

A WORLD COMPOSED:
PHOTOGRAPHS, DOPPELGÄNGERS,
AND NEAR-DOCUMENTARY IN NEW MEXICAN CINEMA

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In the title of his 1993 article, Néstor García Canclini famously raises the question: “Will There Be a Latin American Cinema in the Year 2000?”¹ Canclini’s provocation speaks not only to the withered state-backed film industry in Mexico exemplified by the closing of theaters *en masse* the previous year,² or the disappearance of Mexican films and audiences from those that remained, but the end of a national cinema forged over nearly a century and by more than two decades of continental collective efforts. In the early 1990s, Mexico, a nation defined by its long history of visual culture,³ formerly at the center of Latin America’s film production,⁴ was facing the threat of a cinematic extinction or even, as Canclini puts it, a cultural one. The threat of the end of a Mexican cinema—synecdoche for the cultural unraveling happening throughout Latin America—prompts one of Latin America’s most prominent cultural critics to contemplate “the question as to who will narrate our identity. . .”⁵

Indeed, for Canclini and critics like Charles Ramírez Berg and Zuzana Pick, the crisis of Latin American cinema and identity are one in the same. Only through cinema, argues Ramírez Berg, could Mexico maintain a “realm where all the country’s pasts have been preserved.”⁶ And in fact, during the late sixties—the beginning of a New Latin American Cinema or Mexico’s New Cinema⁷—this unifying purpose to project identity not only intensified for Mexico,⁸ but for Latin America more broadly. If Mexico’s cinematic trajectory was guided by the search for “*mexicanidad*”⁹ or Mexicanness, the New Latin American Cinema that emerged at the end of the 1960s, argues Pick, was “nourished” by the striving for a Latin American one, “a continental unity grounded in projecting Latin America’s distinctiveness.”¹⁰

The birth of (what in retrospect would be called) the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) in 1967 had provided a unified direction for films of the seventies through the early eighties. Seen as a kind of politics in unison, the NLAC offered the promise of strengthened nationalisms through continental agency, what Pick describes as the reciprocity of national and Pan-American commitments to “regional forms of cultural autonomy.”¹¹ Positioning “cinema as an ideological agent”¹²—art turned politics—these films, Pick argues, “could

converge in a rhetoric of cultural nationalism and continental revolution.”¹³ And while much of Mexican cinema in the 1960s was politically and aesthetically lackluster, the events of 1968¹⁴ prompted a cinematic shift toward the NLAC’s agenda and a more socially conscious film known as New Cinema. If the NLAC sought to expose the real conditions of Latin America’s “shared histories of underdevelopment and modernization,”¹⁵ as Pick observes, revealing the suppression of student protests with gunfire ten days before the Olympics to maintain the appearances of “Mexico’s ‘economic miracle’”¹⁶ would serve as the exemplar that could thrust the country toward the NLAC’s agenda of an explicitly political film.

The UNAM student-produced documentary *El grito* or *The Cry* (1968)—“a live testimony”¹⁷—marked a new direction for film in Mexico,¹⁸ the adoption of a militant Hollywood-auteur resistant “Third Cinema” that displaced “authorship” with amplified viewer reception.¹⁹ Deploying “documentary or documentary style as both a witness to reality and a tool . . . to transform reality” not only chipped away at concepts of authorship but at the division between art and the world. By turning the director into a kind of audience via the camera, filmmakers sought to erode the distinction between “what was being represented and its referent.”²⁰ In line with the anti-literary shifts taking place,²¹ the NLAC “contested the traditional premises of authorship” by transferring the site of meaning from the director and the text into the hands of viewers.²² In fact, at a larger scale the “poetics of imperfect cinema” mirrored the artworld’s anti-art movements.²³ Cinema, much like art at the end of the late sixties, became increasingly opposed to aesthetically autonomous “closed forms.”²⁴ The alliance of art and politics manifest in writings like “For an Imperfect Cinema” (1969) posited the demand for “spectators to transform themselves into agents,” and “genuine co-authors.”²⁵ *Testimonio* style, anti-auteur film which relied on activating audience agency at the expense of its own meaning coincided not only with the disappearance of aesthetically ambitious art but primed consumers for a market driven media which in Mexico would dramatically eclipse cinema.²⁶

By the 1990s the corpus of Latin American and Mexican films that aspired to leftist political struggle had faded into a cultural landscape, reducing radical revolutionary projects to memory.²⁷ While committed to nostalgia and reconstructing the past, the politics of the films of the 1990s, Ignacio Sánchez Prado asserts, stemmed from a neoliberal thrust rather than a “social or ideological ‘commitment.’”²⁸ Efforts to make art political, to reduce art to a document conscripted by the real, not only marked the failure of politics and a kind of end for Latin American cinema, but an end for art.²⁹ Despite the revolutionary gains of the left at the end of the 1950s celebrated across Latin America or the efforts of the film movements that followed, by the early 90s, Mexico’s shrinking privatized film industry, symptomatic of the post-NAFTA

era, signaled the neoliberal reduction of culture to the demands of the market. And what the market demanded was easily consumable media, in short TV. By the 90s the culture of MTV, telenovelas, talk shows, and global content consumed in private domestic spaces comprised the primary mode for media. Erasing the line between art and the world left Mexican cinema facing what Canclini describes as an impending “social and narrative” void.³⁰ Of course, it wasn’t the technological miracle—of a uniquely Latin American “electronic iconology”³¹—that would arrive in the year 2000 to save Latin American and Mexican identity, as Canclini had hoped, but New Mexican Cinema’s plea for the return of art.³² Drowning in media in the wake of a failed cultural autonomy, New Mexican Cinema would step in quite literally to fill that void, or rather to frame it. Where New Latin American Cinema appealed to the world, turning art into an ongoing, unfolding cultural situation, New Mexican Cinema, I assert, appealed to the model of the photograph to reinstate film’s aesthetic autonomy. Alejandro González Iñárritu, as we’ll see, mobilizes the conflictual duality of the indexical to stage film’s transformation from media into medium and document into art. New Mexican Cinema’s orphic turn toward photography (cinema’s younger self and its internal double)—which carries within in it, in art historical terms, something seemingly antithetical to the medium, painting—gives it the potential to elevate film from a record to a work of art. For New Mexican Cinema, the photograph, I argue, serves as film’s own *doppelgänger*.³³ Indeed, it’s in producing a cinema that calls on film to act like a photograph—something with a frame (an object disarticulated from the world)—that these filmmakers find a way to portray the tension between life (the relations of the world) and art (the world within the work), a world composed. New Mexican Cinema begins not by resurrecting the nationally galvanizing landscapes of Mexico’s Golden Age, nor with the NLAC’s radically cultural vision. It begins by creating a work in which “(as one might say) [it] loses itself”³⁴ in the medium through the hands of an ad man turned director.

Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Amores perros* / *Love’s a Bitch* (2000), begins in the cinematic “void” with a literal landscape—a black screen divided by a horizontal skipping white line.³⁵ These first few seconds of *Amores perros* are reminiscent of the scratches at the beginning of an old film reel or even the experiments of cameraless films.³⁶ But, of course, since these lines aren’t static we know there’s a camera running, and since they’re horizontal—moving against the direction of the way a roll of film typically runs in a movie camera—we know right away they aren’t accidental. So, a few seconds into the first feature of his career Iñárritu emphasizes two things: first, that this is film, and second, that it’s a film made by someone. In the absence of the view, replaced by the film’s illusion of its materiality (that it’s unmediated by images), the voiced dialogue reverberates like a proclamation of the film’s own self-reflexivity as if from behind a screen: “Qué hiciste cabrón?” “What did you do asshole?”—or

alternatively—“What did you cause? What mess did you make?”

Of course, only seconds later it becomes clear this isn't a flaw running through Iñárritu's 35mm film, but an extreme aerial close-up of black asphalt concrete and the painted white line bisecting a highway. And although the perspective quickly jumps to a horizontal view of Mexico City, the repeated corrugated metal lining the side of the highway, once again, blends into a single drawn-out amplified image of black and white lines, a structure that emerges *in medias res*, as if from the film itself. Despite the rapid cuts, the black and white lines appear once again when the perspective shifts to a receding view of the road and finally to the car's black-and-white, blood-stained upholstery.

Iñárritu's first foray into film—considered by many to be a kind of beginning for New Mexican Cinema³⁷—opens with the experience of a highway, precisely the thing that had come to be emblematic of art's end. So right from the start the film raises questions about art and highways: What do we talk about when we talk about art and highways? And what do highways have to do with making films or making art? Beginning *in medias res* with a blown-up image of the highway, Iñárritu seems to confront sculptor Tony Smith's end-of-art epiphany about the endlessness of the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike—that “[t]here's no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it”³⁸—head on. Of course, this is largely how we've come to understand film, as a medium that immerses us in an experience.³⁹ And even if the Tony Smith moment never occurred to Iñárritu, the landscape and the questions it raises are already endemic to film. For film the landscape (here an urban one, the highway) becomes a way, “to explore,” what Mark Goble calls, the “iconographies and experiences of duration,”⁴⁰ concepts central to the art crisis at the end of the 1960s.⁴¹ Certainly, filling the screen with a blown-up fragment of the highway that looks like film running mechanically through a camera—unfinished celluloid marked by the traces of its own movement—asks us to ponder the possibility of something that looks like Tony Smith's unfinished turnpike: an infinitely unfolding situation.⁴² Iñárritu returns to the end of art moment, I argue, not to instantiate an explicitly political art, nor to construct a uniquely Mexican iconography, but to call up the dual possibility of the medium itself. Indeed, what the first few minutes of *Amores perros* bring to light is that the conditions characterizing the end of art and the end of Mexican Cinema are deeply intertwined.

