here to address the fact that there is something different at work in Tarantino's films: while his soundtracks are well articulated to the development and aesthetic of his films, a considerable portion of the *Amores perros* soundtrack is not even featured in the movie.

28 This point is made by Marvin D'Lugo. 'Amores perros': 229

29 *Once upon a time in Mexico* is the most obvious example. Robert Rodríguez takes his stereotyped vision of the border (developed since his first film, *El Mariachi*) and combines it with the visual language used in the Almada brothers' *narcocine* and also in the *fichera* cinema sponsored during the administration of President José López Portillo, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The result is an accumulation of stereotypes that shatters any cinematographic problematization of the country. It is, simply, a metacinematographic approach that has more to do with Rodríguez's textual and cinematographic references than with Mexico itself. This aesthetic is also present in the recent North American films such as Gore Verbinski's *The Mexican* or Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic*.

30 Cited in Deborah Shaw. *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America*: 54.

31 For a contrast of this film and *Amores perros*, refer to *Contemporary cinema of Latin America*: 36 and ss.

32 See, for example, Serna, Juan Antonio. El discurso de la subcultura transgresora en el film mexicano *Amores perros*. *Ciberletras* 7. Available at: http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ faculty/guinazu/ciberletras/v07/serna.html; INTERNET.

33 See D' Lugo 'Amores perros': 227, *Bored to* distraction: 86–8.

34 The most interesting study of the climax of Tarantinesque cinema and its implications can be found in Botting, Fred, and Scott Wilson. *The Tarantinian Ethics*. London: Sage, 2001.
35 *Al sur de la modernidad. Comunicación, globalización y multiculturalidad*. Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2001: 127.
36 *Las ciudades que median los miedos*. *Espacio urbano, comunicación y violencia*: 25. The Benjamin text referred to is 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'.
37 D'Lugo. 'Amores perros': 227.
38 *Al su de la modernidad*: 127–8.
39 *La fugacidad del arte mexicano*: 486.
40 Un puzzle canino.
41 *La obra de arte en la era de su reproductibilidad técnica*. México: Ítaca, 2003: 96–9.
42 An example of a possible counterpoint can be found in the work of Carlos Monsiváis, who seeks to explain the metropolis from the point of view of its public spaces, while articulating a profound critique of the bourgeoisie's moral discourses. See *Los rituales del caos*. México: Era, 1996. I have discussed this point in my article, De ironía, desubicación, cultura popular y sentimiento nacional: Carlos Monsiváis en el cambio de siglo. *Revista de literatura mexicana contemporánea* 20 (2003): 15–23.
43 This term refers to the recent Columbian narrative that depicts violence from the perspective of the *sicario*, the name for a young assassin working within the world of drug cartels. Notable authors in this genre include Fernando Vallejo, Jorge Franco Ramos and Mario Mendoza.
44 See Braham, Persephone. *Crimes against the state*.
45 Latin America in the US imaginary: postcolonialism, translation and the magic realist imperative. In *Ideologies of Hispanism*, edited by Mabel Moraña. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005: 189–200.
46 El *boom* del subalterno. *Teorías sin disciplina. Latinoamericanismo, poscolonialidad y globalización en debate*, edited by Santiago Castro-Gómez y Eduardo Mendieta. México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 1998: 239.
47 'El *boom* del subalterno': 240.
48 This account can be found in Smith. *Amores perros*: 13–27.
49 Smith observes that this year's Oscar awards were characterized by the press as having a 'Hispanic accent', due to the presence of *Amores perros* along with two of the United States' most recent neo-exotic films: Julian Schnabel's *Before Night Falls* and Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic.*
50 *A través del espejo. El cine mexicano y su público*. México: El milagro, 1994. This book also includes a text by Carlos Bonfil.
51 'Droga y violencia: fantasmas de la nueva metrópoli latinoamericana'. In *Espacio urbano, comunicación y violencia*: 69–88. After a lengthy social analysis, Hopenhayn demonstrates that the reality of drugs and violence often operates counter to ideas generated by cultural manifestations.
52 ¿Guerreros o ciudadanos?: 60.

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