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Juan Velasco

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JUAN VELASCO

James Donald, following Michael de Certeau's description of New York city's landscape in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, states that the city that people experience produces "an 'anthropological,' poetic and mythic experience of space," and later he adds: "In the recesses and margins of urban space, people invest places with meaning, memory and desire."[1]

When the city is transferred to the border, however, film representation, meaning and memory become part of a distorted reality, a landscape filled with images related to fear, hybrid identities, and sexual and racial tension.[2] In fact, the space in between nations and cultures is usually recreated as a war zone; and its city becomes the place in which a dehumanized and distorted configuration of identity raises both sides' respective national fears. Why the hysteria and intense fascination with the space of the border? How does legal discourse participate since the 1940s in the arts and entertainment industry?

In the case of the U.S.-Mexico border, in particular, both nations project their fears onto this liminal territory through the criminalization of the hybrid identities. Film narratives during the 1940s and 1950s (and later on in the 1980s) point to the existence of a space in-between, in which the United States' worst fears and racial and economic distrust are projected.[3]

It is my intention to look at how the theme of "crossings" is transformed into a discourse of criminality while targeting liminality and hybridity, and legitimizing the spread of rhetoric of fear around the issue of

1. JAMES DONALD, THE CITY, THE CINEMA: MODERN SPACES (1995).

2. I am using Canclini's notion of hybridity, a term that conveys the reality of Latin America and the Chicano/a experience. It also goes beyond the more traditional terms used in the past in the context of Chicano/a Studies and Latin American Studies: "Occasional mention will be made of the terms syncretism, *mestizaje*, and others used to designate processes of hybridization. I prefer this last term because it includes diverse intercultural mixtures- not only the racial ones to which mestizaje tends to be limited- and because it permits the inclusion of the modern forms of hybridization better than does 'syncretism,' a term that almost always refers to religious fusions or traditional symbolic movements." NÉSTOR GARCÍA CANCLINI, HYBRID CULTURES: STRATEGIES FOR ENTERING AND LEAVING MODERNITY 11 (1995).

3. In this article, I explore the relationship between *film noir* and the representation of the space of the border, a genre born out of the political instability of the 1940s and 1950s. For earlier representations of Mexican Americans and the legal system, *see* Steven Bender, *Savage Fronteras and Tribal Boundaries: Chasing Success in Hollywood's Bordertown*, paper presented at the LatCrit IV Conference.

the border with Mexico. In order to do that I will analyze the work of two directors which I consider representative of different ways of using the space and the metaphor of the border: Orson Welles' 1957 film *Touch of Evil*, and Lourdes Portillo's documentaries *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (1988), and *El Diablo Nunca Duerme/The Devil Never Sleeps* (1994).

The analysis of Portillo's work demonstrates how the cognitive historical and cultural framework of the Chicana artist is substantially expanded beyond the southwestern border and problematizes the whole notion of borders. On the other hand, the concept of the "border" is problematic, and the projection of destructive desire on this geographic and symbolic area is particularly clear when analyzing the use of visual space in Orson Welles' 1957 film *Touch of Evil.* The original novel, *Badge of Evil*, written by Whit Masterson, takes place not in Los Robles (a bordertown in Mexico) but in San Diego. Critics have interpreted the director's decision to make a film about Los Robles, a fictional town in Mexico, as a shift in the text's emphasis: the "most fundamental theme, from the opening sequence on, is the crossing of boundaries," and the audience becomes complicit in "violent fantasies, sexual and racial."[4] As these changes take place in the script, legal language, sexual miscegenation and criminal suspects enter simultaneously the landscape of representation of these border crossings. In this sense, Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* can be read, simultaneously, as one of the best cinematic examples of not only U.S. contemporary perceptions of the border, but also the criminalized *mestizo* identities it originates. Accordingly, we cannot talk about the border without recalling that the function of every border has always been to stop or at least regulate crossings. The policing of these borders within sexual, racial and economic lines becomes a crucial factor in this analysis. The importance of reenacting the sociohistorical meaning of "borders" along the lines of gender, race, class and sexual oppressions is intrinsically related to the regulation of liminality, hybrid identities, contact, and ambiguity.