What we can begin to see, then, is that projecting a blown-up fragment of the highway doesn't produce the experience of Smith's endlessness but precisely the opposite—finitude. Interrupting the illusion of deep space, the camera's closeness to the highway emphasizes the screen's flatness. Certainly, this shot calls attention to the screen's borders not its depth. So, here, much like the canvas of the abstract expressionists at the end of the late sixties—at the end of art—the screen turns from something we look into to something we look

at. Iñárritu's highway emphasizes the borders and flatness of a black screen to invoke the photograph, I argue, much the way abstract expressionist Morris Louis would emphasize the blank canvas to invoke the page.⁴³ Where Louis's transformation depended on the paint's indexicality and painting's literalism, the blankness of the canvas and the dripping of paint, Iñárritu's depends on reducing the highway to film's literalism, a recording of paint skipping on asphalt.⁴⁴ And indeed, just as Louis would turn to the flatness of the page to restore painting's pictorialism so too does Iñárritu turn to flatness to restore film's frame.

While in the Judeo-Christian tradition there is a search for symmetry and resolution in projecting nothing but a picture of a moving highway Iñárritu displaces the effect of Smith's endlessness for the structural limits of a frame, and in doing so he insists on the fact that "[t]he world of a moving picture is screened."⁴⁵ In fact, Iñárritu can summon the frame from Smith's highway precisely because, as Stanley Cavell suggests:

The screen is not a support, not like a canvas; there is nothing to support, that way. It holds a projection, as light as light. . . . Because it is the field of a photograph, the screen has no frame; that is to say, no border. Its limits are not so much the edges of a given shape as they are the limitations, or capacity, of a container. The screen is a frame; the frame is the whole field of the screen—as a frame of film is the whole field of a photograph, like the frame of a loom or a house . . . [T]he screen-frame is a mold, or form.⁴⁶

Film's frame, as Cavell points out, comes from its photographic quality, the way a director engages a camera. So, here with the simple trick of merging car and camera, doubling down on experience to reduce film to its literal condition, the look of blankness and experience as such, Iñárritu displaces Smith's highways for film's own. If, as Cavell argues, "the screen is a frame" then, as Iñárritu shows, it can take any shape. What Iñárritu's opening reveals is that the medium of film is particularly equipped to overcome its literalism, "defeating or suspending its own objecthood through the medium of shape."⁴⁷ "[T]he successive film frames [that] are fit flush into the fixed screen frame" create something that is "indefinitely extendible and contractible,"⁴⁸ which means, as Iñárritu reminds us, that film has the potential to compete with the highways of the world. Much the way Louis mobilized the impersonality of the dripping paint—its indexicality—Iñárritu mobilizes the indexical movements of the car.

It's in doubling the indexical, the automaticity of the car against the automaticity of the film, that Iñárritu insists on film's separateness. And in fact, the separateness that Iñárritu models in the first few minutes will come to struc-

ture the entirety of the film. If, after the end of art, the problem of the artist is literalism's endlessness, the frame becomes the director's solution to contain that endlessness. Borrowing the camera's finitude, Iñárritu's extreme close-up not only "crops a portion from an indefinitely larger field"⁴⁹ but the entirety of the view. Thus, by blowing up the highway, as if it were a still image, Iñárritu conjures the momentary illusion of something that approaches a picture not a screen.⁵⁰

Rendering the moving image pictorial, Iñárritu moves away from "duration" and the feeling of endlessness—that for Smith and critics like Michael Fried meant the end of art—toward something that approaches the appearance of a static object. Indeed, by the end of art moment, it's in these terms that Greenberg argues on behalf of modernist art: "[P]ictorial art in its highest definition is static; it tries to overcome movement in time and space . . . its unity should be immediately evident . . . and this is something to be grasped only in an instant of time."⁵¹ Engaging the frame to dramatize each movement on the road as an "instant of time"—by reducing paint to a mark and elevating that mark to its shape—Iñárritu turns experience into something like pictorial minimalism. We can conflate the highway with an unmanned film reel, precisely because each appearance of the skipping line, like the "firstness of marking as such"⁵² on a blank canvas (here the screen's blackness) reproduces an illusion of flatness that undermines the stereoscopic experience. In fact, as we'll see, expanding the screen doesn't end up "extending the senses" but instead "confining them, leaving room for thought."⁵³

In insisting on the screen's flatness at the film's opening, Iñárritu reminds us, as Cavell puts it, that "[a] screen is a barrier. What does the silver screen? It screens me from the world it holds—that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me—that is, screens its existence from me."⁵⁴ So, although we can hear the sound of speeding cars, the blown-up image, like a photograph "holding the rest of the world away," interrupts our experience.⁵⁵ The framed segment of the highway guarantees that "the rest of the world," including the viewer, "is cut out."⁵⁶ Thus, beginning in medias res by projecting nothing but action becomes a way to withhold action and by extension the viewers' experience of it. In fact, turning the screen into a highway that looks and even acts like celluloid, creates the illusion that the sound of the cars, the labored breathing, and the plea of a desperate voice, like the viewer, are screened from the film too.

So, while establishing shots typically orient the audience, offering the viewer a sense of time and place, here in conjuring a disembodied voice, the flatness of the screen, and the absence of a view, *Amores perros* not only disorients the audience but insists on the screen's separation from the time and space of the world. Rather than orient us toward a view we can experience, Iñárritu directs us toward a fundamental question about what film is. Is it something

caused? Or is it something made? Certainly, the film's insistence on the possibility of indexicality's conflictual duality, that it can be both caused and made, is a problem hypostasized by the event at the center of the film: a car crash. In redeploying the footage of the car crash in the film four times, an event that occurred in the world only once, Iñárritu insists on the difference between a crash caused by forces, an accident, and a crash composed by a director, a work of art. In fact, much like the crash at its center, what unites Iñárritu's narrative triptych is the collective powerlessness in the face of forces. Despite their varied subjectivities—Octavio, a lower-class unemployed twenty something turned accidental dogfighter who schemes to run off with, Susana, the teenage mother and wife to Ramiro, Octavio's sadistic brother; or Daniel, a successful ad man who leaves his wife and children for a young Spanish model, Valeria—all manner of plans conceived by the characters are violently thwarted. Only a failed revolutionary turned hitman who, like an itinerant director, wanders the film's landscape recomposing it, models a solution.

Indeed, in recomposing the film—here the highly wrought accident—Iñárritu marks his own aesthetic ambitions. In *Amores perros*, even accidents aren't accidents. The director explicitly asserts this aim by reproducing the film's opening nearly an hour into the film when the framed blown-up highway reappears at the end of the first triptych. The reuse of the footage leading up to the crash which displaces the world's temporality in favor of the film's own structure, once again distances the highspeed chase from the viewer pulling it apart from the inside. The desperate plea of voices (now known to us as Jorge and Octavio) overlaying the scene's visual content have the far away quality of a recording more distant and mediated than the first. In detaching the recorded voices from the recorded images and replacing them with non-diegetic music Iñárritu depicts an even more frantic Octavio who mimes dialogue as muted shouts. In one sense the silent screams amplify the desperate state of the characters just as the compressed scene (cut and trimmed down by Iñárritu) increases the feeling of speed. But they do so as a conceptual montage that insists on making Iñárritu's cuts internal. In other words, beginning once again in the film's actual middle (making the *in medias res* of the first literal) Iñárritu marks the fact that the speed, the sound, and the actions of the actors are all shaped by him. Composing and recomposing the opening scene with a series of interruptions, Iñárritu, approaching Cavell's terms, reminds us that where the screen is concerned, "sight is an object,"⁵⁷ and, as Iñárritu demonstrates, for sound that's no less true. Certainly, this is what allows Iñárritu to turn shouts into silence and our experience of the highway into what looks like a film running on the screen. Like its reappearance, the inaugural image of the highway doesn't immerse us in an experience but instead calls attention to what's hidden, the materiality of the film itself.

The rebooted scene takes place after a dogfight gone bad when in the mid-

dle of losing, the kingpin, Jarocho, shoots the film's titular dog and accidental champion, Cofi, prompting Octavio to stab Jarocho with a tiny knife. The camera which approaches with a bent over bodily point of view lingers on the static bloody knife. Iñárritu's hovering over the knife marks the cut and splice coming up just as Octavio and Jorge's walk up and down the corridor four times preceding the stab marks the film's commitment to reuse. These four trips like the four appearances of the car crash structurally elevate Vittorio De Sica's four match strikes. The "repetitions, prolepsis and analepsis in the ordering of the sequences" as Juan Pellicer contends, "achieve the effect or illusion of a continuous and endless present."⁵⁸ Making the discrepancy between "what is real,"⁵⁹ and what is not visible, then, Iñárritu turns "projecting" into to a kind of "depicting," thus directing the viewer to the film's own staging. If film is a medium intrinsically tied to our "physical reality as such,"⁶⁰ or, as Cavell states in his reading André Bazin and Erwin Panofsky, "the medium of film is photographic, and . . . a photograph is of reality or nature,"⁶¹ then film's artistic possibility lies in what Cavell calls "some mode of depicting [reality]."⁶²

By the 1970s and 80s, however, more than a decade before the arrival of *Amores perros* and New Mexican Cinema, it wasn't film's staging but photography's that occupied the place of central importance to art. Indeed, Michael Fried begins his book on contemporary photography⁶³ by observing a particular change that had taken place in photography: like paintings before them the "art photographs" of the late seventies and eighties "began to be made not only at large scale but also—as the French critic Jean-François Chevrier was the first to point out—for the wall."⁶⁴ In the "for-the-wallness" of Jeff Wall's lightboxes and Jean-Marc Bustamante's *Tableaux*, Fried discovers the newfound importance of the photograph's relationship with the viewer. In their "stagedness" each found new ways to do what modernist painting had previously done: to privilege the relations within the work over our response to it.

Yet the "large scale"⁶⁵ photography not only inched toward the wall, but toward the size and look of the film screen. In fact, during "the second half of the 1970s" as Fried points out, "art' photography . . . engaged head-on with the question of cinema."⁶⁶ As Fried notes, Cindy Sherman's *Film Stills* famously take this up.⁶⁷ Sherman's photographs, Fried suggests, model the absorption of cinema: "characters who appear absorbed in thought or feeling . . . or who look 'offscreen'. . . or who gaze close-up at their own image in a mirror . . . or who are viewed . . . from a considerable distance . . ."⁶⁸ What Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* demonstrate in their "stagedness" and commitment to the fiction of cinema's diegetic absorption is how the looking that happens within film addresses the problem of viewing and being viewed. And just as Sherman's photos look like film stills, Wall's near documentary lightbox photographs invoke what Wall himself calls a "cinematographic" quality.⁶⁹ Wall's *Movie Audience*, for example, captures the look of a film audience absorbed in viewing, the way,

as Fried suggests, “a movie audience . . . ‘loses itself’ or, perhaps more accurately, ‘forgets itself’ in the experiencing of a movie.”⁷⁰ But unlike the actual experience of viewing a film, these photos reproduce a “photographic distance from the filmic experience.”⁷¹ In other words, in their “stagedness,” they internally depict experience rather than depend on the audience outside. In deploying the force of the photograph’s frame by calling on something frameless—cinema—these photographers assert the photograph’s crucial ontological quality: that it’s cut off.

Indeed, throughout *Amores perros*, Iñárritu stages the duality of film’s potential—its ability to be both a record and a picture—to overcome Mexico’s media void. We see one such staging in the film’s second triptych when the massive *Enchant* billboard of Valeria distracts Daniel from the family scene taking place in the car as he gazes out the driver’s side window. Once again evoking the shot of the highway at the film’s beginning, the blown-up still of Valeria dominates Daniel’s view (and ours). The photographed ad not only blocks out the other objects, but, like the consumer market, saturates the *mise-en-scène*. This picture isn’t, as Tony Smith imagines, “the art of postage stamps”⁷² but a larger-than-life image placed in tension with the screen. Of course, just like highways, billboard ads don’t in of themselves have a meaning. Their sole purpose is to sell things, to appeal to the potential consumer.⁷³

In the film, however, the ad works differently since it becomes integral to Iñárritu’s aesthetic ambition and to the scene’s meaning. While ads in the world demand our response, this ad demands our interpretation. Introducing us to the character, Valeria, and her lover, Daniel, the car stuck in traffic becomes the justification for a camera that lingers. Valeria’s image framed by the car door window, a surrogate camera lens, literally interrupts the action of the family scene. So here, once again, turning the car into a camera, Iñárritu presents an ad as if it were a still image or photograph. With the speed of the car—or lack thereof—and the window’s shaping of the frame, Iñárritu overcomes the ad’s meaninglessness making it central to the scene. And as we come to find out, the middle-aged Daniel isn’t just gazing at the advertisement bait of a beautiful woman, but pining for his lover, Valeria, the woman in the ad. So, while, in the world, media functions to fragment and do away with meaning, here, the staged media serves to unite the film’s narrative parts.

Despite (or perhaps because of) Valeria’s striking physical presence, Iñárritu constructs the character through a series of fragmented mediated sounds and images.⁷⁴ Antithetical to art, Valeria serves as the affective scream within the film, synecdoche for media’s meaninglessness. Introduced to the viewer through media, she functions as an amalgamation of fractured composites.⁷⁵ Of course, as we come to find out, she is literally fractured and left amputated by the accident. Although Valeria first appears to the viewer in the initial accident scene, the director consigns the encounter to a mere two seconds—a screaming

obscured behind a blur of hands pressed against a bloody window. Iñárritu calls attention to the internal frame of the window partially blocked by a bystander who shouts, “The window. The window that’s it.”⁷⁶

The emphasis on the window points to the way in which the near-anonymous female figure—whom the audience later comes to know as Valeria—is cut off from the viewer, literally trapped behind glass. In fact, this is precisely how we’re introduced to her before the crash, as an image on a TV screen. Like the initial image of the highway, Iñárritu, once again, blows up the television screen to fill the frame, structurally tying the moment of the film’s black screen that marks its beginning. The TV monitor doesn’t just mediate Valeria’s image: it merges in the totality of film’s the *mise-en-scène*. And much like the disembodied voice at the film’s beginning, Iñárritu conjures Valeria as a disembodied scream. Holding her hand next to her face with her head and mouth stretched obliquely, Valeria embodies the scream. Her cry for help manifests generically amidst meaningless sounds—“Ah, help me please! Help me!”⁷⁷—blending with the tapping of her silver ring against the glass and the sound of a stuck horn blaring in the background.⁷⁸ So, the character most associated with the world—media, celebrity, and superficiality—is here reduced to a scream and, compositionally speaking, to one part of the crash. Indeed, Iñárritu stages the juxtaposition between the causal (something we’re meant to respond to or experience) and the composed (something we’re asked to interpret and understand) by contrasting the meaninglessness of Valeria with the meaningfulness of *el Chivo*.⁷⁹

Where Valeria, the character called up by the void of the media highway, is literally reduced to fragments, *el Chivo*, the character most notably associated with photographs and meaning, spends his days actively composing and decomposing those fragments as a kind of internal auteur. In producing himself as a kind of director-viewer⁸⁰ in *el Chivo*, Iñárritu, I contend, doubles down on art photography’s “stagedness” by finding a way to portray “photographic distance” and “filmic experience” not in the stillness of the photograph but in the moving picture of the film. More than the hand of the director wielded by the auteurs of the French New Wave,⁸¹ Iñárritu, the reformed ad man, stakes a claim to New Mexican Cinema by inscribing himself as a figure in his own filmic landscape as, *el Chivo*, the failed gun toting, machete wielding revolutionary who gathers, cuts, and shoots. But while Iñárritu shoots with a camera, *el Chivo* shoots with a gun. In fact, through *el Chivo*, Iñárritu not only implants a self-reflexive critique of the director as a kind of hired hitman, but a scapegoat, a *chivo expiatorio* that answers for failure at the scene of the political-aesthetic crash. Where the director answers to the demands of audiences and studio executives, *el Chivo* responds to the guilt of abandoning his family by giving in to the goading of the corrupt cop, Leonardo, to put out a “hit.” And it’s in producing the discrepancy between these two hitmen—*el*

Chivo's violence to the world, a destructive act, against the director's violence to the medium, an aesthetically generative one—that Iñárritu reinstates the line between his filmic landscape and the world's highway. In fact, it's precisely in adulterating the film that Iñárritu turns records on film into the story of art. When *el Chivo* shoots through glass it shatters just as it does in the world. But when Iñárritu shoots through the glass, the fragments of the world cohere as art.

The figure who lives apart from the world silently watching for most of the film, not only serves as a kind of audience or viewer but director, Iñárritu's metaphoric *doppelgänger*. Of course, if art is the world's other, the director's insertion of himself into his own film demands a kind of inversion. Thus, Iñárritu's double is not someone who makes art but a revolutionary who fails to "compose the world," a "grotesque" machete wielding "Karl Marx" who stands out "as anachronistic and exhausted"⁸² in the Mexico City of the late 1990s as capitalism's neoliberal exemplar.