I. SEXUAL PANIC, SEXUAL CROSSINGS: *TOUCH OF EVIL*

> "Do you realize this is the very first time we have been together in my country?" (Susan's first words to Vargas after crossing the border.)

Sexual tension is rewritten in the film *Touch of Evil,* as Welles is perfectly aware of the fear of miscegenation and the distrust of racial mestizaje suggested by the opening scene. As the camera shows the beginning of the honeymoon between a Mexican man and an Anglo

4. Terry Comito, *Introduction, in* TOUCH OF EVIL 11 (Terry Comito ed., 1985).

woman, the first three and a half minutes of the famous opening sequence proved to be also a classic masterpiece of the criminalization of these sexual and border crossings.

The film begins with an irrational and distorted portrait of the border in a scene in which a newly wed couple (Susan and Vargas) is in the process of crossing to the U.S. for their honeymoon. There is some casual conversation, and then they cross to the American side. Susan asks: "Do you realize this is the very first time we have been together in my country?" Vargas replies: "Do you realize I have not kissed you in over an hour?" As Vargas, a "Mexican" detective played by Charlton Heston, approaches his lips to the lips of the Anglo-American wife Susan, played by Janet Leigh, this act coincides with a dramatic explosion, which literally becomes "the crime." The violent opening scene not only disrupts all predictable associations with a "normal" honeymoon, but also, as soon as their lips touch, a distorted new space, associated with the criminalization of all types of crossings, dominates this tale of sexual and racial murder. The juxtaposition of the image of the kiss between the Mexican male and the Anglo female with the explosion in the background recreates for the audience the hysteria projected onto the media by the McCarthyism of the 1950s, and its biological obsession with the danger of infection of the "American" body.

From the very beginning, the script presents an opposition between a vicious policeman, played by Orson Welles, and a virtuous Mexican official (Charlton Heston). Quinlan (the corrupt and racist policeman) appears just after the explosive opening sequence and from that point on, the city of the border becomes a dark Mexico, a nightmare in which space is no longer objective but rather charged with distrust and racial meaning. This tension rises as the city's liminal and hybrid space is transformed into a site of miscegenation and, as suggested by Terry Comito, of racial and sexual violence.[5] In this context, the border becomes the opening in the body, and the Mexican-American becomes the viral contamination that undermines the biological immunity of the body politics of America.

An example of the interaction between sexuality and race is the important role assigned to the "imaginary rape" scene. With this scene, rapists' identities (Pancho's and that of the entire Grandi's family) are constructed as "Susan's own fantasies about swarthy rapists (with a leather jacketed lesbian thrown in for good measure)."[6]

Thus, the language of criminality, associated with the hybrid Mexican-American, is incorporated into the film industry through one of the most successful genres of the last forty years: the crime thriller. In fact,

5. *Id.*
6. *Id.* at 23.

this discourse reintroduces the Mexican American "problem" to the U.S. public arena as an internal "legal" issue.[7] The "natives" of the border (the Grandi family) inhabit a landscape of ruined morals and viciousness, a landscape of "crossings" from which all criminality emanates. The Grandis represent, as a family, the "half-breed" groups that Quinlan despises. Appropriately enough, Quinlan decides to take "revenge" for his wife's death when he kills, with his own hands, the leader of the clan, Uncle Joe. The "Mexican" detective Vargas does not have a very different attitude toward the Mexican-Americans he encounters at the bordertown. For the Mexican official, the Grandi family is instantly suspicious since "all bordertowns bring up the worst of every country."