El Chivo, then, a kind of filmic *pícaro*⁸³ of the 1968 moment, wanders the landscape at the dawn of the millennium, long after the end of the Left and the end of art. Iñárritu's messianic messenger not only re-describes the failure of politics as the failure of art, as Eugenio Di Stefano aptly asserts, but he makes that failure literal.⁸⁴ Certainly by positioning *el Chivo* in front of the *Heraldo*⁸⁵ newspaper stand with the sign pointed directly to his head at the scene of the crash, Iñárritu explicitly marks the character as a kind messenger. But it's not as the "messenger of justice and guardian of historical memory,"⁸⁶ as Michael Abeyta argues, since it's precisely via violence, as a contract killer who disrupts and discomposes the world, that he operates. In fact, we first see the sign next to *el Chivo* only moments before he carries out a hit—composing the world by discomposing it—shooting his mark through glass. The hitman's revolutionary mode is one made purposeless according to capitalism's impersonalism, reenacting its violence as nothing more than violence as such. And, as we'll see, it's by committing the same error, attempting to "compose the world," that *el Chivo* is reduced to returning to the world by crudely pasting himself into it after the fact.

A hypostasized art-made-life, Iñárritu's angel of death and harbinger of art, then, lives in a world apart. We first encounter *el Chivo* at the outskirts of the city picking through trash, a figure amidst a landscape. With his cart of refuse and pack of dogs, the professor turned "pepenadero"⁸⁷ stands sifting through trash along the side of the highway. Much like the film's opening, here Iñárritu calls attention to the view only to obscure it. Deploying the camera to shift between alternating views that cut back and forth between close-up, medium, and the wide shots, Iñárritu cuts up our view of the scene, splicing the portrait with the landscape.

On one hand, the impersonality of the wide shot filmed with a handheld

camera invokes a documentary style that records the real conditions of the city, a *teporocho*⁸⁸ sifting through trash in front of an expanse of crowded dwellings on a hill. The wide and long shots, as art scholar Peter Galassi has noted, allow the photographer or filmmaker to call forth “details too small, too incidental, or too overwhelming in their inexhaustible specificity to have been noticed, let alone pondered at the moment of exposure.”⁸⁹ They produce, as Fried points out in holding Andreas Gursky’s photographs as exemplar, an image where the “subject is undramatic, even non-descript.”⁹⁰ Thus, Iñárritu introduces el Chivo with an impersonality that resists identification, by presumably documenting him as part of the city’s urban landscape. But on the other hand, this figure, who stands in front of the city, interrupts the landscape and our impulse to identify with what’s being documented, in a parallel with what Gursky discovers in his photographic landscape *Klausenpass* (1984).⁹¹ It’s in this sense that el Chivo’s presence becomes a way to disrupt any documentary impulse, transforming the moment from documentary to something closer to Jeff Wall’s “near documentary.” Iñárritu’s shift to close-up and medium shots—portraits that might prompt the viewer to identify or empathize with the unknown figure and his conditions—are likewise interrupted by el Chivo’s absorption and the speeding cars.

The hitman’s position between the landscape and the highway interrupting our view of his body and his face absorbed in picking trash refuses our identification. In shifting between alternating views, Iñárritu negates “very possibility of reciprocity” declaring not only the antitheatricality of the picture, but its “autonomy and self-sufficiency.”⁹² Here the three overlapping movements—the unsteadiness of the handheld camera, the irregular movements of el Chivo’s body, and the speeding cars—produce a constantly shifting view made up of competing forces and bodies. Like the film’s opening, the competing movements produce a kind of internal montage. In fact, the three layers—the static landscape, the figure of el Chivo, and the speeding cars—become a way not only to make montage internal but flat. Horizontally splicing the image of el Chivo and the landscape, the moving cars in the foreground stretch across the screen like frozen streaks of red, yellow, green, and grey, something that looks as if it’s layered across the surface of the screen like paint. Thus, the roving *pícaro* turned director—invoked by the presence of the squeaking red cart and the antennae—like the landscape that introduces him wanders the film like an impersonal force making the film’s materiality meaningful.

It makes sense then, that el Chivo, who quite literally embodies both the end of the Left and the end of art, emerges picking through the detritus of a particular kind of landscape—the highway. On one hand, el Chivo presents as the physical manifestation of a political end: Sánchez-Prado’s reading of him as a worn-out post-Left “Karl Marx” revolutionary for hire who maintains his anti-market principles by subsisting on trash.⁹³ But on the other hand, with

“the serious expression of his sad eyes and noble face framed by the silver gray of his wispy hair and thick beard, herding his flock of dogs,” as Pellicer observes, he looks like “a figure reminiscent of painter Francisco Goitia’s unmistakable biblical reflections.”⁹⁴ Certainly, our introduction to *el Chivo* points to one of the artist’s landscapes, *Old Man Seated on A Trash Heap* (*El viejo en el muladar*, 1926), where Goitia, paints himself as a shepherd atop a heap of trash. In fact, Goitia— portraitist, muralist, still life painter, and teacher to Diego Rivera and whose work influenced Mexico’s most renowned muralists⁹⁵—is known for inserting himself into his own work, particularly his landscapes. Iñárritu cultivates a resemblance between *el Chivo* and Goitia, however, not merely to set the tone for the gravity of the character, as Pellicer contends. Rather, Iñárritu crafts *el Chivo* as the obvious doppelgänger of the Mexican muralist, I argue, to mark the director’s own inscription into the film and into the history of art.

So, the accident at the center of *Amores perros* is not just the crash uniting the three triptychs, but the crash of three mediums. At the end of art, painting, like film and photography are all ailing from what Fried calls “the expression of a general and pervasive condition” characterizing those arts: literalism.⁹⁶ Where for much of its history a medium like painting was grounded in producing illusion, as it approached the condition of flatness and its literalist death in the late sixties, ambitious painting like abstract expressionism would increasingly shift to an emphasis on causality and indexicality, qualities already intrinsic to photography and film. Thus, artists like Jackson Pollock and Morris Louis (revoking drawing or painting) emphasized the literal qualities of materials on canvases that came to look less like paintings and more like what Fried calls “the manifestation of natural forces.”⁹⁷ While inherently separate, it’s in film, I argue, that the problems raised by literalist painting and photography, an innately literalist art, conceptually meet in the middle. Pollock’s stick “dripping fluid paint” and Louis’s mobilization of paint’s gravity in the unfurleds rely on forces and movement, which are qualities already intrinsic to film. I assert that these paintings find a counterpart in cinema.

In producing paint as the imprint of consecutive movements, painting finds a way to do what film had already done. Pollock’s asserts that in his paintings he doesn’t “use the accident” because he follows “a general notion of what [he is] about” and knows just “what the results will be” because he can “control the flow of the paint.”⁹⁸ This statement is as true for painting as it is for film. Iñárritu’s narrative, as many have pointed out, doesn’t rely on chronological temporality—beginning, middle, and end—but rather, like modernist art, on the structure of the movement that syntactically acts as a mechanics of its own meaning, or as a kind of “meaningfulness as *such*.”⁹⁹ Where for Louis liberating the blank canvas from objecthood meant regaining a pictorially meaningful illusion of flatness, for Iñárritu, liberating film from the record means turning

recording and duration into signifying movement. So, what in *Amores perros* looks like the refusal of film—pushing movement to its literal limits, a record of movement that registers on the screen as stasis—is an insistence on the medium. Indeed, for Iñárritu like Pollock and Louis, it's the “will or impulse . . . to make one's mark, to take possession in characteristic ways, of a plane surface” that is meaningful.¹⁰⁰

Film's literalism, like the body's, operates according to what Fried calls “the manifestation of natural forces,”¹⁰¹ Fried points out that these kinds of forces are present in everything we do but that—like the modifications to Louis's painting practice in response to an undesired blending in the adjacent lines of his early paintings—it is possible to “[find] the means” to “prevent those [natural forces]” from neutralizing the “will or impulse . . . to make one's mark.”¹⁰² Along these lines, Iñárritu not only finds a way to turn the car crash, an embodiment of physics, into a compositional element by reusing and recomposing it in serial, but by making the processes of actors' physical bodies meaningful. “The camera” not only “breathes with the actors,” as Iñárritu attests, it breathes with the film.¹⁰³ Like Morris Louis's drips, Iñárritu's quivering handheld camera throughout guarantees that every stretch of film is marked not only by the director, but by the impersonality of his body. The presence of Iñárritu's camera reminds us of his constant presence just as the relentless movement reminds us that we're watching a film. The handheld camera, something typically used in documentary, becomes a way to aesthetically mark the film elevating the in-situ footage of Mexico City from an urban landscape into a portrait of the world or what we simply might call the impersonality of capitalism, the intersection of politics and art.

Nowhere are Iñárritu's efforts to stage the clash of mediums more visible than in *el Chivo's* compound during a negotiation involving a businessman who wants to kill his half-brother (the private industry), the liaison Comandante Leonardo (the state backed industry), and *el Chivo* (the director). The scene takes place in front of a deposed painting next to three carefully arranged lampshades, a set of purposefully stacked books, and a folded cloth, set atop an old consul television opposite a stack of newspapers. At the center of the still life, quite literally, is “*naturaleza muerta*” or “dead nature:” a wooden beam. These items along with the bright colored stucco texture of the wall mimic the still life painting made part of the composition. The room, marked as an aesthetic space, is more reminiscent of Jeff wall's *The Destroyed Room* (1978) than the dwelling of a hobo hitman. We have a chance to contemplate the stillness of both the painting and the film as the three participants walk past the arrangement into the room slowed down by *el Chivo's* effort to pass out the sandwiches brought for his dogs. In a certain sense, the shot highlights the realness of what we're watching in that it's happening in real time. But at the same time, the insistence on our looking at the movement of bodies in

contrast with the foregrounded stillness of the wall and the objects calls up the mediums of painting and photography. And as el Chivo attempts to refuse the hit (although he eventually takes it) justifying his reasons to the comandante, he, once again, directs us to look at the deposed painting and the stillness that seems to intersect with his head: “The garbage provides, Leonardo, it looks good on me, look.”¹⁰⁴

The relations between the real and the staged are most prominent in the interior of el Chivo’s compound. Like el Chivo himself, the space becomes a way to mark the film. We watch the hitman in his atelier: a trash filled compound absorbed in his plans and mourning his loss. The former revolutionary who failed “to compose the world” lives surrounded by the chaos of its indexical decomposition. The islands of trash, stacks of old newspapers and milk cartons—with traces of their former meanings vaguely inscribed on them—interrupt our view of the space. They are records both in and of themselves and records of his former hits. Newspapers and the piles of washed-out milk containers stand in the for the passage of time, the accumulation of his daily ritual of milk and rum. Like the photograph, these indexical records are the passage of time made static. Certainly, the close-up on the bottom of his cup, “Tupperware,” like the piles of used containers conjures a moment frozen in time, marking the cup and the hitman as two failed 1960s revolutionary relics.

El Chivo’s discomposed world is an indexical one. He’s not only surrounded by traces of the world, but drowning in records and facts. Pitting accumulation against composition Iñárritu stages the space with piles of reports and data, information as such. The camera highlights this point by lingering on the milk container in close-up. As el Chivo pours the milk in real time we see the word “milk”¹⁰⁵ written in graphic lettering over the picture of a blue and white cow, a design that, rhetorically speaking, serves to persuade consumers to buy it. What’s more, the real-time recording of el Chivo’s hand supplementing milk with rum which lingers on the static box’s “nutritional information”¹⁰⁶ allows us to read it. The force of the merely rhetorical or the merely factual, however, is literally transformed by Iñárritu and el Chivo’s own hand. Here el Chivo / Iñárritu’s subtle alteration to the box—marker-drawn eyes to the cow’s face along with the marked-out words on the milk’s carton, and what looks like a signature—direct us not to the facts, but the scene’s staging.¹⁰⁷ In producing el Chivo’s composition as adulteration—discomposition—Iñárritu’s highlights el Chivo’s failure to compose the world, as an extension of the director’s own hand.

Like the papers and their reports reduced to heaps of disconnected facts, el Chivo’s murder of the businessman in itself remains meaningless, a fact emphasized by the close-up point of view shot over el Chivo’s left shoulder on the headline: “Insecurity on the rise / Industrial Murdered Reasons Unknown.”¹⁰⁸ The shot of the story reaffirms the identity of the man “Otto Lieuermann,” a

name, as we see later, that appears among the information on the back of one of the photographs of the hits brought by Lorenzo: mere facts. Just like the photograph in the paper, the photograph of the assassination target looks like a headshot with personal data—name, age, and other identifying information—written on the back.

Most likely a corporate headshot taken for professional purposes, this generically unexpressive portrait serves to rhetorically reproduce a flattering image of the subject. And for *el Chivo*, who studies the photograph to identify the target, the images and the personal data on the back are equivalents. In the most literal sense, they are marks. But while the photo of the hit is a waist up medium shot, the same photo held in *el Chivo*'s hands is a close-up that disproportionately fills the screen. The discrepancy between the actual photograph and the one filmed by *Iñárritu* calls attention to the film's frame and the presence of a camera. The momentary wide shot and the close-up shot of *el Chivo*'s absorbed looking contrast with the camera's shift to an extreme close-up on *el Chivo*'s hands holding the photograph that follows them. The close-up obscures the view. To put it simply, the photograph displaces the view for the shot. And in lining up the hand of the hitman, the hit, and his own camera, *Iñárritu* shows the viewer that it's his shot all the way down. And if this near point of view shot might call us to identify with the perspective of the character, to occupy his place, *el Chivo*'s partial silhouette, the dirty hands and nails holding the expressionless photograph, and the dirty deed behind the act guarantee that we don't. Indeed, the image, which once again approaches the screen, insists on the fact that there is no space for the viewer. In acting as the film's internal director and audience, *el Chivo* displaces the audience.¹⁰⁹

A literal head shot, here an over the shoulder close-up, the silhouette of *el Chivo*'s head shapes the interior of the frame. Unlike the shot that precedes it—a room with a man absorbed in a task—this close-up which restricts our view directs us to consider the still objects against invisible forces, a photograph against the subtle movements of the handheld camera. Likewise, replacing dialogue with silence and human interaction with a photograph displaces the character's situation for a quiet contemplation that emphasizes relations: two dirty seemingly detached hands holding a photo at the center of the *mise-en-scène*. Like the director's, *el Chivo*'s hand is a privileged site of meaning. In the absence of dialogue and a view of *el Chivo*'s face, with only the coldness of the photo, the viewer is tasked to ponder the meaning of the shot through its relations.

Of course, on the most basic level, here and in the film more generally, photographs serve to emphasize the relationship between the mediums. Yet, the photograph's centrality convokes film's shared qualities with its sister medium as much as its differences. Certainly, photographs as static frames in and of themselves interrupt film's ongoingness. But if on one hand, blowing up the

static photograph to a disproportionately screen-sized ratio seems to interrupt the moving picture emphasizing its oneness over the film's, on the other, the shakiness of Iñárritu's camera insists on the fact that this oneness belongs not to photography—the meaningless headshot—but to film. And indeed, we see this gesture amplified later in the film when el Chivo pores over the photo album of his own past. Like the highway at the film's beginning, the photographs are blown-up to fill the entirety of the screen producing the illusion that the film and the photograph are one, and, once again, repeating the gesture of summoning the film's frame. And while this gesture seemingly erases any discrepancy between the still and the moving image by reduplicating the finite quality of the photograph, the shakiness of the camera against the stillness of the photo hammers home the fact that the oneness here belongs to the film not the photo. So, el Chivo's looking which stands in as Iñárritu's not only directs the viewer to linger on the composition of the *mise-en-scène* but on the internal arrangement of the film.

Indeed, it's through the hitman who seeks to edit or re-right the world that Iñárritu, the self-described "executioner" likewise seeks to "rewrite" its "raw material" since, according to the director, it's in composing the record that the "real process, the one that really reveals the film" takes place.¹¹⁰ As Iñárritu puts it, in "editing" not only can "you kill anything," destroying the dependence on the record of what's been recorded, but you can reveal "the poetry of a film . . . created."¹¹¹ Hence, I argue that it's el Chivo's confessional scene that comprises a conceptual master shot that positions *Amores perros* in relation to photography and, by extension, art's own history. It is the logic of this master shot that arguably launches a New Mexican Cinema.¹¹² Unlike a typical master shot which hinges on the drama and interaction of characters in the *mise-en-scène*, this one hinges on el Chivo's / Martín's relation to things: photographs.

As he tells the untold truth of his estranged daughter's family history in an emotional confession on her answering machine, he discloses his true identity: "It's Martín, your father, your blood / biological father."¹¹³ He shares the frame only with his own photograph, which he's pasted over the image of her stepfather in a family graduation picture after the fact. The previously cold unkempt hitman appears here clean shaven and shorn, nearly unrecognizable behind his quivering lips and the tears visibly dripping from his nose as he testifies to his regret for abandoning his wife and daughter in a radical attempt to "compose the world." As Eugenio Di Stefano rightly points out, el Chivo's admission of this failure crucially marks how "political failure in *Amores perros* is conceived of as aesthetic failure."¹¹⁴

Yet, it's not only the "death" of that political-aesthetic world reflected in el Chivo's words that matters. It is also the particular way those deaths live on in the hitman now transformed. This penultimate scene which singularly stands out for its sentimentality, and its attachment to the transmission of truth tell-

ing, blood, and identity—the very ideas fueling the political stance against art and against literature in Latin America—that Iñárritu stages the duality of this failure and a glimpse of the solution. El Chivo’s problem, leaving his family to compose the world, and Martín’s solution, doubling down on identity to unite the past and the present to recompose it, I argue, are not a problem and a solution, but two different versions of the same problem. The point is not that el Chivo failed to “componer el mundo / compose the world” an impulse that as Di Stefano (reproducing Yúdice’s words) argues “sought to reunite art, . . . aesthetics, and life,” but that doing away with these divisions was always the central crux of the problem.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Iñárritu’s “verb choice, ‘componer’ (to compose or order),” not only “resonates with the sensibility that underpins his *dramatis personae*: intellectual, father, convict, guerilla, and hired gun” as Jeff Menne points out, but with the paratactic impotence they embody.¹¹⁶ So, while el Chivo’s fantasy to collage himself back into the life he gave up ultimately commits the same error he attempts to atone for—as he trades composing the world for recomposing it—it’s precisely in making this failure visible that the film succeeds. El Chivo, treating the world as if it were a work of art, composing and recomposing it, becomes Iñárritu’s radical solution.