Not by chance, just a few years before the filming of the movie, Octavio Paz had published a piece of analysis of this border and hybrid identity from a Mexican perspective. In the *Labyrinth of Solitude*, published in 1950, Octavio Paz describes Los Angeles as the site of one of the extremes of Mexicanness; and the city that explains the existence of the "pocho" and the "pachuco," terms used to describe Mexican-American youth in the 1940s.[8] Octavio Paz, referring to the "pachuco", affirms, "His dangerousness lies in his singularity. Everyone agrees in finding something hybrid about him, something disturbing and fascinating."[9] This is the result of a "psychic oscillation between two irreducible worlds- the North American and the Mexican."[10] Moreover, for both Welles' *Touch of Evil* and Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*, the border recreates the worst fears about miscegenation between "*lo americano*" and "*lo mexicano*." In fact, Welles uses *film noir*'s aesthetic and moral ambiguity to create an almost intolerable tension in representing Los Robles's landscape of evil. The camera seems more concerned with establishing the alienating, disorienting space of the bordertown than with a descriptive and organized sense of reality. This is a significant element. Even though Orson Welles shows one of the most racist and scariest characters in the history of cinema, ultimately, the audience understands that the "touch of

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7. Orson Welles, perfectly aware of the Sleepy Lagoon case and the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, recreates in *Touch of Evil* the hysteria of the press, the legal system and the police - working together against the pachuco. In the press, it becomes the archetype of racial miscegenation portrayed as a principle of criminality. However, the film also explains the violence for the audience as later we are all able to understand Quinlan's hatred for the half-breed as a "natural" emotional response to his wife's death. Being a "pachuco" was automatically assumed to be a criminal act as evidenced by the so called pachuco "crime wave" and the coming "sailor riots" of June 3, 1943: "After the Sleepy Lagoon arrests Los Angeles police and the sheriff's departments set up roadblocks and indiscriminately arrested large numbers of Chicanos on countless charges, most popular being suspicion of burglary. These arrests naturally made headlines, inflaming the public to the point that the Office of War Information became concerned over the media's sensationalism as well as its racism." RODOLFO ACUNA, OCCUPIED AMERICA 256 (1988).

8. OCTAVIO PAZ, THE LABYRINTH OF SOLITUDE 13-14 (1950).

9. *Id.* at 16.

10. *Id.* at 18, n.3.

evil" comes from the corruption that has "contaminated" Quinlan. The impression left on the audience is that it is the space of miscegenation and *mestizaje* (the landscape of the border in which Quinlan loses his wife), which embodies the moral corruption and contamination all the characters try to avoid. Thus, the border becomes a symbol and a metaphor of a complex, sometimes contradictory; experience or what has been termed as hybrid and *mestizo* "border identities." In film, as pointed out by David Maciel and Maria Rosa Garcia-Acevedo in "The Celluloid Immigrant," this is reflected in the production of cinema from both sides, since both seem to walk a very thin line between the fear of "the possible loss of *mexicanidad* by the Mexican-origin population in the United States", and the anxiety of "control of our border according to Hollywood."[11]

The imagery of Welles' film stands in marked contrast with the seminal text on Chicano/a cultural production, published only two years after the release of *Touch of Evil*: Américo Paredes' *With His Pistol in his Hand.*[12] This study of the border ballad and the "corrido de Gregorio Cortez" is probably the first modern Chicano narrative to offer a response to earlier representations of border identity and cultural hybridism. Paredes recuperates for Chicano culture the project of a positive representation of the Chicano/a historical subject. Starting with Paredes, the notion of "cultural border" becomes one of the central elements used to delimit the process of self-configuration. Furthermore, the ambit on which Paredes develops the value system of the hero "adopt[s] increasingly specific Anglo legal assumptions while constructing 'forms of resistance'."[13] If Welles during that period uses *film noir* and the language of criminality and legal discourse to address this reality, in a similar context of legality, Américo Paredes will use the *corrido*. Using the *corrido* as "the metanarrative" to address the legal injustice of the system on the protagonist, Gregorio Cortez, *With his Pistol in his Hand* will start reversing and reworking the language of *film noir* and crime thrillers, and the image of the hybrid identities of the border.[14]

If Paredes emphasizes resistance and individuality within the American Anglo legal tradition, during the 1980s and 1990s a new wave of cultural production emerges to emphasize border identities as a "positive" experience of community and multiplicity, hybridity and liminality, and as an opportunity to produce and build a higher sense of self. Gloria

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11. David R. Maciel & Maria Rosa Garcia-Acevedo, *The Celluloid Immigrant*, *in* CULTURE ACROSS BORDERS – MEXICAN IMMIGRATION & POPULAR CULTURE 159, 164 (David R. Maciel & Maria Herrera-Sobek eds., 1998).