It’s precisely for this reason that Iñárritu explicitly marks this scene.¹¹⁷ In contrast with the jagged cutting and the marked instability of the handheld camera characterizing most of the film, this uninterrupted two-and-a-half-minute confession—one of the two longest takes in the film—is composed of a “single static shot.”¹¹⁸ But what’s striking about the scene, apart from this shot’s length and its relative stillness, is what el Chivo shares it with: the frame is filled with photographs and not actors. Maru’s room, where the scene takes place, is plastered with photographs documenting a life lived without Martín. Along with the shots of the answering machine that bookend the confession, el Chivo’s altered photograph, placed amid the compressed photographic testimony of Maru’s life, emphasizes the fact that the film we’re watching, is also a recording, a record. So, when Martín calls himself a “living ghost,” or a “fantasma que sigue vivo” it’s not only as a past kept alive as memory—the father his daughter thinks she’s lost—but as a living ghost made literal, the recorded traces of himself that he leaves behind. The repeated sound of Maru’s voice played back as Martín types her number into the phone or the long beep signaling the end of his recording punctuates that fact. Certainly, Iñárritu amplifies this sense with Maru since it’s only as a recording, a disembodied voice on the answering machine, that we ever hear her speak. But, of course, the repetition of these traces in el Chivo’s many selves, his photobooth portrait collaged into the graduation picture, his voice recorded on the answering machine, and the recording on the film itself are all types of traces, all living ghosts.

On one hand the photographs do the narrative work for the film; they show a life lived without Martín. El Chivo’s interaction with Maru’s recorded

voice and his attempt to paste himself into his daughter's life highlights their separation. (No doubt the content of the melodramatic monologue he delivers alongside the photo would fit better in a typical serial melodrama than it does here.) But on the other, these things call attention to the film's materiality and Iñárritu's staging of it. Just as we can see the twitching of his eyes as tears well up and the quivering of the actor's lips, we can see the tiny camera movements from left to right. So, while a quivering Martín momentarily distracts us from presence of the camera, the centrality of recording conversely directs us to camera's presence. The bobbing of the handheld camera reminds us of the fact that the tears and the photographs, while real are all arranged according to a common purpose, Iñárritu's. Even the photographs—the objects in the *mise-en-scène* emphasizing the film's quality as “the result of a physical imprint,”¹¹⁹ the evidence of “*the thing having been there*”¹²⁰—are staged. It's in this sense that el Chivo's recomposed photograph emblematic of the clash of mediums—the stillness of the film that inches toward the state of photography and the cut and pasted photograph that inches toward a kind of painterly collage—points to the film's materiality, a filmic montage made literal. In fact, as Martín places the photo into the black empty frame, he reproduces the literal black screen at the film's beginning and it's middle closing the circle.

In heightening the melodrama of this “encounter with the real,” against the index of the smiling photograph pasted in the frame, Iñárritu reminds us that while what we're witnessing in the film is real—this man is without a doubt sobbing—the confession itself isn't. El Chivo's physical transformation leading up to this scene, the close-ups of the hitman cutting his gnarled matted hair and grime caked toenails and fingernails, document the reality of the film's own staging. If, as Iñárritu suggests, *Amores perros* “documented reality,”¹²¹ that reality was always intensely staged. Radicalizing the art photography of the late seventies and early eighties, Iñárritu documents a staged reality that often stretches beyond the set. So, for instance, while the dogs that follow el Chivo are street dogs, they were trained to follow the actor Emilio Echeverría for “eight months before shooting began.”¹²² Part of what allows *Amores perros* to succeed as a film, or, in other words, to succeed as art, is its insistence on the inextricability of what's both real and staged. So, although *Amores perros* has a documentary look, and surely, in part, it records Mexico's conditions since it's filmed on location and the places are real, the elaborate staging of the film ensures that it isn't. Making the inextricability of what's real and what's not visible *Amores perros* turns the act of documenting into an aesthetically inscribed act.

So, if the real—realized in the record—comes to embody a stance against art, particularly in Latin America, for New Mexican Cinema, film's ability to mobilize that record becomes the way to insist on being art. In turning to the literal possibilities of the medium, Iñárritu reanimates film's potential to

mobilize what Jeff Wall calls “photography’s two reigning myths—one that claims that photographs are ‘true’ and the second “that claims they are not.”¹²³ In pitting film’s situation in the world—its indexicality, as a record produced by a camera—against film’s meaning as a world—its composition, as a work of art arranged by the director— Iñárritu finds a way not only to reinscribe film in a space of autonomous aesthetic commitment but, like photography, activates the medium to galvanize the line between art’s history and its future. And indeed, it’s el Chivo, along with his counterpart “Cofi” rechristened “Negro / Black,” two names associated with the real who are sent to wander a barren landscape at the film’s end. In reinventing Cofi as “Negro” (Iñárritu’s nickname and a synonym for cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto’s surname¹²⁴), el Chivo / Martín not only announces the director / cinematographer as a kind of literal shadow, but as Juan Pellicer observes, puts “the author’s signature on the film.”¹²⁵ And as the two walk off side by side into a bleak horizon, Iñárritu, like a twenty-first-century Courbet,¹²⁶ leaves his mark on cinema’s barren landscape.

Even if the endlessness of Smith’s highway, which reduced art to “postage stamps”¹²⁷ on the side of the road, meant the end of art and the end of the picture, Iñárritu, director turned *pepenadero*, gathers and arranges that litter on a competing highway to remind us that “the trash provides.” Iñárritu’s framing of pictures made larger than life finds a way to eclipse Smith’s endlessness resurrecting art through cinema’s claim to the picture. If the world is a dog fight and nothing but the capitalist mantra of dog eat dog, then art would be nothing but a vehicle for our affective experiences. By the accident of a crash, Iñárritu composes a crash of mediums, which, though bleeding and all cut up when it’s patched back together, becomes the biggest dog in the fight: art’s a bitch.

NOTES

¹ Néstor García Canclini, “¿Habrá cine latinoamericano en el año 2000?” “La jornada,” *Nueva Época* 193 (February 21, 1993), 27–33. The English translation of this article appeared four years later: Néstor García Canclini, “Will There Be a Latin American Cinema in the Year 2000?: Visual Culture in a Postnational Era,” Translated by Adriana X. Tatum and Ann Marie Stock, In *Framing Latin American Cinema: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Ann Marie Stock, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 246–257.

² In his look at the shift in national visual culture, Canclini notes that “more than two hundred” movie houses “disappeared in 1992 in Mexico” (248).

³ See John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*, (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁴ As Charles Ramírez Berg observes, “Mexico has been one of the chief film-producing countries in Latin America, with a distinguished cinema history dating back to the turn of the century” (8). See Charles Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude: A Critical Study of Mexican Film, 1967–1983*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1992).

⁵ Canclini, “Will There Be,” 254. The answer, of course, raises another question. Will it be Mexico and Latin America or the U.S.? For Canclini’s consideration of the problem of Mexico’s cinematic erosion, this is precisely the problem. Citing “a group of comedians . . . conjecturing what history books would say about Mexico in the twenty-first century,” he quotes them as saying, “Mexico is bordered on the north by the U.S., on the south by the U.S., on the east and west by the U.S., and even on the inside, by the U.S.” (in Canclini 254). Reproducing Octavio Paz’s position on the threat to *lo mexicano*, Canclini’s “group of comedians” makes a largely economic issue cultural.

⁶ Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude*, 1.

⁷ See Ignacio Sánchez Prado’s *Screening Neoliberalism: Transforming Mexican Cinema 1988–2012* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014). Mexico’s New Cinema has its own, somewhat rocky, trajectory, one in which film’s potential waxed and waned alongside the changing political landscape and market forces.

⁸ “With the state and Paz’s *mexicano* displaying profound self-doubts,” argues Ramírez Berg, “*mexicanidad* became a high-priority issue—in a sense the only issue—and films depicted various versions . . . of what it meant to be Mexican” (4).

⁹ Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude*, 5.

¹⁰ Zuzana M. Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*, First

Edition,. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), 2.

¹¹ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 4.

¹² Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 22.

¹³ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 24.

¹⁴ A significant moment for Mexico's cinematic history was the student-popular movement of 1968 and the state's October massacre of bystanders during a student protest at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City. The event, known as the Tlatelolco Massacre, has been considered a significant event in transforming and re-shaping the state's relationship with its citizens. See the archive of materials from the social movements of the period (curated by scholars at Mexico's flagship institution, the UNAM) at <https://m68.mx/acerca-de>. For analysis of film and Mexico 1968, see, for example, Samuel Steinberg, *Photopoetics at Tlatelolco: Afterimages of Mexico, 1968*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016) and Susana Draper, *1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

¹⁵ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 2.

¹⁶ Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude*, 4.

¹⁷ John Mraz in *Looking for Mexico* cites the impressions of Mexico's preeminent documentarian Carlos Mendoza in his description of the film (205).

¹⁸ This documentary film, illustrates Mraz, led the way for other fictional recreations of the 1968 massacre.

¹⁹ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 24.

²⁰ Paul A. Schroeder Rodriguez, "After New Latin American Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 2, (2012): 91.

²¹ John Beverley, *Against Literature*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). The *testimonio's* "erasure of authorial presence" John Beverley explains, makes way for the privileging of "narrator and reader" (77). For a detailed critique of John Beverley's arguments regarding *testimonio* and "anti-literature," see Eugenio Claudio Di Stefano, *The Vanishing Frame: Latin American Culture and Theory in the Postdictatorial Era*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018).

²² Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 39.

²³ Art critics like Rosalind Krauss deployed the photograph's indexical quality, a characteristic shared with film, to do away with ambitious art in the seventies and

eighties. As Krauss puts it, “The photograph heralds a disruption in the autonomy of the sign” (77). In other words, it disrupts meaning. See Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America.,” *October*, Vol. 3. Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, (1977): 68-81.

²⁴ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 49.

²⁵ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 48.

²⁶ See Di Stefano, *The Vanishing Frame* for a full analysis of these phenomena.

²⁷ By 1979, the NLAC’s first official festival, culture was named as the primary force shaping the movement’s revolutionary politics. See Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema*, 30-31.

²⁸ Sánchez Prado, *Screening Neoliberalism*, 107.

²⁹ The link between the failure of politics and the failure of art as a concern for Mexican cinema orients Eugenio Di Stefano’s piece “Oh, come on people...Have a real experience!” Audience and Form in Contemporary Mexican Film,” which was featured at the Newberry Library’s Scholarly Seminars: American Literature (Chicago: January 25, 2023). The essay began as a response to Di Stefano’s arguments regarding the assertion of aesthetic form and its relevance for New Mexican Cinema.

³⁰ Canclini, “Will There Be,” 255.

³¹ Canclini, “Will There Be,” 256.

³² As Paul Julian Smith point out, Iñárritu describes *Amores perros* as a “shout” [or ‘scream’: Spanish ‘grito’] that lasts for two hours” (59). See Paul Julian Smith’s *Amores perros*, (London: British Film Institute, 2003). In *Amores perros* the political scream is silenced in favor of an aesthetic one, something Iñárritu alludes to in producing what Juan Pellicer describes as a nearly silent “Chaplinesque” revolutionary, *el Chivo*. See Pellicer’s chapter “Alejandro González Iñárritu: *Amores perros* (2000),” in *Clásicos del cine mexicano: 31 películas emblemáticas desde la Época de Oro hasta el presente*, Edited by Christian Wehr, (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2016), 490. Scholars like Sánchez Prado and Schroeder Rodríguez argue that the film operates in a primarily affective mode. As Sánchez Prado puts it, “[r]ather than politicizing social difference, the film uses its vertiginous aesthetics in order to provide audiences with an affective experience that supersedes the political in terms of the human” (176). In its commitment to movement and the mobilizing of media tropes from forms like the *telenovela*, this is in some sense true. Surely it demonstrates a politically evacuated space. But as I argue here, Iñárritu calls on film to contain media, in other words, to mobilize the affective experience as part of the film’s material mis-en-scène. Putting the aesthetic scream in tension with the affective scream, Iñárritu appeals to the structure of the film rather than the viewer. The scream motif, affect

par excellence, appears throughout the film uniting the three triptychs. It appears, for instance, in Octavio's iconic "Scream" t-shirt during the final dogfight, in Valeria's affective scream upon her introduction at the scene of the crash, Octavio's scream in the crash's final iteration, and once again in the second iteration of the highway when Octavio's shouts are muted. And as I point out, Iñárritu's commitment to movement is more a commitment to what has become a New Mexican Cinema's auteur aesthetics.

³³ In fact, Iñárritu regularly cites Nan Goldin's photographs as early models of inspiration for the film and his decision to use the bleach bypass process to project their vibrant color. Karen Redrobe Beckman reproducing Iñárritu's *Sight and Sound* interview with Bernardo Pérez Soler notes this influence: "I like Nan Goldin's photography very much, so my first meeting with director of photography Rodrigo Prieto I took in a book by Goldin to exemplify what I wanted to achieve in terms of coloration, grain, visceral appeal" (185-186). See Beckman's *Crash: Cinema and the Politics of Speed and Stasis*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³⁴ Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 12.

³⁵ As Claudia Schaefer and Raúl Rodríguez-Hernández argue, "Mexican films of the Golden Age - those produced generally between the 1930s and the 1960s" grew out of the muralist and pictorial photographic traditions and produced landscapes that "tended to recreate a similarly privileged relationship between the landscape and its inhabitants" (142). See their essay, "From Utopia to Uchronia: After-Images of Revolutionary History in Contemporary Mexican Film," *Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2016), 137-57.

³⁶ The arguments in this essay build on Karen Redrobe Beckman's description of the opening sequence of *Amores perros*: "[A]s the camera points down at the ground, the surface of the road evokes nothing so much as the early practice of sprocketing filmstrips in the center, hinting that a self-reflexive consideration of the medium's mobility, as well as the possibilities of that medium's transformation in time" (190).

³⁷ *Amores perros* is regularly cited as a kind of concrete beginning for New Mexican Cinema. In "A Mexican *Nouvelle Vague*: The Logic of New Waves under Globalization" Jeff Menne cites *Amores perros* as its earliest exemplar. As Menne puts it, "For those prognosticators who had long expected a resurgence in Mexican cinema, *Amores perros* seemed finally to invoke the contours of this new cinema" (73). See Menne's "A Mexican *Nouvelle Vague*: The Logic of New Waves under Globalization," in *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 1 (2007): 70-92. The same could be said of the film's early measures of success which as Paul Julian Smith points out, "is widely credited with kick-starting a Mexican film industry which was in ruins" (10). *Amores perros*, as Sánchez Prado notes, garnered more awards "on the film festival circuit (thirty-five total)" than any other Mexican film (160). Not only was the film a break-out hit

globally, it earned more than any film in Mexico in the year of its release. And twenty years after the film's release, producer Martha Sosa Carlos added in an interview: "It was *Amores perros* the film that opened the door for this new wave of Latin American cinema ultimately." Martha Sosa. Interviewed by Carlos A. Gutiérrez, "Amores perros Producer Martha Sosa Talks About the Success of the Landmark Film," *Cinema Tropical*, last accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.cinematropical.com/cinema-tropical/amores-perros-10-years-later-interview-with-producer-martha-sosa>

³⁸Tony Smith, Interviewed by Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith." In *Minimal Art*, edited by Gregory Battock, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 384. Originally published Gregory Battock, ed, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, (London: Studio Vista, 1968).

³⁹In fact, this is precisely what leads Fried in his seminal essay "Art and Objecthood" to position cinema in a neutral space, "because cinema escapes theater—automatically, as it were—it provides a welcome and absorbing refuge to sensibilities at war with theater and theatricality." In other words, "the automatic, guaranteed character of the refuge—more accurately, the fact that it provides a refuge from theater and not a triumph over it, absorption and not conviction—means that the cinema, even at its most experimental is not a modernist art" (164). See Fried's "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148-172. See also Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰Mark Goble, "How the West Slows Down." *ELH*, vol. 85, no. 2 (2018): 321.

⁴¹Smith's prophetic insight would serve as shorthand for what Fried in "Art and Objecthood," deemed objecthood's threat to modernist art, the privileging of "presence" or "a presentment of endless or indefinite duration" (166) over art's "presentness" in which a work's meaning is "at every moment itself wholly manifest" (167).

⁴²Tony Smith, "Talking," 384.

⁴³For a discussion of Morris Louis, see Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier*. See also, Walter Benn Michaels, "When I Raise My Arm: Michael Fried's Theory of Action," in *Michael Fried and Philosophy*, Edited by Matthew Abbot, (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 33-47.

⁴⁴For a discussion of indexicality, see Walter Benn Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy, Economy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁴⁵Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 24.

⁴⁶Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24-25.

⁴⁷ Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 160.

⁴⁸ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 25.

⁴⁹ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.

⁵⁰ For discussion of a similar phenomenon in James Welling's aluminum foil photographs, see Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier*.

⁵¹ Greenberg, cited in Goble, "How the West Slows Down," 325.

⁵² See Fried's "Morris Louis," in *Art and Objecthood*, 119.

⁵³ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.

⁵⁴ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.

⁵⁵ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.

⁵⁶ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 24.

⁵⁷ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 20.

⁵⁸ Pellicer, "Alejandro González Iñárritu: *Amores perros* (2000)," 486.

⁵⁹ André Bazin in Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 16.

⁶⁰ Erwin Panofsky in Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 16.

⁶¹ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 16.

⁶² Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 16.

⁶³ Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁶⁴ Fried, *Why Photography*, 2. Of course, even if placing photographs on museum walls sparked controversy that divided art critics in the late seventies and early eighties—those who on one side saw photography (like painting) in the tradition of western art and those on the other that saw it as something guided by causal, indexical relationships, as a break from, indeed, an opportunity to discompose that tradition—by the publication of his 2008 *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, this shift (in scale and to the wall) Fried grants, was as "widely known" as it was non-controversial (2). Most notably this divide manifests in Rosalind Krauss's pair of essays on art and the photographic index, a response to Peter Galassi's 1981 exhibit *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*. See both,

“Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America” in *October*, Vol. 3 Cambridge, Mass: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, (1977): 58-67 and “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2,” *October*, Vol. 4 Cambridge, Mass: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, (1977): 68-81.