12. AMERICO PAREDES, WITH HIS PISTOL IN HIS HANDS – A BORDER BALLAD AND ITS HERO (1958).

13. CARL GUTIERREZ-JONES, RETHINKING THE BORDERLANDS 104 (1995).

14. Américo Paredes' use of the corrido as an epic narrative allows the Chicano/a to construct the figure of the hero within the cultural and literary tradition of the "border".

Anzaldua' s treatment of the border in *Borderlands/La Frontera* is a reaction to the border hysteria of the 1980s and can be compared to the border hysteria Americo Paredes was reacting to during the 1950s.[15] From this point of view, Paredes' and Anzaldua's works can be read as two of the most interesting Chicano/a cultural manifestos of the last fifty years.

In the next section I would like to look at how the cinema of Lourdes Portillo, responds to the hysteria of the McCarthyism of the 1950s and the neo-McCarthyism of the late 1980s when the border is again represented in the media as the "orifice" of contamination of the body politics of America.

II. CROSSING CULTURES: CRIME SOLVERS IN THE CHICANO CINEMA OF LOURDES PORTILLO

> "When I dream of home . . . " (Lourdes Portillo's beginning of the narration of the film *The Devil Never Sleeps*)

A more insightful portrayal of the complexities of the experience shaped by border identities is the work by filmmaker Lourdes Portillo. Portillo's Chicana experience takes place mainly in California, as she moved from Chihuahua (Mexico) to Los Angeles in 1957. After graduating from the San Francisco Art Institute, she got her first worldwide recognition as a filmmaker in 1986, with the production of *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (1986). Her most recent film is *Corpus: A Home Movie For Selena* (1999).

Portillo's work generates a visual language that rewrites the unsettling images offered by Octavio Paz's and Orson Welles' border identities. In her films, Chicana identity emerges simultaneously as a bridge between the different cultural "Mexican" experiences on both sides of the border, and as transgression of the homogeneity enforced by hegemonic forces in both countries. By taking as part of the cultural capital the spaces in between that escape the homogenizing control of both national states, her films become a vehicle to define both a cultural and an aesthetic policy. In fact, the crossing of cultures and languages becomes one of the most important characteristics of her work. Especially in two films, *El Diablo Nunca Duerme/The Devil Never Sleeps* (1994) (defined by some as a "crime thriller disguised as a documentary"), and *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (1988), the filmmaker addresses notions of criminality, and questions the representation of the border identities.

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15. *See generally* GLORIA ANZALDÚA, BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA (1987).

Like in *Touch of Evil,* the crossing of boundaries is the key theme in *La Ofrenda.* The film depicts how the Day of the Dead is celebrated in the state of Oaxaca (Mexico), and San Francisco (California). The public and private celebrations of the Day of the Dead portrayed by the film are an example of the kind of border crossings that can benefit the whole. Here, themes of ethnic, gender and sexual difference are surrounded by positive images of unity, peace and respect for a tradition and culture that does not recognize boundaries. In *La Ofrenda,* however, the movie makes no mention of borders; the locus of action is transferred from Oaxaca to San Francisco in an instant, without concern for the crossing of geopolitical boundaries. The director moves from the representation of tradition in Mexico to the way the same tradition is transformed and celebrated as culture in the United States. The camera shows a transition that flows smoothly and naturally. The way the camera flows from the Mexico side of the border to the United States side of the border shows a "natural feeling", which makes sense considering the director's own identity is of both lands and cultures. The distortion is gone; the space in-between is not a sociopolitical orifice, but a nurturing space where ritual, tradition and culture meet.