⁶⁵ Fried, *Why Photography*, 2.

⁶⁶ Fried, *Why Photography*, 5.

⁶⁷ For further discussion of Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills in the context of Fried’s arguments, see Nicholas Brown, *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁶⁸ Fried, *Why Photography*, 7.

⁶⁹ Jeff Wall in Fried, *Why Photography*, 10.

⁷⁰ Fried, *Why Photography*, 12.

⁷¹ Fried, *Why Photography*, 13.

⁷² Tony Smith, “Talking,” 384.

⁷³ For additional discussion of this phenomenon, see Brown, *Autonomy*.

⁷⁴ If, as Julian Paul Smith argues, Valeria is “a case study for the vanity and banality of female beauty” a “mass media . . . coded as feminine” and “larger than life,” “Daniel’s ‘cult of image’ is no less vapid and meaningless (45). Indeed, while “Daniel and Valeria” is the chronologically second sequence in the film’s triptych, and thus, in terms of order, the center of the film, the narrative length and the constant cut aways to el Chivo emphasize the characters’ superficiality. If Valeria’s visibility is an intensely superficial one, “Daniel’s invisibility” or meaninglessness, as Julian Smith points out, is likewise “exaggerated in” the structure of “the film itself” (32).

⁷⁵ Even the new apartment, an intimate space for Valeria and her lover, is saturated with her composite images. Three blown up rows of her photoshoot with the best shots circled in red simulate the positive proof of a contact sheet which stands opposite her *Enchant* billboard, which can be viewed through the apartment window. This media-laden world is emblematic of Valeria’s self-worship and Daniel’s worship of her media image.

⁷⁶ “La ventanilla. La ventanilla eso es.”

⁷⁷ “¡Ay, ayúdame por favor! ¡Ayúdame!”

⁷⁸ Valeria’s screams continue as the screen goes black and “Octavio y Susana” appears.

Using the scream as the sound bridge against the cut to black and the appearance of the intertitle, on one hand calls attention to the latter as interruptions. But on the other, the continuation of the scream foregrounding the cut and the appearance of the words calls attention to their relation to each other. While the scream works against these interruptions, it does so precisely by interrupting, by continuing beyond the visual context of the previous scene. Sounds and image are not just incidental to our experience the way they are in the world, but rather integral to the structure of the film. The anonymous disembodied scream doesn't produce a reaction, but a provocation to consider its meaning.

⁷⁹ For further elaboration of the relation between Valeria and her photographic image in the film, see Beckman.

⁸⁰ In his *Courbet's Realism*, Fried argues that Courbet's placement of himself as a "painter-beholder" in the painting becomes a way "to negate or neutralize his status as first beholder of that painting" (98). It's in the spirit of Fried's "painter-beholder" refusal of beholding that I consider Iñárritu's director-actor-viewer. *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁸¹ See Menne's "A Mexican *Nouvelle Vague*: The Logic of New Waves Under Global Capitalism."

⁸² Sánchez Prado, *Screening Neoliberalism*, 179.

⁸³ The literary *pícaro*, which first originates with the sixteenth century *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), is a clever rogue who, coming into contact with different social strata, critiques the world from the margins.

⁸⁴ Di Stefano, "Oh, come on people...Have a real experience!" Audience and Form in Contemporary Mexican Film."

⁸⁵ *El Heraldo* de México is the name of a daily newspaper in Mexico City. The word "heraldo" translates in English to herald or messenger.

⁸⁶ Michael Abeyta's "The Allegory of the Meat Market in *Amores perros*: Cannibalism, Consumption, and Money," *Hispanic Review* 90, no. 1 (2022): 11.

⁸⁷ Pellicer, "Alejandro González Iñárritu: *Amores perros* (2000)," 493.

⁸⁸ Pellicer aptly uses this term to describe *el Chivo* (485). *Teporocho* is a Mexican expression used to describe a "destitute alcoholic." The term stems from the custom of drinking herbal teas mixed with alcohol in twentieth-century Mexico. The Academia Mexicana de la Lengua states that one possible origin for the word was the custom of selling the beverage for eight cents or "té-por-ocho." See "¿Qué significa la voz *teporocho*?" Academia Mexicana de la Lengua, <https://www.academia.org.mx/>.

⁸⁹ Fried, *Why Photography*, 157-158.

⁹⁰ Fried, *Why Photography*, 156.

⁹¹ Fried, *Why Photography*, 157-58.

⁹² Fried, *Why Photography*, 158.

⁹³ As a corollary, while we can see el Chivo take large sums of money in exchange for carrying out his hits, we never see evidence of him using it and thus can read his contract killing as a strategy for taking money out of circulation.

⁹⁴ Juan Pellicer, "Alejandro González Iñárritu," 490-491.

⁹⁵ Dubbed "los tres grandes," José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros are considered Mexico's most prominent muralists. In these three greats, Mexican cinema was intrinsically equipped with another kind of screen what Indyck-López calls "'portable' frescoes" of the former "tres grandes" (286). The larger-than-life models of the murals, likewise argue Schaefer and Rodríguez-Hernández, served as a model for Mexico's Cinema of the Golden Age. And, of course, that project has arguably been taken up in some way by González Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón, and Guillermo de Toro, New Mexican Cinema and art's new "The three amigos." See Anna Indyck-López, "Mexican Muralism in the United States: Controversies, Paradoxes, and Publics," in Alejandro Anreus, Leonard Folgarait, and Robin Adèle Greeley, eds. *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

⁹⁶ Fried, "Art and Objecthood, 149.

⁹⁷ Fried, "Morris Louis," 122.

⁹⁸ See Michael Schreyach's "Intention and Interpretation in Hans Namuth's Film, Jackson Pollock." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 48, no. 4 (2012): 437-452. Schreyach cites Pollock's 1950 radio interview with William Wight, which was broadcast in 1951. See *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, Edited by Pepe Karmel, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), pp. 20-23.

⁹⁹ Fried, "Morris Lous," 119.

¹⁰⁰ Fried, "Morris Louis," 122.

¹⁰¹ Fried, "Morris Louis," 122.

¹⁰² Fried, "Morris Louis," 122.

¹⁰³ In his chapter "Alejandro González Iñárritu: *Amores perros* (2000)," Pellicer cites

his own 2010 Barcelona interview with Iñárritu.

¹⁰⁴ “La basura deja, Leonardo, me cae, mira.”

¹⁰⁵ “leche”

¹⁰⁶ “Información nutrimental.”

¹⁰⁷ This moment works much like Valeria’s staged *Enchant* made meaningful by the film’s framing.

¹⁰⁸ “La inseguridad en ascenso / Industrial Asesinado se ignoran motivos.”

¹⁰⁹ For a broader discussion of this phenomenon and these techniques in photography, see Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*.

¹¹⁰ Pellicer, “Alejandro González Iñárritu,” 484.

¹¹¹ Pellicer, “Alejandro González Iñárritu,” 484.

¹¹² In fact, Iñárritu announces this declaration shortly before. Just as el Chivo (now Martín) carefully cuts the filmstrip placing his photo in his daughter’s graduation picture, a group of workers cut down Valeria’s *Enchant* ad which undramatically falls in the background.

¹¹³ “Te habla Martín, tu papá, tu papá de sangre.”

¹¹⁴ Di Stefano, “Oh, come on people,” 1.

¹¹⁵ Di Stefano, “Oh, come on people,” 1.

¹¹⁶ If, as Sánchez Prado points out, el Chivo’s “revolutionary subjectivity,” stands out “as anachronistic and exhausted” in the Mexico City of the late nineties, Martín’s vulgar attempt to play the part of bourgeois father and businessman by putting blood money under his already well-to-do daughter’s pillow prior to his confession is no less absurd (179). In collapsing the horizontality of that political failure into el Chivo, the film’s neoliberal everyman, Iñárritu draws a straight line from the failed 1960s revolutionary to the new millennium’s hired hitman.

¹¹⁷ Alongside, Di Stefano, critics have rightly noted that in the context of the rest of the film the scene’s length, style, and content stands out. Paul Julian Smith remarks that the length of the shot Iñárritu explicitly marks this scene.

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Amores perros*, 80.

¹¹⁹ See Krauss’s “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,” *October*, Vol. 3.

Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, (1977): 75.

¹²⁰ Roland Barthes in Krauss “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America (Part 2),” *October*, Vol. 4., Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, (1977): 65.

¹²¹ Carlos Aguilar’s “*Amores perros* at 20: Iñárritu’s Symphony of Desire Still Jolts,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2020-12-19/amores-perros-20-years-oral-history>

¹²² Aguilar, “Amores perros at 20.”

¹²³ Jeff Wall in Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 13.

¹²⁴ The surname Prieto, which is also used to describe people and landscapes, is a synonym for black.

¹²⁵ Pellicer, “Alejandro González Iñárritu,” 490.

¹²⁶ See Fried’s discussion of the painter-beholder in *Courbet’s Realism*.

¹²⁷ Smith, “Talking,” 384.