The film *La Ofrenda* also addresses issues of cultural identity as it relates to the U.S.-Mexican border. If *Touch of Evil* shows the corrosive and destructive forces unleashed by the crossing of boundaries, *La Ofrenda* engages in such a crossing, adding a positive, celebratory tone to it. The metaphors of hybridity, border-crossings, transculturation and *mestizaje* become the space from which Portillo's films negotiate the reconstruction of identity while trying to short circuit or interfere with the purity-oriented theories of nationality, "evil," and "solitude." In fact, her new visual language questions crime thrillers' stereotypes as Chicano/a experience is reworked as a new space that reaffirms identity as a dynamic and constant motion between cultures. Portillo's border discourse comes to define itself as a new subject, a fluid and dynamic model of identity that rejects fixed or monolithic images of the Chicana experience.

The Day of the Dead not only aids in breaking down the geographical border, but also the border between life and death, and is shown to provide a forum for addressing other social stigmas. The celebration gives people the opportunity to cross gender boundaries, and transform themselves in front of the community: "In the general disorder of the fiesta, everyone forgets himself and enters into otherwise forbidden situations and places."[16] Linda Fregoso in *Bronze Screen* also makes an insightful observation about the hidden translation within a cross-

16. Susan N. Masuoka, *La Ofrenda,* Film Review, 53:1 WESTERN FOLKLORE 93 (1994).

dresser's final gesture of offering the viewer an apple.[17] Sexuality is only hinted at by the cross-dresser, but it becomes a profound theme when the documentary switches from rural Mexico to urban San Francisco, California. In San Francisco, we are exposed to the experiences of the gay and lesbian community during the Day of the Dead, and we see personal *testimonios* of gay and lesbian Chicanos and Chicanas.

Some of these Chicanos/as celebrate the Day of the Dead as homage to their friends and family members who have been lost to AIDS. The central notion is that even dimensions of gender, sex, culture and ethnicity are also fluid and ought to be opened up to interpretation. This rhetorical operation, applied to culture, comes to define itself as a new revolutionary subject within the paradigm of a dynamic, fluid, and contradictory identity in constant motion.

The Devil Never Sleeps is quite consistent with this message, expanding also the scope of the traditional documentary format. If *La Ofrenda* offers a positive, celebratory perspective to border crossing, *The Devil* takes the crime thriller genre and transforms its negative vision of the *mestiza* criminal into a positive figure.

What are the cinematic techniques involved in order to expose and revert the crime thriller's stereotypes about the cultural and historical truths of Portillo's Chicana experience? Ironically, she borrows elements from the analytic detective genre: Portillo's uncle is found dead; it turns out that there are reasons to believe that it was a suicide or, as later appears more clearly, that this unexplainable act could be a murder. Portillo's documentary about her own trip to Mexico is transformed into a quest for family history, in the form of a hidden mystery. Thus, Portillo's documentary is not only a search for family origins, but also a clever and poetic rewriting of the stereotype: the crime offender is transformed into a crime solver as she decides to investigate the mysterious death of her uncle.

An intimate relationship between the narrative and the audience is established from the very beginning as Portillo herself narrates in first person: "When I dream of home. . . " Her appeal to memory, however, is punctuated by interviews, pictures, and legal documents. Her cinematography reflects on the manner in which we search for the truth of the people, and the ordinary world of the community. Furthermore, by varying perspectives and voices, *The Devil* breaks through the artifice of a linear narrative as the audience plays a role in reconstructing the story. Through this process, the audience is actually acculturated into the community, becoming familiar with the customs and unspoken norms of Mexican

17. ROSA LINDA FREGOSO, THE BRONZE SCREEN: CHICANA AND CHICANO FILM CULTURE 111(1993).

culture. The crime investigation allows us to penetrate together into the realm of memory and politics, family life and history.

It is in this context that Portillo's work plays an important role: contesting the crime thriller genre and applying the unconventional use of the documentary format, which allows Portillo the convergence of personal memories and the experience of the community. The viewing process invites the audience to understand Portillo's family and cultural experiences, and transforms the crime solving process into a communal effort. Another important aspect of the reversing of the laws of crime thrillers' language, however, is the solution: The true extent of the crime and the real involvement of some of the criminals is never known. Portillo's work shows, adequately enough, how certain crimes committed against a community go unpunished. In standard crime thriller narratives, generally the criminal is punished and the larger cultural value system is reaffirmed: justice is done. Few works are willing to step out into the real world and acknowledge that some murders are never solved. Portillo's work, however, is very willing to do this. Moreover, seemingly the only solution to the crime comes back over and over again: encouraging the pursuit of self- knowledge and information about and for the community. As the audience joins the narrator in the pursuit of truth, the act of questioning itself becomes the path toward acknowledgment of a history hidden by the manipulations of power. Left with pieces of a mystery narrative, the audience must enter her film, putting together fragments in order to form a picture of a Chicana's family life. In this way, the audience actually becomes a part of the work as its members interact with the different members of the family and draw conclusions. Really, *The Devil Never Sleeps* transforms the stereotypes of criminality assigned to Chicanos/as into a community-building action.

As a narrator, director and "crime solver" herself (she becomes her own character), Portillo seems to put a special emphasis on history as the hidden truth behind the story. On both sides of the border, the accumulation of evidence is never sufficient and the audience is forced over and over to reevaluate the dimension of truth, meaning and power in the history of this community. Through this challenge, the audience comes closer to the truth of the Chicana experience and becomes a participant as Portillo searches for the nature of power, family conflict and domination in Northern Mexico.

The real innovation of Portillo's aesthetics is the redefinition of the notion of border crossing within a range of political, autobiographical and cultural facts. Portillo's radical treatment of the crime thriller genre through documentary format and her own representation of the border experience restores, not without tension, both the cultural memories of the individual and those of the community. This is the kind of cultural production that, as John Hawley points out in *Cross-Addressing: Resistance Literature and Cultural Borders*, "explores the uneasy tension im-

plied in this intersecting of the global and the particular, the collective and the individual".[18] Furthermore, the aesthetics of *The Devil* and *La Ofrenda* become a call to construct "alternative stories" which challenge film representations of Chicano/a life in mainstream Hollywood. An idea to explore is that the Chicano/a artist internally creates a kind of diasporic space, which extends his sense of identity beyond that of the birthplace. Lourdes Portillo's films focus on the extreme ambivalence with which the border is represented and its mobility within subjective space. This ambivalence and subjectivity of the border should be interpreted, in this way, as a changing space as present in her daily life as it is the memory of the Chicano community.

This is the most appealing contribution to the crime thriller genre instituted since the 1940s. As André Bazin has noticed, ambiguity has dominated the genre, and especially the work of Orson Welles, almost from the very beginning, an "ambiguity in which aesthetics are nothing but the reverse of morality".[19] According to Portillo's Chicana cinema, the approach to the shaping and remaking of the cultural values of the community is not only centered by the language used in representation, but is firmly rooted in its conception of good and evil, its moral values and the search for the truth in history. Ultimately, the audience is exposed to a change not only in the aesthetics of the film (from crime thriller to personal documentary) but also in the values that its form of expression represents. As Portillo understands the dynamics of the genre, the "touch of *evil*" is rewritten as a Mexican cultural statement ("the devil never sleeps or *el diablo nunca duerme*"), in the form of a calling for the audience to be alert, to watch out. Portillo's concern with truth, falsity, and the meaning of events during her multiple crossings is transformed into a transcendental act of awareness for her and her community. Lourdes Portillo's Chicana cinema offers a new visual language, a merging of the documentary's outer language with that of subjective and autobiographical self-awareness. Switching freely between cultural spaces, her work generates a new legal discourse, a space in which the audience can finally find the border as the cultural legacy of self-consciousness.

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18. John C. Hawley, Introduction, *in* CROSS-ADDRESSING: RESISTANCE LITERATURE AND CULTURAL BORDERS 2 (John C. Hawley ed., 1996).

19. ANDRE BAZIN, ORSON WELLES: A CRITICAL VIEW 125 (1972).